



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

May 11, 2020

REPORT OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING AS A COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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	
William A. White Jr.	City Councilor At Large	Present	
Mary Jo Rossetti	City Councilor at Large	Present	
Wilfred N. Mbah	City Councilor at Large	Present	
Kristen Strezo	City Councilor at Large	Present	

Others present: Doug Kress - HHS, Christine Koh - SomerStat, Brianna Noonan - SomerStar, Chief David Fallon - SPD, Kristen Stelljes - SomerStat, Omar Boukili - Covid-19 Incident Commander, Khushbu Webber - Legislative Liaison, Peter Forcellese - Legislative Clerk.

Kristen Stelljes introduced Bianna Noonan as the newest member of SomerStat.

The meeting took place virtually via GoToWebinar and was called to order at 6:03 PM by Chairman Davis and adjourned at 8:16 PM on a Roll Call vote of 10 in favor (Councilors Clingan, White, Ballantyne, Strezo, Niedergang, Mbah, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Rossetti and Davis) none against and 1 absent (Councilor McLaughlin).

Approval of the April 13, 2020 Minutes

The Minutes were accepted on a Roll Call vote of 10 in favor (Councilors Clingan, White, Ballantyne, Strezo, Niedergang, Mbah, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Rossetti and Davis) none against and 1 absent (Councilor McLaughlin).

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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Approval of the April 21, 2020 Minutes

The Minutes were accepted on a Roll Call vote of 10 in favor (Councilors Clingan, White, Ballantyne, Strezo, Niedergang, Mbah, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Rossetti and Davis) none against and 1 absent (Councilor McLaughlin).

RESULT:

ACCEPTED

Approval of the April 27, 2020 Minutes

The Minutes were accepted on a Roll Call vote of 10 in favor (Councilors Clingan, White, Ballantyne, Strezo, Niedergang, Mbah, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Rossetti and Davis) none against and 1 absent (Councilor McLaughlin).

RESULT:

ACCEPTED

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 and Mr. Kress presented the latest updates on the COVID-19 situation. The city is continuing its investigation into contact tracing to help identify possible clusters of the virus. Community testing is on-going and the city is trying to find a 2nd location, preferably indoors, to expand testing capabilities. Over 1,200 tests have been performed at the Cambridge Health Alliance facility, and of that group, 51 positive cases were found, with the majority of those being asymptomatic. Cases of the virus have been found in the city's 3 zip codes and increases in the number of cases is expected due to the increase in testing. Mr. Kress said that it took about a week and a half, including some days that testing was cancelled due to weather, to perform the 1,200 tests. He again urged that everyone be tested and said that the city still has the capacity to do additional testing each day.

Councilors Rossetti and Ballantyne commented on the number of cases by age group and asked if the city has plans to get this information out to public. Mr. Kress replied that staff is trying to find ways to do that and to determine what to share and how to share it with the high number groups, to encourage the following of the city's Health and Human Services' guidelines. Mr. Kress told the members that he does not have the data of how many people were tested to arrive at the number of case counts by age but he has asked the state to provide it, adding that it may not be available. Councilor Rossetti asked that the City Council be kept informed of efforts in this regard.

Chief Fallon reported that the Police Department (SPD) was asked to assist with compliance of the mayor's Executive Order regarding the wearing of masks. The SPD distributed over 2,000 masks to the public. The SPD has set up permanent locations for mask distribution in the east and west ends of city, as well as at high traffic locations and along the bike path. Four officers per shift have been assigned to exclusively distribute masks. Chief Fallon said anyone who can't go out due to not having a mask, should contact the SPD and one would be delivered to them. The Chief commented that this is about residents looking out for residents and that is was stressed to officers that compliance is voluntary. Councilor Rossetti asked Chief Fallon about the apparent conflict in his statement about voluntary compliance, noting that the mayor isn't going to change his Executive Order. He clarified his remarks by saying that wearing a mask isn't voluntary, as there is a fine for violating the order, but he believes that compliance won't be achieved by issuing fines, but rather through educating the public. Officers have been instructed to be empathetic in cases involving

young children. Councilor Rossetti stated that she agreed with Chief Fallon's remarks and that she supports the Executive Order, except for its fining aspect. Councilor McLaughlin commented that he disagrees with the enforcement aspect because it raises too many questions, so he would like officers to use discretion and only ticket when absolutely necessary. Councilor Clingan asked about a public housing enforcement overlap, i.e., who is providing guidance to the Housing Authority Police on the executive order and do they have the same authority as SPD officers in this situation? Chief Fallon replied that the scenario hasn't been thought out fully and will need to be examined further. He will speak to the Housing Authority Police Chief in the morning.

Mr. Kress is encouraging everyone to be tested so that a better understanding of how widespread the virus is may be determined. He said that although no antibody tests have been approved yet by the FDA, the city is exploring to see what is available. Chair Davis asked how many tests the city has and Mr. Kress said that the city continues to ask for additional tests to keep up with the city's capacity to perform testing, and so far, it's fair to say that our supply is keeping pace, adding that Somerville is leading the way in testing in the state. Responding to a question from Councilor Ewen-Campen, Mr. Kress said that he did not have data on the number of original cases in the city that lead to the number of cases seen here? Councilor Ewen-Campen commented that the current outbreak in the city could have been launched by a small number of cases, and going forward, there may be many more cases, so strict adherence to guidelines is imperative. Councilors Ballantyne and White asked what was being done to encourage seniors to get tested and Mr. Kress said that the Council on Aging is communicating with the thousands of seniors in its database. Councilor White poked about construction during this time and asked that clear guidance be put on the city's website to advise what is and is not allowed. Ms. Webber stated that a phased plan was laid out for large projects to move forward, commencing on June 1st.

Councilor McLaughlin reported that the quarantine has been lifted from Pleasant Street senior housing building. He asked what is being done to test first responders and how is the message getting to them to get tested? Chief Fallon replied that the information is given to officers and if an officer tests positive, that officer is sent to personnel for guidance on how to deal with the virus. Mr. Kress added that testing is available for first responders at Somerville Hospital, but that data from those tests doesn't get compiled in the city's testing data. With regard to the higher numbers in the 02145 zip code, Mr. Kress said that the city is working with the immigrant community and using the proper languages to assist in contact tracing. There are challenges in getting information to those communities since some undocumented people are hesitant to be tested, so they're being told that the info will only be used for testing purposes.

Chief Fallon stated that he would provide information on the number of SPD officer tested and Councilor Scott asked why, if the city wants get everyone tested, was a directive not put out to have officers tested. Chief Fallon said that the CDC is not recommending that first responders be tested, but he will check with the Personnel and Law Departments, since he's not sure if it's legal to order officers to be tested. Councilor Scott asked for the number of officers tested, once that information becomes available as well as the number of Fire Department personnel who have been tested. Mr. Kress will check with the Chief Fire Engineer for the information.

Mr. Kress spoke about the quarantine protocol explaining that people testing positive are asked to self-isolate in a safe location. If a safe location is not available, the city has access to a hotel and medical services outside of the city. So far, 2 people from Somerville have used this hotel. He noted that there have been mixed reactions to it as it's not an easy stay and provides no amenities. In cases where a person testing positive is sharing a domicile or is in close contact with someone, that person is also asked to quarantine and is usually tested the same day. Those affected individuals are provided with information on how to get additional support and/or resources. Councilor Ewen-

Campen said that it's critical for all city staff who interact with the public in the capacity of their jobs to have clear guidelines about what to do if exposed. Chief Fallon noted that the city has worked with Tufts to provide housing for first responders and Mr. Kress said that guidelines have been developed with the Personnel Department about when to be tested. Councilor Scott commented about a restaurant in Cambridge being recently converted to an antibody testing facility and asked Mr. Kress to look into the situation as it is most likely unlicensed and unregulated. Mr. Kress told the members that the city is working with the Immigrant Services Unit, homeless coalitions and women's shelters as well as other shelters. The city is also doing outreach with homeless individuals on the streets and has been able to keep up with the homeless population and get them the services they need and to get them tested.

Responding to questions from the members, Ms. Webber said that the executive order for wearing masks remains the same and it doesn't make sense to change it now. She also reported that Ms. Connor is working on the idea of expanded sidewalks and road sharing and that the administration is open to the idea, but a decision is probably a few weeks away. Councilor Ballantyne commented that Mr. Rawson said last week that information on this would be available today. Ms. Webber is not aware of that. Councilor Strezo asked about the possibility of the city assisting with funding some supplies for mask manufacturers and Ms. Webber said that she is not aware that the city could do this, but will look into it to see what can be done to spur more mask making. She will also find out if the city has a backup of masks and report back. Councilor Ballantyne spoke about the 950 housing units for vulnerable populations in Ward 7 and asked if the city has heard of any concerns regarding their need for masks or supplies. Mr. Kress replied that the city is working with the Council on Aging to get masks out to senior residents and will do its best to meet the needs of anyone out there.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, White Jr., Rossetti, Mbah, Strezo	
ABSENT:	McLaughlin

210001: That the Administration take measures to ensure that first responders and essential personnel are prioritized for COVID-19 testing for personal and public safety purposes.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, White Jr., Rossetti, Mbah, Strezo	
ABSENT:	McLaughlin

210047: That the Administration update this Council on what is being done to help communities of color during this COVID-19 pandemic.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, White Jr., Rossetti, Mbah, Strezo	
ABSENT:	McLaughlin

210048: That the Administration update this Council on what is being done to help the homeless, who are most at risk during this COVID-19 pandemic.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, White Jr., Rossetti, Mbah, Strezo	
ABSENT:	McLaughlin

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.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, White Jr., Rossetti, Mbah, Strezo	
ABSENT:	McLaughlin

210115: That the Administration's weekly update on COVID-19 include a dedicated update from the Police Department on the implementation of the mandatory mask policy, and what steps are being taken to ensure that enforcement is fair and unbiased.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, White Jr., Rossetti, Mbah, Strezo	
ABSENT:	McLaughlin

210124: That the Director of the Council on Aging provide this Council with updates and ways to help seniors living in our community.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, White Jr., Rossetti, Mbah, Strezo	
ABSENT:	McLaughlin

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.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, White Jr., Rossetti, Mbah, Strezo	
ABSENT:	McLaughlin

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

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE. [UNANIMOUS]
AYES: Davis, Clingan, Scott, Ewen-Campen, Niedergang, Ballantyne, White Jr., Rossetti, Mbah, Strezo	
ABSENT:	McLaughlin

Handouts:

- 200511 Situation Summary for City Council (with 209798)
- CoA response 5.7.20 (with 210124)
- Email - D Fallon (with 210115)
- PHPS Committee Meeting Requests 5.11.20 (with 210115)