

Dear Mayor Ballantyne,

When you reached out to me to join your Mayor's Advisory Committee I was impressed with your commitment to working on accessibility and inclusion of people with disabilities within Somerville. Your willingness to invite me into that group, despite my support of your opponent on the campaign trail, filled me with hope that your administration would empower the Commission to serve the City as intended by Mass. Gen. Laws ch 40 §8J, adopted by the City in 1991, which charges municipal Commissions for Persons with Disabilities to "review and make recommendations about policies... of said city or town as they affect people with disabilities". I was also optimistic of your commitment to transparent and inclusive governance.

When your 100 Days Agenda was released Jan 12th, I noted the various commitments to accessibility and inclusion, including "Establish a process to increase engagement and diversification of boards and commissions. Kick off examination of the process of appointment and outreach for membership as well as other potential barriers to diverse participation. Through leadership of the Mayor's Office, direct relevant departments to deliver a written brief on how to strengthen outreach and engagement and reduce barriers to access within the first 100 days." Given the difficulty of finding and retaining people to serve on the SCPD, and your and the ADA Coordinator's knowledge that the SCPD was likely to lose myself and another Commissioner early this year, I trusted that your administration would act expediently to move forward the two qualified candidates that were submitted to your predecessor in September of 2021 and resubmitted to you at the start of January. This has been a topic at each SCPD meeting prior to and since the hiring of Adrienne Pomeroy as a full-time ADA Coordinator and Staff Liaison for our Commission. Unfortunately, during the first week of January one of our potential Commissioners withdrew their application, but we were notified at our monthly meeting on January 18th that Henry Hardy would be on the agenda for the next full City Council meeting to be recommended for appointment. On January 27th, mere hours before the City Council meeting, I received a phone call from Adrienne Pomeroy and Director Denise Molina Capers, Esq. informing me that there was a new policy of your administration to "put a pause on all new commission appointments". I was not provided with an opportunity for discussion nor was I provided written documentation of this policy when I requested it but was referred to your 100 Day Agenda which discusses kicking off a process, not pausing appointments.

Our commission currently has a wealth of diversity in terms of disability, socioeconomic status, sexuality, gender, and educational levels. I agree wholeheartedly that our commission, along with others in the city, lack much needed racial diversity to include and reflect the community we serve. We do not currently meet the state minimum requirements on Commissions for Persons with Disabilities; there are a required 3 Commissioners who identify as having a disability, 1 Commissioner who is a family member of a person with a disability, and 1 appointed or elected official. There are a further four optional slots for people with disabilities (currently unfilled) and other constituents. It is concerning that the appointment of a required person with a disability

was paused at the same time that our City appointed Commissioner was recommended for re-appointment given this is a position the City has direct control over and could use as a tool for increasing diversity when terms end. Upon my and Lian Guertin's departure in March the Commission for Persons with Disabilities will lose not just two required people with disabilities, but also much of the aforementioned diversity. We fear this is going to completely disempower the commission and make it harder to add more people with the capacity to serve given that it is difficult to attract marginalized people when it's clear that serving on the Commission will be a struggle.

I look forward to continuing to serve the community in my remaining time as Chair before moving in March. In addition to the scheduled Licenses & Permits Committee Meeting where my presence has been requested, I am interested in scheduling with your office to discuss how we can move forward the appointment of Henry Hardy as a full Commissioner of the SCPD prior to my departure. As you have publicly attested to being appreciative of the work I have done to move accessibility forward in our community, I trust that you are dedicated to ensuring the SCPD is staffed to continue that work.

Sincerely,  
Bonnie Denis