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Self-storage evictions point to larger crisis

Sean Cotter, Marie Szaniszlo Thursday, August 16, 2018

Credit: Courtesy

'DESPERATE': A Health Department van, right, parks outside the CubeSmart Self Storage where some people were living in the units, above. A tent encampment, top left, popped up in Cambridge.

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The discovery this week of several people living in a Dorchester storage facility is the

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latest indication of the housing crisis in Boston, where rents continue to skyrocket.

“That just indicates the desperate nature of housing here in Boston,” said Joseph Finn, executive director of the Massachusetts Housing & Shelter Alliance.

On Tuesday, authorities inspected CubeSmart Self Storage on Massachusetts Avenue and found several people using storage units as living quarters, some containing curtains, coolers, food and electrical cords.

“Due to the severity of the violations,” Boston Inspectional Services said in a statement, CubeSmart was ordered to vacate those units. And yesterday, a sign was posted on the building’s front door, saying, “Effective immediately, the access hours to the property will coincide with office hours,” which extend from 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays and 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sundays.

The office referred questions to the company’s headquarters, which did not return a phone call yesterday.

The largest unit the CubeSmart Self Storage on Massachusetts Avenue has for sale is 20 feet by 20 feet. One person told investigators she was paying $230 a month to rent a unit. Just a couple of blocks northwest, a studio that measures about 26 by 20 feet is on the market for $2,100 a month. And the overall median rent in Boston is $2,750, according to the rental website Zillow.

Robyn Frost, executive director of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, said every time there’s a lottery for a new rent-restricted apartment, a huge crowd turns up hours in advance.

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“People do try to find whatever they can,” Barbara Trevisan of the Pine Street Inn homeless shelter said. “We have many folks who come through our shelter who are working, but they don’t earn enough of an income to have an apartment here.”

Many people who fall on hard times end up just looking for anywhere safe to go, Frost said.

Yesterday, four tents were set up in the woods near the Alewife MBTA station. A 68-year-old man who declined to give his name said he had been living there for less than a week, with the permission of a Massachusetts Water Resources Authority officer who had stopped by.

“We’re not squatters; we’re only visitors,” said the man, who described himself as a Vietnam veteran who was camping there because it reminded him of being “in country” — in Vietnam.

Both the MWRA and the MBTA said they had not received complaints about the tents.

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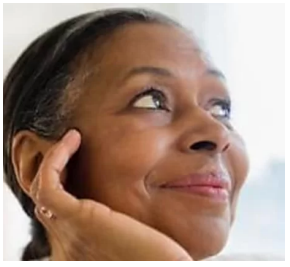

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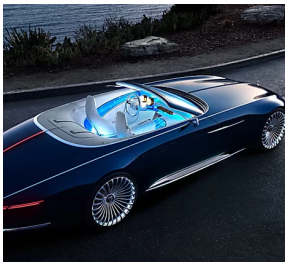

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John Bart

The cost of living and the housing crisis in Boston has gotten to this point where people are living in rental storage units. This is absolutely unbelievable and the mayor/governor should be ashamed. They keep touting that the solution is to build more housing and that the laws of supply and demand will lower the cost of housing. This is absolutely wrong/short sited. As a developer, my goal is to make a profit. It costs me so much per square foot to build in Boston, so I need to recoup that. With that being said I will not sell\rent my units at a loss. The true solution is to deal with the pro… See More

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Tim Kennard

It's been like that for decades.

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Paul Valeriani

So sad. A 68 year old Vietnam veteran forced to live in the woods near the MWRA, and Alewife MBTA Station, while Illegal Aliens, are given Carte Blanche, State financial aid, and Sanctuary!

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Bob Catanzano

Well if they gave cost of living increases for the working people, this would not happen. Can't afford to live in Boston? Move out.

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