



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
CLERK OF COMMITTEES

December 15, 2020

REPORT OF THE EQUITY, GENDER, FAMILIES
AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Wilfred N. Mbah	Chair	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Vice Chair	Present	
Kristen Strezo	City Councilor at Large	Present	

Others present: Jill Lathan - Parks & Recreation, Hannah Pappenheim - Law, Ashley Speliotis - Council on Aging, Khushbu Webber - Director of Governmental Affairs, Lauren Racaniello - Legislative Liaison, Kim Wells - Assistant Clerk of Committees, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:01 PM by Chair Mbah and adjourned at 7:23 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Strezo, Ballantyne and Mbah), none against and none absent.

Approval of the November 4, 2020 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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206647: That the Director of Parks and Recreation express to DCR the importance of keeping public pools and water fountains open later in the season due to climate change.

Director Lathan believes that this was discussed several times in the past and it's really dependent on staffing levels. Councilor Ballantyne stated that this has been discussed since 2018 and she recommends that it be marked 'work complete'.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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206854: That the Director of Health and Human Services work with the Public Schools to allow whole fruits to be saved for use as snacks, given that many children often go without snacks.

Ms. Racaniello appeared before the committee since HHS Director Kress was unavailable this evening. She reported that a pilot program was implemented at the Kennedy School and was successful. The city would like to expand the program to other schools but nothing more has been done because of COVID-19. Councilor Ballantyne commented that she isn't aware of any health regulations regarding that would

prohibit sharing fruit in classrooms. Councilor Strezo said that she saw the program in action at the Kennedy School, where a bowl of fruit was kept in the office for any student who wants it.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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208163: That the Administration report to the Youth Services Committee the feasibility of adding a budget line to make school facilities more affordable for use by community groups by helping to cover custodial fees.

Chair Mbah said that he would like to hear the administration's thoughts on this. Ms. Racaniello spoke with budget director Mike Mastrobuoni about this and the administration is happy to consider this in the next fiscal year's budget. Director Webber said that it would mean waiving custodial fees, if it's fiscally feasible. Chair Mbah said that the response doesn't sound too optimistic and Director Webber said it will be considered but can't be committed to at this time. Councilor Ballantyne noted that the administration, with Council advocacy, has moved to make resources more available to the community, however, space in schools must be arranged through the school department, who then pays its custodians. This essentially amounts to the city side asking the school side to receive payments from a pass-through account. The procedure to make this happen would need to be worked out. Councilor Ballantyne also commented that she's not sure that there is even a demand for space in the school buildings.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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208229: That the Director of Parks and Recreation address the security breach at the Kennedy School pool by either assigning a door monitor or locking the door and installing another system to monitor who comes and goes through the Sartwell Avenue door that leads directly to the pool area and into the school.

Director Lathan said that this item has also been previously discussed. The locker room security issue has been resolved.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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208375: That the Director of Communications create an online and paper sign-up for any citywide event, to make it easy to email them the bus schedule and any other last-minute details.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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208573: That this City Council, In collaboration with the School Committee and the Administration, particularly the Director of Parks and the City Solicitor, draft a "Local Title IX" ordinance ensuring equal opportunity and spending on the basis of gender identity to athletic and academic programs offered by the City.

Director Lathan said that the budget has funds for a consultant to come in to work on this. Solicitor Pappenheim told the committee that this is the first time the Law Department has sat in on discussions for this item and she would like to know the committee's goals so that she may start to draft an ordinance. Chair Mbah asked for the spending breakdown by gender and Director Lathan said that it was looked at, but the consultant will be doing the analysis. An RFP was out for bid and is out for bid again.

Councilor Ballantyne said she doesn't want to wait for the consultant since an ordinance comes from the legislative branch of the city's government. She would like the Law Department to prepare a draft prior to the next committee meeting when this item is discussed. She is available to meet offline with Solicitor Pappenheim to work out some specifics, e.g., how often should reports be generated, should the School Department share reports also? The ordinance should also include language for the School Department reaffirming its adherence to the criteria of financial equity. Councilor Ballantyne pointed out that this item has been around for a year with no progress made. Councilor Strezo agrees and would like to move forward. Solicitor Pappenheim will meet with Councilor Ballantyne to come up with some ideas that would work in tandem with a consultant's report.

Chair Mbah asked if this wasn't already federal law and Solicitor Pappenheim stated that it does not apply to Parks and Recreation Departments, but it does apply to schools. Councilor Ballantyne said the intention was to set how money is appropriated on the athletic side. She asked who the Title IX contact is in the schools and Director Lathan will find out and follow up with that person.

Chair Mbah asked if the consultant was really necessary since the ordinance will be drafted to keep Parks and Recreation in line with the school's Title IX and Councilor Ballantyne stated that she believes that it's important to still have the consultant.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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209365: That the Chief of Police review options relative to the School District's lock-down drills, and provide a description of times when the protocol was used in response to a threat.

Chair Mbah asked if the drills are effective or if they do more harm than good. Ms. Racaniello appeared before the committee since Chief Femino was unavailable. She reported that the Police Department has an all hazard plan and training will be held with the School Superintendent 3-4 times per year. Each school has a designated administrator and a building plan layout. Ms. Racaniello noted that there might be concerns about discussing the full protocol details so as to compromise any future implementations. Councilor Strezo would love to hear from Chief Femino in person at a committee meeting. She feels that the drills may be very damaging to small children. Chair Mbah said that the response to this item is not good and it's not a good start for the new Police Chief. Councilor Ballantyne agreed with Councilor Strezo's sentiment and also has seen residual effects of the lockdown drills in the schools. She thinks that this discussion should also include HHS Director Kress. It seems that the Police Department is fulfilling some obligation by conducting these drills, believing that children need to be educated on how to react during a crisis. She thinks this requires a bigger, more strategic discussion. She noted that Chief Femino does take this matter seriously. She recommends closing this item out and submitting a new, broader order to include HHS. Chair Mbah stated that he was not inclined to close this item. Councilor Strezo wants to keep the item in committee so that it doesn't get side-tracked. She thinks the lockdown drills are gruesome and cause collateral damage to children, especially those dealing with anxiety issues. Ms. Webber said she appreciates the committee's frustration with the response provided and she will take the comments back to the Police Chief to prepare for a future meeting when this matter will be given the attention it deserves.

Councilor Ballantyne's motion **that the Chief of Police and the Director of Health and Human Services discuss the data collected and the mental health impacts that the lockdown drills have on school age children**, was approved on a Roll Call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Strezo, Ballantyne and Mbah), none against and none absent.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

209473: That the Administration update this Council on the teen snow shoveling program, including shoveler recruitment efforts and new income eligibility restrictions for enrollees.

Director Speliotis said there are no income guidelines this year, but all other requirements still exist. Seniors are expressing interest in the program. Councilor Strezo pointed out that sometimes a team comes and then vanishes and she asked how this is dealt with. Director Speliotis said that the Council on Aging coordinates making matches between seniors and shovelers and each participating seniors is provided with a dedicated phone number to the program coordinator to deal with any issues. Shovelers are given a zoom class and a connection call with their matched seniors before the snow comes to go over the particulars, e.g., who will be supplying the shovels, what to shovel, etc.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

209786: That the Somerville Education Foundation share their organizational priorities with this Council's Committee on Equity, Gender, Families and Vulnerable Populations.

Councilor Ballantyne pointed out that this item has nothing to do with the administration. The Somerville Education Foundation is a private organization. Representatives of the foundation would like to appear before the committee to discuss the foundation's work and how to possibly collaborate with the city in the future.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

209796: That the Director of Parks and Recreation arrange to have port-a-potties available at the public parks for the 2020 summer months.

Director Lathan said that this item has also been previously discussed. Councilor Ballantyne said that this was specific to 2020 and it can be marked 'work complete'.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED