



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Open Space, Environment and Energy Committee

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, April 18, 2024

6:00 PM

The meeting took place virtually via Zoom and was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chair Mbah and adjourned at 6:48 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Wilson, Strezo and Mbah), none against and 2 absent (Councilors Scott and Sait).

Others present:

Luisa Oliveira – Director of Public Space and Urban Forestry, Kim Hutter – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Roll Call

Present: City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah, City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo and City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson

Absent: Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait and Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott

- Committee Minutes (ID # [23-1711](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Open Space, Environment and Energy Committee Meeting of November 20, 2023.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: City Councilor At Large Mbah, City Councilor At Large Strezo and City Councilor At Large Wilson

ABSENT: Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Ward Two City Councilor Scott

- Order (ID # [24-0042](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Davis and Councilor Ewen-Campen

That the Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment provide this Council with any updated plans and timelines for a municipal composting program.

This item was discussed with ID # 24-0370.

Director Blais, from the Office of Sustainability and Environment, submitted a written memo regarding this item. Chair Mbah referenced the memo and asked Liaison Hutter about programs already running in the city. She replied that the memo addresses a city-wide curbside composting program and notes that some residents participate in a private composting program. Chair Mbah wants to know what the plan is, how much it will cost and how it will be implemented.

Resident Adrienne Agarwal spoke on behalf of Mothers Out Front and said that the organization is passionate about food waste collection/composting

programs. They have spoken to various entities involved in composting and found out that 10% of Somerville residents are already contracted with private composting vendors. She mentioned that space for land fills is running out. Ms. Agarwal commented that a composting program would be a benefit to the city and acknowledged that there would be an up front cost, but that cost should level out over time. Such a program would also help to control the city's rat population. Councilor Wilson went on record as wanting a program similar to what is being used in the City of Boston.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

3. Resolution
(ID # [24-0086](#))

By Councilor Ewen-Campen

That the Administration explain the issues that are preventing Reavis Field from opening and how the process may be expedited.

Liaison Hutter informed the committee that Director Raiche was unable to attend tonight's meeting and said that the process is active and changing so quickly, that compiling the information was not possible. Councilor Wilson said that this situation is a huge annoyance and unacceptable.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

4. Order
(ID # [24-0091](#))

By Councilor Mbah and Councilor Burnley Jr.

That the Director of Parks and Recreation and the Director of Public Space and Urban Forestry report to this Council's Committee on Open Space, Environment and Energy on the status of the parks and open spaces that have been completed or are under construction and planning as part of redevelopment projects.

Chair Mbah said that he wants to know what projects are in the queue, what projects are being actively worked on and what projects have been completed and he asked if there is a list available with that information. Director Oliveira responded by saying that 2 parks and 1 plaza were completed last year and 2 more parks are scheduled to be finished this spring with another scheduled later this year. There are other projects in various stages of permitting. Chair Mbah asked about Art Farm and Director Oliveira explained that that site is not considered to be open space since it came through development. When work by the city's Infrastructure and Asset Management Department is completed at that site, the parcel will revert to being a public park. Chair Mbah requested that Director Oliveira provide the committee with data for newly acquired parcels (i.e., since the last measurement in 2016) and also show where the city stands on its journey to achieving 125 acres of open space.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Order
(ID # [24-0106](#))
- By Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Davis, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Sait, Councilor Mbah, Councilor Clingan and Councilor Ewen-Campen
- That the Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment work with this Council and Green and Open Somerville to develop a job description for an Invasive Species position to spearhead outreach, education, and citywide invasive plant species removal and to allocate funding for such a position in the FY 2025 budget.
- Discussed with ID # 24-0457.
- Liaison Hutter said the Administration recognizes that this is not part of the FY-25 budget but hears the calls for it. She assured the committee that the request will be under consideration during the FY-25 budget process. Councilor Strezo asked if there have been discussions about community partners, e.g., Groundworks Somerville, assisting or taking the lead on this.
- RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE**
6. Order
(ID # [24-0370](#))
- By Councilor Burnley Jr.
- That the Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment update this Council on the design, cost, and implementation timeline for the city's composting program.
- This item was discussed with ID # 24-0042.
- Director Blais, from the Office of Sustainability and Environment, submitted a written memo regarding this item.
- RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE**
7. Public Communication
(ID # [24-0457](#))
- Green & Open Somerville and Earthwise Aware submitting comments re: invasive plant species.
- Discussed with ID # 24-0106.
- Liaison Hutter said that there have been conversations but this item is tied up in staffing issues in the FY-25 budget. She will take the item back to the Administration.
- RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE**
8. Order
(ID # [24-0472](#))
- By Councilor Wilson and Councilor Scott
- That the Commissioner of Public Works update this Council on the condition of Conway Field and the displacement of infill that is occurring there during extreme rainfall events, as well as the schedule for regular grooming and maintenance of the City's artificial turf athletic fields.
- DPW Commissioner Lathan has submitted a written memo regarding this item.

Councilor Mbah asked what the next step would be and Councilor Wilson summarized the memo, saying that he's hopeful that a solution will be found. He also asked for a city-wide schedule for grooming fields since he doesn't think they're getting the grooming they need and he wants to be sure that the city is doing its part to get the most out of the fields. Director Oliveira clarified that the city did not request an infill substitution and said that the change was made due to the state's bidding requirements. Liaison Hutter noted that the submitted memo states that the fields are groomed every 3-4 weeks.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

- OSEE - 2024-04-18 DPW Memo (with 24-0472)
- OSEE - 2024-04-18 Citywide Composting Program (with 24-0042, 24-0370)