



SOMERVILLE

CULTURAL

CAPACITY

PLAN 2025



Mayor Katjana Ballantyne

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LETTER FROM THE MAYOR

While some communities may see arts and culture as mere adornments, in Somerville they are the very pulse of our city.

They shape our identity and unite our community. Beyond the intrinsic value they offer, arts and culture are economic catalysts, driving business to our local shops, restaurants, and enterprises. But their significance goes deeper—the wildly creative and compelling work of our artists, makers, and champions of culture serve as wellsprings of inspiration, fostering connection, knowledge, and beauty in our lives. Their impact is both vital and monumental; arts and culture fortify our civic fabric.

Somerville’s approach to cultural planning goes beyond a singular vision to recognize the intricate ecosystem of arts and culture in our community. We stand at a pivotal juncture, a moment demanding boldness and reflection. Similar to our visionary plans for SomerVision or Climate Forward, this Cultural Capacity Plan is a dynamic roadmap, sustaining support for our thriving arts scene.

This plan signifies more than reactive measures; it embodies steadfast, purposeful backing for arts and culture. We aim not only to address current needs

but to anticipate future demands and to nurture arts and culture for the long-term. Our responsibility is to establish enduring capabilities for stability and adaptability. We must not only conceive great ideas now but equip ourselves to act upon them in the future.

Working hand-in-hand with our community, my aim is to lay the groundwork and infrastructure that will sustain our artists, creators, and cultural entities for the long haul. This blueprint is a result of community input—some ideas may shift, just as an artist alters their creative course. We’re committed to exploring options, implementing impactful strategies, and remaining accountable for this plan’s success.

Together, let’s forge a future where the arts continue to thrive as a cornerstone of our city’s vitality. By advancing this thoughtful, community-driven Cultural Capacity Plan, we are both investing in today and sowing the seeds for a more vibrant, connected, and resilient Somerville for generations to come. Our commitment to this cause is more than a promise; it’s a testament to our belief in the transformative power of art in shaping a better tomorrow for all.

Kindest regards,

Mayor Katjana Ballantyne



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHAT IS THE SOMERVILLE CULTURAL CAPACITY PLAN (SCCP)?

The Somerville Cultural Capacity Plan (SCCP) is the first ever cultural plan for Somerville, MA. It builds on Somervision 2040, the City’s comprehensive plan (adopted in 2021), specifically its goal to “support and protect artists.”

The SCCP also advances the city’s ongoing creation of neighborhood plans, and it actualizes the intent of the City’s comprehensive zoning ordinance adopted in 2019. The SCCP provides pathways for the City and its artists and cultural organizations to maximize the potential of the City’s unique policy mechanisms to preserve and grow the vibrant arts and culture scene in Somerville.

The SCCP is grounded by robust conversations across many of Somerville’s diverse artistic, cultural, and often marginalized communities. Across these varied groups, the inter-related issue areas of space, affordability, community, and communication arose, giving rise to the way in which this Plan’s recommendations are organized.

The SCCP places planning for arts and culture into the city’s policy frameworks, just as we do for housing and open space. This means making sure that artists and cultural workers have a seat at the table to combat displacement by guiding the distribution of resources to support local talent and to provide opportunities for newcomers such as students. It means giving a voice to Somerville’s diverse cultural communities and continuing to build their capacity to preserve and develop their practices and places to make and enjoy arts and culture.

Underlined words are defined in the glossary on page 47.



What is Cultural Capacity?

Cultural capacity is an emerging concept that is defined as the ability of an organization to manage and leverage its whole culture to support its goals and objectives.

What is a Cultural Capacity Plan?

A Cultural Capacity Plan undertakes two simultaneous purposes: capacity-building and cultural planning.

CAPACITY-BUILDING, according to the United Nations, “is defined as the process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world.”

CULTURAL PLANNING, according to the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, “is a place-based planning process that generates a vision and action plan for strengthening and growing arts and culture assets”.



SCCP MISSION

▶ The SCCP aims to create a dynamic, equitable, responsive, and adaptive arts and culture landscape. Our mission is to emphasize and leverage the integral value that arts and culture bring to Somerville’s growth. We seek to equip the arts community to become resilient and adaptable by integrating arts and culture producers, community members, residents, and organizations into Somerville’s future decision-making, ensuring that they thrive and contribute to the vibrant creative industry of Somerville.

SCCP VISION

▶ The SCCP aims to provide a culturally diverse, creatively thriving, and economically viable place to make and enjoy arts and culture.

SCCP GOALS

▶ The SCCP will build relationships with individuals and community groups to listen to, track, and empower its arts and cultural communities. New initiatives by community leaders will be uplifted by increased funding and other forms of hard and soft support. Existing spaces for arts and cultural activities will be preserved, and new ones will be developed as a result of integrating cultural priorities at all levels of government policy and programs.



WHY DOES SOMERVILLE NEED A CULTURAL CAPACITY PLAN?

The arts and culture sector is vitally important to the City of Somerville and the Greater Boston area. Somerville serves as a regional center of artistic and cultural production in large part thanks to its proximity to world-renowned universities and its vast quantities of industrial space that arose adjacent to the train lines that traverse the city.

Historically when space was more affordable, Somerville's artists and cultural organizations thrived in the margins. Artist studios proliferated in vacant industrial spaces. Artists reclaimed underutilized areas for creative expression.

With the opening of the Green Line extension in 2022, new development is now spreading throughout Somerville. As the **Arts Space Risk Assessment** confirmed, areas that house arts and creative enterprises are now at the highest risk of redevelopment to other uses. Lab buildings are rising out of formerly industrial areas, and vacant lots are being trimmed and primed for development.

The City of Somerville is rising to the challenge. In 2019, Somerville became the first city in the state to codify definitions of **Arts and Creative Enterprise** (ACE) uses in its new zoning ordinance, and it identifies zones where they are allowed by right. That zoning creates ACE space in new buildings by requiring that a percentage of newly developed commercial space be set aside for ACE uses in certain districts.

SCCP community conversations uncovered how these issues around space and affordability cannot be solved without also fortifying communities and fostering communication between diverse cultural groups to build bridges across silos.

The SCCP remedies the challenges of these issue areas by managing the tension between competing priorities. The goals and strategies seek to create ways to listen and respond to community needs in order to establish infrastructure that builds capacity so that the arts and culture community can grow into newly developed space. This Plan seeks to foster productive dialogue between the City, building owners, developers, operators, and occupants to inform policies that redistribute resources and activate local communities.

HOW WE'LL MOVE FORWARD

During the community conversations, the Ambassadors asked their cultural group members to describe the principles that should ground the actions that come out of the SCCP. This engagement process resulted in the following principles which guide the SCCP and its recommendations:

Center diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility

Community members want arts and culture in Somerville to be reflective of and accessible to historically marginalized groups, including the **BIPOC** (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) community members, recent immigrants, the **LGBTQ+** (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) community, community members of all abilities, youth and elders.

Foster financial security to support the arts and culture ecosystem

The Somerville community is concerned with the financial security of all parts of the arts and culture ecosystem, including that of local artists, arts and cultural spaces, and arts and culture organizations and activities.

Maintain elements of Somerville's unique character

Somerville has long been known as a place for cultural production. It is a creative, eclectic and intimate community, yet there are concerns that rapid development patterns, industry and demographic changes are forcing some of the contributors of cultural vibrancy to relocate or shut down.

Collaborate and deepen connection across diverse groups

Arts and culture participants communicated a desire to connect across artistic mediums and cultural groups, as well as to explore artistic collaborations across traditional disciplinary boundaries.

Create an actionable plan

Participants want the SCCP to be an actionable plan that does not sit on a shelf.

Make room for evolution

Participants want the SCCP to evolve to meet the needs of Somerville residents as they emerge and local conditions change.

WHAT WE'LL DO

Each of the 54 community ideas in the SCCP can be summarized by the following five objectives.

Preserve and develop affordable spaces for cultural practices

The City can allocate resources for cultural leaders to activate their communities to preserve and develop cultural spaces by founding a Cultural Trust, establishing cultural districts, and working more proactively with developers.

Increase funding and support for arts and culture

The City of Somerville can directly increase its funding and support through targeted grants, hotel and short-term rental taxes, in-lieu payments from developers, the establishment of a community foundation, job creation programs, a Cultural Trust and other sources that can tap into funding beyond the City's operational budget.

Listen to, learn about, and track diverse arts and culture communities

Create databases of arts and culture practitioners, organizations, businesses and spaces that will allow the Somerville Arts Council (SAC) to have a better understanding of who makes up the arts and culture community. These databases will provide data needed to create resources to best support the creative community.

Catalyze new initiatives led by individuals and organizations

Create proactive pathways for Somerville residents and the arts and culture community to create their own solutions and strategies around fortifying art and culture in Somerville. Work with them to preserve artist production space, and help them develop new ways to present and consume arts and culture in Somerville.

Integrate cultural priorities into government policy and programs

Use policy and programs within the City like zoning, in-lieu payment programs; prioritizing arts and culture uses in Redevelopment Authority projects; refining ACE use definitions and their allowable districts; loosening sound regulations in targeted areas; developing better transit connections; consistent communication channels between SAC and Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD); and developing other strategies to further support the strengthening of arts and culture in Somerville.



BACKGROUND

WHAT'S THE SOMERVILLE CULTURAL CAPACITY PLAN (SCCP)?

The SCCP takes stock of the existing arts and culture community and develops a framework to fortify its capacity.

The collaborative planning process built local capacity, connections, leadership, and a generative exchange of ideas.

As a result, the Plan identifies diverse needs in the community and ways that it can thrive into the future.

The goals of the SCCP are to:

- ▶ **Generate a comprehensive strategy to help arts and culture thrive**
- ▶ **Build capacity in the community to carry out recommendations from this Plan**

In a pre-planning evaluation¹ by the consulting agency TDC, focus groups specified a preference for a city-wide plan versus a municipal plan, and indicated a desire to identify ways to better leverage municipal resources to create systemic impact on arts and culture. The SCCP plan focuses on how the City of Somerville can amplify its municipal resources to grow community-based activities. The findings also show the community's motivation to develop better processes to incubate, develop, and stage arts and culture activities, notably by historically marginalized groups.

The SCCP was initiated by the Arts Council (SAC) and Mayor Ballantyne, with the support of other City Departments with representatives on the Advisory Committee such as the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD),

The Plan endeavored to achieve its mission by undertaking two simultaneous and self-reinforcing purposes:

▶ **CAPACITY BUILDING** helps develop the skills, abilities, and processes of a community's creative individuals, organizations, and institutions to grow the city's network and support of arts and culture offerings, resources, and services.

▶ **CULTURAL PLANNING** generates a vision and strategy to support and develop place-based arts and culture assets.

the Somerville Public Library, Somerville Public Schools, and City Council.

The Somerville Arts Council is a unique entity in Massachusetts in that it is both a municipal Department and a Local Cultural Council (LCC). LCC's receive funding from the Mass Cultural Council to distribute in the form of small grants to local arts and culture initiatives. Like most LCC's in Massachusetts, the board of SAC is volunteer-run. However, SAC is distinctive in that it is one of the three largest LCCs in the State by the number of people it employs. SAC has a broad mission to support individuals, organizations, and to pursue cultural development initiatives. However, the SCCP is not just a plan for the SAC, it is a comprehensive plan for the city and its diverse cultural communities.

The SCCP focuses on both municipal and community resources—including what is available and what could be created—to integrate systems across the city, formalize feedback loops, and to create pipelines of opportunities for individuals and organizations to thrive.



CURRENT CULTURAL CONTEXT

This plan is built upon the local context of the state of cultural production and dissemination in Somerville, the region, and the nation. **From prior national studies², we know that in 2019, the entire U.S. arts and culture sector (i.e., nonprofit, commercial, education) was a \$764 billion industry.**

This represented 4.3 percent of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP)—a larger share of the economy than transportation, agriculture, or construction—according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

National Context

In addition to the economic growth that the arts generate across the nation, artists provide immense value as leaders in social issues, organizing, advocating for their communities and advocating for community members who are marginalized.³ Furthermore, arts and culture venues, programming, presentation and participation can build a sense of place and belonging.⁴

A 2020 landmark report⁵ by the Urban Institute finds that people with access to arts and cultural amenities are more deeply attached to their communities, but equitable access continues to be challenging for communities of color.⁶

Despite these important contributions, artists face various types of economic insecurity and a lack of formalized power within civic and economic systems. Artists across the country face housing insecurity⁷ which has only increased in the past 3 years. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in job losses and increased economic insecurity for arts and culture practitioners.⁸ While the sector has broadly experienced a return to pre-pandemic levels, the latest research⁹ indicates that it has not recovered.

Racial inequity is prevalent in the arts. Relative to the U.S. workforce as a whole, artists are less likely to be non-white or Hispanic according to the National Endowment for the Arts.¹⁰ Additional studies show that artists of color in various disciplines are underrepresented at influential levels, as are women.¹¹ Artists with disabilities face similar challenges to representation.

Arts venues also face instability and economic insecurity, largely due to the increased cost of operating in inflated urban markets, as well as the pressure of gentrification in many communities that are arts and culture hubs. Despite a prevalent narrative that artists make places more desirable to investment¹² (also called ‘artwashing’), the arts and culture sector faces increasing instability when development increases at a rapid pace.¹³ The majority of arts and culture venues are leased, making them vulnerable to changing markets and prices.

Whereas arts uses have historically been one of the highest and best uses of old industrial spaces, with cut throat real estate competition, challenges to funding, and unique equipment/outfitting needs, arts and culture venues face serious threats to their long term viability.

Regional Context

In the context of the region, the New England Foundation for the Arts’ 2017 Report, *Jobs in New England’s Creative Economy and Why They Matter*,¹⁴ finds that “the creative economy is a larger component of New England’s economic base than that of the U.S. overall.” The region houses a lot of creative talent and arts and culture workers who are interested in bringing their expertise to their community.

State support for arts and cultural institutions has withered. At present, there are no regional entities in Massachusetts that provide ongoing operational support to organizations that foster arts and culture. There has been a lull regionally in arts support; for example, this year Mass Cultural Council boasted that it had its second highest budget ever. However, the largest budget was in 1988¹⁵, indicating a 35-year slump in funding to which the state is only catching up in a year with a budget surplus. This indicates that state and regional governments have not been reliable support to the arts and culture ecosystem in the region, which opens an opportunity for cities and local institutions to step in and fill the gap.

In Boston, the *Boston Performing Arts Facilities Assessment*¹⁶ completed in 2018, part of the City of Boston’s cultural plan, found that there is a misalignment in the supply and demand for space caused by the way arts spaces are financed and maintained. Most facilities either can’t afford to cover costs of hosting art events or do not consider it a main goal. Likewise, artists can’t afford to rent some of these facilities. Furthermore, there is little to no governmental ownership of or funding for facilities for arts activities.

Therefore, the SCCP examines the organizational landscape in Somerville and makes recommendations for new institutions that could fill in the gaps to create infrastructural capacity to support arts and culture spaces.



Local Context

Somerville is a majority white community, with its 5 largest ethnic groups being White (Non-Latino) 69%, Hispanic or Latino of any race 11%, Asian 10.4%, Two or more races 4.7%, and Black 4%. Additionally, about 5% of the population under age 65 lives with a disability.¹⁷ The median household income in Somerville in 2022 was \$120,778 and the median property value was \$860,500; Home ownership rate was 33.6% and just over 10% of the population lives below the poverty line¹⁸, suggesting that there is wealth in Somerville but that it is not evenly distributed.

Somerville lies at the confluence of three major rail lines before they enter Boston, and as such is the historic home to numerous industrial facilities, many of which have been converted into artist studio spaces. While these buildings provide workspace to hundreds of artists—artists of color have expressed that they do not feel welcome in these predominantly white spaces. SAC has responded by providing grants and space for members of the **BIPOC** (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) community, but more work needs to be done.

The City's recent comprehensive plan, **SomerVision 2040**, acknowledges that "Somerville's renaissance over the last generation has been sparked by artists, musicians, students, and other creative types," and that "with rising costs, special effort is needed to preserve and extend Somerville's status as a home for artists and musicians."¹⁹ SomerVision 2040, sets target goals for climate and sustainability, commercial development, business, arts, community, governance, housing, infrastructure, mobility, public space and education to which this plan intends to align. SomerVision work incorporates older cultural planning work. For example, arts "uses" were first defined in the 2009 Union Square Arts Overlay District²⁰ which also established incentives to create affordable live/work housing units for artists. In 2019 the City completed a zoning overhaul in establishing the current **Somerville Zoning Ordinance** (SZO)²¹

"The artists already provide valuable contributions. The city leveraged the scaled network effects created by artists' communities of the past to draw the tech industry, increase housing prices, and price out the social fabric of local artists that increased the value organically.

Without reinvestment from the industries that the City prioritized, the small gaps specified here by artists and under-represented groups will increase, eventually affecting the city writ large."

—Community Conversations
Participant: Interdisciplinary Arts

"... Through survey data and interviews, MAPC found that equitable access to arts space is an ongoing challenge, and policies designed to preserve or replace existing arts spaces will not in themselves address issues of equity.

Conversations with operators of arts spaces reveal that existing spaces predominantly serve white artists, and operators want to do more outreach to BIPOC communities to support diverse, intergenerational communities. In addition to policies that maintain affordable creative workspace for artists, redistributive justice programs are needed to increase equitable access to arts space so operators can offer affordable rental rates despite development pressure."

—Somerville Art Space Risk Assessment



which created **Fabrication** (FAB) Districts intended to create and protect space for arts and cultural activity. The ordinance also requires that five percent of commercial floor area in new developments in mixed-use and commercial districts is set aside for **Arts and Creative Enterprise** (ACE) uses, as defined by the **Somerville Zoning Ordinance**.

Even with all of these protections and efforts, Somerville’s art spaces were still at risk which prompted the City to work with the **Metropolitan Area Planning Council** (MAPC) on the *Somerville Art Space Risk Assessment*.²² According to this assessment, “the recent extension of the MBTA Green Line into Somerville and growth in the regional demand for laboratory and office space are increasing redevelopment pressure throughout the city.” Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic increased pressure on artist studio spaces, artists and arts organizations.”

The *Somerville Art Space Risk Assessment* analyzed the risks that existing arts and culture spaces face in light of commercial redevelopment and provided recommendations on how to refine elements of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to achieve the objectives of SomerVision 2040 in relation to arts and the creative economy.

This assessment included strategies to update the definitions of Arts and Creative Enterprise uses, a recommendation to establish a municipal fund for arts space that can help maintain affordability of workspace, as well as strategies for how Somerville can help match artists and arts organizations with appropriate spaces and ensure equitable access to space and resources for artists of color and arts organizations serving artists and communities of color. More details on their recommendations can be found in the report on pages 5–6.

Building on the *Art Space Risk Assessment*, in early 2022 Somerville joined a collaboration with MAPC, and the Cities of Cambridge and Boston, in a regional effort to map, protect, and plan for arts spaces.²³

This is both a region and a city with abundant creative people who are interested in living in and activating Somerville for arts and culture, and yet economic forces along with issues of equity pose ongoing challenges that have hindered an otherwise thriving arts and culture community in Somerville in recent years. This plan seeks to set up a road map for the city’s cultural community to develop capacity to compete in the marketplace and assert itself in the city’s growth and development.



OUR PROCESS

PROJECT MISSION, VISION, AND GOALS

SCCP MISSION

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METHODOLOGY: HOW THE SCCP UNFOLDED

The SCCP was envisioned as a collaborative process involving the Somerville community, the leadership of Cultural Ambassadors from the community, and stakeholders from the City.

The SCCP process provided multiple opportunities for residents to add their voice and build relationships. It also focused on building the leadership capacity of the Cultural Ambassadors through the SCCP process itself.

Early steps of the SCCP were built from an understanding of the current conditions of arts and culture in Somerville through previous research, reports, community actions and advocacy.

Early on, this community was invited to express interest in participation through an online survey. Survey participants who expressed an interest in serving in a leadership role were chosen by SAC to work as Cultural Ambassadors.

The Ambassadors joined a group of municipal Advisors who played a key role in co-designing the planning process, establishing its vision and goals. Together these groups comprised the Advisory Committee, and informed the strategy for the SCCP.

Cultural Ambassadors who led community conversations amongst 30 interest and identity groups to gather insights and experiences from the arts and culture community that are representative of the diversity of Somerville. This process generated data for the SCCP.

Ambassadors probed into the details of issues that face their communities, uncovering structural barriers that would otherwise prevent the communities ideas from moving forward.

Each community conversation followed the same format, using the Innovators' Compass (InnovatorsCompass.org) to discuss:

- 1. PEOPLE** who are involved (and those who are missing)
- 2. OBSERVATIONS** about what is happening in the community and why
- 3. PRINCIPLES** for what matters most
- 4. IDEAS** for ways the Somerville community and SAC can help the arts and culture community to thrive
- 5. EXPERIMENTS** or small steps to try in exploring some of these ideas

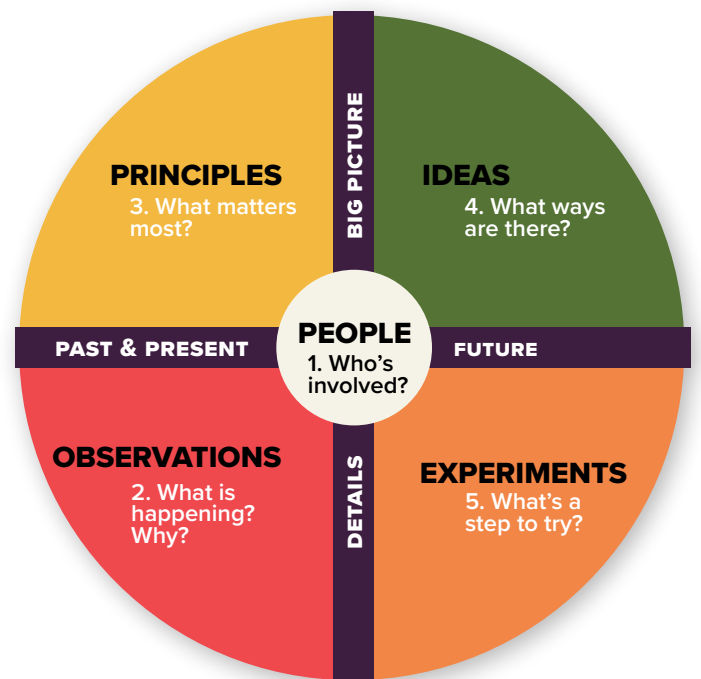


Figure 1: The Innovators' Compass by Ela Ben Ur (visually modified); innovatorscompass.org



Community Conversations Led by Cultural Ambassadors

- March 23 | **Visual Artists** with Jason Polins
- March 28 | **Musicians** with Ajda Snyder
- March 29 | **Media Artists** with Joshua Sariñana
- March 31 | **Arts Non-Profits** with Lynn Gervens
- April 5 | **Youth** with Cidjud Felix
Arts & Culture with Cathy Piantigini
- April 6 | **Visual Arts** with Joe Wight
- April 11 | **Media Artists** with Joshua Sariñana
- April 13 | **Dance Folks** with Callie Chapman and Emily Beattie
Immigrant Communities with Murshid Buwembo
- April 20 | **Literary Artists** with Andrea Read
Musicians with Ajda Snyder
Gallerists with Lynn Gervens
Nightlife Event Organizers
with Ben Demers and Joe Wight
- April 22 | **Makers** with Joe Wight
- April 23 | **Dancers, Dance Educators, Facilitators**
Performing Arts Presenters, Curators, Producers
with Callie Chapman and Emily Beattie
- April 24 | **Nightlife Event Organizers**
with Ben Demers and Joe Wight
- April 25 | **Newcomers to the City** (young adults) with Janeanne Dill
- April 26 | **People with Disabilities** with Murshid Buwembo
- April 27 | **Visual Arts** with Julia Csekö
Elders with Andrea Read
Literary Artists with Andrea Read
- April 30 | **Parents of Kids** with Callie Chapman and Emily Beattie
- May 1 | **Newcomers to the City** (young adults) with Janeanne Dill
- May 3 | **Elders** with Janeanne Dill
BIPOC with Cidjud Felix
- May 5 | **Youth** with Cidjud Felix
- May 6 | **Women's Group** with Catherine Nakato
Men's Group with Catherine Nakato

From these community conversations, the SCCP team and Cultural Ambassadors synthesized major themes. Initial findings were shared at the SCCP City-Wide Forum on May 23, 2023 to gather feedback from the community on the direction of the Plan. During that event participants expressed that they wanted the plan to be actionable, yet they wanted the planning and implementation process to be inclusive and to leave room for evolution (see chapter 3).

This feedback led to the exploration of those capacity-building initiatives that were raised in the City-Wide Forum, and also piloted working groups that could potentially continue as part of a future Ambassador program 2.0. During this period Ambassadors participated in different activities, such as networking with local constituents and regional entities like [#ARTSTAYSHERE COALITION](#).

Ambassadors also continued to meet with SAC staff and consultants to plan the SCCP Vision Forum that was held at Warehouse XI, a private event space in Union Square, on November 13, 2023. Approximately 70 community members attended from across the cultural community including people representing theater groups, theater space designers, performing artists, software developers, promoters, producers, land use specialists, entrepreneurs, planners, writers, storytellers, public artists, circus performers, and more.

The event was facilitated by the Cultural Ambassadors with support from SAC and consultants. The process solidified core competencies in cultural planning amongst SAC staff, and showed the promise of the Cultural Ambassador program to cultivate connections between the City and community. During the final remarks, participants expressed that the event felt “encouraging,” “activating,” and “empathetic.”

Content for the Plan emerged from all of these aforementioned forums and conversations and was heavily informed by the work of the Cultural Ambassadors.

The specifics of the recommendations that came out of this process are included in the Appendix both as a record, and as a roadmap for further use should the City and cultural groups develop capacity and resources to carry out additional actions.



AUDIENCES

The SCCP has been developed by three distinct groups. Each played a crucial role in its development and success. These groups encompass individuals and organizations deeply invested in the cultural and artistic landscape of Somerville:

Local Artists and Arts & Cultural Organizations

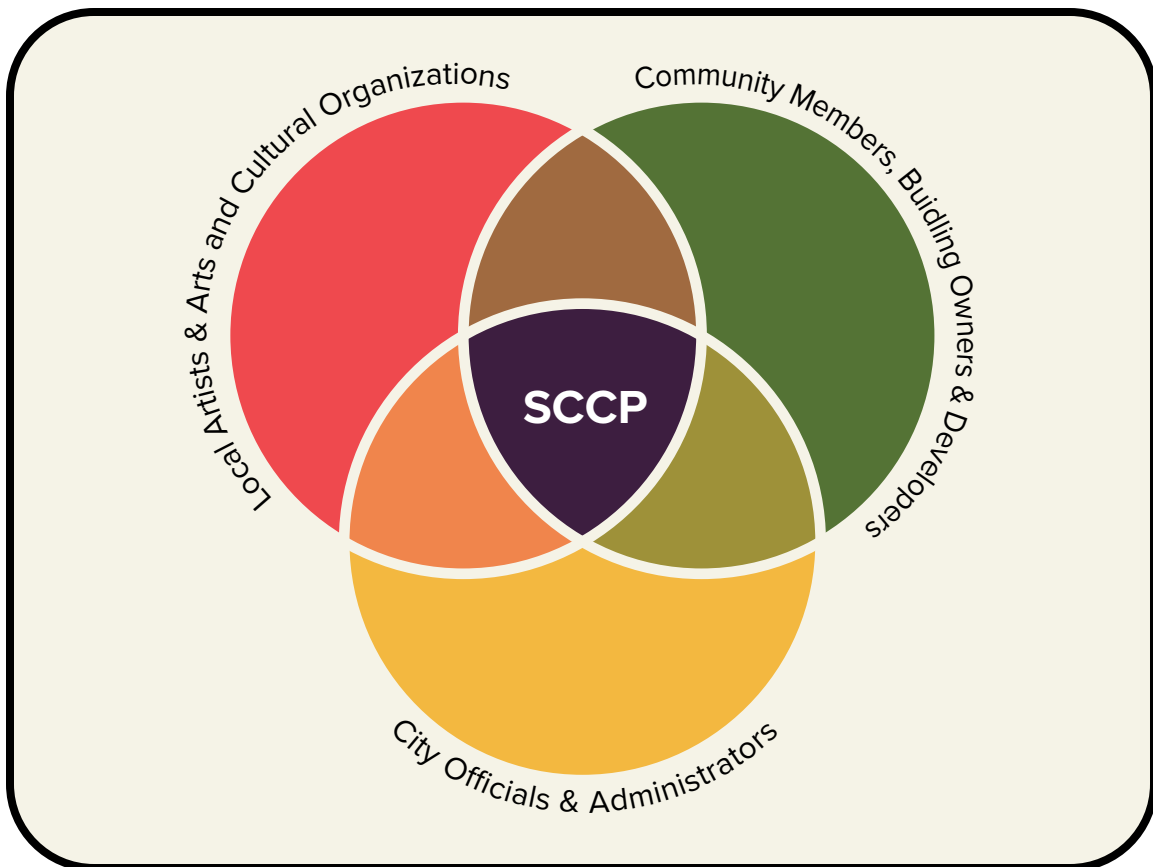
This plan is geared toward local artists, musicians, theater groups, and cultural organizations that form the backbone of Somerville’s arts and culture scene. They will use this plan to build capacity to advocate for their needs within the community by gaining insights into opportunities for funding, resources, and support to help them thrive.

City Officials & Administrators

City officials, including municipal leaders and administrators, will utilize the SCCP to make informed decisions about resource allocation, zoning, and municipal policies that directly impact the arts and culture sector. They will work towards creating an environment conducive to cultural growth, ensuring the availability of municipal resources, and implementing recommendations from the Plan.

Community Members, Building Owners, & Developers

The SCCP also serves the broader community who are invested in the success of Somerville, including people who live, work, or play in the city. They can use the SCCP to better understand the cultural richness of the city and how they can actively support local artists and cultural events. This may involve attending events, volunteering, or participating in initiatives to bolster Somerville’s cultural assets.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Guiding Principles of the SCCP establish the ethos that grounds the recommendations and actions that come out of the plan. These principles were developed through the Cultural Ambassador-led community conversations and are the result of input from specific cultural groups. These principles guided the planning process and contents of the Somerville Cultural Capacity Plan, and are also meant to guide its implementation.

Somerville Cultural Capacity Plan Principles

Center diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility

► Community members want arts and culture in Somerville to be reflective of and accessible to historically marginalized groups, including BIPOC community members, recent immigrants, the LGBTQ+ community, community members of all abilities, youth and elders. Participants noted that in Somerville there has been an imbalance in who has been awarded arts and culture resources and who contributes to the arts and culture fabric of the community, with marginalized groups contributing a large cultural influence to Somerville but often left out of formal systems.

Foster financial security to support the arts and culture ecosystem

► The Somerville community is concerned with the financial security of all parts of the arts and culture ecosystem, including that of local artists, arts and cultural spaces, and arts and culture organizations and activities. Some of the ideas that the community is focused on include fair pay, preserving affordability of practice spaces and studios, and abating rising costs from gentrification and its impacts on artists' housing and arts and culture space rental.

Maintain elements of Somerville's unique character

► Somerville has long been known as a place for cultural production. It is a creative, eclectic and intimate community, yet there are concerns that rapid development patterns, industry and demographic changes are forcing some of the contributors of cultural vibrancy to relocate or shut down. Somerville residents want to continue to ensure city vibrancy, preserve creativity, celebrate identity and maintain Somerville's 'weird' identity even as its physical landscape changes.



Collaborate and deepen connection across diverse groups

► Arts and culture participants communicated a desire to connect across artistic mediums and cultural groups, as well as to explore artistic collaborations across traditional disciplinary boundaries. These same participants are also interested in organizing with other creatives around issues they care about.

Create an actionable plan

► Participants want the SCCP to be an actionable plan that does not sit on a shelf. Cultural Ambassadors want to be able to engage directly and immediately in implementing change on a small scale while the groundwork is simultaneously laid for medium and long term complex recommendations.

Make room for evolution

► Participants want the SCCP to evolve to meet the needs of Somerville residents as they emerge and local conditions change. Continued efforts to make room for people to feel heard and understood will ensure that actions are tailored to the needs of constituents. Somerville artists pride themselves on independence, informality, and spontaneity, and want to create structures only to the extent that they make room to support and amplify personal initiatives as people grow and build capacity in their networks.

SUMMARY

In summary, the Somerville Cultural Capacity Plan process can serve as a tool for ensuring transparency and accountability in the city's arts and culture programming by providing a clear framework for decision-making and resource allocation amongst its many audiences.

The SCCP is a comprehensive strategy designed to engage diverse segments of the community in a collaborative effort to enhance Somerville's cultural vibrancy. It aims to foster cultural growth, resource utilization, and community involvement, making it a valuable resource for multiple audiences with diverse roles in the city's cultural ecosystem.





LONG TERM
(20 min) Ideas
How can we make the future align better with our principles?

SHORT TERM
(10-15 min) Experiment
What simple steps can we try?

Signage
showing
arts in
Somerville
Advertising
neon sign

PUBLIC
SPACE
LARGE
SIGNS
HIGHLIGHTING
ART

SIGNAGE
on
Train Vias
Postcards

Everyone
fits in
Somerville
#Somerville

SO LOVE TO
SEE PLACES
TO SEE ART

SO LOVE TO
SEE PLACES
ARTIST
OWNED
BUILDINGS

Buy art

manipulate
artwork
to
create
new
art

interest of
public
sub-
urban's
demands

T Shirts
with
art
for
this
to
make
big
statement

get people
involved

how to
draw
art

artwork
from
art
to
bus
postcard
for
data
to
live/learn

4

FINDINGS

THEMES IN THE COMMUNITY

During the SCCP process, ambassadors led thirty community conversations which gathered community input on ideas and recommendations for future actions to improve the arts and culture ecosystem in the city. Seventeen conversational categories emerged reflective of the tensions inherent in the Somerville community today. Within these categories, four major themes were found to resonate in nearly every conversation held. The community recommendations in this plan are organized according to these categories and themes. The seventeen conversational categories and four themes are:

Conversational Categories

1. Development and property
2. Community and collaboration
3. Improving grants funding
4. Specific campaigns or projects to initiate
5. Resources and tools
6. Communications and marketing
7. City policies and operations
8. Families
9. Planning and community development
10. Transportation
11. Experiencing art
12. Safety
13. Support from businesses
14. Public art
15. Equity
16. Events
17. Education

Themes

1. Affordability
2. Space
3. Community
4. Communication



Affordability

Key themes that contribute to challenges around *affordability* include:

A regional affordability crisis

Artists helped make Somerville desirable to investment, yet investment creates negative financial pressures for artists

Historically marginalized groups create high cultural value, but generate low financial returns

The affordability crisis is pervasive throughout all elements of the cultural community. The increasing cost of living in Somerville is most acutely felt by people with low incomes, and those who have limited stability, such as renters. Comments made during the conversations reflect frustration that artists and historically marginalized groups bring high cultural value, but traditionally receive little financial return for their efforts. The people who seem to profit most from Somerville’s cultural vibrancy are the developers.

Even long-term artists who have benefited from increasing property values in Somerville through homeownership can be negatively affected by the affordability crisis. Artists aging into retirement are finding that their prospects for staying in the city are limited and many are facing the prospect of selling and moving to more affordable locations far outside the city limits during their retirement.

The affordability crisis is also tearing the community apart from the inside out. For example, at Brickbottom Artists Building, prices for some units have doubled in the past 10 years. As a result, sales of units are increasingly going to non-artists

“There is a mismatch between under-represented groups on cultural influence (high value) and the end financial outcomes (low value).”

*Community Conversations
partipant: Interdisciplinary Arts*

(Brickbottom has no certification requirements), and traditional live-work spaces for artists are disappearing faster than they are being replaced.

While the definitions and policies regarding live/work spaces are being deliberated amongst City staff and the community, the City’s new zoning already includes protections for creative commercial spaces. Many recommendations in this Plan relate to refining these policies in ways that will develop a pipeline of support structures that can help individuals and cultural organizations remain and grow in Somerville as the city is redeveloped.

Community Ideas:

These ideas were distilled and compiled from the community conversations lead by the Cultural Ambassadors.

- ▶ Map and track existing arts culture spaces, cultural organizations, and creative businesses. Collaborate with designers and developers to design user-friendly interactive digital maps.
- ▶ Explore the creation of a Cultural Trust that could assist local and independent organizations to acquire, create, preserve, support, or rehabilitate spaces for arts and culture. Identify its legal structure, composition of trustees, projected revenue sources, and guidelines for the use of its funds.
- ▶ Establish a payment in-lieu program to relieve developers of their ACE space requirement in exchange for funding to go towards arts and cultural uses in other buildings. Establish guidelines for scenarios when this option may or may not be exercised (such as size of space, location in the building, public access, etc.).
- ▶ Consider instituting a short-term rental tax or fee (hotel and airbnb tax) to fund arts, culture, and tourism, potentially supporting a Cultural Trust.
- ▶ Refine the zoning definition for Work/Live Creative Studio, allow it in more districts, and embed it in the City's inclusionary housing policies.
- ▶ Develop a program with the Job Creation and Retention Trust Fund to provide professional development and technical assistance to young and experienced artists and culture workers.
- ▶ Establish a community finance institution to provide capital and low-interest loans to organizations seeking to make capital investments in space.
- ▶ Renovate, develop, or open up underutilized City-owned buildings and other open spaces (such as underneath elevated highways) for arts and culture uses.
- ▶ Create a dedicated grant program to provide funding for operational support to local arts and culture organizations to carry out services for the public good.
- ▶ Create toolkits to help artists navigate the commercial lease process to help artists understand what is allowable in various kinds of spaces (for example, develop guides explaining permitted activities on sidewalks, parks, commercial spaces, homes, etc.).
- ▶ Formalize a Short-Term Rental Program in vacant storefronts (like the ArtAssembled initiative) for art dissemination (performance, galleries, etc.).
- ▶ Explore the creation of a self-taxed district, i.e. District Improvement Financing (DIF), for existing businesses to fund arts and cultural support initiatives in arts and culture rich neighborhoods such as Union Square, Davis Square, or the Brickbottom district.

Space

Key themes that contribute to issues around space include:

Lack of arts and culture spaces

Limited variety amongst arts and culture space

Venues facing increasing challenges

Arts and culture is an afterthought to government and developers

Comments regarding the strengths and weaknesses of Somerville’s arts and culture spaces were mixed depending on the people discussing the issue in each Ambassador-led discussion. However, all groups agreed on the need to preserve existing arts and culture spaces in the face of the increasing risk to redevelopment, and to create new spaces for existing and new organizations to grow.

Somerville has historically served as a regional center for artistic production because of its abundance of old industrial spaces that have been converted into numerous large artist studio buildings. Community members expressed concern that this identity is under threat due to redevelopment pressures that may replace those buildings with other uses. Additionally, people of color expressed that they do not always feel comfortable entering what are perceived to be predominantly white spaces, leading some to feel that even though Somerville contains numerous artist studio spaces, they lack variety in the communities served.

SCCP participants noted a lack and limited variety of arts and culture spaces in many segments of the city’s cultural ecosystem. This trend is particularly noteworthy with regards to spaces for artistic consumption or dissemination like commercial galleries, and mid-sized and large concert venues, and

“Address management capacity, i.e. if we have it, who runs it, who steps up, acknowledgment of a gap there.”

*Vision Forum #2 Attendee
in the breakout group for Space*

theaters that are open late. In short, an artist may be able to find space to make work in Somerville, but it is much harder to find spaces to sell or to present that work.

Allocating resources to preserve and develop arts and culture spaces will warrant the creation of new structures to distribute those resources equitably and transparently. A cultural trust is a possible structure that can facilitate a pipeline of spaces for artists and arts organizations. Like all municipal trusts, a Cultural Trust would be managed by a commission made up of municipal and community representatives (similar to a **Community Preservation Committee** or a **Redevelopment Authority**) to hold and lease real estate, and to distribute funding to maximize equity and access.

Community Ideas:

These ideas were distilled and compiled from the community conversations lead by the Cultural Ambassadors.

- ▶ Create a City-owned community cultural center that is a hub for the arts and other cultural programming (i.e. the Armory) with affordable, accessible space to rent for self-produced shows and events where artists can have access to professional lighting and sound.
- ▶ City to continue refining the policies around Arts and Creative Enterprise (ACE) to better serve the creative community and structure the relationship between developer, City, and community.
- ▶ Develop more places and events for people to meet across disciplines through presentations, panel discussions, and workshops, especially for people of color.
- ▶ Encourage developers of affordable housing to create a mixed-use multi-story building with commercial space on the first floor to be dedicated to arts and cultural uses.
- ▶ Develop and enforce a policy to make Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) available for arts and cultural use.
- ▶ Build a youth center to provide more meeting spaces for youth to enjoy structured developmental events, e.g. financial literacy as well as unstructured joy-centered happenings such as game nights.
- ▶ Provide support to benevolent commercial real-estate owners to keep spaces for artists as they age into retirement.
- ▶ Explore ways to update City sound regulations to allow for louder noise while mediating conflict, such as through the use of proactive sound monitors.
- ▶ Ensure that Brickbottom Neighborhood Plan incentivizes the creation of spaces for cultural production and dissemination, during the day and at night.
- ▶ Develop a community-centered real estate organization to purchase properties, develop them, and hold them to stabilize rents for arts and culture organizations. This entity could function as the Cultural Trust or an arts-focused Community Development Corporation, and could accept municipal funding as a non-city agency.
- ▶ Establish a community development finance institution to provide capital and low-interest loans to organizations seeking to make capital investments in space.
- ▶ Prioritize arts and cultural uses in Somerville Redevelopment Authority urban renewal projects. Research grant programs for venues and other nighttime businesses, such as for facility sound-proofing or to trial an extension of hours later into the night.
- ▶ Support the inclusion of local/independently operated mid- to large-sized music and entertainment venues when planning currently industrial areas, such as Brickbottom. Also support smaller venues throughout the city. Relatedly, research how zoning and other tools can be used to incentivize the development of mid- to large-sized music and entertainment venues within the city.

Community

Key themes that contribute to challenges around **community** include:

Lacking sense of organized community

Artists and groups want ways to better connect

Events are loved and supported

Lots of talent and energy in community

Strong arts and culture institutions

In the majority of conversations participants expressed gratitude for the existence of the cultural community in Somerville. Although community members identified gaps in a few key areas, many people expressed that Somerville is home to many community-loved events, strong institutions, and a lot of talent amongst the city's many arts and cultural groups.

However, most groups expressed that it is difficult to connect with people in their own community, let alone people in other groups. Somerville's arts and culture sector often operates in silos with limited connections between communities.

There is a strong desire to find new ways to connect with people in and across cultural groups, especially since COVID disrupted patterns of attendance at community-based events. There is a sense that old institutions need to be renewed and new opportunities be created to bring people back out into the public domain. While the Ambassador-led discussions generated many ideas for

“Neighborhoods are alive and need support to stay that way.”

*Community Conversations
participant: Visual Art*

events that would bring people together around specific topics, like a poetry festival, there was resonance across groups for informal gatherings that would enable people to meet others across boundaries such as discipline, income, age, race, and ethnicity.

Many of the short term recommendations seek to create structure at the municipal level to support people's individual initiatives to create community. The goal of this network building strategy is to increase people's social capital and enhance capacity in the community.



Community Ideas:

These ideas were distilled and compiled from the community conversations lead by the Cultural Ambassadors.

- ▶ Provide artists and community members with connections to and mentorship opportunities with pro bono consultants and with other organizational leaders in the region.
- ▶ Appoint artists to Affordable Housing Trust, and other boards and commissions.
- ▶ SAC to expand the Cultural Ambassador program to become an annual cohort to incubate initiatives that build networks and expand capacity. SAC offers Cultural Ambassador participants stipends and access to space and dedicates staff to manage the program and connect artists to other resources such as space, technical assistance from pro bono consultants, etc. Participants can attend on their own behalf, or on behalf of institutions.
- ▶ Increase arts and culture volunteering and expand partnerships by creating a portal on the SAC website that would enable community members to sign up and be notified of emerging opportunities.
- ▶ Arts Education: Create groups, funding, infrastructure, an incubator, and space for innovation in curriculum, programming, and pedagogy to have more arts in the schools, more after school programs, and sufficient transportation.
- ▶ SAC and Somerville Open Studios to work together on maintaining a single database of artists and cultural workers in Somerville. Incorporate qualitative data from in-depth interviews with artists and cultural producers. Use analytical methods to identify insights and connections and use analytics to identify common experiences.
- ▶ Continue the BIPOC grants program which provided \$265,000 during a two-year period to BIPOC artists impacted by the COVID pandemic.
- ▶ Create a mentoring program connecting young artists (including youth in high school) to more established local professionals to learn best practices, explore careers, and improve mental health.
- ▶ Develop incubator programming. SAC, in partnership with others such as the Arts and Business Council (A&BC), arts consultants, etc. to help arts organizations scale up so they can take on new space. This could include business consulting, legal assistance, and strategic planning.
- ▶ Offer grants for nightlife event organizers to host new events, with a focus on first-time event organizers and events that target under-served groups.
- ▶ Organize nightlife event organizers and venue owners in Somerville to discuss common issues, advocate as a group, and share resources. This could be formalized as a City task force, or business association whose meetings would be attended by a City staff member.
- ▶ Incentivize neighbors to organize block parties with local artists/performers by enhancing technical assistance and providing small grants to help community members organize such events. Create a process for faster review of summer-based events when City Council is not in session.
- ▶ Establish a community foundation to support Somerville's nonprofits.
- ▶ Expand nighttime transportation services in Somerville, such as introducing nighttime shuttles, or advocating for expanded MBTA service. Create a plan to spin-off and expand social benefit programs from SAC, including: Nibble Kitchen and the SomArt dance space at the Hive.

Communication

Key themes around communication include:

Push back against having loud sound at performance venues

Public experiences difficulty getting information about happenings in Somerville

Lack of communication between City and public around arts and culture assets

A lack of consistent communication between the City and individuals and cultural institutions was a recurring theme that came up in numerous conversations. Community members expressed that it is difficult to find out what is happening in the city. Meanwhile the SAC has their own capacity issues in disseminating information about their numerous programs.

This Plan seeks to create working groups that reinforce existing associations so community members can share resources with each other, and communicate with City staff on an ongoing basis. Standing committees may provide a forum to surface issues as they emerge, rather than dealing with them through high-stakes processes like master plans and relocations to new buildings.

“Rezoning has favored office and high density housing, pushing out venues.”

Community Conversations participant: Nightlife

This Plan also recommends that SAC help plan the logistics of these working groups, coordinate outreach efforts and optimally use social media channels to maximize transparency, ensure access, and adapt to changing patterns of communication behavior since the COVID pandemic.



Community Ideas:

These ideas were distilled and compiled from the community conversations lead by the Cultural Ambassadors.

- ▶ SAC to plan more public forums about specific issues that affect the community. Such as ACE set-asides and the City's process of connecting arts and culture organizations with developers and engaging the public in the evaluation of programs.
- ▶ SAC to coordinate outreach to the public for SAC's various programs, run public engagement in listening sessions, and to help manage the new annual ambassador program.
- ▶ Develop a rolling (or at least twice annual) application process for grants.
- ▶ Upgrade the SAC online calendar portal to become more user-friendly for community members to add events, and encourage adoption and use by partners.
- ▶ Develop standing committees to iteratively listen to community needs, discuss common issues, share resources, advocate as a group, and develop initiatives that address community needs. Committees may be led by local community members and/or ambassadors, and supplemented with staff assistance from SAC. Committee group topics might include: Cultural Space Operators, BIPOC, Nightlife, Cultural Trust, and others per request by Ambassadors (e.g. People with Disabilities, etc.).
- ▶ Research ways to streamline event permitting and make existing event permitting information more easily accessible, such as by creating a consolidated permitting guide.
- ▶ Ensure regular and consistent lines of communication between SAC and OSPCD remain open.
- ▶ Develop systems and workflows to match individuals and organizations with any space coming into new developments.
- ▶ Create a marketing campaign for Somerville nightlife that includes material on existing offerings as well as information about nighttime transportation and other access considerations.
- ▶ Offer and promote technical assistance to community members and cultural organizations. Namely, offer office hours from staff at SAC and the Economic Development Division of OSPCD. Create workshops on topics such as grant writing, program development, etc.; and real estate services such as space identification and lease negotiation.
- ▶ Encourage connections between the City's Small Business Permitting Liaison and the arts and creative community.
- ▶ Establish a new cultural districts in Somerville to support artists and businesses.
- ▶ Explore pathways and policies to allow the Somerville High School (SHS) auditorium to be used more by the public.



STRATEGY

OBJECTIVES

The following objectives are based on the community's stated priorities, concerns, and ideas around arts and culture. Each of these objectives can be accomplished by carrying out the key recommendations or community ideas.

Preserve and develop affordable spaces for cultural practices

The City can allocate resources for cultural leaders to preserve cultural spaces, as well as develop spaces directly, found a Cultural Trust, establish cultural districts, and work more proactively with developers.

Increase funding and support for arts and culture

The City of Somerville can directly increase its funding and support through targeted grants, tax strategies, the establishment of a community foundation, job creation programs, a Cultural Trust and other strategies.

Listen to, learn about, and track diverse arts and culture communities

Create databases of arts and culture practitioners, organizations, businesses and spaces that will allow the Somerville Arts Council to have a better understanding of who makes up the arts and culture community. These databases will provide data needed to create resources to best support the creative community.

Catalyze new initiatives led by individuals and organizations

Create proactive pathways for Somerville residents and the arts and culture community to create their own solutions and strategies around fortifying art and culture in Somerville.

Integrate cultural priorities into government policy and programs

Use policy and programs within the City, such as zoning, buy-back or in-lieu payment programs; prioritizing arts and culture uses in Redevelopment Authority projects; refining ACE use definitions and their allowable districts; loosening sound regulations in targeted areas; developing better transit connections; consistent communication channels between SAC and Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD); and developing other strategies to further support the strengthening of arts and culture in Somerville.

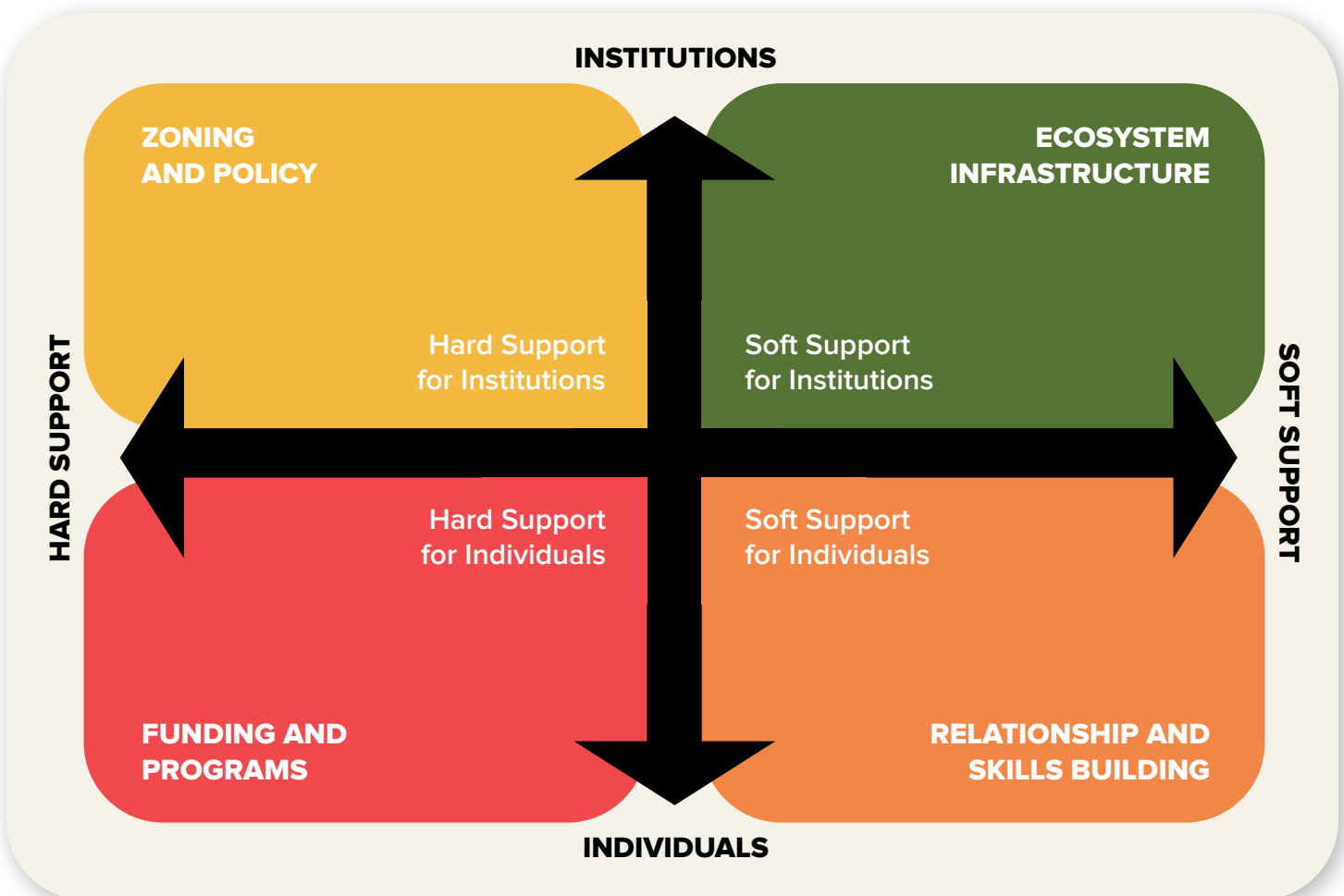
SUPPORT PATHWAYS

The recommendations within this report are the results of a public process and extensive feedback from the Cultural Ambassadors. Figure 2 (below) illustrates a framework to clarify where there are strategic opportunities to strengthen or develop capacity-building initiatives that can deliver hard and soft support to institutions and individuals.

Somerville may use this schema to ensure that any resources that are allocated to arts and culture will be distributed in an environment where local individuals and institutions will be prepared to take advantage of them.

► **HARD SUPPORT** encompasses tangible goods and infrastructure systems like financial resources, physical space, databases of artists/creatives, as well as legal frameworks such as zoning and policy, etc.

► **SOFT SUPPORT** includes intangible and social resources such as knowledge, technical assistance, professional development, mentorship, and social capital.





One example of the way that soft and hard support need to work in tandem to help arts and culture grow is exemplified by the current challenge faced by the City—to ensure that the new zoning lives up to its potential. Currently, zoning includes an innovative mandate that 5% of commercial space in new development must be dedicated to **Arts & Creative Enterprise (ACE)** uses. However, there are no formal structures in place to provide soft support to individuals and institutions to ensure that they are organizationally and financially prepared to take advantage of opportunities for new space as they arise. This scenario has created the potential for existing Somerville-based artists and creatives to be left out of new development.

To ensure that the new zoning ordinance does not leave out existing artists and cultural workers from new development, more technical assistance is needed for individuals and organizations. This framework shows how concentrating efforts in

one area, like refining zoning, may miss opportunities and fall short of intended goals without the complimentary development of soft supports that ensure that actions will benefit Somerville-based artists and cultural organizations, particularly from populations that are historically marginalized.

With this framework, the recommendations are designed to create a regenerative cycle. Individuals can tap into soft support that helps them build relationships and skills. This growth in capacity may lead them to create organizations or institutions that strengthen the creative ecosystem infrastructure. These institutions will be able to access hard support that creates additional resources for the community to inspire and uplift the next generation of artists and cultural workers. The cycle of this framework reinforces the need to consider capacity building as a networked approach that relies on the community and the City working in concert with one another.



ACTION PLAN AND TIMELINE

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below have been synthesized from ideas shared at community conversations, feedback from the Cultural Ambassadors, and input from SAC and the City.

These key actions are meant to establish a framework and denote the involvement of keystone institutions in developing action plans to carry out long term recommendations.

Support ongoing capacity building work in the community

► Create a Cultural Ambassador program 2.0

Hire local cultural ambassadors to incubate initiatives that organize their communities, build networks across disciplines, and expand capacity to carry out initiatives.

Why now? Cultural ambassadors build on momentum and connections made during the SCCP process, and a renewed round can continue to implement recommendations.

► Develop standing committees/working groups

Encourage established committees to keep meeting and create new ones to assess community needs, discuss common issues, share resources, advocate as a group, and to develop initiatives that will address these needs. Committees may include: Arts Organization Leaders, BIPOC members, Nightlife Organizers, Cultural Trust Planners, Artists with Disabilities, etc.

Why now? Working groups can expand the capacity of the arts community through the SCCP process.

► Support community outreach

SAC to manage the Ambassador Program, organize working groups, catalyze specific outreach to BIPOC artists, and provide general outreach about ongoing SAC work to the community.

Why now? The Ambassador program during the SCCP process was managed by a consultant yet still stretched staff capacity. Additional staffing may be needed to help realize the program's potential.

“The municipality can directly connect willing ambassadors and participants with identified ideas/experimental items to operationalize (with appropriate funding distributed quickly for those individuals) to engage local communities.”

*Community
Conversations participant:
Interdisciplinary arts*





Support the capacity of existing arts and culture organizations to continue providing community benefits

► **Create a dedicated operational grant program to support local arts and culture organizations that carry out services for the public good.**

Why now? American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds are ending while the arts and culture sector is still recovering from the pandemic. Additional funding is needed to fill gaps and ensure that arts and culture organizations can remain nimble and accessible especially to people with low incomes.

Explore the creation of a Cultural Trust to catalyze capacity-building

► **Create a Cultural Trust to acquire, create, preserve, support, or rehabilitate art/cultural spaces. Identify its legal structure, composition of trustees, projected revenue sources, and policy/guidelines for the use of its funds.**

Why now? An independent body is needed to hold funding and real estate for cultural uses. The Trust could be funded by revenue derived from a future ACE space payment in-lieu, community benefit agreements, a hotel tax, and more. A Trust could also be authorized to hold municipal real estate, such as the Armory to protect cultural uses by providing quality affordable space in perpetuity for tenants.

Currently MassCreative is working with legislatures in the State House to pass the Creative Space Preservation Act (H.3241/S.530), which would enable municipalities to establish their own Cultural Trusts by right. However, rather than wait for the outcome of this legislation, the SCCP proposes that the City take steps to move forward in the short term such as conducting feasibility analyses, and potentially even submitting a home rule petition to the State to request permission to establish the first Cultural Trust in Massachusetts. Doing so will reposition Somerville as a pioneer in cultural development, and will help create momentum to pass the Creative Space Preservation Act, which will increase cultural capacity statewide.

ACTION PLAN

The action plan and timeline provide a roadmap for how to enact the recommendations from the SCCP process. They provide strategies and actions for the short, medium, and long-term.

SHORT TERM

Listen and respond to community needs

► Key Actions

- SAC to manage the Ambassador Program; create consistent communication across channels for various programs; and plan and execute community listening sessions.
- Establish ongoing committee/ working groups to build capacity (arts organizations, nightlife operators, **BIPOC** folks, and others). Staff committees with SAC staff.
- Incentivise new community based programming by creating a process to permit events in the summer while City Council is out of session, publish permitting guides, and more.

► Predominant Strategies

- Create space for City-Community reflection
- Formalize systems to develop operators of cultural spaces and community-led initiatives that build capacity

MEDIUM TERM

Establish infrastructure to build capacity

► Key Actions

- Set up in-lieu payment process to collect fees from developers in place of required ACE space.
- Establish a new institution to collect funding and manage property in a transparent and equitable fashion such as a **Cultural Trust**, a **Community Foundation** and/or a **Community Development Finance Institution**.
- Continue to use existing structures (Redevelopment Authority, **Jobs Creation & Retention Trust**, Neighborhood Planning, etc) to implement arts and culture objectives.

► Predominant Strategy

- Develop new institutions to build capacity for arts and culture

LONG TERM

Develop and grow the arts and cultural community

► Key Actions

- Expand existing and develop new arts and culture spaces, especially ones that support nightlife.
- Develop capacity-building programs for individuals and organizations to grow in Somerville.
- Create space for arts and culture when City-owned buildings are redeveloped.

► Predominant Strategies

- Mobilize entities to support cultural development
- Support nightlife



CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the process of developing the SCCP that cultural communities are resourceful and often use minimal resources and outside support to create value.

However, cultural workers are often unable to realize that value because they do not typically own their workspaces and cannot scale their businesses to keep up with the rising costs of rent.

New policies, institutions, and public-private partnership models are needed to develop and manage affordable commercial spaces similar to the infrastructure that has been developed to support affordable housing.

As such, an approach with both City-led and community-led components will enable Somerville to build capacity to support new and existing arts and culture organizations to become more secure and resilient, and to ensure that historically marginalized people are centered in its growth.

New municipal zoning, plus legislation moving through the statehouse enabling the creation of cultural trusts for arts and creative uses may establish a pathway to develop structures to preserve and develop affordable spaces for arts and creative uses.

Similarly, facilitating the development of relationships amongst the arts and cultural community, the exchange of ideas, and access to information and community organizing will help to build a stronger ecosystem.

Addressing cultural capacity requires the integration of soft (social) and hard (infrastructural) support systems for individuals and organizations to thrive.





GLOSSARY & ENDNOTES

GLOSSARY

ACE Set-Asides

A requirement within the Somerville Zoning Ordinance that mandates 5% of a building's gross commercial space in certain zoning districts be designated for Arts and Creative Enterprise (ACE) uses. The base zoning districts with this requirement are Mid-Rise 5 (MR5), Mid-Rise 6 (MR6), High Rise (HR), Commercial Core (CC), Commercial Business (CI), and Fabrication (FAB).

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

A federal economic stimulus bill, passed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which provided funding to local municipalities for supporting businesses and organizations.

ArtAssembled

A Somerville Arts Council initiative that provided space for performing artists at Assembly Row from May 2021 to August 2023, supporting over 65 projects and 300 artists through rehearsals, professional development, and creative collaborations.

Arts & Business Council of Greater Boston

A non-profit organization that helps artists and cultural organizations grow, gain influence, seek justice, and thrive through tools, services, and professional development.

Arts and Creative Enterprise (ACE)

A category of land uses defined in the Somerville Zoning Ordinance that includes artistic and creative spaces, such as artisanal production; artist studios and creative incubators; arts education; arts exhibition; art sales or services; and design services.

ArtStaysHere Coalition

A volunteer coalition of artists, musicians, and advocates working together to prevent the displacement of arts and cultural spaces across Greater Boston. The coalition seeks to increase the recognition and support of the arts as essential to communities' wellbeing.

BIPOC

An acronym for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, representing a diverse group of communities often marginalized in society.

Community Development Corporation (CDC)

Nonprofit organizations focused on community development within a specific area. They may engage in activities like economic development, affordable housing, education, and real estate.

Community Development Finance Institution (CDFI)

Organizations that provide financial services to under-served communities, helping to expand economic opportunity through banks, credit unions, and other financial institutions.

Community Foundation

A public charity focused on supporting a specific geographical area by managing donations and distributing grants to local projects, nonprofits, and initiatives.

Creative Space Preservation Act

A proposed Massachusetts state bill that would allow municipalities to establish cultural trusts without requiring special approval through a home rule petition.

Cultural Districts

Designated areas within a city where cultural facilities and programs are concentrated. Cultural districts foster local economies, create a sense of place, and strengthen community cultural engagement.

Cultural Trust

An entity that holds and manages property for the preservation of creative and cultural spaces, ensuring their long-term availability for the arts.

District Improvement Financing (DIF)

A financing tool that allows a municipality to capture additional tax revenue from new private development within a designated district and reinvest it into public improvements and economic development.

Fabrication (Fab) District

A base zoning district in the Somerville Zoning Ordinance 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.

Inclusionary Housing

A policy that encourages or requires developers to include affordable housing units in new developments to meet the needs of low- and moderate-income households.

Job Creation and Retention Trust (JCRT)

Oversees funds from the employment linkage fee (charged to commercial developments over 15,000 square feet) to support job creation and retention initiatives.

Local Cultural Council

A Local Cultural Council (LCC) is a regional or local council led by municipally appointed volunteers and distributes grants through funding from the Mass Cultural Council (MCC). There are 351 LCCs in Massachusetts.

Mass Cultural Council (MCC)

The state agency that supports the arts, humanities, and sciences in Massachusetts through grants, advocacy, and resources for artists, organizations, and communities. It promotes cultural activities that strengthen communities and enrich lives.

Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)

The public agency responsible for operating most of Greater Boston's public transportation services, including buses, subways, and commuter rail.

Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)

MAPC is the regional planning agency for Metropolitan Boston, serving 101 cities and towns. It conducts research and provides resources that inform policy and planning decisions across the region.

Nibble Kitchen

A restaurant in Union Square and part of a Somerville Arts Council initiative that supports the launch of cultural food businesses.

New England Foundation of the Arts (NEFA)

One of six regional arts organizations funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, NEFA supports artists and communities across New England through grants, partnerships, and resources.

Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD)

The City of Somerville's planning and community development office, overseeing a variety of divisions, including Economic Development; Planning, Preservation, and Zoning; Housing Housing Stability; Mobility; and Public Space and Urban Forestry.

Payment-in-lieu

A payment-in-lieu is a mechanism by which a property owner or developer is offered compliance by paying a fee instead of providing the required component, i.e a payment-in-lieu can be paid instead of providing affordable housing units.

Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS)

Privately owned spaces that are legally required to remain open to the public as part of a city's zoning or land-use regulations.

SomArt Space

SomArt is a program of the Somerville Arts Council which seeks to support the creation of new work in performance, visual arts, and trans/interdisciplinary disciplines. As a municipally run program, SomArt is unique in providing subsidized space for artist workspace under the umbrella of City government.

Somerville Affordable Housing Trust Fund (SAHTF)

The Somerville Affordable Housing Trust Fund (SAHTF) was created in 1989 by a City ordinance to preserve and create affordable rental and homeownership units in Somerville, and to carry out programs to directly assist homeowners and renters. All of its activities must benefit low-to-moderate-income households.

Somerville Art Space Risk Assessment

A 2022 report created by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council in partnership with the Somerville Arts Council. It evaluates the impacts of development pressure on arts organizations and offers recommendations to protect and support creative spaces in Somerville.

Somerville Open Studios

An annual event organized by a non-profit that opens artists' studios to the public in Somerville, offering a chance to engage with local artists and their work.

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Innovators' Compass (page 22) Innovators' Compass, developed by Ela Ben-Ur, is a powerful conversation framework that helps us get unstuck in any challenge, big or small. To use this tool for your own project, go to innovatorscompass.org. Follow the attribution guidelines and share your use and experience via tweet to [#innovatorscompass](https://twitter.com/innovatorscompass) or email to ela@innovatorscompass.org

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