

Brendan Salisbury

From: jenn harrington [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, August 31, 2026 9:38 PM
To: Brendan Salisbury
Subject: Fwd: Resignation from the Somerville Commission for Women: Reflections and Recommendations

Categories: MMB Review Public Comment

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Dear Brendan Salisbury,

I'm submitting this correspondence as public comment for the review of the Multiple Member Bodies Committee. Could you please make sure that it gets their attention and send me confirmation?

Many thanks,
Jenn Harrington
Ward 3

Dear Multiple Member Bodies Committee,

I recently resigned from the Somerville Commission for Women after one year of service. I wanted to share my experience because I believe it may be helpful to your committee as you consider how all City commissions can be structured and supported to have a positive and lasting impact on our community.

Before you read the letter I sent to the Mayor, I want to make clear that the concerns I raise are not about any one administration. Rather, I believe they are the rust that can develop over time. My hope is that sharing my experience will provide some perspective and contribute to thoughtful discussion about how these commissions can best serve the community, and, even more importantly, how the City can work collaboratively with them to ensure they are empowered and supported to do so.

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From: jenn harrington [REDACTED]
Date: Wed, Jul 15, 2026 at 11:32 PM
Subject: Resignation from the Somerville Commission for Women: Reflections and Recommendations
To: Mayor <mayor@somervillema.gov>, Brenna Broderick <bbroderick@somervillema.gov>, Catherine Nakato <cnakato@somervillema.gov>

Dear Mayor Wilson,

It breaks my heart to submit my resignation from the Somerville Commission for Women, effective immediately.

As you know, I am a hard worker with drive, creativity, and a deep commitment to public service.

Unfortunately, because a clear path has not been created for commissions centered on human rights, I

have not been able to advocate for many of the issues I spoke about during the lengthy interview process. I am not someone who quits easily, but I can no longer wait for that path to be built. It simply doesn't fit my action-oriented, results-driven nature.

I have tremendous respect for the commissioners who continue to serve and for those who recently resigned. They are experienced, interesting, informed, passionate, and full of thoughtful ideas. Something truly wonderful could have happened this past year, and it saddens me that we were not able to realize that potential. Fortunately, something truly special can still happen if the City is willing to make a few important changes. Please don't let this moment—and the opportunity it represents—go to waste.

During my time on the Commission, I came away with several observations:

- Somerville lacks meaningful data about the real stresses facing its residents. If I were mayor, I would toss the happiness survey and instead invest in research that asks more difficult questions about people's lived experiences.
- City staff were not empowered to create meaningful change for commissions, even when they genuinely wanted to help (this is a longstanding issue). It makes me wonder whether the City is operating too much from the top down. I hope your administration is already working to remove some of those barriers. Directors are not always the greatest knowledge sources, and organizations are strongest when expertise and ideas can flow in every direction.
- City leadership, including the City Council, is not consistently learning from the work of commissions. More formal reporting structures could strengthen that relationship. Perhaps commissions should have regularly scheduled opportunities to present their work and recommendations before City Council meetings.

Someone once told me that it is nearly impossible to create change alone. In many ways, I agree. As things currently stand, I have no meaningful avenue to advance endometriosis awareness and advocacy, menopause advocacy (while highlighting the important community work being led by JJ Gonson), or sexual assault/harassment awareness through this commission. And, it hurts.

If commissioners are leaving in such large numbers, what is the City losing? None of the commissioners who have resigned this past year struck me as people who give up easily. Perhaps, like me, they simply reached the conclusion that there was no clear path forward and that without an enormous investment of time and energy they could ultimately produce very little.

I have had two civic experiences that were deeply fulfilling: serving as co-chair of the Creative Displacement Committee on the Anti-Displacement Task Force and serving as chair of the Arts, Culture, & Creative Economy Policy Committee for your Transition Team. Those experiences worked because they were grounded in research, creative problem-solving, community engagement, and the freedom to let ideas evolve into meaningful recommendations that reached beyond typical municipal reporting. We were trusted to do the work, and that trust produced innovative and compelling results.

If you ever have work that resembles those experiences, especially work focused on cultural equity, please don't hesitate to give me a call. In the meantime, I will continue showing up in my own way: as a critic, as a writer, as a pusher, as a community builder, as a problem solver, and as an ethical thinker. While I wasn't appointed to the Commission for Women during your administration, I appreciate you and your staff for giving me the opportunity to serve. I learned a great deal this year, not only about City processes, but also about the kind of working relationship I hope to have with the City in the future. I remain deeply committed to the residents and workers of Somerville, and I hope the City strengthens the role of commissions so they can lead the charge for civic innovation and community

impact that they have the potential to achieve.

Respectfully,

Jenn Harrington

Ward 3

In some ways, I understand how that kind of "rust" can develop over time. Somerville is rapidly changing, and so is the world around it. We have experienced one emergency after another, along with new and increasingly complex stresses, while the cost of nearly everything continues to rise.

Sometimes, I think about how these larger forces influence Somerville to respond to crises created or driven by people and entities that may not live or work here. I wonder whether, in that process, we risk becoming so focused on responding to the chaos around us that we lose sight of the ideas and opportunities that could create small but meaningful wins for human rights right here in our own backyard.

And I think that's what we may have lost sight of: we need to pay attention to those larger crises around us, but we also need to continue driving our City forward. We need to be able to respond to what is happening in the world, while still making room for the thoughtful, creative, and sometimes incremental work that can make Somerville a better place to live for all.

One way to do both is to empower our commissions to do more—to give them the support and resources they need, as well as a real voice that is heard and taken with the gravitas it deserves. When our commissions are given that level of seriousness and respect, they can turn ideas into action, and help the City make meaningful progress for our residents and workers, and inspire other communities near and far.

I urge the Multiple Member Bodies Committee to encourage more opportunities for commissioners to provide feedback about their experience, to expand training and support, and to give commissions a greater role in shaping the data that informs their work. It might even help to extend your commission's term to ensure that your recommendations come to life.

I believe that the world can be a better place.

I believe Somerville can do many things to help make that happen.

I believe we can't do those things without our commissions.

And I believe that the most empowering thing I did during my time on the Somerville Commission for Women was to resign so I could tell you just that.

Thanks for listening,

Jenn Harrington

Ward 3