



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

CLERK OF COMMITTEES

June 16, 2021
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: Anne Gill - Personnel, Barbara Brown - Personnel, Renee Mello - Personnel, George Proakis - OSPSCS, Ellen Shachter - OSPCD, Michael Feloney - OSPCD,, Sarah Lewis - OSPCD, Tom Galligani - OSPCD, Alan Inacio - OSPCD, Brad Rawson - OSPCD, Luisa Oliveira - OSPCD, Mike Mastrobuoni - SomerStat, Ed Bean - Finance, Lauren Racaniello - Director of Legislative Affairs, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:02 PM by Chair Scott and adjourned at 10:34 PM on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors White, Rossetti, Mbah, Ballantyne and Scott), 0 against and 0 absent.

1. Review of the FY-22 Budget

Chair Scott informed the audience that the FY-22 Budget information is available at www.somervillema.gov/fy22budget <<http://www.somervillema.gov/fy22budget>>

Human Resources

Anne Gill reviewed some of the recent activities of the department and said that a recruiter has been hired. She also spoke about the antiquated computer system and the work that will be necessary in order to upgrade them. She said that it's an employers' market, nationwide, therefore some critical positions will be filled by a temp agency until they can be filled on a permanent basis. She sees this trend continuing for some time. Ms. Gill told the committee that exit interviews will be conducted going forward and that staff will be cross trained in other functions of the department.

Councilor Ballantyne asked about the exit interviews and Ms. Gill shared the limited data collected, noting that some employees have said that they were offered more money elsewhere. Councilor Ballantyne also asked about training and Ms. Gill explained that needs assessment data must be collected in order to determine what needs to be offered. Chair Scott expressed concern about leaning on temp employees rather than filling

positions permanently and Ms. Gill said that she isn't looking at temps as a long term solution. She noted that most of the positions being staffed by temp employees are union positions. Chair Scott asked about a proposed expenditure for a Civil Service study and Ms. Gill explained why this is something that's needed should the city decide to leave the Civil Service system. Chair Scott stated that, although the information may be useful, he would rather use the \$30,000 cost of the study somewhere else. Chair Scott also asked about the Fire Chief Assessment Center and the Police Chief search and Ms. Gill explained both items and why they're needed.

Unemployment Comp

Ms. Gill said that the city self funds this line and that there have been several fraudulent claims made and she see this budget increasing. Mr. Bean said it's hard to predict the amount needed, but the proposed increase id 50% over FY-21.

Worker's Comp

Ms. Gill noted that the city is self insured. Mr. Bean explained that structural changes are being considered. While some cities/towns pay the claims, some have moved to set up a special revenue fund for this, and the city is asking for approval to do that, thereby moving some items from the general fund to this special fund. Ms. Mello said that she thinks this change will make the administration of Worker's Comp more efficient.

Health Insurance

Ms. Brown said that increases have been seen in the GIC Opt Out since teachers are now able to partake in that option. Chair Scott asked what the Profession and Technical Services line is being used for and Ms. Brown ran down the list of items paid from that line.

OSPCD

Mr. Proakis gave a brief explanation of what the overall department will be focusing on during the year and spoke about grant funding, problems posed by the pandemic, requests for 6 new positions, professional development and applying a racial and social justice lens to everything the department does.

OSPCD Administration

Councilor Rossetti asked why line 542007 was overspent by such a large amount and Mr. Inacio explained that it was due to purchasing equipment for employees to allow them to work from home during the pandemic.

OSPCD Planning

Ms. Lewis told the committee that a new web based permit tracking system has been implemented to track projects and workloads more efficiently. Staffing is now at full capacity and she looks forward to resuming neighborhood planning meetings. Councilor Mbah asked about the lower numbers of projects in early 2020 and Ms. Lewis explained that much of that was due to getting used to operating under the pandemic, but now, thinks are moving along at a steady pace. Councilor Ballantyne asked about pre-planning neighborhood meetings and Ms. Lewis responded that those meetings are

designed to be a feedback loop, beginning with the neighborhood meeting for the design stage followed by additional neighborhood meeting at various points in a project. Councilor Ballantyne asked if any neighborhood plans were done. Mr. Proakis interjected that it takes time to implement a new zoning code and there are many opportunities to work with the neighborhoods to influence developments. Ms. Lewis spoke about some of the neighborhood plans that have been worked on. Councilor Rossetti asked if the division has a new name, i.e., Planning, Zoning & Preservation, and Ms. Lewis replied that she is attempting to bring preservation back into the division. Asked about staffing, she commented that adding a Deputy Director would ease and help manage the workload. Chair Scott asked if work on the Union Square East Plan has begun and Mr. Inacio stated that \$30,000 has been encumbered for this, so far. Ms. Lewis commented that the Assembly Square plan will be published shortly. With respect to the Brick Bottom Neighborhood Plan, additional funding, included in the budget request, will be needed to complete it. Chair Scott inquired about the status of several FY-21 Professional and Technical Services lines and asked Mr. Inacio to provide breakdowns of the Profession and Technical Services lines for FY-21.

OSPCD Housing

Mr. Feloney spoke briefly about inclusionary housing and said that since 1990, 283 units have been built and since the new zoning code has been passed, there are 450 units in the pipeline. Mr. Proakis spoke to a question about position reclassification and explained they are based on the content and scope of the workload.

Councilor Mbah inquired about the status of the 100 Homes project and Mr. Proakis stated that the program is being scaled up and he asked if there might be an ownership component down the line. Councilor Rossetti asked about the request for new positions and Mr. Feloney stated that the requests are to fund them for 9-10 months due to the lag time in hiring. Councilor Rossetti reviewed the Personal Services list and inquired about the vacant positions, noting that the information differs from the administration's vacancy report. She asked Mr. Mastrobuoni to provide updated information on vacancies as well as a comparison of staffing for FY-21 vs. FY-22.

Councilor Mbah asked how much grant and/or linkage money is expected to be received this year and Mr. Proakis stated that the first 2 new positions listed would be fully funded by the city. Mr. Inacio said that some CARES funds were used to fund some positions. Councilor Ballantyne asked about the 2000 Homes plan and Mr. Feloney said that all of the funds (\$10 million) have been transferred and used to leverage 49 units. Councilor Ballantyne asked how future purchases would be funded and Mr. Proakis that the funding, in general, comes from other sources, e.g., CPA, Affordable Housing Trust, linkage fees. Chair Scott asked what would be needed for the city to get involved in purpose built housing and what might be the unit cost. Mr. Feloney and Mr. Proakis said that this hasn't been discussed as an option. Chair Scott said that he will be pushing this concept strongly over the next few months/

The meeting was recessed at 8:45 PM and reconvened at 8:55 PM.

OSPCD Housing Stability

Ms. Schachter gave a few highlights from FY-21 and said that \$2.5 million in CARES

funds are being administered now. She pointed out that eviction notices in the city have been decreasing and that the eviction moratorium has been extended for another 3 months. Ms. Schachter then moved on to the FY-22 budget request which includes 1 new position and a doubling of the Flex Fund line.

Councilor Ballantyne asked why the moratorium was extended for 3 months and Ms. Schachter thinks that it was the best the city could do. Councilor Mbah asked how many households are facing evictions and Ms. Schachter said that there were 5 executions since the end of the state moratorium. Councilor White spoke about the 2nd phase of the Green Line gentrification as rents increase, possibly as much as 60-70% and asked if there is a plan to deal with that. Ms. Schachter replied that it has to be a multi-pronged approach, e.g., purposed housing, federal funding, rent control, etc.

OSPCD Economic Development

Tom Galligani recapped FY-21 and told the committee that the department's budget request is 60% higher than the FY-21 request.

Councilor Rossetti questioned the Professional and Technical Services line expenditures and queried the need for all of the contracts therein. Mr. Galligani acknowledged that not all contracts were utilized, due to the pandemic, however, almost all of the budgeted funds have been expended. Chair Scott noted that there was a transfer of \$30,000 into the line and he asked Mr. Inacio for a breakdown of all expenditures I that line.

Councilor Rossetti asked about line #530028 and Mr. Inacio said the expenditure was to get a new service underway, and going forward, that expense will be budgeted under OSPCD Administration. Mr. Galligani pointed out that there is a request for an additional position. Chair Scott asked about Fabville and Mr. Galligani explained the department is attempting to make people aware of it in concert with the opening of the new high school and \$75,000 will be expended from the Workforce Development line to accomplish that. Chair Scott also questioned some of the requests in the Professional and Technical Services line.

OSPCD Redevelopment Authority

Mr. Proakis noted that there were no changes to the budget request.

OSPCD Mobility

Brad Rawson gave a brief summary of FY-21 activities. Councilor Mbah asked if there is money available to make our streets safe and Mr. Rawson stated there is and said that the budget request includes additional staff and funding requests. Chair Scott asked if money has been placed somewhere else, since the budget numbers don't add up and Mr. Rawson said that he would verify the numbers with Mr. Mastrobuoni. Councilor Ballantyne asked if the dedicated bus lane to Teele Square was going forward and Mr. Rawson confirmed that it was. Councilor Ballantyne also asked about traffic signaling for Davis Square and was told that this is also moving forward. Asked about the Vision Zero Action Plan, Mr. Rawson said that Mobility has worked with several departments on this matter. Councilor Ballantyne asked about the MBTA bus route #89 from Clarendon Hill and whether there have been any updates about changing or stopping it and Mr. Rawson said that he has heard nothing. Finally, Councilor Ballantyne inquired about Powder House Blvd STOP signs and traffic lights and Mr. Rawson said that the

traffic signals will be de-commissioned. Chair Scott said that he remains frustrated about the lack of progress made to make dangerous areas safer.

OSPCD Public Space and Urban Forestry

Ms. Oliveira re-capped the department's activities and said that the Urban Forestry Plan is due to be released shortly. Mr. Inacio explained that the funds for tree planting have been placed in the Capital line of the Operations budget. Chair Scott questioned why tree pruning is contracted out and Ms. Oliveira explained that the knowledge needed to perform the task is not available in-house. Councilor Ballantyne asked about Lincoln Park and Ms. Oliveira said that the DPW is in charge of the field maintenance. The warranty on the park has expired and the Parks Department is working to improve the condition of the field. Councilor Mbah commented that a crosswalk should be installed at Woods Avenue.

OSPCD Community Preservation Act

Mr. Inacio pointed out that this is a non-budget item and is included only for review.

Unfinished Business

2. **(ID # 24992): That the administration strike the language “related to ongoing/exiting litigation” from the 3rd paragraph of the Ordinary Maintenance Changes narrative on the City Council page in the FY-22 Budget book.**

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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3. **(ID # 24993): That the mayor allocate appropriate funds for hardware to administrate hybrid meetings and also provide funding for the City Council or Clerks of Committees budget for support staff.**

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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4. **(ID # 24994): That the mayor set aside an additional \$300,000 in a segregated fund to be available for Racial and Social Justice appropriations mid-year.**

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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5. **(ID # 24995): That the mayor appropriate \$80,000 for a community engagement specialist for the City Council and for committee meetings.**

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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6. **(ID # 24996): That the mayor create 2 fully funded new positions (one Review Planner and one Violation Inspector for existing infrastructure) within ISD, requiring hires to have demonstrable experience and knowledge on ADA compliance matters.**

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

7. (ID # 24997): That the administration provide for the creation of a position starting July 1, 2021 for a clerk to assist with the planned superannuation of an employee and ensure a fully staffed department, in the amount of \$90,000 for FY22.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

8. (ID # 24998): That the administration provide for the creation of a position starting October 1, 2021 for an administrative clerk to assist with ARPA and fund tracking documentation, in the amount of \$50,000 for FY22.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

9. (ID # 24999): That the administration devote roughly \$100,000 in personal services to support the position requests of an additional projector manager and the fractional support from the general fund budget for administrative support for IAM.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

10. (ID # 25000): That the administration devote \$1.5 million as requested for the building reconstruction (line 582002) and improvement (line 582003) in Capital Projects.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

11. (ID # 25001): Councilor Scott moved that the administration devote \$500,000 for street repairs (line 588002) in Engineering.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

12. (ID # 25002): That the administration add \$100,000 to Engineering Personal Services to fund an engineering position for implementation of short-term ADA compliant designs for street and building improvements working in collaboration with DPW.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

13. (ID # 25017): That the Police Department Overtime line (513000) be reduced by \$500,000.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**