

**"The last thing you want to do is overbuild, the last thing you want to do is crowd out the market."**

**-Reyes (Chancellor Elect)**

# **BEHIND**

# **"SWAMYVILLE"**

## **The Future of UMass Housing**

### **Massachusetts Daily Collegian**

A free and responsible press serving the UMass community since 1890

**Satire: UMass hosts 'Squid Game' to solve housing shortage**

Many will play, few will win housing

# THE CURRENT SITUATION

As the costs of living skyrocket, our tuition and boarding costs continue to go up—all the while we are deprived of a basic guarantee of campus housing. At the same time the ruling elites continue to peddle their snake oil to us students that “college is the way to a better life.” What sort of better life is there if we can’t even guarantee housing at the universities that we’re studying at? When met with criticism, the administration has no answer besides shrugging and throwing their hands up in the air—“**better luck next year!**”

It’s clear that if they put their money where their mouths are, if students were “respected,” “cared for,” etc., we wouldn’t be dealing with the shortage of on-campus housing. **But it’s not the job of the administrators to care about us**—their job is to create loyal little servants of the elite who can line up to say that “this is the best we can do” and reproduce this system of oppression. Not only does it make the lives of students miserable and precarious in the short term, but also the masses in this country, who are stripped of their dignity to live. From public housing being deteriorated and sold off to power-hungry vultures, to police brutality growing rampant—we’re forced to live under the boot of the ruling few. We’re here today in “**Swamyville**” to protest the housing crisis created by the administrators of this university, part of the larger drive to continue to impoverish the people and grow their power—through nefarious “private-public” partnership schemes, stripping us of guaranteed on-campus housing.



Geodesic Dome from the "Free University City" 1969 UMass Student Housing Protest/Occupation of South West residential area.





## ON CAMPUS HOUSING

Dorms and other university-owned campus residential areas are a stable and a secure housing guarantee for students. We don't have to deal with the headache of finding a decent place to live with an amenable landlord, or haggling for rent, etc. However this access to campus housing becomes more precarious as, **every year UMass knowingly enrolls more students than they can house.** This year UMass has enrolled 22,700 undergraduate students while only having 13,500 available beds on campus.<sup>1</sup> It's true that a significant chunk of people do live off campus (about 30-40 percent of undergraduates), but that still means the number of available beds is still just under the number of students that are expected to live on campus.<sup>2</sup> And likely, if there was a higher availability of quality on-campus housing, we'd see larger numbers of students living on campus. To see this deficit of available housing concretely we need only look at those who applied for on campus housing next year: **of the total amount of people who got a bed on campus, there were over 900 students who were rejected due to limited space.**<sup>3</sup>

[1] Merzbach, Scott. "Fieldstone Housing Project Taking Shape at UMass&nbsp;," Daily Hampshire Gazette, Concord Monitor, 26 Jan. 2023.

[2] Using the figures 22,700 undergraduate students—if 60% to 70% want to live on campus that's 13,620 to 15,890 beds required. This is much higher than the 13,500 available beds.

[3] Bayrak, Saliha. "Students Gather to Call for the Abolition of the UMass Police Department." Massachusetts Daily Collegian, 6 Apr. 2023

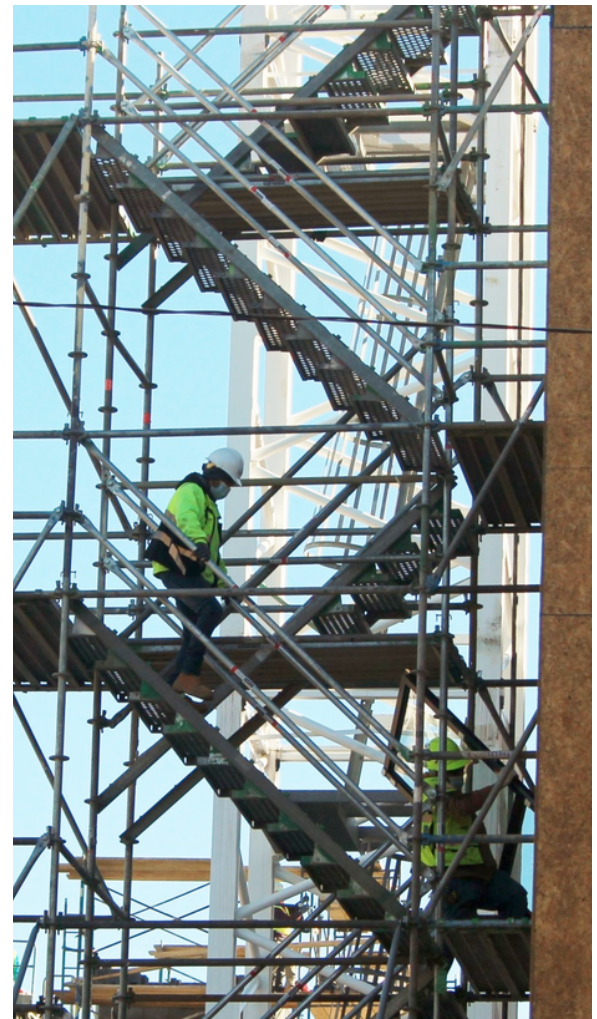


If we indulge the question of off campus housing, we see that for the surrounding area, housing is just as competitive and limited. In Hampshire County (the county Amherst is in), the population has grown so much in recent years that in order to accommodate the demand for housing, there need to be 3,500 more units by 2025. It is no secret that the Pioneer Valley is in a housing crisis.<sup>4</sup> In response to student concerns regarding housing, Chancellor Subbaswamy said UMass comparatively provides more housing than some other schools. The famed UMass slogan “Be Revolutionary” is nothing but a hollow statement, as the “revolutionary” attitude of the administrators is more akin to “it’s good enough”—which in actuality is quite low of a standard.

[4] Maza, Chris. “Housing Policy Presented to Amherst Council.” Reminder Publications, Reminder Publications, 1 Sept. 2021,

# University of Massachusetts Amherst

BE REVOLUTIONARY™





# "WHAT ABOUT THE NEW HOUSING BEING BUILT IN SOUTHWEST?"

One might see the construction of the new apartments near the Southwest residential area and ask: “isn’t the problem solved with this new set of dorms?” Well, not quite. Yes, the university did sell a plot of land to be developed by the private firm, “Axiom,” which is building a 600-bed dormitory. Which, if you’re looking for expensive housing, **the current listed monthly rent for this student housing is \$2,472/per bed in a studio apartment, 1,826/per bed in a 2-bedroom, and 1,504/per bed in a 4-bedroom.** If we compare the 4-bedroom in the new apartments to a shared 3-bedroom apartment in the Honors College (considered the highest quality on-campus housing), the price is \$1,336 per month, a lot more bang for your buck. This selling off of university land to a private developer (privatization) shafts all but the wealthiest students who are not willing to sign onto an expensive 12 month lease to stay on campus the whole year. For students who can’t afford to live and pay these expensive rents, the options are fairly limited besides going off-campus (which we know is already quite precarious), or somehow miraculously finding on-campus housing. These new dorms that are built for private landlords, and being peddled as “campus housing” won’t fix the crisis of adequate room and board, especially if it’s not affordable.



Pictured: Commonwealth Honors College

It’s an earnest exposure of the administrators and university—that they’re not in the business of fostering the development of students intellectually to “create a better world.” This selling out to private corporations is just another aspect of the relationship between the university and the elites’ system of control. They want to create cogs in the machine who serve or rise up to be part

of the ruling class that is squeezing the masses dry through these measures like privatization—which will continue transferring wealth into the hands of the few. We're told essentially to shut up and deal with it, and accept that our rulers are "doing the best that they can." **If we're not cognizant of these advances by the ruling class to eat into our standards of living, then they'll keep doing it.** It's a living testament to the fact that when you don't have an organized student body who fights against these outrages, the administrators and their corporate buddies will keep encroaching on basic things we should be guaranteed.



# THE HOUSING CRISIS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

The push to privatize housing is not just an issue facing university students but also tenants living in public housing funded by the federal government under the Housing and Urban Development department. Public housing is an option for low-income families, elderly, and the disabled to live in subsidized homes if they're unable to afford the standard market rents, and serves as an important form of social security. However, **in recent decades over 100,000 homes have been converted from public housing, leaving poor and elderly families at the whims of big banks and private developers.**<sup>5</sup> This is justified by politicians (even the "progressives" in Congress) by not funding federal housing, and then

[5] Bittle, Jake. "Public Housing Is Going Private, and It's Congress's Fault." The American Prospect, 1 Nov. 2019



crying “look how bad public housing is, we can’t maintain it”—essentially acting as a self-fulfilling prophecy that’s used to sell off the public housing complexes.

After private corporations take over, the situation generally does not improve. Basic things like repairs and renovations are not completed in a timely manner; mold goes unchecked, poor-quality materials are used for repairs, etc. In the Bronx for example, **after a complex was privatized, tenants didn’t have heating in the middle of winter and needed to use space heaters to keep warm—leading to a fire that left 17 dead.**<sup>6</sup> With privatization, tenants lose their right to exercise self-management and organize (which has a rich history in public housing), which the private boot comes to stamp out. The “private-public” partnerships that go on in this country are not a means for giving people a better standard of living, but actually help consolidate the control of tyrant elites that are just looking out for themselves—extending the grip of the fat cats. In other words, **these are just ongoing massive transfers of wealth, not too dissimilar to the recent “private-public” partnership that UMass has taken up with Fieldstone apartments in Southwest.**

[6] Velsey, Kim. “What We Know about the Owners of the Bronx Building That Burned.” Curbed, 12 Jan. 2022

**The long history of people's struggle in this country is a testament to the fact that where there is oppression, there is resistance.**



NYC Tenants in Coney Island, Brooklyn protesting against privatization.



Minneapolis tenants protesting against privatization.

# CONCLUSION

The problems that we face on campus won't go away unless we dare to act and dare to struggle. As the great Black revolutionary Fred Hampton once said "If you dare to struggle, you dare to win. If you dare not struggle, then damn it, you don't deserve to win." **We as students don't need to sit on our hands and let the university and private corporations walk all over us.** We have strength in numbers to fight against these institutions and companies—which we shouldn't give up.

As we can see from the situation with public housing, our fight for on-campus housing encompasses many fronts, including the struggle against the ruling class in this country to privately control even more wealth than they already command—and we must not lose sight of this. **It's an important duty for us as students and intellectuals to think about how to change this world for the better and act on it. We have to start by struggling against the elites who control every aspect of our lives from the bread we eat to the media we consume.**



Pictured: Fred Hampton, Chairman of the Chicago Black Panther Party

**We should not see our fight at "Swamyville" just as one to win housing, but as a fight to win the world!**

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