



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

May 9, 2022

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

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Beatriz GomezMouakad	Chair	Present	
Judy PinedaNeufeld	Vice Chair	Present	
Kristen Strezo	City Councilor at Large	Present	

Others present: Aneesh Sahni - Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Denise Taylor - Director of Communications, Jamia Xible - CHA Director of Health Education and Access, Paula Magnelli - Resident, Maria Teresa Nagel - Director of SomerViva, Doug Kress - CHA Chief Community Officer, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:01 PM by Chair Gomez Mouakad and adjourned at 7:34 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Strezo, Pineda Neufeld and Gomez Mouakad), none against and 0 absent.

Approval of the March 15, 2022 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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New Business - Equity

213370: That the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development and the Somerville Arts Council update this Council on the Arts Space Needs Assessment and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) report.

Director Sahni informed the committee that staff from the Arts Council and OSPCD are working internally on this matter and would like to present at a later time.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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213447: That the Director of Parks and Recreation report on enrollment processes, communications, matriculation data, staffing and programs offered in the past five years.

Director Sahni explained that this is a large data request and it hasn't yet been completed. Chair Gomez Mouakad will work with Director Sahni to streamline the request. She stated that she is receiving many complaints from different avenues and her intent is to have a robust Recreation

Department that is accessible. She would like to know what outreach is being done and what model is being used.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

213448: That the Director of Communications ensure that all translated materials and communications are released at the same time as the English materials and communications.

Chair Gomez Mouakad explained that a that pamphlet from the Recreation Department was distributed in English a week before the Spanish version and that, in some cases, e.g., during COVID, the English pamphlets went out after other languages. Director Taylor spoke about the efforts being made to get materials translated in a timely fashion and noted that there will still be some gaps along the way. Director Taylor will work to increase staff where the need exists, and she welcomes the committee's input. Chair Gomez Mouakad stated that translations for available services needs to be prioritized.

Chair Gomez Mouakad ordered that the Director of SomerViva provide the Committee on Equity, Gender, Seniors, Families and Vulnerable Populations with an update on translation services.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

Old Business - Equity

213183: That the Director of Communications begin updating community bulletin boards with this Council's calendar.

Director Sahni reported that he discussed this matter with the City Clerk and Director Taylor explained that the distribution of flyers is handled by individual departments. She also spoke with the City Clerk to discuss ways to make information available by way of a general poster. The poster would be handled by the City Clerk's office and the Communications Department would be available to assist.

Chair Gomez Mouakad would like a notice sent to all departments directing them to update their notices of meetings, etc. Director Taylor noted that a group is forming that will review best practices for providing information to residents.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

213247: That the Chief of Police provide this Council, in writing, data from FY 2021 for all traffic citations, outcomes of those citations, and any collected demographic data.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Families and Vulnerable Populations

213053: That the Director of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with SomerViva, provide a plan for preventive medicine clinics for immigrant communities.

Chair Gomez Mouakad brought this item forward to advise immigrants of what is available for health care services

Mr. Kress spoke about the interactions between Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA) and the communities in its population areas as well as eliminating the barriers to access and promote wellness, including vaccines and food access. Currently, CHA is assisting on a health needs assessment.

Director Xible addressed the committee and gave a brief presentation, speaking about:

- barriers to care, e.g., the complexity of our health care system, having primary care physicians, coverage/pricing, limited English proficiency, and
- addressing those barriers by following a Community Health Worker Model, working with faith leaders and volunteer health advisors, using urgent care centers as an alternative to an emergency department, having a robust interpreting/translation department and offering a free screening program for underserved women.

Chair Gomez Mouakad wants to know how we can be sure that the message is getting out to the immigrant community. Director Xible replied that CHA trains about sixty volunteers yearly and those volunteers go back to their communities to share information.

Councilor Strezo told members that she has been hearing from high school students who said that CHA's operating hours are too short and that they are being asked for insurance. Students, she said, want more information on reproductive health and mental health services. Councilor Strezo also stated that she was informed that CHA staff at the high school site are telling students that the wait list for mental health services is long.

Mr. Kress said that he can have the proper people address this and that he is looking for alternatives to siting CHA in the school during the summer.

Ms. Magnelli said that although she is a scientist, she has no expertise in public health. From her knowledge of the immigrant community, it is a nightmare navigating our healthcare system. She said many families do not know much about their legal rights and what they do learn usually comes from the schools. She thinks that any initiative has to involve the schools. Ms. Magnelli said that many immigrants view healthcare as reactive, not pro-active, and although some receive recommendations from doctors, they will take medicines or use remedies from their home countries. Mr. Kress said that in order to succeed, there has to be a partnership, adding that additional training would go a long way. Ms. Magnelli said that the PTA would be happy to help promote health care in the schools.

Chair Gomez Mouakad suggested that the administration organize a meeting with the School Department and CHA to discuss options. Director Sahni indicated that he would reach out to his counterparts in the School Department to examine ways to accomplish this. Director Nagel commented that it is important to recognize the nuances of the immigrants' populations.

Chair Gomez Mouakad would like to have a cross disciplinary follow-up meeting on this matter.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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213062: That this City Council work with the Administration to explore an internship program for high school students.

Director Sahni reported that the administration is working with businesses on the summer jobs program for the city's youth, noting that this year there is a climate justice extension to the program. Councilor

Strezo explained that she was looking more for an internship program, possibly with the trades. She said that some seniors have asked for help with their gardens and yard work and she would like to know if there could be collaboration with students to provide those services.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

213063: That this City Council work with the Administration and School District on a year-round expansion of a summer jobs internship program with a focus on addressing Out of School Time.

Councilor Strezo commented that many community members want to make a connection and she asked if the administration has considered addressing the jobs program in this way? Chair Gomez Mouakad asked that the administration provide what is available now for out of school time and what might be added. Director Sahni informed the members that this is an administration priority and that he will arrange for the appropriate staff to appear before the committee to discuss the item. Chair Gomez Mouakad asked if ARPA funds might be able to be applied to this.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

213187: That the Administration provide this Council with an update on the current status of the Young Somerville Advisory Group.

Director Sahni reported that this group was not active under the previous administration.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

Seniors

213067: That the Mayor create a Senior Liaison within the Executive Office to advocate on behalf of Somerville residents aged 65 and older.

Councilor Strezo said this could be a great way of envisioning aging in Somerville and she is looking for decisions to be made with this in mind, as many challenges will be faced in the coming years. Director Sahni stated that the mayor has been in contact with the Massachusetts Senior Action Council, a statewide, grassroots, senior-run organization that empowers its members to collectively address key public policy and community issues that affect their health and well-being. He has no update at this time but said that the administration wants to have senior voices integrated in decisions. As example of concerns, Councilor Strezo mentioned nighttime pedestrian crossing at the Powder House Rotary, saying that the city should be using a lens into the future and thinking about growing older in the city. Chair Gomez Mouakad commented that accessibility changes as we age. She pointed out that this item seems more of a budgetary request and can't be advanced further in this committee, but she acknowledged that the seed has been planted.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

Reference Material:

- HEA Slides for Somerville Equity Committee (with 213053)