



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Legislative Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, February 13, 2024

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Davis at 6:03 pm and adjourned at 8:00 pm with a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilor Scott, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Mbah, Councilor Burnley and Chair Davis), none opposed, and none absent.

Others present: Neha Singh – Mayor’s Office, Anne Gill – Personnel, Brendan Salisbury – City Clerk’s Office, Stephanie Widzowski – Clerk of Committees.

Chair Davis noted that committees are no longer automatically renewing items from the previous calendar year; only items referred for recommendation are carried forward unless resubmitted. He encouraged those concerned by the closing of a specific item to reach out to him or to Legislative & Policy Analyst, Brendan Salisbury.

Roll Call

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

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-1781](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Legislative Matters Committee Meeting of November 28, 2023.

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

2. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-1820](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Legislative Matters Committee Meeting of December 5, 2023.

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

3. Order
(ID # [22-0038](#)) By Councilor Davis
That the Code of Ordinances be amended by requiring the Mayor to annually submit to this Council a report on the status of housing.

Chair Davis noted that he resubmitted this item two years ago. Analyst Salisbury said their intent is to speak with Intergovernmental Affairs (IGA), Dir. Feloney and other relevant staff to draft language to revise the proposed amendment. Revisions would clarify which of the requested information the Administration could provide. Chair Davis suggested moving forward with what the Administration knows can be done now, and making a note of what additional information can be collected in the future. Chair Davis said that he would be the point person on updating the amendment text. Councilor Burnley stressed the importance of including affordability of units.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

4. Order
(ID # [22-1448](#)) By Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Ewen-Campen
That the City hereby adopt the provisions of the Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 175M: Family and Medical Leave.

Taken together with item 23-0075. Dir. Gill said that the city has not adopted the state statute for family and medical leave because they feel that the city policies are better for employees' needs; furthermore, they are in the process of adding more benefits. She confirmed that Personnel thinks it best to have the discussion as part of the larger compensation study as well as collective bargaining with each union. Dir. Gill said that the proposed benefits are the same for union and non-union employees, subject to collective bargaining.

Councilor Ewen-Campen requested a memo with a comparison of city and state policies for each category of employee as well as confirmation of the information Dir. Gill shared verbally. Councilor Burnley requested answers to how much each paid family leave program would cost and which policy employees prefer. The committee considered the merit of an executive session to discuss the status of collective bargaining.

Councilor Scott asked about the delay on this item and suggested moving forward by budget season, whether or not the requested information is received. They also noted that the state policy allows for 12 weeks family leave over Somerville's proposed 8 weeks, but Dir. Gill said that the state only pays a portion of the salary for that period, whereas the city would pay full salary. Chair Davis noted that this item was kept in committee while a related discussion happened in Confirmation of Appointments and Personnel Matters. Analyst Salisbury strongly recommended keeping 22-1448 in committee longer.

Councilor Mbah talked about the effect of benefits on morale and asked Dir. Gill about roadblocks that hinder the optimization of benefits.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

5. Ordinance
(ID # [23-0075](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Kelly
Amending Chapter 2, Article VI, Division 2 of the Code of Ordinances by adding a new section establishing Paid Leave for Survivors.

Taken together with item 22-1448. Analyst Salisbury said that they recommend keeping this item in committee pending the conversation with Intergovernmental Affairs (IGA) and Personnel regarding family and medical leave. He said that the leave proposal being drafted would provide survivors with more leave than what is proposed in this ordinance; but if the committee should proceed with this item, he has substantial suggested revisions. Dir. Gill said that survivors are covered under family and medical leave and that the 2 weeks leave is strictly parental. Councilor Burnley stated that the current policy does not have paid leave for survivors and that it is important to codify that paid leave into law.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

6. Ordinance
(ID # [23-0360](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr.
Amending Section 1-19 of the Code of Ordinances to remove the phrase "Honorably Purchased from Pawtuckets - 1639" from the City seal.

Analyst Salisbury said their understanding from discussions in the advocacy community was that there was disagreement on how to proceed; the phrase "Honorably Purchased from Pawtuckets" is not accurate or appropriate, but removal of the phrase would constitute erasure of the Pawtucket people. They recommended drafting new language for the seal, placing this item on file and then filing another item to replace the seal text. Councilor Ewen-Campen talked about archival research that suggests the word "honorably" was added last minute. He said he wants this decision to be guided by Native and Pawtucket communities who know the history, and that there may be a question of whether Pawtucket or another group, such as the Massachusett, should be on the seal. Councilor Burnley requested keeping the item in committee and coordinating with the Administration to find ways to involve community partners.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

7. Ordinance
(ID # [23-1461](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr.
Amending Section 12-116 of the Code of Ordinances to create a Safe Streets ordinance, to expedite protected bike lanes.

Analyst Salisbury said that they have been meeting biweekly with Mobility, Intergovernmental Affairs and Engineering. There will be a conversation about ADA accessibility of sidewalks in the coming weeks. Analyst

Salisbury said it was their hope that there will be 2 or 3 more meetings before having enough of a plan for committee discussion.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**