



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Housing and Community Development Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, November 18, 2025

6:30 PM

This meeting was held in-person and virtually via Zoom and was called to order at 6:32 pm by Chair Strezo and adjourned at 8:16 pm with a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Hardt, Ewen-Campen and Strezo), none opposed, and none absent.

Others present: Ellen Shachter - Office of Housing Stability Director, Yasmine Raddassi - Legislative Liaison, Luisa Oliveira - Director of Public Space and Urban Forestry, Rachel Nadkarni - Director of Economic Development, Dana Whiteside - Deputy Director of Economic Development and Delaney Fisher-Cassiol - Clerk of Committees

Roll Call

Present: City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo, Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen and Ward Seven City Councilor Emily Hardt

1. Committee Minutes
(ID # [25-1224](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Housing and Community Development Committee Meeting of June 30, 2025.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen and Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt

2. Order
(ID # [24-0075](#))

By Councilor Strezo

That the Director of Office of Housing Stability appear before the Housing and Community Development Committee to discuss the current status of residents facing displacement and the number of households seeking rental assistance.

Ellen Shachter, Office of Housing Stability Director, reported that 637 households are currently seeking assistance, with 49% at imminent risk of displacement. She reviewed the attachment HCD 2025-11-18 Memo (with 24-0075) and explained that, due to the statewide fiscal situation, restrictions have tightened, so only 30% of all funding may now be used for permanent housing. Rapid Rehousing (RRH) funding has been cut by nearly two-thirds, redirected to substance use and mental health housing, and can no longer be used for homeless prevention. State policy has also shifted toward clearing encampments and moving individuals into shelters or temporary sites.

Director Shachter highlighted Somerville's municipally funded voucher program-the first of its kind in the country-which prioritizes families with children in Somerville Public Schools. Funding is secured through FY27,

and the vouchers are intended to be permanent. She also noted that the Older Adult Bridge Program received additional FY26 state funding, allowing more seniors with fixed incomes awaiting subsidized housing to be admitted.

Responding to Councilor Ewen-Campen, Director Shachter confirmed that cuts will occur statewide and the local impact is still unclear. Councilor Ewen-Campen expressed frustration with the cuts and noted that the warming center will open on December 8. Yasmine Raddassi, Legislative Liaison, confirmed this information.

Director Shachter continued, expressing concern that these changes may worsen homelessness and encampments. Section 8 vouchers are no longer being issued statewide, and letters have gone to landlords requesting they avoid rent increases. While no Somerville residents are known to have lost housing yet, she emphasized that the loss of new vouchers is significant. She also shared concerns about potential state discussions regarding time-limiting public housing and the possibility that mixed-immigrant-status households could lose eligibility. She noted that about 30 Somerville households have mixed immigration status, and if any lose eligibility, the Affordable Housing Trust Fund may need to consider support despite limited resources.

Councilor Hardt noted her concern about the situation. In response to her question, Director Shachter clarified that funding is not being removed from households currently using Section 8 vouchers; the cuts affect future allocations. She also noted that Somerville historically administered 50-100 vouchers per year, with about one-third remaining in the city.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

3. Resolution
(ID # [25-0140](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Clingan and Councilor Davis
That the Memorialization Committee dedicate a memorial to Kenneth Lonergan.

Yasmine Raddassi, Legislative Liaison, shared that additional coordination is still needed. She has reached out to the sponsor for more information on the request but has not yet received a response.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

4. Order
(ID # [24-0070](#))

By Councilor Strezo and Councilor Wilson
That the Director of Parks and Recreation discuss how inclusive playground accessibility is being considered in future playground plans and redesign projects.

Luisa Oliveira, Director of Public Space and Urban Forestry, addressed concerns about ADA compliance in the city's parks, noting that they have been compliant for at least 15 years. She reviewed the HCD 2025-11-18

Presentation (with 24-0070) and emphasized the department's strong commitment to ADA standards. While occasional issues such as tree roots may cause temporary disruptions, these are maintenance matters rather than compliance failures.

Director Oliveira highlighted efforts to ensure inclusive play for all abilities. The city recently celebrated new inclusive swings, increasing ADA swing availability from 23% to 80%, and an inclusive playground is planned for the Kennedy School. A virtual community meeting will be held on December 2, with the goal of putting the project out to bid this winter, though additional funding is still needed.

Chair Strezo noted the limited available space at the Kennedy School and asked about expanding the playground closer to the sidewalk due to parent concerns about room for all activities. Director Oliveira said the department has explored reconfiguring the parking lot and other layout options, which will be presented at the December 2 meeting. She acknowledged that teachers are specifically concerned about parking and said the team is aiming to expand into and beyond the grassy area while minimizing impacts on parking.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Order
(ID # [24-1008](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld

That the Director of Economic Development discuss with this Council ways to provide small businesses with financial and technical support when impacted by construction and other emergencies.

Chair Strezo noted that past construction projects have caused significant disruption to nearby businesses due to noise, and that there was little to no communication or advance planning shared with affected businesses. Rachel Nadkarni, Director of Economic Development, explained that managing construction noise typically falls to the contractors. Private construction can also cause disruptions. She suggested a follow-up conversation with the engineering department, as they generally try to communicate as far in advance as possible. Director Nadkarni added that the city is working to ensure contractors are more engaged in sharing relevant information. Chair Strezo emphasized the importance of finding ways to encourage greater contractor engagement.

Councilor Ewen-Campen noted that ongoing utility work on Bow Street has disrupted outdoor dining for local restaurants, making the space unusable for over half the days. He mentioned that businesses have reached out to the mayor seeking partial reimbursement. Director Nadkarni added that the City Clerk's licensing office plans to reset outdoor dining fees in 2026 and discussed options to account for construction disruptions. If construction is known in advance, affected businesses will not be charged the fee.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Order
(ID # [24-1488](#))

By Councilor Strezo

That the Director of Economic Development appear before this Council's Committee on Housing and Community Development to discuss the immediate plans and short-term response efforts to best support and sustain small businesses, post-COVID.

Chair Strezo noted that the city needs to consider how it will continue supporting local businesses. Rachel Nadkarni, Director of Economic Development, reviewed the attachment HCD - 2025-11-18 Presentation (with 24-1008, 24-1488) and explained that Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) could be directed to businesses. Deputy Director Whiteside added that the department is now focusing on business retention, meeting business owners where they are through virtual small business office hours, and providing access and input for business needs. Home-based childcare was highlighted as a key area of support, and there is interest in expanding food safety training in English, in addition to the Spanish and Portuguese offerings currently available. Deputy Director Whiteside emphasized that the city is moving away from directly administering grants and instead focusing on enabling business owners, including by creating a digital library of resources on the city's YouTube channel.

Director Nadkarni shared that the department has been working with city communications to shift the narrative around Davis Square more positively, promoting small businesses through various channels from Small Business Saturday through February without endorsing specific businesses. Chair Strezo suggested distributing flyers at community events, such as the Somerville Tree and Menorah Lighting, and exploring a business reward or recognition program. Director Nadkarni said they are looking into ways to make this work, including tracking business anniversaries and potentially providing plaques.

Councilor Hardt asked whether areas like West Somerville can access CDBG funds. Deputy Director Whiteside clarified that they can, though access is more indirect. City staff have been visiting businesses in these areas, even without dedicated Main Street district staff, to ensure support. Main Street staff from nearby districts have also expanded their assistance where possible. Deputy Director Whiteside emphasized that the city is being intentional about providing equitable support across neighborhoods. Chair Strezo concluded that the city will need to be deliberate in helping one another to support all local businesses.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

- HCD - 2025-11-18 Memo (with 24-0075)
- HCD - 2025-11-18 Presentation (with 24-0070)
- HCD - 2025-11-18 Presentation (with 24-1008, 24-1488)