



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, September 25, 2024

6:00 PM

Joint Meeting with the School Committee's Finance and Facilities Subcommittee.

The meeting took place virtually via Zoom and was called to order at 6:03 PM by Chair Davis and adjourned at 7:57 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Sait and Clingan and Davis), none against and none absent.

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, Neha Singh – Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Roll Call

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

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-0887](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee Meeting of May 29, 2024.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: Ward Six City Councilor Davis, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and Ward Five City Councilor Sait

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.

This item was discussed with Item #24-1284.

Director Raich gave an update and said that the initial meeting with MSBA staff was held in August and that there and some questions that remain unanswered, however, the next meeting is scheduled for this Friday, and hopefully, those questions will be answered. The maintenance and capital planning information has been submitted and everything else is on target. The SMBA will create an agreement to define the scope of feasibility study and Director Raiche noted that there is a need to reauthorize the local funding for the study and that a new item with the correct language will be

submitted to the City Council for approval. Options and locations will be examined during the feasibility study and Director Raiche is anticipating that a decision will be needed by next fall on the question of combining the schools, or not. Asked if making that decision sooner would speed up the whole process, Director Raiche that he's skeptical that the timeline would go any faster.

The Director replied to a question about a ballot override question saying that the city won't be in a position for an override by next November. Councilor Sait would like information shared on a project website for school building updates and Director Raiche said that the following site is up and running: <https://www.somervillema.gov/msba>, and that the older site is being sunsetted. Director Raiche briefly spoke about the available options and subsets saying that what would happen to the buildings, should the Brown and Winter Hill Schools combine, would be part of the discussion.

Somerville School Building Committee Members may be found here: <https://www.somervillema.gov/news/mayor-katjana-ballantyne-announcing-new-somerville-school-building-committee-members>

Consultant Stacie Smith, from CBI, outlined CBI's task, progress to date, current approach, and addressed the purpose, mandate and members of the construction advisory group (CAG). Ms. Smith stated that the CAG meetings are open to the public and that recordings will be posted along with other meeting materials. She explained that the facilitation team held interviews with the CAG applicants and decided who would be in the group. She reported that there were 3 applicants for the Brown School, 7+ applicants for the Winter Hill School, and 2 for the school community at large. She noted that no educators have stepped forward to be on the committee. Ms. Smith outlined the collection and sharing of data and information and the decision making process as well as the broad public process. Dr. Phillips suggested maximizing what has already been heard from those most affected as a starting point, adding that people are getting upset for the sake of process. Ms. Pitone commented that decisions like this have huge financial impacts on taxpayers and will affect the district for the next 50 years.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

3. Order
(ID # [24-1284](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Ewen-Campen
That the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management provide an update on the Construction Advisory Group for the planned construction project to replace the Winter Hill and Brown schools.

This item was discussed with Item #24-0466.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Order
(ID # [24-1285](#))
- By Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Ewen-Campen
That the Commissioner of Public Works provide an update on efforts to eliminate rat infiltration in school buildings.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

5. Order
(ID # [24-1286](#))
- By Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Ewen-Campen
That the Commissioner of Public Works discuss use restrictions in place for Somerville Public School athletic teams at Reavis field.

Commissioner Lathan explained that she wants to make sure that the city's fields are maintainable over the long haul. She noted that best practices is to not allow heavy loads or sharp equipment on artificial turf fields. As an example, the friction caused by the use of football sleds/chutes will cause the fibers of the turf to lay down over time, which could have potentially long term safety implications and possibly lead to replacing parts of the field. The Commissioner said that load limits were examined as was the field's warranty, which she said indicated that heavy static loads equaled misuse of the field. She met with the administration and Somerville High School staff and presented her recommendation. School Superintendent Ruben Carmona stated that reasonable use of this field has been a problem, and he noted that by law, the school district has responsibility for the care and control of school facilities.

Principal Alicia Kerston stated her frustration about permitted uses saying that sleds/chutes are essential to ensuring the safety of the players. The School Department purchased new sleds/chutes that are not supposed to harm artificial turf. She also eluded to personnel not being able to use a storage area at the field. She feels that people are losing site of the purpose of the fields. Mr. Leiran pointed out that this is not a special request, but rather, it's about the health and safety of the players. Athletic Director Stan Vieira commented that he can't say that we're doing all we can when we can't allow players to use equipment. He said he called other schools and they're using this equipment on artificial turf fields.

Michelle Kelly, Athletic Trainer at SHS stated that the sleds are considered best practice for safely and effectively simulating game conditions, adding that it's important to reduce the risk of injury to players. Several players are complaining of lower back pain because they haven't been able to practice with the proper equipment on the artificial turf. Superintendent Carmona said that it's important for the city to be a good guardian of its assets, and he would like to get a 3rd party assessment of equipment and its impact on the turf. Ms. Pitone noted that there's some disconnect about warranty and the use of sleds/chutes, adding that it's important to have plans and a budget for

field maintenance. She asked who has the authority to decide what can and can't be used.

Chair Davis stated that he's frustrated that this is being discussed before this committee, saying that the field is under the purview of School Department and that the mayor is a member of School Committee. He said he doesn't know why this committee's time is being taken up with this matter, since the City Council has no control it, adding that he's not inclined to entertain any further discussion on the matter. Chair Davis commented that this is the mayor's job to sort out how the field is used and that this should have been resolved in the proper forum prior to football season. Chair Davis made it clear that he is upset that School Department personnel felt it necessary to bring this matter to this committee in order to be heard.

Dr. Phillips stated that if the School Committee has the power to decide how the field may be used, she will introduce a motion at a School Committee meeting. Director of Intergovernmental Affairs Singh noted that the administration has presented 2 options to SPS and the goal is to collaborate and come to an agreement.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

6. Order
(ID # [24-1287](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Ewen-Campen
That the Commissioner of Public Works provide an update about the functionality of public address, or PA, systems at multiple Somerville Public School buildings.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

7. Order
(ID # [24-1288](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Ewen-Campen
That the Commissioner of Public Works provide an update on repairs to damaged play structures at the Capuano Early Education Center schoolyard.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

8. Order
(ID # [24-1289](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Ewen-Campen
That the Commissioner of Public Works provide an update on the reliability and repairs of the elevator(s) at the Winter Hill and Edgerly Schools.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

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9. Order (ID # [24-1301](#)) By Councilor Wilson, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Sait
That the Director of Parks and Recreation and the Commissioner of Public Works update this Council on plans to minimize the timing impacts of future closures of the Ginny Smithers Sanders Pool for periodic maintenance.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Documents:

- SBFM - 2024-09-25 Process Update for Somerville CAG mtg (with 24-1284)
- SBFM - 2024-09-25 Memo 9.26.24 - DPW (with 24-1285, 24-1287, 24-1288, 24-1289, 24-1301)