



# City of Somerville, Massachusetts

## City Council Legislative Matters Committee

### Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, November 19, 2024

6:00 PM

The meeting took place remotely via Zoom and was called to order at 6:01 PM by Chair Davis and adjourned at 6:59 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Ewen-Campen, Burnley and Davis), none against and 2 absent (Councilors Scott and Mbah).

Others present:

Cindy Amara – City Solicitor, Jason Piques – Assistant City Solicitor, Maria Teresa Nagel – Director of SomerViva, Neha Singh – Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

#### Roll Call

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

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-1537](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Legislative Matters Committee Meeting of October 15, 2024.

**RESULT:** **ACCEPTED**  
**AYE:** Ward Six City Councilor Davis, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr. and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen  
**ABSENT:** City Councilor At Large Mbah and Ward Two City Councilor Scott

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.

Chair Davis noted that since this item was submitted just a few days ago, the Administration has not had time to review the resolution nor to provide

comments. The Chair referenced the 3 amendments that were added to the original resolution at last week's City Council meeting and said that he has some additional concerns, e.g., telling another department how to act and having an un-needed severability clause included. Having been asked by the Chair how the committee would prefer to proceed, the consensus was that the resolution should be revised and ultimately sent to the City Council for approval and reaffirmation. Councilor Burnley would like to have a discussion about what resources the city has that could be used to reinforce its commitment, e.g., providing legal services for immigrants.

Chair Davis stated that he doesn't think modifying the resolution's language at this meeting is the best use of the committee's time and he proposed 2 options: 1) for the committee to work on the resolution and bring it before the City Council at its December 12th meeting, or 2) prepare revisions to the resolution before the November 26th City Council meeting and to then discharge the item from committee, putting it before the City Council for discussion and possible action. Councilor Burnley offered to review and clean up the language of the resolution, saying that the edits are fairly simple.

Chair Davis commented that Somerville's Welcoming Community Ordinance is one of the strongest in the commonwealth and that it touches on a number of issues but does not supersede federal law. He asked Assistant Solicitor Piques to review the resolution to determine if an ordinance or policy could be pulled from it.

Director Nagel said the big thing to think about is ensuring that the language is strong enough to send a clear message to constituents, while not revealing the particulars of the steps that could be taken, so as not to put residents in danger. Councilor Burnley commented that he is aware of security culture and he asked if would be appropriate to talk about the legal services provided to immigrants. He noted that the City Council has appropriated hundreds of thousands of dollars for immigrant legal services and he asked if a contract was still in place to provide those services. Director Nagel said there have been two vendors over the four and a half years that the city has been providing legal services and that now, the city is in the middle of a -year contract. She noted that some cases are multi-year, so she doesn't know when additional funds or time will be needed, adding that there may be a greater need as a result of the recent federal elections.

Inquiring about a clause in the resolution about all city services being available to residents regardless of immigration status, Director Nagel explained that some restrictions tied to federal or other funding sources would apply to all individuals, without regard to immigration status, and she assured the committee that resources are continuing to be provided at the municipal level.

Chair Davis sponsored Laura Rotolo from the ACLU to speak. Ms. Rotolo commented that the city's 2019 Welcoming Community Ordinance is still one of the strongest in the commonwealth and should remain as is. City Solicitor Amara invited the committee to reach out to the Law Department with any questions.

Councilor Burnley inquired about another clause having to do with providing training to city staff for compliance with the resolution and Director Singh replied that the Administration is having conversations with the Human Resources Department and this query will be brought up.

**RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

Referenced Documents:

- Legislative Matters - 2024-11-19 Resolution - Sanctuary City Amended (with 24-1604)