



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, May 29, 2025

7:00 PM

Special Meeting

NOTICE: This is NOT the official version of the City Council's minutes. While reasonable efforts have been made to assure the accuracy of the data provided, do not rely on this information without first checking with the City Clerk.

1. OPENING CEREMONIES

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM by Ward Seven City Councilor Judy Pineda Neufeld. The City Council entered recess at 8:04 PM and returned at 8:24 PM.

- 1.1. Roll Call Call of the Roll.
(ID # [25-1029](#))

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

Present: City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah
City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson
Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen
Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott
City Councilor At Large Willie Burnley Jr.
Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait
City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo
Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan
Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis
Ward Seven City Councilor Judy Pineda Neufeld

Absent: Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin

2. CITATIONS

3. PUBLIC HEARINGS

4. ORDERS, ORDINANCES, RESOLUTIONS AND MOTIONS OF MEMBERS

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

6. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

7. COMMUNICATIONS OF THE MAYOR

- 7.1. Withdrawn Withdrawn.
(ID # [25-1026](#))

RESULT: WITHDRAWN

- 7.2. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-1028](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$736,080 to fund the FY 2026 Kennedy School Pool Enterprise Fund budget.
- Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 7.2 through 7.8 and items 10.2 through 10.4 and refer them to the Finance Committee.
- RESULT: REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION**
- FOLLOWUP:** Finance Committee
- 7.3. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-1027](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$237,000 to fund the FY 2026 Dilboy Fields Enterprise Fund Budget.
- Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 7.2 through 7.8 and items 10.2 through 10.4 and refer them to the Finance Committee.
- RESULT: REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION**
- FOLLOWUP:** Finance Committee
- 7.4. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-1033](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$373,680 from the Kennedy School Pool Enterprise Fund Retained Earnings to support the FY 2026 Kennedy School Pool Enterprise Fund Budget.
- Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 7.2 through 7.8 and items 10.2 through 10.4 and refer them to the Finance Committee.
- RESULT: REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION**
- FOLLOWUP:** Finance Committee
- 7.5. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-1030](#)) Requesting approval of the expenditure limitations for departmental Revolving Funds for FY 2026.
- Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 7.2 through 7.8 and items 10.2 through 10.4 and refer them to the Finance Committee.
- RESULT: REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION**
- FOLLOWUP:** Finance Committee
- 7.6. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-1034](#)) Requesting approval to appropriate \$2,055,000 from the Facility Construction and Renovation Stabilization Fund to the Assembly Square Fire Station Capital Fund to reduce debt service costs for the project.
- Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 7.2 through 7.8 and items 10.2 through 10.4 and refer them to the Finance Committee.
- RESULT: REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION**
- FOLLOWUP:** Finance Committee
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- 7.7. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-1032](#)) Requesting approval of a transfer of \$216,000 from the Department of Public Works (DPW) Custodian Salaries Account to the DPW Electrical Other Lump Sum Account and the DPW Highway Salaries Account to remediate year-end deficits.
- Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 7.2 through 7.8 and items 10.2 through 10.4 and refer them to the Finance Committee.
- RESULT: REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION**
- FOLLOWUP:** Finance Committee
- 7.8. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-1031](#)) Requesting approval of a transfer of \$37,740 from the Department of Public Works Admin Salaries Account to the Department of Public Works Grounds Salaries Account to remediate a year-end deficit.
- Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 7.2 through 7.8 and items 10.2 through 10.4 and refer them to the Finance Committee.
- RESULT: REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION**
- FOLLOWUP:** Finance Committee
8. COMMUNICATIONS OF CITY OFFICERS
9. NEW BUSINESS
10. SUPPLEMENTAL ITEMS
- 10.1. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-1042](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$362,915,509 to fund the FY 2026 General Fund Operating Budget.
- Prior to delivering her budget presentation, Mayor Ballantyne acknowledged reports that ICE is active in Somerville and said that everyone is working together to advise residents of their rights.
- Mayor Ballantyne then directed her attention to the presentation of the city's FY 2026 operating budget, which is for \$380.1 million, an \$18 million increase over FY 2025.
- Somerville's Financial Outlook and Challenges**
- Somerville is preparing for continued progress despite rising costs and slowing development and is focused on service delivery and strong financial management to navigate federal funding cuts and economic challenges. Costs are increasing, and development is slowing, with new growth projected at \$8M for FY 2026, down from \$14.1M in FY 2025 and \$17.7M in FY 2024. With federal actions on tariffs, immigration, and funding cuts impacting local businesses and government services, the city is implementing a 6-month hiring freeze, reducing non-union cost of living adjustments, and applying alternative funding sources to offset costs.
- Budget Composition and School Funding**
- The FY 2026 budget prioritizes community needs, with schools representing the largest expenditure at 30%, yet the city is committed to maintaining and enhancing educational support despite regional trends of cutbacks. The
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proposed general budget allocates a total of \$125 million for the Somerville Public Schools, an increase of \$5.6 million over FY 2025 and a 33.6% increase over the past four years, and includes additional support for children, youth, families, and school facilities. Long-term financial planning for the school system is a top priority, with a focus on wage equity for staff.

New Initiatives for Community Support

Somerville is mobilizing across departments to launch new initiatives aimed at improving community services and infrastructure. These initiatives focus on housing, public safety, and environmental sustainability. A Permanent Supportive Housing Working Group is being established to address chronic homelessness, upgrades to emergency vehicle traffic signal systems are being implemented to enhance public safety, and the city is launching a recreation hub at Founders Rink to provide multi-purpose space for all ages.

Goals and Projects for FY 2026

The city has set ambitious goals for FY 2026, focusing on youth support, public space improvements, and civic engagement to enhance community well-being and participation. Key youth support positions will be sustained, renovations of parks and planting of over 350 trees are planned to improve public spaces, and the city will host a Municipal Civics Academy to increase civic engagement and voter turnout.

Achievements and Progress in FY 2025

Somerville has successfully delivered on numerous goals in FY 2025, demonstrating effective governance and community support, making significant strides in various sectors, including housing, public safety, and cultural initiatives. The city facilitated 976 affordable housing units in construction or pipeline, successfully launched a Guaranteed Basic Income Pilot and expanded seasonal warming center services, and for the third consecutive year the city has achieved a AAA bond rating reflecting strong fiscal management.

Councilor Strezo inquired about the planned installation of public health vending machines and Health and Human Services Director Karin Carroll said that they would contain basic needs and life-saving supplies. Analysis of use will then allow for fine tuning what items will be available. Councilor Strezo expressed disappointed that women are being sidetracked without having emergency contraception included in the machines, to which Director Carroll replied that everything is on the table. Councilor Strezo noted that the Guaranteed Basic Income Pilot Program is winding down and she suggested that participants of that program be offered a chance to be part of the city's internship program. Councilor Burnley spoke about having an alternative response for some public safety matters and noted that it was not included in the Public Safety for All survey, prompting him to ask the mayor what was referenced during her presentation. Mayor Ballantyne explained that it was a budget priority of the City Council and that the community moved to public safety for all. Councilor Burnley commented that a co-response is not an alternative response, since it still involves having a police officer involved.

Councilor Wilson asked about cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for staff at higher grades and the mayor explained that with the hiring freeze being in place until January 2026, staff in grades 1-4 will get a 2% increase and grades 5-6 will see no increase. Councilor Wilson commented that he wonders whether this might cause some staff to leave and he asked that this decision be reconsidered. He then inquired about vacant positions in the Department of Public Works and the mayor stated that everything possible is being done to fill vacancies. Councilor Wilson asked if the \$3.8 million allocated for bargaining unit contracts was sufficient and Budget Director Michael Mastrobuoni stated that he was confident in the figure. Councilor Scott noted that the proposed city budget reflects an increase of approximately 5.6% over last year, yet the budgets for basic service delivery departments are not rising to keep pace, indicating to him where the administration's priorities are. He went on to say that some departments are losing positions and that it's the mayor who sets staffing levels. Mayor Ballantyne explained that many positions are initially funded by grants and then brought into the general fund. Councilor Clingan asked who was heading up the inter-departmental collaborations and the mayor replied that it depends on what the particular initiatives might be. The team would then come together to problem solve and move it forward. Director Mastrobuoni commented that a series of meetings were held to create the architecture and framework of how this will work. Councilor Mbah asked how employee morale will be addressed and the mayor said that ideas from a task force created during her first term are being phased in, family medical leave was instituted, employee assistance programs have been made available, and that employees will be respected.

RESULT: **REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION**

FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee

10.2. Mayor's Request
(ID # [25-1040](#))

Requesting the appropriation of \$87,000 from the Dilboy Field Enterprise Fund Retained Earnings Account to subsidize the FY 2026 Dilboy Field Enterprise Fund Budget.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 7.2 through 7.8 and items 10.2 through 10.4 and refer them to the Finance Committee.

RESULT: **REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION**

FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee

10.3. Mayor's Request
(ID # [25-1035](#))

Requesting approval to appropriate \$2,715,270 from the Street Reconstruction & Resurfacing Stabilization Fund to various capital project funds to reduce debt service costs for these projects.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 7.2 through 7.8 and items 10.2 through 10.4 and refer them to the Finance Committee.

RESULT: **REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION**

FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee

- 10.4. Mayor's Request
(ID # [25-1025](#)) Requesting approval of a transfer of \$54,412 from the Salary Contingency Salaries Account to the Law Department Salaries Account to remediate a year-end deficit.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 7.2 through 7.8 and items 10.2 through 10.4 and refer them to the Finance Committee.

RESULT: **REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION**

FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee

- 10.5. Officer's
Communication
(ID # [25-1037](#)) Superintendent of Schools conveying the School Department budget, approved by the School Committee on May 28, 2025.

Councilors Davis and Clingan were recused from this item.

Dr. Carmona presented the School Department's FY 2026 budget which he said remains true to its core values, reflects the ability to overcome obstacles, continues the commitment to maintaining current staff levels, advocating for additional funding, and valuing our educators, students, and families. He spoke of the strategic goals of Academic Excellence, Equity and Access, Wellness and Joy, and Family and Community Engagement and noted that challenges include budget deficits, underfunding in PreK-12 education, rising costs, inflation, and uncertainty around federal funding. He noted that the city projects a \$4 million budget gap and that the mayor has requested a 5% budget increase. Dr. Carmona reported that enrollment has steadily increased, with 4,952 students as of October 2025 and that new classroom spaces and staffing adjustments are planned to accommodate growth and transitions. There are 7.5 FTE positions being cut and 17.5 FTE positions are being added, for a net FTE increase of 10. Staffing additions include resource room teachers, ESL specialists, special educators, and administrative roles.

For the Non-Salary Budget there is a proposed increase of \$344,000 (+1.9%) to \$18.9 million for transportation, curriculum, and service contracts and for the Salary Budget there is a proposed increase of \$5.3 million (+5.9%) to \$93 million to support educator compensation and compliance-driven positions.

Councilor Wilson noted that some people want a higher level of school funding and Dr. Carmona responded by saying that the reality is that the Somerville Public Schools (SPS) works within the boundaries it has. Councilor Wilson spoke about coaching and Dr. Carmona noted that there are coaches in the middle and high schools, adding that there is always a need for coaching. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked how the additional after school slots are being delivered and Dr. Carmona explained that the said mayor provided \$100,000 to continue support and that the provider, Apollo, is running programs at 3 schools. Participation numbers are up and space is a concern, as is recruitment of people who can do the work.

Dr. Carmona commented that the School Department's original proposed budget was for a 5.8% increase, however that was reduced to 5.2%. To reduce the gap, funding will come from revolving funds, state funds, circuit

breaker funds, and stabilization funds for school emergencies (\$440,000 balance right now). In all, \$1.5 million will be coming from the city's stabilization funds. Dr. Carmona noted that potential funding losses from various Title programs are still unknown. Councilor Sait commented that \$9.5 million in school funding might be lost and Dr. Carmona said that the city made commitment to assist in the event that funds are lost, although the amount of money has not been determined. Councilor Burnley asked about enrollment and was told that it's steady and strong, however, long-term projections show enrollment will decrease.

RESULT: PLACED ON FILE

11. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was Adjourned at 9:11 PM.