



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
CLERK OF COMMITTEES

April 6, 2021
REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Jefferson Thomas ("J.T.") Scott	Chair	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Vice Chair	Present	
William A. White Jr.	City Councilor At Large	Present	
Mary Jo Rossetti	City Councilor at Large	Absent	
Wilfred N. Mbah	City Councilor at Large	Present	

Others present: Khushbu Webber-Mayor's Office, Emily Monea-Mayor's Office, Balkys Sicard-DPW, Jill Lathan-DPW, Denise Taylor-Communications, Steve Craig-Constituents Services, Kate Hartke-Grants, Rich Raiche-IAM, Sarah Lewis-OSPCD, Cortni Desir-SomerStat, Michael Mastrobuoni-SomerStat, Greg Jenkins-Arts Council, Anne Gill-Personnel, Oliver Sellers-Garcia-Officer of Sustainability and Environment, Ed Bean-Auditor/Finance, Eileen McGettigan-Law office and George Proakis-OSPCD.

The meeting was held virtually and was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Chairperson Scott and adjourned at 9:31 p.m.

Approval of the March 9, 2021 Minutes

The minutes were accepted on a roll call vote with Councilors Mbah, Ballantyne, White and Scott voting in favor. Councilor Rossetti was absent.

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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PROCESS DISCUSSIONS

211495: Acting Director of SomerStat requesting to present to this Council a Capital Investment Plan process.

Ms. Desir presented slides for tonight's meeting who was joined by Mr. Mastrobuoni. The CIP in June 2019, following update 2020 including Conway Park remediation. See attached slides. Ms. Desir stated it has been over a year since the last update due to COVID-19 interruptions. The COVID disruptions caused uncertainty, delay and new needs for the city.

Despite the pandemic, the CIP continues with over \$400M in investments.

The finance team is evaluating \$400M CIP into four buckets: Union Square projects, street and sidewalk repairs and ADA improvements, projects underway such as West Branch Library and recommended projects such as ArtFarm.

The Somerville High School elevator and HVAC for Winter Hill School are potential changes to the CIP.

Mr. Mastrobuoni stated the city staff have been working with the administration to make decisions on capital projects and are testing and refining the framework for future projects. The work so far, this past fall identified the criteria for projects.

Councilor White stated it would be helpful when presenting the CIP and estimated costs to include the debt service and municipal bond rating for that category. He also suggested adding the debt service as an additional column on the CIP.

Councilor Mbah liked the criteria and process, and suggested it would be nice when the project is on its way to have a one-page document submitted to the city councilors. Mr. Mastrobuoni was asked about the existing amounts and newly identified needs and why the costs were not on the slides. Mr. Mastrobuoni stated they do not have the needs yet and it is part of the investigation and scoping process. Mr. Raiche stated these are newly identified needs and want to have a comprehensive picture to share with the committee with as much information on the CIP as possible.

Councilor Ballantyne asked is this report will combine all the CIPs. Ms. Desir stated they will continue to have the general funds CIP and separate water and sewer CIP. Councilor Ballantyne asked how will they measure the criteria that was scoped. Mr. Mastrobuoni stated they set up seven criteria each with a scoring system. Additionally, the workflow system has been setup to be flexible and the weighting will vary from year to year. Councilor Ballantyne wanted to reconfirm what is the debt ratio to operating budget. Has there been thought to changing that or what is the goal? Mr. Bean stated the goal is 7% and reconfiguring and reset the debt service. The 25-50 basis point reduction that will lower the debt service is going forward. Mr. Bean stated the city should be very sound in meeting the conservative estimate at 7% and 3% operating expenses. Councilor Ballantyne inquired about the American Rebuilding Program (ARP) funding since we don't know what it is or if there will be any restrictions.

Councilor White asked a follow up question about Water and Sewer, if Boynton Yards will be separate and if some of the infrastructure will be carried by the developer, as per Mr. Bean. Mr. Bean stated there will be substantial water and sewer infrastructure. Councilor White asked about the DIF, Water and Sewer CIP and what the rates will be over the years. Mr. Raiche stated he has spent time looking at the Water and Sewer CIP and the new rate model built out has a lot more capacity to do planning. Mr. Raiche also stated the new rate model has the capability to show grants, developer contributions and different funding sources. The overall debt service does not include the high school, which does not need to include as per Government Finance Officers Association. Mr. Bean stated that First Southwest has conservative projections of 3% going out in May and may get something lower than the 3%. Our projects on SHS was 5% and ended borrowing at 3%.

Chair Scott asked how much of the funding from ARP will be earmarked for existing ready projects vs. policy goals projects. Mr. Bean stated they are still waiting for guidance from the Federal Government. Ms. Hartke attended a meeting and was told municipalities may not

receive guidance until sometime in May. The city of Somerville will be getting a sizable pot of funding that will come directly to us. Some will go to the higher need communities such as Chelsea and Everett. Councilor Scott asked Mr. Bean to get back to him with the bonding number that moves the needle on the debt service.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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211427: That the Director of Personnel provide this Council with a list of current full-time vacancies broken down by union and non-union positions, and that the Administration address this Council as to the reason for the high number of vacancies.

Acting Personnel Director Anne Gill who has been with the city for about a month, responded to the questions tonight. She pointed out that in good times prior to the pandemic, filling position are difficult in a competitive market in the Boston/Somerville area. Additionally, she stated that Personnel is still understaffed and was without a director for a year and without a recruiter for a long time. When the pandemic hit, they had to set priorities to make sure people were getting paid, receiving their benefits, working with workman's comp, responding to requests from the union and other items that were time sensitive in nature. Ms. Gill stated they do not have the technology to implement an active tracking system and they are working with a very paper driven system. There is currently a list of about 100 open positions in the city, with 40-45 positions being union. Construction type positions such as electrician, trades people and custodial are really sought after in the pandemic. Ms. Gill stated that from the point of posting to hire, it takes about 40 working days which is approximately 2 months to fill a position.

Councilor Mbah asked if the city has a competitive paid grade. Ms. Gill responded that the city cannot keep pace with the private sector, in terms of the pay scale. The city still does not have a recruiter and working with a temp agency on a temporary basis to assist with recruiting.

Councilor Ballantyne made a comment about the hiring climate pre-pandemic and experience is consistent with what she heard and the general hiring climate for businesses. Councilor Ballantyne is interested in the technology and how it can make the department run more efficiently and save more time. Ms. Gill is currently working with IT in having an assessment with Munis to determine what the city has and not utilized fully and what they may need in the future. Chair Scott stated that there are a lot of front-line public service positions in the city and the public sees the roadsides and sidewalks falling apart. Some departments are staffed nearly half and has been the case for a really long time. He is concerned how long it may take to fill the positions. There are a lot of vacant positions in the city and lag money available. Chair Scott asked why are we creating six (6) new positions which will only increase the number of vacancies in the city. Ms. Gill responded the positions are not interchangeable. Prior to Ms. Gill's starting at the city, there was a hiring freeze which may have resulted in some of the vacant positions. Chair Scott stated only 15% of jobs are filled by Somerville residents. He asked what can be done to encourage Somerville residents or modify some of the listing to get more Somerville residents to apply or work at city of Somerville. Ms. Gill has talked to Mr. Raiche and to the Water & Sewer department about offering internships as training opportunities.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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MIDYEAR POSITION CREATION REQUESTS, ENGINEERING

211572: Requesting the use of \$4,230 in available funds in the Engineering Salaries Account to establish the position of Deputy Director of Engineering Projects.

Mr. Raiche discussed items 4-7 together. In June 2020, IAM presented its FY21 budget with the full text of the development program. There is a state of infrastructure needs. Because of COVID-19, a several projects were put on hold. IAM was approved by the city councilors to hire two new position did have 2 positions, with one position as the green building manager to understand how the system works that was put into the new Somerville High School. The other hire was for a stormwater coordinator who would be focused on the scheduled compliance needs for the city. Mr. Raiche is requesting an assistant director of capital projects to help improve buildings for ADA, general compliance and to provide leadership for the project managers.

Mr. Raiche stated there is a dire need for a project manager with streetscape experience. The deputy director of capital projects will initially be funded through the CARES Act due to the immediate needs relating to COVID. The deputy director would be involved in the school buildings needs and addressing the underperformance caught by DPW. IAM needs someone with the expertise to establish the prioritization of the work. The position has been vacant for two years and they are having difficulty finding someone who has the strategic vision. There is an immediate need for 2 positions, starting now. There is a huge backlog with the streetscape and sewer projects with long term flooding needs. The senior project manager for streetscape is needed to lead the projects with streetscape experience. Mr. Raiche stated there has been a recent hire for the traffic engineer who is from Somerville. There is also a building improvement manager that is still vacant. Mr. Raiche stated there are 22 open vacancies with the request of three additional positions this year.

Councilor Ballantyne asked Mr. Bean what is the projected revenue with projected expenses for FY21. Mr. Bean stated that revenues are coming in very well. He's seeing some short falls in the motel/hotel side and the city is above the meals tax projections. Mr. Bean stated that the assessor is working on the growth number for property taxes. He stated that the city will probably feel the impact from the pandemic in the following year. Mr. Bean stated the city is looking at a \$9M property growth and he will have the exact figures for the committee to include projections.

Councilor White stated by approving these requests will be approximately \$163,000. He also confirmed that Item 3 on the slides was not for the city councilors to approve and the position would be funded by the CARES Act.

RESULT:	APPROVED
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211573: Requesting the use of \$3,173 in available funds in the Sewer Enterprise Salaries Account to establish the position of Deputy Director of Engineering Projects.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Mbah
ABSENT:	Rossetti

211574: Requesting the use of \$3,173 in available funds in the Water Enterprise Salaries

Account to establish the position of Deputy Director of Engineering Projects.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Mbah
ABSENT:	Rossetti

211569: Requesting the use of \$9,518 in available funds in the Engineering Salaries Account to establish the position of Senior Project Manager (Streetscapes).

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Mbah
ABSENT:	Rossetti

MIDYEAR POSITION CREATION REQUESTS, PLANNING

211570: Requesting the use of \$7,932 in available funds in the SPCD Planning & Zoning Salaries Account to establish a new Planner position.

Ms. Lewis stated this request was discovered over the last year. There has been a shift in the workload. They are trying to adjust with a number of different processes and procedures to streamline the zoning process. They have had an increase in their case load which includes working on zoning applications to the boards and have not been able to work on the long-range neighborhood planning. OSPCD has a dire need to hire another planner at the regular planning level to help with the case load.

Chair Scott asked if there are two more vacancies. Ms. Lewis stated there are two new planners starting soon, which includes a preservation planner.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Mbah
ABSENT:	Rossetti

MIDYEAR POSITION CREATION REQUESTS, COMMUNICATIONS

211571: Requesting the use of \$6,346 in available funds in the Constituent Services Salaries Account to establish the position of Quality Manager.

Mr. Craig stated the need for a quality manager existed prior to COVID-19. The original intent for this position was to support 311 customer service staff. With staff working from home, there have been a number of errors. Councilor White asked what does the 311 center manager do compared to the quality manager. Mr. Craig stated the 311 center manager is responsible all aspects of 311, live chats, social media, forecasting and staggered shifts. He stated that 50% of the time, 311 does not have a regular manager nor do they have time to do any coaching or action planning to help develop skills. Councilor White asked for the daily tasks for 40 hours a week. Mr. Craig stated that 80% would be focused on internal on 20% on vendors for nights and weekends. 311 is open 24 hours a day with approximately two dozen people taking calls right

now. Chair Scott asked how non-English are handled and if they have increased during the pandemic. Mr. Craig did not have specific data and believes that calls from non-English speaking and seniors have gone up during the pandemic

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Mbah
ABSENT:	Rossetti

211567: Requesting the use of \$5,200 in available funds in the Communications Salaries Account to establish the position of Director of the SomerViva Office of Immigrant Affairs.

Ms. Taylor stated this position would have gone into current fiscal budget if not for needing to scale back on positions. The need for this position has only grown, but is not relating to COVID. Once the program got started, they discovered how great a demand was for services and grew into a full office in Immigrant Affairs. They work closing with Economic Development and with Office of Housing Authority. The office assists the COA and case management work. Additionally, they provide emergency support when families are displaced by fire. There has been a great deal of culture change in Somerville over the past few years. They work on translations and interpretations over the city, as needed. There were 4,000 residents served over the year with direct program related services. This office has intensified the relationship to the racial and social justice department. There is a need for cases of unoccupied minors with Somerville receiving an additional 100 students. Two weeks ago, 6 children and 4 adults came here because they have ties here in Somerville. Every one of the individuals needed coats and other clothing. Ms. Taylor noted that the pandemic has hit the immigrant population harder and will take them longer to recover. This position is in line with city of Somerville being a welcoming community.

Councilor Ballantyne asked where does she see the language needs in the department. Ms. Taylor stated the Nepali liaison was made full time. Right now, the greatest need is Spanish. Councilor Ballantyne also asked if the director position will require a foreign language skill. Ms. Taylor is hoping for a bilingual professional and a native speaker. Spanish and Portuguese would be great but would like to see the candidates first.

Councilor Mbah asked what is the current structure for this office. Ms. Taylor stated there are four and a half language liaisons. He also asked if the legal clinics are free. Ms. Taylor stated the legal clinics are free and the first one happened this month. Councilor Mbah asked about the vaccine issues in the community. Ms. Taylor stated that in addition to assisting with food impact, they are addressing vaccine issues working with Cambridge Health Alliance and having interactive forums. Councilor Mbah asked how does this office overlap with the schools and housing authority. Ms. Taylor stated this office works collaboratively with the city, school staff and a few community partners.

Chair Scott asked how will this director increase the bandwidth. Ms. Taylor stated this office has grown beyond her level of expertise and need someone with the expertise in this matter. Chair Scott asked if the racial and social justice director been consulted regarding this position. Ms. Taylor stated the racial and social justice director is aware of this position.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Mbah
ABSENT:	Rossetti

211568: Requesting the appropriation of \$5,376 from Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Communications Salaries Account to fund the position of Director of the SomerViva Office of Immigrant Affairs.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Mbah
ABSENT:	Rossetti

OTHER FUNDING REQUESTS

211467: Requesting approval to create the Energy Stabilization Fund for the purpose of funding energy efficiency and decarbonization projects in City buildings.

Mr. Sellers-Garcia stated this is dedicated to funding the stream for rapid decarbonization projects in the city buildings. This would increase savings with solar funds agreement and recent efficiency projects. With the initial amount of \$300,000, they can do lighting for buildings. Mr. Sellers-Garcia stated this request is for the creation of the fund and may be coming back for replenishment of funds.

Councilor White asked about the stabilization fund if he will come to the councilors for every request. Mr. Sellers-Garcia will bundle the requests and will come back for more when they scope out the other projects.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Mbah
ABSENT:	Rossetti

211468: Requesting the appropriation of \$294,399 from Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Energy Stabilization Fund.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Mbah
ABSENT:	Rossetti

211470: Requesting to re-purpose \$80,000 in the Covid-19 Stabilization Fund to develop a Somerville Cultural Plan.

Mr. Jenkins stated this is an additional request and they have done a cultural plan in the past. Chair Scott asked how is there still \$80,000 still sitting in this bucket. Mr. Jenkins stated they previously released \$400,000 and last month released another \$660,000. There is a workload of

pushing out the funds to get to the community. Chair Scott asked why not use the \$80,000 for a position in the Art Council. Mr. Jenkins stated he needs help formulating the cultural system and to provide a really robust planning process to reach out to the community. Additionally, he needs someone who is dedicated to get the work done and work along side Mr. Jenkins and his team.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Mbah
ABSENT:	Rossetti

211473: Requesting the appropriation of \$8,865 from the Salary & Wage Stabilization Fund to the Somerstat Salaries Account to fund a temporary salary adjustment.

Ms. Monea stated this request is for Ms. Desir’s position as acting director for SomerStat because Ms. Stelljes is now the Incident Commander. FEMA will only pay for the Incident Commander role and not the difference between the acting SomerStat director’s salary.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Mbah
ABSENT:	Rossetti

PRIOR YEAR INVOICES

211475: Requesting approval to pay prior year invoices totaling \$15,931.99 from various DPW accounts using available FY21 funds.

Ms. Lathan stated they have been working diligently to clear up these invoices and trying to pay these vendors who have been waiting patiently for their payments. Ms. Sicard stated this is an extension to clear up invoices.

Chair Scott asked about the DPW invoices and where were the vehicles going using the E-ZPass. Ms. Sicard stated there are no transponders available at the moment. DPW has not been able to participate in the state program. The invoices have been coming in by mail and required research to identify the plates and if they are DPW vehicles. Ms. Sicard stated they had questioned whether the city was exempt for paying tolls and these are the result of not paying tolls for three years. Ms. Sicard also stated its just under \$1,500 for tolls. Chair Scott asked what can be done to avoid these in the future. Ms. Sicard has opened up an account and will pay these as they come in. She will have a better metric next year to see which vehicles are traveling and where. Chair Scott asked about the street sweeping invoices. Ms. Sicard believes it was a combination of getting the invoices in on time and COVID-19.

Councilor White asked about the work that was done at Lincoln Park for \$12,000 and if DPW could have done the work. Ms. Lathan stated there was some work that was already contracted out and it was decided that DPW would not do this work. It was stated there were some planting that needed some specific expertise. Councilor White stated the description on the invoice was to remove the debris not landscaping.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Mbah
ABSENT:	Rossetti

211476: Requesting approval to pay a prior year invoice totaling \$2,672.30 using available funds in the Police Department Public Safety Supplies Account for Police Department issued firearms.

RESULT:	WITHDRAWN
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ALDERSEY EMINENT DOMAIN TAKING REQUEST

211364: Requesting the adoption of an Order of Taking for 9-11 Aldersey Street for historic, open space, and affordable housing purposes.

Mr. Proakis stated the concern the appraisal maybe expiring and would like for this to be addressed before the end of April.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211373: Requesting an appropriation and authorization to borrow \$3,450,397 in a bond for the cost of acquiring the property at 9-11 Aldersey Street.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Referenced Material:

- CIP_Presentation_FinCom_20210406_Final (with 211495)
- Aldersey St. Debt Service (with 211364, 211373)
- debt-summary-04.06.21 City Council (with 211364, 211373)