



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Equity, Gender, Seniors, Families and Vulnerable Populations Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, December 11, 2023

7:00 PM

This meeting was held remotely via Zoom, was called to order by Chair Gomez Mouakad at 7:02 pm and adjourned at 10:07 pm with a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilor Strezo, Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Chair Gomez Mouakad), none opposed, and none absent.

Others present: Neha Singh – Mayor’s Office, Kimberly Wells – City Clerk, Denise Capers – RSJ, Jenifer McKenna, Harriotte Ranvig – Somerville Commission for Persons with Disabilities (SCPD), Holly Simone – SCPD, Susan Yerkes – Parks and Recreation, Maria Nagel – SomerViva, Nicholas Antanavica – ISD, Luis Quizhpe – OSPCD, Stephanie Widzowski – Clerk of Committees.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Beatriz Gomez Mouakad , Vice Chair Judy Pineda Neufeld and Kristen Strezo

1. Committee Minutes
(ID # [23-0337](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Equity, Gender, Seniors, Families and Vulnerable Populations Committee Meeting of February 28, 2023.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**

AYE: Chairperson Gomez Mouakad, Vice Chair Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Strezo

2. Order
(ID # [22-0671](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad and Councilor Wilson
That the Director of Parks and Recreation report on enrollment processes, communications, matriculation data, staffing and programs offered in the past five years.

Taken together with item 23-0484. Chair Gomez Mouakad asked how to make Parks and Recreation programs accessible to underrepresented communities - especially for adult immigrants. Dir. Yerkes said that the enrollment process is primarily online, but there are office assistants and staff at all programs that can help with registration. The department communicates through social media, flyers and emails. Dir. Yerkes said that they had early enrollment for people with technology or income barriers in 2022, and that scholarship applications are open year-round. She added that they will continue to have early registration for larger summer programs. Dir. Yerkes said that Parks and Recreation is willing to track data from the last five years, but needs time to compile it.

Councilor Strezo asked if there are regularly staffed office hours that are advertised to the public. Dir. Yerkes said the information was online, but the

location needs to be updated again. Chair Gomez Mouakad recommended that the director reach out to Padres Latinos. She also asked if they would consider standardizing scholarships. Dir. Yerkes said that she would need to contact Finance because there are different standards for qualifying for different funding sources.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

3. Order
(ID # [22-0966](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad

That the Director of SomerViva provide the Committee on Equity, Gender, Seniors, Families and Vulnerable Populations with an update on translation services.

Dir. Nagel said that there have been 952 requests for translation since July, not all of which have been filled because of SomerViva's dual mission of providing access and practicing fiscal responsibility. Dir. Nagel talked about the process for approving requests. She said that SomerStat helped to create a new ticketing system. With the fact that the Mayor's initiatives have led to an unprecedented demand for language accessibility in the community, there has not been an opportunity yet to draft the language implementation plan. Chair Gomez Mouakad asked about translating documents like marriage certificates. Dir. Nagel said that SomerViva has been focusing more on strengthening collaboration with colleagues and have other departments send them forms that need translating. At a question from Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Dir. Nagel said a drastic increase in translation requests came after the hiring of Dir. Gamble.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Order
(ID # [22-1272](#))

By Councilor Scott and Councilor Clingan

That the ADA Coordinator deliver a list of ADA complaints received from members of the public in FY 2021 and FY 2022.

Dir. Capers said that all complaints through the ADA have been resolved in a timely manner. Chair Gomez Mouakad pointed out an inaccuracy in the 4th row of the table in the attached report (titled "Equity - 2023-12-11 ADA Report (with 22-1272)") and asked about the item at the West Somerville Neighborhood School. Chair Gomez Mouakad sponsored Commission Chair Holly Simone of the Commission for Persons with Disabilities. Ms. Simone said that she had made several inquiries through 311 and did not see them or her Jotform entries in the report. She also said that residents reached out to her who had not heard back from the city. She asked if RSJ has received any of the emails from 311 calls that are sent directly to Dir. Pomeroy instead of being logged in 311. Dir. Capers said she could not speak to the structure of 311 but could get answers.

Chair Gomez Mouakad suggested having an ADA checkbox on 311 submission forms. She also said that future chairs of this committee should request this report quarterly. Ms. Simone said there needs to be multiple ways to submit complaints regarding accessibility.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Order
(ID # [22-1277](#))

By Councilor Scott and Councilor Clingan
That the ADA Coordinator provide a status on requests for Braille transcription of materials.

Taken together with items 22-1306 and 23-1623. Dir. Capers said that the city now has a Braille embosser and is ordering accompanying technology and software. The next step is to find a permanent location for it. She said that requests for Braille embossing are for members of the Somerville Commission for Persons with Disabilities (SCPD) and the Somerville Pedestrian and Transit Advisory Committee, with the vendor being the Perkins School for the Blind. Dir. Capers said that under Dir. Pomeroy, turnaround time for embossing has gone from 3-4 weeks to 2 weeks. Chair Gomez Mouakad sponsored Harriotte Ranvig of the SCPD. Ms. Ranvig said that embossing in other languages should be available and requested that the embosser be housed soon so that commission heads could print things quickly. She noted that slides in presentations should be delineated when embossing, and graphics should have written descriptions. Dir. Capers said that the embosser will not be open to the public until staff are trained and learn how to service it. She and Ms. Ranvig noted that the equipment is quite loud. Ms. Ranvig suggested reaching out to the Massachusetts Office of Disability for referrals on trainers for the equipment.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Order
(ID # [22-1298](#))

By Councilor Strezo and Councilor Pineda Neufeld
That the Director of Health and Human services discuss the potential effects of the recent Supreme Court ruling on Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health on Somerville women, pregnant women, pregnant people and reproductive health.

Chair Gomez Mouakad summarized an email sent to the Committee that said HHS is tracking this and working with Cambridge Health Alliance on the issue.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

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7. Order
(ID # [22-1306](#))
- By Councilor Burnley Jr.
That the ADA Coordinator coordinate with the City of Cambridge or another nearby entity that can provide Braille translations in less than 3 to 4 weeks until the City can procure a Braille.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
8. Resolution
(ID # [22-1458](#))
- By Councilor Pineda Neufeld
That the Administration update this Council on the timeline and process for identifying a permanent Teen Center.
- Liaison Singh said that there are no updates on permanent locations yet, but the Administration is having internal conversations about planning and goals. Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked if youth are being involved on the planning committee for this as per the Mayor's commitment at a rally last year. Liaison Singh said that her understanding was that department heads needed to discuss the CIP process first.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
9. Order
(ID # [22-1571](#))
- By Councilor Strezo
That this Council's Committee on Equity, Gender, Seniors, Families and Vulnerable Populations hold a public hearing to discuss the feasibility of conducting CORI and SORI checks for Crisis Pregnancy Centers.
- Councilor Strezo sponsored Jenifer McKenna, who discussed the findings of her study examining crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs). She said that they are not licensed healthcare facilities and are not required to meet staffing or legal standards on medical adjacent services like ultrasounds. Ms. McKenna said that there are no CPCs in Somerville yet, but they are looking to expand in the state. Clerk Wells suggested contacting Legislative & Policy Analyst Brendan Salisbury for next steps, as the question seems to be whether to create an ordinance to require licensing or registration for CPCs. She said that it would be more effective to hold a public hearing when there is drafted legislation with specific language to be discussed.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
10. Order
(ID # [22-2120](#))
- By Councilor Gomez Mouakad and Councilor Kelly
That the Director of the Office of Racial and Social Justice, the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management and the Executive Director of the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development document compliance with Code of Massachusetts Regulations (CMR) 521, Sections 3.3 and 3.5.
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Dir. Antanavica said that ISD tracks this information, and the threshold for ADA compliance is when 30% of the assessed value of the property is spent on renovation over a 6-month period. Normal maintenance is not part of the 30% requirement, and outdoor spaces are not considered in the value of the building. Dir. Antanavica said that a lot of work done lately on city buildings has fallen under normal maintenance.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

11. Resolution
 (ID # [23-0073](#))

By Councilor Wilson, Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Kelly, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Scott

That the Administration and School Department prioritize fully meeting Somerville Public Schools families' demand for after school and vacation programming in the 2023-24 school year, including expanding the offerings of after-school enrichment clubs.

That the Administration and School Department prioritize fully meeting Somerville Public Schools families' demand for after school and vacation programming in the 2023-24 school year, in a way that honors our commitments to equity and accessibility, including expanding the offerings of after-school enrichment clubs.

Chair Gomez Mouakad suggested partnering with private organizations that provide these services. Councilor Strezo asked about the cost of enrichment programs and about why students are expected to leave the high school building immediately following the end of the school day.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

12. Order
 (ID # [23-0080](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Kelly, Councilor Scott, Councilor Ewen-Campen and Councilor Gomez Mouakad

That the Director of Procurement and Contracting Services update this Council on the status of the citywide disparity study.

Strategic Planning & Equity Manager Luis Quizhpe, who is managing the disparity study, explained that the study is dictated by Supreme Court case laws and examines purchasing and contracting processes. A goal is to identify barriers for disadvantaged businesses, including in construction. The study is being conducted jointly between Somerville and Brookline and is expected to finish in summer 2024. There will be an information session in January as well as a hearing in April. Chair Gomez Mouakad asked if the study will examine how long contractors wait to be paid from date of invoice, to which the answer was yes. Manager Quizhpe talked about the process of determining disparity.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

13. Order
(ID # [23-0484](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad

That the Director of Parks and Recreation consider giving enrollment priority to low-income families in Parks and Recreation Programs, including but not limited to pre-registration priority.

Taken with item 22-0671.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

14. Order
(ID # [23-0485](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad

That the Director of the SomerViva Office of Immigrant Affairs (SOIA) provide data on the process to connect immigrant families with legal services and the waitlist to receive those services vs. the waitlist for follow-up from government immigrant agencies.

Dir. Nagel said that the intake turnaround is less than 3 days, usually sooner, and that there is not a waitlist right now, but that will change soon because SOIA has already committed \$170,000 of the allotted \$200,000 for legal services. This is because of high demand and the fact that asylum cases are expensive. Dir. Nagel said that there is an incredible backlog of cases federally as well as locally. She stressed that money is not the sole issue; capacity is also a limiting factor.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

15. Order
(ID # [23-0486](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad and Councilor Strezo

That this City Council consider options for Committee meetings like allowing schedule changes to the daytime or fixing presentation times in the evenings to facilitate flexibility for staff and Councilors who are new parents or facing childcare challenges.

Clerk Wells explained that the City Council is considered a part-time body, meaning it needs to be structured in a way that allows members to hold full time jobs. She said that changing meeting times to the day would make it difficult for many to attend and could dissuade would-be councilors from running. Furthermore, the committee clerks are hired with the same expectations, and the schedule change could lead to recruitment or retention issues. The organizational structure of the Council would need to be changed to make daytime meetings possible. However, Clerk Wells said that fixing presentation times could be done with coordination between chairs and Intergovernmental Affairs.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

16. Resolution
(ID # [23-1185](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad

That this Council and the Administration, resolve to support all programs to ensure that all youth reach their full potential and to eliminate all academic gaps between our white students and our students of color, starting at the early stages of development.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

17. Resolution
(ID # [23-1295](#))

By Councilor Strezo

That the Administration designate a small children's section in City Hall between the Council Chamber and the Subcommittee Room for parents and caregivers.

Councilor Strezo said that inclusivity applies to parents and guardians as well, who are often locked out of community processes. She requested at minimum having some children's books or art supplies. Clerk Wells said that the Council Chamber and Committee and Subcommittee rooms belong to the City Council, so the Council could vote to transfer funds to a line designated for a children's section. She noted, however, concerns with supervision and space - it would still be guardians' responsibility to supervise their children, and the rooms have exceeded full capacity multiple times this year. Clerk Wells recommended reaching out to Legislative & Policy Analyst Brendan Salisbury to explore options.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

18. Order
(ID # [23-1366](#))

By Councilor Strezo

That the Director of Sustainability and Environment discuss the plan for outreach for the online Climate Survey and how residents without computers are brought into the conversation.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

19. Order
(ID # [23-1438](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad and Councilor Strezo

That the Chief of Police report on the training, education and policies established for officers to address violence against LGBTQ and gender non-conforming individuals.

Deputy Chief Ward listed trainings in the last three years taken by SPD officers - implicit bias (2021), cultural competency (2022), and hate crimes (2022) that had specific LGBTQ sections. He added that the trainings are through the Massachusetts Police Training Council, that SPD also hires specialists, and that SPD has been working with RSJ to improve the

trainings.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

20. Mayor's
Communication
(ID # [23-1557](#))

Conveying the FY 2023 report of SomerViva: Office of Immigrant Affairs.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

21. Order
(ID # [23-1621](#))

By Councilor Clingan, Councilor Scott and Councilor Burnley Jr.
That the Director of Engineering provide this Council with an update on the 2013 Pedestrian Accessibility Study and the progress made in the 10 years since its release.

Chair Gomez Mouakad said that Dir. Postlewaite was unavailable to speak on the item, but recommended to next year's City Council that this become a top priority.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

22. Order
(ID # [23-1622](#))

By Councilor Clingan, Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Gomez Mouakad

That the Director of the Office of Racial and Social Justice update this Council on the implementation of the FileVine system that was procured to track Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) complaints.

Dir. Capers said that FileVine has been implemented.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

23. Order
(ID # [23-1623](#))

By Councilor Clingan, Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Scott
That the Director of the Office of Racial and Social Justice update this Council on the status of the procurement of a Braille embosser to accommodate requests for materials in Braille.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

24. Resolution
(ID # [23-1626](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr.

That the Administration increase the \$55,000 allotted to support food access to \$100,000, in accordance with its promise to pledge \$1 million for participatory budgeting.

Liaison Singh said that a memo was sent to the Finance Committee about

the remaining \$45,000 of the Participatory Budgeting Stabilization Fund. She said that the funds will be allocated to the next cycle of participatory budgeting.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

- Equity - 2023-12-11 OSE memo (with 23-1366)
- Equity - 2023-12-11 ADA Report (with 22-1272)
- Equity - 2023-12-11 PB Implementation Memo (with 23-1626)
- Equity - 2023-12-11 Memo (with 22-1272, 22-1273, 22-1306, 23-1622, 23-1623)