



CITY COUNCILOR DENISE SIMMONS

Affordable Housing Information Sheet



Dear Friends:

One of my primary duties as a City Councilor is helping people who are searching for affordable housing. Whether people are applying for housing via the Cambridge Housing Authority, or working with organizations like HomeStart or the MBHP, there are many different organizations throughout Cambridge that are dedicated to helping people find an affordable place to live. I have put together this informational handout in order to help you navigate the process of searching for affordable housing, complete with contact information for the various organizations, and tips for what you need to know, what you need to ask, and what you need to do to maximize your chances of success. I am asking that you hold on to this informational handout for future use, and forward it along to your friends and family. You may not need this information right now, but it may prove valuable at some point down the road—and the well-informed are always going to have a leg up when searching for housing. Of course, I am also here to assist you at any time with this process. **I can be reached at (617) 349-4280 or (617) 349-4277, at dsimmons@cambridgema.gov, and at www.DeniseSimmons.com (where you can also sign up for Facebook & Twitter updates).**

ONLINE RESOURCES GATEWAY: www.MassResources.org/housing.html

Cambridge Housing Authority

362 Green Street, Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 864-3020/ www.cambridge-housing.org
Walk-In Hours Thursdays 10 am – 2 pm

Just-A-Start Cambridge

1035 Cambridge St, Cambridge, MA 02141
(617) 494-0444/ www.justastart.org
(housing search advice/assistance)

HomeStart, Inc.

552 Massachusetts Ave, Cambridge
(617) 234-5340/ <http://homestart.org>

Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership

125 Lincoln St, Boston, MA 02111
(617) 859-0400/ www.mbhp.org

Cambridge Multi Service Center

362 Green St, Cambridge, MA 02139
(617) 349-6340 (general information)
<http://goo.gl/pgsn4>

Cambridge Somerville Legal Services

60 Gore St, Cambridge, MA 02141
(617) 603-2700 (general legal information)
www.gbls.org/cambridge-somerville-legal-services

ABCD Housing Development

105 Chauncy Street, Boston, MA 02111
(617) 348-6347 (general housing information)
www.bostonabcd.org/housing-search-workshop.aspx

Department of Transitional Assistance

80 Everett Avenue, Chelsea, MA 02150
(617) 551-1700 (various services)
www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dta

In addition to www.youfindyourstrength.org, another excellent online resource, the organizations listed above are dedicated to either assisting individuals with searching for housing, knowing their legal rights, assessing their needs, or otherwise helping those who are in need of both short term and long term housing. For those who have absolutely no idea where to begin the housing search process, I would advise that you start by contacting the Cambridge Multi Service Center to book an appointment. They are staffed with caring, knowledgeable professionals who will give you a straight-forward consultation on what type of housing you may qualify for, and how to go about applying for it.

THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING A HOUSING JOURNAL

I would strongly, strongly urge any person who is navigating through any part of this process to keep a detailed journal of your housing search. **After every meeting, phone call, or communication with the housing agency, you should note the time, date, name of the person or persons you spoke with, your understanding of what information they provided, and a copy of any documents you either filled out or were provided with.** This information is **critical** to creating a paper trail that, over the course of your housing search, will ensure your application is not lost among the thousands of others that are being processed by the various housing organizations. I cannot stress just how important it is that you keep clear records of this information! My office may assist you with this if you need.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION YOU SHOULD BE PREPARED TO PROVIDE WHEN APPLYING

Whenever you are first applying for housing—regardless of which agency you are applying to—you must keep in mind that the organization does not know you, your background, or what circumstances brought you to this point. You should try to give them as much information about yourself as possible, even if you don't think it is necessary, because this will give the agency a clearer picture of who you are, what your needs are, and what you may qualify for. Some of the most important information to provide, and questions you should ask, are provided below:

Note your age, source of income (if any), number of individuals you will be living with. If you will initially be living alone, but would ultimately like your children to live with you, you should note that. If you have a CORI, you must be honest and upfront with this information (it will not necessarily deter you from housing, and you musn't hide it).

Inform the agency about your employment status: Do you work, or do you expect to be working? Are you eligible to work? Are you prohibited from working?

Note if you are a domestic violence survivor—this is particularly important for the Cambridge Housing Authority to know, as it may significantly reduce your waiting time for apartments. This information can be handled confidentially.

Note your ties to Cambridge – family, work, doctors – this is all important information. You can still apply to live in Cambridge housing if you currently live outside the city, but your wait will be significantly longer in this case.

Do you have any mobility issues, or any other health concerns that impact you? Tell the agencies at the start of the process – this may influence which apartments you are eligible for, which apartments you will apply to, or it may reduce your waiting time. Any health issues cited will likely need medical records or doctors' letters for verification.

If you're unsure of what information *might* influence the length of time you'll be on a waiting list — ASK! Remember, the housing agencies do not know you or your history, but there may be information in that history that will benefit you in your housing search. You can always ask the agencies to give examples of the type of information that would benefit you, or that they might need to know.

Always be sure to ask which buildings have the shortest wait time, the highest rate of turn-over, and what the agency's best guess is in terms of relative wait times (i.e., would signing up for the list mean **months** of waiting, or **years?**). Some lists may have fewer numbers of people (suggesting a shorter wait time), but they may also very rarely have openings, and thus have much longer wait times. This is very important to find out before you sign on to a specific wait list.

RECOMMENDED QUESTIONS TO ASK EACH AGENCY:

- “Based on the personal information I am sharing today, which waitlists would you *recommend* I apply for? How many different lists can I be on at one time?”
- “When I wish to touch base with your agency, whom should I specifically ask for? How do I reach that person? Is there an email address I can write to? Will you only reach out to me by U.S. postal mail, or can I request phone calls or email contact as well?”
- “If my name reaches the top of the list, and I do not like the housing I am shown, do I have the option to refuse it and not lose my spot on the list, or would I have to start this entire process all over again?”
- “What steps must I take to ensure that I am not removed from the waiting list?”

IMPORTANT: If your contact information changes, if you move to a different location, if you change phone numbers or email addresses, YOU MUST UPDATE THIS INFORMATION AT THE HOUSING ORGANIZATIONS YOU APPLY TO. If you fail to do this, you risk losing your place on the waitlist and may have to start over again from the beginning.

This sheet should be considered a guide for getting started on your housing search. It is strongly recommended that if you have any questions at any point in your search, you should contact my office, the Cambridge Multi Service Center, or other housing advocates that you are working with. Please share this guide with your family and friends, in order to make sure that this information finds the people who most need it. As always, you can always contact my office at (617) 349-4277, or by email at dsimmons@cambridgema.gov (or visit my website at www.DeniseSimmons.com). I am always here to help you in any way I can!