

Candidate answers 2021, question 5

5. If you are elected, what will you do on the following issues to address systemic housing discrimination against protected classes and to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing in Somerville?

a. Policies and programs Somerville can use to diversify neighborhoods

b. Continuing to protect and enforce condominium conversion restrictions and other measures to ensure housing for families with children

c. Preventing discrimination against disabled individuals in need of housing that have emotional support animals

d. Preventing discrimination against households with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies

Katjana Ballantyne, Candidate for Mayor:

a. Policies and programs Somerville can use to diversify neighborhoods

- I will be a leading advocate for more education about Fair Housing in the public schools and I'll advocate for funding for Fair Housing education initiatives.
- I'll broadcast on all available public media to publish affordable housing opportunities and I'll advocate for adequate funding for this effort.
- I'll continue my leadership in supporting programs like the 2000 Homes program, which prioritizes purchases of housing in areas where affordable housing opportunities are not available.
- I'll will lead in supporting and funding the Office of Housing Sustainability
- I'll increase funding for Affordable Housing, including City Bond funding against CPA funding stream.
- I'll continue my leadership to establish the Institutional Master Planning (IMP) Requirements, that I proposed, and to pass the home-rule petition that I sponsored, to allow us to require IMPs in our zoning ordinance. These initiatives will improve our PILOT agreements and encourage local residential schools to house their resident students on campus in campus housing.
- I will lead in supporting, promoting and funding the Community Land Trust.

b. Continuing to protect and enforce condominium conversion restrictions and other measures to ensure housing for families with children

I will protect and enforce the Condo Conversion Ordinance.

c. Preventing discrimination against disabled individuals in need of housing that have emotional support animals

I will work to protect the rights of disabled individuals in need of support animals. The presence of an ESA is an accommodation that should not be prohibited by no-pet policies. I'll work with

the FHC, as mayor, to provide landlord outreach and education about the importance of emotional support animals.

d. Preventing discrimination against households with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies

I will use information and education to help landlords and tenants to understand and to maintain their rights regarding Section 8. I'll also push for the highest rent that the Section 8 authority can pay in Somerville. I'll support adequate funding for education about the Section 8 program. It is a great resource for tenants and our landlords.

Mary Cassesso, Candidate for Mayor:

a. Policies and programs Somerville can use to diversify neighborhoods

First, I would create new affordable housing stock across all neighborhoods, creating new affordable housing through 20% Inclusionary Zoning and new publicly subsidized affordable housing utilizing existing resources—Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC), Section 8, the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP). I also will support city and non-profits' programs that allow existing housing to be removed from the speculative real estate market and have permanent affordability restrictions (100 Homes (and beyond), Community Land Trust). Second, I also want to consider tax breaks for landlords who rent to households at below-market rents so that affordable housing isn't just in new buildings but also mixed into the existing neighborhood. Third, I will fund programs coordinated by the Office of Housing Stability—education for tenants and landlords, enforcement for landlords who violate fair housing, and incentives for landlords to fix up units so they are suitable for families.

b. Continuing to protect and enforce condominium conversion restrictions and other measures to ensure housing for families with children

I would continue to enforce condominium restrictions and tenant “right of first refusal” rights, which the current administration and City Council have done a great job strengthening. I would explore rent stabilization legislation. I would actively protect all “community-owned” housing: public housing, publicly subsidized housing, non-profit owned housing, affordable housing with deed restrictions that are expiring. I would ensure that new residential construction includes family-size units with 2- and 3-bedrooms, especially in the affordable and inclusionary units.

c. Preventing discrimination against disabled individuals in need of housing that have emotional support animals

I am an advocate for mental health and therefore I am support of allowing community members to get the services they need. I would work to create solutions with pet owners, and property owners, and health care services, so that emotional support animals can be allowed.

Accessibility—both in retrofitting our existing buildings and ensuring best practices in new buildings—is critical to a welcoming, inclusive, equitable community.

d. Preventing discrimination against households with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies

I will work to increase the accountability of property owners, coordinated through the Office of Housing Stability, and continue to advocate and educate renters to know their rights. Folks who

report discrimination need to be supported throughout the process with resources that allow them to fully exercise their right, for example providing translation services, legal guidance, and housing search assistance when needed.

Will Mbah, Candidate for Mayor:

a. Policies and programs Somerville can use to diversify neighborhoods

I will enact policies that create more affordable housing and units throughout Somerville, not just concentrated in a few neighborhoods, specifically historically low income neighborhoods where affordable housing has traditionally been placed. We can expand the 100 Homes program and buy properties for affordable housing in areas like Ball Square and Teele Square. We can also improve the affordable housing overlay and allow developers to build more densely so that there can be more affordable housing on a structure's physical footprint.

b. Continuing to protect and enforce condominium conversion restrictions and other measures to ensure housing for families with children

I will fully fund and if necessary expand the Condo Review Board so that it has the tools necessary to ensure property owners converting rental units to condos are following the law. We should also increase the powers of the Condo Review Board and do more to penalize those who do not follow the law. I am in favor of increasing the amount of relocation costs and extending the relocation notification period for tenants impacted by condo conversion. I will also continue the city's lead abatement program so that there are more housing units that are safer for families with young children. Finally, we should consider zoning ordinances that require more family units in large developments.

c. Preventing discrimination against disabled individuals in need of housing that have emotional support animals

We need to increase the purview and power of the Fair Housing Commission so it can actually enforce penalties and issue fines against property owners that are discriminating against individuals with emotional support animals. A rental licensure program that provides prospective tenants with a landlord or property manager's history will also incentivize landlords and property managers to not discriminate.

d. Preventing discrimination against households with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies

Again, we need to increase the purview and power of the Fair Housing Commission so it can actually enforce penalties and issue fines against property owners that are discriminating against individuals with Section 8 Vouchers and other rental subsidies. I would also try to get more Section 8 voucher holders into the inclusionary housing units in the city by changing the tenant selection policies for inclusionary housing to prioritize households that have an expiring Section 8 voucher.

Charlotte Kelly, Candidate for City Council At Large:

a. Policies and programs Somerville can use to diversify neighborhoods

We must ensure 3+ story buildings are being built outside of our most diverse neighborhoods like Wards 1, Ward 2 and Ward 4. We have to increase density near the Green Line Extension that creates family units and build ADA compliant units in neighborhoods like Ward 3, Ward 5 and Ward 6. We should work

with the Somerville Community Land Trust to acquire land that can be in the public's hands for good and that can provide affordable housing to low income and middle income families.

b. Continuing to protect and enforce condominium conversion restrictions and other measures to ensure housing for families with children

We should create a process for the Zoning Board, the Office of Housing Stability, and the Fair Housing Commission to update the public on the enforcement of ordinances passed to protect housing for families with children. We should also regularly assess the frequency of condo conversions in the city. If the Fair Housing Commission or City Councilors are notified about violations to inform tenants of a condo being converted, we should add those instances to a public registry of landlords who have been found to violate the ordinance. It's important to note that not every tenant who experiences a violation of their right knows that has happened, nor will every person who does know be willing to come forward. We have to build a culture within the City Council, commissions, departments, and in the city in general that ensures residents know their rights, where people can feel safe to disclose violations, and where they will be met with the necessary support in those situations.

c. Preventing discrimination against disabled individuals in need of housing that have emotional support animals

We can create a registry of landlords who discriminate against tenants with emotional support animals. In addition, we must ensure there is ample housing for disabled people. I would work to make sure the Commission for Persons with Disabilities is centered in creating proposals to ensure mobility and sensory accessibility as an inherent part of real estate development in Somerville. We can push to eliminate the "2 feet elevation" requirement and incentivize more universally designed units to be built in new development projects.

d. Preventing discrimination against households with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies

Similarly to the previous question, we can create a registry of landlords who discriminate against Section 8 Voucher holders. We can look into addressing how under the current Fair Housing "screening" guidelines residents can still be asked for credit, income and employment details, and so on and work with the Office of Housing Stability to provide alternative "screening." In addition, we can expand the pool of potential landlords and owner occupied units who can accept section 8 vouchers by providing assistance and instructions on how to accept section 8 vouchers, in the form of a webinar or a session with an SHA or OHS employee.

Justin Klekota, Candidate for City Council At Large:

b. Policies and programs Somerville can use to diversify neighborhoods

Somerville needs to maintain balance in its housing stock accessible to all income levels. Somerville should continue its practice of requiring 20% of units in new construction be affordable. Increasing housing prices in Somerville are also pressuring middle class renters and homeowners, and Somerville should adopt an expansive definition of affordability that also includes middle income earners in addition to the 20% affordable units defined by current law.

c. Continuing to protect and enforce condominium conversion restrictions and other measures to ensure housing for families with children

In addition to my support for zoning requiring construction of affordable units and units accessible to middle class families, the City Council should fund the educational outreach efforts of the Somerville Fair Housing Commission to include literature explaining our ordinances and restrictions as well.

d. Preventing discrimination against disabled individuals in need of housing that have emotional support animals

It is not uncommon for landlords to have policies that prohibit pets: our educational outreach efforts described above should inform landlords that exceptions exist for disabled individuals that have support animals.

e. Preventing discrimination against households with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies

As noted above, City educational materials for landlords, property managers, real estate agents, and owners should clearly define all of the above protected classes which include “source of income” covering Section 8 Vouchers and other rental subsidies as well as educating current and prospective residents to know their rights.

Kristen Strezo, Councilor At Large:

Generally, I would like the City of Somerville to perform quarterly testing on housing discrimination with residents, landlords, and tenants, as has been done in the past in the Boston area. I also want to listen to the experts; I would love to work alongside the Fair Housing Committee, to learn what the Committee has observed and how I can best support as a City Councilor.

- a. **Preventing discrimination against disabled individuals in need of housing that have emotional support animals.** The biggest barrier to this type of discrimination, I feel, is public awareness of both tenants and landlords and management companies. Tenants may not know they have rights and landlords/management companies may not know the rules and may unintentionally not abide by them. Special needs families also have to be brought into the conversation. I hear from some special needs families in apartment buildings that they feel they constantly have to walk on eggshells, living in fear that they will be kicked out of their unit if their special needs children are too loud or unable to stabilize their behavior or outbursts.
- b. **Preventing discrimination against households with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies.** I am a proud supporter of the SomerVIP program. The SomerVIP program creates incentives for small landlords and realtors to rent to Somerville residents with a Section 8 voucher. SomerVIP expands our city’s very limited Section 8 stock, reduces the potential biases of Section 8, keeps long-term Somerville residents in our community, and secures the option for small landlords to have reliable and invested tenants, many of which are households with children. This program is an initiative I have continually supported and have pushed to the farthest extent in my capacity as a City

Councilor. I was delighted to attend the SomerVIP community rollout meeting back in 2020, which happened a few weeks before the pandemic shutdown happened. But, now that the pandemic is slowing down, I'm excited for the program to initiate more community outreach and amp up again.

Tracey Pratt, Candidate for City Council At Large:

a. Policies and programs Somerville can use to diversify neighborhoods

In order to diversify neighborhoods, each neighborhood must have a variety of fair housing options. This includes homes for purchase and rentals of varied sizes and price ranges. The first step to any type of improvement is education. Protected groups should be specifically targeted for available classes on fair housing, rentals and home ownership. Massachusetts has several programs but if people don't know about them, they can't take advantage of existing opportunities. On the other end of the spectrum, as a city counselor, I'd want to get creative with training for landlords and incentive programs for them and for people selling their homes to protected groups.

b. Continuing to protect and enforce condominium conversion restrictions and other measures to ensure housing for families with children

I believe families with children deserve fair and adequate housing. I would either develop or support any policy that continues to protect this group from any form of housing discrimination.

c. Preventing discrimination against disabled individuals in need of housing that have emotional support animals

Again, this is an issue of renters and condo dwellers knowing their rights. There are some very specific rules to follow when one has an emotional support animal. If an individual goes through these very specific measures then they need to feel empowered to exercise this right. As a city councilor, it's important for me to make sure we have properly trained and adequate staff to investigate and resolve housing discrimination cases.

d. Preventing discrimination against households with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies

As with each of the above responses, education and knowing one's rights with regard to section 8 is the key. I would support ongoing training for tenants and landlords with regard to section 8 vouchers. If we don't have a hotline where people can call to report housing violations, we need one and I would support its implementation.

Virginia Hussey, Candidate for City Council At Large:

a. Policies and programs Somerville can use to diversify neighborhoods

We should continue to fund the 100 homes program to bring affordable apartments to every neighborhood, and we should also not let developers out of affordable unit requirements. We should explore bonuses for developers who provide above the required numbers of units.

b. Continuing to protect and enforce condominium conversion restrictions and other measures to ensure housing for families with children

I will support the existing condo conversion programs, deepen the affordability of inclusionary units, push for more family-sized apartments, and explore other programs like described above.

c. Preventing discrimination against disabled individuals in need of housing that have emotional support animals

I have experienced this first hand, and will work with the Commission for People with Disabilities and other groups to make sure the city is requiring ADA compliance on buildings and that landlords are better educated about renting to people with disabilities. I also have an emotional support dog, and he has been essential to wellbeing with my PTSD, and we should make sure pet policies are acknowledging that these animals are more than pets they are essential to health.

d. Preventing discrimination against households with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies

This is also something I have experienced and will educate city officials, landlords, and anyone else about the impact of this discrimination on the wellbeing of families. We need to protect residents who use vouchers and protect landlords from potential damages. I can bridge this gap between other voucher holders and property owners with my life experience and the backing of city officials as I work with them.

Willie Burnley, Jr., Candidate for City Council At Large:

a. Policies and programs Somerville can use to diversify neighborhoods

As a member of Just Us Somerville, the only organization in Somerville exclusively for BIPOC residents, I've spoken with some of my neighbors about how isolating our community can feel at times for people of color. Part of this, to me, is the lack of celebration of our diverse history and residents. Somerville was home to a Black pastor and abolitionist, Leonard Grimes, who was directly related to the last use of the Fugitive Slave Act in Massachusetts. Our city's seal relates to the indigenous history of the land we occupy. Our immigrant history includes Brazilians, Haitians, Tibetans, and many more people of color whose cultural histories have not been tied into the larger story of Somerville. I believe by helping to tell a truly multiracial story of Somerville, we can help inspire folks to feel more involved in our community and draw in more BIPOC residents. I have spoken to some of the current city councilors about beginning this process and have found partners who are bought into the project.

I am deeply committed to diversifying our community in a way that is equitable and eliminates structural racism, including the segregation that still exists in Somerville. I look forward to engaging with the Director of Racial and Social Justice, along with the Office of Housing Stability, in regards to what changes to our zoning and ordinances can be made to help diversify our neighborhoods. As I have mentioned, I am interested in increasing fair housing checks in

order to ensure that we eliminate housing discrimination in our community and find appropriate responses to property owners that have a pattern of discrimination.

We must recognize that one of the leading causes of the racial homogenization of our community is its general unaffordability. The population of our public schools, for example, is majority BIPOC students. However, as these students get older, their families often move out of Somerville or they find less opportunities locally to keep them around. In the connectivity of our community and the economic as well as cultural opportunities we can provide, we will find a way to keep the diversity that Somerville so often loses to other municipalities.

b. Continuing to protect and enforce condominium conversion restrictions and other measures to ensure housing for families with children

Families with children, though a relatively small percentage of our overall population, make up a crucial thread in the tapestry of our community. When I first moved to Somerville, I lived across from Foss Park on Fellsway W. The sound of children playing and families enjoying themselves day after day helped pull me into this community. Yet far too many families have felt compelled to leave our city due to the high cost of homeownership and a lack of housing options that give an appropriate amount of space for their children.

Having organized with other residents in the Somerville Community Land Trust (SCLT), I know that the SCLT is interested in acquiring and constructing permanently affordable and accessible housing that is both for renters and potential homeowners. By owning the land, the SCLT can keep these homes more affordable than they would be within the market. However, as far as I am aware, the SCLT has yet to create for itself any sort of prioritization of whom it wishes to house, with the possible exception of those facing displacement. As a councilor, I would be willing to engage the SCLT on prioritizing a certain segment of its future stock for families with children. However, in general, I am in favor of building more densely and higher so that we have more stock for families with children.

I am pleased that condo conversions have slowed significantly since the passage of our ordinance and I am interested in other ways that we can preserve our housing and increase opportunities to create social housing.

c. Preventing discrimination against disabled individuals in need of housing that have emotional support animals

As a City, we must ensure that those seeking reasonable accommodations such as emotional support animals are treated fairly and not subject to arbitrary fees, including increased security deposits. This is another area where the need to report ADA violations is crucial and we must make that reporting as simple as possible, perhaps by providing assistance in the process.

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention, in this response, that our community is severely lacking physically accessible housing for those that need it most and that our sidewalks themselves are not ADA compliant. Our City is not living up to its duty in this regard. As a councilor, I will push development to be done with universal design and increase accessible housing in our neighborhoods.

d. Preventing discrimination against households with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies

As I have mentioned before, I believe that we must identify these patterns of discrimination through more thorough tracking - bolstered by an increase in residents' knowledge around and supported ability to report fair housing violations - and to hold the parties responsible accountable. This problem is real and impacting residents and potential residents today. I want our City to know how often it is happening and all parties involved. Although I have ideas about how to implement such a system, I will wait until I better understand the legal landscape of requirements that can be placed on property owners and rental agencies before I disclose them.

JT Scott, City Councilor, Ward 2:

a. Policies and programs Somerville can use to diversify neighborhoods

While I am hopeful for the future of the Somerville Community Land Trust, I feel like it's time to direct our city's bonding capacity (and federal aid through ARPA) to build public housing at the municipal level, bypassing the restrictions of the Faircloth Amendment, providing affordable housing for Somerville residents across the entire income spectrum, and taking a serious step towards guaranteeing housing as a human right. I'm already working with partners in organized labor who have proven success in building mixed-income, multi-generational, family-oriented public housing projects in the region. I'm exploring strategies for securing both the land and the funding to make this dream of stable, affordable housing a reality for more of our residents. We can create hundreds (if not thousands) of new affordable, community-owned housing units in the city - built by Somerville residents earning a truly living wage, trained in trades, and keeping our tax dollars at home in our community.

b. Continuing to protect and enforce condominium conversion restrictions and other measures to ensure housing for families with children

The current Condo Review Board is not set up in a way that I feel enables them to pursue rigorous and investigative review of the materials provided in condo conversion applications. I'd like to see a dedicated staff member assigned to this Board to assist them in investigating conversion applications and ensuring that recently displaced tenants are located and advised of the rights which they may not have been aware of before vacating the unit.

c. Preventing discrimination against disabled individuals in need of housing that have emotional support animals

Whether the need for accommodations includes support animals or basic accessibility/ADA compliance, we need to have city staff with extensive ADA and Fair Housing experience who are available to assist people with disabilities, including providing information to landlords about their responsibilities under the law and how to come into compliance. I proposed several new positions in the FY21 budget for such positions in ISD, but they were not filled this year. I'll continue to advocate for them in the future.

d. Preventing discrimination against households with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies

The new SomerVIP program run by the Somerville Homeless Coalition in conjunction with the Office of Housing Stability is an excellent step. I'm glad to see the OHS hosting seminars for landlord education around the flexibility and benefits of accepting Section 8 vouchers; while it's mandated by law, programs like this can help Somerville be a place where more landlords are actively seeking Section 8 tenants to provide local housing options to SHA voucher holders.

Ben Ewen-Campen, City Councilor, Ward 3:

a. Policies and programs Somerville can use to diversify neighborhoods

First and foremost: create more affordable housing, and protect tenants from displacement. This past year, as Chair of Land Use, I sponsored and led the passage of the Affordable Housing Overlay District, which incentivizes new affordable housing, and removes some of the red tape that can slow these projects down. And over the past two terms, with my colleagues on the Council, we have updated Somerville's Condo Conversion Ordinance to close the loopholes that allowed developers to evict tenants without notice or relocation expenses, we have regulated AirBNBs and other short-term rentals to protect existing housing stock, we passed the Housing Notification Act, and home rule petitions to fund affordable housing via a Transfer Fee, alongside a Tenants Right to Purchase and support for overturning the State-wide ban on rent control.

I am also a co-founder of the Somerville Community Land Trust, which will work to create permanently affordable home ownership opportunities across the city, under community control. And, as described above, in the coming term, I will be working with a diverse task force to write a Somerville version of the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Act, to encode fair housing principles in our zoning and development process. I will also continue working to create a mortgage subsidy program similar to Boston's One+ program, likely using funding from developer contributions and/or the Community Preservation Act.

b. Continuing to protect and enforce condominium conversion restrictions and other measures to ensure housing for families with children

I worked closely with colleagues and the Office of Housing Stability to rewrite our Condo Conversion Ordinance in 2019, for the first time since the mid-1980s. I am very thankful to Ms. Hannah Carrillo and others in the Housing Division who have been carefully monitoring and reporting on this critical legislation, committed to continuing to monitor and update this critical legislation,

c. Preventing discrimination against disabled individuals in need of housing that have emotional support animals

We know that such discrimination is already illegal, yet remains commonplace, and it is therefore primarily an issue of enforcement, and community education. I look forward to working with the Fair Housing Commission and the Administration in finding ways to educate property owners on this issue, and would gladly support initiatives to incentivize landlords to rent to individuals with support animals.

d. Preventing discrimination against households with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies

We often hear from housing advocates that, in recent memory, many Somerville landlords were eager to take Section 8 vouchers because they offered higher payments than “market value” might otherwise dictate. This is clearly no longer the case. Today, Section 8 voucher holders find it increasingly difficult to live in Somerville – in fact, my understanding is that Section 8 is most often used now for tenants living in Inclusionary Zoning units, especially those targeting 80-110% of area median income. More broadly, I believe this is an issue of enforcement and community education, and would gladly work with advocates and the Administration to find ways to [candidate’s statement ends here].

Beatriz Gómez Mouakad, City Council candidate, Ward 5:

a. Policies and programs Somerville can use to diversify neighborhoods

Beyond current existing inclusionary zoning, set up a plan to target affordable housing developments that are 100% affordable or offer a robust mix of mixed income units developments in neighborhoods lacking affordable housing units or having a lower affordable housing stock. This should include 30% below median units. Focus property acquisition for the 100 homes programs in these neighborhoods. For the 100 homes program consider acquisition of two-family and three-family units as affordable homeownership units that would include/preserve an affordable unit. The homeowner would commit to a certain level of affordability for these rental units.

b. Continuing to protect and enforce condominium conversion restrictions and other measures to ensure housing for families with children

Somerville does have a robust condo conversion law. The condo conversion law is attempting to prevent the displacement of rental units and renters, but the question is if it is actually preventing condo conversions of multi-family homes into more units/smaller units which could potentially increase property values drastically or increase the sale of multi-family units. Could these dramatic property increases be making the once affordable Somerville two and three family home inaccessible to families and only attainable to private developers? The City needs to assess property value increases in these types of typologies due to condo conversions that usually target a luxury market. If in effect these condo conversions are forcing an exaggerated inflation of property values, then additional policies to prevent the division of existing two-family homes into more dense multi-family homes should be explored through zoning restrictions beyond the existing code.

c. Preventing discrimination against disabled individuals in need of housing that have emotional support animals

Create tenant protections for individuals in need of emotional support animals.

d. Preventing discrimination against households with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies

- As per item 3 above, increase or make more available information regarding Fair Housing Laws.

- Increase education for property owners on Section 8 as often there is a biased stigma against Section 8 vouchers holders.
- Create property tax incentives for property owners who accept Section 8 vouchers and provide low to zero interest loans for home improvements for energy efficiency or normal upkeep as an additional potential incentive.

Tessa Bridge, City Council candidate, Ward 5:

a. Policies and programs Somerville can use to diversify neighborhoods

I will advocate expanding housing stabilization services by increasing the operating budget of the Office of Sustainable Housing, fully funding tenants' right to counsel, and extending the eviction moratorium. All housing policies must center BIPOC communities and those historically impacted by housing injustice such as redlining, predatory lending, and housing bias and discrimination. By providing affordable housing across the city, not only in specific pockets, we can integrate neighborhoods and ensure that access to housing is not what maintains historic segregation in our city and schools.

b. Continuing to protect and enforce condominium conversion restrictions and other measures to ensure housing for families with children

I will push to invest in building mixed-income social housing including housing for municipal employees who work in Somerville and family-sized units. I will also prioritize efforts to subsidize the cost of living including rental assistance, moving costs, and first-time home buyer programs. We also need to ensure that the new housing stock that is being built isn't only luxury buildings with predominantly smaller units. We need to build housing that is accessible to more residents.

c. Preventing discrimination against disabled individuals in need of housing that have emotional support animals

I will advocate removing the two-foot requirement currently included in zoning for residential units. This requirement results in the majority of accessible units being within larger apartment buildings with accessible entrances to the side or rear, which is inherently marginalizing. It also makes residential neighborhoods inaccessible to people with mobility issues. Our city design should be equitable by default. To make existing housing stock more accessible, I would advocate establishing a city fund to support retrofitting existing units to be more accessible. It is also important to acknowledge that accessibility doesn't stop at the entrance to a building, it must extend into the units themselves. I would work to increase the percentage of affordable units that are accessible and affordable by requiring that 50% of affordable units in all new construction are ADA compliant.

d. Preventing discrimination against households with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies

It is illegal to deny someone with a Section 8 Voucher or other rental subsidy housing, but unfortunately, it still happens due to a lack of oversight and enforcement. There are several ways I would suggest addressing this. One is to focus on encouraging and supporting reporting of discrimination against applicants with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies. The Fair Housing Commission put out a fair housing report that showed that very low numbers of reports have been brought to the commission. This indicates a need to raise awareness of the illegality of excluding potential tenants with vouchers and of the available avenues for reporting so that people can file complaints. We also need to make the reporting process more accessible and expand the representation of people who receive Section 8 Vouchers on the commission and have a space on the commission for someone from the Office of Sustainable Housing. This will better enable the Fair Housing Commission to meet the needs of residents facing housing discrimination.

Furthermore, the market is not accessible for many tenants who qualify for Section 8 Vouchers to use their vouchers in Somerville. Due to the high cost of housing in Somerville, Section 8 vouchers do not cover a significant portion of rent so people make the choice to go to more affordable communities. We can address this by taking bold action to lower the overall cost of housing and increase the availability of affordable housing across the city. Finally, the city must enforce the law and ensure that landlords who reject applicants with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies are held accountable and that landlords who do this serially are added to a registry of landlords who engage in discriminatory practices that is publicly available so that tenants (and their legal council) are aware.

Todd Easton, City Council candidate, Ward 5:

b. Policies and programs Somerville can use to diversify neighborhoods

I would make sure housing programs and new large scale developments include inclusive housing components that would guarantee that these developments don't cater to one particular demographic. These housing programs should reflect the population, recognizing a range of socioeconomic needs and a diverse community. We should be exploring more public/private partnership and new development opportunities in the downtown area.

b. Continuing to protect and enforce condominium conversion restrictions and other measures to ensure housing for families with children

New developments should be required to have family sized units. The City should consider a moratorium on converting two- or three-family houses into multiple small unit condos that increase the number of total units while eliminating family sized units.

c. Preventing discrimination against disabled individuals in need of housing that have emotional support animals

I believe the city has to do a better job establishing and proactively sharing regulations that explain the protections provided to renters and to homeowners.

d. Preventing discrimination against households with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies

The city should have a clear and informative policy on what Section 8 is and how it benefits the renter and owner. I believe there is a lot of misinformation out in the public about what Section 8 is and who uses it. The people who use rental subsidies should not be treated any differently than people who rent at market rate.

Alexander Anderson, City Council candidate, Ward 7:

As a City Councilor, I think it is important to recognize that I am not an expert in all things. Instead, I bring a consistent evaluation and decision making process to make sure I'm making the best decisions and advocating for the right things no matter what issue is at hand.

All of my evaluation and decision making process starts from my values of equity, affordability, and sustainability. All decisions we make should take an intentional approach to making our community more fair, more accessible, and more viable for the long run. From there, I think it is important to understand the components of the systems we are trying to improve, understand the important quantitative and qualitative data, work together to develop improvements with experts and people with lived experience of the situations we're trying to improve, and implement changes while centering the human experience of our work.

For each of the items listed below, I would want to work with the experts who have dedicated their time and careers to advancing fair housing to know what the best solutions are to this challenge. I believe in applying evidence-based practice in all that we do. And, I believe we must have meaningful relationship building with all of the important stakeholders – especially people who experience the challenges of affordability and fair housing – to design changes and improvements together.

a. Policies and programs Somerville can use to diversify neighborhoods

We must support improve outreach and engagement for the wonderful diversity in our community. We should engage with the great communities of people from different backgrounds and work with community liasons to truly understand the challenges and concerns people care most about in our community. And, based on the feedback of people directly, we can take specific actions.

I believe the City should share information about the diversity of our community and neighborhoods and establish specific goals and workplans to increase the diversity of our neighborhoods.

b. Continuing to protect and enforce condominium conversion restrictions and other measures to ensure housing for families with children

When I talk to neighbors while campaigning, I hear a lot of confusion about what the condominium conversion restrictions actually are. I think a first step is to do a better job educating and communicating what the rules actually are.

I also think the City Council should create positive incentives for renovations or rebuilds that focus on building housing geared towards families living in our community for the long run. I support streamlining and standardizing the permitting and licensing process for any renovation or rebuild project that focuses on building family-friendly, affordable housing.

c. Preventing discrimination against disabled individuals in need of housing that have emotional support animals

In addition to approaches described above, I believe the city should subsidize the renovation and improvement of housing units that home disabled individuals.

d. Preventing discrimination against households with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies

The city should extend the eviction moratorium and work directly with landlords renting to individuals and families with Section 8 vouchers as well as the families themselves to ensure long term stability of people living in their homes.

The city should [candidate's statement ends here].

Becca Miller, City Council candidate, Ward 7:

a. Policies and programs Somerville can use to diversify neighborhoods

I support developing and passing a fair housing ordinance similar to Boston's that addresses historic discrimination and diversifies neighborhoods through a range of options given to developers to increase their housing project and providing more opportunities for everyone. Enforcing fair housing law should also help in this regard. Expanding affordable housing options in less diverse neighborhoods, including enhanced down payment assistance and low interest loans for homebuyers, and equity insurance programs to help residents remain in their homes. We should also increase amenities and services in majority diverse neighborhoods like Clarendon Hill and East Somerville to enhance the quality of life and address the legacy of disinvestment. Realistically, the diversity in our neighborhoods is linked closely to the affordability of our neighborhoods. Somerville enforces many important Fair Housing practices, but at the end of the day, if there aren't enough affordable units for working class people to rent or purchase, we will see Somerville's diversity continue to slip away from us.

b. Continuing to protect and enforce condominium conversion restrictions and other measures to ensure housing for families with children

Per the city's own fiscal year 2020 data, the condo conversion ordinance is working; there has been a steep decline in the number of applications to convert apartments to condos. We need to continue to build affordable home ownership opportunities by working with the Somerville community land trust to identify land and housing that can be purchased and taken off the market, and through the hundred homes program. These should include larger (3-4 bedroom) units for families with children.

c. Preventing discrimination against disabled individuals in need of housing that have emotional support animals

As it is currently illegal to discriminate against individuals with disabilities and in need of support animals, this is an ADA accommodations issue, and again requires increased enforcement to ensure compliance. The fair housing commission should work to ensure that persons with disabilities rights are respected and enforced, and share relevant rules with landlords, real estate agents, and homeowners. Somerville also currently has limited accessible housing stock, and we should look into rewriting parts of our zoning that make the majority of housing inaccessible, and require a percentage of new development be accessible, just as we do with the inclusionary affordable requirement. The city should also work to ensure there's not an additional security deposit for support animals as that can be a financial barrier for individuals when looking for housing.

d. Preventing discrimination against households with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies

It's illegal to deny someone who receives public assistance, including section 8, housing. We need to do better at enforcing this. The housing market is not accessible for households with section 8 vouchers in Somerville due to the high cost of housing and unaffordability. The city could limit the amount of vouchers and increase the dollar amount per voucher, which would mean we could have more people with section 8 living in Somerville, but obviously there are pros and cons with this that will need to be analyzed first. Increasing the representation of people with section 8 on the fair housing commission could be one tactic to increase representation and develop strategies to reach the population of residents with section 8 vouchers.

Judy Pineda Neufeld, City Council candidate, Ward 7:

a. Policies and programs Somerville can use to diversify neighborhoods

The supply of affordable housing for our lowest-income and marginalized residents remains deeply inadequate. My approach to housing aims to provide accessible and affordable housing for all and prevent Somerville residents from being priced out of their homes. This should involve creating greater density near our new Green Line stations with a more streamlined inclusionary housing process which creates a supply of affordable units that is more accessible to everyone. I will also work to pass a Fair Housing Amendment to stem displacement. Additionally, I believe housing stability and keeping folks in their homes must be a part of our strategy. I support increasing the capacity of the Office of Housing Stability and access to flexible rental relief funds so they can meet the urgent needs of our neighbors who are struggling to pay rent as a result of the pandemic.

b. Continuing to protect and enforce condominium conversion restrictions and other measures to ensure housing for families with children

I would again educate renters with materials in multiple languages and promoted through multiple on and offline mediums, so that they are aware of their rights and landlords are aware of their responsibilities to their existing tenants before undergoing a condominium conversion. To do this as City Councilor I would provide adequate staffing to the Condominium Review Board and increase resources to the Office of Housing Stability so that they are able to thoroughly

review each conversion request and properly assist tenants, allowing them to seek recourse for any violations of Fair Housing law.

c. Preventing discrimination against disabled individuals in need of housing that have emotional support animals

All new development in Somerville must be ADA compliant, and we must continue to fight for accessibility at the new Green Line stations. I am a natural collaborator and would bring the Commission for Persons with Disabilities to the table when there are discussions about development to try to come up with creative solutions. I will also work with the Commission for Persons with Disabilities and the Fair Housing Commission to ensure that tenants are aware of their legal protections to request reasonable accommodations for their support animals.

d. Preventing discrimination against households with Section 8 Vouchers or other rental subsidies

As I have said above, the most essential step towards providing tenants receiving public assistance with protections is ensuring they are aware of their rights under Fair Housing law and landlords are aware of their responsibilities. This must include information available in multiple languages and published both on and offline through multiple mediums. This can be done by providing adequate staffing and resources to the Fair Housing Commission and the Office of Housing Stability so they are able to spread this message to all tenants in the City.

Maria Koutsoubaris, City Council candidate, Ward 7:

To properly answer this I would appreciate feedback and access to some past case reviews to compare the common practice in order to be able to determine if any changes need to be made to adjust or to accommodate a particular classification as it is presented. I would then like to discuss the common practice of the current employee group that handle these particular issues and cases and obtain their particular concerns and feedback to determine my actions in each of the individual topics you have listed.