



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
CLERK OF COMMITTEES

October 26, 2020

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Lance L. Davis	Chair	Present	
Jesse Clingan	Vice Chair	Present	
Matthew McLaughlin	Ward One City Councilor	Present	

The meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Davis at 6:05pm and adjourned at 8:18pm.

Others present: Khushbu Webber - Mayor's Office; Doug Kress - HHS; Patty Contente - Police

Approval of the October 5, 2020 Minutes

RESULT: ACCEPTED

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

Chair Davis noted that the recommendations were shared in February, but the world has changed since then, and he requested an update on how to move forward. Mr. Kress shared that the Task Force has begun meeting again, and the budget supported funding for a consultant to support this work. The consultant has been chosen through an RFP. Alexis Cohens and Brandon Marshall, who are national leaders in this work, have been selected. The scope of services includes continued meetings with the Working Group, and drafting recommendations for opening a site in Somerville. This will include a community needs assessment and financial and community impact analysis, as well as identifying what is needed within a site. Two models are currently in place, one which is more medical and one more peer-led, and both will be explored and evaluated.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

209666: That the Director of Somerville Cares About Prevention update this Council's Committee on Public Health and Public Safety on their priorities for the year.

Mr. Kress shared an update that there is work underway, including meeting with young people and students both to engage and to ensure that they have things to do to maintain normalcy. The work of Somerville Positive Forces has expanded to include Prospect Hill. The tobacco control initiatives are also continuing, and the substance prevention coordinator is working on a variety of assessments and working

with students to target substance use. The City also received a grant to provide supplies to the unhoused population, including naloxone, and training on how to use it.

Councilor Clingan asked whether there has been a shift in efforts to address pandemic-related issues such as isolation, that have led to an increase in suicides. Mr. Kress responded that there is a youth specialist and out of school time coordinator who have been working with after-school programs to engage young people and share messages around this. Councilor McLaughlin requested that the Director of SCAP, Mr. Mitchell, join a future meeting to introduce himself and share the resources available through his department. Councilor Clingan asked about the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, and Mr. Kress noted that the results from the last survey are available and there is work to determine if there is the capacity to conduct the survey this year and if so, how to include COVID-related updates.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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209667: That the Directors of Health and Human Services and Somerville Cares About Prevention appear before this Council’s Committee on Public Health and Public Safety to discuss their roles regarding recreational marijuana applications.

Councilor McLaughlin is recused from this item, as acting Mayor on marijuana-related issues. Mr. Kress noted that there is no real role in the applications, but there is a question on the application asking how the applicant will work with SCAP on educational opportunities.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED. [2 TO 0]
AYES:	Davis, Clingan
RECUSED:	McLaughlin

210211: That the Director of Health and Human Services work with all community partners in contact with parents to make sure those parents identify someone to care for their children should they need to be hospitalized, and make that information is accessible, with contact information, in case it is needed.

Councilor Clingan shared that often children may end up with DCF if a parent is hospitalized, and working with community partners to identify alternative caregivers would help decrease the trauma inflicted on those children. Mr. Kress noted that the department has been working with immigrant services, the School District, SomerPromise, and other agencies to promote a family emergency plan, which includes identifying individuals who can pick children up from school, and where they could stay in the case of an emergency. There is also work to identify a location where a child can gather, such as a Fire Station, if they are unable to go home. Councilor Clingan wondered who is able to access the plan and how an agency like DCF could access that information. Mr. Kress noted that there are legal questions with access, and the focus of the plan is on informing the School District and ensuring friends and family and informal networks are aware. Councilor Clingan suggested that the Solicitor's office provide guidance on the information sharing between the City's Health Department and DCF.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin

210246: That the Director of Health and Human Services work with City Council to create

and fund an unarmed agency that responds to mental health emergencies, addiction and substance-abuse emergencies, and other non-violent crises.

See 210743.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210433: That the Director of Health and Human Services report to this Council the feasibility of using weekly pooled Covid-19 testing and/or relatively affordable "test strips" for school children, public employees, and workers at public-facing businesses.

Mr. Kress shared that the City is working with Tufts University to explore pool testing, which helps limit the number of tests needed. Initial swabs are conducted, but then the tests can be pooled to be evaluated. It would serve as a screening mechanism rather than for symptomatic testing. If any of the tests were positive, they could be separated and analyzed individually. The need for supplies and staffing would be limited by employing this method. Mr. Kress elaborated that the tests would be conducted in a cohort, such as a class of students or cluster of employees, and that pool would remain together. Chair Davis asked where this model has been used and Mr. Kress noted that Tufts has been a pilot for this, and it would be run by the Broad Institute, who is currently conducting the testing at Tufts and many other universities. Chair Davis also asked for clarification of what groups this would extend to and Mr. Kress noted that this is still being explored. There is also evaluation of the possible use of saliva tests, and decisions have not yet been made.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin

210687: That the Director of Health and Human Services advise this Council what services are available to our neighbors experiencing homelessness, mental illness, and addiction, and where additional funding could improve those services or enable new services.

See 210743. The Chair also noted that this is a shorter-term conversation and was intended to address some immediate issues, particularly in Davis Square.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210743: Proposing a process to create the Somerville Community Safety Coalition.

Sarah Courtney, of the Institute for Health and Recovery, shared a process of community level intervention for working on issues pertaining to substance use. Chair Davis noted that this is the beginning of a long-term conversation about re-imagining policing and how incidents are addressed in the community. The Director of Racial and Social Justice position has been advertised and is not yet filled, but will be another important part of this process.

Ms. Courtney's proposal highlighted that access to quality mental health treatment is the most effective tool for ensuring the best health and justice outcomes for both the individual and the community. The process would begin with interventions prior to law enforcement and incarceration, and would include things like immigration support and housing support. The model identifies strengths in the community as well as gaps in service, and aims to increase collaboration between agencies. The goal is to increase support over time to reduce the need for law enforcement intervention overall.

Chair Davis asked if any other municipalities have this system in place, and Ms. Courtney noted that there are communities who have used the model in community agencies to assess and address gaps in services, and provide comprehensive treatment, but she is not aware of its use at a city level. A good example in Massachusetts is the prison birth project, in Greenfield. Mr. Kress also shared that there is more information about the model here: <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/pep19-sim-brochure.pdf>.

Councilor Clingan noted that Somerville does not have jurisdiction over the court system, so once that step is reached, there will be little that the City can control. He added that the model is already in use in the City, not including the courts and jails, where Somerville does not have jurisdiction. Councilor McLaughlin asked what the City is capable of doing that has not been proposed yet. Ms. Courtney clarified that the proposal is not just the individual programs, but a community collaborative of all programs to address the flow of individuals through the process. The courts do offer services, and those programs would be at the table as stakeholders, with the goal of connecting people to what they need.

Ms. Contente elaborated that this is an excellent model, and it has been implemented through ongoing community stakeholder meetings on Mental Health and the Criminal Justice System. The MA Trial Courts also created a new initiative called the Community Justice Project. One of the main things they are doing statewide is to facilitate mapping workshops for this model. Somerville's was held in January 2019, and the report can be found here: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/massachusetts-community-justice-workshop-report-somerville-district-court-jurisdiction/download>. There have been gaps identified, and resources for each intercept. There are a lot of evolving needs, particularly around Intercept 0. Many of the city's community service providers participate in meetings and work to collaborate to meet residents' needs. The jail diversion program has also been in place since 2012, and a re-entry grant has helped the City provide supports for those returning to the community. The Middlesex Sheriff's Office also has a Data Driven Justice project, designed to help law enforcement better identify behavioral health needs with the goal of avoiding unnecessary incarceration.

Chair Davis commented that there is still room for improvement, and asked how many interventions have been conducted. Ms. Contente estimated that there have been approximately 10 diversions, but also a summons is not always filed when behavioral health is involved. Officers are trained to provide referrals rather than arrest. Councilor Clingan added that there are also many instances of individuals refusing services. Mr. Kress elaborated that the language and cultural barriers are another important consideration, and the department does continue its outreach, including needle exchanges in partnership with Fenway Health, work with the Somerville Homeless Coalition, and expansion of the work on opiate addiction with new grant funds. Ms. Courtney added that some of the work would also be capacity building and learning, and connecting individuals in need to those who have experience with the system.

Chair Davis asked about the immediate needs Ms. Contente identified, and they are insurance resources and referral to services. There are often long wait lists and responses are often through emergency services rather than long-term options. Funding for recovery coaches and other peer supports is a challenge, and sustainable programs for ongoing engagement are needed. Mr. Kress emphasized that a lack of mental health service providers that are accessible, due largely to insurance and wait lists, is a challenge.

Councilor McLaughlin thanked Ms. Contente for her work on these issues and emphasized that understanding what is happening is important before trying to make changes. He suggested that the discussion focus on filling the gaps that exist rather than re-imagining the process. Ms. Contente added that there is a long way to go toward addressing basic needs such as rent and food security.

There are also no emergency shelters due to COVID, and there are services needed for the unhoused. Working through the Police Department allows a level of information that makes it easier to provide continued engagement and supports, and there is a team effort with other City departments that should be maintained.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Items to place on file

209664: That the Director of Health and Human Services discuss using city policies to address pollution mitigation for new developments along high transit roads and highways.

Chair Davis noted that a similar item is before the Legislative Matters Committee, and the Committee has been informed that much of the jurisdiction lies with the Board of Health, and there may be grants to assist in moving forward.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin

210208: That the Director of Parks and Recreation report to this Council's Public Health and Public Safety Committee the plan to re-open the Dilboy Pool on July 1.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin

210209: That the Director of Parks and Recreation report to this Council's Public Health and Public Safety Committee with the plan for re-opening the department's Summer Camp.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin

210282: Director of Parks and Recreation responding to #210208 and #210209 on plans to re-open Dilboy Pool and Summer Camps.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin

210182: That the Postmaster provide any contingency plans to be implemented in the event of a forced shut-down or suspension of service due to a lack of funding or the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin

210356: US Postal Service Manager of Governmental Relations responding to #210182 re: Postal Service operations during the pandemic.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES:	Davis, Clingan, McLaughlin