SomerVision 2040

Comprehensive Plan Update | 2010 - 2040
City of Somerville, Massachusetts







Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone
Adopted MONTH YEAR
SomerVision2040.com

SomerVision 2040

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Adopted by the Planning Board Month Day, Year

Endorsed by the City Council Month Day, Year

Joseph A. Curtatone, Mayor

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City staff owes a big thank you to the SomerVision Committee. We made a call to participate in SomerVision 2040 and the SVC went above and beyond participating in the Kickoff, SomerSuppers, and their respective working groups to create the topic chapters. Thank you!





Executive Summary

Hundreds of participants. Dozens of community events and working sessions. Over 60 volunteers. All of this hard work from our community comes together to create SomerVision 2040, an update to the City of Somerville's Comprehensive Plan written by the community that lives, works, and plays right here in Somerville.

This plan not only captures our values, highlights our goals and ambitions, but also wrestles with our challenges. How do we protect our diverse, close-knit community in the context of rising real estate costs and the constant threat of displacement? What is the best way to use the four square miles of land we have to work with? How can we incorporate equity into everything we do, and ensure that everyone has access to meaningful opportunity? What needs to happen to ensure Somerville remains a welcoming place for everyone, from people who have been here for generations to our brand new neighbors?

The result of this work is included in this document and the SomerVision2040.com website. There are three key components to this plan:

- Our **Introduction** summarizes the process of creating this plan and discusses some of the key overarching themes that emerged from the year of engagement.
- The **Vision** section includes our shared values, the SomerVision Map which captures the intended development pattern in the city, and our Implementation Priorities. These priorities are a key part of the plan; our SomerVision Committee highlighted these 15 tasks from their topic chapters as the items needing most immediate attention.
- The **Topic Chapters** section is the meat of the SomerVision Committee's hard work. These eight sections each tackle an important topic, highlighting strengths, challenges, goals, and task. Each topic chapter also contains a high-level numeric goal. These represent important metrics for success, but must be pursued in a way that balances the many other priorities and values included in this plan.

This plan is an important checkpoint about what our priorities and concerns are as a community, but the work does not stop here. Implementation will require further community input, critical reflection, and careful planning. We cannot afford to hone in on one priority to the detriment of others, but rather must consider how our many different goals can support each other. This work will be difficult, but SomerVision 2040 will provide guidance on what needs to happen.



2020, An Unprecedented Year

The SomerVision Steering Committee and City staff worked diligently in 2019 to prepare the SomerVision 2040 plan for adoption in 2020. However, 2020 by all accounts has been an unprecedented year. Plan updates after the official comment period and feedback process were underway when Somerville declared a local state of emergency in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on March 15. At that time, staff and the City Council pivoted their focus to the response effort.

As the community grappled with the impacts of COVID-19, the killing of George Floyd in May sparked protests across the United States and in Somerville against racism and in support of Black lives. At this point of national reflection, the City initiated a deep look at its own practices and policies. In June, Somerville declared systemic racism a public health and safety emergency and announced the launch of the Racial and Social Justice project. This work, with efforts from the City Council and Mayor's Office, is kicking off in fall 2020.

As the year comes to a close, we are in a position to redirect focus back to SomerVision with our lessons learned from 2020. Although the process took a break through much of the year, SomerVision 2040 makes three important calls that are relevant in the face of COVID-19 and the City's commitment to racial justice: advancing equity, preventing displacement and community collaboration.

Advancing Equity

Equity has been at the core of the planning, discussion, and creation of SomerVision 2040, and recent events make clear why this is so important. The COVID-19 health crisis has laid bare inequities in our society. Data at the national level point to racial and ethnic disparities in the risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19, with racial and ethnic minorities at increased risk.[1] In Somerville, as of October 2020, COVID cases have disproportionately impacted Somerville residents who self-report as Hispanic, with the case rate for the Hispanic population nearly five times the rate for the non-Hispanic population.

Economic impacts are also disproportionately felt. According to analysis from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), because of the types of occupations affected, COVID-19 layoffs have disproportionately impacted workers under the age of 30 and low and middle income households.[2] Of the applications to the Somerville Care Fund, 65% were from households who prefer a language other than English.[3]

The emphasis SomerVision 2040 puts on equity should be carried through both the implementation of this plan and the work which this plan could not have anticipated.

Preventing Displacement

Housing instability was a major concern in the SomerVision 2040 process, and this problem has been exacerbated by economic shifts resulting in income loss for many

1 U.S. Centers for Disease Control. Health Equity Considerations and Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups, July 24, 2020. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html
2 Metropolitan Area Planning Council, The COVID-19 Housing Layoff Gap: A Continued Assessment, April 22, 2020 https://www.mapc.org/covid19-layoffs/
3 Community Action Agency of Somerville. Somerville Cares Fund Update, September 3, 2020.

Somerville households. Over 1,200 Somerville households had applied for financial assistance from the Somerville Cares relief fund as of August 2020.

Business closures and layoffs resulted in an increase in unemployment, peaking at 6,967 unemployed Somerville residents in June (13.8%). As of September 2020, at least 3,829 Somerville residents were unemployed (7.3%).[4] For reference, there were an average of 926 residents unemployed in the six months prior to the pandemic or about 1.7% of the workforce. MAPC estimates that 854 Somerville renter households were in need of nearly $1 million in housing assistance as of October.[5] Sustained unemployment risks depleting emergency savings (if any), digging households into debt, and increasing food insecurity.

Closures and revenue loss have also impacted Somerville's small businesses. Over 300 Somerville businesses applied for assistance from the City's Small Business COVID-19 relief fund. As the local and global economy continue to reel from the effects of COVID-19, housing security should be a focus.

The Statewide eviction moratorium expired October 17, but Somerville has a local eviction moratorium banning physical evictions. This however cannot prevent the filing of eviction proceedings in the courts and residential and commercial tenants are still responsible for any rent owed. Evictions affect people's emotional and physical health negatively and should be avoided at all costs when facing a nation wide pandemic.

Community Involvement

Just like slowing the spread of COVID-19 requires us all to work together, so too does achieving our SomerVision goals. Somerville residents and community members have come together during the pandemic by wearing masks, volunteering to deliver groceries and supplies to immunocompromised neighbors, and raising relief funds for the Somerville Cares Fund. Moreover, small businesses have collaborated with the City on sector-specific task forces to innovate in the time of COVID, from pop-up outdoor dining, to outdoor exercise classes, and modified, safe personal services operations. This collaborative energy is just what's needed to make progress on affordable housing, job growth, sustainable transit, and more.

Moving Forward

The COVID-19 health crisis has taken a significant toll on the local, regional, and state economy. While the full magnitude and duration of the impact is not yet known, we know our shared values will be critical in recovering as a community and tackling the ambitious goals laid out by SomerVision 2040. By focusing on equity in our recovery, we will be stronger than we were before and well on our way to achieving our goals. The path ahead requires patience, a steadfast commitment to equity and anti-racism, and community collaboration. Together, we will make Somerville an even more exceptional place to live, work, play raise a family and grow older.

4 Commonwealth of the Massachusetts, Labor Force and Unemployment Data - Somerville, Accessed October 28, 2020 https://lmi.dua.eol.mass.gov/LMI/LaborForceAndUnemployment/LURResults?A=05&GA=000101&TF=2&Y=&Sopt=&Dopt=TEXT

5 Metropolitan Area Planning Council, The COVID-19 Housing Layoff Gap: October Update, the Crisis Continues, October 5, 2020 https://www.mapc.org/resource-library/covid-19-layoffs-october/



INTRODUCTION

Somerville has a deep tradition of public participation in civic affairs, which goes all the way back to the Revolutionary War when Somerville was a part of Charlestown. This tradition is still alive and well today and can be seen at public meetings in lively debate, in the volunteers who support our many events and programs, in the lines at the polls, and online.

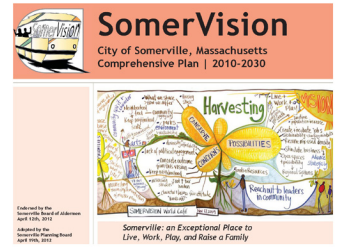
SomerVision 2040, the update to our comprehensive plan, is no exception. In 2009, the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development kicked off what would become SomerVision 2030, the City's Comprehensive Plan. Stakeholders engaged in lively conversation over the course of more than 50 public meetings 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, raise a family, and grow older. SomerVision2030 was adopted in 2012.

SomerVision 2030 declared that we wanted to change and how – we claimed a stake in our values, insisted on more commercial development, and identified where we saw things changing in the SomerVision Map. In some ways, Somerville has tried to have the drivers seat in our change, in others, Somerville is subject to market forces and national politics that feel out of our control. We've had growing pains and with each one there have been lessons learned. Staff and community residents are constantly striving to do better because we all love Somerville.

As we approach 10 years into the plan's time frame, the time is right to take stock; extend the horizon another 10 years to 2040, and check-in, revisit, and edit the plan as necessary. The goal of this process is no different than the many before it – solicit broad and diverse representation in all phases of the update. City staff started by publishing **The Path Since 2010**, a document which captures our accomplishments since 2010, and creating a digital home for the update, **SomerVision2040.com**.

The 2030 Steering Committee was reconstituted as the SomerVision Committee for the plan update. We sought out participation in the committee from all corners of Somerville including elected officials, local non-profits, Board and Commission members, and even an open call. We asked members to commit to reporting back/checking in with their constituency throughout the process, hosting a SomerSupper, and participating in the SomerVision Conference. From the conference, they continued onward to developing and writing the Topic Chapters. They also worked with staff to develop the SomerVision Numbers and identify our implementation priorities. We cannot thank the SomerVision Committee, Co-Chaired by Stephenson Aman, Rachel Borgotti, and Howard Horton, enough for their help.

With this plan update, we are reaffirming our commitment to work together – government, residents, non-profit partners, community groups, everyone – for more positive change. The change will be sometimes be small and other times, quite large. To be the community we desire to be, it's all hands on deck. This is your comprehensive plan.







Outreach Strategy

Our outreach strategy for SomerVision2040 centered around offering multiple avenues for participation to reach individuals that do not typically attend our more traditional evening public meetings due to either time constraints or because they found giving feedback in those settings too difficult. By mixing in-person and online engagement through formal and informal gatherings, both large and small, we aimed at offering at least one option that each resident would find suitable.

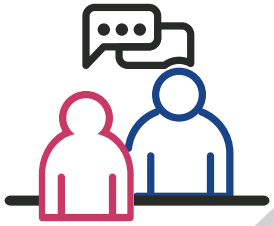
Our SomerVision Card Game gathered specific suggestions for the SomerVision Numbers from hundreds of residents. Our Forums included only a few participants at a time but provided in-depth feedback from demographics typically underrepresented in standard public processes such as non-English speaking immigrants, senior residents, people with disabilities, small business owners, and teens. Our SomerSuppers collected feedback from hundreds of community members in informal settings where the residents themselves lead the discussion without City staff present, then used a form to report back to us. Through our SomerStories and our SomerVision online survey, we received dozens of lengthy answers to open-ended questions about both the challenges and opportunities residents found living in Somerville, as well as their vision for the City's future.

Through the combination of these various approaches, we received feedback in some form from over a thousand residents, ranging from general impressions to in-depth analysis, based on both personal experiences and general perceptions. All the information we collected was carefully analyzed by City staff and reported out to the SomerVision Committee across multiple meetings. Key points throughout our chapters, as well as the SomerVision Numbers and spreads on special topics such as displacement and racial equity, came directly from the extensive community feedback we received.



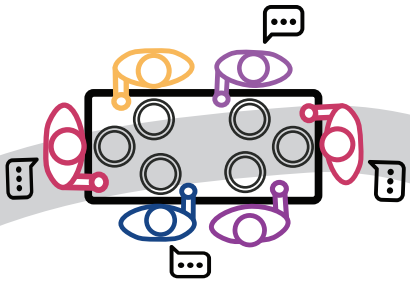


In December 2018, prior to the public kickoff, City staff hosted a Summit for employees to engage in the SomerVision planning process. This was an important internal step to get feedback and generate energy to help the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development , with the help of the SVC, complete the plan update.



SomerVision Card Game

Participants read through possible SomerVision Numbers and picked the eight that were the most important to them. 420 individuals played the game in 4 languages at 10 public events and online throughout Summer 2019.

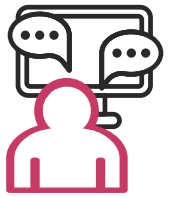


SomerSuppers

Participants hosted their own conversations at their homes, community organizations, and restaurants about life in Somerville. Organizers shared in-depth feedback through report-out forms. 23 SomerSuppers were hosted through Spring 2019.

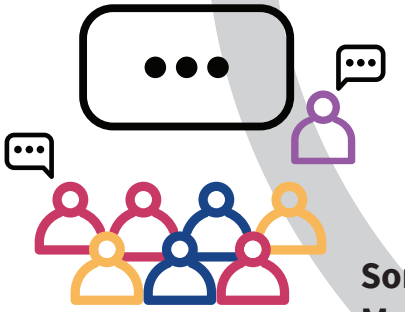
SomerVision Outreach

SomerVision 2040



SomerStories and Qualitative Survey

Individuals filled out a survey and submitted their text or video stories online. These methods of outreach were fairly open-ended, and let participants share what was important to them about Somerville. Submissions came throughout Spring 2019.



SomerVision Public Meetings

These large meetings featured Staff presentations while small group activities or stations solicited feedback. We hosted three meetings in January, April, and October 2019.



SomerVision Forums

Our nine forums, which were hosted in a variety of languages and typically focused on a specific topic or group, enabled Staff to collect feedback from in-depth conversations. These were hosted throughout Spring/Summer 2019.

An Equitable Somerville



Equality



Equity

Equity and equality are two strategies used in an effort to produce fairness. Equality is treating everyone the same. Equity is giving everyone what they need to be successful. By striving for equity, we are seeking to mitigate historic discrimination or other factors that prevent people from being successful today.

Equity is one of our central community values. By considering what everyone needs to be successful, it goes beyond equal opportunity for all community members regardless of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, immigration status, nationality, ethnicity, income, age, and physical ability. What a person may need may differ depending on their background. Putting equity at the core of our policies is how we live up to our ideals and ensure our community remains safe, vibrant, and supportive of all.

In Somerville, we're striving towards equity. Our policies must consider how to acknowledge and mitigate historical inequalities. Policies will look different for civic engagement, economic opportunity, housing, healthcare, and educational attainment. For example, our immigrant community has fueled our small business growth and contributed to the cultural diversity that put Somerville on the map. However, some immigrants can feel unsafe engaging with government at any level because of national policy, experiences of government in their countries of origin, or xenophobic rhetoric in the broader culture.

The SomerViva Office of Immigrant Affairs (SOIA), which aligns with our values from SomerVision to support diversity, was founded in part to address both inequality and inequity. Initially, SOIA focused on striving to ensure that language or culture was not a barrier to accessing city services, programs, or to participating in public discussions and overall civic life. They also hosted cultural events to share and celebrate our diverse cultures. Many of those goals were about creating equality: equal access to city services and equal representation of their viewpoints. But since its creation, SOIA has also expanded to advocating for immigrants locally and nationally; assisting them with navigating social services, the immigration system, completing processes such as an affordable housing or business license application, and they have created safe spaces for sharing feedback with City staff. By providing this extra support, the City aims to address inequities by ensuring immigrants — many of whom have experienced historical inequities due to their race, ethnicity, or nationality — overcome barriers and feel safe and secure and are able to be active members of our community.

Our SomerVision Committee members have been clear from the beginning that equity needed to be central to the SomerVision 2040 planning process, document, and subsequent implementation. City staff convened the SomerVision Committee (SVC) with the hope of including many different viewpoints and experiences, but the SVC was also tasked with viewing their work through an equity lens. At the conference in April, Staff led a session about equity, and several members of the SVC formed an Equity Advisory Group to keep the conversation going. Throughout 2019, Staff, the Equity Advisory Group, and the SVC as a whole continued discussing equity, conducting exercises, and providing materials about equity. The working groups were pushed to consider how their topic chapters would affect populations differently and what historic inequities might be at play. Highlighting goals for each topic chapter related to increasing equity was just one outcomes of their work.

Equity is an ongoing conversation, not a task that gets checked off, but we are proud to incorporate it as a core principle of this document.

POLITICAL CAPITAL & ADVOCACY

One aspect of equity that was discussed in many of the subsequent Topic Chapters was political capital and power. Socially and economically disadvantaged communities have the least power in shaping the institutions that often could assist them. Even when public institutions try to bridge the political capital gap and seek participation from those groups, a justifiable lack of trust, born out of past experiences, can limit civic engagement. For instance, if action is not taken from an issue raised at a public meeting, why would a person choose to participate in another one? This is especially true in disadvantaged communities where available time, childcare, and knowledge may be further limited by social and economic factors.

All of the Topic Chapters wrestle with equity and political capital in some way. How do we create public space that is inclusive to all residents? How do we plan for transportation in a way that incorporates those who are traditionally left out from these processes? The Community and Governance topic chapter—which was created as a result of interest at the SomerVision Conference—focuses on the issue of political capital most directly. Working group members discussed civic engagement, diversity, and government processes and structures, and brainstormed how to lower the barriers to participation in city life. Identifying barriers and working to accommodate all residents who want to participate in the process is essential to including more diverse voices in the decision-making process.

To build trust, we must demonstrate as a broader community that we recognize the issues our residents are facing. Even with our best efforts, we will never have everyone in the room where decisions are being made, but we can do better. It is up to all of us to educate ourselves about others' experiences and empower each other to participate and advocate. As a City, we must work to grow political capital within historically disadvantaged communities while also building their trust and confidence in our public processes.





The City is expanding capacity to better address the issue of equity internally and within our community. The City is currently hiring for a Director of Racial and Social Justice, a position that will build on years of work led by the Health and Human Services (HHS) Department. HHS has facilitated staff equity trainings and worked to develop a city-wide action plan. Most recently, HHS and the Mayor's Office have hosted a town hall and community listening sessions on systematic racism and race and equity in policing. The feedback from these events will help inform the efforts of the Director of Racial and Social Justice.

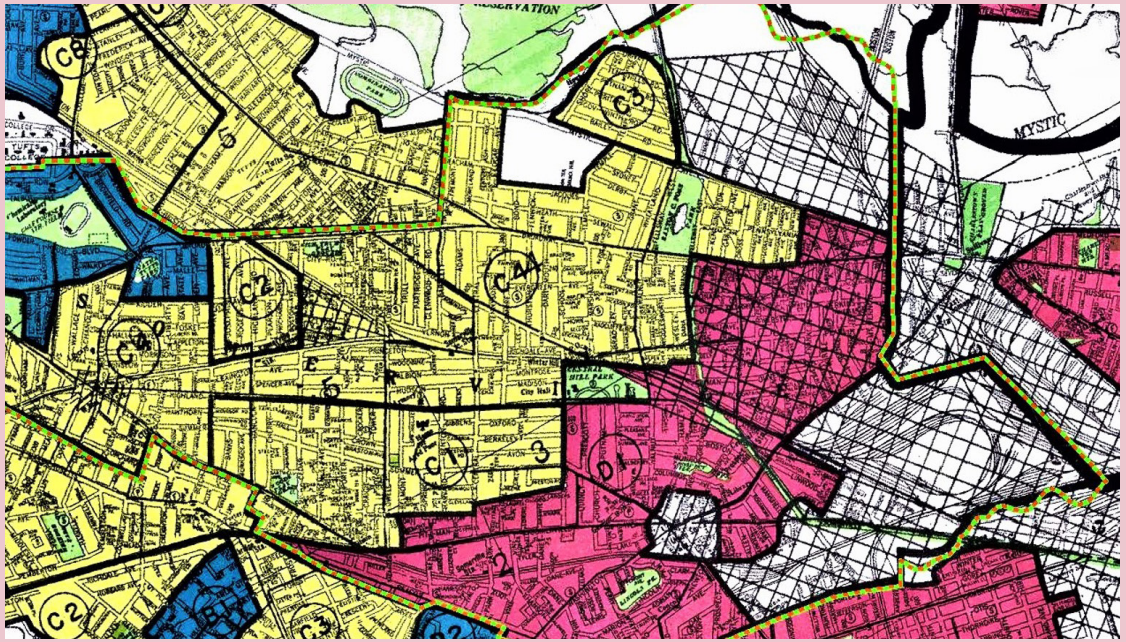
The Director will develop a business plan for creating and ultimately leading an Office of Racial and Social Justice (RSJ), which will work within the City and the community to change the institutional and structural systems that create racial and social disparities and to achieve racial and social justice.

REDLINING & RACIAL WEALTH GAP

Historically, “residential security” maps served as guidelines for real estate professionals and loan officers. These maps would color neighborhoods that had immigrants or people of color living there red, deeming the neighborhoods too risky for mortgages and insurance. At the same time, the real estate industry would also not let immigrants or people of color move into white neighborhoods since it would affect the perceived risk for the residents that lived there already. When the GI Bill of 1944 was implemented, the “redlining” of minority neighborhoods meant that as white veterans were able to buy houses at record rates using their government benefits and insurance, Black veterans were largely unable to access these same resources they had earned.

Redlining was outlawed in 1968, but the effect of these kinds of racist policies have a huge impact on Americans today. In 2015, The Color of Wealth in Boston was published by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston with Duke University and the New School. It compares the value of assets held by white and non-white households – white households have more than 14x more in total assets than the next demographic cohort. The gap in homeownership among races is a component of this wealth gap.

This is only one simple example, but it demonstrates that not everyone has had access to the same opportunities historically. These unfair policies have effects that last for generations. Today, we must consider equity and how to account for these generational injustices in order to ensure meaningful opportunity for success for all of our community members.



Comparison of white and nonwhite household median net worth		
	median net worth (U.S. Dollars)	nonwhite household percentage of white household median net worth
White	$247,500	100%
U.S. Black	$8	0%
Carribean Black	$12,000	4.8%
Puerto Rican	$3,020	1.2%
Dominican	$0	0%
Other Hispanic	$2,700	1.1%
Not elsewhere classified (mainly responders that chose more than one race	$12,000	4.8%
Source: The Color of Wealth in Boston by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston		

Displacement

Concerns about displacement are paramount for many SomerVision Committee members and are a common thread through much of the feedback received during this planning process. As the cost of living rises, individuals and families are forced to move away. This challenge is a central component to the Housing Topic Chapter, which talks about the need for improved data about the housing problem as well as a multi-faceted strategy to pursue housing affordability and prevent additional displacement.

However, worries about displacement and the rising cost of living appear throughout nearly all of the topics the Committee explored. Youth and Education heard from students and parents that the phantom of displacement brings stress to children's lives, whether because they may need to move or because their friends do. Community and Governance identifies displacement as the most immediate threat to the sense of community in Somerville and points out that these departures erode the fabric of connections that make the city stronger. Access to affordable and reliable public transit also plays a role in preserving the affordability of life in Somerville.

Businesses, non-profits, and artists are facing similar challenges as well. Commercial rents are rising, threatening independent businesses that make our squares and neighborhoods so convenient and unique. Similarly, many artist venues and performance spaces are feeling the heat of rising rents or redevelopment pressure of their properties.

There is no single solution to preventing or mitigating displacement, but SomerVision 2040 embodies the idea that it affects all aspects of our community and must remain a top priority moving forward. To preserve a community that is diverse, vibrant, and well-connected, we must pursue all available strategies to prevent people and entities from being forced out of our community.





A Call to Action



There's one thing we know for sure: Somerville is great! The reason it's so great? You!

Our collective actions make Somerville a better place to live, work, play, raise a family, and grow older. It was the 35th President John F. Kennedy that said, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." So in that spirit, we're asking; what can you do for Somerville?

There are so many ways to make a difference. It's the dedication of the 65-person SomerVision Committee that volunteered their time to set a direction in this comprehensive plan update. It's the Community Cooks who create meals for vulnerable neighbors. It's the parents who volunteer in the schools. These are just a few ways to show how our civic activism plays out, and it's strong here in Somerville.

The spark can happen by doing something small. Try holding a door open, waving someone on to turn in front of you, checking in on an senior neighbor, or shoveling out a curb ramp. Looking for something more? Consider dedicating a day. Americans left behind 768 million vacation days in 2017. Local non-profits and community organizations are always looking for volunteers. Think broadly, too: organizations like the Boston Food Bank help Somerville food pantries too.

If you're feeling crunched for time but have a few dollars to spare, consider donating to a local cause. The Somerville Education Foundation is working to promote learning opportunities for all Somerville residents. The Friends of the Somerville Public Library help support the library's long-range planning, advocacy, and fundraising. Many of the library's programming efforts including some of the museum passes are funded by the group.

Last but not least, City staff wants to let you know that we love Somerville too! We are driven to action every day by the community's passion. We're in this together and look forward to making Somerville better.

The time might be right to create a community foundation. A community foundation is a way to raise funds with the intent to fund area non-profits that support the goals of the community – many of which are laid out in this plan update.



THE VISION

Somerville's Shared Values

In 2009, we established the SomerVision Values. In 2019, we regrouped to make sure that they're still right for us. Besides some minor tweaks, these remain substantially unchanged.

1. Protect and foster the **DIVERSITY** of our people, culture, housing and economy.

2. Celebrate the unique character of our neighborhoods and the strength of our **COMMUNITY** as expressed in our history, cultures and vibrant civic engagement.

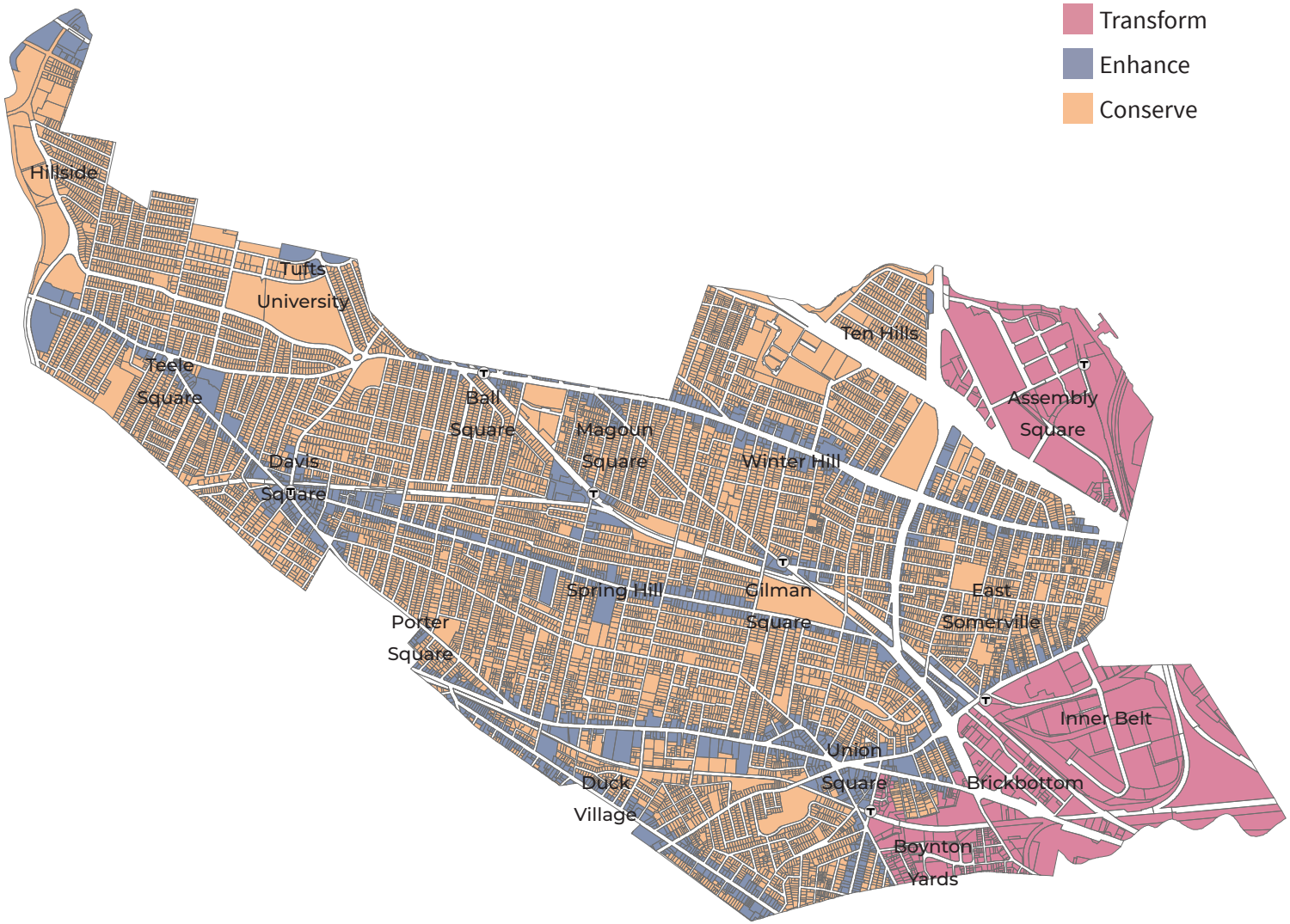
3. Invest in the **GROWTH** of a resilient economic base that is centered around transit, generates a wide variety of job opportunities, creates an active daytime population, supports independent local businesses, and secures fiscal self-sufficiency.

4. Promote a dynamic urban streetscape that embraces public transportation, reduces car dependence, and is **ACCESSIBLE**, inviting and safe for all pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders.

5. Build a **SUSTAINABLE** future through climate leadership, balanced transportation, engaging civic spaces, exceptional educational opportunities, improved health, varied and affordable housing options, and the responsible use of our natural resources.

6. Affirm our responsibility to current and future generations through continued **INNOVATION** in business, technology, education, arts and government.

The SomerVision Map



The SomerVision Map illustrates our vision for the community to Conserve our great residential neighborhoods, Enhance our funky square and commercial corridors, and Transform opportunity areas on the eastern and southern edges of Somerville.

The difference between this map and the version in SomerVision 2030 is that this map is mapped by parcel. This version better illustrates the Enhance areas around the station areas.

Implementation Priorities

How does the City implement SomerVision? The implementation priorities are 15 tasks that the SomerVision Committee identified as the next key steps. Some may take more time than others, and some may require collaboration across many parties, but all are urgent and important. They are listed here in no particular order.

- **INCORPORATE EQUITY GOALS** into new neighborhood plans and development proposals to embed the needs of marginalized communities into the planning process.
- Create an **OPEN SPACE ACQUISITION STRATEGY** that identifies target parcels.
- Reuse at least one municipal building for **SUPPORT OF THE LOCAL ARTS** and artists.
- Establish a task force with sufficient resources and expertise to **MEET OUR TARGET LEVEL OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING** and tools to enable both market and non-market developers to generate that target.
- Develop policy incentives to **ENCOURAGE SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOR** relating to consumer awareness - particularly for building energy consumption, but also for consumer goods and transportation choices
- Educate Somerville residents and businesses on **CLIMATE ISSUES AND AVAILABLE ACTIONS**, to build a citywide culture of engagement and awareness
- Work on **ZONING AMENDMENTS** to support the goals of SomerVision, especially commercial development and housing.
- Study and implement ways to **EXPAND THE ACCESSIBILITY OF CRITICAL CITY MEETINGS**. Measures such as providing childcare, offering translation services, hosting in handicap accessible locations, scheduling at non-traditional times, and enabling remote attendance through video conferencing technology should be explored.
- Create a **CENTRALIZED SOURCE OF INFORMATION** about all public processes and initiatives, which outlines the planned meetings, the timeline, and clearly shows key milestones, opportunities for involvement, and decision points. Update this outline when the process changes. As part of this, define a standard structure for communicating the purpose of meetings (presentation only, public comments, non-binding vote, binding vote, etc.) that is included in its posting.
- Study our open spaces to ensure they are accessible to pedestrians and do not have significant barriers. Use "**SAFE ROUTES TO PARKS**" as a model for park access.
- Implement a **TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH TO ADDRESSING INFRASTRUCTURE** with a focus on greater investment into building resiliency into our water and sewage systems as opposed to a more reactive approach to repairs.

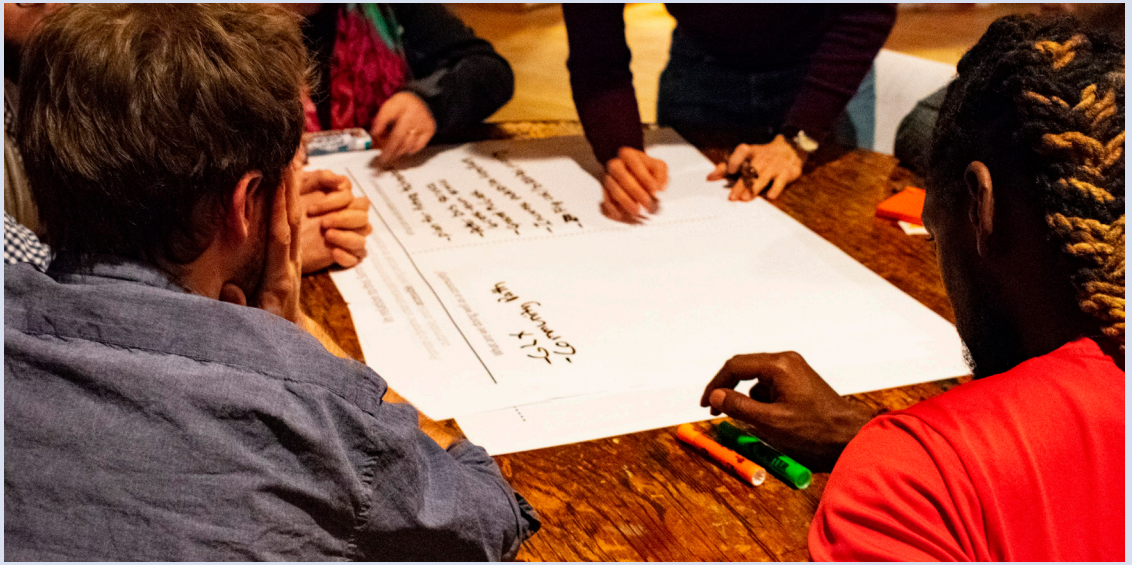
- **REDUCE AUTOMOTIVE VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED** (VMT) in Somerville. In order to achieve a multimodal and more environmentally-friendly system, as well as creating a community that is where people want to live, work, and play instead of cut through en route elsewhere, Somerville would benefit by reducing VMT.

- Explore opportunities to create **NEW GATHERING SPACES FOR YOUTH** in the City. Ensure Somerville has at least one active Recreation or Youth Center accessible for all youth.

- Explore how to provide **AFFORDABLE EARLY LEARNING AND CARE PROGRAMS** to all Somerville families. This effort should consider a city-run or city-supported child care program (similar to the French system), a babysitting cooperative in conjunction with the high school, and a program at the Visiting Nurses Associations that lets seniors engage with children.

- Ensure all **SPS SCHOOLS ARE TRUE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS** with integrated academic, health and social services, yout development, and community supports.





Tackling these implementation priorities will take collaboration among City departments (above) as well as collaboration within the community (below).

Implementation - One Step at a Time

With a vision sketched out, the time comes to begin implementing SomerVision 2040. It will take everyone—our elected officials, City staff, and proactive residents—to bring our ideas to life. Key Implementation Steps:



Photo from Daddy Jones Instagram



1. **Spread the word.** Our first task will be to translate SomerVision 2040 and create an accessible web version of the document. In addition, City staff will be sharing SomerVision 2040 internally, so that every department is familiar with what the community's priorities are. We want our shared vision to be accessible and welcoming to all.

2. **Establish a new committee.** The new SomerVision Committee, made up of City staff, residents, and elected officials, can meet as necessary to ensure progress towards our goals. This committee should work closely with the City's Racial and Social Justice Director (to be hired) to keep equity at the forefront of the implementation work.

3. **Continue to identify priority initiatives.** The Implementation Priorities are the top projects identified by the SomerVision Committee, but these priorities may shift over time. The SomerVision Committee will play an important role in considering which initiatives need more attention and identifying strategies for pushing these efforts forward.

4. **Share regular updates.** Once a year, City staff will release information about the activities of the SomerVision Committee, progress towards the SomerVision Numbers, and actions relating to the Implementation Priorities.

To be involved with the implementation of SomerVision, join our email list at www.SomerVision2040.com.

Community

The Somerville community helped us write SomerVision, but that's just the beggining! With the implementation of each portion of the comprehensive plan there are more opportunities for feedback and in many cases direct citizen action.





SomerVision Implementation Process



Mayor & City Staff

City staff under the leadership of the Mayor offer a wide range of expertise and extensive experience key to all aspects of implementing the comprehensive plan.



City Council

The City Council determines the budget and passes laws. Many major policies in the comprehensive plan will go through additional review by the council prior to being funded and enacted.



Partnerships

Developing partnerships with both non-profit and for profit, current and future organizations in the area is key for long term implementation success.



Boards & Committees

We have a number of boards and committees composed of Somerville residents, both paid and volunteer, who help review, study and approve multiple aspects of policy implementation with city staff support.



TOPIC CHAPTERS

About the Topic Chapters

This section includes the Topic Chapters, which were entirely written by the SomerVision Committee. Each topic – Climate and Sustainability; Commercial Development, Business and Arts; Community and Governance; Housing; Infrastructure; Mobility; Public Space and the Natural Environment; and Youth and Education – had a team of committee members discussing, debating, writing, and revising the content of the chapter. Although the committee members wrote these chapters, they did so with the guidance of the outreach conducted throughout the SomerVision process, including the report-outs from the SomerSuppers, the Forums, and the SomerVision Card Game. When needed, Staff helped by guiding discussions, creating content for feedback, and copy editing and formatting the final chapters.

Each chapter highlights the strengths, challenges, goals and takeaways, and potential tasks related to each topic. The working groups for each chapter were tasked with critically considering how matters of equity and wellness related to their topic, and highlighting the equity goals that most clearly tackle these issues. Two of the potential tasks for each topic are highlighted as Implementation Priorities in the previous spread. They are also repeated here in context with the topic chapter. The wellness goals were not highlighted because so many goals relate to wellness. City staff would like to thank Health and Human Services in their participation working with the SomerVision Committee.

In addition, each topic chapter begins with the related SomerVision Number. This was an intentional change from SomerVision 2030. Manay people felt that he numbers had been elevated over the other elements of the plan, particularly our values. The layout change is meant to keep them in context with the rest of the plan. In addition, we've added indicators to better round out our numerical goal.

While SomerVision 2030 focused on turning opinions into policies and actions, the format for SomerVision 2040 attempts to capture more of the nuance and complexity of these different subjects. Not every conflict is resolved, there are not always clear right answers, but the result is that these chapters capture a spectrum of concerns, ideas, and hopes for the future.



Wellbeing is comprised of numerous dimensions that influence an individual's quality and duration of life. This is broader than just the traditional definition of health. Wellness is achieved through the inter-action of physical, mental and social factors that help people to thrive and flourish. There are many models of wellbeing, or wellness. Topics include: a sense of purpose, social relationships, financial security, relationship to community and physical health. The Eight Dimensions of Wellness, are highlighted above, as promoted by the National Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The interconnectedness of factors that impact wellness has strong correlations with both health across the lifespan and the social determinants of health.

Climate & Sustainability

STRENGTHS

In considering climate and sustainability in Somerville, the working group wants to build on the solid foundation in SomerVision 2030 and Somerville Climate Forward, our climate action plan. SomerVision 2030 established sustainability as one of our community's key values. The working group builds on this in SomerVision 2040 by making Climate and Sustainability a new topic chapter with a focus on:

- Strong environmental leadership
- Balanced transportation modes
- Engaging recreational and community spaces
- Improved community health and access to prevention and protective services
- Effective stewardship of our natural resources

The SomerVision Number

80%

DECREASE IN CARBON EMISSIONS
from 2014 levels by 2040

Reducing carbon emissions is the most important strategy for mitigating climate change, and the 80% goal was first identified in the Climate Forward Plan. Related indicators include the percent of buildings' energy use from sustainable sources and the share of buildings with solar panels.

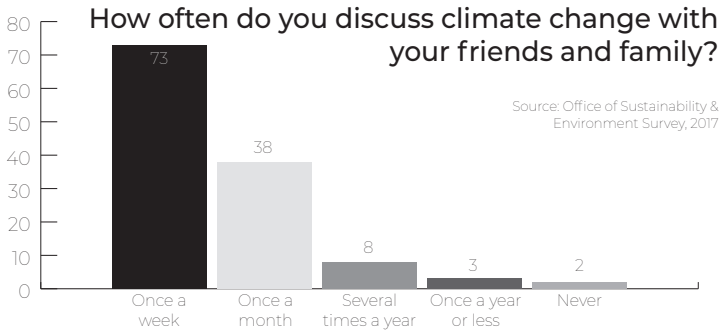
In addition, Climate Forward extensively considered the changes that will reduce emissions in the following sectors:

- Buildings
- Transportation
- Environment (stormwater management, tree canopy expansion, consumption patterns)
- Community (education, civic, and community participation)
- Leadership to advocate for issues that can only be addressed at state or even federal levels

The scope of the Climate & Sustainability topic chapter is: climate change mitigation, climate change adaptation, resiliency, energy efficiency, waste reduction, environmentalism, renewable energy, carbon neutrality, and pollution prevention and mitigation.

Many Somerville residents are already aware of climate change and other environmental issues and are eager to take action. This existing awareness will help to support individual efforts and mobilize needed behavior change at a larger scale.

Beyond policy positions, the City has implemented several programs and physical designs to to enable the community to make sustainable lifestyle choices. The City developed the Somerville Waste Wizard to answer resident questions about how to safely dispose of waste and electronics. Textile recycling was recently launched. The City has invested in cycling facilities, including a bikeshare program to make biking a more attractive option. Priority bus lanes on Broadway makes bus service more reliable and attractive for riders even during heavy traffic. Investments to increase the city's tree canopy will help cool the city during the summer. Somerville is conducting parking reviews to evaluate the city's relationship with cars, especially in corridors with robust public transit. The Green Line Extension will soon offer further public transit opportunities. In 2016 the Solarize Somerville campaign led to the installation of over 100 solar arrays on Somerville



homes. If you're interested and haven't yet been engaged, check out Sustainaville, the City's home to the programs and initiatives to reduce our contribution to climate change and increase climate awareness.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

There are many challenges and opportunities related to climate change and sustainability because the problem is not simple to solve. Solutions are local and global and action needs to be taken in a wide variety of ways. We've identified the issues as: scale of influence, existing infrastructure, the environment and health equity, air quality, and engagement.

The biggest challenge facing Somerville are issues of scale. Much of what we know is environmentally harmful to Somerville is outside of municipal control. The air pollution from Interstate 93 is mostly from cars passing through and not beholden to any Somerville rules. Buildings in Somerville are the biggest consumers of fossil fuels, but Somerville has limited ability to impose new building codes because this is done at the State level. Similarly, transportation requirements like miles-per-gallon minimums are set by federal authorities. Many of the emissions contributing to climate change can only reform through policy change at different levels of government or from technological solutions.

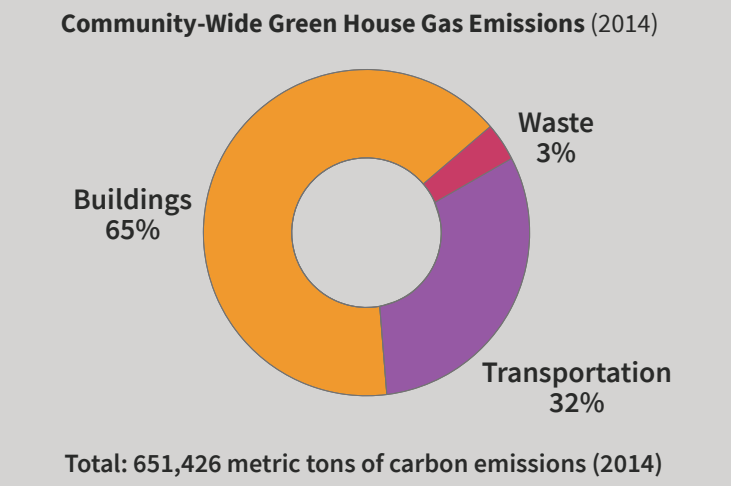


Somerville Climate Forward is Somerville's first comprehensive climate change plan, grounded by a set of implementable actions. These tasks aim to reduce Somerville's contribution to climate change and work towards carbon neutrality, to prepare Somerville for the unavoidable impacts of climate change, and to fairly distribute the opportunities created by climate action and work to alleviate the unequal burdens of climate change.

Changes in Somerville will not be enough to stop climate change nor shelter Somerville residents from its impacts. Our actions may not produce any near-term, discernible benefits and makes it difficult to justify the costs of action on the municipal scale. This lack of control often manifests locally in resistance to changes that would make our community more sustainable. However, municipalities have an important role in effectively mitigating and preparing for climate change. It takes individual investment of cities to reduce their own GHG emissions and prepare for the impacts of climate change in order to move toward the collective impact necessitated by the current challenges and opportunities.

Climate change is driven by fossil fuel emissions and efforts to reduce emissions will require addressing well-established infrastructure. Buildings contribute 65% of Somerville's greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). Most are privately owned, so mitigating steps, if not mandated, will occur based on property owner interest and willingness to pay. Especially in circumstances where tenants are paying the energy bills, there is little incentive to improve. In addition, it will take drastic changes to wean the housing stock off fossil fuels.

Transportation contributes nearly all the remaining GHG from Somerville (32%) and is attributable almost entirely to single occupancy vehicles. Policy throughout the United States has privileged car ownership by directing tax money to build and maintain roads, zoning for an oversupply of parking, and creating below market-rate parking permit schemes. Residents purchased cars assuming these policies would continue, and fight for it to remain so. However, this perpetuates the problem. In order to impact the number of cars owned by Somerville residents the City should consider limiting the number of subsidies available - market rate parking policies, zoning to not create an oversupply of parking, and right-sizing roads for all modes. While electrifying cars can reduce carbon emissions, reducing cars and vehicle miles traveled (VMTs) overall will be difficult to do while so many subsidies remain in place. The City is constantly balancing the needs of all roadway users whether motorists, cyclist, or pedestrian.



The remaining three percent of carbon emissions come from waste, particularly from plastic waste. Plastic is an integral part of the US economy and very difficult to avoid. But, because plastic waste emerges from a myriad of sources yet contributes to less than three percent of Somerville's carbon emissions, even solving the problem would not provide a major contribution to making Somerville carbon neutral.

The effects of climate change will not be uniformly or equitably distributed. Those who are least likely to afford mitigation costs will also be the greatest impacted. Certain populations are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change such as children, seniors, and people with preexisting health problems.The Wellbeing of Somerville Report provides several examples of how age and socio-economic status may put certain groups within Somerville at an increased risk:

- Young children have a limited ability to communicate when overheating or when left in dangerous situations and are less self-sufficient, more reliant on

adults for transportation and other needs, and less likely to cope emotionally during a disaster or climate event;

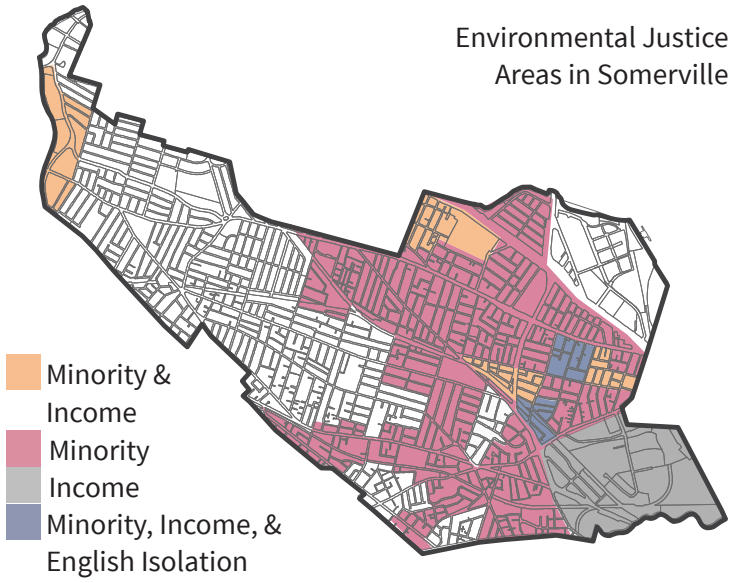
- New residents to Somerville may not be aware of emergency alerts and services available and may have difficulty with language access;
- Renters may have less capacity to make improvements to their homes and therefore could be more vulnerable to heat waves and flooding; and
- Seniors are more susceptible to extreme heat, the impacts from poor air quality, and insect-borne diseases and they may find it more difficult to access support services or evacuate during a climate event.

In addition, income and wealth influence the capacity to prepare for and recover from an extreme climate event. Thus, it is important to consider the role of policies, programs, and institutions which have historically distributed risks and opportunities unequally across the population.

The Wellbeing of Somerville Report highlights air quality as an environmental issue with serious health implications. Research shows that Somerville is a community disproportionately burdened with poor air quality, especially in the neighborhoods adjacent to Interstate 93 and Route 38. According to the National Climate Assessment, climate change will affect human health by increasing ground-level ozone and/or particulate matter air pollution. Recent studies have shown that ultrafine particles emitted from traffic are associated with respiratory infections, lung cancer, heart attacks, stroke and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and are associated with elevated risk of asthma, heart conditions, and obesity.[1]

Ensuring a just and equitable transition to a clean energy economy and a clean energy future will not be easy. However, it's critical that any system the City deploys incorporates various language translations, easy access to information, and community events. Climate change will affect everyone in some way or another. To move forward, we must focus on the opportunities that are available to us.

Climate and Sustainability overlaps with several other chapters. Sustainability will need to be incorporated into all future plans that have any impact or expectation for future fossil emissions.



Environmental justice seeks to ensure the equitable distribution of environmental risks and benefits and fair and meaningful participation in environmental decision-making for all people, regardless of race, color, national origin, or income. In Massachusetts, an Environmental Justice Community is an area with a median household income that is equal to or less than 65% of the statewide median, or an area with over 25% of residents identifying as a race other than white, or an area with over 25% of households having no one over the age of 14 who speaks English very well, or some combination of the three.

1 Walker, Douglas I., et al. "Metabolomic assessment of exposure to near-highway ultrafine particles." Journal of exposure science & environmental epidemiology (2018): 1.



GOALS AND TAKEAWAYS

Leverage control. Above all, Somerville needs to understand what aspects of emissions we have control over, and what we can do within that realm to reset unconscious norms. For example, supporting permeable pavement or planting native plants or trees able to survive the anticipated heat. These must be deliberately considered and acted upon.

Target behavior change. Behavior change is needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The community wants to make better choices, but the City should support efforts to make "better choices" more intuitive and straightforward.

Re-evaluate programs. Programs that were the right fit for the Somerville of 10, 20, 50 years ago, might not be the right fit for the Somerville of today. For example, the City currently utilizes zero-sort recycling (a SomerVision 2030 recommendation), which often has the unfortunate side-effect of decreasing the efficacy of recycling programs. We should continually monitor the results of programs to make sure they're still the best fit for our community and stated goals.

Focus on our largest GHG contributor. Buildings are the largest contributor to Somerville's emissions, and we need to continue to focus on them even though we have limited leverage. We need to support building retrofits, keeping in mind that improvements resulting in cost of living increases is an undesirable outcome.

EQUITY GOAL

Expand messaging. Climate change solutions will entail large changes for residents, local businesses, and how the City operates. How can we help the community understand and accept these changes prior to implementation?



Continue to educate and incentivize. Somerville can think creatively about how to incentivize positive behavior change (for example commuting by bike instead of by car or having a public forum to formalize commitments to fly less like Europe's No-Fly Pledges.

Integrate sustainability in other City objectives. Whether the city budget, neighborhood planning, or regulation, we need to integrate sustainability in all City processes, especially the way we live and move about.

Include food. Food systems are both heavily impacted and contributors to climate change and a community's resilience. In line with the Somerville Food Assessment findings, Somerville should aim to minimize the amount of food that is wasted and support local emergency food providers in creating a more cohesive network for receiving and distributing recoverable food.

Plan ahead. Someville will continue to see the impacts of climate change. We should investigate what actions Somerville can take to further reduce the immediate impacts of climate change that are likely by 2040. The City should put specific emphasis on serving low-income and high-vulnerability individuals with targeted climate change mitigation and emergency preparedness programs. For example, as tree cover mitigates the urban heat island effect, how can we expand tree cover to make more space available for tree plantings on public and private property? We need to consider adaptations for the future and what avenues exist to ease them – how do we learn to live with heat.

EQUITY GOAL

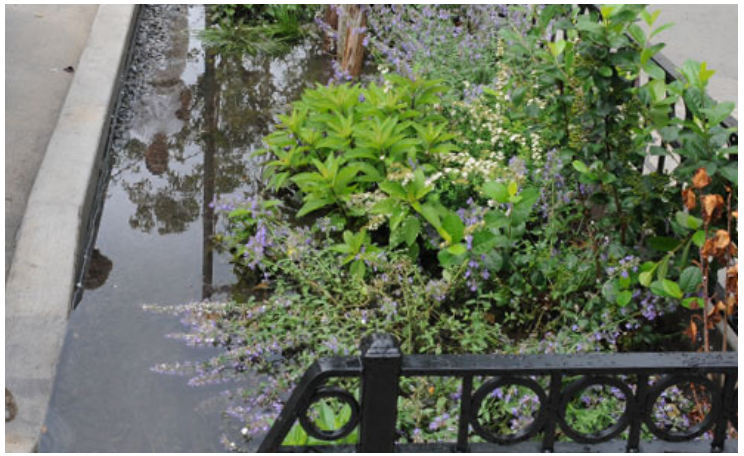


Prioritize Infrastructure. Our infrastructure plays a critical role in improving our sustainability and resiliency to future climate events. We should explore traditional and innovative ways of addressing our problems.

POTENTIAL TASKS

- Align sustainability values with existing city programs and policies.
- Continue to pursue policies that make Somerville less dependent on fossil fuel emissions.
- Develop a plan and guidelines for combating urban heat island impacts.
- Develop policy incentives to encourage sustainable behavior relating to consumer awareness – particularly for building energy consumption, but also for consumer good and transportation choices.

- Familiarize residents with various funds for supporting sustainable development, or consider generating a fund and encouraging residents to donate towards maintaining/planting vegetation locally as an offset for air travel.
- Incentivize landlords to make retrofits, which reduce fossil fuel emissions, improve indoor air quality, and increase resilience to flooding and heat extremes in older housing stock.
- Support and encourage green leasing efforts.
- Support implementation of the Stormwater Management Plan.
- Educate renters to ask for average utility costs prior to renting.
- Require education on residential energy efficiency measures and financial incentives as part of any City-sponsored first time homebuyer programs.
- Build on the zoning overhaul and increase or add new sustainability metrics.
- Publicize Somerville's sustainability-related values more prominently.
- Leverage social networks and citizen groups to share information and opportunities for reducing climate impacts, including food waste.
- Consider the use of public benchmark data for friendly competition between consumers: disaggregate and publicize data for neighborhoods to recognize good behavior and galvanize those who can improve.
- Ensure that materials on climate change are translated into multiple languages and are available to a wide diversity of groups, especially those most impacted by climate change.

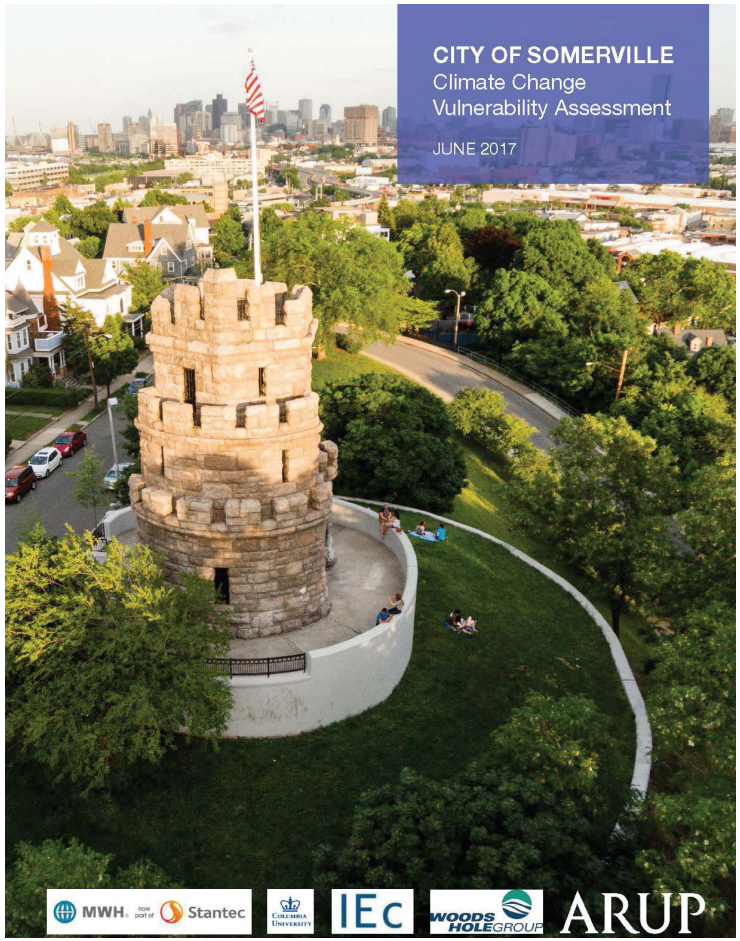




- Adopt visible symbols of our commitments - explore opportunities to support renewable energy production.
- Engage the community in conversations around emergency response plans related to extreme weather events and disruptions to food supply due

to climate change impacts. These conversations should inform the development of community-driven emergency response plans and aim to increase personal resilience to climate change. They should be well-promoted to a variety of subpopulations.

- Publicize Somerville's successes to other communities to demonstrate that sustainable living is possible and encourage other communities to take steps to reap the same benefits.
- Educate Somerville residents and businesses on climate issues and available actions, to build a citywide culture of engagement and awareness.
- Utilize existing communication forums to enhance citizen awareness. For example add current air quality readings to the City website or within the Somerville newspapers.
- Leverage communications technologies and social media. For example provide text message notifications on days with poor air quality to encourage residents to abstain from driving, minimizing additional pollution and protecting their health. Many Somerville residents groups are highly active on social media, which can be used to personalize city announcements or initiatives.
- We should increase scientific literacy of City officials. Somerville already focuses on data-based problem solving. Enhance this by educating City staff and elected officials about new technologies, adaptation strategies, and other solutions.
- Get more community members engaged in climate issues by building a citywide culture of sustainability. For example match engaged residents with those who are less able to devote time to understanding and acting upon climate mitigation initiatives. This could include initiatives like planting vegetable gardens, grocery shopping to minimize plastic consumption, or providing forums for high school students to learn about the issues.
- Support public engagement. Somerville can identify, support, and disseminate grassroots efforts already



A vulnerability assessment explores what aspects of a system might be sensitive to certain threats. The City's Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment focused particularly on sea level rise and storm surge, precipitation, and temperature to analyze how the city would be directly affected by anticipated climate change. This enabled the City to identify the most at-risk populations, assets, and systems, which informed the Climate Forward planning process.

underway and leverage these to drive changes, particularly in the emissions-heavy building and transportation sectors.

- Expand data-driven action and establish protocols for data collection on local air quality on an ongoing and permanent basis.
- Transportation and land-use planning decisions can lower traffic related air pollution and resident exposure. Somerville should leverage the planning process to:
    - Put standards in place for new buildings to ensure that indoor air pollution (allergens and particulate pollution) is significantly reduced from outside
    - Pursue protective ordinances in areas within 500' of a high-traffic roadway
    - Mitigation measures for air pollution generation, such as EV stations
    - Emphasize road diet and walkability score; and
    - Emphasize transportation equity for transportation modes, but prioritize low emission mobility
- Create programs to help existing property owners and tenants within 500' of high capacity roadways.
- Support pedestrians, cyclists, and additional public transit. Between traffic gridlock and MBTA dysfunction, the timing is right to experiment with alternative methods like biking, Mystic River ferry service, dedicated bus lanes, street cars, paratransit, and micro-mobility (for example electric bikes and scooters).
- Leverage the Green Line Extension. This major change gives the city a window of opportunity to make other changes to reduce vehicle miles traveled and consequent emissions. These opportunities include restricting parking permits in transit-accessible areas, increasing the cost of city parking permits, and reducing street parking in favor of space for carbon neutral (or even negative) emissions, like bike lanes





or more trees.

- Take full advantage of existing natural resources. While many green spaces are used and appreciated, other resources like the Mystic River can be further developed as community spaces. New connectivity can help residents access and value the natural world.
- Revisit historic precedents. Somerville used to have many more people, yet much less vehicular traffic. Engage with our history to better understand what low-emission living looked like in Somerville and how we can readapt it today.
- Make thoughtful land use choices. Somerville neighborhoods are walkable, with good sidewalks and often many nearby services and destinations like stores and restaurants. Can neighborhoods further expand their self-sufficiency both to build social capital and minimize the need for vehicle trips? This initiative will be especially powerful if it includes job creation.
- Consider grant programs or financing options for any retrofitting projects residents apply to their homes and/or modes of transport.
- Evaluate waste streams including trash, recycling, and organic waste. Past solutions may not be 2040 solutions. New technologies may make for more efficient waste disposal.

Commercial Development, Business, & Arts

Commercial development plays an important role in the future of Somerville as it provides revenue to support City services, brings jobs to residents that can reduce commutes, and provides a larger daytime population for existing retail and service businesses. Currently, only 17% of the city's property tax is commercial, and only 15% of the city's working residents work in Somerville. However, additional development to increase these ratios will require policies that optimize the city's strengths and effectively manage its challenges.

STRENGTHS

Somerville's workforce is one of its major strengths. One of the most important location criteria for new-economy employers is to be where the talent is. Somerville has the second-highest proportion of residents with advanced degrees among the Commonwealth's 351 municipalities. With its wealth of artistic, musical, and culinary amenities, the city has been a magnet for millennial workers and students who provide a ready workforce for business expansion.

Somerville has emerged as a leader among cities of its size in mobilizing community, industry, and government partners to analyze and further develop this impressive workforce. The recently published Somerville Talent Equity Playbook articulates a coordinated strategy for preparing its residents for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Investment in the new Somerville High School promises to bring state-of-the-art facilities to support its lauded Career and Technical Education program. Jobs linkage – an impact fee paid by commercial developments – provides resources to fund impactful programs to prepare residents for new jobs.

In addition, Somerville's close proximity to the region's preeminent commercial centers, research and educational institutions, and capital sources provide further incentive for workers to locate in the region as well as a proximity advantage to businesses who locate within the city. Somerville's transit access through the Red Line, Orange Line, and the Green Line Extension reinforces this advantage.

Somerville's renaissance over the last generation has been sparked by artists, musicians, students, and other creative types transforming abandoned factories into vital centers for innovation, ideas, and weirdness. Artistic initiatives like Open Studios, Art Beat, the Nibble Kitchen, and Honk! Fest

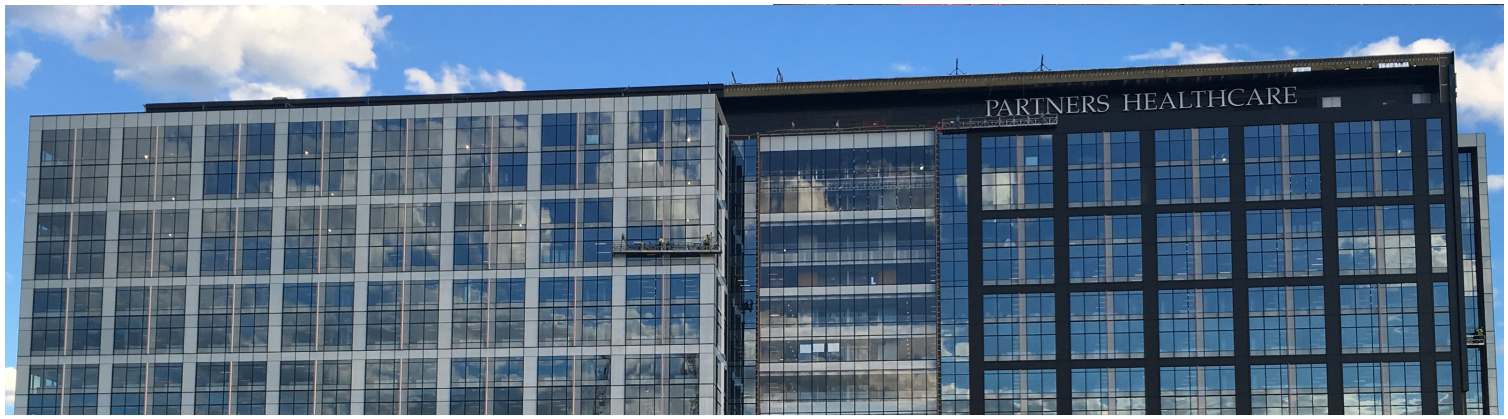
The SomerVision Number

1:1

JOBS TO WORKER RATIO
by 2040

By increasing commercial development and supporting home-based businesses, we hope to have one job for every working-age resident in Somerville by 2040. Related indicators include the square footage of dedicated artist space, the number of minority-owned businesses, the kinds of jobs available in the city, and income inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient.

The scope of the Commercial Development, Business, and the Arts topic chapter is: commercial development, main streets and squares, job quality, the economy, support for businesses, workforce development, job creation, commercial tax revenue, artists, creative economy.



help promote and preserve this spirit of creation that has become the cornerstone of Somerville's emerging economy. This helps to build Somerville's national reputation as a city of innovation – another strength of our community. Wise management of the City's commercial development will protect and extend these creative, innovative, and entrepreneurial forces.

These strengths have facilitated an ecosystem of assets that provide additional incentive for businesses and artists to work in Somerville. For example, Somerville boasts the largest cleantech incubator in North America, Greentown Labs; New England's oldest and largest makerspace, Artisan's Asylum; and a variety of other artist studios, entrepreneurial startups, and creative initiatives. This spirit is contagious and creates a competitive advantage in a world that increasingly values new ideas and creative problem-solving.

With these kinds of strengths, Somerville is poised for strong initiatives around commercial development, business growth, and further support of the arts.

OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

Commercial development provides opportunities to improve our community and engage businesses as major stakeholders of our built environment. By creating new tax revenue, commercial development can shift tax burden away from homeowners. Shifting this revenue would allow the City to provide high-quality services while keeping residential tax rates low.

Another opportunity commercial development offers is to increase the number of jobs in the community. Commercial development would increase the chance that more residents work in the city in which they live. This could reduce vehicle trips, strengthen community, and improve family life by reducing commute times. More commercial development would also produce a daytime population sufficient enough to support existing and new small businesses.



The City's technical assistance programs provide a variety of support for small businesses in Somerville. Historically, this program focused on providing grants to help improve storefronts, like for Winter Hill Brewery. Today, the Small Business Support program provides a combination of free one-on-one expert coaching for business owners and grants for improvements, and can benefit not only storefront businesses but home-based entrepreneurs as well.

To take advantage of the opportunities commercial development brings, a number of challenges must be overcome. Uncertainty is one obstacle that has always existed; historically, this was the concern that Somerville was not a desirable enough location to sustain commercial uses. Today, Somerville is increasingly attractive to biotech and digital technology employers, but some commercial developers remain skeptical. This can be due to the unpredictability of zoning requirements, fee structures, approval processes, environmental contamination, and community-benefit obligations. However, the advantages of Somerville may continue to outweigh these uncertainties.

Somerville's increasing desirability as a place to live and work is creating new challenges for those who wish to promote commercial development. As discussed in the Housing chapter, housing costs are rising, resulting in the displacement of many residents and a shortage of available housing stock. This causes problems for large employers looking to attract talent as well as small retail and restaurant businesses who are facing increasing challenges finding staff. Rising commercial rents are also affecting our small businesses that contribute to the very soul of Somerville neighborhoods. Smart policymaking can mitigate the role commercial development plays in these rising costs and protect the existing squares and main streets that are an important part of the Somerville community.

Another challenge is preserving the artistic community in the City. Rising costs and affordability are the biggest challenges artists cite in continuing to work in Somerville



and have resulted in the displacement of some artistic institutions already. Although there are many art events throughout the year, there are fewer permanent spaces to allow artists to display and sell their work year-round, in part because of the expense of space. The fabrication district has started to address this issue in zoning but it's not a panacea.

Somerville businesses are also dependent on larger social, economic, and consumer dynamics. Minority-owned and immigrant-owned businesses face particular obstacles in securing necessary startup capital and may require additional support to overcome these barriers. Changes in shopping behavior mean that retailers and other small businesses need to be more creative in how they attract and retain customers, but they are still typically working within more traditional permitting and licensing structures.

Commercial development in some ways is a keystone. It provides direct benefits but also creates revenue that could be applied toward designated social programs to bolster community objectives like housing, workforce development programs, open space, and small business support. It could create a market for and produce sufficient municipal surplus to support the creative economy.

GOALS AND TAKEAWAYS

Add jobs. Prioritize commercial development until the number of jobs in Somerville is equal to the number of working residents. This will build a fiscally healthier and more vibrant community. In Boston and Cambridge, the ratio of jobs to working residents is, respectively, 1.6 and 1.8. Currently the Somerville ratio is 0.5.

Encourage more commercial development. Develop sufficient commercial property to generate 50% of property tax revenue from commercial sources.





The City has worked with Tech Goes Home to provide free computer classes to business owners. Participating business owners receive small group coaching in English, Spanish, or Portuguese about how to improve their website, search listings, or financial management on the computer. At the end of the program, participants can purchase their own Chromebook at an extremely discounted rate, an opportunity that can make a big difference for a small business.





Continue to support small businesses. Work to create an environment that enables existing small businesses to thrive and produce entrepreneurial opportunities for new ones. Ensure that the regulatory environment supports the innovative business models necessary for businesses to adapt.

Focus business support on minority-owned businesses. Minority- and immigrant-owned businesses face particular challenges, and business support services should reflect this.

EQUITY GOAL

Promote sustainability in commercial development. Ensure that commercial development uses sustainable design, technology, and practices.

In worker cooperatives employees have shared ownership of the business and participate in its financial success on the basis of their labor contribution. It has the potential to create more democratic and equitable businesses. How can the CIty support and encourage more worker cooperatives ?

Promote Somerville as a forward-thinking place to do business. Enhance Somerville's reputation as a center for technological and environmental innovation.

Find ways for commercial development to support small businesses. Explore how to leverage new development to provide additional benefits including small retail spaces or more affordable space for new and existing independent, local businesses.

EQUITY GOAL

Support and protect artists. With rising costs, special effort is needed to preserve and extend Somerville's status as a home for artists and musicians.

Help promote accessibility and universal design in businesses. Explore how to provide technical and financial assistance to existing businesses to help them be more accessible, and encourage universal design in future commercial development.

POTENTIAL TASKS

- Zone commercial corridors that are in easy walking distance of existing and planned subway stops as commercial only.
- Master plan and then update zoning in the "Transform" areas as office and R&D districts (taking in consideration the Minimum Mixed-Use Ratio study), with supporting residential, retail, hotel, open-space, and public uses.
- Zone and develop Boynton Yards as a biotech cluster and ecodistrict.
- Develop programs that prepare residents especially youth and displaced workers for the needs of employers located in the city, in cooperation with the Center for Career and Technical Education, community colleges, and labor unions.
- Create a public/private team of Somerville stakeholders that promotes the city as a tech center and recruits desirable commercial tenants. Emphasize businesses that create a range of jobs with upwardly mobile career paths.
- Create incentives and requirements for commercial developments to maximize sustainability.
- Adopt zoning that favors independent and locally-owned small businesses.
- Create a requirement that development has a percentage related to the arts. For example, some cities require 1% of a major development's costs be used for murals or local artist projects.
- Work on zoning amendments to support the goals of this chapter and ensure the availability of land best suited to accommodate commercial development.
- Provide a city program for immigrant entrepreneurs to help them to establish small businesses.
- Explore incentives for commercial building owners to



preserve existing studio spaces for artists.

- Continue to promote and invest in “shop local,” “main street,” and our “loyal to local,” programs to support small businesses and any organizations which do the same.
- Establish a system of developer requirements, balanced with incentives, to support local artists, prevent displacement of unique small businesses, and promote minority entrepreneurship.
- Host workshops or other programming to support artists with the business side of their work.
- Develop and implement a system of “innovation zoning” that ensures available space to enterprises throughout their life cycles, from start-up to maturity.
- Reuse at least one municipal building for support of the local arts and artists.
- Create a program to help connect local artists with Somerville businesses who would display or sell their work on their walls.
- Pursue planning efforts about how to best preserve, support, and grow economic opportunity within the arts, possibly through the development of a cultural plan.
- Incentivize property owners to lease to small businesses to prevent displacement, possibly through real estate tax breaks.
- Update local code and advocate for state code changes to facilitate shared use of commercial space among entrepreneurs.
- Consider requiring a construction mitigation plan for master plan projects that address the resources that will be spent to help existing businesses weather the impacts of construction.


Rendering from DiscoverUSQ.com

Community & Governance

The Community and Governance topic chapter is new in SomerVision 2040. This chapter is intentionally broad to attempt to capture the unique nature of Somerville. The chapter entails everything from the feeling a new resident has about their adopted city to the procedures and systems that City Hall uses to engage its constituents. To understand this topic fully and dive into a level of detail that allows for specific goals and tangible action items, this chapter is divided into two sections: Community Ties and Governance.

COMMUNITY TIES

Community ties make up the fabric of our city. They are the conversations between neighbors; the varied connections between residents of different ages, backgrounds, and life-paths; and each resident's sense of belonging in Somerville that make this city great. This section focuses on the community ties that already exist in Somerville, the challenges and opportunities they face, and the ways that they should be strengthened and deepened.

STRENGTHS

For many people, Somerville has long been an attractive place to live because of its strong sense of community. This sense of community was supported by a number of factors that we should work to preserve going forward. One of these strengths was the diverse population of residents that the city's history of affordability and convenient access attracted. Somerville was, and still is, home to groups of residents who share common interests: artists and musicians, gardeners and makers, entrepreneurs and community advocates. It has also been a gathering point for immigrants of many backgrounds and nationalities. Many of these resident groups connect over their shared interests or backgrounds and their connections help strengthen the broader community fabric.

Somerville's frequent community events is another advantage. Each year in Somerville, residents participate in Carnaval, Artbeat, Porchfest, Fluff Festival, Somerville Open Studios, Haiti and Brazil hit the 'Ville, Honk Festival, and many more community-wide events. These events, which are closely related to Somerville residents' diverse interests and backgrounds, can serve as catalysts for community ties, strengthening residents' connections to Somerville and each other.

Somerville's robust business community also plays an important role in fostering community ties in the city. Somerville's varied businesses, many of which are

The SomerVision Number



Setting a numeric goal seems like a mismatch for the topics of community and governance, but there are plenty of indicators to help assess the health and strength of our community. These include **voter turnout**, the **share of City workers who are minorities** and the **share of board and commission members who are minorities.**

The scope of the Community & Governance topic chapter is: civic engagement, diversity, community belonging, constituent service, government processes and structures, committees and commissions, communication, building community and connection.

One way to foster community is by making sure there are physical gathering spaces. Somerville has done an excellent job of this for their public spaces – people love the Community Path, Davis and Union Squares, and our many parks and playgrounds. However, Somerville is short of adequate indoor gathering spaces as highlighted in the Community Spaces Report.

The Somerville libraries serve as one gathering place. Librarians provide an array of ever-changing programming for every interest beyond your average bookclub. The libraries are also a hub for teens during after school time. However, seniors lamented a lack of community gathering space and city staff sometimes struggle to find the right location or type of meeting room for community meetings. Creating indoor community space for Somerville residents is a challenge in increasing communities ties.

locally owned, provide places for residents to meet and congregate, provide financial support for community events or youth sports teams, and lead to more connections between proprietors, staff, and residents. For many residents of Somerville, the city's rich community ties are an essential part of its character and appeal and we should work to preserve its strengths and overcome its obstacles in this area.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Somerville faces multiple threats to the strength and longevity of its community ties. The largest and most immediate threat is the rising costs of housing[1] and the resulting displacement of residents. When residents are forced to leave the city because of untenable costs, their departure severs ties with neighbors and erodes the fabric of connections that make the city stronger. The threat of displacement is particularly strong for Somerville's lower-income and fixed-income residents meaning that their community ties are most at risk. The resulting social isolation was recognized as a risk factor for all ages in the Somerville Wellbeing Report.

While many current residents of Somerville are finding it necessary to move away, many new residents are moving to Somerville, especially young professionals. Between 2010 to 2017, the City's population rose 7%, from 75,754 to 81,361 and the number of residents aged between 25-34 years old increased by an estimated 5,245 people to approximately one third of Somerville's entire population[2]. Meanwhile, the number of residents aged 18 and under dropped nearly 20% and the number of residents between the ages of 35-54 also decreased[3]. The rapid influx of new residents means new community ties need to be created so that new residents feel a part of the broader community. In addition, the concentration of any one age group poses a





1 "Somerville MA Home Prices & Home Values." Somerville MA Home Prices & Home Values, Zillow, 2019, www.zillow.com/somerville-ma/home-values/
2 U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Census (2000) and American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2013-2017)
3 U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Census (2000) and American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (2013-2017)

potential threat to the sense of belonging and community ties of residents in other age groups.

GOALS AND TAKEAWAYS

Knowing the importance of community ties for the happiness and health of our city, Somerville must work to defend and strengthen this fabric of relationships. Somerville should prioritize the following goals and take action to advance them.

Support families and promote their longevity in Somerville. Families have long been a building block of community in Somerville. Families often prefer to stay in one place longer and have more reasons to connect with the larger community (for example through schools, sports, activities) than the average individual. As a result, families can play an essential role in building the rich community fabric we value. We need to prioritize helping Somerville residents who want to stay in the city do so and devote significant resources towards supporting those communities who are most at risk of displacement.

Fight displacement. One of the largest threats to the community ties that we value so much is the rapid displacement of existing residents. When a long-time resident or family is displaced from Somerville, not only are their ties severed, but the entire fabric of community ties gets weaker. We should prioritize helping Somerville residents who want to stay in the city do so and lend extra support to those communities most at risk.

EQUITY GOAL

Help all residents connect. The current reality is that



In this photo, City staff and volunteers are trained on data collection techniques to support the creation of the 2016 Public Space, Public Life Report. Volunteers in Somerville make many data-collecting endeavors possible, including our annual pedestrian / bike counts in all major Somerville intersections.

Internet access plays a critical role in the lives of most people regardless of age and background, whether for education, employment, entertainment, civic participation, communication, creativity, research, innovation, or collaboration. In 2017,there were parts of Somerville where 25% of households lacked home internet. Access needs have been highlighted as a result of the Covid-19 health emergency with working, schooling, and public meetings virtually becoming the new normal.

Eliminating the digital divide is crucial to strengthening community and governance. Somerville's Internet Access Task Force, convened in 2018 and 2019, envisions a city where upload and download internet access is convenient, accessible, and reliable for every person and company. The task force's report lays out our community's challenges with access, speed, and net neutrality – and provides recommendations for improving access.



Somerville's population has seen high levels of turnover[4]. In addition to resisting the displacement of current residents, we should actively welcome new residents and be deliberate about facilitating connections between all members of the community.

POTENTIAL TASKS

- Incorporate equity goals into new neighborhood plans and development proposals to embed the needs of marginalized communities into the planning process.
- Consider displacement as a critical risk in new city planning or policy and work to both reduce the risk of displacement and to support those who are most vulnerable to it.
- Invest in the Office of Housing Stability.
- Study the needs of Somerville's families to determine root causes of family displacement and migration.
- Establish design guidelines for family housing and zoning requirements for minimum percentages of family units (2 and 3-bedroom) in developments.
- Create and preserve public spaces, both indoor and outdoor, that enable and encourage connection between residents (for example community gardens, parks and playgrounds, recreational spaces, the community path, public plazas, etc.).
- Review permitting processes and reduce red-tape associated with holding community events.
- Encourage cross-generational connections in the community such as paired living situations, chore

4 "The Dimensions of Displacement – February 11, 2014 4." The Dimensions of Displacement – February 11, 2014 4, MAPC, 2014, www.mapc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Dimensions_of_Displacement_Final_Draft_2_10_14-1.pdf

services, volunteer opportunities, and community relations committees.

- Enhance the welcome card for new residents to go beyond logistical needs to help them connect with community groups, participate in events, and share their voice in the city's decision-making.

GOVERNANCE

Governance is how our community makes collective decisions and acts on them. It covers our city's government, the elected officials and professional staff that power it, and the structure within which they operate. It also includes the systems and processes that they use to make decisions and the nature of their discourse with Somerville's residents. Beyond just the city's government though, this section covers Somerville residents' civic engagement, their ability to understand the decisions being made – and to influence them, and the effectiveness of their organizations.

STRENGTHS

Somerville already benefits from several important elements of good governance. These strengths come both from its residents and their active, organized participation, and from the government itself, whose staff and elected officials have moved towards greater transparency and responsiveness.

Somerville has a group of committed, engaged residents who participate actively in the City's decision-making processes. These residents attend the numerous community meetings about topics such as the Green Line Extension, Union Square Redevelopment, and the Somerville High School renovation. These residents sit on the City's numerous commissions and spearhead community organizations such as the Gilman Square Neighborhood Association, Union Square Neighborhood Council, and East Somerville Main Streets. Many of these residents bring relevant knowledge and experience along with their participation.



The Mayor and City Council (as pictured in 2018). From left to right first row: Stephanie Hirsch, Katjana Ballantyne, Mayor Joe Curtatone, Matt McLaughlin, Bill White. Second Row: Ben Ewen-Campen, Jesse Clingan, Mark Niedergang, Mary Jo Rossetti, Lance Davis, Will Mbah, and J.T. Scott. In early 2020 , Councilor Hirsch stepped down and Kristen Strezo (not pictured) was sworn in as her replacement shortly afterward.

In addition, Somerville's government has several existing strengths. Although less well-funded than its neighboring governments in Cambridge and Boston, Somerville's tax levy in FY19 was $155M, the 12th highest in the state[5]. Also, the city's multi-decade rise in appeal, its growing regional stature, and its track-record of innovative measures enhances its ability to meet the community's goals. Finally,

5 "Data Analytics and Resources Bureau Tax Levies by Class." Data Analytics and Resources Bureau Tax Levies by Class, Division of Local Services, 1 Oct. 2019, dlsgateway.dor.state.ma.us/reports/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=Dashboard.TrendAnalysisReports.TaxLevyByClass.

the City has already built a reputation of responsive government, investing in systems such as 311, encouraging community input through neighborhood planning, and fostering an open relationship with Somerville's business community which was lauded at the SomerVision Business Owners Forum. Hopefully these strengths will help Somerville effectively address the challenges and opportunities it still faces.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Although Somerville's governance benefits from some strengths, it faces challenges in the extent of the community's engagement, the speed and transparency of its decision making, and its ability to address issues that are regional in nature.

Only a small portion of Somerville residents participate in decisions that influence them. Although the City benefits from an actively engaged segment of the population, this group is small compared to the city's population. Because there are significant costs to being part of the decision-making process, most residents cannot, or choose not to participate. The time needed to be effective, access to childcare, and language are all barriers for many residents that limit their ability to attend community meetings and public hearings. For others, not understanding what the process is and how to make their voice heard prevents them from having input in the decisions that influence them. In a time when Somerville is undergoing significant changes, ensuring that all residents can have a voice in these changes is a critical challenge facing the city.

Did you know that the City gets about 100,000 calls to the 311 system yearly? The calls are picked up quickly (less than 20 seconds) and hold times are less than 30 seconds. The average call time is about 2:30. Have a question? Give the City a ring at 3-1-1 from a landline phone or 617-666-3311 from a cell phone or outside of Somerville.

Another important challenge is the speed and transparency



with which decisions are made. It can be difficult for residents to understand how decisions that affect them directly were made and what the reasoning behind them was. Also, some decisions, such as the zoning overhaul, have taken so long to be made that maintaining active participation throughout the process is difficult and the conditions under which decisions are considered has changed.

Perhaps Somerville's greatest challenge in governance is its lack of control over the regional forces that impacts its residents in significant ways. Somerville is a small part of a large metropolitan area and participates in a regional market for housing, relies on a regional system of public transportation, and works in a regional economy. The Sustainable Neighborhoods Working Group Report noted that Somerville housing prices increase when employment opportunities grow in Boston and Cambridge, and when new construction is limited in surrounding communities, or

when MBTA access is not expanded to new areas. Highways that serve the northeast metro area pollute the air that residents of East Somerville breathe[6]. Many of the problems that Somerville residents experience have regional causes and will require regional solutions that are beyond the City government's jurisdiction. Finding ways to build coalitions, inspire action, and enforce collaboration is a critical challenge that the City will need to address in order to tackle its residents' largest problems.

GOALS AND TAKEAWAYS

An effective, representative, and transparent government is critical to the health of a city. Somerville should prioritize the following goals and take action on them.

Lower barriers to participation in city governance. There are a number of barriers for residents to make their voice heard in the city's decision-making processes. There's the time needed to attend numerous community meetings, the accompanying costs such as childcare or transportation, and there's the attention and knowledge needed to follow various sources of information about the topics under discussion. In addition, there are barriers to specific groups of residents, such as the difficulty in accessing some meeting locations, the timing of meetings, or the language in which they're held. We should strive to lower all of these barriers for the City and community partners and work to accommodate all residents who want to participate in order to include more diverse voices in the decision-making.

EQUITY GOAL

Increase transparency and trust in decision-making process. We should increase transparency in City government and help residents to understand the decision-making process. It should be clear to stakeholders, beforehand and afterwards, when key decisions will be made, in what manner, and how they can make their perspective heard.

Invite community organizations into the decision-making process. Civic organizations play a valuable role in advocating for the rights and interests of their member communities. The City should actively seek their input and invite them into relevant decision-making processes.

Find ways to drive change on a regional level. Many of Somerville's challenges are regional in nature. We need

6 Galvin, Gaby. "Fighting for Breath in Near-Highway Neighborhoods." Better Air Means Better Health in Somerville Massachusetts, U.S. News & World Report, 10 Apr. 2018, www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/articles/2018-04-10/better-air-means-better-health-in-somerville-massachusetts.



Members of the Gilman Square Neighborhood Association Steering Committee and the Executive Director of Strategic Planning and Community Development sign an agreement to help the two organizations collaborate more effectively over the next year.

Next City (nextcity.org) profiled Ithaca, New York in a May 2019 article for being (possibly) the first city to offer daycare at all city council and commission meetings. In the article Mayor Svante Myrick stated, "The same people show up at all the meetings, and that can lead to mistakes in decision making... That's something that's been haunting me. … The city looks different than the meeting room. [The city is] a lot younger and it's less white. … We set out to see how we can get more people involved in local government, and this is one of the policies we've come up with." The article also references a recently completed study from Boston University where they analyzed several thousand meeting minutes. The research determined that residents most likely to participate in planning commission meetings across America were "older, male, longtime residents." Providing childcare might be a way of diversifying feedback on proposed policies.

to establish more powerful mechanisms for creating and pushing for regional solutions.

POTENTIAL TASKS

- Study and implement ways to expand access to critical City meetings. Measures such as providing childcare, offering translation services, scheduling meetings at non-traditional times, and enabling remote attendance through video conferencing technology should be explored. Also, explore engaging and supporting community organizations to help drive or enhance this effort.
- Study the potential impacts of Somerville's government structure and ensure that it is conducive to maximum engagement and fair representation.
- Actively elicit input from a broader cross section of residents, seeking input from community groups and underrepresented populations, including tenants.
- Create a centralized source of information about all public processes and initiatives, which outlines the planned meetings, the timeline, and clearly shows key milestones, opportunities for involvement, and decision points. Update this outline when the process changes. As part of this, define a standard structure for communicating the purpose of meetings that is included in its posting (e.g. presentation only, public comments, non-binding vote, binding vote, etc.)
- Scale the radius of notification for required abutters notice based on the size of the project.
- Actively reach out to relevant community groups to include them in key decision making processes.
- Explore devolving power, spreading it from central sources like the Mayor's Office to commissions and citizen groups.



- Recruit diversity on decision-making commissions including social and ethnic backgrounds, age, etc.
- Build and leverage coalitions with neighboring communities to tackle shared problems.
- Lobby the Commonwealth to take, enable, and enforce action on regional challenges.
- Explore methods of expanding Somerville's ability to influence change on a regional level.
- Match communication platforms to citizen ability to reach the largest and most diverse audience possible.

Housing

STRENGTHS

The phrase "housing crisis," unfortunately, rings close to home for many of the residents of Somerville. The challenges in solving this problem are multifaceted. We will leverage our strengths to rise up to this challenge.

Somerville is a diverse, vibrant, and welcoming place to live. Our community is very involved and many have come out in support of various efforts to make Somerville more accessible and affordable in multiple ways.

We are lucky that in addition to the robust civil society Somerville itself has to offer, our close proximity to the schools and industries of Boston and Cambridge also make Somerville a highly desirable destination. This is further supported by good public transportation (set to be further enhanced by the Green Line Extension).

In addition, Somerville already has a remarkable track record in advancing progressive housing policies, for example: Inclusionary Zoning, the Condominium Conversion Ordinance, the Community Preservation Act, and the Community Land Trust. Somerville also has an administration, city council, and constituents interested in doing more.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

There are six main housing-related challenges facing the city: the rising cost of housing, the lack of affordable housing, forced displacement, chronic homelessness, an insufficient diversity of housing stock, and an inadequate condition of the existing housing stock. This section provides background on each of the challenges, while in the next section we describe goals to address each of the challenges.

Dramatic increases in housing costs are reshaping Somerville. Between 2010 and 2017, median rent in Somerville increased by ~29%[1]. Currently, about 35% of renter households are cost-burdened, and this is expected to increase. Rent increases have hit the lowest-income Somerville residents especially hard: more than 80% of them are cost-burdened, leaving very little left over for other necessities. To learn more, see the callout on the next page.

The median sale price of houses roughly doubled between 2010 and 2018. These prices have generally been beneficial

The SomerVision Number

20%

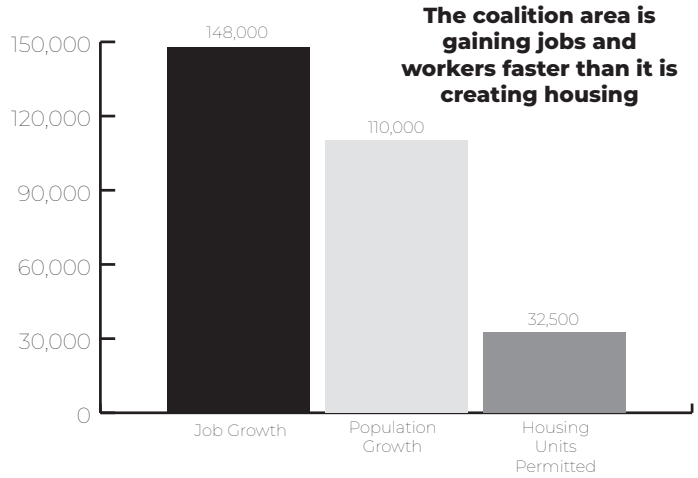
OF HOUSING STOCK AFFORDABLE
in perpetuity by 2040

To make an impact on housing affordability in Somerville, we must not only add to the existing building stock but also increase the share of housing that will be preserved as affordable forever. Related indicators include the number of new units built (both market-rate and affordable) and the share of households burdened by housing costs.

The scope of the Housing topic chapter is: affordable housing, housing for low and middle incomes, housing production, displacement, housing insecurity, and housing discrimination.

1 ACS 2010 and 2017 1-year estimates

Growth in the Metro Mayor's Coalition 2010-2017



Source: Metro Mayor's Coalition

A household is considered cost-burdened, when the rent or mortgage takes up more than 30% of a household's income. In 2017, according to ACS data, of renter households making under $50,000 more than 80% of them were cost-burdened. This income bracket is one third of Somerville's renter population. When households are cost burdened, its more likely that people are having to choose which bills to pay or what food to put on the table. In addition, unexpected expenses can be disasterous to the household.

for existing homeowners, but they have limited the possibility of purchasing a home in Somerville to only the upper class.

Somerville is anticipated to grow: the latest Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) projection shows an increase in population of ~13,000 (~15%) between 2017 and 2030[2]. This corresponds to approximately 5,500 new housing units that have to be built just to satisfy an increase in population (assuming the household size remains at the current level of ~2.37). Even more housing will be needed to potentially slow the increase in housing prices. It is important to note that Somerville represents just a small part of Greater Boston, and thus can only succeed if there is effort from the whole region. Notably, the Metro Mayors Coalition entered a pledge to add 185,000 new housing units across the region by 2030[3].

Only about 10% of units in Somerville are currently deed restricted affordable. For comparison, Boston has 19% and Cambridge has about 15%[4]. Very few units are "naturally affordable" anymore, so if Somerville is to remain accessible to low- and middle-income residents, the city will have to increase the proportion of subsidized units.

Since SomerVision 2030, an important update to the Inclusionary Zoning requirement was passed that raised the minimum requirement for inclusionary zoning to 20% in most new developments. This increase is important, but alone is insufficient. Though Somerville is adding new units that are subsidized, other units' subsidies are expiring, and unsubsidized units are continually becoming more and more unaffordable.

In addition, there are very few mechanisms to produce new units that are affordable to residents whose incomes are extremely low, defined as at or below 30% Area Median Income (AMI). Residents who have extremely low incomes do not qualify for inclusionary units unless they already have a housing voucher – something that often takes years to obtain. New affordable units made affordable through tax credits generally have rents targeted to those at 60% of AMI. The lack of creation of new units affordable to those with extremely low incomes poses a major barrier to accessing stable, affordable housing within Somerville. In order to meet the needs of the wide range of Somerville

2 Population and Housing Demand Projections for Metro Boston, MAPC (2014)
3 https://www.mapc.org/get-involved/coalitions/mmc/; pledge announced at the end of 2018
4 Department of Housing and Community Development Subsidized Housing Inventory (2017)

residents with critical need for affordable housing, models for developing new deeply affordable units must be established.

Affordability of homeownership presents a different challenge. The 2015 Housing Needs Assessment showed that less than 1% of owner housing in Somerville is currently subsidized. High housing prices make home ownership unaffordable to most Somerville residents. In 2014 only ~17% of current owners had incomes sufficient to purchase a condo in the city.

Soaring housing costs have already displaced many low-income residents. No one should be forced to leave their home or community because of a rent increase or a no-fault eviction. This is when a tenant is asked to leave the premises because the landlord wants to recapture the unit although there's been no lease violation. A common example of this is when the landlord wants to have a unit available for a relative move in. Displacement tears apart communities and causes ripple effects through people's lives. Unless community members and the City government (in coalition with the state and federal governments) take dramatic action, we can expect that housing costs will continue to increase, that more people will be displaced, and that more longstanding communities will be fractured. Especially in the context of the equity and health goals of SomerVision as a whole, stopping displacement is a critical issue.

Too many Somerville residents experience homelessness.



A discussion point amongst the SVC working groups including Commercial, Business, & the Arts and Housing was the mismatch between the available jobs in Somerville to the cost of housing. Many of the jobs that have been added in Somerville, in particular the food service and retail sectors, do not pay enough for employees to afford housing in Somerville..

People who are chronically homeless – defined by federal law as those who both have disabilities and experience long-term or repeated periods of homelessness – are especially vulnerable. There is a serious need for more permanent supportive housing units, but because rental costs are so high, securing these units is a major challenge. The types of housing (including location, size/bedroom count, and building type) should satisfy the demands of the diverse demographics and accessibility needs of the city. Importantly, conversations across the community highlighted the need for proactive planning for specific housing types instead of relying exclusively on market forces. Specifically, more housing should be geared towards families with children and seniors.

Somerville has one of the highest proportions of residents aged 25–34 (~33%)[5] among the communities of greater Boston, up from 30% in 2010[6]. These residents undoubtedly

5 ACS 2013-2017
6 ACS 2006-2010

contribute to the vibrancy of the city, and many new developments have targeted this demographic. However, Somerville has been struggling to convert them into long-term residents, as people in their mid-30s to mid-40s have been leaving. Additionally, the proportion of population below age 18 in the city dropped 20% between 2000 and 2017[7]; lack of family-friendly housing has been cited as a major concern.

Somerville's housing stock is also severely lacking with regard to accessible units—especially affordable accessible units. Developers of new construction should strive to utilize universal design that meets the needs of any and all Somerville residents alike, rather than just meeting the basic Americans with Disabilities Act requirements, which often fall short of actual need. While retrofitting existing housing stock is challenging and more costly than building accessible units initially, more needs to be done to provide owners with the necessary resources to make accessibility modifications and retrofit their older homes.

Somerville prides itself on the character of its neighborhoods. However, the age of the housing stock also presents significant challenges. Primary among these is the carbon footprint of our existing housing stock as well as the challenges involved in making it more resilient. About 88% of all housing units in the city were built prior to 1980, and 64% prior to 1939[8].

The City does operate the Housing Rehabilitation Program which provides 0% interest loans to assist homeowners in



making necessary repairs. Because the program is funded by HUD, there are income limits and rent caps for owners who are renting their units, which can make it difficult for homeowners to qualify for the loan. Many homeowners are either over the income limits or are charging market rent for their units, and thus do not qualify. The most common repairs are often to replace heating systems, roofs, or other major structural elements of a property, but owners are also currently utilizing the loan to make their homes more accessible.

An expansion of the program and sources of funding to allow for broader eligibility and an emphasis on rehabilitation for the purposes of accessibility would be beneficial to Somerville homeowners who may be faced with mobility challenges within their aging homes. The program is in need of additional funding sources and additional staff capacity to heighten community engagement and awareness of the program as well.

7 US Census (2000), ACS 2013-17
8 ACS 2013-2017

GOALS AND TAKEAWAYS

Encourage on-campus housing solutions. About 15% of Somerville residents are undergraduate (~6%) or graduate (~9%) students[9]. If more students were able to live on campus, more units would be available for other Somerville residents – particularly for families who require larger units that are often rented to groups of students. This is especially pertinent with regards to undergraduate students who are more likely to want to live on campus than graduate students (as the latter often work and/or have families). The City should work with local universities and support the development of on-campus housing, especially for undergraduate students

Increase the Housing Supply. A significant increase in the supply of housing is critical for the city to keep up with the increase in demand. Importantly, in building new housing the city must additionally pursue the goals of increasing affordability and housing stock diversity. The housing should be contextual to the existing or burgeoning neighborhood or serve as a transition to new building types. There are several other steps Somerville should consider taking to contain housing costs.

EQUITY GOAL

Increase the proportion of affordable housing. Somerville has always been a place for people of all incomes. Losing people of low- and middle-income is against our values of celebrating the diversity of our residents. Programs like inclusionary zoning and the 100 Homes program contribute to affordability, but not at a rate that can keep pace with the increased cost and demand of housing in Somerville. Creating and maintaining programs that allow people of low- and middle-incomes to live in Somerville is critical.

Stop forced displacement. Displacement is primarily a risk for renters, and with 66% of Somerville residents being renters, it poses a major challenge for the city. We need to make sure that people are secure and stable in their rental housing, as displacement is hugely disruptive to everyday life and can often separate residents from their established social circles, community, schools, and other essential social and medical services. This is particularly true for families with school-aged children. School-aged children may be receiving additional support in Individualized Education Programs, specialized school support, or other community services which may be disrupted following



AARP's Livable Communities Initiative includes AARP's Age Friendly Network program to expand the knowledge of member states, counties, and cities to make their communities more livable for a rapidly aging population. Somerville joined the Age Friendly Network program in 2018 and is currently working on an action plan. "The common thread among the enrolled communities and states is the belief that the places where we live are more livable , and better able to support people of all ages, when local leaders commit to improving the quality of life for the very young, the very old, and everyone in between."

9 ACS 2013-2017

displacement. Lower income residents (a group that includes a disproportionate number of seniors, immigrant, and disabled residents) are also increasingly vulnerable to displacement as they often cannot absorb high rent increases.

Protect Immigrants. Somerville must continue to protect immigrants. Undocumented tenants are especially vulnerable to pressure and abuse from landlords and they should be able to exercise their rights as everyone else can. Whenever the City takes measures to prevent displacement or protect tenants' rights it should explicitly aim to ensure that undocumented tenants are also protected. Somerville should strive to protect all renters but especially those that are the most vulnerable.

End chronic homelessness. Somerville should aim to end chronic homelessness through a "housing first" approach. People who are chronically homeless are among the most vulnerable in the city and rising housing costs have made it very difficult to secure permanent housing. The City should consider allocating more resources and securing new funding for additional permanent supportive housing units.

Support modernization of the existing housing. Our housing stock needs to be ready for the 21st century—low energy, resilient, healthy, and comfortable. To meet these goals, the majority of the houses in Somerville need significant renovations. Therefore, this goal needs thoughtful consideration to avoid the negative impacts associated with gut renovations. Insulation, purifying HVAC systems, and lead-free homes benefit renters and owners. However, we need to work to avoid tenant displacement that can occur when exorbitant renovation costs are passed down to renters.

Aim for Universal Design. Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. Using these concepts will make our housing accessible for everyone.

Universal design is the concept of using design to ensure that buildings, products, or environments are accessible to everyone regardless of ability, age, or other factors. Universal design is not about meeting the minimum legal requirements of a regulation like the Americans with Disabilities Act, but rather applying creative thinking to create places and things that are easy and beautiful for everyone to use. People often think of people with disabilities but universal design helps everyone - seniors, people with mobility aides, people pushing strollers and grocery carts, etc. It truly benefits everyone.

Ensure diversity of the housing stock. For Somerville to be a lifelong community, it needs housing for all stages of life. From infancy through old age, people's individual and family needs change. This relates to the size of units, but also their location, type of building, and accessibility to name a few. Somerville has a fairly monotonous housing supply of 1, 2, and 3-family wood frame homes. We need to strive to create different types of housing suitable for the different stages in life, even if that does introduce differences in our housing stock.

EQUITY GOAL

Promote continuity. By increasing the diversity in our housing stock we can better promote continuity of the community, increase the age diversity, and further enforce our overarching vision of making Somerville an exceptional place to live, work, play, raise a family, and grow older.

POTENTIAL TASKS

- Continually re-examine our zoning as well as other regulations pertaining to housing to ensure that the community can adapt to the rapidly changing environment.
- Establish a task force with sufficient resources and expertise to meet our target level of affordable housing and tools to enable both market and non-market developers to generate that target.
- Explore innovative solutions to high housing costs (For example, 3D-printed homes and modular construction).
- Engage local universities and neighboring communities to encourage new on-campus housing.
- Review the zoning map and examine opportunities in places with good transit access like Davis and Porter Squares share in the development of the city.
- Continue to closely partner with other towns in the Greater Boston area to ensure a common strategy to combat the housing crisis.
- Continue to increase the supply of housing as a key strategy for containing costs.
- Encourage contextual housing infill in the conserve, enhance, or transform areas.
- Prioritize planning efforts in the transformational areas of SomerVision.
- Expand the subsidized housing options to include middle-income households.
- Continue to partner with non-profit developers to increase the supply of permanently affordable housing.
- Consider an affordable housing overlay district in zoning.
- Expand revenue sources for affordable housing development. For example, a Vacancy Tax or Real Estate Transfer Fee.
- Create a right-to-counsel program.
- Create a just cause eviction policy.
- Disseminate information about tenants' rights, especially for non-English-speaking tenants.
- Collect data on displacement in Somerville.
- Investigate rent stabilization solutions.
- Expand revenue sources for permanent supportive



Expanding senior housing options was a concern brought up during the SomerVision 2040 feedback process. The Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University's report, "Housing America's Older Adults 2019" projects that by 2038 households in their 80's will be the fastest growing age group. Older adults (65+) have a lower likelihood of moving than any other age group but still made over 1.3 million moves in 2017-2018. Of those moves, 62% were moves within the same county. The report states, "Given that most of these moves will be local, it will be increasingly important for homebuilders and policymakers to offer housing options in or near the communities where older adults currently live." The report goes on to note the there's a large wealth gap between older homeowners and renters. Since home equity accounts for a large portion of wealth, older renters are particularly vulnerable when needs arise.

housing units and transitional and emergency services.
- Study demand with the intent to set targets for family housing development, including deed-restricted family housing.
- Study demand with the intent to set targets for senior housing development.
- Continue to investigate options for intergenerational living.





Somerville Community Corporation created a new affordable housing development at 181 Washington Street at the former site of the Boys and Girls Club. The project includes 35 units of rental housing for families earning at or below 60% of the area median income.

- Consider new models to co-locate senior housing and student housing.
- Consider new models of rental co-housing.
- Increase the number of accessible units, especially accessible subsidized units.
- Work with tenants and property owners to obtain information on energy, gas, and water use across the city in order to benchmark against other localities and identify high energy use buildings.
- Establish mechanisms and/or triggers that would require blower door testing with the goal of understanding actual infiltration rates in all existing housing stock.
- Establish incentives, if not requirements, establishing energy performance levels for all new residential construction. These could be based on the Passive House Building Standard, the 2030 AIA EUI targets, or a Net Zero Energy Standard that prioritizes fundamentally low-load buildings first and renewables second.
- Partner with organizations to review typical housing typologies and evaluate how each might be upgraded to create accessibility.
- Establish a program to facilitate assessment, financing, and process around lead abatement.
- Establish a program to facilitate financing and process around accessibility upgrades.

Infrastructure

Somerville's infrastructure for power, water, transportation, communication, and more is a complex network with many public and private owners, operators, and regulatory authorities. Infrastructure encompasses both visible and invisible assets, including but not limited to roadways, sewers, sidewalks, bridges, tunnels, and utilities like lighting and broadband.

STRENGTHS

Somerville benefits from a pre-war layout when it comes to infrastructure. Generally water and sewer connections run from the front of the building to the street, which makes the connections shorter than our sprawling, suburban counterparts. Somerville has the foundation for high impact investments to improve infrastructure and resiliency due to its dense housing and employment centers.

The City has strong relationships with private and public sector entities that have financially supported efforts to improve city infrastructure. In the last decade, Somerville has been the recipient of a $13 million MassWorks Infrastructure Program grant to make extensive water and sewer improvements in Union Square (thus enabling an additional $200 million in redevelopment investments); $350,000 from the Massachusetts Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program to plan for and build stormwater management solutions; and almost $1 million in State funds to finance infrastructure and pedestrian improvements to the Kensington Connector.

Somerville also utilizes some innovative tools to plan for infrastructure readiness. Since 2015, the City has utilized a data-driven pavement management program based on a number of factors to support objective decisions and develop cost-effective results. Pavement condition data and information regarding other City capital improvements is updated annually to adjust the City's multi-year plan for repaving roads. In addition, Somerville Climate Forward, the City's climate change plan, prioritizes stormwater management and infrastructure investment.

The City of Somerville has consistently identified infrastructure maintenance as a key priority and remains committed to addressing vulnerabilities and proactively planning for the future.

The SomerVision Number

50

MILES OF WATER & SEWER PIPE UPGRADED
by 2040

Ensuring that our water and sewer pipes are in working order not only keep our toilets flushing and our water clean but can also help minimize flooding. Related indicators include the share of accessible sidewalks and the number of combined sewer overflows.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Somerville does face specific challenges to maintaining, modernizing, and replacing its aging infrastructure. Much of the City's infrastructure, specifically its water and sewer

In the SomerVision 2040 process, the Transportation and Infrastructure topic chapter scope was: streets and roads, public transit, sidewalks, stormwater management, bike infrastructure, pedestrian experience, parking, and accessibility. It wasn't until after the working groups turned in the draft chapters that Staff realized that the best way to call attention to our infrastructure needs was to divide the topic into two chapters.

infrastructure, was built between the late 1870's and the early 1900's. Over 90% of it is over 50 years old. We no longer have any lead water mains but some laterals (the pipe from the main to the building lead pipes may have lead. The City has replaced thousands of feet of older water mains, but struggles to catch up with the mounting needs of aging infrastructure. This backlog means that much of the budget is spent on emergency repairs, which are less cost-effective than proactive upgrades.

In addition, much of the underground infrastructure needs are unknown. While the City has managed to assess the condition of some underground water and sewer infrastructure, the vast majority needs to be investigated. This makes it difficult to ascertain the resources and effort needed to not only maintain infrastructure but address its vulnerabilities. There are also privately-owned utilities in Somerville for gas, electrical, and communication services.

Many of Somerville's infrastructure needs, including the separation of sanitary sewage and stormwater runoff, are out of sight, and therefore, out of mind. Addressing the lack of public understanding on these issues that are not visible on a day-to-day basis needs to be communicated to residents. In turn, it could increase public support for dedicating City resources to addressing "hidden" infrastructure concerns.

Did you know that Somerville has over about 165 miles of sewer pipe and 125 miles of water pipe? The City improves roughly 2.3 miles of pipe per year.

GOALS AND TAKEAWAYS

Proactively investing in infrastructure assets not only improves current services but increases the City's long-term resiliency to events like extreme weather and climate change. Somerville must dedicate financial and other resources to both understanding and addressing infrastructure needs. The following goals and action items demonstrate a proactive path forward that will help Somerville remain responsive and resilient to environmental, financial, and social stressors.



Implement a transformative approach to addressing infrastructure. Focus on greater investment into building resiliency into our water and sewage systems as opposed to a more reactive approach to repairs.

EQUITY GOAL

Utilize innovative and sustainable solutions. Updating our water and sewer systems is integral to climate

change mitigation in Somerville.

Educate the public on the importance of investing in our hidden water and sewer systems. Spending funds in a proactive manner versus emergency repairs saves considerable costs.

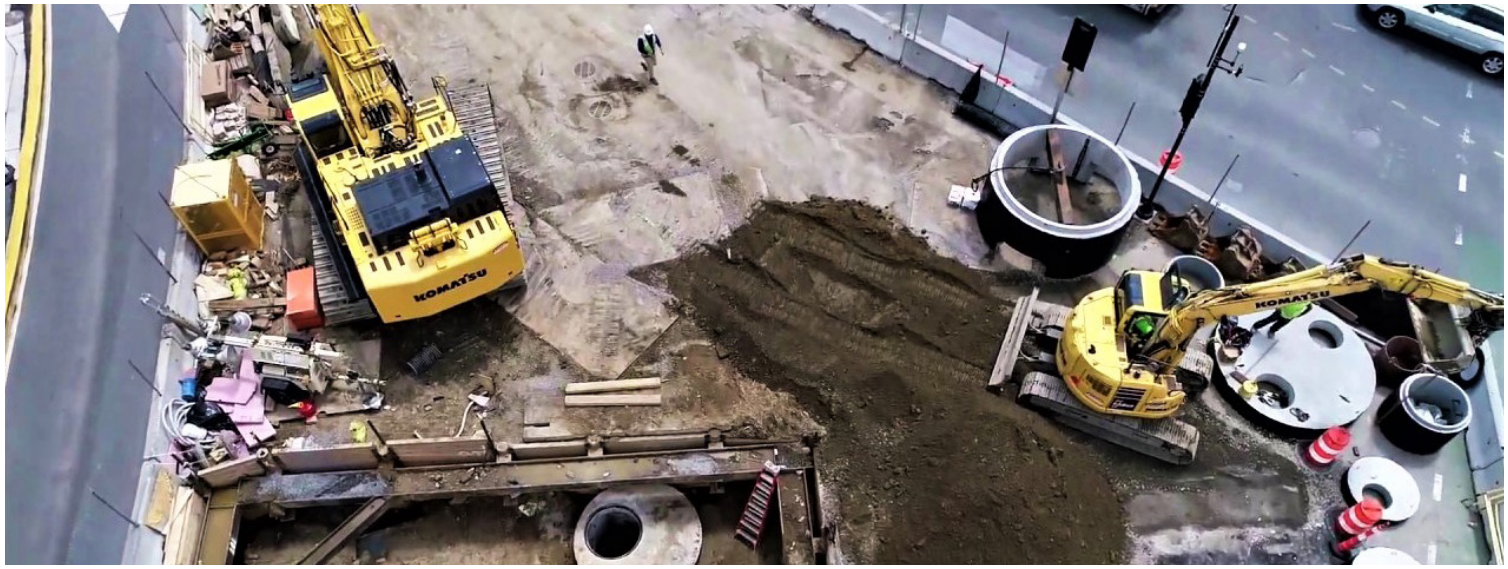
Continue to work towards state compliance. By meeting state compliance targets Somerville will have more flexibility, both financially and strategically, for future infrastructure projects.

Separate pipes that carry sewage and rainwater runoff. Similar to other old American cities, Somerville has a combined sewer system which collects rainwater runoff from driveways, roofs, and roadways, in the same pipes that it collects and transports sewage to the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority facilities for treatment. During significant rain storms, the combined sewer system may fill up beyond capacity, causing flooding in the streets, and combined sewer overflows into the Mystic River and Alewife Brook. Somerville should continue to implement multi-pronged strategies to separate the sewer system, reduce combined sewer overflows, and increase drainage reliability for much of the city.

Collaborate with public entities and private companies. This includes gas, electric, and cellular, to provide reliable and consistent services.

POTENTIAL TASKS

- Continue with the strategic plan to assess the condition of Somerville's water and sewer systems. The sewer and water system is aging in Somerville



Union Square has been a major construction zone in recent years, offering an impressive display of engineering and equipment. This project is the first in a series of projects that will enable the City to conditionally separate stormwater for up to 60% of the City. When the underground work is complete, the next phase will involve streetscape improvements that will enhance pedestrian, transit rider, cyclist, and driver experience. The streetscape will also include green stormwater infrastructure in the form of new planted areas and permeable surfaces. Together, these elements of the project will support imperative improvements to our drainage and sewer system, clean our environment, and minimize the flooding in the Union Square area.

and currently the approach for addressing needs is more reactive than proactive. Assessing the condition of the system and creating a stronger data set allows the City to take more of an asset management approach to maintenance, modernization, and replacement. This both saves money and allows the City to take into consideration an equitable approach to prioritizing opportunities.

- Advance $400 million sewer infrastructure backlog and $75 million ADA backlog. Assess water and sewer infrastructure needs, and fund proactive improvements to our aging infrastructure.
- Establish a plan for meeting state compliance targets and treatment from runoff.
- Investigate innovative or non-traditional funding options for infrastructure improvements. This could include opportunities such as stormwater enterprise funds and renewable energy from sewage systems.
- Invest in green stormwater infrastructure like bioswales in addition to grey infrastructure like an improved pipe system. Introducing sustainable practices decreases the burden on infrastructure and additionally introduces energy and cost savings.
- Pilot energy extraction from sewage. A significant amount of sewage and water from MWRA systems flow through Somerville and there is an opportunity to explore possible energy cost savings by extracting energy from this system.
- Dedicate space on the City's website and other possible locations to communicate the importance of addressing infrastructure vulnerabilities.
- Increase awareness of programs like MassSave to decrease individual household carbon use and infrastructure demand.



The infrastructure pictured to the right are box culverts and they carry our stormwater away. The cool thing about these box culverts is their size. Newly installed in Union Square, they are some of the largest ever installed under our roadways.

Mobility

Somerville's early system of rail and trolley stops and dense development have helped make the city the most compact in New England. This density of residential and commercial development enabled efficient mobility across neighborhoods. But when the Interstate Highway System was constructed in the mid-1900's, many of the city's transit routes were removed or relocated, replaced with high-speed roads made only for vehicular traffic.

STRENGTHS

The City of Somerville benefits from continued investment in transportation infrastructure from internal and external sources. The City's financial strength, in the form of a AA1 bond rating and robust record of financial stewardship, is an advantage in seeking funding for capital and operational planning and construction projects. This was most recently demonstrated by Federal and State funding commitments to the Green Line Extension (GLX), which will add five new stations in the city and offer a one-seat ride to Downtown Boston, extend the Community Path to Lechmere, add 11 miles of new stormwater drainage, and put 85% of Somerville residents within a half-mile of a light rail station (currently at 15%).

Somerville has the physical foundation for improving access to multiple modes of transportation, including a pre-car layout, dense housing and employment centers, and connected neighborhoods. Somerville's dense residential neighborhoods and their closeness to Somerville's many squares contribute to high "walkability scores." Most, but not all, of Somerville residents have convenient access to high-growth job centers and leisure activity districts through a variety of transportation modes both within and adjacent to Somerville, at nearby Alewife, Kendall Square, and Downtown Boston. Somerville residents enjoy strong connections on bus and rail networks running east/west and have access to an increasing number of mobility modes, including several bus lines, rail connections via the Red and Orange Lines, almost 30 BlueBikes stations, and bicycle infrastructure including painted and protected bicycle lanes. In particular, new bicycle lanes continue to grow in response to demand. Somerville has the start of several mobility hubs, a place where multiple modes of transportation emerge, in several neighborhoods. Aided with technology and real time information, this can help people make more sustainable transportation choices.

Somerville is home to strong networks of engaged residents and public officials who advocate for increased access to transportation, including groups such as the Somerville

The SomerVision Number

75%

OF WORK COMMUTES VIA NON-CAR MODE
by 2040

If we can make walking, biking, and public transit reliable, convenient, and pleasant, we can reduce vehicular traffic, improve the health of our residents, and improve the environment. Related indicators include the percent of on-time bus trips and Vision Zero: our goal of eliminating deaths or serious injuries from vehicular crashes.

In the SomerVision 2040 process, the Transportation and Infrastructure topic chapter scope was: streets and roads, public transit, sidewalks, stormwater management, bike infrastructure, pedestrian experience, parking, accessibility. The topic chapters ended up getting split into two and renamed to better reflect the depth of the topics.

Transportation Equity Partnership (STEP) and the Somerville Bicycle Advisory Committee (SBAC). Somerville residents are also vocal outside of organized groups in calls for increased transportation equity and access. Based on the 2017 U.S. Census American Community Survey, more than half of Somerville residents use sustainable modes of transportation to travel for work. Based on data collected by the City and its partners (including this Committee in SomerSuppers and other efforts) Somerville residents express a strong desire for safe, convenient access to sustainable transportation options for the majority of their trips. Residents want reliable public transportation access, safe bicycle lanes, and freedom of movement within the city with decreased congestion. This support encourages the City to make necessary investments in mobility planning and infrastructure.

In step with this desire, the Administration committed to Vision Zero in 2017 and the Mobility division has created a Vision Zero Action Plan. Vision Zero aims to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries on Somerville's streets. The SBAC is also working on a Bicycle Network Plan which will help the City plan infrastructure and investment in the facilities needed.

Somerville residents report that use of modes like public transportation and bicycles promote strong community relationships. For example, one resident commented: "I knew everybody who was at my bus stop, and when somebody was missing, we noticed." Research has shown that sustainable modes of travel make people happier and healthier.

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Somerville has a wide variety of opportunities and challenges related to mobility. The transportation network within Somerville allows the population to be mobile and brings people and business into and out of the city. Residents and businesses are seeking out Somerville partly because of its ease of access. However, transportation capacity and infrastructure has not kept pace. Buses and





trains in Somerville are over capacity during rush hours. Buses are stuck on congested streets and run infrequently during off-hours. Cyclists and micro-mobility users share space with motor vehicles. People feel frustrated, angry, and sometimes unsafe during commutes.

While most of Somerville residents enjoy access to multiple modes of transportation, not all do. The city lacks strong north/south transit connections. In addition, the topography and lack of north/south bicycle lanes can make cycling a challenge. The Assembly and Davis

Square Neighborhoods have more transit and mobility options with train, bus, and multi-use paths than any other neighborhoods in Somerville. The City must recognize that the same convenient service is desired and necessary throughout Somerville. Historically, many groups have been left out of the transportation planning process, which results in the inequitable distribution of resources. Communities of color, seniors, people with low-incomes, youth, and persons with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by transportation decisions but are often not at the table when those decisions are made. It is critical to move forward acknowledging this deficit in order to increase equitable representation and participation surrounding transportation and infrastructure decisions.

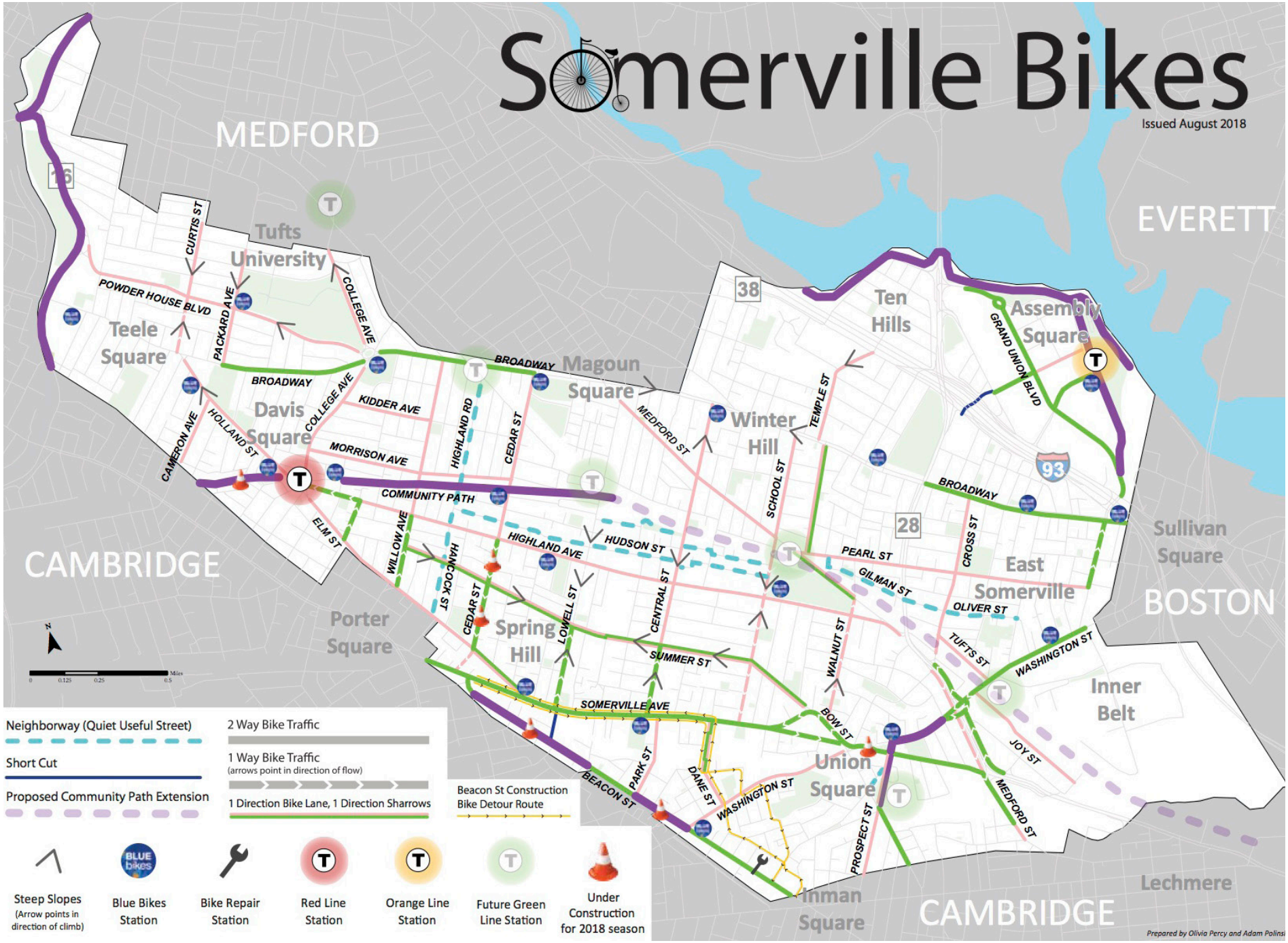
The City of Somerville must seize the growth opportunity for new and improved infrastructure. Increased housing, transportation, utility, and other needs due to increased population and job growth necessitates developing, updating, and/or changing infrastructure. Somerville has started to reassess the best use of the public rights-of-way. The recent conversion of Webster Avenue and Prospect Street to two-way roads successfully reduced car volume through the heart of Union Square by a third. Overall traffic on Prospect and Webster decreased by 10%. This is a significant opportunity to implement a large-scale mode shift in Somerville and increase both mobility and safety for all road users.

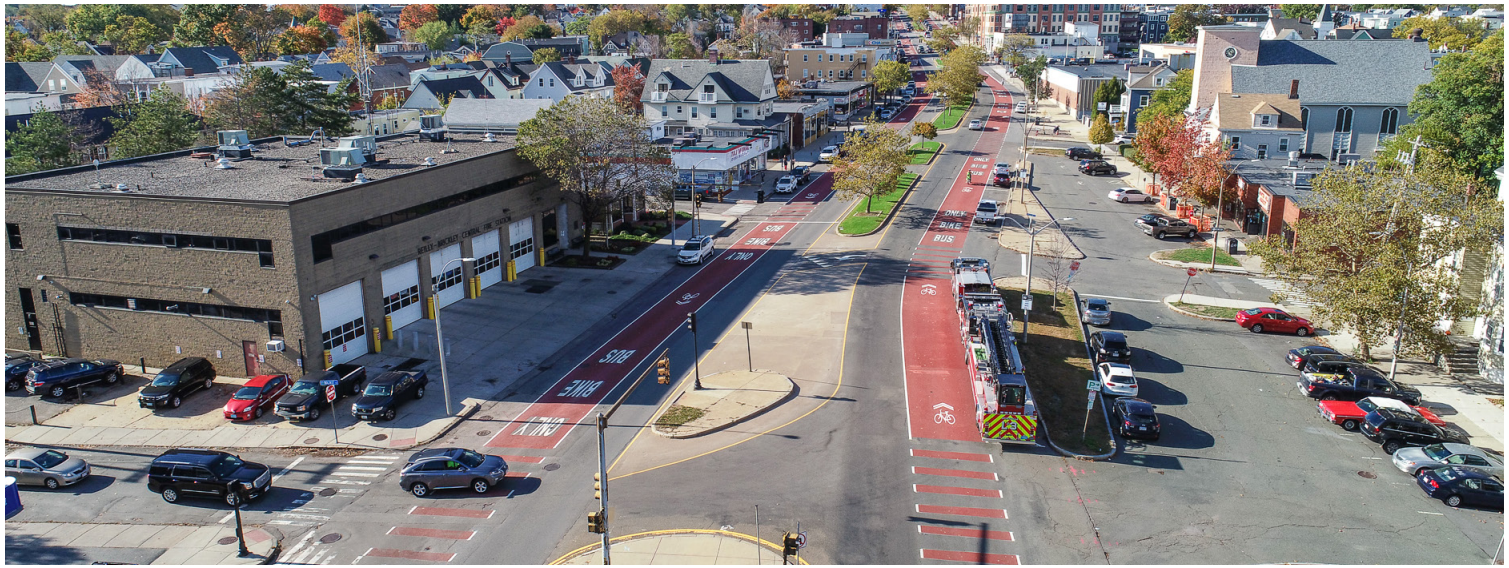
Residents of Somerville, particularly East Somerville, suffer two-fold from roadways like I-93 and McGrath Highway. I-93 and McGrath cut off neighborhoods from other parts of the city and create high particulate rates from vehicular emissions. This results in increased health care costs and a higher risk of developing illnesses. While emissions are a large concern, noise pollution also has negative impacts on health and quality of life. There is an urgent need to reduce emissions in Somerville and to also make Somerville more resilient to transportation-induced public health concerns. While the infrastructure needs for some new transportation innovations are unknown, other infrastructure needs are easy to identify. Many sidewalks, crosswalks, and bus stops across the city are not fully accessible. This challenge is exacerbated by winter weather, overgrown shrubs, extreme heat, and flooding. Somerville's ADA backlog is estimated at $75 million just to bring existing infrastructure up to standard. Vulnerable transportation users like seniors, persons with cognitive disabilities, vision, and mobility-impaired persons must be included in creating and improving safe methods of transportation. Improving safety for vulnerable road users will improve safety for everyone. For example, retiming Davis Square's main intersection gave pedestrians eight more pedestrian signals over the



VISION ZERO SOMERVILLE

Launched in 2017, Vision Zero is the City's commitment to multimodal road safety - striving for zero roadway deaths and serious injuries. The initiative will take a multi-department, data-driven approach to improving safety for all road users, whether on bicycles or on foot, in vehicles, or aboard public transit. The Vision Zero Task Force and Action Plan will help us work towards that goal.


Somerville Bikes
Issued August 2018
MEDFORD
EVERETT
CAMBRIDGE
BOSTON
Tufts University
Teele Square
Davis Square
Porter Square
Spring Hill
Magoun Square
Ten Hills
Winter Hill
Assembly Square
Sullivan Square
East Somerville
Union Square
Inner Belt
Lechmere
Inman Square
CURTIS ST
POWDER HOUSE BLVD
PACKARD AVE
COLLEGE AVE
BROADWAY
KIDDER AVE
HIGHLAND RD
CEDAR ST
MEDFORD ST
TEMPLE ST
GRAND UNION BLVD
CAMERON AVE
HOLLAND ST
MORRISON AVE
COMMUNITY PATH
ELM ST
WILLOW AVE
HANCOCK ST
HIGHLAND AVE
HUDSON ST
SCHOOL ST
PEARL ST
CROSS ST
GILMAN ST
OLIVER ST
LOWELL ST
CENTRAL ST
SUMMER ST
WALNUT ST
TUFTS ST
WASHINGTON ST
SOMERVILLE AVE
BOW ST
JOY ST
BEACON ST
PARK ST
DANE ST
PROSPECT ST
MEDFORD ST
16
38
28
93
Neighborway (Quiet Useful Street)
Short Cut
Proposed Community Path Extension
2 Way Bike Traffic
1 Way Bike Traffic
(arrows point in direction of flow)
1 Direction Bike Lane, 1 Direction Sharrows
Beacon St Construction
Bike Detour Route
Steep Slopes
(Arrow points in direction of climb)
Blue Bikes Station
Bike Repair Station
Red Line Station
Orange Line Station
Future Green Line Station
Under Construction for 2018 season
Prepared by Olivia Percy and Adam Polins



course of an hour.

Despite some advances in safety, people are still being killed or seriously injured in crashes. Others feel limited in choice because of fear for their safety. It is imperative that the City create ambitious plans (like Vision Zero) to address dangerous behavior and infrastructure on our streets. This is particularly salient for safe routes to school planning, because of the vulnerability of the road users. Traffic enforcement or infrastructure improvements would improve safety for students and others because of the unique vulnerability of children crossing the street. In data collection efforts for this report, some Somerville residents also remarked that a high percentage of grade school and high school students are being driven to school. While the cause is difficult to ascertain, residents agree that there are no completely safe routes for children to get to school via walking or biking. The Community Path Extension is an opportunity to increase safety for students traveling to and from school, provide a place for people of all abilities to exercise, and encourage families to walk or bike. It is important for the City to ensure safe and easy access to the Community Path from many different neighborhoods.

The City must be proactive in responding to new and future transportation-related challenges. Innovations in transportation technology and delivery present both challenges and opportunities. These include automated vehicles, micro-mobility, and ride-sharing programs, also known as Transportation Network Companies (TNC) For example, the City must prepare for automated vehicles (AVs) and must proactively plan for automated technology – not passively accept how automated vehicles are marketed. Some additional points of note:

At a SomerVision community meeting, one person specifically asked, "If you're in wheelchair, imagine trying to board a bus. Are other passengers going to try and help you? It is imperative that we address challenges associated with all transportation access for all people."

- Automated delivery vehicles may be the first deployed.
- While the focus of automated technology generally revolves around personal vehicles, there are opportunities for transit as well.
- Automated vehicles are a single mode; their integration should be approached as part of a comprehensive network of walking, bicycling, transit, motor vehicles, and other transportation.

GOALS AND TAKEAWAYS

Increase transportation equity across the city. Historically, marginalized groups – specifically low-income communities and communities of color –have been left out of planning processes. These groups tend to live in areas with inadequate and unsafe transportation infrastructure. The City should increase access in underserved neighborhoods.

EQUITY GOAL

Reduce. Minimize the overall space in Somerville dedicated to personal vehicles.

Reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT). In order to achieve a multimodal and more environmentally-friendly system and create a community where people want to live, work, and play, Somerville would benefit by reducing VMT.

One is too many. Reduce crashes, road fatalities, and injuries in order to increase safety for everyone, especially vulnerable road users.



Prioritize vulnerable road users. When designing our streets, they must be safe for pedestrians, cyclists, people with disabilities, children, roadway workers, and other vulnerable populations and may require dedicated infrastructure for these users.

EQUITY GOAL

Ensure that all bus stops are accessible, safe, and more comfortable for all users. Many bus stops in Somerville are not ADA compliant, lack lighting and seating, and feel unsafe.

Reduce demand. Parking and personal vehicle use take up a lot of space and are not the best use of our land, we should reduce the space available for parking and personal vehicle use.

Proactively address new transportation innovations. Seek to maintain equitable access to public space and increase safety and mobility of all road users. Emerging transportation technology and programs should be integrated as part of a complete multimodal network. These innovations should augment the system as a whole, not preempt other modes.

Prioritize walking, biking, and transit access. Cities are more enjoyable, safer, and more economically prosperous when more space is dedicated to people than cars. Use reclaimed space to create new public spaces, safe infrastructure for sustainable mode users, and other community uses.

EQUITY GOAL

Connect and Expand. Work to connect and expand our off-street network of paths. Collaborate with local advocacy groups on implementation.

Build sustainabile revenue streams. Expand the City's options for financing transportation projects to ensure sustainable revenue streams and introduce new methods of funding both large and small improvements as well as maintenance.

Invest in advocacy and actions. Improve infrastructure that reduces emissions and other pollutants.

Two for one. Encourage joint infrastructure and transportation projects that prioritize the movement of non-vehicular users.

POTENTIAL TASKS

- Continue to implement the City's Complete Streets Ordinance which gives preference to pedestrians, transit, and cyclists first before personal vehicles.
- Increase north/south connections. Specifically, work with the MBTA to expand bus service. Also, add bicycle facilities and upgrade sidewalk infrastructure.
- Incentivize companies to decrease their commercial vehicle fleet by providing incentives for replacing cars and trucks with electric bicycles. For example, London's "Bikes for Business" program encourages the replacement of vans with cargo bikes.
- Consider a congestion zone similar to New York City or London in areas with high congestion and pedestrian traffic.
- Develop a long-range bicycle network plan to create routes that will be safe enough for people of all ages and abilities to bike to all major destinations in Somerville.
- Develop standards for separation between bicycles and motor vehicles based on factors like vehicle speed and volume. Consider an ordinance like one passed in Cambridge to include protected bicycle lanes in all major street reconstruction projects.
- For all new bicycle lanes (and with a plan for existing bicycle lanes) utilize more durable materials than flexposts for quick-build projects, such as planters or precast curbs. Flexposts do not adequately protect riders from vehicles and discourage less confident riders from bicycling.
- Expand on Safe Routes to School proven methodologies, such as increased infrastructure for safe walking, biking, and transit. Methods could



The City implemented new bus lanes and piloted shared streets (photo above) in 2020 as a response to Covid-19. Bus lanes can lower vehicle volumes, reduce travel speeds, and improve bus travel time. Giving riders, especially essential workers, a consistent and quicker ride time was important in delivering bus lanes in Davis Square, on Washington Street, and on Mystic Avenue.

Shared Streets open up low-volume or residential side-streets to pedestrians, cyclists, and other users while still allowing vehicle access. The program uses temporary materials that can be modified based on our experience and feedback from the pilot.

include visible active speed monitors, sidewalk bump-outs, speed humps, protected bicycle infrastructure, and enforcement

- Develop standards for crosswalks for safer, more accessible crossing. Possible opportunities include:
  - Implementing Leading Pedestrian Intervals;
  - Setting walk signal durations that take into consideration vulnerable road users; and
  - Automatic walk signalization.
- Address speed and emerging safety issues (for example drug impaired driving), increased enforcement, infrastructure changes (for example raised crosswalks, chicanes, bumpouts, etc.), and public education and encouragement.
- Incentivize safe driving through public education and programs. Opportunities include:
  - Creating a Somerville version of Boston's Safest Driver Competition;
  - Building a Traffic Garden to give a safe space for learning the rules of the road; and
  - Utlizing movable message board signs that remind people about safety for all road users.



- Improve bus stops by adding or improving lighting, installing bus shelters, building "floating bus stops," providing real-time arrival data, implementing national best practice including bus stop spacing, and other national best practices. Explore opportunities to make these updates distinctive, as a potential arts and culture collaboration.
- Encourage walking by providing seating, improving lighting, and access to public restroom facilities.
- Add wayfinding information at bus stops, train stops, and bikeshare stations.
- Educate City staff on best practices and national pilot projects, such as Boston's Play Around the City.
- Update the City's parking policies to:
  - Prioritize those who need on-street parking (for example those with disabilities);
  - Include household limits;
  - Include dynamic pricing in walkable centers;
  - Implement parking maximums for projects within a certain radius to rapid transit.
- Make the most of curb space by favoring pickup/dropoff zones, loading zones, and short term parking over long term storage.
- Pilot and create a plan for permanently pedestrianizing streets, particularly in high traffic areas such as squares and near active public spaces. Work with the Disabilities Commission and commercial vendors to accommodate mobility and business needs.
- Require a certain level of dense housing, especially

affordable housing, around rapid transit to increase how many people can access rapid transit.

- Address negative externalities and challenges associated with TNCs. Define pick-up zones and increase traffic enforcement in problem areas.
- Define protocol and safety standards for micro-mobility devices (scooters, e-bikes, etc) and communicate outcomes
- Explore innovative financing methods to fund new infrastructure projects, such as DIF districts, development impact and mobility fees, and transportation utility fees.
- Utilize Social Impact Funds, (funds from private organizations for the communities in which they exist) when possible.
- Work with the Commonwealth to reduce emissions caused by I-93 by reducing the number of cars on I-93 and restoring HOV lanes.
- Invest in a sidewalk state-of-good-repair database. Recruit volunteers and/or better utilize 311 to gather data on the condition of sidewalks in Somerville to understand where pain points are.
- Implement a “dig once” approach for right-of-way construction projects. This approach leverages opportunities including separating sanitary and sewer systems, installing cycle tracks, and implementing road diets.
- Update traffic signals with modern controls that are able to more easily adjust based on changes to all types of transportation volumes and modes.
- Pursue opportunities to electrify public transportation. Advocate for upgrading legacy commuter rail corridors to more frequent, electric multiple-unit trains.
- Work with the Commonwealth and regional partners to connect outlying transit centers and regional attractions.
- Prioritize public transit by investing in bus lanes and transit signal priority.
- Expand municipal snow clearance to also include sidewalks, perhaps even before streets are cleared



Public Space & the Natural Environment

STRENGTHS

SomerVision 2030 set an ambitious target of 125 new acres of usable open space. Since 2010, Somerville has created 15 acres of new open space and have 4 more acres in the pipeline. The Open Space Recreation Task Force Strategy memo also outlined planning towards 60 of those 125 new acres in the transformational areas. Access to parks is excellent in Somerville with 94.9% of residents within a five-minute walk (¼ mile) of an open space. In addition to adding acreage, the City has focused on renovating existing parks and schoolyards that are in the poorest condition. Twenty parks have been renovated since 2010 and most of the schoolyards either have been recently renovated or have planning grants to put this process in motion. Somerville has 1.3 miles of coastline on the Mystic River and Alewife Brook. In addition, the Somerville Community Preservation Commitee created a land acqusition fund.

Although adding acreage takes time, the City has demonstrated a commitment to this goal. In November 2012, voters passed the Community Preservation Act, which funds affordable housing, historic preservation, and open space. With new development in our transformational areas, the potential to create more open space is possible through POPS (Privately Owned Public Spaces). The Open Space Creation Task Force released a memo in the summer 2019 identifying strategies and actions to create open space in Somerville.

In addition to creating physical outdoor spaces, Somerville is home to several groups of engaged residents and organizations interested in advancing public space and the natural environment. Resident advocacy and affinity groups like Green & Open Somerville, Somerville Climate Action, the Climate Coalition of Somerville, the Friends of the Somerville Growing Center, the Somerville Garden Club as well as various youth athletic leagues and dog advocacy groups have organized residents and hosted actions from depaving parties to eliminate impervious surfaces to education campaigns about the invasive Black Swallow Wort. Independently, or in collaboration with groups, residents are excited to consider new ways to improve their neighborhoods. All elementary schools have school gardens and composting. Students learn to appreciate the natural world with programs in collaboration with Farms to School, Groundwork Somerville, Mass Audubon, Farrington Nature Linc, and Nature's Classroom.

The SomerVision Number

105

NEW ACRES OF OPEN SPACE
by 2040

This goal, based off of SomerVision 2030's numbers, sets an ambitious target for creating additional open space in the city. Related indicators include the percent of households within a 5-minute walk of open space and the number of trees planted in public spaces.

The scope for the Public Space & Natural Environment topic chapter is: Open and green space, community gardens, recreational space, trees, plants, support for pollinators, and community gathering places.

OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

Will Rogers was right when he said, “Buy land. They ain’t making any more of this stuff.” Somerville is 4 square miles and is not getting any bigger. When land is available, it’s costly, and the City must evaluate its use for all of our goals and priorities including affordable housing, commercial development, open space, and infrastructure, just to name a few.

Privately Own Public Spaces (POPs) may shift some of the burden of acquiring and maintaining open space to private funding, which may allow the City to expand access to open space faster than if the City had to purchase land directly. However, since POPs are still private land, the City must craft guidelines and agreements to ensure that POPs are accessible to all residents and visitors to Somerville.

The City leads community processes on new park or park renovation projects. This is a balancing act - satisfying the needs of the immediate neighborhood but also fulfilling citywide goals. For instance, Nunziato Field was identified as a place to improve stormwater management with infrastructure under the park. There was resistance by residential abutters because of concerns about impacts during construction and project costs. This plays out in different ways on each project, resulting in the need for the City to communicate citywide planning decisions at the hyper-local level.

Public spaces come in many different sizes, shapes, and forms, from passive parks to playgrounds to plazas. Different public space forms can have unspoken rules and perceptions about appropriate use, such as the perception that parks with playgrounds are only for children and passive parks are only for adults. Design (or redesign as necessary), activation from activities, signage, and public information campaigns can inform that all people are welcome in Somerville and that’s also true in our community spaces.





One topic that plays a role in many conversations about public space in Somerville is the material used in new parks. The working groups discussed the differences and pros and cons of both artificial turf and grass fields. A comprehensive plan won’t come to a conclusion as to whether one should always be used over the other because of the diverse roles our parks and green spaces play in our community. However, the decision about whether to use one or the other should be made on a project-by-project basis and informed by community discussion, expert research, and a thorough understanding of the project’s specific context.



One of the more devastating impacts of man-made climate change is the decimation of our insect pollinator populations like bees, butterflies, and moths on which life depends. Even though we are only 4.1 square miles, there are easy steps we can take to reverse this trend. Eliminating pesticides, restoring habitat with the indigenous plants with which insects evolved, and changing harmful landscaping practices will go a long way toward making Somerville a respite for these important creatures. If the bees thrive, we thrive. Making a commitment to them and the earth is essential to see Somerville into 2040.

Our existing parks and open spaces are well used and are designed to be increasingly more sophisticated – especially as parks become working landscapes delivering ecoservices. For many locations, maintenance is an ongoing challenge. Current City efforts focus on acquisition and/or complete renovation of public spaces but they must also consider strategic upgrades and routine maintenance. A failure to address maintenance means that new parks quickly look overgrown and rundown. Users can call 311 to log maintenance issues but that doesn't address some of the larger problems. Additional attention from City planning and maintenance staff, as well as investing in training, could allow upkeep specific to each park. Many times, the efforts of low impact development and environmental stewardship are not carried through the lifetime of the park.

Thinking broadly about public space allows for the inclusion of streets and sidewalks. Somerville right-of-ways contain roughly 605 acres. There's more opportunity for the public realm to be a part of our gathering and natural and green environment instead of a concrete and asphalt place for cars. The City has increased spending on tree plantings but the trees face a tough physical environment and public perception is not always positive. People voice concerns about tree roots, leaves, allergies, and even species. This is an opportunity to expand access and connect our public spaces using programs like neighborways and green corridors. The largest park in Somerville, Foss Park, is practically inaccessible by sustainable modes of transit from the nearby neighborhoods of East Somerville, Ten Hills, and Assembly because of the McGrath Highway and I-93.

The largest challenge is likely that the majority of land in Somerville is privately-owned. The City has limited ability to tell private landowners what to do with their land unless significant changes are proposed. Just as the City evaluates the use of land for our shared goals and priorities, each property owner is doing the same. Parking, gardening, storage, landscaping, patios, porches, and decks are all common elements of a Somerville yard. Property owners vary in their ability to improve property and keep it maintained. Perception of these types of spaces is also varied. While some see a beautiful vegetable garden, others see a habitat for rodents or are concerned about soil contamination.

GOALS AND TAKEAWAYS

Engage the Somerville community. The majority of land in Somerville is privately-owned and almost half is



residential. The SomerVision map calls to conserve our residential areas of one, two-, and three-family homes, but these areas help contribute to Somerville's tree canopy, pervious surfaces, and natural landscapes.

Partner to expand outreach. Local community organizations and nonprofits have a wealth of information and passion for different topics related to public space and the natural environment that they could share with interested residents such as invasive species, native landscapes, certification programs, and depaving.

Expand use of private space. POPS are one way to expand our open space acreage. They should be indistinguishable from our public parks especially when it comes to access. POPS usually coincide with development but there may be assets in our existing neighborhoods that could benefit the community through an access agreement.

Expand options. Although it's a regulation, the Urban Ag ordinance helped elevate the issue of urban agriculture to a community conversation and legalize residents' interests and passions for growing their own food and keeping bees and chickens. Public space is often not open fields or playgrounds and our City should be open to unique ideas to expand our public space and natural environment.

Seek funding. Land is our finite resource and it is expensive. With land acquisition so expensive, the City should seek ways to increase funding for open space acquisition.

Innovate. We should look for cost effective paths to new open space including interim/temporary uses.



Native species are uniquely adapted to environments that mimic pre-contact conditions. When planted in appropriate locations, native species generally use fewer resources and contribute to an efficient and balanced ecosystem. When the conditions are right, native species may be able to grow easily once established, but when conditions are not right they are often outcompeted by invasive species. One of the most important benefits of native species is that they create habitat for native birds, pollinators, and wildlife. In this way, native species are proven to increase and protect biodiversity.

The Public Space and Urban Forestry division has had a successful record of using many native species in appropriate locations in both our parks and streets and of creating landscapes that perform many ecological and sociological functions.



Keep planning. The Planning Staff should continue working towards open space goals in other city planning efforts.

Implement. Use systematic thinking that will make planning objectives a reality. Execution is the point. Rely on decades of city planning, research, and study to bridge from planning to execution. Acknowledge that each step takes time and avoid the temptation to repeat the cycle.

Empower residents. The City designs and builds open spaces for the entire community. These are their spaces to play, sit, relax, and congregate. People should feel empowered to enjoy them and improve them.

EQUITY GOAL

Identify. We need to continue to study and document the open space needs in Somerville because there are always new trends, user groups, etc.

Focus. The total acreage of open space is important, but so is access. Residents tend to enjoy open spaces within walking distance of their home. If parks are within walking distance, but separated by infrastructure like McGrath Highway or I-93, it is much less likely to be used.

EQUITY GOAL

Design. Although people may think parks have one use, such as a playground or playing field, there are many users in one space because generally people use open space that's within easy access to their residence. Park designs should include elements for a wide variety of user.

Prioritize sustainability. Our parks and public realm are designed with climate and sustainability in mind, which sometimes can be at odds with maintenance concerns or design aesthetic. We need to prioritize sustainability in every public space.

Improve training. The City should evaluate if there are training and knowledge gaps to improve maintenance and permitted uses of the public realm.

Study structure. Park design, programming, and maintenance are in three different departments within the City of Somerville. This may produce a gap in knowledge or create problems in communication that should be reviewed.

Challenge assumptions. Known maintenance practices don't necessarily mean that they are the easiest or most cost effective. We should consider landscapes wholistically.

Multi-faceted engagement. Our streets are also part of our public spaces. It's common for people to focus on lanes of travel and bike facilities in streetscape projects, but these are also part of a public realm. We should work to encourage engagement from a variety of subject matter advocates in streetscape redesign projects.



POTENTIAL TASKS

- Provide information online on what people can do to make positive impacts on Somerville's natural environment and create feedback mechanisms such as comment boxes so that information can be updated and improved with resident and community group input.
- Create citywide programs to enhance goals building on the compost bin and rain barrel programs. Consider raised beds and native plantings.
- Waive permit dumpster fees for depaving projects.
- Educate renters on lease-friendly terms for yard usage.
- Review condo conversation to make sure new property owners will have access to outdoor space.
- Create an outreach strategy in collaboration with nonprofit and community organizations. Topics could include plant knowledge, invasive species, pollinators, soil health, etc.
- Study the feasibility of leasing or access easements for open space on privately-owned land.
- Expand learning opportunities for all ages.
- Expand the use of movable furniture in parks.
- Create standards and requirements for POPS.

- Continue to update the Fields Plan.
- Create regulations and/or process for creating neighborways.
- Network with area foundations and corporations.
- Consider proposing an increase to the CPA surcharge.
- Evaluate whether a position within the City could engage residents on land donation/acquisition.
- Identify opportunities on city-owned land for temporary uses.
- Create an open space acquisition strategy that identifies target parcels.
- Continue to identify open space expansion in neighborhood planning.
- Create an Urban Forestry management plan.
- Expand park and public space signage with the intent of including multiple languages.
- Include welcoming language on all park signage for all people.
- Acquire open space strategically to close gaps so that everyone is within a five minute walk to open space. Analyze five minute walk by type, where appropriate.
- Similar to “safe route to schools” programs, study our open spaces to ensure they are accessible to pedestrians while minimizing barriers due to cars and street design.
- Continue making strides to implement the open space goals of adopted neighborhood plans.
- Expand GIS analysis of open space walksheds by type.
- Create framework to evaluate park design for all potential users.
- Create process where major renovations of parks are discussed with the Conservation Commission.



- Evaluate our community garden regulations. Both current and future community gardens should be assessed for fit for purpose, equity, and access.
- Consider community farms as an open space type.
- The City should first identify best practices for sustainability and access to open space, then identify any potential gaps in knowledge and seek additional training.
- The City should interview staff to identify knowledge and training gaps.
- Study the organization of similar mid-sized cities.
- Identify staff to liaise with community groups including ‘Friends of’ lists.
- Connect the SomerServe office with opportunities for volunteering in the parks.

Youth & Education

This chapter of SomerVision is substantially influenced by the Somerville Learning 2030 (SL2030) process. This effort is a strength in and of itself and represents a collaboration between the City of Somerville, Somerville Public Schools (SPS), city youth organizations, youth leaders, and residents. Over a period of eight months, a diverse steering committee of Somerville residents and leadership, supported by a nonprofit consulting firm, conducted community surveys and listening sessions to collect data about the current offerings for youth in the city and opportunities for improvement. The full report is available at www.somervillema.gov/childrenscabinet, under Resources and Tools. This topic chapter captures many of the insights highlighted in the report. In addition, additional perspective and ideas from the SomerVision process, including the Youth and Education working group, SomerSuppers that discussed youth and their issues, and a specific youth forum co-organized with resident teenagers.

STRENGTHS

There is a lot to be excited about regarding youth and education in Somerville. The centerpiece of this optimism is Somerville Public Schools. The City has increased its investment in the school district 70% over 15 years, and this commitment to and investment in education has led SPS to emerge as one of the most innovative urban school districts in the Commonwealth. A key example of this investment is the new Somerville High School. In 2016, 72% of voters supported the new 1,590-student high school project that is expected to open in fall 2021. This willingness to invest in Somerville's educational system demonstrates a shared interest in supporting the community's youth.

The SomerVision Number

100%

OF YOUTH ON A PATH TO COLLEGE, CAREER, LIFE by 2040

Our vision does not end when high school is over, but rather provide the resources necessary for all youth age 18-24 to be on a sustainable life path that works for them. Related indicators include the percentage of Somerville children attending public schools and the dropout rate.

Community feedback indicates that a lot of other things are going well for Somerville youth learning and wellness. Families are thrilled with the plethora of family-friendly resources, including street festivals, excellent playgrounds and schoolyards, and shared playgroups, as well as the existing educational and afterschool programs. The bilingual/bicultural Unidos program, Career and Technical Education program, and youth leadership and employment opportunities were all cited as particularly positive examples. In addition, the central library hosts a teen room and monthly programming including storytimes, crafts, and book clubs.

Somerville's school district continues to see strong enrollment trends, particularly in our elementary-age population. Like the city as a whole, the district's strength is in our diversity; our students are 41% Latino; 38% White;

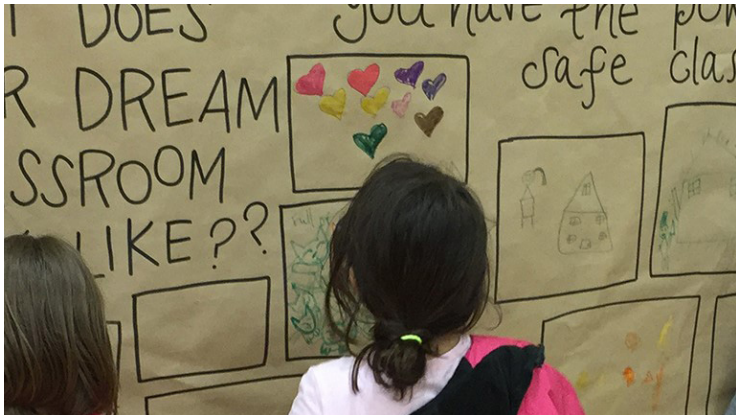
The scope for the Youth & Education topic chapter is: Children (birth through teenagers), public schools, out of school learning, childcare.

The Somerville Children's Cabinet was formed in 2017 with the support of the By All Means initiative of the Education Redesign Lab at Harvard Graduate School of Education. The Cabinet shares the aim of the By All Means Initiative: to develop comprehensive child wellbeing and education systems that help eliminate the link between children's socioeconomic status and achievement. Members of the community, City staff, and Somerville Public Schools staff all sit on on the Children's Cabinet.

10% African American; and 11% Asian or mixed race. Half of our students speak a primary language other than English; approximately 20% are Special Needs; 20% are English Learners and 60% are economically disadvantaged.

Somerville Public Schools has a strong reputation locally and across the Commonwealth for the quality education we provide, our focus on the whole child, our passion for innovation and improvement, the depth and quality of our Arts and Music programming, and for continuing to be one of the highest performing urban districts year after year. SPS is also gaining increasing notice across New England for its bold approach to redesigning its educational model and approach to ensure that all students are prepared for a rapidly changing world. SPS has achieved its highest graduation rate and lowest dropout rate in its history. We also have the greatest number of Somerville High School students ever taking college-level courses. Currently, over 400 SHS students enroll in more than 700 Advanced Placement courses each year.

In partnership with the City and the Somerville community, the Children's Cabinet is continuing our work as a founding member of the Harvard Education Redesign Lab's By All Means initiative. The initiative looks at ways that we can work together as a community to develop a comprehensive child wellbeing and education system to eliminate the link between a child's socioeconomic status and academic achievement. Working together and in concert with other communities across the United States committed to leveling the playing field, Somerville is finding ways to leverage its resources and passion to remove barriers and eliminate opportunity gaps.





A key focus of By All Means has been strengthening extended learning opportunities, particularly for students of color and older students who have been traditionally underrepresented in afterschool and summer learning programs in the city. Somerville has partnered with leading providers including Citizen Schools, Breakthrough, Calculus Project, Enroot, and Boston Debate League to offer a menu of extended learning options for youth. The City's Parks & Recreation department provides additional opportunities for activity and learning for the community, offering well over a hundred different programs for children each year and serving thousands of families.

OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

Many of SL2030 and SomerVision participants expressed a priority for continuing our community's investment in families and youth.



High housing costs and competition for family-sized units makes it difficult for families with children to move to or remain in Somerville. Many SomerVision participants mentioned anecdotes about illegal housing discrimination against children, when landlords avoid renting to families. These housing challenges have a rippling effect throughout the community as children are displaced from their social networks, existing communities are disrupted, and homelessness increases. A recent youth forum highlighted the lack of information and resources for low-income and immigrant families regarding tenant rights, after school options, and support for post-secondary opportunities. Youth saw a need for more outreach to these families about the many resources available.

Another major challenge that emerged was around the





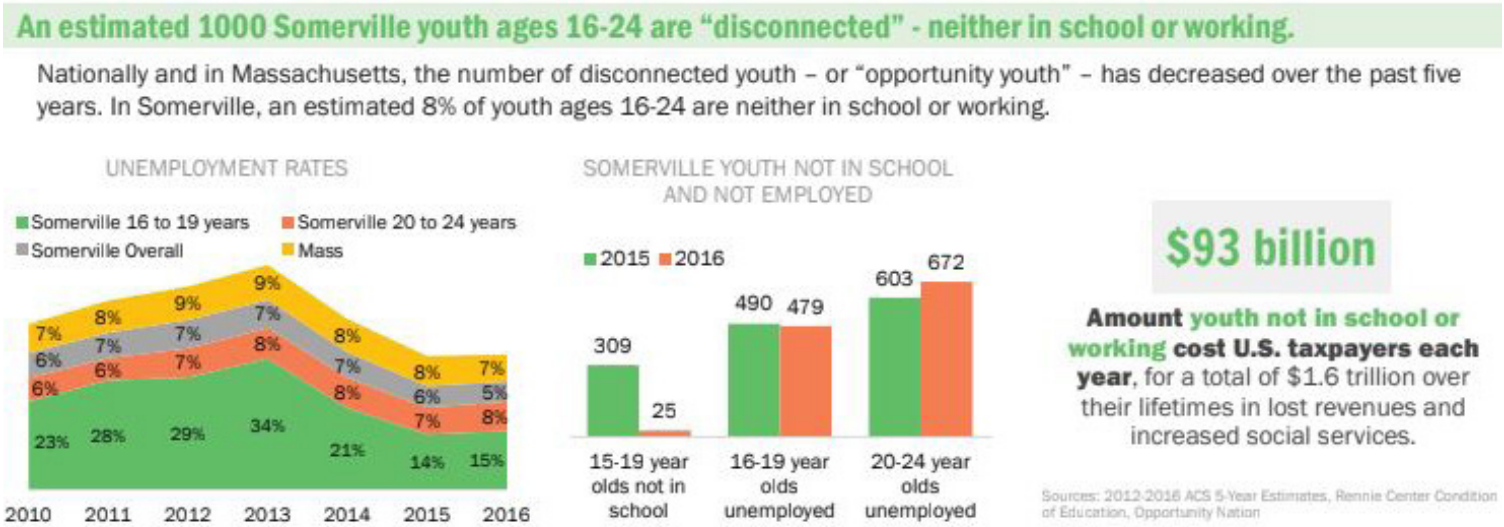
Another strength is the Somerville Parks & Recreation Department, which operates year-round programs throughout the City's public facilities, playgrounds, schoolyards, and other locations to promote positive and healthy activities for all members of the Somerville community.

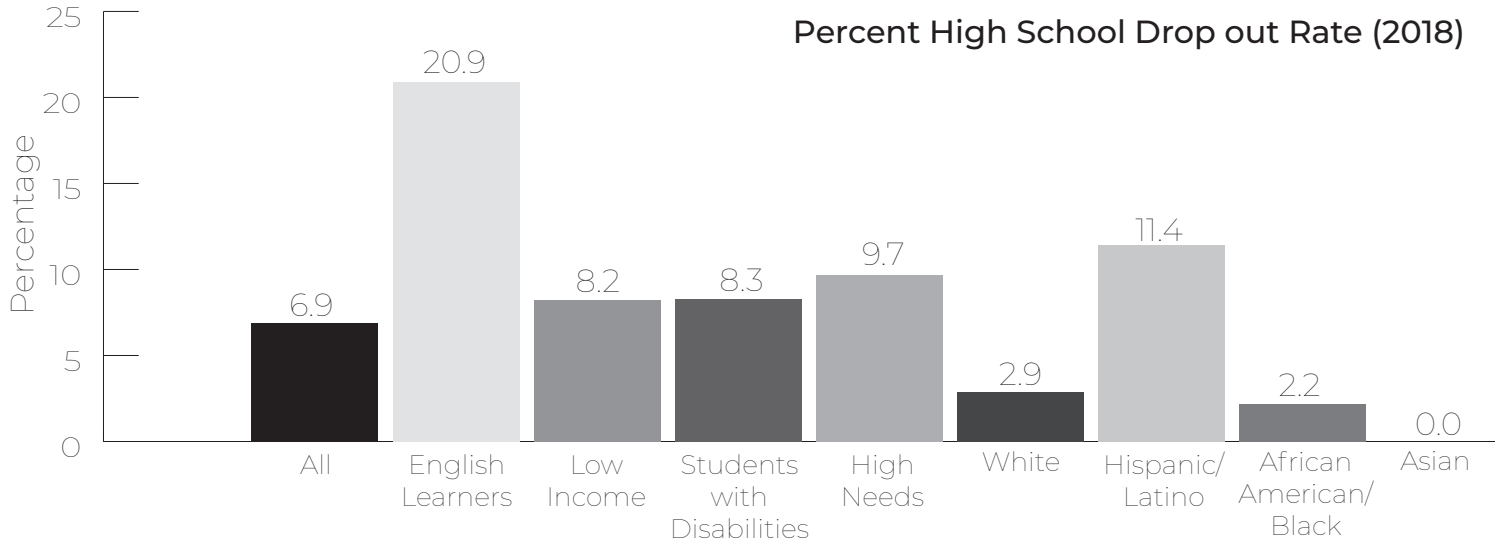
A new, accessible, modern facility for the many services the department provides will make it more successful in providing its existing services for toddlers to middle schoolers and its workforce development program for older youth.

availability and cost of early childcare. Childcare options that support the needs of working family schedules and budgets seem to be in short supply, with participants reporting limited slots and hours, waitlists, high costs, inconvenient locations, and staffing issues. Although afterschool programs are plentiful and often affordable, some expressed concern that high demand for these programs might prevent equitable access to these resources. Additionally, these after school programs tend to dwindle as kids age; middle schoolers age out of traditional afterschool programs but are not ready for complete independence.

One consistent piece of feedback was the need to explore opportunities for adding recreational and community space. The Boys & Girls Clubs of Medford and Somerville (BGCMS) closed in September 2018, leaving behind a gap in unstructured space and services for Somerville youth. Both the YMCA and the City's Parks and Recreation department provide a variety of classes, activities, and resources as well, but both would benefit from more accessible, functional, modern facilities and program space.

Numerous conversations with youth confirmed that the many local festivals and events in Somerville highlight and celebrate the diversity of our neighborhoods. They appreciate the open spaces and parks, many of which have been updated. Youth appreciate the organizations focused on their age group, such as Teen Empowerment and the school department after school offerings such as Citizen Schools and Breakthrough. Many young people take advantage of the Teen Room at the main branch library. They generally appreciate the care and support of teachers at the K-8 schools and Somerville High. The art, music,





and social studies programs were particularly mentioned for their inclusiveness and for helping students after school. Youth also feel that the SHS staff have supported students' voice and organizing in speaking out against gun violence and other critical issues. Young people in the youth forum also emphasized the importance of preserving small businesses for their character and unique value they provide to the neighborhoods. They appreciate the farmers markets and school and community gardens.

Regarding the school system specifically, community members are interested in seeing more emphasis on learning through play and projects for elementary school-age children, as well as more time for physical movement and breaks. For tweens and middle schoolers, there is an interest in putting more emphasis on personal growth and social-emotional support as well as more academic efforts. This theme evolved for the older students as SL2030 respondents, in particular, cited an interest in more flexible approaches to learning in high school and assistance in learning "real life" skills. In addition, participants wondered about methods to improve access to information and meetings. In particular, there might need to be additional resources or support for helping recent immigrants to not only stay informed but to participate meaningfully in the community.

The youth forum highlighted additional challenges students face at the high school related to the needs of low income students, immigrant students and students of color and adequate access to information on postsecondary options and guidance. They felt that more guidance personnel arenecessary, along with more teachers and counselors of color who could better understand students' day-to-day experience.

Another challenge identified in our outreach to youth was concerns about racial equity in the school system. Specifically, teenagers discussed how teachers are responsible for recommending what level of class a student takes and wondered if fewer students of color were ending up in advanced placement or honors classes than their white peers. Furthermore, students of color are more likely to drop out of school. SPS has already put a variety of resources into monitoring attendance – low attendance can be an early indicator for a student dropping out – but additional work will be needed to address the disproportionate numbers. The achievement gap is a challenge that nearly every school district in America faces. There are no easy answers, but Somerville must remain committed to addressing racial and ethnic inequity in our schools.

Finally, communication related to resources for youth remains a challenge. Adequately promoting and sharing the many resources available to families is bound to be a challenge, but ensuring that all families have equal access to information and services is particularly important. This includes everything from facilitating interpretation between teachers and parents to promoting available programs and their accessibility, to ensuring that meetings are scheduled in a way that maximizes involvement.

GOALS AND TAKEAWAYS

Look beyond the school system to support Somerville's youth. The challenges our children and school system are facing are not isolated to the public school system. Issues related to housing, workforce development,



and community engagement all affect the daily lives of students. As a result, school district staff should consider opportunities to participate in nonprofits and coalitions around these important, cross-cutting topics.

Support the development of a youth center. A center for older youth via a collaboration between the City, Somerville Public Schools, and other non profit agencies is needed. A youth board should lead the way in the development and organization of such a center with adults providing support, and help with funding and advisory support and supervision.

Provide affordable, high-quality childcare and afterschool programming. Childcare to all families, with options for all age groups is important. This helps all families, but forum participants also explained that a lack of childcare access is one of the biggest barriers preventing



Support immigrants to access resources and participate in community life. Participants at one of the Portuguese-language forums said that the community already did a great job supporting new Portuguese-speaking families, but SL2030 participants, students, and other stakeholders identified information access as an opportunity for improvement. Although communication to all families is important, ensuring that translation, interpretation, and extra outreach services reach all non-native English speakers to be effective.

EQUITY GOAL

immigrants from taking English and professional training classes.

Embrace a citywide approach to equity and diversity in the school system. Because research shows that all children benefit from a highly skilled and diverse educator workforce that reflects SPS students and families, we must continue to increase our staff of color and staff with multiple language capacity.

Consider growth and changing demographics in the city. As more housing is developed in Somerville, nonprofits, schools, and other community institutions should consider how these additional residents will affect their staffing needs and capacity.

Prioritize play-based learning and hands-on projects that build academic, real-world, and personal skills. Emphasize relevant, deeper learning - enhanced by experiences that take place outside of the classroom or in collaboration with community experts, colleges, and other resources. Introduce flexible scheduling at the high school. Increase access to internships, work-based learning experiences, and youth employment. This should ideally include additional opportunities for youth to participate in city leadership bodies and decision-making processes.

Title IX is a federal civil rights law that that protects people from discrimination based on sex in education programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance. It was passed as part of the Education Amendments of 1972. It was a follow-up to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. A failed amendment to the law led to the widespread misunderstanding that Title IX is a law only about sports-equity; it is broader anti-discrimination law.

In Somerville, we meet the obligations of Title IX and strive to provide opportunities for all interests. For instance, Parks and Recreation provides many sports and activities as co-ed or gender neutral and is currently studying, with the help of a consultant, what they can do to provide even more equitable programming.

Minimize the achievement gap in Somerville schools. The racial achievement gap is a difficult, multifaceted challenge with no singular solution, but it must remain a priority for everyone working with youth and the educational system in our community.

EQUITY GOAL

Provide comprehensive social-emotional wellness and mental health support. Ensure strong access to social-emotional wellness and mental health supports at school and in the community, with a particular focus on racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic equity.

POTENTIAL TASKS

- Establish a cross-cutting task force to explore how to better communicate resources and information to all families. This can include exploration of a common application or registration system that would make it easier for people to apply to multiple programs with only one application.
- Ensure all SPS schools are true community schools with integrated academic, health and social services, youth development, and community supports.
- Explore opportunities to create new gathering spaces for youth in the city. Ensure Somerville has at least one active recreation or youth center accessible for all youth.
- Create a Parks & Recreation facility to host programming, community events, and offices. An accessible, modern facility will support existing programs and serve as a a place for all ages, backgrounds, and interests to come together and



connect.

- Provide strong, collaborative Grade 8 to Grade 9 transition support to every SPS student.
- Find more funds to support paid and unpaid internships and apprenticeships for middle and high school students to help them feel more empowered.
- Research with the intent to implement a later high school start time. Engage parents and youth to discuss the pros and cons of a later schedule.
- Explore how to provide affordable early learning and care programs to all Somerville families. This effort should consider a City-run or City-supported child care program, a babysitting cooperative in conjunction with the high school, and a program at the Visiting Nurses Association that lets seniors engage with children.
- As part of kindergarten readiness, support social-emotional skill development and screen every child for behavioral health, and early learning issues.
- Establish an immigrant student committee and find additional ways to incorporate more student voice onthe Somerville School Committee.
- Use a collaborative process involving parents, educators, and students to review elementary homework policies. Develop a thoughtful, research-informed homework policy focused on student success in school and beyond.
- Expand access to afterschool, summer, and dual-language programs to additional schools.
- Somerville Learning 2030 members and others can form a “Somerville Learning Task Force” that includes representatives of all organizations serving youth with learning opportunities (i.e. schools, community organizations, early childhood centers, industry partners, etc.) to prioritize the report’s recommendations and help inform how each stakeholder group can incorporate them into their work.



Mayor's Office of
Strategic Planning &
Community Development