

Offered by Councilor Kenzie Bok, Arroyo, Breadon, Fernandes Anderson, Flaherty, Lara, Louijeune, Mejia, Murphy, Worrell and Flynn



CITY OF BOSTON IN CITY COUNCIL

ORDER FOR A HEARING REGARDING INCREASING PUBLIC HOUSING IN THE CITY OF BOSTON

WHEREAS: In July 2020, Councilor Bok proposed that the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) make use of its federal authority to build, buy, or certify up to 2464 more public housing units and immediately begin receiving federal subsidies for each one, thereby taking advantage of an untapped federal resource to increase our number of permanent deeply affordable units up to Boston's Faircloth Limit; *and*

WHEREAS: Since then, the BHA and the Mayor's Office of Housing (MOH) have worked with Councilor Bok to take steps towards utilizing this untapped federal resource, including by commissioning a capacity study of BHA land where additional public housing units could be constructed, by preparing an MOH Request for Proposals to offer this public housing subsidy as a funding component for affordable housing transformation projects, and by specifying it as a preferred funding source for affordable housing over the West End Library; *and*

WHEREAS: In its first year (2022), the Wu Administration conducted an audit of all public City land to identify potential sites for new affordable housing, and also worked with the City Council to appropriate American Rescue Plan funds to support social housing on public land, thereby affirming such housing as a form of long-term public infrastructure that truly preserves our communities by providing stable homes for low-income families, seniors, and people with disabilities; *and*

WHEREAS: Public housing secures public health; the pandemic highlighted our need for more such housing that is resilient against shocks like illness or job loss, as Boston scrambled to expand our shelter capacity and called on landlords to house homeless families with vouchers; *and*

WHEREAS: Families who gain access to public housing are immediately able to spend more on food and healthcare for their children (Gubits *et al*, 2016); *and*

WHEREAS: Boston built much of its public housing early in the federal program, enabling the creation of public housing communities in almost every neighborhood of the City, communities that have become one of the only anchors for low-income people and people of color as many parts of the City have gentrified; *and*

WHEREAS: More than 50,000 families are waiting for a Boston Housing Authority (BHA) public housing unit, demonstrating great need despite federal disinvestment; *and*

WHEREAS: A stark reduction in the federal supply of public housing began in the 1970s, when President Richard Nixon declared a moratorium on its new construction, and continued in 1999, when President Bill Clinton signed into law the Faircloth Amendment to the Housing Act of 1937, legally limiting the number of public housing units that could receive capital and operating subsidies from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to the number operated by each housing authority on October 1, 1999, known as a “Faircloth Limit”; *and*

WHEREAS: Recognizing the need for government reinvestment in public housing, several federal politicians have proposed repealing the Faircloth Amendment to allow housing authorities to build new public housing beyond their Faircloth Limits, including a repeal amendment introduced by Representative Alexandria Ocasio Cortez (D-N.Y.) that passed the U.S. House in July 2021; *and*

WHEREAS: Boston need not wait on Washington: the Boston Housing Authority’s Faircloth Limit is 12,086 units, but due to redevelopment in the 2000s that de-densified Boston’s public housing stock, the BHA only has 9622 public housing units receiving HUD capital and operating subsidies, also known as ACC units; *and*

WHEREAS: The BHA could therefore designate up to 2464 new ACC units, and could also transform new ACC units through HUD’s Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program to make them more financially sustainable, as was explicitly outlined by the Biden Administration in January 2022; *and*

WHEREAS: Such federal subsidies provide a reliable source of guaranteed income for landlords, even within times of economic uncertainty, so that converting units within existing buildings to ACC or RAD units could help prevent evictions and foreclosures, especially as the supply of federal vouchers remains limited; *and*

WHEREAS: Boston could also use these federal subsidies in combination with the City’s Inclusionary Development Policy (IDP) or its Acquisition Opportunity Program (AOP) to secure deeper long-term affordability—including for families making 30% of area median income or less—within either large-scale new redevelopment projects or existing apartment buildings scooped off the speculative market; *and*

WHEREAS: Boston should build new public housing units on public land, at existing housing developments, on vacant lots, or above other public assets, as a way to truly utilize the full value of public land for public good in every corner of the City, including neighborhoods from which people of color and low-income people have been historically excluded in violation of fair housing; *NOW THEREFORE BE IT*

ORDERED: That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council hold a hearing to discuss increasing the number of public housing “ACC” units in the City of Boston up to the Faircloth Limit, and that members of the Administration from BHA, DND, and the BPDA, along with housing advocates, affordable housing developers, and the public, be invited to testify.

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