



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

6:00 PM

This meeting was held virtually via Zoom and was called to order at 6:04 pm by Chair Wheeler and adjourned at 8:42 pm with a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Link, Strezo, Hardt and Wheeler), none opposed, and one absent (Councilor Scott).

The meeting was recessed at 7:03 PM and reconvened at 7:13 PM with Councilors Link, Strezo, Hardt and Wheeler present and Councilor Scott absent.

Also present: Emily Wisdom - Somerville Police Department Director of Finance and Administration, Yasmine Raddassi - Legislative Liaison, Alan Inacio - Director, Finance and Community Development, Eric Weisman - Interim DPW Commissioner, Shumeane Benford - Somerville Police Chief, Devin Schneider - Somerville Police Detective Sergeant, Rachel Nadkarni - Director of Economic Development, Maya Yoshikawa - Department of Public Works Sanitation and Hazardous Material Program Manager, Katharine Wiese - Economic Development Planner and Delaney Fisher-Cassiol - Clerk of Committees

Roll Call

Present:	City Councilor At Large Jon Link, City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Emily Hardt and City Councilor At Large Ben Wheeler
Absent:	Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [26-0295](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting of February 24, 2026.

RESULT:	<u>ACCEPTED</u>
AYE:	City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt and City Councilor At Large Wheeler
ABSENT:	Ward Two City Councilor Scott

Environment-related Grant Requests

2. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0268](#)) Requesting approval to accept and expend a \$31,000 grant with no new match required, from the Department of Environmental Protection to the Department of Public Works for upgrades to the Hazardous Household Waste Facility.

Interim Department of Public Works Commissioner Eric Weisman explained that this grant is provided by the Department of Environmental Protection to support improvements to the household hazardous waste facility. Department of Public Works Sanitation and Hazardous Materials

Program Manager Maya Yoshikawa noted that the award includes winterization of windows and water pipes, installation of a new garage door with a pedestrian door cut-out to allow easier entry and exit, and the purchase and installation of safety data sheets. Chair Wheeler asked about accessibility at the facility, noting that there are stairs leading to the office for anyone wishing to speak with staff. Commissioner Weisman responded that there is a phone and signage at the Water and Sewer Office, which is accessible, and that staff from the facility can come down to meet with individuals who have accessibility needs.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

ABSENT: Ward Two City Councilor Scott

Appropriations

3. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0270](#)) Requesting approval to appropriate \$56,339.46 from the Bike Share Stabilization Fund for installation and startup costs of a Blue Bike station at the Boynton Union Connect Transportation Management Association development site.

Director of Finance and Community Development, Alan Inacio, noted that this is a routine stabilization request. In response to a question from Chair Wheeler, Director Inacio clarified that the funds for the project have already been donated to the City and approval is needed only to access the money from the fund and place the order. The donation covers the value of an 18-dock station with 10 bikes.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

ABSENT: Ward Two City Councilor Scott

Police, Fire Department Grant and Gift Acceptances

4. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-0271](#)) Requesting approval to accept and expend a \$22,800.08 grant that requires a match, from the Metropolitan Mayors Coalition Community Safety Initiative to the Police Department for youth violence prevention.

Director of Finance and Administration for the Somerville Police Department Emily Wisdom noted that this is an annual grant used for youth prevention and engagement programs. She explained that the funds have historically supported hotspot patrol overtime, the Youth Police Academy, and youth basketball programs, and may also be used to expand youth engagement and safety initiatives. Director Wisdom added that a new Captain of Community Relations is reviewing how the funds can be used most effectively. Somerville Police Chief Shumeane Benford added that the

programs help engage marginalized youth and those with more challenging backgrounds.

Councilor Link asked about the grant's requirement to submit daily crime data through CopLink and expressed concern that federal immigration authorities could access the information, citing examples of routine arrests connected to court appearances. Chief Benford responded that the information they share is already public. Councilor Link reiterated concern that immigration enforcement could use the data to harm vulnerable community members. Councilor Strezo noted that the grant has supported youth programming for many years, providing critical services to disadvantaged youth. Councilor Hardt asked whether other grants require data submission through CopLink, and Chief Benford said he was not aware of any.

Chair Wheeler noted that these are unprecedented times and expressed concern about the broader implications of data sharing. He suggested a memo or additional discussion to clarify how the information is accessed and stressed the need for the Council to fully understand potential impacts. He acknowledged the department's good intentions but cautioned that publicly available information could be misused. Councilor Hardt asked whether the programs could continue without the grant. Chief Benford responded that while it might be possible using other City funds, external funding allows internal resources to be allocated elsewhere. Councilor Strezo reiterated the importance of supporting at-risk youth and the long history of the grant in helping disenfranchised children, while Councilor Link acknowledged the positive impact of the program but emphasized potential risks related to immigration enforcement.

Director Wisdom noted that the City has until November 30, 2026 to accept the grant, although most programming occurs in late spring and summer. Legislative Liaison Yasmine Raddassi confirmed that the Commonwealth Fusion Center does not provide CopLink or CrimeTracer information to federal authorities, addressing concerns about data sharing with immigration enforcement.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

NAY: City Councilor At Large Link

ABSENT: Ward Two City Councilor Scott

5. Mayor's Request
(ID # [26-0169](#))

Requesting approval to accept and expend a \$43,000 grant with no new match required, from the Boston Office of Emergency Management to the Police Department for software.

Detective Sergeant Devin Schneider explained that GreyKey allows the department to access data from mobile devices during criminal

investigations. With a search warrant or consent, the device can be connected to GreyKey to attempt access, which is a standard tool in contemporary policing and an important source of evidence. He emphasized that privacy is protected by limiting the number of people who view the data, and the technology has been helpful in many cases. Chief Shumeane Benford added that the tool can speed up investigations and that the scope of any search is determined by the search warrant. Exigent circumstances are the only exception to requiring consent or a warrant.

Detective Sergeant Schneider also described Blue Voice, an on-demand field tool that searches data input into it. It is not used for report writing and does not collect any data. Councilor Link clarified that there are two variations of the system: one that functions as a high-powered search engine citing sources without summarizing, and another that summarizes information. Chief Benford explained that this tool provides officers with guidance in the field by directing them to specific areas in the statute relevant to their questions, rather than analyzing the law itself. Councilor Link expressed appreciation for this limitation.

Councilor Strezo noted these tools can be helpful for cases such as human trafficking, crimes against children, and sexual assault, since these cases are rarely convictable. Chair Wheeler acknowledged that this is new territory for municipalities and emphasized the importance of the police department using Blue Voice intentionally and in alignment with the city's values. Councilor Link added that he feels confident the AI use is appropriately limited and intends to publicly share the answers he received if possible.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

ABSENT: Ward Two City Councilor Scott

6. Mayor's Request
(ID # [25-0849](#))

Requesting approval to accept and expend a \$127,000 grant with no new match required, from the Boston Office of Emergency Management to the Police Department for Special Response Team equipment and training.

Chief Shumeane Benford explained that this funding comes from the UASE Program and supports the Special Response Team's training and equipment. The team is a critical resource for the city's most dangerous incidents, working proactively to maintain security and situational awareness. The funding helps offset the cost of expensive equipment and technology and is awarded every three years rather than annually. Chair Wheeler noted that concerns have been raised in other cities that such equipment, including hardened shields, could foster a military-like mindset. Chief Benford responded that Somerville Police officers operate under clear values and accountability to the community. The department does not put officers in tactical gear on the frontlines in the community and instead keeps them

ready behind the scenes, if needed.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

ABSENT: Ward Two City Councilor Scott

Communications

7. Officer's
Communication
(ID # [26-0201](#))

Director of Economic Development conveying the potential use of an Urban Center Housing Tax Increment Financing Tool (UCH-TIF) to incentivize housing production.

Rachel Nadkarni - Director of Economic Development, and Katharine Wiese - Economic Development Planner, reviewed Finance - 2026-03-10 Presentation (with 26-0201). This is a tax increment financing program linked to commercial development, previously used at the Winter Hill site to allow a higher level of affordability. They are exploring this tool for other areas of the City and wanted to familiarize the committee with it as a potential option for future projects. Councilor Strezo noted that a consultant was hired last year to discuss this program and emphasized the importance of input from the Office of Housing Stability and the Housing Division. She highlighted that 110% AMI (area median income) is considered market rate and that there have been issues filling apartments at this level. Councilor Strezo added that some units remain vacant because potential residents may choose to buy on the open market rather than navigate the paperwork and verification process.

Director Nadkarni explained that 110% AMI reflects state minimum standards and that each project would be reviewed individually. She emphasized that the program is unique as an incentive tool and that, as they prepare for further discussions with the committee and City Council, they are considering what recourse and compliance measures will be built into agreements. She noted that the Winter Hill plan was modified based on City Council feedback and that the Housing Division monitors compliance to ensure standards are met. She also explained that any plan would require City Council approval for both a zone and a financing plan, which outlines the City's intentions, goals, and the projects it wants to incentivize. Councilor Link asked who decides which of the listed minimum standards a project must comply with. Director Nadkarni said it is negotiated by project, noting that the listed standards are state minimums and the City can require higher standards if desired.

In response to a question from Chair Wheeler, Director Nadkarni said this is a statewide program targeting areas like downtown districts with little or no housing, seeking a balance between jobs and housing. In other areas, it has involved adding housing above retail. She noted that tax increment financing agreements previously required state approval for commercial projects, but

that approval has been removed, giving the City more discretion. Councilor Strezo expressed concern that this program could incentivize major developers to build luxury units that could be reserved as affordable housing at the higher end of AMI, potentially negatively impacting lower-income residents. Director Nadkarni emphasized that participation is discretionary and that the City's zoning ordinance already requires higher levels of affordability. She noted that the City can use this tool to accelerate housing development, achieve a greater degree of affordability, or support more unique projects, especially given that the market is currently not producing housing. Councilor Link added that the program could potentially incentivize projects that are deeply affordable, not just meet minimum requirements. Director Nadkarni confirmed that the City can set its own affordability standards as long as they meet state requirements. In response to a question from Councilor Strezo about next steps, Director Nadkarni said the team is consulting with stakeholders in and around Assembly Square, including housing and housing stability advocates, before bringing forward a more concrete proposal.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

- Finance - 2026-03-10 Memo-REV (with 26-0270)
- Finance - 2026-03-10 Presentation-REV (with 26-0201)
- Finance - 2026-03-10 Memo (with 25-0849, 26-0169)