



## **City of Somerville**

### **Department of Racial and Social Justice**

### **Somerville Human Rights Commission (HRC)**

#### **Interim Meeting**

#### **Proposed Minutes**

**Date:** February 4, 2026

**Location:** Virtual

**Time:** 6:30 PM – approximately 8:00 PM

Note Taker: Co-Chair Salma Kazmi (Confirmed)

#### **Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order by Co-Chair Elyse Best at approximately 6:30 p.m., with eight Commissioners present, quorum met.



## **Attendance**

### **Commissioners Present:**

- Elyse Best (Co-Chair)
- Salma Kazmi (Co-Chair)
- Brian Sokol (Commissioner)
- Christopher Spicer Hankle (Commissioner)
- Primrose Chakera (Commissioner)
- Jenny Bonham-Carter (Commissioner)
- Jovana Calvillo (Commissioner)
- Jason Mackey (Commissioner)

### **Commissioners Absent:**

- Suelin Chen (Commissioner)
- Pao Mendez (Commissioner)
- Lauren Chapman (Commissioner)

## **1. Old Business – Continued Discussion: Review of Options to Address Incidents of Hate in Somerville**

### *Review of Options to Address Incidents of Hate in Somerville*

The Commission continued discussion from the prior meeting following a presentation by the City's social justice investigator regarding hate incident reporting and investigations.



Commissioners referenced the reported number of incidents over the past year and discussed whether current investigative practices and reporting structures align with the intent of the HRC ordinance and the Commission's responsibilities.

Commissioners also reflected on recent incidents and broader social conditions, noting the importance of clearly defining the Commission's role in an environment where bias incidents may be increasing and where residents expect transparency and accountability.

### **Section Summary:**

The Commission agreed that the meeting's purpose was to clarify its role, strengthen transparency, and determine what information and processes are necessary for meaningful oversight and recommendations.

## **2. Access to Data from RSJ**

The Commission discussed its request to RSJ regarding access to hate and bias incident data. Two categories of data were identified:

- A breakdown of aggregate data, including trends, numbers, and types of incidents
- Access to individual complaints or detailed information sufficient to understand patterns



**Basis of concern:**

- RSJ appears willing to provide aggregate data but has indicated reluctance to provide individual complaint data.
- The limitations on sharing individual complaints were not clearly explained.
- Commissioners discussed the need to understand legal, privacy, and procedural constraints affecting data sharing.

Commissioners noted that aggregate statistics alone may not provide enough information to identify systemic issues, evaluate responses, or recommend policy improvements.

**Section Summary**

Commissioners concluded that access to meaningful and sufficiently detailed data is essential for the Commission to evaluate trends, understand responses, and make informed recommendations.

**3. Avenues of Reporting and Clarity**

The Commission discussed current reporting mechanisms and transparency concerns.

*Topics discussed included:*

- The Somerville Police Department maintains its own hate and bias reporting process.
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- There was discussion regarding whether complaints submitted through RSJ may be routed to the police.
- Commissioners noted that it is not always clear to residents where complaints are routed or how investigations proceed.
- Commissioners emphasized that residents should understand how complaints are handled before submitting them.

*Additional discussions:*

- The importance of transparency for vulnerable communities.
- The potential need for reporting mechanisms that do not automatically involve law enforcement.
- The possibility that the HRC could help consolidate data across reporting systems and provide trend analysis.

Commissioners discussed whether the RSJ website clearly discloses that submitted reports may be routed to the police and emphasized that residents should be informed of routing and investigation procedures prior to submission. Clarifying this information on the website was identified as an important transparency measure

Comments in the Zoom chat reinforced these concerns, particularly regarding lack of clarity on routing and investigation processes and the importance of transparency.

## **Section Summary**

The Commission agreed that transparency in complaint routing, investigation, and resolution processes is critical to maintaining public trust and ensuring equitable access to reporting mechanisms.



#### **4. Role of the Human Rights Commission**

Commissioners discussed possible roles for the HRC:

- Conducting regular reviews of incidents
- Identifying patterns and trends
- Providing recommendations to City leadership
- Issuing public statements when appropriate
- Serving in an oversight or watchdog capacity

Commissioners referenced historical arrangements in which the Commission exercised greater investigative coordination, including prior data-sharing practices and the possibility of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the state to clarify roles and avoid duplication of investigations. This discussion raised broader questions about the Commission's structural authority and how its role has evolved over time

#### **Section Summary**

The Commission emphasized that defining its role clearly and strengthening its capacity to analyze data and provide recommendations are essential to fulfilling its mandate.

#### **5. Proactive and Reactive Framework**

Primrose introduced a framework distinguishing proactive and reactive work.



Proactive work includes:

- Prevention and education
- Outreach and community engagement
- Building partnerships and networks

Reactive work includes:

- Responding to incidents after they occur
- Reviewing investigations
- Recommending changes to prevent recurrence

Commissioners noted that legal limitations mean much of the Commission's work will necessarily be reactive, particularly in reviewing incidents and advising on improvements.

## **Section Summary**

Commissioners agreed that the proactive-reactive framework provides a practical way to organize priorities and realistically define the Commission's responsibilities.

## **6. Key Requests Identified**

The Commission identified the following priorities:

- Access to hate incident data, retroactive and ongoing
- Visibility into complaint routing
- HRC input into routing decisions



- Clear public explanation of routing procedures on the RSJ website
- Input into routing and investigation processes
- Being informed of investigations in progress
- Consolidation of data across reporting systems
- Ability to identify trends and recommend action

Commissioners also discussed concerns arising from the understanding that some reports may be routed to the police. It was noted that this process could create anxiety or reluctance among residents, particularly those who may already feel vulnerable or distrustful of law enforcement, and that this concern has implications for access to reporting and community trust.

## **Section Summary**

These requests were identified as necessary for the Commission to analyze incidents effectively, identify patterns, and provide informed policy recommendations.

## **7. Proactive Work Updates**

Commissioners reported updates on ongoing initiatives:

- Development of a Music Network initiative
- Collaboration between arts organizations and the Poor People's Campaign
- Planning of an interfaith initiative



## Section Summary

These initiatives reflect the Commission's proactive role in education, outreach, and community engagement.

## **8. Commissioner Engagement and Morale – Potluck Gathering**

*Informal gathering. No business will be discussed, according to Open Meeting Laws.*

Jenny and Primrose discussed organizing an informal HRC potluck gathering to support relationship-building among commissioners.

Purpose of the gathering:

- Strengthening working relationships
- Build trust and collegiality
- Create informal opportunities for connection outside meetings

Coordination and logistics:

- Primrose will circulate a spreadsheet to commissioners to confirm attendance, food contributions, and document dietary needs – within week of this meeting.
- Jenny and Primrose will work together to coordinate logistics and propose a date and location.



## **Section Summary**

Commissioners noted that strong working relationships and morale contribute to effective collaboration and sustained Commission work.

## **9. Ways of Working Improvements**

The Commission discussed internal process improvements, including:

- Documenting expectations for commissioners
- Improving clarity around assignments and timelines
- Adding an email address, LinkTree, and QR code to business cards

## **Section Summary**

Improving internal communication, documentation, and expectations was identified as important to strengthening accountability and workflow.

## **10. Action Items**

- Salma to update business cards with LinkTree, QR code, and email address
- Christopher to develop a list of expectations for commissioners
- Primrose to circulate potluck coordination spreadsheet
- Jenny and Primrose to coordinate potluck logistics and propose a date



## **11. Votes**

### **Vote 1: Mission Statement**

The Commission reviewed and approved the mission statement. **The motion was made, seconded, and passed unanimously.**

### **Vote 2: HRC Logo Selection**

The Commission discussed two logo options and **voted to adopt Logo Option 2.**

### **Vote 3: Next Steps on Hate Incident Data**

The Commission **approved next steps** regarding requests for data access and transparency.

## **Section Summary**

These votes established key organizational materials and confirmed a shared direction regarding data access, transparency, and next steps.

## **12. Next Steps**

- Seek clarification from RSJ regarding data access and routing
- Prepare questions and priorities for discussion with the Mayor
- Consider formal public records requests if necessary as a later step

## **Section Summary**



Commissioners agreed to pursue clarification and engagement with City leadership before considering formal records requests.

## **11. Summary of Relevant Zoom Chat Discussion**

During the meeting, commissioners used the Zoom chat to share resources and clarify issues related to hate/bias incident reporting, transparency, and the role of the Human Rights Commission.

### **Reporting Processes and Transparency**

Links to the Somerville Police Department hate-incident reporting page and online reporting form were shared to illustrate current reporting pathways. Commissioners noted that it is not clearly disclosed to residents when or how information submitted through certain forms may be routed to the police. Commissioners emphasized that transparency about routing, investigation, and data-sharing processes is essential, particularly for residents who may feel vulnerable or reluctant to engage with law enforcement.

### **Role of RSJ and Relationship to the Commission**

Commissioners discussed the relationship between the Human Rights Commission and the Office of Racial and Social Justice (RSJ). It was clarified that RSJ serves as a liaison and support office, and that the Commission maintains an independent (autonomous) advisory and policy role while collaborating with RSJ and other city departments.

### **Access to Data and Process Improvements**

Key priorities summarized in the chat included:

- Access to hate/bias incident data, both retroactive and ongoing.



- Greater visibility into how complaints are routed and investigated. Clear public information on the RSJ website explaining reporting pathways.
- Reducing silos across multiple reporting systems.
- Using consolidated data to identify trends and recommend actions to the City.

### **Legal and Procedural Clarifications**

Commissioners clarified that requests for records would be made under the Massachusetts Public Records Law, rather than the federal FOIA process.

### **Training and Commission Operations**

Commissioners noted that a more structured onboarding process could help ensure clarity regarding roles, procedures, and expectations.

### **Additional Notes**

Commissioners used the chat to acknowledge ongoing community-building initiatives and to share reference materials, including the Commission's mission statement and supporting documents relevant to its work.

## **Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at approximately 8:26 PM.

Total Duration: Approximately 1 hour 26 minutes

**Next regular monthly meeting:** February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2026, 6:30 P.M.

