



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Public Health and Public Safety Committee

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, June 5, 2024

6:30 PM

The meeting took place virtually via Zoom and was called to order at 6:30 PM by Chair McLaughlin and adjourned at 7:58 PM on a roll call vote of 2 in favor (Councilors Davis and McLaughlin), none against and 1 absent (Councilor Sait).

Others present:

Director Karin Carroll – Health and Human Services, Kimberly Hutter – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese – Legislative Clerk.

Roll Call

Present: Ward One City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin and Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis
Absent: Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [24-0569](#))

Approval of the Minutes of the Public Health and Public Safety Committee Meeting of April 17, 2024.

RESULT: ACCEPTED
AYE: Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin and Ward Six City Councilor Davis
ABSENT: Ward Five City Councilor Sait

2. Order (ID # [24-0062](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Strezo, Councilor Wilson and Councilor Davis
 That the Director of Health and Human Services provide monthly updates to this Council’s Committee on Public Health and Public Safety regarding ongoing efforts to address homelessness.

Resident Kate Byrne spoke briefly about the work of the Non Profit Boards Collaborative and its advocacy for a warming center. The group conducted a survey of users and volunteers of the warming center. Ms. Byrne said that people on the street need permanent housing.

The committee was given a presentation by Judy Pearlman on the survey results of the performance of the Somerville Warming Center from January through March 2024. The participants in the survey were asked to answer questions about their experiences and offer suggestions for future use of the center.

Director Carroll informed the committee that the report has been forwarded

to consultant and reported that the city has moved forward in the last few months with some positive actions, including using free cash to expand the capacity of 1 adult shelter in Somerville. She noted that \$400,000 has been allocated for a shelter operated by the Somerville Homeless Coalition for additional beds, services, showers and possibly laundry facilities. In addition, funds have been put aside by the mayor for operating the warming center for next winter. (That item is currently in the Finance Committee). ARPA funds were used for a couple of programs that will be wrapping up soon. A two-year grant was awarded to continue the warming center for the next two years. The weekly meetings with departments involved in homelessness issues, including 311, are ongoing. MA DOT is involved in those meetings if state property is involved.

Director Carroll noted the importance of securing sustainable long term housing. She noted that the operating budget for Health and Human Services contains several places that offer support to unhoused people in the city. The team is doing prevention work, delivering supplies, and making referrals to agencies that may be able to provide assistance.

The Director explained that the after action plan is an internal process used to review the program and said that she doesn't know how long it will take to complete.

Councilor Davis asked if any information is currently available from the consultant that might give the City Council an indication of what is has to work with. The Director said that the consultant will be meeting with the team tomorrow about emergency warming shelter capacity and that a larger discussion will take place at a later point in the process. She noted that there might be other asks on the horizon.

Councilor Davis commented that he hasn't heard anything about overcoming the challenges that occurred when the center initially opened, adding that a different approach needs to be taken if the city wants to do this right. His impression is that the city wasn't prepared when it opened the center and he doesn't think the mayor's budget request covers those problems. He said that he wants to know if the concerns noted are going to be addressed for next year.

Chair McLaughlin said that he wants to assure people that funds will be available for a warming center next year. He asked who made the decision to use the Armory for the warming center and what other places considered, but not selected. Director Carroll said that although she can't speak to all the details, many buildings were considered, some of which were old. The preference was to use a city building so that it could be accessed by DPW in case of an emergency. The first year the city operated the shelter, it was housed in the West Somerville library and experienced issues. Moving it to the Armory provided ADA accessibility, heat, etc. in a city building. The

Director told the committee that the administration makes the selection based on recommendations, but she was not involved in that decision. Liaison Hutter stated that she would try to get the requested information. Chair McLaughlin said he had suggested a number of locations and wants to know what was recommended. He also said that he is looking for a permanent location and he asked if people could expect to get something more stable or will if they'll have a repeat of this year.

Director Carrol told the committee that the consultant, Emily Martusco, is someone she has worked with in the past on summertime programs and has a background in emergency management. Part of the meeting, which does not involve the general public, will include a workshop on how to rapidly respond to problems. Neighbors, warming center users and armory tenants will be receiving a survey to provide feedback.

Director Carroll spoke about utilizing community health workers (CHW) and explained that these individuals are here from the community to represent and serve the community, looking for and filling gaps were possible and bringing language and cultural capacity. Three CHW's were funded last year and have now been hired. Chair McLaughlin commented that it might be good to have some of those folks at the next committee meeting.

Director Carroll informed the committee that anyone seeing an encampment should report it to 311, or to 911 in case of an emergency. A protocol is in place to pass the information to the correct people/agency, e.g., Somerville Homeless Coalition, CORE, MA DOT, etc..

Kate Byrne commented that on the night she volunteered, people were waiting outside the Armory to come in and that the stairway was not ADA compliant. She said that the center had 15 cots, 5 matts and 8 blankets available and that there wasn't enough room for those who came. She noted that the staff was welcoming, but space was difficult and she asked why the city hires consultants when there are people with experience available.

Alex Pirie commented that this is a shared problem and everyone needs to pitch in.

Jess White, who works at the Armory, has concerns about how the lack of planning was a problem. She said that nobody reached out to them for feedback and that it's scary to think what will happen in December.

Ruth Faris, a Board member of Arts at the Armory , said it was sad that things were done the way they were and that people were startled because no notice or training was provided to staff. She said that things need to be done more thoughtfully.

Chair McLaughlin announced that the next meeting of the committee will be in September.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

3. Order
(ID # [24-0451](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr.

That the Director of Health and Human Services update this Council on the plan to prioritize the deployment of masks and tests to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Director Carroll reported that she had no updates to provide at this time. The city still has a supply of supplies but is seeing a significant reduction in demand. If any changes are made by the state, she can notify the committee, but there is no indication that the state will be providing any masks or test kits.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Order
(ID # [24-0471](#))

By Councilor Wilson, Councilor Scott, Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Mbah

That the Director of Racial and Social Justice update this Council on the promised road map from the consultant for implementing the recommendations in the report on Police Staffing and Operations delivered in November.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

5. Resolution
(ID # [24-0478](#))

By Councilor Strezo

That the Administration convene the appropriate departments to discuss the monitoring efforts of the wild turkey population within Somerville and the surrounding regions.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Documents:

- PHPS - 2024-06-05 Somerville Warming Center___FINAL (with 24-0062)