



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, June 16, 2025

6:00 PM

The meeting took place remotely via Zoom and was called to order at 6:02 PM by Vice Chair Scott and adjourned at 10:44 PM on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Burnley, Clingan, Scott and Wilson), none against and 1 absent (Councilor Mbah).

Others present:

Chief of Staff Nikki Spencer, Chief Administrative Officer Lammis Vargas, Director William Fisher – Emergency Management, Deputy Director Lauren Mahoney – Emergency Management, Chief Fire Engineer Charles Breen, Director Suzanne Rinfret – Parking, Director Richard Raiche – IAM, Director Brian Postlewaite – Engineering, Director Ralph Henry – Capital Projects, Commissioner Jill Lathan – DPW, Director of Operations Eric Weisman – DPW, Superintendent Jeffrey Barbieri – Highway/lights and Lines, Superintendent Ben Waldrip – Grounds, Superintendent Matthew Bennett – Buildings, Andy Rieder – DPW Building Systems Manager, Police Chief Shumeane Benford, Deputy Police Chief James Stanford, Deputy Police Chief James Donovan, Director Emily Wisdom – SPD Finance and Administration, Director Neha Singh - Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Kimberly Hutter – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Councilor Wilson joined the meeting at 7:28 PM and assumed the Chair.

The Committee recessed at 8:59 PM and reconvened at 9:04 PM with all members present.

Roll Call

Present:	Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott, Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan, City Councilor At Large Willie Burnley Jr. and City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah
Absent:	City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson

Review of the FY 2026 Budget

Executive Administration

Chief of Staff Spencer was asked to provide a breakdown of the dues and membership expenses. Ms. Spencer spoke about the summer youth employment, saying that more funds were spent this year than ever before and that the Administration is planning to expand the program. Chief Administrative Officer Vargas spoke about the “digital divide” and efforts to secure umbrella software.

Emergency Management

Director Fisher spoke about building resiliency and collaborating with the community to identify hazards. He commented that emergencies are defined by their impact and that’s why he believes that community involvement is so important. He spoke about the warming center and noted that after action

reviews will provide additional information that will be helpful.

Fire

Chief Breen and Councilor Scott discussed the current staffing levels and the Chief stated that this is the first time that the department has been fully staffed and that it was achieved without using lateral transfers. Councilor Burnley noted an increase in the overtime line and the chief commented that the last two months of data have not been included in the numbers yet. Councilor Mbah inquired about language access in the response protocol and Chief Burnley stated that fire fighters will be trained on the use of translation software.

Fire Alarm

No questions were asked.

Police

The department was represented by Police Chief Shumeane Benford, Deputy Police Chief James Stanford, Deputy Police Chief James Donovan and Director of Finance and Administration Emily Wisdom. Councilor Scott asked why the overtime line increased and was told that it was due to family leaves, in-person service training, firearm qualifications, investigations and community involvement efforts. Councilor Scott spoke about staffing levels and Chief Shumeane explained that some of the Staffing Study recommendations have been implemented and that the department is looking at today's reality to be creative and innovative. Councilor Scott continues his questioning on the number of SPD staff and was told that there are 88 filled patrol positions. He requested the names of the four individuals currently in the Police Academy and the seven who were given conditional offers of employment.

Councilor Mbah asked about alternative response funding, dealing with marginalized community members, and ensuring that a behavioral social lens is used. Chief Shumeane responded that these remain priorities for the department and that they are working to secure a Public Safety for All manager to address those issues. Councilor Burnley committed that an alternate response is different from a co-response and noted that there are no funds in the budget request for an alternative response. He asked if there was a CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets) style program in place and Chief Shumeane said there was not, but that he had conversations with CORE about what might be available.

Chair Wilson asked if the additional patrols assigned to Davis Square contributed to the overtime costs and the Chief replied that on-duty resources were used for that, with some additional resources brought in. He noted that anytime the department is understaffed, steps are taken to maintain a level of readiness.

Animal Control

Chief Shumeane told the committee that the present staffing is sufficient for the number of calls received.

E-911

Chief Shumeane reported that the vacant operator position has been posted. Councilor Burnley asked about utilizing another phone service for routing calls that may come from an alternative response and the Chief replied that staff is looking at resources to upgrade its systems and noted that some communities are already using alternative systems.

Parking

Director Rinfret responded to questions about safety sticks, saying that they were self-sustaining and that their use will be expanded to enhance Vision Zero. She reported that the department is down 2 PCOs and that interviews are being held to fill those positions. She also commented that she believes that staff will be staying in light if the recent pay increases negotiated. Asked about the Home Rule Petition regarding auto enforcement, Director Rinfret noted that is a matter for the Police Department.

Water & Sewer

Councilor Scott noted that these departments are funded through their respective enterprise funds, but he noted that it's costing the city four times as much to have outside contractors performing work rather than using in-house staff. Councilor Mbah inquired about the Poplar Street project and the director said that there are still some items to complete and noted that the EPA has changed its requirements, which will necessitate the department requesting a supplemental appropriation. Director Raiche told the committee that the departments' budgets are balanced, since, by law, expenses cannot exceed revenue.

He reported that the water meter replacement program is 94% complete and that the new rate structure will be fairer as it will shift the burden from 2-3 family properties to larger ones. He also said that the possibility of providing some sort of subsidy is being explored.

Chair Wilson spoke about the number of bills being sent out and asked if some users were not being billed. The committee was told that there are a few hundred users that do not have accounts and that staff is trying to rectify that. Councilor Scott commented that there are approximately 150 commercial accounts and he asked how some non-profits are classified as commercial. Councilor Scott commented that he is concerned that the departments don't have a grasp of the billing process.

Infrastructure & Asset Management

Director Raiche was asked about the ordinary maintenance line expenditures and reported that the full budgeted amount will not be expended by the end

of FY25. He responded to questions about the expenses for photocopying by explaining that funds were being used to cover the costs of moving into space at the TAB. As for exceeding the dues and memberships line, he explained that these are needed to keep abreast of clean water strategies and federal regulations. He noted that when hiring, the city is also competing with consulting firms, so it's important to keep staff educated and up to date.

Capital Projects

Director Raiche stated that the department is fully staffed but for one project manager position, which won't be filled until needed. Director Henry was asked about any projects on tap and he listed several of them, including the Assembly Square Fire Station which should be ready this August or September. Councilor Burnley asked about the Green Facilities Manager position and Director Raiche explained that it is primarily for the high school but will encompass monitoring other buildings' systems are operating. Chair Wilson inquired about heating and cooling issues and Director Raiche stated that a lot of work has to be done by the city and Eversource as a building is electrified and gas is eliminated. Councilor Clingan asked why information on the CIP wasn't included in the budget book and Director Raiche explained that, due to financial uncertainty and the judgement for 90 Washington Street, the CIP has yet to be nailed down. Councilor Clingan also asked for information on the Winter Hill corridor.

Engineering

Director Postlewaite reported that walking and pedestrian signals are being upgraded and that the pavement and sidewalk condition assessments will be restarted. Councilor Clingan asked about putting together a list of projects being worked on or being planned and the director said that staff is working with the Communications Department to create a webpage to show projects in process. Councilor Mbah inquired if there is a listing of street work to be performed and the director noted that it's on the Engineering Department's webpage but does not have data for 2027 through 2029.

DPW Administration

Councilor Burnley asked about the Jail Diversion Program and Director Weisman stated that, historically, that line item is placed in Administration because services are provided to buildings and grounds. Councilor Burnley asked about the condition of the DPW's fleet and Commissioner Lathan stated that the department works with the Administration as needs arise.

Buildings & Custodians

Staff is working on a central elevator project, boiler projects at the Brown School and the DPW, exploring heating systems for the Parking Department, and securing a House Doctor Program.

Grounds

Staff is doing work on the Armory, two irrigation systems and preventive

maintenance of fields and playgrounds. The department's spending is below its anticipated target, however, not much remains in the line item. Councilor Scott asked about adding another 3-person ground crew at an approximate cost of \$220,000. Councilor Wilson asked about licenses needed to operate the artificial turf groomer and Superintendent Waldrip said that no license is necessary. He noted that, currently, staffing is sufficient and said that discussions are being held due to Dilboy field coming online.

Solid Waste

No discussion

Highway / Lights & Lines / Electrical / Fleet Management / Snow Removal

No positions were added to Highway and the increase in the line item is due to collective bargaining. The department is working on the brining operation and continues to cross-train staff.

There is a vacant electrician position in Lights & Lines. Staff reported that they are working with Pine Ridge to pay invoices related to lighting in Teele Square, and that the remaining funds will be used.

The Fleet Manager's position is scheduled to be filled on June 9th and that position is listed in the Highway Department's budget. At this time, there are 3 vacant positions (1 working foreman and 2 repairmen). An issue concerning employees on administrative leave has been resolved and those positions have been filled.

Link to Departmental Responses:

<https://city-somerville-ma-budget-book.cleargov.com/19991/fund-summaries/fy-26-council-response-memos>