

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, November 20th, 2025 — 3:00 pm

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

- I. Call to order and review of draft minutes from the meeting on October 23, 2025.  
The meeting was called to order by roll call vote.  
Commissioner Rona Fischman moved to approve the minutes as written. Commissioner Kay Mammo seconded and the minutes were approved unanimously.  
Commissioner Dennis Fischman thanked Gloria Huangpu from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) for attending the meeting and for the technical assistance MAPC has been providing.
- II. Standing Agenda Items
  - Facebook page update- The Fair Housing Commission has a Facebook page, which can be found by searching SomervilleFairHousingCommission on Facebook. Commissioner Dennis F. shared that the Commission posts a news article every Friday and a question of the week every Monday on the page. In the past month, they also posted a link to the results of the Mayoral and City Council candidate questionnaire from the Fair Housing Commission. That post had 470 views, 1 reaction, and 7 shares. Commissioner Dennis F. thanked Commissioner Patrice Faulkner, who was a lead in making and sending the questionnaire, and all of the Commissioners who posted the QR code to the questionnaire around Somerville.
  - Review of calls and complaints since the last meeting- Shannon Lawler updated the Commission on a complaint discussed the previous month, in which a household was not told they would need to pay for water, and when they received their annual lease, they were also sent a water bill for the previous year. The household, through the Office of Housing Stability (OHS), connected with the Inspectional Services Department (ISD) to inspect if there were any leaks that caused the water bill to be larger than average. They did not come to a conclusion and connected with the Department of Public Works (DPW) to investigate further. They have a case worker with OHS, who is in contact with an attorney. This could be a fair housing issue, with national origin as the protected class, because the household are not proficient English speakers and did not understand the written lease, which was not translated for them.  
Shannon also received a complaint from a household who lived in a top floor unit that had a rooftop fan which caused excessive noise and vibrations which were detrimental to

their sleep and mental health. Over 50 days prior to reaching out to the Commission, they provided their management company with a note from a healthcare provider requesting a reasonable accommodation for them to transfer to a unit on a lower floor that would be unaffected by the rooftop fan noise and vibrations. They did not receive any response from the landlord. They spoke to an attorney and decided to terminate their tenancy-at-will and have now moved out of the building. Shannon shared that they could submit a complaint to the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination and provided resources on how to do so. Commissioner Dennis F. added that during the community engagement process, community partners shared that one of the biggest needs related to fair housing is educating housing providers to try to proactively prevent discrimination, because many people who are discriminated against in housing are not in a position to make a complaint even though they know their rights.

### III. Updates on Specific Activities

- MAPC technical assistance- Commissioner Dennis F. reintroduced Gloria, who provided updates about continued community engagement conversations, which were focused on how the Commission can reach smaller landlords, and developing a plan for engagement through Fair Housing Month in April of 2026.
  - Gloria reviewed the Commission’s agreements and goals, including expanding priority for engagement to small and medium landlords, having a series of smaller, specific events to test materials leading up to Fair Housing Month, reiterating the events that each Commissioner had the most interest in, and creating updated educational materials that are targeted separately to tenants and landlords.
  - Gloria and Shannon met with the Davis Square Neighborhood Council, Somerville YIMBY, and municipal staff from Worcester and Chicopee who work directly with landlords. This assisted in understanding how to best frame messaging for landlords, helping to support them in compliance with fair housing law in addition to providing helpful resources, such as for home improvement. The neighborhood councils and Somerville YIMBY may be spaces where the Commission can better reach small landlords. Commissioner Dennis F. noted that in the past, Housing Division has brought in larger landlords and done educational activities and that partnering with the Office of Housing Stability, which has resources for landlords (e.g. the voucher incentive program), could help with landlord outreach. Additionally, he commented that because the staff liaison presents at the Somerville Community Corporation (SCC) first time homebuyer courses, if SCC has the contact of their former course participants, this may be an avenue to reaching current smaller landlords who are already familiar with the Commission. Commissioner Patrice F. added that there may be a way for the Commission to have a contact list and create a space for smaller landlords to meet and gain resources, if there is capacity. Commissioner Rona Fischman mentioned that the Commission had discussed creating basic resources for landlords to put on their webpage with MAPC. She added that she looked into the Realtor database to find out if there was a way to sort homeownership demographic data based on age to help collaborate with the Somerville Council on Aging, but that the data cannot be sorted by age of landlord. Gloria shared that in one of the cities she met with, they did a mass mailing to all multifamily landlords to invite them to attend their landlords support program lunch series, however, an effort of this scale would likely require multiple divisions and departments, such as Housing, OHS, ISD, and the Fire Department.

- The MAPC housing team developed draft engagement materials: a fact sheet for landlords, focused on dispelling myths and resources, and a fact sheet for tenants, focused on guidance for what to do if one encounters fair housing discrimination. The Commission provided input and planned to send further input after the meeting. Commissioner Dennis F. suggested that something be added relating to family status, particularly related to rules around lead abatement, in the “myth-busting” section, as this is a form of discrimination that is seen somewhat frequently by the Commission and property owners may not know that there is financial assistance available from the City for lead abatement. Commissioner Patrice F. suggested adding a section related to assistance animals, clarifying that housing providers cannot require pet deposits for these animals. Commissioner Rona F. requested to add that there are some exemptions to fair housing law for owner-occupied two-family homes, but that the protected classes of race and recipient of rental or public assistance are never exempted from fair housing law, that discriminatory advertising is never allowed, and that owner-occupants using a real estate professional to fill the unit are not exempted from any fair housing law.
- Commissioner Dennis F. asked where and how the fact sheets will be distributed and noted that flyers for bulletin boards need to be very eye-catching to get attention from the public.
- Fair Housing Month
  - Gloria led a discussion of the Commission’s planned upcoming engagement events. In the lead up to Fair Housing Month (January to March 2026) the planned events are tabling at the MAMAS Free Store, asynchronous engagement at library branches, and presenting at a Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS) Movement Meeting. During Fair Housing Month (April 2026), the Commission planned to host a program at the Council on Aging, a training for City social workers, and a targeted landlord education event. Each Commissioner planned to lead one event and support one event, and to coordinate with Shannon and Gloria about event outreach.
- No other updates on specific activities were discussed.

**IV. Continued Business**

- FY24 Annual Report – tabled to December meeting
- FY25 Annual Report – tabled to December meeting

**V. Announcements**

- The December Fair Housing Commission meeting was rescheduled to December 11, 2025.

**VI. Adjournment**

- The meeting was adjourned at 4:08 PM.