



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Public Health and Public Safety Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

6:30 PM

The meeting took place remotely via Zoom and was called to order at 6:31 PM by Chair McLaughlin and adjourned at 8:40 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Pineda Neufeld, Clingan and McLaughlin), none against and none absent.

Others present:

Director Karin Carrol – Health and Human Services, Director María Teresa Nagel – SomerViva, Director Neha Singh - Intergovernmental Affairs, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

NOTE regarding Item 25-0135: This item is before the Housing and Community Development Committee and was inadvertently placed on tonight’s agenda. This committee’s recommendation to keep the item in committee will have no effect other than keeping the item in the Housing and Community Development Committee.

Roll Call

Present: Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin, Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan and Ward Seven City Councilor Judy Pineda Neufeld

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-1631](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Public Health and Public Safety Committee Meeting of November 12, 2024.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

2. Order (ID # [25-0230](#))
By Councilor Pineda Neufeld
That the Director of Health and Human Services and the Chief of Police consider installing emergency call boxes in key city locations, including Davis Square.

Director Singh mentioned that the city is examining this issue with several departments working together to outline the next steps and understand the requirements for integrating with the current system. Once that has been completed, the procurement process will follow. Various locations are being considered using data shared by emergency and public safety departments, however the program will have a pilot in Davis Square. Director Singh will provide the committee with further updates and acknowledged that she does not have a specific timeframe.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

3. Order
(ID # [25-0229](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Wilson

That the Commissioner of Public Works work with relevant city staff to plan citywide community cleanup days in each ward.

Director Singh reported that conversations have begun with various departments and that she hopes to have an update soon. Councilor Clingan asked if corporate/business sponsorship has been discussed and the Director replied that she did not know but would check with those who were present for the conversations. Councilor Pineda Neufeld inquired if this matter could be ready this April's Earth Day and the Director replied that she would ask and report back to the committee. Chair McLaughlin requested that detailed information be provided explaining why the cleanups were stopped.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

4. Order
(ID # [25-0136](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin

That the Director of Health and Human Services and the Chief Fire Engineer update this Council on potential impacts of a proposed lithium battery complex in Everett.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

5. Order
(ID # [25-0135](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Wilson and Councilor Strezo

That the Director of Economic Development and the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management update this Council on the potential impacts of the proposed soccer stadium in Everett.

This item is before the Housing and Community Development Committee and was inadvertently placed on tonight's agenda. This committee's recommendation to keep the item in committee will have no effect other than keeping the item in the Housing and Community Development Committee.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

6. Order
(ID # [25-0132](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Clingan

That the Director of SomerViva update the Committee on Public Health and Public Safety on efforts to address immigrant rights.

Chair McLaughlin submitted this item because he wants to dispel rumors of what can and can't be done under Somerville's banner of being a Sanctuary City.

Director Nagle from SomerViva/Somerville Office of Immigrant Affairs (SOIA) explained that her department is a division of the Communication Department that is charged with ensuring that language and culture are not

barriers to residents securing services offered and also to build community engagement. She commented that Somerville is a Welcoming Community that understands that immigration enforcement is a federal responsibility, not a local one and that the belief that federal immigration enforcement cannot occur in the city is incorrect. Federal immigration enforcement can be executed, however the Somerville Police will not help in that effort. If a crime is committed, the perpetrator will be dealt with. Director Nagle noted that all sanctuary city data indicates that those cities are safer because trust is built into the community, adding that Somerville believes in equitable treatment of all people and in maintaining confidentiality of information to the full extent of the law.

Chair McLaughlin sponsored resident Paula Magnelli, a volunteer with Padres Latinos, to address the committee. She explained that this is a small group of volunteers to work to provide equal access to the Latino community and families in the Somerville Public Schools, and working with families in crisis or that need help while being as discreet as possible. Their work involves exchanging information, working with teachers, police and any group that can provide additional information to them. Ms. Magnelli told the members that the city should have more family liaisons. Anyone desiring to help her group should visit their website at

<https://www.padreslatinossps.org>

Councilor Pineda Neufeld sponsored Alex Pirie, a member of the Immigration Services Coalition who has a wealth of information that he uses to refer people to the appropriate contact within and without Somerville. Mr. Pirie He commented that Somerville being a sanctuary city means that it has a history of struggling as a city to get to the point that immigrants belong here, giving them a feeling of being safe. He noted that some non-profits have been developing protocols in the event of ICE agents coming to a resident's door. Mr. Pirie noted that a number of organizations are involved in food security issues, including the schools. Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked what would be on his wish list of city services and he responded by explaining that it's hard to coordinate volunteers because of liability issues and Director Nagle commented that retired immigration attorneys are needed as well as people certified to provide legal services for immigration.

Chair McLaughlin read a statement from Sara Lodgen Kirubi, the Interim Executive Director of the Welcome Project about some of its work.

Director Nagle spoke about the Know Your Rights training sessions developed to empower community members, particularly immigrants, with essential information about their rights and noted that over 1,715 people have participated in the sessions. She also noted that SOIA has translated their full packet of various information and posted it on their website in printable form, held sessions with the Police Department to dispel false information and to build trust, help through economic development, works

on family preparedness with schools, conducting block walks to inform businesses of their obligations in the city, and dispensing workers' rights information in multiple languages. Director Nagle urged everyone to shop locally, saying that the community is scared, including even those who are here legally, resulting in negative effects on the local economy causing a disservice to all residents.

Chair McLaughlin asked what legal services are provided or necessary and Director Nagle said that accredited representatives are needed to help with filings, status renewals and other procedural matters. Services are provided through a city contract with a legal services vendor and the annual budget for that contract has been increased each year. Included in the contract is a dedicated attorney who only works on Somerville residents' cases, providing certain criteria are met. The Director explained that this program often pauses due to lack of capacity, so staff tries to refer people to other providers in a strategic way. She told the members that her department is going back to a clinic model to provide legal consultations, i.e., guidance and next steps, through the legal services vendor. Presently, there is a vacant full time legal policy analyst position, however an offer has been extended to someone. Director Nagle stated that Somerville is one of the few cities in the country that provides the full legal service, handling 27 new cases each year. She spoke briefly about the Public Charge Rule, noting that it has not changed and that very few people are affected by it.

In closing, Director Nagle commented that there are many ways of becoming undocumented and that the federal government sometimes change its rules, thereby forcing some people into becoming undocumented and she made it clear that if a person is law abiding, but undocumented, the Somerville Police will not pursue them for being undocumented. She also said that people should feel very safe in reporting crimes to the Somerville Police because the police will not bother with their immigration status.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

7. Order
(ID # [25-0087](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin

That the Director of Health and Human Services, Director of Housing, and Director of Housing Stability update this City Council regularly on progress towards addressing homelessness.

Director Carroll reported that the vendor operated warming center has been servicing 33-37 people every night and has been at capacity all winter. The site worked out well with extra space, bathroom access and security. She noted that capacity is limited by the staff housing families first but thinks that the center reached capacity most days and that when that happens, vouchers for transportation to other shelters are provided. Weekly meetings are held with HHS, the vendor, and various city staff to coordinate the

ongoing efforts at the center.

Director Carroll gave an update on the public health vending machines program, saying that the machines will dispense basic safety items, diapers, sunscreen, hydration items, Narcan, etc., and that they will be piloted in several locations around the city. An RFP has already been put out by the city. After the program is in service, focus groups will follow home in on what products should be included in the vending machines.

Director Carroll reported that the dual needle kiosks are being delivered this week to the city and will be installed in Davis Square and East Somerville and will be serviced by a vendor. She also noted the following:

- The weekly huddle continues with several departments to deal with issues as they arise,
- The city will receive \$119,000 from the Department of Health for a variety of new initiatives for unhoused people during cold weather and that this funding will be available until June of 2026,
- The city has hired a Prevention Services Director who will be starting next month,
- Community Health workers are continuing their outreach,
- The annual Point in Time (PIT) count was performed on January 29, 2025 and it was reported that 12 people were unsheltered and 35 were in the warming center. (Additional PIT data is expected), and
- The city has entered into a partnership with Tufts for a community health program.

Chair McLaughlin asked if there has been an increase in homelessness in the city and the Director responded that, from the feedback she is receiving about the day engagement center attendance, there has not been a huge increase.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

8. Order
(ID # [25-0086](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin and Councilor Strezo
That the Director of Mobility update the Ward 1 City Councilor on the status of the Kensington Connector.

The Administration has submitted a memo on this item.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

9. Order (ID # [25-0064](#)) By Councilor Wilson, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Clingan and Councilor Mbah
That the Chief Fire Engineer and the Commissioner of Public Works discuss with this Council how to ensure Fire Department facilities are well maintained.

Director Singh requested that this item remain in committee.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Documents:

- PHPS - 2025-03-19 OSPCD Written Response (with 25-0086)
- PHPS - 2025-03-19 Welcome Project statement (with 25-0132)