



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

June 9, 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	
Matthew McLaughlin	Ward One City Councilor	Present	
Kristen Strezo	City Councilor at Large	Present	
Ben Ewen-Campen	Ward Three City Councilor	Present	
Jesse Clingan	Ward Four City Councilor	Present	
Mark Niedergang	Ward Five City Councilor	Present	
Lance L. Davis	Ward Six City Councilor	Present	

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:01 PM by Chair Scott and adjourned at 7:48 PM on a roll call vote of 10 in favor (Councilors Niedergang, White, Rossetti, Ewen-Campen, Davis, Strezo, Mbah, McLaughlin, Ballantyne and Scott), 0 against and 1 absent (Councilor Clingan).

Public Hearing regarding the FY-22 Budget

Chair Scott explained the format for the public hearing and told the audience that anyone who wanted to offer public comment would have the opportunity to do so. Approximately 160 people registered for this meeting and 35 individuals spoke at the public hearing. Additionally, the committee received over 100 emails containing public comments on the FY-22 budget.

Those who spoke at the public hearing expressed their views on various parts of the budget, however, most of the comments had to do with the budget for the Police Department with the common concern being that the FY-22 police budget should be reduced to 10% less than it's FY-21 budget or the entire FY-22 city budget should be rejected. A summary of those comments follows:

- Somerville is a safe city and would be safer with fewer police. More police does not equal a safer city. Police are not wanted in the community and should not be a part of the city's future,
- The city is over invested in police and residents would rather have funds spent on housing, mental health, Council on Aging programs, etc.,
- The mayor's promise hasn't been kept and the city hasn't completed its promise to re-imagining the Police Department,
- Begin civilianizing the Police Department, cut vacant positions, move traffic to civilian

- operation,
- More police does not equal safer city,
- The Police Department study was flawed and the City Council has the power to get a proper study performed,
- The Police Department runs the risk of further non-transparency,
- 7.7% was cut last year from the police budget and calls to defund the police are not new,
- Defunding doesn't mean taking away money - it means reallocate funds,
- The city is more dedicated to police than its residents,
- Reduce the police budget by \$3 million. The Police Department does not need resources,
- Body cameras aren't helping. Violence towards the homeless has allegedly been witnessed,
- Police started as a slave patrol and morphed into enforcement against immigrants and unions and things have not changed,
- The Police Department is not structured properly - it's bloated and inefficient,
- Police do not promote public safety and there are better tools available than police to address crime,
- The only way to force the city into action is to decrease the Police Department budget,
- Police have an abysmal record of caring for victims,
- Policing is a violent institution for women,
- Force the city to the table to have a dialog with the administration, police and residents,
- People of color don't have the choice to avoid interacting with police,
- Police are not needed in schools,
- The Police Department has helped to make the city what it is today. Have seen instances of police offering to help people. There are good things that could be said about the police instead of being negative all the time,
- The Police Department needs more resources and officers,
- Never witnessed any violence by Somerville Police personnel,
- A safe injection site will lead to an increase in crime.

Other comments included:

- There is a blatant disregard for the ADA. Ms. Bonnie Denis, Chair of the Disabilities Commission, stated that the Commission was not consulted at all and never met with Ms. Capers, from the Office of Racial and Social Justice. She feels that the Commission is not getting the support it needs and has been asking for from the city. She was made aware of the proposed change to reassign the Commission under the Office of Racial and Social Justice by the Health and Human Services Department, not the Office of Racial and Social Justice. She stated that the city is not meeting its legal or moral obligations. Ms. Denis recommends there be a stand-alone department and that there is a need for an ADA coordinator,
- City needs to be brought into compliance with ADA as it is not following laws and keeping residents safe,
- Agreement with the inclusion of extra positions dealing with safe streets,
- Mobility budget should be increased by \$450,000 for safety and improvements and by another \$150,000 for highway safety,
- The mayor is slow walking the Racial and Social Justice program,
- There is some disagreement with the RSJ proposal and there should be more participants on the commission as well as providing an Executive Director.

The public hearing was closed at 7:37 PM. Chair Scott informed the audience that the record would remain open until the close of business on June 16, 2021 to submit additional written comment which

should be emailed to cityclerk@somervillema.gov <<mailto:cityclerk@somervillema.gov>>.

Councilor Mbah thanked all who spoke tonight and said that the budget is a reflection of our values and doesn't take his responsibility in this matter lightly. He rhetorically asked why, instead of increasing the police overtime budget, are we not funding alternative response measures for non-violent emergencies? He also indicated support for the concerns raised by tonight's speakers regarding the ADA and reallocating police funds to social well-being programs.

Councilor Niedergang commented that he has proposed large cuts to the Police Department over the last 2 years and that he will propose more cuts. He continued by saying that, with few exceptions, SPD staff are honorable, decent people working to the best of their abilities and he thinks that reallocation of funds can be achieved.

Unfinished Business

(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:	LAID ON THE TABLE
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(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:	LAID ON THE TABLE
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(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:	LAID ON THE TABLE
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(ID # 24995): That the mayor appropriate \$80,000 for a community engagement specialist for the City Council and for committee meetings.

RESULT:	LAID ON THE TABLE
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(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:	LAID ON THE TABLE
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(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:	LAID ON THE TABLE
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(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:	LAI D ON THE TABLE
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(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:	LAI D ON THE TABLE
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(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:	LAI D ON THE TABLE
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(ID # 25001): Councilor Scott moved that the administration devote \$500,000 for street repairs (line 588002) in Engineering.

RESULT:	LAI D ON THE TABLE
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(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:	LAI D ON THE TABLE
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Referenced Material:

- Public Comments
- Public Comments 2
- Public Comment - G Walsh
- Public Comment - A Catatao