



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Public Utilities and Public Works Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, December 9, 2024

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Clingan at 6:02pm and adjourned at 7:28pm with a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Strezo, McLaughlin, Clingan), none opposed, and none absent.

Others present: Bill Fisher – Director of Emergency Management, Kimberley Hutter – Legislative Liason at Intergovernmental Affairs, Brian Postlewaite – Director of Engineering, Demetrios Vidalis – Director of Water and Sewer, Natasha Frazier – Assistant Clerk of Committees.

Roll Call

Present: Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan, Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin and City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo

- Committee Minutes (ID # [24-1612](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Public Utilities and Public Works Committee Meeting of October 30, 2024.

RESULT: ACCEPTED
AYE: Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin and City Councilor At Large Strezo

- Order (ID # [24-1637](#)) By Councilor Scott That the Director of Water and Sewer appear before this Council to discuss recent extended outages in Ward 2 and mitigation plans for future work.

Director Vidalis provided an overview of recenter water shutdowns in Ward 2. He stated that the shutdown on November 12th was planned and that notifications went out on November 8th indicating there would be a shutdown from 9am to 3pm. However, the planned shutdown unexpectedly became an emergency shutdown when an issue was discovered that needed extensive repair, and the shutdown was extended until 9:30pm. When this occurred, a notification was communicated to residents. Among the 17 other shutdowns in the past fiscal year in Ward 2, none of the other shutdowns went over the anticipated timeframe. He also noted that a few of the other previous shutdowns were emergencies.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

3. Resolution
(ID # [24-1608](#))
- By Councilor Mbah, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Sait, Councilor Scott, Councilor Strezo and Councilor Wilson

That the Administration provide this Council with a comprehensive status update of all Veterans Monuments affected by the construction and renovations around the High School complex.

Chair Clingan provided an overview of the memo provided for this agenda item. He stated that there is concern regarding the condition of the monuments that are in storage after being removed to allow for construction. Councilors expressed a desire to see the monument work move forward in honor of Somerville's Veterans. Councilor Strezo emphasized the importance of keeping the community updated about this project and asked the Administration about the status of her request to place signage where the monuments were previously located in order to communicate that they will return. Liaison Hutter stated that she is in conversation with staff about next steps in the process and that the priority has been keeping the monuments in their best condition. She stated that she will inquire with staff about the feasibility and timeline for installing signage.

Councilor McLaughlin stated that the current plan is complicated and suggested that the City does not wait to resolve other outstanding matters such as the plan for the 1895 building or the City's capital investments before acting. He stated that Vietnam veterans are concerned they will not be alive to see the memorial. He suggested prioritizing the return of the Vietnam wall and hosting a ceremony, which Councilor Clingan also expressed support for. Chair Clingan asked Liaison Hutter to convey to the Administration that the Committee would like to see this project prioritized.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Order
(ID # [24-1486](#))

By Councilor Clingan and Councilor Ewen-Campen

That the Director of Inspectional Services appear before this Council to discuss the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)'s application to the Mass Architectural Access Board, on behalf of the City of Somerville, to circumvent Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance.

Director Postlewaite stated that the City does not have jurisdiction over MBTA to require or to determine for them what is considered accessible. He said that this is determined by the state through the MAAB and the federal government through the FTA. He said that when the Gilman Square station was originally constructed, the MBTA gained a variance for the slopes of the approach hills leading to the station, which were considered "existing conditions." He noted that the slopes of these hills are 7.5% and 9%. He stated that this is supported by the Massachusetts Access Law, which

pre-dates the ADA and provides an exception for public ways on natural grade that exceeds the 5% maximum slope for a walkway. He stated that the MBTA went through the correct process to obtain variances and restore existing conditions to how they were pre-construction. He stated that the MBTA is getting an additional variance from the MAAB because they could not meet the initial variance of 7.5%. They went up to an 8.75% slope on the bridge that goes over the railroad tracks, which is owned by the state and does not require the City's approval.

Chair Clingan asked about ADA compliance at the Ball Square station. Director Postlewaite stated that ADA compliant does not mean ADA compliant from every direction one could approach the station. He stated that when the slope of the street exceeds 5% it is considered non-ADA compliant and that there is a grace area of up to 8% because that is the maximum slope for a wheelchair ramp. Councilor McLaughlin stated that the Gilman station is technically ADA accessible, but not practically accessible. He noted that improvements are coming. Chair Clingan asked for an accessibility evaluation of all the stations in Somerville and Director Postlewaite stated that he will get started on this.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Order
(ID # [24-1481](#))

By Councilor Clingan

That the Commissioner of Public Works repair the streetlights along Mystic Avenue between the Medford line and Temple Street.

Chair Clingan stated that the City technically owns the portion of the streetlights that are out along Mystic Avenue, and that as of December 2nd, replacement lights have been ordered per the attached memo.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Order
(ID # [24-1398](#))

By Councilor Clingan, Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Ewen-Campen
That the Commissioner of Public Works provide this Council with a list of the elevators in all city buildings, the operational status of each elevator, and the maintenance and inspection records for each.

Two memos were received for this item and are included as attachments. Chair Clingan stated that per the memo, there are 16 elevators in the city; 9 of the elevators are in schools; and 6 City buildings have elevators. He shared that concerns were raised regarding elevators throughout the City, so a status update of all elevators was requested to ensure they are working.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

7. Resolution (ID # [24-1306](#)) By Councilor Wilson and Councilor Scott
That the Administration update this Council on plans for the Cummings School building and Founders Memorial Skating Rink this fiscal year.

Chair Clingan provided an overview of the memo that was included with this item. He stated that the Cummings School building will be the site of a warming center. Liaison Hutter noted that the warming center at the Cummings School building is currently in operation, and that it took a significant amount of work to make it operational. She noted that a portable company was hired for the bathrooms because the bathrooms in this building are children sized. She noted that a lot of work went into bringing this portion of the building up to code, and that there is outstanding work needed for the remainder of the building that is not yet in use.

Chair Clingan provided an overview of the current plan for the Founders Memorial Rink according to the attached memo. Per the memo, he stated that the plan is in its infancy and that the interim plan is to use the space for recreation activities such as pickleball, noting that there is a heating issue in the winter. Councilor McLaughlin highlighted the need for a Youth Services space.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

8. Order (ID # [24-1182](#)) By Councilor Strezo
That the Director of Emergency Management discuss the city's emergency response plan for freight train routes and action plans in the event of a derailment or chemical spill.

Councilor Strezo noted that several freight train lines come through Somerville and that she wants to ensure the City is prepared to respond to toxic spills from train derailments. She noted that these types of incidents have occurred elsewhere in the past, including a toxic spill resulting from a train derailment in Pennsylvania in recent years.

A memo for this item was included as an attachment to the previous Committee meeting. Director Fisher stated that there appear to be four lines that are active in Somerville. He provided an overview of the "all hazards approach" that applies to toxic spills and described the work being done for emergency management preparation in Somerville through the Emergency Planning Commission and the Somerville Emergency Management Team. He stated that the City's Emergency Management Plan is in the process of being updated for the first time since 2015 and should be ready by the beginning of 2025.

Regarding preparedness for toxic spills from freight train derailment, Director Fisher stated that there are evacuation plans in place and that a key step is identifying the chemical and the risk associated with that chemical in order to establish a safe perimeter. He stated that they are working on a

notification system that would send alerts to everyone within a particular geographic region. He also described how Massachusetts is a home rule state, in which the City can decide whether to request help from the State or the federal government in emergency situations. He noted that Somerville also has mutual aid agreements in place that it may utilize in the event of an emergency situation.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

- PUPW - 2024-12-09 Memo (with 24-1398)
- PUPW - 2024-12-09 Memo (with 24-1608 and 24-1306)
- PUPW - 2024-12-09 Memo (with 24-1481 and 24-1398)