



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, June 17, 2026

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Wheeler at 6:02 pm and adjourned at 10:21 pm on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Link, Strezo, Hardt, Scott, and Wheeler), 0 opposed, and 0 absent.

The committee went into recess at 8:15pm and returned at 8:20pm on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Link, Strezo, Hardt, Scott, and Wheeler), 0 opposed, and 0 absent.

Also present:

Tom Galligani — Executive Director, Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development (OSPCD), Alan Inacio — Director of Finance & Admin, Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development (OSPCD), Brad Rawson — Director of Transportation & Infrastructure, Daniel Bartman — Director of Planning and Zoning, Luisa Oliveira — Director of Public Space & Urban Forestry, Lisa Davidson — Director of Housing, Ellen Shachter — Director, Office of Housing Stability, Rachel Nadkarni — Director of Economic Development, Steven Nutter — Director of Sustainability & Environment, Roberta Cameron — Preservation Act Manager, Eric Weisman — Commissioner of Public Works, Ben Waldrip (Superintendent of Grounds, Department of Public Works, Meghan Huckenhahler — Director of Finance & Administration, Department of Public Works, Jeffrey Barbieri — Superintendent, Highway/Lights and Lines, Matthew Bennett — Superintendent, Buildings Division, Max Bitaraes — Fleet Manager, Department of Public Works – Highway Division, Michael Bowler — Facilities Supervisor, School Custodians, Richard Raiche — Director of Infrastructure & Asset Management, Ralph Henry — Deputy Director of Capital Projects, Brian Postlewaite — Director of Engineering, Kevin Klein — Interim Director of Inspectional Services, Michael Richards — Director of Finance & Administration, Water & Sewer and Delaney Fisher-Cassioli — Clerk of Committees

Roll Call

Present: City Councilor At Large Jon Link, City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Emily Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott and City Councilor At Large Ben Wheeler

1. Review of the FY27 Budget

1.1 Strategy and Development

Administration
Mobility
Planning (formerly PPZ)
Public Space and Urban Forestry
Housing
Housing Stability
Economic Development
Sustainability and Environment
Somerville Redevelopment Authority
Community Preservation Act/Committee

Administration

Director Tom Galligani, Executive Director, Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development (OSPCD), shared that the department's work is focused on creating safer streets, planning for neighborhood change, and preventing displacement. He noted that the City is operating in a period of fiscal constraint and, as a result, the department is prioritizing the protection of core initiatives over the coming year. These priorities include preserving housing, advancing community planning efforts, implementing anti-displacement strategies, modernizing permitting processes, and creating safer and more resilient public spaces. Director Galligani further noted that the department has eliminated three positions and plans to leave two additional positions unfilled, requiring staff to focus resources on initiatives expected to deliver the greatest impact.

Alan Inacio, Director of Finance & Admin, Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development (OSPCD), explained that his team is responsible for financial oversight across all six OSPCD divisions as well as oversight and compliance for state grants. He shared that collaboration across departments had already been occurring organically and that the integration of Sustainability & Environment into OSPCD has been a smooth transition. Formalizing that structure has created more opportunities for regular coordination and strengthened cross-department collaboration. Director Inacio also noted that the department's Executive Assistant position has been retitled to Operations Manager.

Mobility

Brad Rawson, Director of Transportation & Infrastructure, shared that the department's mission is to advance Somerville's goals of safe and accessible transportation. He noted that the department continues to transform Somerville's streets through safety improvements and the installation of traffic calming infrastructure and reported that crashes have decreased by 15% over the previous year.

In response to questions regarding staffing and community engagement, Director Rawson explained that the department's two communications positions were created in response to interest from both the Council and the community in expanding outreach and meeting residents where they are. He

noted that the department established its first outreach specialist position several years ago and later reorganized to add a second position. Staff engage directly with residents through community outreach, collect data in the field, and support 311 requests. Director Rawson added that the department emphasizes cross-training and encourages staff to develop competency across multiple areas of work. Addressing Councilor Strezo's concerns about pedestrian safety among older adults, Director Rawson shared that the department has expanded senior-focused outreach efforts and prioritized trust building to ensure transportation policy is accessible and responsive to all residents, emphasizing that pedestrian safety remains a core priority.

Responding to Chair Wheeler's questions about public engagement and project evaluation, Director Rawson stated that staff distribute physical flyers in neighborhoods to reach residents who may not rely on internet-based communications and that in-person events help build awareness through community networks and word of mouth. He added that the department is continuing to explore ways to broaden and deepen engagement. Councilor Hardt asked about post-project evaluation and Director Rawson noted that the department continues to collect and analyze data to better understand behavioral changes following completed projects and that this information is publicly available online. He also shared a longer-term goal of publishing technical reports several years after project completion, similar to practices used in other municipalities.

Planning (formerly PPZ)

Daniel Bartman, Director of Planning and Zoning, shared that the division supports permitting and development review activities across the City. He noted that the proposed budget will allow the department to complete the Davis Square Development Plan as well as continue infill planning work along the McGrath corridor. Director Bartman stated that the department's goal is for staff to increasingly function as an in-house consulting resource capable of conducting more technical analysis internally.

Director Bartman also discussed the implementation of ArcGIS capabilities, noting that onboarding and integration is expected to take approximately six months. He shared that these tools will allow the department to produce in-house 3D models and model potential future development scenarios. Director Bartman explained that this technology will strengthen the City's ability to evaluate the potential fiscal, housing, water, and sewer impacts of future development and support more informed planning and decision-making.

Public Space and Urban Forestry

Luisa Oliveira, Director of Public Space & Urban Forestry, noted that the department oversees policy, construction, and maintenance of the City's public spaces and urban forest. In the upcoming year, priorities include the

Kennedy Schoolyard project, Davis Square activation, and the Kensington Connector. The department also plants approximately 350 street trees annually as part of its ongoing efforts to maintain and expand the urban canopy.

Councilor Hardt asked about the status of the City's urban tree canopy and potential threats. Director Oliveira responded that the City has made significant progress with the 'tree amigos' who support annual plantings, preventative maintenance, and implementation of the tree protection ordinance. She noted emerging threats, including the emerald ash borer and the beech leaf borer, and described ongoing efforts to inoculate vulnerable trees and proactively identify dead or declining trees to reduce risks to property and public safety. She added that, as a result of sustained investment and maintenance practices, the urban canopy is currently in its strongest and most actively managed condition to date.

Councilor Link asked about efforts to improve canopy equity in ward one. Director Oliveira noted that ward one has limited planting space but remains a priority for environmental justice-focused tree planting. She added that two planners manage tree siting, enforce the tree preservation ordinance, and coordinate proactive maintenance.

Housing

Lisa Davidson, Director of Housing, noted that the Housing Division is a 15-member team focused on creating, preserving, and ensuring access to affordable housing. The department oversees inclusionary housing requirements, partners with developers to produce and maintain high-quality affordable units, and ensures that inclusionary units are properly allocated to eligible residents. She emphasized the dual role of supporting new housing production while also safeguarding affordability standards and compliance across existing developments.

Councilor Scott asked for clarification on what "expediting eligibility screening requirements" means. Director Davidson explained that the Housing Division is working to reduce the amount of documentation required to determine income eligibility, with the goal of streamlining and simplifying the process for applicants. She added that the department is also exploring a sampling-based approach for recertifications, rather than reviewing every case in full, and plans to require annual rent rolls to ensure property managers are not overcharging tenants or violating affordability agreements.

Director Davidson also noted that the department has been working with a stakeholder working group to expand permanent supportive housing in the City. She explained that this work has become more complex due to shifts in federal housing priorities away from permanent supportive housing and toward transitional models. She added that the Somerville Homes Coalition

currently manages approximately 9-11 units and is working to transition residents from temporary or transitional placements into permanent supportive housing and ultimately into traditional subsidized housing pathways.

Housing Stability

Ellen Shachter, Director of the Office of Housing Stability, noted that the office works to prevent displacement through the provision of comprehensive direct services, including case management, tenant organizing, and legal representation. The office also develops programs and advances policies at both the local and state level aimed at promoting housing stability.

Councilor Strezo asked about the stability of contracts with the City's partner organizations. Director Shachter responded that the office expects to maintain its existing robust network of contracts and programs. She noted that many services have historically been supported through off-budget funding sources, but the office currently has secured funding for the municipal voucher program through FY28. She added that legal services are also fully funded through the rollover of unspent funds from the previous year.

Economic Development

Rachel Nadkarni, Director of Economic Development, noted that the department's mission is to expand economic opportunities for residents and businesses. The office supports small businesses through permitting assistance and works to connect residents with job training and workforce development opportunities. She added that new businesses supported by the department have been performing well.

Councilor Scott asked about workforce development staffing, noting that there were six positions last year compared to two this year. Director Nadkarni responded that the department has filled a vacant senior planner position focused on workforce development, whose goal is to strengthen alignment between training programs and labor market needs. She emphasized efforts to ensure youth have greater awareness of available career pathways and increased exposure to local job opportunities. Councilor Hardt asked for an update on TransMedics. Director Nadkarni reported that the company has pulled its first building permit to begin work on facility upgrades, including the addition of an elevator. The project will proceed in a two-phase fit-out, with all permits anticipated in FY27. She added that the company's HR team is beginning to plan for hiring timelines, and the project is expected to ultimately create approximately 600 jobs phased in over several years.

Sustainability and Environment

Steven Nutter, Chief Sustainability Officer and Director of Sustainability &

Environment, noted that the department implements and develops programs aimed at reducing the impacts of climate change, advancing equity, and creating a healthy and enjoyable environment for residents. He added that the team has identified key goals focused on advancing climate action, supporting decarbonization efforts, and building community leadership around sustainability initiatives.

Councilor Hardt asked about the Climate Ambassador Program. Director Nutter shared that the program now has 175 alumni. He also noted that for the Climate Action Commission, 49 individuals applied for 13 available positions. In response to a question from Councilor Link, Director Nutter discussed efforts to strengthen community resilience during extreme heat events, including exploring the development of community-centered spaces and coordinating closely with emergency management to support residents during periods of extreme weather.

Somerville Redevelopment Authority

Rachel Nadkarni, Director of Economic Development, noted that this is a very small group and that Chair Wheeler sits on the committee. Chair Wheeler asked about SRA projects. Director Nadkarni provided an update that the Urban Square renewal project at 299 Broadway is proceeding with construction and is currently wrapping up site work. She added that within the Urban Square Urban Renewal District, project D4.3 is expected to be the next major project to move forward, with anticipated progress in FY27.

Community Preservation Act / Committee

Roberta Cameron, Preservation Act Manager, noted that the work focuses on improving historic buildings that provide social services, with the goal of making them more accessible and functional.

1.2 Public Works

Administration

Electrical

Facilities

Fleet

Grounds

Snow Removal

Streets and Sidewalks

School Custodians

Administration

Eric Weisman, Commissioner of Public Works, noted that the Department of Public Works maintains the City's streets, sidewalks, parks, playgrounds, schools, and other public infrastructure. He added that the department is also responsible for snow removal, custodial services, and waste removal. Ben Waldrip, Superintendent of Grounds, Department of Public Works, noted that over the past year the department has added 30 new employees and promoted 26 staff members, while currently working to fill 16 vacancies.

Meghan Huckenpahler, Director of Finance & Administration, Department of Public Works, noted that the division provides financial and administrative support across all DPW operations, including budget oversight and invoice processing, and added that the department processes approximately 11,000 invoices annually.

Chair Wheeler asked about the recycling bin fee structure for apartment buildings above a certain number of units. Commissioner Weisman responded that the charge is based on the actual cost of recycling services and is intended to maintain an affordable and sustainable recycling system. He also noted that the City will be rolling out new, more durable curbside trash and recycling bins for residents and businesses over the coming year. He explained that the updated carts are more stable, less likely to tip or spill materials, and designed to reduce rodent access due to their improved durability and resistance to chewing and tampering.

Electrical

Jeffrey Barbieri, Superintendent of the Highway Division, noted that the electrical unit is responsible for maintaining traffic signals, street lights, and fire alarm systems across the City.

In response to a question from Councilor Link, he shared that the department is working with the Engineering Division to install six preemption systems in police and fire department vehicles, after which the systems will be tested to ensure proper functionality. Chair Wheeler asked about the pole boxes located on City streets and whether the fire alarm repair line item in the budget allows the City to continue maintaining them in-house. Superintendent Barbieri responded that it does, and that the department will continue servicing the systems as long as the Fire Department requests support.

Facilities

Matthew Bennett, Superintendent of the Buildings Division, noted that the division is responsible for building maintenance and custodial services across 29 city and school buildings. He added that this year the department is focused on continuing to utilize its in-house trades personnel to carry out maintenance and custodial work.

Fleet

Max Bitaraes, Fleet Manager, Department of Public Works - Highway Division, noted that the City's fleet includes a number of aging vehicles and that the department is working to replace several of them over the current and upcoming fiscal years. He added that the City is somewhat behind on replacement schedules, but that all vehicles are being maintained to remain safe and operational in the meantime.

Commissioner Eric Weisman added that the department uses a vehicle

review process to evaluate purchase plans and make recommendations to ensure the fleet is as efficient as possible. He noted that while there are infrastructure constraints related to electrical capacity in Somerville, the City is actively exploring opportunities to electrify vehicles where feasible.

Grounds

Ben Waldrip, Superintendent of Grounds, Department of Public Works, noted that the Grounds Division focuses on ensuring the functionality and safety of parks, green spaces, and other public areas. He added that the division is also responsible for trash and recycling removal, snow removal, and the addition of ornamental plantings, and that it includes a dedicated tree crew that supports ongoing maintenance of the City's green infrastructure. He further explained that the Grounds Division also works in coordination with other departments on rodent mitigation efforts, including the use of the BurrowRX.

Snow Removal

Eric Weisman, Commissioner of Public Works, noted that the department uses both staff and contractors to remove snow and ice in order to maintain safe and continuous operations throughout the winter season. Councilor Link asked about contingency planning in the event of heavy snowfall this winter, including where excess snow would be stored, and Commissioner Weisman responded that the City has designated snow storage locations and will be meeting with property owners the following week to coordinate and finalize operational plans ahead of winter conditions.

Chair Wheeler noted concerns regarding accessibility during winter weather, particularly for residents with mobility challenges at street corners. Commissioner Weisman responded that snow removal responsibilities are shared, with property owners responsible for clearing adjacent sidewalks, while the City clears all four corners at bus stops, City buildings, traffic islands, and school drop-off areas.

Streets and Sidewalks

Ben Waldrip, Superintendent of Grounds, Department of Public Works, introduced the division. Councilor Scott asked how many ADA ramps may be missing or noncompliant, and Superintendent Waldrip responded that a contractor is actively working on ADA ramp upgrades and compliance improvements across the City. He noted that work at the Kennedy School and Powder House School was completed last year as part of ongoing accessibility efforts.

He also explained that street sweeping is handled by an outside contractor because it is classified as a sanitary service. He noted that contracting this work externally helps reduce City liability and also avoids operational challenges that would come with providing the service in-house, including staffing coverage issues and the need to maintain specialized equipment and

vehicles.

School Custodians

Michael Bowler, Facilities Supervisor for School Custodians within the Department of Public Works, noted that the division is responsible for maintenance and custodial operations across all city and school buildings. In response to a question from Councilor Scott, he explained that the overtime budget line is used to cover “floater” staff as needed to ensure adequate custodial coverage across facilities. He added that they are still working on hiring additional staff to fill vacancies as well.

1.3 Infrastructure

Administration

Capital Projects

Engineering

Inspectional Services

Water and Sewer

Administration

Richard Raiche, Director of Infrastructure & Asset Management, noted that the department is responsible for providing drinking water and ensuring that buildings are safe and properly maintained. He added that the division has integrated its work with the Water and Sewer Department, reflecting a long-standing partnership between the two areas that have effectively operated in coordination for many years.

Capital Projects

Ralph Henry, Deputy Director of Capital Projects, noted that the department is responsible for managing major infrastructure projects across the City. He added that the team oversees planning and execution of large-scale capital investments intended to maintain and improve City facilities and infrastructure. Richard Raiche, Director of Infrastructure & Asset Management, added that an updated capital investment plan is expected to be released in November.

Engineering

Brian Postlewaite, Director of Engineering, noted that the department is responsible for evaluating, constructing, and protecting City infrastructure. He added that this includes efforts to reduce flooding, improve water quality, support multimodal street design, mitigate impacts from third-party construction, and provide technical expertise across infrastructure projects. Councilor Scott asked about the repaving of Highland Avenue, and Director Postlewaite responded that the City conducts an annual review each November to prioritize streets for repaving based on a comprehensive infrastructure analysis.

Councilor Hardt asked about expanding street-level stormwater infrastructure and the barriers to doing more of it. Richard Raiche, Director

of Infrastructure & Asset Management, responded that vegetated bump-outs and similar installations depend on subsurface utility connections and are typically coordinated with sewer work. He added that siting must also account for potential impacts to nearby trees, as improper placement can damage root systems.

Inspectional Services

Kevin Klein, Interim Director of Inspectional Services, noted that the department is responsible for building, plumbing, electrical, and other code enforcement and inspection functions. He added that the team prioritizes communication and responsiveness in order to help prevent issues for residents and businesses that could otherwise impact operations or compliance.

Chair Wheeler asked about the department's staffing situation, and Director Klein responded that staffing is going well, with experienced staff actively supporting and mentoring newer employees to strengthen overall capacity. Councilor Scott noted that Inspectional Services had previously released data on annual calls for service, and Director Klein confirmed that the department can provide updated figures for that information.

Water and Sewer

Michael Richards, Director of Finance & Administration, Water & Sewer, noted that the department has implemented much-needed organizational structure and has seen strong success as a result, with continued efforts to modernize and professionalize operations. He added that the department is transitioning to the CitizenServe platform. He also noted that he expects the meter replacement program to be completed shortly. He further added that the department is now fully staffed and no longer relies on temporary hires, and that it has reduced postage and printing costs associated with billing. He also explained that the sewer vehicles repair line is used to fund operations for the vacuum truck, as repairs for that equipment are particularly costly.