



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

May 4, 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	
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 6:00pm and adjourned at 7:51pm.

Others present: Annie Connor - Mayor's Office; Khushbu Webber - Mayor's Office; Doug Kress - HHS; Kristen Stelljes - SomerStat; Christine Koh – SomerStat

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 shared some key dates since the last meeting, including: May 1st, the Governor announced a state-wide face covering order, to go in effect 5/6/20; on April 30th, it was announced that City buildings would remain closed until at least Monday, May 18 and street sweeping is delayed to May 18th; and on April 28th, the Governor announced an extension of the closure of non-essential business to May 18th and the Somerville Cares fund application was released. It can be found here: <https://www.caasomerville.org/somerville-caresfund-request>.

Ms. Koh also shared trend data, noting that globally, there has been an 18% increase in cases over the last week. In the United States, this increase is 24.5%, with an increase in deaths of 30%. Massachusetts is the third ranking state for both total cases and cases by population, with over 68,000 cases (an increase of almost 24% since last week) and just over 4,000 deaths (an increase of 38%). The hospitalizations in Massachusetts show that there has been a plateau, rather than a peak and then a rapid decrease.

As of April 29th, Somerville had 748.64 cases per 100,000 residents, an increase from 542.21 on April 22nd. As of 9:00am on Monday 5/4/20: 640 residents tested positive; 267 recovered; and there have been 9 fatalities. The week of April 5th had the highest number of new cases in Somerville and the number of new cases by week have been steadily declining since then. Further, the number of positive cases may increase as testing becomes more widely available.

Somerville Public Schools have distributed 4,209 meals (breakfast and lunch) during the week of 4/27-5/1, for a total of 29,202 meals distributed in 7 weeks. There is a continuing trend of high demand on Fridays. The City of Somerville Emergency Food Pantry has moved to the Kennedy School and received 21,000 pounds of food from Greater Boston Food Bank through Food for Free. This is an increase of 4,000 pounds compared to prior weeks, which can be accommodated due to the new location, in addition to added capacity to provide diapers, toiletries, and other personal care items in addition to groceries. They have served 846 households (approximately 2,477 individuals), with the number of new referrals by week remaining steady at approximately 300 referrals per week.

The Police Department's calls for service (which reflect unverified calls and do not necessarily represent a crime) data have increased, primarily related to larcenies. The nice weather did not increase total calls, but included more reports of parties. In the last week, the Fire Department responded to 31 COVID-19 related medical calls, which is 13 fewer than the prior week.

Mr. Kress shared that the community testing initiative is separated into three groups: CHA patients, first responders, and the community. The department's access is only to the resident data. Almost 30% of residents have taken advantage of the testing, 76% of whom identify as white. There is outreach to residents, particularly in immigrant communities. A name and date of birth can be provided as verification if no photo ID is available. The food pantry efforts are targeted to those who are isolated or quarantined, and they are seeking additional drivers who are able to work consistent shifts. There has been some funding received from DPH for the work, and the department is working on a budget that will alleviate the burden on city funds.

Councilor Strezo asked about the timeline and requirements for volunteers, and Mr. Kress noted that up to 15 additional drivers are sought and a CORI is required, which will take 3-5 days to process. Interested individuals can reach out to: jutra@somervillema.gov. Councilor Mbah asked whether there was an anticipated increase of cases in May and Mr. Kress noted that it is unknown, but could be affected by individuals failing to comply with social distancing, hand washing, and mask wearing, and emphasized the importance of these practices. Councilor Mbah asked as well about data on the number of masks distributed and Ms. Koh noted that there are several efforts in place and she will research to provide more information. There have not been any tickets issued, and it does appear that most residents are complying with the requirement. Mr. Kress elaborated that there are many resources for making masks at home, and efforts to distribute masks through the Police and Fire Departments. Health and Human Services is focusing on distributing to those in shelters and the homeless populations. The Council on Aging has distributed over 4,000 masks in senior buildings. Councilor Rossetti added that she has received feedback from many seniors who are grateful.

Councilor Scott asked if there were tasks other than driving that volunteers could be used for, and wondered if there was a location where the information for volunteers could be found. Mr. Kress noted that the needs are constantly changing, and drivers for food deliveries are the priority, but the department can try to share more information online. The tasks occur daily, but the same individual does not have to participate every day. There is a shift at noon for packing, and a 4pm shift for sending the supplies out. Mr. Kress added that it is imperative that volunteers register in advance in order to allow for proper planning and compliance with social distancing requirements. Councilor Scott also asked for more specific information about the increase in larcenies and whether they

involved theft from grocery stores. Ms. Koh will connect with the crime analyst to provide that information. Ms. Webber noted that the mask enforcement will be reviewed next week, as the grace period will have expired. The administration plans to provide the number of citations issued and the associated amounts, as well as the location.

Councilor McLaughlin expressed concern about the communication of policies and knowledge of the availability of testing, particularly to first responders. He also shared concern about addressing bias in implementation. Ms. Webber noted that memoranda have been distributed to all members of the Police Department, and all should be aware of the policies and enforcement mechanisms. The department has been instructed to treat these issues with education and compassion. Councilor Niedergang shared that two letters were received from community leaders expressing concerns about implicit bias and differential enforcement of the mask rule. He also asked that the administration be prepared to respond to these concerns by next week. Councilor Ballantyne noted that she spoke with two community police officers who were carrying masks and were aware of the order. Councilor Clingan asked how the Governor's order affects the order already issued by the City. Ms. Webber clarified that municipalities can impose more stringent requirements, but cannot be more lenient. The Governor's order does include children from 2-5 years old, and defers enforcement to municipalities.

Councilor Ballantyne asked if there was data on the number of calls that were from seniors and whether there has been an increase and Ms. Webber will research whether that can be provided. Councilor Ballantyne also wondered if there was any update on the feedback that was shared in the previous meeting relative to the minimum age for requirement of face masks and on opening roads to pedestrians. Ms. Webber noted that there are no current plans to modify the order but it will continue to be evaluated as circumstances change. Ms. Connor shared that the mobility team is developing a plan to roll out roadway changes, and are working with the Police Department. The plan should be ready in a week or two.

Councilor Niedergang expressed a concern that citation sheets do not collect race and ethnicity data. Ms. Webber elaborated that the citation booklets were recently updated, and require approval from the Supreme Judicial Court to amend. Councilor Niedergang also asked if there was guidance or instruction for those in vehicles such as convertibles or motorcycles without masks. Ms. Connor clarified that the order does not extend to vehicles but Ms. Webber will consult with the Law Department for guidance. Councilor Niedergang inquired as well whether there is a team in place to address re-opening and what dialogue is taking place with the state. Ms. Connor noted that a team is looking at internal City policies, but any plans will be developed in collaboration with surrounding communities. The Mayor has been in conversations with surrounding cities' mayors and is in contact with the state's task force.

Councilor White wondered if contact tracing identified any clusters within the city, and Mr. Kress noted that the only large clusters have been seen in one independent living home, but there is a concern about spreading within households/addresses. This highlights why isolation and quarantine are so critical. Additional tests will also be crucial to understanding how the virus is spreading in the community. Councilor Ewen-Campen clarified that the 3,500 tests received must be expended before additional tests can be received.

Councilor Ewen-Campen noted that a better bailout and more sources of revenue are imperative and wondered how the city can put pressure on the state for municipalities to access any funds that are received by the Federal Reserve. He cautioned the need to push back against moves toward austerity. Ms. Connor added that MAPC and the regional mayors are advocating for this at the state level.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210001: That the Administration take measures to ensure that first responders and essential personnel are prioritized for COVID-19 testing for personal and public safety purposes.

Mr. Kress will provide a more detailed update in the May 11 meeting; Councilor McLaughlin elaborated that specifics around the communication about how individuals can be tested is important.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210047: That the Administration update this Council on what is being done to help communities of color during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Kress will provide a more detailed update in the May 11 meeting.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210048: That the Administration update this Council on what is being done to help the homeless, who are most at risk during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Kress will provide a more detailed update in the May 11 meeting.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

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.

Mr. Kress will provide a more detailed update in the May 11 meeting.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210115: That the Administration's weekly update on COVID-19 include a dedicated update from the Police Department on the implementation of the mandatory mask policy, and what steps are being taken to ensure that enforcement is fair and unbiased.

See 209798

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210124: That the Director of the Council on Aging provide this Council with updates and ways to help seniors living in our community.

Mr. Kress noted that actions taken include: mask distribution efforts, phone calls, reviewing building emergency and continuity of service plans, providing programming online and on cable television, and meal distribution in partnership with Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services as well as the Boston Food Bank. Councilor Ballantyne added that there are approximately 10,000 seniors in the city, and asked how

many the Council on Aging connects with, and what else can be done to provide aid in addition to the work already taking place.

Councilor Strezo asked about the type and quality of the masks distributed to seniors and if there were plans to follow up with additional masks. Mr. Kress noted that they were the 3-ply disposable masks, and there is a plan to redistribute. The focus was on the senior housing buildings and those participating in the Council on Aging's programs, but there are approximately 6,000 seniors who are living independently.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210125: That the Superintendent of Schools update this Council on how the school year is faring, best practices, projected changes, any ways to help, etc.

Ms. Connor suggested that this request could be coordinated through the School Committee and she will coordinate scheduling with the School Department administration to participate in a future meeting to share an update.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Handouts:

- 200504 Situation Summary for City Council (with 209798)