



Mustangs get ready for playoffs by dominating opponents

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Officials, residents raise concern over 5G

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City officials are imposing some conditions on Verizon on installations of 5G telecommunications equipment on utility poles around the city, but will be required to approve the vast majority of the 44 applications, most of which are in Medford Square, South Medford and the Hillside area.

After hours of public testimony on the matter during a video-conference meeting Wednesday, March 31, the Ad Hoc Small Cell Committee decided to hold off on dealing with each application until April 8.

"Federal law is very strong; it prohibits municipalities, when acting as a regulatory authority, from effectively prohibiting wireless telecommunications," Robin Stein of legal consultant KP Law told the board. "You can't deny based on health considerations. Federal law is explicit that you can't consider health and environmental concerns. You can impose a condition so long as that is not going to effectively prohibit their ability to install the facility and provide wireless service."

Her advice confirmed statements made by Verizon legal representative Michael Giaimo of Robinson and Cole that the applications were "not inconsistent with federal law" and "municipalities may not decide based on health concerns."

Some of the conditions will probably be compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, setbacks, prohibition of detectable noise, keeping the equipment in good order, prohibiting double piling and holding Verizon financially responsible for costs in preparing poles for installations and costs related to lighting.

Small Cell Committee Chairman and City Engineer Tim McGovern pressed for an annual maintenance schedule, to which Giaimo responded, "I don't think we're going to want to do that."

He also mentioned an internal malfunction detection system. Small Cell Committee member and Director of Community Development & Energy and Environment Alicia Hunt conceded, "We'll just have to trust it works."

The idea of shrouding the installation was brought up. Giaimo said Verizon would ask for a waiver on that because shrouds negatively affect the system.

Despite an aesthetic clause in the city's regulations, Hunt and McGovern feel a shroud is unattractive. Stein advised a waiver would seem to apply to all the applications.

Talk of a structural requirement was brief with Stein advising, "I can't imagine any applicant wanting to put equipment on that," referring to a poorly structured pole.

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'A blip in history'

Older adults more resilient against COVID mental health impact

Lara Salahi and Barrett Hodgson

Special to Wicked Local
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Marcie Ricker, 65, of Beverly, says she has kept herself busy during the pandemic year by homeschooling her two grandchildren, gardening and taking long walks with friends.

As a planning coordinator for the town of Hamilton, Ricker was able to work remotely.

Ricker acknowledged how deeply stressful and isolating the beginning stages of the pandemic were for many, and said she relied on her husband, her adult children and their families who live nearby, and the park down the street to stay socialized.

"I think that the reason I've not been so affected is because we've been in this kind of rather big circle that everybody's been, not quarantining together, but being very safe together," said Ricker.

Indeed, studies suggest that older adults like Ricker have fared better in their mental health amid the coronavirus pandemic compared to younger age groups.

Nearly a quarter of adults age 65 and older reported anxiety or depression compared to the 40% of younger adults, according to a tracking poll by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Another survey by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that independent living adults ages 65 and older were more than four times less likely to report anxiety and depression compared to young adults ages 18 to 24.

Many factors can help explain why older adults may be better at withstanding the mental health strains of the pandemic despite being among highest risk of experiencing complications if they contract COVID-19, according to Dr. Ipsit Vahia, medical director of the geriatric psychiatry outpatient programs at McLean Hospital.

Older adults generally have a greater level of social and economic stability, says Vahia, who published an editorial in the Journal of the American Medical Association reviewing multiple studies on this subject.

"In general older adults who have been able to maintain social connectiveness, they've fared better," he said.

Many older adults have not had to deal with disruptions in school or childcare, and some live on fixed income so they may not have been hit as hard by job loss, he said.

"Many older adults have lived through other societal level traumatic



Many older adults have been physically separated from family and friends during the pandemic due to their physical vulnerability to COVID-19. But experts say they may be more mentally able to withstand the strain than younger counterparts. COURTESY PHOTO

events, even if it hasn't been at this scale," said Vahia.

Ricker agrees, saying she regards the pandemic in some ways like other catastrophic events she has seen in her lifetime.

"When I'm in a time of stress, I try and think about what has happened throughout history," said Ricker, recalling past large-scale conflicts. "And I think this is a blip in history."

Vahia says there are caveats to consider with the data.

"These are the findings at the population level," said Vahia. "There are certainly those that have done worse based on their specific circumstances."

"Older adults are not a homogenous entity," he said.

Higher risk

Of the older adults that reported heightened anxiety and depression in

the Kaiser Foundation poll, 37% of those earned less than \$25,000 annually and 48% reported fair or poor health when reporting their personal health status.

Many community-based programs, like Mystic Valley Elder Services in Malden, have recognized the varying impacts of the pandemic, and have focused on outreach to those at highest risk.

Mystic Valley Elder Services launched a social engagement program in July 2020 to help keep older adults who are aging in place socialized amid the lockdowns. The program connects older adults with volunteers who conduct weekly calls to check in and chat.

"We conceived this program prior to the pandemic, but launched it as care managers were expressing concern that adult day care centers were closed and [seniors were] stuck at home," said Lin-

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Council asks T to reinstate 710 bus route

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City officials will be asking the MBTA to reinstate bus route 710, which gives Fulton Heights residents transportation to Lawrence Memorial Hospital, Wellington Station and stores at Wellington Circle Fellsway Plaza and the Meadow Glen Mall.

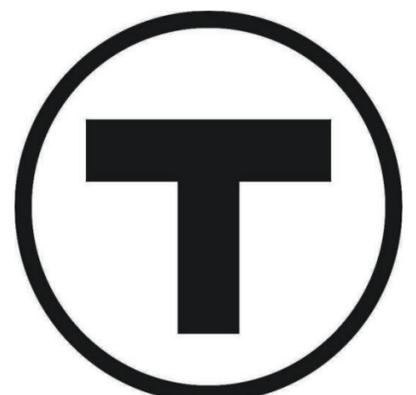
"There's no reason that route shouldn't be maintained; it's the only option people in the Heights have," said City Council President Richard Caraviello, who put the item on the agenda for the meeting Tuesday, March 30. "I've received many calls about this. We should get what we pay for," a reference to charges the MBTA assesses to Medford."

"This is the only bus route easily accessible for people in Fulton Heights; this needs to be an option," added Councilor John Falco, who co-sponsored the agenda item with Caraviello. "This isn't a reduction but elimination. Pulling it out does a disservice to people in that neighborhood. For seniors this is a necessity. Medford is assessed millions of dollars by the MBTA year after year. A service reduction is unacceptable."

"The service provided doesn't add up to what we're paying," Councilor Adam Knight agreed. "The MBTA raises the flag of the Green Line, but a lot of people in Fulton Heights will never see the Green Line."

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He said Route 710 connects Fulton



MBTA logo FILE PHOTO

CORRECTION



Medford residents Molly Froelich, left, and Danae Kristiansen enjoy the work they do in mediation.

COURTESY PHOTO / DANA KRISTIANSEN

An incorrect photo ran with the story about Medford resident Danae Kristiansen of nonprofit Community Dispute Settlement Center in last week's Medford Transcript. The correct photo is above.

Medford sees uptick in COVID cases for March

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Despite vaccinations speeding up, Medford health officials are urging caution.

Health Director MaryAnn O'Connor echoed sentiments from state and national authorities advising vigilance in following COVID-19 safety guidelines, including social distancing and wearing masks.

"We still need to be paying close attention to the guidelines," she said.

Her words reflect an increase in cases in Medford, particularly among younger people. She reported there were 81 cases the last week in February, but 121 the last week in March. Of the 356 cases in March, 176 of those were under 30.

"Our positivity rate is rising; we're definitely seeing an uptick, although not as big as the winter surge," she said.

"A clarion call is needed that we're not out of the woods yet," Councilor Isaac "Zac" Bears said. "We're months away."

He asked if there is any discussion of slowing down re-opening of businesses and venues for public events.

"We don't want our summer ruined by trying to do too much this spring," he said.

O'Connor answered, "We may have to but at this point we're OK."

She also announced Sarah Harris will be succeeding Janet Leahy as Public Health Nurse, who served for 15 years. She officially retired in September, but continued to work due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bus

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Heights to other parts of the city and remembers taking it to the area as a youngster to play basketball on public courts.

Fulton Heights is also known as North Medford and is located east of Interstate 93, north of Route 16 and west of Malden. Its neighborhood school is the Roberts. Councilor Isaac "Zac" Bears, who is a resident of the area, said the bus route "is for seniors and people who don't have a car. It's providing a service for people."

The council's opinion will be sent to Mass Department of Transportation Secretary and CEO Jamey Tesler and MBTA General Manager Steve Poftak.

Falco feels the city needs to act quickly.

"Anytime a route is eliminated, it's hard to bring it back," he said.



Mystic Valley Elder Services put together a program to reach out to older adults during the pandemic and make sure they're doing OK. DAISY-DAISY, GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Blip

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da Cornell, social engagement coordinator at Mystic Valley Elder Services. "The food pantries and other things were closed so COVID made the situation worse by so many being unable to do what they previously could do."

Seniors who live within any of the 11 communities that Mystic Valley services qualify for the program.

Cornell, who receives the call logs, says in some cases, phone calls between volunteers and an elder have lasted as long as three hours.

"Many of them are isolated, lonely, and are in situations where they don't have a lot of external support," said Cornell. "I think many were more mobile before the pandemic, so not being able to go to social events that they used to go to."

"What they really want is a family visitor, but they're settling on a phone call for now," she added. "I don't think it'll slow down after we can do the family visits."

Cheryl Sneed, 61, is one of many older adults who receives a weekly call from a program volunteer.

Sneed, who lives by herself, says she had been recovering from a hip replacement during the initial lockdowns.

"It was very stressful. It really got heavy with coronavirus, but then Black Lives Matter," said Sneed. "The protests really got to me."

Despite never meeting the program volunteer in person, Sneed says she is glad she decided to take part and looks forward to the weekly calls.

"We're buddies. We really talk and laugh. We talk about serious things," she said.

Much of the data published on the mental health effects of the pandemic among older adults is a few months behind real time, which means it's unclear what the impact of the winter surge has been, says Vahia.

"This is an ongoing chronic societal stress, the likes of which we haven't seen before," said Vahia. "As the pandemic has stretched on, an element of fatigue has set in, and we don't yet know the impact of it."

Mass vaccinations may also play into how older adults now feel. Still, Vahia says, despite the stage of this pandemic, there's a lot to learn from older adults about resilience.

"The ability to simplify one's life and the focus on the here and now is an approach that most people can adopt," said Vahia.

"It's also important to recognize that if one is feeling overwhelmed consistently, to seek out professional help," he said.

Lara Salah is assistant professor of journalism at Endicott College. Sarah Wolak, Maria Wilson, Kaley Brown, and David Leonardi contributed to this report.

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5G

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Health risks?

The prohibition against denial related to health irked many of the people tuned into the meeting, with initial remarks coming from City Councilor Michael Marks.

"I find that to be outrageous," he said. "I'm concerned health effects will outweigh the benefits."

McGovern conceded his "concern with proximity to parks and schools," but added, "The Committee has to decide what the best move is and what a denial would mean. If we deny for reasons that don't hold water, they'll go up. The framework the city is put in is that federal laws prohibit the city from stopping this. If we impose some conditions, we'll have some control."

Many citizens spoke after Marks, expressing similar sentiments about health. Delphine Picard said regulations are outdated and "all over the world people are asking for them to study the effects."

Denis Dettling-Kalthofer said 4G technology, on which 5G is based, "has been shown to have effects."

Jared Johnson hopes "if the FCC comes to its senses and removes the requirement cities and states can't reject sites based on health, the city reserves the right to rescind the application."

Bryce Schintzius said his research indicated Verizon's literature mentions personal injury and wrongful death lawsuits against them.

Verizon consultant and University of Pittsburgh physics professor Eric Swanson answered these questions with information about low level and non-ionized radiation, akin to microwave ovens. He said

only prolonged close exposure, akin to hugging, poses a threat, with Giaimo adding Verizon workman disconnect the system before undertaking work.

Peter Jones and Greg Slatin wanted to know who Swanson works for.

"I don't expect Verizon to provide an expert not aligned with the industry," Slatin said.

Swanson replied he worked for CTIA, but said he doesn't know what the acronym stands for. It's the Cellular Telecommunications and Internet Association, an industry advocacy group.

Kathleen Rourke wanted to know if Verizon was targeting low income neighborhoods in their installations due to their lower inability to resist "and then move into wealthier neighborhoods because by then it will be too late to stop."

Jason Flanagan of Verizon said there was no such plan and Verizon is "looking for a citywide rollout," which McGovern confirmed.

Anthony Nardella called the applications "a done deal," but suggested the city had the power to not grant any requests for variances or waivers.

"That's our only option," he said. "Hold them to the letter of the law, which they helped write."

One of the few people speaking in favor of the applications was Marvin Venay, of the education and technology advocacy group Tech Goes Home, but not a Medford resident.

"We support approval," he said. "It will increase access and coverage. Conductivity is invaluable," echoing earlier statements by Stan Usovich of Verizon.

Micah Kesselman has mixed feelings. He said he was not worried about health issues, but was concerned that Verizon would have monopoly on service in the city.

"Any carrier can come into Medford," Giaimo answered. "There are multiple carriers in other communities."

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