



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Open Space, Environment and Energy Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, May 6, 2024

6:00 PM

The meeting took place virtually via Zoom and was called to order at 6:02 PM by Chair Mbah and adjourned at 6:55 PM on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Wilson, Strezo, Sait and Mbah), none against and 1 absent (Councilor Scott).

Others present:

Rich Raiche - Director of Capital Projects, Kim Hutter – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Roll Call

Present: City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah, Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait, City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo, City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson and Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-0570](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Open Space, Environment and Energy Committee Meeting of April 18, 2024.

RESULT: ACCEPTED
AYE: City Councilor At Large Mbah, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Strezo and City Councilor At Large Wilson
ABSENT: Ward Two City Councilor Scott

2. Order (ID # [24-0042](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Davis and Councilor Ewen-Campen
That the Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment provide this Council with any updated plans and timelines for a municipal composting program.

Discussed with ID # 24-0370

Chair Mbah began by saying that it's not enough to say that the committee discussed this item and that the Administration wants to see it happen, so the committee will be asking for a timeline. Liaison Hutter stated that there was no staff from OSPCD present at this meeting to address the issue and she assured the committee that she did present the questions raised to staff but has not yet received any replies. She also reported that she doesn't have any updates beyond the memo provided to the committee on April 18, 2024 and said that the process will go into the next fiscal year. A plan won't be presented prior to the upcoming budget hearings since it is

dependent on budget funding, so there wont be an update for several more months. Councilor Wilson asked Liaison Hutter if she were aware of any budget considerations for the FY-25 budget that would need to be addressed to make program this happen and Liaison Hutter replied that it is her understanding that staff conversations are happening, but she doesn't know the implications of them. Chair Mbah asked Liaison Hutter to take the committee's questions and concerns back to the Administration.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

3. Resolution
(ID # [24-0086](#))

By Councilor Ewen-Campen

That the Administration explain the issues that are preventing Reavis Field from opening and how the process may be expedited.

Director Raiche explained that the delay was caused due to a difference in code interpretation pertaining to the height of the guardrail on wall 3. The code states that it must be 48" above any walking surface and when the roadway was constructed, a 6" high by 4" wide concrete curb was also installed to protect the retaining wall from any plow damage. The city's Inspectional Services Department interpreted the code to mean that the 48" distance should be measured from the top of the curb. The consultant for the high school project disagrees with that interpretation because the walking surface is the roadway (which meets the 48" requirement). The design team is appealing the consultant's viewpoint and a hearing will be held on May 21, 2024 before the state. Occupancy of the field has been barred until the matter is resolved. Director Raiche said that he directed that a fence be installed in the disputed area and that ISD has issued a temporary certificate of occupancy, limiting use of the field. A decision will be rendered by the state on May 21st and the consultant believes their interpretation will be upheld and ISD's will be overruled. Councilor Wilson asked what the timeline would be for opening the field, should ISD prevail in its appeal and Director Raiche said there are 2 possible solutions: 1) to fabricate and install a new guard rail, which would take several months or, 2) modify the top of the curb so it can't be walked on, thereby making the walking surface revert to the roadway.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

4. Order
(ID # [24-0106](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Davis, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Sait, Councilor Mbah, Councilor Clingan and Councilor Ewen-Campen

That the Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment work with this Council and Green and Open Somerville to develop a job description for an Invasive Species position to spearhead outreach, education, and citywide invasive plant species removal and to allocate funding for such a position in the FY 2025 budget.

Discussed with ID # 24-0457

Chair Mbah noted that this was discussed at the last committee meeting and commented that after reading a job description submitted by Green and Open Somerville and Earthwise Aware, he is unsure why it wasn't posted in the Public Space and Urban Forestry Department. He asked if there was any input from the Administration as well as other city departments regarding the job description. Liaison Hutter stated that she is not aware of what conversations took place with city staff and noted that no staff was available tonight to discuss this matter. Chair Mbah asked that his concerns be communicated to city staff.

Chair Mbah sponsored Renee Scott, from Green and Open Somerville, to address the committee. Ms. Scott stated that no input was provided from the Administration or city staff since the job description (attached to the item) is not official. Rather, it's an attempt to show what Green and Open Somerville and Earthwise Aware hoped it would entail. She said that she doesn't have a strong feeling of what department it would fall under. Chair Mbah expressed his feeling that any job description is carefully thought out and he wants to move as quickly as possible. Councilor Strezo noted that it's up to the Administration whether or not to proceed with creating this position and she asked Ms. Scott if the matter was discussed with the city's Human Resources Department, to which Ms. Scott replied that HR was not contacted. Councilor Strezo commented that the invasive species issue should be brought to schools to get the city's youngest residents involved in how invasive species affect the community. She asked if there have been conversations with the School Department about getting a week of action until this item comes to fruition. Ms. Scott commented that the most effective way to effectuate change is to reach young people and that it's OK to have kids on a walk to pull some plants, but it's not going to solve the problem as it needs to be done on a larger level. She noted that although there are some species of plants that can simply be pulled out and discarded, there are others for which those actions make the situation worse. She advocated for a city position staffed by someone who is knowledgeable about invasive plant species. Ms. Scott noted that there are approximately 6-8 species of invasive plants in Somerville with varying degrees of how harmful they are. Councilor Strezo stated that if this is not funded in the city budget, she would like to discuss other options that might be available.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

5. Order
(ID # [24-0370](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr.

That the Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment update this Council on the design, cost, and implementation timeline for the city's composting program.

Discussed with ID # 24-0042

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

6. Public
Communication
(ID # [24-0457](#))

Green & Open Somerville and Earthwise Aware submitting comments re:
invasive plant species.

Discussed with ID # 24-0106

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE