



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

CLERK OF COMMITTEES

May 3, 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	

The meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Davis at 6:04pm and adjourned at 8:33pm.

Others present: Khushbu Webber - Mayor's Office; Lauren Racaniello - Mayor's Office; Chief Charles Femino - Police; Doug Kress - HHS; Michael Libby - Somerville Homeless Coalition

Approval of the March 1, 2021 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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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).

Slides for an updated Situation Summary were shared for reference, noting some recent key dates, including April 19, when vaccinations became open to everyone in MA 16 years or older, and April 12, when the City announced that additional types of activities, outdoor performances, and outdoor retail can resume as of April 19. The data from the MA Department of Public Health (MDPH) shows that Somerville's daily incidence rate is at 19.2, keeping it in the yellow category. The current 7-day average of confirmed cases is 1,043.4 (as of 4/21/21), and the 7-day average for hospitalizations is 693.4 and 7-day average of confirmed deaths is 8.6 as of the same date. On April 21, the 7-day average of percent positivity was three times higher than the lowest observed value of 0.77% on September 21, 2020. Somerville's percent positivity over the previous 14 days is 0.71%, with an average daily incidence rate per 100,000 residents of 19.2.

Mr. Kress reminded the Committee that the data dashboard is available at www.somervillema.gov. The current number of positive cases stands at 5,656, with 85 deaths. Updated guidelines include removing the need for a mask outside, as long as distance can be maintained. Guidance for gatherings and event limits will be updated soon. Testing is still offered in the community and the schools, and contact tracing efforts for those testing positive remain in place. The exposure notification pilot was a huge success, with over 15,000 users enabling the notification on their

devices. From this, there were a total of 321 verification links sent to residents who were exposed. Mr. Kress encouraged people to get vaccinated, noting that regional clinics will be opening this week. This includes a site at the Encore casino which will offer transportation options from public transit stations. Pre-registration is no longer required, and appointments can be made through the www.vaxfinder.com website. Walk-in vaccinations should be made available within the next few weeks. The City is also planning to offer language support at several clinics, and next steps will also include smaller mobile clinics.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Policing

211173: That the Chief of Police utilize the Department's Crime Analyst to track and document police interactions with the public in order to identify possible racial profiling.

Councilor McLaughlin shared that this stemmed from the racial profiling ordinance, during which it was determined that officers should not directly ask the race of individuals during interactions, but noted that the crime analysts may be able to find this information through background research. Chief Fallon noted that most interactions are positive and do not result in enforcement action. Race is categorized through the criminal process, and is reported to the state and federal government. There is opportunity for more transparency in reporting. The Department currently has one crime analyst, and it is not feasible to expect that individual to categorize the demographics from over 40,000 interactions each year. Councilor McLaughlin asked if any information was collected during interactions, and Chief Femino clarified that it is only when citations or arrests take place. Councilor McLaughlin asked if there is a recording of individuals in a database when stops are made. Chief Femino will research further what information may be available.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

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.

Chief Femino noted that the program started in 2019, and in collaboration with the Cambridge Police Department and the Middlesex County District Attorney's office. There were three restorative justice circles held, but the practice was never formalized into a policy within the Police Department. The process requires agreement from both the victim and offender to participate in the process to understand the impact of the offense on the community as a whole. There are approximately 32 Police departments participating in a Communities for Restorative Justice program, and Chief Femino has applied to join, and has drafted a policy to formalize it within the department. He added that the process is generally used for property crimes and not violent offenses. Councilor McLaughlin asked if the process would be used for School incidents and Chief Femino elaborated that it could work in the school system for minor crimes, but the victim would have to desire to participate.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

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.

Councilor McLaughlin shared that he counted 7 arrests for possession over the past 5 years, which indicates a preference for treatment. Councilor Clingan asked about the instances where narcotics

possession charges were included with other charges, but he was very encouraged by the arrest numbers, and Chief Femino noted that it is very incident-specific and the officers don't always get to make the decision if the District Attorney wants to pursue charges.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211430: That the Director of the Community Outreach Help and Recovery Department be fully integrated into Police leadership decisions to ensure a behavioral health perspective is considered in all policy decisions.

Councilor McLaughlin shared that the STARS program out of Denver, which incorporates social workers into interaction, is often cited as a successful model for incorporating equity and public health into Police decisions. The Community Outreach Help and Recovery Department (COHR) is similar to this model and would allow a civilian public health expert to work with police on decisions. Councilor Clingan added that the COHR program provides a wealth of mental health experience and would be a valuable addition to departmental management decisions. Chief Femino agreed that Ms. Contente has built an incredible program, and there is a great relationship. He is currently exploring a co-response model where social workers would ride with officers in order to make immediate assessments, rather than a next-day referral or follow-up. Chief Femino added that the City needs to take a holistic approach to the addition of social workers throughout the organization.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Incident Reporting Transparency

210194: That the Chief of Police provide weekly updates on mask citations issued and any non-compliance incidents.

Chief Femino noted that the approach was more educational than punitive, and he is not aware of any citations that were issued.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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210366: That the Police Department post its weekly crime log on social media every week.

Chief Femino shared that the public safety data including crimes and quality of life issues, are available through a City data portal and are updated every 24 hours. There are internal conversations to expand the data that are available. A weekly arrest log is sent to various media outlets and put online, and there are discussions to update the police website to include some of this information. This should be complete within the next few weeks. Chair Davis clarified that a link to all of this information through social media, specifically, would be useful. Councilor Clingan added that because of a lack of robust use of local media, linking to social media would be a useful way to keep residents aware of what is going on, as well as to highlight the department's work and enhance transparency. Chief Femino elaborated that the serious crimes are not currently included, but will be in the update. Councilor McLaughlin suggested contacting the City Council in a way similar to the alerts the School Committee receives when any incident takes place within the schools. This could help inform the Council's decisions on policing issues.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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210476: That the Chief of Police provide to this Council the number of confirmed shootings since January 2018, including the dates, times, locations, number of rounds fired, and what

or who those rounds hit.

Councilor Clingan thanked the Chief for providing the information, noting that the math equates to about 231 bullets being fired.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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210477: That the Chief of Police provide to this Council the number of times and locations that shot spotter has been triggered since January 2018.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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210478: That the Chief of Police utilize social media, including Twitter, to let residents know when there have been shots fired or when the Police make a firearm arrest.

See item 210366.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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211179: That the Director of Communications advise the community via social media of all shootings and violent crimes that occur in Somerville. (2nd request)

See item 210366.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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Helping Neighbors Experiencing Homelessness

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.

Mr. Kress noted that a variety of opportunities are being considered, including partnering with a number of organizations. Two additional outreach workers have been added through Column Health, and a state grant to continue opioid work in partnership with Somerville Homeless Coalition (SHC) and Fenway Health is underway. The City is also working with the SHC to expand its Project Soup program, both in physical space and support. A larger and more sustainable location is still needed. Additionally, the City has worked with the Cambridge Health Alliance and SHC to provide vaccinations to the unhoused populations. There is hesitancy with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which has posed a challenge.

The City is also looking to potentially utilize funding for stand-alone bathrooms (Portland loos) in certain areas. Additionally, offering mental health supports and trainings remains an important goal. Longer term goals for the Department include finding additional beds, both short and long-term, and considering a day-service center, both for meeting basic needs and connecting individuals with referrals to additional services.

Mr. Kress invited Michael Libby, the Executive Director of the Somerville Homeless Coalition, to answer questions. Councilor Clingan asked what the approximate number of unhoused individuals is in the City. Mr. Libby elaborated that before COVID, the organization interacted with approximately 15 people each week, and now there are about 30 individuals who are the recipients of regular outreach. The SHC also partners with the Police Department's Community Police Division for its outreach. He added that he plans to apply for grant funds for additional staff specifically for outreach work. Mr. Kress added that the City

is also working with neighboring communities to establish consistency for these individuals to receive the services and supports that they need.

Chair Davis emphasized that this is important and all options should be considered. He noted that in the medium-term, more trained staff working with the unhoused seems to be the priority. Very basic services and facilities need to be addressed immediately, while the bigger ideas like warming centers and loos continue to be considered. Mr. Libby elaborated that bathroom facilities are critical. Mr. Kress added that the Department hopes to bring port-a-potties back, and he will collaborate with Public Works to explore what can be done. Chair Davis noted that port-a-potties should be an immediate first step, followed by adding additional staff, and the larger items to follow.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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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 item 211325.

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

See item 211325.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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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 item 211325.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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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 item 211325.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Other

207942: That the Director of Parks and Recreation design with interested parents and caregivers a summer program to support those who have children with autism disorder.

Ms. Racaniello shared the update from Director Lathan that the program developer has reached out to families in the community for feedback, and the Kennedy Pool is looking into working with the Schools to offer programs this summer. Councilor Clingan added that this is important programming and encouraged real efforts to bring programs to fruition. Chair Davis urged the administration to address this as well, noting that it is particularly important after a year or more without many programs due to remote learning.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

211594: That the Director of Health and Human Services discuss how much planned funding will be allocated toward trauma training initiatives for youth in the coming years.

Chair Davis sponsored Councilor Ballantyne to speak to the intent of this item, and Councilor Ballantyne shared that some of the K-8 schools have higher rates of trauma experience, and there are concerns about the effects of the past year on students. Councilor Ballantyne asked if the administration has allocated extra funding for programs to support students in the upcoming year. Mr. Kress agreed that the impact on students has been significant and he has submitted a request for \$20k to be directed towards training, and additional funds to be allocated to counseling services. The City is also looking to expand a tiered model of mental health service delivery. An additional staff member has been added, and the City is working with the District to build on offering the supports that students are requesting.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

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

Mr. Kress shared that the Department continues to explore these efforts, and the possibility of utilizing marijuana funds, which would be a separate allocation from the budget process. The Department has also asked for funding for a supervised consumption facility. Councilor Clingan asked for clarification about the process of providing services and Mr. Kress noted that much of the work is through a referral mechanism, and a supervised consumption facility might provide the avenue for these referrals. Additionally, utilizing community partners and their programs is a path that the City uses. Councilor McLaughlin elaborated that the City directly allocates resources to prevention, and could allocate more toward treatment. He also clarified that safe injection sites are not treatment, though they may lead to treatment. Mr. Kress will compile a list of the partners and resources that the City refers individuals to, and how the City assists those partners with their programming.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

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.

Councilor McLaughlin shared that he spoke with Mr. Rawson and the Traffic Commission and this does appear on the list to be done. He noted that there will be a fire lane in the same location, and this would be a useful item to complete at the same time. Ms. Racaniello noted that a design consultant has been engaged and construction is included in the upcoming Pearl Street sidewalk construction contract, slated for 2021 or 2022. Councilor McLaughlin elaborated that 2022 is too long a delay and DPW could complete it easily. Chair Davis added that there are many inaccessible areas in Davis Square and some of the issues were addressed by Public Works, but it was not a long-term fix. He suggested that a temporary or interim solution could be embraced. Councilor McLaughlin emphasized that it is critical, particularly as this is a path to avoid the dangers of McGrath Highway.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

208989: That the Chief of Police report to this Council on any enforcement actions undertaken under Ordinance 9-97, especially with regard to disturbances of the peace in the vicinity of Tufts College.

Chief Femino shared that between from 2020 through 2021 to date there were 177 noise-related calls for service in the area of Tufts University, though these were not all related to Tufts students. 19 citations were issued for loud parties that included Tufts University students. The Department did issue a memo to coordinate its efforts with the Tufts Police Department. Chair Davis asked Chief Femino to share the list of these enforcement actions in writing.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

Supervised Consumption Site Update

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.

Mr. Kress noted that this is underway, and a written report is expected in the month of May.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

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

See item 208691.

RESULT: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

To Consider for Closing

209978: That the Administration update this Council on contingency staffing plans in case a large number of front-line employees are unable to work due to illness or self-isolation.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

210212: That the Director of Health and Human Services work with the appropriate state agencies to identify all state funded group and foster homes to ensure they have enough PPEs and to examine their plans to keep facilities clean.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

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.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

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.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

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

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

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

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

210541: That the Director of Health and Human Services report to this Council, within 7 days, the ability of the Health Department or the Administration to order Covid-19 testing of all Tufts college students living in Somerville, whether attending classes virtually or in hybrid mode.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

210606: That the Director of Health and Human Services and Tufts University provide this Council with weekly updates on the number of unique COVID-19 tests administered to Tufts undergraduate and graduate students until all students have been tested.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

211355: That the Mayor, the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management and the Director of Health and Human Services update this Council on Public School reopening plans.

RESULT: **WORK COMPLETED**

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: **KEPT IN COMMITTEE**

205829: That the Superintendent of Inspectional Services and other enforcing departments report to this Board on enforcing business signage laws, especially for alcohol, tobacco or

marijuana advertisements.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Material:

- 210426 Situation Summary for PHPS (with 211801)
- Narcotics Possession Arrests (with 211428)
- Council Request - Confirmed Shots Fired 2018 to date (with 210477)