

## **Leveraging Community Impact Fees for Youth Substance Use Prevention in Somerville**

**Background & Local Context** Somerville hosts *12 marijuana retailers within just 4 square miles*, making it one of the most densely saturated communities for cannabis access in Massachusetts.

Evidence from similar saturation with alcohol and tobacco retailers suggests that *increased proximity and visibility* correlate with higher rates of youth use. These environmental factors can lower perceived risks, normalize behavior, and increase access among adolescents.

**Research-Based Nexus: Exposure & Prevention** Studies consistently affirm that structured, supervised activities and employment opportunities for youth are protective factors against substance use:

### **1. Time Use and Risk Behavior (Barnes et al., 2007)**

- *Key Finding:* Time spent on extracurriculars, paid work, and family engagement predicts significantly lower rates of substance use, delinquency, and sexual risk-taking.
- *Risk Factor:* High unsupervised peer time contributes to increased likelihood of substance use.

### **2. OST Contexts & Substance Use (Lee & Vandell, 2015)**

- *Key Finding:* Unsupervised time with peers is the *strongest predictor* of tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana use.
- *Protective Factor:* Participation in organized sports and activities reduces marijuana and tobacco use.

### **3. Positive Youth Development in OST (Tebes et al., 2007)**

- *Key Finding:* A PYD-focused OST program in urban settings led to significantly lower substance use and increased harm perception toward drugs among youth one year later.

**Policy Nexus: Community Impact Fees as a Tool** -Community Impact Fees (CIFs) can be used to address documented local impacts of cannabis businesses. Somerville's intent to use these fees for youth-serving positions aligns with both precedent and best practice.

### **Precedents from Other MA Municipalities**

**Georgetown:** CIFs fund prevention programs; hired a youth prevention staff. **Brookline:** Created a Community Health Specialist role. **Athol:** Funded educational/prevention programming. **Greenfield:** Proposed a wellness coordinator position.

According to Dr. Jeffrey Moyer's 2021 report, over *60% of MA towns* cited youth prevention or public health as part of their HCA-based impact use, reinforcing the legitimacy of this approach.

**Conclusion & Call to Action** With a high concentration of cannabis establishments in a compact urban environment, *Somerville must proactively invest in protective strategies*. OST opportunities, youth employment, and prevention-focused roles serve as vital buffers against increased exposure risk. Community Impact Fees provide a timely, equitable funding source to safeguard youth and advance public health.

**Recommendation:** Allocate Community Impact Fees towards **Out of School Time Coordinator** and **Youth Workplace Learning Coordinator Positions**. OST position will be responsible for working towards the goal of ensuring all K-8 students in Somerville, regardless of background or circumstances, have access to inclusive and culturally relevant OST programs that nurture their academic, social and emotional development while the YWLC will be critical to the success and expansion of the Mayor's Youth Jobs Initiative by providing year-round planning and support to the Summer Jobs Program as well as the newly developed school year jobs programming; from recruitment, hiring, onboarding and regular oversight of 18 students placed in the city in the first year. The YWLC coordinator is also responsible for curriculum development and oversight of student cohorts such as the Climate Cohort and the Social Justice Cohort.