

## **Somerville Renters Forum 2021 - Housing Questionnaire**

*All candidates were asked the same questions. Questionnaires were submitted to the Somerville Renters Committee and CAAS on 8/6/21. The Ward candidates forum was held 8/11/21 on Zoom.*

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Position running for: **City Council Ward 7**

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1. What do you view as the greatest challenge facing low income Somerville renters in 2021, and why?

**The biggest reason that renters in our community are forced to move is the lack of affordable housing, ongoing massive rise in rent across our city, and the lack of any type of rent control. For the lowest-income renters this is compounded by lack of access to civil justice to defend themselves from evictions, and the lack of state level eviction moratorium. Most renters do not know of their rights that they can exercise to hold absent landlords accountable, and most new development does not meet the need of renters who cannot afford luxury units.**

2. In a city where more than half of the people rent, what housing policies would you focus on to ensure that every resident has safe, stable, and affordable housing? We are particularly concerned that the elderly, people with disabilities, veterans, people of color, immigrants, LGBTQ+, and other people with marginalized identities do not have enough access to housing in Somerville. If you are running for re-election, please share what you have already done on this issue and what you intend to prioritize next.

**For Somerville renters, I will pursue policies to increase the number of affordable and accessible units in Somerville. There are a number of ways to do this. Somerville could build deeply affordable housing units (<30% AMI). We need to ensure that units that are currently being held vacant for speculation purposes are made available to the public as affordable housing. We should also work to pass a fair housing ordinance to address historic discrimination and create more affordable housing in all our neighborhoods.**

**For members of our community who have disabilities, I will work to support regulations that establish a fund to retrofit units to be accessible and encourage the city planning and zoning division to enforce existing accessibility regulations on new construction. We could also pursue an ordinance to require accessible front entrances in all residential buildings, and getting rid of the 2-foot rise requirement for front doors on residential buildings, which creates a stigmatizing experience as the only accessible entrances are the side and back doors. I support making our infrastructure ADA compliant, and encourage the city planning and zoning division to enforce existing accessibility regulations on new construction. We could require that 50% of the affordable units are ADA compliant in the zoning as well.**

**In addition to actions that can be taken at the local government-level, I will fight for Somerville to pass a home rule petition allowing us to re-implement rent control, so that massive rent**

**increases no longer push tenants from their homes, and use my platform as an elected official to build the statewide movement to end the ban on rent control, pass just cause eviction restrictions, and give tenants a right to counsel.**

3. Far too many residents are still struggling to pay rent due to income loss during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially those who worked in the service sector, gig economy, and undocumented immigrants who might not qualify for traditional types of rental assistance. How would you support the recovery of residents in these situations so that they remain stably housed? If you are running for re-election, please share what you have already done on this issue and what you intend to prioritize next.

**We need to extend the Somerville eviction moratorium for another 12 months to ensure that undocumented residents, service and gig workers can stay in their homes, and help more apply for the homeowner tax break. We don't have to rely solely on state and federal assistance to keep people in their homes. These are several avenues that we should pursue to secure funding for affordable housing and stabilization programs: municipal bonds, tax revenue redirecting money from the police budget, and the money coming back to the city from the Green Line Extension and the American Rescue Plan Act. We also need to fight the Prop 22 ballot question that is coming to Massachusetts to build a just and fair economy for all workers, and I will support fully enforcing the age theft ordinance, the Workers' Center, and union negotiations.**

4. Affordable housing funding is critical, but limited. Public subsidy often builds homes that are still too expensive for the people struggling the most, with 1-bedroom rents over \$1500. How would you use zoning and other city-controlled tools for less expensive homes so that affordable housing funding can support the lowest-income residents of Somerville (at or below 30% of Area Median Income)? If you are running for re-election, please share what you have already done on this issue and what you intend to prioritize next.

**There are a number of ways the city could support greater housing affordability through local policy. Somerville could increase the percentage of affordable housing required from 20 to 25%, continue to fight for the real estate transfer fee revenue in coalition with other cities to fund the Hundred Homes program, and support the Somerville Community Land Trust with funding to purchase land and make the housing on it deeply affordable for the long term. We could also upzone areas near transit hubs to build more dense housing and enforce the affordable units being built there.**

5. How would you protect Somerville residents, particularly renters, from displacement due to rising rents, gentrification, and increased development? And how would you ensure that new developments give the allocated number of units to low income residents, as the oversight seems to be currently lacking? If you are running for re-election, please share what you have already done on this issue and what you intend to prioritize next.

**I would work with city agencies and community organizations to ensure that our housing**

**system serves the people it is meant to. The discussion of how we house people too often focuses only on issues of buildings and zoning, rather than what should really matter, the people who need to live in them. We often hear about how renters in Somerville are not “real” members of our community because they are “transient.” The biggest reason that renters in our community are forced to move is the ongoing massive rise in rent across our city.**

**We must fight so that new housing that’s being built isn’t just luxury units and is housing that’s accessible to more residents, both in terms of physical accessibility, cost, and size that can accommodate families and workforce housing. We should explore deposit subsidies and moving costs subsidies, more oversight over developments and conditions of units through expanding ISD, pass a citywide community benefits agreement (CBA) ordinance for large developments with specificity around local hiring, and build up neighborhood councils so that they can build power and negotiate strong CBAs.**

6. The housing in Somerville that is available for low income residents -- including publicly owned, inclusionary and other types of subsidized, and privately owned -- is often full of bad conditions, and health and safety code violations. What would you do to ensure that all renters can live in safe and dignified housing in our city? If you are running for re-election, please share what you have already done on this issue and what you intend to prioritize next.

**I will work to fund and reform the Somerville Inspectional Services Department to ensure that we are enforcing regulations on those landlords who fail to uphold their end of the bargain and provide up to code housing for their tenants. The overwhelming majority of tenants (90%+) do not have legal representation when facing eviction in court, whereas the majority (70%+) of landlords do, and we need to provide funding for counsel. I will also explore creating a registry of landlords that have failed inspections and been served code violations to incentivize better upkeep of units. As part of a Green New Deal for Somerville, I will push to retrofit units to be healthier to live in and net zero carbon for a greener future.**

**I also support comprehensive services for Clarendon Hill residents as the redevelopment process begins this fall and to ensure all the families are relocated in housing that is close by and advocating for that to happen as soon as possible to get tenants out of the unlivable conditions at Clarendon Hill.**

7. Low income residents often face unresponsive or hostile landlords and property management. Some tenants who are people of color or immigrants have experienced racism and other forms of discrimination. This means that even if residents can afford to live in Somerville, they do not feel welcome or embraced here. What would you do to ensure that all residents feel like they belong in our city, are empowered to uphold their rights as renters, and are protected from retaliation? If you are running for re-election, please share what you have already done on this issue and what you intend to prioritize next.

**I will work for the rights of all people in Somerville to fight for their home. As city councilor, I will work with the city’s Office of Housing Stability, Fair Housing Commission and community**

**groups like CAAS to ensure that tenants are made aware of their rights and how to exercise them. I support holding training sessions as part of my role as City Councilor, and I will work to push the city to inform all residents of their landlord's responsibilities and of the means to hold them accountable, and to inform tenants of their rights as soon as they sign their lease. We also need to fund programs to give tenants counsel when facing eviction and other disputes. We can also create a landlord/developer registry to make public which have complaints against them for violations of housing law and fully fund the Inspectional Services Department to be able to better enforce housing law violations.**

**I will also use my office to support existing and new tenant unions that form, working with them as they fight to improve conditions in their homes. In Ward 7, this means supporting the Clarendon Hills Tenants association in finding affordable housing in our community as they are displaced by the renovations there. It means fighting alongside the LaCourt Tenants Union as they demand LaCourt realty respects their rights. But what it ultimately means is listening to the needs of the most vulnerable members of our community, and fighting for policies that ensure that the human right to a home is available to all of us.**

8. How would you expand homeownership opportunities for first-time and low income residents in Somerville, especially for people of color, single parents, immigrants, veterans, and people with disabilities? If you are running for re-election, please share what you have already done on this issue and what you intend to prioritize next.

**I support fighting for the real estate transfer fee to pass and using the revenue to fund and expand the Hundred Homes program, and support the Somerville Community Land Trust with funding to purchase land, make it public and make it deeply affordable for the long term. Somerville should also start a first time, income eligible homebuyer program (like One+ in Boston) to help grant affordable mortgages to low and moderate income residents.**

9. As a City Councilor, how would you collaborate with your colleagues on Council and the new Mayoral administration to enact more housing justice policies?  
If you are running for re-election, please share what you have already done to collaborate between both municipal branches and what you intend to prioritize next.

**I am running on a housing justice platform. When I am elected with others running on similar platforms I will hold them accountable (and expect them and my constituents to hold me accountable!) and push with every measure we have to create new affordable housing in our community. I will organize community members and tenant unions to support our bold housing platform and craft proposals, while working to build recognition that housing is the number one issue for our constituents of every council member and the mayor. This also means thorough information-gathering by maintaining a dialogue with city agencies that administer housing programs, and from constituents facing housing insecurity, to create a symbiotic relationship that will build power and pass real, meaningful policy.**

10. What are the top 3 renter protections you would include in a Tenants' Bill of Rights and why? If you are running for re-election, please share what you have already done to enhance renter/tenant protections and what you intend to prioritize next.

*(This question was inspired by Our Revolution Somerville's endorsement questionnaire)*

**1. Right to organize and form tenants unions. The city should support tenant organizing with resources and continued know your rights trainings, as tenants we need to build power to center people first. We could codify this more explicitly and with more protections so that retaliation we've seen in greater Boston ends.**

**2. Right of first refusal - pass a home rule petition to protect the diversity of the city.**

**3. Tenants' right to counsel, including beyond evictions, for all legal thresholds of disputes with landlords.**