



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Legislative Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, September 8, 2025

6:00 PM

The meeting took place remotely via Zoom and was called to order at 6:02 PM by Chair Scott and adjourned at 7:18 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Mbah, Ewen-Campen and Scott), none against and 2 absent (Councilors Davis and Strezo).

Others present:

Neha Singh – Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Commissioner Nick Salerno – Elections, Megan Arruda – Elections, City Solicitor Cindy Amara, Assistant City Solicitor David Shapiro, Manager Michael Potere – License Commission, City Clerk Kim Wells, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Roll Call

Present:	Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott, Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah and Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis
Absent:	City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo

1. Committee Minutes
(ID # [25-1225](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Legislative Matters Committee Meeting of July 1, 2025.

RESULT:	<u>ACCEPTED</u>
AYE:	Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Mbah and Ward Six City Councilor Davis
ABSENT:	City Councilor At Large Strezo

2. Order
(ID # [25-1373](#))

By Councilor Mbah
That the City of Somerville hereby accepts the provisions of Chapter 53 Section 18B of the Massachusetts General Laws.

Items 25-1373 and 25-1335 were discussed together.

Councilor Mbah gave a brief introduction to item 25-1373. Chair Scott recognized former Aldermen Jack Connolly to speak on item 25-1335. Mr. Connolly explained that the revised city charter, now awaiting approval by the state legislature, does not include acceptance of MGL Chapter 53 Section 18B, and he and the signatories of the communication attached to this item believe that it should be part of the revised charter. Mr. Connolly explained that if Chapter 53 Section 18B is not adopted by the city, voters

may not be aware of the particulars of ballot questions, or questions about the proposed revised charter.

Director Singh stated that the Administration is happy to continue discussions on this matter, but at this time, their position is that it is not feasible to implement for this election cycle. Director Singh commented that a voter information plan could still be developed without the adoption of Chapter 53 Section 18B. Chair Scott asked if the mayor's position was to send a communication to residents and Director Singh stated that she can't commit to a mailing but will commit to a plan, which is feasible and legal, to educate voters on ballot questions.

Commissioner Salerno explained that the Elections Department is not in a position, budget wise, to get a notice out and he stated that the timeline to perform a mailing is cumbersome, since the state has until September 30th to provide information to municipalities. Somerville usually sends out information about one month prior to an election, which for this election cycle would be October 1st.

Ms. Arruda explained that the state election laws haven't caught up to mail in voting. If the revised charter is not approved until September 30th, or if any text is changed, the Election Department would have to have the approved text. If the city had received it earlier, it wouldn't be such an issue, however, since early and mail in voting has begun, once a ballot is submitted, a new ballot cannot be issued to replace it. There is also a possibility of other ballot questions appearing on the ballot in the upcoming election cycle which would have to include summaries of the reasons for voting in favor or against the question. Additionally, Ms. Arruda noted the budget constraints of mailing the information to 33,000 households.

Councilor Ewen-Campen agreed that the timeline is tight and challenging and he asked how other cities/towns are handling this. Director Singh replied that, as of 2022, there are approximately 8 communities that have opted into Chapter 53 Section 18B.

Assistant Solicitor Shapiro explained that OCPF guidance states that a community must accept the statute to permit a mass mailing to take place, however, other means may be used to disseminate the information, e.g., government websites, meetings, flyers, etc. City Solicitor Amara reiterated that mass mailings are not permitted unless Chapter 53 Section 18B is adopted. She also pointed out that, due to early voting, some people might

not receive the question information prior to voting.

Councilor Davis asked if the Administration would have any opposition to adopting Chapter 53 Section 18B with a later implementation date and Director Singh replied that the Administration has had conversations with the budget team about the cost of performing a mailing and also has early voting concerns. She told the committee that the Administration prefers that no action be taken at this time, adding that the Administration is happy to continue the discussion for future election cycles.

Mr. Connolly remarked that he was confused about the Administration's concerns of spending \$40,000 to perform a mailing. He noted that the revised charter proposal was sent to the state legislature in May and he's concerned that the Chapter 53 Section 18B acceptance wasn't included, causing him to wonder what is in the charter proposal that the city wants to keep from voters? He stated that voters deserve to be informed about what they're voting on and that not providing that information is a travesty of transparency. He commented that adopting Chapter 53 Section 18B is easy and that the procedures can be worked out after adoption.

Chair Scott commented that the \$40,000 price tag is not a high reach and he's inclined to favor adoption. Councilor Ewen-Campen commented that he was compelled by the timeline arguments, adding that people should be aware but he doesn't see how this can work this year, therefore, he won't support adoption for this election cycle. Councilor Mbah stated that the city owes it to its residents to inform them and he supports adoption. Councilor Davis commented that he would like a better understanding of what the Administration is going to do to get ballot information out to the public. Director Singh explained that the Administration is expecting to get the charter question on the ballot but has to work on appropriate ways to get question information out to voters without violating state law.

Chair Scott commented that he doesn't want to rush an ugly mishap and is now inclined to wait until the next municipal election to do it properly and he told the committee members that he doesn't want to leave the item in committee.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE DISCHARGED WITH NO RECOMMENDATION**

AYE: Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Mbah and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Strezo

3. Public Communication (ID # [25-1335](#)) Former Mayor Eugene C. Brune, former Mayor Dorothy Kelly Gay, and former Alderman John "Jack" Connolly submitting comments re: Chapter 53, Section 18B of the Massachusetts General Laws.

Items 25-1373 and 25-1335 were discussed together.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE PLACED ON FILE**

4. Officer's Communication (ID # [25-1317](#)) Licensing Commission requesting the acceptance of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 138, Section 12D, to allow current wine and malt beverages license holders to apply to convert to a non-transferable all forms alcohol license.

Chair Scott reviewed the memo that was submitted on this item and Ms. Wells explained its details. Councilor Ewen-Campen stated his support for the item. Councilor Mbah stated his support, as well, but asked how many licenses there are in the city and Mr. Potere said some licenses are still available. He explained that this is a forward-looking measure for conversion and not all license holders might take advantage of this option. He will provide a breakdown of licenses as requested.

Councilor Ewen-Campen moved for approval of the item.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen and City Councilor At Large Mbah

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Strezo and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

Referenced Documents:

- Legislative Matters 2025-09-08 MGL Alcohol License Conversion Memo (with 25-1317)