



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
CLERK OF COMMITTEES**

July 13, 2020

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

<b>Attendee Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Arrived</b>
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	Absent	
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 5:08pm and adjourned at 6:25pm.

Councilor Rossetti was unable to attend due to a meeting of the High School Building Committee.

Others present: Khushbu Webber - Mayor's Office; Doug Kress - HHS; Omar Boukili - Incident Commander

**Approval of the June 22, 2020 Minutes**

The minutes were approved on a roll call vote of 7 in favor (Ewen-Campen, Clingan, Niedergang, Ballantyne, Mbah, Strezo, Davis), 0 opposed, and 4 absent (McLaughlin, Scott, Rossetti, White).

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>ACCEPTED</b>
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**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.**

Director Kress provided an update that there are just over 1,000 confirmed cases in Somerville, with 965 individuals having recovered, and 33 deaths. Continued vigilance is critical, with resurgences happening across the country, and retractions of openings in states like California. Several counties have also shifted

fall school schedules to online only platforms. Somerville has delayed its Phase 3 reopening to await additional guidance and precautions. This phase includes indoor activities such as museums, gyms and performance venues, but with lower potential for contact. The City is asking for plans around addressing issues, including limiting capacity, ensuring social distancing and requiring face coverings. These are important to slow the spread of the virus. Somerville is taking a realistic approach, and recognizing that a second wave will come, so expanded testing is also important. The City is working closely with the state to conduct a pilot to better understand the antibody testing, including the possibility of allowing individuals to take tests at home.

Chair Davis asked about the capacity for testing, noting that there are often lines outside testing facilities. Mr. Kress emphasized the partnerships with Cambridge Health Alliance and Cataldo Ambulance, and clarified that Somerville is one of only a few cities testing all individuals, including those who are asymptomatic. There are constraints due to the resources of the hospital system and the increased number of tests requested. Many of the regional testing sites were closed due to lack of use, which shifted individuals from the region to Somerville. Additional testing sites are opening in Chelsea and Everett, which will hopefully soon alleviate the burden on Somerville. The mobile testing unit has focused on the senior housing buildings and the most vulnerable populations, including those with limited access to testing. The community testing takes place outdoors, and is dependent on the weather. The use of the testing sites has also increased as people sought proof of negative tests for travel, return to work, or participation in activities. There have also been issues with availability of the supplies needed. Mr. Kress added that just under 15,000 people in Somerville have been tested, including approximately 1,100 antibody tests, with 81 positive.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked for more information on what is being done to decrease the wait time for tests. Mr. Kress clarified that working with the state to get additional supplies including the reagent is necessary, as well as finding additional locations for testing, and increasing the staff capacity at CHA and Cataldo. Councilor Ewen-Campen also shared that a number of entities are advocating for expanding testing to Somerville workers. Mr. Kress elaborated that the state system is set up such that any test results are returned to the community of residence, so the department would not be able to manage any positive cases for workers who do not reside in the City. Now that the state has the Stop the Spread Testing Program <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/stop-the-spread>, these facilities will be a good option, as the reporting will take place through the state. Councilor Ewen-Campen also noted that Somerville has relaxed the requirement for face coverings while outside in situations where social distancing can be maintained, but commented that many public employees and contractors working outside are not wearing masks, and worried that this is not setting a good example. Mr. Kress noted that the change to this requirement was due to the hot weather, to allow for some relief over the summer months. Ms. Webber added that the administration agrees and believes that face coverings are of critical importance, and mask wearing is part of the safety guidelines required of contractors working in the City, as well as of employees when in public. Councilor Ballantyne echoed this and added that Tufts has also issued a requirement for masks to be worn on campus by both students and workers, beginning July 1st, and it is a concern if the City's requirements are not as strong.

Councilor Mbah asked about indoor activities and Mr. Kress noted that as the virus evolves, the decisions may change, and the department is considering the implications on the spread of the virus as well as on the small businesses, but there is no easy answer, and they will continue to evaluate and make decisions based on the data available.

Councilor Niedergang cited an example of a constituent with symptoms who was discouraged from getting tested by their physician and encountered an ordeal in finding available testing, and wondered how those individuals with symptoms can ensure that they are tested quickly. Mr. Kress noted that

care providers should have a referral mechanism to ensure that their patients are tested. He has also suggested that several appointment spots can be reserved each day for those with critical needs. The state sponsored testing facilities in Chelsea and Everett will also accept some walk-up clients. Councilor Niedergang added that this may be an issue for those who need to take public transportation, and encouraged Mr. Kress to continue to advocate with CHA.

Councilor Strezo asked if a mobile testing unit would be a possibility for the schools, and Mr. Kress noted that this is among the considerations in the plans for re-opening schools, but any place (similar to the senior housing buildings) where there is a high risk, would be a possibility for focused testing. He added that the testing is not recommended for children under the age of 8 due to the invasive nature of the swab. Councilor Strezo also asked if the use of reusable shopping bags has been evaluated and Ms. Webber shared that it has not been a focus, but will be considered for potential implementation during Phase 3 or Phase 4. Chair Davis clarified that although state guidance has changed to allow for reusable bag use, it is still not recommended in Somerville.

Councilor White asked about the city doing a check for antibodies and Mr. Kress stated there will be two pilot studies. Councilor White also asked if the City had any thoughts about utilizing tests on individuals who tested positive with the virus to check antibody levels and Mr. Kress noted that these antibody tests will be conducted as part of a randomized study and the protocol is not up to the City to determine who will be tested. More information will follow. Councilor White wondered if the hospitals are sampling the strain of the virus and if the West Coast could bring in a different strain that may have adverse effects. Mr. Kress was not aware of this. Councilor White also shared concerns about compliance with the wearing of face masks and Ms. Webber noted that the administration will reconsider and reevaluate compliance with the face mask order, and will work to balance concerns with the public health considerations. Councilor White noted that even if the requirements are not increased, perhaps an announcement and reminder would be useful.

Councilor Scott asked if the reduction in testing sites was a conscious choice, and Mr. Kress reiterated that CHA's reduction was due to low usage at some sites. Currently, there is a supply challenge with the reagent, which hopefully will be fixed soon to enable testing to continue at established levels or be expanded in the Somerville. He confirmed that the City is still encouraging everyone to get tested.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>KEPT IN COMMITTEE</b>
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**3. Administration providing an update on Somerville's Phase 3 COVID response See 209798**