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To: ZBA

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To whom it may concern:

I understand Housing Corporation of Arlington is attempting to gain approval for new construction of their Sunnyside project. The plan anticipates creation of 43 units of affordable housing in mixed use space, raising HCA's portfolio (and all associated responsibilities) significantly (from about 150 to about 200 units).

Generally, I believe the more accessible housing, the better it is for everyone. However, after living in HCA's most recent project, BDSI, I completely oppose the approval of the sunnyside project. Although the country, state, and region need affordable units desperately, these affordable units should allow residents to live in good conditions, with dignity, free to let their children play, free to live in a healthy environment, free to unionize, and free from retaliation for expecting such basic rights.

BDSI, like the proposed sunnyside project, increased HCA's portfolio significantly. However, it was delayed, way above budget, questionably built (mostly on an EPA toxic site, without indoor air quality testing), and feels like a prison. Problems I've noted since moving in (1 year ago - with Peabody properties, the current company managing HCA's entire portfolio - in charge) have still not been resolved, though Peabody has routinely used textbook retaliation when I've voiced concern.

For example, the BDSI project is entirely nonsmoking indoors or anywhere on the property due to the type of federal funding approved to make this project a reality. In addition, residents were clearly told during lease signing that although marijuana is legal in Massachusetts, it is not allowed on premises here for the same federal funding reasons.

A member of my family has needed medical care multiple times (including a hospitalization) due to the extreme amounts of indoor smoking - particularly marijuana. The smoke alarms regularly blare, and have needed replacement, because of the smoke drifting into our apartment.

However, when I complained, management did not respond for over a month - then responded by ignoring the smoke but implying my child drawing on the sidewalk with sidewalk chalk was a serious lease violation - then at one point, placed a large stand-up ashtray as if to designate a smoking spot directly outside of my bedroom window where I complained people were standing and smoking, causing smoke alarms to go off and our family to be ill. I was further told my child was seen "playing" in the hallway on video - which was not allowed, and again, cited as a serious lease violation. (HCA's lawyer clarified that he had viewed the video of a child "playing" and it only showed my child sort of skipping to the indoor bike room during the day while proceeding to our only apartment entrance - past the bike room and located in an indoor hallway with a camera trained straight at my apartment door).

To make matters worse, the windows only open literally 1" - enough to let in fumes, but not enough to place a box fan in the window to get a cross breeze or blow the smoke back outside. Peabody has submitted reasonable accommodation requests on my behalf without my knowledge or permission twice - once was to actually relocate my family, and that was after I demanded they cease these actions following the first reasonable accommodation request I didn't make.

You may wonder why I'm the only tenant in this project speaking up. Other residents were equally concerned and we started forming a tenants union. However, HCA's social worker, Paul Jean, told me last July "they were going to do that" when I requested permission to distribute flyers to all tenants. HCA tried to form a "tenants council", which is clearly not a tenants union,

by hand picking who they would like to be involved and paying for “leadership training”, which fizzed out and ended prematurely as soon as the organization providing the training realized what they were told and the reality were in stark contrast.

While we still maintain our grass roots tenants union, the other members are afraid to speak up after witnessing the extensive retaliation I endured when addressing group issues, such as rampant indoor smoking, trash sitting outside all week, poor ventilation, etc.

Residents of other HCA properties expressed the same concern - they have witnessed lack of maintenance and extreme retaliation over the years - whether Peabody Properties, HCA directly, or under their former management companies (which are always interchangeable with HCA, since their address and phone number is identical).

Speaking of maintenance, the board of health has cited HCA in cases of property neglect so extreme rent was withheld from neighboring housing authorities due to HCA's lack of even an attempt to fix violations. My unit (just built) failed inspection due to the poor ventilation I've complained about since day 1, along with other building defects brought to HCA/Peabody's attention, but unaddressed. Peabody/HCA was given 30 days to fix the violations but have not contacted me at all to date (going on 45 days), though a massive new water leak has formed in that time and I was threatened with my car being towed from the parking lot.

Low income and so-called affordable housing provides big money with very little oversight. The only people seriously knowledgeable and interested in the actual vs promised conditions are the residents of these projects, and they're generally afraid to come forward - for good reason, as I have seen for myself.

Before you grant HCA more funding and reputational prowess, please consider that they have not kept up the “affordable” units in their portfolio now, despite receiving market rent through guaranteed funding schemes (a 3 bedroom in BDSI provides over \$3,000/month rent to HCA between the tenant portion and subsidy. The 2 bedroom units provide over \$2300 - 100% of fair market rent for the area.)

Citing new management does not explain why anything will improve next time - both the social workers employed by HCA and Erica Schwarz herself were informed of the horrible conditions, in case Peabody properties had failed to inform them. Nor does the length of time expected to pass between the approval sought and expected completion- just look at the history of BDSI. While I don't wish to publicly share emails back and forth with both HCA and Peabody properties documenting what I've stated, I'm happy to share these privately with those making decisions in this matter to prove the accuracy of my claims.

I hope you'll take these serious matters into consideration before approving HCA's proposed Sunnyside project. Please email me if you'd like proof of any of my statements. I realize they may be alarming and inconsistent with the perception of HCA.

I also encourage you to question how many Arlington families or individuals were helped with HCA's most recent projects. Although where people come from makes no difference to me, I hear a lot of emphasis placed on helping Arlington residents. However, very few residents here have a connection to Arlington before moving into HCA's projects. (This is not new and was noted by an HCA resident and former board member years ago).

Wishing you the very best in your decision,
Kelda Fontenot