



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Equity, Gender, Seniors, Families and Vulnerable Populations Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, April 16, 2025

6:00 PM

This meeting was held in person in the Sub-Committee room and via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Strezo at 6:02pm and adjourned at 6:59pm on a roll call vote of 2 in favor (Councilors Davis and Strezo), 0 opposed, and 1 absent. (Councilor Mbah).

Others present: Suzanne Yerkes - Director of Parks and Recreation, Brad Rawson - Director of Mobility, Neha Singh - Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Erica Satin-Hernandez - ARPA Director, Madalyn Letellier - Legislative Services Manager.

Roll Call

Present: City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo and Lance L. Davis

Absent: City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah

1. Committee Minutes
(ID # [25-0172](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Equity, Gender, Seniors, Families and Vulnerable Populations Committee Meeting of February 3, 2025.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Strezo and Davis

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Mbah

2. Order
(ID # [25-0117](#))

By Councilor Strezo, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Mbah, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Sait and Councilor Wilson
That the Director of Parks and Recreation discuss in the Committee on Equity, Gender, Seniors, Families and Vulnerable Populations, the introduction of an ongoing middle school girls intramural hockey program.

Ms. McKee, representing a parent group advocating for a youth intramural school program, was present to speak on this topic. The goal is to establish a free Somerville girls only intramural hockey program. Ms. McKee's testimony included the bias that young girls face in the sport of hockey, and in co-ed sports. Ms. McKee also spoke about the fees, equipment, and cultural barriers that families face when trying to enter the sport. The goal is to create this youth hockey program to eventually lead to a varsity high school team. The level of skill needed to compete at that level needs to be fostered from a younger age. Ms. McKee emphasized the goal for this intramural program to be free to Somerville residents, free of cost, as well as free of barriers in gender, economic factors, culture, and ice hockey specific

barriers. There is already support from surrounding communities who have agreed to assist in coaching and rent out equipment for those who would like to participate in the program. To gauge interest a survey was sent out to 50 middle school aged girls, 60% of responses indicated they would be interested and 18 responses said maybe.

Chair Strezo opened the conversation on this item explaining how it made its way to the Equity Committee to keep the momentum and interest in programming following intro programming that was completed this past year. Councilor Davis spoke with the viewpoint of a parent of both boys' and girls' hockey players, and as a coach for youth programming in Cambridge. He acknowledged the response from the administration, provided in advance of this meeting as a memo, *Equity - 2025-04-16 Girls Hockey Memo 4.16.25 with 25-0117 (with 25-0117)*, and he expressed his belief that more can be done to uplift youth programs that are aimed at developing female athletes. He cautioned to set a structure for how this program should run in advance of seeing how many participants turn out. Both Chair Strezo and Councilor Davis spoke to and asked for the support of the administration in making this program happen and acknowledged the work the mayor had done as a member of the Council in the past to increase participation of girls in sports.

Finally, Director Yerkes and Director Singh reiterated the commitment equity and inclusion and the continued work to increase girls in sports in programming being offered, as well as continuing to serve the many diverse groups that exist in Somerville.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

3. Order
(ID # [25-0463](#))

By Councilor Strezo

That the Director of Human Resources, Director of Parking, Director of Mobility and Chief of Police respond to the recent incidents of four children being hit by cars in the past few months on their paths to school.

Chair Strezo introduced this item in response to recent events throughout Somerville that involved multiple children being struck by cars. The Chair went on to acknowledge the obstacles in front of hiring crossing guards and commended the administration's efforts in increasing the pay to attract more workers. Chair Strezo made a request to staff about what is being done in the immediate future to address these concerns.

Sergeant McCarey shared the stats on crossing guards which include 35 current crossing guards and there are 10 crossing guards in the process of being onboarded. This puts the number at 45, short about 12 of the 57 positions that are funded for crossing guards. Sergeant McCarey shared efforts being taken to address concerns, including information being sent out to students and parents and on officers being stationed at Highland Avenue during school hours to address the no-left hand turn at the exit of the high

school. There are additional grant opportunities that can be given to pedestrian safety, as well as the continued partnership with the Human Resources department to recruit and attract candidates to fill the remaining positions. There was continued discussion around the potential of split shifts being offered and the Police are working with great flexibility to get bodies on the streets during the needed time. Retention of crossing guards, as of now all have expressed, they will be returning for the next school year. Recruitment is more of an issue over retention. Work is being done to address, track, and report incidents as they come up to support claims with statistics moving forward.

Director Rawson was present to speak on the medium- and longer-term efforts that are being made to add physical traffic calming measures in the city. He shared that reported incidents have dropped from greater than 50 in 2019 to 30 reported incidents in the last year. He addressed enforcement as being a temporary solution, and while quicker to employ, will not solve longer-term issues. In the pipeline there are additional traffic calming measures coming, to slow the speed at which people drive, slotted for the coming months. Director Rawson emphasized that School areas are prioritized. These medium- and long-term efforts are designed to complement the short-term solutions that were discussed.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Order
(ID # [25-0464](#))

By Councilor Strezo and Councilor Mbah

That the Chief of Police report on the current number of regularly staffed crossing guards throughout the city and the total number of crossing guard positions currently available.

This item was discussed with ID #24-0464.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Resolution
(ID # [24-0074](#))

By Councilor Strezo and Councilor Wilson

That the Administration provide an update on plans for Universal Basic Income/Guaranteed Basic Income implementation and roll out.

Director Satin-Hernandez was present to share background on the Guaranteed Basic Income (GIB) Pilot program. Participants were recruited from the Office of Housing Stability (OHS) and other people experiencing housing and homelessness. Preliminary finding shows more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of participants have less than \$50 left on their card at the end of each month. The biggest expense are on rent, loans, debt, as well as basics of food and childcare. Some members have also used the funds to stabilize from difficult family situations and increase their savings. The design of the funds being

on a card has allowed a certain freedom, as it looks like a debit card, for them to use freely at merchants without any stigma. She provided an update that participants are beginning to transition out of the program. Participants were aware of the pilot timeline program at the beginning and there is a large lift to connect with participants to the other benefits that exist.

Director Satin-Hernandez addressed that the program cannot continue to run as it currently exists. Legal, budgetary, and capacity issues are all barriers to its success as currently run in the long-term. Challenges include that the general fund in the city has much more strict regulations to how those funds can be used versus the funds that were provided by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). As the program is currently run requires a dedicated staff and working hours across many departments. With ARPA funding you can allocate funds to staffing and as departments return to their core services and reliance on the general fund increases it becomes harder to allocate those funds.

Finally, discussion continued between the Director and Chair Strezo about the updates to come at the May meeting of the Equity Committee. The conversation will include updates about the demographics of the participants as well as what the participants need for assistance to continue at the comfort level they have reached over this pilot program.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

6. Resolution
(ID # [24-0418](#))

By Councilor Strezo

That the Administration discuss post-pilot plan considerations of the Guaranteed Basic Income pilot program.

This item was discussed with ID #24-0074.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Documents:

- Equity - 2025-04-16 GBI Background Info (with 24-0074)
- Equity - 2025-04-16 Girls Hockey Memo 4.16.25 with 25-0117 (with 25-0117)