



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Public Utilities and Public Works Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, March 10, 2025

6:00 PM

The meeting took place remotely via Zoom and was called to order at 6:01 PM by Chair Clingan and adjourned at 8:03 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Wilson, Scott and Clingan), none against and none absent.

Others present:

Commissioner Jill Lathan – Public Works, Director Rich Raiche – Infrastructure and Asset Management, Director Kellie Hebert - Water and Sewer F&A, Superintendent Neil Viner – Water, Kimberly Hutter – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

President Pineda Neufeld appointed Councilor at Large Wilson to the committee for this meeting only to replace Councilor McLaughlin, who was unable to attend.

Roll Call

Present: Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan, Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott and Councilor at Large Jake Wilson

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [25-0208](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Public Utilities and Public Works Committee Meeting of February 10, 2025.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**

AYE: Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and Councilor at Large Jake Wilson

2. Order (ID # [25-0359](#)) By Councilor Clingan, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Mbah and Councilor Scott
That the Director of Engineering update this Council on the whereabouts of the Portland Loos.

Chair Clingan summarized a memo that was submitted addressing this item saying that the product didn't meet MA Building Codes, which in turn necessitated a redesign of the product. That redesign is expected to be completed by the fall of 2025. Upon review and approval by the state, a new bid will be sent out by the city. Councilors Wilson and Scott expressed their frustration at getting this done in a timely fashion.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**

3. Order
(ID # [25-0356](#)) By Councilor Clingan
That the Commissioner of Public Works discuss the process for clearing bike lanes of snow.

Commissioner Lathan explained that 132 hours and \$343,000 was expended clearing bike lanes. Snow sometimes gets pushed onto sidewalks and streets during the clearing process, since it has no where else to go. Chair Clingan asked if there's a method involved or if it's left to the person clearing the snow and the Commissioner replied that it depends on the storm and amount of snow. The practice is to push the snow as much as possible to clear a path, but again, the snow has to go somewhere. She also said that it's an ongoing process for property owners to keep their sidewalks and driveways clear. Councilor Scott commented that problems tend to be on the sidewalk entrances and exits to the bike path and the Commissioner commented that it's possible that street plows may be pushing snow back onto those entrances and exits in the process of clearing roadways.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Order
(ID # [25-0355](#)) By Councilor Clingan, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Sait, Councilor Strezo, Councilor Wilson and Councilor Mbah
That the Commissioner of Public Works and the Director of Public Space and Urban Forestry discuss the feasibility of removing snow from city playgrounds.

Commissioner Lathan said this is not feasible as each playground would have to be hand shoveled, requiring a lot of manpower, to prevent damaging the surfaces. She also noted that the use of salt/sand might deteriorate the surfaces. Councilor Wilson recounted that the city was instructed (when purchasing the surfaces) not to use machinery, nor to hand shovel the surfaces to avoid any damage. Chair Clingan asked if school yards get cleared and Commissioner Lathan said that their perimeters are cleared, prompting the Chair to explain that's what he had in mind for the playgrounds.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Order
(ID # [25-0350](#)) By Councilor Ewen-Campen
That the Commissioner of Public Works update this Council on how the Municipal Sidewalk Clearing Pilot program for Broadway and School Street is functioning during this challenging winter.

Commissioner Lathan reported that it has been going well, so far, with no complaints received. Chair Clingan asked for an explanation of the workflow and the Commissioner stated that the DPW works with ISD, who advises the DPW which sidewalks need to be cleared. Councilor Wilson

asked about pedestrian crossing ramps at crosswalks and Commissioner Lathan explained that ISD is responsible for regulating that, but DPW staff has gone out to clear them when possible. She believes that property owners are responsible for clearing abutting curb cuts and Chair Clingan noted that it's not codified in the city's ordinances and needs to be addressed.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Order
(ID # [25-0241](#))

By Councilor Clingan, Councilor Ewen-Campen and Councilor Wilson
That the Director of Capital Projects update this Council on the potential plan to use the Homan's site for installation of a stormwater retention tank.

Chair Clingan commented that there has been some confusion in the neighborhood about placing a retention tank at this location. Director Raiche explained that a master plan study to reduce flooding was performed in 2022 and in the course of that study, an evaluation for a tank at the Homan's site was done. That evaluation determined that this location is not a suitable site, from a technical standpoint and that it would not be effective at flood reduction. Since there are other projects in the Winter Hill area that have better prospects at reducing flooding, the city is not pursuing locating a tank there and has taken that possibility off the table.

Now, the city has to deal with a different process, i.e., combined sewer/overflow, (CSO), and is required to evaluate full sewer separation and has already proceeded with the design of a new outfall project in the Foss Park area. The pipe being used in that project has a limited size and capacity, but it is sufficient for the area it's designed for. In order to use it for additional water drainage, a storage tank capable of holding 5 million gallons of water would be needed and such a tank would not be able to fit at the Homan's site. Additionally, the Homan's site would not be able to meet the hydraulics needed to get the water to the outflow.

Director Raiche stated that this is a regional problem and that the DEP codified changes in 1997, adding that state and local governments should be looking at non CSO methods to address the root causes of the problem. He spoke about what would theoretically be needed to handle CSO's in various parts of the city. Councilor Wilson noted that nothing is heard about Belmont and Director Raiche said they weren't named as a party to the DEP's action. Councilor Scott commented about a more holistic approach for mitigation by obtaining some additional parcels and Director Raiche replied that there are lower cost and mitigation projects that can be done, however the focus is on the Mystic River Outfall and Sewer Separation project. Chair Clingan asked how long it may be before the city can pull trigger on doing something at the Homan's site and Director Raiche replied that a draft plan needs to be submitted by the fall of this year, so decisions need to be made during the summer. He also informed the members that the

next listening opportunity on this matter will be on April 3rd. Councilor Wilson commented that councilors should help to make residents aware of that meeting so that they can voice their concerns and receive the latest information.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

7. Order
(ID # [25-0214](#))

By Councilor Mbah and Councilor Wilson

That the Director of Constituent Services submit in writing, the protocol for proper handling of downed wires.

Chair Clingan noted that staff is not prepared to address this matter tonight. Councilor Scott spoke about a report he made months ago about a tree's branches leaning on wires and he's interested in hearing about any protocols that may exist. Councilor Wilson commented that reports for high voltage wires should be called into 911 as opposed to 311.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

8. Order
(ID # [25-0121](#))

By Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Clingan, Councilor Strezo, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Sait

That the Director of Water and Sewer appear before this Council to address resident claims that newly installed water meters are falsely registering air pockets in residential cold water lines as leaks, leading to significantly inaccurate bills.

As a point of information, Director Hebert reported that there are 1,200 meters remaining to be replaced. She summarized the claim being made about the new meters and reported that one resident's claim was denied and that there have been 5 more complaints filed. Examination of these claims has found that residents' concerns began after having a new expansion tank added to their heating systems.

The city is working with the meter vendor, who has gone to their corporate offices to search for problems in other locales, however none have been found. The city does not believe this is a wide spread issue, but rather an isolated issue with the signal. Billing histories and consumption patterns were reviewed but no conclusive evidence was found. Superintendent Viner explained that the meters are tested for accuracy prior to being sent to the city.

Councilor Scott reported that he called the Water and Sewer Department and was told that a meter evaluation for one of his constituents would cost \$100. He then asked if that constituent was among the list of the 5 people who were having problems and Director Hebert replied that the list she has is of those with the expansion tanks. She went on to say that there is a separate

process for reporting other meter problems and that tests not done during the winter months.

Councilor Wilson asked if there was any correlation of false positive readings for leaks found where expansion tanks are involved and Superintendent Viner responded by saying that he believes it's more of a signal issue and not a leak, adding that when the valve to the expansion tank is shut off, the problem ceases. He continued by saying that, generally, expansion tanks are not situated near a water meter, but the ones in question are on the cold water side and are causing a slight fluctuation and signaling indicates there may be a leak, when in fact there is none. If the expansion tanks are located where they should be, the problem will go away. He also explained that the meters do measure backflow and deduct usage. Director Hebert commented that bills might be higher because the meters are actually reading correctly, whereas the older meters may not have been recording usage properly. Chair Clingan asked if, in the case reported by the media, the expansion tank actually increased the usage and Director Hebert said that in that particular case, the year over year usage was the same and the year over year cost went down slightly. She noted that there is a warranty on the meters, followed by a maintenance contract. She encouraged residents to contact the Water and Sewer Department if they have any concerns.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

9. Order
(ID # [25-0089](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin
That the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator provide an estimate for the costs of upgrading 165 Broadway for ADA compliance.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

10. Resolution
(ID # [25-0088](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin
That the Administration prioritize 165 Broadway for Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance to ensure full use of youth-related activities in the building.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Documents:

- PUPW-2025-03-10 Portland Loo Update (with 25-0359)