



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Legislative Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, January 28, 2025

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Davis at 6:03pm and adjourned at 7:38pm on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Strezo, Mbah, Ewen-Campen, Scott, Davis), 0 opposed, and 0 absent.

The committee recessed at 7:03pm and re-convened at 7:08pm on a roll call vote of 5 present (Councilors Strezo, Mbah, Ewen-Campen, Scott, Davis).

Others present: David Shapiro - Deputy City Solicitor, Brendan Salisbury - Legislative and Policy Analyst, Neha Singh - Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Meredith Gamble - Deputy Director of SOIA and Language Justice Coordinator, Madalyn Letellier - Legislative Services Manager.

Roll Call

Present: Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis, Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott, Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah and City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo

1. Committee Minutes
(ID # [24-1679](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Legislative Matters Committee Meeting of November 19, 2024.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**

AYE: Ward Six City Councilor Davis, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Mbah and City Councilor At Large Strezo

2. Resolution
(ID # [24-1604](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Mbah, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Sait, Councilor Scott, Councilor Strezo and Councilor Wilson

Reaffirming Somerville's commitment as a Sanctuary and Trust Act City for justice, equity, and inclusion.

AMENDMENT:

WHEREAS, The City of Somerville has a proud, longstanding history of welcoming and supporting generations of immigrants, dating back to its original Sanctuary City declaration in 1987, reaffirmed in 2016 and 2019, and has continually upheld values of equity, inclusion, and

support for all community members; and

WHEREAS, The national political climate remains increasingly hostile toward immigrants and refugees, and the recent return of the former President to the White House brings heightened risks for immigrant communities across the country, including in Somerville; and

WHEREAS, Somerville’s guiding document, SomerVision 2040, states that “putting equity at the core of our policies is how we live up to our ideals and ensure our community remains safe, vibrant, and supportive of all,” a vision that we uphold with a commitment to protecting our immigrant neighbors and fostering an inclusive environment for everyone; **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT**

RESOLVED, That the Somerville City Council hereby reaffirms its commitment as a Sanctuary and Trust Act City, vowing to protect the safety, dignity, and rights of immigrants, migrants, asylum seekers, asylees, and refugees residing in Somerville; **AND BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED, That Somerville pledges continued support and funding for the Office of Immigrant Affairs, empowering it to advocate for and support immigrants, provide resources, and foster a welcoming environment in our community; **AND BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED, That Somerville commits to maintaining and funding the Immigrant Legal Services Stabilization Fund to provide legal representation to residents facing deportation or removal, and to secure legal guidance through this fund as needed for our constituents; **AND BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED, That no city department, including the Somerville Police Department and Somerville Public Schools, will apply for or accept federal funds that require gathering or sharing information regarding the national origin, immigration, or citizenship status of employees, students, or residents for the purpose of targeting or deportation; Somerville reaffirms its ~~Trust Act~~ **Welcoming Community** Ordinance commitment to non-cooperation with federal immigration enforcement on these matters; **AND BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED, That all city services, benefits, and programs shall remain accessible to all, irrespective of any person’s national origin, citizenship, or immigration status, and that the city will continue providing timely and culturally

competent language access services to ensure inclusivity across all departments; **AND BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED, That city employees will receive training and resources to uphold equal access to city facilities, services, and programming, building a supportive environment for all residents; **AND BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED, That Somerville will partner with the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office to secure justice for victims of hate crimes, and with local organizations to support families affected by federal immigration policies, including providing kinship placements for children where appropriate; **AND BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED, That the city will strongly advocate for schools, hospitals, places of worship, and courthouses to be recognized as "sensitive locations," safe from federal immigration enforcement actions, to ensure the fair and compassionate administration of justice; **AND BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED, That the Somerville Police Department reaffirms its commitment to not cooperate with external law enforcement agencies on matters related to immigration detainment as set forth in the City of Somerville's Ordinance No. ~~2014-07~~ 2019-14, ~~Trust Act~~ Welcoming Community Ordinance; **AND BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED, That the Mayor of Somerville will communicate the city's Sanctuary City principles and available resources to all city departments, boards, commissions, and community organizations working with immigrant populations; **AND BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED, That Somerville also invites neighboring cities in Massachusetts to reaffirm their commitment to serving and protecting their immigrant communities, joining in solidarity to safeguard residents' rights and safety; **AND BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED, That if any section of this resolution is declared contrary to federal or state law, the remaining provisions shall remain intact and enforceable to the fullest extent possible; **AND BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED, That regardless of external pressures or challenges faced by sanctuary cities, Somerville remains committed to its values of inclusion, equity, and justice, and will not waver in supporting our immigrant neighbors, who are integral to the strength and diversity of our community.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE PLACED ON FILE**

3. Resolution
(ID # [24-1682](#))
- By Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Mbah, Councilor Davis, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Clingan, Councilor Sait and Councilor Ewen-Campen Reaffirming Somerville's commitment as a Welcoming Community for justice, equity, and inclusion.

Chair Davis reiterated the spirit for this resolution is to highlight anything that can be done to protect our neighbors. Director Singh shared the law department has been meeting regularly with other communities to see what else can be done to strengthen protections. In response to Councilor Mbah Director Singh further shared there is continuous conversation with other Welcoming communities and organizations to coordinate with what other efforts are currently being made in Massachusetts and will continue to update this committee in further meetings.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

4. Ordinance
(ID # [24-1754](#))
- By Councilor Burnley Jr.
Amending Sections 9-31 through 9-44 of the Code of Ordinances to support the end of wage theft.

Policy Analyst Salisbury spoke through changes to the ordinance. Including, change to the process of filling committee seats and moving away from the designation of organizations. The committee will now consist of 9 members with designees from the Mayor, Council President, and various organizations. As well as clarifying the role of the committee and outlining specific duties and responsibilities, part of this included shifting enforcement authority to city departments and creating a clear complaint process for the committee to forward to the correct authorities and keep track of final decisions made and communicate to the relevant department. Restructuring also occurred of membership and the goal is to get staff on boarded to assist in the monitoring and managing of the complaint process and sharing knowledge of the rights workers have. Policy Analyst Salisbury shared insight on stricken through sections and that many strike through's are the done with the goal to bring the ordinance in compliance with the drafting manual. Councilor Scott expressed concern about the inefficiency of the enforcement authorities at the State level to which Councilor Davis asked for clarification on Sec. 9-37 regarding Sanctions for violations and if it limits the sanctions available under the ordinance, David Shapiro stated he would research more and come back to the committee with an answer. Policy Analyst Salisbury also provided an answer further clarifying the Department of Labor and the Attorney Generals Office has final authority to make determinations and rather this ordinance lays out the Wage Theft ordinance to streamline the way in which complaints are processed and when final decisions are made they are forwarded to the correct city departments. Policy Analyst continued in response to a question by Chair Davis that all references to MGL are included in 9-31a and each section has a reference to the applied laws.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked to confirm that the edits were advised and approved by law and David Shapiro confirmed it is. Councilor Ewen-Campen also asked where in the process the city was on the posting for a lesion for this position and IGA Director Neha Singh, shared Economic Development, is working with Human Resources (HR) to get a job posted soon. Councilor Strezo went on to ask if this position will assist in recruitment efforts, a job description is not currently finalized and the IGA Director echoed previous statements that staff are working with HR to post the position.

Councilor Strezo asked if the committee could currently meet quorum, Policy Analyst Salisbury stated the body is not currently able to meet quorum and this ordinance will require a new constitution of the body and will need new appointments to fill the seats. The councilor went on to ask if there was consideration to remove the staggering of terms for the Wage theft advisory committee, Policy Analyst Salisbury responded by eliminating staggering it can run into a problem of everyone's term being up at once and this is a measure in place to maintain quorum.

Councilor Mbah inquired over the resources available in the city to enforce this ordinance and the scope of violations and will look at or a response from staff in a future meeting.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

5. Officer's
Communication
(ID # [25-0022](#))

City Council Legislative and Policy Analyst conveying the City Clerk's Office Manual on Legislative Drafting.

Legislative and Policy Analyst Brendan Salisbury spoke through the importance of the drafting manual to the legislative matters committee and the most important legislative actions taken by this committee are ordinance and home rule petitions. After giving an introduction, he reminded the committee that he is available to make recommendations to the committee regarding drafting and quality standards. Policy Analyst Salisbury spoke through the five components of effective communication as follows and what questions should be asked during each step: necessity, effectiveness, practicality, legality, and equity. The presentation went on to highlight that nothing can be done without the assistance of staff and the City Attorney is the authority on issues of legality and significant difference. Policy Analyst Salisbury wrapped up the presentation, restating that the process is designed to make it so the questions above have been addressed prior to submission.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Resolution (ID # [24-1603](#)) By Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Mbah
That the Administration work to establish a Language Access Ordinance to codify constituents' right to timely, meaningful, and culturally competent language access services.
- Deputy Director Meredith Gamble shared language access priority in the city is making sure timely services are being provided to residents and has begun researching other language access ordinances around mandating, implementation, and compliance and accountability. Collaboration with administration and law is in the works and once there is something to share with the Council the language draft will be brought back to this committee for additional thoughts and input.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**