



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Legislative Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, November 28, 2023

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Davis at 6:02 pm and adjourned at 7:01 pm with a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilor Scott, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Burnley, Councilor Ewen-Campen and Chair Davis), none opposed, and none absent.

President Ewen-Campen appointed himself to replace Councilor Kelly on the Committee for this meeting only.

Others present: Neha Singh – Mayor’s Office, Ellen Shachter – OHS, Brendan Salisbury – City Clerk’s Office, Jill Currier – OHS, Luis Quizhpe – OSPCD, Jason Piques – Law Office, Stephanie Widzowski – Clerk of Committees.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Lance L. Davis, Willie Burnley Jr., Matthew McLaughlin, Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott and Ben Ewen-Campen

1. Committee Minutes (ID # 23-1708) Approval of the Minutes of the Legislative Matters Committee Meeting of November 14, 2023.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

2. Order (ID # [23-0318](#)) By Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Kelly, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Scott, Councilor Strezo and Councilor Wilson

That this Council draft a Home Rule Petition to authorize Somerville to regulate against rent gouging by establishing Rent Stabilization.

Taken together with item 23-1694.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

3. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-1694](#)) Requesting approval of a Home Rule Petition authorizing the City of Somerville to regulate rent in residential dwelling units.

Dir. Shachter and Chair Davis explained that revisions they made to the proposed Home Rule Petition (HRP) are largely non-substantive and were based on feedback from the previous Legislative Matters meeting. Dir. Shachter reviewed the larger changes (*attachment titled “Legislative Matters - 2023-11-28 Rent Stabilization 11.27.23 (Tracked changes) 2 (with*

23-1694”)), and Solicitor Piques explained why sections 2.d.i and 2.d.ii in that attachment are separate.

There was discussion of the section on Consumer Price Index (CPI). Chair Davis had questions about the use of the word “increase”; Dir. Shachter said that the section was phrased this way to exclude a negative CPI. Councilor Scott asked why not consider having a 0% increase in rent as the lower boundary, noting that 2% higher rents in a period of deflation could cause hardship. Dir. Shachter said that there is nothing in the HRP that requires landlords to raise rent a certain amount.

Councilor Scott pointed out that Section 3.e ends with the word “and”, but the other subsections do not. **Chair Davis said that the word should not cause issues, but stylistically should be removed. Chair Davis moved to replace the current version of the Home Rule Petition with the text of the attachment titled “Legislative Matters - 2023-11-28 Rent Stabilization 11.27.23 (Clean) 2 (with 23-1694)”.** The motion was approved with a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilor Scott, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Burnley, Councilor Ewen-Campen, and Chair Davis), none opposed, and none absent.

Councilor Burnley revisited his outstanding questions from the last meeting over vacancy decontrol and the new construction exemption. He said that this draft of the HRP, with the recent changes, makes clearer the city’s authority to regulate vacancy. *Councilor Burnley moved that the language referring to the 15-year exemption for new construction be lowered to 10 years.* The motion was NOT approved with a roll call vote of 2 in favor (Councilor Scott, Councilor Burnley), 3 opposed (Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Ewen-Campen and Chair Davis), and none absent. Councilor Ewen-Campen moved to recommend approval as amended.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED AS AMENDED

AYE: Chairperson Davis, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr.,
Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Two City
Councilor Scott and Ewen-Campen

Referenced Documents:

- Legislative Matters - 2023-11-28 Rent Stabilization 11.27.23 (Clean) 2 (with 23-1694)
- Legislative Matters - 2023-11-28 Rent Stabilization 11.27.23 (Tracked changes) 2 (with 23-1694)
- Legislative Matters - 2023-11-28 Art 89 - Authority to regulate vacancy decontrol (with 23-1694)