



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
CLERK OF COMMITTEES

September 8, 2020
REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Jefferson Thomas ("J.T.") Scott	Chair	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Vice Chair	Present	
William A. White Jr.	City Councilor At Large	Present	
Mary Jo Rossetti	City Councilor at Large	Present	
Wilfred N. Mbah	City Councilor at Large	Present	

Others present: Annie Connor-Mayor's Office, Khushbu Webber-Mayor's Office, Nick Antanavica-ISD, Tom Galligani-OSPCD, and Greg Jenkins-Arts Council. There were also several members of the artist and cultural community to address an email sent to the committee referenced in agenda item #24.

The meeting was held virtually and was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Chairperson Scott and adjourned at 8:16 p.m.

Approval of the June 29, 2020 Minutes

RESULT: ACCEPTED

Approval of the July 1, 2020 Minutes

RESULT: ACCEPTED

Approval of the July 2, 2020 Minutes

RESULT: ACCEPTED

Approval of the July 6, 2020 Minutes

RESULT: ACCEPTED

Approval of the July 7, 2020 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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Approval of the July 8, 2020 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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Approval of the July 9, 2020 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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Information Requests

209753: That the Director of Communications and the Director of Finance discuss all telecom contracts, their renewal, and how they affect the city budget, PEG, and the Somerville Media Center.

Councilor Ballantyne stated this was discussed during the budget hearing.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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209805: That the Administration present to this Council a more-detailed estimate of the cost of remediating Conway Field down to 36” rather than 18”, with a timeline for the additional digging and any other relevant information.

Ms. Connor is preparing a funding request for the council for the following council meeting and will request to come before the whole council or finance committee. Staff needed is not available at this time. The mayor would like to discuss remediation of the field. The chair would like a presentation to completely understand the funding request.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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209814: That the Director of Finance and the Director of Parks and Recreation advise this Council on the disposition of funds for the boat house.

There was a concern about the budget and Mr. Bean will come back to the committee to clarify the information.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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210302: That the Chief of Police report to this Council, no later than June 18, 2020 a description of any military equipment purchased or received as a federal grant, currently in the possession of the Police Department.

Ms. Connor stated the police department is working on this request and will be attending the finance meeting on the Sept. 22.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

210332: That the City Solicitor explain in writing prior to July 1, how Chapter 589 of the Acts of 1987, "An Act Relative to Dispute Resolution" may provide this Council with the ability to modify or reject components of collective bargaining agreements that reached an impasse and entered arbitration.

There was a written opinion from Chief Labor Counsel for Thursday's meeting as an official record. Ms. Connor will check with Chief Labor Counsel to see if she is available for Thursday's meeting and open for additional questions.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

210438: That the Director of Finance report to this Council, all actual state aid appropriations versus budgeted (anticipated) state aid.

Councilor Rossetti wanted to hear from Mr. Bean on this item. There was no written response and Mr. Bean will come to the meeting on September 22nd on this matter.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

210455: That the Chief of Police provide to this Council an itemized statement of all materials, tools, and property owned or leased by the City for use of the Police Department.

Ms. Connor stated that items 14 and 15 will be responded to on September 22.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

210456: That the Chief of Police provide to this Council an itemized statement of any equipment purchased on behalf of employees of the Police Department which became the individual employee's property.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

Policy Items

209490: Requesting approval of an annual Vacant Property Registration Fee of \$500.

Mr. Antanavica summarized previous discussions and have everything ready to go with forms ready on the citizen serve platform. Activating the registration would help the city know how many vacant properties are in the area. Mr. Galligani supports activating noted that due to the impact of COVID-19, there will be more vacancies throughout the city. Chair Scott suggested increasing the fee to \$1,000 and would like to see properties monitored more closely. Councilor Ballantyne asked what's the percentage of vacant properties and why they are vacant. Councilor Ballantyne believes \$1,000 may be a lot for property owners. She also stated the goal should be to get property owners to register their properties. It was stated that the Ordinance was passed previously and the fee would pertain to properties vacant for more than 90 days. Mr. Galligani stated the registration will help the city understand why the property may be vacant and if there

is anything the city can do to help. Councilor Rossetti remembers supporting this ordinance last February. She states that businesses in the next 90 days may be closing and does not feel comfortable charging businesses. For this ordinance, each case will be viewed separately, per Mr. Antanavica. Fee will be used to maintain the administration of the program. Councilor Rossetti stated she is not comfortable voting until she sees the written policy of this program. Councilor White is concerned about a number of restaurants that will close in the absence of a vaccine. He is also concerned about the charge of \$1,000. He, too, would like to see the policy written out to review by the city councilor to take COVID-19 into account. Councilor Mbah would also like to see a policy to make sure it's fair and equitable. The chair will work with Mr. Antanavica on the policy. Mr. Antanavica and Mr. Galligani will have a draft policy for the committee for the next meeting.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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209562: That the Director of Finance, or the appropriate department, consider raising the limit on assets seniors may claim to qualify for senior tax exemptions.

Mr. Bean was not available to attend this meeting. Councilor White would like a written response before the committee meeting.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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209567: That the City Treasurer, the Chief Assessor and the Director of Finance discuss with this Council the possibility of switching to bi-annual tax bills, and including a simple "explainer" with each bill.

Mr. Bean was not available to attend this meeting.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210004: That the Administration update this Council on opportunities to provide universal broadband internet access in Somerville.

Ms. Connor has not received a response from the school department and will provide a written response as soon as it becomes available. The chair also asked if someone from the Taskforce could come to the meeting to update the committee re: broadband internet.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210221: That the Director of Finance discuss providing small businesses the option to pay the Licensing Commission's annual license renewal fees in installments instead of all at once.

Mr. Bean was not available to attend this meeting. Councilor Rossetti would like this discussed at the next meeting.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210483: That the Administration consider relief for local small businesses as it relates to their annual renewal of licenses and associated fees.

Mr. Bean was not available to attend this meeting. Councilor Rossetti would like this discussed at the next meeting.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210358: That the Mayor move the Rodent Home Assistance Program from the Department of Inspectional Services to the Department of Health and Human Services to streamline rodent assistance for neighbors.

Mr. Antanavica states there is a monthly meeting. They have moved forward with demolition procedures and obtained additional services from the rodent control. Ms. Connor stated they are finalizing the IPM plan and will be distributing to the council. Mr. Antanavica stated the renewal of annual rodent control contract had to go out to bid this year and added additional criteria like record keeping, coordination and methods used. Councilor Rossetti asked Mr. Anatanavica to send in writing the new process and control for rodent control.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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210229: That the Chief of Police prohibit the purchase and use of military technology and eliminate any military stockpiles the department currently has.

Ms. Connor states the chief of police has discussed with the mayor and will be discussed at the September 22nd.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210458: That the Director of Finance and the Director of the Arts Council discuss with this Council's Finance Committee several suggestions for assistance proposed by a group of Somerville arts and cultural organizations.

Councilor Ballantyne introduced the item and invited Mr. Jenkins to respond to this item. Looking at all the revenue streams for local community to make possible ways for funding. Several members of the artist and cultural community submitted an email on July 21st suggesting some areas to help non-profit businesses. Five of the non-profit arts members were sponsored by Councilor Ballantyne to share their thoughts with the committee.

1. Lynn Gervens from Mudflats Studios - Started a meeting over the summer to discuss arts in Somerville. First point was to discuss how to allocate federal/state local money to arts and cultures in Somerville. Boston cultural councilor has distributed funds to individual arts for the artist relief funds. Cambridge is also doing the same thing for local arts.

Mr. Jenkins sent an email and was also in attendance tonight to respond to requests. There are a couple of things that the arts council will be using programming money to create 2 grant categories. The arts council is also initiating a fellowship and project grant categories, as well. The mayor and staff are looking into CARES funds money and how much can be allocated to support the cultural sector which will be discussed in a meeting tomorrow. OSPCD is also

exploring an opportunity if community block grant money could be allocated towards cultural non-profit.

Councilor Ballantyne asked if the CDBG funds could be used for local non-profit businesses as it relates to arts culture.

Mr. Galligani spoke to CDBG and COVID-19 funds to support small businesses. Some of the requirements outlined in CDBG are a little restrictive for small businesses. Funds are directed to provide benefits to low- and moderate-income people. Mr. Galligani will follow up with the City of Lynn to find out how they are using their CDBG funds and if it can be used creatively for the arts culture.

2. Lois Bennett asked about property tax abatement for local artists and to pass on the savings from water and property type provisions. This will be very helpful to the artists who are struggling.

Mr. Jenkins stated there are complexities relating to tax abatement exemptions. Additionally, Mr. Jenkins stated that 95% of arts community are leasing from commercial development who are paying commercial taxes. This type of request would have to go before the city assessor's office and city council.

Chair Scott suggested the city assessor provide feedback and may need a Home Rule Petition for this type of request.

Councilor Ballantyne will put in a separate order for this request.

3. Stephanie Scherpf from the Arts at the Armory spoke on permitting. Her organization needs approximately \$150k for the next 10 months. She emphasized how urgent it is to have these talks and she may need to close her business October 1 if do not receive any assistance. Ms. Scherpf suggested temporarily relaxing permitting to use outdoor space similarly to restaurants.

Mr. Jenkins acknowledged the hardship and complexity in the arts and cultural and business sector due to COVID-19. Places with arts classes will be able to reopen. He has been meeting with this group since April. Currently the administration is not allowing outdoor public events to take place.

Mr. Antanavica was asked about the state of affairs for outdoor performances. Phase 3.1 opening will be able to resume businesses. The city is slowly allowing activities to resume such as art classes. He and Mr. Galligani will work with the artists in Somerville to look at different ways to assist the artist community.

Ms. Webber stated there is a town hall meeting scheduled for next week for arts and cultural sector to discuss these issues.

4. Susan Berstler from the Naïve Gallery. Spoke on the need to create more stable and permanent art spaces. Additionally, there is an immediate action needed to address the artist studio spaces with some closing and some who cannot afford to stay.

5. Emily Lilienthal from Mass Creative works to help build power in the community. She is also a resident of Somerville. She asked how can the city continue to have a dialogue with the arts and culture community to help make sure the community survives COVID-19.

Councilor Ballantyne will continue to follow up with Stephanie Scherpf and the city will discuss possibilities at the town hall meeting next week September 15 at 6:30 pm search the city's website <https://www.somervillema.gov/events/2020/09/15/arts-community-town-hall>. The presenters can also contact the city councilors directly.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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COVID Finance Updates

210035: That the Director of Finance update this Council on all money received to date related to the COVID-19 situation.

Mr. Bean was not able to attend tonight's meeting.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210036: That the Director of Finance update this Council on all expenditures, encumbrances and anticipated expenses to date related to the COVID-19 situation.

Mr. Bean was not able to attend tonight's meeting.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210117: That the Director of Finance provide a written rolling cash flow analysis every 2 weeks during this COVID-19 emergency and include forecasts to ensure sufficient operating liquidity by estimating the available cash deposits, expected inflows, and required disbursements.

Mr. Bean was not able to attend tonight's meeting.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Housekeeping Items

210220: That the Director of Finance and the Budget Director provide funding equity for girls in the FY21 budget with respect to Parks and Recreation Department sports and activities as well as High School varsity sports and activities.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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210252: That the Director of Finance submit to this Council by June 17, 2020, an updated FY21 Capital Projects Plan, taking into account the Administration's freeze on all capital projects during the COVID-19 health emergency.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

210253: That the Director of Finance submit to this Council, a list of all anticipated new and renewal contracts to be signed in July 2020.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

210292: That the Chief of Police or the Director of Personnel report to this Council, no later than June 18, the number and rank of all sworn officers and civilian employees (including job titles) in the Police Department, yearly from 1987 to 2020.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

210293: That the Chief of Police verify whether the Marshall Project website's report that the Police Department received 26 5.56 millimeter rifles worth \$4,257 from the federal government is accurate, whether those rifles are currently in the Department's possession, and what their purpose and potential use is.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

209815: That the Director of SPCD provide a comprehensive description of DIF funds and uses on projects in Assembly Square and independently by FRIT.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

209816: That the Director of SPCD provide this Council with the terms of the recent approval of the State's I-Cubed bonds at Assembly Square to FRIT, including any changes from what the Board of Aldermen approved.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

210305: That the Director of Finance and Director of Budgeting update and submit the 10-year budget forecast in preparation for the FY21 budget review.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

210342: That the Director of Finance address the Finance Committee on the status of the Central Hill bond appropriation, and whether it should be reduced by \$206,000 as a result of applying CPA funds to the project.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

210441: Requesting approval to appropriate \$170,000 from the Union Sq Community Benefits Stabilization Fund to fund a Main Streets Small Business Liaison and job placement and career navigation services for residents.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

Handouts:

- Law Dept Response (with 210332)
- Response to #210458 re Arts funding 9.4.20 (with 210458)