

John Long

From: Wilfred Mbah <aldermanmbah@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, May 12, 2018 4:14 PM
To: Mark Niedergang, Ward 5 Alderman; Mark Niedergang
Cc: John Long; City Clerk Contact
Subject: Support for transfer fee to be read prior to vote
Attachments: Support for transfer fee vote.docx

Dear Honorable Chair of Legislative Matters Committee, Niedergang.

Please read my statement of support below prior to the transfer fee vote.

I have equally attached a copy that you can print.

Dear Honorable Colleagues,

Although I am not able to be here for the vote on the transfer fee, I want to share my strong support for the approach that the revised bill is taking, that is, separately assessing a 1% fee on buyers and a 1% fee on sellers, exempting family transfers entirely, and exempting owner occupant buyers and sellers.

Affordable housing was **the issue** in last November's municipal election, and I believe that I was elected, in large part, because I committed to taking action to address the housing crisis.

The testimony at the Housing Committee's hearing on the extent of that crisis and the testimony at the two hearings conducted by the Legislative Matters Committee put a human face on the crisis, which was already so clearly documented by the December 2015 Housing Needs Assessment, the MAPC's 2014 Dimensions of Displacement report, and the RKG study commissioned by the City to inform the debate about the transfer fee.

It is crystal clear that we need to take action, and it is just as clear that we need additional resources in order to meaningfully increase the chances for Somerville residents to affordably and sustainably own or rent a place to live in this City.

Instituting new taxes and fees is always a controversial matter, and as we heard at the two hearings convened by the Legislative Matters Committee, there are many longtime Somerville property owners who feel unfairly burdened by having to pay a transfer fee. Alderman Hirsch's proposal, exempting family transfers and owner occupants, and focusing on investor owners was a great solution to a challenging situation, and I strongly support the revised legislation incorporating that suggestion.

We also heard testimony about the need to better inform residents about the work we do in the Alderman's Chambers, and about the work of the Affordable Housing Trust, and I would support anything we can do to make that work more transparent and accountable. The City of Somerville has come a long way in making public information more accessible to the public, but we still have a ways to go. And the better the job we do, the more trust we will earn ... and if the testimony we heard is any indicator, there is still a lot of mistrust out there.

I wish I could be here to participate in your vote to send the Transfer Fee Home Rule Petition to the State Legislature, and to participate in some of the other important meetings scheduled. However, I want to make absolutely clear my support for the transfer fee legislation, and to express my appreciation for all the work that you all are doing and have done to address the city's affordable housing emergency.

Best,

Alderman Mbah.

--

Wilfred N. Mbah
Alderman At-Large
City of Somerville
508-718-8126

Dear Honorable Colleagues,

Although I am not able to be here for the vote on the transfer fee, I want to share my strong support for the approach that the revised bill is taking, that is, separately assessing a 1% fee on buyers and a 1% fee on sellers, exempting family transfers entirely, and exempting owner occupant buyers and sellers.

Affordable housing was the issue in last November's municipal election, and I believe that I was elected, in large part, because I committed to taking action to address the housing crisis.

The testimony at the Housing Committee's hearing on the extent of that crisis and the testimony at the two hearings conducted by the Legislative Matters Committee put a human face on the crisis, which was already so clearly documented by the December 2015 Housing Needs Assessment, the MAPC's 2014 Dimensions of Displacement report, and the RKG study commissioned by the City to inform the debate about the transfer fee.

It is crystal clear that we need to take action, and it is just as clear that we need additional resources in order to meaningfully increase the chances for Somerville residents to affordably and sustainably own or rent a place to live in this City.

Instituting new taxes and fees is always a controversial matter, and as we heard at the two hearings convened by the Legislative Matters Committee, there are many longtime Somerville property owners who feel unfairly burdened by having to pay a transfer fee. Alderman Hirsch's proposal, exempting family transfers and owner occupants, and focusing on investor owners was a great solution to a challenging situation, and I strongly support the revised legislation incorporating that suggestion.

We also heard testimony about the need to better inform residents about the work we do in the Alderman's Chambers, and about the work of the Affordable Housing Trust, and I would support anything we can do to make that work more transparent and accountable. The City of Somerville has come a long way in making public information more accessible to the public, but we still have a ways to go. And the better the job we do, the more trust we will earn ... and if the testimony we heard is any indicator, there is still a lot of mistrust out there.

I wish I could be here to participate in your vote to send the Transfer Fee Home Rule Petition to the State Legislature, and to participate in some of the other important meetings scheduled. However, I want to make absolutely clear my support for the transfer fee legislation, and to express my appreciation for all the work that you all are doing and have done to address the city's affordable housing emergency.

Best,

Alderman Mbah.

John Long

From: Donna Adams <dadams_98@hotmail.com>
Sent: Monday, May 14, 2018 12:50 PM
To: Board of Aldermen; City Clerk Contact
Subject: Transfer Fee (which is really a tax)

Dear Members,

Chair Niedergang opened the May 7 meeting by saying that this was a time to listen to us. The Mayor followed by saying this was a time to continue to hear from the public. However, I know from attending this meeting and previous BOA meetings that the majority of you already have your minds made up to pass this "tax". I can see you are only listening to a portion of your constituents and not all of us. You are pretending to listen but you are not open to considering what we are saying. This is taxation without representation. You are only listening to NEW constituents to the community. It was not their hard work to make Somerville a great place, they didn't take it from "Slummerville" to where we are today. Yet there is a sense of entitlement on their part, that they are owed something by the remainder of us who have worked hard for the last 20-30 years or more putting our hearts and souls into our houses, families and neighborhoods. Can you not see that this issue continues to divide this community along the lines of age and class? Can you not see that that these demands have no end, we heard them demanding rent control and no exclusions at the meeting. When I was in my thirties I couldn't afford to live in most of the communities around here. I went to Somerville because it was run down, more affordable and I took a chance that, with my help, it would turn around. In all fairness, this is how our capitalistic system works. We should be encouraging these new folks to do the same, go where they can afford it and turn other communities or states around. Vermont, Lawrence, Lowell, Everett, etc. all could use help. Let them go contribute there. Don't allow them to take from the rest of us what we do not owe them. We have to take care of our own families, retirements and assisted living needs. We can't afford to take care of other peoples families as well. Please don't think that by having exclusions you are not taking money out of our community, you are and it will affect all of us in more ways than you can even imagine, possibly all negatively. I am really sorry for this community that this process has turned into us against them.

Thank you,
Donna
Sent from my iPad

John Long

From: Linda Bohan <lbohan@minlib.net>
Sent: Monday, May 14, 2018 5:10 PM
To: Katjana Ballantyne; Matthew McLaughlin; stephanie@stepaniehirsch.org; Wilfred Mbah; Mary Jo. Rossetti; William A. White; JT Scott; Ben Ewen-Campen; Jesse Clingan; Mark Niedergang; Lance Davis; City Clerk Contact
Subject: Testimony - transfer fee
Attachments: Testimony - Transfer Fee - Bohan.pdf

To All Alderman and Alderwoman

Please see attached public written testimony for the transfer fee

Thank you
Linda Bohan

May 9, 2018

To: All Somerville Aldermen and Alderwomen

From: Linda Bohan

When I spoke to Mayor Curtatone regarding my opposition to building such an expensive high school, opposition to the \$50 million GLX fee to be paid by Somerville homeowners, and the frivolous use of space that was handed over to Partners Health, a non-profit, non-generating tax revenue development, his response to me was my house will be my nest-egg – so now he wants me to give part of my nest egg away?. This is my home and I plan on staying here so the transfer fee may not impact me directly but maybe in the future it would impact my children or grandchild.

You are in a position of privilege and power and your job is to serve and protect the citizens of Somerville. It is not to let power supersede your decisions. You are the gatekeepers of this community and it is your job to do your due diligence by hearing what the people want. The people do not want another tax or fee. We already have high water bills, real estate taxes, excise taxes, a CPA fee and a water meter fee. We get ticketed for trash that is in our driveways, ticketed if we put trash out too early or more than one piece of furniture per week. We get ticketed if we don't shovel in time, or park on the wrong side of the street. Soon tickets will be distributed to those who don't take care of their landscaping. We have to pay for parking meters in every business district and as late as 8:00pm. We have to pay for visitor permits and parking permits so I can park in front of my own house. Now the water and sewage rates are to go up again?

Although frowned upon by "newcomers" in Somerville I am proud to say that I am a "lifelong resident" of Somerville. I have earned the right to boast about it and yes there is a difference – newcomers don't plan on staying and investing in homeownership, sending their future children to our schools and volunteering in our community. They do not want to raise a family here as much as you keep telling yourselves yet you passed a vote to build one of the most expensive new schools in the state. I am talking about the transient, young professionals who can afford to rent but they will not remain in our city. My parents immigrated here and I was born and raised in Somerville. I bought a house here, raised three children here and they are all graduates of the Somerville school system. I volunteered in the school system for 20 years, was a volunteer at the Somerville Library and served on the Planning Board for 10 years. I am also a landlord who charges 50% below rental market rates because my home is not a business it is my home and it is my tenant's home. I have been subsidizing affordable housing to my tenants for the past 34 years while my husband and I held jobs and borrowed money to make improvements to our home instead of charging market rate rental income. My two older children could not afford to rent or own a home in Somerville so I know all too well about affordable housing – there no longer is any in this city.

I drive around the city and all I see is another housing development with too many units and very little character. The Union Square developers, Federal Realty, Maxwell Green, and other real estate developers popping up in this city are driven by the "Green Line greed." They have ruined the fabric of this community – they fabricate traffic and parking studies – they tell us that newcomers (young professionals) won't use cars. We've been made to believe that we will have fewer cars when the green line comes in – I don't believe it. The developers have caused the affordable housing crunch but the Administration and the Board of Alderman allowed it to happen.

Frankly, the point of this email to all of you is that I don't trust what will happen to this money and I think that there will be loopholes in the home rule petition that will allow for amendments to this fund in the future. It will just become another slush fund to be spent by this administration. The only thing I agree on – let the developers and absentee landlords foot the bill and start making decisions that will help the residents of this city not help the rich get richer.

John Long

From: Lenore Schloming <lenoresch@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, May 18, 2018 9:58 AM
To: City Clerk Contact
Subject: Transfer tax

Dear Aldermen and women,

I strenuously oppose the transfer tax. It will raise rents for tenants and raise the cost of housing for people wanting to get into rental real estate.

But there is an even worse aspect. The tax money collected will go into the city's Affordable Housing Trust Fund to build and/or manage "affordable" housing. First off, this burden of providing affordable housing is being placed on rental property owners, not the entire citizenry of Somerville. Why should rental property owners have this burden while others do not??? Only because they are a minority that can be exploited and forced to take on this burden by the majority. "Affordable" housing is a community issue, not one confined to rental property owners, so the entire community should approve and pay for it, if they so decide.

Secondly, "affordable" housing is not affordable. It is built, rehabbed, and/or maintained by hired employees and licensed contractors. These people are the costliest way to build and maintain housing. They require competitive salaries to get people, and benefits and pensions as well. Very costly. Private owners may have salaries and benefits from their non-rental jobs, but their rental property is not paying for those amenities. Private owners do their own repairs and management (ads for new tenants, leases, bills, etc.) at no specific wage or charge, consequently with no upward pressure on rents, so rents can be kept lower. Supporting private owners is the best way to achieve lower rents.

Thirdly, "affordable" housing sooner or later depends, in whole or in part, on taxpayer funds to support it. Consequently, everyone pays for it in the end, but the transfer tax is being approved in a procedure that bypasses all the local taxpayers: meetings that seem to have no appeal to most taxpayers, approval only by the Board of Aldermen and the State Legislature, which again bypasses the taxpayers: Somerville citizens and all citizens.

Finally, the locations of "affordable" housing are maintained in public records, and tenant advocates can access this info and contact the individuals living in "affordable" housing. These individuals often do not have jobs, so they can be corralled to attend meetings, and being dependents on the government in one or more ways, they can be relied upon to support increasing government services and anti-landlord legislation. It is a biased lobbying group, not a representative one, and "affordable" housing makes these people into advocates -- not something a city or state or federal government should be doing. It is, in other words, a corrupt form of government. Section 8 vouchers do not have this drawback. So there are ways to support lower-rent housing for certain needy people in the population that are better than "affordable" housing trust funds.

Please vote against the transfer tax.

Thank you,

Skip Schloming
Owner of two rental properties in Somerville (12 units)
102R Inman Street
Cambridge MA 02139
617-354-2358

John Long

From: mcalia@aol.com
Sent: Friday, May 18, 2018 11:56 AM
To: John Long; City Clerk Contact; Board of Aldermen
Subject: Transfer Fee

Dear Mr. Long,

I would like to submit my opinion in writing to the Boards of Alderman regarding the Transfer Fee.

I am not in favor of the Transfer Fee. As a home owner and lifelong resident of Somerville I have lived through the many changes in the city in over 6 decades. The definition of the word "Fee" is a payment made to in return for services rendered. This Tax which the monies will be managed by Affordable Housing is targeted to one group in the city the homeowner who is already burdened with high taxes and other city fees.

When discussing the number of affordable housing projects, units or developments with my alderman, I was surprised that he did not know the number or where they are all in the city. I know some but not all: North Street, Mystic Ave, Clarendon Hill. Linden Street and Temple Street. These do not include the low income housing in the new developer's units or section 8 housing in various buildings. I would like the city to have a complete catalogue of affordable living spaces prior to any talk of adding a tax. Include new units that are in the process of construction. There is not clear path on managing this money or how this has been managed in the past. An independent audit by Price Waterhouse or some other like vendor should be done on the Affordable House Trust Fund and how the funds are managed and used.

I would like to see the city first manage Air BNB in place of the Transfer Tax. The city is losing monies that it would have received if the hotel tax was collected. Also these Air BNB units take away from housing in the city. Boston is taking the lead on this right now.

Regards,

Mary Calia
Belmont St.