



**Community Survey Response Summary:** *We received 70 responses to our qualitative survey. This document summarizes key points in the answers with edits for clarity, redundancy and relevance.*

**What do you think Somerville is doing well? What positive aspects of our community should we preserve?**

*Community & Governance*

- Many of the City's policies are good examples of progressive governance, driven by a politically active population of residents largely committed to fighting for social justice
- The City is racially and economically diverse, welcomes diversity, and is actively fighting racism and xenophobia
- The City does a good job of communicating with residents about the challenges it's facing, most of the informational materials and web pages are high quality, and community input is solicited regularly
- The Somerville West Library remodel is a good step towards updating our libraries, we need to do the same to the others
- Somerville feels urban, quirky, and vibrant, we should build on this vibe not undo it
- The crime rate is low and the city feels safe
- The City is looking ahead at long term solutions rather than just focusing on immediate issues
- Somerville's elected officials and municipal government generally make an effort to consider all citizens' needs and well-being
- The streets are usually pretty clean and the city-provided trash toters are great
- For a city with a small budget Somerville has done a lot to improve its overall quality in all areas since the 80's

*Commercial Development & Arts*

- There are some good venues for arts and culture like ONCE, the Davis Square theater, Paintnite, the Armory, but there is room for many more

- There is a wide variety of community events around the City and they are usually well organized and fun, keep adding more and work with local businesses and get more of them involved
- Our square like Davis and Union Square are cool and full of unique local businesses
- The farmer's markets are great for the community
- Good progress bringing in new businesses to help diversify our tax base
- Our restaurant scene is great, varied, and just keeps getting better
- Porchfest is a very fun event that encourages people to explore their own neighborhoods
- There are a few really good artists spaces and the art council provides grants and support, we need more but what we have is a solid base
- Summer movie screenings are a blast
- I love the Union Square flea market
- Great bar and restaurant scene
- Assembly is different from the rest of the city but it's great to have a place for larger businesses and shopping
- We have a limited number of larger grocers and warehouse type shopping, which is good, those are good to have but should not dominate

#### *Youth & Education*

- Our public education system has improved a great deal over the years
- Somerville is doing a good job keeping the libraries up to date, and the high school improvement project is very exciting for our youth

#### *Natural Environment & Open Space*

- There are many nice playgrounds for children, let's make sure they're all well maintained
- I love green spaces like Powderhouse Park
- Keep planting trees on the street, they look great and give our streets a feel of open space
- Maintaining flower gardens when it's warm out looks fantastic

#### *Climate Resiliency & Sustainability*

- I think it's great that the city has run programs trying to help homeowners switch to solar and to better insulate their homes, we should help every residential property do this
- We're talking about climate action seriously and the "Climate Forward" report was great
- Excellent progress on energy purchasing options
- Our single-stream recycling is so helpful

#### *Transportation & Infrastructure*

- Upkeep of roads and public services

- The Green Line Extension will be a huge improvement to our capacity to get around Somerville without driving
- Somerville is very walkable for the most part which is awesome, but East Somerville needs a lot of work to catch up
- There has been a real push for bike infrastructure improvements, we're not there yet but we can see the effort
- I love the extended bike paths and the Assembly Square waterfront walk
- Ability to renew parking permits online and the parking permit process in pretty good
- Installation of leading pedestrian intervals
- There are concrete efforts being made towards traffic calming and dedicating less spaces to cars, but there is so much catching up to do

**Which problems or challenges are impacting our city the most? Are there unique issues faced by particular groups of residents that need more attention?**

*Community & Governance*

- We still have some socio-economic diversity and that has to be protected, even if it means less of other things we want, it has to be a priority
- At the Resistat meeting they said that you need to make \$85K to live in Somerville, that is far too high, a great broad goal would be to figure out how we can lower that
- The city is understaffed in the transportation, planning and infrastructure departments, with the amount of money large projects cost it makes no sense to try to save money on staff that oversees them considering the consequences and cost of getting it wrong
- We have diversity but often lack inclusion when it comes to influence and economic opportunity, we should help our immigrant workers do well here not just survive
- Inclusion in power structures for people of color is crucial to make diversity inclusive
- Rats are still a problem, specially in East Somerville
- We need to ensure our city workers can afford to live in the city and are encouraged to do so, they should be personally invested in the community
- The priorities are generally good, but the speed of execution is far too slow, let's get moving faster on improving our streets and public spaces, raise taxes on wealthy residents if that's what it takes, they can afford it

- As a parent of young children, I'm keenly aware of the high price of providing child care for them for their first 5 years of life and think it would be so supportive of families if child care were free starting much earlier than at Pre-K
- Limited voter engagement can lead to some voices gaining an outsized influence
- The information new residents get from the city and the information provided through the city alert system is basically all about parking and vehicle registration while huge amounts of public space on our streets are given over to provide basically free parking for residents who own cars, we are encouraging new residents to get cars
- It would be nice if all new people would be welcomed to Somerville and provided with a list of a variety of volunteer opportunities, we just moved in and are struggling to find how we can contribute, when we called the library about teaching ESL we were told there was a waiting list
- Developers seeking to exploit the community

#### *Public Health*

- Lack of access to mental health care
- The opioid epidemic is not being dealt with enough
- The working poor need access to more affordable healthcare

#### *Commercial Development & Arts*

- Loss of small businesses and risk of the city becoming dominated by big chain stores
- Lack of affordable commercial space for our small businesses
- Property costs are too high
- More resources should be dedicated to helping local entrepreneurs succeed
- We need to embrace our minority cultures by providing them with enough training programs and services to set them up for success
- We need to grow the commercial base to reduce the residential property tax burden, to do this while creating housing we have to increase the number of mixed use, high density projects
- Limited and expensive studio space for artists
- Not enough employment opportunities for young people

#### *Housing*

- We need to consider that being a Sanctuary City is great and all but if immigrants cannot afford housing here and are getting displaced, that doesn't help them
- Housing for families is particularly unaccessible in Somerville
- Homelessness is a major issue
- Affordable housing is a crisis, rents keep increasing and people are getting priced out

- Somerville could be a national leader in reducing rents and making housing more affordable if it worked with the community to come up with a viable solution
- Concerns about how much new housing our infrastructure can support
- The city needs to develop more affordable properties on its own instead of just waiting for private investment
- Immigrants and artists are being heavily impacted by expensive housing and they are a big part of what makes Somerville special
- We need rent control, preferably along with more city or non-profit driven housing development
- Somerville should join with Medford, Cambridge, and Boston to pressure universities in the area to build better on-campus housing to reduce the student housing pressure in the area
- We don't have enough low income housing but at least there are some programs in place; we have no plans to address middle income housing
- The solution to the housing affordability crisis needs to be regional and include breaking the racist, exclusionary zoning in the suburbs so that more housing can be built there to keep up with demand
- Somerville needs to do its part by upzoning and relaxing permit requirements to make it cheaper to build housing here
- Affordable housing and NIMBY opposition to incremental density increases and mixed-use 3-4 story buildings that are necessary to ease cost burdens in the face of population growth and keep our neighborhoods vibrant and inclusive
- Elderly homeowners are disproportionately impacted by higher property taxes
- Airplane noise from Logan flights is terrible in some areas
- Retirees on fixed incomes such as myself are paying a disproportionate share of property tax increases
- We need to increase density for new low- to mid-range income housing options, rather than becoming the standard punchline for the entire nation's luxury condo jokes

#### *Youth & Education*

- Somerville High School's sex ed needs to be improved and should not include abstinence only components, that approach does not work
- Communication in the schools from the district level to the parent level needs work

#### *Natural Environment & Open Space*

- We need more safe public spaces to relax and play

- I would like to see more trees and green space in the Winter Hill neighborhood (park, playground, dog park)
- Foss Park is consistently littered with trash, particularly towards the intersection of Mystic and Fellsway, as there are no trash cans there
- Somerville should consider municipal composting
- I'm worried about the impact of the straw ban, disabled people are saying clearly that ban causes problems for them
- Cavalier cutting of old trees
- Repurposing some of our streets might be key to generating more open space

#### *Climate Resiliency & Sustainability*

- No carbon sequestration program
- We need to do more as a city and community to fight pollution and reduce waste

#### *Transportation & Infrastructure*

- Streets are still built for the commuters in their cars, we need to prioritize pedestrian and mass transit
- Many drivers completely ignore the 25 mph speed limit, please install speed cameras and start ticketing
- Roads are in terrible shape
- The T needs improvement, the red line is unreliable
- Assembly is too detached from the rest of Somerville, I am actually hoping to move away from this neighborhood for that reason
- While Somerville is a leader in the region for being cyclist friendly, it still has a long way to go
- Illegal parking and current traffic patterns make it very tough to get around, I work in south of Boston and there is no option for me to ride a bike, by car it feels like gridlock every direction you go
- Traffic and congestion are out of control
- Davis Square has many infrastructure problems that have been ignored for years; I want to see us close the slip in front of Mike's and address the Powder House rotary
- We need to fix many of the curb cuts to make them ADA compliant
- Bring scooters or e-bikes to the city, they could help with traffic
- Assembly Square continues to grow, yet there is no parking available for commuters driving from nearby to take the T
- Walking from East Somerville to the Assembly T is extremely unsafe due to poor lighting, lack of walking paths, lack of pedestrian crossing signals and no direct route

- It would be great if we could follow Swedish cities and remove snow from the sidewalks in addition to the roads
- I wish buses ran more often on the weekends and that the stops placement was aware to avoid forcing uphill walking, the elderly are often reliant on buses
- Why did Union Sq., Ball Sq., and the Washington Street underpass all have to be closed at the exact same time? And why are there not more traffic police out making sure that, given all of this construction, people behave well and things go smoothly?
- The surplus overhead cables are a danger and a nuisance to the neighborhood, there are numerous cables that lead to nothing and need to be cleaned up
- Somerville is a walkable place where you don't need a car but too many people here still own cars and drive too much because the city subsidizes driving
- Sidewalks are not always passable when it snows and prioritizing street plowing dumps snow on sidewalks makes sidewalks worse for the benefit of drivers
- Many people in Somerville drive cars because it's much safer than riding a bike, we need to change if we want biking to become a real choice for commuters
- People from all over the city come parking near Sullivan Square so they don't have to pay to park, leaving very few spots for the residents that live here
- We should increase parking fees to incentivize use of transit
- We should widen sidewalks anywhere its possible

**What has been your experience engaging with city programs, services and public resources?**

- I attend Resistat meetings regularly and find them informative
- It really depends on the person I'm interacting with, some want to do their best and some don't seem to care
- Small business licensing is time consuming and often counterproductive
- There are always way more than people know about, more information needs to be shared
- There needs to be better and more communications from US2 and the City, and more public meetings, about the plans for Union Square, residents are on edge
- 311 is great; resistat emails are helpful
- Everyone has been helpful, once I reach them
- Everything takes so long
- I've had all positive experiences interacting with city staff

- The city does a fantastic job of providing ample community programs and resources, I have been a resident of Somerville for less than a year but have been very impressed
- Permitting and inspection process can be painful, slow, and confusing to an inexperienced new homeowner
- Thumbs up to the Somerville Public Library, the librarians are excellent
- The City Council only listens to those who agree with them with the exception of two Councilors at large
- I really like having the Bluebikes in Somerville, although I think more stations are needed
- administration staff say one thing but then do something entirely different. Most don't really seem to care what the community wants.
- I think it's ridiculous that police are ticketing bicyclists in intersections where there are no great options for maintaining one's safety, most drivers in Somerville don't respect the space safety needs of bicyclists like cars, so how are we supposed to behave like cars?
- Customer service when calling 311 is spotty, I have had excellent service and other times horrible customer service
- I've been passed back and forth (Eversource vs. Somerville vs. MassDOT) while doing my part to make you aware of defective streets lights, it is not my job to get it fixed
- I've interacted with the library, public schools, city hall and gone to city festivals, and it's been generally good
- The city does a decent job of providing notifications
- I enjoy the Union Square farmer's markets, found the visitor parking permit process efficient and convenient, trash pickup is very efficient as is street sweeping
- Generally whenever I've needed information, I've been able to get answers on the city website or by reaching out to 311
- Positive experiences with Arts Council and events, Central Library, Election Office, but I'm not really sure what resources are available to me or how to access them
- My family uses the parks and playgrounds a lot and find they are well maintained and updated
- ISD really needs work, it is worse than every other department I have interacted with
- I have a positive feeling about the police department, which seems to be very community oriented
- The city collects lots of community input
- Lots of neighborhood meetings have a lot of disorder, where the loudest and sometimes ignorant voices get heard, and some thoughtful people don't



- City staff needs to cut people off if they're going off the rails during public meetings, they should ask for comments not just questions and cut it short if it's not thoughtful so someone else has a chance to contribute
- The city is engaged in hearing the residents and trying to understand their needs but there is often more demand for resources than the city can accommodate, e.g., early childhood education (SMART program) and community garden program
- It varies, but generally City staff seem under resourced, understaffed, and not always able to keep up with the pace of what is happening, I have noticed this particularly with transportation and ISD, while zoning and permitting seems stuck with an archaic process for both residents and staff

**What are your suggestions and ideas for actions, initiatives or policies that would help address any of the points from the previous questions?**

*Community & Governance*

- A program to increase the efficiency of the city budget, some departments may be overstaffed, others may need more efficient tools rather than more staffing
- With marijuana legalization increase public health outreach and campaigns related to its use, coordinate with the colleges
- As new policies are adopted we need to check in on data that shows results and reevaluated them as well as share those metrics with residents
- The City needs to improve its presentations during public meetings to make sure it spells out the value to the community when they propose new developments or policies (including long term goals and how it fits in the bigger picture), rather than just describe what they're doing tell me why I should support it
- Residents need to be informed about who lives in the community/neighborhood as part of meetings so they have more informed opinions, people make a lot of assumptions to make
- Adopt a budget that is "budget neutral," no new positions without eliminating those of equal value
- The City should take long-term vacant or disputed properties by eminent domain and use them for public purposes, like that lot next to the Dunkin's on Somerville Ave
- We need free or subsidized child care, it would make Somerville more affordable to every family here

- The libraries need substantial physical improvements, the staff are outstanding and make up for deficiencies to the buildings, but at some point we need to improve the buildings and hardware
- The 311 system should assign ticket numbers to facilitate follow-ups
- We need a program to combat racial bias among city workers towards residents of color
- We need to make equity institutionalized so we are regularly looking at racial disparities in the city and addressing them directly
- I'd like to see low/no interest loans for city workers to buy homes in Somerville, I prefer to have more City staff living here so they are more personally invested
- There should be a city office responsible to tracking people looking to volunteer and aware of all volunteer opportunities in the city to connect the two
- We need a major education campaign for residents (and anyone working here) on how to get rid of stuff without throwing it in the trash, such as reuse/repurpose strategies, how to give things away, etc.
- We need to provide better information on how to be part of the community to new residents, instead of just informing them about car ownership rules and utilities, how about giving them a list of places to volunteer, community events and festivals, a map of good biking and pedestrian routes, etc.
- The city needs to be clearer and more vocal about how it is helping low income and no income people
- I liked the old way the budget was done with names of city employees, now there is no way to tell who is in charge of which department, or who has what responsibility

#### *Commercial Development & Arts*

- Takoma Park MD outlawed new businesses that had more than 3 locations in a chain from moving in, which preserved the community atmosphere and kept rents in check as well, adopting that in some areas of our city like Davis and Ball Square could help keep a strong small businesses presence
- The City should preserve its remnant industrial properties as makerspaces
- We need a beautification program for our squares and main streets, it attracts visitors and helps businesses

#### *Housing*

- Work with area cities and towns on developing a regional solution for affordable housing

- Adopt a moderate rent control to help medium income folks while building more affordable housing for low income
- Disincentivizing of non-resident ownership of residential property, disincentivizing of owning multiple residential properties
- Limit Airbnb to owner occupied units
- Increase the number of affordable units by expanding the affordability range to include higher AMIs for medium income people
- Legalize accessory dwelling units and basement units to increase the diversity of affordable housing supply for both family and non-family residents
- Some older or newly constructed buildings could have small efficiency apartments, even one room for homeless people to live in
- Ensure that individuals given affordable units have access to other affordable services like affordable transit, food/groceries, and workforce training, otherwise the benefits are greatly diminished
- Zoning reform focused on upzoning so this city doesn't become an exclusive enclave of the wealthy or those who were lucky enough to buy homes on a medium income while they could, our zoning reform needs to enable more and cheaper housing development

#### *Natural Environment & Open Space*

- Start a program that prioritizes unused public owned land to be converted into open space
- Acquire the abandoned Star Market lot and use to for an open space centered project
- Increasing green space even if its through small pocket parks spread around the city
- Build owl boxes around the city in high trees to encourage birds of prey to move in and control the rat population
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- Put more resources into the recreation department programs, they're inexpensive but sometimes not well run or well advertised
- I would love more water features and fountains
- Enable higher-density commercial development that will fund more open space
- Build more pedestrian only streets with linear parks

#### *Climate Resiliency & Sustainability*

- We need to change the building code to enforce sustainable energy use in new developments
- I support Somerville's renewable energy purchasing option for residents and think the baseline should rise quickly
- Water conservation will become more important over the next decade, we need a plan to reduce our usage
- We could have an intermediary collector of things like used clothes from residences to take to Goodwill, perhaps the same thing for old but working electronics or materials artists could use to make things
- To minimize our environmental impact we need to ensure that we do composting city-wide, recycle everything we can, and switch all our public buildings and schools to solar power
- Ban all single use plastics

### *Transportation & Infrastructure*

- Adjust our streets to push through-commuters off our roads, I have read that the population of bedroom communities to the north will double over the next 10-20 years
- Add speed bumps or bump-outs to Main Street to increase safety for the residents in that area
- Remove half of the street parking in the city and repurpose it as bike, bus, and pedestrian space
- Increase fines for parking in firelane
- I moved to my neighborhood partially because of the proximity to the Assembly T, but I'm not able to safely walk the 15 minutes necessary to get there, we need to ensure Assembly is easily accessible for pedestrians in a 15 min walk radius
- Assembly Square needs to have parking available for commuters
- Have a 2-3 hour limit on parking when it's not your residential area/zone of the city
- Anytime a road goes under construction a protected bike lane should be added
- Increasing way-finding and walkable paths from neighborhood to neighborhood would be super helpful
- We need to stop subsidizing car ownership through basically free street parking, if people want to own cars they should pay the full cost of it
- We should consider extra fees and taxes to compensate for the pollution and danger that driving causes
- Eliminate all minimum parking requirements and charge market rates for street parking permits

- Follow through on Vision zero with money, staff, and resources to eliminate serious traffic crashes and set goals like the city of Vancouver did to reduce the number of cars and car trips in the city by at least 50% by 2030, 75% by 2040
- Make the city much more pedestrian and cyclist friendly and do it in bigger increments, set up a plan of city wide network rather than just do it in pieces
- Make snow removal from sidewalks a city service, paid for with a tax on cars, instead of a homeowner responsibility, there isn't enough enforcement to get people to clear the sidewalks, and it's really tough populations with mobility challenges to use the sidewalks during the winter for this reason
- Impose a toll on all the non-Somerville residents who drive through Somerville to commute between their homes in the suburbs and work in Cambridge or Boston, they contribute nothing to our community, but pump out huge amounts of pollution while sitting in gridlock in their single-occupancy cars
- Leverage the Ubers need to access our already-clogged streets and curbs to get some sort of compensation we can put towards sustainable transportation systems
- Have utilities companies, cable, and internet companies take away useless cables and moving forward new cables should be underground
- Create a comprehensive protected bicycle network, well before 2040
- We need more street signs showing the names of the streets
- Repair Davis Square's sidewalks and other public structures, partner with local community groups to do it