



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

September 29, 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	
Matthew McLaughlin	Ward One City Councilor	Absent	
Jefferson Thomas ("J.T.") Scott	Ward Two City Councilor	Present	
Jesse Clingan	Ward Four City Councilor	Present	
Mark Niedergang	Ward Five City Councilor	Present	
Lance L. Davis	Ward Six City Councilor	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Ward Seven City Councilor	Present	
Mary Jo Rossetti	City Councilor at Large	Present	
William A. White Jr.	City Councilor At Large	Present	

Others present: Alan Inacio - OSPCD, George Proakis - OSPCD, Sarah Lewis - OSPCD, Ellen Shachter - OSPCD, Victor Nascimento - OSPCD, Hannah Carrillo - Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:01 PM by Chair Strezo and adjourned at 7:44 PM on a roll call vote of 9 in favor (Councilors White, Ballantyne, Niedergang, Davis, Scott, Rossetti, Mbah, Ewen-Campen and Strezo), 0 against and 2 absent (Councilors Clingan and McLaughlin).

Approval of the July 7, 2021 Minutes

The minutes were accepted on a roll call vote of 9 in favor (Councilors Clingan, White, Ballantyne, Niedergang, Scott, Rossetti, Mbah, Ewen-Campen and Strezo), 0 against and 2 absent (Councilors Davis and McLaughlin).

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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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.

Director Shachter said that the federal moratorium has ended and that the local moratorium has been extended to April 30, 2022. There is an exception that would allow for a tenant to be evicted for

serious violations of the terms of the tenancy, if so determined by a judge. Conditions have been placed on landlords and people engaged in real estate that would allow them entry to the premises provided the tenant is given 48 hours' notice.

The Office of Housing Stability has a 97% success rate in providing assistance and has helped 850 families with rental assistance, securing \$3.2 million in funding. Director Shachter reported that 40-50 requests for rental assistance are being received per month and that the department is seeking approval to use urgent ARPA funds to continue a contract for legal services. Court numbers are below what they were pre-COVID, however 6 executions took place since the end of the state moratorium.

Councilor White commented on the rising cost of rents in the city and Director Shachter reported that pre-COVID market conditions are being seen, i.e., rents are escalating and it's anticipated that rents will spike when the GLX project is completed. Efforts are being made to pass legislation at the state level to put tenant protections in place, and providing additional affordable housing is a priority. Councilor Scott asked about just cause evictions and Director Shachter said that the city would be fully reliant on the state to pass just cause eviction legislation.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211613: Requesting approval of the 2021-2022 HUD One Year Action Plan, for CDBG, HOME, and ESG Programming.

Mr. Inacio stated that this is an annual requirement in order to receive funding. The plan is consistent with the 5-year plan's goals. This is the 4th year of that 5-year plan. Councilor Ewen-Campen moved for approval.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Strez, Ewen-Campen, Mbah, Scott, Clingan, Niedergang, Ballantyne, Rossetti, White Jr.	
ABSENT:	McLaughlin, Davis

212139: Planning Director requesting this Council's endorsement of the SomerVision 2040 Plan.

Director Lewis introduced Victor Nascimento, who gave a slide presentation. He spoke about the community outreach and engagement process and highlighted the key themes and community values of SomerVision 2040, some of which are:

- to apply an equity lens to all segments of the plan
- to minimize displacement
- to foster diversity
- to invest in growth
- to build a sustainable future
- to make 20% of the housing stock affordable, in perpetuity, by 2040
- to decrease carbon emissions by 80% (from 2014 levels) by 2040
- to reduce automotive vehicle miles traveled in Somerville

- to build resiliency into the water and sewage systems
- to create an open space acquisition strategy
- to incorporate equity goals in neighborhood plans and development proposals

Councilor Mbah commented that he is ready to move this item forward although he would have preferred to have more detail included on the various topics. Councilor Ballantyne spoke about equity and asked if all voices are represented in the plan and Director Lewis stated that she believes that people of many backgrounds were reached. Mr. Nascimento said that all corners of the city were engaged, and he acknowledged that the plan doesn't fully address the issue of affordable housing, adding that logistics make it difficult to engage everyone. Councilor Ballantyne commented that some councilors feel that the city hasn't done enough to ensure equity and she asked how equity and gender would play out in a project that comes along. Director Lewis said that the plan is broad-brushed and many of the issues need to be delved into in localized areas of the city. As the plan gets implemented, the Office of Racial and Social Justice would be an integral part of the team to ensure equity. Councilor Ballantyne spoke about gender inequity in the planning of play areas near the city's schools. She asked what equity encompasses and said that there should be a checklist of all the areas it applies to.

Director Proakis spoke about getting as much outreach as possible and also about filling the gaps created when community response is lacking. He asked the Council to approve this plan so that the old 2012 plan may be replaced. Councilor Scott stated that the plan's process was a great improvement over prior attempts, but he wondered how many of the respondents were renters in the city. He's also concerned about the lack of connecting the dots on various sections. He stated that he is unconvinced that the plan is not a policy document. He has heard from several people regarding anti-displacement, senior issues, etc., and he said that the plan has been referenced by developers noting that their developments are in line with the plan. He thinks that the plan may be used as a bludgeon. He asked if there is a summary of top line numbers and Director Lewis stated that part of a comprehensive plan is to make proposals and Mr. Nascimento explained that the thinking was to move away from numbers that sent a message, opting for ranges or percentages instead.

Chair Strezo commented that as a renter in affordable housing, she plans to vote in favor of the plan. She stated that she has seen changes made geared towards seniors. Councilor Ewen-Campen said that a vote should be taken on the item tonight and that he would support it. He believes that the plan is very comprehensive and does a fairly good job. He doesn't believe that it ties the hands of present or future elected officials. Councilor Rossetti was pleased with the additions regarding seniors, and she noted that the plan has been discussed for years. She is ready to vote in favor of the plan this evening. Councilor Niedergang encouraged the Chair to let the discussion continue tonight. He believes that the plan has been a helpful grounding point and although there are some flaws in it, the city would be better off with it than without it. He is ready to vote in favor of the item.

Councilor Scott stated that after compelling concerns from Ward 2 residents, there haven't been changes made to reflect those concerns.

Chair Strezo moved for approval.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [8 TO 1]
AYES:	Strezo, Ewen-Campen, Mbah, Niedergang, Davis, Ballantyne, Rossetti, White Jr.
NAYS:	Scott
ABSENT:	McLaughlin, Clingan

210891: That the Director of Parks and Recreation appear before this Council’s Committee on Housing and Community Development to discuss installing playground communication boards in all parks to expand park accessibility for children who are nonverbal or have other communication challenges.

Chair Strezo reported that the city is working on the logistics of installing the boards and finalizing the location sites.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211059: That the Director of Economic Development work with this Council on a Memorandum of Understanding for the Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan.

Chair Strezo stated that she would like to close this item.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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Referenced Material:

- SomerVision 2040 - 2021 Update Presentation(2) (with 212139)