



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Equity, Gender, Seniors, Families and Vulnerable Populations Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, May 27, 2025

6:30 PM

Roll Call

Present:	City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo and City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah
Absent:	Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait

Committee Minutes
(ID # [25-0821](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Equity, Gender, Seniors, Families and Vulnerable Populations Meeting of April 16, 2025.

RESULT:	<u>ACCEPTED</u>
AYE:	City Councilor At Large Strezo and Ward Five City Councilor Sait
ABSENT:	City Councilor At Large Mbah

Resolution
(ID # [24-0418](#)) By Councilor Strezo
That the Administration discuss post-pilot plan considerations of the Guaranteed Basic Income pilot program.

This item was discussed with 24-0074.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Resolution
(ID # [24-0074](#)) By Councilor Strezo and Councilor Wilson
That the Administration provide an update on plans for Universal Basic Income/Guaranteed Basic Income implementation and roll out.

Jenny Hsi, the ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) Program Manager for Somerville, and Erica Satin-Hernandez, the City's ARPA Director, provided an update on the City's Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI) program, which is funded through the American Rescue Plan Act. They reviewed the document titled *Equity GBI Update 5.27.25*. The program provides 200 participants with \$750 per month via a reloadable debit card, issued in partnership with GiveCard. Manager Hsi explained that most participants use the funds for immediate needs like rent and food. The flexibility of accessing cash, compared to benefits like EBT, has been especially important. Few participants have more than \$150 remaining at month's end, and many have also used the funds to pay down long-term debt. While the city cannot track how cash is spent, participants have shared that this flexibility enables them

to cover rent and childcare, which are expenses that cards often can't accommodate. While the chart showed only 1.1% of tracked transactions go toward housing, most rent payments are made with withdrawn cash, which is not reflected in tracked data.

The program is being evaluated by UMass Boston through surveys and midpoint interviews. Initial feedback shows that beyond financial relief, participants feel more stable and engaged in their communities. A post-program survey and a sustainability study will be completed in June to inform future initiatives. Director Satin-Hernandez shared that the City is considering broader questions for future programs, such as how many people can be supported, how to maintain privacy, and how to incorporate participant feedback. She also noted the need for deeper partnerships with local institutions and schools to create a more comprehensive anti-poverty strategy. She noted that while one year is not enough to transform economic standing, the flexibility and supplemental nature of the funds have made a meaningful impact. The Office of Housing Stability and the Somerville Family Learning Collaborative have also offered workshops to help participants prepare for the program's end. Chair Strezo expressed that there is so much need from participants in programs like this, so she expressed concern that the participants are being negatively impacted if a deeper plan of immediate anti-poverty initiatives are not being considered. She believes participants are going to be feeling anxiety over this program ending.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Order
(ID # [25-0117](#))

By Councilor Strezo, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Mbah, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Sait and Councilor Wilson
That the Director of Parks and Recreation discuss in the Committee on Equity, Gender, Seniors, Families and Vulnerable Populations, the introduction of an ongoing middle school girls intramural hockey program.

Susan Yerkes, Director of Parks and Recreation, shared that 14 girls recently participated in a youth hockey clinic, which served as an early step toward developing a middle school intramural program. A three-year strategic plan has been created to build on this momentum, focusing on growing interest, increasing participation and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the program. The plan includes collaboration with neighboring communities such as Malden, Somerville and Wakefield to help meet future demand and expand opportunities for girls in the sport.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Order
(ID # [25-0072](#))

By Councilor Wilson, Councilor Mbah and Councilor Pineda Neufeld
That the Director of Parks and Recreation update this Council on the
progress of conducting a representative, multi-lingual survey of the
community to determine recreational programming needs.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Officer's
Communication
(ID # [25-0776](#))

Commissioner of Public Works and Director of Parks and Recreation
conveying program and cost information related to item #25-0456,
appropriation of \$160,000 from Free Cash to the Department of Public
Works Repairs to Buildings Account for fabrication and installation of
courts at Founders Rink.

This item was discussed with 25-0456.

**RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE REFERRED FOR
RECOMMENDATION**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Strezo and Ward Five City
Councilor Sait

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Mbah

Mayor's Request
(ID # [25-0456](#))

Requesting the appropriation of \$160,000 from the Unreserved Fund
Balance ("Free Cash") to the Department of Public Works Repairs to
Buildings Account for fabrication and installation of courts at Founders
Rink.

The proposed transformation of the Founders Rink into a multi-use
recreation and community center aims to create a space for residents of all
ages and abilities. While the current polished concrete floor limits its use,
adding removable flooring would expand programming opportunities for
fitness, wellness, and social activities. This would promote physical health
and reduce social isolation. This plan aligns with the SomerVision2040
goals, offering a quicker, more adaptable solution compared to large-scale
infrastructure projects.

The rink was not used for hockey last year, and users shifted to the Veterans
Rink. Greg Robidoux, a community member and board member for
Somerville Youth Hockey, explained that this shift displaced several other
groups, including club teams and neighboring communities that had lost
their own rink access. He acknowledged the excitement around expanding
opportunities for middle and high school girls, but expressed concern over
the loss of rink time for existing youth hockey players. He noted that the rink
is uncomfortably cold in winter and hot in summer and stressed that while
Somerville Youth Hockey supports the multi-use concept, it's discouraging
to see rink space go unused. He emphasized the importance of maintaining
access for all user groups and expressed a desire for inclusive planning.
Aidan Byrne, a community member, questioned the need for additional
flooring at all, noting that pickleball had already been played successfully on

the existing surface. Ruth Foreman, another community member, voiced support for accommodating a wide range of programs but stressed the continued need for ice access, especially in winter. She pointed out that younger skaters benefit from smaller rinks and that many programs, including Learn to Skate, have already been displaced.

Liaison Hutter added that the proposed flooring would be removable, allowing for flexibility and ongoing evaluation of community needs. While the current proposal does not include removal of the flooring, that option could be considered in the future. The goal is to prioritize the needs of Somerville residents.

Chair Strezo suggested involving the hockey community more directly in the conversation. Director Yerkes responded that Parks and Recreation is open to working with any organization to maximize the use of the space. Chair Strezo concluded by saying there appears to be a shared commitment to inclusivity and collaboration and is confident that everyone involved is working to ensure that no community members are left out.

**RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE REFERRED FOR
RECOMMENDATION**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Strezo and Ward Five City Councilor Sait

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Mbah

Referenced Documents:

- Equity GBI Update 5.27.25 (with 24-0074)