



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

September 27, 2021

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC UTILITIES AND PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Jesse Clingan	Chair	Present	
William A. White Jr.	Vice Chair	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Ward Seven City Councilor	Present	

Others present: Lauren Racaniello-Mayor's Office, Luisa Oliveira-OSPCD, Eric Weisman-DPW, Councilor Mark Niedergang, Councilor JT Scott, Jay Hayden-Water & Sewer, Brian Postlewaite-Engineering, Nick Antanavica-ISD, Jill Lathan-DPW, Joel Diagostino-Eversource, Cate Mingoya-Mothers Out Front, Randi Soltysiak-Mothers Out Front and Chris Dwan-resident.

The meeting was held virtually and was called to order at 6:03 p.m. by Chairperson Clingan and adjourned at 7:57 p.m.

Approval of the March 30, 2021 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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Eversource

212225: That Eversource representatives be requested to appear before the next meeting of this Council's Committee on Public Utilities and Public Works to respond to the gas leak data along Somerville Avenue.

Discussed with 210739

Mr. Joel Diagostino from Eversource appeared before the committee to provide updates on this matter. He stated that Eversource sent two crews out to 721 and 725 Somerville Avenue to fix two leaks. After the last call, they fixed more leaks down the street. They will get their survey crews out there to check for more leaks and ask if Mothers Out Front and HEET would like to join them.

The chair allowed Councilor Scott to speak on this matter. There are other leaks on Somerville that makes it impossible to put in trees. Councilor Scott asked for a systemic fix that would provide lasting solution.

Councilor Ballantyne asked if Eversource has gone out before with Mothers Out Front and HEET. Mr. Diagostino stated this was done about four years ago and they are willing to go out with the community again.

Ms. Cate Mingoya from Mothers Out Front lives at the intersection of Somerville Ave in the Porter Square area and was disappointed with the issue. She is thankful that Eversource is willing to go out and looking forward to doing this as soon as possible. They went out with HEET and found more gas leaks.

Mr. Chris Dwan stated there is a memo on the city's website complaining about this matter. He stated that the city staff have told him that they are not planting trees on the heat island because they just die. He also stated that everywhere they checked in the area has a gas leak.

Ms. Randi Soltysiak from Mothers Out Front stated they would love to go out and measure with Eversource. She stated there is a long pipe with lots of leaks coming off of it.

Councilor White questioned how can one expert say there are leaks and others say there are no leaks. Mr. Diagostino stated there are different tools that may give different readings and they should be calibrated. Some times other devices may pick up sewer gases.

Councilor White would like a record made if there are any discrepancies highlighted in a report. He asked if there is a plan in place to replace the old pipes that are over 100 years old. Mr. Diagostino stated the bell joints are what have been leaking which are every 12 feet. They have a pilot using a robot to inspect the pipes. Councilor White suggests working with the city's engineering department on this matter that has been an ongoing issue.

Councilor Ballantyne asked about the pilot using the robot and will have to look at how many joints in the area. She asked when Mr. Diagostino can get started. He stated it will take about a month to get quotes and then they can start doing they surveys. Mr. Diagostino stated the process would include inserting a sleeve inside the pipe that coats the inside of the pipe and would take the pipe out of service. The robot would get inside the main area and fill any holes in the pipe.

Chair asked if Eversource could come back for the October meeting with any updates.

Mr. Brian Postlewaite (engineering) stated that Eversource has been working well with the city. He stated that trees are being seen as part of our infrastructure. He referenced a previous meeting when someone from Eversource stated the repairs probably would not happen until 2025. Mr. Diagostino stated that Eversource is committed to resolving this issue.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210739: That the Director of Engineering and the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management urge Eversource to fix gas leaks at 721 Somerville Avenue and nearby, as identified by HEET, and appear with Eversource staff at the next meeting of the Council's Committee on Public Utilities and Public Works to discuss this matter.

Discussed with 212225

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Items for updates

210587: That the Commissioner of Public Works submit a recycling plan for all buildings that do not receive city solid waste collection services, pursuant to Ordinance 11-40.

Mr. Weisman stated he was hoping to roll out this summer but there was another COVID spike. They are now hoping to have this rolled out by the October meeting.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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209691: That the Superintendent of Inspectional Services inform the Committee on Public Utilities and Public Works whether the newspaper boxes throughout the city are permitted.

Mr. Antanavica stated the newspaper boxes are not currently permitted. Mr. Long was working on putting this together to permit the boxes. He was not able to complete and he will continue to work with the clerk's office on this matter. They are planning on getting this in in time for an update for the October meeting.

Councilor White updated the committee on the purpose of this request. The concern was regarding people putting boxes in, not tending to them and they had trash inside.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210996: That the Director of SPCD, the Director of Parks and Recreation, or the Commissioner of Public Works discuss with this Council the installation of electrical outlets in parks, playgrounds and other public places to charge cell phones, computers, and other such equipment.

Ms. Oliveira provided an update that their dept does not recommend retrofitting older parks with this process. If they retrofit older parks, they would have to cut into the hardscape to put in electrical conduits. She has reached out to Cambridge who has used a special bench, but she heard it does not hold up well with the weather and they are not using anymore. When the city designs parks, it's in compliance with ADA, and could be the pathway for ADA or playground regulations. Newer parks have electrical outlets.

The Chair sponsored Councilor Niedergang to speak on this matter and he does not see it as a top priority for the city. He is satisfied with the response from the administration that they have not heard from anyone in the community meetings that an area is needed to charge phones as being a priority.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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211449: That the Administration create clean, safe, and permanent public restrooms in several outdoor locations, similar to the "Portland Loos" that have been installed in Cambridge.

Ms. Lathan reached out to the Portland Loos and set up a meeting with ISD and Water & Sewer. It can be placed in Somerville once a location has been identified. She is looking at how many and where to locate the loos. Maybe pilot one or two initially. The company is willing, ready

and will need some lead time which could be 8-12 months, especially since these are made per order.

Chair Clingan asked what can the city do to move this forward by the next meeting in October. Ms. Lathan stated the preliminary work has been done and will update the committee in the next meeting. Ms. Racaniello asked the city councilors to reach out to Ms. Lathan and Mr. Kress, if they have any potential locations. Ms. Lathan stated these loos have a maintenance component that will require daily cleaning.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211595: That the Director of Mobility and the Commissioner of Public Works work with the State Delegation to remove the hostile architecture public benches from the Davis Square MBTA station.

The chair talked to Mr. Rawson who reached out to the state delegation and to the MBTA. MBTA is balancing ADA compliances. Ms. Lathan stated she has not been a part of the conversations and will reach out to Mr. Rawson. Councilor Ballantyne reached out to State Senator Pat Jehlen stating it would have been nice if the MBTA had reached out to them. She also spoke to the Homeless Coalition executive director who said they had not heard any complaints from the MBTA and it's not a problem with people sleeping inside the T station.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211596: That the Commissioner of Public Works ensure that no hostile architecture public benches are installed in the city.

Ms. Lathan stated they do not install these benches nor do they have a policy. Mr. Weisman stated that the benches installed by the city are standard non-hostile and do not have any intermediate armrests.

Councilor Ballantyne stated she did not believe it was the city who install these benches. Some of the parks are not city owned, but state owned. She wanted to make sure the city speaks to the city councilors before installing any such benches which would need the Disabilities Commission input before installing.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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211718: That the Director of Water and Sewer discuss with the Committee on Public Utilities and Public Works the notification process regarding non-emergency work.

Mr. Jay Haydan explained the process for non-emergency water shutdown. They research the outage area, then create a map of the area affect that is emailed to engineering, health human, and other city departments along with Eversource. The foreman creates a flyer to notify the residents of any shutdowns. They have a dedicated person who sends out an email to the communications dept with a city alert to all those affected by shutdown. The alert will arrive via text or phone call. If they cannot complete within 48 hours they will send the notification on the Friday before shutdown. The contractor that is hired is also responsible for alerting the resident.

Councilor Ballantyne asked about work being done during the day, what happens if the work is not complete during normal hours, are residents notified if they work is continued later in day.

She stated that residents would like to get calls if the work continues later in the day, to let them know about the unexpected circumstances. Mr. Hayden stated he and his team discuss these matters and most of the time, they are able to complete the work within the given time. They knock on doors and some times use reverse 311 calls to let residents know about the issue. Councilor Ballantyne suggested a quick call to the Ward councilor to let them know that work will not be completed on time so they are able to answer questions from the community.

Councilor White suggested to maybe use police car blow horns to announce the issues, as is done during snow emergencies. Mr. Hayden said they may start using the message boards that is used for paving work.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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212321: That the Commissioner of Public Works replace all the open garbage cans in city parks and on the Community Path with closed rat-proof garbage cans.

Ms. Lathan stated they have been looking at this request city wide, with the understanding that rats are issues. They have had discussions with ISD and will discuss with the rats' czar, once that position is filled. Mr. Weisman has been looking at costs to replace barrels. They are trying to be more systematic about replacing the barrels. He met with Big Belly company on Friday walking through the community paths, discussed data on the parks and existing decorative barrel inventory.

Councilor White asked what the frequency of when the trash is picked up on the paths. Mr. Weisman stated that during the busy season, the trash is picked up every other day. Ms. Lathan talked to the grounds crew and the pick up of trash is very frequent, especially on weekends.

Chair Clingan sponsored someone from the community to speak, Ms. Juana Jean Horstman. Ms. Horstman asked the city to report on open trash barrels and would like the compacting solar cans. She said that sometimes the city does not have enough staff and the trash barrels are not emptied regularly. She also asked the city to be highly effective to price out the compacting barrels, start with 15 larger parks in the neighborhoods.

Chair Clingan asked Mr. Weisman if he could have pricing for the Big Belly for the October meeting. Ms. Lathan needs to review where the money will come from to provide the barrels.

Ms. Racaniello stated they are still going through the hiring process for the environmental health coordinator.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Housekeeping

211719: That the Commissioner of Public Works repair the street lights at 31-33 Bailey Road.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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