



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

March 14, 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	

Others present: Alderman Mark Niedergang, Alderman Stephanie Hirsch, Michael Glavin - OSPCD, Brian Gaspar - Housing Specialist, Tim Snyder - Mayor's Office, Charles Sillari - Clerk of Committees.

The meeting took place in the Committee Room and was called to order at 6:34 PM by Chairman Ewen-Campen and adjourned at 8:43 PM.

Approval of the February 14, 2018 Minutes

RESULT:

ACCEPTED

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.

The chairman explained that he agrees with Alderman White that this committee should have a public hearing, to get people to present data from organizations that deal with people being displaced such as Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services, Community Action Agency of Somerville, Somerville Homeless Coalition, Somerville Community Corporation, and others. He would like a public record of that data. He would also like to show that there is a crisis in the city with respect to affordable housing as that will help in getting a home rule petition passed according to advice from Alderman Bill White. Mr. Glavin cautioned against the term "public emergency" as this term is typically used to describe catastrophic natural disasters, and suggested that terms such as crisis may be more useful in this context.

Ald. Ballantyne explained that a public hearing is usually not a venue for collecting data in her opinion. She would also like to look at the housing situation in the region as a whole.

Ald. Clingan expressed concerns about obtaining the desired results from a public hearing. He would like to invite people being evicted in his ward from a particular apartment building that was recently sold. He feels this issue is about values and income equality. He is excited about this initiative, and wants to make sure that the correct message is being put out to the public so that people can really understand what is at stake.

Ald. Ballantyne wants to make sure that the subject matter experts are at the public hearing to provide the data needed. She said the public hearing needs to be-planned properly in advance.

Ald. Ewen-Campen would like to get data on things such as rent increases over the past 10 years and the number of evictions over the past 10 years. He agrees with the need to plan the public hearing in advance, so that local organizations are prepared to present useful testimony, in addition to comments from the public

Mr. Glavin discussed issues that are happening in Boston and Cambridge and how Somerville can learn from initiatives in those municipalities.

Brian Gaspar, housing specialist, discussed his experiences with eviction processes.

Ald. Ewen-Campen stated he believes the government can help improve people's lives.

The committee discussed the timing of the public hearing and the submission of the home rule petition, and decided that Alderman Ewen-Campen would work with Mr. Snyder and organizational spokespeople to plan a time in the next month or so.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

204984: That the Director of SPCD provide data for all current affordable housing stock in the city, including section 8 vouchers, state and federal affordable housing, and inclusionary housing.

Mr. Glavin submitted data to the committee on how many affordable units are in the city. The committee asked whether inclusionary and/or Section 8 units are included, and Mr. Glavin said that he would return with a clear answer for the committee in the future.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

205191: That the Administration inform this Board on the annual number of eviction cases heard in Somerville District Court, the proportion for which the tenant has no legal representation, and the estimated cost of ensuring that all Somerville tenants have such representation.

Brian Gaspar, housing specialist, presented the requested information to the committee. He said there were 222 summary process actions in Somerville District Court filed in 2017 and 29 in 2018 so far, of which 27 defendants did not have legal representation. He also discussed the findings with respect to how many tenants were represented by counsel. He will send the link to the Massachusetts court website to the committee so that they can review the data. The committee also discussed services available to tenants going through the eviction process.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

204854: That the Chief Assessor report to this Board, the number of properties (residential and commercial) that have been bought and sold within a 1-year period, and the extent of improvements that were made during that period, for the past five years.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

205097: That this Board’s Committee on Housing and Community Development discuss a ‘Housing Hackathon’.

Ald. Hirsch explained what a Housing Hackathon is and how it would bring people of different skill sets together. She anticipates a day-long event in June, and invites Aldermen and community members to reach out with housing data-related questions they may want help analyzing.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

204976: That the Director of SPCD provide this Board with a detailed description of the MA Workforce Housing Initiative and explain how the city can encourage developers to take advantage of it.

Mr. Glavin provided the committee with information on the Workforce Housing Initiative. He discussed how the subsidy works and how it can be utilized by developers. The administration will continue to pursue the program and market its availability. Mr. Glavin clarified that the program is intended to be used as part of larger public/private projects, and is not likely to be taken advantage of by small or mid-sized developers working on a typical neighborhood project.

The committee discussed the 30 year restriction to keep the units affordable. Ald. Ballantyne would like it to be made affordable in perpetuity.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

196368: That the Director of SPCD submit a plan on the use of city owned properties as it relates to projected growth identified in the SomerVision Plan.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

204885: That the City Clerk and the Director of SPCD expand abutter notices for Zoning Board of Appeal, Planning Board and Historic Preservation Commission hearings to include tenants of abutting properties in addition to property owners.

Mr. Snyder discussed the current practices and the difficult task of creating a database of all tenants. The administration has significantly improved their outreach by creating special email lists and websites for nearly every project, allowing any interested abutter to stay informed. Other ways of notification such as signs at the subject property and handing out flyers was discussed. Mailings can be cost prohibitive to the city.

Alderman Ewen-Campen suggested simply sending a letter to ‘current resident’ at every property, instead of just property owners, as he believes this was the intent of Alderman Scott’s order. Ald. Ballantyne noted that, based on her experience campaigning, sending to ‘current resident’ is possible by the U.S. Postal Service. Mr. Synder said that he would look into this solution.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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205098: That the Administration update this Board on opportunities for expanded advertisement of the city’s tax deferral program, and other tools that may help seniors and homeowners on fixed incomes to achieve financial stability.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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204847: That the Director of SPCD update this Board on what is being done to preserve minority owned businesses in the city.

Alderman Mbah was unable to attend this meeting.

Mr. Galligani presented data and submitted a PowerPoint presentation on minority owned businesses which included storefront businesses and professional services that are performed at home. There are 1400 minority owned businesses in Somerville according to the U.S. Census.

The committee discussed the issues faced by many minority-owned businesses, and that the city collects data from the state which is released on a quarterly basis. Minority owned businesses tend to struggle with raising capital. Various ethnic enclaves were discussed and how moving populations can impact businesses. The city has programs that are designed to help minority owned businesses with marketing. A program with the Arts Council that introduces residents to minority owned businesses was discussed. The committee discussed limited access to networks of minority businesses.

The committee discussed ways in which the city tries to assist minority owned businesses, such as connecting them with networks and organizations that will add value.

SomerViva is an organization that assists ethnic business concentrations in the city.

Grants and loans for storefront improvement were discussed as that program is utilized by minority businesses.

The Nibble program was discussed which helps immigrant culinary entrepreneurs get started in business.

The committee discussed city programs that helps minority business owners with social media and marketing.

The committee discussed strategic support such as construction mitigation in preparation of the Union Square construction and Green Line Extension.

The city is working to help form a Brazilian business network.

The city's workforce strategic plan was discussed.

Liquor licenses have been issued to minority owned businesses in the city. The committee discussed incentivizing minority owned businesses to seek liquor licenses and if there are any legal implications. Ald. Ewen-Campen would like a legal opinion to see if the city can promote liquor licenses to minority owned businesses.

The committee discussed new liquor licenses acquired by the city and how they are allocated to different parts of the city.

Boston and Cambridge use one-on-one coaching programs for minority business owners and the city will look at doing something similar.

The city is continuously doing outreach to work with minority businesses.

The committee discussed challenges in getting first floor retail spaces rented and activated, and Alderman Ballantyne said that she would look into submitting an independent Board Order to continue this discussion.

Motion by Ald. Ewen-Campen that legal department draft an opinion on whether the city can prioritize minority owned businesses in city contracts-approved

Motion by Ald. Ewen-Campen that legal department draft an opinion on whether liquor licenses can be granted preferentially to woman and minority owned businesses-approved

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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204995: That the Commissioner of Public Works and the Arts Council Director determine the feasibility of creating a mural (or another graffiti deterrent) on the back side of the Argenziano School.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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204884: That this Board explore establishing a community-based independent Community Land Trust that can purchase property in conjunction with non-profit organizations and private citizens, and make housing permanently affordable.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Handouts:

- Affordable Housing Data (with 204984)
- Workforce Housing (with 204976)
- OSPCD-Eco Dev-Presentation (with 204847)