

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
FAIR HOUSING COMMISSION  
*Katjana Ballantyne*  
*Mayor*

Staff

Lisa Davidson-  
Deputy Director of Housing

Shannon Lawler-  
Program Specialist, Fair Housing and  
Inclusionary Housing Support

Commissioners

Patrice Faulkner  
Dennis Fischman  
Rona Fischman  
Janine Lotti  
Kay Mammo

**Meeting Minutes**

Thursday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024 — 3:00 pm  
Via Zoom  
Online Video Platform

**Attending:** FHC members: Patrice Faulkner, Dennis Fischman, Rona Fischman  
City staff: Lisa Davidson, Shannon Lawler

**Call to Order**

- I. Call to order and review of draft minutes from the meeting on July 25, 2024  
The meeting was called to order by roll call vote.  
A motion was introduced by Commissioner Rona Fischman to approve the minutes from the Commission's July meeting, Commissioner Dennis Fischman seconded, and Commissioner Patrice Faulkner abstained. The minutes were approved.
- II. Standing Agenda Items
  - Facebook page update- Commissioner Dennis F. posts a fair housing question of the week on Fridays and an article or other related item on Mondays, with related announcements being posted as they arise. He will also occasionally post items not directly related to fair housing because they involve protected classes.  
In the past month, the most popular question was "I'm moving out of my apartment, how do I get my security deposit?" The post received 150 views, 2 reactions, and 6 shares. The most popular article was about the Massachusetts Attorney General encouraging other state attorney generals to support the HUD disparate impact rule, which says that when actions affect one protected class differently than another, even if discriminatory intent cannot be shown, the action still falls under the Fair Housing Act. The article had 69 views and 5 shares.
  - Review of calls and complaints since the last meeting- Lisa D. reported that no calls or complaints have been received since the last meeting. Dennis F. stated that the commission wants to acknowledge that sometimes complaints are not received for several reasons; it could be because there are no cases of discrimination, but it could also be that people do not know where to call, do not realize that they've been discriminated against, or do not trust it is worthwhile to report discrimination when they are busy searching for housing.
- III. Updates on Specific Activities

- New Program Specialist hired- Lisa D. announced that the City has hired a new Program Specialist, Shannon Lawler. She started on August 19, 2024. Dennis noted that it has been several years since the Program Specialist position was configured in its current manner, which can be credited to Housing Division Director Mike Feloney, and that he is looking forward to seeing what the Commission can do with Shannon in the role. Lisa D. asked the Commission to share any upcoming fair housing trainings that they know of for Shannon L. to attend. She will be taking a reasonable accommodation training in September and another training in April. Rona F. shared that the Realtors have a fair housing training program that may be open to non-members, which she will look into. Dennis F. shared that Commissioner Janine Lotti is on vacation and Kay Mammo has not been sworn in yet. He shared that one of Kay's interests is in expanding outreach through social media. Lisa D. confirmed this from her interviews. Dennis F. said that while the Facebook page and Fair Housing page can allow people to learn more about their rights, there is room to expand this educational outreach.
- FY24 Annual Report- Lisa D. shared that former staff Hanalei Steinhart started the report outline before she left. She stated that Shannon L. will be working with her, and they hope to have the report completed by January 2025.  
Rona F. requested an outline of what is included the report each year for the next meeting. Lisa D. shared that Commission activities are reported as well as fair housing complaints.  
Dennis F. requested that Lisa review why the report is done and who receives it. Lisa D. responded that the report is shared with the City Council and that it is part of the ordinance to report on fair housing, but that she will meet with Housing Director Mike Feloney to get more information.  
Dennis F. shared that in previous years, an assessment of impediments to fair housing was completed and shared with the federal government.
- Future events for Fair Housing education-
  - Dennis F. provided context that there is not much enforcement done of fair housing complaints and that MCAD has substantially caught up on the fair housing backlog. What resulted from a broader discussion around this was that the City would require a home rule petition in order to expand fair housing enforcement, therefore it should not be prioritized. The focus of the Fair Housing Commission is instead on educational events.
  - Commissioner Rona F. shared that over a decade ago, National Night Out in Foss Park was an opportunity for fair housing education and that these large events which many community members attend would be a good target for educational tabling. She suggested tabling at Civic Day instead of or in addition to a book discussion. She also put forward that the book events should be planned in December before Fair Housing Month in April, in order to receive translations back in a timely manner. She suggested starting to plan for events earlier and ensuring that there is a tent available for shade for tabling. She shared the FHC table at ArtBeat had two mock-up ads that attendees could highlight the discriminatory language on, and that in the future it could be helpful to have even more advertisements with translations in all of Somerville's target languages. She noted that educational tabling or activities might be less successful at other festivals because they are not based around education.
  - Lisa D. will share a spreadsheet with Somerville's festivals and events that are potential tabling opportunities. Dennis F. encouraged the commission to look at the list and think about other public events in Somerville with tabling opportunities.

- Patrice F. agreed that the activity at ArtBeat was very useful in educating people. She also mentioned another mode of education could be through partnerships and building relationships with other organizations focused on social justice.
- Dennis F. shared that what previously, Fair Housing Month included a poster contest in the schools, but after many years, this activity was only reaching the same groups of people. Rona F. agreed that there wasn't anything actionable for the children involved, and that more might be accomplished by ensuring that adults in the community knew where to go when facing discrimination. Affirmatively furthering fair housing began to be prioritized over more symbolic activities.
- Dennis F. asked about the First Time Homebuyer courses, Lisa D. shared that Housing Division presents at Somerville Community Corporation's FTHB courses about Inclusionary housing and fair housing. Housing Division talks about what a protected class is and gives examples. This is a good opportunity to have a conversation with buyers about fair housing. The last time Lisa D. presented, it sparked a conversation about service animals and what a landlord can or cannot prohibit. She shared that SCC does Spanish FTHB classes and are looking into Haitian Creole classes. The Spanish class takes place quarterly and the English class is monthly.
- Dennis F. shared that the presentation has also be done by commissioners, and in his experience, people find out they have been discriminated against in the past and have been encouraged to report the incidents. Rona F. shared that the Anti-Displacement Task Force freed up some resources to work on having DeNovo (a contractor with the city doing legal work in housing and racial justice) and Suffolk Law provide more intervention with landlords.
- Patrice F. reminded the Commission that in the upcoming months, the question about landlord's responsibility to remove snow will become relevant to many Somerville residents, and suggested this may be used as a tie-in question to educate people about their rights as renters, including fair housing law. Rona F. agreed that these types of questions and questions about animals get more attention and are a good topic to bring people to the page.
- Dennis reviewed the discussion on the annual report, online education and outreach, and discussing and planning for tabling events and Fair Housing Month. These items should stay on future agendas.

#### IV. Announcements

- Dennis shared a list of Jewish holidays to assist in scheduling future meetings.
- The next meeting is scheduled for 3pm on September 26, 2024

#### V. Adjournment

- The meeting was adjourned at 3:48 PM by roll call vote.