



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Public Health and Public Safety Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, June 9, 2025

6:00 PM

The meeting took place remotely via Zoom and was called to order at 6:01 PM by Chair McLaughlin and adjourned at 7:06 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Pineda Neufeld, Davis and McLaughlin), none against and none absent.

Others present:

Director William Fisher – Emergency Management, Chief Shumeane Benford – SPD, Director Hanna O’Halloran – Homeless Services, Director Karin Carroll – Health and Human Services, Kimberly Hutter – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Councilor Davis was appointed to replace Councilor Clingan as a member of the committee for this meeting only.

Roll Call

Present: Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Judy Pineda Neufeld and Lance L. Davis

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [25-0522](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Public Health and Public Safety Committee Meeting of March 19, 2025.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**

AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Davis

2. Resolution (ID # [25-0986](#)) By Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Davis
That the Administration update this Council on the report and recommendations of the Davis Square Public Safety Working Group.

The administration has submitted a memo addressing this item.

Councilor Davis explained why this item was submitted and he thanked the stakeholders who participated in developing a plan. He commented that, hopefully, what happened last summer was an anomaly and that, as a result, lessons have been learned. He pointed out that what was experienced then is not unique to Somerville, but rather just the first time it was observed at that level in the city.

Chief Benford told the committee that in order to fully understand what happened, and to devise steps to deal with any future occurrences, some difficult conversations were had with neighborhood residents and he thanked

Councilors Pineda Neufeld and Davis for stepping in to facilitate those discussions.

He then introduced the **Davis Square Public Safety - Shared Community Expectations** document, which was community driven and included vested stakeholders, business owners, social service organizations, the city of Somerville and community advocates and "...outlines community expectations for acceptable behavior, police intervention guidelines, and supportive services aimed at fostering harmony and shared responsibility ...".

Chief Benford then presented a high-level review, touching on:

1. Crime and Public Safety

- a. Drug activity (selling & public use)
- b. Harm reduction strategies
- c. Using outreach teams, public health workers, and trusted community organizations
- d. Non-tolerance of drug sales
- e. Intervention by SPD for public use of illegal substance
- f. Violence & Public Disturbances
- g. Noise considerations

2. Balanced Enforcement

- a. Use a community-centered approach to ensure equitable enforcement
- b. Collaborate with community outreach workers to address non-criminal violations of these guidelines
- c. Exercise discretion and cultural competence in ensuring that individuals experiencing homelessness and/or struggling with substance use are treated with dignity and offered reasonable alternatives to criminal law enforcement action
- d. Notify SPD of people in distress or crisis as soon as practicable by calling 911
- e. Use community feedback to provide opportunities for transparency and accountability in enforcement practices
- f. Consider data, reports, and trends to shape needed enforcement activity in the Davis Square area
- g. Share any shifts in strategy with the public

3. Community Programming and Space Utilization

- a. Public Library Initiatives
- b. Homeless Coalition and engagement center
- c. Park hours and recreational activities
- d. Cultural events

4. Diverse and Accessible Services

- a. Food access
- b. Wraparound services
- c. Pathways to permanent housing
- d. Needle collection and harm reduction
- e. Outreach and support
- f. Community call boxes

Chief Benford noted that the Law Department is working on public postings that will allow police to enforce park regulations and said that it's important to have sustainable pathways and that this plan provides a way to engage with the community throughout the year. He also said that the next direction for the SPD will be the implementation of Neighborhood Engagement Teams.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld noted that weekly meetings are held to discuss data points and she stressed that this is a living plan/document that will be adjusted as needed.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

3. Order
(ID # [25-0923](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin

That the Director of Inspectional Services appear before this Council to discuss recent changes to business permitting in relation to "risk categorization" and the impact they may have on businesses.

The administration has submitted a memo addressing this item.

Chair McLaughlin noted that some businesses have expressed concern about how risk categorization would impact their businesses and he would like to have staff from ISD attend a future committee meeting to discuss this item.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

4. Order
(ID # [25-0379](#))

By Councilor Scott, Councilor Mbah, Councilor Wilson and Councilor Sait

That the Director of Inspectional Services enforce Section 11-111 of the Code of Ordinances - Registration and maintenance of vacant property, in light of the recent collapse of 316 Somerville Avenue.

The administration has submitted a memo addressing this item.

Liaison Hutter summarized the memo, which gave some historical background on 316 Somerville Avenue, and stated its conclusion that enforcement of SCO 11-111 would not have impacted the outcome of the incidents at 316 Somerville Avenue as actions towards the property were being undertaken by both the property owner and ISD.

Chair McLaughlin commented that a number of people are running for office and citing vacant properties in the city. He stated that this is not as big a lift as it's being made out to be and should be taken seriously.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Order
(ID # [25-0230](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld

That the Director of Health and Human Services and the Chief of Police consider installing emergency call boxes in key city locations, including Davis Square.

Director Fisher noted that there are several logistical issues involved with completing this order, e.g., how they operate, do they have integrated cameras, are they solar powered, hard wired, etc. Other considerations are having appropriate signage for the boxes, obtaining them in a color other than the offered blue, and collecting data to select locations for the initial installations and for any additional boxes should the need arise. The director noted that it's important to have call boxes since not everyone has a cell phone.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Order
(ID # [25-0087](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin

That the Director of Health and Human Services, Director of Housing, and Director of Housing Stability update this City Council regularly on progress towards addressing homelessness.

The administration has submitted a memo addressing this item.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

7. Resolution
(ID # [25-0473](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Scott, Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Mbah

That the Administration update this Council on the status of the \$528,218 received from the national opioid settlement fund to combat drug addiction and of any plans to utilize said funds.

The administration has submitted a memo addressing this item.

Liaison Hutter explained that some of the available funds are being used in three areas, i.e., the purchase and maintenance of public health vending machines, the purchase and maintenance of sharps disposal kiosks, and care coordination software which eliminates duplication, improving workflow across the communities of Somerville, Medford and Arlington (and possibly some others).

Liaison Hutter noted that there are restrictions on spending the funds, saying that they have to be linked to impacted individuals and their families. Chair McLaughlin commented that his focus is on what will keep people alive.

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

Referenced Documents:

- PHPS - 2025-06-09 Joint Memo 6.9.25 (with 25-0087)
- PHPS - 2025-06-09 Opioid Funds Memo (with 25-0473)
- PHPS - 2025-06-09 VPO Enforcement Memo (with 25-0379)
- PHPS - 2025-06-09 Risk Categorization Memo (with 25-0923)
- PHPS - 2025-06-09 DSPS Shared Community Expectations (with 25-0986)