



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Legislative Matters Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, May 28, 2024

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Davis at 6:02pm and adjourned at 8:01pm with a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Ewen-Campen, Mbah, Burnley, Davis), none opposed, and 1 absent (Councilor Scott).

Others present: Charles Breen – SFD, Hannah Carillo – Mayor’s Office, Natasha Frazier – Assistant Clerk of Committees, Brian Postlewaite – DPW, Brad Rawson – OSPCD, Neha Singh – IGA.

Roll Call

Present: Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis, City Councilor At Large Willie Burnley Jr., City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah and Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen

Absent: Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-0709](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Legislative Matters Committee Meeting of May 20, 2024.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**

AYE: Ward Six City Councilor Davis, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., City Councilor At Large Mbah and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen

ABSENT: Ward Two City Councilor Scott

2. Ordinance (ID # [23-1461](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr.
Amending Section 12-116 of the Code of Ordinances to create a Safe Streets ordinance, to expedite protected bike lanes.

Councilors Davis and Burnley provided background information regarding this item. The Committee viewed and discussed the language proposed by the Solicitor’s Office for Sections 12-116.3 and 12-116.5, which is highlighted in yellow on the document dated 4/30/24 and available as an attachment to this agenda item. The proposed language states, “All obligations and requirements set forth in this section are subject to appropriation and to the capital planning process.” Liaison Carrillo stated that the Administration is okay with the language being “All obligations and requirements set forth in this section are subject to appropriation” and removing the capital planning process language. Following discussion on the matter, Councilors pointed out that the proposed language from the Solicitor’s Office highlighted in yellow is not being considered by the Committee during the present meeting. Rather, everything in the attached

document except for the highlighted language was being considered by the Committee.

Chair Davis introduced four amendments to the existing amendment that was referred to the Committee. Councilor Burnley stated that he had concerns about the term “improvements” and would like to ensure it is used appropriately in the Ordinance due to its specific meaning. Councilor Burnley explained that the intention behind this is to ensure that the language in the Ordinance aligns with the actions that can be reasonably expected from the City.

Chair Davis moved to amend the language in Section 12-116.2 (b) to replace the word “improve” with the word “enhance” to read as follows: **As feasible, City of Somerville shall incorporate complete streets infrastructure into existing streets to enhance the safety and convenience of users, construct and enhance the transportation network for each category of users, and foster economic development and new employment.**

Chair Davis moved to amend the language in Section 12-116.2 (c) to replace the word “improvements” with the word “modifications” to read as follows: **The City of Somerville recognizes that complete streets may be achieved through single elements incorporated into a particular project or incrementally through a series of smaller modifications or maintenance activities over time.**

Chair Davis moved to amend the language in Section 12-116.2 (d) to replace the language after “opportunity” with the following language: **to make streets and the transportation network better for all users.**

Chair Davis moved to amend the language in Section 12-116.2 (g) by replacing the existing language in this subsection with the following language: **Bicycle, pedestrian, and transit facilities shall be incorporated, consistent with this ordinance, in all improvements.**

The Motions were approved on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Ewen-Campen, Mbah, Burnley and Davis), none against, and 1 absent (Councilor Scott).

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED AS AMENDED**

AYE: Ward Six City Councilor Davis, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., City Councilor At Large Mbah and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen

ABSENT: Ward Two City Councilor Scott

3. Mayor's Communication (ID # [24-0693](#)) Conveying the Surveillance Technology Impact Report for exterior cameras at fire stations.

Chair Davis provided background information about this item. He stated that the Surveillance Technology Ordinance was a collaborative effort which mandates that any time the City seeks to utilize surveillance technology, it must produce an impact report and receive approval from the City Council. He stated that the matter before the Committee this evening is a request by the City to use surveillance cameras.

Chief Breen explained the nature of this request. He stated that the Somerville Fire Department received a grant at no cost to the City to for the installation of nine cameras in total at Somerville's six different fire stations, including headquarters. He stated that these cameras would provide a 24/7 live feed to fire dispatch of the fire station's exterior perimeters and would not record sound. He explained how the camera installation could help resolve some of the issues associated with dispatch not being able to close fire station doors while the fire company is out on calls and would also allow them to monitor the premises for asset protection. He stated that SFD equipment is not secured while the fire company is out and is therefore vulnerable to being tampered with, which has happened in the past in the form of vandalism and break-ins. He emphasized that these are past issues, but the cameras could nonetheless help prevent this from recurring in the future. More broadly, Chief Breen stated that cameras have been on his to-do list for a long time and there are available funds at present to install them at no cost to the City.

Councilor Ewen-Campen sought clarification regarding the circumstances under which footage from these cameras would be reviewed, and whether that would be for criminal matters and/or for monitoring employees. Chief Breen stated that the camera footage would be reviewed for criminal matters but would not be used for monitoring employees. Councilor Burnley asked who will have access to the camera feeds. Chief Breen stated that Somerville's Fire Dispatch Center and the Somerville Police Department will have access.

Chair Davis expressed concerns with the broad language used in the Impact Report that could potentially enable a wide variety of uses for the cameras. He also expressed concerns with the fact that the cameras are primarily controlled and operated by the police department. He noted the lack of parameters regarding when footage will be viewed and downloaded. He stated that he is glad to hear that the cameras will not be used to monitor employees, but that there is no language in the Impact Report stating this, and he would like to see that language added. Additionally, Chair Davis said that he would like to discuss this matter with a representative from SPD in the committee meeting as well as labor representatives to address collective bargaining concerns.

Councilors noted that while they are supportive of the camera installations for SFD's purposes, they would like to address concerns regarding ambiguity as to how SPD will use the footage before voting to recommend this item for approval.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**