



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Public Health and Public Safety Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, January 23, 2023

6:00 PM

Others present: Charles Breen – Chief Fire Engineer, Justin Kates – Director of Emergency Management, Patricia Contente – Director of Community Outreach, Karin Carroll – Director of Health and Human Services, Nick Antanavica – Superintendent of Inspectional Services, Ellen Shachter – Director of Housing Stability, Neha Singh – Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:00 PM by Chair Kelly and adjourned at 7:13 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors McLaughlin, Davis and Kelly), none against and none absent.

Roll Call

Present: City Councilor At Large Charlotte Kelly, Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis and Matthew McLaughlin

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-0112](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of July 11, 2022.

RESULT: APPROVED

AYE: City Councilor At Large Kelly, Ward Six City Councilor Davis and Ward One City Councilor McLaughlin

COVID

2. Order (ID # [23-0094](#))
By Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Kelly, Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Strezo and Councilor Scott
That the Director of Health and Human Services share with this Council any plans to encourage or require indoor masking in light of the recent COVID-19 surge.

That the Director of Health and Human Services share with this Council any plans to encourage or require indoor masking in light of the recent COVID-19, RSV and flu surge.

Director Carroll stated that HHS did consider increased safety protocols after seeing an earlier than usual spike in flu cases. In collaboration with the School Department, HHS asked students and staff to wear masks for a short period of time, if possible. The MA Department of Public Health is monitoring flu and COVID cases and will make recommendations, as needed. Director Carroll also reported that HHS worked with the Communications Department to remind residents of the importance of getting vaccinated. As of now, the number of flu cases is coming down a little, but it might fluctuate over the next couple of months.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

3. Order
(ID # [22-1767](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld

That the Director of Health and Human Services report to this Council on COVID and flu vaccination clinics and strategies to increase opportunities for residents to access vaccines.

Director Carroll reported that HHS continues to offer vaccine clinics at various sites in the city. There was a concern for seniors being hospitalized, so additional clinics were added to reach and vaccinate as many seniors as possible. Data continues to show that vaccinations among the 30-49 age group is low, however, that number is increasing. Efforts are being made to reach targeted populations at various locations throughout the city. Chair Kelly asked if clinics would remain open beyond February if spikes occur and Director Carroll assured her that clinics would continue as long as needed and that outreach would be ramped up, as well, and there might be a recommendation for limited masking during spikes. Director Carroll noted that the Center for Disease Control will be recommending yearly vaccines to combat COVID and flu.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Order
(ID # [23-0081](#))

By Councilor Burnley Jr.

That the Board of Health deliver its annual report to this City Council in January, in compliance with Section 6-20 of the Code of Ordinances, with emphasis on the work to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Director Carroll was told that the report coincided with budget time, but she will have the report ready by the end of January. The department has just staffed up and will begin diving into the data and perform monthly tracking of some key areas.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Emergency Response

5. Resolution
(ID # [22-1934](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Scott and Councilor Kelly

That the Mayor designate a central point of contact for providing on-site response for mass displacement events such as fires and floods, and coordinating efforts to assist impacted residents.

Superintendent Antanavica explained the process for notifying ISD when displacements occur so that they can offer assistance to those displaced. ISD contacts property the owner/manager to request their help in the relocation and works with local hotels to provide temporary lodging. Director Shachter explained how her department assists by notifying displaced persons,

offering flex vouchers, and obtaining Red Cross assistance. An assessment is made about how long the displacement will be and those displaced may be referred to legal services if a landlord refuses to provide assistance. In cases where a unit is not coming back online soon, efforts are made to find permanent affordable housing for those who qualify. Director Carroll noted that additional services are available through HHS, e.g., food, rides, mental health care. etc. Liaison Singh commented that the Administration is committed to doing whatever it can. Director Shachter would like to explore ways of closing the gap for receiving funds to provide assistance sooner.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

6. Order
(ID # [22-1933](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Scott and Councilor Kelly That the Director of Emergency Management, the Director of the Office of Housing Stability, the Director of Health and Human Services, the Chief Fire Engineer, and other relevant staff, discuss with this Council the resources and support services provided to residents impacted by a disaster or crisis such as fire or flood.

See item 22-1934

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

7. Order
(ID # [22-1932](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Scott, Councilor Burnley Jr., City Council Organizational Meeting, Councilor Clingan, Councilor Davis, Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Gomez Mouakad, Councilor Kelly, Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Strezo and Councilor Wilson That the Chief Fire Engineer inform the appropriate Ward Councilor and Councilors-at-Large, as soon as safely practicable, when a major fire has occurred in their Ward, including the number of residents impacted.

Liaison Singh reported that the Administration is working on a standard operating procedure to notify councilors when there is a working fire. Councilor Davis commented that councilors were notified in the past and that recently he was notified of a fire and he looks forward to having that practice continue.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Housing

8. Order
(ID # [22-1739](#))
- By Councilor McLaughlin
That the Director of Housing and the Director of Health and Human Services update this Council regarding repeated requests to provide shelter to homeless residents.

Director Carroll told the committee that HHS was looking for a space to use as an engagement center and even considered modular units. The effort was challenging and it became clear that a longer-term solution was needed. The Somerville Homeless Coalition has moved to new space, so their old site will be modified and used as an engagement center during cold weather. The facility will provide a range of services but will not have showers or laundry capabilities, but laundry vouchers will be available.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

9. Order
(ID # [22-1359](#))
- By Councilor McLaughlin
That the Community Outreach, Help and Recovery (COHR) team work in conjunction with the Homeless Coalition to address homelessness in East Somerville open spaces.

Director Contente reported that COHR staff was making weekly visits to locations where people were in need, to offer assistance, however, that has since stopped. In its place, COHR has organized “coffee” times in libraries to meet with those individuals seeking assistance. Councilor McLaughlin would like the program replicated in East Somerville and said that he is really looking for a place to just keep people alive until other programs are ready. He spoke about possibly utilizing the Ralph and Jenny Center and abandoned properties, as well, and asked for an update on plans for East Somerville. Director Carroll commented that HHS has been continually looking for spaces and said that some city buildings might be able to be used after some extensive renovations. She stated her committed to finding solutions to cover the entire city. Director Carroll reported that HHS recently engaged the Medical Resource Core which will provide volunteers once a facility is finally secured.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

10. Order
(ID # [22-1757](#))
- By Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Kelly and Councilor Davis
That the ARPA Specialist update this Council on the City's plans to use ARPA funding to address chronic homelessness.

See the attached SPD response.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

11. Order
(ID # [22-1307](#))
- By Councilor Burnley Jr.
That the Chief of Police provide this Council with a written report on the number of calls for service related to un-housed individuals, the nature of those calls, and the number directed toward or responded to in collaboration with the Somerville Homeless Coalition.
- See the attached SPD response.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
12. Order
(ID # [22-1761](#))
- By Councilor Burnley Jr.
That the Chief of Police work with the Office of Housing Stability to submit a written report answering the questions contained within.
- See the attached SPD response.
Director Shachter noted that there are protections against eviction for survivors of domestic violence.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
13. Order
(ID # [22-1055](#))
- By Councilor Burnley Jr., Councilor Davis and Councilor Wilson
That the Chief of Police deliver to this Council, a written report of the Police Department's protocol for addressing encampments of un-housed individuals, including any resources that are offered, and whether those individuals are transported and to where.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**

Safety

14. Order
(ID # [22-0058](#))
- By Councilor Kelly and Councilor Scott
That the Director of Inspectional Services discuss with this Council how to increase reliability and frequency of enforcement of public health violations in the City.
- Superintendent Antanavica said this comes down to having additional resources. ISD is currently backfilling positions, created from staff advancements, and will make the department's efficiencies better when fully staffed. He hopes to have the positions filled over the next couple of months. Additionally, he believes that the short term rental ordinance will make enforcement easier.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**

15. Order (ID # [22-1445](#)) By Councilor Gomez Mouakad and Councilor Wilson
That the Director of Inspectional Services report on the status of the enforcement of Section 11-111 of the Code of Ordinances, regarding Registration and maintenance of vacant property.

See item 22-0058

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

16. Order (ID # [22-0959](#)) By Councilor Clingan, Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Gomez Mouakad
That the Chief of Police provide this Council with a list of confirmed shootings between April 2018 and April 2022.

See the attached SPD response.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Housekeeping

17. Order (ID # [22-2123](#)) By Councilor Wilson, Councilor Pineda Neufeld, Councilor Kelly and Councilor Burnley Jr.
That the Director of Health and Human Services and the Superintendent of Water and Sewer update this Council on the feasibility of partnering with a vendor to conduct COVID-19 wastewater testing.

Chair Kelly reported that she was asked by Councilor Wilson to mark this item as work complete due to the high cost associated with it.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED