

December 15, 2021

Cambridge City Council
Ordinance Committee
Cambridge City Hall
795 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139

Re: Zoning Petition Received from Karen Cushing et. al. to Amend the Affordable Housing Overlay to Make Off Street Parking Consistent with Base Zoning

To the Members of the Cambridge City Council Ordinance Committee:

The Cambridge Housing Authority (CHA) is writing to express its concerns regarding the proposed petition to revise the City's Affordable Housing Overlay to make off-street parking consistent with base zoning. The proposed petition has both immediate and long-term effects and should not be adopted.

Most immediately, the CHA is finalizing its plans to rehabilitate its Jefferson Park Federal property located off Rindge Avenue in North Cambridge. These plans are impacted by the proposed petition since the Jefferson Park project is utilizing the AHO and its design standards for the project. Prior to the petition, CHA was currently finalizing its next AHO submission to the Planning Board for its second review of the project, a key step required for the project to proceed with its September 2022 financial closing and construction start. If the petition were to be enacted the project would not be able to move forward on that schedule potentially jeopardizing its funding. Further, given the constraints required by the proposed petition the CHA would not be able to rebuild all the 175 existing units on site as the current parking ratio is below the base zoning requirement of 1:1 at 0.6:1. We would also lose the opportunity to create any of the additional 105 new deeply affordable units planned as part of the redevelopment effort.

In terms of long-term effects, the proposed petition if approved would eliminate one of the most effective components of the AHO in terms of site viability and as a result would stifle the development of new units under the AHO. In its crafting the AHO sought to balance the demands of parking against other City goals and objectives such as open space and environmental sustainability. Maintaining the parking at the base zoning level would require more of the parcel be set-aside for parking resulting in fewer units on sites as well as make some sites not feasible given the financial challenges already facing affordable housing development. It would also create additional heat islands.

In short, the proposed amendment altering the parking requirements as they currently exist in the AHO overlay will impact CHA's ability to proceed with its Jefferson Park redevelopment effort and stifle the ability of 100% affordable housing developers to find properties it could successfully develop under the AHO. The AHO has already shown some significant benefit in creating opportunities for affordable

housing in varied neighborhoods of Cambridge in the short time it has been in place, we would urge the Ordinance Committee and the City Council not to adopt the proposed zoning petition.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael J. Johnston". The signature is stylized with a prominent initial "M" and a long, sweeping tail.

Michael J. Johnston
Executive Director