



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, May 29, 2024

6:00 PM

The meeting took place virtually via Zoom and was called to order at 6:01 PM by Vice Chair Clingan and adjourned at 7:32 PM on a roll call vote of 2 in favor (Councilors Sait and Clingan and Davis), none against and 1 absent (Councilor Davis).

Others present:

Leiran Biton - School Committee, Dr. Sarah Phillips - School Committee, Luara Pitone - School Committee, Dr. Rubén Carmona - Superintendent of Somerville Public Schools, Amara Anosike – Chief of Staff – SPS, Richard Raiche – Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management, Jill Lathan – Commissioner of Public Works, Kimberly Hutter – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Roll Call

Present: Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan and Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait
Absent: Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-0409](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee Meeting of March 25, 2024.

RESULT: ACCEPTED
AYE: Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and Ward Five City Councilor Sait
ABSENT: Ward Six City Councilor Davis

2. Resolution (ID # [24-0466](#)) By Councilor Davis
That the Administration provide the Special Committee on School Building Facilities and Maintenance with regular updates about the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) process for the Winter Hill and Brown Schools.

Director Raiche reported that the constitution of the School Building Committee has been completed and that the Committee will guide the project from design to construction. Four seats were filled and an additional two seats were added for community input. The list has been submitted to the School Building Committee for approval. The next step to be completed is the Educational Profile (EPQ). Work is progressing and a final draft will be ready by Friday, May 31st and submitted to the SMBA on Monday, June 3rd. The MSBA will review the document and schedule meetings for

June/July. Maintenance and Capital Planning for the schools is due in August.

Councilor Sait asked if it's possible to have a dedicated website for school building updates and Director Raiche replied that staff has been working on that but it is stalled because the person working on it is currently out on medical leave. Chair Clingan commented that perhaps the School Department should handle the site and updates. School Committee person (SC) Pitone asked if there has been an update for the Community Advisory Group timeline and Director Raiche reported that progress is being made behind the scenes and a brief update will be going out this week, district wide, followed by a more detailed update before the end of the school year. Stakeholders have been interviewed and a call has been made for volunteers. SC Pitone asked if district and school staff have been involved and Director Raiche confirmed that they are, adding that there is a working group that meets weekly and includes district staff. Staff from different Somerville Public School (SPS) departments were interviewed, as well as School Committee members, City Councilors and teachers. SC Pitone requested that City Councilors on this committee be given copies of MSBA documents.

SC Biton asked about the Winter Hill School at the Edgerly, saying that he has heard reports about rodents in the building. Director Raiche reported that the DPW is aware of the problem and is doing what it can, adding that the largest problem is with open food containers. SC Pitone said she hopes there are plans for the summer but the level of rodent activity at the Edgerly is higher than at other schools and she would like to find out where they're getting in. She requested that an order be submitted to determine how rodents are getting into the building, adding that if a City Council order is submitted then the response should include some data. Dr. Carmona stated that the East Somerville Community School also has a significant rodent problem. Liaison Hutter stated that the Administration is happy to provide updates with appropriate staff and respond to any order submitted.

Chair Clingan asked about a task force and questioned whether the MSBA knows about this other body and Director Raiche replied that the MSBA is aware and generally agnostic about it. The question of whether or not to combine the Brown School with another school is up to the mayor. An estimate of when a decision would have to be made in the MSBA timeline is 18 months, give or take and the goal is to make a decision by September 2025.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

3. Order
(ID # [24-0534](#))
- By Councilor Ewen-Campen
- That the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management provide a report to the School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee with a risk assessment identifying and analyzing major risks to projects the department is currently overseeing.

SC Biton said he asked for this at a School Committee meeting and sent information to the mayor and Director Raiche about what he was looking for. Director Raiche explained that when Water and Sewer projects are in the planning stages, a well defined risk based approach is used. Prior to his arrival as a city employee, the assessment used by the city wasn't very good. Now the city is looking for a new consultant to help with risk assessment. He noted that when construction starts, the tendency is to be conservative in tracking risks against our contingency. SC Biton asked if there's a timeline for having a consultant in place and for getting the final development of risk assessment for planning projects and Director Raiche answered that the consultant should be on board after the first of the year and then it will take about a year to develop the plan.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Order
(ID # [24-0535](#))
- By Councilor Ewen-Campen
- That the Commissioner of Public Works and the Administration discuss with the School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee, the status of science lab spaces at Somerville Public Schools and what is being done to safely reopen any closed lab features following a gas leak reported at the West Somerville Neighborhood School.

Commissioner Lathan reported that, in the fall, DPW received information that there was a gas smell at the school, resulting in the DPW turning all of the gas valves in the labs off. Subsequently, the School Department was going to change its policies. At a later point in time, the DPW was asked to turn the gas to the labs back on, however, the DPW has to have a certified plumber check all lines prior to turning them on. That is scheduled to occur on June 10th. Chair Clingan asked about reports that a student turned the gas on initially and Commissioner Lathan said that the DPW doesn't know, but that's what they were told.

SC Biton's understanding is that the gas was turned on in September and a teacher checking the outlets noticed a gas smell and a smell from outside grass cutting as well. His communications do not mention a student being involved. SC Pitone thinks this matter needs to go to the School Department's Administration for follow up. Chair Clingan commented that he thinks this matter could have been handled more expeditiously, through no fault of the DPW.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Order
(ID # [24-0536](#))

By Councilor Ewen-Campen

That the Commissioner of Public Works discuss with the School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee, the installation of a floor cover for the gymnasium at Somerville High School to prevent damage to the floor and to expand the gym's usability to non-athletic events.

Chair Clingan asked if the floor was still under warranty and if this matter would be within the purview of the DPW. Director Raiche explained that the contract was closed out so it would have to be a new item and that he's not sure if the DPW could handle it. Dr. Carmona said the matter was discussed and that it's not as pressing as getting the school's doors to function properly. The floor is not an issue of maintenance but is an extra layer of protection, adding that it's important but not critical. SC Dr. Phillips asked how this was missed in the first place and how it should be handled with the new Winter Hill School. Director Raiche said the MSBA is selective in what it will pay for. SC Dr. Phillips asked about the cost and Director Raiche didn't have a figure but said that there is cost to purchase the covering and also an operational cost (to install and remove it). Dr. Carmona pointed out that the space needed to store the covering would take away from the gym's usable space. SC Pitone commented that decisions were made to maximize the space with good intentions, but not everything worked out as expected.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Order
(ID # [24-0537](#))

By Councilor Ewen-Campen

That the Commissioner of Public Works report to the School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee on the timeline and progress toward installing water and electrical access at the Benjamin G. Brown School schoolyard.

Liaison Hutter said there are no plans/timeline for when this work will happen and that conversations about what this would look like are just beginning. Chief of Staff Anosike said this is on the school's summer list of projects and that the School Department has begun communicating with the city about this. SC Dr. Phillips commented that the School Committee needs to coordinate better with the Administration and asked how we go from having it as a priority to making it happen. Chief of Staff Anosike pointed out that there are projects ongoing with urgent issues.

Chair Clingan commented that it's OK for the School Department to have a wish list, but just because they want something, doesn't mean they're going to get it. Director Raiche noted that IAM has a working list from the schools that is not on the city's radar. He pointed out that new building

revenue growth is lower this year so some capital improvement projects are being delayed. The DPW has a building improvements line in its budget, but generally things in the low hundreds of thousands can be done on an annual basis while larger ticket items would be on the CIP list.

SC Biton explained that the request was not for a water fountain but for a water connection and outlet on the outside of building, adding that he's hard pressed to see how this can't be put in with the summer's general repairs. Dr. Carmona said this has been requested before and that there is a priority and accountability setting for establishing priorities. He thinks that this project might have to be budgeted.

Councilor Sait asked if the DPW looked at this to see if they can do it and Commissioner Lathan said that type of work has to be planned, budgeted and prioritized, but the DPW can look at it to see what's involved. Chair Clingan said this matter was on the School Department's radar and came from parents and he would like to have everyone work together to get this done. SC Biton said he will bring back the request and Chair Clingan will talk to Councilor Ewen-Campen about it.

**RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK
COMPLETED**