



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

April 14, 2021

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: Lauren Racaniello-Mayor's Office, Councilor Jesse Clingan, Mike Feloney-OSPCD, Doug Kress-HHS, Tom Galligani-OSPCD, Denise Capers-Racial and Social Justice, Gonzalo Puigbo-SCC, Sam LaTronica-SCC, Vickie Choitz-Skilled Workforce, Jeff Shwom-Ball Square District Organization, Jennifer Atwood-East Somerville Main Streets and Joe Lynch-Somerville Media Center.

The meeting was held virtually and was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Chairperson Strezo and adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

Approval of the March 31, 2021 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
----------------	-----------------

210380: That the Directors of SPCD, Housing Stability, and Inspectional Services discuss with the Housing and Community Development Committee the anticipated impact and possible responses when the MA Eviction Moratorium expires on August 18.

It was stated that no one from the Housing Stability Office was able to attend tonight's meeting and no updates at this point. This item will be discussed in next month's meeting.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
----------------	--------------------------

211434: That the Director of SPCD and the Director of Communications discuss with this Council's Committee on Housing and Community Development creating and marketing an app that promotes and incentivizes frequenting Somerville's small businesses.

Mr. Shwom was sponsored by the chair to speak on this item. He stated there are ways to creatively support small businesses to keep money locally. He has had communications with Mr. Galligani and other agencies to use a smart app.

Mr. Galligani stated he was approached by companies who are creating apps with marketing programs every month. They are looking internally and thinking about additional dollars coming from the government to help small businesses. Mr. Galligan stated they are considering dozens of ideas and which ones would be the most efficient for the business districts. One idea is to put banners in the areas to remind the community to buy locally. Ms. Taylor from Communications has done some research in the past and are looking at the impact from the City of Boston with implementing this program. Chair Strezo talked about a punch program that ran in Ball and Magoun Squares. Mr. Galligani stated OSPCD and Communications Departments receive a lot of interest from organizations with marketing programs and it's about balancing all the different competing agendas and opportunities.

Ms. Jennifer Atwood stated she did not want to put the ownness of maintaining the information on the apps on the owners. She suggested that the city dedicate a city staff member to maintain the information.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210787: Requesting approval of the Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan.

Councilor Mbah stated he spoke with Councilor Clingan who is happy to move this item forward. He stated the last conversation was about a few concerns he with the draft of the MOA. Councilor Clingan appeared before the committee stating he is comfortable with voting this evening to move forward for a vote at the next city council meeting.

RESULT:

APPROVED

211228: That the Director of SPCD discuss with this Council's Committee on Housing and Community Development how the 100 Homes program works for property upkeep and maintenance.

Councilor Clingan stated that partnering with SCC and city of Somerville has provided a a number of units towards this partnership. He expressed concerns on how things are maintained. Mr. Feloney stated he had an initial conversation with Councilor Clingan to address these concerns. There was a discussion to make sure there is funding for property maintenance.

Mr. Puigbo stated this is a very challenging portfolio with the primary challenge due to the pandemic. The pandemic makes it challenging to rent all property in 100 homes with the regular apartment rents having similar rates. Mr. Puigbo stated they are not a property management company and agrees with the need to work as a property management. They currently have 116 units and do not have the proper capability to manage the property. Additionally, they applied through the CPA for funding but it did not allow funding for this request. SCC is currently focusing on property that does not need any renovations in their portfolio. The average cost per unit does not allow them to do any work to the units nor to have any reserves to maintain the property. They have applied for tax abatement and should save some money. SCC is also trying to repair some vacant units as quickly as possible to occupy them and get the rent needed.

Mr. LaTronica stated they have been interviewing different staffs with their boards, finance staff to see what could be improved, what are the best practices, and what are the lessons learned. He stated there were a number of incidents with a fire at 650 Somerville Avenue and needed to

move out tenants. Some tenants will be moved back soon. There was also a hot water heater that went out. They are using a full-time contractor who is responsible for the day to day maintenance.

Councilor Ewen-Campen stated this is a really important and timely conversation right now. This conversation is not about blame and everyone has been supportive of 100 homes. Now is the time to have a difficult conversation on how to make sure this program is working for all those who would be living in these units. He is extremely supportive in whatever the city needs to do to make this program work. Councilor Ewen-Campen stated the units need to be safe, repaired when needed and have the necessary funding.

Councilor Mbah asked how often are the councilor briefed on these matters. Mr. Feloney stated that they had initiated the process with SCC which goes back to about a year ago before the pandemic. They have not reconnected since they last met in February and have a quarterly meeting to discuss all the issues. The next quarterly meeting will be in May. There may have been a disconnect with sharing the information within a month or so. This does not mean that issues have not been reviewed. Mr. Feloney will ask for a quarterly update to brief the committee and councilors as it becomes available.

Director of SCC Puigbo meets on a quarterly basis with OSPCD department and had three meetings within the first quarter. They always discuss 100 homes, the pipeline and any challenges.

Councilor Ewen-Campen does not believe there is a need for the committee of the whole to meet at this point. He stated that the SCC and administration will have a productive conversation to get the marketing and funding where it needs to be for this program. He's fully supportive of the energy and to get updates where there is something to update the committee.

Chair Strezo stated a regular quarterly update in writing is a great idea and could be a communication to the whole council. Councilor Clingan was impressed with the details provided and would like a copy of the report.

Chair Strezo asked Mr. LaTronica what the turnaround time for 100 homes maintenance requests were. He said the information would be on the database and that they should be able to provide it. Chair Strezo stated she would like to have that information as soon as possible. She also stated that they are trying to find the best ways to support SCC through the earlier stages of the 100 Homes project.

Councilor Strezo motioned and seconded by Councilor Mbah that the Director of OSPCD and SCC provide quarterly updates to the city council on the progress of property upkeep and maintenance for 100 homes. This motion was approved by all committee members.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

211346: That the Committee on Housing and Community Development convene housing advocates and staff to address racial disparities in home mortgages, including programs like Boston's One+ program to increase assistance for first-time and low-income home buyers.

There was no discussion on this item tonight due to an updated planned for the end of April. This item will be discussed at the next Housing Committee on May 19 at 6:30. Councilor Ewen-

Campan asked if the director of SCC would be a part of the discussion at the next committee meeting.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

211589: That the Committee on Housing and Community Development address the prevalence of toxic stress and trauma emanating from the pandemic that has disproportionately affected women and communities of color.

Ms. Choitz from Skilled Workforce was sponsored by the chair to speak on this item. She stated that over the last year, many people in the community have been struggling with toxic stress which is disproportionately affecting women and people of color. This is leaving a mental scare on the community. Ms. Choitz also stated that women are burdened with childcare and schooling with 100% unemployment claims from women. Toxic stress and trauma are doubling and tripling People of color due to the pandemic. Ms. Choitz stated that in a publication named In These Times, 40% has reported pandemic related depression and 49% anxiety symptoms with some thinking of suicide. She referenced the Baltimore communication in 2015/2016 in which they gathered a community-based participation to learn about toxic stress and trauma to understand the symptoms and how they effect communities. This supported individuals to help them understand and adopt positive behaviors to become stronger to handle their lives. This initiative would be helpful for community members in the City of Somerville. Chair Strezo asked would this be possible to bring forward and what would be the cost. Ms. Choitz stated this is a COVID recovery response and could be available to use American Rescue Plan funding to adopt this initiative. It could be a year to 18 months to educate people across the schools and agencies. It was stated that the Somerville staff is already stretched and this could be an RFP to go out to identify organizations with expertise in providing training on toxic stress and trauma. She spoke with CHA who is already doing some of this work.

Chair Strezo asked the administration if some of the ARP funding could be used for this purpose. Ms. Racaniello stated the city is still waiting on guidance on how the funding can be used and will look into this once they receive that information. Additionally, this topic has been discussed with Mr. Kress from HHC.

Ms. Capers, the new Racial and Social Justice director stated this is on the right path. It's very important to go about it methodically. The first step to creating a strong foundation is to create authentic and trusting relationship to gather information to set the path to move forward. There's still time to take a step back on the steps needed to take on the initiative from the very beginning. Ms. Capers would like to hear more about the committee's vision to begin this initiative.

Chair Strezo would like the administration put some funding aside from the ARP to be put towards mental and healing services. Ms. Choitz stated it's a racial justice issue, student success issue and mental health issue. In order to improve k-12 students and job training programs, they must understand the stress and trauma they are experiencing.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

211590: That the Committee on Housing and Community Development consider whether a community-wide trauma response, such as the Baltimore Partnership for Family and Trauma-Informed Care, could work here to aid post-Covid-19 recovery and

reconstruction.

See 211589.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

211244: That this Council's Committee on Housing and Community Development, with the Director of Economic Development, invite representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and restaurant and business communities to discuss an ordinance addressing the impacts of third party delivery services.

Chair Strezo stated these two items are targeted at small businesses and restaurants.

Mr. Lynch chair of licensing commission stated that restaurants and businesses enter into third party agreements through their websites and their apps to allow third party delivery services to delivery for them. The identities of the restaurant's online website presence and the consumers who go to the website, may go to the link of the third-party provider. The third-party provider adds a fee to the restaurant and consumer. In many cases, the restaurants do not know it's a third party picking up the food. This is happening nationwide. The third-party providers are adding a fee of 20-30% and in cases, the restaurants and businesses are not aware of the fees. Mr. Lynch recommends the city councilors and/or mayor send a communication to the Attorney General's Office requesting action be taken on this matter.

The license commission will work with Economic Development to warn the community of these practices to get the third-party delivery providers to stop this practice.

Ms. Atwood spoke on what she has seen in East Somerville, and encourages whatever can be done to stop the fee gouging. Small businesses are closing while these third-party delivery providers are thriving. Councilor Ewen-Campen stated the city need to make sure residents know to contact restaurants directly to avoid the fees.

Chair Strezo asked Ms. Racaniello the administration's opinion on this matter and how to move forward with a communication campaign. Ms. Racaniello with work with the communications department and Mr. Galligani on this matter. Mr. Galligani stated the city has email addresses for businesses. The state finally passed a cap on third party delivery fees of 15 % which will expire once the pandemic has ended. There is still a need to talk to state legislature to make this a permanent state and discuss possible fines for this type of behavior.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

211245: That this Council's Committee on Housing and Community Development discuss with the Director of Economic Development and the Chair of the Licensing Commission the creation of a public education campaign focusing on copycat restaurants and their impact on the community.

See 211244.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED