



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

February 1, 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	
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 6:03pm and adjourned at 8:46pm.

Councilor Scott departed early to attend a community meeting. Councilor McLaughlin left prior to the final discussion of item 211175, as he is recused from matters related to the Police Department.

Others present: Mayor Curtatone; Khushbu Webber - Mayor's Office; Lauren Racaniello - Mayor's Office; Brianna Noonan - SomerStat; Doug Kress - HHS; Chief Charles Breen - Fire; Assistant Chief Chris Major - Fire; Acting Chief Charles Femino - Police; Deputy Chief James Stanford - Police; Deputy Chief Chris Ward - Police; Omar Boukili - Incident Commander

Approval of the October 26, 2020 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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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 updates, beginning with key dates, including the most recent January 31 announcement that Somerville will return to limited Phase 3 Step 1 re-opening beginning February 1, 2021. The world passed 100M cases and 2M deaths last week, with the United States leading the world in both. As of January 28, the CDC reports that the United States has reached over 25M cases and 427,626

deaths. The MDPH state data shows that Somerville has an average daily incidence rate per 100,000 residents of 39.4, which puts it in the yellow category, moving from the red category last week. The MDPH dashboard shows a number of indicators, including totals of almost 500k confirmed cases, just over 14k deaths, and a 4.4% positivity rate for the state.

As of January 23, Somerville conducted a total of 298,100 tests (including 20,676 conducted from January 10 through January 23). As of January 28, 2.4% of the COVID-19 tests completed by Somerville residents over the last 2 weeks had positive results, down from 4.3% on January 14. This includes higher education testing. Ms. Noonan noted that the average is affected by days such as holidays, where there was no testing. In total, Somerville has 4,180 positive confirmed cases (PCR test) and 265 positive probable cases (antigen or antibody test), with 59 fatalities.

The Police Department data for the past 2 weeks showed an average of 53 calls for service (CFS) per day, with calls for noise and groups averaging 2.4, domestic incidents averaging 1.1, and mental health averaging 1.1. The Fire Department last week (1/24-1/30) saw 12 COVID-19 related medical calls, which is 5 fewer than the prior week. In total, there have been 625 COVID-19 related medical calls as of January 31. Last week had an average of 2 COVID related calls per day.

Councilor Scott asked what the positivity rate is without the higher education testing, and the City is working to get the numbers from Tufts and/or the state's tracking software, but the efforts are still underway. Councilor Scott asked as well what the total cases were in the City's Police and Fire Departments. Ms. Webber shared that since the start of the pandemic, 32 individuals in the Fire Department have tested positive and 15 in the Police Department. Two individuals are currently out on COVID-related leave in the Fire Department and none in the Police Department. Councilor Mbah asked if there was any data on the variants, and Ms. Noonan noted that there is no data yet, and Mr. Kress added that the sequencing of the individual samples has not begun at the Broad Institute, which conducts the City's testing, but the department hopes to have more information as the situation evolves.

Councilor Mbah asked how mental health will be addressed and Mr. Kress elaborated that the pandemic has added stress in a variety of ways. There are resources available through the City's website, and neighbor-to-neighbor calling is set up for seniors. The School District is also coordinating services for students, and information is shared through social media for both employers and individuals. There are grant funds available through Cambridge Health Alliance to assist with these efforts.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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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.

Councilor Ballantyne shared the impetus behind this request, noting that in preparation for the budget and potential changes that may be made, it would be helpful to gain a deeper understanding. Councilor Niedergang added that public safety needs to be considered in a broad context, not just Police and Fire. He expressed that investing in the Mobility Division may be more important for public safety than adding additional police officers. Councilor Rossetti added that this discussion will also help inform items in the Confirmation of Appointment and Personnel Matters Committee. Councilor Mbah shared his priorities of creating a diverse police force and bolstering public safety in the region. Councilor Ballantyne commented that the population of Somerville is growing, and wondered what anticipated population various recommendations are based on, and what the response is based on the types of calls that are received.

Chief Breen shared that approximately 50% of calls are medical calls, and the crew from the closest Fire company is sent. The minimum staffing is an officer and two firefighters, for safety reasons. He agreed that the population has grown and is predicted to continue to grow. From 2010-2020, the department's responses to the Assembly Square neighborhood have tripled. This call volume increase is expected in other areas such as Brickbottom, Inner Belt, and Boynton Yards. The current Fire Department staff is 152, which has been the case for 10 years, and he envisions a need for increased staffing as the call volumes increase. Chief Breen added that EMS is a business-oriented service, and the ambulance service may be coming from another City.

Councilor Niedergang elaborated that the challenges facing the Fire and Police Departments are different. The increase in buildings and added traffic are issues, but crime in the City has plummeted by over 60% in the last 30 years. Councilor Niedergang asked if a smaller, less expensive vehicle, such as those used in Cambridge, would be a more efficient alternative to respond to medical calls. He also noted that the staffing is very top-heavy, with 54 out of 140 firefighters as superior officers. The Police Department reflects the same problem, with superior officers making up 36 out of 130. Chief Breen noted that the span of control states that a supervisor should not have more than 5 firefighters under their command, as it is easy to lose control in a hectic scene. Every company has an officer, and other responsibilities such as homeland security, fire investigation, and fire prevention, necessitate rank and expertise. He suggested that rather than top-heavy, the department may be bottom-light. Chief Breen added that it is a plan to implement a squad company, not to replace existing staffing, but to add to it in locations such as Assembly Square. They would not serve as fire suppression companies, and this would not replace an engine or ladder truck. Councilor White asked for clarification that in order to reduce staff, given minimum staffing requirements, a company would need to be out of service. Chief Breen confirmed that NFPA standards suggest a minimum of 4 or 5 on each apparatus and could not be reduced any lower without closing a company.

Chief Femino echoed that the population growth in the City will lead to an increase in calls for service to both Police and Fire. The Police department has decreased from 121 officers to 84 or 85 in the previous 30 year period. Councilor Ewen-Campen shared general thoughts that the staffing levels cannot be considered in a vacuum, but must be evaluated in relation to the work that the department is being asked to perform. There should be a re-thinking of how to respond to non-violent, non-criminal issues. The Police Department's workload will decrease as the City adjusts its response to these types of calls. The department has taken on a lot of roles over time, many not involving crime or violence. Currently, there is a hesitancy among residents to call the Police for some issues. Councilor Ewen-Campen emphasized that the City needs to seriously build its non-Police response for many types of issues. Chief Femino agreed that policing has changed dramatically, and mental health and substance abuse issues are at the forefront. Reimagining policing will take some time, and the department must still provide services to the residents of Somerville. The City is also more active now than it has been in the past, and is up and running at all hours for all types of calls, including an increase in gun violence over the last several years. Chief Femino expressed concern that the department would be unable to provide the level of service that residents need.

Councilor Ballantyne added that a safety plan for all in the community is needed, based on the values that residents think are important. Councilor Niedergang shared that his position at this point is to support replacement of the retired officers, but not to add the additional six positions that were requested. Councilor Niedergang added that based on his analysis, the incidents of shots fired are low, and regular deployments should not be based on rare events. He also wondered why the Somerville Housing Authority Police Department is not factored into dealing with situations that occur within their developments, and noted that Somerville has mutual aid agreements with other surrounding cities and towns that could be used in these rare situations, or an on-call system could be utilized. Chief Femino emphasized that the emergencies are not just gun violence, but any emergency, including medical calls and fires, are collaborative efforts and Police are deployed. The Housing Authority has limited staff, and mutual aid is not meant to cover calls for service, but for extreme emergencies. Additionally, other

agencies are trained differently, and accountability is a challenge. Councilor Clingan stressed that a spreadsheet is not sufficient when there are people who are getting shot and concern for protecting the victims should be paramount. He expressed agreement with Councilor Ewen-Campen that the City needs to be working toward changes before cuts are made. There is a level of service for all types of issues that residents expect, and there must be an alternative to ensure safety.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210436: That the Chief of Police provide a breakdown of how 911 emergency calls are triaged, coded, and dispatched under our current system.

Councilor Ewen-Campen noted that the policy is available under the Police Department's policies on their website at https://www.somervillepd.com/images/Policies/123_CallResponse.pdf.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

211220: That the Covid-19 response team update the Committee on Public Health and Safety on the Phase 2 vaccine roll-out for residents, particularly senior citizens and other vulnerable residents.

Mayor Curtatone shared more information on the City's COVID response, in particular the vaccine rollout. The groups currently eligible for the vaccine are those in Phase 1 and individuals who are age 75 or older from Phase 2. The allowable groups are determined at the state's discretion. Current vaccine information for Massachusetts shows that 496,103 total doses have been administered, of the 728,400 doses shipped to MA. Per the CDC as of January 29, 5.89% of MA residents have received at least one dose and 1.21% of MA residents have received both doses. Somerville has the capacity to administer 500 to 1,000 vaccines per day, with the main impediments being: small vaccine supply (currently receiving only 100 doses per week); rigid state vaccine program regulations; and unpredictable and changing distribution guidance. Mayor Curtatone emphasized that the City has expertise in understanding its population and in successful flu vaccine delivery. Plans to ensure equitable distribution of Somerville's current and future vaccine allotment include: scheduling vaccine clinics during off hours; launching pop-up community vaccine site; drive-in vaccine site(s); and leveraging existing community partnerships. There are efforts underway to offer on-site vaccine clinics at affordable senior buildings when available. Somerville is working with regional and community partners to share information, strategies, and resources.

Somerville is focused on supporting those who: do not speak English; do not have access to the internet and/or email; cannot access available vaccine sites; are not available during the day; are unable to navigate the process; have vaccine hesitancy; and have other access issues/concerns.

Outreach equity measures include: language access; addressing cultural and immigration status barriers/fears; bridging the digital divide; focusing on seniors as well as marginalized populations and the hardest hit neighborhoods; addressing vaccine hesitancy and transportation. Continued internal and external coordination are in progress and are critical to ensuring a successful rollout when the needed vaccine allotment is received.

Mr. Kress added that the state's guidance must be followed, and the eligibility just opened for seniors in Phase 2. An opportunity was presented to affordable senior housing programs for vaccinating within the buildings, and the senior buildings who are not part of the federal housing program can partner with the City. The Council on Aging and Health and Human Services are working with the buildings on the process of applying through the state for the City to be the partner that orders and

provides the vaccines through clinics at the buildings. The City's process has proved successful with flu clinics and the mobile testing. The vaccines are not available yet, and will not be provided until the state reaches the next group of individual 65 years of age.

Councilor Ewen-Campen emphasized that the vaccine availability is great news, and will prevent serious illness and death, and urged everyone to get the vaccine as soon as they are able. He also stressed that the virus can still be transmitted, and cautioned that other public health practices must be continued. Chair Davis shared a question from Councilor Scott, highlighting that even at 500 vaccines per day, it would take over 5 months to vaccinate all Somerville residents, and including teachers would add to that timeline, and wondered whether July is the goal, or if additional capacity to deliver vaccines will be added. Mr. Kress noted that some individuals are utilizing other services and locations to be vaccinated, and the City's focus is to address those who are unable to use those other locations due to travel or other issues. The City is hoping that additional supply will be made available, and is ready to speed up the rollout if possible. Mayor Curtatone added that the City is working with regional partners as well to enhance the amount administered.

Councilor Mbah asked how the City plans to address the hesitancy of vaccinations among people of color. Mayor Curtatone highlighted that there are a number of community partners working with SomerViva to reach out, educate, and increase the confidence in the community. Mr. Kress added that education is taking place through ambassadors, social media, sharing community leaders' experience receiving vaccinations, sharing promotional information in multiple languages, and operating a phone line in multiple languages. Councilor Mbah suggested including religious leaders in the outreach.

Chair Davis noted that on the lists of locations for vaccinations, there was nothing in Somerville, and wondered why there were no options in the region. Mayor Curtatone agreed that this was an issue and he had no explanation for the state's plan. Mr. Kress added that the cities were not included in the planning, and were also disappointed, and pushed the state to be included as part of the rollout.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211221: That the Directors of Health and Human Services and the Council on Aging collaborate to bridge the digital divide for residents seeking to obtain the Covid vaccine who may not have access to the internet.

Mr. Kress shared that the Council on Aging is planning a 75+ clinic, to help facilitate the process of vaccinating, and is also working on facilitating appointments via phone in multiple languages. See also: 211220.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211222: That the Administration help residents over 75 years of age sign up for Covid-19 vaccinations.

See 211221.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211223: That the Administration include teachers on the priority list as the vaccine distribution plan is rolled out.

Mr. Kress reminded the Committee that teachers are included in Phase 2 Group 3, right after the 65+ seniors and the senior housing buildings. Keeping the schools safe is an important goal for the City. Mr. Kress also reminded that the vaccine is not the only way to keep each other safe, and cautioned to continue the recommended public health practices of mask wearing (multiple is possible), social distancing, and hand washing.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Handouts:

- 210201 Situation Summary for City Council (with 209798)
- CC vaccine presentation_02.01.21 (with 298798)
- SFD Org Chart (with 211175)
- Item 211175_SPD Staffing Memo (with 211175)
- Email from Councilor Niedergang (with 211175)
- Department Org chart appendix 1 jan 2021 (with 211175)
- Carlson Group Fire Study_Somerville FINAL REPORT 4_28_16 (with 211175)
- SFD Incidents (with 211175)
- SFD Staffing (with 211175)