



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, November 17, 2022

6:00 PM

Others present: David Goodridge – CIO, Michael Mastrobuoni – Budget Manager, Alan Inacio – Senior Accountant OSPCD, Danielle Palazzo – Executive Administrator DPW, Chris Major – Assistant Fire Chief, Richelle Embree - Director of Finance and Administration for Public Safety, Rich Raiche – Director of Capital Projects, Jill Lathan – Commissioner DPW, Ed Bean – Director of Finance, Eric Weisman – Director of Operations DPW, Aneesh Sahni – Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chair Wilson and adjourned at 8:51 PM on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Kelly, Pineda Neufeld, McLaughlin, Scott and Wilson), none against and none absent.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Jake Wilson, Vice Chair Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott, Matthew McLaughlin, Judy Pineda Neufeld and Charlotte Kelly

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [22-1902](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of November 3, 2022.

RESULT: APPROVED
AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly

Prior Year Invoices

2. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1880](#)) Requesting approval to pay prior year invoices totaling \$116,166.91 using available funds in various Public Works Ordinary Maintenance Accounts for invoices in Administration, Buildings, Grounds, Lights and Lines, Highway, Fleet, Sanitation, and Snow..

Commissioner Lathan reviewed several of the items contained in the requested and explained that this was caused because the purchase order was closed prior to receiving all of the invoices. She made it clear that all vendors were asked to submit their invoices by a certain date, (prior to closing the purchase order), however many vendors did not comply, resulting in this request to pay prior year invoices. Commissioner Lathan explained that some invoices were sent to a former DPW employee and that the department is attempting to correct this type of problem from occurring in the future. Director Weisman stated that all vendors are instructed to send emails to shared mailboxes. Commissioner Lathan stated that the DPW will

be submitting another request for additional prior year invoices.

Applications are being reviewed to fill the vacant position of Director of Administration and Finance and the first round of interviews will begin soon. Councilor Scott questioned an invoice for tree work and Director Weisman explained that it was for an intense preventive maintenance project and the removal of 3 trees and 2 tree stumps. This invoice dates back to 2020. Director Weisman commented that vacancies in the DPW tree crew should be filled in the near future.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly

- 3. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1851](#))

Requesting approval to pay prior year invoices totaling \$409.60 using available funds in the City Clerk Ordinary Maintenance Credit Card Convenience Fees Account for credit card convenience fees.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly

Contracts

- 4. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1773](#))

Requesting approval to amend a contract with Greenberg Traurig LLP for an additional two years and \$300,000, for ongoing litigation related to the 90 Washington Street eminent domain taking.

See item #22-1875

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly

- 5. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1858](#))

Requesting approval of a time-only contract extension with Stantec Consulting Services Inc. for Poplar Street Pump Station Design Services.

Director Raiche explained that due to the expected duration of the construction project, a time extension of the professional services agreement with the engineer of record, Stantec, will also be required to provide ongoing design and engineering services during construction.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly

Grant Acceptances

- 6. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1857](#)) Requesting approval to accept and expend a \$6,000 grant with no new match required, from Somerville Cambridge Elder Services to the Council on Aging for transportation to Council on Aging sponsored events.

Somerville Cambridge Elder Services has awarded the Council on Aging with an additional \$6,000 grant. Additional funding is provided by Federal ARPA dollars and is intended to expand services provided by our Title III funding.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly

- 7. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1856](#)) Requesting approval to accept and expend a \$3,000 grant with no new match required, from Somerville Cambridge Elder Services to the Council on Aging for transportation to events at the Council on Aging.

This grant is provided to the Somerville Council on Aging on a yearly basis from Title III funding with the purpose of providing transportation to the city’s older residents for such programs as nutrition, exercise and individual appointments with the city’s social worker. This funding also allows the Council on Aging to provide transportation for seniors to join community sponsored COA events.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly

Appropriations

- 8. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1923](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$1,616,575 from the Receipts Reserved for Appropriation Parking Meter Receipts Account to reduce the FY 2023 Tax Rate.

Mr. Mastrobuoni told the committee that the Administration plans to make updates to the city’s FY-23 budget and investments because of an increase in revenue collected from some fees, e.g., meals tax, room tax and safety review fees. Additionally, the state has reimbursed the city for 2 errors it made. Combined, the excess revenue amounts to an increase of \$4.264 million in local receipts, however, this additional money will not impact the tax rate. Mr. Mastrobuoni stated that remediation, overtime, and emergent costs are the reasons for additional appropriations, with the largest amount earmarked for street resurfacing.

Councilor Scott said that this amounts to expanding the city budget prior to finalizing it with the state and noted that nothing that the City Council requested during the past budget season has been included as an item to be paid for by the increased revenue. Councilor Kelly asked if additional funds would be used for housing stability and Mr. Mastrobuoni replied that if the need arises, free cash would be used. Director Bean said that meetings have been held with the state regarding certifying the budget and establishing the amount of free cash. In FY-22, revenue exceeded expectations by \$22 million and he believes that the city’s free cash this fiscal year will be over \$24 million. Director Bean said that 3 votes will be taken at the next City Council meeting so that the tax rate certification may begin.

Director Sahni commented that although the City Council’s priorities are not included here, they remain priorities for the Administration, as well, and are not yet at the point of appropriation. Mr. Mastrobuoni noted that this is an extension of the operating procedure and is part of budget revenue.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED
AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City
 Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda
 Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly

Supplemental Appropriations

- 9. Mayor's Request Requesting a supplemental appropriation of \$949,338 to the Capital Outlay, (ID # [22-1983](#)) Infrastructure-Streets Account for street resurfacing projects.

Director Raiche explained that these funds would allow the city to partially pave approximately 1.5 miles of travel lanes on side streets. He told the members that there is no budget line item for this as funding comes from Chapter 90 funds. The priority plan for paving is posted on the city’s engineering website and is based on several criteria. Councilor Scott asked if there was a list of streets that could be added to the paving list and Director Raiche said he will submit it to the committee. He also noted that the city was not able to get to Pearl Street this year due to supply chain issues, such as granite curbing.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED
AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City
 Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda
 Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly

- 10. Mayor's Request Requesting a supplemental appropriation of \$650,000 to the Fire (ID # [22-1888](#)) Department Overtime Account.

Director Embree explained that overtime expenses are projected to be \$2.6 million for FY-23 and that the amount requested here can’t be covered by line-item transfers. She noted that currently, there is a salary lag of about

\$800,000. Assistant Chief Major noted that 7 fire fighters were recently appointed and that 3 more vacancies exist, plus there may be 1 more vacancy in May due to a retirement. The certification list has been closed and a new list will be called for. Councilor Scott asked when hiring process will begin to fill the vacancies and Assistant Chief Major said that’s up to the Chief and the Administration.

Councilor Kelly asked why this wasn’t budgeted for in June and Mr. Mastrobuoni said the Administration wants to take a close look at this trend and Director Embree said that the city is looking at factors contributing to the overtime, e.g., the number of vacancies and the snowball effect on vacations, etc. Councilor Scott stated that this situation is a direct operational cost resulting from not having enough staff.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly

11. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1892](#))

Requesting a supplemental appropriation of \$500,000 to the Capital Projects, Building Improvements Account for repairs and upgrades to HVAC systems.

Director Raiche explained that these funds would be used for building improvements in several of the city’s schools. He told the committee that the Winter Hill Community School will have a comprehensive analysis performed in the near future and that a report of that analysis should be ready in January or February.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly

12. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1972](#))

Requesting a supplemental appropriation of \$500,000 to the Salary Contingency, Salaries Account.

Mr. Mastrobuoni said salary adjacent items are being targeted as there are needs that need to be met. The funds would be appropriated out at a later date and if not expended by the end of FY-23, the funds would go into the salary stabilization fund. Councilor Scott contended that approval of this item moves the levy limit up to the projected amount, however, Mr. Mastrobuoni stated that it has no bearing on the tax levy. Councilor Scott countered that if this item is denied, then the money could be used to lower taxes, as an example, adding that the City Council had made requests during the past budget process that were not addressed. Mr. Mastrobuoni explained that if this request is rejected, it would result in edits to the local revenue estimates.

Councilor Kelly asked about the Work Better Task Force and Mr. Mastrobuoni said it's an inter-departmental group who's work product is a list of recommendations (that will be released soon) to the mayor aimed at finding and maintaining employees.

Chair Wilson asked about the possibility of the city continuing to receive federal reimbursement for the department's overtime expenses, possibly at the rate of 90%.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly

NAY: Vice Chair Scott

- 13. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1925](#))

Requesting a supplemental appropriation of \$424,950.10 to the Information Technology eRate Account to replace all Somerville Public School network equipment via the eRate grant program.

The upgrades will allow the school department network to be in step with the municipal network and allow for an up-to-date, consistent, and resilient network design. Director Goodridge told the committee that the city would be responsible for 20% of the cost. Asked about the internet problems at the Winter Hill School, Director Goodridge stated that the problem is believed to be a cellular issue and improvements have been made and will be tested soon.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly

- 14. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1875](#))

Requesting a supplemental appropriation of \$300,000 to the 90 Washington Demonstration Project Account for ongoing litigation and planning costs.

See item #22-1773

Mr. Inacio reported that litigation is ongoing and incurring attorney costs. The original bonding authorization has been exhausted and it's projected that there will be additional costs in the neighborhood of \$300,000. Approval of this request would allow the process to keep moving forward.

Councilor McLaughlin asked for information that is public knowledge, e.g., who's being sued? Mr. Inacio said that since the city's special counsel could not make tonight's meeting, he's not comfortable getting into the details of the litigation. Director Sahni commented that the litigation, brought by Cobble Hill LLC, is ongoing and involves the amount paid for the parcel. Councilor

Kelly asked if this requested amount of funds would be spent during FY-23 and Mr. Inacio said there are unpaid invoices needing to be paid, so about half will be spent in this fiscal year.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly

- 15. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1918](#))

Requesting a supplemental appropriation of \$250,000 to the Law Department, Legal Services Account for outside legal counsel services.

Discussed with items 22-1979, 22-1919, 22-1889, 22-1985

Mr. Mastrobuoni stated that outside legal counsel is expensive and he doesn't know how long the requested funds will last. He informed the committee that additional staff in the Law Department will be starting soon and that once a labor attorney is on staff, the outside legal fees should decrease.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly

- 16. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1979](#))

Requesting a supplemental appropriation of \$200,000 to the Traffic Safety Stabilization Fund to fund traffic safety measures.

Discussed with items 22-1918, 22-1919, 22-1889, 22-1985

Mr. Mastrobuoni did not have the recommendations but commented that Director Rawson would be happy to discuss matter with the committee.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly

- 17. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1890](#))

Requesting a supplemental appropriation of \$110,000 to the Capital Projects Division, Capital Outlay, Fences Account to fund temporary construction fencing at the 90 Washington Street site.

Director Raiche said the design of the building is being paused to allow for a more robust conversation with the public. The internal area of the site will be used for DPW storage. The larger portion of the requested amount is for artwork done by students in the city's schools. Councilor McLaughlin expressed his support the fencing being installed to remove the blight of the site.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

- AYE:** Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly
18. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1915](#)) Requesting a supplemental appropriation of \$100,000 to the DPW Sanitation, Hazardous Waste Removal Account to fund a shortfall.
- Director Weisman explained that the funds are to increase hazardous waste disposal dates. Councilor Scott noted that since July, the City Council has authorized \$2 million to pay prior year invoices for the DPW. Director Lathan will get the actual amount.
- RESULT:** **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
- AYE:** Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly
19. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1919](#)) Requesting a supplemental appropriation of \$100,000 to the Law Department, Judgments and Settlements Account.
- Discussed with items 22-1979, 22-1918, 22-1889, 22-1985
- RESULT:** **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
- AYE:** Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly
20. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1905](#)) Requesting a supplemental appropriation of \$70,000 to the Fire Alarm Overtime Account.
- This appropriation will mitigate an anticipated deficit in the Fire Alarm Overtime object. When combined with an eventual transfer of salary lag, this funding will mitigate the projected deficit at the end of FY23. This deficit is primarily due to increased sick leave and pending retirements. Director Embree said the annual OT budget is \$250,000 and this request is to make up a shortfall.
- RESULT:** **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
- AYE:** Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly
21. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1889](#)) Requesting a supplemental appropriation of \$50,000 to the Immigrant Legal Services Stabilization Fund for additional immigrant legal defense services.
- Discussed with items 22-1979, 22-1919, 22-1918, 22-1985

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly

22. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1985](#)) Requesting a supplemental appropriation of \$50,000 to various Finance Department-Auditing Division Accounts to support the Public Participatory Budgeting Project.

Discussed with items 22-1979, 22-1919, 22-1889, 22-1918

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly

23. Mayor's Request (ID # [22-1911](#)) Requesting a supplemental appropriation of \$10,000 to the Police-Animal Control Overtime Account.

Director Embree said the annual overtime cost is about \$22,000 and that the current amount of \$6,500 is ahead of what was anticipated. There was also increased costs for medical care for the animals. Trends are being analyzed for inclusion in the FY-24 budget.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**
AYE: Chairperson Wilson, Vice Chair Scott, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Kelly