



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
CLERK OF COMMITTEES

January 19, 2022

REPORT OF THE HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Kristen Strezo	Chair	Present	
Ben Ewen-Campen	Vice Chair	Present	
Judy Pineda Neufeld	Ward Seven City Councilor	Present	

Others present: Hannah Carrillo-Mayor's Office, Ellen Shachter-Office of Housing Stability, and Ashley Speliotis-Council on Aging.

The meeting was held virtually and was called to order at 6:01 p.m. by Chairperson Strezo and adjourned at 7:07 p.m.

Approval of the September 29, 2021 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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212859: That the Director of the Council on Aging and representatives of the administration appear before the Housing and Community Development Committee to discuss the transportation needs of seniors who utilized the Senior Taxi Grant Program, including immediate funding sources and steps that may be taken to respond to the December 2021 grant expiration.

Ms. Speliotis talked about the senior taxi grant that came in 2021. Prior to this, the city did not offer any taxi services to allow seniors to go to grocery stores and other areas. When the pandemic came about, they started delivery food and other services to seniors. The funding comes from Lyft and Uber, the state receives a portion of the funding to help communities. The grant was also used to take seniors to doctor appointments and it was over 4,000 taxi trips. The grant was renewed and funding began in September and ended in December. The state has ended the grant and the City of Somerville is waiting to see if additional funding will be available from other resources.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked if the services were also available for people to receive vaccine and other such related services. They were able to use Elder services to get seniors to these appointments.

Ms. Carrillo will get back to Chair Strezo with an update on the status of requesting funding from ARPA to extend this program.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

212861: That the Director of the Office of Housing Stability appear before the Housing and Community Development Committee to discuss the current status of Somerville residents facing displacement and the number of households seeking rental assistance.

Ms. Shachter appeared before the committee and noted that the numbers of evictions remain fairly low. The City of Somerville moratorium expires the end of April this year. From September to December last year, there were 3 -9 cases over the months. Most were for cause cases and were more complex and complicated. In Somerville district eviction court, there were fewer cases around 2 cases in a couple of months. There is still a small number of execution number which is a case that has gone all the way through trial during the COVID crises and are at immediate risk. There are approximately 157 cases a month for assistance needing intervention. They are averaging 40-50 cases each month for rental assistance. On April 15, the state may stop taking cases if they do not receive funding.

Ms. Shachter also discussed the flexible ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funding program of around \$1M and hoping to contract to non-profit agencies to get the funds out to them. They are also working on the concept municipal voucher program with ARPA staff and team in the next few months to expand permanent housing resources.

There is an ARPA proposal for a new engagement program to provide a place for services inside when it's cold that will provide a range of services. The non-profit organizations came together to put the proposal together.

Ms. Shachter also talked about \$6M-10M lobbying and communications firm that are working with the coalition for Martha Vineyard and Nantucket Islands. Mass General Brigham Hospital put out its press release in support of this legislation. There will be an Evicted exhibit with Somerville being the only location, besides Connecticut, and this may be at the Armory in August for 6 to 12 weeks.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked how many people are working with the office of housing, since there was a posting for positions. Ms. Shachter stated there are seven in the office that are permanent. There are five rental assistance through ARPA funding. They are hiring two people right now that are English/Spanish speaking.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked about the backlog. Ms. Shachter stated they have kept a backlog of 12-15 cases and can get to people within three weeks. They will take cases sooner, if there are emergencies.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

212862: That the Director of Somerville Cares About Prevention appear before the Housing and Community Development Committee to discuss the increased constituent reports of teens vaping in the high school during school hours and what is being done to address this.

Ms. Carrillo stated that no one from Somerville Cares About Prevention was able to appear before the committee tonight.

The chair stated that she's heard from students and parents that some students are vaping in the bathrooms. She also had a conversation from someone from Somerville Cares About Prevention and he believes it's more of a school issues and should work directly with them. Another student said that they are trying to put through vaping detectors in the bathrooms.

Councilors Ewen-Campen and Pineda Neufeld both suggests raising this issue with members of the school committee to institute policies about this issue.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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212864: That the City Solicitor respond in writing and appear before the Committee on Housing and Community Development to discuss the Encore Casino's compliance with its Surrounding Community Agreement.

Items 212864 and 212865 were discussed together.

The chair stated these orders were resubmitted to be discussed. There was an agreement to the city that a certain amount funds would be spent in businesses in Somerville annually to create a customer loyalty program. The chair has asked previously for data in the housing meetings and has not received any updates. Ms. Carrillo stated that this was addressed last session by the law office and nothing further was to be done. The staff did put in time and did not find any information. The chair recalled that numerous attempts were made to Encore and was waiting to hear back from city solicitor's office. Ms. Carrillo did not have any additional information to add for comment.

Councilor Ewen-Campen stated if there is a breach of the contract, the city solicitor's office should reach out to Encore. Additionally, he would like a clearer explanation from the city solicitor's office on whether there is a breach of contract and what the next steps would be on this matter. The response should be writing from the city solicitor's office to the housing committee.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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212865: That the Executive Director of the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development update this Council's Committee on Housing and Community Development on the Encore Casino's efforts to support Somerville small businesses per their Community Agreement.

Items 212864 and 212865 were discussed together.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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