



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
CLERK OF COMMITTEES

October 28, 2020

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: Khushbu Webber-Mayor's Office, Tom Galligani-OSPCD, Doug Kress-HHS, Ellen Schachter-OSPCD, Ashley Speliotis-Council on Aging, Jeff Shwom-Ball Square Business District Association, Jennifer Atwood-East Somerville Main Streets and Jessica Eshleman-Union Square Main Streets

The meeting was held virtually and was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chairperson Strezo and adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Approval of the September 16, 2020 Minutes

The minutes were accepted on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Mbah, Ewen-Campen and Strezo) to none against.

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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210781: That the Director of Health and Human Services appear before this Council's Committee on Housing and Community Development to discuss the Teen Snow Shoveling Program for the 2020-2021 winter season.

Mr. Kress stated this is a partnership with HHS and Council on Aging. They are using a slightly different recruiting mechanism this year since students are not in school. There will be advertisements out for afterschool programs along with a variety of apps for recruitment. The application will be put in in accessible places so that everyone can see it including putting on website and mailings. Some things are changing to make it contactless as possible COVID safe protocol for both the students and the seniors. Shovels will be placed in accessible locations and will put payment down on surface or in other areas. HHS will do the pairing up on the telephone to make a match with seniors who need the most help. HHS telephone numbers will be available in case there are questions or conflicts with either student or seniors schedules. Senior must live in the residence and the application requires a completed CORI check. The property cannot be larger than a 2-family house. The income requirement has been removed. The senior must be 60

years or older or disabled individual. It was stated that usually, the city is able to recruit 25-40 students.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked how many seniors were served last year. Ms. Speliotis stated that previously 150 seniors were served and last year there was a little less. She believes they can increase the number this year due to removing the income requirement.

Chair Strezo asked if the senior pays every time the teen comes out to shovel and if there are any assistance program to help seniors pay. Mr. Kress stated that HHS and Councilor on Aging can work with the seniors if there are concerns. He also stated that someone may request to have the snow removed from their car or porch. The program can cost between \$20-\$25.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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210807: That the Director of the Arts Council and the Director of SPCD appear before this Council’s Committee on Housing and Community Development to discuss adapting how the city celebrates the 2020 holiday season, with the emphasis on neighborhood connections and local businesses.

Chair Strezo sponsored some members from the audience to speak tonight. Mr. Shwom from Ball Square Business District Association, Jennifer Atwood from East Somerville Main Street and Jessica Eshleman from Union Square Main Streets.

Mr. Shwom stated a few of the organizations met to discuss the encouragement of any events this holiday season. He stated that they want the businesses to shine safely with diverse events to serve those with a lot or little spending power. Additionally, they would like the Arts Council to come up with safe guidelines that will support the businesses this winter.

Ms. Eshleman stated the final 6 weeks of the year is the most critical for brick and mortar businesses and can go from red to black. This year, the final 6 weeks could be survival for many small businesses. The holiday can generate connections with businesses, unique opportunities, and possibly a holiday stroll with activities in one Saturday. Given the current events, they would like to create a week-long promotion, to take place the first week in December, such as store decorating and with people voting on the decorations. This would encourage people to take selfies in front of the buildings and put on social media.

Councilor Mbah asked what can the councilors do. Mr. Shwom stated in Ball Square they are trying to work with the Arts Council on different ideas since the Illumination Tour has been canceled. Maybe modify for Ball Square, Magoun Square and Winter Hill with a winter stroll to see houses that are decorated, including houses on Broadway. There could be a market to allow local businesses show their ware in a different way in Ball Square maybe on a Saturday or Sunday.

Mr. Galligani stated the city has developed very rigorous guidelines for the farmers market and working on additional standards for outdoors sales for the holiday season.

Councilor Mbah asked if outdoor music would be part of the standards for the holidays. Mr. Galligani stated that Mr. Jenkins has a working group trying to develop a strategy for this in a safe manner.

Councilor Ewen-Campen says a walking and/or biking tour would be a great idea for the holiday Illumination stroll.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210379: That the Director of Inspectional Services report to the Housing and Community Development Committee its implementation plans for the 2019 Tenant Notification Act.

Items 210379 and 210380 were discussed together.

Ms. Schachter updated the committee about sending out notices to all property owners and their responsibilities to put out notices. The only notice she has heard of is from Clarendon Hills. No complaints from tenants that have not received documents. The Homeless Coalition received contacts from tenants on the notice to quit.

Mr. Galligani stated small businesses are facing the same challenges and sending forms to be completed by the landlords. OSPCD has shared information with small business owners a quick memo outlining their rights and the process to make sure they are fully informed. They are fielding calls from a few tenants, 1 or 2 a week with complaints and working with landlords. Small business assistance is using CBDG \$750,000 of assistance and will hear more in the next few days which can probably help 100 businesses to stay open during coronavirus. There will be a press release to let everyone know when the application will be available. The feedback is that some landlords are open and helpful, others are unable to keep businesses and have limited flexibility. Mr. Galligani stated that if anyone knows of a business that is struggling to have them email economicdevelopment@somervillema.gov <<mailto:economicdevelopment@somervillema.gov>>. Mr. Galligani was asked how many small businesses are struggling and stated that the majority are struggling in some form. There are approximately 1,700 brick and mortar with the vast majority struggling. Some businesses may choose to close down for the winter with some being temporary and others may be permanent.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

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.

Items 210379 and 210380 were discussed together.

Ms. Schachter stated this ended and ongoing legislative activity to try to get extended moratorium. They are sending to printer final brochure about legal services and rental assistance. Also sending a letter to all property owners reminding them of their obligations until housing notification act. The court issued new rules relating to MA Eviction Moratorium had to be updated and sending to translator and will be on website. Citywide coalition is working on materials to give out on the street, flyers about basic immigration and eviction rights which is almost ready and will be on website. The organizer at Caas making sure the information is correct. The city is also paying for banners about eviction and trying to find the right location. A new contract coming out from government being signed this week on legal services and non-legal staff to make sure rental documents are together. There's a lot of hiring of legal and non-legal positions for Cambridge and Somerville. There is also hiring of recruiting firm statewide.

Tenants do not have the technology to do Zoom hearings and cannot use city run buildings for meetings. Ms. Schachter stated that she and Mr. Proakis will be discussing the possibilities of finding a location for tenants to meet with legal and non-legal counsel which could be in Assembly Square. She also stated that the city hired 4 contractors that speak multiple languages who started on Monday. The new hires will help with the 2-months of backlog which is probably 125 families. Most of funding sources now are to take people out of order with court summonses and are most at risk for displacement. Ms. Schachter is seeing an uptick with notices to quit which are the priority.

Councilor Ewen-Campen has heard confusing information about eviction ban has been lifted, and at the same time in Somerville from the sheriff will not execute residential evictions. Ms. Schachter state moratorium expired. Some of the cases are in housing and while others are in district court. The district court says landlords can file an affidavit and will stop any eviction trials. The housing will let the cases go forward and will not issue papers to allow constables to remove people from their homes. There is a declaration that has to be signed and can be found on the city's website and to be sent to landlords. This information will also be in the mailing. The City of Somerville has an order while COVID is considered in this city, no constable can remove anyone from their homes. If they do receive a notice to be removed, they should call Ms. Schachter immediately at 781-307-3307. Ms. Schachter states to make sure reach someone live or call 617-625-6600 ext 2581.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210469: That the Administration update this Council on any discussions regarding a regional E-911 call center, and how such a center would impact the re-imagining of how emergency dispatch is done in Somerville.

Ms. Webber provided a brief update stated that in 2013, MAPC, regional municipality agency conducted a study on 911 system. There is a report that she will share after the discussion. Ms. Webber was unsure of the next steps. She also stated that Medford decided to move forward with their own public safety building. At this point, there is not much discussion because one community has decided to develop their own system.

Ms. Webber stated that Somerville is at phase 1 system and working to move into phase 2 system. The current system related to an issue that happened a couple of years ago and the system could not find individual. The system can now identify and uses GPS to find the individuals.

Councilor Ewen-Campen is interested 911 system, stating that certain calls could go to armed police, mental health or substance abuse could go to other agencies. The larger conversation with the council on how the 911 system also relates to the administration's hiring racial and social justice position. Councilor Ewen-Campen stated this is a detailed conversation that should happen after the hiring of the racial and social justice person.

Ms. Webber pointed out as a follow up the person hired will working to put together the public safety building committee and will have a discussion around the services provided in that building. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked if the working group is already set up. Ms. Webber stated it is already set up and Councilor McLaughlin is on the committee and a civilian will be appointed as well.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210550: That the Director of Personnel provide a written demographic breakdown of employees in the E-911, Fire Alarm, and Constituent Services Departments. (2nd request)

Chair Strezo received a response from Personnel with the breakdown for 311, E911 and fire alarm by ethnicity and age range. This topic came up last year and again this year during the budget season.

See attached document with the specific details on order.

Councilor Ewen-Campen stated that salaries are set through collective bargaining. There is a discrepancy in the positions

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Handouts:

- Response to CC #210382 (with 210550)