



THE SOMERVILLE CHARTER REVIEW FINAL REPORT

City of Somerville

September 8, 2022

Charter Review Committee Members

Meagan Benetti, MS, MBA

Meagan is an evaluator, community-based researcher, and facilitator who has a deep commitment to advancing racial, social and environmental justice. She's worked at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community for the last seven years where she's partnered with a variety of stakeholders to improve mental health and social service systems. Meagan is new to Somerville and is currently a member of the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Volunteer Council. She enjoys traveling, yoga, hiking, kayaking, and exploring the Boston area through its rich culinary scenes.

Ben Echevarria

Ben is a lifelong resident, former Executive Director of The Welcome Project, and a Trustee at Cambridge Health Alliance. He has years of organizing experience in the community.

Ona Ferguson

Ona is a senior mediator at the Consensus Building Institute, based in Alewife. Professionally, she helps groups work together, especially on natural resource and public policy topics. She was born and raised within a half a mile of where she lives now, and has a husband and two young children.

Zoe Iacovino

Zoe is proud to call Somerville her home for her whole life! She graduated from Somerville High in 2013 and after college came back to work for State Senator Pat Jehlen where she learned more about the needs of this city and community doing constituent services and communications. She is currently a grad student at Harvard in Urban Planning and Public Policy.

Jessica Lieberman

Jessica has lived in Somerville for 11 years and serves as the chair of the Ward 6 Democratic Committee. She has a BA from Tufts, an MPA from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, and a JD from Boston College Law School. In her day job, she works for an organization that provides leadership and campaign skills training to veterans and national service alumni considering running for office.

Matthew McLaughlin, Ward 1 City Councilor and City Council President, City Council's Designee
Matthew is currently the City Council President and has served on Somerville's City Council since 2014. He grew up in Somerville, attending Somerville public high school afterwards going to Tufts University to pursue a degree in Political Science.

Laura Pitone, Ward 5 School Committee Member, School Committee Chair's Designee

Laura has represented Ward 5 on the Somerville School Committee for the last seven years including serving as School Committee Chair in 2017. In addition to volunteering and leadership positions in the Somerville Public Schools, Laura's professional background is in strategy, planning and organizational development. Laura has collaborated with City staff on facilities planning projects and the City/SPS Children's Cabinet. She and her husband have lived in Ball Square for the last 15 years with their two teenage children and are celebrating their 20th anniversary of living in Somerville this year.

George Proakis, Executive Director of the Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, Mayor's Designee

George worked for the City of Somerville for over 12 years, and has spent his career in planning and municipal government. He received his bachelor's degree in civil engineering from Northeastern, and went on to earn his MPA from Syracuse University and his MPC, City Planning from MIT.

Kat Rutkin

Kat is an urban planner, political consultant, and nonprofit professional. She worked for the City of New York where she wrote and interpreted zoning code, advised elected officials in New York and Massachusetts, and most recently worked in the non-profit sector here in Somerville. She'll be celebrating her tenth anniversary of living in Somerville this June. She lives in East Somerville with her family, which includes two kids, two cats, one snake, and a hamster named Mabel.

Lucas Schaber

Lucas is an active volunteer in the Somerville public schools. He has also helped out on many political campaigns in Somerville. He currently works as an aide for Rep. Uytendehoeven after working for Rep. Provost for two years.

Beverly Schwartz

Bev is a long-time Somerville resident who has engaged with her community through Havurat Shalom, Somerville Pop Warner, and various City committees. With her wife, she has raised three children in Somerville and has experience with the Somerville schools, including special education. She has worked as a software engineer at a Cambridge company for over 30 years and looks forward to applying her research and analysis skills to this project.

Crystal Turner

Crystal currently serves as co-chair of the Somerville Commission for Women and her analytical and problem-solving skills come from having spent over a decade working in finance.

Former Members

Emily Monea, Former Chief of Staff to Mayor Joe Curtatone, Mayor's Designee

Emily was the Chief of Staff to Mayor Curtatone and served on the Charter Review Committee as his designee. She has worked for the City of Somerville for almost 8 years and spent most of her time in SomerStat, the City's performance management and data office. Prior to joining the City, she attended the Harvard Kennedy School and worked on policy research at the Brookings Institution.

William White, Former At-Large City Councilor, City Council President's Designee

Bill is a graduate of Harvard College and Georgetown Law. He is an attorney and his office is in Davis Square. He served on the Somerville City Council/Board of Aldermen for 24 years. Participating in Somerville's government during these transformative years has been a fascinating and rewarding experience for him.

Staff

Anna Corning, Project Manager

Anna is a project manager, startup and policy professional She has worked as a project manager for Boston area tech startups. And more recently worked in the Boston Mayor's Office of Food Access to launch the Boston Food Access Council, in federal congressional offices, and on campaign as an organizer.

Hope Williams, Project Manager

Hope is a policy professional and project manager with experience working in municipal, state, and federal governments. Additionally, she has spent time on electoral campaigns.

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To: Mayor Ballantyne and the Somerville City Council
Fr: The Somerville Charter Review Committee
Da: September 8, 2022

Re: **The Charter Review Committee’s Process, Recommendations, and Charter Text**

A. Overview

We are proud to present you with our final recommendations and proposed new charter text. We unanimously endorse this proposal and have worked hard to ensure that it meets the needs of our city today and in the future.

In October 2020, then-Mayor Curtatone and City Council President Matthew McLaughlin created a 12-member Charter Review Committee, with the charge of reviewing the City’s current charter and making recommendations for amendments to the Mayor and the City Council to improve and modernize the City’s structure and governance. The Committee was also asked to engage the community in robust discussions about potential charter amendments. The committee consisted of 12 members, one designee of the Mayor, one of the City Council President and one of the School Committee, plus nine community members: three appointed by the Mayor, three appointed by the City Council President, two appointed by the School Committee Chair, and one jointly appointed by the Mayor and City Council.

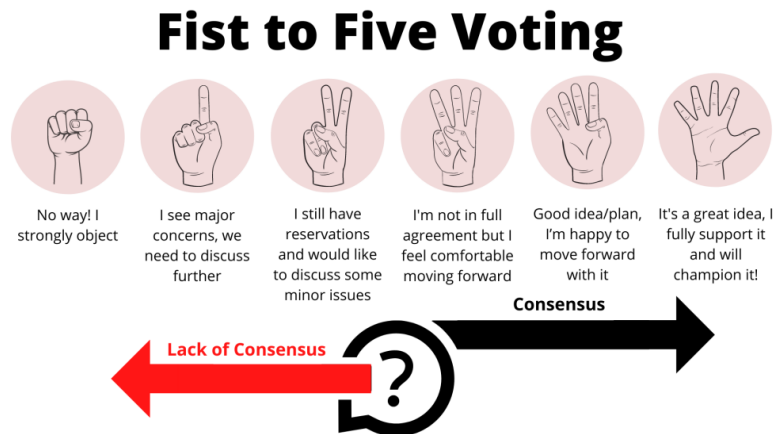
The city’s charter is the “constitution” of the city, laying out the structure and core functions of its government, as distinguished from the city’s ordinances and measures. Our intention was to produce a new charter that lays out the foundation for our city government in a way that reflects the values of the city’s residents and is clear and understandable.

The enclosed document is the product of 16 months of Committee deliberations and community engagement, including 32 committee meetings, more than 10 community engagement events, 85 public comments, over 1,000 community survey responses and countless hours of hard work. We believe this charter to reflect the best possible approach to moving the Somerville government forward in a way that is more just, empowering, responsive and innovative.

B. Process

Our committee’s process included four phases. This approach allowed us to explore and document the values that would guide our decision making, learn about charters and best practices, deliberate policy issues that are important to Somerville, and collectively reach agreement. Through the process, the committee established small topic-specific working groups to conduct our work. Our phased approach was:

Phase 1 (March 2021 - June 2021): Identifying Guiding Values for Our Work: Over the first few committee meetings, we discussed, drafted and decided upon four key values to guide us when there were differing opinions on policy questions. (See below for more on our values.) Because we felt it was important to ensure that all voices on the committee were fully heard and considered, we adopted a consensus-based approach to decision-making known as the “fist-to-five voting method.”



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Phase 2 (July 2021 - October 2021): Learning about Charters (Ours and Others): We then reviewed the general content in the existing Somerville charter and began to learn about other charters in Massachusetts, evolving best practices, and new innovations aimed at addressing current municipal needs. We collaborated with our technical consultants from the Collins Center at UMass Boston to better understand the role of charters and their limitations. As a part of this phase we commissioned 7 interviews of current and former city employees and elected officials reflecting a variety of roles and experiences.

Phase 3 (November 2021 - July 2022): Deliberating the Contents of the New Charter: We used a deliberative process for every topic in this charter. Ahead of each meeting, with extensive support from our facilitation team and content expert consultants, we received a detailed “deliberation planning document” which named the questions to be discussed, laid out existing language in the current charter, explained best practices from other municipalities, included any community input we received on that particular topic, and suggested a broad range of possible outcomes. The committee members reviewed the document prior to the meeting, and during meetings worked together question by question, exploring every option, and listening carefully to recommendations, concerns, and opinions voiced by committee members and the public. We reminded each other of our guiding values often (e.g. “how can we make this process more transparent?” or “which of these options will foster community engagement?”). We regularly looked to the interview summaries and the designees of the mayor, city council and school committee for practical, real world insights.

Throughout our deliberations, we used straw polls to assess the groups preferences but didn’t move on from the topic without achieving consensus as measured with the fist to five method. When a proposed decision got a low score by one or more members, we explored why they had reservations or concerns

¹ Image from <https://opentextbooks.uregina.ca/paths/chapter/making-decisions-as-a-team/>.

with the direction of an issue and sought to address them and make our recommendation better. We tried to solve each issue, always exploring concerns. Thus, when it finally came time to vote for the charter, we had worked through our concerns together, made adjustments we thought were prudent, edited and re-edited, and were able to unanimously support our final product.

Phase 4 (November 2021 - September 2022): Finalizing our Recommendation: Concurrent with the third phase, our drafting working group met regularly after each full committee meeting to accurately capture our recommendations in a draft charter document. The full committee reviewed several iterations of that draft and discussed areas for revision. At the conclusion of all deliberations, the committee conducted a formal vote on the proposed charter language. Each committee member voted (yea/nay) on the record and unanimously supported the final charter you have in your hands today.

C. Community Engagement

Our committee utilized a robust community engagement process from the very beginning. This process included an in person, outdoor Kick-off Event at Foss Park on August 28, 2021, tabling at farmer's markets and winter markets around Somerville, city wide mailers, community meetings, public comments at all committee meetings, a public hearing, monthly newsletter, outreach to community organizations, a community survey, and more.

We emphasized the importance of not only having a deep understanding of community opinions about Somerville city government, but also hearing possible solutions, gaining feedback, and ensuring the committee *incorporated* community input. We listened to Somerville residents and implemented what we heard. Throughout the process, we used an equity lens to engage historically underrepresented and new Somerville residents and make the charter as accessible as possible - this included ensuring our mailers and community survey were available in Somerville's five most spoken languages. In order to maximize community input, we considered how people could engage over time and in different ways from the beginning of the process. Community engagement was integral to our process and final charter recommendations.

D. Values-Centric

The committee explored what the community values in its government and captured these priorities in the Charter Review Committee Values Statement. These values aligned members in a common language and elevated deliberation to thoughtfully consider the complexities of the charter from the perspective of how municipal government can and should serve its residents.

The Charter Review Values Statement builds on the rich history and tradition of the city while reflecting new and evolving needs of today's and future residents. The Committee believed that the Somerville Government can be *more* for the community and its residents than it is today - *more just, empowering, responsive and innovative*.

To be *more just* the proposed charter includes:

- **Enfranchising non-citizen and 16 and 17 year old residents in municipal elections**, allowing our city leadership to represent the voices of those most vulnerable in our community.
- **Ranked Choice Voting Implementation Committee** to recommend how best to implement a voting system. This reform was strongly supported by the Somerville community and will better reflect the will of the electorate.
- **Equitable Compensation Distribution Committee** which will meet every 5 years to reconsider the distribution of compensation across city government, from the highest to lowest pay brackets, through a lens of equity and fairness.

To be *more empowering*, increasing avenues of engagement and accessibility, the proposed charter includes:

- **Collaboration on the Budget**, including specific involvement for both residents and City Council at various steps in the process.
- **Reduced signature requirements for at-large and ward-elected offices** of both School Committee and City Council to be included on the ballot, to expand access to elected office.
- **Public Financing of Campaigns Committee** to consider ways to level the playing field for all interested in serving for public office, not just those who can self-finance a campaign.

To be *more responsive*, through changes to both the executive and legislative branches, the proposed charter includes:

- **Chief Administrative Officer**, working under the direction of the Mayor and approved by City Council, enabling city operations to be more effective, efficient, and accountable.
- **Mayoral 4-year term**, allowing greater stability that will allow the administration to retain high-quality staff that can better respond to community needs.
- **City Council authority to hire staff and independent advisory legal counsel**, expanding their perspective, resources, and capacity to serve the community.
- **Clear protocols for City Council to access information from the executive branch** and a clear and improved **multiple member body and department head appointment process** to increase transparency and accountability.

To be *more innovative*, the proposed charter includes the following reviews of city government, policies, and structure to proactively respond to future community needs and address any difficulties of current municipal processes:

- **Periodic Review of Charter every 10 years**
- **Periodic Review of Ordinances every 10 years**
- **Periodic Review of Multiple Member Bodies every 10 years**

E. New Charter

Our committee chose to write a *new* charter text rather than modifying the existing charter. While we kept much of the actual form and structure of the current charter and Somerville government, we found the

existing charter hard to understand and in need of organization. We determined that it needed an overhaul. This gave us the opportunity to write it more cleanly for today's community members, capturing the essential messages and structure while seeking to be as approachable as possible, despite the complexity of the subject matter.

F. Closing

We look forward to hearing your deliberation and reflections on the proposed charter text. We have provided a justification document to explain the rationale for why some things are (or are not) recommended in the new charter. We hope it will help you and the public to understand the rationale for the choices made by the committee.

We are excited to see this new proposed charter implemented. We believe it will help create the future our community needs. Please consider this enclosed report as our final recommendations to you, respectfully submitted with our best intentions.

Sincerely,

Meagan Benetti

Ben Echevarria

Ona Ferguson

Zoe Iacovino

Jessica Lieberman

Matt McLaughlin

Laura Pitone

George Proakis

Kat Rutkin

Lucas Schaber

Beverly Schwartz

Crystal Turner

Proposed Charter at a Glance

The new charter has nine articles.

ARTICLE 1: INCORPORATION; SHORT TITLE; DEFINITIONS

This article defines the municipality, separation of power, and definitions for the document. The Mayor-Council form of government has served Somerville well so the proposed charter retains this structure.

ARTICLE 2: LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

This article defines the role of the city council including their powers, responsibilities, appointments, and more. The proposed charter includes an access to information provision, the ability to hire advisory legal counsel and staff, and the appointment confirmation processes.

ARTICLE 3: EXECUTIVE BRANCH

This article defines the role of the mayor including their powers, responsibilities, appointments, and the vacancy process. The proposed charter recommends extending the mayor's term from 2 to 4 years.

ARTICLE 4: SCHOOL COMMITTEE

This article defines the role of the school committee including their powers, rules and procedures, and more.

ARTICLE 5: ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION

This article defines the organization of the city's administration. The proposed charter recommends defining the city's departments, agencies, board and commissions in an administrative organization, which allows the city to add, remove or modify elements of the city's administration without submitting a charter change for approval with the state legislature.

ARTICLE 6: FINANCIAL PROCEDURES

This article defines the financial elements of the city including the city's budget process, capital improvement plan, and the appointment of an independent auditor. The proposed charter recommends earlier submission and action deadlines for the city's budget, adding opportunities for city council and public input, separating the capital improvement plan timeline from the regular city budget, and changing the appointing authority of an independent auditor to city council.

ARTICLE 7: ELECTIONS

This article defines the city's election process, what form of voting the city will use and who is eligible to vote and run for office in city elections. The proposed charter recommends expanding municipal voting rights to non citizens and 16- & 17-year-olds and changing the signature requirement to get on the ballot for some city offices.

ARTICLE 8: GENERAL PROVISIONS

This article defines overall elements of the charter including computation of time, references to Massachusetts general laws, and enforcement of charter provisions. The proposed charter recommends the addition of a regular review of the charter, of city ordinances and of multiple member bodies.

ARTICLE 9: TRANSITION PROVISIONS

This article defines the continuation of existing laws, unless they are explicitly repealed by the charter, also provides for the continuation of personnel and functions of the city. The proposed charter adds the recommendation of five study committees to explore: 1) implementing Ranked Choice Voting, 2) public financing of campaigns, 3) equitable compensation distribution, 4) review of multiple member bodies, and 5) participatory budgeting.

Recommendations

The following proposed recommendations are based on considerable research, community engagement, spirited committee deliberation, insights from Somerville elected officials and employees, best practices from similar Massachusetts municipalities, and the committee's stated values of creating a more just, empowering, responsive and innovative City government.

The Committee's review and deliberation process included:

- 1) Brainstorming and sharing potential topics and areas for consideration
- 2) Interviewing major stakeholders including current and former elected officials and city employees
- 3) Researching other charters, structures of government, and creative solutions to modern municipal challenges
- 4) Drafting and approving a work plan for deliberations
- 5) Reviewing an exemplar charter document, asking questions, considering alternatives, and flagging areas to deliberate
- 6) Deliberating issue by issue, always reaching consensus on each topic before continuing

Below is an overview of each individual recommendation, followed by the policy considerations, committee discussion, and community engagement that led to the decision.

GENERAL

Recommendation #1: Write a new and modernized Charter.

The committee wrote an entirely new charter that would be more accessible and clear, encompassing all recommended changes and existing provisions.

As the current Somerville charter is an archaic document with numerous amendments and edits, coupled with the vast community support for a more approachable and transparent government, the committee decided to draft a new, organized, and straightforward charter text.

Policy Considerations: As a best practice for governing, innovation, and accessibility, it is common for municipalities to rewrite and modernize their charter. Most modern charters last 30 to 40 years. The current Somerville charter was drafted in 1899 and still has many remains of old language and outdated practices. It has been amended and overridden by State and federal law countless times, making much of the document null and void or nearly impossible to follow. The committee realized that adding amendments to the current charter would amplify this problem instead of improving the document.

Community Feedback: Somerville residents and elected officials have expressed strong support for a more clear and accessible government; modernizing and organizing the charter and its language were the best first step to fixing this issue.

Recommendation #2: Maintain the Mayor-Council system of governance.

The committee recommends keeping a Mayor-Council form of government.

Based on the current functioning system, the value in electing your chief elected officer, challenges in other municipalities in Massachusetts, and lack of community and city employee support for a manager system, the committee voted to keep the current form of government.

Policy Considerations: There are two legal forms of government in Massachusetts: Mayor-Council and Council-Manager. A Mayor-Council form of government is based on balance-of-powers between a mayor and a city council. Separation of powers provides healthy independence, debate, consensus building, and creative tension. A Council-Manager form of government is based on unity of power where the council makes all decisions and a professional manager runs the nuts-and-bolts of the city. By professionalizing the running of city government, theoretically, city business is removed from city politics.

The difference between a “strong mayor” and “weak mayor” form of government is not well-defined, generally with “strong mayor” defined as one with a lot of power and a weak mayor as one with little power. One key feature that seems consistent among policy discussions on this topic is whether the mayor sits on city council and is just one vote with no additional power or the mayor is the head of the executive branch as an opposing power.

The entirety of the current charter is based upon the Mayor-Council system with a “strong mayor,” meaning they head an executive branch.

Community Feedback: The Somerville community has shown almost no indication of preference to switch to a council-manager form of government or to a “weak mayor,” and there was strong opposition to changing the form of government. In a questionnaire from Our Revolution, 11 of the 12 currently elected city councilors indicated they would vote against any charter with a council-manager form of government.

Recommendation #3: Change the start of term.

The committee recommends changing the start of term of office from the first Monday in January to the first business day in January.

Changing the start of term to the first business day avoids cultural and religious holidays.

Policy Considerations: The first Monday in January occasionally conflicted with religious holidays. Watertown, Framingham, and Newton all begin on the first business day of January.

Community Feedback: There was no community feedback at the start of term, although one member of the committee was personally affected by this issue and stated that the impact on their religious community was felt by many.

ARTICLE 1: INCORPORATION; SHORT TITLE; DEFINITIONS

Recommendation #4: Require posting to the City website.

The committee recommends adding the city website to posting requirements and to affirm Open Meeting Law requirements in definitions of posting requirements.

Based on the committee’s emphasis on transparency and community demand for increased access to information regarding city happenings, as well as the committee's value to become modern and innovative regarding city operations, the committee voted to include posting to the Somerville website in our definition of “posting.”

Policy Considerations: It is a best practice to have municipal governments post all meeting notices, documents, and minutes to their website. Ensuring that residents can find this information on the Somerville website is a key step toward transparency.

Community Feedback: The community supported increasing access to information by residents, which we heard frequently in public comments at meetings.

ARTICLE 2: LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Recommendation #5: Maintain the current composition of city council.

The committee recommends keeping the current city council composition: 7 ward and 4 at large councilors.

Policy Considerations: The city council's current structure of ward and at-large membership has served the Somerville community well. Residents receive the positives of both types of membership. Benefits of ward councilors seats include: increased representation for historically underrepresented groups (especially those geographically based like race and economic status), councilors can be more in tune with the unique issues of their constituents, and ward representation can increase political participation and communication between residents and their representative. The major benefit of maintaining at-large councilors is the ability to take a wider view of the role as they are accountable to all residents. At-large seats also can increase participation in elections and the number of candidates on the ballot.

Community Feedback: There was not significant community support to change the composition of city council.

Recommendation #6: Keep city councilor terms at 2 years.

The committee recommends keeping city councilor terms at 2 years.

The committee makes this recommendation with the belief that a 2-year city council term has many benefits, including: a) shorter terms allow people who may not be able to commit to 4 years to run for office, b) as the makeup of Somerville is diverse and ever changing, ensuring the 11-member city council is representative of the ward and at-large population should happen frequently, and c) the vast community support for keeping the terms 2 years.

Policy Considerations: Every Massachusetts municipality with a population greater than 50,000 has 2-year terms for city councilors, including the eleven municipalities with a population greater than 50,000 with 4-year terms for the mayor.² It is a best practice to have the city council serve 2-year terms. As mentioned above, there are many benefits to a 2-year term for city councilors for the residents. Additionally, it is important to ensure the legislative body is representative of the wards or at-large residents they represent and are held accountable to the voters frequently.

After deliberating intensively about the possibility of staggered terms for city council, the committee concluded that the negatives outweigh the benefits. Staggered terms can only exist in 3 or 4 year terms to ensure there is not an election every year. For 3 year terms, every other cycle it would be the same year as a state or federal election, meaning the election could not be in November. For 4 year terms, the same ward and at-large seats would always fall off cycle from the mayor's election, which could cause a constant imbalance in turnout for certain ward and at-large seats. Additionally, because the committee

² The only municipality with a complication is Framingham, which has 2-year terms for ward councilors and 4-year terms for at-large councilors. This is the only municipality with 4-year council terms of any kind.

ultimately decided to not include a recall provision in their recommendations, keeping a 2-year term allows for the legislative body to have accountability to the voters through more frequent elections.

Community Feedback: Community members were in favor of 2-year terms for city councilors.

- 65% of respondents to the community survey supported 2-year terms for city councilors.
- At a community meeting, the majority of participants were in favor of 2-year terms for city councilors, emphasizing that shorter terms allow folks who may not be able to commit to 4 years to run for office.

Recommendation #7: Allow city council to hire their own advisory legal counsel.

The committee recommends adding a provision that allows city council to hire their own advisory legal counsel, ensuring a funding mechanism and guardrails for the City are included.

The committee believes this recommendation is a balance of power mechanism that can increase trust in city government and provide city council with an important additional resource by allowing city council to have their own advisory counsel on hand when they have legal questions or concerns.

Policy Considerations: Currently, school committee is allowed advisory legal counsel as dictated in Massachusetts General Laws. In deliberations, the committee felt that allowing city council the ability to get a second opinion on legal questions can potentially increase trust in government, especially when there is disagreement between the Mayor's Office and city council. The city council designees emphasized the benefits of this professional legal resource, while acknowledging the importance of guardrails around the advisory nature of the role. The legal counsel would be advisory only and prohibited from representing city council or the City in any legal proceedings. The City Solicitor serves as the legal representation and authority for all branches of Somerville government and this would remain true with this provision.

Community Feedback: The community supported more support for city council.

- In the community survey, 52% of the respondents said they felt city council needed more support.
- In the community survey, 56% of respondents who answered the question "which of the following would be helpful in better supporting city council" selected advisory legal counsel as one option.
- Some participants at one of our community engagement meetings expressed support for advisory legal counsel.

Recommendation #8: Allow City Council to hire staff.

The committee recommends adding a provision that allows city council to hire their own staff.

This recommendation is a balance of power mechanism that can increase city council's policy making and legislative ability by providing additional resources. Currently, city council can hire staff, but this recommendation would enshrine the power in the charter.

Policy Considerations: A few MA charters explicitly state that their city councils *can* hire staff. There are none that *require* the hiring of staff or appropriations - this is understandable as mandating city council to hire staff could add an additional burden to the council. Somerville city council can currently hire staff subject to appropriations. For example, in FY22 (the year that just ended), the council requested a full time staff position called a Policy Analyst in the budget for their department. This was approved and they were allotted the funds. At city council's request, this staffer does not report to city council/city councilors, but to the city clerk.

Community Feedback: The community supported more support for city council.

- In the community survey, 52% of the respondents said they felt city council needed more support.
- In the community survey, 70% of respondents who answered the question "which of the following would be helpful in better supporting city council" selected staff as one option.
- Participants at one of our community engagement meetings also expressed support for city council hiring staff.

Recommendation #9: Add city council approval process for department heads and members of multiple member bodies.

See Recommendation #15 and Recommendation #16 on the entire process below.

Recommendation #10: Add an access to information provision to the charter.

The committee recommends adding an Access to Information provision, which would allow city council to formally request that department heads or the mayor appear before them in response to requests for information related to their department/city agency.

This is a new balance of power mechanism. The addition of this provision was critical to the committee as they made other key decisions relating to transparency, accountability, and balance of power.

Policy Considerations: Currently, there is a process that allows city council to submit non-binding orders for information to the mayor and department heads. This provision is an expansion and enshrinement of that process - instead of non-binding orders, city council would be able to submit formal Access to Information Requests to make investigations into the affairs of the city and into the conduct and performance of any city agency. This would *not* prevent City Council from the current practice of filing non-binding orders.

Including this provision in a charter is a best practice and it is a part of many Massachusetts charters.

Community Feedback: The community supported increasing access to information by residents, which we heard frequently in public comments at meetings, and this provision would allow for residents to learn more about city operations via the request of city council.

Recommendation #11: Add a group petition mechanism.

The committee recommends adding a group petition provision, which would require City Council to hold a public hearing on every petition submitted that is signed by at least 100 municipal voters within 3 months.

The committee considered multiple resident participation mechanisms, but approved *only* the group petition mechanism. Community feedback was generally negative on resident participation mechanisms, and concern was expressed for how initiatives are being used to disrupt government and stoke culture wars across the country.

Policy Considerations: The current charter provides a mechanism for fifty qualified voters to make a written request for a general meeting called by city council. The current charter has no other participation mechanisms such as initiative petitions, referendum, or recall. The group petition the committee recommends is most similar to what is in our current charter, but allows any municipal voter to sign on, raises the signature requirement to 100, and has a timeline for when city council must respond. We debated the number of signatures and agreed to 100, as 100 is the number of signatures a candidate must gather to run for an at-large city council seat.

Community Feedback: When the committee started this process 16 months ago, we heard from a number of people interested in direct participation mechanisms. As time passed, there were increasing cases of groups using these mechanisms to disrupt governments nationwide, and we started to receive only negative feedback on this topic. At the community outreach meeting which occurred towards the beginning of the process, there was split opinion on individual petition, overwhelming support for group petition, support for initiative petition with a high requirement for number of signatures (most votes for 500 or more), and split opinion on referendum. In our community survey, which occurred towards the end of the process, the question on referendum had 38% for, 41% against, 20% not sure, and 1% no preference. On recall, 33% for, 47% against, 19% not sure, and 1% no preference.

Recommendation #12: Maintain the vacancy process for at-large and ward city councilors.

The committee recommends keeping the current vacancy process for city councilors.

- *Ward: if a vacancy occurs more than 180 days until the next municipal election, a special election is held.*
- *At-large: if a vacancy occurs with more than 180 days until the next municipal election, the defeated candidate with the largest number of votes replaces them - if they decline or there isn't anyone, a special election is held.*

Policy Considerations: The committee considered several factors when deliberating vacancies, specifically: 1) this process has been working well for the city council, 2) both city council designees were in favor of keeping the policy the same, as it was recently tested/interrogated by a vacancy and worked successfully, and 3) while it is unique to Somerville, the process allows residents to be represented by the person with the most votes for an at-large seat.

The committee discussed the difference between a ward and at-large vacancy, specifically about how there are many more candidates and voters for at-large seats, meaning the defeated candidate with the largest number of votes is representative of the electorate. This is not necessarily true of a ward seat, when oftentimes there is no challenger or there is a very small number of votes for the individual challenger.

Community Feedback: There was no community feedback on the city council vacancy process.

ARTICLE 3: EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Recommendation #13: Increase the mayoral term to 4 years.

The committee recommends increasing the mayoral term from 2 years to 4 years.

The committee makes this recommendation with the belief that a 4-year mayoral term has many benefits, including: a) more time to implement and pass policy priorities, b) stability for administration jobs and the ability to attract stronger talent, c) the appeal for more potential candidates to run for mayor because of a longer term for a full-time role, and d) the vast community support for a 4-year mayoral term.

Policy Considerations:

The committee had several considerations for this increase. First, in Massachusetts, mayoral terms are either 2 or 4 years across the state. Second, term lengths are trending towards 4-year terms, especially in municipalities that have recently revised their charters. Third, eight out of eleven cities closest in population to Somerville have 4-year terms for mayor.

In addition to the above-mentioned benefits, the committee considered that 4-year terms would also allow for more credible challengers with more time to build their case to voters.

Community feedback and interviews with critical members of city staff and elected officials also factored into the recommendation, as a majority of the community and interviewees were in favor of an extended term length.

Community Feedback: Community members were in favor of a 4-year term for mayor.

- 62% of respondents to the community survey supported a 4-year term for the mayor.
- At a community meeting, the majority of participants were in favor of a 4-year term, emphasizing the benefits of committing less time to campaigning, which would give more time for governing.

Recommendation #14: Add a Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to the city administration.

The committee recommends adding a Chief Administrative Officer to the city administration who would be confirmed by city council as laid out in the department head process.

The committee added the ability for the mayor to publicly appoint someone dedicated to running city operations and allow city council to have approval over the appointment. The committee also sought to

ensure that anyone in this role had the skills and qualifications needed to successfully serve the City in this role. In the past, the day-to-day running of the City has largely fallen on a combination of the mayor's Chief of Staff and various department heads with no oversight from city council. Adding the CAO position to the charter: 1) gives city council some oversight and confirmation of the role, 2) frees the Chief of Staff to focus on policy, and 3) allows department heads to focus on their departments.

Policy Considerations: A Chief Administrative Officer is a position that oversees the municipality's day-to-day operations at the direction of the mayor. The CAO must have strong administrative and executive qualifications based on experience, training, and/or education. The role would be appointed by the mayor with approval from city council. The job requirements and hiring process will be defined in the city's administrative code.

While a CAO has a similar skillset to a city manager, this position differs from a city manager in that (1) the CAO is answerable and accountable to an elected official, the mayor, and (2) the mayor (not the CAO) hires department heads and makes appointments to multiple member bodies.

Nationwide, 52% of mayor-council cities with a population of 10,000 or higher have a CAO. The 9th edition of the National Civic League's [Model City Charter](#) strongly recommends having a CAO in a mayor-council system because "the office of CAO builds into the charter a support position for the mayor and institutionalizes the professional coordination of the departments of city government." Additionally, this year, 2022, the current mayor supported the addition of a CAO and requested funding in the city budget to add this role.

Community Feedback: Interviews with key city staff and elected officials indicated support for an executive role to supervise and oversee operational and day-to-day functions of the city, similar to a Chief of Staff but who is focused on city administration rather than policy. There was no community feedback on the CAO position.

Recommendation #15: Change the department head structure.

The committee recommends six changes for department heads:

- 1. Candidates have a conditional offer prior to city council confirmation;*
- 2. City council must take up the appointment of a department head within 30 days of filing;*
- 3. City council must provide an explanation for rejection of a department head appointment;*
- 4. Temporary department head appointments have an initial 150-day limit with possible 60-day extensions if approved by city council;*
- 5. Department heads serve at the discretion of the mayor and may be removed by the mayor, may no longer request reinstatement from city council; and*
- 6. Removal of terms for department heads.*

The committee recommended several changes to the appointment, removal, holdovers/temporary appointments, and term lengths of department heads. The committee balanced these decisions with the acknowledgment that: a) these positions are employees, not elected officials, b) city council should have authority to approve or reject department heads (in a timely manner), c) department heads are accountable

to the mayor, d) the access to information provision will allow for city council to call these individuals to council meetings, e) there should be a limit on temporary department heads terms, but flexibility if they cannot find someone to hire, and f) creating a more transparent system.

Policy Considerations:

The committee balanced the needs of the mayor’s office for filling department head positions in a timely manner with the desire for oversight from city council, while staying mindful of employment law.

Timelines were put in place to increase the City’s ability to hire the best candidates. Candidates may be granted a conditional approval/offer by the mayor while waiting for city council confirmation - this ensures that the City does not lose good candidates by being unable to extend an offer. City council will then have 30 days to approve or reject a department head appointment so candidates can get a final answer promptly. If city council rejects a candidate they must provide a written explanation.

Currently, there is no time component for temporary appointments, giving the mayor the ability to keep candidates who would not otherwise get approval from city council. The timeline in this charter provides the mayor adequate time to fill a position, the ability to extend the temporary appointment if the mayor has trouble filling the post, and the ability for city council to bring a temporary appointment to an end if they feel the extensions are being used improperly. For oversight once department heads are appointed, city council may now investigate city departments and call department heads into city council in the new Access to Information provision.

In a mayor-council system, employment of department heads is at the discretion of the mayor. In practice, term lengths are ineffective - department heads serve at the discretion of the mayor and the current term lengths do not have enforcement mechanisms of any kind. If the mayor removes a department head, city council can no longer force the mayor to keep a department head they no longer want, as this would create a hostile work environment and potential conflicts with employment law. In the new charter, if an employee believes they are wrongfully terminated by a mayor, this wrongful termination would be covered by employment law processes.

Community Feedback: There was no community feedback on the department head process.

Recommendation #16: Change the multiple member body (MMB) structure.

The committee recommends three changes for multiple member bodies:

- 1) Holdovers and temporary appointments last 150 days, with an option for 60-day extensions with city council approval;*
- 2) City council has 45 days from filing to confirm or reject mayoral appointments, and can have a single 15-day extension upon request; and*
- 3) MMBs, their structures, and term lengths will be specified in Administrative Code. For MMBs governed by MGL, MGL takes precedence.*

The committee recommends keeping:

- 1) Current procedures for removal of MMB appointments (the appointing authority is the removing authority);*
- 2) Current practice that the mayor serves ex officio on all MMBs;*
- 3) Use of uniform governing procedures for MMBs including following Open Meeting Law; and*
- 4) MMB members are appointed for terms.*

Please see Recommendation #33 about the Periodic Review of MMBs.

The committee recommended several changes to the holdovers and temporary appointments, timeline, and the coding of multiple member bodies. The committee balanced these decisions with the acknowledgment that: a) city council should have authority to approve or reject multiple member body appointments (in a timely manner), b) there should be a limit on holdovers/temporary appointments, and c) it is important to have all multiple member bodies codes, legal authority, and information in one place.

Policy Considerations: In Somerville there are over 400 seats on the 40+ MMBs. The committee worked hard to balance the needs of the mayor (or other appointing authority) to track and fill these positions in a timely manner with city council's desire for oversight and approval. Currently, there is no time limit for holdovers and temporary appointments to MMBs, giving the mayor the ability to keep members who would not otherwise get approval from city council. The committee recommends a timeline that provides the mayor with adequate time to fill a seat, the ability to extend the temporary appointment or holdover if the mayor has trouble filling the seat, and the ability for city council to bring an end to a temporary appointment or holdover if they feel the extensions are being used improperly. For MMBs governed by MGL which require a quorum to function, MGL takes precedence.

The authority, code, and legislation for MMBs all currently exist across multiple sources: MGL, the charter, and ordinances. The committee felt it was important to have all of these laid out clearly and transparently in the Administrative Code. The committee also established a Periodic Review of MMBs, the first to happen immediately upon the passing of the charter, to examine the current effectiveness, challenges, and potential improvements to Somerville's MMBs. See Recommendation #28 for more on this.

Community Feedback: There were a few responses to the community survey expressing frustration with the lack of accountability for holdovers on MMBs.

Recommendation #17: Change the vacancy process for mayor.

The committee recommends changing the vacancy process for the mayor based on a 4-year term. If a vacancy occurs: in the first 17 months of the term there will be a special election, in months 18-21 there will be a mayoral election added to the regular city election, in months 22-42 there will be a special election, and in months 42-46 the mayoral election will be the regular scheduled election. The City Council President will serve as acting mayor until the election is decided in all cases.

The committee recommends this change to ensure mayoral vacancies are filled in the most transparent and representative way for the residents.

Policy Considerations: The committee sought to ensure the vacancy process prioritizes accountability to voters and fills the role in a timely manner. The committee considered several other factors when deliberating about a mayoral vacancy, specifically: 1) how much time there is until the upcoming election, 2) what has worked well in other communities with 4-year mayoral terms, and 3) how to ensure the City could best function with an acting mayor.

Community Feedback: There was no community feedback on mayoral vacancy.

ARTICLE 4: SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Recommendation #18: Maintain the current composition of school committee.

The committee recommends keeping the current school committee composition: 7 ward members, mayor and city council president serve ex-officio.

Policy Considerations: A ward based school committee has served the Somerville community well, ensuring representation and ease of access to each member. Multiple committee members expressed concerns regarding converting entirely to an at-large structure.

Community Feedback: There was no community feedback on the composition of school committee.

Recommendation #19: Keep school committee terms at 2 years.

The committee recommends keeping school committee members terms at 2 years.

The committee makes this recommendation with the belief that a 2-year school committee terms have many benefits, including: a) closer accountability to voters for a policy making body, b) shorter terms allow people who may not be able to commit to 4 years to run for office, especially for a part-time role, and c) the vast community support for keeping the terms 2 years.

Policy Considerations: Twenty of the twenty three Massachusetts municipalities with a population greater than 50,000 have a 2-year term for school committee members.

As mentioned above, there are many benefits to a 2-year term for school committee members for the residents. It is important to ensure the policy making body is representative of the wards they represent and are held accountable to the voters.

After deliberating intensively the possibility of staggered terms for school committee, the committee concluded negatives outweigh the benefits. Staggered terms can only exist in 3 or 4 year terms to ensure there is not an election every year. For 3 year terms, every other cycle it would be the same year as a state or federal election, meaning the election could not be in November. For 4 year terms, the same seats

would always fall off cycle from the mayor's election, which could cause a constant imbalance in turnout for certain seats.

Community Feedback: Community members were in favor of 2-year terms for school committee members.

- 69% of respondents to the community survey supported 2-year terms for school committee members.

Recommendation #20: Maintain the vacancy process for school committee members.

The committee recommends the following process:

- 1) *If more than 1 year remains in the term, there will be a special election;*
- 2) *If less than 1 year remains in the term the school committee will appoint a replacement, however the seat will not be filled if the next city election is within 120 days, the newly elected member will start immediately.*

Policy Considerations: The committee considered the benefits of the current system of filling vacancies on the school committee. The priority was to keep the representation of residents as much as possible without overly burdensome special elections. The committee weighed the pros and cons of special elections, noting potential costs for the city, but after input from city officials the committee concluded that keeping the process for a special election if a vacancy occurs at the beginning of a term is the best practice to ensure resident voices are heard.

Community Feedback: Concerns about cost for the city, but nominal after discussion with election and city officials.

ARTICLE 5: ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION

Recommendation #21: Organize the City via Administrative Code.

The committee recommends two changes:

- 1) *The City should be organized via Administrative Code; and*
- 2) *Removing all city organization from the charter.*

An Administrative Code is essentially an organization chart of a city, which includes all city departments, agencies, roles, administration, and boards and commissions. This document lives outside the charter and does not require approval by the state legislature for changes.

Policy Considerations: Currently, Somerville's city departments and agencies are defined in the city's charter, which require the administration to submit home rule petitions (edits to the charter) to the state legislature for approval each time they want to create a new department head or reorganize agencies. The Somerville Charter Revision of 2012 enabled the City of Somerville to implement an Administrative Code. If this document exists, the mayor can create, reorganize, or abolish city departments, agencies, boards, commissions and offices in the administrative code by submitting administrative orders to city council for approval.

In alignment with the committee's values of a responsive and innovative government, the committee recognized the benefit of allowing the administration to define its organization without needing a Home Rule Petition, increasing flexibility for city operations. While administrative code was enabled in 2012, the city has yet to draft the code in order to remove city departments and general organization from the charter. By enshrining administrative organization in the recommended charter and removing departments and boards, the next step will be for the city to draft an administrative code.

Community Feedback: There was no community feedback on administrative code.

Recommendation #22:: Add a periodic review of compensation of all city employees to ensure compensation is distributed equitably and to the greatest extent possible compensation is sufficient to live in the city.

See Recommendation #35 on the periodic review process below.

ARTICLE 6: FINANCIAL PROCEDURES

Recommendation #23: Change Somerville's timeline for drafting the City budget.

The committee recommends four changes:

- 1) Adding an Annual Budget Meeting prior to April 1;*
- 2) Requiring the mayor to submit the budget to city council "on or about" 30 days before the end of the fiscal year;*
- 3) Requiring the school committee to submit their budget to the mayor "on or about" 15 days prior to the date the mayor submits their budget; and*
- 4) Requiring city council to take action on the budget prior to the beginning of the new fiscal year.*

Policy Considerations: Currently, the Somerville budget timeline is defined by Massachusetts General Law, which requires the mayor to submit a budget 170 days from the beginning of the year (~June 20), and allows City Council 45 days to approve said budget. A best practice in modern charters is to establish a timeline in the charter to ensure proactive communication between branches of government, transparency, opportunity for community input, and ultimately a cohesive and reflective budget. The committee's primary concerns regarding changing the budget timeline were increasing accessibility for residents, considering potential constraints to ensure adequate drafting time for all parties, and creating more opportunity for collaboration between branches of city government and community members.

The committee believes formalizing an annual budget meeting, which is rarely held in Somerville, will lead to increased collaboration between branches and create a foundation for parties to proactively compile and draft city budget priorities.

By establishing earlier budget submission deadlines for the mayor and school committee and requiring city council to take action on the budget prior to the new fiscal year, there will be an increase in accountability between parties, more time for city council to review, and clear expectations that promote

transparency between the Somerville government and its residents. In deliberations, the mayor's designee supported an earlier submission deadline for the mayor, the only concern would be if a crisis occurs, such as the pandemic that impacted that city's ability to submit a budget on time. The school committee designee emphasized the constraints the school committees works within to build the school budget such as employee contracts, union negotiations and operational requirements. As other similar sized municipalities have revised their charters and modernized budget processes, establishing earlier budget timelines and increasing collaboration mechanisms have been top priorities. The committee's final recommended timeline ensures there is a clear overall budget strategy, adequate time for the mayor and school committee to gather input and prepare their budgets and allows more time and structure for public input.

Community Feedback: In community feedback many residents advocated for increased transparency in the budget process and sought more information on the financial state of the city. Additional feedback focused on increased time for city council to adequately review the budget.

Recommendation #24: Change Somerville's mechanics for drafting the City budget.

The committee recommends five changes for the budget drafting process:

- 1) Requiring a public budget hearing on or before February 15th;*
- 2) Adding a framework that allows city council to submit their budget priorities to the mayor prior to budget drafting;*
- 3) Continuing with Massachusetts General Law that allows city council only to delete or decrease budget items;*
- 4) Adding at least one public hearing on the budget prior to city council cuts; and*
- 5) Requiring the budget to be posted on the city website.*

Policy Considerations: Two main goals guided the committee in their deliberations on potential changes to the components of creating the city's budget: 1) increased transparency for Somerville residents on the entirety of the budget process and 2) elevating city council's role in budget prioritization.

Throughout the deliberations the committee focused on increasing transparency and accountability between the Somerville government and its residents. The addition of two public hearings to the budget process, one at the beginning of the year and one after the budget has been submitted to city council, add two formal opportunities for the community to provide budget input. Committee members also noted the success of the two public hearings this year (2022), and saw the opportunity these could provide the mayor and their department heads to explain why the budget is allocated in certain ways, ensuring there was flexibility for the city to add more public hearings as deemed necessary. Additionally, to ensure continued accessibility throughout the budget process, the committee recommends enshrining the requirement to post the budget to the city website, which is already in practice.

Increasing collaboration between the mayor and city council on drafting the budget was a top priority for many committee and community members. Of the 351 municipalities in Massachusetts, only Boston, in November 2021, has deviated from Massachusetts General Law in allowing city council to add or reallocate monies in their city budget. The committee deliberated whether to recommend a process akin to

Boston's or wait and assess the success and impacts of that new budget process. After considering the significant changes to Somerville's process that would be required - Boston's budget process this year included, numerous public hearings, the mayor submitting a budget to city council in February, three months for their city council to submit a revised budget back to the mayor and a final vote to approve the budget - the committee looked to smaller first steps to achieve their goal of structured collaboration. Because of the positive impacts of city branches working together on budget priorities in Somerville this year, 2022, the committee focused on formalizing that collaborative framework, allowing city councilors to submit their priorities to the mayor ahead of budget drafting. The committee made these recommendations acknowledging there would be another charter review in 10 years, and at that time there would be more information on how Boston (or other communities) changes to budget processes affected their city's operations.

Community Feedback: The Somerville community emphasized in their feedback that collaboration between the mayor and city council, accessibility to budget process and documentation, and transparency in the drafting process were critical elements they hoped to see addressed in charter review.

- In the community survey, 52% of respondents wanted to require a public hearing on the budget and 47% wanted to see shared budget drafting responsibility between the mayor and city council.

Recommendation #25: Implement a Capital Improvement Plan.

The committee recommends three changes to the capital improvement program:

- 1) Moving the date the mayor submits the Capital Improvement Plan to city council to "on or about" October 15;*
- 2) Requiring a public hearing on the capital improvement plan "on or about" December 1; and*
- 3) Moving the date the city council adopts by resolution the Capital Improvement Plan to "on or about" December 1.*

It is a best practice to have a formal Capital Improvement Plan, which serves as a critical building block to the budget process and future of the physical spaces in the city. The committee felt it was important to formalize this process in the charter.

Policy Considerations: Currently in Somerville a capital improvement program is a practice encompassed within the general budget submission timeline. The committee considered the time-consuming nature of the regular city budget process and deliberated whether the capital improvement process should run parallel or be separate. The mayor and city council designees suggested moving the capital Improvement Plan to the fall, opposite the regular budget timeline, to allow for dedicated time.

In alignment with the committee's continued priority of responsiveness and transparency in government, moving the Capital Improvement timeline to the fall allows for dedicated time to gather community input and hold a public hearing prior to adoption.

Community Feedback: There was no community feedback on capital improvement programs.

Recommendation #26: Change the appointment of the independent auditor to city council and mandate the appointment.

The committee recommends moving the independent auditor appointment to city council and mandating the appointment annually.

The committee and community support requiring an annual independent audit and for this to be a city council appointment, as the mayor is the primary arbiter of the budget. The committee believes this decision addresses one component of balance of power.

Policy Considerations: The current charter enables, but does not require, the mayor to hire an independent auditor. Across Massachusetts, it is considered best practice to require an independent audit annually and for this to be a city council appointment.

Community feedback: Community members supported changing the appointment to city council and making the appointment mandatory.

- In the community survey, 63% of respondents supported city council having the authority.
- In the community survey, 62% of respondents supported the appointment being mandatory.

ARTICLE 7: ELECTIONS

Recommendation #27: Expand municipal voting rights to include non-citizen residents.

The committee recommends expanding municipal voting rights to include all non-citizen residents of Somerville who are otherwise eligible to vote.

Policy Considerations: The committee considered expanding municipal voting rights to include all non-citizens who are currently ineligible to vote because of citizenship status. Historically non-citizens had the right to vote in elections in the county, however that right “was steadily eroded and ultimately eliminated all across the country”³. This recommendation is in alignment with the committee's values, The Somerville Clean and Open Elections Task Force recommendations, and Somerville City Council’s unanimous approval of a home rule petition in October 2021 to expand municipal voting rights to include non-citizen residents of Somerville.

Community Feedback: The community supported expanding municipal voting rights to non-citizen residents.

- In a community meeting regarding elections issues, 66% of responders supported expanding municipal voting rights to non-citizens.
- In the community survey, 62% of respondents supported this change.

Recommendation #28: Expand municipal voting rights to include 16- and 17-year-old residents.

³ Somerville Clean and Open Elections Task Force Final Report - <https://s3.amazonaws.com/somervillema.gov/ef-us-east-1/s3fs-public/clean-and-open-elections-task-force-final-report-october-2018.pdf>

The committee recommends expanding municipal voting rights to include 16- and 17-year-olds who are otherwise eligible to vote.

Policy Considerations: The Somerville community has shown strong support for expanding municipal voting rights generally. The Somerville Clean and Open Elections Task Force recommended lowering the municipality voting age to 16, which in turn encouraged city council to unanimously approve a home rule petition in May 2019 to expand municipal voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds. Somerville was the first municipality in the state to do so. The documented positive long-term impacts of early engagement with municipal voting and civic engagement was a key driver in the committee's decision to include this in the charter.

Community Feedback: Community feedback was mixed on this topic.

- In a community meeting regarding elections issues, 66% of respondents supported lowering the municipal voting age to 16.
- In the community survey, 42% of respondents supported lowering the municipal voting age while 48% were opposed to the change.

Recommendation #29: Maintain current eligibility requirements to run for office.

The committee recommends no change to eligibility requirements to run for municipal office.

Policy Considerations: The committee deliberated expanding eligibility to run for municipal elections. No other municipality in Massachusetts or the county have made changes due to State and federal employment law.

Community Feedback: There was no community feedback on this topic.

Recommendation #30: Update signature requirements for all elected offices.

The committee recommends keeping the mayoral signature requirement at 250 signatures, lowering the at-large city councilor signature requirements to 100 signatures, and lowering the ward city councilor and school committee member signature requirements to 50 signatures.

Policy Considerations: The committee considered the impacts of raising, lowering, maintaining, or adding ward specific signature requirements to appear on the ballot for at-large seats. As it aligns with the committee's value of empowerment to lower barriers to running for office, the committee recommended reducing or maintaining the signature requirements for all city council and school committee seats. The committee discussed concerns regarding the challenges for a new candidate to build a network outside their immediate neighborhoods and therefore recommends no ward requirement for at-large offices.

Community Feedback: We had limited feedback on this topic.

- At a community meeting most respondents indicated the current signature requirements were about right or too high and indicated a strong preference to ensure it is as accessible as possible to

run for office. In response to mayoral signature requirements one community member said: “I think that being able to run for public office should be as accessible as possible, that goes for those that are not as well known in our community, as well as those who have the widespread name recognition.”

ARTICLE 8: GENERAL PROVISIONS

Recommendation #31: Establish a Periodic Review of Charter.

The committee recommends requiring a periodic review of the charter at least every 10 years.

Policy Considerations: A charter is a city’s primary governing document, so most modern charters last 30 to 40 years and then are rewritten to stay updated with changing communities and municipal best practices. Reviewing this governing document at regular intervals will ensure that the charter is updated to make our government more just, empowering, responsive and innovative for its residents. Periodic review is considered best practice, and is conducted in similar municipalities such as Cambridge, Lawrence, Fall River, Lynn, and Framingham.

Community Feedback: The Somerville community is a highly involved and engaged constituency, and has vocalized that a key outcome of the charter review should be increased access to information regarding their government operations. Establishing a periodic review of the charter ensures there is an accessible and clear document outlining the structure of government in Somerville.

Recommendation #32: Establish a Periodic Review of Ordinances.

The committee recommends requiring a periodic review of ordinances at least every 10 years.

Policy Considerations: A regular review of city ordinances ensures ordinances align with current city practice and can address potential outdated regulations and conflicting measures. The committee intended the review to be made by a committee of relevant stakeholders and community members who will identify and recommend any necessary revisions or recodifications. Several municipalities in Massachusetts have similar ordinance reviews, including Cambridge, Lynn, Lawrence, and Fall River (every 10 years) and Framingham (every 5 years). The committee discussed the appropriate interval for review in order to maximize the value and consider the workload required.

Community Feedback: The committee recognized implementing this review as another mechanism to create a more transparent and approachable government, key to addressing concerns from community members regarding reducing barriers to information regarding government documents.

Recommendation #33: Establish a Periodic Review of Multiple Member Bodies.

The committee recommends adding a 10-year review of all multiple member bodies to the charter, with the first review happening immediately after the charter is passed.

Policy Considerations: A ten year review can ensure the continued relevance of multiple member bodies and their compositions. The committee considered the significant amount of work the first review would entail, but recognized the necessity of addressing the outdated, overlapping and number of current multiple member bodies. Key areas the committee sought to address through a periodic review were clarification on which multiple member bodies are active, term lengths for seats, appointment and approval processes and where to find current documents related to each body.

Community Feedback: Community members were vocal about concerns with the numerous multiple member bodies and were in support of a comprehensive review. The committee received several public comments at committee meetings and also heard anecdotal feedback in conversation.

ARTICLE 8: TRANSITION PROVISIONS

Recommendation #34: Establish a Public Financing of Municipal Campaigns Study Committee.

The committee recommends creating a study committee to explore public financing of municipal campaigns.

Policy Considerations: The Somerville [Clean and Open Elections Task Force](#) recommended creating and implementing a public financing model, but emphasized the importance of “further study and research” on how it would work in Somerville. Currently, no municipality in MA has public finance options, although the state has a partial public finance option for statewide elections. Small donor match systems have been implemented in cities such as San Francisco and New York City, with the latter heavily contributing to [electing the most diverse council in the city’s history](#).

Because of the many ways public finance of campaigns can be funded and implemented, the committee recommends that the city convene a study committee to explore public campaign finance in Somerville.

Community Feedback: Community members expressed support of exploring new options of campaign finance. Concerns about the current system of fundraising included the influence of money from outside Somerville, and the outsized influence of developer money in local campaigns.

- In the community survey, 23% of survey respondents thought the current process of raising money was working well.
- In the community survey, 52% of community survey respondents support exploring a public campaign finance option.

Recommendation #35: Establish an Equitable Compensation Committee.

The Committee recommends the creation of an Equitable Compensation Committee to research, develop and create an implementation strategy to address goals of economic justice for municipal employees.

Policy Considerations: The committee, in alignment with the values of equity, empowerment, and justice, sought to address the wage gap between the highest and lowest paid city employees. The committee believes all municipal employees should earn a wage that creates an opportunity for them to

create a sufficient material foundation upon which to have a dignified, productive, and creative life beyond economics within the City of Somerville. An Equitable Wage Distribution Committee can look beyond the current scope of the [Municipal Compensation Advisory Board](#), studying the equitable distribution of wages through all levels of employment with the City of Somerville, rather than the adequacy of municipal compensation.

Community Feedback: There was no community feedback on this.

Recommendation #36: Establish a Ranked Choice Voting Study Committee.

The committee recommends the creation of a Ranked Choice Voting Commission to explore ranked-choice voting, propose a measure to adopt ranked-choice voting, and outline an implementation strategy for Somerville.

Policy Considerations: The committee had several considerations for this recommendation. The Fair and Open Elections Task Force, convened in 2018, voted unanimously to recommend RCV as a vehicle to increase the diversity of the candidate pool and make elections more transparent and open. The 2020 Statewide Ballot Initiative had a 75% approval vote in Somerville, despite not passing statewide.

Interview feedback from critical members of city staff and elected officials noted several concerns about the complicated nature of RCV and issues other states had with the implementation. Because of these, the committee voted to recommend that within 6 months of the passage of the charter the city shall convene a Ranked Choice Voting Commission to adopt RCV and outline an implementation strategy for Somerville.

Community Feedback: Community members are in favor of ranked choice voting.

- The committee received 85 public comments in support of ranked choice voting.
- At a community meeting, the majority of participants were in favor of switching to Ranked Choice Voting for municipal elections
- In the community survey, 67% of respondents supported the use of Ranked Choice Voting.

Recommendation #37: Establish a Participatory Budgeting Study Committee

The committee recommends establishing a Participatory Budgeting Study Committee in the transition provisions.

Policy Considerations: Participatory budgeting is a democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. Cambridge has had 8 cycles of participatory budgeting and currently follows a process that is extremely close to the best practice process laid out by the [Participatory Budgeting Project](#). In 2021, Boston voted via ballot initiative to establish an Office of Participatory Budgeting. Establishing a study committee will allow the City to review best practices in neighboring cities and determine an ideal process that suits the needs of Somerville.

Community Feedback: Community members expressed support for participatory budgeting.

- In the community survey, 63% of survey respondents would like participatory budgeting.

- In a community meeting attendees liked the idea of voters having a direct say in how money is spent, although they weren't sure it should be included in the charter or in an ordinance.

Community Engagement Summary

Community engagement was integral to the Somerville Charter Review Committee process. The central goal was to reach as many Somerville residents across our diverse communities as possible. Our community engagement strategy was designed to embody the Committee's values - to be just, empowering, responsive, and innovative.

Our strategy emphasized the importance of not only having a deep understanding of community opinions about Somerville city government, but hearing possible solutions, gaining feedback, and ensuring the committee *incorporated* community input. We used an equity lens to engage historically underrepresented and new Somerville residents and make the charter accessible to anyone. In order to maximize community input, we considered how people could engage over time and in different ways.

We developed a four-phase roadmap that was flexible over time, provided transparency to the community on our process, and continuously communicated how residents could be involved. The four phases of the roadmap were: 1) General awareness and education - informing the public that the charter review was happening as well as educating the public about the charter and the review process, 2) Broad engagement and feedback - providing opportunities for residents to share their ideas and opinions about city government and possible charter changes, 3) Targeted engagement and surveying - asking the public specific questions about potential charter changes the committee was considering and obtaining quantifiable data on resident opinions, and 4) Direct feedback - soliciting community input on the committee's recommendations. More details about the components of each roadmap phase are included below.

Phase 1: General Awareness and Education

- **Community Mailer:** A brochure was mailed to 10,000 Somerville residents that provided education on the charter, what it can and cannot do, the review process, general information on Somerville's government, and how residents could get involved. The mailer was provided in multiple languages including Spanish, Portuguese, Kreyol, and Chinese (Mandarin).
- **Kick-off Event:** The community engagement process officially launched at a committee-led event held in Foss Park on August 28th, 2021. About 80 residents enjoyed ice cream from local favorite Tipping Cow and learned about the charter, the review process, the committee's values, ways to engage in the process, and a place where residents could share their opinions about their best and worst experiences with local government. Residents were able to meet the charter review committee members and ask questions about the review.
- **Tabling & Community Group Presentations:** Charter review committee members attended public events such as Artbeat and the local Davis Square, Union Square and Winter Farmers Markets to provide education and awareness about the charter review, engage community members where they work and play, and answer any questions about the process. Committee members also presented at community group meetings such as Rotary Club and Kiwanis in order to actively reach out to diverse groups across Somerville.

Phase 2 - Broad Engagement and General Feedback

- **Monthly Newsletter:** Over 560 subscribers were able to read what the committee had covered in the previous meeting, what it would be covering in the meeting to come, and upcoming community events. As the meetings were on Zoom, this was a useful way to ensure people had access to the links.
- **Unstructured Engagement:** As the review started in spring of 2021, before vaccines were widely accessible and indoor in-person gatherings (even masked) were discouraged, the Committee prioritized virtual and outdoor formats for informal engagement. Tabling continued, and the Community Engagement working group experimented with an online platform called Mind Mixer which allowed residents to discuss various questions the Committee would be considering.
- **Public Comment:** At the bi-weekly, full-committee meetings, the Committee voted to designate the first 20 minutes to public comment. People interested in making comments could sign up to speak before the meeting or as the meeting was starting. In the deliberation on establishing public comment, the Committee wanted to include its guiding values of transparency and accessibility. Public comment could also be submitted in written form for those who would not be able to attend or preferred writing instead of speaking. The committee heard over 85 public comments.

Phase 3 - Targeted Engagement and Surveying

- **Intentional Direct Engagement:** In Fall 2021, the Committee hosted four community meetings, with the goal of gaining meaningful feedback and ideas from the Somerville community. The community meetings were hosted by a professional visual facilitator, Brian Tarallo and utilized a tool called “Mentimeter,” an anonymous polling software that allowed community participants to engage interactively and live. The four meeting topics included (1) The roles and responsibilities of the City Council, Mayor, and School Committee, (2) Administrative Organization and Finance, (3) Elections and Nominations, and (4) Citizen Participation Mechanisms. 55 community members attended across the four meetings.
- **Data Collection and Analysis:** In Spring 2022, the Committee released a Community Wide Survey to hear from residents of what outcomes they would like to see on key topics as identified from the previous engagement and research activities. Over 900 community members responded as a result of extensive outreach to 105 community organizations, mailers, tabling, etc. The survey questions included (1) Balance of Power, (2) Municipal Elections, (3) Finance, and (4) Local Government Participation.

Phase 4 - Direct Feedback

- **Public Hearing:** In Summer 2022, the Committee hosted a town hall style community forum to present committee recommendations, lead community discussion, answer questions and gather any additional feedback. The town hall was held at the Somerville High School and via zoom. Over 20 community members and city elected officials attended, and were generally supportive of the Committee's final recommendations.

Proposed Charter Text

Approved Proposed Somerville Charter Text

July 14, 2022

Approved Unanimously by the Somerville Charter Review Committee

PREAMBLE

We, the people of Somerville, with our diversity in culture and thought, in order to reaffirm the liberties of the people with respect to the conduct of our local government, adopt this charter to continue and enhance the city's strong traditions of the pursuit of justice; empowerment of residents; ethical, transparent and responsive leadership; wise use of public resources; representation for all; and an engaged populace. We expect that our government will be approachable, accountable, equitable, inclusive, and respectful towards all people, and it will strive to provide all residents an equal opportunity to participate fully in the economic, cultural and intellectual life of the city.

ARTICLE 1

INCORPORATION; SHORT TITLE; DEFINITIONS

SECTION 1-1: INCORPORATION

The residents of the City of Somerville within the territorial limits established by law, shall continue to be a municipal corporation, a body corporate and politic, under the name "City of Somerville."

SECTION 1-2: SHORT TITLE

This instrument shall be known and may be cited as the City of Somerville Charter ("charter").

SECTION 1-3: SEPARATION OF POWERS

The administration of the fiscal, prudential and municipal affairs of the City of Somerville shall be vested in an executive branch led by a mayor and a legislative branch consisting of a city council. The legislative branch shall never exercise any executive power and the executive branch shall never exercise any legislative power.

SECTION 1-4: POWERS OF THE CITY

Subject only to express limitations on the exercise of any power or function by a municipal government in the constitution or General Laws, it is the intention and the purpose of the municipal voters of Somerville, through the adoption of this charter, to secure for themselves and their government all of the powers it is possible to secure as fully and as completely as though each power were specifically and individually enumerated in this charter.

SECTION 1-5: CONSTRUCTION

The powers of the City of Somerville under this charter are to be construed liberally in favor of the city and the specific mention of any particular power is not intended to limit the general powers of the city as

stated in section 1-4. To the extent that any provision of this charter shall conflict with any special act or law adopted by the city to the contrary, the provisions of this charter shall prevail.

SECTION 1-6: INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Subject only to express limitations in the constitution or General Laws, Somerville may exercise any of its powers or perform any of its functions and may participate in the financing thereof, jointly or in cooperation, by contract or otherwise, with the commonwealth or any of its agencies or political subdivisions, or with the United States government or any of its agencies.

SECTION 1-7: DEFINITIONS

Unless the context clearly requires otherwise, the following words shall have the following meanings as used in this charter:

- 1) “Business day(s)” - any day that is not a Saturday, Sunday, or legal holiday.
- 2) “Charter” - this charter and any adopted amendments to it.
- 3) “City” - the City of Somerville.
- 4) “City agency” - any multiple member body, department, division or office of the City of Somerville.
- 5) “City officer or department head” - a person having charge of a city office or department.
- 6) “City website” - an online site established and maintained by the city as its repository of municipal information.
- 7) “Day(s)” - calendar days.
- 8) “Emergency” - a sudden, generally unexpected occurrence or set of circumstances demanding immediate action or response.
- 9) “Full city council” - the entire authorized membership of the city council, notwithstanding any vacancy which might exist.

- 10) “Full multiple member body” - the entire authorized membership of a multiple member body, notwithstanding any vacancy that exists.
- 11) “General Laws” - the General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, a codification and revision of statutes enacted on December 22, 1920, and including all amendments subsequently adopted.
- 12) “Majority vote” - when used in connection with a meeting of a multiple member body, shall mean a majority of those present and voting, unless another provision is made by ordinance or by such body’s own rules; provided, however, that General Laws related to any vote to meet in executive session shall always require a majority of the full multiple member body.
- 13) “Measure” - any ordinance, order, other vote or proceeding adopted, or proposed to be adopted, by the city council or the school committee.
- 14) “Multiple member body” - any council, commission, committee, subcommittee or other body consisting of two or more persons, whether elected, appointed or otherwise constituted, but not including the city council, the school committee, or an advisory committee or task force established by the mayor or city council.
- 15) “Municipal voter(s)” - anyone who is eligible to vote pursuant to this charter in a municipal election
- 16) “Statewide voter(s)” - anyone who is eligible to vote pursuant to state and federal law.
- 17) “Organization or reorganization plan” - a plan submitted by the mayor to the city council which proposes: a) a change in the organization or the administrative structure of the city administration or organization, or b) a change in the way in which municipal services are delivered.
- 18) “Posting or post” - making available publicly on the city website, at city hall, and as otherwise may be required under the General Laws.
- 19) “Quorum” - a majority of all voting members of a multiple member body unless some other number is required by law or by ordinance.
- 20) “Year” - a calendar year, unless otherwise specified.

ARTICLE 2

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

SECTION 2-1: COMPOSITION; TERM OF OFFICE; ELIGIBILITY

(a) Composition - There shall be a city council consisting of eleven members which shall exercise the legislative powers of the city. Four of these members, to be known as councilors-at-large, shall be nominated and elected by the municipal voters at large. Seven of these members, to be known as ward councilors, shall be nominated from and elected by the municipal voters in each ward; one such ward councilor to be elected from each of the seven wards into which the city is divided under section 7-7.

(b) Term of Office - The term of office for councilors shall be two years each, beginning on the first business day in January following the municipal election.

(c) Eligibility - Any statewide voter shall be eligible to hold the office of councilor-at-large. Any statewide voter in the ward from which election is sought shall be eligible to hold the office of ward councilor. If the city council determines that a ward councilor or a councilor-at-large has removed from the city during the councilor's term, that office shall immediately be deemed vacant and filled in the manner provided in section 2-12. A ward councilor who removes from the ward in which the councilor was elected and who remains a municipal voter of the city may continue to serve the balance of the current term.

SECTION 2-2: PROHIBITIONS

(a) Holding Other City Position – Except as otherwise provided by this charter, a member of the city council shall hold no other compensated city position. A former member of the city council shall not hold any compensated appointed city position for 1 year after termination of their service on the city council, unless eight members of the city council approve the appointment. This section shall not prevent a city employee who vacated a position to serve as a member of the city council from returning to the same position upon the expiration of the term for which that person was elected.

(b) Interference with Administration - The city council or any member of the city council shall not give orders or directions to any employee of the city appointed by the mayor, either publicly or privately.

SECTION 2-3: COMPENSATION

The members of the city council shall receive compensation for their services as set by ordinance. An ordinance increasing or reducing the compensation of the members of the city council shall not be effective unless:

- (i) it is adopted by a 2/3 vote of the full city council;
- (ii) it is adopted during the first 18 months of the council's term; and
- (iii) it provides that the compensation increase or reduction is to take effect upon the organization of the city government following the next regular city election.

SECTION 2-4: GENERAL POWERS

Except as otherwise provided by the General Laws or by this charter, all powers of the city shall be vested in the city council which shall provide for the performance of all duties and obligations imposed upon the city by law.

SECTION 2-5: EXERCISE OF POWERS; QUORUM; RULES

(a) Exercise of Powers - Except as otherwise provided by General Laws or by this charter, the legislative powers of the city council may be exercised in a manner determined by the city council.

(b) Quorum - Once a quorum is present, the affirmative roll call vote of a majority of members present shall be required to adopt any ordinance, except as otherwise provided by General Laws or by this charter.

(c) Rules of Procedure - The city council shall adopt rules regulating the procedures of the city council, which shall include, but not be limited to, the following rules:

- (i) regular meetings of the city council shall be held at a time and place fixed by ordinance and all regular meetings of the city council shall provide for a period of public comment; the city council may make rules that regulate the period of public comment;
- (ii) special meetings of the city council shall be held at the call of the president or at the call of any 3 or more members, for any purpose. Except in an emergency as declared by the city council president, notice of the meeting shall be delivered to each member at least 2 business days in advance of the time set and shall specify the date, time, location, and purpose for which the meeting is to be held. A copy of each notice shall immediately be posted.
- (iii) all sessions of the city council and every city council committee or subcommittee shall, at all times, be open to the public, unless otherwise specified by law; and
- (iv) a full, accurate, up-to-date account of the proceedings of the city council shall be maintained by the city clerk, which shall include a record of each vote taken and be made available with reasonable promptness following each meeting. Executive session minutes shall be made available as soon as publication of the minutes would not defeat the purpose of the executive session, unless otherwise provided by law.

SECTION 2-6: ELECTION, TERM, AND POWERS OF CITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT AND VICE-PRESIDENT

(a) Election and Term - As soon as practicable after the councilors-elect have been qualified following each regular city election, as provided in section 7-4, the city council shall elect from among its members a president and vice-president who shall serve for 1-year terms. The member of the council with the most years of service shall preside at such election. If two or more members have the same term of service the council with the last name that is first in alphabetical order from among such councilors shall preside. The conduct of all elections of the city council president and vice president shall otherwise be prescribed within the rules of the city council.

(b) Powers and Duties - The president shall have the following powers and duties:

- (i) prepare the agenda for city council meetings;
- (ii) preside at all meetings of the city council, regulate its proceedings, and decide all questions of order, but the vice-president shall preside in the absence of the president;
- (iii) appoint all members of committees of the city council, whether special or standing;
- (iv) have the same powers to vote upon measures coming before the city council as any other member of the city council; and
- (v) perform any other duties consistent with the office that are established by this charter, ordinance or other vote of the city council.

SECTION 2-7: APPOINTMENTS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

(a) Advisory Legal Counsel - The city council may secure legal services, either by employment or on a contractual basis. Such legal services shall be solely in the service of the council and may include research, analysis, and drafting assistance. The mayor shall annually provide to the city council a sum of money sufficient to satisfy the estimated cost of legal services as presented to the mayor, in writing, by the city council. The legal services provided to the council shall not include representation of the council or any councilor in any court matter or related litigation, or the issuance of formal legal opinions on behalf of the city. The city solicitor shall remain the only authorized officer of the city in all legal matters involving the city's government.

(b) Other Staff - Subject to appropriation, the city council may employ staff as it deems necessary.

(c) Removals and Suspensions of City Council Staff – City council appointments may be removed at the sole discretion of the city council subject to limitations and requirements imposed by federal and state laws, rules and/or regulations.

SECTION 2-8: CITY COUNCIL CONFIRMATION OF CERTAIN APPOINTMENTS

(a) Department Heads - The mayor shall refer to the city council and simultaneously file with the city clerk the name of each person the mayor desires to appoint as a department head. The city council shall have 30 days after the date on which notice of the proposed appointment was filed with the city clerk to vote to approve the appointment with approval not to be unreasonably withheld. An approved appointment shall be effective immediately. The city council shall accompany a rejection of the appointment with a written statement describing the reason, which shall be delivered to and placed on file with the city clerk within 30 days of filing. If the city council does not take up the appointment within 30 days, the appointment shall be deemed approved. The question on rejection of any appointment made by the mayor shall not be subject to the procedure of charter objection provided in section 2-9(b) of this charter.

(b) Multiple Member Bodies - The mayor shall refer to the city council and simultaneously file with the city clerk the name of each person the mayor desires to appoint as a member of a multiple member body. The city council shall have 45 days after the date on which notice of the proposed appointment was filed with the city clerk to vote to approve or reject the appointment, with approval not to be unreasonably withheld. If the city council does not approve or reject the appointment within 45 days, it may file a 15-day extension with the city clerk. If the time period elapses and no extension has been filed, the appointment shall be deemed approved. Multiple member body members may be removed at the discretion of their appointing authority subject to limitations and requirements imposed by federal and state laws, rules, and/or regulations.

SECTION 2-9: ORDINANCES AND OTHER MEASURES

(a) Measures - Every adopted measure shall become effective at the expiration of 10 days after adoption or upon the signature of the mayor, whichever occurs first, unless the ordinance or this charter provides otherwise. An ordinance shall not be amended or repealed except by another ordinance adopted in accordance with this charter.

(b) Charter Objection - On the first occasion that the question on adoption of a measure is put to the city council, a single member present may object to the taking of the vote, and postpone the vote until the next meeting of the city council, whether regular or special. If two or more present members object, the vote shall be postponed until the next regular meeting. This procedure shall not be used more than once for any specific matter regardless of whether it has been amended. A charter objection shall have privilege over all motions but shall be raised prior to or at the call for a vote by the presiding officer and all debate shall cease.

SECTION 2-10: ACCESS TO INFORMATION

(a) In General - The city council may make investigations into the affairs of the city and into the conduct and performance of any city agency. Absent compelling circumstances or an emergency which shall be declared on record and noted in the city council minutes, the city council shall give a minimum of 14 days' notice to a person it may require to appear before it under this section. In circumstances involving compelling circumstances or emergency, 7 days' notice shall be allowed. The notice shall include specific questions on which the city council seeks information and any person called to appear before the city council under this section shall not be required to respond to any question not relevant or related to those questions presented in advance and in writing. The mayor shall receive a copy of any notice issued under this section at the same time as the person who is requested to appear before the council. Any notice under this section shall not be issued without first being authorized by a majority vote of the city council.

(b) Department Head - The city council may require, by majority vote, specific information from a department head or their designee on any matter related to the municipal services, functions and powers or duties which are within the scope of responsibility of that person. The department head or their designee shall not be required to answer questions relating to any other matter outside the scope of the matter noticed.

(c) Mayor - The city council may request, by majority vote, specific information from the mayor on any municipal matter. The mayor or their designee shall appear before the city council and respond to the

questions. The mayor or their designee shall not be required to answer questions relating to any other matter. The mayor may bring to this meeting any assistant, department head or other city officer or employee that the mayor may consider necessary to assist in responding to the questions posed by the city council.

SECTION 2-11: GROUP PETITIONS

The city council shall hold a public hearing and act with respect to every petition which is addressed to it and which is signed by at least 100 municipal voters as certified by the Board of Election Commissioners. The hearing shall be held by the city council or by a committee or subcommittee thereof, and the city council shall act on the petition within 3 months of filing with the city clerk. Hearings on two or more petitions filed under this section may be held at the same time and place. At least 14 days before the hearing, the city clerk shall notify the ten petitioners whose names first appear on each such petition, publish a general summary of the subject matter of the petition, and post notice of the date and time of the public hearing. A hearing shall not be held upon any subject more than once in a given 12-month period, as determined by the city council president.

SECTION 2-12: FILLING OF VACANCIES

(a) Councilor At-large – Whenever a vacancy occurs in the office of councilor at-large the process for filling of the vacancy shall be determined by the number of days remaining until the next municipal election. In all occurrences of a vacancy, the city clerk shall notify the city council and the chairperson of the board of election commissioners of the vacancy within 7 days. Within 7 days after notification, the chairperson of the board of election commissioners or a designee shall certify, in writing, to the city clerk that the defeated candidate for the office of councilor-at-large with the next highest number of votes at the municipal election at which councilors-at-large were elected for the term in which the vacancy occurs shall serve as councilor-at-large. If the person is eligible and willing to serve, the city clerk shall administer the oath of office to the person within 15 days after certification and the person shall serve. If

the person who is eligible declines the office, is not eligible and willing to serve, or fails to take the oath of office within the time period set forth in this section, then the person with the next highest number of votes at the election who is eligible and willing to serve shall serve.

If a vacancy occurs:

(i) more than 180 days until the next municipal election, the next highest candidate serves the remainder of the unexpired term. If there is no defeated candidate eligible and willing to serve who has taken the oath of office, there shall be a special election

(ii) 180 days or less prior to any regular municipal election in the office of councilor at-large, the next highest candidate serves until the next municipal election. If there is no eligible and willing candidate from the most recent municipal election, then the seat remains vacant until the next regular municipal election. The person elected shall fill the vacancy for the remainder of the unexpired term and the term to which elected. The city clerk shall administer the oath of office to them at the next meeting of the city council.

(b) Ward Councilor - If a vacancy occurs in the office of ward councilor more than 180 days prior to any regular municipal election, the city council shall immediately order a special election to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the unexpired term. If a vacancy occurs 180 days or less prior to any regular municipal election, the seat shall remain vacant until the next regular municipal election for the office and the person elected shall fill the vacancy for the remainder of the unexpired term and the term to which elected. The city clerk shall administer the oath of office to the person at the next meeting of the city council.

ARTICLE 3

EXECUTIVE BRANCH

SECTION 3-1: MAYOR: ROLE; TERM OF OFFICE; ELIGIBILITY

- (a) Role – The chief executive officer of the city shall be a mayor, elected by the municipal voters of the city at large.
- (b) Term of Office – The term of office for mayor shall be four years, beginning on the first business day in January following the municipal election.
- (c) Eligibility – Any statewide voter in Somerville, shall be eligible to hold the office of mayor. The mayor shall devote full-time to the office and shall not hold any other elective public office.

SECTION 3-2: PROHIBITIONS

The mayor shall not hold another compensated city position or other elected public office. A former mayor shall not hold a compensated appointed city office or city employment for 1 year after termination of their service as the mayor. Any former mayor shall not receive compensation for contracted work authorized during their tenure as the mayor, however, they may be compensated for limited hours advising the incoming mayor. This subsection shall not prevent a city officer or other city employee who has vacated a position to serve as the mayor from returning to the same office or other position of city employment held when the position was vacated. This prohibition shall not apply to persons covered by a leave of absence under section 37 of chapter 31 of the General Laws.

SECTION 3-3: COMPENSATION

The mayor shall receive compensation for their services as set by the city council by ordinance. An ordinance increasing or reducing the compensation of the mayor shall not be effective unless:

- (i) it is adopted by a 2/3 vote of the full city council;
- (ii) it has been adopted on or before the 42nd month of the mayor's term; and

(iii) it provides that the compensation increase or reduction is to take effect upon the organization of the city government following the next regular city election.

SECTION 3-4: EXECUTIVE POWERS

(a) Executive Powers - The executive powers of the city shall be vested solely in the mayor and may be exercised by the mayor either personally or through the city agencies under the general supervision and control of the office of the mayor. The mayor shall cause this charter, laws, ordinances and other orders of the city government to be enforced and shall cause a record of all official acts of the executive branch of the city government to be kept. The mayor shall supervise, direct, and be responsible for the efficient administration of all city activities and functions placed under the control of the mayor by law or by this charter.

(b) Supervision of City Agencies - The mayor shall exercise general supervision and direction over all city agencies, unless otherwise provided by law or by this charter. Each city agency shall furnish to the mayor, upon request, any information or materials the mayor may request and as the needs of the office of mayor and the interest of the city may require. The mayor shall be responsible for the efficient and effective coordination of the activities of all city agencies and may call together for consultation, conference and discussion, at reasonable times, all persons serving the city.

(c) Multiple Member Bodies - The mayor shall be, by virtue of the office, a *ex officio* member of every appointed multiple member body of the city. The mayor may, as an *ex officio* member, attend any meeting of an appointed multiple member body of the city, including executive sessions, to participate in the discussions of that body, but shall not have the right to vote.

SECTION 3-5: APPOINTMENTS BY THE MAYOR

(a) Department Heads - The mayor shall appoint, subject to review by the city council under section 2-8(a), all department heads for whom no other method of appointment or selection is provided by this

charter. Department heads serve at the discretion of the mayor subject to the limitations and requirements imposed by federal and state laws, rules, and/or regulations.

(b) Multiple Member Bodies - The mayor shall appoint, subject to confirmation by the city council under section 2-8(b), all members of multiple member bodies for whom no other method of appointment or selection is provided by administrative order or General Laws. All members shall serve terms as defined by administrative order or General Laws.

(c) City Employees - The method of appointment for all other city employees shall be prescribed by administrative order.

SECTION 3-6: APPOINTMENT OF CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

The mayor shall appoint a chief administrative officer to coordinate and direct the operations and functions of municipal government. The chief administrative officer shall be appointed by the mayor, subject to review by the city council under section 2-8(a). The appointee shall be chosen on the basis of strong administrative and executive qualifications and shall have a combination of experience, training, and/or education to perform the duties of the office.

SECTION 3-7: TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS TO CITY OFFICES

Whenever a temporary or permanent vacancy occurs in a city office that is appointed under section 3-5(a), the mayor may designate a person to perform the duties of the office on a temporary basis for up to 150 days until the position can be filled as provided by law or by this charter. Persons serving as temporary officers under this section shall have only those powers indispensable and essential to the performance of the duties of the office during the period of temporary appointment and no others.

(a) Filing of a Temporary Appointment - When the mayor designates a person under this section, the mayor shall file a certificate with the city clerk in substantially the following form:

“I designate (*name of person*) to perform the duties of the office of (*office in which vacancy exists*) on a temporary basis until the office can be filled by (*the regular*

procedure for filling the vacancy or when the incumbent shall return). I certify that this person is qualified to perform the duties which will be required and that I make this designation solely in the interests of the City of Somerville.”

(b) Extension of Temporary Appointments - If an extension of a temporary appointment is necessary, the mayor may seek additional extensions in 60-day increments, which shall be authorized by a majority vote of the city council. If an extension is not approved, the position shall be deemed vacant.

SECTION 3-8: TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS TO MULTIPLE MEMBER BODIES

Whenever a temporary or permanent vacancy occurs on a multiple member body that is appointed under section 3-5(b), the mayor may designate a person to perform the duties of the office on a temporary basis for up to 150 days until the position can be filled as provided by law or by this charter. If an extension of a temporary appointment is necessary, the mayor may seek additional extensions in 60-day increments, which shall be authorized by a majority vote of the city council. If an extension is not approved, the position shall be deemed vacant, except on multiple member bodies where such vacancy would prevent a quorum. In such instance, a temporary appointment shall be permitted to remain until a successor is qualified, however, the authority of the temporary appointment shall be limited to matters where failure to act by the multiple member body may have adverse consequences to the City.

SECTION 3-9: APPROVAL OF MAYOR, VETO

Every order, ordinance, resolution, or vote adopted or passed by the city council, except any matters relating to the internal affairs of the city council, shall be presented to the mayor for approval within 3 days of such adoption or passage. If the mayor approves the measure, the mayor shall sign it; if the mayor disapproves the measure, the mayor shall return the measure with the specific reason for such disapproval attached to the measure in writing to the city council. The city council shall enter the objections of the mayor on its records, and reconsider the same measure after 14 days but before 30 days from the date of its return to the city council. If the city council, regardless of the disapproval by the mayor, shall again

pass the identical measure by a 2/3 vote of the full council, it shall then be deemed in force. If the mayor has neither signed a measure nor returned it to the city council within 10 days following the date it was presented to the mayor, the measure shall be deemed approved and in force.

SECTION 3-10: COMMUNICATIONS; SPECIAL MEETINGS

(a) Communications to the City Council - The mayor shall, by written communication: (i) recommend to the city council for its consideration measures as the needs of the city require; and (ii) keep the city council fully informed of the financial and administrative condition of the city and shall specifically indicate any fiscal, financial, or administrative issues facing the city.

(b) Special Meetings of the City Council - The mayor may call a special meeting of the city council for any purpose. Unless the mayor designates an emergency, notice of the meeting shall be delivered at least 2 business days in advance of the time set and shall specify the date, time and location of the meeting and the purpose for which the meeting is to be held. A copy of the notice shall be posted immediately.

SECTION 3-11: TEMPORARY ABSENCE OF THE MAYOR

(a) Acting Mayor – Whenever the mayor is unable to perform the duties of the office, the president of the city council shall be the acting mayor. In the event that the city council president is unable to serve as acting mayor under this section, the city council shall elect a councilor to serve as acting mayor from among its membership. The city council, by the affirmative vote of eight members, shall determine whether the mayor is unable to perform the duties of the office. Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, the vote shall be taken in public session by a roll call vote.

(b) Powers of Acting Mayor – The acting mayor shall have only those powers of the mayor as are indispensable and essential to conduct the business of the city and on which action may not be delayed. The acting mayor shall have no authority to make a permanent appointment or removal from city service unless the absence of the mayor shall extend beyond 60 days, nor shall the acting mayor approve or disapprove of any measure adopted by the city council unless the time within which the mayor must act

would expire before the return of the mayor. The city council president or another councilor serving as acting mayor shall not vote as a member of the city council.

SECTION 3-12: DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY BY MAYOR

The mayor may authorize and subsequently remove authorization from a subordinate officer or employee of the city to exercise or perform a power, function, or duty of the office of the mayor, provided, however, that all acts performed under any such delegation of authority during the period of authorization shall be and remain the acts of the mayor. Nothing in this section shall be construed to authorize the mayor to delegate the powers and duties of a school committee member, the power of appointment to city office or employment, or to sign or return measures approved by the city council unless the provisions of Section 3-11 apply.

SECTION 3-13: FILLING OF VACANCY

Whenever a vacancy occurs in the office of mayor by death, removal, resignation, or any other reason, the process for filling of the vacancy shall be determined by the month of the mayoral term in which the vacancy occurs. Following an election to fill a mayoral vacancy, the winning candidate shall start immediately and serve the remaining unexpired term.

(a) Whenever a vacancy occurs during:

- (i) Months 1 through 17: The city council shall call a special election to be held within 90 days following the date of the vacancy.
- (ii) Months 18 through 21: A special election need not be held and the position shall be filled by vote at the upcoming regular city election.
- (iii) Months 22 through 41: The city council shall call a special election to be held within 90 days following the date of the vacancy.
- (iv) Months 42 through 46: A special election need not be held and the position shall be filled by vote at the upcoming regular city election.

(b) The city council president shall serve as the acting mayor in all cases until the vacancy is filled. In the event that the city council president is unable to serve as the acting mayor under this section, the city council shall elect a councilor to serve as the acting mayor from among its membership. If the councilor serving as the acting mayor under this section chooses to run for mayor, they shall not be entitled to have the words “candidate for reelection” printed with that person’s name on the subsequent election ballot. Any person serving as the mayor under this section shall receive the compensation then in effect for the position of mayor and shall not vote as a member of the city council.

ARTICLE 4

SCHOOL COMMITTEE

SECTION 4-1: COMPOSITION; TERM OF OFFICE; ELIGIBILITY

(a) Composition – There shall be a school committee of nine members. Seven members shall be nominated and elected by the municipal voters of the city, one member elected from each ward. The mayor and the president of the city council shall serve, *ex officio*, with the same powers and duties as other school committee members, but neither shall serve as chair.

(b) Term of Office – The term for the school committee shall be two years, beginning on the first business day in January following the municipal election.

(c) Eligibility – A school committee member shall be a statewide voter in the ward from which election is sought. If a school committee member removes from the city during the committee member's term, that office shall immediately be deemed vacant and filled in the manner provided in section 4-6. If a school committee member removes to another ward in the city, the member may continue to serve for the balance of the current term.

SECTION 4-2: PROHIBITIONS

A member of the elected school committee shall not hold any other compensated city position. A former member of the elected school committee shall not hold any compensated appointed city office or city employment for 1 year after termination of their service on the school committee. This section shall not prevent a city officer or other city employee who has vacated a position in order to serve as an elected member of the school committee from returning to the same office or other position of city employment held at the time the position was vacated.

SECTION 4-3: COMPENSATION

Members of the school committee shall receive compensation for their services as set by ordinance by the city council. An ordinance increasing or reducing the compensation of the members of the school committee shall not be effective unless:

- (i) it is adopted by a 2/3 vote of the full city council;
- (ii) it is adopted during the first 18 months of the school committee's term; and
- (iii) it provides that the compensation increase or reduction is to take effect upon the organization of the city government following the next regular city election.

SECTION 4-4: SCHOOL COMMITTEE RULES AND PROCEDURES

School committee officers and procedures shall be determined by the school committee.

SECTION 4-5: SCHOOL COMMITTEE POWERS AND DUTIES

The school committee shall have all powers which are conferred on school committees by the General Laws and the additional powers and duties provided by this charter, including but not limited to:

- (i) selecting and removing a superintendent of the schools who shall be charged with the administration of the school system, and all other personnel as provided by the General Laws;
- (ii) making all policies for the management of the public school system and for conducting the business of the school committee as deemed necessary or desirable;
- (iii) adopting and overseeing the administration of an annual operating budget for the school department, subject to appropriation by the city council;
- (iv) providing ordinary maintenance of all school buildings and grounds, unless a central municipal maintenance department, which may include maintenance of school buildings and grounds, is established; and

(v) provided further at least one member of the school committee, or a designee of the school committee, shall serve on the agency, board, or committee for the planning or construction of a new, remodeled, or renovated school building.

SECTION 4-6: FILLING OF VACANCIES

If a vacancy on the school committee occurs with 1 year or more remaining in the term, the city council shall order a special election to fill the vacancy. If a vacancy on the school committee occurs with less than 1 year before the end of the term but more than 120 days before any regular municipal election, the school committee shall appoint a replacement to serve for the remainder of the term from the qualified statewide voters of the ward. The school committee shall publicly post a public notice of the vacancy and solicitation of nominations, and appoint the replacement in accordance with school committee policy. If a vacancy occurs within 120 days of a regular municipal election, the vacancy shall be filled by the regular election and the newly elected school committee member's term shall begin on the first day following the election. The person elected shall fill the vacancy for the remainder of the unexpired term and the term to which elected. The city clerk shall administer the oath of office to them on or before the next meeting of the school committee.

ARTICLE 5

ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION

SECTION 5-1: ORGANIZATION OF CITY AGENCIES

The organization of the city into agencies to provide services and administer the government may be accomplished only through an administrative order submitted to the city council by the mayor. An administrative order may not originate with the city council. The mayor may, subject only to express prohibitions of General Laws or this charter, propose administrative orders to establish a new agency, reorganize, consolidate or abolish any agency, in whole or in part, as is deemed necessary for the orderly, efficient, or convenient conduct of the business of the city. The mayor may also propose administrative orders to establish terms of office and prescribe the functions and administrative procedures to be followed by all such agencies.

These proposed administrative orders shall be accompanied by a message from the mayor which explains the expected benefits and advises the city council if an administrative order shall require amendments, insertions, revisions, repeal, or otherwise of existing ordinances. Whenever the mayor proposes an administrative order, the city council shall hold one or more public hearings on the proposal and post notice. An organization or reorganization plan shall become effective at the expiration of 60 days from filing, unless the city council has voted to disapprove the plan prior to that date. The city council may vote only to approve or to disapprove the plan and may not vote to amend or to alter it.

SECTION 5-2: QUALIFICATIONS FOR APPOINTMENTS AND PROMOTIONS

All appointments and promotions of city officers and employees shall be made on the basis of fitness demonstrated by examination, past performance, or by other evidence of competence and suitability. Each person appointed to fill an office or position shall be a person who has the experience, training, and/or education to perform the duties of the office or position.

SECTION 5-3: COMPENSATION OF CITY EMPLOYEES

The mayor and city council shall provide a review to be made of all municipal employee compensation at 5-year intervals to ensure compensation is distributed equitably across all municipal employees and to the greatest extent possible compensation is sufficient to live in the city. This review shall be made by a special committee to be established by ordinance, and the initial review shall be implemented as provided in Section 9-7(b). The special committee shall receive a budget sufficient to hire qualified consultants and/or any other resources necessary to undertake a thorough review. The special committee shall file its report with the city clerk on a date specified by ordinance. This report shall include an analysis of the current pay and compensation structure with recommendations for adjustments to that structure, taking into consideration the city's current and expected financial situation and the impact of the recommendations on the budget. The review of compensation shall be under the supervision of the chief administrative officer.

ARTICLE 6

FINANCIAL PROCEDURES

SECTION 6-1: FISCAL YEAR

The fiscal year of the city shall begin on July 1 and end on June 30, unless another period is required by the General Laws.

SECTION 6-2: COMMUNITY AND COUNCIL BUDGET INPUT

The city council shall hold a Community Budget Hearing on or before February 15th of each year in order to solicit public input regarding budget priorities. The city council shall post notice of the Community Budget Hearing 14 days in advance of the hearing. After the Community Budget Hearing but at least 10 days before the Annual Budget Meeting, the mayor shall solicit budget priorities from all city councilors.

SECTION 6-3: ANNUAL BUDGET MEETING

On or before April 1st of each year, the mayor shall call a joint meeting of the city council and school committee, including the superintendent of schools, to review the financial condition of the city, revenue and expenditure forecasts for at least 3 years, and other relevant information prepared by the mayor in order to develop a coordinated budget.

SECTION 6-4: SUBMISSION OF OPERATING BUDGET; BUDGET MESSAGE

On or about June 1st, the mayor shall submit to the city council a proposed operating budget for all city agencies for the next fiscal year. The proposed operating budget shall include the school budget, as adopted by the school committee, which shall be submitted to the mayor on or about May 15th. The proposed operating budget shall be accompanied by a budget message and supporting documents. The budget message shall explain the operating budget in fiscal terms and in terms of work programs for all city agencies. It shall outline the proposed fiscal policies of the city for the next fiscal year, describe important features of the proposed operating budget and include any major variations from the current

operating budget, fiscal policies, revenues and expenditures together with reasons for these changes. The proposed operating budget shall provide a complete fiscal plan of all city funds and activities and shall be in the form the mayor deems desirable; provided, however, that the budget proposals relative to elected officials shall identify the cost of compensation and the cost of benefits for those officials. The mayor and the superintendent of schools shall coordinate the dates and times of the school committee's budget process under the General Laws.

SECTION 6-5: ACTION ON THE OPERATING BUDGET

(a) Public Hearing - The city council shall post a notice of the proposed operating budget as submitted by the mayor. The notice shall state: (i) the times and places where copies of the entire proposed operating budget are available for inspection by the public; and (ii) the date, time, and place when a public hearing on the proposed operating budget shall be held by the city council, at least 7 days after posting of the notice. The city council shall not act on the budget until after the public hearing has occurred.

(b) Adoption of the Budget - The city council shall adopt the proposed operating budget, which may have amendments, before the end of the fiscal year. In amending the proposed operating budget, the city council may delete or decrease amounts except expenditures required by law; provided, however, that except on the recommendation of the mayor, the city council shall not increase any specific item or the total of the proposed operating budget, unless otherwise authorized by the General Laws. If the city council fails to act on an item in the proposed operating budget prior to the beginning of the fiscal year, that amount shall, without any action by the city council, become a part of the appropriations for the year and be available for the purposes specified.

(c) Availability of the Operating Budget – In addition to any other posting requirements under law, immediately after the submission of the proposed budget to the city council, the mayor or their designee shall post the entire budget document on the city website. Said proposed budget document shall remain posted during the city council review process contained in this article. After the enactment of the budget, the final budget shall be posted on the city website and shall remain there throughout the fiscal year for

which it is in effect. The final budget shall reflect any amendments made by the city council and approved by the mayor and shall indicate that it is the final budget.

SECTION 6-6: CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

(a) Submission - The mayor shall submit a capital improvement program to the city council on or about October 15 of each year. This information shall be annually revised by the mayor regarding the capital improvements still pending or in the process of being acquired, improved, or constructed.

The capital improvement program shall include:

- (i) a general summary of its contents;
- (ii) a list of all capital improvements proposed to be undertaken during the next 5 years, with supporting information as to the need for each capital improvement;
- (iii) cost estimates, methods of financing, and recommended time schedules for each improvement; and
- (iv) the estimated annual cost of operating and maintaining each facility and piece of major equipment involved.

(b) Public Hearing - The city council shall post a notice stating: (i) the times and places where entire copies of the capital improvements program are available for the public; and, (ii) the date, time, and place of a public hearing on the plan to be held by the city council at least 14 days after posting of the notice.

(c) Adoption – Following the public hearing, but not later than December 1, the city council shall by resolution adopt the capital improvements program. The adopted program may be amended, provided that each amendment shall be voted on separately, and that an increase in the capital improvements program as submitted shall clearly identify the method of financing to accomplish the proposed increase.

SECTION 6-7: INDEPENDENT AUDIT

The city council shall annually provide for an outside audit of the books and accounts of the city to be conducted by a certified public accountant or a firm of certified public accountants, which has no personal

interest, direct or indirect, in the fiscal affairs of the city or any of its officers. The mayor shall annually provide to the city council a sum of money sufficient to satisfy the estimated cost of conducting the audit as presented to the mayor, in writing, by the city council. The award of a contract to audit shall be made by the city council on or before September 15 of each year. The report of the audit shall be filed with the city council not later than March 1 in the year following its award. At least every 5 years, the city council shall conduct a competitive procurement process to retain these auditing services.

SECTION 6-8: EXPENDITURES IN EXCESS OF APPROPRIATIONS

Except as otherwise provided by law, an official of the City of Somerville shall not knowingly or intentionally expend in a fiscal year sums in excess of the appropriations, awards, grants or gifts duly made in accordance with law or involve the city in any contract for the future payment of money in excess of these appropriations, awards, grants or gifts. It is the intention of this section that section 31 of chapter 44 of the General Laws shall be strictly enforced. Any official who violates this section shall be personally liable to the city for any amounts so expended to the extent that the city does not recover these amounts from the person to whom the sums were paid.

ARTICLE 7

ELECTIONS

SECTION 7-1: ELIGIBILITY TO VOTE IN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

In addition to individuals eligible to vote according to the General Laws, in the City of Somerville the following individuals may upon application have their names entered on a list of municipal voters established by the Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Somerville and may thereafter vote in any election for municipal offices and municipal ballot questions in accordance with this charter. Such municipal voters shall remain eligible to vote in any election for municipal offices and municipal ballot questions in the city for so long as they remain domiciled in the City of Somerville:

- (i) Any non-citizen residing in the City of Somerville, who is ineligible to vote due to citizenship status under federal or state law, rule, or regulation, but who is otherwise eligible to vote; and
- (ii) Any 16 and 17 year old residing in the City of Somerville, who is ineligible to vote due to age under federal or state law, rule, or regulation, but who is otherwise eligible to vote.

SECTION 7-2: PRELIMINARY ELECTIONS

A preliminary election to nominate candidates for mayor, councilors-at-large, ward city councilors, and school committee members shall be held on the third Tuesday in September in each odd-numbered year in which the candidates are to be elected. The city clerk may, with the approval of the city council, reschedule the preliminary election to the fourth Tuesday in September to avoid a conflict with any civil or religious holiday. Whenever a special election to fill a vacancy is to be held, a preliminary election shall be conducted, if necessary, 28 days before the date established for the special election. A preliminary election to fill a vacancy for ward councilor or school committee member shall be held only in the ward where there is a vacancy.

SECTION 7-3: PRELIMINARY ELECTION PROCEDURES

(a) Signature Requirements - The number of signatures of municipal voters required to place the name of a candidate on the official ballot to be used at a preliminary election shall be as follows:

(i) Mayor - at least 250 certified signatures;

(ii) At-Large City Councilor - at least 100 certified signatures;

(iii) Ward City Councilor - at least 50 certified signatures, all of which shall be certified as being from the ward from which election is sought;

(iv) School Committee Member – at least 50 certified signatures, all of which shall be certified as being from the ward from which election is sought.

(b) Forms - Signatures of municipal voters shall be made on a form prescribed by the Board of Election Commissioners and shall be made available not earlier than April 2 in each city election year. The forms shall be submitted to the Board of Election Commissioners for certification of the names on or before the 14th day preceding the date fixed for submission to the city clerk. The forms shall be submitted to the city clerk on or before 5 o'clock in the afternoon on the 45th day prior to the declared date of the preliminary election. An individual may appear on the ballot for only one office at any preliminary, regular or special city election.

(c) Ballot Position - The order in which names of candidates for each office appear on the ballot shall be determined by a drawing conducted by the city clerk at least 40 days before the preliminary election. The drawing shall be open to the public.

(d) Determination of Candidates -

(i) Offices of Mayor, Ward Councilor, and School Committee - the two candidates who receive the highest number of votes for nomination to each office at the preliminary election shall, except as provided by section 7-3(d)(iii), be the candidates for that office. The candidates' names shall be printed on the official ballot to be used at the regular or special city election at which the office is to be voted upon and an acceptance of a nomination shall not be necessary to its validity.

(ii) Offices of City Councilor At-large - the eight people who receive the highest number of votes for nomination to the office shall, except as provided by section 7-3(e), be the candidates for the

office. The candidates' names shall be printed on the official ballot to be used at the regular or special city election at which the office is to be voted upon and an acceptance of a nomination shall not be necessary to its validity.

(iii) Tied Preliminary - If there is a tie among candidates for the last available ballot position for any given elected office, then all tied candidates for the office shall be printed on the general election ballot, notwithstanding any other provisions in this charter specifying the number of candidates to be printed on the election ballot.

(e) Condition Making Preliminary Unnecessary - If the time for filing statements of candidates to be on the ballot for any preliminary election has expired, and the number of statements filed to the city clerk for an office is not more than two for the office of mayor, any ward councilor or school committee member, or eight for any city councilor at large, the candidates whose statements have been filed shall be deemed nominated to that office. Those candidates shall be voted on for such office at the regular or special city election. The city clerk shall not print those names on the ballot to be used at the preliminary election and another nomination to the office shall not be made, and a preliminary election shall not be held for such office or offices.

SECTION 7-4: REGULAR CITY ELECTION

The regular city election shall be held on the first Tuesday following the first Monday in November in each odd-numbered year.

SECTION 7-5: BALLOT POSITION, REGULAR CITY ELECTION

The order in which names of candidates for each office appear on the ballot shall be determined by a drawing conducted by the city clerk not later than 7 days after the certification of the preliminary election results. If there is no preliminary election in advance of the regular city election or a special election, the drawing shall be conducted on the sixth Tuesday prior to the election. The drawing shall be open to the public.

SECTION 7-6: NON-PARTISAN ELECTIONS

All elections for city offices shall be non-partisan and election ballots shall be printed without any party mark, emblem or other political designation.

SECTION 7-7: WARDS

The territory of the city shall be divided into seven wards by the city clerk to consist of nearly an equal number of inhabitants as it is possible to achieve, based on compact and contiguous territory, bounded as far as possible by the center line of known streets or ways or by other well-defined limits. Each ward shall be composed of voting precincts established under the General Laws. The city council shall review these wards to ensure uniformity in the number of inhabitants at least once every 10 years.

SECTION 7-8: APPLICATION OF STATE GENERAL LAWS

Except as otherwise expressly provided in this charter and authorized by law, all city elections shall be governed by the General Laws relating to the right to vote, the registration of voters, the nomination of candidates, voting places, the conduct of preliminary, regular and special city elections, the submission of charters, charter amendments and other propositions to the voters, the counting of votes, the recounting of votes, and the determination of results.

ARTICLE 8

GENERAL PROVISIONS

SECTION 8-1: CHARTER CHANGES

This charter may be replaced, revised or amended in accordance with the state constitution or the General Laws.

SECTION 8-2: SPECIFIC PROVISION TO PREVAIL

To the extent that a specific provision of this charter conflicts with any provision expressed in general terms, the specific provision of this charter shall prevail.

SECTION 8-3: RULES AND REGULATIONS

A copy of all rules and regulations adopted by a city agency shall be posted to the city website. Unless an emergency exists, as determined by the mayor, a rule or regulation adopted by a city agency shall not become effective until at least 5 days following the date it is posted. This section shall not apply to internal operating protocols and policies enacted by city departments.

SECTION 8-4: PERIODIC REVIEW OF CHARTER

The mayor and city council shall provide for a review to be made of the city charter at least once every 10 years to prepare recommendations for proposed revision. The manner of the review shall be established by ordinance and incorporate community input. The recommendations shall be filed with the city clerk at a date specified by ordinance.

SECTION 8-5: PERIODIC REVIEW OF ORDINANCES

The mayor and city council shall provide for a review to be made of some or all of the city ordinances at least once every 10 years to prepare recommendations for proposed revision or recodification. The manner of the review shall be established by ordinance. The review of city ordinances shall be under the

supervision of the city solicitor and incorporate community input. The recommendations shall be filed with the city clerk at a date specified by ordinance.

SECTION 8-6: PERIODIC REVIEW OF MULTIPLE MEMBER BODIES

At least once every 10 years the mayor and the city council shall provide for a review to be made of all multiple member bodies. This review shall be made by a special committee to be determined by ordinance, and the initial review shall be implemented as provided in Section 9-7(d). All members of the committee shall be municipal voters of the city. The special committee shall file its report with the city clerk at a date specified by ordinance. The committee's report should include an assessment of the function and relevance of all multiple member bodies, and recommendations to combine, remove, or add new multiple member bodies to address redundancies or new concerns of the city. Recommendations shall not conflict with multiple member bodies required by the General Laws.

SECTION 8-7: UNIFORM PROCEDURES GOVERNING MULTIPLE MEMBER BODIES

Open Meeting Law and procedures in the General Laws shall apply to the proceedings of multiple member bodies, including the following:

(a) Officers – All appointed multiple member bodies shall elect a chair, a vice-chair and a clerk and any other officer it deems necessary.

(b) Meetings - All appointed multiple member bodies of the city shall meet regularly at the times and places that the multiple member body, by the body's own rules, prescribe. Special meetings of any multiple member body shall be held at the call of the chair or by a majority of the members of the body. Notice of the meeting shall be posted as required by law. Except as may otherwise be authorized by law, all meetings of all multiple member bodies shall at all times be open to the public.

(c) Meeting Documents and Submissions - Each appointed multiple member body shall determine its own rules and order of business. Each multiple member body shall provide for the keeping of agendas, minutes and related submissions of its proceedings. All such documents shall be a public record and certified

copies shall be placed on file in the office of the city clerk within a reasonable period from the date of approval.

(d) Voting - If requested by a member, a vote of an appointed multiple member body shall be taken by a roll call vote and the vote of each member shall be recorded in the minutes, but if the vote is unanimous, only that fact need be recorded.

(e) Quorum - A majority of the members of an appointed multiple member body shall constitute a quorum. Unless some other provision is made by the multiple member body's own rules while a quorum is present, except on procedural matters, a majority of the full membership of the body shall be required to vote on any matter representing an exercise of the powers of the multiple member body. General Laws related to a vote to meet in executive session shall always require a majority of members of the body.

SECTION 8-8: REFERENCES TO GENERAL LAWS

All references to General Laws contained in this charter refer to the General Laws of the Commonwealth and are intended to refer to and to include any amendments or revisions to such chapters or sections or to the corresponding chapters and sections of any rearrangement, revision or recodification of such statutes enacted or adopted subsequent to the adoption of this charter.

SECTION 8-9: COMPUTATION OF TIME

In computing time under this charter, the day of the act or event after which the designated time period begins to run shall not be included. The last day of the period shall be included, unless it is a Saturday, Sunday or legal holiday, in which event the period shall be extended to the next business day.

SECTION 8-10: OATHS OR AFFIRMATIONS

(a) Officials Elected in Regular Elections - On the first business day in January of each even-numbered year, the city council members-elect, the school committee members-elect, and, in years immediately following a mayoral election, the mayor-elect, shall meet and take an oath or affirmation to faithfully

discharge the duties of their office. The oath or affirmation shall be administered by the city clerk. Each official taking the oath or affirmation shall also sign a written version, which shall be kept in a bound book maintained by the city clerk. If the mayor-elect or any member-elect of the city council or school committee is absent on the day the oath is administered, the oath or affirmation may be administered at any time after to that person by the city clerk, the assistant city clerk, a judge of a court of record or by a justice of the peace. Modifications to this section may be made by ordinance.

(b) Other Elected Officials and Appointed Positions - Except as otherwise provided by law, every person who is elected or appointed to an office or as a member of a multiple member body shall take an oath or affirmation before performing any act under this election or appointment. A record of this oath or affirmation shall be kept by the city clerk.

(c) Certificate - Every person who is elected or appointed to an office or as a member of a multiple member body shall receive a certificate of that election or appointment from the city clerk.

SECTION 8-11: LIMITATION ON OFFICE HOLDING

Unless otherwise allowed by law or this charter, a person shall not simultaneously hold more than 1 office or position of employment with the city. This section may be waived by the mayor by filing a notice of the waiver with an explanation and justification with the city clerk.

SECTION 8-12: FELONY CONVICTION

An elected official who has been convicted of a state or federal felony while holding office shall be deemed to have vacated the office.

SECTION 8-13: ENFORCEMENT OF CHARTER PROVISIONS

It shall be the duty of the mayor to see that this charter is faithfully followed and complied with by all city agencies and employees. Whenever it appears to the mayor that a city agency or employee is not following this charter, the mayor shall, in writing, cause notice to be given to that agency or employee

directing compliance with this charter. Whenever it appears to the city council that the mayor is not following this charter, the city council shall, by resolution, direct the attention of the mayor to those areas in which it believes there is a failure to comply with this charter. The procedures made available in chapter 231A of the General Laws may be used to determine the rights, duties, or other legal relations arising under this charter, including any question of construction or validity which may be involved in such determination.

ARTICLE 9

TRANSITION PROVISIONS

SECTION 9-1: CONTINUATION OF EXISTING LAWS

All General Laws, special laws, city ordinances, city council votes, and rules and regulations of or pertaining to Somerville that are in force when this charter takes effect, and not specifically or by implication repealed by this charter, shall continue in full force and effect until amended or repealed, or rescinded by due course of law, or until they expire by their own limitation. In any case in which the provisions of this charter are found to be inconsistent with the provisions of any general or special law that would otherwise be applicable, the provisions of this charter shall prevail.

SECTION 9-2: CONTINUATION OF GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

All city agencies and city officials shall continue to perform their duties until reappointed, or until successors to their respective positions are appointed, or until their duties have been transferred and assumed by another city agency.

SECTION 9-3: TRANSFER OF RECORDS AND PROPERTY

All records and property of any city agency, or part thereof, the powers and duties of which are assigned in whole or in part to another city agency, shall be transferred forthwith to such agency.

SECTION 9-4: CONTINUATION OF PERSONNEL

All city office holders and employees shall retain the office, position, or employment they hold, and shall continue to perform the duties of such office, position, or employment until their employment or position is otherwise terminated or other provisions are made. A person in full-time service of the city shall not forfeit accrued time in service of the city as a result of adoption of this charter.

SECTION 9-5: EFFECT ON OBLIGATIONS, TAXES, ETC.

All official bonds, recognizances, obligations, contracts, and other instruments entered into or executed by, with, or on the behalf of the city before the adoption of this charter, shall continue to be obligations of the city and all taxes, assessments, fines, penalties, forfeitures, incurred or imposed, due or owing to the city, shall be enforced and collected; and all writs, prosecutions, actions, and causes of action, except as herein otherwise provided, shall continue without abatement and remain unaffected by this charter; and any legal act done by or in favor of the city shall not be rendered invalid by reason of the adoption of this charter.

SECTION 9-6: DISPOSITION OF CERTAIN SPECIAL ACTS

(a) Certain Special Acts Recognized and Retained - The following special acts are hereby especially recognized and retained: ***[TO BE ADDED BY THE CITY COUNCIL]***

SECTION 9-7: TIME OF TAKING EFFECT

[TO BE ADDED BY THE CITY COUNCIL]

(a) CREATION OF PUBLIC FINANCING OF CAMPAIGNS COMMITTEE

Within 6 months of the adoption of this charter, the city council shall create a Public Financing of Campaigns Committee to study public financing mechanisms and prepare recommendations with the goal of making running for office in Somerville more accessible to potential candidates. The directive of this study committee is to consider a full range of options as practicable, provide analysis on the potential benefits and barriers of each option, and consider which are the best fit for Somerville. If the city council has already taken action consistent with this provision, no action is necessary.

The committee shall consist of seven members: one shall be the Chairman of the Board of Elections Commissioners or designee, two shall be community members appointed by the city council, two shall be community members appointed by the school committee, two shall be community members appointed by the mayor. The committee shall elect a chair and establish the schedule of its meetings.

The committee shall issue recommendations to the city council within 12 months of creation. The city council shall take action on the recommendations within 90 days of receipt.

(b) CREATION OF THE INITIAL FIRST EQUITABLE COMPENSATION DISTRIBUTION COMMITTEE

The mayor and the city council shall convene the initial Equitable Compensation Distribution Committee, pursuant to section 5-3, within sufficient time that the committee's report can be delivered by the date of the Annual Budget Meeting in the following calendar year. If the city council has already taken action consistent with this provision, no action is necessary.

In addition to the subject matter required in section 5-3, the committee's initial report shall include: a) proposed solutions to address existing compensation disparities or related issues, including but not limited to tying mechanisms (a set ratio to determine pay of elected officials, tying the highest possible pay of an elected official to the lowest paid municipal employee), b) a proposed implementation plan to establish compensation distribution standards, c) an analysis of the proposed cost and timeline to implement such standards d) a comparative analysis of other approaches to this issue in similar municipalities and f) an analysis of the impacts on the Somerville community.

The committee shall consist of at least eight members including: the mayor or their designee, the city council President or their designee, one member of the school committee or their designee, one member of the Municipal Compensation Advisory Board, one member of the Charter Review Committee, one community member appointed by the mayor, one community member appointed by the city council, and the City Auditor or their designee. In addition, any other representation deemed necessary by the mayor and city council may be jointly appointed. The committee shall elect a Chair and establish the schedule of its meetings.

The committee shall be provided with an initial budget of at least \$50,000 for its expenses, including hiring of consultants as required to assist with the examination and analysis.

The committee shall submit a report to the city council and city council shall respond to and vote on the recommendations within 90 days of receipt.

(c) CREATION OF RANKED CHOICE VOTING IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE

Within 6 months of the passing of this charter, the city council shall create a Ranked Choice Voting Committee to propose a measure to adopt ranked-choice voting and submit a report on ranked-choice voting in Somerville. A voting method shall be considered ranked-choice voting if the municipal voter ranks candidates in order of preference. The Committee's report shall include: a) the elected offices to be selected by this voting method, b) a timeframe and strategy for implementation, c) infrastructure and equipment requirements, d) a cost analysis, e) a comparative analysis of other voting methods, f) an analysis of potential equity concerns, and g) a community education plan. If the city council has already taken action consistent with this provision, no action is necessary.

The goal of this committee is to implement ranked-choice voting in order to more accurately reflect the will of the voters, increase the number and diversity of candidates, lower barriers to candidate participation, and increase transparency of elections.

The committee shall consist of seven members: one shall be the Chairman of the Board of Elections Commissioners or their designee, two shall be community members appointed by the city council, two shall be community members appointed by the school committee, two shall be community members appointed by the mayor. The committee shall elect a Chair and establish the schedule of its meetings.

The committee shall propose a measure to the city council within 18 months. The city council shall take action on the measure within 90 days of receipt.

(d) INITIAL PERIODIC REVIEW OF MULTIPLE MEMBER BODIES

The mayor and the city council shall convene the first Periodic Review of Multiple Member Bodies Committee, pursuant to section 8-6, within 6 months of the passing of this charter. The committee's report should include a) an assessment of the functions and relevancies of the city's current multiple member

bodies, b) a review of activities of multiple member bodies from recent years, c) the ability of The City to fill appointments to the body, d) recommendations for combining, removing or adding new multiple member bodies. If the city council has already taken action consistent with this provision, no action is necessary.

The committee shall consist of at least eight members including: the mayor or their designee, the city council President or their designee, one member of the school committee, one member of the Municipal compensation advisory board, one member of the Charter Review Committee, one community member appointed by the mayor, one community member appointed by the city council, and the City Auditor. In addition, any other representation deemed necessary by the mayor and the city council may be jointly appointed.

The committee shall elect a Chair and establish the schedule of its meetings. The committee shall be provided with an initial budget of at least \$25,000 for its expenses, including hiring of consultants as required to assist with the examination and analysis.

The committee shall submit a report to the city council and they shall respond to and vote on the recommendations within 90 days of receipt.

(e) PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING STUDY COMMITTEE

Within 6 months of the adoption of this charter, the city council shall create a Participatory Budgeting Committee to study participatory budgeting and related participatory mechanisms and prepare recommendations with the goal of increasing resident participation in city government. The directive of this study committee is to consider a full range of options as practicable, provide analysis on the potential benefits and barriers of each option, review the results of previous participatory budgeting programs, and consider which are the best fit for Somerville. If the city council has already taken action consistent with this provision, no action is necessary.

The committee shall consist of seven members: one shall be the Director of Finance or their designee, two shall be community members appointed by the city council, two shall be community members appointed

by the mayor, and two shall be community members appointed by the school committee. The committee shall elect a chair and establish the schedule of its meetings.

The committee shall issue recommendations to the city council within 12 months of creation. The city council shall take action on the recommendations within 90 days of receipt.

Appendix A: Values Statement

CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE VALUES STATEMENT

We seek to revise the Somerville Charter to make our government more just, empowering, responsive and innovative for its residents.

- **To be just**, our city government should be structured in a way that fosters equity, fairness, inclusivity, and accessibility. It should encourage government officials to care for our most vulnerable residents, serve diverse needs, and seek social and environmental justice.
- **To be empowering**, our city government should provide avenues of engagement for as many of our residents as possible, including those who do not typically participate in governance. It should use inclusive language and give agency to all our residents.
- **To be responsive**, our city government should be approachable by our residents and accountable to our residents. It should be structured in a way that is logical and transparent while allowing the city to effectively and efficiently respond to problems that occur.
- **To be innovative**, we should seek creative solutions in our charter, and we should structure our city government so that it can adapt as required to respond equitably and efficiently to needs that may arise in the future.

Appendix B: Community Engagement Documentation

Section 1: Community Meetings

Charter Review Committee Community Meeting #1: City Council, Mayor, and School Committee Tuesday, September 28, 2021

Location: Virtual Zoom Meeting
Number of attendees: 15
Professional facilitator: Brian Tarallo
Staff: Hope Williams, Anna Corning

Introduction

This was the first of four community meetings hosted by the Somerville Charter Review Committee,⁴ with the goal of gaining meaningful feedback and ideas from the Somerville community. The topics of this meeting were the roles and responsibilities of the City Council (CC), Mayor, and School Committee (SC). The community meeting was hosted by a professional facilitator, Brian Tarallo. The community meeting utilized a tool called “Mentimeter,” an anonymous polling software. Below, the discussion questions are labeled **green**, while written responses and aloud discussion are labeled **yellow**.

Question #1: What is your favorite thing about the city of Somerville?

Written responses: 8

- Community
- Unique Restaurants
- The people
- I'm never the weirdest thing out that day.
- Passionate Citizens
- Yes to passionate citizens. Walking everywhere.
- Know my neighbors
- The bike path!

Discussion:

- There are so many great local restaurants!

Question #2: The national and statewide standard for term length is 2 or 4 years. In MA, municipalities are split about 50/50. In Somerville all elected officials serve a 2-year term. What do you see as the benefits of a TWO-year term for elected officials?

⁴ To learn more about the Somerville Charter Review Committee, click here: <https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/charter-review-committee>

Written responses: 6

- More accountability/ responsiveness to voters
- It is easier to change non-performing elected officials.
- Short terms allow for frequent input by voters
- More opportunity for voters to be in habit of voting
- Public participation
- I'm not honestly sure! We have two year terms now and don't see an obvious reason for a change so maybe its status quo bias.

Discussion:

- A community member said: Shorter terms allow for a council that is more representative of the people because it allows for them to be held accountable more often.

Question #3: What do you see as the benefits of a FOUR-year term for elected officials?

Written Responses: 8

- Very much in favor of this, less time spent in constant campaigning, less expensive, more important elections
- One possible benefit: electeds may not have to constantly be in "campaign mode". Canvassing is different from governing
- Officials spend more time governing and Less campaigning
- It may create the opportunity for longer term planning and execution. Of course this depends on the officials' capacity for that.
- Gives more time for the elected to enforce longer projects
- More time to get stuff done. Less frequent elections might actually increase voter participation. Lots of time, money and energy goes into such frequent elections.
- Many districts have staggered 3 yr terms, longer than 2 year, and entire body doesn't change at once

Discussion:

- Brian, the professional facilitator, mentioned an overall trend about less campaigning and more governing.
- A community member asked: Do elections have to be off cycle with state and national elections? This resident is of two minds - that having it on cycle would have higher participation, but would make it much harder for those running to raise money.

Question #4: If you were deciding today, would you choose a 2-year or 4-year term for the City Council?

Written Responses: 8

| Choices | Votes |
|-------------|-------|
| 2-year term | 5 |

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| 4-year term | 1 |
| Another term length entirely | 1 |
| Either is fine / no opinion | 1 |

Discussion:

- 4-year term supporter expressed: incredibly frequent elections are taxing for voters and electeds, and at the pace municipal government moves, 2 years is not that long in terms of delivering on campaign promises, to embark on ambitious projects, etc.
- 2-year term supporter expressed: shorter terms allow folks who may not be able to commit to 4 years. With a two year term you have the opportunity to vote corrupt people out more quickly.
- Either is fine/no opinion supporter expressed: Carrie Normand of the School Committee identified herself and her role. She mentioned the possibility of staggered terms in order to create some consistency over time instead of the entire body turning over at once. It could create more steady governing. +2 in the chat.

Question #5: If you were deciding today, would you choose a 2-year or 4-year term for the Mayor?

Written Responses: 9

| Choices | Votes |
|------------------------------|-------|
| 2-year term | 3 |
| 4-year term | 5 |
| Another term length entirely | 0 |
| Either is fine / no opinion | 1 |

Discussion:

- 4-year term supporters expressed: There has been a slow evolution in MA of moving from 1 year to 2 year to 4 year terms over time, and we are falling behind in that trend. It would be good to have the mayor every 4 years, but City Council every 2 years, so there is still a check on power, people are still in the habit of voting, and the mayor doesn't spend as much time in campaign mode.
 - A community member responded: if the goal is for the 2-year city council terms to be a check and balance, should the city council have more power than they do today for this idea to work?

- A 4-year term supporter responded: There could be the implementation of a resolution of disapproval process for CC whereby by a binding vote they repeal actions of the mayor. This process would lead to a really good check on the mayor, which solves the problem of balance of power and makes city councilors take positions. Also, recall as an option to balance for 4-year terms.
- 2-year term supporter said: If it's a strong mayor form of government it would be good to recall that person after 2 years because they have so much power - 8 or 9 years ago there was another committee like this formed, and they decided to keep it for 2 years. This community member explains that currently the CC has the ability to do two main things: zoning and removing budgeting items.

Question #6: If you were deciding today, would you choose a 2-year or 4-year term for the School Committee?

Written Responses: 9

| Choices | Votes |
|------------------------------|-------|
| 2-year term | 1 |
| 4-year term | 0 |
| Another term length entirely | 3 |
| Either is fine / no opinion | 5 |

Discussion:

- Brian, the professional facilitator, mentioned that it seems that Carrie Normand, who has served on School Committee for eight years, made an impact with her earlier comment on the staggered 3-year term limit for the school committee.
- Another term length entirely supporter said: Sold on the idea of the staggered limit in order to ensure consistency over time to help the governing process overall.
 - Carrie responded: You cannot make as much meaningful change with the 2 year terms, because every two years you have to rewrite district goals which wastes time and resources and doesn't allow for systemic change kids deserve. Two years is too short of a time. The short length is not just about campaigning, but also about governing. To make fundamental changes to the education system there have to be longer term goals, not goals that can be changed based on political whims. Stability in leadership is key to lengthening terms.
 - Another community member responded: I'm in the anything-but-2-year camp. I worry that it would be expensive to have elections every single year, but maybe 4-year staggered terms?

- Carrie responded: There isn't a magic number or solution to terms, but it's about staggering elections and not having a change of leadership not happen all at once. The way it works now is destructive to district leadership and goal-setting.
- Another community member said: What about electing school committee members to 4 year terms staggered over time?

Question #7: The statewide standard for municipal government is to not have term limits. In MA, 3 out of 351 municipalities have them. Somerville does not have term limits, which means elected officials can be elected as many times as voters want. Would you like the Charter Review Committee to consider establishing term limits?

Written Responses: 9

| Choices | Votes |
|------------|-------|
| Yes | 1 |
| No | 5 |
| No opinion | 3 |

Discussion:

- No supporters said: Lawrence does have term limits and it is dissuading members of the city council to want to run for mayor. Also, cities with term limits usually have people with less municipal experience and data shows they default more and tend to have more financial troubles.
- Yes supporters said: it's not an absolute yes, it's about what form of government the charter review committee comes up with - we should think about this all in the context of the current city government. Right now our city is facing systemic long term issues.

Question #8: If you were to describe Somerville's government in one word, what would it be?

Written Responses: 9

- Divisive
- Divided
- Well-designed
- Tentative
- bizarre
- Slow
- Responsive
- Online
- exclusive

Discussion:

- Community member responded: Having both at large seats and ward seats the way Somerville does has led to our government being a lot better, and leaves people with something to like - there aren't many people who strongly dislike the current city council structure (unlike in neighboring cities).
- Community member responded: Concerns aren't necessarily to do with its forms, but that Somerville has a lot of tight constraints other cities don't have. Much of this is fiscal, high density population, very low developable land left, and the least amount of open space in the Commonwealth. Leaders need to think systemically. You do anything about anything and you're going to affect everything. Leaders should think long term - it doesn't seem like current elected officials are thinking long term, but instead about what is politically popular.
- Community member responded: City is relatively well designed based on high density and other issues stated above.
- Community member responded: Priorities in SomerVision have been laid out but slow to implement. Same with police reform. It seems like there should be more decisions on stated community goals and elected officials should have to act on those goals.
- Community member responded: Seems like a lot of things are getting held up at things they don't have control over, like state roads running through Somerville. The city should have more control over facilities in its space.

Question #9: Municipal charters set parameters around the powers, resources, and roles for City Council, Mayor, and the School Committee. The committee is considering how to increase support and resources for City Councilors. Do you believe City Councilors need more resources?

Written Responses: 10

| Choices | Votes |
|------------|-------|
| Yes | 8 |
| No | 0 |
| No opinion | 2 |

Discussion:

- Community member responded: the role of city councilor seems to grow with the amount of time they have to give the role. A lot of people suggest adding staff/resources, but we have to consider what that additional time will add. How will they use their 40 hours if they go full-time?
- Community member responded: there are inherent limits to having city council be volunteers. Just want to make sure the city council is representative of the actual city and its population.
 - It was clarified that it is a part-time paid role currently.
- Community member responded: Agree with other statements, and want to explore other resources, perhaps their own legal counsel. We may need an elected city auditor, with their own resources. Ward councilors have historically been thought of as being ombudsmen (a public advocate) in addition to legislators, and at large councilors have been policy makers. I know ward

councilors that do no constituent services, but maybe that would happen less if they were full time.

Question #10: What recommendations do you have for improving support for the City Council?

Written Responses: 9

- Important to keep in mind that powers of councilors are only collective -- bad to have system where individual councilor have staff (fragmentation) and tend to create a separate shadow administration
- More accurate COLA updates, and reconsidering the time commitment required of the office
- More support to communicate w public, both get word out and more importantly to listen
- Researchers, outlines for constituent services, College interns
- Committee research capabilities
- Give them a budget / more influence over city budget
- Additional staff, legal counsel and/or legislative staff, possibly constituent facing or communications staffer
- Second idea re: independent counsel to avoid conflicts of interest
- Constituent services are less important in a city as small as Somerville - we are not far flung wards where it difficult for citizens to see the councilor on regular basis

Question #11: What suggestions do you have about the role or power of the Mayor?

Written Responses: 4

- I think the mayor's power could be curtailed in favor of a more equal division of power with the city council
- No strong opinion about Mayor vs City Council but I think it's important to have empowered government overall and relatively few veto points
- I don't think many citizens realize how much power the mayor has over the budget vs the councilors.
- The council should have the power to add to the budget and not just subtract.

Discussion:

- Community member said: Important to think about post-BLM budgeting process regarding police reforms. Believes the council only had the ability to approve or disapprove the budget, they couldn't implement a new line item.
- There was further clarification on how the budget process works.

Question #12: What suggestions do you have on the structure or operations of the School Committee?

Written Responses: 3

- I am too ignorant to have an opinion

- I confess to being a little unsure why the schools (over public health, housing etc) have their own governing body when all other areas of city life are overseen by the mayor and city council.
- I'm biased, school committee doesn't have staff support in same way as council

Discussion:

- Community member responded: why do the schools have a specific governing body?
 - Community member responded: Mayor and City Council president sit on the committee, so it's not entirely separate. Also, schools are the largest budget item in the city by far.

Question #13: What's one word you would use to describe your experience this evening?

Written Responses: 12

| | |
|--|-------------|
| convenient | Pretty cool |
| engaging | Effective |
| Stimulating | optimistic |
| little-participation | Well done! |
| uncomfortable with format and technology | educational |
| Well done | interesting |

Charter Review Committee
Community Meeting #2: Administrative Organization and Finance
Wednesday, October 13th, 2021

Location: Virtual Zoom Meeting
Number of attendees: 3
Professional facilitator: Brian Tarallo
Staff: Hope Williams, Anna Corning

Introduction

This was the first of four community meetings hosted by the Somerville Charter Review Committee,⁵ with the goal of gaining meaningful feedback and ideas from the Somerville community. The topics of this meeting were Administrative Organization and Finance. While it had lower attendance than other community meetings, it was engaging for residents and the committee received positive feedback from attendees. The community meeting was hosted by a professional facilitator, Brian Tarallo. The community meeting utilized a tool called “Mentimeter,” an anonymous polling software. Below, the discussion questions are labeled green, while written responses and aloud discussion are labeled yellow.

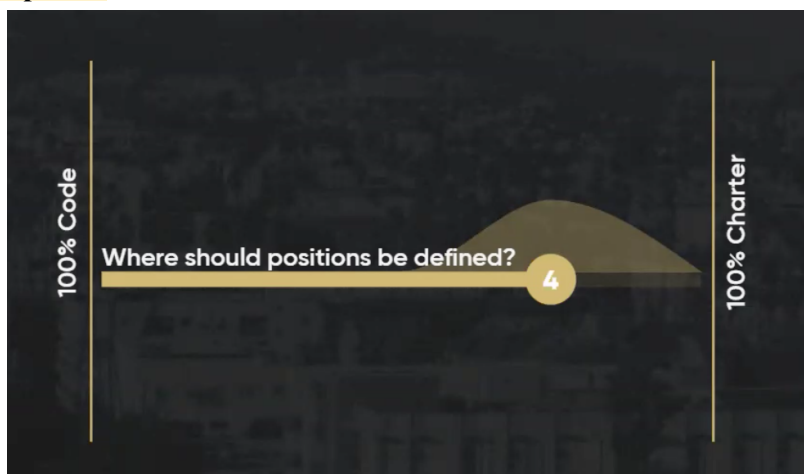
Question #1: What is your favorite Somerville memory?

Written responses: 2

- Returning to my old coop house, years ago, after 3 months in the Antarctic
- So many! Most recent is this past Saturday at HONK!, wandering the residential streets from Foss Park to Davis Square. I love the architecture of this city

Question #2: To what extent do you believe positions should be determined in the charter or code?

Voted responses: 1



⁵ To learn more about the Somerville Charter Review Committee, click here: <https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/charter-review-committee>

Discussion:

- A community member said: It's important to have major positions defined in the charter - like Mayor, City Council, head of planning and zoning boards, a Chief Administrator Role, etc., but we don't need to have it all in the charter. Folks that don't have large authority don't need to be in the charter.

Question #3: This question is about the possibility of having a Chief Administrative Officer. Should the committee consider adding a Chief Administrative Officer or equivalent?

Written Responses: 2

| Choices | Votes |
|----------------------|-------|
| Yes | 2 |
| No | 0 |
| Not sure/ No opinion | 0 |

Discussion:

- A community member said: It's important to have someone doing the role of administration, and this person would help with the day-to-day. This is better than a City Manager, where they don't have to live in the City.
- Another community member said: It would be good to have someone helping with the administrative things.

Question #4: Where do you go to get information about the City now?

Written Responses: 3

- City calendar
- City website
- City Hall

Discussion:

- A community member said: I tend to check the online calendar.

Question #5: What do you think might be a more transparent and accessible way of sharing information?

Discussion:

- A community member said: Libraries would be a great place - it's where people can pick up tax forms so there's already precedent for government information being there. Another good option is T stations. It's clear not everyone subscribes to city newsletters, so having it in public is great.
- Another community member said: Twitter, Facebook, and social media du jour.

Question #6: How have you engaged with city finance and/or the budget in the past?

Written Responses: 2

- Pay my taxes :) via the web, go to hearings, "terrorize" city officials
- Last summer I attended the City Council meetings on the budget

Discussion:

- One community member said: Knowing how to interact with the budget process is important. You can talk to lots of elected officials and talk about the budget with them.

Question #7: Do you think the committee should include a mandated budget meeting in the charter?

Written Responses: 2

| Choices | Votes |
|----------------------|-------|
| Yes | 0 |
| No | 1 |
| Not sure/ No opinion | 1 |

Discussion:

- A community member who voted no: It's important to have this and the hearings. I just wonder about "mandating" it.

Question #8: Do you think the committee should include a mandated public hearing on the budget in the charter?

Written Responses: 2

| Choices | Votes |
|---------|-------|
| Yes | 0 |

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| No | 1 |
| Not sure/ No opinion | 1 |

Discussion:

- A community member who voted no: The budget process needs to happen so quickly that it's concerning if this could happen in a way that works well. If it's in there and not working, it takes a lot of time to remove it.

Question #9: Do you think the committee should consider including the capital improvement program process in the charter?

Written Responses:

| Choices | Votes |
|----------------------|-------|
| Yes | 0 |
| No | 0 |
| Not sure/ No opinion | 1 |

Question #10: Do you think the community members should vote on how to spend a portion of city money?

Written Responses: 3

| Choices | Votes |
|----------------------|-------|
| Yes | 2 |
| No | 0 |
| Not sure/ No opinion | 1 |

Discussion:

- A community member who voted yes: I like this idea. I like the idea of having community members able to participate more directly in how city money is spent.
- A community member who voted not sure/no opinion: I like this idea too, but I wonder if this could be in ordinance or somewhere else. In Cambridge it might not be in charter.

Question #11: Would you rather an independent auditor be chosen by the Mayor or the City Council?

Written Responses: 2

| Choices | Votes |
|----------------------|-------|
| Mayor | 0 |
| City Council | 2 |
| Not sure/ No opinion | 0 |

Discussion:

- A community member who voted City Council: I have more faith in the City Council than the Mayor in this regard. It's one person who might not be totally above board and doing the right thing, whereas the City Council has more people.
- Another community member who voted City Council: they passed the budget, so they should be able to appoint an auditor.

Question #12: What other comments, questions, suggestions, or opinions do you have about the City Administration or Finance?

Written Responses:

- I suggest a "state of the city" thing where finance is explained. I doubt anyone knows the state of the city's finances.
- Maybe annual plans need to be publicly explored

Discussion:

- A community member: It's been frustrating to hear about departments saying they're understaffed. I'm not sure what the solution is here, but when in interactions with the Planning Division and other boards this comes up.
- Another community member: I think having a state of the city would help a lot. There's a lot of money spent over the last 5 years, and it would be good to know where our debt is, what will need to be done, etc. Maybe every department head puts out a plan for the year.

**Charter Review Committee
Community Meeting #3: Elections & Nominations
Saturday, October 16, 2021**

Location: Virtual Zoom Meeting
 Number of attendees: 20
 Professional facilitator: Brian Tarallo
 Staff: Hope Williams, Anna Corning

Introduction

This was the third of four community meetings hosted by the Somerville Charter Review Committee,⁶ with the goal of gaining meaningful feedback and ideas from the Somerville community. The topic of this meeting was Elections and Nominations. The community meeting was hosted by a professional facilitator, Brian Tarallo. The community meeting utilized a tool called “Mentimeter,” an anonymous polling software. Below, the discussion questions are labeled green, while written responses and aloud discussion are labeled yellow.

Question #1: What’s one word you would use to describe the city of Somerville?

Written responses: 15

| | | |
|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| Gentrifying | Vibrant | Nexus |
| Emerging | Gentrifying | Progressive |
| Diverse | Dense | Cultural |
| Potential | Modernizing | Progressive |
| Artsy | Residential | Neighborhoods |

Question #2: To run for Mayor the current signature requirement is 250 signatures. Do you think this is the appropriate number of signatures to run for Mayor?

Written responses: 6

| Choices | 1: This is not enough by far | 2: This is not enough | 3: This is just right | 4: This is too many | 5: This is far too many |
|---------|------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Votes | 1 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 |

⁶ To learn more about the Somerville Charter Review Committee, click here: <https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/charter-review-committee>

Discussion:

- A community member said: I think that being able to run for public office should be as accessible as possible, that goes for those that are not as well known in our community, as well as those who have the widespread name recognition. So having the number be 250 requires some effort from the candidate but doesn't create a barrier for lesser known candidates.
- A community member said: I agree with the previous statement, wondering if people choose the middle because this is how it currently operates and it seems to be working. In the most recent prelim we had a good choice of candidates on the ballot.

Question #3: To run for Councilor-at-large the current signature requirement is 150 signatures. Do you think this is the appropriate number of signatures to run for Councilor-at-large?

Written Responses: 7

| Choices | 1: This is not enough by far | 2: This is not enough | 3: This is just right | 4: This is too many | 5: This is far too many |
|---------|------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Votes | 0 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 0 |

Discussion:

- A community member said: Councilors-at-large represent all of Somerville, so it is fitting for those councilors to require 150 signatures compared to the ward councilor candidate which are required only 100. Given the population at 80K, it seems that the 150 number is reasonable.

Question #4: To run for Ward Councilor the current signature requirement is 100 signatures. Do you think this is the appropriate number of signatures to run for Ward Councilor?

Written Responses: 7

| Choices | 1: This is not enough by far | 2: This is not enough | 3: This is just right | 4: This is too many | 5: This is far too many |
|---------|------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Votes | 0 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 0 |

Discussion:

- N/A

Question #5: To run for School Committee the current signature requirement is 100 signatures. Do you think this is the appropriate number of signatures to run for School Committee?

Written Responses: 6

| | | | | | |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Choices | 1: This is not enough by far | 2: This is not enough | 3: This is just right | 4: This is too many | 5: This is far too many |
| Votes | 0 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 0 |

Discussion:

- A community member said: I think for city wide offices the number could be higher because you are representing more people, compared to the ward representatives who are representing a much smaller population of residents.

Question #6: Should Somerville require a minimum number of signatures per ward for the Mayor and At-Large City Councilors to get on the ballot?

Written Responses: 12

| Choices | Votes |
|---------------------|--------------|
| Yes | 6 |
| No | 3 |
| No Opinion / Unsure | 3 |

Discussion:

- A community member said: I heard this discussed at a previous committee meeting, there isn't an enormous objection. But if the goal is to reduce barriers I'm not sure this helps that.
- A community member said: This proposal probably came from someone who's never collected signatures. How you get on the ballot/ and how people vote for you are very different.
- A community member said: I think I like the idea of having signatures from a certain number of the wards, maybe 5 signatures from 3-5 wards. Not unusual if you are collecting signatures in a common/populated place that you get a couple from various areas of the City. They don't need to be required to have conversations with each and every community but expanding beyond their immediate neighborhood is a positive.
- A community member said: Echoing previous statements, a small threshold is good. Don't want to make it a burden, but we have a lot of diverse experiences in our small community. But everyone who is seeking this type of office should be ensured to have conversations with folks outside their immediate square/ ward.
- A community member said: I understand the sentiment of this change, in that it would motivate candidates to do more outreach to more parts of the city. But my concern is that it is a very time intensive effort especially if they don't have a large group to support them. I think it could be a barrier to participation.

- A community member said: If you can't get 10 people per ward to support your candidacy that is problematic. We've never had someone with that poor of performance. I think it's also good for incumbent officers to be encouraged to get out into all neighborhoods.

Question #7: What do you think of the balance between the number of Ward (7) and At-Large councilors (4)?

Written Responses: 11

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| City-wide candidates need to visit all wards during the campaign anyway, so no need to require that when gathering signatures. | Seems about right. | I think it's fine as is |
| It's about right. | Have thought about it, not concluded anything and just want to wait and see | Out-dated. At-large should be proportional. |
| Off hand, the balance seems to be okay. I wonder if we need a couple more At-Large Councilors to increase diversity. | I think it's a decent balance | The at large structure doesn't maintain the Condorcet principle (they don't need a majority to win), so I would want as few as possible. |
| It seems okay, but I would be okay with fewer as well. I would not want any more at-large councilors, though. | "size of council is sufficient to fulfill the committee, specialities" via direct message | |

Discussion:

- A community member said: One question I would mull on, if ward councilors advocate primarily for their wards. Do at large councilors have more of a burden to think about the city as a whole, not that ward councilors aren't doing that. But does the balance need to be shifted.
- A community member said: I think there is no right answer, depending on the priority. At large councilors benefit, allows them to have representation from those that might not be able to get a majority somewhere. But that begins to get dangerous with competition for all four seats if there aren't 8 candidates running. You could win with a very small number of candidates. Especially because municipal elections turn out to be low.
- A community member said: The way at large councilors are selected affects how many Somerville should have. Nationally fair representation act, suggests the idea of multi member congressional districts, which I think would be nice in Somerville. But also would be rocking a boat that doesn't need to be rocked right now. We don't have a gerrymandering problem. Ward councilors are helpful for day to day issues residents have.
- A community member said: How the number of councilors has been determined, might be an outdated formula based on a number of male voters. Not sure how accurate that is today. How our

city is represented, who are the councilors, is based solely on geography. How could we weigh the representation in a different way so representation of various groups is clear. Constituencies that don't necessarily get representation based on the ward system. Proportional representation to get away from geographic representation.

- A community member asked a clarifying question in the chat: "I have been meaning to ask this, and this seems like the right group: is that male electors clause still used? Has it been judicially reinterpreted?"
- A staff member responded in the chat: "It is not in use, it has been overruled by state and federal law, But it is still charter language, just no longer valid"
- A community member said: Our system depends on good actors, yes a person could be elected with very few votes. But that person could actually be a very good person to include. And in fact having only requiring a low number of votes, might provide an opening for those who might just be new to the system.

Question #8: Should the Committee consider extending the right to vote in municipal elections to include non-citizens and others currently disenfranchised?

Written Responses: 9

| Choices | Votes |
|------------------------|-------|
| Yes | 6 |
| No | 2 |
| No Opinion / Unsure | 1 |

Discussion:

- A community member said: I've heard about these groups being included in voting. I really support 16/17 year olds, because it will bring in those who might become extremely valuable members of our communities. Also supporting currently disenfranchised, and non citizens.
- A community member said: I believe that anyone who lives/works/pays taxes in Somerville deserves representation, so we should extend the vote to them. Shouldn't matter your citizenship status, and include 16/17 year olds help them learn about the processes of voting and elections.
- A community member said: Selected not sure - because there was no maybe. 16/17 year olds sound ok - state laws might make this difficult. Non citizens maybe but one of the reasons people want to become a citizen is to be able to vote, and I'm not sure what the incentive is if we remove that.

Question #9: "Our election system should be..."

Written Responses: 20

| | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Accessible | Fair | Accessible |
| Trustable | Approval Voting | Transparent |
| Representative | Transparent | Energizing |
| Secure | Easy to understand | Majoritarian |
| Empowering | Representative | Transparent |
| Equitable | Accessible | Secure |
| Not approval voting | Ranked Choice | |

Question #10: If you were designing our election system today, what would you choose?

Written Responses: 15

| Choices | Votes |
|-----------------|-------|
| Winner-take-all | 1 |
| RCV | 13 |
| Approval | 1 |
| Other | 0 |

Question #11: In the current election system (winner-take-all) what do you think is working well?

Written Responses: 24

| | | |
|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| Simple | It is easy to understand how to fill out your ballot. | it is understood by the voters |
| known - simple | Easy to understand | Candidate choices narrow |
| Known | it generates quick results | basic |
| Intense focus on limited number of candidates; familiarity. | Secure | partial results can be indicative |
| Two-way runoff ensures a majority winner. | Familiar | secure????? |
| excludes people of color | spoilers | exclusive |
| An unpopular candidate can | the candidate you hate may win. | You have to figure out how to |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| become the winner if there are too many others in the running. | | vote strategically, which is not simple. |
| does not represent what in people want | Two elections are expensive and exhausting. | Can achieve results in a single election |

Discussion:

- A community member said: As an election official, making it understandable by the voters is very important. When we have ballot questions or a special election we have more spoiled ballots than on a regular election.
- A community member said: Candidate choices are narrow, if there are 5 candidates in the prelim then after prelim you have to really only choose from 2 candidates

Question #12: In the current election system (winner-take-all) what do you think are the limitations?

Written Responses: 27

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| Spoilers | Vote splitting | Non representative top 2 | Favors 2-party system; little room for others. |
| we pay more for a suboptimal outcome | Voters strategize instead of voting their true preference | Not enough choice | candidate bashing |
| The amount of financial and person power resources that have to go into a low-turnout preliminary | Strategic voting | Tactical voting | An unpopular candidate can become the winner in a crowded field. |
| Low turn out | Not always representative | Low turn out again | You can win with 22% of the vote |
| vote splitting | Two elections are expensive and exhausting. | Can win with 22% of the vote | Figuring out how to vote strategically is not simple. |
| More expensive | Proven track record of success in govt. elections in US and abroad | So so much, but it makes sure (in a single seat) that the person with majority support wins. | Not truly representative |
| arrives at candidate with broad support | So so much, but with a single seat it ensures the person with majority support wins. | voter suppression CAN GET YOU ELECTED | |

Discussion:

- A community member said: Tapping into some of these comments, it doesn't lend itself well to vote splitting and sometimes you get candidates you don't want.
- A community member said: Agree with the points being made, in Boston and Somerville have seen in recent prelim election cycle that these concerns came into play

Question #13: What do you think are the positives of Rank Choice Voting systems?

Written Responses: 28

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| Easy | Getting rid of the preliminaries | Can vote for who you believe in | So so much (in single candidate races) where it ensure the person with majority support wins. |
| You can express your actual preferences. | Reduces the spoiler effect | Potential to better reflect support. | Requires candidates to campaign positively and inclusively |
| costs less | More accurate representation of voter preferences | No need to think about strategic voting. | more collaborative campaigning - more civility between candidates |
| Can save money | More expressive | Better voter turnout | Cooperative campaigning instead of defensive |
| Get to choose between all the people running; not just the two who made it to the end. | Is representative | Proven effective in the US and other countries | Voters more empowered than in winner-take-all. |
| Can achieve results in a single election. i.e. cheaper | Honest choices, instead of strategizing | More democratic | Fewer voters who get frustrated with political infighting and sit out the election |
| Disincentivizes attacks on other candidates | Allows candidates to run for one November election instead of two elections | Fair to all candidates and voters | Just like NYC! |

Discussion:

- A community member said: I'm very supportive of RCV, I think sometimes we might be surprised with the candidate with the most support. But it better reflects the city.
- A community member said: There is so much, in single seat races it ensures the person with the most support wins.
- A community member said: Ensures winners have broad support. Voters can vote for their favorite with a backup. Allows lesser known candidates to run without feeling like they are causing a split in the vote. More than 75 % of Somerville residents supported this on the statewide ballot.
- A community member said: Echoing everyone else, forces candidates to be more inclusive, and to reach out to more diverse groups of voters. Reflected in their campaign platforms. I think it also creates a more positive environment.

Question #14: What do you think are the challenges of Rank Choice Voting systems?

Written Responses: 19

| | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| Complex | people are suspicious of change | Implementation | Doesn't fully solve spoiler effect |
| Having to learn about more candidates to avoid your ballot being exhausted | explaining it to non-native voters | i think voter education should be done before first use. It's been done, worked fine. Can use cost savings on the prelim for it | Voter confusion initially. |
| Leads to many spoiled ballots | Doesn't work to produce majority in multi member seats. | Requires new ballot design | It will take intentional, clear communication about how it will work. Voter education will be so important. |
| Requires legislative consent | Will require voter education and clear instructions available in multiple languages (we can do this Somerville!) | most voters won't actually do it. | Would this be used only within a Party designation, or open to all Parties in a single field? |
| On the cost point, I would guess that in the long run RCV would be less expensive because the city wouldn't need to run preliminaries elections every 2 years (if I'm understanding the systems correctly!). | Yes, it's expensive, but it's worth it. If our taxes can't be put towards upholding/bettering our election system, education voters, and making voting accessible, then why are we paying taxes? | Cambridge uses RCV for at-large, not single-winner. | |

Discussion:

- A community member said: RCV advocates promise a lot, and maybe over promise on the system. Following the recent NYC mayoral primary you can easily see how some of those promises didn't live up to expectations .One example is that RCV is supposed to incentivize collaborations and reduce attacks. But attacks still happened. RCV promises a majority candidate, but the candidate won with only 43% of the vote, because of spoiled ballots. Expensive to do education and ballot design. Counting isn't secure, because it is centralized vs by precinct, more prone to hacking. Harder to understand. It's also not obvious to tell how many votes each of the non winning candidates received.
- A community member said: I disagree with some of this, if someone were to say that rcv eliminated all negative campaigning that'd be wrong. There was an increased collaboration among candidates. Eric Adams was the most broadly supported candidate, if technically was not the majority winner, but he was the first round plurality winner and the 2nd, 3rd choice of many of voters whose 1st picks were eliminated. NYC folk were surveyed and 75% liked and wanted to use it again. Our voting machines already work with RCV and our population is very invested in making this change.
- A community member said: NYC is a bad example, the timeline issues are unique to NY. RCV discourages attacks but does not eliminate it. It has been used in 100s of elections with positive feedback.
- A community member said: Surprised Cambridge hasn't shown up, they've been doing it for a very long time. It would be nice to have someone from the Cambridge Board of Elections to speak on how it's working there.

Question #15: What do you think are the positives of Approval Voting systems?

Written Responses: 13

| | | | |
|--|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| Simple | Easy | Supposedly a more consensus pick | Don't need to decide between equals |
| Understandable | Can vote for who you believe in | No vote splitting | Likely that people will feel heard |
| Less likely to require a runoff? | When voting for multiple candidates, such as our present At-Large Councilors, this gives better results to represent support. | Vulnerable to strategic bullet voting (pro/con). | Transparent |
| The first choice of 99% of people can lose an election | | | |

Discussion:

- A community member said: Advocate for approval voting, believe better addresses a lot of the problems that we all agreed exist in the current system. It's a simple process, similar to the system today. Don't need to revisit ballots to calculate the winner. See support for non-winners. Doesn't add costs for election. Expressive in that you don't need to decide who should get your vote, you can choose as many as you like.
- A community member said: I respect everyone's views. If there is one thing I don't want to see come out of the charter review its approval voting. I've never liked 2 politicians equally before, and it's been used before but I don't think it supports the wants of Somerville's residents.

Question #16: What do you think are the challenges of Approval Voting systems?

Written Responses: 14

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| Doesn't guarantee majority winner | Bullet voting as a strategy. | I literally dont know how I would have voted in Somerville's recent election | Doesn't let me say which candidate i like best |
| The first choice of 99% of people can lose an election. | Difficult to decide where to draw the line between medium preferences | No way for a voter to differentiate between strong support for a candidate and mild support for a candidate | people will vote for everyone. |
| Can't distinguish between candidates | Big incentive to bullet vote just for your 1st choice because voting for your 2nd choice hurts your 1st choice | Approval/disapproval is relative | Doesn't reflect gradations of support within a single ballot, only as aggregate. |
| Scarcely used in the world so almost no empirical data from real elections as to how it would work in practice | I would have only voted for 1 even though 3 might have been "acceptable" in the last mayoral candidates. This doesn't seem like a beneficial system. | | |

Discussion:

- A community member said: Expressiveness concerns, feel differently about different candidates, and wouldn't know how to vote on a yes / no ballot. Valid concern, and if we wanted a more expressive ballot, where you can give different ratings to different candidates. Really should have a Rating or score ballot, similar to the NYC primary. Expressiveness/ maximize voter satisfaction. But it would be more simple than a RCV election. But would need to redesign the ballot and upgrade machines, but the increase in voter satisfaction isn't increased with that.

- A community member continued: If you want the expressiveness that some of us are talking about, you could allow the voter to rate/score each candidate how they place. But on a ranked choice ballot you can't rank candidates the same way. Why should I be penalized for feeling a certain way about ballot candidates?
- A community member said: I would be concerned with the use of adding the scores to an approval ballot. And so then we are back to all the concerns folks have expressed here. Speaking for myself, this recent election there was one candidate I didn't want and three candidates I thought about carefully and I had a preference. Should I have approved of 3 because I strongly hated the 4th or only picked my favorite. I think ranking is intuitive. I wish I could have ranked in this prelim.

Question #17: Based on what you just heard, if you were designing our election system today, what would you choose?

Written Responses: 14

| Choices | Votes |
|-----------------|-------|
| Winner-take-all | 1 |
| RCV | 12 |
| Approval | 1 |
| Other | 0 |

Discussion:

- A community member said: Why do we want to state the election process in the charter? I think this is currently the case that we don't. Also, we need poll workers!
- A community member said: One thing I like about RCV is that it is one of the systems where listing your votes honestly, and a resilient system.
- A community member said: Based on personal experience as a voter I really support RCV. One thing I think is really interesting is that people get nervous that they won't understand the RCV process. So the city needs to make an effort to educate and invest in confidence building for voters. If we can do that effectively we might see an increase in turnout.
- A community member said: My son is 9, and the other day I asked him what kind of ice cream he wanted from the store and he told me and then I said if they don't have that what else would he want. Ranking was clear to him. It's an intuitive process.

**Charter Review Committee
Community Meeting #4: Citizen Participation Mechanisms
Monday, November 8, 2021**

Location: Virtual Zoom Meeting
 Number of attendees: 17
 Professional facilitator: Brian Tarallo
 Staff: Hope Williams, Anna Corning

Introduction

This was the fourth of four community meetings hosted by the Somerville Charter Review Committee,⁷ with the goal of gaining meaningful feedback and ideas from the Somerville community. The topic of this meeting was Citizen Participation Mechanisms. The community meeting was hosted by a professional facilitator, Brian Tarallo. The community meeting utilized a tool called “Mentimeter,” an anonymous polling software. Below, the discussion questions are labeled **green**, while written responses and aloud discussion are labeled **yellow**.

Question #1: What issue or topic are you passionate about in Somerville?

Written responses: 11

| | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Traffic and parking | Affordable housing | Zoning policy enforcement |
| democracy | Charter reform | rats |
| Affordable housing | Small businesses | transit |
| Elder affairs | Government powers | Affordable housing |
| Elder affairs | Funding allocation | |

Discussion:

- N/A

Question #2: Do you currently interact with City Council or School Committee?

Written responses: 11

| Choices | Votes |
|---------|-------|
| | |

⁷ To learn more about the Somerville Charter Review Committee, click here: <https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/charter-review-committee>

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Yes | 9 |
| No | 2 |
| No Opinion / Unsure | 0 |

Discussion:

- A community member said: I contact my ward councilor or school committee member if I have questions
- A community member said: most important to me is the online webinar session to watch city council when they are not in executive session
- A community member said: Public comment, a lot of issues are open for public comment or written comment. Actually was improved by COVID because taking comment digitally has increased overall participation

Question #3: What do you think are current barriers to participating in local government?

Written Responses: 10

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| Lack of widely received public notice | Language access | The near-dictatorial power of the mayor's office | Language access |
| Length of meetings | A lot going on, super long meetings with huge agendas. | Timing— it's not easy for parents | Understanding the processes and practical consequences of certain decisions. |
| Meetings are not always convenient | Fear of our voices being ignored in favor of special interests | Time of meetings. | People feeling as though their basic needs are met |
| Mistakenly referring to all residents as citizens, suggesting non-citizen residents cannot or should not participate. | Are there meeting minutes somewhere? I've never seen them. | | |

Discussion:

- N/A

Question #4: Do you think you would use an individual petition to make your voice heard?

Written Responses: 13

| Choices | Votes |
|------------------------|-------|
| Yes | 6 |
| No | 2 |
| Maybe | 4 |
| No Opinion / Unsure | 1 |

Discussion:

- A community member said: most people are remarkably shy, if I had something I wanted addressed I would be embarrassed to ask to take up others' time about an issue unless I knew they were passionate about the same thing. The second piece is understanding how to make an individual petition, in writing/digitally.
- A community member said: generally discomfort with public speaking
- A community member said: I don't know what an individual petition consists of. When I had a request about an item, I just emailed my school committee member. Of course you have to know who your representative is.
- A community member said: I know that committee has discussed the threshold for this, I know maybe the committee discussed 10?

Question #5: If a topic was important to you, do you think you would use a group petition to make your voice heard either by starting one or signing one?

Written Responses: 11

| Choices | Votes |
|------------------------|-------|
| Yes | 10 |
| No | 0 |
| Maybe | 1 |
| No Opinion / Unsure | 0 |

Discussion:

- A community member said: it's a question of importance or convenience
- A community member said: it's very easy to sign someone else's petition, I'd be more hesitant to start one

Question #6: How many signatures do you think should be required for a group petition?

Written Responses: 10

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 10 | 20 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 32 | 48 | 50 | 109 |
| 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

Discussion:

- A community member said: I think the bar to be heard should be very low
- A community member said: Worried about folks with nuisance complaints and those getting out of hand. Example, someone complaining about traffic in their neighborhood
- A community member said: I'd like to see some sort of dismissable process for dilatory issues, the council clerk authority or something to avoid topics taking councils time

Question #7: If a topic was important to you, do you think you would use a citizen initiative to make your voice heard?

Written Responses: 10

| Choices | Votes |
|------------------------|--------------|
| Yes | 7 |
| No | 2 |
| Maybe | 1 |
| No Opinion / Unsure | 0 |

Discussion:

- A community member said: it's like a referendum, I'm leery of using these. I'm not saying never but it would have to be very specific and universal support
- A community member said: Power to the people, we should be making it as easy as possible for people to influence their government. But I agree with other community member that there needs to be a higher threshold because of the significance

- A community member said: I think there is a desire to increase participation with government, but i want to avoid additional municipal special elections so holding the vote on a preliminary or general municipal election is a best practice

Question #8: How many signatures do you think should be required for a citizen initiative?

Written Responses: 11

| 100 | 200 | 500 | 504 | 521 | 528 | 1000+ |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |

Discussion:

- A community member said: I think a problem I'm seeing as a resident (developer/lawyer) of Somerville is that after an ordinance is passed I think boards/commissions are misinterpreting language/ the language itself is vague. My concern is that , if you are signing a petition it should specifically affect you, instead of supporting a neighbor or fellow resident. Less than 30% of residents voted, this small group is making a decision about a topic/ ordinance.
- A community member said: Because significant/big things can happen, if something is going to happen not through elected officials. If it is going to go to ballot that is a big deal and the threshold should be high.
- A community member said: How do we enforce ordinances that are enforced by the appointed commissions/boards when the residents & councilors have different opinions

Question #9: Would you use referendum if it were an option?

Written Responses: 10

| Choices | Votes |
|------------------------|-------|
| Yes | 4 |
| No | 1 |
| Maybe | 4 |
| No Opinion / Unsure | 1 |

Discussion:

- A community member said: normally I support the most direct democracy. I think unless it comes at the end of a term it's hard to be timely, it's taken out of effect until the next election. There's so

many things it can't apply to that it would be confusing and lead to an increase in municipal elections.

- A community member said: I think it would be surprising if there were a lot of reasons to completely remove instead of modifying. I think modifying would be a more general purpose.
- A community member said: My yes is in line with the previous speaker, I don't know that a referendum should remove a total bill, there are often several layers. The most sound solution would be able to modify or remove.

Question #10: What % of total voters do you think should be required to sign to initiate a referendum?

Written Responses: 10

| 3 | 10 | 15 | 17 | 20 | 25 | 30 | 55 |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

Discussion:

- A committee member said: I just wouldn't want it to be a slight majority rule, it should be as many people involved as possible.
- A committee member said: thinking of state wide requirement is about 3% so I was going off of that
- A committee member said: I think if we had about 18% vote in an election for a Mayor, and we have any number for this in terms of signatures to get something on the ballot that is higher than the number we typically see in an election, we just need to be realistic.

Question #11: What % of total voters do you think should be required to sign to initiate a recall?

Written Responses: 8

| 5 | 10 | 15 | 18 | 20 | 30 | 44 |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

Discussion:

- A community member said: more than 20% requirements, what is the reasoning behind this. Is it real issues or political?
- A community member said: I agree, the amount of voters, most people who become unhappy about a politician probably didn't vote in the first place. Now I'm being affected. I want to address this now that I'm being affected. More than 20% will ensure more support of the community

- A community member said: It needs to be difficult, 15% is 1/6th of voters and a high percentage makes sure that its so
- A community member said: Catch all provisions that if we do this it should be for cause, and that if this is implemented that in no case should the number of signatures exceed the sum total of voters in the previous election for that office. It should be conceivable process otherwise useless
- A community member said: keep in mind what happened in Fall River, the ballot to recall Mayor and who to elect to replace resulted in the mayor being recalled and then re elected to mayor, the logistics are important
- A community member said: Completely agree with previous, it should be the total amount of registered voters vs the amount of those who voted

Question #12: Which of these participation mechanisms would you be most excited to see in Somerville?

Written Responses: 9

| Choices | Rank | 1st | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th | 6th |
|-------------------------------------|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Group Petition | 1st | 6 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Citizen Initiative | 2nd | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Individual Petition | 3rd | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Referendum | 4th | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Recall | 5th | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| Something else we haven't discussed | 6th | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |

Discussion:

- A community member said: I wanted to bring up something about citizens/voters, and it's frustrating that the bias was set before the discussion began. The cc passed a home rule petition making this change, so that shouldn't have been a surprising possibility. I came to this thinking there would be more conversation about boards/commissions and general barriers to participation and. It feels like a lot of these are already designed/formulated and we are getting a "fisher price" version, and i'm unsure how this is really relevant or helpful

- A community member said: I appreciate that perspective, there are certain committees/commissions that are making decisions for us. These decisions should be made by residents whether they vote or not.
- A community member said: None of the above. All are based on an attitude of distrust that our elected and appointed officers are capable of understanding the needs and sense of the community in the normal and routine procedures, defined by law. They all run the risk of interrupting the routine business of the city. We began the meeting by saying that many people do not participate because meetings are too long and complex -- now we will add to the regular agendas on budgets and land use decisions a variety of self-serving initiatives. This will turn off more voters and participants.

Question #13: Do you think these four options address the barriers to participation?

Written Responses: 8

| Choices | Votes |
|---------------------|-------|
| Yes | 0 |
| No | 5 |
| Maybe | 2 |
| Unsure / No Opinion | 1 |

Discussion:

- A community member said: these mechanisms are really great for people like us who showed up at this meeting. The people who aren't participating are likely to be younger, renters, immigrants, lower income, and for those people these mechanisms have nothing to do with why they aren't participating. We aren't reaching them where they aren't participating
- A community member said: the small group of folks we have today, the 60k other voters and residents of Somerville didn't know about this. Getting the word out and sharing all other meetings and public forums. Increasing the awareness rather than the mechanism themselves.

Section 2: Community Survey

Charter Review Community Survey Summary March - April 2022

Total Respondents: 1028

| Zip Code | Count | Percent |
|----------|-------|---------|
| 02145 | 240 | 23.35% |
| 02143 | 362 | 35.21% |
| 02144 | 356 | 34.63% |
| Total | 1028 | |

1. How many years should the Mayor's term be?

| Terms | 2 years | | 4 years | | Not Sure | | No Preference | |
|------------|---------|-----|---------|-----|----------|----|---------------|----|
| Mayor Term | 293 | 32% | 576 | 62% | 49 | 5% | 19 | 2% |

2. How many years should a City Councilor's term be?

| Terms | 2 years | | 4 years | | Not Sure | | No Preference | |
|-------------------|---------|-----|---------|-----|----------|----|---------------|----|
| City Council Term | 610 | 65% | 252 | 27% | 60 | 6% | 16 | 2% |

How many years should a School Committee Member's term be?

| Terms | 2 years | | 4 years | | Not Sure | | No Preference | |
|---------|---------|-----|---------|-----|----------|----|---------------|----|
| SC Term | 647 | 69% | 177 | 19% | 70 | 7% | 43 | 5% |

3. If you have additional thoughts on this, you can add them here:

185 residents shared additional thoughts and were almost equally divided in their opinions about 2- or 4-year terms. However, residents generally favored longer terms for the Mayor and shorter terms for City Council and School Committee. Some residents proposed 3-year terms or staggering terms to maintain stability during election cycles. Other residents proposed term limits for all elected officials and many commented on the financial and time burdens of campaigning.

- “The mayor is basically a management position. Two years barely gives them time to start making changes. Four gives them time to show those changes. City Councilors don’t have that issue- they can be effective immediately”.
 - “I think campaigning is wasteful of time, money, and resources, so terms should be longer. It does encourage community engagement though. If 2 year cycles could be done in a way that reduced the arms race of campaigning, that might be better”.
4. Do you think the City Council currently has the right level of support (e.g. staff, salary, other resources)?

| City Council Support | Count | % |
|------------------------|-------|-----|
| Too much support | 61 | 7% |
| Right level of support | 198 | 21% |
| Needs more support | 487 | 52% |
| Not sure | 177 | 19% |
| No Preference | 9 | 1% |

5. Which of the following would be helpful in better supporting City Council members? (Select all that apply.)

| How to support | Count | % |
|---|-------|-----|
| Advisory Legal Counsel | 381 | 57% |
| Staff | 477 | 71% |
| Higher salary | 303 | 45% |
| Change role from part time to full time | 285 | 42% |
| None | 17 | 3% |

If you have additional thoughts on City Council support, you can add them here:

203 residents shared additional thoughts. The largest number of responses were in favor of city council having access to shared staff, as well as independent legal counsel although to a lesser extent. Many residents strongly supported the idea of equitable compensation and felt that compensation should be high enough and/or full time so that lower income residents could afford to run for office and so that councilors could afford to live in Somerville. Some residents felt that city council was adequately supported and others were unsure of what councilors needed in addition to current levels of support.

- “Even one or two staff positions shared between the councilors would make an enormous difference in their capacity. Legal counsel would enable them to be on a more level playing field with the mayor”
- “Making City Council a higher paid and/or full-time position would open public service as a realistic option for lower-income folks”

- *“Quiero apoyar el aumento de salario, pues ayudaría a reclutar más personas de bajos recursos para el concejo municipal. También quiero apoyar la posición de concejal como tiempo completo pues esta Ciudad está creciendo y sus problemas son más complicados. Para poder enfrentar los nuevos retos de una Ciudad debido al aumento de nuevos desarrollos y las demandas de las crisis de vivienda, del clima y de equidad; el concejal debería dedicar más tiempo a entender estas crisis y estos problemas para desarrollar leyes que realmente pueden dirigir la complejidades que enfrentan a Somerville.”***

6. Which voting system would you prefer?

| Which voting system would you prefer? | Count | % |
|---------------------------------------|-------|-----|
| Ranked Choice Voting | 604 | 67% |
| First Past the Post (current system) | 217 | 24% |
| Not sure | 40 | 4% |
| No preference | 13 | 1% |
| Another System Entirely | 31 | 3% |

If you have additional thoughts on this, you can add them here:

153 residents shared additional thoughts and were almost equally divided being in favor of adopting ranked choice voting and either being against ranked choice voting or in favor of maintaining the current system. Residents in favor of ranked choice voting mentioned it would improve election processes, while those opposed felt that it would unnecessarily complicate Somerville’s election process and reduce voter turnout. For example, *“The Task Force on Clean and Open Elections recommended this after a thorough study, and we’ve seen in countless races in various locales and at various levels where first past the post results in someone being elected to an office with insufficient endorsement by the voters. Let’s lead the way toward RCV!”* and *“Ranked choice voting is too complicated for many voters to understand. We already have low participation rates for some demographic groups”*. Some residents were in favor of other voting systems altogether while others felt they needed more information to provide an opinion.

7. Non-citizen residents in Somerville: Do you support expanding municipal voting rights to all non-citizen Somerville residents who would otherwise be allowed to vote?

| Do you support expanding municipal voting rights to all non-citizen Somerville residents who would otherwise be allowed to vote? | Count | % |
|--|-------|-----|
| Yes | 594 | 62% |
| No | 301 | 31% |
| Not sure | 56 | 6% |
| No preference | 6 | 1% |

8. 16 and 17 year-olds in Somerville: Do you support expanding municipal voting rights to 16 and 17 year-old Somerville residents who would otherwise be allowed to vote?

| Do you support expanding municipal voting rights to 16 and 17 year-old Somerville residents who would otherwise be allowed to vote? | Count | % |
|--|--------------|----------|
| Yes | 418 | 42% |
| No | 472 | 48% |
| Not sure | 89 | 9% |
| No preference | 7 | 1% |

If you have additional thoughts on this, you can add them here:

168 residents shared additional thoughts and were split on this issue. Many supported expanding voting rights, arguing that both 16 and 17 year-olds and immigrants in Somerville had interest and reason to deserve a say in local election and governance. That 16 and 17 year olds are engaged and capable and that immigrants are tax payers, have children in public schools, and are members of the Somerville Community. Others argued that young people and immigrants are most impacted by environmental risks and deserve the right to shape policy of their environment. Some expressed interest in expanding voting rights further to incarcerated people, though that is beyond the scope of the Somerville Charter. Arguments against expansion saw the rules on voting as “there for a reason” and cited the responsibility of voting as right that should be earned. Some suggested conditions for voting rights or various models that would give groups a symbolic vote. Most opposition expressed unfamiliarity with the idea.

9. How do you think the ways candidates can raise campaign money (described above) is working in Somerville?

| How do you think the ways candidates can raise campaign money (described above) is working in Somerville? | Count | % |
|--|--------------|----------|
| Working well - no change needed | 159 | 23% |
| Needs reform - major changes needed | 178 | 26% |
| Not sure | 332 | 48% |
| No preference | 18 | 3% |

If you have additional thoughts on this, add them here:

203 residents shared additional thoughts and many expressed concern about the role of money in elections, whether it was undue outside influence from political action committees (PACs) or corporate donations or the risks and limitations of self funding that advantage wealthy candidates and can lead less wealthy candidates to financial ruin. Opposition and support expressed distrust of campaign finance

practices and lack of transparency, but differed on the potential solutions. Many respondents were unsure if the charter was the best vehicle for reform versus state law.

10. Would you support Somerville exploring public financing of campaigns?

| Would you support Somerville exploring public financing of campaigns? | Count | % |
|---|-------|-----|
| Yes | 536 | 52% |
| No | 348 | 34% |
| Not sure | 126 | 12% |
| No preference | 11 | 1% |

If you have additional thoughts on campaign finance, add them here:

133 residents shared additional thoughts, most people had expressed their thoughts on campaign finance in the previous question and echoed their support of measures to level electoral playing fields skewed by access to campaign funding. Opposition to the use of tax dollars to fund campaigns was clearly expressed in these responses, arguing that there are a lot of needs in the city from infrastructure to schools that should receive priority before campaigns.

11. How do you think the budget process is working in Somerville?

| How do you think the budget process is working in Somerville? | Count | % |
|---|-------|-----|
| Working well - no changes needed | 119 | 14% |
| Needs reform - major changes needed | 248 | 28% |
| Needs reform - minor changes needed | 233 | 27% |
| Not sure | 262 | 30% |
| No preference | 11 | 1% |

12. What changes to the budget process would you like to see? (Select all that apply.)

| What changes to the budget process would you like to see? | Count | % |
|---|-------|-----|
| Share budget drafting responsibility between Mayor and City Council | 472 | 45% |
| Require a public hearing on the budget | 530 | 51% |
| Increase allotted time for city council to review | 317 | 31% |
| Allow city council to change where funding goes | 355 | 34% |
| No changes needed | 59 | 6% |

| | | |
|-------|----|----|
| Other | 42 | 4% |
|-------|----|----|

If you have additional thoughts on this, you can add them here:

113 residents shared additional thoughts, key themes throughout the comments were support for increased awareness and transparency of the process and increase in collaboration between parties in budget drafting. Some residents supported more power for city council such as the ability to add line items and funding. Others weren't extremely familiar with the process and supported an annual budget meeting and public hearings to provide the community the opportunity to learn about the current finances of the city, share input and priorities.

- *“This process is pretty opaque. Having more public awareness and scrutiny, though not necessarily participatory budgeting, would be good. There's such a thing as too much democracy, but never too much transparency transparency”*
- *“The mayor is in a better position to budget than city council members and should maintain primary control of budget.”*
- *“This is not an issue I've studied, and I don't know what the ideal process would be or how to make the process better reflect the needs and concerns of the Somerville population. “*

13. Would you support Somerville exploring participatory budgeting?

| Would you support Somerville exploring participatory budgeting? | Count | % |
|---|-------|-----|
| Yes | 614 | 63% |
| No | 247 | 25% |
| Not Sure | 102 | 10% |
| No Preference | 16 | 2% |

If you have additional thoughts on this, you can add them here:

136 residents shared additional thoughts, many residents mentioned the program that exists in Cambridge and supported a similar structure for Somerville. Some supporters felt it was an opportunity to get more residents civically engaged, with the opportunity to drive how funds are spent on set projects. A handful of respondents expressed concerns regarding potential challenges in keeping the process equitable and community lead.

- *“This process is useful more for engagement than for actual budgeting. Somerville offers many avenues for engagement that I think are sufficient, and creating an additional one only means spreading tax dollars out even more thinly to accommodate the administration of another program. “*
- *“I'm worried wealthier voices would be loudest, because there would be more ability to participate in voting”*

- *“must be careful to ensure equitable participation access. Must also ensure that outcomes do not contradict other city-wide goals (eg, if people vote to increase free car parking, that is directly conflicting with climate goals and should not be allowed).”*

14. Who should have the authority to appoint an independent auditor?

| Who should have the authority to appoint an independent auditor? | Count | % |
|--|-------|-----|
| City Council | 539 | 63% |
| Mayor | 98 | 11% |
| Not Sure | 150 | 17% |
| No Preference | 71 | 8% |

15. Should appointing an independent auditor be required?

| Should appointing an independent auditor be required? | Count | % |
|---|-------|-----|
| Yes | 632 | 62% |
| No | 228 | 22% |
| Not Sure | 147 | 14% |
| No Preference | 14 | 1% |

If you have additional thoughts on this, you can add them here:

123 residents shared additional thoughts, primarily residents supported a joint or city council lead appointment process. A primary response was that the body with the least control over the budget and city finances should have the appointing authority. Overall respondents supported requiring an independent auditor and sought a public and accessible report.

- *“The City does this as a best practice, so codifying it wouldn't materially change a process. Independent is independent, regardless of the appointing authority, so I have no preference on that piece.”*
- *“It depends. In the current system, the city council should appoint the auditor. If we change the power dynamics, whoever has least influence on the budgeting process should appoint.”*

16. How do you think the Somerville government could be more visible, supportive, and easily available to serve the residents of the city?

487 residents shared additional thoughts, overwhelming responses focused on increasing access to information on meetings, agenda topics, events, and decisions that are happening throughout the city. Adding opportunities for more voices to be heard, direct outreach in physical spaces and standard processes for online meetings.

- *"Translation and captioning/CART services for all city meetings, Standardized policies for remote meeting software and settings"*
- *"Clearer websites, better election communications, and more open data."*
- *"I would like to see more events like the outreach around the charter, not necessarily ice cream in Foss Park per se, but events at a range of times and locations, since city council meetings can be prohibitive to some"*
- *"I am not dissatisfied with city service and find that the city's departments are easily accessible and helpful. In particular, the periodic telephone calls from Jackie Rosetti about snow emergencies, etc. are very useful. The websites are also relatively easy to follow. The city, as I understand it, is making more efforts to expand non-English communications and broader media/communications to reach harder-to-contact families and groups -- this effort should be supported (but probably not a Charter-level mandate)."*

17. Should Somerville add referendum to the city charter?

| Should Somerville add referendum to the city charter? | Count | % |
|---|-------|-----|
| Yes | 410 | 38% |
| No | 440 | 41% |
| Not Sure | 222 | 20% |
| No Preference | 12 | 1% |

If you have additional thoughts on this, you can add them here:

186 residents shared additional thoughts, primarily residents were concerned about the unnecessary burden this provision could create for the city. Many residents thought with 2-year terms for city councilors this is unnecessary as if something isn't working there would be the opportunity to elect new representatives. Residents also pointed to how this was experienced in California which further drove their support against adding this provision.

- *"I am wary of this because of all the special-interest-fueled ballot questions in recent years"*
- *"It depends how easy it would be to get a referendum on the ballot."*
- *"It would potentially slow down city operations."*
- *"Keeping a 2yr term will allow the public to change leadership if they feel it is necessary."*

18. Should Somerville add recall to the city charter?

| Should Somerville add recall to the city charter? | Count | % |
|---|-------|-----|
| Yes | 349 | 33% |
| No | 500 | 47% |
| Not Sure | 202 | 19% |
| No Preference | 11 | 1% |

If you have additional thoughts on this, you can add them here:

176 residents shared additional thoughts, similar to the responses regarding adding a referendum provision, residents were concerned about the disruption this can cause a city. Additionally noting that elections are often enough to reduce the need for recalling an elected official.

- *"I'd rather see 2-year terms than add the possibility for recall."*
- *"This has many of the same reactionary risks as the referendum issue, however if the new charter enacts longer terms it might be worth considering, although with high thresholds required for calling a vote and for the actual recall vote."*
- *"I believe a two year term limit generally makes recalls unlikely. However, I think they are a useful democratic tool to hold wayward political leaders accountable and should be an option."*
- *"If the term of an elected official is 2 years long, particularly if the method of voting is approval or score voting, then the likelihood of voters feeling the need to have a recall option is very small. If the term is 4 years and/or the voting method continues to incentivize strategizing with one's vote, then a recall becomes a better option because people won't be electing the candidates they most believe in, and they will be stuck with said candidates for longer. So my answer depends on how Somerville decides on previous issues in this survey."*
- *"We have seen this tool used increasingly in other places as a destabilizing tool of vocal minority perspectives. "*

19. Overall, what would you most like to see changed through charter review?

- *"I would like to expand and improve the vote first and foremost. If the only thing we accomplish in this review is implementing Ranked Choice Voting and expanding to allow non-citizens and 16/17 year olds to vote I would consider that an exceptional improvement. I would love to see more, but believe the continued strength of our polity requires this effort at establishing greater equity."*
- *"Ranked choice voting, and then probably more power sharing between mayor and council."*
- *"More checks and balances on the hearings and a public participation review of the city employees in each department, Board and Committee "*
- *"Support to city council members and city commissions /staff who are responsible for review and implementation of city directives."*
- *"I think the most impactful reform would be adoption of ranked-choice voting, including the proportional version of the at-large seats."*
- *"Expanding electoral participation, and balancing power so that the City Council and people can have more say in the annual budget -- not everything under the Mayor."*
- *"Transparent financial controls on city budget, spending and taxes"*
- *"More independence and support for the city council. More transparency from the mayor's office."*
- *"I love the idea of participatory budgeting"*
- *"Implementation of ranked choice voting and a 4 year mayoral term."*
- *"Ranked choice voting and increased community participation in city budget"*