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**Somerville Commission for Persons with Disabilities**  
**February 14, 2023**  
**7:00 PM – 9:00 PM (ET)**  
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HOLLY SIMIONE: We do not have Brian tonight so I will volunteer to take the minutes unless there is another person who would like to do that. Hi Harriet. Hi Lian.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: You are not sideways.

SPEAKER: If I do this, I am sideways?

ADRIENNE POMEROY: Yes.

HOLLY SIMIONE: I will go down the list of the people who are here. We have Adrienne, Pauline, Harriet, Adam, Bonnie, Denise is our captioner, Bonnie, Nicole and myself and Lian. Brian is not able to join us tonight so I will take the minutes. Kate also isn't able to join us tonight. We do not have a quorum and therefore we cannot deliberate or vote. However, we have lots of guests and many things to share and talk about. It will be a very full meeting on this lovely day of Saint Valentine's.

Just for note for the attendance I have myself and Lian present. Again, I would like to welcome all of our guest tonight. We have Adam and Katherine from the mobility team. They are going to be speaking shortly after a few little updates. We have Bonnie here

to give us an update as well and Nicole who is here from CAAS who will talk briefly about what her agency does. Adrienne, would you like to go first with your piece?

ADRIENNE POMEROY: This is Adrienne through the Chair. First of all, thank you to those of you who have responded to email communication back in the late fall about questions and things to include in the ADA community survey which launched approximately eight days ago, roughly. We are now in the great piece of it where it is out there but there is a very huge component of sort of either via in Zoom or on the ground opportunity to do some listening sessions to get some more feedback and then ask folks to engage in the survey. This is something that the department of Racial and Social Justice has been doing with their public safety For All survey which is been out for a few months now.

I would like to engage the membership here and that outreach and that can look like a few different things. First of all, these can be, these listening sessions or outreach can be done via Zoom or in person or combination of both or whatever that looks like and really they exist to give folks save space to share their thoughts, experiences around inclusion and accessibility within the City of Somerville and then we would make and ask for them to engage in the survey. Some folks choose to engage in the survey why they are participating, some of that multitasking component if they are able to do that. I am working with our Department Office of Immigrant Affairs to do some language specific sessions so folks where English is not their primary language can engage and take the survey as well but there is real opportunity for the members of the Commission to participate in these sessions whether you are assisting RSJ with hosting the sessions in hearing what folks have to say in the safe space or attending herself, whatever that looks like for you.

I'm just taking a few minutes to gauge any interest from the group and participating because we have to allow for weeks of planning and logistics and things that come with the sessions.

SPEAKER: On raising my hand. This is Harriet. I have to turn my phone sideways to unmute so that is what that is about. I would like to be engaged in any way at all possible. Because I think obviously a variety of people with a variety of disabilities from all different groups of people is going to be really important and reaching people, I think, is probably the biggest challenge. I, myself, could not actually access the survey and lost track of it when you were kind enough to send it out for proofing in November so that is going to be. We don't have to belabor discussion about access but I assume if I could not find it, there might be a few other people who could not find it who were not visually impaired. So we will work on that together.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: Of course. I just saw your email, Harriet. We can have a discussion about that. But what I would like to know, if you are comfortable sharing and then others can share when you can reach out at a later time as I said, there are many ways we can do that. Have the virtual component which probably a lot of folks would feel safe about because you're in your home and your safe and there is always the option for in person. So, Harriet, what are your feelings on that?

SPEAKER: I think hybrid is important to offer but sometimes if you have a hybrid I suppose those who are in person may not feel quite as comfortable in an equal sort of way. But I don't know what other people would consider. Since I'm pretty much unaffected by the virtual whether I'm in person or in Zoom and I feel safer on Zoom just for health reasons, you know, I have a particular propensity to want to do it -- I think hybrid is a fair and makes it more accessible so yeah, that's pretty much my thought about it. and I would love to participate in any way just as a listener, as a speaker, whatever.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: Great. Yeah, a really important component of this is that and I have not looked at the results that have come in so far there's been out for eight days but what we are seeing a lot of is some folks did not know the ADA division exists and that there is a Commission. So I think this is a great way for folks, whatever venue you all choose that the group feels the safest about that they are engaging with current members of this Commission and learning more about that. So it is a bigger conversation, of course.

And then as I mentioned, I'm working with SOYA to do some language focus sessions because there are folks who, you know, may not just based on culture may not know what the ADA is and that there are resources for them in this community. That is another avenue of it. You are right, Harriet, there is at the very least over 7000 people in Somerville based on the U.S. Census that identifies having a disability and that's a very large group considering our population.

SPEAKER: Yeah, sure. Absolutely. I'm hoping without it being a huge hassle that somehow since the Commission for Women and the Human Rights Commission and if Disability Commission, our Commission could be under RSJ directly we might be found a little more easily let's say.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: Yeah.

HOLLY SIMIONE: I'm going to let Bonnie speak, she has her hand raised. Please go-ahead Bonnie.

BONNIE DENNIS: I was curious Harriet what your access issues were. I know when I was doing the survey, I found it pretty difficult to order things because it required a drag and drop function that is difficult for me to maneuver because I have arthritis in my hand. (Indiscernible by captioner)

HOLLY SIMIONE: Someone just joined as Yuko.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: Yes, I muted them and if they need assistance unmuting when Bonnie is done speaking we can do that.

HOLLY SIMIONE: No need to apologize. That is fine. Please continue, Bonnie.

BONNIE DENNIS: I was just curious how that works with screen readers.

SPEAKER: It does not work well. I have to confess I only could get to the survey with sighted assistance and did read it through and I haven't attempted to actually fill it out. That I will try next. Yeah, I will try to do that next but if you have problems with drag and drop I'm probably going to have problems too. But we will see. I cannot say until I actually attempt it. Thanks.

HOLLY SIMIONE: I'm happy to help out as well, Adrienne. And I agree with what Harriet said about hybrid meetings are best and clearly looking to reach specific communities who may not either be aware of what our role is and/or need, you know, -- I'm losing my words right now. I think it is a lack of food today. Making sure that we cover multiple people and groups within the city. Lian, do you have something to add? Please go ahead.

LIAN GUERTIN: As far as the hybrid meetings, I guess my question is would the purpose of these meetings to be to have a large group of people all meeting at the same time or to have an opportunity for as many people as possible to like interact with someone on the Commission or city staff to get assistance with the survey?

ADRIENNE POMEROY: That is a great question, Lian. Almost a little bit of both. The real intent is to offer a safe space so like a space where people feel like they can share openly and also from a health perspective, as Harriet mentioned, a lot more people feel safer on the Internet or on Zoom. And so, offering a safe space for them to be able to share and then see that the Commission is here maybe field some questions that way if they are curious about membership or just knowing who you all are and then hopefully making and ask for them to take the survey if they haven't already which would be optional.

We would not require that if they wanted to attend. But really being able to reach folks just to maybe here from some folks who may be, you know, needed space to do that.

LIAN GUERTIN: Okay. Yeah. I think if the goal is to have a space for the public to interact with each other and hear each other's contributions then hybrid is important for that. If it is more about like having a chance to interact with us then it might make more sense to just have multiple options so like some online, some in person if we have

people that are comfortable doing that. So that there are fewer technical issues to get in the way of the actual. And also this to me feels like something that would be better as something smaller just because I don't know how many people are going to be more comfortable talking about things if they are not -- if it doesn't feel as public.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: I understand that. Thank you. That is a good perspective.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Thank you, Lian, for your comments. Anything else you want to report on tonight, Adrienne?

ADRIENNE POMEROY: Not right now. That's all I had. Thank you for that space. I know we have guests that have other really important things to talk about. With that said, anything about the survey or outreach that you want to pass on, feel free to email me or call and we can definitely talk about it. Harriet, I will contact you tomorrow and we can talk about that access point that you just spoke of.

SPEAKER: Great. Thank you so much.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: You're welcome. Thank you, Holly.

HOLLY SIMIONE: I have a report. I will try to go quickly. Many of the things on here we can't accomplish tonight because we don't have the ability to vote. When good news is that tomorrow there will be a hearing of the subcommittee for appointments and we have three people being reviewed at that meeting. It is on the 15th and I only just grabbed the agenda to see if it has --

SPEAKER: It is 6 PM, I believe.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: And they are starting with the Constable appointments. And then I believe the folks from this Commission are in the middle of the agenda and then there is something else at the end.

HOLLY SIMIONE: We have Harriet and Deborah. It starts at seven.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: 6 PM.

HOLLY SIMIONE: I'm sorry it said it was posted at 7 PM, my apologies. I did just add it about an hour ago to the website or requested it be posted to the meeting with meeting materials but also will make sure I send it out to the group tonight so if you would like to join and listen in you have that.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: Holly, I'm so sorry to interrupt you. This is Adrienne. Harriet, did you happen to get a link from GoToMeeting?

SPEAKER: I believe I did. It came through even on my calendar.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: Oh, okay.

SPEAKER: I will get some assistance. GoToMeeting can be somewhat difficult.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: I was asked by Hannah to check. I have to call -- Pauline and I already had this conversation. I will call Pauline tomorrow because it did not come to her. We will figure that out. Sorry, Holly.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Tied into that membership update is once that process is completed and that subcommittee votes hopefully all three candidates will move forward and not this Thursday, the following Thursday is the next full meeting of City Council where the final votes, where they will approve the final Commissioners and then the process involves some training online and forms being completed and then a swearing in.

I'm behind the scenes myself, Adrienne and the city clerk and other staff with the city are working diligently to make sure we have a process of how we go from the swearing in process to a notification of seats in the terms and we are working diligently to have that ready before people land in those spots. That is only because in my own experience I did not have a lot of that information available so we are working on making sure everything is transparent and communicated to all of the persons who would like to be a member of the Commission. The next thing I wanted to talk about briefly is you were asked in January to provide a list of three goals to RSJ and I put together a document, that is one of the meeting materials for tonight, it is more than three but it's basically the goals are all specifically from the executive order for commissions.

I know we cannot talk about those tonight but going forward we just need to look at those and agree that either in its entirety or choosing three of those is what we will provide to RSJ.

SPEAKER: Excuse me, Holly. At some point I had a comment about the previous thing on the appointments.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Absolutely. Go right ahead.

SPEAKER: Sorry. It's a little bit of a dance here. I just wanted to say I understand the part that you all will be working on, but am I correct that I heard there's also some online training after the City Council votes us to be in?

HOLLY SIMIONE: Yes. There's a process. You have to take -- one piece is about open meeting law, one is about conflict of interest. One of them produces a document that you have to give to the city clerk and then there is this assignment of persons to slots or seats of which there are nine.

SPEAKER: Okay. But that part is what you guys do and what we as new appointees need to do are the documents, right? The training documents, right?

HOLLY SIMIONE: Yes. I just wanted to make sure that the process was outlined clearly of what those steps are.

SPEAKER: Okay. Good. I got the latter steps. I just wanted to hear about the online training or whatever stuff too as well. Thank you.

HOLLY SIMIONE: You are welcome. Regarding handicap funds we are in the process of formalizing an agreement with the Somerville High School Scholarship Foundation. Hopefully that will be inked I would say before March or by early March, Adrienne? There is a lot of moving parts to it. and then hopefully we will be able to move forward with reviewing applications and get that \$50,000 allotted.

There has been a few meetings with IT about website accessibility. I don't have time to go into much details but I would like everyone to know that those communications continue and Dan and his new team have been really fantastic making changes on the fly and listening to those that I have been speaking with.

I think that is all I can go through today that would be helpful. I just would like to give Adam and Katherine their time now. I don't know if you have any materials or if you want to share your screen, but you have the floor.

KATHERINE WHITE: Thank you very much, Holly. We do have presentation slides today that we are happy to send along tomorrow. We thought it would be helpful to guide the conversation this evening. Would someone be able to audibly let me know for those who are looking.

Thank you so much everyone. My name is Kate White. I'm the outreach and engagement planner for the city's Mobility Division. I'm joined by my team member senior member Adam Polinski. We are here today to talk about a one-on-one about what does the Mobility Division do. We will go through transportation planning projects that happen in our city and why we do these projects. We thought we would first start with all the departments that are involved in transportation projects in our city. We will start first with our Infrastructure and Asset Management Office. We have our Engineering Division and Capital Projects Division.

Then we have our Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development. That is where the Mobility Division is housed as well as other divisions we work with depending on the project or who you might also interact with on other projects. This includes our economic development -- division, administration, planning or preservation, zoning, public space and urban forestry, housing and housing stability.

We also have our parking department who is formally called traffic and parking in August by Parking Department which has an administration division, parking control officers, and sign and meter crews.

And then we have Department of Public Works who focuses on maintenance of street facilities like sweeping and snow removal and upkeep of street amenities like benches

and flex posts and more. That is all the departments involved in transportation projects in our city.

We thought we would talk a little bit about how do we work together. Delivering you street projects is a collaborative process with all of these departments. We thought we would start with an example with the process for building speed humps in our city. Mobility, which is myself, Adam and our team members Justin, Lauren, Greg, Brad and Viola. We identify priority streets for speed hump installations based on transportation safety data and community engagement. Various things we have are doing outreach for projects or receiving 311 service requests. Then we come to the Engineering Division. We consult with them about the feasibility of locations. Engineering then determines the budget, design, and construction of speed humps. And then our Parking Department works with engineering in coordinating new signage installation as speed humps are constructed. Mobility coordinates with DPW and maintenance planning to ensure streets are still swept and snow removed.

This workflow is a little different for each type of street project. We wanted to show an example about how all the divisions work together for different types of street projects. We also wanted to talk a little bit about who is who in Somerville transportation in terms of committees and commissions. Once that really focus on policy is our City Council committee on traffic and parking. Those who serve more in an advisory capacity is our Pedestrian and Transit Advisory Committee, or bicycle advisory committee and you all the Commission for Persons with Disabilities.

Those who serve more in the regulatory capacity is our traffic Commission will vote to approve or endorse changes to parking regulations or traffic regulations or the traffic board who serves to hear appeals of Traffic Commission decisions.

That is a little bit about the committees and commissions involved in transportation planning projects in our city. And then we want to talk a little bit about why do we make changes to our streets? City wide comprehensive plans inform our city transportation goals. You might be familiar with the City's comprehensive plan SomerVoice 2040. Our climate forward plan, our ADA Transition Plan, our Vision Zero action program and currently in development is our Somerville Bicycle Network Plan but all and all our projects are focused on keeping people safe in our streets, improving access to public transit and creating more sustainable transportation options for people.

We're going to talk a little bit about how to change is good made in our streets. To organize this into three buckets. I will start with the first, which is the largest kind. It is a major full-depth reconstruction or capital projects. These are types of projects where all options are on the table the telecommunication lines, lines below the street service. These projects often originate from major underground infrastructure needs. It could be having to redo the whole sewer system and they can be funded through state, city and private funding streams.



A general timeline we have seen in our city is often more than seven years long. That is really from the beginning of concept development, beginning of communication and community engagement and development of design to construction and construction.

One example of this type of project is the Somerville Ave utility and streetscape that runs in Union Square.

Another type of project comes from our annual pavement and sidewalk maintenance program. So this program which looks at ADA compliance and other factors but has fewer options for major changes. So unlike our major full depth reconstruction where we can completely dig up the street and move where the sidewalk is entirely we have sum or limits about being able to dramatically remove the curb line. This is a data-driven program. Engineering or Brian Postlewaite, as you know closely, their division conducts a three-year rolling annual survey of streets. That highlights streets that are degrading in pavement or low-compliance on sidewalks. And then the types of projects that come out of this program range from complete streets and that is where we redo the sidewalks, and the street to speed hump installation and that might be on streets that are not being totally repaved but there's an opportunity for construction crews to install speed humps.

General timeline for these types of projects are three years. One example of these types of projects is our Pearl Street Safety and Reconstruction Project.

The final bucket that our projects fall into are called quick-build projects. These are the projects that primarily take place between existing curbs. We can often only make changes with paint, signs, and plastic posts but we would have to -- it would really fall in the maintenance and sidewalk program we were moving the sidewalk or redirecting the street. Sometimes these types of projects can involve traffic signals or other upgrades. And the general timeline from that kind of concept design, development, engagement to construction is one and a half years and one example of this is Powder House Circle. These are some of the types of projects. Adam will talk more about what we are working on right now.

ADAM POLINSKI: Thanks, Kate. A couple of these are projects that Kate described on the last slide. I wanted to give a little more context to some of them and kind of what -- how we framed things and what our role is in the project. This slide is what I have been working on. On the left we have an image of College Avenue. You can see the crossing islands that we recently constructed for the crosswalks across College Avenue which is actually right near where I live so that is a photo I was able to take.

This College Avenue was part of the annual pavement and sidewalk maintenance program, as Kate had described briefly. Holland Street and College Avenue were both streets that were in pretty dire need of repaving. The sidewalks were not in great condition. So they were selected as streets for an amount of upgrade.

And then Engineering came to us to figure out sort of what upgrades could be made and this has been an ongoing conversation. It has been changing a little bit every year and we had a little bit more play to do more of the things that we want to incorporate in terms of major safety upgrades. Like these crossing islands here, more bike infrastructure to create protected bicycle lanes or things in the way of transit amenities like floating bus stops or bus lanes.

It is changing a little bit every year and getting closer to what we see as meeting more of our long-term goals for our streets here in Somerville. There is more work to do on College Avenue. So we have essentially taken those designs that we had in mobility and handed it back to engineering so they could construct. That construction is largely wrapping up and now we are in the phase of doing some evaluation of how some of these new elements are functioning and I will get into a little bit of the data that we typically collect and how that informs our decision-making in a couple slides here.

I also want to talk briefly about the photo on the right which is of a floating bus stop on Somerville Avenue which is part of what we affectionately call the Saucy Project. That is kind of the capital all out full construction project that Kate was describing and that one, you know, we can really accomplish a lot of different goals in that type of project. Because we are sort of fundamentally reconstructing the street from top to bottom with all of the sewer upgrades underneath, all the gas work that needs to happen and then all of the long-term goals we want to meet in regards to the types of infrastructure we are envisioning for people driving, people walking, people biking and people taking the bus.

SPEAKER: I have a question. Are you doing anything with Highland Avenue around that Davis Square area?

ADAM POLINSKI: At this time, we do not have anything planned for Highland Avenue on the approach to Davis Square other than a signal timing project that is currently in the pipeline. So there will be some minor changes to how the signal timing works. And there will be -- we will be also incorporating a bike lane on I guess technically it is Highland Avenue actually on the approach into Davis Square but it's really just the last 100 feet or so into the intersection. And so in terms of like, that particular piece of Highland Avenue, that is the only project we have on our plate at this point. So there really isn't going to be a lot in terms of changes to the street but if you are walking through Davis Square or driving or biking and hopefully taking the bus too because it is intended to get the buses to run a little more quickly and also make it safer for pedestrians, you might notice some of those changes later this year.

PAULINE DOWNING: Get rid of those brick sidewalks.

ADAM POLINSKI: Yeah, I'm sure you guys are aware we did take care of some of the ramps late last season a few months back. But yes, the sidewalks, I believe, will be incorporated in one of the upcoming street packages but I'm not sure if that will be this year or next year.

SPEAKER: Can you explain what is a floating bus stop?

ADAM POLINSKI: Sure. A floating bus stop you can see it in the image here. The goal of the floating bus stop is to allow a bus stop to stop in the travel lane without having to conflict with bikes. It gives a dedicated waiting area where you can see the bench and the fence where people are waiting for the bus. It doesn't have to pull over and just stop in the travel lane but also does not have to stop in the bike lane. Bikes kind of go behind it, they go in the space between, but it separates all of the different users versus putting them all in the same space including a potential conflict.

PAULINE DOWNING: This is Pauline again -- Go ahead.

KATHERINE WHITE: I was going to add to Adam's description I often imagine it's like taking the sidewalk and you're putting it closer. So the bus doesn't have to pull over which can cause sometimes a bit of a delay as well it is harder for the bus to pull totally straight up against the sidewalk which again the aim is to improve accessibility getting on and off the bus so because you're not having the potential triangular gap the bus has it pulled all the way up. And it's easier for the bus to continue on and doesn't have to merge back into traffic. That is how it improves some of the bus service and then as Adam described when there is a bike lane the bike lane can go behind so there's not that point with the bus and bikes crossing. Then there is dedicated space for people waiting at the bus stop, which sometimes it can be benches or bus shelters. And then there is still the sidewalk on the exterior of the bus lane -- sorry the bike lane. So people who are not stopping at the bus and are just walking they don't have to move around people waiting for the bus.

PAULINE DOWNING: Where are you going to have the room for all of this? The streets are only so wide.

ADAM POLINSKI: Yeah, it is a struggle. We have very narrow streets here in Somerville. You are right. Essentially any street that we have that we are able -- that we have parking and at least room for a bike lane next to it you can generally make that set up work because the floating bus stop itself is essentially as wide as the parking lane. But, in fact, it saves space and can you know where we are always trying to balance a lot of needs and that does include parking. Often our projects -- the cost of existing street parking but these floating bus stops rather than needing 100 feet for the bus to pull off and pull up to a stop you only need the room for the length of the actual bus so in some cases you can be more efficient with that space and preserve things parking while still providing a better stop experience and a bike lane to potentially.

SPEAKER: Harriet, putting my hand up in the stack.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: I think you are next, Harriet.

SPEAKER: Okay. Great. I have a few different questions. Thank you for clarifying the large projects, the median projects, and the quick projects. I am blind and I have lived behind the Somerville Theater for most of my life since 1983. I'm curious to ask when was there planning and any chance for discussion about those wonderful traffic islands? I will explain why I am asking that but I want to know how long they were in the planning like the one on Cameron Avenue or the ones on Cameron and Holland Street?

ADAM POLINSKI: Sure. Yeah, that is really a pretty new element we just started to roll out on College Avenue and on Holland Street

SPEAKER: And also on Cameron.

ADAM POLINSKI: You're right. It is the intersection of Holland at Cameron.

SPEAKER: So my question is I think it's really unfortunate that you didn't consult with some visually impaired folks because I know these islands make things safer for pretty much everybody, however, because we were not consulted, we need more of those even higher if possible yellow bumps like 4-5 feet before it goes down because that gradual descent which is so perfect for a wheelchair. We have -- I have walked into the intersection not quite aware that I was already there until I was there. Do you see what I mean? Because I think it is only 2-3 feet that you have of the bump strips, do you know how much it is I think they are --

ADAM POLINSKI: I think they are two feet wide.

SPEAKER: I don't know that is a post thing you can do but I would feel a hell of a lot safer if you could do that.

ADAM POLINSKI: That is great feedback, Harriet. Honestly the visually impaired community is one we have had a hard time reaching in the past. We are still pretty much learning. I'm totally willing to admit that.

SPEAKER: You can hit me up anytime.

PAULINE DOWNING: And me too.

SPEAKER: And Pauline as well. I will mention historically when we started having ramps I was thrilled and I realized it happened because of the Vietnam vets and their spinal cord injuries and we had so many more people. Let's forget about the mamas and the strollers. But anyway my difficulty initially was just like now I would hit a nice even curb down to a flat area oh it's a driveway, at least if it were in a residential area. So I'm having a similar déjà vu about this particular situation. So I appreciate hearing about the fact that it was fairly recent that you guys put the traffic islands in and from others I have understood there are some issues in Davis Square regarding wheelchair usage but I'm not quite sure whether that has to do with traffic islands or something else. Could someone speak to that who is in our meeting?

HOLLY SIMIONE: I'm going to interject here for a second. I appreciate everything that you have added, Harriet, and everyone on these subjects. We have about 10 minutes left for the Mobility Team and I'm not sure how many more slides you may have. If you would like the conversation to keep going where it is -- I'm interjecting just to let you know where we are timewise.

ADAM POLINSKI: We only have a couple more slides so why don't I just wrap those up and then happy to continue the conversation or any questions anyone else has.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Thank you.

ADAM POLINSKI: So here are a couple more slides we have of projects that the Mobility Team has been a part of. On the left here you have a photo of a new Green Line train. Which is awesome. The Green Line extension which is a capital project. Even more so than Somerville. This is an all out project that is not just a city project along. It is managed by MBTA, by the state and the federal government is involved to some degree at least the funding of a project this magnitude. So that we really are only a piece of the puzzle on that one. There are hundreds of folks involved from advocacy all the way up to like I said the federal government and everything in between involved in a project of that magnitude. But it is, you know, no less of a success in just, you know, we are really happy this has been able to get to where it is but that project that is super impactful like that it does take -- this has been a long time in the making.

I guess you could say on the other end of the spectrum is another project we completed fairly recently on a much shorter timeline which is Powerhouse Circle. This is an intersection that has been notoriously dangerous and in fact has seen some of the highest crash rates of any city-owned intersection for a long time. There has been a lot of energy from residents and stakeholders in the area alike to do something about the mess that used to be powder house Circle. So in fairly short order which really is the main benefit of these quick build type projects, we can't do everything we want unfortunately but we can make pretty substantial improvements on a much faster timeline than a lot of the other projects we just describe.

We are able to go out and significantly reduce the amount of driving space which slows cars down and makes it a little bit more orderly, shorten the crossing distances for pedestrians, use some of the extra space to provide a bike lane around the edge and things make it work a little bit better and less confusing. That is an example of a quick build type project we have been working on.

Just as we are always looking for feedback in trying to improve and knowing there's always more work to be done with things like the crossing islands, as Harriet was just speaking to, we also want to look at the data to understand are we actually achieving our goals with the projects we are rolling out. That is essentially what Vision Zero is. The sort of proclamation that the city has made to getting to zero traffic fatalities or serious deaths in Somerville. On one hand we have been seeing a decrease in terms of the overall number of fatal and serious injuries over the last 10 years which is an

encouraging sign and we like to think it means we are doing something right, but we have not been able to, you know, the number of fatalities has remained stubborn and we had at least one over the last four years which really makes it hard for us to sort of cope with that when we are trying to weigh and balance a lot of different things and really it continues to give us -- we really want to focus our emphasis on improving safety and making sure that number does eventually get to zero hopefully sooner than later.

SPEAKER: He was going to finish the presentation, Pauline.

ADAM POLINSKI: Give me a couple more minutes. I'm almost done with my spiel. And then lastly, I just want to show the group some data that we collected at a number of different locations. We are showing photos here of Central Street, will be Street, Sycamore at Jerome, Lowell at Alpine and Morson at Pearson Road. And what we have is a metric and that we did just install speed humps on all of those streets.

SPEAKER: Happy Valentine's Day buddy.

ADAM POLINSKI: Happy Valentine's Day.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Happy Valentine's Day, Manu. Glad you could join us.

ADAM POLINSKI: So in terms what we are seeing here is that for example on Central Street 40 percent of cores that we measured on an average day were going over 25 miles per hour over the speed limit on Central Street and after we installed the speed humps that number was down to nine percent of vehicles. On Sycamore we saw 50 percent of vehicles speeding and then went down to four after installation of the speed humps and then similar findings at Lowell and Morrison 42 percent to 7 percent and 33 percent to six percent. We are seeing these are effective and the greatest opportunity for someone to actually get hurt, seriously hurt or killed on our streets is due to speeding. So if we are reducing the ability for people to speed we are making progress towards our ultimate goal. We were encouraged to see some of these and hope to continue to enroll these types of things out.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Someone has a lot of recent background noise I don't know if they wouldn't mind putting themselves on mute. Thank you very much. Please continue.

ADAM POLINSKI: I think with that, I can turn it back over to Kate to wrap.

KATHERINE WHITE: Thanks, Adam. Thanks everyone for giving us this time and space to talk about our work. Before we jump into discussion if you're interested in staying up-to-date on different transportation planning projects in the area and you like getting emails, we have a monthly mobility newsletter that gives you 4-5 highlights of the different transportation planning projects in the area so I will make sure to share that link when we are in discussion as well as share it with Adrienne and Holly to follow up afterwards. In case you want to learn more you can send questions to our mobility division at [transportation@somervillema.gov](mailto:transportation@somervillema.gov). We also have another tool called SomerVoice, which is a webpage that shows all the different developing projects in the

city or planning projects. You can see transportation ones, land use, economic development. Just another way to peruse what is going on in the city. With that we want to give space to any questions or comments. And again, this is just to provide some background but we are happy to talk anytime whether it's about specific projects or different transportation safety issues.

ADAM POLINSKI: One more thing I would like to plug is the Mobility Team is also working on publishing its first workplan in the efforts of sort of bringing a little bit of order to the chaos that is the number of requests we get every year for various types of projects but also to increase transparency and give everyone in Somerville a look at our plan for the year and the work we do and what we are hoping to accomplish. We will definitely make sure that the Commission has an ability to review that and can discuss the appropriate way to make that happen as well. But in terms of upcoming projects or upcoming work projects, I think that is one the Commission will definitely be interested in seeing.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Thank you, Adam and Kate. This is Holly. I just want to thank you both for being here today. I know there are a few people who have their hands raised or would like to speak. I greatly appreciate you coming here tonight. The goal of having and doing your overview -- the goal the Commission is working towards is being involved not just from the ability of sending emails or subscribing to your newsreels but to actually be there before the planning process, when things are first being discussed. I think you had us as an advisor capacity which is great but we really look forward to having some communication long before things might be shown on your SomerVoice site. Those of us who are blind, those of us with hearing impairments and those of us with mobility challenges, we all bring different aspects to the table and I think that would only help your projects be stronger. So maybe off-line we can talk a little bit more about how we can see that come together. I just had one other question. SomerVoice is that built on an accessible platform? Can someone with a screen reader go through and access the information that is there?

I know some of the pages that are more modern had the requirements in them and some of them in existence at challenges with their not yet accessible and there are projects going on. Do you happen to know if your page is?

KATHERINE WHITE: To answer your question about SomerVoice is an engagement platform that we actually contract through a vendor for who has certain requirements they must meet to ensure that the product is accessible as well as a variety of other things. I'm happy to double check what are their specific specifications but we contracted for that reason to ensure things stay up to date. It is connected but separate from our main city website. And has a dedicated customer service team that we reach out to when we find any issues come up. So if we get feedback that things are not working well we can hand it back to the customer service team.

HOLLY SIMIONE: I'm very happy to hear that was part of the contracting process was to make sure it could be accessible. Harriet, hold on one second. I know Bonnie had her hand up. I'm not sure if anyone else did. We just have a few minutes left.

BONNIE DENNIS: Two things. I will go with the accessibility presentation first because that was just talked about. I know that I had brought this up before. It is not accessible. Especially to this group to give presentations without sharing slides ahead of time. We have two people in this meeting for instance who are blind and that's a problem too with the presentations that are done soliciting community feedback.

I am dubious about SomerVoice being accessible. There's a lot of things done with sticky notes on a separate browser which is difficult to open, hard to follow because there are things being talked about and at the same time you're expecting people to go to another page and interact with that. These are not new things. I've been bringing them up I think for two years now. So I think, you know to Holly's point getting the Commission involved before that point makes a lot of sense but the Commission is not everything with disabilities and I think the engagement and the feedback would be a lot better if you put more effort into listening to the fact that how things are being presented are not accessible.

The other thing I wanted to touch on is it said there were few options for changing the curb line. And I guess I'm just curious as to why that is? Because that's hard to do in a quick build project but if you are saying that is a problem in the longer-term things, how do we ever get the city to be fully accessible?

KATHERINE WHITE: Adam, do you want me to answer point one and you can do point two.

HOLLY SIMIONE: I can understand what you said Bonnie did you say there are limited ways to do this or there are multiple?

BONNIE DENNIS: The presentation said there are few options for changing the curb line.

HOLLY SIMIONE: So there are only a few?

BONNIE DENNIS: Yes. That was put under this section doing the large-scale projects that were not quick builds. That were the more permanent things.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Please go ahead, Adam.

SPEAKER: Kate wanted to answer first.

KATHERINE WHITE: I first wanted to say thank you very much for the feedback. Our team has been working with other community space specialists in the city and participating in a regional body that does virtual in person and hybrid community engagement. We are trying to learn what are some of the best ways to make more accessible, inclusive and how do we navigate this new space of hybrid opportunities? I



really appreciate that feedback. We are talking internally and with the external partners on how do we create best practices that people experience similar things in those meetings. So we are having a virtual meeting are these components always shared first? Or how do people communicate about them? And then how is that discourse followed up? One thing we are exploring internally is instead of all the pressure being on one particular public meeting is just create more opportunities. So that depending on someone's comfort, ability or need or desire they can participate in whether that is standing next to someone as they are walking their kid back and forth to school or if it is meeting someone in the middle of the grocery store and trying to share information about a project or if it is in this virtual capacity. So just thank you very much for that. I really appreciate your continued advocacy to make this more accessible. Would you like to hear Adam's comment first?

BONNIE DENNIS: I would love to address that really quickly. Especially in the time of COVID it is not over. It still exists for us. People have brought up health concerns and want virtual options. There are many people with disabilities and I assume many other people as well who it is not an option to do an in-person meeting so the continued lack of access virtually is an even bigger problem. And I understand wanting to have people feel like it is an experience in wanting to engage people in different ways, but a very basic thing is sharing materials ahead of time so people who have access needs and need more time to be able to absorb materials can do that and show up and participate in meetings. That doesn't need a study group. You have this Commission that has shared that information repeatedly with the city. It is pretty basic access. And it continues to not be done including in this meeting today. So that's all.

KATHERINE WHITE: Thank you, Bonnie. I appreciate it. Adam, do you want to field the second point of her question?

ADAM POLINSKI: Yes. So I'm trying to recall exactly what the slide said but to clarify for the full-depth reconstruction projects we do have opportunities to move the curb so anything is on the table for a major capital reconstruction project. An example of that is Somerville Avenue, Central Street is a more recent example. That one is currently under construction. It is a cost thing, but it is very much possible in those types of projects. There is any nuance to it it is just that we have to be careful about where the curb can go based on where underground utilities are which is something we were running into and having a little bit of a problem with when we were designing the Springhill project and Central Street particular. So we just have to be cognizant of that. We simply can't move it where we want without potentially moving other utilities but it is very much an option on those -- in those bigger capital full-depth reconstruction projects. I apologize if I wasn't clear.

KATHERINE WHITE: Adam, I think there is in regards with the ability to move the curb as much in the annual pavement and sidewalk maintenance program.

BONNIE DENNIS: This is Bonnie. I'm sorry I saw it in a different section, that is my mistake. It is something I have encountered a lot of pushback to when we have talked about moving the curb around trees and doing other things like that to provide more access. My apologies for seen it in the wrong place.

SPEAKER: This is Harriet. I have input for you Kate and the Commission and your department and also concerning the curb business. Regarding accessibility, you could mention to your contract people have you had visually impaired person who uses, and I will give you the two names voice over for iPhone or Mac computers, it's called voice over software and for android or PCs it's called job access with Windows or JAWS. So I mean I'm skilled enough to beta-test. I could just go to the SomerVoice be tested personally for you.

The thing is unless the person has a beta tester they can't know, believe me. They just can't know. Do you know what I mean? Unfortunately, I learned from working with Anne Moore was a key administrator and sole administrator until January of this year. That what happens is to make sites accessible, they but what are called widgets in, in other words little fixes, but the problem with those sometimes they make it accessible in one way and totally inaccessible in another way. So just use me. I can have Holly put my number in the chat or I can call you at work. So that is one thing.

Thank you, Kate for giving me the chance to add that in for whatever it's worth. And then I wanted to speak about the limited curb cuts options. I think Brian you already addressed the issue of running into the issues with the electrical and I was just at -- where was I? Near Tufts. I can't remember the number. It is on Boston Avenue. It actually happens to me right here at Buena Vista and Meacham Road near my home. And I don't think there is a light pole right next to it in my case. When you have an apex, which I only learned that what I was having problems with was the apex, for me as a blind cane user were I to use the ramp at the corner of Meacham and Buena Vista if I let my feet follow the ramp it sends me right across Meacham. And I live on the right hand side of Meacham. So I have to do a roundabout thing where I have to find a long cut shortcut so I do not use the curb cut.

And the one on the Boston Avenue is to get across to the Somerville community acupuncture thing. That actually may be in Medford, I'm not sure. Anyway the problem is can you sort of see the dilemma like oh, yes, we can't just move a stoplight but at the same time even though there may only be 7000 people of which there may only be 500 people seriously visually impaired I'm glad I'm not dead yet.

HOLLY SIMIONE: I'm going to have to ask us to table the rest of the conversation. I appreciate your feedback and everyone's comments tonight. I do want to go back to my original request which was how we can work together on a regular basis ahead of these, be more aware of when plantings or ideas are coming up and not just as a member of the community but as the Commission. We can talk more about that off-line. I would really like to recommend that you provide us some days or times and we can

maybe give you some particular locations that we would like to walk with you during those times. Some very specific, you know, this location these are the issues and be able to have people like Harriet, myself or other people who can demonstrate what the issues are. Clearly, we would love to see those things corrected but also as the educational purposes so going forward those things, they will not be designed that way just so you can, you know, there's always two lanes. There is the proactive Lane which I like to drive on the whole time so we sort of get things right early and then there is the okay, but we have in tandem correct things that maybe work done practically or need repaired. Is that something you would be willing to work with us to sort of collaborate on?

KATHERINE WHITE: I think we are always interested in doing those kinds of things. When it comes to the specific things that is where the collaboration with engineering is critical for us because some of those questions again that is where they check the feasibility or have very specific reasons to have why something might be like this and not those. So happy to follow up more off-line to explore options and see how we can pull in Engineering.

HOLLY SIMIONE: That would be great. We can definitely talk off-line but I wanted to bring it up at the meeting so other Commissioners would understand some of my ideas. And certainly our desire to physically be on the ground in these areas that are problematic as well as the next project and what you are thinking of to physically be on the street. I'm going to thank you both very much for your time, you are welcome to stay for the rest of the meeting and of course provide public comment or ask questions. A lot of what was going to be done in the last half hour is going to have to be tabled because we can't vote on it so we may have some time later if you're available and can hang in with us to answer some more questions for us. I totally understand if you can't but just like to open that up to you.

KATHERINE WHITE: I really appreciate that unfortunately, I have not eaten dinner or anything prior to this and had committed to having some Valentines dinner with my husband. We see this as an ongoing dialogue and just like you said we want to be more connected so that as projects even get thought of its like getting to talk to we don't see this as the end at all of having this dialogue.

HOLLY SIMIONE: I agree. So thank you both.

KATHERINE WHITE: Thank you very much for your time.

SPEAKER: Have a lovely Valentine's evening. Thank you, Adam and Kate.

HOLLY SIMIONE: First, I would like to thank Bonnie for being here not just tonight but for all the years you put in at the Commission. You finished up in December at the end of the month and I wasn't able to thank you in January for all that you have done and continue to do. So I would just on behalf of all the Commission and residents thank you

for everything. And now that I have said that, you have the floor to talk about the meeting that you went to.

BONNIE DENNIS: Is this better?

SPEAKER: Holly, can you hear? It's still a little soft.

BONNIE DENNIS: Let me see. All right I will just try projecting as much as I possibly can.

SPEAKER: That's much better.

BONNIE DENNIS: Bonnie Dennis she/her, former Commissioner. At the last meeting in December Adrienne Pomeroy brought up that there was a city meeting that they wanted representation from the Commission and I offered to go to it. That was on the HOME-ARP Allocation Plan and ARP is the American Rescue Plan. There was a very small pool of money that was set aside for -- sorry I'm trying to find the exact wording - Go to provide homelessness assistance and supportive services. And HUD oversees these funds. That is Housing and Urban Development so the federal government oversees the funds. They give them to the city and the city comes up with a plan and then the federal government has to approve that plan. Like I said, there was 1.5 million dollars for very narrow purposes and is allocated for some specific groups. That is people who are experiencing homelessness or at high risk of being homeless. People who are experiencing domestic violence. A couple others and then people with disabilities fall into this category that's kind of a catch-all of not enough to require services on your own what makes things harder to access housing.

The meeting was run by the office on housing stability in Somerville. There were a lot of local nonprofit directors and staff members that attended. And I attended as well. And the discussion was what to do in terms of submitting a plan. The plan has not -- the plan has not been approved at this point. It may have been submitted but it has not yet gone to public comment. That is supposed to happen sometime in February and that would be where Commission Members could chime in if you have anything to add. So I just wanted to share a little bit about what the plan they came up with was in my recommendations. They decided that the best use of the funds since there are not a lot of them, is to have the various agencies work together to create a specific team to coordinate services in the city.

So people from the Office of Housing Stability, people from the Somerville Housing Authority, people from the Somerville School System that work to prevent homelessness with the kids in Somerville Schools, CAAS which Nicole is here from this evening. Some organizations that work with people experiencing domestic violence and they want to use these funds to specifically hire more staff to create a team that can talk together on a set schedule and say we have these resources to share or we have these people looking for services, they do not quite fit what we can provide them but maybe

somebody else here can take care of them. And my suggestion was to use some of those funds to do staff training on how to work with people with disabilities.

I myself am low income and while I have not experienced homelessness, I have experienced a lot of housing insecurity and struggle accessing accessible housing. I have a lot of personal experience to draw from there. And some of the suggestions that I made were making sure that staff of the various agencies know what accommodations are available to people with disabilities. For example, if you have a mobility impairment and you are using a Section 8 voucher you can get a higher payment standard to be put in an accessible unit even if they are only market rate units available at that time which is not something many staff know or something they tend to share proactively.

Something else is that there is usually a limit on how long you're allowed to search for housing before they get the voucher away, but if you – Holly, I can see your face looking horrified. Which it is horrifying is a general concept but for people with disabilities it means that you have an extra struggle because if you're looking for wheelchair accessible housing or housing that can have visual alarms if you are deaf you might need more than two months to search for that and that is an accommodation you are legally allowed but people have to know they can help you get that accommodation. Another thing is home modifications. Very few people know that you are allowed, like, they have to allow you to make reasonable modifications to a unit.

If there are more than 10 units in the building then the landlord is responsible for paying for those. But even if there are fewer, you are allowed to make those modifications. So other things that households might need like there's rules about couples sharing bedrooms but people with disabilities might need more space to accommodate that and might not be able to share a bedroom and right now the forms just state that to get a second bedroom as a couple you need to have the space just to house medical equipment but there are other things that might impact that and again these are things that an accommodation can be made for if staff are trained to know that is a thing they can do.

More proactive case management for people who have anxiety, for people with executive dysfunction so that instead of expecting you to on your own show up at the exact right time, having someone checking in to make sure you've got everything you need. And the thing we have talked about this evening, making sure things are available in alternative formats. Having braille, having ASL interpreters when required, having audio of the forms or if somebody wants to speak with the person virtually to fill out a form together. Like, there's a lot of things that do not require a lot of money, just requires some knowledge and care that I think a little bit of training could go a long way in helping people with disabilities access housing and maintain it. So those are my suggestions. Like I said, there should be a public comment sometime in February or March and if folks have other ideas, I'm sure they would be open to hearing them. And if folks have questions, I can try to answer them.

SPEAKER: Harriet.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Go ahead, Harriet.

SPEAKER: I just wondered how would the meeting be named so we can recognize it or would you put us in touch with it?

HOLLY SIMIONE: Adrienne?

ADRIENNE POMEROY: I'm sorry to interrupt but as soon as Bonnie said about the public meeting I realized -- and I was under the assumption that those who attended that same meeting that Bonnie did that Paul would've sent it to us but I'm not sure he did. The public meeting was posted today so I have that information. Which I am happy to share but I did not know if we wanted to take other -- I could do that now and then we can share it out in various forms.

HOLLY SIMIONE: It was posted today or it happened today?

ADRIENNE POMEROY: No, no. It was posted today. I'm sorry.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Proactive.

BONNIE DENNIS: This is Bonnie. That has not been shared with us.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: And I saw it and I was like you must have sent this to all those people that went to the meeting. I cannot attend. And then he was like here, here you go. So thank you, Bonnie, for that tab. So if you don't mind -- so it is saying it will happen virtually, it looks like on Zoom at 6:30 PM on Thursday, February 23 and that they will accept -- so you can go to the public meeting and verbally give your comments, as Bonnie said -- public comment. They will also be accepting written comments from Friday, February 24 through March 17.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Can you put the link in the comments, in the chat box.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: This is in a file he sent me. I can put the file to be downloaded in the chat and then we can email it out, Holly. I know there is probably more commentary on this but then I can find the link hopefully.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Thank you for sharing. Go ahead, Bonnie and Harriet I interrupted your conversation, I'm sorry.

BONNIE DENNIS: This is Bonnie. That is great. Thank you, Adrienne, for sharing that. I was hoping he would send it to us and I did not have a chance to check the city calendar today, so that is super helpful.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Harriet did you have more?

SPEAKER: I was just asking what the name of the meeting was, that is all. Hearing on what? I will see it in the email. That is fine.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: I dropped the PDF and the chat.

HOLLY SIMIONE: It looks like Frank also dropped the URL to the page online.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: I can check that.

HOLLY SIMIONE: That seems to open up that.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: That is the link for the meeting.

HOLLY SIMIONE: So now we have both. Thank you everybody.

ADRIENNE POMEROY: Thanks, Frank.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Harriet were you asking a question?

SPEAKER: No, I think I am set now. If I had one, I forgot it.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Anyone else have any questions or comments for Ms. Dennis?

SPEAKER: I do.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Go right ahead.

SPEAKER: Okay. My question is how can housing -- if my brothers want to live in a house -- we can live in it together with my brother's girlfriend? Her name is Tatiana. And she is really nice. We can always have a nice bedroom together. And maybe have a TV in our room so we can watch sports games.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Manu, you currently live with your brother now?

SPEAKER: He is living in Sacramento, California.

HOLLY SIMIONE: So your question was about how yourself, your brother and his girlfriend could live together in housing that tied right to what Bonnie was talking about?

SPEAKER: Yeah, subsidized I guess. I'm sorry.

HOLLY SIMIONE: I'm just trying to clarify what you said.

SPEAKER: This is Harriet. Where do you live?

SPEAKER: I live in Alexandria but my mom passed away so just me and my dad.

SPEAKER: I see.

BONNIE DENNIS: I'm sorry to hear your mom passed away. This is housing in Somerville, Massachusetts. There might be somebody in Alexandria who can help you. An office on housing stability or there might be other agencies there but I'm not familiar with them.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Manu, would it be helpful if myself and Adrienne reached out to you with some local resources where you live. What we talk about in our Commission certainly is across the United States but is very specific to Somerville, Massachusetts. So it may be important for you to have the connections to where you live for those resources.

SPEAKER: Okay. Okay.

HOLLY SIMIONE: You're always welcome to come to a public meeting. It doesn't matter where you live. You are always welcome to ask questions. I would in no way discourage you. I would love for you to keep doing that. I think Bonnie and I and others just want to make sure you are getting the information that is specific to where you live that can help you.

SPEAKER: Okay. Okay. It sounds nice.

HOLLY SIMIONE: I know we all would love to help. We all help each other here and across the community. Thank you for asking your question.

SPEAKER: Do we have contact --

SPEAKER: Thank you.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Any other comments or questions for Ms. Bonnie? I will let our next guest speak which is Nicole. Nicole, is it Eigbret. Can you pronounce your name for me? I apologize.

NICOLE EIGBRET: Thanks, Holly. Eigbret and I use she/her pronouns.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Do you want to share your screen, the floor is yours. Let us know what you need. I know we had talked about 10 minutes but you probably have more like 15 or 20 if you would like.

NICOLE EIGBRET: That sounds great. In light of what Bonnie was saying earlier about accessibility, I apologize if I did not send my materials within the timeframe to the Commission to make sure that it was part of the agenda. Holly, I think I got back to you last Thursday but I'm not sure for instance if it's a full BusinessWeek. Materials are often submitted. I do have a slideshow but it's going to be more accessible for Commissioners and members of the public to just listen to me speak at a very high level, I'm happy to do that instead and then perhaps my materials can be included in the follow-up package after the meeting.

HOLLY SIMIONE: That is my mistake if you send it out that I did not forward them. I apologize. If you don't mind showing the presentation and then not just talking about the slides but really explaining what is visually on the slides, that would be very helpful for some of our members.

NICOLE EIGBRET: Yes, it looks like I have permission to do that. Give me one moment. Thanks for your flexibility on this.



HOLLY SIMIONE: I'm going to look in my email to see if I have that and I will forward it while you are doing your piece.

NICOLE EIGBRET: Okay. Again, my sincere apologies if this is also maybe a slide design that is a bit too busy. But I again will work with Holly and other members of the Commission to make sure you all have these materials. This is a presentation about CAAS, the Community Action Agency of Somerville. We are a nonprofit in the City of Somerville's Antipoverty Agency. Our headquartered office is in Union Square Somerville. We have been serving Somerville's low-income residents for more than 40 years. I work at CAAS as the Director of Community Organizing and Advocacy. My presentation today is meant to be an overview of CAAS's antipoverty programs and then what more specifically what our community organizing program seeks to do in our interest in making sure residents with disabilities here in Somerville know about our programming and can feel invited to get engaged and that we can be supporting tenants as well. The second side is our mission. CAAS has been serving Somerville Massachusetts since 1981. Our organization's mission is to help local families and individuals achieve financial security while working to eliminate the root causes of economic injustice.

I know that is very nonprofit jargon so don't worry I will get into more of what this actually looks like on the ground. But as an organization our vision for Somerville is a city where no one lives in poverty, where we support each other through strong community structures and where the opportunity to thrive is a lived experience for every resident.

In terms of the programs that we offer at CAAS, we have four primary antipoverty programs. The first one is our Head Start Preschool Program. CAAS actually administers the head start program for the cities of Somerville and Cambridge. We have several classrooms between both cities. And we enroll hundreds of students, I don't know the exact number but I believe this year it is more than 200 students, from low-income families and households in this free preschool program that also provides comprehensive wraparound services.

Our second program at CAAS is the VITA Tax Preparation program. Books may be familiar. VITA is a federally funded tax program that helps low to moderate income residents file taxes for free. Last week CAAS began its appointments for the new tax season. This program is open to any Massachusetts resident. You can contact CAAS and make an appointment with us and I believe this year the tax appointments returned to being in person at our Union Square office.

Our third program which is just for Somerville residents is our Housing Advocacy Program. This program provides individual case management to households around

rental assistance, eviction advocacy. So if you receive an eviction notice or perhaps are already in the court eviction process and other supports such as public benefits assistance and longer-term economic stability.

So if the housing advocacy program kind of works on the individual household level, what we do in the community organizing and advocacy program, that is the fourth and final program at CAAS, we attempt to work with tenants and households more on the collective community level and we really seek to work alongside residents on broader systemic change within our city.

On this next slide, I have kind of outlined our values within the CAAS community organizing program and as I mentioned, we seek to work with residents to create systemic change. Our first value I have a little icon of the house. And the text next to it says housing just as equals housing as a human right for all. That is really one of our guiding values. Not only fighting for affordable housing but also housing that is safe and dignified and in the communities that we call home and accessible. And that is very clearly where our work intersects with the Commission.

Our second value there is an image of a lightbulb in the text next to it says anyone can be a leader; we honor lived experiences. So, you know, leadership development is really a core at our work at CAAS as well. We really want to work with any resident in Somerville who may or may not think of themselves as a leader. And it is really through our lived experiences and our stories that we can find our voice and then use that alongside other neighbors' voices to make change.

Our third value is an image of kind of cartoon people connected in a circle. The value states that residents who are most impacted by housing injustice and oppression are the leaders of our campaigns and movement. That is really a value we see connected to equity and making sure again that, you know, people who are impacted by racial justice, economic injustice, ableism, all sorts of oppressions in our society are the leaders in our work.

So in terms of what our organizing looks like in Somerville, this slide kind of has multiple icons as well. The first one which is the image of a book is tenants' rights and advocacy. We do a lot of education on tenants' rights and we work alongside Somerville renters specifically in public, private and inclusionary housing if you think the rights may be violated. None of the CAAS organizers are lawyers. I will be very clear about that, but we educate ourselves. We take trainings in professional development. We also work very closely with our colleagues in the other CAAS programs and externally like at the Office of Housing Stability and other partners, lawyers as well to help tenants advocate for themselves if their rights are being violated.

The second bucket of work that we do, as I mentioned, is leadership development. This image has two people next to each other with like a bubble talking. What this means again is that we work intentionally with renters to organize campaigns that might prevent their displacement from Somerville and residents who want to work on broader

campaigns for change. So policies and budget funding, you know, the types of structures that impact all Somerville residents. We also do campaigns, this image has three fists raised up in the air with one of them holding a pencil. A lot of our campaigns are about challenging and building power for the community. Some of our campaigns really center tenants, again who are at risk of being displaced from Somerville because of rent hikes for the building being sold and we have rallied and mobilize the community to fight back against evasive landlords. We have also organized a number of demonstrations and advocacy efforts to make sure that, you know, the city Council and Mayor's office are furthering tenants' rights and putting investments in affordable housing.

Finally, the last bucket of work that we do this image has two hands shaking in its unite our community. CAAS really seeks to build our local movement as one that is multiracial, multicultural, multiclass really bringing all residents of all backgrounds believing that housing must be human right in Somerville.

This next slide says from crisis to courage. I like to use this phrase as another descriptor of what our work is about. Often your meeting Somerville renters when they are at their most vulnerable moments when they might be in crisis when they think they are losing their homes and the work that we try to do is not only build that tenant's competence and strength to fight back but also surround them and build the community support and it's been very humbling for me to witness my neighbors move in this process from crisis to courage.

I meant to mention at the start that I am a Somerville renter myself. I reside in Somerville. So I think at this point I'm going to stop sharing at least the presentation because I think that is probably the most succinct overview I can give of our work. But for those of us who do not know CAAS, you know, this is really my hope to build more of our partnerships and awareness here in the city to again make sure residents with disabilities know who we are and can refer to us as a resource if they feel that their rights are being violated or if you might need more specialized case management perhaps if you are searching and applying for affordable housing, if you are in need of rental assistance, eviction advocacy and things like that. And the final kind of invitation I will make is that in the community organizing program we run a monthly virtual meeting for Somerville renters of all backgrounds. It's called the Somerville Renters Meeting. It's pretty straightforward. The purpose of these meetings are to allow renters of many backgrounds to get to know each other and build connections. And especially as the pandemic continues we really view this as a priority, strengthening our cohesion as a community. The second goal of the meeting is to educate renters about their community resources and rights.

Every month we have a different topic that we present on in this month will actually be about utilities and how to find financial assistance if you're struggling to pay your bills. Then the third goal of the meeting is to, you know, get people excited and empowered to be involved in community change and community organizing. So this month's

meeting we are also going to talk about the new campaign we are launching around the City of Somerville free cash allocations which is the budget surplus and really trying to mobilize the community to make sure a significant portion is put towards the affordable housing crisis.

HOLLY SIMIONE: I've never heard of that before.

NICOLE EIGBRET: Yeah. You know, Holly, I had never heard of the term free cash either until last spring. So our staff and our tenant leaders have been working really hard to educate ourselves and educate other neighbors about what this means and why we should care about it. and so, that has been a really exciting process. This month's renters' meeting is actually taking place tomorrow Wednesday, February 15 from 7 PM to 8:30 PM on Zoom. These are multilingual meetings, so we always have professional interpretation from English into Spanish and Portuguese and other languages upon request and I also want to give a big thank you to Bonnie. She has been a resource as we have been looking to improve our access around CART services and whatnot. We don't quite have all of those pieces in order for this meeting tomorrow but I'm really hoping that by March we will have CART services available not only in English but also these other languages if necessary. I will go ahead and put the registration link for the renters' meeting in the chat in case anyone is interested in that. It should also be in the materials that are part of the follow-up package.

HOLLY SIMIONE: You did a great job describing the images on the slide. I really appreciated that. That was great.

NICOLE EIGBRET: Thank you for giving me the time and opportunity to present. I apologize again that this was not more accessible but I don't want to take up too much more time but I would love to answer any questions that folks at the meeting may have before logging off.

HOLLY SIMIONE: I think the most important thing that you did and then I see we have a couple of hands, was that you were willing to adapt quickly and were able to do just reading those slides makes a huge difference reading those images just. Thank you for that. I saw Lian and I saw Bonnie. Lian, do you want to go first? And Harriet.

LIAN GUERTIN: This is Lian. I have sort of a two-part question on the housing assistance side of things. How much of what you do is on the like crisis eviction you know dealing with issues in someone's existing housing versus helping them with finding suitable housing that they don't yet have and for that latter specifically you had mentioned that side of things was specifically for Somerville residents, for the finding housing side with that also include someone who has been previously displaced from Somerville or someone who does not currently live there but due to family or a job or some other reason has a connection to the city and is trying to move into it and needs help with that?

NICOLE EIGBRET: Thanks for your question, Lian. What I was explaining about eviction crisis support and affordable housing search. That is actually all in my colleagues program, that housing advocacy program that I can speak to it for a moment. Our Housing Advocacy Program has a contract with Somerville Office of Housing Stability to do the affordable housing search. So by my understanding and I would be happy to loop back to the Commission for the final details on this, my understanding though is the way the contract is set up his residence do have to prove current Somerville residency for that service.

There is also income eligibility guidelines. But in terms of just like how much capacity is kind of given to each thing, our staff in the Housing Advocacy Program are trained to do both roles and we have some staff who do more of the rental assistance in eviction cases and then other staff more of their plight has the affordable housing search and it's part of their day to day work. So it depends on who you talk to. But when you apply, you fill out the pre-application for HAP, as it is known as, you will be screened and then assigned to a staff member based on who is available.

I will be really transparent in that giving the continued economic fallout from the pandemic eviction and rental assistance advocacy remains top priority for our advocates. So unfortunately, I have met tenants who really are in need of more affordable housing or safer and more dignified housing been on a waitlist longer because residents facing immediate crisis are higher in the priority. But this is not unusual, unfortunately, in this sector right now. I believe OHS has similar waitlist, the Somerville homeless coalition as well and it's just indicative of deeper failures, quite frankly, of our system right now.

HOLLY SIMIONE: I would agree with the description of failures. You could also say it is opportunities to fix things but that would be very helpful.

NICOLE EIGBRET: Yes. That is what the organizing program is really hoping to do. What I did not totally mention is that many of the tenants who are now leaders of the program and our campaigns are former clients within CAAS and so maybe they came to us again in a situation of crisis and really needing that urgent help but have been able to kind of move into a more empowered position with us and their neighbors to be using their personal experience to challenge to change the system.

HOLLY SIMIONE: That's a great story. Lian, did you have any other questions or comments?

LIAN GUERTIN: No, that was it.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Ms. Dennis, you had your hand up and then Harriet.

BONNIE DENNIS: Thanks. I just want to echo the describing the slides. I really appreciate you explaining the images as well as the words on them. I have three interrelated access comments. One is even though you don't have CART for tomorrow's meeting, being on Zoom is a great start. Just make sure whoever is running

the meeting enables automatic live captioning and that will go a long way. It is free. It is not as good as CART, but it still provides some access. The other two, I was excited to hear that the VITA program is for any Mass resident but to access thoughts on that. One, are you doing accommodations for people who can't do in person and two, for people who are doing in person but have mobility access needs are you advertising how one actually gets into the building because that is different than people without mobility access.

NICOLE EIGBRET: Yeah, thank you, Bonnie so much for, you know, just very concisely raising these questions. The renters meeting, captioning and then the VITA program. I don't know if we are making special accommodations to do a hybrid appointment where the volunteer preparer may be on site in the residents case in home or on Zoom. I would love to find out. I can certainly do that and loop back to the Commission with the answer. And likewise with access to our building. Yeah, if you are familiar, we are located at 66 Union Square which is the former police building in Union Square kind of in the Plaza where like the independent and other restaurants are.

HOLLY SIMIONE: The historical original building with the jail in the basement.

NICOLE EIGBRET: Yes. Yes. That is the space we occupy, Holly. And some of our administrative suites have those jail cells, which is very interesting. But that being said, yeah, it is not totally clear when you arrive how the heck you get in there so I really appreciate the suggestion and I will also bring that back to CAAS's management about how we can make sure those instructions are available.

BONNIE DENNIS: Because it is possible to go down the alleyway and there is an intercom system and you have to get buzzed in but knowing that that exists, I only know because I was seeing a chiropractor in that building.

NICOLE EIGBRET: Yes. Yes. And we do have accessible elevators but again you would have to come in all the way to the back. Yeah.

BONNIE DENNIS: Also can very quickly say thank you. Nicole reached out to me and I connected her with Henry, one of the Associate Commissioners, and she has been proactively trying to figure out how CAAS can work better with people with disabilities and I super appreciate that.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Thank you I appreciate that as well. Ms. Harriet.

SPEAKER: I have a couple things. In the housing part of CAAS how many staff do you have to distribute around all these deep problems?

NICOLE EIGBRET: Thanks, Harriet. I don't have an easy answer for you. I mean I have a good one though. Our housing and community organizing programs have basically doubled in size in the last 2-3 years. And at this moment I believe our housing advocacy program has seven staff and they are hiring for 2-3 positions, so not fully

staffed. And in the community organizing program that I lead, there are five of us so myself +4 community organizers and we are actively hiring for a fifth.

SPEAKER: Excellent. And then of course, you work very closely with the housing stability folks, and they have a number of people. I don't know how big that office is.

NICOLE EIGBRET: Exactly. I'd have to ask the Director, but I think she has been in a similar position where OHS began with maybe five staff and throughout the pandemic the administration has put more money into part-time workers and full-time staff, I think they might be up to at least 10 staff members at this point who are assisting with rental assistance applications and other issues.

SPEAKER: And then I just had one more thing to offer which is I have been as a member of the local chapter of national adapt I have been on the MassADAPT Chapter here. I was invited by one of my fellow members who works with the Boston Tax Coalition. And they too of course have the same free tax preparation for the greater Boston area which I don't know if that includes Somerville Cambridge or not. I'm not sure about that.

But what I worked on with them is a pilot program to assist people with visual impairments. So you know I have been there to orient someone who is going to be this dapper, to bring them into the building. It is in person and just how to gracefully work with people. And I'm so pleased that they are doing it. It is income based, 60,000 or less per year and I don't know. If people don't have the space to in your program to check in with them, I could say a little bit about it but it's a good thing to have at some point. They are only doing it four or six Wednesdays in February and March and you have to make an appointment and such like. I just wanted to mention it is something you could pass on that does exist and hopefully will continue to exist tax year by tax year.

NICOLE EIGBRET: Thanks.

HOLLY SIMIONE: We have about 4-5 minutes left. Is there anyone else who would like to ask a question or provide a comment back to Nicole? Okay.

NICOLE EIGBRET: Thanks, Harriet, Boston Tax Coalition for your questions and comments. And thank you all again so much for inviting me to be part of this agenda. It was really valuable for me to hear all the other conversations and presentations this evening. So much appreciation.

HOLLY SIMIONE: We have three minutes. We have never had three minutes of silence. Anything anyone wants to -- Frank is clapping. I'm opening it up to the floor if anyone has anything they want to add or we can do the magic thing and vote to finish our meeting before 9 PM.

SPEAKER: Woohoo!

HOLLY SIMIONE: I'm going to count to five in my head, anyone? I don't see anyone jumping in to speak.

LIAN GUERTIN: This is Lian. I do have one thing I wanted to -- about the materials that you had sent out or had linked in the meeting. The current draft of the bylaws that got attached with the meeting materials doesn't actually say it is a draft.

HOLLY SIMIONE: It is not a draft.

LIAN GUERTIN: If it is the current version, which I don't believe it is the current version, because there's a lot of stuff we definitely haven't voted on that is in the one that is sent out.

HOLLY SIMIONE: So it should be the current version. Let me just grab it as well.

LIAN GUERTIN: It had some fairly substantial changes, I believe, that are not things that we had voted on.

SPEAKER: Could I add a comment here since we have a few seconds? This is Harriet. That would be we voted on some sections and those are done and tonight was to deliberate the rest of it, vote on it to make it completely done. That was my understanding and I could be incorrect but that's just my understanding.

HOLLY SIMIONE: This is supposed to be, and I will double check this Lian. This is supposed to be everything that existed and only what we did approved for changes. And I will double check that visually between the different versions, but I needed to have a document exist as of our last approved bylaws and then I added to it the dates of the other version so that we would have that.

LIAN GUERTIN: Umm the -- I'm trying to compare it to what had previously been approved to make sure it wasn't just a -- the updated formatting and it does look like it is substantially different than the previously approved version and not just the things we have approved in the meetings.

HOLLY SIMIONE: So I can go back through that if you have time later this week if you want to let me know if you want to look at it with me remotely. That's great. If not, I will compare the two. I had to take out track changes. I had to produce one that again had everything that was approved in the last meeting. And I took out things that were not. Rings that were suggested but were not voted on. So I had removed all of those.

LIAN GUERTIN: Okay. I think possibly in updating it to not be the 10-year-old upside down, badly scanned PDF some things may have gotten mixed up about what was a track change and what was a change from the beginning. Because this is definitely significantly different than the 2013 version and so I think probably this version needs to be marked as a draft because otherwise -- I think it's more than just like a couple things that got missed. It's like the whole thing is significantly different.



HOLLY SIMIONE: I will go back and visually look at the different versions and make sure it is accurate and I will make sure I update the Commission on what I find. Thank you for letting me know it does not look right to you. So I will double check that. Ms. Bonnie?

BONNIE DENNIS: I can say that I scanned it as well and it's definitely not remotely what was there before and I was not at the last meeting but I did look through things and I think Lian is correct. It even includes commentary on some of the things in some strikethrough, so. I think that there was some issues with

HOLLY SIMIONE: With my version?

BONNIE DENNIS: Documents merging.

HOLLY SIMIONE: I will fix that. Thank you. Well, it was great to have all of our guests. It is great to see you, Ms. Bonnie. Thank you very much. I make a motion that we end this February 14, Valentine's Day meeting of the Commission?

LIAN GUERTIN: This is Lian, I will second that motion.

HOLLY SIMIONE: Great. All in favor? Good night, everyone.

(End 9:03 PM EST)