



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

June 24, 2020

REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING AS A COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Jefferson Thomas ("J.T.") Scott	Chair	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Vice Chair	Present	
William A. White Jr.	City Councilor At Large	Present	
Mary Jo Rossetti	City Councilor at Large	Present	
Wilfred N. Mbah	City Councilor at Large	Present	
Matthew McLaughlin	Ward One City Councilor	Present	
Ben Ewen-Campen	Ward Three City Councilor	Present	
Jesse Clingan	Ward Four City Councilor	Present	
Mark Niedergang	Ward Five City Councilor	Present	
Lance L. Davis	Ward Six City Councilor	Present	
Kristen Strezo	City Councilor at Large	Present	

The meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Scott at 6:05pm and adjourned at 12:03am.

Others present: Annie Connor - Mayor's Office; Interpreters: Ines Fusco; Danyal Najmi; Moise Pierre

1. Public Hearing regarding the FY-21 Budget (210308)

Chair Scott welcomed everyone to the Public Hearing of the Somerville City Council's Finance Committee of the Whole, on the FY21 Budget and shared instructions for participation through GoToWebinar. He noted to participants that, if they are comfortable identifying as Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color, to type "BIPOC" in the questions area to be called on to have their voices heard earlier in the evening. Likewise, for speakers of Portuguese, Spanish, or Haitian Creole, the Chair shared that translators were available, and encouraged attendees to indicate the need for translation in the "questions" area to be called on first and have someone translate their words for us. Written comments will also be accepted and can be sent to cityclerk@somervillema.gov or by mail to City Clerk, 93 Highland Avenue, 02143. Written testimony will be accepted through 10am on Tuesday June 30.

Mr. Pierre translated the welcome for Haitian Creole speakers, Ms. Fusco for Spanish speakers, and Mr. Najmi for Portuguese speakers.

151 residents spoke at the public hearing, with the vast majority (approximately 138) sharing that they signed a petition along with over 4,000 Somerville residents, to de-fund the Somerville Police Department (SPD) and urging the Councilors to reduce the SPD budget by at least 60%, and to reject any budget that calls for less than a 10% reduction. There were also many calls to continue from there to cut each year until the department is abolished. Many speakers also encouraged using the funds for community services such as housing stability, school counselors and social workers, paraprofessionals, transportation, re-engineering streets, addressing climate change, and other community programs.

There was also a recurring theme of fear in calling the police, with a number of personal stories of frightening experiences. Other commonly expressed concerns included that the budget should reflect the City's values, and comments that reforms have not worked (including body cameras, diversity hiring, de-escalation training, and the creation of Commissions). Further, that the Police Department budget is 26 times higher than that for housing is disproportionate to the needs of the City, and police are not providing a good value for the money.

Some specific concerns included a call to cut the line item for weapons of mass destruction (WMD), cutting the funding for vacant positions, cutting the line item for NEMLEC. Other suggestions included capping overtime, not hiring any new officers, removing school resource officers, and implementing unarmed first responders. Another specific call to action included: rejecting the budget and beginning a discussion about how to effectively put change in place; seeking home rule authority to renegotiate the contract with the police union to allow transparent discipline; and working with the Mayor to establish an interim budget to set goals to move funds from the Police Department to other functions.

Two residents expressed support for the Police Department and shared that they are helpful in the schools and the community, and are necessary to respond to incidents. A Somerville Police officer also shared that she cares about the community and provided some additional information, including that the WMD line item includes training for handguns, and the city does not use tear gas in its day-to-day operations; Police in schools can foster relationships that would not otherwise exist, particularly in immigrant families; officers are called to many different types of incidents, so there is a high amount of training, including in crisis intervention; and Somerville is open to change.

A few additional topics were discussed as well. A teacher at the Kennedy School and VP of the Somerville Teacher's Association talked about the difficulty of remote learning and how more staffing and counseling are needed. Recent state guidance on the size of classes is not feasible. A stabilization fund for SPS is needed to support the students and their needs. The Executive Director of the Community Action Agency of Somerville, which is the administrator of the Somerville CARES Fund, shared that the anti-poverty work skyrocketed during the pandemic, and added that nothing has changed since the requests for assistance first came in. Not one penny of City funding is allocated to direct relief for those who have suffered from the pandemic, and that is a moral failing. Another resident spoke to the importance of transportation funding, noting that the pandemic disrupted transportation for many and the budget for mobility should reflect the priorities of getting residents around successfully and safely.

2. Tabled Items from previous meetings

Motion by Councilor Rossetti on June 22, 2020 to reduce line number 571001 (In State Conferences) in the City Council Budget by \$1,199.00

This item remained on the table

Handouts:

- Public Budget Comments 061120-062220 (with 210308)
- FY21 Budget public comments 062220-062320_Redacted (with 210308)