



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

CLERK OF COMMITTEES

March 31, 2021

REPORT OF THE HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Kristen Strezo	Chair	Present	
Ben Ewen-Campen	Vice Chair	Present	
Wilfred N. Mbah	City Councilor at Large	Present	

Others present: Lauren Racaniello-Mayor's Office, Jill Lathan-DPW, Steve Craig-Constitutional Services, Fred Berman-OSPCD, Hannah Carrillo-OSPCD, Paul Anderson-Somerville Police Department, Christopher Ward-Somerville Police Department, City Councilor Katjana Ballantyne and Christopher Major-Somerville Fire Department.

Members from Tufts University: Barbara Stein-VP of Operations, Robert Chihade-Director of Real Estate, Chip Colette-Director of Public Safety, and Rocco DiRico-Director of Government and Community Relations. Also present: Danielle O'Hearn parent and Somerville Fire Department, and Maryann Wallace from ORS.

The meeting was held virtually and was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chairperson Strezo and adjourned at 9:02 p.m.

Approval of the February 3, 2021 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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210380: That the Directors of SPCD, Housing Stability, and Inspectional Services discuss with the Housing and Community Development Committee the anticipated impact and possible responses when the MA Eviction Moratorium expires on August 18.

Mr. Berman stated the housing division is doing their best to avoid crisis when the moratorium ends. One of the things they are doing is spending federal money utilizing state funds to pay down and eliminate causes of eviction. Over the past year, leveraged \$1.5M of ERAP which is part of the states program. The system has increased over time. There is now a 12-month cap with no dollar limit and the program is also paying up to \$1,500 for utility assistance even if residents do not have a shut off notice. The state has reduced the waiting time for results and getting some turnaround time of a week or two of submission of applications. They are now paying 5 contractors to help with rental assistance applications. This has reduced from 3 ½ months waiting time which now is about a month. Anyone with a Notice to Quit or court

involvement is being seen immediately. In the first fully staff year of 2019, they had about 584 cases and in the past year there have been 1,688 cases. Some people are directly referred to Somerville Homeless Coalition. For people who have court action, referring to Somerville legal services and other legal services in the area. They have brought some of the non-profits Homeless Coalition, Just A Start, CAAS and others to meet with some of the larger landlords in the city. The housing authority negotiated an agreement to contact OHS when issuing a notice when relating to COVID so they can begin to work with the tenants immediately. The number of evictions are much smaller than they might have been if not for these services. There is a “no eviction” pledge with smaller and larger landlords. Averaging 140 cases a month, which has gone up a little in March 2021. There is \$470M from the state for housing relief from the federal COVID legislation. They are trying to figure out to deal with situations when landlords do not want to cooperate or the tenant is afraid to ask them landlord. The landlord has to provide a W9 to show income but some do not want to show this because they may be paid under the table. There is a walk to prevent homeless is done every year, which raises funds to pay for tenants. Exploring using flex funds in some cases, there are situations when you cannot use federal funds because of some housing quality standards. They are also doing supporting by the community action agency with state funding or hired an organizer to train a core of residents to work with some of the non-profits of the city to come to the aid of those illegally locked out or otherwise threatened with eviction. Mr. Berman stated that Ms. Schachter has worked with the chief of police on the moratorium who understand that landlords cannot evict someone under the city’s moratorium. Additionally, OHS is working with landlords to help if they are behind in mortgage payments to apply for arrears assistance to get up to \$10,000 in assistance.

Councilor Mbah asked how much of the \$480M will come to Somerville. Mr. Berman stated this will be a disbursement from the state to many communities and not sure when the funds will be disbursed.

Mr. Berman stated that 1,600 referrals that have come to OHS which could be from Health Alliance and Somerville Family Learning Collaborative that may be duplicates or it could be a household of four people or more. Chair Strezo asked how many households involve children. Mr. Berman was not able to provide the exact numbers, but noted that the majority of households had children in them. The city has entered into a contract through SomerStat to make available a database that will be shared with OHS, HHS and the Immigrant Services Unit to do a better job of record keeping.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210891: That the Director of Parks and Recreation appear before this Council’s Committee on Housing and Community Development to discuss installing playground communication boards in all parks to expand park accessibility for children who are nonverbal or have other communication challenges.

Ms. Lathan stated that Ms. Oliveira looked into the communications boards and have a number of different options. Ms. Oliveira stated the boards range in price and features and can be customized. Ms. O’Hearn, a parent from the community, who also works for the Somerville Fire Department, asked about availability of communication boards. Ms. Oliveira stated there are a couple of categories to choose from. Ms. O’Hearn stated the city will want personal feelings like hurt and thirsty and customize more options for children. It would depend how large a board for

the parks. The boards come in a variety of shapes, sizes and languages. They range in prices from \$50-\$1,000 each, not including installation or grommets. There are aluminum ones that are more expensive. Ms. Oliveira needs to spend some time to decide what to say on the boards on start installing in the spring. Ms. Oliveira also showed examples of the one currently used in Conway Park.

Ms. Lathan stated this is an investment in the community and need more information before making these decisions.

Councilor Mbah asked about how this is done in other communities. Ms. Oliveira nor Ms. Lathan have seen these boards in Cambridge or Boston. Ms. O'Hearn looks forward to being involved and suggested bringing her child's communication board to share with the members.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211253: That the Director of Public Space and Urban Forestry appear before this Council with an update on the delayed Healey Schoolyard master plan and the current implementation schedule.

Ms. Oliveira stated the Healy school has been divided into two projects. Both are moving forward without any delays. A contractor has been selected for the playground for April or May. There were some COVID issues with supply chain, but on track to start construction. The contractor saw the site for the larger schoolyard and should get started in May or June.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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211328: Conveying an update on the Healey Schoolyard project.

See item 211253.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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211370: That the Director of Health and Human Services and the Director of the Human Rights Commission advise the Committee on Housing and Community Development how the City may address reported cases of suspected hate speech on public and private property.

Mr. Craig responded to the question of using 311 to record hate crimes. They would report the instance to public works if there was something painted on property. 311 is generally best served in supportive role. They do have a menu that would be selected if graffiti is hate or gang related.

Councilor Mbah asked Mr. Craig about calls about hate crime, if it goes to the police. Mr. Craig stated they have a strict rule within 311 if there is a threat to public health or safety, they get the call to 911 or fire alarm as quickly as possible. Deputy Chief Ward stated that Sgt Anderson is responsible for all hate crimes and documentations. Sgt Anderson stated that 311 related calls go to SPD. He has a 6-step process works with a detective and will be dispatched and documented. Then a work order is with DPW if there is graffiti, the investigative process to figure out what happened, witnesses and documented with the state investigated system. Councilor Mbah asked if there are any stats for Asian American hate crime. Deputy Chief Ward the last time hate crime

reported relating to an Asian American was in 2019, with nothing in 2020 or 2021. Chair Strezo stated the councilors know that there are incidents and the public are not reporting the issues. Councilor Mbah stated it would be good to communicate to the community to know there are resources and the number to call with issues.

Councilor Ewen-Campen stated this was brought to his attention about an anti-Chinese sign on someone's house. A resident wrote a very thoughtful email to councilors and wanted to know if the city is trained and know how to handle these types of issues. Article 16 gives extremely high limitations on what people put on their property. They have a right to free speech on their property. The law office is involved and preparing some protocol. Mr. Craig stated will continue to keep staff informed on handling these situations and working with SPD to make sure they are routing appropriate issues.

The city's new racial and social justice director was asked to attend, but she had another meeting to attend.

Ms. Racaniello stated there have been several meetings with the new racial and social justice director on this matter.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

209479: That the Committee on Housing and Community Development convene a Public Hearing on the ongoing Tufts Payment in Lieu of Taxes negotiations, and request written answers from the Administrations to the attached questions raised by the "ORS Pilot Working Group."

Ms. Wallace co-chair of Our Revolution Somerville (ORS) pilot working group was present at the meeting. Also, Deputy Chief Ward from SPD and Chris Major from SFD were in attendance.

The group has been working on this pilot for the benefit agreement. They need to have a clear understanding about the assessed value if they were to pay taxes and any services they would need from fire and police. Tufts has cut payments to other communities. Tufts is encroaching more into the city and forcing residents out of the city. Assistant Chief Major has been collecting data since 2014 breaking down by address of how many times SFD have gone out to certain addresses. There are breakdowns of different types of calls with 237 times to Tufts. In 2020, the number of calls went down due COVID. There is a code for building fire and in 7 years, they have gone to 9 buildings. Medical responses are the number one response of 832 in the last 7 years, especially during late night and weekends.

Mr. DiRico from Tufts stated that they have collaborated in a number of programs with the City of Somerville, with funding to 30 organizations. They have provided free COVID testing in the fall to neighbors. They have also shared their knowledge to testing program. Mr. DiRico stated that Tufts has paid \$4.5M to the City of Somerville, allowing Somerville to use facilities and provided local grants. Additionally, \$1.6M was provided to Somerville students with a needs base. Tufts leases space to the city of Somerville at the Tab building at below market rates. They pay fees and permits to Somerville such as water and sewer of \$800,000 in 2020. They employ many Somerville residents for Tufts which makes them the largest employer.

Councilor Ewen-Campen stated he shares the believe of the excellent partnership with Tufts and Somerville. However, the pilot negotiations have not progressed. The municipality is frustrated with the payments. He stated that \$450,000 that was originally \$275,000 a year. Mr. DiRico stated the city wanted the same amount as what was paid to the city of Boston. All 3 cities, Somerville, Boston and Medford are paid \$450,000 a year.

Councilor Mbah asked how many scholarships have they offered to Somerville residents every year. Mr. DiRico, stated they have need base financial aid of \$1.6M for undergraduate students from Medford and Somerville. They were asked if Medford has a fire department and if they respond to everything on Medford side. Tufts also has their own police dept.

Tufts stated they provided financial aid assistance for Somerville students who needed it.

Chair Strezo asked Mr. DiRico how much Tufts provided as scholarships vs. financial aid. Mr. DiRico said he will provide the chair with this information. Chair Strezo pointed out that financial aid funds are loans and therefore require students to pay back that debt, which causes students to graduate from Tufts with massive amounts of debt.

Mr. DiRico stated that household income of \$60,000 or less, may qualify for scholarships from Tufts. Mr. DiRico stated that students at the lowest income bracket will receive grants, not loans.

Ms. Wallace asked the fire chief how much of the city's expenses were for the calls of 832 calls to Tufts, between manpower, gas and wear and tear. The fire chief will try to get that figure. Additionally, she wants the cost for Somerville police. She asked for replacement for fire and police services rendered to Tufts.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211392: That the City's Chief Assessor provide a list of all non-profits that have Community Benefit Agreements and/or Payment in Lieu of Taxes agreements, including their property sizes.

Ms. Racaniello stated the chief assessor was not available to speak tonight. This is an overview of payments received in 2020 and 2021, as of yesterday's date. There was also a document provided by the city treasury with information about when payments are due.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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203222: That this Board's Committee on Housing and Community Development meet with representatives of Tufts University for an update on the conversion of wood frame office-houses into residential housing in Medford and Somerville.

Councilor Ballantyne stated there is stress every year with concerns about the neighborhood. She submitted this to learn what the university will do with housing. She has had to chase the university every year for this information. The neighbors feel that Tufts University could expand at any moment into their neighborhood. The residents do not want Tufts to expand into their neighborhoods. Councilor Ballantyne learned last Friday what the intentions were going to be and she and the neighbors do not support it.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

206823: That Tufts University engage the Somerville community in its public Master Planning process.

Councilor Ballantyne stated this is one of multiple orders dating back to 2018. The community does not want housing expanded into the neighborhoods and should be built on Tufts Campus.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

211341: That Tufts update this Council on its student housing plans for the University district.

Councilor Ballantyne stated the neighborhood is not in support of the housing plans.

Mr. DiRico stated that Tufts has not purchased any property outside of their area since 2007.

Councilor Ballantyne stated she found out about their intention through an article from Tufts Daily and it was disturbing to read that Tufts is planning to use Packard and down to Powderhouse Boulevard. Tufts has not had a conversation with the community about their long-term plans. Councilor Ballantyne who represents the neighbors do not want housing expanded into their neighborhoods.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

211342: That Tufts reconfirm that it is not expanding beds in any of its buildings outside of the University district.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

211436: Tufts responding to #211341 and #211342 re: student housing.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

211345: That this Council's Committee on Housing and Community Development review the findings of the Condo Conversion Annual Report.

Ms. Carrillo presented slides on condo conversion background. It was necessary to update the ordinance in March 2019 and was implemented in October 2019, due to not having expirations dates on permits. Additionally, the board did not have the means for tenant protection. In 2019 there were 71% applications submitted for vacant property and 40% in 2020. There are better tools to protect tenants with notices at least 2 weeks before, along with compliance hearing and final hearing. Tenant notices are issued to make sure that all tenants know their rights. There is also a relocation payment available for tenant in accordance with their income status. A lot of conversions are owner occupied or rental properties. There is an increase in owner-occupied conversions and a decrease in tenant rental property.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked about notifying tenants who had previously lived in a property. Ms. Carrillo stated there is an affidavit to provide contact information of any tenants of the last 6

months. There have been a few instances that contact information was not available because they may have moved out of the country.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

211445: That the Director of Constituent Services discuss with this Council's Committee on Housing and Community Development options for residents to report hate crimes to 311 and the 311 mobile app.

See item 211370.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Material:

- Tufts 2020 October Somerville Building Data
- FY20 CRB Annual Report (with 211345)
- CRB FY20 Annual Report Slides (with 211345)
- Hate Crime Processing Map (with 211370)
- 311 Hate Speech or Hate Related Calls- Process Map (with 211445)
- overview received PILOT payments FY 2020 & 2021 as of 03302021 (with 211392)
- TUFT1 (with 209479)
- WALNUT (with 209479)
- YEARLY BILLING MAILING PILOTS SCHEDULE TREASURY (with 211392)
- Tufts CFS 5 yr (with 209479)
- TUFTS RESPONSES BY TYPE 2014 -2020 (with 209479)
- LETTER Tufts to Housing Committee 3.31.2021 (with 209479)
- 2019-Tufts-University-Community-Benefits-Report-for-the-Cities-of-Medford-and-Somerville (with 209479)