



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

May 18, 2020

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 7:39pm.

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

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 shared some key dates since the previous meeting, which include: May 18, the Governor announced phased reopening plan; May 15, it was announced that the citywide state of emergency will continue beyond May 18th, and the suspension of city sponsored or permitted events will extend through the end of 2020, and a mobile testing unit was announced; and on May 13, it was announced that City buildings will remain closed through June 1st.

Global trends show that the world is at 4.7 million cases and 315,000 deaths. In the United States, 1.4 million cases and 88,000 deaths have been reported. Massachusetts ranks third in the number of total cases, and fourth in the cases per population. Massachusetts has, however, seen fewer hospitalizations at a rate of 3% (down from 4% and 5% in previous weeks). The rate of cases for the 80+ age group is more than twice as much as any other age group, with an average age for all cases in the state at 53. Somerville, as of 10:40 am on Monday, 5/18/20, has 787 residents who have tested positive, with 499 recovered and 20 fatalities. The City's 02145 zip code consistently has the highest

case counts, though this does not take into account differences in population size between the zip codes. All zip codes show total cases decreasing.

The Cambridge Health Alliance community testing data has a rate of 4.5% of positive cases out of 1,615 total tests administered (this only includes Somerville residents who get tested at a CHA community testing site and are not CHA patients or first responders. Somerville Public Schools distributed 4,786 meals and 5,784 face masks.

The Police Department distributed 5,021 masks, with 416 total non-compliant individuals between May 6 and May 17, and noted that a significant amount of the non-compliance was due to masks being worn improperly. Individuals were advised without issue. The Fire Department saw 18 COVID-19 related medical calls last week, which is 10 fewer than the prior week.

Mr. Kress shared that community testing will be expanded and the Department is working with the Somerville Housing Authority to test residents in their properties, as well as other senior facilities. Public Health masters and doctoral students will be assisting communities throughout the Commonwealth with providing services and collecting data.

Ms. Webber added that the shared streets plan is being evaluated to also provide expanded sidewalk space for restaurants, curbside pickup for retail businesses that are not currently operating, as well as mobility for pedestrians and cyclists. A phased approach is being prepared and will be presented to the City Council.

Councilor Strezo asked about child inflammatory disease linked to COVID-19 and wondered whether information is being shared with Somerville parents. Mr. Kress noted that DPH is monitoring this and not many cases have been reported in Massachusetts. All physicians have been instructed to report cases where the symptoms are demonstrated and DPH will be collecting that data. Councilor Ewen-Campen expressed concern about re-opening, noting that there is still community transmission (i.e. cases are not yet at zero), and asked whether there is information about how the community transmission is occurring. Mr. Kress shared the re-opening concern, noting that contact tracing efforts are underway but it is not easy to discern how the transmission is taking place. Hand washing, social distancing, and wearing masks have slowed the spread in Somerville, however we must remain vigilant and continue to follow these practices. Limiting group interactions is also critical, and Mr. Kress urged caution, even once activities are allowed. Councilor Ewen-Campen suggested that the contact tracing data needs to be shared, and until the spread can be better understood, significant precautions should remain in place.

Councilor Ballantyne wondered whether any shared streets plans would be implemented over the holiday weekend, as warm weather is expected. Ms. Connor agreed that this does pose a concern for social distancing and mask protocols, but there are not specific plans for shared streets to be implemented by this weekend. Councilor Ballantyne asked as well about how the City is prioritizing testing for the senior buildings, and how many tests the mobile testing unit can administer each day. Mr. Kress noted that the smaller buildings will be tested first, as it will be quicker to contact and schedule all of the residents, and then it will be dependent on staff availability. One to two buildings can be completed per day, depending on the size of the buildings.

Councilor Mbah asked about the impact on childcare and Ms. Connor noted that according to the Governor's plan, it will continue to be limited to emergency needs (for essential workers). The current capacity for the essential childcare facilities is only about 35%, so there is room for expansion. Councilor Mbah also asked if the Somerville-specific data could include cases by zip code as a rate, rather than total numbers and Ms. Noonan will look into that for next week. Councilor White asked about what the plans are for testing seniors who are not living in senior buildings, as

many have been cautioned not to leave their homes. Mr. Kress noted that information about testing was shared at the town hall meeting with seniors, and it is safe to be tested at the drive through (or walk-up) facilities. Appointments can be made by calling 617-665-2928. For those who are homebound, the individuals are encouraged to work with their caregivers, and CHA does also offer programs working with the homebound. Councilor White also noted the prevalence of gloves as litter and suggested that there should be receptacles at any facility that is open to the public. Councilor White also encourage that entities should be required to provide hand sanitizer dispensers as part of the protocols required for re-opening. Councilor White also noted that vehicles are speeding and not observing crosswalks more than previously and encouraged stricter enforcement. Ms. Webber noted that one of the considerations of the shared streets plan is to mitigate the speeding throughout the city.

Councilor Scott asked if there was further information about testing of first responders. Mr. Kress noted that the data is not being provided to or collected by HHS, though many first responders are being tested, and all have been encouraged to do so. There is a special number provide to allow for immediate appointments for first responders. Councilor Scott also asked whether Phase 1 businesses are included in the expanded definition of essential, to allow employees access to emergency childcare. Ms. Connor noted that this does not appear to be addressed and she will raise it with the Lieutenant Governor. Councilor Scott also raised the issues with access to unemployment, as well as potential employee concerns about safety. Ms. Connor noted that it will be a complaint-driven system, and employees can file a complaint with the state if there are businesses that are re-opening with potentially unsafe conditions. Somerville will evaluate how the City can aid employees in those situations and not rely solely on the state.

Councilor McLaughlin expressed concern about the lack of diversity in the food selection, noting that many populations are not accustomed to what is being provided. Ms. Webber noted that the City, in partnership with the United Way, launched the Somerville Cares Fund, which focuses on vulnerable individuals and families. Over 700 applications were received, with estimated requests totaling \$1.3 million, and \$250,000 has been raised. One of the items that this fund provides is grocery gift cards, which both allows the individuals to choose the foods they prefer, as well as reduce demand on the food pantry. She encouraged sharing of the fund information widely. Councilor Ballantyne added that the Somerville Public Schools are focusing on non-perishable basics, but have tried to consider cultural preferences with produce.

Chair Davis shared the highlights on the City's plan for re-opening, which will include non-essential construction and high-priority preventative medical care beginning today, and other medical and curbside retail beginning on May 25. All additional re-opening steps will remain on temporary hold as the City considers what is safe and reasonable. Chair Davis inquired about specific information regarding the construction allowances, and whether it is only City projects, or private projects as well. Ms. Connor noted that the intention is just City projects in this phase, with the exception of emergency private projects that have been allowed to continue. Councilor Ewen-Campen noted that private construction is contemplated for phase 2, beginning June 1.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210112: That the Director of Health and Human Services collaborate with the appropriate state agencies for the support, specialized services, medical supplies and personal protective equipment necessary for residents with complex medical needs to stay in their homes during this COVID-19 crisis.

Mr. Kress has connected with DPH and DHS to work with staff to provide PPE and services to those caring for relatives at home. Councilor Clingan noted that COVID-19 has exposed a number of service gaps, and there are city residents who are under state care who are not receiving what they need. Mr. Kress agreed that there is a need to better bridge the gaps to provide more seamless services, but he does not have specific answers about what is being done currently.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210125: That the Superintendent of Schools update this Council on how the school year is faring, best practices, projected changes, any ways to help, etc.

Councilor McLaughlin provided a written update at the most recent City Council meeting.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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210126: That the Mayor consider increasing the minimum age for mandatory wearing of face masks to children over 5 years of age.

Ms. Connor confirmed that this has not been under consideration by the administration.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Handouts:

- 200518 Situation Summary for City Council (with 209798)