

## 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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Candidate name: **Maria Koutsoubaris**

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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?

**Competitive rent is the biggest and maintaining tenancy during the pandemic.**

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.

**These subjects shouldn't be divided, as they should be created equally. However if permits and construction time can be done at a faster pace, there will be more money to build. That will allow for more housing, therefore giving all individuals homes.**

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.

**Due to loss of rental payments, homeowners can apply for assistance with mortgage arrears. These resources need to be reachable to owners. I would also advocate for flexible funding for families or individuals who are not eligible for RAFT. This would also warrant the need for other housing options, making sure resources are available for these matters.**

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.

**I would be a strong voice with federal, state and local funding to offer more of a tax break to**

**developers. The tax break would navigate the location of the development, this would give opportunity of building in more diverse neighborhoods. These developers would have to build in areas of Somerville in greater need of affordable housing. For example, East Somerville has a great need of affordable housing in a very diverse neighborhoods. This would navigate developers to develop in greater areas of need and prevent over developing in certain areas in Somerville. As we are seeing more of over developed areas with high rentals.**

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 support a policy for any developer who is offering rentals, mandated to attend a Fair Housing education class. I would utilize Inspectional Service Department and Board of Health to create a process that will reassure the rentals are subsidize and fit for habitability. I would also work with the Council to request a Fair Housing Staff who would be located at City Hall to assist all renters with any fair housing matters.**

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 would utilize the Inspectional Service Department and Board of Health to help with these issues. I would make all resources accessible and user friendly to all renters. I would use these resources to assure units are in code of health and safety. The Certificates of Fitness is a must before a unit is rented. Also, offerings of community workshops that would educate renters of their rights. These workshops would be offered in diverse neighborhoods in several languages.**

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 would support a Resource Center for renters and property owners, to access support in tenant issues. These resources could also offer education to property owners on discrimination with tenant selection. Education is a prevention and intervention that is a need with tenant and property owner issues.**

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 would work with banks, mortgage companies and credit repair vendors in the Somerville area to help with first time homeowners. Working with these resources will be the gateway for our residents in Somerville, who are looking to become homeowners. These vendors would offer workshops throughout the city in several languages that represent the diversity in our city neighborhoods.**

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 would bring renters concerns and barriers to the City Council. Together the council would propose policies to the Mayor of Somerville.**

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. Discrimination**

**I believe the importance for renters to know their rights regarding discrimination and retaliatory acts from a property owner.**

**2. Renters Protection Rights during a Process Summary/Eviction.**

**Renters knowing their rights with their tenancy during an eviction process.**

**3. Rental Assistance 90 day clock.**

**During the pandemic RAFT has been an essential resource in preventing eviction. The need for a time clock is a must in this process.**