

a place to call home

Couple get affordable apartment, move out of hotel they lived in chelmsford Housing Authority

by **Jacob vitali**

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chelmsford » A small room at the Ayer Motor Inn with little more than a bed and a bathroom wasn't a place to call home for Cindy MacKay and her partner of 34 years, Pauline Gould.

The neighbors were noisy and loud music often kept them up at unreasonable hours. Frequent calls to the police proved to be in vain. The room, which was supposed to be handicapped-accessible, couldn't accommodate Gould's walker and common amenities were placed too high to reach. They were paying \$ 1,400 a month for the little they had. On Nov. 4, the pair moved into their new apartment at the Brianna Lyn Estates, a Chelmsford Housing Authority property located at 86 Richardson Road.

At their new unit, MacKay and Gould pay \$ 625 a month for rent, with utilities included. They have their own kitchen, a

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**'if you ask me, this is a luxury apartment,
everything is brand new.'**

– *Cindy MacKay*



Cindy McKay, left, and her partner of 34 years, Pauline Gould, who can no longer walk, at the Chelmsford Housing authority apartment they moved to with help from state sen. Jamie eldridge, D-acton, after they had to leave the ayer Motor inn.

Julia Malakie PHotos / lowell sun



Cindy McKay, with her Christmas tree that she may plant somewhere, is seen in the living room of the new apartment.

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weeks of supply chain-related delays.

"If you ask me, this is a luxury apartment, everything is brand new," MacKay said.

living room, access to an elevator and much friendlier neighbors. One neighbor helps MacKay get to the grocery store. It's a stark contrast to the life they lived for five years, where they had to pay \$ 1,400 each month.

When they were looking to get out of the motel, MacKay said they sought help from the Ayer and Pepperell housing authorities. They wanted to stay in the area because Gould has a sister in Pepperell.

"Be thankful you have a roof over your head," was the response MacKay said she heard.

Standing in her living room, MacKay hugged state Sen. Jamie Eldridge, D-Acton, and called him a "life saver." She credits him with making the new apartment possible.

Eldridge had tried to call the housing authorities on their behalf, but even a state senator found it frustrating. He was introduced to the couple by MacKay's hairdresser, who had seen him speak at Trinity Church in Shirley.

But Eldridge did know Chelmsford Housing Authority Executive Director David Hedison would return his phone calls and might be able to help.

"They build a lot of new housing, which unfortunately, a lot of housing authorities don't do," Eldridge said. "He told me that they were purchasing this building and rehabbing it and it would all be affordable."

After getting MacKay and Gould approved for the apartment, Eldridge said he and his office kept advocating to ensure they were treated as a high priority. When they were approved to move, Eldridge brought in the Lowell-based nonprofit Community Teamwork Inc. CTI helped the pair apply for the state Residential Assistance for Families in Transition program. They also helped with moving expenses and a security deposit, Eldridge said.

Just before MacKay and Gould moved into the new unit, Eldridge said he paid for a required \$150 pest inspection out of pocket. Littleton Unitarian Church pitched in by moving their belongings from Ayer to Chelmsford, he added.

Since moving in November, MacKay said her quality of life and mental health has significantly improved. It is also a better space for Gould, who MacKay acts as the full-time caregiver of, due to various health concerns.

Eldridge said the disparities with low-income housing continue to exist. In the suburbs, low-income housing constitutes 80% of the median income. He said the figure makes sense for teachers and lower-income professionals, but it leaves out people like MacKay and Gould.

Eldridge also said he recognizes there are state and federal regulations surrounding affordable housing, but said some regulations have a negative impact on the people who need affordable housing.

"If you're checking someone's credit history or their records, disproportionately that's going to mean poor people are gonna get discarded from not being eligible, so that that's a serious problem," Eldridge said.

One bright spot Eldridge sees could be with legislation passed last session, which says communities served by the MBTA must designate one area to be zoned as multifamily housing. However, Eldridge acknowledged there's nothing to ensure the costs are kept affordable.

"That's where I'm pushing communities to say, if you're going to approve multifamily development, then also say to developer, 'I want 25% of it to be affordable,'" Eldridge said. "The towns are going to have to put up money to subsidize that. So if the community is not willing to do that, the state should as well, but the community should step up." Eldridge also said communities across the state's different housing authorities received a collective \$100 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds.

The pending Housing and Environment Revenue Options bill could also make a difference in affordable housing, as could a pending bill allowing individual communities to implement rent control, Eldridge said.



state sen. Jamie Eldridge, d-Acton, and his legislative aide/environmental policy adviser, Immaculate

Reflecting on their journey, MacKay said too many communities are prioritizing luxury apartments and forgetting about people in her situation.

“Who is going to pay over \$2,000 a month for an apartment?” MacKay asked. “ You’re never there because you’re working to pay for it. I think the rents are crazy, people can’t afford it.”

The pair are growing older and are largely dependent on Social Security. Living in a motel wasn’t the choice they wanted to make, but they had been evicted from an apartment in Woburn.

When they were younger, Gould owned a laundromat in Chelsea but the business closed when the neighborhood got rough. They also found work for a dry cleaning business in Revere.

“We came up this way because I thought it would be cheaper. But it’s not at all. It’s like living in a big city,” MacKay said.

Their new place could be considered small to some, but they have the ability to hang photographs and artwork on the wall. The space is clean and modern. On Thursday, their new couch arrived after

Mchome, left, visit cindy McKay, center, at the chelmsford Housing Authority apartment they helped McKay and her partner move to, after they had to leave the Ayer Motor Inn.

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A drawing done during a visit to Las Vegas years ago of cindy McKay, right, and her partner of 34 years, Pauline Gould, hangs on the wall at the chelmsford Housing Authority apartment they recently moved to.