



SOMERVISION2040

Sustainability • Diversity • Opportunity • Connectivity • Community

Artists Forum

Date of the event: June 6, 2019

How many people attended this event? 24

Target participants: Somerville artists and creative economy advocates

In what language was this forum? English

Where was this event hosted? Lowell Street VNA

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

- The Arts council staff is very involved and helpful
- Art grants given out by the Arts council are very helpful, there should be more of them
- There is diverse and inclusive cultural programming throughout the city
- The Nibble program and shared kitchen space are great
- Resistat meetings are helpful, they should include more information about arts and creative economy though
- The Art Farm project looks promising (and is hopefully finished soon!)
- The existing large live and work artist spaces are invaluable (Artist's Asylum, Joy Street Studios, Brickbottom Artist's Association) but we need more
- Strong sense of community, especially among artists
- City does a great job communication with residents about what's happening
- There is a sense the city staff and community overall cares about people struggling, but bolder actions need to be taken
- The City is pushing programs to improve housing affordability, but it doesn't go far enough
- The City isn't afraid to try new ideas

- Somerville has a strong arts and cultural presence that was built over many decades, it's at risk now and we must preserve it
- DPW is helpful during community events with redirecting traffic
- The independently owned small businesses
- Somerville is fun and bike friendly, as well as artsy and funky, which attracts people to come live here
- The green line extension and bike paths
- Open Studios, Art Beat and Honk
- Sanctuary laws
- The 311 program

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

- Housing and cost of living are too high, it will ultimately not matter what else we offer artists if they can't find housing or studio space at an affordable level in the city
- Many artists have already moved out due to affordability issues
- Due to new developments and rising rent we are losing art organizations like Third Life Studio and at risk of becoming a cultural wasteland like Harvard Square
- A lot of the new development is plastic Snap-On building materials and small apartments with overpriced rent, it's not good for the city long term and isn't suited to the needs of families, artists or other moderate to low-income people
- We have a lot of short-term art events but not enough permanent art infrastructure where artists can display and sell their work year-round
- Immigrants are particularly struggling due to lack of housing affordability and immigrant artists bring a unique perspective
- There is a tension between making sure Somerville works for those who already live here and accommodating new people who want to move in, currently it seems we're not doing enough of the first and too much of the second
- Properties are too expensive, makes it difficult to create artist spaces

- The City is not providing enough incentives for companies like Rogers Foam to keep their studio spaces
- There is lack of artists organizations in the city doing political advocacy and pushing for the development of more artists spaces
- SomerVision2030 did not do enough for the artist community in terms of creating new spaces and making them affordable, which is essential
- The artist community is aging, and young artists can't afford to move here
- The proposed zoning must consider artists, while the fabrication district promises more maker spaces and excludes apartments, we must ensure they don't get taken over by tech companies who are not artists
- Too many people don't appreciate the arts in our community, we need to raise awareness of its importance among our youth through schools

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.

- Artists must be included in more aspects of city planning, if there is a new open space or streetscape redesign there may be opportunities to include an art installation that would provide work for artists and enhance the space for everyone
- Art has intrinsic value for the community in addition to the commercial revenue potential, it's justifiable to use public funds to subsidize spaces where we can make art and invite people in to see it, it shouldn't just be left up to the private sector
- We should provide incentives to commercial property owners to provide live-work artist space, perhaps a reduction in property tax, or a density bonus
- The city needs to ensure its zoning policies protect existing studio spaces from being turned into apartment buildings or office space and the language in the zoning overhaul should encourage live-work art spaces in the new fabrication district rather than create loopholes that would open it up to other uses

- We should have a program in the city that collects some small amounts of fees from new developments to provide subsidized studio spaces to young artists; they need a leg up in this economy, otherwise we'll only be left with older and already established artists in the city
- We need rent control or other rent stabilization policies
- The city should look at its own building stock to ensure it integrates art spaces into them: community meetings spaces could double as large studio spaces when not being used, civic and city buildings could include spaces to display community based art, unused buildings could become subsidized but self-managed live-work art spaces
- We need to encourage local artists to form an association or some other type of city-wide artist advocacy group with leadership that can engage with the city without being bound to the administration
- Some subsidized units from affordable zoning could be live-work artist spaces
- 1% of the value of any new development could go to an artist fund to build subsidized live-work artist spaces to attract young artists
- Add deed restrictions to new creative art spaces required in transformational areas by to ensure they don't get turned into something else down the line
- Do workshops for independent local artists to help them with the business side of their work
- Alternative ownership models are a great match for live-work artist spaces, we need to apply the new community land trust model to create and develop spaces that are owned and occupied by artists, these places could include storefronts as well
- Put artist workspaces in Art Farm and make it affordable for new artists but on a limited time frame, like 1-year residencies, to help new artists get started and have something to put on their CV
- The City must move faster on project involving artist spaces given the shortage, Art Farm is taking far too long

- The new GLX station on Washington St. should be called Brickbottom not East Somerville, it is not in the East Somerville neighborhood and Brickbottom would bring attention to the history and artist community in the area
- The City should emulate the Art Prize event in Michigan as it is one of the largest in the country
- The City needs to encourage incorporating art throughout new private developments before we start looking like every other place, there is plenty of money to go around in these projects and art brings value and attracts people
- In addition to larger live-work spaces we need a couple of high density, studio only spaces for independent artists who don't need and can't afford larger spaces
- The City should have a program that allows creative economy artists or other small businesses to utilize currently long-term vacant store fronts short term for a reduced cost until they are filled, would help artists get started and fill in the emptiness
- It would be great to have a mix of community space with a public art studio that is shared, and people can schedule windows of time to use, experiment and display
- The City could buy small vacant commercial spaces and rent them to local artists for a lower than market rate but still enough to not burden the City cost as a way to protect the use
- The City could use the accessory units in the Zoning Overhaul to create studio spaces in residential areas by providing property tax incentives to homeowners willing to convert their accessory units to studios
- We have a lot of food establishments with empty wall space, if the City had a program to match them with local artists to display/sell their work in those places it would be advantageous to everyone and very few do that currently