



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

April 11, 2022

REPORT OF THE OPEN SPACE, ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Jefferson Thomas ("J.T.") Scott	Chair	Present	
Beatriz GomezMouakad	Vice Chair	Present	
Willie Burnley Jr.	City Councilor At Large	Present	
Jake Wilson	City Councilor At Large	Present	
Ben Ewen-Campen	Ward Three City Councilor	Present	

This meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Scott at 7:05 pm and adjourned at 8:38 pm. Councilor Wilson moved to adjourn, and the motion was passed by unanimous roll call vote.

Others present: Aneesh Sahni - Mayor's Office, Hannah Carrillo - Mayor's Office, Jill Lathan - DPW, Ben Waldrup - DPW, Nicholas Antanavica - ISD, Nancy Bacci - Health and Human Services, Christopher Hosman - Health and Human Services, Stephanie Widzowski - Assistant Clerk of Committees.

Approval of the January 19, 2022 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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212844: Affirming the federal Green New Deal resolution by establishing goals, identifying actions necessary to meet these goals, and calling for the federal government to enact policies to advance a Green New Deal.

Councilor Burnley stated that the Green New Deal is a job creator and a unifier, but Somerville does not have one. He said he will keep looking at policies to implement at the local level that will not be challenged. He described some state and federal policies of interest, including a state program for municipalities to opt in to carbon-neutral construction. He said that one bottleneck here is that the Council cannot implement policies alone because it cannot allocate funding.

Chair Scott said that there has not been collaboration with the Administration on this item yet and asked how to proceed. Councilor Burnley replied that that is not the fault of the Administration; but he did put forward a budget priority item to incentivize community divestment from fossil fuels, and he hopes to discuss that with the Administration. Dir. Sahni

invited councilors to reach out to him with specific policies to discuss and he would be happy to coordinate. He stated the importance for the Administration to act on climate change.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

212845: That the Administration create a paid "Teen Invasive Plant Removal Program" similar to the "Teen Snow Shoveling Program" to train young people to remove harmful invasive plants and connect them with residents desiring such help.

Councilor Ewen-Campen talked about a community organization called Green & Open Somerville that hosts invasive plant removal events for species such as black swallow-wort, which attracts monarch butterflies but is toxic to caterpillars. He said that property owners who have invasive species can connect with the city program to get the plants removed, and that Cambridge has a program like this. Councilor Ewen-Campen met with summer staff from Cambridge, who called the program ongoing and fruitful. He also has had conversations with the Administration about this. The teen shoveling program, however, is likely not the right model for an invasive species removal program, because this would require more training and infrastructure.

Commissioner Lathan said that DPW is on board with the pilot and hopes that it can grow into a larger program. She said that there needs to be a concrete plan for if youth work on private property - there need to be background checks in place to safeguard the workers. Councilor Wilson praised the literature circulated about black swallow-wort and called attention to the need to have the flyers in other languages.

Councilor Ewen-Campen mentioned a non-profit group called Meadowsclaping for Biodiversity and one of its members, Jean Devine, to reach out to.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

213050: 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.

The Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment was unable to attend the meeting. Dir. Sahni said that the Administration has started a conversation between Housing, OSE, and SCC, and they have identified a few opportunities to move forward. Councilor Gomez Mouakad spoke to underserved communities that are most affected by environmental change and called for an inclusive economy.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

213121: That the Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment discuss opportunities to increase the number of electric vehicle charging stations and maintain charging stations.

Councilor Wilson said that as an owner of an electric vehicle, it is hard to find a charging station without a broken plug, and often drivers treat the charging stations as another parking space. He

and Councilor Gomez Mouakad both cited the projected shift in the market towards electric vehicles by 2030.

Chair Scott said that Mobility has also been involved with this issue and suggested inviting them to the conversation; Dir. Sahni said that he would follow up with them.

Councilor Gomez Mouakad suggested sending this item to the Traffic and Parking Committee. Chair Scott said that if this committee could not get an update in more than a month, then he would discharge the item to City Council and refer it to Traffic.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

213283: That the Director of Parks and Recreation update this Council on plans to improve the performance of the natural grass surface of the Lincoln Park soccer field.

Taken together with item 213284. Councilor Wilson said that he has high hopes for the soccer field, but it does not hold up to heavy use every season. Commissioner Lathan spoke to Dir. Waldrip's experience with agriculture and field maintenance and deferred to him. Dir. Waldrip described soil aeration and fertilization processes that happen in May, June, August, September, and October. July is skipped due to the harsh conditions that, combined with aeration, would damage the field. DPW uses a calcium supplement called Silical later in the year that helps keep the grass healthy.

Chair Scott asked about the history of sand/soil ratios. Dir. Waldrip explained that the softball and soccer fields use an 80% sand, 20% organic matter soil, but that the areas surrounding the fields are closer to 50% each. They are trying to bring the fields more in line with a native soil composition, but with daily use and permanent play, it is difficult to allow germination on the fields. Councilor Wilson asked if the maintenance is fully organic, to which Dir. Waldrip answered yes, and the fertilizer is naturally derived from poultry, bone or blood.

Councilor Wilson asked about past construction on the field, which he had heard was done incorrectly and needed to be fixed, causing disruption to the field. Dir. Waldrip said that during the original build, it was planned as an 80/20 sand field, but the landscape architect did not do comparative analysis, so the field needed to be reinstalled. Councilor Wilson asked if it was an issue of drainage - or if the field is draining too quickly. Commissioner Lathan said that would be a better question for the Public Space and Urban Forestry Department. Dir. Waldrip said that the sand allows the field to drain very quickly, which was done to keep the fields open during rainstorms.

Councilor Wilson asked if the irrigation system broke in May 2021. Dir. Waldrip said that it was an issue with the contract, not irrigation. The bid from the company was much higher than usual, so the work started noncontractually. Also, there were a few hot days in the spring that damaged the grass. Chair Scott asked if the noncontractual work was done by city staff. Dir. Waldrip answered that the work was done by an irrigation specialist group called Corbett. Councilor Wilson asked if an invoice from 2021 was for a contractor or repair, but Dir. Waldrip said that was for a flow sensor acquired in 2020.

Councilor Gomez Mouakad asked if the irrigation system is suited for unpredictable weather conditions seen in Somerville. Dir. Waldrip replied that Corbett had never seen an irrigation

system as complex as the one at Lincoln Park; the system is already fine-tuned for Somerville and should not require major adjustments going forward, but it can be changed for the weather.

Councilor Wilson noted the frequent unauthorized use of the field by people with dogs and said that the dogs can dig large holes in the turf. He asked what could be done to give the field the protection it needs. Dir. Waldrip said that they are looking at soil remediation, which would lead to either re-seeding or rolling out sod in the fall, but Commissioner Lathan added that either option would require closures of the field. She said that casual use and use by dog owners would require a broader discussion of enforcement. Dir. Waldrip said that he had been at the fields today with Parks and Recreation staff for a few hours, and in that time asked a few dozen people to leash or move their dogs; most were compliant.

There was discussion on the advantages and problems with fencing and whether it would be necessary to protect the field. Commissioner Lathan said that in reality, Somerville cannot afford to rotate and close fields because there are so few of them, but she thinks the only way to protect overused fields is by fencing them and closing them in the winter to prevent damage. She said that she could not imagine a permanent fence for the fields at Lincoln Park, though, because of use from the school and by residents. Councilor Burnley asked for examples of current fenced-off areas in Somerville. Commissioner Lathan said that Conway Field and Dilboy Stadium are some of the few areas that are closed, but most areas that are semi-closed or semi-fenced do not keep people out. Councilor Burnley commented that the fencing at Lincoln Park would be new territory, and said that fencing to keep people out leads to the question of enforcement and who would be in charge of enforcement. Commissioner Lathan said people using the fields without permission usually leave when asked, and that reinforcement would not be called for this kind of situation. Councilor Burnley said he is interested in hearing the community response toward fencing.

Chair Scott asked if the city had had any conversations with the principal of the Albert F. Argenziano School about their need for the fields. Commissioner Lathan said that they had talked in past years about shifting outdoor time to the softball field in the winter when the soccer field is fenced off.

Councilor Gomez Mouakad asked if Lincoln Park would see less usage now that Foss and Conway are open, but Commissioner Lathan said that there is still a large need for fields, so there is still demand for Lincoln Park. Foss is operated by DCR, which has a different permitting process.

Chair Scott asked about the next steps for the fields. Commissioner Lathan said that there would be a conversation with the Mayor's Office about whether to seed or add sod to the field, and that neither option has been definitively chosen yet. The plan should be resolved during the budget process. Dir. Waldrip said that they sampled the soil at the softball and soccer fields and should get results in a few weeks.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

213284: That the Director of Parks and Recreation update this Council on current grass maintenance practices.

213341: 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.

Mr. Antanavica said that with all permits that go through ISD, they like to look into specific cases with more detail, but on average, if all the items required to process the permit are ready, the time from application to issuance of the permit takes 10-15 days. Extended periods come from asking or waiting for additional information. A bottleneck can arise from staffing shortages as always, but otherwise, the systems in place do not hinder solar installation. All types of solar panels are permitted in Somerville, and the state has made photovoltaic implementation easier in recent years.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked what inspection points are needed, what is needed from the city and state, and how to get an inspector. Mr. Antanavica explained that both a building and electrical permit are required for solar installation. In reviews, they are looking for diagrams showing how the system and breakers are configured, and any disconnects. They would also look for an affidavit from the engineer and designer. Sometimes there are additional requirements needed for the building, such as strengthening rafters to support the extra weight. Finally, electrical inspections are conducted. The use of photos is allowed during inspections, but photos would then be required to show that the necessary changes were made. A delay happens either from not receiving information from the contractor, or from the sheer volume of requests.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked if it is possible to create a report for the average installation time for residents, and also when Eversource or the state get involved in the inspections. Mr. Antanavica said that he could create the reports, and that Eversource usually does not participate in the inspections, but requires documentation from the city that everything is ready before turning on the power. That last step usually happens within 24 hours. Councilor Ewen-Campen commented that funding more ISD inspectors was one of the Council's top budget priorities, and he hopes that this helps with installations.

Councilor Burnley asked about the costs of permits and the purpose of fees. Mr. Antanavica said that the cost is on ISD's website and gave a breakdown of the costs for the building permit. He said that the electrical permit is more complicated - it can be calculated per amperage, per breaker, or by other factors - and that ISD needs to look at the application itself to determine cost. Mr. Antanavica explained that the purpose of permit fees is to cover the cost of service for inspections. Councilor Burnley asked for the cost per square footage and who determines the fee structure for permits. Mr. Antanavica said that square footage is not usually how solar cost is calculated, but can include that in the report Councilor Ewen-Campen requested. He added that the Director of ISD sets the fees.

Chair Scott commented that from the perspective of residents, a bottleneck can happen from not knowing what information is needed. He spoke to ongoing efforts to put information together for residents, and also stressed that communication of needs is important. Mr. Antanavica added that there are a few local contractors that know the solar process well and are efficient, but because of high turnover, there is a lot of continual training. Chair Scott said that the report might show an operational issue to discuss, and Mr. Antanavica said that once they create the report, they can look at specific parameters.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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213345: 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:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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