

From: Alison Drasner
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Subject: Somerville Museum Block Party Event

Dear City Council Members,

We wanted to take a moment and explain the importance of the event for which we've requested a special event license. The event is titled, 'Your Neighbor is a Museum' Block Party, scheduled for Saturday, 9/18 from 3-7pm. This event will serve as both a fundraiser for the Access for All & More Campaign as well as an opening reception for the exhibition, Penny Chronicles and the Stories They Tell.

Why a Block Party?

The Somerville Museum has been around for over 100 years. Yet, despite years of promotion and outreach, there are still many residents who don't know that we exist. After being closed for more than a year because of the pandemic we've struggled to find opportunities to interact with the public in person. While we can, and will, invite visitors indoors to view the current exhibition, we're limited to how many people we can comfortably and safely host indoors. Not to mention, many people are still not comfortable being indoors with others. Having an outdoor event, near the Museum, is essential to not only interacting with the community but raising the awareness of all the programs and events that we offer with the primary purpose of promoting the history, art, and culture of Somerville. We came up with the title, "Your Neighbor is a Museum" Block Party to highlight the fact that we are all residents' neighborhood museum - and a resident ourselves of Westwood Road. We want everyone to feel comfortable visiting us and benefit from our programs. We have a wide-ranging list of programs from supporting local artists (Somerville Open Studios and Community Curator Program, local students (The Basement Project and the Somernova Art Project), to immigrants (Voices from Somerville), and many others.

Months ago, when we started the planning process, we reached out to neighbor Heather Thompson Brenner who owns both #2 and #17 Westwood Road. We asked her opinion of this type of event and if she would be interested in taking part in the planning process. She enthusiastically agreed and then reached out to all the neighbors individually to talk with them about the idea of the event. At that time, there were no complaints made known to us. We continued to plan, submit the license request, follow all the rules, etc. When we hand delivered invitations to all the neighbors explaining the event we received an email from neighbor Marjie Alonso a few days later on August 30. She wrote that she was happy that the construction project was coming to fruition and wished us luck with our fundraising efforts. Her concern was primarily her ability to enter in and out of her driveway to take care of her father. Heather Thompson Brenner immediately responded to her concern and then we responded via email as well. There would be no issue - we don't plan on using much of the street and will be happy to accommodate. She also expressed a question about why we're phrasing it as a "Block Party" when no neighbors were involved. Which is untrue. Heather has been involved since the beginning and all were invited to participate.

I live on the corner of Central Street and Hudson Street and have for about 12 years. About 6 years ago I applied for a license to hold a Block Party on Hudson Street. I didn't know a lot of neighbors and mostly planned the event myself. Not only was it a huge success, but after the first event others wanted to be involved and 6 years later I can call my neighbors good friends. We also attract residents from other neighborhoods and it's become a connector of sorts between us all. These types of events only happen when someone initiates them.

Why a Fundraiser?

The Access for All & More Campaign is a campaign raising money to complete our current construction project. The construction project will make the Museum ADA compliant with the addition of an elevator, ADA bathrooms, and other upgrades. Everything we do is for the community. This project is no different. Not only do we want to open up the Museum to those who previously weren't able to access it, but by becoming ADA compliant we'll be eligible for more grant funds to support programs and staff. It's important to host an in-person fundraiser now that we're nearing the end of the project so that people can actually "see" the project, the process, and ask us

questions about what it will accomplish. But, this event isn't just a fundraiser. It's also meant as a reception for our exhibition, Penny Chronicles and the Stories They Tell, which opens today (Thursday, 9/9). We're not yet comfortable having a traditional reception where we promote and welcome many visitors in the space given the pandemic. Lastly, a Block Party event will help us attract neighbors from Westwood Road, surrounding streets, and hopefully some other surrounding neighborhoods helping us to raise awareness of the Museum in the community.

Other Notes

While we were advised to request that the whole of Westwood Road be blocked off, we do not plan to use the whole street. Like any other Block Party event we plan to accommodate neighbors as much as we can. And, of course we would never tow any cars, which we know at least one neighbor was concerned about. While we understand that the neighbors have dealt with construction for months, a lot of that construction is city/street related and our project only occasionally needed to block the street. But, of course, we are sympathetic to the inconvenience of construction and have been working through it ourselves. However, like any Block Party, we'll be putting up no parking signs as recommended by the City and hope that neighbors won't park on the street or will take the time of the event into consideration. But more than anything, we hope they'll join us for the festivities. Unfortunately, it is our belief that many neighbors harbor resentment for the construction project and the ADA additions to the building for various reasons. This is a very necessary project and one that has been in the works for years. Again, everything we do is for the betterment of the community. It's our hope that they can put these negative feelings aside to support us as we continue to provide for our community.

There have been many challenges faced throughout this pandemic. At a time when many artists are being forced out of the city and organizations face difficulties to survive, it's more important than ever for our city leaders to support cultural institutions that help make Somerville unique and special.

Thank you for your consideration,

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