



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Open Space, Environment and Energy Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, April 7, 2025

6:00 PM

The meeting took place remotely via Zoom and was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chair Mbah and adjourned at 7:21 PM on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Davis, Wilson, Sait and Mbah), none against and 1 absent (Councilor Burnley).

Councilor Sait arrived at 6:03 PM.

Others present:

Director Christine Blaise – OSE, Director Luisa Oliveira - Public Space and Urban Forestry, Yasmine Raddassi – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Roll Call

Present: City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah, City Councilor At Large Willie Burnley Jr., City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson and Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis

Absent: Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-1768](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Open Space, Environment and Energy Committee Meeting of December 9, 2024.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: City Councilor At Large Mbah, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., City Councilor At Large Wilson and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

2. Committee Minutes (ID # [25-0341](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Open Space, Environment and Energy Committee Meeting of February 20, 2025.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: City Councilor At Large Mbah, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, City Councilor At Large Burnley Jr., City Councilor At Large Wilson and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

3. Order
(ID # [24-0106](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Davis, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Sait, Councilor Mbah, Councilor Clingan and Councilor Ewen-Campen

That the Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment work with this Council and Green and Open Somerville to develop a job description for an Invasive Species position to spearhead outreach, education, and citywide invasive plant species removal and to allocate funding for such a position in the FY 2025 budget.

Liaison Raddassi reported that she and the mayor have met with Green and Open Somerville. She told the committee that the Director of Finance has indicated that the city is looking at a level funded budget for FY2026 due to less revenue being received. With that in mind, the Administration is looking at different ways to address the matter of invasive species, including recently hiring a gardener in the DPW who has experience in removing those plants from parks, and by collaborating with other communities to learn from their experiences.

Director Oliviera commented that the plants are invasive and spread aggressively since they can be spread by birds and/or people and have the capability of taking over entire landscapes. Some of these plants require an herbicide treatment, which the city doesn't like to use, to kill them.

Councilor Burnley expressed his disappointment at where this matter stands after 15 months since it was submitted and he finds it bizarre that this item has been dispensed with, as he believes there is more that can be done. He commented that not having been part of the conversations about this, he's not aware of any commitment from the Administration. Councilor Davis would like Director Oliveira to focus more time on this, but in lieu of that, he urged that outreach efforts to the public be increased. He also stated his belief that digging up Japanese knotweed to remove it also helps it to propagate.

Director Oliveira also reported that the city has hired a horticultural contractor who is removing invasives from parks. The problem exists in areas where the landscape is not maintained by the DPW, e.g., on private properties and along train tracks. Councilor Davis noted one of the largest sites for Japanese knotweed is the building owned by Eversource and he suggested that the city contact them about a treatment plan.

Councilor Wilson asked if an educational brochure has been made available in other languages and Director Oliveira said that has not been done yet, but she will ask SOIA to help. Councilor Sait commented that community cleanup days would be a good opportunity to educate the public and work on the problem together. Director Oliveira said that her department is committed to boosting its website with information for the identification of invasives. Finally, she noted that the Pollinator Action Plan, which is hyper-specific to Somerville, has been released and is online.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED4. Officer's
Communication
(ID # [24-1552](#))

Director of Sustainability and Environment conveying an overview of the Commonwealth's Clean Energy Goals, Electric Sector Modernization Plan, demand growth in Somerville, and capital projects underway or planned.

Chair Mbah inquired if any new state or federal laws were impacting the implementation of electric modernization efforts or capital projects. Eversource Community Relations Representative Jason Wright explained that Eversource has been experiencing supply chain challenges since COVID, which have impacted its costs. He also noted that geo-political issues have impacted securing some of the materials needed. Juan Martinez, Director of System Planning at Eversource, commented that the current trade war could have an impact, but it's too early to know. He said that it might affect purchases of equipment needed for future projects and noted that the equipment needed or projects already underway was purchased in advance and should not be impacted. Chair Mbah commented that there are projects already in progress in Somerville and he expressed concern about how the costs being passed up the line would impact utility bills. Mr. Martinez stated that there would be no immediate impact, however, there may be at a later time.

Director Blaise pointed out that Somerville participates in the Community Choice Aggregation program and has locked in rates that are slightly lower than Eversource's until 2028, but there is no guarantee that the rates will remain to be lower. She noted that utility companies are dealing with supply and demand costs and said that Eversource is using a new pricing scheme of February to July to combat volatility between summer and winter rates. Mr. Wright acknowledged that customers had higher gas rates this year due to a colder winter and increased costs associated with the Mass Save program. He told the committee that the state decreased the Mass Save budget by \$500,000 and that Eversource is doing its best to negate the impacts of rising costs.

Councilor Wilson commented that the cost of modernizing the grid, along with the CEO's salary, also contributes to increased billing and he asked what was really driving delivery charge increases. Mr. Wright explained that those increases were driven by the Mass Save program, adding that the more it's utilized, the more it costs. Councilor Wilson asked if the Somerville substation project was being delayed and Mr. Wright replied that construction is ongoing. Councilor Wilson asked about the impacts of life science buildings and Mr. Martinez said that they are seeing life science space shifting to commercial enterprises across the system. Mr. Wright told the committee that Eversource has a special team to engage with the community to minimize the impacts of any problems or disruptions.

Councilor Davis asked if increasing the density for housing would have an impact on Eversource's load and Mr. Martinez explained that Eversource has a long-term plan for load growth and has a proposal for a new station. He assured the members that Eversource should have enough substation capacity for 10 years hence, and that plans are reviewed each year.

Chair Mbah asked if any programs would have to stop due to federal funding and Mr. Wright replied that there should be no impact, adding that the governor signed the Climate Act that establishes funds for some communities and will be working with Eversource to implement it by March of 2026.

Finally, Mr. Wright stated that Eversource's relationship with Somerville is on solid ground as they work collaboratively to advance initiatives.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

5. Order
(ID # [25-0067](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Ewen-Campen

That the Director of Parks and Recreation restore or replace the nearly 30 year old Nunziato Field plaque.

Liaison Raddassi explained that because of the nature of the damage to the sign, the Parks and Open Space Department will be dealing with this matter. Director Oliveira noted that the plaque was installed in the 1980's and that newer signs have more location information displayed. She also noted that plaques like that are no longer made, so it's not something that should be replaced. Instead, it should follow along with other flag signs and could be wrapped into the Parks and Open Space Department program.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Order
(ID # [25-0083](#))

By Councilor Sait

That the Commissioner of Public Works make a change to the calendar by extending the yard waste collection by at least one week.

Liaison Raddassi reported that the DPW will pilot a modified collection schedule beginning this October and will evaluate its success at the end of the year. Director Oliveira commented that the Pollinator Action Plan does not recommend disposing of yard waste.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED