



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, June 5, 2023

7:30 PM

Committee of the Whole

The meeting took place virtually via Zoom and was called to order at 7:30 PM by Chair Wilson and adjourned at 11:24 PM on a roll call vote of 10 in favor (Councilors McLaughlin, Gomez Mouakad, Strezo, Burnley, Pineda Neufeld, Ewen-Campen, Clingan, Kelly, Scott and Wilson), none against and 1 absent (Councilor Davis who was attending his daughter's graduation).

Others present:

Nikki Spencer – Chief of Staff, Lammis Vargas – Chief Administrative Officer, Stephanie Widzowski – Clerk of Committees, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

Roll Call

Present:	Chairperson Jake Wilson, Vice Chair Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott, Charlotte Kelly, Jesse Clingan, Ben Ewen-Campen, Matthew McLaughlin, Beatriz Gomez Mouakad, Willie Burnley Jr., Judy Pineda Neufeld and Kristen Strezo
Absent:	Lance L. Davis

1. Update on the Winter Hill Community Innovation School

Chair Wilson sponsored the Mayor's Chief of Staff, Nikki Spencer and Chief Administrative Officer, Lammis Vargas to address the committee regarding the Winter Hill Community Innovation School (WHCIS).

Ms. Spencer and Ms. Vargas spoke on behalf of Mayor Ballantyne, (who was attending the Somerville High School Graduation), and reported that, thanks to the generous support of Tufts University and Somerville Public School staff, temporary classrooms for the school have been secured and that classes will resume on Thursday, June 8th.

Classrooms for the AIM students will be located in the Edgerly building on the first floor, pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms will be located in the Capuano Early Childhood Center, and classrooms for grades 1 through 8 will be located at Tufts University's Olin Hall. Students will have all the same services on site, including meals and nursing staff.

Transportation plans are in place to and from Tufts, as well as for the AIM program at the Edgerly. Plans are being developed for the Capuano Early Childhood Center. These locations are temporary and specifically for the end of this current school year only and plans for the summer will be shared as they are finalized. The end of the school year will remain as previously scheduled.

Through Wednesday, the city will provide a meals program for students to pick up breakfast, lunch, and snacks each day, and also an all day rec drop in center with meals and activities for students. Specific details for each location as well as the rec programs and meal pick up are available at the school website at <https://somerville.k12.ma.us/>.

A virtual information and Q&A session will be held on Tuesday, June 6th from 5 to 7 PM. Interpretation will be provided in Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian, Creole, and Mandarin. All details will be available on the school's website at <https://somerville.k12.ma.us/>.

These are only temporary fixes until the end of the school year. The city has committed to tackling the critical infrastructure issues that are troubling our public schools, in particular, the Winter Hill and Brown Schools. The FY 2023 city budget contained \$850,000 to develop the city's first ever strategic, system-wide master plan for all city schools as well as system stress testing, and that is happening now. The mayor is working closely with the city's finance team, and a request will be put before this Council to, among others, secure free cash to ensure that the needs of the city's students, families, and staff are funded.

2. Public Hearing regarding the FY 2024 Budget

The Public Hearing was opened at 8:00 PM

An analysis of the virtual meeting data shows that there were 427 unique viewers with 343 concurrent views. There were 69 speakers offering testimony. A summary of the comments follows:

There were three areas of concern that were voiced repeatedly; 1) funding to repair and rebuild the Winter Hill Community Innovation School (WHCIS), 2) long term funding for affordable housing, and 3) city-wide alternative emergency response program that is not based in the Police Department.

1) funding to repair and rebuild the Winter Hill Community Innovation School (WHCIS)

- personal items eaten by mice, cockroaches and other pests
- mold growing on top of previously untreated mold
- no intercoms in the rooms
- second grade classroom trying to have morning meeting with mice running around on the very same rug they sit on
- the Brown School has had issues in the past and nothing has been done
- the city is going to spend \$100 million dollars on a police and fire station, despite apparently not having money to stop our school buildings from crumbling
- do not pass this budget before the Mayor commits to

replacing the WHCIS building

- do not approve the FY 24 budget until the Mayor's Office presents a detailed plan and timeline for tackling the WHCIS problem
- city politicians have failed the children, displaying sa outright abdication of responsibility
- the WHCIS is literally falling apart
- city should make a full and transparent accounting of the results of the structural engineering audit that it's doing on the school building
- put a question on the November ballot for a debt override question to fund the schools
- many parents, educators and students have repeatedly highlighted the various problems at the WHCIS
- the City of Somerville needs to fulfill its obligations to the children of Somerville by ensuring that this year's budget provides the necessary funds to improve and protect physical plants, particularly the WHCIS
- establish a swing space to keep the WHCIS population together for the 2024, school year, as well as during any future construction process
- students are continually asked to meet our high expectations, and it's time that the adults in their lives meet theirs.
- provide immediate commitments in this year's budget to ensure that the WHCIS, or an alternative in the neighborhood, is ready for school to begin next fall
- the existing structure is unsafe and beyond repairs. Please budget money in fiscal year 2024 to demolish the existing structure
- the Winter Hill School community was neglected to the point of the building becoming uninhabitable
- apparently, there was no disaster, recovery or contingency plans in place
- reject this budget until the Mayor commits to making the Winter Hill School the top priority
- the City Council will be complicit if there is no commitment to the Winter Hill School

2) long term funding for affordable housing

- provide free legal advice and representation to those facing eviction
- increase infrastructure work to place electrical lines underground

where possible

- increase infrastructure work for water and sewer issues
- amplify the city's work on affordable housing and anti-displacement efforts
- provide immediate rental assistance for out of control rent increases
- utilize green initiatives to increase affordable housing

3) city-wide alternative emergency response program that is not based in the Police Department.

- advocate for decreasing the police budget and reallocating money to an alternative emergency response program outside the police department
- alternative emergency response program funded by the city and operated out of the community, separate from any affiliation with the police or formal mental health systems
- alternative emergency response must be separate from the police
- allocate \$1.4 million for a real alternative emergency response program that is separate from the police department.
- unarmed alternative emergency response program outside of the police department
- reducing the police budget, with their increasing service load, will be a detriment to the Police Department's ability to service the city
- lowering the police budget is only going to be a detriment because police officers won't be able to get the training that they need
- the city has an increased population and the police have so many more responsibilities, that it just doesn't make sense to cut the police budget
- do not cut from the police budget
- reshuffle the police budget to provide officers with mental health training
- restore cut social work positions and provide additional counseling support and services during this difficult time for students, staff, and families

4) Other comments:

- that the City Council approve an Ordinance that would create a Somerville equity program for cannabis businesses, to provide technical support and financial assistance to local cannabis entrepreneurs
- the city is putting a lot of money into food programs

- Somerville is a slum lord and always has been. It is not a healthy, holistic, comprehensive city
- amend the FY 2024 budget to include inclusive playground equipment for children with disabilities
- the budget should be human centered and not just be for the wealthiest people

Chair Wilson will keep the Public Hearing open until noon on June 21, 2023, to receive written comment. Comments may be emailed to cityclerk@somervillema.gov <<mailto:cityclerk@somervillema.gov>>.

Note: Written comment may also be emailed to cityclerk@somervillema.gov and will be accepted until noon on Wednesday, June 21, 2023.

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Referenced Documents:

- Finance - 2023-06-05 Budget Hearing Public Comments