

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, December 11th, 2025 — 11:00 am

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

- I. Call to order and review of draft minutes from the meeting on November 20, 2025.
The meeting was called to order by roll call vote.
Commissioner Rona Fischman moved to approve the minutes as written. Commissioner Patrice Faulkner seconded and 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. Because the previous Commission meeting was less than a month before the current meeting, in the interest of time, there was no update on posts in the past month.
 - Review of calls and complaints since the last meeting- Shannon Lawler shared that since the last meeting, the Commission has only received one complaint. The complainant called with a question about the Inclusionary Housing Program but mentioned previous discrimination by a Somerville landlord on the basis of sexual orientation related to discriminatory comments prior to an eviction proceeding. Because the discrimination occurred over one year ago, it cannot be reported to the US Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) or the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD). The household was in contact with Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services (CASLS) at the time of the eviction and they decided to focus on the eviction case as that was the more urgent need. Shannon noted that this highlights the importance of awareness building about what the Commission does so that people can contact them at the time the discrimination occurs and provide the possibility of advocacy or submitting complaints to the State. Commissioner Rona F. suggested that Shannon share a brief summary of fair housing complaints received to other members of Housing Division so that if they receive a call about their specialty that may also connect to fair housing discrimination, they can refer it to the Commission. Commissioner Patrice F. suggested sharing a database of what complaints may look like across Housing Division and related divisions and departments. Commissioner Dennis F. suggested adding this topic to the Facebook page question of the week roster.

III. Updates on Specific Activities

- Scheduling 2026 meeting dates- Commissioners discussed and agreed to continue meeting on the fourth Thursday of each month at 3:00 PM. If a meeting date needs to change, it will be done at or before the meeting prior. Commissioner Rona F. added that when the new Commissioner is onboarded, the Commission should check back in to see if the regular meeting time works for them.

- MAPC technical assistance: Fair Housing Month

Gloria Huangpu from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council introduced the discussion around identifying dates and times for the Fair Housing Month events in April.

Commissioner Rona F. shared that Kerry O'Donnell, the Head of Adult Services at Somerville Public Library, had reached out to her about planning a date for *The Color of Law* book event. The Commission discussed capacity for the planned events.

Commissioner Patrice F. commented that the events involve both capacity and identity—the library events are connected with the identity of the Commission; ideally, the Commission has partnerships with other organizations and does collaborative events in addition to events that are focused solely on fair housing. She added that the book event and know-your-rights events are an important part of the Commission's identity, and suggested that they could ask partner organizations to assist with some of the preparation for these events. Commissioner Rona F. shared that the preparation on the part of the Commissioners for the library event is six to eight hours and that the previous year, the event was a panel discussion. Commissioner Dennis F. asked whether the Commission could keep the book event in 2026. Gloria suggested replacing one of the other events discussed in the previous meeting with one of the library events and including the preparation process in the regular meetings from November to March each year, which can build capacity and institutional knowledge. Commissioner Dennis F. heard from Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS) and plans to meet with them in early January. Shannon shared that a big lift for the library events is marketing them and getting an audience. With the collaborative events planned (at CAAS, Mutual Aid Medford and Somerville (MAMAS), and the Council on Aging) there is a more built-in audience. Regarding the event targeted to landlords, which this year will be held at the Council on Aging, Commissioner Dennis F. reminded the Commission that this type of event was done previously and marketed as helping landlords avoid problems with fair housing law. Commissioner Rona F. would like to see a short webpage that reviews fair housing rules for landlords which would have a QR code to share with all fair housing materials. This could build a landlord audience. Gloria asked Commissioner Dennis F. to share any materials he has from previous landlord events.

Gloria also suggested that partner organizations could help with outreach. Commissioner Dennis F. shared that the previous year, the Department of Racial and Social Justice was invaluable in assisting with outreach and ideas, as well as food for the events.

Commissioner Rona F. added that notices in the Somerville Times and Cambridge Day about the events increased participation, and she suggested reaching out to Tufts and partner boards and commissions. She also said that sharing translated flyers by March is important for outreach.

Gloria suggested a timeline of developing outreach materials and facilitation plans for the events in January, starting to advertise in February, and doing the final rounds of outreach in March. Commissioner Patrice F. asked the Commission to explore the idea of holding the book event in a hybrid format to increase engagement and asked who the target audience is for the event. Commissioner Rona F. commented that the group is somewhat self-selecting because it is centered around the book. Commissioner Dennis F. suggested that the CAAS, Council on Aging, and book events are all possible in April with current capacity. Commissioner Patrice F. will be meeting with MAMAS regarding tabling at

one of their free stores and highlighted the importance of discussing how food and financial insecurity overlap with fair housing issues in order to best collaborate with them. The MAMAS free store event may not be held in April, but if it is done in March it could lead to and help advertise the Fair Housing Month events. The Commission agreed to hold the book event in the evening on April 16, 2026. Shannon asked for a Commissioner to focus on marketing and connecting with other City commissions and Departments. The work for the book event will be distributed between the Commissioners.

- Letter from Mayor-Elect to Commission Chairs—Commissioner Dennis F. corrected a typo in the agenda: there is a letter going to Mayor-Elect Wilson from several commission chairs asking him to streamline the process of getting new members nominated and their appointments approved, to seek out interpretations of open meeting law that allow working groups to act between full commission meetings, and to support staff liaisons to commissions in a manner that preserves continuity and prevents frequent turnover in staffing.
- Tabling- tabled for a later meeting.
- Online education and outreach- tabled for a later meeting.
- Capacity building for future Commission members- tabled for a later meeting.

IV. Continued Business

- FY24 Annual Report – The Commission reviewed the FY24 annual report and Shannon will submit it to City council.
- FY25 Annual Report – No update.

V. Announcements

- The Commission thanked Commissioner Rona F. for her years of service to the Commission.
- The next meeting is scheduled for January 22, 2026, correcting a typo on the agenda which had the meeting scheduled for 2025.

VI. Adjournment

- The meeting was adjourned at 12:05 PM.