



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, June 13, 2023

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Wilson at 6:05 pm and adjourned at 9:34 pm with a roll call vote of all in favor (Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Clingan, Councilor Kelly, Councilor Scott, and Chair Wilson), none opposed, and none absent.

A recess was taken at 8:17 pm and ended at 8:23 pm with a roll call of four members present (Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Kelly, Councilor Scott and Chair Wilson) and one absent (Councilor Clingan).

Others present: Cindy Amara – Solicitor’s Office, David Shapiro – Solicitor’s Office, Suzanne Rinfret – Parking, Roberta Cameron – OSPCD, Alan Inacio – OSPCD, Tom Galligani – OSPCD, Luis Quizhpe – OSPCD, Brad Rawson – OSPCD, Michael Feloney – OSPCD, Ellen Shachter – OSPCD, Rachel Nadkarni – OSPCD, Luisa Oliveira – OSPCD, Stephanie Widzowski – Clerk of Committees.

Roll Call

Present:	Chairperson Jake Wilson, Vice Chair Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott, Charlotte Kelly, Jesse Clingan and Ben Ewen-Campen
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Review of the FY 2024 Budget

- **Parking**
- **Community Preservation Act**
- **OSPCD Administration**
- **Mobility**
- **Planning, Preservation & Zoning**
- **Housing**
- **Housing Stability**
- **Economic Development**
- **Redevelopment Authority**
- **Public Space & Urban Forestry**
- **Law**
- **Damages to Persons & Property**

Parking

Dir. Rinfret introduced the budget and explained that there is an increase in the Personal Services line, but a decrease in the Ordinary Maintenance line largely due to a decrease in the cost of the ticketing contract.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked about the goals of the comprehensive parking study and how this year’s budget will support the implementation of the resulting recommendations. Dir. Rinfret said that a project manager was one of the recommendations and is included in the Personal Services line. Councilor Ewen-Campen expressed his desire for big-picture action on the topic.

Councilor Kelly asked for a list of target areas for the “safety stick” technology that was piloted in 2022. Dir. Rinfret described the location of the two sticks on Elm Street in Davis Square and said that they are planning to implement two more later. Councilor Clingan asked about pedestrian impact recovery systems deployed in crosswalks. Dir. Rinfret said that they are in the Parking budget and that the Parking department is working on a plan to determine appropriate sites for them.

Chair Wilson asked for detail on the \$9,999 listed in the Parking budget. Dir. Rinfret said that was the price of conducting curb inventory with a previous vendor who recently went out of business. She also noted the need for a curb project manager due to the ever-changing nature of curb regulations. She said that the Parking department reserved this amount for the bid for a new contractor, though the cost might be greater.

Community Preservation Act

Dir. Cameron said that projected total revenue this fiscal year will be \$3.2 million, given an estimated \$2.8 million of surcharge revenue and a state match of about \$388,000. She also talked about the debt service program. Chair Wilson asked why the state match projection dropped significantly from FY23. Dir. Cameron replied that more cities are adopting the CPA, and the total fund is fluctuating, so the share allotted to each city is expected to be less. Chair Wilson asked when the actual figures would be shared, to which Dir. Cameron said that disbursement is announced in the fall.

OSPCD Administration

Dir. Galligani stated that the FY24 OSPCD Administration budget seeks to “strengthen the gears” of OSPCD, and that support infrastructure is struggling to keep up with city initiatives. Dir. Inacio noted a 35% increase in the salaries line, mostly from a Grants and Procurement Analyst position previously approved by the City Council. Councilor Scott asked for an explanation of the increase of the Personal Services line. Dir. Inacio said that, with senior accountants’ increased workload in other areas, it is difficult to justify the same grant allocation to CDBG and other programs as before. He described work that the accountants have taken on instead, such as managing general fund contracts and invoicing.

Councilor Clingan asked if there is a specific law structure needed in bridging the digital divide. Strategic Planning & Equity Manager Luis Quizhpe described the Digital Bridge Initiative, an umbrella of projects that includes public WiFi and fiber optic. In response to the third answer in the presubmitted questions document, Councilor Kelly asked about FY23 funds that were transferred or unable to be spent. Dir. Inacio said the transfers were related to office and facilities issues. He also said that the reason the

line is level-funded is to be ready to react to unanticipated, urgent requests across departments.

Mobility

Dir. Rawson introduced the Mobility budget and described how staffing levels in FY23 allowed the department to design and implement more safety projects than before, such as traffic calming. Chair Wilson asked how much of an increase to the services line allow for more traffic calming. Dir. Rawson said that if the Senior Traffic Engineer and Project Engineer positions budgeted in other departments are funded, it would increase Mobility's output.

There was discussion about the Highland Ave redesign project, where the funds for each stage of the project would reside, and the timeline on construction and design. Councilor Ewen-Campen noted that only the resurfacing portion of the project is in the FY24 budget and asked about the status of other phases of the project. Dir. Rawson confirmed that reconstruction east of Central is in the existing CIP for FY26. Councilor Ewen-Campen said that he heard very differently during the CIP process and expressed his frustration with the timeline.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked about efforts on a local level to pursue "micro mobility" or North-South connectivity in public transit. Dir. Rawson said that Mobility is looking to organize existing or future shuttle services to solve that issue, starting with internal resources in the coming fiscal year. Chair Wilson asked for updates on finding MBTA alternatives to their 40-ft buses for these routes. Dir. Rawson did not have updates, but emphasized that the city will be consulting with the MBTA on private shuttle operations to complement and not compete with their services.

Councilor Ewen-Campen initiated a conversation about the lack of signage at new crossings along the community path extension. Dir. Rawson talked about challenges with implementation, such as weather fluctuations and staffing issues among multiple contractors. Councilor Kelly asked how many people would be covered in each group that is eligible for the free city transit program. Dir. Rawson said that approximately 2000 students, 650 parents or guardians of students, and 650 Somerville Public Schools employees are served now, and the low-income program is planned to serve 500. Councilor Scott asked about balances on the PTS line of the FY23 budget that were transferred out, which were for signs and cones, and asked about the typical amount needed for signs and cones. Councilor Clingan asked about the cost of flex posts and whether they are effective. Dir. Rawson noted that they are the best short-term solution, but separating the bike lane with a curb is the ideal long-term solution.

Planning, Preservation & Zoning

Dir. Lewis said that PPZ has not been able to start new neighborhood planning work, but is finalizing projects that are underway. She said that the largest change to the budget is in the preservation team and highlighted a temporary salary line to cover a consultant, who is designing a model for Assembly and Brickbottom to use on future building projects.

Chair Wilson asked if the current organizational chart will allow for effective division of funds to accomplish permitting work, and whether the budget will allow PPZ to facilitate all work from the Land Use Committee. Dir. Lewis said that the national economy may cause a slowdown in large, complex projects, and she talked about the need for a public liaison for Land Use.

Councilor Clingan asked about historic staffing levels and how the new zoning has impacted workload. There was a general discussion about what will allow the department to go from reactive to long-term planning.

Housing

Dir. Feloney highlighted a Personal Services line increase of 24%, mostly from program improvement requests, and an Ordinary Maintenance increase of 15%, largely related to Professional and Technical Services. He said that large scale housing transactions require a full time housing counsel within the department, and expanding program and staffing increase the need for an Assistant Director of Housing. He also gave an update on the Consolidated Rental Waitlist model.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked for an update on rental registry work. Dir. Feloney said that was mostly paused in FY23 during the hiring process for the Clean Green Somerville Program Manager and the Housing Intake Specialist. He said that the rental registry would be a top priority for the two positions in collaboration.

Councilor Kelly asked how long Phase III of the Consolidated Rental Waitlist will take once a consultant is hired. Dir. Feloney estimated that implementation will take 4-6 months. Councilor Scott asked about unexpended funds and funds transferred out from the Professional and Technical Services line last year. Dir. Feloney said that funds for the successor to 100 Homes did not get spent because of the new Housing Development Program Manager position, who has done work on how to redesign the project. The department plans to build on that work in FY24. Councilor Scott requested the invoices for the PTS line, which Dir. Inacio said he would provide.

Housing Stability

Dir. Shachter highlighted the department's achievements in FY23 - including responding to over 1500 requests for service and helping tenants obtain \$5 million collectively in assistance. She talked about ongoing initiatives and two new positions in the budget: a Program Development Communications Policy Coordinator and a Senior Case Manager.

Chair Wilson asked how much will go to Flex and SomerVIP, which Dir. Shachter replied are at \$220,000, but she said that amount should be enough, with the lesser demand on those funds thanks to ARPA. This year the funds were not fully depleted. Councilor Kelly asked for clarity on the location of legal services in the budget, and whether covered income brackets would be expanded for housing and legal services. Dir. Shachter said that both ARPA contracts have a maximum income of 100% AMI, and that legal services through Housing Stability accept up to 80% AMI. Councilor Kelly also asked for an update on the emergency response stabilization fund and short-term hotel stay program. Dir. Shachter said that \$300,000 of free cash will be set aside for this, and that the hiring process for a director for the emergency management is ongoing.

Economic Development

Dir. Nadkarni talked about two ARPA-funded coach positions to help high school graduates with a first job or next institution. She said that the department shifted resources into Professional and Technical Services related to the Fabville program, and talked about business support services offered through ARPA as well as collaborations with other departments.

Chair Wilson asked if the \$100,000 allotted to Fabville is about workforce development, which Dir. Nadkarni confirmed. She talked about two Fabville assistants, positions for high school students, hired in FY23. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked for updates on the permitting liaison position. Dir. Nadkarni said the new liaison is already solving issues for many businesses and has implemented weekly office hours for permitting questions. Councilor Ewen-Campen requested written follow-up on the question. Councilor Scott asked how the department plans to address vacancies. Dir. Nadkarni said that vacant positions can be staffed now that she has transitioned into the Director role.

Redevelopment Authority

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked for updates on the representing counsel. Dir. Galligani said that the intention is to make Attorney Salchert's position permanent, as it has been a contractor position for over 12 months.

Public Space & Urban Forestry

Dir. Oliveira listed projects completed in FY23 and those still in progress,

the number of tree plantings, and upcoming plans for FY24. She said that PSUF is able to complete the Pollinator Action Plan this year.

Councilor Scott asked about the difficulties with spending funds in the PTS line. Dir. Oliveira explained that two items not spent last year were for the Somerville Pollinator Plan, which had capacity and hiring issues, and the Treekeeper 311 merge, delayed by technical research. Councilor Kelly asked about the possibility of planting additional trees around the new community path. Dir. Oliveira talked about the constraints relating to the proximity to MBTA tracks.

Law

Solicitor Amara said that as of July, the Law Office will be staffed as intended. Their budget is primarily salaries, and the rest comes from the budget for outside counsel. She noted an error in a salary calculation - a difference of \$64,000 that should be resolved in the final appropriation. Councilor Scott highlighted a discrepancy that states there is a 34% decrease in the Ordinary Maintenance line.

Damages to Persons & Property

Solicitor Amara noted that neither she nor her staff prepared the answers to the presubmitted questions. Councilor Kelly asked about overspending, to which Solicitor Amara said that there were multiple large settlements last year, and that she could provide a list of those settlements. Deputy Solicitor Shapiro added that the city historically keeps the budget for settlements and judgements low and asks for additional funds later if needed.

Note: Written comment may also be emailed to cityclerk@somervillema.gov and will be accepted until noon on Wednesday, June 21, 2023.

Referenced Documents:

- Finance - 2023-06-13 OSPCD FY2024 Budget Memo (003)
- Finance - 2023-06-13 Response to budget questions Law Dept
- Finance - 2023-06-13 fy2024 City Council Questions Parking Dept