

Somerville — Investigative Briefing Memorandum

PUBLIC RECORDS ANALYSIS · REAL TRUTH MA · RETRIEVED SEPTEMBER 11, 2026

Somerville

March 2026 (Revised)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Somerville's FOIA return constitutes a high-value document set that reveals the mechanics of coordinated Nicotine-Free Generation (NFG) policy adoption across a six-municipality collaborative. The return includes Board of Health meeting minutes from January, February, and March 2025; email correspondence between Maureen Buzby and Somerville officials; grant reporting documents spanning FY24 and FY25; template regulations; scripted advocacy materials; letters of support; and the final adopted regulations. Together, these documents expose a systematic campaign in which external advocates drove policy adoption through a state-funded "Six City Tobacco Initiative" while manufacturing the appearance of organic community demand. The most significant evidence centers on the coordinated timeline: Maureen Buzby—Regional Tobacco Prevention Program Manager for the City of Melrose—emailed Somerville officials on December 23, 2024, coaching them on how to respond to anticipated opposition at a public hearing that had not yet been publicly noticed. The Board of Health then pre-determined its positions on fines, NFG adoption, and nicotine pouch restrictions at its February 20, 2025 meeting—before the March 20, 2025 public hearing. At that hearing, 26 individuals testified, including at least eight students (one from Needham, outside Somerville), known NFG network advocates Mark Gottlieb, Dr. Jonathan Winickoff, Kate Silbaugh, Anthony Ishak, and Buzby herself. The Board voted to adopt the regulations at 7:21 PM—just 81 minutes after opening the meeting. The FY24 and FY25 grant reporting documents are particularly damning: they explicitly document the Six City Initiative as a coordinated effort among Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Revere, Somerville, and Winthrop, with progress toward NFG adoption tracked as a grant deliverable. One entry states that MAHB's Cheryl Sbarra "provided a draft regulation for Somerville with detailed cap options," confirming that template regulations were supplied to the municipality by external advocates.

The Somerville case matters because it provides the clearest documentation of the state-funded pipeline: the Six City Tobacco Initiative grant reports tracked NFG adoption as a quarterly deliverable, and when Somerville adopted NFG on March 20, 2025, the grant report recorded "Another win! Somerville adopted NFG and model reg updates on March 20th." The Board had already made substantive policy decisions at its February 20 meeting—including fine structure, nicotine pouch restrictions, and content limits—before any member of the public had an opportunity to testify at the March hearing. The public hearing was not deliberative; it was performative. Citizens who attended participated in a proceeding whose substantive outcomes were predetermined, and the grant report treated their participation as irrelevant—the only metric that mattered was whether the "win" was secured.

KEY DOCUMENT EXCERPTS

Buzby Coaches Somerville Officials on Opposition Talking Points

From: Maureen Buzby <mbuzby@CityofMelrose.org>

To: Karin Carroll <kcarroll@somervillema.gov>

Date: Monday, December 23, 2024 at 10:51 AM

Subject: Tobacco Prevention funding clarification

"Terrific meeting last Thursday. So many thoughtful questions from Board members. There were some new ones – and we've done a lot of NFG info sessions."

SIGNIFICANCE: Buzby references a private meeting with Board of Health members that occurred before any public hearing was noticed. The phrase “we’ve done a lot of NFG info sessions” confirms a systematic campaign of private briefings with officials across multiple municipalities. The “terrific meeting” language reveals Buzby’s role as an advocate coaching officials rather than providing neutral information. “The American Lung Association publishes an annual Tobacco Control ‘grade’ for all the states. Massachusetts traditionally earns an ‘A’ for policy because we have some of the best tobacco prevention policies in the nation and an ‘F’ for funding because we don’t use all the funds from the Feds on tobacco prevention. This will be pointed out by the opposition if Somerville decides to hold a public hearing.” **SIGNIFICANCE:** Buzby is explicitly prepping Somerville officials on anticipated opposition arguments before a public hearing has been scheduled. This is strategic coaching—she is arming officials with counter-arguments to use against citizens who will testify. The phrase “if Somerville decides to hold a public hearing” further suggests the hearing decision itself was still being coordinated. “Please feel free to share this email with Somerville Board of Health members if you feel it will be helpful.” **SIGNIFICANCE:** Buzby encourages distribution of her coaching materials to Board members who will later sit as supposedly neutral adjudicators at the public hearing. Karin Carroll confirmed in her reply that she “shared with the Board.” The Board members who voted to adopt NFG on March 20, 2025 had been receiving advocacy materials from Buzby since at least December 2024.

Karin Carroll Confirms Board Received Buzby’s Coaching

From: Karin Carroll <kcarroll@somervillema.gov>

To: Maureen Buzby <mbuzby@CityofMelrose.org>

Date: Monday, December 23, 2024 at 12:42 PM

Subject: RE: Tobacco Prevention funding clarification

"Thank you, Maureen—I have shared with the Board."

SIGNIFICANCE: This two-sentence reply confirms the chain of influence: an external advocate (Buzby, funded by the City of Melrose through a DPH grant) prepares coaching materials, sends them to Somerville’s Director of Health & Human Services, who then distributes them to Board of Health members—the same individuals who will

later preside over the public hearing and vote on adoption. The Board received advocacy materials nearly three months before the March 20, 2025 public hearing.

Buzby Solicits Letters of Support for Somerville Hearing

From: Maureen Buzby

To: Julie Smith-Galvin (Green Path Strategies)

Date: Prior to March 20, 2025

Subject: Letter of support for Somerville Public Hearing March 20, 2025

"Hi Julie, If you write a letter of support please send it to Karin Carroll at kcarroll@somervillema.gov or to: Karin Carroll, MPH, Director of Health and Human Services, City of Somerville, 167 Holland St, Somerville MA 02145. Thank you so much! Maureen"

SIGNIFICANCE: Buzby is actively soliciting support letters from individuals outside Somerville for the city's public hearing. Smith-Galvin is a Wakefield resident and business consultant with no apparent connection to Somerville governance. Buzby provides the exact contact information and mailing address for Somerville's Director, demonstrating that she is orchestrating the manufacture of public support across municipal lines. This is the hallmark of an astroturf campaign.

Cross-Municipality Supporter Responds to Buzby's Solicitation

From: Julie Smith-Galvin (Green Path Strategies)

To: Karin Carroll <kcarroll@somervillema.gov>

Date: Thursday, March 20, 2025 at 1:07 PM

Subject: Re: Letter of support for Somerville Public Hearing March 20, 2025

"I'm sorry I can't make the public hearing this evening, but I wanted to send you a note of support for the Nicotine-Free Generation (NFG). I work in Somerville and live in Wakefield. Wakefield has passed NFG and it has been a welcome policy."

SIGNIFICANCE: This email, sent just hours before the evening public hearing, demonstrates Buzby's solicitation network in action. The Cc to Buzby confirms she remains the coordinating hub. Smith-Galvin explicitly references Wakefield's prior NFG adoption, connecting the cross-municipality pattern. The letter arrived the day of the hearing—timed to bolster the record of "public support."

Buzby Details Funding Strategy and Six City Initiative

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SIGNIFICANCE: Buzby explicitly names the “Six City Initiative”—the coordinated effort among Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Revere, Somerville, and Winthrop—and connects it to state and federal funding streams including the Master Settlement Agreement and the \$41 million Juul Labs lawsuit settlement. This reveals that NFG advocacy is tied to grant deliverables and funding aspirations, not organic community demand.

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PUBLIC HEARING OBSERVATIONS

The following observations are drawn from observation of public Board of Health and City Council meetings in Massachusetts municipalities considering NFG adoption.

"There was no board discussion beyond a brief reading of the proposal. Brian Green made a motion to adopt the regulations, and all Board members voted to adopt the proposal." — Board of Health Meeting, Somerville, March 20, 2025

"Thank you for the courage and leadership of the youth in this meeting who have told their stories about this issue." — Lovelee Heller, Board Member, Somerville, March 20, 2025

KEY FINDINGS

Six City Initiative Operated as a Coordinated NFG Adoption Pipeline FY24 and FY25 grant reporting documents explicitly track the Six City Tobacco Initiative—a collaborative among Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Revere, Somerville, and Winthrop—as a state-funded program with NFG adoption as a measured deliverable. The FY24

Q2 report states that Cheryl Sbarra “provided a draft regulation for Somerville with detailed cap options.” The FY25 Q1 report notes that “Somerville is interested in NFG and will have a presentation in November.” By Q3 of FY25, the report records: “Another win! Somerville adopted NFG and model reg updates on March 20th.” The use of “another win” in official grant reporting reveals that NFG adoption is treated as a program achievement—not a neutral policy outcome.

Board of Health Pre-Determined Outcome Before Public Hearing At the February 20, 2025 Board of Health meeting, the Board made substantive policy decisions about the NFG regulations—including the fine structure, the decision to restrict nicotine pouches to adult-only stores, and the decision to refrain from limiting nicotine content in oral pouches—one month before the public hearing. The minutes state: “The Board has chosen to present the graduated structure for local fines for tobacco violations next week to the community hearing.” The use of “chosen” and “present” reveals that the public hearing was a forum for announcing a predetermined decision, not for receiving genuine public input.

Scripted Advocacy Materials Distributed Across Municipalities Two documents in the FOIA return contain virtually identical NFG advocacy content: “Document1.docx,” attributed to Bonny Carroll and dated September 19, 2024 for the “Six City Tobacco Initiative,” and “A Maureen speech.docx,” attributed to Maureen Buzby for a Malden presentation on April 24, 2025. The identical text—including the same statistics, historical narrative, legal citations, and policy justifications—demonstrates that advocacy materials were authored centrally and distributed to local coordinators for presentation as if they were locally generated. This undermines any claim of organic, municipality-specific policy development.

Cross-Municipality Testimony Manufactured for Public Hearing Of the 26 individuals who testified at the March 20, 2025 hearing, multiple were from outside Somerville: Isabel Tashie (Needham High School), Kate Silbaugh (Brookline), Emily Wieja (Cambridge), Katherine McDaniel (Cambridge Health Alliance, “former doctor”), and Julie Smith-Galvin (Wakefield, via letter). Known NFG network advocates Gottlieb, Winickoff, Silbaugh, Ishak, and Buzby all appeared. The Board’s minutes note that “most of the testimonies were in support of the NFG initiative.” This pattern—external advocates and students from other municipalities testifying at a local public hearing—is consistent with manufactured grassroots support.

Youth Mobilized for Testimony at Public Hearing At least eight students testified at the March 20, 2025 hearing: Bhavika Kalia, Nico Kuczwara, Astrid Garcia, Ava Polsko, Chahat Kalia, Ishana Bali (all Somerville High School), Benjamin Murphy (West Somerville Neighborhood School), and Isabel Tashie (Needham High School). The presence of a student from Needham—a municipality with no apparent connection to Somerville’s regulatory process—suggests recruitment beyond the municipality’s borders. The volume and coordination of youth testimony is consistent with the template-driven, organized mobilization documented in other NFG FOIA returns.

MAHB Provided Template Regulations and “Technical Assistance” The January 23, 2025 Board of Health minutes state that the Board “will revisit the final draft regulation in February, with technical assistance available from MAHB if needed.” Grant reporting confirms that Cheryl Sbarra of MAHB directly provided draft regulations. The Somerville Draft Tobacco Sales Regulations are marked “Revised template as of 1.12.23,” confirming they

originate from a standardized template rather than locally drafted policy. The FY25 Q3 report further notes that “Cheryl and/or I met with them at 3 various times to explain” the regulations—documenting repeated private meetings between external advocates and Board members.

NETWORK DATA POINTS AND FUNDING CONNECTIONS

Master Settlement Agreement (1998): Buzby’s December 23, 2024 email explains that DPH receives tobacco prevention funds from the MSA, with MTCP receiving “only a portion of those funds—anywhere from 5 to 10%.” This establishes the funding pipeline from state-level settlement funds to the Six City Initiative. Juul Labs Lawsuit Settlement: Buzby references “\$41 million coming to Mass” from the Juul Labs settlement, noting it is “specifically targeted for education, prevention, enforcement, and treatment.” She expresses hope it will “fund more tobacco prevention programs like the Six City Initiative,” directly connecting federal lawsuit proceeds to local NFG advocacy. Six City Tobacco Initiative (DPH Grant): FY24 and FY25 reporting documents track the Six City Initiative as a grant-funded program covering Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Revere, Somerville, and Winthrop. NFG adoption is tracked as a program deliverable with quarterly progress reports. MAHB Technical Assistance: Cheryl Sbarra provided draft regulations and met privately with Board members on at least three occasions (per FY25 Q3 report). MAHB’s involvement suggests organizational resources dedicated to driving NFG adoption at the municipal level. Public Health Excellence Grant: Referenced in February 20, 2025 Board minutes in connection with regional health worker initiatives, indicating overlapping public health grant infrastructure. MTCP Program: Buzby’s role as Regional Tobacco Prevention Program Manager is funded through the Massachusetts Tobacco Cessation and Prevention Program (MTCP), which receives MSA funds. Her coordination activities across six municipalities are conducted in her official, grant-funded capacity.

FINANCIAL CONTEXT (IRS FORM 990 ANALYSIS)

The following financial information, derived from IRS Form 990 filings of organizations identified in this municipality’s FOIA return, provides context on the institutional funding infrastructure supporting NFG advocacy:

The Public Health Advocacy Institute (PHAI), directed by Mark Gottlieb at Northeastern University School of Law, reported total revenue of \$21.2 million in FY2023—a dramatic increase from approximately \$740,000 in the prior year. Gottlieb’s compensation was reported as approximately \$325,000. PHAI provides pro bono legal defense to any municipality adopting NFG.

The Massachusetts Tobacco Cessation and Prevention Program (MTCP), funded by the Department of Public Health, operates through regional collaboratives that serve as the primary pipeline for connecting municipalities with NFG advocacy resources and template regulations.

EVIDENCE SUMMARY

Evidence Category	Status	Summary
PRE-HEARING COORDINATION	CONFIRMED	Buzby emailed coaching materials to Somerville officials on December 23, 2024, referencing a private meeting with Board members. The Board did not hold its public hearing until March 20, 2025—nearly three months later. FY25 reporting documents a November 2024 NFG presentation and multiple private meetings with Sbarra and Buzby.
TEMPLATE USAGE	CONFIRMED	Somerville Draft Tobacco Sales Regulations marked “Revised template as of 1.12.23.” Cheryl Sbarra provided draft regulations directly. Identical advocacy speech text used across Somerville (September 2024) and Malden (April 2025) presentations.
NETWORK ACTIVITY	CONFIRMED	Six City Initiative explicitly documented in grant reporting. Known network players Buzby, Gottlieb, Winickoff, Silbaugh, Ishak, and Sbarra all active in Somerville’s adoption process. Buzby served as coordinating hub across municipalities.
CROSS-MUNICIPALITY COORDINATION	CONFIRMED	Testimony at Somerville hearing included residents of Brookline, Cambridge, Needham, and Wakefield. Buzby solicited support letters from outside Somerville. Six City Initiative tracked synchronized adoption across six municipalities.
YOUTH RECRUITMENT	CONFIRMED	Eight students testified at the March 20, 2025 hearing, including one from Needham. Volume and coordination of youth testimony consistent with organized mobilization.
PREDETERMINED OUTCOME	CONFIRMED	Board chose fine structure and policy positions at February 20, 2025 meeting before the March 20, 2025 public hearing. Hearing lasted 81 minutes; vote occurred at 7:21 PM with meeting adjourned at 7:26 PM.

What These Documents Demonstrate

State-funded tobacco prevention programs (Six City Initiative) are used as vehicles for coordinated NFG adoption, with policy passage tracked as a grant deliverable. External advocates (Buzby, Sbarra) contact local officials months before public hearings, provide template regulations, and coach officials on anticipated opposition. Scripted advocacy materials are authored centrally and distributed to local coordinators who present them as locally generated content. Youth and non-resident testimony is mobilized across municipal boundaries to manufacture the appearance of grassroots support at public hearings. Board of Health members receive advocacy materials from external coordinators and pre-determine policy positions before public hearings, reducing the public hearing to a procedural formality. The coordinated timeline across six municipalities—with adoption progress tracked quarterly—reveals an organized campaign, not independent municipal decision-making.

CONCLUSION

The City of Somerville’s FOIA return provides comprehensive documentation of coordinated NFG policy adoption driven by external advocates operating through a state-funded Six City Tobacco Initiative. The evidence demonstrates that Maureen Buzby served as the central coordinator—coaching officials on opposition talking points, soliciting support letters from non-residents, and testifying herself at the public hearing she helped orchestrate. The Board of Health pre-determined its policy positions before the public hearing, and the hearing itself featured a parade of known NFG network advocates and recruited students from multiple municipalities. The grant reporting documents are uniquely valuable to the investigation. Unlike most FOIA returns, which require inference to establish coordination, the FY24 and FY25 reports explicitly document the Six City Initiative’s coordinated adoption strategy, track NFG passage as a deliverable, and celebrate successful adoption with language like “Another win!” This language, written in an official grant reporting context, directly contradicts any claim that Somerville’s NFG adoption resulted from independent, locally driven policy deliberation. This FOIA return satisfies all six evidence categories and provides a strong foundation for further investigation into the NFG advocacy network’s operations across Massachusetts municipalities. The Somerville return is particularly significant because of the grant reporting documents, which offer a rare, unguarded view of the coordinated campaign from the advocates’ own perspective.

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