



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Housing and Community Development Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, June 30, 2025

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Strezo at 6:06pm and adjourned at 7:11pm on a roll call vote of 2 in favor (Councilors Ewen-Campen and Strezo), 0 opposed, and 1 absent (Councilor Clingan).

Others present: Ellen Shachter - Director of Housing Stability, Dana Whiteside - Deputy Director of Economic Development and Delaney Fisher-Cassiol - Clerk of Committees

Roll Call

Present: City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo and Ward Seven
City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen
Absent: Jesse Clingan

1. Committee
Minutes
(ID # [25-0413](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Housing and Community Development
Committee Meeting of March 4, 2025.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**
AYE: City Councilor At Large Strezo and Ward Seven City
Councilor Ewen-Campen
ABSENT: Clingan

2. Order
(ID # [25-0133](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin
That the Director of Housing Stability update this Council on recent changes
to condominium conversion and tenant protection laws as a result of the
2024 Housing Bond Bill and how Somerville may strengthen its protections.

Policy changes from the Housing Bond Bill have recently gone into effect,
giving municipalities the authority to regulate condominium conversions in
buildings with more than four units. While Somerville already had its own
local law, the new Affordable Homes Act did not impact those existing
regulations. As a result, three times as many buildings and twice as many
units are now regulated, but the city cannot expand its authority any further
under current law.

Councilor Ewen-Campen expressed appreciation for the update. Chair
Strezo asked whether the city can legally give preference to Somerville
residents when a unit comes onto the market. Director of Housing Stability,
Ellen Shachter, explained that all tenants have the right of first refusal
during condominium conversions, and that while Boston has implemented a
tenant selection plan, research by Somerville's Housing Division has

supported a residency preference for programs like 100 Homes. Data confirms that this approach does not violate fair housing rules or place any group at a disadvantage.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

3. Order
(ID # [25-0134](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin

That the Director of Housing Stability update this Council on efforts to raise awareness for eviction sealing assistance in light of recent state legislation enabling the sealing of evictions.

Director Shachter provided an update on the eviction record sealing process, now available under specific circumstances. She emphasized that this effort is critical, as eviction records can impact a person's ability to secure housing, even in cases where the tenant won in court or was misidentified due to having the same name as someone else. The goal is to give people a fair chance at stable housing.

Under the new law, which took effect on May 5, tenants can petition the court to seal records from no-fault evictions, such as when a landlord sells the property, significantly increases rent, or dismisses the case. Most cases involve non-payment of rent. If the tenant pays the full court-ordered amount, they can request immediate sealing. If the amount is unpaid, tenants may still qualify after four years without additional non-payment cases, provided they can demonstrate economic hardship. For fault-based evictions, tenants may request sealing after seven years.

Somerville and Cambridge have partnered on eviction response efforts and have hosted six workshops to help residents navigate the process. Four records have been sealed so far. The court has discretion to hold a hearing or seal the record directly. Director Shachter noted that a simple online tool has been developed to guide tenants through the petition process and outline any next steps.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Order
(ID # [25-0247](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Mbah, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Sait, Councilor Strezo and Councilor Wilson
That the Director of Economic Development report on the economic impact to small businesses in Somerville as a result of recent federal immigration policy changes.

Economic Development Deputy Director, Dana Whiteside, provided an update on the division's efforts to support Somerville's small business community. While the division does not directly track business data, it relies on SomerStat for information such as sales tax revenue, which helps assess overall economic impact. Staff regularly engage with small business owners

to connect them with available resources. Prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, the division was able to provide financial stability through various programs, but those funding sources have since declined, and the Urban Agenda Grant has concluded for the current fiscal year.

In response to these constraints, Deputy Director Whiteside emphasized the division's goal of enhancing communication and strengthening relationships with partner agencies to serve as a convener and source of best practices. Through ongoing conversations with businesses across the city, many owners have expressed frustration with navigating processes and accessing assistance. The division aims to play a more active role in streamlining resources and ensuring businesses are aware of the support that exists.

He also highlighted additional tools and programs currently in place. The Massachusetts Area Planning Council created a leasing handbook available in multiple languages, and with ARPA funding, the city launched two grant programs: a Vitality Grant, which awarded \$576,000 to 30 businesses between January and August 2024, and a Business Enrichment Grant totaling \$1.3 million. Business owners have voiced a desire for greater visibility, leading the division to develop a new social media policy to explore how its platform can be used to promote local businesses. The division is also working to build stronger partnerships across the region and continues to host weekly business hours to support entrepreneurs directly.

Chair Strezo expressed enthusiasm and asked whether there had been discussion about helping very small businesses obtain tax IDs, noting that many are unfamiliar with the process. Deputy Director Whiteside confirmed that assistance is available. During the Urban Agenda Grant period, the division hosted a series of operational workshops, and small business office hours remain ongoing. All workshops are now available online.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Mayor's Request
(ID # [25-1005](#))

Requesting approval of the 2025-2026 Housing and Urban Development One Year Action Plan for Community Development Block Grant, Home Investment Partnership, and Emergency Solutions Grant Programs.

Director of Finance and Community Development Alan Inacio presented the annual plan, noting that a similar filing is submitted each year. He reviewed the presentation entitled HCD - 2025-06-30 Annual Action Plan 2025-2026 (with 25-1005).

Chair Strezo asked what differences he has observed between this year's plan and last year's. Director Inacio shared that, for the first time in 20 years, the city will be fully leveraging the financing capabilities of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. While this approach will require the city to make an annual entitlement payment of \$500,000, it is

expected to result in significant long-term benefits for the community.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Strezo and Ward Seven City Councilor Ewen-Campen

ABSENT: Clingan

6. Order
(ID # [25-1200](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Davis

That the Director of Economic Development provide an update to this Council on efforts to mitigate construction impacts on small businesses in the city, what resources are available to small business affected by construction, and what additional support can be made available.

Deputy Director Dana Whiteside expressed appreciation for the opportunity to speak on this issue. He acknowledged that while funding resources are limited, the City's partnership with small businesses remains a priority. He emphasized the distinction between city-led and non-city-led construction projects, noting that the City has more control over those it leads directly. Regardless of who manages the work, Deputy Director Whiteside stressed that the City has a role to play in both contexts, as small businesses are often impacted. He shared that the City has begun conversations on how to better coordinate with third-party entities to ensure alignment and responsiveness. He emphasized the importance of incorporating this coordination into regular project reviews and welcomed input from the committee to strengthen communication efforts moving forward.

Chair Strezo expressed hope that a meaningful and feasible outreach strategy can be implemented. She noted that some small businesses have raised concerns that construction drives customers away and disrupts their ability to answer phones or operate efficiently, even for just one day, such as during snow events. She also raised concerns about third-party contractors, asking whether the City has any control over which vendors are hired and whether contractors are held accountable for respectful engagement with the community. She referenced examples from other communities where signage is placed during construction to inform residents and customers, and she asked how Somerville might adopt similar practices to minimize disruption and confusion.

Councilor Ewen-Campen referenced the ongoing Spring Hill construction project, now in its third year. He acknowledged that while the City has made progress in its outreach to residents, there have still been missed opportunities in communication. He was particularly struck by the lack of signage indicating that local businesses remained open during construction. He suggested that more proactive communication at the start of projects could help maintain positive relationships between the City and small business owners and mitigate negative impacts.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

7. Resolution By Councilor Sait
(ID # [25-1178](#)) That the Administration notify Magoun Square businesses of planned construction projects.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE