

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
FAIR HOUSING COMMISSION

Jacob D. Wilson
Mayor

Staff

Shannon Lawler-
Program Specialist, Fair Housing and
Inclusionary Housing Support

Commissioners

Patrice Faulkner
Dennis Fischman
Janine Lotti

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, January 22nd, 2026 — 3:00 PM

Attending: FHC members: Patrice Faulkner, Dennis Fischman, Janine Lotti
City staff: Shannon Lawler, Alanna Gaffny

- I. Call to order and review of draft minutes from the meeting on December 11, 2025.
The meeting was called to order by roll call vote.
Commissioner Patrice Faulkner moved to approve the minutes as written, Commissioner Janine Lotti seconded, and the minutes were approved unanimously.
- II. Announcements
 - Alanna Gaffny introduced herself, she was formerly the Inclusionary Housing Program manager and is now the Deputy Director of Housing Division, supervising Shannon Lawler's role as the Fair Housing Specialist.
 - Commissioner Dennis Fischman shared that the Commission has two vacant seats which they are looking to fill.
- III. Standing Agenda Items
 - Facebook page update- Commissioner Dennis F. shared that you can find the Commission's Facebook page by going on Facebook and typing in "SomervilleFairHousingCommission."
 - Review of calls and complaints since the last meeting- Shannon received one complaint from someone living in a Somerville Housing Authority (SHA) unit. They were sent a notice to quit the previous year and received assistance from Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS). They received another notice to quit and are now receiving more assistance from GBLS. The household may have a fair housing complaint because they requested a reasonable accommodation to transfer to a first floor unit, but they have only been offered one-bedroom units despite being a two person household. Commissioner Janine L. asked if the household has reached out to the Resident Services department at SHA and suggested that they could reach out to Shannon Bennett with that department.
- IV. Updates on Specific Activities
 - Fair Housing Month
 - Commissioner Dennis F. reiterated that the Commission is looking to fill the two vacant seats on the Commission. He has been working with the Commission for Women and the Commission for Persons with Disabilities to send an email to the new mayor asking to expedite the process to fill the seats, to work towards an understanding of open meeting law that allows for working groups to meet, and

to adequately support staff liaisons because a lack of support affects the work and institutional memory of the Commission.

- Commissioner Dennis F. noted that a key finding of the consulting work that the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) has done for the Commission was that community partners placed value on educating landlords to prevent discrimination before it happens. Gloria Huangpu, from MAPC, confirmed these findings, and noted that reaching populations more vulnerable to discrimination is less effective because of the current environment and that many tenants already know their rights, but are hesitant to exercise them. When reaching out to residents who may experience discrimination, the focus will be on ensuring they are aware of next steps in reporting discrimination and ways they can exercise their rights. For outreach specific to housing providers, the focus will be on small landlords who are looking for information and support in filling their responsibilities.

- Commissioner Dennis F. opened the conversation to the Commission's capacity and which events they want to organize in Fair Housing Month. Shannon listed the options: *The Color of Law* event at the library, tabling at the Mutual Aid Medford and Somerville (MAMAS) free store, an event at the Council on Aging targeted to small local landlords, and the Community Action Agency of Somerville Movement Meeting.

Gloria added that the Council on Aging event and library events have set dates already.

Commissioner Patrice F. shared that MAMAS' board wanted to meet with the Commission well before the free store event, so it likely will not happen before April. She emphasized the importance of the event, after Fair Housing Month, and the partnership with MAMAS. She will reach out to schedule a time to meet with MAMAS in the upcoming month. Commissioner Janine L. suggested contacting Pastor Jordan Harris at Connexion church and former Commissioner Rona Fischman added that the Commission and the church have a connection from herself, Gloria, and Shannon meeting with Jordan in the fall of 2025.

Shannon shared the MAMAS website: <https://www.mutualaidmamas.com/>.

Commissioner Janine L. noted that having more than two events in April may go over the Commission's current capacity.

Commissioner Dennis F. reported that he has been in communication with CAAS and they will schedule a planning meeting in the upcoming month. He suggested that an event with CAAS does not need to happen in April.

The Commission agreed to do the events at the Council on Aging and library in April, and wait until later months for the CAAS and MAMAS collaborations.

- Discuss Commissioners' pre-work outlines of each event-

Commissioner Janine L. shared her plan for the event, including an interactive activity/game, talking to them about what the Commission does, and landlord incentives in Somerville.

Commissioner Dennis F. will work on the publicity for the library event. The Commission discussed whether they should update the library event to be more focused on the state of fair housing today, but ultimately decided to continue with *The Color of Law* focused event for this year, based on capacity.

Shannon will make the flyers for both events and submit them for translation.

Commissioner Dennis F. asked the Commission how to ensure that the Department of Racial and Social Justice (RSJ), who were partners in the

previous year's Fair Housing Month, know about this year's events. Commissioner Patrice F. emphasized the importance of continued collaboration with RSJ and will reach out to them to invite their staff and share the events with their broader distribution list.

- Capacity building for future Commission members- Commissioner Dennis F. asked that Shannon and the Commissioners take notes and document what they are doing to prepare for Fair Housing Month for future Commissioners have when they are planning events. Gloria added that there are template facilitation plans for each event for current and future reference.

V. Continued Business

- FY24 Annual Report – tabled for February meeting
- FY25 Annual Report – tabled for February meeting

VI. Announcements

- The next meeting is scheduled for February 26, 2026 at 3:00 PM.

VII. Adjournment

- The meeting was adjourned at 4:18 PM.