



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Finance Committee

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, October 20, 2026

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Wheeler at 6:00 pm and adjourned at 7:36 pm on a roll call vote of 4 in favor (Councilors Link, Hardt, Scott, and Wheeler), 0 opposed, and 1 absent (Councilor Strezo).

Also present: Tom Galligani — Executive Director, Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development (OSPCD), Richard Raiche — Director of Infrastructure & Asset Management, Catherine Nakato — Director of Racial and Social Justice, Amanda Nagim-Williams — Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Emily Wisdom — Somerville Police Director of Finance and Administration, David Slonina — Deputy IT Director, Joey Hustins — Deputy Chief Procurement Officer and Delaney Fisher-Cassiol — Clerk of Committees

Roll Call

Present:	City Councilor At Large Jon Link, Ward Seven City Councilor Emily Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott and City Councilor At Large Ben Wheeler
Absent:	City Councilor At Large Kristen Strezo

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [26-1520](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting of October 6, 2026.

RESULT:	<u>ACCEPTED</u>
AYE:	City Councilor At Large Link, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler
ABSENT:	City Councilor At Large Strezo

Equity and Belonging

2. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-1472](#)) Requesting approval to appropriate \$100,000 from the Racial and Social Justice Fund to implement the 2026 Community Grant Cycle.

Catherine Nakato, Director of Racial and Social Justice, discussed this fund, noting that it supports Somerville's commitment to social justice and strengthens connections between residents and government. Councilor Scott expressed appreciation for the fund. In response to a question from Councilor Link, Director Nakato explained that the grants focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion, including community engagement and training. She reviewed the attachment *RSJ Fund Memo (10.8.26)* and highlighted several funded programs.

Councilor Hardt asked whether information about individual grant amounts would be made public. Director Nakato stated that the City plans to publish information about the funded projects and will consider whether to include grant amounts. She added that the City is committed to documenting the progress and impact of the organizations' work. In response to a question from Chair Wheeler, Director Nakato explained that organizations typically pay project expenses upfront, submit invoices, and receive reimbursement. For organizations that may have difficulty covering costs in advance, the City is working with the Finance team to explore options for providing upfront funding while ensuring expenses are properly documented.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Strezo

Community Space

3. Resolution
(ID # [26-1427](#))

By Councilor Sait and Councilor Link

That the Administration and relevant departments submit a memo to this Council showing the cost of staffing Somerville High School to be used as a teen center after school hours.

Councilor Link highlighted the need for a third space for teens. Amanda Nagim-Williams, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, noted that this remains a priority for the administration and that planning is ongoing. While a formal plan has not yet been developed, the administration is continuing to assess options. A walkthrough with the Mayor and Superintendent is planned for later this month to evaluate the space, identify needs, and determine resource requirements. She noted that staffing and programming needs will vary depending on the space and expressed hope that a teen center pilot could launch soon. Councilor Scott requested that Councilors be invited to participate in the walkthrough. Director Nagim-Williams stated that the administration would consider including Councilors in the walkthrough or providing opportunities for input through future updates.

In response to a question from Chair Wheeler about which departments would oversee programming, Director Nagim-Williams noted that Parks and Recreation would be involved, along with other departments. She emphasized that planning remains in the early stages, particularly as the walkthrough has not yet occurred. Chair Wheeler also asked about the anticipated number of participants. Director Nagim-Williams explained that capacity would depend on available funding and noted that she would follow up on this question. She added that the administration is proactively exploring grant opportunities. Councilor Link asked whether Health and Human Services would be involved and emphasized the importance of making the space student-driven. Director Nagim-Williams noted that the administration is considering both structured and unstructured programming.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEEPolice Department4. Mayor's Request
(ID # [26-1414](#))

Requesting approval to accept and expend a \$35,000 grant with no new match required, from the Mass Department of Mental Health to the Police Department for overtime/backfill to support officers and supervisors in obtaining/maintaining Crisis Intervention Team Training certification.

Emily Wisdom, Somerville Police Director of Finance and Administration, explained that the grant builds on previous Department of Mental Health grants supporting the jail diversion and mental health training program. The funding helps officers obtain and maintain their certification and helps ensure adequate staffing while officers complete the training.

In response to a question from Chair Wheeler, Director Wisdom stated that she would request any available program reports to share with the Council. Chair Wheeler noted public interest in the program and emphasized that the reports would be helpful in understanding its impact.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Strezo

Council Orders5. Order
(ID # [26-1032](#))

By Councilor Link and Councilor Wheeler

That the Director of Procurement and Contracting Services provide this City Council with a report of all artificial intelligence vendors and services for which the city currently has contracts or ongoing payment obligations.

Amanda Nagim-Williams, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, noted that the administration is developing an artificial intelligence (AI) policy. She explained that Bluevoice is currently the only product the City has purchased specifically for its AI functionality. David Slonina, Deputy IT Director, clarified that Bluevoice operates as a closed-loop AI system, keeping data internal. He added that other City software may have embedded AI features, but the City has no other products purchased specifically for AI. Deputy Director Slonina expressed concern over potential security breaches if they were to publicly identify specific products the City used that has AI as a secondary feature such as security software. Councilor Link emphasized the need to balance transparency with security and shared that Outlook had moved a large number of constituent emails into a folder without his knowledge, due to embedded AI features in Outlook. Deputy Director Slonina agreed to investigate the issue.

Councilor Scott noted that the Police Department and the Planning Department both use generative AI for projects. Deputy Director Slonina

acknowledged that the City does not have a complete inventory of AI use across departments and needs a better system for tracking it. Director Nagim-Williams explained that staff have not been instructed to use AI, but the administration is working to develop an internal policy. She noted that a working group is advising on the policy and that two AI-related events had recently been held at City Hall. Councilor Scott raised concerns about sensitive information being shared through external AI tools, noting that the City handles significant amounts of private information. He also cautioned that using AI for public communications could undermine public trust and emphasized the need for a clear, accessible policy outlining what employees can and cannot do.

Councilor Link stated that he did not believe the order had been sufficiently answered and called for a more complete inventory of AI use across City departments. Joey Hustins, Deputy Chief Procurement Officer, clarified that the item concerns AI contracting rather than AI use generally. He explained that Procurement cannot track AI features embedded in products that were not purchased specifically for AI functionality. The department focused its review on vendors and services whose primary purpose is AI functionality.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**

Infrastructure

6. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-1487](#)) Requesting authorization to borrow \$3,143,557 in a bond, and to appropriate the same amount for additional costs of design, construction, and equipping of the Poplar Street Pump Station.

This item was discussed with item #26-1486.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Strezo

7. Mayor's Request (ID # [26-1486](#)) Requesting authorization to reduce the borrowing appropriation of \$89,332,819 for the Poplar Street Project by \$2,097,667.05.

Rich Raiche, Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management, explained that large infrastructure projects include contingency funds to cover unforeseen circumstances. At the Poplar Street project, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) changed its rules for disposing of soil containing polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) after the contract had been awarded and work was underway. Because the site was historically used as a waste transfer station and incinerator, a significant volume of excavated soil contained PCBs and required disposal at a specialized facility in Ohio, increasing costs beyond the contingency amount and affecting the project schedule. Director Raiche noted that the City negotiated a reduction in the

additional costs with the contractor and subcontractor.

Director Raiche explained that the project was eligible for ARPA funding and approximately \$2.1 million in ARPA funds allocated to the City remained unspent and subject to expenditure deadlines, so the City applied the remaining funds to the Poplar Street project. He noted that this is primarily an administrative measure to formally allocate the ARPA funds to the project, update the overall project cost, and reduce the original borrowing authorization. He added that this documentation is required for ARPA funding compliance.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE APPROVED**

AYE: City Councilor At Large Link, Ward Seven City Councilor Hardt, Ward Two City Councilor Scott and City Councilor At Large Wheeler

ABSENT: City Councilor At Large Strezo

Economic Development

8. Order
(ID # [26-1429](#))

By Councilor Mbah

That the Director of Finance and the Director of Economic Development report to this Council on the situation of financial bankruptcy, involving the investor funds, holding equity in the empty lab building at 808 Windsor Place, Boynton Yards.

Tom Galligani, Executive Director of the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD), noted that financial difficulties in the life sciences market are not uncommon now. He explained that an investor in one of the lab buildings filed for bankruptcy in Germany in August and subsequently turned the property over to the bank. Councilor Scott asked about plans for the property and which bank currently holds it. Director Galligani stated that their plan is to continue operating the facility and retain the former property owners to manage the building. He did not believe the property would be auctioned and identified Bank OZK, based in Arkansas, as the current holder, noting that the bank is involved with several lab properties in the Boston area.

Councilor Link asked about the potential implications for City tax revenue. Director Galligani explained that owners of vacant buildings may petition the City for tax abatements if the properties' assessed values decline. In response to a question from Chair Wheeler about community benefits agreements, Director Galligani confirmed that agreements were in place but were not affected by the bankruptcy or transfer to the bank, as the required payments were triggered by the construction of the space and had already been received by the City.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**