

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
SOMERVILLE AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST FUND

KATJANA BALLANTYNE

MAYOR

Andrea Shapiro, Managing Trustee

Trustees

Mary Cassesso
Michael Feloney
Kathryn Gallant
David Gibbs
Donna Haynes
Councilor Charlotte Kelly
Brielle Calderan
Jessica Turner

Minutes

Thursday, September 8, 2022 Meeting* – 5:15 pm

***Please note that the Trust met twice in the month of September. This meeting focused on Strategic Planning the Trust initiated in April, 2022. The second meeting, held on September 22nd, included regular monthly business items.**

Trustees attending: Mary Cassesso, Mike Feloney, Katie Gallant, Donna Haynes, Charlotte Kelly, Andrea Shapiro, Brielle Calderan, Jessica Turner

Trustees not attending: David Gibbs

Staff attending: Paul Goldstein, Alexis Turgeon (OSPCD- Housing Division)

Members of the public attending: Jenn Goldson, Elana Zabar (JM Goldson)

The meeting started at 5:15 pm, with Andrea Shapiro serving in the role of chairperson.

1. Introduction-JM Goldson Team

Paul Goldstein reminded those attending that the meeting would focus entirely on reviewing and providing comments to the draft Strategic Plan which was circulated to Trustees prior to the meeting. Paul reminded Trustees that the meeting scheduled for September 22nd would be for monthly business items. Paul then introduced Jenn Goldson and Elana Zabar of JM Goldson, who would be presenting the work the JM Goldson team completed over the summer, and would facilitate Trustee question and comments sessions on the draft plan following each section of the presentation.

2. Draft Strategic Plan review

Summary of findings and goals/recommendations for Strategic Plan-presented by JM Goldson and Trustee feedback/questions. Jenn began by noting her team had included with the draft plan the results of the survey provided to past grant recipients, background information, past goals, funding history, and feedback provided by Trustees and other stake holders during their one-on-one interviews. The “Goals” chapter of the plan was left blank intentionally to allow for Trustee input in advance of drafting that section.

Jenn gave a brief overview of the draft plan by walking Trustees through the table of contents, and then provided summaries of the following sections of the draft plan:

- Summary of Trustee/stakeholder interviews, and results of the survey completed by past funding applicants.

- Goals identified in the 2014 Strategic Plan, with Trustee feedback on which goals to modify, remove, and new goals to add.
- Funding priorities for the Trust.

Summary of interviews and survey results: The JM Goldson team interviewed 16 individuals, including the 9 Trustees. Trustees and stakeholders in their interviews provided the following points of feedback:

- Not having enough time to review materials in advance of monthly meetings.
- The need for meeting materials to be accessible to the members of the public.
- The need to recruit new Trustees to serve on the board.
- The benefits of a hybrid meeting format where Trustees could meet in person.
- The ability of the Trust to rapidly disperse funds should be improved/explored.
- The process for applying for Trust funding is inconsistent, and a formalized/consistent process is needed.
- Funding requests are often branded as “emergencies”, which leads Trustees to feel pressured to make a quick decision. It would be helpful to clarify what kind(s) of requests warrant such accelerated consideration.
- Trustees had differing views on whether SAHT should focusing more on the types of programmatic funding the passage of the Home Rule Petition would allow, as opposed to focusing more on development projects.

Trustee comments and take aways on the interview and survey results included the following:

- Increasing the diversity of the board should be a priority, including additional members who qualify as low to moderate income residents of Somerville. Increasing the number of Trustees who serve on the board may be warranted.
- Concerns over high rents displacing Somerville residents, especially families, and the need for the Trust to work to mitigate these issues.
- Desire to fund new and innovative programs/projects.
- The need to better understand what other housing work is being done in the City, and avoid potential duplication of other efforts.
- A desire to do community outreach was noted, along with the view that time spent on such efforts should be compensated; i.e. that Trustees should be compensated for board service.
- Establishing deadlines for receipt of any materials for Trustee review would help ensure adequate time to review materials thoroughly.
- The importance of prioritizing the type of activities the Trust engages in was noted; a related comment pertained to the income levels to be served, by assigning percentages and values to funds dispersed to activity areas and income group(s) served through collaborations with the City and local providers.
- Researching other Municipal Affordable Housing Trusts to explore ways in which on-boarding new Trustees and transmitting meeting materials may be improved.

Goals identified in 2014 Strategic Plan: Jenn briefly reviewed the goals the Trust included in its 2014 Strategic Plan and, following that review, invited Trustees to provide feedback on which goals to modify, remove, and/or identify new goals to add for the new Strategic Plan. Jenn noted that the most recent Housing Needs Assessment commissioned by the City and completed in 2021 showed a comparatively greater demand for housing serving lower income levels (50% Area Median Income and below) than for moderate income levels (80 and 110% AMI).

Trustee feedback and comments on revising the goals of the Trust including the following:

- Revising them to prioritize more rental housing for lower income tiers at 50% AMI or lower. It was noted that there has been a significant increase in households applying for rental assistance who are facing eviction and/or homelessness. The importance was further noted, given issues housing authorities are facing in connection with increases in Fair Market Rents that have impeded issuance of new vouchers.
- Working on ways to support equity in the City, especially for those who are rent burdened.
- Revisiting use of AMI levels as a way to set goals, as AMI can be “out of balance” when several high-income households inhabit a small area which leads to a higher reported AMI, and widens the gap between low income and moderate/average income households.
- Continuing to prioritize moderate income level rental/home ownership opportunities, to respond to there still being a large demand for housing at this income level, and more and more moderate-income level Somerville households are facing significantly increased rents.

Funding priorities for the Trust. Jenn gave a brief review of the funding history of the Trust provided in the draft plan, and reviewed the funding priorities established by the Trust in the 2014 Strategic Plan.

Trustee feedback and comments on funding priorities for the Trust included the following:

- Funding supportive services program should be a priority, in the event of passage of the Home Rule Petition. Certain segments of the Somerville population are unable to access existing housing opportunities and assistance without these services.
- Create more equity through homeownership opportunities, and continue to fund down payment and closing cost assistance programs.
- Explore funding other types of home ownership assistance, such as programs which provide buying power to applicants pursuing a home on the open market.
- The need to fund anti-displacement efforts.
- Include job creation/training as part of housing projects/programs the Trust funds so that those who are able to access affordable units can remain there and become self-sufficient.

3. *Next steps and October meeting schedule*

Jenn explained that JM Goldson would be creating an online survey for Trustees to complete to provide further feedback on the draft Strategic Plan. The next draft of the plan, which will include the first version of the Goals chapter written with the feedback provided by Trustees, will be completed by October 6th, and presented to Trustees at its October meeting. Any additional comments on the draft plan from Trustees should be provided by September 15th.

Paul shared that Jenn and her team had a scheduling conflict with the date on which the regular monthly meeting would fall in October (October 13th). Paul noted that he would be reaching out to Trustees with options to reschedule the meeting to identify a date that works both for Trustees and JM Goldson.

4. *Communications*

Paul noted that the September 22nd meeting would include a funding request from Just-A-Start as an agenda item, and that the Somerville Community Land Trust would not be presenting a funding request to the Trust at that meeting.

5. *Adjournment*

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 PM.

Documents distributed:

- Draft Strategic Plan