

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS



Volume 4 Issue 1

Inside this issue:

The Alliance of Cambridge Tenants	1
How Much is a Voucher Worth?	2
Verifying Utility Payments	2
City Offering Green Jobs Training	3
Earn \$50 Telling Your Housing Story	4

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"The mission of the Cambridge Housing Authority is to develop and manage safe, good quality, affordable housing for low-income individuals and families in a manner which promotes citizenship, community & self-reliance."

ALLIANCE OF CAMBRIDGE TENANTS: A NEW VOICE FOR TENANTS A COMMUNITY OF MUTUAL SUPPORT

The Alliance of Cambridge Tenants (ACT) represents all of us who live in CHA's housing programs. That's more than 5,400 households. A series of citywide meetings in 2008 led to the election of the first ACT board in 2009. The 38-member ACT board is the first resident organization in the U.S. to have equal representation from voucher holders and public housing residents. We hold monthly board meetings that are open to all ACT members (every adult who is currently listed on a CHA public housing lease or who is a CHA voucher holder is an ACT member). But the real power of ACT comes from the grassroots. That means all of us acting together and helping each other.

Take ACTION, join an ACT committee!

If you're interested in changing housing policy, helping others with problems and questions, organizing a tenant group where you live, or raising funds for resident services and activities, there's an ACT committee that you can join. If you are experiencing a housing problem, ACT volunteers will help you get the information or resources you need to protect your housing.

The *Technical Assistance Committee* (TAC) keeps tenants informed about proposed changes in CHA policies and programs. TAC studies how tenants will be affected by CHA's decisions and promotes the policy ideas that give tenants a greater say in what happens to their housing. The *Finance Committee* raises funds for resident services and activities that benefit tenants. ACT's *Assistance and Outreach Committee* (A & O) is there to help residents advocate and organize for themselves. A & O includes subcommittees to back up public housing Resident Councils and voucher holders. The voucher subcommittee plans to hold community meetings to bring us together so our voices can be heard at last. There are ACT members who are working to create community gardens, protect the rights of tenants with disabilities, and improve conditions

(Continued on page 3)

NEW PAYMENT STANDARDS MAKE IT EASIER TO FIND AN APARTMENT IN CAMBRIDGE

In February 2010 CHA increased the Payment Standards it uses to determine rents for units rented by voucher holders. The Payment Standard is the maximum rent CHA will help a voucher holder pay towards an apartment in Cambridge. Voucher holders can rent apartments with rents higher than the Payment Standard, but it is the voucher holder's responsibility to pay the difference between the Payment Standard and the actual rent, in addition to the 30% of income voucher holders typically pay towards rent. Also, CHA will not usually allow a voucher holder to rent an apartment if the total rent the voucher holder would be responsible for exceeds 40% of their monthly income.

Raising the Payment Standard makes it easier for voucher holders to find apartments in the City's expensive and competitive rental market. Once again this year, CHA's Payment Standards are higher than those recommended for Cambridge by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and represent an average increase of 3.6% over last year's Payment Standards. This is the largest Payment Standard increase in several years. This year's Payment Standards range from 12–25% higher than HUD's recommended rents.

Effective February 1, 2010 the Payment Standards for Cambridge are:

Studio	1 bedroom	2 bedroom	3 bedroom	4 bedroom
\$1,220	\$1,362	\$1,685	\$2,000	\$2,191

These Payment Standards reflect the maximum amount CHA and voucher holders combined, generally pay for new or newly renovated Cambridge apartments with all utilities included. CHA's inspectors make adjustments for the cost of tenant supplied utilities and each unit's physical condition. Additionally, CHA maintains a citywide rental market database which it uses to confirm that rents requested by owners are reasonable. CHA uses each local Housing Authority's Payment Standards when considering rents for units outside of Cambridge.

You can find CHA's Payment Standards as well as the Utility Reimbursement rates online in the "For Voucher Holders" section of CHA's new website: www.cambridge-housing.org.

REMINDER: BRING PROOF OF UTILITY PAYMENTS

Federal regulations require that you provide the Housing Authority with evidence that you are up-to-date with all utility payments when you come into CHA for your annual recertification. This is required because the cost of your utilities is factored in when CHA determines your rent. In other words, CHA is helping you pay for your utilities, so you must be able to show that you're utility accounts are all current in order to continue receiving rental assistance.

The easiest way to show CHA that you're utility payments are current is to bring your most recent electric and gas (if you pay for gas) bills with you to your recertification appointment.

("Alliance of Cambridge Tenants" continued from cover)

in SRO (Single Room Occupancy) housing. ACT offers workshops and trainings on important housing and community issues and our members participate in state and national housing conferences. We are proud of our place in our communities and are learning to defend our rights, our homes, and our neighbors. If you think you might like to join us, welcome. If you have a problem, we might be able to help. Let us know, give us a call!

ACT has an office!

We are located at the Manning Apartments on 237 Franklin Street (enter from the elevator or down the back stairs from Franklin Street). There's a terrific group of volunteers who staff the ACT office. It's a good place to learn self-advocacy skills, basic things tenants should know like how to get bad conditions fixed and how to figure out voucher and public housing rents.

ACT is in the process of being recognized by the CHA as the citywide organization representing voucher holders and public housing residents. We also appreciate the active support of Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services, the Mass. Union of Public Housing Tenants, the Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee, and the Cambridge Housing Authority.

If you want to keep up on what ACT is doing, find out about when the ACT board and committees meet and what's on the agenda, you can ask to be placed on our mailing list. You can reach us by calling (617) 499-7031, sending an email to tenants@earthlink.net.

CITY OFFERING GREEN JOBS TRAINING

After a year-long effort on the part of a citizen Green Jobs Task Force, the City of Cambridge just launched a new green jobs initiative for eligible Cambridge residents. Through the Cambridge Green Jobs Program, individuals will receive training to become energy efficiency technicians through the Energy Efficiency Technician Apprenticeship Program (EETAP), or green building maintenance technicians through the Building Energy Efficient Maintenance Skills Program (BEEMS). Working in collaboration with the Asian American Civic Association (AACA), the City began offering training in April.

"Through the new Cambridge Green Jobs Program, Cambridge is promoting sound energy efficiency practices among residential and commercial citizens and helping our unemployed and underemployed residents increase their chances of becoming employed in the new green economy," said City Manager Robert W. Healy.

Among other skills, participants will study energy auditing, basic residential energy efficiency and conservation practices, basic carpentry and general maintenance, plumbing, electricity and weatherization. Program graduates will receive job placement assistance and support services such as computer training, vocational ESOL, math and workforce preparedness training.

To determine if you qualify as a potential program participant, contact Chris Albrizio at 617-426-9492 extension 250 or via email at chris@aaca-boston.org or Pardis Saffari, City of Cambridge, Community Development Department at 617-349-4654 or psaffari@cambridgema.gov.



CAMBRIDGE HOUSING AUTHORITY

675 Massachusetts Ave.

Cambridge, MA 02139

Phone: 617-864-3020

Fax: 617-520-6420

www.cambridge-housing.org



CHA welcomes Inspectors Martina Williams and Kunthea Ly to the Leased Housing Department

Las noticias del vecindario están disponibles en español en nuestra oficina del Central Square y en línea en www.cambridge-housing.org.

Nouvèl Vwazinaj disponib an Kreyòl nan Biwo-nou nan Central Square epi sou intènèt nan www.cambridge-housing.org.

As notícias da vizinhança estão disponíveis em Português no nosso escritório em Central Square e no internet no www.cambridge-housing.org.

TELL YOUR HOUSING STORY, EARN \$50

RESEARCHER LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEERS IN CAMBRIDGE

A Harvard student doing research on Public Housing and Voucher programs in the greater Boston area recently asked CHA if we would allow her to talk with CHA voucher holders about their experiences with the program. Participation in this interesting project is completely voluntary, so CHA agreed to let the researcher reach out to the families we serve.

The researcher, Holly Wood, is seeking parents or guardians of children under the age of 18 who are currently paying for housing with the help of a Housing Choice (Section 8) Voucher. Volunteers receive \$50 in exchange for a conversational interview where they and the researcher sit and talk casually about the family's experiences, concerns and hopes for their future housing choices. The interviews usually take between 60 and 90 minutes and Holly will travel to you for the interview.

If you'd like to learn about this interesting project, or to volunteer please contact Holly at: (617) 903-0720. Please leave a message making sure to leave Holly your **name, phone number**, and the best time for her to call you back. You can also reach Holly by email at: voucher-study@gmail.com.

This study is not sponsored by CHA, your participation is anonymous and nothing you share with Holly will affect your status with CHA in any way.