



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Open Space, Environment and Energy Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, May 8, 2023

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Burnley at 6:10 pm and adjourned at 8:04 pm with a roll call vote of four in favor (Councilor Wilson, Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Scott, and Chair Burnley), one absent (Councilor Pineda Neufeld), and none opposed.

Others present: Neha Singh – Mayor’s Office, Renee Scott, Leigh Meunier, Christine Blais – OSE, Luisa Oliveira – OSPCD, Stephanie Widzowski – Clerk of Committees.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Willie Burnley Jr., Vice Chair Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott, Beatriz Gomez Mouakad and Jake Wilson
Absent: Judy Pineda Neufeld

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-0263](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Open Space, Environment and Energy Committee Meeting of February 16, 2023.

RESULT: ACCEPTED
AYE: Chairperson Burnley Jr., Vice Chair Scott and City Councilor At Large Wilson
ABSENT: Ward Five City Councilor Gomez Mouakad and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

2. Order (ID # [23-0217](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld
That the Director of Public Space and Urban Forestry, the Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment, and the Director of Communications and Community Engagement discuss with this Council, opportunities to increase communication and education of residents on the impact of black swallow-wort and how to effectively remove and dispose of it.

Chair Burnley sponsored members from Green & Open Somerville, Renee Scott and Leigh Meunier, to present on invasive species such as black swallow-wort in Somerville. Ms. Scott and Ms. Meunier talked about events they have hosted to remove invasive species, roadblocks to progress, and their hopes for resources the city could provide to address the issue. Dir. Oliveira commented that it is difficult to educate or convince owners to remove invasive species on their private property. There was discussion of cleanup programs that used to occur and steps to take to initiate those

programs again. Dir. Oliveira said it was her recollection that the Arts Council had been involved in those programs.

Councilor Gomez Mouakad suggested narrowing the scope of initiatives to specific problem areas and considering Somerville Garden Club as a potential partner for education and outreach.

Chair Burnley had questions about the history of city legislation proposed to ban black swallow-wort. Agenda item 209224, which was discussed in committee in 2020 and placed on file in 2021, was one such drafted ordinance. Chair Burnley expressed support for the idea of neighborhood competitions to remove black swallow-wort, but wondered if the City Council should lead the effort. Councilor Wilson added that the city is well suited to aid in education and possibly limited funding for youth roles in invasive species removal. Ms. Meunier emphasized incorporating invasive species education into existing outreach.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

3. Order
(ID # [22-0828](#))

By Councilor Wilson, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Clingan and Councilor Pineda Neufeld

That the Director of Public Space and Urban Forestry update this Council on plans to dramatically increase the number of trees in Foss Park.

Dir. Oliveira said that Dir. Boukili met with a team from DCR about planting more trees in Foss Park, and that DCR was eager to do so; moreover, they expressed interest in microforest implementation. Dir. Oliveira stressed that following up on these sentiments is critical, though, and that her priority is to keep lines of communication open. She said that DCR plans to budget for trees for the park, but if they do not, PSUF plans to do so instead. Councilor Gomez Mouakad asked if plantings would interfere with future maintenance in the park, to which Dir. Oliveira said that the city will need to keep that in mind. Councilor Wilson asked about plans to plant trees alongside Mystic Ave and McGrath Hwy to shield from particulates. Dir. Oliveira answered that DCR is receptive to targeting those areas.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Order
(ID # [22-0687](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Scott

That the appropriate staff update this Council on the status of the community gardens and discuss opportunities to create a mutual aid garden.

Dir. Oliveira talked about the Conservation Commission, which has purview over community gardens, and explained that she reached out to them to answer the Committee's questions. She cited statistics on community garden waitlists that suggest that wait times are not as long as public perception.

However, the Conservation Commission is looking to streamline the waitlist process, as well as expanding the community garden at Glen Street. Dir. Oliveira talked about the citywide garden coordinator position (paid through PSUF) created by the Conservation Commission. She ended by addressing the potential for mutual aid gardens and stressed that successful mutual aid gardens, such as the Beacon Food Forest in Seattle, seem to require significant organization and upkeep. Councilor Scott commented that there needs to be an expectation that the purpose of any mutual aid gardens established in Somerville is to support neighbors, and cited Groundwork Somerville's efforts.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Order
(ID # [22-0569](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad
That the Director of Planning & Zoning and the Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment report on strategies to integrate and implement photovoltaics, weatherization, and electrification in Historic Properties.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Order
(ID # [22-0951](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Kelly and Councilor Strezo
That the Director of Sustainability and Environment update this Council on any plans for a municipal composting program.

Dir. Blais said that OSE is finishing a zero waste plan, which includes a municipal composting program. They have been working with a vendor for a couple months and plan to complete the work this year, though the estimated end date has been pushed from July to September. Councilor Wilson urged that the city follow in Boston's footsteps in their partnership with Garbage to Gardens. Chair Burnley asked if funding was set aside for a municipal composting pilot. Dir. Blais said that there was not, but that Environmental Coordinator Vithal Deshpande was drafting a pilot program before he left the department. OSE still has this information, but Dir. Blais emphasized that composting programs need to stay in line with the zero waste plan and with rodent mitigation efforts.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

7. Order (ID # [22-0565](#))
By Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Kelly and Councilor Gomez Mouakad
That the Director of Inspectional Services report to this Council on the average time it takes for residents to have solar panels installed, identify the bottlenecks in this process, and discuss how this process can be streamlined and accelerated.
- Liaison Singh said that the typical wait time is seven days to review all required documents to complete the permitting process, and that according to ISD, delays occur when contractors have not followed the process or there are issues with documentation.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
8. Order (ID # [22-0274](#))
By Councilor Gomez Mouakad and Councilor Scott
That the Director of Housing and the Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment work with the Somerville Community Corporation to explore funding and rebates available for weatherization and other sustainability measures.
- Councilor Gomez Mouakad stressed that the city needs to leverage any available resource when it comes to energy efficiency, especially in the 100 Homes Program. Liaison Singh said that the Housing Division is working with SCC to explore funding and rebates on sustainability measures on a project by project basis, and that SCC was able to secure a grant that would assist with expenses for decarbonization. She added that Housing is looking to assign that work to a new position currently in the interviewing stage, the Clean Green Somerville Housing Program Manager position. Councilor Scott expressed surprise that the position was only posted so recently and asked if it had been previously filled. They also asked about the possibility of enacting energy efficiency standards for projects receiving funding assistance from the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, for example, through local legislation. Liaison Singh said that she would return with answers from the relevant departments.
- RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE**
- Referenced Documents:
- OSEE - 2023-05-08 PPZ Preservation-Sustainability Memo Packet (with 22-0569)