



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, June 5, 2024

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Wilson at 6:06pm and adjourned at 9:58pm with a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Clingan, Burnley, Ewen-Campen, Scott, Wilson), none opposed, and none absent.

Others present: Nikki SPencer - Chief of Staff, Lammis Vargis - Chief Administrative Officer, Rebecca Cooper - Digital Innovation Officer, Ed Bean - Finance Director, Mike Mastrobuoni - Budget Director, Erica-Satin Hernandez - ARPA Director, Christine Blais - Director of Sustainability and Environment, Garrett Anderson - Residential Decarbonization Program Manager, Steven Flythe - Deputy Director of RSJ, Amanda Nagim-Williams - RSJ Coordinator, Haakon Brooks - Public Information Officer, Anna Gartsman - Director of SomerStat, Gregory Jenkins - Executive Director Somerville Arts Council, Kate Hartke - Director of Grants and External Funds, Jennifer Allison - Deputy Director of Grants Development, Frank Golden - Chief Assessor, Linda Collector - Treasurer & Collector, Cindy Amara - City Solicitor, Angela Allen - Chief Procurement Officer, Madalyn Letellier - Legislative Services Manager.

Roll Call

Present: City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson, Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott, City Councilor At Large Willie Burnley Jr., Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan and Ben Ewen-Campen

1. Review of the FY 2025 Budget
 - Executive Administration
 - Chief Administration Officer
 - Office of Sustainability and Environment
 - Racial and Social Justice
 - SomerStat
 - Arts Council
 - Finance
 - Auditing
 - Grants Development
 - Assessing
 - Treasury
 - Building Insurance
 - Law
 - Damages to Persons and Property
 - Procurement and Contracting Services
 - Miscellaneous Budgetary Items

Executive Administration and Chief Administration Officer

Chief of Staff Nikki Spencer addressed the Council with a summary of the goals for the executive office for FY 25 and stated that the budget reflects a

6% increase. Lammis Vargis, Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) addressed the Council with updates and accomplishments that occurred in the first year of the CAO role. Rebecca Cooper, Digital Innovation Officer (DIO), addressed the Council and outlined her roles and responsibilities in the last year around developing data producing systems to support departments and make their work more efficient.

Chair Wilson asked CAO Vargis about where the funding to implement payment software, identifying the proper system and the plan for implementation is in the budget. CAO Vargis relayed the funding was moved over to the Information Technology (IT) department. Chair Wilson also asked about the Deputy CAO role that the Council cut last year and if the plan for the DIO would be to perform similar work. CAO Vargis relayed DIO Cooper will continue to work and assist in the system software's to improve system efficiencies across the city and is not performing Deputy CAO job functions. Chair Wilson asked Chief of Staff Spencer about what the strategy is to utilize the funding in the Summer Youth Employment line. Chief of Staff Spencer identified the hire of a Youth Services Director to expand the programming and the opportunities presented to the youth for employment.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked about the possibility for multiyear contracting for non-profit organizations who have long term service provider relationships with the city. Finance Director Ed Bean addressed the Council by stating if there is a funding source there is no prohibition for multiyear contracts, a lot of the non-profit funding sources are grant funded and there is no guarantee it is long term and operate on a year-by-year basis for that reason.

Councilor Burnley asked if the CAO would be the right person to ask about the ongoing disparity study.

CAO Vargis answered Procurement and Contracting Services (PCS) would be the best office to direct those questions to. Councilor Burnley addressed two questions to Chief of Staff Spencer: why the administration is not cutting the Special Items funding when it is historically underspent and why has the Executive Office continued to double in budget compared to the rest of the city. Chief of Staff Spencer addressed the plan to expand spending in the Summer Youth Employment line with partnering with other city departments and touched on expanding the events and programming being offered out of City Hall. Budget Director Mastrobuoni added it was a 56% increase in the Executive Administration budget and was not doubled.

Councilor Scott asked to clarify if the funding for the Charter was going away. Chief of Staff Spencer confirmed the budget is lowering, not going away. Councilor Scott also asked if an overdose prevention center has been launched. Chief of Staff Spencer responded no, it remains a continued goal and made reference to work with the State who conducted their own

feasibility study. Councilor Scott asked a follow up question of who paid for the feasibility study. Chief of Staff Spencer relayed the state paid for their own feasibility study through the Department of Public Health. Councilor Scott asked if universal basic income pilot has been started. Chief of Staff Spencer responded American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) colleagues will be presenting later and can provide more information and shared the pilot is set to start in July. Councilor Scott asked to confirm the FY 25 appropriation order for the Executive Administration personal services line. Director Mastrobuoni confirmed the amount is \$1,111,171. Councilor Scott asked to confirm that the Somerville Municipal Employee Association (SMEA) unit has not had a raise since FY 21. Director Mastrobuoni added they receive steps, but the scale has not changed while the collective bargaining continues. Councilor Scott asked what the steps are as a percent each year and Director Mastrobuoni said it depends on the Union.

Councilor Clingan asked if the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) program managers and directors will continue to be funded in future years. Chief of Staff Spencer answered those positions are funded through ARPA and will continue to be through calendar year 2026. Councilor Scott asked if any ARPA funded positions have been rolled into the general fund. ARPA Director Erica Satin-Hernandez stated Somerville Office of Immigrant Affairs (SOIA) Outreach Workers, Pop Up Teen Center staff, and Pilot Veterans Services Coordinator transferred to the general fund last year.

Office of Sustainability and Environment

Director Christine Blais introduced her staff, Kathy Cole Financial Analyst, Emily Sullivan Climate Change Program Manager, Eric Larson Energy Manager, Julia Damiano Environmental Policy Manager, and Garrett Anderson Residential Decarbonization Program Manager.

Director Blais presented the department budget with Personal Services projected up 24.5% with the anticipation of hiring a new position. Ordinary Maintenance is projected down 37% due to completion of the climate action study. FY25 will be focused on strategizing and reimagining the approach to implementation of climate forward, followed by a scaling up and mobilization of city staff.

Councilor Scott asked where Appendix B with a personnel list is on the budget book. Director Mastrobuoni said it is not posted yet they are working with Human Resources (HR) for an accurate list. Councilor Scott also asked about the underground transformer electrification feasibility study and what the department expects to come from it. Director Blais answered the project is budgeted at \$100,000 and is looking at underground and below ground sites to identify areas to install advanced technologies to design a pilot for a net geothermic plan.

Councilor Burnley asked Director Blais about the 25 cent per kilowatt charge being added to electric vehicles and where the need is coming from

and how much the 12 charging stations cost the city. Director Blais responded it is a comparable cost per kilowatt to surrounding communities and will also help keep up with repair and maintenance costs associated to the charging stations. They are expecting to generate about \$89,000 from these charges where the stations cost between \$150,000 and \$185,000. Councilor Burnley also asked Decarbonization Manager Anderson, how much money they are expecting to spend relative to outreach versus grants. Decarbonization Manager Anderson stated the Empower grant focuses on outreach to the community and money in their line items for outreach is a part of the general fund. Councilor Clingan asked for the breakdown of costs to reach \$150,000-\$185,000. Director Blais stated it includes the cost per kilowatt house, administration, licensing, and insurance. Councilor Clingan asked how much in terms of replacement the department sees and has the department investigated additional hook ups. Director Blais stated there is a significant amount of replacement due to the wear and tear of 2,000 people using the station every month. Director Balis stated Somerville has Eversource, and we have no more room to add onto the poles, so they are exploring other options.

Racial and Social Justice

Deputy Director Steven Flythe introduced staff, Amanda Nagim-Williams RSJ Coordinator, and Haakon Brooks Public Information Officer. Deputy Director Flythe emphasized the past two years have been focused on hiring and FY 25 is looking to build institutional knowledge and work to welcome a new Director. Ordinary Maintenance is projected to be down 38%.

Councilor Burnley asked at what point in the process the hiring of a Director is at. Public Information Officer Brooks stated applicants have been received and interviews are set to begin soon. Councilor Burnley asked about the Director's projects line that is allocated \$30,000 and what projects they are. Deputy Director Flythe stated that is reserved for the new Director to start. Councilor Burnley also asked where the department is at with an implementation strategy for when residents submit hate crimes. Deputy Director Flythe stated that there is an online form but with the hire of an RSJ Investigator there will be a more robust system in the future. Councilor Scott asked if the new position being paid \$75,000 is the first position to be paid out of the Racial and Social Justice Fund from 2020. Deputy Director Flythe responded it is.

The committee entered recess at 8:06pm.

Chair Wilson called the meeting back to order at 8:12 pm with a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Clingan, Burnley, Ewen-Campen, Scott, Wilson)

SomerStat

Director Anna Gartsman presented to the Council and highlighted community and city partnerships and successes through the work of staff and

members of the public. She provided specific updates on supporting staff in data and workforce partnerships, as well as continued analysis work and data systems development reflects the department's fiscal year goals. Personal Services are projected to be down 3.5% and Ordinary Maintenance is projected to be up 7%.

Councilor Scott asked how the personal services line was only down 17% after the substantial transfer out of the Digital Innovation Officer occurred. Director Gartsman replied that the additional request for intern funding is up. Chair Wilson asked about the budget line for office furniture from last year's budget and whether it was spent. Director Gartsman shared furniture will be delivered to the new office the last week of June.

Arts Council

Executive Director Gregory Jenkins gave a high-level review of initiatives completed and ongoing by the Arts Council to support the arts programming in the city which included zoning, arts space, and Nibble kitchen programs.

Councilor Burnley asked about why the non-union holiday line has been zeroed out. Director Jenkins stated the line is there for when a holiday falls on a Saturday and that does not occur in FY 25. Councilor Scott asked about the increase in funding by \$40,000 to the Professional and Technical Services line. Director Jenkins suggested those questions be directed to the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD) as they are handling the transition of funds. Councilor Scott also asked what funding would be needed to create a transition guide for the Arts Council in relation to zoning changes. Director Jenkins stated there are existing models out there and once ongoing projects have been completed enough bandwidth should open up to create in-house in partnership with other city departments.

Finance Auditing

Finance Director Ed Bean introduced staff Collen Tam Deputy City Auditor and Lisa Gallagher Manager of Accounts Payable. Director Bean spoke to the addition of three new members to the budget team, Meghan Huckenspahler Budget Analyst, Addison Baker Capital Budget Analyst, and a Principal Clerk to help with the accounts payable and invoice processing. Auditing budget is up 1.85 %, personal services are up 2.97% and Ordinary Maintenance is projected down 7.18%.

Councilor Scott inquired about Appendix B personal listing and filling the Principal Clerk position.

Director Bean verified the position was filled in November.

Grants Development

Director Kate Harke introduced staff Deputy Director Jennifer Allison. Director Hartke presented on the Grants team being instrumental in securing funding and managing the awards received by various departments. Director Hartke related Personal Services are projected up 4% for union staff and Ordinary Maintenance is projected up 10% for continued training, dues, and membership fees.

Councilor Burnley asked for the Director to speak to how much the department is able to utilize the Inflation Reduction Act for funding sources. Director Harke responded that it has a list of programs under it that she vets which ones are most competitive, Deputy Director Allison restated that they research and share out opportunities to departments to make an effort and apply for those funds. Director Harke also added the department applies for anything that aligns with departmental goals and will be competitive.

Assessing

Chief Assessor Frank Golden spoke to the budget stating there are no vacancies in the department and Ordinary Maintenance is increasing by \$10,000 for appraisals and legal services.

Treasury

Treasurer and Collector Linda Dubuque introduced staff members Cheryl Cruz Deputy Treasurer and David Zhang Assistant Tax Collector. Treasurer and Collector Dubuque presented the budget and a department update that the one vacancy has an internal bid out, Professional and Technical has been reduced because of better electronic funds and estimates, and increased training budget for additional opportunities and in state conferences.

Councilor Burnley asked where in the process the department is in requiring direct deposits for new hires and if that has any budget implications. Treasurer and Collector Dubuque replied to this required coordination with other departments to start rolling out.

Building Insurance

Treasurer and Collector Dubuque stated the building insurance is an estimate from a few months ago based on current statement of values from Liberty Mutual. The department is working on a questionnaire to get the statement of values to get the reality and did add \$20,000 as a contingency for Assembly Square.

Law

City Solicitor Cindy Amara spoke to the department being fully staffed and a 12% increase to the Ordinary Maintenance line and additional spending towards office supplies.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked for clarification if outside counsel is all included in the legal services line and City Solicitor Amara confirmed it is.

Councilor Ewen-Campen also asked for more information regarding when the city uses outside counsel and asked if it is the intent for the department to be fully self-sufficient now that it is fully staffed. City Solicitor Amara relayed the intent is to be primarily independent but a decision for outside expertise is to be made on a case-by-case basis. Councilor Burnley asked if any work towards the overdose prevention center has been done in-house or outside and City Solicitor Amara replied she has not engaged with any outhouse counsel on that subject. Councilor Scott asked about the change in position grading for a paralegal from FY 24 versus FY 25 at NU 13 to NU 11. Director Mastrobuoni corrected the position upgraded from part-time to full-time to support the department. It will remain a 1.0 FTE and a correction will be made to the budget book and can be shared back to the Council. Councilor Scott expressed a similar grade shift to an Inspectional Services Department (ISD) paralegal and Director Mastrobuoni stated his team would take a look and get back to the councilor.

Damages to Persons and Property

City Solicitor Cindy Amara stated this department funding covers any type of litigation happening in the city.

Councilor Scott asked if a judgment would be reflected in the general fund. Solicitor Amara stated it does not appear in the general fund because it is not a final judgment and at the moment is under appeal. Director Mastrobuoni added it would depend on the funding source for a judgment or settlement to appear on the general fund.

Procurement and Contracting Services

Chief Procurement Officer Angela Allen introduced staff Deputy Chief Procurement Officer Andrea Caruth. Chief Procurement Officer Allen relayed the department is fully staffed, as well as a 3% increase in Personal Services, no change to Ordinary Maintenance, In State Travel and In State Conferences lines are going up to reflect the fully staffed department's ability to attend more training and conferences. The Chief Procurement Officer spoke to the ongoing disparity study.

Councilor Burnley asked what stage the disparity study is at and once the study is over what are the anticipated implications to the budget. Chief Procurement Officer Allen shared the study is halfway done and they are the process of reviewing data from the consultant. She anticipates it will be complete later in the calendar year and it would be speculation to comment on the budgetary implications as it is a city-wide project.

Miscellaneous Budgetary Items

