



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

June 8, 2022
REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Jake Wilson	Chair	Present	
Jefferson Thomas ("J.T.") Scott	Vice Chair	Present	
Beatriz GomezMouakad	Ward Five City Councilor	Present	
Judy PinedaNeufeld	Ward Seven City Councilor	Present	
Charlotte Kelly	City Councilor At Large	Present	

This meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Wilson at 6:02 pm and adjourned at 12:07 am. Councilor Gomez Mouakad moved to adjourn, and the motion was passed by unanimous roll call vote. A recess was taken at 9:40 pm and ended at 9:45 pm.

Others present:

Hannah Carrillo - Mayor's Office, Michael Mastrobuoni - Auditing, Nikki Spencer - Mayor's Office, Anna Gartsman - SomerStat, Rebecca Cooper - SomerStat, Gregory Jenkins - Arts Council, Nicholas Salerno - Elections, Megan Arruda - Elections, Maria Pierotti - Elections, Christine Blais - OSE, Vithal Desphande - OSE, Erik Larson - OSE, Erica Mace - Communications, Dan Moore - Communications, Maria Nagel - SomerViva, Meredith Gamble - SomerViva, Steve Craig - Constituent Services, Elena Viveiros - Constituent Services, Elisabete Baker - Constituent Services, Steven DeCarlo - City Cable, David Slonina - IT, David Goodridge - IT, Stephanie Widzowski - Assistant Clerk of Committees.

Executive Administration Chief of Staff Spencer reviewed this year's proposed budget changes for Executive Administration, highlighting a 10% increase in budget reflective of pre-pandemic spending levels. The budget also has funding for two new positions: Chief Administrative Officer - which will focus on day-to-day operations and improving city systems - and an additional Legislative Liaison position. Summer youth employment also increased 88% due to overwhelming demand. There is less need for temporary positions in the department now because the charter review process is drawing to a close.

Councilor Scott asked for the encumbrances from the Administration - that is, funds set aside at the beginning of the year to keep the department from overspending. Ms. Spencer said that she is working to make those available and would follow up.

Councilor Scott moved to reduce the personal services line of the Executive Administration budget by \$173,000. Chair Wilson laid the motion on the table until cut night.

SomerStat Dir. Gartsman said that personal services are increasing 2% this year, and ordinary maintenance changes are increasing by \$50,000 to account for the happiness survey and training software. There was discussion around the happiness survey and how to make it more accessible -for example, including more translations, adding important demographic questions, and ensuring that surveys are delivered and received. The committee also discussed how SomerStat planned to use more of its budget this year and address vacant positions. The process for vacant positions was delayed until Dir. Gartsman joined, and SomerStat now plans to post those as soon as possible.

Arts Council Dir. Jenkins said that the Arts Council budget remains largely the same as last year, though there is a new position in the budget for the Art Space Manager. Councilor Scott praised the Arts Council for using all of the funds they requested as well as doing good programming. Dir. Jenkins said that the previous administration gave the Arts Council \$1.1 million in free cash that they distributed through in-person and virtual events. Long-standing staff is another key to their success.

Dir. Jenkins also talked about the art spaces risk assessment that examined 2019 zoning and development and concluded with nine key points to strengthen art spaces. He said the city needs a need analysis, especially for marginalized communities.

Elections Commissioner Salerno talked about the success of two municipal elections this year, including early voting and mail-in voting, but that the state gave them very late notice and it was difficult to prepare quickly enough. He said that the FY23 budget is increasing both in personal services and ordinary maintenance. Councilor Kelly asked how the additional clerk position would help with operations. Commissioner Salerno answered that their department has been stretched thin lately and could use more resources, especially for early voting. He also explained the increased overtime is due to repeated mailings that require a lot of overtime.

Office of Sustainability & Environment Dir. Blais said that personal services are increasing 29% this year, and the budget includes two new positions with job descriptions. Ordinary maintenance is up over 300% this year to address immediate and pressing community needs related to a Climate Forward update and greenhouse gas inventory and emission analysis. Dir. Blais added that normally, these items happen in different years, so part of the reason for the large spike in budget this year is because they are all happening at once. The budget includes a zero waste plan, funds for the Community Engagement Specialist position, and consultant recommendations for buildings and transportation. Councilor Scott requested documentation on the \$22,000 encumbrance in writing. Councilor Kelly noted that OSE was unable to spend all of its budget last year and asked for confirmation on how OSE will use the funds this year. Dir. Blais said that part of the reason for unused funds in FY22 was because four of the five positions in the department are being filled with new hires.

Communications & Community Engagement Mr. Moore explained that increases in CCE's budget are primarily to support city website improvements and the creation of a division of web services. Cambridge has a three-person web development team, and Boston's is fifteen, but Somerville has only one person devoted to web development. They are facing a bottleneck in trying to make updates that a larger staff capacity would address. CCE is requesting funds for two new full-time positions: a Web Content Administrator and a Web Content Writer to help with accessibility and engagement. There is also a

department-wide request for a financial analyst.

Councilor Kelly asked why CCE spent more than it was funded in FY22; Mr. Moore said that Dir. Taylor would need to speak to that. Councilor Scott asked for documentation for the encumbrances in the budget. There was also discussion around the need for technical support during hybrid meetings.

Constituent Services Ms. Viveiros said that 311 has started to include in the last few years testing, vaccination support, and housing assistance resources, and they have seen an overall increase in the number of requests, especially from seniors, in finding resources or getting assistance with applications. FY21 was an all-time high for calls, and FY22 is still above historical norms. Ms. Baker added that they cannot sustain a high level of quality service if they do not get support. They have partnered with IT and SomerStat to leverage existing infrastructure, and they are also allocating for a full-time system administrator to maintain and oversee technical investments.

The committee discussed the status of various positions, how they are funded, and when they are scheduled to start. Dir. Craig said that there are several vacant customer service representative positions that have been posted and are moving to the Q&A stage. He said they may be able to meet the deadline for hiring if they can find an internal candidate, but if they need to do an external search, it may cause delays.

SomerViva Dir. Nagel said that SomerViva's proposed budget is increasing 80% from last year. The 87% personal services increase reflects last year's appropriation request to greatly increase staff capacity. Dir. Nagel also said that ARPA is funding 12 part-time outreach workers and 2 full-time support workers continuing this year. The 58% increase in ordinary maintenance reflects training for new staff around engagement and interpretation. Dir. Gamble added that the professional/technical services line increases are to cover interpretation equipment, referrals, vendors for events that require technical expertise, and interpretation services for boards and commissions. The ordinary maintenance line also includes translation services for City Council and software for improved long-term translation.

Councilor Scott moved that a line item be specifically added to ensure all City meetings be hosted in an online platform that enables interpretation support. Councilor Gomez Mouakad proposed an amendment adding "for all city meetings open to the public". **The final motion text is: "that a line item be specifically added to ensure all City meetings open to the public be hosted in an online platform that enables interpretation support."** The motion was laid on the table for cut night.

PEG Access Dir. DeCarlo explained that Somerville City TV provides programming for two city TV stations, which make up two-thirds of the scope of PEG Access. Staff has added and adjusted programming through the pandemic, but the FY23 budget is largely the same as last year. Chair Wilson asked what PEG Access needs to make hybrid meetings in the chamber successful. Dir. DeCarlo said that hardwiring the monitors is preferable over a WiFi connection because that has been unreliable in the past. They also want to make web attendees visible and eliminate obstacles with audio. He said that they hope to get permission to transition to Zoom instead of using GoTo Webinar because it is more streamlined. However, it will be difficult to assess what funds are needed until the work is started.

There was discussion around funding for PEG Access from cable providers. Dir. DeCarlo

explained that they receive 5% of providers' revenue, but revenue has dropped sharply in the last few years.

Information Technology Dir. Goodridge explained that personal services increased 15% due to the addition of two support positions that will work with IT managers on applications. Ordinary maintenance is down 4% from last year due to the completion of recurring projects as well as some projects funded through ARPA.

Councilor Kelly asked how IT is addressing existing personnel vacancies. Dir. Goodridge said that there is one vacant position of IT Project Manager. They were not attracting applicants with the appropriate experience, so Dir. Slonina reworked the position description. They are working with a talent acquisition recruiter to determine how to get the applicants they need. Dir. Goodridge said that the new application support positions may help as well.