



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
CLERK OF COMMITTEES

June 3, 2020

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: Annie Connor-Mayor's Office, George Proakis-OSPCD, Kelly Donato-OSPCD, Michael Feloney-OSPCD and Ellen Shachter-OSPCD

The meeting was held virtually and was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Chairperson Strezo and adjourned at 7:58 p.m.

**Approval of the March 10, 2020 Minutes**

The minutes were accepted on a Roll Call vote of 3 in favor (Strezo, Ewen-Campen and Mbah) to none against.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>ACCEPTED</b>
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**208986: That the Administration update this Council on plans to preserve onsite affordable senior housing and care for the current and future residents of the Little Sisters of the Poor facility.**

Ms. Connor stated the property is being purchased by the Visiting Nurses Association. Mr. Proakis stated there have been discussions and the relationship with VNA and Little Sisters of the Poor is a good match. VNA is a committed and successful partner for the Little Sisters of the Poor. VNA has the capacity to manage different types of senior properties. They will maintain the existing property as is. Councilor Ewen-Campen raised a couple of issues, if there is any possibility of open green space on the site for the public and if there is a chance this deal will fall apart due to COVID. Mr. Proakis believes this agreement will continue in good faith. He will look into the open space option for the community.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>WORK COMPLETED. [UNANIMOUS]</b>
<b>AYES:</b>	Strezo, Ewen-Campen, Mbah

**206773: That the Administration establish a widely-advertised Fair Housing enforcement**

**program that proactively tests for illegal housing discrimination.**

Councilor Ewen-Campen stated the issues are federal fair housing laws that make it illegal to discriminate to rent to families with children. Testers are out there from a Suffolk University program. It was stated that Mr. Garpard from the fair housing commission has a relationship with Suffolk law that has been gaining traction to build relationships and working to fully populated fair housing division with newer members. There was an event with fair housing and Suffolk to discuss their program. Ms. Shachter stated that the advisory board level Section 8 discrimination is a big component, having specific credit policies and application in inclusionary program with changes to credit policy and percentage of income policies. Some landlords tell renters their income as to be 3x the rent amount to rent a unit, including those who have Section 8 vouchers and people of color which could be a fair housing violation. Mr. Feloney stated Suffolk has secured funds from the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development to conduct this testing program.

The chair asked if there is an opportunity to expand the program for more testers. There was a previous recruitment for testers in 2019 posting event on Fair Housing Commission Facebook page. Councilor Mbah asks for data on what's been done so far. The chair suggested having the chair from the fair housing commission come before the committee to share what has been done in the past. Councilor Ewen-Campen stated there has been numerous conversations on limited staffing capacity and housing division resource support. The chair asked for a copy of the communication from the fair housing commission to help update the committee.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>KEPT IN COMMITTEE</b>
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**210213: That this Council discuss the need for Rent Control in light of the global COVID-19 pandemic, as illustrated by dramatic rent increases displacing residents.**

Mr. Proakis stated there is a universal interest for a smarter, better system for rent control that can protect tenants. He stated other strategies have been tried such as: transfer fee, building affordable housing and 100 homes. A 30-year-old state law ballot is keeping municipalities from having discussions on rent control. Ms. Shachter referenced bill H.3924 that, among other things, will lift the statewide ban on rent control and allow municipalities that choose to do so to enact tenant protections in their own communities such as rent control and just cause eviction protections. This bill received a favorable recommendation by the Housing Committee at the State legislature by a vote of 13-2 and has advanced to the Steering, Policy and Scheduling Committee. This is the bill that Rep. Connolly's letter addressed. Councilor Ewen-Campen stated it's a long shot for state legislature to pass rent control in the future. This bill has been supported by the Mayor.

The chair opened up the floor to allow a resident, Anna Rosen, to speak on this matter. Ms. Rosen sent emails over the last few weeks. She referenced what she and other tenants in her building are experiencing. Some tenants have been displaced with very large rent increases. She is a post-doctoral fellow from Harvard University. Just moved to Somerville last August with her new landlord who bought the building and increased the rent by 30% during a pandemic. The building was previously owned by a family since the 1970's. In 2019, the building was sold without any prior notice to the tenants for \$13M to a company in Michigan. The owners were unwilling to negotiate and she was told to get a roommate or move. Ms. Rosen has been working with a tenant association and stated that 65% of residents in Somerville are tenants.

Councilor Ewen-Campen talked about the Home Rule Petition that would give tenants at the time of selling the property, legal ability to purchase the building or work with a non-profit to purchase the building. He also stated that landlords are required by law to notify tenants if buildings are being sold.

The chair opened up the floor for any members of the public to speak in response. No members of the public responded.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>KEPT IN COMMITTEE</b>
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**209565: That the Director of SPCD help ensure the effectiveness of the Tenant Notification Act via a citywide mailer, and by ensuring that the Director of 311 and the Director of Inspectional Services inform all city employees of the enforcement of this policy.**

Ms. Shachter stated there was outreach to landlords, attorneys, constables, immigrant community and training available to tenants. The city-wide mailing would cost \$15,000 and did not have in budget at the time. She has had meetings with ISD and 311 to discuss provisions and mailings. Additionally, no one should be buying property without knowing about this bill. Ms. Shachter also stated that articles were in Somerville Journal and Boston Globe on this bill. The eviction moratorium ends August 18 or 45 days from the state-wide emergency declaration. Ms. Shachter would like to send out a mailing towards the end of July or with a tax bill in August. Mr. Proakis suggested sending out mailing before the moratorium expires. Ms. Shachter and Mr. Proakis will brainstorm ideas on mailings and come back to the committee. Next committee meeting expected in July.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>KEPT IN COMMITTEE</b>
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**204990: That the Director of SPCD update this Board on the Affordable Housing Universal Wait List plan and consolidating the process of applying for affordable housing into a single, universal, persistent application, lottery, and wait list.**

Items 204990 and 208576 were discussed together.

Mr. Feloney and Ms. Donato stated the last update was February 2020. It was stated that they received responses to the Request for Proposal (RFP) and there is a need to revisit the scope of work. They went back to speak with some consultants that they thought were going to respond to the RFP but they did not. Since the last update at February meeting, they spent a good deal of time interviewing two consultants. There are three basic components captured in the RFP: 1. Prep and planning stage, 2. Marketing and outreach and 3. Implementation of revised application, lottery and waitlist process. Received one response for an all-inclusive response in the second round of outreach proposals received. That respondent was not able to respond to all requests. The second phase marketing and outreach Scope of Work (SOW), may need to revisit the consultant's availability at a later date. Met with another consultant Maloney Properties which does a great deal of lottery related work in Boston and other areas. The city is very close to executing agreement with this consultant. Ms. Donato stated there has been productive meetings so far with this consultant. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked for a timeframe of when the work will be done. Mr. Feloney, stated the next large rental opportunity will be Block 8 at Assembly which is in construction. FRIT still projects it will be on time in early 2021. Housing will need to procure marketing and outreach to push forward on the timeline. Ms. Donato stated

that July 31 is the end date for preparation and planning work. Next step will be marketing and outreach process. Chair Strezo inquired about how COVID may affect the budget relating to steps 1, 2 and 3. Ms. Connor stated the overall goal for the budget is to not make any cuts and provide critical services to residents.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>KEPT IN COMMITTEE</b>
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**208576: That the Director of SPCD provide a quarterly update regarding implementation of a universal waiting list for affordable housing opportunities.**

Items 204990 and 208576 were discussed together.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>KEPT IN COMMITTEE</b>
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**Handout:**

- Email - Rep. M Connolly (with 210213)
- Memo to Housing and CD Comm-2-5-19 (with 206773)
- Suffolk University Housing Discrimination Testing Program\_Test 19-90 Report (with 206773)