



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

March 14, 2022

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Charlotte Kelly	Chair	Present	
Lance L. Davis	Vice Chair	Present	
Judy PinedaNeufeld	Ward Seven City Councilor	Present	

Others present: Aneesh Sahni - Director of Intergovernmental Relations, Justin Kates - Director of Emergency Management, Elizabeth Kelman - Public Nurse Manager, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:30 PM by Chair Kelly and adjourned at 8:28 PM on a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Pineda Neufeld, Davis and Kelly), 0 against and 0 absent.

Approval of the November 29, 2021 Minutes

The minutes were accepted on roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Pineda Neufeld, Davis and Kelly), none against and none absent.

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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213142: That this Council discuss the barriers to accessing mental health care and the services provided by local community mental health agencies.

Chair Kelly introduced and sponsored the following individuals to address this item:

- Julie Catalano, Executive Director, Clinician - NCCS
- Kristina Best Ramos, Board President, Clinician - NCCS
- Yesenia Mejia, Board Vice President - NCCS; Clinician for HealthCare for the Homeless
- Ellen Neacy, Board Secretary and Intake Coordinator - NCCS
- Deborah Shea, Board Director - NCCS; Faculty Advisor at Boston University School of Social Work
- Christopher Maffucci, Esq., Board Director, Legal Advisor - NCCS
- Constantinos Magimbi - Clinician (at Next Wave/Full Circle) - NCCS

- Elizabeth Desir - NCCS (Cambridge College Mental Health Counseling Intern)
- Ashley Smith, NCCS (Boston University School of Social Work intern)
- John O'Shea, NCCS (Volunteer)

The speakers explained what a community mental health agency/center actually is and reviewed some statistics, e.g., which professions are most at risk. During 2019, the Neighborhood Community Counseling Service (NCCS) client intake was 111. That number increased to 148 in 2021 and more than doubled for the 1st quarter of 2022 compared to the same period in 2021. The center is servicing 58 clients from the Somerville School system and provides services for outpatient individual counseling for children, adolescents, adults, couples and families from surrounding communities as well.

NCCS strives to provide accessible mental health care for those with all types of insurance (or sliding scale prices) and has a wide range of available hours and diverse clinicians.

The committee was presented with the organization's proposed structure for their licensed non-profit mental health clinic.

Additional info about NCCS is available at <https://www.neighborhoodcounselingservices.org/>

Councilor Davis commented that this subject has come up many times in the past and he encouraged the speakers to let the city know specifically what their organization needs in the way of assistance. Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked about the language capacity of the staff and Ms. Catalano replied that several staff members are multi-lingual. She noted that there is a shortage of clinicians as they want fair pay and sign on bonuses - which is an up-front cost that is not sustainable by NCCS. Ms. Catalano also noted that both the Brookline Center and the Arlington Youth Counseling Center receiving local funding. Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked about referrals to other agencies and Ms. Neacy explained that NCCS offers its own wait list (currently at 3-6 months) and most people choose to stay on that wait list since other agencies have wait times of 8 months or more. Riverside and the New England Home have facilities in Somerville and do a lot of work with children providing mainly in-home therapy, but she doesn't know their wait list times. Ms. Neacy also stated that care is taking longer due to the trauma of the pandemic.

Chair Kelly commented that this discussion serves as a good jumping off point for moving forward on the issues concerning mental health

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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212975: That the Director of Health and Human Services provide an update on acquiring and distributing 200,000 KF94 or KN95 masks to residents.

Chair Kelly sponsored Colin Killick, the Executive Director of the Disability Policy Consortium, to speak. Mr. Killick stated that the pandemic is not over and persons with disabilities are still at risk, noting that there is a blasé attitude about deaths in the disabled community. He stated that poor and homeless populations are least able to access medication, supplies and transportation to medical appointments. He urged the committee and the City Council to not roll back some of the regulations and to maintain the indoor masks and vaccination requirements.

Justin Kates, the Director of Emergency Management, addressed the committee regarding masks and testing saying that these matters fall under the Health and Human Services Department (HHS), but until a new director is appointed, he has been taking the lead. Director Kates explained that the city took initiatives and pushed federal efforts to support distribution of high-quality masks through pharmacies. N95 masks were distributed across the country because it was determined that cloth masks didn't provide adequate protection from the Omicron variant. The city acquired KN95 masks and distributed them through the SomerViva Office. As for the rapid tests, all households may request tests, but Director Kates noted there hasn't been a big demand for them. The city also took steps to provide free PCR testing. The testing site was well promoted and open 3 days/week for 1 month, however, demand decreased in the last few weeks of program.

Approximately 16,000 rapid tests were distributed by the city through the Somerville Housing Authority, the School Department, and local non-profits. After that supply was exhausted, additional rapid tests were ordered and continue to be distributed through SomerViva. When a new HHS Director is in place, the work on a long-range plan will continue.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked about data points that are checked in decision making and Director Kates said that the number of cases were being tracked, but that data ultimately wasn't really helpful. Now, the city is looking at the CDC model that guides communities in their actions. Additionally, the city is in touch, via regular calls, with other health officials. Director Kates also reported that wastewater analysis data has provided some useful information, although not specific to Somerville.

Chair Kelly commented that many residents are struggling to access tests and masks and asked what the city is doing to directly supply masks to those who need them. Director Kates advised that those individuals contact 311, since that department serves as a resource for HHS. He said that most requests for tests are centered around traveling. For those having trouble securing them, the request may be filled out on the USPS website. For masks, the city has them available but would like to use them for people with the most need. As demand increases, the city can release more services as needed.

Chair Kelly spoke about a problem with the USPS website relative to multi-unit dwellings and Director Kates said that particular issue has been resolved and there is a section on the site to deal with similar problems. Chair Kelly noted the difficulty navigating that site and said that it would be useful to have a link on the city's website.

Director Kates reported that a couple thousand dollars in ARPA funds were used to purchase masks and about \$20,000 in ARPA funds was expended to purchase rapid tests since the general distribution of masks isn't covered through FEMA's Emergency Declaration. The city has a stockpile of masks and rapid tests, to be used primarily for first responders.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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212976: That the Director of Health and Human Services provide a plan for all residents to receive at-home COVID tests and increase the number of appointments for PCR tests.

Items 212975, 212976, 212977 and 212978 were discussed together.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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212977: That the Director of Health and Human Services provide an update on contact tracing efforts.

Items 212975, 212976, 212977 and 212978 were discussed together.

Elizabeth Kelman, the city's Public Nurse Manager, said that the MA Department of Health no longer requires contact tracing for all cases. She said that Somerville is approaching tracing from a regional basis, i.e., in conjunction with surrounding cities and towns and is no longer following search protocols.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

212978: That the Director of Health and Human Services provide an update on how to report positive results of at-home COVID-19 tests.

Items 212975, 212976, 212977 and 212978 were discussed together.

Elizabeth Kelman, the city's Public Nurse Manager informed the members that the state does not have a reporting process because home test results are not considered official result, so the city is not allowed to enter that data. She noted, however, that tests are clinical but not official.

Chair Kelly asked about plans a possible next surge and Ms. Kelman replied that the city has a regional view that allows it to observe clusters. The city has 5 part time tracers (and others who could be available if needed). City staff will continue to review quarantine guidance, review navigation of the city's website and make themselves available to answer questions. Ms. Kelman also noted that the city has provided a food delivery service. Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked if any city events led to clusters being seen in last few weeks and Ms. Kelman stated that no major clusters have been seen. She commented that the majority of exposure results from indoor family gatherings. Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked if an information campaign would be helpful, and Ms. Kelman replied that the Communication Department has put out information and that she will check to see if they have any plans to do so again. Councilor Pineda Neufeld stated that it would be a good idea for the city to have an information campaign for large events and to make rapid tests available at those events.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

212974: That the Director of Health and Human Services update this Council on previous efforts to verify and certify employee vaccination status in Somerville businesses.

Councilor Davis commented that the Board of Health is an independent body and has the final say on these matters.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

212832: That the Board of Health host a public hearing on the implementation of the order requiring COVID-19 vaccination for indoor entertainment, recreation, dining, and fitness settings in the City of Somerville.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

213333: That the Administration encourage Somerville grocery stores and pharmacies to implement a daily "mask-hour" when masks or face coverings are required, so immune-compromised residents and seniors may shop in an environment that is less risky to their health.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld explained that this might be a way to protect the city's most vulnerable residents at the places they need to frequent, akin to the 'senior hour' shopping period implemented by many supermarkets. Director Sahni commented that he has no update on this and said it's an interesting idea but hasn't reached out to staff yet to contact local businesses. He asked Councilor Pineda Neufeld to keep him apprised of additional constituent concern regarding this matter. Councilor Davis supported the idea and said that it's timely in light of the mask mandate being dropped. Chair Kelly noted that the Somerville Farmers' Market does have an hour set aside for immuno-compromised individuals to shop.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Reference Material:

- NCCS Presentation (with 213142)