

**Opening Remarks For July 9, 2015 Housing Committee Meeting**

Cambridge City Hall, Sullivan Chamber

3:00 pm – 5:00 pm

***The Housing Committee will conduct a public hearing to discuss whether there are measures the City and local housing agencies and advocates can take to assist the soon to be displaced tenants of 295 Harvard Street.***

*Note: In addition to the City Manager's Office, The Human Services Department, and the Community Development Department, the following organizations have been invited to share information with the residents of 295 Harvard Street at this meeting: Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services, CEOC, the Alliance of Cambridge Tenants, the Cambridge Housing Authority, Homeowners Rehab, Inc., and Just A Start.*

Good afternoon:

The Housing Committee last met in this chamber in mid-June, to discuss ways the City might create LGBTQ-friendly housing. As that meeting concluded, a gentleman came up to me and mentioned that everyone in his building, 295 Harvard Street, had recently been told they'd need to vacate the building by the end of the summer. This was the first I'd heard of this development, and I must state for the record: I was not pleased.

Over the course of this term, I have been leading this committee through rigorous discussions looking at the affordable housing crunch in our city and in surrounding areas, and we have heard about the great struggles people have had in maintaining a home in the city that they love. It's a challenge that has steadily grown over the past twenty years, and our meetings have generally been VERY well-attended and covered in the local papers. It would be disingenuous if any local housing provider were to plead ignorance of the affordable housing crunch Cambridge has been experiencing.

And that is why I cannot understand why Ming Slomiak, who owns this building that houses over 100 tenants, wouldn't at least send a letter – as a courtesy – to the Housing Chair, or to the Mayor's Office, informing us that in the midst of our affordable housing crunch, he is going to be sending over 100 people scrambling out into our already overstressed housing market. As a building owner, he is certainly free to do with his building as he wishes, but I cannot understand why he wouldn't even think to give the City a courtesy heads up on this, so that we could try to offer assistance and guidance to those tenants who are suddenly experiencing this great upheaval. Where was the common decency here...?

As soon as I learned of this situation, I worked to schedule a Housing Committee meeting focusing on this as soon as possible, to get information about housing resources to the tenants of 295 Harvard Street from housing agencies and advocates, and to see if the City can in any way assist these soon-to-be-displaced tenants. Due to the challenges of scheduling summer meetings, today was the first available date for this meeting, and while I normally take pains to hold these meetings later in the day so that more people can attend, I didn't want to risk pushing this later into the month and losing precious time. So I do apologize to those who could not come, and I will certainly work to get any information from this meeting to the tenants who could not join us today.

What I would like to do is hear from City departments and the housing agencies assembled here to find out what programs and services these tenants might be eligible for, what they will want to be mindful of as they race to find housing over the next few weeks, and whether any of our experts here want to share other important information that these people may need to be made aware of. I would also like to pose the question as to whether the City Council can and should be examining the possibility and the legality of imposing a trigger that would alert us to scenarios like the one that brought us here today much earlier in the process, so that we can act earlier and, perhaps, more effectively, in getting information to and assisting those tenants who are being displaced.

First, I would like to open the floor for Public Comment, to ask any tenants in 295 to share their stories and their concerns, and any others that may wish to speak. This will be followed by going around the table to hear from our City Departments and housing agencies and advocates. The floor is now open for Public Comment.

**Agenda For July 9, 2015 Housing Committee Meeting**

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- I. Opening Remarks from Councilor Simmons**
- II. Public Comment**
- III. Information Sharing From Department of Human Services Programs**
- IV. Information Sharing From Community Development Department**
- V. Information Sharing From Other Housing Service Providers**
- VI. Councilor Simmons Closing Remarks/Meeting Concludes**

**Crane, Paula**

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**From:** kchandi@comcast.net  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 09, 2015 6:21 PM  
**To:** Crane, Paula  
**Subject:** Cambridge Housing Committee meeting at 3 pm Thus July 9

Prepared notes delivered by Khushi Chandiramani at Cambridge Housing Committee meeting at 3 pm Thus July 9, 2015:

My name is Khushi Chandiramani. I am 77 years old and retired since 2011. I have spent 55 of my 77 years in Cambridge, and the last 48 years of these as a tenant at Harvard Towers building in Cambridge. I have liked living in this place because of its convenient location, quiet neighbors, pleasant neighborhood, and reasonable rents. I had planned on staying here for good 10 years or more, as long as my health permits. I have had a long history of cardiac disease, COPD, and vitiligo. This last disorder makes me very sensitive to direct sunlight, so I prefer, and enjoy, spending most of my daylight hours indoors. The prospect of this rather quick and sudden relocation, coupled with previous family-related commitments to travel out of town for a good part of June 2015, has subjected me to great stress. I am currently involved in securing a rental place in this neighborhood at a considerably higher rent. However in the light of my very long stay as a tenant at Harvard Towers, is it too much to expect some extra consideration from the property management in the form of a few months rent? And in a few years, perhaps, when my mostly fixed-income assets have dwindled considerably, I would appreciate access to some sort of assistance in ensuring affordable housing, so that I can continue my stay in Cambridge, which I greatly value and enjoy.

**Alpert, Neal**

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**From:** Ti-Grace Atkinson <tatki61912@aol.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, July 08, 2015 2:19 PM  
**To:** Simmons, Denise; Benzan, Dennis; Kelley, Craig; Mazen, Nadeem; McGovern, Marc  
**Subject:** Unaffordable Housing in Cambridge

**To the Housing Committee,  
The Cambridge City Council**

**My name is Ti-Grace Atkinson. I have lived in Cambridge for 18 years, at 35 Harding Street. I am now 76 years old. I am disabled from severe arthritis and have had multiple joint replacement surgeries.**

**The cost of living has skyrocketed in Cambridge since I've been here, and the quality of life has similarly deteriorated. Housing and food are about as fundamental as you can get.**

**I have an apartment in one of three buildings (from 33 to 42 Harding Street) bought in mid-June by Boston Investments. Their general manager, Tony Madan, has raised rents overnight to impossible limits, asking \$2400 for an apartment which rented for \$1400 just before. In effect, people are being forced out of their homes, in one case, his home for some 35 years.**

**We need the City Council to take an interest in our case and to communicate with this real estate investor that the Council is concerned about Boston Investments' apparent intention of displacing tenants from 13 units, some of whom have been residents of Cambridge for decades. We need rents that we can afford. AND we need at least the services which the Sanitary Code requires, such as taking out the garbage bins to the street for pick-up. To be so greedy AND irresponsible is surely a horrible combination.**

**I should add that I have made an effort to organize a tenants' group with some success. I have also been the only tenant to receive an Eviction Notice.**

**Sincerely, Ti-Grace Atkinson**

# HARVARD TOWERS CORPORATION

CC

July 7, 2015

Reference: Notice of Expiration of your Lease.

Dear ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

This is a reminder that your lease is due to expire on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015. We will not be renewing your lease for an additional year upon the expiration of your lease. We will also be terminating your parking rental space (if applicable) on August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015 as well. Please consider this letter the required written notice to vacate the premises as stated in your current lease and your current rental parking space.

To assist you in the transition from your current apartment to a future apartment we are currently working with Advantage Realty and Gentle Giant to assist you in this process. The phone number for Advantage Realty is 617.714.4000. Advantage Realty is willing to reduce their standard broker's fee to assist you in finding a new apartment. Chris from the Gentle Giant Moving Company will work with each tenant to assess what reductions are available based on your moving needs. Chris can be reached at 617.212.0609.

The City of Cambridge Community Development Department (CDD) has also offered to assist the tenants at Harvard Towers in any way that they can. The CDD Housing Division will be holding an informational session on affordable housing opportunities this coming Thursday, July 9, 2015 from 10am to 2pm at the City Hall Annex, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. The address of the City Hall Annex is 344 Broadway, Cambridge. Enclosed with this letter is the informational flyer for this upcoming event along with the CDD Housing Division rental application. In addition to the informational session there will be a Housing Division meeting on Thursday, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at 3pm at Cambridge City Hall located at Massachusetts Avenue in the Sullivan Chamber.

I understand that this has been a very difficult process for you but the building is need of a renovation. The building was built in the 60's and all of its systems are roughly 50 years old. It is better to proactively make these improvements than to wait for a major system (i.e. electrical, plumbing) to fail. Once these renovations are completed, all of our current tenants are welcome to come back to the building at the then current market rates. We will waive any associated broker's fee (if there are any) should you wish to come back to the Harvard Towers.

Please contact me once you know of your move out date so that I can book a time slot for your move out. I will work with everyone as best as possible to provide an orderly move out schedule. I greatly appreciate all of your cooperation and assistance in regards to this.

Your remaining monthly rent payments are to be paid to the end of your occupancy in compliance with the terms of your Lease. Your security deposit cannot be used as rent payment at any time. After you vacate the premises, an inspection will be made to ensure that

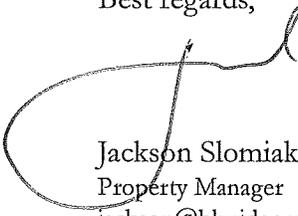
July 7, 2015

the Leased Premises have been cleared of all furniture and personal items and left in a clean and undamaged condition. All keys to the premises must be returned to the Landlord when you vacate. You must also provide the Landlord with your forwarding address.

This letter serves as a reminder notice of the expiration of your Lease at 295 Harvard Street, Apt. [REDACTED] located in Cambridge, MA 02139. Failure to comply with the above requirements could result in legal proceedings to regain possession of the property, which in turn may incur attorney costs and court fees for which you may be responsible. Failure to act in accordance with your Lease can also adversely affect your credit rating.

I would like to thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Best regards,



Jackson Slomiak  
Property Manager  
[jackson@bluridgemgmt.com](mailto:jackson@bluridgemgmt.com)  
617.391.1802

Enclosures (2): CCD Flyer  
CCD Rental Application

## Crane, Paula

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**From:** Harvard Towers Tenant <dissatisfied.295harvard.tenant@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, July 07, 2015 7:08 PM  
**To:** Crane, Paula  
**Cc:** Simmons, Denise  
**Subject:** testimony vs. Harvard Towers

Dear Ms. Crane:

I am writing to express my extreme dissatisfaction with the way that Harvard Towers management has treated its tenants. Like my other neighbors in the building, I received a letter from City Councilor Denise Simmons informing me of the upcoming emergency hearing to address the matter this Thursday; however, I will be at work and unable to attend. I am providing anonymous testimony to circumvent possible repercussions by the management company.

I have been a long-time resident at 295 Harvard St., and have always paid my rent on time and kept my apartment in good order. It was thus a great shock to me when I received the letter from Jackson Slomiak informing me that my lease would not be renewed. What was even more appalling was the lack of advance communication from the Harvard Towers management vis-a-vis lease renewal. Typically, lease renewals have been offered to building tenants many months in advance; however, when I attempted to contact the management about this topic, I received no answer. The management must have known about the lack of lease renewals much earlier than May, when we received the non-renewal notices, yet they chose not to let me or any of the other tenants know until the last minute. This short notice has caused considerable difficulty in locating a new residence, especially given the current tight housing market. Many Sept. 1 Cambridge apartments are already rented, and most moving companies are already booked. If I had known earlier that I would have to move out by Aug. 31, I would have been much better prepared to minimize serious disruptions to my work and home life. This experience has left me very dissatisfied with the Cambridge housing situation.

The lack of communication by the Harvard Towers management is quite callous and unprofessional. Most of the apartment units have been recently renovated, with Pergo floors, granite countertops, new appliances, built-in HVAC units, and marble bath tiles. It is therefore unclear what sort of "renovations" would justify vacating the entire building and thus losing out on hundreds of thousands of dollars of rent. A covert condo conversion seems much more likely, and with a vacant building, the Harvard Towers owners can avoid many of the legal ramifications governing such a conversion, such as offering assistance to elderly and disabled tenants in finding comparable housing, relocation payments to all tenants, and tenants' right of first refusal. Perhaps Harvard Towers Corporation has a legal right to take such a route, yet it is undoubtedly the tenants who must suffer the consequences. Given Harvard Towers Corporation's refusal to respond about lease renewal in advance of their untimely notice concerning non-renewal, it is highly likely that their prior statements to the City Council representing that they did not know of this plan well in advance is a blatant fabrication. This dishonesty, in addition to the Corporation's lack of clarity about any specific renovation plans or timeline, strongly suggests that any excuses made by Harvard Towers for the mass tenant exodus should be viewed with utmost skepticism.

Unfortunately, Cambridge itself has no laws governing condo conversions, so tenants must rely on state law for protection. This, along with essentially mandatory brokers' fees accompanying each apartment rental and skyrocketing rent, is symptomatic of the housing market being heavily skewed towards landlords, with tenants holding little to no bargaining power. I am extremely disappointed in the unethical actions of Jackson Slomiak and the Harvard Towers Corporation and hope that the Cambridge City Council can offer some much-needed reprieve to my fellow 295 Harvard St. tenants and me.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,  
Dissatisfied Harvard Towers Tenant