

Happiness Survey 2025: Data Release



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
SOMERSTAT

KATJANA BALLANTYNE
MAYOR

What we're doing today



Introduction

Why does the City run the Somerville Happiness Survey?



2025 Details

Distribution of the most recent survey



2025 Data Release

Exploration of findings



Next Steps

Further analysis

Topics & questions for 2027

Overview & Purpose

- The Happiness Survey measures residents' overall happiness and satisfaction with various aspects of life in Somerville and informs City decisions that support and enhance residents' happiness.
- SomerStat has conducted the survey every **two years** since 2011.
- Data from the Happiness Survey is used in:
 - Tracking performance in long-range goals
 - Evaluating pilot programs (e.g., composting)
 - Setting budget and resource priorities



THE 2025 SOMERVILLE HAPPINESS SURVEY

INSTRUCTIONS

- To take this survey online, visit <<Jotform Link for TinyURL>> or scan the QR code.
- Your participation is voluntary and anonymous. Your demographic information is only used to make broad comparisons and ensure the survey is representative.
- Do not write your name or contact information on this sheet.
- Fill the circle of your choice ● completely. Mark checkboxes with ☒ or ☐.
- Only one person in your household should take the survey. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes.
- Submit your survey by **May 31, 2025**, either online or using the enclosed envelope.

HAPPINESS & GENERAL SATISFACTION

How happy do you feel right now? Very Unhappy ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Very Happy

How satisfied are you with the following?	Very Unsatisfied		Neutral		Very Satisfied
Your life in general	○	○	○	○	○
Somerville as a place to live	○	○	○	○	○
Your relationships with your neighbors	○	○	○	○	○

How much do you agree with the following statements?	Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree
I feel like I am part of the Somerville community	○	○	○	○	○
I feel safe in Somerville	○	○	○	○	○

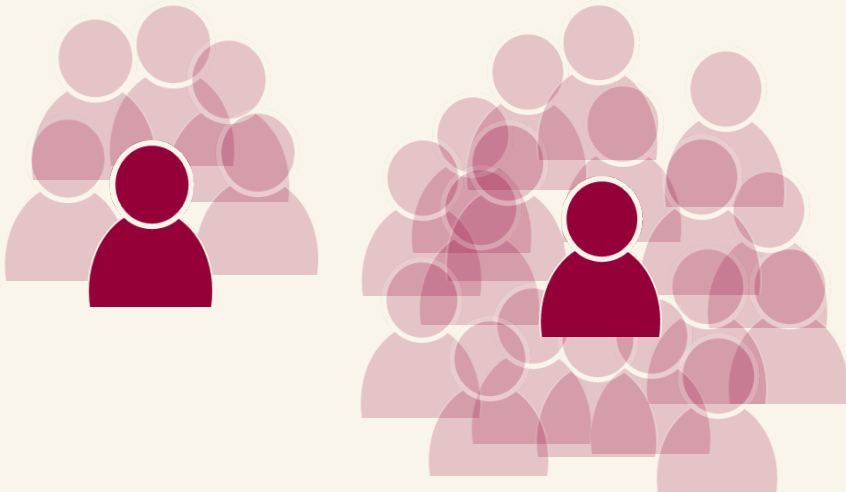
COMMUNITY & GOVERNANCE

How satisfied are you with the following?	Very Unsatisfied		Neutral		Very Satisfied	Not Sure
Opportunities in Somerville to interact with people of different backgrounds and life experiences	○	○	○	○	○	○
Opportunities for civic participation (e.g., community meetings, Participatory Budgeting, boards and commissions)	○	○	○	○	○	○

How much do you agree with the following statements?	Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree	Not Sure
I feel heard by my City government	○	○	○	○	○	○
City government processes are visible and understandable to me	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have the information I need to vote in Somerville's local elections	○	○	○	○	○	○

Why run the Happiness Survey?

Surveying a **random sample** of residents + **targeted outreach** to special populations provides insight into a broad cross-section of opinions that aren't always heard in public meetings and online comments.



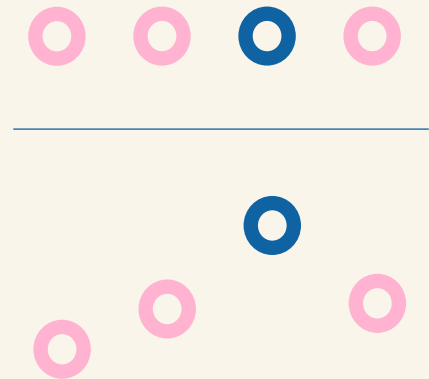
Asking about a lot of topics forces respondents to consider them relative to each other.

How satisfied are you with the reliability of water and sewer services?

How satisfied are you with the maintenance of streets, sidewalks, and bike lanes?



Biennial survey allows for longitudinal analysis, where it's easier to see if a result is part of a trend or a one-off anomaly.



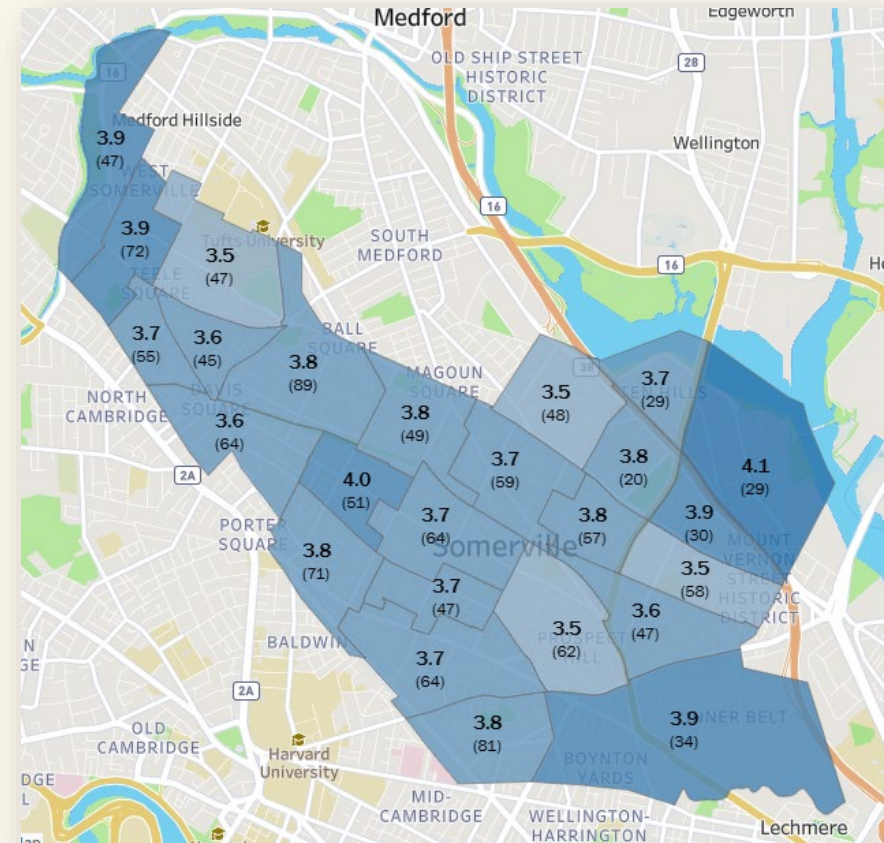
2025 Survey Distribution

- The 2025 survey was sent to randomly-selected households in Somerville in April-May 2025.
 - Paper surveys in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Haitian Creole
 - Online option in above languages + Nepali, Traditional Chinese, and Simplified Chinese
 - Sent out by postcard & paper surveys as a test of methodology: paper response rate is much higher
- We received nearly 1,400 responses.
- Our sample overrepresents women, white people, homeowners, and high-income households, but almost all demographic groups have enough respondents to analyze/report.
- Keep in mind that results reflect sentiment in spring 2025!



New in 2025

- Results viewable on a map by census tract, from a geographically-representative sample
- “Deep dives” into some themes of City work
 - This year: community & governance, public health, public space, infrastructure, commercial development & arts, and education
- Open-response questions for what the City is doing well (up to 3) and what it could improve (up to 3)
 - Almost 1000 people left comments in both!
- Open-response questions about your last interaction with the City, and where the City should spend more and fewer resources



COMMUNITY & GOVERNANCE

How satisfied are you with the following?

	Very Unsatisfied	Neutral	Very Satisfied	Not Sure
Opportunities in Somerville to interact with people of different backgrounds and life experiences	☐	☐	☐	☐
Opportunities for civic participation (e.g., community meetings, Participatory Budgeting, boards and commissions)	☐	☐	☐	☐

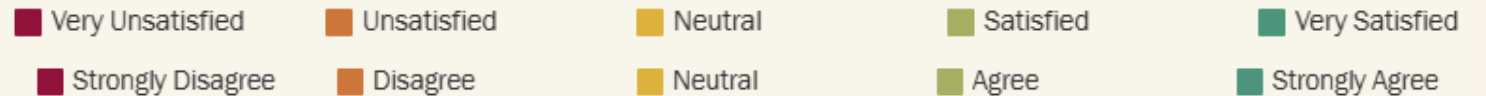
How much do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Not Sure
I feel heard by my City government	☐	☐	☐	☐
City government processes are visible and understandable to me	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have the information I need to vote in Somerville's local elections	☐	☐	☐	☐

How to read the charts

Results are shown as average scores and as percentages of responses by answer choice. Percentages of responses exclude “not sure” and blank responses and offer the most detail in understanding responses.

Satisfaction and Agreement Questions



- 5-point scale, from 1 (Very Unsatisfied) to 5 (Very Satisfied), or from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)
- Generally, an average score near or above 4.0 (average response of “Satisfied” or “Agree”) will be on the higher side of what we see in this dataset. However, whether that is considered “good” will depend on the question.
- For comparing average scores, a difference of 0.2 or less is generally negligible, while a difference of 1.0 or more is marked.

Concern Questions



- 3-point scale, from 1 (Not Concerned), to 3 (Very Concerned)
- Because the 3-point scale offers few selection options, percentages of responses are more helpful than averages in assessing differences.

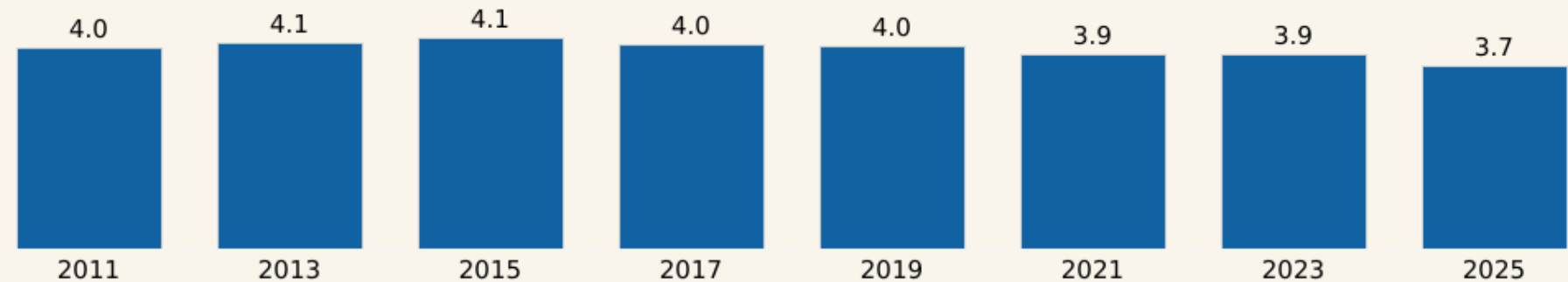
Open Ended Questions

- Open ended question add explanation, context, and nuance to the quantitative/scale questions.

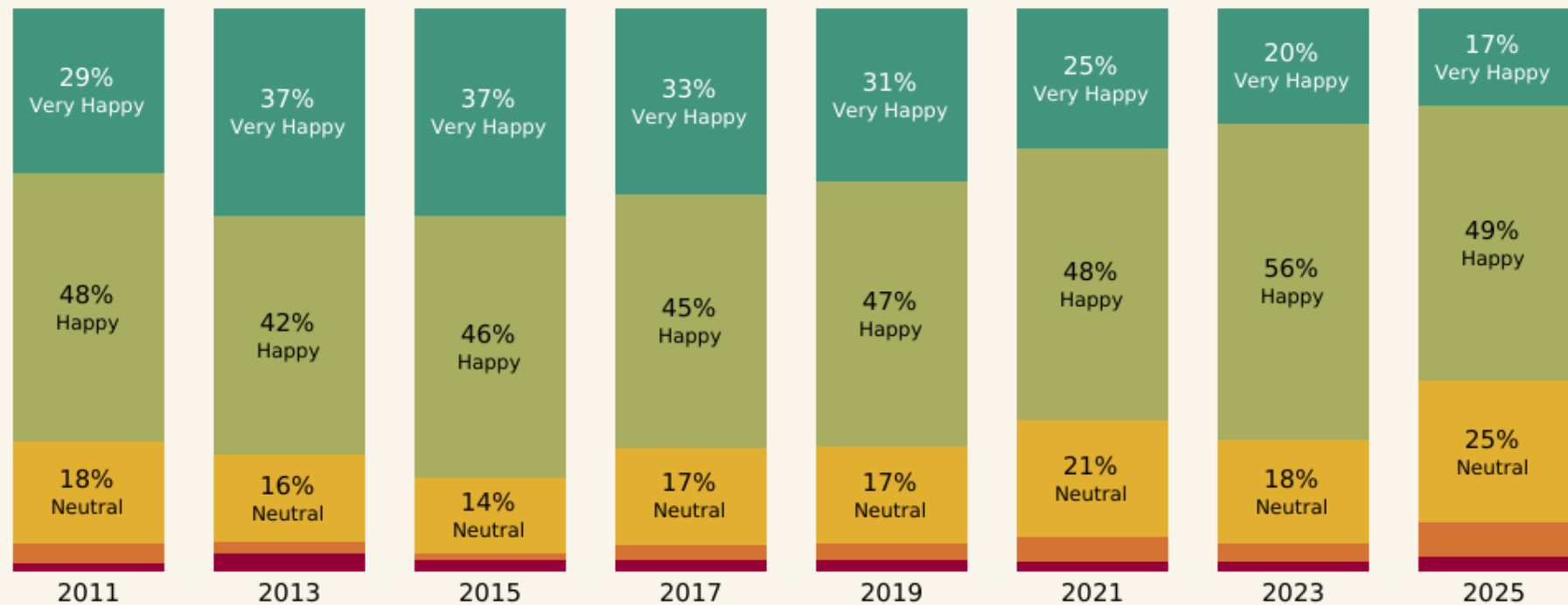
Overall, Somerville residents are happy!

Although it's
gone down a bit
recently.

How happy do you feel right now?
Average score on a scale from 1 to 5 (higher is happier)



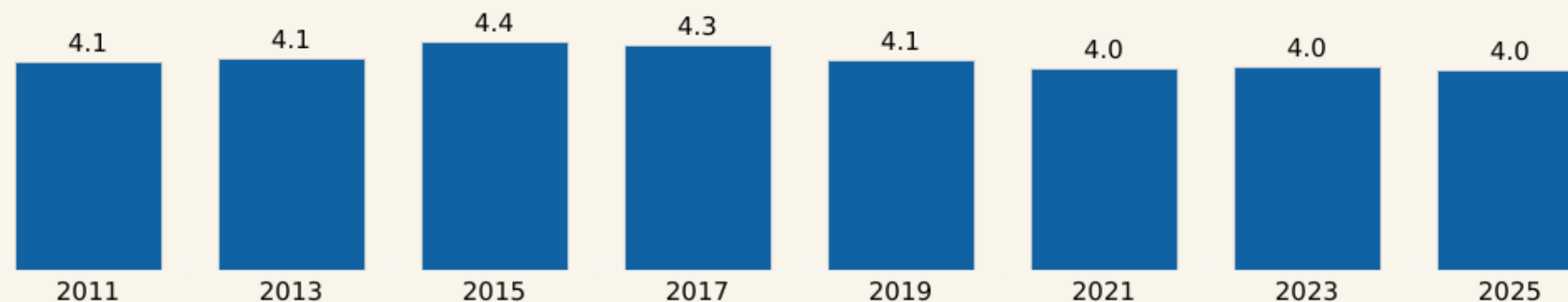
How happy do you feel right now?
Percent of responses by answer choice



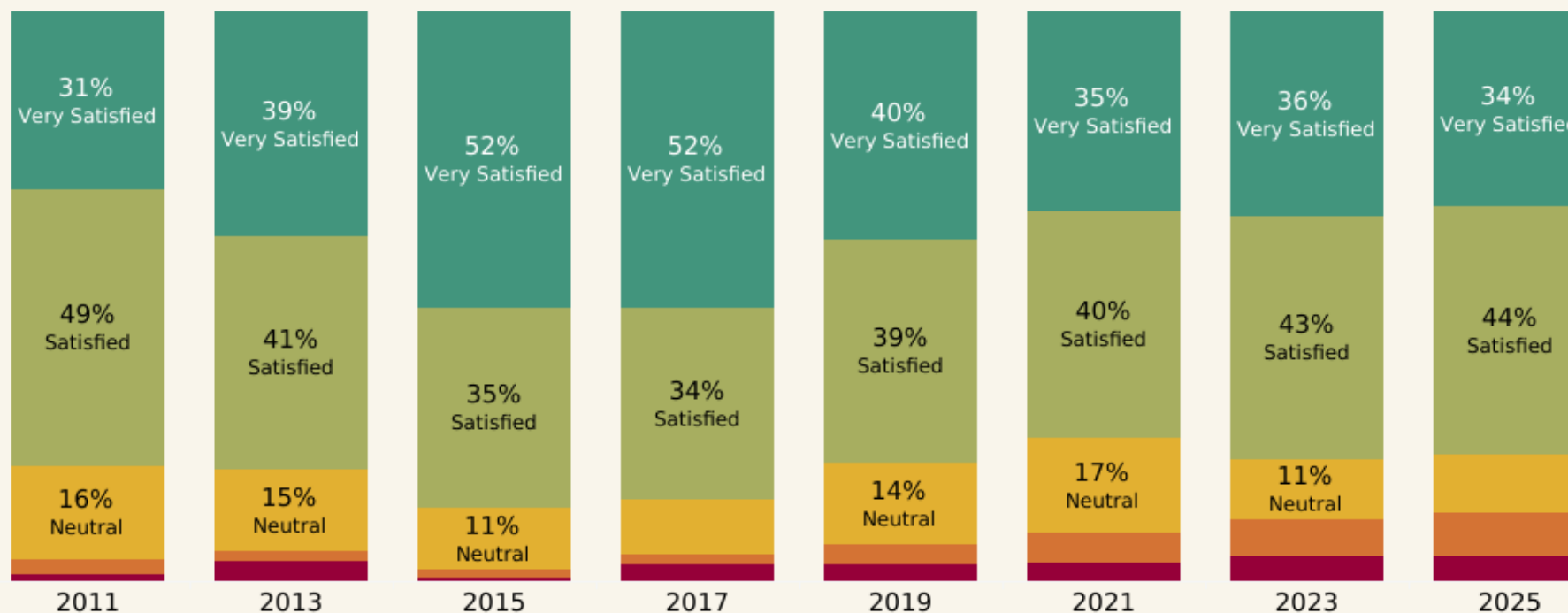
**However,
they
continue to
be happy
with
Somerville
as a place
to live.**

This has been
steady since the
COVID-19
pandemic.

How satisfied are you with Somerville as a place to live?
Average score on a scale from 1 to 5 (higher is more satisfied)



How satisfied are you with Somerville as a place to live?
Percent of responses by answer choice

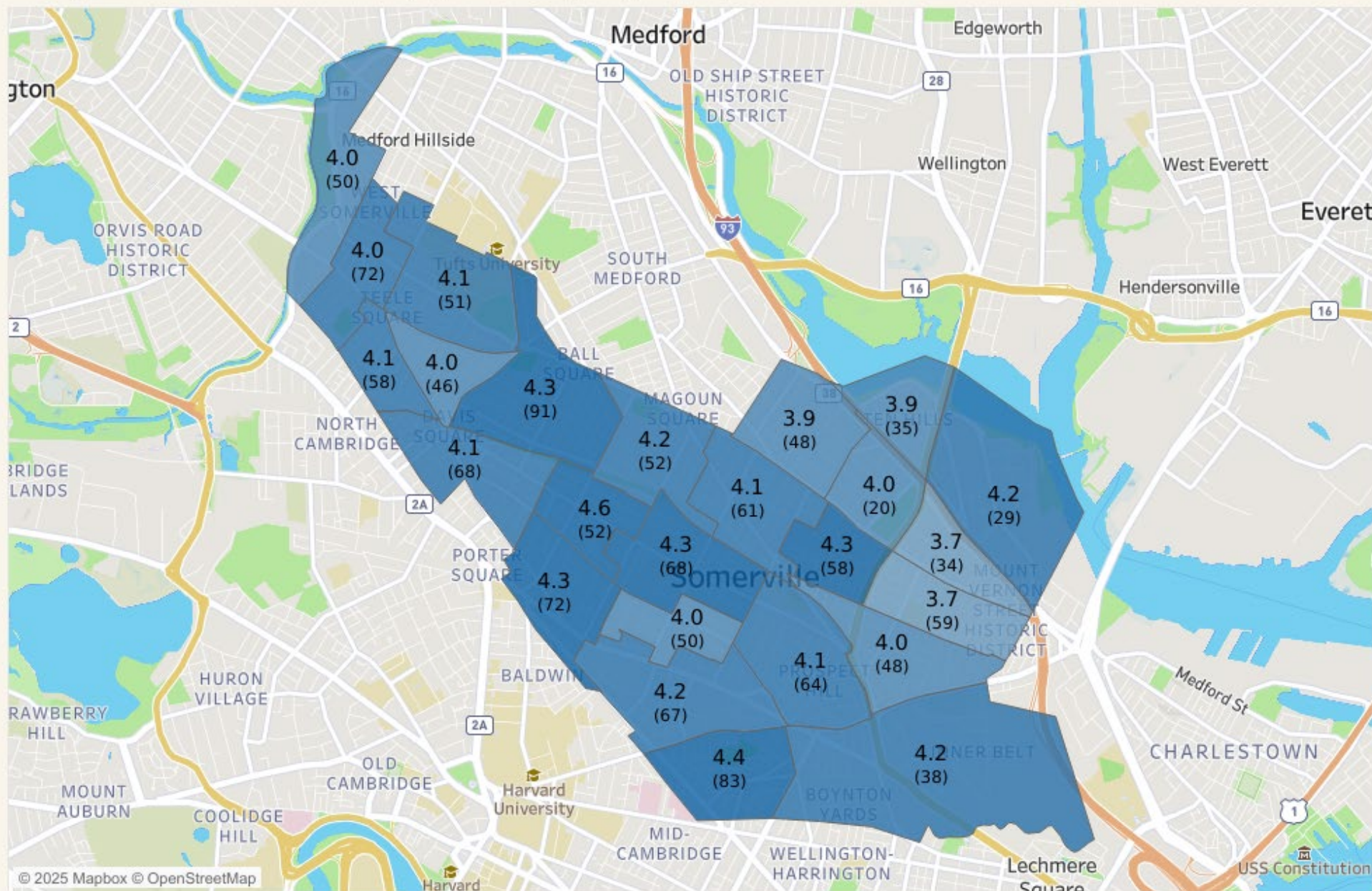


**People also
feel safe in
Somerville.**

Everywhere.

How much do you agree? I feel safe in Somerville (2025)

Average score on a scale from 1 to 5 (higher is stronger agreement)



Themes: Core City Services

Respondents are highly satisfied with the overall **quality of City services** they receive, including **emergency response services**, **reliability of water & sewer services**, and the **availability of information** about City services.

There are about 170 comments about 311 and 2/3 are positive.

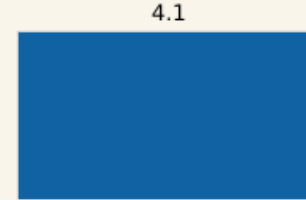
311 has been great. They are polite and full of information. Professional when taking down my concern it is great to speak with human.

311 is always extra helpful whenever I call!!!!

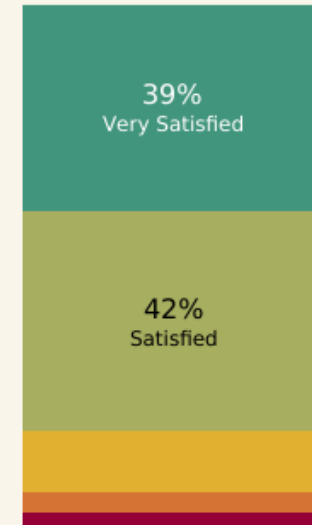
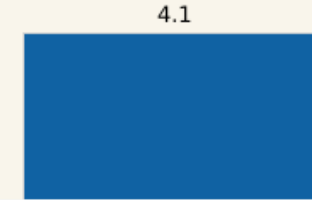
Contacting 311 is easy, but I'm not sure if actual action was taken afterwards.



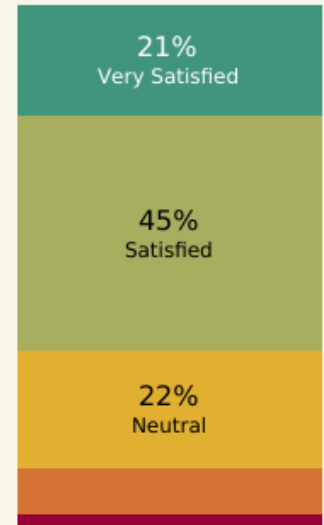
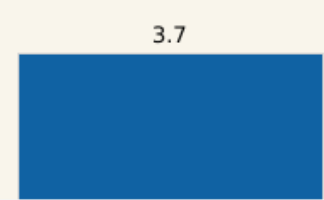
Quality of City Services



Quality of emergency response services



Reliability of water & sewer services



Availability of information about services

Themes: Governance

Respondents are highly satisfied with **opportunities for civic participation** and **having the information to vote in Somerville**.

Respondents are less likely to feel that **government processes are visible and understandable**.

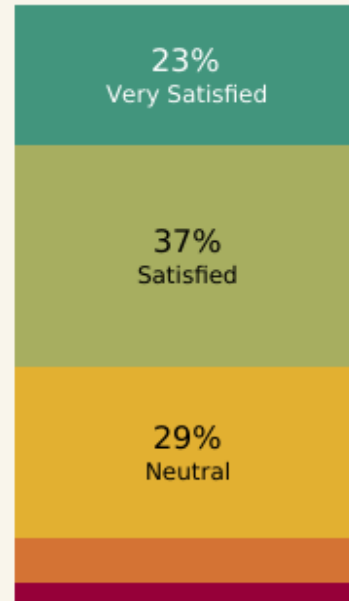
There are about 80 comments about city processes, largely focused on processes for permitting, parking permits, paying tickets, etc.

Comments are split about 1/3 positive to 2/3 improvement suggestions.

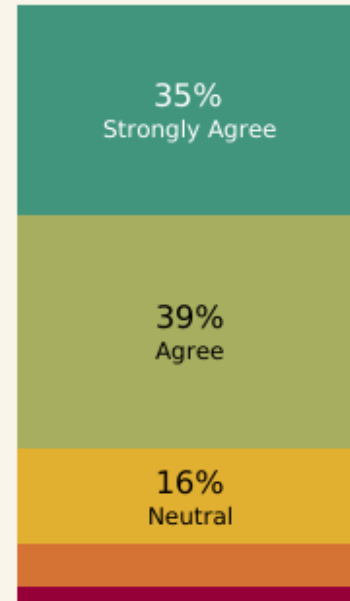
Easy to use website and online payments

We had contractors who won't work [in Somerville] because it's too hard to get anything done

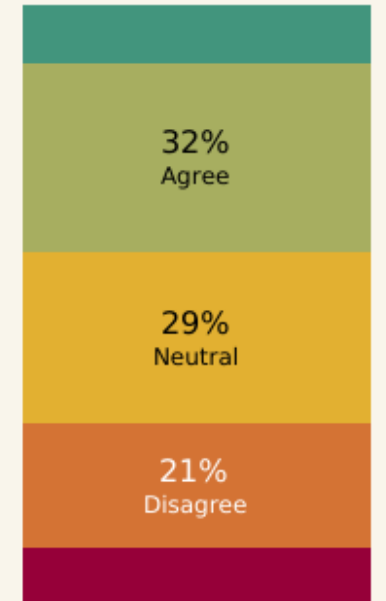
I went in person to pick up my permit. It was easy and quick. However, the reason I went in person was because my mother who also lives in Somerville warned me that she ordered hers online and it never came.



Opportunities for civic participation



Information to vote in local elections



Visible and understandable processes

Themes: City Design

Respondents are highly satisfied with **proximity to parks they want to use** and **other public spaces**.

Respondents are less likely to be satisfied with the **layout and design of streets in their neighborhood**.

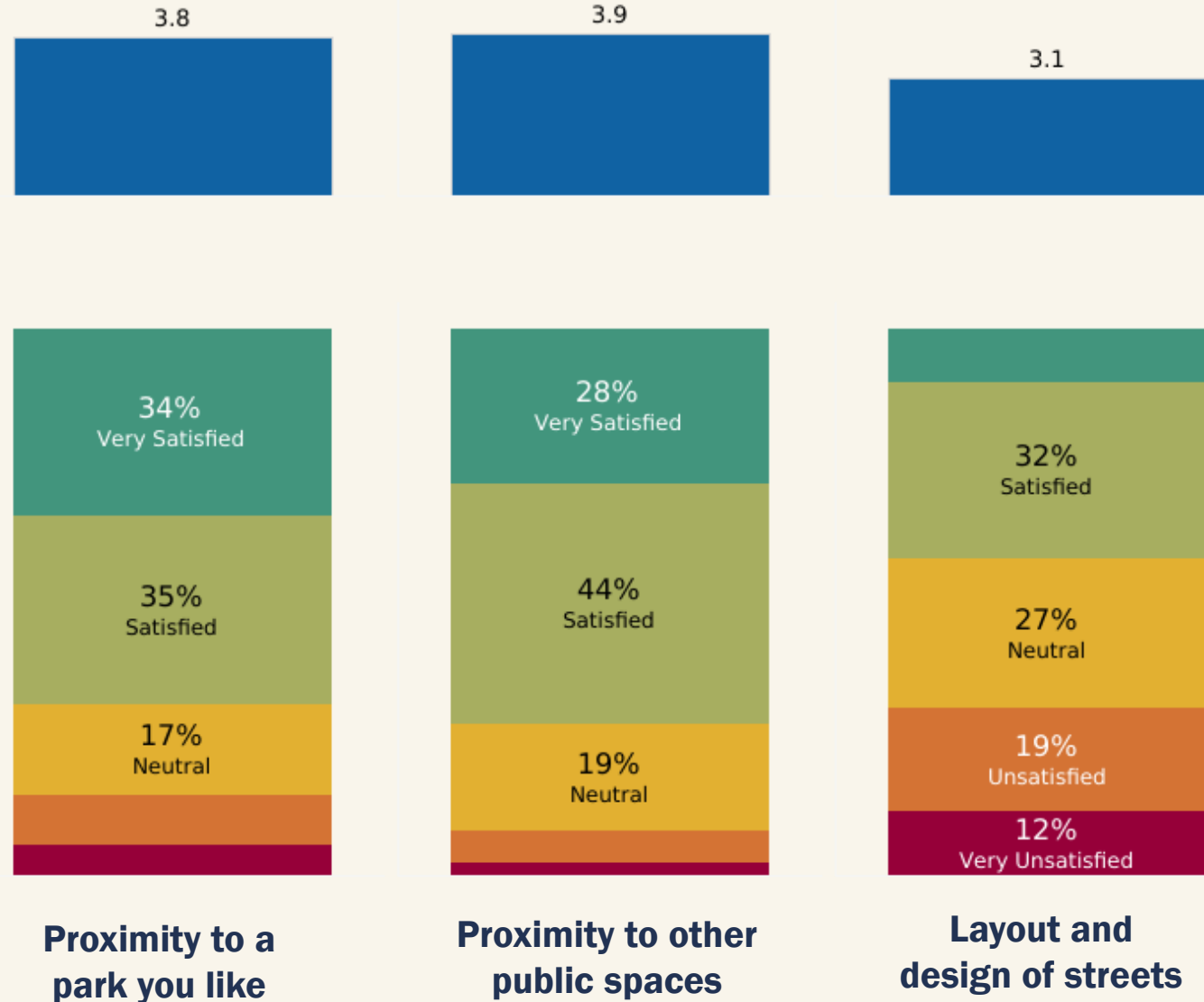
There are about 200 comments about street layout and design, largely focused on availability of bike & pedestrian infrastructure and availability of parking.

Comments are split about 50/50 positive to improvement suggestions.

Bike and pedestrian infrastructure has improved a lot. Please keep it up.

Taking away parking with no alternatives

Crosswalks should not be placed right where cars enter/exit roundabouts; interrupts the roundabout flow and is unsafe for pedestrians.



Themes: Maintenance

Respondents are fairly satisfied with the **beauty, cleanliness, and upkeep of their neighborhoods** and the **maintenance of municipal buildings**.

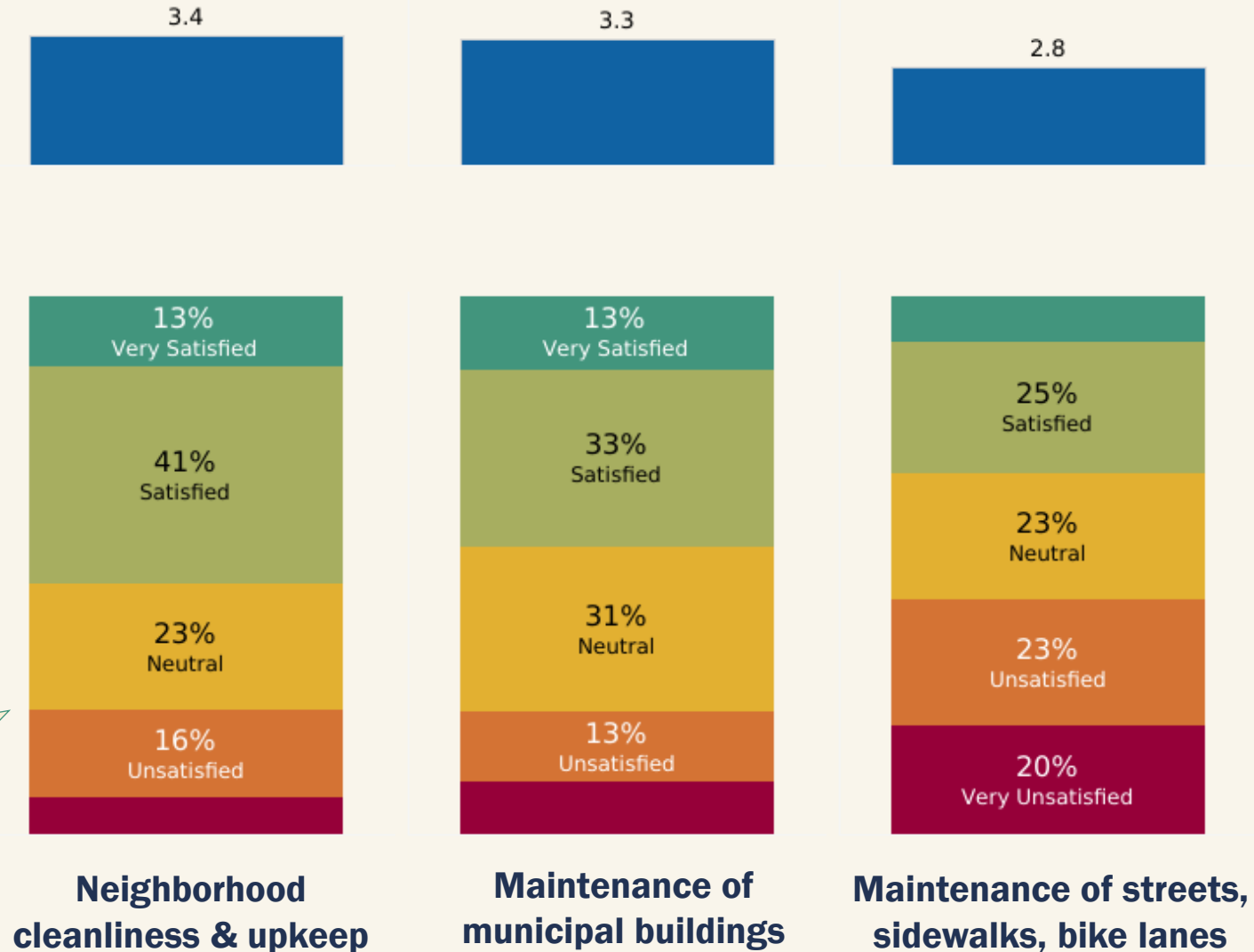
Respondents are less likely to be satisfied with the **maintenance of streets, sidewalks, and bike lanes** (which has been declining since before the COVID-19 pandemic).

There are over 250 comments about maintenance of roadway infrastructure; they are split about 10% positive to 90% improvement suggestions.

Finally fixing (part of) highland avenue

Sidewalk repair, in general and after street work. Makes it difficult for seniors to walk.

We need road repairs!!! Terrible street conditions make Somerville more unsafe for everyone.



Themes: Arts and Local Economy

Respondents are highly satisfied with **social community events**, the ability to **create and enjoy art in Somerville**, and the **restaurants, shops, and other businesses** in their neighborhood.

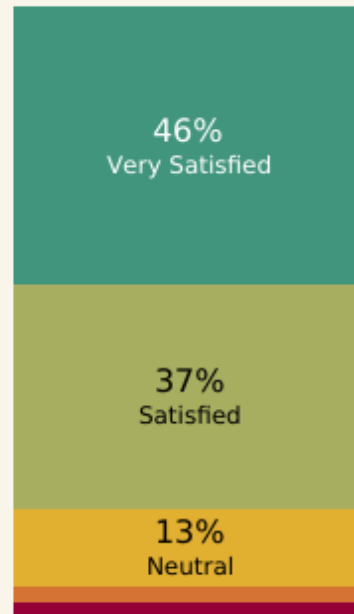
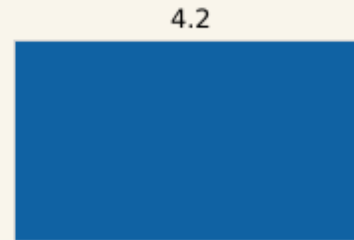
There are about 250 comments about local businesses, split about 50/50 positive to improvement suggestions. Respondents are happy with existing local businesses and want even more support for them.

Small and unique businesses abound - love the lack of big chains

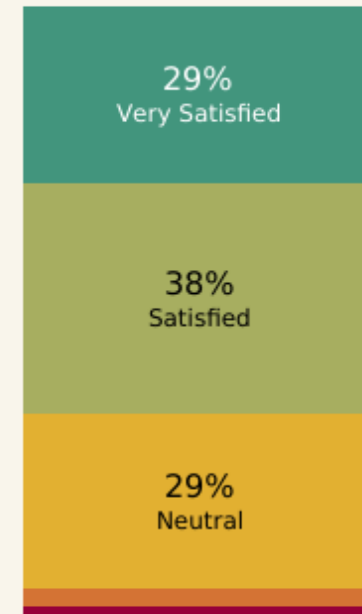
More support for local businesses, less big corporate development

So many small businesses - easy to shop for almost everything

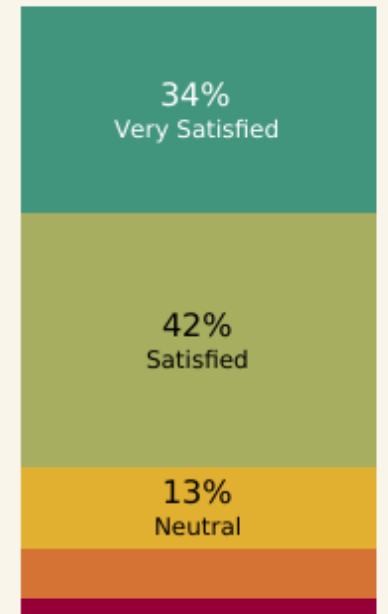
Businesses close and nothing reopens for years



Social community events



Ability to enjoy and create art



Neighborhood restaurants, shops, and other businesses

Themes: Education Supports

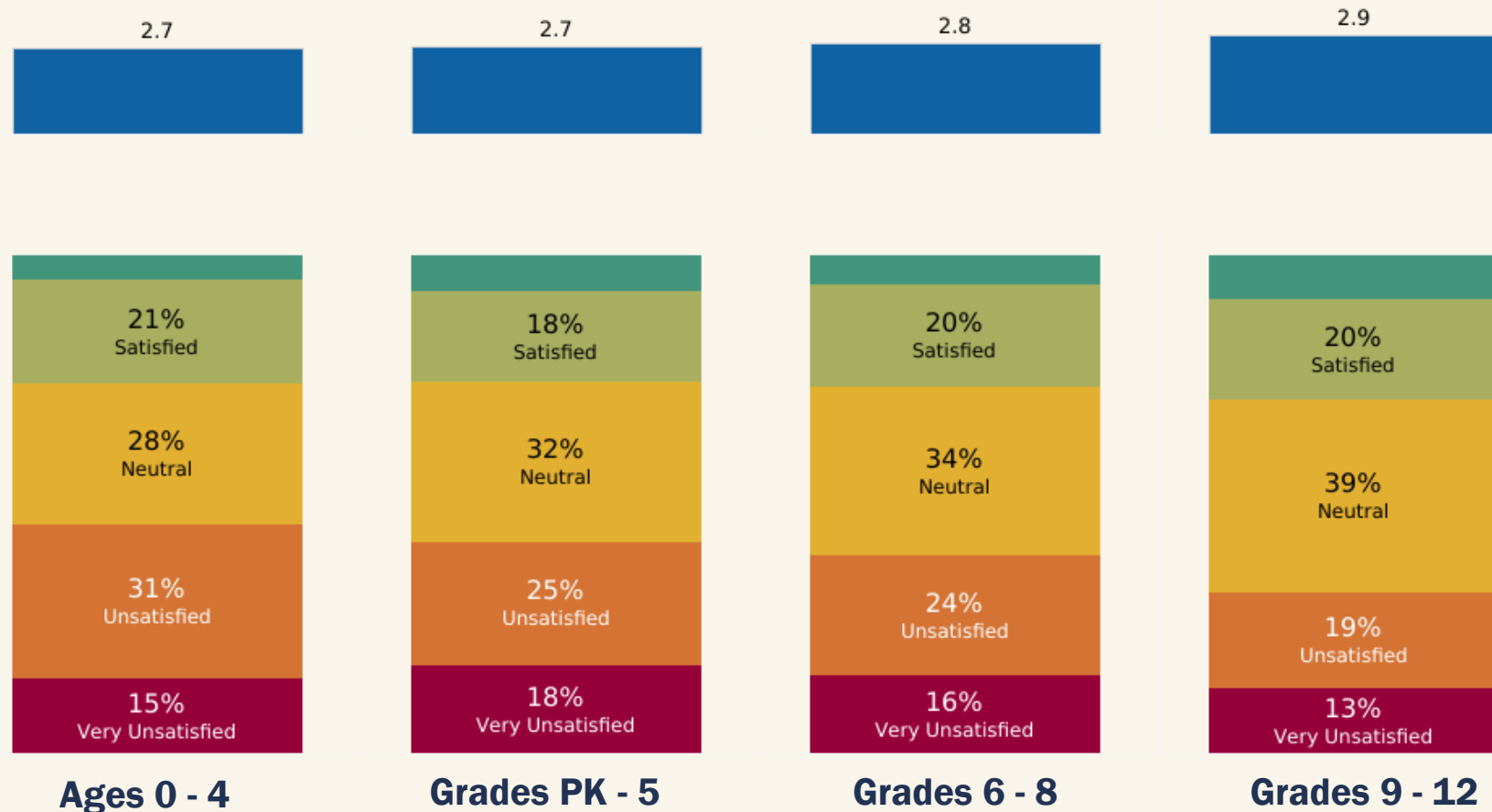
(Parents/guardians)

Parents and guardians report relatively high level of dissatisfaction with **availability of childcare** or **out of school care** for all age groups (somewhat improving with child's age).

There are about 45 comments about education supports, split about 1/3 positive to 2/3 improvement suggestions:

- Positive mentions include the quality and availability of Pre-K, afterschool programs, new parent groups
- Improvement mentions frequently include asks for youth programming/center, more affordable childcare options, and universal Pre-K.

Parent/guardian responses about availability of childcare or out-of-school care by age group



Themes: Housing

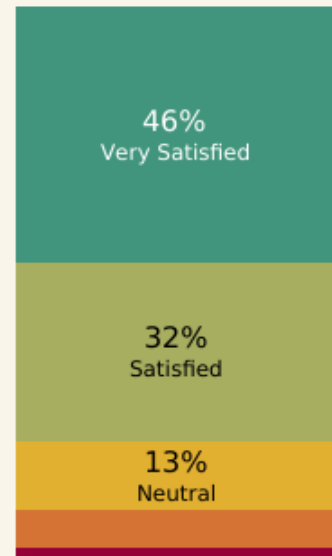
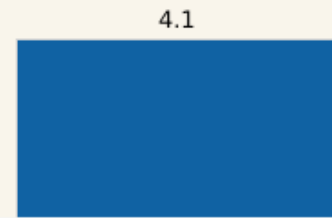
Respondents are highly satisfied with **condition of their housing**, but much more likely to be dissatisfied with the **quality and variety of housing options in their budget**.

Respondents also report high rates of concern about **being priced out of living in Somerville**.

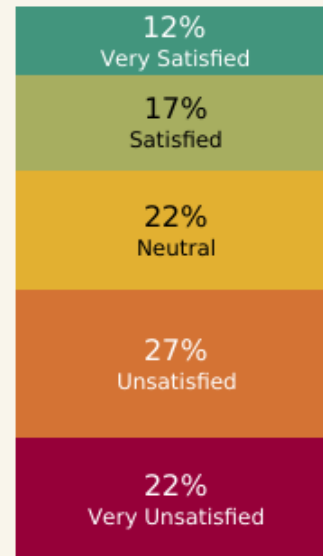
Housing affordability is one of the most prevalent comment topics (around 350 mentions), and they are split about 10% positive to 90% improvement suggestions.

Commitment to affordable housing access. Keep going + expand.

Making Somerville housing more affordable for middle-income folks. Limiting the number of million-dollar condos going up. Who can afford these, really?



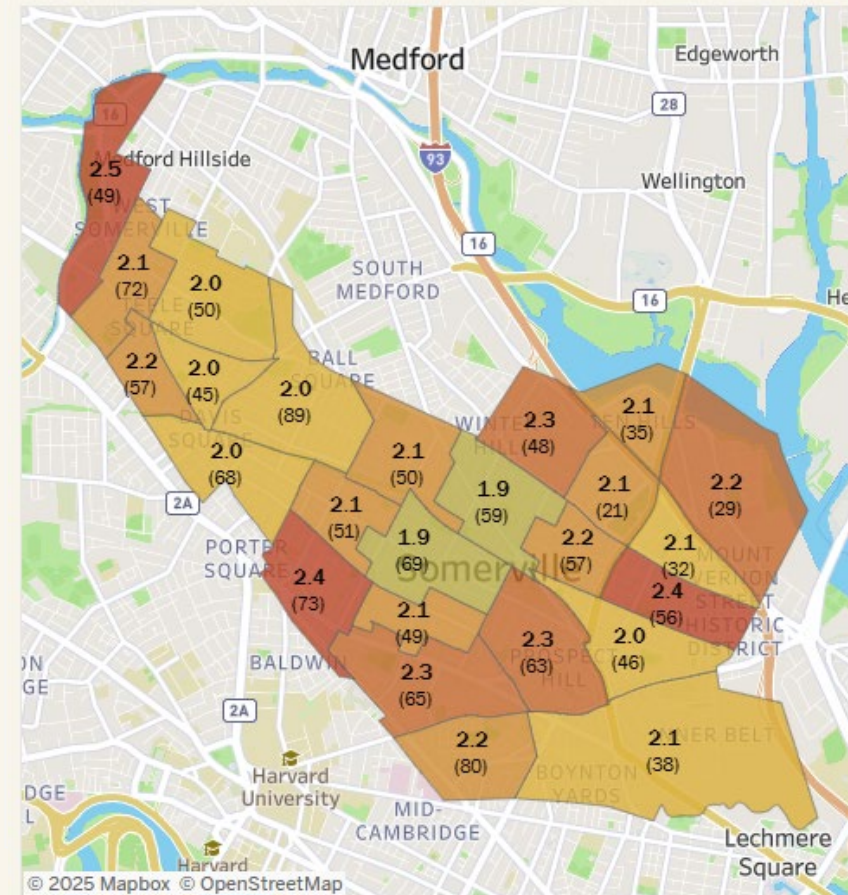
Condition of your housing



Quality & variety of housing options in budget

How concerned are you about being priced out of living in Somerville?

Average score on a scale from 1 to 3 (higher is more concerned)



Only census tracts with at least 10 responses for the chosen question are shown. The number of responses from each tract is indicated in parentheses.



Themes: Health Supports

(Respondents who report difficulty paying for food)

Respondents overall report very high levels of satisfaction with **ability to access basic needs, grocery stores, services that support health, and relief from extreme heat.**

However, respondents who report **difficulty paying for food** have much lower scores (and represent thousands of residents).

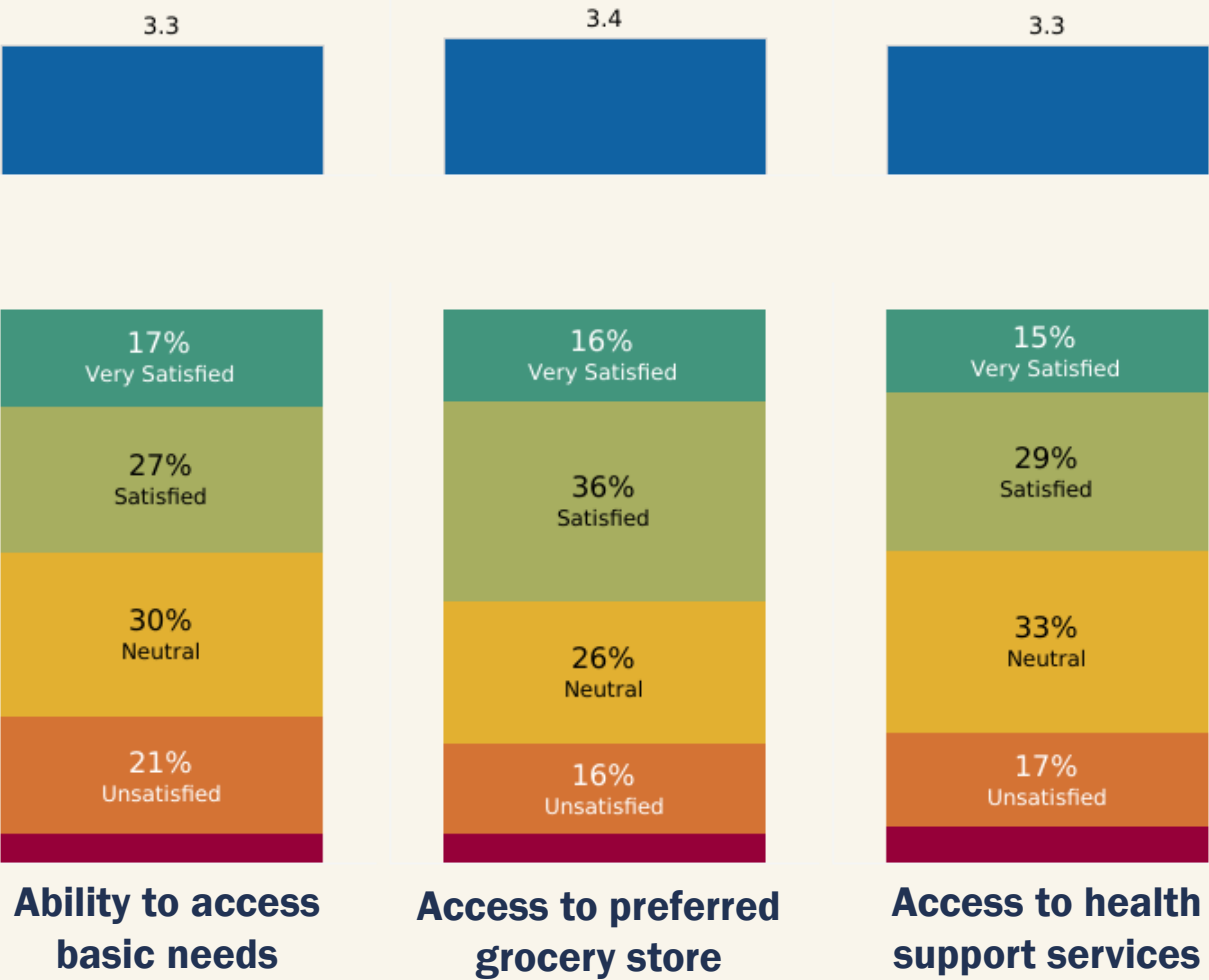
Cost-related comments by people who report difficulty paying for food generally reflect the desirability of living in Somerville and the need to continue improving on affordability.

This is a special community and special place to live, but the rental system is totally broken... Childcare is insanely expensive.

I love Somerville. I love to live in Somerville. I consider myself incredibly lucky to live in Somerville. We still must do better at making the community affordable and accessible.

I cannot fully appreciate and engage in all the opportunities to socialize or volunteer with my neighbors because my entire human existence is devoted to paying rent and not becoming homeless again.

**Respondents who report difficulty paying for food:
responses about ability to access basic needs**



Split opinions:

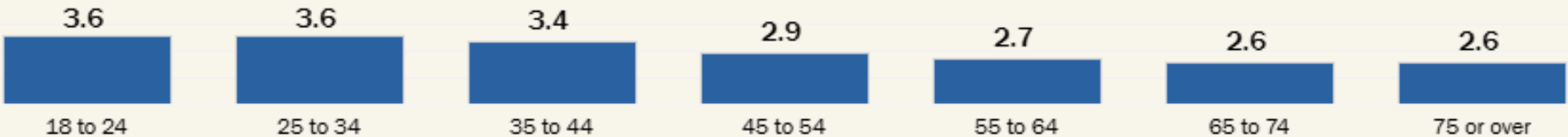
Respondents actively disagree on whether to repurpose parking for other uses

[The City is doing well at] converting street parking to outdoor dining.

Remove bike lanes and reclaim parking spaces on Broadway. That idea was insane!

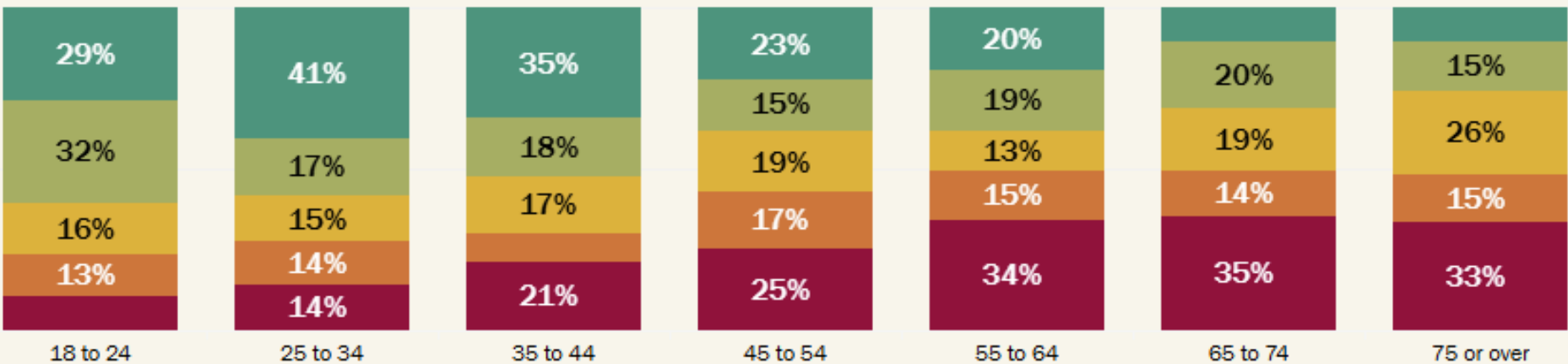
How much do you agree? The City should repurpose street parking for other public uses by Age (2025)

Average score on a scale from 1 to 5 (higher is stronger agreement)



How much do you agree? The City should repurpose street parking for other public uses by Age (2025)

Percent of responses by answer choice



46% Agree
38% Disagree

Higher agreement
near T stations

Split opinions:

Respondents actively disagree on whether the City is doing enough to decrease the presence of rats and mice.



32% Satisfied
40% Unsatisfied

Renters more satisfied than owners

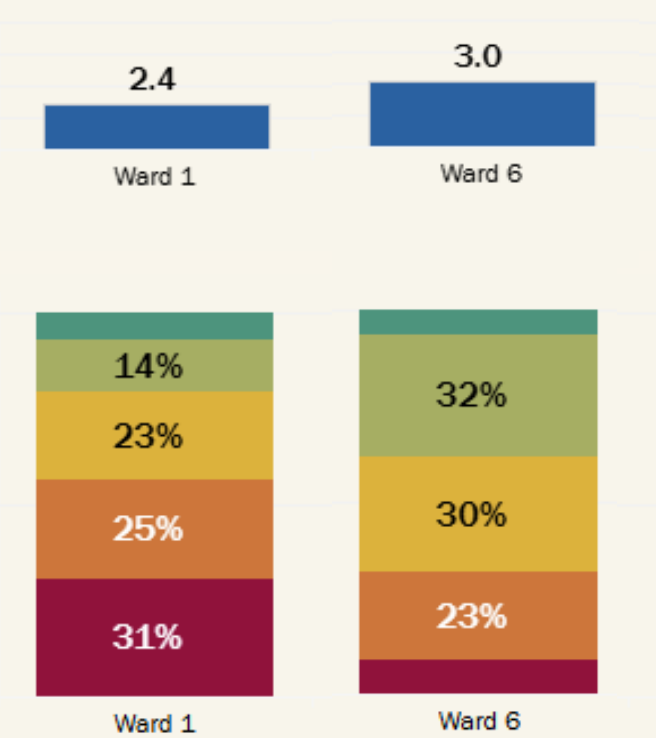
Rat population curbing without harmful rodenticide.

Offer composting to reduce rats and waste.

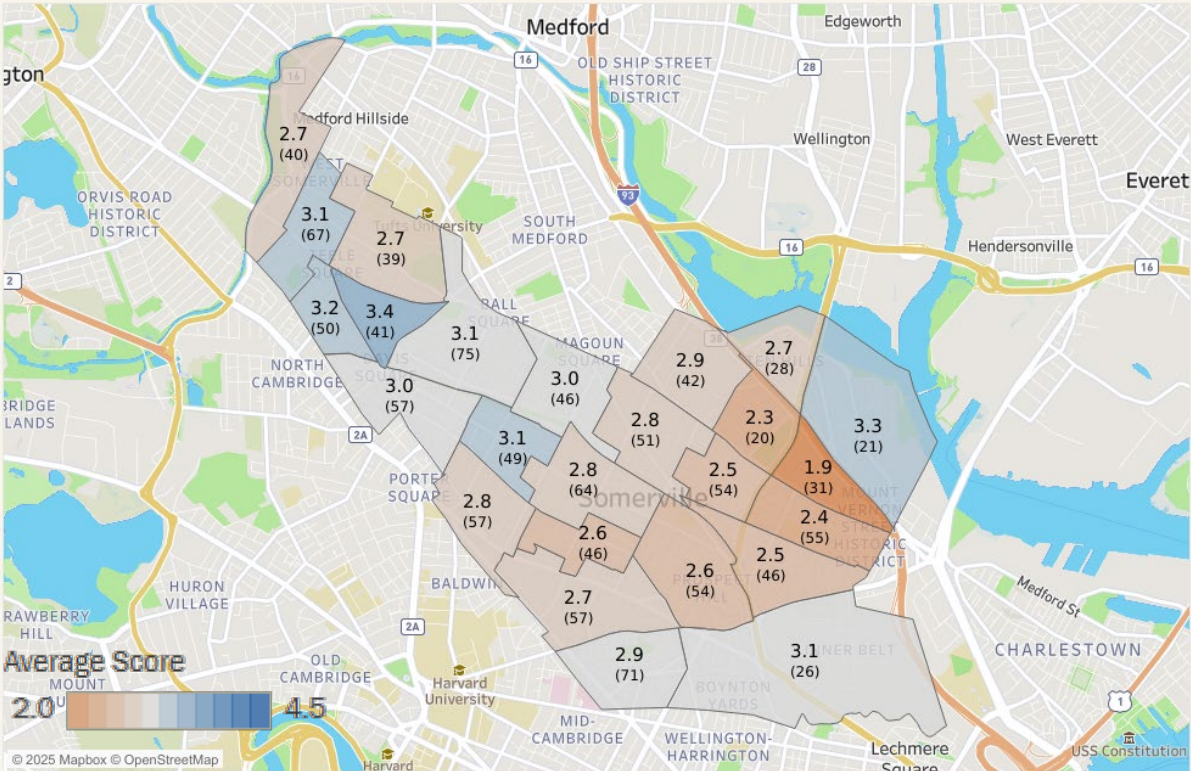
Do more to get rid of the rats

Continue to combat rats. Cite restaurants when they let dumpsters overflow /need to increase frequency of rubbish pick-up.

Satisfaction with the City’s efforts to decrease rats and mice

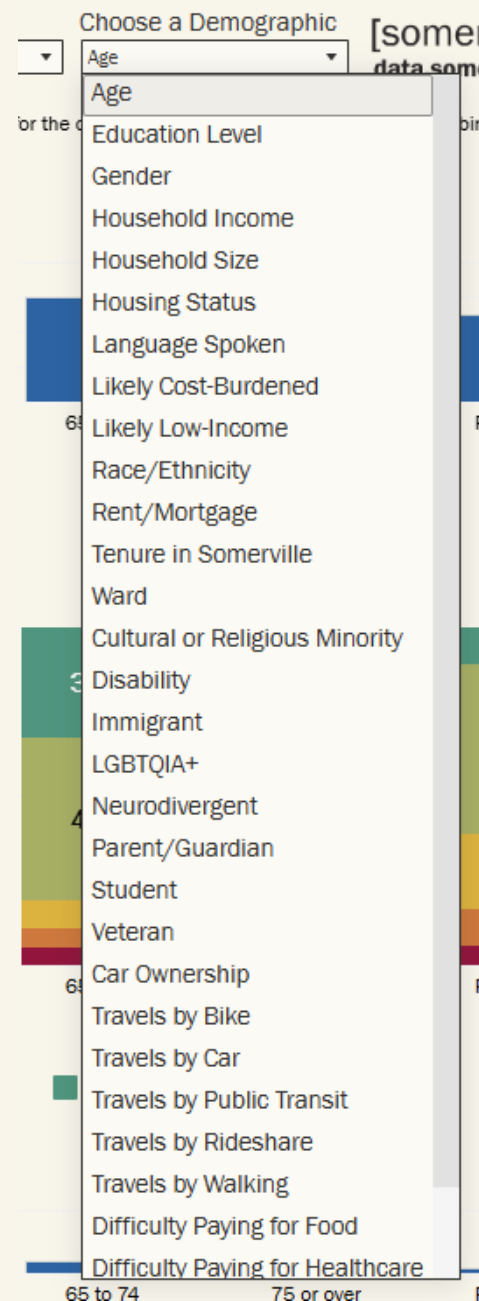


How satisfied are you with the City's efforts to decrease the presence of rats and mice? (2025)
Average score on a scale from 1 to 5 (higher is more satisfied)



Exploratory Views Examples

- Questions Over Time (2011-2025)
- Demographics Over Time (2011-2025)
- Questions by Demographic (2011-2025)
- Questions by Geography (2025)
- Concern Questions (2025) including map
- Question Comparison (2025)

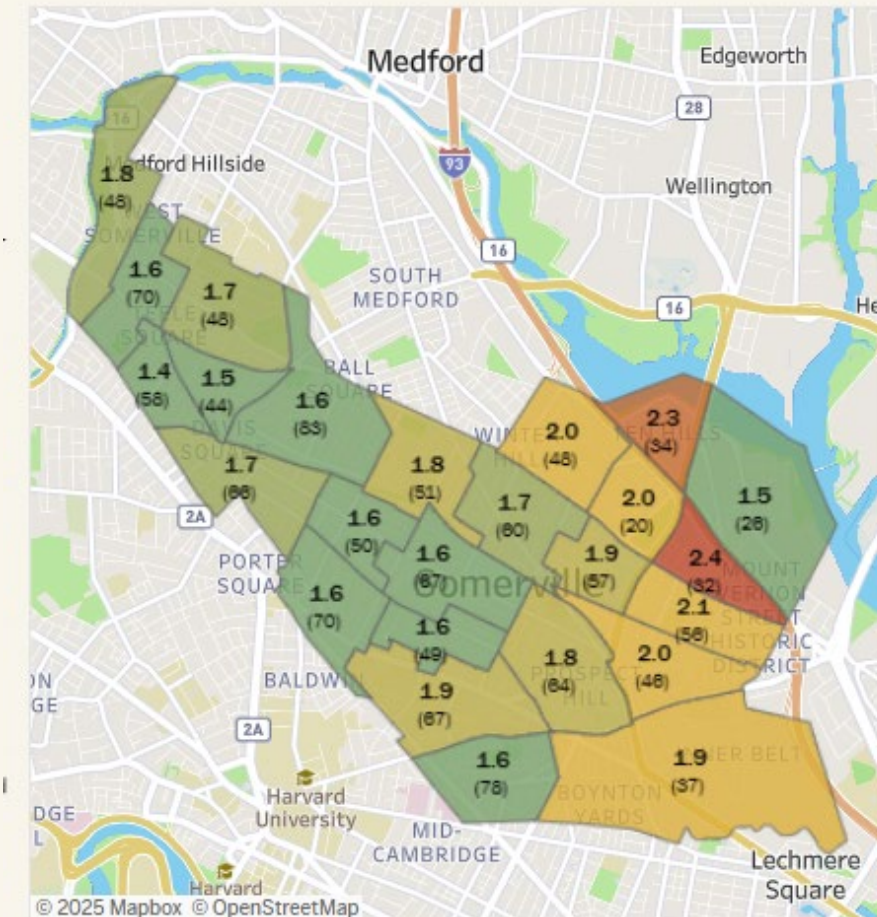


Choose a Concern to Map

How concerned are you about air pollution in your neighborhood?

How concerned are you about air pollution in your neighborhood?

Average score on a scale from 1 to 3 (higher is more concerned)



Only census tracts with at least 10 responses for the chosen question are shown. The number of responses from each tract is indicated in parentheses.

Average Score

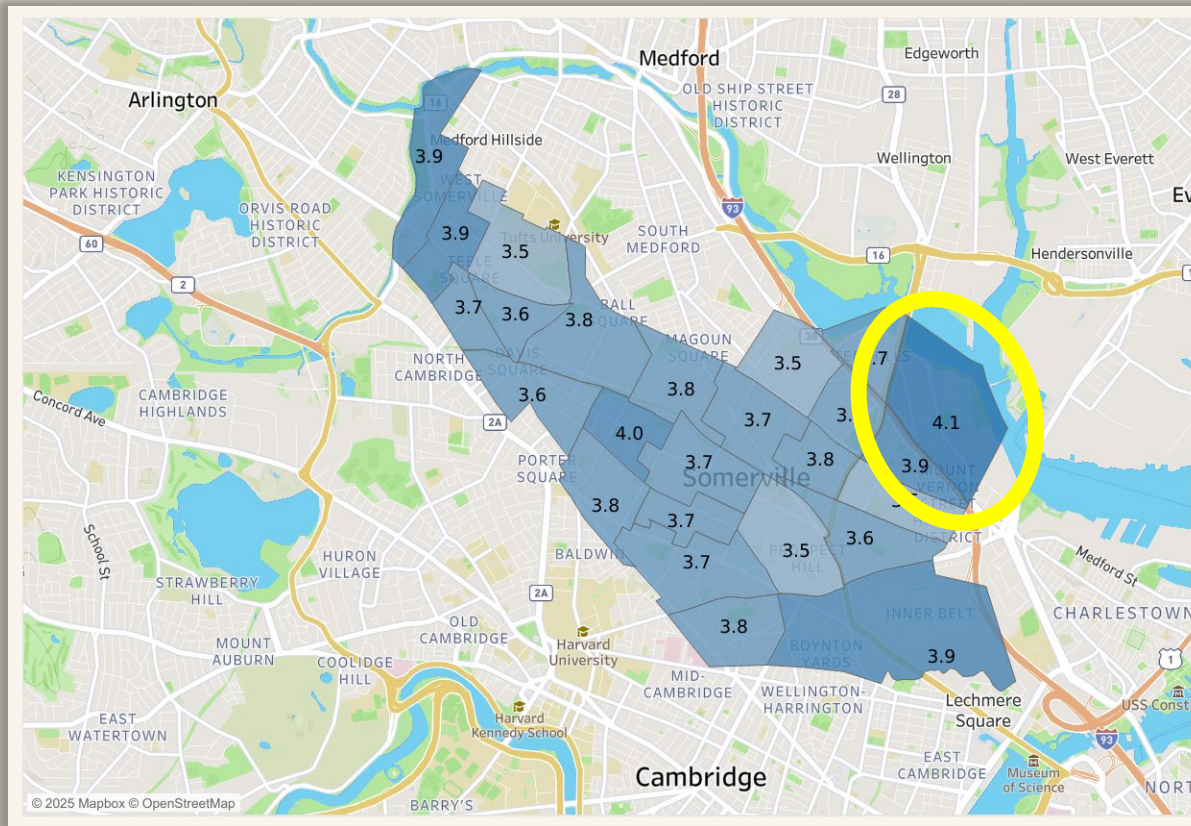
1.5

2.5

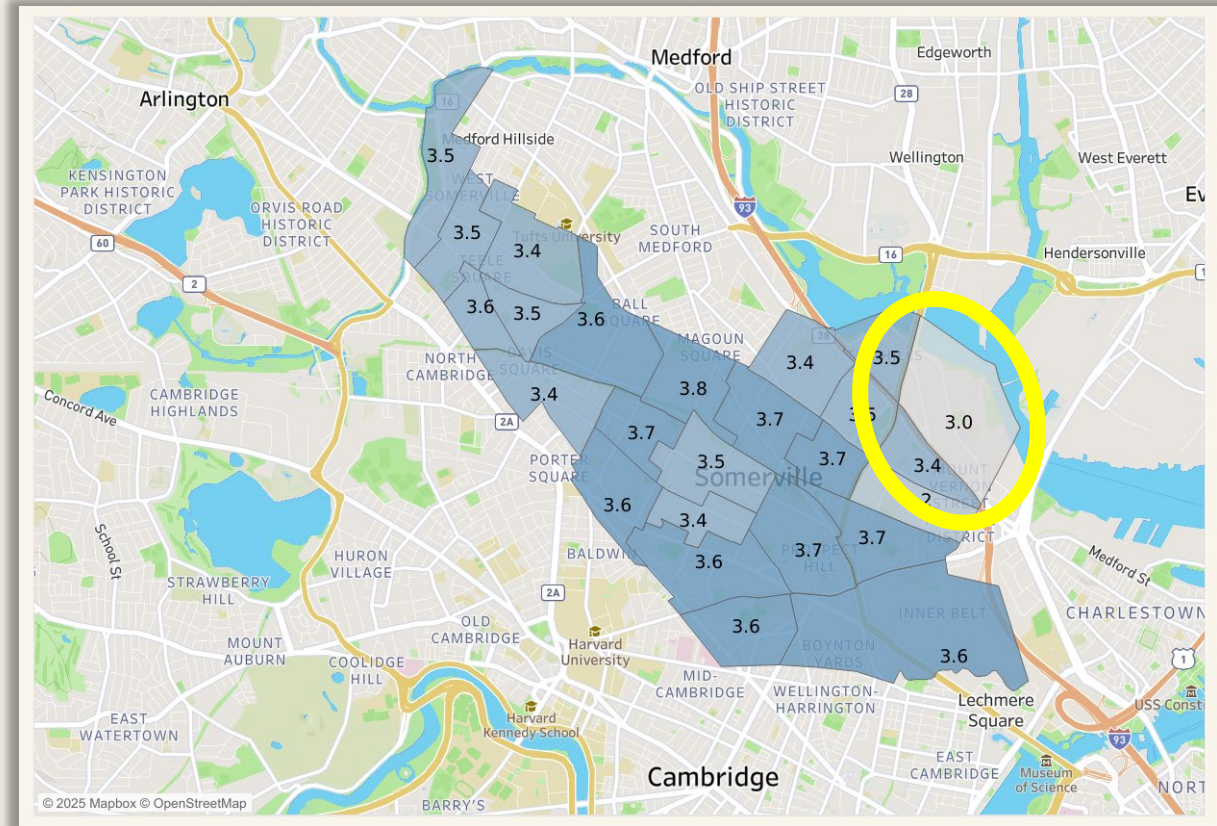
Geographic exploration example

Respondents in Assembly row are among the happiest but feel least connected to Somerville.

Happiness



I feel like a part of the Somerville community



What's available & what's next

Currently available products

- Open Data (2011-2025)
 - [Dataset](#)
 - [Data dictionary](#)
 - [Data visualization](#)
- While we've done extensive quality checks, this initial release is likely not perfect! If anything looks potentially inaccurate, please let us know.

Contact Email:
data@somervillema.gov

Further analysis and reporting

- Finish processing open-response comments and publish comment categories in the open dataset.
- Conduct internal assessments by focus area and department, and other by-request investigations for City departments.

Topics & questions for 2027

- We welcome ideas for potential topics and questions for 2027. The 2027 survey will include deep dives on the remaining six focus areas: climate & sustainability, housing, mobility, public safety, modern & efficient government, and foundational City services.
- As always, we're balancing longitudinal data collection with new information.

Somerville Happiness Survey Data Dictionary

Background

This is a data dictionary for the Somerville Happiness Survey Responses 2011 – 2025. The dataset contains every question from the 2025 Happiness Survey and applicable historical data from past Happiness Surveys. Visit the [Open Data Portal](#) to download data, view the survey instruments, and explore reports. You can also find visualizations from the 2025 survey.

How happy do you feel right now?

Average score on a scale from 1 to 5 (higher is happier)



General Notes

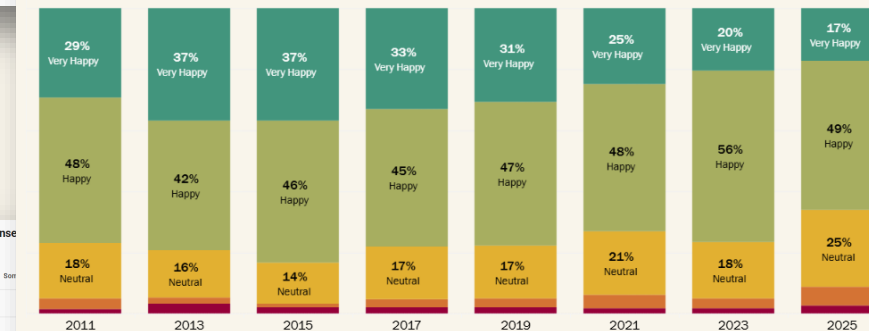
Question Types: In this dictionary, questions are categorized by type (checkbox, radio button, etc.).

Boolean Columns: Columns with a value of 1 or 0, representing a yes/no or true/false response.

Scale Questions: Each scale question has a label (e.g., "Very Happy") adapted from 10-point to 5-point scales.

How happy do you feel right now?

Percent of responses by answer choice



Somerville Happiness Survey Response

Happi...	Happi...	Life S...	Life S...	Sort
3	Neutral	4	Satisfied	
4	Happy	4	Satisfied	
3	Neutral	2	Unsatisfied	
5	Very Happy	5	Very Satisfi	
3	Neutral	2	Unsatisfied	
5	Very Happy	5	Very Satisfi	
4	Happy	5	Very Satisfi	
4	Happy	4	Satisfied	
5	Very Happy	1	Very Unsat	
3	Neutral	3	Neutral	
5	Very Happy	5	Very Satisfi	
4	Happy	5	Very Satisfi	
4	Happy	5	Very Satisfi	
5	Very Happy	5	Very Satisfi	
4	Happy	5	Very Satisfi	

Questions?



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
SOMERSTAT

KATJANA BALLANTYNE
MAYOR