



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Public Utilities and Public Works Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, October 30, 2024

6:00 PM

The meeting took place remotely via Zoom and was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chair Clingan and adjourned at 8:05 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Strezo, McLaughlin and Clingan), none against and none absent.

Others present:

Nick Antanavica – Director of Inspectional Services, Kimberly Hutter – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Roll Call

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

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-0403](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Public Utilities and Public Works Committee Meeting of March 18, 2024.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

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

Public Hearing

2. Public Communication (ID # [24-1088](#)) 76 registered voters submitting a petition for a public hearing on the Somerville Internet Task Force 2019 Report and a Feasibility Study on Municipal Broadband, pursuant to Section 8 of the City Charter.

Prior to the public hearing, Chair Clingan sponsored Kate Zebrose from the Somerville Internet Task Force (ITF) to present an overview of the ITF Executive Summary. She described internet access' critical role for people around the world. Policy concerns also shape public opinion about internet access and the filtering of content by private companies contribute to those concerns. Competition between 2 cable providers is not sufficient to significantly improve broadband services. Chair Clingan also sponsored Cambridge resident Roy Russell, from Upgrade Cambridge, to speak. Mr. Russell stated that Cambridge has a single internet provider, Comcast. Cambridge hired a consultant to perform a feasibility study for municipal broadband and the conclusion was that municipal broadband was feasible for Cambridge. Mr. Russell noted that there are hundreds of examples of municipal broadband throughout the United States, with most being successful. The consultant's report also noted that the City of Cambridge

might have to invest \$150 million in order to attract private partners, who would invest another \$4 million and provide service and maintenance for the next 25 years.

The public hearing was opened. Greg Hill read a statement from Jeffrey Raits, a member of the ITF, listing the benefits of municipal broadband and the lack of follow up action by the city. Susan Eldridge stated her support for municipal broadband as a way to level the playing field. She noted that it would be expensive for the city but would also allow for the addition of new technology as it becomes available. Mr. Hill spoke again about the benefits of municipal broadband and asked that the mayor put out an RFP for a feasibility study. The public hearing was closed.

Liaison Hutter stated that the Administration realizes that internet access is a vital resource and said that city staff is committed to working on feasible solutions and encourages residents to stay engaged with the city and its digital staff. Councilor Strezo expressed her support but is unsure how to make it a reality. Through the Chair, she asked a prior speaker, Roy Russell, how Somerville compares to other communities that have municipal broadband with regard to population, program cost and density. Mr. Russell had already left the meeting, however another prior speaker, Greg Hill, stated that he would provide Councilor Strezo with Mr. Russell’s email address so that she might pose the question to him.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Grant of Location

- 3. Grant of Location (ID # [24-1240](#)) Eversource applying for a Grant of Location to install a new hip guy and anchor at Utility Pole 291/11 in Prospect Street.

This item was withdrawn by Eversource.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE WITHDRAWN

Traffic and Parking

- 4. Order (ID # [24-1421](#)) By Councilor McLaughlin That the Director of Parking install a NO THROUGH STREET sign on Alston Street by the Cross Street intersection.

Liaison Hutter had a conversation with the Director of Parking and reported that the requested sign cannot be installed since the street is, in fact, a through street.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Order
(ID # [24-1426](#))
- By Councilor McLaughlin
That the Director of Parking enforce parking permit laws on Alston Street.
Liaison Hutter stated that PCO's will enforce the laws while on their routes.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Mobility

6. Order
(ID # [24-1425](#))
- By Councilor McLaughlin
That the Director of Mobility prioritize Alston Street for a potential Neighborways project.

Liaison Hutter told the committee that staff will take this item under advisement, adding that it's unlikely to be prioritized at this time.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

7. Order
(ID # [24-1424](#))
- By Councilor McLaughlin
That the Director of Mobility place a sided bump on Alston Street.

Liaison Hutter told the committee that this request has been added to the speed bump list and that a commitment to a timeline cannot be made at this time.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

ISD

8. Order
(ID # [24-1203](#))
- By Councilor Clingan
That the Director of Inspectional Services inspect any exterior finishing down to the wood to ensure there is no asbestos shingling present before granting building permits.

Chair Clingan noted some instances where potential problems may exist and asked if there is a way to inspect properties in a more in depth manner to prevent asbestos from being disposed of improperly. Director Antanavica noted that there has been an increase in complaints, possibly due in part to a lack of education. He went on to say that it's not feasible to check every building, so steps have been taken to have inspectors obtain asbestos certifications which will allow them to know what is supposed to happen with respect to asbestos removal and to determine if the removal was done properly. This will help ISD to identify problems, going forward. The Director noted that OSHA compliant safety plans must be in place and that both a general contractor designee and a safety officer must be on site.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

9. Order
(ID # [24-1419](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin

That the Director of Inspectional Services inspect open space parcels along McGrath Highway, behind Alston Street and Chester Avenue for rodent activity and bait accordingly.

Director Antanavica said that Director Ziegler was at the site earlier in the week and that now, the ownership of the property needs to be determined. ISD will try to coordinate with the state to resolve that issue. Councilor McLaughlin requested that any findings be forwarded to the committee.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

10. Order
(ID # [24-1423](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin

That the Director of Inspectional Services address graffiti on Alston Street and ensure the property owners are maintaining their properties.

Director Antanavica stated that citation letters have been sent.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

11. Order
(ID # [24-1272](#))

By Councilor Mbah

That the Director of Inspectional Services and the Commissioner of Public Works appear before this Council to discuss the problems of local restaurants complying with the requirements of proper waste handling and contracting for city waste collection.

Director Antanavica commented that ISD is looking at revising and innovating ways to get compliance from restaurants as well as considering a revamping of the food licensing process. He noted that there is a dedicated dumpster inspector but said that he could not speak to waste collection being performed by the city, as this is a DPW matter, but he did state that there are some legacy restaurants that are still having their waste removed by the city.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Tree Warden

12. Order
(ID # [24-1422](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin

That the Tree Warden inspect the trees behind Chester Avenue and address falling limbs.

Liaison Hutter said that since this is private property, it's not practice for the city to inspect the trees. Councilor McLaughlin noted that the city had

addressed this in the past and that he's not comfortable leaving dangerous trees unattended. Director Antanavica said that this will be added to the frequent property list and explained that ISD would need to update the property's track record on ticketing in order to proceed to taking court action. If the tree warden deems that the situation presents an imminent danger, then more options are available to the city..

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

DPW

13. Order
(ID # [24-1420](#))
- By Councilor McLaughlin
That the Commissioner of Public Works clean the open space parcels along McGrath Highway, behind Alston Street and Chester Avenue of trash and debris.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

14. Order
(ID # [24-1202](#))
- By Councilor Clingan and Councilor Strezo
That the Commissioner of Public Works create a process for residents to report downed and dangling utility lines.

Chair Clingan stated that he wants this to be a simple process and noted that there is an ordinance in place. He believes that there are some city staff who know which utilities own the poles throughout the city and he noted that each utility company has a liaison to deal with issues in the city. What he would like to happen is for the city to contact the appropriate utility company when a request is submitted to 311, and then note same in the 311 request, rather than having the resident who submitted the request being told to contact the utility department. Director Antanavica commented that 311 routes the request to the appropriate people if they know who owns the utility line. Councilor Strezo noted that it's clear that the utilities are not taking the city seriously. She asked about getting access to a database of pole owners and Director Antanavica replied that he doesn't run that database, so he can't make that decision. Chair Clingan stated that the database is with the Engineering Department and he also noted that another order should be put in to discuss state law enforcement. Director Antanavica commented that the city has a delicate relationship with the utility companies because, at some point, the city may need their help in another area.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

15. Order
(ID # [24-0977](#))
- By Councilor Clingan
That the Commissioner of Public Works install big belly trash barrels at the intersection of Meacham and Moreland Streets.
- Liaison Hutter commented that it's not in the city's best interest to situate the barrels at that location and she asked that she be informed of the concerns of residents so she can look for other suitable remedies.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
16. Order
(ID # [24-0039](#))
- By Councilor Strezo
That the Commissioner of Public Works re-install the bench, previously donated and installed in honor of longstanding Brown School principal Marilyn Haggerty, on the Brown School grounds.
- Chair Clingan noted that a memo has been submitted regarding this item and that the bench has been reinstalled.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**

Assessor

17. Order
(ID # [24-1418](#))
- By Councilor McLaughlin
That the Chief Assessor determine the ownership of open space parcels along McGrath Highway, behind Alston Street and Chester Avenue to determining who is responsible for maintenance.
- Liaison Hutter reported that she had a conversation with staff in the Assessor's Office. The two parcels in question are 0 Chester Avenue and 0 Alston Street. The Chester Avenue property is owned by a private group in Texas. Asked who is responsible for trees on this property, Liaison Hutter replied that the property owner is responsible, however, the city had responded to some service calls for them in the past. She noted that she is not aware of any contact being made with the owner.
- The Alston Street property was taken by eminent domain by the state in 1954 to build McGrath Highway and there are no other records showing that the ownership has changed. It's not clear who has the title, but it is known that the city has never owned this property. Liaison Hutter will set up a meeting with DCR and MADOT to explore who holds the title to determine responsibility for maintenance of the parcel. There is an available graphic from the 1950s as well as a document from the state from the time of taking. Councilor McLaughlin commented that the city needs to get to the bottom of this matter.
- Councilor McLaughlin would like this matter to be completed by the next City Council meeting and he requested that the deed for state land be

provided.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Comms

18. Order
(ID # [24-1268](#))

By Councilor Strezo

That the Director of Communications discuss the communication plan to address move-in/move-out related discarded furniture, including items left on sidewalks blocking pedestrian pathways and restricting public way accessibility.

Chair Clingan stated that the city needs to do a better job with this issue. Liaison Hutter reported that she spoke with staff in the Communication Department and she described the current outreach efforts and plans going forward. She noted that handouts are given when parking signs and permits are picked up and that information is also available on the city's website welcome page. There is also a social media push in the spring and fall. Councilor Strezo commented about possibly issuing fines for violations and perhaps creating a second hand database or social media presence for discarded items.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Administration

19. Resolution
(ID # [24-1205](#))

By Councilor Davis

That the Administration allocate additional resources to proactively clean up used needles and other potentially hazardous items in Seven Hills Park and other areas.

Director Antanavica stated that calls regarding sharps should be directed to 311. He reported that ISD personnel has been trained in the disposal of sharps and that the daily morning 'walk arounds' in the area have been increased. A reduction in the number of items to be picked up has been noticed.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

20. 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.

Liaison Hutter reported that the Cummings will be used as a warming center and that the city is determining what needs to be done to the facility to make it ready. A timeline for any needed repairs has not yet been established, but Liaison Hutter noted that the repairs will allow the building to be used for

other uses in the future. The Founders Rink is being used by the Parks and Recreation Department to provide multi-generational recreation space.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Director of Emergency Management

21. 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.

Chair Clingan noted that a memo has been submitted regarding this item

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Documents:

- PUPW - 2024-10-30 OEM Memo (with 24-1182)
- PUPW - 2024-10-30 Memo Bench at Brown School (with 24-0039)
- PUPW - 2024-10-30 Eversource Withdrawal Letter (with 24-1240)
- PUPW - 2024-10-30 Plan Taking 1954 Shawmut St (with 24-1418)
- PUPW - 2024-10-30 Relevant Assessors map 0 Alston (with 24-1418)
- PUPW - 2024-10-30 Taking book8352 page93 1954 Shawmut St (with 24-1418)