



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Housing and Community Development Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, October 19, 2022

6:00 PM

Others present: Tom Galligani – Director of Economic Development, Officer Joseph Teves – SPD, Hannah Carrillo – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chair Strezo and adjourned at 7:21 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Pineda Neufeld, Ewen-Campen and Strezo), none against and none absent.

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Kristen Strezo, Vice Chair Ben Ewen-Campen and Judy Pineda Neufeld

1. Committee Minutes
(ID # [22-1701](#)) Approval of the Housing and Community Development Committee Minutes of September 29, 2022.

RESULT: **APPROVED**

AYE: Chairperson Strezo and Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld

ABSENT: Vice Chair Ewen-Campen

2. Order
(ID # [22-0085](#)) By Councilor Strezo
That the Director of the Office of Housing Stability appear before the Housing and Community Development Committee to discuss the current status of Somerville residents facing displacement and the number of households seeking rental assistance.

No staff was present to discuss this item.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

3. Order
(ID # [22-0174](#)) By Councilor Strezo and Councilor McLaughlin
That the Director of the Office of Housing Stability discuss proactive measures to inform tenants in inclusionary housing units of the rights and resources available to them.

No staff was present to discuss this item.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

Public Hearing re: 22-1032

4. Public Communication (ID # [22-1032](#)) 55 voters submitting a petition calling for a public hearing re: the Arts at the Armory building.

Chair Strezo explained the procedure and opened the public hearing at 6:06 PM. There were three speakers, as follows:

Jess White spoke and clarified that the actual name of the building is The Armory.

Parama Chatopadhyay spoke about the treatment of Armory tenants by the city. She feels that there has been a pattern of intimidation and hopes that tenants are notified of future meetings regarding the future of the building. She also mentioned that some of the tenants are worried about an exhibit at the Armory that deals with eviction and she hopes that sub patterns of intimidation cease and that there is a fair process going forward. She closed by saying that she just wants open discussions and clarity.

Jason Berube commented that the city has not been forthcoming about its plans and he stated, for the record, that it's in poor taste to have an exhibit about eviction on display in a building where some tenants may be facing eviction. He noted that the arts are already in the building and that what the city is doing seems to be a strange way to erase the work of many of the organizations there. Mr. Berube would like the facility to remain, in part, as a venue for unknown artists.

There being no other speakers, Chair Strezo closed the public hearing at 6:14 PM. The record will remain open until 12:30 PM on October 21, 2022 to receive additional public comment. Comments may be emailed to the City Clerk at: cityclerk@somervillema.gov

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Armory Items

5. Order (ID # [22-0501](#)) By Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Kelly, Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Gomez Mouakad

That the Director of Economic Development update this Council on the efforts to hire a consultant regarding the Armory.

Director Galligani reminded the committee that the city purchased this building 1 ½ yrs. ago and said that it has taken time to get things going and that now the city is in the middle of developing a process to determine the future of the building. The planning schedule will continue to mid-2023 and focus groups are beginning to be held. A plan is expected to be introduced during the first quarter of 2023 and will, hopefully, be approved by spring. Additional information is available on the city's SomerVoice page: <https://voice.somervillema.gov/armory-master-plan>

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Order
(ID # [22-0169](#))

By Councilor Strezo and Councilor Gomez Mouakad

That the Director of Economic Development discuss the city's maintenance plan for tenants and occupants of the Arts at the Armory.

Director Galligani explained that since the building was taken by eminent domain, the transition of ownership process has been unfriendly, e.g., the city did not have keys to the building and had no operational knowledge of the building's operation. City staff were not prepared, at that time, to handle the building. Since then, the DPW has added staff and one of those new employees brought with him extensive knowledge in building operation and maintenance. Director Galligani told the members that the DPW is fully engaged and committed to this building and stands ready to respond to its needs. Additionally, the Infrastructure and Asset Management Department has been included to work on the long-range plan.

Tenants were informed that a strategic master plan would be developed that would keep the building as a space for the arts, therefore, those tenants who were not in the arts were told that they might not be included in the building's future plans. When the city took control of the building there were ten tenants. Since then, two have moved out and of the remaining eight tenants, most are involved in the arts. City staff has had regular conversations with the remaining tenants to keep them informed of about what's going on and to explain the relocation process and inform them of their rights.. Leases have been extended to this December and might be extended until June of 2023 or later. By law, the city would have to offer relocation assistance and a relocation consultant has been hired by the city to develop a plan and prepare an estimated cost of the relocations. No new tenants are being brought in at this time but the vacant spaces are being activated to be used by artists.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**Crossing Guards**

7. Order
(ID # [22-1566](#))

By Councilor Strezo, Councilor Kelly, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Burnley Jr.

That the Director of Human Resources update this Council on the hiring process and staffing numbers for crossing guards for the 2022-2023 school year.

Liaison Carrillo provided an update on the hiring process and said that the crossing guard contract is up next June and that negotiations can begin on September 1st. The Human Resources Department will be considering costs, benefits, and other incentives that might help to boost the number of

staff. Liaison Carrillo noted that the pay can't be increased without going through the collective bargaining process. Officer Joseph Teves, who oversees the crossing guards, reported that staffing has been low for 2 years. Some years back, there were 56 crossing guards employed, but now that number has been reduced to 36, resulting in the primary posts barely being covered.

The last collective bargaining session saw a weak representation from the crossing guard union and Officer Teves explained that may have been due to the position the guards found themselves in. He explained that a pay increase can be a double edge sword as it might force some guards to work less hours due to their income limits restrictions. He commented on recruitment efforts to fill vacant positions and told the members that 99% of the candidates contacted are refusing the job offer because of the hours and/or salary.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

8. Order
(ID # [22-1567](#))

By Councilor Strezo, Councilor Kelly, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Burnley Jr.

That the Director of Human Resources discuss the possibility of modernizing crossing guard positions to attract candidates and increase hiring.

Officer Teves told the committee that said some crossing guards are working inside of the schools in varying capacities when not performing crossing duties. In the past, there was a crossing guard who also worked for the Traffic and Parking Department, but this practice has been stopped. Officer Teves believes that something like this would help to attract new people and retain them in the positions, adding that such a policy opens the door to city employment, making opportunities available. He commented that it would take some planning but could work if implemented properly. Chair Strezo asked if there's a possibility of an emergency plan being put in place in case of a dire shortage of staff and Officer Teves answered that he is not aware of any such plan.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE