



# **DRAFT** **Somerville Armory** **Master Plan**

City of Somerville  
Mayor Katjana Ballantyne

Somerville Armory  
January 21, 2025



Office of Strategic Planning & Community  
Development and Somerville Arts Council

# Agenda

## **Draft Armory Master Plan Update**

- Public Comments & Public Hearing
- Edits Made
- Further Comments received from Tenants
- Next Steps

# Public Comments & Public Hearing

Public Hearing was held in Finance Committee on December 10<sup>th</sup>

Written comments received until Jan 6<sup>th</sup>

- 149 submitted comments

Consistently in both formats we heard

- Urgency to move ahead to the tenanting phase as soon as possible
- Much appreciation for current programs in the Armory

# Edits Made

New section on current and past arts tenants to highlight the programs and producers that make the Armory what it is.

(pages 4-6 of the revised draft)

who produce events, classes, performances – are core partners in bringing the Armory into its future as Somerville's home for the arts community and need to be consulted along the way

## ART AND CULTURE AT THE ARMORY

### Current Arts Tenants

The Armory currently hosts vibrant arts tenants who contribute to the rich creative fabric of Greater Boston. From nonprofit cultural hubs to specialized audio services, each tenant fosters a unique space for artistic expression and community engagement. These tenants offer invaluable resources and platforms for local artists, musicians, and performers, supporting both emerging talent and established professionals. Below is a summary of the organizations and businesses that make up this artistic community.



AcousticStrings.biz

### Acoustic Strings of New England & Angela Leidig (1A)

Acoustic Strings has been a trusted provider of fine European instruments and top-tier music supplies in New England since 1999. The shop works with schools and rental programs throughout New Hampshire, Greater Boston, and the wider New England area. Acoustic Strings is dedicated to offering exceptional service and competitive pricing for string players of all levels. Angela Leidig is a violin instructor specializing in the Suzuki Method and the Alexander Technique, offers private lessons for learners of all ages.



AudiotechServices.com

### Audiotech Services (B7)

Audiotech Services supports Greater Boston's music community with over 40 years of audio engineering experience. Their mission is to offer affordable, specialized tech support for artists – services that are not widely available in the broader market. Their offerings include repair and restoration of vintage tube amplifiers, professional studio equipment, and audiophile gear. Audiotech Services also provides high-quality analog equipment for rent, with delivery, setup, and operation handled by professional sound engineers.



### Center for Arts at the Armory (1B, 1C, B9)

Arts at the Armory is a non-profit dedicated to providing an inclusive, accessible space that fosters opportunities for artists and cultural workers. The center brings diverse audiences together, enriches lives, and supports the creative economy. It hosts over 750 events annually, spanning music, dance, theater, literature, visual arts, film, circus,

# Edits Made

Updated description of the tenant selection criteria to highlight that there is a community interest in seeing current tenants apply to stay, while acknowledging that procurement rules require open competitive applications. (page 25)

## Massachusetts Procurement Law: Chapter 30B

In 1990 the Massachusetts state legislature enacted the Uniform Procurement Act, also known as Chapter 30B. In general, this law governs how municipalities handle:

1. Supplies and services procurements
2. Surplus supplies
3. The acquisition or disposal of real property

Chapter 30B regulates how cities offer long term leases to municipal property like the Armory.

## Recommended Tenant Criteria

The Somerville Armory is intended to be multi-tenanted, and community based. Each time requests for proposals are issued to fill vacancies in the building the Somerville Armory Advisory Board will review the criteria for the upcoming selection against the specifics of the available space and its own limitations. In 2025, the City of Somerville, guided by the Somerville Armory Advisory Board, will lease all Armory spaces through a procurement process compliant with Massachusetts law and consistent with the criteria recommended in this Plan. **Current tenants occupying space in the Armory before it was acquired by the City of Somerville can participate in this process and must if they would like to remain tenants in the building. The Somerville community said clearly throughout the process, that all current arts-organizations in the building are valued and applications should be welcomed from all current tenants.**

Below: A music event taking place in the Rooted Cafe operated by the Center for Arts at the Armory.



# Edits Made

Clarified sidebar note that procurement law is the regulatory standard that the City must follow to get to the long-term lease making stage.

(page 25)

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Below: A music event taking place in the Rooted Cafe operated by the Center for Arts at the Armory.



# Edits Made

Narrowed scope for the Advisory Board to include advising on tenant selection and financial investments but not operational policies or tenant conflict mediation.

(pages 17-20)

The Armory Advisory Board is envisioned as a five-member board consisting of three representatives of the Somerville arts community and two residents of Somerville.

The scope of work before the Advisory Board includes:

1. Advise the Mayor and City Council on ways to align investments with the Mission and Vision of Success.
2. Review requests for proposals for tenancies in detail and make recommendations on the tenant mix of the Armory.
3. Make recommendations on the utilization of funds generated from tenant rents, fees and grants for investments in the building & grounds, including any supporting service contracts.
4. Engage with current tenants and neighbors regularly to inform recommendations.
5. Advise on when and how to transition governance to a more independent structure

# Edits Made

Attached draft by-laws for the Advisory Board articulating more details about how their work will be structured (pages 56-62 of packet)

## By-Laws – Somerville Armory Advisory Board

*This is the draft by-laws of the Somerville Armory Advisory Board. It will not be finalized until agreed upon by the selected Board members.*

### I. Purpose, Objective, and Scope

#### A. Purpose

The City of Somerville shall establish an advisory board consisting of five members to review and make recommendations relative to tenancies, building finances, and building-wide governance of the Somerville Armory, a 34,000 square foot public arts center located at 191 Highland Avenue.

The City of Somerville acquired the Armory in 2021 to preserve arts space and reposition the building as a public arts center. The Armory Master Plan, adopted in 2025 outlines the mission and vision of success for this transition and is intended to serve as the roadmap for governing and managing the property.

The Somerville Armory Advisory Board is given the responsibility of guiding the governance of the building into the future, ensuring commitment to the mission and vision of success is carried forward, and advising on the transition to a more independent structure.

#### B. Mission

The Mission of the Somerville Armory, its governing body, and this Master Plan is to protect and ensure the long-term vitality of the historic Armory property as an affordable and accessible public center for art, community, and culture.

#### C. Vision of Success

# Further comments from Tenants

Highlighted change that wasn't noted in the memo:

Clarified that contracting with an existing non-profit could be the pathway for independence (page 20)

## *Paths Towards Independence*

Forming the Somerville Armory Advisory Board is the first step to transition the Armory administration away from City staff to an independent entity. This initial structure will provide a platform when there is readiness to transition governance to an independent third-party entity, such as a non-profit corporation or a quasi-government agency like a cultural trust. Such independent entities have more direct decision-making power on administrative and fiscal matters and with less oversight by the City.

The City can seek the services of a non-profit corporation to govern the Armory. Such a corporation would have an independent board and staff that can expand the scale of Armory programming and increase the facility's public exposure and brand, while also fundraising for major building renovations or improvements. Alternately, creating a special purpose, quasi-governmental agency requires special state legislation but combines the efficiencies of a non-profit corporation with heightened access to municipal resources. Passage of pending state legislation may allow the City to create an independent cultural trust to run the Armory and any future municipal cultural assets, leveraging all available efficiencies of scale and resources to maximize arts and culture programming to the public.

The Advisory Board will need to advise on how the City should structure that future relationship with a separate governing entity to maintain consistency with the Mission and Vision of Success and create the checks and balances that assure the Somerville community that the public purpose is continuing to be met.

# Further comments from Tenants

Request for more timeline  
information for the next  
steps

## **2025 first steps (as noted on page 15)**

- Forming the Advisory Board
- Launching RFP
- Tenant selection
- Recalibrating rents and fees
- Investing further in the building with staff time and building investments

# Further comments from Tenants

Request to incorporate City programming into the description of tenants and clarify the temporary nature of those current uses

(BIPOC Gallery & SomArts Space)

who produce events, classes, performances – are core partners in bringing the Armory into its future as Somerville's home for the arts community and need to be consulted along the way

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# Further comments from Tenants

Request to modify the approach to considering City-use of the building to address unmet needs in the arts ecosystem

There may be needs in the city that would align with the Armory's mission and vision of success but that are not being proposed by potential tenants. This could take a variety of forms not fully anticipated at this time, but an example might be addressing the need for affordable spaces available by the hour. In such a case, the Advisory Board could recommend dedicating a space to a function that is staffed by the City of Somerville instead of being rented out to a tenant. If required, this can be done by:

- The Armory Advisory Board identifies an unmet need and recommends that the City fill that need in a specific space in the building to the Mayor.
- The Mayor and City staff determine whether the City can fund the Board's recommendation.
- If the City can support the Board's proposal, the Mayor and staff develop a budget and scope for meeting the Board's recommendation, if additional funding is needed the City Council approves the funding request.

# Further comments from Tenants

Request for the draft Advisory Board by-laws to more directly highlight their role in advising on timing and steps toward independence

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## Next Steps

- Finalize the Master Plan based on feedback described and other comments heard tonight
- Form and recruit for the Armory Advisory Board
- Launch the Request for Proposals (RFP) for long term leases

**Thank you!**