



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Equity, Gender, Seniors, Families and Vulnerable Populations Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, February 3, 2025

6:00 PM

The meeting took place remotely via Zoom and was called to order at 6:02 PM by Chair Strezo and adjourned at 7:50 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Sait, Mbah and Strezo), none against and none absent.

Others present:

Director Ashley Speliotis – Council on Aging, Director Karin Carroll – Board of Health, Director Luisa Oliveira - Public Space and Urban Forestry, Kimberly Hutter – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Roll Call

Present: City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo and Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait
Absent: City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah

Councilor Mbah arrived at 6:45 PM

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-1770](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Equity, Gender, Seniors, Families and Vulnerable Populations Committee Meeting of December 10, 2024.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**
AYE: City Councilor At Large Strezo and Ward Five City Councilor Sait
ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Mbah

2. Order (ID # [25-0039](#)) By Councilor Strezo
That the Director of Health and Human Services provide an update on the availability and accessibility of free menstrual products in all city-owned bathrooms, including realistic sizes.

Chair Strezo thinks this is an important issue to discuss as it has not been a city priority, and she believes that these products should be freely available in schools. She spoke about having realistic sizes available as she heard from parents that some products are too large for some younger bodies. She also said that she wants them in all teachers' bathrooms and all gender neutral bathrooms. Director Carroll noted that there is much research around period poverty and that it is a very real issue. Her department began a pilot program last fall, installing 6 dispensers at teen centers, Project Soup and other areas where teens and adults might be found. The dispensers are restocked every 28 days and the average usage appears to be about 25

tampons and 25 pads dispensed per dispenser per month. She also has not heard of any issues with the products. Utilization data from the program will be available around March or April.

Director Carroll reported that the city has 3 contracts to provide these products; one with HHS, one with the Libraries, and one with the School Department. She noted that there are some gaps in service and that the products are not available in every school building. Her department met with the School Department and she commented that they might work up an analysis to see what is needed. The School Department also inquired if having a single contract would be more beneficial than having 3 separate contracts.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

3. Resolution
(ID # [25-0062](#))

By Councilor Clingan, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Davis, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Mbah, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Sait, Councilor Scott, Councilor Strezo and Councilor Wilson

That the Administration return the Vietnam and Korean War memorials to a new, public location as soon as possible rather than waiting for a comprehensive plan for all veterans memorials.

Discussed with Item# 25-0042

Director Oliveira discussed the two memorials, planned to be placed outside Somerville High School with reinstallation scheduled. The design is underway, with bidding set for February and construction starting in April, aiming for completion in summer. Director Oliveira mentioned that updates are available on the SomerVoice website, however, Chair Strezo requested a physical sign be placed outside the school to inform people of the ongoing process. Liaison Hutter noted that staff discussed placement of signage but faced challenges. She told the committee that conversations with veterans' groups will continue. Chair Strezo suggested issuing a press release in local papers.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Order
(ID # [25-0043](#))

By Councilor Strezo and Councilor Mbah

That the Commissioner of Public Works and the Director of Veterans Services install signage at the previous locations of Veteran Memorial landmarks, acknowledging the missing Veterans Memorials and conveying to the public a timeline and/or plan for their re-installation.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Order (ID # [25-0042](#)) By Councilor Strezo, Councilor Clingan, Councilor Mbah and Councilor McLaughlin
That the Commissioner of Public Works and the Director of Veterans Services provide an estimated timeline as to when the removed Veteran's memorial monuments on the City Hall concourse will be re-installed.

Discussed with Item# 25-0062

Liaison Hutter reported that there are no additional plans for reinstallations at this time and said that the other memorials will be placed on the high school concourse and at other appropriate locations in the city, adding that staff is working diligently on this matter.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Order (ID # [25-0041](#)) By Councilor Strezo
That the Director of the Council on Aging discuss how the Council on Aging can help support seniors dealing with grocery store inflation and how the city can help support their transportation to regional discount grocery stores.

Director Speliotis reported that transportation services have been provided for the last five years to complement other modes. Taxi services are available to all seniors and elderly individuals with disabilities, for medical appointments, grocery stores, farmers markets, and food pantries. Residents of Somerville can receive rides within the city. Routine medical care constitutes 65-70% of these services and a survey indicated that it is not necessary to expand grocery shopping services outside the city, though this may be considered in the future. The taxi service charges a flat fee of \$14 within Somerville, however, the costs would increase for destinations outside the city. The taxi budget for FY25 is \$10,000 per month, funded by the city rather than grants. Each senior is allowed one routine medical ride per week and two additional rides per month for groceries and medications. Director Speliotis also noted that the Council on Aging also provides community meals, discounted restaurant meals, and food stamp assistance.

Chair Strezo discussed the high cost of food and suggested considering gift cards for groceries as a means of enhancing food security for residents. Councilor Mbah inquired about the composition of the Board of Directors, to which the Director responded that there are nine advisory members. Councilor Mbah also asked how seniors are informed about current programs, and the Director outlined the various communication methods used.

Councilor Sait questioned the impact of the end of ARPA funds, and the Director explained that the conclusion of these funds caused some programs to cease operations, with Somerville's program absorbing some of those clients. Councilor Sait further inquired about the city's preparations for

unforeseen situations, and the Director noted that the city has taken on the program's costs, alleviating some of the pressure, adding that the discussion should emphasize the need to consider whether or not to expand services outside the city while maintaining affordability.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

7. Resolution
(ID # [25-0040](#))

By Councilor Strezo and Councilor Mbah
That the Administration create a full time staff position within the Executive office, known as a Senior Liaison, who will work to prevent potential barriers within Somerville to growing older in place.

Discussed with Item# 25-1178

Chair Strezo emphasized that the goal is to support the work of the Council on Aging. Liaison Hutter mentioned meeting with advocates from the Massachusetts Senior Action Group to discuss the issues being addressed, saying that they identified several key aspects of the programs that are already available and that at this time, there are no plans to add another position. Chair Strezo noted that seniors sometimes require assistance with transportation and highlighted the challenges they face when trying to access College Avenue due to bike lanes impacting the Ride's ability to drop off seniors safely. This resolution aims to have an advocate examine street plans and other city projects with the city's aging population in mind, including permits for modifying homes for elderly accommodations. She intends to continue advocating for this initiative.

Liaison Hutter acknowledged that staff are consistently considering these matters, but new designs can sometimes conflict with existing infrastructure. Nonetheless, they strive to collaborate across departments to improve conditions for seniors. Chair Strezo referred to the College Avenue design as a misstep. Councilor Mbah inquired if any advocates were invited to the discussion. He suggested keeping this item open to allow advocates and affected individuals to participate. Chair Strezo confirmed that although the Massachusetts Senior Action Group was not invited, they are always welcome to contribute and she noted that she has brought this matter forward as a budget item for several years.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

8. Resolution
(ID # [24-1178](#))

By Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Mbah, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Strezo, Councilor Wilson and Councilor Sait
That the Administration hire a liaison dedicated to working with senior residents in order to amplify their voices in city decision making.

Discussed with Item# 25-0040

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

9. Order
(ID # [24-0788](#))

By Councilor Strezo

That this Council discuss how the lapse in consistent mail delivery in Somerville has affected municipal bill collection, reports of bills not received, or accounts marked delinquent.

Chair Strezo expressed concerns about delayed mail delivery, noting instances of significant life events being impacted. Liaison Hutter indicated that since this issue was brought to attention, there has been no increase in the city's unpaid bills. She noted that staff intends to closely monitor the situation to address any potential recurrence and will also examine redundancies.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED