



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, June 18, 2025

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Wilson at 6:01pm and adjourned at 7:52pm on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Mbah, Burnley, Clingan, Scott, and Wilson), 0 opposed, and 0 absent.

Others present: Matthew Zaino-Inspectional Services Department Superintendent, Kimberly Wells-City Clerk, Michael Mastrobuoni-Budget Director, Cynthia Amara-City Solicitor, Nicholas Salerno-Board of Elections Chairman, Francis Golden-Chief Assessor, Angela Allen-Chief Procurement Officer, Ellen Schneider Collins-Deputy Director of Personnel, Susan Yerkes-Director of Parks and Recreation, Gregory Jenkins-Arts Council Executive Director, Delaney Fisher-Cassiol-Clerk of Committees

Roll Call

Present:	City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson, Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott, Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan, City Councilor At Large Willie Burnley Jr. and City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah
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Review of the Fiscal FY 2026 Budget

- Inspectional Services
- City Council
- Clerk of Committees
- City Clerk
- Licensing Commission
- Law
- Damages to Persons & Property
- Elections
- Auditing
- Grants Development
- Assessing
- Treasury
- Building Insurance
- Procurement & Contracting Services

- Human Resources
- Health & Life Insurance + Medicare
- Workers' Compensation
- Information Technology
- Parks & Recreation
- Enterprise Funds
- Arts Council
- Salary Contingency
- Revolving Funds
- PAYGO
- Debt Service
- Unemployment Compensation
- Pension
- State Assessments

Inspectional Services

Councilor Wilson reported that he attended the Massachusetts Municipal Association conference in January and spoke with vendors offering systems to track short-term rentals. He noted the importance of the City having tools to monitor these properties and suggested that such a system could ultimately pay for itself. Councilor Scott raised a concern that the memo did not mention the City's vacant properties ordinances, which he identified as one of his budget priorities, and asked whether enforcement would take place this year. Superintendent of Inspectional Services Richard Zaino said he could not confirm how funding would be allocated at this time.

Councilor Burnley asked Superintendent Zaino whether it would be helpful to have a discussion at an upcoming Council meeting about enforcement of the vacant property ordinances, which have been on the books for five years but have not been enforced. He also asked whether prioritizing enforcement would require supplemental funding. Superintendent Zaino said he would welcome a conversation about what the next steps would look like. In response to a follow-up question about staffing, he said a building inspector is expected to start soon and that the department is in the process of hiring a director. He said they feel good about the team currently in place, though acknowledged that there is always room for improvement.

Councilor Mbah said he has heard from constituents and small business owners who struggle to navigate the City's permitting systems, particularly non-English-speaking residents and first-time applicants. He asked what is being done to improve accessibility. Superintendent Zaino responded that optimizing the applications and permitting systems is a goal for Fiscal Year 2026.

City Council

This was discussed with the Clerk of Committees.

Clerk of Committees

Councilor Burnley asked about the funding allocated for in-state

conferences. City Clerk Kimberly Wells explained that the line item has been increased for the current fiscal year after the City went over budget in this area last year.

City Clerk

No additional questions were asked during the meeting.

Licensing Commission

Councilor Burnley asked whether any additional funding would be required to create new licensing types. City Clerk Kimberly Wells responded that no additional funding would be needed, as the work would be supported by adding a new position within the City Clerk's Office.

Law

Councilor Mbah noted a small increase in the budget to support converting a part-time paralegal position into a full-time role. Budget Director Michael Mastrobuoni added that \$250,000 has been allocated for judgment and settlement claims in the upcoming fiscal year.

Councilor Burnley observed that the online subscription line went over budget by \$4,000 last year and asked what caused the overage and why no additional funding was included for this fiscal year. City Solicitor Cynthia Amara explained that the department has now made all necessary purchases and does not expect further expenses in that area.

Damages to Persons & Property

No additional questions were asked during the meeting.

Elections

Councilor Burnley asked about the braille and whether its availability would change their work, and Chairman of the Board of Elections, Nicholas Salerno said that persons with disabilities can use the AutoMARK machines, which assist voters with accessibility needs.

Auditing

No additional questions were asked during the meeting.

Grants Development

No additional questions were asked during the meeting.

Assessing

Councilor Burnley noted that the in-state travel line item was three times over the allocated budget. Chief Assessor Francis Golden explained that there has been increased travel to support the training and accreditation of new staff, which typically takes two to three years. He added that the department encourages online training opportunities whenever possible.

Chair Clingan observed an increase of \$7,000 in the printing and stationery budget and inquired about the reason for the change. Chief Assessor Golden responded that exemptions are mailed to residents annually, and it is time to send out those materials along with exemption paperwork. Additionally, part of the increase is intended to improve the efficiency of the department's newsletter. He noted that the newsletter funding was recently transferred from the Treasury Department to Assessing, which accounts for the larger budget.

Treasury

No additional questions were asked during the meeting.

Building Insurance

No additional questions were asked during the meeting.

Procurement & Contracting Services

Councilor Burnley asked for recommendations on how to better utilize existing resources and staffing. Angela Allen, Chief Procurement Officer, emphasized that a key priority is filling the Deputy Chief Procurement Officer position to address data management needs. She also noted that they are meeting with officials from the cities of Cambridge and Boston to learn how those municipalities are implementing similar recommendations.

Human Resources

Ellen Schneider Collins, Deputy Director of Personnel, explained that the special items budget covers union-related expenses such as educational programs, reimbursements, fluency bonuses, and the MBTA pass program. She also noted that the cost of medical insurance has risen, which has led to an increase in the Group Insurance Commission (GIC) expenses.

Health & Life Insurance + Medicare

No additional questions were asked during the meeting.

Workers' Compensation

No additional questions were asked during the meeting.

Information Technology

No additional questions were asked during the meeting.

Parks & Recreation

Councilor Mbah expressed surprise that there were no planned improvements for children's summer education programs or enhancements to the department's website to facilitate parent enrollment. Susan Yerkes, Director of Parks and Recreation, responded that the current budget has been thoroughly reviewed, and the department feels it is sufficient to meet their needs this year. Councilor Mbah then asked whether additional funding should be considered to help keep fees from increasing too much and to

ensure programs remain accessible for families.

Enterprise Funds

Chair Wilson noted that the revenue generated from Dilboy Field last year is expected to remain consistent this year. He also observed that users have maintained the same number of hours across all fields despite the opening of new ones. Chair Wilson inquired about the retained earnings and what the outlook for that will be next year. Director Susan Yerkes replied that this year's plan is to use the remaining balance and monitor the results, with an expectation that revenue will increase due to higher usage.

Arts Council

Gregory Jenkins, Executive Director of the Arts Council, explained that the City is currently undertaking a three-year master plan for Arts at the Armory. He discussed developing a fee structure that is both sustainable and equitable for the community, noting that community meetings are being held to gather input. Director Jenkins emphasized that one key benefit of the City maintaining this space is the opportunity for collaboration with other City departments.

Salary Contingency

No additional questions were asked during the meeting.

Revolving Funds

No additional questions were asked during the meeting.

PAYGO

No additional questions were asked during the meeting.

Debt Service

Councilor Mbah noted a small increase in the debt service budget and asked whether this aligns with the City's planned capital projects. Director Mastrobuoni explained that the City manages its debt service by carefully controlling the amount it borrows. Councilor Mbah then inquired if the City is slowing the pace of the Capital Investment Plan to limit new debt. Director Mastrobuoni responded that, due to economic uncertainty, they anticipate needing to reduce the number of projects in the Capital Investment Plan.

Unemployment Compensation

No additional questions were asked during the meeting.

Pension

No additional questions were asked during the meeting.

State Assessments

No additional questions were asked during the meeting.

Link to Departmental Responses:

<https://city-somerville-ma-budget-book.cleargov.com/19991/fund-summaries/fy-26-council-response-memos>