



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
CLERK OF COMMITTEES**

March 1, 2021

**REPORT OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
MEETING AS A COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Lance L. Davis	Chair	Present	
Jesse Clingan	Vice Chair	Present	
Matthew McLaughlin	Ward One City Councilor	Present	
Jefferson Thomas ("J.T.") Scott	Ward Two City Councilor	Present	
Ben Ewen-Campen	Ward Three City Councilor	Present	
Mark Niedergang	Ward Five City Councilor	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Ward Seven City Councilor	Present	
Wilfred N. Mbah	City Councilor at Large	Present	
Mary Jo Rossetti	City Councilor at Large	Present	
Kristen Strezo	City Councilor at Large	Present	
William A. White Jr.	City Councilor At Large	Present	

The meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Davis at 6:02pm and adjourned at 8:06pm.

Councilor Rossetti left just prior to the final section and vote due to illness.

Others present: Khushbu Webber - Mayor's Office; Lauren Racaniello - Mayor's Office; Brianna Noonan - SomerStat; Doug Kress - HHS; Ashley Speliotis - Council on Aging; Mike Libby - Somerville Homeless Coalition

Approval of the February 1, 2021 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
----------------	-----------------

COVID/Vaccine

209978: That the Administration update this Council on contingency staffing plans in case a large number of front-line employees are unable to work due to illness or self-isolation.

Ms. Noonan shared the weekly situation updated, beginning with key dates, noting that as of February 26 Somerville remains in limited Phase 3, Step 1 reopening, where capacity limits remain status quo. Global trends as of February 26 show that cases have increased by 5.3% and deaths by 6.5%, with the United States leading in both cases and deaths. In the United States, cases are up 4.1% and deaths 8%. The state

of MA still has one of the highest risk levels, with more than 25 new cases per day per 100,000 people. The MDPH (MA Department of Public Health) data shows Somerville's average daily incidence rate over the past 14 days is 19.3 cases per 100,000 residents.

As of February 20, Somerville conducted a total of 367,697 tests, with 35,191 conducted between February 6 and February 20. Calculated using 14 day periods, as of February 20, there were 0.7% of the COVID-19 tests completed by Somerville residents that had positive results, down from 1.1% on February 13. This includes higher education testing. As of Thursday, February 25, Somerville had: 4,695 positive confirmed cases (PCR test); 302 positive probable cases (antigen or antibody test); and 73 fatalities. The 14 day moving average of confirmed cases was decreasing dramatically, but the decline does seem to be slowing.

Broadening the scope of the Police Department's calls for service to include: Traffic-related Incident Response; Directed Patrol; and Traffic Enforcement, the past two weeks averaged 100.5 daily calls for service. The past two weeks also averaged 53 daily Incident Response calls for service, with major categories including: Noise & Groups; Domestic; and Mental Health. Incidents included one shooting and one possible fatal overdose.

Last week (February 21 through February 27), the Fire Department saw 5 COVID-19 related medical calls, which is 9 less than the prior week. There have been a total of 658 COVID-19 related medical calls as of February 28, with an average of 0.7 per day in the past week.

Chair Davis asked about the change in the threshold for color-coding status and Ms. Noonan clarified that the state changed its guidelines on November 6, and the colors now reflect the new criteria.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

211220: That the Covid-19 response team update the Committee on Public Health and Safety on the Phase 2 vaccine roll-out for residents, particularly senior citizens and other vulnerable residents.

Mr. Kress shared that the vaccine rollout is currently in Phase 2, Group 2, which includes those over age 65 and with designated medical conditions, as well as those living in senior housing in the City. The newly approved additional vaccine will add to the options available. The state will be responsible for the distribution to municipalities and other providers. The City has been able to receive some allotment separately for specific projects such as the senior housing distribution.

Councilor Mbah asked about primary care and Mr. Kress clarified that some primary care providers received some vaccine doses, and CHA was one of the locations that did, but the state has limited the number of vaccines available to hospitals. There are challenges with the current distribution plan being inconvenient for many, though the City was able to provide several clinics while it had access. The lack of internet access or familiarity among senior populations also posed challenges and the Council on Aging reached out to seniors by phone to assist with scheduling or provide appointments in the City's clinics. The City also signed up individuals who were able to attend the mass vaccination sites to make more local spots available for those who were most in need. Ms. Speliotis added that the Council on Aging team continues to try to be creative about reaching residents and getting appointments scheduled. Mr. Kress added that the site near Target is the CHA's vaccination location. He is working with Tufts University, CHA, and 9 surrounding communities to try to become a regional vaccination site.

Councilor Scott asked what resources the City is making available for when the qualifying participants are not within the senior population. Mr. Kress noted that 311 and the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) volunteers can assist with telephone outreach. Residents can find the link to volunteer with the MRC through the City's website as well.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

211221: That the Directors of Health and Human Services and the Council on Aging collaborate to bridge the digital divide for residents seeking to obtain the Covid vaccine who may not have access to the internet.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

211222: That the Administration help residents over 75 years of age sign up for Covid-19 vaccinations.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

211223: That the Administration include teachers on the priority list as the vaccine distribution plan is rolled out.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Schools

210741: That the Administration appear before this Council to give a report on the Public School building reopening plans.

Chair Davis noted that the agreement reached through collective bargaining involved students returning to the School buildings beginning today. He clarified that the City Council is not responsible for the School District, but the School buildings sit outside the purview of the School Committee, so particularly where the condition and ventilation were a factor, the City Council oversight is important. Ms. Webber shared the update that the reopening plan is a multi-pronged process, involving both the buildings as well as the testing protocol and other requirements to get the students and teachers safely back. As of March 4, teachers are back in the High School and the Capuano School, along with English Language learners and Special Education students. On March 18, more students will return to those schools, as well as to the Argenziano and East Somerville Schools. March 25 is when all of the schools will open for Pre-K and Kindergarten, with the exception of the Healey, Winter Hill, and Brown Schools. Students from the Brown School will be using the High School modular units as of April 1. There is a possibility that the Healey may be able to open some time in April, but those students will be using the High School in the interim. The Winter Hill Community School is not planned to open this school year. Students in grades 1 through 8 will be phased back into the buildings throughout April.

Councilor Niedergang shared that residents have raised concerns about different types of ventilation, and asked if natural or mixed-mode ventilation will be considered. Ms. Webber explained that this is being considered, but is likely to impact the next school year, as any changes would potentially delay the phased reopening for the current school year. Councilor Niedergang also asked whether the Brown and Winter Hill Community Schools might be usable this year, and Ms. Webber clarified that the School Committee would be more familiar with the union negotiations, but it is likely that those schools will not open. Councilor Niedergang also asked about the plan for the next school year to allow all students to return full time, and Mr. Kress noted that the guidance continues to evolve and the City is constantly seeking new information, and mitigation protocols such as testing, mask wearing, and contact tracing all remain important. Councilor Niedergang suggested evaluating other potential building space to utilize if necessary.

Councilor Rossetti asked if families will have the option for students to remain virtual and Ms. Webber confirmed that will be an option. Councilor Rossetti also asked about transportation and Ms. Webber will research how transportation will be provided.

Councilor Rossetti moved that the administration provide a response about how transportation will be provided to all SPS students relocated to different buildings, before the next City Council meeting. The motion was approved on a vote of 11 in favor (Mbah, Rossetti, Strezo, White, McLaughlin, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, Clingan, Davis) and 0 opposed.

Councilor Rossetti also asked who will be returning to the High School, and Mr. Kress clarified that the High School will house students from the Healey and Winter Hill Schools, as those buildings will not be reopening. Once the Healey School is ready to open, those students will return to that building, with students from the Winter Hill School remaining at the High School. Councilor Rossetti asked for data on how many students opted to remain virtual and how many plan to return to the school buildings, as well as a comparison of enrollment for this year versus last. Councilor McLaughlin encouraged discussion with the School Committee, as they worked hard on the reopening plan. Councilor Rossetti clarified that she is primarily interested in the data as it pertains to the budget.

Councilor Ballantyne asked what will happen when the science and data change, and Mr. Kress noted that it will be constantly monitored and changes made as needed. It is hard to project what would necessitate a change in the agreement, but the department will work with the school administration to determine what is needed.

Councilor Ballantyne sponsored Daniele Lantagne, a professor at Tufts and specialist in infectious diseases, to speak, and she noted that it is understood that Somerville may need to do things differently than what the state is recommending. Now that there is a better understanding of the modes of transmission, there could be a better plan. The business and parent community need to talk about what the plan is moving forward, as there will be new variants. It is difficult to understand what Somerville's plan is to react to new information. Dissemination of information about how the City is thinking about these issues would be useful. Councilor Niedergang shared that per School Committee member Laura Pitone, the SEU agreement has nothing about specific building standards. The City needs to share information about the standards and efficacy before teachers are required to return to the buildings. Dr. Lantagne expressed concern that this area of the agreement is vague and could lead to delays in return.

Councilor Rossetti suggested that the City Council and School Committee should have a coordinated meeting to discuss these issues together. Councilor Niedergang agreed that this could help clear up a lot of confusion and make the work more efficient.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
----------------	--------------------------

211320: That the Administration, with the Director of Health and Human Services, share a re-opening plan for schools and businesses which defines goals, risks and contingencies.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
----------------	--------------------------

Services for people experiencing Homelessness

211325: That the Director of Health and Human Services prioritize homelessness outreach workers for upcoming COVID-19 grant funding to better address the increased demand for homeless services.

Mr. Kress asked Mike Libby, the Executive Director of the Somerville Homeless Coalition, to share some details of their work. Mr. Libby elaborated that a big success was collaborating with the City to host a

clinic for the guests of the family and adult shelters to receive a vaccine. The SHC's Project Soup has doubled its activity in the past year, distributing over 38,000 bags of food in 2020. Mr. Libby added that before COVID, there were approximately 20 home deliveries per month and now there are over 200. With the eviction moratorium ending in October, the SHC has also worked to use various COVID relief funds to prevent over 200 evictions, but there are over 400 applications in the queue. There is also a small street-outreach program, which has been working to address housing needs while also providing immediate needs such as food, blankets, and hand warmers. They are hoping to leverage CARES Act funding to increase staff time to work with these populations, as well as to provide a space for warming and engagement.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked whether the Somerville Homeless Coalition is regularly turning individuals away from beds, and Mr. Libby noted that before COVID, there were approximately 50 calls per day for 16 beds in the adult shelter, and people continue to be turned away. Councilor McLaughlin supported the idea of a warming station, noting that there are vacant buildings that could be used.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
----------------	--------------------------

211326: That the Director of Health and Human Services develop a plan for a warming center or engagement center to address increased homelessness in the community due to COVID-19.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
----------------	--------------------------

Supervised Injection Site

208691: That members of the recently established Safe Injection Site Task Force appear before this Council's Committee on Public Health and Public Safety to discuss their findings in a public forum.

Chair Davis shared that with the impact of COVID, changes at the U.S. Attorney's office, and a request to engage outside counsel on this issue, this item is moving back to the forefront. Councilor Clingan noted that despite COVID and other setbacks, things have been continuing to move forward and there is a dedicated task force invested in this. Mr. Kress added that the use of expert researchers on supervised consumption facilities is underway and recommendations should be provided by May. A variety of stakeholders have been engaged and community input is important to the team.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
----------------	--------------------------

208692: That the Director of Health and Human Services provide the City Council with a copy of the Safe Injection Site Task Force recommendations.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
----------------	--------------------------

208261: That the Director of Health and Human Services highlight any funding for drug treatment during the budget process.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
----------------	--------------------------

Other (To consider placing on file)

209930: That this Council urges Governor Baker to enact a single-payer health insurance system during this pandemic to reduce the bureaucracy for Covid-19 testing and treatment, and to make such testing and treatment free to those without health insurance.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, Mbah, Strezo,	White Jr.
ABSENT:	Rossetti

209934: That the Administration update this Council on the City’s disaster preparedness assessment for emergencies during this pandemic and how this reduces our first responders' workforce.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, Mbah, Strezo,	White Jr.
ABSENT:	Rossetti

209940: That this Council collaborate with the Administration to create a one-page coronavirus information sheet that can be physically delivered to every resident and small business owner, containing public health information, emergency resources, and instructions on where to get more information.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, Mbah, Strezo,	White Jr.
ABSENT:	Rossetti

209977: That the Administration update this Council on planning underway to provide housing for people who are likely to be exposed to the Covid-19 virus and need isolation, or are recovering from the virus and don't need a hospital setting.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, Mbah, Strezo,	White Jr.
ABSENT:	Rossetti

209798: That the Director of Health and Human Services appear before this Council with an update on measures to reduce the spread of the coronavirus and to support anyone who may become infected.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, Mbah, Strezo,	White Jr.
ABSENT:	Rossetti

209979: That the Administration update this Council on any efforts to ensure that city

trash and recycling contractors are protected from coronavirus exposure and supported if exposed.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, Mbah, Strezo,	White Jr.
ABSENT:	Rossetti

209999: That the Chief of Police and the Chief Fire Engineer appear before this Council’s Committee on Public Health and Public Safety with an update on their plans to keep first responders safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, Mbah, Strezo,	White Jr.
ABSENT:	Rossetti

210112: That the Director of Health and Human Services collaborate with the appropriate state agencies for the support, specialized services, medical supplies and personal protective equipment necessary for residents with complex medical needs to stay in their homes during this COVID-19 crisis.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, Mbah, Strezo,	White Jr.
ABSENT:	Rossetti

210126: That the Mayor consider increasing the minimum age for mandatory wearing of face masks to children over 5 years of age.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, Mbah, Strezo,	White Jr.
ABSENT:	Rossetti

210460: That the Administration and the Traffic Commission cease all dedicated Tufts shuttle stops and remove all associated signage in Ward 6, particularly in Davis Square, without delay.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, Mbah, Strezo,	White Jr.
ABSENT:	Rossetti

210134: That the Director of Communications create signage to post citywide reminding the public of the penalties and public health risks associated with COVID-19 for littering

used masks, gloves and wipes.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, Mbah, Strezo,	White Jr.
ABSENT:	Rossetti

Referenced Material:

- 210301 Situation Summary for City Council (with 209978)