



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE  
MAYOR

To: Honorable City Council  
Re: Mid-year Appropriation Requests  
Date: March 24, 2021

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This memo explains mid-year appropriation requests for six positions urgently needed in the City to address existing needs. As the Council knows well, most new positions are added during the annual budget process, but it generally takes until early September, and sometimes longer, to fill positions that are funded as of July 1. In addition to providing the justification for and key duties of each position, this memo elaborates on the urgency in filling these positions as soon as possible and explains why we cannot wait until early September to fill the six positions described below. A summary of the requests is provided at the end of the memo.

**Infrastructure & Asset Management (IAM): Engineering**

**Request #1: Senior Project Manager (Streetscapes Program)**

The City's annual roadway paving and sidewalk improvements projects have historically been executed as "book jobs" that require minimal preparation for bidding and rely on engineering consultants for verification of quantities to pay our construction contractors. With increased construction citywide, and as IAM and the Mobility Division of OSPCD (Mobility) have increased the expectations for execution of construction projects, that model has shown flaws. Moreover, given the backlog of streetscape repairs and the City's goals of reprioritizing public space within the City's rights-of-way for public transportation, bicycles, pedestrian safety, urban forest, green stormwater infrastructure, ADA accessibility, and other public uses, the complexity of the City's annual paving and sidewalk contracts has increased substantially. Additionally, improvements planned by Mobility, as well as the identification of streetscape-focused projects such as Highland Avenue, New Washington Street, and Power House Boulevard / Clarendon Hill, highlight the need for a project manager (PM) with more streetscape experience than the Engineering Division's (Engineering) existing "wet" utility (water and sewer) PM focus. Engineering's long-term workload forecast indicates the division will need 1.5 to 2.0 full-time equivalents (FTEs) with streetscape expertise within the next two to three years. For now, we are proposing a new Senior Project Manager be added to the Engineering staff with a focus on streetscapes, including execution of City contracts and coordination with private contractors and utilities. This position is complementary to the Mobility staff additions recently supported by the Council, and is in

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fact critical to completing the construction of necessary traffic calming and pedestrian safety improvements. With streetscape improvements to College Avenue and Holland Street, as well as targeted safety improvements to several intersections set to start construction in April 2021, it is critical that this position be filled as soon as possible.

### **Request #2: Deputy Director of Engineering Projects**

The Spring Hill Sewer Separation and the Poplar Street Pump Station projects, while driven by sewer needs, are both highly complex projects that will incorporate water system upgrades, gas main replacements, streetscape improvements, private property inflow removal, and new building construction all requiring multi-discipline coordination across several City departments and with private companies. The combined results of the asset condition assessments and the hydraulic modeling to generate a citywide comprehensive drainage and water quality improvements plan will undoubtedly result in similarly complex projects. Engineering's current workload overwhelms the current staff's capabilities to achieve regulatory deadlines, particularly those associated with the federally issued stormwater and combined sewer permits. To avoid enforcement actions and to better achieve the City's own flood reduction and streetscape improvement goals, additional staff is required. Engineering's long-term workload forecast indicates the need for 3.5 additional project managers with expertise in water, sewer, and general civil engineering in addition to the 1.5 to 2.0 streetscape project managers discussed above. For now, we are proposing to create a Deputy Director of Engineering Projects position<sup>1</sup>: this position would both manage the current and future anticipated complicated projects in the department and manage Engineering's project managers, which, as noted, will likely increase in the near future.

**Why now (requests #1 & #2):** Engineering's long-range project and workload forecast demonstrates that the division requires additional staff to be in place and productive as soon as possible to support the calendar year 2021 (CY21) construction season in advance of the beginning of the fiscal year 2022 (FY22). Engineering staff are currently overloaded, and the only reason they did not fall further behind on critical programs is that several projects were placed on hold in CY20 due to COVID-19. With those priority projects expected to resume in CY21, and with several other projects transitioning from design to construction, which requires substantially more management time, Engineering requires additional staff as soon as possible.

### **Infrastructure & Asset Management: Capital Projects**

#### **Request #3: Deputy Director of Capital Projects**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to safely return students and teachers to in-person learning while mitigating risk of exposure and transmission of the virus, in FY21 IAM launched an intensive project to improve air handling in the City's school buildings, including increased filtration, addition of humidification and UV disinfection, and a full retro-commissioning of all building mechanical systems

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<sup>1</sup> As part of the FY22 budget process, Engineering plans to propose to rename the Assistant Director of Engineering position, which is currently vacant, the Deputy Director of Engineering Services, since this position manages the technical group within Engineering.

related to ventilation. The highly skilled trades people contracted to complete that work uncovered significant issues with these building systems that the City's on-call operations contractor, Honeywell, failed to identify or exacerbated through inadequate maintenance. This discovery complicates the work under contract and creates additional scope that must be defined, procured, and managed in the immediate term to accommodate both the phased school reopening for the remainder of this school year and for the full opening next school year. While work continues in the school buildings, attention must also be given to the municipal buildings. Furthermore, the work to improve air quality in the school buildings identified system deficiencies that could only be revealed through in-depth recommissioning; therefore, IAM will need to conduct further audits of the existing building systems, partner with DPW to improve their maintenance contracts, and develop capital project contracts to address identified deficiencies.

This work must be conducted as soon as possible, and the Capital Projects Division requires additional staff to lead both immediate-term and long-term efforts to remediate building system issues caused by Honeywell's deferred and inadequate maintenance. While current Capital Projects staff have been supporting the school building effort to date, they lack both the technical expertise and the bandwidth to fulfill current, short-term, and long-term needs. We are therefore proposing the creation of a new Deputy Director of Capital Projects position. The ideal candidate will possess both the technical knowledge of building systems and the strategic vision to address the administration and prioritization of the capital improvements related to airflow improvements in school and City buildings. In the future, the Deputy Director will provide the strategic project prioritization and management oversight of the Building Improvement & Preventative Maintenance Manager, the Green Building Manager, and other staff focused on managing building improvement projects.

**Why now:** The remediation work in school and City buildings is of utmost priority for fully returning students, teachers, and staff to the facilities and for opening municipal buildings to the community. Because of the need to fill this role immediately as well as the fact that this position's responsibilities will be 100% related to the COVID-19 pandemic for the foreseeable future, we are proposing to utilize CARES Act funding to support staffing costs incurred through June 30, 2021; after that time, the staff costs will shift to the City's budget or another to-be-determined funding source.

### **OSPCD: Planning & Zoning**

#### **Request #4: Planner**

The new zoning ordinance has shifted the workflow of and workload for the Planning & Zoning (P&Z) Division. While the administration procedure is more transparent to the public than the previous code, managing the process requires more staff time. Furthermore, as the ordinance was originally passed with an understanding that there would be additional adjustments and as department staff continue to work on updating the ordinance in coordination with the Land Use Committee of the City Council, this work has required the full-time attention of one staff member. At the same time, preservation projects in the City have skyrocketed as home improvement projects continue to increase, requiring one staff member that was previously working on Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and zoning cases to

now be fully occupied with work for the HPC and unable to do zoning case review. Meanwhile, the development pressure on the city continues to increase, and P&Z is currently reviewing simultaneous large-scale projects in multiple neighborhoods. Combined, these factors have limited the staff's ability to work on case review and long-term planning efforts – especially neighborhood plans – and have led to the need for another Planner position.

**Why now:** Creating a new Planner position will allow the division to refocus on long-term and neighborhood planning efforts, process case reviews more expeditiously and provide better service to constituents, and generally normalize workloads for an overburdened staff, all while ensuring the development review process, which is critical for the city's economic recovery as the pandemic wanes, keeps moving.

### **Communications & Community Engagement: SomerViva Office of Immigrant Affairs**

#### **Request #5: Director of SomerViva Office of Immigrant Affairs**

The SomerViva program was established in 2013 to address language, culture, and ethnicity barriers to city services and public processes. With a staff of native speakers, themselves immigrants, the mission was to build the trust and language access needed for equitable access to city services and information, support participation in civic activities and processes, and to celebrate the diverse cultures and contributions of Somerville immigrants. Evolving to meet broader needs, the program has grown since into a full SomerViva Office of Immigrant Affairs (SOIA) that offers extensive immigration-related services and advocacy, multilingual leadership development, small business supports, housing access assistance, multi-lingual elder services, social service referral and case management, emergency supports (e.g., fires, snow, pandemic, homelessness, etc.), among other services. SOIA also has steadily worked to build cultural competency and language services across all departments, consulting on program, policy, and service development. Meanwhile, translation and interpretation demands as well as community engagement needs have continued to expand as engagement activities and language access awareness have grown; without a corresponding increase in staff, this has forced a rationing of service in these areas, running counter to the core mission of equitable access. During this time, the Director of Communications & Community Engagement has overseen SOIA serving as the de facto Director, which was an appropriate structure when the program was smaller and the scope narrower. But with an average of 4,000 residents served per year and the broadened depth and breadth and specialized nature of the work, as well as the City's intensified commitment to racial and social justice for all BIPOC residents – many of whom in Somerville are first- or second-generation immigrants — the office requires a dedicated director to oversee, guide, and advance SOIA's critical work.

**Why now:** This position was originally included in the FY21 budget but was removed as a pandemic-related cost-saving measure. Pandemic needs have made the need for this position particularly acute, but it is important to note that the need for a SOIA Director both pre-dates and extends beyond the pandemic. Especially with upcoming important racial and social justice public processes and with new federal immigration policies once again allowing entry, the office is anticipating a surge in demand

across all functions. Approval now would allow us to hire a Director in the spring rather than delaying potential approval to the next budget making the earliest hire no earlier than September.

### **Communications & Community Engagement: Constituent Services**

#### **Request #6: Quality Manager**

A consistent quality assurance and improvement program is an essential part of the success formula for many customer service organizations. The vast majority (about 85%) of the country's top 311 centers have some type of quality management program in place. When done correctly, a quality management program can improve the performance of individual staff members and boost morale in the department. By regularly identifying areas of improvement in ways that are both positive and collaborative, staff know they are valued and are encouraged to grow professionally while being held accountable for their work. Most importantly, by reducing the number of errors made by staff, we elevate the community's perception of and trust in how City services are being managed, while increasing efficiency and reducing operational costs to maximize value. Modern 311 services are accessible in many different ways including in person; by telephone, email, and live chat; and through social media. Each of these engagement channels requires different skills and knowledge from the employees to engage effectively. Currently, individual work performance is only able to be reviewed upon complaint or after a critical failure is discovered internally. With people in the community looking to 311 for assistance now more than ever, it is increasingly urgent that the department be able to consistently review the performance of all aspects of front-line staff operations, set targets for improvements based on need, and follow up with action planning designed to ensure staff are enabled and engaged to serve the public to the best of their abilities. To meet this need, we are proposing to create a Quality Manager position. This individual will work with the Director, 311 Center Manager, and others to ensure team members are equipped with what they need to resolve issues quickly and correctly and to provide accurate, correct, and easy (ACE) customer service. This individual will also be responsible for coordinating efforts towards service trainings and improvements with 311 vendors, as well as any additional coordination, analysis, documentation, or reporting necessary.

**Why now:** We have seen all-time highs in the demand for 311 support; since June of last year we have seen a 20-40% increase in monthly traffic for 311 services. That means dozens or even hundreds of additional people calling, emailing, tweeting, etc. each day. It is also why many of our service levels are at all-time lows (e.g., wait times, abandon rate, average call times). Adding additional customer service representatives has been somewhat helpful, but onboarding and training new staff in a 100% remote environment has created additional challenges, including lengthening what was already a 3 to 6 month training and onboarding period. With these trends likely to continue – and the majority of 311 staff likely to remain in either a fully or hybrid work configuration for the foreseeable future – we need additional capacity as soon as possible to support staff, improve customer service, and boost service levels.

Request	Position	Department	Salary Grade	Anticipated Hire Date	Funding Request	FY21 Funding Source
1	Senior Project Manager (Streetscapes Program)	IAM: Engineering	NU06	5/24/21	\$9,518	Available salary funds
2	Deputy Director of Engineering Projects	IAM: Engineering	NU05	5/24/21	\$10,576	Available salary funds (30% Water Enterprise, 30% Sewer Enterprise, and 40% Engineering)
3	Deputy Director of Capital Projects	IAM: Capital Projects	NU05	5/10/21	\$14,578	CARES
4	Planner	OSPCD: P&Z	NU09	5/24/21	\$7,932	Available salary funds
5	Director of SomerViva Office of Immigrant Affairs*	Communications & Community Engagement: SOIA	NU05	5/24/21	\$10,576	Available salary funds + free cash
6	Quality Manager	Communications & Community Engagement: Constituent Services	NU11	5/24/21	\$6,346	Available salary funds

\* A note on net cost: As part of the pandemic emergency response, the City is currently paying a contractor for 25 hours per week to coordinate emergency response efforts targeting immigrant community members. The new full-time SOIA Director would assume these pandemic duties eliminating the need for a vendor and also provide capacity for non-pandemic services at roughly the same cost.