



City of Somerville

Department of Racial Social Justice

Somerville Human Rights Commission

Monthly Meeting

March 25, 2026, 6:30 PM

Zoom Meeting

Proposed Minutes

Time called to order: 6:35 PM

Presiding: Salma Kazmi, Co-Chair

Notes by: Christopher Spicer Hankle, Commissioner

1. Call to Order

Salma called the meeting to order at 6:35 PM and asked for a note taker. Christopher agreed to take notes.

2. Roll Call and Attendance

Present commissioners at roll call: Brian Sokol, Jenny Bonham-Carter, Salma Kazmi (Co-Chair), Christopher Spicer Hankle, Suelin Chen, Primrose Chareka, and Lauren Chapman, establishing quorum. RSJ liaison Elijah Booker was present. Jason was expected to join later. Elyse Best (Co-Chair) was absent.



3. Approval of Previous Minutes

The Commission reviewed the minutes from the February meeting.

- A motion was made, seconded, and the vote to approve the minutes passed.4.

Old Business

A. Wage Theft Training Update

Summary: The Commission received a progress update on planning for the wage theft training, including content development, speakers, and event framing.

- Brian Sokol provided an update on the wage theft training.
- Content from the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office was reported as largely complete.
- Brian requested additional content addressing domestic workers and immigrant workers to ensure the training materials reflected the event's purpose and audience.
- Rodrigo, representing the Painters Union, was expected to serve as a speaker; final presentation materials had not yet been received.
- Brian reported that Salma would likely provide the Human Rights Commission introduction at the event and offer a brief overview of the Commission's role.
- Brian stated he was gathering data to help frame the scope of wage theft issues for that introduction.

Status: Ongoing planning and coordination.

No vote taken.



B. Venue and Interpretation

Summary: The Commission confirmed the event location and discussed accessibility logistics for hybrid participation.

- The venue was confirmed at the Somerville Public Library.
- Owl video conferencing equipment was confirmed as available.
- Zoom registration would be used to provide the remote participation link.
- The Commission discussed language interpretation options for remote attendees.
- Elijah stated he would confirm the appropriate interpretation process with Hawken and SOIA (Somerville Office of Immigrant affairs).

Action Item:

- Elijah to confirm remote interpretation procedures and technical setup.

C. Flyer Outreach

Summary: The Commission finalized flyer distribution plans and assigned neighborhood outreach responsibilities.

- Brian reported that the event flyer had undergone several revisions and was ready for distribution.
- The Commission discussed distributing approximately 150 flyers across the city.
- Outreach responsibilities were divided by neighborhood, including:
 - Union Square
 - Davis Square
 - Gilman Square
 - Prospect Hill
 - East Somerville
 - Magoon Square



- Assembly Square
- Nearby areas

Outreach commitments included:

- Jenny to share the flyer with Interfaith Council contacts and explore posting opportunities at Somerville High School.
- Suelin to promote the flyer through neighborhood listservs.
- Primrose to distribute flyers in Prospect Hill and nearby areas.
- Salma to distribute flyers in East Somerville.
- Brian to follow up with Jason and Elyse regarding additional outreach coverage, particularly in Assembly and Ball Square.

Additional outreach strategies discussed:

- Social media outreach, including Facebook
- Personal and professional networks
- City Councilor newsletters
- Outreach to local businesses and contractors
- Christopher offered to email an existing East Somerville restaurant contact list to support outreach efforts.

Status: Outreach assignments underway.

No vote taken.

D. Food and Budget

Summary: The Commission approved an increase to the event food budget to support participation during the dinner-hour training.



- Brian reported that food planning had shifted from a homemade option to using a professional caterer.
- Members were asked to submit food preferences to support final vendor selection.
- Salma noted that the event would occur during dinner hours.
- She stated that the Commission had not yet expended a significant portion of its \$3,500 allocation.
- The Commission discussed increasing the food budget to support attendance and accessibility.
- Brian proposed increasing the food allocation to \$1,000 to provide flexibility for food and related costs.

Motion:

- To increase the wage theft training food budget allocation to \$1,000.

Second: Recorded.

Vote:

- Approved unanimously.

Action Item:

- Committee to finalize catering arrangements based on approved budget.

E. Translation Logistics

Summary: The Commission confirmed interpretation services and expanded language access for outreach materials.

- Brian reported that the Commission secured a student translator.



- In-person Spanish interpretation would be provided using headsets.
- Approximately 30 headsets were projected to be sufficient based on expected attendance.
- Attendees requiring interpretation in other languages would be able to request accommodations in advance through RSVP.
- Elijah confirmed that the flyer had been submitted for translation.
- Elijah requested that materials also be translated into:
 - Nepali
 - Traditional Chinese
 - Simplified Chinese
- The Commission approved additional language translations for outreach materials, including Nepali, Traditional Chinese, and Simplified Chinese

Action Item:

- Ensure translated flyers are distributed in the approved languages.

5. New Business

A. Human Rights Report

Summary: The Commission initiated planning for the Human Rights Report and scheduled working meetings.

- Salma provided an update on the planned Human Rights Report.
- Volunteers had signed up to participate.
- Meetings were scheduled from the present date through June.
- The first meeting was scheduled for the 30th.
- Salma noted that meetings must be publicly posted to ensure compliance with Open Meeting Law requirements.



Action Item:

- Ensure that all report-related meetings are properly posted in advance.

B. Mayor's Staff Meeting Update

Summary: The Commission discussed data access and limitations within the current complaints intake system.

- Salma summarized a prior meeting with the Mayor's Chief of Staff, staff from the Somerville Office of Racial and Social Justice, and David Shapiro, City Solicitor.
- Discussion topics included:
 - Complaint intake procedures
 - Access to complaint data
 - Investigation processes
- Salma explained that the intake system uses JotForm.
- Complaints were not currently being tabulated into a spreadsheet or database.
- This limitation made reporting and analysis more difficult.
- The City committed to sharing raw complaint data.
- The Commission is expected to receive 2024 and 2025 data soon.

Discussion:

- Suelin noted that JotForm typically has data tabulation functionality.
- She suggested the issue may be related to configuration or workflow.
- Brian offered that the Commission could help improve the process.
- Salma stated her immediate priority was obtaining the data before addressing process improvements.

No vote taken.



C. Sensitive Complaint Discussion

Summary: The Commission discussed a reported complaint handling gap and the need for a consistent response framework.

- Salma raised an incident involving a complaint that appeared to have been submitted through the RSJ website but had not been addressed.
- The example involved an email describing a hate-crime or verbal-assault incident witnessed and shared with the Commission.
- Salma stated she raised the matter with RSJ and the Mayor's Chief of Staff as an example of a potential process gap.

Discussion:

- Suelin recommended developing a response template that:
 - Centers the harmed person or people.
 - Ensures listening and documentation.
 - Identifies actions within the Commission's authority and resources.
- **Jenny** agreed and emphasized transparency about the development process.
- Christopher stated that prior collective actions should be accurately documented.
- Salma stated she did not want to describe actions as formalized without a clear operational process or defined remedies.

No vote taken.

D. Complaint Response Actions

Summary: The Commission assigned follow-up responsibilities to strengthen incident response procedures.

- Salma proposed that the Rights Violation Response Committee complete the following tasks:
 - Draft a statement acknowledging actions taken in response to the incident.



- Develop a menu of possible response options for future incidents.
- These tasks were approved.

Additional discussion:

- The Commission discussed requesting legal guidance regarding subpoena authority and procedural steps.
- Jovana suggested asking the City Solicitor directly how the authority should be used.
- Salma agreed to follow up with David Shapiro, the City Solicitor.

Action Items:

- Rights Violation Response Committee to draft acknowledgment statement.
- Rights Violation Response Committee to develop response options framework.
- Salma to follow up with the City Attorney regarding subpoena authority.

E. Additional Updates

Outreach: Jenny's Outreach, Interfaith Council

Jenny (from Promotion of Diversity City Subcommittee) reported engagement with the **Somerville Interfaith Council** as part of community relationship-building and coordination. Awareness update.

This outreach relates to:

- Connecting the Commission with faith-based community leaders
- Supporting communication between the Commission and religious communities
- Building partnerships for community response, education, and dialogue
- Potential collaboration around trainings and community support initiatives



Media and Public Communications

Summary: The Commission reviewed and voted on social media content and community engagement postings.

- Commissioners discussed proposed items for posting on Commission social media platforms.
- Commissioners expressed some concerns and pushbacks regarding posting content related to the Cyrus Cylinder.
- The Commission considered several public awareness and community engagement posts.

Items considered for posting included:

- Public Housing Day, April 16.
- Immigration Advocacy Day.
- Earth Day.
- Women's History Month recognition.
- Social media engagement (e.g., liking or sharing) content from the North American Indian Center of Boston event.
- Community advocacy opportunities shared by the Somerville Food Security Coalition, including sign-up for advocacy communications.
- Immigrants Day at the State House participation and recognition.

Decision:

- The Commission voted to approve social media posting of the listed community engagement and awareness items.

Vote:

- Motion passed.



Record Note:

- Discussion included differing viewpoints regarding posting content related to the Cyrus Cylinder; however, the vote approved the broader set of social media items.

Community Events and Engagement Opportunities

Summary: Commissioners shared upcoming community events and encouraged participation and information sharing.

- The Chair of Information and Advocacy invited Commissioners to share upcoming events the Commission may participate in during the coming weeks.
- Examples shared included:
 - “No Kings” gathering — March 28
 - “Her Stories” Women’s Month event — March 31
 - Book launch for *The Criminal State: War, Atrocity, and the Dream of International Justice* at the **Harvard Law School Human Rights Program**
 - Community events hosted by the **North American Indian Center of Boston**

Status:

- Events shared for awareness and possible participation.
- No vote taken.

Future Business

Summary: Commissioners discussed ongoing training priorities and the importance of public acknowledgment in response to community harm.



- Commissioners serving on the Training Committee were encouraged to continue advancing planning for upcoming trainings scheduled for the year.
- Discussion included continued preparation for potential Islamophobia training.

Commissioner Statements (summarized for the record):

- Jovana stated that such an event could demonstrate support for the Muslim community and acknowledge harm experienced in Somerville.
- Lauren stated that public recognition can serve as a crucial first step in a transformative justice process.

Additional Discussion:

- Commissioners raised questions about timelines and process expectations related to the Somerville Office of Racial and Social Justice, including:
 - How long response timelines typically take.
 - Whether those timelines were included in the original documentation.

Status:

- Discussion only.
- No vote taken.

Adjournment

- No adjournment time was stated in the transcript.
- The absence of a recorded adjournment time is noted for the official record.

Key Decisions

- The February minutes were approved.
- The wage theft training food budget increased from \$300 to \$1,000.
- Commissioners voted to approve items for social media.



- Commissioners agreed to distribute flyers broadly using multiple outreach methods.
- The flyer was approved for additional language translation, including:
 - Nepali
 - Traditional Chinese
 - Simplified Chinese
- The Rights Violation Response Committee was tasked with drafting a statement and developing future response options.
- Minutes were Approved.

Exhibits / Materials Referenced

A. Materials Distributed or Approved by the Commission

- Wage Theft Training Flyer (final version) .
- Translated Wage Theft Training Flyers.
 - Spanish (in-person interpretation supported)
 - Nepali
 - Traditional Chinese
 - Simplified Chinese
- Social Media / Communications Posting List (community engagement approvals).

B. Materials Referenced During Discussion (Not Formally Distributed)

Training & Policy Materials

- Content presented from the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office (wage theft training materials).



C. Internal Committee Work (Referenced Only)

- Rights Violation Response Committee:
 - Draft acknowledgment statement
 - Develop response options framework
- Training topics under discussion:
 - Wage theft
 - Islamophobia
 - Anti-Semitism

D. External Events / Community Materials Referenced

- Public Housing Day (April 16)
- Immigration Advocacy Day
- Earth Day
- Women's Month programming
- Immigrants Day at the State House (March 18)
- "No Kings" gathering (March 28)
- "Her Stories" event (March 31)
- Book launch: *The Criminal State: War, Atrocity, and the Dream of International Justice*
- North American Indian Center of Boston programming

E. Advocacy / Community Organizations Referenced

- Somerville Food Coalition (advocacy sign-up and communications list)
- North American Indian Center of Boston

F. Social Media Content List (Approved Items)

Approved for posting:



- Public Housing Day
- Immigration Advocacy Day
- Earth Day
- Women's Month recognition
- North American Indian Center of Boston engagement
- Somerville Food Coalition advocacy sign-up
- Immigrants Day at the State House

Adjournment: No adjournment time was stated. The absence of a recorded adjournment time is noted for the official record.

Next Meeting: Wednesday, April 29, 2025, at 6:30 PM.

Minutes finalized by: Elyse Best, Co-Chair