

THE PATH SINCE 2010

A SomerVision Progress Report



City of Somerville
Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone
January 2019
SomerVision2040.com

 **SOMERVISION2040**

OUR SHARED VALUES, FROM SOMERVISION 2030

In Somerville, We:

- Celebrate the **diversity** of our people, cultures, housing and economy.
- Foster the unique character of our residents, neighborhoods, hills and squares, and the strength of our **community** spirit as expressed in our history, our cultural and social life, and our deep sense of civic engagement.
- Invest in the growth of a resilient **economic base** that is centered around transit, generates a wide variety of job opportunities, creates an active daytime population, supports independent local businesses, and secures fiscal self-sufficiency.
- Promote a dynamic urban streetscape that embraces public transportation, reduces dependence on the automobile, and is **accessible**, inviting, and safe for all pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders.
- Build a **sustainable** future through strong environmental leadership, balanced transportation modes, engaging recreational and community spaces, exceptional schools and educational opportunities, improved community health, varied and affordable housing options, and effective stewardship of our natural resources.
- Commit to continued **innovation** and affirm our responsibility to current and future generations in all of our endeavors: business, technology, education, arts and government.

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This report has been prepared by the Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development.

The SomerVision2040 logo was inspired by the SomerVision2030 cover art by Kelvy Bird and the SomerVision Steering Committee.



Introduction

Introduction

A comprehensive plan is, at its heart, a reckoning with change: how do we want to change and how do we want to stay the same?

Over the course of three years, the Somerville community came together to answer just that and created **SomerVision: Somerville's Comprehensive Plan 2010-2030** (SomerVision 2030). Stakeholders engaged in lively conversation over the course of more than 50 touchpoints to imagine the future we wanted for our city. Through that process, the community identified the goals and metrics that would ensure Somerville continues to be an exceptional place to live, work, play, and raise a family.

Now, as we approach **10 years into the plan's time frame**, it is the time to revisit SomerVision and extend the vision to 2040. The City is planning a public, communal effort to update the plan, focusing particularly on the SomerVision numbers, goals, policies, and top implementation priorities.

Before we start this update process, it is helpful to take stock of what we've accomplished since SomerVision was first adopted. *The Path Since 2010* captures some of the programs and initiatives that have been implemented since SomerVision was adopted and introduces the new plans and research that have emerged. For a more complete list of these achievements, visit [SomerVision 2040.com](http://SomerVision2040.com). In addition, this document starts to surface the difficult questions that our revision process will face about our values, goals, and strategies as a community.

The City's goal for SomerVision 2040 is to encourage diverse

and broad involvement, while providing opportunities to contribute that will appeal both to busy residents who want to quickly weigh in on key issues and to those who want to participate more deeply through debates about specific policies and strategies.

Join us in shaping our future!



These colorful notes capture some of the topics on the Steering Committee's radar during a SomerVision 2030 meeting.

spoke

Crunching THE Numbers

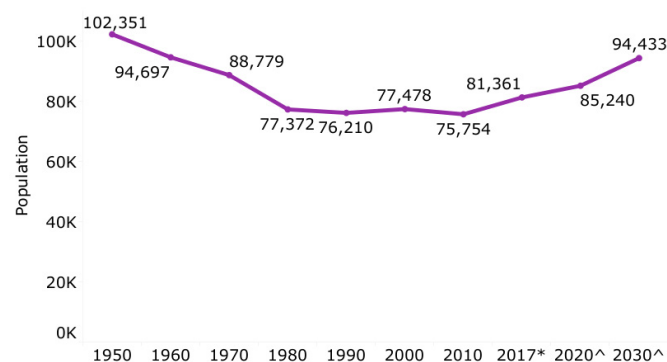
Crunching The Numbers

The SomerVision Numbers are the most-cited element of the over 500 policies and actions described in the plan. They capture specific goals related to housing production, open space, job creation, and other important topics. This section will detail current progress on these different metrics.

A note on the data: The SomerVision 2030 public process started in 2009. The plan was adopted in 2012, but it covers the years 2010-2030. Internal data collection for the SomerVision Numbers is done by using Certificates of Occupancy, which is a term used in building construction to indicate that people can occupy the building. SomerVision's time frame is from 2010-2030, which means that although projects were permitted in 2010, they didn't reach the occupancy and reporting stage until 2011.

Of course, the SomerVision Numbers don't capture all of the metrics that matter to the community—like, for example, maintaining socioeconomic diversity (Fig. 2)—the changing demands on our metropolitan area or City, or the physical manifestation of how we meet these goals. For example, the Metro Area Planning Council projects that the population of Somerville could reach 95,000 by 2030 (Fig. 1). In scenario planning, changing trends could result in “higher population growth, greater housing demand, and a substantially larger workforce” (MAPC Population and Housing Demand Projections for Metro Boston). Folding these regional issues into the SomerVision 2040 conversation is key to making sure we live up to any new numbers targets or goals.

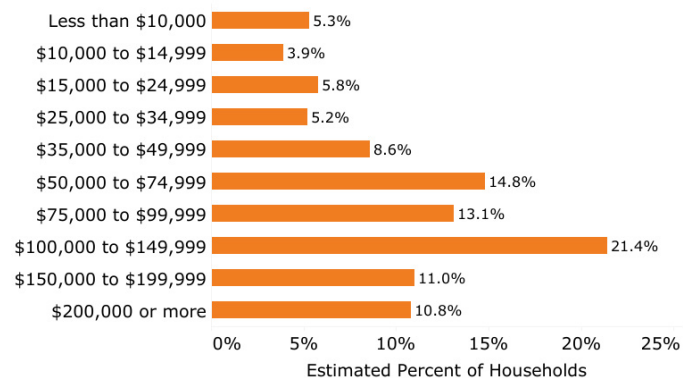
Fig. 1: Population Over Time



Somerville's **population increased 7%** from 2010 to 2017.

U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Census (1950-2010) and American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Estimate (2017), MAPC Population & Housing Demand Projections for Metro Boston (2020, 2030)

Fig. 2: Households by Income (2013-2017)



U.S. Census Bureau ACS 5-Year Estimate (2013-2017)

JOBS

SomerVision Number:

30,000 **new jobs** as a part of a responsible plan to create opportunity for all Somerville workers and entrepreneurs.

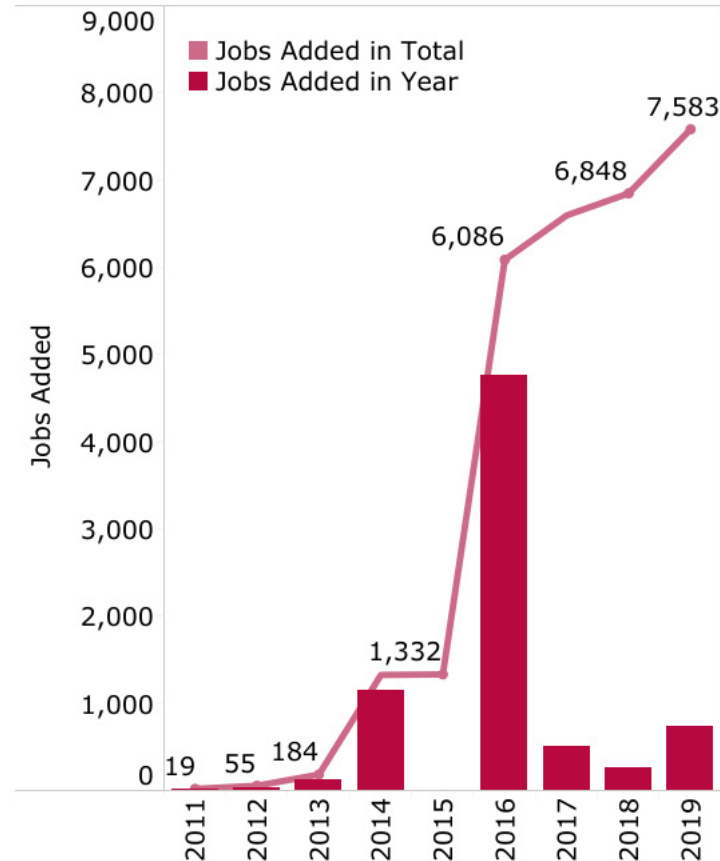
During the SomerVision process, community members identified that Somerville residents leave in large masses every day to access job centers in other communities. This hurts our local squares that need a daytime population to thrive, burdens residents with a daily commute, and adds to regional traffic congestion. The 30,000 new jobs goal was created to provide access to jobs for our workforce population at a 1:1 ratio, meaning that for each working-age resident in Somerville there would also be one job.

According to internal data tracking, 6,848 jobs were added between 2010 and 2018, and we are projecting that an additional 735 will be added in 2019 resulting in a total of 7,583. This suggests that we will have reached 25% of our goal by the end of 2019.

This growth is the result of over 2 million square feet of new commercial, lab, and retail development, 92% of which has occurred in transformative areas. The Assembly and North Point neighborhoods are home to the most new jobs with 6,085 and 585 jobs respectively (see Fig. 5).

In addition to the number of jobs, it is useful to consider the

Fig. 3: Jobs Created



How is it calculated?

We use industry standards to calculate how many jobs could fit in new development. We estimate that one job is added for every:

- 500 square feet of new retail space;
- 200 square feet of new office space; and
- 440 square feet of new laboratory space.

Each development in the city is tracked for these types of spaces to create our tally of jobs added.

kinds of jobs in the city as well. Currently, many of Somerville's jobs are in healthcare, retail, and restaurants (see Fig. 4). The industries expected to create the most jobs in Somerville's new development, however, include computer systems design, software development, and research and development services (see the Somerville Linkage Fee Nexus

Study for more detail). These estimates indicate a potential shift in which industries are most important to Somerville's workforce.

CHALLENGES

There are some challenges in our efforts to reach this Somer-Vision Number. First, we need to establish some neighborhoods as employment centers. Right now, businesses look for the cache of a Boston or Cambridge address. Secondly, commercial buildings are more difficult to build than housing because the financial risk in commercial real estate development is greater than residential development, which makes the hurdles for lending higher.

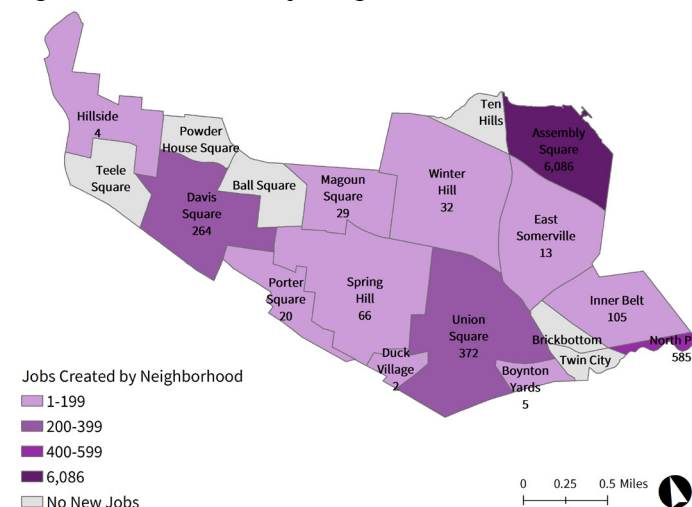
Somerville is most likely to get “build to suit” commercial developments where a majority tenant signs onto a lease prior to any construction starting. Speculative development, which is commercial development undertaken without any lease commitments, is only likely to happen in the most mature commercial markets during the strongest economic cycles. For example, Cambridge Crossing, which is in Cambridge, Somerville, and Boston, started the construction of the new Phillips headquarters speculatively, but this is not something we anticipate in other commercial districts. In order to overcome these realities of the private market, the City will need to attract businesses like Partners who want to build their space in Somerville, while still investing in the workforce development initiatives necessary to help Somerville residents compete these new jobs.

Fig. 4: Top Industries in Somerville (2015)

| Industry | Jobs | Share |
|--|-------|-------|
| Health Care and Social Assistance | 6,261 | 23% |
| Retail Trade | 4,181 | 15% |
| Accommodation and Food Service | 3,430 | 12% |
| Administration & Support, Waste Management and Remediation | 2,459 | 9% |
| Other Services (excluding Public Administration) | 1,883 | 7% |

U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics

Fig. 5: Jobs Created by Neighborhood



Currently, Somerville has a little less than **one job for every two residents** of working age.

Source: Massachusetts Employment and Wage Data and American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

ACRES OF OPEN SPACE

SomerVision Number:

125 **new acres of publicly-accessible open space** as part of our realistic plan to provide high-quality and well-programmed community space.

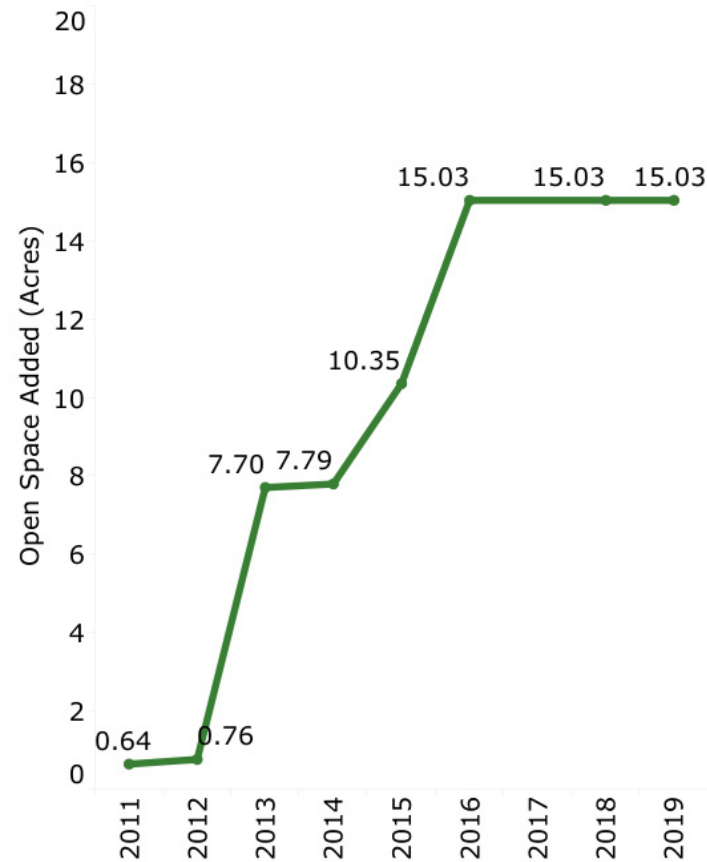
Somerville has the least open space per capita in Massachusetts, which to some degree is expected given that it is also the most densely populated community in New England. The Steering Committee members, knowing the important health and recreation benefits that open space provides, set an ambitious goal of 125 new acres of open space.

A little over 15 acres have been created since 2011, representing 12% progress towards our SomerVision Number (see Fig. 6). Although we don't expect any additional open space to become available by 2019, there is an additional 4.9 acres of open space in progress at ArtFarm, 5 Palmer, 35 Richardson and the Community Path Extension (see Fig. 8).

In addition to adding acreage, the City has focused on renovating existing parks and schoolyards. 20 parks have been renovated since 2010, and an additional renovation will be completed in 2019 at Prospect Hill Park.

As shown in Fig. 7, half of Somerville's open space is passive, which means the spaces are suitable for a variety of informal uses like walking, reading, or simply sitting and enjoying

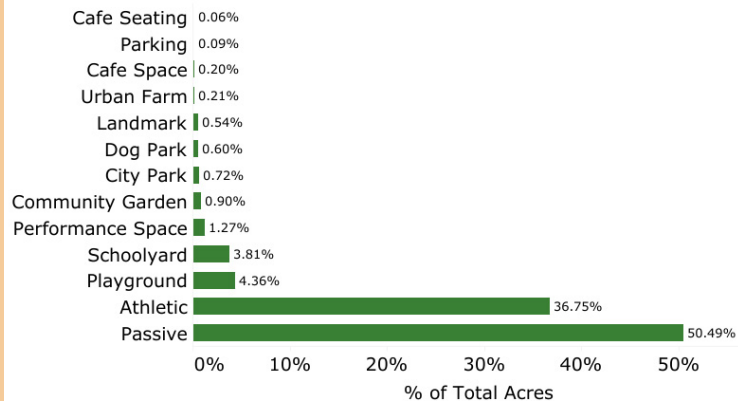
Fig. 6: New Usable Open Space



Our recreational fields get **15,000 hours of use per year**, with 70% of that time dedicated to youth activities.

nature. This flexibility is helpful with a limited supply of open space, but more use-specific open space is needed as well. For example, although 37% of open space is dedicated to athletic uses, this is not nearly enough to meet current demand; 3,000 requested athletic field hours could not

Fig. 7: Open Space by Use Type



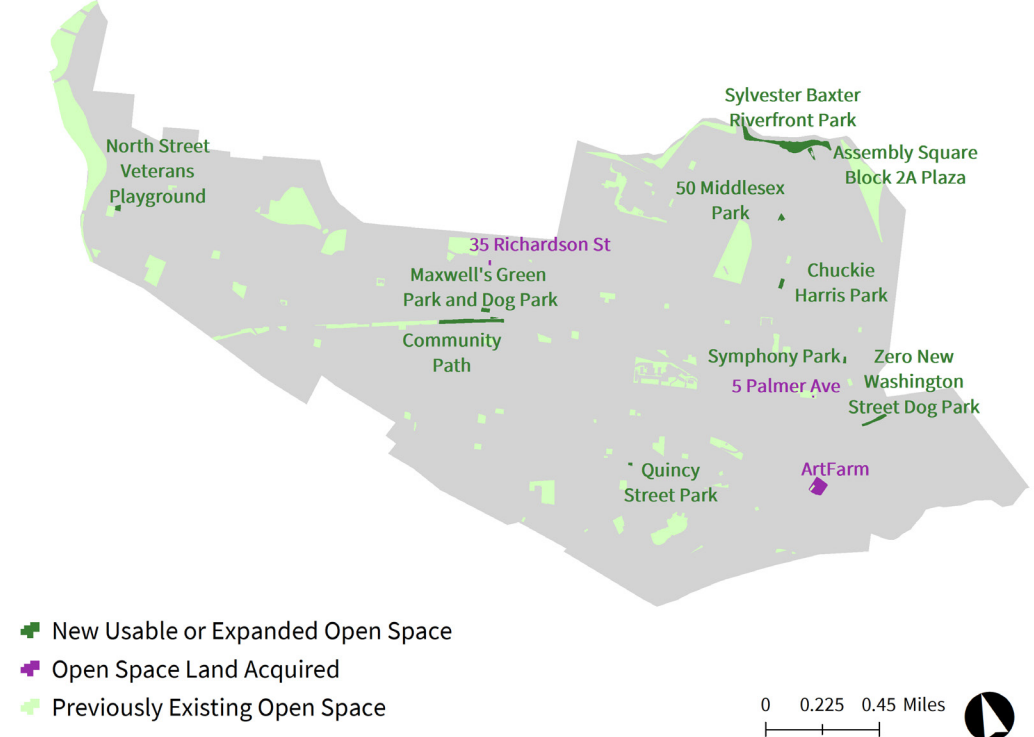
Source: OSPCD Transportation & Infrastructure

be permitted last year due to a lack of available field time. Another example is community gardens, which have a wait list of over 200 people. Additional open space creation will ideally create different types of parks and green spaces for different activities and help meet these gaps in service.

CHALLENGES

One obvious challenge for any densely settled municipality trying to create more open space is finding the land for it. But an additional challenge is financial: creating open space costs an estimated \$6.2 million per acre including acquisition, design, and construction. Recent estimates put the total cost of meeting the SomerVision Number at \$629 million—four times the obligation of the new high school—in addition to ongoing maintenance and operations costs.

Fig 8: New Usable Open Space, 2012-2018



SomerVision 2040 is a great opportunity to assess the feasibility of the 125-acre goal; discuss other key metrics of open space success like access, quality, variety, and pressure on facilities; and consider strategies for creating additional, much-needed open space throughout the city.

96% of Somerville households live within 1/4 mile of a playground.

HOUSING UNITS

SomerVision Number:

6,000 **new housing units**—1,200 permanently affordable—as part of a sensitive plan to attract and retain Somerville's best asset: its people.

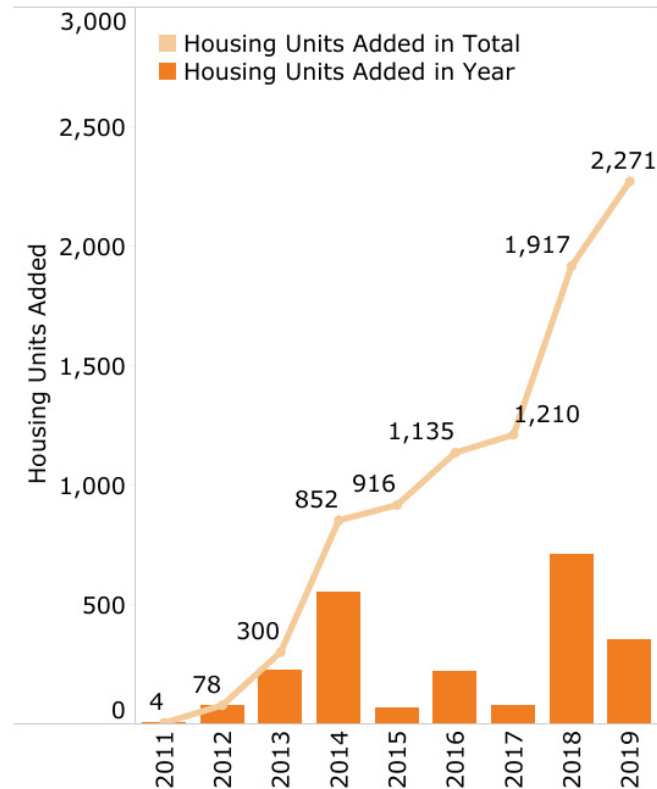
The SomerVision number for new housing units felt ambitious at the time because of the Great Recession. Since then, urban living has become more widely desirable among baby boomers and millennials alike. This increasing demand, along with a strong economy and inadequate housing production, have made living in cities like Somerville more expensive than ever.

1,917 new housing units have been created since 2011, 387 of which are affordable (see Figs. 9 and 10) and over 1,000 of which are located in Assembly (see Fig. 11). We are projecting an additional 354 housing units, 51 of which will be affordable, in 2019. This will take us to 2,271 housing units and 438 affordable housing units by the end of 2019, which represents more than one third of our goals approximately one-third of the way into SomerVision 2030's timeline.

CHALLENGES

Despite these accomplishments, displacement is still a risk for too many residents. According to the 2012-2016 ACS 5-Year Estimates, over a third of Somerville households, both renters and owners, are cost-burdened by their housing, meaning

Fig. 9: Housing Units Created



In 2018, the Metro Mayors Coalition Regional Housing Task Force, which Somerville Mayor Curtatone co-chairs, announced their commitment to regional housing production: adding a total of **185,000 housing units between 2015 and 2030.**

they are paying over 30% of their income on housing costs. According to the City's 2015 Housing Needs Assessment, the median income for renter households in Somerville is just \$58,510 per year but an income of over \$95,000 is needed to afford the average monthly rent observed in the city.

In addition to these affordability challenges, our supply

Fig. 10: Affordable Housing Units Created

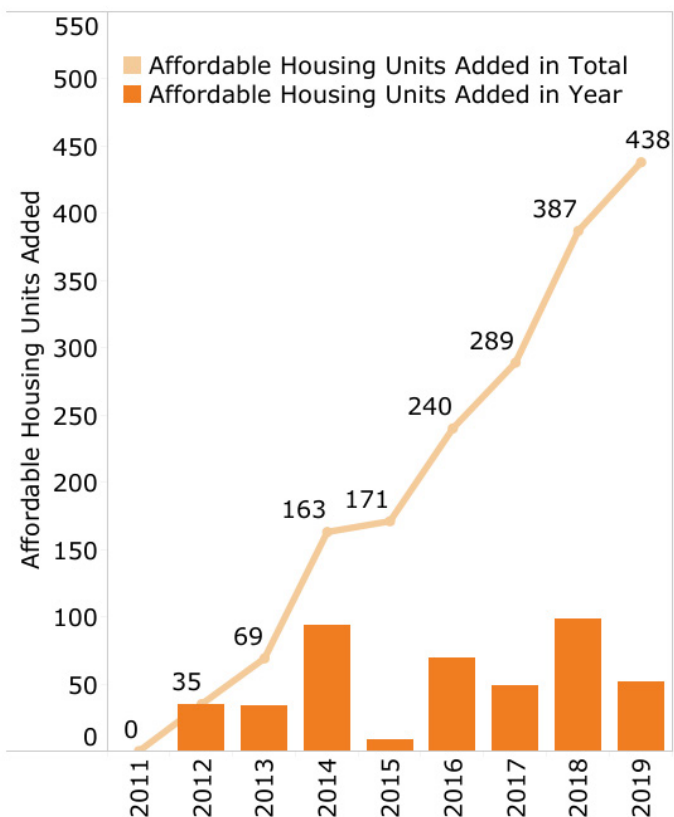
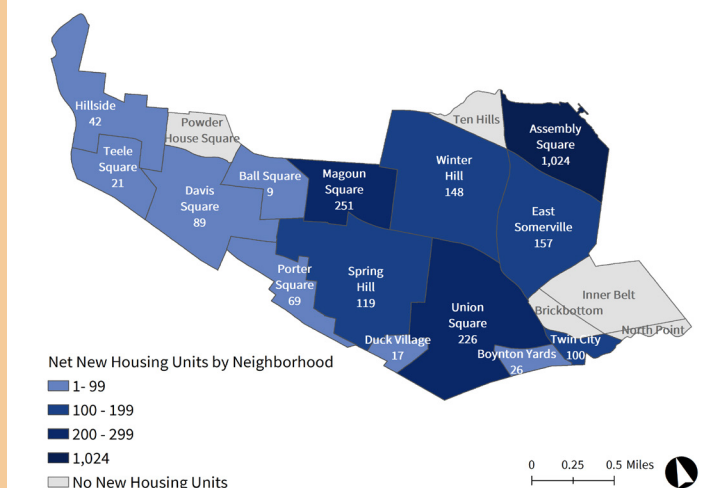


Fig. 11: Map of Housing Units Added



Of the new affordable units, 47 have been created through the **100 Homes Program**, which is a collaboration between the City and the Somerville Community Corporation to rehabilitate properties on the market and preserve them as affordable housing.

targets might not be ambitious enough. The 2014 Dimensions of Displacement report from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) projected that Somerville could need as many as 9,000 new housing units by 2030 to meet demand and maintain affordability. Of those 9,000 new units, MAPC estimated that 35% would be needed for low-income households.

Preserving housing affordability and accessibility is never going to be solely a question of supply, and a multifaceted strategy will be necessary to meet our goals. Determining appropriate levels of affordability and regional collaboration are opportunities for additional discussion. Revisiting this SomerVision Number, however, will be an important conversation for SomerVision 2040.

SUSTAINABLE TRIPS

SomerVision Number:

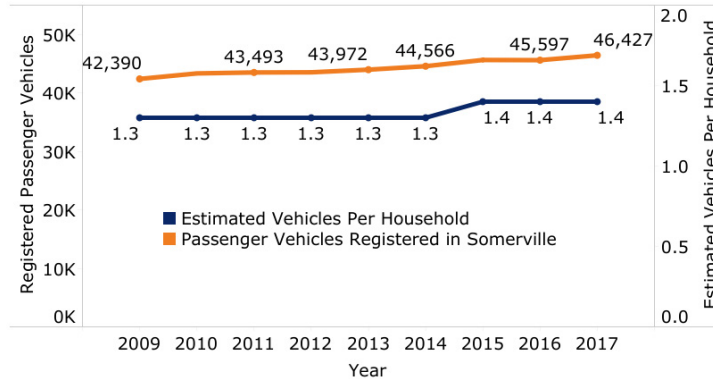
50% of **new trips via transit, bike, or walking** as part of an equitable plan for access and circulation to and through the City.

This SomerVision Number was designed to ensure that new development would not cripple the city with traffic congestion, but instead encourage healthier, more sustainable transportation behaviors from the residents and employees of new housing and commercial space.

Because this target was structured to consider the share of trips generated by new development, it has not been measurable for the majority of the time since SomerVision's adoption. Tracking changes in travel behavior can be complicated unless new development is required to report how residents and employees of new buildings travel to and from home or work on an annual basis.

The City currently requires mobility management for new development in the Union Square Overlay district and the Assembly Square Mixed-Use district. Property owners in these areas have started to implement their approved mobility management plans, including reporting data on how people travel to and from these buildings. After a period of data collection, changes in travel behavior can be analyzed to determine whether we are reaching this SomerVision Number.

Fig. 12: Vehicle Ownership Over Time

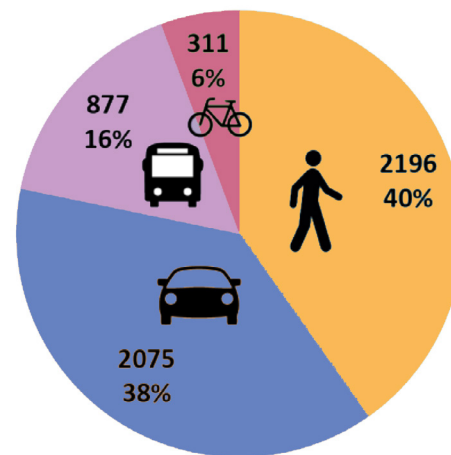


City excise tax data; Vehicle per household estimate is an OSPCD calculation using Census household estimates.

Why can't we track the SomerVision goal?

The Zoning Overhaul will require major commercial developments to survey their employees about their commute habits, which will allow us to take a closer look at this SomerVision Number in the future.

Fig. 13: Travel Modes of Arrivals in Davis Square, AM



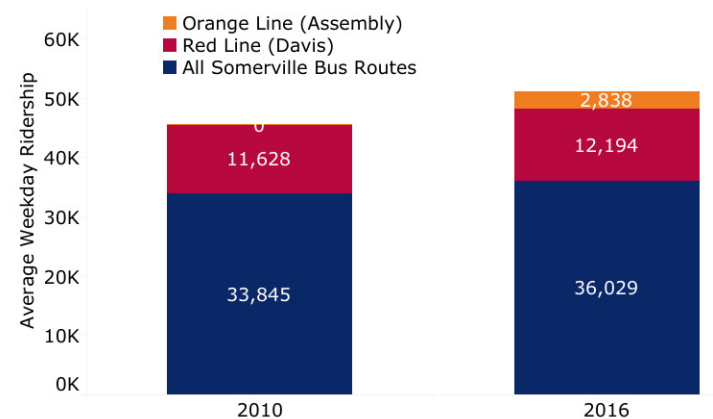
Davis Square Neighborhood Plan (Draft)

While this data is gathered, we can look at other markers to determine if we're headed in the right direction, including car ownership rates, transit ridership, and new infrastructure. Although Fig. 12 indicates that car ownership has ticked upward since 2010, MBTA data demonstrates that weekday transit ridership has increased at Davis Square and on Somerville bus routes (Fig. 14).

In addition, transit access will soon increase substantially with the arrival of six new Green Line stations in 2021. Currently, 15% of residents are within a 1/2 mile of a subway station, but when the Green Line Extension opens that share will jump to 85%. Recent data indicates that 62% of Davis Square arrivals in the morning rush hour arrive by sustainable modes (Fig. 13), and we expect the new stations and extended Community Path will cause some drivers to shift modes to walking, biking, or public transit.

In addition, the City continues to make annual investments in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure which increases the availability and safety of these more sustainable modes of transportation. As shown in Fig. 15, the total miles of bike lanes has grown from under 4 miles in 2009 to over 17 miles in 2018.

Fig. 14: Average Transit Ridership (2010 vs. 2016)



Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority

Fig. 15: Total Miles of Bike Lanes



OSPCD Transportation & Infrastructure Division

The magic of signal timing.

It's not just about new infrastructure. As part of the Davis Square Neighborhood Plan, the City updated traffic signal timing in Davis Square to improve traffic and pedestrian flow. As a result, each crosswalk gets **8 more cross signals per hour**, and early data shows that buses are moving through the intersection **35 seconds** faster than before.

TRANSFORMATIVE DEVELOPMENT

SomerVision Number:

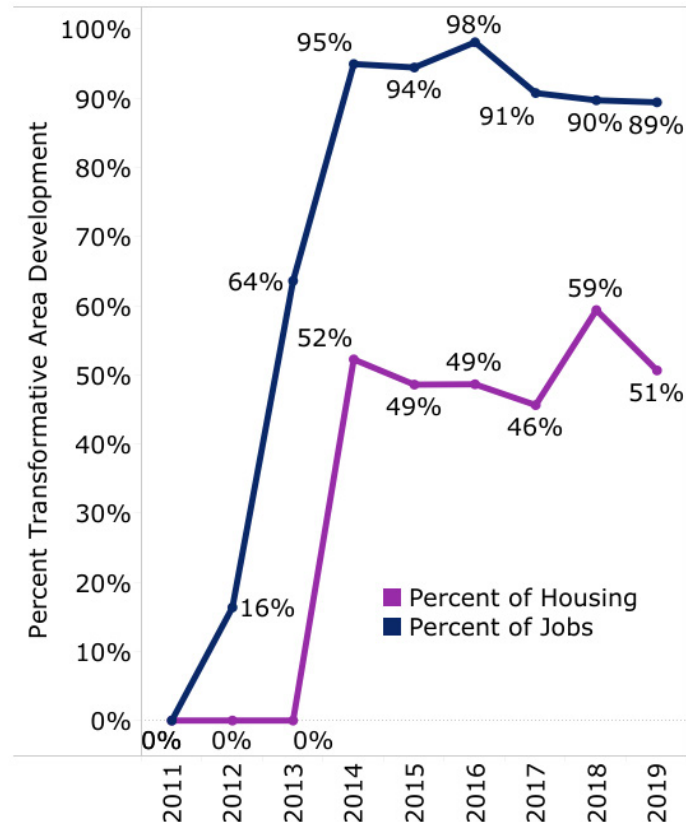
85% of **new development in transformative areas** as part of a predictable land use plan that protects neighborhood character.

One key theme of SomerVision 2030 is the need to preserve what's great about Somerville while still encouraging mixed-use, transit-oriented development in strategically selected areas to support our job and housing goals. The SomerVision Number summarizes that priority by setting a target of 85% of new development in transformative areas. See Fig. 17 for a map of which neighborhoods are considered transformative areas.

According to internal data tracking, 5.7 million square feet of development has been constructed, of which 3.7 million have been in transformative areas. This means 65% of development since 2010 has occurred in transformative areas. As shown in Fig. 16, 89% of SomerVision jobs and 51% of SomerVision housing units have been developed in transformative areas.

The majority of new development, and 59% of transformative-area development, has taken place in Assembly Square. This includes Blocks 1-6 in Assembly and the Partners HealthCare building. Assembly Square, Union Square, and to some extent Boynton Yards are poised to absorb additional development in the near term.

Fig. 16: Percent of New Development in Transformative Areas



59% of all transformative development has happened in Assembly Square.

Photo: Avalon at Assembly

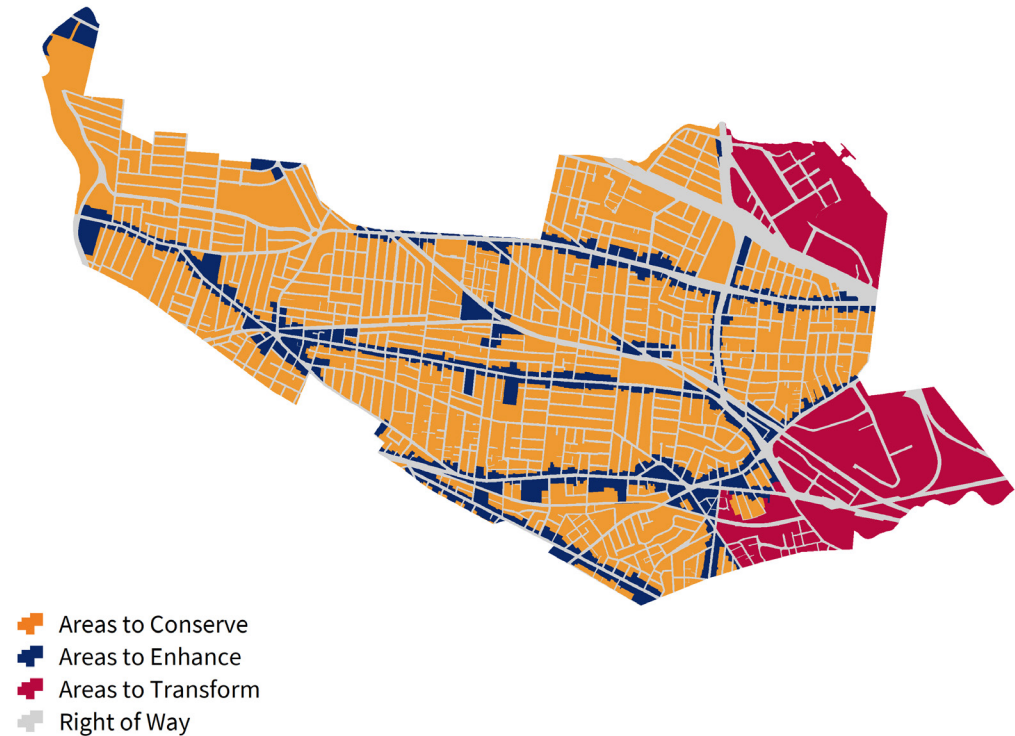
In other transformative neighborhoods, like Brickbottom and Inner Belt, a neighborhood planning process is needed first (see SomervillebyDesign.com). This process will determine what kind of development the community would like to see before putting in place the appropriate policies and zoning to make it possible.

CHALLENGES

The biggest challenge to developing in the transformative areas is balancing the needs of the City and the private market. We want the transformative areas to do it all – provide housing, jobs, and open space as well as resources for existing and future residents. Yet, we need the private market, through development, to help us achieve these goals.

These transformative neighborhoods are historically industrial in nature, meaning that to achieve our goals they also need investments in new streets, updated infrastructure like sewers, and often environmental cleanup before new development can happen. A lot of this work has already been executed in Assembly Square with public and private money, but the same will need to happen in other transformative areas.

Fig 17: The SomerVision Map



This map is similar to the SomerVision Map that appears in SomerVision 2030, but identifies the exact parcels that are included in the transform, conserve, and enhance districts.

A photograph of a brick wall covered in vibrant, multi-colored graffiti. The graffiti includes large, abstract shapes in shades of orange, yellow, green, and red. A large, semi-transparent red circle is centered over the wall, containing the text. To the left, a portion of a doorway is visible, featuring a white geometric pattern and a yellow arrow pointing downwards.

Progressing

TOWARD OUR

Vision

Progressing Toward Our Vision

This section reviews the goals identified in SomerVision and explores the different planning and policymaking efforts that have occurred since, which will inform a successful SomerVision 2040 document. In addition, we profile some of the biggest successes we have had as a community in pursuing these goals. Visit [SomerVision2040.com](https://www.somerville2040.com) for a more comprehensive list of what has already been implemented.

NEIGHBORHOODS

The Neighborhoods goals are focused on quality of life, preserving the city's strong residential and mixed-use neighborhoods, and providing more avenues for civic engagement.

One of the City's biggest initiatives at the moment, and the one that involves the most SomerVision actions, is **overhauling the zoning code**. Zoning regulates the built environment, so it is essential to preserving and enhancing neighborhood character, supporting local businesses, and enabling development around transit stations. The overhaul's third draft is currently under review with the Board of Aldermen. Read more about the zoning at [SomervilleZoning.com](https://www.somervillezoning.com).

In several specific neighborhoods, the City has worked with residents to develop **neighborhood plans**. These include Union Square, Winter Hill, Gilman Square, and the Lowell Street Station Area. The Davis Square Neighborhood Plan will be completed soon. The plans were created as directed by SomerVision and help visualize how each neighborhood can support SomerVision goals by providing suggestions of targeted infill sites, identifying neighborhood-specific action items, and creating long-range plans for the location of

SomerVision 2030 Goals: Neighborhoods

- 1. Civic Engagement** | Engage community members in civic life and decision-making, seeking diverse representation and participation.
- 2. Neighborhood Centers** | Strengthen and support neighborhood commercial centers that integrate residential uses, offer lively destinations, and contribute to Somerville's unique identity.
- 3. Small Business & Entrepreneurship** | Protect and promote a diverse and interesting mix of small-scale businesses in Somerville's neighborhoods.
- 4. Neighborhood Character** | Preserve and enhance the character of Somerville's neighborhoods, enable sensitive, economically feasible maintenance and adaptive reuse of historic buildings, and respect neighborhood form and patterns while expanding Somerville's architectural legacy.
- 5. Neighborhood Infill** | Facilitate transit-oriented, neighborhood infill development when it enhances the lively, human-scaled and walkable character of Somerville blocks and neighborhoods.
- 6. Environment** | Improve our shared neighborhood environmental quality.
- 7. Quality of Life** | Foster vital, healthy, inclusive, and distinctive urban neighborhoods that are the best possible places to live, work, play, do business, learn, and serve.

assets like open space. Once adopted, the City, named partners, stakeholders, and residents take on different aspects of implementation.

The Office of Sustainability and the Environment has been focused on the environmental component of the SomerVision neighborhood goals. The department led a multi-year

climate change planning process that has culminated in **Somerville Climate Forward**, a plan to decrease Somerville's contribution to climate change by reducing the collective carbon emissions of both the City and its residents and to prepare Somerville to thrive amid the potential impacts of climate change such as storms, flooding, and heat waves.

To help improve civic engagement, Mayor Curtatone established the **Clean and Open Elections Task Force** in 2018 to provide recommendations on how to increase voter participation, lower barriers to candidate participation, and increase the general openness and transparency of the election process. The task force submitted a report with 16 recommendations to improve voting and elections in Somerville. So far, the Mayor has submitted a Home Rule petition covering two of the Task Force's recommendations, that municipal voting be opened to non-citizen residents and residents over the age of 16, to the Board of Aldermen for consideration.

For more information about implementation successes, visit SomerVision2040.com.



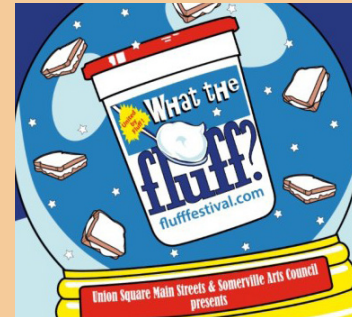
The paving of private lots and impervious surfaces in neighborhoods was one topic discussed in the Neighborhoods section. This photo is of some landscaping associated with a residential development, which will help manage stormwater.

Successes in Implementation: Neighborhoods



SomerViva

Since 2013, SomerViva has provided tremendous support for non-native English speakers and immigrants in our community.



Union Square Main Streets

Perhaps known best for its annual Fluff Fest, this organization collaborates with businesses in Union Square with financial support from the City.



Sustainable Energy

SustainaVille has numerous energy efficiency and renewable energy initiatives, including their Solarize, which increased the city's installed solar capacity by over 500 kW.

SQUARES & MAIN STREETS

The Squares & Main Streets section, renamed from “Commercial Corridors, Squares, and Growth Districts” as it appears in SomerVision 2030 to better reflect our built environment, includes a number of goals focused on commercial development in Somerville and how it relates to priorities like workforce development, fiscal responsibility, and job creation.

It’s truly an exciting time to be in Somerville where years of planning are coming to fruition. Since SomerVision’s adoption, **Assembly Square** has evolved into an urban center with a new MBTA station and over one million square feet of new development including 1,000 residences, new plazas, and a renovated Baxter Riverfront Park.

Parts of **Union Square** are also preparing for transformation. The City signed a master developer agreement with US2 to create the mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented, thoughtfully-designed development imagined in SomerVision and the Neighborhood Plan. Organizations like the Union Square Neighborhood Council are putting in long hours to help ensure that the development benefits the community as carefully and effectively as possible. These developments, and the planning, legal, and community processes associated with them, play a big part in achieving the SomerVision goals in this section.

The transformation of these neighborhoods is important for financial self-sufficiency in the face of declining state aid. The long-term strategy is to promote new commercial growth, which is taxed at a higher rate, in order to reduce the resi-

SomerVision 2030 Goals: Squares & Main Streets

1. **Financial Self-Sufficiency** | Promote municipal financial self-determination and reduce fiscal dependence on state aid and residential taxes and fees.
2. **Job Development and Emerging Businesses** | Make Somerville a regional employment center with a mix of diverse and high-quality jobs.
3. **Business Environment** | Support a business-friendly environment to attract and retain a diverse mix of businesses that can start here, grow here, and stay here.
4. **Human Capital** | Invest in the talents, skills, and education of people to support growth and provide opportunities to residents of all social and economic levels.
5. **Connectivity** | Link our corridors, squares, and growth districts to support future development and economic activity.
6. **Transformative Development** | Transform key opportunity areas, such as Assembly Square, Inner Belt, Brickbottom, Boynton Yards, and the southeastern portion of Union Square into dynamic, mixed-use, and transit-oriented districts that serve as economic engines to complement the neighborhoods of Somerville.
7. **Commercial Reuse & Infill** | Facilitate thoughtfully-designed, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development and re-use opportunities in commercial corridors, squares, and around transit stations that are sensitive to neighborhood context, and serve existing and future residents and businesses.

dential tax liability for Somerville households. Although new development has not yet created tax decreases, commercial growth is helping to reduce the size of residential tax increases.

One policy that helps commercial development support other SomerVision goals is the **jobs linkage fee**. Passed in

2017, the fee of \$2.46 per square foot is assessed on commercial developments larger than 15,000 square feet and the resulting revenue is put into a fund to finance job training for residents. How can that funding be spent most effectively? The **Somerville Talent Equity Playbook** helps answer that question by making strategic suggestions for how to better support workforce development by looking at the labor market, the current ecosystem of workforce development resources, and best practices in other communities.

One goal that has proven challenging is the pursuit of **Business Improvement Districts** (BIDs). The City supported efforts to create a Community Benefits District (CBD) law at the state level which, so far, has not been approved. This more flexible, community-centric version of a BID was a compelling idea for providing the kinds of services and amenities in commercial square and districts that BIDs typically do. Given that this legislation has not moved forward, the City will need to consider alternatives. These can include BIDs and additional support for Union Square and East Somerville Main Streets, but also more informal groups like the Ball Square Business Association, which hosted A Ball for Squares in September 2018 to draw people to the square.

In addition to these planning and policy efforts, the **Zoning Overhaul** as described in the Neighborhoods section of this report will also play a role in supporting the goals of creating additional commercial development as described in SomerVision.

For more information about implementation successes, visit [SomerVision2040.com](https://www.somervillema.gov/somervision2040).



In addition to transformative new commercial development, some older buildings in Somerville's squares welcomed transformative new uses too. In 2017, RightHand Robotics moved into the old Post Office in Union Square.

Successes in Implementation: Squares & Main Streets



Greentown Labs

The largest cleantech incubator in the world doubled their square footage and added a wet lab using flexible financing from the City.

Photo: Barry Hetherington



Assembly Square

Housing, commercial development, parks, amenities, and a new T station—Assembly has transformed since SomerVision 2030.



Construction Mitigation

The City has been stepping up efforts to support business districts affected by construction with events like A Ball for Squares in September 2018.

RESOURCES

The Resources section of SomerVision includes a number of goals relating to community assets: cultural institutions, the arts, education, and gathering spaces. It explores our strengths and imagines how they can become even better in the future.

Somerville Public Schools is currently embarking on a planning process of its own, called **Somerville Learning 2030**. This process is a community visioning conversation about what learning opportunities should be made available to school-age children. This will be a great opportunity to think big about shared priorities.

Public space is traditionally thought of as parks, but it includes all the public space between buildings, including streets, sidewalks, plazas, and parks. Our public space is one of our biggest assets, but there is a limited supply in four square miles. Since SomerVision's adoption, the City conducted a **Fields Master Plan**. One problem it identified was a shortage in access to large rectangular fields. So far, it has led to better maintenance of grass fields, the creation of a new field at the Winter Hill Community School, and commitments to invest in state-owned properties.

In addition to the Fields Master Plan, the City finalized its **2016-2023 Open Space and Recreation Plan**. This document makes Somerville eligible for state funding for City parks but was also helpful in accurately quantifying and inventorying our existing open space. The plan goals include acquiring more land and renovating existing parks and open spaces.

SomerVision 2030 Goals: Resources

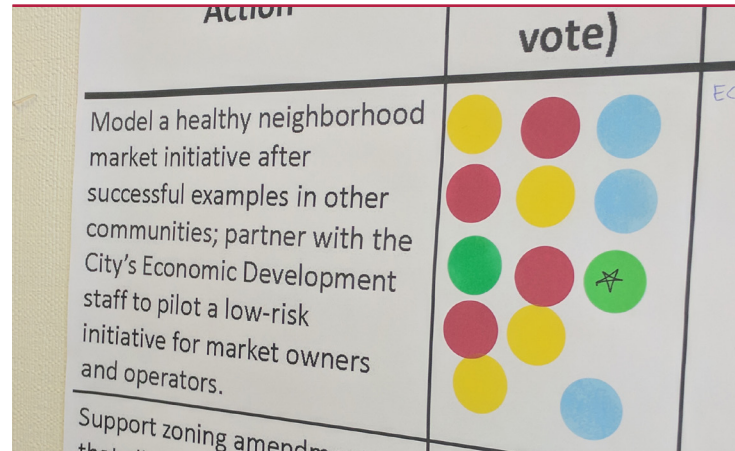
1. **Creative Community** | Increase the recognition of Somerville as a center of arts and creativity.
2. **Creative Spaces** | Ensure that Somerville has a mix of spaces for creative production, performance and exhibition, and that art is incorporated into the built environment.
3. **Cultural Institutions** | Help local arts and cultural institutions, such as theaters, film and art festivals, museums and libraries to succeed, network and grow.
4. **Education** | Strengthen existing education programs and university and professional partnerships within Somerville schools.
5. **Waterfront** | Approach our waterfront as a regional ecological resource, balancing community access and ecological health.
6. **Parks & Recreation** | Create and program a network of vibrant public open spaces and shared use paths throughout the city that are multi-purpose, promote healthy living, and reflect changing recreational interests and cultural opportunities.
7. **Public Realm** | Design and maintain a healthy and attractive public realm that fosters community connection, including streets, sidewalks, and other public spaces.
8. **Green Infrastructure** | Maximize environmental sustainability in design and implementation of all infrastructure systems and public facilities.
9. **Energy** | Ensure the infrastructure for all utilities is sufficient in capacity and quality, of the best available technology, redundant, and supportive of the desired level of future growth.
10. **Emergency Services & Preparedness** | Ensure that the Somerville municipal government, residents, and business communities are well prepared and equipped to address emergency situations.

Trees are another important public resource to be maintained. In 2018, the City planted 401 new trees, not including those planted in parks. There is additional work needed to protect our existing trees, strategize about future plantings, and manage threats like the Emerald Ash Borer. For that reason, one of the suggestions of the Open Space and Recreation Plan is to create an **Urban Forestry Plan** to tackle some of these important issues.

In addition, improvements to the public realm happen every construction season. The Capital Investment Plan includes recurring annual investments in street and sidewalk improvements. In addition to annual repairs, the City invests in strategic streetscape projects, such as for Broadway in East Somerville. Streetscape improvements are also underway for Beacon Street and Union Square.

SomerVision does not explicitly discuss food systems, but Shape Up Somerville's **Food Systems Assessment** relates to several SomerVision goals. The assessment identifies the current food landscape as well as opportunities for improving the local food economy—both in the growing of food and value-added products, communications about nutrition and food resources, and waste recovery efforts. Next steps include a variety of initiatives that involve collaboration across community organizations and City departments. Some of these tasks may be candidates for SomerVision 2040 implementation priorities.

For more information about implementation successes, visit SomerVision2040.com.



A photo from the Food Systems Assessment report release, which doubled as a planning effort for identifying high-priority next steps.

Successes in Implementation: Resources



Somerville High School

The new Somerville High School is already under construction. The result will be an innovative, state-of-the-art education facility for our community's students.



Park Improvements

75% of all City-owned parks and schoolyards have been renovated since 2004. This photo, from the grand reopening of Hoyt-Sullivan Park, is one such renovation.



Arts Events

The Somerville Arts Council manages or supports over 30 events per year, including Art Beat, SomerStreets, and Porch-Fest.

TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

The Transportation & Infrastructure goals in SomerVision 2030 cover a variety of subjects (see next page). They include both far-reaching thinking about how to protect the right of ways for projects like the Urban Rail Radial Project as well as tactical everyday life issues like vehicular congestion. In addition, this section considers what kinds of water, sewer, energy, and utilities improvements are needed to support future growth and an attractive, functional city.

Of course, one of the biggest stories for Transportation & Infrastructure is the **Green Line Extension**, which is currently under construction. Expected to open in 2021, this project has been in progress for decades and will drastically improve access to transit. Once all six new stations open, 85% of the population will be within a 1/2 mile of an MBTA station.

Another major priority relating to Transportation & Infrastructure is **Vision Zero**, launched in September 2017. Vision Zero is a worldwide effort to create a road network with no fatalities or serious injuries. This initiative has involved tasks like lowering speed limits citywide and planning and developing parking-protected bike lanes, strategically placed crosswalks, new signal beacons, and more.

Meanwhile, the City has been working to modernize and update our **water and sewer systems**. Infrastructure work isn't always glamorous, but we can all appreciate flushing toilets and dry basements. The City is currently working to separate sewers on Somerville Avenue and planning for a

new sewer connection in conjunction with the MBTA GLX project. The City has also recently replaced a brick sewer on Cedar Street and leveraged this opportunity to introduce important traffic calming improvements during the street's subsequent repaving.

For more information about implementation successes, visit SomerVision2040.com.

Somerville has the 5th highest share of bicycle commuters in the country as of 2017, with **9% of all commuters doing so by bike.**

Source: League of American Bicyclists, "Where We Ride: An Analysis of Bicycle Commuting in American Cities"

Successes in Implementation: Transportation & Infrastructure



Green Line Extension

GLX construction has started, and the expectation is that all of the new stations will be open by the end of 2021.

Photo: GLX Constructors



Bike Infrastructure

Since SomerVision 2030, our four miles of bike lanes have become 17! This is in addition to additional sharrows, bike parking, and Blue Bike docking stations.



Neighborways

Low-cost experiments with paint help create safer, more pedestrian-friendly streets throughout the city.

Photo: Somerville Neighborways

SomerVision 2030 Goals: Transportation & Infrastructure

- 1. Mass Transit** | Create a mass transit network accessible to all parts of the city and all users, with innovative physical and informational improvements that allow for easy use and seamless intermodal connections.
- 2. Alternative Transportation** | Increase active and alternative transportation options; reduce congestion and promote workplace-based policies and incentives for mode choice, work hours, and employment location.
- 3. Bikes & Pedestrians** | Expand bike and pedestrian culture by transforming existing infrastructure to accommodate for bicyclists and pedestrians, resulting in safe, accessible and well-connected networks.
- 4. Roads & Transportation Network** | Use technology and infrastructure improvements to balance the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, private vehicles, and mass transit; reduce congestion and pollution; decrease road space dedicated to private automobiles, and unlock economic development potential while maintaining a fiscally sound road maintenance program.
- 5. Parking** | Manage the parking supply and demand in a flexible, rational, and innovative manner.
- 6. Highways, Bridges, Rail Rights-of-Way** | Connect the city: retrofit, redesign, and build, as necessary, roads, bridge, paths and rights-of-way to improve transportation networks and link neighborhoods and commercial centers within Somerville and beyond.
- 7. Water System** | Provide a safe, high quality, potable water system that is well maintained, financially solvent, and accommodates the future growth needs of the city.
- 8. Sewer & Stormwater** | Improve stormwater and wastewater management systems to increasingly separate storm water and sewerage and support desired levels of future growth.
- 9. Sustainability** | Maximize environmental sustainability in design and implementation of all infrastructure systems.
- 10. Energy Self-Sufficiency** | Move toward energy self-sufficiency by increasing supply of locally generated power and reducing per capita energy demand.
- 11. Utilities** | Ensure utility infrastructure is sufficient in capacity and quality, uses the best available technologies, has redundancy, and supports the desired level of future growth.

HOUSING

Housing has become an even more difficult challenge for Somerville since the adoption of SomerVision 2030. This section of SomerVision 2030 explores how to create more housing choice, promote the right kind of housing development, prevent displacement, reduce homelessness, and support our existing ecosystem of resources. However, the difficulties remain: a 2015 Residential Market Potential study shows that 4,330 households represent the annual potential market for housing in Somerville. That means that our housing goal of 6,000 new units over the course of 20 years could be absorbed in 1.4 years!

Some of the first steps coming out of SomerVision 2030 involved additional research and dialogue to determine the right strategies. In 2015 the City established the **Sustainable Neighborhoods Working Group**, which was made up of 29 subject matter experts, resident stakeholders, community advocates and real estate professionals. Their task was to develop approaches that protect and preserve affordable housing in the city and expand the City's resources to create additional units. The result of their efforts was published two years later and included 18 recommendations to address these goals. Many of the successes in implementation listed in this section are ideas discussed by this group.

Another key component of research was the **2015 Housing Needs Assessment**, which was conducted in compliance with the City's Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance to assess whether any improvements to the ordinance are needed. The assessment identified 285 units that are at risk of losing

SomerVision 2030 Goals: Housing

1. **Choice** | Preserve and expand an integrated, balanced mix of safe, affordable, and environmentally sound rental and homeownership units for households of all sizes and types from diverse social and economic groups.
2. **Mixed-Use, Transit-Oriented Development** | Promote mixed-use, mixed-income, transit-oriented development to provide new housing and employment options.
3. **Displacement** | Mitigate displacement of low and moderate income residents by retaining the existing affordable housing stock and by creating policies that allow residents to remain in their homes in the face of a changing city.
4. **Homelessness** | Create a diversity of programs that prevent homelessness and address the housing needs of the homeless and those at risk of homelessness.
5. **Resources & Capacity** | Expand financial, organizational, programmatic, and other resources available for housing.

their affordability by 2020 and highlighted other gaps in the current affordable housing stock. In addition, the report found that while the median income for renter households in Somerville is just \$58,510 per year, an income of over \$95,000 is needed to afford the average monthly rent observed in the city.

The City has also been engaging with this issue from a regional perspective. The **Metro Mayors Coalition Regional Housing Task Force** identified that the 15 municipalities in the coalition have added nearly 110,000 residents and 148,000 new jobs since 2010, while only permitting 32,500 new housing units. Raising this number of units will be a key factor in ensuring attainable housing in the region.

Housing affordability is not solely about supply, however. Programs to prevent displacement, to help low-income families find and stay in their homes, to prevent evictions, and to connect people to the resources they need are just as essential to an attainable housing ecosystem. The **Office of Housing Stability** is a new City department that will work on these efforts by providing professional services to help residents stay in Somerville despite the threat of displacement.

See Successes in Implementation for more initiatives that have been completed or are currently in progress.

For more information about implementation successes, visit SomerVision2040.com.



Over a third of Somerville households, including both renters and households, **are cost-burdened by their housing** according to the 2012-2016 ACS 5-Year Estimates. That means they are spending over 30% of their income on housing costs.

Successes in Implementation: Housing



100 Homes

26 households avoided displacement because of the 47 rental units created since 2014 through the 100 Homes program.



Linkage Fee

For every commercial development over 30,000 square feet, developers pay \$10 per square foot into a fund for the creation and preservation of affordable housing.



Inclusionary Zoning

In 2016, the Board of Aldermen voted to increase the inclusionary zoning rate to 20% citywide for all developments of 18 or more units.

Photo: DiscoverUSQ.com



Next Steps

Next Steps

It has been nearly 10 years since SomerVision 2030, and we've accomplished a lot. We don't rest on our laurels in Somerville, though, so now is the right time to revisit the community's hard work and update the plan for the next 20 years.

KEY DELIVERABLES

One of the key goals of the City during this process is to create a "Living" Comprehensive Plan Website that:

- Is in a format that is easy to scan and interpret while still providing necessary detail and analysis.
- Is translated into Spanish, Portuguese, and Haitian-Creole.
- Provides guidance on the most important actions for the next five years.
- Is updated regularly to track progress.

In addition, the City will create a SomerVision 2040 document that will be adoptable by the Board of Aldermen.

PROCESS GOALS

The process of creating SomerVision 2040 will be a public one, which will involve as many community members as possible. We will strive toward a process that:

- Provides access to everyone in some way, whether online or in person.
- Encourages civil, engaging dialogues built on mutual respect and compassion, even when they are about difficult subjects.

- Provides an opportunity for neighbors to get to know each other better and understand different perspectives.
- Is inclusive and welcoming, but also targeted and efficient; is respectful of participants' time.
- Is open to and appreciative of constructive feedback.

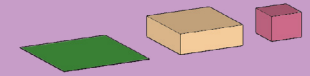
THE PATH AHEAD

SomerVision 2040 is not starting from scratch. Rather, we seek to build upon the community process that produced SomerVision 2030 and plan to update, remove, and add as necessary with the help of both 2030 participants and newcomers. We will be posting to SomerVision2040.com as components of the process are scheduled, but each event, initiative, or opportunity for engagement will be related to one or more of the following plan components:

GOALS. Which goals need to be updated? Which goals have been missing? Broad community involvement—whether through a brief comment online, a conversation in person at an Arts Council event, or a discussion at a SomerVision 2040 planning session—will help us get this list of goals right.

NUMBERS. The SomerVision Numbers can be difficult to discuss because the numbers can feel so abstract, but it's important to balance feasibility and ambition. Deep-dive conversations informed by data, research, and best practices will be our most important tool for determining the targets we want to set.

POLICIES & ACTIONS. This is the "to do" list of the City and



How can we maximize all of our priorities on Somerville's four square miles?

The above shows a pocket park (2,000 square feet), a housing unit (1,125 square feet), and a job (250 square feet).

This helps illustrate the potential trade-offs we will need to consider, as goals that we set for one priority will affect the feasibility of other goals.

community, and will likely be the component that changes the most from SomerVision 2030. We can't predict exactly which actions will make sense in the future, but we can review what we're doing already and brainstorm new ideas and initiatives to explore.

PRIORITIZATION. The Steering Committee will be tasked with taking all of the input received regarding Goals, Numbers, and Policies & Actions and helping staff determine what is most important. They will help prioritize actions for the next five years and may be tasked with answering other difficult questions that arise during the process.

GET INVOLVED!

The City is planning a public process that will encourage feedback through a variety of activities, including dinner with your neighbors, in-depth conference-style events, and casual conversations with City staff at public events. We hope this report arms you with the updates you need to start



thinking about the tough questions we will be tackling as a community. These are some questions we have heard from the community recently:

- How do we grow and protect our urban forest?
- How many affordable housing units should the City aim to create by 2040?
- How can we increase our open space acreage?
- How can we continue to build the City's fiscal strength?
- What can the City do to prevent residential displacement and keep housing affordable and accessible to a diversity of households?
- How do we balance all of the competing priorities for space?
- What goals should the City set related to climate change and environmental sustainability?
- How do we build a more equitable community for our diverse population?
- How can we support our independent businesses, particularly those that are minority-owned?
- What health-related goals might we want to include in SomerVision 2040?
- Are there goals missing in SomerVision 2030 that we want to include in SomerVision 2040?

There are likely many other questions, and this is a great opportunity to ask each other.

Visit SomerVision2040.com to learn more about how you can participate in this important community process.



City of Somerville
Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone
January 2019
SomerVision2040.com