



Somerville Human Rights Commission

Meeting Minutes

Date: November 19, 2025

Time: 6:30 PM – 8:57 PM (via Zoom)

Recorded Meeting: Yes

Note Taker: Elyse Best, Co-Chair

Attendance

Commissioners Present:

- Elyse Best (Co-Chair)
- Brian Sokol
- Salma Kazmi
- Primrose Chareka
- Christopher Spicer-Hankle
- Suelin Chen
- Jenny Bonham-Carter
- Lauren Chapman

City Staff / Liaisons:

- Elijah Booker, Office of Racial & Social Justice (RSJ)

Absent:

- Pao Mendez (noted)



Note Taker: Elyse Best

Quorum:

- Quorum was confirmed.

Call to Order

Chair Elyse Best called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM. Attendance and roll call were completed, and the meeting was confirmed as recorded.

Approval of Minutes

October 29, 2025 Meeting Minutes – unanimously approved

- A motion was made by Salma Kazmi to approve the October 29, 2025 meeting minutes.
- The motion was seconded by Elyse Best.
- Vote: Approved unanimously.



Old Business

1. Letter to RSJ Regarding Complaints

- Salma Kazmi reported that a draft letter requesting clarification on complaint processes and roles between HRC and RSJ had been completed and sent to commissioners (BCC'd).
- The letter is informational in nature and seeks clarity on responsibilities and procedures.

Status: Completed; awaiting response.

2. Open Commissioner Seat – Recruitment Process

Elijah Booker (RSJ) provided a detailed overview of the standard appointment process, including:

- Drafting and posting a public call for applicants
- Application materials (typically a letter of intent)
- Interview panel composition
- Nomination and mayoral review
- City Council confirmation and onboarding requirements

Key discussion points:

- Typical posting period is 4–6 weeks
- City Council recess and mayoral transition may affect final confirmation timing but do not prevent posting
- Prior applicants may be re-contacted and invited to reapply or update materials

Motion:



- Motion to proceed with posting the open commissioner seat
- Moved by Salma Kazmi, seconded by Elyse Best

Vote:

- Approved unanimously

Next Step:

- RSJ will move forward with posting the open seat by the end of the month, with the Commission assisting in outreach during the holiday period.

3. MLK Day Initiatives

Presenter: Christopher Spicer-Hankle

Two proposed initiatives were discussed:

a. MLK Day Essay Contest

- Proposed collaboration with Somerville Public Schools (8th grade and high school students)
- Essay prompts focused on Dr. King's legacy, human rights, and lived examples of social justice
- RSJ confirmed willingness to support and match scholarship funding
- Anticipated review volume: 10–100 submissions
- Requires a task group to manage review and logistics



b. MLK Day of Service

- In-person service opportunity tied to human rights and community needs
- Conceptual planning to continue through a designated group

Discussion Highlights:

- Need for accessible, non-exclusive public engagement (beyond social media platforms)
- Interest in developing an HRC mailing list or neutral sign-up mechanism
- Recommendation to delegate planning to a subcommittee or task force

Decision:

- Initiative assigned to the Information, Advocacy & Engagement Subcommittee

Budget Motion:

- Motion to approve \$175 for the scholarship prize (to be matched by RSJ)
- Moved by Salma Kazmi, seconded by Elyse Best
- Vote: Approved

4. Narrative 4 Training – Follow-Up

- Commissioners discussed experiences with Narrative 4 training (live and self-paced options)
- Training consists of approximately 9 modules (2–4 hours)
- Purpose: community-building and development of local facilitators

Action Item:



- Salma Kazmi will circulate the direct registration link associated with the QR code to all commissioners.

New Business

Immigration Rights Initiatives

Presenter: Salma Kazmi

Salma summarized discussions with the Director of SOYA and outlined potential HRC roles, including:

- Supporting and amplifying “Know Your Rights” trainings
- Understanding funding constraints facing immigrant-serving organizations
- Offering accountability and partnership rather than duplicative services
- Exploring interpretation and translation training opportunities for commissioners
- Considering HRC’s role as a convening and fact-finding body

Proposed Areas of Work:

- Outreach to immigrant-serving nonprofits
- Coordination with LUCE and other partners
- Mapping immigrant services and identifying gaps
- Reporting on the state of immigrant rights in Somerville
- Collaboration with neighboring municipalities via the Massachusetts Coalition of Human Rights Commissions

Related Discussion:

- Wage theft enforcement as an immigrant-rights issue



- Employer and bystander “Know Your Rights” education
- Data collection and reporting capacity of the HRC
- Preparedness planning for immigrant families

Outcome:

- No formal motions taken
- Agreement to continue outreach, research, and subcommittee-level development of recommendations

Summary of Key Actions & Decisions

- ☒ Approved October 29, 2025 meeting minutes
 - ☒ Authorized RSJ to post open commissioner seat
 - ☒ Approved MLK Day essay contest and day-of-service planning
 - ☒ Approved \$175 scholarship budget (matched by RSJ)
 - → Assigned MLK initiatives to Information, Advocacy & Engagement Subcommittee
 - → Directed follow-up on Narrative 4 training access
 - → Continued exploration of immigration-rights initiatives and partnerships
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- Elijah Booker (RSJ): Coordinate the posting of the open commissioner seat by the end of the month.
 - Salma Kazmi: Contact legal counsel (David) to clarify restrictions regarding HRC email access and Facebook access.
 - Information, Advocacy & Engagement Subcommittee: Lead planning for the MLK Day essay contest and Day of Service initiatives.



- Salma Kazmi: Distribute the direct registration link associated with the Narrative 4 training QR code to commissioners.
- Compliance & Training Subcommittee: Review wage theft ordinance enforcement and related initiatives.
- Brian Sokol: Develop an attendance tracking system for the Commission.
- Elyse Best: Email Neha Singh to request guidance on the ordinance amendment process.
- Elyse Best: Consult with Solicitor Shapiro regarding fundraising options and applicable legal requirements.
- Elyse Best: Schedule future Administration Subcommittee meetings for the third Monday of each month at 5:00 PM.
- Primrose Chareka: Circulate guidance on meeting minutes preparation to the note-taking rotation of volunteers.
- Compliance & Training Subcommittee: Distribute a survey or recommendations for focus group follow-up activities by December.
- Jason Mackey: Follow up with Elijah Booker to clarify the scope of matters the Rights Violation Committee may discuss regarding complaints in progress.
- Jason Mackey: Schedule the first Rights Violation Committee meeting for the first Wednesday in December.
- Christopher Spicer-Hankle: Follow up with Elijah Booker regarding MLK Day service planning.
- Primrose Chareka: Send a survey to commissioners to identify dates for January strategic planning meetings by the end of next week.
- Elyse Best: Consult with the City Solicitor regarding executive session requirements for the strategic planning meeting.
- Elijah Booker (RSJ): Confirm requirements for weekend meetings and whether staff support is required.
- Brian Sokol, Jenny Bonham-Carter, and Jovana: Continue drafting the Commission mission statement and report back at the next meeting.
- Elyse Best: Finalize planning for the ageism event and bring a proposal forward for a December vote for March programming.



Meeting Summary

The Human Rights Commission met from 6:30 PM to 7:57 PM to review and approve prior meeting minutes, advance the process for filling an open commissioner seat, and discuss ongoing and future initiatives. The Commission approved the posting of the vacant seat, authorized funding for an MLK Day essay contest scholarship, and delegated MLK Day planning to the Information, Advocacy & Engagement Subcommittee. Members also discussed progress on Narrative 4 training and explored potential Human Rights Commission initiatives related to immigration rights, Next HRC Meeting: December 17th, 2025, including partnerships, education, and data-informed advocacy.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:57 PM.

Next Human Rights Meeting: December 17th, 2025