



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, June 14, 2023

6:00 PM

The meeting took place virtually via Zoom and was called to order at 6:03 PM by Chair Wilson and adjourned at 8:52 PM on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Ewen-Campen, Clingan, Kelly, Scott and Wilson), none against and none absent.

Others present:

Michael Mastrobuoni – Budget Director, Ed Beab – Director of Finance, Karin Carroll – Director of Health and Human Services, Ashley Speliotis – Director of the Council on Aging, Chris Hosman – Director of SomerPromise, Ted D. Louis-Jacques - Director of Veterans Services, Catherine Piantigini - Director of Libraries, Susan Yerkes – Director of Parks and Recreation, Denise Taylor - Director of Communications and Community Engagement, Steve Craig - Director of Constituent Services, Maria Teresa Nagel – Director of SomerViva, Meredith Gamble - Deputy Director and Language Justice Coordinator, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Roll Call

Present:	Chairperson Jake Wilson, Vice Chair Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott, Charlotte Kelly, Jesse Clingan and Ben Ewen-Campen
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1. Review of the FY 2024 Budget

- **Health & Human Services**
- **Council on Aging**
- **SomerPromise**
- **Veterans Services**
- **Libraries**
- **Parks & Recreation**
- **Kennedy Pool Enterprise**
- **Dilboy Enterprise**
- **Communications & Community Engagement**
- **Constituent Services**
- **SomerViva**
- **PEG Access**

- **Health & Human Services**

Director Carroll addressed the committee and said that the HHS Department has reduced the number of staff vacancies from 18 to 2, thereby allowing staff to go where they are needed most. She spoke about establishment of a new unit of public health workers, i.e. Community Health Workers (CHW). Improvements will be made to mental health services and will assess the need for youth services and identify gaps.

The proposed budget includes a 19% salary increase due to additional staff (Food Coordinator, Case Managers). Ordinary Maintenance costs have

increased 15% due to rising vendor contract costs, the Needs Assessment position for youth, the diaper pilot program and sanitary products at the teen center, library, city hall, and other to be determined places. Director Carroll reported that HHS is looking at funding options and modeling for an overdose prevention center. There is a proposed increase of \$10,000 for supplies to homeless populations and some smaller increases that are directly proportional to the number of staff. Additionally, the Medical/Dental line is increasing by \$34,000 as HHS expects to offer more clinics.

Director Carroll reported that the department met and exceeded some of the FY-23 goals. Community participation has increased, new partnerships were created for teens in order to provide increased services, and efforts for food distribution and sheltering continued. Overall, the department will finish FY-23 under budget.

Councilor Scott questioned the number of vacancies in the department and requested an up to date list. Director Carroll explained that 3 employees started in the past few weeks and 2 more will begin in the next few weeks. The Nurse Manager position and the Finance Manager position are only vacancies in the department and interviews are underway to fill those positions. Director Mastrobuoni will double check with Director Carroll on staffing.

Councilor Kelly asked about the timeline to implement the sanitary product program and Director Carroll explained that it will depend on the vendor. An RFP will go out, hopefully, in a couple of months. Councilor Kelly inquired about the \$422,000 request for Teen Empowerment and Director Carroll explained that Teen Empowerment has a contract with the city to provide services to develop job and life skills among youth. The Director will provide a copy of the work plan. Councilor Kelly asked about the department number of HHS and Director Mastrobuoni clarified that the number is 0151251 and that it's listed as Board of Health.

No motions were submitted for this department.

- **Council on Aging**

Director Speliotis addressed the committee and spoke about revamping existing programs and working on strategic and emergency plans. Having received community feedback, the department is increasing the exercise programming for seniors. The committee was told that Somerville is the only community in the surrounding area that provides these physical fitness programs free of charge. Growth has been seen across the board in all programs to the point where demand outweighs capacity. With regard to staffing, two positions in the department are currently capped at 19 hours per week, and that's not enough to service seniors. Transferring positions to the general budget will help staff to get the work done.

Councilor Scott asked Director Speliotis if she requested a position to specifically work on policy issues for seniors and she responded that she

didn't, but has been promoting and advocating for different programs in the department.

Councilor Clingan asked if the Council on Aging (COA) was still located at the TAB building and the director replied that it was and that it is also at the Ralph and Jenny Center. Director Speliotis noted that the lease of the space at the TAB isn't handled through the COA and that there is no definitive plan for moving out of there in the near future.

No motions were submitted for this department.

- **SomerPromise**

Director Hosman spoke about some of the FY23 accomplishments, e.g., increased early education support, formalized contracts with eight vendors and training two multi-lingual workers. The department will be starting an infant literacy program, and moving forward with a mixed delivery system. The Somerville Childrens' Cabinet will be restructuring to become an advocacy entity.

Councilor Kelly asked why only \$700k of \$6 million in available funding was spent and Director Hosman explained that the department wanted to ensure that child care spots were provided to families who didn't have them, however, many centers didn't have the resources to serve those clients they already had. Other ways to provide services are being explored, such as looking at smaller centers and helping them to get licensed.

Councilor Clingan commented that the challenges for day care centers are due to the requirements of the state.

Councilor Scott commented a \$20,000 direct benefit to families is amazing, but he wonders if a voucher program might be considered, as well.

No motions were submitted for this department.

- **Veterans Services**

Director Louis-Jacques stated that the department exists to provide assistance to veterans through a number of programs and added that housing for veterans remains to be a problem. He highlighted some information and reported that 77% of vendors are veteran, women or minority owned. A Veterans' History Project has been started that provides an opportunity for veterans to connect with the city's youth. He noted that the work can't be done alone and he thanked the city for its support.

Councilor Ewen-Campen thanked the Director for various events and ceremonies, but especially for focusing on the needs of veterans.

No motions were submitted for this department.

- **Libraries**

Director Piantigini said that her departmental budget is straightforward and that it includes funds for implementing a pilot program to offer Sunday hours at the East Branch library.

Councilor Kelly asked why the library partnered with the Polinf Department for its social worker and Director Piantigini explained that it was presented to them via COHR and that library staff reached out to COHR, who

provided an intern to work with the library team. Having the position in the West Branch library was well received. Councilor Kelly said she was concerned that the social worker didn't come from another department. Councilor Scott was disappointed about the decision not to pursue a grant for the main library and asked if there were other requests that did not get funded. Director Piantigini said there was one other request for a social worker position. Councilor Scott asked Director Mastrobuoni about the funding for that position and he replied that a FY-24 funding source was located in Library State Aid and may be funded for $\frac{3}{4}$ of a year. There is no general funding for this position. No motions were submitted for this department.

- **Parks & Recreation**

Director Yerkes said her budget request increased due to the teen center and seeking three new full time positions, echoing the Mayor's call to scale departments to meet the needs of residents. Programming has been increased and over 355 youth have registered for teen spaces. The department wants to expand programs at the Powderhouse site. Director Yerkes noted a desire for further development among current staff as they want to grow in their profession.

Chair Wilson noted the impact made by getting the Edgerly site up and running, adding that it might have a different use in the coming school year. He inquired about any contingency plans and Director Yerkes said that there were none, as it's a fluid situation at the present time.

No motions were submitted for this department.

- **Kennedy Pool Enterprise**

Director Yerkes explained that budget request increased because of maintenance contracts.

Chair Wilson noted the pool has been renamed to the Ginny Smithers Sanders Pool.

Councilor Scott noted that the City Council has no authority to modify enterprise funds.

No motions were submitted for this department.

- **Dilboy Enterprise**

Director Yerkes explained that the Salaries line was increased due to staffing and that a new fee schedule was presented to cover operations, maintenance and staffing.

Councilor Kelly would like the pool left open longer in the season and Director Yerkes said that the goal is to keep it open through August, but more life guards will be needed to accomplish that..

Chair Wilson praised the manager at the facility and asked about the fees. Director Yerkes explained that the fees are supposed to cover the enterprise fund and noted that expenses increase every year. There may be a shift to more adult use with the completion of SHS.

No motions were submitted for this department.

- **Communications & Community Engagement**

Director Taylor noted changes to her department's budget saying that two new positions (Communications Coordinator, Emergency Public Information Officer) are being proposed, with the latter position being moved to the Emergency Management Department in the FY-25 budget. She also noted an increase of \$19,000 in the Printing line.

Chair Wilson noted that residents want notifications when things happen in the city, e.g., shots being fired.

Councilor Scott, mindful of the critical need for planning in the city, said that he'll be looking to possibly cut these new positions.

Councilor Kelly asked about printing costs and the Director explained that the Communications Department usually pays for the mailings, but this year a participatory budgetary mailing was worked out that was paid outside of the Communications Department.

No motions were submitted for this department.

- **Constituent Services**

Director Craig informed the committee that his department's budget request shows a 7% increase over last year. A new Deputy Director position is being requested to support staff and identify training needs. There is also a plan to bring three 311 representatives into the department once ARPA funding ends.

Councilor Scott said he'll be looking to possibly cut these new positions due to other critical needs of the city.

No motions were submitted for this department.

- **SomerViva**

Director Nagel noted some major changes in the budget including an increase of \$41,600 for language access and a request to increase the immigrant legal defense funding to \$200,000.

Deputy Director and Language Justice Specialist Gamble spoke about a new position, Language Justice Coordinator, to provide support in building out a 5-year access plan and to keep up with the number of requests received daily, noting that requests have doubled over last year.

Councilor Scott commented that the organizational chart doesn't match with appendix B and Director Nagel explained that many of the positions were temporary ARPA funded positions, therefore weren't included in the general budget. Now, the request is to put them into the general budget. Councilor Scott asked what the salary changes were and the director said that within the Temporary Wages line are two Project Assistants and one Community Engage person for youth. The Language Justice Coordinator new position is included in the Salaries line.

Councilor Scott said that the organizational chart shows positions that aren't listed on the Personnel List. He asked where the Equity Support positions were in the personnel list. Director Mastrobuoni will meet with the city's

Intergovernmental Affairs Team and advise the Finance committee of any changes to budget book.

Chair Wilson asked if the \$80,000 request for translation services will be enough and the Director replied that last year's request was to increase the line to \$40,000. Right now, that line is on track to spend \$58,000.

Councilor Scott noted that, due to the needs of the city, the departmental budget will be closely examined.

No motions were submitted for this department.

- **PEG Access (City TV)**

Director Taylor noted the changes and spoke about a new approach for funding. This team was moved to the general fund. Personal Services - fringe benefits, will be funded from the Benefits line. The Director explained how the franchise fees might be split should the move not be approved.

Chair Wilson asked if funding was separate from general fund and Director Taylor said the money doesn't flow into the general fund.

No motions were submitted for this department.

Referenced Documents:

- Finance - 2023-06-14 FY24 HHS Responses
- Finance - 2023-06-14 Council on Aging Budget Questions Response
- Finance - 2023-06-14 SomerPromise Council Response
- Finance - 2023-06-14 FY24 Library Responses
- Finance - 2023-06-14 Budget Questions Parks and Rec
- Finance - 2023-06-14 FY24 CCE Council Responses
- Finance - 2023-06-14 Questions from CC FY24 to SOIA final