



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, June 24, 2025

6:00 PM

Committee of the Whole

The meeting took place virtually via Zoom and was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chair Wilson and adjourned at 6:59 PM on a roll call vote of 10 in favor (Councilors Mbah, Ewen-Campen, McLaughlin, Sait, Strezo, Clingan, Davis, Pineda Neufeld, Scott, and Wilson), 1 opposed (Councilor Burnley) and 0 absent.

Others present: Neha Singh - Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Shumeane Benford - Somerville Police Chief, Anne Gill - Director of Human Resources, Michael Mastrobuoni - Budget Director, Delaney Fisher-Cassiol - Clerk of Committees

1. Roll Call

Present: City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson, Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott, Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan, City Councilor At Large Willie Burnley Jr., City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah, Lance L. Davis, Matthew McLaughlin, Ben Ewen-Campen, Kristen Strezo, Naima Sait and Judy Pineda Neufeld

2. Review of the FY 2026 Budget

Councilor Scott made the following motion:

That the Executive Office - Administration, Personal Services Salaries line be reduced by \$186,744 in the FY2026 budget.

This amount reflects the salary of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO). The proposed reduction had been brought forward in prior budget years and was presented as an opportunity for the Council to reflect on the need for the position.

Neha Singh, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, spoke against the motion, highlighting the administration's position on the value of the CAO and stating that the reduction would have a serious impact on existing programs and initiatives. Councilor McLaughlin, who arrived after the vote was taken, expressed his support in this cut last year, but has since seen the value this positions adds and stated his opposition to this motion.

APPROVED on a roll call vote of 6 in favor (Councilors Mbah, Scott, Burnley, Strezo, Clingan and Davis), 4 opposed (Councilors Wilson, Ewen-Campen, Sait and Pineda Neufeld) and 1 absent (Councilor McLaughlin).

Councilor Scott made the following motion:

That the Police Personal Services Salaries line be reduced by \$496,370.34 in the FY2026 budget.

The reduction reflects eliminating six vacant patrol officer positions. Councilor Scott said similar recommendations appeared in studies from 2001 and 2004, so he emphasized the Council's responsibility to consider these longstanding suggestions.

Police Chief Shumeane Benford opposed the motion, stating that the department needs staff to meet increasing safety challenges. He pointed to rising attacks nationally and locally and stressed the importance of maintaining staffing so the community feels safe. Chair Ewen-Campen also opposed the motion, noting that vacancies have existed for years due to recruitment difficulties, but candidates will soon be coming before the Council. He explained that the budget increase is largely due to collective bargaining agreements. Councilor Davis expressed appreciation for the Police Department and said circumstances have changed since the study. He wants the vacant positions filled and hopes some study recommendations are implemented but does not support the proposed cut. Councilor Clingan agreed, stating the department is working with minimal staffing and highlighting concerns about potential crime severity in Somerville. Councilor Pineda Neufeld said her constituents want more community policing and trust between police and residents. She praised the new Police Chief's early work and warned that cuts would worsen recruitment challenges and threaten jobs. Councilor Mbah also opposed the cut, saying Chief Benford is working hard but the community, especially in public housing, needs more resources, not policing. He expressed frustration at the recurring nature of this debate. Chair Wilson noted the study recommends reducing patrol officers by three, not six, from 46 to 43.

Director of Human Resources, Anne Gill, reported six conditional offers for police officers have been extended; three candidates are academy-trained, and three will begin academy training in October. Councilor Sait said she understands the frustration behind the motion but does not support the cut. She submitted a request for an alternative emergency response model and noted that many immigrants prefer mental health professionals over police in crises. In closing, Councilor Scott said the proposal is not hasty, citing consistent staffing reduction recommendations from 2001, 2004, and 2023. He also noted similar proposals for the Department of Public Works and current hiring freezes.

MOTION FAILED on a roll call vote of 2 in favor (Councilors Scott and Burnley), 8 opposed (Councilors Mbah, Wilson, Ewen-Campen, Sait, Strezo, Clingan, Davis and Pineda Neufeld) 0 absent, and 1 recused

(Councilor McLaughlin).

Councilor Burnley made the following motion:

That the Executive Office - Administration, Personal Services Salaries line be reduced by \$90,360 in the FY2026 budget.

This amount represents the salary for the Public Safety for All Project Manager position. Councilor Burnley argued that the administration is doubling down on existing approaches instead of adopting the new strategies requested by the Council and constituents. He asserted that these funds would be better invested in an alternative emergency response program. Councilor Scott supported the motion, noting that although the funds were authorized a year ago, the position has yet to be filled. He acknowledged that hiring decisions are the administration's responsibility but emphasized that the Council can use budget reductions to signal its priorities and hopes the mayor will reconsider the current direction.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld opposed the cut, highlighting that the Public Safety for All task force was a diverse group of 16 community members who conducted a comprehensive survey in seven languages. While she recognized that not everyone agrees with every recommendation, she stressed the process was inclusive and representative of the community. Councilor Davis, who joined the task force toward the end of its work, expressed gratitude for its efforts but clarified that he disagreed with many recommendations.

Budget Director Michael Mastrobuoni explained that the Public Safety for All Project Manager is an implementation position funded through the Racial and Social Justice Fund rather than the general budget. He clarified that cutting this position would require reallocating funds from other areas, potentially affecting other initiatives.

MOTION FAILED on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Mbah, Scott and Burnley), 8 opposed (Councilors Wilson, Ewen-Campen, McLaughlin, Sait, Strezo, Clingan, Davis and Pineda Neufeld) and none absent.

3. Submission of Orders and Resolutions by City Councilors

4. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-1025](#)) Requesting approval of a transfer of \$54,412 from the Salary Contingency Salaries Account to the Law Department Salaries Account to remediate a year-end deficit.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE DISCHARGED WITH NO RECOMMENDATION

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| 5. | Mayor's Request (ID # 25-1027) | Requesting the appropriation of \$237,000 to fund the FY 2026 Dilboy Fields Enterprise Fund Budget. RESULT: <u>RECOMMENDED TO BE WITHDRAWN</u> |
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| 6. | Mayor's Request (ID # 25-1028) | Requesting the appropriation of \$736,080 to fund the FY 2026 Kennedy School Pool Enterprise Fund budget. RESULT: <u>RECOMMENDED TO BE DISCHARGED WITH NO RECOMMENDATION</u> |
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| 7. | Mayor's Request (ID # 25-1030) | Requesting approval of the expenditure limitations for departmental Revolving Funds for FY 2026. RESULT: <u>RECOMMENDED TO BE WITHDRAWN</u> |
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| 8. | Mayor's Request (ID # 25-1031) | Requesting approval of a transfer of \$37,740 from the Department of Public Works Admin Salaries Account to the Department of Public Works Grounds Salaries Account to remediate a year-end deficit. RESULT: <u>RECOMMENDED TO BE DISCHARGED WITH NO RECOMMENDATION</u> |
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| 9. | Mayor's Request (ID # 25-1032) | Requesting approval of a transfer of \$216,000 from the Department of Public Works (DPW) Custodian Salaries Account to the DPW Electrical Other Lump Sum Account and the DPW Highway Salaries Account to remediate year-end deficits. RESULT: <u>RECOMMENDED TO BE DISCHARGED WITH NO RECOMMENDATION</u> |
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| 10. | Mayor's Request (ID # 25-1033) | Requesting the appropriation of \$373,680 from the Kennedy School Pool Enterprise Fund Retained Earnings to support the FY 2026 Kennedy School Pool Enterprise Fund Budget. RESULT: <u>RECOMMENDED TO BE DISCHARGED WITH NO RECOMMENDATION</u> |
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| 11. | Mayor's Request (ID # 25-1034) | Requesting approval to appropriate \$2,055,000 from the Facility Construction and Renovation Stabilization Fund to the Assembly Square Fire Station Capital Fund to reduce debt service costs for the project. RESULT: <u>RECOMMENDED TO BE DISCHARGED WITH NO RECOMMENDATION</u> |
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| 12. | Mayor's Request (ID # 25-1035) | Requesting approval to appropriate \$2,715,270 from the Street Reconstruction & Resurfacing Stabilization Fund to various capital project funds to reduce debt service costs for these projects. |
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RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE DISCHARGED WITH NO RECOMMENDATION

13. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-1040](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$87,000 from the Dilboy Field Enterprise Fund Retained Earnings Account to subsidize the FY 2026 Dilboy Field Enterprise Fund Budget.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE DISCHARGED WITH NO RECOMMENDATION

14. Mayor's Request (ID # [25-1042](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$362,915,509 to fund the FY 2026 General Fund Operating Budget.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE DISCHARGED WITH NO RECOMMENDATION