

Somerville Commission for Women

Regular Meeting

February 20th, 2018

7:00pm

Cross Street Center

165 Broadway

Present: Jessica Alter, Co-Chair
Kristen Strezo, Co-Chair
Stephanie Goodell
Kat Rutkin
Maggie Norcross Devin
Marlena Erdos
Patricha Paul
Kaitlyn Dmyterko (Arrived 7:05)
Cristina DeWeese

Absent: Daisy Monsalve
Sumayya Essack
Melissa Alfone

Staff Members in Attendance: Chris Hosman

Guests: Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone
Skye Stewart, Chief of Staff
Holly Fox
Jason Behrens

Meeting Called to Order: Meeting was called to order by Jessica Alter at 7:10 p.m.

Listening Sessions Update: Low attendance at the Council on Aging Listening Session due to snow storm. Attendees discussed an interest in intergenerational programming. Attendees identified housing and caregiving as issues facing this particular population. Particularly the need to care for the caretaker. There is an interest in connecting with the COA again and staying connected with this group.

SomerViva listening session was well attended. The top issue raised were Domestic Violence in the Brazilian community. The SCW is interested in seeking out information to deliver culturally appropriate programming in this area in partnership with RESPONSD. Empowerment and information for female business owners came up as well. Other topics raised were Women's Health, particularly menopause, and Mental Health. Also, access to mental health resources and health resources in general are difficult to navigate based on what type of insurance you have. Those with Mass Health or Private insurance stated they have an easier time while those, who fall in the middle struggle.

Discussion of what the SCW would like to do to address these issues took place. One suggestion is working with SCAT TV to create Spanish and Portuguese informational videos on Domestic Violence.

The Mayor suggested partnering with OSPCD regarding working with female business owners.

Discussion regarding what the SCW can do to support the immigrant community. The Mayor detailed the various efforts in the City the SCW can support.

The Listening Session at the High School with the Women's Empowerment Group was productive. The young women detailed the various topics they are planning to address with the school administration. Efforts include addressing sexual intimidation in school, athletic uniforms, and gender imbalance in particular classes. The importance of working with both the School Committee and the School Administration was discussed.

The Mayor stated that he expects the school administration will be supportive of these efforts as they are in line with the values of the city and the schools.

Conversation with the Mayor: The Mayor asked what the perceptions are generally of being a woman living in the city.

The difficulties discussed were rising rents, mortgages and childcare. Another issue raised was the difficulty parents face when youth transition from elementary schools to the high school.

The Mayor asked how the administration can partner with the commission to ensure we create a sense of confidence in the fact that we are in every way a feminist community.

Discussion that one way to do this is through transparency. The SCW is currently researching consent curriculum in the Somerville Public Schools and the Sexual Harassment policies of the City of Somerville.

The city began a review of harassment policies back in October. The Board of Aldermen have also expressed an interest in looking at harassment policies. The SCW will have an opportunity to review the policies and provide feedback.

Discussion took place about the positive aspects of being a woman living in the community. The community is seen as forward thinking, and progressive which is why people want to live here. One challenge is bringing together all women in such a diverse community.

The Mayor discussed the importance of raising hard, but necessary, conversations. Discussion also included current initiatives such as transportation, keeping costs out of extracurricular activities, and comprehensive zoning overhauls. The Mayor also discussed having the Economic Development department present information to the SCW regarding the plans for keeping the city affordable.

Previous Minutes:

The December Meeting Minutes were approved based on a motion made by Jessica Alter and seconded by Maggie Norcross Devin.

The January Meeting Minutes were approved based on a motion made by Jessica Alter and seconded by Stephanie Goodell.

Task Force Updates: Women's History Month Event will be held March 26th. We will invite young women from the female empowerment group at the High School.

Financial Literacy training is planned for April 14th.

Co-Chair Elections: Co-Chair elections will be held in April. In March you must announce your intent to run. The vote will take place in April.

Sub-Committee Review: Sub-committees are disproportionate so we will be re-visiting the structure in the March meeting.

Eastern Bank Grant: Based on a motion made by Jessica Alter, the SCW will apply for the upcoming Eastern Bank Grant. The motion was seconded by Kristen Strezo.

Adjourned: Based on a motion made by Jessica Alter, the meeting was adjourned at 9:00. Seconded by Kristen Strezo.