

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 At-Large candidates forum was held 8/16/21 on Zoom.

Candidate name: **Tracey Leah Pratt**

Candidate email: pratt4somerville@gmail.com

Position running for: **City Council At-Large**

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 possible eviction. Chances are residents who fall in this category may not have had a steady income during the COVID Pandemic. Without some type of assistance, many residents who earn lower salaries may be taken to court by their landlords.

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 would focus on the City of Somerville inclusionary zoning ordinance, new affordable developments and housing rehabilitation as outlined in Somervision 2040 in an effort to have 20% of housing stock deemed affordable.

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 ensure the city enforces ordinances under the office of housing stability. Complaints need to be investigated and fines issued if procedures are not followed. I would want to look into the feasibility of providing some incentives to landlords for forgiving part or all of rents.

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 propose increasing the transfer fee for properties based on the sale price. For example: properties that sell for \$1 million or less should be assessed 1% of sale price. Properties that are sold for more than one million could be assessed 1.5% of sale price.

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.

If developers are not allocating the agreed upon number of units to low income residents due to lack of oversight then something is lacking within the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development. I would advocate for an assessment of appropriate department within OSPCD. To determine if there are enough staff to enforce this policy.

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.

Advocate for the appropriate amount of city staffers to perform inspections and investigate complaints. Landlords must be held accountable for violations. Also both renters and landlords need to be educated about rights and existing policies.

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 mentioned in question 6, education is paramount. Renters and landlords need to be educated about housing policies, responsibilities on both parts and possible penalties. Residents need a safe welcoming space to be able to report complaints and they must be taken seriously. Landlords and property managers must be held accountable for infractions to the fair housing act.

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.

In order to expand homeownership opportunities in Somerville, we must be able to sell a portion of homes and condominiums at below market prices, provide down payment and closing assistance and homebuyer training. We need to look at building new dwellings with a variety of housing types. We need to expand and put into effect already existing programs.

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.

As housing is an urgent need in our city, this is one of my top priorities. I'd love to be part of a subcommittee that addresses this issue.

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. Mediation hearing prior to any eviction

2. Landlords must properly maintain households to code so they are safe

3. Percentage of rent forgiveness in extreme circumstances (like the pandemic)

4. (Not necessarily in this order)