



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council

Meeting Minutes

Monday, July 27, 2026

6:30 PM

Special Meeting

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

Present: Ward Three City Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen
City Councilor At Large Jon Link
Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott
Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan
City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo
Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait
City Councilor At Large Ben Wheeler
Ward Seven City Councilor Emily Hardt
Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin
City Councilor At Large Wilfred N. Mbah
Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 PM by Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis.

- 1.1. Roll Call Call of the Roll.
(ID # [26-1230](#))

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

2. CITATIONS

3. PUBLIC HEARINGS

4. ORDERS, ORDINANCES, RESOLUTIONS AND MOTIONS OF MEMBERS

5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- 5.1. Mayor's Request Requesting approval to accept and expend a \$231,635 grant with no new
(ID # [26-0378](#)) match required, from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety
and Security to the Police Department for a body-worn camera program.

Discussed with items #26-1228 and #26-1229.

Councilors expressed both support for body-worn cameras (BWCs) and concerns about the process, cost, and absence of civilian oversight.

Councilors Ewen-Campen and Link emphasized the city's financial constraints and the need for civilian oversight, with Councilor Link also citing recent layoffs and school staffing shortages. Councilor Sait supported BWCs but opposed accepting the grant because of the expedited process and lack of oversight. Councilor Wheeler acknowledged the benefits of BWCs but argued the grant was not essential and that current budget constraints made implementation too costly. Councilor Scott expressed frustration that civilian oversight has remained stalled since 2020 and said stronger policies should be in place before moving forward.

Councilors Mbah, Clingan, Hardt, and Strezo supported accepting the grant. Councilor Clingan stated that the city could both accept the funding and establish meaningful civilian oversight. Councilor McLaughlin strongly supported accepting the grant, citing the long history of delayed BWC implementation and arguing the city had acted in good faith. He questioned whether some councilors would support BWCs even if civilian oversight were established, given concerns about costs and broader police reform. Councilor Davis focused on strengthening the surveillance policy, objecting to officers reviewing footage before writing reports and to limited public access. He said he would support the grant if the administration committed to revising the policy to address those concerns, and Mayor Wilson agreed. Mayor Wilson also reaffirmed his commitment to establishing civilian oversight, noting that funding had been included in the budget, and said he shared Councilor Link's goal of increasing interventionist support in the schools.

RESULT: **APPROVED**

AYE: Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, City Councilor At Large Mbah, and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

NAY: City Councilor At Large Link, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

6. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

7. COMMUNICATIONS OF THE MAYOR

- 7.1. Mayor's Request Requesting that this City Council hold a public hearing regarding the
(ID # [26-1222](#)) implementation and use of body worn cameras by the Somerville Police
Department.

Mayor Wilson, Public Safety for All Project Manager John Hillman, Assistant City Solicitor/Labor Counsel Matthew Sirigu, and Police Chief Shumeane Benford presented an overview of the City's proposed

Body-Worn Camera (BWC) Program for the Somerville Police Department.

The presenters stated that the City has been preparing for implementation of a body-worn camera program following more than a decade of community discussion, research, and collaboration. They noted that work on the program began in 2015 and has involved City Councilors, police unions, community members, civil rights organizations, and two task forces. Public feedback, including recommendations from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and residents, was incorporated into the development of the proposed policy.

The presentation outlined the goals of the BWC program, including increasing transparency, accountability, and public trust while supporting contemporary policing practices. Research cited during the presentation indicated that body-worn cameras have been associated with reductions in use-of-force incidents and citizen complaints and provide objective evidence during critical incidents. It was noted that neighboring communities, including Cambridge, Arlington, Medford, and Boston, have implemented body-worn camera programs.

The presenters explained that, if approved, implementation would begin in August 2026 with Superior Officers and later expand to Patrol Officers upon completion of collective bargaining. The program is expected to equip 119 officers and will be supported by a supervising officer and a civilian program manager.

The presentation also addressed the City's plans to establish a civilian oversight authority, which would have access to BWC footage for incident review. The presenters stated that staffing for the oversight body and development of the necessary ordinance are anticipated in 2027.

Funding for the program was reviewed. The City was awarded a state grant in the amount of \$231,635 to support equipment purchases and startup costs. The presenters stated that salary adjustments associated with BWC implementation had been funded in prior budgets and would not affect the Fiscal Year 2027 budget. Ongoing subscription costs are expected to be incorporated into the City's general operating budget, with efforts to offset future expenses through operational savings.

The presenters reviewed key provisions of the proposed 2026 Body-Worn Camera Policy, including:

- Requirements governing when officers must activate body-worn cameras
- Protections related to First Amendment activities
- Limitations on officers' review of footage following deadly force incidents
- Procedures governing data retention, access logs, and public records

requests

Access to footage for authorized civilian oversight entities

The presenters requested that the City Council:

Discuss the proposed program while grant funding remains available

Approve the required Technology-Specific Surveillance Use Policy and the Surveillance Technology Impact Report

Accept the state grant to support implementation of the Body-Worn Camera Program.

Councilor Wheeler inquired about the duration of the next police collective bargaining agreement, language related to civilian oversight, projected operational savings, and data regarding shift differentials. Mayor Wilson stated that he agreed with the Councilor regarding pursuing a longer-term collective bargaining agreement. Assistant City Solicitor/Labor Counsel Matthew Sirigu advised that specific collective bargaining strategy could not be discussed in open session.

President Davis opened the public hearing at 7:19 p.m.

Thirty-nine individuals addressed the Council during the public hearing. Eleven speakers expressed support for implementation of body-worn cameras, while twenty-eight speakers expressed opposition.

Speakers in opposition raised concerns regarding the timing of the proposal, the absence of an established civilian oversight body prior to implementation, policies governing data storage and access to recorded footage, long-term financial impacts, and the overall public process. Several speakers also questioned the effectiveness of body-worn cameras and expressed concern that funding could be directed toward other public priorities.

Speakers in support stated that body-worn cameras would enhance transparency and accountability, provide objective documentation of police interactions, and align the Police Department with neighboring communities that have already implemented similar programs. Supporters also referenced the public engagement process undertaken during policy development and stated that the program reflects recognized policing best practices.

RESULT: APPROVED

7.2. Mayor's Request
(ID # [26-1228](#))

Requesting approval of the Technology-Specific Surveillance Use Policy for Body Worn Cameras.

Discussed with items #26-0378 and #26-1229.

RESULT: APPROVED

AYE:	Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, City Councilor At Large Strezo, City Councilor At Large Wheeler, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, City Councilor At Large Mbah, and Ward Six City Councilor Davis
NAY:	Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Link, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, and Ward Five City Councilor Sait

- 7.3. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-1229](#)) Requesting approval of the Surveillance Technology Impact Report for Body Worn Cameras.

Discussed with items #26-0378 and #26-1228.

RESULT: **APPROVED**

AYE: Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, City Councilor At Large Strezo, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin, City Councilor At Large Mbah, and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

NAY: Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen, City Councilor At Large Link, Ward Two City Councilor Scott, Ward Five City Councilor Sait, and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

8. COMMUNICATIONS OF CITY OFFICERS

- 8.1. Officer's Communication (ID # [26-1231](#)) Director of Intergovernmental Affairs conveying information on body-worn cameras.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

9. NEW BUSINESS

- 9.1. Public Communication (ID # [26-1232](#)) Sixteen residents submitting comments re: item #26-1222, requesting that this City Council hold a public hearing regarding the implementation and use of body worn cameras by the Somerville Police Department.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

10. SUPPLEMENTAL ITEMS

11. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was Adjourned at 10:10 PM on a roll call vote of 11 in favor (Ewen-Campen, Link, Scott, Clingan, Strezo, Sait, Wheeler, Hardt, McLaughlin, Mbah, Davis), 0 opposed.