



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

June 1, 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	
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 6:02pm and adjourned at 6:43pm.

Chair Davis requested that the Councilors share thoughts on the scheduling of these meetings, and whether weekly and Committee of the Whole are the preferred approaches.

Others present: Annie Connor - Mayor's Office; Khushbu Webber - Mayor's Office; Doug Kress - HHS; Kristen Stelljes – 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. Stelljes presented the weekly situation summary, with key dates for the week including: May 29, when the City announced its June 1 reopening date for hair salons and barbershops, along with higher safety standards than state guidelines, and also announced that city buildings will remain closed to the public past June 1; and May 28, when the City announced \$1.5 million in rental assistance.

Global trends show cases and deaths continuing to increase, with cases up 14.7% from last week, and deaths up 8.3%. United States' trends depict slightly slower growth in cases, with an increase of 8.6% over last week, and an increase in deaths of 6.9%. The country has now surpassed 100,000 deaths. Massachusetts' rank among states has decreased slightly, ranking fifth in total cases (with 96,301) and fourth in rate of cases by population (1,395 per 100,000 residents).

The MA Department of Public Health (DPH) dashboard depicts positive trends in testing capabilities, along with decreases in hospitalizations and hospitals using surge capacity. The rate of growth in the state over the past week was an increase of 4,290 cases (4.6%) and 474 deaths (7.4%), both indicating a downward trend, with an increase of 60,480 tests (11.4%).

As of May 27, Somerville had 1,105.3 cases per 100,000 residents (up from 1043.9 on May 20). Chelsea continues to see the highest case rates across MA (7,203.1), followed by Brockton (4,031.6), Lawrence (3,333.1), and Lynn (3,251.6). Additionally, Somerville had 8,732 tests per 100,000 residents in the same time period. Shirley had the highest testing rates across MA (26,076), followed by Chelsea (17,900), Ayer (17,686), and Bedford (15,225). The rate reflects the number of people tested, not the total number of tests (people may be tested more than once). Also as of May 27 (for the duration of the pandemic), 12.7% of the Somerville residents who were tested for COVID-19 had positive test results. Buckland has the highest percent positivity across MA (44.4%), followed by Chelsea (40.2%), Lynn (31.3%), and Everett (30.6%).

As of Monday June 1 at 12:40pm: 902 Somerville residents tested positive, with 665 recovered and 27 fatalities. Ms. Stelljes noted that the next week will be important to indicate any increases due to the Memorial Day holiday, and the following week may show increases due to close proximity during protests. The rate of cases is highest in the 80+ age group, though this is likely impacted by the testing concentrated on this group. The gap between cases in Somerville's three zip codes has decreased. For the week of May 25 through May 31: 02143 saw a rate of 0.19 cases per 1,000 residents; 02144 had 0.15 cases per 1,000 residents; and 02145 experienced 0.29 cases per 1,000 residents.

For the week of May 25 through May 29, the Somerville Public Schools (SPS) distributed 4,354 meals (breakfast and lunch). School meal sites were open on Memorial Day but had the lowest number of pickups since the start of the meal program. An additional 2,384 face masks were also distributed (298 bags with 8 masks each). The Emergency Food Pantry served 605 households (approximately 2,243 individuals), which was a continuing trend of fewer new referrals.

For Public Safety, the week of May 24 through May 30 saw 11 COVID-19 related medical calls, which is 6 fewer than the prior week. As of May 31, there have been 287 COVID-19 related medical calls, with last week averaging 1.4 COVID related calls per day.

Mr. Kress shared that the focus is on guidance in reopening in the community and ensuring safety. Investigations on positive cases and contact tracing are also continuing, utilizing nursing staff. The department is working to maintain some of the school nurses for summer work. Community testing (which excludes CHA patients and first responders) has served over 3,500 individuals, with 129 positive cases cumulatively. The City has worked with volunteers across the region, including public health students and alumni. The mobile testing site, testing of senior and other multi-unit buildings, shelters, and other residents in need, also continues to progress.

Councilor Rossetti asked about the COVID cases from public safety personnel. Ms. Webber reported that the administration will not share these numbers, because the numbers are so low that disclosure could be identifying to individuals and maintaining employee privacy is a concern. Councilor Rossetti noted that the Committee should be informed if the numbers are rising. Councilor Mbah asked whether daycare facilities would be able to open next month. Ms. Webber noted that the City does not have the authority to open or close daycares, as they are regulated at the state level. The Governor's order indicates that they will remain closed until June 29, and the City has not heard differently, and is also awaiting information on what guidelines will be put in place for reopening these facilities.

Councilor White noted that street cleaning announcements and reminders do not seem to be functioning on the City's website, and suggested that the link be evaluated <https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/sweeping>. Ms. Connor has asked the staff for more information, and is awaiting a response. Councilor White also noted that there were not many available parking spaces and requested information about tickets issued for street sweeping to ensure it is not becoming a hardship. Ms. Connor noted that this is and will continue to be monitored and the administration will report about citations. Councilor Ballantyne expressed thanks for the mobile testing and the MRC reserve corps and the student health volunteers.

Councilor Scott expressed concern about the rate of testing in the public safety departments. He suggested stronger encouragement to convince police officers and fire fighters to be tested. He also shared that orange netting was removed from parks in order to access them, and nothing has been done to address this despite reports to 311. Ms. Webber confirmed that there has been no change in policy, and she will follow up with DPW and Parks to rectify the situation. Councilor Strezio asked if there were citations for violations of the mask ordinance. Ms. Webber reported that there have been no citations, and further, no arrests have been made stemming from non-compliance with the face covering order.

Councilor Ewen-Campen shared concern about green space, in particular pieces of green space that could be reopened that are low risk, such as community gardens and tennis courts. Councilor Clingan noted that the Dilboy tennis courts were opened today, those at Foss Park are pending a response from the state, as they are not under the City's purview, and those at Tufts are privately controlled.

Chair Davis requested an update on the plans for outdoor dining and retail spaces through the shared streets program, recognizing that the focus is on transportation, but that in a city as dense as Somerville, these plans will be important to small businesses.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Handouts:

- 200601 Situation Summary for City Council_updated (with 209798)
- First Responder COVID19 Testing memo (with 209798)