



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Housing and Community Development Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, February 28, 2024

6:00 PM

This meeting was held in the Committee Room and virtually via Zoom, was called to order at 6:01 pm by Chair Strezo, and adjourned at 7:59 pm with a roll call vote of all in favor (Councilor Clingan, Councilor Mbah and Chair Strezo), none opposed, and none against.

Others present: Hannah Carrillo – Mayor’s Office, Ellen Shachter – OHS, Rachel Nadkarni – OSPCD, Ted Fields – OSPCD, Tom Galligani – OSPCD, Stephanie Widzowski – Clerk of Committees.

Roll Call

Present:	City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo, City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah and Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan
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1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-1709](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Housing and Community Development Committee Meeting of November 15, 2023.

RESULT:	<u>ACCEPTED</u>
AYE:	City Councilor At Large Strezo, City Councilor At Large Mbah and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

2. Order (ID # [24-0075](#)) By Councilor Strezo
That the Director of Office of Housing Stability appear before the Housing and Community Development Committee to discuss the current status of residents facing displacement and the number of households seeking rental assistance.

Dir. Shachter updated the committee on recent activity in OHS and the state of rentals in Somerville. She addressed topics such as rental assistance, programs (upcoming community workshops, the municipal voucher program and an upcoming guaranteed basic income pilot), legislation (the real estate transfer fee, the Affordable Homes Act and legal services for residents facing eviction), and eviction data.

Numbers of note: Dir. Shachter said that there were 1519 requests for services in 2023, about a 10% increase over last year. The city received \$4.3 million in flexible rental assistance through ARPA to last until December 2024, and \$3.8 million of those funds have already been spent in contracts with SHC and CAAS. However, \$3,000,000 has been set aside from Free Cash to extend funding. Somerville had 214 eviction cases in 2023, 51 of which were executed. Dir. Shachter noted that this number was lower in Somerville than in surrounding communities (123 executions in Cambridge

and 158 in Malden).

Councilor Clingan asked about occupancy in the 100 Homes program and what can be done about credit score screening for affordable units; Dir. Shachter said that the upcoming universal waitlist will change how credit is screened. Councilor Mbah requested more detail on funding for the Somerville Homeless Coalition.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

3. Order
(ID # [24-0070](#))

By Councilor Strezo and Councilor Wilson
That the Director of Parks and Recreation discuss how inclusive playground accessibility is being considered in future playground plans and redesign projects.

Liaison Carrillo said that Dir. Oliveira is not available and can address this item in March. Chair Strezo sponsored Holly Simione to speak as a resident on the importance on inclusive design. Ms. Simione said that true inclusivity goes beyond ADA compliance, and cited examples of features and parks. She also asked how choices for a park are influenced when a school is involved. Councilor Clingan asked about the schedule for park redesign and suggested Grimmons Park as a place to test new designs.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

4. Resolution
(ID # [24-0044](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Strezo
That the Administration honor the Commonwealth's Fourth Annual Crossing Guard Appreciation between March 1-20, 2024 by planning appreciation events and opportunities to thank our crossing guards.

Liaison Carrillo said that the Administration is working with the Police Chief and Officer Teves on this item and will have more information in March. Councilor Clingan asked if Officer Teves is still in charge of the crossing guard program.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Order
(ID # [24-0072](#))

By Councilor Strezo, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Sait, Councilor Scott and Councilor Wilson

That the Director of Health and Human Services provide an update on the communication efforts and rollout of the Warming Center, including the plan to inform Armory tenants, and the plan for security and client assistance.

Taken together with item 24-0076. Dir. Nadkarni gave a presentation on security, maintenance and communication updates with the Armory, as well

as the status of the master plan. Councilor Sait raised concerns with the timeline and with issues arising due to what feels like a lack of planning. Dir. Nadkarni said that the Law Office had finished their review and there will be information to share next week. Councilor Sait also asked about community participation in the meetings for the master plan, and this led to a conversation on factors that go into decision making. Councilor Mbah started a discussion about ideal locations for the warming center and which places were considered. Dir. Nadkarni emphasized that the warming center needs a heating system that can handle being on overnight.

Chair Strezo sponsored Stephanie Scherpf and Jess White, co-directors for Arts at the Armory, to share their perspectives. They spoke about how communication from the city has been lacking on multiple occasions, including in the establishment of the warming center and in a recent fumigation for bedbugs. Ms. White spoke about security concerns, and Ms. Scherpf stated that the Administration should not be leading this process due to having a vested interest and called for a survey to gather community input.

**RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK
COMPLETED**

6. Order
(ID # [24-0076](#))

By Councilor Strezo
That the Executive Director of the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development discuss the maintenance plan for the Armory building.

Taken together with item 24-0072 - see that item for notes.

**RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK
COMPLETED**

Referenced Documents:

- HCD - 2024-02-28 SOMERVILLE ARMORY Presentation (with 24-0076)