



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
CLERK OF COMMITTEES

November 26, 2018

REPORT OF THE HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Ben Ewen-Campen	Chair	Present	
Jesse Clingan	Vice Chair	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Ward Seven Alderman	Present	

Aldermen in attendance: Ald. Mark Niedergang, Ald. Lance Davis, Ald. Wilfred Mbah.

Others in attendance: Steve MacEachern, Stan Koty, Tim Snyder, Andre Green, Brad Rawson, George Proakis, Arn Franzen.

Additionally, there were 3 pages of residents signed in for the meeting.

The committee meeting started at 6:03 p.m. and ended at 9:05 p.m.

1. Approval of the September 19, 2018 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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UNIVERSITY ACCOUNTABILITY UPDATES

205325: Tufts University submitting its Spring 2018 University Accountability report.

These items were discussed together. Chairman Ewen-Campen explained that Tufts and Harvard are required by Ordinance to report on the statistics for students residing on- and off-campus in Somerville. There are 7% Harvard students who live in Somerville and 18.5% Tufts student who live in Somerville. Any questions or concerns can be brought up in Committee, and Mr. DiRico from Tufts University offered to appear in person if any issues arose.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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205403: Harvard University submitting its Spring 2018 University Accountability report.

For discussion of this item, see #205325.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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206890: Tufts University submitting its Fall 2018 University Accountability report.

For discussion of this item, see #205325.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

206914: Harvard University submitting its Fall 2018 University Accountability report.

For discussion of this item, see #205325.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

HEALEY SCHOOL

206820: That the Director of SPCD update this Board on the Healy schoolyard redesign and consider making it a top priority.

The Chair stated this matter has been an issue for many years, and specifically since the Community Preservation Act awarded a grant to develop a Master Plan in the Spring of 2015. There were many people from the community along with their children in the committee room for this item. Mr. Rawson from OSPCD began his remarks by stating that he is a Somerville resident and father, and provided a general overview of this item. He talked about the Healey School community being the eyes and ears of the city to help inform the city of what needs to be changed. The administration recommended a “two-tiered” approach, which would include more immediate-term, obtainable improvements in the coming year or two, plus a focused long-term plan to establish a concrete plan for major improvements to the area. Both of these goals would be pursued in parallel, so that much-needed fixes to the schoolyard could come quickly, while additional work could be done to address major issues including a possible playing field and a handicapped accessible route from the Mystic Housing to the schoolyard. There were talks about the boat house work being done and Shore Drive and Mystic working together with DOT. Mr. Rawson said the Healey school yard is a challenging project from an engineering perspective. Currently, there is \$80,000 for a design firm to come up with a design, specifically for improvements near the schoolhouse, and hoping to be ready for the bidding for construction in the December-February timeline. Ald. Clingan talked about the pump house cannot down, but maybe shrink some of the footprint. To address issues of which parcels are owned by the SHA, the city’s design process will include a title search to find out much land is owned by SHA. The chair gave many residents in the room an opportunity to speak on this matter. Some parents talked about social justice and safe paths to the school. Questions were asked about the acquisition of the two top lots and if they are in the master plan. Other parents talked about the area at Healey are not up to code with broken asphalt. One parent provided a large poster showing the cracked black top area at the school and referred to it as a prison yard. Andre Green, Chairman of the School Committee stated this is not a new conversation and has been in discussion for 10-15 years. Another parent stated that Healey is the most economic and diverse school in the city. President Ballantyne said that Healey and West Somerville were the first school to be redone 21-22 years ago. A kindergarten teacher at the Healey talked about the woodchips is disintegrating, not good for kids with asthma. Additionally the gates do not lock and dogs get in and there is a need for clean up before the kids can use the area. Mr. Rawson offered to come to the Healey School’s open house to answer any questions that current or future parents may have about the school property. The secretary for the Healey talked about the difficulty of getting to the school from the housing development. There needs to be a staircase with a ramp for baby carriages and wheel chairs. Currently, crossing is unsafe for kids. The Committee affirmed that this item will be a top priority for the upcoming year, and will ask for an update from OSPCD at a meeting in January.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

205664: That the Director of SPCD update this Board on the Healey-Mystic Master Plan, especially the redevelopment of the Healey schoolyard pavement to create green space, an outdoor performance space and a soccer field.

For discussion of this item, see #205664.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

HOUSING

204990: That the Director of SPCD update this Board on the Affordable Housing Universal Wait List plan and consolidating the process of applying for affordable housing into a single, universal, persistent application, lottery, and wait list.

Kelly Donato, Ellen Shackter and Bryant Gaspard appeared before the committee with George Proakis. Mrs. Donato explained that the concept of a Universal Wait List would only apply to inclusionary units, which are distinct from Somerville Housing Authority units and units managed by Somerville Community Corporation, both of which will retain their own independent lottery methods. The current inclusionary program requires applicants to reapply for each opportunity. While there are some benefits to the current system, a universal wait list would be less confusing and less need to reapply for opportunities, and importantly would allow residents and their advocates/representatives to plan longterm, which is a necessity. The important question to resolve is exactly how “priority” applicants will be defined so that a wait list can accommodate those most in need, and those facing the most urgent threat of displacement. Mrs. Shackter explained that the new Office of Housing Stability and the Housing Dept. will now work to propose recommendations on this issue, for further discussion with the Board and the public. There is research available on how other communities currently handle their wait list. The plan would be exhaust the current wait list and start the universal wait list with new projects. There will be a consultant to help administer the lottery. Despite remaining questions to be addressed, OSPCD does believe that a Universal Wait List is the preferable option to go forward, and committed to providing an update in February 2019.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

206773: That the Administration establish a widely-advertised Fair Housing enforcement program that proactively tests for illegal housing discrimination.

Mr. Gaspard explained that Housing Dept has been researching an existing program administered by Suffolk University regarding fair housing program, funded by HUD grants. This program is based on both (1) complaints from residents, and (2) random testers - most of the effort is currently dedicated to complaint-based tests. Chairman Ewen-Campen asked whether the data collected by Suffolk is publicly available, and Mr. Gaspard said he would respond in writing. He said that Housing has been advertising this program for Somerville residents, and hoped residents would join. There is monthly training and advertising on this program. The Chairman asked whether a very obvious link could be added to the Somerville website for residents who believe they have experienced discrimination, to facilitate the complaint process. There is also a Fair Housing website and a form online to fill out, and the Chairman requested that this information be made more prominent on the city’s website. At this time, the Housing Dept. does not intend to create a stand-alone testing agency, but will instead partner with this existing Suffolk University Program, and will report back with data as this begins. A member of the public was recognized, and suggested to put the information in multiple languages such as: Spanish, Haitian and Creole.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

SNOW EMERGENCY PARKING

204794: That the Administration revise the Snow Emergency policy to prohibit parking in school lots, so the School Department can make independent decisions regarding school closings and delays.

The discussion was focused on two issues: how this policy was communicated with the Board and the public, and how the policy will be smoothly implemented. Mr. Snyder said that the administration has overall communication responsibility for closing parking lots., and apologized that information was not shared earlier. Mr. Snyder reiterated that the goal of the administration priority is to allow school to be open on more days, as snow emergency parking can sometimes prohibit school from opening when it otherwise would be possible. Several Aldermen re-iterated that the failure to inform the Board and the public in advance of the announcement led to unnecessary concern and mistrust. Mr. Snyder explained that school gates were installed prior to having the snow policy in place. Ald. Ballantyne talked with the school superintendent who wants more options to have school open after snow emergency. Questions were asked about staffing and how will teachers get to school. An option was discussed to have a late start in school. There are currently 355 parking spots on school property and 510 parking spots in municipality. The chair suggested encouraging driveway sharing in the community, and it was explained that the City does not wish to do so for legal liability reasons. Ald. Ballantyne stated they she started creating a list of where to park to share with her constituents during snow emergency. Somerstat is starting to collect data on opening parking spots. Ald. Davis asked about the 20 parking spots at the Brown School during snow emergency, and asked that these be added to the inventory of parking spots. Mr. Snyder said that the city will be carefully monitoring the roll-out of the process this winter to make improvements if and when issues arise.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

205428: That the Administration update this Board on any plans to revise the Snow Emergency policy to prohibit parking in school lots, so the School Department can make independent decisions regarding school closings and delays.

For discussion of this item, see #204794.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

205429: That the Administration advise this Board on what information sources are available and what sources are used to assess weather conditions in making both snow emergency and school cancellation decisions, in light of the attached email citing the forecasts of MEMA.

Mr. Snyder and Mr. Koty talked about how the decision is made to have a snow emergency. There is a meeting with the mayor, fire, police, DPW and school superintendent along with others. Steve MacEachern looks at 10 different weather sources. Sometimes it is decided at the last minute to call for snow emergency. It's usually over 4 inches and other considerations before declaring snow emergency such as: time of when the snow will fall, range and type of snow. Time is needed to record the snow emergency message and give people time to move their cars. Ald. Davis talked about primary concern is losing quality education days as we push closer to the summer trying to make up snow days.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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205679: Tim Sackton submitting comments re: the city's snow policy.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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DE-PAVING

206765: That the Director of Engineering, the Commissioner of Public Works and the Superintendent of Inspectional Services report to this Board on possible actions to incentivize residents to de-pave their properties, such as waiving dumpster fees and lending de-paving tools.

Mr. Snyder told the committee that Engineering Director Rich Raiche (who was unable to attend this meeting) would like to brief the committee on a holistic approach to stormwater management. There were discussions about evaluation from a technical perspective. This can cause flooding in the basement of houses. This can depend upon the soil around the house. It was also discussed that you may not need to pull a driveway permit if just removing sections of the driveway. Mr. Raiche will be working with a consultant to develop standards. It was suggested that maybe the city could waive dumpster fees and talked about the stormwater ordinance. Mr. Raiche will appear before the committee at a future date to discuss the issue.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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PARKS AND PUBLIC SPACE MAINTENANCE

206819: That the appropriate department adjust the hours of the dog parks from 8:00 am to 7:00 am.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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206063: That the appropriate city department assist Teen Empowerment with their previously requested removal of old furniture and repairs to the roof.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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206269: That the Administration work with the Ward 6 Alderman and the community to devise an accelerated plan to replace the brick sidewalks in Davis Square with something that ensures pedestrian safety while maintaining a connection to the familiar character of the bricks.

Ald. Davis and Mr. Snyder confirmed that sidewalk improvements will take place as soon as possible, and will do a walk through in the square in the next couple of weeks. There were discussions about a contract for general work. There will be some challenges replacing the bricks in some places. Mr. Raiche and Mr. Proakis will bring a consultant to bid the package together and will meet the first week in December. There is no intention to replace every brick with concrete, and Alderman Davis emphasized that the character of the existing sidewalks will be preserved to every extent possible.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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206061: That the Commissioner of Public Works repair the water feature at the Walnut Street playground so it doesn't spray onto the slide, and replace the deteriorating rubber mat beneath the play structure.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

206199: That the Director of SPCD share how decisions are made regarding the placement of bike racks.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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206200: That the Commissioner of Public Works share the policy for removing items that are blocking sidewalks.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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206201: That the Director of SomerStat share an update on implementing a work order system for asset management, CRM requests, preventive maintenance, and related functions, for departments like Public Works, Engineering, and Urban Forestry.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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206304: That the Community Preservation Act Manager share information about how public access agreements get arranged with CPA fund recipients.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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206456: Community Preservation Manager responding to #206304 re: current practices on public access agreements for CPA funded sites.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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206369: That the Director of SPCD immediately explore both short- and long-term strategies to increase pedestrian accessibility to the Central Library, particularly for seniors and others with mobility concerns.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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205183: That the Administration reassess the city's agreement with Globe Direct regarding stopping deliveries upon request.

It was discussed how the administration had previously reached an agreement with Globe Direct, but that Alderman McLaughlin's order suggested that there has been a turnover in leadership at Globe Direct and this has resulted in an increase in complaints. The administration will reach out to Globe Direct again. It was also stated that the plastic bags were used only in inclement weather.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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203190: Publishers Circulation Fulfillment responding to #203057 re: Globe Direct distribution.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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COMMITTEE HANDOUTS:

1. Sign-In Sheet
2. Suffolk Grant w/#206773