

Dear Mayor Curtatone and the City Councilors,

We, members of the arts community of Somerville, are growing alarmed as the COVID-19 crisis disrupts our lives, takes a toll on our sense of community, and decimates our local arts economy. We urgently request support from the City to survive this difficult time.

Art studios, performance spaces, maker-spaces, galleries, and other arts and cultural organizations are all struggling, especially those that typically generate revenue through their classes, after-school programming, skills training, events, monthly exhibitions, and rental spaces. Our costs have gone up as we've procured COVID-related protective supplies, while our income has been halted or severely curtailed. Meanwhile, our exorbitant Somerville rent is still due. To date, we have received almost no rent forgiveness and no municipal assistance for our organizations.

The arts have brought in money, tourism, new residents, new ideas, and new businesses for decades, making Somerville a diverse and dynamic place to live and work. However, if the City and the community wants the arts to continue to exist in Somerville in any meaningful way when this crisis is over, we need real, substantive investment now to stay afloat. Mayor Curtatone and members of the City Council, we're asking that you:

1. Allocate city, state, and federal funds for the Somerville arts community, which includes its nonprofit arts and cultural organizations, with grants awarded on the basis of organizational need and impact. One model is the City of Boston, which has allocated federal CARES Act dollars toward arts organizations through a competitive process.¹ Another is the City of Cambridge, which is making substantial arts investments in its FY21 budget.
2. Enact a property tax abatement for landlords and owners who lease to artists and arts and cultural organizations. Tie these property tax reductions to rental relief for those tenants.
3. Temporarily relax certain permitting and licensing rules so that arts organizations can use their outdoor spaces to recapture some of their lost income for the next 3–4 months. The City made accommodations to support restaurants' expansion of their outdoor operations; similar assistance is needed for the arts and culture sector.
4. Explore ways to create new, permanent art spaces and secure existing facilities (including through issuing a municipal bond to support acquisition and dedicating a municipal building for arts use).
5. Please meet with us for a Town Forum and a wider conversation of how arts organizations and the City can partner for a brighter future. Let us help you! We, like you, are creative and innovative by nature.

Communities all around us are recognizing how much is lost when the arts and culture sector suffers, and they are acting swiftly to shore up their fragile, yet essential nonprofit arts organizations. Befitting our city's reputation as a leader in progressive action, we ask you to create a bold plan for the arts and cultural community of Somerville, so that we can survive this crisis and contribute to the city for years to come.

Respectfully,

Artisan's Asylum: Lars Torres
Arts at the Armory: Stephanie Scherpf
The Beautiful Stuff Project: Marina Seevak
Brickbottom Artists Association: Lois Blood Bennett and Shannon Humphreys
Brickbottom Gallery/Mad Oyster Studios: Debra Olin
Cervena Barva Press: Gloria Mindock
Dead Moon Audio, LLC: Adam Preston Cissell, Owner
Deborah Mason Performing Arts Center: Deborah Dudley
Mudflat: Lynn Gervens
NAVE Gallery: Susan Berstler
Somerville Media Center: Brian Zipp
Somerville Museum: Barbara Mangum, President of the Board
Theatre@First: Elizabeth Hunter, Artistic Director
Washington Street Art Center: Lee Kilpatrick
Ann Hirsch, artist at Vernon Street and Mad Oyster Studios
Kerrie Kemperman, photographer, Washington Street Art Center
Eva Rosenberg, Interim Director of Arts & Culture, The Boston Foundation,