



CITY OF SOMERVILLE
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
MONTHLY MEETING
SEPTEMBER 30, 2026 | 6:30 P.M.
VIRTUAL MEETING
PROPOSED MINUTES

The meeting began at approximately 6:40 PM after the guest speakers with the City opened the Zoom meeting link following a delay in access.

Attendance was taken. Quorum was established.

Attendance

Commissioners Present: Salma Kazmi, Elyse Best, Brian Sokol, Primrose Chakera, Suelin Chen, Jovana Calvillo, Jenny Bonham-Carter, Christopher Spicer Hankle, and Jason Mackey.

Commissioners Absent: Pao Mendez

Guest Presenters: Erica Satin-Hernandez, ARPA Director, and Megan Benetti, ARPA Evaluation Manager, City of Somerville (SomerStat).

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

The Commission reviewed the July 8 and August 26 of 2026 meeting minutes.

July 8 minutes: Approved with a correction to the attendance record.

August 26 minutes: Approved Unanimously.

Co-Chair Nominations and Elections

The Commission considered nominations for co-chair positions. No additional candidates expressed interest. Elyse Best and Salma Kazmi were nominated to continue serving as co-chairs.



Decision: Elyse Best and Salma Kazmi were selected to continue as co-chairs for another term.

HRC Complaint Investigation Process Document

The Commission discussed the revised Complaint Investigation Process document. Commissioners reviewed the most recent version, which incorporated earlier feedback, and noted that the document still needed to be submitted to the City's Law Department for further review.

VOTE: Following discussion, the Commission unanimously approved the revised Complaint Investigation Process document.

Follow-Up: Submit the revised document to the Law Department for review.

Somerville Human Rights Complaint Form

Commissioners discussed the form and the information it would collect, the process for submitting supporting documents, and the importance of setting clear expectations regarding response times. A recommendation was made to include language explaining that the Commission is an all-volunteer body and requesting patience from individuals submitting complaints.

VOTE: Following the discussion, the form was approved by unanimous vote, pending incorporation of the agreed-upon changes.

Follow-Up: Update the complaint form to include the agreed-upon language regarding the Commission's volunteer status and response expectations.

Guest Presentation: Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI) Pilot Program

Erica Satin Hernandez and Megan Benetti from the City's ARPA team and Somerset presented findings from the Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI) pilot program.

The program ran from July 2024 through June 2025 and provided approximately 200 participants with \$750 per month for 12 months, distributing nearly \$1.8 million in total. It primarily targeted residents facing housing challenges.

Key outcomes included:

- More participants reporting money left at the end of the month, along with the ability to build savings and pay down debt
- Improved self-reported housing stability and feelings of safety in their homes
- Ability to catch up on unpaid rent
- Better employment outcomes, with participants finding newer or higher-paying jobs or adjusting their work in ways that worked better for them



Overall satisfaction with the program was very high. The pilot has concluded, and no continuation is currently planned due to funding and administrative limitations.

The GBI evaluation report and related program information are publicly accessible through www.somervillema.gov/gbi and www.somervillema.gov/arpa.

Public Statement Regarding Hate and Bias Complaints

The Commission reviewed and actively edited a draft public statement addressing Hate and Bias complaints, the collection of related data, and the Commission's approach to responding to reported human rights violations. During the discussion, several revisions were made. The Commission clarified the meaning of 'transformative justice,' describing it as an approach that seeks to address the underlying causes of harm rather than simply punishing alleged wrongdoers. Language was also refined to specify that the statement applies within the context of Somerville, and the overall framing was adjusted to emphasize a non-punitive approach that recognizes systemic factors contributing to harm while avoiding commitments the Commission cannot yet fulfill.

Following the discussion and revisions, the Commission unanimously approved the updated public statement.

VOTE: Follow-Up: Finalize the approved statement and coordinate its publication alongside the Commission's investigation and complaints procedures.

Somerville Stands Together Coalition Membership

The Commission received an overview of the Somerville Stands Together (SST) Coalition and its work on community issues, including labor rights, wage theft, and other human rights concerns. Discussion included the benefits of formal participation in the coalition and opportunities for collaboration with community organizations.

VOTE: Following the discussion, the Commission voted unanimously to formally join the Somerville Stands Together Coalition.

Anti-Hate Workshop Collaboration with Somerville Office of Immigrant Affairs (SOIA)

The Commission received an update on a proposed collaboration with SOIA on an anti-hate workshop planned for November. The workshop would feature a keynote session on dehumanization across interpersonal, cultural, structural, and global levels, followed by community breakout sessions. These sessions would share community experiences of marginalization, explore connections across different forms of harm, and identify concrete ways participants can stand in solidarity.

Proposed focus areas included antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Black racism, anti-trans bias, and anti-immigrant bias. The Commission discussed these categories, potential additional areas such as disability and ageism, and the importance of using complaint data to help prioritize its work. The discussion



included a suggestion to focus on the types of harm reflected in the complaint data when identifying priority areas.

VOTE: Following discussion, the Commission unanimously approved participating in and co-sponsoring the workshop.

Community Outreach and Neighborhood Councils

Commissioners discussed outreach to neighborhood councils and community organizations, including Union Square, Gilman Square, and East Somerville. Some outreach efforts remained pending, and commissioners expressed interest in strengthening communication and participation with neighborhood organizations.

Follow-Up: Continue outreach and pursue opportunities to attend neighborhood council meetings.

Unfinished Business and Future Agenda Items

- Advisory Council nominations
- Subcommittee updates
- Subcommittee membership
 - Proposed topic to discuss at the next HRC meeting.
- Review of additional complaint data
- Commission priorities for 2027

Documents, Forms, and Materials Referenced

The following materials were discussed, reviewed, demonstrated, or considered during the meeting:

- HRC Investigation and Complaints Process (Draft)
- Somerville Human Rights Complaint Form (Draft)
- Public Statement Regarding Hate and Bias Complaints (Draft)
- Guaranteed Basic Income Pilot Evaluation Report

Availability of Meeting Materials: HRC documents, forms, and other materials discussed or referenced during the meeting may be requested from the Somerville Human Rights Commission at [**hrc@somervillema.gov**](mailto:hrc@somervillema.gov).

Adjournment: There being no further business; the meeting adjourned at approximately 8:00 PM.

Next Meeting: The date and time of the next meeting have not yet been determined.

Notes taken by Salma Kazmi and Elyse Best.

Minutes prepared by Elyse Best.