



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, May 21, 2024

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Wilson at 6:01pm and adjourned at 7:10pm with a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Clingan, Burnley, Sait, Scott, Wilson), none opposed, and none absent.

Others present: Cindy Amara – City Solicitor, Hannah Carillo – Mayor's Office, Natasha Frazier – Assistant Clerk of Committees, Jill Lathan – Commissioner of DPW, Richard Raiche – Director of IAM, Michael Richards – Director of Finance and Administration at IAM, Catherine Lester Salchert – Assistant City Solicitor, Julie Spurr-Knight – Director of Finance and Administration at DPW, Wendy Tavico – Finance Manager at Parks and Recreation, Mohammed Uddin – Financial Analyst, Demetrios Vidalis – Director of Water and Sewer, Susan Yerkes – Parks and Recreation Director.

Roll Call

Present: City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson, Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott, Ward Two City Councilor Naima Sait, City Councilor At Large Willie Burnley Jr. and Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan

- 1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-0652](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting of May 7, 2024.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**
AYE: City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Two City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr. and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

Personnel Requests

- 2. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0654](#)) Requesting approval to use available funds in the City Clerk Salaries account in the amount of \$1,913.40 to fund a Legislative Services Manager position.

Clerk Wells stated that the Legislative Services Manager position combines the responsibilities of the existing Boards and Commissions Administrative Assistant position with the Clerk of Committees position into one role. Clerk Wells stated that combining these roles enables clerical support for the City Council’s upcoming budget season and bypasses the challenges of filling the Clerk of Committees role as a part-time hourly position. Clerk Wells stated that the requested funding would cover the salary of the Legislative Services Manager position for June 2024. She also stated that the new rate and classification of the position will be included in the fiscal year 2025 budget.

Chair Wilson asked if this involves hiring new staff, and Clerk Wells stated that this does not involve hiring, and instead reclassifies an existing position. Councilor Burnley asked what the total salary will be for the Legislative Services Manager, and Clerk Wells stated it will be approximately \$81,000. She stated that the funds are coming from the budget for the Clerk of Committees role.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Two City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr. and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

Appropriations

- 3. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0655](#))

Requesting the appropriation of \$250,000 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Law Department Legal Services Account for anticipated outside legal counsel invoices.

Solicitor Amara stated that the requested appropriation amount is an estimate from outside legal counsel, and that this estimate was based on prior invoices through March of this year. The requested amount is what the City's office anticipates needing to pay, primarily for attorney fees, and that the invoices are forthcoming. Solicitor Amara stated that the attorney fees are for various legal proceedings involving the City, including two ongoing eminent domain proceedings and some other matters. She stated that the appropriation request provides \$15,000 of buffer room so as to avoid returning with a supplemental appropriations request.

Solicitor Amara and Assistant Solicitor Lester Salchert provided an overview of some of the ongoing legal matters that are being funded through this request. There were questions by several Councilors regarding the background and status of the case involving 191 Highland Avenue, which is known as The Armory. The Solicitors stated that at present this case is headed to trial. The Solicitors also provided updates regarding other cases, which Councilors asked follow-up questions on. Several Councilors requested that moving forward, the Solicitor's office provides brief summaries of legal matters for which appropriations are being funded in advance of future meetings so as to ensure Councilors are informed about what is being funded and voted on.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Two City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr. and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

Bonding

4. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0644](#)) Requesting authorization to borrow \$3,010,000 in a bond, and to appropriate the same amount for the recurring FY 2024 Building Improvements program.

Director Richards stated that funding from this bond will go towards school building improvements, which bonds of this kind have gone towards for the past 3 years. This bond will supplement some existing authorizations for fiscal year 2022 and fiscal year 2023. Studies will determine exactly how the bond authorization will be allocated.

There was significant conversation regarding the allocation of funds. Councilor Scott and Councilor Sait asked exactly what projects the funding will go towards, and both Councilors expressed concerns regarding authorizing the funding before knowing what it will be used for specifically. Councilor Sait expressed concerns regarding funding repairs that may need to be redone. Chair Wilson expressed concerns with repairs that increase fossil fuel dependence and emphasized the importance of decarbonizing.

Director Raiche stated that authorization for the bond is being requested now while the process for determining allocation of funds is still underway because of the urgency of the school building repairs. He stated that the City does not have the luxury of waiting to appropriate this money. Instead, he said the City must move in and do repairs as soon as possible in order to keep the school buildings operational.

Director Raiche also stated that a \$3,010,000 bond is far below the actual amount of money required to address the school maintenance backlog. Director Raiche stated that a new chiller alone costs approximately \$4.5 million dollars, and that bonds from previous years will help the City afford this. Additionally, he stated that they have been budgeting around the requested \$3,010,000 bond authorization amount in the Capital Plan for a long time. Councilor Clingan suggested developing a regular mechanism of communication for school building maintenance updates.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Two City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr. and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

Grant and Gift Acceptances

5. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0643](#)) Requesting approval to accept and expend a \$50,000 grant with no new match required from Home Energy Efficiency Team, Inc. to the Office of Sustainability and Environment for a feasibility study to identify potential locations for geothermal networks.

Chair Wilson stated that a memo from OSE is attached to this item explaining the background of this request and is available to the public. Chair Wilson also stated that he hopes geothermal networks could be installed at Central Hill given the high school and municipal buildings in

that area, and that he hopes the rocky terrain does not deter consideration of the feasibility of this location.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Two City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr. and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

6. Mayor's Request
(ID # [24-0669](#))

Requesting approval to accept and expend an up to \$60,000 grant with no new match required, from the Low Income Housing Water Assistance Program through the City of Cambridge to the Water and Sewer Department for income eligible ratepayers who are directly billed for their service(s) and who have an arrearage.

Director Vidalis stated that the City has received \$47,590.25 from Cambridge for the program, and money is used to pay past due amounts on eligible households' bills. The request is for up to \$60,000 because the City is still awaiting one more check from Cambridge. This program has been able to assist 146 households among people who were eligible and applied.

Chair Wilson noted that this program is difficult to qualify for, and asked Director Vidalis to comment on the eligibility requirements. Director Vidalis did not recall the eligibility requirements but stated that it was a temporary federally funded program that is now closed. He said they are looking into making it a permanent program in the future, but applications are no longer being accepted at this time.

Councilor Scott conveyed his longstanding desire for a relief program, and asked how many households received assistance among all that applied. Director Vidalis stated that 146 households received assistance, but he does not know how many households applied. Councilor Scott stated that he would like to see a more robust relief program, but that he is glad some families received assistance.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Two City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr. and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

7. Mayor's Request
(ID # [24-0666](#))

Requesting approval to accept and expend a \$28,000 grant with no new match required, from Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection to the Department of Public Works for the Recycle Dividend Program.

Director Spurr-Knight stated that municipalities receive payment for participating in this program, and that the City is receiving \$28,000 as well as an additional \$4,573.32, but that tonight's request is only for the \$28,000. She stated that grant money that is received is channeled back into the City's recycling program, such as through recycling cards.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Two City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr. and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

Transfers

8. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0668](#)) Requesting approval of a transfer of \$80,000 from the Department of Public Works (DPW) Lights & Lines accounts to the DPW Grounds Professional and Technical account to cover year-end grounds maintenance expenses.
- Director Spurr-Knight stated that the Grounds budget currently has under \$20,000 in available cash and requires additional funding to deal with the extensive rain and grass during this time of year. The Lights & Lines account did not have capacity to support this spending, but the more recent contract with Pine Ridge does have capacity. Director Spurr-Knight stated that the contract with Pine Ridge is for one year, with the option to extend for two additional years and that it is up to the City to extend. Councilor Scott requested a comparison of the two contracts.
- RESULT:** **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
- AYE:** City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Two City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr. and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

Prior Year Invoices

9. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0660](#)) Requesting approval to pay prior year invoices totaling \$70 using available funds in the Department of Public Works Fleet Division R&M Vehicles account for vehicle inspection invoices.
- Director Spurr-Knight stated that the DPW did not have invoices from the vendor until recently and that her office is changing their account reconciliation process to catch prior year invoice issues moving forward.
- RESULT:** **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
- AYE:** City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Two City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr. and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan
10. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0661](#)) Requesting approval to pay prior year invoices totaling \$7,075 using available funds in the Department of Public Works Buildings Division Rental Buildings account for portable restroom rental services.
- Director Spurr-Knight stated that these invoices are from October 2021 through July 2022. They were being sent to the incorrect department and were merged with the Parks and Recreation Department's invoices. Manager Tavico was able to help reconcile these invoices and ensure they are valid. The next step is getting the invoices paid, thus necessitating this request for approval.
- RESULT:** **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Two City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr. and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

11. Mayor's Request
(ID # [24-0627](#))

Requesting approval to pay prior year invoices totaling \$32,695 using available funds in the Parks and Recreation Building Rental account for portable invoices.

Finance Manager Tavico stated that there was a transition period in which accounts were going from Parks and Recreation to DPW, but that she worked closely with the vendor and with DPW to resolve this. Manager Tavico further stated that moving forward DPW is taking responsibility for these invoices.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Two City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr. and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

Referenced Documents:

- Finance - 2024-05-21 HEET Grant Memo (with 24-0643)