



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

April 6, 2020

**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	
William A. White Jr.	City Councilor At Large	Present	
Mary Jo Rossetti	City Councilor at Large	Present	
Stephanie Hirsch	City Councilor At Large	Present	
Wilfred N. Mbah	City Councilor at Large	Present	

Others present: Christine Koh - Somerstat, Doug Kress - HHS, Annie Connor - Mayor's Office, Khushbu Webber - Legislative Liaison, Rositha Durham - Clerk of Committees, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chairman Davis and adjourned at 7:33 PM.

Approval of the March 24, 2020 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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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.

Ms. Koh gave a COVID-19 situation update covering global, national, state and local data trends, compiled from the most reliable data available, and highlighted several aspects of the crisis, including:

- As of today, there have been a total of 1,280,046 cases world-wide (a 74% increase over the March 30, 2020 number of cases)

- As of today, there have been a total of 69,789 fatalities world-wide (a 100% increase over the March 30, 2020 number of fatalities)
- To date, 265,462 people have recovered from the illness
- Massachusetts ranks 6th on the list of states for the number of cases (and 4th on the number of cases per capita)
- MA DPH data indicates that there have been substantial increases in the number of total cases, hospitalizations and fatalities from March 29,2020 to April 5, 2020
- Somerville averaged 12 new cases per day from March 30, 2020 to April 6, 2020, bringing the total number of positive cases to 133, of which 46 recovered and 1 resulted in a fatality
- MA State officials anticipate a medical surge between April 10 - 20 with a potential for 47,000 to 172,000 cases
- Calls made to the city's 311 call center have been primarily for informational purposes
- The city has been providing an average of 950 meals per day (breakfast and lunch) at school locations
- The city's food pantry has been distributing bags of food to households and organizations
- The Council on Aging is working with Meals on Wheels to provide meal deliveries and transportation to grocery stores

Ms. Koh stated that she would provide the slides to the Council so that they can be attached to the meeting minutes and available online to the public.

Councilor Rossetti asked Ms. Koh to provide information on the financial impact to the city resulting from its efforts to combat this virus. Councilor Hirsch inquired about peaks in the curve and Mr. Kress explained that when the number of positive tests decline, people are in recovery and that after the peak, fewer people will test positive on a daily basis.

Mr. Kress provided an update, as well, and told the committee that there has been a change about the need for using masks, noting that since we don't know who may be positive or asymptomatic, the use of masks is helpful. He stressed that the 6-foot social distancing parameter is still in effect and he urged everyone to wash their hands before and after going outside. Additional precautions should include wiping down steering wheels, keys, gear shifts, etc. The city's HHS Department has provided guidance on cleaning large apartment buildings as well as on the preferred procedure for obtaining take-out food. Additionally, the department is dispensing personal protective equipment to various agencies in the city and has entered into a partnership with Tufts to provide space to house first responders. The city has also partnered with the City of Cambridge to provide housing for homeless individuals and is attempting to identify another location to deal with overcrowding situations.

Responding to a question, Mr. Kress said that complaints concerning a restaurant's operation should be made directly to the city's Inspectional Services Department. He also said that guidelines for ride share food delivery services should be added to the guidelines for restaurants. Councilor Niedergang inquired about social distancing on the community path, commenting that he's getting calls about the bike path becoming a meeting location for groups of people. Mr. Kress replied that this is an enforcement issue that's being looked at and Ms. Connor added that the matter has been elevated to the Police Department. Officers are going to parks to spread the word and break up groups of people congregating there. Ms. Connor will ask the police to step up their patrols. Ms. Webber stated that the city has posted signs informing people to utilize other areas for walking, e.g., sidewalks.

Councilor Ballantyne reported that she spoke with Representative Barber about this situation and was assured that the representative would see if anything can be done at state level.

Councilor Rossetti followed up on her question from last week regarding state assistance, federal stimulus, and FEMA funding and Mr. Kress stated that the recent \$200,000 grant received by HHS came from the DPH. Councilor Rossetti also requested a COVID-19 financial aid update, specifically, what funds the city has received so far and what has been expended to date. She would appreciate it if this information could be available for the April 7, 2020 City Council meeting. Councilor Hirsch asked what was being done to deal with overcrowding in households where someone has tested positive for the virus since it could be a disincentive to being tested if there isn't a place for them to be isolated. Mr. Kress replied that the city is looking for a location to use as a shelter and is also exploring ways to provide housing for affected families.

Councilor Mbah asked about wearing gloves and testing supermarket employees and Mr. Kress said that he worries that people may have a false sense of security when wearing them, since gloves may keep their hands clean, but they won't stop the possibility of transferring the virus to one's face. If someone wants to wear gloves, he suggests washing them when finished with the task at hand. As for testing supermarket employees, he said that would be a business decision. Councilor Clingan asked for a description of how mask decontamination is performed at the recently opened facility (at the former Kmart site). Mr. Kress will provide a response. Councilor Ballantyne spoke about the possibility of domestic violence cases increasing due to people being asked to remain at home, adding that Chief Fallon had estimated that domestic violence numbers would increase this year. Mr. Kress told the committee that HHS has been working with RESPOND to make sure they have the needed coverage to deal with that. Ms. Connor will facilitate getting a police response, hopefully in time for tomorrow's City Council meeting.

Councilor McLaughlin commented that he will be putting out information about wearing facemasks and he asked if there were any new updates relative to going outside. Mr. Kress stated that the stay in place advisory put out by Governor Baker remains in place and stressed the importance of staying inside. He realizes that it may be necessary to leave one's house to get groceries or medications, but he cautioned against making any unnecessary trips since many people may have, and still be able to transmit, the virus even though they may be asymptomatic and show no symptoms. Asked about following the City of Boston's lead in implementing a curfew, Mr. Kress stated that it is not being considered here since Somerville hasn't seen the issues Boston has with regard to groups congregating. Several councilors suggested that the city's street sweeping program be delayed beyond the April 15th start date to keep people inside their homes and to avoid problems with the lack of parking spaces resulting from people being out of work. Councilor Scott asked that the Administration consider a process to clean troubled areas, e.g., fast-food drive-thrus and Ms. Connor will look into it further. Councilor Scott also asked that a renewed focus be placed on providing COVID-19 information on the city's website.

Ms. Connor told the committee that additional guidance from the state is needed with regard to when schools might re-open. She also stated that the city is doing its best to acquire masks for the city's front-line people, i.e., medical and public safety personnel, and said that the city is examining ways to organize people to make masks. Ms. Connor also stated that the city's deadline for the payment of real estate taxes will be delayed and noted that the Housing Department is looking at possibly expanding one of its programs to assist with those payments. She asked that anyone having a problem in this regard, contact the city to work out an arrangement.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

209936: That this Council calls on landlords and real estate agents to avoid showing occupied units to avoid the spread of coronavirus.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

Handouts:

- 200406 Situation Update for City Council (with 209798)