



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Housing and Community Development Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, October 21, 2024

6:00 PM

This meeting was held in the Committee Room and virtually via Zoom, was called to order at 6:02 pm by Chair Strezo, and adjourned at 7:30 pm with a roll call vote of three in favor (Councilor Clingan, Mbah, and Chair Strezo), none opposed, and none absent. Councilor Mbah joined the meeting at 6:35pm.

Others present: Kimberely Hutter - Legislative Liaison, Rachel Nadkarni - Director of Economic Development, Madalyn Letellier - Legislative Services Manager.

Roll Call

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

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-0889](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Housing and Community Development Committee Meeting of June 11, 2024.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

2. Resolution (ID # [24-1181](#)) By Councilor Strezo, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Wilson and Councilor Sait That the Administration update this City Council on a permanent location and regular hours for the Teen Center.

Chair Strezo introduced this item and read from the submitted memo entitled, Parks & Rec Memo (with 24-1181), Legislative Liaison Kimberly Hutter spoke on this item on behalf of the administration. She highlighted the on-going programming and the priority for securing a teen space. No updates on a space being updated or secured but the Parks and Recreation department are working diligently to secure a space. Councilor Clingan asked if the fire building in Ward 1 could be made accessible would that be an option to be used as space for a Teen Center on the first floor and how the Council on Aging is utilizing the space. Liaison Hutter does not have the exact breakdown of current programming and can continue to bring it up in conversation. Chair Strezo asked for clarification if only Parks and Recreation are handing the teen center or multiple, Liaison Hutter confirmed there are multiple departments involved in the planning and decisions. Chair Strezo spoke on how the fire building used to be used for many community events pre-covid and the need for space for teens could be solved by making use of vacant space and to her understanding nobody has been meeting in the building and would like to continue the conversation in further meetings.

Chair Strezo emphasized that Teen Empowerment has been locked out of the second floor and unable to meet as the city has deemed it inaccessible by not meeting accessibility requirements. Liaison Hutter confirmed she did not have further information on the occupancy of the building on Cross Street but would gather answers and provide them to the committee. Councilor Clingan clarified an earlier statement that Teen Empowerment is not locked out but cannot have larger community events in the space at this time.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

3. Order
(ID # [24-0146](#))

By Councilor Ewen-Campen and Councilor Strezo
That the Executive Director of the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD) update this Council on current efforts to create a Community Center as part of the new developments in Union Square and Boynton Yards.

Director Rachel Nadkarni appeared in person to provide an update on the requirements for development at Boynton Yards and the specifics on the space. She spoke to the master plan requiring 20,000 sq feet of community use space required by DLJ, which does not kick in until the third phase of their residential build. As they are still in the first phase there has not been any progress, DLJ has met with the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD) and the Union Square Neighborhood Square Council, the discussion has been about consolidating the space from three different locations into one larger space. Director spoke to the many ways a community space could be developed, either by the city in the future or from one of the larger non-profits. The determination is still in the works between having multiple smaller spaces or one larger space. Chair Strezo asked if conversations around expediting the community center before the third phase are taking place. Director clarified it is approved as a part of the third phase of the residential building, so it happening ahead of schedule is more difficult to reach. There are multiple community spaces that are already open and holding events currently. Councilor Clingan also asked to clarify the meaning of a community space in this discussion and how the nature of the space usage will change on the size of the community center. Director said they discussed a zoning amendment to bring it all into one to make it its own independent building structure and allows the community to make decisions and if it its own space everything about its operations will have to happen in future and ongoing discussion as it gets built.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Order
(ID # [24-1008](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld
That the Director of Economic Development discuss with this Council ways to provide small businesses with financial and technical support when impacted by construction and other emergencies.

Chair Strezo introduced this item and how small businesses are looking for

more updates on when construction is happening and how to further collaborate with the city to align their operating hours with ongoing construction. Director Nadkarni elaborated that these scenarios happen about once a month and the various ways they appear. Such as a fire, a city managed project, a privately caused disruption in the area, and an emergency that affects the entire city. The team has been focused on the COVID-19 recovery and where all the resources have gone and as that era wraps up with the end of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding there is acknowledgment that conversations around emerging construction is a conversation that needs to happen and how to add funding and budget for it appropriately across many departments and the policy decisions that will come from it. The team is aiming to be in a place for strategic planning and highlighting priorities to be ready for the next fiscal year and return to these other conversations. Chair Strezo asked the Director to define what strategic planning means. Director explained the past years have been focused on keeping doors opened but prior to COVID it had been innovation economy and future planning is identifying what services are really needed and wanted in the small business community. Councilor Mbah asked if there is a measure to assess what type of conversations are happening. Director spoke to how her department is regularly out in the community to communicate with business owners but construction with outside contractors and holding them to a schedule is much harder to reach a specific clear schedule. Chair Strezo followed up by asking how construction projects can reach better communication with the city so that the city can provide a better heads up to better support the small businesses in Somerville. Director acknowledged the numerous challenges of being an operating business and the department has been trying to identify what the other pain points are, such as permitting, that can create a poor environment. Director identified a large challenge the city has been relying on ARPA dollars to support small businesses and that has timed out twice without an economic development bond and the network of financing to support small businesses now requires advocacy at the State level to get the funding needed for small businesses and backfill dollars for key businesses to provide resources to businesses that may be struggling. Economic Development has also been actively applying and seeking outside funding sources such as grants throughout the state. Councilor Strezo emphasized the importance of supporting small businesses within Somerville and being prepared with resources to assist them. The Chair and Director had a lengthy discussion around what other resources are available and the lengths Economic Development is going to try and compile a resource guide for small businesses to reach out to appropriate parties depending on what needs they are struggling with.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

5. Resolution (ID # [24-0902](#)) By Councilor Clingan, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Strezo, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Mbah That the Administration hold a community meeting within the next 30 days to address the impacts of the missing United States Postal Service mail, and the overall lack of mail delivery in various parts of Somerville.

Councilor Clingan introduced this item and spoke to its origin back in early summer when there was a lack of mail and a lot of missing mail. He did express how he would have liked to have seen more support from the administration in organizing a public meeting on this matter but since the issue has been improving does not feel the need to continue and would like it to mark completed. Councilor Strezo and Liaison Hutter both referenced a letter from Postmaster General Louis DeJoy over postal services with Liaison Hutter elaborating that the municipality does not have authority over the post office and the administration had multiple meetings with state and federal delegates and brought the issue to the attention of the appropriate parties so it could be addressed.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

- HCD - 2024-10-21 Parks & Rec Memo (with 24-1181)
- HCD - 2024-10-21 USPS Closures and Service Letter (with 24-0902)