

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, September 25th, 2025 — 3:00 pm  
Via Zoom—Online Video Platform

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

- I. Call to order and review of draft minutes from the meeting on August 14, 2025:  
The meeting was called to order by roll call vote.  
Commissioner Rona Fischman moved to approve the minutes as written and  
Commissioner Dennis Fischman seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously.
- II. Standing Agenda Items
  - Facebook page update / fair housing questionnaire for incumbent and challenging candidates to City Council- Commissioner Dennis F. shared that the Fair Housing Commission has a Facebook page, which can be found by searching SomervilleFairHousingCommission on Facebook. Each week on Monday, a fair housing related article is posted, and on Friday, a question of the week is posted. The Commission also periodically makes relevant posts outside the article and question. In the past month, a link to the questionnaire for Mayoral and City Council candidates was posted. The post received 2199 views, 19 reactions, and 86 clicks on the link. The questionnaire was also in The Somerville Times and the Commissioners posted QR codes linked to the questionnaire around the City.  
The question of the week that got the most attention was about how long it should take for a security deposit to be returned after moving out. The article that received the most attention was about a housing provider being taken to court after refusing to accept housing choice vouchers, which is considered discrimination in Massachusetts. That article received 13 clicks on the link.  
Commissioner Patrice F. asked the Commission what can be done before the general municipal election in November to more widely spread the questionnaire. Commissioner Rona F. suggested that the QR code flyers should be posted again before the general election.
  - Review of calls and complaints since the last meeting- Shannon L. shared that no new fair housing complaints were received within the past month. She reviewed the complaint that the Commission heard the previous month, about a household who was switched to tenancy-at-will from an annual lease after requesting lead abatement. Both she and the household attempted to speak with the housing provider to request an annual lease, but

the request was denied. The household decided to move out and will be filing with the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD). She also received two emails from constituents in the past month, one of whom was referred to the Inspectional Services Department, while the other was referred to the Office of Housing Stability, as they were not fair housing cases.

### III. Updates on Specific Activities

- MAPC technical assistance- Commissioner Dennis F. introduced Gloria Huangpu, a Community Engagement Planner from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC). MAPC is providing technical assistance to the Commission to expand their educational outreach, in part through working with other organizations in Somerville. Gloria shared an update on the landscape analysis, the first phase of relationship building between the Commission and other groups in the Somerville, and the community engagement plan, involving the Commissioners' input. The landscape analysis was informed by demographic data and data on the protected classes most frequently reporting discrimination in Somerville. The conversations in the landscape analysis are the foundation for continued relationship building. Gloria, Shannon, and members of the Commission had conversations with Connexion Church, Somerville Office of Immigrant Affairs, East Somerville Main Streets, Somerville Council on Aging, Community Action Agency Somerville, and Somerville Public Schools. Gloria shared that from these conversations, what emerged was that the housing affordability crisis heightens the risk in all situations related to discrimination, that there is some distrust between priority communities and government, which leads to lack of reporting, and that it is important to meet people where they are (including through language access) with clear, actionable information. It was also noted that there is a dynamic of distrust between landlords and the City, with some misunderstanding of funding programs available for housing. Messaging should be tailored to renters and landlords separately and specifically. MAPC is beginning to create materials to start awareness building and education through the next several months.

Commissioner Dennis F. noted that there is limited capacity on the Commission as well as issues of continuity, with both Commissioners and staff moving on after a few years. Commissioner Rona F. added that she would like to have a packet of information available on the Commission website that instructs landlords about fair housing laws and not violating them in the providing of housing. Commissioner Patrice F. discussed capacity building for the next generation of Commissioners and creating systems that can be recreated and expanded upon in the future.

Gloria shared that one outcome of the technical assistance work will be a community engagement plan, including a tool that will list where upcoming community engagement events are and what materials can be used for those engagements and relationships. The goals are to improve awareness of the Commission and education on housing rights with tenants and landlords. This will be done through a focus on relationship building with community organizations and City departments, as well as meeting people where they are through language access and trusted community partners. The Commission can train community organization and City staff who will further amplify the message to constituents with whom they engage. The MAPC Housing team will build out a library of engagement and educational materials for the Commission to engage with priority community members.

Commissioner Rona F. noted her concern with office hours events, because the Commission lacks Portuguese and Spanish language capacity. Commissioner Janine Lotti shared that she is interested in presenting to the City social workers to make sure they understand and have the resources to best help their clients. Commissioner Patrice F.

shared her concern that they may not be able to reach the immigrant population due to the current Federal administration. She added that while the Commission may not be able to reach these community members directly, they could go through partner organizations who are trusted by some of the immigrant population in Somerville. She suggested having a few train-the-trainer events and receiving commitments from the attendees that they will train at least one other person who works closely with the community within a set amount of time, in order to expand knowledge and capacity around fair housing rights. This capacity building could also be tailored towards landlords and property managers, with the suggestion of two training events, one for housing providers and one for community partners, per year. Commissioner Patrice F. also suggested creating a tool for partner organizations to keep track of fair housing discrimination that their constituents and clients face, particularly when the person facing discrimination may not be willing to go to the Commission or MCAD. This would assist in keeping records that come closer to the actual number of fair housing incidents in the City. The tool could also have resources immediately available to point community partners and the people they serve in the right direction.

Commissioner Rona F. asked whether information about fair housing can be placed in City tax bills.

Commissioner Dennis F. shared that 6 or 7 years ago, the staff to the Commission would gather identified landlords for a training on fair housing law. He also noted that tabling at the Mutual Aid Medford and Somerville free store could be done even before new materials are created. He added that asking elected officials, particularly Ward Councilors, for their support when going to events in their ward could be both a courtesy and add capacity to what the Commission can do in the future.

- Online education and outreach- tabled for the October 23, 2025 Commission meeting.

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

- FY24 Annual Report- Commissioner Dennis F. asked the Commission whether they tabled at ArtBeat in 2023. The Commission will follow up with Shannon when they determine the answer.
- FY25 Annual Report- tabled for the October 23, 2025 Commission meeting.

#### **V. Announcements**

- The next meeting is scheduled for 3:00 PM on October 23, 2025.

#### **VI. Adjournment**

- The meeting was adjourned at 4:16 PM.

#### **Document shared:**

- MAPC Somerville FHC Landscape Analysis and Engagement Plan 09.25.2025