

# **Our Homes, Our Communities**

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## **How Tenants Preserve, Protect and Steward Public Housing**



Prepared by the Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants  
and the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute  
February 2006

## Dedicated to Gilda Ramirez

Board Member of Mass. Union of Public Housing Tenants  
Former Chair of the Public Housing Organizing Committee  
of the Chelsea Human Services Collaborative  
Active community member in Chelsea  
Mother to Pedro (PJ) Figueroa, 14  
Samantha Falcon, 9, and  
Antonio Falcon, 3

Gilda passed away from an asthma attack on October 31, 2005.  
She is sadly missed by the Mass. Union Board.



### Cover Photo:

Carlos Morales, resident at Collins Apartments in Jamaica Plain. The Collins Apartments development has been involved in "Boston Shines," a program that provided equipment and supplies so Collins residents could establish a community garden.

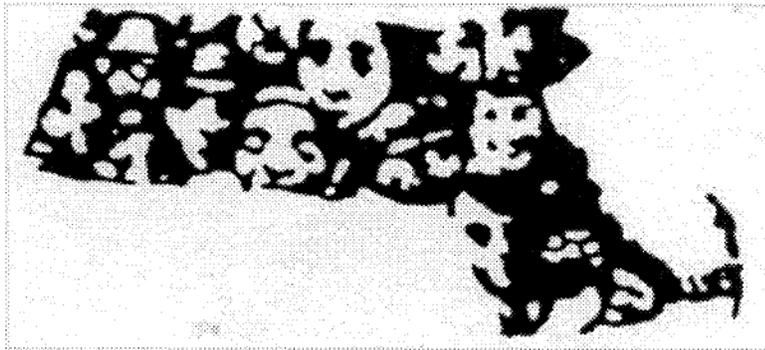
*Photo taken by Luba Glukhovsky.*

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### **Acknowledgments**

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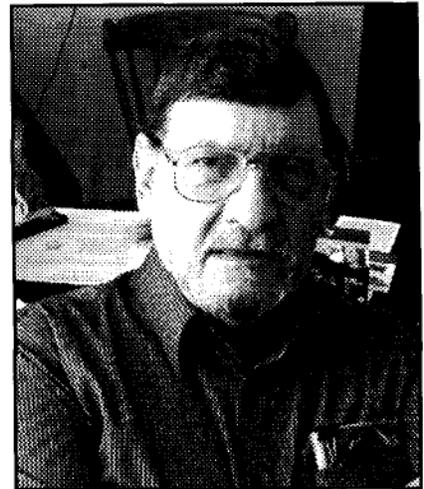
# The Right to Participate

As residents of public housing, we have the right to be involved in all policy and decision-making procedures of a housing authority. This right is important to ensure that all public housing residents and resident groups are treated equally and with respect while representing the best interests of those who live in public housing.

Across Massachusetts, residents are exercising, or trying to exercise, their right to participate. Some with the support of housing authorities; some without.

This report, *Our Homes, Our Communities*, is about what can happen when we who live in public housing are involved.

There are many ways for us to be involved. We can participate as housing authorities rehabilitate aging properties. We can participate in developing new policies. We can participate in creating good neighborhoods.



## What's the Law?

### **Federal tenant participation regulations say:**

HUD promotes partnerships between residents and housing authorities which are an essential components to building, strengthening and improving public housing. Strong partnerships are critical for creating positive changes in lifestyles and thus improving the quality of life for public housing residents, and the surrounding community.

*24 Code of Federal Regulations 964.14*

### **State tenant participation regulations say:**

Participation by tenants and household members through effective tenant organization is beneficial to the administration of public housing. Cooperative working relationships enhance housing programs and benefit both housing authorities and residents.

*760 Code of Massachusetts Regulations 6.09*

There is much that is good in public housing communities that goes unseen. After reading this report you will better understand residents' experiences and at the end come to learn the power of **meaningful participation.**

Bill King  
President  
Massachusetts Union  
of Public Housing Tenants



# Senator Brooke on Public Housing

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Edward W. Brooke was U.S. Senator from Massachusetts from 1967-1979. Just a few months after taking office, Senator Brooke waged a vigorous campaign in Congress for tenant participation in the modernization of public housing and championed the first statute to achieve this.

Brooke then worked with HUD to articulate the goals of public housing as a matter of national policy. In 1968, HUD issued a Circular that spelled out these goals, a key component of which was tenant participation. The Housing and Urban Development Act of 1970 elaborated on these tenant participation goals.

In 1969, Senator Brooke led the effort in Congress to pass what became known as the Brooke Amendment. This legislation established two principles for public housing: rents should be affordable to tenants; and a subsidy system should be established for public housing agencies to fill the gap between rents and operating expenses. We reached Senator Brooke recently and asked him to reflect on public housing issues then and now.

## **Why was tenant participation so important?**

**Brooke:** There was never a question in my mind that tenants should have a voice in the management and operation of public housing where they live. But it was more difficult to get tenant participation than I imagined. It should not have been, but housing authorities and members of Congress did not want tenants to participate. It was always tenants versus management, and management making decisions that affected the tenants with no input from them. I wanted to try to bridge that divide.



**Senator Brooke with Mass. Union members Susan Bonner, Paulette Turner, and Wanda Alvarado (from left to right) at 1996 press conference with Republican members of the Massachusetts Congressional delegation. At the time, conservative members of Congress were trying to repeal the Brooke Amendment. The press conference proved instrumental in garnering support from key Republicans, and ultimately the Brooke Amendment was saved.**

## **Baby Brooke**

In 1971, Massachusetts mirrored federal law and passed a “Baby Brooke” law to keep rents affordable in state public housing.

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*Continued next page*

## Do you feel that public housing should be seen as transitional?

**Brooke:** I have always believed, and still do, that our economic system should enable people to have a living wage, which at their option would allow them to move from public housing to private housing. Unfortunately, people who have low incomes, who are working and want to own their own home or move into the private market, cannot. Not because they do not want to. But because they cannot afford to. The idea of public housing as something to be forced out of if one is not making a livable wage flies in the face of the purpose of public housing.

**Public housing is about providing safe, decent, affordable and, I would add, stable housing—a home, a place to raise one’s family, a neighborhood, a community.**

## Goals of Tenant Participation

On March 22, 1968, HUD sent a Circular to all housing authorities entitled “Social Goals for Public Housing.” This document spelled out the major goals of public housing and marked the first time that the objectives of tenant participation, which are reprinted below, were officially articulated.

### Tenant Participation

Management should assume the responsibility for encouraging and assisting tenants to get together to solve problems, pool ideas and expand their capacities through self-help and self-determination. Some suggestions follow:

- Work with tenants in partnership to create a sense of community in the project, to promote citizenship, and to encourage tenants to put down roots and assume a responsible role in project affairs.
- Develop a two-way communication with tenants concerning basic policy; afford the tenants full opportunity to organize, including the provision of meeting rooms and access to tenant lists and bulletin boards.
- Give residents the opportunity to participate in the determination of management policies and practices, subject to general principles of HAA, such as: rental and occupancy policies; rules and regulations; charges for breakage and damage; evictions; etc.
- Involve tenants in plans for physical improvement of buildings, playground equipment, recreation and community facilities, and safety and security measures.
- Involve tenants in the selection and implementation of programs and activities intended for their own benefit, [such] as job training, social services, day care, and health services.
- Encourage ownership by tenants of units or buildings as the tenants become economically able and have established their ability to maintain a good home; give them training and experience to prepare them for individual and group ownership.
- Seek to enlarge the possibility for training and employing tenants, not only in the maintenance of the project, but for careers in management.

This circular was obtained from the most recent edition of *HUD Housing Programs: Tenants' Rights* (3d ed. 2004), by the National Housing Law Project. See Chapter 12: Resident Participation and the PHA Plan Process.

# What Is Stewardship in Public Housing?

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A steward is:

- One who represents another person.
- One who is entrusted with certain duties.
- One who is faithfully responsible to others.
- One who serves wisely.

In public housing, stewardship means taking care of both our people and the housing that we need. It means educating residents about laws that affect them; it means organizing so that tenants' voices can be heard; it means negotiating with those who manage the properties; and it means communicating up and down the line with residents, housing authority, staff, boards, and politicians.

At the Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants' 2005 Fall Convention, the MUPHT began the process of focusing on what solutions are necessary to preserve public housing. We want to be pro-active. We want to define for ourselves who we are.

With these goals in mind, at our Convention, we began to gather stories of stewardship in public housing. This report is a compilation of just some of those stories. They are the stories that people rarely hear about.



**MUPHT 2005 Fall Convention in Brockton.**

- In Boston, tenants teamed up with public health schools to tackle asthma.
  - In Gloucester, residents started a fresh produce market in their neighborhood.
  - In Wenham, tenants have raised thousands of dollars and given it away.
  - In Fall River, young people cleaned up their development while adults have been blocking its demolition.
  - In Worcester, residents build unity while negotiating with the housing authority.
  - In Brockton, the Resident Advisory Board looks for answers to protect tenants.
  - In Jamaica Plain, residents use music to find common ground.
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# In Boston, Public Housing and Public Health Team Up

According to the National Institutes of Health, more than 15 million Americans are asthmatic. Children suffer disproportionately from this disease. But this is changing for the better in public housing communities in Boston.

“There is growing acknowledgment that housing has a lot to do with increasing asthma rates because this is where you find many of the triggers,” said Jack Spengler of the Harvard School of Public Health.

Over the past three years, schools of public health in the Boston area along with a coalition of partners joined together in a multi-year program to improve the health of people living in public housing—especially kids.

The program, the Healthy Public Housing Initiative, trained 20 residents living in public housing in Boston about asthma education and research. These residents became community health advocates and have been educating parents about what triggers asthma, collecting data, measuring air samples, and implementing different responses to address problems.

In September 2005, the project issued a final report to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The report documented that the frequency of breathing problems in children had been significantly reduced:

- Children reporting asthma symptoms went down from **76% to 40%**;
- Slowing down or stopping play due to asthma attacks went from **64% to 26%**;
- Children waking up at night due to asthma went down from **64% to 30%**.

The report also found that because the community health advocates were residents who were known and trusted in their communities, the project gained access into people’s homes and was accepted in the developments. “This project is about improving the health and well-being of residents while giving them the power to advocate for themselves for decent housing,” said Kimberly Vermeer of Urban Habitat Initiatives, another partner.



**Community Health Advocates Maribel Sanchez, Maximo Vasquez, and Carmen Arroyo (left to right) get ready to go out to interview public housing residents.**

## Asthma Triggers

The following can trigger asthma:

- Dust mites
- Cockroaches
- Mold
- Rodents
- Pet dander
- Hygiene
- Stress
- Weather
- Certain food
- Certain medication
- Exercise
- Pollen
- Indoor pollution
- Cigarette smoke

This project is also about residents caring for each other. As Laura Bradeen, the Executive Director of the West Broadway Tenant Task Force, a local program coordinator for the Initiative, said:

For some time it's been known that asthma rates in public housing neighborhoods were greater than in the larger population. Residents began to believe it was due to housing conditions.

When universities started to pay attention to this, we decided that we wanted to scientifically prove what we knew was true in order to have these facts behind our advocacy. We wanted to partner with the Boston Housing Authority, who also needed these facts to advocate for funds.

The Initiative was a way to leverage what we needed, to bring attention to health problems, and to validate residents' concerns. These issues are real. Residents aren't complaining about nothing. The project gave us a practical way to take care of each other and participate in improving our quality of life.

Funded by HUD and private foundations, including the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Boston Foundation, and the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust, the Initiative was developed by a broad coalition of partners, including:

Boston University School of Public Health  
Harvard School of Public Health  
Tufts University School of Medicine  
Boston Public Health Commission  
Boston Public Housing Authority  
South Boston Community Health Center  
Urban Habitat Initiatives  
Committee for Boston Public Housing  
West Broadway Tenant Task Force  
Franklin Hill Tenant Task Force

For more information, training manuals, and reports about the Initiative, go to: [www.hsph.harvard.edu/hphi/](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hphi/).

## **Interventions**

Healthy Public Housing Initiative used different "interventions" to respond to people's asthma, including:

- New allergen-resistant mattresses
- Education about asthma medication management
- Education about pest control
- Commercial cleaning
- Low-toxicity pest control (gels, baits, traps)
- Support for improved food storage and waste management



**Harvard School of Public Health graduate student Junette Peters and community health advocate Linda Henson taking air samples inside an apartment to measure the air exchange (amount of fresh air in the apartment).**

# In Gloucester Farmer's Market Plants Seeds of Community

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Healthy food leads to better nutrition which leads to better health. This equation was put into action by a group of residents at Riverdale Park in Gloucester, who, with the Cape Ann Food Pantry, started a fresh produce market in their neighborhood.

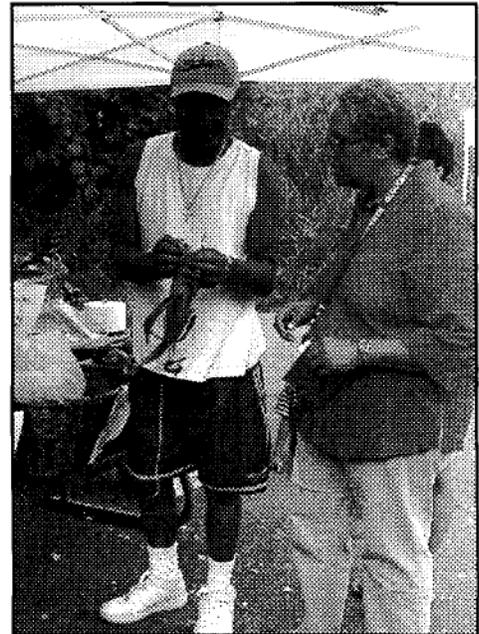
Riverdale Park, with 500 residents, is the largest family public housing community in Gloucester. The idea for a market started when the Cape Ann Food Pantry—which had been inspired by an urban farmer's market in the Bronx called City Harvest—approached a core group of tenants about starting a market at Riverdale.

The first step in Gloucester was for the tenant group to survey people in the neighborhood about what food they would be receptive to. Then the relationships with food suppliers were established. Organic produce came from Appleton Farms, a community-supported agricultural farm. Produce also came from a youth agricultural program in Lynn called the Food Project and from local grocers, including Crosby's and Trader Joe's.

Located outside the Riverdale community center, the market ran once every two weeks from June through November. Food stations operated by residents had baskets filled with fresh produce—peppers, squash, potatoes, corn, peaches, eggs, bananas.

To make the link between health and nutrition, the market partnered with the local hospital across the street, which set up a table to do blood pressure screenings and educate people about how to enroll for Medicaid.

A station was also provided for guest chefs to showcase vegetable recipes, with samples (and recipes) available. Chefs included local



**Reuben James, who volunteered to work at every single market, checks the corn with Loretta Peres.**



**Elizabeth Moulton and Julie LaFontaine from the Cape Ann Food Pantry.**

catering groups, and on at least one occasion the Director of the Board of Health.

“ We are all familiar with the soup lines and food pantries where you go to get your cans of corn or beans,” said Julie LaFontaine, Director of the Open Door Cape Ann Food Pantry, the sponsor of Riverdale’s produce market.

“This is about being able to have access to fresh produce, participate in your own solution, and build a little corner of the community at the same time. Here is a market by tenants, for tenants.”

Out of 150 households in Riverdale, last year about 80 signed up to participate in the market. The food is available at no cost, with the amount received based on the size of your household. The market asks residents to donate two hours of their time over the course of the season to help with the operation.



***On market days at Riverdale, where over half of the people who live in the neighborhood are children, Artspace, a nonprofit community art program, organizes activities with kids.***

## **More Information**

### **Food Project**

For 14 years, The Food Project has been bringing youth from the city and the suburbs in the Greater Boston and North Shore areas together to produce healthy food. By growing fresh, organic vegetables, young people work together as a team to serve others, learn farming and business skills, explore issues of hunger and community, and challenge themselves.

Each season, the Project grows nearly a quarter-million pounds of food without chemical pesticides, donating half to local shelters. Applications for internships, fellowships, and the 2006 Summer Program for ages 14-16 are online at: [www.thefoodproject.org](http://www.thefoodproject.org).

### **ArtSpace**

A grassroots art and musical center for young people in Gloucester. [www.artspace.org](http://www.artspace.org).

### **City Harvest**

City Harvest, located in the Bronx, was the original inspiration for the Gloucester market. It partnered with the American Heart Association. [www.cityharvest.org](http://www.cityharvest.org).

# In Jamaica Plain, Music Builds Common Ground

Last year, the Collins Apartments Task Force in Jamaica Plain reached out to the nearby New England Conservatory of Music, and music has now become a part of the community.

“At our invitation, Tanya Maggi from the New England Conservatory came to one of our monthly residents’ meetings,” described Carol Leary from Collins Apartments, “and spoke about how we could have student musicians come and perform for us at no cost. People got very excited—so excited that, at that meeting, a 93-year-old man who lives in the apartment under me went home during the meeting, came back with his guitar, and sang for everyone at the meeting. It was very unifying.”



***New England Conservatory student Santiago Diaz, a classical guitarist from Mexico plays, at the Collins Apartments community center.***

The effort to bring music into Collins was part of a community-building effort to find common ground among residents who speak different languages and come from different cultures. There are 43 apartments for seniors and people with disabilities, and one-third of the residents are Spanish speakers from several countries.

The first performance, held last May in the community room, was by New England Conservatory student Santiago Diaz, a classical guitarist from Mexico. “It was heavenly,” said Carol. “People invited their children and grandchildren. We had a record turnout. People from big old houses and condos from the neighborhood came. Music is such common ground.”

This past December, the Collins Apartments and the New England Conservatory hosted a second program of seasonal music by a four-woman vocal quartet, with two sopranos and two mezzo-sopranos. “It was truly memorable,” said Carol, “and that day attendance was even higher.” Now tenants are planning a jazz concert for the Spring.

## **More Information**

For more about the Performance Outreach Program at the New England Conservatory, contact Tanya Maggi at (617) 585-1243 or [tmaggi@newenglandconservatory.edu](mailto:tmaggi@newenglandconservatory.edu).

# Brockton Residents Have Questions and Answers

The Brockton Resident Advisory Board (RAB) represents over 2,000 tenants in Brockton. Like other RABs across the state, it is representing residents in order to improve housing conditions and the quality of residents' lives. "We try to bring tenants and the housing authority together to discuss issues," said Joe Sterling, RAB Vice President. "Housing authority staff are here 8 hours a day, 5 days a week. We live here 24/7. We know what's going on."

"Tenants are always calling us about something. Sundays. All hours of the day. It comes through us," said Madeline Greenlaw, President of the RAB. "We get complaints, we bring them to the housing authority, and we look for answers." At monthly meetings, the Brockton RAB brings information to residents—information about what the law says, what HUD says, what DHCD (Department of Housing and Community Development) says, and what is happening in the state and federal government.

Residents in Brockton are also building a Main Street in their basement. Rosemary Foster, President of the Campello A Tenant Association, started the Corner Store with help from others, including a local police officer, the manager of her building, and the Mayor's office. Run as a non-profit, it is located next to the community room at Campello A, a housing development for seniors and people with disabilities. "Seniors can't get out to get supplies. We have a lot of tenants whose families don't come to help them. The store sells milk, eggs, toilet paper, margarine, water," said Rosemary. "I do it because people need it."

Three months ago, Rosemary also helped set up Golden Locks, a hair salon located next to the Corner Store. Cuts go for \$5. "Men and women come to the salon for coffee, a cut, a manicure. They stay to talk. They stay to help. The salon is getting people out and talking."



**Madeline Greenlaw, President of the Brockton RAB, and Joe Sterling, Vice President.**



**Officer Thomas Donahue, Brockton Police Department, assigned to elder affairs, with Rosemary Foster behind the counter at Rosemary's Corner Store.**



**Hairdressers at Campello's Golden Locks, Brenda Arinell (left) and Dana Pierce (right).**

# In Wenham, Tenants Act Locally and Give Globally

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“We want to be known in the community as not ‘those old people over there,’ but as people who give,” says Gail MacLean, a member of the Enon Village Tenant Association.

Over the past four years, it has raised over \$9,000, mostly by cooking—bean suppers, spaghetti suppers, corned beef dinners, holiday dinners, bake sales, and yard sales.



**Enon Village Tenant Association at its January meeting. Enon Village is operated by the Wenham Housing Authority and provides 92 apartments for people over 60 and people with disabilities.**

“We have awesome cooks here and people love to eat. When we do a bake sale, it starts at 9 and the food is gone by 11,” adds Gail MacLean.

The Tenant Association decides as a group how and where to donate the money raised. Funds have gone to local doctors who went to Indonesia to provide care to tsunami victims; to a college scholarship fund for a Hamilton/Wenham high school student; and to the local police, firefighters, hospice care, library, Salvation Army. Some of the money raised stays local; some of it goes to help people in other parts of the world. The Tenant Association also recently put together 25 boxes of necessities and shipped them to service men and women overseas in Iraq at Christmastime.

“We know what it's like to need a little help. We're grateful for the help we get from others,” said Bonnie Schultz, a member of the Tenant Association, who is beginning to organize a voter registration drive in her development, “and we like to pass it on.”

# In Boston, Housing Authority Supports Resident Trainings

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Last year, the Boston Resident Advisory Board—a board of residents elected by residents to make policy recommendations to the Boston Housing Authority—completed a 9-month leadership training program.

The idea—to bring training to the whole RAB—began several years ago with the three co-chairs: Phillip Askew, Remona Davis, and John Young. The entire Board *and* the BHA adopted the idea. “The benefit of this type of training,” commented RAB member Peggy Santos, “was that all of my colleagues on the RAB got to learn at the same pace. We learned how to be leaders together.”



**(Left to right) RAB members Jose Mateo, Phyllis Corbitt, and Brenda King, and (center) Joe Hughes from Cross-Cultural Communications, who is translating a small-group exercise on conflict resolution.**

The curriculum paralleled the RAB’s work and included sessions on HUD’s rules on the role of the RAB, tenant participation funding, conflict resolution, public speaking, priority setting, and other organizational and legal issues. RAB member Phyllis Corbitt, reflected on how the training personally benefited her. “I spoke out at the public hearing last year and now I feel I have a voice at RAB meetings.”

“The more skilled a resident group is, the more organizational capacity it has, the more the RAB and BHA can cooperate and build a strong partnership. BHA supported this because it’s common sense,” said John Kane, the RAB’s liaison in BHA’s Planning Department.



**RAB members Mary Spaulding, Theodore Hampton, and Phillip Askew, and Mac McCreight from Greater Boston Legal Services, at the conflict resolution training.**



**RAB members Peggy Santos and Phyllis Corbitt from the Design Committee.**



**Boston RAB at the final day of training.**

# In Fall River, Young People Clean Up Development . . .

“When I moved to Fall River 30 years ago when I was 18, Watuppa Heights was one of the prettiest areas. You saw children playing. It was clean. I had no idea it was public housing,” reflected Jayne Kerns.

Watuppa Heights is a state-funded public housing apartment complex. After Kerns moved into Watuppa Heights 2 1/2 years ago, she suggested to her manager that they organize a clean-up day on Earth Day. Last year, with support from the Fall River Tenants Association and local businesses that contributed snacks and prizes for the kids, clean-up day started rolling. Jayne, her husband, and her son purchased a large packet of index cards and handwrote invitations to everyone at Watuppa to join them for a family Earth Day 2005.

Two weeks later on Earth Day, a handful of adults and over a dozen kids ranging from 6-17 years old met, were briefed and given gloves, and fanned out in teams around the complex. Over the course of the weekend, they collected 100 bags of trash and planted over 50 pounds of grass seed provided by the housing authority.

“I don’t belong to any church, but I am very spiritual. I told these kids that if you give from the heart, it will come back tenfold,” said Jayne Kerns.



## . . . While Adults Block Demolition

In the late 1990s, even though the state housing agency had committed several million dollars to renovate Watuppa Heights, the City of Fall River and the Fall River Housing Authority began a campaign to demolish the development instead. Tenants and community activists opposed the demolition, but still the Housing Authority and Mayor asked the state Legislature for special permission to replace Watuppa Heights with 26 single family-homes for sale.

The battle at the State House was hard fought; in the end, despite the Housing Committee’s voting unanimously against the demolition, the Legislature approved it by one vote in 2002. However, the tenants have not given up and, as of this date, no specific plans for the demolition have been filed for approval.

# Mass. Union Begins Environmental Justice Campaign in Fall River

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The Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants and the Massachusetts Environmental Trust Foundation have joined forces to take on the issue of toxins in public housing. The Mass. Union and the Fall River Housing Joint Tenants Council recently hired Samouen Pech to reach out to families in the Cambodian community in Fall River's public housing. Fall River has the second largest Cambodian population in the country.

Working with the Fall River Housing Joint Tenants Council, Samouen Pech has been surveying families about what cleaning products they use in order to identify appropriate substitute cleaners. The project seeks to:

- Reduce exposure to respiratory irritants from household chemicals in cleaning products, solvents, and paints;
- Educate residents about methods to improve indoor air quality, as a way to reduce asthma triggers; and
- Reduce exposure to pest infestation through strategies that do not rely on toxic pesticides.

The other by-product of the project is that now the Tenant Council has a dialogue with residents they were unable to reach because of a linguistic and cultural barrier. Pech's presence in the community has also enabled the Council to intervene on behalf of Cambodian families and work with the Fall River Housing Authority to resolve issues that these families face on a day-to-day basis.



**(From left to right) Resident Vorn Sao with Samouen Pech, Cambodian Liaison for the Fall River Housing Joint Tenants Council, and John Picard, Director of Housing Development and Support Services.**

# In Worcester, Residents Build Unity While Negotiating

The Worcester Citywide Tenant Association represents approximately 4,800 households in Worcester who live in public and subsidized housing. A little over a year ago, they decided to make their priority negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Worcester Housing Authority.



**Members of the Worcester Citywide Tenant Association (from left to right around the table), Carl Decker, Marianella Queiruga, Sarah Nadjarian, Dante Piermattei, and Roland Robideau.**

MOUs are documents that establish understandings between groups, such as housing authorities and tenants, about how they work together. The process is hard. It raises issues. It challenges tenants and housing authorities. But, as described by Marianella Queiruga, President of Worcester Citywide, the process in Worcester has had the power to unify.

“Before meeting with the housing authority, the tenant association met once a week for several months. We went through our draft MOU section by section. The process took months and many late nights. We currently have 11 active members of the Citywide and everyone was included and everyone felt respected.

The process of negotiating the MOU helped our group understand the tenant participation regulations and other regulations. It assisted us in taking a closer look at the 1- and 5-year plans of the housing authority. In doing so our group became more sophisticated in dealing with the housing authority because we had studied ahead of time. It helped us pose better questions and come up with better answers.

At our first meeting with the housing authority we were all nervous. But we felt more secure because we had prepared in advance. Our Deputy Director thanked us for being so well prepared. I remember the faces of relief on several members, and that positive comment helped set the tone for the rest of the meeting. That first meeting motivated us to work harder and to try to be more unified.

## **More Information**

**Creating a Memorandum of Understanding:  
A Know Your Rights Guide for Public Housing Residents in Massachusetts.** Available at [www.MassLegalHelp.org](http://www.MassLegalHelp.org)

We understood that the key to dealing with our housing authority was to be prepared and to try to be more unified.

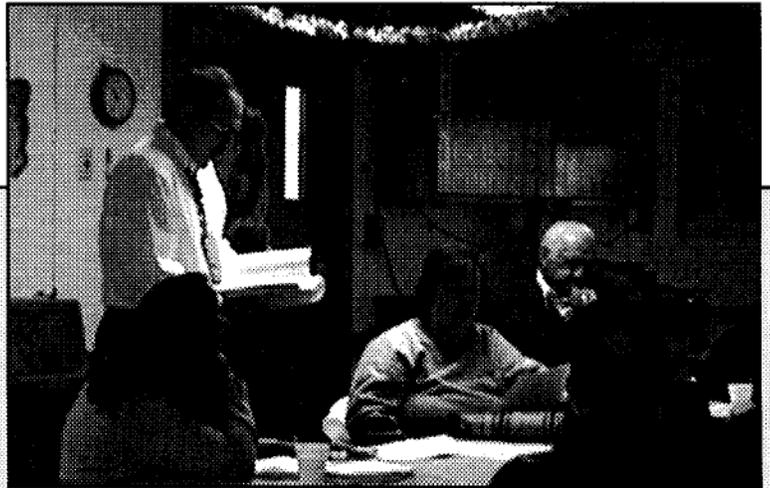
Honestly, our group has had its highs and lows with our housing authority, but our being prepared really had an impact on the outcome of the document. For example, the MOU includes a provision that the Citywide has the right to have input about company that is hired to do security.

The MOU also helped me better understand my own role. I care about where I live. It's my home. It's where I raised my kids. Being part of this process is not just about paying my rent; it's about fully participating. I care about the decisions that the housing authority makes and how it affects me, and I care about my community."

## Strengthening a Partnership

As someone who grew up and spent 20 years of his life living in public housing in Worcester, I know firsthand the need for public housing and the challenges that it faces. Over the years, the image of public housing has suffered. In my years as a member of the Worcester City Council and Mayor of Worcester, I have watched as state and federal government have neglected our properties. In my opinion, some residents who live here have also neglected our communities.

At the Worcester Housing Authority, where I am the Executive Director, we have been able to make some changes. Many have been driven by resident suggestions and in some instances with their active participation. For example, the dramatic improvement in our crime statistics and overall building security can be tied, at least in part, to 13 active crime watch groups made up of Worcester Housing Authority residents. While the surrounding community has seen



**A recent meeting with Worcester Citywide Tenant Association and Executive Director Ray Mariano (standing).**

increased crime, our properties have seen dramatic decreases.

In all of our work, I have come to rely heavily on our tenant associations and their leaders. These hard-working residents have made a meaningful difference in the lives of their neighbors. Recently, we have been negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding with our Worcester Citywide Tenant Association. The details of the MOU, while important, are less important than the overall impact it will have. It is my hope that by working cooperatively, this agreement will serve to galvanize resident efforts and strengthen our partnership with each Tenant Association.

Raymond V. Mariano  
Executive Director, Worcester Housing Authority



# Mass Union Policy Recommendations

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Public housing is the largest stock of **permanently affordable housing** for low-income people that we have in Massachusetts and the United States.

There are about 47,000 state-funded public housing apartments and 33,000 federally funded apartments across the state. Approximately half of these apartments are for seniors and people with disabilities and half are for families. Over 101,000 households are on waiting lists for public housing across the state.

**Not only do we need to hold on to every one of our existing public housing apartments, we need to build more.**

For years public housing has been severely underfunded at both the state and federal levels. Necessary repairs have gone unmade and aging properties are deteriorating. We cannot afford to neglect public housing anymore.

**We have a vision of decent housing and good neighborhoods where our children play and where our seniors and people with disabilities are cared for. But it can't be done unless policymakers make public housing a priority.**

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# **The Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants, which represents public and subsidized tenants statewide, has the following recommendations for 2006:**

## **We urge all elected officials and candidates to:**

- Make public housing a priority. Protect it and provide funds to build more.
- Meet with public housing residents and housing authorities to better understand the challenges that people and public housing in your district face.

## **We urge Members of Congress and HUD to:**

- Provide housing authorities with operating funds as agreed to by a special negotiated rulemaking committee. HUD's current interpretation of the rule will result in significant funding cuts to about two-thirds of the housing authorities nationally.
- Appropriate funds needed to address the \$20 billion backlog of repairs and modernization needs of federal housing nationwide.
- Allow the Resident Opportunity Self-Sufficiency program to fund resident capacity building.
- Keep rents affordable.

## **We urge our State Senators and Representatives to:**

- Enact a state public housing operating budget for Fiscal Year 2007 in the amount of \$60 million, which is approximately half of the \$115 million that the 2005 Harvard Cost Study recommended is necessary for adequate support.
- Enact legislation increasing DHCD's "allowable expense cap" by 6%. The cap has not changed since Fiscal Year 2002 and needs to be raised to meet increasing expenses.
- Enact the supplemental budget for operating funds owed to housing authorities.
- Support programs in public housing for seniors and people of all ages with special needs who require help with their daily living so that they can stay in their homes.
- Keep rents affordable.

## **We urge Governor Romney to:**

- Raise the bond cap and use bond money that the legislature has authorized for necessary capital repairs.
- Sign into law the supplemental budget for operating funds owed to housing authorities.

## **We urge Department of Housing and Community Development to:**

- Develop a yearly funding formula so that housing authorities can make necessary capital repairs and protect state public housing from further decline.
- Match state resident participation funding to the federal tenant participation formula.

## **We urge local housing authorities to:**

- Comply with tenant participation regulations.
- Support tenant associations and help them build their capacity to lead.
- Build partnerships with residents so we can work with you to protect our housing.

# The Mass. Union Is a Statewide Steward

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***First row (left to right): Board members Linda Montgomery, Phyllis Corbett, Susan Bonner, Kathleen LaPlante, with staff member Margarita Morales. Back row (left to right): Executive Director Jack Cooper, with Board members Joe Sterling, Bill King, Rosemary Foster, Bruce Valade, and Peter Seppala. Board member Marianella Queiruga and MUPHT Secretary Marion Walker are not in the photo.***

The Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants (MUPHT) is the oldest statewide association of public housing tenants in the United States. We are a board of 12 public housing residents elected by tenants who live in public or subsidized housing. Our membership comes from the largest cities and the smallest towns, from Boston to Pittsfield, from Beverly to Fall River.

MUPHT has been recognized and funded by the state's Department of Housing and Community Development and the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development as a partner in drafting of regulations and policies. We hold statewide conventions twice a year which serve as a forum for debate around pressing issues and provide training and workshops on new legislation and regulations.

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