



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Legislative Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, November 14, 2023

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Davis at 6:02 pm and adjourned at 8:55 pm with a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilor Scott, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Burnley, Councilor Ewen-Campen and Chair Davis), none opposed, and none absent.

President Ewen-Campen appointed himself to replace Councilor Kelly on the Committee for this meeting only.

Others present: Neha Singh – Mayor’s Office, Ellen Shachter – OHS, Kimberly Wells – City Clerk, Jill Currier – OHS, Jason Piques – Law Office, Stephanie Widzowski – Clerk of Committees.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Lance L. Davis, Willie Burnley Jr., Matthew McLaughlin, Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott and Ben Ewen-Campen

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-1647](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Legislative Matters Committee Meeting of October 30, 2023.

RESULT: ACCEPTED
AYE: Chairperson Davis, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and Ewen-Campen

2. Order (ID # [23-0318](#))
By Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Kelly, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Scott, Councilor Strezo and Councilor Wilson
That this Council draft a Home Rule Petition to authorize Somerville to regulate against rent gouging by establishing Rent Stabilization.

Taken together with item 23-1694.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

3. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-1694](#)) Requesting approval of a Home Rule Petition authorizing the City of Somerville to regulate rent in residential dwelling units.

Taken together with item 23-0318. Chair Davis noted that there is an extra week between the next City Council meeting and the final one of the year, so there is time to resolve any outstanding concerns on this item before 2024. Councilor Ewen-Campen introduced the item and explained that the timing

of this Home Rule Petition (HRP) is based on changes at the state level as well as Boston filing its own rent stabilization HRP. He added that work was done through the Anti-Displacement Task Force. Dir. Shachter gave a presentation on the HRP and the approval process. She noted during the presentation that, while research has not found a negative correlation between rent stabilization and new construction, many developers have stated the opposite, so the 15-year new construction exemption is to ensure that the HRP will not hinder new housing.

Committee discussion centered around the 15-year exemption for new construction, vacancy decontrol (which is not included in the HRP), and exemptions for owner occupancy. Dir. Shachter also noted that some provisions of the HRP may be carried out best through regulation as opposed to ordinance, or vice versa. It was repeatedly mentioned that much consideration was given in the drafting of the HRP to the political climate of the state legislature; councilors gave arguments for and against that strategy. Chair Davis asked about plans for a rental registry; Dir. Shachter said that a registry would make it easier to implement a rent board. The Committee also talked about the logistics of vacant units.

Councilor Scott requested a written opinion from the City Solicitor whether the HRP as-is would allow the city or City Council in the future to establish vacancy control provisions, and to provide language on how to handle potential blind spots in base rent with respect to owner occupancy exemptions and just cause evictions for family. She called for a clause that explicitly reserves the right of the city to establish base rents and protocols for when a unit goes from exempt to non-exempt. Chair Davis also requested guidance on whether the city could clarify in the HRP the lack of exemptions for the rental cap. Solicitor Piques said he could put something together and report back.

Councilor Burnley introduced two motions: *That the City Solicitor draft language to be added to the Somerville Rent Stabilization Home Rule Petition to make clear that there is not a provision for vacancy decontrol,* and *To lower the exemption for new construction from 15 years after certificate of occupancy to 10 years.* He withdrew these motions with the intent to finish the conversation at the next Legislative Matters Committee meeting.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Documents:

- Legislative Matters - 2023-11-14 Rent Stabilization Home Rule Petition - Legislative Matters FINAL (with 23-1694)