



# CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

## CLERK OF COMMITTEES

June 7, 2021

### REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Jefferson Thomas ("J.T.") Scott	Chair	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Vice Chair	Present	
William A. White Jr.	City Councilor At Large	Present	
Mary Jo Rossetti	City Councilor at Large	Present	
Wilfred N. Mbah	City Councilor at Large	Present	

Others present: Lauren Racaniello-Mayor's Office, Ed Bean-Auditor/Finance, Michael Mastrobuoni-SomerStat, Fire Chief Breen, John Long-City Clerk, Assistant Fire Chief Major, Steve Craig-Constituent Services, Denise Taylor-Communications, Denise Molina-Capers-Racial and Social Justice, Frank Golden-Assessor, Nick Antanavica-ISD, Emily Monea-Mayor's Office, and Nick Salerno-Elections. The Chair sponsored a few people from the community to speak, Crystal Turner from the Somerville Women's Commission, Bonnie Denis from the Disabilities Commission, Derek Rice from the Human Rights Commission and Chris Spicer-Hankle from the Human Rights Commission.

The meeting was held virtually and was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Chairperson Scott and adjourned at 10:50 p.m.

### Approval of the May 25, 2021 Minutes

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>ACCEPTED</b>
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### Review of the FY-22 Budget

- **Revenue**

Mr. Bean presented FY22 Summary. The revenues to fund the general fund budget municipal appropriation is \$286M and will need to raise additional revenue. The estimates were submitted by department heads. Mr. Bean stated that revenues will change as we go through the fiscal year with some uncertainty due to the pandemic. Mr. Bean shared slides with the general fund report as of today and the city is doing 98% of revenue budget and will exceed revenue budget as of June 30<sup>th</sup>. The proposed tax levy is \$202,570 which includes top real estates taxes. The debt service for the high school is going forward and is posted on the city's website. The real estate taxes assume \$9.5M which is the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest of

new growth. The chief assessor and staff will continue to watch the revenue until June 30<sup>th</sup>. If new growth comes in, the city assessor will recalculate in the fall.

Mr. Bean stated that the excise taxes that is some of the revenue was not paid on time. The revenue exceeded by \$500,000 and will end up with \$6M.

He also stated there is declining car registration in Somerville and is about 9% down from previous year. Additionally, local meal taxes was about \$2.1M, exceeding estimate this fiscal year at a 54% increase over this year's budget for meals.

Hotel/motel \$443,000 was the budget and will not make it due to the pandemic with only \$276,000 in for hotel/motels. DOR is waiving and deferring until this calendar year and will be level funded.

There are pilot program payments with Tufts University even though we do not have a formal agreement. The city expects to receive \$475,000 this year and will pursue from Tufts. The city is also expecting \$81,000 from Partners which is now known as Mass General Brigham.

Mr. Bean stated that State aid is projecting that all communities will receive 3.5%.

Building permits will be increased to \$8.5M which is a conservative estimate. Parking fines and ordinance violations will increase as people are going back to work.

Mr. Bean stated all this information is available on the city's website with all the debt service projects and slides presented tonight.

Councilor Rossetti asked Mr. Inacio why planning and zoning is flat lined. Mr. Inacio stated this year the city is ahead in special permits with a lot of the larger projects going into permits. This year will be over on the special permits and will turn into building permits in 2022.

Councilor Mbah asked Mr. Bean about the FY22 estimates impact of the debt exclusion. This information is posted on the city's website.

Chair Scott asked about the \$9.5M increase with the majority from construction. Mr. Golden stated that 65% comes from six or seven major projects in the city.

- **Elections**

Mr. Salerno stated they will be asking for far less than last year. OM will be 18% less. Salary is basically collected bargaining and merit increases.

Councilor Rossetti asked Mr. Salerno about the three census mailings this year. Mr. Salerno stated this is a routine that was put in place a couple of years, mandated to do this by January 1<sup>st</sup> and also mandated to do postcard mailing in May or June. The city is also mandated to do a follow up mailing in March.

- **Executive Administration**

Ms. Monea stated that projections are up 7% for FY22 for PS. OM lines have been returned to pre-COVID levels. OM is projected up 35% for FY22. The request for Youth Employment, Official Celebrations line and Charter Reform Study to fund the work of the Charter Review Committee. Additionally, funds needed for training and two positions for the incoming mayor.

- **City Council**

Mr. Long presented the budget, OM projections are down 77% for FY22, main difference is that the opening Professional & Technical is now with the RSJ. Professional & Technical Services allocated in FY21 for the Civilian Oversight process have been removed for FY22 and reallocated to the RSJ department. There is a new line for legal services for the first time ever for the city councilors to have outside legal counsel.

Councilor Rossetti asked Mr. Mastrobuoni to edit the line under OM to remove the language of ongoing and existing. She also stated \$25,000 is a very low figure for outside counsel and just a start. Please strike the language of ongoing/exiting litigation.

**Councilor Rossetti motioned that the administration strikes the words ongoing/existing in the 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph and add a new line of legal services has been proposed for FY22. This motion was Laid on the Table.**

- **Clerk of Committees**

Mr. Long was present to answer any questions. Chair Scott asked about extra funding in the budget. Mr. Mastrobuoni stated the city is planning for more work in FY22 with the continuation of virtual meetings. Mr. Mastrobuoni will get back to the committee on this matter. The Chair stated the demand for clerking may be more and it would be helpful to have a clerk for community meetings. The budget had additional \$18,000 to support the virtual meeting and may need additional funding of 5% to support the new city councilors and longer meetings.

**Chair Scott motioned requesting the mayor allocate appropriate funds for hardware to administrate hybrid meetings and also asked for funding for the city councilor or clerks' budget for support staff. This motion was Laid on the table.**

- **City Clerk & Licensing**

Mr. Long stated that PS is projected up 24% for FY22 and OM is projected up 17% for FY22. He also requested a new position for an assistant city clerk. Additionally, the changes are due to collective bargaining agreements and merit increases base on annual performance reviews.

Councilor White asked Mr. Long if the zoning ordinance could be friendlier. He suggests there be a brief summary of what is allowed in the zones which would be helpful for new home owners.

Councilor Rossetti asked Mr. Long a question about how senior issues are handled in his department. She asked Mr. Long to ask how they are supporting senior citizens issues at regular meetings.

- **Racial and Social Justice**

Ms. Molina-Capers shared slides stated she has been dedicated to listening to members of the community and others. She has also listened to 2020 Racism sessions findings. The proposed goals for the first year are to hire eight positions such as: deputy director, public

information officer, RSJ coordinator, community engagement specialist, ADA coordinator, analyst, project specialist and Commissions coordinator. The budget proposed eliminates the DEI manager and the work will be handled by other staffers. RSJ will be focusing on internal, external and elected officials to include training and build an equity lens.

Ms. Molina-Capers stated the commissions were consulted previously and aware of the change in structure.

Chair Scott sponsored a few people from the public to ask questions. Crystal Turner from the Women's Commission stated that the commission as a whole was not consulted about the changes. On April 7, the women's commission requested a meeting with the mayor. Several other meetings were requested. Ms. Turner believes the decisions were done as a top down and not with community stakeholders and they feel blindsided. She proposed a recommendation that's inclusive and transparent for stakeholders to discuss structural changes and hold a public forum. Mr. Mastrobuoni stated the phasing of the hiring for RSJ is for \$64,000 and anticipating hiring in November. Some positions will be fully funded while others are not. The \$64,000 position will be split for staffing needs.

Ms. Bonnie Denis from the Disabilities Commission stated they were not consulted at all and never met with Ms. Capers. She has been the chair for this commission for over a year. She feels that are not getting the support they need and have been asking for from the city. She heard from the HHS, not from RSJ that they would be listed under RSJ. She stated the city is not meeting its legal or moral obligations. Ms. Denis recommends a stand-alone department and could use an ADA coordinator.

Councilor Rossetti asked Ms. Racaniello to have a conversation with the mayor, HHS and RSJ about the structure of the commissions and the miscommunications.

Mr. Derrick Rice from the Human Right Commission was also sponsored to speak at the committee meeting. He stated the news came to them very late. The HRC has not had more than 12 out of the 14 members.

Chair Scott asked where the funding of \$750,000 went and does not show up in the budget. Mr. Mastrobuoni stated the \$750,000 still exists and they are trying to figure out the best way to allocate the funds.

The chair also sponsored Christopher Spicer Hankle from the Human Rights Commission. He talked about the hate incidents, including Asians and others.

**Chair Scott motioned requesting that the mayor set aside additional \$300,000 in a segregated fund to be set aside that would be available for appropriations mid-year. This Motion was Laid on the table.**

- **Communications**

Ms. Taylor PS down 33% for FY22 and up 16% for OM.

She stated that communications created a range of pandemic mailings. Additionally, there was a 72% increase in website traffic. The Communications department continues to issue timely and informative multilingual information. They would like to hire a SOIA director

(SomerViva Office of Immigrant Affairs) which is part of the communications department. Immigrant Affairs will have a dedicated department with 5.5 persons. Ms. Taylor stated they have enough equipment for five meetings per night. There will be one unit for the committee room and one for city hall. Additionally, they have been focusing on equipment for hybrid setup with screens and the software to connect with the community and city staff. This will be funded through the PEG fund. The Chair asked about the mobile kit which is \$1500 a piece and includes a screen and software. Ms. Taylor stated that the people who are remote will have access to a camera. There will be a large screen in the back of the council so that councilors will have the best view for community participation. The Chair asked about using Zoom for meetings and Ms. Taylor stated they are hoping to have a second prescription for the Zoom account. Additionally, the SOIA will have \$10,000 to get translations services which is about \$30-\$80 an hour.

Councilor Rossetti asked Ms. Taylor, if there is someone in the department to handle senior citizen issues and how are they addressed. Councilor Rossetti received this question from one of her constituents and asked all the department heads this same question.

**Chair Scott motioned to request \$80,000 be set aside for a community engagement specialist for the city councilors and for committee meetings. This Motion was Laid on the table.**

- **Constituent Services**

Mr. Craig stated that the PS up 22% and OM up 15%.

He stated that his department received the largest volume of public requests since 2005, which is 25% more than their historical numbers even with the addition of short-term staff. He stated that many seniors, folks with mobility issues and households that do not speak English as their first language were the ones that reached out the most. Mr. Craig is requesting a service operations manager and reclassification of a senior customer service representative.

Councilor Mbah asked Mr. Craig about constituents calling for ADA issues. Mr. Craig stated they refer the calls to ADA coordinator or assistant them with completing the forms or to assist them with getting on the website.

Councilor Rossetti asked about the quality manager position that is vacant and has been vacant for quite a while. Councilor Rossetti asked Mr. Mastrobuoni for an updated vacancy report and he will post this information on the city's website. Councilor Rossetti asked if the new position will assist with Mr. Craig's goal to respond to those who reach out to 311. The new service operations vacant position is slated to be filled on September 1<sup>st</sup>.

- **SomerViva Office of Immigrant Affairs**

Ms. Taylor stated they are still in the process of hiring the director with strong candidates. The challenges are ongoing with many immigrant families having limited language proficiencies. There is also a proposal for a part time Spanish language community engagement special position to meet the growing demands of the community.

- **Inspectional Services**

Mr. Antanavica stated PS is up 15% and OM up 9%.

There are 3 new positions proposed: Deputy Sealer, Senior Zoning Review Planner and Director of Administration and Finance. The Superintendent and Deputy Director positions have been reclassified for FY22. There are several vacant positions and they are actively interviewing for these positions. There is a new building inspector who will be starting on 6/21.

Councilor Ballantyne asked for clarification on the changes. Recently a neighbor did not hear back from ISD for 4 months on a request for renovation. She asked if the proposed changes will help speed up the process. Mr. Antanavica stated that with the new zoning codes, the requests are taking a little longer. He was also asked about the new electrical building codes and if it includes solar panels, onsite generators and battery packs. Councilor Ballantyne asked if the code is keeping up with the type of technology that is out there on the market such as for sustainability.

Councilor Mbah asked about ADA violations. Mr. Antanavica stated they have coordination meetings with restaurant setups to identify which ones are having issues. One of the duties is for the inspectors to follow up with ADA complaints. Mr. Antanavica stated that ISD receives approximately 40 complaints a day and need to prioritize which ones need a quicker response.

Chair Scott stated that the chair of the disabilities commission went into a new building that had an eight inch drop without a ramp.

Councilor Rossetti asked about goals for the rats' situation in the city. A lot of constituencies have stated they feel that the bait boxes are failing the city. She asked why the city stopped using dry ice. Mr. Antanavica stated it's a liability with the pest control company. In order to use the dry ice, there are specifics about the distance in where the dry ice is placed. She stated that Boston is going back to use dry ice who had stopped using it at one time and now back using it. Mr. Antanavica stated they are talking to their contractor about using dry ice again. Councilor Rossetti also asked about stepped up efforts to handle senior citizen issues.

Councilor Rossetti asked about reclassifying his position which changes the responsibility of the position. She also asked about the deputy director position and how long the position has been open, which was opened in April. Mr. Antanavica stated they are trying to redefine what the position will be and responsibilities. He is hoping the position will be filled in the late summer. Mr. Mastrobuoni stated the deputy director position is budgeted for the full year. Councilor Rossetti asked about sizable increases for a lot of Mr. Antanavica's staff. Mr. Antanavica stated that winter positions that work outside get a 10% differential for things like clothing. He also stated that a lot of the positions in ISD are coming up for retirement and there are longevity payments which would be the difference from the base salary to total compensation. It was stated that 35% of ISD are coming up for retirement.

Chair Scott asked if there has been any thought on creating junior level positions as a way to introduce Somerville residents to the trades. Mr. Antanavica stated he has been trying to set up a succession plan which is hard with the union. He is also looking to bringing in building inspectors, too. There was also a discussion about maybe an intern workshop with the high school students.

**Chair Scott motioned that the mayor creates 2 new positions with ISD targeted with ADA expertise with review planner position and inspecting infrastructure. This motion was Laid on the table.**

- **Fire**

Chief Breen stated his PS is up 2.8%, OM projected flat for FY22. He stated that the grant match line is projected at \$54,836 for a 107% increase. Chief Breen proposed a new director of Finance & Administration position which will be 75% funded in Police and 25% funded in Fire.

Councilor Rossetti asked about training in hazardous materials. The Chief wants 12 new technicians, the goal is to have at least 3 hazmat techs on shifts at all times. Assistant Chief Major stated that currently the stipends are not budgeted yet until the training is done which may not be addressed until FY23.

- **Fire Alarm**

Chief Breen stated the PS is up 3.6% for new collective bargaining agreements, OM costs are unchanged. Chief Breen believes there should be a combined communications center to include 911 and fire alarm operators.

- **Emergency Management**

Chief Breen stated this position is a 960 position Homeland Security Coordinator.

**Referenced Material:**

- Finance Committee Memo - RSJ - FY-22 Budget