



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

April 13, 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	
Stephanie Hirsch	City Councilor At Large	Present	
Wilfred N. Mbah	City Councilor at Large	Present	
William A. White Jr.	City Councilor At Large	Present	
Mary Jo Rossetti	City Councilor at Large	Present	

The meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Davis at 6:04pm and adjourned at 8:16pm.

Councilors Ewen-Campen and Rossetti were attending other City meetings and joined during the discussion of item 209798.

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

Approval of the March 30, 2020 Minutes

The item was approved by a roll call vote with 9 Councilors (McLaughlin, Scott, Clingan, Niedergang, Ballantyne, Hirsch, Mbah, White, Davis) in favor and 2 absent (Ewen-Campen, Rossetti).

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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Approval of the April 6, 2020 Minutes

The item was approved by a roll call vote with 9 Councilors (McLaughlin, Scott, Clingan, Niedergang, Ballantyne, Hirsch, Mbah, White, Davis) in favor and 2 absent (Ewen-Campen, Rossetti).

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 an update, beginning with a map of the global spread of the virus. Some data includes that, as of this morning:

There were 1,860,011 cases worldwide, an increase of 579,969 over last week.

The nationwide trend is also increasing, with more than double the number of fatalities as last week.

Massachusetts has the fourth highest number of total cases, as well as the fourth highest per capita.

In Somerville, there have been 258 residents to test positive, with 71 recovered and 1 fatality.

The growth in Somerville is similar to that in Cambridge, as well as in Middlesex County and the state, but Somerville has more residents in the 30-39 age range.

Race and ethnicity data are lacking for many cases, including 68% of those in Somerville.

Somerville Public Schools have distributed 14,209 meal kits and the City Food Pantry served 302 customers through deliveries and pickups and an additional 245 through partnerships with other organizations.

Councilor White asked if data could be provided regarding current cases and how many are self-quarantined, hospitalized, and in critical condition. Director Kress noted that the data are not always accessible by the municipalities. Councilor White also inquired about clusters and the GIS coordinator is beginning to map to determine if there are geographic patterns and that data will be shared when it is available. The contact tracing efforts are underway through HHS to encourage quarantine of individuals who have been exposed. The numbers can easily become overwhelming. Councilor White asked as well if the city was aware of individuals who are self-quarantining and if they need services, and HHS is working to determine this as well, but it is a one-by-one process to contact everyone. Director Kress reminded everyone that sharing this information is voluntary and discouraged overuse, as it is unreliable.

Councilor McLaughlin requested a weekly update of any policy changes to better inform residents. Ms. Koh clarified that the daily numbers reflect when the cases were entered into the system, which is affected by factors such as staff time for data entry, when the report becomes available, and when labs are open.

Director Kress noted that the anticipated peak is approximately 8-10 days from now and encouraged reinforcement of efforts to stay home, and use interventions such as masks and proper hand washing when going out in public is necessary. The City continues to work with state and local partners to address issues such as the homeless populations. Other partners are adding staff to undertake contact tracing efforts, along with city staff and volunteers, and will be using software that will be different from but interface with the MAVEN tracking software. Demographic and language data will also be further researched in the process. Mr. Kress emphasized that providing the data is voluntary, but they will collect as much as they are able. He noted that there is an increase in the need not only for food access, but also other personal supplies.

Councilor White asked if there were inspections or enforcement for establishments who may not be complying to social distancing standards. Mr. Kress will discuss with ISD and the Chamber of Commerce to follow up with establishments about the guidelines. Councilor Hirsch wondered if there were options for individuals to quarantine separate from their families to not spread the virus further. Mr. Kress emphasized that most likely, the entire household should be quarantined, and it is easier to provide services if they remain together. If an individual who has tested positive needs to be isolated, they could be moved to a facility in conjunction with MEMA. Councilor Hirsch asked as well how items and services other than food, such as laundry, are being delivered. Mr. Kress noted that the department is looking for supplies to be provided along with food delivery.

Councilor Hirsch asked if there was information about the sources of the spread of the virus in the city, even if it is not completely evidence-based, to address any major vulnerabilities such as workplaces or living situations that may be hot spots. Mr. Kress emphasized that the best course of action is to stay home and follow public health guidelines, including washing hands frequently.

Councilor Hirsch asked if there were thoughts on why Somerville's younger population shows higher rates of infection, particularly in comparison to Cambridge, which has a similar population distribution. Mr. Kress was unsure if there were particular reasons for that difference. Planning for the next wave is an important consideration and there are many challenges, including testing capacity, which would help with decision making about reopening. The decisions also need to be made in partnership with the region and the state. Somerville has and will continue to be a leader in taking the actions necessary and collecting data to inform the slowing of the spread of the virus.

Councilor Scott wondered who is in touch with households where individuals are affected, and it is the public health nurses, with the contact tracing occurring through the nursing staff or the Partners in Health effort. One strategy is to work with members of a household as a unit, to further contain the virus.

Councilor Scott confirmed that Partners in Health brought in 13 new staff members, to complement the work of the city's two public health nurses, nurse navigator, and 17 school nurses.

Councilor Scott asked about tests for the Fire and Police Department personnel and how many personnel have tested positive. Ms. Webber noted that there are currently no positive tests within the Fire Department and no individuals are quarantined. Mr. Kress will research how many tests have been conducted for SPD and SFD staff and provide that information. Individuals are tested whenever there is a potential risk, including exposure, and the individual begins to show symptoms. Councilor Scott suggested that there be comprehensive testing to address the possibility of asymptomatic spread and Mr. Kress noted that the state handles the testing; the city does not get to determine how tests are allocated.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked what steps are being taken to support elderly residents and staff in the elderly resident buildings. The Council on Aging has worked with the Housing Authority and other buildings to address services as well as PPE, and noted that there are universal backlogs of availability. The National Guard has been to the Little Sisters of the Poor building to perform testing, and there has also been outreach to the VNA. Substantial outreach work has been done to encourage staying home and encourage other ways to connect, such as via video. Mr. Kress is working with the state to expand testing for seniors beyond nursing homes.

Councilor McLaughlin suggested that it is important to know what city staff are infected, particularly essential personnel and first responders. Ms. Webber also clarified that Boston has partnered with the East Boston Health Center to create a drive through testing facility for first responders, but those who

are tested must still meet the Department of Public Health criteria (exhibiting symptoms and/or contact with another individual who is presumed or has tested positive).

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

209999: That the Chief of Police and the Chief Fire Engineer appear before this Council's Committee on Public Health and Public Safety with an update on their plans to keep first responders safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Councilor Scott reinforced that there are no plans to test Fire and Police employees unless they show symptoms, regardless of potential asymptomatic spread. Ms. Webber clarified that the DPH guidelines inform the protocols for testing first responders. The Police Department has been given protective masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, and cleaning materials for cruisers. They have been made aware of safety guidelines while interacting with the public. Structural changes have been made to work spaces. Fire apparatus also have two bins with COVID-19 equipment, including masks, disinfectants, and biohazard items. There has also been extensive training. Requirements around PPE have been strengthened for all first responders, and all medical calls are treated as if the individual is positive for the virus. Ms. Webber also noted that three Police staff have tested positive and two Police staff are in quarantine. There was one previous positive test in the Fire Department, and that individual has recovered.

Councilor Ewen-Campen emphasized again that the city cannot determine who to test, and this is largely due to catastrophic failures by the federal government. Councilor Mbah confirmed that there is no treatment for the virus, but that an individual can test positive and subsequently test negative. Mr. Kress clarified that this is because the test is conducted through a nasal swab and is not internal.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210000: That Director of Health and Human services provide this Council with evidence-based research on handling postal mail without protective equipment with respect to the spread of the coronavirus.

Ms. Connor shared that there is research indicating that the virus lives less than 48 hours on paper. The general advice is that mail is not a significant risk, but individuals should wash their hands after opening mail. The Post Office has put measures in place to protect workers. There is concern for workers, but it is not under the city's purview.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

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.

See 210001

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210032: That the Chief of Police discuss what may be done to curb domestic and partner violence especially during the COVID-19 crisis, as victims are quarantined with their abusers.

Ms. Webber explained that the city has continued to contact all reporting victims and treat all incidents as they normally would with the exception that rather than conducting face to face interviews, the victim-witness advocate is conducting interviews virtually. Information about domestic violence is being disseminated by officers, and individuals are referred to RESPOND for domestic violence resources. Services are being offered via phone and through Zoom. BARCC (Boston Area Rape Crisis Center) is also offering a web chat option. Councilor Ballantyne asked that this be repeated at least weekly via social media.

RESPOND: www.respondinc.org; 617-623-5900

BARCC: www.barcc.org; 800-841-8371; chat available from 9am-11pm

Somerville Police Victim's Advocate Maureen DiPaolo: 857-270-8744

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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210033: That the Director of Health and Human Services explain the current protocol for notifying residents of positive COVID-19 tests and contacts and how services may be offered that allow them to receive treatment, maintain household stability, and isolate themselves as needed.

See 210033

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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210034: That the Board of Assessors extend the deadline for applications for Residential and/or Statutory Exemptions beyond the current April 1 deadline.

Ms. Webber noted that per Assessor Golden, the Board intends to extend the deadline to June 1st. There have been very few exemptions requested. Councilor White noted that the DOR has issued guidelines on extensions and wondered whether this was the maximum deadline allowed by the state. Ms. Webber will research and provide a response.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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Handouts:

- 200413 Situation Update for City Council (with 209798)
- DV Safety Planning during Covid19 (with 210032)