



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, June 12, 2024

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Wilson at 6:00pm and adjourned at 9:25pm with a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Clingan, Burnley, Ewen-Campen, Scott, Wilson), none opposed, and none absent.

Others Present:

Denise Taylor - Director of Communications and Community Engagement, Dan Moore - Director of Web Content and Development, Steve DeCarlo - Director of City TV, Steve Craig - Director of Constituent Services, Maria Terese Nagel - SomerViva Director, Meredith Gamble - Deputy Director and Language Justice Coordinator SomerViva, Nicholas Salerno - Chairman of Elections, Anne Gill - Director of Human Resources, Ellen Schneider Collins - Deputy Director of Personnel, Nilofar Jhalodwala - Health, Life Insurance and Medicare, Renee Mello - Workers Compensation Safety Manager, Ashley Speliotis - Director of Council on Aging, Chris Hosman - Director of SomerPromise, Jerome Thomas - Director of Veterans Services, Cathy Piantigini - Director of Libraries, Susan Yerkes - Parks and Recreation Department, Mike Mastrobuoni - Budget Director, Madalyn Letellier - Legislative Services Manager.

Roll Call

Present: City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson, Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott, City Councilor At Large Willie Burnley Jr., Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan and Ben Ewen-Campen

1. Review of the FY 2025 Budget
 - Communications and Community Engagement
 - PEG Access
 - Constituent Services (311)
 - SomerViva (SOIA)
 - Elections
 - Human Resources
 - Health, Life Insurance and Medicare
 - Workers Compensation
 - Council on Aging
 - SomerPromise
 - Veterans' Services
 - Libraries
 - Parks and Recreation
 - Kennedy Pool Enterprise Fund
 - Dilboy Pool Enterprise Fund
 - Miscellaneous Budgetary Items

Chair Wilson stated for the record that Councilor Ewen-Campen joined the meeting at 6:01pm.

1. Review of the FY 2025 Budget

Communications and Community Engagement

Director Denise Taylor presented the Communications and Community Engagement (CCE) budget and stated that CCE is an umbrella department covering 311 Constituent services, SomverViva, GovTV, and Communications including web content and development. Director Taylor stated the focus for the department is two-way communication to cover city services, programs, events, celebrations, and emergencies. The department's goals are to build robust information infrastructure to provide support to all city departments to access the correct information in an efficient and equitable manner.

Chair Wilson asked about the funding going to the web maintenance design and development and what the final product will look like online. Director Taylor explained the approach to do updates year to year rather than waiting many years and having to do a massive overhaul. Director of Web Content and Development Dan Moore supplemented the response by highlighting the department has teamed with a new vendor for ongoing integration and is making progress toward bettering website accessibility and access. Director Moore speaking on a master plan for the website said goal is to reach compliance following guidelines set forth by the Department of Justice. Councilor Scott asked Director Moore if the Drupal migration has occurred. Director Moore responded that there have been multiple migrations.

PEG Access (City TV)

Director Steve DeCarlo spoke about the goals of City TV to bring equitable programming to the entire city 24/7 over multiple streaming platforms. The department is looking to add more Public Service Announcements (PSA) around rodents, SomerViva (SOIA) programming, and bring them all to constituents in multiple languages. Director DeCarlo stated their department budget has been moved to the general fund and includes an increase in Personal Services to hire more part time staff, with hopes of partnering with the high school to hire students.

Councilor Scott asked about a note in CCE for a placeholder for a new division in City TV. Director Mastrobuoni clarified that is an old text from FY 24 and not reflected in the current budget.

Councilor Burnley asked about the freelance and part time budget in temporary wages and how many part timer positions City TV is hoping to hire in FY25. Director DeCarlo stated the department would like to hire five part time employees and have two come from the high school.

Constituent Services (311)

Director Steve Craig presented the budget and made note the department's customer service representatives are in active negotiations to join Somerville Municipal Employee Association (SMEA) Unit B. Director Craig highlighted the collaboration between 311 and dozens of city departments to answer constituent request throughout the year.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked about fundings for new training in the budget and what is the process to escalate calls and requests and if budget allocation can assist in bettering that process. Director Kelly first responded about the ongoing development that is happening in-house for a customer service training that will be tailored specifically to city staff. Director Kelly emphasized each problem is different, but the department takes the effort to identify where the problem arose and how to best address it in the future.

Councilor Burnley asked about the \$20,000 difference in the Professional and Technical Services line in the budget book and what the department has listed. Director Kelly, corrected by Director Mastrobuoni, stated the \$20,000 for the customer service initiative was placed in the Professional and Technical service line when it should have been a program improvement request. Councilor Burnley continued to ask about the budget and the increase in the overtime line. Director Kelly responded it is related to ongoing negotiations with SMEA and further follow up can happen outside of an open meeting.

SomerViva (SOIA)

Director of SomerViva Maria Teresa Nagel spoke to the growing budget need and desire for translation and interpretation requests across the city as they have nearly doubled, with that comes more training and software needed. Director Nagel also pointed out the establishment of an Out of State Travel Funding to allow employees to learn from other communities and bring that back to the city.

Councilor Burnley asked about the plan for translation services lines in SOIA versus other departments. Deputy Director Meredith Gamble responded that Language Access has been centralized in the budget. Interpretation and Translation is not a line item in other budgets as all those services come directly from the SOIA budget. Councilor Burnley asked for further clarification on why there is now a separate line item for out-of-state travel and how that figure was chosen. Director Nagel relayed it is in direct response to learning from past years of missed opportunities and wanting to be able to capitalize on those available in the future to bring that knowledge back to the city. The \$6,000 figure comes from curating the conferences that have already been published and the ones that make the most sense to attend.

Elections

Chairman Nicholas Salerno highlighted the success of recent elections and the ability to adhere to all rules and regulations of the city and the state.

Chair Wilson asked how old the polling equipment is the city currently uses and what's the life span of it. Chairman Salerno responded that the city has the most up to date technology with 32 plus four backup tabulators to service the city.

Human Resources

Director Anne Gill reviewed the completion of goals for FY24 and upcoming goals for FY25 with continued efforts to implement an Employee Self-Service (ESS) system and to revamp the onboarding process for new hires.

Chair Wilson followed up on a pre submitted question for the start date for two positions and a September 1 versus July 1 start date, Director Gill confirmed the new September 1 start date. Chair Wilson additionally asked if the difference in budget would be \$30,778.33, Director Mastrobuoni said he could confirm that number for cut night. Chair Wilson also asked about specialized postings for technical job listings and if there is a budget to support those postings. Director Gill said they work directly with department heads to decide where postings should go and there has not been any deficiency in budget postings to date.

Councilor Scott asked about the Professional and Technical support lines and why it is still underspent and what did not get done in FY24. Director Gill stated money was put aside for a Munis implementation and the cleanup can be done in house, there was additional money put aside for training and funds were instead received from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Councilor Scott also asked about the third-party investigative service lines and how many investigations happened, Director Gill said she can follow up with the exact figure.

Councilor Clingan asked if the proposed budget accounted for outsourcing Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) process and if that included the coordination for sick time, he went on to ask if Munis is the system used for payroll. Director Gill stated the FMLA outsourcing was in projections for about \$55,000 and it will just be for FMLA. Director Gill went on to explain the ESS is something different and reiterated that ESS will eventually be available to employees for day to day time off requests and approvals. On the point of FMLA Councilor Burnley asked for clarification on what the \$55,000 covers and when collective bargaining gets resolved if that number will need to be expanded to service the larger number of employees. Director Gill reiterated it is an estimate of what it would cost to have a vendor and if it does need to be expanded it will be discussed once the proposal begins. Councilor Clingan asked how long the contract is for an FMLA vendor for \$55,000 and how many employees it would be able to

service. Deputy Director Collins clarified that \$55,000 is a contract for one year and a number cannot be put to its usage as it depends on when an employee needs to utilize the benefit.

Chair Wilson moved to reduce the HR personal services salary line by \$30,778.33.

This motion was laid on the table until cut night on June 18th.

Health, Life Insurance and Medicare

Benefits Specialist Nilofar Jhalodwala stated the benefits offered in the city and this department assists in administration to employees in the city.

Workers Compensation

Manager of Employee Safety and Training Rene Mello stated there is no change in the budget to assist employees with work-related injuries.

The committee entered recess at 7:54.

Chair Wilson called the meeting back to order at 8:00 pm with a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Clingan, Burnley, Ewen-Campen, Scott, Wilson)

Council on Aging

Director Ashley Speliotis spoke to serving the aging community within the city and the expanded services including emotional, education, and physical that can be conducted due to the hiring and transferring of new positions to the department. The budget presentation included \$80,000 to sustain the Taxi to Health programming through FY 25 after ARPA funding runs out in October.

Chair Wilson asked on behalf of Councilor Pineda-Neufeld, can residents under 60 be served through the COA Taxi to Health program. Director Speliotis relayed state funding was used from a grant to start the program in 2020 specifically for the target population of senior residents, as well as funding received from ARPA that has clear guidelines to serve the population aged 60 and over or those with qualifying disabilities. Chair Wilson stated this is being funded through the general fund and asked if there is a policy with restrictions on the population able to be serviced. COA programming and all services, receive state funding, a formula, and a per dollar amount for seniors along with a charter within the board of directors which is to provide services to folks over the age of 60. Health and Human Services (HHS) saw a need and opportunity and the department created their own program for residents under the age of 60. Chair Wilson asked to clarify what qualifies as with a disability to utilize the services, Directo Speliotis clarified the COA would service an adult with a disability and recommends anyone curious if they can utilize the services should reach out and connect

with the COA directly.

SomerPromise

Chris Hosman Director of SomerPromise presented the budget with the announcement that the Community Out of School Time Coordinator position has started this week, and an offer has been made to fill the Youth and Family Resource Navigator Position. Director Hosman spoke to the collaboration with Somerville public schools and the multiple programs that have been implemented through grant and ARPA funding with organizations throughout the city and further information will be available in the SomerPromise report at the end of the month.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked how the Out of School Time Coordinator decision was made for SomerPromise to hold it in their budget over the schools. Director Hosman stated to keep building a robust out of school time program with partnerships throughout the city the job description has been split to service both the schools and SomerPromise programming.

Councilor Burnley asked why the Early Years project funding has gone unspent and was moved into Professional and technical Services for FY25, the director relayed the early years contract will be expended by the end of the year. Councilor Burnley followed up asking if the expenditure is at the very end of the billing year. Director Hosman responded that the amount left to bill is what they would expect to see at this time of the year. Councilor Burnley went on to ask about discrepancies in what was budgeted and what was spent in FY24. Director Hosman spoke on the updated report that now that there is an out of School Time Coordinator their funding will be allocated throughout the summer and most of the line is being utilized at 99.3%. Councilor Burnley asked Director Mastrobuoni to update actuals on spent to be showcased in the digital budget book. Director Mastrobuoni said this is a variance that one could expect to see between the digital budget book and reports run directly from the department on day of. Last question from Councilor Burnley on why the spending in the Profession and Technical services line has gone down. Director Hosman relayed that between the programs being shifted to multiple partnerships in the city funding has shifted.

Veterans' Services

Director of Veterans Services Jerome Thomas introduced himself as the new director and goals of the Veteran's Services to engage with more veterans throughout the community in the upcoming year.

Chair Wilson asked about the small spend on veteran's benefits and is wondering how the department can connect with more veterans to utilize the funding. Director Thomas highlighted the goal to reach out multiple times throughout the year and work with other departments and their outreach activities to try and engage in a one-on-one basis.

Libraries

Director of Public Libraries Cathy Piantigini presented the budget and the programming and services that the library staff has planned and implemented over the past fiscal year with the launch of a new five-year strategic planning process for library facilities.

Chair Wilson asked about the social workers grant position and what happens to the \$49,000 in grant funding if the position is not filled. Director Piantigini said it is Library State Aid and it can be carried over year to year and will be utilized for another pilot program. Councilor Scott asked about pieces of property that was gifted and what that funding means for the trustees. Director Piantigini clarified that property was to the Somerville Public Library Foundation, which is a 501(c)(3) and not the Trustees which is more of a governing body.

Parks and Recreation

Director Sue Yerkes spoke to the part time salaries line item not being spent but most will be done by July 1, what was not spent was due to the displacement from the Edgerly. Other budget increases include admissions, fees, transportation, food, and rental equipment and supplies.

Chair Wilson asked if the \$50,000 in Professional and Technical Services for consultants, clinics, and events also includes compensation. Director Yerkes will need time to respond and will follow up offline.

Kennedy Pool Enterprise Fund

Director Sue Yerkes presented the budget request increase due to the new pay scale structure for part-time staff and the additional staff required for summer programming.

Chair Wilson asked on the actuals from FY24 and a budget shortfall. In response Director Mastrobuoni said they updated the year to dates earlier today and it broke something on the digital budget book, none of the enterprise funds run a deficit. Chair Wilson went on to ask Director Mastrobuoni about the subsidization that happens out of the general fund and if the figure \$659,255 is correct for the year.

Director Mastrobuoni said the figure is correct and it's increasing significantly this year and relayed the way fund the increase in staff costs is by subsidizing to a greater degree. Chair Wilson asked a question to the professional and technical services line and if there are any compensation agreements with any community youth, athletics, or nonprofit partners in the city to which Director Mastrobuoni said he would have to get back to the Chair with answers.