



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

May 23, 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	

This meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Kelly at 6:32 pm and adjourned at 7:15 pm. Councilor Davis moved to adjourn, and the motion was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

Others present: Hannah Carrillo - Mayor's Office, David Shapiro - Solicitor's Office, Brendan Salisbury - Legislative & Policy Analyst, Stephanie Widzowski - Assistant Clerk of Committees.

Approval of the March 14, 2022 Minutes

RESULT:

ACCEPTED

213143: That this Council discuss the unmet public health needs that have been identified by Somerville's non-profits and service providers.

Chair Kelly said that she had had conversations with service providers about unmet public health needs, and that she is interested in sponsoring some of them to speak in upcoming committee meetings.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld announced that an organization that came to speak at a recent meeting, Neighborhood Counseling & Community Services, is closing. Councilor Davis added that he heard they are closing as of June 1, citing challenges with funding and the inability of the city to help in meeting their needs. Councilor Pineda Neufeld expressed concern at the loss of this community service. She said she was impressed with their services and language capacity on staff, and that she is thinking about other organizations doing mental health work that can fill that gap. She suggested bringing other members of the Administration in for a conversation on how to support patients, clients and staff from that organization.

Councilor Davis cited challenges and nuances with accessing ARPA money and stated that the city and country as a whole do not put nearly enough resources towards helping people whom society is structured to exclude. He said he had extensive conversations with the former director of Health and Human Services, among others, about what can be done to help community

partners directly, and said there needs to be a larger conversation with the Administration - the same conversations he had as chair of this committee last year. He referenced how the Somerville Homes Coalition always stood “shoulder-to-shoulder” with Health and Human Services, and that this work can still be done, even though the Council has not yet reestablished a link with the Administration to determine which services can be provided.

Chair Kelly asked if it would be helpful to put forward a resolution based on these conversations to check in with the Administration. Councilor Davis said it would. Going forward, he said he would like to have someone to speak on the status of the supervised consumption site, and have someone from the Administration discuss the letter in committee last year that listed items the Administration planned to address. He said that he felt many items there were not worked on in earnest. Chair Kelly said she will review the letter for discussion at a later meeting.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

212988: That the Director of Health and Human Services provide this Council with an update regarding progress and plans to establish a Supervised Consumption Site in Somerville.

Ms. Carrillo said that the memo drafted by Dir. Mitchell contains all current updates, but did add that the new Health and Human Services director is on track to start on June 6. Chair Kelly noted in the memo that there have been weekly meetings about the community engagement process with Fenway Health, Somerville Prevention, the Administration, and the Racial & Social Justice and Communication departments. She announced that there will be a community forum on June 1 for the consumption site (see more information here:

<https://www.somervillema.gov/news/supervised-consumption-site-virtual-forum-june-1>)

Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked if interpretation will be provided at the forum, to which Chair Kelly said that according to the press release, Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Kreyol and Nepali interpretation may be available upon request. Councilor Davis referred to where the memo included city-owned brick and mortar buildings, parking lots, and modular units in its list of potential locations. He acknowledged that no final decision has been made yet, but asked if parking lots implied the possibility of a mobile facility, to which Ms. Carrillo answered yes.

Chair Kelly asked if the Administration planned to make requests in the upcoming budget for supervised consumption site resources. Ms. Carrillo said that she will ask Dir. Mitchell about those details. Chair Kelly stressed that she does not want to wait until the next budget cycle to start this process and expressed support for including a budget item for it, even if incomplete. She asked if there was a sense of a timeline for establishing a site. Ms. Carrillo said that the report should be finished by the end of June, and that there should be a better sense of a timeline then. In the meantime, she said she could ask Dir. Mitchell if there is more information to share. Councilor Davis added that he would like to see all options explored for a consumption site, not just one. He expressed worry that city-owned brick and mortar buildings would provide good long-term solutions but would require years of processing to establish a facility; action is needed in the meantime. Ms. Carrillo replied that the Administration has considered the fact that a mobile unit would come online much more quickly.

Chair Kelly closed this item by acknowledging three community members who died in May from potentially bad batches of drugs. She said that safe consumption sites save lives, and the city should act with urgency.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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212970: That the Director of Health and Human Services request an update from Cambridge Health Alliance on the delayed opening of an adolescent treatment unit.

Ms. Carrillo said that the interim director, Nancy Bacci, is reaching out to CHA for more information. Chair Kelly asked for a written update for this item.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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213075: That the City Solicitor advise this Council on its ability to ban hostile architecture.

Taken together with item 213185. Chair Kelly said that she spoke with Councilor Burnley, who sponsored this item originally, and that he met with Dir. Oliveira and other staff. His update from those conversations is that it is not typically Somerville's policy to use hostile architecture. Solicitor Shapiro said that he thinks this can be done and that it is legal, but that he would want to see the details of any proposal.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked what restrictions there may be to a ban. Solicitor Shapiro said that there is one exception at minimum, which are MBTA stations. The city cannot regulate the state. He spoke to his experience in a similar case from SJC involving build wards.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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213185: That the City Solicitor advise this Council on its ability to ban hostile architecture through a zoning change or other means.

Taken together with item 213075.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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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.

Taken together w/ items 213615 and 213813. Councilor Pineda Neufeld said that she and Councilor Burnley had asked for information on item 213813. She was not sure if anyone on the Council understands in what metrics Somerville would reinstate COVID measures. She talked about the most recent wave of a more contagious variant and how many groups of people feel uncomfortable going to do basic errands, either because they have conditions that put them at higher risk or live with higher-risk individuals. She said that groceries and pharmacies do not have many protections in place right now, and that is the reasoning behind a morning mask hour. She also referred to Brookline's mask mandate for town buildings and suggested that Somerville consider that as well. She stressed that Somerville needs to do everything it can to protect its

most vulnerable residents, given that even vaccinated people can suffer severe symptoms, and not much information is available yet on long-form COVID.

Chair Kelly noted that the summer farmer’s market, in addition to the winter market, has a mask hour, and while local businesses are putting in decentralized efforts to combat the virus, there needs to be a central approach. She asked if the Administration has any updated plans for COVID protections. Ms. Carrillo responded that there are updates from the Board of Health meeting last week. The Administration is focusing efforts more on making information and resources available for everyone to protect themselves rather than requiring masks in indoor spaces.

Chair Kelly expressed concern that there is not a trigger for a mask mandate when a surge happens and talked about projections for fall and winter surges. She asked for the Administration to keep the Council updated on their efforts, and asked if there has been talk of using a “circuit breaker” model for COVID response. Ms. Carrillo said that she is not typically the person who works on COVID matters, so she will consult with staff and follow up on that question. Chair Kelly said that constituents have brought this up before, and the circuit breaker model removes some of the human error from the response by purely making a call based on numbers.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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213615: That the Director of Health and Human Services update this Council on any attempt to track rising rates of COVID-19 locally via wastewater data.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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213813: That the Deputy Director of Health and Human Services update this Council on any plans to reinstitute an indoor mask mandate and what standards should be used to determine when implementation is needed.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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Reference Material:

- Public Health Public Safety memo 5.23.22 (with 212988)
- Response to PHPS Committee 5-23-2022 (with 213615)