

Human Rights Commission (HRC)

APPROVED HRC Meeting Minutes – August 20, 2025

Attendees: Chair Jason Mackey, Commissioners Chris Spicer, Brian Sokol, Elyse Best, Salma Kazmi, Suelin Chen, Pao Mendez, Primrose Chareka. Staff: Elijah Booker (RSJ). Guest: Liz Eldridge.

Absent: Commissioner Jenny Bonham-Carter

1. Opening

- Meeting called to order by Chair Jason Mackey.
- Quorum confirmed.
- Minutes from May are pending approval once located; no minutes available for June or July as no meeting was held.

2. Suspension of Rules

- **Motion:** Commissioner Chris Spicer moved to suspend the rules for the evening.
- **Second:** Commissioner Elyse Best.
- **Vote:** Passed unanimously.

3. RSJ Updates

- **Elijah Booker (RSJ):** Four new members officially joined; one more pending swearing-in.
- Commission will soon reach 11 members (maximum is 12).

4. Focus Group Updates

- **Chris Spicer & Brian Sokol** summarized outcomes of recent focus groups:
 - Purpose: Gather community input on human rights concerns in Somerville.
 - Attendance varied: good turnout for virtual session; poor attendance for in-person East Somerville session.
 - Major recurring issues: immigration concerns (leading to a fear of participation in programs), housing affordability, racism and lack of representation in city government. Other concerns included disability rights, book access, and healthcare.
- Notes and thematic analysis are being compiled with support from an assistant.
- Commissioners discussed need for better outreach and visibility.
- **Action Item:** Chair Mackey to circulate summary notes once compiled.
- Suggestions for improvement:
 - Regular/ongoing focus groups (monthly).
 - Tabling at community events and doing on-the-street engagement.
 - Better publicity via city channels and HRC website.

5. Language Accessibility

- **Discussion:** Ensuring interpreters and translation services at future events.
- **Next Steps:** Work with SOIA and Adrienne Pomeroy for accommodations.

6. Newsletter

- HRC will be included in the monthly RSJ “Social Justice Journal.”
- Chairs will be contacted before publication to submit blurbs.
- **Action Item:** Elijah to provide circulation and engagement statistics.

7. Subcommittee Participation / Advisory Council

- Clarification sought on whether non-commissioners may serve on subcommittees.
- **Elijah:** Substantive HRC work must be performed by Commissioners; volunteers may assist with event logistics but not official subcommittee work.
- **Discussion:** Commissioners suggested creating an **Advisory Council** (per ordinance) of up to 21 members to broaden community participation.
- **Action Item:** Review ordinance to clarify Advisory Council’s mandate and begin recruitment.

8. Ageism Project – “The Right to Remember”

- **Commissioner Elyse Best** presented update:
 - Title: *The Right to Remember: Addressing Ageism, Alzheimer’s, and Care with Justice*.
 - Event Date: Tentatively October 5, 2025 (flexible for scheduling conflicts). Venue: Connexion.
 - Format: Panel discussion + community Q&A, simulcast on GovTV.
 - Goal: Address ageism as a human rights issue; highlight intersection with disability, health equity, and racial justice.
 - Panelists: Dr. Schwartz confirmed; awaiting confirmation from Council on Aging director; seeking Indigenous and LGBTQ elder representation.
 - Subcommittee: Elyse Best (lead), Brian Sokol, Lauren, with support from Commissioners Chen and Mendez.
- **Budget Request:** \$1,150 (panelist honoraria, venue, catering).
 - Total HRC annual budget: \$3,500.
- **Discussion:**
 - Chair Mackey and several commissioners emphasized need to maximize attendance if the HRC is to commit such a large percentage of its budget.
 - Commissioners Chen and Mendez offered additional contacts and expertise in aging and caregiving.
- **Motion:** Commissioner Best moved to request \$1,150 for the Ageism Project.
- **Status:** Motion discussed, and budget approved by unanimous vote.

9. Ordinance / Advisory Council Reference

- Discussion about locating official ordinance text (Somerville website currently down).
- **Action Item:** Staff to provide ordinance copy when the website is restored.

10. Next Steps / Action Items

- **Chair Mackey:** Circulate focus group notes once compiled.
- **Elijah (RSJ):** Provide newsletter engagement stats; confirm support for translation, accessibility, and flyers.
- **All Commissioners:** Review ordinance regarding Advisory Council; consider outreach for membership.
- **Ageism Subcommittee:** Finalize panelists, confirm venue/date, refine marketing and event goals before next meeting.

11. Fluff Festival

- Motion to table at Fluff Festival proposed by Commissioner Best and seconded by Commissioner Mackey. Approved Unanimously.

12. Adjournment

- Motioned by Commissioner Spicer. Meeting adjourned at 8:33 PM.

Minutes prepared by:

/Jason Mackey/ Interim-Chair

Actions & Motions

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Motions

1. Suspend Rules for Meeting

- *Motion:* Commissioner Spicer
- *Second:* Commissioner Best
- *Result:* Passed unanimously

2. Ageism Project Budget Request

- *Motion:* Commissioner Best requested \$1,150 for “The Right to Remember” event (honoraria, venue, catering).
- *Status:* Discussion held; **tabled pending confirmation of speakers and outreach plan.**

3. Invite Speaker Liz Eldridge

- *Motion:* Chair Mackey moved to invite Liz Eldridge, Chair of the Somerville Special Education Parents Advisory Council, to speak at the September 17 meeting (tentative).
- *Second:* [Noted in discussion, unspecified in minutes excerpt]
- *Result:* Passed unanimously to invite Liz Eldridge to present on special education and disability rights.

Action Items

Focus Groups

- Chair Mackey to circulate compiled notes once summaries are complete.
- Commissioners to brainstorm better outreach methods (events, tabling, clipboards, regular sessions).

Language Accessibility

- RSJ to confirm interpreter/translation availability for future events.
- Flyers and materials to include accessibility information.

Newsletter

- Elijah (RSJ) to provide HRC with circulation and open-rate data.
- Commissioners to submit blurbs/events for inclusion in Social Justice Journal.

Subcommittees & Advisory Council

- Clarify ordinance rules on Advisory Council (up to 21 members).
- Staff to provide ordinance text once website is restored.

- Begin planning recruitment for Advisory Council to broaden community input.

Ageism Project – “The Right to Remember”

- Subcommittee (Best, Sokol, Lauren; with Chen & Mendez joining) to:
 - Confirm panelists (Council on Aging, gerontologist, Indigenous/LGBTQ elder representation).
 - Finalize event date (October 5 tentative, may shift to late Oct/Nov).
 - Develop clear marketing, Q&A structure, and audience engagement plan.
 - Ensure accessibility and robust outreach before budget approval.