



**CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS**  
***MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT***  
**KATJANA BALLANTYNE**  
**MAYOR**

THOMAS F. GALLIGANI, JR.  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**MEMO**

To: Finance Committee, City Council

From: Rachel Nadkarni, Director, OSPCD, Economic Development Division  
Gregory Jenkins, Director of the Arts Council

Date: January 17, 2025

Re: **25-0019 - Director of Economic Development and Director of the Arts Council conveying an updated draft Armory Master Plan.**

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Enclosed please find the revised Draft of the Somerville Armory Master Plan, amended based on public feedback received between December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024 and January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025 by the Economic Development Division and the Arts Council. The collected written commentary received in December and early January is enclosed with the revised draft for reference. As you review the revised draft plan, you will find **sections where edits beyond typographic errors were fixed noted with red clouds**. Page references are also included in the description of changes below.

There are two primary changes from the initial Draft Plan that address comments from the Armory tenants and broader public.

The first change is a new section on past and current arts-related tenants in the Armory. Staff heard that neither the current tenants nor the legacy of arts uses in the building were sufficiently described to showcase the Armory's position within the community. Staff drafted language related to each current tenant and has run the draft language by tenants (**see pages 4-7, 25**).

The second and more substantive change is a more closely tailored role for the Armory Advisory Board, focusing its attention on advising the Mayor on tenant selection and allocation of Armory resources. This narrowing of the Advisory Board's scope will remove them from operational policy making and tenant conflict mediation, clarifying more strongly the distinction between governance and management (**see highlighted changes on pages 17-20, 37**). Much of the concern heard was about clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the Advisory Board. To this end, the Administration has attached to this revised draft Master Plan a draft of the Advisory Board's by-laws as well. The responsibility for working with tenants on day-to-day operational issues of the building (parking, common area use, etc) will fall to City staff. The plan outlines that tenants will be consulted in decision making (**see page 30**).

A small, but important, edit was also made to the sidebar on page 25 to more specifically clarify that Chapter 30B, the procurement law, regulates how the City can offer long term leases to tenants. The interest in moving to that phase of work was stated by several speakers during the public hearing and in the written commentary. Public procurement law must be followed throughout the implementation of the Master Plan and staff felt it was important to make this highlight.

Please contact Economic Development and Arts Council staff with any questions about these revisions or the Master Plan in general.



2025

# Somerville Armory Master Plan

A roadmap for successfully managing the  
Somerville Armory as a community arts center.

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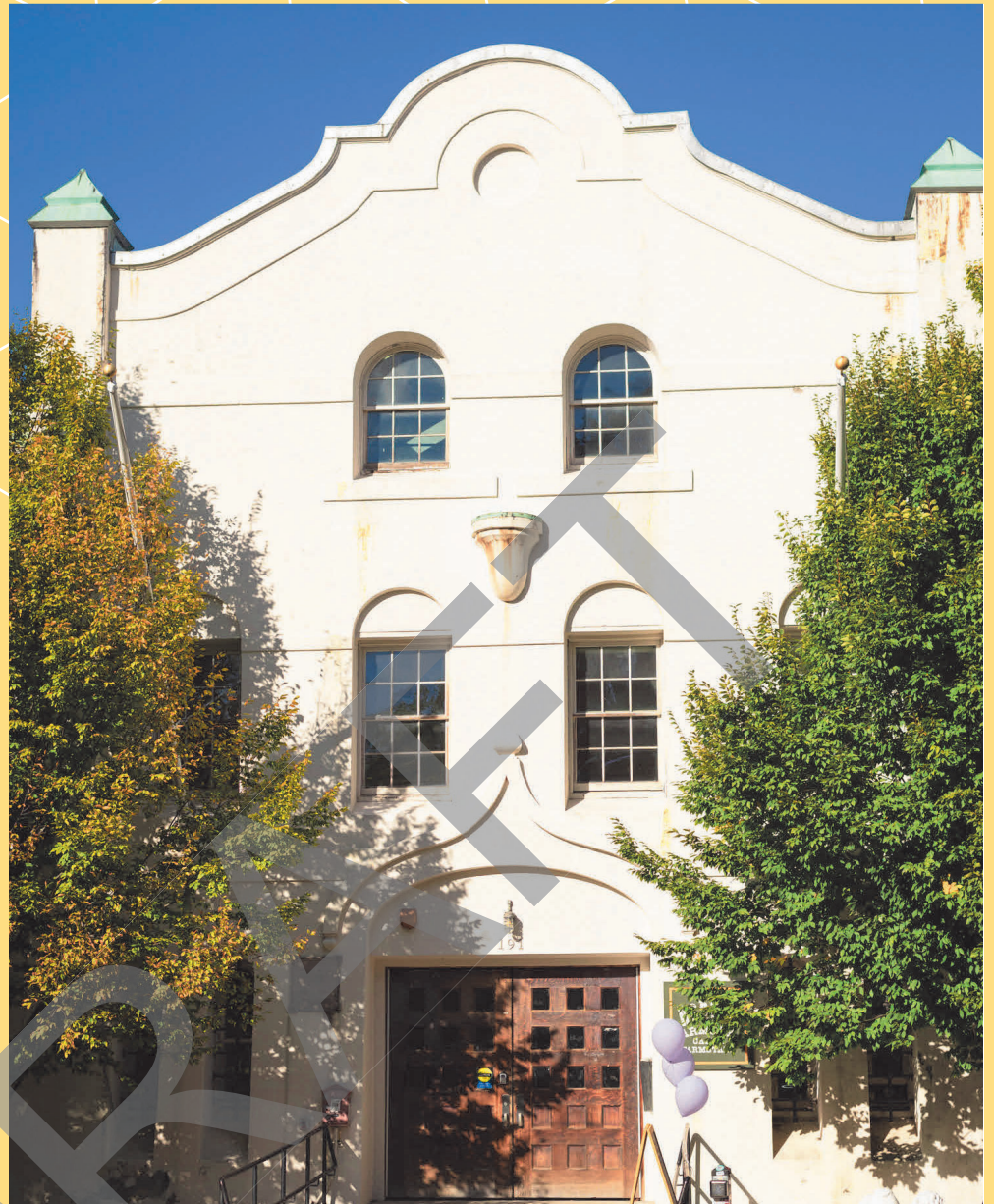
CITY OF SOMERVILLE



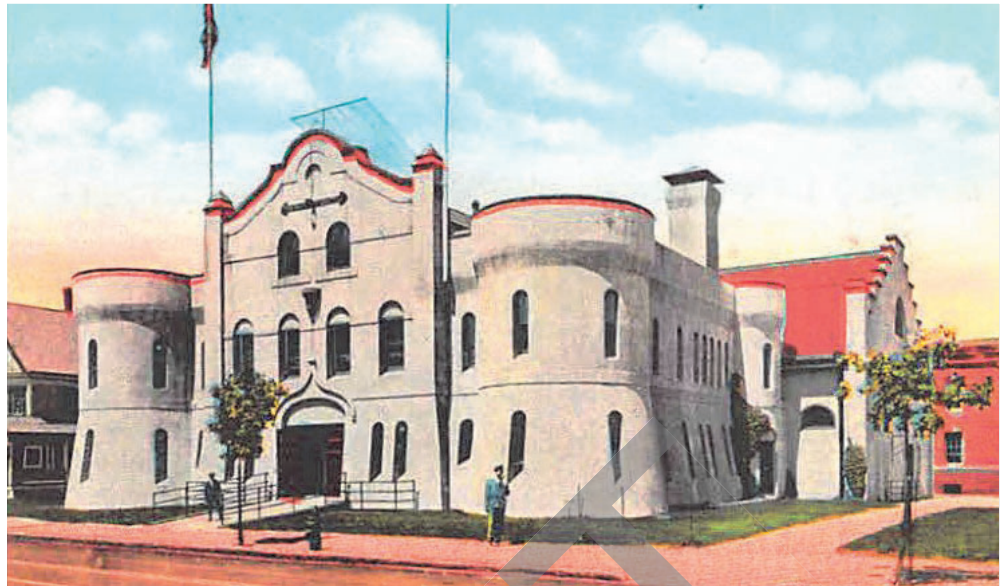
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# Introduction



Throughout this document the term “Armory” is used to refer to the Somerville Armory as a building, located at 191 Highland Ave, and should not be confused with one of the building’s current tenants, Center for Arts at the Armory (sometimes referred to as “Arts at the Armory.”)

## INTRODUCTION & BUILDING HISTORY

The Somerville Armory has evolved since it was built for the Somerville Light Infantry of the Massachusetts Volunteer Militia in 1903. After more than 50 years as a military facility (first the militia and then the National Guard), in the 1960s the Armory was reorganized into a State Police office building, and ultimately lay vacant for decades before being sold in 2004. When the Commonwealth sold the building the Somerville community expressed a range of interests for the property’s unique drill hall and other spaces. Many advocated for it to become a community center or arts venue, and ultimately the Commonwealth sold the facility to the Sater brothers, the experienced operators of the Middle East club in Cambridge, who converted the Armory into the spaces we know today. Over the years, the range of tenants in the Armory changed with more and more non-arts-related businesses brought in to help finance operations. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic forced many tenants to temporarily close and pushed the private owners to consider turning the Armory completely into an office property. The resulting outcry spurred the City to acquire the Armory by eminent domain in 2021, to serve the public with artistic and civic uses for decades to come.

The Somerville Arts Council (SAC) is the Local Cultural Council (LCC) for the City of Somerville as well as a municipal department. The mission of SAC is to cultivate and celebrate the creative expressions of the Somerville community. Through innovative collaborations and quality programming, we strive to make the arts an integral part of life, reflecting the diversity of our city.

LCCs were established under Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 10, Section 58.

To fulfill this new purpose as a public community arts center, the City of Somerville’s Economic Development Division and Arts Council partnered to develop a Somerville Armory Master Plan. A consultant, Create Today LLC, was selected to work with the City on community outreach and research to develop this Master Plan to:

1. Establish guiding principles for maximizing the arts use of the building
2. Outline the financial realities involved in operating the Armory as a public arts center.



The Armory Master Plan is a guide and roadmap for the next iteration of the Somerville Armory, meant to guide decision-making for years to come. It is written to be the reference point for those making governance decisions for the building and intentionally leaves space for those empowered to make decisions to address changing needs in the community. The Armory Master Plan also leans into an expectation that incremental change is both practical and purposeful, recognizing that the people who will bring life to this building – the artists and creators who produce events, classes, performances – are core partners in bringing the Armory into its future as Somerville’s home for the arts community and need to be consulted along the way.

## ART AND CULTURE AT THE ARMORY

### Current Arts Tenants

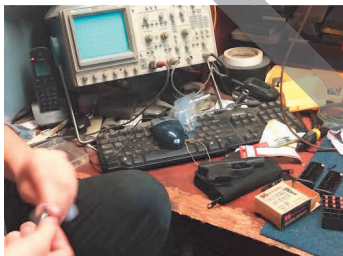
The Armory currently hosts vibrant arts tenants who contribute to the rich creative fabric of Greater Boston. From nonprofit cultural hubs to specialized audio services, each tenant fosters a unique space for artistic expression and community engagement. These tenants offer invaluable resources and platforms for local artists, musicians, and performers, supporting both emerging talent and established professionals. Below is a summary of the organizations and businesses that make up this artistic community.



AcousticStrings.biz

#### *Acoustic Strings of New England & Angela Leidig (1A)*

Acoustic Strings has been a trusted provider of fine European instruments and top-tier music supplies in New England since 1999. The shop works with schools and rental programs throughout New Hampshire, Greater Boston, and the wider New England area. Acoustic Strings is dedicated to offering exceptional service and competitive pricing for string players of all levels. Angela Leidig is a violin instructor specializing in the Suzuki Method and the Alexander Technique, offers private lessons for learners of all ages.



AudiotechServices.com

#### *Audiotech Services (B7)*

Audiotech Services supports Greater Boston’s music community with over 40 years of audio engineering experience. Their mission is to offer affordable, specialized tech support for artists – services that are not widely available in the broader market. Their offerings include repair and restoration of vintage tube amplifiers, professional studio equipment, and audiophile gear. Audiotech Services also provides high-quality analog equipment for rent, with delivery, setup, and operation handled by professional sound engineers.



ArtsattheArmory.org

### *Center for Arts at the Armory (1B, 1C, B9)*

Arts at the Armory is a non-profit dedicated to providing an inclusive, accessible space that fosters opportunities for artists and cultural workers. The center brings diverse audiences together, enriches lives, and supports the creative economy. It hosts over 750 events annually, spanning music, dance, theater, literature, visual arts, film, circus, comedy, and more. With its affordable venues, Arts at the Armory is committed to serving performing arts, cultural, and community groups in Greater Boston. The Performance Hall and Café offer a broad range of arts and cultural events, while the facility also organizes markets that promote local businesses and community development. Both spaces are available for private rentals.



DeadMoonAudio.com

### *Dead Moon Audio (B1)*

Dead Moon Audio is a recording studio designed to serve local artists and engineers. With a spacious Live Room, Isolation Booth, Control Room, Isolation Cabinet Room, and Lounge, the studio is equipped to accommodate nearly any musical ensemble. Its acoustically designed Live Room captures performances with exceptional sound quality, while the Control Room, crafted by Michael Blackmer, utilizes advanced acoustic treatment and non-parallel surfaces to minimize resonances and achieve a “flat” acoustic response.



OutoftheBlueArtGallery.com

### *Out of the Blue Community Arts Gallery (3B, B6, Common Area Walls)*

Out of the Blue Gallery is committed to showcasing the creative work of local and international artists, musicians, and other creatives from all backgrounds. Its mission is to create an inspiring, supportive, and empowering environment where people can come together and celebrate creativity. They provide a platform for artists of all skill levels to express themselves through painting, music, dance, poetry, storytelling, acting, and singing. The Gallery fosters collaboration and growth, encouraging artists to learn from one another across disciplines.

**Figure 1: Armory Building Usable Space Occupation (January 2025)**





### **Legacy of Art within the Somerville Armory**

Since its transformation into a private arts and culture center in 2008 by Joseph and Nabil Sater, the Somerville Armory has become a vibrant home for artists, creatives, and businesses. While its tenants have evolved over the years, many have made lasting contributions to Somerville's arts and cultural landscape. Not all tenants have been arts-focused, however – fitness centers, accountants, and various offices have also found space within the building.

When the COVID-19 pandemic threatened the survival of arts-based businesses, the Armory's future as a cultural hub was at risk. To preserve its legacy as a place for art and culture, the City acquired the property from the Sater family. This ensured the Armory's continued role as a home for creativity and community permanently.

Below are a few of the former tenants whose work and presence have contributed to our creative and cultural community since opening its doors as an art center in 2008:

- Actors' Shakespeare Project
- Armory Sound
- Case AVP Photography
- Center for Arabic Culture
- Červená Barva Press
- Daniel Ostergren Visual Arts
- David's Dance Center
- FOLK New England
- Henley Design
- Hi-N-Dry Music Studio
- Mark Sandman Music Project
- Moving Celebrations
- Scout Magazines
- Tim Jones Illustration
- University of the Middle East Project
- Yesterday Service Sheet Music

# PURPOSE

The Armory Master Plan is a roadmap for successfully managing the Somerville Armory as a community arts center through the 21st Century. It lays out a community driven mission and vision of success that support recommendations on fairly and clearly operating the Armory as a public asset serving Somerville's diverse needs for arts and civic spaces. After the Master Plan is adopted by the City, governing, financial, and investment decisions on the Armory will be aligned to the Vision and Mission contained in this Master Plan.

Somerville Armory from above



# MISSION AND VISION OF SUCCESS

## Mission

The Mission of the Somerville Armory, its governing body, and this Master Plan is to protect and ensure the long-term vitality of the historic Armory property as an affordable and accessible public center for art, community, and culture.

## Vision of Success

The Somerville Armory will serve as a successful public arts center by:

### I. **Focusing on Artists and Arts:**

The Armory is a center for art, community, and culture where a broad range of arts programming is offered to the Somerville community. To encourage this, the Armory is also an affordable, stable, and supportive home for artists to focus on their work.

### II. **Nurturing Collaboration and Synergy:**

Tenants and programs at the Armory are carefully chosen to produce a complementary but diverse range of activities. The Armory welcomes a broad array of creators, allowing for a mix of long-term tenancies and short-term or periodic rentals to meet different needs of artists and arts organizations.

### III. **Inspiring Community:**

The Armory is a welcoming and inspiring place where visitors not only enjoy diverse arts and cultural programming but are also inspired to flex their own creative muscles.

### IV. **Supporting the Creative Life Cycle:**

The Armory fosters artistic and cultural creativity at all levels and scales by users and visitors.

### V. **Making Clear and Community-Based Decisions:**

The Armory remains flexible for the needs of the artistic community and the tenants. Decisions about the Armory's future are made through transparent and fair governance where neighbors are appreciated and engaged.

### VI. **Mitigating Conflict:**

Management considers noise impacts, building capacity, and other physical constraints when choosing tenants to minimize conflict, and should anticipate and address conflicting needs.

### VII. **Ensuring Financial Stability:**

The Armory is a public asset of the City of Somerville. As such, its operation generates revenue that is sufficient to maintain the property in a clean, comfortable and orderly manner, and to fund upgrades and renovations to preserve and enhance its future utility as a municipal arts center.

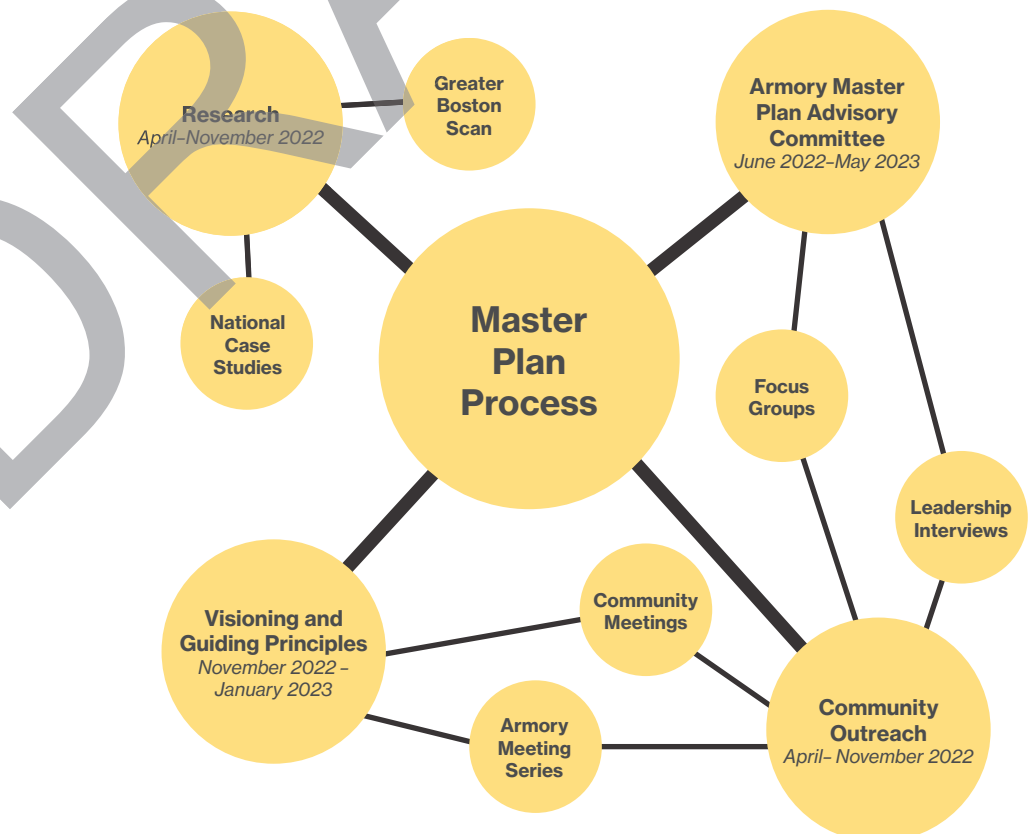
# PLANNING PROCESS AND TIMELINE

## Overview

After the City of Somerville acquired the Armory in 2021 and took responsibility for daily operations, the City began the process to develop a master plan for the long-term stewardship of the Armory as a public arts center. The City selected Create Today LLC as a consultant and work began midway through 2022, also creating the Armory Master Plan Advisory Committee, comprised of local artists, elected officials and Armory neighbors. The City's Economic Development Division and Arts Council staff oversaw Create Today's research and helped convene meetings for public opinion outreach. The City and consultant team conducted various community outreach activities to learn about community needs and aspirations for the Armory from the general public, art organizations, individual artists, neighbors, and current tenants. Expanding public outreach further, the City undertook a four-part meeting series beginning in January 2024 that explored the Armory's role in Somerville's ecosystem and imagining its future. These outreach methods, combined with the research has informed this Master Plan.

Figure 2: Outreach Activities

- Greater Boston Environmental Scan  
*April - July 2022*
- National Case Study  
*July - November 2022*
- Armory Master Plan Advisory Committee  
*June 2022-May 2023*
- Leadership Interviews  
*August 2022*
- Visioning and Guiding Principles  
*November 2022 - January 2023*
- Focus Groups  
*March 2023*
- Community Meetings  
*July and August 2023*
- Armory Meeting Series  
*January-May 2024*





## Preliminary Research

Create Today began the master planning process by conducting an environmental scan that researched 46 nearby art spaces to determine the Armory's advantages and weaknesses within Greater Boston's cultural environment. Overall, the Armory is a unique space with competitive advantages, including its large performance hall, on-site parking, and flexible layout that provides an array of spaces for a wide variety of artists and creators to both produce and present their art.

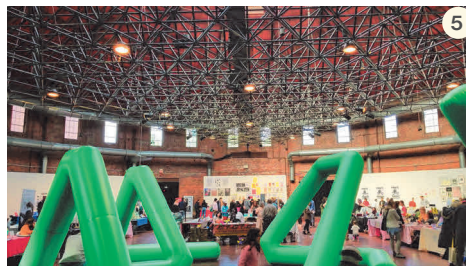
Create Today supplemented the environmental scan with detailed case studies on six (6) model arts facilities that are owned and operated by either public agencies or non-profit corporations to provide insight on best practices for operating the Armory as a public arts center. These models each:

- Focus exclusively on serving artists and providing arts programming
- Accommodate short and long-term users
- Have clear use policies, fees and expectations, such as requiring users to provide public benefits (classes, performances, exhibitions, etc.)

### Model Art Facilities Case Studies

1. African Heritage Culture Arts Center  
*Miami, FL*
2. Archie Bray Foundation  
*Helena, MT*
3. Headlands Center for the Arts  
*Sausalito, CA*
4. Torpedo Factory Art Center  
*Alexandria, VA*
5. Boston Center for the Arts  
*Boston, MA*
6. Mudflat Studio  
*Somerville, MA*

Images are sourced from each of the organizations represented.





Above: Historical postcard of the Somerville Armory

### Community Outreach

Create Today's research was supplemented with public outreach efforts to inject community feedback into the planning process. In 2022 twenty (20) local artists, cultural leaders, policy makers, Armory tenants, and abutters were interviewed. More than half (11) of these people were artists and over a third (7) were people of color. The stakeholders interviewed stressed that the Armory should serve Somerville as an innovative and affordable public arts center. They also felt it was vital that a vision be developed for the Armory to ensure its long-term success as a diverse public arts center.

In 2023 four focus groups with a diverse array of local artists, residents, Armory tenants and neighbors were hosted. Overall, participants wanted the Armory to remain a "...space that features a blend of arts and cultural programming as well as community events." Specifically, artists wanted the Armory to focus on artists and creators and offer diverse arts and cultural programming. Visitors and abutters wanted the Armory to remain accessible to the public and accommodating of community needs. Existing arts tenants wanted to stay in the Armory and continue creating and presenting art to the public while operating under clear and fair management. Finally, many focus group participants acknowledged that the Armory was not large enough to accommodate all of Somerville's arts and community space needs.



In 2022-23, the Armory Master Plan Advisory Committee (AMPAC), made up of local artists, elected officials, and Armory neighbors, met four times with Create Today and City staff to review research and advise on how the Armory should be governed for long-term success as a public asset. The AMPAC recommended that:

- The City identify the Armory as a community arts center accommodating a diverse range of arts, artists, creators and visitors (including current arts-oriented tenants)
- The Armory operate with clear policies, fair user selection criteria, and affordable fees that cover maintenance and long-term facility costs
- Armory management should be overseen by an independent body to ensure fairness, access, and affordability and to incorporate community input

During the summer of 2023 three public meetings (two in-person and one virtual) were held to review work that had been completed over the past year: the assorted planning research, case studies, and draft a vision of success for Armory governance. Most importantly, these meetings sought feedback about the community's preferred management style for operating the Armory as a public arts center, ranging from total City involvement in all areas of operations to City delegation of operating responsibilities to independent third-party organizations. Attendees were also asked whether the City should control, occupy, and program all the spaces in the Armory, or whether it should lease space in the property to one or more arts-related tenants to help defray operating costs and programming responsibilities. The participants in these meetings expressed a few clear desires that the City of Somerville:

- Retain ownership of the Armory
- Continue to lease space in the Armory to artists and arts-focused groups
- Invest in the building, both management services and the physical infrastructure

Right: Feedback from community members at a community meeting held in the Rooted Cafe

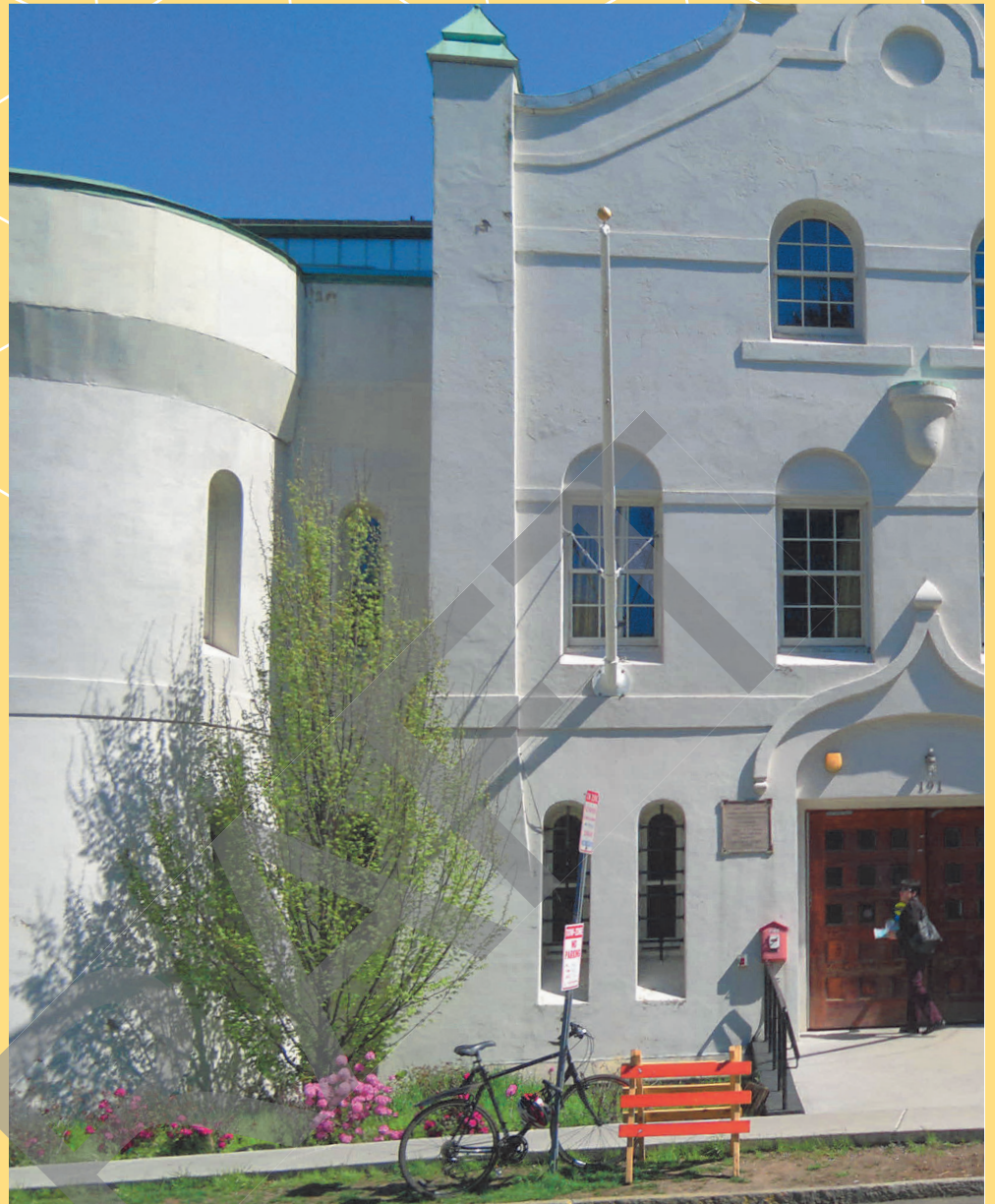


Material from the Armory Meeting Series in 2024 can be found on Somervoice

Following this engagement, the City expanded outreach efforts through a second series of community conversations to delve deeper into future goals for the Armory. The City organized this four-part meeting series from January–May 2024 with an aim to deepen the understanding and context of the Armory. This series explored the Armory's relation to the arts ecosystem of Somerville, its context in the community space needs of Somerville, its existing physical conditions and uses, and what future governance might entail. The feedback gathered informed the vision of success. From these meetings it was established that:

- The Armory should host a broad range of art and the tenant mix should be complementary but diverse
- The Armory should serve the broader community but retain an artistic focus
- The Armory should contain a mix of short-term and long-term rental opportunities
- Management should anticipate and address conflicting needs
- Governance should not be the role of a single tenant and should be the role of an independent body





# Roadmap for a Public Arts Center

Transforming the Armory from private ownership to successful public stewardship will take time and resources. Fortunately, the City can draw on the Armory's heritage as an arts center to hasten this process. Three years of municipal operations, public feedback and research on arts facilities has revealed how Somerville wants the Armory to be governed as a community asset. This Plan is a blueprint for successfully governing this unique public property sustainably, equitably, and transparently as a multi-tenant public arts center for decades to come.

Achieving this Plan's vision needs to be accomplished in stages, with a short-term transition program followed by long-term sustainable operation. This approach focuses on making critical changes to management, staffing, revenue generation and occupancy first, followed by continued improvements that could potentially lead to full independence from the City. The implementation of this plan is rooted in a fundamental fact – setting the Armory on a path for long-term success requires resources (revenue and staff), time, and patience.

The City has three tasks ahead to ensure the success of the Armory as public arts center:

- Fully tenant the Armory with arts tenants and scale up to independent governance
- Enhance Armory management and operating conditions
- Plan for stable finances, balancing affordability and investments in the building

During 2025, the first steps on the road to success for Armory include:

1. Forming an Armory Advisory Board guiding the Mayor and City Council on tenant selection and building investments.
2. Allocating staff time and investing in building upgrades to enhance property conditions
3. Recalibrating rents and fees for usable space in the Armory.
4. Carefully selecting occupants for Armory spaces by releasing a Request for Proposals (RFP).



## Governing a Public Arts Center

The Armory has hosted and supported artists and cultural establishments for years before it became a public asset in 2021. The City of Somerville will build on this legacy by continuing to lease spaces in the Armory to a diverse mix of arts focused tenants. The City will set up an initial governing body to oversee this process while also exploring more independent governance over time.

Governance refers to the system by which an organization is controlled, operates, and is held accountable. Governance ensures an organization's overall direction, accountability, and effectiveness, typically managed by a board of directors. It involves:

- Setting goals and direction
- Balancing interests
- Making key decisions
- Ensuring adherence to strategies and ethical guidelines

### **Set-Up an Advisory Board and Path for Future Governance**

The first recommendation is to establish a Somerville Armory Advisory Board. As envisioned today, this body will meet to oversee selection of tenants and spending of Armory revenues for building services and capital investments.

Massachusetts law places the authority to lease municipal property and allocate municipal revenues with the Mayor and City Council and therefore the Advisory Board is not the final decision maker but a key partner in the crucial first step of filling vacancies in the building and the ongoing investments in the property. The Advisory Board will be a part of the executive branch, under the Mayor, but because the authority for the decisions this body will oversee is held jointly by the Mayor and City Council, both the Mayor and City Council will have a role in Advisory Board member selection.

The Armory Advisory Board is envisioned as a five-member board consisting of three representatives of the Somerville arts community and two residents of Somerville.

The scope of work before the Advisory Board includes:

1. Advise the Mayor and City Council on ways to align investments with the Mission and Vision of Success.
2. Review requests for proposals for tenancies in detail and make recommendations on the tenant mix of the Armory.
3. Make recommendations on the utilization of funds generated from tenant rents, fees and grants for investments in the building & grounds, including any supporting service contracts.
4. Engage with current tenants and neighbors regularly to inform recommendations.
5. Advise on when and how to transition governance to a more independent structure



### Community Voices

Community input is crucial to ensure that the Armory mission is successful. There are various ways that community input can be regularly incorporated into Armory governance to ensure decisions are fair, transparent, and align with the vision and mission.

The scope of the Armory Advisory Board includes tenant selection and investment in the building to sustain it and make operations easier. That said, operational policies are specifically not included in their purview. Throughout the Armory Master Plan, there is a distinction between governance (the long view to assure the mission is met for years to come) and operations (the daily adjustments that keep the building running). The Armory Advisory Board is expected to regularly seek feedback of tenants, neighbors, and the broader community with respect to tenant decisions and financial investments.

The Armory Advisory Board will notice any meeting about financial investments at least 48 hours in advance to all tenants by email and in all the standard channels of the City of Somerville for resident notice and take public comment on all matters related to investment recommendations. This standard of public notice is set as a minimum requirement, and it is fully expected that while the Armory is governed by the City that staff and the Advisory Board are regularly connecting with tenants and neighbors about the topics in discussion.

The Armory Master Plan engagement with current tenants and the community articulated that the Armory should be a home to diverse artistic organizations and the initial re-tenanting should accommodate any and all of the current arts tenants who would like to be considered to stay on. When it comes to future tenant selections, whenever they occur after the initial selection in 2025, the voice of the then tenants and broader arts ecosystem is essential ahead of bringing in someone new. A public arts center can and should be positioned to meet the needs of artists that are going unaddressed by the private real estate market. In the years to come, the ecosystem of arts facilities and supports will shift and it will be important to check in with Somerville artists to know what the greatest need is. For example, during the development of the Armory Master Plan, artists working in music, dance, and movement said their access to space has been constrained by changes in the ecosystem of rehearsal and performance venues in greater Boston. This knowledge will help with considering what channels to market the request for proposals so that organizations feeling the pinch are aware of the Armory as an opportunity.

To understand the evolving needs of working artists, the City will develop and regularly administer a survey to assess the ecosystem and what role the Armory might play to address these needs.

The Armory Advisory Board will additionally be providing advice on how to invest further in the building utilizing the revenue generated by tenants, be that a new service contract like hiring a parking lot attendant for days when multiple tenants have events or a capital project like replacing windows. These decisions should be guided by the input of tenants and neighbors and as such the Advisory Board is expected to host listening sessions and brainstorming conversations to solicit ideas from key stakeholders about where investment is needed. This could look like an annual meeting of the board like the Jobs Creation and Retention Trust hosts to review its priority list with stakeholders as well as more routine public comment periods for things that come up at other times.

### *Governance Transparency*

Armory tenants, visitors, and Somerville residents have advocated for Armory governance to be as transparent and public as possible. With the goal of setting the Armory on a path to independent governance in mind, one of the first actions of the board will be to establish a set of norms that can be carried forward when governance shifts to a non-profit or cultural trust. This begins with creating bylaws that outline the policies by which the board will operate and will be formally adopted by the Board. There will be dedicated City staff time for planning and organizing the Advisory Board's meetings and preparing and distributing meeting materials. A link to the draft bylaws is included in the appendix.

### **Cultural Trust**

The "Cultural Trust" concept arose from the cultural sector's need to protect creative spaces. In 2024, a bill was introduced that ultimately did not pass, but is still being advocated for by MassCreative and other arts and culture agencies and groups.

*H.3241 / S.530: An Act to Preserve Space for the Creative Economy*  
Sponsored by Rep. Dan Cahill and Sen. Liz Miranda, this bill aimed to create property restrictions for creative maker and performance spaces. It also proposed incentives for cities and towns to establish trusts to preserve these spaces, helping keep artists in their communities.

One element of the draft bylaws to highlight is the meeting notice standards. The Armory Advisory Board will notice any meeting about financial investments at least 48 hours in advance to all tenants by email and in all the standard channels of the City of Somerville for resident notice and take public comment on all matters related to investment recommendations. This standard of public notice is set as a minimum requirement, and it is fully expected that while the Armory is governed by the City that staff and the Advisory Board are regularly connecting with tenants and neighbors about the topics in discussion.

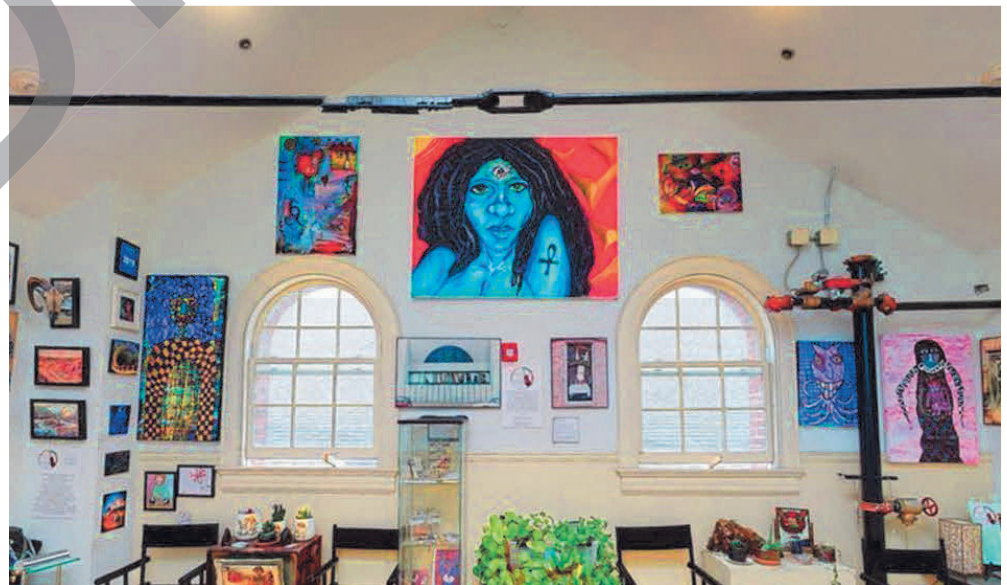
### *Paths Towards Independence*

Forming the Somerville Armory Advisory Board is the first step to transition the Armory administration away from City staff to an independent entity. This initial structure will provide a platform when there is readiness to transition governance to an independent third-party entity, such as a non-profit corporation or a quasi-government agency like a cultural trust. Such independent entities have more direct decision-making power on administrative and fiscal matters and with less oversight by the City.

The City can seek the services of a non-profit corporation to govern the Armory. Such a corporation would have an independent board and staff that can expand the scale of Armory programming and increase the facility's public exposure and brand, while also fundraising for major building renovations or improvements. Alternately, creating a special purpose, quasi-governmental agency requires special state legislation but combines the efficiencies of a non-profit corporation with heightened access to municipal resources. Passage of pending state legislation may allow the City to create an independent cultural trust to run the Armory and any future municipal cultural assets, leveraging all available efficiencies of scale and resources to maximize arts and culture programming to the public.

The Advisory Board will need to advise on how the City should structure that future relationship with a separate governing entity to maintain consistency with the Mission and Vision of Success and create the checks and balances that assure the Somerville community that the public purpose is continuing to be met.

Right: Artwork in the hallways of the Armory curated and shown by Out of the Blue Community Arts





## CASE STUDIES



The Umbrella Arts Center in Concord, Massachusetts, provides an example of how management of a cultural institution can evolve to improve facilities and enhance programming and public engagement. Started in the 1980's by local artists who wanted to start a public arts center, the Umbrella started life being run by a small non-profit corporation governed by its artist tenants that leased and renovated a surplus school from the town. The Center operated this way for thirty years, when the Arts Center Board determined that local demand for cultural programming far exceeded the capacity of the original building. In 2010, the Board shifted its mission from managing operations to marshaling resources for an extensive expansion of the facility and its programmatic offerings. Board membership shifted towards people skilled in fundraising while daily management shifted to professional staff overseen by a director hired by the Board. In 2019, the new Board had raised over \$20,000,000 to dramatically expand the Center's building, hire additional staff and instructors and offer more cultural programming in new facilities, including two theaters, maker spaces, a computer graphics laboratory and an art gallery. Since the Umbrella board has focused on raising funds to support the Center's expanded operations.



The Northampton Community Arts Trust provides a great example of how a third-party entity can govern an arts center. The Arts Trust is the owner of 33 Hawley Street, a building that provides an affordable space for Northampton Center for the Arts, Available Potential Enterprises (A.P.E), and Northampton Open Media, each conducting an active presence in the building through their own programming. This building is the first and only project of the Arts Trust, adapting the model of conservation and community-land trusts. By acquiring 33 Hawley the Arts Trust removed the building from the speculative real-estate market and are protecting the space, in perpetuity, for acts of creativity and imagination. This model can provide an example of how a cultural trust, or a non-profit governing body can function at a higher level, leaving programming to the tenants of the building.

## Select Diverse Yet Complimentary Tenants

As a multi-user building, the Armory will be programmed by the tenants in the spaces that they lease; they will enliven the building with rehearsals, meetings, classes, and performances. Potential tenants should be considered both individually on their artistic merits and how they fit into the building as a whole, using a fair, transparent, and public process. It is also important that the Armory remains open to new tenants, new artists, new ideas, and community priorities, with fresh programming and access to emerging artists encouraged. This should be accomplished by offering spaces in the Armory at a range of price points and durations (daily, weekly, long-term lease) so income and artistic practice need is not a significant barrier to accessing Armory space. The Advisory Board should also regularly reflect on how the Armory and its tenants are serving the broader community and adjust subsequent leases and lease renewals to stay aligned with the mission and community need.

Right: Dead Moon Audio's recording studio located in the Armory basement.



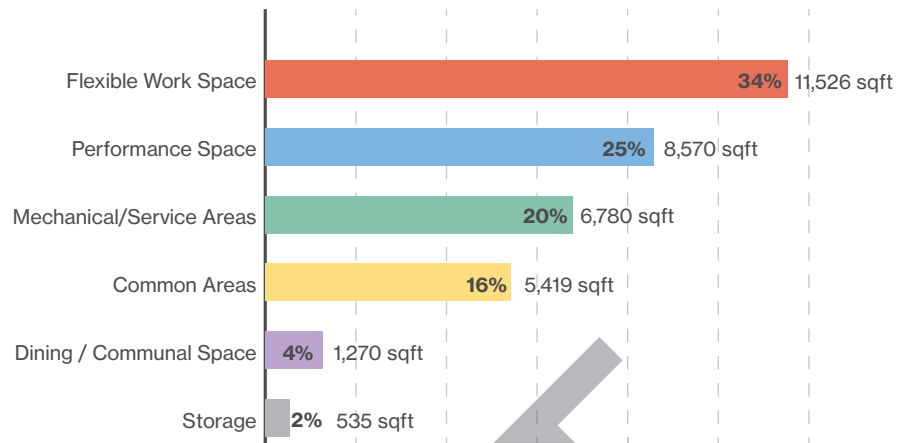
Left: Audiotech Services offers affordable equipment repair and tech support to artists of Greater Boston and is located in the Armory.



Right: Acoustic Strings New England, a musical instrument rental and repair shop located in the Armory



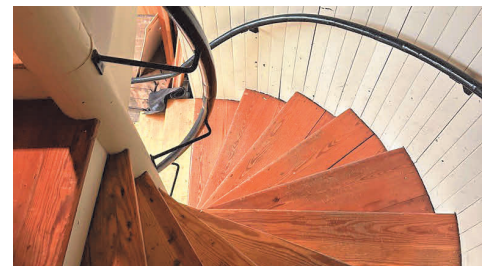
Figure 3. Armory Building Square Footage



While the Armory should try to attract many types of artists, its design, construction, and occupancy limit the disciplines it can realistically host. The presence of the large performance hall with specialized lighting and media equipment lends the building to accommodating performing artists (musicians, dancers, media artists, etc.), but, as Figure 3 shows, there is nearly 10,000 square feet (SF) of space that can easily host relatively low-impact disciplines that will not generate significant noise, dust, or vibrations. Disciplines requiring equipment that generate heavier impacts may be able to use spaces in the basement, which have concrete floors and walls and generally more robust construction. Additionally, the third floor of the building was designed in 2009 as two residential units. There are functional limitations and substantial challenges with having residents living above a performance venue. All of the residents who have lived at the property so far have moved in knowing they will live above a music venue and harmony between tenants has mostly been achieved. That said, there are significant challenges with hosting a private residence in the context of a public arts center. Long-term residential leases are not recommended, but accessory residential functions (like an artist in residence program or sleeping quarters for visiting artists) may be a good utilization of the existing facilities. During tenant selection, the Advisory Board will have to keep property limitations in mind as each space has its own distinct set of features.

Left: Armory common area on the 1st floor

Right: Back stairwell of the Armory





Artists utilizing the 2nd and 3rd floor spaces of the Armory as part of the SomArt Program of the Somerville Arts Council

Left:  
Artist Michael Talbot and Sean Webster (Copper Collective) present their work in the 2nd floor BIPOC Gallery.

Right:  
Continuum Dance rehearse a dance piece in the 3rd floor rehearsal space for their AIR residency.



### *Support Art and Creation*

Some artistic practices are unsustainable in the free market economy, but that does not mean they do not deserve space. The benefit of a publicly owned arts center is the ability to subsidize space for users who cannot afford market prices. Often the work artists present is just the tip of the iceberg. There are countless hours spent preparing, writing, ideation, researching, and experimenting, all which may require low-cost space. Supporting art at all levels and not just the final stage is important in supporting a thriving and diverse arts ecosystem. Fortunately, the Armory has a variety of spaces, some better for production and others more suited for artistic presentation or performances, all of which can be offered to artists and organizations at different price points.

Artists participating in the Master Plan process also desired for the Armory to support artists with different business models and varying time-in-space needs. Some organizations will need dedicated access to space on a long-term basis (e.g. a performance venue needs a multi-year tenancy to allow for booking shows 1-2 years in advance) while other businesses need access to space by the hour or day (e.g. a music teacher needs space to teach Thursdays from 4pm – 8pm). Some of the Armory's current tenants offer space to other artists as a regular part of their own business models, and this is common practice for many arts organizations as a means of fostering collaboration and expanding their network. During the development of the Master Plan, the City of Somerville also opened some vacant spaces in the building to artists for short term use through the SomArt program of the Somerville Arts Council. The City should continue this legacy by offering at least one if not multiple spaces in the building to artists at an hourly or daily basis with clear price transparency, managed either by an Armory tenant or the City.

**Massachusetts Procurement Law:  
Chapter 30B**

In 1990 the Massachusetts state legislature enacted the Uniform Procurement Act, also known as Chapter 30B. In general, this law governs how municipalities handle:

1. Supplies and services procurements
2. Surplus supplies
3. The acquisition or disposal of real property

Chapter 30B regulates how cities offer long term leases to municipal property like the Armory.

***Recommended Tenant Criteria***

The Somerville Armory is intended to be multi-tenanted, and community based. Each time requests for proposals are issued to fill vacancies in the building the Somerville Armory Advisory Board will review the criteria for the upcoming selection against the specifics of the available space and its own limitations. In 2025, the City of Somerville, guided by the Somerville Armory Advisory Board, will lease all Armory spaces through a procurement process compliant with Massachusetts law and consistent with the criteria recommended in this Plan. Current tenants occupying space in the Armory before it was acquired by the City of Somerville can participate in this process and must if they would like to remain tenants in the building. The Somerville community said clearly throughout the process, that all current arts-organizations in the building are valued and applications should be welcomed from all current tenants.

Below: A music event taking place in the Rooted Cafe operated by the Center for Arts at the Armory.





The City is looking for diverse tenants that can deliver on the Mission and Vision for Success. The following tenant selection criteria are generally applicable whether the Advisory Board is considering filling one space or multiple:

- **Mission Alignment:** Does the prospective tenant's mission or purpose align with the Mission and Vision of Success for the Armory?
- **Facility Alignment:** Is the prospective tenant's space needs compatible with the type and amount of space available including any particular restrictions related to that unit?
- **Building Mix:** Does the prospective tenant's offerings add to the diversity of offerings in the building? Is it compatible with other uses? What potential conflicts of noise bleed or conflicting uses will need to be mitigated in selecting this tenant?
- **Community Breadth:** Does this prospective tenant reach a wide spectrum of Somerville's community and/or offer a wide variety of activities that are responsive to community needs? Or does the prospective tenant reach an under-resourced community and fill gaps in our current creative ecosystem?
- **Community Benefit:** Does this prospective tenant contribute to a benefit to the Somerville community in ways that align with identified community needs in the arts ecosystem or broader community? If making space available to others in the ecosystem, do they have defined and approachable pricing structures?
- **Collaborative Nature:** Does this prospective tenant have a proven record of collaborative experience?
- **Economics:** How does this tenant's price proposal fit within the goal of making the Armory a financially stable building? Is it a tenancy that would need subsidy or offer the ability to subsidize others?



### *Community Uses & Public Purpose*

Residents stated often that they want the Armory to continue serving artists as well as wider community needs by hosting public markets, meetings, and other civic events. The building currently hosts a Winter Farmers Market, city elections, blood drives, and other civic events while maintaining its artistic identity and focus. Just as with making space for artistic producers, this desire to mix in civic uses embedded in the arts ecosystem can be met through the partner selection criteria and the rent structure. During selection, tenants could, for instance, be asked to describe their offerings to the public; how they could provide access for a range of potential artistic partners; and how they will accommodate civic uses. These answers could provide the Advisory Board and Mayor guidance to negotiate with a selected tenant/partner to clearly outline their commitments in their lease. This could take the form of reserving specific dates for civic functions like voting or set pricing for non-profit or independent artist space rentals.

The café situated on the first floor by the entrance is an intermediate space that welcomes all and promotes intermingling of artists, patrons, and members of the public. It is also flexible, serving as a performance space as well as a retail establishment. There is a desire for there to always be ground floor space that is designated for community gathering like the café has been in recent years. A space where people can gather and congregate in the building will help foster synergies within the building and provide a foundation for a strong community.

There may be needs in the city that would align with the Armory's mission and vision of success but that are not being proposed by potential tenants. This could take a variety of forms not fully anticipated at this time, but an example might be addressing the need for affordable spaces available by the hour. In such a case, the Advisory Board could recommend dedicating a space to a function that is staffed by the City of Somerville instead of being rented out to a tenant. If required, this can be done by:

- The Armory Advisory Board identifies an unmet need and recommends that the City fill that need in a specific space in the building to the Mayor.
- The Mayor and City staff determine whether the City can fund the Board's recommendation.
- If the City can support the Board's proposal, the Mayor and staff develop a budget and scope for meeting the Board's recommendation, if additional funding is needed the City Council approves the funding request.

## Summary of Recommendations: Governing a Public Arts Center

### *Establish a Transparent Advisory Board & Governance Structure:*

- Set up the Somerville Armory Advisory Board to oversee tenant selection and revenue distribution.
- Collaborate with the Mayor and City Council for decisions, ensuring the Board's advisory role is clear.
- Make meeting agendas and minutes publicly available to ensure transparency and community access.

### *Support Artists and Engage the Community:*

- Hold regular meetings for the Advisory Board to gather input from tenants and the community.
- Launch and regularly administer a survey to assess local artists' needs and adjust the Armory's role accordingly.
- Provide low-cost or subsidized space to support artists in various stages of creation and presentation.
- Facilitate a mix of tenants that provide civic and cultural programming.
- Maintain a flexible, community-focused space that encourages public engagement and interaction with artists.

### *Select Diverse yet Complementary Tenants:*

- Implement a transparent, public process for selecting tenants that aligns with the Armory's mission and vision of success.
- Prioritize tenants based on mission alignment, space compatibility, and community benefit.
- Utilize community survey results to cross check that the Armory is meeting the needs of the artistic community.
- Offer flexible pricing and lease options to ensure accessibility for a range of artists and arts organizations, including opportunities for both traditional long-term leases and short-term space rentals.

### *Evaluate and Adapt Governance:*

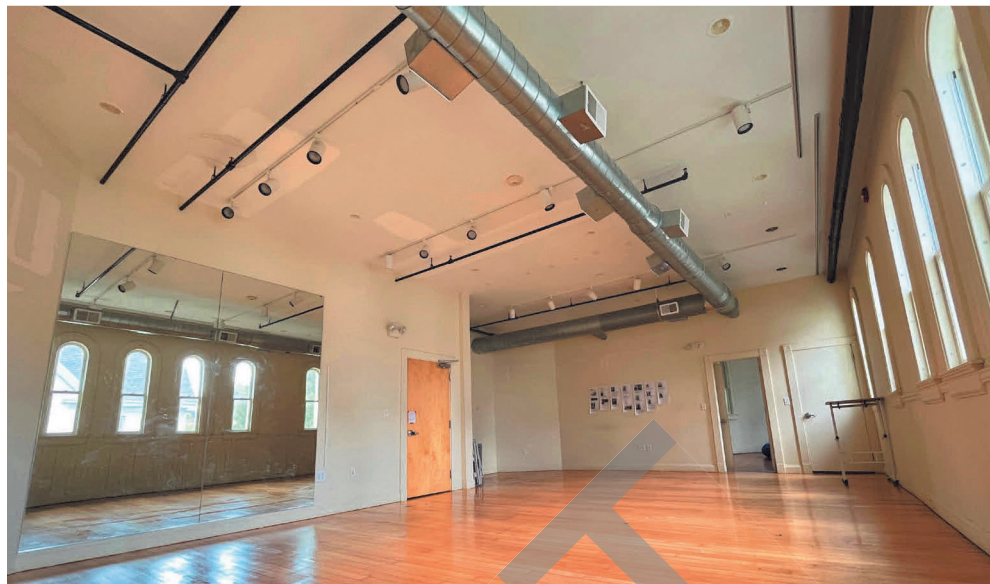
- Continuously assess tenant selection, space utilization, and community engagement to ensure alignment with the Armory's mission and broader community needs.
- Adjust programming and space offerings based on feedback and changing needs in the arts and local community.
- Use the Advisory Board as a sounding board for transitioning to an independent governance structure, such as a non-profit or cultural trust.

## Managing and Maintaining the Armory

Managing the Armory efficiently, transparently, and fairly while continually maintaining and improving the property is fundamental to achieving the Vision and Mission. Armory revenue must be stable and sufficient to support management, enhanced building upkeep, technical upgrades, and renovation of major building components. This plan uses industry benchmarks for similar facilities to recommend ways to improve the Armory's daily operations, upgrade building conditions, and minimize user conflicts while maintaining the Armory's long-term financial viability.



An unoccupied space on the second floor of the Armory.



### **Improve and Standardize Daily Operations**

Improving and standardizing daily building operations is crucial for enhancing efficiency, reducing costs, and ensuring a consistent quality of service in the Armory. Standardization allows for better staff training, improves communication, minimizes errors, and optimizes processes, resulting in time savings and increased productivity. Additionally, standardized operations can lead to better compliance with safety and regulatory standards, ultimately fostering a safer and more sustainable environment for tenants and visitors alike.

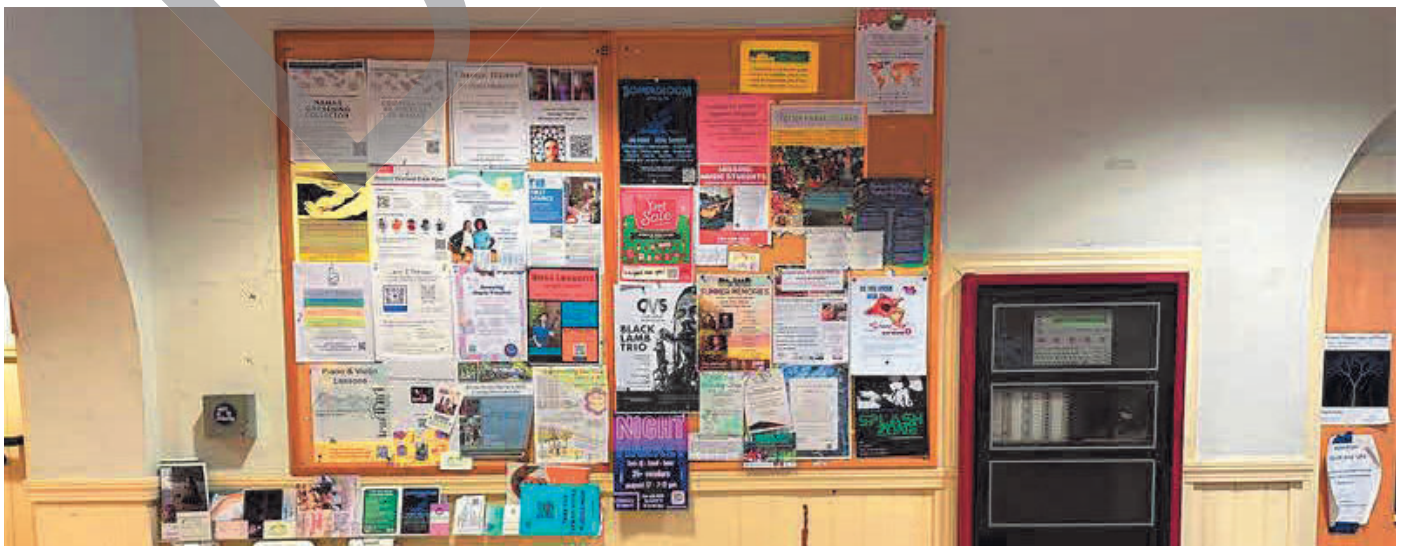
During the engagement process, the City heard from current tenants that they would like future decisions about operational policies to include deeper tenant engagement. As much as possible, the Armory Master Plan recommends distinguishing between governance (assuring alignment with the Mission and Vision of Success) and operations (day-to-day coordination). With this in mind, the scope of the Armory Advisory Board explicitly does not include advising on operational policies. Instead, City staff will be responsible for working with representatives of all tenants once the building is filled in 2025 to create a standard for engagement. Tenants will be consulted as policies are developed for a broad range of issues described in this section of the master plan – common area use policies, parking lot signage, and shared marketing of the building are all likely topics in the first years.

### *Expand Cleaning and Maintenance Protocols*

Maintenance is crucial for the Armory to be a successful public asset for the City of Somerville keeping the property functional and welcoming to tenants, visitors, and the public. Currently staff from the Department of Public Works cleans the building's common areas, maintains the grounds, and makes minor repairs as needed. Structural renovations, servicing and replacement of building systems, and installation of major upgrades require the services of private contractors. The Armory is only one of the many public buildings that Public Works cleans and maintains. It is unique in that it is currently maintained and serviced in part by City staff but primarily houses private tenants and hosts private events. This arrangement could lead to conflicts between the needs and priorities of City management and private tenants and the rights of unionized employees. Determining the right mix of City staff and outside support services will necessarily evolve over time as the needs of the building change.

The Advisory Board will be advising the Mayor on spending from the Armory budget, that could include recommendations on additional contract cleaning and maintenance services. Regular maintenance, including weekend cleaning and trash removal, and system upgrades including wireless intercoms for the front door and greater interior sound dampening. City staff will be needed to assist the Advisory Board in planning and organizing all aspects of daily administration of the property as a public arts center. The Advisory Board and their necessary support staff may also need to contract consultant services to assess how the Advisory Board can better integrate the Armory's needs into the Department of Public Works current systems. This assessment will help streamline operations and make management more efficient, reliable, clear and fair for Armory tenants and the public, while taking advantage of the economies of scale gained from utilizing existing City resources.

Below: Community bulletin board located in the first floor common area of the Armory.



### *Ensure Safety and Security*

To fulfill its mission as a public asset, the Somerville Armory needs to be both safe and accessible to the general public while also being a secure place for artists and arts organizations to create and conduct business. Successful operation will make common areas (lobbies, halls, and the grounds) secure and welcoming. These common areas are due for system upgrades as a result of aging infrastructure. Modernizing the call box would go a long way in simplifying the visitor experience. Beyond these physical issues, City staff will also work with tenants to determine public hours of operation for the Armory to clarify how the public is welcomed in and ensure that there is a designated point-person for City communications to address safety, security, and questions from general public visitors to the Armory.

As part of transitioning the Armory to public stewardship, the City published a code of conduct for Armory visitors in 2024 that applies to the property's common areas and grounds. The City is also enacting a set of building rules for Armory tenants and their patrons. The code of conduct together with these rules outline what is expected of individuals within the Armory and will be enforceable if violated.

A thorough safety plan should be developed with property management and tenants. Part of this needs to include a detailed analysis of the building's spaces, their capacities and uses, and egresses. The Armory's current infrastructure is not designed to accommodate tenants of every use. Beyond the performance hall, the building currently lacks sufficient bathrooms to handle large numbers of people in the building at one time. Additional emergency exit doorways were added after it was converted into a private arts venue and some have direct access to the street, making them a better fit for large gatherings. For example, if there were two or more large events simultaneously in the building, the safety plan would need to address emergency egress and coordination. Additionally, types of artistic use need to be considered and planned for – the Armory can only accommodate some artistic practices with its current infrastructure. For example, if an artist wanted to work with spray paint, there is not adequate ventilation in place to allow for the safe use of materials with toxic fumes. To install a spray booth or fume hood the artist would need to work with the City on creating system upgrades and coordinating a safety plan for using and storing hazardous materials on site. It is recommended that the Advisory Board conduct a comprehensive study about building upgrades that can allow for a broader range of art practices safely but continue to work on an as needed basis until a complete study can be completed.



## Maintain and Improve Existing Infrastructure

Ensuring the Armory serves local artists and the greater public successfully in the future requires reliable and sustainable revenue streams that are sufficient to pay for desired building services, building upgrades and renovations.

### *Near-Term Site Investments*

To jump start improved management of the Armory by implementation of this Master Plan, the City should undertake relatively inexpensive, but strategic, building upgrades as soon as possible:

- Intercom and security infrastructure
- Wayfinding signage and directional maps in interior and exterior common areas
- Common area painting and floor refinishing

### *Mid-Term Site Investments*

The Armory was fully renovated fifteen years ago, and as noted, is in generally good condition. However, several building systems require repair or replacement to prolong the structure's lifespan and its ability to be operated with financial stability into the future. These are medium-sized capital investments and may require bond funds or large grants from the City or State to be completed.

- Accessibility upgrades, i.e. upgrading the elevator and making all bathrooms ADA compliant.
- Exterior facade renovation – Repair cracks, replace broken masonry, replace deteriorated stucco and repaint
- Roof replacement – Replace existing rubber roof, shingle roof, and replace gutters, scuppers and drainage systems.
- Window replacement (east side) – Replace deteriorated second floor windows on the east façade with double-glazed aluminum windows.
- Emergency door renovation – Replace deteriorated wood doors and door frames of emergency exits on east, north and west sides of the Armory.
- Apply for municipal funds from the Somerville Community Preservation Act (CPA) program, Capital Improvement Program, as well as state and federal grants, to fund mid-term capital improvements.



### *Long-Term Site Investments*

Protecting the Armory for future generations is a major reason for operating the property as a successful community arts center and municipal asset. Several building system upgrades and improvements can increase the Armory's operating efficiency and utility for users and visitors. These investments do not have to be made immediately but should be pursued within the next three to five years.

- **Elevator replacement** – Replace existing elevator car system with a modern, more reliable model.
- **Structural insulation** – Insulate the Armory's structural shell to enhance energy efficiency.
- **Window replacement** (north, west and south sides) – Replace remaining windows with more efficient, soundproof models
- **Mechanical systems** – Install modern, more efficient HVAC systems in all rooms. Upgrade interior/exterior lighting
- **Site improvements** – Regrade the Armory grounds for better drainage and universal accessibility. Replace and reevaluate layout of the parking lot.
- **Interior renovations** – Install soundproofing and upgrade finishes in common and tenant areas.
- **Apply for municipal funds** from the Somerville Community Preservation Act (CPA) program, Capital Improvement Program, as well as state and federal grants, to fund long-term capital improvements.

The Armory is a building where people gather in both large and small quantities to enjoy art.

Left: People gather for an visual art exhibition opening in the SomArt Space.

Right: A large audience watches The Brazilian Theater of Boston present: BRASIL: The Land of Samba in the Armory performance hall



### **Nurture Community and Coordinate Programing**

Creating a thriving arts center involves effective coordination among diverse programming and tenants. The Armory, with its multi-functional spaces, must navigate the complexities of simultaneous uses to ensure all users can coexist harmoniously. Establishing clear expectations, promoting communication, and implementing a cohesive marketing approach will better serve the Armory tenants and the wider community. These recommendations aim to cultivate a supportive environment that highlights the Armory's unique offerings and ensures a seamless experience for all visitors and tenants.

#### **Coordination of Building Programming and Capacity**

As an arts center with multiple uses occurring at once, it is important to keep in mind what activities the building can simultaneously accommodate. Competing music performances in spaces that are not adequately sound-proofed, multiple large events that rely on the common bathrooms, and artistic production that requires the use of loud or messy machinery can all cause disruptions to other users of the building. Setting clear expectations and creating a collaborative environment will ensure that the tenants within the Armory are mindful of each other and are supportive of each other's programming.

While this synergy needs to be thought of during tenant selection, it will also be important for tenants to communicate amongst themselves and determine best courses of action for their overlapping programming. It is recommended that the tenants and City staff track potential issues, especially ones that may be resolved with future building improvements such as mitigating noise bleed between spaces.



### *Parking and Mobility*

The Armory is situated in the center of Somerville between Davis, Magoun, and Union Squares. The property is highly accessible to city residents via MBTA buses that run down Highland Avenue, a short walk to the Magoun Square green line station, and a Blue Bike station located two blocks away. The Armory is unique among Somerville arts venues because it also has a relatively large parking lot with forty-eight (48) vehicle spaces behind the building and 2 accessible spaces at the right side of the building. A loading zone and public parking are located along the Highland Avenue curb line in front of the building. Arts at the Armory also has arranged an overflow parking area at a nearby Cambridge Health Alliance property on Highland Avenue for major events. The following parking and mobility strategies are recommended to maximize access to the building by the public:

- Encourage building tenants to apply for municipal Business Parking Permits.
- Require hosts of performances to hire parking attendants for the Armory parking lot.
- Encourage performance attendees to walk, bike, or take public transportation.
- Conduct a site mobility plan for improvements to loading zones, event parking management, fire lane access, accessible parking, EV charging, dumpster access, and other circulation issues.

Below: Somerville Armory parking lot seen from above.



### *Mitigating Conflict*

One of the items outlined in the vision of success for the Armory is the fostering of community within the building and mitigating any potential conflict. It is a goal of the Armory Master Plan that all conflict is mitigated through resolution systems and mindful selection of tenants and programming. Following all recommendations outlined in this Plan, the Armory should be able to function with minimal conflict. If any issues and conflicts should arise and cannot be resolved between the tenants, they can bring the issue to City staff. Tenant leases will include standard penalties for violating the code of conduct and building rules. The code of conduct and building rules may from time to time be updated to reflect new policies agreed to among tenants and the City to mitigate conflicts that arise.

### *Showcase the Armory's Tenants and Programs*

It is important that the public knows what is happening at the Armory, how to access the Armory, and knows of its existence. Awareness will help the community further engage with the Armory's offerings and help tenants attract more visitors to their programming.

Currently each individual tenant is responsible for their own marketing, resulting in a fragmented approach. This Master Plan recommends that the City adopt a marketing strategy that compiles promotional material from all tenants so there is a single source for all building related events and news that can redirect visitors to the appropriate building tenant. This can be in the form of a building website, social media feed, etc. This recommendation would not replace individual tenant marketing strategies and still encourages individual tenants to do their own marketing to their audiences.

It is also recommended by this Master Plan also recommends that mechanisms be put into place for the public to feel further involved with the building. This can be done through a group like the community organization Friends of the Somerville Library, who help raise money, fill in with programming support, and organize annual book sales. This Plan recommends such a group should be explored by the Advisory Board after the tenants have been selected so that the tenants can have a voice in shaping such a group if one is valuable.

Beyond a digital presence, the visibility of the Armory can be improved by creating a strong building identity and sense of place. Fostering strong place-based branding can help identify the building and create cohesion between the physical space and the digital presence. The physical place-based branding can come in many forms such as signage, outrigger banners, flags, wall murals, architectural and/or multi-media lighting and public art. In addition to providing a visual identity, this material can also provide functional benefits like wayfinding and tenant information.

## Summary of Recommendations: Managing and Maintaining the Armory

### *Standardize and Expand Operation Protocols:*

- Implement standardized operational procedures for improved efficiency, cost reduction, and consistent service quality.
- Increase cleaning and maintenance services for common areas, including weekend cleaning and trash removal, through the Advisory Board's budget recommendations.
- Streamline operations by integrating the Armory's needs into the Department of Public Works systems.

### *Ensure Safety & Security:*

- Upgrade intercom call box and security infrastructure systems, including installing video surveillance in common areas and improving door security.
- Develop a more comprehensive safety plan, considering building capacity, usage types, and emergency protocols.
- Ensure compliance with safety and regulatory standards to foster a safe, welcoming environment for tenants and visitors.
- Address building infrastructure limitations (e.g., ventilation for hazardous materials) to safely accommodate diverse art practices.
- Require parking attendants for major events to ensure fire lane access and safety.

### *Invest in Infrastructure:*

- Plan to invest in infrastructure improvements and prioritize based on need and available funding
- Near-Term: Implement low-cost upgrades like wayfinding signage and interior painting.

- Mid-Term: Undertake repairs and upgrades, including exterior facade renovation, roof replacement, and window replacements
- Long-Term: Pursue major improvements such as elevator replacement, energy-efficient insulation, and upgraded HVAC systems to improve sustainability and operational efficiency.

### *Nurture Community & Coordinate Programming:*

- Establish clear communication and coordination among tenants to prevent conflicts from simultaneous programming (e.g., noise management, shared facilities).
- Create a collaborative environment to encourage mutual support and understanding among tenants.
- Foster a community-oriented atmosphere by addressing conflicts proactively.
- Implement conflict resolution systems and enforce building rules and the code of conduct through tenant leases.
- Develop a comprehensive mobility plan addressing parking lot improvements, accessible parking, EV charging, and fire lane access.

### *Showcase Tenants & Programs:*

- Adopt a unified marketing strategy to promote Armory events and activities via a centralized platform (website, social media, etc.).
- Create a strong, cohesive visual identity for the Armory through branding initiatives (improved signage, murals, lighting) to attract and inform visitors.
- Encourage public involvement and support through community organizations, like a "Friends of the Armory" group.



## Financing the Armory's Vision

“Ensuring Financial Stability” is the final statement in the Vision of Success. The Armory requires stable and sustainable finances to operate and maintain the building as well as to modernize and improve the facilities. Finances encompass revenue (funds coming in to support the property's operation) and expenses (funds spent on the property's operation). While under City management, the broad goal is for revenue to equal expenses in the short-term and with time, to build up a reserve to allow for deeper investments. Throughout this section you will see references to the average expenses that the Armory faces as estimated in 2024. These are not suggestions for what the rents should be but rather indicate what needs to be covered by all revenues to make the building work.



### Stabilize Revenue

The Armory's revenue under private ownership was fully driven by space rentals. The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on attendance at arts centers like the Armory was harshly felt and the ability of tenants to pay rents that kept up with inflation made the economics of the building untenable. The instability of revenues for an arts center was at the heart of why the City of Somerville stepped in to take this building and also continues to be a core challenge for the Armory's future.

### Filling Vacancies & Diversifying Revenue

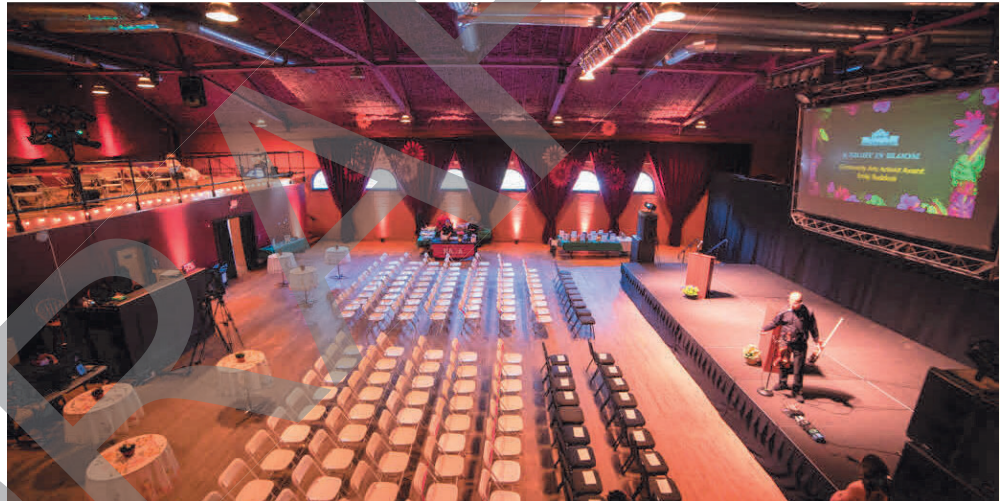
When the City took the Armory for a public arts center in 2021, the building already had several tenants (some arts-focused and some not), and while the building had vacancies it was mostly occupied. Unlike a private sale, a government taking obligates the purchaser, in this case the City, to provide relocation to tenants who leave as a result of the government's new ownership. That opportunity combined with COVID-driven changes in the economy lead several of the tenants to take relocation payments and leave the building. As of November 2024, there are five remaining tenants, with more space vacant than occupied. Remaining tenants continue to pay rent based on their leases with the prior property owner, the exception of which is Arts at the Armory, who was granted rent relief related to COVID-19 shutdowns in 2021 and 2022. As a result of vacancies, revenue is much less than what it had been under private ownership. Filling vacancies with tenants will certainly increase the revenue of the building.

One need in the arts community that emerged during the City's Cultural Capacity Plan work was for extremely low-cost rehearsal and exhibition space. The Arts Council first ran such a space in a vacant storefront in Assembly Square. That lease ended just as vacancies were starting to tick up at the Armory, and so the City opened two spaces in vacancies at the Armory on a temporary basis: a zero-cost gallery and workspace for artists who identify as black, indigenous, or persons of color (BIPOC) and a low-cost hourly rental rehearsal space for dance and movement artists. What this experience has shown is that a low-cost hourly rental space can generate comparable revenue to a long-term lease, while also meeting community space needs. During the Armory master plan process, the community expressed interest in seeing both hourly and long-term rentals made available to meet different artists' needs.

### *Accounting for Escalation and Inflation*

As with everything, dollars one year are not worth the same as dollars the year before. Inflation will inevitably raise the costs of operating the Armory year-over-year relative to costs for labor, materials, utilities, and services. Recent global supply chain disruptions, driven by COVID-19 and similar events, have increased inflation in building operations. Delays in the production and shipment of materials and building systems, coupled with increased demand for construction and renovation projects, have contributed to recent price spikes. Inflation in the energy sector has also significantly impacted utilities, especially for facilities and programs that rely heavily on electricity. Create Today estimates that inflation in operating costs for arts facilities nationally currently averages 3% per year, fairly close to the prevailing Consumer Price Index. As such Create Today has recommended utilizing this national standard in leases so that rents keep pace with changing inflation year-over-year. The Armory Advisory Board will need to account for this inflation rate as it considers recalibrating Armory rents and planning for expenses in future operations.

Right: The Armory's former drill hall, now the performance hall space of Center for Arts at the Armory



### **Balance Resources**

As a public arts center, the Armory will need to balance three competing resource needs: subsidizing arts tenants, improving operational quality, and reserving funds for capital investment. No matter whether the Armory is managed by the City of Somerville or an independent non-profit, these tensions for resources will remain. A benefit of municipal ownership is the ability to tap into the City's resources and existing systems. The City of Somerville is however constrained with investments needed across the schools, emergency services buildings, and city offices. The degree to which the City can fund operational support and/or capital investments will always be dependent on the current financial situation. In 2024, it is anticipated that the next few years will see stable but flat local, state and federal budgets, which will limit the expansion of resources flowing from the City to the Armory.



### *Subsidizing Art*

Whether governed by the City or a non-profit, maximizing rents is not the goal. That said, not all artists will be able to afford rents that cover the full operating costs of the Armory. Under private ownership, the Armory had a mix of higher paying business tenants that allowed the owners to support lower rates for some of the arts spaces, including the performance hall. There may be a need to develop criteria to subsidize some tenants in the future just as when the building was operated privately. Setting a flexible range of rents and income-adjusted fee structures are ways that the Armory can continue offering spaces to artists, creative businesses, and community members of varying income levels.

Economy of scale allows the City to support the Armory at lower costs than a private entity. Currently, the City annually spends about \$5 per square foot (SF) for minimal level maintenance of the Armory's common areas, building systems, and grounds, using current municipal staff and existing vendor contracts (e.g. trash hauling). Create Today estimates it would cost an independent operator without access to municipal staff and resources approximately 20%-30% more (\$6/SF annually) to run the Armory at existing service levels or any level of service for that matter. For instance, snow clearance at the Armory is currently worked into existing routes for plows and shoveling crews, without passing these costs on to the tenants. This is one way the City can provide significant subsidy to the Armory that increases affordability. As transition to independent governance is considered, there will need to be conversations about which services and maintenance responsibilities stay with the City and which transition to the independent entity.

Covering the cost of utilities is another way to subsidize the arts tenants in the Armory. The City has covered water and sewer charges for all tenants in the building since it was acquired in 2021, whether they have private restrooms and sinks or are sharing the public facilities. Since the Armory was renovated in 2009, most tenants have paid for their own electricity and gas service from separate utility meters. In contrast, the performance hall shares meters with the common area, and the City has covered those costs since the acquisition. A step toward fairness between tenants might be to install a separate meter, or the City could continue to take on this cost as a means of subsidizing the operation of that space. Similarly, separate water meters may be a logical step if a tenant with particularly high water use is selected for the building, or the City could continue to take on this cost as well. Transitioning to an independent operation would necessitate separate metering or bolstering the endowment of the organization to continue utility subsidies to tenants.

### *Improve Operations*

Tenants have continually requested better building services over the past three years to improve building conditions up to industry standards. Some tenants have requested the presence of dedicated management staff on-site when the Armory is open to the public, more frequent trash pickup, deeper cleaning, and heightened maintenance. Such service improvements will cost more to implement, requiring careful consideration to balance better conditions with preserving the Armory's affordability.

To assess the cost of improving Armory operations, Create Today built a financial model for the Armory modeling to a "best practice" standard of service. They looked at the service priorities that the current tenants and community raised in the engagement process as well as industry standards, the case study research, and expense data from the City. The "best practice" operation of the building is modeled to have four full time equivalent (FTE) staff including the governance coordination functions, welcome desk staff, and custodial services every day of the week including weekends. That level of service would cost approximately \$20/SF, four times the current investment. The operating budget is not the only expense that the building has either, so getting to that best practice would require revenue above \$20/SF in order to sustain the level of services. Please note that this represents the expenses that revenues need to cover, and not the anticipated rents for any given unit in the Armory.

Below: The Somerville Winters Farmers Market operated by Center for Arts at the Armory



FTE = full time equivalent job. This is reflective of either City or private sector workers

Table 1: Management and Operation Service Tiers

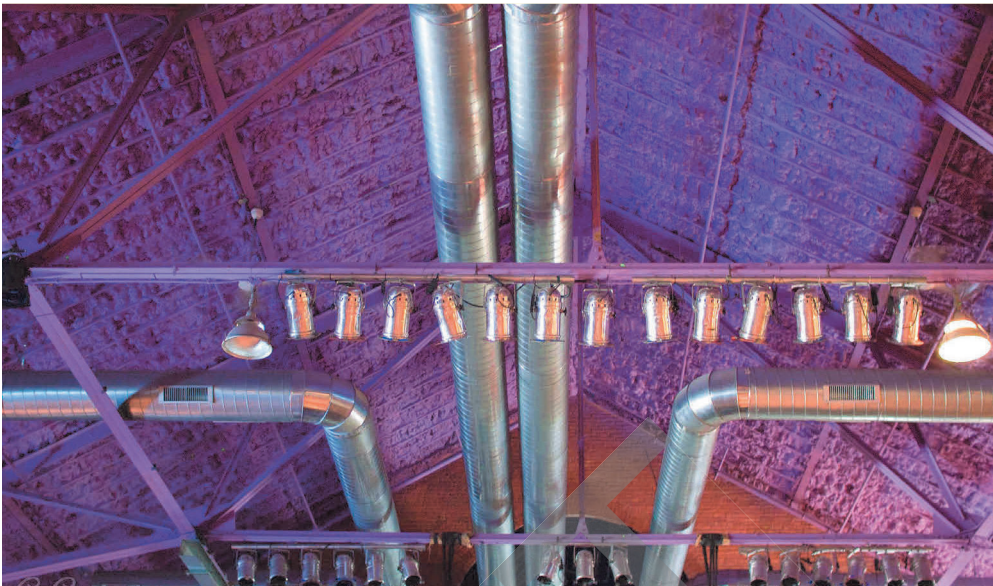
Management and Operations Level	Estimated Cost Range	Staff and Services
Tier 0: Current Service	\$5 – 6+ per sf/yr	No dedicated staff, 5 days/week of custodial service, low operating reserves
Tier 1: Modest	\$8 – 10+ per sf/yr	1 FTE dedicated staff, 7 days/week of custodial service, extra trash service, modest reserves
Tier 2: Moderate	\$10 – 12+ per sf/yr	1.5 FTE dedicated staff, 7 days/week of custodial service, extra trash service, moderate reserves
Tier 3: Standard	\$13 – 16+ per sf/yr	2.5 FTE dedicated staff, 7 days/week of upgraded custodial service, extra trash service, standard reserves
Tier 4: Best Practice	\$20 – 24+ per sf/yr	4 FTE dedicated staff, 7 days/week of custodial service, enhanced maintenance and security services, high reserves

In order to help the Advisory Board put this in perspective, Table 1 describes several potential tiers of service that could be achieved between the current level (Tier 0) and the best practice (Tier 4) and rough estimates of the costs associated with each tier.

Staffing is one of the most expensive differences in the level of service options. As described in previous sections, the City intends to dedicate staff time to support the Armory's governance. This person will staff the Armory Advisory Board and support engagement with tenants and neighbors. That role will necessarily touch on operations issues as well as larger governance topics. Revenue from a full building will also give the City the capacity to retain supplemental vendors and possibly additional staff. Determining a target level of service tier and additional staff needs will need to go hand in hand with the selection of tenants, because the revenue from rents will not be known until then nor will the need for staff services be known until tenants are selected. Another way to lower the costs might be to work with a volunteer program like Americorps to staff a welcome desk. All of these operational staffing considerations will require the input of the Armory Advisory Board.

The possible or desirable level of service is also likely to change over time. Transitioning from the current investment at Tier 0 to the best practice at Tier 4 would take at least a year, as that would involve hiring for roles that do not currently exist. Rather than immediately targeting the Tier 4 best practice level, the Advisory Board should work with tenants to address the critical needs and target the level of service accordingly. The Board will also need to consider having reserves on hand for the times when there are vacancies in the building and less revenue coming in, even if just for a few months while new tenants are selected. The ultimate balancing act is to target a level of service that meets the needs while not pushing rents out of reach of the artists and arts organization the building is intended to serve and still also preparing for larger capital investments.





*Plan for Capital Investments*

Buildings have life cycles, and their components degrade despite regular upkeep. It is important to tenant stability that the timely replacement of older systems is addressed. Replacement of major building systems and large-scale renovations are sporadic costs that are beyond the scope and more expensive than regular preventive maintenance. These are considered separate from standard operating expenses and require large capital infusions. Funding for such investments can come from a variety of sources – reserves built up from rental revenues, community fundraising, municipal taxes or bonds, and state/federal grants.

Somerville’s Capital Projects Division determined in 2021 that the Armory has short and long-term capital investment needs totaling over \$14 million (2024 dollars) summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Armory Capital Investment Needs and Estimated Cost (2024 Dollars)

Short-term Capital Investment Needs	Investment Required
Exterior repair, roof and window replacement	\$4,800,000
Entry and call box upgrades	\$300,000
Common area investments	\$300,000
Total:	\$5,400,000
Long-term Capital Investment Needs	Investment Required
HVAC/electrical improvements	\$4,600,000
Interior renovations & upgrades	\$2,700,000
Regrading grounds and parking lot rebuild	\$1,900,000
Total:	\$9,200,000

The Armory's capital investments needs cannot be supported by rent revenue alone without pushing rents beyond the reach of the artists and arts organizations it is intended to serve. Fortunately, there are other public and private sources of capital to pay for replacement and modernization of crucial building systems. As a municipal property, the City can bond for capital investments in the Armory, just like it does for the schools, fire stations, and City Hall. Investments funded through the typical municipal process are managed through the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) process, which allocates municipal tax revenue and bonding to improve City assets. The CIP evolves based on funding and priority projects, meaning the Armory is evaluated against the needs of schools and other facilities for the limited funding available. The funds raised locally from the Community Preservation Act (CPA) could also be a source for capital projects. CPA funding has a more limited range of purposes so there is less competition for these resources. One such purpose is to renovate and upgrade historic buildings, such as the Armory. CPA monies are awarded annually through an application process and could potentially provide up to \$1,000,000 for the Armory.

Grants and fundraising are further opportunities to finance capital investments. An important program to track is the operates a Cultural Facilities Fund (CFF) from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, which supports capital investment in public cultural facilities through an annual grant process. Municipally owned and managed cultural facilities are only eligible if they are more than 50,000 square feet or at least 125 years old, which means the Armory is not eligible for this source at the moment (34,000 square feet and 121 years old). Waiting four years or transitioning to non-profit governance would open up this important state-level funding resource. Most CFF grants are made to non-profits and grants are made for capital investments even if the organization leases their space. Further conversations with the Massachusetts Cultural Council are needed to understand if the CFF could be a resource for a project on municipally owned infrastructure (e.g. the HVAC) but that is used exclusively by a non-profit tenant.

In general, transitioning to a non-profit structure would allow for more flexible fundraising as there are more grant opportunities and soliciting for donations is allowed. However, such an organization then needs to have the staff to do that fundraising and grant seeking. In either case, municipal or non-profit governance, all possible options for public and private financing should be explored to ensure the Armory is a resource for the next generation of Somerville residents to enjoy.

## Summary of Recommendations: Financing the Vision

### *Stabilize and Diversify Revenue:*

- Fully occupy the Armory with arts-focused tenants to increase rental revenue.
- Offer flexible rental options (long-term leases and hourly rentals) to maximize space usage and revenue generation.
- Pursue fundraising, public/private grants, and municipal tax revenue to diversify revenue sources and support operations (as allowed).
- Anticipate inflation to align with the Consumer Price Index and build escalation into leases.

### *Subsidize Art:*

- Offer space at a range of price points to ensure affordable access for different artists and creative businesses.
- Consider subsidizing rents for arts tenants that meet certain criteria (e.g. public service).

### *Balance Resources:*

- Leverage the City's economy of scale to subsidize operations (e.g., snow clearing, utilities) and reduce overall expenses.
- Ensure that as the Armory transitions to independent governance, discussions are held to determine which services will remain City-supported and which will be transferred.

### *Incremental Operations and Management Upgrades:*

- Gradually upgrade services as occupancy increases, allowing for better property management aligned to tenant needs.
- Prioritize incremental upgrades to avoid large operating deficits while improving experience for tenants and visitors.
- Balance the level of service with the goal of keeping the Armory affordable.

### *Plan for Capital Investments:*

- Address short-term (\$5.4 million) and long-term (\$9.2 million) capital investment needs
- Secure capital funding from public and private sources, including municipal bonds, state/federal grants, and community fundraising.





## Conclusion



2022 Somerville Arts Council's SomArt program's 2022 AiR awardees, Claire Lane and Caroline Bradbury of Detritus Dance, performing at Arts at the Armory in an accumulating performance.

The Somerville Armory has a dynamic 120-year history, transforming over the decades to meet different needs. Residents want the Armory to be a stimulating, vibrant public arts center that is efficiently managed and transparently governed. Hosting a variety of creative, arts-focused tenants will help maintain the Armory's dynamic character over time.

The Vision of Success includes seven core statements to guide every decision taken. Whether deciding about filling a vacancy in the building, the level of service that can be provided next year, or making a change to a common space policy, every decision should reflect these values:

- Focusing on Artists and the Arts
- Nurturing Collaboration and Synergy
- Inspiring Community
- Supporting the Creative Life Cycle
- Making Clear and Community-Based Decisions
- Mitigating Conflict
- Ensuring Financial Stability

The task ahead is threefold: to stay true to the mission and vision of success, be responsive to the evolving needs of the Somerville arts community, and to establish a lasting foundation of resources and infrastructure that ensures the Armory's long-term vitality. By thoughtfully balancing investment with subsidy, the Armory can and will be a model center to empower working artists and deepen the connection between the community at large and the arts community in Somerville.





## Appendix



## APPENDIX DOCUMENTS

	<b>Armory Master Plan Advisory Committee (AMPAC)</b>	
1.1	<a href="#">Roster of Members</a>	2022
1.2	<a href="#">Workshop #1</a>	June 2022
1.3	<a href="#">Workshop #2</a>	September 2022
1.4	<a href="#">Workshop #3</a>	January 2023
1.5	<a href="#">Workshop #4</a>	May 2023
	<b>Research</b>	
2.1	<a href="#">Greater Boston Environmental Scan</a>	August 2022
2.2	<a href="#">Case Study Report</a>	January 2023
	<b>Community Engagement</b>	
3.1	<a href="#">Leadership Interview Report</a>	August 2022
3.2	<a href="#">Focus Groups Report</a>	May 2023
3.3	<a href="#">Create Today Community Engagement Summary</a>	September 2023
3.3	<a href="#">Community Engagement Methods</a>	2022–2023
	<b>Armory Meeting Series</b>	
4.1	<a href="#">Armory &amp; Arts Ecosystem Presentation and Notes</a>	January 2023
4.2	<a href="#">Armory &amp; Community Spaces Presentation and Notes</a>	February 2023
4.3	<a href="#">Armory Existing Conditions Presentation and Notes</a>	March 2024
4.4	<a href="#">Armory Governance Presentation and Notes</a>	May 20204
4.5	<a href="#">Armory Governance Handout</a>	May 2024
	<b>Findings</b>	
5.1	<a href="#">Business Plan</a>	November 2024

DRAFT



*This is the draft by-laws of the Somerville Armory Advisory Board. It will not be finalized until agreed upon by the selected Board members.*

## I. Purpose, Objective, and Scope

### A. Purpose

The City of Somerville shall establish an advisory board consisting of five members to review and make recommendations relative to tenancies, building finances, and building-wide governance of the Somerville Armory, a 34,000 square foot public arts center located at 191 Highland Avenue.

The City of Somerville acquired the Armory in 2021 to preserve arts space and reposition the building as a public arts center. The Armory Master Plan, adopted in 2025 outlines the mission and vision of success for this transition and is intended to serve as the roadmap for governing and managing the property.

The Somerville Armory Advisory Board is given the responsibility of guiding the governance of the building into the future, ensuring commitment to the mission and vision of success is carried forward, and advising on the transition to a more independent structure.

### B. Mission

The Mission of the Somerville Armory, its governing body, and this Master Plan is to protect and ensure the long-term vitality of the historic Armory property as an affordable and accessible public center for art, community, and culture.

### C. Vision of Success

The Somerville Armory will serve as a successful public arts center by:

#### I. Focusing on Artists and Arts:

The Armory is a center for art, community, and culture where a broad range of arts programming is offered to the Somerville community. To encourage this, the Armory is also an affordable, stable, and supportive home for artists to focus on their work.

#### II. Nurturing Collaboration and Synergy:

Tenants and programs at the Armory are carefully chosen to produce a complementary but diverse range of activities. The Armory welcomes a broad array of creators, allowing for a mix of long-term tenancies and short-term or periodic rentals to meet different needs of artists and arts organizations.

#### III. Inspiring Community:

The Armory is a welcoming and inspiring place where visitors not only enjoy diverse arts and cultural programming but are also inspired to flex their own creative muscles.



**IV. Supporting the Creative Life Cycle:**

The Armory fosters artistic and cultural creativity at all levels and scales by users and visitors.

**V. Making Clear and Community-Based Decisions:**

The Armory remains flexible for the needs of the artistic community and the tenants. Decisions about the Armory's future are made through transparent and fair governance where neighbors are appreciated and engaged.

**VI. Mitigating Conflict:**

Management considers noise impacts, building capacity, and other physical constraints when choosing tenants to minimize conflict, and should anticipate and address conflicting needs.

**VII. Ensuring Financial Stability:**

The Armory is a public asset of the City of Somerville. As such, its operation generates revenue that is sufficient to maintain the property in a clean, comfortable and orderly manner, and to fund upgrades and renovations to preserve and enhance its future utility as a municipal arts center.

**D. Objective**

The Armory Advisory Board will:

1. Provide the Mayor with recommendations on selection of tenants for the Armory.
2. Provide the Mayor with recommendations on the use of funds generated by the Armory tenancies to reinvest revenue in the building operations and improve the building condition along with any other grants or funds dedicated to the Armory as available.

The input received and processed by the Armory Advisory Board will inform the decisions of the Mayor.

**E. Scope**

The Armory Advisory Board (AAB) is formed by the City of Somerville to assist the Mayor in establishing tenancies that align with the Armory Master Plan's Mission and Vision of Success and prioritize investments in the building. The Board will be responsible for reviewing proposals for tenancies in detail and making recommendations to the Mayor on the tenant mix of the Armory. The Board will review proposals for use of the revolving funds generated by tenants in the building and make recommendations to the Mayor on the use of funds for services or capital investments. The Mayor is not bound by the recommendations of the Board, but will give careful consideration of the Board's advice.

The Advisory Board may recommend allocating Armory space to municipal programs instead of accepting a tenant to meet a need identified by the community that aligns with

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the Armory's Mission and Vision that is not being proposed by potential tenants. When such a need is identified, the Advisory Board may recommend that the space be staffed by city personnel and/or a vendor. The process by which that recommendation will be reviewed is as follows:

1. The Armory Advisory Board identifies an unmet need and recommends to the Mayor that the City fill that need in a specific space in the building.
2. The Mayor and City staff determine whether to pursue the Board's recommendation.
3. If the Mayor moves forward with the Board's recommendation, the Mayor and staff will develop a budget and scope for meeting the Board's recommendation, and pursue additional funding as needed.

This Board has a purview limited to filling Armory spaces, primarily through tenant selection, and financial investments in the building. The Board will refrain from direct involvement in initiating additional projects or processes unless its scope is officially amended.

## II. Armory Advisory Board Composition

### A. Membership

The Armory Advisory Board is designed to include representation of the Somerville arts community and the residential neighborhood that surrounds the Armory. In total the committee has five (5) appointed member seats with 3-year terms.

1. Three (3) representatives of the Somerville arts community

This is understood to be individuals who are producers, presenters, or curators; those that produce their own art; lead arts organizations as staff or members of nonprofit boards; or are teaching artists.

These representatives do not need to be Somerville residents as long as they are connected to the arts ecosystem in Somerville.

2. Two (2) residents of Somerville

One resident shall be a resident of Ward 3 or Ward 5.

One open resident seat.

### B. Seating Alternates.

In the case that there are insufficient applicants for any of these categories, these seats may be filled by any resident of the City of Somerville for a period of 1-year, after which additional recruitment efforts must be attempted.

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Members seated who fit the alternative member criteria will be seated for a 1-year term. A new member search will be conducted to determine if there are any new candidates that fit the listed criteria at the end of each 1-year term. If no members meeting the listed criteria are chosen after the search, then the alternative member(s) may continue to serve.

### **C. Disqualification Terms for any Member of this Board**

No member of this board may be an interested party of a tenant or applicant for tenancy in the building. This is understood to mean that advisory board members may not have a financial interest in a tenancy and may not be staff or a board member of any corporation or nonprofit organization tenanted in the building.

Immediate abutters to the property at 191 Highland Ave are also disqualified from participation as members of the Armory Advisory Board.

### **D. Member Resignation**

Any member may resign by written notice sent to the Mayor. Such notice shall be placed on file with the City Clerk and stated in the meeting of the Advisory Board meeting next following the receipt of the resignation notice.

### **E. Member Selection Process.**

The City of Somerville will advertise this opportunity within the neighborhood around the Armory and within the artistic community in Somerville. Those interested in participating will apply to the Somerville Arts Council. Applications will be reviewed by City Staff representing, at minimum, the Somerville Arts Council and Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, along with one representative of the City Council, to be selected by the City Council President. Members will be appointed by the Mayor.

Members will be considered based on their ability to support the City of Somerville in addressing the scope of work for the Board outlined in Section I. Additional backgrounds that could serve the committee well are:

1. Knowledge of arts organizations and Somerville arts ecosystem
2. Knowledge of the setting of the Armory within the Spring Hill neighborhood
3. Knowledge of multi-tenant or shared-space building dynamics
4. Knowledge of building infrastructure and capital investment

### **F. Membership Terms**

Members are selected for a 3-year term. There are no term limits. Representatives are requested to notify the Board and staff if they are no longer going to participate in the board so that a replacement can be found.



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Members serve at the pleasure of the Mayor and the Mayor may for any reason ask for the resignation of members.

### G. Officers

The Armory Advisory Board shall elect two (2) members to serve as a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson. The Chairperson is responsible for setting meeting agendas and chairing meetings of the Board. The Vice-Chair will assume the duties of the Chair when the Chairperson is unable to do so.

Board Officers shall be elected by a simple majority of the Board. The Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson shall serve a three-year term and there are no term limits.

## III. Meeting Standards

### A. Meeting Frequency

The Armory Advisory Board shall meet not less than quarterly. Meetings may need to be as frequent as weekly at times to efficiently make decisions when required.

Meetings may be held in person or remotely via video conference or teleconference, but in all cases all members must be able to participate in discussions and vote on agenda items.

### B. Standards for Agendas and Documentation

City staff will work with the Chair to develop agendas in advance and distribute reading materials with at least 5 days' notice.

There will be two distinct standards for the agendas and documentation – one for recommendations for tenant selection and one for recommendations on financial investments in the building.

#### 1. Documentation Standards for Tenant Selection Discussions

Due to the sensitive nature of these discussions concerning business practices and timelines with potential tenants, documentation for tenant selection discussions made available to the public will be limited.

Agendas for meetings in which tenant selection is the only topic will not be published.

If a meeting includes both tenant selection and investment discussions, the agenda item for tenant selection will state only “tenant selection discussion” without reference to the parties involved. This portion of the agenda will be treated as an executive session, closed to public view.

At the conclusion of the tenant selection process, final recommendations from the Advisory Board will be delivered to the Mayor and a copy of recommendations will be placed on file with the City Clerk.

## **2. Documentation Standards for Discussions of Financial Investments**

Discussions of possible investments in the Armory must be noticed on an agenda at least 2-business days in advance of the meeting.

Agendas must be distributed to all tenants by email and through the City channels for resident notifications.

These meetings will be documented and minutes will be taken. Meeting materials and minutes will be available to the public on the City website.

Quorum is defined as a majority of the membership of the Board.

To achieve the Advisory Board's objectives in a timely fashion, City staff and Board members may communicate between meetings on administrative matters (e.g., adjusting meeting times, disseminating information, following up on action items) using email and other technology. In the interest of a transparent process, communication between meetings will not include or take the place of group deliberation.

### **C. Meeting Ground Rules**

1. To facilitate an open and collaborative discussion, the members agree to abide by the following rules: Only one person will speak at a time, and no one will interrupt when another is speaking.
2. Members will refrain from speaking for other participants or on behalf of the group.
3. Members will refrain from raising their voices, making personal attacks, calling names, and other such negative behavior.
4. Members will make every effort to stay on track with the agenda and avoid grandstanding and digressions.
5. Members will make every effort to be concise and succinct in their comments and questions.
6. Members will make every effort to review available materials and documents prior to each meeting and be prepared to discuss them.

## **IV. Media and Public Communications**

Individuals are free to speak to the media (print, web, social media, radio, television, etc.) and in their own communications about the Armory in general and their personal interests, concerns, and ideas. However, because of the confidential nature of negotiations with prospective tenants,

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participants agree to hold those negotiation discussions in confidence. With respect to other matters before the board, members are asked to not speak on behalf of the board or represent another's views.

### V. Amending the By-Laws

These bylaws can be amended with prior notice of at least ten (10) business day and an affirmative vote by two-thirds of the membership of the body.



## Written Comments on the Draft Armory Master Plan

Responded at	What comments or feedback do you have on the Armory Master Plan?
2024-11-25 16:57:27 -0500	Thank you for everyone's hard work on this! My feedback is to emphasize that the dance rehearsal spaces on the 2nd and 3rd floors managed by som art are instrumental to the dance community as affordable, accessible spaces. I hope they remain an instrumental part of the plan to serve the arts and artists in this building. Thank you!
2024-11-25 17:52:13 -0500	Hello, I'm the artistic director of the two small theater companies Pazzi Lazzi Troupe and All'italiana - Boston Italian Theatre Company and we have been using the 2nd and 3rd floor for rehearsals and theater classes and labs with the purpose of gathering Italian speakers to create art and community. Our members of over 30 people are asking to keep the 2nd and 3rd floor as rehearsal spaces under the SAC/SomArt program. Thank you very much, Chiara Durazzini
2024-11-25 18:03:21 -0500	I notice this master plan does not mention the Center for the Arts at the Armory and whether their tenancy would continue. I don't know how to interpret this, or what it means for artists with events booked in 2025 and considering booking into 2026!
2024-11-25 18:06:59 -0500	Please consider keeping the 2nd and 3rd floor for as rehearsal space under the SAC/SomArt program
2024-11-25 19:14:41 -0500	I think it is important to keep the 2nd and 3rd floors as rehearsal spaces under the SAC/SomArt program. This is crucial for small arts/theater groups who need this kind of space to rehearse and continue to create their community focused artistic works
2024-11-25 19:18:06 -0500	Hello, Armory offers a fantastic venue on the 2nd and 3rd floors for our weekly theater rehearsals as part of the SAC/SomArt program. Please consider including the actively engaged artist groups in future decision-making processes 🙏.
2024-11-25 20:19:06 -0500	Please keep the 2nd and 3rd floor open as theater rehearsal room. We enjoyed so much this space!
2024-11-25 22:17:32 -0500	The Armony provides a great venue for weekly acting classes. An excellent opportunity to meet people, build relationships, and create a community with people who share a strong interest in the arts. Please consider these very special artists when making decisions about the Armony.
2024-11-25 22:48:33 -0500	Please keep 2nd and 3rd floor as rehearsal space under the SAC/SomArt program
2024-11-26 04:30:14 -0500	<p>Couldn't find specifics on key issue for local performing artists: cheap one-off rentals. What will it cost to put on a small performance? (Audience of 20 or fewer people?) right now renting cafe for an open mic, author talk, or solo performance is a rip off.</p> <p>Will you continue to discriminate against straight white artists?</p>
2024-11-26 08:46:52 -0500	Keep the 2nd and 3rd floor as a rehearsal space for the SomArt program

## Written Comments on the Draft Armory Master Plan

2024-11-26 12:20:41 -0500	This past summer we had a community space run by the Culture House that was very accessible and friendly to the community. Artist and community organizers could book for free and even receive a small stipend. I used it to do my storytelling and also community meeting for a festival preparation that took place in the Somerville Community Growing Center. Would it be possible to consider running one or two small rooms in the Armory in the same manner as how the Culture House ran their space this summer?
2024-11-27 17:49:51 -0500	I would really appreciate it if you could keep the 2nd and 3rd floors as rehearsal spaces under the SAC/SomArt program. Thank you!
2024-11-28 09:52:35 -0500	49 pages! Really?!! I couldn't get through it but I will tell you the kind of things I would like to see there. Places for meetups and classes- chi gong, yoga, line dancing, free dancing with a band or DJ w drinks like a club, ballet or modern dance, special classes for youth and seniors, lectures, live music, theater, recreational opportunities like a ping pong table, weight training, or pickleball court, cafe, bakery, cooking classes, yoga, meditation sanghas, tai chi...
2024-11-28 10:47:41 -0500	Beyond other concerns that have been voiced about the Draft Master Plan, it is stunning to me that, aside from a brief definitional comment, and unless I missed it, there is no mention of the non-profit that has been managing the Armory building since 2008, The Center for Arts at the Armory. Not even in the Building History section! Seems like a major oversight that deserves to be corrected, at the very least.
2024-11-29 19:33:11 -0500	I am very supportive of the Armory being used as an arts-focused community center, both for regular tenants, events, and small public spaces. I have heard that this plan has been in progress for some time, and that it is important to get it finalized soon. I am somewhat concerned that what I am reading here is a set of values and guidelines rather than a concrete plan.
2024-11-30 21:23:46 -0500	I'm not sure why an EV charger is needed. Unless it creates significant revenue. Encouraging EV's is great but, taxpayers shouldn't have to foot the bill for other peoples convinces. Depending on how fast these charges may be, might this impact parking? Also the plan mentions the winter farmers' market, but vey briefly, I hope the intent is to continue it in the future.
2024-12-01 15:44:16 -0500	I never knew who the previous owners were or why they were forced to sell the building. If you could provide me with that information I'd appreciate it. Thank you.
2024-12-01 20:30:14 -0500	Seems like a great plan all around!
2024-12-03 09:02:20 -0500	The 2nd and 3rd floor rehearsal spaces at The Armory run by SomArts are a vital resource for my dance company. They are affordable and well run, and our favorite place to rehearse as a group. With so many dance spaces closing since the pandemic, SomArts spaces have been a beacon for the dance community - please keep them as part of The Armory master plan!

## Written Comments on the Draft Armory Master Plan

2024-12-03 11:26:19 -0500	I strongly urge a multi-year contract for Center for the Arts at the Armory to manage the building. Strongly oppose the continued delays by the city.
2024-12-03 14:45:47 -0500	I am disappointed, very disappointed. The city has demonstrated no respect for community feedback.
2024-12-03 15:07:06 -0500	<p>Thanks for your work on saving the Armory and building its future for Somerville! After a quick read through, I encourage you to consider use by families and particularly children. The word "art" is used 269 times in the document. The words "Family" "child" "kid" are used zero times. In Somerville and the broader area, children's art classes can run over \$30 per child per class (see Backyardartists and Ready Set Kids), making it tragically unaffordable once you have two kids, especially when you consider this on top of the already astronomical costs of childcare. It would be great to have family-focused space and programming. You may also draw inspiration from the Cambridge Public Library HIVE maker space. Thank you for your time and attention. Have a good day!</p> <p>Amy Sterling Mom of 2 young girls in Davis Square</p>
2024-12-03 16:01:54 -0500	<p>Considering that the City will own and manage the Armory for some time, I did not see any reference to the Constitutional problems that could arise. As a public entity, the City will be overseeing the selection of tenants and, perhaps indirectly, performers, all of whom are engaged in "speech" activities within the meaning of the First Amendment. Does the City have a plan to educate the Armory staff and advisors on their responsibilities under that Amendment? The two "case studies" offer no guidance, as they seem to be operated by private organizations.</p>
2024-12-05 08:37:22 -0500	<p>I participated in theater group on the second and third floor. The availability of this space was invaluable to the group. It afforded us a space to create community, and also brought me to the armory which connected me to all the wonderful arts thriving there as well as the diverse communities that have found a home. I hope the rehearsal spaces at the Armory continue to be part of the future of the armory.</p>
2024-12-05 11:44:49 -0500	<p>Any plan that allows access to arts centered citizens is incredible. I feel seen and cared for as a Somervillian when I see the city make plans to keep this going for many years to come.</p> <p>As it stands, being able to have a space to do my work at the tenant SOMArts- as a movement artist- is not a given in every city. In addition the physical research, the practice, the training, the collaborating that I do is largely unseen, but is essential to produce work that generates thought, revenue, new communities etc. Someone in the city ranks gets that this resource is needed and it is so refreshing. I support a plan that sees the value in resources similar to this for all art forms.</p> <p>I appreciate that the city is looking to pass the governance on to a board that is not city related. I believe it is wise to give governance to the group of people it is supposed to serve.</p> <p>I appreciate so much the long and hard work that the city has been engaged in to get to this point. Thank you for taking in the full picture slowly and taking a direction with this plan.</p>



## Written Comments on the Draft Armory Master Plan

2024-12-06 16:12:44 -0500	How in heaven's name has the city come back with THIS, after 3.5 years? A plan which bears the greatest resemblance to one that has been overwhelmingly rejected, twice, in public hearings? A plan which provides absolutely no details? My organization has rented space from the CAA nonprofit for many years, and while our relationship has not been perfect, I can say that, administratively, the CAA nonprofit has always been clear with us, and provided us with timely feedback and guidance - the exactly opposite of what the City of Somerville is doing here. The plan the city has proposed is a recipe for delay, an almost-guarantee that the building will be wasted. I am deeply, deeply disappointed at the fecklessness that the City of Somerville has exhibited here.
2024-12-06 18:53:02 -0500	I don't think the city should have control over the nonprofit and it should be able to operate independently without an advisory or oversight board.
2024-12-07 12:03:49 -0500	I think you all did a fantastic job on this project so far. Kudos to all the hard work and I look forward to seeing the end result. I am the mother of two elementary aged kids in the SPS system. Neither of my kids got into after school. Maybe the armory could host some after school activities or clubs?
2024-12-08 12:14:17 -0500	The Armory Master Plan seems like a sound and well thought out step forward. Having a support of the city to provide subsidized art space for local artists is essential in keeping the arts community thriving. As a 4 year renter of the arts space, Continuum Dance Project, could not be where we are today without rental space at the Armory. The plan addresses long term financial needs and scaffolding to support the building with inflation. Not having to fundraise as a non-profit will allow staff to focus on the longevity of the work done in the building and supporting the community as a whole. We are in support if this plan!
2024-12-10 08:13:07 -0500	I am generally in favor of the current Master Plan for the Armory. I know that many people have been working diligently for years to put the Armory on a sustainable path. I am particularly pleased by the intention to have city staff gradually transition management of the armory to an independent body. I think this will be among the more challenging aspects of the plan, and I hope that residents and stakeholders stay engaged so that this plan can be carried out successfully. [Tom Scahill, 24 Bolton St., 3R]
2024-12-10 09:13:31 -0500	I'm excited to be part of the Armory's future. I'm calling a coalition of groups including Somerville's Poet Laureate, Lloyd Schwartz, Ibbetson Press, Cervana Barva Press, Bagel Bards, and New England Poetry Club to form a Poet's Haven at the Armory. Many Somervillans sit on the board of NEPC which has no home. A space would provide so much to us and we, in turn, would add to the vibrancy of the Armory. Linda Conte
2024-12-10 10:05:48 -0500	I am extremely concerned about the Armory Master Plan, I have lived within walking distance of the armory for the past three years and I have come to attend events there regularly. As a performing artist, I have also performed in shows at the armory. Arts at the Armory has created a wonderful space for local art to thrive, as well as brought amazing touring artists right to Somerville (which is particularly needed as many of the small live music venues have closed down since the pandemic). I do not see how city control of the space via a new non-profit would improve upon it, as the Armory currently exists it is a massive boon to the local arts

## Written Comments on the Draft Armory Master Plan

	community. I would like to know what exactly the city plans to improve upon at the armory in regards to supporting the local art scene that is so vital to Somerville.
2024-12-10 11:26:56 -0500	Arts at the Armory have done a remarkable job of producing programs that serve all of Somerville: concerts, art exhibits, the annual Somerville Open Studios Community Space, farmers' markets, small business markets, and more. The city should give Arts at the Armory a long-term lease that will let them stably plan for the future, and should do nothing that could threaten to displace this vital organization.
2024-12-10 11:27:36 -0500	Arts at the Armory have done a remarkable job of producing programs that serve all of Somerville: concerts, art exhibits, the annual Somerville Open Studios Community Space, farmers' markets, small business markets, and more. The city should give Arts at the Armory a long-term lease that will let them stably plan for the future, and should do nothing that could threaten to displace this vital organization. -- Ron Newman, 18 Day St #310, Somerville MA 02144
2024-12-10 12:59:26 -0500	From the plan: "The City can seek to create a non-profit corporation to govern the Armory". This is ridiculous. We already have one. Arts At the Armory. The city doesn't need to do anything except support the structure that already exists.
2024-12-10 13:32:00 -0500	The Armory master plan should consider the needs of Somerville's large and growing poetry community. Providing a space for the Somerville Poet Laureate to meet with constituents for individual advice or group workshops. Provide a much needed space for the New England Poetry Club, or a local space for Mass Poetry. These are important needs that the Armory could easily fulfill. Thank you, Lloyd Schwartz, Somerville Poet Laureate
2024-12-10 17:54:37 -0500	The Arts at the Armory organization is a vital part of the Somerville community. The Armory Master Plan does not recognize the urgency of providing the Arts at the Armory organization with a lease for at least one year. It is beyond appalling to provide a vague plan to make a committee to make decisions instead of acting crisply to fix the current lack of stability and with respect for the people who have been doing the hard work of centering the Armory to meet community needs.
2024-12-10 18:24:29 -0500	The Non-Profit org Center for Arts at the Armory has been maintaining the facilities and Performance hall - as well as the Lavender Room. I work there as a promoter and the staff there is amazing. We would be concerned and it would be extremely unfortunate to lose this org as it is tied in to our ability to do shows there. The team has come back strong since COVID and improved the facilities , stage, and video. There are fewer stages around town to do shows at - and Arts at The Armory is a valued asset to our business and growth. - Clay Fernald, Bill Blumenreich Presents, LeaguePodcast. Boston Resident, 336 Faneuil St Brighton

## Written Comments on the Draft Armory Master Plan

2024-12-10 18:30:46 -0500	I think it is vital that whatever plan is implemented includes the leadership and programming of the Center for Arts at the Armory. They have made the Armory the vital, exciting, accessible place for arts and community that it is: the programming that comes in is diverse and exciting; everyone loves the winter farmer's market; they have improved the space; and through their POP program they make it possible for non-profits and community organizations to utilize the performance space at a fair price. That is invaluable. I'm sorry, but I don't see the city being able to do this better. Or at all. And I wouldn't want us losing this incredible org to another city while we try to create a replacement non-profit from scratch. I feel like it would be a loss to the community as well as a huge step backwards.
2024-12-10 20:22:30 -0500	Please don't turn this into a city space, the people in this area need a place for art. Keep the armory building an arts community.
2024-12-10 20:51:24 -0500	The Center for Arts at the Armory needs to be part of the master plan. They are an essential organization for Somerville and, as a resident, I get so much out of their work. I urge the city to give them a stable lease and to do necessary maintenance on the building so they can keep putting on amazing shows. I invite other residents and people from out of town to join me for their shows. If we lost them, Somerville would really be diminished.
2024-12-10 22:08:38 -0500	When something is working and it's good, you reinforce it, you don't replace it. Michael Raskin, 39 years at 16 Ivaloo St, Somerville  Please don't waste time reinventing the wheel. Paula Garbarino, 50 years at 16 Ivaloo St, Somerville
2024-12-11 06:47:01 -0500	Arts at the Armory is such an important space for a variety of cultural and community building events. The city should maintain the building and allow Arts at the Armory to have full autonomy over the space, while renting it at a price that is sustainable for Arts at the Armory.

## Written Comments on the Draft Armory Master Plan

<p>2024-12-11 07:21:13 -0500</p>	<p>Thank you for taking the time to read and review feedback on the Armory Master Plan. I have attended many community meetings and feedback sessions over the past several years, and I was frustrated to see so little of the community's input reflected in the Draft Armory Master Plan. Time and again, the community has said clearly that the City of Somerville should <i>*not*</i> be responsible for the operations of the Armory building, yet the Plan calls for the creation of a City-controlled Armory Advisory Board that will eventually lead to a non-profit organization or a quasi-municipal trust. There are no plans to finance this advisory board, but the work of the proposed board would be enormous and require professional expertise to perform well. The Armory is too important a resource to the arts community to be operated by part-time volunteers. It needs and deserves the focused attention of paid professionals with the expertise to do the job correctly.</p> <p>It also seems to me that the draft master plan is calling for the reinvention of the wheel. A non-profit organization with exactly the required expertise already exists and has said time and again that it is willing to take on the work of operating the Armory building. Arts at the Armory has proven itself as a faithful and crucial partner to the arts here in Somerville and is ready and qualified to do the work that is needed.</p> <p>Finally, I'm deeply concerned that the matter of rent has still not been adequately addressed, leaving the tenants in limbo.</p> <p>I strongly urge you to reconsider the direction proposed in the Draft Master Plan.</p> <p>Best, Ellen Waylonis</p> <p>Co-Owner &amp; CEO, Esh Circus Arts Founding Member, Circus 617 Founding Member, Boston Circus Guild</p>
<p>2024-12-11 08:24:27 -0500</p>	<p>Be better landlords to your current tenants! This is a wonderful space, don't f      it up.</p>



## Written Comments on the Draft Armory Master Plan

<p>2024-12-11 18:32:43 -0500</p>	<p>Dear City Councilors,</p> <p>My name is Brenna Banister, and I live at 70 Northampton Street Boston, MA. I am a SomArt artist who has had the privilege of rehearsing on the second and third floors of the Somerville Armory as part of the SomArt program, run by the Somerville Arts Council.</p> <p>The dance group I founded, Alive Dance Collective, rehearses at the SomArt Armory space at least once a week (sometimes more) during our regular season. Having a reliable, easy-to-book, and financially viable space to hold rehearsal is rare. As a contemporary dance group of adults, our dancers and admin team have full-time jobs (most outside of the arts), families, and very full lives outside of our rehearsals. This space allows us to come together to share dance with each other and our community. SomArts at the Armory's space is an integral part to our company's functioning, including rehearsals, producing shows, and creating community workshops.</p> <p>The rehearsal spaces at the Armory have been vital to my work as a performing artist. These shared spaces provide not just an affordable place to create but also a supportive environment where collaboration thrives. The resources and infrastructure—such as sound systems and clean, open floors—allow me and many others to focus on our creative processes without the added burden of managing operational challenges. I fully support the Master Plan in its current form. It thoughtfully balances governance, operations, and programming to create a sustainable framework that ensures the Armory remains an accessible and equitable hub for artists and community members alike. By distributing responsibilities and leveraging the City's support, the plan reduces strain on individual tenants, enabling them to prioritize their missions and programming—which is what ultimately impacts the people of Somerville the most.</p> <p>As a performing artist, I deeply appreciate how the Master Plan addresses the unique needs of sectors like mine. Dance and performance often rely on shared space models that foster accessibility for both creators and audiences. Programs like SomArt, which lower the cost of rehearsal space, are central to this ecosystem. Without them, the financial barriers to production—already significant—would be even more difficult to overcome. The current plan strengthens this vital infrastructure, making it possible for artists like me to bring our work to life and share it with the community.</p> <p>I am excited to see how the Armory will evolve as a cultural cornerstone under this thoughtful plan. Thank you for your efforts to prioritize the arts and for considering the needs of artists and audiences alike.</p> <p>Sincerely, Brenna Banister Alive Dance Collective Artistic Director</p>
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## Written Comments on the Draft Armory Master Plan

<p>2024-12-11 19:53:53 -0500</p>	<p>I attended last nights public forum in hopes of further understanding the conflict I know to exist about the Armory Master Plan. Though I believe that the community members and those who wanted to say their piece were asked to voice those words in the making of the Master Plan, I still believe that the majority of those words were ignored. The main concern I heard raised was the existence of the plan in general. I heard multiple "if it's not broken why fix it" statements and I can't help agree. The statement "Somerville Armory Master Plan is a roadmap of how to best preserve the Armory building as a thriving arts center for years to come." confuses me for the Center for Arts at the Armory is already do this very thing. The factor that seems to be getting in the way most prominently is the looming government involvement and this Master Plan. If the city of Somerville intends to be a place/city that listens to its community members (which I deeply hope it tries to be) than it needs to know when it is not needed. I hope the city (and specifically the group in charge of the arts) can focus its attention on the many other avenues I know exist and need attention much more than an already thriving community staple. Know your place, providing help to those who aren't asking for it is not help.</p>
<p>2024-12-13 15:11:49 -0500</p>	<p>I am advocating for the following changes to the plan: Include a section in the plan that acknowledges the current tenants in the Somerville Armory, and their work. This section should also set forth a short term plan and timeline for the current tenants (the next 6-12 months) that affirms the following: the RFP process will begin before June 30, 2025; leases will be issued before the end of 2025; the City will redouble efforts in the day-to-day management and upkeep of the building and grounds. Stipulate that the anchor tenant in the Somerville Armory can be selected to participate in the Armory Advisory Board. The Armory Advisory Board would not therefore be the author or arbiter of the RFP. The City of Somerville would do that. Stipulate that an existing non-profit organization could perform future Armory governance. Remove the idea of a quasi-municipal trust performing future Armory governance. Stipulate that the Armory Advisory Board does not need to be in place in order to start the RFP process.</p>
<p>2024-12-13 15:34:17 -0500</p>	<p>Please allow the current tenants to remain as an interictal part of The Armory management and Advisory Board , Arts at the Armory has hosted 2 x recitals per year for Guitar Stop students since 2016. Arts at the Armory is a very important asset to the community of Cambridge and Somerville. Jeanne Oster proprietor Guitar Stop Cambridge MA</p>

## Written Comments on the Draft Armory Master Plan

<p>2024-12-15 07:37:57 -0500</p>	<p>I believe that the city should include a section in the plan that acknowledges the current tenants in the Somerville Armory, and their work. This section should also set forth a short term plan and timeline for the current tenants (the next 6-12 months) that affirms the following: the RFP process will begin before June 30, 2025; leases will be issued before the end of 2025; the City will redouble efforts in the day-to-day management and upkeep of the building and grounds.</p> <p>The anchor tenant in the Somerville Armory can be selected to participate in the Armory Advisory Board. The Armory Advisory Board would not therefore be the author or arbiter of the RFP. The City of Somerville would do that.</p> <p>I believe that an existing non-profit organization could/should perform future Armory governance.</p> <p>Please remove the idea of a quasi-municipal trust performing future Armory governance.</p> <p>It should be stipulated that the Armory Advisory Board does not need to be in place in order to start the RFP process.</p> <p>Thank you for your consideration of my comments. Martha Cleveland 144 Morrison Avenue</p>
<p>2024-12-16 20:51:39 -0500</p>	<p>I am not affiliated with Center for Arts of the Armory (CAA) nor am I an artist but I have greatly enjoyed a variety of arts and cultural events at the Armory and feel strongly that this facility and the programming organized by CAA has become a very important part of Somerville. I read the Master Plan. I understand the concept of creating a plan that allows for changing community needs and encompasses more voices than the players we have at the table but I am very disappointed about where this plan leaves us at this point, years into the planning process. The recommendations seem very vague. By recommending an advisory board of 5 people, without even defining who would select these members, it feels like yet another delay to forward progress.</p> <p>It's also surprising that the Master Plan doesn't acknowledge all the work that CAA has accomplished over the years they have been the anchor tenant. I have participated in several public meetings regarding the future of the Armory and I have seen how the community appreciates what CAA has brought to Somerville. If there is a legal reason CAA cannot be a part of the planning process, that should explicitly be stated. I am very concerned that CAA has not been granted at least a year lease (ideally two year) in order for them to continue operating at the Armory. Given how long this process has taken, if we lose CAA, I have little faith that the City or a new advisory board will be able to effectively manage the transition to a new governance structure.</p> <p>I watched the video of the Finance Committee meeting on Dec. 10 and saw again how overwhelmingly positive the sentiment is toward the CAA. It would be an incredible loss to Somerville if they find a different home that is more stable.</p>

## Written Comments on the Draft Armory Master Plan

	<p>I also appreciate the Somerville Arts Council and love so many of the events that they sponsor. But why give them so much power in determining what happens with the Armory?</p> <p>It sounded like there were other management options raised at the December 10 meeting, such as what is used by the Somerville Media Center, that need to be explored.</p> <p>Lori Segall, 25 Cherry St.</p>
2024-12-17 16:59:04 -0500	Please keep the Armory as community centered as possible <3
2024-12-17 18:11:04 -0500	<p>Please acknowledge and support the organizations and tenants that are already in the Armory, doing the work, creating wonderful arts and culture programming (Arts at the Armory), and teaching music (Acoustic Strings of New England). It seems like this plan ignores the very people it's aiming to support in favor of some ideal future tenants and leadership. Please financially subsidize the arts in this space so the Armory can truly thrive. The arts have intangible community benefits, which may not make them financially sustainable, but it makes life in Somerville worth living. If the city truly supports arts and culture and wants to keep it a vibrant arts-filled place, you have to support the artists, who are on the brink of being pushed out, with public funds. The arts are a public good and should be honored as such. Without civic money going to help keep existing creative individuals and organizations in the city, verbal "support" for the arts in Somerville is meaningless.</p>
2024-12-19 11:06:39 -0500	<p>Thank you for letting us comment. My first impression is concern about the Advisory Board. The description is a blend of advisory plus operations. It's not a great mix, as some operations (tenant selection, public meetings, etc. You need someone who will oversee these on a day-to-day basis. I've never seen advisory groups work well when overseeing operations, as they often overreach or underreach. Consider separating these roles! The chief tenant or manager of the facility should take on the organizing of these or you may have deadlock over and over. The advisory board can be part of the final decision, but someone has to organize the work and make a first-pass recommendation.</p> <p>I approve of using case studies to gather and test ideas. And yet, the selections and conclusions made are concerning. They should not be used a proof of concept for the Armory, as all arts organizations have different funders, community members, and community needs. The Concord Arts Center is successful because you pay for classes, which take up space on an ongoing basis and not allowing for much else. The Armory is not suited to that. Is this what you aspire to?</p> <p>As a Somerville resident, I want more arts space and support from the City, yet hope that this particular space can be use for arts and culture, and not narrowly focused on creating art. I suggest you find another location - old post office in union square? that is more suitable. Then, you can have classes, rent space to artists, and create a gallery for sales.</p>



## Written Comments on the Draft Armory Master Plan

	<p>The recommendations listed are all very vague, more goals than a specific plan. The goals should be narrowed down and made more realistic for the space. I also appreciate what is there now, so also want to know what you think needs changing.</p>
<p>2024-12-20 15:09:33 -0500</p>	<p>Dear Office of Strategic Planning and Economic Development , City of Somerville Elected Officials and Administrators, and Members of and Arts Council:</p> <p>Congratulations on your Masterplan for the Armory. You are tackling a big set of variables and potentialities for a really big and cool building. We, the local artists, are so grateful.</p> <p>I am the organizer of a twice-a-year, free, all-day experimental performance series, the THANG series, which has taken place in Somerville for 15 years. THANGsgiving is the day after Thanksgiving: goodTHANG on Good Friday/First night of Passover Friday, in March/April. We are more than 200 artists from Boston and the Northeast who come together, roughly forty at a time, to present work to each other and the public. The event has always been free, and all donations go in full toward renting your amazing spaces. We held our THANGs at Center for the Arts at the Armory, then once at SomArt @ the Armory, and now have twice been at SomArt @ the Hive. Some of us also rehearse at the SomArt spaces.</p> <p>We will continue to bring our best work and energy to your performance spaces, and we hope to see you there.</p> <p>Paul Kafka-Gibbons founder, THANG series</p>
<p>2025-01-03 10:11:53 -0500</p>	<p>I am a long time resident of Somerville who loves and utilizes the Armory on a consistent basis. It is an essential part of Somerville and provides fantastic cultural events as well as a much needed third place. Please support the armory with a long term lease so that they can continue to be an important mainstay in the community</p>

## Written Comments on the Draft Armory Master Plan

<p>2025-01-03 10:24:45 -0500</p>	<p>We are advocating that the City administrators revise the Armory Master Plan Draft so that 1) the Plan can ideally be approved by City Council at a TBD January meeting 2) the approval of the Plan will lead to the start of the RFP Process asap and 3) Arts at the Armory can respond to the RFP and secure a long-term lease on the Performance Hall, the Café, B5, and any other spaces in the Armory building that we wish to bid on.</p> <p>We are advocating that the City making the following revisions to the Draft:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Include a section in the plan that acknowledges the current tenants in the Somerville Armory, and their work. This section should also set forth a short term plan and timeline for the current tenants (the next 6-12 months) that affirms the following: the RFP process will begin before June 30, 2025; leases will be issued before the end of 2025; the City will redouble efforts in the day-to-day management and upkeep of the building and grounds.</li> <li>-Stipulate that the Five Person Advisory Board will only be involved in advising City administration in the RFP process to dispose of Armory properties, and will not be involved in future Armory governance.</li> <li>-Stipulate that an existing non-profit organization could perform future Armory governance.</li> <li>-Provide more practical information about the quasi-municipal trust option performing future Armory governance. What is a projected pathway and timeline for this? How is it similar to how the Somerville Media Center functioned?</li> </ul>
<p>2025-01-03 10:25:34 -0500</p>	<p>I am writing to support the amendments to the Armory Master Plan proposed by Arts @ the Armory as it is critical to maintain this facility as a thriving place for the arts and more, which includes the winter farmers' market. As a resident of Cambridge, I am also writing to let you know that this resource is utilized by residents of the Greater Boston area, which brings positive publicity and an economic benefit to the city, such as patronizing local restaurants if people are going to an event there. I urge you to make the decisions to keep the Arts @ the Armory possible. The model being proposed has worked well, such as The Foundry in Cambridge where the city owns the facility but it is managed by a non-profit. Thanks for your consideration — Norma Wassel</p>
<p>2025-01-04 06:39:30 -0500</p>	<p>I really love and appreciate the services the armory provides including the cafe, many community events, farmers market, performances, etc. I am concerned that the Armory is not on board with the master plan - they seem like a key stakeholder as they've been successfully running it for years.</p>
<p>2025-01-04 13:03:49 -0500</p>	<p>Please stay, it's such an asset to the community and needs to be preserved.</p>