



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
CLERK OF COMMITTEES

November 29, 2021

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	

Others present: Doug Kress - Director of Health and Human Services, Patricia Contente - Director of Community Outreach, Help and Recovery, Hannah Carrillo - Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:04 PM by Vice Chair Clingan. Chair Davis joined the meeting and assumed the Chair at 6:11 PM. The meeting was adjourned at 8:06 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors McLaughlin, Clingan and Davis), 0 against and 0 absent.

Approval of the May 3, 2021 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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COVID-19 Response

211801: That the Mayor and the Director of Health and Human Services update the Committee on Public Health and Public Safety on the Covid-19 public health emergency and the city's response (following on #209798).

Director Kress gave a brief update and said that the COVID online dashboard is updated every Tuesday. He reviewed the number of cases and said that the order to mask in public places is still in effect. He acknowledged that there is not much known about the new variant, omicron. The city continues to offer vaccines and booster shots in various locations and encourages everyone who is eligible to get a booster.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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212304: That the Director of Health and Human Services discuss with this Council, what COVID/Delta variant safety measures and mandates are being proposed, including mandating vaccinations.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

Addiction Treatment, Generally

208261: That the Director of Health and Human Services highlight any funding for drug treatment during the budget process.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

212035: Director of Health and Humans Services responding to #208261 re: funding for drug treatment.

Councilor McLaughlin commented that more funding is needed for the COHR program. Director Kress noted that there is other funding available, however his memo did not address that. Councilor Clingan asked if the city receives updates from Column Health and Director Kress said that the city meets monthly with Column Health.

RESULT:

PLACED ON FILE

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 discussion of items 210241 and 210874.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

210874: Director of Health and Human Services responding to #210687 re: current and potential services available to neighbors experiencing homelessness, mental illness, and addiction.

Chair Davis noted that this response is thorough, and he highlighted many of the bullet points in it. Director Kress provided updates to the memo saying that city property is being assessed as possible locations for safe restroom access, noting that a multi-service center would be preferable, however, due to the limited amount of city assets, this has not yet been completed. Additionally, sites and funding for "Portland Loos" are still being explored.

The city has been working with other communities on a regional approach to address the problem of homelessness. Advocacy opportunities continue in order to make known the needs that exist in the city. Director Kress spoke of securing a grant to provide additional training for health workers, ultimately embedding those people in various agencies within the city. The HHS Department continues to work with various agencies, e.g., Somerville Homeless Coalition and Project Soup.

Chair Davis is curious as to why port-a-potties placed specifically to address the basic human needs of members of our community are being removed when calls of complaint come into 311. Director Kress stated that this has been corrected by establishing a system of communication regarding the port-a-potties between HHS and other departments. Councilor McLaughlin noted the need for a port-a potty at Chuckie Harris Park. He expressed his concern about the delay in providing spaces for the homeless, noting that there have been two deaths in his ward in recent months. He noted that there are currently three public health emergencies in the city and it seems like the city is just spinning its wheels, making no real progress. He recently proposed that the city take several blighted properties by eminent domain and that

providing a simple facility for basic services like heat and bathrooms would be a good reason for doing so. Chair Davis agreed that the need for an engagement center is immediate and urged the administration to pursue all options for both short term and longer term solutions, including using the power of eminent domain.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE
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211708: That the Director of Health and Human Services update the Committee on Public Health and Public Safety, in writing and in person, on what steps have been taken and are planned to provide services to our neighbors experiencing homelessness, mental illness, and addiction.

See discussion of items 210241 and 210874.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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212241: Requesting the establishment of a restitution program for current and former residents who have been harmed by the war on drugs.

Chair Davis noted that there are various views of this topic.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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Engagement Center/Harm Reduction Site-related Items

211326: That the Director of Health and Human Services develop a plan for a warming center or engagement center to address increased homelessness in the community due to COVID-19.

See discussion of items 210241 and 210874.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE
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211715: That the Directors of SPCD and Health and Human Services discuss options for the Somerville Homeless Coalition and other community based organizations who need public spaces for engagement centers to meet unsheltered people in a safe and private environment.

See discussion of items 210241 and 210874.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE
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212235: That the Director of Health and Human Services identify a location for a harm reduction site to provide alternative methods of addressing substance abuse while plans for a safe consumption site are prepared.

See discussion of items 210241 and 210874.

RESULT:	PLACED ON FILE
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212570: That the Administration update this Council on plans to create a "Community Engagement Center" to offer support to residents experiencing homelessness or otherwise in need.

See discussion of items 210241 and 210874.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Other Public Health-Related

210241: That the Chief of Police expand the Community Outreach, Help and Recovery program.

Councilor Clingan introduced this item in an effort to highlight and expand the COHR program. Director Contente said that over the last couple of years there has been an increase in mental health calls. She noted that the city has been moving towards providing assistance in these cases well before the move to re-imagining policing. She spoke about the lack of infrastructure of services and programs in the city. The police are doing a good job but are working with a reduced staff in this area. Director Contente said that the waiting period for mental health care is long and there is a lack of staffing to meet the needs of those people who need assistance. Councilor McLaughlin spoke about the loss of momentum in the effort to reallocate police funding towards mental health programs. Director Contente stated that the COHR's program has not received any additional funding since this item was submitted, noting that everything has been put on hold in favor of organizing the Racial and Social Justice Department. Councilor Clingan asked Director Contente if she sees COHR staff being able to respond to mental health calls instead of the police and she stated that this concept needs to be evaluated, noting that most of the mental health calls come into 911 as an emergency. Councilor Clingan believes that the police should be contacted and when the situation is under control, they could turn the case over to COHR staff. Director Contente commented that the police do, on a limited basis, reach out to COHR staff for assistance when appropriate and when staff is available. Conversely, COHR staff also contacts the police for assistance when needed, pointing out that it's an integrated approach.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

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.

RESULT:

PLACED ON FILE

211325: That the Director of Health and Human Services prioritize homelessness outreach workers for upcoming COVID-19 grant funding to better address the increased demand for homeless services.

RESULT:

PLACED ON FILE

211716: That the Directors of Health and Human Services and Infrastructure and Asset Management advise this Council whether gender neutral bathrooms are available in all public K-8 schools, as requested by middle schoolers.

Chair Davis explained that, where possible, neutral gender restrooms have been established. The city's response to this request is attached, which notes that any decisions to establish or expand gender neutral facilities in the schools would be the purview of the school department and the School Committee.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

212473: That the Director Inspectional Services discuss with this Council how to increase reliability and frequency of enforcement of public health violations in the City.

Liaison Carrillo reported that this has not yet been completed. Chair Davis suggested that the Director of Constituent Services be consulted about making the dispositions more transparent and understandable.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

212618: That the Director of Health and Human Services update this Council on the staffing of the Environmental Health Coordinator position to help combat rat infestations throughout the city.

Director Kress reported that this position has been filled and that the new Coordinator is developing a plan of action. Director Kress advised that rat sightings be reported to 311, that trash barrels be covered, that over flowing trash be reported to Inspectional Services and that neighbors work with each other to combat the rat problem. Councilor Clingan asked if any aggressive steps are being taken to deal with the problem and Director Kress said that it's up to everyone to work together. A pilot program utilizing several newer techniques is being considered to help alleviate the problem.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

Related to SHA Police

210239: That the Mayor work with the Director of the Somerville Housing Authority to abolish the Housing Authority Police Department and reallocate the funds for social services for Housing Authority residents.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

210240: That the Director of the Somerville Housing Authority (SHA) develop a formal process for SHA residents to report SHA Police misconduct, in lieu of an outright abolition.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

211929: That the Chief of Police request an update from the Housing Authority on the 2020-discussed reforms such as marked vehicles, uniformed officers, body cameras, and updated policies and procedures for officer accountability and discipline.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

212190: Acting Chief of Police responding to #211929 re: Housing Authority Police reforms.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

To consider for discharge to OSEE (or to place on file)

207449: That the Director of Traffic and Parking waive parking dumpster fees for property owners who are de-paving their driveways.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

208362: That the Director of Water and Sewer and the Director of Sustainability and the Environment create a water preservation program to encourage water preservation among residents and limit water bills.

Councilor McLaughlin commented that we, as Americans, waste more water than other populations and he submitted this item to call attention to the matter.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

To consider for closing/placing on file

206427: That the Superintendent of Inspectional Services report on whether or not an increased amount of construction can lead to more lead exposure, and what measures ISD uses to ensure contractors limit the release of lead into the soil or air.

Chair Davis stated that a memo was sent to the entire Council regarding any concerns any councilor might have with agenda items 26 through 50, and not having received any requests from any member, he suggested that they all be marked "work completed".

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

206585: That the Administration share a more comprehensive set of goals related to air quality based on CAFEH study results, when or if available.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

206856: That the Administration consider a public information effort to inform the community about code violations that impact public safety, such as improper lead paint removal.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

207040: That the Chief of Police and the Chief Fire Engineer, and related staff, discuss how each department receives and handles a 911 call, including the dispatch of State Police, E911, Fire Alarm, and Cataldo Ambulance, and including the handling of asthmatic-related emergencies.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

207042: Expressing the intent to work towards helping improve systems involving emergency response, care and education related to asthma.

RESULT: PLACED ON FILE

208360: That the Chief of Police, the Director of Health and Human Services, the Director of Parks and Recreation and other relevant groups appear before the Public Health and Public Safety Committee to discuss strategies to prevent youth violence and gun possession.

RESULT: PLACED ON FILE

208691: That members of the recently established Safe Injection Site Task Force appear before this Council's Committee on Public Health and Public Safety to discuss their findings in a public forum.

RESULT: PLACED ON FILE

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

RESULT: PLACED ON FILE

208910: That the Administration report to this Council on implementation of the Vulnerable Road Users Ordinance including, without limitation, application to FW Russell Disposal.

RESULT: PLACED ON FILE

208922: That the City Solicitor and Chief of Police report to this Council on how civil asset forfeiture funds have been received and spent over the past 5 years, and how they can be directed to the General Fund.

RESULT: PLACED ON FILE

209097: Assistant City Solicitor responding to #208922 re: civil asset forfeiture funds.

RESULT: PLACED ON FILE

209144: That the Director of SPCD consider installing ADA/bicycle accessible ramps at the opposite ends of Edward Leathers Park to enhance the Neighborways bike path.

RESULT: PLACED ON FILE

209539: That the City Solicitor inform this Council of the minimum condition that would allow the Supervisor of Inspectional Services or the Commissioner of Public Works to clear a sidewalk that is in violation of the snow shoveling ordinance, and charge or lien the

property owner for the cost.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

210170: That the Director of Communications and the Director of Economic Development publicize that one of the best ways to support small businesses offering take-out service is to call them directly to place an order, and pick it up instead of using third party delivery services, to help save them unwanted costs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

210428: That the Administration advise this Council as soon as possible, what oversight it will implement with Tufts University, following Tufts' decision to invite all undergraduate students back to campus for the fall 2020 semester.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

210432: 19 residents requesting a Public Hearing on Tufts University's plans to re-open its campus in the fall.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

210741: That the Administration appear before this Council to give a report on the Public School building reopening plans.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

210743: Proposing a process to create the Somerville Community Safety Coalition.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

211175: That the Chiefs of Police and Fire discuss with this Council, by the end of February 2021, the staffing requirements for their respective departments, as there are suggestions that staff counts should be changed.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

211320: That the Administration, with the Director of Health and Human Services, share a re-opening plan for schools and businesses which defines goals, risks and contingencies.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

211353: That the Director of Health and Human Services create a vaccination site, once more vaccines become available, given the number of vulnerable populations.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

211371: That the Director of Health and Human Services use the attached tool to help small businesses and schools adapt to the evolving science around Covid-19 by sharing current data, identifying risks, and defining contingencies.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

211428: That the Chief of Police appear before this Council's Committee on Public Health and Public Safety to discuss the policy on drug possession arrests for the past 5 years.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

211599: That the Chief of Police update this Council on Somerville's Restorative Justice program, including a description of what sorts of cases are referred for restorative justice and how those decisions are made.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

212303: That the Director of Health and Human Services provide metric-based transparent information for small businesses and schools as we learn to live with COVID and follow emerging science.

RESULT: **PLACED ON FILE**

Reference Material:

- CO-211716 SPS Bathrooms Response 2021May05 (with 211716)