



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, June 15, 2026

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Wheeler at 6:03 pm and adjourned at 12:01 am on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Link, Strezo, Hardt, Scott, and Wheeler), 0 opposed, and 0 absent.

The committee went into recess at 9:51pm and returned at 9:58pm on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Link, Strezo, Hardt, Scott and Wheeler), 0 opposed, and 0 absent.

Also present: Amanda Nagim-Williams – Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Karin Carroll – Director of Health & Human Services, Erica Satin-Hernandez – ARPA Director, Rachel Strutt – Interim Director of the Somerville Arts Council, Mike Mastrobuoni – Budget Manager, Catherine Piantigini – Director of Libraries, Ohemeng Kyeremateng – Recreation Director, Linda Duong – Finance Manager, Parks and Recreation, Denise Taylor – Director of Communications, Steve DiCarlo – Director of Somerville City TV, Adriana Fernandes – OSPCD Senior Planner Minority/Women Business Support, Anoop Malik – Finance Manager, Health & Human Services, Colin Zeigler – Environmental Health Manager (ISD), Lisa Robinson – Director of the Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities, Ashley Speliotis – Director of Council on Aging, Nancy Bacci – Deputy Director of Health and Human Services, Maria Teresa Nagel – Director of SomerViva, Suzanne Rinfret – Parking Director, William Fisher – Emergency Management Director, Sean Tierney – Assistant Fire Chief, Jennifer Corn – Director of Community Outreach Help & Recovery (COHR), Meredith Willis – Senior Crime Analyst, Shumeane Benford – Chief of Police, Emily Wisdom – Somerville Police Department Director of Finance & Administration, James Donovan – Somerville Police Department Deputy Chief, Aliya Ewing – Somerville Program Director, Teen Empowerment, Delaney Fisher-Cassiol -- Clerk of Committees

Roll Call

Present:	City Councilor At Large Jon Link, City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Emily Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott and City Councilor At Large Ben Wheeler
-----------------	--

1. Review of the FY27 Budget

1.1 Culture and Community

Arts and Culture
Libraries
Parks & Recreation
Communications and Public Engagement
Communications
CityTv
Engagement and Neighborhood Services

Arts and Culture

Erica Satin-Hernandez, ARPA Director, noted that the Culture and Community Department is a newly established department. While the department's public-facing programming is most visible through events, she emphasized that its broader purpose is to strengthen community cohesion and support placemaking across Somerville. Rachel Strutt, Interim Director of the Somerville Arts Council, highlighted the department's signature programming, including events such as Carnival and PorchFest, which help strengthen neighborhoods, support local businesses, and build a shared cultural identity. A key priority area is space access for artists, as affordable and stable creative space is essential for artists to remain in Somerville. She described ongoing efforts with the Mayor's Office and partner organizations to explore a cultural trust to help preserve and expand cultural spaces. She also referenced Nibble Kitchen, which supports immigrant chefs through workforce development; several Nibble Kitchen graduates now operate restaurants in Bow Market.

Councilor Scott requested clarification regarding departmental operations and oversight. Director Satin-Hernandez noted that the funding account is currently administered through the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD). Director Strutt added that there is a five-member oversight structure related to the Arts at the Armory building. Councilor Scott sought further clarification on the nature of this board, and Director Satin-Hernandez explained that members were appointed through an advertised process to support stewardship of the building, and while not a formal independent board, they serve at the pleasure of the Mayor. She added that she could provide additional logistical details as needed. She also noted that the City is in the process of hiring a Property and Tenant Relations Manager, who will be compensated through the Armory Revolving Fund. Councilor Scott noted that this position does not appear in the budget. Budget Director Mike Mastrobuoni clarified that the Council previously approved the creation of the Armory Revolving Fund, which is used for building maintenance and is funded through tenant rent revenue. He explained that this type of revolving fund operates separately from the general fund and is not fully detailed within the annual budget in the same manner as general fund positions, as certain appropriations are reauthorized annually through separate processes.

Councilor Link asked for an update on the open director position. Director Satin-Hernandez responded that the City was intentional in developing the job description with input from multiple community stakeholders. She noted that the position was posted approximately two weeks ago and remains open. In response to Councilor Link's question regarding the proposed cultural trust, she explained that the intent of the fund is to help protect and expand arts spaces, and that the City is actively seeking community input on its design and implementation.

In response to a question from Chair Wheeler, Director Strutt noted that the

City is exploring models that allow for partial or time-based reservations of cultural spaces rather than full ownership structures. She also noted that leasing City-owned property to non-government entities requires a formal Request for Proposals (RFP) process.

Libraries

Catherine Piantigiani, Director of Libraries, noted that the Somerville Public Library system includes three libraries staffed by both full-time and part-time librarians. She highlighted the strong support structure provided by the Board of Library Trustees, as well as community partners including the Somerville Public Library Foundation and the Friends of the Somerville Public Library. Director Piantigiani added that the next funding cycle for library building expansion or renovation through the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners will occur in 2028 and requires a 40 percent local match. Councilor Scott expressed appreciation for library staff, noting that they are doing more with limited resources.

Parks and Recreation

Ohemeng Kyeremateng - Recreation Director and Linda Duong - Finance Manager reported that their programming reached approximately 6,000 participants. They also noted ongoing coordination with the Police Department and the Council on Aging to diversify and expand programming offerings. In response to a question from Councilor Hardt on priorities, Director Kyeremateng stated that priorities include developing sustainable programming, introducing new offerings, improving advance communication regarding program changes, and strengthening partnerships with community-based organizations to better coordinate youth services and serve as a central hub for referrals and engagement.

Communications

Denise Taylor - Director of Communications, noted that the department's work focuses on creating a two-way flow of information through both content generation and distribution to ensure City programming effectively reaches Somerville residents and connects communities to services. She emphasized that a key priority is providing proactive, accessible information across six languages and multiple communication channels, including digital media and print, both to improve community access and to alleviate staffing burden across City departments by reducing repetitive information requests and improving clarity of outreach. She also noted that the Office of Immigrant Affairs began as a communications initiative to address language and cultural barriers and has grown to a staff of 28. As part of a recent reorganization, approximately half of the Office of Immigrant Affairs staff will transition to Health and Human Services, while the remaining staff will be integrated into the Communications and Public Engagement Department

to allow for more focused operations and improved coordination of language access work, including translation services and broader language justice efforts. She added that the budget reflects this restructuring and that the City is pursuing a new translation management system, which will increase software costs but is expected to improve efficiency by retaining commonly used City terminology and adapting over time to City-wide language needs. The City has not yet procured the system and will issue an RFP prior to selection and implementation. In response to questions from Chair Wheeler, she noted that Spanish is the most commonly spoken language after English, followed by Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Nepali, and Chinese. She also explained that the department is organized into functional divisions led by directors, though staff often operate across overlapping roles due to capacity needs. In response to Councilor Hardt, she added that the City also utilizes in-language radio, media outlets, and public access television to reach Haitian, Brazilian, and other communities as part of its broader outreach strategy.

CityTv

Steve DiCarlo - Director of Somerville City TV, noted that City TV provides public access to government and school meetings and events, ensuring equitable 24/7 access through two cable television channels, livestreaming, YouTube, and social media platforms. He added that the department's YouTube channel and broader digital presence continue to grow in reach and engagement. He also reported that an overhaul of the City Council chambers production control room is planned, with funding allocated to support updated equipment and installation.

Engagement and Neighborhood Services

Adriana Fernandes - OSPCD Senior Planner Minority/Women Business Support, noted that her division's goal is to be present wherever residents are, ensuring direct and accessible connection to City services across neighborhoods.

In response to Councilor Hardt, Senior Planner Fernandes confirmed that despite the restructuring, staff will continue to engage with small businesses and support access to City services and processes. She noted ongoing collaboration with Davis Square Main Streets and efforts to expand similar engagement in areas such as Winter Hill and Ball Square to strengthen local business support. In response to Councilor Strezo, she stated that the division has been in communication with the Equity Office to advocate for increased space and visibility for minority-owned businesses. In response to Councilor Link, she noted that staff are working across departments to streamline permitting and application processes and improve navigation for residents and businesses. She also highlighted that the division has hosted office hours for direct community support.

1.2 Health and Human Services

Administration

Public Health (includes ISD Health)

Community Wellness

Council on Aging

Human Services (includes SomerPromise and Veterans' Services)

Immigrant Advancement

Administration

Karin Carroll - Director of Health & Human Services, noted that the department integrates a wide range of services to promote resident wellbeing, support vulnerable populations, advance elder care and immigrant inclusion, and improve public health outcomes. She highlighted ongoing work including a new teen programming space, research on immigrant and refugee experiences, expanded senior access to benefits, rodent reduction efforts, and development of a low-income certification process.

In response to Councilor Strezo's questions regarding a \$40,000 Medicaid billing contract, Anoop Malik - Finance Manager, Health & Human Services, explained that the contract between Health and Human Services and Somerville Public Schools supports data collection and Medicaid reimbursement for direct services, including behavioral health, therapy, and medical service documentation processed through an independent billing consultant. He noted efforts to expand reimbursable services to include counseling and nursing, previously billed separately, with an anticipated \$300,000 in additional revenue. In response to a question on public health vending machines, Director Carroll confirmed they are well utilized and funding is expected to sustain the program for several years.

Colin Zeigler - Environmental Health Manager, noted that rodent "smart boxes" will continue to be used to track and analyze areas of high activity and guide targeted interventions, supplemented by community walkthroughs that have proven effective in identifying issues and informing response strategies.

Public Health (includes ISD Health)

Colin Zeigler - Environmental Health Manager, noted that the division conducts inspections of housing and public spaces, connects residents to resources, and oversees a range of public health programs.

Chair Wheeler highlighted that there are 456 establishments with 891 expected routine inspections. Councilor Link asked about the reorganization of the division and coordination with other departments to ensure clear and consistent communication. It was noted that Inspectional Services will

continue coordinating closely with Public Health to maintain alignment and communication across functions.

Community Wellness

Karin Carroll - Director of Health & Human Services, noted that the division is a new unit with approximately 15 employees whose work supports all residents through programs including the mobile farmers market, public health vending machines, street outreach, SNAP services, and related supports. She added that funding has not been reduced for youth services. She also noted that the Youth Services Director will sit within Community Wellness and work across divisions, and that the department is exploring modifications to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey to strengthen data collection on positive protective factors and better identify service gaps.

In response to Councilor Link's questions regarding food access and reliance on external partners, Lisa Robinson - Director of the Office of Food Access, noted that the department maintains ongoing communication with partner organizations to determine if workflows should be adjusted as needed to maintain continuity of services.

Council on Aging

Ashley Speliotis - Director of the Council on Aging, noted that the department provides preventative health programs for seniors at little or no cost and that Somerville is recognized as an age-friendly community. She explained that increased transportation needs are largely due to reduced capacity from partner organizations, including Somerville Cambridge Elder Services.

In response to Councilor Strezo, she noted that City programs such as social work access and fitness programming are more affordable than comparable services elsewhere, and that while fee increases have been discussed, the Council on Aging has prioritized keeping most services free. Councilor Strezo also raised concerns about credit card requirements for parking payments near the TAB building and noted the City's decision to absorb those costs.

In response to Councilor Hardt, Director Speliotis confirmed continued transportation support, including assistance to vehicles, and noted that Somerville Cambridge Elder Services still provides medical escort services. In response to Chair Wheeler, she added that the Council on Aging holds office hours with board members to gather feedback, and highlighted ongoing concerns about affordability for seniors on fixed incomes, alongside advocacy for senior tax relief and rebate programs.

Human Services (includes SomerPromise and Veterans' Services)

Nancy Bacci - Deputy Director of Human Services, noted that the Human Services Division supports residents in accessing opportunities to thrive and includes programs such as SomerPromise, Veterans Services, and broader social services. She explained that the division provides access to medical specialists, social workers, case managers, and supports for veterans and LGBTQ residents. Director Bacci noted that Veterans Services maintains strong outreach efforts to ensure eligible veterans are aware of and able to access available benefits and supports.

Councilor Scott described SomerPromise as an evidence-based, peer-led outreach model grounded in culturally competent home visits, and expressed concern regarding staffing structure and workload distribution between managers and directors.

Immigrant Advancement

Maria Teresa Nagel - Director of SomerViva, noted that the office works across departments through community engagement, policy development, and cultural programming to advance a Somerville where all residents feel they belong. She added that staff have been reallocated as part of the recent reorganization, and that the Administration has increased support for the Immigrant Legal Services Stabilization Fund by \$350,000.

Councillor Link resolved to add 400,000 in funding for the youth development services granting so teen empowerment can have full funding

The motion was laid on the table until the June 23, 2026 Finance Committee of the Whole meeting.

1.3 Public Safety

Parking
Emergency Management
Fire
Fire Alarm
COHR
E911
Animal Control
Police

Parking

Suzanne Rinfret- Parking Director, noted that it has been a busy year for the department, particularly in mobility and engineering, including implementation of a new ticketing process. She reported a modest increase in personnel due to collective bargaining adjustments, alongside streamlined workflows and the elimination of one unfilled position.

In response to Councilor Strezo, Director Rinfret explained that the convenience fees reflected in the budget are tied specifically to parking meter transactions. She noted that the City collects the full amount paid by users (base rate plus convenience fee) and then passes portions of those funds through to payment processors and vendors under a pass-through merchant model. She added that while tickets and permits are paid directly by constituents, meter payments involve variable credit card and merchant processing fees depending on card type and provider, and that these layered costs are not fully offset by the convenience fee structure, contributing to the higher appearance of fees in the budget.

Emergency Management

William Fisher - Emergency Management Director, noted that the department focuses on strengthening collaboration and coordination during “blue sky” days to ensure readiness for effective emergency response. He reported ongoing work to update the Hazard Mitigation Plan, following a completed listening session that is now under review. He also highlighted efforts to develop “resilience corridors” by identifying and synthesizing resources across Somerville.

In response to Councilor Scott, Director Fisher reported that he has been meeting weekly with schools and has a draft Continuity of Operations Plan in place. He added that a tabletop exercise with City and school department heads is scheduled for the 30th to simulate a disruption and test response coordination, with a focus on maintaining continuity of school operations. He noted that the integrated preparedness plan remains in progress, that the department has hosted 19 emergency preparedness events serving 167 residents, and that a formal stakeholder advisory group has not yet been established.

Fire

Sean Tierney - Assistant Fire Chief, noted that the department’s mission is achieved through prevention, suppression, education, and preparedness for emergency response. Chair Wheeler referenced the department being approximately \$1 million over budget in the prior year, which Assistant Chief Tierney clarified was due to union contract settlements and retroactive payments. He also discussed efforts to reduce health risks associated with toxin exposure through established protocols, cancer prevention training, maintaining two sets of equipment, and using contaminated gear bags for transporting used equipment.

In response to Councilor Strezo, Assistant Chief Tierney noted that there have not been budget increases for vehicle maintenance and that the fleet is becoming newer overall. He stated that the department tracks maintenance issues and conducts routine maintenance without concerns outside normal

operations. He also highlighted the department's training division, including implementation of a high-rise standard operating guideline and continued training through both the Massachusetts Fire Academy and internal programming.

Assistant Chief Tierney further noted that pedestrian accidents have decreased. In response to Councilor Scott, he confirmed that each apparatus is staffed with three to four people and that the department dispatches the closest appropriate vehicle to medical emergencies based on established response protocols. In response to Councilor Hardt, he acknowledged that several stations are aging and noted that repair needs are submitted through City processes, with the goal of pursuing more substantial improvements in the future.

Fire Alarm

Assistant Fire Chief Sean Tierney noted that Fire Alarm is responsible for receiving emergency calls, dispatching emergency response resources, and maintaining communication with fire personnel during active incidents to support coordinated operations and response.

COHR

Jennifer Corn - Director of Community Outreach Help & Recovery (COHR), noted that the program supports individuals experiencing substance use or behavioral health-related crises who are identified through police interactions and stated that the goal is to have all police personnel trained in crisis response. Councilor Link noted that although COHR operates independently from the Police Department, the program appears closely integrated with police operations. In response to Councilor Scott, Director Corn reported that through April 30 COHR had completed 1,005 interactions involving 206 unique individuals and typically conducts approximately 3,000 interactions annually, and Meredith Willis - Senior Crime Analyst noted that data on mental health-related calls could be provided at a later time.

E911

Chief Shumeane Benford noted that E911 serves as the initial triage point for emergency calls and that medical and fire emergencies are transferred to Fire Alarm for dispatch and coordination. He explained that Fire Alarm serves as the primary liaison between field personnel and additional response resources. In response to Councilor Scott's question regarding the co-response model, Chief Benford noted that Fire Alarm is responsible for determining the appropriate apparatus and resources to dispatch based on the nature of the emergency.

Animal Control

Deputy Chief James Donovan noted that he oversees Animal Control, which includes two certified animal control officers who respond to both wildlife and domestic animal calls. He stated that the unit operates a kennel at the DPW yard, utilizes a dedicated vehicle, and is dispatched through the Police Department.

Police

Chief Shumeane Benford noted that the Police Department operating maintenance budget reflects a 16 percent reduction, including correction of approximately \$500,000 that had previously been overbudgeted in the shift differential line item following implementation of new payroll software. He stated that the department operates with a lean budget and staffing model, lost 12 positions in 2024, and has implemented recommendations from the 2023 staffing study while undertaking internal reforms. He also noted ongoing efforts to secure state funding to support a full-time co-response model and stated that the department spends approximately \$258 per resident, which he described as lower relative to peer communities.

Chair Wheeler noted that the department is not seeking to increase non-sworn staffing outside of the co-response model and that, as of June 4, all costs associated with body-worn cameras, including the Body-Worn Camera Coordinator position, had been removed from the budget. Emily Wisdom - Somerville Police Department Director of Finance & Administration, explained that the coordinator position had initially been included but was removed while related policy discussions remain under committee review. In response to Councilor Scott, Director Wisdom stated that a civilian coordinator position would cost approximately \$117,000 annually but may not be necessary if cameras are phased in only for superior officers and oversight can be handled internally. She added that while grant funding will offset initial implementation costs, ongoing camera costs are estimated at approximately \$100,000 annually regardless of deployment scale.

Chair Wheeler referenced the staffing study recommendation to reduce minimum staffing from seven officers to six per shift. Chief Benford stated that the department has not yet evaluated all operational implications but remains open to future discussion with the Mayor as capacity allows. Councilor Link noted that retroactive contract payments represent a significant portion of the budget and expressed interest in future budgets more clearly reflecting annual operating costs. In response to Councilor Scott, Chief Benford added that the department has made progress on staffing diversity across gender, ethnicity, and religion and stated that the department is approaching full staffing and does not currently believe further staffing reductions would support public safety goals.

2. Order
(ID # [26-0979](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Hardt, Councilor Link, Councilor Mbah, Councilor Sait, Councilor Scott, Councilor Strezo and Councilor Wheeler That the Director of Health and Human Services update this Council on recent changes for Requests For Proposals for youth programming grants, particularly grants that impact Teen Empowerment directly.

Aliya Ewing, Somerville Program Director for Teen Empowerment, spoke in support of Teen Empowerment programming and expressed concern over the proposed reduction in funding. Director Ewing noted that the organization had been informed in early March that funding could be reduced, the scale of the reduction was unexpected. Director Ewing stated that reductions extending beyond Teen Empowerment disproportionately impact teen residents and emphasized the importance of continued City investment to support youth and allow them to remain in Somerville. In response, Karin Carroll, Director of Health and Human Services, clarified that there has been no overall reduction to the youth services budget this year. Director Carroll explained that under Massachusetts procurement requirements, youth programming undergoes a competitive procurement process every three years and that the City completed a needs assessment and reviewed Youth Risk Behavior Survey results to inform adjustments to programming. As a result, the City restructured youth services into two Requests for Proposals (RFPs), with a third anticipated. Director Carroll noted that \$300,000 is currently in procurement and that outreach has been conducted to encourage organizations to apply.

In response to a question from Councilor Hardt regarding shifting priorities, Director Carroll stated that the needs assessment identified three primary recommendations: youth advocacy, improved communication and coordination of youth resources, and expanded career and professional development opportunities. Councilor Scott emphasized that Teen Empowerment had historically received \$400,000 and is now eligible for \$100,000 in direct funding, characterizing the shift as a policy choice rather than an overall reduction in youth investment and encouraging the Mayor to reconsider the reduction. In response to a question from Councilor Hardt regarding the City's broader vision for youth development, Director Carroll stated that the approach is multifaceted and includes expanded services and new youth spaces while reiterating that overall youth funding has not been reduced. Councilor Hardt expressed concern that the needs assessment and survey process may not have fully captured the value of transformational youth leadership development.

Director Carroll reiterated that the City is following the procurement process and implementing recommendations from the year-long needs assessment, which directly informed the RFP structure. Councilor Scott also expressed concern that staff were unable to provide an update on the number of applications received through the current RFP process. Amanda

Nagim-Williams, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, noted that procurement staff were not available during the meeting but would provide that information at a later date. In response to a question from Chair Link, Director Carroll clarified that through the RFP process, Teen Empowerment may ultimately receive up to an additional \$300,000 in funding.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

3. Unfinished Business

3.1 Resolution By Councilor Strezo 6/9/26

That the collective salaries of Licensing Commissioners be increased to \$15,180 with the Chair receiving \$5,180 and Licensing Commissioners 2 and 3 receiving \$5,000 each annually.

3.2 Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0950](#))

Requesting the appropriation of \$376,778,493 to fund the Fiscal Year 2027 General Fund Operating Budget.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE