

July 23, 2020

Somerville Ward 7 and Community Questions & Concerns

Re: Tufts University Fall 2020 Re-Opening Plan

Dear President Monaco,

Thank you for agreeing to host a virtual community meeting for our residents the first week of August to discuss concerns and questions regarding Tuft University fall 2020 re-opening plans for its undergraduates.

Over the last few weeks I have received hundreds of emails, calls and text messages highlighting a number of issues. I wanted to share these with you in preparation of the community meeting. And, as the Governor has been updating our Commonwealth's guidelines and restrictions, like he did today with new travel rules, I imagine residents will have even more questions for you at the community meeting.

In addition to the pending items awaiting response from our July 10th meeting, below you will find a compilation of these questions and concerns as of today.

I) Major interest & concerns shared by neighbors:

- 1) Does the Mayor, City of Somerville and Director of Health and Human services support your plan?
- 2) How will Tufts ensure the public health of Somerville neighbors? Concern that the arrival of thousands of students from around the country and world (including those from areas seeing a surge in cases and/or where mask-wearing is not a habit) will cause cases in Somerville to go up, forcing us to go back to Phase 2 or 1 or shelter-in-place, and to close public schools and businesses.
- 3) How will Tufts control behavior of off-campus students?

II) Questions, concerns and requests from residents:

OVERALL RE-OPENING DECISION

- 4) How will Tufts support students in complying with the requirements from the Governor order? The Governor's order requires a strict quarantine with provisions that include requirement that travelers must remain in their living quarters at all times, contactless food delivery, and no one else can be in their living quarters other than in "the Travel Party."
- 5) On the above point how will they ensure that they meet these requirements until they receive their initial test results?
- 6) How will Tufts ensure that students who live off campus have access to the required housing during the quarantine period? Presumably off campus apartments will not be viable locations for quarantine while awaiting test results, since the order requires that "The living quarters must have a separate bathroom facility for each individual or family group."

- 7) How will Tufts assist students who return to the area before the resumption of classes?
- 8) Why did Tufts choose the most ambitious/risky option for the fall? Concern this does not prioritize community safety and health.
- 9) Will Tufts change its mind about their re-opening plans as other colleges have?
- 10) What criteria was used to re-open Tufts?
- 11) Why not have no students on campus (like Berklee and UMass Boston)?
- 12) Why not only allow some students to campus, such as only first-year students (like Harvard) or seniors (like MIT)?
- 13) Would Tufts follow the Ithaca College model by not allowing students from the 22 states on the New York travel advisory list to return to campus for the fall semester until their respective states are delisted?
- 14) Somerville city officials have moved so cautiously with re-opening. Why are they letting one organization potentially un-do all of our hard work?
- 15) Is there any coordination between city timelines and the Tufts schedule to help isolate cause and effect in case patterns? For instance, if we end up moving to stage 3 a week or two before Tufts students arrive, how would we know whether increased cases are from phase 3 or from lots of people arriving from out of state? Should we be delaying phase 3 as a city until there's been time for "data" to settle?
- 16) What is Tufts' response to this passage from a [Time magazine essay](#) by professors Katie Mack and Gavin Yamey (he's also a physician and directs the Center for Policy Impact in Global Health): "For the city where a campus is based, reopening will be like dropping a cruise ship into the center of town—and giving passengers free rein. Campus outbreaks cannot be hermetically sealed—they will inevitably cause a spike in community spread, affecting the city, state, and beyond. Universities that fully re-open in the midst of an uncontrolled epidemic will bear responsibility for the damage they cause to their wider communities."
- 17) How will the university deal with different regulations in Somerville and Medford?
- 18) How will Tufts handle students that are asymptomatic walking our neighborhoods, shopping our grocery stores from areas that have not taken our aggressive steps in managing the virus?

MASK WEARING, SOCIAL DISTANCING & COMPLIANCE

- 19) As of July 1, 2020 Tufts University was suppose to have a mask requirement, and on July 21, 2020 I see many on campus who do not wear masks, playing basket ball, hanging out on the lawns. Where is the enforcement?

- 20) When there are so few on your campus now why can't you get the mask enforcement right? What will Tufts do differently for the fall to get the enforcement in the place?
- 21) What if the percentage of positive cases reaches a certain plateau?
- 22) Will Tufts be willing to shut down if a certain student compliance is not adhered to? What is that metric?
- 23) Will Tufts guarantee in writing that they will rigorously enforce the mask and quarantine rules including immediate expulsion with no second chances for those who do not comply?
- 24) Will Tufts provide abutters with phone numbers of who to call regarding social distancing, mask compliance etc?

REQUEST FOR TRANSPARENCY

- 25) The University of Texas at Austin released a [detailed list of triggers](#) (such as the death of a student) that would prompt it to close the campus or take other operating measures. (More details [here](#).) Can Tufts also release its list of triggers so everyone in the community knows what to expect?
- 26) Will Tufts publish their estimates of the number of infections, hospitalizations, and deaths that re-opening will cause? What does the modeling look like?
- 27) Will Tufts make public on its website its enforcement plan for on-campus and off-campus plan?
- 28) Has Somerville Police Dept, Somerville Fire Dept seen the plans, and do they agree with them?
- 29) Will Tufts agree regular community meetings during the fall, including regular updates on positive cases, rule compliance, and actions the university is taking? If yes, what will the frequency be? If no, why?
- 30) How frequently will Tufts share test results with city officials? Will aggregate results be publicly available on a website? How will the Somerville and Medford community be informed if/when there's a (big) COVID outbreak on campus? What is being done/would be done to protect Somerville/Medford residents?
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OFF-CAMPUS STUDENTS BEHAVIOR

- 32) Will more students be living off-campus than in other years, because of the de-densification of dorms?

- 33) How will Tufts control the social behaviors of its students who live off-campus (especially since Tufts, like all schools, has been unsuccessful controlling other off-campus behaviors like binge drinking, underage drinking, and sexual assaults)?
- 34) Are students required to eat in their bedrooms? How will the off campus kitchen protocols be handled, monitored and enforced?
- 35) Concern - Neighbors have seen crowded off-campus parties by unmasked Tufts students from March until now:
- I live right by Tufts in Somerville on the Medford line. I see parties still going on every weekend. They aren't as big but they are definitely still happening.
 - I just walked by two parties last week.
 - I saw one party near the 4th of July where everyone was outside without masks and they were playing beer pong.
 - What is the enforcement plan for now and when students return?
- 36) Neighbors want the ability to report off-campus students who are having parties, not wearing masks, and not socially distancing 24 hours a day/7 days a week.
- 37) Who can residents call Saturday at midnight to get action while the infraction is taking place?
- 38) As a close neighbor, I'd like to know what we can do if we see mask noncompliance, parties, etc. Do I need to know who is a Tufts student? How would I? I don't want to call the police.

TESTING

- 39) How fast are test results available? Are students allowed off campus if they are waiting for their test results? Allowed to attend their in-person classes?
- 40) What happens if the Broad lab becomes backlogged? Is there an alternative lab? The Boston Globe has reported that the Broad Institute is only processing 7,000 tests per day right now, but promises it will have the capacity for more come September. Some labs nationwide have delays of 5+ days.
- I work at Lynn Community Health Center. Our tests are processed at Broad. Until this week [July 20] had a 24-48 hour turnaround time, which was wonderful. We were told this week that due to the statewide increase in testing, due to the Stop the Spread campaign in 8 hotspots like ours, we should expect increased turnaround time to 4-6 days. 4-6 days is almost useless from an epidemiological point of view. So I have reason to wonder whether Broad has the capacity to take on widespread testing for schools.
- 41) What are the penalties for students who skip their testing? If yes, what are they? If no, why not? Would you make public the penalties?

- 42) Will students be monitored when they administer the test? What if students ask other students to take the test for them?
- 43) Will staff be tested? Will faculty be tested? At what frequency?

QUARANTINE AND ISOLATION

- 44) Is Tufts requiring students to comply with the state advisory, guaranteeing that all students (including those living off-campus) will quarantine for two weeks upon arrival? How will Tufts ensure this happens?
 - The state is very clear about this: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/frequently-asked-questions-about-covid-19> All travelers arriving to Massachusetts including Massachusetts residents returning home – are instructed to self-quarantine for 14 days, with some exceptions.
- 45) How many isolation units are available in the trailers for infected students? I saw A/C units, but is there heating? Will they continue to be used after Thanksgiving?
- 46) I read in a news article that the trailers were also for staff. How does that work?
- 47) Who is tasked with cleaning the trailers and dorm rooms of infected students? Are cleaning staff getting hospital-grade PPE and hazard pay?

ENFORCEMENT OF RULES

- 48) What are the enforcement rules? Unless college students are far more docile than they were in my personal and not-all-that-long-ago experience as one, compliance with "stay on campus" and "no parties" orders will be... limited, unless the threat of "high-level consequences" for noncompliance is both severe and credible. I hope the Council and the mayor's office will continue to press the Tufts administration for (1) clearly spelled-out explanations of what compliance red lines the Tufts administration is setting out for its students in the interests of maintaining a constructive town-gown relationship, (2) clearly spelled-out explanations of what consequences for noncompliance Tufts will be applying in the event of violations, and (3) assurance that Tufts will not hesitate to apply these consequences when, inevitably, violations occur.

STUDENT MOBILITY

- 49) What plans and assurance will Tufts give regarding student mobility around Somerville?
- 50) Can some streets on the Tufts campus become a Shared Street, with auto and pedestrian passage allowed only for residents? This would be especially important for streets with seniors and other vulnerable high risk people and those with children? Streets off Curtis St and Packard Ave should be a priority.
- 51) Will Tufts students living on-campus be restricted to staying on campus? Would Tufts share the map with the boundaries clearly marked?
- 52) How will Tufts living off-campus have restricted mobility routes? How will this be managed and enforced?

- 53) Can Tufts go farther and ban this travel? Tufts is strongly advising students not to engage in personal travel during the semester. This feels especially important if these students want to travel to states that are experiencing a surge in cases.
- 54) Can Tufts cancel the Davis Square Shuttle? Running shuttles encourages students to get off campus and socialize.
- 55) Will students be travelling to off-campus jobs, internships, service/volunteer positions?
- 56) Are there guidelines for students working in k-12 schools or around children? Elders? If yes, what are these? If no, why not?

OTHER

- 57) When will Tufts start enforcing the mask and other rules? I've seen people hanging out on the President's Lawn and upper quad (both in Medford technically) in groups without masks all summer.
- 58) Is the university encouraging local community members to avoid campus (including the library)? If so, when?
- 59) Who is the point person for all residents to get questions answered?
- 60) How will Tufts assure us that a "no parties will be tolerated?"
- 61) What is the status of the fraternity or international houses on campus- will students reside in them this year?
- 62) How will the Somerville and Medford community be informed if/when there's a (big) COVID outbreak on campus? What is being done/would be done to protect Somerville/Medford residents?
- 63) Will the University locate more trash bins throughout the campus for proper disposal of such used face masks and gloves?

Thank you for your attention to the concern of our residents.

Sincerely,
Katjana Ballantyne
Councilor, Ward 7 Somerville

cc:
Mayor Joseph Curtatone, Somerville
Doug Kress, Director Health & Human Services, Somerville

Rocco Dirico, Director Community Relations, Tufts University