

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, April 23rd, 2026 — 3:00 PM

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

- I. Call to order and review of draft minutes from the meeting on March 26, 2026.
The meeting was called to order by roll call vote.
The review of minutes was tabled to the May Commission meeting.

- II. Standing Agenda Items
 - Facebook page update- The Commission has a Facebook page titled SomervilleFairHousing. Commissioner Dennis Fischman shared that the item with the most attention in the last month was a question about what to do if one's landlord refuses to fix the back stairway. If it is an accessibility issue, disability is a protected class, and this could be a fair housing issue. The post received 151 views and 5 interactions. Another post asking "what is fair housing month" received a lot of attention. A news item about providing reasonable accommodations for people in drug or alcohol recovery by allowing more people to live in a location than typically allowed by zoning laws also received attention. Commissioner Dennis F. mentioned that Somerville had laws on how many unrelated persons could live together. Shannon Lawler added that this law recently changed, where before up to four unrelated persons could live together, now residential occupancy is any number of persons living together, even if they are unrelated. Commissioners Dennis F. and Janine Lotti asked whether this was related to the change in the Fair Housing Ordinance to add protections for polyamorous individuals.
 - Review of calls and complaints since the last meeting- Shannon received two new referrals in the past month.
The first complainant's protected class was family status. They claimed that their landlord has threatened them with eviction if they do not reduce the noise in their apartment related to their young children. They have also received several written noise complaints. The household feels they may be treated differently from the neighbor who is submitting the complaint and verbally harassing them, especially during and after the informal mediation meeting conducted by their property manager. They shared that they do everything possible to reduce the noise caused by the children, who make an appropriate amount of noise for their ages. The household was asked to sign a mediation agreement stating that they agreed to be more contentious of the noise level in their apartment, which concerned them because there was no definition of what noise level was appropriate. This may be discrimination if they are being treated differently based on the household having children, because children must be expected to make a certain level

of noise, and the household should not be threatened with eviction for a reasonable amount of noise.

The second referral came from Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS). The household lives in an Inclusionary unit and felt management was not taking their complaints seriously compared to market rate tenants. In Shannon's understanding, this would not necessarily fall under source of income discrimination because they do not have a voucher, but this may be a gray area in mixed-income buildings. She spoke with the household, who shared that when they first moved into the building, they were the recipients of several noise complaints (and they had a child). At that time, they reached out to the Attorney General's Office, who contacted the property manager to remind them that households with children cannot be treated differently. Currently, their neighbors are making noise during the quiet hours defined in the lease, and despite the noise complaint the household has submitted, the noise level has not changed. CAAS is currently working with the household and property management. Shannon told them to reach back out if the household feels there may be discrimination again based on family status or if there is retaliation.

Shannon also followed up on a complaint from the previous meeting, regarding potential discrimination based on disability related to the complainant smoking medical cannabis on the property. She spoke with the complainant, who shared that the notice to quit was sent for a reason unrelated to the cannabis. The household is already in contact with the Office of Housing Stability (OHS) who connected them to legal services for the eviction.

III. Updates on Specific Activities

- Fair Housing Month review:
 - Council on Aging event- Commissioner Janine L. reported her impressions from the event. The event was well attended and the majority were landlords, so the outreach reached the target audience, which the Commission had not previously reached. Shannon thanked Commissioner Janine L. for her presentation and Commissioner Dennis F. for his assistance with bingo. Gloria Huangpu noted that there was a very diverse group attending the Council on Aging event and that fourteen of the participants filled out the feedback form. Commissioner Janine L. mentioned that the Commission and Council on Aging discussed doing future events together, and that the feedback form would be helpful for future planning. Gloria shared the results of the participant feedback forms. For future events, participants noted that they wanted the Commission to go into more detail. Commissioner Dennis F. received feedback from a participant suggesting that the Commission do the same presentation at the Ralph and Jenny Center by East Somerville to reach a different audience. Commissioner Patrice Faulkner suggested having one event with the Council on Aging in the spring during Fair Housing Month and one in the fall.
 - *Color of Law* library event- Commissioner Patrice F. commented that the outreach work done by the Commission to other organizations brought much higher attendance and participation to the event this year than in previous years. She added that the attendance was very diverse and that the participants were placed into smaller discussion groups which resulted in good conversations. There were participants from Somerville YIMBY and CAAS at the event. Commissioner Patrice F. also thanked Shannon and Luis Quizhpe from the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development for writing the discussion questions for the event. Commissioner Dennis F. added that the Community Preservation Committee was represented at the event as well by Roberta Cameron and Rona Fischman, and they had a board on which

participants could place stickers under the categories they most wanted Community Preservation Act funds to go. Shannon reviewed the methods of outreach for the event, primarily sending the event to the community organizations that the Commission connected with the previous summer and fall. Gloria emphasized the relationship building and starting outreach earlier were likely causes of the higher turn out. Commissioner Dennis F. shared that the discussions were intense, interesting, and varied by each group. Some participants had questions around why Somerville has not done more to address the effects of residential segregation, while others shared that they were learning for the first time about measures the City has taken. Commissioner Patrice F. added that because City employees were there, the event was a good format for them to receive feedback of what people want done. Gloria shared the results of the participant feedback forms, including that people were interested in learning how they could continue engaging and where they can channel their energy.

- MAPC Technical Assistance Program- Gloria confirmed that there is funding through the end of the fiscal year for the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) Technical Assistance Program with the Commission. She also shared some of the outcomes of the year, which will be shared in more detail at the May meeting. Commissioner Patrice F. asked if, in the last two months of the program, MAPC can help the Commission come up with more organizations to connect with and make resources to help replicate the conversations with new organizations. Commissioner Dennis F. shared that the consultation has reshaped the way the Commissioners think of the Commission and its work, and will have a larger impact through future collaboration.
- June CAAS Movement Meeting- Commissioners Patrice F. and Dennis F. will be presenting at the CAAS Movement Meeting in June and will meet to prepare.
- East Somerville Main Streets Carnival- Shannon asked whether the Commissioners want to table at Carnival on June 7. Commissioners Janine L. and Patrice F. tentatively agreed to join Shannon tabling at the event, if the new Commissioners are not sworn in or not able to attend.
- Vacant seats – Shannon updated the Commission that the top two candidates for the open seat were shared with the Mayor and the Mayor selected the top candidate for approval. The Mayor will send the appointee to City Council for approval. For the income-restricted seat, the Mayoral Administration will be running interviews through the Human Resources Department, and the interviews will begin in May. Commissioner Dennis F. noted that he does not want to Commission to lose its role in interviewing and helping to recommend candidates for vacant seats.
- Capacity building for future Commission members- Tabled to the May meeting.

IV. Continued Business

- FY24 Annual Report – with City Council
- FY25 Annual Report

V. Announcements

- The next meeting is scheduled for May 28, 2026 at 3:00 PM

VI. Adjournment

- The meeting was adjourned at 4:10 PM.