

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
FAIR HOUSING COMMISSION

Joseph A. Curtatone

Mayor

Liaison

Bryant Gaspard

Commissioners

Claudia DeAndrade

Dennis Fischman

Rona Fischman

Meeting Minutes

June 28th, 2018

Somerville Library-Central Branch

1st Floor Auditorium

79 Highland Avenue

1:00 pm

The meeting began at: 1:10 pm.

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

Minutes distribution (upon acceptance) to: FHC members

I. Standing Agenda Items

- Meeting Minutes: Members reviewed draft minutes for the May meeting that had been prepared by Bryant Gaspard and reviewed by Mike Feloney. Rona Fischman made a *motion* to accept the minutes, which was seconded by Claudia DeAndrade and unanimously *approved*.
- Facebook page update: Dennis shared that in the month of June one of the most popular and shared Facebook items was a news article about an apartment building advertising that it was wheel chair accessible, but in fact, did not have any amenities or building features that would benefit a wheel-chair bound tenant.

Another popular item on the page was information about the City of Somerville's new Office of Housing Stability and the Director of the office, Attorney Ellen Shachter, who will be starting in her new position on August 13th.

- Review of Calls/Issues/Complaints-Bryant shared that he received an email notification about a potential Fair Housing violation from Bluye Demmissie on May 28th. Bluye had filled out a Fair Housing complaint on the city's website sharing that he felt he was being discriminated against because of his race and nationality. He responded to an ad about an apartment on Beacon street in Somerville. When he spoke to the landlord, she proceeded to ask Bluye about where his parents were from which he thought was a weird question to ask. He believed the inquiry was based on his name and responded to her question by stating his parents were from Ethiopia. Subsequently, the landlord told him to come see the apartment the next day. Within a few hours the landlord called Bluye back and said that she could not rent the apartment to him. When he asked the landlord the reason she was no longer going to rent to him, she did not provide a reason and stated to him that she did not need to give a reason. I spoke to him about this incident and told him about the MCAD (Mass. Commission Against Discrimination) process and what information he needed and should remember.

Bluye informed me that he would be going to the MCAD office in the next week to file the complaint.

II. Update on Specific Activities

- AFFH (Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing)-Bryant shared the most recent press release for the AFH and the changes made to incorporate the City's commitment to housing and displacement.
 - Rona responded to the press release by sharing that to own a home in Teele Square you either brought the property over 15 years ago or you're very wealthy.
 - Claudia stated that she felt it was discriminatory that poor people could not afford to stay in the city, some of whom have lived here their entire lives. She shared that even though there are affordable apartments in the city, some low income residents may not view these apartments as affordable, but out of their budget. Claudia also felt that developers who are building in the city are purposely discriminating against children by only creating one and two bedroom units or having a low amount of three bedroom units in their development.
- AFFH-related items:
 - Rona shared that there was no progress on the tenant handbook because she was working and attending meetings on the transfer fee.
 - Bryant gave the commissioners copies of the track changes he made to the Fair Housing Ordinance and that the City solicitors' office is reviewing the changes. Bryant shared that he took into account the commissioners wishes regarding getting rid of some of the criteria in the ordinance that made filling a vacancy very difficult. He also stated that he put in a live or work option in the ordinance and language that would allow for commissioners to stay on the commission for the duration of their term if they have to move.
 - Dennis stated that he liked the provision of allowing commissioners to finish out their term if they had to move due to employment changes or were displaced.

III. Two Vacancies on Fair Housing Commission

- Claudia shared that she may know of a staff member at SHA who would be a good fit for the Fair Housing Commission.
- Bryant shared that he reached out to several staff at the Somerville Community Corporation (SCC), but no one had the time to do it.

A motion to adjourn was introduced by Rona and seconded by Claudia and approved unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 2:10pm.

Documents distributed at meeting:

- City of Somerville Assessment of Fair Housing Report press release
- Track changes to Fair Housing Ordinance.