



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, April 21, 2026

6:00 PM

This meeting was held virtually via Zoom and was called to order at 6:00 pm by Chair Wheeler and adjourned at 8:15 pm with a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Link, Strezo, Hardt, Scott and Wheeler), none opposed, and none absent.

Also present: Emily Wisdom - Somerville Police Department Director of Finance and Administration, Yasmine Raddassi - Legislative Liaison, Steven Nutter - Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment, Cathy Piantigini - Somerville Public Library Director, Anthony Baum - Arts Program Coordinator, Erica Satin-Hernandez - American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Director, Vanessa Boukili - Urban Forestry and Landscape Planner, Denise Taylor - Director of Communications, Roberta Cameron - Preservation Act Manager, Richard Raiche - Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management, Charles Breen - Somerville Fire Chief, Shumeane Benford - Somerville Police Chief and Delaney Fisher-Cassiol - Clerk of Committees

Roll Call

Present: City Councilor At Large Jon Link, City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Emily Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott and City Councilor At Large Ben Wheeler

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [26-0640](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting of April 7, 2026.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

Grants and Acceptances

2. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0601](#)) Requesting approval to accept and expend a \$125,000 grant that requires a match, from the Department of Energy Resources to the Office of Sustainability and Environment for light retrofitting at Dilboy Field.

Steven Nutter, Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment, provided an update on the lighting retrofit project at Dilboy Field through the Department of Energy Resources' Green Communities program, noting the City was awarded funding in March and that the project will support decarbonization efforts. In response to a question from Chair Wheeler, he explained that the existing lighting is energy-intensive and generates significant heat, while the proposed LED lighting will be more energy efficient, lower cost, and capable of remote control. Councilor Scott asked

whether specific fixtures had been identified; Director Nutter said an AECOM consultant has specified the lighting, though it has not yet been purchased. Councilor Scott emphasized the importance of aligning with dark sky policy and avoiding overly bright or blue tones, and Director Nutter noted coordination with Public Space and Urban Forestry and that he will follow up with additional information.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

3. Mayor's Request
(ID # [26-0506](#))

Requesting approval to accept and expend a \$30,000 gift from the Carnegie Corporation of New York to the Public Library for library operations.

Cathy Piantigini, Director of the Somerville Public Library, shared that three of the city's existing library buildings were originally constructed with Carnegie funding in the early 1900s. She noted that, in recognition of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, a \$10,000 donation is being offered per Carnegie library building.

In response to Councilor Hardt, Director Piantigini stated that there is no specific plan for the funds at this time and that they will likely be placed in the library's consolidated gift account. She added that the funds are unrestricted and may be used to support or supplement existing services.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

4. Mayor's Request
(ID # [26-0507](#))

Requesting approval to accept and expend a \$300 gift from James and Linda Hyson to the Public Library for materials for the West Branch Library.

Cathy Piantigini, Director of the Somerville Public Library, noted that the donation was made by the family of a longtime West Branch volunteer in their honor. She stated that all donations to the library are required to be reviewed by the Finance Committee.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

Contracts and Agreements

5. Mayor's Request
(ID # [26-0512](#))

Requesting approval of a five-year extension to the lease with BwB-Square LLC for Nibble Community Kitchen.

Anthony Baum, Arts Program Coordinator, shared that this is a five-year lease extension to continue operations and expand outreach and capacity of

Nibble Community Kitchen. Councilor Strezo noted that the lease has increased from approximately \$40,000 in the first year to just over \$48,000 and raised concerns about reduced restaurant spending and potential impacts on Nibble Kitchen. Coordinator Baum referenced the attachment *Finance - 2026-04-21 Memo (with 26-0512)* and stated that program revenues from kitchen operations have remained largely consistent and are not expected to be an issue. Councilor Scott asked about the lease structure and noted it included a prior extension option. Coordinator Baum clarified this is a new five-year lease after eight years in the space. Chair Wheeler asked how rent is funded, and Coordinator Baum explained that Nibble maintains a dedicated account within the Arts Council where revenues are deposited and used to cover rent and operating expenses.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

Appropriations

6. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0513](#)) Requesting approval to appropriate of \$46,500 from the Street Tree Stabilization Fund for FY 2026 Ash Tree treatments.

Vanessa Boukili, Urban Forestry and Landscape Planner, noted that this funding covers the city's biennial ash tree injection treatment using a neem oil-based application to protect against Emerald Ash Borers. In response to Councilor Link, she stated there are 956 ash trees in the city, with approximately 700 on city property. In response to Councilor Hardt, Planner Boukili and Councilor Scott noted that the stabilization fund is primarily supported by mitigation payments.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

Transfers

7. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0603](#)) Requesting approval of a transfer of \$31,800 from the Communications and Community Engagement Salaries Account to the Communications and Community Engagement Professional and Technical Services and Printing and Stationary Accounts for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and program signage.

Denise Taylor, Director of Communications, shared that the item requests moving personnel services lag monies into the operating and maintenance budget to cover two unplanned expenses related to Americans with Disabilities Act compliance for digital services and signage under the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). She noted that the city proceeded with compliance work ahead of the original April 26 deadline using other budget funds, which has created pressure in other areas. While

the United States Department of Justice has since extended the deadline by one year, she explained that the request is intended to restore funding so the department can continue necessary software and service payments through the end of the year, including upcoming renewals that would otherwise need to be paused.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

Community Preservation Act Appropriations

8. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0518](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$400,000 from the Community Preservation Act Fund for improvements to the Kennedy Schoolyard.

This item was discussed with item 26-0519.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

9. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0517](#)) Requesting approval of a transfer of \$228,000 from the Community Preservation Act (CPA) Undesignated Fund Balance to the CPA Open Space Reserve.

This item was discussed with item 26-0519.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

10. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0509](#)) Requesting the approval of a time-only contract extension until 5/31/2029 for the Mystic River Watershed Association for the Community Preservation Act FY 2023 grant for design of the Blessing of the Bay Linear Park improvements.

Roberta Cameron, Preservation Act Manager, noted that the contract extension allows the Mystic River Watershed Association to continue overseeing construction administration through the completion of improvements to Blessing of the Bay Linear Park, following the grant awarded in fiscal year 2023 to initiate the project.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

Bonds

-
11. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0519](#)) Requesting approval to reduce the borrowing authorization for the Kennedy Schoolyard Renovation Project from \$2,000,000 to \$1,600,000.
- Roberta Cameron, Preservation Act Manager, said that after completing this year's funding allocations, the Community Preservation Committee identified an opportunity to use remaining revenue for the Kennedy Schoolyard project. The funds come from the undesignated fund balance and must first be transferred into the Open Space Reserve before they can be used. This reduces the project bond by \$400,000, saving about \$30,000 in interest over the life of the project. Chair Wheeler thanked the Community Preservation Committee and noted that the Kennedy Schoolyard project will improve accessibility and include stormwater mitigation.
- RESULT:** **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
- AYE:** City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler
12. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0515](#)) Requesting authorization to borrow \$8,284,000 in a bond, and to appropriate the same amount for the recurring FY 2026 Water Main Rehabilitation program.
- Richard Raiche, Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management, noted that this is an annual water main rehabilitation project. He explained that while the water mains are adequately sized, they are on average 100 years old. This year's work focuses on the McGrath Corridor, with design now complete and the project ready to go out to bid for construction this season. In response to a question from Chair Wheeler, he noted that there are multiple qualified contractors available and that bidding is typically competitive, with strong interest in working with the city. He added that the bond will be repaid through water bills over the next 20 years.
- RESULT:** **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
- AYE:** City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler
13. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0516](#)) Requesting authorization to borrow \$2,000,000 in a bond, and to appropriate the same amount for the annual FY 2026 Sewer System Rehabilitation - McGrath Corridor.
- Richard Raiche, Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management, noted that the sewer system is complex and requires full replacement in certain sections to meet modern standards. He explained that the city prioritizes identifying pipes at risk of imminent failure in order to address issues proactively. While trenchless repair is used where possible, some projects require full excavation and replacement. He added that this appropriation supports the design and construction of selected pipe segments, and that the bond will be repaid over 20 years through sewer user bill fees.
- RESULT:** **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
-

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

Fire Department Grant and Gift Acceptances and Transfers

14. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0524](#)) Requesting approval to accept and expend a \$48,866.25 grant with no new match required, from the Urban Areas Security Initiative to the Fire Department for the purchase of a vehicle for the Fire Department Auxiliary.

Charles Breen, Somerville Fire Chief, noted that funds originally accepted by the Police Department for training were not fully expended for that purpose and will instead be used to purchase a new van shared by the Fire Department, Department of Public Works, and Police Department. Councilor Scott noted that the funding is from fiscal year 2023 and stated there are no concerns regarding the terms of the grant.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

15. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0523](#)) Requesting approval to accept and expend a \$30,380 grant with no new match required, from the Department of Fire Services to the Fire Department for firefighter safety equipment.

Charles Breen, Somerville Fire Chief, noted that there are seven new recruits and the funds will help offset the cost of purchasing their personal equipment. Chair Wheeler noted that the gear contains some PFAS. Chief Breen shared that they are aware, but that there is currently not a strong alternative, though there may be opportunities to replace the gear in the future. Chair Wheeler asked for confirmation from the union that they are in agreement with this purchase.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

Police Department Grant and Gift Acceptances and Transfers

16. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0511](#)) Requesting approval of a transfer of \$35,000 from the Police Department Salaries Account to the Police Department Animal Control Salaries Account for an expected deficit.

Emily Wisdom, Somerville Police Department Director of Finance and Administration, noted that the transfer is needed due to unanticipated staffing needs in the Animal Control Division. She explained that the division consists of only two staff members, and one was out on leave, which had not been budgeted for, resulting in the remaining staff member covering additional shifts.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

17. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0510](#)) Requesting approval of a transfer of \$325,000 from the Police Department Salaries Account to the Police Department Medical and Dental Services Account for medical procedures for current and retired employees injured in the line of duty.

Emily Wisdom, Somerville Police Department Director of Finance and Administration, noted that under state law the police and fire departments are required to cover medical expenses for employees injured in the line of duty, as well as certain retirees who qualify under Chapter 111F. She explained that there were more procedures than expected this year; while costs are typically consistent year to year, they can be unpredictable when significant injuries occur. She added that the procedures have been approved, but additional funding is needed to cover them.

In response to Councilor Hardt, Director Wisdom noted that the additional funding is being offset in part by cost savings from employees who have retired or left the department, resulting in unspent salary savings for the year.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

18. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0378](#)) Requesting approval to accept and expend a \$231,635 grant with no new match required, from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security to the Police Department for a body-worn camera program.

Shumeane Benford, Somerville Police Chief, emphasized that the body cameras are intended as a tool for transparency, trust-building, and validating positive interactions with the public. He added that many surrounding communities already use body worn cameras and that this has been identified as a priority by the Mayor.

Councilor Scott referenced the attachment *Finance - 2026-04-21 Memo (with 26-0378)* and noted that the grant would require an estimated annual city cost of approximately \$95,000, along with a required 2 percent increase in police salaries under the contract, resulting in significant long-term costs. He expressed concern that the total impact could be roughly half a million dollars annually and stated that, given current budget constraints and increased surveillance considerations, he does not support the proposal. Councilor Link concurred, noting that departments are being asked to do more with fewer resources and expressing concern about the financial impact.

Councilor Strezo referenced recommendations from the NAACP and the Public Safety for All Task Force and invited Ben Struhl, Chair of Somerville's Public Safety for All Task Force, to speak. He cited research indicating that body worn cameras can reduce complaints and use of force, including studies showing measurable benefits in Boston.

Chair Wheeler noted that body worn camera footage can help provide a shared understanding of interactions between police and the public and that the technology is generally supported by public defenders and attorneys. He acknowledged potential benefits but stated that, due to recurring costs and current budget constraints, he is not prepared to support the item at this time, though it could be revisited.

Chief Benford responded that even a single adverse incident can demonstrate the value of body worn cameras and emphasized their role in accountability, trust-building, and officer training and professional development. He noted that approximately 80 departments applied for the grant and 30 were selected.

Councilor Hardt stated that while she recognizes the potential value and has reviewed the recommendations, she is not comfortable moving forward without additional information, particularly regarding policies governing use of the technology. Chair Wheeler concurred, noting the need for additional time to review the information. Councilor Scott reiterated concerns about ongoing budget commitments and the lack of finalized oversight structures, noting that the grant primarily covers startup costs. Councilor Link added that while body worn cameras may reduce complaints, they do not eliminate them and reiterated concern about the long-term annual cost.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

NAY: City Councilor At Large Link and Ward Two City Councilor Scott

Communications

19. Public
Communication
(ID # [26-0636](#))

Alexandra Thorn and Daniel Wong submitting comments re: item #26-0378, grant for body-worn camera program.

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

Referenced Documents:

- Finance - 2026-04-21 Memo (with 26-0378)
- Finance - 2026-04-21 Memo (with 26-0512)
- Finance - 2026-04-21 Memo (with 26-0601)

