

The Minutes of the Public Hearing of the Somerville Housing Authority (SHA) duly called and held on March 26, 2026.

The Public Hearing of the Somerville Housing Authority was held in-person at the Mystic Activity Center, 530 Mystic Avenue, Somerville on Thursday, March 26, 2026, at 5:00 PM.

The Executive Director Diane L. Cohen called the roll at 5:05 PM. Upon roll call Commissioners present and absent were as follows:

PRESENT	ABSENT
Chairman Capuano	
	Comm. Mannion
Comm. Lemard	
Comm. Rances	
Vice-Chairman Zamer	

Others in Attendance: Adam Garvey, Deputy Director; Arnaldo Velazquez, Director of Finance & Administration; Matt Lincoln, Director of Leased Housing; Brian Langton, Director of Modernization; Shannon Bennett, Director of Resident Services; Andrew Rocha, Director of Operations; Charlie O’Leary, Maintenance Supervisor; Emily Eschmann, Executive Secretary; Susan Hegel, Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services (CASLS); Rey Santana, Mystic Tenant Association (MTA) Vice-President; Denise Lauers, MTA President; Fatima DeChaves, Brady Towers Resident.

1. COMMUNITY INPUT/RESIDENT COUNCILS

MTA President Denise Lauers expressed concern that requiring residents to pay court fees would place an additional financial burden on individuals who are already struggling. She noted that while some residents are attempting to seek assistance from outside organizations, these resources are limited and may not be sufficient to cover the added costs. She also pointed out that nonprofit organizations often lack the funding to assist, and with the City of Somerville facing a projected \$5 million budget shortfall, she is concerned about the long-term sustainability of any support systems.

MTA Vice-President Rey Santana emphasized that adding court fees to existing debts would significantly increase stress for residents who are already facing financial hardship. She noted that many residents are doing everything they can to make ends meet.

CASLS Attorney Susan Hegel stated her agency as well as other local organizations oppose proposed changes to the Rent Collection Policy being considered by the Board of Commissioners. Their main concern is a new requirement that tenants must pay court costs up to about \$316 in order to “cure” nonpayment of rent and avoid eviction. They argue this creates a financial burden for low-income tenants and may lead to more evictions and increased legal costs for the housing authority, whereas the current policy, which does not require court costs for curing, has worked effectively for both tenants and the agency.

As a compromise, they proposed delaying the filing of eviction cases by at least two weeks after serving tenants, instead of one week. They believe this would give tenants more time to secure rental assistance, reduce unnecessary court filings, and prevent avoidable evictions. They note this approach has been successfully used by other housing authorities.

They requested the Board to maintain the current policy on court costs and adopt the proposed two-week delay to better support tenants and reduce administrative and legal burdens.

Deputy Director Adam Garvey emphasized that the Housing Authority is facing significant financial strain and can no longer absorb avoidable costs associated with resident behaviors, such as court fees and delayed rent payments. He noted that SHA is the only Housing Authority among its peers covering these types of expenses, which is unfair to compliant residents.

He highlighted the severity of the current budget crisis, including a projected 20% funding gap, reduced operating subsidies, and rising cost pressures. Adam stated this is the worst financial situation he has seen in his career and stressed the importance of preserving resources to maintain staffing, building conditions, and quality standards.

Additionally, he underscored the critical importance of rent collection, citing approximately \$169,000 in arrears and \$93,000 in repayment agreements. Delinquency is placing a growing burden on staff, who are spending significant time pursuing payments and connecting residents to services. Due to these challenges, collection efforts are becoming more aggressive.

Overall, Adam conveyed that the current approach is unsustainable and that changes are necessary to ensure financial stability and fairness.

Executive Director Diane Cohen agreed to the proposed policy change to delay the

filing of eviction cases to at least two weeks after serving tenants, rather than one week, but maintained that SHA can no longer cover residents' court costs.

2. Approval of the SHA Rent Collection Policy

Commissioner Lemard made a motion to approve the proposed SHA Rent Collection Policy, with an amendment to delay the filing of eviction cases by at least two weeks, rather than the one week specified in the proposed policy. Commissioner Zamer seconded the motion.

All in favor: 4-0

3. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Lemard made a motion to adjourn at 5:37 p.m. Commissioner Zamer seconded the motion.

All in favor: 4-0

Diane L. Cohen

Diane L. Cohen
Executive Director

ATTEST

A True Copy

Documents presented during the Somerville Housing Authority Public Hearing on 3/26/26.

- Agenda
- SHA Rent Collection Policy Draft