

Fair Housing Questionnaire for Candidates, 2023:

The [Somerville Fair Housing Commission](#), a nonpartisan group of citizens serving the community, asked candidates for Mayor and School Committee a set of questions about Fair Housing in 2021 and again this year, in 2023.

You can see answers for Question 2 from 2021 here: [Question 2](#)

You can see answers from 2023 candidates who did not submit any responses in 2021 **below**. Incumbents seeking reelection have answered follow up questions available [here](#).

Question 2: What do you think are the most common forms of housing discrimination in Somerville?

William Tauro, Candidate for Mayor

Currently, one of the biggest factors in housing exclusivity is cost. When there is a bidding war on a piece of real estate in Somerville, the house goes to the highest bidder regardless of who they are. Huge property prices become huge rents. So, the issue becomes the groups that these huge price tags exclude from living in Somerville. People of modest income helped by housing vouchers must not be excluded from renting a unit by law. Also, condo conversions have resulted in a lot of smaller units which excludes by size, people with children. The problem arises when the voucher does not reflect the cost of the rental unit or fair market rates.

Matthew Hunt, Candidate for City Council, Ward 1

A profit driven model that prefers short term gains over community building. Gentrification and a lack of affordability is a shrouded means to continue to discriminate against protected classes.

Naima Sait, Candidate for City Council, Ward 5

Enforcement of Fair Housing laws is left largely to private legal action, so even many people who belong to protected classes (thanks to race, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, marital status, etc.) lack the resources to sue and so suffer illegal discrimination. The high price level of housing in Somerville is a major barrier to housing access for people in most income brackets. Practices that are common among local landlords such as checking credit scores, checking public eviction records, and requiring renters to pay their first and last months' rents alongside their security deposit, often as well as a broker's fee, can exclude even many people who can make the rent payments but whose financial histories are imperfect. Somerville's existing housing stock also presents barriers to many people. Few smaller buildings have accommodations for people with disabilities. Families struggle to find apartments with three or more bedrooms that have either been de-leadged apartments or are held by landlords willing to bear the risk of children living in apartments that have not been de-leadged. Tenants who live in

unsafe conditions in apartments that do not meet code may be reluctant to call Inspectional Services out of fear of retaliation by their landlord or the loss of their housing if ISD should declare their unit unfit for habitation.

Jack Connolly, Candidate for City Council, Ward 6

Housing is denied most oftenly because the process seemingly has been made too difficult almost as if on purpose to sort out who should and shouldn't have it. Housing should be made available to anyone who needs it and we need to use our resources that we already have to make it more accessible. Groups like Somerville Housing Authority should receive more support from the city and no one should ever be turned away from the opportunity to have housing of any kind in this city.

The City of Somerville has hosted housing lotteries frequently but they could offer more, they could also make a better effort at letting the community know more about them and providing assistance with the application for those needing it. One of the worst things about the lotteries is what do you do if you don't win? Your hope of finding a home that you found to be perfect for you and your needs in a City you couldn't wait to live in have gone away. There should be follow up with applicants that didn't win the housing lottery to go over other housing options, assistance, and programs that could be available to them.

Wilfred Mbah, Candidate for City Council At Large

We need to understand that racism and discrimination are deeply embedded within our society and, as a result, people of color are often denied housing. But it does not end at race, there are several other groups that landlords and property managers discriminate against -- national origin, marital status, sexual orientation, age, source of income, disability, gender and pregnancy, or veteran status.