

## 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: **Tessa Bridge**

Candidate email: [tessaforsomerville@gmail.com](mailto:tessaforsomerville@gmail.com)

Position running for: **City Council Ward 5**

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

**The greatest challenge facing low income Somerville renters is the overall lack of affordable housing in our city. Rents have skyrocketed in Somerville making it increasingly unaffordable to live here. There are no checks on the housing market which gives landlords no reason to offer more affordable options or to maintain buildings. The same is true for new development, where developers are focused on building luxury units that do not meet the needs of low income renters, especially families, and often sit empty. There is no recourse for renters to push back on the market-based housing market or to hold negligent landlords accountable.**

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.

**I will advocate expanding housing stabilization services by increasing the operating budget of the Office of Housing Stability and increasing funds to local community organizing efforts such as CAAS to ensure that tenants have access to the services they need to find housing, and then ensure that they are well-treated by their landlords and that the housing is maintained. By investing in a thriving network of community organizations we can build a strong safety net to support tenants. I will also advocate to pass a tenants bill of rights including tenants' right to counsel, and to extend the eviction moratorium.**

**To increase the amount of accessible units, I will advocate to remove the two-foot front entrance height requirement currently included in zoning for residential units. This requirement results in the majority of accessible units being within larger apartment buildings with accessible entrances to the side or rear, which is inherently marginalizing. It also makes residential neighborhoods inaccessible to people with mobility challenges. Our city design should be equitable by default. To make existing housing stock more accessible, I would advocate for establishing a city fund to support retrofitting existing units to be more accessible. It is also important to acknowledge that accessibility doesn't stop at the entrance to a building, it must extend into the units themselves. I will work to increase the percentage of affordable units that are accessible and affordable by requiring that 50% of affordable units in**

**all new construction are ADA compliant.**

**All housing policies must center BIPOC communities and those historically impacted by housing injustice such as redlining, predatory lending, and housing bias and discrimination. By providing affordable housing across the city, not only in specific pockets, we can integrate neighborhoods and ensure that access to housing is not what maintains historic segregation in our city and schools. Beyond these policies that can be implemented at the municipal level I will advocate for the state to pass rent control to systematically address the housing crisis facing our region.**

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.

**First of all, I support extending the eviction moratorium so that no one is evicted from their home during a pandemic. I will also push for municipal funds to be directly invested in building more affordable and social housing and to fund housing stabilization services. We have several streams of revenue at this time that makes this possible, including increased tax revenue from commercial development, COVID relief funds, money being returned to the city from GLX, and funding redirected from the police budget. By building more affordable and social housing and investing in programs such as subsidizing moving costs, direct rental subsidies, tenants right to counsel, and other housing stabilization services through the city and through community agencies we can support residents in our community to stay in their homes. We must also provide funds to support deep community outreach and engagement and work with community partners such as SomerViva, CAAS, and the Workers Center to ensure that residents know of the opportunities available to them.**

**In addition to direct housing-related supports, I will fight for us to build a more equitable economy here in Somerville so that working people across sectors have access to good jobs in our city. I will push for pro-worker policies and practices including fully enforcing the wage theft ordinance, supporting the Workers Center, vocally support unions to fight for fair contracts, and ensuring that all new construction in Somerville be built with prevailing wage. I will also actively support worker-owned coops and advocate for grants and loans from city funds to small businesses along expanding transit lines to mitigate rising rents and property values, provided that businesses have workers on their board.**

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.

**We have several tools at our disposal to directly invest in more affordable housing in Somerville. I would support increasing the percentage of new development that must be affordable housing and holding developers accountable to building that housing. This in tandem with up-zoning in areas near public transit will result in many more affordable units being built as part of new development. I will also advocate to use funds from the real estate transfer fee, linkage fees, PILOT, COVID relief, and money back from GLX to expand the hundreds home program, buy land and put it into the Community Land Trust (CLT), and build city owned deeply affordable and social housing. We do not need to wait for the state or federal government to take action. We must do what is within our control here in Somerville to support residents to access accessible, safe, and stable housing.**

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.

**Somerville is a thriving city that is a highly desirable place to work and live. We must value ourselves and our community highly in negotiations with developers. This includes requiring developers to create Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) with neighbors and workers to ensure that large-scale new developments reflect and meet the needs of our community. And providing support to CBAs including meeting spaces, training etc. so they can negotiate strongly. It also includes prioritizing affordable housing in new development. I will push for the highest percentage of affordable units including increasing the percentage of affordable housing above 20%.**

**I will also push to build mixed-income social housing including family-sized units as well as prioritize efforts to subsidize the cost of living and mitigate displacement including rental assistance, deposit subsidies, moving costs, and first-time home buyer programs. We also need to ensure that the new housing stock that is being built isn't only luxury buildings with predominantly smaller units and to build housing that is accessible to more residents. Finally, we must ensure that new development is built with prevailing wage and push for local hiring to ensure that jobs created through development and new businesses coming to our city create jobs for workers in Somerville.**

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.

**In order to ensure that older housing stock is maintained adequately, we need to increase**

**Inspectional Services Department (ISD) enforcement, including reforming ISD to work better for landlords and tenants. Part of this needs to be requiring random inspections to be done with regularity to ensure that buildings are being maintained. The city can create a registry of landlords who engage in discriminatory practices and do not maintain buildings and release that information publicly so that tenants (and their legal council) are aware. We can also provide subsidies from the city to support retrofitting buildings to be safe and healthy as well as net-zero. These programs will be part of a larger green new deal designed to both improve housing, particularly for low-income and BIPOC residents, and create green jobs.**

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.

**As City Councilor, I will work with both the Office of Housing Stability and the Fair Housing Commission to create and fund programs that protect tenants against landlords including lawyers for tenants facing eviction and in other disputes. I am a strong advocate of the tenants bill of rights and creating a landlord/developer registry for residents of Somerville to access to see which landlords have complaints against them. I will also fully support existing and new tenant unions, so that tenants are organized to push for better living conditions and hold landlords accountable. Too often tenants do not know their rights or how to come forward when violations occur. To change this, I will advocate for City Council to increase the budget towards community engagement through the Office of Sustainable Housing, the Fair Housing Commission, and community partners to support more know your rights trainings, and to universally distribute resources about tenant rights when leases are signed, rather than waiting for a notice to quit to inform people of their rights.**

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.

**We must expand resources for the Somerville Community Land Trust and the hundred homes program to bring more homes out of the market and into the public home ownership programs in concert with creating a first time homebuyer program, similar to the One+ Boston program. By enacting these two approaches in concert, we can ensure that loans are available to low income residents, BIPOC, single parents, immigrants, veterans, and people with disabilities, and also that there are homes available that they are less likely to be out-bid on in the uncontrolled market.**

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 for City Council on a platform of boldly investing in affordable housing in our community. This is the number one issue that I hear about on doors. I take seriously the commitments that I am making to my neighbors and will fight for those commitments in office. When I and other candidates who are running on similarly bold platforms are elected, it will give us a mandate to push hard, using every tool at our disposal to push for policies and budget decisions that prioritize increasing access to affordable housing. I will work tirelessly with my colleagues on the council, the new Mayor, and city departments to make this happen. And I will remain accountable to and in community with the residents of Somerville by organizing movement support for policies that the council is working on to increase access to 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 would include the right to organize and support via the city to do so, because all tenants have a right to collectively organize and take action. It is through organizing that individuals build power to push back on developers and landlords, and force our systems of power to center people first. It is incumbent upon the city to ensure that tenants know this and have the support they need to do so. I would include the right of first refusal because it is one way to protect against gentrification and preserve the diversity of our community. I would also push for additional city funds to be allocated towards the 100 homes project and other initiatives to support tenants to purchase properties directly. Finally I would include the right to counsel because anyone facing eviction has an essential right to be represented by a lawyer.**