

Somerville Human Rights Commission

Minutes

September 22, 2022

6:30 - 8:00 p.m.

Present:

Commissioner Christopher Spicer Hankle

Commissioner Lara Versari

Racial Social Justice Department Deputy Director Steven Flythe

Members of the Public Present:

Crystal H.

Simone P.

Rita

Guest Presenters

Ruth Faris, Somerville Resident, Board Member Arts at the Armory

Liora Norwich, Somerville Resident, Network of Justice (?)

Motion to Approve minutes for July 2022 meeting. Approved.

Discussion of Evicted: The Exhibit

Ruth Faris shared that the exhibit is wheelchair accessible on the second floor of the Armory. Commissioner Christopher cited from the exhibit which specifies statistics to Somerville, that 226 evictions cases in Somerville since the MA Moratorium ended (October 2021-June 2022).

Resident Crystal H. expressed concern with accessibility for immuno-compromised. Ms. Faris said that numbers observing the limit at any given time were limited, and that private tours were available to schools and churches and this could help the immuno-compromised. Contact organizers@caasomerville.org

Volunteers would help the exhibit, which runs through Nov. 4, as they serve to help debrief visitors and distribute a booklet designed to help people make a difference.

An upcoming event billed as a Service Fair will serve to connect potential advocates to programs and services addressing the Housing Crisis.

Liora Norwich shared with the Commission about the event organized for IDP at Wright Locke Farm in consultation with Matowin of United American Indians of New England (UAIINE). This will be a family friendly event practicing good relations with the Earth and one another.

The model of the event and timeline were discussed. Typically a 12 week timeline made sense for them, but this is their second year and already a location and framework.

Commissioner Lara observed the need for a change of dates due to late working hours on the usual 2nd Thursday, the upcoming meeting will shift to Wednesday, October 12th which comes after the Somerville Honk Festival, Indigenous People's Day.

Commissioner Lara summarized that this has been the first of a three part series. At our next meeting we will continue addressing the housing crisis by hearing from Ellen Shachter, Director of the Somerville Office of Housing Stability, by zoom.

Motion to support planning of an Indigenous People's Day observance in Somerville. Approved.
Motion to support using financial budget of Human Rights Commission pertaining to honorariums for guest speaker or other event costs, a proportion of which will be determined by future subcommittee.

Motion to adjourn at 8:00 p.m.

Resources

Join the Local Options for Housing Affordability Coalition Hannah Carrillo at hcarrillo@somervillema.gov or go to <https://www.realestatetransferfee.org>.

Join the Right to Counsel Coalition: <https://www.massrtc.org> or contact Annette Duke aduke@mlri.org

Join the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) Coalition: www.topa4ma.gov and click the Join US button.

To take action with the Eviction Response Network, sign up here:
tinyurl.com/NoSomervilleEvictions

Meetings for Somerville renters are held in English, Spanish and Portuguese with simultaneous translation. Register here: bit.ly/Somerville-Renters

Contact Community Action Agency of Somerville at 617-623-7370 ext. 148 or email:
organizing@caasomerville.org

We speak English, espanol, portugues, and francais!

www.caasomerville.org

Somerville Community Land Trust
www.somervillecommunitylandtrust.org

Somerville Homeless Coalition
www.somervillehomelesscoalition.org

Somerville Office of Housing Stability

www.somervillema.gov/departments/office-strategic-planning-and-community-development-ospcd/office-housing-stability

Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services

www.gbls.org/our-work/cambridge-somerville-legal-services

DeNovo

www.denovo.org/

Somerville Community Corporation

www.somervillecdc.org/

Turning to the second focus of the agenda, Commissioner Christopher observed the following events:

Tuesday, Sept. 20, "13 Moons: A History of Wampanoag Culture" was an event sponsored by the Somerville Library, a zoom conversation with Darius [Da-rye-us] Coombs, Wampanoag Cultural educator.

Sat, September 24, "Whose Name, Whose Place? Naative Placenames in Southern New England" Dr. Frank Waabu O'Brien a member of the Abenaki Nation, Dr. O'Brien is the author of Understanding Indian Place Names of Southern New England.

Framing concern with indigenous rights today in the context of housing, Somerville Indigenous community was described last year by Councilor Jesse Clingan as forcibly displaced, that is by forces of gentrification, lack of support for housing stability. Resource shared by Commissioner Christopher: The highly-regarded author of *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States* discusses her latest work *Not a Nation of Immigrants*. Here she asks, What about the leadership of immigrants, or, those war-fleeing asylum seekers who find themselves on occupied land?

[**View Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz book discussion now on YouTube**](#)

On Wednesday, the Department of the Interior released an investigative report documenting the brutal conditions endured by Native children who were forced to attend federal boarding schools. The next day, a House subcommittee held the first-ever hearing on this critical issue.

The impacts of this tragic era persist today. These schools—more than 30 of them run by Quakers—are inextricably linked to the loss of tribal languages, cultural resources, and dispossession of land. Many of the problems facing tribal nations today, including poverty, violence, suicide, and alcohol and drug abuse, are rooted in the traumatic separation of children from their families and the abuses at these federally sponsored institutions.

Your advocacy is making a difference. We have to keep the pressure on. [Urge your members of Congress to support the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act \(S. 2908/H.R. 5444\)](#).