



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Public Health and Public Safety Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, July 10, 2023

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Kelly at 6:00 p.m. and adjourned at 7:22 p.m. on a Roll Call Vote: 3 in favor (Councilors McLaughlin, Davis, Kelly), 0 opposed, 0 absent.

Others present:

Michael Potere – Assistant Clerk of Committees; Neha Singh – Legislative Liaison; James Donovan – Captain, Somerville Police; Karin Carroll – Director of Health & Human Services.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Charlotte Kelly, Vice Chair Lance L. Davis and Matthew McLaughlin

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-0838](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Public Health and Public Safety Committee Meeting of May 15, 2023.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: Chairperson Kelly, Vice Chair Davis and Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin

New Business

2. Order (ID # [23-0913](#)) By Councilor Kelly
That the Chief of Police and the Director of Mobility report to this Council on the methodology used for pedestrian and cyclist stops made by Police Department officers.

Chair Kelly stated that this item would be taken together with Item 3 (ID # 23-0912).

Captain Donovan stated that officers set up on high visibility streets with the most traffic for bicyclists, and when a bicyclist is stopped by an officer, a written warning is issued, with the purpose of further educating the cyclist on safe practices. Captain Donovan added that the written warnings are also used to collect data for further analysis, including the location and time of day for the citation. Captain Donovan also stated that locations for the officers were chosen based on data regarding accident rates and the heaviest traffic.

Councilor Davis asked about the role of state funding in the department's data collection from the cyclist stops, and Captain Donovan replied that such data is used to represent the grant's usage to the state to determine its effectiveness.

Councilor McLaughlin asked if any monetary citations had been issued to cyclists, and Captain Donovan replied that they have only issued non-monetary written warnings.

Chair Kelly asked if monetary citations would be issued to a cyclist is stopped more than once. Captain Donovan replied that it would be difficult for officers to keep track of people who had previously received written warnings, but even if they could, the department is not seeking to punish cyclists and would likely continue to issue written warnings. Chair Kelly asked if those who receive written warnings are added to a database, and Captain Donovan replied that they are not, but that the aggregate data is collected and provided to the state for the purposes of the grant.

Chair Davis requested that the department consider evolving studies regarding bicycle safety, including updated analyses suggesting that it can actually be safer for cyclists to yield at red lights, as opposed to stopping.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

3. Order
(ID # [23-0912](#))

By Councilor Kelly

That the Chief of Police halt the use of unmarked patrol vehicles for all traffic enforcement.

Chair Kelly stated that this item would be taken together with Item 2 (ID # 23-0913).

Captain Donovan stated that the police department only possesses one unmarked vehicle, which is a pickup truck obtained through state Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) funding, and added that is the reason it has not been marked. Captain Donovan continued that the Chief of Police was working to develop a way to mark the vehicle, including considering using magnets.

Councilor Davis asked about the legality of placing magnets on the pickup truck, and Captain Donovan replied that because the vehicle is funded by UASI, its use in that role would need to be considered when marking it.

Councilor Kelly asked when the department would decide how to mark the pickup truck, to which Captain Donovan replied approximately three months.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Resolution
(ID # [23-0921](#))

By Councilor Scott

Urging the Mayor to fill the two vacancies on the Biosafety Committee and restore it to a functional body.

Legislative Liaison Singh stated that the candidates for these vacancies have been selected and are currently pending approval before the City Council.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Order
(ID # [23-0618](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr.

That the Director of Health & Human Services work with this Council and community partners to determine if the city has a current PILOT agreement with Mass General Brigham and other healthcare providers, and how mental health services can be a component of such agreements, particularly as part of a mental health gun buyback program.

Legislative Liaison Singh stated that some clarification regarding the information Councilor Burnley is seeking with this item would help the Administration respond to it.

Chair Kelly requested a copy of the PILOT agreement between the city and Mass General/Brigham. Legislative Liaison Singh replied that the agreement would be produced as requested.

Chair Kelly stated that the item would be kept in committee pending further clarification from Councilor Burnley.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

6. Order
(ID # [23-0616](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor McLaughlin and Councilor Davis

That the Chief of Police and the Director of Communications and Community Engagement discuss with this Council the viability of establishing a gun buyback event, focused on those who may be a danger to themselves, including strategic outreach involving community partners in the healthcare industry.

The department provided a written response to the item, and Captain Donovan added that the department wanted to be careful to not single out a specific group of people when conducting gun buybacks.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Old Business

7. Order
(ID # [22-2111](#))

By Councilor Ewen-Campen and Councilor Wilson

That the Chief of Police report to this Council, the percentage of requested traffic details for construction projects that have been filled by Somerville Police Department officers, filled by non-Somerville police officers, and unfilled, for the past three years.

Chair Kelly noted that this would be kept in committee while the department collects data for an adjusted timeframe proposed by Councilor Ewen-Campen.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

8. Resolution
(ID # [23-0796](#))

By Councilor Kelly, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Davis and Councilor McLaughlin

That the Administration update this Council on the progress and timeline for establishing a safe consumption site.

Director Carroll began by explaining that the name of the site has been changed from “safe consumption site” to “overdose prevention center” (OPC), which is reflective of the holistic approach the center will take to tackle issues related to drug abuse prevention. Director Carroll then stated that the department recently received an additional \$170,000 from the City Council to purchase and set up a modular unit for the center, and that the department continues exploring options for additional funding for the center. Director Carroll stated that the Winter Hill School closure has diverted some resources that were previously allocated to the creation of the center, but that the department has been collecting information that will guide it when it issues RFPs for the modular units and analyzes site selection. Director Carroll also explained that the department has been engaging in ongoing meetings with stakeholders to further inform its decision-making process.

Councilor Davis asked if the department’s goal is to implement whatever forms of assistance it can offer as soon as possible and then add additional services later, which Director Carroll confirmed.

Chair Kelly asked about the potential sites that were previously identified by the department as viable for the center and if they were still being considered. Director Carroll replied that three main sites were being considered, and that the department would be considering them in conjunction with the feasibility study that is currently being conducted at the state level.

Chair Kelly asked about the department’s timeline for site selection and issuing RFPs, and Director Carroll replied that no additional information regarding a timeframe was available, but that such information would be provided to the committee when it is.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Housekeeping

9. Order
(ID # [23-0608](#))

By Councilor Wilson and Councilor Clingan

That the Chief of Police provide this Council with a report containing the information requested within for all incidents where a firearm was discharged since January 1, 2018.

Chair Kelly stated that this data has been received by the committee.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

10. Order
(ID # [22-0367](#))
- By Councilor Kelly and Councilor Pineda Neufeld
That this Council discuss the unmet public health needs that have been identified by Somerville's non-profits and service providers.

Chair Kelly noted that this was an old item that was on the agenda to be marked work completed.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

- PHPS - 2023-07-10 SPD Memo