



Memorandum

To: Mayor Nelson and Members of the City Council
From: Daniel R. Buchholtz, MMC, Administrator, Clerk/Treasurer
Date: April 5, 2023
Subject: Dominionium letter

The City Council received an email from Columbia Heights City Council Member Justice Spriggs sharing a letter the Columbia Heights City Council sent to Dominionium asking for a 3% rent cap for the next 12 months.

Councilmembers Dircks and Goodboe-Bisschoff asked that this letter be added to our next work session agenda for discussion.

As noted in the Blaine/SLP Life Newspaper, there is proposed legislation (HF 2676/SF 2590) that would limit rent increases to five percent in any 12 month period for rental units to qualify for the Class 4d property tax classification.

Staff is seeking direction on 1) sending another letter to Dominionium regarding anticipated rent increases and 2) adopting a resolution of support for HF 2676/SF 2590.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 763-784-6491.

Daniel Buchholtz

From: Lisa Dircks
Sent: Wednesday, March 22, 2023 12:57 PM
To: Daniel Buchholtz
Subject: Fwd: City of Columbia Heights Correspondence with Dominion Properties
Attachments: 2023.02.21. City of CH. Council ltr to Dominionium.pdf

Sent from Android device

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Justice Spriggs <JSpriggs@columbiaheightsmn.gov>
Date: Mar 21, 2023 3:42 PM
Subject: City of Columbia Heights Correspondence with Dominion Properties
To: Bob Nelson <rbnelson@slpmn.org>
Cc:

This message was sent from outside of the organization. Please do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the source of this email and know the content is safe.

Mayor Nelson and Council Members Wendling, Moran, Goodboe,-Blsschoff, and Dircks (blind copied),

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Justice Spriggs, and I am a council member in the City of Columbia Heights. Today, I am emailing you in regards to the housing corporation Dominion. In Columbia Heights, we have multiple rental properties built and managed by Dominion, including a 55+ living facility under the name The Legends. For multiple months, the residents of The Legends in Columbia Heights have had concerns about maintenance, safety, and unreasonable increases in rent and excessive fines. Dominion has proposed 12.5% rent increase for the next year, and many of our residents have stated that they cannot afford this due to already being on a fixed income. I have been working with the residents there to ask for safety improvements in addition to a cap in rent of 3% for 12 months.

I am reaching out to you today because last week, I attended a rally at the State Capitol with seniors living at multiple Dominion properties who share the same concerns, including some from Spring Lake Park. I was able to share about what we are doing to help in Columbia Heights – one being a letter I authored to Dominion leadership that our entire council signed on to. Many of the other Dominion residents there wanted me to share that letter, hence my email today. They also wanted me to pass along that HF2676 and SF2590 are moving along at the legislature to combat this issue.

Please let me know if you have any questions or comments for me.

Best,
Justice

Justice Spriggs (he/him) | Council Member - City of Columbia Heights
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****Please note: Due to my schedule and family/work balance, I often email outside of typical business hours. Please do not feel pressured to respond outside of your own working pattern.***

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City of Columbia Heights

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Mayor
Amada Márquez Simula
Councilmembers
Connie Buesgens
Kt Jacobs
Rachel James
Justice Spriggs
City Manager
Kelli Bourgeois

February 21, 2023

Dominium Board of Directors, Executive Committee, and Senior Leadership Team
c/o Mr. Paul Sween
2905 Northwest Blvd, Suite 150
Plymouth, Minnesota 55441
psween@dominiuminc.com

Mr. Sween,

The City of Columbia Heights is a vibrant, tight-knit city that prides itself on being a welcoming, inclusive, and friendly place where people from all walks of life can live and thrive. Columbia Heights has so much to offer for our residents, including a robust system of parks and recreational areas, opportunities to patronize a wide variety of restaurants and businesses, and multiple community organizations, all while being within a short commute to the Twin Cities. One of the core goals for our city is to provide affordable, quality, safe housing options for all of our residents, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, and income, among others. The city showed excitement for the incoming Dominium senior living facility development that broke ground in 2017, The Legends, as it aligned with the above values of Columbia Heights. To ensure these units remained affordable, Dominium was given Tax-Increment Financing (TIF), allowing for the company to pay taxes at a lower rate.

Recently, we have heard many serious and alarming concerns from residents of The Legends, foremost citing that they have been facing year-over-year proposed rental increases up to 12%. This rental price increase would be difficult for any tenant to afford, but especially for the residents of The Legends, as many are on fixed incomes. We have repeatedly heard tragic stories from tenants there about difficult situations they have been placed in because of these rent increases – asking friends for money to afford rent, needing to move in with family after being unable to afford the price increase, going to extreme measures with rationing their food and relying on food shelves to sustain themselves, and being unable to afford other basic necessities. Many of the residents are severely limited in their ability to freely travel as desired as they are unable to afford to have their own cars with a substantial amount of their income being dedicated to rent.

Residents of The Legends also have safety concerns regarding fire detectors not being changed, elevators repeatedly being out of service and a security door not locking properly, the latter leading to repeated break-ins. Additionally, residents have voiced issues such as having doors that are not aligned properly, cracks in walls, being charged excessive fines, trash not being properly disposed, and not having the carpets or windows cleaned in their facility in years. Cleaning and maintenance staff at The Legends work in good faith with the tenants, but the residents do not feel that the staff has the appropriate support or resources to complete all the necessary tasks to keep the facilities clean, safe, and adequate.

We are asking that Dominion cap the rental increases of the residents at The Legends of Columbia Heights to no more than 3% for 12 months or until a more permanent solution is put in place. The 12-month timeframe will allow all residents to benefit from the cap in an equitable fashion, regardless of what month their lease started. Recently, the residents of another Dominion property, River North in Coon Rapids, MN, were able to secure this same agreement with the help of a bipartisan group of elected officials, including State Representative Zach Stephenson, State Senator John Hoffman, and State Senator Jim Abeler, among others. Per the Dominion website, it is stated that the company is striving to “set the new benchmark for quality and affordability” and we believe that this proposed increase of 3% aligns with this statement. In addition to the 3% rental cap, the residents also deserve to have their safety, sanitary, and quality of life concerns addressed.

Enacting this same rent increase agreement would align with the stated values of Dominion and fit along with the City of Columbia Heights to provide quality, stable, and affordable housing for all. We agree with Dominion that a home is much more than four walls and a roof, and that everyone deserves the dignity of a home. We feel that Dominion has not been faithful in their promises to provide the aforementioned affordable and quality housing to our senior residents in Columbia Heights. The current conditions are unacceptable for our tenants, and we demand that they are addressed. If these concerns persist, we will continue advocating for fair treatment in addition to engaging other parties and officials.

The City of Columbia Heights looks forward to resolving these issues – our residents depend on it.

Sincerely,



Amáda Márquez-Simula

Mayor, City of Columbia Heights



Connie Buesgens

Council Member, City of Columbia Heights



KT Jacobs

Council Member, City of Columbia Heights



Rachel James

Council Member, City of Columbia Heights



Justice Spriggs

Council Member, City of Columbia Heights