

FY2026 Budget Priorities

Councilor Ewen-Campen

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The keyword for local budgets in FY2026 is uncertainty. As our budget is being prepared, our own Federal government is actively creating an almost unbelievable degree of uncertainty. An extreme right-wing, authoritarian and senile President has teamed up with the world's richest man to simultaneously crash the economy and also to directly attack the social safety net, public education, health and science, and other foundations of civil society.

Locally, this means we need to do everything we can to plan ahead and ensure that our basic priorities are protected in this year's budget. To me, this means focusing on fundamentals: public education, housing stability, ensuring that all residents, regardless of their background, have access to city services, basic street safety, and stabilizing at-risk community members and institutions.

Below, I respectfully submit a list of some of my core priorities for the FY2026 budget.

Continuing to invest in a robust Public School Budget. The school budget is the purview of the School Committee and SPS, but I want to emphasize here my belief in the critical importance of continuing to invest in a public school system that serves every Somerville student and family, including efforts to expand out-of-school time programming. I understand that the Mayor has committed to another strong year of budgetary support for SPS, and I fully support this as a major driver of the FY2026 budget.

Housing Stability. Somerville has created and supported an enormous number of outstanding programs related to housing and homelessness that I hope will continue to be fully supported. This year, my top four priorities for housing stability are:

1. Ensuring the continuation of the Office of Housing Stability's legal services budget line so that residents have access to adequate legal protections.
2. Continued support for rental assistance staff positions, which provide critical support to Somerville's most vulnerable residents.
3. Making sure that our rental assistance funds are sufficient to get through FY2026.
4. Expanding available financing opportunities for new affordable housing projects as much as possible.

Access to city services for all residents - translation and interpretation. We need to ensure that we are doing everything in our power to support all of our residents and connect them with all of the resources available here, regardless of where they're from.

1. Translation and interpretation are fundamental to this goal, and we should increase our investment in the services provided by our Office of Immigrant Affairs to allow City

Departments and members of the public to have access to translation and on-demand interpretation services.

2. Ensuring that there is a sufficient printing budget for Somerville's Office of Immigrant Affairs, which has seen a dramatic increase in the need to create materials to inform residents of their rights and connect them to resources.

Safe streets. Ensuring that our streets are safe for all pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, and people with disabilities continues to be a top public safety priority. I continue to strongly support all of the Vision Zero and Bike Network Plan efforts being undertaken by the City, and specifically wish to emphasize three top priorities:

1. Launching the Highland Ave redesign process. It is well beyond time to launch the community process to design a Highland Ave that is safe for all users.
2. Civilian Flaggers: complete SPD contract negotiations to allow for civilian flaggers at traffic details. The current monopoly on this job by sworn officers has led to enormous levels of unfilled traffic detail requests.
3. Pilot program for red-light cameras to automate traffic enforcement.

Art Space Preservation - 57 Central St studies. With so much affordable artists space being lost, I want to ensure that we have the budgetary capacity to complete our efforts to preserve and stabilize the artist building at 57 Central St. In addition to whatever costs may be needed to get the sale over the finish line, I advocate for sufficient funds to stabilize the building and its tenants.