



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council

Meeting Minutes

Monday, May 5, 2025

7:00 PM

Special Meeting

NOTICE: This is NOT the official version of the City Council's minutes. While reasonable efforts have been made to assure the accuracy of the data provided, do not rely on this information without first checking with the City Clerk.

1. OPENING CEREMONIES

Present: City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson
Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen
Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott
Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin
City Councilor At Large Willie Burnley Jr.
Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait
City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo
Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan
Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis
Ward Seven City Councilor Judy Pineda Neufeld

Absent: City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM by Ward Six City Councilor Lance Davis.
Councilor Pineda Neufeld arrived at 8:04 PM and assumed the chair.

- 1.1. Roll Call Call of the Roll.
(ID # [25-0870](#))

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

2. CITATIONS

3. PUBLIC HEARINGS

4. ORDERS, ORDINANCES, RESOLUTIONS AND MOTIONS OF MEMBERS

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- 5.1. Order By Councilor McLaughlin
(ID # [25-0742](#)) That the City Solicitor appear before this City Council to discuss the
proposed Charter currently in the Mayor's office and update this Council on
its progress.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., Ward Five City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Mbah, and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

5.2. Home Rule
Petition
(ID # [25-0774](#))

By Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor McLaughlin and Councilor Davis
Proposing a Home Rule Petition to establish a charter for the City of
Somerville.

Councilor Scott assumed the Chair to allow President Davis to speak on the item. Councilor Davis noted that there was still some ambiguity with Section 3-5 (b) and the section's interaction with Section 2-8 (a) relative to appointments.

Councilor Davis moved to amend Section 3-5 (b) by inserting "and the provisions of such 2-8 (a) shall apply to both an appointment and reappointment" before the previously inserted and adopted amendment "provided however that a reappointment shall not be rejected except by negative vote of 8 members of the city council." The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 9 in favor (Wilson, Ewen-Campen, Scott, McLaughlin, Burnley, Sait, Strezo, Clingan, Davis), 0 opposed, 2 absent (Mbah, Pineda Neufeld).

Councilor Davis commented that he shares the frustration felt by some councilors during the process of negotiating a revised charter and with the inability of the Council to obtain a larger share of power, due largely to Somerville's form of government. He stated that he does not support the 4-year term question to be on the ballot but he accepts that the Council approved it, adding that he considers it a win with respect to the city attorney's position.

Councilor Burnley spoke about the City Council changing its mind on items in the past and Councilor Sait commented that, although Councilors Scott's amendments are important, this is about the 4-year term for the mayor. Councilor Ewen-Campen noted that the proposed charter is a major improvement over the one in use today and said that he's happy with the outcome. Councilor Scott stated that he is proud of the process and engagement of colleagues but disappointed that it fell apart in the last 7 days. Councilor McLaughlin pointed out that the Home Rule Petition still needs to be signed by the mayor and make it through the state house in time to be included on the ballot by November. He remarked that the proposed charter is a huge gain for the City Council and for the city.

Councilor Clingan gave credit to the Charter Review Committee for their work and said that he believes that Beacon Hill does not have the appetite for certain things. Liaison Hutter told the Council that the mayor's office is grateful for the Council's work on this matter.

Following approval of the item as amended, Councilor Ewen-Campen moved for reconsideration. The motion was not approved on a roll call vote of 0 in favor, 10 opposed (Wilson, Ewen-Campen, Scott, McLaughlin, Burnley, Sait, Strezo, Clingan, Davis, Pineda Neufeld), 1 absent (Mbah).

RESULT: **APPROVED AS AMENDED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., Ward Five City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward Six City Councilor Davis, and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

NAY: Ward Two City Councilor Scott

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Mbah

- 5.3. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-0853](#)) Requesting approval of a Home Rule Petition to establish a charter for the City of Somerville.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward Six City Councilor Davis, and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Mbah, and City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr.

- 6. **REPORTS OF COMMITTEES**
- 7. **COMMUNICATIONS OF THE MAYOR**
- 8. **COMMUNICATIONS OF CITY OFFICERS**
- 9. **NEW BUSINESS**
- 10. **SUPPLEMENTAL ITEMS**

- 10.1. Order (ID # [25-0909](#)) By Councilor Scott
That the proposed Charter be amended relative to providing legal counsel for the City Council by inserting a new section placing the question on the ballot.

Councilor Scott withdrew this item.

RESULT: **WITHDRAWN**

10.2. Order
(ID # [25-0910](#))

By Councilor Scott

That the proposed Charter be amended relative to the inclusion of the Chief Administrative Officer as a Charter office by inserting a new section placing the question on the ballot.

Councilor Scott stated that he was introducing a number of items to be placed before the voters for approval, saying that procedures matter and that a compelling argument was made a few weeks ago at another City Council meeting to not fast track ballot questions. He told his colleagues that legislative responsibility should not be abdicated, and he acknowledged that the implicit threat is that without the ballot issue regarding to the 4-year term for the mayor being tacked onto the charter, the charter reform process will take longer. He stated that if the Council agrees to remove that particular amendment and not place the question on the ballot, he will remove his proposed amendments.

Councilor Ewen-Campen stated that he does not want to vote to reconsider the vote taken last week on that amendment and that he wants to pass the charter without further amendments since these were already approved by the Council and the mayor. He said that the sticking point is the term length for the mayor and he feels this should be a ballot question, but he does not support the other amendments being proposed by Councilor Scott tonight. Councilor Clingan agreed with Councilor Ewen-Campen and said that this compromise is the only path to success. Councilor Burnley commented that the mayor's office held up the charter to build in less accountability for themselves and that by allowing the mayor to put forth the ballot question, he believes that the Council is not in agreement and just gave in, as it has done repeatedly. He said that constituents want the City Council to be able to re-allocate funds to specific areas. He then spoke about the behavior of some councilors during meetings and how that manner of behavior has been allowed to continue. At this point, President Davis reminded Councilor Burnley to keep his comments to the matter currently being discussed. Councilor Burnley said that he would like to take up Councilor Scott's amendments individually.

Councilor McLaughlin stated his readiness to vote, saying that he will not support Councilor Scott's amendments and that if the Council did vote to approve them, he feels that some of them would be deal-breakers for the mayor. He noted that the state legislature will have to decide on the Home Rule Petition and that they most likely won't bother with it if it contains multiple items to be decided by the voters. He also stated that the proposed charter gives the City Council power and the mayor only gets the possibility of a 4-year term.

Councilor Scott assumed the Chair to allow President Davis to speak on the item. Councilor Davis said that he agrees with the process objections that Councilor Scott has and that from his perspective, the difference between the 4-year term item and Councilor Scott's items is that they (Councilor Scott's) will raise red flags on Beacon Hill, therefore, he won't support Councilor Scott's items. Councilor Davis then assumed the Chair.

Councilor Burnley encouraged colleagues to consider if they would support the charter with this contentious language, saying that it's a document that should have unanimous support, as it did. He stated that he was surprised to see that the mayor rejected it and sent back it with changes that were then approved by the Council even though the Council had previously rejected them.

Councilor Scott then spoke regarding the Chief Administrative Officer saying that the position was created by the mayor and that it is still a matter of controversy. He recounted that the City Council was divided and very nearly eliminated the position last year, yet it voted to enshrine the position in the proposed charter.

RESULT: **NOT APPROVED**

AYE: Ward Two City Councilor Scott, and City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr.

NAY: City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward Six City Councilor Davis, and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Mbah

10.3. Order
(ID # [25-0911](#))

By Councilor Scott

That the proposed Charter be amended relative to the City Council authority to redirect budget funds by inserting a new section placing the question on the ballot.

Councilor Scott noted that some of the impetus for charter reform was to revise the balance of power in the city and he recalled an incident where the Council favored funding a program which the mayor ultimately failed to fund. Councilor Burnley reiterated that a shift in the balance of power has been supported by the City Council in the past and he sees no reason to concede the issue to the mayor. Councilor Wilson commented that putting this ballot question language into the charter would amount to giving it a poison pill.

RESULT: **NOT APPROVED**

AYE: Ward Two City Councilor Scott, and City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr.

NAY: City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward Six City Councilor Davis, and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Mbah

10.4. Order
(ID # [25-0912](#))

By Councilor Scott

That the proposed Charter be amended relative to reducing the voting age in municipal elections by inserting a new section placing the question on the ballot.

Councilor Scott commented that this amendment was a recommendation of the Charter Review Committee, however, some councilors believed that it might prevent the Home Rule Petition (HRP) from getting through Beacon Hill's legislative process. Councilor Burnley pointed out that the City Council previously supported lowering the voting age but then backtracked. Councilors Ewen-Campen and Clingan noted that said HRPs regarding reducing the voting age have been passed multiple times by the Council, but at this point, it should not be an obstruction to passing the charter.

RESULT: **NOT APPROVED**

AYE: Ward Two City Councilor Scott, and City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr.

NAY: City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward Six City Councilor Davis, and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Mbah

10.5. Order
(ID # [25-0913](#))

By Councilor Scott

That the proposed Charter be amended relative to extending municipal voting rights to non-citizen residents by inserting a new section placing the question on the ballot.

Items #25-0913, #25-0914 and #25-0915 were discussed together. Councilor Scott commented that these items have broad community support. President Pineda Neufeld joined meeting and assumed the Chair. Councilor Burnley stated that he thinks non-citizens should have the right to vote and have a voice in local government. Councilor Scott acknowledged Councilor Burnley's frustration and commented that he appreciates the trust of his colleagues to call a fair game in this charter process.

RESULT: **NOT APPROVED**

AYE: Ward Two City Councilor Scott, and City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr.

NAY: City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward Six City Councilor Davis, and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Mbah

10.6. Order
(ID # [25-0914](#))

By Councilor Scott

That the proposed Charter be amended relative to utilizing ranked choice voting for single-occupant offices by inserting a new section placing the question on the ballot.

Items #25-0913, #25-0914 and #25-0915 were discussed together.

RESULT: **NOT APPROVED**

AYE: Ward Two City Councilor Scott, and City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr.

NAY: City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward Six City Councilor Davis, and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Mbah

10.7. Order
(ID # [25-0915](#))

By Councilor Scott

That the proposed Charter be amended relative to expanding public availability of the annual budget by inserting a new section placing the question on the ballot.

Items #25-0913, #25-0914 and #25-0915 were discussed together.

RESULT: **NOT APPROVED**

AYE: Ward Two City Councilor Scott, and City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr.

NAY: City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward Six City Councilor Davis, and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Mbah

11. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was Adjourned at 8:29 PM on a roll call vote of 9 in favor (Wilson, Ewen-Campen, Scott, McLaughlin, Sait, Strezo, Clingan, Davis Pineda Neufeld), 0 opposed, 2 absent (Mbah, Burnley).