



# CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

## CLERK OF COMMITTEES

May 19, 2021

### REPORT OF THE HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Kristen Strezo	Chair	Present	
Ben Ewen-Campen	Vice Chair	Present	
Wilfred N. Mbah	City Councilor at Large	Present	

Others present: Lauren Racaniello-Mayor's Office, Mike Feloney-OSPCD, Tom Galligani-OSPCD, Ellen Schachter-Housing, Nick Antanavica-ISD, Mike Feloney-Housing, Frank Wright-City Solicitor, Hannah Carillo-Housing, Liz Haney-Somerville Community Land Trust, Ben Baldwin-Somerville Community Land Trust and Eliza Datta- Community Land Trust.

The meeting was held virtually and was called to order at 6:34 p.m. by Chairperson Strezo and adjourned at 8:41 p.m.

#### Approval of the April 14, 2021 Minutes

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>ACCEPTED</b>
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**210380: That the Directors of SPCD, Housing Stability, and Inspectional Services discuss with the Housing and Community Development Committee the anticipated impact and possible responses when the MA Eviction Moratorium expires on August 18.**

Ms. Schachter stated its coming closer to the end of the moratorium. Housing has seen a successful low level of evictions. In July, however, they are expecting that levels will increase. There is a high level of coordination trying to avoid eviction. Housing is getting some funds under the American Rescue Fund with legal services funded under ARF. Ms. Schachter stated that the local moratorium prevents people from entering people's homes.

Ms. Schachter spoke about the COVID Emergency Legal Help service that is available by calling the state or calling 311. This service has a lot of paralegals to assist the residents. Additionally, there is a TTP line for people with disabilities and expanding to others without disabilities. Ms. Schachter also stated that the city amended its contracts for the immigrant community because they were getting locked out of certain contracts.

Mr. Antanavica stated there are no actions ISD can take at this moment until there is some violation. The ISD department has bi-weekly meetings every Tuesday and Thursdays with continuous updates and any new requirements.

**211346: That the Committee on Housing and Community Development convene housing advocates and staff to address racial disparities in home mortgages, including programs like Boston's One+ program to increase assistance for first-time and low-income home buyers.**

Ms. Datta, an affordable housing developer, has been working with members from the City of Somerville. She talked about property in Chinatown and how she has been working with the Land Trust to do some acquisitions. Please see attached slides with more details. Ms. Datta stated that the City of Boston was laying the ground work for Boston's One+ and used some Community Action Plans fund to contribute towards giving housing more buying power. They realized they could start to reach households for people who make \$40-45K a year and are in the process of selling the first condo in Chinatown area. Ms. Datta also talked about the interest rate buy down program.

Ms. Haney, President of the Somerville Community Land Trust and Mr. Baldwin one of the key volunteers, were also present at the virtual meeting. They expressed excitement to bring homeownership to lower income, especially to people of color. Ms. Haney stated that the first community land trust was in Georgia to help black farmers own their farmland in the 1960's. Community land trust across the country have some of the lowest foreclosures. The land trust also supports the homeowners to make sure the bank does not sell off their property.

Councilor Ewen-Campen, who is also on the board of the Community Land Trust, explained how the program would work. He stated that the city would decide to capitalize on the fund and put lump sum down to buy down the mortgage for lower income. He also asked thoughts on next steps moving this program forward.

Councilor Mbah asked if brownfield vacant lands could be rehabilitated and used for community land trust in Somerville.

Chair Strezo asked if there are any relationships with banks or identifying any partners that would be open to a program like this one. Ms. Datta stated one of the other CLT members has resources, but the connection has not been made yet. Chair Strezo asked how can the city even the playing field for people with lower income to buy houses when some are over bidding for houses. Ms. Datta stated that in Boston's program, you must be a Boston resident which may help residents in Somerville if they decided to do the same. Chair Strezo asked for an update on the CLT. Mr. Baldwin stated they will be ready to showcase their business plan and campaign strategy on June 5<sup>th</sup>. This will include steps on how to acquire land and impact larger developments within the City of Somerville.

**205286: That the Director of SPCD share what role the city has, or could have with additional staff, in assisting residents with condo association dilemmas, tenant organizing, or ensuring that inclusionary unit owners or tenants have equal voice in building decisions.**

Mr. Feloney stated this was originally introduced by former Councilor Hirsch. He stated that voting shares in condo associations reflect the number of owners in the property and the amounts

paid. Mr. Feloney also stated that it's not a skillset of what they do everyday in the inclusionary program. He also stated that a land trust is getting involved in homeownership, focusing on affordability and organizing is something they continue to do.

Ms. Schachter talked about tenant organizing is really important and she participated in a forum at MIT on this matter.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>WORK COMPLETED</b>
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**209361: That the Director of SPCD discuss the impact on small businesses city-wide since the expansion and growth of Assembly Square and the opening of the Encore Casino.**

Mr. Galligani stated it's premature to understand the impact on small businesses, since Encore opened in 2019. He does not think the city has a stabilized impact whether positive or negative. Given the pandemic, it's too early to tell.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>WORK COMPLETED</b>
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**211897: That the City Solicitor advise in writing and appear before the Committee on Housing and Community Development to discuss how extensively the Encore Casino has been in compliance with its Surrounding Community Agreement.**

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>KEPT IN COMMITTEE</b>
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**204174: That the Superintendent of Inspectional Services, the Director of SPCD, and the City Solicitor meet with a committee of this Board to discuss how to prevent developers from repeatedly violating city ordinances and regulations.**

Mr. Antanavica was asked how many violations were there in a year in the City of Somerville. Mr. Antanavica stated there are systems in place to become more consistent and to review projects before they are completed. He stated that a lot of the checks into projects were happening at the end of the project. At that point, it may put the city in a situation. ISD is making changes to put more of the ownness on the developer. ISD will require a written narrative on how the developers addressed any violations. Mr. Antanavica brought up numbers about staffing to address the violations in the city. Due to the number resources, they are unable to provide the immediate response that most people expect. Many people expect the same response as with fire and police. From 2016 to current, ISD averages over 14,000 complaints on an annual basis. Additionally, they have average of over 1000 restaurant inspections a year. ISD has issued more than 3900 tickets over the past year.

Chair Strezo asked how do residents find out if an action has been taken on a complaint. Mr. Antanavica would like to create a department liaison position to help with the over 100 emails they receive daily which would help with follow up to complaints.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>KEPT IN COMMITTEE</b>
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**204462: That the Administration advise this Board on enforcing city ordinances, and develop a better response to repeat violations, including whether eyewitness reports or**

**submitted evidence can be the basis for a citation.**

Mr. Antanavica stated there is a process to submit and accept witness evidence. The easiest way is for an inspector to visually confirm a violation, so they do not need to rely on an affidavit. Chair Strezo asked if the 311 app could be used for this request. Mr. Antanavica stated the ISD inspectors do go out to see the violation and use the 311 photos as confirmation.

Councilor Ewen-Campen stated they he has received photos from residents that may look like violation. Then finds out the inspector has been there to deal with the violation and without the resident knowing this has been done. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked Mr. Antanavica to back to revisit the situation. Mr. Antanavica stated there are cases where there was a violation and the violation may no longer be present. If they do receive another complaint, they do attempt to check out the complaint and do not close out until they look at the potential violation.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>WORK COMPLETED</b>
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**205183: That the Administration reassess the city's agreement with Globe Direct regarding stopping deliveries upon request.**

Ms. Racaniello will follow up with the Chair with information from the last meeting on this matter.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>WORK COMPLETED</b>
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**Referenced Material:**

- ONEBoston\_Borrower-Flyer\_05.28.2020 (with 211346)
- Summary of ONE+ Boston Mortgage Program (with 211346)
- Somerville CLT - Homeownership Affordability Analysis 5.6.21 (with 211346)
- Response to 211897 - Encore Casino (with 211897)
- Somerville-Wynn-Surrounding-Community-Agreement (with 211897)