



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Housing and Community Development Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, November 15, 2023

6:00 PM

This meeting was held in the City Council Committee Room and via Zoom for remote participation, was called to order by Chair Strezo at 6:06 pm and adjourned at 7:58 pm. A recess was taken from 7:30 pm to 7:44 pm.

Others present: Hannah Carrillo – Mayor’s Office, Nancy Bacci – HHS, Rachel Nadkarni – OSPCD, Ben Demers – OSPCD, Christine Carlino – Gilman Square Neighborhood Council, Tom Galligani – OSPCD, Stephanie Widzowski – Clerk of Committees.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Kristen Strezo, Vice Chair Judy Pineda Neufeld and Jesse Clingan

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-1416](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Housing and Community Development Committee Meeting of September 20, 2023.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

2. Order (ID # [23-1358](#)) By Councilor Clingan and Councilor Ewen-Campen That the Director of Economic Development appear before this Council to discuss the current status of the implementation of the Gilman Square Neighborhood Plan.

Ben Demers, a planner in the Economic Development division, presented on the status of implementation of the Gilman Square Neighborhood Plan (Attachment titled “Housing & Community Development - 2023-11-15 Gilman CC pres _ no transitions (with 23-1358)”).

Christine Carlino, Board President of the Gilman Square Neighborhood Plan, spoke on behalf of residents. She praised Somerville for its efforts to change zoning and codify sustainable development, but said that the implementation process has been opaque and only focused on certain areas of the city, with what seems like constantly changing goals. She challenged the approach of revenue-first development and cited concerns that Gilman Square will stagnate while waiting for the study for the Winter Hill school. Ms. Carlino listed community outreach efforts in Gilman Square going back to 2012 and urged the city to implement without delay.

Dir. Nadkarni explained that the disposition study has not been started yet, partially due to staffing. The application for a senior planner position that will manage the disposition study will be going online in 1-2 weeks. Dir.

Nadkarni said that the Homans site and two other parcels are considered high priority areas for the study. Councilor Clingan echoed frustrations for having to wait for the completion of the study before starting the RFP process, and asked about the timeline. Dir. Nadkarni and Dir. Galligani estimated that the disposition study would take 8-12 months to complete, not years.

Dir. Nadkarni spoke about the logistics of meeting both Procurement and ARPA requirements to move forward. She stated that the Homans site has been deemed too small to house the Winter Hill school, but is still being considered as part of a solution to keep the playground open. She also said that the city is actively searching for grants to address accessibility at the MBTA stations. Dir. Nadkarni talked about the logistics of ARPA funding. She said that the federal government issued revised guidance for ARPA, and now all ARPA funding needs to be spent in 2024. She added that she could not discuss details of the proposal yet, but they are aiming for major investment in Gilman Square and on Washington St. The city is looking for a partner who can work on engaged program development.

Councilor Clingan asked about the massing study that had been previously done, which Dir. Nadkarni said had been inconclusive. Councilor Clingan said that a conversation with the community needs to be started again on what the Homans site could be used for. Dir. Nadkarni said that the Gilman Square Civic Advisory Committee will be recruiting new members this winter, and that meetings are all public and have a public comment section. She encouraged members of the public to use these meetings as a venue for discussion of details.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 3. Officer's Communication (ID # [23-1396](#))

Fair Housing Commission conveying the Fiscal Year 2022 Fair Housing Commission Annual Report.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 4. Order (ID # [22-1295](#))

By Councilor Strezo, Councilor Wilson and Councilor Scott That the City Solicitor provide an opinion on the legality of landlords including non-disclosure agreements in leases.

Chair Strezo explained that this item was submitted after a tenant's association was negotiating leases with the new owner of a building, and the new owner stated that the tenants would not be able to discuss the terms of their leases with other tenants. She said that the Solicitor's office is responding to the item.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 5. Order (ID # [23-0274](#))

By Councilor Strezo
 That the Director of Health and Human Services create and distribute an outgoing participation survey for participants of the Teen Snow Shoveling program.

Chair Strezo said that she has heard from participants that the cost of the program is prohibitive sometimes, and she is curious about options to modify the program or to add an exit survey. Dir. Bacci said that they followed up with the youth participants last year, but it is difficult to engage them after the program ends. They got feedback that the rate was too low, and that the rate is the same regardless of snow accumulation. Dir. Bacci shared this information with Dir. Speliotis from the Council on Aging, and she said that they have not heard from seniors that the cost is a concern. Councilor Clingan asked about an exit survey for seniors. Dir. Bacci said that has been discussed with the Council on Aging, and she also talked about how the Youth Services Division and coordinator will help strengthen the relationship with the program.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 6. Order (ID # [22-0172](#))

By Councilor Strezo
 That the Director of Public Works and the Director of the Office Sustainability and Environment discuss the possibility of installing Cigarette Bin Voting Boxes throughout the community.

Chair Strezo said that she would like to see cigarette bin voting boxes submitted as a budget request next fiscal year. She stressed the seriousness of the issue of cigarette butt pollution and suggested that elementary school students could develop questions for the boxes.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 7. Order (ID # [22-1570](#))

By Councilor Strezo
 That the Director of Housing update this Council on maintenance issues of the 100 Homes Program.

Chair Strezo asked if Wingate is managing all the properties in the 100 Homes Program, which Liaison Carrillo confirmed.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 8. Order (ID # [22-0055](#)) By Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Clingan, Councilor Wilson and Councilor Burnley Jr. That the Executive Director of the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development work with the owner of 125 Highland Ave and local non-profit housing developers to convert that structure into permanently affordable housing.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 9. Order (ID # [22-1408](#)) By Councilor Strezo, Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Ewen-Campen That the Housing and Community Development Committee discuss the Democracy Collaborative’s report on Advancing Community Wealth Building in the City of Somerville.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 10. Order (ID # [22-0051](#)) By Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Clingan, Councilor Strezo, Councilor Davis and Councilor Kelly That the Administration collaborate with the Bicycle Committee, the School Department, the Somerville Bike Kitchen and other local organizations to develop a program to help Somerville youth and other residents learn to repair bicycles donated by the City of Somerville.

Chair Strezo noted that the Somerville Bike Kitchen now has a location in Ward Two.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 11. Order (ID # [22-0178](#)) By Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Kelly, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Scott, Councilor Clingan, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Strezo, Councilor Davis, Councilor McLaughlin and Councilor Burnley Jr. That the Director of Housing provide a comprehensive list of bedroom counts and number of accessible units for construction projects permitted over the past three years and continue to track this data

Chair Strezo recalled that previous discussions in committee highlighted the lack of stock for 3-4 bedroom units, and she called for more investment in family size units.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

- Housing & Community Development - 2023-11-15 Gilman CC pres _ no transitions (with 23-1358)