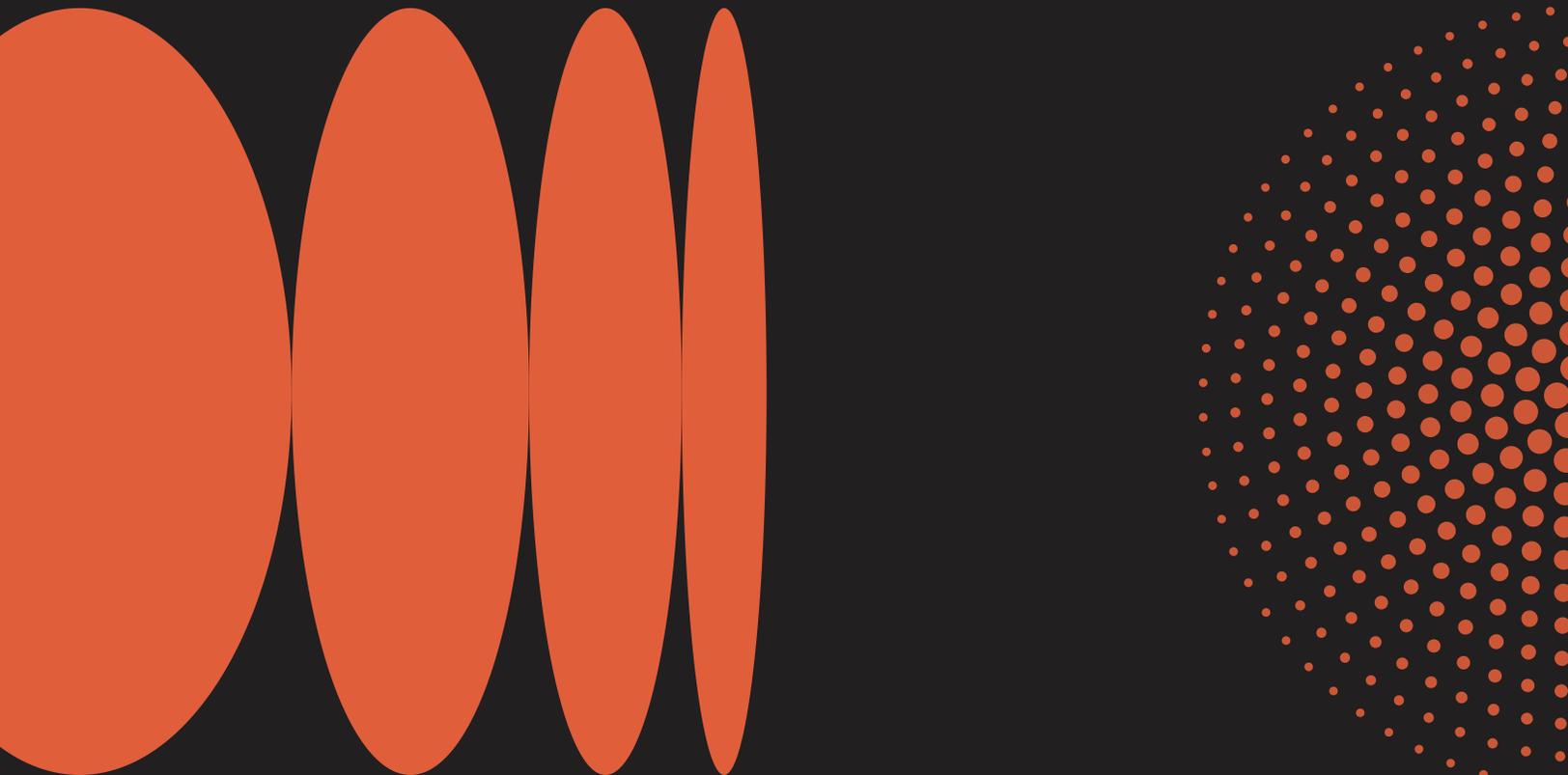




City of Somerville Anti-Displacement Task Force



Small Enterprise Displacement Committee

2025

Findings & Recommendations



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ANTI-DISPLACEMENT TASK FORCE: SMALL ENTERPRISE DISPLACEMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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INTRODUCTION

The Small Enterprise Displacement Committee (The Committee) developed recommendations to reduce displacement in Somerville's Small Business and Non-Profit communities. The Committee was an Anti-Displacement Task Force (ADTF) working group. The Committee was co-chaired by City staff and community members. The Economic Development Division (EDD) of The Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development (OSPCD) did local outreach to find small businesses and non-profits to join the Committee.

The City ensured that disadvantaged businesses would have an equitable opportunity to apply and participate in the Committee's work.

- Recruitment materials were translated from English into Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Nepali, and Chinese (Traditional and Simplified).
- Individual support was given as needed to individuals looking to apply.
- Interpretation was available for Committee meetings.
- Committee reading material was summarized in plain language and translated as needed.

Up to fifteen members and city staff met monthly as of June 2023 to find ways the City could help businesses avoid moving or closing. The Committee agreed that recommendations should be **quick, effective, and efficient** at protecting small businesses from having to move or close their business because of the impacts of new construction, rising rents, or changes to the population in Somerville.

The Committee started by focusing on members' direct experiences, inquiring about times when they felt they had to move or close their business because of economics or other factors outside their control. Then, the Committee transitioned to coming up with action-oriented solutions. In the Fall of 2023, the Committee came up with a three-part plan to:

- help small enterprises in need in the short term,
- help small enterprises be more resilient to displacement in the middle term and,
- increase "affordable" commercial space for small enterprises in the long term.

Economic Development staff ensured that all members were notified of meetings and that non-native English speakers received notifications in their native language throughout the Committee's service. Staff also made interpretation services available to members during Committee discussions and considerations to ensure everyone felt comfortable participating in the Committee's work.

PROCESS SUMMARY

The Committee first discussed how rising rents, new construction, and people moving away made it harder for local businesses to stay in their neighborhoods. They recognized that small, local businesses make Somerville a special place to live, work, and have fun. But, as Somerville becomes more popular, redevelopment and higher rents price residents, businesses, non-profits, and creatives out.

In their first meeting, the Committee decided:

- Small businesses need affordable rent for their spaces.
- The City should offer more help and resources to small businesses and non-profits.
- The City should assist small businesses and non-profits in buying their own spaces.
- There should be a group to watch over leases that small, independent businesses enter to make sure everyone is doing what they agreed to do in the agreement.

The Committee found that the main problem is that small businesses don't have control over their spaces, making them vulnerable to rent hikes and having to move or close because of redevelopment. They believe local businesses need to own their spaces or lease them from a group offering affordable rent to stay in Somerville.

So, the Committee decided to focus on three things:

1. How can the City stop businesses from having to move or close?
2. What can the City do right away to help?
3. What parts of this problem are beyond the City's control and need help from the State or Federal government?

Selected member thoughts are paraphrased below:

"...A lot of things that we're dealing with now, people attribute to the pandemic, but we were already struggling before the pandemic. The city, state, and federal governments gave small businesses a lot during the pandemic, and that was a breath of fresh air. Maybe there's something to be said for helping small businesses more—leasing, policies, financial aid, whatever it is. (We need) More protections for small businesses."

"I would love to be able to buy something. If the city could help with purchasing real estate, that would be very big."

"Is it possible to encourage the city to adopt laws that would require developers to have a certain amount of affordable commercial space like the 20% of required affordable housing in new developments? We should encourage the city to invest in programs that help small, minority-owned

businesses buy their real estate. Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation (MGCC) is piloting a similar program on the state level.”

“Can we develop a Bill of Rights for commercial tenants? We should consider commercial land trust models to help small business owners buy their buildings... The City should consider programs that help enforce commercial lease terms. The government should provide financial support to small business owners and help them purchase their commercial property. The City should lobby for action at the state/federal level for real reforms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

SHORT TERM GOALS

Prepare & Publish a Commercial Leasing Handbook

The Small Enterprise Displacement Committee acknowledged that businesses often need to relocate because tenants lack control over their spaces. Business owners typically gain control by purchasing their leased properties. However, in overheated property markets like Somerville, this option is not always feasible. The Committee emphasizes that neighborhood business operators must understand the importance of securing their commercial spaces, as leases offer fundamental security over the premises. Consequently, business operators should learn how to negotiate the best lease terms. Many local business owners, particularly immigrants, operate without a lease, which increases their vulnerability to rapid displacement with limited or no recourse. Somerville business owners' testimony confirms the Committee's insights.

Small business owners expressed their desire for coaching on commercial leases and strategies for negotiating with landlords. Over time, fair and predictable lease terms can save tenants money on business costs and help them work towards owning their commercial spaces, which is crucial for long-term stability. Therefore, the Committee believes that the City's efforts to enhance local small business owners' understanding of commercial property leasing are worthwhile. Well-informed business owners can advocate for favorable leases and negotiate fair terms, allowing them to navigate changes in the property market more effectively.

The Somerville Economic Development Division (EDD) secured a \$45,000 technical assistance grant from the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) to prepare and publish a "Commercial Leasing Handbook" in different languages and formats. MAPC has prepared a rough draft. The final version is being prepared for review by the Committee and eventual publication.

Expand Emergency Swing Space Referrals Program

The Small Enterprise Displacement Committee reviewed existing services that the Economic Development Department (EDD) offers to local businesses to mitigate displacement for small businesses and non-profits. These services include a temporary space referral program, where EDD staff connect available vacant commercial spaces with entrepreneurs seeking temporary or short-term leases under one year. Shorter leases cater to entrepreneurs testing new retail concepts, micro-enterprises looking for "pop-up" spaces, and neighborhood businesses displaced within Somerville that need a temporary location while they search for a permanent space in the city. While not all displaced businesses can utilize this short-term "swing space," many can maintain operations and generate revenue while seeking new locations in Somerville. For this reason, the Committee felt it essential to recommend that EDD continue offering this service and expand the

availability of temporary spaces for businesses in the city. The Committee can also extend this concept to housing. The Residential Displacement Committee recommends that the Housing Division collaborate with interested landlords to provide short-term residential space for households facing displacement.

Expand Site Finding Assistance Program

The Small Enterprise Displacement Committee reviewed EDD's existing services for local businesses, including those facing displacement. Among these services is the longstanding SiteFinder program. EDD staff assist entrepreneurs in finding commercial spaces available for long-term lease using data from the Division's Small Business team and CoStar, a comprehensive commercial real estate data platform. Clients utilize this data to contact landlords and negotiate leases. SiteFinder information, along with support from the community, empowers local business organizations like East Somerville and Union Square Main Streets to assist small business owners before or during lease negotiations.

The Committee believes that EDD should continue the SiteFinder Program and, if possible, expand it to help smaller, disadvantaged business owners visit spaces and negotiate lease terms with property owners. The Committee also recognizes that SiteFinder is just one of several options available and effective in helping commercial tenants find open spaces.

Use American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds to Develop a Business Technical Assistance Pilot Program

Business owners that have less opportunities to obtain higher levels of education, training, and experience are more likely to face displacement. Somerville's small neighborhood business owners have consistently requested coaching and training from EDD in areas such as financial management, accounting, marketing, property management, and commercial law.

Well-informed and experienced business owners typically manage their operations better and can adapt to changes in the property market and new developments more swiftly. The City received \$77.5 million in ARPA emergency COVID-19-related funding. EDD prioritized this funding for programs aimed at enhancing knowledge of business-related topics for commercial tenants heavily impacted by COVID-19.

The Committee supports allocating ARPA federal funds to initiate a new test program. This program will provide up to 15 hours of business coaching and minor grants of up to \$12,000 to assist businesses in recovering from COVID-related impacts. This initiative will serve as a pilot for a future program that the City can implement to support small local businesses, particularly those that have had to relocate or may need to relocate from Somerville.

More information on how the pilot program can be found in the *TAKING ACTION ON SHORT TERM GOALS* section of this report

MID-TERM GOALS

Dedicate City Budget Or Seek Grant Funding To Create A Permanent Commercial Tenant Technical Assistance Program, Based On ARPA Pilot

The Committee recognizes that the Business Technical Assistance Pilot Program is crucial for commercial tenants and recommends that the City allocate a dedicated budget or seek grant funding to provide technical assistance. The Small Enterprise Displacement Committee understands that displacement disproportionately affects business owners with limited access to resources and opportunities.

A program aimed at empowering disadvantaged business owners to develop more sophisticated business practices will increase the resilience of Somerville's most vulnerable small businesses. Somerville's business owners have consistently requested coaching and training from the City and the Committee in both hard and soft business skills, including financial management, accounting, marketing, property management, and commercial law. To address this need, the Committee urges Economic Development to build upon the findings of the short-term ARPA small business assistance pilot program, made possible by emergency federal funding.

The Committee believes in implementing mid-term support to help business owners expand their skill sets and adapt with ongoing technical assistance. Since the ARPA funding must be expended by December 2025, EDD currently lacks funding to continue the technical assistance program.

Create a Commercial Tenant Bill of Rights

Somerville's small business owners voiced strongly that they want a Commercial Tenants Bill of Rights listing the basic needs for running their businesses. Without it, less experienced tenants are more likely to be offered unfair lease terms or no leases, making them vulnerable to getting pushed out. California recently passed Senate Bill 1103 to address similar concerns raised by small business owners in that state. The new legislation provides commercial tenants with similar protections regarding notice of rent increases and lease termination offered to residential tenants.

The Committee recommends the City gather small business owners, with help from EDD staff, to create a simple list of rights for commercial tenants. Then, they should officially publish this list to help business owners ask for better lease terms and protect them from having to move from Somerville.

Amend the Vacant Storefront Ordinance

Somerville passed a vacant storefront ordinance # 2019-13 to promote quick re-use of empty commercial space. However, there is a perception among the City's business community that the ordinance may not prove to be effective as written. The ordinance could be reviewed for ways to improve it so it can work in an Anti-Displacement framework. An improved ordinance could

encourage landlords to minimize the amount of time their commercial spaces are empty, ensuring that commercial space is not warehoused which could cause rents to increase.

The Committee reviewed similar regulations from surrounding communities and recommended reviewing the incentive structure, including potentially scheduling higher fines and fees, for not actively leasing vacant commercial space. This will help ensure Somerville’s commercial property market operates as close to peak efficiency as possible, reducing displacement pressures.

Change The City’s Rules To Encourage Affordable Commercial Spaces In New Buildings

New commercial spaces are too expensive for most small neighborhood businesses. The Committee recommends changing the City’s rules to encourage affordable commercial spaces in new buildings. A study by Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government in 2023 showed that giving developers a bonus, like an extra floor, can help make new commercial spaces affordable for small businesses. The study found that the cost of leasing ground floor space at lower rents could be recovered by adding an extra floor. Taller buildings would need less of a developer bonus to offset the lower ground floor rent.

The Committee also recommends the City change its rules to allow multiple businesses to share one commercial space to help with high rents and costs.

Before any changes are made to the City’s rules to encourage affordable commercial space, those ideas should be sufficiently tested.

LONG TERM GOALS

Create An Entity To Find And Manage Spaces For Businesses To Rent At Lower Prices

The Committee looked for ways to help local businesses stay in their neighborhoods even when prices go up. One idea that is promising is for the City to create an entity that would find and manage spaces for businesses to rent at lower prices. This group could build, buy, or lease these spaces for local businesses.

Some places, like Albuquerque, Anchorage, New Orleans, Oakland and St. Paul have already tried this with success. The Economic Development Division has received a \$10,000 grant to begin studying how to set up a similar program here and expect to finish the study in 2025.

The City is also considering the feasibility of working with the Somerville Land Trust to include affordable commercial spaces in future projects they plan on building.

Continuous Support for Policy Changes and State-Level Advocacy

There is a continuous need for policy changes that positively impact commercial tenant guidebooks. Although future research and feasibility studies may be needed, a long-term recommendation is to continue to seek policy changes that benefit small businesses and advocate for policy changes at a state level including but not limited to tax credits or exemptions, incentivization for leasing towards small businesses, legacy business support, favorable zoning, land use protections, commercial rent stabilization and control, community benefits, community ownership, place-based management, support of future business support organizations and non-profits, and more. The Committee supports the City and EDD in pursuing feasible policy changes and advocating on a state level for such protections.

APPENDIX: TAKING ACTION ON SHORT TERM GOALS

The Committee expressed urgency in the City's EDD moving on short term goals to stabilize small businesses who were vulnerable to displacement. The City's EDD was able to begin acting on the Committee's recommendations during the development of the report. The City's EDD started to work on a Commercial Tenant's Leasing Handbook and the ARPA Business Technical Assistance Program – both goals of the Committee. Although neither program was completed when drafting and publishing this report, some initial insights are as follows:

Commercial Leasing Handbook

The City received a \$45,000 technical assistance grant from MAPC to prepare and publish the "Commercial Leasing Handbook". The handbook aims to empower small business owners with information and resources to advocate for themselves.

Upon initial research into commercial leases, MAPC found very few rights for those with commercial leases in Massachusetts. Most commercial tenants' rights are almost exclusively dependent on the terms of the leases. This solidified the importance of the handbook for small business owners so that they can secure favorable terms. Some other key insights are the importance of detailed individual and legal review of leases before signing and having insurance for possession.

Additionally, the City secured about \$10,000 in funding to continue working with MAPC to expand the initial project scope to include research on Commercial Community Land Trusts to assess the possibility and considerations of implementation in Somerville. This supports the long-term goal of looking into the feasibility of an affordable commercial corporation. The portion of the project with MAPC has not yet begun, so findings will be reviewed once this project is complete and anticipated in Summer 2025.

Pilot ARPA Small Business Technical Assistance Program Findings:

Since the start of the Small Enterprise Displacement Committee, the City's Economic Development staff has launched a pilot program based on one of its recommendations: the ARPA Business Technical Assistance Program. Although the program is still underway as these recommendations are published, some initial insights are as follows.

The City hired iParametrics, a consultant team selected through a standard City bidding process, to handle the digital application creation, follow-ups, and grant disbursements with business owners. Future programs must consider administrative options if hiring an outside consultant is not feasible. It is also essential to continuously work to streamline any paperwork or follow-up requirements needed from business owners to avoid program delays.

To meet high demand and work within limited funding, the program limited eligibility and prioritization criteria to:

1. businesses with fewer than 10 full-time employees.
2. Priority criterion was established for
 - a. Somerville residents
 - b. having not received previous City funding,
 - c. having a singular location,
 - d. having fewer than 5 full-time employees,
 - e. having a creative/arts focus
 - f. home-based childcare providers, and
 - g. diverse ownership

In cases where businesses had the same number of priority points, the time of application was used to break ties. While these eligibility and priority points helped ensure a fair selection, any future programs might need to seek to add random selection as a tiebreaker, considering the limited time and digital capacity some business owners may have to put toward the application process.

The application was internet-dependent and required a level of digital literacy. The Economic Development team made special and dedicated efforts to reach out to the small, often immigrant-owned businesses that might have faced technological or language barriers (although the application was published in English, Spanish, and Portuguese). Efforts to improve digital accessibility and inclusiveness for all business owners should continue in future efforts for all small business programs. Furthermore, English, Spanish, and Portuguese were identified as the most prominent languages of applications, so the program included providers fluent in these languages. Future programs should expand multilingual support to help reach even more business owners.

The pilot provided consulting services in childcare business management, bookkeeping, digital marketing, restaurant operations, and legal support. Each business submitted an evaluation form to evaluate its needs and assign the business owners to a technical assistance provider. The form responses lead to general business management or digital marketing matches. Self-assessment bias may have occasionally led to a mismatch between providers and the business needs. Future programs might benefit from a separate or third-party initial assessment process to help match businesses with the most suitable technical assistance provider.

The program has been well-received overall, with business owners reporting satisfaction with assistance from technical providers and recognizable improvements. The program was designed such that there was a financial incentive (grants of up to \$12,000) to receive technical assistance, which will likely be unfeasible in any following programming. Future iterations of the program may have to emphasize the technical assistance component over any grants. Limited funding may also require a cohort-based approach to maximize the program's impact on small businesses.

This pilot program began in the summer of 2024 and will conclude sometime in the winter of 2025. Results and feedback from business owners will be reviewed after the program officially concludes.

Commercial Tenants Bill of Rights

Economic Development staff have started reviewing California's recently approved Senate Bill No. 1103, which formulated a code of fundamental rights for commercial tenants, like standards for residential tenants and leases.

APPENDIX: REPORT - MITIGATING COMMERCIAL DISPLACEMENT IN SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

The Committee reviewed a report commissioned by Somerville’s Economic Development Division in 2023 from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government that studied commercial displacement in the city and recommended ways of addressing it. *Mitigating Commercial Displacement in Somerville* was compiled by student researchers and guided by City staff. The group interviewed small business operators in Somerville to identify challenges, made recommendations for the City to monitor and map displacement in the city, and developed innovative methods to help businesses affected by displacement and increase the amount of affordable commercial space in the city through research.

INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS:

Researchers conducted 31 interviews with small business owners, nonprofit staff, developers, academics, and local government officials over the Spring of 2023. The interviews revealed different perspectives on the challenges small businesses face from displacement and potential ways to reduce its effects or prevent it entirely. This outreach demonstrated that the community holds common goals but often has different perspectives on the right approach to achieving them. Interviewees agreed the City of Somerville is well-positioned to lead the process and implement the policies necessary to allow development without displacement. The themes of these interviews are summarized in this section.

Shared Vision

Most interviewees emphasized similar goals for the future of Somerville’s economic development regardless of their organization type, including retention of existing businesses and preservation of diversity, affordability, and local identity. Primary differences surround whether new development can serve as a vehicle for this preservation—developers are more optimistic than small businesses—and how to best utilize public space to support small businesses, including re-orientation towards pedestrians and public transit vs. private transit options—small businesses are concerned about a loss of access for car-driving customers.

Displacement Spectrum

Small businesses face similar pressures regardless of location; however, these are felt more acutely in areas of Somerville undergoing rapid change, such as Union Square. Here, the general feeling is that gentrification is inevitable, and businesses have minimal options for avoiding its effects. Elsewhere, in East Somerville, for example, small businesses generally feel more insulated and able to prepare for change.

Transitioning Customer Base

Business owners readily acknowledge and feel primarily optimistic about the opportunity brought by new workers and residents. The long-term outlook for most, even businesses with minority customer bases, is positive because they feel they can market themselves in a new environment if given the resources and space. There is a short-term pessimism in areas like Union Square, however, where small businesses feel unable to cope with the pace of change long enough to benefit from its upsides.

Common Small Business Challenges

Primary challenges faced by business owners include an inability to secure leases from their landlords, escalating rent, and reduced patronage due to disruptions from COVID-19, construction patterns, and changes in the built space surrounding their business (e.g. bike lanes). Small businesses feel the City's transit goals do not align with their customers' interests, many of whom rely on cars to travel from surrounding communities. There is an acute shortage of affordable, adequately equipped, and right-sized space for those seeking stability in a new location. Interviewees also feel they lack information on and meaningful participation in City decisions.

City Services

There is strong support for City services, including the technical and financial assistance that helped many small businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many businesses acknowledge the efforts underway to increase communication through block walks. However, there is a clear consensus about the difficulty of City processes. The delays, difficulty, and number of offices involved in obtaining permits are seen as confusing and frustrating. In some cases, failure to obtain permits quickly has cut into small business revenues.

Developer Disconnect with Small Businesses

There is a range of dispositions among developers toward the issues of inclusive retail, their degree of focus on community engagement to inform projects and the public amenities they seek to provide. The nature of discussions between small businesses, developers, and retail brokers indicates a disconnect between the stated intentions of developers to provide affordable spaces and the feasibility of their offers for many. Developers and small businesses have a different understanding of what qualifies as affordable and what business models can work within new buildings. Small businesses noted half-hearted attempts at outreach and low responsiveness by developers in some cases. Developers feel that business maturity, the legal complexity of lease terms, and build-out costs for space represent the primary obstacles to greater inclusivity.

Lack of Coordination Among Different Actors

Interviewees cited a lack of information sharing and coordination among and between all groups as a barrier to better compromise. Some feel more organization is needed among the small business

community to share resources and advocate for their needs. The entire business community, including developers, would like greater participation in the City's decision-making process.

Somerville's nonprofit community, mostly prominently the Main Streets organizations, serve as key intermediaries to fill gaps in awareness and representation for these groups but are stretched beyond their means. Interviewees recognize that additional platforms or resources are needed to increase collaboration and ensure accountability among the different groups.

Inconsistent Problem Diagnosis

Developers and small businesses emphasize different drivers of displacement, including inadequate demand for services vs. supply of assistance measures. Developers see change as inevitable and focus on demand-driven opportunities for businesses to increase their sales and afford higher rents. Small businesses recognize the opportunity to leverage new customer demand but feel customer demand is artificially constrained by many impediments associated with new development. Some feel they cannot fully take advantage of new opportunities without more affordable space, regulatory reform, and financial assistance to relocate or upgrade their business infrastructure.

Shared Proposed Solutions

Unlike the problem's diagnosis, interviewees had relatively shared views on solutions. There was consensus on

- 1. the need for increased coordination between all actors,*
- 2. that developers can afford to do more when provided the right incentives and*
- 3. The city has the tools to increase small business retention, whether from a demand or supply perspective, through new forms of assistance, regulatory reform, and zoning incentives.*

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

The Harvard Study also reviewed ways to prevent commercial displacement, which is particularly important because the City has limited resources and means to help small businesses, particularly funding directly. The Harvard team combined a sophisticated commercial real estate study with a review of Somerville's Zoning Ordinance and state law to gauge the feasibility of using zoning and land use controls to encourage developers to make a portion of new commercial construction affordable to small local businesses. The Committee carefully considered this part of the study in developing their middle and long-term recommendations.

Inclusionary Zoning for Commercial Development

The Harvard Study determined that "...Zoning is the City's greatest tool to pursue displacement prevention." Through zoning, Somerville can encourage developers to include affordable space for

local enterprises in new commercial properties. The City already does this by building and preserving affordable housing through inclusionary zones, which require residential projects beyond a specific size or in certain zones to have a certain level of affordable dwellings. Somerville can be one of the first to implement this concept in commercial development to help limit and prevent commercial displacement.

There are three significant elements involved in applying inclusionary zoning to commercial development.

1. The first is the *type* of zoning regulations: are they mandatory or optional? Do they apply throughout the city or only in certain districts? If they are optional, are they combined with incentives such as height bonuses or faster permitting?
2. The second is *defining* a legally defensible definition of “commercial affordability”
3. The third element is how to *implement* zoning changes, specifically whether affordable commercial space developed from new zoning is managed through a community land trust or by the Somerville Redevelopment Authority.

Height Bonuses For Affordable Commercial Space

The Committee was particularly interested in using height bonuses as zoning incentives to encourage the inclusion of affordable commercial space in new buildings throughout the City. It avoids some legal concerns because they are optional for developers.

In addition to extra height, faster and easier permitting for buildings with affordable commercial space is another incentive worth exploring – *“Developers interviewed for this project shared deep frustration with the length of permitting processes. Other cities such as San Diego leverage expedited permitting in incentive zoning packages.”*

The Harvard Study’s financial analysis demonstrates that increasing density (building height and the number of floors) in new projects can offset the loss of rent from making part of ground floor commercial space “affordable.” The study determined that ground floor retail space contributes less than 20% of pre-tax profit in medium-sized (5-7 floor) mixed residential/commercial buildings. Developer interviews reveal that ground floor retail space in larger projects *“... is often considered more important for branding than for generating operating revenue”*. The study found that for various hypothetical mixed-use and non-residential projects ranging from 5-10 stories, developers can build one extra floor of height more than offset rent losses by making some ground floor commercial space affordable to local businesses.

Defining “Affordable Commercial Space”

Defining “affordable commercial space” is a unique challenge to using zoning incentives such as height bonuses to fight commercial displacement in Somerville.

Affordability could require either

- (1) a set-aside provision restricting the rent of a certain amount of commercial space, like affordable housing requirements or
- (2) property owners must lease a set amount of commercial space at an affordable rate to a third party that sublets space to small local businesses at affordable rates via a master lease agreement.

Partnering with third parties, such as community land trusts and redevelopment authorities, allows the City to promote affordable commercial space without precisely defining it. This avoids potential legal and implementation problems enforcing “affordability” definitions. The Somerville Redevelopment Authority and the Somerville Community Land Trust are promising potential partners (or a similar organization explicitly created to sublease affordable commercial space).

The City could define essential criteria for businesses to qualify for affordable commercial space, such as

1. having 20 or fewer employees
2. not being a chain or national franchise

From there, one or more third-party partners could handle functions for new affordable commercial spaces created by zoning incentives such as

1. marketing,
2. business screening,
3. property management space.

Third-party partners would select participating business tenants and set “affordable” rents, lease durations, and terms. They could also set affordable rents based on what a business earns instead of what the market demands if opening that business would accomplish community goals.

There is precedent for affordable commercial spaces across the nation: the Anchorage Community Land Trust, for example, recruited a credit union and urban farm to address unmet community needs; the Rondo Community Land Trust in St. Paul prioritized Black-owned and longtime neighborhood businesses from a reparative perspective, while CORE in Los Angeles focused on local artists.



Mayor Katjana Ballantyne | City of Somerville

ANTI-DISPLACEMENT TASK FORCE

SMALL ENTERPRISE DISPLACEMENT COMMITTEE

OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

DEPARTMENT OF
**RACIAL &
SOCIAL JUSTICE**



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MA



somerville arts council

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我们会说您的语言

