



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Public Utilities and Public Works Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, December 4, 2023

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Clingan at 6:00 p.m. and adjourned at 7:29 p.m. on a Roll Call Vote: 3 in favor (Councilors Kelly, Gomez Mouakad, Clingan), 0 opposed, 0 absent.

Others present:

Michael Potere – Assistant Clerk of Committees; Demetrios Vidalis – Director of Water and Sewer; Richard Raiche – Director of IAM; Hannah Carrillo – Legislative Liaison; Jake Wilson – At-Large City Councilor.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Jesse Clingan, Vice Chair Beatriz Gomez Mouakad and Charlotte Kelly

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-1705](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Public Utilities and Public Works Committee Meeting of November 13, 2023.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: Chairperson Clingan, Vice Chair Gomez Mouakad and City Councilor At Large Kelly

2. Order (ID # [23-1773](#)) By Councilor Clingan, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Davis, Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Kelly, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Scott and Councilor Wilson That the Director of Engineering provide this Council with a timeline for all utility work and paving projects scheduled for Highland Ave including the Highland Ave redesign project.

Legislative Liaison Carrillo stated that administration staff are currently working on drafting this timeline.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

3. Order (ID # [23-1677](#)) By Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Davis and Councilor Clingan That the Director of Water and Sewer explain the increases in water bills for households with new water meters and consider a forgiveness period for unexpected increases due to inaccuracies in prior metering.

Director Vidalis explained that the bill increases resulted from faulty water meters that stopped communicating usage to the city. Without readings from meters, ratepayers were billed based on estimated usage, and when the actual usage information was received, it was determined that in some cases

their usage was either over- or underestimated. As a result, some ratepayers received bills for usage due to underestimation, and some received credits to their account for overestimation.

Chair Clingan asked how the city is progressing on installing new meters, and Director Vidalis replied the department has installed 2/3 of the new meters.

Councilor Gomez Mouakad asked if the percentage or number of ratepayers who were overcharged as compared to undercharged was known, and Director Vidalis said it was not. Councilor Gomez Mouakad explained that if only a small number of ratepayers received a bill, it might be a more manageable situation and response for the city.

Councilor Gomez Mouakad noted that receiving an unexpected water bill could place a hardship on Somerville residents. Director Vidalis replied that the department is working on a ratepayer's assistance program to help those having difficulty making payments, but explained that the city is itself billed for actual water consumption by the state and must pay the state for that usage.

Director Vidalis stated that the city does not shut off water service for nonpayment, that interest accrues on unpaid water bills at a rate of 14% per year, and that seniors are eligible for a 25% discount on city service bills. Councilor Gomez Mouakad replied that it is unfair to charge a ratepayer 14% interest on a bill they received by no fault of their own, and Councilor Kelly agreed.

Chair Clingan suggested creating an option for ratepayers who received credits to return them and give them to a ratepayer who received a bill.

Legislative Liaison Carrillo noted that the administration is currently in the process of developing a ratepayer assistance program.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

4. Order
(ID # [23-1596](#))

By Councilor Ewen-Campen

That the Commissioner of Public Works install a water fountain for people and dogs at Nunziato field.

Chair Clingan noted that a memorandum was submitted regarding this Item, that the request is more complex than originally thought, and that it will be kept in committee for future discussion.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

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5. Resolution (ID # [23-1437](#)) By Councilor Gomez Mouakad and Councilor Ewen-Campen That the Administration report on capacity to allow parallel staffing and funding for the development of the 1895 Building, School Building Master Plan and the Fire Department Master Plan Building Study.
- Director Raiche noted that the administration plans to address Items 5 (ID # 23-1437), 6 (ID # 23-1436), and 7 (ID # 23-1435) in this Committee during a future meeting.
- RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE**
6. Resolution (ID # [23-1436](#)) By Councilor Gomez Mouakad and Councilor Ewen-Campen That the Administration collaborate with the School Department on determining the best and future use of the 1895 Building.
- Director Raiche noted that the administration plans to address Items 5 (ID # 23-1437), 6 (ID # 23-1436), and 7 (ID # 23-1435) in this Committee during a future meeting.
- RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE**
7. Order (ID # [23-1435](#)) By Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Ewen-Campen That the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management report on ongoing deficiencies of City Hall and the City Hall Annex that could impair the future use of these buildings.
- Director Raiche noted that the administration plans to address Items 5 (ID # 23-1437), 6 (ID # 23-1436), and 7 (ID # 23-1435) in this Committee during a future meeting.
- Councilor Gomez Mouakad noted that although school buildings are very important to maintain, other city administrative buildings should not be ignored along the way.
- RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE**
8. Order (ID # [23-1183](#)) By Councilor Gomez Mouakad That the Director of Water and Sewer and the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management explain what maintenance will be required for the new Poplar Street Pump Station and Spring Hill Sewer Separation Project, and how these maintenance requirements will be staffed to ensure their proper upkeep.
- Director Vidalis explained that the maintenance for the Poplar Street Pump Station will vary based on need, that it will primarily consist of maintenance for the equipment and pumps, and that staffing this maintenance will require one full-time employee for the first year, and then approximately one quarter of a full-time employee beyond that; for the Spring Hill Sewer Separation Project, it will be continuous maintenance facilitated by the preventative maintenance programs currently employed by the city, and as such no
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additional staffing will be required.

Councilor Gomez Mouakad expressed support for continuous preventative maintenance for the city's large capital improvement projects to ensure they do not fall into disrepair, and Chair Clingan agreed.

Director Raiche noted that consideration of maintenance is done during the project's planning phases.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

9. Order
(ID # [23-0548](#))

By Councilor Clingan

That this Council's Committee on Public Utilities and Public Works discuss the Somerville Internet Access Task Force's recommendation regarding Municipal Broadband.

Chair Clingan stated that this Item has been previously discussed and is on the Agenda to be marked work completed.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

10. Order
(ID # [22-2124](#))

By Councilor Wilson, Councilor Clingan and Councilor Scott

That the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management and the Director of Engineering discuss with this Council, a policy of burying utilities when a new thoroughfare is constructed.

Director Raiche stated that when a new development is constructed, utilities are typically relocated underground as part of the project's development, but that doing the same can be more difficult on smaller streets or in situations where the underground space is occupied by other utilities such as water or gas lines.

Chair Clingan asked if utilities could be fed through gas lines, and Director Raiche replied they cannot because gas lines are too small to accommodate utility wiring.

Chair Wilson sponsored At-Large Councilor Wilson, who expressed support for the administration's work in this area, and noted that Somerville is an old city with an old infrastructure.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

11. Order
(ID # [22-2023](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Strezo, Councilor Ewen-Campen and Councilor Burnley Jr.

That the Commissioner of Public Works provide information on options to engage local and minority owned businesses in contract work.

Legislative Liaison Carrillo stated that administration staff are working on a

memorandum with this information to be presented at a future meeting.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

12. Resolution
(ID # [22-1987](#))

By Councilor Davis

That the Administration work with the City Council to establish a process for enforcement of Section 11-63 of the Code of Ordinances.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

13. Order
(ID # [22-1848](#))

By Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Kelly, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Scott, Councilor Strezo and Councilor Wilson

That this Council discuss municipal broadband, and the implementation of the Somerville Internet Access Task Force.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

14. Resolution
(ID # [22-1797](#))

By Councilor Clingan, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Davis, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Kelly, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Scott, Councilor Strezo and Councilor Wilson

That the Administration make information about all licenses and permits viewable without requiring a CitizenServ account.

Legislative Liaison Carrillo explained that anyone can search for information by address, parcel permit, license and subtype, or a license or permit number without a CitizenServ account, and that the administration is working to make more information available without an account in the future. Legislative Liaison Carrillo provided the following link to access information as it is currently available:

[https://www4.citizenserve.com/Portal/PortalController?](https://www4.citizenserve.com/Portal/PortalController?Action=showHomePage&ctzPagePrefix=Portal_&installationID=149)

[Action=showHomePage&ctzPagePrefix=Portal_&installationID=149.](https://www4.citizenserve.com/Portal/PortalController?Action=showHomePage&ctzPagePrefix=Portal_&installationID=149)

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

15. Resolution
(ID # [22-1763](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin

That the Administration update this Council on developments related to the Request for Proposals for the disposition of the property located at 90 Union Square.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

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16. Resolution
(ID # [22-1762](#))
- By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Scott
That the Administration update this Council on actions taken related to the possible relocation of the Somerville Media Center and Massachusetts Alliance for Portuguese Speakers from the city-owned property at 90 Union Square.
- Chair Clingan stated that this Item has been previously discussed and is on the Agenda to be marked work completed.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
17. Order
(ID # [22-1737](#))
- By Councilor McLaughlin and Councilor Kelly
That the Commissioner of Public Works update the Ward 1 City Councilor regarding plans to find a location for excessive snow other than 90 Washington Street.
- Chair Clingan noted that a memorandum was submitted indicating that this has been addressed by the administration. Legislative Liaison Carrillo does not yet know the location that has been selected.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
18. Order
(ID # [22-1688](#))
- By Councilor Clingan
That the Director of Engineering develop safety protocols and notification requirements for any projects, planned or emergency, taking place within a determined radius of a school.
- Chair Clingan explained that this Item has been addressed with engineering and is currently being implemented.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
19. Order
(ID # [22-1596](#))
- By Councilor Burnley Jr.
That the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management present to this Council, a plan to fix the Somerville Media Center's roof.
- Chair Clingan stated that this Item has been previously addressed.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
20. Ordinance
(ID # [22-0835](#))
- By Councilor Strezo, Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Gomez Mouakad
Amending Sec. 11-63 of the Code of Ordinances regarding the removal of poles, conduits and wires.
- RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE**
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21. Order
(ID # [22-0450](#))
- By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Kelly and Councilor Strezo
That the Commissioner of Public Works work with the MA Department of Transportation to address highway safety measures along I-93 that directly about the East Somerville neighborhood.
- Chair Clingan noted that this has been addressed by the state, but that there could be more done to improve the safety in the area. Councilor Kelly agreed, and noted that such improvements could be a larger wall and improving the barricades.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
22. Order
(ID # [22-0336](#))
- By Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Clingan and Councilor Wilson
That the Director of Engineering and the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management consider implementing a pilot program for Green Infrastructure as a means to reduce issues of flooding in the Gilman Square Neighborhood.
- Director Raiche explained that, as a matter of policy, the department already does put green stormwater pumphouses and bio-basins when doing a major sewer project, but that Gilman Square was a not a candidate for that because the flooding in that area is caused by the hydraulic grade line systems backing up.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
23. Order
(ID # [22-0052](#))
- By Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Kelly, Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Ewen-Campen
That the Executive Director of the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development work with this Council to create policies to reduce the length of time that construction projects block sidewalk access, including the possibility of increasing fees to discourage extended sidewalk closures.
- RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE**