



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

JOSEPH A. CURTATONE

MAYOR

MAYOR'S OFFICE

To: City Council
From: Joseph A. Curtatone
Subject: Mid-year Staffing Request for the Department of Transportation
Date: February 12th, 2020

Background and Context

In its recent Spotlight series on Greater Boston's transportation system, the Boston Globe stated: "the fundamental linchpin of city life is failing." We have been working for years in Somerville to prevent a similar fate by investing in bike infrastructure and pedestrian improvements, prioritizing transit, and, of course, securing the Green Line Extension. With this request to create a Department of Transportation (DOT), however, we ask the City Council to join us in recognizing that, in order to build the safe, accessible, reliable, and sustainable transportation system that our residents deserve, we need more resources devoted to and more staff working on these issues.

Our community has ambitious goals and expectations for our transportation system. With our Vision Zero commitment, we seek to eliminate fatalities and serious injuries due to crashes. With Somerville Climate Forward, we seek to eliminate greenhouse gas emissions from all sources, including transportation. We need a dedicated department with extensive expertise and resources to achieve this change. Focus areas of the Department of Transportation will include but are not limited to:

- Holistically assessing and evaluating all components of the system including but not limited to travel lines, parking, traffic signals, traffic calming infrastructure, bicycle infrastructure, pedestrian infrastructure, bus stops, and other transit infrastructure
- Conducting extensive community outreach on desired transportation system outcomes in addition to relevant policies and projects
- Formulating and implementing a comprehensive mobility strategy that improves safety, access, sustainability, efficiency, and reliability
- Coordinating across City departments as well as neighboring communities, the MBTA, MassDOT, and the U.S. Department of Transportation to improve transportation outcomes
- Developing, implementing, and analyzing the success of targeted transportation improvement projects such as dedicated bicycle and/or transit infrastructure and traffic signal optimization
- Collaborating with Infrastructure and Asset Management on transportation infrastructure projects

The Request

We have identified three new positions that are critical to establishing a new Department of Transportation: a Director of Transportation, a Director of Finance & Administration, and an Outreach Coordinator. The DOT will also absorb the staff of the Mobility Division of the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD).

As with the creation of the Office of Housing Stability, the Director of Transportation's first task will be to define the appropriate organizational structure for the department. Fortunately, this individual will benefit from Somerville's participation in the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO), which recently convened cities across the country to analyze best practices in establishing and managing DOTs. Larger cities like Pittsburg and Atlanta have recently established consolidated transportation departments, and NACTO will provide guidance and establish best practices for smaller communities like Somerville that seek to follow a similar strategy. City staff in Somerville have been monitoring and reviewing this effort, and we anticipate that this research will assist our Transportation Director in putting together the new department.

Budget

We are requesting an appropriation of \$49,431 for the anticipated salary associated with these positions for nine weeks. Should the Council approve this request, the positions will be posted immediately with the intention of hiring by May 1st.

In addition to staff, we are requesting \$15,000 in ordinary maintenance funding for office equipment and supplies as well as \$15,000 for professional and technical services to provide the Director with the flexibility to contract for any services or bring in a consultant to support the establishment of the department.

Future Budget Requests

We expect to include additional positions for the Department of Transportation in the FY21 and/or future budget requests, once the Director of Transportation has defined the appropriate organizational structure for the department.

We also anticipate seeking funding for and approval of a lease for office space for the department. As the Council knows well from the Building Master Plan report and presentation, there is no available space in existing City buildings to accommodate a new department of this size, so the only option available in the short term is to lease space. To assist with this and with other space needs at City Hall, we have released a request for proposals (RFP) for leased office space that we expect to be available in the spring.

Finally, as the work of the department expands, further resources will be necessary to implement new projects and programs. We intend to include substantial investments in traffic safety to advance our critical Vision Zero goals in the FY21 and/or future budget requests.

Related Budget Request

We are also requesting \$10,592 for the anticipated salary for a new position in Constituent Services that will offer essential support to the work of a new Department of Transportation. The DOT will benefit enormously from harnessing the community's vast knowledge of safety concerns and transportation challenges, and 311 is ideally situated as a powerful tool that can enable the community to share this information with us. To responsibly serve this role, Constituent Services needs a Quality Assurance and Improvement Manager. This individual will ensure that staff members both in 311 and in relevant departments have needed ongoing training and skills development and oversight and that request processes are functioning as intended. In doing so, this individual will ensure that information from

residents finds its way to the right people and that the appropriate action is taken in response to that information. In the context of traffic safety, it is critical that this workflow operate correctly.

Summary

The following table summarizes the funding necessary for the remainder of FY20 to establish the Department of Transportation:

	Department	Priority	Funding (9 weeks)
Personal Services			
Director of Transportation	DOT	High	\$22,950
Director of Finance & Administration	DOT	High	\$15,888
Outreach Coordinator	DOT	High	\$10,592
Quality Assurance and Improvement Manager	Constituent Services	Medium	\$10,592
Ordinary Maintenance – Office Supplies & Furniture	DOT	High	\$15,000
Ordinary Maintenance – P&T	DOT	Medium	\$15,000
Total			\$90,023