



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, June 10, 2024

6:00 PM

The meeting took place virtually via Zoom and was called to order at 6:03 PM by Chair Wilson and adjourned at 8:33 PM on a roll call vote of 5 in favor (Councilors Clingan, Burnley, Ewen-Campen, Scott and Wilson), none against and none absent.

Others present:

Roberta Cameron - Community Preservation Act Manager, Suzanne Rinfret - Director of Traffic and Parking, Tom Galligani - Executive Director of OSPCD, Alan Inacio – Senior Accountant – OSPCD, Brad Rawson – Director of Mobility, Sarah Lewis - Director of Planning & Zoning, Michael Feloney – Director of Housing, Ellen Shachter - Director, Office of Housing Stability, Rachel Nadkarni - Director of Economic Development, Luisa Oliveira - Director of Public Space and Urban Forestry, Michael Mastrobuoni – Budget Director, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

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
 - Community Preservation Act
 - Parking
 - OSPCD Administration
 - Mobility
 - Planning, Preservation and Zoning
 - Housing
 - Office of Housing Stability
 - Economic Development
 - Redevelopment Authority
 - Public Space and Urban Forestry
 - Miscellaneous Budgetary Items

1. Review of the FY 2025 Budget

The meeting was recessed at 6:05 PM due to technical difficulties and reconvened at 6:12 PM.

The meeting was recessed at 7:55 PM and reconvened at 8:00 PM.

Community Preservation Act (pg. 369)

Manager Cameron told the committee that the CPA plan was submitted with the department's budget request. The projected revenue for FY25 is \$3,436,000 including state funding and grant awards. The preference is to

maintain the same level of disbursements as in previous years. The estimated debt service from 3 projects amounts to \$721,000 and the total available funds is \$2.5 million.

Parking (pg. 263)

Director Rinfret informed the committee that the increase in the Personal Services line is due to the addition of a new Project Manager position. The budget for Ordinary Maintenance has decreased slightly compared to FY24. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked about the delay in getting parking permits to residents and Director Rinfret explained that it's taking up to 3 weeks because of problems with the U.S. Postal Service. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked if renewal notices are mailed out to permit holders and the Director said that they have not been sent for the past 4 years since the city has a transient population. She did say that renewal emails are sent if the permit holder's email address is on file.

Councilor Scott asked about vacant meter repair positions and the Director replied that all 6 positions are filled and that the information presented in the budget book is incorrect.

OSPCD Administration (pg. 181)

Tom Galligani - Executive Director of OSPCD

Senior Accountant Alan Inacio presented the Administration's \$9.3 million budget and told the committee that this will be the first year that OSPCD will absorb the increase of ARPA programs. Asked about funding for various conferences, Mr. Inacio said that several staff members have professional credentials and use the trips to acquire continuing education credits for certifications and to learn about best practices, etc. Councilor Wilson asked about the FY24 ARPA funded Disparity Study and Mr. Inacio said that the implementation portion of that study will be absorbed by OSPCD. Councilor Scott inquired about the P&T Services line for ad hoc council requests and Mr. Inacio explained that it's a placeholder for emergency requests. Councilor Scott also asked about a timeline for the Anti Displacement report and Mr. Inacio said that the committees are restructuring and that the final dates are not available yet.

Mobility (pg. 214)

Director Rawson told the committee that the Mobility Department's service budget is level funded and the Transportation Planner vacancy is expected to be filled July 1st. Director Rawson explained that the resources for quick build projects are drawn from the lines for signs and cones, parking signs, and off budget places, e.g., grants. He spoke about participatory budgeting, saying that the department tried to honor the work of participatory budget committee, and that the projects are additive, i.e., outside the normal scope of the department's work. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked about improving

the sequence of streetscape contract work and Director Rawson drew a distinction between annual streetscape contracts and Capital Improvement Planning projects, noting that the Engineering Department prepares the bids. Councilor Burnley spoke about the budgets for FY23 and FY24, noting that FY23 spending was over budget while FY24 was underspent and Director Rawson explained that FY23 saw a one time purchase to propel the quick build program. Councilor Burnley also asked about police details, saying that the actual spending in FY23 and FY24 was \$0. Director Rawson explained that this is a placeholder for when details are needed, primarily when performing overnight pavement markings.

Planning, Preservation and Zoning (pg. 186)

Director Lewis noted that all permitting is now handled online through CitizenServ and that staff is working with the City Clerk to get user facing zoning ordinances completed. She noted that the department used ARPA funds to contract for the arts. \$130,000 in encumbrances have been accumulated and will be paid in 2025. There are 2 vacant positions for a Senior Planner and a Planner and applications are being received.

Councilor Scott asked about long range planning and when the Union Square East plan will get underway and Director Lewis said that the department's staff capacity was changed to accommodate Broadway grant funding and CitizenServ, adding that it may be possible to free up staff in the fall for Union Square. Some groundwork was started but had to be put on pause when other projects were taken on. Councilor Scott asked if the requests for additional planning support was geared to assisting the City Council and Director Lewis stated that all planners are able to work with the Council. Councilor Scott said he has grave concerns that urgency is led by groups with large piles of cash and that capacity is not being added to take care of the needs of the neighborhoods.

Housing (pg. 192)

Director Feloney stated that the department has a staff of 17 and that the Deputy Director's position is now dedicated and that a full time housing counsel has been hired. The department's budget reflects an overall increase of 10.8 %, mainly for P&T Services. Councilor Scott expressed his concerns about lotteries for affordable housing and Director Feloney explained that the policy is for lotteries for 5 units or below to be administered directly by the Housing Department and for quantities over 5 units, the developer/owner is responsible to contract with a lottery agent to administer the lottery. Councilor Scott noted that funding for a universal wait list has been budgeted for the 7 years and Director Feloney acknowledged that fact and said that major progress has been made. Somerville will be the first municipality to do this, however the software has to be in place, so staff is working with IT and procurement to identify a contractor.

Office of Housing Stability (pg. 197)

Director Shachter informed the committee that the Guaranteed Income Pilot is being implemented and the first payments are due in July. The municipal voucher program has also begun and there is program funding through FY27. Also, an RFP has been issued for emergency hotel/motel placements. The department is fully staffed but there is a need for a full time person to admin 12 contracts with non-profits. The ARPA funds for rental assistance programs will be used up by October and then funding will come from the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. Legal services will continue for 1 year using ARPA funds.

Councilor Burnley noted a decrease in the translation services line and Director Shachter explained that was due to services being taken over by SOIA. Councilor Burnley said that he was advocating for a new case manager for the department and the Director noted that there is a high volume of cases. The department's staff has gone from 5 to 13 since it started and the additional staff has been indispensable. The Director said that the department has the capacity to provide high quality services with this budget.

Economic Development (pg. 204)

Director Nadkarni told the committee that the department's service budget is level funded. Councilor Burnley questioned the expenditures to date of the P&T Services and the Director noted that nearly all of the budgeted amount has been spent or encumbered. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked when a decision will be made on moving forward with the Armory and Director Nadkarni said that a plan for approach is moving forward and that staff is looking at a building similar to today, but some governance levels need to be worked out. A Master Plan Draft will be sent to the City Council and the mayor by September for action in 2025. She noted that added capacity has been included in the DPW budget to handle daily maintenance at Armory.

Redevelopment Authority (pg. 204)

Director Nadkarni said that the only personnel costs are related to members of committee. Currently, there is one vacancy.

Public Space and Urban Forestry (pg. 219)

Director Oliveira reported that there are 2 vacant positions in the department. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked about the Central Hill Monuments and the Director explained that the process was delayed and that the estimate was higher than expected, so other sources of funding are being sought. The goal is to have some of the monuments back in place in FY25. Councilor Scott inquired about the park at 217 Somerville Avenue and the Director said that a bid was awarded and work will start in the fall of this year or the spring of 2026.

Councilor Wilson commented that the current budget is underspent to date and Director Oliveira explained that a number of invoice will be coming in for payment and that the department is pretty close to spending the budgeted

amount. Councilor Clingan asked about maintenance coordination of trees with the DPW and the Director explained that maintenance is proactive (for young trees) and reactive (for removals, trimming - done by DPW).