



# CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

## CLERK OF COMMITTEES

June 14, 2022  
REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

| Attendee Name                   | Title                     | Status  | Arrived |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|---------|---------|
| Jake Wilson                     | Chair                     | Present |         |
| Jefferson Thomas ("J.T.") Scott | Vice Chair                | Present |         |
| Beatriz GomezMouakad            | Ward Five City Councilor  | Present |         |
| Judy PinedaNeufeld              | Ward Seven City Councilor | Present |         |
| Charlotte Kelly                 | City Councilor At Large   | Present |         |

This meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Wilson at 6:00 pm and adjourned at 11:56 pm. Councilor Gomez Mouakad moved to adjourn, and the motion was passed by unanimous roll call vote. A recess was taken at 8:15 pm and ended at 8:20 pm. A second recess was taken at 10:39 pm and ended at 10:43 pm.

Councilor Scott left at 10:40 pm and said he would submit any further questions in the morning after watching the recording.

Others present:

Hannah Carrillo - Mayor's Office, Denise Capers - RSJ, Suzanne Rinfret - Parking, George Proakis - OSPCD, Alan Inacio - OSPCD, Sarah Lewis - Planning & Zoning, Michael Feloney - Housing, Ellen Shachter - OSPCD, Tom Galligani - OSPCD, Brad Rawson - OSPCD, Stephanie Widzowski - Assistant Clerk of Committees.

### Review of FY 2023 Budget:

#### Racial & Social Justice

Dir. Capers presented on her department's accomplishments and actions since being established in 2020, and listed their goals for FY23. Their ultimate goal is to dismantle structural racism in Somerville, achieved first with institutional transformation, then community transformation, and finally healing. She said RSJ has hired a deputy director, ethics specialist, commission coordinator, ADA coordinator, and RSJ analyst; and they are preparing for second-round interviews with final candidates for the RSJ coordinator, community engagement specialist, and public information officer positions.

There was discussion of how RSJ plans to spend its budget this year when little of its budget was spent last year. Dir. Capers explained that RSJ is trying to build itself out in addition to tackling systemic problems. The amount that should be allocated for translational services was also discussed. Councilor Gomez Mouakad stated that translational services are a need

and the committee should not debate about it. Councilor Kelly asked Dir. Capers to share in a memo information given verbally in this meeting.

After nearly two hours of discussion, Councilor Pineda Neufeld criticized the committee for scrutinizing RSJ to a higher degree than other departments and stated that spending 100% of a budget does not always equate to good work.

### **Parking**

Dir. Rinfret said that there is an increase of 3% in the personal services line of the proposed budget with two new positions to support signing personnel, and there is a decrease of 6% in the ordinary maintenance line due to the conclusion of the parking study. Chair Wilson asked if the sign contract is enough to address the new 20-mph speed limit across much of the city. Dir. Rinfret said that the contract is to replace faded signs. There was discussion about the ticket processing vendor that Parking is requesting. Dir. Rinfret said that the vendor software allows Parking staff to process tickets and is the “backbone” of the department.

### **OSPCD Administration**

Dir. Proakis said that OSPCD is putting more resources towards affordable housing and sustainability goals. They have requested five additional positions and the redesign of three existing positions. Overall, the administrative OSPCD proposed budget is increasing 4.5% from last year. Councilor Scott asked how the city is preparing to transition to a new director. Dir. Proakis said that the mayor is expected to make an announcement in a week or two, at which point she will likely appoint an interim director. Councilor Scott also asked about vacant positions. Dir. Proakis said that the Equity Manager position is down to two finalists. Councilor Kelly asked if the disparity study would be in the FY23 budget, to which Dir. Proakis said yes, but it is important that the equity manager is in place first.

### **Planning & Zoning**

Dir. Lewis said that the changes to the budget are mainly due to zoning software and to fund professional note takers for meetings. Increased salaries are partly covered by a reduced salary for historic event planners. Councilors asked about plans for Union Square, Ball Square, and Teele Square. Dir. Lewis said that Union Square was paused because of transportation issues, but they anticipate resuming it again. There was also discussion about the zoning software and about preserving artist spaces.

### **Housing**

Dir. Feloney said that the personal services line is only proposed to increase 2% but involves fundamental changes driven in part by the completion of a federal grant supporting lead hazard reduction this year. That lead paint program will now be funded through CDBG. Housing also intends to reallocate five existing positions into one for an integrated one-stop shop program that offers clean, hazard-free housing improvements. Another focus is on

helping to reach Climate Forward goals. Housing also plans to create a consolidated waitlist for housing.

Councilor Kelly requested a list of grants used by Housing before the close of budget season. Councilor Scott asked for deliverable dates on universal wages for affordable opportunities from the FY16 budget. There was also discussion on staff turnover and the status of vacant positions.

### **Housing Stability**

Dir. Shachter said that Housing Stability is allocating two new positions to its personal services line: a client services manager - serving in a supervisory role to assist with a growing staff - and an intake supervisor. These positions will help with capacity when ARPA ends. The budget also includes four contracts to do with housing search, tenant housing, legal services, and the flex fund and SomerVIP fund. More money has been built in for these contracts because the costs of contracting go up each year.

Highlights of the conversation were the flex fund, responses to the end of the eviction moratorium, and who can get access to services through Housing Stability or associated services such as De Novo. Dir. Shachter said they are informing tenants of their rights and reaching out to landlords to work with the city and find solutions for tenants instead of eviction. Councilor Kelly asked for a list of revenue streams used by Housing Stability. Councilor Scott expressed concerns about federal restrictions for Flex ARPA and his support for doubling flex funding.

### **Economic Development**

Dir. Galligani said that Economic Development is adding two new positions: a deputy director and small business liaison. The latter will assist small businesses in permitting processes, and the deputy director is needed to coordinate on complex projects such as Boynton Yard. Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked if Somerville would forgive outdoor dining fees for restaurants again this year. Dir. Galligani said that update would typically come in late summer or early fall. They followed up with all permitted outdoor dining establishments with updates on available funding and helped eight businesses design potential outdoor spaces so they can utilize funds. Chair Wilson expressed concern that there may be pushback if or when fee waivers are removed in the future.

### **Redevelopment Authority**

#### **Mobility**

Dir. Rawson said that Mobility has seen the shift of one staff position from external grant funding to the city's general operating budget, which represents a 10% increase in Mobility's proposed budget. The second change is a reduction in traffic detail support. In FY22 there was a one-time relocation of the Union Square farmer's market that required a greater traffic detail than usual, but FY23 returns to the norm. Finally, there is a proposed increase to the signs and cones line to support quick build safety interventions.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked about goals for the free or reduced fare bus program. Dir. Rawson talked about a two-part strategy to offer benefits to customers - for example, passes for seniors and vulnerable populations - as well as launching a free/reduced fare program. Councilor Kelly discussed a CharlieCard purchasing program.

### **Public Space & Urban Forestry**

Dir. Oliveira said that they are asking for \$100,000 for a pollinator action plan and are hoping to hire consultants on this project. They are also asking for \$110,000 for a tree keeper inventory that will allow them to keep more accurate data and work across departments more efficiently. They are also asking for a new planner position to continue current work on ecosystem restoration and zoning compliance, and there will need to be a new open space and recreation plan. \$200,000 was moved from CIP to the operating budget for trees, and there are a few small increases for various programs to increase survival chances for trees in urban environments.

### **Community Preservation Act**

Dir. Cameron talked about the newly formatted community preservation plan. She said that the CPC's own goals are to increase public awareness through engagement and signage, publicize their small grant program, broaden the application pool, continue to make improvements to CPC's documentation, and making their program more accessible by improving navigation. She encouraged people to reach out with potential CPA projects, as the FY23 application just opened.