

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

Staff

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

Commissioners

Patrice Faulkner  
Dennis Fischman  
Rona Fischman  
Janine Lotti  
Kay Mammo

**Meeting Minutes**

Thursday, April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025 — 3:00 pm  
Via Zoom—Online Video Platform

Attending: FHC members: Dennis Fischman, Rona Fischman, Janine Lotti  
City staff: Shannon Lawler

**I. Call to order and review of draft minutes:**

The meeting was called to order by roll call vote.  
Review of the March 20, 2025 meeting minutes was tabled to the next meeting on May 22, 2025.

**II. Standing Agenda Items**

- Facebook page update- Commissioner Dennis Fischman shared that the Fair Housing Commission's Facebook page shares a news item each Monday. The most popular news item shared was an article about the National Urban League, National Fair Housing Alliance, and AIDS Foundation of Chicago's lawsuit challenging the federal administration's DEIA restrictions. The post received 5 reacts and 1 share. The fair housing question of the week is posted on Fridays and the most popular question asked whether a housing complex can ban children playing outside, which is not allowed (with some exceptions). The post received 81 views, 6 reacts, and 2 shares. There were also announcements about Fair Housing Month events and informational posts about Housing Division on the Commission's Facebook page.
- Review of calls and complaints since the last meeting- Shannon Lawler shared that there was one report of discrimination in the past month, citing source of income as the protected class. The household was not able to pay full rent and after they applied for Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT), the landlord did not fill out their portion of the application by the deadline. The landlord rescinded the notice to quit but sent a notice of non-renewal. Shannon L. consulted with the Office of Housing Stability and told the household to reapply for RAFT and ask the landlord to fill out their portion of the application again, and if the landlord does not do so, that is likely a violation of fair housing law. She also sent the "landlord FAQ" document provided by the State to the household to share with their landlord. Commissioner Rona Fischman suggested having the State informational documents on the Fair Housing webpage.

**III. Updates on Specific Activities**

- Debrief April Fair Housing Month Events

Commissioner Janine Lotti shared that the turnout was higher this year compared to previous Fair Housing Month events and that the audience was engaged. Commissioner Rona F. added that the turnout may have been higher because other City divisions and departments were aware of the event and because food was provided.

Commissioner Janine L. added that she learned a lot from the other panelist at the Color of Law event. Commissioner Dennis F. shared that he is now reading the follow-up book to *The Color of Law, Just Action*. The Commission is generally limited to addressing individual instances of discrimination, while the two books and the event discuss the history of government policy that brought about institutional discrimination, as well as ways to resist and challenge this discrimination. He added that this falls under the Commission's goal to expand educational outreach about fair housing.

Shannon L. thanked Commissioner Janine L. for being a panelist and bringing her expertise to the April 10 event and Commissioner Rona F. for facilitating both events and assisting with last minute changes.

Commissioner Rona F. added that the April 17 event had both Attorney Todd Kaplan from Greater Boston Legal Services and Susan Chimene from Somerville's Office of Housing Stability as presenters.

Shannon wrote down and saved notes of the steps taken to plan and coordinate the Fair Housing Month events to reference next April.

Commissioner Rona F. shared that the event took place with the help of Somerville's Racial and Social Justice Department and noted that many of the connections made during this Fair Housing Month should be strengthened, with the help of the technical assistance grant the Commission is receiving from Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC).

Commissioner Dennis F. noted that the Commission should not wait until next Fair Housing Month to connect and collaborate with other departments and commissions.

- Consultation with MAPC
  - All the Commissioners have had or will have meetings with Gloria Huangpu from MAPC, who asked about what the Commissioners would ideally like the Commission to be able to do. Commissioner Janine L. would like to look into enforcement of fair housing law and promoting fair housing policy. Shannon L. shared that Gloria will be coming to the May Commission meeting. Commissioner Rona F. suggested talking to Gloria about social media strategy.
- Online education and outreach
  - Commissioner Dennis F. and Kay M. met on April 1st to talk about what the Commission could do on Instagram, including self-introduction videos. Commissioner Janine L. added that she relies on YouTube for informational media and suggested using YouTube shorts to disseminate information. Commissioner Dennis F. suggested having City staff be a co-owner of any accounts made with a Commission member.
- Planning for tabling events
  - Carnival- The event will be on June 1 from 2-6 PM (with a rain date of June 8). Commissioners Patrice Faulkner and Janine L. may be available to table with Shannon L. and Lisa Davidson. Shannon L. will ask East Somerville Main Streets if the Commission can still sign up. Commissioner Rona F. suggested having a spinning wheel or throwing a nerf ball to answer a question at the event, as well as listing all of the protected classes on a poster board. Commissioner Dennis F. added that Housing Division has items for giveaway.

- ArtBeat- The event will be on July 19 from 1-7 PM.
- Fair housing questionnaire for incumbent and challenging candidates to City Council
  - Commissioner Dennis F. shared that this will be discussed further in the next meeting, but that candidates can take out nomination papers starting May 5 and must return them by June 11, with nomination papers being certified on July 2. The Commission will send the questions to candidates after the June deadline. The Commission will decide at the May meeting whether the subcommittee will send the questions through Shannon to receive feedback before the June meeting or whether they will receive feedback and be approved at the June meeting.

#### **IV. Continued Business**

- FY24 Annual Report – Shannon L. has finished the draft report and it is with Interim Housing Division Director Lisa Davidson for review.
- FY23 Annual Report – Shannon L. shared that the report has been marked as “work completed” by City Council. Commissioner Dennis F. asked if there were any comments on the report. Shannon L. shared that the Housing and Community Development Committee asked about the current MCAD backlog, whether Suffolk’s testing program can do proactive testing in Somerville, and investigating whether there is any overlap in property managers or owners who have had complaints submitted for their properties.

#### **V. Announcements**

- The next meeting is scheduled for 3:00 PM on May 22, 2025.

#### **VI. Adjournment**

- The meeting was adjourned at 4:06 PM by roll call vote.