



# City of Somerville, Massachusetts

## City Council

### Meeting Minutes

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Thursday, June 20, 2024

7:00 PM

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*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 7:00 PM by Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen.

The City Council entered Executive Session at 7:03 PM and returned at 7:45 PM.

The City Council entered recess at 10:03 PM and returned at 10:20 PM.

The City Council entered recess at 10:34 PM and returned at 10:42 PM.

- 1.1. Roll Call                      Call of the Roll.  
(ID # [24-0944](#))

**RESULT:**            **PLACED ON FILE**

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

#### 2. CITATIONS

#### 3. PUBLIC HEARINGS

#### 4. ORDERS, ORDINANCES, RESOLUTIONS AND MOTIONS OF MEMBERS

#### 5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

#### 6. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

##### 6.A. FINANCE COMMITTEE

- 6.A.1. Committee Report    Report of the Committee on Finance, meeting as a Committee of the Whole  
(ID # [24-0927](#))            on May 30, 2024.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.A through 6.H. He reported that the committee met over the course of several nights, in both Regular and Committee of the Whole sessions. After reviewing the budgets for each city department, two cuts were made totaling \$216,244.33. Two resolutions for the reallocation of funds in the amount of \$253,306.00 were also approved.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.H.2, 6.H.13, 6.H.14 and 6.H.37 and place them on file.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.H.3 through 6.H.12, 6.H.15 through 6.H.36 and 6.H.38 through 6.H.42 and approve them this evening.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

## 6.B. FINANCE COMMITTEE

- 6.B.1. Committee Report Report of the Committee on Finance, meeting as a Committee of the Whole  
(ID # [24-0928](#)) on June 4, 2024.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.A through 6.H. He reported that the committee met over the course of several nights, in both Regular and Committee of the Whole sessions. After reviewing the budgets for each city department, two cuts were made totaling \$216,244.33. Two resolutions for the reallocation of funds in the amount of \$253,306.00 were also approved.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.H.2, 6.H.13, 6.H.14 and 6.H.37 and place them on file.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.H.3 through 6.H.12, 6.H.15 through 6.H.36 and 6.H.38 through 6.H.42 and approve them this evening.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

## 6.C. FINANCE COMMITTEE

- 6.C.1. Committee Report Report of the Committee on Finance, meeting on June 5, 2024.  
(ID # [24-0929](#))

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.A through 6.H. He reported that the committee met over the course of several nights, in both Regular and Committee of the Whole sessions. After reviewing the budgets for each city department, two cuts were made totaling \$216,244.33. Two resolutions for the reallocation of funds in the amount of \$253,306.00 were also approved.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.H.2, 6.H.13, 6.H.14 and 6.H.37 and place them on file.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.H.3 through 6.H.12, 6.H.15 through 6.H.36 and 6.H.38 through 6.H.42 and approve them this evening.

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**RESULT: APPROVED**

6.D. FINANCE COMMITTEE

- 6.D.1. Committee Report Report of the Committee on Finance, meeting as a Committee of the Whole  
(ID # [24-0930](#)) on June 6, 2024.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.A through 6.H. He reported that the committee met over the course of several nights, in both Regular and Committee of the Whole sessions. After reviewing the budgets for each city department, two cuts were made totaling \$216,244.33. Two resolutions for the reallocation of funds in the amount of \$253,306.00 were also approved.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.H.2, 6.H.13, 6.H.14 and 6.H.37 and place them on file.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.H.3 through 6.H.12, 6.H.15 through 6.H.36 and 6.H.38 through 6.H.42 and approve them this evening.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

6.E. FINANCE COMMITTEE

- 6.E.1. Committee Report Report of the Committee on Finance, meeting on June 10, 2024.  
(ID # [24-0931](#))

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.A through 6.H. He reported that the committee met over the course of several nights, in both Regular and Committee of the Whole sessions. After reviewing the budgets for each city department, two cuts were made totaling \$216,244.33. Two resolutions for the reallocation of funds in the amount of \$253,306.00 were also approved.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.H.2, 6.H.13, 6.H.14 and 6.H.37 and place them on file.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.H.3 through 6.H.12, 6.H.15 through 6.H.36 and 6.H.38 through 6.H.42 and approve them this evening.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

6.F. FINANCE COMMITTEE

- 6.F.1. Committee Report Report of the Committee on Finance, meeting on June 12, 2024.  
(ID # [24-0932](#))

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.A through 6.H. He reported that the committee met over the course of several nights, in both Regular and Committee of the Whole sessions. After reviewing the budgets for each city department, two cuts were made totaling \$216,244.33. Two

resolutions for the reallocation of funds in the amount of \$253,306.00 were also approved.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.H.2, 6.H.13, 6.H.14 and 6.H.37 and place them on file.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.H.3 through 6.H.12, 6.H.15 through 6.H.36 and 6.H.38 through 6.H.42 and approve them this evening.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

#### 6.G. FINANCE COMMITTEE

- 6.G.1. Committee Report Report of the Committee on Finance, meeting on June 17, 2024.  
(ID # [24-0933](#))

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.A through 6.H. He reported that the committee met over the course of several nights, in both Regular and Committee of the Whole sessions. After reviewing the budgets for each city department, two cuts were made totaling \$216,244.33. Two resolutions for the reallocation of funds in the amount of \$253,306.00 were also approved.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.H.2, 6.H.13, 6.H.14 and 6.H.37 and place them on file.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.H.3 through 6.H.12, 6.H.15 through 6.H.36 and 6.H.38 through 6.H.42 and approve them this evening.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

#### 6.H. FINANCE COMMITTEE

- 6.H.1. Committee Report Report of the Committee on Finance, meeting as a Committee of the Whole on June 18, 2024.  
(ID # [24-0934](#))

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.A through 6.H. He reported that the committee met over the course of several nights, in both Regular and Committee of the Whole sessions. After reviewing the budgets for each city department, two cuts were made totaling \$216,244.33. Two resolutions for the reallocation of funds in the amount of \$253,306.00 were also approved.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.H.2, 6.H.13, 6.H.14 and 6.H.37 and place them on file.

Councilor Wilson moved to waive the readings of items 6.H.3 through 6.H.12, 6.H.15 through 6.H.36 and 6.H.38 through 6.H.42 and approve them this evening.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

- 6.H.2. Mayor's Request Requesting the appropriation of \$342,878,129 to fund the FY 2025 General Fund Operating Budget.  
(ID # [24-0814](#))

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**RESULT: PLACED ON FILE**

6.H.3. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0816](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$31,947,141 to fund the FY 2025 Sewer Enterprise Fund budget.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

6.H.4. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0817](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$21,398,392 to fund the FY 2025 Water Enterprise Fund budget.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

6.H.5. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0818](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$736,255 to fund the FY 2025 Kennedy School Pool Enterprise Fund budget.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

6.H.6. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0819](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$237,000 to fund the FY 2025 Dilboy Fields Enterprise Fund budget.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

6.H.7. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0820](#)) Requesting the appropriation or reserve of \$3,436,205 in estimated FY 2025 Community Preservation Act (CPA) revenue for CPA projects and expenses.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

6.H.8. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0821](#)) Requesting approval of the expenditure limitations for departmental Revolving Funds for FY 2025.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

6.H.9. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0822](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$2,584,976 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Rainy Day Stabilization Fund.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

6.H.10. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0823](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$1,000,000 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Salary & Wage Stabilization Fund.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

6.H.11. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0824](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$500,00 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Compensated Absence Liability Fund.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

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- 6.H.12. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0825](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$1,200,000 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB) Trust Fund.
- RESULT: APPROVED**
- 6.H.13. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0826](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$1,600,000 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Sewer Stabilization Fund to support the Water-Sewer Capital Investment Plan.
- RESULT: PLACED ON FILE**
- 6.H.14. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0827](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$400,000 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Water Stabilization Fund to support the Water-Sewer Capital Investment Plan.
- RESULT: PLACED ON FILE**
- 6.H.15. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0828](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$943,392 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Parks Stabilization Fund to support the 5-Year Capital Investment Plan.
- RESULT: APPROVED**
- 6.H.16. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0829](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$2,589,087 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Capital Projects Stabilization Fund to support the 5-Year Capital Investment Plan.
- RESULT: APPROVED**
- 6.H.17. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0830](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$403,187 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Energy Stabilization Fund for projects that reduce carbon emissions and energy costs.
- RESULT: APPROVED**
- 6.H.18. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0831](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$2,089,659 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Street Reconstruction and Renovation Stabilization Fund to support the 5-Year Capital Investment Plan.
- RESULT: APPROVED**
- 6.H.19. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0832](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$7,635,022 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Facility Renovation and Reconstruction Stabilization Fund to support the 5-Year Capital Investment Plan.
- RESULT: APPROVED**
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6.H.20.Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0833](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$500,000 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Traffic Safety Stabilization Fund for traffic safety improvements.

**RESULT:** APPROVED

6.H.21.Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0834](#)) Requesting approval of a transfer of \$2,110,472 from the Salary Contingency Account-Salaries to the Salary & Wage Stabilization Fund.

**RESULT:** APPROVED

6.H.22.Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0835](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$2,000,000 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund to support flexible rental assistance programs.

**RESULT:** APPROVED

6.H.23.Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0836](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$270,000 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Immigrant Legal Services Stabilization Fund for immigration legal services.

**RESULT:** APPROVED

6.H.24.Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0837](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$500,000 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the COVID-19 Stabilization Fund to fund the Somerville Public School Parent/Guardian Transit Pass Program.

**RESULT:** APPROVED

6.H.25.Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0838](#)) Requesting approval to appropriate \$500,000 from the COVID-19 Stabilization Fund for funding for the SPS Parent/Guardian Transit Pass Program.

**RESULT:** APPROVED

**AYE:** Ward Six City Councilor Davis, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, City Councilor At Large Mbah, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld, and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen

**ABSENT:** Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin

6.H.26.Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0839](#)) Requesting approval to create the Community Composting Program Stabilization Fund.

**RESULT:** APPROVED

**AYE:** Ward Six City Councilor Davis, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, City Councilor At Large Mbah, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld, and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen

**ABSENT:** Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin

6.H.27.Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0840](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$1,432,778 from the Water Enterprise Fund Retained Earnings Account to the FY 2025 Water Enterprise Fund budget.

**RESULT:** **APPROVED**

6.H.28.Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0841](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$500,000 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Capital Projects Stabilization Fund to supplement a prior appropriation to purchase and install prefabricated standalone public toilets.

**RESULT:** **APPROVED**

6.H.29.Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0842](#)) Requesting approval to appropriate \$149,051 from the Racial & Social Justice Fund to hire a Project Manager for the development of an Alternative Emergency Response Program.

**RESULT:** **APPROVED**

**AYE:** Ward Six City Councilor Davis, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, City Councilor At Large Mbah, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld, and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen

**ABSENT:** Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin

6.H.30.Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0843](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$700,000 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Capital Projects Stabilization Fund for a Fire Alarm Alerting System.

**RESULT:** **APPROVED**

6.H.31.Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0845](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$1,000,000 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Participatory Budgeting Stabilization Fund for the Participatory Budgeting Program.

**RESULT:** **APPROVED**



- 6.H.32. Mayor's Request  
(ID # [24-0846](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$350,000 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Community Composting Stabilization Fund for a pilot community composting program.
- RESULT:** **APPROVED**
- 6.H.33. Mayor's Request  
(ID # [24-0847](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$266,000 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Emergency Stabilization Fund to provide funding for the Warming Center.
- RESULT:** **APPROVED**
- 6.H.34. Mayor's Request  
(ID # [24-0848](#)) Requesting approval to appropriate \$270,000 from the Immigrant Legal Services Stabilization Fund for legal services to immigrants.
- RESULT:** **APPROVED**
- AYE:** Ward Six City Councilor Davis, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, City Councilor At Large Mbah, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld, and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen
- ABSENT:** Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin
- 6.H.35. Mayor's Request  
(ID # [24-0849](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$850,000 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Open Space Acquisition Stabilization Fund to acquire new publicly accessible open space.
- RESULT:** **APPROVED**
- 6.H.36. Mayor's Request  
(ID # [24-0851](#)) Requesting approval to appropriate \$725,000 from the Capital Projects Stabilization Fund to fund the Fire Alarm Alerting System.
- RESULT:** **APPROVED**
- AYE:** Ward Six City Councilor Davis, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, City Councilor At Large Mbah, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld, and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen
- ABSENT:** Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin
- 6.H.37. Officer's  
Communication  
(ID # [24-0913](#)) Director of Water and Sewer conveying the FY 2025 Water & Sewer Rate proposal.

**RESULT: PLACED ON FILE**

6.H.38.Order  
(ID # [24-0945](#))

By Councilor Wilson  
That line 0115251-511000, Human Resources Personal Services Salaries, be reduced by \$30,778 to \$1,508,672 in the FY 2025 budget.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

6.H.39.Resolution  
(ID # [24-0946](#))

By Councilor Wilson  
That the Administration allocate an additional \$67,840 to line 0151251-511000, Health & Human Services Personal Services Salaries, to fund an additional Case Manager position in Health & Human Services in the FY 2025 budget.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

6.H.40.Order  
(ID # [24-0947](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin  
That the Administration - Executive Office, Personal Services Salaries line be reduced by \$185,466 in the FY 2025 budget, reflecting the salary of the Chief Administrative Officer.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

6.H.41.Resolution  
(ID # [24-0948](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld  
That the Administration allocate \$185,466 to the Health and Human Services Department in the FY 2025 budget to continue to serve residents through a transit equity program run through the Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

6.H.42.Resolution  
(ID # [24-0949](#))

By Councilor Ewen-Campen  
That the Administration re-submit the FY 2025 water and sewer rates as follows: no change in base charges, 9.5% increase in the water rate and 0% increase in the sewer rate.

**RESULT: APPROVED**

## 7. COMMUNICATIONS OF THE MAYOR

7.1. Mayor's Request  
(ID # [24-0815](#))

Requesting ordainment of an amendment to Sections 2-322 and 2-323 of the Code of Ordinances, to update categories and associated salaries for non-union positions.

**RESULT: ORDINANCE ORDAINED**

**AYE:** Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Six City Councilor Davis, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Mbah, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld, and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen

**NAY:** Ward Two City Councilor Scott

7.2. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0943](#)) Requesting the rescission of \$2,478,271 of authorized but un-issued borrowings.

**RESULT:** **APPROVED**

**AYE:** Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Six City Councilor Davis, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, City Councilor At Large Mbah, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld, and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen

**8. COMMUNICATIONS OF CITY OFFICERS**

**9. NEW BUSINESS**

**10. SUPPLEMENTAL ITEMS**

10.1. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0952](#)) Requesting that this Council convene in Executive Session to discuss Collective Bargaining Agreement negotiation strategy in FY 2025 based upon updated budget and staffing projections.

The Council recessed at 7:03 PM to enter into Executive Session. The Council reconvened at 7:45 PM and President Ewen-Campen reported that no votes were taken in Executive Session other than the vote to adjourn.

**RESULT:** **APPROVED**

**AYE:** Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Six City Councilor Davis, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, City Councilor At Large Mbah, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld, and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen

**ABSENT:** City Councilor At Large Strezo

- 10.2. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0953](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$342,878,129 to fund the FY 2025 General Fund Operating Budget.

**RESULT: PLACED ON FILE**

- 10.3. Mayor's Request (ID # [24-0954](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$342,878,129 to fund the FY 2025 General Fund Operating Budget.

Mayor Ballantyne addressed the Council regarding the FY 2025 city budget and spoke about new challenges being faced by the city and having the capacity to meet the needs of residents. She addressed the Council's concern regarding the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) position and spoke about the Mayor's role in managing the city. She addressed the need for administrative capacity and said that eliminating the CAO position would leave a gap and lead to the down grading of several projects. Mayor Ballantyne addressed her own involvement in union negotiations saying that she remains committed to doing right by union employees. She spoke about the CAO growing up in a union family and said that she appreciates having the CAO at the bargaining table. The Mayor addressed the stated lack of interaction with the City Council and said that the city needs to scale the organization to keep pace with the city's goals. The Mayor said that the City Council needs to be sure that a message is not sent to employees about the Council's willingness to cut occupied positions, as this harms employee morale.

Budget Director Mastrobuoni explained that four corrections were made to the budget that ultimately did not change the bottom line. Councilor Pineda Neufeld questioned why the resolution she put forth at the June 18 Finance Committee of the Whole meeting wasn't listed and the Director explained that it was not general fund eligible, prompting Councilor Pineda Neufeld to reply that knowing the restriction, she specifically worded it so funds would go to funding a program.

The meeting's focus shifted to the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) position and whether or not to eliminate it. Councilors came down on both sides of this issue, with some defending the position and others seeing it as being redundant. Other councilors spoke about the tenor of the discussion at the June 18 Finance Committee of the Whole meeting, saying that the deliberations were not fair and that it wasn't the intent to review the position in public.

Councilor McLaughlin said he doesn't like playing games with people and explained that the only authoritative functions the City Council has relative to budgets is to approve them or to make cuts. He said that he proposed cutting this position because some of the things being worked on were also being addressed by staff in other departments. He went on to say that the Mayor started with one liaison and has since grown the Executive Administration Department by adding several more positions which he feels are a buffer and obstruction to the public and he wonders if information and requests sent to the Mayor from committee meetings are actually being delivered to her. Councilor McLaughlin expressed his belief that councilors

should have access to department heads and the mayor.

Councilor Davis stated that cutting the position has nothing to do with the person serving in the role.

Councilor Clingan thanked the Mayor for addressing the City Council tonight but said it's too little, too late. He noted his assumption that department heads meet to find ways to improve things in the city and that the City Council, as overseers of the budget, has a financial responsibility to the public.

Councilor Scott commented that he understands the frustration in the room but doesn't think that eliminating the CAO position is a direct path to a solution and he wouldn't blame anyone from changing their vote from Tuesday night. He went on to say that he has opposed this position for two years and been disappointed for the past two and a half years about not being able to make changes, adding that he doesn't see in this budget the type of changes that need to be made.

Councilor Mbah spoke about the lack of communication from the Executive branch. Councilor Sait said the takeaway is lack of communication, lack of urgency. Councilor Pineda Neufeld said she has not had a one-on-one conversation with CAO as she hoped and came into this budget season knowing what needs to be done.

President Ewen-Campen sponsored CAO Lamiss Vargas to address the Council. CAO Vargas spoke about her childhood and said she understands the struggle of workers. She said that she values the opportunities given to Somerville residents and understands the frustration expressed by councilors about communication. She stated that she does not make decisions for the mayor but does make recommendations. CAO Vargas spoke at length about accomplishments and projects in the pipeline, as well as the goals delivered as a team and said if her position is eliminated, it could lead to delaying any potential improvement being worked on.

Councilor McLaughlin pointed out that this position is included in the proposed revamp of the city's charter, and he asked for an update of where the charter reform stands. Intergovernmental Affairs Director Singh reported that the process has been held up for a variety of reasons and that she hopes to have a proposal before the Council in the future and wants to transmit a document of changes during the summer recess.

Councilor McLaughlin expressed his dismay at the delay and said he thinks that the charter document is sitting on the mayor's desk. He spoke again about the lack of communication from the Administration and Director Singh said that she plans to provide details to the Council on how to communicate more effectively and she encouraged councilors to interact with department heads. Councilor McLaughlin asked the mayor where she sees charter reform and the mayor replied that she has not seen the final draft yet, prompting Councilor McLaughlin to point out that it's a complete document that was negotiated with her staff and that it's been there for two years, something that reinforces his opinion that his desires are not priorities. Mayor Ballantyne noted that other matters, e.g., moving two schools, took priority.

Councilor Ewen-Campen noted that the frustrations being expressed, which are valid and directed to the Mayor's office, are not because of CAO's functions.

President Ewen-Campen sponsored Chief of Staff Nikki Spencer who said it was apparent for many years that policies and programs were built up, but foundations were not there and that some things weren't apparent until the CAO came. She explained that the city needs the CAO position because although some things were changed, there's not enough time, bandwidth, or political capital to do what needs to be done.

Councilor McLaughlin stated that CAO Vargas gave the best argument for retaining the CAO position tonight and plans on changing his vote on the matter. Councilor Davis commented that some of the frustration expressed is relevant to the CAO position and he thinks that the position should not exist outside of the city's charter without some sort of oversight. He'll be voting to keep the position.

**RESULT:** APPROVED

**AYE:** Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Six City Councilor Davis, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Mbah, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld, and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen

**NAY:** Ward Two City Councilor Scott, and City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr.

10.4. Mayor's Request  
(ID # [24-0950](#))

Requesting the appropriation of \$1,407,458 from the Sewer Enterprise Fund Retained Earnings Account to subsidize the FY 2025 Sewer Enterprise Fund budget.

**RESULT:** APPROVED

**AYE:** Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Six City Councilor Davis, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, City Councilor At Large Mbah, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld, and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen

10.5. Mayor's  
Communication  
(ID # [24-0951](#))

Conveying the FY 2025 Water & Sewer Rate proposal.

Director Vidalis presented the proposed Water and Sewer (WS) rates which were adjusted by utilizing all of the retained earnings from water and some retained earnings from sewer, as needed because as projects come online, retained earnings will need to be available and used. Finance Director Ed

Bean told the Council that he didn't know what issues would be put aside. He said that funding the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) was assumed and built on rate increases each year, but now, the city will need to look at projects and see what is tolerable for ratepayers. Director Bean noted that a staggering amount of money is involved, and that the city has to look at long range plans and possibly defer or reset some projects.

Director Vidalis told the Council that a consultant ran projections of the effects of a 0% increase on water rates and 0% on sewer rates and Director Bean noted that the Poplar Street project is still a \$101 million project. He said that appropriating funds could bring borrowing down to \$80 million, however he doesn't want to undermine the \$437 million general fund CIP.

Councilor Scott, as at other meetings on the WS rates, asked about department vacancies and the implementation of a ratepayer assistance plan. In response to a question from Councilor Clingan, Director Vidalis explained that if the Council votes for the proposal before them, the rates for next year would be in the neighborhood of 10-12% for water and 17% for sewer.

Councilor McLaughlin said he thinks that money exists that could be used to address this matter and Councilor Mbah commented that the city should be creative with funding options.

**RESULT:**     **NOT APPROVED**

**AYE:**           Ward Six City Councilor Davis, City Councilor At Large Wilson, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld, and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen

**NAY:**           Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, City Councilor At Large Mbah, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, and City Councilor At Large Strezo

## 11.     **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was Adjourned at 11:14 PM.