

Deal on table to maintain affordability for Craigie

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The residents of Craigie Arms had reason to celebrate with loud applause at a meeting two weeks ago when it was announced that the owners of the building have accepted an offer from Homeowners Rehab, Inc.

When the building's original owner, Bob Kuehn, died,

he left the ownership of Craigie Arms to 30 different beneficiaries who sought to sell the property. The change in ownership put residents on edge and threatened the status of the 25 units of affordable, low-income housing.

The new deal will retain the affordability of the 25 units and maintain the rents of the other 25 market rate units.

City Councilor Marjorie Decker, chair of the council's Housing Committee, called the offer from Homeowner's Rehab, Inc. "really good news."

"This is really good news everybody," she said to the crowd of cheering residents who attended the Housing Committee meeting at City Hall. "This is the best news we can have. This is exactly where we want to be."

Peter Daly, executive director of Homeowner's Rehab, said the process is not done yet and there is still a way to go before everything is finalized, but he is positive the deal will move forward.

"What this means is that we have a signed contract with the seller," he said. "If all goes according to the contract, we hope to acquire the property by the end of the year."

Some of the issues that still need to be resolved revolve around the ownership of the land. According to the agreement Kuehn made with Harvard in 1985, the ownership of the building will be transferred back to Harvard in 2040.

Tom Lucey, director of communications for Harvard University, said he could not

discuss the details of the arrangement until the deal was finalized.

"What I will say is that I'm optimistic that the right thing will happen here," he said. "In recent history, Harvard has been part of creating more than 600 affordable housing units in the city, so we came to the table with a history of working with the city on this issue."

Back in June, Craigie Arms residents packed City Council chambers during public comment encouraging councilors to work to maintain affordable housing at the Harvard Square apartments.

On Thursday, Decker said the pressure the residents put on the owners and the city was a key factor in getting a deal on the table.

"People needed to see that you were not going to back down easily," she said. "I hope you feel really good, you were an important role in this and that made a difference. Don't underestimate your role in this."

Craigie resident Yehuda Avniel has lived in one of the market rate units for over 15 years. Although he's glad there is a deal on the table, he is concerned with the management company Home Owners Rehab, Inc. uses — WinnResidential.

"While I want them to maintain the mixed income, I'm worried about Winn," he said. "The deal looks good on paper, but it's hard for me to know just how it's going to be when they take over management."