



City of Somerville
Somerville Human Rights Commission
Human Rights Commission

June 3, 2026 | 6:30–8:00 PM

Virtual Meeting

Draft Minutes

Meeting Called to Order: Approximately 6:35 PM

Roll Call

Present:

Salma Kazmi (Co-Chair), Elyse Best (Co-Chair), Brian Sokol, Jenny Bonham-Carter, Christopher Spicer Hankle, Jason Mackey, Primrose Chareka, Suelin Chen, Jenny Bonham-Carter, Elijah Booker, (RSJ Staff).

Absent: Pao Mendez, Jovanna Calvillo

1. Subcommittee Updates

Information and Advocacy

Christopher reported that the subcommittee had not met during the previous month. He provided updates on community outreach, food access initiatives, fundraising activities, and the Commission's letter published in the *Somerville Times*. Commissioners also discussed advocacy efforts following the death of Steven McCloskey, including concerns related to resident safety, community care, and emergency response.

Compliance and Training:

Brian reported on ongoing work related to wage theft compliance concerns, collaboration with the Somerville Food Coalition, and exploration of antisemitism and



anti-Muslim/Islamophobia training opportunities. Updates included community outreach efforts and follow-up regarding available training options.

Commissioners discussed volunteer participation at Somerville Food Coalition events and opportunities to distribute Human Rights Commission materials during community outreach efforts.

Promotion of City Diversity Subcommittee

Jenny reported that the subcommittee had experienced scheduling difficulties and had not yet held a formal meeting. She welcomed Elyse to the committee and indicated that members planned to reconvene following the full Commission meeting to establish priorities and a future meeting schedule.

Rights Violations Response Subcommittee

Jason reported that the subcommittee had been unable to meet due to scheduling challenges but anticipated meeting before the next Commission meeting. Commissioners received an update on the status of the Commission's public records request and discussed access to complaint records, ongoing development of complaint response procedures, and future investigation protocols.

Administration Subcommittee

Human Rights Commission Bylaws

Elyse reported on ongoing work to draft Commission bylaws. The purpose of the bylaws is to provide operational clarity, establish procedures where ordinances are silent, and strengthen the Commission's organizational framework. Commissioners were encouraged to review the draft and provide comments. Discussion emphasized the importance of ensuring the bylaws remain flexible while providing sufficient structure for Commission operations.

Human Rights Commission Advisory Council

The Administration Subcommittee also discussed a proposal to establish a Human Rights Advisory Council pursuant to City ordinance:

- The Advisory Council's role as a community engagement and feedback body.
- Potential membership from community organizations, advocacy groups, subject matter experts, and other stakeholders.



- Meeting frequency, with discussion ranging from two to four meetings annually.
- Potential contributions including advising priorities, reviewing Commission initiatives, supporting outreach efforts, and providing community-based perspectives.
- Development of a nomination and selection process to ensure diverse representation and relevant expertise.

Commissioners generally expressed support for continued development of the Advisory Council concept.

Commission Google Drive Access

Commissioners were informed that access permissions for the Commission's Google Drive had been expanded. Members now have read access to Commission materials and edit access to documents associated with their respective subcommittees.

2. ADA Coordinator and Investigator Position

Commissioners discussed concerns regarding the proposed ADA Coordinator and Investigator position, including its scope of responsibilities, placement within Human Resources, and potential implications for the Human Rights Commission's role and independence. Members agreed to seek clarification from City leadership and legal staff regarding the position and its relationship to the Commission.

3. Annual Human Rights Commission Report

Commissioners reviewed the status of the Commission's first annual report.

Discussion included:

- Requests for commissioners to review at minimum the executive summary.
- Plans to circulate the report to partner organizations for feedback.
- Future distribution to City leadership and the City Council.
- Opportunities to strengthen findings, recommendations, and key takeaways from the report.
- The importance of defining what a municipal Human Rights Commission does and how human rights principles apply at the local level.

Commissioners were encouraged to submit comments and feedback before final publication.



4. Transformative Justice

Suelin Chen introduced Transformative Justice as a potential framework for the Commission, including consideration of shifting focus from restorative justice to transformative justice.

- Suelin described Transformative Justice as an approach that seeks to address the root causes of harm outside of carceral systems, including systemic conditions such as unmet needs or lack of resources.
 - Provided an illustrative example comparing carceral, restorative, and transformative approaches using a hypothetical theft scenario.
- Commissioners discussed potential application of the framework in the Commission's work:
 - The role of consent in restorative and transformative processes, and limitations in cases involving non-cooperative parties.
 - The possibility of supporting impacted individuals even when the responding party does not participate.
 - Consideration of harms beyond poverty-related offenses, including white-collar crime and wage theft, and the role of systemic incentives.
 - Interest in Transformative Justice as a guiding mindset, alongside questions about how to operationalize the approach within existing procedures.
- Suelin shared resources (a link and book title) for further review. Commissioners agreed to continue discussion at a future meeting.

5. Public Policy / HRC Involvement

Salma raised the topic of the Commission's involvement in public policy and legislative matters, including how the HRC should engage with the city on issues affecting human rights and investigations.

The Commission discussed its role in reviewing and commenting on matters pertaining to human rights, and its authority to make written recommendations to city officials as part of its ordinance-based functions.



Members also discussed how the Commission's policy and advocacy work relates to public education, coordination with city departments, and broader efforts to protect human rights in municipal processes.

5. Public Comment

A comment was received regarding cameras on school buses. Commissioners discussed appropriate referral options and noted challenges related to public participation in webinar-format meetings due to security concerns.

6. Approval of Minutes: The April 29, 2026 meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

7. Action Items

1. Commissioners to review and comment on draft bylaws.
2. Administration Subcommittee to continue development of the Human Rights Advisory Council proposal.
3. Commissioners to review the annual report and submit feedback.
4. Compliance and Training Subcommittee to continue discussions with Project Shema regarding training opportunities.
5. Volunteers to coordinate participation in upcoming Food Coalition tabling events.
6. CO-Chairs to raise concerns regarding the ADA Coordinator and Investigator position during the upcoming meeting with City officials.
7. Rights Violations Response Subcommittee to continue development of investigation procedures and monitor the status of the public records request.

Adjournment: Meeting concluded at approximately 7:35 PM.

Exhibits, Documents or other Information Shared: Materials Distributed

- Draft Human Rights Commission Bylaws
- Draft Annual Human Rights Commission Report
- Link for Transformative Justice video list and references shared in Chat

Next Meeting: July 29, 2026

Meeting Minutes prepared by Elyse Best, Co-Chair