



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

July 7, 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: Ellen Shachter - OSPCD, Luisa Oliveira - 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 5:07 PM by Chair Strezo and adjourned at 6:34 PM on a roll call vote of 1 in favor (Councilor Strezo), 0 against and 2 absent (Councilors Ewen-Campen, Mbah).

Approval of the May 19, 2021 Minutes

The minutes were accepted on a roll call vote of 2 in favor (Councilors Ewen-Campen, Strezo), 0 against and 1 absent (Councilor Mbah).

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.

Ms. Shachter reported that:

- for the month of June, requests for rental assistance have increased,
- Somerville's moratorium was extended until September 15, 2021,
- the Supreme Court declined to hear a case declaring the CDC moratorium illegal, staying some eviction proceedings,
- the moratorium on commercial sites has been lifted,
- eviction filings have decreased in the city and 5 cases were filed in June,
- any tenant who is required to appear in court will be provided a lawyer, if requested,

- direct payment to tenants is being allowed if a landlord is non-responsive,
- the state legislature has renewed protections, i.e., landlords must provide notice of assistance for all evictions,
- there have been some staff changes in the department, and
- the contract for legal services has been renewed.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked if there is sufficient funding available and Ms. Shachter said that an analysis to be done to determine needs. She was unable to provide the dollar amount that would be needed to make all renters whole. Staff is trying to identify assistance gaps and Ms. Shachter explained that, due to various restrictions on how some funds may be utilized, flexible funding is needed. The problem won't be solved, she said, until there is enough permanent affordable housing.

Chair Strezo spoke about inclusionary housing being nearly at market rate and Ms. Shachter told the committee that 100% of rental units are problematic and many remain vacant due to their high cost. She thinks that the ownership units are still beneficial. Many of the inclusionary units are being filled by tenants with Section 8 vouchers and Ms. Shachter explained that incentives can be offered to real estate professionals for placing Section 8 tenants.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211940: That the Director of SPCD re-evaluate SomerVision post-pandemic, and ways to mitigate the impact from the pandemic.

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

Mr. Nascimento spoke about the goals of the plan and gave a brief presentation, highlighting some of the key areas and changes to the plan, the draft of which was released at the end of 2019 and put on hold in the spring of 2020 due to the COVID pandemic. Mr. Nascimento stated that the plan is the by-product of many community members who volunteered their time and that it attempts to reflect a broad community vision.

Chair Strezo sponsored Elaine Koury to speak. Ms. Koury said that seniors were distressed because senior issues were omitted from earlier versions of the plan and she pointed out that there still is no real section in the plan dealing with seniors, ignoring the fact that seniors have needs that others don't. The committee was informed that roughly 11,000 residents of Somerville are over the age of 65. Prices are rising and people on fixed incomes can't keep pace. Many seniors in Somerville are struggling and rampant development has caused displacement of many seniors. Ms. Koury spoke about the difficulties faced by seniors during the winter months in dealing with snow shoveling and negotiating sidewalks. She commented that owning a house with a high property value is great if it's an investment, otherwise it's just more expense for a person on a fixed income. She believes that data should be published on people over 65 relative

to safety, displacement, etc. Ms. Koury told the committee that seniors need to be on the city's radar, reminding the members that many senior vote. She noted that the incoming Council will be made up of younger people, leaving seniors without an age-wise peer to represent them. She urged the committee to not approve a 20-year plan until senior needs are addressed and ended her remarks by stating "Take a stand and stand up for us."

Councilor Ewen-Campen assumed the Chair.

Councilor Mbah said he won't endorse any plan just for the sake of moving it forward. Mr. Nascimento explained the comprehensive plan is developed by the Planning Board, who has the authority to pass it. The Council is merely being asked for its endorsement, as it was for prior plans. Chair Ewen-Campen noted that the plan is also in the Land Use Committee and that the Council's approval is not needed for passage. Councilor Strezo assumed the Chair. Councilor Mbah thinks that the Planning Board should take input from the Housing Committee. Chair Strezo stated that she will put this item on an agenda for a Committee of the Whole meeting and also stated that she will be endorsing the plan at some point after the summer recess. She sees this item as an "and", i.e., "and are we going to address the needs of seniors". She is considering asking the City Council to reinstate its Committee on Senior Services and believes that seniors must have a voice at the table. Councilor Mbah commented that the first thing he noticed in the plan was that there was no mention of the charter reform in the community and governance section. Mr. Nascimento explained that it wasn't within the scope of the document and what was included in the plan were items that people wanted to discuss. He went on to say that the term "comprehensive" references things within the scope of planning. Councilor Mbah said most of the plan is about goals and tasks and Mr. Nascimento explained that a goal is stated and then tasks are identified to achieve that goal, noting that it's not a complete list. Councilor Mbah spoke about job loss and the effects of COVID and noted that these issues aren't addressed in the plan either.

Councilor Ewen-Campen, before leaving this meeting to attend a community meeting, stated that he supports having another public hearing with the Committee of the Whole and he thinks that a deadline should be set for voting on the item.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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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.

Ms. Oliveira gave an update and said that 15 boards were ordered and are expected to be delivered in 4 to 6 weeks. Placement locations have not yet been determined and Ms. Oliveira asked that suggestions for placement locations be emailed to her at loliveira@somervillema.gov <<mailto:loliveira@somervillema.gov>>. If there is a child who could benefit from the board, priority will be given for that placement.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Referenced Material:

- SomerVision 2040 - 2021 Update Presentation (with 212139)