



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, June 6, 2023

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Wilson at 6:01 pm and adjourned at 9:29 pm with a roll call vote of all in favor (Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Clingan, Councilor Kelly, Councilor Scott, and Chair Wilson), none opposed, and none absent.

A recess was taken at 6:03 pm and ended at 7:00 pm with a roll call of four members present (Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Kelly, Councilor Scott and Chair Wilson) and one absent (Councilor Clingan). Councilor Clingan joined the meeting at 7:04. Another recess was taken at 9:01 and ended at 9:07 pm with a roll call of all members present (Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Clingan, Councilor Kelly, Councilor Scott and Chair Wilson).

Others present: Christine Blais – OSE, Emily Sullivan – OSE, Erik Larson – OSE, Vladimir Kan – OSE, Denise Capers – RSJ, Nikki Spencer – Mayor’s Office, Lammis Vargas – Mayor’s Office, Anna Gartsman – SomerStat, Gregory Jenkins – Arts Council, David Goodridge – IT, David Slonina – IT, Jay Rizzo – IT, Anne Gill – Personnel, Barbara Brown – Personnel, Michael Mastrobuoni – Auditing, Renee Mello – Personnel, Stephanie Widzowski – Clerk of Committees.

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

- **Executive Administration**
- **Office of Sustainability & Environment**
- **Racial & Social Justice**
- **SomerStat**
- **Arts Council**
- **Information Technology**
- **Human Resources**
- **Health & Life Insurance + Medicare**
- **Workers’ Compensation**

Executive Administration

Chief of Staff Spencer listed the main goals of Executive Administration: investment in long-term COVID recovery, strategic review of scaling and city systems, and departmental and city initiatives. She noted increases in the personal and technical services and ordinary maintenance lines. Ms. Spencer also cited that nonprofit partners have expressed how hard it is to get paid by the city as an example of how city systems need to be revised.

- Multiple councilors had questions and comments about the Deputy Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) position. Chief Administrative

Officer Vargas explained that the position was based on her assessment. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked for the differences in daily responsibilities and roles between the Deputy CAO and the CAO, and whether the Administration expects to request additional staff in future years. Councilor Kelly said she was struggling to justify the concept and asked how the Administration plans to eliminate process redundancies within staffing roles. Ms. Spencer noted that this additional staffing would aid in the areas of delivering constituent services, improving quality of life for staff, and preventing burnout.

- Councilor Kelly asked for clarification on how the last funds for the Winter Hill Community Innovation School will be spent. Ms. Spencer said that the funds are being used to hire a temporary Emergency Management Director as a consultant. The in-house position is currently vacant.
- Councilor Kelly had a question about how youth summer job funding would be split across fiscal years. Ms. Spencer said that the Administration will likely spend another \$60,000 on youth employment in June. There was a discussion on barriers to entry for youth, such as paperwork and transit coverage.

Councilor Kelly moved to reduce line 0112151 of the Executive Office - Administration Personal Services budget to \$0. The motion was laid on the table until the June 21, 2023 "cut night" Committee meeting.

Councilor Kelly moved to reduce line 0112152 of the Executive Office - Administration Ordinary Maintenance budget to \$0. The motion was laid on the table until the June 21, 2023 "cut night" Committee meeting.

Office of Sustainability & Environment

Dir. Blais said that the OSE budget has a projected increase of 16% this fiscal year, with funding for two full positions approved in FY23 as well as a new position, the Sustainability and Resiliency Planner.

- Chair Wilson asked about a discrepancy between two lines in the composting school program, and Dir. Blais explained that OSE decided to reallocate resources toward the Somerville Climate Forward update, but will work with DPW and other partners to revamp the pilot so it can expand to other schools. Climate Forward is slated to be completed during Earth Week in 2024. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked what OSE is doing to expand composting in the city, which led Dir. Blais to describe the Zero Waste program in development.
- Chair Wilson asked if the extra \$25,000 budgeted this year for a consultant for a citywide electric vehicle plan would be enough to attract applicants, to which Dir. Blais said yes.
- Councilor Ewen-Campen asked if there is a dedicated staff for the

public to consult for questions on energy efficiency upgrades on housing. Dir. Blais elaborated on several existing positions that can address this, including two new positions, the Clean Green Somerville Housing Program Manager in the Housing Division and the Sustainability and Resiliency Specialist, but said there is no dedicated role yet.

- Councilor Kelly asked questions about the professional and technical services lines that prompted a discussion about encumbrance. Mr. Kan said that OSE expects to spend 53% of its PTS line by the end of the year, since they are expecting more invoices to arrive this month and to have some of the encumbrance move to the expenses line.
- Councilor Scott asked about the scope of the transformer feasibility study.

Racial & Social Justice

Dir. Capers explained that RSJ built the capacity and foundations for initiatives in FY23 and described events, initiatives and groups they and their partners have spearheaded during the year.

- Councilor Ewen-Campen asked if the discussion around a non-police emergency response is happening in the alternative safety task force and whether RSJ has taken a position on non-police response as a shared goal. Dir. Capers said the task force will take a data-driven approach to determine which model fits the needs of the community.
- Councilor Kelly asked follow-up questions about the pre-submitted responses in the budget book relating to staffing levels and the internal survey across 17 departments. Dir. Capers said that the survey is meant to determine every way residents are currently filing complaints and whether streamlining needs to happen.
- Councilor Scott asked about the total funding spent for Reimagining Public Safety initiatives, which led to questions of encumbrance. They also asked about the balance of the RSJ fund, which Dir. Capers explained was a one-time payment of \$750,000. She stressed the need to establish infrastructure and systems before funds can be distributed into the community.

SomerStat

Dir. Gartsman said that the previous fiscal year was spent largely on hiring and training staff as well as setting up capacity for program evaluation and data analysis citywide. She added that SomerStat is requesting a one-time expense for new office furniture and increased funding for temporary wages. Chair Wilson asked about the amount requested for furniture, and Dir. Gartsman said it may be an overestimate, but they are looking to update eight workstations.

Arts Council

Dir. Jenkins said that the Arts Council has been able to distribute almost \$1.5 million to the community through grants, and they created a new BIPOC initiative from the stabilization fund. He talked about secured state and corporate funds and initiatives in progress. The Arts Council is requesting an additional \$35,000 in ordinary maintenance for pop-up art installations. Dir. Jenkins also noted that a new Arts Space Coordinator was hired.

- Councilor Kelly asked how the Arts Council was able to secure such low rent prices on commercial space and about locations for pop-ups. One upcoming location is the Taza Chocolate building at 561 Windsor St.
- Councilor Ewen-Campen asked whether in-lieu payments instead of ACE requirements will be included in zoning recommendations, to which the answer was yes. Dir. Jenkins said that they are looking at appraisal analysis to create the fee and plan to bring that before the Land Use Committee in the fall.

Information Technology

Dir. Goodridge spoke to ordinary maintenance line increases of 21% due to departmental requests and security increases. He also noted cellular service cost increases from a higher headcount.

Human Resources

Dir. Gill stated that Personnel's areas of focus are in recruiting, rewarding and retaining. She said that budget increases are largely from the MBTA pass program and education reimbursement for non-union staff. She described the work of an engagement specialist, who will work with the Work Better Task Force on retention strategies. Dir. Gill also stressed that city systems are in dire need of streamlines and upgrades.

- Councilor Kelly asked if MBTA pass numbers are including school and city staff, and whether that \$500,000 will come out of the city general fund. The answer was yes.
- Councilor Scott noted the inclusion of funding for the police chief search again this year and asked about the status of the search. Dir. Gill said she would like to speak to the search team first, but it is underway. The remaining \$20,000 is from unspent funds on the contract in FY23.

Health & Life Insurance + Medicare

Ms. Brown said that there is a 14.1% increase in the budget this year, mostly from the closure of Tufts health plans (effective 07/01/2023). She said that 45% of city employees are enrolled in those plans, and most of those will be migrated automatically to Harvard health plans to an average of 9% increase. Life insurance rates have also increased by 16%.

Workers' Compensation

Councilor Kelly asked for a breakdown by department on workers compensation.