



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, April 25, 2023

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Wilson at 6:00 p.m. and adjourned at 7:41 p.m. on a Roll Call Vote: 4 in favor (Councilors Clingan, Kelly, Scott, Wilson), 0 opposed, 1 absent (Councilor Pineda Neufeld).

Others present:

Michael Potere – Assistant Clerk of Committees; Julie Spurr-Knight – Finance and Administration Director; Vladimir Kan – Financial Analyst for the Office of Sustainability and Environment; Jill Lathan – Commissioner of DPW; Hannah Carrillo – Legislative Liaison; Alan Inacio – Director of Finance & Community Development; Danielle Palazzo – Executive Administrative Assistant; Richard Raiche – Director of IAM; Michael Richards – Director of Finance & Administration; Michael Mastrobuoni – Budget Director; Dan Amelin – Utilities Project Manager; Eric Weisman – Director of Operations; Karin Carroll – Director of Health & Human Services; Stephen Haynes – Director of Administration And Finance.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Jake Wilson, Vice Chair Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott, Charlotte Kelly and Jesse Clingan
Absent: Judy Pineda Neufeld

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-0541](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting of April 11, 2023.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**
AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, City Councilor At Large Kelly and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan
ABSENT: Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

Requisitions

2. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0526](#)) Requesting the use of \$14,154.88 in available funds from the Health and Human Services Salaries Account to fund a Finance Manager position.

Director Carroll stated this item is to fund a new position in HHS that will direct and coordinate the financial administrative functions for the department, including budget preparation, quality assurance, quality review of financial invoices and procedures. Director Carroll continued that this position would assist in the implementation of the ARPA funds and vaccine revolving accounts.

Chair Wilson asked if Director Carroll anticipated filling this role before the

end of the fiscal year, which has around 65 days left, and Director Carroll responded that hiring for this position was a priority and that a job description has already been drafted for publication.

Councilor Kelly asked why HHS decided to go with a financial manager position as opposed to a financial analyst position, and Director Carroll responded that this position is designed to have people report to the person hired, so HR believed that classifying it as a manager position would be more appropriate. Councilor Kelly asked if there was any way to role the responsibilities for this position into other roles in the department instead of creating a new position, and Director Carroll replied that the need for a new, separate role is based on the high volume of work that needs to be done regarding the various accounts funded through HHS, and that the other positions in HHS are closer to public health and public policy, as opposed to accounting. Councilor Kelly asked about the other vacancies in the department and whether they have been filled, and Director Carroll replied that approximately 12 or 13 vacancies have been filled during the past year. Director Carroll added that the reasons behind the delay in filling some of those positions related to their specialized nature, as well as the consideration of how the roles would fit into the department's goals. Councilor Kelly asked Director Mastrobuoni if some of the other financial analyst positions for the city have been filled, who replied that they have. Councilor Kelly concluded by expressing concern that it took a long time to fill vacancies that were created in June 2022, and that this position is being put forth so close to the end of the fiscal year.

Councilor Scott also expressed concern regarding the creation of this position so close to the formulation of the annual budget, and added that it should be discussed within the larger context of the entire budget during that process. Councilor Scott clarified that they are not necessarily against the creation of the position, but rather that it should be considered with the entirety of the budget, and that HHS should focus on hiring a Grant Manager and other positions that have already been created. In light of that, Councilor Scott indicated that he would not vote in favor of this item.

Director Carroll clarified that the position HHS is currently seeking to fill is a Grant Administrator, not a Grant Manager, and is therefore more of an administrative role, rather than a financial or accounting role, which this item intends to address.

Councilor Clingan expressed support for the item, and indicated that Director Carroll is relatively new to the role and should have an opportunity to develop and run the department.

Chair Wilson expressed concern regarding HHS's ability to fill the vacancy during the current fiscal year given the difficulties in government hiring more generally.

Legislative Liaison Carrillo stated that the sooner that HHS can begin working to fill this role, the better off the department will be given the large number of accounts that the person hired in the role would be managing.

Councilor Scott reiterated that his opposition to the item was not based on whether or not they would ultimately support the creation of the role, but rather due to the close proximity to draft the entire budget for the upcoming fiscal year. Councilor Kelly again expressed support for the item and the creation of the position, but also expressed reservations regarding its timing. Councilor Kelly also asked the administration to try to bring the creation of new positions to the Committee as early as possible to avoid future conflicts.

On a roll call vote, the item was approved: three in favor (Councilors Clingan, Kelly, and Wilson); one opposed (Councilor Scott); one absent (Councilor Pineda Neufeld).

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, City Councilor At Large Kelly and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

NAY: Vice Chair Scott

ABSENT: Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

Appropriations

- 3. Mayor's Request Requesting the appropriation of \$180,000 from the Medical Marijuana Stabilization Fund for the Substance Use Prevention Coordinator position for FY 2024 and FY 2025.
 (ID # [23-0527](#))

Director Carroll stated that this position originated from a working group recommendation in December 2020, when the host agreements were being discussed. Director Carroll added that it is a social work position that will work closely with the school’s youth to promote substance abuse prevention. Director Carroll stated that the position has been in place for two years and this item will continue it for an additional two years.

Councilor Clingan expressed support for the role, but concern that the person who held it in the past was replaced by a contractor. Councilor Scott asked if this person could be brought back to fill the role, Councilor Clingan responded that the person is believed to be retired, and Director Carroll clarified that the position is currently filled, and that this item continues to fund it for the next two years. Director Carroll added that the person currently in the role is doing a great job.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, City Councilor At Large Kelly and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

ABSENT: Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

4. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0510](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$1,618,683 from the Community Preservation Act Fund Affordable Housing Reserve to the Affordable Housing Trust.

Director Inacio stated that this Committee has consistently voted to allocate 50% of the CPA budget to affordable housing projects, to be administered through the Affordable Housing Trust. Chair Wilson expressed strong support for this item.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, City Councilor At Large Kelly and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

ABSENT: Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

5. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0539](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$135,050.89 from the Parks and Open Space Stabilization fund for completion of the 25% design services for Union Square Plaza and Streetscape project.

Director Inacio stated that this project initially had an estimate and bond authorization for \$1 million, but the winning bid came in at \$1.135 million on a max fee contract. Director Inacio added that they originally thought they would get to the 25% design phase of the project and acquire funding for the next phase of the design. However, there will be a timing pause on this project due to a reprioritization of CIP projects, and that as a result there is a gap in the budget, which this agenda item addresses.

Chair Wilson asked if the next steps in this project would be the phasing and 100% technical design drawings, and Director Inacio responded that the next phase would be 25% to 100% of the design, and that the PSUF team would be coming out with their initial findings on the first 25% of the design phase.

Councilor Scott stated that this item is in their ward, and expressed support for it.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, City Councilor At Large Kelly and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

ABSENT: Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

Grant Acceptances

6. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0544](#)) Requesting approval to accept and expend a grant of \$2,500 from the Massachusetts Cultural Council to the Public Library for a Library Comix Con event.

Councilor Scott indicated that it was National Library Week and expressed support for additional funds being allocated to the city's libraries.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, City Councilor At Large Kelly and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan
ABSENT: Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

7. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0521](#)) Requesting approval to accept and expend an \$18,840 grant with no new match required, from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection to the Department of Public Works for mattress recycling.

Vladimir Khan stated this item is to address the cost of mattress transportation and recycling from July through October 2022. Kan added that in the past, this grant was paid directly to the vendor, but that the vendor was not selected in 2022 and so the grant was paid directly to the city. Chair Wilson asked if any additional reimbursements were expected, and Kan replied that, for the time being, this is a one-time payment.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, City Councilor At Large Kelly and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan
ABSENT: Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

Transfers

8. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0507](#)) Requesting approval of a transfer of \$30,000 from the DPW Electrical Account to the DPW Fleet Account for costs related to motor parts and accessories.

Commissioner Lathan began by introducing the DPW's new Finance and Administrative Director, Julie Spurr-Knight.

Director Weisman stated that this item is to fund repairs for a street sweeper. Councilor Scott expressed strong support for this item because it brings work to city employees, as opposed to having it outsourced to third-party vendors. Chair Wilson agreed with Councilor Scott's statement and expressed further support for the item.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, City Councilor At Large Kelly and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan
ABSENT: Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

9. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0542](#)) Requesting the transfer of \$12,729.52 in available funds from the Parks & Recreation Uniforms Account to the Department of Public Works Interior Building Maintenance Account for the installation of a buzzer system with a security camera at the Edgerly Building.

Commissioner Lathan stated that the DPW moved its organizational hub to this location and is requesting a buzzer and camera system to monitor foot traffic and other activity. Chair Wilson asked if this request would facilitate easier access to the Teen Center, and Commissioner Lathan stated that it

would. Councilor Clingan expressed support for this item, and added that it would also be easier to monitor people who enter the building for non-school related business.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, City Councilor At Large Kelly and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

ABSENT: Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

10. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0633](#)) Requesting approval of a transfer of \$1,000 from the Engineering Personal Services Salaries Account to the Infrastructure & Asset Management Personal Services Salaries Account to fund the IAM Administrative Assistant position reclassification.

Director Richards stated that this is to fund a position reclassification, a promotion from Head Clerk to Administrative Assistant. Councilor Scott asked if this reclassification would remove the position from the Somerville Municipal Employees Association, and Director Richards indicated that it would not, and that it reflects a promotion for the person in the role, who has taken on additional responsibilities such that a promotion and pay raise was justified. Councilor Scott indicated strong support for the item because it maintains a union job, and also properly recognizes the person's workload and responsibility.

Director Raiche added that the person in the role, Julia Wingate, has been in the role for the past five or six years, and that this promotion is very well deserved.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, City Councilor At Large Kelly and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

ABSENT: Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

Bonding

11. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0533](#)) Requesting authorization to borrow \$7,110,000 in a bond, and to appropriate the same amount for participation in the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority's Local Water System Assistance Program for Water Main Rehabilitation projects.

Director Raiche indicated that this item reflects the annual recurring water system improvements bond, that the project behind this was approved by this Committee in October 2022, and that the interest rate on the bond is 0% (zero percent). Chair Wilson expressed strong support for this item due to the lack of interest on the loan.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, City Councilor At Large Kelly and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

ABSENT: Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

12. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0532](#)) Requesting authorization to borrow \$2,840,000 in a bond, and to appropriate the same amount for the recurring FY 2023 Building Improvements program.

Director Raiche stated that this is an annual recurring bond that will be dedicated to repairing and replacing aging HVAC systems in the city's schools, including the chiller at the Kennedy School and some equipment that is at the west end of the Healey School. Director Raiche added that those projects will likely consume the fund, and that another similar request can be expected for Fiscal Year 2024.

Councilor Scott asked if this item reflected a choice regarding the source of the funding, and if this bond would be instead of taking the money from the CAP Stabilization Fund. Director Raiche confirmed that was correct.

Councilor Scott asked how many basis points this bond is going out at, and Director Mastrobuoni replied that a spreadsheet was uploaded and that the Fiscal Year 2023 improvements are being projected at 5% for 20 years.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, City Councilor At Large Kelly and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

ABSENT: Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

13. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0531](#)) Requesting authorization to borrow \$2,000,000 in a bond, and to appropriate the same amount for additional work on the Somerville Ave Streetscape & Utilities project.

Chair Wilson stated that this item would be taken up together with Item 14 (ID # 23-0530).

Director Raiche stated that this funding is related to the utility and streetscape overhaul the city began in 2017, adding that a 20% contingency was built into the project and that most of the construction-related change orders that occurred during the project mostly fell within that contingency. Director Raiche stated that these items are related to the McGrath Highway and requirements by the Massachusetts DOT to monitor the overpass at Somerville Avenue, during which time bridge deflections were discovered and needed to be addressed, which in turn required negotiating solutions with the state, causing additional unforeseen costs. Director Raiche continued that these items address streetscape work and sewer work that could not be completed within the budget as a result, with the former being repaid by the General Fund and the latter by the Sewer Enterprise.

Councilor Scott asked if the contingency on the original amount was 10% or 15%, and Director Raiche responded that the bids for the project came in below what was projected, allowing for the 20% contingency.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, City Councilor At Large Kelly and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan
ABSENT: Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

- 14. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0530](#)) Requesting authorization to borrow \$4,200,000 in a bond, and to appropriate the same amount for additional work on the Somerville Ave Streetscape & Utilities project.

Chair Wilson stated that this item would be taken up together with Item 13 (ID # 23-0531).

Director Raiche stated that this funding is related to the utility and streetscape overhaul the city began in 2017, adding that a 20% contingency was built into the project and that most of the construction-related change orders that occurred during the project mostly fell within that contingency. Director Raiche stated that these items are related to the McGrath Highway and requirements by the Massachusetts DOT to monitor the overpass at Somerville Avenue, during which time bridge deflections were discovered and needed to be addressed, which in turn required negotiating solutions with the state, causing additional unforeseen costs. Director Raiche continued that these items address streetscape work and sewer work that could not be completed within the budget as a result, with the former being repaid by the General Fund and the latter by the Sewer Enterprise.

Councilor Scott asked if the contingency on the original amount was 10% or 15%, and Director Raiche responded that the bids for the project came in below what was projected, allowing for the 20% contingency.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, City Councilor At Large Kelly and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan
ABSENT: Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

Orders

- 15. Order (ID # [23-0359](#)) By Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Kelly That the City Solicitor advise this Council regarding the city's ability to use General Funds for a mass medical debt relief program.

Chair Wilson stated that this item was not ready for discussion tonight and would be kept in committee to discuss at the meeting on May 9, 2023.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

Communications

- 16. Communication (ID # [23-0642](#)) By Councilor Wilson Conveying the draft schedule for the FY 2024 Budget Review.

Director Mastrobuoni stated that the administration is planning to post the

proposed budget online on May 26, 2023, with the mayor presenting the budget to the School Committee on June 1, 2023. Director Mastrobuoni added that changes have been made to the process this year that will allow Councilors to review the budget and submit questions in advance of meeting.

Chair Wilson added that it was very helpful to have the budget posted a week earlier this year to give the Councilors more time to review it, and expressed appreciation to the administration for the hard work in making that happen.

Councilor Clingan also expressed appreciation to the administration for being able to produce the budget earlier this year.

Councilor Scott noted that there was one additional meeting scheduled for this year as compared to last year, and asked for clarification regarding the timing of the administration's planned publication of the proposed budget. Director Mastrobuoni replied that the goal is to have it published on May 26, 2023, and that the software being used this year will allow it to be downloaded in a single PDF file. Councilor Scott asked if the administration was also planning to publish a shorter summary of the proposed budget, similar to what it did in 2021, and Director Mastrobuoni indicated that a decision has not yet been made. Councilor Scott asked about the timing of the publication of the Professional and Technical Services breakdowns, and Director Mastrobuoni replied that every effort was being made to encourage departments to submit their breakdowns as early as possible.

Councilor Kelly asked about moving the time slots for these meetings up to 5:30 p.m., instead of 6:00 p.m., and Councilor Clingan replied that could work if the meetings would be virtual. Director Mastrobuoni indicated that such a change would be difficult to coordinate logistically for members of the administration's staff.

Councilor Kelly asked if the Google form used to submit questions could be improved and simplified. Chair Wilson stated that the Google form will be improved this year.

Councilor Scott asked if meetings could be held on Saturdays. Chair Wilson stated that Saturdays would be difficult to coordinate. Councilor Clingan stated that Saturdays would not be their preference but that they are not necessarily opposed to it. Legislative Liaison Carrillo noted that, if a change was going to be made to have Saturday meetings, the administration would need more notice to build into the schedule, and therefore may be better suited to discussion for future budgets.

Director Mastrobuoni stated that the landing page on the Somerville website

for the Fiscal Year 2024 budget would be live shortly.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

- Finance - 2023-04-25 FY23 Building Improvements (with 23-0532)
- Finance - 2023-04-25 MWRA Water Main Rehabilitation (with 23-0533)
- Finance - 2023-04-25 Memo to City Council SPL MCC Grant (with 23-0544)
- Finance - 2030-04-25 Somerville Ave Utilities & Streetscapes Improvements (with 23-0531)
- Finance - 2023-04-25 Gen Fund - Somerville Ave Utilities & Streetscapes Improvements (with 23-0530)