



# SOMERVISION2040

Sustainability • Diversity • Opportunity • Connectivity • Community

## Youth Forum

**Date of the event:** July 31, 2019

**How many people attended this event?** 9

**Target participants:** Somerville teenagers

**In what language was this forum?** English

**Where was this event hosted?** Central Library, 79 Highland Ave

**What do you love about the Somerville Community? What aspects of Somerville do we want SomerVision 2040 to enhance or preserve?**

- Somerville is doing a great job at showcasing our culture and neighborhood pride through local events
- Most of the open spaces are great, we use it all the time when it's warm
- The farmer's markets are very helpful, specially with discounts on organic produce for low income residents and those living in public housing, eating healthy is a huge struggle on a low income
- Youth organizations like teen empowerment are helpful with giving young people a voice
- The library is great and offers one of the few hang out spots near the high school for teens after class, and the librarians are very helpful with finding things and are nice
- The art and music programs at SHS are very good
- The history department is the great, they oppose student tracking (AP, honors, etc) and provide support for students after school
- We love that there still are a lot of locally owned small businesses, we need to preserve them
- There is a culture about speaking out at SHS that's great for students, we appreciate the walk out against gun violence that the staff supported
- Most of the teachers at the high school are good people who care

**What problems and challenges affect the Somerville community? Which are the most important to you personally?**

- The city needs to have more youth hot spots, specially near the high school, there is nowhere to hang out in the evening and have fun, all the new places in Union and Assembly are too expensive, sit down places, and geared for adults, most teens I know to go Boston or Everett for exciting places like Skyzone and Metrorock
- Eating healthy is a huge struggle for low income people, more can be done to help them have access to affordable fresh produce on a regular basis
- Teens, specially from low to middle income families that may not have the time or knowledge to offer career and college advice, really need good guidance and are often not receiving it from guidance counsellors
- While the library is good, teens must be quiet there, we need a civic space where teens can socialize after school that's safe and comfortable
- Housing is a huge issue, from immigrant kids like me I know so many of their families are either in public housing or really struggling to stay in the city if they rent, never mind buy, it doesn't make us feel welcome
- There are still not enough teachers and guidance counselors per student in Somerville high
- Teachers, but specially guidance counselors are mostly white and struggle to relate to the experiences of students of color, specially immigrants, we need staff to be more diverse
- ESL students are not given support to move up to higher tracks in the school, AP students can go entire academic year without interacting with ESL students which greatly diminishes the benefits of a diverse student body
- The systems in place for students to complain about biased staff behavior are insufficient, it feels like there is little accountability or recourse if you feel like you're being treated differently because of your background
- Police and security at SHS do not make students feel safe, it makes them feel watched and in prison, specially students of color
- It's good on paper that national honors requires volunteer service, but many low income students have jobs to help support their families and it's unreasonable to expect them to volunteer on top of that and school, having a job should count

- Tracking (honors, CP, and AP) is just codified segregation within the schools, the content is not harder, it's just more homework at the AP level which penalizes students who have to work, take care of siblings in the evening, or get less help at home, the tracks just divide up students by race and economic background
- The art and music programs at SHS could be more connected with local groups of artists and musicians, perhaps pairing students with mentors in the field and creating spaces for them to display their art, it should be supported as a real career choice for talented students
- The Somerville public libraries and schools should be more connected: field trips for activities in the library during school time for example
- The city doesn't have enough public garden spaces, it's not just about green space but also about making it easier for low-income families to access fresh produce
- Enroot's office in the high school is poorly advertised and hard to find, most students don't know it exists
- Students of color seem to get pushed to shop classes and not encouraged to go to college, while for white students it's the other way around, it's subtle and not across the board but you just have to look around and see assumptions are being made about students based on race
- Alternative schools just separate and alienate kids, instead make the schools better equipped to serve a wide range of needs and make sure students aren't siloed so they learn from each other
- Affordable homes need to be seamlessly integrated with the rest of the community, living in the projects becomes an identity because it's so separated, it makes kids get treated differently and can hurt their confidence and self esteem
- It's disheartening to see new developments with open space that's fenced in and locked

**What are some ideas you would like the community to explore? These could be solutions to some of the problems we identified or other programs or initiatives?**

- Outreach to youth needs to involve listening like this forum, not just the assumption that because teens are young, they cannot contribute eloquent ideas and opinions
- We need to make a lot more affordable housing, if it's not possible with the way we do things maybe we need to change how we do things, we need to city to make a bold move on this

- Somerville needs a good youth center for young people to go to study, hang out, and get help if they need until late in the evening, some kids don't have safe or quiet places to be after school to do homework and hang out, especially in the winter
- The youth center could also host free tutoring by community volunteers, we have a lot of well-educated people in our community who might be willing to tutor teens if there is a public space to do it at with a city staff coordinator
- Somerville can also really use an arts center with space for artists to display and sell their work, a place for bands to perform, and subsidized studio spaces rented by hour, if this could be combined with a youth center it would be even better so students could learn from them, check out the Brookline Teen center and Dorchester art projects as examples
- All our schools should have gardens, solar power, and other sustainability strategies the students can participate in and learn about
- There is no reason why teens can't get shop training AND be prepared to go to college, we need to stop treating those as two totally separate tracks and figure out ways for kids to do both, so they have options
- The Somerville YMCA is in bad shape, given its location it would be a great spot for youth and the community but it needs a renovation
- Teens need more mental health resources, it's also a much better way to keep everyone safe than having security everywhere
- The schools should all use composting systems and there should be a city program for homes to do it as well
- Even when the GLX is done there is a real challenge with getting from the north of the city to the high school area, it would be great if we could add a shuttle or bus line making that connection
- SHS can do more towards the human connection with students and fostering an environment of empathy, things like plants, pets, comfy areas for sitting down in circles to talk, instead of just traditional rigid classrooms, do a lot to help students feel safer learn better
- Activities that promote intergenerational interactions are powerful, community gardens are a good example where we could have elderly folks who have experience teach teens how to garden, or experienced professionals tutoring teens at the library or a community center
- The libraries are good because of the staff but the buildings are really outdated, I think in this day and age libraries can evolve to offer a lot more resources like modern computers with

technical software installed and classes on how to use them, workshops on useful skills like personal finance, mental health counseling, job searching help, etc.

- Getting SHS students out of the classroom to experience the city more would be great, a lot of kids just never get to learn about other neighborhoods they don't live in or the history of Somerville, students should know the history of their community
- There should be a large digital bulletin board by both the high school and the libraries(that's also available online) that displays all kinds of things for both teens and adults going on at the schools after hours, libraries, city events, non profit volunteer opportunities or offerings and all that sort of thing, sometimes not enough people got o things just because they don't know about it and there isn't one place
- Teachers and everyone who works for the city should be encouraged to live here and offered support to do it, it makes a difference when they experience the community themselves
- Students should have a high school email address and receive newsletters with opportunities for them