

OPENING REMARKS August 11, 2015 Housing Committee Meeting

Cambridge City Hall, Sullivan Chamber

5:00 pm – 7:00 pm

The Housing Committee will conduct a public hearing to discuss how to assist tenants in danger of losing their homes due to the recent sale of their buildings on Harding Street.

Good afternoon:

Thank you all for coming to this evening's Housing Committee meeting, which is focused on the tenants of 33-35 Harding Street and 34-42 Harding Street, buildings which have recently been purchased by a company called Boston Investments. Since this purchase took place, the tenants have been told by the company's chief executive, Tony Madan, that the company wants them to vacate their units so that the buildings can be renovated and then rented out to new tenants at higher rates. Coming on the heels of similar news surrounding the Harvard Towers building, which will displace over 100 tenants from their homes, this news was not well-received by me or my colleagues on this committee. Also similar to the Harvard Towers situation, the City Council only learned of this occurrence by the tenants bringing it to our attention.

As I stated at our most recent Housing Committee meeting when we discussed the Harvard Towers situation: we know that there is an affordable housing crisis in this area. The tenants who have called Harding Street home – some have been living there for decades – are now being forced out into a very inhospitable housing market, and the ways in which Boston Investments has been trying to nudge its tenants out have been questionable AT BEST. I appreciate that this company purchased these buildings to make a profit – this is what these kinds of companies exist for, after all – but this does NOT give these companies license to act inhumanely to the residents of the buildings they have acquired.

All that being said, we are not here to beat up on Boston Investments as a company, or Mr. Madan as an individual, or any other person or entity. The reality is that these buildings HAVE been sold, and I am now asking all of us – tenants, housing advocates, the City, and Mr. Madan and his staffers – to work collaboratively to assist those tenants in either negotiating for a longer window of time to remain housed where they are, to assist them with searching for new housing, and to ensure that those tenants who DO remain in the Harding Street buildings, for however long, are allowed to do so peaceably.

I will first open the floor for Public Comment, to ask any Harvard Street tenants who wish to share their stories with us to do so. After that, I will ask my Housing Committee colleagues to share their initial thoughts, and then I will open the floor and go around the room to ask for people to contribute to this conversation. The floor is now open for Public Comment.

Agenda For August 11, 2015 Housing Committee Meeting

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- I. Opening Remarks from Councilor Simmons
- II. Public Comment
- III. Remarks from Housing Committee Members
- IV. Open Forum
- V. Councilor Simmons Closing Remarks/Meeting Concludes

Attachment C

August 11, 2015

Dear Councilor Simmons and Housing Committee members,

The Cambridge Residents Alliance is writing to ask that the city work to protect tenants from displacement and sharp rent increases. We appreciate the attention the city council and administration have recently given to these issues, and we hope they will soon decide a course of action and take actions.

We want the 33 Harding St. tenants to be able to remain in their homes at reasonable rents.

We want the city to find ways to prevent or slow the mass eviction of 100+ people, as happened in the case at 295 Harvard St.

Some ideas to pursue are:

- Condition issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy after a rehab occurs on whether the owner has complied with good practices of aiding residents with 6 months advance notice, which would give the city time to help tenants and give more time for tenants to find a new apt., and let tenants experiencing a mass eviction leave their lease early if they find a new apt.

- Strengthen Cambridge's condo conversion law by lengthening the time a tenant is protected.

- To prevent evictions in order to do a rehab, which is followed by condo conversion (which is currently legal), enact a new law saying that the owner can not convert a building to condos within 2-5 years of evicting all tenants.

- Inclusionary housing rules should also apply to major rehabs of larger apt. buildings, so that more affordable units are created in rehabbed older buildings.

- Create a policy to require the owner to notify the City of Cambridge of any large transition of property that will affect a large number of people.

- Develop a comprehensive housing plan, so that the type and quantity of housing does not result only from piecemeal development that is largely controlled by developers. How high and fast can Cambridge's population grow? What density of residents do we want? And what amount of housing do we want at each income level?

We look forward to working together for strong and effective tenant protections.

Sincerely,

Lee Farris,
Vice President, Cambridge Residents Alliance

Working for a Livable, Affordable and Diverse Cambridge

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