



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, April 14, 2025

6:00 PM

Joint Meeting with the School Committee's School Building Facilities and Maintenance Committee

The meeting took place remotely via Zoom and was called to order at 6:04 PM by Chair Davis and adjourned at 7:32 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Sait, Wilson and Davis), none against and none absent.

President Pineda Neufeld appointed Councilor Wilson to replace Councilor Clingan as a member of the committee for this meeting only.

Others present:

Director Sue Yerkes – Parks and Recreation, Commissioner Jill Lathan – DPW, Superintendent Nick Antanavica – ISD, SPS Personnel Laura Pitone, Leiran Biton, Dr. Sarah Phillips, Danielle Berry - Facilities Transportation and Safety Coordinator, Yasmine Raddassi – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

The Committee recessed from 6:06 – 6:07 PM to allow the SPS Committee to be called to order.

Roll Call

Present: Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis, Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait and Jake Wilson

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [25-0659](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee Meeting of March 31, 2025.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: Ward Six City Councilor Davis, Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Wilson

2. Order (ID # [25-0233](#)) By Councilor Pineda Neufeld That the Commissioner of Public Works work with relevant city staff to develop a prioritization and tracking system of 311 requests to maintain optimal school building conditions and proactively address potential concerns.

Liaison Raddassi informed the committee that this matter is being worked on by Chief Administrative Officer and that a response was submitted to the committee at its March 31, 2025 meeting. Mr. Biton asked when the tracking system would be fully ready for use and Liaison Raddassi replied that the tool is functional and is being used by SPS staff. She also stated that SPS meets on a regular basis with staff from the DPW and IAM to

review and discuss concerns.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

3. Order
(ID # [25-0466](#))

By Councilor Strezo

That the Director of Parks and Recreation report on the process by which Ginny Smithers Pool patrons are promptly notified of pool cancellations or schedule changes, including any modifications that could be made to that process in light of the March 2025 temporary pool closure.

Items 25-0466, 25-0642, 25-0727 and 25-0729 were discussed together. The Administration submitted a memo regarding this item.

Director Yerkes began by taking responsibility for the situation and apologized to the residents of the city for the pool's closure. She told the committee that she and her staff are committed to providing a safe pool experience for everyone and to that end, protocols have been reviewed, staff have been retrained, in-service training has been scheduled, and efforts are underway to improve communications and outreach.

Commissioner Lathan noted that the actual date that the pool draining and cleaning began was April 3rd. DPW will be replacing the drains in the next few days and will then refill the pool. DPW will be responsible for checking the pumps and filtration system on a regular basis and Commissioner Lathan commented that moss bags will be added to the filtration system as another level of protection.

Chair Davis asked why this happened and if the cause has been determined and Director Yerkes said that staff are still investigating and that no definite reason has been determined. Councilor Sait asked for an explanation of the maintenance process, i.e., who is responsible for what. Commissioner Lathan stated that the DPW maintains the pumps and filtration system and she commented that, historically, this pool has been "quirky", however this situation was more extreme. She explained that it's important to have an annual closure of the pool to clean it and check for any problems and said that by doing that now means that the pool won't have to be closed in August to do it. Parks and Recreation (P&R) is responsible for the daily monitoring and cleaning of the pool. Councilor Sait asked why it took so long to make the decision to drain the pool and Commissioner Lathan replied that the pumps were ok and that it's not DPW's job to deal with chemical levels so the responsibility fell with P&R. After some time, DPW stepped in and decided to start over.

Director Yerkes explained that P&R staff shocked the pool twice without getting the proper results and then decided to bring in outside help to assist. A consultant was hired and an expert was brought in to advise on other

methods of keeping the water clean. Councilor Sait stated that P&R wasn't transparent about what was happening and that led to the frustration experienced by residents. She also noted that the timing of the communications was not ideal as some notices were received the day before events. She said that the memo provided (referenced below) contradicts what she has been hearing from constituents and she asked if P&R has a person responsible for communications. Director Yerkes explained that the department utilizes the software system, myRAK, and that the pool manager sends out the notices for aquatic programs. Councilor Sait asked that communications be improved.

Councilor Wilson asked how often the pool is tested by ISD and Superintendent Antanavica said testing is required annually and throughout the year if complaints are received. He told the committee that this particular inspection was part of the annual licensing check. Councilor Wilson asked why the water quality deteriorated in just 5 months and Director Yerkes said that she doesn't know why it went bad so fast, however she doesn't think that the expired testing kit was the cause. Superintendent Antanavica noted that the total chlorine level was high and could have reached that level from a variety of sources. Councilor Wilson noted that tap water has higher chlorine levels than pool water and Commissioner Lathen commented that this is not unusual. Councilor Wilson asked if ultra-violet light from outside keeps problems away from the Dilboy pool and the commissioner said that it does, since outdoor pools are different than indoor pools. Councilor Wilson asked if the city might look at a UV treatment and Commissioner Lathan replied that it's always a possibility, but that it wasn't needed in the past. Councilor Wilson noted 4 methods of communication used by P&R and he referenced the communication failure associated with the past fall festival cancellation. He said that he wants to make sure that people are informed about situations and he asked P&R to revise its communication process to include the use of all 4 methods.

Ms. Pitone asked that P&R coordinate with the School District to accommodate students who missed out on programming and Ms. Berry stated that she would inform SPS of the request. Mr. Biton asked if the pool is open, noting that the P&R website said that it was open as of March 7th and Director Yerkes replied that the website banner should say that the pool is closed indefinitely. She will have staff make the correction to the website. Asked about the next steps, Commissioner Lathan said that the drains will be changed before refilling the pool for 3-4 days, followed by getting the chemical balance to where it should be.

Chair Davis commented that the inspection report attached seems to paint a picture of confusion about who is supposed to do what and he has significant concerns about the city's ability to manage assets when it can't figure out who is supposed to do things. He told Liaison Raddassi that he wants the Mayor's Office to submit a clear plan, in writing, for managing the

pool. Liaison Raddassi will bring the request to the Mayor's Office and will return with a more detailed response.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Order
(ID # [25-0642](#))

By Councilor Sait, Councilor Wilson and Councilor McLaughlin
That the Director of Parks and Recreation and the Commissioner of Public Works update this Council on the continued closure of Ginny Smithers Sanders Pool and address the lack of communication with users of the pool.

Items 25-0466, 25-0642, 25-0727 and 25-0729 were discussed together.
The Administration submitted a memo regarding this item.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Resolution
(ID # [25-0727](#))

By Councilor Davis
That the Administration report to this Council on the cause of the reported chemical imbalance at the Ginny Smithers Pool and the process being used to address the imbalance.

Items 25-0466, 25-0642, 25-0727 and 25-0729 were discussed together.
The Administration submitted a memo regarding this item.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

6. Resolution
(ID # [25-0729](#))

By Councilor Davis
That the Administration develop a new process to address ongoing maintenance at the Ginny Smithers Pool and report to this Council to describe that process.

Items 25-0466, 25-0642, 25-0727 and 25-0729 were discussed together.
The Administration submitted a memo regarding this item.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

7. Order
(ID # [25-0602](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld
That the Commissioner of Public Works provide an update and timeline for repairs to damaged play structures at the Capuano Early Education Center schoolyard.

Discussed with Item 25-0603.

Mr. Biton commented that some structures have not been repaired yet and Commissioner Lathan stated that the needed parts should be received in the next day or two and that repairs should be made by Wednesday.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

8. Order
(ID # [25-0603](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld

That the Commissioner of Public Works plant natural turf in the muddy greenspace area at the Capuano Early Education Center in advance of the May 3 Family Fun Day celebration for the Capuano's 20th anniversary.

Discussed with Item 25-0602.

Mr. Biton noted that this was a time sensitive issue and Commissioner Lathan explained that if the area was re-seeded, it wouldn't be ready in time for the celebration. DPW will reach out to the school principal to verify the space that needs repair before making any decisions on mitigation options. Councilor Wilson inquired about using sod and Commissioner Lathan explained that whether seed or sod is used, it needs time to take root to withstand foot traffic, adding that if sod is used now, it would only be for optics (for the celebration) since it won't last without taking root.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

- SBFM - 2025-04-14 Memo Response Ginny Smithers Pool (with 25-0466, 25-0642, 25-0727, 25-0729)