



# SOMERVISION2040

Sustainability • Diversity • Opportunity • Connectivity • Community

## Somerville Commercial Property Owners Forum

**Date of the event:** April 11, 2019

**Attendance:** 8

**Target participants:** Commercial property owners of Somerville

**Language of forum:** English

**Location:** The Independent

### What is working well for you in Somerville right now?

- The arts overlay was very important for Bow Market because of the relief they got for adding additional parking. Establishing incentives for development tied to the uses people want and the size of businesses people want is helpful.
- Property owners do occasionally allow a tenant to rent for below-market rate, but it's difficult to build the trust necessary for this arrangement between property owner and business owner.
- There are some great walkable places in Somerville, but there are opportunities to improve pedestrian mobility, particularly at night.

### What problems and challenges in Somerville are affecting you? Which are the most important to you personally?

- It is time to implement the zoning overhaul. The administration has done a terrific job, and it's time to implement the overhaul with the expectation that we will continue to make changes over time.
- Parking and transportation is a challenge for businesses. Their schedule might not align with when parking is available, which is usually not until. Transportation changes take a long time to make an impact, so this is an important topic to consider in a twenty-year vision.
- Loading zones, employee parking and employee transportation options are all challenges to Somerville businesses.
- Micromobility strategies like scooters can be a way to fill the gap since some districts are not currently benefitting from transit stations like Porter Square or Davis Square.



- The retail business is changing, thanks to the Internet, so there are few stores selling merchandise and the nature of uses has changed. This has increased the presence of personal services and changed the nature of tenancing. A lot of the lost tenants in Somerville are because the businesses don't exist anymore, and that may be due to macro issues like the changing economy and not Somerville-specific issue.
- We must protect industrial and commercial space. Residential is so hot, and definitely needed, but a well-balanced community will include these industrial and commercial spaces as well.

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

- Consider expanding the definition of “artist” in artist live/work spaces. These are attractive units with smaller footprints and can be densely packed, but could include chefs or offices. We can build a class of professionals that are not currently existing in the city. Maybe a food manufacturer or an independent retailer should be considered an artist.
- Incentives for providing smaller retail units in the zoning can help make bookstores and other retailers feasible, as long as we have a mix and aren't too saturated with one particular use. Of course, smaller stores present issues for accessibility and bathrooms, but clustering uses like Bow Market did helps.
- Explore the kind of mix tape zoning Detroit is using. Mix tape is a term for lessening red tape that can thwart economic development.
- What incentives could exist for property owners to rent to affordable, diverse businesses?
- Exploring ways to allow pop-ups or pilots temporarily in a space. This can include a temporary use that is not a full change of use to test an idea on a property.
- Brainstorm ways the city can engage property owners who are not paying attention. Vacancies or poorly-maintained buildings affect other businesses and properties.
- Explore options to promote a diversity of mobility options and pilot innovative ideas in this space, while still meeting ADA requirements.

