

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, October 23th, 2025 — 3:00 pm

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 September 25, 2025.  
The meeting was called to order by roll call vote.  
Commissioner Janine Lotti moved to approve the minutes as written and Commissioner Rona Fischman seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously.
- II. Standing Agenda Items
  - Facebook page update- Commissioner Dennis Fischman shared that the Fair Housing Commission has a Facebook page, which can be found by searching SomervilleFairHousingCommission on Facebook. A question of the week is posted on Fridays and a news article related to fair housing is posted on Mondays. The post with the most attention since the last meeting addressed why real estate agents will not answer questions about whether there are families with children in a neighborhood. They do not answer these types of questions as they can be considered steering, and family status is a protected class. The post had 92 views and 14 interactions. Commissioner Rona F. added that this topic comes up frequently because many people do not realize that family status is a protected class.
  - Review of calls and complaints since the last meeting- Shannon L. shared that one complaint was received in the last month and was a referral from the Somerville Office of Immigrant Affairs (SOIA). The tenant was not told that they would need to pay for water when they moved in, but when they received their lease renewal letter, it came with a large water bill from the previous year. She is working with SOIA, the Office of Housing Stability (OHS), and Inspectional Services Department (ISD) to check whether the property has submetering, because the landlord cannot charge tenants for water without submetering. Commissioner Rona F. noted that submetering is common in condo units and that it is not equitable to split a water bill evenly amongst different units without it, as each unit may use a different amount of water. Shannon L. added that the tenant may not have been given the original lease in a language they could read, which could be another source of discrimination. She shared that the Commission received other inquiries on their intake form and over the phone which were ISD-related, and she referred them to ISD as they were not fair housing issues.

### III. Updates on Specific Activities

- MAPC technical assistance- Commissioner Dennis F. shared that the Commission has been working with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to determine how the Commission can better communicate and direct their work. Shannon reported that in the previous few weeks, the Commissioners were asked to share which engagement events they wanted to prioritize. She shared the events with the most interest: the Mutual Aid Medford and Somerville (MAMAS) free store, flyering in East Somerville restaurants, Community Action Agency Somerville (CAAS) movement meetings, presenting at the Council on Aging, attending a Somerville YIMBY, Davis Square Neighborhood Council, or Union Square Neighborhood Council meeting, and training amplifiers (social workers with Health and Human Services) on fair housing. She asked how the Commission wants to prioritize these events.
  - Commissioner Rona F. will write the outline of a proposal for the MAMAS board and send it to Shannon L. and Gloria Huangpu with MAPC, then send it to the board. Tabling at this event may happen later in the year and translated materials will be needed.
  - Commissioner Patrice Faulkner is interested in the Council on Aging and training staff social workers, with another Commissioner and Shannon L. Commissioner Janine L. is also interested in those two events, and in particular, making information more approachable for older landlords at the Council on Aging. Both Commissioners noted that these are groups that the Commission previously has not reached. Commissioner Rona F. added that the event on the Council on Aging could include information on how to do tenant screenings without violating fair housing law.
  - Commissioner Dennis F. reminded the Commission that during the community engagement process, feedback from community organizations included that housing provider education is very important because many tenants know their rights, but landlords and property managers do not always know or abide by fair housing law. He emphasized the importance of communicating with both large and small landlords and property management companies. SomerVIP is a voucher incentive program that could be shared with these groups. Shannon L. added that she and Gloria H. will be meeting representatives from Davis Square Neighborhood Council and Somerville YIMBY and are hoping that they may share ideas on how to best reach landlords or allow the Commission to share materials or present to their groups, which have a higher population of landlords than previously reached. Commissioner Janine L. expressed interest in reaching small property owners, potentially through the Assessor's office and Commissioner Rona F. said she may have access to a property database that could help target materials.
  - There is also interest in attending the January CAAS movement meeting.
- Fair housing questionnaire for incumbent and challenging candidates to City Council- Commissioner Dennis F. shared that the questionnaire was the most popular post the Commission's Facebook page has ever had. He will post it one more time before the election and noted that it seems to have accomplished its dual goal of making the candidates think about addressing fair housing and informing voters of the candidate's positions. Commissioner Patrice F. requested an updated flyer with the QR code that specifies election day, which she will post around her neighborhood.
- Tabling events- Commissioner Dennis F. recently attended the Monster Mash and Fluff fest but noted that both may be too busy and crowded to effectively reach people. Commissioner Rona F. added that Civic Day was effective because it was entirely City departments, and Commissioner Janine F. shared that Carnival was also very effective

while being less crowded. Both events are on the list for tabling again in the future. Shannon L. will look into the cost of tabling at the Winter Farmer's Market, as it could be a location to reach both tenants and landlords.

- Online education and outreach- Commissioner Dennis F. reminded the Commissioners to share their photos and a short bio with Commissioner Kay Mammo to create an Instagram page.
- Capacity building for future Commission members- Commissioner Patrice F. asked if there is a list of all the elements necessary to have a meeting. Shannon L. responded that there is a list of the basic necessities to running the Commission, but that the Commissioners can collaborate more with MAPC to memorialize the activities they do in detail. MAPC is also assisting with building a list of annual and ongoing activities that the Commission does. Commissioner Rona F. emphasized the need for more bilingual capacity on the Commission, as they have had in the past. Commissioner Dennis F. asked what the staff liaison had to learn when new to the Commission. Shannon L. shared that planning Fair Housing Month events took a lot of detailed work which was new to her, and which she tried to write down as a resource for herself and future staff. Additionally taking meeting minutes and determining which calls and complaints were fair housing issues that needed to go to the Commission, as opposed to those that could be referred to other departments, are staff activities that could have written instructions. Commissioner Dennis F. observed that the Commission could begin a manual for new staff and Commissioners.
- Adding protected classes to the Fair Housing Ordinance- Shannon L. spoke with the City of Boston regarding their work in adding "returning citizens" to their Ordinance. They are in the early stages of working on this. This item will be removed from the agenda for the next few months and re-added after April (Fair Housing Month) when there is more time and capacity for research.

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

- FY24 Annual Report- The Commission will send the report to City Council in January.
- FY25 Annual Report- Shannon L. shared that the report is not yet ready for review.

#### **V. Announcements**

- The next meeting is scheduled for 3:00 PM on November 20, 2025.

#### **VI. Adjournment**

- The meeting was adjourned at 4:05 PM.