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Alianza de Inquilinos de Cambridge
Alliance of Cambridge Tenants
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OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK
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Tuesday, 9 October, 2012

To the Honorable Members of the Cambridge City Council:

Under Cambridge's Plan E charter, the City Council generally lacks any review power over the City Manager's appointments. An important exception is the Manager's appointments to the Boards of the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority (CRA) and the Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA):

In a city, four members of a housing or redevelopment authority shall be appointed by the mayor [or city manager] subject to confirmation by the city council (MGL Ch.121B sec.6 par. 2)

The statute requires that the five-member CHA Board of Commissioners reserve seats for one representative of organized labor and one public housing resident. The statute further provides clear guidelines for resident input into the latter appointment:

In a city, one of the four members of a housing authority ... shall be a tenant in a building owned and operated by or on behalf of the local housing authority who shall be appointed ... from lists of names submitted by each duly recognized city-wide and project-wide tenants' organization in the city. A tenants' organization may submit a list which contains not less than two nor more than five names to the mayor who shall make his selection from among the names so submitted; provided that, where no public housing units are owned and operated by the local housing authority and no such units are owned and operated on behalf of the local housing authority, the mayor shall appoint any tenant of the housing authority from lists submitted in accordance with this section. If no list of names is submitted within sixty days after a vacancy occurs, the mayor shall appoint any tenant of his choosing to the authority. (MGL Ch.121B sec. 5 par. 6)

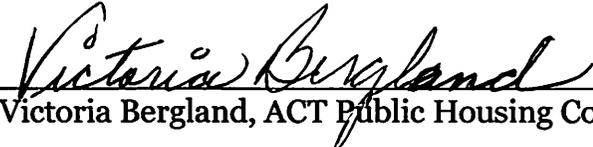
The Alliance of Cambridge Tenants (ACT) and the tenant councils at Woodrow Wilson, Corcoran Park, and Manning Apartments each submitted from three to five nominations prior to the City Manager's September 30, 2012 deadline. Because of overlap the total number of names that has been submitted is eight. We believe this satisfies the intent of

the statute, since each tenant organization followed the rule, “not less than two nor more than five.” Our survey of active tenant councils found no other names submitted by tenant organizations.

The term of the incumbent tenant commissioner expired as of October 1, 2012. In his August 13, 2012 letter to tenant council representatives, the City Manager indicated that he would render a decision within 60 days of the close of nominations. The City Council must then vote to confirm his appointment.

The power of appointment to the CHA Board of Commissioners is vested in the City for a reason. It allows the City some oversight over the policies of an agency which is otherwise legally independent; policies which affect the whole city but especially the several thousand Cambridge households who live in public housing or have vouchers administered by that agency. We encourage the City Council to take the opportunity to review this important appointment.

Sincerely,


Victoria Bergland, ACT Public Housing Co-Chair


Cheryl-Ann Pizza-Zeoli, ACT Voucher Co-Chair