

I. Introduction and welcome

Thanks to all of you for joining us here this evening. My name is Michael Libby, and I'm the executive director of the Somerville Homeless Coalition.

I'd like to begin by expressing my continued appreciation to everyone for engaging with us and with each other in conversations around the relocation and expansion of the Somerville Homeless Coalition's adult shelter. We're hosting a series of meetings and soliciting feedback, which are really important steps to actively involve members of the local neighborhood and the larger community.

II. Summary of project/purpose

For those of you that did not attend the July 10th Community Meeting, I will offer a brief summary of the project. With public funding and the willingness of First Church Somerville to host a shelter, there was a unique opportunity to expand our support of Somerville's unhoused residents and help meet the community's urgent need to find solutions to the housing crisis. At the current shelter location we are unable to expand and it is not able to be safely accessed by those with ambulatory limitations. As part of this relocation, there is an opportunity to expand the number of beds from 16 to 26, and those with significant physical limitations will be able to access emergency shelter.

III.

But, regrettably, I know that the decision to move to First Church Somerville was made quickly and was not inclusive to include the neighborhood at an earlier stage as part of a wider community process. The move brings new dynamics to the neighborhood as well as concerns about shelter operations and facilities management, and we're committed to being good neighbors, which includes focusing on communication, transparency, and openness about the topics that are most on your mind.

With that, I want to acknowledge the concerns and apprehension that some in our community have shared over the last six weeks or so, especially with the neighborhood communication process, itself.

I'd like to again offer my apologies for not engaging with abutters and other community members earlier in this process, and to those who came away from our July 10th community meeting disappointed and feeling that their voices were not heard that evening. Everyone's concerns are valid and we are here to listen and engage in an open and honest dialogue.

IV. Focus for this evening's meeting

It's important to us that we restore your trust as we move ahead with the relocation and expansion process. I'm hopeful that engaging in an interactive meeting this evening, in smaller focus groups, will be helpful as we strive for a smooth transition to First Church Somerville. We are here to clarify concerns, but we want to hear more about what is most important to you in this "community process", itself.

This evening we want to talk about some issues that I know are on the minds of many people here tonight:

- **Shelter operations** at FCS, which includes staffing, establishing lines of communication, safety and security, day-to-day activity, parking, and sex offenders at the shelter.
- **Also: facility management** – trash, pest control, cleanliness and building upkeep.
- And as I mentioned earlier: **communications**: what should the communication process going forward look like from your perspective?

We will be listening and discussing these topics and many others tonight. One of our goals coming out of this meeting is to be able to shape the next steps in this process in a collaborative way, with all of you. We're here to answer questions and clarify concerns where we can, AND we want to hear from you.

Civil discourse

Before we move into smaller table talks, I'd like to add that it's our hope that we'll all participate in a courteous, respectful and dignified exchange of ideas and suggestions. That is the best way for us to listen to your concerns, answer your questions and work together as a community as we strive for a peaceful and smooth transition to our new shelter location.

Thank you again for your time and your willingness to engage in this important neighborhood meeting tonight.

I'd now like to introduce Serena Taylor, SHC Board President.

Closing Remarks

I'd like to thank everyone for your time this evening and for voicing your thoughts and concerns in a respectful manner.

I understand that this has been a challenging process and I appreciate your honesty and willingness to engage with us.

We needed to listen, and as you leave here tonight, we hope you feel heard. Your feedback is crucial and we want you to continue to share your thoughts as we work to address the issues raised in recent weeks and tonight. Keep in mind, we gathered tonight not to make final decisions, but to have conversations about how we proceed.

Our goal is to remain trusted partners with the community, and we're committed to being responsive and transparent as we move forward.

We will share outputs from this meeting to everyone and the information will be posted on our website as well.

I will share my next letter with the community on Friday, August 16th.

We will soon share details about our next community meeting. We will reach out to neighbors who have expressed interest in being involved in communications and community engagement so that the next meeting has a collaborative approach, much like tonight.

You can always email questions to us at "shelterinfo@shcinc.org".

Thank you again for your time and your input and I hope everyone has a nice night.