



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, November 30, 2023

7:00 PM

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

This meeting was held in the City Council Chamber and via Zoom for remote participation, and was called to order by Chair Pineda Neufeld at 7:03 p.m. and adjourned at 10:36 p.m.

The Committee entered into recess at 8:55 p.m. and reconvened at 9:05 p.m.

Others present:

Michael Potere – Assistant Clerk of Committees; Denise Molina Capers – Director of Racial and Social Justice; Cassandra Deck-Brown – Consultant, Raftelis; Jonathan Ingram – Senior Manager, Raftelis; Charles Femino – Chief of Police, City of Somerville.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Judy Pineda Neufeld, Vice Chair Jesse Clingan, Willie Burnley Jr., Kristen Strezo, Jake Wilson, Ben Ewen-Campen, Beatriz Gomez Mouakad, Charlotte Kelly and Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott

Absent: Lance L. Davis and Matthew McLaughlin

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-1648](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters Committee Meeting of November 1, 2023.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

2. Officer's Communication (ID # [23-1734](#)) Director of the Department of Racial and Social Justice conveying the Police Department Staffing and Operations Analysis.

This Item was taken together with Item 3 (ID # 22-1844).

Director Molina Capers introduced Jonathan Ingram and Cassandra Deck-Brown of Raftelis Financial Consultants, Inc., who presented a slideshow that is attached to this Item.

Councilor Wilson asked if traffic enforcement was considered during the study, and Ingram responded that it was, but in the context of patrol officer staffing.

Councilor Kelly asked about the definition of “proactive policing,” and

Ingram replied that it includes officers initiating activity and building community relationships.

Councilor Kelly asked about the meaning of “best practices,” and Ingram replied that they are derived from examples of what has worked in other communities, institutional knowledge that is often derived from various national organizations, and experience gained in Raftelis’s own organization.

Councilor Kelly asked from what period of time was the department vacancy data gathered, and Ingram stated March 2022, to which Councilor Kelly replied that there are currently fewer vacancies than discussed in the report.

Councilor Kelly asked why the report calls for adding ten additional patrol positions, and Ingram replied that doing so would cover unexpected absences and department turnover, and the number is based, in part, on the requirement that patrols need to be staffed 24 hours per day.

Councilor Kelly asked about traffic enforcement, and Ingram replied that one of the considerations in recommending additional patrol officers would be to allow capacity for traffic enforcement.

Councilor Kelly asked when the police department should be making staffing decisions and when those decisions should be left to an independent body, and Ingram replied that anytime a decision is made regarding police department staffing, the department itself should be involved given its institutional knowledge of the city’s public safety requirements.

Councilor Gomez Mouakad emphasized the importance of considering immigrant and other communities when determining both appropriate staffing levels and diversity in hiring for the police department, as well as for the types of training provided and community interactions the officers engage in.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked if the staffing recommendations in the report would alleviate some of the forced overtime issues the city has experienced, and Ingram replied that would be an issue handled in the negotiation of the department’s collective bargaining agreement.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked if a future unarmed first response force should be located inside or outside of the existing police department, and Ingram recommended that it be located within the police department to take advantage of the department’s hierarchy and institutional knowledge of the city’s public safety needs and patterns.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked about additional evidence of the benefits of community policing, and Ingram replied that such evidence is difficult to

conceptualize empirically, but that the overall idea is that community policing increases positive interactions between officers and community members.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked about whether or not a civilian police oversight body should have formal authority, and Ingram replied that the main issue with that becomes the disciplinary aspect of that body and where the power to allocate that power.

Councilor Scott asked if the Council would be able to contact Ingram or Deck-Brown for follow-up questions, given the limited amount of time they had to review the report prior to the meeting, and Ingram replied that the Councilors would receive the Implementation Plan next week, which will conclude their work.

Councilor Scott asked about the need for staffing overnight and the definition of “severe incident response,” and Ingram replied that the term means “imminent threat to life and property,” and that numerous factors are considered when determined appropriate levels of overnight staffing, such as traffic and travel distance.

Councilor Scott asked about the optimal ratio of supervisory officer to patrol officer, and Ingram said around one supervisor for every six or seven patrol officers, with that metric requiring evaluation as the needs and population of the city change, as well as based on the specific tasks the patrol officers are required to do, with a smaller ratio required for more complex tasks.

Councilor Burnley stated that “public safety” and “policing” are not synonyms, that the Council itself will be limited in its ability to respond to a number of the recommendations due to the police department’s collective bargaining agreement, and expressed strong concern that community-based alternatives to policing were not given more discussion in the report.

Councilor Clingan expressed satisfaction with the quality of the report.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked about the information on which the forthcoming implementation plan will be based, and Ingram replied that it will contain steps for the city to adopt the recommendations contained within the report.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked about the ways in which a Community Service Officer (CSO) Unit would function in conjunction with the Community Outreach, Help, and Recovery (COHR) team, and Ingram replied that one way it could work would be with a Call Response Model, which is when both an officer and a mental health professional respond to certain calls. Ingram also noted that doing so can increase the duration of these types of calls, at which point the city itself would need look to its needs to determine how to create a CSO Unit and allocate resources thereto. Deck-Brown

added that the CSO Unit can be modified after it has been created to continue adapting to changes in community needs.

Chair Pineda Neufeld asked about whether managing crossing guards should be located within the police department or if the position could be civilianized, and Deck-Brown replied that the city should conduct a cost-benefit analysis to determine what works best, as some communities even hire outside contractors to fulfill their crossing guard needs.

Councilor Wilson asked for clarification regarding the reported number of patrol officers, and Chief Femino replied that the 88-officer figure is what is authorized and funded, and the 46 figure represents patrol officers who are primarily assigned to patrol cars.

Councilor Wilson asked about the definition of a “call for service for a directed patrol,” and Ingram replied that those are calls for service initiated by officers in the field, as opposed to calls for service initiated by a 911 call.

Councilor Gomez Mouakad asked about the technical implementation of a CSO Unit, and Deck-Brown provided a brief list of steps: engage with stakeholders who have expertise in mental health to explore options for policy implementation, leverage those stakeholders and experts to conduct training, consider what equipment is necessary, begin the process of hiring the social workers who would accompany police officers on these calls, then ensure that certain calls are properly coded so the CSO is deployed when needed and that the right people are sent in response to these types of calls.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

3. Order
(ID # [22-1844](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad
That the Director of Racial and Social Justice provide an update on the Police Staffing Report.

This Item was taken together with Item 2 (ID # 23-1734).

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

- C of APM - 2023-11-30 Somerville Final Report Presentation (with 23-1734)
- C of APM - 2023-11-30 Somerville Police Staffing Final Report (with 22-1844, 23-1734)