

CRAIGIE ARMS

Claims put housing in doubt

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A change in ownership of Harvard Square's Craigie Arms apartments has threatened the residents living in its 25 units of affordable, low-income housing.

When the building's original owner, Bob Kuehn, died, he left the ownership of the building to 30 different beneficiaries who, according to City Councilor Marjorie Decker, are looking to sell the property.

To further complicate the issue, according to the agreement Kuehn made with Harvard in 1985, the ownership of the building will be transferred back to Harvard in 2040.

Residents of Craigie Apartments came to Monday night's City Council meeting urging the council to officially go on record to encourage Harvard University to ensure the continued affordability at Craigie Arms apartments.

The Council's unanimous vote came after listening to, at

times, emotional and passionate testimony from residents who want to continue to call the Harvard Square location their home.

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A change of ownership at Craigie Arms, a group of buildings that contains 122 Mt. Auburn St., right, might have an effect on affordable housing units there.

WICKED LOCAL STAFF
PHOTO BY DAVID L. HARRIS



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At stake are 50 units of housing with 25 of those designated as units that must be rented to low-income residents until 2015.

Decker, who brought the issue up to Council, said that although they have no power to stop the sale to a for-profit venture, they could ask Harvard to "step forward and show it's renewed commitment to affordable housing."

"I'm disappointed at this point because we have not heard back from Harvard University's real estate board on how they will move forward here," she added. "They could, flat-out buy the units now and maintain them as affordable, or they could enter in a partnership with the city so they can maintain the 25 affordable units."

Cambridge Mayor David Maher called Kuehn a leader in affordable housing initiatives the Greater Boston area.

"This was a gentleman who was completely committed

to affordable housing, so to see this happening to a building where he had his offices and knew the tenants, is really quite a travesty," Maher said.

The buildings located are 120-122 Mt. Auburn St., 2-4-6 University Road and 6 Bennett St. Residents and supporters spoke passionately about Craigie Arms and their connection to the area.

Anna Lawso spoke of her love of the diversity in the area and how the proximity of services makes the location one that she could not do without.

"I have the subway, the bank and post office just outside my door and I don't want to move," she said. "I've lived in Cambridge for 22 years. Harvard should be encouraged to step up and extend the lease and keep affordable housing in Harvard Square."

The Harvard- and MIT-educated Rev. Dr. Linda Jordan, who is also the pastor of the newly formed A Place to Heal Ministries in Cambridge, spoke passionately about the need for public housing in the city.

"When I became sick with cancer, I was forced to stay in Massachusetts... when you get sick and you cannot work, no matter how much education you have, you may lose your housing. I'm one of those travesties."

Had she not been a student at Harvard, living on campus housing, she said she would have been homeless while under going chemotherapy. She said Craigie Arms was a place for Cambridge to show its diversity and that Harvard should work to maintain affordable housing in the area.

"We're asking you to not take away what we need in order to survive," she said.

Other councilors spoke in support of the issue. Vice Mayor Henrietta Davis called the community at Craigie Arms "a naturally occurring retirement community."

"And one that would be a terrible shame to close," she added. "Residents have made their voices heard that this is a priority for the city. Affordable units should be made available throughout the city and not just in some areas."