

NOTICE: This is NOT the official version of the Committee Report as APPROVED by the Board of Aldermen. While reasonable efforts have been made to assure that this is the Committee Report that was presented at a meeting of the Board of Aldermen, you should check the Minutes of that meeting in order to confirm its approval, rejection or amendment. Do not rely on the accuracy of this information without first checking with the City Clerk.

March 26, 2008

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Committee on Housing and Community Development held a meeting on March 26, 2008 with Chairman Rebekah Gewirtz presiding and Committee members Aldermen William White and Thomas Taylor also present and voting. Also present were Chief Assessor Richard Brescia, Phil Ercolini from SPCD, Melissa McWhinney from the Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS), Ellen Schacter from the Greater Boston Legal Services, Lisa Davidson from the Somerville Homeless Coalition and Rachael Burger from Josephine Avenue.

The committee discussed the subject of foreclosures and Mr. Ercolini informed the members that a report is being prepared by a student from the Kennedy School of Government that will be helpful to the city when developing policy and strategies regarding housing. Somerville's foreclosure rate, he said, is lower than some other communities due to the high number of rental units in the city. Mr. Ercolini also discussed various types of assistance offered by the city, including pro bono services, to those homeowners in default or facing foreclosure and noted efforts by Congressman Barney Frank and Governor Deval Patrick. In addition, Mr. Ercolini discussed the need for stricter underwriting standards and the impact of the situation on inclusionary housing and further suggested that the city's 311 operators be instructed where to direct questions regarding foreclosures.

Mr. Brescia presented data describing the national foreclosure rates of various types of property and told the members that there is \$650 billion worth of adjustable rate mortgages nationwide. He also discussed the city's residential tax exemption and compared Somerville's real estate market to those in other communities.

Ms. McWhinney told the members that there is evidence of a trend of foreclosures in the Winter Hill and East Somerville sections of the city and she suggested that the city pay for a mailing, printed in various languages, informing residents of tenants' rights.

Ms. Schacter discussed various ways that people delinquent on their mortgages can fight foreclosure and she spoke about trying to keep people in their homes after foreclosure. Ms. Schacter also spoke about home rule legislation aimed at protecting tenants from being evicted.

Chairman Gewirtz made a motion that Mr. Ercolini research the City of Boston's proposed ordinance regarding foreclosures to determine if it would be feasible for Somerville to adopt a similar ordinance.

No papers were acted on.

Alderman Rebekah L. Gewirtz, Chairman
Committee on Housing and Community Development

COMMITTEE REPORT

Report of the Committee on Housing and
Community Development, March 26, 2008

In Board of Aldermen

Clerk