



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, June 1, 2023

7:00 PM

NOTICE: This is NOT the official version of the City Council's minutes. While reasonable efforts have been made to assure the accuracy of the data provided, do not rely on this information without first checking with the City Clerk.

1. OPENING CEREMONIES

The meeting was called to order at 7:06 PM by Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen. The Council entered into recess at 8:54 PM and returned at 9:08 PM.

- 1.1. Roll Call Call of the Roll.
(ID # [23-0825](#))

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

Present: City Councilor At Large Willie Burnley Jr.
City Councilor At Large Charlotte Kelly
City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo
City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson
Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin
Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott
Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen
Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan
Ward Five City Councilor Beatriz Gomez Mouakad
Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis
Ward Seven City Councilor Judy Pineda Neufeld

2. CITATIONS

3. PUBLIC HEARINGS

4. ORDERS, ORDINANCES, RESOLUTIONS AND MOTIONS OF MEMBERS

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

6. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

7. COMMUNICATIONS OF THE MAYOR

- 7.1. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0924](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$319,923,766 to fund the FY 2024 General Fund Operating Budget.

Mayor Ballantyne presented an overview of the FY 2024 General Fund Operating Budget, saying that the budget is based on the city's shared goals and takes into account community input. The largest share of revenue comes from taxes and the city has seen record commercial growth since FY 2004, allowing the city to invest in its residents without adding to their burden. Last year, a Foundation for Progress was developed utilizing strong fiscal management, quality core services and shared community goals for progress. Mayor Ballantyne commented on some of the FY 2023 goals that have been delivered and noted that the city has recently been given a AAA bond rating, signaling that it is fiscally stable.

The Mayor highlighted some of the steps taken to focus the proposed budget on advancing progress for the city's people, places and planet and stressed that it's essential that the proper staff and resources be available to do the work. To that end, several departments will be scaled up to better serve the community. Among those changes are:

- Adding a new ADA position
- Changing two part time positions to permanent in the Council on Aging
- Adding two Jail Diversion positions in the Police Department
- Adding Language Justice Coordinator and Communication Coordinator positions
- Adding a Sustainability and Resiliency Coordinator position
- Adding an Employee Training and Retention Specialist position
- Adding a Deputy Chief Administrative Officer position
- Adding a Plumbing Inspector position
- Adding an Accounts Payable position in Auditing
- Adding a Deputy Assessor position
- Adding a Curb Management Program Manager position

The city's water and sewer infrastructure is aging and older building maintenance has been deferred over the years. Two approaches are planned to address this: 1) strategic planning and investment, and 2) a new approach to maintenance. To right the ship, an investment is needed in the Department of Public Works (addition of 4 new positions). Additionally, a Deputy Director's position will be added to Constituent Services (311).

Other proposals include:

- Increasing the School Department budget by 7.8%
- Funding to alleviate displacement and to increase staff in the Housing Department
- Permanently fund spaces for the Arts
- Funding a pilot program to open the East Somerville library on Sundays
- Permanently funding Emergency Management and adding 2 positions
- Trees and Urban Forest
- Rodent control
- Street and mobility improvements
- Allocating \$500,000 for an MBTA pass program
- Adding more bike lanes

The Mayor spoke about a mobile city hall, bringing essential services out of city hall and into the community and about undertaking a community process to plan and dispose of two buildings (24 Cross Street East and 45 College Avenue). She mentioned some of the projects that would be funded outside of the proposed budget, e.g., a Universal Basic Income pilot, a municipal housing voucher program, an overdose prevention center, a warming shelter and stabilization funds for emergency displacements.

Questions from the Council

Councilor Burnley commented that the administration's alternative emergency response missed the mark in his view, pointing out that the Council's recommendation didn't get into FY 2023 nor FY 2024 budgets. Jail diversion, in his view, isn't an alternative emergency response and he asked why it was written in as Council priority when the Council didn't ask for it. Mayor Ballantyne said that is still in process and the city is working with a consultant on staffing and operations. She noted that, last year, there was a request to direct people away from jail and toward the services they need.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked what the Mayor learned from the last budget to help with this year's budget and Mayor Ballantyne responded by saying that the organization needs to be scaled. Although city staff is committed to the city, there are gaps that need to be filled to meet the needs of the residents. Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked if any ARPA funds are getting absorbed in this budget and the Mayor said 14 positions were absorbed in this budget and moved onto the general fund.

Councilor McLaughlin asked about rats and resource increases. The Mayor stated that one full time Environmental Health Coordinator position is being added along with additional smart boxes.

Councilor Davis inquired about the \$500,000 out of school programming funds and the Mayor explained that the city side budget also was increased for Parks and Recreation. Councilor Davis asked about the community health initiative and the Mayor said it's focused on prevention and is the beginning of a larger program.

Councilor Wilson asked about the tens of millions of dollars from free cash needed for housing and Finance Director Ed Bean said a good portion of free cash will be drawn down, adding that at least \$3M for affordable housing will be used in addition to what has already been appropriated. Councilor Wilson reminded councilors about pre-submitted questions for the budget process.

Councilor Scott asked about the new Food Security Coordinator position and Mayor Ballantyne replied that it falls under the Health and Human Services Department. She will follow up with answers to his specific questions. Councilor Scott noted that ordinary maintenance for the Housing Department is flat and asked if there is another funding source. The Mayor said that two positions are being added to connect people with resources. Budget Director Mike Mastrobuoni explained that Housing Stability staff utilizes fund resources from a number of revenue streams. Councilor Scott noted that the ISD budget is flat, also and the Mayor said that staff has been added to ISD. He said that he is trying to reconcile the managerial capacity without filling front line staff positions.

Councilor Clingan commented that he didn't hear much about youth in the Mayor's presentation, to which she replied that the city is trying to reach everybody.

Councilor Kelly asked what steps are being taken to ensure that positions don't become duplicative across departments and Mayor Ballantyne explained that, though some positions may have the same title, they would be managing a lot of the work that used to be done by department heads. The city doesn't have a centralized department manager, so this is an example of the need to scale the organization. Councilor Kelly asked about direct aid

programs and the Budget Director will provide that information. Councilor Kelly inquired about the \$20,000 increase for rodent control and the Budget Director will provide additional information. Councilor Kelly pointed out that some departments expended less than 50% of their budgets and asked how the Mayor would intervene to make sure departments take advantage of their full budget. The Mayor said that SomerStat staff has been increased to address that point. Councilor Kelly asked why a new position for a Deputy Chief Administrative Officer is needed when the city's Chief Administrative Officer just started working here. The Mayor said that it's needed because there's so much work to be done and support is needed. Councilor Kelly asked how someone could get in touch with the Jail Diversion Coordinators and Deputy Chief Ward explained that the Director of Community Outreach, Help and Recovery (COHR) reviews the calls that come in and subsequently reaches out to them. He noted that there are several first contacts.

Councilor Kelly asked if the administration could outline how it's moving forward to improve the Winter Hill Community School (WHCIS). This information will be provided. Councilor Kelly inquired about a community center, asking if the city could now move forward with it, in light of the recent AAA bond rating. The Mayor replied that the city has to first make schools and city buildings safe, but assured the councilor that the city is working on it and trying to be creative.

Councilor Gomez Mouakad asked that everyone work together to fix the WHCIS. Noting that housing is a national crisis she asked if 24 Cross Street could possibly be considered for affordable housing investment, to which the Mayor replied that the disposition of that building will be a community process. Councilor Gomez Mouakad asked why her request for a Wage Issues Program Manager position wasn't included in the budget and Budget Director Mike Mastrobuoni will contact the councilor to discuss that. Councilor Gomez Mouakad asked councilors to talk to city staff as much as possible before the budget meetings. She urged councilors not to politicize mental health issues and said that she wants professionals to respond to incidents rather than police.

Councilor Clingan asked if any money has been set aside for the immediate situation (the falling concrete that happened today) at the WHCIS and Mayor Ballantyne will get back to him. Councilor Scott asked if there is an emergency plan in place for the students and the Mayor said that there is and that she will share that information shortly.

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- RESULT:** **REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION**
FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee
- 7.2. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0934](#)) Requesting the appropriation or reserve of \$3,283,713 in estimated FY 2024 Community Preservation Act (CPA) revenue for CPA projects and expenses.
President Ewen-Campen waived reading of items 7.2 through 7.8, 7.10 and 10.1 through 10.6 and referred them to the Committee on Finance.
RESULT: **REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION**
FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee
- 7.3. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0932](#)) Requesting approval of the expenditure limitations for departmental Revolving Funds for FY 2024.
President Ewen-Campen waived reading of items 7.2 through 7.8, 7.10 and 10.1 through 10.6 and referred them to the Committee on Finance.
RESULT: **REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION**
FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee
- 7.4. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0933](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$7,796,452 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Facility Renovation and Reconstruction Stabilization Fund to support the FY 2023 5-Year Capital Investment Plan.
President Ewen-Campen waived reading of items 7.2 through 7.8, 7.10 and 10.1 through 10.6 and referred them to the Committee on Finance.
RESULT: **REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION**
FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee
- 7.5. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0931](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$4,676,448 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Street Reconstruction and Renovation Stabilization Fund to support the FY 2023 5-Year Capital Investment Plan.
President Ewen-Campen waived reading of items 7.2 through 7.8, 7.10 and 10.1 through 10.6 and referred them to the Committee on Finance.
RESULT: **REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION**
FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee
- 7.6. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0939](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$1,600,000 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Sewer Stabilization Fund to support the Water-Sewer Capital Investment Plan.
President Ewen-Campen waived reading of items 7.2 through 7.8, 7.10 and 10.1 through 10.6 and referred them to the Committee on Finance.
RESULT: **REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION**
FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee
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- 7.7. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0935](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$638,218 to fund the FY 2024 Kennedy School Pool Enterprise Fund budget.
President Ewen-Campen waived reading of items 7.2 through 7.8, 7.10 and 10.1 through 10.6 and referred them to the Committee on Finance.
RESULT: REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION
FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee
- 7.8. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0936](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$221,481 from the Kennedy School Pool Enterprise Fund Retained Earnings Account to the FY 2024 Kennedy School Pool Enterprise Fund budget.
President Ewen-Campen waived reading of items 7.2 through 7.8, 7.10 and 10.1 through 10.6 and referred them to the Committee on Finance.
RESULT: REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION
FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee
- 7.9. Withdrawn (ID # [23-0937](#)) Withdrawn.
RESULT: WITHDRAWN
- 7.10. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0938](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$40,000 from the Dilboy Field Enterprise Fund Retained Earnings Account to the FY 2024 Dilboy Field Enterprise Fund budget.
President Ewen-Campen waived reading of items 7.2 through 7.8, 7.10 and 10.1 through 10.6 and referred them to the Committee on Finance.
RESULT: REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION
FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee
- 8. COMMUNICATIONS OF CITY OFFICERS**
- 9. NEW BUSINESS**
- 10. SUPPLEMENTAL ITEMS**
- 10.1. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0948](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$33,863,918 to fund the FY 2024 Sewer Enterprise Fund budget.
President Ewen-Campen waived reading of items 7.2 through 7.8, 7.10 and 10.1 through 10.6 and referred them to the Committee on Finance.
RESULT: REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION
FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee

- 10.2. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0949](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$18,996,902 to fund the FY 2024 Water Enterprise Fund budget.
- President Ewen-Campen waived reading of items 7.2 through 7.8, 7.10 and 10.1 through 10.6 and referred them to the Committee on Finance.
RESULT: REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION
FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee
- 10.3. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0945](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$271,200 to fund the FY 2024 Dilboy Fields Enterprise Fund budget.
- President Ewen-Campen waived reading of items 7.2 through 7.8, 7.10 and 10.1 through 10.6 and referred them to the Committee on Finance.
RESULT: REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION
FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee
- 10.4. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0943](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$5,890,276 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Capital Projects Stabilization Fund to support the FY 2023 5-Year Capital Investment Plan.
- President Ewen-Campen waived reading of items 7.2 through 7.8, 7.10 and 10.1 through 10.6 and referred them to the Committee on Finance.
RESULT: REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION
FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee
- 10.5. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0942](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$1,636,836 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Parks Stabilization Fund to support the FY 2023 5-Year Capital Investment Plan.
- President Ewen-Campen waived reading of items 7.2 through 7.8, 7.10 and 10.1 through 10.6 and referred them to the Committee on Finance.
RESULT: REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION
FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee
- 10.6. Mayor's Request (ID # [23-0941](#)) Requesting the appropriation of \$400,000 from the Unreserved Fund Balance ("Free Cash") to the Water Stabilization Fund to support the Water-Sewer Capital Investment Plan.
- President Ewen-Campen waived reading of items 7.2 through 7.8, 7.10 and 10.1 through 10.6 and referred them to the Committee on Finance.
RESULT: REFERRED FOR RECOMMENDATION
FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee

10.7. Officer's
Communication
(ID # [23-0946](#))

Superintendent of Schools conveying the School Department budget, approved by the School Committee's Finance and Facilities Subcommittee, meeting as a Committee of the Whole on May 16, 2023.

School Committee (SC) Chair Andre Green said this budget is the most transparent one he has ever been involved with. Acting Superintendent Dr. Jeff Curley commented that the budget is a critical investment that builds on the work started by former Superintendent Skipper and is meant to develop the whole child. Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Gorski spoke about the budget guidelines, saying that the budget is student centered and accountability focused. Dr. Curley noted that 55% of the almost 5000 students in Somerville schools are high needs and that multiple specialized programs are available. Some of the areas touched upon include grounding all work in equity, supporting academic recovery, expanding mental health services, creating an Office of Basic Needs and Housing Support Services, and planning for the future. Last year was a transition and recovery period after COVID. Attendance for April, 2023 was 92%, suspension rates are returning to normal levels, drop out rates increased last year, and graduation rates remain stable.

School Committee Goals

- Whole child teaching and learning
- Equitable access to programming
- Workforce diversity
- Equitable resource allocation

There is a \$2M increase to support Special Education students and staff will be shifted to keep caseloads manageable. New English as a Second Language teacher positions are being added, a Social Emotional Wellness curriculum will be rolled out, Restorative Justice Professional Development courses will be offered, threat assessment staff training will be provided, and peer mediation training will be available. There will be 1800+ students in after school programs and out of school time programs will be restructured to expand programs and provide stronger support. The out of school time budget increased \$550,000 over the FY 2023 budget and \$1.9M has been allocated to increase equitable access to out of school programming.

Budget summary

Non-salary budget is \$17.9M (a \$2.3 million increase over last year)

Salary budget is \$82M (a \$4.9 million increase over last year)

The total FY 2024 budget request is for \$117.4M (\$100 million of which will come from the city)

RESULT: PLACED ON FILE AND SENT FOR DISCUSSION

FOLLOWUP: Finance Committee

11. LATE ITEMS11.1. Resolution
(ID # [23-0956](#))

By Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Kelly, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Scott, Councilor Strezo and Councilor Wilson

That this Council hereby welcomes Isaac Neufeld Paskind to Somerville, extends its best wishes to his proud parents, and looks forward to Isaac's bright future in Somerville.

RESULT: APPROVED

12. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was Adjourned at 10:16 PM.