



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
CLERK OF COMMITTEES

November 4, 2020

REPORT OF THE EQUITY, GENDER, FAMILIES AND VULNERABLE POPULATIONS
COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Wilfred N. Mbah	Chair	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Vice Chair	Present	
Kristen Strezo	City Councilor at Large	Present	

The meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Mbah at 6:03pm and adjourned at 7:52pm.

Others present: Khushbu Webber - Mayor's Office; Ellen Collins - Personnel; Jill Lathan - Parks & Recreation; Oliver Sellers-Garcia - OSE; Tom Galligani - OSPCD; Eric Weisman - Public Works

Approval of the March 2, 2020 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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205289: That the Director of Purchasing share the process for procuring food, food packaging and flatware for the school cafeterias.

The Chair thanked Mr. Sellers-Garcia for his interest in this process, and elaborated that the procurement is with the School District, and he would like more information about what role the City Council can take. Mr. Sellers-Garcia added that there isn't much overlap between the School and City Purchasing departments and there is no oversight of School purchasing from the administration. Mr. Sellers-Garcia is aware that the School District does its procurement in a group with other municipalities in order to get the lowest costs. He suggested that the School Committee could engage with the School District staff to further this issue. Councilor Ballantyne has discussed with the Superintendent in the past to find ways to reduce the upstream packaging waste at the vendor level, and she expressed confidence in the Schools' sustainability efforts. Councilor Strezo added that the health and safety restrictions of COVID may play a role in making these efforts more challenging. Councilor Ballantyne agreed that the School District has other priorities, but she will follow up with the School Committee Chair and the Superintendent in the spring.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Mbah, Ballantyne, Strezo

205290: That the Commissioner of Public Works share the process of handling different types of cafeteria waste, including recyclables and food waste.

Mr. Weisman shared that two years ago, DPW, OSE and the School Department started a pilot for composting and recycling in four school cafeterias. This was expanded last year to all schools except the Capuano and SHS. The program was running until schools were closed in March due to COVID. There are separate receptacles for compost, recyclables, and trash. It remains unclear what the new policies and procedures will be when the students return to the school buildings. Chair Mbah asked if the Green Team was involved, and Mr. Sellers-Garcia shared that the Green Team has not been active, but there has been quarterly training conducted for students on composting. Councilor Ballantyne added that there are a variety of green efforts in the schools, but the terminology may be different, and those students do a lot of the recycling and spearhead environmental efforts.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Mbah, Ballantyne, Strezo

205361: That the Director of Parks and Recreation and the Superintendent of Schools share their policies and procedures for allocating indoor spaces and outdoor spaces, in particular for local or youth-serving organizations.

Ms. Lathan has previously shared the field permit policies, and the field master plan.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Mbah, Ballantyne, Strezo

205531: Parks and Recreation Director responding to #205361 re: the allocation of indoor and outdoor spaces.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Mbah, Ballantyne, Strezo

205532: Parks and Recreation Director submitting the Department's Fall, 2017 youth participation statistics.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Mbah, Ballantyne, Strezo

210228: Supporting full implementation of body worn cameras by sworn personnel in the Police Department.

Chair Mbah noted that he would like this to move forward. Ms. Webber commented that in early June, the administration shared its intention to move forward with this through the negotiation process with the union. She reinforced that the administration is committed to doing this and noted that Assistant City Solicitor McKenzie is the primary point person on this. Councilor Strezo added that the best way for body cameras to work is coupled with a police oversight committee. She also suggested that the new Chief must be on board with this in order to enact it successfully.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210237: That the Administration re-assess its hiring policies to include people of color in leadership positions and update this Council on efforts to promote equity across all departments.

Chair Mbah has discussed this with Ms. Collins and expressed that there should be a road map for hiring, and he requested the demographic data related to hiring. Ms. Collins completely agreed that true diversity across all departments and leadership positions is the goal. The City's hiring policy is not discriminatory, but putting this into practice is the challenge. The Personnel Department is working with SomerStat to collect the data for management positions, both for race and gender. Ms. Collins also emphasized that the searches can be failed if the pool of candidates is not diverse. The department would like to fill positions quickly, but not at the expense of a diverse pool of candidates. Leadership positions open less often, so the goal is that over time, the diversity will expand, both through promotions and external hiring.

Councilor Ballantyne asked if there was a specific ratio or metric that the City is trying to achieve. Ms. Collins noted that there are no specific numbers, but exploring each department as a position opens up to determine what could bring diversity to the department or the role. In general, the department would like to see the workplace represent the City's population. Councilor Ballantyne also asked if the City uses websites or employment agencies that target certain demographics, or if there are contacts with different professional groups. Ms. Collins shared that the positions are first posted on the City website, as well as shared with a local group of community contacts, including non-profits and job coaches. There is an effort to get the jobs advertised to residents, as well as to create a pipeline to City jobs through the schools and local universities. There are different ways of reaching out depending on the position, but strengthening the connections within Somerville has proven successful for the department. The pandemic has made this more challenging, but a community-first focus is still the priority.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210238: That the Director of SPCD update this Council on the minority-owned business initiative and provide data on the number of businesses that have been helped from being gentrified.

Chair Mbah elaborated that this was an issue even prior to the pandemic, and he would like to see that minority-owned businesses were assisted prior to the COVID funds. Mr. Galligani noted that customers are wary of all businesses, which has had a dramatic impact. The Economic Development office has focused on three areas. The first is communication, which has taken place through email newsletters, updating the website, and hosting business working groups within different segments of the business community, organized around the Governor's four-phase strategy for re-opening. Secondly, the division has focused on providing direct assistance to businesses, largely utilizing CDBG funds. There have been 123 small businesses in the community who have received those grant awards. The Mayor has also decided to conduct a second round, though with less money, but they estimate that approximately 75 businesses can receive assistance, which will be granted through a weighted lottery (the first round was determined through a Community Advisory Committee). One of the few restrictions is that those who received assistance in the first round are not eligible. Additionally, restaurant businesses who have adopted outdoor dining will also receive assistance. The third effort is revamping the technical assistance program, to provide a business coach/counselor/expert to give assistance in particular areas. The providers also speak multiple languages. Of the award winners in the first round, 46% were minority-owned businesses and 56% were women-owned businesses.

Chair Mbah asked if the diversity business catalogue was utilized and Mr. Galligani shared that 40 businesses self-identified as diverse. They are on the list to receive all of the information that the Economic Development department disseminates. There is also a goal to better market the diversity catalogue when the department has the resources. Mr. Galligani added that some of the primary partners have been the two Main Streets organizations, the Chamber of Commerce, Somerville-Cambridge Local First, the Welcome Project, as well as the Arts Council.

Councilor Strezo asked how frequently the working groups meet, and Mr. Galligani noted that they met daily in the process of determining the restrictions to put in place, and now that those have been developed, the restaurant group meets approximately monthly and the other groups are not meeting formally, but the department does check-in periodically. The Arts Council is also spearheading a working group to focus on outdoor entertainment and should have some recommendations soon. Councilor Strezo asked what the plans were to address winter shutdowns or additional restrictions. Mr. Galligani noted that there are some other groups still meeting (such as through the Chamber), and there is communication with the City through other means, and the department will join or convene meetings on an as needed basis. Councilor Strezo noted that she has been meeting with different neighborhood groups, and the needs are all unique and complicated, but it seems that the businesses in locations that aren't in the squares or tied to networks don't seem to be receiving the communications. She wondered how to expand outreach to those outer pockets. Mr. Galligani elaborated that this is something the department is aware of and working on, and noted that the City provides funding to the Main Streets organizations through both CDBG and City funds to help with these efforts, but there is acknowledgement that there are gaps. For the second round of small business funding, the City will be sending out a mailing in an effort to reach everyone that may have been missed electronically or otherwise. Mr. Galligani also encouraged Councilors to keep reaching out to businesses and to the Economic Development office to share opportunities. He added that Federal Realty has also been a great resource to share information and bring issues to the City's attention.

Mr. Galligani also shared that Wynn is required to spend \$10M per year at Somerville businesses, and he is pressing them for data on that. They are also required to purchase \$25,000 worth of gift cards and he is seeking evidence of that, and exploring creation of a program to spread that throughout the City. Councilor Strezo emphasized that this is a great resource and encouraged follow up on how the money has been spent. Councilor Ballantyne asked if the department has contact information for all small businesses in the City, and Mr. Galligani explained that there is no comprehensive list, and it is nearly impossible to keep up with, but there are approximately 1,700 businesses on the City's list. The major tool has been the email newsletter, and any business owners should be encouraged to sign up.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210239: That the Mayor work with the Director of the Somerville Housing Authority to abolish the Housing Authority Police Department and reallocate the funds for social services for Housing Authority residents.

Ms. Webber commented that the administration can work with the Somerville Housing Authority (SHA) to address any equity issues, but the understanding is that the residents have vocalized that this is not something that they are interested in moving forward with. The racial and social justice work is designed to be community-driven, and the administration would prefer to defer to those residents. Councilor Strezo expressed that she has heard from residents who do not want to move forward with this. Councilor Ballantyne added that residents that she has spoken to were also not supportive of this. The SHA also had

a community meeting in June and her understanding is that the consensus from the attendees was that there was no desire to do this.

The Committee recommended that this item be moved to the Committee on Public Health and Public Safety.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210240: That the Director of the Somerville Housing Authority (SHA) develop a formal process for SHA residents to report SHA Police misconduct, in lieu of an outright abolition.

See 210239. Ms. Webber clarified that the SHA is not obligated to comply with any of the City's recommendations.

The Committee recommended that this item be moved to the Committee on Public Health and Public Safety.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210290: 3,380 citizens (approx.) submitting comments re: redistributing Police Department funding.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Mbah, Ballantyne, Strezo

206188: That the Administration update this Board prior to July 12, 2018, on providing public restrooms at public parks, including parks that will be used by programs that would otherwise use Conway Park, including Dickerman Park.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Mbah, Ballantyne, Strezo

206232: That the Administration install portable toilets at playgrounds and the following parks: Albion, Dickerman, North Street, Lincoln (when it reopens), Marshall Street, Chuckie Harris, Kenney, Grimmons, Healey, Hoyt-Sullivan (when it reopens) and Conway, no later than July 2018.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Mbah, Ballantyne, Strezo

206643: That the Administration report on how the port-a-potty pilot went this summer, whether or not it can be expanded, and how residents should notify the city if port-a-potties need cleaning.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED. [UNANIMOUS]

AYES:

Mbah, Ballantyne, Strezo