



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
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Participatory Budgeting Memo to City Council

I. Purpose and Overview of Initiative

This memo accompanies a request for appropriation of \$1,045,000 by City Council for 6 projects in the City's second cycle of Participatory Budgeting. Winning projects in the first cycle of funding amounted to \$955,000, leaving a balance of \$45,000 to be applied to winning projects in Cycle 2. All allocated funds go directly towards project implementation while funds used to run the program and pay for the graphic design, outreach materials and city-wide mailers are found in the Auditing Ordinary Maintenance budget of FY25 General Fund.

The Participatory Budgeting Stabilization Fund was created in June of 2022 with the express purpose of "funding the administration and execution of a participatory budgeting process by which residents of Somerville can propose and vote on projects to fund in the community. Participatory budgeting will directly involve residents in municipal budgeting and priority-setting in the hope of creating a more equitable distribution of civic resources". Residents have been involved in every stage of the process and continue to provide feedback on the initiative, which have led to improvements between each funding cycle.

Residents were solicited via mail to submit ideas on how to spend PB funds of \$1 million within the three criteria provided at submission: 1) ability to implement project on city-owned property 2) cost less than the allotted \$1 million and 3) being a one-time expense that does not require hiring staff or significant ongoing maintenance. These guidelines helped ensure expectation setting and are in line with how similar communities such as Cambridge, Hartford, and Greensboro run Participatory Budgeting. The idea submission website was open from September 13th – November 13th in 2024 and garnered over 700 submissions. While the total number of ideas submitted was lower in Cycle 2, the decline can be attributed to a reduction in the number of ideas that were better suited for 311 tickets. Guidance was provided to alert city officials using 311 for issues related to regular maintenance such as sidewalk repairs, potholes, and park repairs.

During the Proposal Development stage, community members coming from varied backgrounds and experiences reviewed the idea submissions and graded them for feasibility, need, and impact. Over the course of 10 weeks, 40 volunteers reviewed city plans & documents, talked with city staff, and selected the 20 projects to appear on the ballot. They were given information on Somerville demographics and existing city programs to make the best use of ballot proposals.

All residents were solicited again via mailers in the month of April to vote online for their top 5 of the 20 ballot proposals. Outreach was also conducted at Civic Day and through yard signs in public squares and parks. A total of 4,225 votes were received; an 8% increase from votes received in Cycle 1.

II. Results of Cycle Two

The winning projects to be funded are listed below, in order of rank, is as follows and can also be accessed at any time, along with the current project status at www.somervillema.gov/pb. A complete listing of the 20 projects can be found in Appendix A.

Project	Description (as it appeared on the ballot)
1. Afterschool Programs (\$150,000)	This proposal would expand capacity at afterschool programming for residents by increasing capacity through collaborative partnerships across the community. This program would provide enriching opportunities for our city's youngest learners to ease the pressure on working parents and foster academic, social, and emotional growth.
2. Boost Somerville's Nutrition Security Network* (\$220,000)	Improve our community's access to fresh healthy food by expanding cold storage and fresh food volume. The project will work with community partners to purchase and install a walk-in fridge and freezer, to store and distribute fresh food donations to community partners, nonprofits, and community fridges. Funds will also directly supply the cold storage unit with increased volumes of fresh food, strengthening Somerville's emergency food system. *In 2024, the City of Somerville was awarded \$50,000 to fund community resilience to climate change through the State's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) 2.0 grant program .
3. Public Community Compost (\$125,000)	Install, contract, and maintain community composting drop-off bins at high-impact, public locations. Free, accessible, and rodent safe composting solutions are key for Somerville's food system, rodent reduction, and climate resiliency. Funds for this program would also go towards coordination with community food rescue applications, transporting compost to community gardens, and supporting Somerville's food system.
4. Bike Network Guarantee (\$400,000)	Provide funding to implement roughly one mile of separated bicycle lanes consistent with the Somerville Bicycle Network Plan 's 2026 program year. The Bicycle Network Plan guides investment in infrastructure that is safe and comfortable for all residents regardless of age, ability, gender and background. This proposal would help create financial resilience for this plan in the face of potential reductions in federal and state spending.
5. Outsmart Somerville Rats (\$120,000)	Deploy an additional 40 SMART boxes in Somerville public spaces, which electrocute rodents upon entry while providing real-time data . Also install landscaping solutions to limit burrowing activity at city properties, such as schools. Additional funds can support community education on how improved trash management is the first step to outsmarting rats and rat infestations.

6. Pollinator Gardens (\$30,000)	This proposal will replant existing raised beds and add new raised beds with native flora in parks around the city. Enhancing native flora is consistent with the Somerville Pollinator Action Plan to provide more habitat for pollinators.
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➤ **Appendix A: Full listing of Ranked Choice Ballot Results**

Project	Cost	Rank1	Rank2	Rank3	Rank4	Rank5	Total Score
Afterschool Programs	\$ 150,000	620	466	359	283	217	20439
Boost Somerville's Nutrition Security Network*	\$ 220,000	409	365	356	274	210	16629
Public Community Compost	\$ 125,000	427	324	277	269	257	15935
Bike Network Guarantee	\$ 400,000	523	331	256	226	173	15895
Outsmart Somerville Rats	\$ 120,000	455	290	272	244	243	15510
Pollinator Gardens	\$ 30,000	185	274	279	365	408	14573
Bus Access for All: ADA-Compliant Bus Stops	\$ 200,000	293	329	323	242	191	14071
Slow Streets, Safe Streets	\$ 200,000	155	258	232	224	157	10290
SomerStories: Community-Centered Murals	\$ 120,000	99	143	213	266	359	10157
Watering Truck to Improve Tree Care*	\$ 150,000	115	164	206	257	279	9789
Expand BigBelly Trash Can Adoption	\$ 125,000	96	214	211	257	221	9697
Green Light for Green Line Pedestrian Safety	\$ 200,000	163	172	221	183	151	8913
SomerBlooms: Calming Traffic with Planters	\$ 50,000	91	137	215	225	267	8910
Enhanced Safety for the Elm-Beacon Connector	\$ 250,000	134	162	173	178	171	8090
Improve School Crossings for Kids	\$ 200,000	127	217	185	126	99	7687
Keep Dog Waste Off the Community Path	\$ 15,000	52	66	75	114	144	4278
More Blue Bike Stations	\$ 225,000	65	76	85	108	82	4094
Expand Public Electric Vehicle Charging	\$ 65,000	86	66	71	57	84	3653
Park Bench Replacement	\$ 50,000	35	54	73	98	123	3610
Voting in the 'Ville	\$ 75,000	56	59	55	81	104	3432