



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Public Health and Public Safety Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, November 12, 2024

6:00 PM

The meeting took place remotely via Zoom and was called to order at 6:01 PM by Chair McLaughlin and adjourned at 7:43 PM on a roll call vote of 2 in favor (Councilors Davis and McLaughlin), none against and 1 absent (Councilor Sait).

Others present:

Nick Antanavica – Director of Inspectional Services, Chief Shumeane Benford - SPD, Captain Jeffrey Digregorio – SPD, Hannah O’Halloran – Director of Homeless Services - Somerville Homeless Coalition, Kimberly Hutter – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Roll Call

Present: Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin, Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis and Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-1386](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Public Health and Public Safety Committee Meeting of September 23, 2024.

RESULT: ACCEPTED
AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, Ward Six City Councilor Davis and Ward Five City Councilor Sait

Homelessness

2. Order (ID # [24-0062](#))
By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Strezo, Councilor Wilson and Councilor Davis
That the Director of Health and Human Services provide monthly updates to this Council’s Committee on Public Health and Public Safety regarding ongoing efforts to address homelessness.

A memo from the Administration regarding this item has been submitted to the committee and referenced at the end of these minutes.

Liaison Hutter gave a brief update and spoke about the installation of sharps receptacles. Councilor Davis inquired about the types and number of sharps receptacles being deployed and asked that the Administration provide a response to committee.

Captain Digregorio reported that directed patrols have been in operation 24 hours per day at Seven Hills Park, Statue Park, Davis Square and along the

bike path. During those 900 patrols, 21 arrests were made in Davis Square for various offenses including violent crimes, drug sales and outstanding warrants. Captain Digregorio explained that the increased interaction with people tends to interrupt undesirable activity and he noted that the number of calls for a 4-week period decreased vs. the same time period last year.

Director Antanavica noted that ISD also saw a decrease in calls and in the quantity of items being picked up. Ms. O'Halloran stated that the Somerville Homeless Coalition also noted a decrease in calls and she informed the committee that 16 individuals were placed into positive situations. She went on to say that some key arrests, and the services being offered, calmed things down in the area and caused some individuals to move to other areas. Overall, she feels that progress is being made, although it might not be that visible, and feels that, overall, it was handled as it should have been, with teamwork and a balanced approach, adding that she has not heard any negative feedback from the unhoused population in the area. Ms. O'Halloran told the committee that there are approximately 15-20 people at the park in the daytime and about 7 who sleep there at night and she noted that the engagement center saw over 6,000 visits this year, so far. Ms. O'Halloran commented that the city's ongoing support was helpful to the coalition and that she appreciates that the city sought perspectives from multiple players in order to effectuate a response to the situation. She also noted that some of the individuals arrested were not of the unhoused community.

Chief Benford stated that arrest and enforcement is one part of the balanced approach plan to address the situation, along with providing services. He noted that there was some use of some resources from across the city to address the situation and Captain Digregorio commented that it does stretch the department thin in other areas. Chair McLaughlin inquired about crime reporting and Chief Benford replied that all police responses are tracked. Chair McLaughlin asked that data on the arrests in the area be provided.

Liaison Hutter said that weekly huddles will continue to address the situation and she noted that there has been a statewide shift in the shelter system that will affect Somerville, but the Administration will continue to advocate to the city's state delegation for additional funding and support in addressing housing issues.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

3. Order
(ID # [24-1299](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Wilson, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Sait, Councilor Mbah and Councilor Clingan
That the Director of Health and Human Services update this Council on interdepartmental efforts to establish a Warming Center at the Cummings School and the repairs needed to accomplish this.

A memo from the Administration regarding this item has been submitted to the committee and referenced at the end of these minutes.

At this time, the Cummings building is still being evaluated to determine what repairs are needed to make the facility useable. The plan is to have this building replace the former warming center at the Armory. Director Antanavica reported that ISD is coordinating with other city departments to make sure the proper upgrades are being made to the building and he noted that there are no structural issues. He also stated that some of the rooms in the building have been cleared out and that a contractor has been hired to upgrade the fire building's alarm system.

Liaison Hutter informed the committee that a public meeting has been scheduled for November 18th to discuss this matter and to, hopefully, provide some clarity about the many uncertainties that exist, including a timeline.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 4. Order (ID # [24-1209](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr.
That the Director of Health and Human Services update this Council on the establishment of an Overdose Prevention Center, including a timeline for implementation.

Liaison Hutter stated that the Administration is dedicated to pursuing and continues to advocate for this matter, but no timeline has been established yet..

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 5. Resolution (ID # [24-1207](#))

By Councilor Davis
That the Administration update this City Council on efforts to open an Overdose Prevention Center.

Discussed with item #24-1209.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Davis Square

- 6. Resolution (ID # [24-1206](#))

By Councilor Davis
That the Administration update the Ward Six Councilor in writing on efforts to address open substance use in Seven Hills Park and other areas.

AMENDED: That the Administration update ~~the Ward Six Councilor~~ this

City Council in writing on efforts to address open substance use in Seven Hills Park and other areas.

A memo from the Administration regarding this item has been submitted to the committee and referenced at the end of these minutes.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

7. Resolution
(ID # [24-1204](#))

By Councilor Davis, Councilor Wilson and Councilor Burnley Jr.
That the Administration install or replace needle disposal receptacles in Seven Hills Park and other areas with secure, appropriately designed equipment.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

8. Resolution
(ID # [24-1201](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Strezo
That the Administration greatly increase the trash and needle pickup in and around Davis Square, including Seven Hills Park and the Community Path.

A memo from the Administration regarding this item has been submitted to the committee and referenced at the end of these minutes.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

9. Resolution
(ID # [24-1200](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld
That the Administration discuss with this Council, its policies and plans to address the widespread and open drug use in Davis Square.

A memo from the Administration regarding this item has been submitted to the committee and referenced at the end of these minutes.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Police

10. Order
(ID # [24-1414](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Mbah, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Clingan and Councilor Sait

That the Chief of Police update this Council on how the Police Department will ensure members of the public remain separated during counter-protests.

A memo from the Administration regarding this item has been submitted to the committee and referenced at the end of these minutes.

Captain Digregorio summarized the memo and said that the department's

policy was updated and reflects best practices, adding that the Police Department’s number one goal is safety and, to that end, it works to set up ground rules and expectations so that people are afforded the opportunity to exercise their right to free speech. If officers witness an assault they will take action. Chair McLaughlin asked about the pro Palestine/pro Israel protests happening daily in the city and asked if the police would get involved in a situation where 2 people were arguing in a public space, but there was no violence. Captain Digregorio explained that police could be present at these protests, but they would want to protect the right of free speech. He noted that no additional police resources have been diverted to these protests and that there is not a standing a standing police presence there.

Councilor Sait asked if the Police Department wants groups to reach out when planning/holding a protest and Captain Digregorio affirmed that desire and told the committee that officers have conversations about protests at roll calls and staff meetings and receive bi-annual training in crowd control for best practices.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 11. Order (ID # [24-0471](#))

By Councilor Wilson, Councilor Scott, Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Mbah

That the Director of Racial and Social Justice update this Council on the promised road map from the consultant for implementing the recommendations in the report on Police Staffing and Operations delivered in November.

A memo from the Administration regarding this item has been submitted to the committee and referenced at the end of these minutes.

Chief Benford had conversations with the RSJ Director and the Mayor made it clear to him that the recommendation were a top priority. He spoke about employing a community approach and having early meetings to establish the foundations to move ahead. The Chief has met with task force members and had preliminary discussions with the Mayor to develop strategic plans to get the work done. He also said that a broader conversation will be held to implement a framework for implementing the recommendations and changes.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 12. Resolution (ID # [24-1199](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld

That the Administration discuss with this Council, the programs and services being offered to the un-housed population in Davis Square.

A memo from the Administration regarding this item has been submitted to the committee and referenced at the end of these minutes.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Buildings

13. Order
(ID # [24-1413](#))
- By Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Mbah, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Sait, Councilor Scott, Councilor Strezo and Councilor Wilson

That the Director of Inspectional Services submit a written report of outstanding 311 requests submitted for the Edgerly School building and provide an update to this Council with a plan to ensure that staff and students have safe and appropriate facilities.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

14. Order
(ID # [24-1326](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin and Councilor Strezo
That the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator take the necessary measures to ensure ADA compliance for the second floor of 165 Broadway for the purposes of expanding youth services.

Liaison Hutter reported that she had no additional information on timeline and said that the city is launching an ADA Transition Task Force. She said that the net steps would deal with the building's 2nd floor and elevator, however there is no concrete information regarding when the work would be done. Chair McLaughlin asked for an estimate to make the building ADA compliant and wants to know if the work could be fast-tracked. Liaison Hutter explained that a full assessment would take a significant investment, but she will ask the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management to provide a list of the remaining work to be done. She also told the committee that teen spaces are a priority for the Administration.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

15. Order
(ID # [24-1034](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin and Councilor Davis
That the Director of Economic Development discuss outdoor seating policies and fees, especially pertaining to small businesses.

A memo from the Administration regarding this item has been submitted to the committee and referenced at the end of these minutes.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

16. Resolution (ID # [24-0478](#)) By Councilor Strezo
That the Administration convene the appropriate departments to discuss the monitoring efforts of the wild turkey population within Somerville and the surrounding regions.
- A memo from the Administration regarding this item has been submitted to the committee and referenced at the end of these minutes.
- Captain Digregorio informed the committee that wild turkeys are a protected game bird.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**

Referenced Documents:

- PHPS - 2024-11-12 CHW Info (with 24-1199)
- PHPS - 2024-11-12 Living with Turkeys (with24-0478)
- PHPS - 2024-11-12 HHS Memo (with 240062, 24-1199, 24-1201, 24-1299)
- PHPS - 2024-11-12 Memo_OutdoorDiningFees_wAppendicies (with 24-1034)
- PHPS - 2024-11-12 Memo SPD (with 24-0471, 24-0478, 24-1200, 24-1206, 24-1414)