

REIMAGINING COMMUNITY SAFETY IN SOMERVILLE



**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCIDENT PREVENTION,
INTERVENTION, AND RESPONSE**



PRODUCED BY THE SOMERVILLE TROTTER COLLABORATIVE TEAM

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Executive Summary

Although the City of Somerville has engaged in efforts to reform policing, opportunities remain to reimagine public safety more broadly through improving incident prevention, alternative intervention, and holistic response.

As students in the MLD-375: Creating Justice in Real Time: Vision, Strategies, and Campaigns class at the Harvard Kennedy School, we worked in partnership with our teaching team, the William Monroe Trotter Collaborative for Social Justice, and the City of Somerville to develop this report, which aims to inform the City's efforts to reimagine policing and emergency response. Our findings are based on interviews conducted with community members and City officials as well as our analyses of existing literature and available City data. Regarding safety, we found that the

City lacks robust systems to prevent and address harms to resident safety and wellbeing, including accessible and adequate affordable housing, comprehensive healthcare (especially mental health services), and strong systems of community support. Regarding policing, many residents (especially those who identify as persons of color, immigrants, or those who are mentally ill or have substance use disorders) have had at least some negative interaction with police or avoided calling the police due to fear of a violent response. Other findings include that the City lacks effective non-police responses to non-violent incidents, diverse representation at the City and crucial decision making tables, and

transparency and accountability for the City generally and the Somerville Police Department (SPD) specifically. Our recommendations comprise different aims that the City should pursue in achieving these goals, including:

- **Dedicating sufficient resources to the community to foster safety,**
- Developing a consolidated and publicly available map of community assets,
- **Restructuring Somerville's 911 and dispatch procedures,**
- Implementing applicable alternative intervention and holistic response programming,
- **Improving the City and SPD's data transparency practices**
- Accelerating progress towards more diverse representation at the City, and
- **Clarifying the authority of the new Racial and Social Justice Director**

We share in our recommendations existing programs throughout the country that tackle issues of incident prevention, alternative intervention, and holistic response that we believe the City could consider adopting to improve its own policies and programming, as well as other best practice recommendations.



City of Somerville. (2017). [The Wellbeing of Somerville Report].
<https://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/wellbeing-of-somerville-report-2017.pdf>

Background

In this section, we provide a brief explanation of our partnership with the City, an overview of the scope and methodology of our report, and an analysis of the factors - past and present - that should be considered when evaluating public safety in Somerville.

How This Research Came About...

Through the MLD 375¹ course at the Harvard Kennedy School, we worked with community organizations, staff of the William Monroe Trotter Collaborative for Social Justice, and government stakeholders in the City of Somerville to reimagine policing and emergency response. Our team developed this report to uplift the visions of community residents and provide City officials with specific plans and strategies for them to consider when improving public safety in Somerville. Our team is from different schools across Harvard University, including Harvard College, Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard Law School, and the Harvard Chan School of Public Health. Our goal for this report is to provide context and

understanding to help the City reimagine community safety broadly through the lens of incident prevention, alternative intervention, and holistic response.

Scope

This report includes a review and analysis of policing and emergency response in the City of Somerville from conversations conducted with a diverse group of City and community stakeholders. The report's scope centers specifically on efforts led by the Mayor's Office and other City departments. The Somerville City Council and their work on civilian oversight was expressly not included in our purview. This project does not include an evaluation of the Somerville Fire Department. We also

did not speak with representatives from the police union, though efforts were made to contact them. All recommendations and analyses provided in this report are from our own findings (outside of brief mentions of the City's community listening sessions) and are completely independent from the work being conducted by the City of Somerville.

Methodology

Below we share the methodology we used to produce this research and provide our recommendations.



Document and Data Review

City budgets: We used multiple sources of information to analyze City budget data for FY2021, specifically: 1) The City of Somerville website, including the Mayor's presentation of these data; 2) Conversations with City staff, including Budget Manager Michael Mastrobuoni; and 3) Budget reports from four additional cities for comparable data, including: Malden, Fall River, New Bedford, and Lawrence.

Police dispatch policies: Our team spoke with a Somerville 911 dispatcher, who outlined the basic structure of a call for service in Somerville and provided significant context surrounding the dispatch process in Somerville. We also reviewed SPD policies related to dispatch and communications and reviewed best practices from dispatch literature.²

Police data: The City of Somerville provided our team with a dataset of police incident data from January 1, 2016, through October 25, 2020.

It included breakdowns by incident data and type. A Senior Crime Analyst for SPD cleaned and organized this data for us and categorized it into five broad categories: Incident Response, Proactive Enforcement, Proactive Engagement, Traffic/Motor Vehicle Enforcement, and Traffic Incident Response. Our team based our conclusions on our own categorization of these incident classifications as well. We acknowledge that there are limitations in our analysis because the labels were assigned by Somerville 911 dispatchers that tagged the incidents based on initial information obtained from callers. As such, incidents may have evolved and changed from the code initially assigned. For our analysis, we organized and reviewed incident classifications into their relevant sub-categories (see Appendix A).

Community Listening Sessions: On November 13, 2020, two members of the Trotter Collaborative team attended the reflection event of the ten Systemic Racism Listening

Sessions held by the City of Somerville from July through October 2020.

Though we can't go into specific participant identities, comments, or experiences due to concerns about confidentiality, our team received permission to reference their recommendations in this report.

Public Hearings: We reviewed the audio from the public comment hearing on the FY2021 budget held by the City on June 24, 2020, as well as the accompanying written public comments.

Interviews

We conducted interviews with two groups of respondents: 1) service providers and community organizations including justice advocacy groups, and 2) Somerville municipal department staff.



Community organizations and service providers: Though comprising a small proportion of all the community organizations and service providers engaged in the issues of public health and safety in Somerville, the thirteen organizations we interviewed shared a diverse range of perspectives and included some of the largest community-based organizations in Somerville. These interviews explored perspectives on community safety, the reimagining of policing, and areas of improvement for the City in promoting racial and social justice and supporting the Somerville community broadly. Interviewees included: six service providers, four community-based organizations, and three justice advocacy groups.

Interviews with City departments: Over the course of our collaboration with the City, project liaison Christine Koh connected us with 20 representatives from nine different City departments and sub-departments:

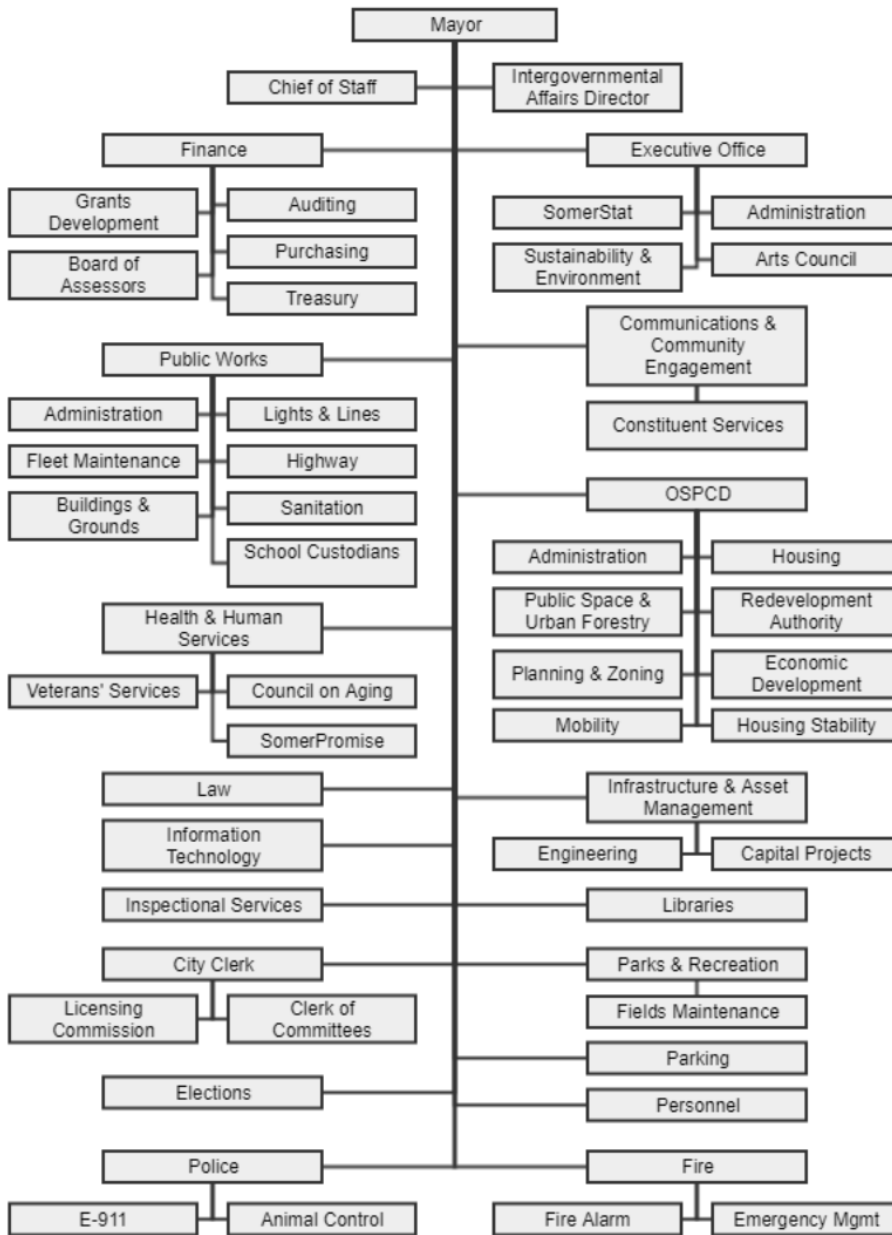
1) the Mayor's Office; 2) SPD; 3) Office of Immigrant Affairs (OIA); 4) Public Information; 5) Community Outreach Help and Recovery (COHR, part of SPD); 6) Health and Human Services (HHS); 7) Budget Management; 8) Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; and 9) Somerville 911 (part of SPD).

We spoke with representatives from these departments about the work they do and their perspectives on community safety and reimagining policing in Somerville.

Observation of community listening session review: As mentioned above, two members of the Trotter



City of Somerville. (2017). [The Wellbeing of Somerville Report]. <https://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/wellbeing-of-somerville-report-2017.pdf>



City staff, service providers, parents, seniors, and students. Mayor Curtatone and some City Councilors listened in on these sessions, and some were facilitated by community liaisons from the OIA. While the purpose was to “educate policy makers... about the needs and concerns of residents closest to the pain [and] experiencing systemic racism in the City,” our team received permission to consider the session recommendations in this report given their relevance to and overlap with our own.

Collaborative team attended the reflection event in November that summarized the City's findings from listening sessions they held during the last few months. These sessions included 70 participants in total and involved communities of color, immigrant communities, business owners, faith leaders,

Current National and Local Context

In the City of Somerville, local residents came together to hold protests and vigils following George Floyd's murder in May 2020. As of November 8, 2020, the Washington Post found that police have killed 977 people this year alone and 5,750 since 2015. Of those killed this year, 28% of them were Black - despite Black people only making up 13% of the country's population. In response to the deaths of George Floyd and countless others, more than 600 people came to the Somerville Finance Committee's FY21 proposed budget meeting on June 24th.³ Of the 151 of those who spoke, 148 spoke in support of defunding the police department and reinvesting those funds into housing, education, and other public services. Many of those speakers said they were signatories of a Defund SPD petition to defund the police department that had more than 4,000 signatures. Another

Of the 151 of those who spoke, 148 spoke in support of defunding the police department and reinvesting those funds into housing, education, and other public services.

almost 300 public comments were also submitted, all of which supported these reinvestments in lieu of the city's focus on #8Can'tWait reforms. In many ways, the City of Somerville has indicated an interest in making changes and investments to emergency response and community safety. On June 3, 2020, Mayor Curtatone announced that the City of Somerville would "continue ongoing efforts to deliver just, unbiased, and compassionate policing to the community via a number of new initiatives and efforts that draw from policy platforms." SPD adopted police reform policies from the #8Can'tWait

initiative of Campaign Zero, a data-informed platform led by activists that provides policy solutions to end police violence. Mayor Curtatone also submitted a budget for fiscal year 2021 that allocated \$1.6 million to new racial and social justice initiatives. While some of the proposed funding would support initiatives like increasing Family and Community Liaisons to full-time benefited positions in public schools in Somerville, the remaining \$1 million would support the City's new Racial and Social Justice (RSJ) Project. While these efforts are notable, concerns remain that reforms have not significantly curbed incidents of police violence, reduced the disproportionate impact of violence on marginalized communities, or addressed gaps in public safety systems. We hope the recommendations we provide give the City of Somerville tools for addressing these remaining concerns. **In addition, there are two significant personnel changes occurring in the City that we believe makes this moment uniquely opportune for making progress around emergency response and policing.**⁴

First, the City of Somerville announced that the Chief of Police, David Fallon, is retiring on December 11, 2020.⁵ Charles Femino will be serving as the Acting Chief of Police but is not eligible to apply for the permanent position. For that reason, it will likely take months for the police chief selection committee to find, interview, and select a candidate. Second, the City is hiring a RSJ Director to "change the institutional and structural systems that create racial and social disparities" and create an RSJ Office.⁶ The director will also be playing a key role in allocating monies from the inaugural RSJ Fund, which is a funding source for "implementing community-identified strategies to redress the impacts and deconstruct the underlying causes of racial and social injustice."⁷ Therefore, we believe the city should use these changes as an opportunity to reimagine its public safety.



Timeline of Somerville Police Reform and Racial and Social Justice Efforts

In order to understand the context of reimagining policing in the City of Somerville, our team researched past reforms and efforts around racial and social justice conducted by the City.

In 1973, SPD hired its first Black police officer, Francis Moore. We start here to provide a name and additional context to the police department's integration process. During his tenure at SPD, Officer Moore faced significant racism from people in the Somerville community. He also received multiple suspensions from SPD for minor offenses like missing roll calls and failing to wash police cars while in uniform. He was eventually dismissed in 1976 when he refused orders to conduct foot patrol without a service weapon in an area known for its open hostility towards Black people. He eventually sued the City for

discrimination and settled for \$14,000 in 1979.⁸ Despite the racism Officer Moore faced in the 1970s, the City of Somerville has since grounded many of its official policy decisions in international humanitarianism. The City created the Somerville Affirmative Action plan in 1980 and committed to representative hiring practices that uplift Somerville's minority populations. Recognizing the need to identify safe spaces for refugees seeking asylum in the United States, the City of Somerville declared itself a Sanctuary City in 1987 and followed this declaration with human rights legislation in the early 1990s. The Mayor's Office also responded to local incidents of racialized violence by creating a task force to

investigate and respond to these issues and their root causes. Mayor Joseph Curtatone, Somerville's current mayor, has been a driving force of police and social justice reform since he took office in 2005.

As part of his early administrative efforts, Mayor Curtatone commissioned a report about SPD's current status and areas for

improvement. The resulting Harshbarger Report, delivered in September 2005, noted gaps within the department and made recommendations for reform.⁹ These changes ranged from being administrative, like creating a Police Duty Manual for all officers, to structural, like geographic reorganization of the department into distinct districts.¹⁰ Mayor Curtatone responded to these recommendations and outlined a plan for their implementation. In recent years, SPD has focused on bolstering its response to behavioral health concerns in the community, particularly following

the fatal shooting by Somerville police of Carol Kingsely, a 33-year-old white woman, while she was in the midst of a behavioral health crisis. This tragedy led SPD to incorporate the **Crisis**

Intervention Team Training and

Technical Assistance Center into the department to ensure that officers have at least 40 hours of training in mental health crisis de-escalation. Additionally, the COHR team, made up of behavioral health clinicians and case managers, was embedded within the police department in 2016 to conduct crisis intervention trainings, facilitate arrest diversion programs, and assist officers with mental health crisis response. More recently, Mayor Curtatone has focused on ensuring the police department can effectively respond to drug overdoses by carrying Narcan and working with an overdose after-care community outreach team. The City has worked with the Chief of Police to begin an annual review of incidents with potential bias and set limitations on surveillance technology and officer use of force.



1980

The Somerville Affirmative Action Plan is approved and commits to representative hiring at the City level. This commitment was renewed in 1985.

1990

Members of the Somerville Women's Commission and the Somerville Coalition for Racial and Ethnic Justice meet with Mayor Capuano regarding increasing minority employment in City Hall.

1992

"Count on Me" Campaign is founded in solidarity with human rights for all. City creates Human Rights position, Ordinance, and Commission.

23 SEPTEMBER 2005

Mayor Curtatone issues plan to reorganize SPD based on Harshbarger report. Plan includes: Removing Chief position from MA Civil Service and creating East and West Districts to distribute police into neighborhoods and emphasize community policing.

2010

Carol Kingsely is shot and killed by SPD officers while she is in the midst of a behavioral health crisis.

2013

The Crisis Intervention Team-Training and Technical Assistance Center (CIT-TTAC) opens at SPD to facilitate behavioral health crisis response and training.

1973

SPD hires its first Black police officer, Ofc. Francis Moore.

1987

The City of Somerville passes the Sanctuary City Resolution. The Welcome Project is founded "to address racial tensions in the recently-integrated community."

1991

Mayor's Task Force on Racism and Violence is founded in response to local incidents of racialized violence.

8 SEPTEMBER 2005

Commissioned in April 2005 to investigate the status of the SPD, the Harshbarger Report is delivered to Mayor Curtatone outlining recommendations for reform.

2008

Intentional SPD hiring practices reflect some communities of color, including Haitian Creole and Latinx communities.

2012

SPD creates Mental Health Jail Diversion Program. A civilian domestic violence advocate position is embedded in SPD.

2014

Limits are placed on police power to detain people and report them to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).
SPD officers begin carrying Narcan.

2015

SPD develops a partnership to refer youth involved with drug use, gang activity, and violence to Roca, a community social services provider.

2016

The Community Outreach Help and Recovery (COHR) clinical team is embedded within SPD.

2017

The Executive Policy on Surveillance Technology limits police ability to use surveillance to only temporary (less than 30 day) periods and exceptional circumstances.

2018

The first SPD annual review of police incidents involving potential bias takes place.

2019

The ACCESS grant allows for overdose follow-up in partnership with an after-care team.

31 AUGUST 2019

SPD assists Boston Police and other jurisdictions with crowd control at "Straight Pride Parade." Police actions lead to citizen complaints of controversial crowd control techniques.

FALL 2019

SPD Officer Michael McGrath pepper sprays a man in handcuffs and in custody. Though placed on administrative leave after the incident, McGrath does not face charges until October 2020.

SPD issues an after-action report with plans to reform crowd control response following "Straight Pride Parade" on August 31.

25 MAY 2020

George Floyd is killed by Minneapolis police officers, sparking uprisings against police brutality around the country.

JUNE 2020

Mayor Curtatone declares state of emergency because of systemic racism and announces commitment to reimagining policing, including:

- Creation of Race and Social Justice Project
- City Council-initiated process to create civilian oversight board

-A 4.3% decrease in the SPD budget

SEPTEMBER 2020

The Trotter Collaborative begins to meet with City and community representatives to build recommendations for reimagining policing and community safety in Somerville.

Literature Review of the Social Determinants of Health and Violence

"Violence is seldom random. Rather it is the result of an interplay between individuals and their environment."

- Division of Violence Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ¹¹

On June 4, 2020, Mayor Curtatone declared a local state of emergency in Somerville, officially deeming systemic racism a threat to public health and safety.¹² In his statement, Mayor Curtatone described the need to address both the root causes and destructive impacts of systemic racism as an imperative for the nation. We conducted a literature review of the social determinants of health and violence to consider what factors affect the wellbeing of Somerville civilians and occurrence of violence in the city to inform our findings and recommendations.

Social Determinants of Health: The social determinants of health refer to

"the conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks."¹³ These determinants are well-documented and described under five key components: economic stability, education, social and community context, health and health care, and neighborhood and built environment.



The 2017 “Wellbeing of Somerville” report was a key tool for understanding how these factors are at play in Somerville and exacerbate conditions for minority, immigrant, and poor residents.¹⁴

Social Determinants of Violence: The social determinants of violence have been less explored. The latest strategic vision of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s Division of Violence Prevention focused on “connecting the dots” between multiple forms of violence, which have been shown to share common risk and protective factors.¹⁵ Key risk factors include growing up and living in impoverished environments; being exposed to harmful norms about violence, gender, and race/ethnicity; and experiencing high stress, such as that caused by racism and family conflict. Key protective factors include connectedness (e.g., to a caring adult, prosocial peers, and one’s school/community) and access

to mental health services.¹⁶ Enacting reforms to the City’s incident prevention, alternate intervention, and holistic response policies and programming will help Somerville better address the social determinants of health and violence that affect resident wellbeing and safety. This is evidenced by the demonstrated effectiveness of expanding access to health care and specifically substance-abuse treatment to reduce local crime.^{17,18} Insights generated directly from incarcerated people align with the same key factors. A recent study by Slate and The Marshall Project asked nearly 2,400 incarcerated people: “What services or programs would have helped to keep you from committing the crime(s) that led to your incarceration?” The three most common responses were: therapy (citing struggles with mental health, domestic violence, and drug addiction), affordable housing, and a living wage.¹⁹

As Somerville pursues pathways to foster greater safety, justice, and healing, the City must also consider policing and police brutality in the ecosystem of social determinants of violence.

"For decades now, communities have been told that the only resource they can have to address their community problems is more policing and more incarceration."

- Social scientist Alex Vitale²⁰

The American Public Health Association issued a policy statement in 2018 that called for the need to address safety, including police violence, through a prevention lens.²¹ Summarizing the issue and introducing recommendations, it reads: "While interventions for improving policing quality to reduce violence (e.g., community-oriented policing, training, body/dashboard-mounted cameras, and conducted electrical weapons) have been

implemented, empirical evidence suggests notable limitations. Importantly, these approaches also lack an upstream, primary prevention public health frame. A public health strategy that centers community safety and prevents law enforcement violence should favor community-built and community-based solutions. APHA recommends the following actions by federal, state, tribal, and local authorities: **(1)** eliminate policies and practices that facilitate disproportionate violence against specific populations (including laws criminalizing these populations), **(2)** institute robust law enforcement accountability measures, **(3)** increase investment in promoting racial and economic equity to address social determinants of health, **(4)** implement community based alternatives to address harms and prevent trauma, and **(5)** work with public health officials to comprehensively document law enforcement contact, violence, and injuries."²² Though Somerville has made efforts towards police reform, SPD

remains far from immune to direct officer violence. A report generated from a public records request found that Somerville police officers had reportedly used force 83 times between January 2018 and July 2020.²³ One of these officers, the President of the Somerville Police Union Michael McGrath, had used force three times within this period prior to pepper spraying a man he handcuffed in custody in October 2019.²⁴ He currently faces assault and battery charges levied by the Middlesex County District Attorney in October 2020. Officer McGrath was placed on administrative leave but remains employed with SPD

and the president of the police union at the time of this writing.²⁵

Understanding policing as a source of structural and interpersonal violence, especially to marginalized communities, highlights the need for the City to recognize how certain at risk and in need populations may not be utilizing available public safety resources. This understanding also allows the City to evaluate how public safety reform or reimagining policing should involve decoupling elements of emergency response services from the police to minimize possible resident exposure and harm.



City of Somerville. (2020). [Somervision 2040]. <http://www.somervision2040.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/01/SomerVision.pdf>

Findings

Below are our findings from interviews with community organizations, service providers, and City officials. Our conclusions are also based on our research and analysis of information and data focused on three areas: incident prevention, alternative intervention, and holistic response.

Summary of Conversations with Community Organizations and Service Providers

Below are our findings produced through twelve interviews and one written statement submitted from community-based organizations, service providers, and justice advocacy organizations under three categories: perspectives on safety, perspectives on policing, and areas of improvement to better support the community particularly with regards to racial and social justice.

Perspectives on Safety Almost all respondents who discussed community safety described it in terms of violence prevention, including accessible and adequate housing

stability, health care (particularly mental health care), education, transportation, and strong systems of mutual aid and community support. Gender equity, a sense of safety in public, and having someone to turn toward in times of need were also mentioned. Three respondents also discussed the need for stronger systems for addressing harm when it occurs, including for hate crimes and incidents of police brutality. One group discussed the need for greater restorative and transformative justice solutions which differ from the punitive approach of the criminal legal system.²⁶

"If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail."
- Community organization respondent

Two groups cited the police's presence as positive for public safety (both specifically mentioned the Mystic Housing Development area, and one also mentioned traffic enforcement near the Green Line construction area). However, at least one respondent from each of the three organization types (community organizations, service providers, and justice advocacy organizations) cited the need for safety from police violence and unnecessary criminalization.

Perspectives on Policing

"You want to change policies and reform, but all the people that have the true stories of injustices are too scared to put their face to their instances. And rightfully so."

-Community organization respondent

Despite multiple respondents having some positive relationships with and citing positive actions taken by SPD

leadership in recent years, almost every organization shared at least some (or in some cases numerous) negative interactions between police, themselves as individuals, and/or, more often, the people they serve. This was especially the case for those who are people of color, immigrants, have mental illness, or suffer from substance use disorders. The incidents include the following: direct harassment by officers, unnecessary criminalization (particularly of youths or those who are mentally ill or have substance use disorders), police presence deterring community members from services, and harmful differences between official department policy and rank-and-file actions. It is notable that these interviews did not focus on specific interactions with officers. However, respondents discussed how these incidents, as well as the systemic impacts of policing across communities, contribute to a sense of fear that is disproportionately felt by the communities noted above.

Just under half of respondents also mentioned positive interactions with police, specifically in which the police responded quickly, successfully de-escalated one notable incident, or had respectful communication. Several respondents also noted some community members avoid calling police due to fear of a violent response. These sentiments were especially felt by those who are people of color, non-English speaking, immigrant, poor, and/or undocumented. It also included those who were in families of people who experience behavioral crises.

With regards to reimagining policing, respondents provided five main



recommendations:

- **Expand and improve non-police responses to crises:** Most

respondents expressed a need for crisis intervention support that is not a police response. Many believed this would lead to improved services and avoid the risk of unnecessary and detrimental contact with the criminal legal system. For that same reason, respondents noted that while COHR is a useful community resource, it should be moved out from under the purview of SPD and into HHS. They advised that resources to call in a crisis should be better tailored to the needs of the person in crisis, especially for behavioral health issues and non-violent community issues like truancy. On this topic, multiple respondents cited the need to route 911 calls to appropriate types of response more effectively

by moving the 911 department out of SPD. Few alternatives to police response currently exist and there is little awareness of those services, such as the Boston Emergency Services Team (BEST). BEST was described by multiple respondents as a useful resource but one that it is currently under-resourced and thus often lacks the ability to respond in a timely manner, during which time situations can escalate and lead to police also being called.

- **Limit and define the role of police:** Most respondents noted a need to both limit and better define the role of police in Somerville. Multiple groups recommended that the SPD should be decoupled from social services (such as separating the COHR program from SPD, as noted above). Respondents also stressed the need to remove police from schools and eliminate their traffic, construction, and health incident response duties.

- **Redistribute resources towards prevention:** Most respondents also recommended a redistribution of City resources from SPD directly to communities and community-based organizations that can support prevention of the need for emergency response. Areas mentioned as in need of additional investment are noted in the “Perspectives on safety” section above (e.g., housing stability, mental health care, and education).

- **Take meaningful steps towards greater transparency and accountability on behalf of SPD:** A third of respondents articulated this need. They also asked for increased representation of the diversity of the community in SPD, particularly around language and race.

- **Explore the historical rationale behind and current work toward police abolition:** Two respondents recommended the City adopt a long-term strategy towards achieving police abolition by

investing in community resources so that any amount of police violence is no longer necessary.²⁷ A specific resource recommended for this topic include the #8toAbolition reforms.²⁸

community by recognizing the fullness of the community, [including its] residents, organizations, and agencies - who share the desired outcomes



City of Somerville. (2020). [Somervision 2040]. <http://www.somervision2040.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/01/Somervision.pdf>

Areas of improvement to better support the community, particularly around racial and social justice

"If the City doesn't consider [schools, residents, and community-based organizations] as active and worthy of engagement and informing policy, [there are] miss[ing] opportunities. The City can continue to better support the

of a healthy, safe community."

- Service provider respondent

On how the City can better support the community, two main themes were mentioned by almost all respondents: more diverse representation in City Hall and "at the table" for City decision-making, and more financial investment in community resources with specific

emphasis on violence prevention.

Diverse representation is lacking at service providing organizations and the City at all levels.

Authentic representation was noted as particularly lacking in City leadership positions and at City decision-making tables. Additionally, more social services and emergency responses need to be run and staffed by people who speak resident languages and are from the same communities as the people in need of support. Community organizers and other representatives wanted their opinions to be included early on in City processes and given greater respect and weight in City decision making. Multiple respondents also cited **a need for greater transparency and follow through** from the City more broadly on its community programs and initiatives. One way to do so, participants said,

was by ensuring language access for all. Greater financial investments are also needed for improved access to housing, mental health, and education services and the creation of a robust, inclusive, and well-coordinated social safety net for all residents throughout the Somerville community. **Multiple respondents stressed that, while Somerville is more advanced in providing community resources when compared to other cities and towns in the region and nationally, accessible services are not currently sufficient to foster community safety for all** - especially in terms of affordable housing. While SomerViva and other programs are noted as “a good start,” the City should focus on demonstrating outcomes for poor residents and communities of color. Residents mentioned that more leaders for youth programs, behavioral health workers, and social workers are needed. However, they cautioned that

professional qualifications (like requirements for an advanced degree) should be carefully considered to prevent the exclusion of some qualified community members from being hired to address issues in their communities. Respondents believed that the City could become a leader in the development of a robust safety net and should partner with the state and local regions (like Medford, Malden, Cambridge, etc.) towards these improvements given the interconnectedness of these issues. This could include, for example, working with other legislatures on regional policies to address the availability of affordable housing and impact of gentrification. Multiple respondents also cited the following additional recommendations:

- **Clarify the authority (including responsibilities, powers, and goals) of the new RSJ Director** to ensure they can speak frankly and reflect multiple community voices. Relatedly, the City should ensure that its reimagining of policing is

inclusive of those who have experienced feeling unsafe in their communities. Processes should be participatory²⁹ and designed to account for the fact that those most impacted are also likely the most uncomfortable voicing their opinions in the same spaces as SPD given the differential power dynamic.

- Better educate the community about available community resources.
- Expand existing and develop more diversion programs, particularly for drug crimes.
- Foster greater civic engagement, including through ensuring language access and adopting a participatory budgeting process.

How these findings relate to recommendations from community listening sessions

It is notable that almost every recommendation listed here is also

mentioned in the community listening sessions under the following topics: 1) Access to Decision-Making and Resources, 2) Representation, and 3) Transparency and Equitable Application of Rules. Few respondents from our interviews focused on education, and while some discussed cross-cultural understanding, few recommended anti-bias training.

Summary of Conversations with City Stakeholders

In addition to the interviews we conducted with community stakeholders, our team met with 20 representatives from nine different departments at the City (listed in full

in our Acknowledgements section). From these conversations, we found a few consistent themes, also organized by safety, policing, and areas for improvement.

Perspectives on key priorities for community safety

"We have to give people not just a feeling but knowledge that they are safe in the community and have standing in the community."

- Mayor Joseph Curtatone³⁰

City representatives across departments acknowledged that the needs expressed by Somerville community members should define



City of Somerville. (2017). [The Wellbeing of Somerville Report].
<https://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/wellbeing-of-somerville-report-2017.pdf>

the City's community safety work. Though perspectives diverged somewhat across departments, most City representatives mentioned that the impact of COVID-19 and the call to reimagine policing are key to their work. Representatives from HHS stressed the importance of facilitating access to resources to community residents and noted that immigrant communities specifically face unique barriers to access. Chief of Police David Fallon also provided us with his vision of community safety: "My vision would be working in collaboration [with] community [members] to fully grasp what [community safety] means to them [...] [E]very member[']s definition is individualized".³¹

Perspectives on policing

Police relations

"The unique perspective that police have and the impressions that they have are so helpful because they know people, they're often

responding to the same people over and over again." - COHR

All departments we met with had positive experiences to share about the SPD. Clinicians from COHR in particular expressed how the police have unique relationships with individuals in the community and can therefore provide useful clinical information to the COHR team. HHS representatives described a close working relationship between the police department and RESPOND, a local provider responding to domestic violence in the community. Representatives from OIA and Public Information shared a mixed view from the community members with whom they work with by saying that some individuals "have asked for more and better policing, [while others] have been harassed [by police]" and are reluctant to speak out about issues.³² Members of SPD reflected on their relationship with the community, citing that while some facets of the Somerville community receive proactive police

support through outreach programs, others are “difficult to reach at times.”³³

Police reform

“Culture is very important in an organization [...]. Culture in the police department always trumps policy.”

- Chief of Police David Fallon

Barriers to police reform expressed by City representatives included funding limitations, both in the flexibility of the budget and general financial limitations (e.g., costs of adding 24/7 mental health responders to SPD or as a separate emergency response entity). OIA reiterated trust as a barrier to the effectiveness of reforms. However, they did mention the utility of the anonymous tip line the City created to enhance police accountability. SPD representatives mentioned the need for a culture shift among the police rank-and-file whenever reforms are proposed, a shift they said takes time and intentionality to implement. All representatives from the City we spoke to were generally wary of the safety and effectiveness of an unarmed

response, given the uncertainty of many emergency situations; instead, these representatives focused on co-locating mental health clinicians, homeless



City of Somerville. (2017). [The Wellbeing of Somerville Report].
<https://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/wellbeing-of-somerville-report-2017.pdf>

advocates, and other non-police responders within the department to enhance the effectiveness of police incident intervention.

Representatives from several departments including Somerville 911, OIA, Somerstat, and HHS echoed these sentiments. Mental health specialists and psychologists trained in de-escalation were suggested as individuals who could take the lead on behavioral health emergency response with police as support in

case incidents became violent. SPD stakeholders cited the foundational nature of the training that already exists (e.g., a budget allocated to paying for training initiatives and the training of 60-70% of officers in crisis de-escalation) and the burgeoning diversion programs being run in partnership with the Middlesex County District Attorney's Office. Several departments mentioned the BEST team as an existing alternative to police for emergent mental health crisis response.³⁴

While the BEST team provides crisis evaluation and treatment services, it lacks the resources to provide emergency response akin to that of police. These limitations include long response times, lack of widespread knowledge of the resource, and insufficient staffing.

On areas for improvement

"If there would be one area, I'd say it would be housing; individuals

have rights to be where they are. I just wish there was more housing for individuals and services to keep them engaged and off the street."

- Somerville 911

In addition to outlining their perspectives on and visions for community safety, City representatives shared their views on areas in greatest need of improvement. Stakeholders from COHR, SPD, and the Mayor's Office cited a need to invest more in behavioral health resources (mental health and substance use alike). Several representatives mentioned the dearth of available behavioral health resources within the City of Somerville or an accessible distance, particularly for those community members who may be income or housing insecure. For that reason, we discussed with City stakeholders the importance of a uniform, comprehensive, and publicly-available asset map for community members to identify the resources that do exist, as we will discuss further in our



City of Somerville. (2020). [Somervision 2040]. <http://www.somervision2040.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/01/SomerVision.pdf>

recommendations. Though the City of Somerville has engaged in numerous discrete efforts to identify the full range of government resources, it currently lacks a single source available to the public that includes resources beyond government services. City stakeholders conceded that community members may not be aware or taking advantage of all services available to them as a result. These stakeholders also noted a need for permanent housing for people experiencing homelessness and workforce development programs.

Individuals from OIA articulated a need to improve trust between community members and government officials, particularly in immigrant communities who may not readily trust attempts made to include their voices in participatory processes. The Budget Manager finally cited logistical difficulties with engagement and transparency when communicating with community members and seeking to involve them in budgeting processes.



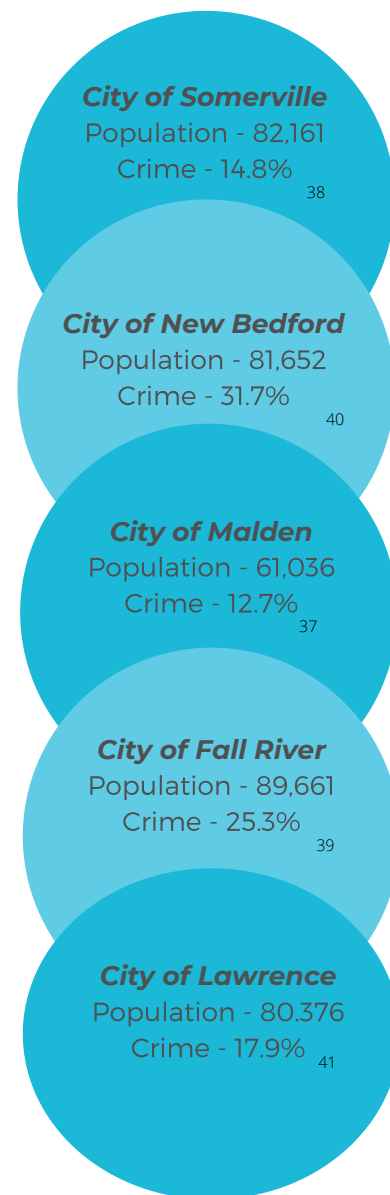
Budget Analysis

The City of Somerville's municipal funding consists of its capital investments and budget appropriations. In FY21, it amounts to \$ 262,670,264. Capital investments and projects cover the creation and maintenance of city building, road, environmental, and other community assets. These investments and projects total \$113,476,193 for FY21 and are funded through city bonds, operational and stabilization funding, free cash, federal grants, and more. The City's yearly budget revenue comes from a variety of sources. 70.4% of it for the upcoming fiscal year comes from property taxes alone. Generally, most of the City's budget is spent on the salary, healthcare, and pension costs of its employees, which the City estimates to include about 1,800 people including those who work in the City's school system. This is also the case for the City's public safety funding specifically. Only \$542,700 out of \$14,989,552 in spending -

or 3.62% of the budget - goes to non-salaries for SPD. \$508,896 out of \$18,219,378 (2.79%) goes to non-salaries for Somerville Fire Department. \$721,880 out of \$3,788,466 (19.05%) goes to non-salaries for the Department of HHS. Somerville city officials state that its budget reflects its public funding priorities. They explained that these priorities include increasing equity amongst the community and investing in solving community problems. This year in particular, due to a decrease in revenue (for example, the state projects that there will be a 25% decrease in state aid by \$6.7 million and \$3 million decrease in lost revenue from fines and forfeits) and concerns around COVID-19, the City has remained focused on promoting public health and retaining City employment. However, we have spoken with many City officials and residents that would like the City's

budget to more directly align with community needs. Somerville's City Council responded to resident calls to defund SPD this past summer by reducing the Police Department Personal Services budget by \$650,000 and the Ordinary Maintenance budget by \$92,000. The cuts to Personal Services include a \$266,634 reduction to salaries, a \$68,821 reduction to holiday and shift differential lines, and \$314,545 reduction to temporary salaries and wages, overtime costs, and court timelines. Much of the funding taken from SPD went toward the funding of a new position for an RSJ Director within the City as mentioned above.³⁵ To set the foundation for budget cuts and reinvestments in public safety, we decided to compare the city's public safety spending with its peers. We acknowledge that other analyses have been done in the past - most recently in the Mayor's budget presentation.³⁶ However, we noted that many of the other cities in his comparison were of other populous cities in the country that

were dissimilar in multiple spending and resident metrics. Therefore, for our analysis, we used the following cities and towns in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts based on their similarities in population, crime, and/or general fund budget levels: Malden, Fall River, New Bedford, and Lawrence.



We found that Somerville has the second lowest crime rate per 1,000 residents of our cities analyzed at 14.8%. The city's crime rate has also been continually decreasing over the past several years.⁴² With \$262,670,264 for the upcoming fiscal year, it has the second smallest amount of the five cities allocated to the general fund in its budget. However, it spent the highest percentage of its budget on public safety at 17.74%.^{43, 44}

When focusing on funding to the police department specifically, however, the City of Somerville

was in the middle of the cities in its spending at \$17,547,431 for the upcoming fiscal year.⁴⁵ Finally, the City of Somerville is the second lowest of its peers in the number of chiefs, deputy chiefs, sergeants, lieutenants, and patrol officers they employ with 125 officers.⁴⁶ Due to the city's high public safety spending relative to its general fund budget and crime levels when compared to other similarly situated cities, we believe the City of Somerville can make further deductions to its SPD funding and reallocate these monies to existing and new incident prevention, alternative intervention, and holistic response programs, as we will explain in further detail in our recommendations section.

CITY	TOTAL BUDGET	PUBLIC SAFETY SPENDING (%)	POLICE DEPT SPENDING	POLICE DEPT STAFFING
Somerville	\$262,670,264	17.74 (46,593,281)	17,547,431	125
Malden	\$184,203,531	12.35 (22,743,061)	11,390,308	100
New Bedford	\$363,897,499	13.02 (47,399,545)	25,527,814	248 ⁴⁷
Fall River	\$282,888,285	13.47 (38,113,573)	22,937,404	143
Lawrence	\$330,569,847	9.11 (30,098,997)	15,410,728	159

Analysis of Somerville police data and dispatch processes

SPD houses the City's Emergency 911 (E-911) call center, Somerville 911. Calls for emergency assistance within the Somerville community are routed to this call center and received by Somerville 911 dispatchers. Dispatchers prioritize obtaining location information from the caller so that emergency services can respond even if the call gets disconnected. Once a dispatcher has the location of the incident, they attempt to gather more information about the incident occurring. Somerville 911 staff expressed that this information can be difficult to obtain for several reasons:

"When people are scared [or] stressed out it's hard to get basic information, even [their] names... [With respect to behavioral health concerns,] if a person is alone, especially if it's someone on the street... those calling will not know

[the] details about what's going on with the individual and will feel a threat is present even if it is a behavioral health issue."

- Somerville 911 Staff ⁴⁸

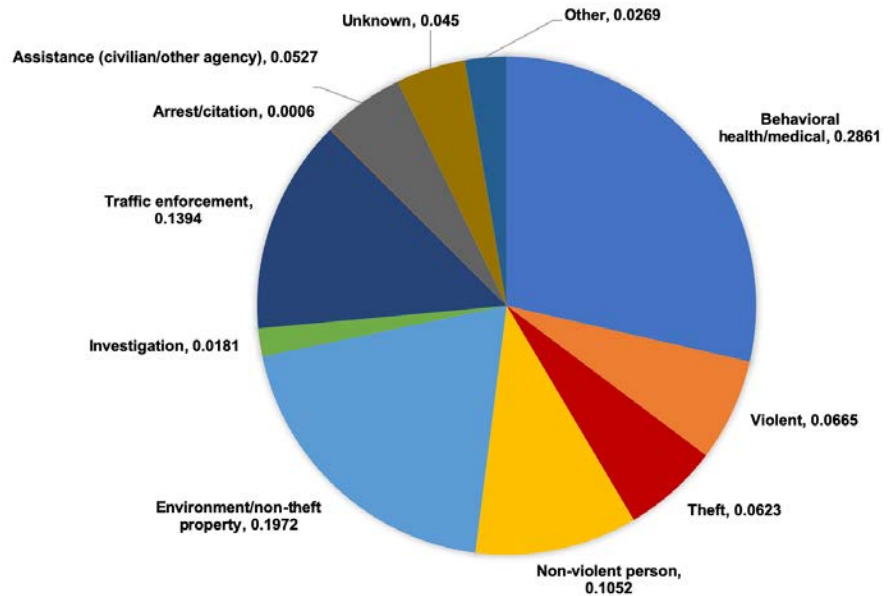
911 staff noted that, given the difficulties that can inhibit dispatchers from identifying the full nature of an emergency situation, all branches of the emergency response system (police, fire, and emergency medical services) are dispatched to respond to almost every call for service.⁴⁹

This substantiates information we reviewed from a City Council meeting on August 27th, 2020 in which Councilor Clingan stated that "96% of 911 calls are routed to the [Somerville] Police."⁵⁰ Because

of the number of police on patrol in Somerville at any given moment, 911 staff explained that police are almost always the first responders to any incident.

911 staff mentioned that police officers are trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and equipped with Narcan so that they can respond to situations requiring resuscitation or opioid overdose reversal. Somerville 911 dispatchers and police officers themselves can also reach out to the COHR team for specialized behavioral health assistance during

COHR's operating hours if a call is clearly related to a mental health crisis; however, COHR stated during our meeting with their team that they are "not an



Somerville Calls for Service By Type (January 2016 - October 2020)

emergency service." The figure above displays the percentage of incident response calls for service (CFS) by category. Of the categories we built, incidents related to behavioral health and medical concerns comprised nearly 30% of CFS. Calls related to environmental issues and non-theft property related concerns comprised the next largest proportion (19.72%), followed by general traffic-related calls (13.94%). Incident response CFS we classified as violent comprised 6.65%, while those related to theft comprised 6.23%.

As outlined in the literature review on the social determinants of health and violence, criminal activity is often related to the inadequate provision of protective factors like income, affordable housing, and accessible behavioral healthcare services.⁵¹

Research by Neil Metz and Mariya Burdina indicates that property crime rates increase in neighborhoods with higher income inequality.⁵²

Our analysis of CFS data indicates that incidents related to property (theft and non-theft) comprised nearly 15% of incident response CFS in Somerville. Though we did not conduct a specific analysis of income inequality in Somerville, both our qualitative data from community stakeholders as well as The Wellbeing of Somerville Report (2017) suggest that income inequality in the City may be on the rise.⁵³ Mending the social safety net in a way that decreases income inequality (e.g. decreasing barriers to employment, facilitating access to benefits) may decrease the number of incidents

Over 90% of incidents were non-violent

Nearly 30% were health-related

related to property in the Somerville community. CFS data also indicates that nearly 30% of incidents are related to behavioral health and medical concerns. Given the way in which incidents are classified, we are unable to determine what percentage of these incidents were life-threatening and required emergency medical care. We therefore make the assumption that some proportion of these incidents were not life-threatening and could have been ameliorated with facilitated access to primary care and behavioral healthcare services. In addition, many of the behavioral health, medical, property, and environment-related calls could have

been ameliorated with targeted strategies to serve Somerville's homeless population.

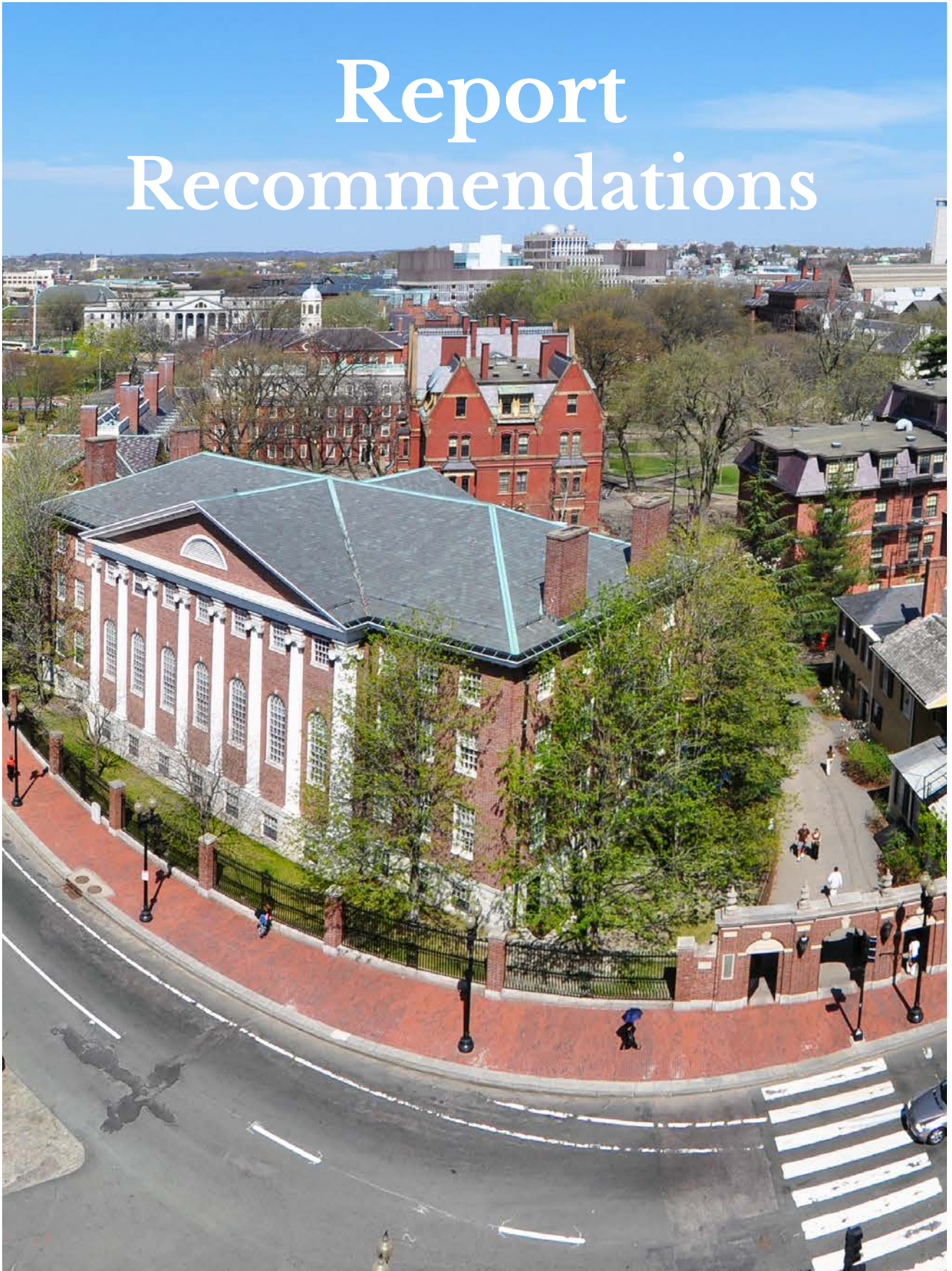
The most recent point-in-time count conducted by the Somerville-Arlington Continuum of Care (CoC) in January 2018 estimated that nearly 270 people experienced homelessness on a given night in Somerville, with nearly 100 people estimated to become homeless in the next year.⁵⁴ Additionally, the CoC acknowledges that “these numbers underestimate the risk of homelessness as many people are doubled up or living paycheck to paycheck in order to avoid homelessness.”⁵⁵ Though the CFS data we analyzed does not capture the housing status of individuals involved in each incident, qualitative data from Somerville 911 and our community stakeholder interviews indicate an

overlap between behavioral health concerns and homelessness, which is substantiated by national comorbidity data.⁵⁶

This data also indicates comorbidities between homelessness and incidents related to overdoses, discarded hypodermic needles, and other activities related to public drug use that necessarily occurs when individuals lack a safe indoor space to use and/or adequate treatment for their use.⁵⁷



Report Recommendations



Incident Prevention

The City of Somerville should prevent incidents from occurring by addressing the social determinants of health and violence through a comprehensive asset map and robust funding of new and existing preventative programs.

Recommendation 1: The City of Somerville should engage in asset mapping in alignment with best practices, and create a uniform, comprehensive, and publicly-available asset map for community members.

"There aren't those immediate crisis resources for immediate [behavioral health] needs... Cambridge Hospital closed [its] detox facility; [...] there is nowhere in Somerville. We would like to see more community-based services." - COHR

Asset maps provide community members, service providers, and first responders with an accessible tool to identify resources, while also empowering government agencies with information about opportunities for strengthening these resources. The importance of creating such an

inventory to address the social determinants of health and violence has been widely documented. For example, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) criteria articulate the necessity of an asset map with respect to behavioral health, stating: "[F]actors such as the community's inpatient and outpatient treatment options, crisis response services, [and] ancillary services such as housing and substance abuse treatment, population, and geography [must be examined]" through an "inventory of existing services," an "assessment of program and service capacity," and a prioritization of "behavioral health resources and increased funding."⁵⁹ Best practices across the country establish the necessity of asset maps with respect to health and violence. Cities demonstrating asset map leadership include: Boston, Massachusetts;⁶⁰ New

York City, New York;⁶¹ Chicago, Illinois;⁶² and Denver, Colorado.⁶³ The City of Boston partnered with MassGIS to create a publicly accessible search tool for communities with resources spanning from senior services to child care to immigration assistance.⁶⁴ New York City utilized Google Maps to pinpoint resources in six primary categories: economic security, housing, health, education, youth, and family and community.⁶⁵ The City of Chicago partnered with asset mapping platform “Purple Binder”⁶⁶ to equip community members with health resources,⁶⁷ and is in the process of mapping “resiliency resources” with respect to violence.⁶⁸ In Denver, the City’s Public Safety Department partnered with United Way’s 2-1-1 database to identify resources including food services, substance use facilities, libraries, and mental health treatment.⁶⁹ Municipalities of comparable size to Somerville have also implemented asset maps, including Roanoke, Virginia, and Duluth, Minnesota. Roanoke created web-based and mobile application

platforms to provide community members with a searchable map of government services and civic information.⁷⁰ In Duluth, the City partnered with the University of Minnesota and United Way’s 2-1-1 services to identify community support services, particularly with respect to employment and workforce development.⁷¹

In undertaking this effort, BJA criteria state: “planners should pay special attention to the needs of racial and ethnic minorities and women,” and in utilizing the asset map to bolster resources available to communities, should “mak[e] culturally competent and gender-sensitive services available to the extent possible.”⁷²

Somerville should consider the efforts of other municipalities in partnering with services such as Purple Binder⁷³ or NowPow⁷⁴ to house the map, as well as in engaging community strengths such as advocacy organizations, service providers, United Way 2-1-1, and local universities to conceptualize

and execute the mapping. We specifically recommend:

- The City of Somerville should make and continuously maintain an inventory of local community resources broadly defined, including those not City-operated, and record certain metrics like type(s) of services, hours of service, location(s) of service, capacity of service, cost of service and insurance coverage, and eligibility criteria, including populations served and any exclusionary requirements.
 - The City should ensure this inventory is continually updated with accurate information.
 - The City of Somerville should make this inventory available to first responders and the public, including via phone call, internet search, and mobile device. The City should ensure there are qualified and trained professionals who can help assess the needs of individuals and connect them with apposite resources from the inventory.
- First responders should establish policies regarding referrals, and incorporate policies, instructions, and simulations into their trainings.
- The City should ensure this inventory is available in multiple languages, as well as with audio options for people with vision challenges. The City should ensure intersectional search criteria are available.
 - The City should engage in public education and outreach efforts regarding community resources.
 - The City should utilize this inventory to ensure resources are distributed and accessible to meet community need.



City of Somerville. (2017). [The Wellbeing of Somerville Report].
<https://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/wellbeing-of-somerville-report-2017.pdf>

Recommendation 2: The City should dedicate sufficient resources to entities fostering community safety.

Our findings indicate that the City should more heavily invest in affordable housing, comprehensive healthcare services, and expanded language access resources. **We believe that the funding for these investments can come from multiple areas - including SPD.** First, the City can eliminate its funding for weapons of mass destruction, which received \$63,500 in funding in FY21.⁷⁵ According to a recent study, weapons of this form - particularly those from the US Department of Defense 1033 program - further militarize the police and can directly lead to an increase in civilian casualties.⁷⁶ Participants in the City's June 24th hearing specified this line item when discussing how to defund the police.⁷⁷ Second, the City can reallocate funding for existing vacancies in police positions and

maintain its current police employment level of 125 officers. As noted in our budget analysis, the City of Somerville has been experiencing a decrease in crime rates in recent years while maintaining a relatively constant level of police employment.⁷⁸ As a result, the City does not have a public safety need to increase its police employment and can use this excess funding for prevention efforts. Other small line item eliminations can include allocations for out of state conference and travel funding, given that the City has already indicated that they've eliminated such funds for other departments.⁷⁹ Finally, the City can consider creating or expanding regional or state partnerships to help finance additional policies and programs. The SomerVision 2040 report highlights that meeting target affordable housing levels and working on zoning requirements are priorities for the City.⁸⁰ Based on our findings above, we believe that achieving these goals would align with the City's priorities on public safety. The Somerville Community Corporation found that there are approximately 35,000 housing

units in the city.⁸¹ 3,500 of those units are dedicated to affordable housing and 1,500 of them are managed by the Somerville Housing Authority.⁸² The City can help facilitate affordable housing by prioritizing the provision of rental assistance from the Somerville Housing Authority to lower income/higher risk geographic areas, providing tax credit and other supply-oriented subsidies to areas with less affordable housing stock overall, creating affordable rentals and homes through the Somerville Affordable Housing Trust Fund, and preserving existing affordable housing - especially the affordable units that have deteriorated.⁸³ Regarding zoning reform, we support the city's inclusionary housing ordinance that requires most new residential units to set aside 20% of its residences for affordable units.⁸⁴ Given that other cities like Cambridge have implemented such policies, we encourage the City to collaborate with nearby municipalities in passing additional zoning and general housing policies.⁸⁵

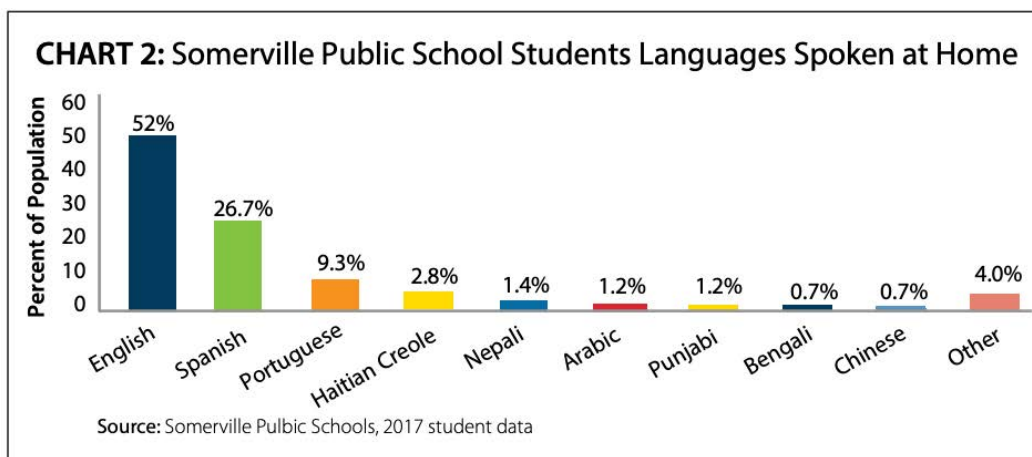


City of Somerville. (2020). [Somervision 2040].
<http://www.somervision2040.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/01/SomerVision.pdf>

As highlighted in the City's Wellbeing of Somerville Report, the City should consider ways to support its efforts to promote resident mental health, prevent substance use disorders, and increase access to health-promoting services.⁸⁶ One way to accomplish this goal, as explained above, is by creating an asset map that lists available resources. The City should also reallocate funding from other public safety departments (e.g., in the form of defunding vacant salary provisions) and other revenue sources in the budget to further support the Department of HHS. This support should come in the form of hiring more substance use disorder and

mental health providers, particularly those who have language capabilities and share the racial, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic identities of their clients. The City can also invest some funding into existing local clinics like the Cambridge Health Alliance's Central Street Clinic. Especially as the city continues to grapple with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, the City should also work to establish and expand physical or online tools for residents to access health, self-care, and self-advocacy resources and training.⁸⁷ These tools can be promoted via in-person or online fairs and should be provided in multiple languages. Though the report suggested these options should be available for senior

residents specifically, we recommend that they also be available for all residents - especially those most vulnerable. Across all City departments and resources, efforts should be made to ensure that documents are translated into the languages of community residents, including but not limited to Spanish, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, Nepali, and Mandarin. While SomerViva and other programs are noted as "a good start," the City should focus on demonstrating outcomes for communities of color. Organizations mentioned that more leaders for youth programs, behavioral health workers, and social workers are needed, although exclusionary qualifications should be carefully considered. Implementation of this



City of Somerville. (2017). [The Wellbeing of Somerville Report].
<https://www.somervillema.gov/sites/default/files/wellbeing-of-somerville-report-2017.pdf>

recommendation should also be guided and continuously informed by any key gaps highlighted in the proposed asset map as described in Recommendation 1.

Recommendation 3: The City of Somerville should implement and fund programs that offer wraparound supports to high-risk populations.

Best practices from other cities include mentorship, outreach, and counseling programs dedicated to producing long term transformations in at risk neighborhoods. These wraparound case management services are also effective tools to support individuals with serious mental illness (SMI), who are at high risk for incarceration and recidivism.⁸⁸ Research has demonstrated that “effective case management tailored

to the needs of formerly incarcerated people with SMI improves their quality of life and reduces their involvement in the criminal justice system.” By implementing a wraparound case management and counseling program, the City of Somerville can prevent first time offenses and confront the cycles of recidivism that plague high risk communities and those with mental health needs. Programs like the Peacemaker Fellowship tackle the social determinants of crime. Fellowship case managers have the ability to connect individuals with financial, behavioral health, or other services to address the factors that lead to crime in the first place. In Somerville, these practices can be implemented to support residents experiencing poverty, hunger, and untreated trauma as a proactive measure against violence.

Peacemaker Fellowships - Richmond and Sacramento, California

“Our work at Advance Peace aims to offer 'real nutrition' to our community, which is daily doses of love, caring and support. We work to boost the immune systems of those traumatized and at the center of gun violence through healthy food and housing, but also through stable mentorship.”

- Julius Thibodeaux: Advance Peace Sacramento

Background: In 2007, the homicide rate in the city of Richmond, California was eight times higher than the national average.⁸⁹ In response, Richmond established the first Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) and began implementing the Peacemaker Fellowships.⁹⁰ The Peacemaker Fellowships are dedicated to providing social support for likely victims and perpetrators of gun violence. Because of the success of the program in Richmond, Advance Peace now works to implement this model elsewhere, including Sacramento, California.

Program Details: Through the Operation Peacemaker Fellowship, Richmond residents considered most likely to become a perpetrator or victim of gun violence (based on the guidance of community members and neighborhood leaders) are offered an 18-month non-mandated counseling and career training program. This “trauma responsive approach to interrupting urban gun violence...intensively engages those at the core of firearm conflicts in urban neighborhoods.”⁹¹ The ONS Operation Peacemaker fellowship program offers mentorships, 24-hour case management, cognitive behavioral therapy, internships, social service navigation, substance abuse treatment, and stipends for the successful completion of established goals.⁹²

Results: Ten years later, the ONS and Operation Peacemaker Fellowship is proven to be highly effective. In 2016, the ONS completed its fourth Fellowship cohort.

All of the fellows are alive and 84%⁹³ have not been injured by a firearm, which is staggering considering that the fellows represented those most likely to be victimized by gun violence.⁹⁴ The results extended beyond the most vulnerable. Ten years after the ONS was established, the homicide rate in Richmond fell by 80 percent.⁹⁵

100% of fellows
are alive

Homicides
fell by 80%

A study in the American Journal of Public Health found that the Peacemaker Fellowship was associated with a 55% reduction in firearm-related deaths and hospital visits and 43% fewer firearm-related crimes.⁹⁶ The ONS program is a testimony to the potential of separating social services from the

criminal legal system and empowering communities with resources outside of the system.

Cost/benefit analysis: When this program expanded to Sacramento, California, Advance Peace was charged with enrolling up to 50 residents identified from a group of about 200 individuals suspected of being involved in gun violence according to local leaders and neighborhood knowledge.⁹⁷ During the eighteen months of the fellowship (July 2018 - December 2019), gun homicides and assaults declined by 22% in the high crime areas where the fellows resided, and 10% citywide.⁹⁸ The total cost of the two-year program was \$1,384,836 for a city with a population over 500,000.⁹⁹ This includes the salaries for the six neighborhood change agents who coordinated the program. The financial benefit was determined to fall between \$25.2 to \$58 million,



Pulse, R. (n.d.). [Operation Peacemaker Fellowship]. RCF. <https://www.rcfconnects.org/community-initiatives/public-safety/operation-peacemaker-fellowship/>

which means the program saved the City of Sacramento between \$18.20 and \$41.88 for every dollar spent.

Implementation in Somerville: The Peacemaker Fellowship is a model that is adaptable and can be used to serve the communities of Somerville with the highest rate of victimization for gun violence. One possible area

of focus for a Somerville Advance Peace program could be the Mystic River Development. In addition to serving a low income community, it also offers connections to the Mystic Activity Center, the Welcome Project, and the Mystic Learning Center.¹⁰⁰ These resources could support the efforts of Advance Peace and help them reach the communities at greatest risk of violence in Somerville.



Alternative Intervention

The City of Somerville should adopt alternative intervention programs to ensure the availability of a rapid and appropriate response to behavioral health crises that promotes the safety of civilians.

Recommendation 4: The City should restructure Somerville 911 and dispatch procedures.

The City of Somerville should restructure its protocol for responding to emergency CFS so that:

- Somerville 911 is removed from the purview of the police department and becomes its own entity or a part of a regional E-911 center with neighboring municipalities.¹⁰¹
- Dispatchers effectively triage 911 CFS to the appropriate branch of emergency response, including a specialized mental health emergency response team. The City of Somerville must provide dispatcher training so that dispatchers can evaluate CFS and determine which branch of emergency response services should be dispatched. SPD should revise General Order 123 so that the police are no longer the lead

responding agency for medical and behavioral health incidents. Best practices from the Annals of Emergency Dispatch and Response suggest that, "with the exception of the relatively few cases of sudden cardiac (or respiratory) arrest, there exists very little evidence that incrementally shorter EMS response times actually improve patient outcomes, so there appears to be little reason not to allow [dispatchers] to complete a thorough evaluation of the patient and emergency situation before notifying response crews."¹⁰³ The City of Somerville should ensure that each branch of emergency response services is adequately resourced to respond as promptly as the police department does currently.

- Dispatchers provide callers with the option to request only one branch

of emergency response service dependent upon their emergency. This would limit and better define the role of the police, as was recommended by most of our community respondents. Dispatchers may use their training and discretion to send an additional branch of emergency response as a secondary responder if the dispatcher believes it is necessary; however, this action must be taken only after the caller is notified.

Recommendation 5: The City of Somerville should adopt alternative intervention programs.

Several models, such as CAHOOTS (explained below), are leading the way in effective and safe emergency response. The City of Somerville should adopt alternative intervention programs that go beyond the expertise and training of current law enforcement. The CAHOOTS program in Eugene, Oregon, is a model for Somerville to adapt for mental health-related crises and non-violent situations. We

recommend activity-based cost analyses to determine the cost of SPD response to mental health incidents and by extension the savings Somerville could see by investing in BEST. By replacing armed law enforcement with trained health professionals, the City can protect civilians, save money, and grow as a leader in reimagining safety.

CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets) – Eugene, Oregon

"I carry my de-escalation training, my crisis training and a knowledge of our local resources and how to appropriately apply them. I don't have any weapons, and I've never found that I needed them... I came into this work passionate about being part of an alternative to police response because my father died during a police encounter... [I]n 30 years, we've never had a serious injury or a death that our team was responsible for." - Ebony Morgan, CAHOOTS Crisis Worker

Background: In Eugene, Oregon, the Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets (CAHOOTS) program is serving as a model for responding to mental health-related crises. The model is proving that unarmed health professionals, when capable of responding quickly, can replace armed law enforcement in situations involving mental health crises or non-violent conflicts. With thirty-one years of experience, CAHOOTS is now offering consulting services to help other cities adopt or expand alternative emergency response models.

Program Details: In Eugene, Oregon, dispatchers are trained to recognize non-violent situations by having a mental health component in their scripts. They route these calls to the CAHOOTS program, where two-person teams consisting of a medic and a crisis worker respond to a wide range of mental health-related crises.¹⁰⁴ The medic and crisis worker are not law enforcement officers and are not

armed. Instead, the teams rely on trauma-informed de-escalation and harm reduction techniques.

Results: In 2019, out of a total of around 24,000 CAHOOTS calls, police backup was requested only 150 times. That is less than one percent of all calls (.625% of calls). For the more than 99% of calls that did not require backup, an armed officer was not needed and there was no risk of

CAHOOTS responded to 24,000 calls

99% of which required no officer backup

death or serious harm to a civilian in crisis.

Cost/benefit analysis: The program is also cost effective. In 2019, CAHOOTS received \$2 million from the City and Lane County while responding to 20% of calls for police.

The police department received over \$60 million. By diverting calls from the police to CAHOOTS (the Eugene Police Department estimates the cost of each police response at \$800), the program saves the city of Eugene an estimated \$8.5 million annually.

Implementation in Somerville: The BEST team exists to respond to mental health crises. The City of Somerville should collaborate with BEST by providing this program with funding for a 24/7 mental health clinician team as well as the equipment (like sirens, lights, radios, and bidirectional communication with Somerville 911) and permission to respond as an emergency service.

Expanding BEST will allow appropriate responders to de-escalate mental health crises rapidly.

By making this investment, Somerville can protect residents in crisis from the threat of an unnecessary armed response and better connect them with the resources they need to prevent future incidents. The City of Somerville can look to the CAHOOTS model as an example from which to base the BEST expansion. CAHOOTS offers consulting services, ride alongs, and site visits to help prepare emergency responders in other cities.



Holistic Response

The City of Somerville should implement holistic, healing response models after an incident occurs, to avoid the risk of unnecessary criminalization, hospitalization, traumatization, and additional police contact.

Recommendation 6: The City of Somerville should work in conjunction with Middlesex County to expand existing jail diversion programs by exploring and adopting best practices from national holistic response models.

Investing in programming around holistic response allows cities to more effectively meet the needs of its community members, engage in less harmful means of accountability, and decrease cyclical involvement in the criminal legal system. While the City of Somerville COHR Unit is working to expand jail diversion programs, interviews with city leaders and community members have demonstrated that the current holistic response model is not adequate. The small COHR team provides “assistance with assessment,

referral, alternative to arrest, as well as pre- and post-adjudication planning for individuals impacted by behavioral health.”¹⁰⁵ COHR also assists with emergency response and provides training classes for residents and officers to assist with addiction and crisis. The expansive role of COHR limits their ability to focus on their execution of diversion programs. The City should consider either limiting the scope of COHR’s responsibilities or increasing their funding and resources dedicated to diversion. The City of Somerville can alternatively look to other municipalities to partner with and adopt other diversion program models. One national model, LEAD (described below), is already in practice in New Bedford, Massachusetts and should be considered.

Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) – New Bedford, Massachusetts

“For police officers - reduced paperwork allows them more time to be in the community... For the courts - [it] reduces case management for minor offenses, less probationary cases, less court hearings, [and] more time to focus on significant matters. For the individual - [it provides] immediate access to harm reduction supplies, recovery coaches, medically assisted treatment, and community supports.” - Sergeant Samuel Ortega, New Bedford Police Department, commenting on impact of LEAD

Background: New Bedford, Massachusetts diverts individuals with low-level possession charges to a community-based, harm-reduction case management program, instead of incarcerating them.¹⁰⁶ The program addresses the “unmet behavioral health needs” of the community, by seeking to address the factors that lead to crime in the first place. Instead

of detention, individuals are placed in “a trauma-informed intensive case-management program where the individual receives a wide range of support services, often including transitional and permanent housing and/or drug treatment.”

Program Details: A team of two recovery coaches and a project manager support the LEAD program in New Bedford.¹⁰⁷ The team also supports outreach efforts in New Bedford with overdose prevention and treatment. Recovery coaches connect individuals at risk for overdose with behavioral health treatment providers or peer recovery support providers trained in addiction support and recovery. Prosecutors and police officers collaborate with case managers to “maximize the opportunity to achieve behavioral change.” This is a “less punitive, more effective, public health-based approach to public order issues.”

Results: More than two years after the

program's launch in New Bedford, 66% of the people that have entered the program have not been arrested again or called back to court for any reason.¹⁰⁸ Research has shown that for the LEAD program in general (not just in New Bedford), participants have a 60% lower likelihood of arrest at six months than a comparison group.¹⁰⁹ After four years, LEAD participants were 58% less likely to be arrested. The LEAD program is also improving relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve. Of participants originally reporting negative experiences with law enforcement, about half said these experiences had become more positive after their involvement with the LEAD program.

Cost/benefit analysis: LEAD is associated with significant reductions in criminal legal system utilization and associated costs.¹¹⁰ This is largely a result of better participant outcomes. LEAD participants spend 41 fewer days in jail per year and have 88%

66% of participants have not been re-arrested

Participants have an **88%** lower odds of incarceration

lower odds of prison incarceration. This reduces the county and city costs associated with incarceration.

Implementation in Somerville: By adopting a holistic response model such as LEAD, the City of Somerville can incorporate best practices to more effectively protect civilians from unnecessary detention. In addition, if Somerville adopts the LEAD model, they can gain access to the National LEAD Bureau's support team and keep in regular contact through monthly calls and offers of support. The group calls are facilitated by the retired police chief of Albany, NY, Brendan Cox. For a more localized partnership, Sergeant Samuel Ortega helped coordinate the LEAD program in New Bedford and was highly

responsive to requests for information. When asked if any challenges have arisen relating to the implementation of the program, Sergeant Ortega stated that there have been very few challenges. It is important to note that like the current work of COHR, the success of a LEAD implementation would require an effective partnership with the police department and the district attorney's office. We also recommend establishing clear metrics and guidelines for the use of jail diversion programs to avoid any conscious or unintentional bias in its implementation.

Recommendation 7: Explore supporting survivor-centered approaches to creating justice and addressing harm when it occurs.

The City does not currently support responses to harm that offer survivors approaches to justice outside the criminal legal system. Approaches such as restorative and transformative justice, which center survivors and

differ from the punitive approach of the criminal legal system, have burgeoned in recent years. We recommend the City explore opportunities to support this work in Somerville. The Alberta Community Restorative Justice program is one of these programs and is supported by the Government of Canada, which has embraced restorative justice through federal legislation, policy, and programs for over forty years.¹¹¹ The Alberta program notes the following benefits of restorative justice: meaningful resolutions and healing; a reduced chance of offenders committing other crimes; greater satisfaction with the process among victims and offenders compared to more formal proceedings; and active participation by communities in the resolution of crimes.¹¹² Possible city partners may include the National Center on Restorative Justice, a program launched by the US Bureau of Justice Assistance in late 2019, and the local organization Communities for Restorative Justice.^{113,114}

Other Recommendations

Below are the other recommendations we have that are related to community safety but independent of the focus areas discussed above.

Recommendation 8: The City should improve data transparency at SPD and across City departments.

“While police departments must be cautious to protect individuals’ right to privacy, transparent data on police-citizen interaction is a vital tool to assess the efficacy and fairness of interactions between citizens and the police.”
- Open Government Partnership, 2020¹¹⁵

As discussed in our findings above, multiple community respondents in our interviews and the City’s community listening sessions called for greater transparency and accountability from the City and SPD. The City of Somerville has an opportunity to be a leader in pushing for greater transparency in these critical areas. While data transparency should not be considered a solution to shortfalls and issues surrounding emergency

response and public safety related issues, our team identified this gap based on our own struggles with accessing sufficient data to inform our analyses. Police data is notoriously difficult to access and multiple independent projects have been established to fill this gap.^{116,117,118} Therefore, we recommend the City implement formal mechanisms to track, analyze, and publish all police activity data (including all stops, arrests, and complaints) with demographic and geographic breakdowns. Legislation to collect data for traffic stops and pedestrian stops has already been introduced in the Massachusetts State House.^{119,120} We suggest that these policies be formally codified into law and published in multiple languages for accessibility.

Relatedly, while the City's new tip line is an improvement in providing an anonymous way to report issues with police, the City should take steps to foster further usage of this resource by promoting the line as a resource for civilians, expanding its language and submission options, and releasing the data from the complaints on a consistent basis. The City should also consider expanding on its recent progress in providing greater budget transparency through the Somerville OpenGov portal by also collecting and reporting information on disbursement breakdowns in government contracts, licenses, and permits by race, gender, age, and other key demographics.



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Recommendation 9: The City should accelerate progress towards more diverse representation in its departments.

On January 9, 1990, members of the Somerville Women's Commission and the Somerville Coalition for Racial and Ethnic Justice met with then-Mayor Mike Capuano to advocate for greater minority employment in City Hall.¹²¹ Despite a Somerville Affirmative Action Plan having been approved in Somerville as early as 1980, the need for more diverse representation in the City at all levels also emerged as a key theme from our interviews with community stakeholders. As a result, we recommend accelerating progress towards this goal, particularly in the Office of Housing Stability, SPD, and senior leadership across City departments.



City representation of languages spoken in Somerville, including Haitian Creole, Spanish, Portuguese, Nepali, and Mandarin, should also be prioritized.

Recommendation 10: The City should clarify the authority of the new RSJ Director.

Finally, per the recommendation of community stakeholders, the City should carefully consider and document the authority (including responsibilities, powers, and goals) of the new RSJ Director from the start of their work. These actions would help ensure the Director can

speak frankly and fulfill the City's commitment to genuinely uplift and support community engagement through the RSJ Office and Fund. Given concerns about the autonomy the future Director will have to actually make their mandate a reality and develop “a foundation for impacting racial and social justice city-wide,” the City should ensure that the Director is able to include the voices of those who have experienced feeling unsafe in their communities in conversations surrounding the reimagining of policing. Led by the RSJ Director, these processes should be participatory and designed to account for the fact that those who are most impacted by law enforcement are also likely the most uncomfortable voicing their opinions when SPD is involved due to different levels of power and access.¹²²



Though the City of Somerville has laid a foundation for reimagining policing and community safety, further steps must be taken toward achieving these goals to ensure success. We hope that the City will consider the voices of the diverse government and community stakeholders we outlined in this report who identified opportunities for improvement towards their shared goal of community safety. We also want our analyses of the utility and cost effectiveness of creating new programs and policies as well as reforming existing ones to

drive the city to implement our recommendations in a timely and transparent fashion. The tireless advocacy put forth by Somerville residents in concert with crucial City leadership vacancies has created a moment that the City cannot ignore. Therefore, we hope that the City of Somerville will institute policy and programmatic changes to the areas of incident prevention, alternative intervention, holistic response, as well as in other key areas related to emergency response and policing to achieve the change its residents need to all be safe and well.



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continued

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122 An example of such a participatory process is the “Care First, Jails Last” report developed by the Los Angeles County Alternatives to Incarceration Work Group:

<https://lacialternatives.org/reports/>

Appendices

Appendix A: Sub-categories of Incident Classification

Behavioral Health/Medical Incidents:

Check condition (welfare checks/medical concerns), death, drunk, drugs, attempted suicide, suicide, disorderly conduct, confused, overdose, motor vehicle accident (person injured), sick person, injured person, psychiatric transport, psychiatric emergency, mental health home visit, medical alert (known medical condition)

Violent Incidents: Assault and battery (general, related to domestic violence, and with a dangerous weapon), assault (all kinds), bomb scare, domestic violence (well being check, interview, meeting, follow-up), emergency restraining order issuance, family disturbance/violence, fight (all kinds), harassment, hate incidents, hit and run accident, homicide, indecent exposure, kidnapping, attempted kidnapping, restraining order served, road rage, robbery, sex offender, shots fired or heard, shotspotter alert, restraining order violation, weapons (use, possession, etc.)

General arrest/citation: Arrest, citation

Other traffic incident response: Motor vehicle accidents (non-injury or hit and run), bicycle stops, disabled motor vehicle, parking violations, traffic light violations, traffic complaint,

Assistance (to civilians or other agencies): Assist, assist other agencies
Unable to Determine: Silent 911 call, unknown call type, Other

Theft-related Incidents:

Attempted larceny (motor vehicle, with breaking and entering, any), breaking and entering (all kinds, from motor vehicle), bad checks issued, counterfeit money, fare evasion, flim flam, fraud, fraudulent credit cards, identity theft, larceny (motor vehicle, bicycle, scooter, package, vehicle plates, general), shoplifting

Non-violent Person-related Incidents:

Dispute, groups causing disturbance, interpreter required, missing person report, found missing person, obscene/threatening phone calls, suspicious person, trespassing, unwanted guest

Environmental/Non-theft

Property Incidents: Abandoned motor vehicle, alarm (bank, fire, motor vehicle, general), animals, arson, fire, found hypodermic needle, found property, graffiti, hazardous condition, hazardous waste, injured animal, hazardous leak, lockout, lost property, motor vehicle vandalism, noise, open doors, recovered property (bike, motor vehicle, etc.), street flooding, suspicious package, suspicious vehicle, trash, vandalism

Investigation: All units be on lookout, attempted warrant served, city code violation, crime scene investigation, cyber crime investigation, general followup, general investigation, notification of person, receiving passed information, restraining order, sex offender audit, search warrant, summons served, warrant served

Appendix B: Recent State and Nearby City Legislative Reform Efforts

STATE HOUSE REFORMS

Both the House and Senate have introduced two versions of police reform bills. The most relevant policies in these bills are listed below:



- (1) Creating a Police Officer Standards and Accreditation Committee, which would monitor and investigate police conduct, license law enforcement, and revoke licenses for violent or racist behavior and other misdeeds. These revocations could result in the stripping of qualified immunity
- (2) Commissioning of a study on qualified immunity more generally
- (3) Banning certain police tactics, including chokeholds, and setting new limits on the use of tear gas and rubber bullets
- (4) Requiring police departments to seek “civilian authorization” before buying military equipment for use on citizens
- (5) Banning schools from feeding information about students’ immigration status or suspected gang affiliation to police

CITY OF BOSTON REFORMS

Mayor Martin Walsh endorsed recommendations proposed by a task force on reform in the City of Boston on October 13, 2020. These recommendations, to be accomplished in 180 days, include:

- (1) Creating an independent Office of Police Accountability and Transparency (“OPAT”) with full investigatory and subpoena power
- (2) Formalizing and expanding the BPD’s commitment to diversity and inclusion through the creation of a Diversity & Inclusion unit
- (3) Expanding the BPD’s adoption of the body-worn camera program and continuing to ban the use of biometrics and facial recognition software.
- (4) Enhancing the BPD’s Use of Force policies (Rule 303, Rule 303A, Rule 303B, Rule 304) and holding the BPD publicly accountable for the violation of these policies
- (5) Adopting practices that maximize accountability, transparency, and public access to the BPD



CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS

Various cities and towns in Massachusetts have considered the role that leaving the Civil Service can play in providing them with more flexibility on how they hire and promote their police officers.



The civil service system was enacted in 1884 to help the government recruit and hire the most talented personnel as well as eliminate patronage and political interference. All police officers must take the civil service exam to be hired or promoted. Grafton, Marlboro, Uxbridge, and Athol are among more than two dozen Massachusetts communities that have already left Civil Service completely. They argue that leaving the civil service gives them more flexibility to have different requirements for their officers, including on issues of diversity, residency, language proficiency, and more.

We agree to have all and/or specific portions of
this report shared by the Harvard Kennedy
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