



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
CITY COUNCIL

CHARLOTTE KELLY
CITY COUNCILOR AT LARGE

To: Honorable Mayor Katjana Ballantyne and Members of the City Council
From: Charlotte Kelly, City Councilor-At-Large
RE: Request for input on priorities for FY23 Budget (Item #213016)
Date: April 14, 2022

Honorable Mayor Ballantyne and members of the City Council:

I want to start by thanking the thousands of residents, workers, and members of our community whom I've been in dialogue with over the past year. I want to thank the housing advocates, racial justice organizers, queer and trans community leaders, public safety activists, economic justice advocates, and countless organizations, community groups, and leaders who helped contribute to this list of budget priorities.

In talking to our residents, it became acutely clear that Somerville is a city with significant unmet public health and public safety needs. We have a looming eviction crisis that threatens to displace our neighbors from their homes. We have neighbors facing displacement from their homes due to rising unaffordable rents. We have unhoused residents who need the safety and security of a stable home. We have neighbors who cannot access healthcare, who fear calling an ambulance because of the cost, and many more urgent problems. Our residents' lives are multi-faceted, and consequently, the struggles outlined below are intersecting and can't exist in a vacuum. Policy responses must similarly work together to meet the complex needs of our community.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has sharply revealed, improving the health and safety of our community is a collective effort, and I believe it is the duty of our municipal government to work to address these unmet needs through broadly expanded universal public goods and services. We deserve a city where every resident can easily access nourishing food without question; safe, stable, and rat-free housing without fear of displacement; and physical and mental health care for free at the point of use without judgment or stigma. We deserve a city where harm is addressed with trauma-informed services that emphasize transformative justice rather than punishment. Budgets are statements of our values, moral documents that tell us what our community believes to be a problem

and what we believe to be a priority. Somerville's next municipal budget must move us towards enacting this vision of what we deserve and know is possible.

I've advocated for more just local, state, and federal budgets for nearly ten years. Too often elected officials say their constituents' priorities are not possible because of a lack of money, time, or other resources when the real problem is a lack of political will and courage to truly tackle the issues our communities face. Whether we look at our \$24 million in free cash, our AAA bond rating, or \$77 million in federal ARPA funds, Somerville is in an unprecedented financial moment. I submitted these budget resolutions in the spirit of meeting this unprecedented moment with the political will and courage to do more for our residents.

Charlotte Kelly
City Councilor At-Large

Housing

Housing is a human right and is a matter of dignity, equity, and justice. The housing-related budget priorities listed below will combat rising housing costs; help meet the immediate day-to-day needs of our neighbors experiencing homelessness; and work to tackle long-term solutions to keep people in their homes, in Somerville, and in their communities as a way to maintain a healthy and vibrant city.

1. That the FY 2023 budget establish funding for a Somerville Rental Relief Fund that provides first, last, security deposit, and relocation funds to Somerville tenants who are at or below 80% AMI, facing unaffordable rent increases (at or above 10% increases), have received a no-fault eviction, or are otherwise within neighborhoods and zones facing high risks of displacement due to market forces such as building sale and development, in order to ensure that people who live in Somerville can stay in Somerville.
2. That the FY 2023 budget establishes sustained funding for a municipal housing voucher program that will provide permanently subsidized housing within Somerville for no fewer than 40 low-income households per year, regardless of immigration status.
3. That the FY 2023 budget includes funding for 4 multilingual staff within the Office of Housing Stability to review and assess the legality of rental leases for Somerville tenants, and refer landlords found to be engaging in unfair business practices by repeatedly issuing illegal leases to the Office of the Attorney General for enforcement action.
4. That the FY 2023 budget includes funding for 2 multilingual staff within the Office of Housing Stability to provide housing legal advisory for Somerville tenants.
5. That the FY 2023 budget establishes a \$10 million dollar trust for the Somerville Community Land Trust, in order to provide and expand affordable, community-owned property and homeownership and rental units in perpetuity.

6. That the FY 2023 budget established a fund to cover the cost of hotel rooms for unhoused people who cannot find shelter during adverse and seasonally severe weather
7. That the FY 2023 budget provide funds for transitional living community resources and expanded shelter access for unhoused people

Health & Wellbeing

While many of the issues that our residents face require state and federal inventions, there are real solutions to these problems that we can tackle on a local level. We can learn from other municipalities around the country that have already piloted and taken on these ideas. The health and wellbeing of our residents is paramount to the health and wellbeing of our community as a whole.

8. That the FY 2023 Budget pilot no less than three fare-free bus routes from the following list: 80, 86, 87, 88, 89, and 90
9. That the FY 2023 Budget establishes a 18 month Universal Basic Income food program that would benefit no fewer than 5,000 households by providing \$400 per month on debit cards.
10. Consumption Site Needs Assessment and Feasibility Report
11. That the FY 2023 budget include the creation of a Division (or Office) within HHS to connect residents with short term and long term social, emotional, and mental services, and to enact policies to eliminate structural barriers to receiving social, emotional, and mental health care.
12. That the FY 2023 budget include the creation of restorative justice facilitation services and staff specializing in intimate partner violence and sexual violence, within an appropriate Division or Office of HHS.
13. That the FY 2023 budget establishes a \$500,000 fund to support Community Mental Health Service providers and build sustainable accessible mental health services in Somerville
14. That the FY 2023 Budget includes meaningful investment towards establishing a municipal ambulance service within the Department of Fire and Rescue which is free at point-of-care, providing medical care to residents who may otherwise be dissuaded by cost.
15. That the FY 2023 budget provides funds to create three additional rodent management positions in the Somerville Inspectional Services Department to expand rodent mitigation measures.
16. That the FY 2023 budget supply funds to investigate establishing a free clinic in Somerville which will provide walk-in STI screenings without requiring insurance, identification, or payment at point-of-care and with sufficient staff to accommodate evening and weekend office hours increase access to sexual health services to Somerville's LGBTQ residents.
17. That the FY 2023 budget includes funding to lease a location for a Safe Consumption Site based on the services and location guidance of the Somerville Supervised
18. That the FY 2023 budget establishes a mobile COVID-19 vaccine clinic and a mobile COVID-19 testing clinic with consistent availability during and outside standard business

hours, access to PCR and rapid test kits, and on-site information in commonly spoken languages about what to do if someone tests positive for COVID-19

Employment & Equity

The employment and equity budget priorities are mechanisms of economic justice which have the potential to give residents the autonomy to live and thrive in our community. They also facilitate a more transparent and accountable government when it comes to delivering on the promises of racial and social justice.

19. That the FY 2023 budget establish a Vulnerable Artists Stabilization fund to help keep artists in their studio, practice, and/or gallery physical spaces
20. That the FY 2023 budget includes meaningful investment towards procuring publicly accessible studio space for artists.
21. That the FY 2023 budget establishes a multi-lingual Employment Connection Center to help residents in searching for jobs, provide access to training programs, and support navigating unemployment/employment services
22. That the FY 2023 budget provide funding for commissions including staffing to conduct an assessment of the administrative needs of the commissions, stipends for commission members, and clerk support during commission meetings and between meetings as required.
23. That the FY 2023 budget includes funds to hire staff within the SomerStats and Human Resource departments to build a public dashboard that publishes the staffing demographics by race, gender, age, sexuality, and ethnicity.