

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
Calli Masters
Taylor Perkins

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, July 23rd, 2026 — 3:00 PM
Via Zoom—Online Video Platform

Attending: FHC members: Dennis Fischman, Janine Lotti, Calli Masters
City Staff: Shannon Lawler

- I. Call to order and review of draft minutes from the meeting on June 25, 2026.
The meeting was called to order by roll call vote. Commissioner Janine Lotti made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from June 25, 2026 and Commissioner Dennis Fischman seconded.
- II. Welcoming new Commissioners
 - Commissioners Janine L. and Dennis F. and the staff liaison, Shannon Lawler, introduced themselves to Calli Masters, the new Commissioner. Commissioner Calli M. introduced herself, sharing her personal experience and her background working with state-level policy around fair housing.
- III. Standing Agenda Items
 - Facebook page update- Commissioner Dennis F. shared that the Fair Housing Commission has a Facebook page which posts a question of the week on Fridays and a news article on Mondays. Since the previous meeting, the post that got the most attention was an article about the use of artificial intelligence in fair housing discrimination. The article got 174 views and 9 likes, comments, and shares. The question of the week with the most attention was about whether an apartment building can ban children from playing outside. The answer was generally no, as they are part of a protected class. This post received 126 views and 7 likes, comments, and shares.
 - Review of calls and complaints since the last meeting- Shannon shared that a complaint was received regarding the Inclusionary Program. She had not yet heard back from the household, but she provided them with resources to file a complaint with the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD).
Another household with HomeBASE (a State program that provides households with up to \$30,000 over two years) submitted a complaint because they applied for an affordable unit and had questions about whether the rent was calculated differently for their household because they had HomeBASE. They gave Shannon permission to speak with the housing provider. Commissioner Dennis F. asked for clarification on whether there appears to be discrimination based on a protected class and Shannon responded that because the Commission does not currently have investigatory powers, she cannot make

that determination but rather can do some advocacy work, speaking directly to the provider. This household has worked with MCAD previously. Shannon followed up on a complaint from the previous month where the household's rent increased after they requested and received lead abatement. She contacted the landlord directly with the household's permission and received a response with clarification from the landlord. Without the ability to investigate, the Commission cannot determine whether the rent increase was discriminatory, and Shannon reminded the household that they can submit a complaint with MCAD, which can investigate. At the time of the meeting, the rent increase was not finalized. Commissioner Calli M. asked if there are any municipal programs that assist with lead abatement and Shannon shared that Somerville has a Home Improvement Program which prioritizes lead abatement. The assistance is a forgivable loan for income-qualified properties.

IV. Updates on Specific Activities

- CAAS Fair Housing Training- Shannon shared that the Commission is collaborating with the Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS) to do a fair housing training on July 30. Commissioners Patrice F. and Dennis F. will be speaking at the training which will be held on Zoom and have Spanish and Portuguese interpretation.
- Building on MAPC connections: continuing to grow relationships with community organizations

Commissioner Dennis F. provided background on the Commission's efforts in building connections with community organizations and City departments. Shannon proposed reaching out to the organizations that they have built connections with during the past year and ask if there are events that Commission members and staff can show up to support.

Commissioner Dennis F. suggested reaching back out to the Council on Aging to run a training for small landlords at the Ralph and Jenny Center and reminded the Commission that CAAS has other groups, including staff and Head Start, who discussed the usefulness of a fair housing training. Shannon added that they could also plan a training for City social workers.

- Shannon referenced the Community Engagement Capacity Building Final Report, written by Gloria Huangpu from MAPC, which includes a recommendation to "Consider Connecting Engagement with Structural Changes." This will be added to future agendas. Commissioner Calli M. will provide more information about state level fair housing policy that the Commission can learn about or support, particularly leading up to January when bills will be refiled. She also discussed the funding challenges that fair housing agencies are facing throughout the state which may impact households coming to Somerville's Fair Housing Commission and shared that the Massachusetts Fair Housing Center just filed a suit against the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) regarding federal grant changes.
- Commissioner Dennis F. provided context on the Commission's relationship with the City and with other boards and commissions. The chairs of several commissions will be reaching out to other multi-member bodies to build a stronger working relationship and to ask them about their relationship with the City government.
- Commissioner Dennis F. shared that he was contacted by City Councilor Strezo regarding an increase in fees for Somerville Housing Authority residents. While this is not discriminatory and does not fall directly under the Commission's purview, the Councilor wanted to share the information with the Commission to invite the Commissioners to attend meetings regarding the issue.

- Tabling- Shannon will look into tabling opportunities in autumn and share them at the August meeting.
- Commission meeting scheduling- The Commissioners discussed changing the meeting start time to 4:00 PM. Shannon will ask the Commissioners not in attendance if 4:00 PM on the fourth Thursday will work for the meeting time.

V. Continued Business

- FY25 Annual Report- tabled for the August 2026 meeting.

VI. Announcements

- The next meeting is scheduled for August 27, 2026 at 3:00 PM. The meeting time may change to 4:00 PM and will be published on the City calendar.

VII. Adjournment

- The meeting was adjourned at 4:11 PM.