



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS  
JOSEPH A. CURTATONE  
MAYOR

To: Honorable City Council  
Re: Racial & Social Justice Staff Request  
Date: January 20, 2021

---

During the FY21 budget process, the community made a commitment to the [Racial and Social Justice project](#), which encompassed a number of initiatives and efforts, including the hiring of a Racial and Social Justice (RSJ) Director, the establishment of a Racial and Social Justice Fund, a commitment to reimagining policing and developing a new public safety model, and the Council's work to create an ordinance to deliver on the Administration's promise to establish civilian oversight of the police department. Fundamental to both the Racial and Social Justice Fund and the RSJ Project on Reimagining Policing was the commitment to an inclusive community-led process coordinated by the RSJ Director. As the Council knows, the hiring of the RSJ Director has itself been an inclusive process with representation from the community, the Council, the School Committee, and the Administration. While broad participation is significantly more time intensive, this commitment to inclusion called for by members of our community who have traditionally been underrepresented has helped produce many promising candidates, and we look forward to hiring a Director who will have the trust and support of our residents.

In response to ongoing conversations between the Administration and the Council, and also based on the urgency to move the RSJ Project forward, we are proposing additional investments in the RSJ Project with the goal of ensuring the RSJ Director, once hired, has ready access to the initial resources they will need to launch the community processes as soon as possible and to begin the work of reimagining policing without unnecessary delay. Specifically, we are proposing to initiate the process of hiring two additional staff members – an Outreach Coordinator and a Mental Health & Social Service Emergency Response Coordinator – as described below.

As discussed with the Council during the budget process, we always envisioned the RSJ Director would propose a business plan that would include additional staff positions and resources for a Racial and Social Justice Office. We recognize, however, that proposing, securing funding for, and hiring staff is a time-intensive process. This proposal aims to kick start that process for a limited number of critical staff so that the RSJ Director can focus on the substantive work of the RSJ Project when they start. This does not preclude the Director from proposing additional investments in a RSJ Office; indeed, we look forward to a robust discussion with the Council about those investments during the FY22 budget process.

CITY HALL • 93 HIGHLAND AVENUE • SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS 02143  
(617) 625-6600, EXT. 2100 • TTY: (866) 808-4851 • FAX: (617) 625- 3434 • [www.somervillema.gov](http://www.somervillema.gov)  
E-MAIL: [mayor@somervillema.gov](mailto:mayor@somervillema.gov)



**Outreach Coordinator**

The Outreach Coordinator will report directly to the RSJ Director and will be responsible for facilitating the community processes for the RSJ Project. Working with the Director, this individual will plan and execute community meetings, establish relationships with community leaders and organizations, and employ creative strategies to engage community members, especially those who are traditionally harder to reach and who have been most directly impacted by racial and social injustice, all with the goal of establishing as inclusive and representative a community engagement process as possible for the RSJ Project.

**Mental Health and Social Service Emergency Response Coordinator**

The Mental Health and Social Service Emergency Response Coordinator will report directly to the RSJ Director but will sit in the Somerville Police Department (SPD). The Coordinator will be responsible for strengthening coordination between the social service providers in the community and the Police Department so that we continually improve upon how to effectively engage those providers involved in both direct and follow-up wrap-around response to mental health and other calls that require social-service support. This coordination will require establishing strong relationships with those providers and serving as their point of contact within the Police Department; analyzing and documenting how the Police Department categorizes emergency response calls and how they respond to different types of calls; and working with the social service providers and the SPD to analyze the Police Department's response to mental health and related calls in order to identify gaps, areas for improvement, opportunities for innovation, and pathways to reimagining this service provision. The Coordinator will also manage additional coordination with the social service providers and will coordinate with and be guided by the re-imagining policing community process.

These positions fit within our existing framework for the RSJ Project and represent a long-term commitment to collaboration between the Administration, the SPD, the City Council, and community organizations to reexamine the community's social service needs and to integrate ideas of how to address these needs into any policing reform recommendations. They would also ensure community engagement is at the forefront of these efforts. And again, due to the necessarily lengthy RSJ hiring process, the Administration finds it critical to advance these initial additional RSJ positions now so that the new Director's vital work can get underway swiftly. Funding and job descriptions for the two positions will be submitted to the City Council for the January 28, 2021 meeting. We look forward to discussing this proposal further with the Council at that time.