



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Public Health and Public Safety Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, May 15, 2023

7:00 PM

This meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Kelly at 7:00 p.m. and adjourned at 7:51 p.m. on a Roll Call Vote: 3 in favor (Councilors McLaughlin, Davis, Kelly), 0 opposed, 0 absent.

Others present:

Michael Potere – Assistant Clerk of Committees; Karin Carroll – Director of Health & Human Services; Neha Singh – Legislative Liaison; Lisa Robinson – Director of Food Access & Healthy Communities.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Charlotte Kelly, Vice Chair Lance L. Davis and Matthew McLaughlin

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-0529](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Public Health and Public Safety Committee Meeting of April 4, 2023.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**

AYE: Chairperson Kelly, Vice Chair Davis and Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin

2. Order (ID # [23-0608](#)) By Councilor Wilson and Councilor Clingan
That the Chief of Police provide this Council with a report containing the information requested within for all incidents where a firearm was discharged since January 1, 2018.

Chair Kelly stated that this item would be taken together with Item 3 (ID # 22-2111).

Councilor Davis stated that the Committee should provide the Councilors who made these motions time to review them prior to dismissing them from committee.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

3. Order (ID # [22-2111](#)) By Councilor Ewen-Campen and Councilor Wilson
That the Chief of Police report to this Council, the percentage of requested traffic details for construction projects that have been filled by Somerville Police Department officers, filled by non-Somerville police officers, and unfilled, for the past three years.

Chair Kelly stated that this item would be taken together with Item 2 (ID # 23-0608)

Regarding Item 3 (ID # 22-2111), Legislative Liaison Singh stated that it was not the administration's intention to withhold the requested information, but rather to communicate to the Committee that compiling it would be labor intensive. Chair Kelly asked if any other departments would have this data, and Legislative Liaison Singh responded that they could look into it and reply later. Councilor Davis expressed support for the administration's proposal in response to the request to possibly shorten its timeframe to facilitate providing a partial response.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

4. Order
(ID # [22-1760](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr.

That the Director of Food Access & Healthy Communities provide this Council with a report on the Taxi to Health program.

Director Robinson stated that the program started as a way to provide taxi vouchers to residents over the age of 60, but that it has expanded to include non-emergency medical appointments due to high demand. Director Robinson continued that the department recently completed compiling data on voucher usage, and that the data would be used to evaluate long-term transit solutions for the city.

Chair Kelly expressed support for the program, and in particular finding a solution for residents who need to use the "North-South Connection" on Broadway and Somerville Ave, and asked about funding to create such a solution. Director Robinson replied that the department is evaluating that in conjunction with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), and that the department will have a better sense of funding requirements once an analysis of the data is completed.

Chair Kelly shared a story regarding a resident who needed emergency medical treatment but did not want to take an ambulance to the hospital due to the cost, and asked about the program potentially being used in emergency situations. Director Robinson responded that the city's voucher contract with the taxi company prohibits their use for emergency medical services. In response, Chair Kelly asked the Director Robinson to look into alternative options for emergency medical transportation solutions.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Resolution
(ID # [22-1687](#))

By Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Kelly, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Scott, Councilor Strezo and Councilor Wilson

That the Administration update this Council on plans to establish a Community Engagement Center.

Director Carroll stated that the administration used ARPA funds to open an engagement center in Davis Square in partnership with the Somerville Homeless Coalition. Director Carroll continued that the center provides clients with: furniture and a place to rest, a coffee and snack station, computers and Internet terminals, lockers and basic supplies like backpacks and clothing, and training regarding Narcan and overdose prevention. Director Carroll stated that, since opening, the numbers of visitors has increased: 246 in January, 278 in February, and 346 in March. Director Carroll added that the center would like to provide additional services such as showers, laundry, and medical support, but is unable to do so due to the structural limitations of the building and staffing.

Chair Kelly and Councilor Davis expressed support for the community engagement center and the services it provides to its clients, and indicated support for future requests for additional funding to facilitate additional services such as showers, laundry, and medical support. Councilor McLaughlin also expressed support for the engagement center and its location.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Order
(ID # [22-1529](#))

By Councilor Strezo

That the Director of Health and Human Services take steps to install emergency contraception dispensers in designated city bathrooms.

Director Carroll stated that the administration communicated with Tufts University regarding the success of their contraceptive vending machine pilot program, and has been exploring similar options for the city. Director Carroll continued that the administration is also considering the use of vending machines for additional necessities such as diapers, Prep P for HIV prevention, and Narcan, and evaluating possible locations for pilot programs for both types of vending machines in the city's teen centers and libraries. Director Carroll continued that some services, such as emergency contraceptives, may come with a small fee of \$15, adding that the tender accepted would be debit or credit card because using insurance cards as a payment method may not be feasible.

Councilor Davis expressed support for the measure and for the funding needed to implement it.

Chair Kelly expressed support for the measure, and added that these vending machines could be an extremely positive resource for members of the community, similar to the community refrigerators that provided free food during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

7. Resolution
(ID # [23-0796](#))

By Councilor Kelly, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Davis and Councilor McLaughlin

That the Administration update this Council on the progress and timeline for establishing a safe consumption site.

Legislative Liaison Singh stated that the administration is working to publish an RFP for the procurement of a complex and customized facility, and that their goal is to obtain a large response from vendors because modular units are currently in high demand. Legislative Liaison Singh continued that the administration currently has no firm timeline for the opening of the facility.

Councilor Davis expressed strong frustration regarding the lack of a timeline, and stated that this program has been requested by the City Council for several years. Councilor McLaughlin expressed similar frustration with the lack of a timeline, and added that, during her midterm address, the mayor stated that the site would be open during the current calendar year.

Chair Kelly asked if there was a timeline for sending out the RFP, and Legislative Liaison Singh responded that there was not. Chair Kelly asked if the Fiscal Year 2024 budget discussions were impacting the site's timeline, and Legislative Liaison Singh stated that the site would be part of those discussions.

Chair Kelly reiterated the Committee's frustration with the lack of a timeline for opening the site, and added that constituents regularly ask about its progress and are unsatisfied with the absence of a concrete timeline. Chair Kelly stated that this item would be kept in committee and urged the administration to have a better sense of the timeline for the July 2023 meeting.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Documents:

- PHPS - 2023-05-15 SPD Memo (with 22-2111)
- PHPS - 2023-05-15 Firearm Discharges and Arrests (with 23-0608)