



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

December 16, 2020

REPORT OF THE HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEETING AS A COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

Others present: Khushbu Webber-Mayor's Office, Lauren Racaniello-Mayor's Office, Ellen Shachter-OSPCD, George Proakis-OSPCD, Hannah Carrillo-OSPCD, Ithzel Polanco-Cabadas-OSPCD, Tom Galligani-OSPCD, Denise Taylor-Communications, Chris Hosman-SomerPromise, Ben Baldwin-Community Land Trust, Joe Lynch-Somerville Media Center and Kat Powers-Somerville Media Center

The meeting was held virtually and was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Chairperson Strezo and adjourned at 9:23 p.m.

Approval of the October 28, 2020 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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Approval of the November 18, 2020 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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Approval of the November 16, 2020 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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210787: Requesting approval of the Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan.

Councilor Clingan stated this item was in committee last week. There were concerns expressed by some of the city councilors. He would like a response from the administration regarding the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). Councilor Clingan stated he sent some language to the city staff for consideration for the MOA. Councilor Clingan stated he will not support the taking of this private property by the city without a MOA.

Mr. Galligani stated he heard the concerns of the councilors regarding the developer selection process. There were discussions about a MOU used as a tool for 90 Washington Street and using Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA) for the taking of the property.

Mr. Proakis stated his purpose tonight was to listen to the concerns of the city councilors. He stated that 90 Washington is a different project than the Winter Hill project. There is a city SRA relationship. Mr. Proakis referenced Mass Legislature Chapter 121B, Housing and Urban Renewal stating this project relates to redevelopment and that land disposition agreements can be complicated.

Councilor White stated this is a replay of the problem he had with Union Square. There are no guarantees that all concerns will be considered appropriately. There should be a better spelled out urban renewal plan before the taking of the property. Councilor White supports Councilor Clingan on his concern to draft some agreement to incorporate the councilors concerns.

Councilor Neidergang supports and appreciates Councilor Clingan's position on this matter. He's not sure what the solution is and has a couple of suggestions. There have been significant changes to the SRA. He does not trust the SRA to make the right decisions for Somerville. He stated the SRA is not aware of their power and asked questions at a meeting that they should already know. Councilor Neidergang stated the city councilors should have a role in decisions in the selection of the developer at the end of RFQ proposal and approving the land disposition agreement.

Councilor Ewen-Campen also supportive of Councilor Clingan's request. It makes sense to have a MOU to lead the city on a better path. He stated this project is very political and should formalize a role for the city councilors to be involved in making the decisions.

Councilor White stated he asked Ms. McGettigan to incorporate some language that may have been used in the Assembly Square Redevelopment Plan. Mr. Proakis stated that Ms. McGettigan was not able to find the language and did not get back to Councilor White.

Mr. Galligani shared what was outlined in the plan. Research was done, reviewed all renewal plans in the commonwealth. He stated that urban plans are not detailed and could be risky if you want to make changes. Mr. Galligani stated the plan was community centered and will identify the details to launch the RFP process.

Councilor McLaughlin was hoping to vote on this tonight. He spoke to city staff about the concerns had by the city councilors. He agrees with Councilor Neidergang about the SRA. The consensus is to have a MOU and have the city councilors involved in the process.

Councilor Scott fully supports Councilor from Ward 4. The taking of the property is really in the contract signed by the Mayor. The SRA in the past, disregarded comments by the city councilors. The redevelopment of this site is of the utmost importance to the city.

Councilor Davis stated he is in complete agreement with his colleagues and believes the new make up of the SRA will listen to the voices of the people of Somerville.

Councilor Ballantyne stated she is in support of MOA and it gives the tools to the future city councilors and neighbors. She agrees that the city councilor should be involved in selecting the master developer and signing land disposition agreement.

Councilor McLaughlin motioned and it was accepted that the director of Economic Development work with the Ward councilor and city councilors to develop the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

Mr. Proakis stated the SRA would also need to be involved in the developing the MOU.

Councilor Neidergang suggested the SRA watch the video from tonight's meeting and November 18th meeting to understand the concerns of the city councilors.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210986: That the Director of the Somerville Media Center appear before this Council's Committee on Housing and Community Development to consider out-of-school programming and funding to help address the lack of accessible childcare options during this pandemic.

access for the city of Somerville for 35 years. The Media Center has a contract with the city of Somerville that comes up for renewal every three years. This year, there were some technical delays due to the pandemic. The mayor has asked them to vacate their home of 35 years and find new a location. They have a verbal from the mayor to stay until June 2021. They are stable for now, but have to find a new facility to act as cable access for Somerville. They do not have a new contract yet from the city. Their attorney has commented and made changes which are back with the city. Mr. Lynch is hoping this will be finalized by Friday. The Media Center has offered programs for film making, poetry, digital learning as part of the out of school time program. They received a grant to work with SomerPromise to institute and manage a summer program in 2020 for 300 children free of charge. They are seeking grants and outside funding to offer programs for the children. Mr. Lynch stated The Media Center is a valuable facility for the community and need funding and a stable place to call home to continue with the out of school program.

Councilor Scott asked about the mayor not signing the media's contract and that as of December 31st they will not be able to serve in that capacity. He asked if there is another partner. It was stated that the contract expired April 2020, due to pandemic asked mayor for an extended period to renegotiate the contract. Ms. Webber clarified that the city is in active negotiation to renew contract. She stated there are no other vendors for this service. Mr. Lynch stated negotiations did not start until this month.

Councilor Ballantyne stated she put in an order on this matter. She stated that if the city does not negotiate the contract, they can take the services in house.

Councilor Davis asked about extending the contract for a year and expressed support and value of having the media center. Ms. Webber stated that Director Taylor is available to answer these questions.

Mr. Chris Hosman from SomerPromise who has an out of school coordinator and provider. He stated there are no caps on the number of youths served in the program. CARES Act funds helped to provide programming. Currently developing funds for \$50,000 for the Somerville media center to continue the remote program moving forward. This funding would support the program for remote access, childcare and social opportunities.

Ms. Denise Taylor was able to join the meeting to respond to the questions about negotiating the Media Center contract. This spring during pandemic they agreed to extend the contract through December. They worked with the attorney to allow equipment funding but they chose to stay with the same contract. The contract gets renewed every 3 years. The only changes were an effort to provide them with greater support than they have had previous years. They expect to complete negotiations before the end of the year. There is no jeopardy for the funding.

Councilor Scott asked if the only modification is to give Media Center for funding. Ms. Taylor stated it's also to provide more stable and larger share of funding. Mr. Lynch stated there are significant changes that would not provide the stability that they are looking for.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210928: That representatives of the Community Land Trust discuss with this Council's Housing and Community Development Committee how the Council can help implement the Trust's goals.

Councilor Ewen-Campen recused himself from this item.

Mr. Baldwin has been involved with the CLT organizing work and currently is a real estate manager. He introduced the CLT as a nonprofit that uses land ownership for affordable housing and deed restriction to keep property affordable. They formed the CLT from conversations with councilors and the mayor in late 2017 and were able to get a group of people from the Somerville community to get the planning going. Currently, they are in the middle of 6 month technical assistance process with consulting team who are CLT experts. The process will result in a report in April or May with a business plan, staffing plan and structural partnership. Mr. Baldwin stated their main ask is to consider CLT in long term planning and budgeting, including Winter Hill urban renewal plan, Parks & Recreation on Walnut Street and GLX. Mr. Baldwin stated they have been working on a volunteer basis and could use a part time staff as an organizer, promoter and communications person.

Councilor Ballantyne asked how this option fits into the city's work with various affordable housing developers. She asked the administration who will determine which instrument would be used? Who's making that decision. Ms. Carrillo stated they are looking for collaborative relationships with the city. They will have more information as they work through the technical assistance process.

Councilor Scott asked about conversation with the mayor about the Recreation building on Walnut Street. Mr. Baldwin stated there have not been conversations with the mayor and have not addressed the parcels with anyone in the city.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210380: That the Directors of SPCD, Housing Stability, and Inspectional Services discuss

with the Housing and Community Development Committee the anticipated impact and possible responses when the MA Eviction Moratorium expires on August 18.

Ms. Shachter stated the federal moratorium expires end of December. There may be a month continuance with the federal moratorium. Since the pandemic began, 1,343 requests for service. Housing has hired 5 contractors to help out with the backlog. All bilingual. Ms. Shachter stated they sent out a 6-sided brochure to residents in Somerville about legal services. Letters are going out to property owners this week about housing notification act. There are meetings with OHS, legal services, CAAS every 2 weeks to plan around eviction prevention. There will be 7 new people through the governor's initiative with legal experience. The mayor is sending out a letter calling on large landlord to sign on a state-wide pledge to take other measures rather than eviction. There are 4 banners going up in four areas. DPW will put up the banners. Finishing up for \$2M for rental assistance, the mayor committed another \$500k. She stated how difficult it has been to get the funds out the door and that \$200,000 is allocated for cases that have been documented. All money must be spent by December 30th. Evictions are happening and CAAS has a program for those who are in the eviction program.

Councilor Mbah asked if the brochure includes information about rental assistance. Ms. Shachter stated that OHS is not distributing funds, they are helping to distribute applications. The resident mailers have information about OHS assistance to help complete the application. There are 20 workshops about eviction and the work that OHS is doing to try to get the word out to the community. A lot of people are contacting them. Many are also returning for subsequent funding.

Councilor Niedergang asked what is the impact of the city's moratorium. Ms. Shachter stated there has not been any challenge of the eviction moratorium. It does not prevent the eviction cases, but does prevent the residents being removed from their homes. She is not aware of any instances that have been violated. The letter from the mayor states that the Somerville moratorium is in place and it is a violation to evict anyone. Ms. Shachter stated she worked with Senator Jehlen to protect tenants if they had a rental application pending, the application will continue until there is an answer. She was pleased there was language in the budget to protect local people.

Chair Strezo asked if there are any plans since the state moratorium expires end of this month. Ms. Shachter stated it would be a huge help if the state extends unemployment assistance.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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209360: That the Director of SPCD provide this Council, in conjunction with its FY21 budget review, a list of upcoming commercial development, including the square footage and linkage payment projections with corresponding payment dates.

This was on the agenda last month and was promised to have a response and have not. Councilor Ballantyne stated that Mr. Proakis sent an email this evening and it has the information on it. Councilor Scott stated the email came in after the meeting started.

Mr. Proakis stated he had planned to send out on Monday, but the Phase 3 closure caused delay in getting the email out. He included projects that are in the pipeline and have been finished. The email also includes projects under construction and in development phase.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

206200: That the Commissioner of Public Works share the policy for removing items that are blocking sidewalks.

DPW provided a response on this matter and was not available to attend due to the pending storm. Ms. Webber will relay any questions back to DPW.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

206233: That the Director of SPCD develop an affordable housing program targeted especially at city employees whose income is below a certain threshold level.

Councilor Neidergang stated this was Councilor Rossetti's idea. They have had meetings with the administration and why it's not feasible. Ms. Polanco-Cabadas from Housing division stated the current housing program includes people who work and live in Somerville. They also have city employees who live in inclusionary units and offer closing cost assistance. Employees do not have to live in Somerville already.

Councilor Rossetti talked about the city of Gloucester or Marblehead and asked if the city is still following them and looking to restructure the inclusionary rental list. Councilor Rossetti asked Housing to send out an email to city and school staff letting them know that the city does have this program in place and copy the councilors. They will send out notice to all city staff and school on affordable home opportunity next week. In January, Rossetti would like a memo to go out to city and school staff where they stand in priority and who to contact for information for affordable housing.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

208251: That the Director of SPCD appear before the Committee on Housing and Community Development to discuss the specific steps required to fill inclusionary units in new developments, and any suggestions for ways to increase the efficiency of this process.

Items 11 and 12 were laid on the table then Chair Strezo motioned to take both items off the table to be discussed.

Mr. Proakis stated his goal is to consolidate the wait list. The system has taken longer than expected. They are looking at people who are most at risk and this is an opportunity to know who's filling the inclusionary units. Mr. Proakis hopes to bring another person in the inclusionary staff position to with this effort.

Ms Polanco-Cabadas shared slides on the overview on prior income certification. The open application period which includes lottery from the wait list. Some on the wait list may have a Section 8 voucher, need movers, or assistance with first months, last months and security funds. They are trying to reduce the open application period and will pull from one wait list in the future.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

208809: That the Administration initiate a Disparity Study to formally evaluate whether Somerville has a basis for implementing race- and gender-conscious contracting policies,

and to serve as a baseline for future equity-based policies.

Items 11 and 12 were laid on the table then Chair Strezo motioned to take both items off the table to be discussed.

10 members in favor and 1 absent (White)

Councilor Mbah states this has been in place for more than a year and wants to know the status. Ms. Webber stated the city’s response to COVID slowed the response. In August, they convened a group of internal stakeholders for a diversity equity inclusionary manager on how to develop this study. They have been meeting regularly. One model to identify issues within the city and recommendation to the purchasing to diversify the vendors. On a regional level, Brookline and Cambridge are interested in looking at this at a larger level. The city wants to make sure the processes are consistent in other cities and address diversity at a higher level. They are pushing forward to identify potential consultants and will have something in 2021.

Councilor Mbah asked how many people from Cambridge are in the group meeting. Ms. Webber stated there are employees from the city of Cambridge. Director Allen is the one coordinating efforts from Cambridge and Brookline. Ms. Webbers was informed by Ms. Allen that Brookline is planning to invest their own money in a larger regional study. Somerville is still trying to identify other cities to join this initiative.

Councilor Ewen-Campen stated this was discussed several times in committee. He stated the mayor’s office can set an administrated goal for minority vendors.

Chair Strezo asked how long the study will take. Ms. Webber stated it really depends on what the city wants the consultants to study.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Handouts:

- DPW response to item 206200
- OSPCD-HD-CHCD (with 206233, 208251)