

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
FAIR HOUSING COMMISSION
Katjana Ballantyne
Mayor

Staff

Hanalei Steinhart
Fair Housing Commission staff liaison

Commissioners

Claudia DeAndrade
Patrice Faulkner
Dennis Fischman
Rona Fischman
Janine Lotti

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 23, 2023, at 3:00pm
Via GoToWebinar
Online Video Platform

Attending: FHC members: Claudia DeAndrade, Dennis Fischman, Rona Fischman, Janine Lotti
City staff: Mike Feloney, Hanalei Steinhart
Members of the public: none.

I. Call to Order and Review of Draft Meeting Minutes

The meeting was called to order shortly after 3:00pm.

A motion was introduced to approve the minutes from February 23rd. The minutes were approved unanimously by roll call.

II. Standing Agenda Items

Dennis Fischman and Hanalei Steinhart led review of the two standing updates on the agenda, Facebook page update and review of Fair Housing calls and/or complaints, respectively.

1. Facebook page update: Dennis noted, for anyone who may later watch video of the meeting, that the FHC's Facebook page can be found by searching "Somerville Fair Housing Commission" and that he generally posts a question of the week on Fridays and a fair housing-related news item on Mondays. Dennis reviewed the two most popular posts and the amount of views, comments, and shares the post had.
The most popular post had 123 views, 6 reactions, and 2 'clicks' on the accompanying article. It asked "Do I have a right to have my dog live with me? He's essential to my health." Dennis shared the answer that, "It depends on whether he's a service dog (specifically trained to assist you), a therapy dog, or an emotional support dog. Here's an explanation of the differences," along with a link.
The second most popular post had 103 views and 6 likes; there was not an accompanying article to select. It asked if a property owner is required to rent to members of a protected class. Dennis shared the answer, that while a property owner is not required to rent to them, they must be treated equally to all other applicants.
2. Review of Calls/Issues/Complaints: Hanalei reported that no complaints had been received since the last meeting. She informed the Commission that contact information on the Fair Housing Website had been updated with her contact information.

III. Update on Specific Activities

Hanalei Steinhart reviewed 6 areas activities in the order they follow below.

1. FHC Annual Report for FY 2022: Hanalei reported that she has begun reviewing and compiling data for the Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report; she has not yet begun writing. There were no questions about this item.
2. Ensuring a continuing presence on the Anti-Displacement Task Force: Mike Feloney shared that the focus of the Task Force has shifted from being explicitly focused on fair housing, to looking at displacement more generally. He shared that one reason for the change of title was that the original approach was modeled after an ordinance passed by the city of Boston that incorporated fair housing and anti-displacement measures into the Boston zoning ordinance.

The task force as initially assembled eventually determined that the City of Somerville was not positioned to replicate this approach, and that some measures in Boston have already been adopted in Somerville. For these reasons, the Task Force has shifted its focus to three kinds of anti-displacement: residential, small business commercial displacement, and cultural and creative displacement. The reconvened Task Force is scheduled to meet on: May 18th and September 27th 2023, and January 18th and May 16th 2024.

Task Force meetings are expected to be held Thursdays at 6pm. Rona Fischman said that she might be able to attend these meetings, but that she has prior conflicting commitments during that time. Commissioners agreed to revisit this item at the next meeting.
3. Follow up on posting Tenant Union information to City website: Rona reported that she has reached out to the authors of the complete “Getting Organized” handout about permission to use the full handout or excerpts. She said that she is still tracing down the authors as there are no individual authors mentioned. It is expected that this item will be discussed again at the next meeting.
4. Color of Law event planning- translation and outreach: Hanalei updated the commissioners with the dates and locations of the two planned events. One will be held in person on 4/23 from 1pm to 3:00. The other will be held on Zoom on 4/24 from 6:30 to 8:30pm. She shared that calendar invitations have gone out to the commissioners as placeholders, but that they will need to register with the library to access a Zoom link for the virtual session.

Hanalei reported that the flyers had been submitted for translation and that she had connected with SomerViva Office of Immigrant Affairs (SOIA) to discuss language access. Commissioners discussed potential methods of outreach such as the Fair Housing Facebook page, Social Studies teachers at the high school and posting flyers. The commissioners discussed the importance of the event in educating community members about racism and that the event was a success last year.
5. Updating Commissioners videos on the website: Hanalei shared selected observations regarding the City of Somerville Fair Housing website. She noted that several of the introductory videos on the website were out of date, with only three current commissioners represented. Commissioners discussed how to address this while also respecting preference of some commissioners not to share videos. Some commissioners agreed to write short bios to be added to the website. Hanalei said when she had received all of them, she would send the update to the web team to minimize work for them. Rona additionally volunteered to make an introductory video for the Fair Housing Commission.
6. Questionnaire for candidates and incumbents: Mike reminded Commissioners on the background of this item. Two years ago, Patrice Faulkner led the initiative to draft

questions for all mayoral and City Council candidates. These questions were posted on the Fair Housing website and covered by some local media.

Staff asked Commissioners whether they would like to do similar questions for the upcoming election. Dennis Fischman offered to be part of a working group on the questions as he brings historical context. The Commissioners agreed to keep the questions similar to the previous set, but with some potential additions for incumbents.

IV. **Announcements**

1. Monthly meeting: The next monthly meeting is scheduled for 3:00pm on April 27, 2023. A motion to adjourn was introduced and approved unanimously by roll call vote. The meeting was adjourned around 4:00 pm.
2. Dennis Fischman shared that he spoke at the March meeting of the City Council's Housing and Community Development Committee meeting about the letter previously sent by the Fair Housing commission in regards to the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) backlog.