



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

CLERK OF COMMITTEES

July 8, 2020

REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Jefferson Thomas ("J.T.") Scott	Chair	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Vice Chair	Present	
William A. White Jr.	City Councilor At Large	Present	
Mary Jo Rossetti	City Councilor at Large	Present	
Wilfred N. Mbah	City Councilor at Large	Present	

Others present: Steve MacEachern - DPW, Balkys Sicard - DPW, Mike Bowler - DPW, Vithal Deshpande - OSE, Denise Taylor - Communications, Steve Craig - Constituent Services, Michael Mastrobuoni - SomerStat, Ed Bean - Finance, Annie Connor - Mayor's Office, Khushbu Webber - Legislative Liaison, Rositha Durham - Clerk of Committees, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chairman Scott and adjourned at 9:09 PM on a Roll Call votes of 5 in favor (Councilors White, Rossetti, Mbah, Ballantyne and Scott) and none against.

Mr. Mastrobuoni informed the committee of 3 updates that have been published to the Finance page of the City's website.

Review of FY-21 Budget DPW Administration

Mr. MacEachern presented the division's FY-21 budget request. Councilor Mbah inquired about police and fire details and Mr. MacEachern explained the circumstances when they would be used, e.g., during snow removal. Councilor Mbah suggested that non-police/fire personnel could perform that work and Chair Scott pointed out that providing details is part of the police/fire contracts.

DPW Buildings and Grounds

Ms. Sicard presented the B&G budget request. Chair Scott commented that for the past 5 years, the OM budget has been over budgeted by \$1.9 million and Ms. Sicard said that there have been some expenses that have not been paid yet. Chair Scott pointed out that those aren't reflected in the July 7th update provided to the committee.

Councilor Scott made a motion to cut \$900,000 from line 521001 (Electricity) in the DPW Buildings and Grounds budget. The motion was tabled.

Mr. MacEachern commented that a lot of work was unable to be performed due to COVID-19 since city buildings were closed and that was a contributing factor to having unspent funds in the OM bottom line.

DPW Custodians

Ms. Sicard presented the Custodians budget request. Councilor Rossetti asked if the overtime line could be reimbursed through the CARES Act. Mr. Bean said that disinfection of buildings is potentially a reimbursable expense and will be pursued. COVID related costs are put on the CARES Act list. Mr. Bowler explained why buildings are being cleaned on overtime, saying that it was due to COVID protocols. Mr. Bean believes that the overtime cleaning expenses will be reimbursable. Councilor Rossetti asked for information on what was charged to COVID vs. what was reimbursed. Councilor Ballantyne asked how overtime was factored into the budget with regard to the re-opening of school and she asked if the projected overtime amount will be enough. Mr. Bowler said he is working with the School Department and he hopes that the requested amount will be enough. Mr. Bean said there is a COVID Stabilization Fund before the Council with an infusion of \$3 million.

DPW Solid Waste

Ms. Sicard presented the Solid Waste budget, which has no Personnel. Councilor Rossetti asked if yard waste could be dropped off at the DPW and Mr. MacEachern said that has always been an option but he prefers the system in place now, since it would increase traffic at the DPW and would take up much of their limited space. Councilor Mbah asked about rodent control efforts. Mr. MacEachern said that rodent control was slowed due to COVID. Councilor White asked about tipping fees and was told that the current tipping fee is \$99.67/ton for Russell Disposal, \$71.22/ton for Waste Management and a flat fee of \$327,972 for yard waste. Councilor White asked for the tonnage and charges for waste disposal for the past 5 years.

DPW Highway

Ms. Sicard presented the Highway budget and reported that there are 2 vacancies which are expected to be filled when the budget is approved. There have been some OM lines transferred out to COVID and Mr. Mastrobuoni will have that information available tomorrow.

Councilor Scott made a motion to cut \$60,000 from line 553003 (Ready Mix Concrete) in the DPW Highway budget. The motion was tabled.

Mr. MacEachern again said that the excess funds are due to work not being performed due to COVID. Councilor Mbah asked about trees and Mr. MacEachern said that tree trimming is down significantly.

DPW Lights and Lines

Ms. Sicard presented the Lights and Lines budget and said that there is 1 vacancy that is in the budget at 75%.

DPW Fleet Management

Ms. Sicard presented the Fleet Management budget. The personnel cost for this division is in the Highway Department budget. Councilor Rossetti will be proposing a cut in this department since there is a substantial unused balance.

Councilor Rossetti made a motion to cut \$100,000 from line 548006 (Motor Parts and Accessories) in the DPW Fleet budget. The motion was tabled.

Councilor Rossetti's motion that the Administration consider reallocating any funds cut from the DPW Fleet Management budget to the immediate needs of the community during these COVID times. The motion was tabled.

DPW Snow Removal

Mr. MacEachern presented the Snow Removal budget.

Communications & Community Engagement

Ms. Taylor presented the department's budget and reviewed its actions during the COVID crisis. Councilor Ballantyne asked about outreach positions in other departments. Ms. Taylor reviewed the personnel additions made over the past 2 years. Councilor Ballantyne inquired about the Professional and Technical Services line for website expenses and Ms. Taylor addressed the question by speaking about the transition of the city's website to a new platform. Councilor Mbah asked if population metrics are used when communicating to the community and Ms. Taylor replied that communications are geared to the most popular languages spoken in the city.

Councilor Ballantyne made a motion to increase the Community Engagement Specialist - Nepali position in the Communications & Community Engagement budget to a full-time position. The motion was tabled.

Councilor Ballantyne made a motion to add 10 hours to the Community Engagement Specialist - Spanish position in the Communications & Community Engagement. The motion was tabled.

Chair Scott questioned why Immigrant Services is not its own department and Ms. Taylor feels that it should be, however it would require its own director. Chair Scott estimated that in excess of \$300,000 of the Communications budget goes to immigrant services. Ms. Taylor noted that the Immigrant Services staff also assists the Office of Housing Stability. Chair Scott expressed concern about the SomerViva website, noting that there are many broken links and links that lead to English language sites. Ms. Taylor stated that the website is not the preferred method of receiving information among the immigrant populations, therefore, the department's primary effort has not been put into the website. Efforts are tailored to the groups being served. She also noted that the website is able to be viewed in multiple languages. Ms. Taylor said that it's a myth that Somerville spends more on communications than other cities and explained that Somerville's Communication Department performs numerous functions that are performed by other departments in other cities. She also stated that any cuts to the proposed budget will hinder the city's ability to deal with the COVID situation in the most efficient manner. Councilor Ballantyne asked that the information regarding Boston be provided to the committee, tomorrow. Ms. Taylor clarified the budget increases over time saying that, historically, the department was also partially funded by the Cable Access Department, therefore, those numbers should be taken into account when making year to year comparisons.

PEG Access

Ms. Taylor reviewed the department's budget. Councilor Ballantyne asked for a status update regarding the Somerville Media Center. Ms. Taylor replied that the existing contract was extended until the end of the year due to the COVID situation. The Media Center has been given permission to stay in the building until the end of the year, as well. Chair Scott asked who manages the minutes for various boards and commissions and Ms. Taylor said that each has its own point person who is responsible for sending the information to IT for posting.

Constituent Services

Mr. Craig reviewed the department's budget. He spoke about a pilot work-from-home program that began last October, prior to the COVID outbreak. The department has seen new challenges since COVID and is fielding 400-600 calls per day.

Councilor Ballantyne asked for an update on how the department's technology is operating and where the department would like to be in 5 years. Mr. Craig said that the immediate need is to be able to handle the increase in daily calls. He also said that their focus is to be able to assist other departments to help them provide better customer experiences.

Councilor Scott asked for an update on the overnight call center and Mr. Craig replied that the contracted company has been sold. Efforts continue to be made to improve the operation and Mr. Craig estimated that it would take \$250,000 to bring that operation into the department.

Unfinished Business

Motion by Councilor Rossetti to reduce line number 571001 (In State Conferences) in the City Council Budget by \$1,199.00. The motion was tabled by the Finance Committee on June 22, 2020. This item remained on the table.

Motion by Councilor Rossetti to reduce line 572000 (Out of State Travel) in the Health and Human Services Department's budget by \$1,350. The motion was tabled by the Finance Committee on July 1, 2020. This item remained on the table.

Motion by Councilor Rossetti to reduce line 542001 (Printing and Stationery) in SomerStat's budget by \$16,600. The motion was tabled by the Finance Committee on July 6, 2020. This item remained on the table.

Motion by Councilor Scott to reduce line 530000 (Special Items Professional and Technical Services) by \$150,000 in the Executive Administration budget. The motion was tabled by the Finance Committee on July 7, 2020. This item remained on the table.