



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Housing, Community Development and Equity Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, April 15, 2026

6:00 PM

This meeting was held in-person and virtually via Zoom and was called to order at 6:03 pm by Chair Strezo and adjourned at 7:27 pm with a roll call vote of 2 in favor (Councilors Sait and Strezo), none opposed, and one absent (Councilor Link).

Others present: Ellen Shachter - Office of Housing Stability Director, Yasmine Raddassi - Legislative Liaison, Alanna Gaffny - Deputy Director of Housing, Shannon Lawler Fair Housing and Inclusionary Housing Program Specialist and Delaney Fisher-Cassioli - Clerk of Committees

Roll Call

Present: Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait and City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo
Absent: City Councilor At Large Jon Link

1. Committee Minutes
(ID # [26-0260](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Housing, Community Development and Equity Committee Meeting of January 28, 2026.

RESULT: ACCEPTED
AYE: Ward Five City Councilor Sait and City Councilor At Large Strezo
ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Link

2. Committee Minutes
(ID # [26-0374](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Housing, Community Development and Equity Committee Meeting of March 4, 2026.

RESULT: ACCEPTED
AYE: Ward Five City Councilor Sait and City Councilor At Large Strezo
ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Link

3. Order
(ID # [26-0050](#))

By Councilor Strezo
That the Director of Office of Housing Stability discuss the current status of residents facing displacement and the number of households seeking rental assistance.

Ellen Shachter, Director of the Office of Housing Stability (OHS), reviewed the attachment *HCDE - 2026-04-15 Memo (with 26-0050)* and highlighted recent housing trends. Over a five-month period from October 2025 to February 2026, OHS received 505 requests for assistance across 471

households. Of these, 37% were at risk of displacement, and roughly half spoke a language other than English.

She emphasized the need for the mayor to identify future funding sources, noting that while increased evictions are expected as assistance becomes more limited, this has not yet been observed but could start to happen within the next one to two quarters. Rental assistance disbursements have declined significantly, from an average of \$259,000 per month in 2025 to approximately \$97,000 per month, due to tightened eligibility criteria and funding constraints.

Director Shachter clarified that an execution allows for the removal of belongings but does not always result in a completed eviction, and noted that arrest does not disqualify individuals from assistance. She also highlighted ongoing advocacy efforts and outlined federal policy changes that may further impact vulnerable residents, including reduced Section 8 voucher availability and a proposed U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development rule affecting mixed-status households that could force families to separate or lose housing assistance.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

4. Order
 (ID # [26-0049](#))

By Councilor Strezo

That the Director of Housing report to this Council how many new housing units have been approved for development, year-by-year, since adoption of SomerVision 2040, and of those numbers, how many are permanently affordable, and how the department defines affordability.

Alanna Gaffny, Deputy Director of Housing, reviewed the attachment *HCDE - 2026-04-15 Memo (with 26-0049)*. She noted that development in Somerville is primarily within Neighborhood Residential districts, with 170 of 233 permits issued in these areas. Prior to the elimination of the Small Property Additional Unit Program (SPOT) to comply with the MBTA Communities Act, only five units had been approved and two built. Outside of SPOT, 178 of 233 permits were for three units or fewer, which did not trigger affordability requirements at the time. She added that larger-scale development has shifted, with Assembly Square largely built out between 2016-2021 and more recent activity concentrated in Union Square, while mid-sized (10-20 unit) projects appear to have slowed.

In discussion, Deputy Director Gaffny reiterated that SPOT was intended to encourage homeowners to add units but saw limited uptake due to administrative barriers. Chair Strezo noted an increase in three-unit developments, suggesting developers may be avoiding affordability thresholds, and emphasized the need for creative housing incentives given that Somerville exceeded accessory dwelling units (ADU) and backyard

cottage requirements. Councilor Sait asked about four-floor zoning near transit stations; Deputy Director Gaffny indicated interpretations remain ongoing. Chair Strezo expressed interest in continuing the conversation and noted strong community support for affordable housing.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Officer's
Communication
(ID # [26-0141](#))

Fair Housing Commission conveying the FY 2024 Annual Report pursuant to Section 17-7 of the Code of Ordinances.

Shannon Lawler, Fair Housing and Inclusionary Housing Program Specialist, reviewed the attachment *HCDE - 2024-04-15 Presentation (with 26-0141)* and noted that the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule has been rolled back at the federal level. She also noted that the Fair Housing Specialist role is currently part-time and that the Fair Housing Commission was not fully seated in FY24, with just four members serving.

Specialist Lawler explained that “family or relationship structure” (including polyamorous households) is a protected class at the city level but not under state law. No complaints have been received to date, and any such cases would be routed through the Inspectional Services Department (ISD). She referenced Cambridge’s model, which includes a staff attorney/investigator, as a potential staffing consideration. She added that there are currently four backlogged complaints from Somerville with the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD). Chair Strezo noted that awareness of this protected class remains limited and noted that she had heard about incidents. Specialist Lawler emphasized that education and community outreach are intended to increase understanding of residents’ rights. She explained that MCAD complaints generally must be filed in person in Boston or by mail, as the online intake system is limited, though an online portal may be forthcoming. Chair Strezo noted this as a significant barrier to access. Specialist Lawler also noted concerns about individuals being unable to secure appointments within required reporting timeframes.

Councilor Sait asked about points of contact, and Specialist Lawler shared that the Housing Division and Office of Housing Stability can be reached at 617-625-6600 ext. 2577, where staff can direct inquiries to the appropriate department.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

- HCDE - 2026-04-15 Memo (with 26-0049)
- HCDE - 2026-04-15 Memo (with 26-0050)
- HCDE - 2024-04-15 Presentation (with 26-0141)