



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

CLERK OF COMMITTEES

March 9, 2021

REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Jefferson Thomas ("J.T.") Scott	Chair	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Vice Chair	Present	
William A. White Jr.	City Councilor At Large	Present	
Mary Jo Rossetti	City Councilor at Large	Present	
Wilfred N. Mbah	City Councilor at Large	Present	

The meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Scott at 6:02pm and adjourned at 7:21pm.

Others present: Khushbu Webber - Mayor's Office; Ed Bean - Finance; George Proakis - OSPCD; Brad Rawson - OSPCD; Rich Raiche - IAM; Chad Whiting - Water & Sewer; Alex Lessin - Water & Sewer; Chief Charles Breen - Fire; Hannah Pappenheim - Law

Approval of the February 23, 2021 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
----------------	-----------------

211365: Requesting an appropriation of \$2,200,000 from Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Water and Sewer Stabilization Fund.

Mr. Bean reminded the Committee that this fund was established in 2012, in anticipation of the redevelopment of Union Square and the substantial infrastructure needed to transform that area. The goal is to move funds from free cash to this fund to mitigate debt service for projects, and to lessen the burden on the water rates. Target goals were set by fiscal year based on the 2017 DIF. For FY 2021, the target is approximately \$13.7M, with the current balance just over \$11M. There were no appropriations in 2020. This appropriation will bring the fund closer to its target balance, although now there are additional needs that have been recognized.

Chair Scott shared that the retained earnings balance is just over \$2.5M, and asked why this isn't what is used to transfer to the stabilization fund. Mr. Bean noted that it is likely that both will be needed. Transfers from retained earnings are generally made at the end of each fiscal year. Councilor Rossetti asked for clarification that approval of this request would decrease free cash to just over \$8M and Mr. Bean specified that it would be \$8,203,004. Councilor Rossetti added that the plans for the School District have been further complicated and expressed concern that further funding would be needed.

Mr. Bean suggested that the Recovery Act funding should be substantial and will help with pandemic-related issues such as the Schools. He also clarified that stabilization funds are not intended for the operating budget, but the federal funding can assist with that as well as school building improvements. Chair Scott highlighted that transfers can be made out of the stabilization funds and Mr. Bean confirmed that the City Council does have the power to appropriate those funds.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Rossetti, Mbah

211368: City Solicitor requesting approval to retain the pro bono services of Todd & Weld as outside counsel to advise the city with respect to the establishment of safe consumption sites.

Ms. Pappenheim shared that the request to retain Todd & Weld to advise the City on efforts to establish a safe consumption site. She introduced attorney Maria Davis, a partner at Todd & Weld, who is offering pro-bono support to this project. Chair Scott thanked Ms. Davis for her support and that of the office.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Rossetti, Mbah

211011: Requesting acceptance of a \$25,495.51 grant with no new match required, from the Department of Transportation Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration to the Fire Department for the purchase of thermal imaging cameras.

Chair Scott noted that this item was previously before the Committee, but the Surveillance Technology Impact Report had not yet been completed and accepted. It is now accepted and on file.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Rossetti, Mbah

211255: That the Mayor dedicate resources as a supplementary FY21 budget request and in the FY22 budget to create a Department of Transportation with at least three new, additional full-time staff including a senior position empowered to coordinate this work across departments - a Chief of Streets.

Chair Scott noted that this item is in conjunction with items 8-11. Councilor Mbah expressed hope that the request would be approved, as street safety is an emergency issue. Equitable mobility and accessibility, and the impact on the climate, are critical. Councilor Mbah sponsored Arah Shuur and Ken Carlson to speak on this. Ms. Shuur and Mr. Carlson have been working as part of SASS, the Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets. They suggest a rethinking of the way that the City uses its streets. They highlighted that the budget should reflect the interests of the community, and noted that traffic priorities align with the City's other goals. They suggested that better streetscape design is a successful alternative to enforcement. SASS made a specific request to the Mayor and emphasized support for the mid-year request for additional Mobility staff.

Mr. Proakis elaborated on the plan, which is a shift from a previous proposal to create a new department with management-level positions, to a focus on front-line roles. Mr. Rawson confirmed that there are no vacancies in the Mobility Division and estimated that the positions could be filled by June. Mr. Proakis clarified that the funding would cover the period of May 15 through the end of the fiscal year. Councilor Ballantyne noted that the position descriptions are project management focused and questioned why they weren't concentrated on an engineering skill set. Mr. Proakis clarified that the job descriptions were designed to be flexible, but they have found engineering roles more difficult to fill in the past. Mr. Rawson added that staff have many design skills, and physical planning and in-house design capacity have proven important, but they will also continue to build engineering talent.

Councilor Rossetti expressed support, commending colleagues and previous colleagues, as well as the community, for their advocacy in this area. She requested a citywide organization chart to better understand the departments, employees, and titles. Chair Scott added that a report on current vacancies would be useful as well. Councilor White noted that this is the first of many steps to respond to the community to create a more inviting mobility community. Councilor Ballantyne echoed those sentiments and also supported the appropriation, adding that the City needs to be forward-thinking. Chair Scott also shared his gratitude for a proposal that took concerns into consideration.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
----------------	-----------------------

211258: That this Council discuss FY22 funding and organizational priorities for the Mobility Department.

See 211382.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
----------------	--------------------------

211374: Requesting a transfer of \$50,000 from the SPCD Planning and Zoning Personal Services Account to the SPCD Mobility Ordinary Maintenance Account for a mid-year professional services request.

Mr. Proakis clarified that some of these funds are moved from OSPCD accounts in order to start four studies: an Organizational Design; a Bike Network Plan; a Bus Network Plan; and a Transportation Demand Management Plan. There will be additional funds requested in the subsequent budget. Chair Scott asked how these services would be delivered and Mr. Rawson noted that they would provide the City staff with data and analysis to synthesize with existing plans. The consulting teams would be able to conduct the technical analyses to inform the public dialogue, but the intention is that staff would complete the final reports.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Rossetti, Mbah

211375: Requesting to establish a Senior Planner position in the SPCD Mobility Division at an annual salary of \$88,434 (NU7) and transfer \$10,237 from the SPCD Economic Development Personal Services Account to the SPCD Mobility Personal Services Account to fund this position from May 15 to June 30, 2021.

See 211255.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Rossetti, Mbah

211376: Requesting to establish a Senior Planner position in the SPCD Mobility Division at an annual salary of \$88,434 (NU7) and transfer \$10,237 from the SPCD Housing Personal Services Account to the SPCD Mobility Personal Services Account to fund this position from May 15 to June 30, 2021.

See 211255.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Rossetti, Mbah

211377: Requesting to establish an Outreach Coordinator position in the SPCD Mobility Division at an annual salary of \$62,424 (NU11) and transfer \$7,266 from the SPCD Planning and Zoning Personal Services Account to the SPCD Mobility Personal Services Account to fund this position from May 15 to June 30, 2021.

See 211255.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Scott, Ballantyne, White Jr., Rossetti, Mbah

211379: Director of SPCD submitting information regarding mid-year transfers to establish new positions and new projects in the Mobility Division.

See 211255.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE
----------------	-----------------------

211382: That this Council consider advocating for an additional \$750,000 in the FY22 budget, as attached, for safe streets and equitable mobility.

Councilor Mbah emphasized that more is needed in the next budget. He sponsored Mr. Carlson to speak on the item. Mr. Carlson enthusiastically supported the request and outlined some specifics, such as design, studies, and implementation. Councilor Scott emphasized that the concerns of the disability, bicycle, elderly, and other communities are all addressed by this resource. Mr. Proakis added that there is a lot of convergence between what is being considered in the Mobility Division and what is on the list. The Division is submitting a request for design, materials, and construction, but also plans to leverage other funding to achieve this. He clarified that a parking plan is underway through the Parking Department, though the Mobility Division has assisted in the effort. A Bicycle and Bus Network Plan is intended in conjunction with the request for funding for professional and technical assistance. He also noted that the Outreach Coordinator or Communications Department will be leveraged for multilingual assistance. Chair Scott emphasized that the Communications Department is already stretched thin and making the City truly inclusive includes planning for multilingual and equitable access at all levels and

throughout all divisions. Councilor Rossetti suggested that this should be considered in conjunction with the other priorities for next year's budget.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Materials:

- SASS slides (with 211255, 211382)