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CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

May 6, 2024

Dear City Manager Huang and Affordable Housing Trust members,

We are writing to raise concerns about the Print Shop Condominiums located at 125 Harvard Street. The condominiums contain 24 affordable homeownership units, including 14 family-sized units with six 3-bedroom and eight 2-bedroom units, and an additional ten 1-bedroom units. All units were sold to income-eligible first-time homebuyers who would not be able to afford market rate condos. Owners have been experiencing significant challenges with their units since shortly after residents began to move in in 2009. It is unclear how many vacant units there are at the property, but current owners believe no one should be moving into these units given the challenges. There is photographic evidence to back up all the issues, and residents are asking to speak to the City Manager and the Affordable Housing Trust members about the conditions they are living under.

The following are concerns we heard from residents:

- **Condo Fees Increasing:** Condo fees have nearly doubled over the past decade. In addition, residents must pay special assessment fees that are over \$450. Fees continue to increase which are turning into heavy financial, emotional, and mental burdens for residents.
- **Leaks:** Water leaks in apartments due to rain and also pipes that freeze, likely due to improper installation and the cost to make repairs has been estimated at around \$200,000, which is nearly the full cost of each individual condo.
- **Non-insulated pipes:** The pipes in the building were improperly installed. The garage is an exposed garage and the pipes were exposed in the garage. There is a question of how this design ever passed inspection. These pipes leak regularly—within the building and in garages. Residents were assessed to fix these pipes, but it did not fully solve the issue in cold weather.
- **Sprinklers:** The sprinklers have been fixed once but need to be repaired again. After the initial repair, the original insurance company declined to renew the Print Shop's policy which forced them into a significantly more expensive policy.
- **Elevator:** Does not function and was shut down by the fire department, who noticed it was malfunctioning and shut it off to prevent any future damages. Currently, there is a woman in a wheelchair who can no longer make it to her appointments. The apartment building was marketed as ADA accessible, but this resident is at risk if there is an emergency or fire.
- **Solar Panels:** In 2009-2010 the first residents to move in discovered the plugs did not work. Upon hiring an electrician, with their own funds, they learned that the electrical wiring was not connected to the back end of the sockets. The units were sold when the outlets did not work.

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- **Faulty Garage Door:** Numerous issues with the garage door, which has had to be replaced and repaired multiple times since 2009.
- **Fatigue on Board:** Trustee members have had to work sometimes almost full-time to address the ongoing concerns and the various property managers. At this point, there is a potential for no residents stepping up to replace current trustees, as the role is so taxing and emotionally fraught. Residents must rapidly learn about complex issues and have been defrauded by at least one management company.

Cascap property managers continually placed blame on residents, claiming that owners were causing the damages on the basis that they are first-time homebuyers. However, there have been many issues with these units since 2009 that have not been addressed and condo owners must use their own money to fix issues. Since then, subsequent property management companies place blame on substandard building issues, placing residents in a double bind.

The owner requests are as follows:

1. Return them to first time homeowner status so they can move and purchase something else.
2. Provide grants to make repairs in a speedy manner, as they are currently facing multiple urgent/emergent issues.
3. Longer term, lift the city's deed restrictions so owners can recoup costs in a variety of ways, including by having roommates or subletting the units temporarily, or allowing a higher rate of return upon sale.
4. A meeting with the City manager and CDD team who are directly connected with the building issues.
5. Request for the City manager and Inspectional Services to visit the building with an investigation team to check and review all the structural defects of our building.

Ultimately, while the city has a stated and important goal of helping individuals reach homeownership, the reality is that due to the difficulties related to this property, living in these units has become unaffordable.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Sumbul Siddiqui in black ink.

Councillor Sumbul Siddiqui

Handwritten signature of Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler in black ink.

Councillor Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler