



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

April 30, 2018

REPORT OF THE HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Ben Ewen-Campen	Chair	Present	
Jesse Clingan	Vice Chair	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Ward Seven Alderman	Present	
Matthew McLaughlin	Ward One Alderman	Absent	
Jefferson Thomas ("J.T.") Scott	Ward Two Alderman	Present	
Mark Niedergang	Ward Five Alderman	Present	
Lance L. Davis	Ward Six Alderman	Present	
William A. White Jr.	Alderman At Large	Present	
Mary Jo Rossetti	Alderman at Large	Present	
Stephanie Hirsch	Alderman At Large	Absent	
Wilfred N. Mbah	Alderman at Large	Present	

Others present: Michael Glavin - OSPCD, Annie Connor - Legislative Liaison, Charles Sillari - Clerk of Committees.

The meeting took place in the Aldermen's Chamber and was called to order at 6:37 PM by Chairman Ewen-Campen and adjourned at 8:33 PM.

Approval of the March 14, 2018 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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Public Hearing - Item 205334

205334: That the Committee on Housing and Community Development investigate the condition of affordable housing units in the City, gathering testimony and data, to determine whether there is an affordable housing crisis that constitutes a public emergency, which may inform any home rule petitions related to affordable housing.

Chairman Ewen-Campen stated the purpose of the public hearing, to gather data and testimony regarding the affordable housing crisis in Somerville. He told those present that he invited six experts to speak about the affordable housing crisis in Somerville. He then read a list of

questions (attached) for the Administration into the record and Ms. Connor stated that she will present written answers to those questions. Alderman Ballantyne asked if the Administration could also answer whether there will be a time limit on extended stay hotels planned for Union Square. Alderman Ewen-Campen explained that he would use the testimony from tonight, together with the data provided by the administration, to compile a report from the Housing and Community Development committee.

Written testimony was submitted by David Tisel entitled “Introduction: Case Study on Tenant Displacement in Somerville, MA.” Alderman Ewen-Campen invited David Gibbs, executive director of the Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS), and Ellen Shacter from Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services to speak as experts in the field of displacement, eviction, and low-income housing in Somerville. Mr. Gibbs discussed his experience with people facing evictions and spoke about properties that have been sold and vacated for renovation. According to Mr. Gibbs, when low-income tenants are evicted, there is essentially no available affordable housing in Somerville. He told the committee that CAAS is in favor of the transfer fee and the proposed right of first refusal and that he would like the funds received to be used to purchase properties for conversion to affordable housing. Ms. Schacter, an attorney who represents low income tenants, cited a quote from the Supreme Judicial Court regarding the impacts of homelessness and discussed the Section 8 program in Somerville and the waitlist. The Somerville Housing Authority has issued no new housing vouchers in the past year and there have been 50 relocation vouchers issued, but most of those people have had to leave the city. Section 8 tenants are at risk of losing their housing due to the prices of rental units in Somerville. Ms. Schacter spoke about 2 eviction cases she is currently working on and suggested various policies that she would like to see put into place that could help low income tenants.

Scott Hayman, of the Somerville Community Corporation, discussed ways in which his organization has helped meet affordable housing goals in Somerville and he provided reasons why he believes housing is becoming unaffordable in Somerville. He also spoke about various living conditions that he has seen in the city. Mark Alston-Follansbee and Lisa Davidson from the Somerville Homeless Coalition spoke about the particular challenges faced by very low-income people, who make less than 30% of the area median income, and therefore require more substantial subsidies. Ben Echevarria, director of the Welcome Project, spoke together with Angie Mejia, a high school student who resides in the Mystic Ave. Somerville Housing Authority residence, about the particular affordable housing challenges faced by immigrants in Somerville. Regina Bartholo, liaison for the homeless in Somerville Public Schools spoke about her experiences, saying that there are many cases of homeless school children in the city. She discussed the cost to house a family in a Somerville apartment and spoke about families that have had to move to other cities.

Alderman Ewen-Campen then invited testimonies from members of the public.

Several members of the public spoke on the matter, and their concerns are summarized herein:

- The market doesn’t work - it is not providing sufficient affordable housing.
- Gentrification and speculation throughout the city,

- It will soon be impossible for low income people to live in the city,
- How rents have increased over the years,
- CPA funds have helped those in needs,
- Help provided (by outside entities) to those who face affordable housing issues,
- The affordability problem was caused by the GLX,
- There is gentrification and systematic racism in the city,
- The city budget has increased \$100 million in 10 years,
- Not enough money has gone into affordable housing,
- The city should build its own public housing,
- Institute rent control,
- Doesn't want to lose the diversity of the city,
- Developers are in the city to drive people out,
- City Hall sides with the rich,
- Housing is a human right,
- People of color are being pushed out,
- Affordable housing is disappearing,
- People in public housing can't afford their rent,
- Wants more housing and diversity,
- Properties need to be purchased and deed restricted,
- The transfer fee will be paid by developers and flippers,
- Higher costs charged by the city forces property owners to charge higher rents,
- Absentee landlords shouldn't have to pay a transfer fee,
- The housing stock is old and requires upkeep,
- Too many people leave the city because of rising costs,
- Tax developers and the rich,
- The housing situation's impact on public health,
- The city is too densely populated to build more affordable housing,
- Forfeiture of rental units due to the proposed new zoning,
- The new zoning will be too restrictive and will not allow new units to be built in many neighborhoods,
- Concerned about housing and the eminent domain tactics employed by the city,
- The importance of transparency and outcomes from the city,
- Increased city budget,

- Many people are forced to sell because taxes and fees make it difficult to stay.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Handouts:

- Comments - R Bertholdo (with 205344)
- Housing Questions for Administration (with 205334)
- Comments - D Tisel (with 205334)