

Volume 2 #1 Newsletter Mass Union of Public Housing Tenants January -February 2021

Mass Union celebrating our 50th ANNIVERSARY.

Mass Union was founded by public housing residents in 1967 and incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1971. It is the first statewide public housing tenants’ organization in the nation.

Born from a sense of frustration, and hopelessness, fed by a need for justice, basic human rights and decent living conditions, Mass Union believes in the knowledge that information, perseverance, and community strength can create a decent future, pride in one’s community and the understanding that individuals united together for a just cause can affect and change any situation.

Mass Union’s philosophy is that public housing developments can be communities of which to be proud. Until the day when affordable housing is the right of all, public housing must be maintained as a precious resource.

Mass Union believes that public housing residents have the intelligence and commitment to be active partners in the management of their developments, and that active tenant involvement is essential for creating positive public housing communities. It believes that while maintaining independence, tenant organizations and management can build relationships of mutual respect and cooperation, and that working together they can eliminate the unfair stigma under which public housing suffers.

Policy Board Members

- Phyllis Corbitt, Chair (Boston)
- Linda Montgomery, Vice Chair (Cambridge)
- Ethel Peggy Santos, Treasurer (Boston)
- Commissioner Renee Spencer, Secretary (Wellesley)
- Commissioner Susan Bonner, Legislative Chair (Nahant)
- Commissioner Tanya Morel, Member (Wellesley)
- Commissioner David Underhill, Member (Fall River)

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The Chair's Corner

Happy New Year!



A new beginning. A new US President. This year will be Mass Union's 50th Anniversary. We are hoping that by October everyone will have received their COVID-19 vaccinations and the world will be a little safer. Maybe, we will be able to hold Conventions.

On January 2021, President Biden nominated Congresswoman Marcia Fudge from Ohio to be the Cabinet Secretary at the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. February 2021, Congresswoman Fudge was approved by the US Senate Banking Housing and Urban Affairs Committee. Secretary Fudge's career mission has been to reduce poverty and address inequality. She believes that we can make progress toward ensuring that all our communities have safe and affordable housing.

Mass Union continues our work with CHAPA, Mass NAHRO, and Massachusetts Law Reform. January 15, 2021 our collective work resulted in the passing of a new process for public housing residents in towns. The Town LHA Tenant Board member election process is a new law (121b MGL 5a). Residents can choose their tenant board member and submit their preferred candidate to the town selectmen for appointment to the LHA board. The seven years of negotiating and having Mass Union affiliates and our partners support made a guaranteed victory. Resident Councils and LHA tenant board members must work together and support their LHA community.

There is still a lot of housing work to be done and we would like you to join us by volunteering to work with the Mass Union Policy Board. Any duly elected local tenant organization (LTO) is eligible for membership. Mass Union is looking for new Policy Board members. There is a small annual cost per organization. Annual dues will allow an affiliate to nominate candidates and vote at the Mass Unions' Policy Board elections. The COVID-19 virus will prevent us from holding our convention and elections in April. We would like to have a convention and elections in October.

Please stay safe. Our next Union Beacon is due March/April. Please feel free to contact us at Mass Union for information on elections and the Conventions.

Phyllis Corbitt, Chairperson

Town Appointed Tenant Board Members

On January 15, 2021 Governor Baker signed into law the Tenant appointment process to Housing Authority Boards in Towns.

The law reserving a resident seat on town housing authority boards was voted into law in 2014.

Unfortunately, the Massachusetts Secretary of State disagreed with the original process and forced Mass Union and our partners to agree on a new process. Mass Union, Mass NAHRO, Citizens Housing and Planning Association, Senator Bancore staff, and Representative Kevin Honan staff met with the Secretary of State officials. The meetings led to all parties agreeing on a process.

The law creates a process for residents of local housing authorities in towns to be appointed to boards of their housing authority. The changed law goes into effect 120 days after the Economic Development Bill signing. (May 15, 2021) Effective date.

The Process: the tenant member is to be appointed, by the Board of Selectmen from a list of candidates submitted by local tenant organizations like the process used in cities since 1980. If there is no tenant organization, tenants can nominate themselves.

If there is a vacancy on the LHA (local housing authority) as of the effective date of the legislation, it shall be filled by the appointed tenant within 90 days of the guidance going into effect.

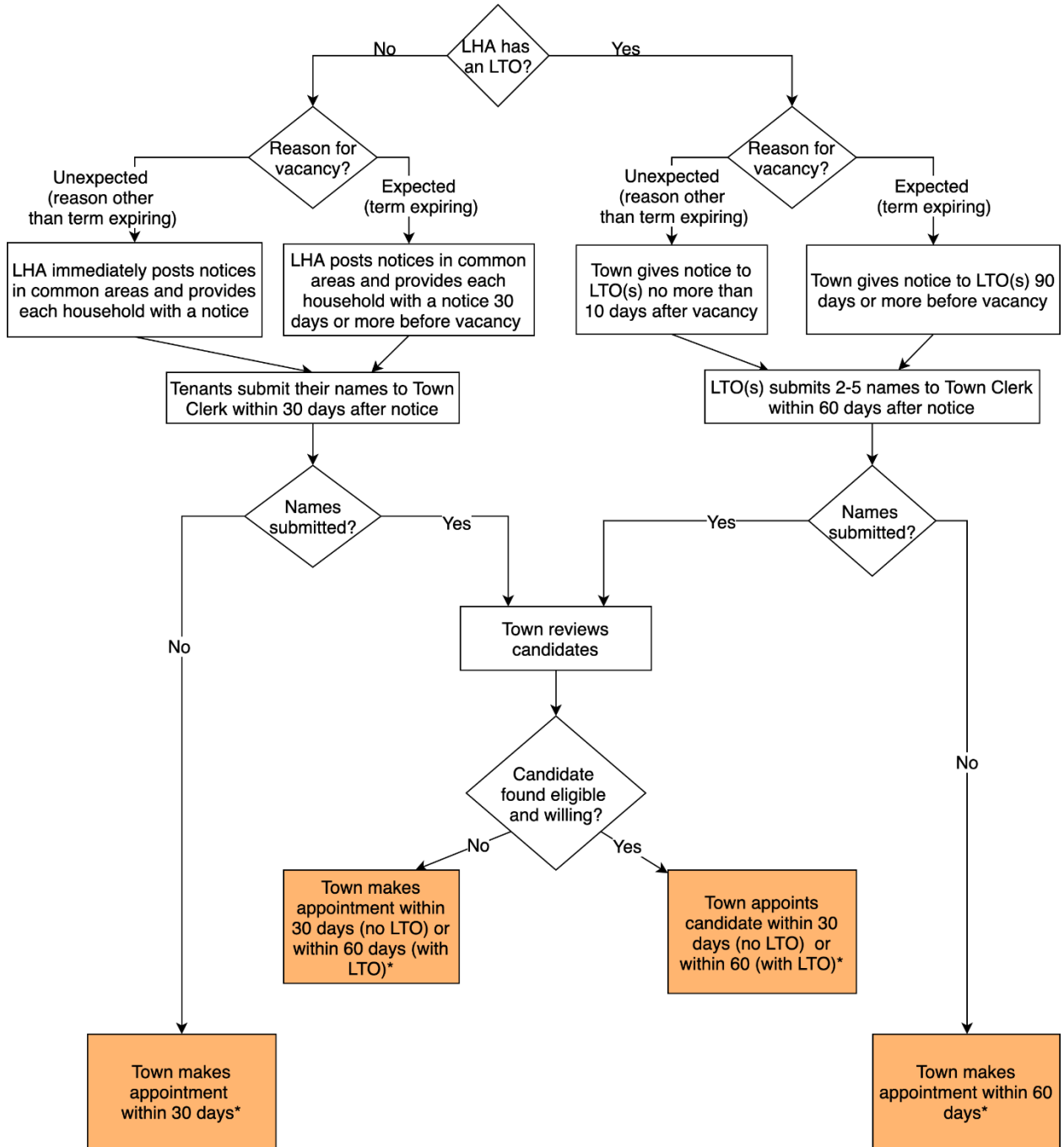
If there is no vacancy on the board as of the effective date of the law, LHA must reduce the number of elected members from 4 to 3. The seat that has expired or the next seat to expire or become vacant shall be filled by the appointed tenant member.

A housing authority may request a waiver from the requirement of appointing a tenant if there is currently an elected or appointed tenant on the board, or there is no tenant eligible and willing to serve. The waiver will be for one 1 year and can be renewed for successive 1-year periods until the current tenant member's term expires or a seat is vacated.

If there is no vacancy on the board on the effective date of these provisions, it is the first seat to expire at least 60 days after the effective date of these provisions that becomes the tenant seat on the date that expires.

Filling Town Appointed Tenant Board Member Seat

Filling Tenant Board Member Seat



*Federal tenant gets preference if applicable

COVID-19 vaccinations for senior housing settings

Beginning February 18, 2021, people age 65 and older are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine in Massachusetts. The COVID-19 vaccine is safe and free.

When can I get vaccinated? Vaccinations for people ages 65 or older will begin on February 18, 2021 and continue throughout the remainder of the winter and into the spring and summer.

Appointment scheduling for these individuals will be available starting 18, 2021. The current COVID-19 vaccines require two doses. You will not be fully vaccinated until you receive both doses, and both doses should be administered at the same site.

Eligibility People ages 65 and older are eligible for the vaccine beginning on February 18, 2021. Please note, due to high demand and limited supply, it may take several weeks to get an appointment at a location near you.

As more vaccine supply arrives in Massachusetts, additional appointments will become available How do I book an appointment?

Appointments can be scheduled online by visiting vaxfinder.mass.gov. Individuals can enter their ZIP Code or City/Town name to find an appointment online.

While there is extremely high demand for appointments and limited vaccine supply, new appointments will continually be added to the website regularly and the mass vaccination sites have the most availability for appointments.

As of now, mass vaccination sites post appointments weekly, on Thursday, and some smaller sites, such as CVS, post more regularly. If you are unable to secure an appointment, please continue to check the website.

Steps to book an appointment:

1. Visit vaxfinder.mass.gov
2. enter their ZIP Code or City/Town to identify a location.
3. Have your important information with you, such as your insurance card.
4. Fill out the self-attestation form through the appointment booking process.

For more information go to:

www.mass.gov/doc/covid-19-vaccine-overview-for-individual-ages-65-and-older/download

First Tenant Participation Memorandum of Agreement signing between Bromley Heath Tenant Management Council and Boston Housing Authority Management. Former resident leader and State Representative, Doris Bunte died February 15, 2021.

Boston in the 1970s

In the 1970s, Doris Bunte and other residents organized and won:

- ▶ A revolutionary new lease that spelled out the Housing Authority's responsibilities, not just the tenant's
- ▶ The right to put rent in escrow if repairs were not made
- ▶ A hearing panel which included residents to resolve disputes with the Authority
- ▶ Requirements that the Housing Authority keep all its developments in "decent safe and sanitary condition"
- ▶ The right for tenants to manage the Bromley-Heath Development through a Tenant Management Corporation (pictured)

Ms. Doris Bunte eventually became a state legislator and the head of the Boston Housing Authority. A development in Boston is now named after her.



Pictured: Anna Mae Cole, Doris Bunte, Mildred Hailey, Bromley Heath residents, and BHA legal staff. Location: 52 Chauncy Street Conference Room, Boston Housing Authority Office. Bromley Heath has since been renamed after Mildred Hailey, and its community center is named after Anna Mae Cole.