



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, November 29, 2023

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Gomez Mouakad at 6:02 p.m. and adjourned at 8:31 p.m. on a Roll Call Vote: 3 in favor (Councilors Davis, Clingan, Gomez Mouakad), 0 opposed, 0 absent.

Others present:

Michael Potere – Assistant Clerk of Committees; Matthew Bennett – Superintendent of Buildings, DPW; Jill Lathan – Commissioner of DPW; Neha Singh – Director of Intergovernmental Affairs; Chad Mazza – Assistant Superintendent, Somerville Public Schools; Laura Pitone – School Committee, Ward 5; Richard Raiche – Director of IAM; Sara Dion – School Committee, Ward 7; Emily Ackman – School Committee, Ward 1.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Beatriz Gomez Mouakad , Vice Chair Jesse Clingan and Lance L. Davis

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-1513](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee Meeting of October 4, 2023.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: Chairperson Gomez Mouakad, Vice Chair Clingan and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

School Building - Feasibility Study

2. Order (ID # [22-1528](#)) By Councilor Gomez Mouakad and Councilor Strezo That the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management provide an update on the status of the School Building Systems Feasibility Study.

In response to the memorandum attached to this Item, Chair Gomez Mouakad asked for confirmation that the Kennedy School chiller failed in 2022, and that the replacement chiller has since been ordered, which Director Raiche confirmed, and noted that the contractor will begin enabling work prior to receiving the unit as appropriate. Chair Gomez Mouakad asked how much longer the temporary chillers will be used in the meantime, and Director Raiche replied through Summer 2024, with the new chiller arriving and in use by Summer 2025, and noted that work is scheduled around school closures to minimize disruption. Chair Gomez Mouakad asked if this timetable is typical for work of this nature, and Director Raiche replied that each building has a different character, and that in this instance other factors were considered, such as replacing the old unit with a more efficient one that will handle heating as well and reduce its carbon footprint.

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked if the Healy School project includes a new roof and if the engineering firm has been retained, and Director Raiche confirmed both. Chair Gomez Mouakad asked if the project was in design development, and Director Raiche confirmed that it is, and that once that is complete, the department will go to City Council to request funding for construction.

Chair Gomez Mouakad expressed strong frustration with the lack of additional information from the department in response to this Item, and urged the department to be more transparent with timelines and schedules for school construction and repairs in the future to ensure that Somerville parents do not lose trust in the city's government and school system.

Councilor Clingan expressed agreement with Chair Gomez Mouakad, and added that although it can be difficult to put timelines in writing for the purposes of managing expectations, the information currently being communicated is lacking.

School Committee Member Pitone expressed support for the work the department has done to increase communication to the city's residents and parents, and that it is much improved from what has been the case in the past, but that the requests for additional and more detailed information now reflects a higher expectation for transparency in the community.

Chair Gomez Mouakad agreed, noting that a lack of communication about these school projects can lead parents to think the city is inactive on them, and that it would be preferable, for example, to communicate a date and then change it than to hear nothing at all.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

3. Order
(ID # [23-1738](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad and Councilor Wilson

That the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management deliver a study showing the steps to de-carbonize mechanical systems in existing school buildings as part of the Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Feasibility Study, and assess potential grants and funding to help accelerate this process.

Director Raiche explained that although a specific plan for this study is not feasible due to funding constraints, each project is evaluated with an emphasis toward decarbonization. Director Raiche continued that the department would be willing to submit a funding request for a project like this in Fiscal Year 2025. In response, School Committee Member Pitone inquired as to whether the City Council would support such a request, and Chair Gomez Mouakad noted that the current and future composition of the City Council would be very likely to support it.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

4. Order
(ID # [23-1739](#))
- By Councilor Gomez Mouakad and Councilor Wilson
That the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management provide a list of schools that do not have solar panels, and a plan including potential grant and funding sources to install solar panels in those buildings following any roof repairs and replacements.

Chair Gomez Mouakad explained that this Item reflects requests from some parents to advocate for more green energy to be supplied to the city's schools. Director Raiche noted that every project the department undertakes has a strong priority to decarbonize, but that it may not be possible in every circumstance. Chair Gomez Mouakad asked if the plans for the school renovations at Kennedy, Healy, and West Schools included increased options for electrical power, and Director Raiche replied that was a more technical question and would need to obtain additional information to answer it.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Order
(ID # [22-1527](#))
- By Councilor Gomez Mouakad and Councilor Strezo
That the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management provide an update on the status of the School Building Feasibility Study.

Director Raiche explained that the results of the Capacity Study would be released and discussed during an upcoming meeting on December 19, 2023, and that it would inform decisions moving forward regarding planning and construction for school buildings. Director Raiche also noted that the results of the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) funding process will be released on December 13, 2023, at which point the department will know if the city has been invited to participate in the next round of MSBA funding.

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked if the report on the Winter Hill School would be available in advance of the December 19th meeting, and Director Raiche replied that it would not be due to it being in the final rounds of edits at the moment, but that the information contained therein would help advise the construction and renovation process moving forward. Chair Gomez Mouakad expressed frustration with the delay in the publication of these reports, noting that the Brown School will likely need repairs and maintenance more urgently.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

6. Order
(ID # [22-1417](#))
- By Councilor Gomez Mouakad
That the Commissioner of Public Works provide quarterly reports to the School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee on any major repairs and 311 work orders in school buildings.

Commissioner Lathan presented a spreadsheet containing data in response to this Item, which is attached to this Agenda. Commissioner Lathan noted that there is a difference between what would be reported to the department through 311 for general maintenance and what would be requested from the City Council in terms of a capital request for larger issues. Councilor Clingan requested that the department produce a document that contains all repairs of any size for each school, and Assistant Superintendent Mazza noted that the department is developing program to have a person at each school who keeps track of all repairs to better monitor them at the aggregate level.

School Committee Member Pitone asked about the progress with making this information more publicly available, and Commissioner Lathan replied that the department is in the procurement phase of putting together an interactive website that will contain this and similar information.

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked about repairs for school elevators, and Commissioner Lathan replied that some of those were excluded from the report because they were repairs as opposed to more major projects, but that including that information in the future would be looked into.

Councilor Davis asked if there is a central location that contains information for all DPW work, including school buildings, and Commissioner Lathan replied that the creation of that database was part of the reason the department requested funding for a Building Systems Manager, who would keep track of that information and publish it. Councilor Davis requested that the information collected include building structural issues, such as leaks, in addition to equipment and systems.

Commissioner Lathan agreed to continue providing quarterly reports with expanded information, and the Councilors noted that a timeline for those reports moving forward could be discussed outside of the meeting.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

7. Resolution
(ID # [23-0988](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Clingan and Councilor Wilson That the Administration work with the School Department to develop emergency plans for at-risk school relocation including, but not limited to, the Winter Hill Community Innovation School and the Benjamin Brown School.

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked if there is a “Plan B” in place if something should happen that would require the Brown School to close, and Director Raiche responded that there is not currently such a plan in place.

Councilor Clingan expressed support for the creation of such a plan, and noted that one of the new emergency preparedness/risk management positions created in the FY 2024 budget could possibly undertake creating

one. School Committee Member Pitone also expressed support for such a plan.

School Committee Member Ackman asked if a list exists containing all the potential buildings in the city that could be used to relocate students in the event of an emergency, and Director Raiche replied that there is and it could be provided, and noted that the city is under a tremendous space crunch and that the city needs to invest in renovations, repairs, and purchases of additional space for all civic uses.

Councilor Clingan asked if the risk management/emergency preparedness positions created for FY 2024 have been filled, and Director Singh stated that the information could be provided.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Communications

8. Order
(ID # [23-1000](#))

By Councilor Strezo

That the Director of Communications and Community Engagement create a regularly updated public-facing website dedicated to the Winter Hill Community Innovation School plan, with links to publicly filed documents.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Other

9. Order
(ID # [23-1619](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin and Councilor Clingan

That the Director of Parks and Recreation provide an outdoor storage box at the Edgerly School for additional equipment.

Councilor Clingan explained that this Item reflects a request from parents of students at the Edgerly School for more storage space for equipment.

Director Singh and Director Raiche stated that conversations regarding this are taking place and that an update would be provided in the future.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

10. Order
(ID # [23-1594](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad

That the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management and the Director of Finance explain to this Council the steps and processes in the School Building Master Plan for a ballot vote on Proposition 2½ in reference to funding a School Building project.

Chair Gomez Mouakad explained that this Item is intended to clarify the process for a Proposition 2½ for the benefit of the public.

Director Raiche explained that a Proposition 2½ debt exclusion override allows the city to take on debt that is not under the 2.5% cap, and that before

a ballot vote on a Proposition 2½ can take place, a full design and cost estimate need to be completed, and that none of that would be possible to place it on the ballot in 2024. Director Raiche continued by explaining that factors influencing the timeline for such a vote would include deciding what to build, determining what portion of the funding would be covered by MSBA, and what the bond market looks like at the time. This information then forms the substantive basis and dollar amount for the Proposition 2½ vote itself. Director Raiche also stated that the project could be funded by a capital investment plan decision from the City Council, but that doing so could divert funding from other areas, such as paving roads, etc. Director Raiche also explained that the timeline for something like a Proposition 2½ vote will become clearer after the December 13, 2023 MSBA decision.

Councilor Clingan asked if such a Proposition 2½ has to be on the ballot during a national presidential election year, and Director Raiche replied that a Proposition 2½ vote is not tied to a presidential election year.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

11. Resolution
(ID # [23-1511](#))

By Councilor Strezo and Councilor Clingan

That the Administration provide an update on the Edgerly building kitchen equipment, and discuss the plan to serve the Winter Hill Community Innovation School youth and future city programs.

Councilor Clingan explained that, since this Item was submitted, the kitchen at Edgerly is up and running, and that the Item might therefore be outdated.

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked about the status of the supply chain for food to the city's schools, and if it is the production kitchen is at the Argenziano School now that the Winter Hill School is closed. Assistant Superintendent Mazza replied that the Edgerly Kitchen is up and running, and confirmed that the Argenziano School would become the new production kitchen when all of the equipment is received, which will allow it to be the primary production kitchen for the city and permit the preparation of meals from scratch.

School Committee Member Pitone asked about the variety of food the kitchens are able to produce, and asked about the timeline for the completion of the Argenziano project. Assistant Superintendent Mazza replied that without a primary production kitchen, options have been limited, and Director Raiche answered that a formal timeline has not issued for the Argenziano completion but it is hoped to be ready before the next school year.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

- SBFM - 2023-11-29 Responses (with 22-1528, 23-1511, 23-1739)
- SBFM - 2023-11-29 School and City Building Maintenance Summary ONGOING 11.28.23
(with 22-1417)