

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.

Candidate name: **Judy Pineda Neufeld**

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

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

The pandemic has so greatly impacted the lives of many in our community, with loved ones at risk of falling ill, kids struggling out of school, jobs lost, and schedules disrupted. Somerville renters have fallen behind on their payments, and for some it will still take months if not years to make a full recovery from Covid-19. On top of the other struggles of the pandemic, our City is facing unprecedented housing instability, and municipal government must step up to ensure everyone has a safe, accessible and affordable home, especially for those left behind by Federal and State relief.

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.

To increase Somerville's supply of affordable housing stock, as City Councilor I would begin by increasing the inclusionary housing requirements and create greater housing density in our commercial corridors and near transit, especially along the new Green Line Extension. I also believe housing stability must be part of our solution, and would increase funding for flexible rental relief through the Office of Housing stability. I am also in favor of creating a tenants right to counsel program and I would extend the eviction moratorium through the end of 2022. I would also work to create a rental database so the City can track and hold accountable landlords who are violating the rights of their tenants.

Overall, one of the best ways to ensure that vulnerable populations are fully protected by our housing laws is to make sure that both tenants and landlords clearly understand their rights and responsibilities. This must be done in a way that accounts for language and cultural barriers and reaches those without access to the internet or a computer. I have already begun this work as the lead for the Immigrant Services Unit (ISU) under the City of Somerville's Covid response. There I helped ensure that immigrant communities and marginalized folks had information on city and partner services in five languages. Members of the ISU participated in the Know Your Rights coalition led by CAAS, and the ISU tabled at grocery stores and city squares with information on tenant rights and the eviction moratorium. I believe in meeting

people where they are and utilizing a comprehensive communications campaign in our main languages in Somerville to spread the word. Flyers, social media, town halls, word of mouth, and just plain community organizing are all keys to success in getting the information out about tenant and landlord rights and responsibilities. As City Councilor I look forward to continuing my work with CAAS and other partners both in and out of City government on this issue.

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.

I believe housing stability and keeping folks in their homes needs to be a part of our strategy to reduce displacement in our City. I support increasing the capacity of the Office of Housing Stability, our community partners who assist with rental assistance, and their access to flexible rental relief funds so they can meet the urgent needs of our neighbors who are struggling to pay rent as a result of the pandemic. Somerville has over \$60 million in ARPA funds coming from the federal government, and a portion of these funds must be used to support these programs.

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.

Increasing density in our City is an important part of the solution to our affordable housing crisis. I believe this should begin around our new Green Line stations, where residents will have easy access to public transportation. This must also be done with a simplified inclusionary housing process that ensures these new units are available to all. As City Councilor I would also propose for Somerville to allow accessory dwelling units (also known as ADUs or in-law apartments), like has been done in Boston, to increase available rental options. As a City Somerville must also increase the availability of deeply affordable low income housing, and I believe we should do this through greater investment in the Somerville Community Land Trust and the 100 homes program. These are crucial steps towards creating a City that has truly affordable housing options for all.

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.

As a City, Somerville must support our municipal departments, boards and commissions to ensure they are able to effectively carry out their work on our behalf. The civil servants and volunteers that give their time to our City play a crucial role in the execution of municipal housing policy, and we must give these groups, such as the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development and the Fair Housing Commission, the funding, staff and resources they need for enforcing housing laws and holding developers accountable. As City Councilor I will push for this funding and will use my platforms to hold hearings and pass resolutions highlighting these issues. I'll make sure that developers and their oversight departments are held accountable for carrying out our housing policies. I am also in support of Somerville passing a Fair Housing amendment that requires community impact assessments which account for past histories of discrimination, and as City Councilor I will ensure these assessments are adequately examining the factors that have lead to gentrification, displacement and discrimination in our City.

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.

The City of Somerville must ensure that our public housing is adequately maintained. From canvassing at Clarendon Hills and speaking with residents of Somerville public housing at the doors, I know this is one of their top concerns for this upcoming election. I would increase funding for the upkeep of existing public housing, and work with the tenants associations in Ward 7 to ensure there is accountability when management does not do proper maintenance of its buildings. I will also support the needs of the tenants at Clarendon Hill during its redevelopment, and ensure the agreement negotiated between the tenants union and the developer is upheld, including the right of return for all residents. As City Councilor I will also explore ways to incentivize landlords to retrofit older housing so renters and buyers across the City have safer and more accessible housing options.

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.

Discrimination of any form is unacceptable and as City Councilor I will ensure it has no place in Somerville. As I have said above, the most essential step towards providing tenants with

housing protections is ensuring they are aware of their rights under Fair Housing law and landlords are aware of their responsibilities. This must include information available in multiple languages and published both on and offline through multiple mediums. This can be done by providing adequate staffing and resources to the Fair Housing Commission and the Office of Housing Stability so they are able to spread this message to all tenants in the City, and provide those whose rights have been violated with a method of recourse. I again am also in support of the City forming a rental database to track when landlords are violating the rights of their tenants and hold them accountable. To further make our City more welcoming and accessible to all, as City Councilor I will pass a Language Access Ordinance to ensure that all municipal services and materials are available in the many languages spoken in our city.

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.

Homeownership is an important step towards building wealth and stability for our marginalized communities, and closing the racial wealth gap. As City Councilor I will work to expand first time homeownership programs such as the First Time Homebuyer class that Somerville Community Corporation facilitates. As with other City services, I will ensure these programs are offered in multiple languages and widely publicized through multiple mediums, both online and offline. I will also use my platform on the Council and my relationships with our representatives in the State Legislature to push state agencies to expand mortgage programs for moderate to low income folks.

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.

Having grown up in a multi-racial and multicultural household, I bring a keen understanding of cultural competency that helps me value diverse perspectives and find commonalities where others cannot. In my work as a leadership development consultant I have brought a wide range of voices to the table for input on the issues that affect them, and I plan to do the same as City Councilor. This past work has included developing housing policy.

I oversaw the collective impact process on housing stability for the City of Boston's Department of Health and Human Services, which required bringing together many different stakeholders to find beneficial solutions and make progress for all. In addition, from my years of experience working in our communities in Somerville, and my time as the lead for Somerville's Immigrant Services Unit, I have developed strong working relationships with many of our current City Council members and our City Council and Mayoral candidates. I hope to build on these relationships to advocate for Ward 7, and work together to find solutions to our shared challenges across the City, including and especially working for more accessible and affordable

housing.

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)

I support guaranteeing tenants the right purchase, the right to withhold rent if safety requirements or city codes aren't met, the right to counsel in housing court, and the adoption of just cause eviction standards. I will promote these changes on the City Council and advocate for them to our representatives at the State House.