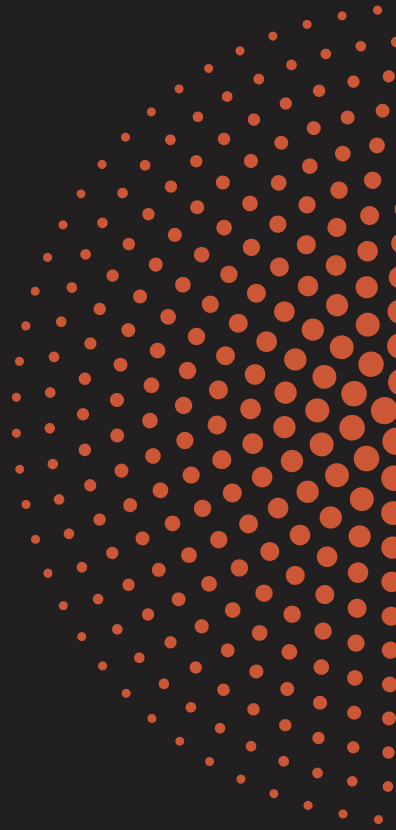
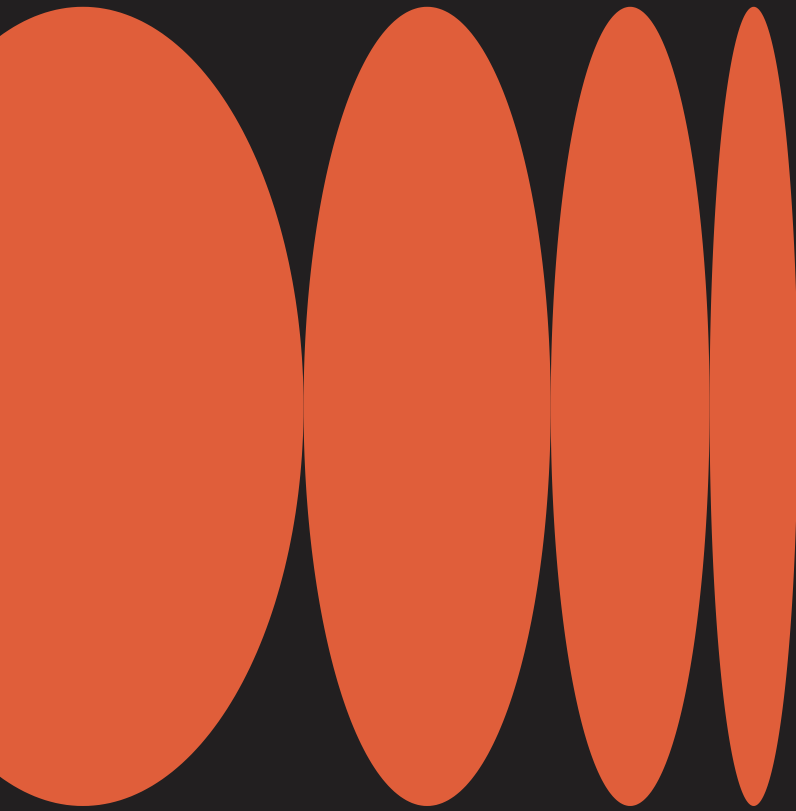




City of Somerville Anti-Displacement Task Force



Creative Displacement Committee

2025

Findings & Recommendations



ADTF-Creative Displacement Committee

Introduction

- [ADTF-Creative Displacement Committee Members](#)
- [The State of the Local Arts and Creative Economy](#)
- [A Letter from the Community Members of the ADTF - Creative Displacement Committee](#)
- [Summary of Policy Initiatives](#)

Policy Initiatives

1. [Integrate Arts and Creativity into the City's System](#)
 - City Statement of Values for the Arts
 - Arts and Culture Policy and Planning
2. [Assess and Monitor Somerville's Arts Ecosystem](#)
 - Creative Space Inventory
 - Artist Census
3. [Cultivate and Preserve Creative Space](#)
 - Community Ownership of Cultural Space
 - Arts and Community Space Catalog
 - More Affordable Artist Housing
 - Arts and Culture Property Tax Reduction
4. [Support Arts and Culture through Zoning and City Ordinances](#)
 - Arts and Creative Enterprise (ACE) Refinements
 - Creative and Cultural Districts
 - Agent of Change Policy
 - ACE Set-Aside Affordability
5. [Enhance Arts Business Development](#)
 - Somerville Arts Council Grant Expansion
 - Somerville Arts and Culture Assistance Collective
 - Artist Entrepreneurship Programming
6. [Identify and Establish Arts and Creative Funding Sources](#)
 - District-Based Financing Mechanisms
 - Room Occupancy Excise Tax Community Impact Fee
 - Patrons for the Arts
 - Property Tax Surcharge to Support Art
 - Outside Grant Opportunities
 - Percent for Art Program

Epilogue

- [Case Study: Mill No. 5](#)

Introduction

Anti-Displacement Task Force: Creative Displacement Committee Members

City of Somerville

Michael Rosenberg

ADTF - Creative Displacement Committee Co-Chair; Arts and Culture Planner, Somerville Arts Council

Steven Flythe

Deputy Director, Department of Racial and Social Justice

Luis Quizhpe

Strategic Planning & Equity Manager, Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development

Creative Committee Advisors

Councilor Willie Burnley Jr.

Councilor At-Large, Somerville City Council

Andrew Graminski

Planner, Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Division

Sarah Lewis

Senior Planner, Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Division

Victor Nascimento

Senior Planner, Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Division

Maria Teresa Nagel

Director, Somerville Office of Immigrant Affairs

Creative Committee Community Members

Jenn Harrington

ADTF - Creative Displacement Committee Co-Chair

[linkedin.com/in/jenn-harrington-about-one-thing](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jenn-harrington-about-one-thing)

Janeann Dill

[janeanndill-artist.com](https://www.janeanndill-artist.com)

Becky Donner

Somerville Arts Council Board Member

[beckylonner.com](https://www.beckylonner.com)

June Carolyn Erlick

[linkedin.com/in/june-erlick-7413275](https://www.linkedin.com/in/june-erlick-7413275)

Joshua Lankford

[linkedin.com/in/joshua-lankford](https://www.linkedin.com/in/joshua-lankford)

Matthew Martino

[linkedin.com/in/matthew-martino-66443810](https://www.linkedin.com/in/matthew-martino-66443810)

Thomas Scahill

[linkedin.com/in/thomas-scahill-5aa58956](https://www.linkedin.com/in/thomas-scahill-5aa58956)

Creative Advocacy Specialists

#ArtStaysHere Coalition

<https://www.artstayshere.org/>

Abbey Judd

Senior Arts and Culture Planner, Metropolitan Area Planning Council

[linkedin.com/in/abbey-judd](https://www.linkedin.com/in/abbey-judd)

Introduction

The State of the Local Arts and Creative Economy

From Somerville Public Testimony Records, 2023

“Thalia Zedek’s “Fighting Season” (from her solo album of the same name)—a song filled with grief and resistance, a song that’s forthright and unflinching—is, in a sense, where we are now. We’re at that last point where everything could change for the better or it could all go away for a very long time. We’re at that point where we need to choose what’s important to us.

For the legends we pass by in a back alley on our way into a nondescript building to meet in a decades-old recording studio hidden in a basement; for the musicians we enjoy for free at Porchfest (many who are struggling to find a way to make rent, an affordable place to practice, or an indoor stage in Greater Boston to perform on); for the local promoters who reach within their own wallets to pay the bands; for the venue owners who put everything they have into a space they don’t own because they believe in independent and local music; for the people who go to shows and lay down a buck or twenty extra at the merch table because they’ve done the math and the numbers don’t add up; for the young dreamers who are just starting out on their instruments; for the musicians who had no choice but to leave Somerville, yet still keep an eye on us, hoping things will get better so they can return, because that’s what you do when you fall in love with and care for a community...

For them all...we’re asking you to fight.”

—Emily Arkin • Benjamin Cuba • Ethan Dussault • Sam Epstein •
Melissa Gibbs • Mike Gintz • JJ Gonson • Marji Gere • Jenn
Harrington • Ajda Snyder • Jason Trefts • Nick Zampiello

Support Thalia Zedek’s work on Bandcamp: thaliazedek.bandcamp.com

If art asks us to fearlessly roam into ideas, what happens when people become afraid to make art? This question may seem too hypothetical. But, in another wave of gentrification, we are still learning—through painful experience—about its impact.

Creatives nationwide are under attack in multifaceted and interconnected ways.

- **Where they live.**
Affordable living options are scarce. Creatives need affordable housing to pay for the upfront costs of their craft. Without affordable housing, creatives put less of their earnings toward their work.
- **Where they work.**
Industrial buildings often provide affordable space for creative work. When developers renovate or repurpose these buildings, they become too expensive. Without access to low-cost workspaces, creatives do not have a place to work.
- **How they share their work and make money.**
Small businesses that support local creatives are shuttering. Galleries, venues, and independent stores tend to be community-minded. Without them, local creatives do not have a place to present or sell their work to a wider audience.
- **How much they pay for necessities.**
The cost of products and space is at an all-time high. This includes basic necessities as well as required equipment for practicing a trade. Without the tools of their trade, it becomes impossible for creatives to make new work.
- **How much they earn.**
The creative economy is not an equitable industry. In many ways, society undervalues creative work, and creatives are receiving the smallest share. While the creative economy organizes to receive fair compensation, creatives require financial stability from other sources to make the living wage they deserve.

Why would creatives fear creating? Unfortunately, the answer is simple. Like many of us, creatives struggle to get by in tough economic times. The very act of creating comes at a cost. When creatives must choose between immediate needs and future aspirations, they are not a protected workforce.

The State of the Arts in Somerville

In our research, the Anti-Displacement Task Force (ADTF) Creative Displacement Committee focused on two pressure points for creatives in the area: “Where they work” and “How they share their work and make money.” Both of these pressure points amass as affordable creative spaces decline.

Loss of Creative Space

The Greater Boston area is going through an arts space crisis. At a 2023 Boston public hearing, Chief of Arts and Culture Kara Elliott-Ortega stated that, in the past 5–7 years, Boston alone has lost over 100,000 square feet of cultural production space. She revealed one of the primary issues of arts space displacement: “We see time and time again that developers file their projects with no mention of what's being displaced, no acknowledgment of what is on site and

what that site means to people. We at the city, across departments, need to show up for communities that make a cultural space and continue to work together to make that work visible. Without that championing, we'll always be stuck being brought in too late at the point of crisis.”

Somerville has experienced its own dramatic cultural space losses. We lost multiple major creative maker collectives with hundreds of businesses within them. We lost many respected recording studios, renowned venues, celebrated galleries, and niche instrumental restoration and repair shops. We lost our only rehearsal studio for loud music, an aerial performance studio, and a zine library. The list goes on. The list includes visual and performing arts spaces. The list contains a host of DIY spaces that are integral to emerging creatives as well as established creatives seeking to experiment with material.

Each creative industry is an ecosystem. When space diminishes, the community and surrounding businesses that rely on those creatives suffer. In a 2024 announcement about the creation of a State Cultural Economy Advisory Council, the Healey Driscoll Administration stressed that the Massachusetts’ creative economy “adds \$27 billion to the state economy each year and supports 135,000 jobs across the state.” Americans for the Arts ACTION Fund’s 2024 report, [Why the Creative & Cultural Sector Matters](#), states that the Arts & Culture industry in Massachusetts, surpasses retail, construction, and transportation. Moreover, money isn’t the only community benefit.

- “72% of Americans believe that the arts unify communities.”
- “91% think the arts improve academic performance.”
- “75% say that medical care professionals tell them to take part in the arts for their physical or mental health.”
- “72% state that creativity is of “high importance” in the job market.”

When Somerville's arts community declines, especially due to substantial space losses, our economy declines. And so does the care of the individuals in our community.

It’s important to reflect on what has replaced our cultural spaces. These spaces are, in many respects, private spaces. They include labs, coworking spaces, and apartment buildings. Even with window-filled lobbies, they are spaces that don't welcome the public. Or, they only welcome the public if they spend money. On weekends, these are often closed-off spaces. And, unfortunately, these are often front-facing spaces on main thoroughfares. These spaces have shifted from places dedicated to discovery to blank windows that only reflect people passing by.

For the pedestrian, lazy frontages are like walking through a dead zone. There is no life there. It’s unnerving when our buildings and streets become less about connection and more about the utility of getting from work to home. In a city, our lives are not meant to become smaller. For streets to have a pulse, they need to capture people’s attention by providing unique shared experiences. [Urban Land Institute](#) states, “ground-floor activation is not just a best practice but also a design ethic that we all must uphold.” Fortunately, the creative economy often provides

the assets for a dynamic urban environment. Unlike other industries, the creative economy's work requires connection and communication. Community is part of its calling.

It burdens our creatives to ask them to do more for their community for much less. Cities must be aware that continuing to retain and attract creatives requires a trade-off. Many cities have wised up, providing fairer trades by offering incentives and protections. Creatives are moving to places where they can make a living. They are moving for affordable housing. They are moving to spots where there are affordable studios. They are moving for the opportunity to own creative space so that their investment is not managed by the whims of landlords. They are moving to neighborhoods that welcome them. They are moving to communities that acknowledge that their expertise is a necessity. They are joining scenes that are confident and enthused by a creative boom. Like any resident, they find themselves attracted to spaces that are full of life.

Rise in Arts Emergencies

In 2023 and 2024, we saw a rise in arts emergencies.

- Developers made multiple attempts throughout the city to chip away at the 50 acres of the Fabrication District (FAB). If approved, it would contribute to a loss of 26% of a zoning district meant to protect old industrial buildings that often serve as affordable creative spaces.
- The Joy Street community is under distress due to the high-priced sale of its building, rent increases, and a lack of assurance from the developer.
- Both Central Street Studios and Washington Street Art Center have faced the threat of the sale of their property, destabilizing their organizations under the notion that their spaces might not exist anymore if sold.
- Residents have complained more about noise from indoor and outdoor performances. Researchers have linked these kinds of complaints in other U.S. cities to gentrification.
- Rental prices for creative workspaces are climbing all over the city, especially in development areas. While some creative workspaces may still exist, local creatives are already priced out.

In 2022, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) released the [Somerville Art Space Risk Assessment Study](#). The report stressed that “affordability of workspace and access to workspace are key to retaining and expanding Somerville’s artistic community as one of the drivers of its local cultural and creative economy.” In 2023, the City released its [progress report](#). As of November 2024, only two recommendations—hiring an Arts and Culture Planner and submitting revised ACE definitions to the City Council—are complete. This new staff role and the revised definitions are victories. But, it is disappointing that the City hasn't yet been able to implement MAPC's other recommendations.

Individual crises interrupt the work to develop good policies and partnerships. They force city planning and advocacy efforts into reactive rather than proactive mechanisms. Also, ongoing emergencies make the creative economy, residents, and small businesses skeptical. They doubt anyone wants to build a future for them in Somerville.

Meaningful Solutions

All is not lost. Somerville, through years of hard work, financial investment, and wise planning, actually has a good foundational structure to take on the next wave of action to fight the displacement of our cultural community.

Zoning

In many respects, Somerville zoning is a step ahead of other cities. In 2019, the City established the Fabrication District (FAB) with the intention to “create, maintain, and enhance areas appropriate for small- and moderate-scale, single- and multi-use buildings; activities common to the arts and creative economy and supporting commercial activities; and a variety of employment opportunities in the arts and creative enterprises.” Arts & Creative Enterprise (ACE) was also created as a land use type. ACE created a special designation for arts uses, allowing them by right in most zones of the city. This new land use category also requires developers in certain zoning districts to reserve a percentage of commercial space in new developments for arts and creative uses.

These forward-thinking zoning initiatives are essential for a healthy arts and creative industry. Yet, after only five years, and the pandemic interfering with its growth, two of the largest FAB districts will most likely have overlays to welcome in new development for other industries. Unfortunately, zoning cannot ensure affordability. These large parcels will be unaffordable without long-term solutions from the City, developers, or others. Also, ACE has not yet proven effective at creating affordable spaces for creatives.

Funding by the City

The City invests in resources, including funding and expanding the Somerville Arts Council, purchasing The Armory, managing and matching funding for LCC Grants, and paying creatives for City events. Not only do these resources work towards financial security and equity for local artists, they serve as a statement that the work of local creatives is important.

That said, there is a risk that these funding initiatives will become inequitable. As creatives leave the area due to affordability concerns, these funds benefit a smaller pool of creatives. There is also a risk that investments made to individual artists will eventually benefit other cities if Somerville doesn’t offer enough benefits to convince them to stay.

Capacity-building

In 2023, the Somerville Arts Council launched the [Cultural Capacity Planning Process](#), engaging local creatives to “strengthen and improve access to Somerville’s cultural assets.” While the final report is not set to be released until winter 2024/2025, key recommendations include:

- Explore the creation of a Cultural Trust to catalyze capacity-building.
- Support the capacity of existing arts and culture organizations to continue providing community benefits.
- Support ongoing capacity building work in the community.

At a time where so much has been lost, this unique initiative gave creatives a platform to proactively bring forward issues, propose solutions, and build an arts ecosystem for the future. Not enough time has passed to measure if this work has created proactive changes for Somerville's cultural landscape.

Arts at Decision Tables

In 2023, the City of Somerville launched the Anti-Displacement Task Force with Residential, Small Enterprise, and Creative Committees. These committees focused on challenges as well as unique solutions for specific populations of our community. It was impactful for the creative economy to be given the consideration of an entire committee.

This report is a result of this initiative. In order for the project to be successful, bold measures will need to go into effect immediately.

A Community of Creatives

But perhaps our greatest assets are the people—creatives who contribute to a wealth of cultural organizing.

- Somerville Arts Council (SAC), the SAC Board, and the Cultural Ambassadors.
- Independent entities, arts organizations, local businesses who support local creatives, among many others.
- Publicly owned spaces, including The Armory, Somerville Public Library's three branches, and FABville.
- Arts studio buildings that attract visitors and partners, constantly shining a bright light on our City's reputation.
- Spaces that feature local creatives and commit to weekly arts programming year-round.
- Youth-oriented organizations who include arts and culture in their programming.
- Volunteers, many without whom treasured programming would not exist, who have worked for free and for decades on events like Artbeat, Evolution of Hip Hop Festival, Ignite, Illuminations Tour, Porchfest, and SomerStreets as well as retired events like Project MUM and the Windows Art Project.
- Local arts advocacy efforts like studio building steering committees and advocacy campaigns like Don't F with FAB! (a collaborative project of the Somerville arts community and #ARTSTAYSHERE).

A Vision of the Future

Released in October 2021, [Somervision 2040](#) emphasizes the protection of artists as one of its primary goals. "With rising costs, special effort is needed to preserve and extend Somerville's status as a home for artists and musicians." To hold the City accountable and welcome new ideas, we should regularly ask ourselves what we have accomplished and what we need to do next to build firm commitments toward this aim.

We Need to Do More

The era of asking creatives to sacrifice is over. In this digital age, we see the arts making money. But we also see the injustice in how companies funnel it away from artists. Groups like the

United Musicians and Allied Workers (UMAW) are fighting for fair wages, safer venues, and lower merch cuts. Organizations like MassCreative are offering resources, training, and peer learning to strengthen local creative advocacy. Creatives in Somerville are speaking up at City Council meetings. They are asking the City to acknowledge them. Over and over, they request affordable space. Without it, they cannot stay.

The National Endowment for the Arts's [Arts Attendance, Art-Making, and Social Connectedness](#) report found that "those who had access to arts activities in their communities reported lower rates of loneliness than those who lacked such access." Additionally, creatives as well as those who attended arts events were more likely to claim they had social and emotional support, they participated in clubs or organizations, and they more frequently connected with family and friends on the phone.

Creative work isn't just dollars. It's a fundamental way to communicate ideas, to understand ourselves and each other. A city would not be able to work without its citizens having an awareness of how to thrive. Communities cannot prosper without opportunities to gather. We cannot have community discussions about societal issues and seek change without the ability to see another way. No one can look to the future with hope and innovation without the imagination to transform it. Simply, Somerville cannot succeed without our creatives because without art individuals cannot succeed.

The price of art is hard to measure. This is one of the reasons we face the displacement of our local creative economy today. When we experience beauty, there is joy. It's sometimes easy to talk about what that joy means, but it's far more difficult to account for what the experience of feeling joy is worth. Even more complicated: because creatives often feel fulfilled by creating, some people assume that they deserve less compensation due to the feelings they experience while they work.

The combination of inadequate pay and rising costs presents a stark inequity. Soon, only the wealthy will be able to afford to be a part of the creative industry. Without action, we are stifling the voices and new ideas of our underserved communities. Without action, we are encouraging an inequitable world where privilege dictates the job market. Without action, we are training youth to ignore the possibility of following a creative field. The National Endowment for the Arts's Arts Attendance, Art-Making, and Social Connectedness research found that the likelihood of in-person arts attendance and arts creation correlated with the increase of educational attainment and income levels. Now knowing what we know, without action, we are intentionally isolating those who need joy and community, fulfillment and support, as well as opportunities for learning and higher income, the most.

It might not seem that the creative economy has disappeared in Somerville at all. But this is not the experience of creatives who work within it. Those who have left could not afford rent, as many of our former neighbors could not. Those who have left could not afford to wait for another affordable studio space to magically appear. Those who have left saw the options to make a living here dwindle. Those who left were a wealth of experienced cultural workers.

Those who left create work that now benefits other communities. In a way, those who left are some of our current cultural residents who now travel to other parts of Greater Boston to produce their trade. Those who left include the vast networks each creative has. Those who stay? Many of them fear that they too will have to leave.

If art asks us to fearlessly roam into ideas, what happens when people become afraid to make art? If a city does not make space for creativity, what happens to that community? When affordable creative space is at risk, we need to ask these hard questions. Since affordable creative space is rapidly disappearing in Somerville, we must ask these questions now.

Introduction

A Letter from the Community Members of the ADTF - Creative Displacement Committee

From Somerville Public Testimony Records, 2024

“We are all so threatened. We are so scared...Art is already here...We want to keep making it...We love our building. It may be old and crusty, but we are there and we want to stay...We want to keep doing what we love.”

—Audrey Ryan

Dear Mayor Ballantyne and Somerville City Council,

Years of cumulative decision-making have made the City of Somerville a place where a vast portion of our community feels it is not welcome anymore. As a result, we have already lost much of what this task force aimed to protect.

In Somerville's creative community, properties that once sheltered arts and performance spaces remain empty years past closure or have disappeared entirely. Creative organizations that were integral to our community have dispersed or migrated to more hospitable cities. Foundational structures that once provided security for the creative economy are dismantling. There is an alarming decrease in diversity. It's no wonder that creatives have left and continue to leave in droves—as much as Somerville benefits from the economic value of the creative economy, we have become a city that does not pay in kind.

For over a year, the Anti-Displacement Task Force (ADTF) Creative Displacement Committee has reviewed the wealth of resources creatives provide to Somerville as well as the gravely dwindling list of resources creatives rely on. We have attended countless community meetings on the overwhelming amount of arts emergencies in our city. Yet again, we have seen creatives step up—engaging in community processes, fighting for zoning, speaking up for at-risk creative spaces, and investing in our community. Yet again, we have not seen significant progress in the face of the challenges arising against them. As is the trend, we attend to the creative economy last. We see that this scarcity of aid is creating even more insurmountable deficits for the creative economy as well as for the communities it serves. These losses will take years to recover.

In light of the colossal crises our creatives are now facing, the ADTF Creative Displacement Committee composed our report to:

- Assess the status of Somerville's creative economy and resources.
- Offer options and pathways, many of which the City can carry out without a financial burden, to address a time rife with complex problems by:
 - Encouraging new ideas and creativity in fighting creative displacement without being overly prescriptive about how to accomplish them.
 - Learning from the proactive work that other cities have already instituted.
- Communicate to a wide audience (without too much government jargon) to empower city officials, residents, creatives, arts organizers, community advocates, and developers to work towards solutions together.

We would like to acknowledge:

- Cities experiencing similar challenges have adopted many of the proposals herein.
- Many of these proposals address issues that our own community has raised for years.
- All these proposals are only *first steps* to preserve our cultural institutions, cultural identity, and its future.
- All these proposals would contribute to slowing further cultural erosion, so we can:
 - Work on art space recovery.

- Create much-needed gains in policy and funding.
- Safeguard our creatives and cultural workers.
- Provide a warm reception to those who have had to leave.
- Welcome those who have not yet had the opportunity to be a part of our community, especially those who face more systemic and unjust barriers to entry into the creative ecosystem than others.

The ADTF Creative Displacement Committee, composed of City staff and residents, shows what Somerville can accomplish when we invite people with different expertise and experiences into the same room and ask them to focus on a critical issue. Our City needs more of this kind of vital community interaction—one that steps back from politics and hones in on communication, teamwork, transparency, and innovative problem-solving. To find solutions for the crises our creative economy is facing, we need creative, collaborative, community-driven decision-making and support.

Our team has spent a year, unpaid, trying to identify some of the long-standing inequities in our creative community caused by displacement. Even though this task force has reached the end of its term, we are still invested in the outcome. The community members of the Anti-Displacement Task Force’s Creative Displacement Committee ask the City to continue to keep us and the community informed about the progress of this work. We would also like the City to consider us for continued involvement.

We have already lost too much, but we still have hope. There is still time to preserve the cultural assets that remain, to rebuild the hundreds of thousands of square feet we have lost, and to envision much-needed gains. To do this, we must:

- Acknowledge the harm that has already occurred.
- Recognize that even in the best of times, needs were not met.
- Adopt policies today to preserve and protect creative spaces.
- Champion policies that fight for cultural equity and diversity.
- Include local creatives in discussions about planning in every city sector.
- Consider youth, without condescension, in the instruction, programming, and organization of arts pursuits.
- Partner with real estate and other development companies that embed arts and culture in their missions.
- Create a long-term plan to continue enacting policy changes that will incentivize growth in the creative sector.
- Discover new ways to advocate for the arts in an ever-changing world.
- Show respect to professionals in the local creative economy by hiring and paying them for their skills.

This work is far from complete. There will be more solutions to consider tomorrow. Rather than following our past mistakes, let us be a city determined to work towards becoming what we imagine it can be.

We would like to thank:

- Our fellow Anti-Displacement Task Force Committees—representing the needs of our residents and small businesses—whose proposals we support.
- Luis Quizhpe, Michael Rosenberg, Steven Flythe, Councilor Willie Burnley Jr., and Andrew Graminski and Victor Nascimento for their time and dedication, strong work ethic and expertise, and thoughtfulness and care, with us and for our community. We learned so much from this experience because they welcomed us into this process.
- Mayor Ballantyne and the City of Somerville for believing that we can do better for residents, small businesses, and creatives.

Finally, we politely point out: Government is slow. The creative economy is not. We needed change and resources years ago, and we have been advocating as much. We bring this to your attention not to point fingers, but to note an overwhelming backlog of problems. We thank the Mayor for bringing our creatives to service by giving us the autonomy to lead the City to the desirable outcomes outlined in this report. We look forward to seeing these kinds of collaborations continue!

Creative displacement policy work is still relatively new. Cities worldwide are now dedicated to the needs of the creative economy because cities do not work without a strong creative economy. During a time of so much change, we hope Somerville can evolve to advocate for our creatives as much as we strategically advocate for our residents and small businesses.

Sincerely,
Jenn Harrington
ADTF - Creative Displacement Committee Community Co-Chair

ADTF - Creative Displacement Committee Community Members
Janeann Dill
Becky Donner
June Carolyn Erlick
Joshua Lankford
Matthew Martino
Thomas Scahill

Creative Advocacy Specialist
Abbey Judd, [Metropolitan Area Planning Council](#)

Introduction

Summary of Policy Initiatives

Displacement affects communities across the nation. It disrupts lives, erodes cultural heritage, and exacerbates economic inequalities. In response to displacement in Somerville, the Anti-Displacement Taskforce Creative Committee has developed six key policy initiatives to address pressing issues in our creative economy. Each initiative aims to keep creatives in place and support their livelihoods. Moreover, our recommendations will mitigate displacement and empower communities to thrive.

Policy Initiatives Overview

1. **Integrate Arts and Creativity into the City's System**
Embed arts and creativity within all the City's planning and development processes. Make certain that culture is a priority in decision-making.
2. **Assess and Monitor Somerville's Arts Ecosystem**
Conduct comprehensive assessments of the local arts ecosystem. Identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities, enabling informed policy decisions.
3. **Cultivate and Preserve Creative Space**
Focus on the preservation and development of affordable and accessible creative spaces. Maintain that artists and cultural practitioners have the resources they need to thrive.
4. **Support Arts and Culture through Zoning and City Ordinances**
Institute zoning policies and ordinances that protect and promote arts spaces. Secure the preservation of creative hubs. Make them accessible to all members of the community.
5. **Enhance Arts Business Development**
Advance and expand new and existing programs to bolster artists as businesses. Use monetary and technical contributions to uplift the creative economy on many levels.
6. **Identify and Establish Arts and Creative Funding Sources**
Explore diverse funding streams for arts and cultural projects. Secure grants, sponsorships, and public-private partnerships to sustain and grow the local arts scene.

Together, these initiatives represent a holistic approach to combating displacement, so that Somerville's creative community not only survives but thrives in the face of change. By prioritizing the recommendations within each of these policy initiatives, in combination with the recommendations from the Residential and Small Enterprise Committees, we will build a more just and inclusive future for all.

Policy Initiative

Integrate Arts and Creativity into the City's System

From Somerville Public Testimony Records, 2024

“Artists need rough-around-the-edges spaces in which we can make messes on the way to making art that will enter the public sphere...If you want art for the walls of your high rise, or the walls of your office, or for the plaza or local park, you need to leave artists space to work—and affordable space to live. If you want street festivals and art markets and performers and puppet shows and murals and darkroom photographers and free or affordable workshops for yourself or your kids to learn pretty much any art form, you need to leave artists space to work and space to live.”

—Ellen Rounseville

Integrate Arts and Creativity into the City's System

City Statement of Values for the Arts

Recommendation

The City adopts a Statement of Values for the Arts to:

- **Signal to the community the role local artists have and will continue to have in the future growth of the City.**
- **Remind stakeholders of the importance of the arts and the creative economy.**
- **Ensure that arts and artists are top of mind for City officials when making decisions.**

A public-facing, community-driven guiding statement of how the city values and prioritizes the arts will:

- Document how the local arts economy contributes to the success of the city, its business owners, and its residents.
- Emphasize the critical importance of independent, locally owned and managed arts spaces.
- Broadcast that the sustainability and advancement of our creative economy is an active priority.
- Articulate the prosperity a city can achieve when artists live and work in it.
- Create space for our displaced artists so they can continue to advance their careers and work with their network.
- Introduce and encourage connections between our community and current/future investors. Then investors can tap into the wealth of talent that our community holds.
- Credit our local arts workers for their educational and cultural value. In doing so, the city can generate more opportunities for them.
- Create a reference for city staff so they can make decisions with the arts in mind. Departments can then work together with a clear focus on this set of values.

Next Steps

- The Somerville Arts Council and other City departments host a "Community Chaos" event. This online community input forum in the form of a Google Doc, or something similar, would encourage immediate feedback, collective brainstorming, and transparency.
 - Host the ADTF-Creative Displacement Committee's City Statement of Values for the Arts online in various languages.
 - Allow readers to post comments for feedback.
 - Collaborate with the City's communications team for a press release and posting on social media.
 - Send email announcements to all Somerville arts and community stakeholders. Include arts advocacy groups in Massachusetts, like MassCreative, Boston Lawyers for Civil Rights, and #ArtStaysHere.
 - Ask libraries and schools to collaborate and spread the word about this project.
- The City creates a new page on its website. It would include the Statement of Values for the Arts, information on the Somerville Arts Council, and a list of other cultural assets.

- City departments, with input from staff at all levels, provide an annual report. A summary of the year, it proposes new developments to support, engage, and foster the arts and creative economy for the coming year.
- The City considers adopting a logo or other visual identifier to place on all City materials and spaces that align with the Somerville Statement of Values for the Arts.

Somerville Statement of Values for the Arts

The City of Somerville recognizes the magnitude of social, economic, educational, development, and growth opportunities the local creative economy—and the individual people who comprise it—contributes to the success of the city and its residents. The city acknowledges that the local creative economy is key to cultivating equity, creating a culture of belonging, building stronger community connections and values, and aiding vast improvements in health and well-being—in addition to creating our city’s identity.

In such, the role of the City of Somerville is to

- Commit to equity by embracing the universal goal that everyone should have access to the pursuit of the arts. Realize that in order for everyone to have access to the arts, affordability and space need to be the top priorities.
- Value the contributions of our residents and community members who work in the creative economy.
- Champion development, planning, policy, and partnerships that keep the fabric of our city—the arts and creative economy—in mind.
- Strive to protect and expand access to affordable performance, production, and practice spaces where our creative economy can thrive.
- Endeavor to keep artists and creatives both working and living in the city.
- Advocate for arts spaces and programming that provide equitable access to underrepresented artists as well as their audiences.
- Consistently create and seek subsidies, new partnerships, and income-generating projects that support/employ our local creative workers.

We take pride in the workforce of the Somerville creative economy, including the Somerville Arts Council—its staff, the SAC Board, Cultural Ambassadors, our arts activists and volunteers, and everyone who contributes to it. We pledge not to silo this vast collaborative network by

- Bridging the Somerville Arts Council with the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD), the Planning Board, and other city departments.
- Making a concerted effort to prioritize and plan for arts and creative economy needs across city departments.
- Evaluating city activities across departments and with our community partners to ensure that we are in compliance with this statement of values. This report will include a synopsis of all paid and volunteer hours that were enlisted for city arts and cultural programming. The city will do this on an annual basis.
- Aiming to develop, review, and refine a communications plan for the arts.

We, the City of Somerville, avow:

- We would not be a “we” without the connections that the arts continuously build for us.
- We will not be able to prosper without the means that the arts generously supply.
- In turn, we must welcome our creatives by
 - making space here for them to work,
 - providing a place here for them to live,
 - protecting the cultural history they have amassed,
 - amplifying their presence so they can be found,
 - and provisioning platforms where their voices may be heard.

Integrate Arts and Creativity into the City’s System

Arts and Culture Policy and Planning

Recommendation

The City continues to include and expand the role of arts and culture in all levels of decision making, community planning, and development processes.

Because the arts are an integral part of a community’s fabric, the City must include the arts in all planning and development processes. We have seen that the arts and government working in silos only encourage the displacement of creative space. With collaborative efforts, arts stakeholders can encourage the City to think outside the box. They can inspire the City to form stronger inter-departmental bonds. They can remind the City that policy and development impact people. Moreover, having local creatives in a variety of roles keeps them in mind for future prospects.

Proposal I: Arts Representation

- **Create a Standing Committee/Task Force**
Convene a City Council Arts Standing Committee or a Mayor’s Standing Task Force to ensure year-round attention to arts issues.
- **Include Arts at All Other Tables**
The Somerville Arts Council and other local arts representatives should be at all organizing tables. This includes
 - Discussions about zoning (regardless of whether it is an area designated as FAB)
 - Neighborhood and comprehensive plans
 - New or redeveloped building plans (especially public and educational institutions)
 - Economic development initiatives, and other policy changes.
- **Give Arts and Culture a Platform**
Arts representation should exist throughout the City and not only via the Somerville Arts Council. Create an Arts and Culture Planning Division or position a team within the Mayor’s Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development. This will unify arts and culture needs with Somerville’s planning processes.

Proposal II: A Gentrification Division of the Law Department

- **Expand the Law Department**

Hire a lawyer, full-time or as needed. They will oversee all gentrification issues, including oversight of arts spaces and Community Benefits Agreements. This representative will work closely with other City departments.

Proposal III: Arts in All Communications

- **Include Arts in Public Meetings**

The City evaluates all public meetings and finds ways to amplify local arts in programming. This could be as simple as promoting the artist of the month as well as the creative's website before a Zoom meeting (while people wait for it to begin). It could be a live (and paid) performance of a song before a City Council meeting. It could be paying a sketch artist to document a series of public hearings.

- **Fine-tune Public Communications**

The City works with local creatives to amplify City messaging (videos, bulletin boards, emails, reports) with pay and amplification of that creative's work.

- **Create a Somerville Music Playlist**

The City integrates local musicians' recorded work into soundtracks. Each year, a music curator creates a new soundtrack in exchange for the use of work. The full soundtrack will be available on the City's website (please do not use Spotify). See Austin's "Music on Hold" program. We recommend that a local booker who works with local musicians curate the playlist.

Next Steps

- Approve the Statement of Values for the Arts.
- Revisit the Somerville Art Council's Mission Statement to ensure it aligns with the current community needs.
- Re-evaluate the SAC Board's purpose to pay these community members for their service.
- Evaluate City communications (including the City's website), meet with local creatives about ways they could influence messaging, and analyze if intentional aesthetic changes create positive results.
- Create an Arts and Cultural Planning Division.
- Create a position in the Legal Department with a direct focus on issues of gentrification.
- Ask all City departments to think outside the box, working with SAC to feature the arts in ways they may not have considered before. SAC should manage featured spots to ensure that there is diversity in programming.
- Commit to another Cultural Capacity Plan in 2030, with regular updates every 5 years.

Policy Initiative

Assess and Monitor Somerville's Arts Ecosystem

From Somerville Public Testimony Records, 2024

“When I lost my performance space, which was my heart and my home, it was because I couldn’t pay the rent during the pandemic. I was overwhelmed not only by my sadness but also by the sadness of the hundreds of community members who regularly attended and enjoyed our shows...The rash of development sweeping through the city has made it impossible to find, much less afford, a space to create music and performances in. I have been forced out of Somerville...The loss of ONCE has had a large and negative impact on the income of surrounding businesses as well as the culture of performing arts in Somerville.”

—JJ Gonson

Assess and Monitor Somerville's Arts Ecosystem

Creative Space Inventory

Recommendation

The City continues to develop an Arts and Cultural Space Inventory to track the arts and creative ecosystem of Somerville.

An Arts and Cultural Space Inventory enables the City and the community to troubleshoot potential issues in the arts ecosystem before dire emergencies emerge. Accurate, up-to-date data supports understanding the deeper arts and cultural landscape within Somerville.

Monitoring the loss and growth of arts spaces:

- Illustrates larger trends in our creative community.
- Makes visible imbalances in workspaces and performing/exhibition spaces.
- Creates conversations about needs throughout the city.
- Highlights where investments should be made.
- Provides an opportunity for our creative workforce to have an equitable platform as the City makes plans for its future.

It's vital to our city's arts and creative economy to document its history. ADTF-Creative Displacement Committee has kicked off an [Arts and Cultural Space: Arts Inventory Report](#). This inventory aligns with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council's regional project, [Making Space for Art](#)—a catalog of art spaces across Boston, Cambridge, and Somerville.

Next Steps

- The City continues to develop the Arts and Cultural Space Inventory. It will create an annual evaluation and summary of arts and creative space with Somerville Arts Council leading the charge.
- The City works with creative spaces to conduct in-depth case studies. These case studies will analyze space needs and what they contain. They will also describe who they serve and the ongoing value they provide. ADTF-Creative Displacement Committee recommends starting with Milk Row Studios due to its multidisciplinary arts focus and location.
- The City publishes the inventory data on their open data portal. There should be a quarterly update of the data.
- The City develops a web-based map visualization of the inventory data. It should be user-friendly and interactive. (see [Seattle's Cultural Space Report](#)).
- The City creates a mechanism for community input on the inventory data. Community feedback keeps the data reflective of the changing landscape.
- The City utilizes this data in planning efforts and zoning revisions. Plans should understand the potential impacts on the creative community and strive for no net loss of cultural spaces.

- The City uses this data in the development review process. Plans should consider the displacement of arts spaces or risks to nearby ones.

Case Studies

Seattle Cultural Space Inventory | Seattle, WA

Seattle updates its ongoing cultural space inventory as it receives information. As of April 2024, it has identified 1,215 cultural spaces going back to the early 1800s. With the data, the city makes an inventory map. It measures space stability and tracks the renters and owners of cultural spaces. “From the largest to the smallest, The Office of Arts & Culture is counting every theater, gallery, arts office, rehearsal room, library, music club, museum, and cinema in town.”

London Cultural Infrastructure Map | London, UK

The London Cultural Infrastructure Map shows research on cultural spaces in one easy-to-use platform. This data portal lets users see data and explore imagery of cultural spaces. This tool lets users view other layers of the cultural infrastructure. These include future development, open spaces, and transportation.

National Independent Venue Association’s *The State of Live* | United States

In 2025, the National Independent Venue Association (NIVA) is launching *The State of Live*, the first national economic research study of the independent live entertainment sector. “This groundbreaking project will quantify the economic contributions of independent venues, promoters, performing arts centers, and festivals while addressing the challenges threatening their sustainability.” The survey period is January 7–February 18. Data analysis is scheduled February–May. The report will be released on June 23.

National Independent Venue Association’s Music Venue Impact Calculator | United States

The National Independent Venue Association (NIVA) offers a Music Venue Impact Calculator. It shows regions the economic value of venues, both in spending and employment. The developers created this tool, along with an associated report, to “create a reliable foundation for a larger conversation about the value of venues to communities...Beyond demonstrating value, the time is now to invest more in venues as a means of strengthening communities...Venues are being considered in local and regional economic development plans, and governmental and quasi-governmental agencies (e.g. downtown development authorities) are directing funds and other resources to music venues as part of key community and economic development strategies.”

Assess and Monitor Somerville's Arts Ecosystem

Artist Census

Recommendation

The City creates and maintains an artist census to track individual creatives living and working in the city.

An Artist Census uses data as a driving factor for decision-making. It tracks cultural diversity. It pinpoints new and old challenges. It provides a dependable platform for creative voices. It emphasizes what is working so we can lean our resources into effective models.

The Somerville Arts Council tracks data on artists via LCC grants, the Space Connector Survey, and Somerville Creators. An artist census would be an expansion of their efforts.

Next Steps

- The committee recommends an Artist Census every two years, starting in September 2025. It will seek to understand artist displacement of local creatives, as well as local independent arts spaces.
- After the basic census, consider adding focus areas. This will help us understand the needs of specific creative communities.
- Collaborate with Economic Development on a One City/One Directory project. It will combine all business information in one easy-to-find place. This directory should include artists, creative businesses, local businesses, and restaurants in Somerville. It should also feature Economic Development's [Diversity Catalog](#), highlighting women- and minority-owned businesses.

Case Studies

[Los Angeles Artist Census](#) | Los Angeles, CA

An artist-run research initiative, the Los Angeles Artist Census collects local artists' quality-of-life experiences, including "affordable housing, income security, debt, education, and access to healthcare," and intersectional identities.

[MASS MoCA's North Adams Artist Census](#) | North Adams, MA

MASS MoCA's Assets 4 Artists organizes the North Adams Artist Census every two years to collect information from creatives living and working in the area to "prioritize what [the] community really needs, tout what [it] already [has], and track the progress."

[Chicago's Arts Census](#) | Chicago, IL

Led by the arts workers of the city and funded by several local non-profits, the Chicago Arts Census "is built to amplify our voices as art workers in Chicago, serve as an advocacy tool fighting for better working, living, and making conditions, and create opportunities for coalition-building across art sectors."

Austin Music Industry Census | Austin, TX

Run by an independent music organization, Titan Music Group, the Music Industry Census provided an opportunity to focus on the key needs of musicians, venue owners, and music industry workers. The census “provides a starting point to plan initiatives to best serve Austin’s music industry growth and establishes a benchmark for future measurements.”

Policy Initiative

Cultivate and Preserve Creative Space

From Somerville Public Testimony Records, 2024

“Without [the Joy Street] community, my creative life would wither. I am not alone. Many Somerville artists like me depend upon the creative community that affordable art space attracts. The unrelenting pressure of upscale development...threatens all of us. Affordable, long-term space for artists is crucial for keeping artists in Somerville and for fostering the city’s vibrancy and cultural health. Please help us preserve and grow our city's culture.”

—John Bullitt

Cultivate and Preserve Creative Space

Community Ownership of Cultural Space

Recommendation

The City supports community ownership of creative and cultural space.

Owning space is a key way to ensure long-term affordability and fight displacement. While the pathway to ownership is not always easy, it can be a fantastic outcome for artist studios and creative businesses. Unfortunately, high property values put it out of reach for most artistic businesses and organizations. However, the City is in a unique position to be able to support the community ownership of space in Somerville. With some technical aid and policy changes, the shift in ownership could provide creatives with a long-term home in Somerville.

Option I: Cultural Trust

A cultural trust would buy and protect land for creative uses and provide affordable space in perpetuity for tenants by taking buildings out of the open real estate market. The [Cultural Capacity Plan](#) also recommends creating a creative/cultural trust.

There are several pathways in which Somerville can establish a creative trust. The options are not mutually exclusive. For instance,

- **A Municipal Trust Fund**
 - e.g., Somerville Affordable Housing Trust
 - Allows the City to collect money reserved for preserving cultural space. Funding can come through the municipal budget, development funds, and other sources.
 - Specifies certain organizations or projects that can receive the funding.
 - Government doesn't get involved in the ownership of spaces. It grants money to others for creative space preservation.
- **A Semi-Governmental Agency/Trust**
 - e.g., Cambridge Redevelopment Authority
 - Allows the trust to collect money reserved for preserving cultural space. It is a simplified mechanism for acquiring property (outside of eminent domain, which is how governments typically acquire property).
 - Allows the trust to operate outside of government decision-making while still leveraging funding and other benefits as part of the City.
 - Leverages partnerships, both private and public.
 - Positions Somerville as a pioneer in cultural development. It will help create momentum to pass the Creative Space Preservation Act, which advocates for the ability for municipalities to create municipal cultural trusts by right. Passing this bill will increase cultural capacity state-wide and offer more protections for our creative spaces.
- **Non-Profit Trust/Foundation**
 - e.g., Somerville Community Land Trust, Somerville Library Foundation, Cambridge Community Foundation

- Allows for flexible structure to best suit the needs of the community. A non-profit can be structured in a variety of ways including a foundation that provides funding, a trust that holds a single property, or a Land Trust that aims to hold multiple properties.
- Can allow the purchase and restriction of property for creative uses.
- Can move with agility to acquire property or grant out money, if enough capital is available.
- Operates outside of government control. Managed by a board and governed by bylaws and priorities.

Option II: First Right of Refusal

A first right of refusal is a contractual right. It gives a party the option to buy an asset before the owner sells it to someone else. The City considers helping creatives make contracts with property owners that include a first right of refusal.

First right of refusal clauses can be positive measures for both sellers and community buyers.

- Providing a path that would be out of reach in normal property sales bidding.
- Encouraging strong early partnerships between owners and tenants.
- Reassuring both entities that their businesses have long futures that can shift over time.
- Incentivizing businesses to invest more in the community since they will have greater confidence that they can continue to be a part of it.

Option III: Creative Community Organizing

To best advocate for themselves, creatives need to come together to unify their voices.

Organizing Somerville's creatives will empower them to collectively address issues affecting them. It will empower them to influence decision-making processes and advocate for change, ultimately, improving their quality of life by addressing the root causes of problems.

Collective action holds institutions accountable. Moreover, it can promote meaningful collaboration between organizational entities. The Somerville Art Council's cultural capacity planning process shows that organized efforts can create an equitable forum for creatives to share their ideas and concerns.

The creative community can organize through advocacy, community, and tenant associations. They can also foster connectivity among the larger creative ecosystem of Somerville.

Next Steps

- **Cultural/Land Trusts**
 - The City researches the feasibility of a Cultural Trust that would uplift and preserve Somerville's creative space. The feasibility study investigates issues such as "What does such an entity look like for Somerville?" "How would it receive funding?" "Who oversees the Trust?" "Is it government-adjacent or completely separate?" "What kind of partnerships can be built with a trust?"

- Implement the recommended pathway from the research provided. If the City decides to move forward, submit a home rule petition to the State.
- **First Right of Refusal**
 - The City considers assisting the establishment of first right of refusal agreements with larger creative buildings by providing technical support or legal support.
 - The City establishes working relationships with developers who invest in artist-owned properties.
- **Creative Community Organizing**
 - The City identifies the variety of creative community organizing in Somerville and evaluates how to support those efforts and if there is more need.
 - The City helps the creative community amplify its voice, continuing collaboration with community organizing entities.

Case Studies: Cultural/Land Trusts

Cultural Land Trusts

Somerville Community Land Trust | Somerville, MA

In 2018, the City of Somerville formed a group to research if a community land trust would fit Somerville's needs. At the group's recommendation, the City funded the Somerville Land Trust (SCLT) to launch as a community-based, non-profit. Its goal is to build "community power and stability in Somerville by acquiring residences and land and making them permanently affordable." As of 2024, SCLT has secured eleven homes, hired staff, and established a Board of Directors.

Austin Cultural Trust | Austin, TX

In 2018, the City of Austin supported the Austin Cultural Trust. Its mission is to "create, through purchase and long-term lease, affordable spaces that support artists and arts organizations, preserve historic and iconic cultural buildings and create new spaces for creative and cultural uses." So far, they have announced five projects. Projects must partner with private landowners and creative organizations, additionally they must use public funding and private fundraising. The Advisory Committee is a subcommittee of the Austin Economic Development Corporation's Board of Directors. AEDC is "a Public Real Estate Developer, working for purpose instead of profits."

Artist-Owned Properties

AS220 | Providence, RI

AS220 has galleries, performance spaces, workshops, and live/work apartments. It offers affordable access to artists and visitors. The artist-run non-profit owns several downtown Providence properties totaling 100,000 square feet. "Each year, AS220 serves over 1,000 artists and is a destination for upwards of 93,000 people." In 1985, it launched the organization, starting with a one-room rental and a budget of \$800.

Humphreys Street Studios | Dorchester, MA

Humphreys Street Studios is one of the biggest success stories in the Greater Boston arts scene in the past decade. It developed as an artist community renting in a former dry cleaning building. In partnership with New Atlantic Development, the founding location is now a majority artist-owned building. It provides affordable spaces to 50 local artists and creative small businesses.

Cultural Developers

New Atlantic Development | Boston, MA

New Atlantic Development is a Boston real estate firm. It is “dedicated to the creation and preservation of vibrant and diverse communities.” Projects include:

- **ArtBlock**
ArtBlock in Boston's South End is 85,000 square feet of mixed-use homes, artist live/work studios, and a gallery. It is the “first disposition of publicly-owned land in Mayor Menino's Artist Space Initiative.”
- **Brookside Artist Studios**
Brookside Artist Studios in Jamaica Plain has 18 affordable artists' live/work lofts, 3 market-rate live/work lofts, and 3 commercial condominiums. The redevelopment transformed a 100-year-old former rubber factory building to “assure its long-term affordability for working artists.”
- **Hibernian Hall**
Hibernian Hall is a thriving center for the arts planned with affordability in mind. It is in a once-abandoned, historic dance hall that was boarded up for almost 20 years. This project was “one of the first uses of federal New Markets Tax Credits in Massachusetts.”

Arts & Business Council of Greater Boston | Boston, MA

The Arts & Business Council of Greater Boston (A&BC) focuses on the development and ownership of creative real estate. It also provides legal support and professional development to creatives. Its vision states, “For communities to thrive, the artists and arts organizations within them must be sustainable, viable, safe, and supported.” A&BC's first acquisition was the Boys & Girls Club in Worcester. The 33,000 sq. ft. building is now home to Creative Hub Worcester. A&BC also acquired Western Avenue Studios + Lofts in Lowell. The 5-building complex totaling 265,000 sq. ft. serves over 370 artists in 250 studios and 50 live/work spaces.

Case Studies: Right of First Refusal and Rental Tenant Protection

Rally Austin and Empire Garage & Control Room | Austin, TX

In 2024, Rally Austin loaned Heard Entertainment funding to buy and expand their property. The deal includes a guarantee for the Empire Garage & Control Room to have a space for the next 20 years. The contract includes a right of first refusal clause to the venue if Heard Entertainment sells the property.

Creative Space Assistance Program | Austin, TX

Austin's Creative Space Assistance Program provides funding to commercial creative spaces facing displacement or new leases at higher and unaffordable rates. In 2023, the program assisted 65 of 150 applicants. Grants ranged between \$5,000 and \$50,000.

Case Studies: Creative Community Organizations

#ArtStaysHere | Greater Boston, MA

#ArtStaysHere's mission is to bring people and organizations together to "prevent arts and cultural displacement throughout Greater Boston and lead a movement where the arts and artists are more valued." It became a nonprofit after the successful campaign to save Dorchester's Humphreys Street Studios.

Partnership for Creative Industrial Space | Providence, RI

The Partnership for Creative Industrial Space (PCIS) brokers and consults on tenant relocation programs. It connects with developers, architects, preservationists, planners, advocates, and the real estate market. Its goal is to "facilitate artistic and small business growth through real access to space in the city of Providence." In an [interview about Partnership for Creative Industrial Space](#), Erik Bright states, "Wanting to keep the art and creative community alive in our capital is probably the biggest impetus, and allowing opportunities for other kids who are not, you know, startups—people coming out of their basements and garages and having a place to start their business is important. If we don't have that, we're going to lose the long-term economic growth of the city."

Hypha Studios | London, England

Hypha Studios aims to engage youth and empower emerging artists. It "acts as a mediator between landowners and artists, breaking down traditional barriers to collaboration." Arts industry professionals lead the organization, forming an extensive network. It has provided £1.6m worth of free space to London's creative economy.

Resources

Mass Cultural Council's Artist Space Guide | Massachusetts

Mass Cultural Council has created an Artist Space Guide to "help you think through the process of creating and preserving affordable artist spaces." The guide includes information on leasing/owning, zoning and permitting, financing, design and construction, and managing spaces.

Arts and Community Space Catalog

Recommendation

The City evaluates all indoor and outdoor spaces available for arts and community events. It shares a list that includes costs and contact information.

Somerville is a dense community with varying space needs. It is equitable to be transparent about which public and private spaces are available for use to host events and gatherings. The City should build on the [2020 Somerville Community Spaces Report](#) by keeping an updated list of City-owned and private spaces available for community use.

Next Steps

- The City shares a public list of all indoor and outdoor spaces available for short-term use in Somerville. The list includes whether they are available for free or the rental fee. The list includes public, non-profit, and private spaces.
- The City creates a single platform system to access information on how to utilize the privately owned public spaces provided by new developments.
- The City creates a working group of City staff (including SAC representatives) and arts community members (in particular those with experience in sound and performance as well as event planning) to expand on the comprehensive list of venues and spaces.
 - The City should pay community members for this work.
 - The working group creates a report card to measure all event sites, both indoor and outdoor. The report card includes a list of appropriate use types (i.e., amplified music, large gatherings).
 - The group makes a report on buildings approved for rental by outside event organizers. It will include their capacity, best use, and the requirements of approved event organizers. It will also cover resources, hours of operation, and a pricing structure. It will describe the supervision of events and other expectations.
 - The working group creates a marketing plan. It will recommend methods for presenting spaces visually, including maps, photos, and video.

Case Studies

City of Boston's Outdoor Special Event Guide | Boston, MA

The City of Boston's application process includes a Public Event Portal online. The city guides applicants through the process using a PowerPoint presentation. It includes an event permissions timeline, a list of City departments, and Special Events Committee contacts. It also has individual permit costs and pro tips.

Boston Public Library's Private Event Rental | Boston, MA

The Boston Public Library's info on Private Event Rental includes a virtual tour, photos of past events, and rental procedures. It also includes maximum and seated capacities, costs for private and non-profit events, the square footage of the spaces, their availability, and any extra charges.

Cultivate and Preserve Creative Space

More Affordable Artist Housing

Recommendation

The City incentivizes the creation of more affordable artist housing.

The Greater Boston area is in a housing crisis. The region needs more housing, especially affordable housing. We must set aside specialized affordable housing for artists. It will keep the creative economy alive and maintain its artistic vibrancy.

While artists can apply for general affordable housing, some have unique needs. Creating artists' housing can meet those needs. Keeping artists in place will let Somerville's creative community thrive. It will also preserve the character that residents love. [Boston Affordable Artist Housing Report](#) states, "Artist housing is by definition part of a broader cultural community. Being in close proximity to existing community anchors can build on a network of cultural spaces available to artists and to the public and can also create a cultural destination." In 2024, there are eight inclusionary artist units in Somerville. The Somerville Arts Council must certify residents as artists.

Next Steps

- The City revises zoning to allow artist housing in the Arts and Creative Enterprise (ACE) requirement in certain districts, especially Mid-Rise districts.
- The City requires some inclusionary housing units to be artist housing units in arts, culture, and creative districts, as stated in the Brickbottom Neighborhood Plan.
- The arts community should take part in artist certifications and a firm, transparent approval process.

Case Studies

Metro 9 Lofts Affordable Artist Housing | Somerville, MA

Somerville Community Corporation (SCC) owns and operates five affordable apartments for creatives in the Metro 9 development. Applicants for these units must receive artist certification via the Somerville Arts Council.

Midway Artist Studios | Boston, MA

Midway Artist Studios has 89 live/work artist housing units. It provides affordable housing to creatives at all stages of their careers. Artists bought the building in 2014. A Board of Directors now runs it. It has a gallery, a production and performance space, and some commercial space.

Cultivate and Preserve Creative Space

Arts and Culture Property Tax Reduction

Recommendation

The City considers tax breaks for property owners for creating/maintaining affordable arts spaces.

Creative and cultural spaces make our community a great place to live. Preserving diversity among our commercial spaces is key to keeping Somerville a thriving community. Due to rising real estate costs, cities are offering tax incentives in order to preserve and grow affordable studios, artist live/work units (residential tax rate), and other spaces that benefit artists and small business owners.

Tax incentives are complex and have large implications on municipal budgets. To respect the time and expertise needed for consideration, the Anti-Displacement Task Force Creative Committee suggests forming a new working group. This group will assess cultural tax incentives, focusing on financial responsibility.

Next Steps

- Form a working group to research tax incentives adopted by other communities. This group should include finance experts.
- Assess Somerville's ability to support tax breaks for cultural purposes.
- Release a report with findings and recommendations.

Case Studies

Toronto Creative Property Tax | Toronto, Ontario

Toronto's Creative Co-Location Facilities Property Tax Subclass reduces property taxes to support the growth of creative spaces. This initiative fosters accessibility to the arts and vibrant cultural activity. Properties that qualify for the 50% tax reduction:

- Tenant-Based Model: Shared spaces for artists and creative businesses.
- Membership-Based Model: Co-working spaces for creative professionals.
- Live Music Venues: Spaces focused on hosting live music performances.

In addition, buildings must have:

- Tenants that produce/provide cultural goods/services.
- Below market level rents.

- At least 10,000 square feet of rentable space, or 5000 square feet if city-owned, or house more than 40 different tenants.

Councilor Joe Cressy led the creation of this tax incentive to make operating in Toronto more affordable. Councilor Cressy stated, “The high property values and the rising real estate market are having a corresponding negative impact by driving creative industries out of our cities...This is a problem not just because the absence of arts and culture makes for an unlivable city, but more broadly this hurts the economy.”

Place-Based Enhancement Program | Austin, TX

Austin’s Place-Based Enhancement Program (PBEP) is a “real estate development program aimed at providing commercial affordability relief” to encourage stability and growth of local small business, legacy businesses, non-profits, cooperatives, and those in the creative sector. Expected to launch in Spring 2025, there are four categories:

- **Affordable Space:** Connects developers with incentives to provide affordable, long-term leases to high priority community benefit targets.
- **Community Impact:** Provides incentives to assist in the establishment of stand-alone facilities of Community Benefit Target projects.
- **Transformative Infrastructure:** Supports infrastructure elements that further the transformational achievement of an adopted community plan or development tied to Council resolution.
- **Cultural Preservation:** Supports retention and enhancement of music venues, creative spaces, and legacy businesses to enhance operational resilience and mitigate long-term displacement pressures.

Economic Development Incentive Program | Massachusetts Economic Assistance Coordinating Council

Massachusetts Economic Assistance Coordinating Council's Economic Development Incentive Program offers credits to lower taxes in exchange for economic growth efforts. 2024 recipients "are expected to leverage approximately \$44.8 million in private investment, create 120 net new jobs and retain 1,521 jobs statewide." Each category has its own incentives.

- **EDIP Certified Projects:** Provides state tax credits and local property tax incentives in exchange for a commitment to create new jobs, retain existing jobs, and commit private investment to the project.
- **Local-Only Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Projects:** Negotiates agreements between a business and host municipality. Creative Hub Worcester plans to invest \$14,705,000 to renovate and preserve the historic former Ionic Avenue Boy's Club building in Worcester. It will create 25 net new jobs. The City of Worcester approved a 10-year TIF valued at \$751,686.
- **Vacant Storefront Program:** After municipalities have a Certified Vacant Storefront District, a business may secure a commitment of local matching funds in order to apply for refundable EDIP tax credits for leasing and occupying a vacant storefront in that district.

Policy Initiative

Support Arts and Culture through Zoning and City Ordinances

From Somerville Public Testimony Records, 2024

“If I were to lose my current studio and if I were not able to find another here, I would have to move...Every studio we lose, makes Somerville’s arts community, my community, smaller...People don’t move here because it’s fancy. They move here because of what happens here and who lives here and has lived here...Since the creation of the fabrication zone, Somerville has shown that it cares about this community and realizes its value. But, every time a landlord wins an override to this protective zoning, Somerville loses another piece of its character...The fabrication zone is essential not only to Somerville’s creative community but to everyone who loves Somerville...Please listen to us. Please keep the Fabrication District strong.”

—Ellen Rounseville

Support Arts and Culture through Zoning and City Ordinances

Arts and Creative Enterprise (ACE) Refinements

Recommendation

The City enacts a protocol about how to manage ACE set-asides to ensure their success in supporting the creative community. The City adapts them when necessary.

In MAPC's 2021 Somerville Art Space Risk Assessment, Arts and Creative Enterprise (ACE) was highlighted as a key way to protect arts spaces during development. In some zoning areas of the City, five percent of commercial space must be set aside for ACE, as defined in the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. Creating and keeping these spaces is crucial to supporting Somerville's creative industry during redevelopment.

To make the current policy work, the City needs to prioritize ACE. The Risk Assessment includes recommendations for improving policies and finding other ways to protect creative spaces. While progress has been made—such as hiring an Arts and Culture Planner and revising the ACE definitions and submitting them to the City Council—Somerville must act on the report's recommendations more quickly. This process should be flexible and adapt as new information or circumstances arise, ensuring the needs of the artistic and creative communities are always considered.

Next Steps

- *Continue to implement recommendations from the [Somerville Art Space Risk Assessment](#):*
 - Establish mechanisms to better implement zoning requirements that five to ten percent of commercial floor area be set aside for ACE uses where applicable; specifically, create buy-back standards and establish a municipal fund to receive in-lieu payments.
 - Streamline enforcement of the set-aside provision by improving communications among the Somerville Arts Council, OSPCD, and Inspectional Services and creating a database to track artists' and creatives' workspace needs.
 - Maintain accountability to the Somerville arts and culture community through ongoing collaboration with Cultural Space Task Force or commission established to oversee new municipal arts space fund.
 - Establish a collaboration between the Somerville Arts Council and Somerville Office of Racial and Social Justice to guide an inclusive comprehensive cultural plan and develop programs that foster equitable access to arts spaces.
 - Launch a Comprehensive Cultural Plan to analyze the full ecosystem of ACE uses and spaces that support ACE uses and to recommend an arts space development strategy.
 - Establish a process for the City to proactively acquire and disburse properties for ACE uses.

- Study additional incentives that may be proposed by Somerville and enacted by the State Legislature such as deed restrictions for arts uses and a right-of-first-refusal option for occupants of arts spaces under redevelopment.
- Be reflective and adaptive making sure policies are helping the creative community maintain and grow, altering existing policy and creating new initiatives as needed.
- Work with developers to fill ACE requirements with known gaps in the Somerville Creative Economy.
- Focus on research and communications.
 - Track and publicize, in a user-friendly interface, all required benefits of new development, including ACE spaces.
 - Create accessible short educational materials explaining zoning and other policies that benefit our cultural landscape. This will keep the public informed at all times. Each item should focus on one topic.
 - Create an annual report for the public to see ACE growth. Evaluate creative space gains against creative space losses, including types of usage.

Case Studies

Harlem's 125th Street | New York, NY | [American Planning Association's feature on Harlem's 125th Street](#) | [More information on Establishment of Bonused Space Local Arts Advisory Council](#)

The American Planning Association lists Harlem's 125th Street as a Great Street in America. It “managed to maintain a strong identity through periods of tremendous population growth and infrastructural strain, disinvestment, and urban renewal.” The plan specifies:

- Establishment of Bonused Space Local Arts Advisory Council
- Special Arts and Entertainment Uses
- Arts and Entertainment Use Requirement
- Uses not permitted on the ground floor of buildings
- Special Sign Requirements
- Floor area bonus for visual or performing arts uses

Creative Enterprise Zones | London, ENGLAND | [City of London website](#)

London established the Creative Enterprise Zones in 2018 to reserve permanent and affordable space for artists and creative businesses to work. The zones are “where local people are helped to learn creative sector skills and access pathways to employment.”

Support Arts and Culture through Zoning and City Ordinances

Creative and Cultural Districts

Recommendation

The City creates and establishes Arts, Culture, and Creative Districts throughout the city. It does so using local ordinances and the Massachusetts Cultural Council Cultural District designations.

Creative and Cultural Districts, often formed organically, serve a variety of purposes, including:

- Cultivating and supporting arts and cultural resources.
- Revitalizing communities.
- Fostering sustainable economic development.
- Attracting visitors and new businesses by creating enticing places for them to enjoy.
- Supporting unique places so that Somerville retains the character that local businesses and creatives have fashioned over time and with much effort.

With state and local policy, these districts can thrive. It will support their positive effects on the creative community and the city. By enacting local protections, Somerville can expand upon the Massachusetts Cultural Council program. It can then protect and incentivize arts and creative businesses in cultural and creative district overlays.

Potential Somerville Cultural Districts

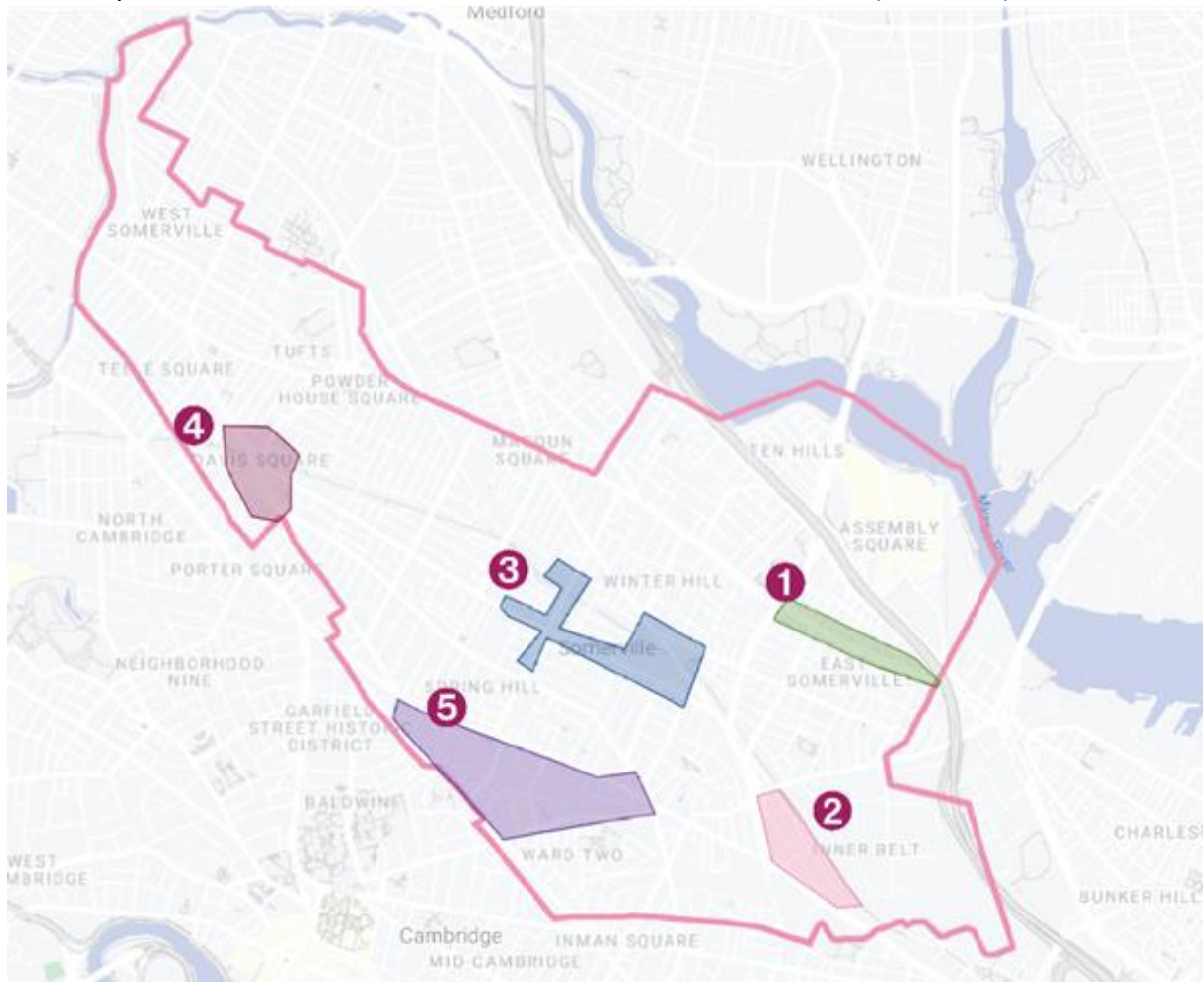
It is important to note that in this proposal, the "Cultural District" is a place for enjoying art and culture. The "Creative District" is for producing art. These are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, we are not proposing these specific boundaries. The list that follows is purely conceptual to spark conversation.

1. East Somerville Cultural District.

Note: In 2020, East Somerville Main Streets applied for State designation. The City supported the application. But, they did not receive the designation due to an unforeseen MCC issue. The plan is to resubmit once MCC reopens the application process.

2. Brickbottom Neighborhood Creative District
3. Central Hill Creative/Cultural District District (Highlands)
4. Davis Square Cultural District

5. Union Square/Cobble Hill/Somerville Ave Creative/Cultural District (Lowlands)



Important Note on Timeline

- Per Mass Cultural Council: During program redesign, all new applications for Cultural District designation are paused until 2026.

Goals of Somerville Cultural Districts

- **Support Local Artists and Creatives**
Celebrate, partner, and provide financial support to the Somerville arts community, especially to those displaced.
- **Boost Economic Development**
Preserve and protect local and independent cultural businesses This includes asset mapping of cultural resources (inclusive of restaurants and gathering spaces).
- **Create Partnerships**
Form an alliance with other cultural districts. Learn from and support each other. Make connections with city staff.
- **Be Unique**
Reflect and enhance the cultural identity of the area by recognizing, preserving, and

supporting local cultural heritage (including historic buildings, arts, crafts, traditions, etc.).

- **Commit to Community Engagement**

Involve the local community in the district's planning, development, and ongoing activities. It will ensure that it serves the needs and interests of residents.

- **Organize Programming and Activations**

Hold arts festivals and community events with a diverse range. This will enrich the district's culture and attract visitors.

- **Create a Strategic Marketing Plan**

Build a website and manage social media for your cultural district.

Next Steps

- Create local "cultural districts/arts overlays/creative enterprise zones" as zoning overlays. They should protect and encourage arts and creative uses.
- Once applications reopen, assist East Somerville Main Streets to complete their MCC Cultural District application and comply with the new application process.
- Support creating entities to manage cultural district events. Focus on squares or districts without business associations or Main Street organizations.
- Pilot a local cultural district and a zoning overlay using the zoning part of the Brickbottom Neighborhood Plan.

Case Studies

London's Creative Enterprise Zones | London

A 2017 initiative of London's Mayoral office, Creative Enterprise Zones "designate areas of London where artists and creative businesses can find permanent affordable space to work and are supported to start-up and grow." With careful tracking of these zones, the initiative saw a net rise in creative economy jobs, less loss during Covid-19, and opportunities for new models of diversity and inclusion.

Canalway Cultural District | Lowell, MA

Lowell's Canalway Cultural District is one of the American Planning Association's "Great Places in America." It's a prime example of how industrial spaces can evolve into vital and vibrant cultural spaces. It includes the Western Avenue Studios complex, "the largest artist community on the eastern seaboard of the U.S., and home to over 300 artists in 250 work-only studios and 50 live/work lofts."

Crossroads Arts District | Kansas City, MO

Kansas City's Crossroads Arts District is one of the American Planning Association's "Great Places in America." It is an example of how the creative and tech sectors can merge. It is a hub for visual and performing arts, local businesses, and tech startups. It has efficient transportation options. It has a strong commitment to community planning. "The district continues to thrive in large part because of strong collaborative partnerships between city leaders, artists, entrepreneurs, and residents."

Support Arts and Culture through Zoning and City Ordinances

Agent of Change Policy

Recommendation

The City adopts and supports an Agent of Change Policy.

As development grows, cities worldwide are adopting Agent of Change policies. They want to protect cultural spaces, especially live music venues, from rising complaints and closures.

In the past two years, ADTF-Creative Displacement Committee has seen noise complaints and penalties for long-standing venues and events. Also, with the rise in pandemic closures of local, indie venues, the city must attract new venues and more creative uses of existing spaces.

Somerville Agent of Change Policy

Somerville's Agent of Change Policy promotes good communication among developers, cultural venues, other spaces, event planners, residents, and city staff. With a better understanding of the rules, more space developers, owners, and managers will feel emboldened to create cultural event opportunities.

- Developers must consider the impact of changing their property by accommodating the neighborhood. For instance, if a developer wants to build a new residential building in a city square, they must soundproof the new living spaces. The city square must continue to be a bustling area of activity.
- The City provides a list of resources and departments to connect to during development planning. This list of considerations must include the Agent of Change Policy.

Next Steps

- The Somerville Arts Council leads a short-term task force to refine an Agent of Change Policy. It includes city departments, music venue owners, bookers, and managers of spaces that would be open to hosting music. We expect that this review will be one working session with short follow-ups via email and zoom.
- The City of Somerville creates a new webpage that includes the Agent of Change Policy followed by a list of resources.
- The City of Somerville invests in decibel meters. Event promoters can reserve meters at various places. These include the Somerville Arts Council office and the libraries, which have more flexible hours and locations. Lenders should report on the frequency of use so the City can buy more if needed.

Case Studies

City of Austin's "Sound Assessment & Disclosure Requirements Proposal" | Austin, TX

In 2018, the Austin City Council approved an Agent of Change Policy to "support music, arts and culture [by proposing] programs, rules, and ordinances necessary to improve compatibility

between residents, lodging establishments, and music-related businesses.” In spring 2024, Austin's Development Services Department proposed changes to the Music Commission. It would require developers to document and disclose area sound levels to potential buyers and renters. The proposed changes will go into effect in October 2024.

London's Policy D13 Agent of Change | London, England

In 2016, over 27,000 people signed a petition to save Curzon Mayfair Cinema from developers. The developers cited noise from the historic cinema as problematic for new development. In response, the City of London included an Agent of Change Principle in the 2018 London Plan. It placed the “responsibility for mitigating impacts from existing noise and other nuisance-generating activities or uses on the proposed new noise-sensitive development.”

Support Arts and Culture through Zoning and City Ordinances

Arts and Creative Enterprise (ACE) Set-Aside Affordability

Recommendation

The City researches the feasibility of an affordability requirement in the 5% set-asides for Arts and Creative Enterprise.

Under the current zoning ordinance, space is set aside for Arts and Creative Enterprises (ACE) in specific districts. The base zoning requires developers to reserve 5% of a building's gross commercial area for a use defined as ACE in Mid-Rise 5 (MR5), Mid-Rise 6 (MR6), High Rise (HR), Commercial Core (CC), Commercial Business (CI), and Fabrication (FAB). While creating space for creative uses in new development is great, it does not guarantee that this space is accessible.

New development is costly to produce. It often raises monthly rents within these new spaces. These rent increases are inaccessible for most creative uses. If the creative economy can't afford market rates, it can't lease space in new developments. New development needs to introduce some level of affordability for the creative economy. This will encourage a diverse mix of arts and creative uses that will be beneficial to the creative ecosystem. It will also be a boon to the entire city's economy as well as its community.

Next Steps

- The City should complete an in-depth assessment to understand the creative space rental market. It should evaluate what affordability actually means to creatives in Somerville. It should include creatives who already can't afford studio space.
- The City should research ways to attain affordable creative spaces. Considerations should include zoning ordinances, Master Plan Development Overlays, Community Benefit Agreements, and subsidy of rent through payment in-lieu funds, etc.
- The City should recommend a system to obtain affordable ACE spaces. It should base the recommendation on market research and other methods. Then, it should implement the best system.

Definitions

- Arts and Creative Enterprises (ACE): A defined group of uses in the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. As of September 2024, uses include artisanal production, arts exhibition, art sales or services, co-working, design services, shared workspaces or arts education, and live/work creative studios.
- Commercial Core (CC): A district intended to create, maintain, and enhance areas appropriate for commercial and mixed use buildings.
- Commercial Business (CI): A district that serves only commercial uses and contains large buildings only 1 or 2 stories tall.
- Fabrication (FAB): A district that protects older commercial buildings up to four (4) stories tall. Intended to preserve buildings that are key assets to the creative economy of Somerville from residential conversion, FAB safeguards existing workspace and retains incubator spaces for start-up, entry-, and mid-level businesses.
- Mid-Rise 5 (MR5): A mixed-use district characterized by a variety of up to five (5) stories in height. Buildings are close to the sidewalk to support pedestrian activity and a sense of place. The district is primarily commercial, with ground-floor uses that address the needs of residents and employees from the immediate neighborhood, but can also provide goods and services to the larger Somerville community and visitors from the broader Boston metropolitan area.
- Mid-Rise 6 (MR6): Same as Mid-Rise 5, but buildings go up to six (6) stories in height.
- High Rise (HR): Same as Mid-Rise 5, but with a greater allowed building height.

Policy Initiative

Enhance Arts Business Development

From Somerville Public Testimony Records

“I have been associated with 3 different Arts organizations that have been displaced a total of 4 times within the last 26 years...Each time, it feels like a punch in the gut. Then the search continues to find a new space, build it out with our own money, create community and culture for the area, and then hope that you get enough use out of it before the cycle repeats.”

—Duncan Wilder Johnson

Enhance Arts Business Development

Somerville Arts Council Grant Expansion

Recommendation

The City expands Somerville Arts Council grant programs. It should allocate more funding and expand grant categories.

Creatives have long faced underfunding. During social financial crises, creatives receive less and less of a cut for their work. Along with a high cost of living, artists also face financial challenges of studio rent and production cost increases. Yet, creative work is elemental to the success of all economies.

Communities should invest in their own prosperity by:

- Acknowledging the creative economy's value.
- Recognizing that the workers and organizations in this industry deserve a living income.
- Using subsidies and endowments to mitigate the damage to the underserved creative economy.
- Funding creatives and creative organizations that have contributed to the City's success.

Next Steps

- Create an organizational support/operations grant.
- Expand fellowship grants to fund individual creatives.
- Publish grant awardees on the Somerville website. It will improve transparency. It will create more interest within the artist community to apply. It will be a valuable resource for buyers, curators, and other professional teams who would like to expand their networks, book creatives, and buy work.
- Fine-tune the outreach of grants. Ensure that those who need funding the most know about and feel welcomed to apply.
- Commit to a post-grant study to follow grant awardees' successes.
- Develop an event promotional guide. It will show city event curators ways to promote their programming.
 - After their event, ask curators to review the guide. They may have tips to help future planners.
 - Interview local event curators about their projects and experiences. This will raise awareness of their work among other organizations.
- Create a youth curator training model. It will make certain that we invest in diverse and quality programming. It will ensure that younger curators can develop our cultural community.

Case Studies

Boston Cultural Council Organizational Grants | City of Boston

With a mission to “advance a vibrant, creative, and just Boston” and to enhance quality of life, Boston Cultural Council Organizational Grants award up to \$5,000. Organizations, artist collectives, and unincorporated entities with budgets under \$2 million that offer creative programming in the city receive grants. The Grant Advisory Team reviews the applications, and the BCC Board approves them.

Cultural Space Fund Grants | City of Boston

Cultural Space Fund Grants aim to “secure the long-term future of existing cultural spaces and operators in Boston [and] expand equitable access to cultural space.” They allocated \$1.5 million in 2022-23 (its first year). The Mayor’s Office of Arts and Culture and contributions from development projects funded this new grant. Grants “prioritize projects that support spaces for underrepresented communities, spaces for cultural production (where work is made), and projects that address market gaps.”

Neighborhood and Downtown Activation Grants | City of Boston

Neighborhood and Downtown Activation Grants center on “communities who have been impacted by long-standing systemic inequities.” Grants “fund community-focused arts, cultural, and creative activations in public spaces that foster joy and strengthen community wellbeing across Boston neighborhoods.” Grants range from \$5,000 to \$50,000-\$100,000 for large-scale or multiyear projects.

Cultural Investment Grants | City of Boston

Cultural Investment Grants were a one-time opportunity funded by the American Rescue Plan Act in 2023. The intent was to grow and sustain “arts and cultural organizations with a clear vision of a creative, equitable, and more just city.” Awards ranged from \$400,000 to \$1 million, distributed over four years.

Enhance Arts Business Development

Somerville Arts and Culture Assistance Collective

Recommendation

The City works with the arts community to create a Somerville Arts and Culture Assistance Collective.

The City should support a Somerville Arts and Culture Assistance Collective. The mission of this group of local peers would be to:

- Keep arts and culture in Somerville.
- Cultivate cultural opportunities for the local arts and culture economy.
- Bolster financial support for artists, creatives, and small local cultural businesses.

Option I: Arts Zoning and Space Preservation

- **Purpose**
A team that oversees the work of the City, developers, and the community. It evaluates changes in the arts community, watches for fluctuations, and alerts the City and the community before emergencies arise.
- **Collaborations**
It works with the Somerville Arts Council, Planning and Development, Cultural Trusts, property owners, and other experts.
- **Additional goals**
Tracks and reports on successes. Expands paid and professional development opportunities for residents and students. Provides community tutoring to widen the network of assistance for this program.

Option II: Music Venue Trust / Somerville Venue Emergency Response Team

- **Purpose**
A team that helps venues at risk of closure, eviction, or licensing issues. They assist with noise complaints, legal action, and the effects of nearby development.
- **Collaborations**
It works with venue owners and operators, as well as City staff, cultural trusts, and other experts.
- **Additional goals**
Works in partnership with the City and property owners when venue space has remained vacant for a long time. Expands paid and professional development opportunities for residents and students. Provides community tutoring to widen the network of assistance.

Option III: Arts and Culture Grant Proposal Writing Services

- **Purpose**
A team of tutors that provides grant support to creatives and creative organizations. They create online guides for Grant Writing 101. They hold tutoring sessions/feedback on drafts.
- **Collaborations**
It works with paid and volunteer tutors, City staff, local colleges, youth interns, other experts, and the arts community.
- **Additional Goals**
Writes content for a tutor newsletter about community needs and pro tips. Tracks and reports on successes. Expands paid and professional development opportunities for residents and students. Provides community tutoring to widen the network of assistance.

Option IV: Business Plan Services

- **Purpose**
A team that refers creatives to resources to develop competitive business plans and

financing. It provides support to creatives who want to start a business. It creates online guides and holds tutoring sessions/feedback on drafts.

- **Collaborations**

It works with paid and volunteer tutors, City staff, non-profits, local colleges, youth interns, and the arts community.

- **Additional goals**

Writes content for a tutor newsletter about community needs and pro tips. Tracks and reports on successes. Expands paid and professional development opportunities for residents and students. Provides community tutoring to widen the network of assistance.

Option V: Fiscal Sponsorship Program

- **Purpose**

A team that manages and creates outreach for a local Patrons of the Arts program.

- **Collaborations**

It works with creators, creative organizations, City staff, and donors.

- **Additional Goals**

Writes a newsletter to potential donors about calls for support. Tracks and reports on successes. Expands paid and professional development opportunities for residents and students. Provides community tutoring to widen the network of assistance.

Next Steps

- Map out Somerville Arts Council's current assets and organizational structure.
- Define the Somerville Arts Council Board's role. This new model must support, not conflict with, their work.
- Assess the arts community needs. Use the Cultural Capacity Plan and the Somerville Arts Council staff's expertise.
- Assess program needs. Include the cost of paid work and space needs for programming. Include any other required support tools.
- Assess funding and training needs. Give special consideration to a paid internship youth program.

Case Studies

Boston University's Pro-Bono Grant Writing Assistance | Boston, MA

Boston University's Fundraising and Grantwriting for Nonprofit Organizations (MET AR 550) gives real-world experience to grad arts admin and fundraising students. It asks them to work with nonprofit partners to complete a grant proposal.

Music Venue Trust Emergency Response | United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's Music Venue Trust is a "registered charity which acts to protect, secure and improve UK Grassroots Music Venues for the benefit of venues, communities and upcoming artists." The charity has a Gig Guide, Emergency Response, and a Pipeline Investment Fund.

Creative Visions | Worldwide

Creative Visions's mission is to empower educators and youth to be creative activists. It aims to "raise awareness of critical issues and drive positive change through impact storytelling."

Studio Institute's Arts Intern | New York, NY

Studio Institute offers paid summer internships in the arts. It has "opportunities for skilled college undergraduates with financial need to experience arts professions." Boston partners are Boston Children's Chorus, Celebrity Series of Boston, EdVestors, Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, Spoke Art, Inc., and WBUR. We note this program because Somerville has all the assets, except financial. It needs to commit to its own program with its own youth.

Enhance Arts Business Development

Artist Entrepreneurship Programming

Recommendation

The City expands entrepreneurship programs for artists developing their businesses.

It is important for creatives to understand how to work within a capitalist system. It is equally important, though harder, for society to see the creative industry as a business.

U.S. economic development knows that business support must combine financial and technical aid. But most resources that artists can access are financial grants that attract intense competition. By expanding technical aid to creatives, we give them equal opportunity to rent and buy space in a competitive market. Creative businesses need programs to teach them how to operate in a capitalist system. Programs will help creatives make wise business decisions. They will empower creatives with more financial independence.

Next Steps

- Use inclusive language for artists and creative businesses in existing and new small business support programs.
- Expand current offerings of single business development classes to artists. Offer these development tools several times a year.
- Create a structured business development program for a cohort of artists and creatives. Cover topics such as business planning, marketing, financing, taxes, and copyright/intellectual property.
- Partner with organizations that offer these types of resources.

Case Studies

Austin Artists Career Training | Austin, TX

Artist Career Training is a six-week program to advance creative businesses. It encourages participants to learn from experts about business planning, intellectual property, marketing, and funding.

Nibble Entrepreneurship Program | Somerville, MA

The Nibble Entrepreneurship Program (NEP) helps cultural food entrepreneurs start a business. The eight-week program offers business help, food industry resources, and vending opportunities. A select few NEP graduates receive invitations to a year-long residency in the Nibble Kitchen, a small City-run space in Bow Market.

Policy Initiative

Identify and Establish Arts and Creative Funding Sources

From Somerville Public Testimony Records, 2024

“If Esh lost its space, it would be a huge blow to the local community both in terms of economic impact on coaches and staff, and would be an immeasurable loss of a space that fosters creation, connection, physical fitness, and personal growth...I want to live in a community that actively values and supports these things, not one that tears them down.”

—Lauren Breunig

Identify and Establish Arts and Creative Funding Sources

District-Based Financing Mechanisms

Recommendation

The City funds the arts by exploring the feasibility of district-based financing mechanisms.

Option I: District Improvement Financing (DIF)

District Improvement Financing (DIF) would let Somerville create a funding source for economic development within a specific area. DIF is a tool that helps the City collect extra tax revenue from new private investments in a defined area and use it for public improvements and economic development. This money could support cultural projects and the growth of art and creative industries.

Option II: Business improvement District (BID)

Business Improvement Districts (BID) would allow Somerville property owners in a specific area to initiate, manage, and finance supplemental services or enhancements above and beyond the services already provided by the City. With the goal of improving a specific commercial area by attracting customers, clients, shoppers and other businesses, a BID creates a stable local management structure, providing a sustainable funding source for revitalization and long-term maintenance. Property owners vote to initiate a BID. If the majority vote is positive, a fee is charged on properties within the BID's boundaries, and the money is spent only within the BID for a range of services and/or programs.

Option III: Parking Benefit Districts

Parking Benefit Districts are defined districts, where some or all parking revenue can be reinvested to support district services such as streetscape and lighting improvements, trees and other improvements to the public realm in addition to parking investments such as meters, signage and marketing. A parking benefit district can be managed by a district management organization and be a source of funding for supplemental arts and cultural programs and services.

Next Steps

- DIF and BID
 - The City creates a cross-departmental team to evaluate all major development plans, public and private, to see if utilizing a DIF and/or BID would encourage better and affordable outcomes for the community.
 - City planners make sure all stakeholders working for the city, including city councilors, have awareness of the potential of DIF and BID when new development is proposed.
- Parking Meter Revenue
 - A community-feedback process is initiated to introduce the concept to neighborhoods to gauge interest.
 - With community support, the City Council establishes parking benefit districts specifically created to support locally-owned and managed creative spaces.

Case Studies

BID: Central Square Business Improvement District | Cambridge, MA

In spring 2024, the Central Square BID secured a 5-year second-term contract for the continued advancement of the square. This award-winning BID's work includes:

- The creation and four-year operation of Starlight Square.
- The launch of Popportunity, Inc. It supports 140 local entrepreneurs and helps four with brick-and-mortar spaces on Mass Ave.
- The support for 30 new pieces of public art.

BID: Amherst's Downtown | Amherst, MA

Amherst's BID, created in 2011, aims to "promote business and cultural activity and create a thriving, accommodating destination for visitors and the local and regional communities."

Activities include the Downtown Amherst Block Party, a summer music series, and events to encourage buying local. It also revives former music venues like The Drake.

Parking Meter Revenue: Arlington's Parking Benefits District | Arlington, MA

In 2017, Arlington established a Parking Benefits District in Arlington Center. The goal of the added revenue is to "make Arlington Center more inviting and easier to use for shoppers, diners, employees, and other users of the area."

TDI Creative Cities | Massachusetts

TDI Creative Cities is part of MassDevelopment's Transformative Development Initiative. It is "a creative and cultural economy ecosystem builder designed to follow a city's designation as a TDI District." While Somerville is not an eligible city, it can learn from those cities that have partnered in this program. In 2024, New Bedford Creative (TDI) announced that they awarded \$509,200 in grant funds to 82 creatives and creative organizations.

Identify and Establish Arts and Creative Funding Sources

Short-term Rental Community Impact Fee

Recommendation

The City opts into the Short-term Rental Community Impact Fee, with at least 50% of the funds going to arts and cultural displacement.

Short-term rentals take away long-term housing units in an already burdened housing market. The Massachusetts Room Occupancy Excise Tax allows cities and towns to charge additional taxes and fees on hotels, motels, lodging houses, bed and breakfasts, and short-term rentals. This tax permits up to an additional 6% Room tax on top of the 5.7% tax the state collects. Somerville instituted the 6% excise tax in 2009. The FY2024 projection is \$2,425,853.

In July 2019 to reduce the impact of short-term rentals, Massachusetts let towns opt in to a Short-Term Rental Community Impact Fee Rate. This fee allows for an additional 3% fee to be

added to short-term rentals (not hotels, motels, lodging houses, or, bed and breakfasts). Over time, 29 towns in Massachusetts opted in, including our most immediate neighbors, except for Malden ([MA Department of Revenue, Division of Local Services: Local Tax Options](#)).

When Somerville voted on this funding source, the council deemed it negligible due to a short-term rental ordinance. In January 2023, the City Council amended the ordinance to require short-term rentals to register with the City to take effect in April 2023. It is important to note that Cambridge also has a short-term rental ordinance (requiring registration) in addition to the 3% tax.

ADTF-Creative Displacement Committee recommends adding the 3% maximum allowed. The funds should support municipal trusts focused on residential (50%) and arts and cultural displacement (50%). The Commonwealth of Massachusetts guidelines state, "A city or town shall dedicate not less than 35% of the community impact fees collected under this section to affordable housing or local infrastructure projects" ([Commonwealth of Massachusetts](#)).

Next Steps

- Adopt the excise tax via Somerville City Council.
- Allocate 50% of the excise tax to fight arts displacement.

Case Studies

Somerville

Room Excise Tax

6.00% (as of 4/2024)

FY2024 Budget: \$2,425,853.00

FY2023 Actual: \$2,507,330.72

Short-term Rentals Community Impact Fee

Does not opt in

0% (as of 2024)

Boston

Rooms Excise Tax

6.50% (as of 4/2024)

FY2024 Budget: \$108,000,000.00

FY2023 Actual: \$129,271,291.31

Short-term Rentals Community Impact Fee

Since 2019

FY2024 Budget: \$530,000.00

FY2023 Actual: \$648,813.86

Cambridge

Room Excise Tax

6.00% (as of 4/2024)

FY2024 Budget: \$15,120,000.00

FY2023 Actual: \$16,050,161.71

Short-term Rentals Community Impact Fee

Since 2019

FY2024 Budget: \$300,000.00

FY2023 Actual: \$296,893.26

"The FY24 budget includes \$300,000 in Short-Term Rental Community Impact Fees for the Affordable Housing Trust" ([City of Cambridge](#)).

Medford

Room Excise Tax

6.00% (as of 4/2024)

FY2024 Budget: \$1,200,000.00

FY2023 Actual: \$1,467,452.29

Short-term Rentals Community Impact Fee

Since 2020

FY2024 Budget: \$45,000.00

FY2023 Actual: \$47,245.71

Arlington

Rooms Excise Tax

6.00% (as of 4/2024)

FY2024 Budget: \$350,000.00

FY2023 Actual: \$532,952.48

Short-term Rentals Community Impact Fee

Since 2020

Chelsea

Room Excise Tax

6.00% (as of 4/2024)

FY2024 Budget: \$1,900,000.00

FY2023 Actual: \$2,424,215.00

Short-term Rentals Community Impact Fee

Since 2019

Everett

Room Excise Tax

6.00% (as of 4/2024)

FY2024 Budget: \$1,600,000.00

FY2023 Actual: \$1,969,909.00

Short-term Rentals Community Impact Fee

Since 2019

Lexington

Room Excise Tax

6.00% (as of 4/2024)

FY2024 Budget: \$678,000.00

FY2023 Actual: \$718,671.32

Short-term Rentals Community Impact Fee

Since 2021

Malden

Room Excise Tax

4.00% (as of 4/2024)

FY2024 Budget: \$120,000.00

FY2023 Actual: \$122,523.53

Short-term Rentals Community Impact Fee

Does not opt in (as of 4/2024)

Plymouth

[Room Excise Tax](#)

6.00% (as of 4/2024)

FY2024 Budget: \$1,040,794.19

FY2023 Actual: \$1,433,000.00

[Short-term Rentals Community Impact Fee](#)

Since 2019, 3%, Allocates 35% to Affordable Housing/ Infrastructure and 65% to the general fund.

FY2024 Actual: \$79,009.14

- Affordable Housing: \$27,653.20
- General Fund: \$51,355.94

FY23 Actual: \$68,594.45

- Affordable Housing: \$24,008.06
- General Fund: \$44,586.39

Salem

[Room Excise Tax](#)

6.00% (as of 4/2024)

FY2024 Budget: \$1,775,000.00

FY2023 Actual: \$2,124,418.10

[Short-term Rentals Community Impact Fee](#)

Since 2023

Source

[Mass.gov](#)

Identify and Establish Arts and Creative Funding Sources

[Patrons for the Arts](#)

Recommendation

The City creates a Patrons for the Arts crowdfunding platform to encourage the Somerville community to support local projects.

A Patrons for the Arts program connects potential patrons with local artists and organizations. Establishing such a program would:

- Provide substantial financial support to creatives and creative organizers for their work.
- Call attention to the wealth of talent in the area.
- Create much-needed arts programming and other projects in addition to the ones funded by the Somerville Arts Council.
- Bring our community together to celebrate a unique city that seeks to elevate and preserve our cultural landscape.

Next Steps

- A working group of City staff and local creatives should convene to discuss a plan that includes:
 - Propose the online management structure of Patrons for the Arts.
 - Establish the formation of the review panel for projects.
 - Create guidelines for the application process.
 - Propose new ways to expand outreach to encourage financial contributions and a wide range of applicants.

Case Studies

MassDevelopment's Commonwealth Places | Massachusetts

MassDevelopment, in collaboration with crowdfunding platform Patroncity, offered financial aid to municipalities and nonprofits with creative "crowd granting." Commonwealth Places aims to "help improve public spaces around the Commonwealth of Massachusetts."

MassDevelopment matched the crowdfunded goal amount up to \$50,000. Funded projects include Bow Market Courtyard (\$50,644 funded of \$50,000 goal), Starlight Square (\$239,058 funded of \$15,000 goal), and Dedham's Transformation: From School Gym to Performance Center (\$76,998 funded of \$50,000 goal).

Cambridge's Block Party Grant | Cambridge, MA

The City of Cambridge offers funding to residents for Neighborhood Block Parties Grants. It aims to "address loneliness and promote community resilience by bringing Cambridge neighborhoods together to dance, play, and share meals." They offer free access to pop-up equipment. In 2024, Cambridge increased the grant from \$200 to \$300. Moreover, it eliminated the permit fee and created efficiencies in the approval process.

Identify and Establish Arts and Creative Funding Sources

Property Tax Surcharge to Support Art

Recommendation

The City explores the feasibility of a small property tax percentage supporting arts and culture.

Providing stable funding sources for arts and culture is a great way to uplift the economic viability of the creative community. One method to achieve this is to adopt a small surcharge on property taxes to support local arts and culture. Like the Community Preservation Act surcharge, an arts and culture surcharge would fund a vibrant cultural community. It would create a stable, reliable source of money for the arts.

Next Steps

- Research a property tax surcharge to support arts and culture in Somerville.
- If feasible, offer the prospect of the surcharge as a ballot measure for a City election.

Case Studies

Jersey City Arts + Culture Trust Fund | New Jersey

Jersey City instituted a tax to benefit the arts, the first in New Jersey, via a referendum on a City ballot. 64% of residents voted to enact the new tax to provide a dedicated revenue stream to the arts. The municipal budget process, which often cuts arts budgets year after year, won't affect this new revenue stream.

Identify and Establish Arts and Creative Funding Sources

Outside Grant Opportunities

Recommendation

The City invests more staff time and/or paid opportunities for residents to apply for grants to bring more funding for the arts into Somerville.

Grants available for municipal arts and culture projects will complement the funds available in the City budget. This will justify directing more resources toward securing these grants.

Next Steps

- The Somerville Arts Council identifies potential grant application ideas.
- Somerville Arts Council, SAC Board, and Cultural Ambassadors evaluate the Cultural Capacity Plan as well as upcoming developments in policy and construction, and create a pool of potential ideas for future applications.
- The City identifies departments that can partner with SAC to research and apply for grants.
- The City considers creating short-term community-paid positions to assist with grant writing efforts. Residents or workers in Somerville must fill these positions.

Case Studies

Our Town Grant | National Endowment for the Arts

The National Endowment for the Arts's Our Town Grant, is an annual grant funding activities that integrate arts, culture, and design into local community strengthening efforts. Selected projects receive \$25,000-\$150,000 with a minimum non-federal cost share/match equal to the grant amount. In recent years, several cities in Massachusetts have received this grant including Boston and North Adams.

- **Community Music Center of Boston, Inc. | Boston, MA**
The Community Music Center of Boston submitted a grant application to "support an artist workforce development program [where] early-career artists will receive paid arts sector workforce training, paid externships at arts agencies with mentorship, and stipends to produce arts projects across the city." The application identified partners. The committee awarded \$75,000.
- **Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art Foundation, Inc. | North Adams, MA**
Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art Foundation submitted a proposal to "support the creation of a resource center that will serve as a business development hub for local artists and creative entrepreneurs." The committee awarded \$100,000.

Identify and Establish Arts and Creative Funding Sources

Percent for Art Program

Recommendation

The City considers adoption of a Percent-for-Art Program.

Percent-for-art programs require one percent of construction costs to fund public art. They fund new art commissions and the upkeep of existing works. The two different options that seem most appropriate for Somerville are:

- **Private Development Percent-for-Art Programs**
These programs rely on partnerships between governments and developers. The collected funds would buy, commission, and install artworks.
- **Public Development Percent-for-Art Programs**
These programs get 1% of the budget for capital projects of government projects. This includes big investments, like a new school. The City reserves these funds to commission and maintain public artworks.

Next Steps

- The City should form a working group to study a Percent for Art Program. It should include City staff (including SAC reps) and arts community members.
 - The City should pay community members for this work.
 - The working group deliberates what value a Percent-for-Art Program could bring to the City as well as what model(s) would work best for Somerville.
 - The working group proposes a plan. It includes who will manage the program, project parameters, and any potential exemptions.
 - The working group drafts policies and procedures. These cover art accession, installation, maintenance, ownership, etc.
 - The working group conceptualizes a potential multidisciplinary approach to acquired work.
 - The working group discusses potential community learning opportunities.

Case Studies

Cambridge's Percent-for-Art | Cambridge, MA

Written into City Ordinance, Cambridge's Percent-for-Art Program is for public development projects. Cambridge has supported over 200 public arts projects with this program, led by the Arts Council. It also offers tours, informational virtual sessions, and art tour cards.

LA's Civic Art Policy | LA's Private Arts Development Fee Program | LA's Public Works Improvements Arts Program | Los Angeles, CA

Los Angeles maintains both public and private Percent-for-Art Programs.

- Now a decade old, LA's Civic Art Policy aims to "commission socially engaged civic artworks, support conservation efforts, and manage artistic and cultural programs and services." The program allocates 1% of capital project costs to this special fund. The Department of Arts and Culture's Civic Art Division manages the policy and funding. They spend funds on art accession and preservation. The program also hires a prequalified list of local curators. They handle project management, installation, and community engagement. This gives creatives a chance to use their skills and gain experience.
- Started in 1991, LA's Private Arts Development Fee Program (ADF) requires a fee for all private commercial projects over \$500,000. The project's square footage determines the fee. Developers may negotiate a developer-led arts project or pay into a trust. LA emphasizes the importance of using local creatives, fabricators, and manufacturers.

Epilogue

Case Study: Mill No. 5

As we finalized this report in late 2024, we learned of the abrupt decision to close Lowell's Mill No. 5. Home to a diverse mix of independent businesses, including The Overlook, Luna Theater, A Little Bazaar, a music shop, a bookstore, a letterpress, and a record store, Mill No. 5 also hosted live music and other cultural events. It was "an ongoing experiment in building a vital and unique experience for independent businesses, visitors and creatives who are drawn to the variety of opportunities for commerce, culture and community."

The closure has left these businesses, the creatives who depended on them, and the Lowell community at large in a state of upheaval. The disruption also has affected a city that was dependent on this unique space to attract visitors.

We should learn lessons from what happens in other communities, especially those so nearby. The displacement of the Mill No. 5 community is a stark reminder of the vulnerability of creative spaces when those who occupy them do not own the property. Let us appropriately mourn this loss with Lowell by doing our all to not allow the creative spaces Somerville has left to experience the same outcome.



Mayor Katjana Ballantyne | City of Somerville

ANTI-DISPLACEMENT TASK FORCE

CREATIVE DISPLACEMENT COMMITTEE

OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

DEPARTMENT OF
RACIAL &
SOCIAL JUSTICE



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MA



somerville arts council

SOMER VIVA

OFFICE OF
IMMIGRANT
AFFAIRS

WE SPEAK YOUR LANGUAGE

HABLAMOS SU IDIOMA

FALAMOS A SUA LÍNGUA

NOU PALE LANG OU

हामी तपाईंको भाषा बोल्दछौं ।

我们会说您的语言

