



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Equity, Gender, Seniors, Families and Vulnerable Populations Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, February 28, 2023

6:00 PM

Others present: Meredith Gamble - Deputy Director and Language Justice Coordinator, Maria Nagel – Director of SomerViva, Nick Antanavica – Superintendent of Inspectional Services, Susan Yerkes – Director of Parks and Recreation, Sarah Lewis – Director of Planning and Zoning, Hannah Carrillo – Legislative Liaison, Neha Singh – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcelllese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:04 PM by Chair Gomez Mouakad and adjourned at 7:49 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Strezo, Pineda Neufeld and Gomez Mouakad), none against and none absent.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Beatriz Gomez Mouakad , Vice Chair Judy Pineda Neufeld and Kristen Strezo

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [22-2072](#)) Approval of the Equity, Gender, Seniors, Families and Vulnerable Populations Committee Minutes of November 29, 2022.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: Chairperson Gomez Mouakad, Vice Chair Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Strezo

Equity

2. Order (ID # [22-1884](#)) By Councilor Strezo, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Kelly, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Scott and Councilor Wilson

That the Director of Parks and Recreation eliminate equity barriers for residents signing up for recreation programs.

Councilor Strezo spoke about residents having outstanding balances being prevented from signing up for any programs, even free ones. Director Yerkes explained that the software being used does not allow a bypass to be entered online, but there is a posting on the department’s main web page advising customers to call or visit the office, so that staff can bypass for free programs. If a balance is due, a payment plan must be made before participation in any paid programming. Chair Gomez Mouakad asked about non-English speakers seeking assistance and Director Yerkes replied that translation services are available in the office. Councilor Strezo asked if the

notice on the main page could be made more specific and Director Yerkes will work with the councilor to draft additional language. Councilor Pineda Neufeld expressed her desire to have the notice available in multiple languages. Councilor Gomez Mouakad also requested that the language button be available in different languages. Director Nagel agreed that multiple languages should be displayed and she will work with Director Yerkes to make those changes. Councilor Strezo inquired how information about scholarships is conveyed and whether there is forgiveness for balances due. Director Yerkes said that the scholarship form is online and that the website will be updated to include a 'donate' button for people to make contributions.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

3. Order
(ID # [22-1717](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad

That the Director of the SomerViva Office of Immigrant Affairs provide an update on the proposed 5-year language plan and how this plan will be implemented in the next five years.

Director Nagel gave an update, saying that much of the work has taken longer than expected and that a baseline assessment is being developed by Director Gamble. Chair Gomez Mouakad advocated for a transition from the GTW platform to Zoom, in order to provide better translations services. Director Nagel told the members that efforts are being made to ensure high level translation services are available by looking at best practices and developing a city staff "how to" guide. When ready, a plan will be put before the Council. Director Nagel explained that the plan would be a living document that will change due to the dynamic nature of translations. Director Gamble commented that there is much to deal with for language justice, i.e., it involves more than simply providing interpreters for literal translations, but also the nuances of translation.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Order
(ID # [22-1298](#))

By Councilor Strezo and Councilor Pineda Neufeld

That the Director of Health and Human services discuss the potential effects of the recent Supreme Court ruling on *Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health* on Somerville women, pregnant women, pregnant people and reproductive health.

Liaison Singh informed the members that the Director of Health and Human Services was unavailable to attend tonight's meeting. Liaison Singh reported that 1) the project utilizing an intern to map demographics and available resources is ongoing and 2) SOIA has connected to appropriate resources. Councilor Strezo asked that this item be kept in committee and

that HHS address what kinds of birth control are being discussed with residents.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

5. Order
(ID # [22-1272](#))

By Councilor Scott and Councilor Clingan
That the ADA Coordinator deliver a list of ADA complaints received from members of the public in FY 2021 and FY 2022.

The FileVine system is functional, and the ADA coordinator is working to input ADA complaints into the new system. The ADA Coordinator is anticipating having the FY22 complaints available by late spring of 2023. Regarding FY21, as communicated previously, gathering complaints from FY21 is a heavy lift due to complaints existing in multiple places. The ADA Coordinator is continuing to work with other city staff to locate all ADA related complaints from FY21. See attached memo.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

6. Order
(ID # [22-1277](#))

By Councilor Scott and Councilor Clingan
That the ADA Coordinator provide a status on requests for Braille transcription of materials.

The Office of Racial and Social Justice (RSJ) is continuing to work with Library staff to procure a loan Braille embosser from the Perkins School for the Blind. The embosser will be loaned out for 12 months in order to gather more data about use, needs and allow ample time to onboard and train staff to use the embosser. The RSJ Department anticipates the embosser to be acquired by late Spring of 2023. It is anticipated that following the 12 month rental period, the RSJ and Library Departments will be able to purchase a braille embosser for the city. See attached memo.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

7. Order
(ID # [22-2120](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad and Councilor Kelly
That the Director of the Office of Racial and Social Justice, the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management and the Executive Director of the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development document compliance with Code of Massachusetts Regulations (CMR) 521, Sections 3.3 and 3.5.

Chair Gomez Mouakad commented that the memo submitted for this item did not adequately respond to the item and that further discussion and clarification is needed. She explained (CMR) 521, Section 3.3 and its ramifications for ADA compliance saying that when the work performed on a building is divided into separate phases or projects or is under separate building permits, the total cost of such work in any 36 month period shall be

added together in applying 521 CMR 3.3. She inquired how the city's Infrastructure and Asset Management and/or Parks and Forestry Departments track costs? Chair Gomez Mouakad commented that it's unclear from IAM's response that they fully understand CMR 521 and she recommended the procurement an outside consultant to prove compliance. See attached memo.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

8. Order
(ID # [23-0082](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Clingan, Councilor Kelly, Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Wilson

That the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator, the Director of Inspectional Services, and the Director of Planning, Preservation & Zoning explain to this Council how the City provides oversight for compliance with Fair Housing Act Design Guidelines, the Massachusetts Architectural Access Board CMR 521 and the ADA Standards for Accessible Design, from plan review through building and occupancy permits.

Chair Gomez Mouakad spoke about a property at 165 Cedar Street that appeared to not be in compliance with ADA regulations and how that led to the question of how things are tracked. Resident Seth Goodman spoke about the difficulties he experiences in his living accommodations due to his medical condition and he commented on the loopholes in the Fair Housing Act. Somerville Commission for Persons with Disabilities member Hollie Simione addressed the members saying the GoToWebinar platform is not handicap accessible and needs to be replaced by another platform. She spoke about communication and said that the rules haven't been updated in a long time.

Director Lewis explained that the 165 Cedar Street property was approved under a previous ordinance and Superintendent Antanavica noted that there are about 6 projects being constructed under the old code plus 1 or 2 more due to COVID extensions. Now, however, under the city's new ordinance, there is a weekly pre-submittal meeting attended by various city representatives to ensure that everything is in compliance. Chair Gomez Mouakad commented that problems need to be found at the beginning of a project and an ADA checklist is helpful in finding the problems. Councilor Strezo commented that 8 ADA units have been built since 2016. Chair Gomez Mouakad inquired about the housing needs, i.e., 1,2,3 bedroom dwellings and indicated that she would submit a request for the information.

Superintendent Antanavica informed the members that a more robust process has been implemented and that the department is working on providing ADA regulation training for its inspectors. ISD staff will be increased and will allow for a dedicated ADA compliance reviewer. When all positions have been filled there will be 9 licensed inspectors.

Superintendent Antanavica informed the members that inspectors must obtain 45 CEU's every 3 years to maintain their licenses. Internal reporting indicates that training is below where it should be in the department.

Ms. Simione asked about variance documents and Superintendent Antanavica said if an address is provided, he should be able to find any associated paperwork. Ms. Simione inquired what happens if city wants to build something, i.e., does same team do the inspecting? Superintendent Antanavica acknowledged that they would, however, Capital Projects and other departments would be included. He also pointed out that as a project moves through the process, there are several points where the city signs off or can rectify issues.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

9. Order
(ID # [23-0080](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Kelly, Councilor Scott, Councilor Ewen-Campen and Councilor Gomez Mouakad
That the Director of Procurement and Contracting Services update this Council on the status of the citywide disparity study.

Liaison Sing reported that the evaluation has been done and that the city is moving forward with the study.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Families and Vulnerable Populations

10. Resolution
(ID # [23-0073](#))

By Councilor Wilson, Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Kelly, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Scott
That the Administration and School Department prioritize fully meeting Somerville Public Schools families' demand for after school and vacation programming in the 2023-24 school year, including expanding the offerings of after-school enrichment clubs.

That the Administration and School Department prioritize fully meeting Somerville Public Schools families' demand for after school and vacation programming in the 2023-24 school year, in a way that honors our commitments to equity and accessibility, including expanding the offerings of after-school enrichment clubs.

Councilor Strezo commented that this concept is being discussed in the Children's Cabinet. She's concerned weather the programs launched using ARPA funds are able to be sustained. She would like SomerPromise staff available to discuss this item.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Documents:

- Equity - 2023-02-28 IAM Response (with 22-2120)
- Equity - 2023-02-2802 ADA Coordinator Memo (with 22-1272, 22-1277)