



City of Somerville
**OPEN SPACE &
RECREATION
PLAN**

2025–2035





CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
KATJANA BALLANTYNE
MAYOR

April 12, 2025

ATTN: Melissa Cryan, Grant Programs Supervisor
Division of Conservation Services
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

Dear Ms. Cryan:

It is with great pleasure that I submit the City of Somerville's 2025-2035 Open Space & Recreation Plan to the Division of Conservation Services. This exemplary plan is the product of months of outreach, public participation, and research. It represents a comprehensive documentation of past, current, and future efforts to improve, enhance, and increase open space and recreational opportunities in the city.

Somerville is a densely populated municipality in which open space is intensely used and highly valued by residents. It is vitally important for the City to rely on its Open Space & Recreation Plan as a guide for informing its short- and long-term strategic vision around open space. The City is grateful for the ongoing support from the Commonwealth that has made it possible to acquire new open space, construct new spaces, and revitalize many of our existing parks, playgrounds, and recreational fields.

I enthusiastically approve this plan. With its submission, I pledge on behalf of the City to continue the essential work that contributes so substantially to a better quality of life for all residents of Somerville.

Sincerely,

Katjana Ballantyne
Mayor





Open Space & Recreation Plan 2025–2035

City of Somerville
Mayor Katjana Ballantyne

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Land Acknowledgement

The City of Somerville acknowledges its foundation and construction on the ancestral lands originally inhabited by the Massachusett, Pawtucket, and Naumkeag peoples. We extend our respect and affirmation to the present-day members of these communities, the descendants of the earliest inhabitants of this land.

We celebrate the enduring historical, cultural, and contemporary significance of Indigenous Peoples whose heritage is intertwined with the lands that later became known as the Americas.

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Thank you to each resident who
generously shared their feedback through
our survey, community meetings, or in
conversations with staff. We couldn't do
our work without you.

This OSRP was written in 2023-2025,
released to the public and for State
review in early 2025 and finalized shortly
thereafter. It represents an update of the
data collected, analyzed, and presented
in the City's 2016-2023 Open Space and
Recreation Plan. It was accepted and
approved by the Massachusetts Executive
Office of Energy and Environmental
Affairs in 2025.

Facing Page: Photo by Ed Wonsek. Designed By Warner Larson
Landscape Architects.





SECTION 1

Plan Summary

While the specific open space needs of Somerville residents may shift and change over time, one thing remains constant: high-quality open space is vital to resident happiness and urban vibrancy. Somerville was developed without a large open space network and grew to be the most densely populated city in New England. City planners have been striving to address this deficit for decades. While trying to create additional new acres in innovative ways, old parks are renovated every year because every square foot counts.

The desire for more open space is consistent, but many things have changed. Development pressure has steadily risen. Property values and income levels have increased. Stressors from climate change demand relief from heat and flooding. Somerville adopted a new zoning ordinance in 2019 which requires developers to build public open spaces. Millions have been spent on renovating parks, schoolyards, and athletic fields across the city. Thousands of new trees have been planted in Somerville streets and parks.

This 2025-2035 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) directs City staff to continue looking for and constructing open spaces, but it notes a new focus on enhancing what we have through small and large upgrades. It emphasizes the need for “performance landscapes” to address community needs. These landscapes capture and infiltrate stormwater and create native habitat. Residents tell us they want relief from the heat, and parks provide shade and cooling water features. Our engagement feedback reveals a need for community connection (particularly evident during the era of COVID lockdown)

and our parks offer flexible third spaces to gather. They also foster health with new and upgraded sports fields and outdoor exercise equipment. With limited space, the parks and programs that we have need to serve varied groups through layered uses.

Over 750 residents participated in engagement efforts related to this OSRP update and patterns in their feedback pointed to priorities related to passive recreation, access to the water, the need for gathering spaces, accessibility improvements, and ecological enhancements. At the same time, we must be aware that in a city of 81,000 residents, not all are at the table. Our park system is used by diverse populations, but this diversity is not reflected at public meetings where decisions are made about parks. The plan acknowledges this gap and directs staff to develop strategies that reach a broader audience in future park planning efforts to ensure that all groups in Somerville have a say in the future of their city. There is a strong connection between parks, trees, and human health, and all our residents deserve to benefit.

Inside this document, you'll find an overview of Somerville's history, physical development, and environment (see **Sections 3 and 4**). It describes recent community engagement data and patterns in open-space needs (see **Sections 2, 6, and 10**). It condenses those patterns into a set of overarching goals and more detailed action items to guide the City's work over the next ten years (see **Sections 8 and 9**). It is both a physical plan for Somerville's open spaces and provides guidance for the public and private groups stewarding those spaces. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the plan acts as an information resource for residents and community groups who wish to learn more about the City's commitment to expanding and improving open space and recreational opportunities in Somerville.

SOMERVILLE AT A GLANCE:

- Most densely populated city in New England
- Approximately 81,00 residents
- 4.12 square miles of land area
- 6.6% is open space
- 99% of residents live within a 5-minute walk to an open space in the city



13,604 publicly owned trees in Somerville.

350 trees planted every year.

UPDATES since the last Somerville Open Space & Recreation Plan:

5 PLAYGROUND Renovations Completed



Cremien Playground, Hoyt Sullivan Playground, Allen Street Playground, Central Hill Playground, Lincoln Park

6 SCHOOLYARD Renovations Completed



Winter Hill Community Innovation Schoolyard, Argenziano Schoolyard, Healey Schoolyard, Brown Schoolyard, Edgerly Education Center Schoolyard, West Somerville Neighborhood School

11 PASSIVE PARK Projects Completed



Lincoln Park, Powder House School Park (now Lou Ann David), Prospect Hill Park, Conway Park, among others

Anticipated: Ken Kelly Park, Somerville Junction Park

8 PRIVATELY DEVELOPED Public Spaces Opened



ESCA Park, Metro9 Park (formerly Millbrook Park), Assembly Row Dog Park, Martha Perry Lowe Park

5 URBAN AG Amenities Improved



Allen Street Playground, South Street Farm, Somerville Community Growing Center, Lincoln Park, Glen Park Community Garden

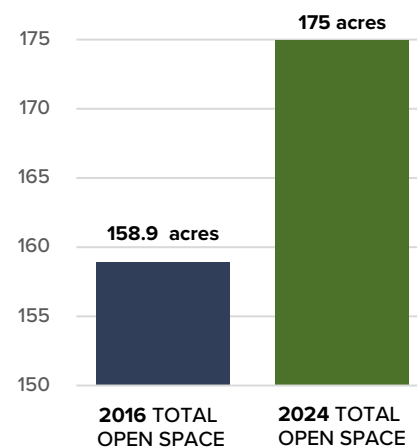
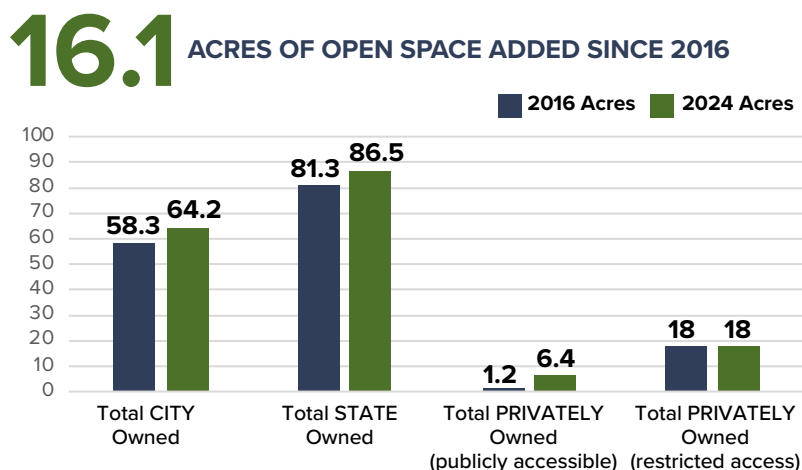
ATHLETIC FACILITIES

6 Fields Renovated
1 Stadium and Track (with DCR)



Healey Schoolyard, Conway Park, Dilboy Stadium and Aux Fields, Foss Park, Lincoln Park

FIGURE 1-1 ACRES OF NEW OPEN SPACE





SECTION 2

Introduction

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Facing Page: Community partners, residents, and City staff gather at a community meeting to discuss urban agriculture in Somerville.

2A.

Statement of Purpose

Somerville is an incredibly dense and highly developed city. It is critical that we understand how our open spaces and recreational opportunities meet the needs of residents as every square foot counts. The Open Space and Recreation Plan process gives us a chance to reassess how we are doing and set a vision for the coming years.

The purpose of the 2025-2035 Open Space and Recreation Plan is to:

- Increase awareness of existing open and recreational spaces in Somerville.
- Connect with residents about their open space and recreation needs, especially those that we don't often hear from.
- Evaluate the City's goals as detailed in various planning documents, analyses, and conversations with staff.
- Outline a ten-year strategic action plan that synthesizes stakeholder visions, goals, and needs for the creation, protection, management, and enhancement of open space in the city.
- Encourage thoughtful planning and a sustained commitment to open space.
- Build on past plans to create a comprehensive, centralized document.

The plan includes physical network mapping (existing properties, amenities, and infrastructure), analyzes internal operation systems (maintenance, management, and decision-making), serves as an educational resource, and sets a course for prioritizing projects and policies.

The careful analysis and vision outlined here should guide future decision-making and actions. At the same time, this is a

living document. While the goals should be consulted on a regular basis by citizens and decision-makers, they should also be subject to periodic evaluations and updates. Residents' needs might change in the next ten years and the goals and analyses in this document will be a foundation for future data gathering, short- and long-term open space planning, and further community conversation. Public feedback on this plan is welcome and encouraged at any time.

2B.

Planning Process and Public Participation

In October of 2023, the Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD) began the process of revising our Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). Outreach took place through the winter and early spring and the plan was drafted in 2024-2025 by Public Space and Urban Forestry (PSUF) staff. This update builds on the significant work of the 2016-2023 OSRP, reflects what we hear from our constituents today, and aligns with other planning projects undertaken by City of Somerville departments.

Opportunities to share feedback included a survey, multiple public meetings, a project website with a form for idea submissions, and focus groups. These opportunities were advertised on social media accounts, at tabling events, in fliers posted around the city, City department newsletters, local newspaper coverage, and through community partner networks like Groundwork Somerville, the Growing Center, youth sports leagues, and Union Square Main Streets.



A scene from a January 2024 public meeting at the West Branch Public Library. Somerville City staff present about open space planning, the Open Space and Recreation Plan update, and what has changed since 2016.

Three public meetings were held in January 2024 as an initial round of engagement. The first two were held in accessible buildings on opposite ends of the city. Attendees learned about the OSRP process, the importance of their input, and broke up into groups to discuss four topics: 1) natural and restorative spaces, 2) climate change resiliency, 3) play and recreation, and 4) urban agriculture. Relevant City departments facilitated discussions and listened to input directly from residents. The third meeting was held on Zoom to foster maximum attendance. At this meeting, staff presented patterns appearing in the outreach feedback and asked: “Did we hear you correctly? Did we miss anything?” Promotion for these meetings included flyer-ing, social media posts, sharing project information at events, and City department network emails.

The City released a survey in November 2024 to poll residents about their feelings on open space, recreational programs, barriers to access, and their outstanding needs. We were happy to receive 708 responses, and we acknowledge that certain groups were overrepresented. Overrepresented demographics include white people, Wards 3 and 5, and people between the ages of 35 and 54. Underrepresented groups include people aged 19-24, people of color, and the lowest-income households (earning 30k or less).

Given these demographic disparities, City staff set up a series of engagement events to connect directly with seniors and teens. These events were held at Teen Empowerment, Somerville High School, Groundwork Somerville, and the Council on Aging.

individual park project involves a public engagement process. Each neighborhood plan that Planning, Preservation, and Zoning writes reflects hours of public outreach. And each time a developer builds a civic space, they must engage the community. We are always ready to hear from our community about what they need.

2C. Enhanced Outreach

Inclusive and diverse public participation was a central tenet of the OSRP update process. Staff sought to include many voices and address the varied open space and recreation needs/interests in the city. However, we recognize that the residents who attend our public meetings and respond to surveys (our traditional means of engagement) rarely represent vulnerable or minority populations.

To address this imbalance, we worked with the SomerViva: Office of Immigrant Affairs (SOIA). They have extensive networks in varied immigrant communities in Somerville, many of whom fall into the Environmental Justice (EJ) category because they speak a language other than English at home (primarily Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Kreyol, Nepali, and Chinese). The SOIA language liaisons foster relationships to reach residents with important City information or resources. They work with churches, schools, cultural organizations, events, and run language-specific social media accounts. These cultivated networks give residents an accessible venue to voice their needs. For this OSRP update, SOIA staff translated flyers and press releases and disseminated event information through their networks. They were prepared to offer translation at any of the public meeting events (it was not requested). They also shared input about open space needs and desires from

their networks with OSRP planners. That input was critical to making this plan a more effective reflection of our community.

In addition to the promotion methods described in 2B, staff used a variety of strategies to get the word out about engagement opportunities to underrepresented residents. They posted multilingual fliers in demographically varied parts of town. The City's Economic Development division discussed the project and opportunities to share feedback on their regular "block walks" to local businesses. Information was also shared through the City's and SOIA's social media accounts or text groups. When gaps in the feedback were identified, Staff reached out directly to local groups like Teen Empowerment and the Council on Aging to set up focus groups.

This work sought to reach a broad community, but we acknowledge that our strategies are still a work in progress. We will continue to build relationships with community members and try new methods of outreach to increase the number of voices that inform City projects.



SECTION 3

Community Setting

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SUCCESS STORY: PRIVATELY OWNED PUBLIC SPACES		46
SUCCESS STORY: SOMERVILLE COMMUNITY PATH COMPLETION		48

Facing Page: This iconic view from Prospect Hill toward Boston was the site of the raising of the first American flag in the United States. Somerville’s topography shaped the development of the city with industry and railroads concentrated in the lowlands and residential development on the hills. Very little land was set aside for parks as the city grew. Each open space in Somerville, especially those with views like Prospect Hill Park, is extremely valuable to the experience of living in this dense city.

3A.

Regional Context

Located in the coastal Boston Basin ecoregion, Somerville is bounded to the north by the Mystic River and the communities of Medford, Malden, and Everett; to the west by the Alewife Brook and the town of Arlington; and to the east and south by the cities of Boston and Cambridge (see **Appendix A: Regional Context Map**).

The Mystic River and Alewife Brook connect Somerville to towns up and downstream. The brook is linked by fragmented parkland (including Alewife Brook Reservation) up to Spy Pond in Arlington. The Mystic is also linked by fragmented riverside parks from Horn Pond in Woburn to Chelsea Creek in Revere and Boston Harbor (see **Section 4C** for more information).

Physical topography is a defining characteristic of Somerville. Seven hills create drainage divides between the Mystic River and Charles River watersheds while lowlands and filled marshlands have influenced the historical and current development of industry, housing, and transportation. Although Somerville is part of a vast regional network of natural resources and open space, the city has a unique urban character.

Because of its proximity to the state's largest city and local waterways, Somerville has always been part of the region's transportation infrastructure. Five major railroad corridors and three high-volume traffic arteries crisscross the city. These roads and rails connect Boston to northern suburbs, but they also pollute the air and create barriers that separate Somerville neighborhoods from each other and from some of the city's largest open spaces. Interstate 93 slices through historic parts of Winter Hill and East Somerville with few crossing points

underneath its elevated sections. Route 16 (Alewife Brook Parkway) cuts residential areas off from riverside parks. State Route 28 (locally known as the McGrath Highway) isolates East Somerville and the Brickbottom district from the rest of the city, Foss Park, and the Mystic River.

Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) Red, Green, and Orange Lines, including Green Line stations that opened in 2022, and major improvements to local and regional bicycle infrastructure give residents many options for connecting to the broader Boston area.

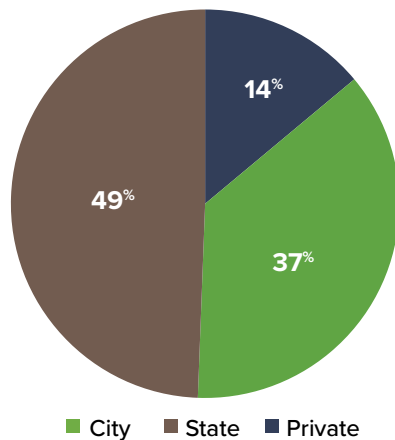
OPEN SPACE CONTEXT

Due largely to development and subdivision patterns during the first half of the 20th century (see **Section 3B**), Somerville has little open space compared to its neighbors. At the end of 2024, there are 175 acres of publicly accessible open space within the city's 4.12 square miles, representing roughly 6.6% of the total land area.

The acquisition of large areas of new open space remains challenging due to high costs and a lack of available parcels. Past efforts have focused on three primary objectives: 1) meeting the maintenance and renovation needs of existing parks and open spaces; 2) acquiring small residential sites for pocket parks or community gardens; and 3) developing stronger connections to local and regional open space resources.

Somerville is located close to many regional open space amenities. The Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR)'s over 2,200-acre Middlesex Fells Reservation lies less than a mile north of Somerville's northwest border. The Upper and Lower Mystic Lakes are two miles to the northwest and the Mystic River is on the northern border. The 115-acre Alewife Reservation is located a half mile beyond the

FIGURE 3-1 TOTAL ACRES BY OWNERSHIP



western boundary of the city, and the popular Charles River shoreline and parklands are two miles south of Somerville. In addition, the Atlantic coast, with all its New England beaches and parks, is just a short trip away.

Despite the highway barriers mentioned above, recreational travel corridors (such as the recently extended Community Path and other regional bikeways) support connections to other towns and waterways. Ongoing projects include improvements to Mystic River Greenways,¹ the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail,² and other local projects like the Kensington Connector (opened in 2021) which gives pedestrians and bicyclists access under Route 93.

The city faces a variety of competing interests reminiscent of many of the cities in our region: development pressure by industries like biomedical, high housing costs, limited housing stock, and increasing climate extremes. The City is exploring ways to leverage the desirability to live and work in Somerville with the shared community goals of creating more open space and enhancing the vibrancy of the city's streets, plazas, and parks through public and private efforts.

1 Mystic River Watershed Association, "Greenways," 2024.

2 "Mass Central Rail Trail," 2024.

The high density and expensive housing in Somerville, Boston, and Cambridge have led to longer commutes and an increased reliance on cars for transportation to work, school, and appointments. In 2024, the Greater Boston area received a significant Congestion Relief Grant from the federal government to investigate ways to reduce driving and enhance the use of other transportation modes, including improved public transit and biking. This grant aims to address several transportation issues that affect Somerville residents and workers in their daily lives: public transit gaps, transportation equity, commute times, limited parking, air quality, carbon emissions, and access to open space.³

REGIONAL PLANNING EFFORTS

Below are some regional open space initiatives that have helped guide Somerville's planning and implementation.

Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)

The City of Somerville is a member of the MAPC which brings together the 101 cities and towns of Metropolitan Boston. Somerville is an active participant in collaborative planning projects with MAPC. Some projects include:

Inner Core Committee (ICC) MAPC's Inner Core Committee consists of 21 cities and towns, including Somerville. The ICC is MAPC's largest subregion, representing over 1.6 million residents. This group tackles challenges such as public transit, congestion, finite developable land, and affordability.

Metro Mayors Coalition (MMC) MMC is a groundbreaking coalition made up of 14 communities in Greater Boston. Established by MAPC in 2001, the voluntary forum enables members to exchange information

3 Metropolitan Area Planning Council, "\$21.6M Grant To Fund Bluebike Expansion, New Transit Shuttles, Other Congestion Relief Solutions In Metro Boston," 2024.

and create solutions that affect their over 1.3 million constituents. The Coalition launched a Climate Preparedness Taskforce in 2015 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address vulnerabilities. They have looked at sustainable land use practices and recently focused on urban heat mitigation.

Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA)

MyRWA conducts social and ecological projects throughout the watershed. They collaborate with organizations at the community, city, regional, and state levels, including direct partnerships with the City of Somerville. Their programs encompass water quality monitoring, evaluations of ecosystem health and bioindicator species, environmental education, and partnerships for regional greenway projects.

In 2023, they received a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to fund air quality monitoring in the Lower Mystic. This three-year study will collect data to inform transportation planning, reduce exposure to harmful vehicular air pollutants, and raise community awareness.

Charles River Climate Compact (CRCC)

The CRCC was established in 2019 as a voluntary alliance comprised of twenty-eight communities, including Somerville. The Compact focuses on climate adaptation and mitigation strategies using a watershed-wide approach to address regional risks such as flooding, sea level rise, extreme heat, and the health of ecosystems. In 2023, the CRCC published a strategic plan describing goals related to flood and drought mitigation, improving biodiversity, working together on smart and effective climate laws, among others.⁴

Resilient Mystic Collaborative (RMC)

Established in 2018, the RMC was created to address the urgent need for climate preparedness. It comprises staff members from 21 municipalities in the Mystic River watershed alongside participants from key state agencies and local non-profits. MyRWA and the Consensus Building Institute (CBI) facilitate the RMC, which works across political boundaries to plan, finance, and implement multi-benefit measures to enhance regional climate resiliency.

Within the RMC, staff from towns around the Lower Mystic joined to form the Lower Mystic Working Group. Together they conducted climate assessments on infrastructure and vulnerable communities in Somerville, Charlestown, East Boston, Chelsea, Everett, Revere, and Winthrop. This region of the Boston Harbor watershed contains the most concentrated critical infrastructure and densely populated residential areas in New England. The studies looked at lifeline sectors—systems deemed by the Department of Homeland Security to be so essential that their disruption or destruction would severely impact U.S. security, the national economy, public health, or safety. They found five in the Lower Mystic:

- **Transportation:** Logan Airport, three MBTA rail lines, the Ted Williams and Callahan tunnels.
- **Food distribution:** the New England Produce Center.
- **Energy:** Over 100 fuel storage tanks, the Lower Mystic Generating Station.
- **Wastewater management:** Deer Island Wastewater Treatment Plant.
- **Dam:** Amelia Earhart Dam.⁵

4 Charles River Watershed Association, “Charles River Climate Compact,” 2024.

5 Mystic River Watershed Association, “Resilient Mystic Collaborative Releases Equity-Based Climate Assessment,” 2022.

3B.

History of the Community

Archaeologists have documented evidence of Native American communities in this region since around 12,500 years ago. By 3,000 years ago, those communities had developed into a network of linked settlements across the Northeast, bound together by family, social ties, languages, ideologies, and trade. All of present-day Somerville and the surrounding area formed part of the territory of the Massachusetts, Pawtucket, Naumkeag—indigenous peoples who were culturally and linguistically allied with the larger Algonquin nation which stretched into present-day Canada.

Following the arrival of Europeans in the 1500s, these indigenous peoples were dispossessed of their land through disease,

warfare, treaties, and forced removal. In the early 1600s, conflicts and European disease outbreaks led to a devastating mortality rate for indigenous communities throughout the region.

As indigenous communities were displaced, the English imposed their own ideas of land ownership and land use on the area. In 1639, Pawtucket leaders deeded land in present-day Charlestown and Somerville to the colonists. The Massachusetts remained in the area for much of the remainder of the seventeenth century and their descendants continue to live in this region. While the land of current Somerville was part of their core domain, no indigenous archaeological sites from this era have yet been preserved or officially recognized.

Somerville's location in the Boston Basin coastal plain has influenced its development for the last four centuries. European settle-

FIGURE 3-2 MAP BY MARTIN DRAPER, JR., 1852.

Reproduction courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map & Education Center at the Boston Public Library.



FIGURE 3-3 MAP OF EARLY SOMERVILLE ROADS.

Map published in Landscape Research's *Beyond the Neck*, 1982 (11).

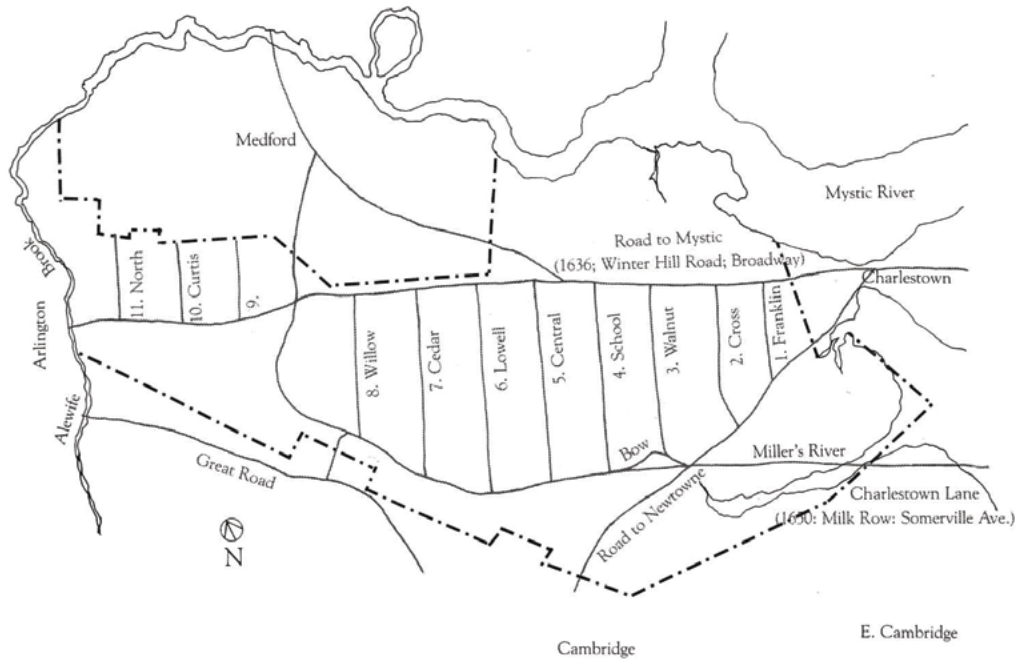
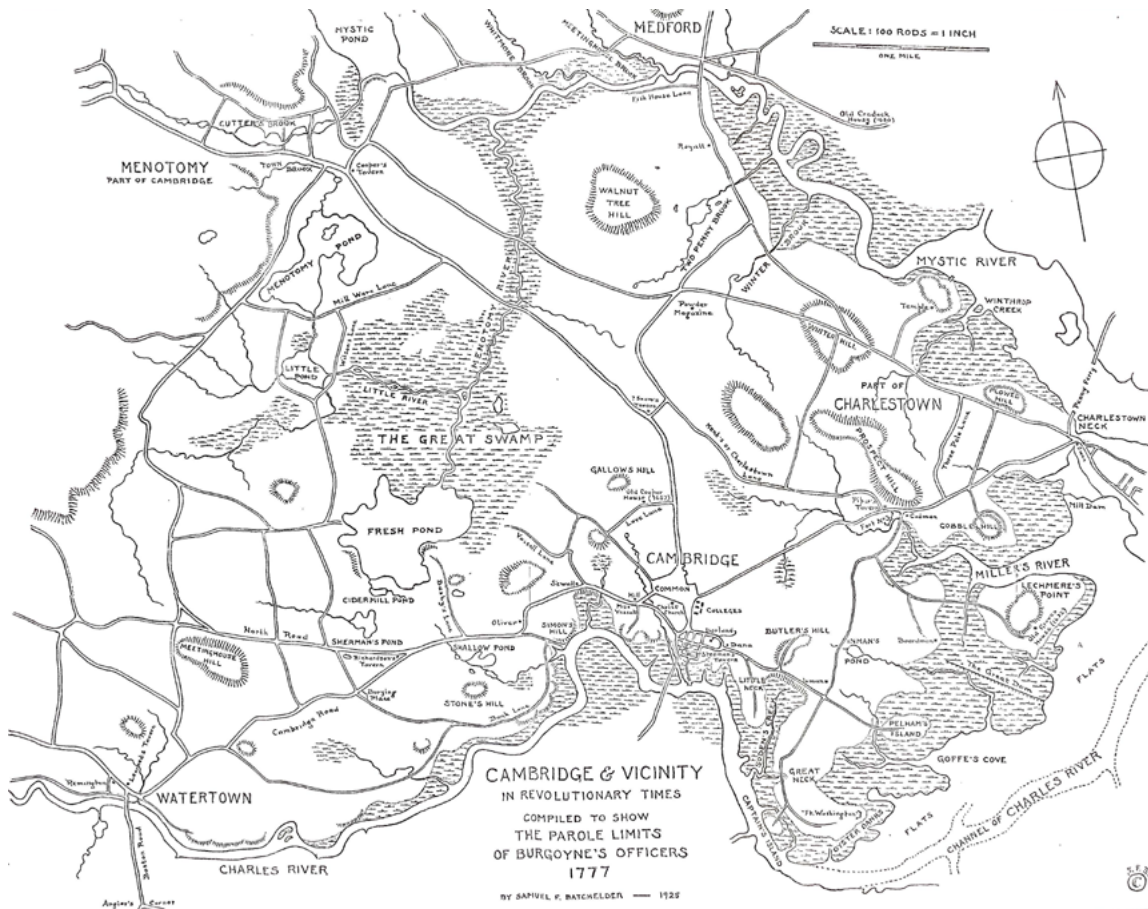


FIGURE 3-4 MAP BY SAMUEL F. BATCHELDER, 1925.

"Cambridge & Vicinity in Revolutionary Times. Compiled to Show The Parole Limits of Burgoyne's Officers, 1777." Published in the *Cambridge Historical Society: Publications XII, Proceedings for the Year 1917-1919*, 1925 (328).



ment and land-use patterns in Somerville were historically driven by the geographic relationship to maritime Boston. First, colonists settled on the narrow strip of land connecting Somerville to Charlestown. Then in 1639, the Pawtucket Nation deeded present-day Somerville to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The Ten Hills area along the Mystic River provided a defensible position for forts, and a direct trade path strengthened the connection to Charlestown and Boston.

Another important route (now Washington Street) was established as neighboring Cambridge grew, connecting Cambridge to Boston through Somerville. Somerville's hilly ridgeline defined east-west routes (now Broadway and Somerville Avenue), while 11 north-south roads were built between 1681 and 1685 (see **Figure 3-3**).

Colonial Somerville land was mostly used for grazing and small farms. The first residential development was concentrated in Charlestown Neck, along what are now Broadway and Washington Streets.

Early industries in the area included sawmills, gristmills, pottery, brickmaking, and quarries, but most of the land was still used for agriculture throughout the 1700s. Somerville's "seven hills" and its river routes were strategically important to the colonists during the American Revolution. Prospect Hill played a key role. It was the site of a string of fortifications created by George Washington and the Continental Army during the siege of British troops in Boston in the first year of the American Revolution. On New Year's Day 1776, the first official flag, featuring thirteen red and white horizontal stripes, was raised atop Prospect Hill.

After 1800, Somerville expanded its industrial base, most notably with the establishment of a bleachery and new brickyards. The strong road network and the new Middlesex Canal provided routes for dairy farmers

in western towns to move their products to Boston through Somerville. As a result, Somerville agriculture shifted largely to small crops and fruit orchards.⁶

In 1835, railroad construction began, leading to the establishment of the Boston and Lowell line and the Fitchburg line within a decade. The railroads brought about the industrial and residential expansion that defined Somerville's growth throughout the mid-1800s.

In 1842, the Town of Somerville, with a population of 1,013, formally separated from Charlestown. New passenger rail service emerged, but the cost of rail travel was too high for all but the wealthiest. The railroads had a significant early impact on the landscape. Industry erupted along the railroad corridors, particularly in the southeast floodplain where several lines crossed. This lowland area, the Millers River marsh, was turned into rail yards, slaughterhouses, and other large-scale land uses. The industrialization of these tidal flats between Somerville and Cambridge caused so much pollution that the Commonwealth ordered this portion of the river to be filled.

After the Civil War, Somerville's population rapidly grew. While the most densely populated residential areas were historically in East Somerville, the advent of streetcars led to development in areas further west; the easy commute to Boston made the area appealing to new residents. Previously, hilltop lands in Somerville had seen limited development because of a lack of available water and limited roads, but a water tower built on Spring Hill (now Bailey Park) in the 1880s solved the problem of municipal drinking water at higher elevations. Sewer lines were built throughout the city as the Metropolitan District Commission established a pumping station along Alewife

6 *Beyond the Neck*, 18.



View toward Prospect Hill from Union Square Fire Station Tower, Somerville, 1923. Image from Leslie Jones Collection in the Boston Public Library (Digital Commonwealth). Photography by Leslie Jones.



View of Bow Street in Union Square ca. 1915. Photograph by Thomson and Thomson. Courtesy of Historic New England.

Brook. These infrastructure improvements facilitated a housing boom among immigrants looking for affordable rental units within easy commuting distance of employment in Boston.

Somerville was incorporated as a city in 1872 and rapid municipal growth ensued. Civic buildings were constructed along the Central Hill ridge and police and fire stations were built in Union Square. The top of Prospect Hill was lowered to fill the area of flats along Union Square to make this possible. The City followed this land use pattern for the next fifty years, with commerce and industry in the lower elevations and along major travel routes, and residences at higher elevations.

Between 1880 and 1890, Somerville's population experienced significant growth, increasing from 24,933 to 40,152. During this time, the orchards, farmlands, brick-yards, and marshlands in the western part of the city were transformed into densely populated areas featuring mainly two-family housing. Additionally, it became common for larger residential properties to be divided into smaller lots with long street blocks and shorter dead-end spurs.

At the time, this rapid land subdivision was publicly criticized for its cheap construction and a lack of landscaping. In response, the Somerville Improvement Association was founded in the 1880s and started to garner support for planned trees and open space. The Heptoreans, a women's organization, also focused on acquiring parks and forming zoning ordinances. They played a key role in the decision to create Prospect Hill Park in 1903.⁷

During the 1870s, only two major parcels of land were dedicated as permanent open space before the enormous housing boom at the turn of the 20th century. These parcels were Central Hill Park—currently home to Somerville's High School, City Hall, and Central Public Library—and Broadway Park—now known as Foss Park and owned by the DCR. Private estates were largely sold for development and only one tract of land was donated to the City for public use: Nathan Tufts Park in 1890.⁸

⁷ *Beyond the Neck*, 58.

⁸ *Ibid.*



View of East Somerville, Ten Hills, and the Mystic River in 1925. Photo reproduced in Landscape Research's *Beyond the Neck*, 1982 (7).

Between 1890 and 1910, 50% of today's housing stock was constructed. This rapid development and subdivision left little remaining land for public parks. By 1900, only 52 acres (4.7%) of Somerville's land had been dedicated to parks or playgrounds.⁹

There was also a lack of strategic planning in creating or preserving open space at the state level. In 1900, the Governor vetoed a bill for the extension of the Metropolitan Park System, which also included an appropriation for a boulevard across Somerville that could have served as a green corridor.

This lack of planning is further evident in Somerville's public park history after 1900. Only two major parks, Lincoln Park (1900)

and Trum Field (1903), were designated at the time. The rest of the city's parks, playgrounds, and open spaces were constructed with little administrative master planning and most of Somerville had already been developed. For this reason, many of Somerville's open spaces are less than half an acre in size and are irregularly scattered throughout the city (see **Appendix A: Open Space Maps**). Some of today's parks are located on previously undeveloped housing lots, while the City's larger parks are typically situated on former schoolyards and other municipal lands that were converted to parks in the latter half of the 20th century. Soon after the turn of the 20th century, almost all of Somerville had been developed.

9 *Beyond the Neck*, 58.

3C.

Population Characteristics

POPULATION TRENDS

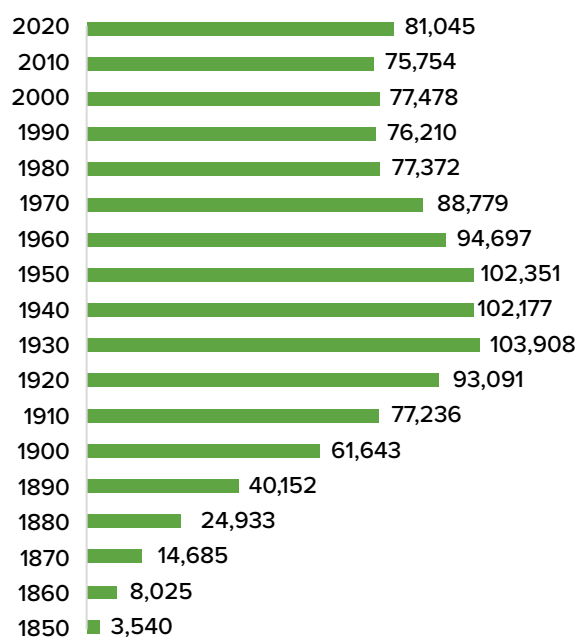
Somerville's population reached a historic peak in 1930 (103,908 people) and then decreased consistently for the next 60 years. The most significant population decline occurred between 1950 and 1980, when the city lost over 25,000 residents, largely from the neighborhoods of East Somerville, Spring Hill, and Union Square. This population shift is consistent with national trends toward suburbanization and smaller family size during these decades. In 1990, the U.S. Census recorded Somerville's population at 76,210 individuals. By 2000, the number of residents in Somerville rebounded to 77,478—a 1.7% increase. This influx of new residents was attributable to many factors, including increased immigration and the availability of affordable housing options in Somerville. Since 2000, there has been a shift in demographics and growth patterns, giving rise to a modern mix of families,

youth, retirees, and students, producing one of the most diverse cities in the Commonwealth. Between 2000-2010, the population decreased to 75,754. Several dynamics may explain this, including shrinking household size, housing supply, and a surge in housing prices. Since 2010, the population increased to 81,045.¹⁰ Somerville has become a highly desirable place to live with increasing pressure on the housing stock.

DENSITY

Somerville possesses a large population relative to its area (19,671 persons per square mile, or 30.7 persons per acre based on 2020 data), and is the densest city in New England. This density, however, is not evenly distributed across the city. Typical residential neighborhoods have a population density of 40-60 ppl per acre. There are several former industrial areas, including Boynton Yards and Inner Belt, with few to no residents. Somerville is experiencing a surge of development, including in these less populated areas. Lab and commercial uses make up a large part of the new growth with some substantial housing developments in areas like Assembly and Union Squares.

FIGURE 3-5
SOMERVILLE POPULATION OVER TIME



Because of Somerville's dense nature, open space is consistently identified as an important feature to residents in established and transforming neighborhoods. However, the dense development and extraordinary real estate costs are constant challenges. The City is always looking to buy parcels for open space, but resources are finite and open space is only one of many municipal needs, including affordable housing and infrastructure improvements. Presently, the biggest generator of new open space is private development. For more information about how private development creates open space, see **Section 3D3** and **Section 5**.

¹⁰ The data in Section 3C comes from the following source unless otherwise noted: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, "Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics," 2020.



TABLE 3-1 DEMOGRAPHICS AT A GLANCE	
Total Population	81,045
Median Age	31.4
Persons Under 9 Years Old	7%
Persons 10-19 Years Old	8%
Total White Population	69%
School Enrollment White Population	38.8%
Language Other Than English Spoken at Home	24.7%
Foreign Born	24.6%
Population with Disability	8.2%
Median Household Income	\$124,110
Median Home Value	\$860,500
Poverty Rate	10.2%
Without Health Care Coverage	1.3%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	72.6%
Employment Rate	77.3%



FIGURE 3-6 POPULATION BY RACE AND ETHNICITY COMPARED TO MA

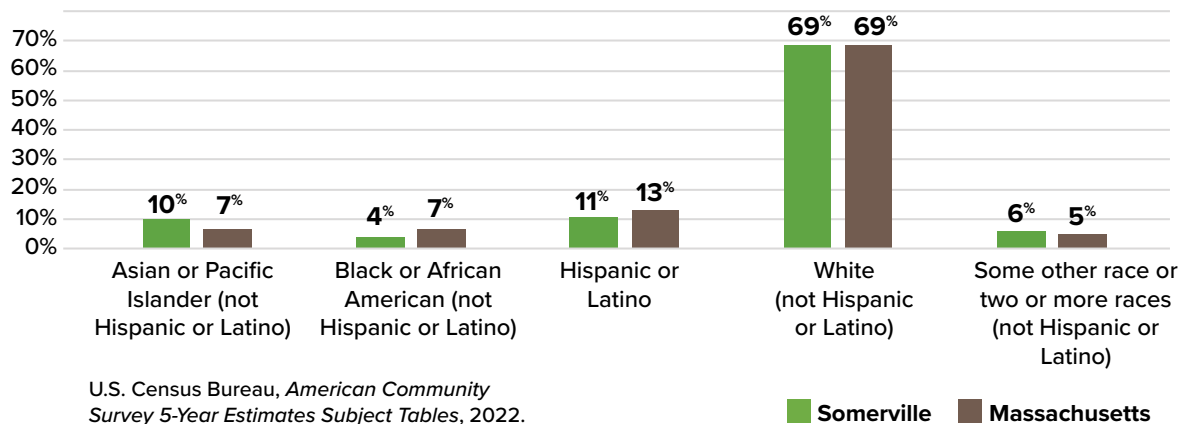
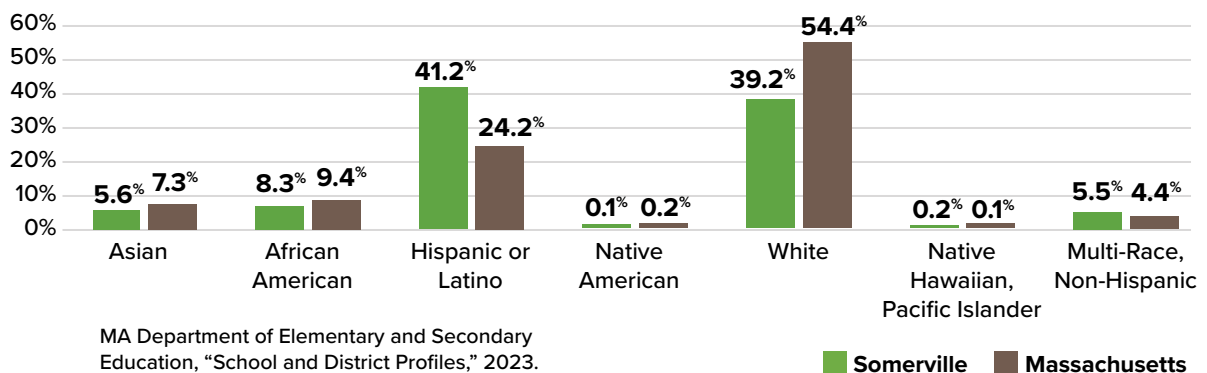


FIGURE 3-7 SCHOOL ENROLLMENT BY RACE AND ETHNICITY (2022–2023)



RACE, ETHNICITY, AND LANGUAGE

Somerville's racial breakdown is similar to Massachusetts' with a slightly larger Asian population and fewer Black and Hispanic residents. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, 32% of the city's population is non-white, making Somerville more racially diverse than the state as a whole (20% non-white). Interestingly, the percentages are reversed when it comes to school children. The Massachusetts Department of Education enrollment data shows that only 38.8% of the students enrolled in Somerville Schools are white.¹¹

While Somerville has a long-standing history as a gateway community for newcomers to the United States, foreign-born residents have decreased from 27% in 2010 to 24.6% in 2020. This percentage has been slowly falling over the last 20 years but remains higher than the state average. Not surprisingly, 24.7% of Somerville residents speak a language other than English at home, and many languages are spoken in the city. The most common are Spanish and Portuguese and there are smaller concentrations of Haitian Creole, Italian, Chinese, and Nepali speakers.

Between 2019-22, the Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities (OFAHC) researched Somerville park users to inform community-wide health initiatives. OFAHC conducted informal observational surveys and found that a larger proportion of park users are non-white in comparison to city-wide census data (see **Appendix D**). This information underscores the importance of addressing staff concerns about the racial demographics represented in our public engagement processes. If our community meetings are attended by only a small sliver of Somerville's white population, then our

park designs may not address the needs of non-white, non-English-speaking residents who heavily use City open spaces.

AGE AND EDUCATION

Somerville's reputation as a young city is reinforced by 2020 U.S. Census data: the median age was 31.4 years old (Massachusetts' average age was 39.9). Of the city's residents, 44% (or 35,476 residents) are between the ages of 20 and 34 years of age, 14% are 18 and under, and 4% are under 5 years old. The 65 and older population is estimated to have dropped from 10.5% in 2000 to 9% in 2020. With such a young population, the demand for playgrounds, athletic fields, and active parks is evident. Since the last OSRP, the City has focused on meeting the demand for athletic fields for youth in Somerville.

The trend in Somerville is toward a more highly educated populace with 72.6% holding a bachelor's degree or higher in 2020. In 2010, this number was 52.3%, up from 40.5% in 2000.



Residents at the Senior Picnic at Trum Field in 2024.

11 MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "School and District Profiles," 2023.

HOUSEHOLD, FAMILIES, AND INCOME

As of 2020, there are 34,448 households in Somerville. A household is one or more people who occupy a housing unit. 17.8% of households are inhabited by nonrelatives (versus 4% statewide).

Somerville's median household income is rising faster than Massachusetts', which is already well above the national average. In 1999, the median household income in Somerville was \$50,502. By 2014, it was

estimated at \$66,866, slightly lower than the statewide median of \$67,846. Within six years, it has risen to \$124,110 in 2020, significantly higher than the statewide median of \$94,448.

Somerville has a higher percentage of high-income households than the state as a whole. Although a quarter of households (25%) have median incomes of \$200K or more, and 60% earn over \$100K, 20% of households live on under \$50K per year. 10.2% of Somerville residents live below the poverty line. The poverty rate in Somer-

FIGURE 3-8 MEDIAN INCOME 2010–2022 in 2022 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars

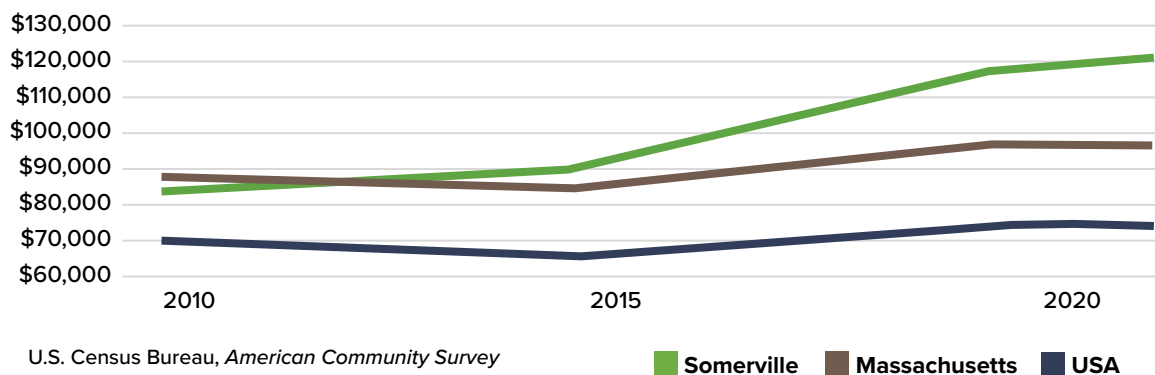


FIGURE 3-9 PERCENT OF POPULATION BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME CATEGORY in 2022 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars

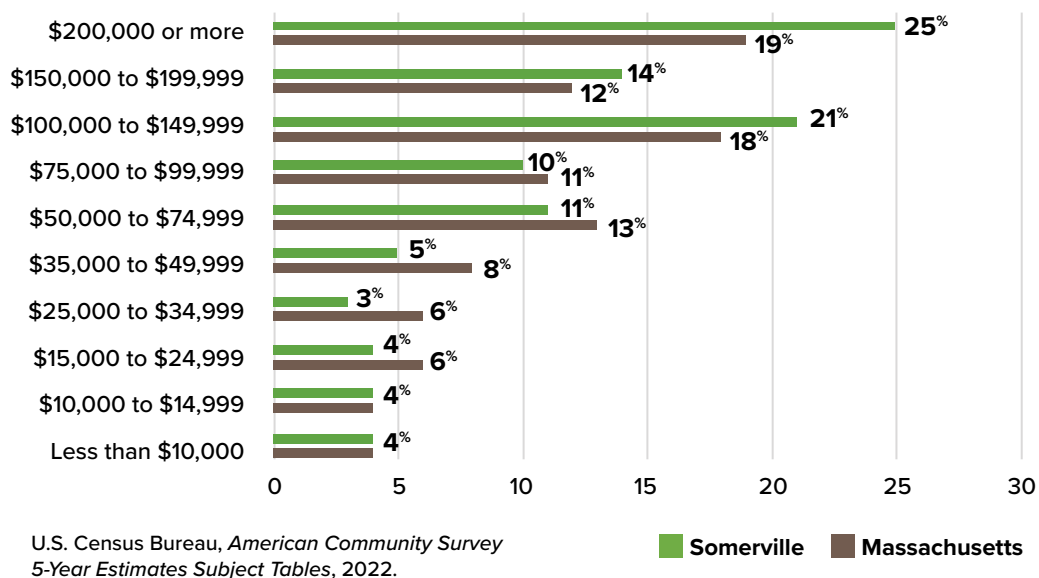
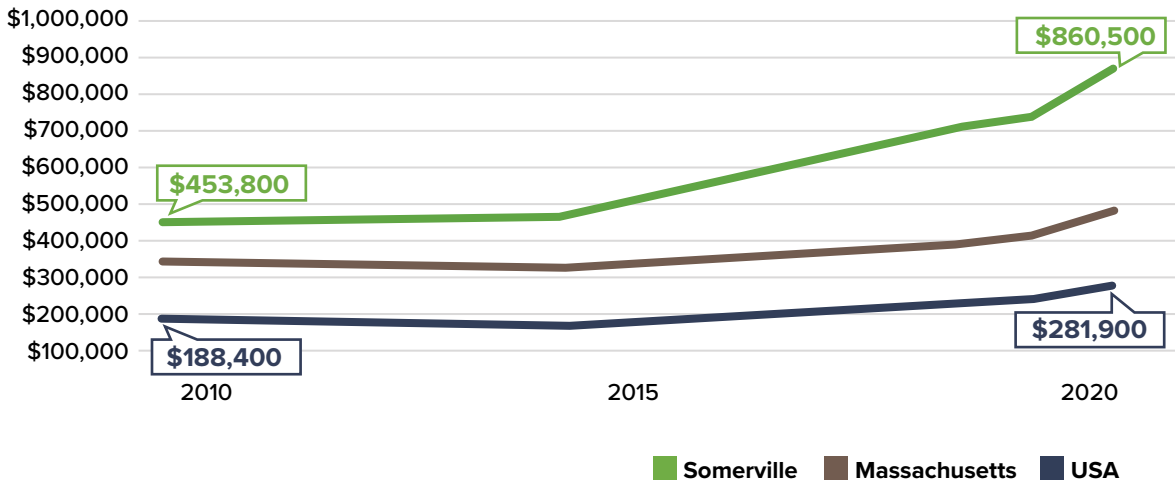


FIGURE 3-10 MEDIAN HOME VALUES 2010–2022 in 2022 Inflation Adjusted Dollars



ville has decreased significantly in the past 12 years, however it is worth noting that reducing poverty does not necessarily reflect improved quality of life. It can also be indicative of gentrification and displacement.

Somerville has changed from a working-class, immigrant city to a city wealthier than the Massachusetts average. At the same time, there are still large segments of the population who are challenged to make a living and afford housing in Somerville. Their voices are seldom at the table when making decisions about open space and recreation.

VETERAN STATUS

1.5% of Somerville residents are veterans.¹² In recent years, veterans have been involved in design processes about the City's war memorials and where to place them.

DISABILITY

8.2% of Somerville residents are estimated to have a disability. This is a population with unique interests and needs. Fortunately, it is also an increasingly organized community

that advocates for the types of comprehensive, cohesive, and individualized services that it needs. While Somerville parks are all compliant with the ADA law at the time construction is complete, advocates continue to point out issues in older parks and the need for inclusive amenities and an inclusive playground in the city.

HOUSING

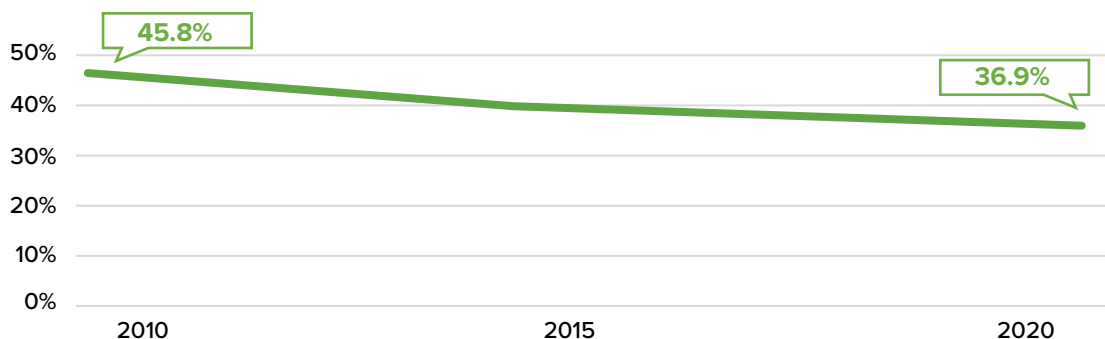
According to the City's 2021 Housing Needs Assessment, Somerville has been historically a city primarily comprised of renters and remains so. However, a gradual, modest trend toward homeownership has been underway over the past two decades. In 2000, 30.6% of Somerville's housing was owner-occupied and 33% of all Somerville households own their home or condominium.¹³ 4.2% of housing units are vacant. These are lower than state or national averages. 26% of residents moved within the last year, and 83% of housing units were built pre-1980, compared to 69% statewide.

Consistent with the metro Boston area, housing costs have skyrocketed in the last decade. Somerville's home values are higher than state or national averages and are

¹² U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Subject Table – Veteran Status, Table S2101*, 2022.

¹³ City of Somerville, *Housing Needs Assessment 2021* (2021).

FIGURE 3-11 RENT-BURDENED HOUSEHOLDS IN SOMERVILLE 2010–2022



increasing at a faster rate. The median value of owner-occupied housing units in 2015 was an estimated \$449,100 and has risen to \$860,500 in 2022. The median home value is 7.12x the median income, far higher than state or national rates. The median gross monthly rent in 2022 is \$2,357 (+/- \$48).

Housing has become so expensive that residents across all different income groups pay more than the industry standard. In 2021,

out of 32,455 households in Somerville, 27% of homeowners and 35% of renters are “cost burdened,” which means they pay more than 30% of their income for housing and utilities. In lower income brackets, the percentage of households cost burdened or “extremely cost burdened,” which means they pay more than 50% of their income for housing and utilities, is progressively higher.¹⁴

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE POPULATIONS

While much of Somerville meets one of the three criteria of the Environmental Justice designation defined by the state Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, small parts of East Somerville and West Somerville are designated as both low-income/minority or minority/English isolation (see **Appendix A: Environmental Justice Map**).¹⁵ Many open space projects, including the transformative Winter Hill and Healey Schoolyards and the Foss Park athletic field (DCR), as well as those funded by PARC and LWCF grants, are located in these and other EJ areas.



The field (reconstructed in 2021) and the pool at Foss Park are in high demand by residents across Somerville. This park is also one of the largest open spaces in East Somerville.

14 City of Somerville, *Housing Needs Assessment 2021* (2021).

15 The criteria can be found here: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/environmental-justice-populations-in-massachusetts>.

EMPLOYMENT

Labor Force Participation Rate

The labor force participation rate in Somerville is 79.1% (percent of civilian population aged 16 and over that is working or actively looking for work). This is an increase from 75.1% in 2015. Only 2.8% of those in the labor force are unemployed, compared to 5.3% in Massachusetts as a whole.¹⁶

Industry Trends

The top three industries in Somerville, by percent of labor force employed, are:

- Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services (28%)
- Educational services, and health care and social assistance (27.8%)
- Manufacturing (10%)¹⁷

Development and the creation of jobs has been concentrated in the “Transform Areas” identified in SomerVision 2040 Comprehensive Plan.¹⁸ Union Square, Assembly Square, Boynton Yards, Brickbottom, and Inner Belt have all seen large scale development projects, many of which are life sciences. These developers are required to contribute new open space as part of their projects (see 3D.3 for more information).

Work-Home Patterns

Somerville, much like the broader metro Boston region, has bounced back from the shutdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic but it has changed the way many employees relate to their places of work. 2023 American Community Survey (ACS) estimates that



Members of the Community Design Team connecting with residents for the Union Square Plaza and Streetscape project in 2022.

31.8% of Somerville residents work from home. This is up from 15.2% in 2019.¹⁹ Additions to public transportation infrastructure, like the opening of the Green Line extension, have also made it easier to commute to work. In 2020, 7.1% of working people who lived in Somerville also worked in Somerville. They worked primarily in Central Hill, Assembly Row, and Davis Square.²⁰ Employed Somerville residents also worked most notably in the Financial District, Longwood Medical Area, Back Bay parts of Boston, Kendall Square, and Harvard Square in Cambridge. In 2020, 14.4% of people employed in Somerville lived in Boston, 3.8% in Medford, and 3% in Malden.

16 U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Subject Table – Employment Status, Table S2301*, 2022.

17 U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Subject Table – Selected Economic Characteristics, Table DP03*, 2022.

18 City of Somerville, *SomerVision 2040*, 2021, 11.

19 U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Subject Table – Commuting Characteristics by Sex, Table S0801*, 2023 and 2019.

20 U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, *LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (MA)*, 2020.

3D.

Growth and Development

3D.1. PATTERNS AND TRENDS

Early colonial settlement in Somerville occurred in the 17th and 18th centuries, linked to development in adjacent Charlestown and Cambridge. During the 19th century, railroads were extended through Somerville, following the lowlands between the City's hills, and new neighborhoods were built alongside the routes. Industry and commercial uses emerged in lowlands adjacent to the rail corridors, while residential subdivisions occurred on nearby hillsides.

Somerville's historic commercial squares developed at the junction of major thoroughfares. By the late 1800's Union Square, Gilman Square, and Davis Square had become established centers of small-scale commerce. A second type of commercial district was linear in geometry: the "main street" corridors along Broadway, including East Somerville, Ball Square, and Teele Square.

Large industrial landscapes developed along the eastern and southern edges of Somerville during the same era, often on filled tidelands. Assembly Square, Inner Belt, and Boynton Yards were characterized by heavy railroad uses, meatpacking, and industrial production businesses. As industrial activity increased, new residential building types were introduced, with many large classical apartment blocks constructed around Somerville between 1900 and 1920. Somerville's urban fabric by this point would closely resemble the present day.

By mid-century, national and local economic conditions became less favorable, and public policy decisions at the federal, state, and local level discouraged growth and investment in

Somerville. Rail and trolley service was discontinued, elevated highway projects sliced through historic neighborhoods, and suburban competition eroded the vibrant retail squares of the city. Widespread disinvestment took hold, and for several decades, the municipal government struggled to provide basic services.

Somerville's late-century renaissance was closely tied to the return of public transportation. In the late 1970's and early 1980's, regional subway service was extended to Somerville's borders, with Orange Line service at Sullivan Square and Red Line service at Porter Square and Davis Square. Redevelopment of land near the stations (especially in Davis Square) was guided by participatory planning among Somerville residents, business owners, civic organizations, and public officials.

Now, development is building on those successes. Public policy, including the SomerVision 2040 plan, steers large-scale growth toward old industrial areas well-served by public transit and medium-scale reinvestment to Somerville's commercial squares and main street corridors. Over-development of the traditional residential neighborhoods of two- and three-family homes is discouraged. Emphasis is placed on access to quality open space and on a mix of employment, goods, and services within walking distance of homes.

There is a strong desire to increase the amount of open space in the city, but businesses and industry, housing (particularly affordable housing), and open space are competing for land. Open space has to grow by very small amounts and space has to be used efficiently.



3D.2. INFRASTRUCTURE

Transportation

Somerville’s development as a streetcar suburb of Boston created a dense and grid-like street network. Five major railroad corridors and four high-volume traffic arteries crisscross Somerville and connect Boston to northern suburbs. Portions of three state roads run through the city: Route 16 (Alewife Brook Parkway/Mystic Valley Parkway), Route 28 (McGrath Highway/Fellsway), and Route 38 (Mystic Avenue). Interstate 93 is also accessible from the northeast corner of Somerville. While these facilitate large volumes of regional automo-



TABLE 3-2 TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE	
Service	Stops
Red Line	Davis (opened 1984)
Orange Line	Assembly (opened 2014)
Green Line - D	Union Square (opened March 2022 as part of the Green Line Extension)
Green Line - E	East Somerville, Gilman Square, Magoun Square, Ball Square (opened December 2022 as part of the Green Line Extension)

bile traffic, these roadways are physical barriers for Somerville residents hoping to traverse their neighborhoods. This is particularly evident around Dilboy Fields and Foss Park, where direct access from the neighborhood requires crossing a major roadway.

The City explores options to improve these connections, though it often requires collaboration and cooperation with State partners. The McGrath Highway in Somerville and Cambridge has been in a redesign process and construction is expected to begin in the next five years. The elevated overpass on McGrath Highway is to be demolished and replaced with a ground-level road. Removing the overpass will reconnect Somerville neighborhoods to much-needed open space and access to the rest of the city. The new, tree-lined “McGrath Boulevard” will also improve air quality and safety for pedestrians, cyclists, buses, and cars alike.

In general, Somerville is considered highly walkable, bikeable, and transit friendly. The well-connected streets, extensive sidewalk network, robust bike and train systems coupled with dense, mixed-use development, makes it very easy to get around the city sustainably. In 2015, the ACS reported that 43.6% of Somerville residents drove to work, 52.8% used sustainable transportation modes like public transportation, walking, or biking, and 3.3% worked from home. As of the 2020 Census, the rate of residents commuting by car dropped to 34.1%, with 46.8% commuting via public transportation, walking, or biking, and 12.7% working from home.

The number of bicycle commuters, at 7%, is far above the national average of 0.5%, but City staff hope to increase that. As of 2022, roughly 26% of Somerville streets have some type of bicycle infrastructure. The recently released Somerville Bike



View of Powder House Circle sandwiched between Tufts University fields and Nathan Tufts Park. The rotary was redesigned in 2021.

Network Plan (2023) proposes an 88-mile citywide network of connected protected bicycle lanes and low speed and low volume residential streets (“neighborways”). Compared to the fragmented 30-mile network that exists today, the plan envisions a future with vastly more biking infrastructure, safer facilities, and better connectivity.²¹

The spine of the pedestrian and bicycling network is the Community Path which runs east to west for 3.2-miles in Somerville and now connects to Boston and regional off-street paths like the Minuteman Commuter Bikeway which reaches as far as Bedford. It is considered part of the state-wide Mass Central Rail Trail. The Community Path was opened in multiple sections, the final stretch in 2023 after the opening of the Green Line Extension.

Public transportation services in Somerville are provided by the MBTA. The city is principally served by fixed-route buses which

facilitate east-west travel across and connections to the Red, Orange, and Green Lines.

- The Davis Square Red Line Station service connects west Somerville with destinations in Cambridge and Boston.
- The Assembly Square Orange Line Station connects a new mixed-use neighborhood with destinations in Boston, Medford, and Malden.
- The Green Line Extension (GLX) opened in 2022 and connects Somerville with Medford, Boston, Brookline, and Newton.

The emphasis on non-motor vehicle transportation aligns with a variety of recent City plans including the City’s Vision Zero goals,²² Somerville Climate Forward goals,²³ and SomerVision 2040 plan goals.²⁴

21 City of Somerville, *Somerville Bike Network Plan*, 2023. <http://voice.somervillema.gov/somerville-bicycle-network-plan>.

22 City of Somerville, *Vision Zero*, 2020. <http://s3.amazonaws.com/somervillema-live/s3fs-public/vision-zero-action-plan.pdf>.

23 City of Somerville, *Climate Forward*, 2024. http://s3.amazonaws.com/somervillema-live/s3fs-public/Final_Somerville_CAP_REV061824_Online.pdf.

24 City of Somerville, *SomerVision 2040*, 2021. <http://www.somervision2040.com/plan>.



Large stormwater storage tank under construction at the Poplar Street Pump Station. A park will be built above the tank when it is complete.

Water System

Somerville's water and sewage disposal systems are supplied by the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA). Water supplies are transported from surface reservoirs in western and central Massachusetts by pipeline to Somerville. There are no surface impoundments within the city that are utilized for drinking water. Sewer services consist of a series of sanitary/storm-water lines that convey effluent to a regional treatment plant at Deer Island, operated by MWRA. City records do not indicate that any private water supplies or sewage disposal systems are in use.

All water in Somerville is purchased by the City's Water Department from the MWRA. The water is treated and then delivered through seven MWRA master meters into a system of pipes, valves, hydrants, and service lines. This brings our homes, businesses, and other facilities drinking water and water

for uses like fire suppression. The system consists of approximately 125 miles of water main pipes, laid mainly in the late 1880s to early 1900s.

The City of Somerville is working on many upgrades to underground infrastructure including recent projects:

- replacing approximately 7283 linear feet of high and low service water main and replacing 63 gate valves and 20 hydrants on Spring Hill (in 2023).
- upgrading the water main beneath Broadway between Temple Street and Boston Avenue.

Drinking water is sampled weekly at 21 locations to monitor for potentially harmful contaminants. They also regularly test for lead and copper to ensure a healthy supply for residents and actively work to replace any remaining lead services.²⁵

²⁵ Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, "Somerville," 2024.

Sewer System

The city has approximately 165 miles of sewers—72 miles are combined sewers (handling both sewer and stormwater), approximately 64 miles are separated sanitary sewers, and approximately 48 miles are separate storm drains.²⁶ The majority of Somerville's sewers were constructed in the latter part of the 19th century and aging infrastructure and increased demands burden the current system.

Somerville's existing sewer system was not designed to handle today's high levels of stormwater runoff. More buildings, streets, and paved parking lots exist now than when the sewers were built. These impervious surfaces exacerbate the effects of a storm as the runoff water is unable to filter into the ground, funnels to the nearest drains, and flows into the sewer system. With the predicted increase in rainfall due to climate change, this will be an ongoing and urgent issue.

Somerville has two combined sewer overflow (CSO) outfalls—one at Alewife Brook Parkway near the Cambridge border and one on the Mystic River in East Somerville by Baxter Park. These CSOs discharge into the waterways when heavy rain exceeds the system's capacity, thus contributing to pollution in the rivers. One discharges a mix of wastewater and stormwater, and the other releases treated stormwater into the Mystic. The City of Cambridge and MWRA own additional outfalls that discharge into these two rivers.

The City is updating sewer, stormwater, and drinking water infrastructure through a variety of projects to move away from a reliance on CSO outfalls. The Spring Hill Sewer Separation Project adds new storm drains that separate stormwater from the existing combined sewer system. It also



Excavation at the site of the Poplar Pump Station for future stormwater storage.

includes the construction of green stormwater and the planting of trees to absorb and slow water. This project is expected to be complete in 2025.

The Poplar Street Pump Station project will provide critical flood relief to streets and stormwater/sewer drains in a large portion of the city—particularly those flood-prone zones around Union Square. The new system will collect stormwater from the newly separated Spring Hill project and future sewer separation projects and will store any excess in an underground stormwater tank. This water will be slowly pumped, relieving pressure during a storm, into an MBTA drain which discharges to the Millers River (now running through underground pipes). This major piece of infrastructure will impact how stormwater is managed for approximately 60% of the city. The project broke ground in 2023 and is expected to be completed in 2027. The City will build a park above the tank after it is complete.

²⁶ City of Somerville, "Stormwater Management," 2023.

3D.3. LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS

SomerVision

The SomerVision Map, adopted as part of the SomerVision 2040 Comprehensive Plan (see **Figure 3-12**), describes the long-term, strategic development patterns of the City of Somerville. This map apportions all City parcels into one of three category zones: Conserve, Enhance, and Transform. This categorization serves to guide city-wide development in conserving residential neighborhoods, enhancing squares and commercial corridors, and transforming opportunity areas in the eastern and southern edges of Somerville.

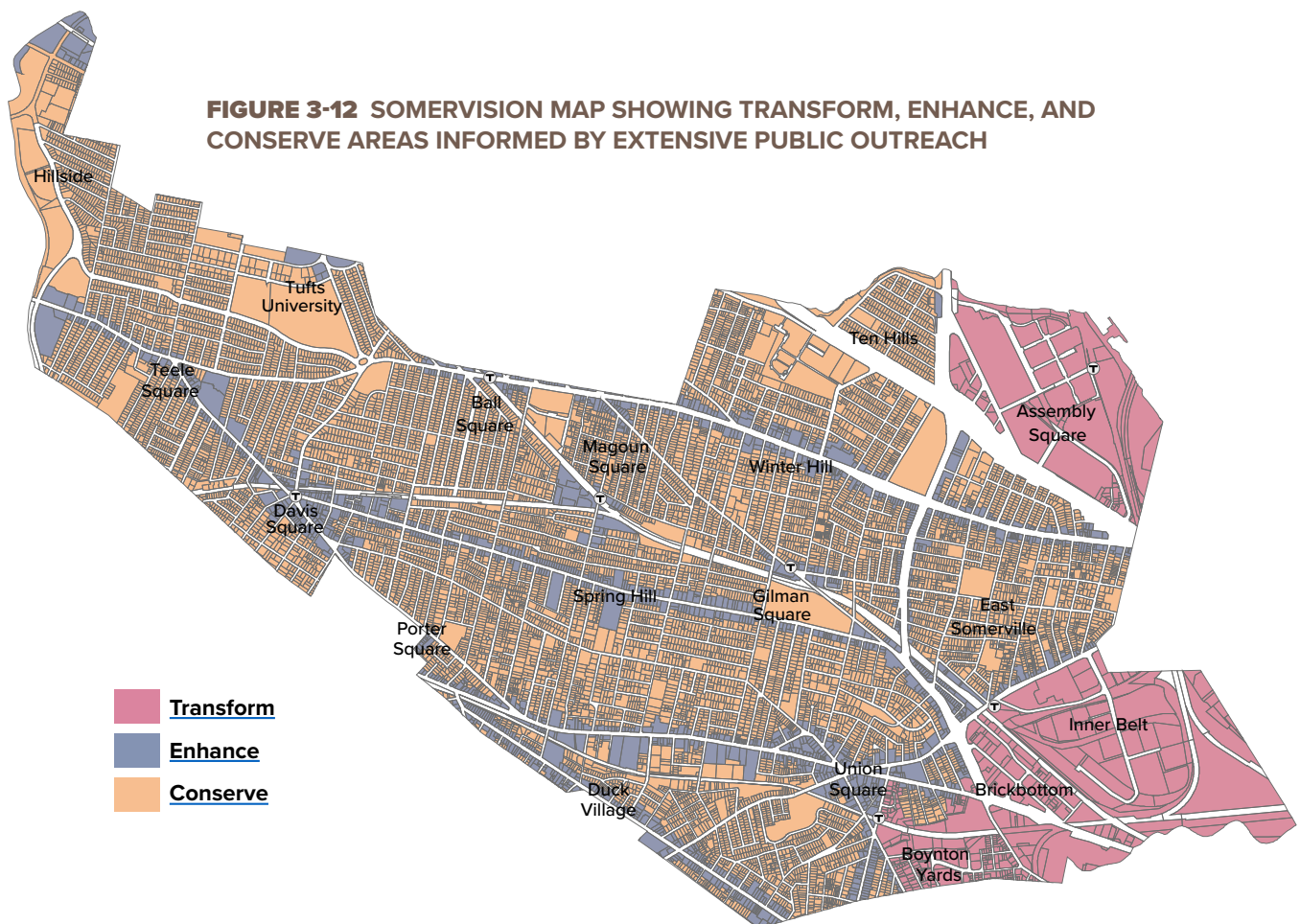
Currently, the transformation zones allow for increased density in the Assembly Square, Boynton Yards, Brickbottom, Inner Belt, and Union Square neighborhoods, all of which are at varying stages of develop-

ment. These districts are zoned for mid- to high-rise mixed-use, commercial, and urban residential development. They make up Somerville's densifying urban core. The City is also working with developers and community members to plan a new overlay district for the Central Somerville Avenue area. This proposal envisions an innovative green technology R&D hub for the region.

Across all of the "Transform" areas and within special overlay districts defined by our 2019 Somerville Zoning Ordinance (described below), the City is working to strike a balance between growth, job development, and quality of life. They are also planning carefully to discourage displacement and to mitigate the impacts on City infrastructure and traffic.

2019 Somerville Zoning Ordinance

To implement and enforce the SomerVision 2040 plan and the SomerVision Map, the City undertook a zoning overhaul (described



in the 2016 OSRP). The Somerville City Council adopted the new Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) on December 12, 2019. After 7+ years of public engagement, research, and analysis, the City transitioned to a form-based zoning code. This code has specific approval processes and requirements to improve the public realm and encourage climate positive design. It requires larger developments to widen sidewalks, install new street trees and streetscape amenities, and propose projects that surpass a mandatory “Green Score.”

The SZO notably requires that all new developments within a “Master Planned Development” overlay district (zones identified as SomerVision “Transform” areas) allocate a percentage of the development to public open space, called civic space (see **Appendix A: Zoning Districts Map**). So, while the City continues to pursue open space acquisition opportunities, most new open space comes from private development. These additions move the city closer to SomerVision 2040’s ambitious goal of adding 105 acres of new publicly accessible open space.

City staff work closely with developers to design open spaces that serve local, community needs beyond their tenants—both existing neighbors and future generations. The Civic Space Design Guide to Privately Owned Public Space (2024) describes this need in detail and guides developers through the process.²⁷ For more information about how the City adds open space acres to meet this goal, see **Section 5**.

Green Score

The SZO also requires a “Green Score” calculation for any new building construction and substantial renovation, guaranteeing that all new developments meet minimum environmental performance standards



Union Square Station Plaza was built by private developers and will be maintained by them in perpetuity. The new plaza opened in 2023 with 23 new large trees and thousands of native perennials. It adds seating and a place to pause adjacent to the Union Square MBTA train station.

specific to their zoning district. The Green Score, which is reviewed by Public Space and Urban Forestry (PSUF) staff, incentivizes urban landscapes that infiltrate stormwater, filter pollutants, reduce urban heat island effect, provide habitat, sequester carbon, and improve air quality. Points are given for landscape elements that provide these benefits such as raingardens, green roofs, and tree preservation.

Since the adoption of the new SZO, the City has seen an uptick in development projects preserving existing trees, planting new trees, installing green roofs, and improving streetscapes. PSUF continues working with the Planning, Preservation, and Zoning Division to hone the Green Score criteria to achieve high-quality ecological services on private property. Ultimately, the civic space requirement and the Green Score work together to deliver landscapes (public and private) that are sensitive to their environment and meet community-specific needs within Somerville’s developing districts.

27 City of Somerville, *Civic Space Design Guide to Privately Owned Public Space* (2024). <http://voice.somervillema.gov/pops>.

Privately Owned Public Spaces



A city's parks and open spaces create vibrancy, health, and community. In Somerville, the most densely populated city in New England, residents consistently identify open space as a precious community resource worthy

of protection and expansion. In a city with very high property values, one critical way we secure new acres is through private development. The 2019 Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) requires certain development projects to include public “civic space” in their project. These Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) add to the City’s network of open space amenities and leverage development pressure for public benefit.

In addition to guidelines in the SZO, Somerville’s Public Space and Urban Forestry Division (PSUF) established a framework to articulate the City’s POPS goals. Research on POPS since the 1960s reveals that the strategy of privatizing public space has created several problems. For example, many POPS appear private though they are meant for public use. PSUF works to avoid this pitfall by getting involved from the start to guide their design and construction. Developers must:

- **Expand and preserve** Somerville’s open space network.
- Create **all-season parks** that are **well used** throughout the day and evening.
- Provide spaces that **respond to the community** profile and the contextual network of open spaces in which they are located.
- Create a **variety** of open space types that are **welcoming** to all members of the public, serve multiple purposes,

are **attractive, high quality, and maintainable** in the long term.

- Create active recreational spaces that **encourage movement and exercise**.
- Provide furnishings that **accommodate a variety of physical needs** and are comfortable, durable, and maintainable (including seating, tables, bike racks and signage).
- Create a public realm composed of consistent streetscape details (lighting, furnishings, hardscapes, tree plantings) to establish a **harmonious** experience across the city.
- Create a **safe** environment with sufficient lighting and fencing.
- Increase the **urban tree canopy** for relief from extreme temperatures. Provide adequate soil volumes, young tree care, and long-term maintenance.
- **Carefully select plant material** that considers climate change, habitat, survivability, long-term maintenance, and is in line with the Somerville’s Native Planting Ordinance.
- Maximize pervious surfaces to **minimize stormwater** flowing into City infrastructure.
- Create parks that provide ecosystem service benefits and **build resiliency** to the effects of climate change (e.g.: shade for cooling).
- **Communicate** the location of POPS onsite and in an online map on the City’s website.

The Civic Space Design Guide to POPS can be found here:

<https://voice.somervillema.gov/pops>



PRIVATELY OWNED PUBLIC SPACES DATA POINTS:

As of 2025:

■ Total POPS in Somerville: **11**

■ Total POPS acreage: **6.37**

To Minuteman Bikeway
and Alewife T Station

Somerville Community Path Completion

With the June 2023 completion of the 1.9-mile Somerville Community Path Extension, a once-only-dreamed-of project became reality. Opening the last section created a nearly 50-mile continuous network of multi-use paved paths connecting Bedford to Boston to Waltham and a variety of multi-use trails in between.

Prior to the extension, the Community Path was already considered one of Somerville's most cherished open space assets. It served as a major daily transportation route, a linear park, and a recreation facility for thousands of Somerville residents.

The first portion of the Community Path opened in 1985 and traveled over the right of way for the Red Line subway between the Alewife and Davis Square MBTA "T" stations.

In subsequent years, "the Path" connected to popular multi-use trails including the 14-mile Minuteman Bicycle Trail and was extended to Cedar and Lowell Street.

Now, with the new Green Line Commuter Rail Extension and the adjoining Community Path Extension in place, the Path encompasses over ten acres of open space and extends almost two miles beyond Lowell Street. You can find it along the Green Line corridor to the new Somerville Junction Park, past the renovated Somerville High School, through East Somerville, on to the new Lechmere Station in Cambridge across the bridge from downtown Boston and the Charles River.

The Community Path also comprises a segment of the more extensive Massachusetts Central Rail Trail—a partially completed 100-mile pathway between Boston and Northampton. In the coming years, it is expected that the Path may connect to two other shared-use paths: the Mystic to Charles Connector and the Grand Junction Multi-Use Path.

The Community Path has always been a valued asset for the city. It enhances transportation equity, encourages family recreational opportunities, and makes Somerville a more walkable, bikeable, and transit-friendly city. With this final segment in place, Somerville celebrates the dedicated work of the MBTA, City staff, and community advocates.

Mayor Ballantyne stands with members of the Friends of the Community Path advocacy group.





Ribbon cutting at the opening ceremony in 2023.



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Environmental Inventory and Analysis

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Facing Page: Urban parks, like Nathan Tufts Park, host some of the densest and oldest plantings in the city. Given the lack of large natural areas in Somerville, city parks are vital for wildlife habitat, relief from heat, social gathering, and recreation.

4A.

Geology, Soils, and Topography

GEOLOGY

The geologic story of Somerville is as old as the earth itself, though the elements which are most visible to residents today are due to periods of repeated glacial advance during the Pleistocene. The most recent glacier, the Wisconsin, covered Massachusetts to the end of Cape Cod and Nantucket. Around 12-14,000 years ago, the ice retreated and left drumlins (literally “little hill ridges”) running west to east across the New England landscape. While the bedrock below is part of a geologic form called the Avalon Belt that defines the Boston area, the typical experience of Somerville is shaped by these small, glacier-formed hills.



Prospect Hill is one of the highest points in Somerville and also the site of the beloved Prospect Hill Park.

When the glacial waters receded from the Boston Basin, the clay-lands were replaced with forest and then a layer of peat. Several millennia later, when Europeans settled in Somerville, the clay was exposed only in nearby streams or tidal creeks. At that time, marshes could be found in lower lying areas at the eastern, southern, and northern edges of the then-named Charlestown mainland. Meadowland and grassland interrupted by marsh grew at the western edge near the Alewife Brook. Until the late 19th century, the relatively flat tract between Charlestown Neck and Alewife Brook was used largely for agriculture. Before the onset of intense development in the early 20th century, large tracts of forested land could still be found in isolated upland regions in and around Somerville.

Glacial deposits including glacial till—unsorted and randomly layered rocks which were carried and left by the glacier—compose much of Somerville, particularly the “seven hills of Somerville.” Other areas, including some of the marshes mentioned above, were artificially filled to expand the city’s footprint.

SOILS

Within the city’s boundaries, soil types range from sandy loam in the elevated areas of West Somerville to dense clay in the Ten Hills neighborhood and around the former Millers River estuary near Union Square and Beacon Street (see **Appendix A: Soils and Geologic Features Map**). Much of the southern and eastern portions of Somerville are part of the Cambridge Floodplain, which fills the lower valley of the Charles River from Watertown to Boston Harbor. Somerville’s clay deposits were formed as the glacier retreated around 14,000 years ago and contain fossilized shells of the saltwater Leda clam.

Some of the city's soils are characterized by wet substratum. These can be found in the areas along the Mystic River and former Millers River and overlap with locations of artificial fill and flood prone parts of the city.

Because of Somerville's history of intensive land use, the soils in its parks and open spaces are designated as "Complex Urban Soil." Commonly referred to as "urban fill," these soils must often be removed and replaced or amended to support healthy plant growth. Soil is typically tested for nutrients, pH, and texture, as well as contaminants based on the land-use history of the site. In garden sites where the soil conditions cannot be ameliorated, raised beds provide clean soil for community growing and urban agriculture.

There are no prime farmland soils in Somerville.

TOPOGRAPHY

Across the city, elevations range from below sea level under the Mystic River to 137 feet above sea level at Spring Hill. The drumlins left by the glacier greatly shaped how communities across the city developed and we recognize them today as: Clarendon Hill, Powder House Hill, Spring Hill, Prospect Hill, Winter Hill, Central Hill, and Mount Benedict (see **Appendix A: Topography Map**).

This topography was further defined by the Mystic River flowing along the northern edge of the city, Alewife Brook along its west, and Millers River along the southeast. While Millers River has since been buried, the low elevations around Union Square and the southeast corner of the city were carved by that waterway. Similar low elevations are found along the Mystic River where marshland was filled in.



Waterfront parks, including Sylvester Baxter Riverfront Park, provide valuable access to Somerville's unique geography along the Mystic River.

4B. Landscape Character

As discussed above, the Somerville physical landscape is characterized by its river borders and series of hills with relatively steep sides and outcroppings of slate. These hills create distinct neighborhoods and provide panoramic views of the Metropolitan Boston area while the Mystic River and Alewife Brook offer chances for water access and passive recreation.

Today, the Somerville landscape is very much a cityscape. Neighborhoods possess distinct urban, human-scaled, and walkable character. Historic patterns of land subdivision created a regular rhythm of 4,000 square foot lots occupied by detached two- and three-family homes. Main-street-style commercial districts generally run from east to west, and where major roads intersect, town squares have evolved over time. Nearly every Somerville neighborhood contains the key amenities for daily life: a public school,

parks and playgrounds, convenience retail and service businesses, community centers, and places of worship.

Somerville contains 81,045 residents in only 4.12 square miles. The population density in Somerville has both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, residents are well served by a variety of open spaces within a very short walk. On the other hand, little land has been left undeveloped and competing development interests (e.g.: housing, commercial, or open space) make it hard to acquire new tracts of land for open space or recreation. Large parcels of land are rarely, if ever, available and are prohibitively expensive to acquire. The average assessed acquisition cost of one acre of land is over 17 million dollars.

Much of Somerville's landscape character can be found in its vibrant and creatively designed streetscapes, parks, and recreational areas. The juxtaposition of these open spaces with historic buildings and squares, local commercial activity, and the city's diverse residential population lend Somerville a truly unique urban feel.



Events of all kinds take place in open spaces throughout the city—everything from large festivals, to farmers' markets, to historical reenactments. The design of each park shapes what types of events are possible to host in each location. **Right:** A view into Assembly Square from Sylvester Baxter Riverfront Park.

FIGURE 4-1 SOMERVILLE WALKSHED ANALYSIS

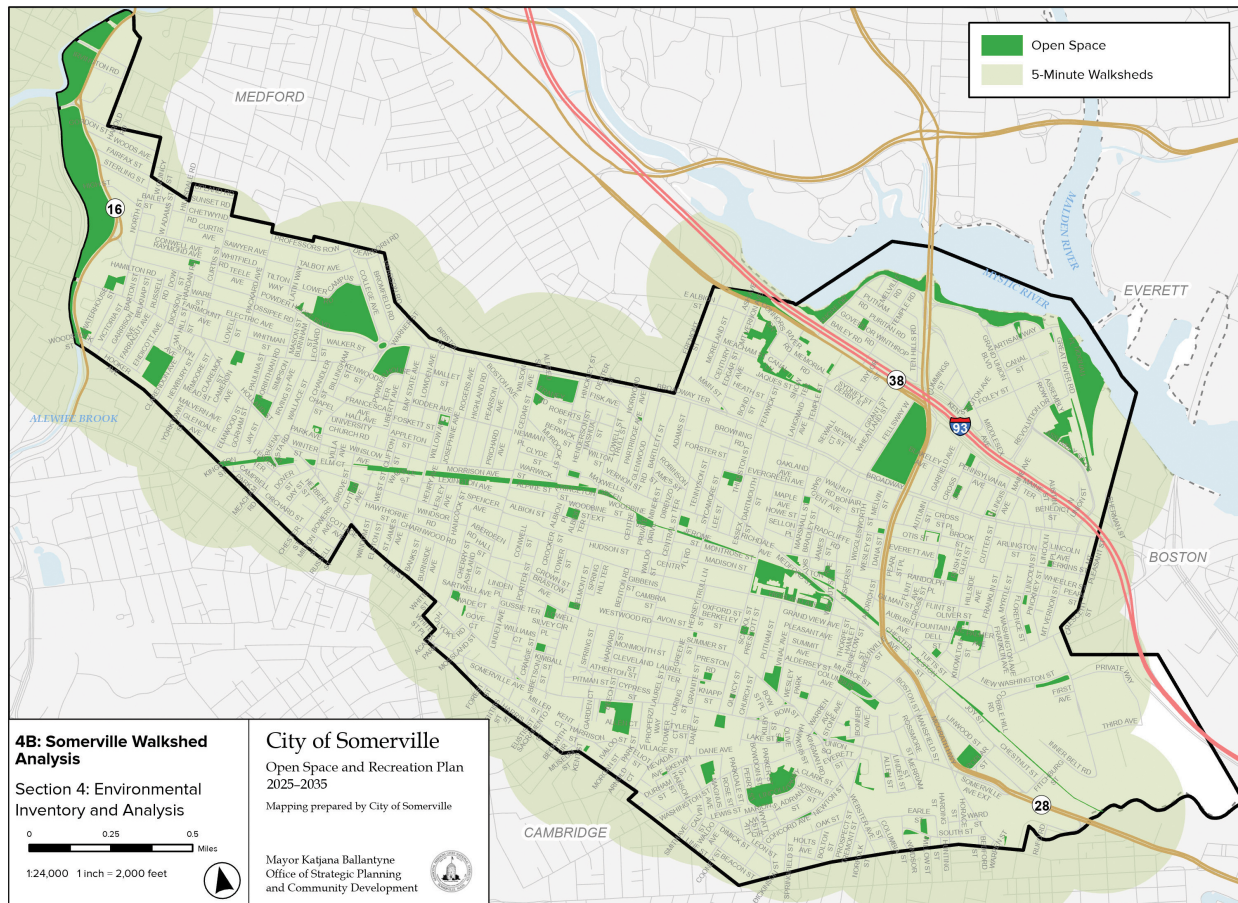


TABLE 4-1 PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLDS WITHIN WALKSHED

	1/4 Mile (5 Minutes)	1/2 Mile (10 Minutes)	3/4 Mile (15 Minutes)	1 Mile (20 Minutes)
Playgrounds	94.28%	98.69%	98.71%	98.71%
Passive Parks & Plazas	96.57%	98.69%	98.71%	98.71%
Fields	95.27%	98.37%	98.71%	98.71%
Community Gardens	58.50%	90.66%	97.21%	98.71%
All Open Spaces	98.71%	98.71%	98.71%	98.71%



TABLE 4-2
CIVIC SPACE TYPES

Parks
Regional
Community
Neighborhood
Pocket
Commons
Public Commons
Public Square
Green
Plazas
Central
Through Block
Pocket

CIVIC SPACE TYPES

Since Somerville does not have large open tracts of preserved land, the City places high value on offering a wide range of open space types—everything from a sports field to a small plaza adjacent to a train station. During the development of the 2019 Somerville Zoning Ordinance, the City developed clear categories of “Civic Spaces,” which refer to open spaces that support “civic, cultural, ecological, recreational, or social activities.”¹ We use this term to describe open space at multiple scales:

Parks. A park is a civic space type designed for active and passive recreation, with its character defined by the uses and features provided to meet the needs of different user groups. There are four subtypes of parks: Regional Park, Community Park, Neighborhood Park, and Pocket Park. While each of these types may be unique in terms of their size, vegetation, furnishings, and components, they must all provide varied spaces that accommodate a wide range of ages, physical abilities, and programming. They must be welcoming, comfortable, and provide shade.

Commons. A common is designed for passive recreation and civic purposes and it is mostly vegetated, perhaps by lawn. There are three subtypes of commons: Public Common, Public Square, and Green. The openness of these spaces keeps options open for residents to engage in different forms of play, sports, picnics, events, and simple relaxation.

Plazas. A plaza is designed for passive recreation, civic engagement, and commercial activities. These spaces are typically paved with more minimal vegetation. Plazas are generally located in activity centers or the nexus of major roads, trains, or paths. There are three subtypes of plaza: a Central Plaza, Through Block Plaza, and a Pocket Plaza.

¹ City of Somerville, “Glossary,” in *Somerville Zoning Ordinance*, 2.1.1.



CIVIC USES

The Zoning Ordinance defines a variety of “Civic Uses”. They include the wide range of activities that residents expect from their open spaces (e.g.: community gardens or splash pads). The table in **Appendix B** identifies the use types in each open space parcel in Somerville and their locations are shown in **Appendix A**.

Athletic Field. Athletic fields can be natural or synthetic turf and are designed for sports including soccer, baseball, and football. The recreational backbone for field users, both formal and informal, are 11 City-owned properties including Conway Park, Capuano Field, Hodgkins-Curtain Park, Lincoln Park, Nunziato Field, and Trum Field. There are also two DCR-owned regional parks (Foss Park and Dilboy Stadium and Auxiliary Fields) and the playing fields owned by Tufts University and the Benjamin Banneker School. A 2016 planning process identified the need for additional fields and field renovations. Since then, the City has built new fields at Somerville High School, the Healey School, and small fields at the West Somerville Neighborhood School, Winter Hill Community School, and the Benjamin Brown School. They also renovated the



The Somerville Zoning Ordinance describes the standards for each type civic space type and the uses allowed in each one. Civic uses include playgrounds (**top: Central Hill**) and dog parks (**bottom: Lincoln Park**). The SZO also defines standards and design guidelines for each civic use.

Dilboy Stadium Field, Capuano Field, East Somerville Community School, and Conway Park.

Café Seating. These spaces, equipped with tables and chairs, are used for sitting, eating, games, and gathering. Often located in urban plazas, which are not conventionally considered recreational or open space, this civic use supports the vibrancy of a

city's street life. Cafe seating can be accommodated on small parcels of land and can activate their use dramatically. Recently, pilot projects introducing movable furniture have worked towards re-imagining and activating street and plaza spaces.

Dog Park. Somerville has four parks designed for dogs to interact off-leash: Edward Leathers Community Park, Lincoln Park, Nunziato Field, and Zero New Washington Street Park. When properly planned and sited, dog parks are assets for community residents—dog owners and non-dog owners alike. They reduce the need for leash-law enforcement and provide a safe, secure environment for dogs and their owners to exercise and interact without competing with other park uses.

Landmark. Parcels of land set aside to commemorate a historic person or event are called landmarks. These include historic cemeteries (e.g.: Milk Row Cemetery), small parks (e.g.: Henry Hansen Park), or landscaped areas (e.g.: Paul Revere Park), as well as memorial structures and sculptures erected to commemorate people or events (e.g.: Paul Revere Park).

Passive. Passive recreation areas accommodate varied uses including walking, jogging, picnicking, sitting, and traveling on trails or paths. Given the restorative role of naturalistic parks in a dense, urban landscape, the city's passive parks are an important use type. Powder House Park (Nathan Tufts), Lou Ann David, ESCA, and Prospect Hill Parks provide meandering walks, while smaller parks like Edward Leathers Community Park, Quincy Street Park, and Symphony Park, offer contemplative spaces. Although water quality in the Mystic River and Alewife Brook are not yet pristine, paths and parks along these water features still provide valuable passive recreation. Sylvester Baxter Riverfront Park, Blessing of the Bay

Park, and the soon-to-be-renovated Draw Seven Park continue to bring people to the Mystic River.

Performance Space. Often a feature in multi-use spaces, this use identifies spaces designed for live performances of cultural entertainment or artistic expression such as concerts, dance, comedy, literary readings, performance art, and theater. These spaces are important given the value of public art in Somerville. Street festivals, music performances, and art exhibits are not only a local source of pride, but a regional draw to the city. Multi-use amphitheaters, stages, and display areas are crucial to supporting the vibrancy of the arts in Somerville. They can be found in spaces such as Symphony Park, Kenney Park, Lou Ann David Park, and Chuckie Harris Park.

Playground. Playgrounds are structured areas designed for children's play. Across the city, the most common civic use is playgrounds typically no more than a half-acre in size. There are 40 playgrounds in total. With 5,889 children under 10,² that averages to 147 children per playground.

Public Service. This use accommodates essential government services that benefit the community at large. This can include municipal operations such as departmental offices, social service facilities, and public works facilities; public safety services, such as police and firefighting headquarters and substations; and open spaces reserved for social and recreational activities or natural resource protection.

Schoolyard. Many of the city's elementary/middle schools have an attached yard used for recess, gym, and events. In the past, these were often an asphalt expanse. The City has

2 U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, "Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics," 2020.



Left: Gardeners farming at South Street Farm. This agricultural use produces food for people, habitat for pollinators, and is a demonstration garden that educates our community about growing food and urban ecosystems.



Right: Swimmers at the Dilboy Memorial Pool. Water features provide necessary relief from heat in summer.

worked hard in recent years to build better play and learning environments adjacent to schools. Since 2016, six schoolyards have been renovated in the order of their condition (poor to high condition). The Kennedy School is the only remaining yard to be completed, though one of its playgrounds was renovated in 2015. The design process is slated to begin in 2025. Schoolyards primarily serve the adjacent school, although they are used during non-school hours by neighborhood residents. They are not, however, protected open space.

Skate Park/Rink. Any facility providing a level surface or a collection of ramps and other obstacles intended for use by skateboarders or bicyclists counts as this use type. Skateboard elements can be found in Lincoln Park and Morse-Kelley Playground.

Urban Agriculture. This use can range from a parcel of land divided into individual garden plots for residents to grow food to a larger urban farm working to produce sellable crops. There are currently 13 community gardens in use throughout the city. Together they comprise over 256 differently

sized plots, including 16 ADA-accessible plots—all of which are being gardened. Each community garden has a garden coordinator who works with the Conservation Commission to ensure that the gardens are properly maintained. Some of these gardens have been in production for over 40 years and all are sources of community pride. Two are privately owned (Tufts and Avon), one is on MBTA land leased by the City (Bikeway Community Garden), and one is on land owned by the Somerville Housing Authority for the exclusive use of its residents (Mystic). South Street Farm, which is farmed by Groundwork Somerville, a non-profit group focusing on empowering youth, operates the only urban farm in the city.

Water Feature. This use highlights varied water features from spray heads and fountains to pools, ponds, cascades, waterfalls, and streams. Given that temperatures are increasing across the globe, water features are a vital civic use to provide relief from heat in the summer. They are one of the most popular features of Somerville's open spaces in the summer.

Community Preservation Act

Adopted in 2012, the Community Preservation Act (CPA) enables the City to fund improvements related to affordable housing, historic preservation, open space, and outdoor recreation through a small surcharge on property taxes. Somerville is one of 196 communities in the state who have voted to do so. Funds are managed by the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) composed of ex officio City officials and passionate residents.

Impacts on Open Space

The potential for the CPA to improve Somerville's existing open spaces and acquire new ones is tremendous. State law requires at least 10 percent of annual CPA funds be devoted to open space and outdoor recreation projects. The Somerville CPC goes above and beyond and has allocated 20 percent of their total funds to open space and recreation over the past 13 years.

The CPA is a more flexible funding source than the state grants traditionally used for park projects. This creates a myriad of opportunities for open space improvements. For example, CPA funds can be used to improve State-owned parks and natural grass fields in the city, which account for around half of Somerville's open space acres. CPA funds can also be awarded directly to community partners piloting innovative approaches to open space like Groundwork Somerville, the Community Growing Center, and the Mystic River Watershed Association.

Projects Funded to Date

Since 2012, the CPA has funded 48 open space projects that cover 25 unique sites around the city. This funding has gone to the design and construction of many beloved parks and schoolyards. Some of the most notable recent projects:

- Design and construction of the transformative **Healey Schoolyard** with a multi-level accessible play structure, fitness equipment, and ball courts.
- Design of a **new pocket park** along Somerville Avenue: Ken Kelly Park.
- Rehabilitation of historic **Prospect Hill Park and Monument**.
- Expansion of the **Glen Park Community Gardens**.
- Improvements to **Blessing of the Bay Park** including an improved boat launch, a trail with accessible routes to the Mystic River, and green infrastructure along Shore Drive.

All these projects, ranging from big to small, have a positive impact on the quality of the city's open space resources and serve to bring more opportunities for residents to engage with parks, gardens, and waterbodies.

Facing Page: Top: The renovated Healey Schoolyard. Photo by Ed Wonsek. Designed By Warner Larson Landscape Architects. **Right:** Ribbon cutting at the Benjamin G. Brown Schoolyard in 2023.



COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT DATA POINTS:

- **2012** – year that the Community Preservation Act (CPA) was passed by over 75% of Somerville Voters
- **2024** – year that Somerville residents voted to double the CPA surcharge tax to 3%
- **\$43 MILLION** – amount raised for CPA projects since 2014
- **20%** – amount of CPA funds allocated for open space and recreation projects



Success Story

Photo by Ed Wonsek. Designed By Warner Larson Landscape Architects.



ATHLETIC FIELDS DATA POINTS:

Between 2016-2025:

- **6 FIELDS** renovated
- **3 ARTIFICIAL TURF FIELDS** built
- **1 ARTIFICIAL TURF FIELD** constructed with DCR



Because of overuse, City fields were in horrible condition and posed safety problems. Natural grass fields are now carefully cared for and playing hours are limited to allow grass to grow.



Athletic Fields Master Plan Completion

When the City began the public process for renovating Lincoln Park, the largest open space in Somerville, a controversy erupted over whether the athletic field should be made of natural grass or synthetic turf. This controversy sparked a study that revealed a crisis in meeting Somerville youth's needs for playing hours on athletic fields.

In 2016, the City released its "Athletic Fields Master Planning Staff Report" to formalize and make field planning more transparent and to overhaul maintenance practices. In a data-based approach, the "Fields Plan" laid out a path for steady rehabilitation of overtaxed fields and set priorities for a schedule of major improvements and renovations. It also described goals for new field creation and acquisition. The plan balanced the sometimes-conflicting preferences of a diverse and engaged community. It reflected the interests of both sides of the synthetic or natural grass field debate by preserving natural grass fields wherever possible and introducing synthetic turf fields where absolutely needed to meet demand. Where the plan recommended rebuilding natural grass playing surfaces, it created a policy for

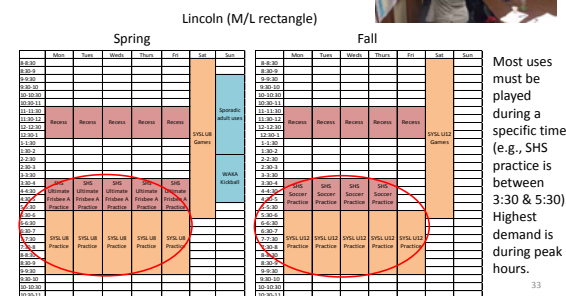
employing best management practices to maintain safe and playable surfaces. Where the plan recommended installing synthetic playing surfaces, it called for the highest quality materials with plant-based infill and installation techniques to ensure health and safety for users.

From 2016-2025, the City has renovated six fields, created three additional turf fields with plant-based infill, and partnered with DCR to add a synthetic turf field at Foss Park. Dilboy's natural grass field is currently under renovation and will be opened in 2025. As of 2025, the plan has been completed with only slight deviations.* Based on the 2016 assessment, Somerville has now met the recreational needs of field users.

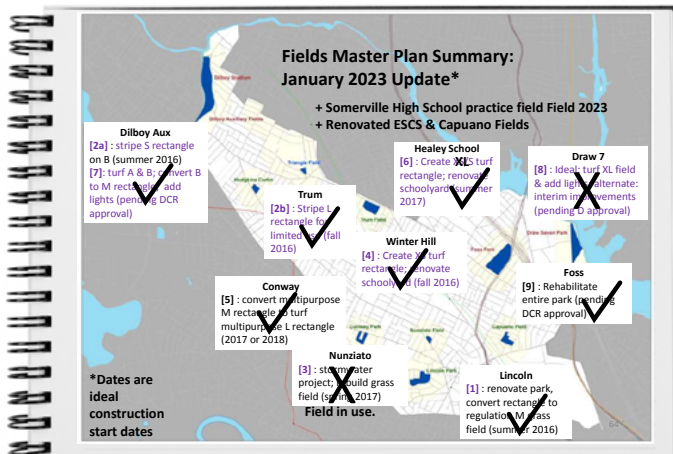
*Deviations from the original plan include a living shoreline instead of a field at DCR's Draw 7 Park to build resiliency toward climate change and the addition of a turf practice field to the renovated campus of Somerville High School (completed in 2023).

The 2016 Athletic Fields Master Planning Staff Report can be found here: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/somervillema-live/s3fs-public/athletic-fields-master-planning-staff-report-jun-2016.pdf>

And during peak hours
(M-F, 3-10, Spring & Fall)



Plan Page 33: An intensive data gathering process revealed an unmet need for playing hours.



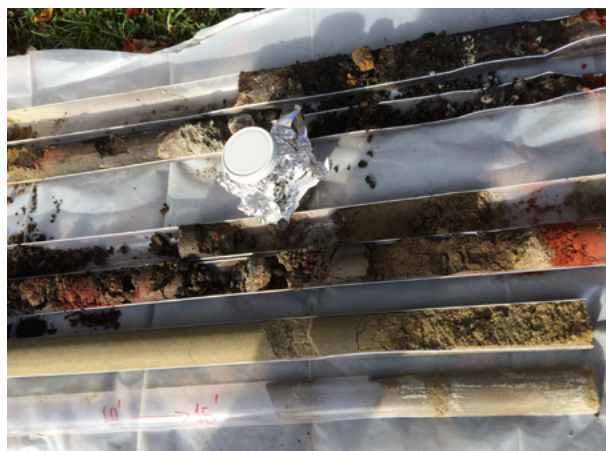
Plan Page 64: Progress update on the 2016 Fields Plan.

Conway Park

In 2017, the City initiated environmental assessment work after investigating a failing retaining wall on Allen Court. Sampling revealed large amounts of construction and demolition debris. This material had been used as sub-surface fill across the Conway Park ballfield. Testing found elevated levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and lead above Massachusetts Contingency Plan standards. The City worked closely with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) and a consultant between 2017 and 2019 to perform extensive soil sampling at Conway Park and define the nature and extent of contamination.

On April 9, 2019, MassDEP requested cleanup assistance from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Thereafter, the EPA and the City agreed to collaborate on a coordinated mixed-work approach. The EPA expected to spend up to approximately \$3 million with the City performing the rest of the work (estimated at over \$3 million) under EPA oversight. The cleanup included removal of source contamination and elimination of any potential direct contact by providing sufficient cover material (a synthetic turf athletic field) over any residual contamination.

Conway Park was reopened in May of 2022 after five years of soil testing, extensive interagency cooperation, remediation work (including the removal of 8,714 tons of contaminated soil), and extensive reconstruction. In addition to the heavily used field, playground, plaza with water feature, and basketball courts, the project includes resiliency features designed in anticipation of climate change. This includes permeable paving and a subsurface stormwater infiltration system that adds 3,743 cubic feet of storage to minimize the strain on Somerville sewers during 2-, 10-, 25-, and 100-year storm events.



Extensive soil sampling was done to understand the extent of contamination.

Preservation of mature trees and the addition of 64 new native trees provide shade in the park along the perimeter of the field. Other features include new scoreboards, benches, backstops, water bubblers to keep athletes hydrated, and energy-efficient lighting that minimizes spillage into nearby homes. Centrally located on Somerville Avenue, the 2.8-acre parcel is now a safe, vibrant community space that will better serve all users.



CONWAY PARK DATA POINTS:

- Completed in **2022**
- **8,714 TONS** of contaminated soil removed
- **3,743 CUBIC FEET** of stormwater storage
- **64 NEW NATIVE TREES** planted



Top: Moveable furniture gives park visitors the flexibility to watch games on the new field. Residents have made requests for additional bleacher-style seating.

Center: The popular playground and seating area is well shaded by mature trees. These were carefully preserved during construction.

Left: Infiltration chambers installed under the athletic field help slow and infiltrate stormwater.

4C.

Water Resources

Somerville's water resources create a unique open space amenity and distinctive riparian environments in an otherwise urban context. However, development and pollution of these water resources limits their full potential for active water use.

WATERSHEDS

Because of its distinct topography, Somerville contributes to two watersheds. The Charles River Watershed occupies its southern half, while the Mystic River Watershed runs along its northern half (see **Appendix A: Water Resources Map**). Both watersheds have important advocacy organizations with whom the City partners: the Charles River Watershed Association (CRWA) and the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA).

SURFACE WATER RESOURCES

Surface water resources, shared with Medford and Arlington, consist of the last mile of Alewife Brook and the last mile of the lower Mystic River down to the Amelia Earhart Dam. These waterways form the northern and western boundaries of Somerville and are part of the Mystic River watershed. This watershed encompasses approximately 76 square miles and contains 21 cities and towns in which over 600,000 people live.

Alewife Brook

A once-meandering brook surrounded by wetlands, the Alewife Brook has been substantially altered by development starting in the early 19th century. Industrial activity and clay extraction for bricks transformed

the historic river conditions. 20th century development, including channelization to deepen and straighten the brook's path, led to the form that we recognize today. The land along the river is owned by DCR and one portion borders the edge of the Dilboy Pool and Stadium.

Mystic River

Formerly a tidal estuary before the construction of the Amelia Earhart Dam in the 1960s, the Mystic River is a slow-moving urban river with open parklands and riparian vegetation along its banks. DCR-owned riverside parks, including Blessing of the Bay, Sylvester Baxter, and Draw Seven, offer pleasing views and support a diversity of plants and animals. Assembly Square, a development begun in the last decade and still under construction, is located along its eastern banks. This area is a mixed-use urban neighborhood and commercial district with access to public transportation and vibrant outdoor spaces.

Millers River

The Millers River once ran from Union Square to the Charles River and was buried in the 1870s. This created more land for industrial activity but eliminated habitat and stormwater drainage connections to adjacent water bodies. Now sections of the river flow underground through a series of drainpipes in Cambridge that empty into the Charles River. The underground flow also affects combined sewer overflow (CSO) drainage into the Mystic River due to interconnections throughout the City's pipes. Over the years, stormwater flooding has been a consistent issue around the former location of the river (particularly in Union Square). The City has invested heavily in underground system improvements and green stormwater infrastructure in this area to minimize future flooding.

WATER QUALITY

Water quality in the Mystic River Watershed is similar to other urbanized watersheds. Dense development and historic CSO systems contribute pollutants to the water. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s 2022 report card of compliance with water quality standards, the Upper Mystic Lake received an "A+" while Alewife Brook was rated a "D" (consistent with the last eight years' measurements) and the Mystic River a "B." While the "B" rating is a decrease from the A- rating received between 2015-2019,³ it is a significant improvement from the "D" rating it received when the EPA issued its first report card in 2007.⁴ Today it is typically okay to boat on the Mystic River, but it is not safe to swim or fish.

As of their reporting in April of 2023, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) and the cities of Somerville and Cambridge reported that the water in the Alewife Brook/Upper Mystic River Basin continues to struggle with bacteria and other pollutants. Stormwater is now recognized as one of the primary polluters of our waterways. It can contain pet and animal waste and nutrients (primarily phosphorus) that cause algae blooms.⁵ Due to the nature

of river systems, contamination sources all along Alewife Brook and the Mystic River result in limitations to recreation and ecological well-being in Somerville and each town is working to address these concerns in some way.

Combined Sewer Overflows

As described in **Section 3D.2**, CSO systems are common in older cities. When inundated in high rainfall events, more frequent now due to climate change, they release a combination of stormwater and wastewater into adjacent water bodies. Discharges at the two outfalls in Somerville on Alewife Brook and the Mystic River prevent wastewater from backing up into homes or streets during heavy rainfall, but they contribute to water pollution.

The municipalities around these waterways along with the MWRA (through its Long-Term CSO Control Plan), have closed 72 out of 86 CSOs in the metro Boston area and accomplished an 88% reduction in CSO volume discharges.⁶ The remaining open CSO outfalls in Somerville continue to relieve pipes during large rain events. As the City completes sewer separation projects, the frequency of discharges of stormwater and sewage will continue to decrease.

3 EPA, "Mystic River Watershed Report Cards," 2023.

4 EPA, "About the Mystic River Watershed," 2023.

5 EPA, "Environmental Challenges for the Mystic River Watershed," 2023.

6 City of Somerville, "Combined Sewer Overflow Control Planning Program," 2023.



View of the boardwalk path under Fellsway that connects Blessing of the Bay Park and Ten Hills with Sylvester Baxter Riverfront Park and Assembly Square. Water quality in the Mystic River has improved significantly over the years. It is safe to boat on the river, but it is not safe to swim or fish.

Contaminant concerns can include microbial pathogens (i.e., bacteria, viruses, and parasites) and toxins (i.e., metals and synthetic organic chemicals). Exposure can cause skin irritation to gastrointestinal illness in humans. To avoid any health risks, public health officials recommend avoiding contact with the Alewife Brook/Upper Mystic River Basin for 48 hours after rainfall. Somerville, Cambridge, and MWRA all have rapid reporting systems and online notifications that alert residents of outfall discharges to the Alewife Brook/Upper Mystic River Basin. According to this system, the Alewife Brook outfall discharged 6 times in Somerville in 2024.⁷

Somerville City staff are in the midst of a planning process to control CSO outfall events even further⁸ and local and state groups continue to advocate for the reduction of sewage overflow.

The combination of grassroots, municipal, regional, and national efforts continue to improve water quality in Somerville. The EPA works at a broad level through its permit requirements for pollutant discharge to surface waters and enforcement orders that demand municipalities identify and fix sewage discharges. Local advocacy groups, the City, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, neighboring municipalities, and MWRA work to increase access to water resources, to educate residents about the importance of urban waterways, and to implement physical projects to reduce future pollution.

WETLANDS

Most of Somerville's wetlands were lost due to extensive development during the first half of the 20th century. Those that remain are restricted to the 100-foot buffer zone on

the shores of the lower Mystic River. They provide landscape diversity, natural habitat, flood mitigation, and recreational enjoyment. An inspection by the Conservation Commission in 2007 determined there were no other existing wetlands within the city. The limited quantity makes them a vital resource worthy of preservation.

While there is little wetland ecology in Somerville, wetlands can be found up and downstream of the city. The Mystic River Reservation on the northern shore of the Mystic River in Medford contains important habitat and is a much-used recreation area with more wetlands than along Somerville's river edge. Supporting ecological functions along the entire Mystic River and Alewife Brook can support the well-being of human and non-human species in Somerville.

AQUIFER RECHARGE AREAS

Somerville contains no drinking-water supply aquifer recharge areas. The closest aquifer recharge area is in Medford. This aquifer is classified by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) as a medium-yield, "non-potential drinking water source." Somerville obtains its drinking water from the MWRA and Quabbin Reservoir.

FLOOD HAZARDS

Somerville's historic floodplain was likely much larger than it is today. The filling of marshlands to make way for rail yards and other industries, combined with the channeling of Millers River and the construction of the Amelia Earhart Dam, eliminated most of the City's flood storage capacity. These actions also made it possible to develop right up to the river's edge, which puts residents at risk of flooding throughout the watershed.

Today, FEMA delineates flood risk in areas north of the Amelia Earhart Dam, partic-

⁷ City of Somerville, "Combined and Sanitary Sewer Overflow Control," 2024.

⁸ City of Somerville, "Combined Sewer Overflow Control Planning Program," 2023.

ularly around Assembly Square, Foss Park, and along Alewife Brook.⁹ DCR parklands in these areas (Blessing of the Bay, Foss, and Dilboy) provide important water storage capacity during flood events.

Recent flood mapping in Somerville has expanded our understanding of flood risk from these areas along the Alewife Brook and Mystic River to a block-by-block picture of inundation even in the innermost parts of the city.¹⁰ This is in line with what we see today. Even now, much of the city's lower elevation neighborhoods—including Assembly Square, Union Square, Somerville Avenue, historic rail beds, and parts of Davis Square—suffer from localized stormwater flooding during heavy storm events. This will likely intensify as the climate changes.

The Citywide Flood Mitigation and Water Quality Master Plan (2022) sought to understand the root causes of flooding and identify mitigation actions (four projects are now in the early design stage).¹¹ Other flood relief projects include: the addition of green infrastructure along Somerville Avenue, Spring Hill Sewer project, small incentives like the “Adopt-a-drain” initiative,¹² and the Poplar Street Pump Station (described in **Section 3D.2**).¹³ Educational initiatives like the “Flood Ready” program prepare residents for flooding events and encourage actions to reduce its negative impacts.¹⁴ Zoning changes, like the addition of a Floodplain Overlay District, aim to prevent damage and emergencies by requiring development to be in compliance with flood-safe building codes and to restrict development that might obstruct flood flows away from community assets.¹⁵ Building permitting and City



Inland flooding is a risk particularly in lower elevation areas like Union Square. Increasing water infiltration on private property and stormwater storage in parks reduces the impact of large rain events across the city.

Green Score reviews (see **Section 3D.3**) also monitor the amount of impervious surfaces and incentivize permeable surfaces, raingardens, green roofs, and vegetation to support infiltration and water storage on private properties. These strategies are great for diverting stormwater from city sewer systems and reducing flooding.

We have limited locations to store stormwater, so the City has been constructing storage chambers under its parks and schoolyards. Lincoln Park, renovated in 2018, can hold 250,000 gallons of water under the sports fields. Symphony Park, renovated in 2015, has a 2,000-gallon storage tank to capture stormwater and reuse it for irrigation. Conway Park contains 3,743 cubic feet of stormwater storage in underground chambers and a sand filter layer underneath the athletic field. In other parks, rain gardens and other stormwater storage features create “performance landscapes” that are solving contemporary flooding problems. This

9 FEMA, “FEMA Flood Map Service Center”

10 City of Somerville, *Urban Flooding Map* (2022).

11 City of Somerville, *Citywide Flood Mitigation and Water Quality Master Plan* (2022).

12 City of Somerville, “Stormwater Management,” 2023.

13 City of Somerville, “Poplar Street Pump Station,” 2023.

14 City of Somerville, “Flood Ready,” 2023.

15 City of Somerville, “Overlay Districts,” in *Somerville Zoning Ordinance* (2019), 8.3.



View of Sylvester Baxter Riverfront Park, one of the valued points of connection with the Mystic River in Somerville.

integration of stormwater storage and open spaces continues to be a priority for park projects in Somerville, though they cannot solve the issue alone.

All of these actions, educational efforts, zoning requirements, stormwater infrastructure projects, are directly in line with the Climate Forward Plan (2024).¹⁶

RECREATION

As the water quality of the Alewife Brook and the Mystic River improves, both areas attract users pursuing recreational interests like boating, canoeing, kayaking, birdwatching, wildlife viewing, and fishing (in the Mystic). The Blessing of the Bay Boathouse, owned by DCR and shared between private rowing clubs and the City's recreation department, offers public canoe rentals. In the past decade, the City, DCR, and MyRWA worked to improve boat house access through design changes and by enlivening it with public art and signage.

Regional planning groups that include Somerville, like the Resilient Mystic Collaborative and its Lower Mystic Working Group,¹⁷ consider these waterfront areas as important community resources and potential points of connection between municipalities.

¹⁶ City of Somerville, *Climate Forward* (2024).

¹⁷ "Resilient Mystic Collaborative," 2023.

4D. Vegetation

Dense development in Somerville substantially limits the size of vegetated zones. The largest swaths of vegetation can be found in parks, along railway corridors, and river edges. To fully understand the ecology of this city, one must look at private properties. Trees in backyards make up an important component of our urban forest and shrub and perennial plantings offer habitat and forage for pollinators and other wildlife.

Community gardens and small urban farms are the only agricultural lands. Though they bear little resemblance to Somerville's traditional agricultural past, they offer an outlet for community building, food production, and contribute to the range of plant species growing in the city.

The riparian soils along the Mystic River and Alewife Brook support a diversity of mature vegetation. In 2018, the tree species along the Mystic River were inventoried revealing the dominance of non-native lindens and Norway maples. Other species included alder, ash, birch, black pine, cottonwood, red oak, and staghorn sumac.¹⁸ Invasive species—most notably water chestnut,

¹⁸ Offshoots, "Living Tapestry," 2019.

phragmites, oriental bittersweet, and Norway maple—have infested large areas along the shorelines. Invasive vegetation competes with native plants for limited natural resources, dominating habitats and reducing food and shelter for native wildlife. Groups like MyRWA organize volunteers every year to remove plants like water chestnut and bittersweet. In 2024 alone, 1,374 volunteers removed 2,313 baskets of water chestnut, 190 bags of bittersweet, and 597 bags of trash.¹⁹

Somerville's parks are home to some of the largest concentrations of trees and feature some of the most mature and stately trees in the city. Powder House Park (Nathan Tufts) has many mature red oaks and white pines over 80 feet tall. The City is actively planting trees throughout parks and schoolyards to foster comfortable, shady public spaces in anticipation of increasing heat extremes.

Though the tree species are diverse across the city, there are no known rare or endangered plant or tree species in Somerville.

URBAN FORESTRY

The City completed its Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) in 2021 and determined that 14.6% of Somerville's land is covered by tree canopy according to 2018 aerial imaging. By far the largest number of public trees can be found along the city's streets. Nearly 14,000 trees grow on publicly owned property in Somerville (e.g.: in parks and on municipal- or state-owned properties), and over 9,000 of these are found along the public right-of-way (i.e., street trees). About 2/3 of the city's tree canopy is found on private residential and commercial property, creating a patchwork across the city. Together, these public and private trees comprise a vital urban tree canopy which offers a host of ecological, social, and economic benefits.

19 Mystic River Watershed Association, "Restoring Biodiversity," 2025.

The UFMP estimates that trees on public and private property provide residents with "almost \$283,869 annually in quantifiable benefits related to stormwater runoff reduction, air quality improvements, and carbon sequestration." On top of that, the amount of carbon stored in the woody tissue of those trees over their lifetime adds an additional \$2.2 million in benefits.²⁰ In addition to their monetary value, trees provide innumerable environmental, aesthetic, and psychological benefits that cannot be quantified.

Management and Oversight

The City's Urban Forestry program is split between two departments: the Department of Public Works (DPW) and the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD). Two Urban Forestry Planners in OSPCD collaborate with the

20 City of Somerville, [Urban Forest Management Plan \(2021\)](#), 18.



Street trees and trees on private property are a vital component of Somerville's urban ecosystem. They provide shade, cool hot streets in summer, and absorb stormwater. City staff plant at least 350 new trees every year.

DPW Tree Warden to meet the city's tree canopy needs and goals. DPW's urban forestry work focuses on reacting to resident concerns regarding tree health and public safety via a three-person tree crew as well as outside contractors. Meanwhile, the two Urban Forestry Planners in OSPCD manage the planting of trees on city streets, spearhead proactive maintenance, and planning and policy efforts to protect trees. A community-led Urban Forestry Committee advises the management and maintenance of all existing and new trees and shrubs on public grounds and public ways. They meet monthly to review policies, promote and educate residents on the benefits of trees, and review tree removal and maintenance issues.

Increasing Tree Canopy

The UFMP makes a clear argument for increasing urban canopy cover and sets a goal of reaching 16% landcover. To get there, we need to involve residents and City staff. We need to plant trees on private and public property, to make efficient use of existing pervious landscapes, to plant large-growing trees, and to reduce tree loss through maintenance.²¹ City staff currently plant at least 350 street trees every year and actively replace young trees that did not establish successfully. They also take opportunities to add and replace trees during public construction or renovation projects.

Exact planting locations are informed by resident requests and evaluations of canopy density data in each ward. They seek to address disparities and climate change vulnerability. The 2018 inventory also assessed the most common tree species and their ecological benefits. It found that three species are dominant (Norway maple, Callery pear, and red maple) and 44% are native to New England. With this data, OSPCD staff carefully select species that are appropriate for each planting location and diversify the

species ratio while maximizing ecosystem services (e.g.: stormwater capture and carbon sequestration) and survivability.

Tree placement also considers physical limitations of each space and ensures that ADA requirements on the city's sidewalk and streets are maintained.

Care and Maintenance

To reach the goal of 16% canopy landcover, proactive tree maintenance is essential. It helps prevent property damage, injury, and fosters long-term tree health. Currently, the Tree Warden and Urban Forestry Planners conduct tree inspections and direct mature tree maintenance by external arborist contractors. New trees under warranty are watered and maintained by the external planting contractor. Future DPW staff hires will increase internal capacity to manage maintenance requests for public tree needs like pruning.

In line with the UFMP's maintenance goals, the Parks Tree Health Program and the Young Tree Training Program are currently cycling through young and public park trees in Somerville. Proactive pruning aims to increase tree health and longevity, reducing the need for tree removal or costly high-priority tree maintenance in the future (see "Success Stories" for more details).

Education and Stewardship

Since 66% of Somerville's tree canopy is located on private lands, educating the public about the importance of trees and how to care for them is critical to their survival. The Urban Forestry Committee is partly tasked with engaging the public at events throughout the year. The "Adopt-A-Tree" program tries to get residents invested in their street trees by inviting them to water, mulch, and weed around new trees to help them establish successfully. Each time a resident engages with the Green Score permitting process, they are also encouraged to think

21 City of Somerville, *Urban Forest Management Plan* (2021), 28.

Urban Forest Management Plan

The City of Somerville proudly released its first comprehensive Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) in 2021. This Plan describes the current state of the City's urban forest and details our goals and action plan. This document will guide urban forestry planning and policy for the next five to ten years.

Somerville's urban forest is an important part of life in the city and provides countless benefits. Trees offer cooling through shade and evapotranspiration, they clean our air and water, mitigate stormwater runoff, increase property values and retail sales, and provide habitat for pollinators and other wildlife. This plan provides a data-driven approach to growing the urban forest and maximizing these services.

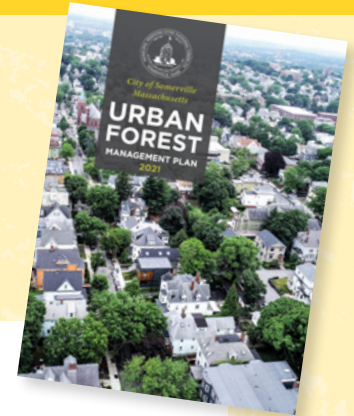
The UFMP is divided into five sections.

- A description of **the importance of trees** in the city.
- An assessment of the City's **public tree inventory data**.
- Propositions for **how to expand, preserve, and maintain** our urban forest.
- A road map to **increase operational efficiency, identify funding, protect trees, and improve outreach**.
- An **action plan** to summarize steps towards meeting the plan's goals.

The document includes an analysis of tree canopy cover, calculations of the ecosystem service benefits that our urban trees provide, and strategies for planting, pruning, and removal. The UFMP also details current practices and future needs for preparing for storms, managing invasive insects and diseases, optimizing operations and policies, increasing urban forestry funding, and getting the public more involved in caring for our urban trees.

UFMP DATA POINTS:

- **13,604 PUBLICLY OWNED TREES** in Somerville, 44% of which are native to New England
- The City's **9,313 STREET TREES PROVIDE \$1.05 IN MEASURABLE ECOSYSTEM SERVICE BENEFITS** each year
- The City of Somerville has **14.6% CANOPY COVER, AND A GOAL TO REACH 16% CANOPY COVER**
- Every year the city plants **AT LEAST 350 NEW STREET TREES**



Photograph credit, front cover of Urban Forest Management Plan: Victor Nascimento, City of Somerville.

This UFMP was developed by the Public Space and Urban Forestry Division in the Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, with assistance from its consultant, Davey Resource Group. Many provided input including various City departments, the Urban Forestry Committee, and city residents. The City received an Urban and Community Forestry Grant from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation to fund the development of this UFMP. The UFMP was based, in part, on the City's most recent public tree inventory which was completed in early 2019.

The Urban Forest Management Plan can be found here: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/somervillema-live/s3fs-public/documents/somerville-urban-forest-management-plan.pdf>

The City's Public Tree Inventory: <http://somervillema.treekeepersoftware.com/index.cfm?deviceWidth=1920>



Proactive Maintenance For Trees

Parks Tree Health Program

In March of 2020, the City implemented a proactive Parks Tree Health Program (PTHP). Each year, three to ten Somerville-owned parks cycle through this program. The PTHP performs a health assessment and then maintains each tree using the best arboricultural practices to promote healthy growth. The aim is to maintain all the City's park trees on a seven-year cycle.

The PTHP involves:

- The completion of a **comprehensive health assessment** of the trees in each park by a certified arborist.
- A **work plan** for proactively maintaining those trees.
- The **execution of that work**.
- A **final report** detailing long-term maintenance recommendations.

Proactive maintenance extends the life cycle of the urban forest and, therefore, its “ecosystem service benefits”—stormwater absorption, shade, habitat, and carbon sequestration. It also protects the City against liability caused

by hazard trees and assures the safety of park users. Since the inception of the PTHP, 761 trees throughout 23 parks have been assessed and maintained. The work of the PTHP also records health data for each tree within each park.

Young Tree Training Program

To promote the health of our newer, most vulnerable trees, the City has commenced a Young Tree Training Program (YTTP). This program focuses on pruning all young trees in the City on a three-year cycle. Through this program 700 to 900 trees are maintained each year. To date, YTTP has maintained well over 3,400 trees since the program's inception in 2020.

Why is this program important?

- Pruning trees at early stages will **encourage proper structure and growth**.
- Pruning **removes limbs that threaten the health of trees and the safety of the public**.
- Maintenance is **easier and less costly** when trees are young.
- **Decreases the likelihood a tree will have catastrophic branch failure in the future.**

PROACTIVE TREE MAINTENANCE DATA POINTS:

Since 2020:

- **1,043 MATURE TREES IN 34 PARKS** assessed and maintained
- **3,407 YOUNG TREES** maintained



about the value of their trees (see **Section 3D.3**). Many points are given for preserving trees and planting high-value, large tree species. All these public relations efforts will bolster citizen interest and City support for the Somerville urban tree canopy.

4E. Fisheries and Wildlife

Although Somerville lacks large areas of conserved habitat, it does support a diversity of plant and animal species typical in an urban environment. This biodiversity is greatest along the Mystic River and Alewife Brook and thins toward the city's center, where there is less desirable habitat.

Resident mammals are spread throughout the city, occurring in many neighborhoods, parks, and along railroads. These mammals include gray squirrels, chipmunks, mice, rats, rabbits, raccoons, opossums, skunks, and even brown bats. Coyotes are frequent visitors along the railbeds in Inner Belt and Brickbottom. More heavily vegetated areas and parks along the river may provide access points for foxes, muskrats, moles, shrews, and other mammals into Somerville, but documentation of these species is minimal. It should be noted that all the latter species have been seen upriver from Somerville and therefore have the potential for occurring in the city.

Given its location along the Atlantic Flyway migration corridor, bird life is relatively varied in Somerville. 122 species are identified on iNaturalist including sparrows, finches, cardinals, chickadees, juncos, mockingbirds, blue jays, crows, downy woodpeckers, mourning doves, pigeons, robins, nuthatches, catbirds, starlings, grackles, gulls, mallards, Canada geese, turkeys,

red-tailed hawks, Cooper's hawks, kestrel, swans, herons, terns, osprey, and woodcocks.²² Many of these birds can only be found in specific habitats such as along the Mystic River. The Massachusetts Audubon Society has designated the Mystic River Watershed as an "Important Bird Area."²³ Each Spring, the herring and alewife run (discussed below) provides a tremendous food source for gulls, cormorants, and is vital for black-crowned night-herons. The common tern, last seen in Somerville in 2017, is the only "Species of Concern" listed in the city according to MassWildlife's Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program.²⁴

Between May and June of 2020, over 700,000 blueback herring and alewife migrated up the Mystic River to points beyond the upper Mystic Lake. The surge in population over the past 10 years is thanks to functional fish ladders that allow the fish to pass through dams and travel further upstream.²⁵ There, the fish spawn and then return to the ocean. While there are no documented sites of herring spawning in Somerville, our city is on their travel route, and they are considered a fishery resource within the city. Other resources include the freshwater fisheries of the Mystic River and Alewife Brook system. The species that make up that system are not well inventoried, but it is known that carp have invaded both the river and the brook.

Groups like the Tufts Pollinator Initiative and Earthwise Aware have led substantial citizen-science observation efforts to understand insect (particularly pollinator) populations in Somerville. The Somerville Pollinator Action Plan (2024) builds on this data and examines pollinator species and habitat

22 "iNaturalist," 2023.

23 Mass Audubon, "Important Bird Area Sites in Massachusetts," 2023.

24 Mass.gov, "Rare Species Viewer," 2025.

25 Mystic River Watershed Association, "Love Nature? Count Fish," and "The Amazing Return of Mystic Herring: An Urban Ecological Restoration Story," 2023.

in the city.²⁶ It identifies which species are of particular concern and proposes ways to increase habitat for the wide array of native species in Somerville.

One major problem for fisheries and wildlife in Somerville is the fragmentation of available habitat areas. Somerville's open spaces are typically small and interspersed with dense development. Few areas of contiguous passage for wildlife are possible other than the rivers' edges, the community path, and railways. Just as the successful resurgence of herring populations is due to efforts all along the Mystic River, increasing habitat in Somerville will require substantial collaboration among private and public entities to bridge the developed landscape.

4F. Scenic Landscapes and Unique Environments

SCENIC LANDSCAPES

As described in **Section 3B**, Somerville's history of residential development without planned open space has resulted in a series of small, scattered parks that must meet demanding community needs. Large, scenic landscapes are few, and those that exist (such as Central Hill Park or Foss Park) have suffered from accommodating changing community needs without a master plan to support trees, preserve unique character, and provide adequate maintenance.

Due to its unique physical geology, however, Somerville has an abundance of scenic perspectives in a very small land area (See

Appendix A: Unique Features Map). Some of the "seven hills of Somerville" command excellent views of the Boston metropolitan area, and hilltop open spaces offer cool breezes and respite in the summer. Protected lands along the Alewife Brook and Mystic River also provide valuable scenic views and a welcome refuge from the city's urban character. Finally, some street corridors provide important scenic perspectives. From east to west through the city there are ten notable scenic vistas in Somerville:

- From the banks of the Lower Mystic River near Assembly Square looking north and east in the direction of the Amelia Earhart Dam, and along Shore Drive looking north and east across the Mystic River toward Medford.
- From the summit of Prospect Hill (particularly from the Prospect Hill Monument) in all directions. Excellent views of the Cambridge and Boston skylines.
- From Central Hill looking toward the northern suburbs (the site of original cannon defenses) and southeast in the direction of the Boston skyline.
- From Winter Hill looking southeast toward the Boston skyline, and west at sunset.
- From the crest of Spring Hill (particularly along Summer Street at St. Catherine's Church and at the corner of Craigie Street) looking south and west over Cambridge.
- Former and current railroad corridors: from any of the railroad bridges looking down the tracks, and along sections of the Community Path looking west toward Route 2 in Arlington.
- From Nathan Tufts (Powder House) Park overlook looking northwest over Tufts University.
- From Powder House Boulevard looking in either direction, for the tree canopy/setback.

26 City of Somerville, *Somerville Pollinator Action Plan* (2024). <http://voice.somervillema.gov/somerville-pollinator-action-plan>.

- From the open space along the shore of the Alewife Brook on Somerville's western boundary, in all directions.
- From the Healey School's athletic field looking northwest toward Everett.

UNUSUAL GEOLOGIC FEATURES

Somerville's seven hills create a topographically diverse landscape. With lowlands in Union Square and along the water and high points scattered across the city, residents can experience immersion in the landscape and vistas. The underlying geology is also visible in historic quarries. Evidence of three historic quarries can be seen in Nathan Tufts Park, in Osgood Park, and between the Healey School and the Mystic Housing Development. Nathan Tufts Park honors that history with sculptural tools embedded in the stone.

HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT AREAS

Somerville greatly values and commemorates its significant historic holdings, including many parks and landmarks. Several public landscapes are used for historic reenactments, celebrations, and other educational events.²⁷ The following open spaces are of particular historic and cultural interest:

Paul Revere Park

This park is located at the junction of Broadway and Main Street, at the crest of Winter Hill. Locally referred to as the "smallest park in the world," the site is marked by a simple stone to commemorate the route taken by Paul Revere on his ride to Lexington and Concord. This is also the site of the Winter Hill Fort, a Revolutionary stronghold during the siege of Boston and a prisoner of war camp.

²⁷ Event information can be found here: <http://www.somervillema.gov/departments/ospcd/historic-events-and-education>.

Milk Row Cemetery

Milk Row Cemetery is located on the south side of Somerville Avenue opposite the terminus of School Street. Originally part of the Samuel Tufts farm, this land was established as a cemetery in 1808 with the condition that the land be used only as a burying ground and that it always be fenced. The City of Somerville was given control of the site in 1893. The cemetery is no longer in active use but is featured in local historical walks and events. The first Civil War Memorial in the country, erected in 1863, is the main focal point of this site.

Nathan Tufts Park (also known as "Powder House Park")

This park is the site of a historic powder house, originally built in 1704 as a gristmill. In 1747, the mill was deeded to the Province of Massachusetts Bay for use as a public powder house. The first encounter of the American Revolution occurred here in 1774, when the British seized more than 200 barrels of gunpowder. The property was later owned by the Tufts family, which operated a large brickyard just east of the site. At the end of the 19th century, the family conveyed the property to the City with the stipulation that a park be erected around the Powder House for public use. The Powder House was renovated in the late 1990s and the park renovated in 2003.

Prospect Hill Park

Prospect Hill, one of the highest of Somerville's drumlins, was the site of camps and fortifications built after the Battle of Bunker Hill. The Battle of Prospect Hill occurred when the British troops were retreating from Lexington and Concord. The first flag of the United Colonists was raised on January 1, 1776, on the highest point of the hill. The top of the hill was later lowered to fill adjacent lowlands and to form the Boston and Main railroad yard in the Brickbottom area southeast of Prospect Hill. A monument erected at

this site commemorates Somerville's involvement in the Revolutionary War. This park is designated a "Local Historic District."

ARCHAEOLOGICALLY SIGNIFICANT AREAS

Any archaeologically significant sites in Somerville are likely to have been disturbed by extensive movement, extraction, and filling of lands within the City's borders in the past 200 years. The significance of any future uncovered artifacts may hold meaning for the communities connected to their lineage. Consulting those community members, when possible, is necessary to understand if the object or the site holds historic importance.

UNIQUE ENVIRONMENTS

According to DCR, as of 2010 there are no designated areas of Critical Environmental Concern within city limits.²⁸ However, the Mystic River and Alewife Brook are identified as Core Habitat or Critical Natural Landscape by BioMap for their importance to connectivity, natural communities, and resilience.²⁹ These are the most well-recognized areas of ecological value in the city, though there is increasing interest and appreciation for urban tree canopy and networks of smaller habitats that can increase the experience of nature, resilience to climate change, and support wildlife in an urban context.

28 MassGIS, "Areas of Critical Environmental Concern," 2009.

29 BioMap, "Interactive Map," 2022.

4G.

Environmental Challenges

As a highly urbanized, coastal city, Somerville faces many challenges shared by our neighbors. City planning must address everything from the effects of climate change to soil contamination to noise, water, and air pollution. Understanding these is key to planning for a healthy and sustainable future.

CLIMATE CHANGE RISKS – HEAT AND FLOODING

Somerville, like all cities, is entering a critical phase in planning for, adapting to, and minimizing the impacts of climate change. The region is already seeing increasing temperatures and more hot days, precipitation and drought extremes, and flooding. Planners in Somerville are thinking carefully about reducing greenhouse gas emissions and becoming more resilient and adaptable. Local and regional action is underway and needed more than ever.

Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment

The Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment (CCVA) was first published in 2017 and updated in 2023. The CCVA identifies key areas of concern and ever-increasing vulnerabilities in Somerville. It inventories critical assets (e.g.: schools, medical facilities, food resources, social services, etc.) vulnerable to flooding and neighborhoods that will experience particularly high temperatures. It identifies two important coastal flood inundation paths: one from the Mystic River in Assembly Square and the other from the Charles River Dam, through Cambridge, into Union Square. 82% of Somerville is identified as at risk for extremely high temperatures. This analysis calls out Assembly Square, East Somerville, Union Square, Win-

ter Hill, and Davis Square as neighborhoods with the highest number of assets exposed to either flood or heat.³⁰ The information in the assessment was used to develop strategies in the Climate Forward Plan and will help the City make future decisions that can reduce risks to climate impacts within Somerville and within the region.

Climate Forward Plan

In 2018, the City of Somerville published its first climate action plan (Climate Forward) with the goal of reaching carbon neutrality by 2050. The open space-related action items called for updated stormwater management policies and an expanded tree canopy. A thorough update was released in 2024 and outlines climate goals for 2030 and 2040 to help us get to carbon net-negative by 2050. The strategies and action items aim for a more equitable and climate resilient community.³¹

The update proposes actions related to building standards, energy supply, alternative transportation options, green infrastructure, urban canopy expansion, sustainable material practices, and expansive educational programs and resources for community members.

One Climate Forward update goal states that through the implementation of the plan, Somerville's natural systems will be resilient in the face of climate change and provide resilience benefits to all. This goal will be accomplished by prioritizing nature-based solutions and using climate-adaptive practices to enhance our urban tree canopy and open spaces.

30 City of Somerville, *Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment Update* (2023), 3-8. http://s3.amazonaws.com/somervillema-live/s3fs-public/Somerville_Climate_Change_Vulnerability_Assessment_2023.pdf.

31 City of Somerville, "Climate Forward," 2024. <http://www.somervillema.gov/departments/programs/climate-forward>.

Climate Change and Public Space

Open space (everything from parks to sidewalks) has the potential to mitigate stormwater and extreme heat. The City's efforts to plant more trees and create habitat, install stormwater storage tanks under parks, and to explore green infrastructure along roads all work toward these ends (see **Section 3D.2** for more information about flood risk and mitigation).

The CCVA and Climate Forward plans direct City planners to work in neighborhoods that are particularly vulnerable. For example, flood data points us to consider how natural areas and constructed landscapes along the Mystic River can absorb and filter stormwater to protect interior inhabited areas. Additionally, communities in East Somerville tend to have higher land surface temperatures and lower incomes (See **Appendix A: Heat and Tree Canopy Map**). This overlap reflects a mix of land use history (Inner Belt and Brickbottom are mostly industrial) and historic investment disparities. Some of these neighborhoods (Assembly, Union Square, Boynton Yards, and Brickbottom) have high development pressure and both the Zoning Ordinance and City staff attempt to guide development to increase open space, tree canopy, habitat, and cool areas for all residents. The City's expanded tree planting efforts also address some of these temperature concerns. Parks and street trees can be part of the solution to alleviate flood water and heat pressures, especially for more vulnerable populations.

OSPCD is already implementing strategies so that the city's parks can play a role in mitigating contributions to climate change and building community resilience. Somerville staff are planning for and implementing the following practices:

- Selecting plant and turf species that are more resilient to heat and precipitation/drought extremes.

- Building biodiverse ecosystems in parks with horticultural maintenance and careful plant selection to create habitat.
- Exploring sustainable building material choices.
- Reducing water usage through drought-tolerant plant species selection, low-flow water heads in water features, and the reuse and capture of stormwater.
- Improving stormwater retention capacity in all parks with permeable pavements, underground storage chambers, and rain gardens.
- Increasing tree cover on sidewalks, parks, and open spaces to reduce heat island effect.
- Planting trees strategically to provide shade in playgrounds, gathering and active areas.
- Continuing to survey the health of the tree canopy, pruning as needed, and replanting dead and dying trees to help mitigate heat extremes.
- Adapting tree care and species selection to pest and disease risk.
- Reducing energy consumption for lights and fountains by upgrading to energy efficient systems and equipment.

AIR AND NOISE POLLUTION

Major highways cut through several Somerville neighborhoods exposing our residents to harmful air pollution and acting as a barrier to access for many public parks, playgrounds, and open spaces including Foss Park and DCR parklands along the Mystic River. The City of Somerville works closely with numerous community partners to study and mitigate the impacts of near-highway air pollution. Community-based organizations including the Somerville Transportation Equity Partnership have partnered with Tufts University and other research institutions to collect extensive scientific data on the levels of ultrafine particulate matter and

other harmful traffic-generated pollutants in our Winter Hill, Ten Hills, Mystic Apartments, and East Somerville neighborhoods. The 2022 Cambridge Health Alliance also published a Regional Wellbeing Report which further details air pollution risks in the region.³² The City's mitigation strategies include working to reduce motor vehicle traffic, addressing physical barriers (roadways) between open spaces and adjacent neighborhoods, and upgrading building systems such as windows and HVAC systems in homes near the highways. PSUF is also building parks in these underserved neighborhoods with thick evergreen plantings to mitigate air pollution. An example is ESCA Park along I-93 which opened in 2023.

BROWNFIELDS

Somerville's brownfields program is administered by the OSPCD Economic Development Division. The program comprises several innovative initiatives to remediate brownfield sites owned by public, private, and non-profit redevelopers. These initiatives have catalyzed new housing, parks, and commercial development throughout Somerville. For example, Somerville coordinated federal, state, and local resources to clean up and transform the former Kiley Barrel site into a 700,000 square foot mixed-use development adjacent to the new MBTA Union Square Station. Somerville's program features a Brownfields Cleanup Revolving Loan Fund, which can be used to loan cleanup funds to private developers and grant funds for City projects.³³

Somerville has worked with the EPA on several brownfields-to-parks conversion projects. These include the Allen Street Community Garden, Somerville Junction Park, and Edward Leathers Park. Most

32 Cambridge Health Alliance, *Regional Wellbeing Report* (2022), 53-56.

33 City of Somerville, "Brownfields Remediation Assistance," 2024.

recently, the City partnered with the EPA and the DEP to clean up soils underneath the Conway Park ballfield. This involved the removal of 8,714 tons of contaminated soil and field reconstruction with enough cover material to prevent any direct contact with residual pollutants. The partnership was unprecedented in the region and today the once-contaminated site is Somerville's most heavily used athletic field.

LANDFILLS

All municipal solid waste generated in Somerville is taken to a waste-to-energy facility in Saugus. All recyclable materials generated in Somerville are transported to a Materials Recovery Facility in Charlestown, MA. The athletic field of the former Matignon School was used as a landfill in the early 1900s, terminating prior to 1930.

GROUND AND SURFACE WATER POLLUTION (Point and Non-Point Source)

Despite ongoing monitoring and containment efforts by City departments and Somerville's Conservation Commission, point and non-point source water pollution remains a major obstacle to the realization of recreational goals for the City's waterways. The Mystic River and Alewife Brook are on the DEP's 2022 Integrated List of Waters for a variety of causes such as E. Coli, oil and grease, phosphorus, high pH, lead, copper, and trash, among others.³⁴

Point-source pollution originates primarily from upstream CSOs outside the City's jurisdiction, as well as the two remaining CSOs in Somerville (see **Sections 3D and 4C** for more details). These impacts are magnified by illegal sewer hookups to stormwater collection systems. These problems are shared by most of Somerville's neighbors, however significant improvements have been

made in the last decade. This includes active implementation of the Illicit Detection and Discharge Elimination Program to identify any illegal sewer hookups.³⁵

Non-point source pollution issues arise from stormwater flowing through Somerville's urbanized landscape—particularly its expansive impermeable surfaces such as streets, paved residential yards, and commercial lots. These impervious surfaces generate large volumes of stormwater runoff, which is commonly contaminated with road and highway dirt, auto leakage, animal waste, trash, and other contaminants. Phosphorus is a particular concern as it accumulates in waterbodies from landscaping fertilizers, road salt, animal waste, car exhaust, and plant and leaf litter. Excess phosphorus in waterbodies can cause harmful algae blooms. Again, Somerville shares these non-point water pollution issues with most neighboring communities. The Somerville Zoning Ordinance places limits on impervious surfaces for new developments and requires landscaped areas on all lots to reduce runoff.

SEDIMENTATION

The accumulation of sediment on the concrete bottom of the Alewife Brook is a long-standing, historic condition. This area was once tidal but since the construction of the Amelia Earhart Dam, sediment does not flow downstream as it once did and builds up in the channel. Sediment that has accumulated may contain contamination that would be dangerous to disturb. Alewife Brook is recognized as an important resource and the City, in collaboration with state agencies, the Conservation Commission, and local community groups, continues to explore means for safely improving water quality and preventing further sedimentation.

34 EPA, *Final Mass Integrated List of Waters* (2023), 128 and 131.

35 City of Somerville, *Final Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination Plan* (2022).

INVASIVE SPECIES

Either by accident or brought in as specimens, certain species have found a home in our local ecosystem. According to the state, 725 plant species are “naturalized” (non-native) and 72 in that group are classified as “invasive.”³⁶ “Invasive” indicates their tendency to out-compete, displace, or kill native species. These include garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*), Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*), Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*), and black swallow-wort (*Cynanchum louiseae*) which is toxic and threatens monarch butterflies and songbirds. The City publishes a “Most Un-Wanted Weeds” list to aid volunteer groups in identifying invasives on its website and a partnership between staff and community groups seeks to spread the word annually about the importance of black swallow-wort removal.³⁷

In addition to plants, some invasive insects like the Asian longhorned beetle, emerald ash borer, and the spotted lanternfly can damage or kill native tree species. Somerville has over 1,000 ash trees which are under threat from the emerald ash borer. Our ability to support a healthy urban canopy and wildlife habitat is challenged by these species and arborists are actively working on solutions including bi-yearly inoculation of ash trees.

Considerable invasive-species data has been collected in certain areas (e.g.: along Mystic River and the Somerville Community Path) and about invasive trees, however a citywide inventory of the types and density of invasive populations in Somerville has not been completed.

BIODIVERSITY CRISIS

For National Climate Week in 2023, Governor Maura Healey signed an executive order directing the state to develop biodiversity goals.³⁸ Just a few months prior, Somerville staff began work on a pollinator action plan to address threats to pollinator biodiversity. These actions reflect an awareness of the urgent need to respond to global biodiversity loss from habitat loss and fragmentation, pollution, climate change, and invasive species. The health of humans is directly related to non-humans (e.g.: many insects facilitate food growth by pollinating flowers). These actions at state and local levels mark an important movement to support wildlife even in an urban context. Somerville is proud to be at the forefront of these efforts (look to our Somerville Pollinator Action Plan for more information).³⁹

36 MassWildlife, “Invasive Plants,” 2024.

37 City of Somerville, “Plantings in City Spaces: Information on Natives Policy & Invasive Plants,” 2024.

38 Governor Healey and Driscoll, *No. 618: Biodiversity Conservation in Massachusetts* (2023).

39 City of Somerville, *Somerville Pollinator Action Plan* (2024).

Tree Preservation Ordinance

On June 27, 2019, the Somerville City Council passed a Tree Preservation Ordinance (Ord. #2019-15). The intent was to slow the removal of trees on private property—a source of city-wide canopy loss. The ordinance went into effect on August 1, 2019. It incorporates and updates the prior City of Somerville Tree Ordinance, which historically only set requirements for the removal of public trees.

The new ordinance requires that any removed noninvasive tree on private property measuring more than eight inches in diameter at breast height (DBH) must be replaced. Replacements may come in the form of planting an amount equal to the DBH of the removed tree(s), or as a payment made to the City's Tree Fund.

Homeowners who live on the property do not need to meet the replanting or payment requirements if the home is fewer than three units, but they must still apply for a permit and provide plans regarding the proposed tree removal(s). The ordinance also includes exemptions for emergency situations such as hazardous, dead, or dying trees. A permit is not required for the removal of trees under eight inches DBH or the removal of invasive tree species.

Somerville is committed to enforcement practices that prevent, dissuade, and/or mitigate tree canopy loss due to development. Since passing the Tree Preservation Ordinance, the City has progressed in the preservation of its canopy. The tree removal permit process will also become an important data source for tracking canopy loss on private property. This information will inform where our tree planting efforts are needed most.

TREE PRESERVATION ORDINANCE DATA POINTS:

Since 2019, the Ordinance has:

- Collected over **\$245,000 FOR THE TREE FUND**
- Required the planting of **OVER 606 TREES**

Native Planting Ordinance

In response to the biodiversity crisis and to create habitat for native species, Somerville advocates and then City Councilor, Katjana Ballantyne, worked with the Public Space and Urban Forestry Division to pass a Native Planting Ordinance. This policy establishes minimum percent requirements for native plants and trees planted in City-owned parks, open spaces, and streets. The legislation, which applies to new plantings by or on behalf of the City, passed unanimously in March of 2021.

The Ordinance requires that native species constitute:

- 100% of all new plantings in any City-owned land on the Community Path, the Green Line Extension corridor, and riverfront areas.
- At least 75% of new plantings in City-owned parks.
- At least 50% of street trees and new plantings in bioswales, plazas, streetscapes, and other City-owned property.

It defines native plants and trees as those with origins in North America east of the Mississippi River.

Somerville's policy is believed to be the first of its kind to include percentage requirements for planting native species across all landscape types in a city. Similar legislation in other cities encourages doing so but without a specific metric.

Somerville's ordinance prioritizes planting native species while also accounting for the realities of urban planting conditions and climate change. Some native plants and trees aren't equipped to survive in Somerville today because they evolved thousands of years ago in an environment radically different from the modern-day city. Climate change will also bring hotter temperatures and more severe weather events, so any plantings installed now need to tolerate more extreme heat, higher salt concentrations, and longer periods of flooding and drought. The Somerville Native Planting Ordinance allows flexibility for climate change adaptation.

Background image: Native planting for Ball Square installed in fall 2023.



Somerville Pollinator Action Plan



After establishing the Native Planting Ordinance in 2021, community advocates and newly elected Mayor Katjana Ballantyne sought to further promote biodiversity on a local level. Pollinator populations are declining in New England and worldwide due to habitat loss and pesticide use. This is one part of a global biodiversity crisis happening because of development, industry, and climate change.

In response, Mayor Ballantyne tasked the Division of Public Space and Urban Forestry with developing a plan to foster habitat for pollinators in the city. Staff and a Mayor-appointed advisory committee led the effort to develop the Somerville Pollinator Action Plan (SPAP) which was published in 2024.

The committee included youth, community advocates, inter-departmental City staff, relevant City committee representatives, and members of local non-profit groups. They first met in early 2023 and established goals for the planning process, hired a consultant, provided feedback on the plan drafts, and assisted with outreach. Involving these community members from the start intended to ensure the process was democratic and reflected community priorities. Given that Somerville does not have large tracts of conserved habitat, SPAP's success depends on private and public action. These committee members will be liaisons for pollinator habitat in our community long after the project is complete.

The SPAP proposes actions to maximize existing urban habitats and ways to expand habitat on private and public property.

The plan:

- **Describes** Somerville-specific and regionally significant **pollinator species**.
- **Identifies existing and potential pollinator habitat** within the city.
- **Educates** public servants and residents on the interdependence of pollinators, habitat, and resilient human life.
- **Proposes** feasible ways that public servants and residents can **foster Somerville-appropriate pollinator habitat**.

In addition to the SPAP itself, the team will develop a series of pilot project ideas and project proposals that City staff will work to implement in the coming years. The Somerville Pollinator Action Plan is the first of its kind created for a densely settled urban environment.



Somerville Pollinator Action Plan Advisory Committee tours the Somerville Growing Center.

The Somerville Pollinator Action Plan can be found here: <http://voice.somervillema.gov/somerville-pollinator-action-plan>

Miyawaki Micro-Forest

As communities nationwide look for innovative ways to address climate change, the City of Somerville took an outside-the-box approach and planted its first Miyawaki forest. On October 22, 2023, over 80 community members gathered behind Somerville High School to plant 410 native shrubs and trees. Their generosity made it possible to transform 1,500 square feet of weedy, unused land into a biodiverse new forest.

Inspired by global and local precedents, a “Miyawaki forest” refers to a strategy developed by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki. His technique encourages quick growth by densely planting a wide range of native species in a small area. This arrangement mimics natural forest behavior where species grow taller and more robust as they compete for sun, water, and nutrients. The result of this high-density, native planting is a mature forest adapted for our region in as few as 20-30 years. These forests add biodiversity, increase resilience to heat extremes, reduce air pollution, capture carbon dioxide, and provide habitat and food for birds and pollinators.

This project emerged from the advocacy of Somerville’s community members, Mayor Ballantyne, City staff, with support from Biodiversity for a Livable Climate and their partner SUGi. Somerville’s Public Space and Urban Forestry team worked with Biodiversity for a Livable Climate’s Maya Dutta to organize the planting. Site prep, planting, and mulching required substantial effort from many. Volunteers, Department of Public Works Grounds Division staff, Somerville High School staff and students, and City staff put in hours of work to make this a reality. For the first three years, volunteers and City staff will weed and water and then the forest should be self-sufficient. The result is a planting that many can say they had a hand in making a reality.

Planting small, dense forests is not a typical local practice. Each time a city or town does so, we learn more about ways to make our urban lands resilient, livable, and beautiful. At the time of the next OSRP update, we should have a clear sense of the efficacy of this type of planting in Somerville. We look forward to watching it grow.



Photos by Cassandra Kios. Courtesy of SUGi.





MIYAWAKI MICRO-FOREST DATA POINTS:

- **1,500** square feet
- **34 NATIVE SPECIES**
- **410 PLANTS** planted
- **OVER 80 VOLUNTEERS**



SECTION 5

Inventory of Lands of Conservation and Recreation Interest

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Facing Page: The East Somerville Committee Action (ESCA) Park was opened in 2023. It was completed through a public-private partnership and features dense tree plantings to help clean pollutants from the air along I-93.

As this Plan illustrates, the City of Somerville's parks and open spaces comprise a vital resource for individuals, neighborhoods, and the city as a whole. All of these spaces are used extensively by the city's more than 80,000 residents. The following section provides an inventory of parks and open spaces in Somerville by property ownership and land protection.

Somerville's comprehensive master plan, *SomerVision* (2010), established an aspirational goal of adding 125 new acres of publicly accessible open space to the city by 2030 (see **Section 3D.3** for more information). When the plan was updated in 2021, this target was adjusted to 105 acres of new publicly accessible open space reflecting the 15 acres of space created after 2010.

New parks, plazas, squares, commons, and other publicly accessible open spaces are created by both public and private entities. First, the City of Somerville builds new parks and other public open spaces. For example, the City acquired land at 217 Somerville Avenue to build a new park (Ken Kelly Park). It is slated to open in 2025.

Second, developers create new open spaces through regulatory incentive or personal desire. The Master Planned Development (MPD) overlay district in the Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) aligns with portions of Somerville designated as "Transform" areas (see the *SomerVision* Map in **Section 3D.3**). The MPD incentivizes the construction of open space in exchange for taller buildings and increased density. In the Union Square and Boynton Yards neighborhoods, developers recently completed open spaces required by their approved master plans: Boynton Yards and Union Square Station Plaza.

Leonard Grimes Park, on the other hand, was built by the developer of an affordable housing project who was not located in the

Master Planned Development overlay district, but was required in a deed restriction to preserve the adjacent parcel as a public park.

These developer-built public spaces are regulated as 10 potential types of open spaces. There are four types of parks (regional, community, neighborhood, pocket), three types of commons (public common, public square, green) and three types of plazas (central, through block, pocket) (see **Section 4B** for more information). The selected type, size, and features of any privately developed public open space can evolve from public comment and City staff/Planning Board feedback, zoning regulations,¹ and relevant City plans.

5A. Land Ownership

Somerville has a total of 96 parcels equaling 175 acres of open space of varying types. The amount of open space has increased by 16.1 acres since the 2016 OSRP, with increases in State-owned, City-owned, and privately owned open space (see **Table 5-1**).

150.7 acres (86%) of Somerville's open space is owned by State or local government and 24.4 acres (14%) are privately owned. The State is the largest open space landowner with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) owning 73.4 acres and the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) owning 13.1 acres. The MBTA's open space increased significantly since the 2016 OSRP due to the completion of the Somerville Community Path as part of the Green Line Extension project. This off-street, multi-use path now traverses the entire length of Somerville and connects to regional paths east and west of the city. The City of Somerville

1 City of Somerville, "Public Realm," in *Somerville Zoning Ordinance* (2019), 13.1.

TABLE 5-1 PUBLIC AND PRIVATE OPEN SPACE BY OWNERSHIP

OPEN SPACE TYPE	OPEN SPACE OWNERSHIP	2024 ACRES	2016 ACRES
Public Open Space	City of Somerville	63.4	
	City of Somerville/MassDOT Cremin (Otis Street) Playground	0.2	
	City of Somerville/Private East Somerville Committee Action Park	0.6	
	TOTAL CITY OWNED	64.2	58.3
	Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR)	73.4	
	Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA)	13.1	
	TOTAL STATE OWNED	86.5	81.3
	Privately Owned, Publicly Accessible Assembly Row Dog Park Assembly Square Block 2A Plaza Avon Street Community Garden Davis Square Plaza Great Lawn at Mass General Brigham Martha Perry Lowe Park MaxPac Square Metro9 Park Middlesex Plaza TAB Building Basketball Courts Tufts Community Garden	6.4	
	TOTAL PRIVATELY OWNED (publicly accessible)	6.4	1.2
Privately Owned Open Space (Restricted Public Access)	Benjamin Banneker Charter School	4.2	
	Tufts University Fields	13.8	
	TOTAL PRIVATELY OWNED (restricted access)	18.0	18.0
TOTAL OPEN SPACE (City, State, Private)		175.0	158.9
TOTAL LAND AREA IN SOMERVILLE		2624.0	2624.0
TOTAL % OF OPEN SPACE LAND AREA		6.7%	6.1%

ville is the second largest open space land holder with 64.2 acres of open space.

Of the 24.4 acres of open space that are privately owned, some spaces are publicly accessible while others have limited public access. For example, public access is available for Tufts University's athletic fields on a limited basis and is administered by the City's Parks and Recreation Department.

In contrast, the Benjamin Banneker Charter School's (BBCS, formerly Cambridge Matignon School) athletic fields are not open to the public. Together, open space with limited public access totals 18 acres.

The remaining 6.4 acres are considered publicly accessible and commonly referred to as "POPS" or privately owned public space.

5B.

Protected Open Space

As this Plan illustrates, the City of Somerville's parks and open spaces comprise a vital resource for individuals, neighborhoods, and the city as a whole. All of these spaces are used extensively by the city's more than 80,000 residents. As articulated in SomerVision 2040 and by community members during our outreach process, the desires to expand, protect, and activate open spaces are important shared community values. The City of Somerville works diligently to ensure that its residents have access to as much green, open, and inviting space as possible. Below is a description of all forms of open space protection in use within the City of Somerville (see **Table 5-2**).

TYPES OF PROTECTION

Article 97 Protection. Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution is a codification of the "Public Trust Doctrine." It protects publicly owned land acquired for open space, natural resource, conservation, or other related uses such as recreation. This form of protection is the gold standard of open space protection. Changing its use is extremely challenging. Selling, transferring, or converting the use of an Article 97 property requires a vote of the Conservation Commission and the City Council as well as a roll-call vote by a two-thirds majority of both the State House and Senate. Article 97 is triggered when a property is acquired and dedicated to the public in a manner enforceable by the courts. Many park construction grants require dedication to the public, giving them Article 97 protection. This is the case with many Somerville parks and playgrounds.

POPS. Developers of privately owned public spaces in the MPD overlay district are required by the SZO to dedicate their open space "to the public in perpetuity by a covenant or other

deed restriction..."² This gives them protection under Article 97.

Easements, Deed Restrictions, and Covenants.

Open space protections can be written into legal documents attached to the property. They are imposed by a property owner and recorded at the Registry of Deeds. Easements used for POPS give the public legal rights to enjoy the site in perpetuity. If the privately developed property is conveyed back to the City, easements grant the developer access to maintain the site in perpetuity.³ Easements have no time limit and both parties must agree to them and agree to any amendments. A deed restriction is a binding agreement. It "runs with the land," meaning it is applied to land regardless of ownership. To be enforceable, a covenant must "touch and concern the land." It can limit the size, type, or number of structures, as well as the appearance, land use, or type of development. These are enforced by local governments, condo associations, or non-profits and may have a time limit. If specified in the legal language, these documents can preserve a parcel as open space in perpetuity, subject to termination after a period of years (defined in the document, statute, or common law) or until an owner of the land desires to change the use.

Conservation Restriction. Conservation Restrictions (CR) permanently protect properties with natural resource or recreation value. They are legally enforceable and prevent future uses that don't align with those conservation values. CRs must be approved by the State Division of Conservation Services and are held by an organization like a government body or non-profit dedicated to conservation. Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding for land acquisition requires preservation through a CR. In 2019, Somerville's first CR was placed on 5 Palmer Avenue, a former resi-

2 City of Somerville, "Master Planned Development (MPD)," in *Somerville Zoning Ordinance* (2019), 8.4.7.c.

3 For more information about POPS development, see: City of Somerville, *Civic Space Design Guide to Privately Owned Public Space* (2024).

TABLE 5-2 OPEN SPACE LEVELS OF PROTECTION IN SOMERVILLE

LEVEL OF PROTECTION	SUM OF TOTAL ACRES	% OF TOTAL OPEN SPACE
In Perpetuity (Article 97, CR, etc.)	133.5	76.3%
<i>entire property</i>	112.3	
<i>part of property</i>	21.2	
CIV District	15.8	9.0%
Deed Restriction or Covenant Privately Owned Public Spaces Built Prior to 2019 (Exact level of protection to be determined)	5.6	3.2%
City Ownership (Not CIV District)	1.1	0.6%
None	19.0	10.9%
GRAND TOTAL	175.0	100%

dential lot that was acquired using CPA funds and transformed into a community garden. The CR is held by Groundwork Somerville.

City Ownership. City ownership of open space is not formal legal protection. These parcels are preserved through the discretion of the City’s administration, but municipal officials are accountable to the public and their needs. The City of Somerville can acquire land for open space multiple ways, including receiving privately owned public spaces conveyed to the city, fee-simple purchases, and eminent domain.

Civic (CIV) Zoning District. All land owned by the Federal, State, or local government, including most of Somerville’s open spaces and all public utilities, are mapped in the “Civic” zoning district. This includes cemeteries and most schoolyards (some schoolyards are protected under Article 97). This district designation restricts redevelopment to municipal buildings, utilities, open spaces, and buildings aligned with those uses. Using this land for private development would require an act of City Council to change the zoning district. This adds a bureaucratic layer of protection to many open spaces.

Rights of Way (ROW). According to the SZO (1.3.2.c: Unmapped Land), any area that

is “not specifically included in any zoning district on the maps of the Official Zoning Atlas is subject to the provisions of Article 11: Public Realm Standards and classified as the Civic District.”⁴ Our streets and some civic spaces like Union Square Plaza (which is partly a ROW) are not mapped and are thus considered part of the CIV district. That means they are protected from development as described above.

Local Historic District. Local Historic District (LHD) designation could provide an extra layer of protection on an open space that is designated as a historic property. For example, Milk Row Cemetery is a designated LHD due to its historic significance as an early 19th century burial ground. Any proposed changes to the site come under the review of the Historic Preservation Commission and require their approval. Approval is not guaranteed.

Note: There are no Chapter 61 lands or Agricultural Preservation Restrictions in Somerville.

Disclaimer: The definitions of legal interests in land are intended to illustrate the types of protections and not intended to constitute legal advice or conclusions.

4 City of Somerville, “Glossary,” in *Somerville Zoning Ordinance* (2019), 1.3.2.c.

TABLE 5-3 CITY-OWNED PROPERTY

PARK NAME	OWNER-SHIP	MANAGEMENT AGENCY	PUBLIC ACCESS	OPEN SPACE PROTECTION	DEC 2023 CONDITION	EXISTING ZONING	ADA ACCESS	RECREATION TYPE	RECREATION POTENTIAL	FUNDING
Albert F. Argenziano Schoolyard	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Good	CIV	X	Active	No additional	Local
Albion Playground	City	DPW, Con Comm	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Active, Basketball	No additional	LWCF, USH/ PARC
Allen Street Playground and Community Garden	City	DPW, Con Comm	Yes	In perpetuity	Excellent	CIV	X	Active	No additional	CPA, LWCF, CDBG, USH/ PARC
Art Farm	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Design	CIV	X	Passive, Farming, Performance	Urban agriculture, walking path, fitness, performance and event space, water	ArtPlace America, Mass Cultural Council, CPA, Local
Arthur D. Healey Schoolyard and Community Playground	City	DPW, School Dept, REC	Yes	CIV protection (partial)	Excellent	CIV/UR	X	Active, Basketball, Soccer	No additional	Local, CPA, CDBG
Bailey Park	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Poor	CIV	X	Passive	Water	LWCF
Benjamin G. Brown Schoolyard	City	DPW, School Dept	Yes	CIV protection	Excellent	CIV	X	Active	No additional	Local, CPA, ARPA, CDBG
Bow & Somerville Ave Triangle	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Good	Not Zoned		Passive	None	
Bow & Summer Triangle	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Good	Not Zoned		Passive	None	
Boynton Yards Park	City	Lincoln Property Company	Yes	City ownership	Excellent	MPD overlay CI	X	Passive	No additional	Private developer
Central Hill Park	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity (partial), CIV protection (partial)	Good	CIV	X	Active, Passive, Performance, Soccer	No additional	Local, CPA, PARC
Chuckie Harris Park	City	DPW, Con Comm	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Active	No additional	PARC, Local

TABLE 5-3 CITY-OWNED PROPERTY, CONTINUED

PARK NAME	OWNER-SHIP	MANAGEMENT AGENCY	PUBLIC ACCESS	OPEN SPACE PROTECTION	DEC 2023 CONDITION	EXISTING ZONING	ADA ACCESS	RECREATION TYPE	RECREATION POTENTIAL	FUNDING
Conway Park	City	DCR, REC	Yes	In perpetuity	Excellent	CIV	X	Active, Soccer, Baseball, Softball	No additional	LWCF, EPA (2004: LWCF, USH/ PARC)
Corbett-McKenna Park	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Active	Courts	LWCF
Cremin (Otis Street) Playground	City/ MassDOT	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Active	No additional	PARC (1984: LWCF)
Cummings Building	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Good	CIV	X	Active	Water, courts, play equipment	Local
Dickerman Playground	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Active	Courts	PARC, LWCF
Durell Community Garden	City	DPW, Con Comm	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Passive	No additional	USH
East Branch Library Lawn	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Good	CIV	X	Passive	No additional	Local
East Somerville Committee Action Park	City/ Private	East Side Place Condominium	Yes	In perpetuity	Excellent	CIV	X	Passive	Courts, water	LWCF, Private Developer
East Somerville Community Schoolyard	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Good	CIV	X	Active, Basketball, Soccer	Water	Local
Ed Leathers Community Park	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Passive	Tables, water	USH, CDBG
Edgerly Education Center Schoolyard	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Good	CIV	X	Active	Water	CDBG, Local
Florence Playground	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Poor	CIV	X	Active	No additional	CDBG
Gilman Square	City	DPW	Yes	None	Design	MR4	X	Passive	Tables, seating, courts, play equipment, urban agriculture, field, water	Local

TABLE 5-3 CITY-OWNED PROPERTY, CONTINUED

PARK NAME	OWNER-SHIP	MANAGEMENT AGENCY	PUBLIC ACCESS	OPEN SPACE PROTECTION	DEC 2023 CONDITION	EXISTING ZONING	ADA ACCESS	RECREATION TYPE	RECREATION POTENTIAL	FUNDING
Glen Park and Capuano Early Childhood Center Schoolyard	City	DPW, REC	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Active, Soccer	Courts, water	LWCF, CDBG, CPA
Glen Park Community Garden	City	DPW, Con Comm	Yes	In perpetuity (partial), CIV protection (partial)	Good	CIV	X	Passive	No additional	LWCF, CDBG, CPA
Grimmons Park	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Active	Courts	Local
Henry Hansen Park	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Design	CIV	X	Passive	No additional	Local, CPA
Hodgkins-Curtin Park	City	DPW, REC	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Active, Baseball	No additional	LWCF
Hoyt-Sullivan Park	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Active, Basketball	No additional	CPA, LWCF, PARC
John F. Kennedy Schoolyard	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Good	CIV	X	Active, Basketball	Play equipment, courts, water	Local, CPA
Kenney Park	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Good	CIV	X	Active, Basketball	No additional	Local
Leonard Grimes Park	City	31 Tufts Street LLC c/o Wingate Management	Yes	City ownership	Excellent		X	Passive	No additional	Private developer
Lexington Park	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Active, Basketball	Water	
Lincoln Park	City	DPW, REC	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Active, Basketball, Soccer, Skatepark	No additional	LWCF
Lou Ann David Park	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Excellent	CIV	X	Passive, Performance	Courts, event space, water	Developer, CPA
Marshall Street Playground	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Active	Courts	USH, OCB
Middlesex Park	City	PS Northeast, LLC.	Yes	SPC	Construction	ASMD	X	Passive	No additional	Private developer
Milk Row Cemetery	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Good	CIV	X	Passive, Historic	None	CPA

TABLE 5-3 CITY-OWNED PROPERTY, CONTINUED

PARK NAME	OWNER-SHIP	MANAGEMENT AGENCY	PUBLIC ACCESS	OPEN SPACE PROTECTION	DEC 2023 CONDITION	EXISTING ZONING	ADA ACCESS	RECREATION TYPE	RECREATION POTENTIAL	FUNDING
Morse-Kelley Playground	City	DPW, Con Comm	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Active	No additional	LWCF, PARC, CPA
Mystic Housing Development	City	SHA	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	UR/CIV	X	Active	Courts	USH
Nathan Tufts Park	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Passive, Historic	Play equipment	Local, LWCF
North Street Veterans Playground	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	UR/CIV	X	Active, Basketball	No additional	PARC
Nunziato Field	City	DPW, REC	Yes	CIV protection	Poor	CIV	X	Active, Soccer	Water	Local
Osgood Park	City	DPW, Con Comm	Yes	In perpetuity	Poor	CIV	X	Active	Courts	LWCF, USH
Palmacci Playground	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Active	Water	LWCF
Paul Revere Park	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Good	CIV	X	Historic	None	CDBG
Perkins Playground	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Poor	CIV	X	Active	Courts, small field	LWCF, USH
Perry Park	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Passive	Water	USH/PARC
Powder House Circle	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Good	CIV		Passive	None	
Prospect Hill Park	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Excellent	CIV	X	Passive, Historic	No additional	CPA, PARC, CDBG (prior: LWCF)
Quincy Street Park	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Poor	CIV	X	Passive	No additional	Local
Seven Hills Park	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Poor	CIV	X	Passive	Courts, event space, tables and seating, water	
Somerville Community Growing Center	City	Friends of the Growing Center, DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Good	CIV	X	Passive	No additional	CDBG, CPA

TABLE 5-3 CITY-OWNED PROPERTY, CONTINUED

PARK NAME	OWNER-SHIP	MANAGEMENT AGENCY	PUBLIC ACCESS	OPEN SPACE PROTECTION	DEC 2023 CONDITION	EXISTING ZONING	ADA ACCESS	RECREATION TYPE	RECREATION POTENTIAL	FUNDING
Somerville Junction Park	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Construction	CIV	X	Passive	No additional	PARC, CPA, ARPA, CDBG (Prior = State, Local, EPA)
South St Farm	City	Groundwork Somerville	Yes	CIV protection	Good	CIV	X	Passive, Farming	No additional	MDAR, CPA
Statue Park	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Good	CIV		Passive	No additional	Local
Stone Place Park	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Passive	Tables and seating, court	USH/PARC
Symphony Park	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Passive, Performance	No additional	PARC
Trum Field	City	DPW, REC	Yes	In perpetuity	Poor	CIV	X	Baseball	Courts, event space, watter	LWCF, USH
Trum Playground	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Active	Water, courts	LWCF, USH/ PARC and/or UPARR
Union Square Plaza	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Good	Not Zoned	X	Passive	Event space	Local
Union Square Station Plaza	City	Prospect Union Square	Yes	City ownership	Excellent	CIV	X	Passive	No additional	Developer
Union Square Triangle	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Good	Not Zoned	X	Passive	None	Local
Veterans Memorial Cemetery	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Poor	CIV	X	Passive	None	Local
Walnut Street Park	City	DPW, Con Comm	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Active	Courts	LWCF, USH
West Branch Library	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Excellent	CIV	X	Passive	No additional	CPA, Local
West Somerville Neighborhood Schoolyard	City	DPW, School Dept	Yes	CIV protection	Excellent	CIV	X	Active, Basketball	No additional	Local, CPA, ARPA, CDBG
Wilson Square	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Good	Not Zoned	X	Passive	None	

TABLE 5-3 CITY-OWNED PROPERTY, CONTINUED

PARK NAME	OWNER-SHIP	MANAGEMENT AGENCY	PUBLIC ACCESS	OPEN SPACE PROTECTION	DEC 2023 CONDITION	EXISTING ZONING	ADA ACCESS	RECREATION TYPE	RECREATION POTENTIAL	FUNDING
Winter Hill Community Innovation Schoolyard	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Good	CIV	X	Active, Basketball, Soccer	Water, tables	CPA, Local
Woodstock Playground	City	DPW	Yes	In perpetuity	Poor	UR/CIV	X	Active, Basketball	Dog park	LWCF
Zero New Washington Street Park	City	DPW	Yes	CIV protection	Poor	CIV	X	Passive	No additional	Local

TABLE 5-4 CITY-OWNED PROPERTY, CONSERVATION RESTRICTION

PARK NAME	OWNER-SHIP	MANAGEMENT AGENCY	PUBLIC ACCESS	OPEN SPACE PROTECTION	DEC 2023 CONDITION	EXISTING ZONING	ADA ACCESS	RECREATION TYPE	RECREATION POTENTIAL	FUNDING
Glen Park Community Garden (partial)	City	DPW, Con Comm	Yes	In perpetuity	Excellent	CIV	X	Passive	No additional	CPA

TABLE 5-5 STATE-OWNED PROPERTY

PARK NAME	OWNERSHIP	MANAGEMENT AGENCY	PUBLIC ACCESS	OPEN SPACE PROTECTION	DEC 2023 CONDITION	EXISTING ZONING	ADA ACCESS	RECREATION TYPE	FUNDING
Alewife Brook Reservation	State	DCR	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Passive, Conservation	
Community Path	State	MBTA, DPW, Con Comm	Yes	In perpetuity (partial), CIV protection (partial)	Good	CIV/Not Zoned	X	Active	USH, CPA, MBTA, Local
Dilboy Auxiliary Fields	State	DCR, REC	Yes	In perpetuity	Design	CIV	X	Active, Soccer, Baseball	CPA
Dilboy Memorial Stadium & Pool	State	DCR, REC	Yes	In perpetuity	Excellent	CIV	X	Active, Basketball, Tennis, Baseball, Soccer, Track, Pool	Local
Draw 7 Park	State	DCR	Yes	In perpetuity	Design	CIV	X	Active	
Foss Park	State	DCR	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Active, Soccer, Tennis, Baseball, Pool	
Mystic River Reservation/ Blessing of the Bay Park	State	DCR	Yes	In perpetuity	Design	CIV	X	Passive, Conservation	CPA
Sylvester Baxter Riverfront Park	State	DCR	Yes	In perpetuity	Good	CIV	X	Passive, Active	

TABLE 5-6 PRIVATE WITH PUBLIC USE

PARK NAME	OWNERSHIP	MANAGEMENT AGENCY	PUBLIC ACCESS	OPEN SPACE PROTECTION	DEC 2023 CONDITION	EXISTING ZONING	ADA ACCESS	RECREATION TYPE	FUNDING
Assembly Row Dog Park	Private	Street Retail, Inc. (FRIT)	Yes	None	Excellent	ASMD	X	Passive	Developer
Assembly Square Block 2A Plaza	Private	Street Retail, Inc. (FRIT)	Yes	SPC	Excellent	ASMD	X	Passive	Developer
Avon Street Community Garden	Private	DPW, Con Comm	Yes	None	Good	NR	X	Passive	Local
Davis Square Plaza	Private?		Yes	CIV protection	Good	CIV	X	Passive	
Great Lawn at Mass General Brigham	Private	Mass General Brigham	Yes	SPC	Excellent	ASMD	X	Passive	Developer
Martha Perry Lowe Park	Private	John M. Corcoran and Co.	Yes	In perpetuity	Excellent	MR5	X	Passive	Developer
MaxPac Square	Private	MP Maxwells Green LLC	Yes	SPC	Excellent	UR	X	Passive	
Metro9 Park	Private	Somerville Millbrook Assoc LLP	Yes	SPC	Excellent	HR	X	Passive	
Middlesex Plaza	Private	PS Northeast, LLC.	Yes	SPC	Good	ASMD	X	Passive	
TAB Building Basketball Courts	Private	Tufts University	Yes	None	Good	CB	X	Active, Basketball	
Tufts Community Garden	Private	DPW, Con Comm	Yes	None	Good	TU	X	Passive	

TABLE 5-7 PRIVATE WITH PRIVATE USE

PARK NAME	OWNERSHIP	MANAGEMENT AGENCY	PUBLIC ACCESS	OPEN SPACE PROTECTION	DEC 2023 CONDITION	EXISTING ZONING	ADA ACCESS	RECREATION TYPE	FUNDING
Benjamin Banneker Charter Public School	Private	Benjamin Banneker Charter Public School	No	None	Good	NR	X	Active	
Tufts University Recreational Field	Private	Tufts University	No	None	Good	TU		Active	
Tufts University Triangle Field	Private	Tufts University	No	None	Good	TU		Active, Soccer	



Somerville Schoolyards

In the last decade, Somerville has focused on transforming K-8 schoolyards into state-of-the-art open spaces for students and residents. These schoolyards have always provided much-needed outdoor spaces for kids to run and play. Most of them, however, were outdated and lacked age-appropriate play features, trees, and vegetation. They also lacked ADA-compliant routes and surfaces.

Key to the transformation of Somerville's schoolyards is the involvement of neighborhood residents and the school community in the design process. Inclusive engagement ensures that redesigned schoolyards are effective and valuable as school spaces and as neighborhood parks after school hours.

While individual to each school, all the designs incorporate safe, active, age-appropriate recreation features, unstructured and inclusive play elements for students of different abili-

ties, and calm spaces where children can relax and socialize. Designs also include significant new tree plantings, landscaping, garden beds, ADA-compliant safety surfaces, topographic variation, good circulation, seating, and artwork. In addition, several schoolyards now include very popular small- to medium-sized recreational fields for school use and city recreation programs.

Studies have documented multiple physical, emotional, and academic benefits to schoolyard renovations. Teachers and school administrators also report that attendance, behavior, and test scores improve following well-designed schoolyard updates. By setting a high standard for design, incorporating recreation spaces and educational elements for the schools, and including climate resiliency features, many of these schoolyard renovations have been transformational.



SOMERVILLE SCHOOLYARDS DATA POINTS:

Completed Schoolyards since 2016:

- Albert F. Argenziano School
- Arthur D. Healey School
- Benjamin G. Brown School
- Edgerly Education Center
- West Somerville Neighborhood School
- Winter Hill Community Innovation School
- Somerville High School

Top left: Ribbon Cutting at the West Somerville Neighborhood School in 2023.

Top right: Playground outside of Argenziano School.

Left: Winter Hill Community Innovation Schoolyard before renovations and after.

Green Stormwater Infrastructure

In Somerville, like all densely populated cities with high percentages of impermeable surfaces, the problems created by stormwater runoff are becoming more urgent as the frequency of intense storms increases. Minimizing and infiltrating stormwater runoff, controlling flooding, and eliminating pollutants that are carried to regional water bodies are important goals for planners and engineers. One way to achieve these goals is with innovative retention and catchment features in parks and open spaces.

In Lincoln Park, completed in 2018, softball and soccer fields are used for both sports and managing stormwater. Before its renovation, the park flooded regularly during heavy storms. Now, besides hosting sports and recreation activities, infiltration chambers underneath the fields allow water to slowly trickle into the ground without limiting programmed activities on the surface. Additionally, stormwater from the school's roof is stored underground and recycled to irrigate the park.

In the renovation and remediation of Conway Park, completed in 2022, the City was able to install Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI)

features during construction. Like Lincoln Park, Conway is prone to flooding during high intensity storms. Installing GSI features was vital to preserving the park's usability and to mitigating flooding in the area. Conway Park now has 3,743 cubic feet of stormwater storage under the ballfield to capture and detain rainfall where it can infiltrate into the ground. It also has a sand filter layer in the synthetic field to aid in stormwater infiltration. This helps control flooding and replenishes groundwater resources. Additionally, permeable pavers cover an area greater than 1,000 square feet in the small plaza to increase the permeability of the site as a whole. These measures, in combination with the 64 new native trees planted during the renovation of the park, are part of the City's preparations for the increased severity of storms and heat due to a changing climate.

Since many of these stormwater management measures are invisible or underground, the City is also working to reveal Green Stormwater Infrastructure with interpretive signs in parks and a webpage with an interactive map.

For more information, visit: somerma.gov/gsi.



An intricate subsurface stormwater collection system sits below Lincoln Park's athletic fields to alleviate flooding.



GREEN STORMWATER INFRASTRUCTURE DATA POINTS:

PARK: Conway Park

Structural BMPs List	Area (sf)	Storage Volume (cf)	Depth of Filter Course
Porous Pavement	1,060	1,766.66	1.66
Sand Filter/ Synthetic Field	86,980	108,725	n/a
Infiltration Chamber	n/a	3,743	n/a

PARK: Lincoln Park

Structural BMPs List	Storage Volume (cf)
Biofiltration	2,000
Infiltration Chamber	179,044
Rain Harvester Cistern	2,687

Streetscapes

Somerville values vibrant streetscape corridors that create cool, comfortable, and safe travel paths. Streets lined by trees and other vegetation are safer for vehicles and pedestrians as driver stress is reduced and traffic speeds attenuate naturally. Vegetation moderates temperatures and improves air quality. Working streetscapes include green infrastructure that filter and capture stormwater and biodiverse plant palettes that support native pollinators and wildlife.

Somerville's streetscape planning and development has evolved in recent years into a highly collaborative process in which the goals of multiple City departments are aligned. Streetscape projects are currently spearheaded by the Engineering Department in close collaboration with staff from the Mobility and Public Space & Urban Forestry divisions.

Streetscape planning involves a thorough assessment of existing trees and provisions for protecting and maintaining them when at all possible. To increase soil health and water infiltration, tree wells are expanded during sidewalk replacement and permeable pavement is placed around large trees. In addition, new trees are added everywhere possible to create fully tree-lined streets. Where existing

trees have grown so large as to limit ADA-accessibility, trees are often preserved by building tree curb bumpouts that create accessible routes while also increasing the soil availability for tree roots.

While most of the city's streetscape improvements projects are limited to surface reconstruction, some projects also involve complex underground infrastructure changes. These larger scale projects, such as the Somerville Avenue Utility and Streetscape Improvements Project (SAUSI) and the Spring Hill Sewer Separation Project, create opportunities for additional green infrastructure. The SAUSI project resulted in a reduction of 0.7 acres of impervious surface through the construction of new planted areas, rain gardens, stormwater infrastructure, and permeable surfaces along the road. 51 new trees were planted in expanded tree pits with maximized soil volumes using Silva Cells—a soil-filled modular system that holds up the sidewalk while expanding space for root growth. These tree pits are surrounded by porous and permeable pavements for increased water and air exchange. In addition to new drainage, sewer improvements, new water mains, and improving mobility through the project area, the Spring Hill Sewer Separation Project is also adding green stormwater infrastructure including 7 bioretention basins, 3 subsurface infiltration tree trenches, 5 subsurface infiltration trenches, and 195 new trees with structural soil.



SOMERVILLE STREETSCAPES DATA POINTS:

- **3 TREES PRESERVED** by installing tree curb bumpouts in 2023
- **340 NEW TREE WELLS** created as part of City's streetscape projects from 2020-2024



Top left: Silva Cell structures being installed around tree wells in Somerville Avenue. After these structures are filled with soil, they provide trees with a much larger soil volume than is typical for street trees. The increased water and nutrient availability results in healthy, faster-growing trees.

Top right: Installing permeable pavement instead of concrete around large trees increases the amount of water available to these trees, reduces soil compaction, and reduces the chance that large roots will crack and lift the pavement.

Left: New tree curb bumpouts were installed on Evergreen Ave in 2023. These bumpouts re-route the sidewalk into the previous parking lane to provide an accessible pathway around large trees.



Horticultural Maintenance

As more parks are designed as working landscapes, performing functions such as rain-water capture and habitat creation, the need for sophisticated and regular maintenance grows. Complex, all-season planting palettes need maintenance performed by horticultural specialists who understand plants, invasive species, and soils. In 2021, the Public Space & Urban Forestry (PSUF) Division worked with a consultant to create maintenance manuals for five recently renovated parks with more complicated plantings. These manuals contained the original planting plans, described each plant and how it should be cared for, and set a detailed maintenance schedule.

PSUF then worked with the Department of Public Works to pilot a horticultural care program. A specialty horticulturalist was hired to care for the five parks according to the maintenance manual. The horticulturalist contractor makes five visits per year per park, removes invasives, conditions soil, prunes and trims, and reports on plant health.

This program has been a successful inter-departmental collaboration and the quality of our plantings in these parks is much improved. Caring for plantings in parks makes a difference in function as well as appearance. PSUF regularly reminds City officials, the public, and other City departments that parks and trees are assets that require resources for their care. The three-year contract ended in 2024, and a new horticulturalist team was hired in 2025 to care for 12 parks.



Horticultural care includes weeding, trimming growth back from paths, pruning, and transplanting plants. This kind of care allows us to plant and care for more complicated garden designs throughout the city.



ACCOMPLISHMENTS DATA POINTS:

- **23 PARK IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS** completed since 2016
- **28% OF TOTAL OPEN SPACE IMPROVED** since 2016
- **16.1 ACRES** open space acreage added since 2016

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Teamwork. The City of Somerville is proud of its open space and recreation accomplishments achieved since the last OSRP (2016). These achievements reflect the work of a diverse team from many City departments, including:

- **OSPCD:** plans and manages renovation and construction of City parks, open spaces, and streetscapes.
- **Parks & Recreation:** operates programs for residents of all ages in our open spaces.
- **DPW Buildings and Grounds:** maintains and repairs all City-owned outdoor properties.
- **Capital Projects:** provides construction oversight for the built environment.
- **Accessibility Services:** advocates and advises on accessible and inclusive open spaces.
- **Office of Sustainability & Environment:** collaborates on climate change adaptations in parks.
- **Office of Food Access & Healthy Communities:** advocates for food security, community resilience, and active living.
- **Procurement & Contracting Services:** handles purchasing and design/construction contracts.
- **Finance and Grants Development:** identifies and secures funding.
- **Law:** provides counsel for all legal matters.

Open space projects in Somerville also include the active support and dedication of many committed community partners. These individuals, nonprofits, public/private partnerships, and other associations provide advocacy, education, funding, and stewardship of Somerville's outdoor space network. Without their contributions, Somerville's parks and recreational areas would not be as well used, cared for, and cherished as they are today.

Report Card. Measuring against the last OSRP (2016-2023), Somerville has met most of its open space goals and has completed 23 park construction projects. These represent improvements to around 49 acres of our open spaces, which is about 28% of total open space. Since 2016, the City has added 16.1 acres of new open space and more is in the pipeline for 2025 and beyond.

The following is a list of the 2016 OSRP goals and a description of the progress made since it was written.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS TABLE 1 PARK PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

DONE?	PROPERTY NAME	PROJECT TYPE (NEW CONSTRUCTION OR RENOVATION)	2016 OSRP TARGET GOAL (YEAR)	ACTUAL	NOTES
Done	Cremin Playground	Renovation	2017	2017	
Done	Hoyt Sullivan Playground	Renovation	2017	2018	
Done	Lincoln Park	Renovation	2017	2018	
Done	Winter Hill Community Innovation Schoolyard	Renovation	2017	2018	
Done	Powder House School Park (now Lou Ann David)	Renovation	2017	2021	
In Design	ArtFarm	New Construction	2018		Postponed due to construction of new stormwater infrastructure.
Done	Prospect Hill Park	Renovation	2018	2020	
Done	Allen Street Playground	Renovation	2018	2020	
Partially Complete	Community Path improvements	Renovation	2018		Repairs done in 2017-2019. Extension opened 2023.
Done	Henry Hansen Memorial Park	Renovation	2019	2024	
Design Complete	Nunziato Field	Renovation	2019		Construction on hold.
Done	Healey Schoolyard	Renovation	2019	2023	Construction included completion of Joe Mackey Field.
Done	Conway Field	Renovation	2019	2022	Both field and park renovated.
Under Construction	Somerville Junction Park	Renovation	2023	2025	
	Corbett McKenna Playground	Renovation	2023		
Partially Complete	Dilboy (DCR)	Renovation	2023	2021	Field update anticipated for 2025.
Under Construction	Draw 7 Park (DCR)	Renovation	2023		
Partially Complete	Foss Park (DCR)	Renovation	2023	2021	Field, pool, and splash pad updated in 2021.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS TABLE 2 ADDITIONAL COMPLETED PROJECTS

DONE?	PROPERTY NAME	PROJECT TYPE (NEW CONSTRUCTION OR RENOVATION)	COMPLETION DATE	NOTES
Done	Albert F. Argenziano Schoolyard	Renovation	2018	
Done	Metro9 Park (formerly Millbrook Park)	New Construction	2018	Privately owned public space.
Done	Milk Row Cemetery	Renovation	2019	
Done	Somerville Community Growing Center	Renovation	2019	
Done	South Street Farm	Renovation	2019	
Partially Complete	Mystic River Reservation/ Blessing of the Bay Park	Renovation	2021	Partial renovation.
Done	West Branch Library	Renovation	2021	
Done	Assembly Row Dog Park	New Construction	2022	Privately owned public space.
Done	Central Hill Playground	Renovation	2022	
Done	Benjamin G. Brown Schoolyard	Renovation	2023	
Done	East Somerville Committee Action	New Construction	2023	Privately owned public space.
Done	Edgerly Education Center Schoolyard	Renovation	2023	
Done	Martha Perry Lowe Park	New Construction	2023	Privately owned public space.
Done	Union Square Station Plaza	New Construction	2023	
Done	West Somerville Neighborhood School	Renovation	2023	
Done	Glen Park Community Garden	New Construction	2025	
Under Construction	Middlesex Park	Renovation and New Construction	anticipated 2025	Privately owned public space.
Done	Boynton Yards Park	New Construction	2024	
Done	Leonard Grimes Park	New Construction	2024	
Under Construction	Ken Kelly Park (217 Somerville Ave)	New Construction	anticipated 2025	

ACCOMPLISHMENTS TABLE 3 2016 GOALS PROGRESS REPORT

2016 OBJECTIVE	2016 ACTION	PROPOSED COMPLETION DATE (YEAR)	PROGRESS UPDATE
CATEGORY Acquire Additional Land			
1.1 Create an Acquisition Fund to increase the City's ability to buy parcels for open space.	1.1.1 Establish a criteria for acquisition.	2017	Complete. Open Space Acquisition Task Force formed in 2018 and released proposals in 2019.
	1.1.2 Work with other departments to structure this fund.	2017	Complete. Acquisition Fund established through the Community Preservation Act (CPA) in 2020. An "in lieu" payment was also established through the 2019 Zoning Ordinance that sets money aside for open space acquisitions as an alternative to building civic space within private developments when required.
1.2 Increase open space opportunities through public/private partnerships.	1.2.1 Continue to create publicly accessible open spaces in large scale development areas: Assembly Square, Union Square, the Community Path, and McGrath Planning process.	2016-25	Ongoing. As of January 2025, 6.37 additional acres of open space have been created by private development across the city. The Community Path extension opened in 2023, providing an additional 4.9 acres of open space.
	1.2.2 Continue to create Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) that reflect open space needs in individual neighborhoods.	2016-25	Ongoing. PSUF requires a study of the neighborhood to understand what amenities are needed by the community for each POPS project. PSUF continues to work toward the goals laid out in the published POPS Guide.
1.3 Identify regulatory strategies for increasing open space.	1.3.1 Expand zoning requirements for publicly usable open space through zoning reform.	2018	Complete. 2019 Somerville Zoning Ordinance requires developers in Master Planned Development Overlay Districts to construct civic space. It also sets standards for POPS to assure quality civic spaces that serve the community.
CATEGORY Renovate Parks and Open Space			
2.1 Develop a renovation schedule based on existing conditions reports, open space needs and user data.	2.1.1 Prioritize parks in worst condition.	2017	Ongoing. PSUF continues to revise this list as projects are completed.
	2.1.2 Prioritize projects that meet areas of need based on data. In 2017, data shows great need for athletic fields and community gardens.	2016-25	Ongoing.
2.2 Leverage additional funding resources for park projects.	2.2.1 Continue to apply to grants and other outside funding sources for parks and open spaces.	2016-25	Ongoing.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS TABLE 3 2016 GOALS PROGRESS REPORT, CONTINUED

2016 OBJECTIVE	2016 ACTION	PROPOSED COMPLETION DATE (YEAR)	PROGRESS UPDATE
CATEGORY Develop an Urban Forestry Plan			
3.1 Develop a five-year Urban Forestry Management Plan (2018-2023)	3.1.1 Update the 2009 Davey Tree Report and map existing tree canopy.	2018	Complete. Public Tree Inventory completed in 2019 (somervillema.treekeeperssoftware.com).
	3.1.2 Develop a plan to add at least 150 trees per year with CDBG, City, or other funds.	2016-25	Complete. City staff published the Urban Forest Management Plan in 2021. It sets a goal to plant at least 350 trees per year. PSUF planted 153 trees in 2016 and over 350 every year since 2018 (with the exception of 2020, where only 201 trees were planted due to COVID).
	3.1.3 Develop a plan for protecting the health of existing trees.	2018	Complete. The Urban Forest Management details ways to support and expand our urban canopy. In 2020, PSUF started two proactive maintenance programs: Young Tree Training and Parks Tree Health. Staff also continues to respond to tree maintenance requests across the city as they come up.
3.2 Develop best-practices guidelines around proper tree planting and maintenance, to be utilized by contractors and existing City tree programs (i.e., DPW and OSPCD).	3.2.1 Draft "Somerville Tree Manual" for distribution to City tree programs.	2025	Partially complete. Staff developed comprehensive tree planting details and specifications to include in tree planting contracts. They also review development projects to ensure appropriate tree planting specifications. A brief, stand-alone document is not yet complete.
	3.2.2 Conduct workshop(s) for DPW on tree program goals and best practices.	2016-25	Ongoing. A workshop (with Davey Tree) was held for DPW staff in March 2017. Urban forestry staff also regularly meet with DPW to review urban forestry-related issues. DPW staff have recently attended an Electrical Hazard Awareness Program and a climbing and rigging class in 2024. DPW is expanding the tree crew staff and more opportunities for trainings will emerge in the future.
	3.2.3 Assemble an "Urban Forestry Committee" composed of residents and City liaison.	2017	Complete. UFC meets monthly (www.somervillema.gov/departments/urban-forestry-committee).
3.3 Increase educational outreach to residents and business owners about the benefits of trees in Somerville.	3.3.1 Increase visibility of the City's Urban Forest Initiative (i.e., print materials, web presence, point of contact)	2021	Ongoing. City staff updated the urban forestry website, added educational videos, and started an Instagram account. UFC tables at events 2-5 times per year, initiated an Adopt-A-Tree program, and has created various educational fliers.
	3.3.2 Conduct workshops / presentations for community groups and residents about Somerville's "green infrastructure initiatives.	2016-25	Ongoing. City staff have presented to the Somerville Garden Club (2018 and 2022), to City of Somerville staff (2018), to Climate Justice Summer Youth Jobs Program (2022 and 2023), to the Boston Society of Landscape Architects, and the Somerville Pollinator Action Plan Committee (2023).

ACCOMPLISHMENTS TABLE 3 2016 GOALS PROGRESS REPORT, CONTINUED

2016 OBJECTIVE	2016 ACTION	PROPOSED COMPLETION DATE (YEAR)	PROGRESS UPDATE
CATEGORY Develop a Maintenance Schedule for Parks			
4.1 Create a plant maintenance plan for each park.	4.1.1 Work with DPW to create pilot maintenance “worksheets”.	2017	Complete. Park conditions assessment and park maintenance worksheets established by PSUF staff in 2020. These were shared with DPW.
4.2 Examine parks renovated within the last 10 years and create rotating list for larger plant/soil interventions.	4.2.1 Implement plant materials interventions for 1 to 2 parks a year.	2018-25	Ongoing. PSUF partnered with DPW to establish and expand contracts with private vendors to improve plant care and maintenance.
CATEGORY Continue to Improve Access for Persons with Disabilities			
5.1 Continue to design and build parks that are compliant with ADA.	5.1.1 As written in City contracts for parks, assure ADA compliance in all projects.	2016-25	Complete. All new parks constructed are ADA compliant. City staff are exploring ways to increase accessibility beyond minimum ADA requirements.
5.2 Evaluate the items noted in the City’s Self Evaluation of 36 parks as part of the City’s transitional plan.	5.2.1 Prioritize items that are (no longer) ADA compliant and assess universal design items.	2025	Ongoing. Staff continue to work with the City’s ADA Coordinator and the Department of Racial and Social Justice to ensure that all parks are accessible.
CATEGORY Continue to Incorporate Sustainable Design			
6.1 Incorporate best practices for stormwater retention, energy and resource use and plant and materials selection in every design of a park or open space.	6.1.2 Write these elements into RFP and specifications.	2017	Complete and ongoing for new projects.
6.2 Continue to select native and native compatible plants that grow well in urban conditions and are more salt, flooding, drought and heat tolerant in response to Planting Zone changes and other adaptations to climate change.	6.2.1 Write these elements into RFP and specifications.	2017	Complete. All Somerville park plantings incorporate native plantings that are selected for their habitat compatibility, as well as their seasonal interest.
6.3 Continue to clean up and redevelop brownfields.	6.3.1 Explore funding opportunities for brownfield sites that could become open space.	2016-25	Ongoing. All Somerville park projects tackle some form of soil contamination. The renovations at Conway Park, Healey School, and Somerville High School are three major examples of remediation projects since 2016.
6.4 Record, promote and educate citizens about the sustainable features in existing parks and in new parks as they occur.	6.4.1 Create and update a list of the features in parks that make them more sustainable and/or respond to climate change.	2016-24	Complete. City staff developed a comprehensive list of parks (Golden Source) which detail their amenities and components. As parks are upgraded or reconstructed, this information is updated. It tracks everything from playground equipment to green infrastructure.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS TABLE 3 2016 GOALS PROGRESS REPORT, CONTINUED

2016 OBJECTIVE	2016 ACTION	PROPOSED COMPLETION DATE (YEAR)	PROGRESS UPDATE
CATEGORY Planning Based on Data			
7.1 Continually update data to reflect population changes (with an emphasis on EJ communities), user data, and spatial data.	7.1.1 Coordinate with GIS office to assure accuracy of spatial data	2016-25	Ongoing with each new open space acquisition and change.
	7.1.2 Educate the public about data at public meetings.	2018	Ongoing. Current data is shared during park project community meetings and Open Space & Recreation Plan outreach meetings.
	7.1.3 Work with SomerStat to analyze and disseminate open space data online and to prioritize projects based on data.	2017-25	Ongoing. PSUF is collaborating with SomerStat as they develop a SomerVision dashboard to update the public on City goal progress.
7.2 Respond to present data showing a need for athletic fields and community gardens	7.2.1 Explore all opportunities to increase athletic fields and community gardens.	2016-25	Complete. The Athletic Fields Plan was published in 2016 and its outlined tasks will be completed in 2025. Since 2016, the City has renovated 6 fields, created 3 additional fields (including Reavis Field at the Somerville High School), and partnered with DCR to add a field at Foss Park. Dilboy Auxiliary natural grass fields are under construction. The community garden program is under assessment and 53 new community garden beds were added since 2016.



SECTION 6

Community Vision

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Facing Page: The Community Design Team from the Union Square Plaza and Streetscape project in 2022. This group included 11 well-networked Union Square residents from diverse backgrounds, ranging in age from 16 to 60+ and speaking six different languages. Their outreach strategies aimed to reach residents from traditionally underrepresented groups in Somerville.

6A.

Description of Process

Since the last OSRP, Somerville has been engaged in numerous planning processes to understand the needs of its residents and to help prioritize the City's work. This plan is informed by a public process which began in the fall of 2023 and involved three public meetings, a survey, and stakeholder meetings. The process is described in **Section 2** and the findings are detailed in **Section 10: Public Comments**.

This plan also incorporates information from recent City plans and studies, including SomerVision 2040 and the Massachusetts Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (see **Section 7B** for more



City staff present information about landscape architecture in municipal work at Boynton Yards.

information about the SCORP). Taking the myriad of planning efforts—each grounded in their own community feedback processes—into consideration is an attempt to align this OSRP with others' outreach efforts.

LONG-TERM PLANNING

SomerVision 2040 (2021)

Ten years after developing goals, policies, and action statements for the original 2012 SomerVision Plan, it was time to reassess and reprioritize. This update process engaged hundreds of participants over dozens of community events and working sessions from 2019-2020.¹ The plan set many new goals including:

- Securing 105 new acres of open space.
- Acquiring open space with consideration of barriers to access such as infrastructure like McGrath Highway, or I-93.
- Engaging the community in topics related to the natural environment like native landscapes and invasive species.
- Encouraging residents to contribute to ecological needs in the city on their own properties (pervious surfaces, tree canopy, etc.).
- Expanding the use of privately owned public space (POPS).
- Innovating ways to secure open space for interim/temporary uses.
- Empowering residents to feel welcome and safe in our open spaces.
- Designing parks to include elements for a wide variety of users.
- Prioritizing sustainability.
- Studying and increasing maintenance capacity.

¹ City of Somerville, *SomerVision 2040: City of Somerville Massachusetts Comprehensive Plan Update 2010-2040*, October 2021.

Neighborhood Planning

The implementation of SomerVision calls for the creation of design-based plans for each Somerville neighborhood. These planning processes engage residents to define the long-term future of their neighborhoods, identify challenges and opportunities, establish goals and objectives, and create a clear path for the future. In addition to in-person events, the City’s “Somerville by Design” and SomerVoice websites allow residents to read planning documents, follow processes, and give feedback without physically attending a meeting.² To date, plans have been published for Lowell Street, Gilman Square, Union Square, Winter Hill, and Brickbottom. Neighborhood plans for Assembly Square, East Somerville, Davis Square, and Magoun and Ball Squares are in different stages of development.

Open Space Creation Task Force (2019)

To address the large open space acquisition goals set by the SomerVision plan, a group of City staff, elected officials, and community members met to develop an understanding of issues related to open space creation and to develop recommendations.³ The overarching goals included:

- **Goal 1:** Increase new publicly accessible open space.
- **Goal 2:** Increase the number of athletic fields to meet the demand for youth recreation hours.
- **Goal 3:** Increase the number of community garden plots.
- **Goal 4:** Provide a range of publicly accessible open spaces within a 5 minute (0.25 mile) walk of every residential parcel in Somerville.
- **Goal 5:** Provide equal access to high quality open space across the city.

² <http://www.somervillebydesign.com> and <http://voice.somervillema.gov>.

³ City of Somerville, *Open Space Creation Task Force Strategy Memo*, August 2019.

- **Goal 6:** Maximize the ecosystem benefits that open spaces provide to residents and the natural world.

The plan and its recommendations are discussed further in **Section 7B** and the report is included in **Appendix E**.

Climate Forward Update (2024)

Between 2023-24, the City and a wide group of stakeholders updated the Somerville Climate Forward Plan. The plan’s ambition is to create “a strong, healthy community in the face of climate change while simultaneously reducing climate pollution, also referred to as greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and our dependence on fossil fuels.”⁴ This plan looks at five focus areas, including “Natural Resources and Waste.” Four action items relate to this OSRP:

- Increase drainage capacity to mitigate stormwater-based flood impacts.
- Utilize green infrastructure to improve water quality and mitigate heat risk to senior living, supportive, and public housing facilities.
- Prioritize tree planting and preservation of existing canopy in heat vulnerable neighborhoods.
- Implement strategies of the Somerville Pollinator Action Plan, Open Space and Recreation Plan, and Urban Forest Management Plan to increase biodiversity and support healthy habitats.

Consolidated Plan (2024)

In 2024, the City updated its Consolidated Plan which outlines local housing/community development needs and priorities. The plan is required to qualify for funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development and its focus is on the needs of households with low and moderate incomes. The

⁴ City of Somerville, “Climate Forward Update,” 2024. <http://voice.somervillema.gov/somerville-climate-forward-update>.



Community engagement happens in many different ways throughout the year. Outreach for the Union Square Plaza and Streetscape project (above) went all around Union Square to get adults and kids sharing their input. A temporary parklet for “Park(ing) Day” (below) invited residents in Davis Square to take a seat, chat with staff, or learn about City projects.

plan was informed by focus groups, a multi-lingual survey, stakeholder meetings, and other City plans. Its findings note that the City should continue to invest “in suitable, quality open space...particularly those areas that are most densely populated with higher concentrations of families and children.”⁵ It identifies the importance of both active and passive parks and recreational spaces, like pocket parks and community gardens, and supports City tree planting efforts in low- to moderate-income neighborhoods.

Happiness Survey (2023)

Every two years since 2011, City staff poll a random sample of Somerville residents to rate their personal happiness, wellbeing, and satisfaction with City services.⁶ Topics range from “How happy do you feel right now,” to “How would you rate your trust in the local police.” In 2023, there was one question related to open space, described below:

How satisfied are you with your proximity to parks and open spaces?

- 13% said they were either unsatisfied or very unsatisfied
- 140 or 14% said neutral
- 341 or 34% said they were satisfied
- 393 or 39% said they were very satisfied
- The average score was 4.0 out of 5

Did the responses vary by demographic groups?

- Age – The most satisfied age groups were 35-44 (79%), 45-54 (84%), and 75+ (75%). Ages 18-24 reported satisfaction at only 65% and recorded the most unsatisfied responses (29%).
- Ward – The results were relatively even. The range for satisfied responses by ward was between 69-79%. The most unsatisfied responses (20%) were from

Ward 1 and the most “very satisfied” responses (47%) were in Ward 7.

- Income – The \$75-100k income group reported the most unsatisfied responses (20%) followed by the income group under \$25k. Satisfied responses came in between 63% (under \$25k) and 79% (\$100-150k).
- Disability – There was minor variation in the range of satisfaction, though 17% reported either unsatisfied or very unsatisfied in comparison to 11% of those who did not report a disability.

OPEN SPACE PLANNING

Park Use Analysis

The Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities completed evaluations in 2019, 2021, and 2022 to understand who uses Somerville parks, when, what activities they engage in, among other questions. They developed five key recommendations based on their study (see [Appendix D](#) for the full analysis):

1. People of color use the parks in Somerville. Continue to work on creative ways to engage communities who use the parks in future design or other changes to park spaces.
2. Offer more programming for older adults in parks.
3. Continue to build opportunities for young people who identify as female to be active in park spaces.
4. Prioritize upkeep and addition of features in parks near preschools and programming for children.
5. Provide opportunities for adults to be active while watching kids and conduct outreach to promote these opportunities.

⁵ City of Somerville, *Consolidated Plan FY2024-FY2028*, 2024.

⁶ City of Somerville, “Happiness Survey,” 2024.

Parks Projects

In addition to the larger planning conversations about open space in Somerville, each park project has its own public engagement process. Typically, parks projects have a minimum of three community meetings in addition to other stakeholder conversations. Park designs respond directly to the feedback received through these engagement events. Information about park projects and upcoming outreach events can be found at <http://voice.somervillema.gov>.

Foss Park Community Outreach

To understand community needs for Foss Park, City staff held two public meetings in October and November 2019 and one youth focus group in February 2021. The findings from these meetings inform an ongoing collaboration between DCR and City staff to ensure the park serves the community. Outreach found that many residents think the park needs partial or substantial improvement and identified action items around health/safety, access, park amenities, and engagement. The report can be found in **Appendix F**.

Union Square Plaza and Streetscape Design (2023)

Between 2021-22, the City engaged in an extensive public engagement project to inform design proposals for Union Square Plaza and the surrounding streetscapes. An interdisciplinary team of community members, staff, and design members collaborated with the Design Studio for Social Intervention to increase the reach of outreach efforts. The 25% design was released in 2023 after 5 years of work. Key recommendations in the plan include:

- Creating more than 1.3 acres of new open space, up from the existing 0.56 acres today, for festivals, events, play, rest, outdoor dining, markets, and more.

- Converting the Union Square Plaza parking lot into a plaza extension.
- Prioritizing design elements to mitigate the impacts of climate change.
- Converting a portion of Bow Street into a shared street that will function as an extension of the Plaza.
- Adding an array of new public amenities like tables, varied seating, and art.
- Planting new trees.⁷

Community Preservation Act Annual Engagement (2024)

Each year, Community Preservation Act (CPA) staff conduct outreach to understand the priorities of residents. Outreach typically includes a survey, tabling, and a public hearing. Staff ask how CPA funds should be spent: on historic preservation, open space and recreation, or affordable housing? Of the 75 survey responses, 32% said open space should be the highest funding priority. Other comments related to open space and recreation included requests for more (especially in East and West Somerville), park improvements, passive open spaces for community gathering, more tree cover and shade, public restrooms, pickleball, dog parks, and performance space.⁸

7 City of Somerville, "Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes," 2023. <http://voice.somervillema.gov/union-square-p-and-s>.

8 City of Somerville, *FY25 Community Preservation Plan*, 2024.

6B.

Statement of Open Space & Recreation Goals

Somerville's open space and recreation goals reflect the community's desires to increase open space acreage, to make our existing amenities inclusive and welcoming for all, and to improve our experience of natural resources in the city. They reflect both community feedback, the various planning and engagement efforts described above, and many conversations with City staff.

Goals

1. **Acquire and build new open spaces** to expand Somerville's total open space acreage, meet open space variety needs, and ensure equitable distribution of open space access across the City.
2. Invest in existing parks and open spaces to **preserve, protect, and enhance** what we already have.
3. Work to make open spaces **inclusive, safe, and welcoming** for all.
4. Continue to incorporate **resilient landscape practices and amenities** in open spaces and streetscapes in response to the challenges of climate change.
5. Ensure **recreation programs and facilities** meet the needs of residents today.



Outreach projects often include sharing information with residents and asking them to imagine a future design that better meets their needs. Drawing and mapping are common exercises to record residents' dreams on paper.



SECTION 7

Analysis of Needs

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7A.

Summary of Resource Protection Needs

Somerville may not have large swaths of protected natural resources, but the urban nature that defines the city still requires protection and care. The waterways (the Mystic River and Alewife Brook), tree canopy, parks, and each backyard or container garden contribute to the ecological well-being of wildlife, the City's ability to adapt to climate change stressors, and to the mental and physical health of residents.

PRESERVE AND ENHANCE

While it may not be readily apparent how to define “natural resources” in a densely developed urban landscape, the bottom line is that they exist and are vital. Somerville's borders along the Mystic River and Alewife Brook are unique in the city, as access points to water for humans and urban wildlife and the only densely wooded areas. These ecologically and socially important sites must be protected and enhanced. Not only do residents wish they had improved access to the river for recreation (in alignment with the goals of the SCORP—the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan), but vegetation and water quality still need attention (see **Sections 4C** and **4D**). Enhancing the quality of vegetation, water, and recreational amenities serves both human and non-human resident needs. Note that any work in these areas will require collaboration with State agencies.

Parks and gardens throughout Somerville, regardless of size, build upon one another to create valuable habitat, relief from the heat, stormwater infiltration, etc. Without them, the city would be inhospitable to wildlife and stressful for humans. Today's patches of habitat must be preserved and maintained,

but they should not be isolated. Adding new biodiverse plantings, new shade trees, and permeable landscapes will create corridors of habitat and relief from climate stressors. The 2024 Somerville Pollinator Action Plan called out Assembly Square, Brickbottom, Inner Belt, and areas east of Lincoln Park as key locations for new plantings.¹

WATER RESOURCE PROTECTION NEEDS

The City, DCR, local non-profits, and regional partners have taken great strides to improve local water resources, particularly the Mystic River. Many additional projects are in the works that will further separate sewage and stormwater pipes, reduce the overall amount of stormwater flowing into riverways, and improve riverside habitat and access to it (see **Section 4C** for more information). To meet the community's desire to access the waterfront and the need for quality habitat, the City must continue its work on stormwater infiltration/filtration, reducing nutrient content in stormwater runoff, and sewer separation. Actions can include everything from street-scape green infrastructure projects (and addressing their maintenance), to completing the Poplar Street Pump Station stormwater tank, to further promoting public stewardship programs like “Adopt-A-Drain.”

Open space projects, while not a fix for stormwater and river water quality issues, can complement Engineering's work by infiltrating, filtering, and reusing stormwater on site. Park projects like ArtFarm (to be constructed above the Poplar Street Pump Station) can also function as a public education tool. Including signage that describes the infrastructure underneath the soil and the importance of stormwater management could increase public awareness of the City's water quality goals.

¹ City of Somerville, *Somerville Pollinator Action Plan* (2024), 127. <http://voice.somervillema.gov/somerville-pollinator-action-plan>.

URBAN FORESTRY NEEDS

Somerville's approximately 14,000 public trees are a vital natural resource that offer measurable ecological, economic, and social benefits. The Urban Forest Management Plan and input gathered from the community through many recent planning processes underscore the need for shade, additional street trees, and the preservation of our existing canopy (see **Section 4D** for more information). The City has made great strides toward these goals in recent years and should continue this work. It should continue its strong tree planting program, push for the protection of trees during construction and development, and enforce fines for illegal tree removal. With robust, current data about the urban canopy, it can also continue to advocate for biodiverse and climate resilient/urban-tolerant tree species.

The City should continue to increase its capacity for proactive maintenance to ensure existing mature trees stay healthy and young trees establish well. Steps include increasing the capacity of DPW to meet tree care goals and continuing pruning programs like Young Tree Training. Recent updates to our tree inventory and future data maintenance and updates will help monitor progress toward these goals.

The City should also collaborate among departments to develop solutions for streetscapes that give trees enough room to grow while also accommodating pedestrian and bike access. Somerville's historic streets are narrow and while the City requires wider streetscapes on new thoroughfares, there remains a need to address this conflict between access and tree health.

Cultivating a healthy urban canopy requires more than just planting trees. It requires proactive care like watering young trees, pruning, protecting trees during construction, and constructing sidewalks with enough soil for the tree to thrive.

PRIVATE PROPERTY AS NATURAL RESOURCE

In our densely developed urban environment, City staff and residents need to consider the role that private property plays as a natural resource. The Somerville Pollinator Action Plan argues that even small actions—such as putting pollinator-friendly plants into pots on a balcony—benefit pollinators. That means that each renter, property owner, or developer has a role they can play in developing ecological resources for wildlife. The Green Score requirement for development and substantial home improvements is one way that City is pushing for landscape elements like tree preservation, biodiversity, native plants, invasive plant removal, and stormwater infiltration on private property. The City should continue pursuing education and stewardship projects that encourage and enable residents to enhance their properties as a valuable part of our urban ecology.



7B. Summary of Community Needs

Huge steps have been made toward the improvement and expansion of our open space resources in recent years. City staff, including the Department of Public Works (DPW), Parks and Recreation, and Public Space and Urban Forestry (PSUF), have worked to increase the variety and quality of our open space and recreation amenities. Nearly every athletic field has been improved or reconstructed. Nearly every schoolyard has been rebuilt and upgraded. Projects like Lincoln Park have added new amenities (including a skate park) and substantial stormwater storage.

The residents and stakeholders who responded to the OSRP survey or attended community meetings continue to ask for more open space, confirming the goals set in SomerVision planning processes. They also reveal some new patterns, including an interest in passive recreation like walking paths and picnic tables, a focus on accessibility, and a desire for more equity in open space/street tree distribution.

The following statements are not comprehensive, nor do they perfectly reflect the needs of all residents in Somerville. They describe patterns that emerged from community input and stakeholder conversations (see **Section 10: Public Comments**), State priorities, and mapping analyses (see **Appendix A**). We know these needs will evolve over time and City staff will continue to engage the community through each new park design and planning process.

INCREASE AND PROTECT OPEN SPACE

The need for additional acres of open space is a consistent ask from the community. It was documented clearly in the 2012 SomerVision Plan, restated in the 2021 SomerVision update, and confirmed in the survey for this OSRP. Out of 706 survey responses, 91% said that we need more open space. Since 2011, 19.3 acres of open space have been added to the city's inventory. This includes additions to City parks, privately developed open spaces, and State-owned land. This is substantial for a city that is so densely developed and there remains a long way to go to reach the ambitious SomerVision 2040 goal of 105 new acres.

In 2019, the Open Space Creation Task Force identified the following strategies to create new open space:

1. Develop an open space acquisition plan that identifies parcels for acquisition.
2. Develop at least 60 acres of new open space in the Transform Areas.
3. Prioritize proper siting of open space in neighborhood planning.
4. Integrate open space into affordable housing and community organization sites.
5. Convert excessive street space and underutilized parking lots to open space.
6. Purchase mid-block access outright or through easements to increase pedestrian access to open space.
7. Explore back of sidewalk tree programs and secure front yard easements along streets to create Commonwealth Avenue style tree boulevards.
8. Solidify efforts to create land trusts in Somerville.



Leonard Grimes Park, named after a Black abolitionist and pastor who lived for a time in Somerville, opened in 2024. The passive pocket park was constructed by a private developer in partnership with the City to serve both adjacent neighbors and the larger community.

The task force explored financial barriers, including the high cost of real estate, and developed creative solutions to meet the acreage goal. A series of financial actions were proposed, including creating a linkage fee, increasing the CPA surcharge (passed in 2024), working with developers, and exploring District Improvement Financing for open space creation.² Currently, the City gathers funds to purchase land for open space through the CPA Acquisition Fund and other grant applications, City Council requests, and in-lieu payments from developers who are granted exemptions to civic space development requirements.

The City continues to look for opportunities to gather funds and purchase open space where it is financially feasible and in line with neighborhood plans. But this goal will not be met by the actions of the City alone. It is critical to continue to leverage private development for open space and to partner with other organizations and non-profits to make this goal a reality.

City staff work closely with private partners to achieve high quality open space that meets the needs of residents. Given the fast pace of development and the emphasis on increased housing density (especially around public transit), open spaces are important additions to the urban landscape. Residents need comfortable outdoor spaces that mitigate the impacts of taller and denser construction. And these spaces must be truly public, regardless of private investment. This process, common pitfalls, and City goals are outlined in the Civic Space Design Guide to Privately Owned Public Space (2024).³

Meeting the demand for open space in Somerville also requires protecting open space acres and increasing awareness of what we already have. While City staff work to acquire land, spreading the word about existing parks and recreational programs is one step toward addressing a perceived lack of amenities and services. Some parks are small and tucked inside of residential neighborhoods. Outreach and new communication tools could increase awareness of these hidden gems.

2 City of Somerville. *Open Space Creation Task Force Strategy Memo* (2019). See **Appendix E**.

3 City of Somerville, *Civic Space Design Guide to Privately Owned Public Space* (2024). <http://voice.somervillema.gov/pops>.

UPGRADES AND SMALL FIXES

The bulk of park improvement work in the past decade has focused on full park renovations. This OSRP marks a moment when we have made huge strides to improve the overall condition of Somerville parks, schoolyards, and fields. There will always be a need to renovate aging parks, but the City can increase its impact by embracing partial park upgrades. Upgrades can take fewer staff hours, cost less, and are completed more quickly as they do not change the overall function or design. They simply improve the quality and lifespan of our existing parks. Financial avenues like CPA funds are appropriate for smaller improvement projects, such as installing inclusive swings, adding seating, or refreshing a planting bed.

According to PSUF's inventory, 78% of open spaces (a total of 77) are in good or excellent condition. An additional 9 are in design or active construction and only 11 are in poor condition. In 2024, PSUF conducted condition reviews for the 11 in poor condition plus an additional 2 rated as "good" but with some safety or quality concerns. Each park was ranked based on set criteria and identified as either a full renovation or upgrade project. Each park was then run through a

"priority matrix" with criteria informed by the 2023-24 public outreach efforts. This process is recorded in **Appendix C**. These rankings directly inform our parks renovation priority list following the Action Plan table in **Section 9**.

DESIRE FOR PASSIVE RECREATION AND NATURE

This OSRP is being written four years after the start of the COVID pandemic. The survey sent out in 2023-24 asked residents to reflect on the impact it had on their experience of open space (the results can be reviewed in more detail in **Section 10**). Many responded that it made them appreciate and spend more time in parks. 70 respondents noted that parks became an important place for community gathering. This pattern was reflected in survey respondents' general requests for passive parks for sitting/gathering and other passive recreation amenities like trails/walking paths, access to the waterfronts, and immersive experiences of nature. While the survey is not a fully comprehensive look at Somerville residents' needs, it does point to a pattern of valuing the experience and flexibility of passive open spaces.



Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the City worked to renovate and open new parks. This groundbreaking for the Central Hill Playground in 2021 took place at a safe distance. The park opened one year later in March 2022.

DESIRE FOR VARIETY, MULTI-USE, MULTI-SEASON, MULTI-GENERATIONAL

The need for flexible open spaces was repeated in a variety of responses that asked for unprogrammed, passive open spaces. Many noted the value of playgrounds but commented that they are not open to all residents. Lincoln Park was praised many times for its mixed uses and varied amenities. There were also requests for usable spaces in all weather and all seasons. Given that Somerville has limited open space for thousands of residents, embracing layered uses, variety, and all-season functionality would make efficient use of our limited space.

COMMUNITY GARDEN PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS

The Somerville Community Garden program, made up of 11 active community gardens and 256 plots, is currently overseen by the Conservation Commission and a Citywide Garden Coordinator. The wait time for a plot ranges from 2-5 years, depending on the garden. At the end of 2024, over 650 people were on the waiting list. While demand clearly exceeds the supply, the waiting list requires regular review to remove duplicates and to check if applicants still live in Somerville or were assigned a plot in another garden. In addition, some community members desire mutual aid gardens that are gardened by anyone and open to all. It is not clear if an open garden would meet the current demand for personal garden plots or who would administer it, but that type of garden could meet other food access goals.

Urban agricultural programs are more than just spaces for food production. Gardens are spaces for learning, community, and resilience building. We do not currently have data to show if users of the program reflect City demographics or if the garden beds serve any low-income or vulnerable resi-

Community garden plots are in high demand in Somerville. In a dense city, many residents do not have access to a yard to grow food. Not only do community gardens provide that resource, they also cultivate connections between residents and support overall resilience.



dents. It is important to clarify the program's goals and identify discrepancies between those goals and today's program.

Additionally, distinct City groups manage elements of the urban agricultural program which ranges from community gardens to school garden programs. This includes PSUF (construction), the Conservation Commission (community gardens), Somerville Public Schools (funders of school garden programming), and Groundwork Somerville (South Street Farm). The Commission's garden sub-committee strives to improve the process, but they are not in charge of constructing new gardens to meet demand. Nor are they connected to broader City food access projects. While each party shares information with the others, examining and improving how the program is administered between these groups could strengthen its efficacy.



Shade structures, like this one in the Healey Schoolyard, make outdoor spaces useful for a large part of the year. Providing shade is an important function of urban parks in an increasingly hot climate. Photo by Ed Wonsek. Designed By Warner Larson Landscape Architects.

INCLUSIVITY AND COMFORT

Community members voiced requests for accessibility improvements and comfort amenities in parks. These ranged from needing bathrooms (or information about the nearest bathroom), to inclusive playground equipment, to places to rest, to safe/accessible routes to parks.

Some open spaces have a seasonal portable toilet, but the demand seems to outweigh supply. City staff have been trying to increase public toilet amenities around the City and staff should promote these to ensure residents know their locations. Staff should also explore opportunities to increase awareness of public bathrooms or any future bathroom installations.

To ensure high-quality, inclusive park designs, staff members and members of the Somerville Commission for Persons with Disabilities should collaborate on park design reviews to ensure that improvements successfully meet the needs of our diverse residents. While Somerville parks are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), City staff acknowledge that there is room to go above and beyond that requirement to make parks more inclusive.

The City monitors conditions of parks as they age to identify repair or renovation needs. Accessibility upgrades and enhancements should be considered when issues arise and as resources allow.

Increasing the availability of inclusive open space amenities should be done with attention to the location of schools, daycare centers, senior housing, and communities identified as particularly vulnerable to climate change stressors. Areas of more extreme heat, as in East Somerville (see **Appendix A: Heat Maps**), would benefit from increased access to shade, water features for cooling, and access to the waterfront. These amenities should be well communicated to those groups to ensure they are known resources in moments of need.

TEENS AND SENIORS

In the OSRP survey, many adults expressed the need for a teen center, more activities targeted at teens and tweens, and spaces for teens to hang out. In a series of focus groups, teens themselves expressed a desire for unstructured spaces to hang out and more seating options for groups. Some expressed that playgrounds for little kids aren't comfortable to spend time in and requested separate zones and age-appropriate play equipment

(climbing walls, big hills, big slides, workout or weightlifting equipment). Other specific requests included: places to study, indoor spaces for shelter from summer heat or winter cold, open grassy fields, unpermitted time on sports fields, indoor courts, natural areas, and places to get lost.

The seniors who shared feedback also expressed a desire for more seating in parks, in particular close to housing developments/senior housing. Like teens, they expressed that areas for little kids do not feel comfortable to visit. Other requests included: more shade, more trees, more natural areas, gardens, spaces to gather, railings, dog-friendly parks, an inclusive walking path for seniors with disabilities, more water fountains, and handicap parking spaces near entrances to the community path.

EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION AND REPRESENTATION

Residents and City staff express a need for tree plantings, open space amenities, and public engagement practices to be equitably distributed and representative. While there is an outreach process for every new park project, very few residents participate. City staff, particularly the staff in the SomerViva: Office for Immigrant Affairs (SOIA), have been working to build relationships with community members to shift this dynamic. PSUF staff recognize that park designs and open space analyses require more equitable representation to meet the needs of residents, especially at a time when displacement of low-income residents is a critical concern. Open spaces should be welcoming and meet the needs of diverse populations. City staff must continue to expand their outreach efficacy to include the opinions of historically underrepresented populations (teens, seniors, immigrant communities, etc.).

Additionally, residents and staff identify disparities in open space distribution across



Residents of Somerville make good use of the athletic fields and courts around the city. Look here for information about the adult/kid programs offered by Parks and Recreation: <http://sommervillema.myrec.com>.

the City. Many survey respondents requested additional tree coverage and open space in East Somerville in particular. City staff should prioritize open space and recreation projects in these areas, especially where amenities are missing. SOIA staff can help to promote existing amenities, programs, and events to non-English-speaking residents to ensure residents are enjoying what we do have.

ACTIVE RECREATION NEEDS

Somerville has limited space for large recreational amenities like fields or skating rinks, but the City has made progress in adding them or improving them where possible, including completing the goals of the 2016 Athletic Fields Master Plan.⁴ State improvements to Foss Park and the addition of a field at the Healey School have increased the equitable distribution of active offerings across the City.

There remain unmet desires for indoor recreation (e.g.: a teen center) with a direct connection to outdoor recreation for all-season comfort. There are also requests from the public for more unpermitted field “open hours” to allow for drop-in play. OSRP

⁴ City of Somerville, *Athletic Fields Master Planning Staff Report: June 2016 Update* (2016).

outreach revealed desires for more outdoor fitness equipment, pickleball, tennis, and generally more fields (though this may be impossible given the lack of large open space availability in Somerville). Demand for active recreation remains high and the City should support active recreation and fitness where possible and appropriate.

In all open spaces, but particularly in privately developed public areas, it is critical for new open spaces to draw in more than the employees of adjacent buildings. Be it with basketball courts, volleyball, or splash pads, engaging active features can bring in residents outside of workday hours. The City should continue to advocate for active amenities with developers, following the Civic Space Design Guide to Privately Owned Public Space and with an eye on amenity distribution and community needs.

STATE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN (SCORP)

In 2023, the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs' Division of Conservation Services published a plan that examined statewide and regional recreational facility needs.⁵ The four goals of the 2023 Massachusetts SCORP are as follows:

1. Improve access to beaches and other water-based recreation facilities.
2. Support trail projects.
3. Create and renovate neighborhood parks, especially to benefit the underserved.
4. Create opportunities, especially for the underserved, to enjoy protected natural areas

⁵ Massachusetts Division of Conservation Services, *Massachusetts Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2023, 2024*.

Most of these goals overlap with previously stated Somerville goals, including access to riverfronts, walking and trail projects, prioritizing projects in Environmental Justice areas, and trying to give all residents access to urban nature.

7C. Management Needs, Potential Change of Use

SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE

To meet the maintenance needs of a growing open space network, DPW needs adequate staffing with a range of landscaping skills, including horticultural knowledge. Unfortunately, DPW Grounds has been struggling to hire and retain a crew. They are exploring ways to incentivize learning and skill development to meet the needs of Somerville landscapes and have identified the need for professional growth opportunities and adequate compensation to encourage job applicants and staff retention. Given staffing shortages, DPW is struggling to keep up with day-to-day maintenance needs and they are unable to do above-and-beyond tasks like proactively reviewing park infrastructure to address issues before they arise. Supporting DPW in building stable grounds and tree maintenance crews is critical to ensuring that our park and streetscape investments last as long as possible.

HORTICULTURAL AND ARBORICULTURAL MAINTENANCE

As the City increases the complexity of plantings and the number of public trees, maintenance demands increase. However, DPW Grounds has been unable to meet those increasing demands due to the staffing

issues described above. DPW is building a tree crew to address the needs of the urban canopy, but they are still working to fully train and staff the team. They seek out applicants with horticultural experience, but there remains little experience with plants on their grounds crew. While the Somerville Pollinator Action Plan proposals include “doing less” (e.g.: leaving the leaves in garden beds), it also calls for the planting of new pollinator gardens in existing parks and beyond. This will only increase the need for a skilled and robust maintenance crew. If DPW can expand its horticultural and arboricultural knowledge and retain staff, the city can rely less on outside contractors.

COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION

Effective communication and delineation of responsibility is an important part of an open space network where many different parties own and maintain parks and recreation facilities (DCR, MBTA, City of Somerville, private entities like Tufts). At the moment, there remain some grey areas around maintenance identified by City staff and evident through PSUF’s work with private developers of public open space.

Privately developed open spaces are privately maintained, which relieves DPW Grounds of those responsibilities, but it also leaves some room for confusion. Each time PSUF works with a private party to build public open space, they collaborate on a “Landscape Management and Maintenance Plan.” Through these conversations, City staff clarify standard permitting procedures that apply to even privately developed open spaces and define responsibility for tasks like snow removal or equipment replacement. Because these procedures overlap with DPW and Parks and Recreation work, communicating those agreements and workflows to all parties is a necessary part of new park development.

For State-owned properties, recreation facilities, or streetscape plantings, confusion often emerges over maintenance responsibilities like pruning plants, replacing dead lights, or repairing broken equipment. These issues overlap again with Parks and Recreation, DPW, Engineering, and State partners. Making sure that we have clear and responsive lines of communication to resolve these points of potential confusion ensures that each space is usable and safe.

The City also needs to increase its communication with the public about maintenance work to prevent misunderstandings about what to expect from DPW (e.g.: snow removal on playgrounds). The new proposals for pollinator-friendly maintenance practices from the Somerville Pollinator Action Plan embrace more naturalized landscaping (e.g.: mowing no more than every two weeks). Communicating the intention and purpose of these practices—to foster pollinator habitats—could reduce the number of complaints.

DESIGN FOR MAINTENANCE

PSUF staff have cultivated a practice of consulting with DPW during open space design development to make sure that DPW is able to care for the site after construction. Their concerns, such as snow removal or access to water cabinets, inform design details and successful design outcomes. This process has been successful so far and leads to better long-term outcomes. The City should continue and strengthen these collaborative practices in future projects.



SECTION 8

Goals & Objectives

VISION STATEMENT

The City will provide a network of inclusive, safe, and welcoming parks/ open spaces that meet the needs of varied user groups and foster a resilient ecosystem and community.

The City is committed to implementing a ten-year action plan (2025-2035) as outlined in **Section 9**. This plan aims to achieve the following overarching goals and objectives:

GOALS/OBJECTIVES

1. **Acquire and build new open spaces** to expand Somerville's total open space acreage, meet open space variety needs, and ensure equitable distribution of open space access across the City.
 - A. Continue to add to **acquisition funds** through CPA applications, private development "in lieu" payments, and other grant applications.
 - B. **Acquire** new parcels using techniques developed in the Open Space Task Force to meet SomerVision 2040 goals.
 - C. **Build** high-quality, new open spaces to address open space network gaps (gaps in civic space type or geographic distribution).
 - D. Foster **public understanding** of the City's work to meet SomerVision 2040 open space expansion goals.
2. Invest in existing parks and open spaces to **preserve, protect, and enhance** what we already have.
 - A. Fully **renovate or make upgrades** to existing parks and open spaces to improve those in poorest condition and ensure attractive, safe, and accessible public lands.
 - B. **Protect** existing open space acres, both publicly and privately owned.
 - C. **Maintain** what we have to protect open space assets and ensure public enjoyment.
 - D. **Communicate** existing amenities and park use procedures to the public.
3. Work to make open spaces **inclusive, safe, and welcoming** for all.
 - A. Continue to improve safe, healthy, and comfortable **access** to parks and open spaces.
 - B. Improve design processes to include more **equitable representation** of residents/stakeholders.
4. Continue to incorporate **resilient landscape practices and amenities** in open spaces and streetscapes in response to the challenges of climate change.
 - A. Continue to expand, protect, and care for Somerville's **urban canopy** through new plantings, proactive maintenance, tree removal permitting, and education.
 - B. Continue to incorporate **resilient design elements** that increase community and ecological resilience to climate change.
 - C. Enhance **urban habitat** on public property and encourage private property participation in ecologically valuable improvements.
5. Ensure **recreation programs** and facilities meet the needs of residents today.
 - A. Expand and improve **facilities** for Parks and Recreation programs.
 - B. Continue to improve **equitable access** to programs and facilities for all residents.
 - C. **Support City staff's** ability to meet Somerville recreation demands.



SECTION 9

Ten-Year Action Plan

The following Ten-Year Action Plan is reflective of community feedback received during the development of this document in 2023-25 and of plans developed in previous years. Each of these action items supports the goals identified in **Section 8**. Funding may not yet be available for many of these actions and possible funding sources are noted when possible. Each action is also accompanied by proposed responsible leads that can see to the completion of the task and an estimated timeline.

Facing Page: The George Dilboy Memorial Stadium field and track were renovated in 2021 as part of the City's Athletic Fields Master Plan. Many residents and leagues use these facilities including Somerville High School, youth soccer and ultimate frisbee, and Boston adult soccer leagues.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE FOLLOWING TABLE ARE AS FOLLOWS:

CC	Conservation Commission
Comms	Communications & Community Engagement
CPA	Community Preservation Act
DPW	Department of Public Works
ED	Economic Development
GDO	Grants Development Office
IAM	Infrastructure & Asset Management
MD	Mobility Division
OFAHC	Office of Food Access & Healthy Communities
OSE	Office of Sustainability & Environment
OSPCD	Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development
PPZ	Planning, Preservation, & Zoning
PR	Parks & Recreation
PSUF	Public Space & Urban Forestry
PNP	Private Non-Profit
SCPD	Somerville Commission for Persons with Disabilities
SOIA	SomerViva: Office of Immigrant Affairs
SS	SomerStat
UDC	Urban Design Commission
UFC	Urban Forestry Committee

NOTE: The objectives in each sub-section below are listed in order of priority, from highest to lowest.

GOAL 1: Acquire and build new open spaces to expand Somerville’s total open space acreage, meet open space variety needs, and ensure equitable distribution of open space access across the city.

OBJECTIVE	ACTION	RESPONSIBLE LEAD	FUNDING SOURCE	PROPOSED COMPLETION
1A. Continue to add to acquisition funds	Pursue CPA applications for land acquisition funding.	PSUF/CPA	CPA	Ongoing
	Collect “in lieu” payments from private development where civic space is not appropriate.	PSUF/ED	Private	Ongoing
	Explore grant opportunities for land acquisition when appropriate parcels are identified.	PSUF/GDO	State/Federal	Ongoing
	If the opportunity arises, request acquisition funds from City Council.	PSUF	City General Fund	Ongoing
1B. Acquire new parcels	Continue to pursue opportunities for land acquisition to meet SomerVision 2040 goals.	OSPCD	See 1a.	Ongoing
	Continue to work with private developers to develop quality civic space development proposals as required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.	OSPCD	See 1a.	Ongoing
	Analyze existing open space network to determine gaps (e.g.: in walkshed, amenity distribution) to inform future opportunities.	PSUF	n/a	2026
	Share analysis with OSPCD to inform other divisions’ planning work.	PSUF	n/a	2026
	Prioritize open space land acquisition in Environmental Justice areas of Somerville, particularly East Somerville.	OSPCD	See 1a.	Ongoing
	Prioritize open space land acquisition that addresses gaps in the open space network.	OSPCD	See 1a.	Ongoing
1C. Build high-quality, new open spaces	Design and build new open spaces to address type/amenity needs (informed by open space network analysis and community input).	PSUF	LWCF, PARC, CPA, CDBG, among others	Ongoing
	Complete Civic Space Design Guidelines for privately developed open spaces.	PSUF	n/a	2025
	Review private developer civic space designs to ensure they meet community needs and follow Somerville Zoning Ordinance requirements and Civic Space Design Guidelines.	PSUF/UDC	Private	Ongoing
	Collaborate with State and local partners to explore opportunities for new open space in State projects (e.g.: McGrath Boulevard Project).	PSUF/State	Private	Ongoing
	Continue to participate in regional planning efforts (e.g.: Resilient Mystic Collaborative) to meet demand for cohesive and connected recreation along the Mystic River.	PSUF	n/a	Ongoing
1D. Foster public understanding	Promote new public spaces when acquired and/or constructed.	PSUF/Comms/SOIA	n/a	Ongoing
	Communicate methods of open space land acquisition to the public through City data portals.	SS	n/a	Ongoing

GOAL 2: Invest in existing parks and open spaces to preserve, protect, and enhance what we already have.

OBJECTIVE	ACTION	RESPONSIBLE LEAD	FUNDING SOURCE	PROPOSED COMPLETION
2A. Fully renovate or make upgrades to existing parks and open spaces	Set project priorities based on safety needs and prioritization matrix (see Appendix C). Adjust as needed over next 7 years.	PSUF	n/a	Ongoing
	Update Capital Investment Plan for City parks and open spaces based on condition reports, prioritization matrix, and community input.	City of Somerville	n/a	Ongoing
	Continue to apply for grant opportunities for design/construction from outside funding sources to reduce the burden on City budget.	PSUF/GDO	n/a	Ongoing
	Continue to fully renovate parks in worst condition.	PSUF	LWCF, PARC, CPA, CDBG, among others	Ongoing
	Develop program to prolong the life of our assets by doing smaller park upgrades to address safety needs, accessibility needs, and to improve user experience.	PSUF	LWCF, PARC, CPA, CDBG, among others	2025-2026
2B. Protect existing open space acres	Follow-up with POPS (privately owned public space) owners to ensure that open spaces are clearly marked and welcoming to the public.	PSUF	n/a	Ongoing
	Complete analysis of open space parcel protections. Identify any gaps or unresolved protections issues.	PSUF	n/a	2025
	Identify City-owned open spaces that require additional protection. Determine next steps.	PSUF/PPZ	n/a	2025-2026
2C. Maintain what we have	Increase DPW Grounds staffing to meet maintenance needs of the City's landscapes.	DPW	City General Fund	Ongoing
	Continue exploring strategies to foster skill development, professional growth, and workforce stability in DPW Grounds staff.	DPW	City General Fund	Ongoing
	Continue to supplement internal arboricultural and horticultural maintenance capacity with outside contracts.	PSUF/DPW	City General Fund	Ongoing
	Continue to increase arboricultural and horticultural maintenance capacity through DPW staff training and new hires.	DPW	City General Fund	Ongoing
	Establish clear responsibilities and strengthen communication between DPW, PR, State partners, and private developers.	PSUF/DPW/PR/State	n/a	Ongoing
	Explore and implement strategies to save money and increase ecological value/sustainability of City landscapes informed by the Pollinator Action Plan.	PSUF/DPW	City General Fund	Ongoing
	Communicate Pollinator Action Plan-informed maintenance strategies to the public to foster acceptance and awareness of new care practices.	PSUF/DPW/Comms/SOIA	n/a	Ongoing
	Develop proactive review of parks to address maintenance needs before problems arise.	DPW/PSUF	n/a	Ongoing
	Continue to communicate with State agencies that own and manage open space in Somerville. Advocate for maintenance and community needs.	PSUF/State	n/a	Ongoing
2D. Communicate	Work with City staff and community liaisons to increase awareness of existing open space amenities and permitting process, especially to non-English-speaking community members.	PSUF/SOIA/Comms	n/a	Ongoing

OBJECTIVE	ACTION	RESPONSIBLE LEAD	FUNDING SOURCE	PROPOSED COMPLETION
2D. (CONTINUED) Communicate	Communicate year-round maintenance expectations to the public (e.g.: snow removal in playgrounds).	PSUF/ DPW/ SOIA/Comms	n/a	Ongoing
	Clearly define urban agriculture program goals and identify discrepancies between goals and today's garden program. Develop strategies to address those gaps.	OFAHC	n/a	Ongoing
	Enhance internal workflow among those administering community gardening and food access programs to respond to community agriculture demands.	PSUF/CC/ OHFAC	n/a	Ongoing

GOAL 3: Work to make open spaces inclusive, safe, and welcoming for all.

OBJECTIVE	ACTION	RESPONSIBLE LEAD	FUNDING SOURCE	PROPOSED COMPLETION
3A. Continue to improve safe, healthy, and comfortable access	Build an inclusive playground and explore options for park upgrades that can increase inclusive amenities for residents with disabilities (e.g.: seating, swings, communication boards, sensory environments for self-regulation, etc.).	PSUF/SCPD	LWCF, PARC, CPA, CDBG, among others	Ongoing
	Analyze distribution of inclusive amenities and comfort features (e.g.: bathrooms, shade, water features) across the city to identify any gaps.	PSUF/OSE	n/a	2026
	Support MD's goals to create safe and accessible routes to parks.	MD/PSUF	n/a	Ongoing
	Work with MD to lessen pedestrian/bicycle conflicts in open spaces (e.g.: along the Community Path).	MD/PSUF	n/a	Ongoing
	Collaborate with IAM and MD to develop strategies that support healthy street trees and create cooler, accessible sidewalks and implement in streetscape/thoroughfare projects.	PSUF/IAM	n/a	Ongoing
	Collaborate with City departments and State partners on roadway improvements (like McGrath Boulevard) to improve streetscape experience, to foster healthy trees, and to improve connections to the waterfront, Foss Park, Assembly Square, and other nearby open spaces.	PSUF/MD/IAM/ State	n/a	Ongoing
3B. Improve design process	Continue to work with City staff and partners to reach community members that are not traditionally represented at public meetings or in survey data.	PSUF/SOIA/ Comms	n/a	Ongoing
	Develop strategies for open space design processes to increase equitable community feedback (in particular from low-income residents, people of color, persons with disabilities, non-English speakers, youth, and seniors).	PSUF/SOIA	n/a	Ongoing
	Continue to improve design success through interdepartmental collaboration with DPW, PR, MD, IAM, and commissions like CC and SCPD.	PSUF	n/a	Ongoing
	Compile and analyze community engagement input to understand what makes open spaces successfully inclusive and welcoming to the broadest array of residents.	PSUF	n/a	Ongoing

GOAL 4: Continue to incorporate resilient landscape practices and amenities in open spaces and streetscapes in response to the challenges of climate change.

OBJECTIVE	ACTION	RESPONSIBLE LEAD	FUNDING SOURCE	PROPOSED COMPLETION
4A. Continue to expand, protect, and care for urban canopy	Staff a full tree crew in DPW and increase their capacity to meet urban canopy maintenance needs.	DPW	City General Fund	Ongoing
	Continue to plant 350+ trees every year, especially in high-priority areas.	PSUF	City General Fund	Ongoing
	Continue to implement the Young Tree Training and Parks Tree Health programs to proactively care for City trees.	PSUF	City General Fund	Ongoing
	Identify high-priority areas for tree planting through analysis of tree inventory data, Pollinator Action Plan priority matrix, and routes to parks and schools.	PSUF	n/a	2025-2026
	Continue to process tree removal permit applications, mitigation requirements, and illegal tree removal fines.	PSUF	n/a	Ongoing
	Improve tree protection requirements during construction projects.	PSUF/DPW/IAM	n/a	Starting 2025, Ongoing
	Continue to develop educational programs to increase public awareness of the importance of street trees and ways residents can support urban canopy health.	PSUF/UFC	n/a	Ongoing
	Continue to implement and measure action items from the 2021 Urban Forest Management Plan.	PSUF	n/a	Ongoing
	Update/refine the Tree Preservation Ordinance as needed.	PSUF	n/a	2025
	Assess need for an update to the 2021 Urban Forest Management Plan.	PSUF	n/a	2030
4B. Continue to incorporate resilient design elements	Communicate location of amenities to the public for relief from climate stressors.	PSUF/SOIA/Comms	n/a	Ongoing
	Prioritize the inclusion of water features and/or tree plantings in open space improvements in the identified gap areas and especially in areas vulnerable to high heat as identified in the Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment Update (2023).	PSUF/OSE	LWCF, PARC, CPA, CDBG, among others	Ongoing
	Continue to incorporate stormwater capture, reuse, and infiltration design elements into park and streetscape projects.	PSUF/IAM	LWCF, PARC, CPA, CDBG, among others	Ongoing
	Support DCR projects that increase public enjoyment of and access to the waterfront.	PSUF/DCR	n/a	Ongoing
	Support DCR projects that increase shade tree and biodiversity.	PSUF/DCR	n/a	Ongoing
4C. Enhance urban habitat	Continue to protect wetlands and riverfronts through the Somerville Conservation Commission review process.	CC	n/a	Ongoing
	Continue to meet percentages of native plants required by the Native Planting Ordinance.	PSUF	n/a	Ongoing
	Continue to remove and discourage invasive species in park construction, maintenance, and through educational campaigns.	PSUF	Various	Ongoing
	Update Green Score requirements in the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to improve the ecological value of landscape required.	PSUF/PPZ	n/a	Started 2024, Ongoing
	Complete Somerville Pollinator Action Plan and brochure.	PSUF	n/a	2024-2025
	Implement biodiverse, pollinator-friendly plantings in existing parks, new parks, and other open space locations based on the Pollinator Action Plan and high-priority analysis.	PSUF	City General Fund	Ongoing
	Analyze existing pollinator habitat in Somerville and identify high-priority locations for new pollinator plantings. Reassess at regular intervals.	PSUF	n/a	Started 2024, Ongoing

OBJECTIVE	ACTION	RESPONSIBLE LEAD	FUNDING SOURCE	PROPOSED COMPLETION
4C. (CONTINUED) Enhance urban habitat	Partner with non-profit groups and residents to engage the public in pollinator habitat creation and insect data collection.	PSUF/PNP	n/a	Ongoing
	Promote seasonal insect data collection opportunities, pollinator-friendly garden maintenance tips, and related events/programs.	PSUF/SOIA/Comms	n/a	Ongoing
	Continue to steward the desire for nature in the city through ecological restoration projects and programs.	PSUF	Various	Ongoing

GOAL 5: Ensure recreation programs and facilities meet the needs of residents today.

OBJECTIVE	ACTION	RESPONSIBLE LEAD	FUNDING SOURCE	PROPOSED COMPLETION
5A. Expand and improve facilities	Continue to pursue, design, and build new recreation/ community center.	PR/IAM	CPA/City General Fund	Ongoing
	Install AEDs at all athletic facilities.	PR	City General Fund (or State)	Ongoing
	Analyze location of water bottle fillers in open space network and explore opportunities for installation.	PSUF/PR/DPW/ OSE	City General Fund	Ongoing
	Find facility with access to indoors and outdoors for comfortable recreation in all seasons, particularly for teens.	PR/IAM	City General Fund	Ongoing
	Identify space and recreation options for all-season senior recreation.	PR/IAM	City General Fund	Ongoing
	Explore opportunities for adding outdoor fitness equipment and interactive recreation equipment (e.g.: NEOS, Ping Pong, Foosball, Corn Hole etc.)	PSUF/PR/DCR	CPA/City General Fund	Ongoing
	Explore opportunities for new tennis and pickleball courts.	PSUF/PR/DCR/ DPW	CPA/City General Fund	Ongoing
	Expand quality wireless internet in recreation facilities.	PR	City General Fund (or State)	Ongoing
	Work with DCR to renovate facilities at Dilboy (i.e.: pool, roof).	PR/DCR	City General Fund	Ongoing
	Work with DCR to renovate facilities at the Blessing of the Bay boathouse.	PR/DCR	CPA/City General Fund	Ongoing
5B. Continue to improve equitable access	Analyze barriers to access, especially for non-English-speaking or low-income residents and persons with disabilities. Work with relevant City departments to address these issues, including website improvements.	PR/SOIA/Comms	n/a	Ongoing
	Promote PR programs to the public to increase awareness of City offerings.	PR/SOIA/Comms	City General Fund	Ongoing
	Continue to host “open hours” at fields for teens to use with adult supervision to avoid conflicts with reserved field demands.	PR	n/a	Ongoing
	Examine programming selection against community input and develop strategy to meet programming needs.	PR	City General Fund	2025
5C. Support City staff	Increase staffing to meet community demands for programs.	PR	City General Fund	Ongoing
	Increase PR transportation fleet to meet demands of programs.	PR	City General Fund	Ongoing
	Establish clear responsibilities and strengthen communication between DPW, PR, State partners, and private developers.	PSUF/DPW/PR/ State	n/a	Ongoing
	Continue to collaborate with other City departments to understand responsibilities and protocols in privately developed and maintained public open spaces.	PSUF/DPW/PR	n/a	Ongoing



In addition to these prioritized goals, objectives, and actions, the Public Space and Urban Forestry division renovates and constructs parks. For a map of the parks to be renovated by PSUF in the next ten years, see **Appendix A: Ten-Year Action Plan Map**.

Active Construction

- Ken Kelly Park
- Dilboy Auxiliary Natural Grass Fields
- Somerville Junction Park
- Draw Seven Park (DCR)

2025 Projects

- ArtFarm
- Central Hill Monument Restoration
- John F. Kennedy Schoolyard
- Mystic River Reservation/Blessing of the Bay Park (DCR and MyRWA)
- Quincy Street Pocket Park Walkway and Planting Upgrade
- Nunziato Dog Park Water Fountains Upgrade

Ten-Year Plan: Potential Projects through 2035*

**The following parks are in order of priority based on an assessment and ranking process outlined in Appendix C. The exact order of renovation or upgrade will be determined by needs in a given year and by the City's Capital Investment Plan.*

Potential Full Renovation Projects

- Perkins Playground
- Woodstock Playground
- Nunziato Dog Park
- Florence Playground
- Osgood Park
- Bailey Park

Potential Upgrade Projects

- Trum Field Bleachers
- Nunziato Field
- Zero New Washington Street Park
- Palmacci Playground
- Lexington Park
- Seven Hills Park

Additional Considerations

The following parks were last renovated over 20 years ago. They may not be in poor condition in 2025, but they should be considered for renovation or upgrade when appropriate:

- Corbett-McKenna Park
- Trum Playground
- Nathan Tufts Park
- Walnut Street Park
- Perry Park
- Ed Leathers Community Park



SECTION 10

Public Comments

Overall Summary

This Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) update identified a wide variety of priorities from the community, City staff, and key stakeholders. This report will describe the findings from each individual outreach method and describe patterns that emerged.

The outreach plan was developed with one major consideration: the people who attend public meetings and participate in our surveys tend to be more homogenous than our city demographics. Writing an OSRP gives City staff an opportunity to set priorities based on concrete feedback. It is critical to expand traditional outreach methods to reach voices heard less frequently. Outreach for this OSRP update was partially successful in this effort and the plan identifies other ways staff can improve the process.

Each outreach effort was done to answer the following questions:

- What is most important to residents today with regard to open space and recreation? How has this changed over the last seven years?
- Where are the gaps in our open space and recreation network?
- What barriers prevent residents from freely using and enjoying our existing open space and recreation amenities?

The feedback received from stakeholders directly informs **Section 7's "Analysis of Needs,"** the **Section 9 "Action Plan,"** and the park renovation/upgrade priority matrix (see **Appendix C**). Feedback was also given to relevant City departments to inform their work. This plan tries to draw conclusions about what is broadly important to the community in 2023-25 from the wide range of comments received.

COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Three community meetings were held in early 2024 (two in person and one virtual). In total, around 45 people attended these three events.

At the in-person meetings, staff were present to represent Public Space and Urban Forestry, the Office of Sustainability and Environment, Parks and Recreation, and the Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities. They facilitated conversations and listened to feedback shared by residents.

After introducing the OSRP and its goals, community members were asked to think about barriers to access, maintenance, and general needs on four different topics:

- Natural and Restorative Spaces
- Climate Change Resiliency
- Play and Recreation
- Urban Agriculture

In the virtual meeting, staff presented the findings from the first two meetings and asked if the feedback resonated and if anything was missing.

Findings Summary:

Five broad topics emerged in these conversations: open space, accessibility, nature in the city, comfort and climate resilience, and equity.

Open Space

- Take opportunities to acquire new open space
- Protect what we have
- Prioritize variety
- Create sense of connection between open spaces (signage, vegetation, safe routes)
- Look for opportunities to increase passive recreation (don't forget grass)
- Spaces for dogs

Accessibility

- Bathrooms
- Inclusive play structures
- Seating for rest
- Wayfinding & increase awareness of open space amenities
- Trash & cleanliness
- Safe routes to parks
- Pedestrian-bike conflicts
- Access to waterfront parks (roads and paths)

Nature in the City

- More trees
- Vegetate areas between parks (streetscapes, etc.)
- Increase capacity to maintain plantings (including trees)
- Increase biodiversity and habitat
- Prioritize projects that increase access to “natural” areas for people
- Promote & develop incentives/programs to involve the public in planting on private property
- Invasive species management

Comfort & Climate Resilience

- Transform hot, paved surfaces to vegetation & grass
- Increase shade between parks and in parks
- Add more water fountains and water bottle fillers
- Continue to use parks for stormwater capture
- Increase biodiversity in plantings
- Engage community in caring for vegetated spaces

Equity & Process

- Learn from who we DON'T see at community meetings
- Take lessons from this planning process and apply to future design/outreach
- Include teens & tweens in public space planning
- Increase awareness of how community feedback turns into action
- Continue to analyze park and tree distribution across city
- Increase coordination with depts and commissions

SURVEY

The official OSRP survey was released in November 2023 and closed at the end of January 2024. 708 responses were received and staff in the SomerStat office and Public Space and Urban Forestry division analyzed the results.

The full survey dataset is available on the City of Somerville's Open Data Portal.¹

Demographics Summary:

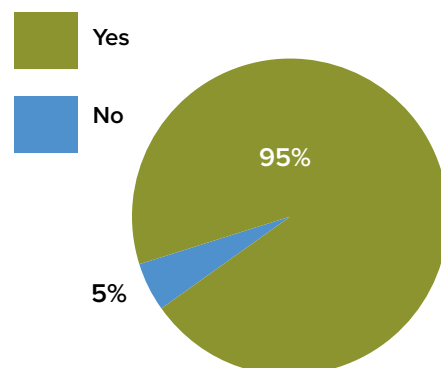
- Most demographic groups had enough respondents to analyze as a group; respondents ages 19 to 24, respondents over 75, and Black respondents did not.
- The survey overrepresents ages 35-54, white people, Wards 3 and 5, and households with children under 18.
- The survey underrepresents ages 19-24, people of color, and the lowest-income households. It is unclear if high-income households are overrepresented.

Most respondents ages 35-44 have children in their household, and most respondents with children in their household make above median income.

Findings Summary:

- Most respondents in all demographic groups say Somerville needs more open space.
- Respondents from Wards 2 and 4 feel the least like they have access to nature. Wards 6 and 7 feel the most like they have access to nature.
- Many demographic groups use open spaces in similar ways (primarily for walking). Visiting playgrounds is much more common for households with children and respondents ages 35-54.
- Respondents say Somerville needs more trails and walking paths, passive parks for sitting/gathering, and access to rivers.
- Community gardens and passive parks may be more important for Environmental Justice populations, and access to the Mystic River may be more needed than access to Alewife Brook.

Does Somerville Need More Open Space?



¹ City of Somerville, "Open Space and Recreation Plan Survey Dashboard," 2025. <https://data.somervillema.gov/d/vamq-kd64>.

Open Space Questions

Does Somerville need more open space?

(The options: yes, no, other)

704 responses, 4 skipped

Overall:

- Most respondents say yes (91%). Only 4.8% said no.

Themes in the “other” responses (n=29):

- Fine with the amount but enhance the spaces we have.
- Yes, AND enhance the spaces that we have to be more inviting or accessible.
- Enhance sidewalks and streetscapes with plantings and seating.
- Yes, but not at the expense of housing (“quality,” “affordable,” “more”).

Do you feel like you have access to nature?

(The options: yes, no, other)

701 responses, 7 skipped

Overall: 41% say yes, 47% say no.

Overall:

- The most “no” answers came from Wards 2 and 4. The most “yes” answers came from Wards 6 and 7.
- 27% of Ward 2 respondents feel like they have access to nature vs. 54% of Ward 7.

Themes in the “other” responses (n=85):

- Could be better.
- I leave the city to connect with nature.
- It depends on where you are in Somerville and if you have a backyard.
- Different opinions on what feels like “nature.”
- Cars make a difference.

How did COVID-19 change your feelings about parks or use of parks?

(Open-ended responses)

535 text responses

The past seven years since the last OSRP update overlap with the emergence of COVID-19. This question was intended to determine if the pandemic affected open space use.

Themes in open-ended responses:

- COVID made me appreciate parks more (n=250)
- COVID caused me to spend more time in parks (n=104)
- COVID had no impact on how I use parks (n=73)
- COVID made it clear that we need more/ bigger parks (n=61)
- COVID increased my need for time in nature (or increased how much I value time in nature) (n=25)
- COVID deterred me from using parks (n=14)

70 respondents noted that parks became an important space for community and gathering. 38 noted walking and hiking as important components of their use of open space during COVID.

What do you do MOST OFTEN in our open spaces?

(Select up to three: visit playgrounds, sit and relax, social gatherings with friends/family, walking, use athletic fields, Parks & Recreation programs, visit splash pads, community gardening, other)

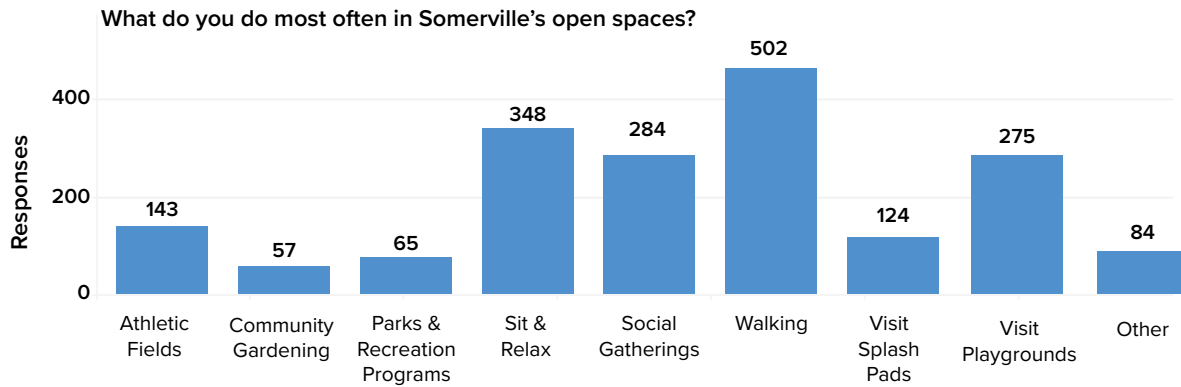
708 responses

In order, respondents say they most often use open spaces for:

- Walking
- Sitting and relaxing
- Social gatherings with friends/family
- Visiting playgrounds

Themes from demographic analysis of responses:

- Many groups use open spaces in similar ways.



- No substantial differences were found between racial groups, wards, or income groups.
- Visiting playgrounds is, expectedly, much more common for households with children and respondents ages 35-54; other age groups rarely report common use.
- Social gatherings with friends/family in open spaces are more common for younger people and less common for older people.

Themes in the “other” responses (n=84):

- Dog socializing, dog walks, dog parks (n=33)
- Bicycling including along the community path (n=20)
- Fitness or running (n=12)

How long do you spend in our open spaces (guess an average)?

(The options: between 0-10 minutes, 10-30 minutes, 30-60 minutes, 1-2 hours, 2-4 hours, other)

708 responses

Overall:

The majority of respondents selected either 30-60 minutes (33.6%) or 1-2 hours (37.3%).

Note: This data may be challenging to interpret because some respondents noted confusion about the question. They wondered if this was the number of minutes in a given unit of time (for example, how many minutes per day, week, year) or if it was the number of minutes per visit (as the survey intended).

What do we need more of in Somerville?

(The options: playgrounds, passive parks for sitting/gathering, trails and walking paths, athletic fields, community gardens, access to the Mystic River or Alewife Brook, other)

708 responses

In order, respondents say Somerville needs more:

- Trails and walking paths
- Passive parks for sitting/gathering
- Access to the Mystic River or Alewife Brook
- Community gardens

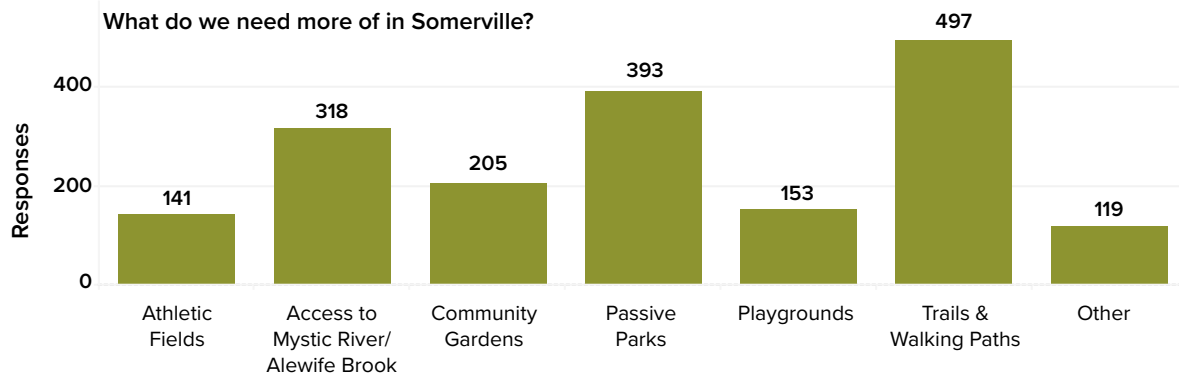
Themes from demographic analysis of responses:

- Passive parks for sitting/gathering may be more important to (and/or more needed by) respondents with lower incomes, non-white respondents, and youth under 18.
- Community gardens may be more important to (and/or more needed by) respondents with lower incomes and non-white respondents.
- Trails and walking paths are important to most groups, but more so to white and above-median-income respondents.
- Better river access is important to residents in wards with and without river access alike. Based on responses by ward, better Mystic River access may be more needed than Alewife Brook access.

Themes in the “other” responses (n=118):

These responses were very wide-ranging and supplement the answers in the following question “What kinds of open spaces are missing in Somerville that you wish we had.” Here are the highest-ranking categories:

- More dog-friendly spaces – either off-leash



- areas, separate dog parks, or on-leash areas where dogs are allowed (n=34)
- More trees (n=16)
- More nature-forward/natural spaces (n=8)
- More vegetation across the city in general (n=7)
- More tennis courts (n=7) and more pickle ball courts (n=4)
- More teen spaces (n=5)
- More bathrooms (n=5)
- More spaces that can be used in winter, rain, or at night (n=3)
- More basketball courts (n=3)
- More space for communal gathering.(n=3)
- More mobility-friendly play equipment or park spaces (n=3)

- Overall increase in plants, planted areas, and gardens (n=54)
- Amenities suited for passive sitting/gathering areas including the terms “picnic” and “seating” (n=57)
- Larger parks (n=25) and larger parks with mixed uses like Lincoln Park (n=28)
- Dog parks/dog-friendly spaces (n=43)
- Habitat for wildlife (n=30)
- Waterfront access/waterfront use (n=21)

The following were mentioned fewer times but are worth noting: more open space (n=19), spaces for teens/tweens (n=17), more pocket parks (n=16), quiet areas (n=14), programming or activating the spaces that we have (n=12), more community gardens (n=11), playground improvements (n=11), all-weather/all-season spaces (n=11), bathrooms (n=9), more equitable distribution of parks across the city (n=9), increased accessibility for persons with disabilities (n=7).

What kinds of open spaces are missing in Somerville that you wish we had?

(Open-ended responses)
520 text responses

The open-ended responses to this question reinforce the findings in the multiple-choice question above while adding nuance and additional categories.

Themes in the open-ended responses:

- Passive parks with unstructured or unprogrammed space (n=75)
- Walking paths and trails (n=82)
- Natural spaces or nature immersion suggested by terms like “nature,” “wild,” and “forest” (n=87)
- Shade (n=34) and trees (n=68)

Requests for sports equipment or spaces were typically separated by sport. The largest number of requests were for exercise equipment (n=14), followed by pickleball (n=13), tennis (n=12), more fields in general (n=12), pools (n=9), basketball (n=7), space for drop-in/pickup sports (n=6), and indoor space (n=6).

Are there any barriers that prevent you from using or enjoying Somerville’s parks or programs?

(Open-ended responses)
286 text responses

Themes in the open-ended responses:

- Limited access (locked, don’t know when available, programs fill up, hours don’t match

with my schedule) (n=64)

- Limited routes/safe routes to parks (non-car) (n=35)
- Distance (n=33)
- Communication gaps (n=24)
- No bathrooms (n=18)
- Parking limited (handicap or general) (n=16)
- Trash/waste (n=16)
- Limited accessibility for persons with disabilities (n=16)
- Too many people/crowded (some parks, community path) (n=16)
- Poor conditions (e.g.: pools, fields, drainage) (n=15)
- Exposed/no shade (some parks, also routes to parks) (n=14)
- Safety (e.g.: Chuckie Harris) (n=12)
- Not enough time (n=10)
- No spaces for dogs (n=10)
- Presence of dogs (n=8)
- Inclement weather & winter (n=8)

Please provide any additional comments, concerns, or ideas that you'd like to share about open spaces and recreational programs.

(Open-ended responses)
239 text responses

There were a wide range of answers to this question, many of which are covered by the answers to other questions. Some additional common comments of note are:

- Appreciation for the community path extension
- Increase open space acres
- Desire to see Matignon Field remain a public open space
- Desire for bleachers/seating at Conway Park
- More trees!
- Concerns about rats
- Requests to preserve Trum Field as open space
- Notes about an imbalance in open space across Somerville

Open-Ended Demographics Questions

Do you or anyone in your family play sports in Somerville parks? If so, what do they play?

(Open-ended responses)

381 text responses including 80 "no"s and 301 non-"no" text responses

- 190 listed soccer
- 2 listed futsal
- 33 listed baseball or little league
- 2 listed t-ball
- 72 listed basketball or bball
- 28 listed tennis
- 15 listed pickleball or pickle ball
- 13 listed volleyball
- 42 listed frisbee or ultimate frisbee
- 11 listed track
- 18 listed run or running or jog or jogging
- 8 listed cross country
- 3 listed walk or walking
- 7 listed football
- 4 listed lacrosse
- 6 listed swim or swimming
- 6 listed hockey
- 3 listed ice skating
- 10 listed bike or biking
- 2 listed scootering
- 1 listed gymnastics
- 3 listed skating or rollerblading
- 3 listed skateboarding
- 6 listed kickball
- 9 listed parkour
- 3 listed catch
- 1 listed non-league free play
- 1 listed circus
- 2 listed splashing or splash pads
- 1 listed paddle games
- 1 listed hacky sack

Do you or anyone else in your household have a disability or chronic health condition that affects access or enjoyment of Somerville's open spaces?

(Open-ended responses)

186 text responses, including 117 "no"s and 23 unspecific "yes" answers

The more detailed "yes" responses vary and are hard to summarize but around 15 answers described concerns related to limited mobility. Another 6 specified the desire for places to rest (seating or a place to lay down), 4 need vehicle access, and 2 requested soft walking/running surfaces. 5 respondents said they need a bathroom nearby to be able to enjoy open spaces. 6 described respiratory concerns and 3 said they need water/shade for relief from heat and the sun. 4 noted autism and 2 the need for quiet spaces or areas with fewer people.

The unspecified "yes" answers represent needs, but it is not possible to identify if our parks and open spaces meet those needs.

In February 2025, the public, City staff, and City Councilors registered 77 comments in response to the draft OSRP. Those comments were wide-ranging and it is not possible to draw themes from them. However, many comments reinforced patterns already noted in the plan and a total of 54 comments stated that Founders Rink should remain open as a skating rink.

Recreation Questions

How often do you participate in Somerville's recreation programs?

(The options: rarely, occasionally, sometimes, often, very often, other)

696 responses, 12 skipped

Overall:

- Most respondents rarely participate in Somerville's recreation programs.
- In general, non-white respondents may use rec programs more than white respondents.
- Respondents under 18 may use the rec programs more often than other age groups.
- Respondents with children under 18 in their household likely use rec programs more often than respondents without children under 18.
- Respondents ages 35-54 may also use the rec programs more often, likely driven by children under 18 in the household.
- Note: Findings about frequency of recreation program use are more uncertain than other questions, depending on how respondents interpreted "rarely," "occasionally," "sometimes," etc.

Themes in the "other" responses (n=32):

- Never, but I'm new to town.
- Never, but I didn't know we had them.
- Not me, but my kids do.
- Never, but would with better offerings.

What programs would you like Parks and Rec to offer?

(Open-ended responses)

387 text responses

If we could acquire a recreation center, what would you like to see inside?

(Open-ended responses)

465 text responses

These results were shared with Parks and Recreation staff to analyze and use for future planning.

STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

City staff met with many different internal and external stakeholder groups to understand their needs/priorities related to open space and recreational programming. This plan should act as a compliment to the work of other City departments and take advantage of the outreach and planning work done by other staff.

Certain demographics were not well represented in the survey and community meeting feedback, so City staff met with seniors, immigrant community liaisons in the SomerViva: Office of Immigrant Affairs, and teens to hear more.

Stakeholders:

- OSPCD
 - Economic Development
 - Historic Preservation
 - Mobility
 - Planning, Preservation, and Zoning
 - Public Space and Urban Forestry
 - Strategic Planning & Equity Manager, Luis Quizhpe
- Parks & Recreation
- Department of Public Works
- ADA Coordinator, Adrienne Pomeroy
- Office of Food Access & Healthy Communities
- Capital Projects
- Engineering
- Environmental Health Manager, Colin Zeigler and Alicia Privett
- City Committees
 - Community Preservation Committee
 - Urban Forestry Committee
 - Conservation Commission
 - Somerville Commission for Persons with Disabilities
- Council on Aging
- Somerville Partnership for Young Children
- Teen Groups
- Teen Empowerment
- Groundwork Somerville Green Team
- Somerville High School Environmental Club

Community Feedback Notes

Teen Groups:

- Age-friendly structures
- Areas separate from little kids (so they don't feel like creeps)
- Places to get lost
- Seating
- Assembly Square needs more parks (tiny, broken up)
- Some neighborhoods have more parks than others (distance barrier)
- Improve open space in the Mystic Housing Development
- Outdoor space adjacent to an indoor space
- Fields to use for open play (so they are not kicked off)

SomerViva: Office of Immigrant Affairs:

- Outdoor fitness equipment
- Parks near senior housing
- Seating & tables for flexible use
- BBQ/music outlets for public use
- Shade
- Plant giveaways
- Help kids learn about the environment
- Help immigrants to connect with local ecology
- “Where are amenities?”
- “Why would I use the parks?” (Good for your health, here's what amenities there are, etc.)
- “What do you need to do to use the park for a party?” (To prevent conflicts when permitting rules are unfamiliar)
- Translate event promotional materials
- Coordinate with SomerViva staff to get the word out and to help non-English-speaking residents to navigate surveys and public processes.

Council on Aging:

- Seating – especially around active recreation (playgrounds and fields)
- Railings
- Social gathering space, especially near senior housing
- ADA/wheelchair-accessible path for exercise
- Chess tables
- Shade
- Places they particularly enjoy: Ed Leathers, Stone Place, Foss Park

SECTION 11

References and Reports

The following reports, references, and websites were used in the writing of the OSRP.

BioMap. “Interactive Map.” Last updated November 2022.

<http://biomap-mass-eoea.hub.arcgis.com>

Cambridge Health Alliance. *Regional Wellbeing Report* (2022).

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Charles River Watershed Association. “Charles River Climate Compact: Regional Collaboration for Climate Action.” Accessed 2024.

<http://www.crwa.org/climate-compact>

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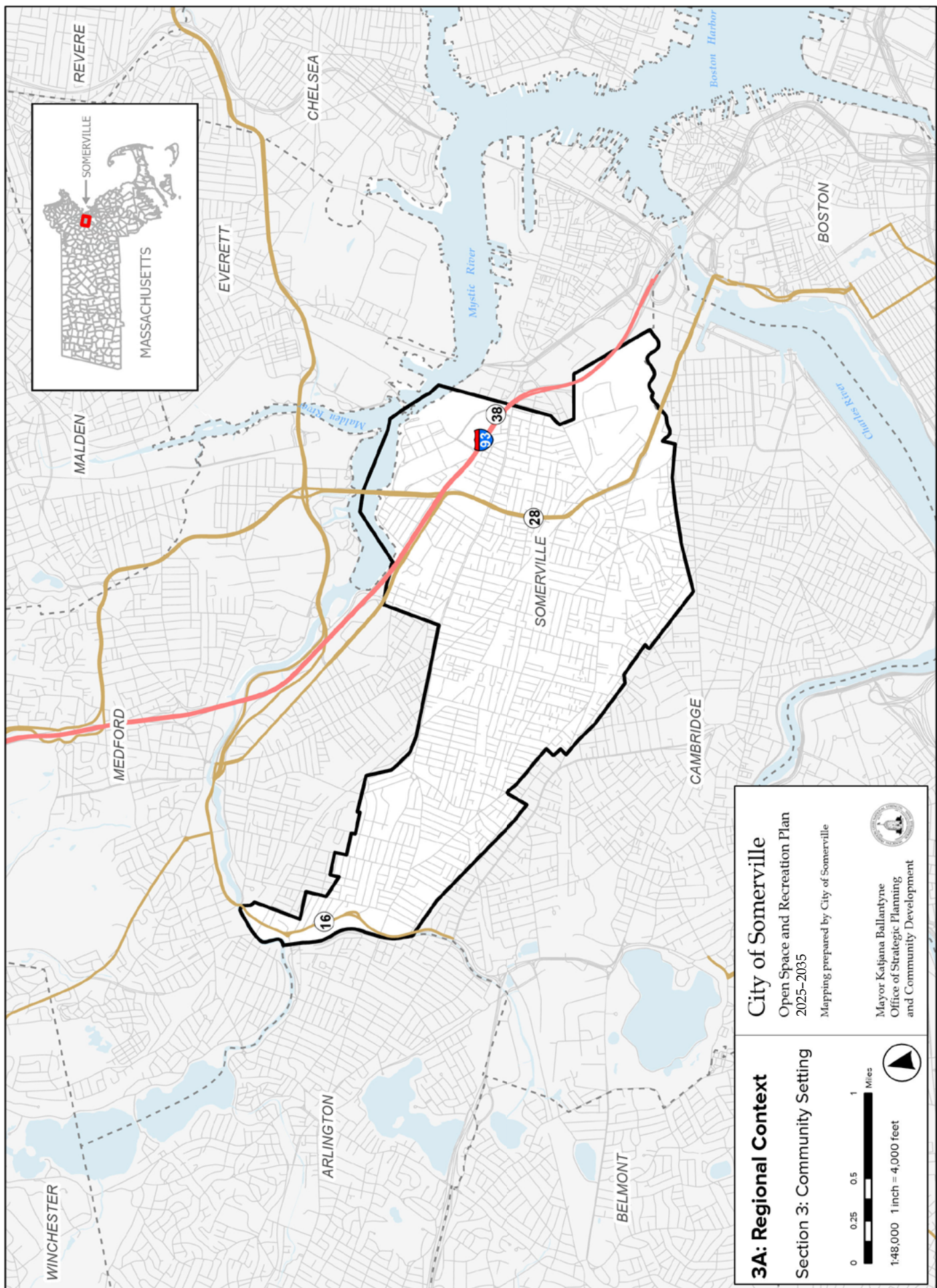
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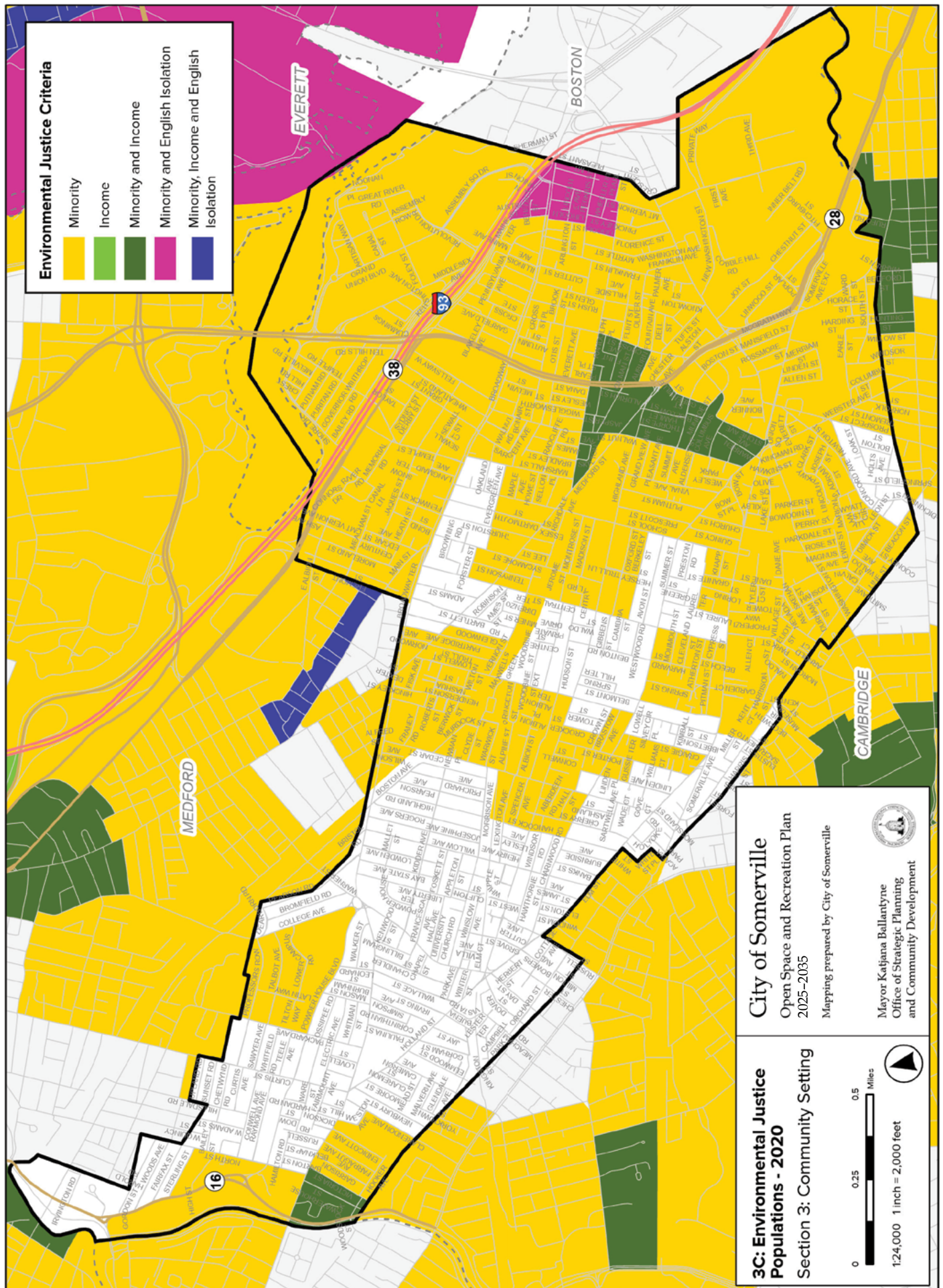
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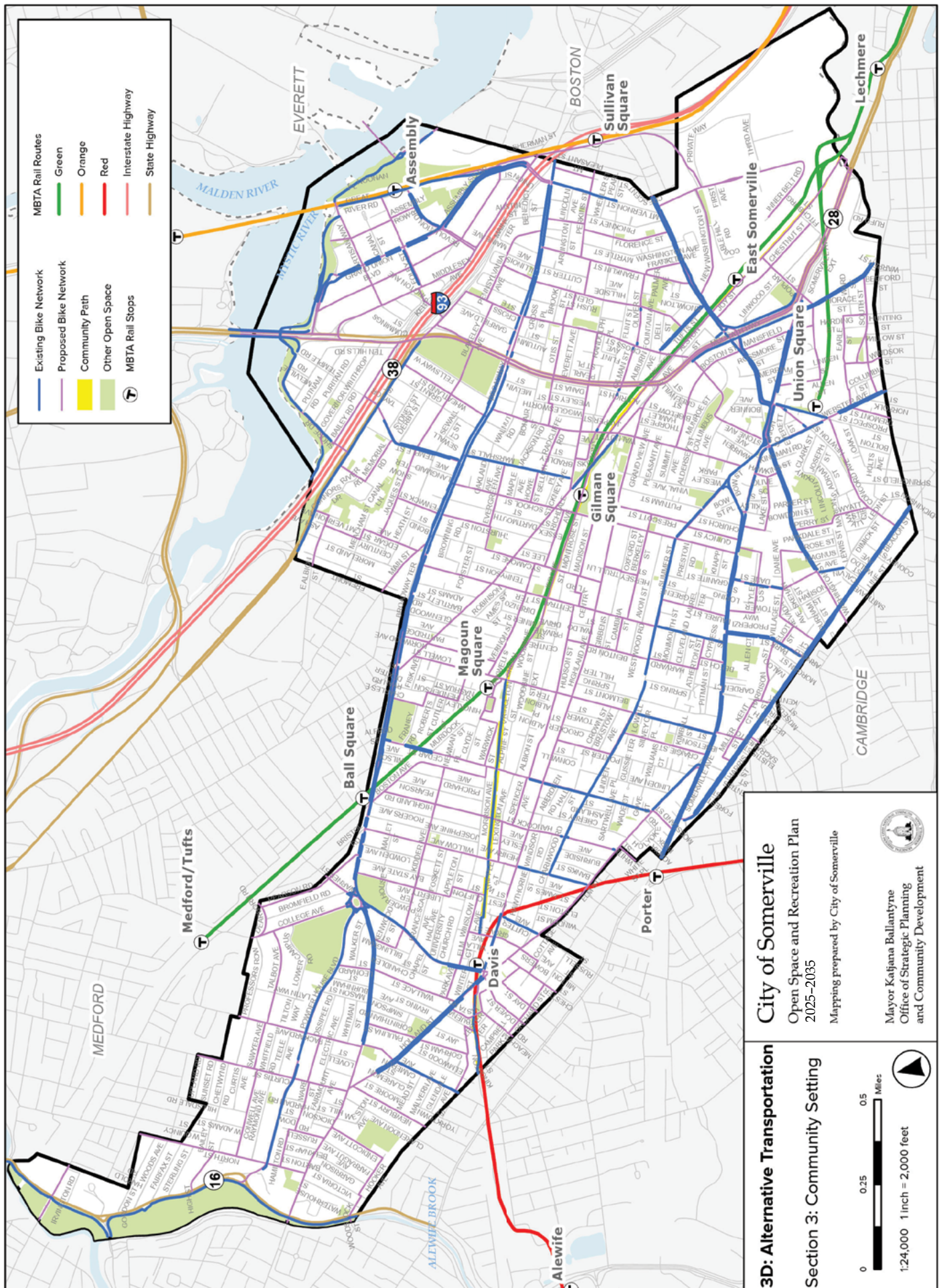
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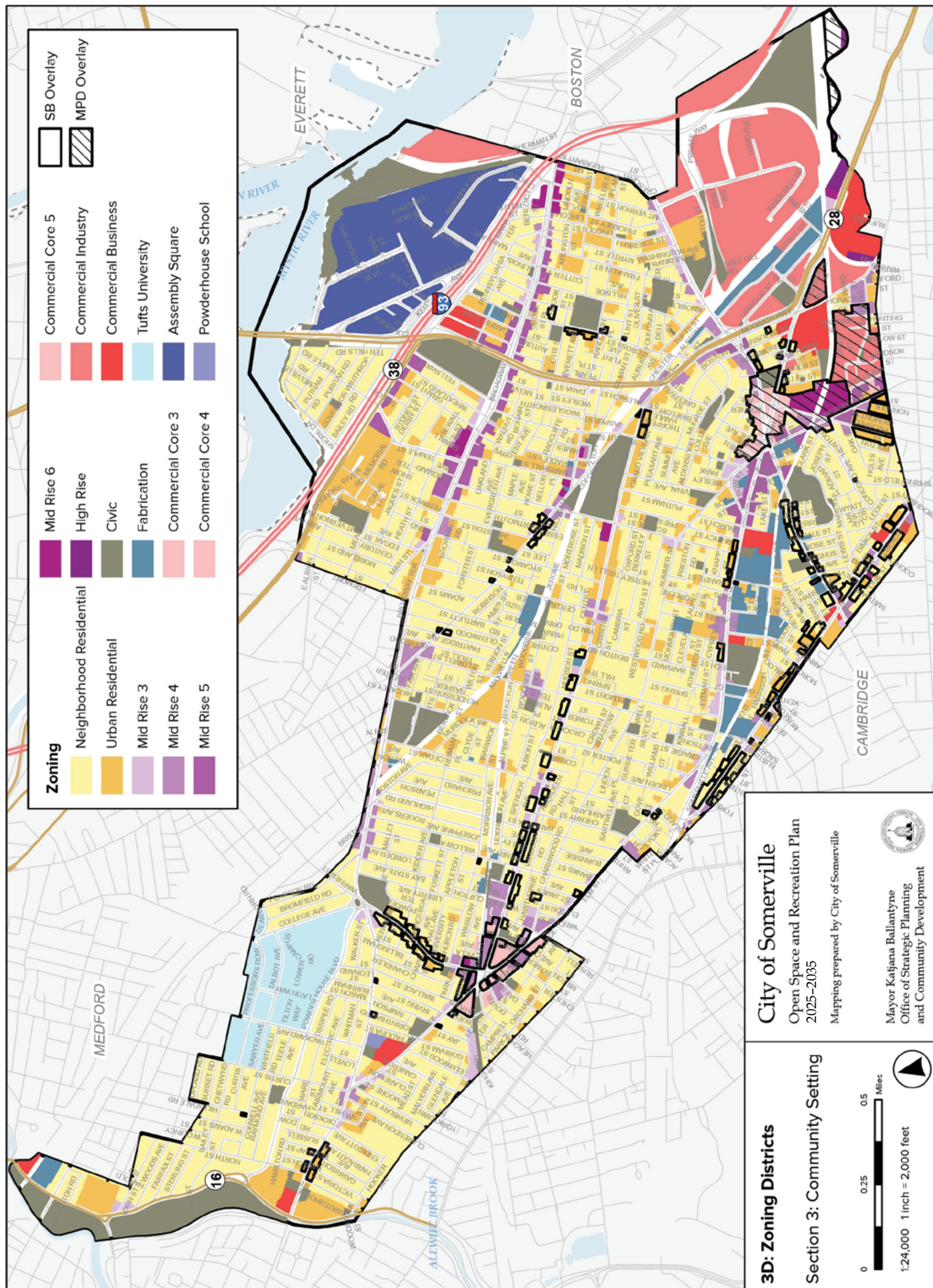


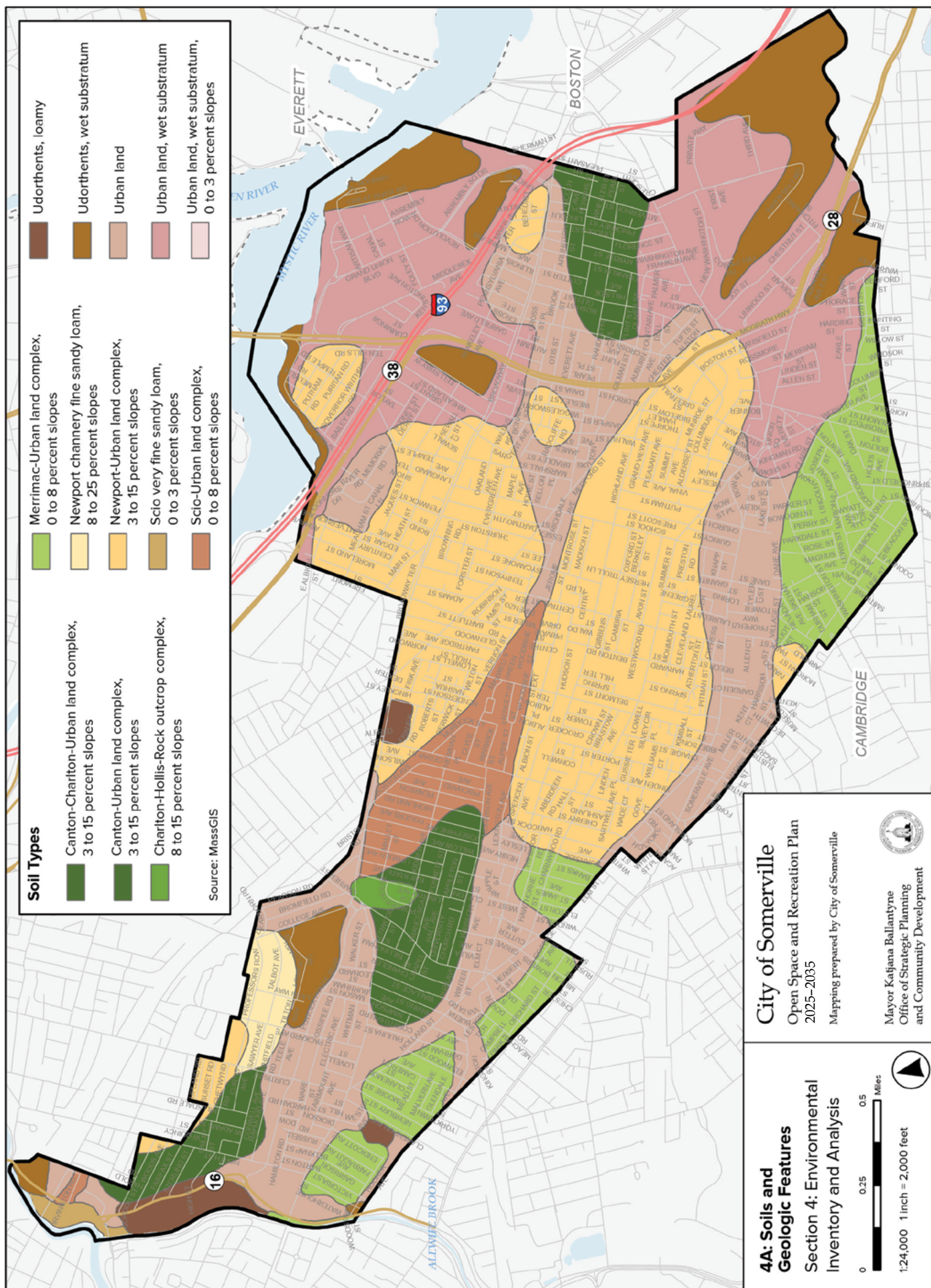
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2025-2035
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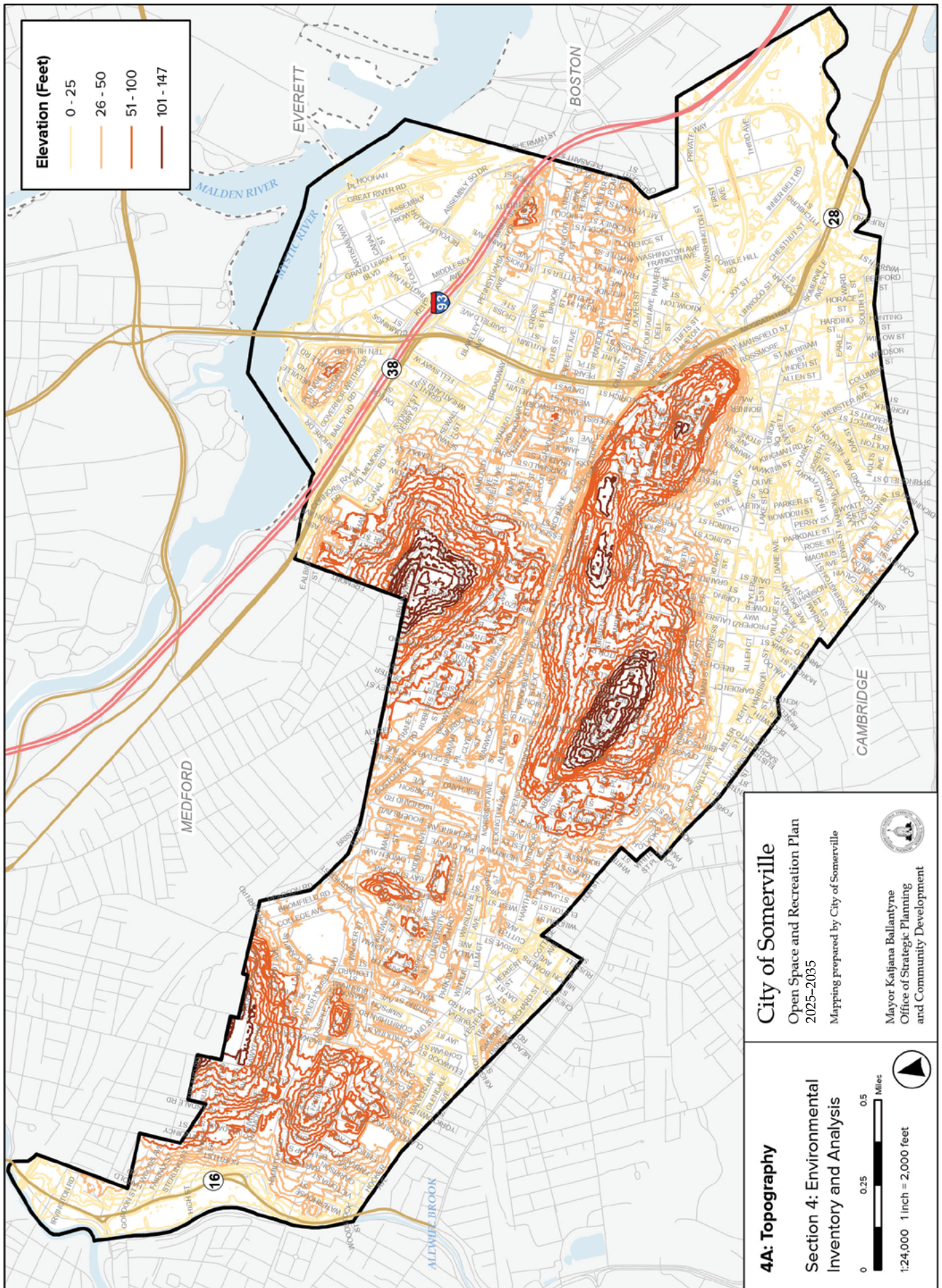


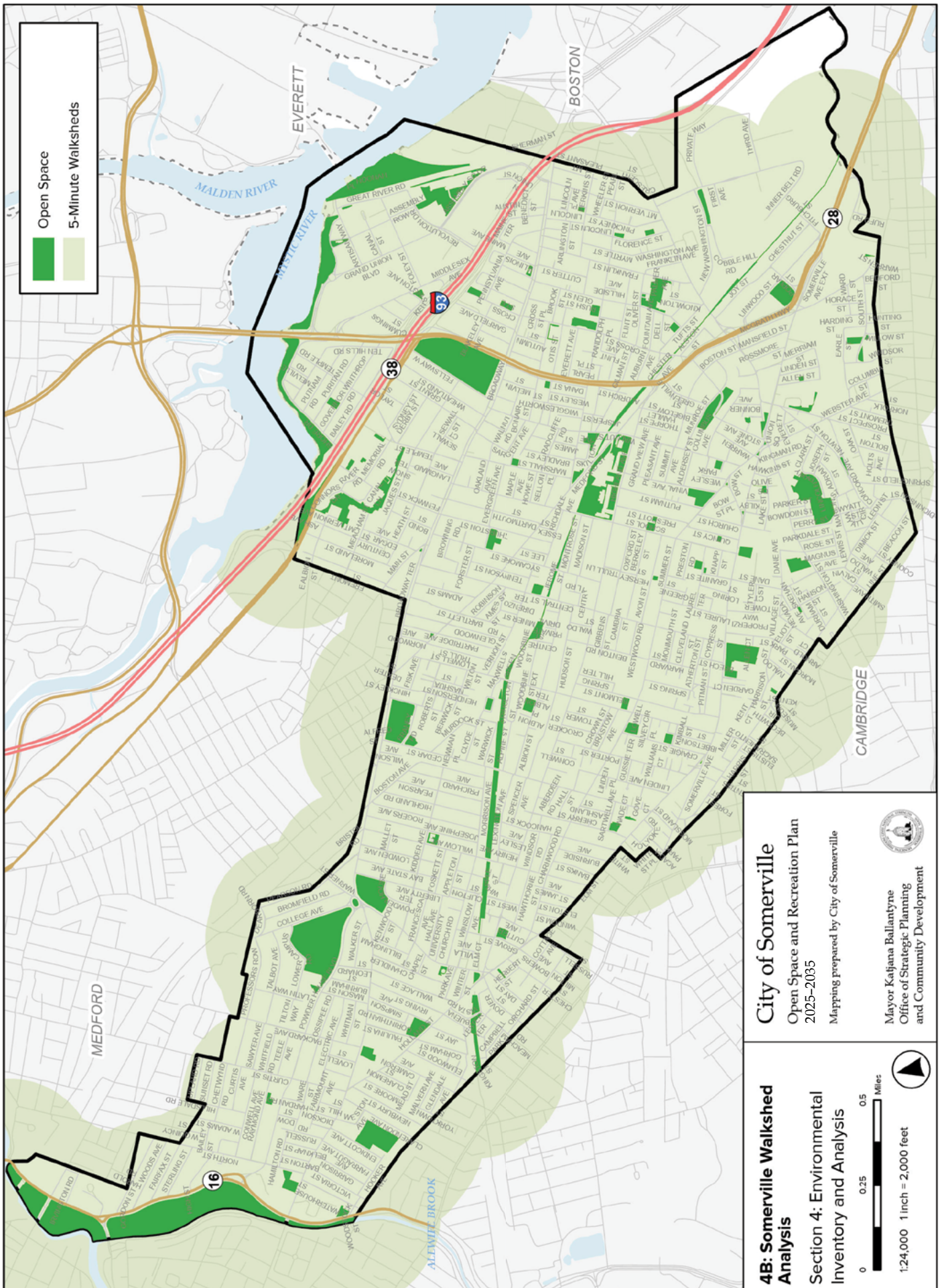
Mayor Kajana Ballantyne
Office of Strategic Planning
and Community Development

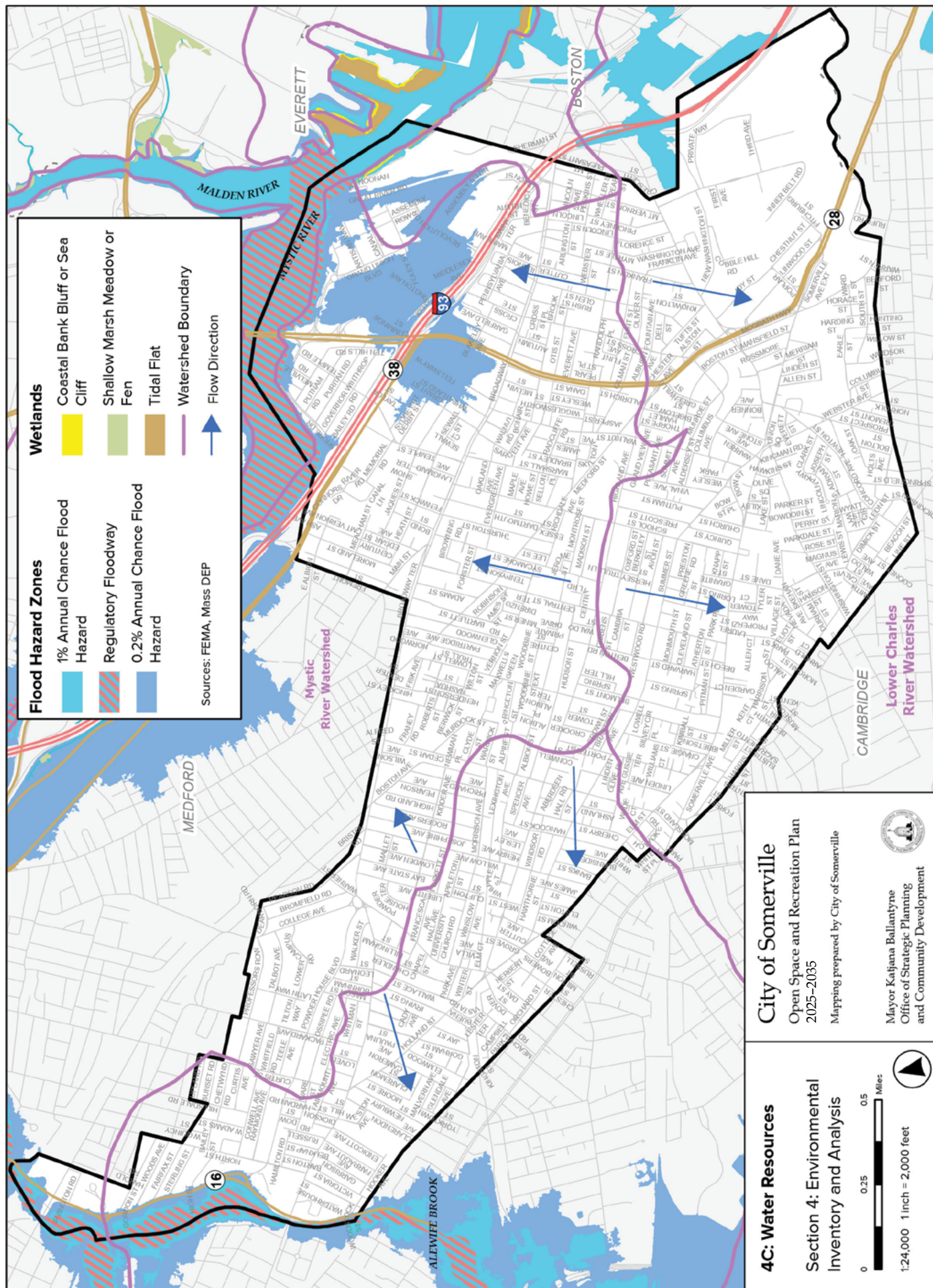
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Section 3: Community Setting

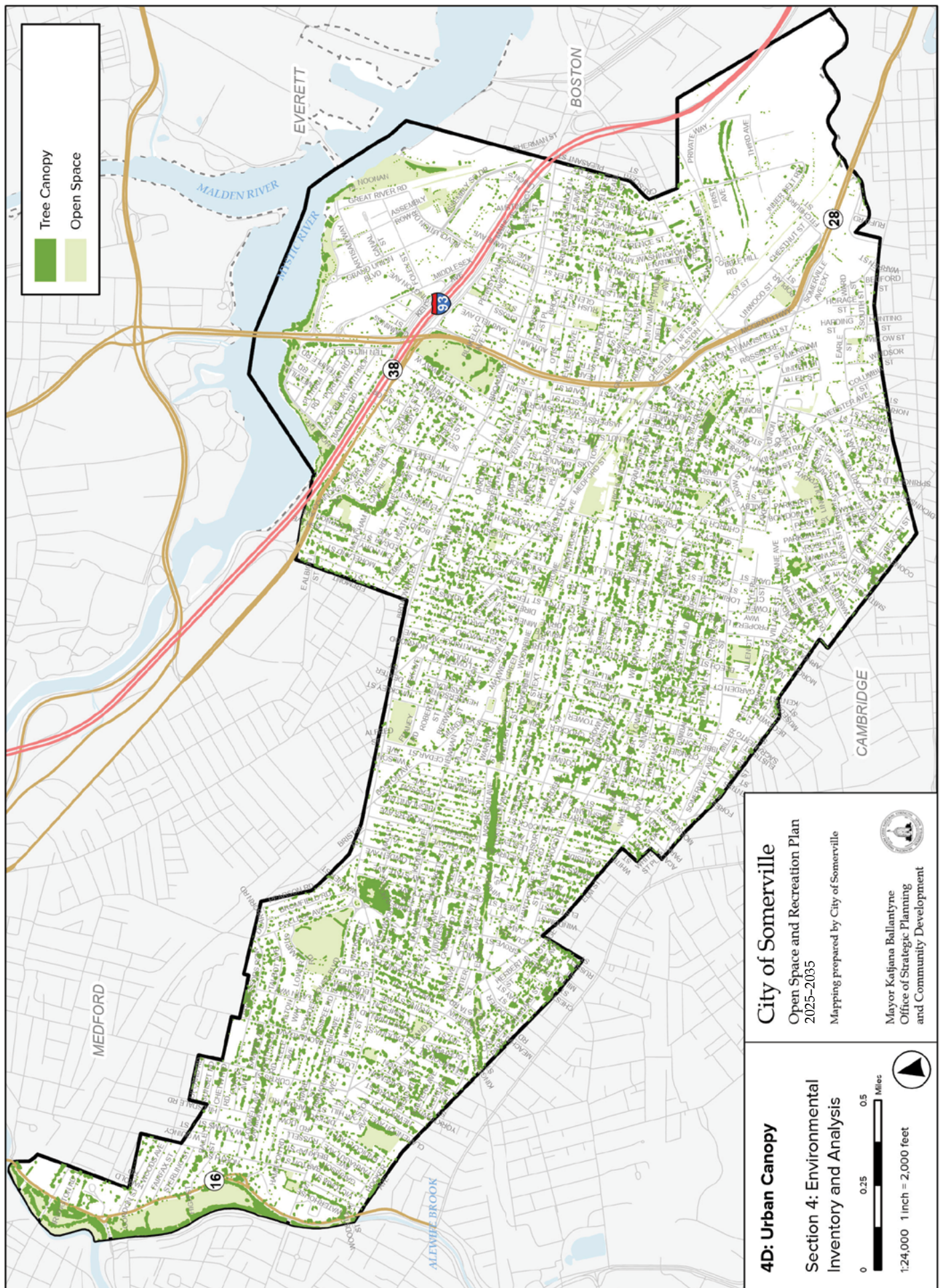


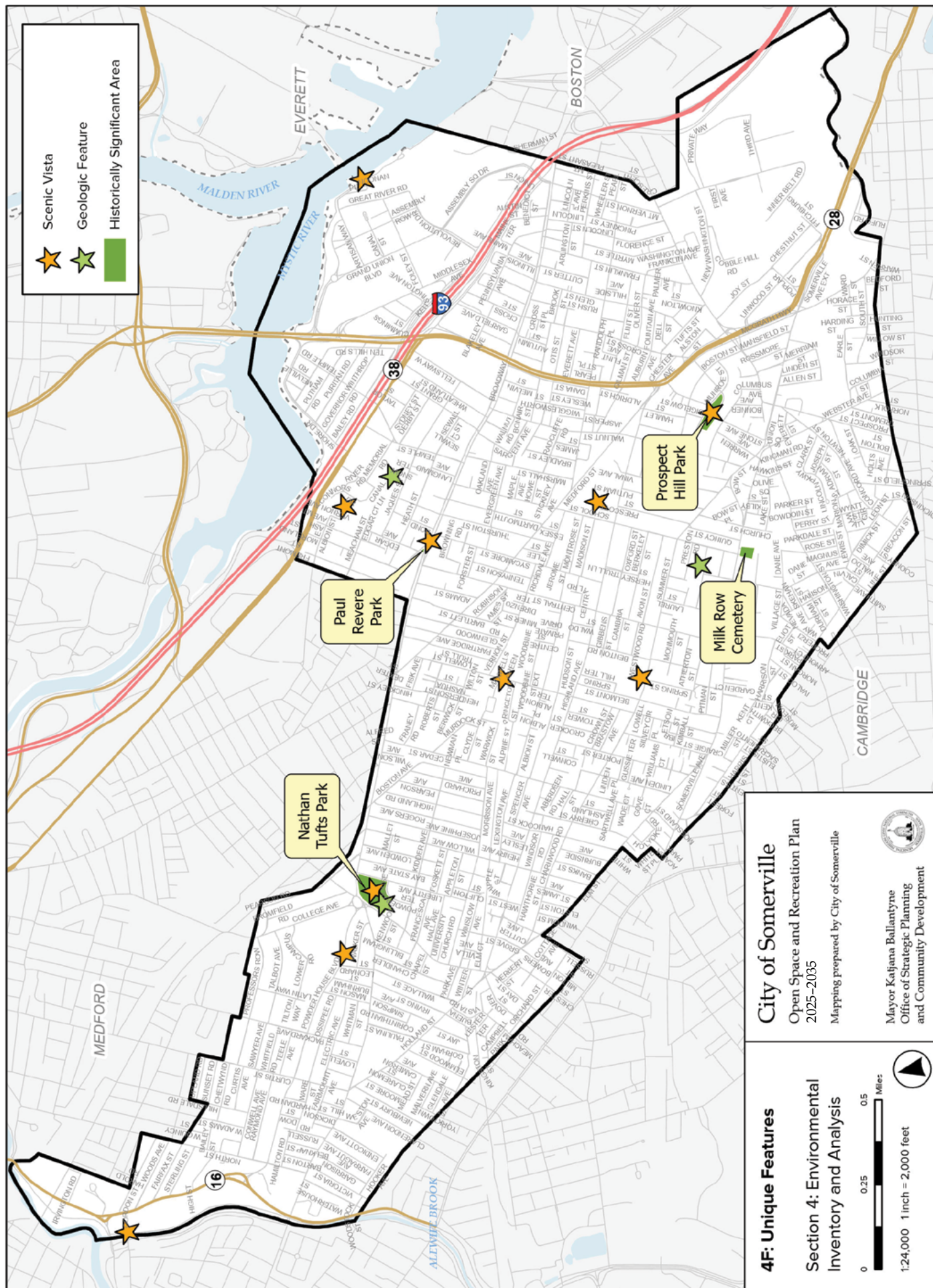












4F: Unique Features

Section 4: Environmental Inventory and Analysis

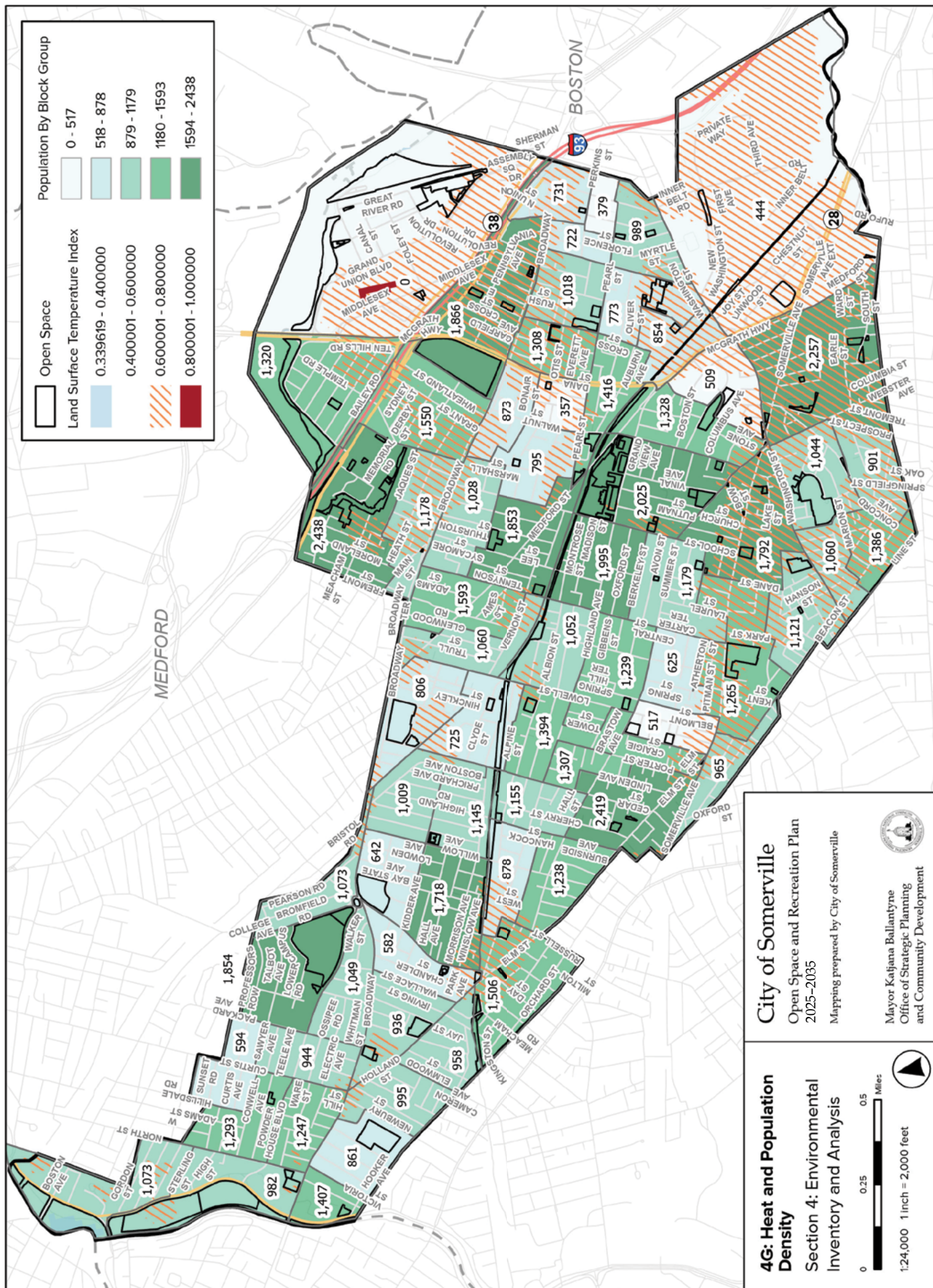
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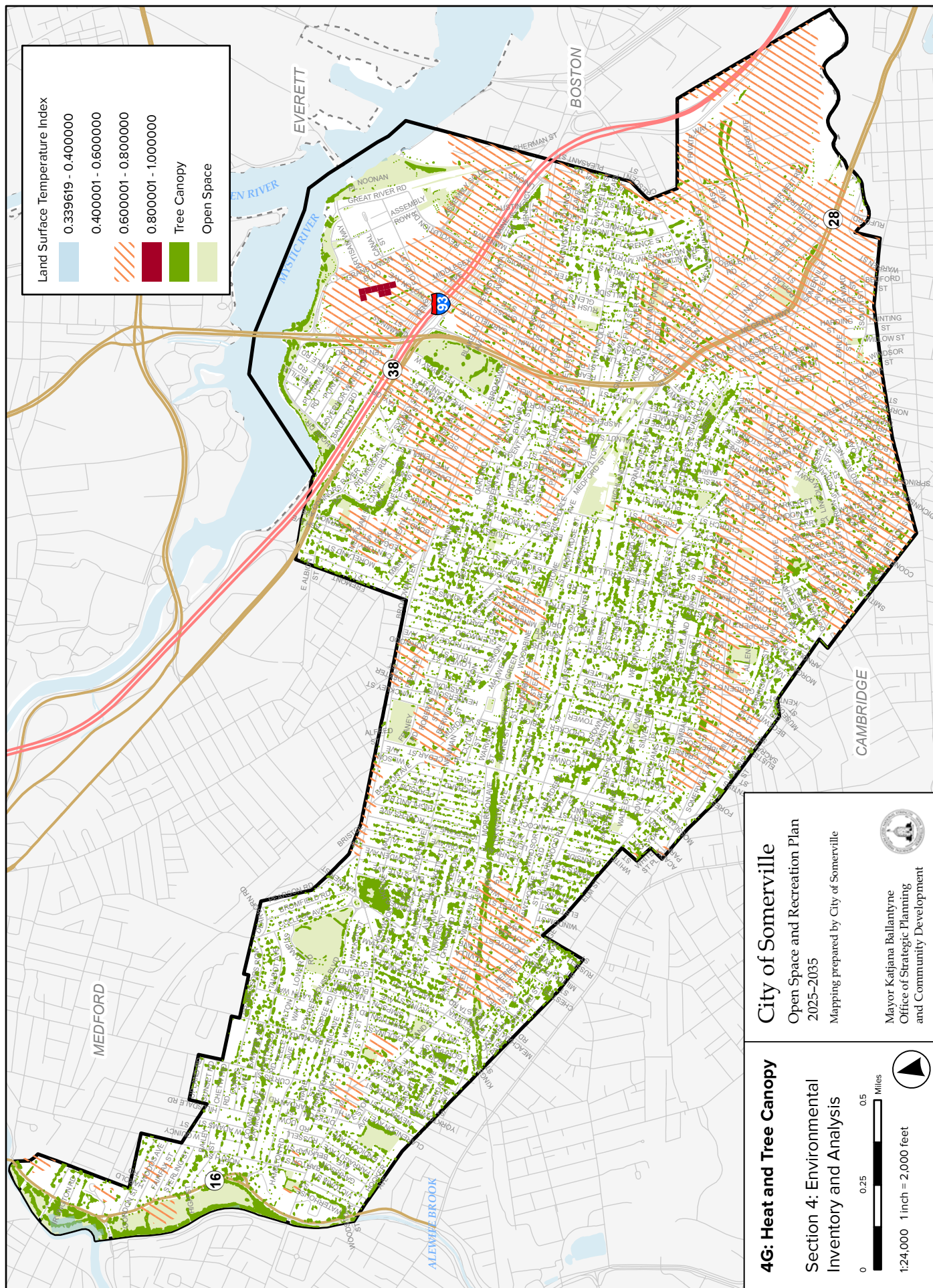
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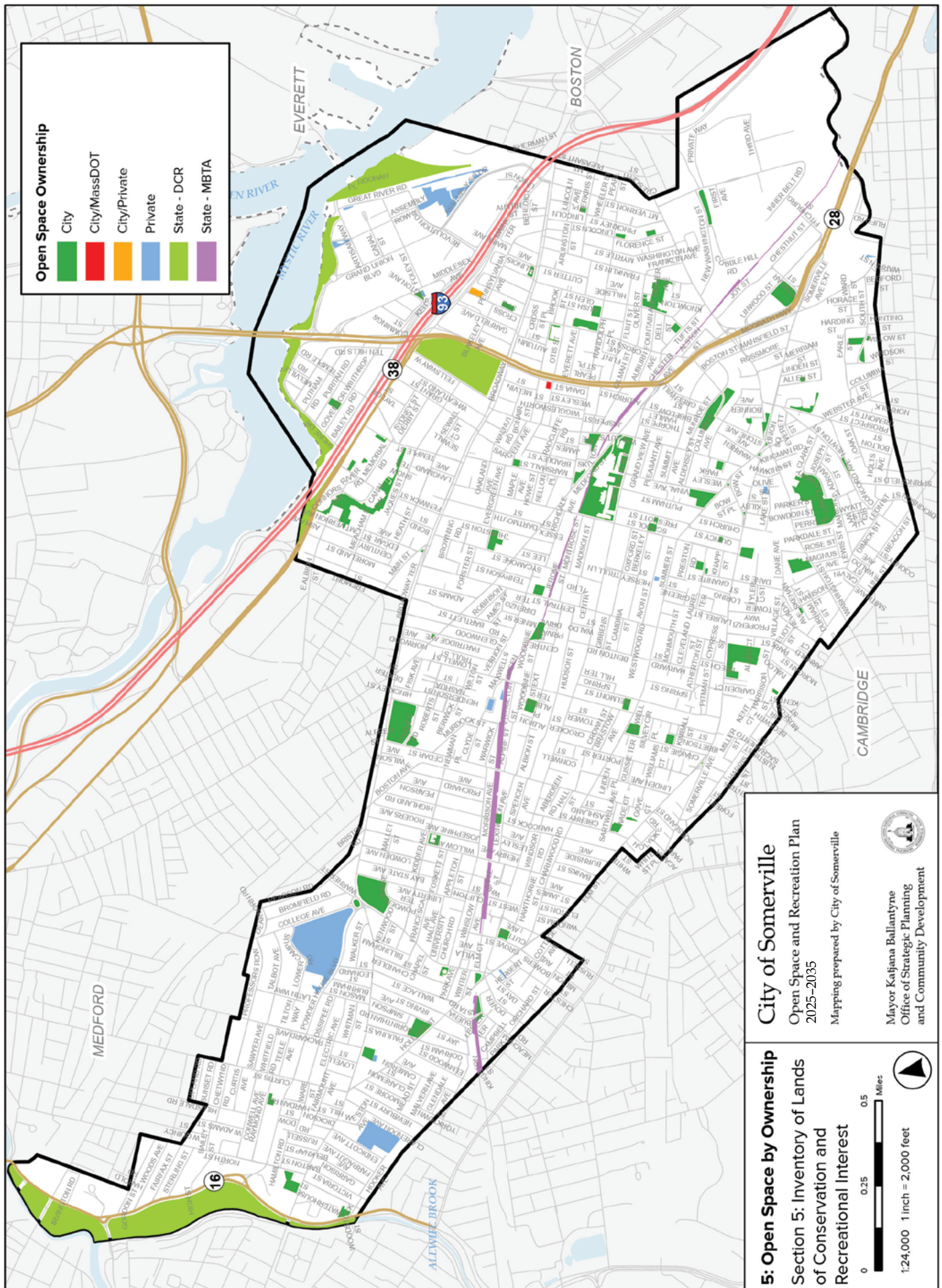
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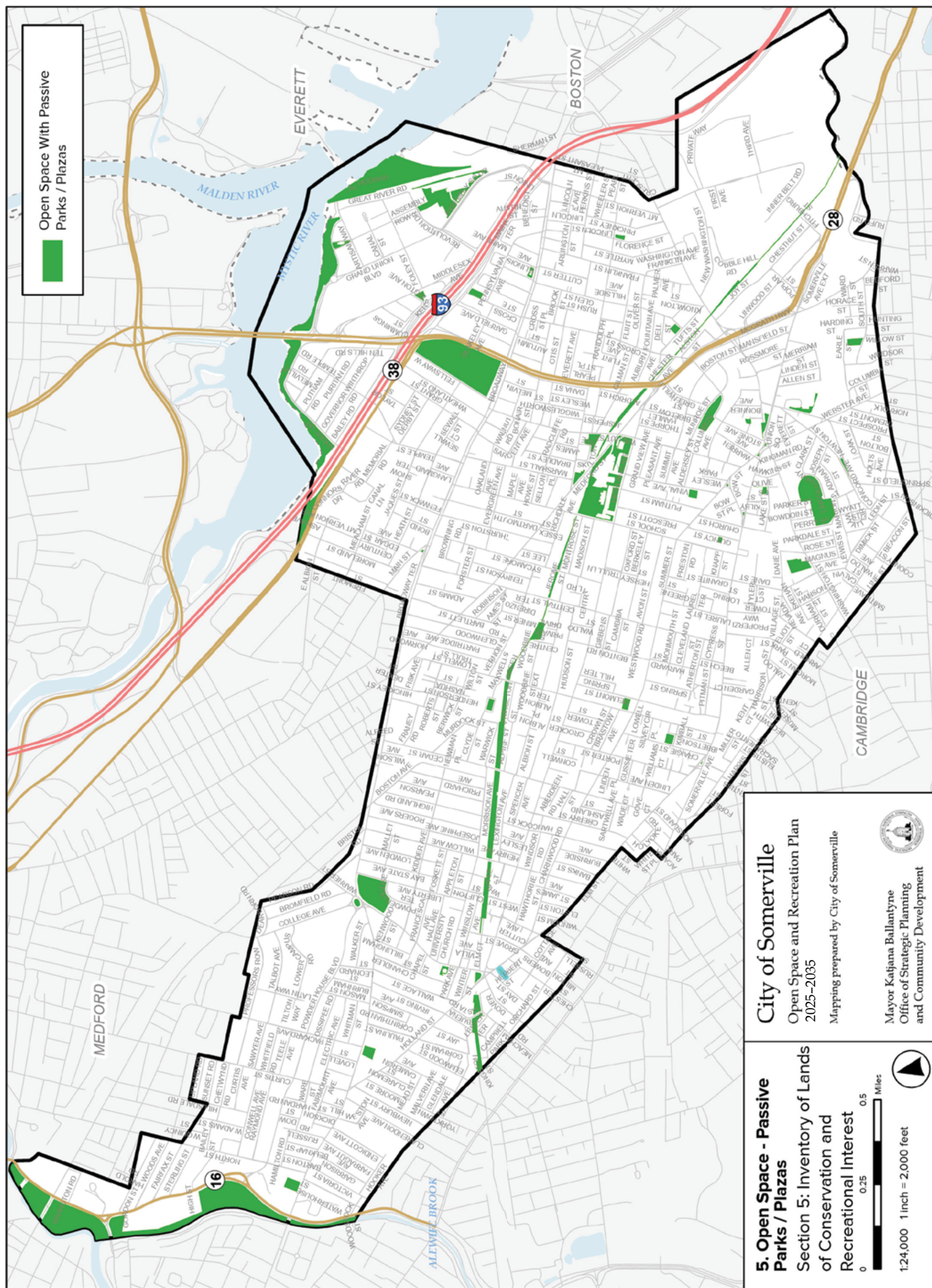


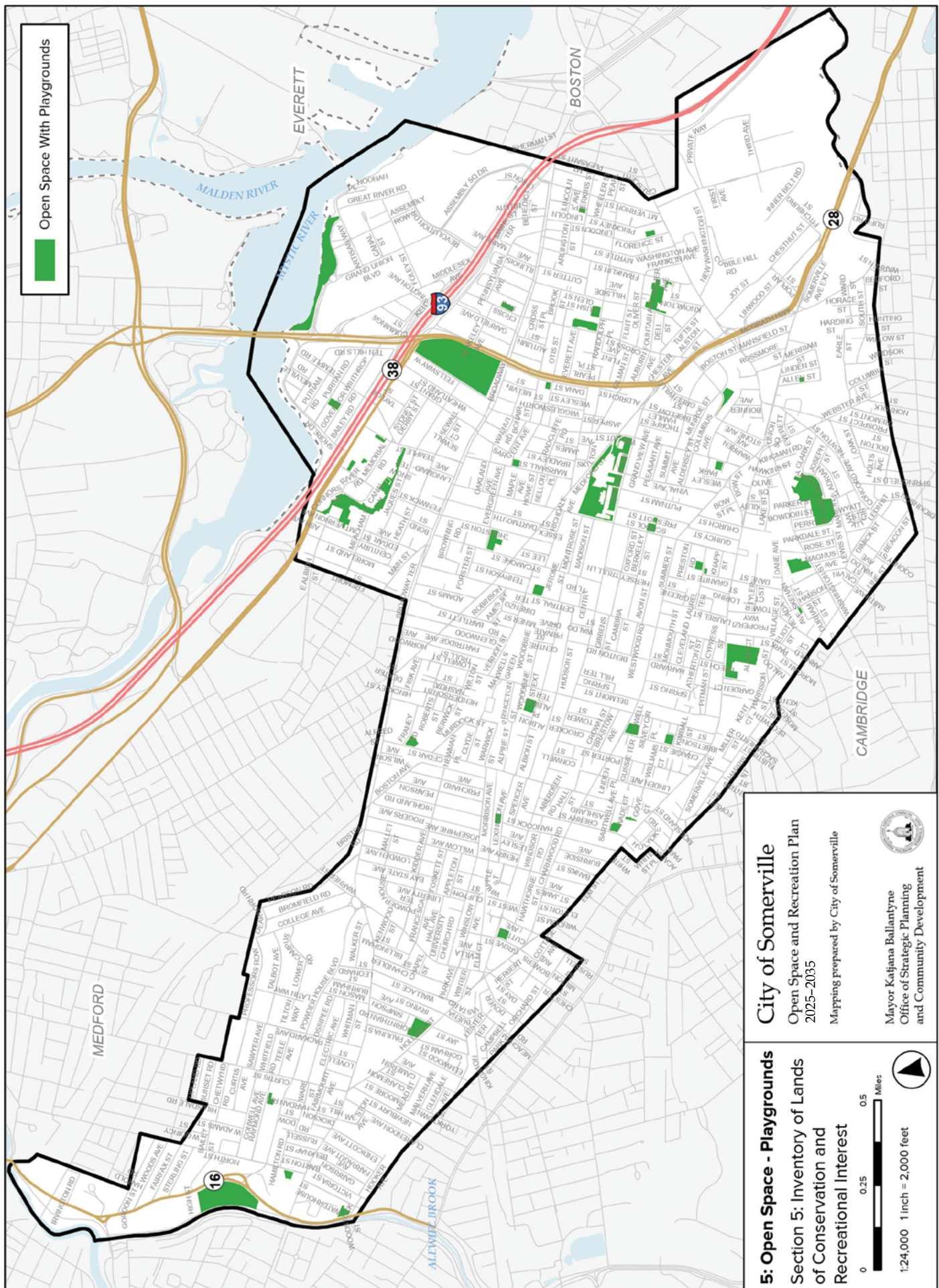
Mayor Katjana Bullantyne
Office of Strategic Planning
and Community Development

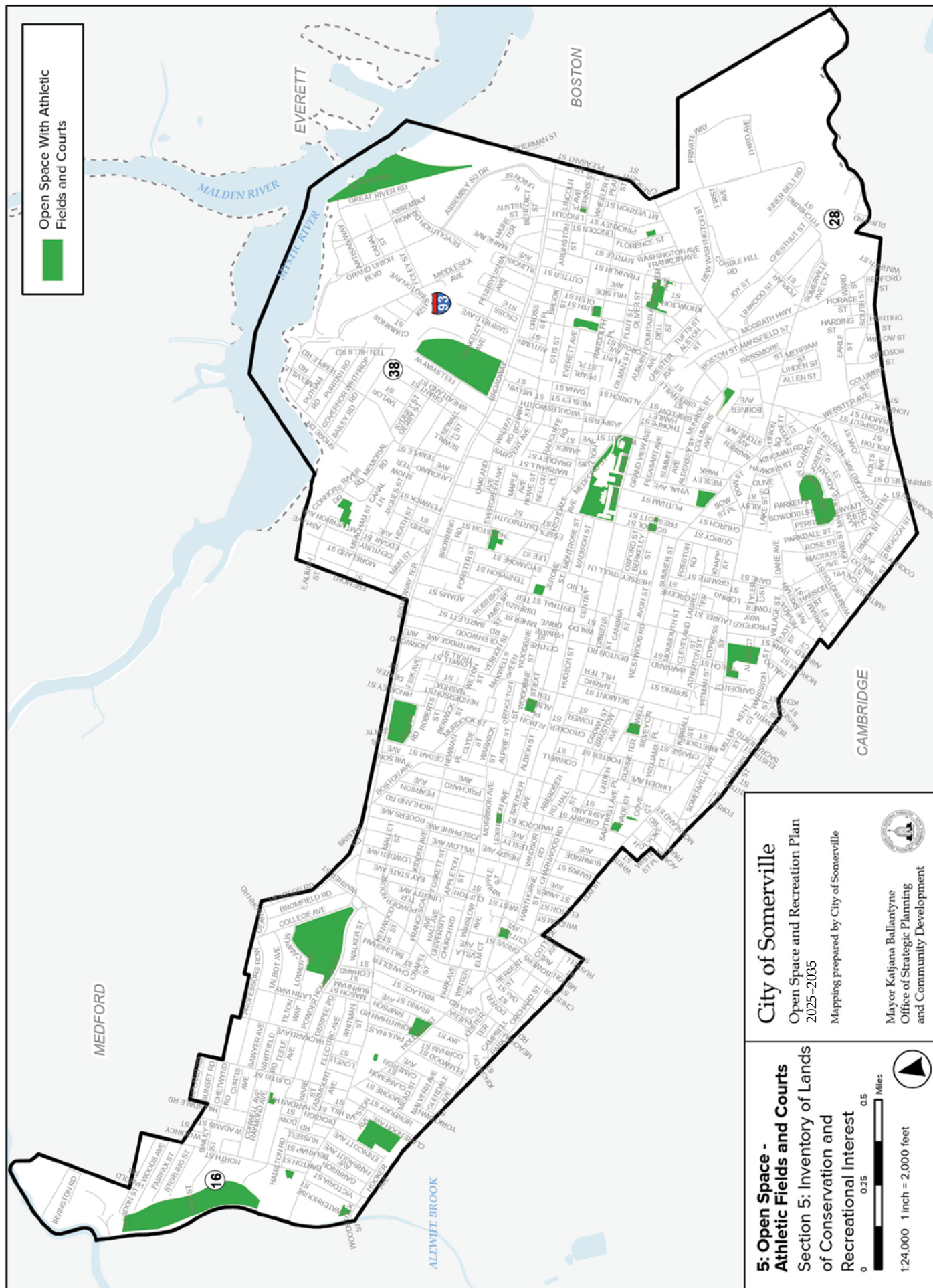


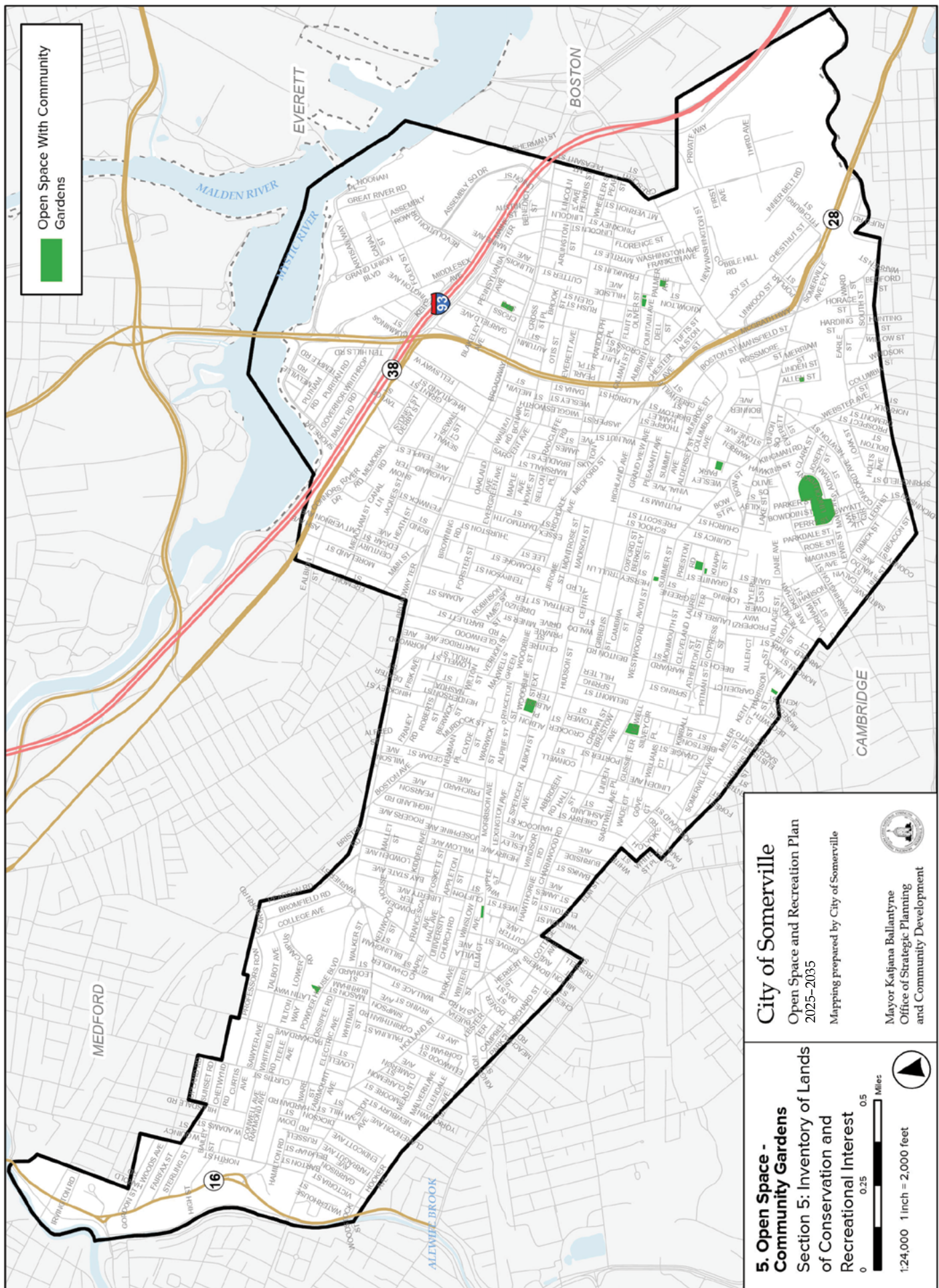












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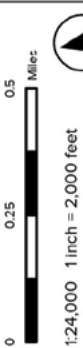
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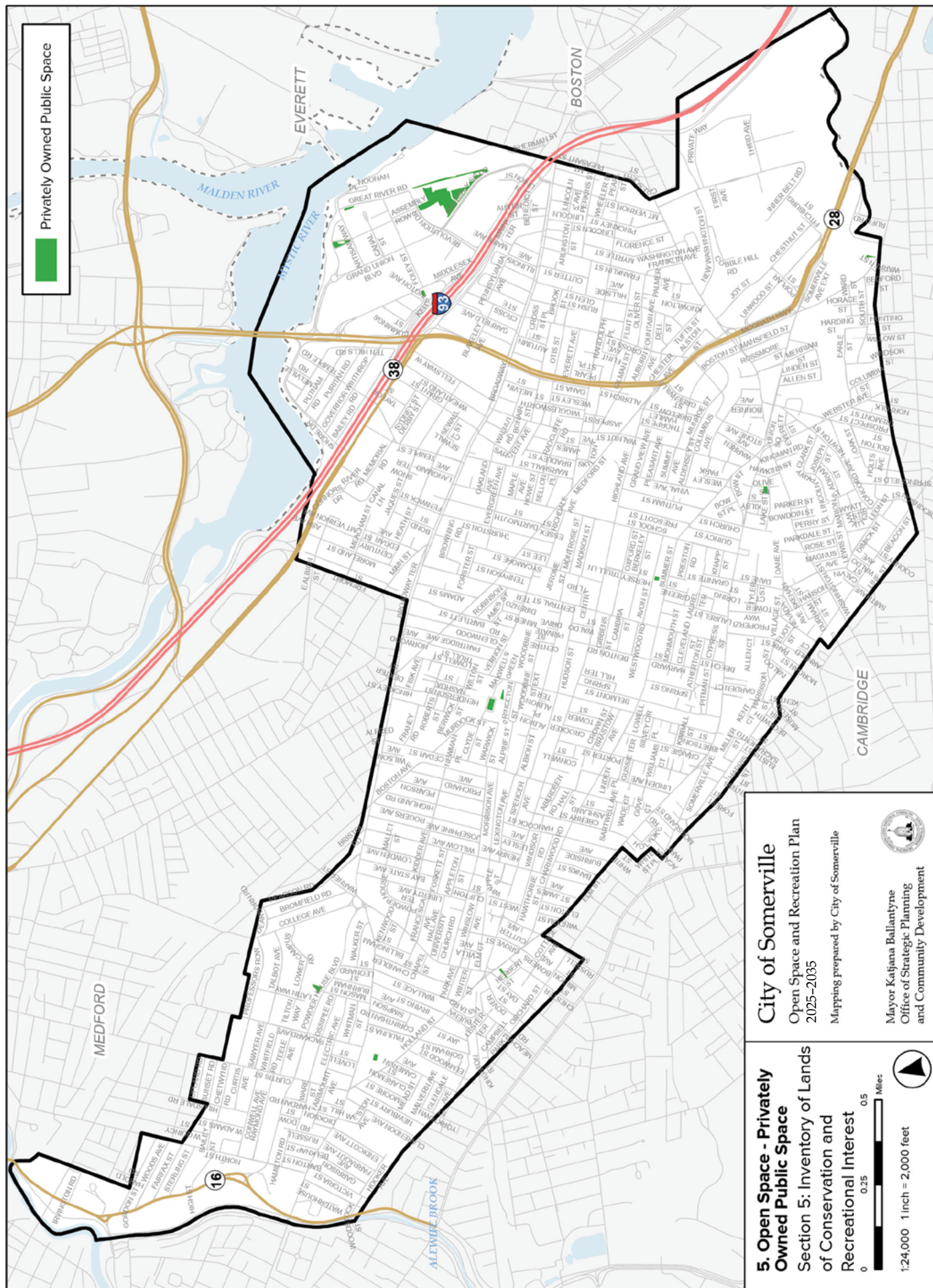
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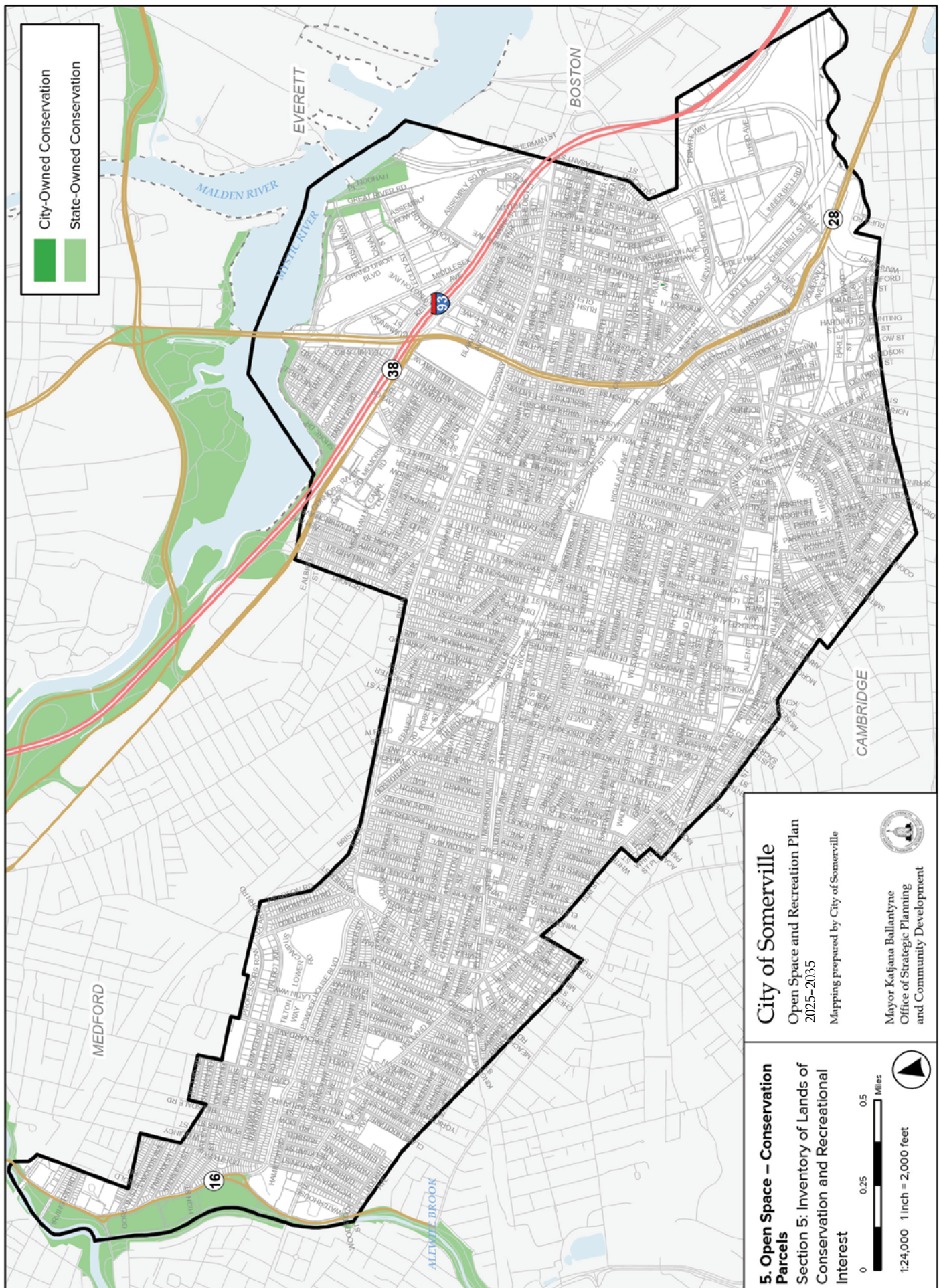


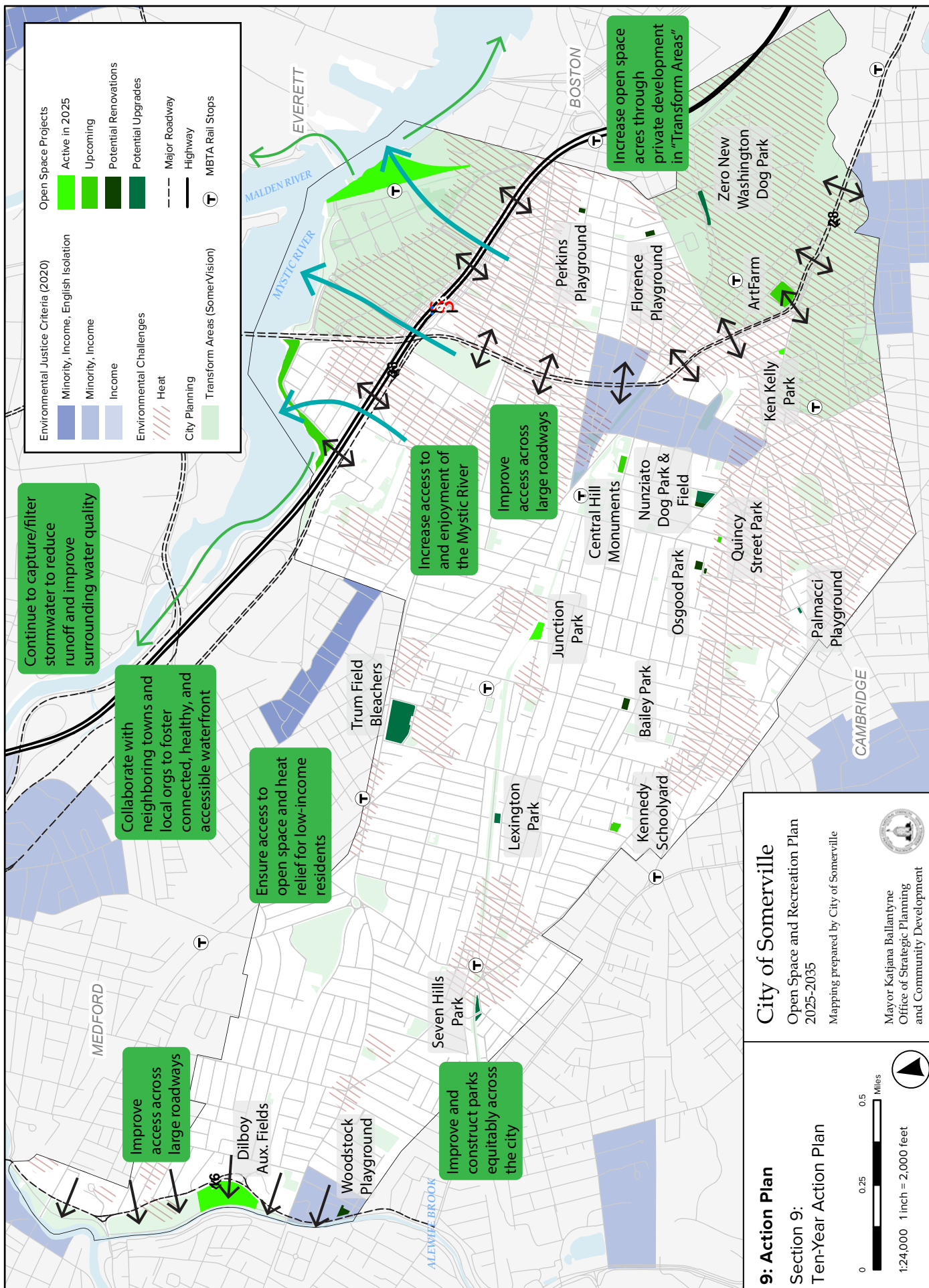
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Office of Strategic Planning
and Community Development

5. Open Space - Community Gardens Section 5: Inventory of Lands of Conservation and Recreational Interest









PARK NAME	TOTAL ACRES	WARD	OWNERSHIP	OPEN SPACE PROTECTION	ADA Access	School Garden	Community Garden	Urban Agriculture	Plaza	Performance Space	Dog Park (OLRA)	"Dogs Allowed (On-Leash)"	Historic Property	Designated Local Historic District	Scenic Vista	Playground (Age 5+)	Tot Lot (Ages 2-5)	Swings	Climbing Wall	Skateboard Elements	Bocce Court	Water Play	Water Feature	Gazebo/Shade Arbor	
CITY OPEN SPACE																									
Albert F. Argenziano Schoolyard	0.61	2	City	CIV protection	X	X			X	X						X	X	X							
Albion Playground	0.68	5	City	In perpetuity	X		X		X	X						X	X	X				X		X	
Allen Street Playground and Community Garden	0.12	2	City	In perpetuity	X		X		X								X								
ArtFarm	2.10	2	City	CIV protection	X			X		X															
Arthur D. Healey Schoolyard and Community Playground	1.28	4	City	CIV protection	X	X			X	X					X	X	X	X						X	
Bailey Park	0.39	3	City	In perpetuity	X							X	X		X										
Benjamin G. Brown Schoolyard	0.37	6	City	CIV protection	X	X			X	X						X									
Bow & Somerville Ave Triangle	0.04	3	City	CIV protection																					
Bow & Summer Triangle	0.02	3	City	CIV protection																					
Boynton Yards Park	0.51	2	City	City ownership	X				X			X										X		X	
Central Hill Park	7.70	3	City	In perpetuity (partial), CIV protection (partial)	X	X			X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X				X			
Chuckie Harris Park	0.41	1	City	In perpetuity	X		X			X						X	X				X	X			
Concord Square	0.13	2	City	CIV protection	X																				
Conway Park	3.76	2	City	In perpetuity	X				X	X			X			X		X				X			
Corbett-McKenna Park	0.62	3	City	In perpetuity	X										X	X		X				X			
Cremin (Otis Street) Playground	0.17	1	City/ Mass DOT	In perpetuity	X											X	X	X				X			
Cummings Building	0.44	3	City	CIV protection	X											X									
Dickerman Playground	0.39	3	City	In perpetuity	X					X						X		X				X		X	

	PARK NAME	Shade	Lawn	Tables	Seating	Drinking Fountain	Lighting	Landmark	Fitness Equipment	Baseball - Little League	Baseball - Adult	Softball	Basketball Full Court	Basketball Half Court	Multi Purpose Goal	Ice Hockey/Skating	Soccer/Rectangle Field	Diamond Field	Stick Ball	Tennis Court	Handball/Tennis Wall	Running Track	Bike Path	Walking Path	Porto Potty	Restrooms	Pool	Boathouse	Fishing	Stormwater Capture	Pollinator Planting
	CITY OPEN SPACE																														
	Albert F. Argenziano Schoolyard				X	X								X	X						X									X	
	Albion Playground	X	X	X	X	X	X						X		X										X						
	Allen Street Playground and Community Garden				X	X																									
	Art Farm																														
	Arthur D. Healey Schoolyard and Community Playground	X		X	X	X	X		X				X	X			X				X				X					X	
	Bailey Park		X		X																										
	Benjamin G. Brown Schoolyard				X		X							X			X				X										
	Bow & Somerville Ave Triangle	X			X																										
	Bow & Summer Triangle	X			X																										
	Boynton Yards Park	X	X		X	X	X	X																							
	Central Hill Park	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X								X							X		X				X	X
	Chuckie Harris Park		X	X	X	X	X																		X					X	
	Concord Square		X																												
	Conway Park	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X			X	X	X								X				X	X
	Corbett-McKenna Park			X	X	X	X																								
	Cremin (Otis Street) Playground	X		X	X	X	X						X																	X	
	Cummings Building																														
	Dickerman Playground		X	X	X	X	X						X																		

PARK NAME	TOTAL ACRES	WARD	OWNERSHIP	OPEN SPACE PROTECTION	ADA Access	School Garden	Community Garden	Urban Agriculture	Plaza	Performance Space	Dog Park (OLRA)	"Dogs Allowed (On-Leash)"	Historic Property	Designated Local Historic District	Scenic Vista	Playground (Age 5+)	Tot Lot (Ages 2-5)	Swings	Climbing Wall	Skateboard Elements	Bocce Court	Water Play	Water Feature	Gazebo/Shade Arbor	
CITY OPEN SPACE, CONTINUED																									
Durell Community Garden	0.12	2	City	In perpetuity	X		X																		
East Branch Library Lawn	0.18	1	City	CIV protection	X																				
East Somerville Committee Action Park	0.59	1	City/ Private	In perpetuity	X							X													
East Somerville Community Schoolyard	1.52	1	City	CIV protection	X	X										X									
Ed Leathers Community Park	0.74	1	City	In perpetuity	X					X		X				X									
Edgerly Education Center Schoolyard	0.21	1	City	CIV protection	X	X											X								
Florence Playground	0.25	1	City	CIV protection	X											X		X				X			
Gilman Square	0.36	4	City	None	X																				
Glen Park and Capuano Early Childhood Center Schoolyard	1.96	1	City	In perpetuity	X											X	X								
Glen Park Community Garden	0.42	1	City	In perpetuity (partial), CIV protection (partial)	X		X																		
Grimmons Park	0.45	4	City	In perpetuity	X											X	X		X			X			
Henry Hansen Park	0.06	5	City	In perpetuity	X								X												
Hodgkins-Curtin Park	1.44	7	City	In perpetuity	X											X	X	X				X			
Hoyt-Sullivan Park	0.52	5	City	In perpetuity	X				X	X					X	X	X	X					X		
John F. Kennedy Schoolyard	0.54	5	City	CIV protection	X	X										X		X							
Kenney Park	0.52	6	City	CIV protection	X				X	X						X							X		
Leonard Grimes Park	0.10	1	City	City ownership	X							X													
Lexington Park	0.31	5, 6	City	In perpetuity	X											X	X					X			

	PARK NAME	Shade	Lawn	Tables	Seating	Drinking Fountain	Lighting	Landmark	Fitness Equipment	Baseball - Little League	Baseball - Adult	Softball	Basketball Full Court	Basketball Half Court	Multi Purpose Goal	Ice Hockey/Skating	Soccer/Rectangle Field	Diamond Field	Stick Ball	Tennis Court	Handball/Tennis Wall	Running Track	Bike Path	Walking Path	Porto Potty	Restrooms	Pool	Boathouse	Fishing	Stormwater Capture	Pollinator Planting
	CITY OPEN SPACE, CONTINUED																														
	Durell Community Garden				X																										
	East Branch Library Lawn		X		X		X																								
	East Somerville Committee Action Park	X	X	X	X	X	X																X	X						X	
	East Somerville Community Schoolyard				X		X							X			X														
	Ed Leathers Community Park	X	X		X	X	X																							X	
	Edgerly Education Center Schoolyard	X		X	X		X							X																	X
	Florence Playground	X		X	X	X							X																		
	Gilman Square		X		X																										
	Glen Park and Capuano Early Childhood Center Schoolyard		X	X	X	X	X						X												X						
	Glen Park Community Garden			X	X		X										X														
	Grimmons Park			X	X		X														X										
	Henry Hansen Park				X			X																							
	Hodgkins-Curtin Park		X	X	X	X	X			X				X										X	X						
	Hoyt-Sullivan Park	X		X	X	X	X							X																	
	John F. Kennedy Schoolyard				X		X						X																		
	Kenney Park		X	X	X	X	X						X																		
	Leonard Grimes Park			X	X	X	X																							X	
	Lexington Park				X		X						X																		

PARK NAME	TOTAL ACRES	WARD	OWNERSHIP	OPEN SPACE PROTECTION	ADA Access	School Garden	Community Garden	Urban Agriculture	Plaza	Performance Space	Dog Park (OLRA)	"Dogs Allowed (On-Leash)"	Historic Property	Designated Local Historic District	Scenic Vista	Playground (Age 5+)	Tot Lot (Ages 2-5)	Swings	Climbing Wall	Skateboard Elements	Bocce Court	Water Play	Water Feature	Gazebo/Shade Arbor	
CITY OPEN SPACE, CONTINUED																									
Lincoln Park	5.60	2	City	In perpetuity	X		X			X		X				X	X	X		X		X			
Lou Ann David Park	0.64	7	City	CIV protection	X				X	X		X													
Marshall Street Playground	0.24	4	City	In perpetuity	X				X	X						X	X						X	X	
Middlesex Park	0.19	1	City	SPC	X							X											X	X	
Milk Row Cemetery	0.70	2	City	CIV protection	X								X												
Morse-Kelley Playground	0.67	3	City	In perpetuity	X		X										X		X	X				X	
Mystic Housing Development	4.13	4	City	In perpetuity	X											X	X					X			
Nathan Tufts Park	4.32	6	City	In perpetuity	X							X	X	X	X										
North Street Veterans Playground	0.31	7	City	In perpetuity	X											X	X					X			
Nunziato Field	1.13	3	City	CIV protection	X						X	X													
Osgood Park	0.40	2	City	In perpetuity	X		X									X	X	X				X			
Palmacci Playground	0.08	2	City	In perpetuity	X				X							X									
Paul Revere Park	0.03	5	City	CIV protection	X								X												
Perkins Playground	0.16	1	City	In perpetuity	X											X		X				X			
Perry Park	1.27	2	City	In perpetuity	X					X		X				X									
Powder House Circle	0.21	6	City	CIV protection																					
Prospect Hill Park	1.68	3	City	In perpetuity	X							X	X	X	X										
Quincy Street Park	0.12	2	City	CIV protection	X							X													
Seven Hills Park	0.39	6	City	CIV protection	X					X			X												
Somerville Community Growing Center	0.35	3	City	CIV protection	X					X															
Somerville Junction Park	0.82	5	City	In perpetuity	X							X			X										
South St Farm	0.34	2	City	CIV protection	X			X																	
Statue Park	0.24	6	City	CIV protection					X																
Stone Place Park	0.14	3	City	In perpetuity	X																				

	PARK NAME	Shade	Lawn	Tables	Seating	Drinking Fountain	Lighting	Landmark	Fitness Equipment	Baseball - Little League	Baseball - Adult	Softball	Basketball Full Court	Basketball Half Court	Multi Purpose Goal	Ice Hockey/Skating	Soccer/Rectangle Field	Diamond Field	Stick Ball	Tennis Court	Handball/Tennis Wall	Running Track	Bike Path	Walking Path	Porto Potty	Restrooms	Pool	Boathouse	Fishing	Stormwater Capture	Pollinator Planting
	CITY OPEN SPACE, CONTINUED																														
	Lincoln Park		X	X	X	X	X					X	X				X	X						X	X					X	
	Lou Ann David Park	X	X	X	X	X	X																	X						X	
	Marshall Street Playground	X	X	X	X																									X	
	Middlesex Park	X	X	X	X	X	X																X	X							
	Milk Row Cemetery		X		X			X																							
	Morse-Kelley Playground			X	X	X	X	X					X	X					X												X
	Mystic Housing Development		X				X																								
	Nathan Tufts Park		X		X	X	X	X																X							
	North Street Veterans Playground		X	X	X	X	X							X	X						X									X	
	Nunziato Field		X		X		X										X								X						
	Osgood Park				X	X	X																								
	Palmacci Playground	X		X	X	X																		X							
	Paul Revere Park																														
	Perkins Playground	X	X	X	X	X								X																	
	Perry Park		X	X	X	X	X																	X							
	Powder House Circle				X																										
	Prospect Hill Park	X	X		X	X	X	X																X							
	Quincy Street Park				X																			X							
	Seven Hills Park		X		X		X																X								
	Somerville Community Growing Center		X		X																										
	Somerville Junction Park		X		X		X	X															X	X							
	South St Farm				X																										
	Statue Park			X	X	X	X																								
	Stone Place Park		X		X	X																									

PARK NAME	TOTAL ACRES	WARD	OWNERSHIP	OPEN SPACE PROTECTION	ADA Access	School Garden	Community Garden	Urban Agriculture	Plaza	Performance Space	Dog Park (OLRA)	"Dogs Allowed (On-Leash)"	Historic Property	Designated Local Historic District	Scenic Vista	Playground (Age 5+)	Tot Lot (Ages 2-5)	Swings	Climbing Wall	Skateboard Elements	Bocce Court	Water Play	Water Feature	Gazebo/Shade Arbor	
CITY OPEN SPACE, CONTINUED																									
Symphony Park	0.21	1	City	In perpetuity	X					X													X	X	
Trum Field	4.77	5	City	In perpetuity	X																			X	
Trum Playground	0.47	5	City	In perpetuity	X											X	X	X				X			
Union Square Plaza	0.37	2, 3	City	CIV protection	X				X																
Union Square Station Plaza	0.49	2	City	City ownership	X				X	X		X													
Union Square Triangle	0.03	3	City	CIV protection	X				X																
Veterans Memorial Cemetery	0.79	7	City	CIV protection	X																				
Walnut Street Park	0.30	3	City	In perpetuity	X		X									X	X					X			
West Branch Library	0.22	6	City	CIV protection	X				X				X	X											
West Somerville Neighborhood Schoolyard	0.29	7	City	CIV protection	X	X			X							X	X		X						
Wilson Square	0.01	5	City	CIV protection	X																				
Winter Hill Community Innovation Schoolyard	0.97	4	City	CIV protection	X	X										X									
Woodstock Playground	0.40	7	City	In perpetuity	X											X	X					X			
Zero New Washington Street Park	0.64	1	City	CIV protection	X				X		X	X												X	
STATE OPEN SPACE																									
Alewife Brook Reservation	18.65	7	State	In perpetuity	X																				
Community Path	13.05	5, 6, 7	State	In perpetuity (partial), CIV protection (partial)	X		X					X			X										
Dilboy Auxiliary Fields	6.71	7	State	In perpetuity	X											X	X	X							
Dilboy Memorial Stadium & Pool	9.55	7	State	In perpetuity	X					X															
Draw 7 Park	12.18	1	State	In perpetuity	X							X												X	
Foss Park	13.77	1	State	In perpetuity	X							X				X	X					X			

	PARK NAME	Shade	Lawn	Tables	Seating	Drinking Fountain	Lighting	Landmark	Fitness Equipment	Baseball - Little League	Baseball - Adult	Softball	Basketball Full Court	Basketball Half Court	Multi Purpose Goal	Ice Hockey/Skating	Soccer/Rectangle Field	Diamond Field	Stick Ball	Tennis Court	Handball/Tennis Wall	Running Track	Bike Path	Walking Path	Porto Potty	Restrooms	Pool	Boathouse	Fishing	Stormwater Capture	Pollinator Planting	
	CITY OPEN SPACE, CONTINUED																															
	Symphony Park		X		X	X																								X		
	Trum Field		X		X		X			X	X		X					X									X					
	Trum Playground		X		X	X																										
	Union Square Plaza	X		X	X		X																									
	Union Square Station Plaza	X		X	X		X																		X							
	Union Square Triangle				X		X																									
	Veterans Memorial Cemetery		X				X	X																								
	Walnut Street Park			X	X	X																										
	West Branch Library	X		X	X		X	X																			X					
	West Somerville Neighborhood Schoolyard	X		X	X	X	X							X	X		X															
	Wilson Square				X																											
	Winter Hill Community Innovation Schoolyard				X		X						X				X									X						
	Woodstock Playground			X	X	X	X																									
	Zero New Washington Street Park			X	X	X	X																									
	STATE OPEN SPACE																															
	Alewife Brook Reservation																								X							
	Community Path	X			X		X		X															X	X							
	Dilboy Auxiliary Fields		X			X	X			X		X					X	X		X						X						
	Dilboy Memorial Stadium & Pool		X		X	X	X						X				X			X		X				X	X	X				
	Draw 7 Park		X		X		X																						X			
	Foss Park		X	X	X		X			X	X		X				X	X		X						X	X					

PARK NAME	TOTAL ACRES	WARD	OWNERSHIP	OPEN SPACE PROTECTION	ADA Access	School Garden	Community Garden	Urban Agriculture	Plaza	Performance Space	Dog Park (OLRA)	"Dogs Allowed (On-Leash)"	Historic Property	Designated Local Historic District	Scenic Vista	Playground (Age 5+)	Tot Lot (Ages 2-5)	Swings	Climbing Wall	Skateboard Elements	Bocce Court	Water Play	Water Feature	Gazebo/Shade Arbor	
STATE OPEN SPACE, CONTINUED																									
Mystic River Reservation/ Blessing of the Bay Park	7.08	4	State	In perpetuity	X							X						X							
Sylvester Baxter Riverfront Park	5.45	1	State	In perpetuity	X					X	X				X	X						X			
PRIVATELY OWNED (PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE)																									
Assembly Row Dog Park	0.22	1	Private	None	X						X												X		
Assembly Square Block 2A Plaza	0.33	1	Private	SPC	X				X																
Avon Street Community Garden	0.10	3	Private	None	X		X																		
Davis Square Plaza	0.11	6	Private	CIV protection	X				X		X														
Great Lawn at Mass General Brigham	4.59	1	Private	SPC	X				X	X	X														
Martha Perry Lowe Park	0.16	2	Private	In perpetuity	X				X		X														
MaxPac Square	0.35	5	Private	SPC	X				X																
Metro9 Park	0.08	2	Private	SPC	X																			X	
Middlesex Plaza	0.10	1	Private	SPC	X				X		X														
TAB Building Basketball Courts	0.14	7	Private	None	X																				
Tufts Community Garden	0.19	6	Private	None	X		X																		
PRIVATELY OWNED (RESTRICTED ACCESS TO PUBLIC)																									
Benjamin Banneker Charter Public School	4.16	7	Private	None	X																				
Tufts University Recreational Field	12.64	6	Private	None																					
Tufts University Triangle Field	1.18	6	Private	None																					
TOTAL ACRES	175.0																								

	PARK NAME	Shade	Lawn	Tables	Seating	Drinking Fountain	Lighting	Landmark	Fitness Equipment	Baseball - Little League	Baseball - Adult	Softball	Basketball Full Court	Basketball Half Court	Multi Purpose Goal	Ice Hockey/Skating	Soccer/Rectangle Field	Diamond Field	Stick Ball	Tennis Court	Handball/Tennis Wall	Running Track	Bike Path	Walking Path	Porto Potty	Restrooms	Pool	Boathouse	Fishing	Stormwater Capture	Pollinator Planting
	STATE OPEN SPACE, CONTINUED																														
	Mystic River Reservation/ Blessing of the Bay Park		X		X	X	X																X	X			X	X			
	Sylvester Baxter Riverfront Park		X		X	X	X																X	X							
	PRIVATELY OWNED (PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE)																														
	Assembly Row Dog Park																														
	Assembly Square Block 2A Plaza	X		X	X		X																								
	Avon Street Community Garden					X																									
	Davis Square Plaza						X																								
	Great Lawn at Mass General Brigham	X	X	X	X		X																	X						X	X
	Martha Perry Lowe Park		X	X	X	X	X																							X	
	MaxPac Square		X		X																										
	Metro9 Park	X		X	X		X																								
	Middlesex Plaza			X	X																										
	TAB Building Basketball Courts						X						X																		
	Tufts Community Garden																														
	PRIVATELY OWNED (RESTRICTED ACCESS TO PUBLIC)																														
	Benjamin Banneker Charter Public School				X												X														
	Tufts University Recreational Field																X														
	Tufts University Triangle Field																X								X						

APPENDIX C:

PARKS PRIORITIZATION MATRIX

In 2024, the Public Space & Urban Forestry (PSUF) Division conducted condition reviews of 11 parks in poor condition, along with 2 parks rated as “good” in PSUF’s open space inventory but with safety or quality concerns. According to that inventory, 78% of Somerville open spaces are in good or excellent condition, 9 are in design or active construction, and 11 are in poor condition. The team evaluated the 13 parks using a 2014 assessment model. The 2014 assessment scorecard includes categories for safety and security, accessibility, appearance, and equipment/serviceability. A new category for climate resilience was added. Each park was scored based on those categories and then grouped as either “renovate” or “upgrade.”

The priority matrix shows each group of parks (“renovate” followed by “upgrade”) ranked high to low. The categories in the top row come directly from community and stakeholder feedback gathered during the 2023-25 public outreach process. The score is based on the rubric described in the “Ranking Methodology” table. Higher scores are given for qualities such as: hazardous/very poor conditions, location in an “Environmental Justice” area¹, sites where multiple accessibility-improving or climate resilient features could be added, or sites that add a substantial amount of open space. The resulting scores directly inform the project priority list outlined at the end of **Section 9**.

¹ See a description of “Environmental Justice” and its criteria as defined by the State here: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/environmental-justice-populations-in-massachusetts>.

RANKING METHODOLOGY

NEED	POINT VALUE
Physical condition: <2 2–2.4 2.5–3	3 = poor condition 2 = inadequate 1 = adequate
Adds open space	0 = No new square footage added 1 = 1/2 acre or less 2 = 1/2 to 1 acre 3 = 1+ acres
Contributes to or potential for fitness/wellness/active rec	0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = Multiple
Potential for “nature” experience	0 = No 1 = Yes
Potential for accessible amenities	0 = Not possible 1 = Yes 2 = Multiple
Economic Justice area	0 = No 1 = Yes
Potential amenity(s) not w/in a 10-min walkshed	0 = No 1 = Yes 2 = Multiple
Potential for new cool/comfortable features (shade, water)	0 = No additions possible or shade/water features already on site 1 = Yes 2 = Multiple
Potential for stormwater features (capture / infiltration / reuse)	0 = No stormwater features possible Capture only: small = .5 Capture and infiltration: small = .75 Capture only: large = 1 Capture and reuse: small = 1 Capture and infiltration: large = 2 Capture and reuse: large = 3

PRIORITIZING PARKS PROJECTS

RENOVATE	<i>2024 Physical Condition</i>	<i>Condition</i>	<i>Adds open space acreage</i>	<i>Contributes to or potential for fitness/ wellness/ active rec</i>	<i>Potential for “nature” experience</i>	<i>Potential for accessible amenities (bathrooms, playground equipment, seating)</i>	<i>Economic Justice area</i>	<i>Potential amenity(s) not w/in a 10-min walkshed</i>	<i>Potential for new cool/ comfortable features (shade, water)</i>	<i>Potential for stormwater features (capture / infiltration / reuse)</i>	<i>Score</i>
ArtFarm	<i>n/a</i>	-	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	12
Perkins	2.2	2		1	1	1	1		2	1	9
Kennedy (front)	<i>n/a</i>	2	1			2		1	1	1	8
Woodstock	2.0	2		1	1	1	1	1		1	8
Nunziato Dog Park	1.5	3				1		1	2		7
Florence Playground	2.3	2		1	1	1	1			1	7
Osgood	2.2	2		1	1	1			1	1	7
Bailey Park	2.3	2			1				1	1	5

UPGRADE	<i>2024 Physical Condition</i>	<i>Condition</i>	<i>Adds open space acreage</i>	<i>Contributes to or potential for fitness/ wellness/ active rec</i>	<i>Potential for “nature” experience</i>	<i>Potential for accessible amenities (bathrooms, playground equipment, seating)</i>	<i>Economic Justice area</i>	<i>Potential amenity(s) not w/in a 10-min walkshed</i>	<i>Potential for new cool/ comfortable features (shade, water)</i>	<i>Potential for stormwater features (capture / infiltration / reuse)</i>	<i>Score</i>
Quincy St (existing hazard)	2.0	2			1	1					4
Trum Bleachers	1.8	3		1		1		1			6
Nunziato Field	2.2	2		1		1		1	1		6
O New Wash	3.0	1			1	1	1		1		5
Palmacci	3.0	1			1	1			1		4
Lexington	2.8	1		1		1			1		4
Seven Hills	2.5	1			1	1		1			4

Summary of Park Evaluation Results: 2019, 2021, and 2022

Prepared by: Lisa Robinson and Alissa Ebel, Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities
Department of Health and Human Services, City of Somerville

Contents:

- I. Park Evaluation Overview
- II. Key Recommendations
- III. Summary of Information Gathered

I. Park Evaluation Overview

What is the purpose of the Park Evaluation?

The goal of the Evaluation is to understand the use of Somerville parks, with a particular focus on equity in access to modern parks with engaging features for all residents. The Evaluation seeks to answer:

- Who uses the parks? During which times?
 - What is the perceived age, gender, race/ethnicity of park users?
- How active are people in the parks?
 - What features promote activity?
 - Which groups are most active?
 - Which parks need renovation or improvement, and what type of improvement?
- How do people use parks for unstructured recreation?
 - How does field permitting affect park accessibility for unstructured play?

How are the Evaluations completed?

What tools does it use to collect information?

The Evaluation uses tools adapted from the System for Observing Play and Recreation in the Community (SOPARC) technique. This is a tested method of gathering information through observation of people in parks. The method has the advantage of making an evaluation more feasible and less disruptive to park activity because it does not require intercepting park users to complete a survey. The drawback is that demographic characteristics are reported as perceived by observers and not self-reported by people in parks.

In addition to park observation data, information in this report comes from:

- US Census American Community Survey: Race, Ethnicity, Age, and Gender of the Somerville population.
- The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: Race, Ethnicity, and Income of the Somerville Public School population.
- The Office of Public Space and Urban Forestry: Park type classification.
- The Department of Parks and Recreation: permitting records for spring 2022.

Who collects the information?

Staff members from the Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities (former Shape Up Somerville), graduate students in public health, and community volunteers have collaborated to complete the three evaluations summarized here. The Office of Food Access and Healthy Communities produced this summary and analysis. The Public Space and Urban Forestry Division (PSUF), Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, has provided input throughout the evaluation process.

When was the information summarized here collected?

This information was collected over three years from 2019-2022. There was no evaluation in 2020 due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. The timeframes for data collection in each year were:

- 2019: mid-September through mid-October
- 2021: mid-May through mid-June
- 2022: June through early July

II. Key Recommendations

Several consistent themes have emerged over three years of evaluation. This section summarizes these themes and recommendations for improving park infrastructure, upkeep, and programming.

1. **People of color use the parks in Somerville. We should continue to work on creative ways to engage communities who use the parks in future design or other changes to park spaces.** Evaluations show that the perceived race/ethnicity of park users more closely matches the Somerville Public School (SPS) population, which is majority minority and about 50% low-income, than the general population.
2. **Offer more programming for older adults in parks.** Perceived older adults had lower levels of activity in 2021 and 2022 observations and were underrepresented compared to share population in some years, suggesting a need for more park programming aimed at this age group.
3. **Continue to build opportunities for young people who identify as female to be active in park spaces.** Perceived girls/women were more likely to be sedentary or only engaging in light activity compared to perceived boys/men, though the difference is less marked in the most recent year of observation.
4. **Prioritize upkeep and addition of features in parks near preschools and programming for children.** In addition to school-related park use, many childcare facilities rely on their local parks to provide outdoor recreation for young children. We should recognize this and work to keep up and improve parks near childcare centers.
5. **Provide opportunities for adults to be active while watching kids and conduct outreach to promote these opportunities.** Adults are frequently sedentary in parks, especially when accompanying young children.

III. Summary of Information Gathered

This section summarizes the data collected over the three evaluations on number of park users, activity level, perceived race or ethnicity, perceived gender, and perceived age of park users.

Park Evaluation Overview and Results 2019-2022

How many people did we observe and in which parks (Table 1 & Figure 1)?

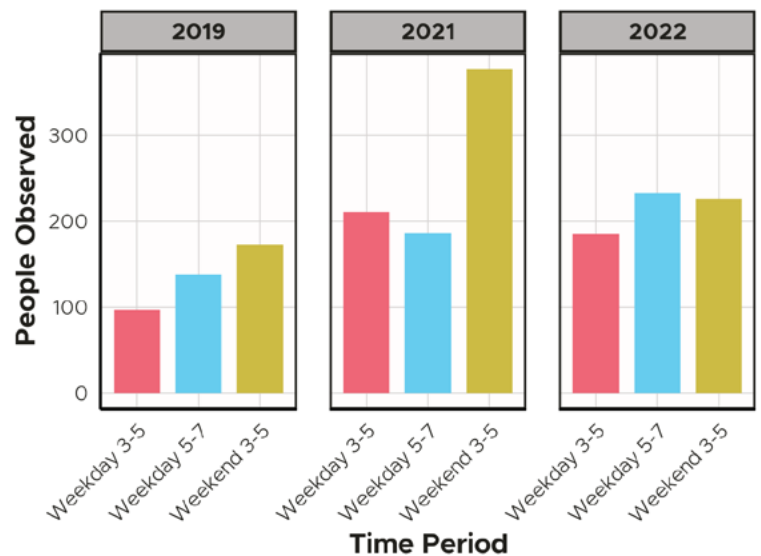
We observed a total of 21 parks over three years, 12 in 2019, 13 in 2021, and 13 in 2022. 5 parks were observed in all three years. Parks were chosen through a combination of renovation date and area income, with priority given to parks in neighborhoods with Environmental Justice populations*.

*Environmental Justice neighborhoods in Massachusetts are determined by meeting at least one of the following criteria: 1) annual median household income is 65% or less of the state's median household income; 2) minorities make up 40% or more of the population; 3) 25% or more of households identify as speaking English less than 'very well'; 4) minorities make up 25% or more of the population AND annual median household income for the municipality (in this case Somerville) is not more than 150% of the state's annual median household income.

Table 1: Parks observed and number of people observed, 2019-22

Park	Main Land Use Type	2019	2021	2022
Draw 7	Athletic Field	--	38	49
Foss	Athletic Field	104	323	217
Nunziato	Athletic Field	--	--	26
Junction	Passive	--	6	--
LouAnne David	Passive	--	--	36
MaxpacSquare	Passive	--	26	--
Partners	Passive	--	22	--
Prospect	Passive	--	--	55
Albion	Playground	63	63	--
Allen	Playground	1	--	11
Central Hill	Playground	14	--	44
Chuckie Harris	Playground	30	13	31
Corbett	Playground	--	--	19
Grimmons	Playground	36	31	--
Hoyt	Playground	75	93	51
Marshall	Playground	7	33	--
Mystic	Playground	26	23	--
North	Playground	36	78	69
Osgood	Playground	--	--	20
Deanna Cremin	Playground	7	25	16
Woodstock	Playground	9	--	--

Figure 1: Observations by Time of Day, 2019-22



Note: While Golden Source (PSUF Data) classifies Allen St as a community garden, only the playground portion was ever observed being used, and users reported it is regularly used as a play place for children from the nearby CAAS HeadStart. In light of these observations, we reclassify Allen as a Playground.

How active are people in Somerville parks (Tables 2A and B & Figure 2)?

Playground primary use parks have highest activity level, largely due to active children. For example, Allen Street Playground was observed when a HeadStart class was using it for outdoor recreation.

Figure 2: Activity Level, All Years and All Parks

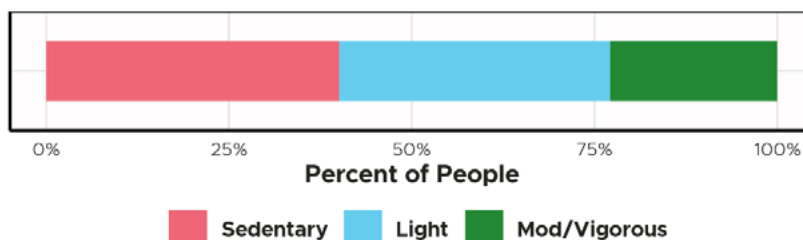


Table 2A: Parks with 25% or more moderate-vigorous activity

Park	Mod/Vig	Total	Percent
Allen	8	12	66.67
Corbett	9	19	47.37
North	77	180	42.78
Mystic	14	48	29.17
Foss	170	636	26.73
Chuckie Harris	19	74	25.68
LouAnne David	9	36	25

Table 2B: Parks with 50% or more sedentary activity

Park	Sed.	Total	Percent
MaxpacSquare	18	26	69.23
Nunziato	18	26	69.23
Junction	4	6	66.67
Prospect	33	55	60
Draw 7	44	87	50.57

While passive parks like Junction and Prospect Hill have high levels of sedentary activity, when a passive park is available to a group, it can easily be used actively. For example, Lou Ann David Park was observed just after the daycare ended at the Tufts Administration Building, leading to higher activity levels.

What are the perceived ages of park users and how does activity level differ with perceived age (Figures 3 & 4)?

Observations show that perceived older adults are underrepresented in parks, compared to their share of the population, and were much less active than perceived adults in 2021 and 2022, and than children and teens in all

Figure 3: Park users by perceived age, 2019-22

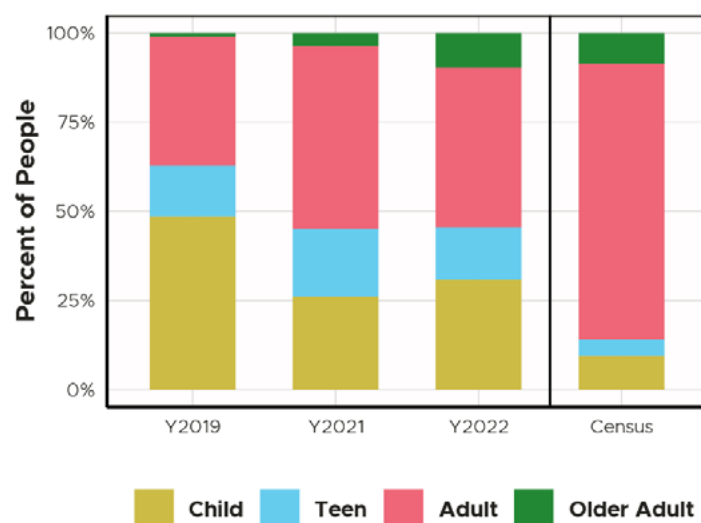
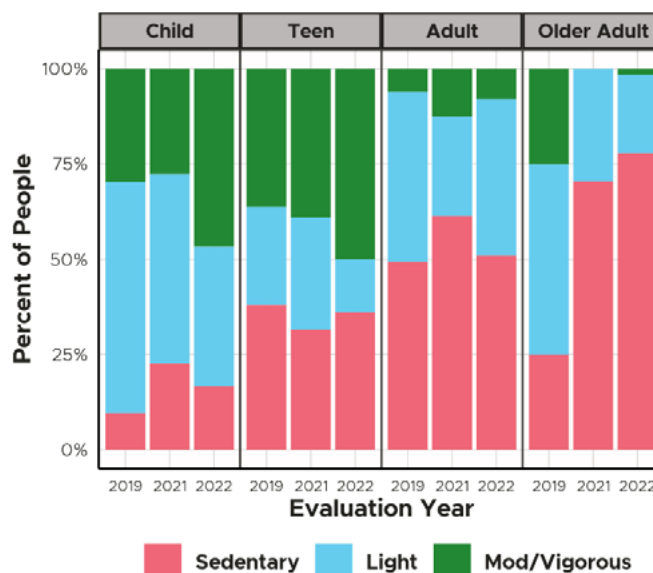


Figure 4: Perceived age of park users and activity level, 2019-22



years. This points to an opportunity to offer more programming for older adults in parks. Perceived adults are also underrepresented in parks and have low levels of activity. Many observations noted adults sitting while children played actively, suggesting there may be an opportunity to build infrastructure that would encourage guardians to be active when accompanying children.

What are the perceived races or ethnicities of park users and how does activity level differ with perceived race or ethnicity (Figures 5 & 6)?

Perceived black and Latino/a/e residents are over-represented in public parks; perceived park demographics more closely resemble the demographics of the Somerville Public Schools, which are majority minority. Notably, Somerville Public School children are also majority low-income, suggesting the importance of investing in our parks to achieve our cities' goal of equitable access to active and healthy lifestyles.

The 2021 Park Evaluation also assessed attendance at community meetings and showed that representation in the park planning community engagement process did not typically reflect park user demographics. The analysis included a focus group with Spanish-speaking parents, who used parks but did not engage with the planning process because meetings are in the evenings, far from home, time-consuming, and offered primarily in English. As a result of these findings, the Public Space and Urban Forestry Division and other city partners are working to make the process more accessible and equitable.

Figure 5: Park users by perceived race/ethnicity, 2019-22

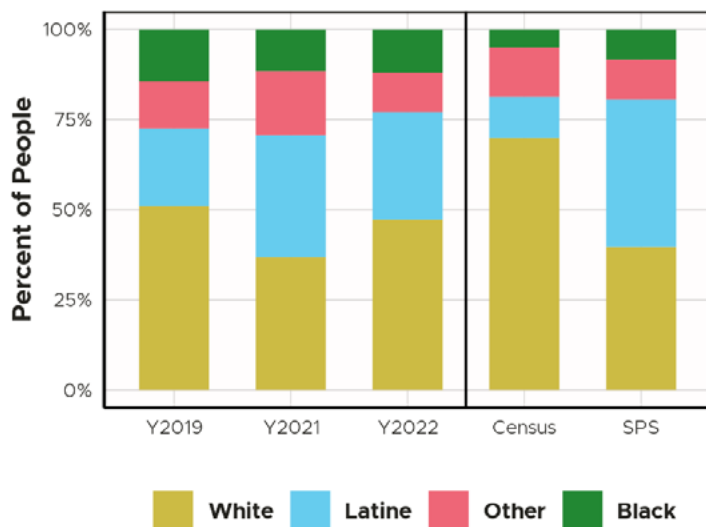
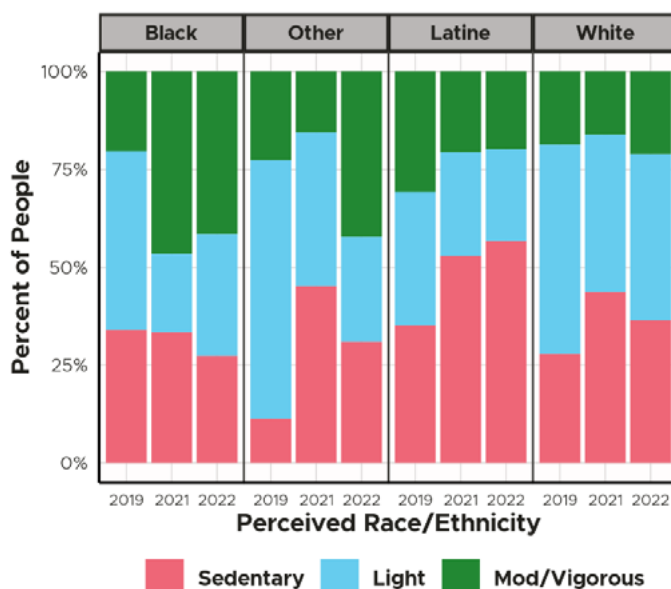


Figure 6: Perceived race/ethnicity and activity level, 2019-2022



Note: Census questions distinguish race and ethnicity, asking residents to indicate both, e.g. Black Hispanic or White Hispanic. The Park Evaluation perceived Latine category is designed to capture anyone who would identify as Hispanic on the census, regardless of race. However, depending on the cultural competencies and experience of observers, folks who would identify as Hispanic and Black on the census may have been observed as Black.

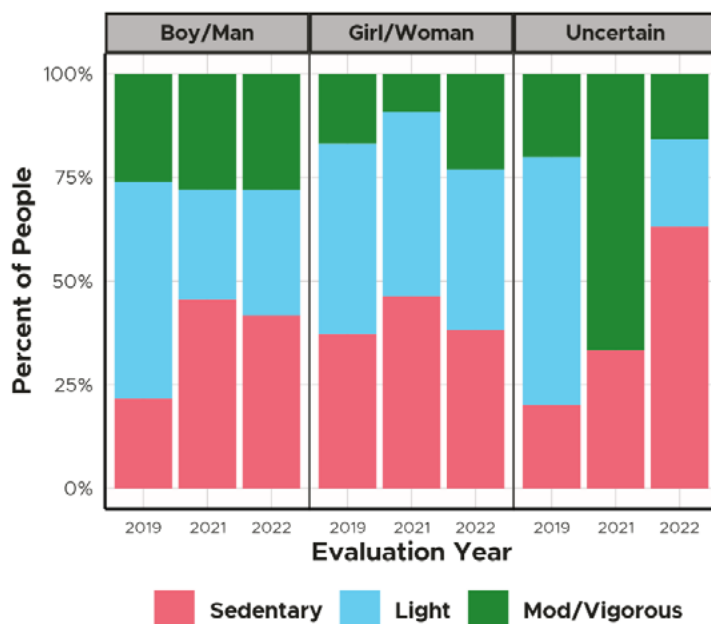
How does activity level differ with perceived gender identity (Figure 7)?

2019 and 2021 found a disparity in activity level between female-appearing and male-appearing park users, although the difference was minimal in 2022 observations. These observations point to a need to continue to grow programming, policies, and messaging that support active recreation for all gender identities, especially among teens where the disparity is typically greater.

How frequently are parks with fields permitted for specific uses and not open for unstructured recreation (Table 3)?

Due to Somerville's limited acreage, field space is at a premium in the city. Fields are often permitted for specific group uses during peak times, limiting access to spaces for unstructured recreation. People were frequently observed working out and playing in fields during unpermitted times on weekends indicating a need for more unstructured field time. Additionally, permitted activity does not always occur as planned. For example, during our 2022 weekday observation of the Winter Hill Field from 5-7, it was permitted for Somerville Youth Soccer, but was open for a family who was playing there.

Figure 7: Perceived gender and activity level, 2019-22



These observations suggest there may be a value in preserving some field time for unstructured access for the public. This intervention could consider adding lighting to create a welcoming and safe space. The 2019 Evaluation showcased several missed opportunities for recreation due to lack of lighting in mid-fall.

How do people use our schoolyards (Table 4)?

Observations of our schoolyards show that many of these spaces are heavily used throughout the week, especially if they have facilities like fields and basketball courts. Investing in these spaces benefits both our youth and the broader community.

Table 3: Permitting of Popular Fields, April 1, 2022-
June 18, 2022, Weekdays 5-8 PM

Field	Percent of Time Permitted
ESCS Field	100.0
Winter Hill Field	99.4
Capuano Field	95.8
Nunziato Field	75.0
Trum Diamond A	73.2
Trum Diamond B	58.9
Lincoln Park Field	50.0

Table 4: Schoolyard Use by Time Period, 2019-2022

Park	2019			2021			2022		
	Weekday	Weekday	Weekend	Weekday	Weekday	Weekend	Weekday	Weekday	Weekend
	3-5	5-7	3-5	3-5	5-7	3-5	3-5	5-7	3-5
Argenziano	122	46	301	57	185	132	--	--	--
Brown	32	0	0	18	0	0	--	--	--
Capuano	51	28	74	42	60	30	27	29	11
East Somerville	58	61	27	93	25	30	69	16	18
Healey	57	11	6	26	9	2	--	--	--
Kennedy	8	1	15	52	17	8	47	13	28
West Somerville	33	0	5	20	0	0	0	5	34
Winter	40	33	17	30	16	9	71	17	55

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Existing Open Spaces in Poor Condition

Open Space	Owner	Environmental Justice Area	Renovation Status
ArtFarm	City of Somerville	Yes	Design being finalized
Avon Street Community Garden	Somerville Home	Yes	Unscheduled
Bailey Park	City of Somerville	No	Unscheduled
Brown Schoolyard	City of Somerville	No	Design underway
Cummings Playground	City of Somerville	Yes	Unscheduled
Dilboy Auxiliary Fields	DCR	Yes	Design underway
Draw 7 Park	DCR	No	Design funding underway
Edgerly Schoolyard	City of Somerville	Yes	Unscheduled
Florence Playground	City of Somerville	Yes	Unscheduled
Foss Park	DCR	Yes	Partial improvements planned
Hansen Park	City of Somerville	Yes	Design being finalized
Harris Playground	City of Somerville	Yes	Design being finalized
Mystic River Reservation/ Blessing of the Bay Park	DCR	Yes	Design underway
Osgood Park	City of Somerville	Yes	Unscheduled

Tufts Community Garden	Tufts University	No	Unscheduled
West Somerville Community Schoolyard	City of Somerville	Yes	Design underway
Veterans Memorial Cemetery	City of Somerville	Yes	Unscheduled

Open Space Creation Task Force Strategy Memo

August 9, 2019

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Somerville is home to world-class, award winning open spaces from the new Lincoln Park to historic Nathan Tufts Park. These parks, playgrounds, plazas, gardens, and fields provide opportunities for Somerville's residents to play, relax, socialize, grow food, and commune with nature. They provide a wealth of benefits not only to Somerville's residents but also to the urban environment as they provide important ecological services such as stormwater management and pollinator habitat.

At the same time, as New England's most densely populated community, the percentage of land dedicated to open space in Somerville is small. In 2010, SomerVision, Somerville's comprehensive plan, established the goal of creating 125 new acres of publicly-accessible open space. From 2010-2019, 19.9 new acres have been created or are in the process of being created. Somerville is now in the process of updating SomerVision. In addition, several neighborhoods are slated for major redevelopment, creating a unique opportunity to partner with private developers to create more open space through privately owned public spaces (POPS). To make greater progress towards the SomerVision goal and to take advantage of new opportunities that come with redevelopment, Somerville needs a thoughtful strategy that grapples with the realities of open space creation and lays out implementable actions that will result in more open space for all residents.

The purpose of this strategy memo is to provide recommendations for what such a strategy should include. It is intended to inform the SomerVision Steering Committee's process in selecting goals and metrics related to open space creation, as well as City of Somerville staff as they are working to create new open space.

Open Space in Somerville: Our Reality

Somerville currently counts 89 parks, plazas, gardens, and fields as open space, for a total of 162.99 acres. Seven of these spaces are privately owned public spaces (POPS), which total 5.76 acres. The eight largest spaces are owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which total 81.28 acres. So, while the City of Somerville owns the majority of parks (69 of 89), it only controls 47% or 75.68 acres of open space within the City.

Somerville is the most densely populated community in New England and almost all of Somerville was developed by 1930. Somerville is also very small in size- at 4.1 square miles. Fifty percent of today's housing stock was built between 1890 and 1910. According to U.S. Census records, Somerville's population reached its peak in 1930, with 103,908 residents. Somerville currently has around 80,000 residents. By 1900, only

52 acres (4.7%) of the city was dedicated to parks or playgrounds.¹ Because open space was not prioritized during this period of rapid development, many of Somerville's open spaces were created after most of the city was developed. As a result, most parks are less than half an acre in size and are scattered throughout the city in an irregular pattern. Some of today's parks were undeveloped house lots, while more sizeable parks are typically former schoolyards or other municipal lands that were converted to parks in the latter half of the 20th century, as public demand for open space grew and housing needs declined.²

Today, many of Somerville's residents are calling for more open space because of the health benefits it provides. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that only 25% of American adults are physically active at recommended levels and 29% engage in no physical activity. Only 27% of students in grades 9 through 12 engage in moderate to intensive physical activity. This lack of activity puts individuals at risk of obesity and the health risks associated with being overweight. A group of studies reviewed in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* documented that access to places for physical outreach combined with informational outreach led to a 48.4% increase in the frequency of physical activity and easy access to a place to exercise results in a 5.1% median increase in a range of health benefits related to physical activity.

Open space can also provide other health benefits. Community gardens provide both an opportunity for exercise and for growing healthy food.³ Trees in open spaces also contribute to human health. Evapotranspiration can help reduce peak summer temperatures by 2 to 9 degrees Fahrenheit according to the EPA. Trees also filter pollutants out of the air.⁴ Exposure to the natural world has also been linked to other health benefits such as shorter hospitalizations, improved mental health, and better concentration for children with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).⁵ Finally, open space can improve the social health of communities. Research has shown that residents with green common spaces are more likely to have stronger social ties than those with only concrete.⁶

As part of the SomerVision comprehensive planning process that began in 2009, Somerville residents engaged in a discussion about how much new open space they would like to see created in Somerville between 2010 and 2030. Staff proposed 50 new

¹ Zellie, 58.

² City of Somerville, 29.

³ Trust for Public Land, 10.

⁴ Trust for Public Land, 13.

⁵ Trust for Public Land, 15-16.

⁶ Trust for Public Land, 17.

acres based on an analysis of what they believed was feasible given land and anticipated funding available. Residents advocated for a higher number and 125 new acres of publicly-accessible open space was adopted as the SomerVision goal. From 2010 to 2019, 19.9 acres were created or are in the process of being created, of which 5.76 acres are privately owned public spaces (POPS). A further 12.25 acres are planned based on neighborhood plans for Davis, Gilman, and Union Squares, Winter Hill, and expanding Somerville Junction Park. Developers are expected to create 3.7 of the planned acres. This means that an additional 92.85 acres need to be identified to reach the SomerVision goal.

Table 1. Progress to Date Towards SomerVision Goal

Open Space Acres Created Since 2010: Public Space + POPS									
Public		Zero New Washington	Quincy St.	North St. Veterans	Chuckie Harris	Symphony	Baxter	Path (Cedar/ Lowell)	Total
	Acres	0.64	0.12	0.09	0.41	0.21	5.45	2.35	9.27
POPS		Block 2A Plaza	Maxwell's Green	50 Middlesex	Partners	Milbrook Park			
	Acres	0.33	0.46	0.29	4.60	0.08			5.76
In Progress		ArtFarm	5 Palmer	35 Richardson	Path Extension				
	Acres	2.1	0.04	0.13	2.6				4.87
							Total	19.9	
							Remaining to 125	105.1	
Planned		Gilman Square	Winter Hill	Union Square	Davis Square	Somerville Junction II			
	City Share	0.25	0.25	7.55	0.50	0.85			8.55
	Developer Share	0	0.85	2.00	0	0			3.7
	Total	0.25	1.10	9.55	0.50	0.85	Total		12.25
							Remaining to 125	92.85	

Based on recent acquisitions and park renovation projects, the City of Somerville estimates that the average acquisition cost today is \$4 million per acre and the average cost for design and construction is \$2.2 million per acre. These costs are expected to increase rapidly as a result of the demand for land in Somerville and the strength of the construction market. With 105.1 acres of open space remaining to create, Somerville will need to mobilize a minimum of \$651,620,000 at today's prices to reach its 125 acre goal.

Each year the City of Somerville has limited funds to contribute to open space acquisition and creation. Somerville's budget comes from tax revenue and a minimum amount of local aid from the state. The vast majority of these funds are committed each year to pay for staff salaries and the ongoing costs of providing vital services such as public education, fire and police services, and maintenance of the streets, sidewalks, and existing open spaces. The City is also facing the consequences of deferred maintenance on its infrastructure, which is over 100 years old and deteriorating rapidly. The City's Capital Investment Plan (CIP) contains the list of critical projects that must go forward in order to maintain the level of infrastructure services residents expect. The 19 projects on this list are expected to cost over \$500 million and an additional 32 projects are currently unscheduled and unbudgeted on this list. The cost of improving the City's 25 parks that are in need of renovation over the next ten years is not included in this list nor is the cost of reaching the 125 acre goal.

In addition to using funding through its operating budget, the City can seek grant funding for open space acquisition through two sources. The City's Community Preservation Act (CPA) program raises approximately \$2 million each year to fund affordable housing, historic preservation, and open space/recreational land projects. To date, CPA funds have been used to acquire two parcels that total 0.17 acres at the cost of \$710,000. Currently 20% of CPA funds are allocated to open space, which totals approximately \$400,000 annually. An additional \$200,000 is available in flexible funds, though open space projects compete with affordable housing and historic resources projects for these funds. CPA funds are awarded through an annual competitive application process. The City can also seek funding through grants like the state's Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) program, which awards grants of up to \$400,000 and requires a 40% local match. The City has been very successful in receiving these grants which have been primarily used for park renovations, including Lincoln, Hoyt-Sullivan, and Prospect Hill parks. The City did use one year of PARC funding to acquire the land that is now Chuckie Harris Park.

Another strategy for creating new open space is partnering with developers to create privately owned public spaces, which are known as POPS. Somerville has the

opportunity to create a substantial number of new acres of open space through the creation of POPS as part of the development of the city's Transformative Areas, which are:

- Assembly Square
- Boynton Yards
- Brickbottom
- Grand Junction
- Inner Belt, and
- Union East.

Currently, the proposed zoning overhaul includes a 25% open space requirement for the Transformative Area overlay districts. In order to ensure that these POPS are successful, Somerville will need to learn from the experiences of other communities such as New York and San Francisco to ensure these spaces are designed with the community's needs in mind and are inviting spaces for all. Recommended strategies for creating successful POPS are included in the recommendations section below.

When City planners develop plans for new open space they seek both to ensure good urban design and to maximize the benefits of the open space for residents and the environment. There are four design principles that guide neighborhood planning, including the siting of open space:

- **Walkable structure:** Neighborhoods should be structured so residents can safely and easily walk to where they want to go, including open spaces.
- **Spatial enclosure:** People feel most comfortable when they are not in wide open spaces (think Boston's City Hall Plaza). Neighborhoods and individual open spaces should provide sufficient enclosure so people feel comfortable but not so closed in that it is not possible to see what is happening inside a park, which could lead to safety concerns.
- **Density and intensity:** Neighborhoods should balance the density and intensity of their buildings with their open space and other uses so that people neither feel overwhelmed by the space nor that the space is empty.
- **Variety and activity:** Residents want to be able to see and do a wide variety of things within their neighborhoods. This not only makes the experience of being in a space more enjoyable, but also safer as there are more people out and about on the street throughout the day and evening.

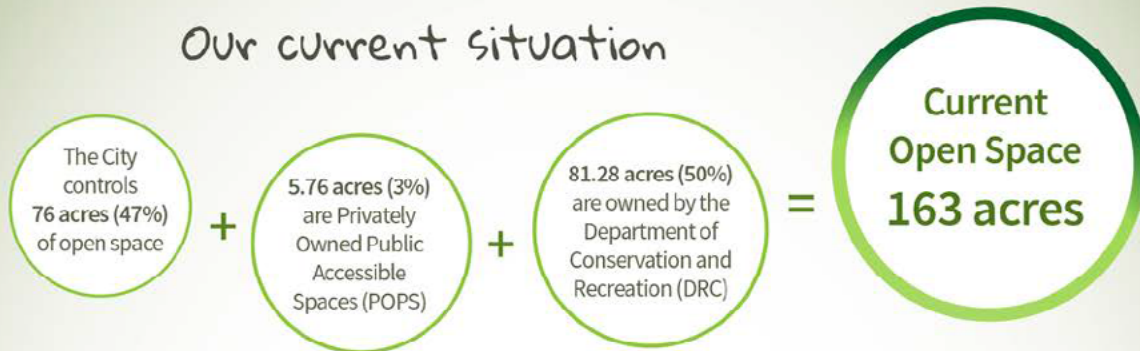
Given the limited space available in Somerville, parks planners seek to maximize the benefits each open space provides through maximizing the ecosystem services present. There are four ecosystem services⁷:

⁷ Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 57.

- **Food production:** Being able to grow food provides a wealth of benefits, as such, the City seeks to provide opportunities for those without access to their own yards to grow food. This includes traditional community gardens and innovative spaces such as ArtFarm.
- **Regulate natural phenomena:** Parks do a lot of work above and below ground. Where feasible, parks include underground chambers that help regulate the flow of stormwater. The tree canopy helps to regulate the surrounding air temperature, filter air pollution, and sequester carbon. Parks also support pollination by including host plant species for general and native pollinators.
- **Cultural services:** Parks offer a range of opportunities for residents to experience the natural world, exercise and play, and interact with their neighbors. Given the limited number of open spaces in Somerville, many of them offer multiple opportunities in one location. For example, Lincoln Park offers playing fields, playgrounds, a dog park, a skate park, Parkour equipment, a walking path, and community gardens.
- **Supporting existing natural processes:** By including green spaces and plants, open spaces support soil formation and retention, production of oxygen, nutrient cycling, water cycling, and habitat.

Somerville Open Space

Our current situation



100% of Somerville residents live within a 10 min walk of open space.

This map shows open spaces in dark green, and all areas within a 10 min walk in light green.



SomerVision Goal



Open Space Creation Task Force: Members & Process

Somerville Mayor Joseph A. Curtatone convened the Open Space Creation Task Force (the “Task Force”) in December 2018 with the purpose of bringing together representatives from community organizations and City departments working on open space issues to develop recommended strategies for creating new publicly-accessible open space in Somerville. The members are:

1. Daniel Bartman, City of Somerville Senior Planner- Zoning & Urban Design
2. Edward Bean, City of Somerville Director of Finance
3. Amber Christoffersen, Mystic River Watershed Association Greenways Director
4. Michael Fager, Conservation Commission member; Community Preservation Committee chair
5. Stephanie Hirsch, At-Large City Councilor
6. Luisa Oliveira, City of Somerville Senior Planner for Landscape Design
7. Kat Rutkin, Groundwork Somerville Executive Director
8. Renée Scott, Green & Open Somerville Co-Founder
9. Sunayana Thomas, City of Somerville Economic Development Planner

The meetings were facilitated by Kristen Stelljes, City of Somerville Community Preservation Act Manager/SomerStat.

The group met from January to June 2019. The group had eight meetings over a total of 42 hours. These meetings included learning sessions to develop a common understanding around the issues related to open space creation and working sessions to develop the outputs documented in this strategy memo.

The final draft of this memo will be shared with the SomerVision Steering Committee, including the Public Realm and Natural Environment Working Group, the organizations represented on the Task Force, and will be shared publicly.

Open Space Definition, Vision, Values, and Goals

Definition

The Open Space Creation Task Force adopted the following definition for open space: *Open space is any piece of land open to the sky that provides ecological, recreational, cultural, or social benefit, regardless of ownership or access.*

Task Force members recognize all types of open space, from playgrounds to private green roofs, provide benefits to Somerville's residents, both human and non-human. As a result, this document provides recommendations for programs that could support owners of private open spaces such as yards, internal courtyards, and rooftops to maximize the ecological, recreational, cultural, or social services these spaces provide. However, this report will focus on recommendations for creating publicly-accessible open space, including publicly and privately owned public spaces.

Vision

One of the first tasks of the Task Force was to create a shared vision to articulate their hopes for Somerville's open space. The Task Force's vision is:

Somerville residents access a network of open spaces that provides a vibrant range of options within a safe, easy walk from their front door. Whether residents want to commune with nature, engage with neighbors or local culture, play boisterously, grow food, or share a quiet moment, there is open space for every mood and activity. Open spaces also support our natural environment. Somerville's open spaces provide visitors with a healthy environment that is cool, air that is breathable, and healthy trees and soil that can absorb stormwater. Open spaces allow residents to coexist with the natural world and the plants and animals that make up a healthy ecosystem.

Values

The SomerVision refresh expanded upon the values established in the original SomerVision document. The SomerVision 2040 values are as follows:

- *Protect* and foster the **diversity** of our people, culture, housing and economy.
- *Celebrate* the unique character of our neighborhoods and the strength of our **community** as expressed in our history, cultures and vibrant civic engagement.
- *Invest* in the **growth** of a resilient economic base that is centered around transit, generates a wide variety of job opportunities, creates an active daytime population, supports independent local businesses, and secures fiscal self-sufficiency.
- *Promote* a dynamic urban streetscape that embraces public transportation, reduces car dependence, and is **accessible**, inviting and safe for all pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders.
- *Build* a **sustainable** future through climate leadership, balanced transportation, engaging civic spaces, exceptional educational opportunities, improved health, varied and affordable housing options, and the responsible use of our natural resources.

- *Affirm* our responsibility to current and future generations through continued **innovation** in business, technology, education, arts and government.

The Task Force's goals support these values by focusing on providing equitable, safe access to Somerville's open spaces for all residents. Creating new open spaces will strengthen the unique character of Somerville's neighborhoods and their social fabric by providing opportunities for residents to meet and interact with each other. Maximizing the ecosystem benefits of open spaces supports a sustainable future where all of Somerville's residents can enjoy the health and ecological benefits that their open spaces provide. Somerville's open spaces are innovative in their use of best practices in green infrastructure, promoting play and active lifestyles, and fostering social interactions. As a result, Somerville's open spaces have become a model for other communities.

Goals

To achieve this vision, the Task Force recommends the following goals, which are discussed in greater detail below:

1. Increase new publicly-accessible open space
2. Increase the number of athletic fields to meet the demand for youth recreation hours
3. Increase the number of community garden plots
4. Provide a range of publicly-accessible open spaces within a 5 minute (0.25 mile) walk of every residential parcel in Somerville
5. Provide equal access to high quality open space across the city
6. Maximize the ecosystem benefits that open spaces provide to residents and the natural world

The Task Force sees the first goal and its related strategies below as the highest priority for open space creation. The other goals and their related strategies are designed to support the creation of open space that is equitably distributed and that provides high quality spaces. As a result, the remainder of the report is divided into two sections: Adding to Our Open Space and Creating High Quality Open Space.

Adding to Our Open Space

The primary goal proposed by the Task Force is: *Increase new publicly-accessible open space*. The specific numerical target for this goal will be established by the SomerVision Steering Committee. The Somerville community set the goal of creating 125 new acres of open space in Somerville by 2030 during the first SomerVision process. While

progress has been slow, the City of Somerville remains committed to this goal. At the same time it recognizes that it may not be possible to reach 125 new acres by 2040 because it will take time to mobilize the over \$652 million needed to reach this goal. If members of the SomerVision steering committee reconsider the 125 acre goal, the Task Force encourages them to have these discussions with all stakeholders- open space advocates along with affordable housing advocates and those who want to see commercial development prioritized.

For each goal, the Task Force created recommended indicators to measure progress towards the goal. The recommended indicators for the *Increase new publicly-accessible open space* goal are:

Indicator	2019 Baseline
Number of new acres of publicly-accessible ⁸ open space, disaggregated by ownership (city, state, and POPS).	0 (19.9 acres have been created from 2010-2018)
Annual amount of capital investment in open space by the City of Somerville disaggregated by purpose (acquisition, renovation)	Total=\$12,326,044 ⁹ Acquisition=\$710,000 (5 Palmer, 35 Richardson) Renovation= \$11,616,044 (4 completed in calendar year 2018- Argenziano, Lincoln, Winter Hill, Hoyt Sullivan)

To achieve the goal of creating new publicly-accessible open space, the Task Force recommends a range of implementation strategies. This section is divided into two components: strategies to create new open space and strategies to support the creation of high quality, equitable open space. The summary section provides a list of all of these strategies with proposed groups responsible for their implementation.

Open Space Creation Implementation Strategies

The Task Force recommends the implementation of the following strategies to create new open space:

⁸ Publicly-accessible = An open space is considered publicly-accessible, if for at least part of the day, any member of the public can access it. For example, a schoolyard is publically accessible during non-school hours but a typical community garden and one athletic field are not because they are locked and only those with a plot/permit are allowed.

⁹ Figures provided for calendar year 2018, as calendar year 2019 has not been completed.

1. Develop an open space acquisition plan that identifies parcels for acquisition:

In order to effectively plan for the creation of new open space, the City of Somerville needs to create an acquisition plan that identifies potential opportunities for acquisition and prioritizes them based on the benefits they would provide the community. The prioritized list of parcels will allow the City to develop an annual open space acquisition budget. The plan should also identify necessary staffing to ensure that progress is made in acquiring new parcels.

2. Develop at least 60 acres of new open space in the Transformative Areas: The Transformative Areas provide the greatest opportunity for the creation of new open space in Somerville. Through a planning exercise, the Task Force explored the amount of the Transformative Areas that could be converted to open space while still maintaining good urbanism and recommends creating a minimum of 60 new acres of open space as part of the development of these areas.

3. Prioritize proper siting of open space in neighborhood planning: Ideal locations for open space in the Transformative Areas and other neighborhoods are established through the neighborhood planning process. As new neighborhood plans are created for neighborhoods such as Assembly Square, Brickbottom, and Winter Hill, City planning staff should prioritize the proper siting of open space in the neighborhoods to maximize open space in balance with other community priorities, including the creation of affordable housing and commercial development.

4. Integrate open space into affordable housing and community organization sites: To create new open space while also bringing it to populations that have some of the greatest demand for open space, projects to develop new affordable housing and locations for the provision of community services should integrate the creation of new open space into their sites.

5. Convert excessive street space and underutilized parking lots to open space: Though these interventions would not on their own add large amounts of additional open space, they would create new open space opportunities throughout the city and could incorporate features that would help mitigate the effects of climate change by helping to manage stormwater and provide shade. In addition to their open space benefits, these spaces could also contribute to traffic calming.

6. Purchase mid-block access outright or through easements to increase pedestrian access to open space: Some residents can see a park or playground from their front doors but have to walk a relatively long way to reach it because they need to

walk around their block. Creating more mid-block access points for our open spaces could not only potentially create more publicly accessible open space through the creation of the paths themselves but also make our open spaces more accessible to more people and provide safer routes to our parks and playgrounds.

7. Explore back of sidewalk tree programs and secure front yard easements along streets to create Commonwealth Avenue style tree boulevards: While not providing traditional open space, creating tree boulevards would provide new green space for all of the public to enjoy and would help to mitigate urban heat island effects by providing added shade. Environmental justice neighborhoods should be prioritized for these interventions. A back of sidewalk tree program could include the City of Somerville distributing trees to residents to plant in their front yards along the sidewalk. Securing an easement involves creating a legal agreement between the Somerville Conservation Commission and a homeowner guaranteeing that trees could be planted and maintained in their front yards. The easement program could be particularly appropriate for the Transform Areas when new street grids are created.

8. Solidify efforts to create land trusts in Somerville: Local advocates are currently working to create a community land trust that is focused on creating more affordable housing in Somerville and has left the door open to be able to create new open space. Groundwork Somerville recently changed their bylaws to allow the organization to hold real property interest, enabling it to hold the perpetual conservation restrictions required for land purchased with Community Preservation Act funds. Both organizations could help increase the speed at which new open space is created by increasing the number of organizations working together on our creation goal and by mobilizing funding that is not available to the City of Somerville.

Financing Open Space Creation

Since the initial launch of SomerVision, Somerville has gained 15.03 acres of open space and additional 4.87 are underway, for a total of 19.9 new acres of open space. To reach the 125 acre goal, funding needs to be mobilized to create an additional 105.1 acres of open space. The City of Somerville estimates that today it takes \$6.2 million to create a new acre of open space- \$4 million for acquisition and \$2.2 million for design and construction. This is based on data from the last five years of parks renovation projects and the purchase prices for the recent Community Preservation Act open space acquisitions. Assuming these numbers, the Somerville community will need to mobilize over \$651 million to reach the 125 acre goal. Land values and construction costs are rapidly increasing, so it is expected that the cost for creating new open space will increase significantly over time.

Through the neighborhood planning process, a further 12.25 acres in open space is planned and the City is constantly monitoring parcels for acquisition that totals roughly five acres at any given time. That means that in addition to mobilizing funds, Somerville will also need to identify 87.85 acres of land to be converted to open space. Many of these acres will come from the Transformative Areas. The Task Force encourages City planners to strive for a goal of 30% open space in the Transformative Areas, which would create 60 new acres of open space, leaving an additional 26.85 acres to be located in existing neighborhoods.

In addition to working with private developers to create POPS, the City of Somerville will need to prioritize investing in open space creation to also increase the number of publicly-owned open spaces in Somerville. Currently, the City of Somerville has limited funds to invest in open space. The annual City operating budget is \$250 million and less than 10% of that amount is discretionary after paying for salaries, debt service, and other necessary expenses. There are many priorities competing for these funds.

Table 2. Time to raise funding to create 1 acre:

Annual investment	\$500,000	\$750,000	\$1 million	\$1.5 million	\$2 million	\$3 million	\$5 million
Years to save \$6.2 million	12.40	8.27	6.20	4.13	3.10	2.07	1.24

Because the City's primary source of revenue is property tax, it increases its budget through new growth- both property owners who make improvements to existing property and the creation of new buildings, both residential and commercial. As Assembly Square, Union Square, and the Transformative Areas develop, they will generate new revenue that could be put towards open space.

In 2017, the City of Somerville hired TischlerBise to explore the fiscal impacts of different land use types to inform the proposed zoning code overhaul. The fiscal impact analysis explored the revenue generation potential and the operating and capital costs associated with the provision of public services. "While fiscal zoning is illegal, the analysis can help inform an appropriate mix of land uses knowing that some land uses are "contributors" while others may be recipients."¹⁰ The study found that while mixed-use developments and non-residential land uses generate net fiscal revenue, residential units generate a net deficit of \$840 per unit. This is a result of the services residential

¹⁰ *TischlerBise, 1.*

units receive, including school services, and the residential exemption owner-occupied units receive on their property tax. A summary of the results is in the table below.

Table 3. Annual Net Fiscal Results by Land Use Type

Land Use Type	Neighborhood Residential (per unit)	Mixed-Use Residential (per unit)	Retail (per 1,000 sf)	Office (per 1,000 sfl)	Hotel (per room)
Annual Net Fiscal Impact	-\$840	\$337	\$1,352	\$3,142	\$7,964

The result of this study suggests that in addition to meeting the SomerVision goal of having a job located in Somerville for every resident of working age, integrating a mix of commercial uses into new development will lead to greater revenue that could be used to pay for new open space, as well as other significant needs in the city, such as affordable housing.

The City of Somerville Finance Department has developed a long range forecast that estimates revenue and expenses over the next ten years, drawing on projections of new development and the costs of providing excellent services to residents. For the first time, investment in open space acquisition has been added as an item in the City's long range forecast. The version below was shared with the City Council on June 26, 2019. Over the next ten years, the Finance Department estimates the City will be able to invest \$9.1 million from the City's operational budget in open space creation.

In addition to general funds, the City has two primary sources of grant funding for open space acquisition: the state's Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) program, which awards grants of up to \$400,000 and requires a 40% local match, and the local Community Preservation Act (CPA) program. The annual CPA revenue is around \$2 million and 20% has been allocated to the open space/recreational land category over the last two years and 10% has been allocated to the flexible category. This means that around \$600,000 could be available for open space acquisition funds each year. However, there are typically demands for funds for renovation of existing open spaces beyond the annual open space budget and other affordable housing and historic resources projects also compete for the flexible funds.

Below the Task Force recommends increasing the CPA surcharge from 1.5% to the maximum of 3%. Doing so would double the amount of funding available for open space/recreational land. Assuming that the Community Preservation Committee, which manages the CPA funds, allocated half of the funding available in the open

space/recreational land category over the next ten years, CPA funds could contribute an estimated \$4 million to land acquisition.

Combining the City of Somerville general fund contribution of \$9.1 million and the \$4 million in CPA funds, would result in \$13.1 million available for new open space from our current fiscal year, FY20, to fiscal year FY29. Using the estimate of \$6.2 million per acre for acquisition, design, and construction, using only City resources, an additional 2.11 acres could be created over the next ten years. At this pace, it would take 498 years from today to reach the 125 acre SomerVision goal, using only City funding. If you assumed that from FY30 onwards, the City kept the pace of investing \$2 million a year in open space creation, that would reduce the time from FY20 to reaching the 125 acre goal of 329 years. This suggests that it is essential to mobilize other sources of funding, such as requiring developers to create privately owned public spaces, shifting from using PARC funds for renovation projects to acquisition projects, and engaging other partners that could tap into other sources of funding such as a community land trust.

Table 4. Estimated long range municipal contributions to open space creation

Source	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25	FY26	FY27	FY28	FY29	Total
General Fund	0	0	500,000	750,000	850,000	1,000,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	9,100,000
CPA	200,000	200,000	450,000	450,000	450,000	450,000	450,000	450,000	450,000	450,000	4,000,000
Total	200,000	200,000	950,00	1,200,000	1,300,000	1,450,000	1,950,000	1,950,000	1,950,000	1,950,000	13,100,000

Because the high land values and rising construction costs in Somerville and the ambitions of our goals require such a substantial amount of funding, the Task Force is proposing strategies that will increase the funding available for open space creation by going beyond traditional funding sources and suggesting the creation of new community organizations that could support fundraising efforts. None of the proposed strategies alone will solve Somerville's open space financing needs. A full toolbox needs to be assembled in order to increase the speed at which open space is created. The strategies proposed by the Task Force for financing open space acquisition are:

1. Create a linkage fee that will support the creation of new publicly accessible open space:

Linkage fees are charges paid by developers to ensure that new development in a community benefit its residents. Somerville currently has linkage fees that support affordable housing and workforce development. Adding a linkage fee for open space would increase the pace at which the City of Somerville could raise funds to acquire new open space.

2. Increase the Community Preservation Act surcharge from 1.5% to 3%: Funds for the Community Preservation Act (CPA) program come from a surcharge on property tax. In 2012, Somerville adopted a 1.5% surcharge with an optional City match. Given the many competing demands for discretionary City funding, including repairing our aging infrastructure, traffic calming, providing immigrant services, and affordable housing, the City has not been able to maximize its optional City appropriation since the first two years of the program. Increasing the surcharge from 1.5% to the maximum of 3% would double the amount of revenue that could be reliably generated. It would also have the benefit of increasing the match rate from the state, which provides a higher match rate to communities that have invested the maximum of 3% locally. The state match rate has been declining in recent years as the funding for the state CPA trust fund has remained flat while more communities have adopted CPA, including larger communities such as Boston and Springfield. Fortunately, the match rate for CPA will increase in fiscal year 2021 as a result of legislation just passed to permanently increase the registry fees that fund the CPA state trust fund. In addition to benefiting the creation of new open space, additional community investment in CPA would also benefit the other two CPA eligible categories- affordable housing and historic preservation.

Increasing the surcharge would require the passage of a ballot measure by the voters of Somerville. There are two pathways to putting a CPA question on a ballot: by City Council vote (90 days before a city election or 120 days before a state election) or by submission of a petition signed by at least 5% of the registered voters and filed with registrars (42 days before a city election and 67 days before a state election).

3. Explore using District Improvement Financing for the creation of open space: District Improvement Financing (DIF) allows municipalities in Massachusetts to commit all or a portion of the tax increment for new developments to fund improvements in the established district. Somerville currently has a DIF in Union Square. Land acquisition is one of the allowable uses of DIF funds, which are generated through posting a bond.

4. Work with developers to create privately owned public spaces (POPS): Creating open space in the Transformative Areas presents the opportunity to have private developers create open space as they develop other projects in these areas. Because privately owned public spaces (POPS) create open space without costing existing taxpayers, they are a very appealing strategy for creating new open space in Somerville. At the same time, this approach should be balanced with efforts to increase the number of publicly owned open spaces because of the trade-offs that exist with POPS. For example, the cost of creating these privately owned publicly open spaces will be passed on to future residents through higher rents to new residents and businesses. POPS also need to be carefully planned in order to ensure they feel

welcoming to all and provide amenities that neighbors need and want. As a result, the Task Force is recommending that the City develop clear guidelines for the development of POPS in Somerville and a communication plan, including signage, so that residents know where POPS are and that they are welcome to take advantage of these spaces. The Task Force also encourages the City to have private developers turn over open space they create to the City while continuing to support maintenance so the City can more effectively ensure public access to these spaces.

5. Encourage the creation of a community foundation and friends groups for the city's open spaces: Community foundations help residents invest in their community and raise funds through donations and other gifts to support community priorities, which could include the creation of new open space. In addition, the creation of friends groups for individual open spaces or Somerville's open spaces as a whole, could tap into other sources of funding for open space. A local example is the Friends of the Community Growing Center, which maintains, operates programming, and raises funds for the Community Growing Center. As a governmental entity, the City of Somerville cannot access some types of grant funding. Creating new non-profit entities in Somerville that can access these funds could increase the opportunities for generating funding beyond asking taxpayers to support these efforts. See the section on community roles for further discussion.

6. Encourage private gifts in support of open space creation: Individuals can leave funds and property to the City of Somerville or non-profit entities in their will or while they are still living. Residents should be made aware of the opportunities and be encouraged to consider them as they plan their personal philanthropy and for their estate.

Prioritizing Parcels for Acquisition

While at any given time there may be several different parcels that could be acquired for new open space, the Task Force realizes that funding may not be available to acquire them all at once. To help in decision making about which parcels should be prioritized for open space, the Task Force proposes the following key questions should be considered when deciding whether or not a parcel is a good candidate for new open space and when prioritizing among different potential parcels for acquisition:

1. Does the parcel fill in an open space access gap in the neighborhood?
Consideration should be given to access gaps by type and use needs based on neighborhood demographics. Parcels should be given higher priority if they fill in an access gap in an environmental justice neighborhood.

2. Does the parcel provide the opportunity to add a needed open space type or feature? Currently there is a need for new athletic fields and community gardens, but these needs could evolve over time.
3. Does the parcel add area to an existing open space?
4. Is there a partnership opportunity to create and/or maintain open space on the parcel? For example, is there a developer or non-profit that could help fund the project? Does the parcel contribute to another project that serves a vulnerable population such as an affordable housing development or the home of an organization that provides social services?
5. What is the anticipated cost per square foot of the parcel?
6. What are the opportunity costs of converting the parcel to open space? For example, could the site also be used for affordable housing or commercial development? Is there an opportunity to combine these uses?

These questions should be paired with a physical site analysis that explores the feasibility of placing open space on the site. The analysis should explore: topography, solar analysis, local context, existing vegetation, potential for stormwater capture, need for environmental remediation, etc.

Community Roles in Acquiring New Open Space

The City of Somerville and private developers have been responsible for the creation of all new open space since the launch of SomerVision in 2012. While local government and private developers will continue to generate the largest amounts of open space in Somerville, progress will happen faster if the number and type of organizations working to create open space in Somerville expands to include non-profit partners and a community foundation.

For example, Northampton works with multiple non-profits and a community foundation to acquire open space. The Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts accepts donations from private individuals that are pooled together to purchase large parcels of land. Northampton also purchases open space with Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding. This funding comes with a requirement to perpetually preserve the land as open space. The City of Northampton partners with the Kestrel Land Trust and Mass Audubon to hold the restrictions on larger parcels. However, they also work with the Friends of Northampton Parks and Recreation, which holds restrictions on smaller properties, such as neighborhood parks. The Friends also raise funds for open space.

In addition, the City should consider expanding the role of the Conservation Commission to play a role in land acquisition, which is allowed for in their governing

statue. For example, in Northampton, the Conservation Commission receives CPA funds to make purchases under \$20,000. This fund has mainly acquired conservation and agricultural preservation restrictions and small park parcels.

Below are the Task Force's recommendations for roles for open space acquisition in Somerville. The summary section of this report recommends organizations to involve in each of the recommendations included in this report, which is more extensive than the list provided here.

Local Government Entities

City of Somerville: The City of Somerville should take the lead in community efforts to expand access to open space. This will include developing a plan for which parcels should be acquired to meet the goals recommended in this report as well as establishing the guidelines and policies necessary to ensure POPS created by private developers address the open space needs of the neighborhood as well as meet Somerville's high standards. The City should actively invest in its land acquisition fund as well as maximizing the optional City appropriation to the Community Preservation Act fund while Somerville is a 1.5% surcharge community. The City should also hire a staff person or assign an existing staff person to reach out to the property owners of parcels that would be good candidates for conversion to public open space. This would help build relationships with these owners so they will consider selling their property to the City or donating it as open space when they are ready.

Community Preservation Committee: The Community Preservation Plan, established by the Community Preservation Committee currently prioritizes the acquisition of new open space. To date, CPA funds have supported the acquisition of 0.17 acres of open space. The Community Preservation Committee should continue to prioritize the acquisition of open space and contribute funds to the City's open space acquisition fund. The Community Preservation Committee could also work to integrate open space components into the other areas it funds- affordable housing and historic resources. The existing Committee could also be an asset in developing the campaign to gain support in increasing the CPA surcharge.

Conservation Commission: The role of the Conservation Commission should be expanded so the body could play a role in land acquisition. They could take on the program to acquire easements to create pathways through neighborhoods that could increase access to open space, establish tree boulevards, or to create community gardens in side yards.

Existing Non-Profit Organizations

Groundwork Somerville: Groundwork Somerville is currently partnering with the Community Preservation Committee to hold the conservation restriction on land purchased with Community Preservation Act dollars. As part of taking on this role, the organization amended their bylaws to allow Groundwork to hold real property interest. Groundwork could consider expanding their role in the city to including land acquisition and open space creation. As a non-profit organization, they would be able to access grant funds the City of Somerville cannot access as a government and some people may be more comfortable donating land to a non-profit.

Mystic River Watershed Association: MyRWA, based in Arlington, focuses on open space along the Mystic River and Alewife Brook Parkway. They are working closely with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation to renovate open space along the river, including the Blessing of the Bay Boathouse Park. Where possible they should seek to expand the open spaces along Somerville's waterways.

Community Land Trust: Community members are developing a community land trust that is focusing on developing new units of affordable housing. They have expressed a desire to also support the creation of new open space. They could build on the real estate expertise they are gaining to support open space creation in conjunction with the creation of affordable housing.

Potential New Non-Profit Organizations

Community Foundation: The role of a community foundation is to raise local funds to support local projects. They can connect residents who want to invest in their community and are interested in pooling their resources with other residents to support work that is meaningful to them with projects in need of funding. A community foundation could help raise funds for open space in ways that the City or other non-profits could not. Somerville residents would likely be willing to contribute towards the acquisition of new open space. A new community foundation would give them a mechanism for doing so.

'Friends' groups: Somerville parks lack traditional 'Friends' groups that help with stewardship of parks, including maintenance and fundraising for improvements. The Friends of the Community Growing Center is a notable exception. Friends groups could be formed to improve and expand existing parks and could be formed to help create new parks. They could also be formed with a mission of supporting open space in a neighborhood or across the City. For example, the mission of the Friends of

Northampton Parks and Recreation is “to engage in fundraising and support, maintenance, labor and development of current and future recreation facilities, and to encourage interest and promote athletic and recreational activities and facilities in the city of Northampton.”

Creating High Quality Open Space

While the mandate of the Task Force was to focus on how Somerville can create new open space, through the course of its conversations, its members recognized that other goals are also important to work towards to ensure that the open space created is high quality and addresses the needs of the Somerville community. Accordingly, the Task Force recommends the following supportive goals:

- Increase the number of athletic fields to meet the demand for youth recreation hours.
- Increase the number of community garden plots.
- Provide a range of publicly-accessible open spaces within a 5 minute (0.25 mile) walk of every residential parcel in Somerville.
- Provide equal access to high quality open space across the city.
- Maximize the ecosystem benefits that open spaces provide to residents and the natural world.

The Task Force sought to identify indicators that would provide a holistic view of the state of open space in Somerville with a focus on the creation of open space that provides equitable access to all Somerville residents. Proposed indicators to measure the progress of each of the five supportive goals are below. While the Task Force is proposing some supportive goals and indicators, it recognizes that it did not fully explore, and therefore is not proposing, indicators related to open space design and use of specific parks. The Task Force recognizes the value of having this information and encourages the City of Somerville and the SomerVision Steering Committee to explore adopting additional measures such as activity within public parks, their physical condition, and the Gehl Quality Criteria to track the use and quality of parks once they are created. The City should also considering developing partnerships with universities and researchers to regularly measure air quality and urban heat island and consider how the results from these studies should impact the creation and design of open space.

Goal 2: Increase the number of athletic fields to meet the demand for youth recreation hours.

Somerville's youth and adults who play team sports are currently underserved by the athletic fields in the city. The Task Force encourages the City to expand field capacity so that all teams that want to permit a field will be able to do so. The data suggests that the City can accomplish this by continuing with current plans to open the new Lincoln fields in 2019, expanding the playing time at Dilboy Auxiliary with the addition of lights, and creating a new athletic field as part of the new Somerville High School campus.

Indicator	2019 Baseline
Number of new athletic fields disaggregated by size	0
Number of athletic fields with expanded capacity disaggregated by size	0
Number of hours requested for athletic field time that do not receive a permit	3,000
Number of hours of permitted athletic field time	9,034

Goal 3: Increase the number of community garden plots.

The Somerville Conservation Commission currently manages 232 garden plots in 12 gardens. These plots are available to Somerville residents who can keep their plots as long as they remain Somerville residents and are actively using their plot. Community gardens are each managed by a volunteer community garden coordinator. Eight of the 12 garden managers have shared their waitlist with the Conservation Commission. Combined there are 122 unique individuals on their waitlists. The Task Force believes that all residents who would like to have the opportunity to grow their own food in Somerville should have that opportunity. At the same time, they encourage the City and the Conservation Commission to explore new models for future community gardens that allow residents who do not have plots to also enjoy these spaces, as most of them are locked.

Indicator	2019 Baseline
Number of community garden plots managed by the Conservation Commission	232
Number of unique individuals on community garden waitlists	122 (8 of 12 gardens reporting)

Goal 4: Provide a range of publicly-accessible open spaces within a 5 minute (0.25 mile) walk of every residential parcel in Somerville.

Standards used to determine how much open space a community needs has changed over time. In the 1980s organizations such as the Trust for Public Land and the National Parks and Recreation Association proposed standards of 6 and 10 acres per 1,000 residents respectively. However, both organizations have moved away from these recommendations as they recognized they are not feasible for many communities, particularly urban communities that have already been fully developed. As a result, both organizations have shifted instead to encouraging communities to consider access to parks within walking distance from home. They have partnered with the Urban Land Institute on a campaign to ensure everyone lives within a 10 minute walk of home. Somerville has already reached this goal. The Task Force is suggesting that Somerville adopt an even more ambitious goal of providing access to a range of parks within a five minute walk of home to all residents. The Task Force recommends measuring access to playgrounds because of the importance of play and active movement to children's development and to passive spaces because of the connections they provide to the natural environment. See the appendix for maps depicting the walkshed for each of the indicators below.

Indicator	2019 Baseline ¹¹
Percentage of Somerville residential parcels within a 5 minute walk of a publicly-accessible open space (all types)	94.4% (11,487/12,163)
Percentage of Somerville residential parcels within a 5 minute walk of a publicly-accessible playground	63.1% (7,675/12,163)
Percentage of Somerville residential parcels within a 5 minute walk of a publicly-accessible passive space	74.0% (9,000/12,163)
Number of publicly-accessible dog parks in Somerville	5
Number of publicly-accessible parks with skateboard elements in Somerville	2

¹¹ The City of Somerville is currently refining its GIS data to ensure that all landscape use types are accurately reflected in the GIS layers for each park. As a result, the access numbers for the playground and passive uses may increase once all of the use types are reflected in the GIS open space layer.

Goal 5: Somerville residents enjoy equal access to high quality open space across the city.

The Task Force firmly believes that all Somerville residents deserve equitable access to high quality open space to which they can safely and easily walk. Based on the 2010 U.S. census data, 55.5% of Somerville's land area is located in an environmental justice area.¹² Currently, 73% of Somerville's parks overall and 76% of the City's parks listed as being in poor condition are located in environmental justice areas, of which five of the twelve are in an active design process to renovate the park (see appendix for a list of parks in poor condition). While these numbers suggest that there is equal placement of parks and that current issues with the equitable access to quality parks are being addressed, there is not currently data on whether all of Somerville's residents can safely and easily walk to their neighborhood parks. For example, residents in the Mystic neighborhood are close to the Healey School, but have the climb challenging sets of stairs to access the school yard. They are also close to the Blessing of the Bay Boathouse and Park but need to cross under I-93 to access the park and river. To better understand access to safe routes to parks, the Task Force is recommending, in alignment with the Vision Zero Action Plan, the implementation of a Safe Routes to Parks program, which includes conducting a safe routes audit for each of Somerville's parks. The goal of the Safe Routes to Parks program is to "ensure that people can walk, bike, or roll to a park or green or open space in a way that is convenient, comfortable, appealing, and safe from traffic and personal danger." This is measured through a walk audit that looks at sidewalks, street crossings and intersections, driver behavior, safety, comfort, park appearance, and park features.¹³

Indicator	2019 Baseline
Number and percentage of open spaces listed in poor condition (Numerator: Number of open spaces listed in poor condition; Denominator: Total number of open spaces)	# = 17 % = 19% (17/89) (with an additional eight in active design; when these are complete = 10%)

¹² Environmental justice areas are census block groups where 25% or more of residents are minorities, 25% or more are non-English speaking, or the median income is less than the state median. A block group is considered to be an environmental justice area if it meets one, two or all three of these criteria.

¹³ Safe Routes to School National Partnership.

<p>Number and percentage of open spaces in environmental justice areas</p> <p>(Numerator: Number of open spaces in environmental justice area; Denominator: Total number of open spaces)</p>	<p># = 65 % = 73% (65/89)</p>
<p>Percentage of open space listed in poor condition located in an environmental justice area</p> <p>(Numerator: Number of open spaces in poor condition located in an environmental justice area; Denominator: Total number of open spaces in poor condition)</p>	<p>% = 76% (13/17) (with six in active design; when these are complete = 41%)</p>
<p>Number and percentage of open spaces that pass a Safe Routes to Parks audit.</p> <p>(Numerator: number of open spaces that pass a Safe Routes to Parks audit; Denominator: total number of open spaces in Somerville)</p>	<p>New indicator: baseline needs to be established</p>
<p>Percentage of open spaces that do not pass a Safe Routes to Parks audit located in an environmental justice area</p> <p>(Numerator: Number of open spaces that do not pass audit located in an environmental justice area; Denominator: Total number of open spaces that do not pass audit)</p>	<p>New indicator: baseline needs to be established</p>
<p>Number and percentage of open spaces that meet the accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.</p> <p>(Numerator: Number of open spaces that meet ADA requirements; Denominator: Total number of open spaces)</p>	<p># = 89 % = 100% (89/89)</p>

Goal 6: Somerville’s open spaces maximize the ecosystem benefits they provide to residents and the natural world.

Somerville’s open spaces need to serve 80,000 people, their dogs, and the natural world. The City’s parks planners should continue to work closely with residents to determine the right mix of uses for each new park and to incorporate as many features as possible that support natural phenomena and processes, including pollination, as well as plan for the changing climate.

Creating open space that supports native pollinators is vitally important to human health and the health of local ecosystems. Bees, butterflies, bats, and birds are essential to food production systems. Plant choices can have significant impacts on the health of these populations. There is currently little known about what native pollinator species are present in Somerville and the health of these populations. The Task Force calls for first establishing what species are present in Somerville or could be if we created more habitat for our native pollinators. Based on the results of these surveys and research being done by community organizations in partnership with pollinator experts, the Task Force calls for the development of a community-wide plan to support the health of our existing pollinators and encourage additional pollinators to make Somerville their home.

Indicator	2019 Baseline
Information on the range of ecosystem services ¹⁴ for each park are listed on the City’s website	No
Number of public parks and POPS that include native pollinator host plants	New indicator: list of relevant native pollinator host plants to be developed following pollinator species survey and plants selected for appropriateness for a public park
Number of private residences and buildings on the City of Somerville pollinator friendly yard map	New indicator: list of relevant native pollinator host plants to be developed following pollinator species survey and plants selected for appropriateness for private yards
Number and health of bee and butterfly species found during annual survey	New indicator: baseline needs to be established

¹⁴ Food production, regulating natural phenomena, cultural services, and supporting existing natural processes)

Implementation Strategy Recommendations for Supportive Goals

To achieve the recommended goals to support the creation of high quality, equitable open space and make progress on the proposed measures, implementation strategies are proposed below for each of the goals that will support the creation of high quality open space.

Goal 1: Increase New Publicly-Accessible Open Space

1. Allow for creation of green roofs, courtyards, and forecourts: While green spaces in private residential developments may not be public, they still provide substantial environmental benefits. So while the Task Force recommends the City's efforts focus on creating new publicly-accessible open space in Somerville, it encourages all efforts to increase the amount of green space in Somerville.

2. Engage the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to plan and design public space improvements in partnership with the City: DCR owns a higher percentage of open space in Somerville than the City of Somerville does and several DCR owned open spaces are listed as being in poor condition and are in environmental justice neighborhoods. As a result, the City of Somerville needs to work closely with DCR to make improvements to the DCR owned open space in Somerville and to seek opportunities to increase the amount of open space along the Alewife Brook and Mystic River.

3. Allow private homeowners to open up their yards to community gardens: The proposed zoning overhaul would allow private homeowners to open up their yards to their neighbors by providing garden plots. The Task Force is supportive of this effort and encourages the City to advertise this new opportunity to encourage residents to share their yards for community garden uses. The City should also consider subsidizing water for the program.

4. Create City-sponsored programs and incentives for residential and/or commercial owners to provide more green and open space: In order to encourage Somerville's residents and businesses to green their own spaces, the City of Somerville should create a range of programs and incentives to celebrate efforts to green private spaces. These efforts should encourage the use of host plants for native pollinators. These incentives could include:

- *Greenest Street* in Somerville contest to encourage neighbors to work together to create green spaces that could serve as pollinator corridors on their blocks.

- *Native pollinator host plant give-aways* to help residents get started in creating native pollinator habitat in their yards.
- *Walking tours* of pollinator-friendly gardens to allow people to teach others about what they have done to create pollinator habitat in their yards.
- *Create a map* on the City of Somerville website that will allow private property owners to add their open space to the list of pollinator friendly sites.

5. Develop fee for service programs that help residents and businesses make their green space more pollinator friendly: Community organizations such as Groundwork Somerville and Green & Open Somerville that are already working to create more pollinator habitat in the city could develop programs to support the effort of residents and businesses to make more green space on their property and make that green space friendly to native pollinator species. Organizations could use these programs to generate revenue to support both the pollinator habitat program and their other programs.

6. Plan and budget for effective maintenance of current and new open space: Somerville's open spaces are unique- each with their own features and plant palettes. Their designs have become increasingly complex over the years as green infrastructure and native plantings have been integrated into the designs of each of the city's new parks. As a result, the maintenance of Somerville's open spaces now requires more time and specialized skills than in the past. The staffing levels and expertise within the Department of Public Works, which maintains the City's parks, needs to be increased to effectively maintain the City's existing parks and to be able to take on the additional work of new open spaces. Some strategies to support funding for open space maintenance include:

- *Increasing the budget and staffing* for open space maintenance as new open spaces are created to keep pace with the growing demands on the Department of Public Works.
- *Partnering with developers* to ensure ongoing and efficient maintenance of open space created through redevelopment. For example, the developer who is creating the new open space at the former Powder House School will be responsible for maintaining the new park for a set establishment period so the necessary care and attention needed for the new plantings to flourish can be provided.
- Using the *Business Improvement District (BID)* approach to generate funds for maintenance. BIDs allow property owners to vote to accept an additional levy that supports improvements within the established district. BID funds could

generate additional funds from commercial properties that could be used to improve and maintain nearby open spaces.

- *Working with community partners* to maintain open spaces. For example, the City of Somerville could engage the Groundwork Green Team to support the maintenance of open space while also providing employment for youth.

Goal 2: Increase the number of athletic fields to meet the demand for youth recreation hours

Provide opportunities for open play on the city's athletic fields: The Task Force recognizes the great demand for athletic field playing time for the city's organized youth and adult sports teams and the need to manage how our natural grass fields are used to maintain safe playing conditions. It also recognizes the value of having open spaces to play catch, fly a kite, run with abandon, or twirl in circles on the grass. Therefore, the Task Force encourages playing fields to be left unlocked when not in use by permitted sports teams. It also encourages factoring in the need for opportunities for open play when planning for the amount of fields needed in the community in addition to the needs of the city's organized sports teams. The hours that parks are available for open play should be posted so families can know when they can make use of the fields.

Goal 3: Increase the number of community garden plots

Find ways to include more public accessibility in community gardens: Community gardens provide wonderful opportunities for residents to be able to grow their own food and be part of a community. At the same time, the existing approach to community gardens in Somerville can feel exclusive as those without a plot are locked out and waitlists are long because gardeners can hold their plots for their lifetimes. The Task Force encourages the City to explore innovative approaches to designing community gardens that allow more residents to benefit from them.

Goal 4: Provide a range of publicly-accessible open spaces within a 5 minute (0.25 mile) walk of every residential parcel in Somerville

Install signage noting when schoolyards and fields can be used by the public: In a community as small and dense as Somerville, open spaces often need to serve multiple purposes for multiple populations. In Somerville, schoolyards are open to the public after school hours and athletic fields can be used when not permitted. To help the public understand when they are able to use the facilities, signs should be placed at the City's schoolyards and fields with information about when they are available for use and how to reserve them, if applicable.

Goal 5: Provide equal access to high quality open space across the city

1. Implement a Safe Routes to Parks program as called for in the Somerville Vision Zero plan: Residents cannot fully enjoy the city's open spaces if they cannot safely walk, bike, or roll to them. The Task Force is aware of challenges accessing some of the city's open spaces safely. For example, to reach the Dilboy complex, one must cross Route 16. To comprehensively understand how accessible open spaces are to residents, the Task Force proposes the City of Somerville implement a Safe Routes to Parks program and improve the accessibility of its open spaces based on the results.

2. Prioritize creation and maintenance, as well as balancing of type, of open space in environmental justice areas: The Task Force encourages the City of Somerville and its partners to ensure that its most vulnerable residents have access to high quality open space. As a result, the Task Force proposes that when the City of Somerville has the opportunity to create new open spaces and renovate existing open spaces it priorities those opportunities within environmental justice communities. Part of this prioritization should include providing access to a range of open space types.

Goal 6: Maximize the ecosystem benefits that open spaces provide to residents and the natural world

1. Work with experts to develop a list of host plants for native pollinator species that would count towards a pollinator friendly designation and develop a plan for supporting native pollinator habitats: In order for the efforts to create habitats that are friendly to native pollinators described above to be effective, the City of Somerville and community organizations need to learn more about the pollinators that are currently present in Somerville, the health of these populations, and pollinator species in surrounding communities that could expand to Somerville if given the proper conditions. Surveying pollinator species and their health will require working with entomologists and biologists who are experts in pollinators native to Massachusetts. Once there is greater understanding of local pollinator populations, a plan should be developed to support the health of the city's native pollinators.

2. Develop citizen science programs to monitor the health of Somerville's bee and butterfly communities: Once the presence and health of local native pollinator species has been determined, community organizations should work to develop citizen science programs that will teach residents, especially youth, about local pollinators, and train them to survey existing populations to track their health over time. These organizations

should partner with the City of Somerville to regularly refine strategies for supporting the health of native pollinator populations.

3. Include as many ecosystem benefits as possible within each park, including designing for residents at all stages of life: City of Somerville parks planners should continue to maximize the ecosystem benefits that each open space in the city provides. This work should include considering the needs of residents at all stages of life and ensuring that within each neighborhood there are open spaces that will appeal to young children, teens, young adults, families, and seniors.

4. Design open spaces with climate change in mind: The Task Force encourages the City of Somerville to design parks that take air quality, stormwater infiltration, and urban heat island into consideration. The Task Force encourages the City to develop relationships with university partners who can help monitor air quality and urban heat island effects on a regular, ongoing basis.

5. Design open spaces that will be well used and well loved: In addition to serving the natural environment, Somerville's parks should be designed to meet the needs of residents. Many people in the city do not have access to a yard, so the city's open spaces provide residents with the opportunity to spend time outdoors and access all of the benefits of doing so. One way of measuring the success of open space designs is the Gehl quality criteria of protection, comfort, and enjoyment. Regular assessments of the use of open space should be done and the results should be used to inform the design of new parks and the renovation of existing parks.

Summary

To summarize the Task Force's recommendations on creating new publicly-accessible open space, the tables below lists the related strategies and proposed institutions to be responsible for implementing the recommended strategies.

Implementation Strategies

Recommendation	Organizations Involved
1. Develop an open space acquisition plan that identifies parcels for acquisition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">City of Somerville Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development- Economic Development, Planning & Zoning, Public Space and Urban Forestry Divisions

2. Develop at least 60 acres of new open space in the Transform Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Somerville Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development- Planning & Zoning and Public Space & Urban Forestry Divisions • Somerville Redevelopment Authority • Private developers
3. Prioritize proper siting of open space in neighborhood planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Somerville Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development- Planning & Zoning and Public Space & Urban Forestry Divisions
4. Integrate open space into affordable housing and community organization sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Somerville Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development- Planning & Zoning and Public Space & Urban Forestry Divisions • Somerville Planning Board • Somerville Affordable Housing Trust and the Community Preservation Committee • Somerville Community Corporation, Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH), Community Land Trust, and other affordable housing developers
5. Convert excessive street space and underutilized parking lots to open space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Somerville Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development- Mobility, Planning & Zoning, and Public Space and Urban Forestry Divisions
6. Purchase mid-block access outright or through easements to increase pedestrian access to open space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Somerville Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development- Planning & Zoning and Public Space & Urban Forestry Divisions • Somerville Conservation Commission

7. Purchase front yard easements along streets to create Commonwealth Avenue style tree boulevards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Somerville Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development- Planning & Zoning and Public Space & Urban Forestry Divisions • Somerville Conservation Commission
8. Solidify efforts to create land trusts in Somerville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groundwork Somerville • Community Land Trust

Funding Strategies

Recommendation	Organizations Involved
1. Create a linkage fee that will support the creation of new publicly-accessible open space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Somerville Mayor's Office • Somerville City Council • City of Somerville Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development- Planning & Zoning Division
2. Increase the Community Preservation Act surcharge from 1.5% to 3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somerville City Council • City of Somerville Mayor's Office • City of Somerville Finance Department • Community Preservation Committee • Community advocates
3. Explore using District Improvement Financing for creation of open space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Somerville Finance Department • City of Somerville Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development- Planning & Zoning Division
4. Work with developers to create privately owned public spaces (POPS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Somerville Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development- Economic Development, Planning & Zoning, Public Space and Urban Forestry Divisions • Somerville Planning Board

5. Encourage the creation of a community foundation and friends groups for the city's open spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community advocates
6. Encourage private gifts in support of open space creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Somerville Finance Department • City of Somerville Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development- Public Space & Urban Forestry Division

Conclusion and Next Steps

Somerville residents currently have access to award-winning open space within walking distance of their front doors. One hundred percent of residents live within a 10 minute walk of open space in Somerville. The national average is 54%. While this achievement is definitely something to celebrate, the community recognizes the need to create significantly more open space in order to meet the needs of residents and the natural environment. The Open Space Creation Task Force met over six months to learn together about zoning, municipal finance, urban and open space design, ecosystem services, and much more and use this shared learning to make recommendations as to how the City of Somerville can increase the amount of open space in Somerville as well as ensure equal access to high quality open spaces across the city. The result of this shared learning and discussion is captured in the pages of this report. The Task Force hopes that both the City of Somerville and the SomerVision Steering Committee will find the recommended strategies and measures both practical and implementable as well as inspirational, encouraging new and creative ways to create open space with more partners than are currently involved.

This report will be shared with the City of Somerville administration and organizations that are represented on the Task Force: City Council, Conservation Commission, Community Preservation Committee, Green & Open Somerville, Groundwork Somerville, and the Mystic River Watershed Association. If requested, the Task Force will present the findings and recommendations from this report to these institutions.

The Task Force will also share this report with the Public Realm & Natural Environment Working Group of the SomerVision Steering Committee. This working group is tasked with writing the chapter of the SomerVision 2040 report on the public realm and natural environment, including open space creation, and will be participating in discussions on

what measures and targets related to open space should be included in the SomerVision report. The Task Force welcomes the opportunity to share their learning and recommendations with the Working Group.

The Task Force challenges the City of Somerville and its boards and commissions, community organizations and advocates, and all of its residents to consider what steps they each can take to turn the recommendations within this report into a reality- from purchasing new acres to choosing to depave a portion of a backyard and plant host plants for native pollinators. It is only in working together that the open space vision articulated in this report will be achieved:

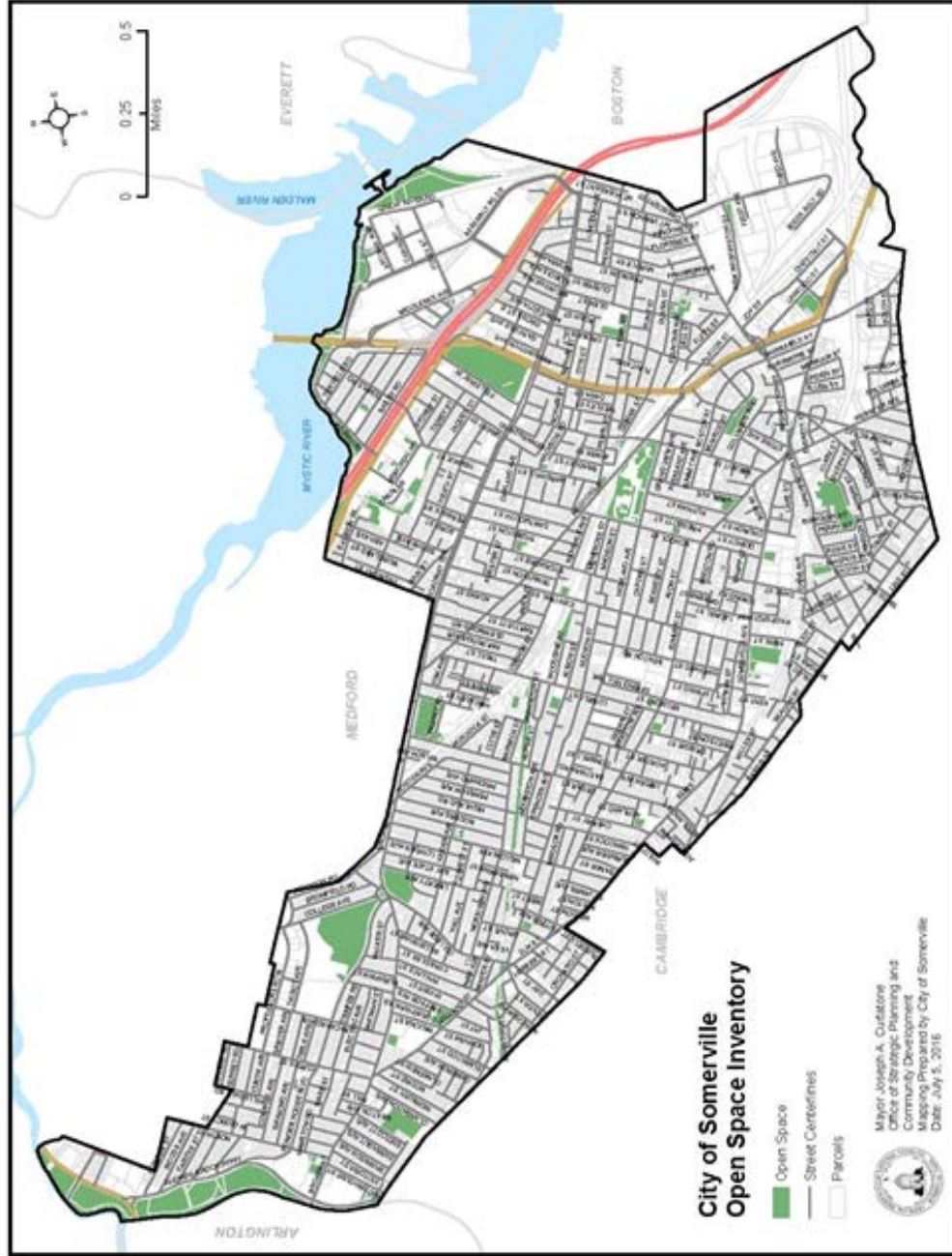
Somerville residents access a network of open spaces that provides a vibrant range of options within a safe, easy walk from their front door. Whether residents want to commune with nature, engage with neighbors or local culture, play boisterously, grow food, or share a quiet moment, there is open space for every mood and activity. Open spaces also support our natural environment. Somerville's open spaces provide visitors with a healthy environment that is cool, air that is breathable, and healthy trees and soil that can absorb stormwater. Open spaces allow residents to coexist with the natural world and the plants and animals that make up a healthy ecosystem.

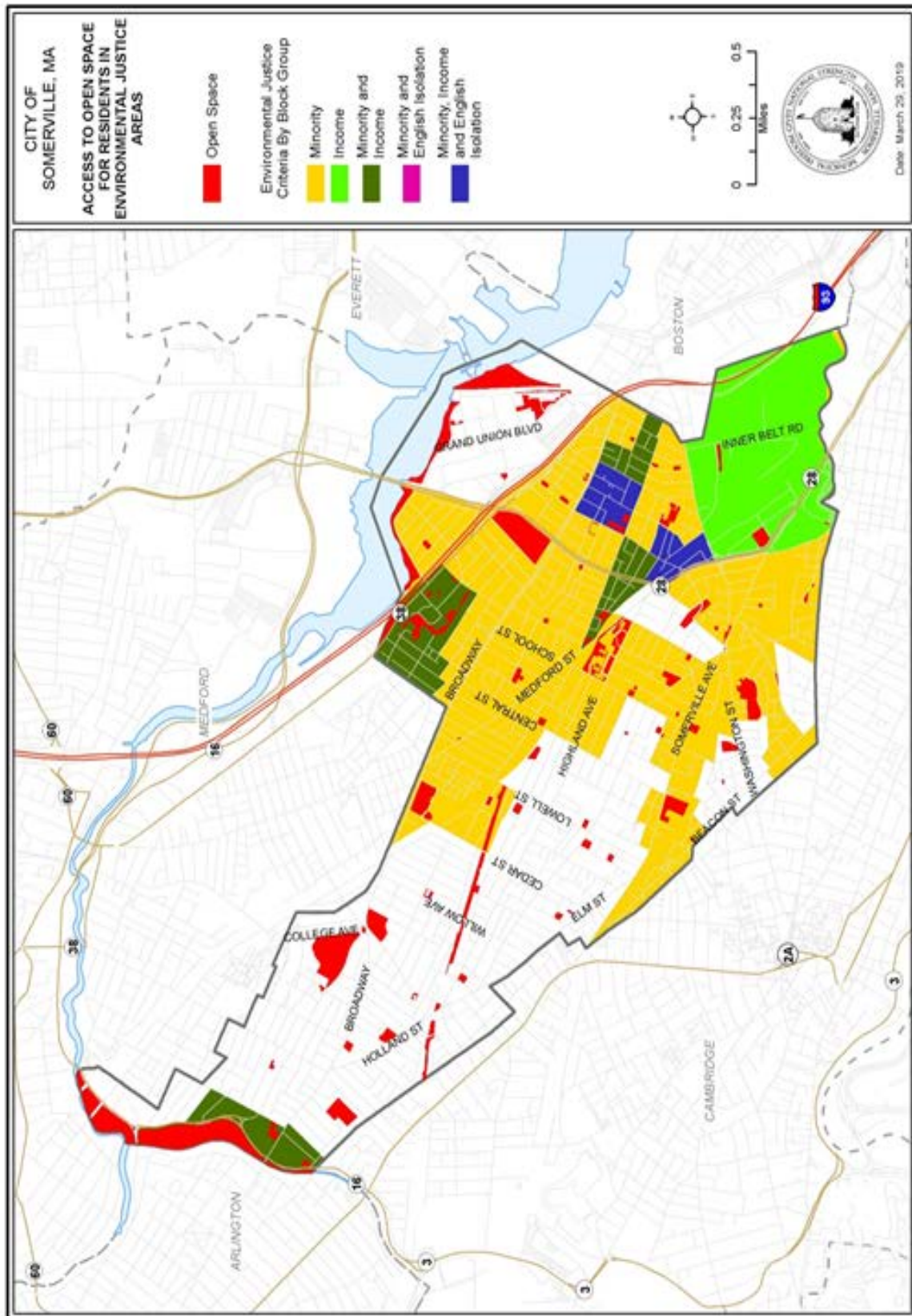
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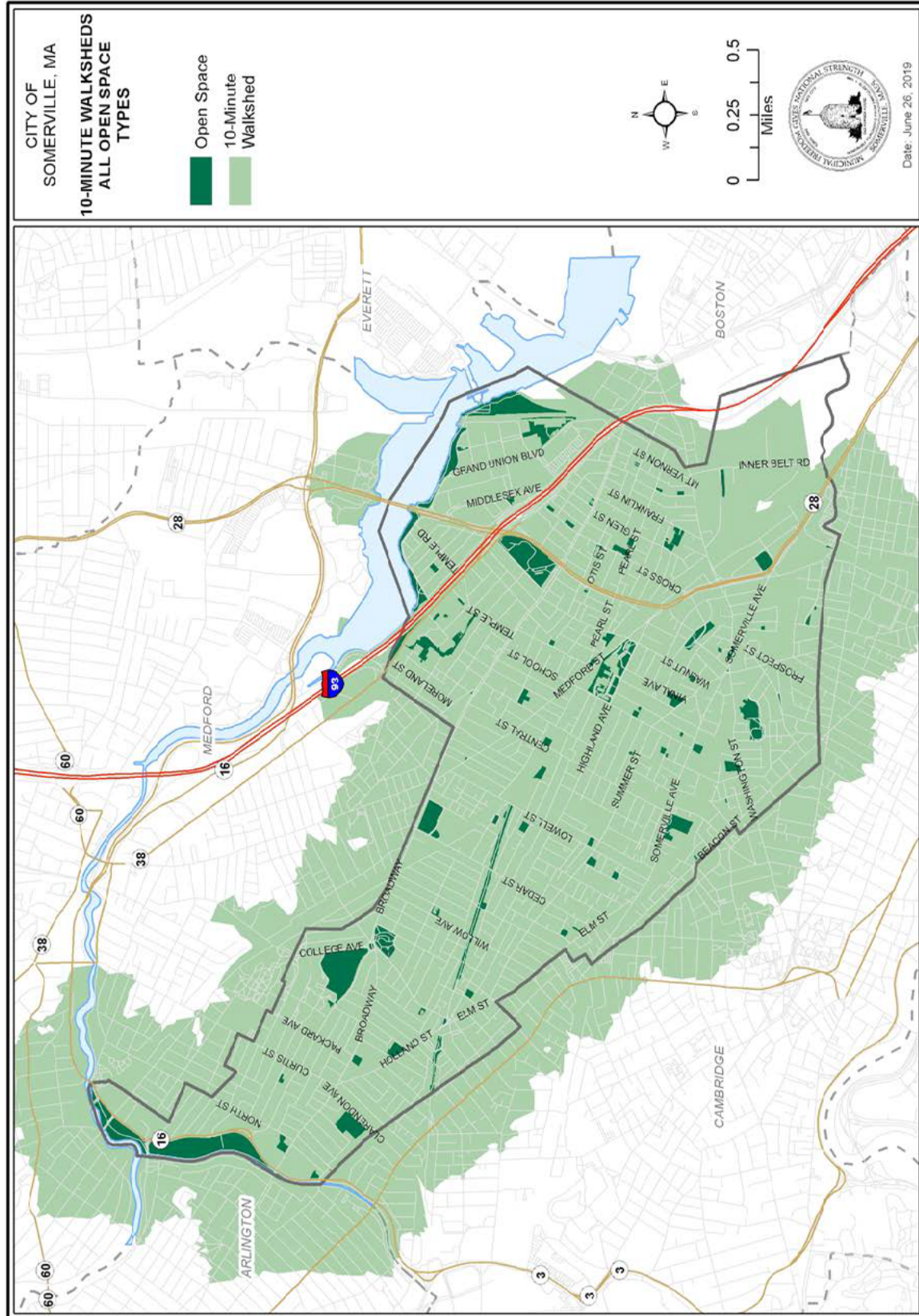
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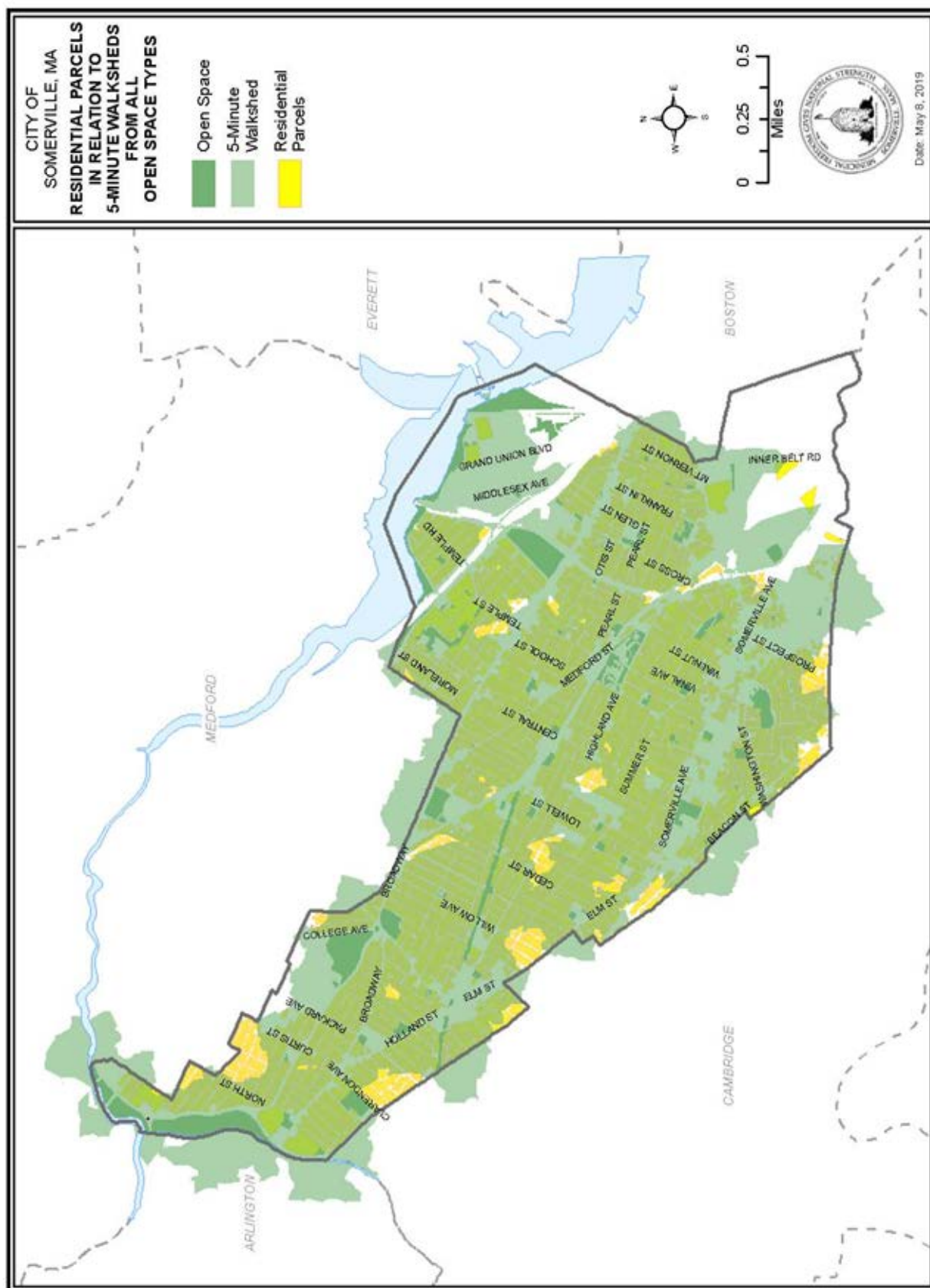
Appendix

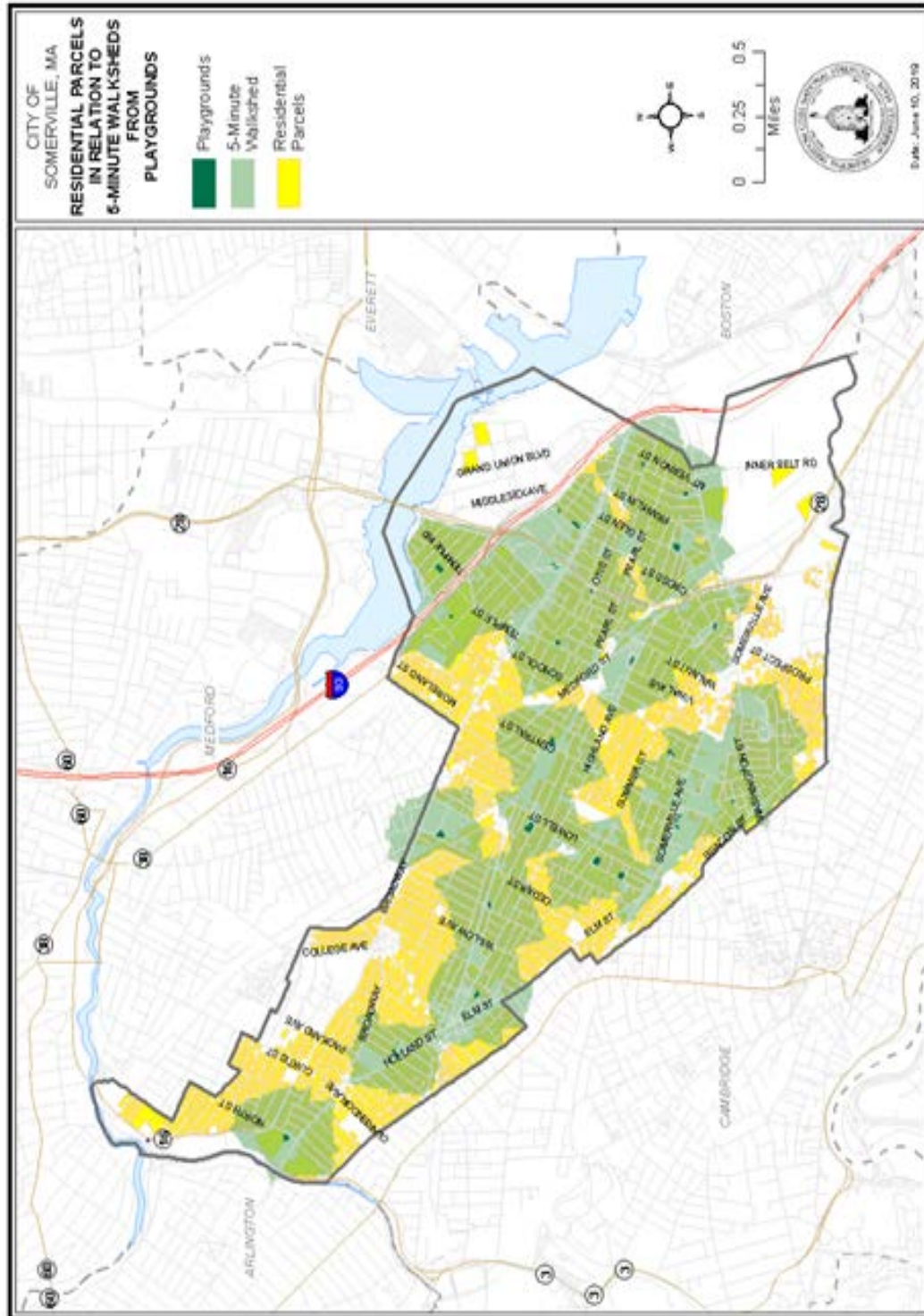
Open Space Maps











Existing Open Spaces in Poor Condition

Open Space	Owner	Environmental Justice Area	Renovation Status
ArtFarm	City of Somerville	Yes	Design being finalized
Avon Street Community Garden	Somerville Home	Yes	Unscheduled
Bailey Park	City of Somerville	No	Unscheduled
Brown Schoolyard	City of Somerville	No	Design underway
Cummings Playground	City of Somerville	Yes	Unscheduled
Dilboy Auxiliary Fields	DCR	Yes	Design underway
Draw 7 Park	DCR	No	Design funding underway
Edgerly Schoolyard	City of Somerville	Yes	Unscheduled
Florence Playground	City of Somerville	Yes	Unscheduled
Foss Park	DCR	Yes	Partial improvements planned
Hansen Park	City of Somerville	Yes	Design being finalized
Harris Playground	City of Somerville	Yes	Design being finalized
Mystic River Reservation/ Blessing of the Bay Park	DCR	Yes	Design underway
Osgood Park	City of Somerville	Yes	Unscheduled

Tufts Community Garden	Tufts University	No	Unscheduled
West Somerville Community Schoolyard	City of Somerville	Yes	Design underway
Veterans Memorial Cemetery	City of Somerville	Yes	Unscheduled

City of Somerville's Division of Public Space & Urban Forestry (PSUF) held two public meetings and a youth workshop to gather input on the future of Foss Park.

What Did We Learn?



- Foss Park is Somerville's **2nd largest open space**
- 38%** of respondents think the Park is “terrible” or “needs improvement”
- 80%** of respondents had difficulty reserving a court or field for their sporting event
- Respondents prioritized “planting more trees to fight global warming, sequester carbon, and to clean and cool the air” as “most important” or “kind of important”
- The most popular means of traveling to the Park is by walking or cycling
- Respondents cited the need for better lighting, accessible routes, more trees, and permanent restroom facilities



REPORTED FEELING UNSAFE AT @FOSS



BELIEVE THERE NEEDS TO BE “MORE” OR “A LOT MORE” MAINTENANCE @FOSS

Youth Input

- Youth primarily use the park as a shortcut to get other places, for enjoying nature, and for using the pool and fields
- Youth want to see more trees and benches and more amenities and programming for teens

Foss Park Program Today

- 50m outdoor pool & pool house
- Splashpad
- 2x playground areas
- 2x tennis courts & a basketball court
- 2x little league fields
- Softball field
- Regulation multi-sport synthetic turf field & sports lighting system (2021)
- Walking paths, benches

How do people use Foss Park?

WALKING PATHS (22)

ENJOY NATURE (20)

POOL & SPLASHPAD (19)

SHORTCUT (17)

PLAYGROUND (16)

TENNIS (12)

SOCCER/FOOTBALL (11)

WALK DOGS (8)

BASKETBALL (6)

BASEBALL (6)



FOSS PARK

Community Process

The Future Of Foss Park

How Can Foss Better Serve The Community?

What Changes Should We Advocate For?



1 Health, Safety & Access

- Update facilities to modern safety standards
- Improve maintenance of natural grass fields
- Improve park lighting and add sport lighting
- Buffer park users from surrounding highways to reduce exposure to noise and air pollution
- Address accessibility issues

2 Park Amenities

- Pool, playgrounds, and splashpad are heavily used but need updating
- Passive recreation is a primary use. Future renovations should consider increasing the tree canopy and adding a greater variety of seating opportunities
- Increasing the Park's ecological function (air quality, storm water storage)
- Add new facilities: fitness equipment, skateboarding, and volleyball
- New facilities could support active programming like concerts or yoga

3 Engage Diverse Users

- Foss has a great diversity of users: young and old, people from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds
- Future planning efforts should especially consider youth, minority, and immigrant user needs; consider outreach methods to engage underrepresented populations
- Enhance park use through active and event programming

Foss Park History

- 1872 - City Engineer Charles Elliot wins design competition
- 1876 - Broadway Park completed
- 1921 - Renamed Foss Park
- 1954 - MDC assumes responsibility
- 2021 - DCR adds synthetic turf field

FOSS PARK

Community Process



Community Engagement

The findings in this fact sheet were collected during two public meetings and a Youth Outreach Workshop. Some data collected in a SomerVoice survey that was advertised at the public meetings.



Outreach Meetings

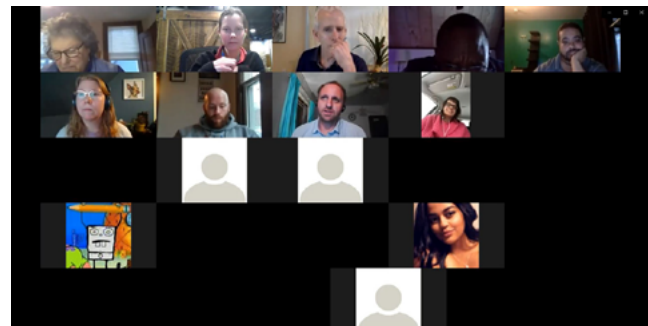
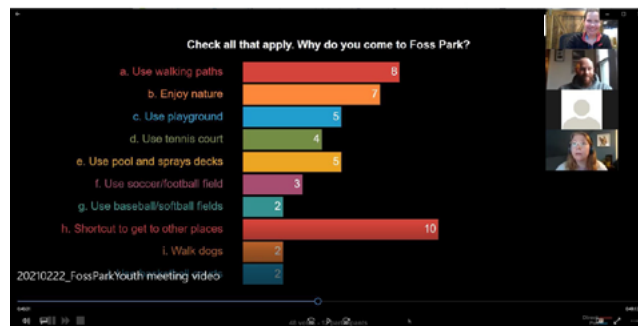
October 2019 - Community Outreach Meeting #1

November 2019 - Community Outreach Meeting #2

February 2021 - Youth Outreach Workshop

Participation

- 15 local high school students from the Welcome Project participated in the youth workshop
- The SomerVoice survey had 30 respondents



Screenshots from Youth Outreach Meeting February 2021



Posters advertising 2019 Outreach Meetings

FOSS PARK Community Process



Open Space & Recreation Planning

Feedback Report

January 25th, 2024
Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning
and Community Development



What is an OSRP?

- A tool for planning future of its conservation and recreation resources (parks, wooded areas, athletic fields, etc.).
- Informed by public participation and reflects the needs of its community members.
- Describes the city – history and current trends.
- Sets goals for the next seven (7) years.



OSRP Visioning Session



January 2024 5



Section 1: Plan Summary

Section 2: Intro

Section 3: Community Setting

Regional, History, Population Growth & Development

Section 4: Environmental Inventory & Analysis

Geology, Water, Vegetation, Environmental Challenges

Section 5: Inventory

Section 6: Community Vision

Section 7: Analysis of Needs

Section 8: Goals & Objectives

Section 9: Action Plan

OSRP Visioning Session

January 2024

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2016 OSRP Goals

Goal 1

Acquire more land to meet Somerville's goals and expand Somerville's total open space acreage in every neighborhood.

Goal 2

Renovate existing parks and open spaces to improve the parks in poorest condition to ensure attractive, safe, and accessible public lands.

Goal 3

Develop an **Urban Forestry Plan** to continue to increase tree canopy, manage tree population and protect tree health.

Goal 4

Work with other City departments to improve **maintenance** practices in parks and open spaces in an effort to protect the City's investments.

Goal 5

As part of a city-wide effort, continue to **improve access** to parks and open spaces for persons with disabilities and the elderly.

Goal 6

Continue to incorporate **sustainable design** in response to the challenges of climate change in city parks and open space projects.

Goal 7

Use **data** to guide open space planning. For 2016-2021 Plan, data shows that there is a need for athletic fields and community gardens.

Action Plan

To find the last OSRP:
[www.somervillebydesign.com/
public-space/osrp/](http://www.somervillebydesign.com/public-space/osrp/)



OSRP Visioning Session

2016 - 2023 ACTION PLAN FOR OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

This Seven-Year Action Plan proposes a prioritized action and schedule for each goal listed in Section 9. A responsible department is identified for each action.

GOAL 1: ACQUIRE ADDITIONAL LAND

Strategy	Action	Responsible Lead	Funding Source	Proposed Completion	Priority
1.1 Create an Acquisition Fund to increase the City's ability to buy parcels for open space.	1.1.1 Establish a criteria for acquisition.	OSPCD: T & P	CPA	2017	1
	1.1.2 Work with other departments to structure this fund.				1
1.2 Increase open space opportunities through public/private partnerships.	1.2.1 Continue to create publicly accessible open spaces in large scale development areas: Assembly Square, Union Square, the Community Path, and McGrath Planning process.	OSPCD: T & P	Private	2016-2023	1
	1.2.2 Continue to create Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS) that reflect open space needs in individual neighborhoods.			2016-2023	1
1.3 Identify regulatory strategies for increasing open space.	1.3.1 Expand zoning requirements for publicly usable open space through zoning reform.	OSPCD: Planning		2018	1

Schoolyard Renovations



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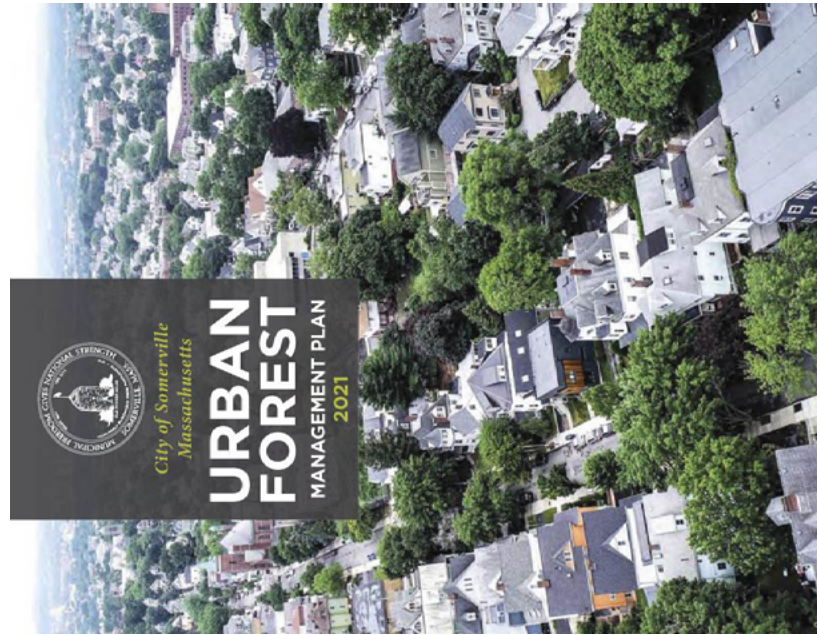


Athletic Field Updates

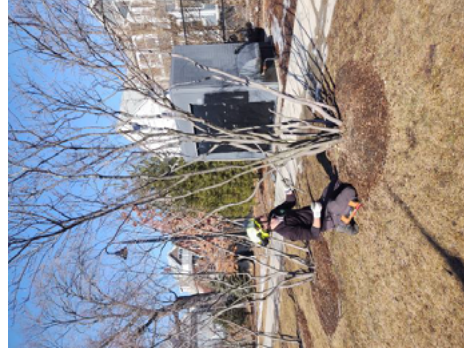
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Urban Forestry Management Planning & Proactive Tree Care



To find the UFMF:

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/somervillema-live/s3fs-public/documents/somerville-urban-forest-management-plan.pdf>



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Census Data *at a glance*

Total Population	81,045
Median Age	31.4
Persons Under 9 Years Old	7%
Persons 10-19 Years Old	8%
Median Household Income	\$ 124,110
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	72.6 %
Employment Rate	77.3 %



Census Data *at a glance* ...2

Total Housing Units	36,269
Without Health Care Coverage	1.3 %
Total Households	36,001
Hispanic Or Latino (Of Any Race)	9,159
Language Other Than English Spoken at Home	24.7%
Foreign Born	24.6%

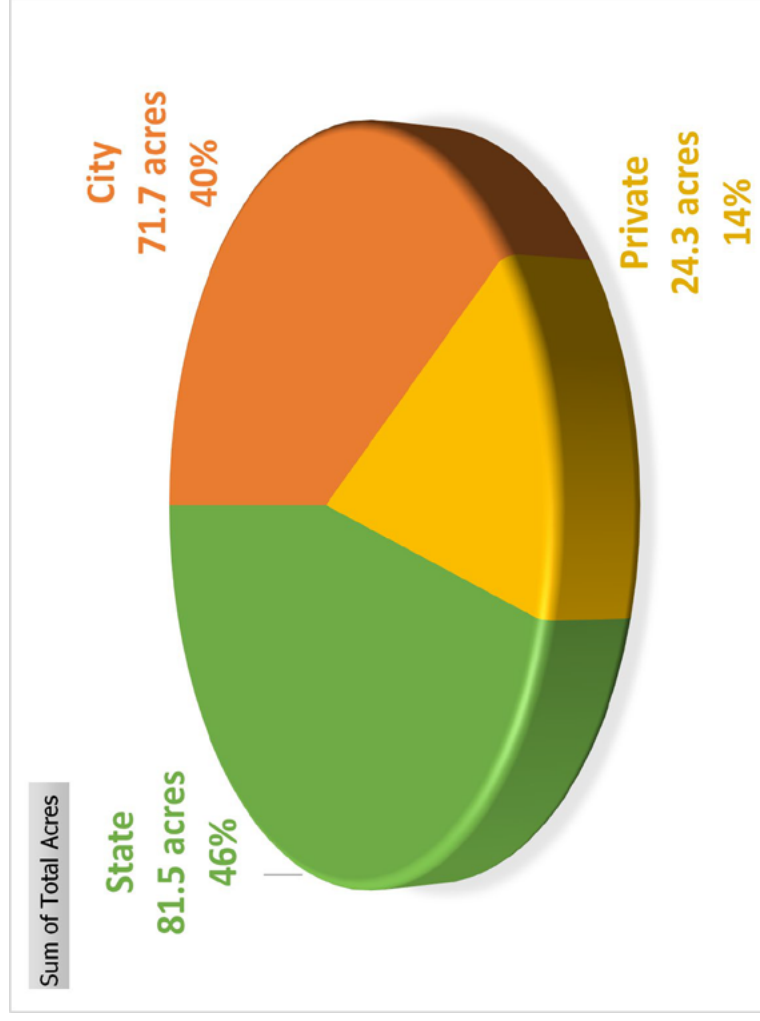
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Open Space in Somerville

- 81.5 State-owned acres, primarily land along the rivers and Foss Park
- 12 Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS)
- 40 Playgrounds
- 16 Publicly Accessible Athletic Fields
- 238 Community Garden Plots
- 1 Urban Farm (Groundwork Somerville)





2023-24 Public Outreach

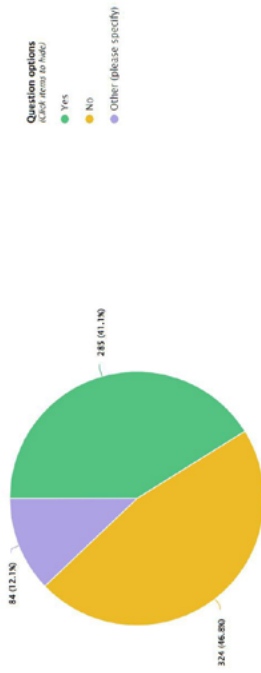
Survey Demographics

- 701 responses.
- Pretty evenly distributed between each ward.
- Most responses from people between 25-54. 3.8% were under 18 and 6.4% over 65.
- Half of the responses were from households with children.
- 82.2% respondents identified as white. 43 people did not self-identify and 33 skipped the question.

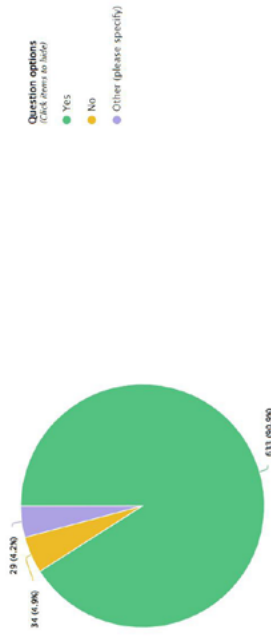


2023-24 Public Outreach

Do you feel like you have access to nature?



Does Somerville need more open space?



OSRP Visioning Session

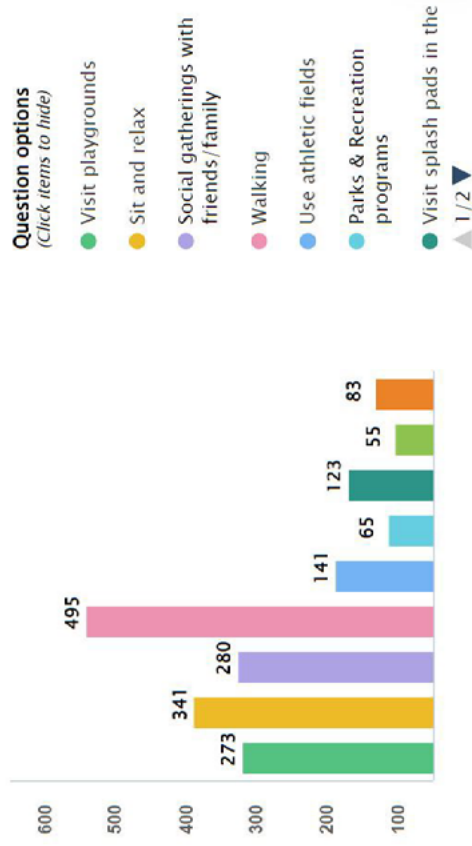
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2023-24 Public Outreach

What do you do MOST OFTEN in our open spaces? (select up to three)



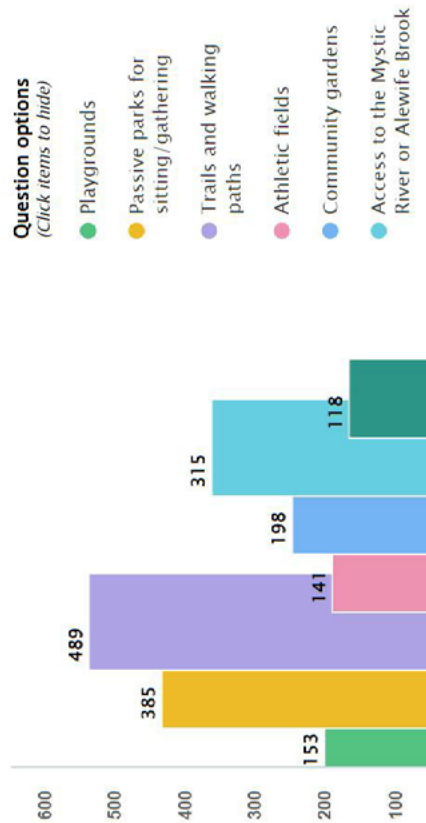
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2023-24 Public Outreach

What do we need MORE of in Somerville? (select up to three)



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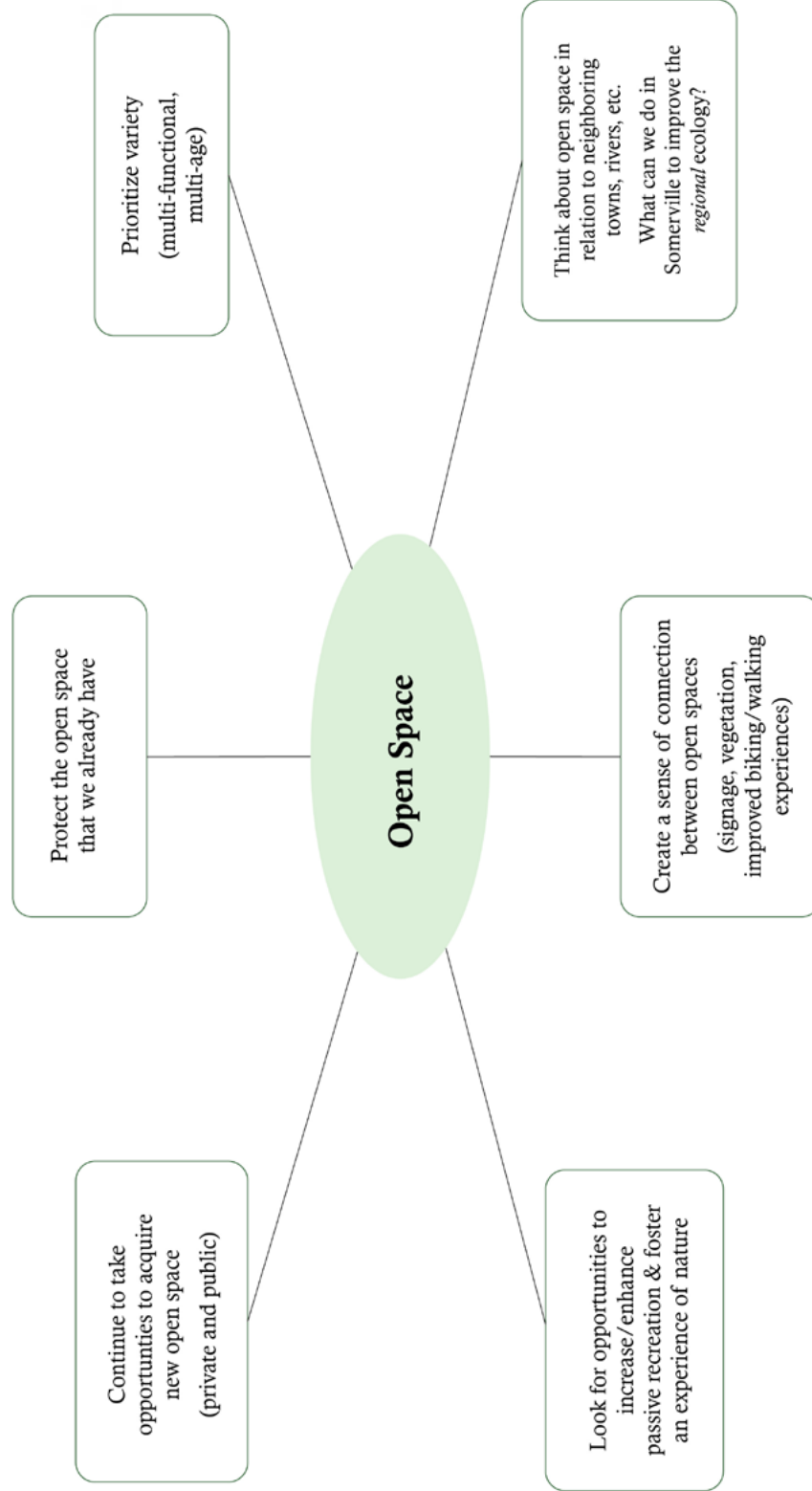
January 2024 16

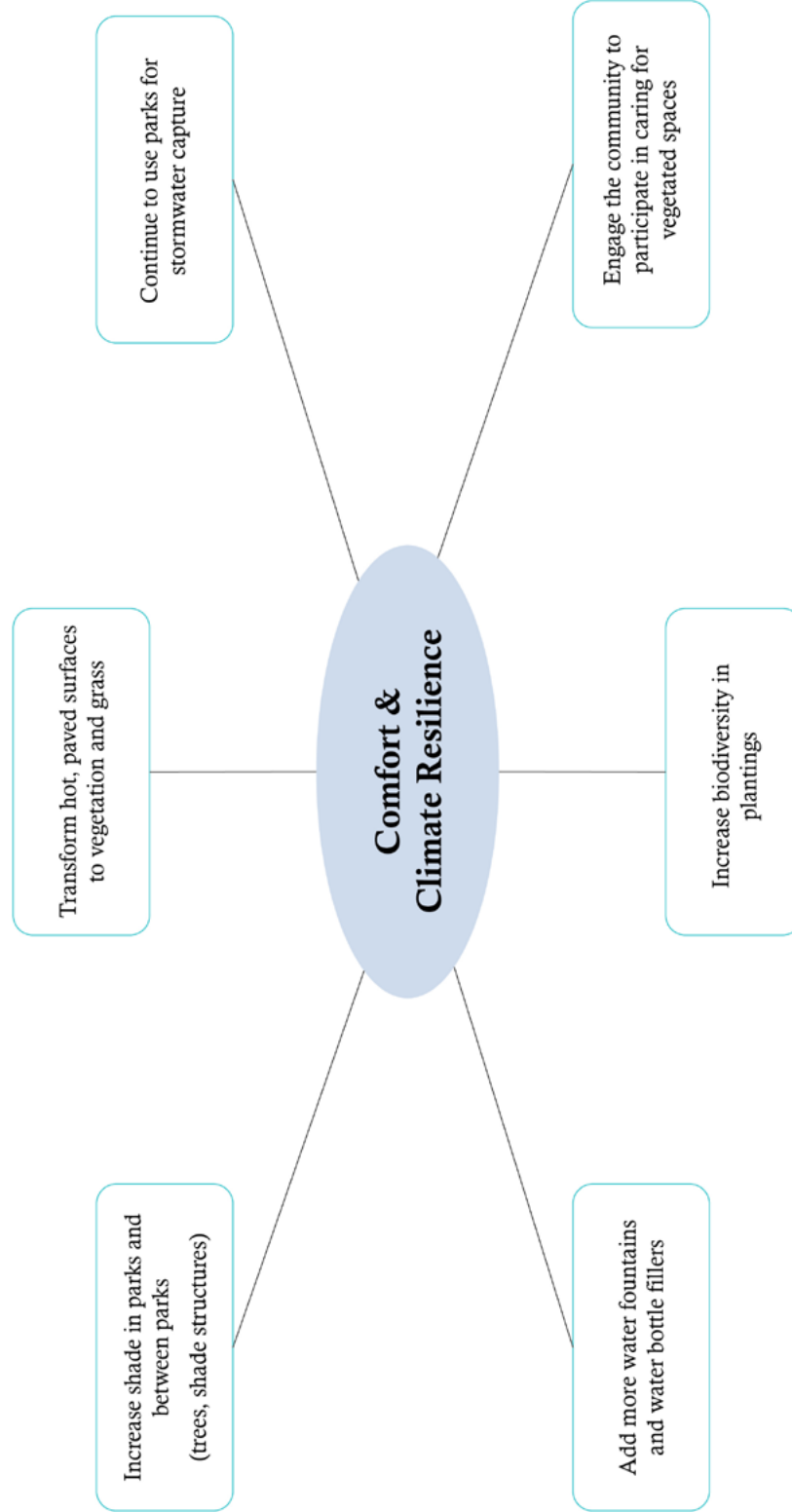


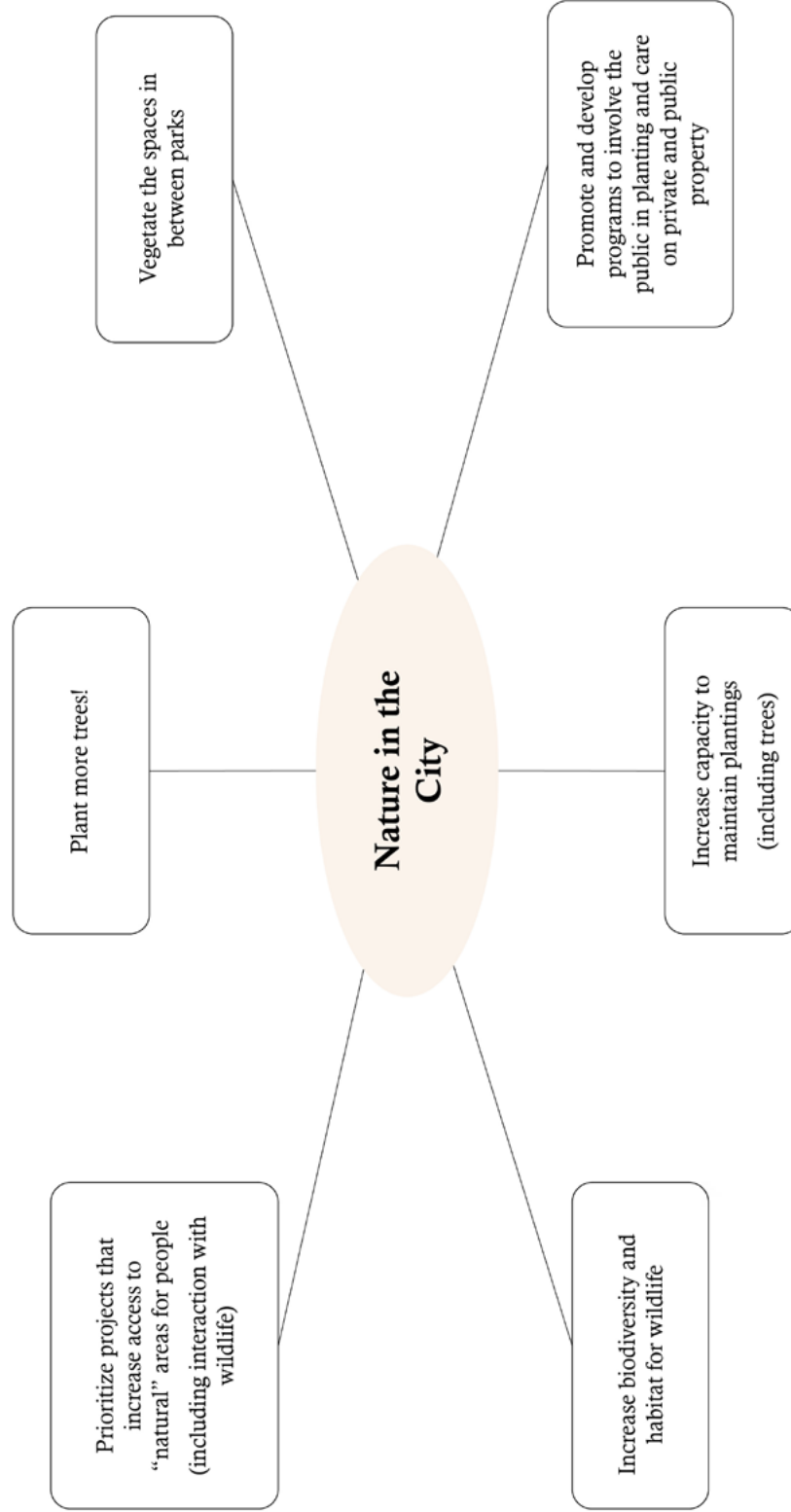
2023-24 Public Outreach

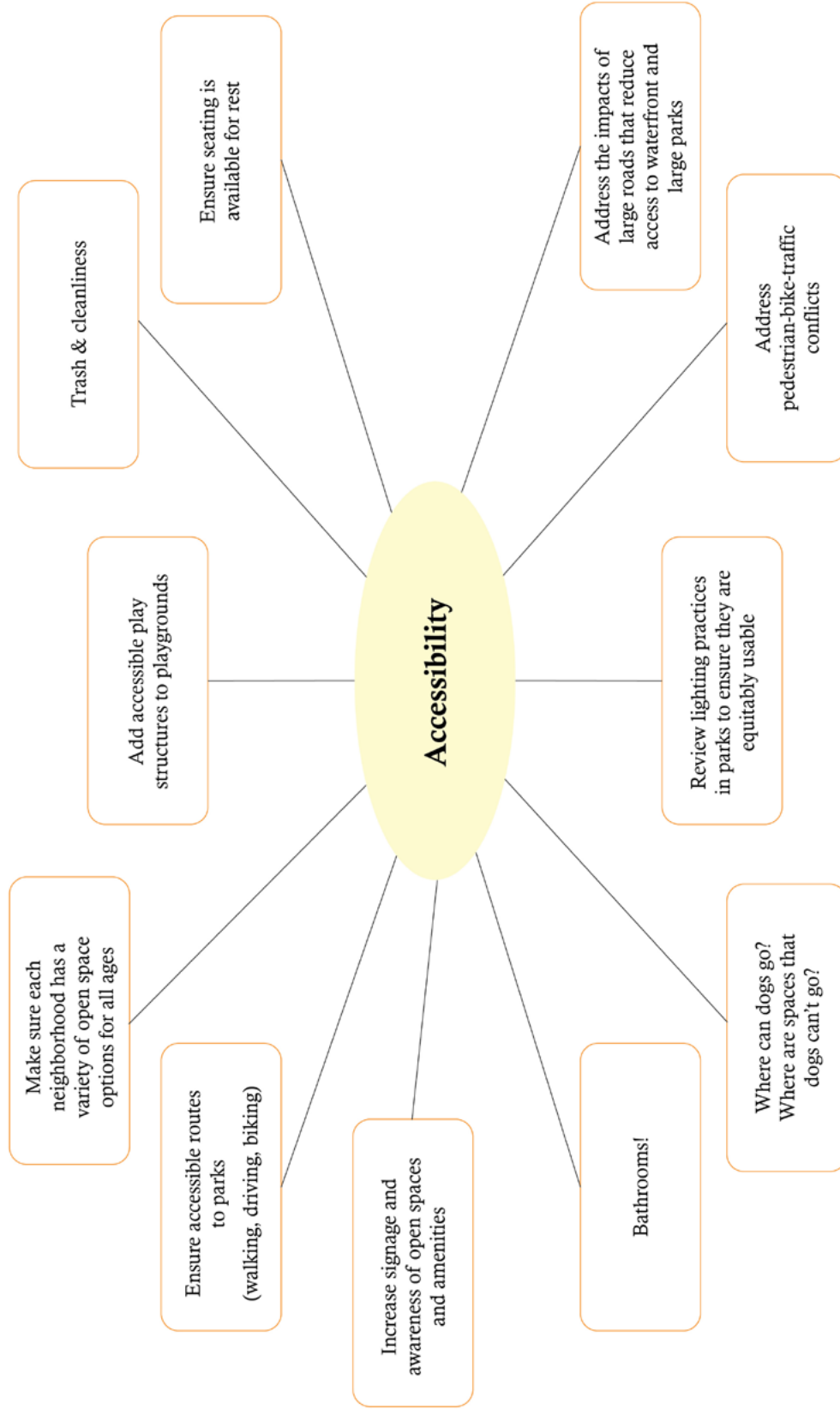
Community Meeting Findings

- Two community meetings, January 10th and 11th
- Discussed topics together and in breakout groups:
 - Play & Recreation
 - Natural & Restorative Spaces
 - Climate Resiliency in Parks
 - Urban Agriculture & Community Gardens





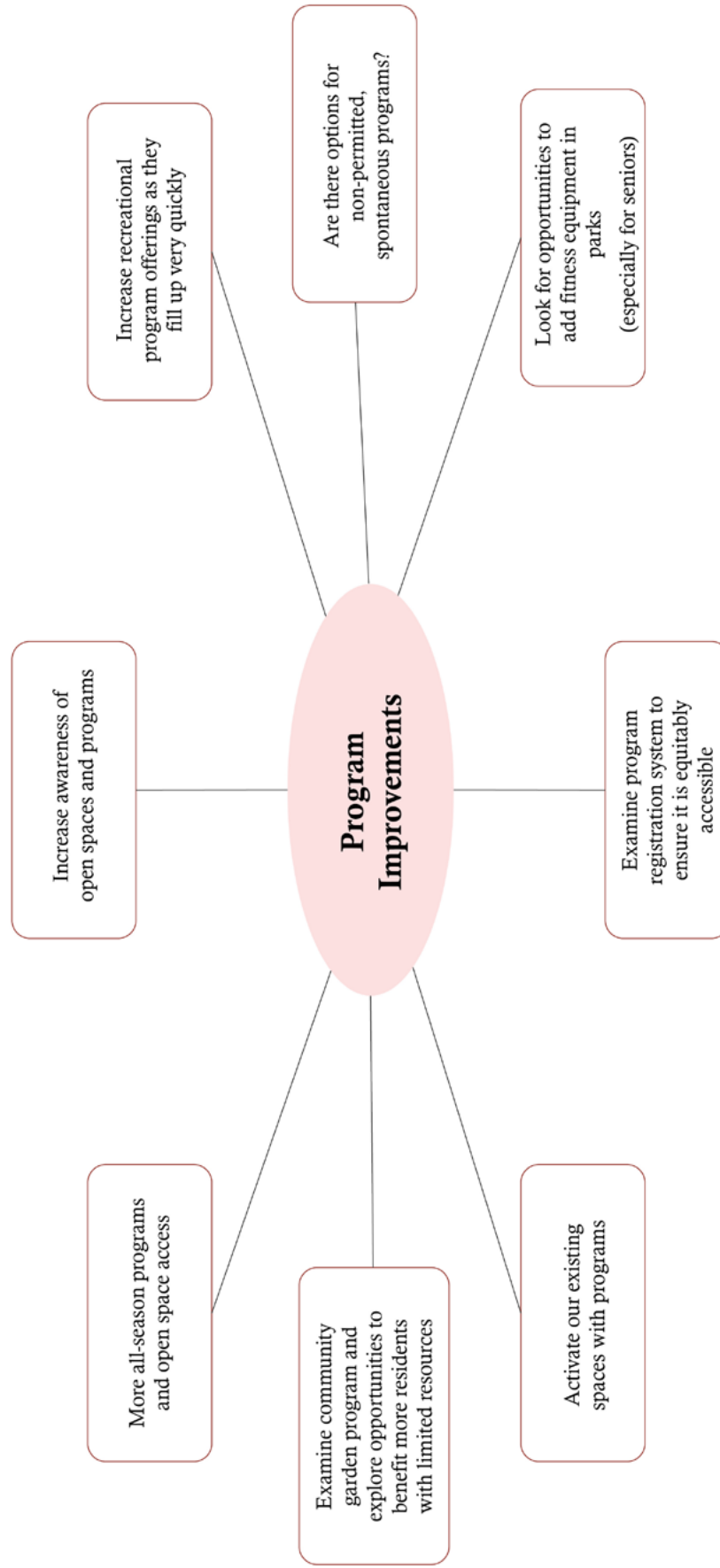


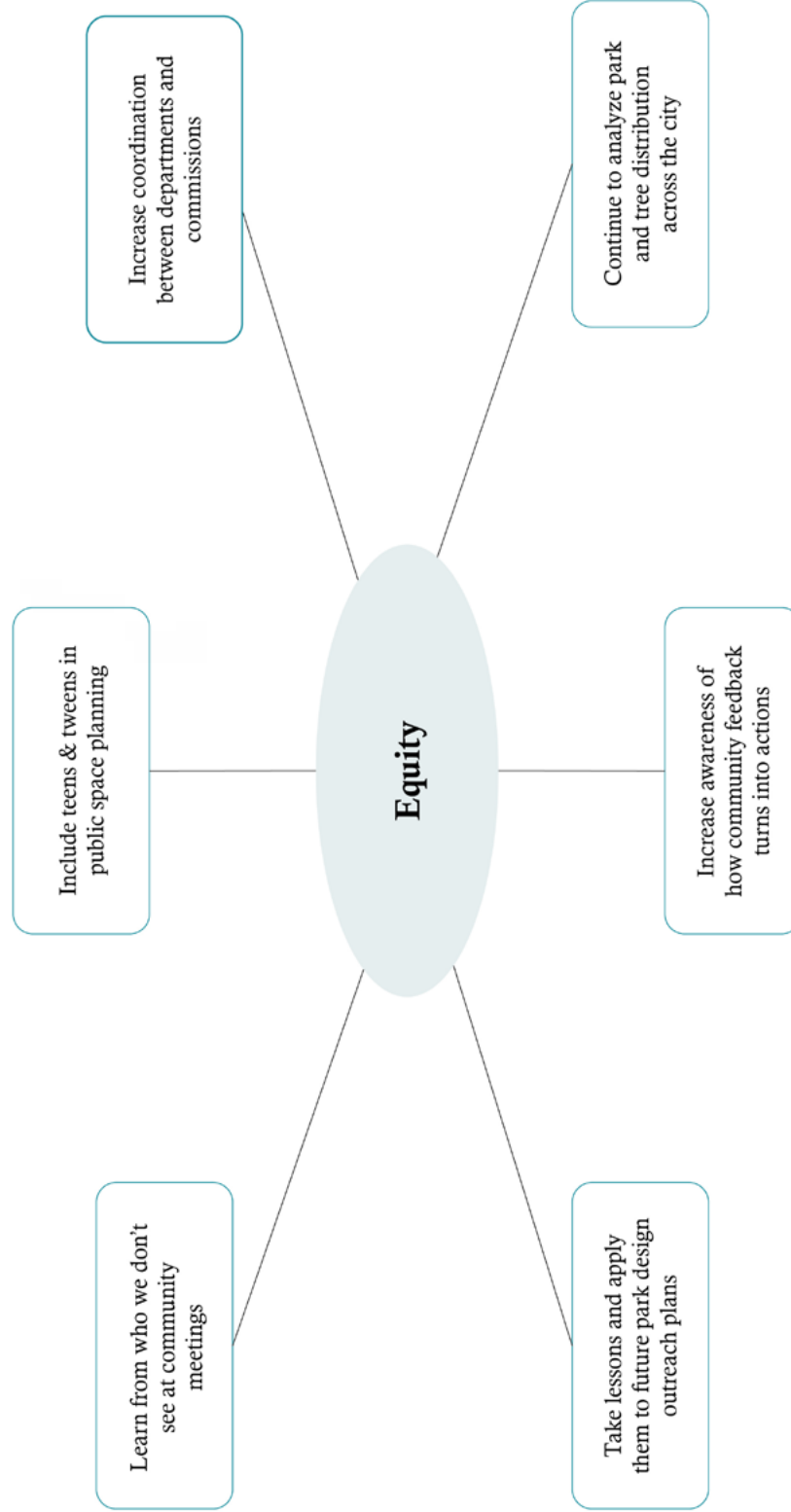


OSRP Visioning Session

January 2024

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Mayor Katjana Ballantyne
Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development



TAKE THE SURVEY

YOU can shape the future of parks & open space in Somerville



Scan me for details!





For ADA accommodations, please contact 311.
For free interpretation please contact 311 at least 7 days in advance.



ATTEND A MEETING

In person:
Wednesday, January 10th from 6:30-8pm
at Somerville Public Library West Branch

Thursday, January 11th from 6:30-8pm
at Capuano School Cafeteria (150 Glen St)

Virtual:
Thursday, January 25th from 6-7:15pm

For more details: <http://voice.somervillema.gov/open-space-and-recreation-plan-update> or email amaurer@somervillema.gov



Alcaldesa Katjana Ballantyne
Oficina de Planeación Estratégica y Desarrollo Comunitario



PARTICIPE EN LA ENCUESTA

USTED puede definir el futuro de los parques y espacios abiertos en Somerville



Más información aquí





Para modificaciones razonables, llame al 311.
Para interpretación gratuita, llame al 311 al menos 7 días antes del evento.



PARTICIPE EN UNA REUNIÓN

En persona:
Miércoles, 10 de enero de 6:30 a 8pm
Biblioteca Pública de Somerville, sucursal oeste

Jueves, 11 de enero de 6:30 a 8pm
Cafetería de la escuela Capuano (150 Glen St)

Virtual:
Jueves, 25 de enero de 6 a 7:15pm

Para más información visite: <http://voice.somervillema.gov/open-space-and-recreation-plan-update> o envíe un correo a amaurer@somervillema.gov



Prefeita Katjana Ballantyne
Escritório de Planejamento Estratégico e Desenvolvimento Comunitário



RESPONDA À PESQUISA

VOCÊ pode definir o futuro dos parques & espaços ao ar livre em Somerville



Detalhes? Escaneie aqui





Para acomodações da ADA, ligue para 311.
Para interpretação gratuita ligue para 311, com pelo menos 7 dias de antecedência.



PARTICIPE DE UMA REUNIÃO

Presencial:
Quarta-feira, 10 de janeiro das 18h30 às 20h
na Biblioteca Pública de Somerville, Unidade Oeste

Quinta-feira, 11 de janeiro das 18h30 às 20h
na cafeteria da Capuano School (150 Glen St)

Virtual:
Quinta-feira, 25 de janeiro das 18 às 19h15

Para saber mais: <http://voice.somervillema.gov/open-space-and-recreation-plan-update> ou e-mail amaurer@somervillema.gov



Majistra Katjana Ballantyne
Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development



PRAN SONDAJ LA

OU ka defini fiti pak & espas ouvè yo nan Somerville



Eskane pou plis detay





Pou Akomodasyon ADA, tanpri kontakte 311.
Pou entèpretasyon tanpri kontakte 311 a mwens 7 jou an avans.



ASISTE NAN YON REVINYON

An pèsòn:
Mèkredi 10 Janvye a 6:30-8pm
nan Somerville Public Library West Branch

Jedi 11 Janvye a 6:30-8pm
nan Capuano School Cafeteria (150 Glen St)

Vityèl:
Jedi 25 Janvye a 6-7:15pm

Pou plis detay: <http://voice.somervillema.gov/open-space-and-recreation-plan-update> oswa email amaurer@somervillema.gov



मेयर काटियाना ब्यालेण्टाईन
रणनीतिक योजना तथा सामुदायिक विकास कार्यालय



सर्वेक्षणमा सहभागी हुनुहोस्!

तपाईंले समरभिलमा भविष्यका लागि पार्क तथा खुला ठाउँका लागि आकार दिन सक्नु हुन्छ।



पार्क विकासका लागि समयानुसार हेर्नुहोस्।





एडि ए (ADA) सम्पत्तिको लागि कृपया ३११ मा सम्पर्क गर्नुहोस्।
निशुन भाषा अनुवादका लागि कृपया ३११ मा सम्पर्क गर्नुहोस् र ७ दिन अगाडि सम्पर्क गर्नुहोस्।



बैठकमा सहभागी हुनुहोस्।

व्यक्तिगत रूपमा:
बुधबार, जनवरी १० साँझ ६:३० - ८:००
पश्चिम साखा समरभिल सार्वजनिक पुस्तकालयमा

बिहिबार, जनवरी ११ साँझ ६:३० - ८:००
कापुनो स्कूल क्याफेटेरियामा, १५० ग्लेन स्ट्रीट (150 Glen St)

भर्चुअल:
बिहिबार, जनवरी २५ साँझ ६:०० - ७:१५

बिस्तार जानकारीका लागि: <http://voice.somervillema.gov/open-space-and-recreation-plan-update> वा ईमेल amaurer@somervillema.gov



卡佳娜·巴蘭頓市長
策略規劃及社區發展辦事處



填寫問卷調查

你可以塑造薩默維爾的公園和開放空間的未來發生



掃描二維碼了解詳情！





如需 ADA協助，請聯絡311。
如需名義口譯服務，請至少提前7天聯絡311。



參加會議

實體會議：
1月10日 (星期三) 下午6時30分至8時
薩默維爾公共圖書館西分館

1月11日 (星期四) 下午6時30分至8時
Capuano School 食堂 (150 Glen St)

線上會議：
1月25日 (星期四) 下午6時15分至7時15分

如欲了解更多詳細資訊，請瀏覽<http://voice.somervillema.gov/open-space-and-recreation-plan-update> 或發送電郵至 amaurer@somervillema.gov



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
KATJANA BALLANTYNE
MAYOR

THOMAS GALLIGANI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

MEMBERS

MICHAEL A. CAPUANO, ESQ., *CHAIR*
AMELIA ABOFF, *VICE CHAIR*
JAHAN HABIB, *CLERK*
MICHAEL MCNELEY
LYNN RICHARDS
LUC SCHUSTER, *ALTERNATE*

May 5, 2025

To Whom to May Concern,

On behalf of the City of Somerville Planning Board, I am writing in support of the draft 2025-2035 Open Space and Recreation Plan. The Board has reviewed the document and was able to discuss the plan with City staff at a public meeting.

We understand and endorse the goals and objectives of the OSRP, and we approve the draft with no substantive revisions recommended. The Planning Board voted 6-0 at the May 1, 2025 meeting to endorse the plan.

Sincerely,

Michael A. Capuano
Chair of the Planning Board



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(617) 625-6600 EXT. 2500 • TTY: (617) 666-0001 • FAX: (617) 625-0722
www.somervillema.gov



KATJANA BALLANTYNE
MAYOR

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE



5/9/25

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my strong support of the 2025-2035 Open Space and Recreation Plan on behalf of the Somerville Community Preservation Committee. We endorse the goals and objectives of this OSRP update. The plan is very informative and will help to guide the decisions of the CPC to fund projects that will improve and expand open space in Somerville. The CPC looks forward to continuing our collaboration with City of Somerville staff and their partners to achieve the ambitions of this plan.

Sincerely,

Ryan Kiracofe
Chair, Somerville Community Preservation Committee



SMART GROWTH AND REGIONAL COLLABORATION

June 18, 2025

Melissa Cryan
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
100 Cambridge St. – Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

Dear Ms. Cryan:

The City of Somerville recently submitted its updated Open Space and Recreation Plan to the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) for review. The Division of Conservation Services (DCS) requires every community in the Commonwealth to submit their Open Space and Recreation Plan to their respective regional planning agency (RPA) and receive a letter of review. This review is advisory and only DCS has the power to approve a municipal open space plan. While your office reviews open space plans for compliance with your guidelines, MAPC reviews these plans for their attention to regional issues generally and more specifically for consistency with [MetroCommon 2050](#), the regional policy plan for the Boston metropolitan area.

Consistency with MetroCommon 2050 – *MetroCommon 2050* is the official regional plan for Greater Boston. Adopted in 2021, in accordance with Massachusetts General Law, the plan seeks to expand equity throughout the region and envisions a more prosperous, resilient, and sustainable Greater Boston for existing and future residents. This vision is embodied in and supported by eleven (11) goals, five (5) action areas, twenty (20) recommendations, sixty-eight (68) strategies, and over 200 policy actions. We encourage all communities within the MAPC region to become familiar with the plan by visiting metrocommon.mapc.org

We are pleased to note that Somerville's Open Space and Recreation Plan is well aligned with several core goals and action areas of *MetroCommon2050*. We are pleased to note that Somerville's Open Space and Recreation Plan is well aligned with several core goals and action areas of *MetroCommon2050*. The plan places strong emphasis on creating a network of inclusive, safe, and welcoming parks and open spaces that support both community well-being and ecological resilience. Somerville's OSRP vision is supported by a seven-year action plan that prioritizes expanding and equitably distributing open space across the city, while also protecting and enhancing the city's existing parks and open space. The plan also focuses on ensuring that Somerville's recreation programs and facilities evolve to meet the diverse and growing needs of residents.

Surrounding Communities – Somerville is an active member of the [Inner Core Committee \(ICC\)](#), one of eight subregions within the MAPC region. The ICC includes 21 communities that meet regularly to address shared planning challenges, exchange best practices, and explore opportunities for regional collaboration on issues to support sustainable growth.



SMART GROWTH AND REGIONAL COLLABORATION

Due to Somerville's density and existing development patterns, the plan highlights the vital role of regional parks and shared natural resources in supporting the city's recreation and conservation goals. It emphasizes the importance of collaboration at the regional level to protect ecological systems and expand access to recreational amenities that serve the broader region. Key regional assets noted in the plan include the Mystic River Greenways, the Massachusetts Central Rail Trail, and the Alewife Brook Reservation, all of which offer important connections to nature and recreation for Somerville residents

Somerville's OSRP is comprehensive and provides a strong foundation for the City's ongoing efforts to preserve open space and address the evolving recreational needs of its residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Courtney Lewis'.

Courtney Lewis
Senior Regional Land Use Planner





Open Space & Recreation Plan 2025–2035

City of Somerville
Mayor Katjana Ballantyne