



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Public Utilities and Public Works Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, March 18, 2024

6:00 PM

The meeting took place virtually via Zoom and was called to order at 6:01 PM by Chair Clingan and adjourned at 6:36 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors McLaughlin, Strezo and Clingan), none against and none absent.

Others present:

Arn Franzen – Director of Parks and Open Space, Brian Postlewaite – Director of Engineering, Hannah Carrillo – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Roll Call

Present: Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan, Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin and City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-0180](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Public Utilities and Public Works Committee Meeting of February 12, 2024.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin and City Councilor At Large Strezo

2. Order (ID # [24-0151](#)) By Councilor Clingan That the Director of Water and Sewer address the use of threatening notifications as part of the water meter replacement project.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

3. Order (ID # [24-0148](#)) By Councilor Wilson and Councilor Clingan That the Director of Engineering update this Council on the policy and plans pertaining to repairing leaking gas pipes versus replacing them, and the necessary transition away from gas infrastructure.

Mr. Edward Woll from Mothers Out Front, and a member of Gas Transition Allies, spoke about gas line repair vs. replacement (or triage and transition) and the Future Clean Heat Bill in the MA Legislature that seeks to have gas companies be authorized to get into a new business, i.e., installing non-emitting renewal thermal energy. He noted that Framingham is beginning a pilot program of geothermal networks that utilize non-combustible geothermal energy sources in the next week or so. Mr. Woll also touched upon the DPU's new vision to transition from gas to

thermal energy, non gas pipeline alternatives, funding for continued training of employees, and eliminating depreciation of pipes.

Director Postlewaite said he was prepared to discuss what he could about the Engineering Department's role with respect to this topic and he noted that Mr. Woll's remarks were wider ranging than what Engineering can contribute to. The Engineering Department is charged with facilitating the use of public streets for utility work and, by law, cannot favor one type of energy over another. Director Postlewaite commented that he agrees with moving towards less carbon intensive energy systems and said that the Engineering Department is looking at electrification and/or network geo thermal and is hiring a consultant to study decarbonization. He told the committee that there's a challenge between transitioning to a non-carbon system and maintaining an existing system to the standards required by the DPU.

On the topic of leaking gas pipes, Director Postlewaite noted that the SYSPOT repair system was a challenge because Eversource was incapable of shutting off the gas line due to the legal agreements with customers on that line. Eversource knew they were intending to shut the line at some point so they didn't want to invest money into it, thus making the SYSPOT repair the best option. Brian doesn't know if it's more beneficial to repair or replace gas lines but if the Committee wants more info, a meeting can be arranged to have gas companies attend a future committee meeting.

Councilor McLaughlin said the city could do a better job at publicizing the contact information for the utility companies' liaisons. Lindsay Lucke, from Mothers Out Front, said it's far less expensive to repair gas pipes rather than to replace them. She would like to see some of the funds that were set aside for repairing pipes go towards alternative methods, e.g., non-combustible fuels rather than replacing pipes.

The Bill, S2103 has been accepted by the state Senate and reported it out favorably but the House has not accepted it yet. It might go to a conference committee and there may be some activity on the bill in April. Ms. Lucke said the first step is to get the bill through the state legislature. Chair Clingan commented that the city has little sway over what utility companies are doing and passage of the Future Clean Heat Bill will the give city some tools to proceed.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Resolution
(ID # [24-0040](#))

By Councilor Strezo

That the Administration and the Director of Water and Sewer update this Council, in writing, on the plan to support residents who cannot afford the recent water bill increases.

Liaison Carrillo informed the committee that the Administration will be making a presentation on this topic at the March 20th Housing and Community Development Committee meeting.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 5. Order
(ID # [24-0039](#))

By Councilor Strezo
That the Commissioner of Public Works re-install the bench, previously donated and installed in honor of longstanding Brown School principal Marilyn Haggerty, on the Brown School grounds.

Director Franzen told the committee that a new bench will be provided for Brown School. A quote has been received and a purchase will follow. A dedication plaque will be placed on the back of the bench, which will be mounted on concrete pad. The estimated time for delivery is 6-8 weeks. Councilor Strezo requested that this item remain in committee until the bench is installed.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE