



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Legislative Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, April 15, 2025

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Davis at 6:02pm and adjourned at 7:54pm on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Strezo, Mbah, Ewen-Campen, Scott, Davis), 0 opposed, and 0 absent.

Others present: Meredith Stivers - Assistant City Solicitor, Jay Piques - Assistant City Solicitor, Brendan Salisbury - Legislative and Policy Analyst, Christine Blais - Director of Office of Sustainability and Environment, Vanessa Boukili - Senior Urban Forestry and Landscape Planner, Neha Singh - Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Madalyn Letellier - Legislative Services Manager.

Roll Call

Present: Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis, Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott, Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah and City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [25-0661](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Legislative Matters Committee Meeting of April 1, 2025.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**

AYE: Ward Six City Councilor Davis, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Mbah and City Councilor At Large Strezo

Tree Ordinance

2. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-0566](#)) Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Chapter 12, Article VI of the Code of Ordinances to modify the Tree Preservation Ordinance.

Assistant City Solicitor Stivers reviewed the amendments to the Tree Ordinance related to Stop Work Orders and Enforcement, referencing the memo listed in Referenced Documents, *Legislative Matters - 2025-04-15 Memo - Tree Ordinance enforcement_04-14-25 Final (with 25-0566)*.

Councilor Mbah began the discussion on inquiring about the language related to tree pruning, to which Solicitor Stivers clarified that this language specifically applies to city trees. Chair Davis then inquired whether a Stop Work Order could be issued if someone was performing work outside their

building permits, specifically if the work was hazardous to trees. Solicitor Stivers explained that while a Stop Work Order could be applied if the work is covered under an existing building permit, this is a complex scenario, and there are legal concerns with issuing Stop Work Orders as a blanket measure for trees.

Councilor Scott asked if a Zoning Compliance Officer works in the Inspectional Services Department (ISD). Senior Planner Boukili confirmed there are two Zoning Compliance Officers within ISD. The conversation shifted to the review process and ownership of the work flow and Senior Planner Boukili shared that there is a collaboration between departments to address issues as they arise. Councilor Scott continued to inquire about enforcement parameters for Stop Work Orders. Senior Planner Boukili noted that the ordinance includes enforcement provisions such as fines and violations, specifically under Sec. 12-113(c). Councilor Scott and Chair Davis raised questions regarding the definition of “offender”. Solicitor Stivers explained that property owners could change their corporate names and emphasized that the intent is to define those who own multiple properties. If further clarification is needed, she will review the issue.

Finally, Chair Davis requested that a revised ordinance be prepared for the next meeting, incorporating the changes discussed in the memo, including language on Stop Work Orders and the suspension or revocation process mentioned earlier, as well as clarification for the definition of “offender” in the language.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

3. Public
Communication
(ID # [25-0077](#))

Chris Dwan submitting comments re: Urban Forestry Committee recommendations.

This item was discussed with ID #25-0566.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

4. Order
(ID # [25-0066](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Scott and Councilor Sait
That this Council discuss proposed amendments to the Tree Preservation Ordinance, as outlined in item #24-0493.

This item was discussed with ID #25-0566.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Commission on Energy Use and Climate Change

5. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-0257](#)) Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Sections 2-304 through 2-310 of the Code of Ordinances to update the Commission on Energy Use and Climate Change.

Legislative and Policy Analyst Salisbury presented his suggestions to the committee in relation to the Commission on Energy Use and Climate Change (CEUCC) Ordinance. His amended version is listed in the referenced documents, listed as *Legislative Matters - 2025-04-16 CEUCC Ordinance Amendments (with 25-0257)*. Discussions were had surrounding the intent of the original draft language and the re-organization of content for clarity and in many instances the edits to keep like topics together.

Analyst Salisbury discussed the decision to edit text to clarify the qualifications of the commission regarding Somerville residents and the presence of youth members on the commission. Councilor Mbah asked a clarifying question if the members of the commission are compensated, Director Blais shared all members are volunteers, and the language stating there is no compensation was removed from the amended version so if there is a change made in the future the ordinance will not be a hindrance. Councilor Mbah asked how the committee can create an incentive within the ordinance for youth, and members of the public, to want to engage with the CEUCC. Chair Davis shared his opinion that because the ordinance does not include anything about compensation there is a possibility of revising that element in the future.

Analyst Salisbury clarifies sub section (b) was mainly a reorganization on ideas and tweaks in language, but no substantive changes had been made. Analyst Salisbury went on to identify one of the substantive changes which is the language in Sec. 2.309-Interim commission. Chair Davis clarified the intent, which was correct, that this section is to continuously meet quorum while trying to advertise and recruit for members to serve under the new CEUCC ordinance.

Chair Davis made a motion to amend the language to include the changes submitted by the Legislative and Policy Analyst.

Chair Davis moved to make amendments to Sec. 2-304 as follows:

Sec. 2-304. - Establishment; function.

(a) There ~~shall~~ will be a climate action ~~commission on energy use and climate change~~, hereinafter called the "commission."

(b) It ~~shall~~ will be the function of the commission to:

- (1) Address and reverse both the climate and environmental crises through community and local government operations toward the ultimate goals of creating a healthier, safer, thriving, equitable, resilient community, advancing environmental justice, and adapting to climate change, and reversing the climate and environmental crises.
 - (A) The commission may consider and pursue interventions in any relevant areas, including: public engagement; environment; policy; adaptation; mitigation; climate science; public finance; business and workforce; equity; social and infrastructure resiliency; community health; buildings; natural resources; waste; municipal and school operations; transportation; or, mobility.
- (2) Advise the mayor and municipal staff.
- (3) Mobilize Somerville residents and stakeholders by educating the public, sharing information, conducting through outreach and engagement.
- (4) Act as a centralizing force in the city and the community which will address issues of climate change and sustainable environmental policy, providing information, referral, guidance, advocacy and coordination, and offering and providing technical assistance to other public agencies, organizations and institutions engaged in activities intended to reduce the city's greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to local, regional, national, and international efforts to protect the earth's climate.
- (5) Take such action as the commission deems appropriate to assist the city in taking all necessary steps to effectively control the release of greenhouse gases within the city and ensure the energy efficiency of municipal operations to protect the climate.
- (6) Take such action as the commission deems appropriate to assist the city in implementing cost-effective measures such as energy conservation, the adoption of "clean energy" standards and "smart growth" policies, as a component of urban development plans.
- (7) Take such action as the commission deems appropriate to assist the city in advocating and promoting transportation strategies that give people incentives to reduce car use.

Chair Davis moved to make amendments to Sec. 2-305 as follows:

Sec. 2-305. - Membership; appointment; term; removal.

- (a) The commission shall be composed of no less than five and up to thirteen voting members who shall be appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the City Council. Members shall be residents of the city, except one member who owns or does business in Somerville may reside outside the city. Two members shall be youth representatives, one between the ages of fifteen and seventeen and the other between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. The commission shall consist of seven

members and one associate member, six of whom shall be appointed initially by the mayor and confirmed by the city council to serve for the following terms:

- (1) Two members shall serve for a one-year term.
- (2) Two members shall serve for a two-year term.
- (3) Two members shall serve for a three-year term.
- (4) One member shall serve ex-officio.
- (5) One associate member shall serve for a one-year term.

After the initial terms all commissioners shall be appointed for a term of three years.

- (b) Initial appointments to the commission shall be staggered, with three members appointed for a term of one year, five members appointed for a term of two years, and five members appointed for a term of three years. Subsequent appointments shall be for a term of three years, with the exception of the youth representatives who shall be appointed for a term of one year. Unless otherwise stated in the ordinance, members shall serve a term of three years; however, of the members first appointed to the commission, three shall be appointed to a term of one year, five shall be appointed a term of two years, and five shall be appointed to a term of three years. Subsequent members of the commission shall be appointed to a term of three years by the mayor and approved by the city council. Members shall be residents of the city, with the exception of one member who owns and does business in Somerville. It is the intention that each year, approximately one-third of membership of the Commission will be subject to appointment and confirmation. If any commissioner is inexcusably absent for three meetings of the commission during a calendar year, that position of said commissioner shall be automatically vacated upon certification to the mayor by the commission.
- (c) If a vacancy occurs prior to the expiration of a member's term, a new member shall be appointed by the mayor, subject to confirmation by the City Council, to serve the remainder of the vacated term. Two members shall be designated youth representatives and shall be appointed for a term of one year each. One representative shall be between the ages of 15 and 17 and the other between the ages of 18 and 25 at the time of appointment. Both representatives will have the option to renew for one term. After the initial appointments, subsequent members of the commission shall be appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the city council with recommendations provided by the commission. If a vacancy occurs prior to the expiration of the member's term, an appointment shall be made to serve for the remainder of that term.
- (d) After the initial appointments, subsequent members of the commission shall be appointed by the Mayor subject to confirmation by the City Council. If any member is absent from three or more successive meetings, the commission may request the mayor remove that member

~~from membership. The commission at all times shall strive to be representative of all socioeconomic segments, religious creeds, national origins, sexes, sexual orientations and racial segments of the city as well as different neighborhoods.~~

- (e) In appointing members of the commission, the mayor shall ~~at all times~~ consider diverse representation of its membership including by socioeconomic ~~status segments~~, religious creed, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity ~~segments of the city as well as different, and~~ neighborhood.
- (f) A quorum of the commission shall be a simple majority of the members serving on the commission.
- (g) Members of the commission shall be classified as special municipal employees for the purposes of M.G.L. c. 268A.

Chair Davis moved to make amendments to Sec. 2-306 as follows:

Sec. 2-306. - Support for the commission. ~~Environmental coordinator to serve ex-officio.~~

- (a) The director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment, or their designee, shall serve as a member of the commission by virtue of their office. ~~The city's environmental coordinator shall serve as an ex-officio member of the commission whose selection and shall coincide with his or her length of employment. The environmental coordinator shall be a voting member.~~
- (b) The director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment, or their designee, shall serve as the staff liaison to the commission, and serve as the custodian of all records for the commission, including recordings, attachments, minutes, agendas, advertisements, and materials. ~~The city's environmental coordinator shall be the custodian of all records for the commission.~~
- (c) The superintendent of Somerville Public Schools, or their designee-~~approved by the mayor~~, shall serve as a member of the commission by virtue of their office.

Chair Davis moved to make amendments to Sec. 2-307 as follows:

~~Sec. 2-307. —~~ Qualifications of commissioners members.

- (a) ~~All prospective members shall have interest in at least one of the following areas: public engagement; environment; policy; adaptation; mitigation; climate science; public finance; business and workforce; equity; social and infrastructure resiliency; community health; buildings; natural resources; waste; municipal and school operations; transportation; or, mobility.~~ All prospective commissioners shall have knowledge of and/or expertise in one or more of the following areas: energy management, energy conservation, transportation, architecture and contracting, environmental education, and/or urban planning.
- (b) ~~Members of the commission shall be classified as special municipal employees for the purposes of M.G.L. c. 268A. Commissioners must be~~

residents of the city.

- (c) ~~Members of the commission shall be classified as special municipal employees for the purposes of M.G.L. c. 268A.~~
- (d) ~~The appointed associate member will not vote on commission decisions. The appointed associate member shall be designated by the chairperson to sit in the place of any member incapacitated by personal interest, inability to act, or absence.~~
- (e) ~~No member of the commission shall receive compensation for service on the commission.~~

Chair Davis moved to make amendments to Sec. 2-308 as follows:

Sec. 2-~~308~~307. - Election of chairperson; by-laws.

The members of the commission shall elect a chairperson from among its members; and shall adopt by-laws for the commission.

Chair Davis moved to make amendments to Sec. 2-309 as follows:

Sec. 2-~~309~~308. - Powers and duties.

~~The powers and duties of the~~ commission shall ~~be the following:~~

- ~~(1) Take such action as the commission deems appropriate to~~ assist the city in:
 - ~~(A) adapting to climate change and improving the environment;~~ ~~ultimately creating a healthier, more resilient community.~~ To seek to work with the municipal government departments, commissions, and boards, to increase energy efficiency and conservation by the city;
 - ~~(B) Take such action as the commission deems appropriate to assist the city in taking all necessary steps to~~ decarbonizing and mitigating the impacts of climate change; and, and improve the environment. ~~To design and implement community education programs that promote environmental advocacy, awareness and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in the city;~~
 - ~~(C) Take such action as the commission deems appropriate to assist the city in~~ ensuring environmental justice and equity are central components of strategies implemented to address climate change and improve the environment. To recommend transportation strategies as a component of urban development plans;
- (2) review progress towards the city's climate, environment, and emissions goals, actions, and strategies. ~~To recommend local greenhouse gas reduction targets;~~
- (3) ~~To recommend an action plan to achieve set greenhouse gas reduction target goals, and to monitor its progress;~~
- (4) ~~To work in collaboration with any public organization or group to further the city's goal of local greenhouse gas emissions reduction and energy efficiency and conservation;~~
- (5) ~~To recommend initiatives to the mayor and the city council to ensure the energy efficiency of municipal operations and promote energy conservation and green power use within the city; and~~

- (6) ~~Submit an annual report to the mayor and the city council on its activities of the prior year, including a record of attendance and remaining length of term of each member.~~

Chair Davis moved to make amendments to Sec. 2-310 as follows:

Sec. 2-~~310~~309. - Interim commission.

- (a) The Commission on Energy Use and Climate Change shall serve as interim membership of the Climate Action Commission until a sufficient number of members to achieve quorum has been appointed. The Commission on Energy Use and Climate Change shall retain all rights and responsibilities delegated by ordinance until the Climate Action Commission has a sufficient membership appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the City Council to achieve quorum.

- (1) An interim member of the Climate Action Commission may apply for appointment to a full term. Members of the Commission on Energy Use and Climate Change shall be eligible for appointment to the Climate Action Commission.

Following the acceptance of the above amendments, Chair Davis made a motion to accept the ordinance as amended.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED AS AMENDED

AYE: Ward Six City Councilor Davis, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Mbah and City Councilor At Large Strezo

Surveillance Technology Impact Report

6. Mayor's Request Requesting approval of the Surveillance Technology Impact Report for Hudl
(ID # [25-0452](#)) Focus cameras.

Chair Davis stated a question was raised in the last Council Meeting that these cameras do have audio capability, and a request was made for the administration to submit an a new version of the report with the appropriate revisions.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE PLACED ON FILE

7. Mayor's Request Requesting approval of the Surveillance Technology Impact Report for Hudl
(ID # [25-0752](#)) Focus cameras.

This item was discussed with ID #25-0452.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE PLACED ON FILE

Short Term Rental Community Impact Legislation

8. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-0484](#)) Requesting the acceptance of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 64G, Section 3D(b), to authorize the city to impose the community impact allowed under Chapter 3D(a) of G.L. c. 64G, on each transfer of occupancy of a short-term rental unit in a two- or three-family dwelling, that includes the operator's primary residence.
- Director Sing introduced two items related to the city's request to impose a 3% fee on short-term rentals. The Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR) will collect and distribute these fees to the municipality on a quarterly basis. Assistant City Solicitor Piques clarified that a procedural step is required for this to move forward. The next step in the process is to approve this item, which would allow the city to impose a fee on professionally managed short-term rental units. Additionally, the city must also implement fees for privately owned units and hotels.
- RESULT:** **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
- AYE:** Ward Six City Councilor Davis, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Mbah and City Councilor At Large Strezo
9. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-0483](#)) Requesting the acceptance of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 64G, Section 3D(a), to authorize the city to impose a community impact fee of 3% of the total amount of rent upon each transfer of occupancy of "Professionally-managed units".
- This item was discussed with ID #25-0483.
- RESULT:** **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
- AYE:** Ward Six City Councilor Davis, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Mbah and City Councilor At Large Strezo

To be discharged without recommendation for the purpose of reassigning to other committees

10. Order (ID # [24-1686](#)) By Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Scott That the City Solicitor confirm whether an LGBTQ Legal Services Stabilization Fund can be created to pay fees associated with gendered document changes and potential court sealing of records associated with such documents.
- Chair Davis discussed agenda items 10, 11, and 12 together. The intent is to discharge them so they can be sent to Finance Committee.
- RESULT:** **RECOMMENDED TO BE DISCHARGED WITH NO RECOMMENDATION**

11. Communication (ID # [25-0270](#)) By Councilor Burnley Jr.
Conveying the cost of changes to identity documents, in support of item #24-1686.
- This item was discussed with ID # 24-1686.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE DISCHARGED WITH NO RECOMMENDATION**
12. Public Communication (ID # [25-0336](#)) Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition submitting comments re: item #24-1686, creation of an LGBTQ Legal Services Stabilization Fund.
- This item was discussed with ID # 24-1686.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE DISCHARGED WITH NO RECOMMENDATION**
13. Order (ID # [25-0379](#)) By Councilor Scott, Councilor Mbah, Councilor Wilson and Councilor Sait
That the Director of Inspectional Services enforce Section 11-111 of the Code of Ordinances - Registration and maintenance of vacant property, in light of the recent collapse of 316 Somerville Avenue.
- Chair Davis discussed his intention to discharge this item so it can be sent to the Public Works and Public Utilities Committees to discuss practical implications.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE DISCHARGED WITH NO RECOMMENDATION**

Referenced Documents:

- Legislative Matters - 2025-04-15 - CEUCC Ordinance Amendments (with 25-0257)
- Legislative Matters - 2025-04-15 Memo - Tree Ordinance enforcement_04-14-25 Final (with 25-0566)