

Advancing Police Reform: Body-Worn Cameras

July 27, 2026



We are committed to community safety
transparency and accountability.

Mayor Jake Wilson

Body-Worn Cameras: A 10-Year Journey

- **2015:** City pursued full implementation of body-worn cameras for sworn personnel in the Somerville Police Department since at least 2015.
- **2021:** City Council unanimously supports a proposed 2020 resolution in support of deploying body-worn cameras and both police unions reached agreements with the City allowing for BWC implementation.
 - It is common for there to be a salary adjustment associated with implementation of a new technology like this. Agreement included a 2% salary increase for officers upon implementation

Arlington (2 %)	Medford (1.5 %)	Malden (\$1,000)	Cambridge (existing stipend increase, 1 %)
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- **2025:** Public Safety for All Task Force recommended the implementation of BWCs as soon as possible.
- **2026:** The salary increase associated with the BWC program will not affect the FY27 budget, as all costs this year already were accounted for years ago with Council-approved transfers to the Salary & Wage Stabilization Fund. This is not the same area of funding as it would be for other positions in the City.

The Future of Public Safety in Somerville

- Administration committed to implementing the Public Safety for All recommendations:
 - **Clinician Response:** Clinician co-response pilot program launched May 2026, targeted for grant-funded growth of clinician positions in FY27
 - **Body-Worn Cameras:** Estimated launch August 2026, pending City Council approval, targeted for expansion to Patrol Officers following acceptance of collective bargaining agreement with an identical BWC policy to Superior Officer MOA
 - **Civilian Oversight:** Public Safety for All Project Manager tasked with implementation, program director position funded & ready to work with Council to launch in 2027
- Administration also pursuing additional community safety initiatives:
 - **School Liaison Officer:** Working with SPS Administration & Chief Benford on SLO, hopeful of 2027 implementation
 - **Community Policing:** Working with SPD leadership and unions on a new hybrid approach to patrol ahead of FY28 budget

Why Body-Worn Cameras?

- Key recommendation of 2025 Public Safety for All Task Force reports
- Considered best practice in conjunction with a strong policy
 - Negotiated policy incorporates recommendations & feedback from: ACLU, NAACP, neighboring cities, City Councilors, members of public
- Research: BWCs lead to reduced instances of officer use of force
 - UPenn Crime Lab and Campbell Systematic Review: Clear evidence of reduction in use of force incidents & fewer citizen complaints when BWCs are implemented
- Incidents in neighboring municipalities without BWCs
 - Cambridge
 - North Andover

Cost of Progress

- Civilian response, civilian oversight, and BWCs all cost money
- Grant funding & stabilization fund fully cover FY27 costs
 - Awarded \$231,635 state grant with no new match required for BWC program
 - Funds for Superior & Patrol compensation increases transferred years ago
- Future costs of a full BWC program will be phased onto General Fund
 - Half-year of subscription costs covered by grant in FY28
- Looking to offset cost of program with Police Department budget savings
 - Operational & bargained cost savings
 - Reduction in overtime costs
- Encouraging early signs for FY28 revenue picture

Chicken or Egg: Civilian Oversight

- Moving forward with multiple initiatives simultaneously
 - Council collaboration on civilian oversight ordinance after recess
- Civilian oversight is rare & ineffective without BWCs
 - Madison: Now moving quickly to implement BWCs
- BWCs will help with civilian oversight collective bargaining
 - Video over conflicting testimonies

Why Now?

- Examples elsewhere show what can happen without BWCs
 - Cambridge
 - Madison
- Grant opportunity expires August 31, 2026
 - Final year of grant program; not expected to be renewed
- Civilian Oversight will require body-worn cameras, possibly as soon as later this year
 - Will be doing this without nearly a quarter million dollars of grant funding
 - Increasing technology costs

Somerville has broad support for Body-Worn Cameras

Jon Hillman, PSFA Project Manager

The road to BWC implementation reflects a community-driven and informed process

- The Public Safety for All Initiative was a community-driven and informed process that has its roots starting in 2015.
 - Public Safety for All Task Force and the Civilian Oversight Task Force
- Task Force members are still engaged and invested in seeing the recommendations on BWC implementation come to fruition.
 - Public Presentation of their recommendations in February 2025
 - Public Comments Submitted in July 2026
- Community feedback on the body-worn camera Technology Specific Surveillance Use Policy (“TSSUP”) and Surveillance Technology Impact Report (“STIR”) has been incorporated.

The Administration is actively advancing civilian oversight

Jon Hillman, PSFA Project Manager

The Administration is Committed to Civilian Oversight

- Somerville wants and deserves a police oversight entity that is effective and sustainable. Examples across the nation have shown BWC are instruments that help facilitate this.
- The Administration has publicly shared its commitment to civilian oversight including but not limited to the Mayor's FY27 budget presentation and before the Public Health and Public Safety Committee.
- The contract with the Somerville Police Superior Officers Association ("SPSOA") specifically includes language that says BWC footage shall be provided to the applicable police oversight authority. The STIR and TSSUP tonight reaffirms that a local Somerville oversight authority will utilize BWC footage.
- As for next steps, the Administration has:
 - Created a Police Accountability Program Coordinator position in the FY27 budget
 - Committed to working with the Council to develop an ordinance for this oversight body

Overview of the Body-Worn Camera Policy

Matt Sirigu, Labor Counsel

Collective Bargaining and the BWC Policy

- **March 2021:** The City and both police unions (Somerville Police Superior Officer Association ("SPSOA") and Somerville Police Employee Association ("SPEA")) agree to implement a BWC program.
- **June 2022:** The City Council cut funding included in the FY23 budget to implement a BWC program due to concerns about the March 2021 BWC Policy.
- **October - December 2025:** The City learned the state's BWC grant program was not being renewed and submitted a final application.
- **November 2025 - April 2026:** The City and police unions negotiated over a one-year contract that includes revisions to the BWC Policy consistent with:
 - City Council recommendations
 - Constituent feedback
 - MA BWC Task Force Report

Overview of the current BWC policy

- The former BWC Policy was a concise document that included terms governing:



- The 2026 SPSOA BWC Policy includes significant revisions to the former policy, including the following additions:



Overview of the current BWC policy

- **Unique components of Somerville's BWC policy:**
 - Officers may not view footage following a deadly use of force absent approval of the District Attorney's Office
 - No general surveillance of public demonstrations or other 1st Amendment protected activities
 - Specific reference to access to footage for police oversight bodies
 - Requirement for submission of use narratives when officers exercise discretion over camera use
 - Detailed access log provisions and records retention schedule
- **Public Access**
 - Public records requests will be overseen by the City Attorney's Office
 - By law, City must provide an initial response within 10 business days of a request and a full response within 25 business days
 - SPD maintains day-to-day custody of the data but does not have discretion over external records access

Surveillance Technology Use

- **Conditions of Acquisition and Use**
 - Before the grant is accepted and BWCs are acquired, the Council must first accept and approve the:
 - Technology Specific Surveillance Use Policy (“TSSUP”)
 - Asks: If a technology is acquired what are the legally enforceable operating rules?
 - Surveillance Technology Impact Report (“STIR”)
 - Asks: Is the acquiring of a technology justified by assessing the benefits and risks?
- **The TSSUP and STIR are documents put forward by the Mayor for Council approval that:**
 - May be amended with approval of the City Council;
 - Are substantively based on the terms of the 2026 SPSOA BWC Policy; and
 - Govern the City's use of surveillance technology.

Somerville Police Department and Body-Worn Cameras

Shumeane Benford, Chief, Somerville Police Department

Body-worn Cameras are a valuable and common tool used in policing

- Transparency
- Accountability
- Public Trust
- Training Opportunities
- Better protect victims of Domestic Violence

Body-worn Cameras are a valuable and common tool used in policing

- There are significant cost saving benefits to implementing BWCs.
 - Providing unbiased evidence to inform potential lawsuits and prevent costly false accusations
 - More efficient in conducting and closing out investigations
 - Proof for Victims
 - Exculpatory evidence for police
 - BWCs capacity to reduce excessive use of force or other violations reduces potential costs for legal settlements
- Somerville is the only municipality in the Greater Boston region without BWCs.
 - Somerville Housing Authority Police have BWCs.
 - Arlington, Boston, Cambridge, Chelsea, and Medford police departments all have BWCs.
 - It would be helpful when requesting Mutual Aid assistance.

Body-worn Cameras are a valuable and common tool used in policing

- Cambridge (2023)
 - Attorney Marsha Kazarosian, who represented Faisal's family and led an inquest for more information around the case, said if McMahon had been wearing a body camera at the time of the shooting, it could have brought more clarity to the case.
 - [The Cambridge Police Department] said, "We know this will be another tool that will go a long way to build trust and transparency with our community."
- North Andover (2026)
 - Judge Jeffrey T. Karp noted, "Perhaps the commonwealth could have easily met its burden if the officers had been wearing body cameras."

Phased Implementation Overview

Shumeane Benford, Chief, Somerville Police Department

Phased Implementation of the BWC program

- If the grant is accepted, SPD will begin working on the phased implementation of the BWC with the Superior Officers at the end of Summer 2026.
 - Overview of anticipated BWC functions and capabilities
- The program will be managed by a single Superior Officer in Phase 1 of the BWC Implementation.
 - Overview of Access
- If and when an agreement is reached with SPEA, then SPD would hire an unsworn civilian to help manage the BWC program.
 - The program would then have 2 staff members (Superior Officer + Civilian BWC Manager) overseeing the program for a total of 119 officers with cameras.
 - 31 Superior Officers
 - 88 Patrol Officers
 - Most municipalities have multiple staff members assisting with the BWC program management.

Financial Overview of Implementation

Jon Hillman, PSFA Project Manager
Matt Sirigu, Labor Counsel

What does the grant cover?

- In March 2026, Somerville was awarded a \$231,635.00 grant with no new match required from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security to the Police Department for a body-worn camera program. (see 26-0378).
 - 119 BWCs
 - 14 Transfer Stations
 - 15 Charging Docks
 - Contract Costs
- While there will be no additional salary costs to the City in FY27 for BWC implementation, this grant cannot be used for personnel costs or salary increases.

BWC Financials with SPSOA

This chart outlines the Grant covered expense costs associated with implementation for the SPSOA.

	Year 1 (FY27)	Year 2 (FY28)	Year 3 (FY29 and beyond)
Installation Costs	\$85,520.24	\$0	\$0
Salary Cost Increase	N/A	N/A	N/A
Recurring Subscription Costs	\$95,833.70	\$50,281.06	N/A

BWC Financials with SPSOA

This chart outlines the costs to the City associated with implementation for the SPSOA.

	Year 1 (FY27)	Year 2 (FY28)	Year 3 (FY29) and beyond
Installation Costs	\$0	\$0	\$0
Salary Cost Increase	\$105,000*	~\$105,000*	~\$105,000*
Recurring Subscription Costs	\$0	\$45,552.64	\$95.833.70

*The salary costs for FY27 implementation as of now totals \$105,000. This figure represents the 2% increase to SPSOA salaries associated with implementation of BWCs in FY27 and the funding for this increase comes from the funds set aside in 2019 in the Salary Wage Stabilization Fund. This wage increase becomes part of employees' base salary, for calculations such as COLA and pension.

The salary cost increase to the City prorated per month would be \$8,750.00.

BWC Financials if an agreement is signed with SPEA

- In the event SPEA comes to an agreement for the use of body-worn cameras, the salary increase for patrol officers who have 8 years + of service or more would total approximately \$110,000 annually in addition to the previously referenced SPSOA salary cost increase.
 - The number of Patrol Officers this 2% increase would apply to in FY27 is 47.
 - Should SPEA come to an agreement in FY27, the funds for the salary increase would come from the Salary Wage Contingency Fund where these dollars have been previously reserved.
 - The FY27 salary cost increase to the City would be \$9,166.67 per month, prorated to the date of implementation.

BWC Financials if an agreement is signed with SPEA

- The City would seek to establish a civilian role (Body-Worn Camera Coordinator) in SPD to manage the program. That position is currently estimated at \$117,000 including benefits.
 - \$90,000 annually in salary with the inclusion of a 30% fringe benefits estimate of \$27,000.
 - The monthly cost of for the Body-Worn Camera Coordinator would be approximately \$9,750.00 per month in FY27 if the phased implementation expanded to SPEA, prorated to the date of implementation.

Tonight's asks

1. Engage in a public discussion while this grant is still available
2. Vote on the Technology Specific Surveillance Use Policy ("TSSUP"), and the Surveillance Technology Impact Report ("STIR") for BWCs
3. Vote on the BWC grant of \$231,635.00 with no new match required from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety and Security

Thank You