



Shumeane Benford
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City of Somerville Police Department

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Date: November 8, 2024
To: Public Health and Public Safety Committee
From: Chief Shumeane Benford
Deputy Chief Jim Donovan
Captain Jeff DiGregorio
RE: Response to Item 24-1206, 24-1200, 24-1414, 24-0471 and 24-0478

Item 24-1206: That the Administration update Ward Six Councilor in writing on efforts to address open substance use in Seven Hills Park and other areas.

Item 24-1200: That the Administration discuss with this Council its policies and plans to address the widespread and open drug use in Davis Square.

Beginning August 22, 2024, in partnership with Mayor Ballantyne and administration partners, SPD instituted 24-hour directed patrols in the Davis Square area (with an emphasis on Seven Hills Park and Statue Park). To date (11/7/24), Somerville police officers have conducted;

- **997 Directed Patrols**
 - Officers proactively increase their presence in specific location(s) where crime and/or quality of life issues are expected to occur.
- **247 Park Walk & Talks**
 - Officers proactively increase their presence in specific areas where they exit the cruiser and engage with residents, businesses and community stakeholders (~45 min).

During this period, officers made **21 arrests** in the Davis Square Area. Arrests included charges for the following offenses:

- 6 violent crime-related
- 5 narcotics distribution-related
- 8 outstanding warrants
- 2 other arrests (property crime & violation of restraining order)

The area has experienced a **decrease** in calls for service as a result of increased Officer presence, enforcement and coordinated efforts with partners. Over the past 4 weeks, total calls for service were **31% lower** than the same period last year (**151 vs 220**).

- October 1 - Chief Benford met with community members and Councilors Davis and Pineda Neufeld

to hear their concerns for the space. Community members and all in attendance responded to an appeal to identify community representatives to work in partnership to adopt a public safety Improvement Action Plan (IAP) for Davis Square.

- In September, October and November the Mayor's Office held a series of ward-based community meetings, a Davis Sq specific meeting and a meeting with business and non-profit partners to hear and discuss the community's concerns around safety in the Sq. SPD reiterated our appeal for community stakeholders to join us in a developing a community informed public safety plan for the Sq. The community and stakeholders responded.

As a result of the above appeals and efforts, Chief Benford, with the help of the Mayor's office and Ward Councilors Davis and Pineda-Neufeld, will be facilitating an initial meeting of the working group. We will be bringing together community stakeholders to discuss a pathway forward on developing a codified plan. This initial meeting will take place on November 13, 2024.

Item 24-1414: That the Chief of Police update this Council on how the Police Department will ensure members of the public remain separated during counter-protests.

It has always been law enforcement practice to separate groups on opposing sides of issues during public demonstrations to ensure the safety of all people present. To further institutionalize this process moving forward, SPD will be taking the following steps;

- This practice is now codified in our official Crowd Management and Control policy No. 121.
- Copies of the updated policy have been distributed to all commanders, supervisors and officers with emphasis on the changes.
- Shift Commanders will be conducting roll call reviews to ensure that officers are aware of their responsibilities and expectations.
- We have communicated with peer cities on best practice and resources that are available to support the establishment of designated areas for all event participants
- Working with city partners and advocates to pro-actively plan for pre-planned events. Pre-event dialogue leads to greater understanding of the groups needs, improved safety plans for all involved, information sharing, established communication channels and the greatest opportunity for a safe and successful event.

Response to pop-up demonstrations or protest comes with it's share of challenges and concerns that impact response.

Item 24-0471: That the Director of Racial and Social Justice update this Council on the promised road map from the consultant for implementing the recommendations in the report on Police Staffing and Operations delivered in November

I want to thank the Committee for your work and interest in the benefit of these recommendations for our community. Mayor Ballantyne has conveyed to me that consideration and or implementation of recommendations from the staffing study completed in the Fall of 2023 are top priorities. As I near the 60-day mark of appointment as Chief, ensuring continued effective operation and service delivery by SPD to our community during the transition period was and is extremely important. As a believer in collaborative

approaches to problem solving, early introductions and meetings with department, community and government stakeholders to include the city council have also been top priorities. These early meetings and discussions are critical for recognizing the legitimacy of our partners and in establishing an impenetrable foundation for the work ahead. These vitally important conversations are on-going and often include the premise for this order as a subject of discussion.

Work to date in furtherance on acting on recommendations from the study include:

- Meeting(s) held with the RSJ and the respective Task Force members to discuss recommendations (Public Safety for All, Civilian Oversight Task Force and Anti-Violence Working Group)
- Preliminary conversation to discuss the intersection of;
 - Racial Justice/Public Safety for All recommendations
 - Staffing Study Recommendations
- Early discussion on commitment to a strategic plan for implementation of both priorities

Item 24-0478: That the Administration convene the appropriate departments to discuss the monitoring efforts of the wild turkey population within Somerville and the surrounding regions

- Please see attached documents provided by our Animal Control Unit outlining authorizations and protected status of wild turkeys

Respectfully,

Chief Shumeane Benford
Deputy Chief Jim Donovan
Captain Jeff DiGregorio