



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES DEPARTMENT

JOSEPH A. CURTATONE
MAYOR

DOUGLAS KRESS
DIRECTOR

MINUTES
BOARD OF HEALTH
September 9, 2021
Open Conference / Virtual Meeting

Present:

Douglas Kress, Director
Brian Green, MD (Chair)
Robert Ciccio, Board Member

Absent: Paula Machado, Board Member

City Staff - Ellen Shachter from Office of Housing Stability

Guests: 20

Meeting Called to Order:

On a motion made by Dr. Green, the meeting was called to order at 6:05pm. It was seconded by Mr. Ciccio.

Approval of Minutes: Dr. Green made a motion to postpone approval of the August 19, 2021 minutes until next meeting. Mr. Ciccio seconded it.

Eviction Moratorium: Ellen Shatner from the City of Somerville Housing Stability Office, presented slides on updates of the Eviction Moratorium which included:

- A. Federal Eviction Moratorium – The United States Supreme Court strikes down the federal moratorium on August 26, 2021 in a divided opinion. The Biden Administration issued a letter urging localities and states to adopt/extend eviction moratorium to August 27, 2021.
- B. High levels of outstanding rental assistance applications at the state and local level with a denial rate of approximately 50% in recent months. The city's OHS estimates a 97% success rate for rental assistance applications.
- C. New study (Sept. 2021) funded through Robert Wood Johnson and others with participation of dozens of universities show lifting of state moratoria led to 433,700 excess cases and 10,700 excess deaths nationally. States that lifted moratoria had on average 2.1 times higher incidence and 5.4 times higher mortality. Confirms earlier studies.
- D. New Programs – The SHERA program allows housing authorities and other owners of subsidized housing to apply for rental arrears for all tenants that accrued arrearages during COVID. The Homeownership Assistance Program, Massachusetts got 178,000,000 through the American Rescue Plan which will cover wide ranges of expenses including mortgage, utilities, internet, foreclosure funds, home repairs, etc. It will cover 1 – 4 unit buildings.
- E. OHS Caseload Data – 77 new request for assistance / 30 requests for rental assistance only.
- F. Somerville Homeless Coalition waitlist is at 332 applicants with new applications from August 13 through September 8, 2021 was 5.
- G. Community Action Agency of Somerville had 21 new applications from August 18, 2021 through September 9, 2021.

H. Court Filings – The Eastern Housing Court had 3 new cases file from August 18, 2021 through September 9, 2021 and the Somerville District Court had 1 new case filed from August 18, 2021 through September 8, 2021.

Eviction Moratorium Extension Date Hearing: The Board of Health conducted a public hearing virtually at their September 9, 2021 board meeting, where the public was able to speak in support of extending the date of the eviction moratorium. After listening to the comments from the public, the board members were able to come to a determination to extend the eviction moratorium date to April 30, 2022. The rationale behind extending it to April 30, 2022, was the following:

- A. This would give tenants/landlords enough time to get assistance from the federal and local governments programs available to them.
- B. Pushing the date to June 30, 2022, is too risky due to litigation and has the moratorium end too soon.
- C. Winter (November) is not an appropriate time of year to end the eviction moratorium and so a spring date was talked about and then the board could evaluate the moratorium at their April 2022 meeting.

Dr. Green made a motion to amend the extension date from November 30, 2021 to April 30, 2022. Mr. Ciccio seconded it. A vote was taken – 2 yes / 0 no – All in favor. **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY**

Tobacco Regulations Update: Mr. Kress informed the board that the city is looking to be more in line with the state's new changes to their tobacco regulations. One (1) item that the board should discuss at their next meeting is the sales of tobacco to a minor would result in immediate suspension of sales for three (3) days, and the new state model regulations would be presented to the board next month to compare the state with the City of Somerville's regulations.

Directors' Updates: HHS was awarded two (2) grants – Public Health Excellence which the city will partner with Arlington and Medford to assess that public health's are reaching their goals, and will be hiring two (2) Epidemiologists. The other grant is for contact tracing also partnering with Arlington and Medford. Additional funding was granted to for Somerpromise's Somerbaby Program. Funding for trainings for low income individuals for mental health support was also obtained. HHS hired a social worker. Substance Abuse Prevention position has been filled. The Public Health Nurse position is still open. Erica Hernandez Satin from SUS was promoted and now is working up at City Hall. HHS continues to have covid testing and covid vaccine clinics. The flu season is upon us and flu clinics will start in October. The Covid19 dashboard is still available for viewing on the city's website. The guidance from the state for the covid19 vaccine booster shot has not been finalized yet and HHS does not have approval yet to provide booster vaccines to the city residents.

Next meeting – Virtual

October 21, 2021

Adjournment:

On a motion made by Dr. Green, the meeting was adjourned at 7:56pm. Mr., Ciccio seconded it.

List of Documents:

Notice/Agenda, Eviction Moratorium Slides

Respectfully Submitted,
Kathy Henkle-Teixeira
Board of Health Secretary
September 16, 2021