



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Housing and Community Development Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 20, 2024

6:00 PM

This meeting was held in the Committee Room and virtually via Zoom, was called to order at 6:01 pm by Chair Strezo, and adjourned at 7:21 pm with a roll call vote of two in favor (Councilor Clingan and Chair Strezo), none opposed, and one absent (Councilor Mbah).

Others present: Hannah Carrillo – Mayor’s Office, Tom Galligani – OSPCD, Demetrios Vidalis – Water and Sewer, Jon Bronenkant – PSUF, Stephanie Widzowski – Clerk of Committees.

Roll Call

Present: City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo, City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah and Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-0254](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Housing and Community Development Committee Meeting of February 28, 2024.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: City Councilor At Large Strezo, City Councilor At Large Mbah and Ward Four City Councilor Clingan

2. Order (ID # [24-0070](#)) By Councilor Strezo and Councilor Wilson That the Director of Parks and Recreation discuss how inclusive playground accessibility is being considered in future playground plans and redesign projects.

Chair Strezo sponsored Holly Simione and Nicole Cannon, who gave their perspectives as parents of children with disabilities. Ms. Simione stressed the importance of including disabled people in the design and planning process. Ms. Cannon highlighted the urgent need for accessible recess, especially at the Capuano school.

Public Space Planner Jon Bronenkant said that PSUF is considering the Kennedy School as a site for a universal playground and listed considerations for choosing a site. Responding to a question from Chair Strezo, he talked about next steps. Dir. Galligani added that there is an item in the Finance Committee for CPA funds to be used for the Kennedy playground - about \$32,000 - and that OSPCD is working on a 5-7 year plan for open spaces and parks that should be available by the end of June. Mr. Bronenkant added that Capital Projects is involved on this and on playground renovations.

Councilor Clingan suggested implementing universal features in a quick build at a playground that already needs renovations. He asked Chair Strezo to keep the item in committee and requested a list of possible features to replace existing structures in parks.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

3. Order
(ID # [24-0047](#))

By Councilor Mbah

That the Director of Housing and the Director of the Office of Housing Stability report on the feasibility of fair housing enforcement.

Liaison Carrillo said that she and Chair Strezo have been meeting regularly with the Fair Housing Commission and staff in the Housing Division and are receiving data directly from MCAD. She said that it would likely require a Home Rule Petition (HRP) to make enforcement feasible, which is difficult to achieve. Councilor Clingan asked what Boston and Cambridge are doing for enforcement and asked for historical context on the issue. Liaison Carrillo said that Hanalei Steinhart in OSPCD would be a good resource.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

4. Resolution
(ID # [24-0073](#))

By Councilor Strezo

That the Administration, in conjunction with the Housing and Water and Sewer Departments, provide optional, affordable, water utility assessments in low-income housing units and in benevolent landlord and subsidized landlord housing, whereby residents would pay their own water and sewer bills.

Dir. Vidalis spoke to the ongoing meter replacement program, which is about 85% complete. Councilor Clingan asked if there is a way to intervene on leaks, and Dir. Vidalis said that it will be possible to send alerts once meters are replaced. He said the department is also exploring options for disputing or forgiving bills - currently there is an online form for filing a dispute.

Dir. Vidalis gave an overview on current efforts and considerations for water utility assessments. Water and Sewer has been using Raftelis as a consultant. Dir. Vidalis also requested the Council's advocacy to help continue an ARPA-funded program, Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP), which is scheduled to end this month and in which 900 Somerville residents are enrolled. Liaison Carrillo said the Administration is planning to increase outreach efforts about existing programs, and Dir. Vidalis also mentioned senior discounts on water bills. Councilor Clingan asked questions about fee structures and about the number of low income residents moving into affordable units paying their own water or sewer bills. Liaison Carrillo noted that they are still investigating how property owners assess fees.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED