



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

CLERK OF COMMITTEES

August 31, 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	
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 7:35pm.

Others present: Annie Connor - Mayor's Office; Khushbu Webber - Mayor's Office; Doug Kress - HHS; Kristen Stelljes - SomerStat; Brianna Noonan - SomerStat; Omar Boukili - Incident Commander

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. Noonan presented the situation summary, beginning with a key date of August 25, when the City announced its consideration of allowing limited Phase 3 Step 1 business to reopen as soon as September 8. Global trends show that there are approximately 24.5 million cases in the world, with the United States leading the count. Over the last 2 weeks, the cases have increased 16.9% and deaths by 9.5%. Unites States trends show the U.S. at approximately 5.8 million cases and 178,000 deaths. Massachusetts now ranks 13th in states for the number of total cases and 16th in cases by population. Somerville is rated yellow by the state, indicating a case rate of 4-8 cases per 100,000 population, averaging 4.7 cases over the last 14 days. Neighboring communities Revere, Everett and Chelsea are in the red category. As of August 27, the state has recorded 117,500 confirmed cases and 8,775 deaths. The data are less reliable when they are closer to the date reported, and there are some lags in reporting. As of August 26, Somerville has tested a total of 30,218 people. As of August 30, there have been 1,131 positive confirmed cases (PCR test) and 95 positive probable cases (antigen or

antibody test) with 1,094 recovered and 38 fatalities in the City. There are currently 94 active cases in Somerville. A new Somerville COVID dashboard launched today, and there may be small discrepancies between that data and the MDPH data, due to a few cases reported prior to March 1 which are not included in the City's visual depiction range.

Last week (8/23-8/29), the Fire Department saw 4 COVID-19 related medical calls, which is 4 fewer than the prior week. There have been 374 total COVID-19 related medical calls as of today. Last week had an average of 0.6 COVID related calls per day.

Chair Davis confirmed that Somerville was previously coded green by the state, and is now yellow. Mr. Kress elaborated that the City increased its positivity rate a bit over the last few days, which is the reason for the change. Councilor Ewen-Campen questioned whether the City's dashboard includes anyone who has tested positive from Tufts, and Mr. Kress confirmed that it does, as counted in the MAVEN software. It will fluctuate based on how the data are entered into that system, which is operated through the state. The Broad Institute, which is conducting the testing for Tufts, reports its data into the system, though it does require some occasional quality control. Councilor Ewen-Campen also noted that Tufts does have its own dashboard that is available to the public and can be found at <https://coronavirus.tufts.edu/testing-metrics>.

Councilor Ballantyne clarified that the 30,218 number includes the number of tests, rather than the number of individuals tested. Mr. Kress added that this is how Tufts is reporting data as well, and students will be tested multiple times. Councilor Ballantyne wondered if the number of individuals would be useful and Mr. Kress noted that the approach to testing varies widely by individual and the number of unique tests would indicate how much of the population has been tested. Councilor Rossetti asked how many of the 7 positive cases from Tufts thus far are from the Somerville/Medford campus site, noting that the student and staff population are all getting tested. Mr. Kress has asked Tufts to clarify the information within the dashboard, and 3 of those who tested positive are Somerville residents. He emphasized that the process has moved quickly to get the students into the isolation unit, and their families have also been contacted to get tested as well. The test results are being returned within 24 hours and the contact tracing and quarantining process is working.

Chair Davis asked about the plans for the City's transition into Phase 3, Step 1. Mr. Boukili responded that this Phase has been on hold for the past 7 weeks, and the City has now expressed that it will begin this phase of reopening next week if the health indicators continue the positive trend. This will allow for the restricted opening of gyms and fitness centers, though other types of indoor entertainment such as movie theaters will remain unavailable due to the risk. Chair Davis added that this step seems inconsistent with the administration's previously expressed caution and priorities, such as prioritizing a return to school. Mr. Boukili noted that theaters are a particular concern due to the enclosed area for an extended period of time with limited movement. This phase will continue to limit capacity on indoor spaces and to require face coverings, and will also require strict monitoring of information for contact tracing purposes. Chair Davis asked further what has happened to lead to the comfortability with the increased risk. Mr. Boukili noted that this has not been decided, and surveillance testing will remain critical, as well as continued monitoring of health data. Much will depend on the safety plans and regulations submitted by each operator.

Councilor Strezo requested that there be messaging to emphasize mask wearing. Mr. Kress responded that communications are being updated, particularly directed at wearing face coverings, and face coverings are also being distributed to some vulnerable populations. Further, there will be ambassadors at Tufts tasked with distributing and encouraging wearing of masks. Councilor Strezo

wondered as well if the directives that were updated for summer would be extended and Mr. Kress will continue to research and evaluate.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

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.

Councilor Rossetti noted that there have been calls to the Police Department for parties around Tufts and wondered what action was taken by the university. Ms. Webber noted that there were 11 complaints made to the Tufts University Police Department over the past weekend. Of those 11, only 6 were occupied by Tufts students and no violations were observed in any of those locations. Councilor Rossetti emphasized that now is the time to ticket the gatherings and the communication between the SPD and Tufts and Medford Police Departments needs to highlight that this is serious. Ms. Webber noted that Mr. DiRico from Tufts indicated that Tufts Police is also doing what they can to ensure appropriate, effective and quick communication. Councilor Rossetti also reiterated her request for a weekly report on incidents related to Tufts University. Mr. Boukili clarified that the report focus requested is the calls to the Police Department that are Tufts related, as well as a summary of any discussions that the City has had with the University.

Councilor Ballantyne asked whether all undergraduate students enrolled for the Fall have been tested, and Mr. Kress noted that there are students still arriving as classes do not begin until next week, but any students who have arrived have been tested. According to the dashboard, it appears that 5,056 students have been tested thus far, but undergraduate students are not counted separately, so Mr. Kress will ask Tufts about this. Councilor Ballantyne also asked about the testing enforcement plan for students who live off-campus. Mr. Kress noted that any student who goes to campus must follow the testing protocol (every 3 days). Councilor Ballantyne clarified that there are 113 students living in the area who have opted to only learn remotely and there is no compliance plan for those students. Mr. Kress added that in order to be on campus for any reason, the testing protocols must be followed. For those (who Mr. Kress believes number 45 in Somerville) who will be 100% remote, including those who are not full time, they can be part of the testing program but there is no standing for the University to require it, as they cannot require it of those learning remotely from other areas and thus it would not be considered equitable. Councilor Ballantyne asked further whether the administration supports the University's reopening plan, and Mr. Kress noted that the administration continues to work closely with them to review the plan and ensure a safe reopening. If challenges are found, the City will use any power it has to ensure compliance. Ms. Webber added that the Mayor has not endorsed the plan, as the City is still awaiting detailed responses related to concerns outlined by both Somerville and Medford.

Councilor Strezo noted that councilors have been assured that Tufts would have a no-tolerance policy with regard to parties, and Mr. Boukili noted that if there is any disregard to the City's rules, the administration does not intend to allow leniency. Councilor Strezo wondered if the results of disciplinary action by the University can be reported to the Committee and Mr. Boukili will work with the team to gather and report data.

Councilor McLaughlin asked if any other City department approved the lodging licenses before the Licenses and Permits Committee and Ms. Webber noted that Mr. Antanavica did send inspectors to review the lodging houses and they appeared in compliance with public health, building, and fire safety codes. Councilor McLaughlin expressed that in his view, this is an endorsement. Councilor White added that he has conferred with Mr. Long with regard to those permits, and they have

completed the inspection process, which may not be an endorsement, but rather indicates compliance with the law. Councilor Clingan highlighted the relationship between Tufts Police and SPD and asked what the accountability system is between the two. Mr. Boukili clarified that Tufts is not required to enforce the City's orders, such as that for face coverings, but outside of the campus, the City will be enforcing its regulations.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210460: That the Administration and the Traffic Commission cease all dedicated Tufts shuttle stops and remove all associated signage in Ward 6, particularly in Davis Square, without delay.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Handouts:

- 200817 Situation Summary for City Council (with 209798)