



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
CLERK OF COMMITTEES

March 23, 2021

REPORT OF THE EQUITY, GENDER, FAMILIES AND  
VULNERABLE POPULATIONS COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Wilfred N. Mbah	Chair	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Vice Chair	Present	
Kristen Strezo	City Councilor at Large	Present	

The meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Mbah at 6:34p and adjourned at 8:41pm.

Others present: Khushbu Webber - Mayor's Office; Oliver Sellers-Garcia - OSE; Doug Kress - HHS; Ellen Collins - Personnel; Hannah Pappenheim - Law; Tom Galligani - OSPCD; Sarah Lewis - OSPCD; Jill Lathan - Parks & Recreation, DPW; Deputy Chief Chris Ward - Police

**Approval of the December 15, 2020 Minutes**

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>ACCEPTED</b>
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**208573: That this City Council, In collaboration with the School Committee and the Administration, particularly the Director of Parks and the City Solicitor, draft a "Local Title IX" ordinance ensuring equal opportunity and spending on the basis of gender identity to athletic and academic programs offered by the City.**

Councilor Ballantyne shared the update that Ms. Pappenheim submitted a draft ordinance that has been shared with Councilor Scott, who suggested some additional language, and continues to work on his comments. Ms. Pappenheim noted that a department would need to be identified to collect data and publish a report, and Ms. Lathan suggested that this would need to be a collaboration between Parks and Recreation and Somerville Public Schools, particularly the Athletic Director as many of the items are geared toward High School and Middle School athletic programming. Councilor Ballantyne asked about the next steps and timeline and Ms. Lathan suggested coordinating a meeting with the appropriate individuals in the schools to determine how this would be implemented, determining data points with a SomerStat analyst, and drafting reporting that could be presented. Ms. Webber added that a large part of the conversation will be a departmental impact assessment as part of the implementation, and using that as the framework to determine amendments, additional resources, or anything else needed to implement the ordinance.

Chair Mbah asked about the consultant who was intended to work on this and Ms. Lathan noted that it was put out to bid and there were limited responses that are currently being evaluated and interviewed.

**RESULT:**

**KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

**209365: That the Chief of Police review options relative to the School District's lock-down drills, and provide a description of times when the protocol was used in response to a threat.**

Deputy Chief Ward shared an overview of lockdown drills and the inception of the concept. After the shooting at Columbine High School in 1999, active shooter drills were implemented. Following the Sandy Hook School shooting in 2012, the US Department of Education issued formal regulations for lockdown drills under the "run, hide, fight" model. Nationwide, 95% of schools use some sort of lockdown procedure, with the rationale that if a student cannot be seen, they will give more time for the Police to arrive on scene. The Somerville Police do not oversee the lockdown procedure, the School District will notify both the Police and Fire Departments, who will send staff to assist, but the Schools control the procedure. Notifications are sent on three separate occasions prior to the drills, and are also done with age-specific guidelines in mind. Somerville utilizes the "be safe" model, which consists of two functions: secure and hold; and lockdown with intruder. Secure and hold would encompass situations with a possible intruder outside and all students would be secured in the classrooms. Lockdown with intruder would indicate a threat inside the school, with different protocols implemented.

The Deputy Chief expressed an understanding that this could cause trauma and suggested including mental health professionals in the process. He urged that parents should discuss the drills and procedures with their children to alleviate concerns.

Chair Mbah asked how many times Somerville has used this process, and Deputy Chief Ward shared that the crime analyst could only find one instance of a secure and hold, which took place at the Kennedy School in 2019. He added that the protocols for triggering use are specific to each school. The Police Department does have schematics for each school in order to more easily navigate and resolve the situation if there is an intruder.

Councilor Ballantyne asked if there is data collection on the mental health impact on drills, not just actual incidents, and if any modifications have been made to address the concerns. Mr. Kress emphasized that this is a School District effort, and the District has not requested assistance for mental health services from Health and Human Services (HHS). He added that all students may react differently, and communication about the experience with both parents and students is important. HHS will be instituting a modified Youth Risk Behavior Survey, which will include a question about trauma, how the respondents reacted to those traumatic experiences, and if they had resources available.

Councilor Strezio asked what procedures were used when there was an escaped fugitive and Deputy Chief Ward noted that the Police Department does not maintain records of when the Schools take action to utilize lockdown procedures. Councilor Strezio also asked if there were procedures for special needs students or those with anxiety issues and Mr. Kress commented that it would be a great question for the School District, but HHS would be happy to assist with clinic specialists, social workers, or other trained staff. Councilor Strezio suggested that a survey on this would be useful. Chair Mbah agreed that following up with the School Committee would be a good next step.

**RESULT:****WORK COMPLETED****209572: That the Committee on Equity, Gender, Families and Vulnerable Populations provide feedback on SomerVision 2040's chapter on Youth and Education with respect to metrics and key tasks.**

Ms. Lewis shared that much work on SomerVision was completed in 2019 and there were several outreach groups and a youth forum to solicit student input. The current draft includes recommendations to look beyond the school system to support the City's youth. Creation of a youth center or defined community center was also included as a recommendation, and zoning now requires large development projects to dedicate space toward community and civic uses. SomerVision also recommends after school programming aimed at the shifting demographics and the in-between ages that are too old for a playground and too young for other outdoor activities. The Public Space and Urban Forestry Committee is studying ways to include all age groups in public spaces throughout the City. Ms. Lewis noted that SomerVision is more of a guide than an action plan, and many chapters were written with equity in mind. Councilor Ballantyne noted that she looks forward to reading the final version.

**RESULT:****WORK COMPLETED****209615: That the Director of SPCD and the Director of Health and Human Services consider developing, and hiring a third party for, an Equity Justice Review for the Somerville Climate Forward Plan and the SomerVision 2040 Plan.**

Councilor Ballantyne shared that this stemmed from feedback from some committee members who worked on the environmental portion of the SomerVision 2040 plan, who noted that there was a lot of talk about equity but not enough input and direction in that area. Mr. Sellers-Garcia clarified that his office is very committed to leading with equity on climate, and equity was one of the four pillars of the planning process. He remains open-minded about an additional review of the Climate Forward plan, but suggested that the steps already being taken can be included in the next plan. Ms. Lewis added that many of the comments were added into the SomerVision 2040 revised document, which can be found at <https://2xbcbm3dmsg12akbzq9ef2k-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/SomerVision-202012023.pdf>.

Chair Mbah added that an Equity Task Force could be another way to address this.

**RESULT:****WORK COMPLETED****209786: That the Somerville Education Foundation share their organizational priorities with this Council's Committee on Equity, Gender, Families and Vulnerable Populations.**

Councilor Ballantyne shared that this stemmed from concerns about food insecurity and thinking of potential partnerships. Councilor Ballantyne sponsored Greg Nadeau of the Somerville Education Foundation (SEF), to speak. Mr. Nadeau noted that the priorities were created prior to the pandemic, but remain relevant. The three main priorities are basic needs; year-round learning; and applied learning. Meeting basic needs would ensure that all children are secure in food, shelter, clothing, resident status, health, and mental health to be ready to learn. In a normal year, 80% of time is spent outside of school, and SEF has the goal of bringing resources together to enable learning to continue during these times. Applied learning is designed to help ensure access to internships and other learning opportunities for all students. The Somerville Education Foundation wants to help students fall back in love with learning, and find opportunities to think differently and use project-based learning. Mr. Nadeau suggested that the out-

of-school time coordinator position be upgraded to a Director level position. He emphasized that the City must do more to support the needs of its youngest and most vulnerable residents.

Chair Mbah asked about the funding for SEF and Mr. Nadeau noted that it is a private 501(c)(3) and serves as a fiscal agent to philanthropic groups, but the City should also use tax dollars and federal funds received from things like the CARES Act to fund these priorities. Chair Mbah emphasized that this would fall under the purview of the School District budget, but he would advocate for these issues. Councilor Ballantyne agreed that finding ways to help students love learning is important, and noted that there has been investment in the school buildings and additional funds for out of school time and enrichment would benefit the community. Councilor Strezo shared that she looks forward to continuing to work on this.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>WORK COMPLETED</b>
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**209916: That this Council collaborate with the Administration to apply racial and gender equity lenses to all decisions, including resource decisions and new programs or laws.**

Chair Mbah noted that this is the direction in which the City should be heading, and hopefully can be addressed with the new Director of Racial and Social Justice. Ms. Webber announced that the Director of Racial and Social Justice has been hired and the administration looks forward to future discussions.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>KEPT IN COMMITTEE</b>
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**209976: That the Director of SPCD discuss highlighting equity for seniors in SomerVision 2040 in the areas discussed in the attached document.**

Councilor Ballantyne shared that the suggested edits were incorporated and Ms. Lewis confirmed this, noting that seniors were reflected throughout the document in every chapter.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>WORK COMPLETED</b>
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**210118: That the Director of SPCD add the attached changes into the SomerVision 2040 draft.**

See 209976.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>WORK COMPLETED</b>
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**210228: Supporting full implementation of body worn cameras by sworn personnel in the Police Department.**

Chair Mbah celebrated this achievement and thanked the administration for continuing to see this through.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>WORK COMPLETED</b>
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**210237: That the Administration re-assess its hiring policies to include people of color in leadership positions and update this Council on efforts to promote equity across all departments.**

Chair Mbah shared that he looks forward to discussing this with the Director of Racial and Social Justice. Ms. Collins also added that this is a priority for the City and the Personnel Department will continue this work in conjunction with the Director of Racial and Social Justice. Some focus areas include increasing the diversity of the hiring pools and also on providing unconscious bias trainings. Chair Mbah elaborated that he is grateful for the Personnel Department's work and will close the item after it is discussed with the Director of Racial and Social Justice.

**RESULT:**

**KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

**210238: That the Director of SPCD update this Council on the minority-owned business initiative and provide data on the number of businesses that have been helped from being gentrified.**

Mr. Galligani commented that the City moved quickly to support its small businesses in the wake of COVID-19, and many of the small businesses in the City are owned by women and minorities. He walked through some of the steps taken in the past year, including: hosting meetings to share information in English, Spanish, and Portuguese (with a few additional meetings in Haitian-Creole); making the business technical support program available to all businesses, not just those who qualify under the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program; and working with the Licensing Commission and Inspectional Services Department to help restaurant owners with outdoor dining, and assisting with language support to many of those businesses. Additionally, in 2019, the Department published a diversity catalogue highlighting 39 different businesses to raise awareness, which supplemented work by the Purchasing Department to provide procurement training. This year, the Department estimates that the catalogue will include 200-250 businesses. The major efforts over the last year also included providing direct financial assistance, with 123 grants distributed in the first round. The census data on business ownership should be updated soon, and the department is awaiting the new information.

Councilor Strezo asked if there was any local data available and Mr. Galligani noted that the only way to gather it would be to ask every business in the City and it would require self-identification, and probably not a good use of resources. However, the data has been accumulated in the context of funds distributed and used to build the catalogue. It will continue to be updated through the department's direct work with businesses. Chair Mbah thanked the department for its creativity and progress.

**RESULT:**

**WORK COMPLETED**

**211056: That the Chief of Police and the Director of Health and Human Services discuss the data collected and the mental health impacts that the lockdown drills have on school age children.**

See 209365.

**RESULT:**

**WORK COMPLETED**