



City of Somerville

Somerville Human Rights Commission

Monthly Meeting (Virtual)

August 26, 2026, 6:30 PM

APPROVED MINUTES

Attendance: Co-Chair Salma Kazmi (facilitator) and Co-Chair Elyse Best were present. Commissioners Primrose Chakera, Brian Sokol, Christopher Hankle, Jenny Bonham-Carter, and Suelin Chen were present. Commissioners Jason Mackey, Jovana Calvillo, and Pao Mendez were absent.

Call to Order:

The meeting was called to order at **6:59 PM**. Quorum was present.

Note for the public record: The meeting began later than the scheduled start time due to a delay in obtaining access to the City meeting link from staff.

Prior Meeting Minutes for July 8 Meeting:

The Commission did not take up the July 8 meeting minutes during this meeting. The July 8 meeting minutes will be taken up at the September meeting.

1. NDA / Complaints Data

One outstanding NDA signature is preventing full release of complaints data. The Commission will inquire whether the City is willing to release the data for those who have already signed NDAs, so work can proceed.

2. Annual Report Outreach

Outreach included elected officials and candidates, the City Council, School Committee, Mayor's Office, City departments, libraries, community organizations and coalitions, the Council on Aging, food-access organizations, and local and regional media. Hard copies and digital copies have been distributed through multiple channels, and copies provided to Somerville libraries are now in circulation. Additional outreach to regional media and City communications channels is ongoing.



Positive feedback on the Annual Report has been received. Posts related to the Annual Report also appear on the “Friends of the HRC” Instagram account.

3. Neighborhood Council Outreach

The Commission discussed proactive outreach this fall to neighborhood councils to increase visibility and build community relationships. Activities would include attending meetings, either by Zoom or in person, providing a brief introduction to the HRC of approximately 15 minutes using 2-3 slides from existing materials and a link to the annual report, and inviting residents to join the HRC mailing list.

Volunteers identified included Co-Chairs Kazmi and Best and Commissioners Sokol and Bonham-Carter. Members will research meeting schedules and cover as many councils as possible, preferably in their own neighborhoods. A buddy system was also suggested.

4. Statement on Complaints Data

The Commission has received complaints data for 2024 and 2025. Data for 2026 has not yet been received. There was a notable volume of complaints related to local incidents connected to the Israel-Palestine conflict and the activism around it.

The Commission discussed developing a public statement about this data. The draft statement is in progress. No statement was finalized or adopted at this meeting.

The discussion focused on what the statement should and should not do. The group agreed that the statement should:

- Address the overall volume and patterns in the complaints (described as “taking the temperature of the city”)
- Clarify the Human Rights Commission’s role
- Emphasize transparency and responsiveness while protecting identifying information
- Encourage constructive dialogue and disagreement without rising to discrimination or hate

The Commission was clear that the statement should **not** make determinations about individual complaints or decide which ones were “legitimate.”

The Commission also discussed releasing the statement together with information about the new complaints-handling process currently being developed. The current draft of the statement will be reviewed at the next meeting, ideally alongside the completed complaints process.

Once the 2026 data is received, the Commission may issue a short interim report on complaints from recent years. The Commission also discussed including relevant complaints analysis in future annual reports.



5. Other Business / Announcements

- Co-chair elections are upcoming. Co-Chairs Kazmi and Best have served for approximately one year. The timing for the elections, potentially September or October, will be confirmed.
- New priorities will be discussed at the next meeting.
- Brian invited a guest speaker to speak about the recent Somerville Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI) pilot program. The Commission expects to hear about the pilot at the next meeting, as the report is being released.
- A preference was expressed for an in-person meeting, possibly the next meeting, to support strategic planning. Availability will be checked by email.
- The Google Form regarding advisory council structure and nominations has received limited responses. Members were asked to complete the form and forward their nominations.
- Members who have not reviewed the draft complaint form were asked to do so. The link will be resent if needed.

Adjournment

Due to time constraints and the risk of losing quorum, remaining agenda items were deferred. The meeting adjourned at approximately **7:31 PM**.

Next Meeting: September 30, 2026, 6:30 PM

Minutes Prepared by: Elyse Best