



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, March 31, 2025

6:00 PM

Joint Meeting with the School Committee's School Building Facilities and Maintenance Committee

The meeting took place remotely via Zoom and was called to order at 6:02 PM by Chair Davis and adjourned at 7:59 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Sait, Clingan and Davis), none against and none absent.

Others present:

SPS Personnel Laura Pitone, Leiran Biton, Dr. Sarah Phillips, Dr. Ruben Carmona, Director Rich Raiche – IAM, Environmental Health Manager Colin Zeigler – ISD, Director Nick Antanavica - Inspectional Services, Yasmine Raddassi – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

The Committee recessed from 6:04 – 6:05 PM to allow the SPS Committee to be called to order.

Roll Call

Present: Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis, Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan and Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [25-0408](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee Meeting of March 3, 2025.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**

AYE: Ward Six City Councilor Davis, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and Ward Five City Councilor Sait

2. Resolution (ID # [24-0466](#)) By Councilor Davis
That the Administration provide the Special Committee on School Building Facilities and Maintenance with regular updates about the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) process for the Winter Hill and Brown Schools.

Director Raiche reported that efforts are continuing to form the team module and that 4 firms have been invited to interview this week for the OPM position. The schedule remains on track for the meeting with the MSBA in May. Councilor Clingan inquired about a School Building Committee being part of the OPM selection process and Director Raiche replied that the building committee, which is almost identical to that for the high school, will have input for the design committee, but not for the OPM position.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

3. Order
(ID # [25-0489](#))
- By Councilor Sait and Councilor Wilson
- That the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management work with a consultant to provide this Council with the renovation cost of the Cummings School building.
- Director Raiche mentioned that the project has merit but faces budget and staff time issues. Mr. Biton inquired whether obtaining an estimate requires additional budget and staff time, to which the director replied that an architect would be necessary for the ADA plan and related code implications, making the cost estimation process complex. Chair Davis asked for a rough estimate, and Director Raiche suggested it could be \$100 million to convert it into a building suitable for use as a school.
- Councilor Sait asked about funding and potential consultant hiring to get an estimate soon and the director noted that initial funding typically comes from the Capital Projects Annual Operating Budget, and once an estimate is received, an appropriation is put before the City Council for approval. He also indicated that concurrent budgeting is unlikely due to existing projects consuming the department's budget but hopes to have start date in July. Director Raiche noted that cost estimates are usually valid for some time but are currently volatile due to inflation.
- Ms. Pitone expressed frustration regarding the expectations of the MOU between the city and the School Department for repair costs and basic maintenance plans for the building and the director acknowledged that deficiencies have been identified but the work has been hindered by budget and staffing constraints. Ms. Phillips requested that the city provide an update on the plan and Mr. Biton commented that he would submit a follow up item for inclusion on a future agenda of this committee.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
4. Order
(ID # [25-0466](#))
- By Councilor Strezo
- That the Director of Parks and Recreation report on the process by which Ginny Smithers Pool patrons are promptly notified of pool cancellations or schedule changes, including any modifications that could be made to that process in light of the March 2025 temporary pool closure.
- A memo has been submitted addressing this item.
- Mr. Biton commented that many people were unaware of program cancellations at the pool and said that the referenced memo conflicts with what some parents experienced, since they didn't receive an initial email from the aquatics team. He asked that the participant list be reviewed and that a consistent process be used for notifications. Dr. Phillips asked why a chemical imbalance in the water would necessitate keeping the pool closed

for a month. Liaison Raddassi stated that part of the problem is because it's unknown when the imbalance will be corrected. She noted that email notifications go out to those who opted in (the notification process) and that posting are put on social media. Ms. Pitone stated that she has never heard of chemical imbalance closing a pool for a month and she asked if it's due to a lack of in-house expertise and whether a third party should be brought in to address the situation. She noted that the pool has been unstable for years and asked what could be done differently to stabilize it.

Chair Davis submitted 2 items for inclusion on the next City Council regular meeting agenda, as follows:

- *That the Administration report to this Council on the cause of the reported chemical imbalance at the Ginny Smithers Pool and the process being used to address the imbalance.*
- *That the Administration develop a new process to address ongoing maintenance at the Ginny Smithers Pool and report to this Council to describe that process.*

Councilor Clingan expressed frustration that the pool is still closed and that Parks and Recreation Director Yerkes was not present to discuss the matter. He went on to say that there is an ISD report somewhere and that he wants a copy of it attached to the administration's responses to the 2 items submitted tonight by Chair Davis. Councilor Clingan commented that he has concerns and questions and he asked Liaison Raddassi to bring the message that this is unacceptable back to the administration. Chair Davis commented that he saw a social media post today that said the pool was closed indefinitely. Councilor Clingan commented that he thinks that notification emails were not sent by design, because this is a bad situation. Councilor Sait noted her displeasure that the Parks and Recreation Director was not at this meeting with information and she noted that she is receiving emails and calls from constituents regarding this matter.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

5. Order
(ID # [25-0236](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld

That the Director of Inspectional Services discuss the metrics for measuring the effectiveness of rodent mitigation strategies in Somerville Public School buildings.

A memo has been submitted addressing this item.

Mr. Zeigler gave a brief presentation about formulating new ways of tracking metrics to improve rodent control. The data being tracked includes basic contact information, site assessment, conducive conditions, the number of visits and follow-ups and recommendations based on staff

responsibility. He compared the current flow chart with the new version which was designed to remove redundancy by having 311 information forwarded directly to CitizenServe, (and to him) bringing everyone into the loop. Mr. Zeigler noted that his department's workload will increase but said that the integration of systems will streamline the process. Mr. Zeigler explained that at the present time there are no approved or designated submitters but that administrative staff will be assigned at each school, adding that having a central contact at each school will eliminate duplicate complaints. Information will be pushed out to the person who filed the report and reports will be used to determine the areas of most need and/or where the most bang for the limited dollars may be achieved.

Dr. Carmona commented that the schools still have challenges with rodents and that staff have been advised to keep areas clear of food and clutter and said that rodent access to buildings is being addressed. Director Antanavica said that ISD is coordinating with the schools and will use the remainder of this school year to review the new distribution process and to develop a program of best practices for the schools. Councilor Clingan inquired about having pest control done by city staff and Director Antanavica explained that in addition to requiring a state license, there are insurance issues to be considered, so it's best for the city to use contractors. Councilor Clingan asked if any evidence of rats being inside the school buildings has been observed and Mr. Zeigler replied that signs have been noted around the buildings, but not inside, since rats don't normally live indoors, although they can.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Order
(ID # [25-0233](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld

That the Commissioner of Public Works work with relevant city staff to develop a prioritization and tracking system of 311 requests to maintain optimal school building conditions and proactively address potential concerns.

A memo has been submitted addressing this item.

Mr. Biton noted that this item was inadvertently omitted from the School Department's agenda, so he asked that it remain in committee. Chair Davis noted that at the Brown School, for example, there had been reports of roof leaks over the years, but that a central repository for complaints/issues wasn't available and, in 2015, the roof partially collapsed. Liaison Raddassi informed the committee that the Chief Administrator Officer is collaborating with the School Department on this matter.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

-
7. Resolution (ID # [25-0116](#)) By Councilor Strezo and Councilor Mbah
- That the Superintendent of Schools consider opening the Highlander Cafe within Somerville High School to the public for regular lunch hours while school is in session and that the Administration address any barriers to this request.
- In the past, the Culinary Arts Program at Somerville High School operated a restaurant to the public, showcasing the skills of the students in the program. Since the opening of the new high school, the restaurant has been discontinued. Dr. Carmona explained that one of the issues involves departmental structure, i.e., logistical issues and finding a different way to navigate the space. Additionally, it's necessary to have enough students and staff available in the program and staffing has been a challenge. Mr. Biton asked about revenue from the restaurant and Dr. Carmona commented that he doesn't know what receipts are available, but that the usual procedure is for any proceeds from a restaurant to be used to fund the program.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**

Referenced Documents:

- SBFM - 2025-03-31 Response (with 25-0233)
- SBFM - 2025-03-31 Memo Response (with 25-0466)
- SBFM - 2025-03-31 School Rodent Update (with 25-0236)
- SBFM - 2025-03-31 Kennedy School Rodent Inspection (with 25-0236)