



City of Somerville

Planning and Zoning

City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

Dear Members of the City Council,

The information below is meant to address some of the concerns brought to us regarding SomerVision2040 and to provide a summary of its background. We hope it can inform our discussions of this topic in our efforts to seek your endorsement. We can address any questions and expand on any of the points below in our next meeting. Thank you for your time.

The referenced document and the edit tracking list is available at www.somervision2040.com.

How was SomerVision2040 created?

SomerVision2040 was primarily written by a committee of approximately sixty residents from a wide range of backgrounds and interests, with the support of OSCPD, and informed by a robust strategy of community outreach. City staff conducted a year-long process that involved a wide range of engagement strategies: small forums dedicated to specific groups (teens, seniors, immigrants, etc.) in multiple languages, large public meetings and gatherings, interactive games and tabling during community events, resident-led discussion dinners, and online surveys. We estimate that over 2,000 residents contributed feedback in some way, an excellent participation rate for our population size.

Particularly because it is a community-written document, it is essential to us that it is concise and written in non-expert language so that every community member, regardless of their background, can easily understand it. This objective helped shape the scope and structure of the document.

What is the intended scope of SomerVision2040?

SomerVision2040 is a comprehensive plan — also known as a general plan, master plan, or land use plan — a **document designed to guide the future actions of a community** with long-term goals and objectives, often over a 10 to 20-year timeframe. It is not an implementation document, it is a visioning one. Its purpose is to define our core shared community values, identify our broader goals, and provide a list of potential tasks that could address them. Each of the proposed solutions warrants more detailed feasibility studies, financial analysis, implementation plans, and additional review by both the community and elected officials before they become reality. Attempting to do those analyses for all proposed tasks as part of this document would be unfeasible. Approving the comprehensive plan is not an endorsement of all suggested tasks in it, nor does the document suggest the lists of tasks are exhaustive. It certainly does not anticipate nor does it preclude tasks that we also may need to pursue to address future concerns.

The core part of the document are the defined shared values and goals. While not dissimilar to those of SomerVision2030, they are a strengthened, expanded, and more up-to-date version of them. It is powerful to have a document that clearly states that mitigating displacement, fighting for equity, fostering diversity, making our streets accessible, building a resilient local economy,

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and a sustainable future, are guiding principles our community overwhelmingly supports and stands by. It provides a blueprint for what issues OSPCD should prioritize and the general direction we should move towards as we continue to innovate in our solutions beyond this document.

How is SomerVision2040 structured?

We recognize many groups have unique concerns and experiences regarding the topics in the comprehensive plan: seniors, women, LGBTQA, immigrants, persons with disabilities, BIPOC, and others, all have unique challenges in accessing resources due to both practical and historical reasons. With that in mind, we ensured diverse participation in the overall process and ran equity workshops with the committee to ensure it was always a consideration.

We organized SomerVision2040 by topic rather than by demographic so we could primarily focus on defining our broader community values and goals. We addressed some specific equity concerns as examples of how to apply our equity framework, but to do so comprehensively for each demographic under each topic chapter was beyond the scope of this document. SomerVision2040 is intended to define our community's vision of and commitment to equity as an overarching framework for all future implementation processes and interventions, and we hope it will encourage many different initiatives that will more comprehensively study the needs of different demographics.

In keeping with this framework, we are changing the topic chapter entitled “Youth and Education” to “Education”, to reflect that it is not about comprehensively addressing youth needs, but is rather focused on education and schools, which disproportionately impacts youth. This is consistent with the goal and structure of the document which, as noted above, is intended as an overarching framework rather than a deep dive into the needs of particular demographics.

Does COVID-19 warrant changes to SomerVision2040?

We understand that the pandemic largely exacerbated existing inequities and issues impacting our community. We added a two-page section last year addressing the context of the pandemic and how it affected our community. We did not believe our values or goals needed to be changed because, while the pandemic further aggravated issues like housing affordability and small business resiliency, those issues were already highlighted as priorities in the document. The pandemicWhile the pandemic should be a consideration for may impact the scale of intervention needed in some areas, but that is something best considered and addressed in discussions about specific implementation plans and proposals. We believe the best way to move forward, especially given the ongoing public health crisis, is to proceed with the approval process for SomerVision2040 as is. SomerVision2040 is a visioning document that will help to guide us as we continue to move forward with initiatives and policies that address the priorities highlighted in the document, without further delay.

What is the status of SomerVision2040?

We believe significant content changes to SomerVision2040 at this stage would discredit the work done by the SomerVision Committee, which is no longer organized to provide feedback. Furthermore, we did have a public hearing and open comment period for this document prior to the pandemic. We believe the values and goals in this document do accurately reflect a broad community consensus, thus achieving its primary purpose. Our goal for SomerVision2040 now is to ideally receive an endorsement from the City Council this fall and then proceed with an approval vote by the Planning Board.