



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS MAYOR JAKE WILSON

To: Somerville School Committee

From: Sarah Anders, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office

CC: Mayor Jake Wilson

Eric Weisman, Interim Commissioner of Department of Public Works

Richard Raiche, Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management

Steven Nutter, Director of the Office of Sustainability and Environment

Brad Rawson, Director of Mobility

Date: January 28, 2026

RE: SEU Bi-annual Updates

School Committee will provide the SEU with bi-annual updates on progress on:

1. Partnership with the City to maintain safe and healthy teaching and learning environments within school buildings and school grounds

The City of Somerville and Somerville Public Schools (SPS) partner closely to maintain safe and healthy teaching and learning environments. We are deeply committed to responding to the building and grounds needs of all SPS schools. SPS and the City will continue to partner on the goal of eliminating non-academic barriers that negatively impact teaching and learning. Below is a non-exhaustive list of recent examples of efforts that directly impact school buildings and grounds.

a. Air quality control post-COVID:

- i. MERV-13 filters have been added at every school. The federal Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) has tested these filters and confirmed they capture small enough particles to address viruses and bacteria. The EPA has found that improved ventilation in classrooms leads to reduced absenteeism and improved test scores, as well as overall health and performance in both students and teachers.¹
- ii. Filter replacement protocols have been revised to shorten the service period to four times per year at a minimum, improving environmental conditions as well as Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) performance.

¹ <https://www.epa.gov/iaq-schools/how-does-indoor-air-quality-impact-student-health-and-academic-performance>

- iii. UV lighting has been installed in the air handling equipment wherever feasible. According to the EPA, these lights have been shown to eliminate mildew and mold, kill viruses and bacteria in the airstream, and prevent contaminant build-up on the HVAC components.² These efforts led to improved airflow and system performance, as well as increased energy efficiency in the HVAC systems.
- iv. In October 2022, SPS was awarded a \$700,000 Improving Ventilation and Air Quality (IVAQ) Grant from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The goal of this grant funding is to improve ventilation and air quality in school districts with students and communities disproportionately impacted by the COVID pandemic. SPS projects included replacing various cooling and heating equipment at the Healey, Brown, West, and Kennedy schools. The IVAQ grant was extended through December 2024 and all projects have been completed apart from ESCS multiple door replacements in food service area and the Argenziano food service exterior door replacement. Our DPW team still plans to complete this work

b. Resiliency

- i. Community resiliency work in progress includes:
 - a. Regional project with the Resilient Mystic Collaborative to conduct a preliminary study of a regional network of resilient community centers in Somerville, Cambridge, Medford, Everett, Chelsea, Revere, and Winthrop. This project will wrap up in June 2026 with initial recommendations for a regional network.
 - b. Community heat resilience project with the Barr Foundation, Metropolitan Area Planning Council, Cambridge Health Alliance, and CultureHouse to implement a heat resilience program in Summer 2026. The heat resilience program concept is under development.
- ii. Infrastructure resiliency work in progress includes:
 - a. IAM – Engineering continues its annual pipeline rehabilitation program and has started including the installation of Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) basins wherever feasible. GSI provides natural attenuation of stormwater, removes pollutants, and reduces heat island effects in our roadways.
 - b. AM – Capital Projects completed the Argenziano Infill Classroom project which converted an open atrium space into a fully functioning classroom to provide additional student capacity at the AFA.
 - c. IAM – Capital Projects completed updates and upgrades to the kitchen at the Argenziano to serve as the production kitchen for the district.

² <https://www.epa.gov/mold/does-ultraviolet-uv-radiation-uv-lamps-kill-mold>

c. Climate Forward

- i. In Spring 2024, the City updated Climate Forward, a community climate action plan with a roadmap for achieving interim goals. Climate Forward proposes a 50% reduction in emissions in municipal and school buildings by 2030.
- ii. As of April 2024, the City of Somerville has committed that all new schools will be net-zero.
- iii. In early 2025, the City Council unanimously approved an amendment to the Commission on Energy Use and Climate Change establishing ordinance. The Commission has modernized into the Climate Action Commission (CAC) which is currently interim. This year, the CAC will recruit 13 members, including at least two youth members. A member of Somerville Public Schools Administration has also been designated to serve as an ex-officio member.
- iv. In Spring 2024, Somerville Public Schools and OSE hosted the first-ever April Break Climate Camp, called Climate Tech Academy, for middle schoolers at the Somerville High School. The program also hired high schoolers to help run the program. In October 2025, Climate Tech Academy evolved into a week-long STEM program for 5th graders at all SPS elementary and community schools. During this STEM week program, students learned about climate change, local impacts of climate change, and applied what they learned through an activity to design and test stormwater management systems in the classroom.
- v. In Spring 2025, the City worked with SPS to pilot afterschool Climate Action Clubs at three schools – Argenziano, East Somerville, and Winter Hill Schools. The City and SPS are working to expand Climate Action Clubs in Spring 2026. The Climate Action Club program was developed in coordination with the SEU representatives developing the district-wide climate change curriculum. In Spring 2026, the afterschool program will tentatively be offered to students in grades 5-8 at the Argenziano, East Somerville, West Somerville, Kennedy, Healey, and Winter Hill Schools. School participation is currently being confirmed. The clubs will run from March – May 2026. The 2026 Climate Action Clubs will hire approximately 18 SHS students to lead the program and provide workforce exposure to the high school students. The 2025 program hired nine high school students.
- vi. In 2025, the City was recognized as a member of the inaugural class of communities designated as Climate Leaders by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Through this program, the City was awarded technical assistance to create an overview of the path to decarbonizing all municipal assets, including school buildings.

- vii. In 2025, OSE completed the sixth cohort of the popular Climate Ambassadors program, open to residents aged 16 and older. The seventh cohort is starting in January 2026.
- viii. The City facilitated the fourth summer of Mayor's Climate Justice Youth Summer Jobs program in 2025, hosting a student to analyze electric vehicle charging station use patterns and recommend changes.
- ix. The City will host SustainaVille Week, the annual climate change week, in Spring 2026. The City is coordinating with the Libraries, SPS, Interim Climate Action Commission, and community organizations to create an engaging and educational schedule of events.

d. Efficient Systems and Work Order Processes

- i. SPS leadership continues to partner with the City to improve the current work order process for addressing and tracking facility needs.
- ii. The Administration will continue to meet regularly with SPS to discuss, prioritize and plan for SPS building needs.
- iii. Looking to the future, following an extensive procurement process in 2025, IAM has executed a contract with OpenGov for a full Asset Management and Work Order system. The software integration process will begin in early 2026.

e. Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA)

- i. The Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA) has specific requirements for the way school districts identify, manage, document, and inspect asbestos-containing materials (ACM). While AHERA is a reporting requirement for school districts, within Somerville, DPW is the designated department for the AHERA management plan and compliance.
- ii. DPW staff completed the AHERA Awareness Training on December 28, 2023. Follow up discussions with the designee were held in Summer 2024 and 2025. Another full-scale AHERA training is being scheduled for Summer 2026.
- iii. An electronic copy of the Asbestos Management Plan and three-year inspection plan for each school building has been shared with SPS Administration. DPW is currently working with a new AHERA vendor to provide a new 3 Year Inspection Report by the end of September 2026.

f. Snow Removal

- i. During the winter months, SPS and the City share a high priority of keeping students and families safe on their way to and from school. The Department of

Public Works and other relevant departments prioritize the following during any snow event:

- a. First priority: school entrances, drop-off areas, staircases and walkways
- b. Second priority: school crossings
- ii. Staff use several methods of de-icing and removal depending on the surface. These include pretreating with plant-safe ice melt or salt, and removing snow with shovels, snow blowers, brooms and squeegees.
- iii. In addition, the City continues its pilot of Sidewalk Snow Clearing on Broadway and School Streets. On these two routes, Inspectional Services staff ticket property owners who do not remove snow from their sidewalks after an allotted amount of time. City workers then clear snow to promote pedestrian safety.
- iv. To improve safe passage for WHCIS students, DPW works proactively with DCR, advocating that the Otis street bridge is clear of ice and snow.
- v. Snow removal on granular rubberized surface (i.e. poured -in-place) is not performed due to potential damage caused when removing snow. Manufacturers and installers of this product all recommend against snow removal or any activities other than foot traffic on these surfaces due to damage digging, abrasion, and friction can cause to the rubber resulting in exposure of the underlayment. The poured-in-place is designed with ground rubber granules and glue as a binder. This material forms a flexible surface providing give under foot or fall protection in parks and playgrounds. If a shovel or plow were to be used on this surface, the rubber granules can be dislodged. DPW observed this damage on the bike path in past years and has since ceased snow removal on these surfaces.

2. Partnership with the City to become carbon neutral

As various building systems require replacement, the City will be identifying and installing new technologies that reduce each building's carbon load, improve resiliency and energy efficiency. Active projects advancing those goals include:

- a. **Kennedy School:** The chiller was replaced in 2024 and fully integrated with new control systems in 2025. The system is now fully operational, and City staff can monitor the performance of the building. The specified modular chiller and project have several important roles to reduce energy use, including to:
 - i. better match the load of the building, without excessive energy consumption;
 - ii. be compatible with future heat recovery add-ons like pool heating and/or solar hot water; and

- iii. enable chillers to also provide the heating, thereby reducing reliance on the existing natural gas boiler.
- b. **West Somerville Neighborhood School:** The school has gone through a conceptual design process. The next steps are design and construction. The school will have the same modular chiller system as described above for the Kennedy School, a new roof with added insulation, and be made solar ready. The downstream heating and cooling units will also be replaced to accept modern sustainable design strategies which will maximize efficiency.
- c. **Healey School:** Both boilers have been re-tubed as the boilers and burners themselves were in excellent working condition. The previous boiler tubes had corroded from moisture over the years. The school has also gone through a conceptual design process. The next steps are design and construction. The school will have the same modular chiller system as described above for the Kennedy School, a new roof with added insulation, and be made solar ready. Additionally, downstream heating and cooling units will also be replaced to accept modern sustainable design strategies which will maximize efficiency.
- d. **Somerville High School:** A 330KW (DC) solar array was energized at Somerville High School in June 2025. The array is active under a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) wherein the city pays for the energy produced by the array at approximately one third of the current delivered electricity price. The array produces approximately 350,000 kilowatt hours (KWH) annually, which is approximately 12% of the building's annual consumption.
- e. **East Somerville Community School:** The ESCS solar array, which was energized in 2022, has continued to produce approximately 400,000 KWH annually. This energy is purchased by the City at approximately 27% of the current delivered electricity price. The array offsets approximately 40% of the building's electrical consumption.
- f. **Albert F. Argenziano School:** The City was awarded a \$132,000 grant from the US Department of Energy for upgrading LED lighting in the Argenziano. The final phase of LED lighting replacement of the school was completed in May of 2025.
 - i. DPW has discovered that one of the smaller three boilers is failing. DPW has multiple quotes to replace the existing boilers with new boilers. DPW is currently working with Capital Projects to move this forward as a joint project.
- g. **Brown School:** Both boilers have been replaced with two high efficiency boilers and the chimney flue was reconfigured to bypass the existing chimney that has

ACMs and interior structural issues.

- h. Citywide:** The City is methodically investigating the mechanical systems in school buildings, starting with retro-commissioning or “stress-testing” of HVAC systems and their controls. Through that effort, the City is identifying systems that are not functioning or are nearing the end of their useful life and developing proactive system replacement projects to replace that equipment. One primary design objective is the evaluation and selection of alternatives to address those issues in advancing the City’s climate goals. Additionally, the City is currently working with Eversource to conduct comprehensive building assessments on all school buildings, scheduled to be completed in Spring 2026. Comprehensive building assessments are the building block to unlocking funding opportunities for larger energy efficiency and decarbonization projects.
 - i. Fleet:** The City is scheduled to roll out an updated vehicle purchase policy in 2026 to comply with the requirements of state programs and encourage purchase of energy-efficient vehicles across the fleet. In 2025, the City installed a new EV charging station at Ibbetson. In 2026, the City is planning to install seven new charging stations, six paid for with grant funding. All station locations are aligned with the interdepartmental siting strategy published in 2024.

3. Partnership with the City to increase parking availability for staff around school buildings - particularly those without a dedicated lot and a large staff - and to reduce parking demand by incentivizing alternate modes of transportation.

The City continues to prioritize schools in its transportation policy, projects and programs, especially around traffic safety to reduce crashes and transit priority to incentivize alternate modes of transportation. In 2025, the City completed a major accessibility and safety project in the Spring Hill neighborhood, proximate to the High School. The City also initiated a major walkability and traffic calming reconstruction project on Tufts Street adjacent to the Capuano. Smaller-scale safety and accessibility upgrades were completed adjacent to the Winter Hill at Edgerly and around the Argenziano. The City continues to provide free parking passes, free transit passes and free bikeshare memberships to SPS staff. The City also continues to provide free transit passes to SPS students in grades 7-12 to improve travel choice and reduce traffic and parking demand.