

**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
**SOMERVILLE AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST FUND**  
*JOSEPH A. CURTATONE*  
*MAYOR*

*Mary Cassesso, Managing Trustee*

*Trustees*  
Michael Feloney  
Kathryn Gallant  
David Gibbs  
Donna Haynes  
Andrea Shapiro  
Councilor Kristen Strezo  
Brielle Short  
Jessica Turner

**Minutes**  
**May 14, 2020 Meeting – 5:15pm**

Pursuant to Governor Baker’s March 12, 2020 Order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. C. 30A, s. 18, and the Governor’s March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place, as well as Mayor Curtatone’s Declaration of Emergency, dated March 15, 2020, this meeting of the Somerville Affordable Housing Trust was conducted via remote participation.

Trustees present: Mary Cassesso, Mike Feloney, Kathryn Gallant, David Gibbs, Andrea Shapiro, Brielle Short, Kristen Strezo

Trustees not present: Donna Haynes, Jessica Turner

Staff attending: George Proakis, OSPCD Executive Director; Heidi Burbidge, Lisa Davidson, Kelly Donato, OSPCD Housing Division

Meeting started at 5:20pm with Mary Cassesso serving as chair.

**1. Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Trustees reviewed draft minutes of the April 9, 2020 Trust meeting. David Gibbs introduced a **motion** to approve the April 9, 2020 meeting minutes which was seconded by Katie Gallant and PASSED, 7-0.

**2. Ongoing/Unfinished Business**

Housing programs administration, and operations during COVID-19 emergency-

- George Proakis noted that Housing staff had been keeping him apprised of challenges that Trust-funded housing program providers were reporting during the COVID-19 emergency. Challenges include social distancing precautions that had made it difficult for applicants to provide all of the typically required documentation with their applications to providers. George noted his understanding that in response to requests from providers to allow application accommodations during the emergency, Housing staff had committed a considerable amount time to secure feedback and guidance from multiple sources. Housing staff had been working in coordination with providers to establish uniform accommodations that had been determined to be permissible. It was also noted that Housing staff would be issuing guidance in writing and maintaining it to keep information up-to-date.

Kelly Donato described programs being funded in further detail.

Kelly noted that the three non-profit agencies administering Trust-funded Tenancy Stabilization programs (Just-a-Start Corp., Somerville Homeless Coalition (SHC) and the Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS)) would continue to limit program assistance to a \$3,000 lifetime cap. She noted that during the typical application process housing providers use HUD's Part 5 income certification process to determine applicant eligibility based on the program's income limits. Kelly noted that the standard requirements of the income certification process include a "wet" (original) signature and third-party income verification. She noted that during the emergency, providers had been unable to meet in person with applicants, and that obtaining third-party income verification had been difficult with businesses temporarily closed and/or employees on furlough or laid-off.

Kelly noted that HUD and other funding sources were reacting "in real time" to the challenges faced by housing providers during the emergency and that information and clarifications had been coming out incrementally in piecemeal fashion. She noted that housing providers and the City would like to have questions about what accommodations can be allowed resolved as quickly as possible; to that end Housing staff had been consulting with Somerville's HUD representative, had participated in a call with DOR, and had been in regular communication with MHP, the Citizen's Housing and Planning Alliance as well as staff from other municipalities that administer Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds and other housing programs.

Kelly reported that based on this research and guidance, Housing staff had identified accommodations that federal and state level funding sources had begun granting during the COVID-19 emergency. She noted that Housing staff had advised the Trust-funded housing program agencies that when it was feasible during the emergency for applicants to submit complete application and income certification process requirements, those requirements would remain in place. If applicants could not obtain the required documents, self-certifications by email, photo or other electronic means would be permissible.

Kelly explained that agencies would be expected to document due diligence attempts to obtain required third-party verifications during and after the emergency response period. She noted that if the agency staff remained unable to secure verification after repeated due diligence efforts then the file would be considered complete. It is expected that programs would resume past practices after the current emergency declaration is no longer in effect.

During the emergency, a rent letter or letter from the landlord would be accepted in lieu of a Notice to Quit. Once the emergency has ended, a Notice to Quit would again be required of new clients in order to be eligible for assistance.

Kristen Strezo asked about the approximate turnaround time for a household to receive assistance after making an application. Brielle Short reported that without accommodations, it could take two weeks to a month for the application process to be completed based on the time it took for staff to pick up wet signatures from applicants and to get third-party verification from employers. Brielle noted that some applications had remained incomplete and went on to explain that SHC's staffing capacity had an impact on how quickly these tasks could be completed. She noted that the moratorium on evictions in effect in Massachusetts was relieving some pressure and allowing additional time before payments were needed. Finally, Brielle noted that SHC had funds available on their Trust contract and were releasing it on behalf of clients when their applications were approved.

David noted that CAAS had already spent its contract funds.<sup>1</sup>

Kelly indicated that it is the sense of Housing staff involved that work on these issues would be ongoing and dialogue continuing as to what was working and/or not working and in need of further consideration. She reported that staff from Just-a-Start, SHC and CAAS had continued to provide very helpful information and feedback about their respective needs. Housing staff had held a group conference call with all three agencies, followed by individual Zoom calls; another group Zoom call had been scheduled and was upcoming. Kelly noted in conclusion that Housing staff would continue to engage in an ongoing dialogue with providers to address the guidance from funding sources and how the accommodations can work best to serve clients.

Mary Cassesso thanked staff for the information and the effort it reflected, and noted the Trust's support for the ongoing work of Housing staff and the housing program agencies, and that the application accommodations appeared justified given the emergency circumstances and need.

### 3. Communications

Clarendon Hill – project status update-

- Katie reported that the scheduled date for the zoning meeting at which the project would be on the agenda had been moved to June 10<sup>th</sup>. George reported that in the meantime, the development team had continued follow-up with the City's Engineering offices on the redesign of the intersection at Clarendon and Alewife Brook Parkway. He noted that a section of roadway needed to be moved in order for Redgate to start construction on the first building. He noted that the project's finances were based on a schedule where construction on the market-rate portion of the project would begin before that on the affordable portion. He reported that a construction start date could be possible in early 2021.

George noted that in addition to CPA funding already committed by the Trust to the project, there was potential for District Improvement Financing (a form of tax increment financing administered by MassDevelopment) to create a revenue stream for the City by borrowing against the incremental additional revenue created by the project's improvements. He noted that the City could also consider granting building permit fee waivers to reduce project costs, among other sources that will comprise the City's overall \$10million funding commitment.

Trustee reappointments – status-

- Heidi Burbidge reported that she had reached out that week to the Mayor's office staff to update when the Trustee reappointment process for Mary Cassesso and Donna Haynes would be rescheduled as an agenda items for a City Council Committee on Appointments and Personnel Matters meeting. She noted that she would continue to inquire and to keep Trustees informed.

Transmission of executed SCC agreement in association with loan for 88 Wheatland

- Heidi noted that at its April meeting the Trust had voted to enter into an agreement with SCC laying out details and requirements for repayment of the 88 Wheatland Street loan. She reported that the agreement was executed on April 23rd and that she had sent a PDF version of the executed contract to Trustees by email.

---

<sup>1</sup> Subsequent to the meeting, CAAS staff clarified that, as 5/28, there actually was \$24,214.51 remaining on their \$200,000 contract.

#### Trust Home Rule Petition – status update

Mike Feloney noted that rulings issued in recent years the state Department of Revenue (DOR), which oversees CPA and other Massachusetts Affordable Housing Trust (MAHT) expenditures, had limited the ability of municipalities and MAHTs to provide housing assistance that was not tied to a specific unit. In October, 2019 the City Council unanimously passed a Home Rule Petition (HRP) that would expand the purpose of Somerville’s Trust to allow greater flexibility in support of housing programs, including housing related social service programs such as landlord tenant mediation, legal services for tenants, case management, homelessness prevention and start-up costs for new affordable housing production initiatives.

Mike noted that in late February, the HRP’s sponsor Senator Patricia Jehlen’s office had introduced it to the State Legislature. Her staff recently reported that while the process had been slowed down during the pandemic and social distancing that postponed legislative activity for a time, they would be taking measures to get it moving again. He noted that staff had been informed that there was not a deadline for the matter to be taken up.

#### 4. New Business

Monthly CPA and non-CPA financial reports for January, February and March

- Mary noted that Heidi had sent monthly financial reports to Trustees by email. Consideration of the reports was postponed to the June meeting.

#### 5. Announcements-

David Gibbs noted that the City had issued a press release stating that the Somerville CARES fund was in need of donations. He noted that over 800 applications from Somerville households had been received, requesting a total of more than \$2.4 million in assistance. Over \$220,000 had been raised to date. Of the \$2.4 million requested, about \$1 million was specifically for housing assistance.

A **motion** was made to adjourn which was seconded and PASSED, 7-0.

*Next meeting date – The next meeting date will be Thursday, June 11, 2020 at 5:15pm. It will be held remotely using GoToWebinar. Instructions to join the meeting will be provided on the meeting agenda posted at City Hall.*

Documents distributed:

- Draft April Trust meeting minutes
- Trust agreement with SCC for repayment of the 88 Wheatland Street loan
- Monthly CPA financial reports for February and March
- Monthly non-CPA financial reports for January, February and March