

Joint Meeting of the Somersworth City Council and School Board

June 28, 2021

6 PM

Somersworth High School Cafeteria

Present: Mayor Dana Hilliard; City Manager Bob Belmore; City Councilors Marty Pepin, Ken Vincent, Dave Witham, Don Austin, Matt Gerding, Rick Michaud, and Crystal Paradis; School Board members Maggie Larson, Matt Hanlon, Todd Marsh, Steve Potter, Ed LeVasseur, and Coty Donohue; Assistant Superintendent Lori Lane.

Absent: Councilors Marty Dumont and Nancie Cameron, School Board members John O'Brien, Tom McCallion and Gerri Cannon.

Guests: Jenne Holmes, Suzanne Weete, Mary Boisse, and Ashley Wright

Meeting was called to order at 6:03 PM by the Mayor.

Mayor Hilliard outlined the purpose of tonight's joint meeting and its focus on creating a mental health alliance for the City of Somersworth. The Mayor introduced the night's speakers – Suzanne Weete from Community Partners, Mary Boisse from SOS Recovery and Ashley Wright from Goodwin Community Health and the Strafford Public Health Network.

Suzanne, Mary and Ashley presented a 12 minute video they created that discussed the value of creating an alliance focused on mental health. The key points were:

- Creating an alliance recognizes that mental health is a community responsibility. It cannot be dealt with in isolation by one agency such as the school district or a public health network.
- Education and creating awareness helps to "normalize" the conversation about mental health and starts to remove the stigma around discussing mental health challenges. We need to create "safe spaces" where discussion can happen without discrimination.
- There is not one way to be well or get well. Along with offering more traditional 12-step programs, SOS Recovery has multiple programs and avenues to help those recovering find their own way to meet their personal goals. They also work with the criminal justice system and other agencies and employers to provide support and resources.
- Recovery isn't just possible, it's probable. There is hope. Recovery and overcoming mental health challenges isn't about shame, it's about one step at a time.

After the video, Suzanne, Mary and Ashley spoke further about the work they hope to embark on. They will work with the team from Somersworth to identify what the needs are. Each community is unique and needs to identify its own issues and concerns. From there, the group will develop a logic model and strategic plan to move this effort forward. It is a lot of work, but when done well by a dedicated group, we can start to make a difference by changing the conversation about mental health in Somersworth.

Mayor Hilliard opened the floor for questions/comments from the Council and Board. There was tremendous support for moving forward by both bodies. The effort is long overdue and is welcomed. The Mayor stressed that this is a building process and will take time. Tonight is the first step.

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Mayor Hilliard announced the formation of the “Hilltop Mental Health and Wellness Commission.” He stated that the Commission’s object is “to examine, study and implement systems which foster, promote and support mental health, wellness and recovery support to all city and school employees, students, and citizens of the Hilltop City while creating a mental health, wellness and substance recovery friendly Somersworth.”

The Mayor named the following members of the Commission: Todd Marsh and Maggie Larson from the School Board, Don Austin and Ken Vincent from the City Council, Suzanne Weete, Ashley Wright, Mary Boisse, the Mayor or designee, the City Manager or designee, and the Superintendent of Schools or designee. Todd Marsh will serve as the Commission’s Chair. Mayor Hilliard said that others will be named as the Commission’s work evolves.

The meeting was adjourned by the Mayor at 7:02 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

*Lori Lane
Assistant Superintendent of Schools*