



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

CLERK OF COMMITTEES

February 22, 2022
REPORT OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Jake Wilson	Chair	Present	
Jefferson Thomas ("J.T.") Scott	Vice Chair	Present	
Beatriz GomezMouakad	Ward Five City Councilor	Absent	
Judy PinedaNeufeld	Ward Seven City Councilor	Present	
Charlotte Kelly	City Councilor At Large	Present	

Others present: Willie Burnley, Jr. - City Council, Aneesh Sahni - Mayor's Office, Tom Galligani - OSPCD, Andrea Caruth - Purchasing, Luisa Oliveira - OSPCD, Stephanie Widzowski - Assistant Clerk of Committees.

This meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Wilson at 6:07 pm and adjourned at 8:45 pm.

Approval of the February 8, 2022 Minutes

The minutes were accepted on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Kelly, Pineda Neufeld, Scott and Wilson), none against and 1 absent (Councilor Gomez Mouakad)

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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212987: That the Director of Economic Development and the Director of Procurement and Contracting Services work with community partners to assess, report, and provide recommendations for improving the city's procurement rates in order to support local businesses.

Councilor Burnley said that this item, and the particular consideration in it of equity for women- and minority-owned businesses, was important to him, especially given it is Black History Month. In light of Boston's disparity studies, he is eager for Somerville to create one as well. Somerville identified partners, but the studies never happened. He hopes to move forward with this as soon as possible.

Dir. Caruth explained that she worked with partners on item **212987** and asked for clarification on which to address. Councilor Burnley said it is difficult to separate the two items, and that there were questions on contracting and community partnerships. He asked what caused the 3-year pause in these plans. Dir. Caruth replied that she understands the connection between the

two items and is prepared to speak to this agenda item, but would refrain from talking about the disparity study in detail in order to give it a proper discussion in a future meeting.

Councilor Burnley asked about current procurement plans and what kinds of community partnership they would like to foster. More broadly, he asked what steps to take moving forward. Dir. Caruth described the Procurement office's efforts on this item. The Chief Procurement Officer has been building relationships with other community members as well as having internal discussions about equity. They met with local municipalities, especially Boston and Brookline. Procurement wants to analyze what a disparity entails, and how it comes about. She cited a group called Living Cities that, among other things, looks at whether cities have race-based or race-neutral policies. She stressed that if Somerville does a disparity study, they have to do it holistically. Every city department should be equity-minded and thinking about this issue. Moreover, she called for more immediate solutions as well as conducting studies. She listed potential partners and stakeholders to connect with, including BECMA. Another reason to collaborate is to mitigate staffing issues.

Dir. Galligani added that the role of Adriana Fernandes in OSPCD is to share information and opportunities with disadvantaged groups and provide technical assistance. He said they are interested in partnerships with Mass General Brigham, Tufts University, and "the casino across the river".

Councilor Burnley said that determining partners goes beyond the City Council's role, but is a good addition. He reflected Dir. Caruth's point that it will take all departments and that it is important to start now. He asked why departments need to wait until staff are hired to start working on this issue. He also asked Dir. Caruth if her team is interested in a regional study, and how much the city spends on purchasing and contracts. She responded that the lack of staffing does not cause a problem, but having more staff adds to their momentum. She estimated that they would need at least \$200,000-\$300,000 for a disparity study, and there would be both a data and policy component.

Councilor Burnley expressed worry at the effort to approve a regional collaboration across governments.

Chair Wilson commented that budget season is coming, and if funding will be an issue, they should start talking about finding funds. It seems that the city is reliant on outside certification for businesses. He asked what support there is for small businesses to get that certification. Dir. Galligani answered that they held state certification courses a few years ago and would like to continue with them. Over 50 prospective businesses were represented at each session.

Councilor Kelly asked Dir. Caruth to come back and speak when more time is allotted, especially about the disparity study. She stated that it is important to be able to consider funds for the study during the budget process. She also expressed concern about a regional collaboration for the study, considering that Brookline and Boston have different demographics from Somerville. She suggested a collaboration with a closer neighbor such as Cambridge or Medford. She asked about the timeline for the internal process to set up a disparity study, to which Dir. Caruth replied that it is too soon to speak to setting up the study, given multiple options for scope. Councilor Kelly said that previous communications from the Council were more focused on a local study. She would like to know the timeline for that, not excluding the possibility of a regional study later. Councilor Kelly supported keeping this item in committee.

Councilor Scott said this is the first time the Committee had heard of a regional approach. He asked how much the city spends on outside contracting and how much goes to WME (Women/Minority-owned Enterprises). He said it does not seem like a \$200,000 issue and asked if Auditing or Processing were involved. Dir. Caruth said data can cause holdups, and even once data is collected, it can be deceiving. The team would need to verify the IDs and certifications of contractors first, and data on subcontractors can be hard to track.

Councilor Scott said that top-line data can be useful, even if it is not always possible to get all the data. He asked if there was an internal record of contracts on a cash-flow basis - something that showed the top 100 contractors, for example. Dir. Caruth said they did have a record of the value of contracts, but that it would be best to check with Dir. Bean and discuss in the future.

Chair Wilson suggested keeping this item in committee and invite staff back for discussion, explicitly about the disparity study.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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212847: That the Administration comply with Order #206164, relative to the employment of other counsel.

Councilor Scott said that there has been a difference in opinion in previous iterations of the Solicitor’s Office on seeking counsel. In multiple cases, the Administration has required the City Council to seek outside counsel in a legal dispute to prevent a conflict of interest. The Administration said that funds would be set aside for this - and in line 530110 of the 2022 budget, \$25,000 was appropriated for this purpose - but Councilor Scott has still not heard guidance. He asked what mechanism is available for employing these funds. Dir. Bean said he had not discussed it yet with the current administration.

There was discussion over whether the City Solicitor’s input is needed for this item. Councilor Scott requested that Dir. Sahni reappear in front of the Committee next meeting with the procurement process. Councilor Kelly agreed that the Solicitor’s input is not necessary here and said that guidance could come in the form of a memo, but that guidance was needed. Dir. Bean agreed to coordinate with the appropriate staff.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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212850: That the Administration update this Council on the status of the Police Staffing Study which was included in the FY2022 budget and estimated to take 2-4 months.

Dir. Sahni explained that last time this item appeared before the Committee, the contract was still under negotiation, but it was recently signed. They plan to start work in March, if not sooner.

Councilor Kelly noted that no files were attached to this item or item **213022**, which makes it difficult for councilors to ask questions. She said she would like to keep this item in committee until they can discuss it more.

Councilor Scott asked who won the contract, to which Dir. Sahni said he would follow up with that information. Chair Wilson asked when the updates would be reflected in the online database so that the public could stay informed. Dir. Sahni said he was not sure.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

213022: That the Chief of Police provide this Council’s Committee on Finance with the full language of the crossing guards’ contract and also provide the number of crossing guard hours filled by SPD personnel.

Dir. Sahni explained that this item referred to materials sent by Chief Labor Counsel McKenzie, and that the Administration does not currently track how frequently SPD personnel fill crossing guard hours because it is rare and listed as part of regular hours, not overtime.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld talked about a communication by Chief Femino about the number of crossing guards and their distribution, which they discussed in the Housing committee. Of the 35 crossing guards cited, five are currently not available. There are 33 designated locations, but only 27 are considered “primary”. Because of staffing shortages, many guards only work one of two shifts - morning or afternoon. Secondary and even some primary locations are not currently covered.

Councilor Kelly suggested keeping this item in committee until additional materials are received or until Chief Femino can appear before the Committee to provide more information. She also noted that they had previously discussed compensation for the lowest-paid workers of the city, and that updating pay and contracts could attract more applicants.

Councilor Scott said that calls for service are documented, and can be distinguished as internal or external with a tag. If police are dispatched to a crossing guard location, it would be listed as an internal call for service, which is trackable. He agreed that it would be appropriate to keep this item in committee.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked what would be the most efficient way to have this conversation, given that the Housing committee is also discussing this topic.

Chair Wilson said there was a mention of officers taking shifts at a previous meeting, but did not remember it as a rare occurrence. He would like to determine how frequently this happens. Dir. Sahni said he thought he provided the Committee with that information on 2/3.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

212888: Requesting approval to appropriate \$591,442 from the Medical Marijuana Stabilization Fund for implementing related priorities.

presenting to the Committee. Dir. Bean said that the Portland Loo Purchase & Installation cost will likely be higher than the listed amount of \$435,000.

Councilor Kelly listed some questions that she would like to be addressed publicly, including questions of retention of staff. At one point Somerville had a full-time licensed social worker, but they left. Is there an exit survey? What does “two individual student assessments” refer to in the document - are they citywide assessments? How can the city better retain staff? And finally, how does the city plan to support youth in the social media ambassador role?

Councilor Scott said that Councilor Kelly’s question about the exit survey may be more appropriate for a Confirmation/Personnel committee meeting. He asked if the Committee could approve the item with the current funds requested and address future changes in cost later. Dir.

Bean answered that that was possible, but they cannot sign a contract with the winning bidder until they have the full appropriation, so it would make sense to wait. Councilor Scott said that the city often makes small appropriations gradually to get a process started. Dir. Bean added that this is a reoccurring source of revenue. Medical marijuana dispensaries are required to contribute 3% of their gross sales to this fund. He agreed that they could appropriate funds now and reappear in front of the Committee later to request more.

Councilors Kelly and Scott discussed the best way to get more information available to the public about Councilor Kelly's earlier questions. Councilor Pineda Neufeld added that they should think about language access and justice as well. Salary should be adjusted for language skill, and any public information should be translated into multiple languages.

Councilor Kelly made a motion to introduce an order: That this Council request the Interim Dir. Of Health and Human Services discuss the Medical Marijuana Dispensary Host Community Agreement Funding Recommendations and address questions phrased by this Council.

Councilor Kelly's motion was approved by roll call vote: 4 Yes and 1 Absent (Councilor Gomez Mouakad).

Councilor Scott moved for approval on this item.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Wilson, Scott, PinedaNeufeld, Kelly
ABSENT:	GomezMouakad

212849: That the administration assign staff to support the Wage Theft Advisory Committee.

Councilor Scott said he is following up with members of WTAC about this. Councilor Gomez Mouakad said she was also working with WTAC to develop a job description. Councilor Scott said no funds have been set aside for that yet, and as such requested to keep this item in committee.

Chair Wilson noted that a policy analyst is about to be hired, and asked if that person could support WTAC as part of their job. Dir. Sahni said that WTAC intended to report to the Council and should follow up with the Clerk's office. The Office of Immigration Affairs has been providing interpretation services to WTAC and is scheduled to continue through May.

Replying to Chair Wilson, Councilor Kelly expressed concern about having too many tasks under one job title and stressed that two positions would be needed, not one. She requested developing the job descriptions before making judgments on whether to merge the two positions.

Councilor Scott said that the Council was fighting for resources to allocate to WTAC, and that it is laughable to suggest that the Council could adequately fund a position at this point.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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213081: Requesting the appropriation of \$964,344 from the Unreserved Fund Balance/Free Cash Account to the Arthur Healey Schoolyard Renovation Account to remediate

contaminated on-site soils.

Dir. Oliveira explained that last fall, they were excavating for the creation of a flight of stairs when some soil was found to be structurally unsuitable. Upon testing, it was found to be contaminated. Because not all of the soil has been excavated, they need to test surrounding areas. They are hoping not to find additional contamination. The funds requested here are the best estimate so far, and hopefully an overestimate.

Councilor Kelly asked what the timeline for the project is, to which Dir. Oliveira replied that they are hoping to finish by fall 2023, but there may be delays. Councilor Kelly asked if students, staff and nearby residents had been informed of the contamination. Dir. Oliveira answered that they had, and the principal is updated on a weekly basis. The removal is done cautiously, adhering to strict DEP protocol, to ensure safety.

Councilor Scott said he had no concerns about the cost, and asked if it seemed to be a straightforward cleanup. Dir. Oliveira said that the contaminants are not as serious as those found in the Conway project, but the DEP has not spoken about AUL yet.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Wilson, Scott, PinedaNeufeld, Kelly
ABSENT:	GomezMouakad

213082: Requesting a transfer of \$23,612 from the Health and Human Services Salaries Account to the Inspectional Services Salaries Account to establish the position of Environmental Health Coordinator in the Inspectional Service Department.

Chair Wilson explained that this would move the “Rat Czar” position under the ISD. Dir. Sahni added that this was in order to streamline with the ISD’s own rodent mitigation measures.

Councilor Kelly encouraged people to watch the presentation in the Rodent Issues committee, and that she heard early on, dealing with the rat problem required doubling staff.

Councilor Kelly moved to approve this item.

RESULT:	APPROVED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Wilson, Scott, PinedaNeufeld, Kelly
ABSENT:	GomezMouakad

213016: Conveying a request for City Council input on priorities for the Fiscal Year 2023 Budget.

Chair Wilson said that he asked colleagues to submit individual resolutions, but extended the deadline by two weeks. They are looking at a mid-March starting point to discuss as a group.

Councilor Kelly said that Mayor Ballantyne was requesting resolutions no later than the first City Council meeting in April. She explained that as an at-large councilor, she has a different scope than if in charge of a particular ward. She said that as she talks to various stakeholders in Somerville, it becomes more difficult to make sense of short-term priorities. She asked if councilors should still be allowed to submit multiple budget items as one. Chair Wilson said that

he hoped to have individual budget items and supplement with a consensus-built communication from the Council.

Councilor Kelly said that it will be hard to capture everything residents have to say, and that it is helpful for her constituents for her to be able to submit individual items.

Councilor Scott said that he contacted the Clerk's office and made broad inquiries about open meeting and straw polling laws. He added that a consensus-driven process may not fit Robert's Rules of Order, and that they would have to be mindful of state law as well. He will keep investigating how to make consensus possible. The Mayor has requested resolutions from councilors for priorities, and there are many asks. He said that there are many reasons for which ones get fulfilled.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld said she is looking forward to seeing themes and common priorities. Councilor Kelly added appreciation for the way councilors inform one another, highlighting different wards' needs as well as the city's needs at large. Chair Wilson said he hopes to get answers for this item at the next Finance meeting.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE