

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
FAIR HOUSING COMMISSION

Joseph A. Curtatone

Mayor

Liaison

Bryant Gaspard

Commissioners

Claudia DeAndrade

Dennis Fischman

Rona Fischman

Meeting Minutes

July 26th, 2018

Somerville Library-Central Branch

1st Floor Conference Room

79 Highland Avenue

1:00 pm

The meeting began at: 1:16 pm.

Attending: FHC members, Claudia DeAndrade, Dennis Fischman, Rona Fischman;
City staff, Bryant Gaspard

Minutes distribution (upon acceptance) to: FHC members; Michael Feloney, OSPCD Housing

I. Standing Agenda Items

- Meeting Minutes: Members reviewed draft minutes for the June meeting that had been prepared by Bryant Gaspard and reviewed by Mike Feloney. Dennis Fischman made a *motion* to accept the minutes, which was seconded by Rona Fischman and unanimously *approved*.
- Facebook page update: Dennis shared that in the month of July one of the most popular shared Facebook items was about what qualifies as an emotional support animal.
- Review of Calls/Issues/Complaints: No calls or complaints to report since last meeting.

II. Update on Specific Activities

- AFFH (Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing): Bryant shared the details of a conference call that he and his colleagues had with a graduate student working for PolicyLink, a national research and action institute. PolicyLink reached out to Housing Division staff to discuss the Assessment of Fair Housing (AFH) process, community engagement related to the AFH, and issues about housing in the city such as lack of supply, high ratio of renters compared to homeowners and the low amount of minority homeowners. Dennis noted that during the outreach stage of AFH preparation, he attended the community meeting at the East Somerville School, and that there was not a high turnout.

Dennis also expressed interest in how the current administration is using the AFH to guide policy. Rona shared that it would have been nice if the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) was a part of the AFH process, but noted that in her experience it is difficult to get in contact with staff. She also offered the observation that homes that are passed down through a family contribute to the issue of why certain populations have higher poverty rates and lower homeownership rates, due to the equity that can be associated with such an inheritance.

- AFFH-related items: Claudia shared that she thought affordable housing was disappearing in the city, and used Clarendon Hill as an example in terms of its impending demolition and redevelopment. She believes that residents will have a difficult time returning to the property once the new development is completed, because they may settle elsewhere in the interim. Claudia also shared her concern that the public housing tenants would not be able to use the amenities of the market rate development that would be adjacent to Clarendon and currently do not have a access to an on-site community or computer room.

Dennis expressed the view that it was not reasonable for people to go to the Mystic View and River apartments to use their computers and/or community room because it is on the other side of the city. Rona inquired as to whether a shuttle bus could pick tenants up and bring them to the Mystic Activity Center.

III. Status of Board Vacancies

- Possible use of city employee to fill a vacancy: Bryant shared that the current ordinance may allow for the use of a city employee or a Somerville Housing representative to fill the vacancy, and that both options are being considered. He also mentioned that in his review with the Legal Department of draft ordinance revisions, a preference for maintaining a seat specific to of a Somerville Housing Authority (SHA) representative be kept as a way to help ensure communication and work with SHA. The City Solicitor's office also expressed a strong preference for retaining the requirement that board member(s) resign if they no longer reside in the City (and not serve out a term). Staff reported that no other commission or board allows service beyond the time a member loses residency status.

Dennis shared that hopefully one of the vacancies could be filled by someone who speaks Spanish for language capacity purposes, but that it was not mandatory. He expressed the view that the process to appoint residents to boards and commissions takes too long and should be expedited.

IV. Announcements

- Members agree that the Commission would not hold a meeting in the month of August.

A *motion* to adjourn was introduced by Claudia and seconded by Rona and unanimously *approved*. The meeting adjourned at 2:13 pm.