



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
KATJANA BALLANTYNE
MAYOR

To: Honorable Members of the City Council
From: Mayor Katjana Ballantyne & Finance Staff
Re: FY23 review and request for FY24 budget priorities
Date: January 24, 2023

This memo is being submitted to provide updates to the FY23 Council budget requests and to request budget priorities for the fiscal year 2024 (FY24) budget from City Councilors. The memo also includes a roadmap of additional budget participation expected for FY24.

Requesting FY24 Budget Resolutions

Since my inauguration in 2022, I have been working with members of the City Council on pursuing our shared vision for Somerville. I want to thank the Council for partnering with me in my role as Mayor to make this City we all care about even better. My administration has focused on raising up the voices of our neighbors and ensuring that City Hall is welcoming to and working for all. Whether meeting with me and members of City staff in the community, at City Hall, or in my office, representatives for artists, immigrants, families, lower-income residents, youth, residents of color, seniors, LGBTQ+, persons with disabilities, local businesses, nonprofits, and many more have all had my ear and the respect of my administration. I look forward to continuing that community-centered focus. This, of course, includes collaboration and cooperation with you, our City Council.

As you know, it was long tradition for City Councilors to submit budget resolutions at the end of the budget process, allowing little time for them to be accommodated. For the first time last year, to more effectively engage the Council in budget development, I changed that process. Instead, we requested early submission of funding priorities for the FY23 budget from City Councilors. Thank you for the diligence you applied to your proposals, all of which received careful review and consideration.

I look forward this year to an update on where you feel it is most important for our community to invest. For the FY24 Budget, I am requesting that Councilors submit their funding priorities as resolutions by March 29th. In consultation with the City Clerk, we request that you bundle your priorities into a single submission per Councilor this year in order to maintain streamlined agendas.

My staff have been instructed to consider your resolutions to help inform their departmental budget proposals. As we work toward a fiscal year 2024 budget, your priorities will be considered alongside strategic goals and service responsibilities, Citywide and community-driven master and project plans,



and the departmental goals and planning that we develop based on best practices and staff expertise informed by community input.

We remain committed to pursuing quality core services, serving all, and challenging the status quo in Somerville to better support our community and effectively collaborate with the City Council. I look forward to again receiving your input and continuing to refine this new avenue of partnership.

Response to FY23 Requests

I appreciated the thoughtful resolutions submitted for the FY23 budget and wanted to take the time to follow up on [the memo submitted last year](#) as a response to the Council's ten shared priorities. The full list of over a hundred resolutions has been reviewed multiple times throughout the full year as my administration continues to incorporate the Council's priorities into the work that we do together.

Below is a sample of items that were submitted last spring and updates on their progress. Again, I thank you for your support of these shared and vital priorities.

Transportation

Council Requests- That the FY 2023 budget allocate increased funding for quick build and permanent improvements consistent with the Vision Zero Action Plan.

- The City increased production rates by 30% for permanent traffic calming measures, from 34 new total permanent installations in 2021 to 46 new total permanent installations in 2022. These installations include speed humps, curb extensions, crossing islands, and raised crosswalks.
- The City increased the use of quick-build traffic safety treatments, with highlights including our first major "daylighting" project (improving pedestrian and driver sightlines to reduce the likelihood of crashes)" on Broadway and a new flexpost-protected bike lane on Holland Street.
- The City recommended and the Council approved allocation of an additional \$200,000 in funding to the Traffic Safety Stabilization fund as a supplemental appropriation to the FY23 budget, which will provide additional resources for quick build and permanent safety improvements.
- Improving the condition of our streets has been an ongoing conversation between residents, the Council, and City staff. In response, a supplemental appropriation of nearly \$950,000 was approved with the goal of significantly increasing the number of road miles we can resurface this coming year.

That the FY 2023 budget contain funding for a fare-free Bus pilot program.

- In FY23, the City implemented four major free transit initiatives funded by ARPA. In total, these programs provide for free public transit access to roughly 4,700 residents and workers.
 - The Parent/Guardian Program administered through a City partnership with the Somerville Public Schools purchased 1,100 MBTA Link Passes offering unlimited bus and subway trips to income-eligible parents and guardians of Somerville Public School students.
 - The Low-Income Transit Pass Program administered through a City partnership with the Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS) purchased 500 MBTA Link Passes for income-eligible residents.
 - The SPS Workforce Transit Pass program pilot is a City-Schools partnership that offers MBTA Link Passes to 1,100 employees of the Somerville Public Schools (SPS).
 - The SPS Student Pass Program was expanded and now provides free bus/subway passes to 2,000 SPS students grades 7-12.

Public Health

Council Request- That the FY 2023 Budget allocate increased funding for creation of a Mental Health Unit within the Health and Human Services Department, as well as increased funding for other mental health professionals and services to respond to mental health crisis.

- Health & Human Services received additional mental health service support in this year's budget, and we anticipate continued build-out of the city's mental health services over time.
- Our 10% increase in the school budget, the largest in Somerville history, supports the following: core learning, paying paraprofessionals a living wage, expanding our special education services, expanding supports for a growing multilingual learner student population, and adding more counselors and social workers.
- We are expanding our mental health services not only within HHS, but directly in our schools as well through increased embedded counseling and 13 new staff positions to support the increased social-emotional and mental health needs of our students.
- Safe Consumption:
 - HHS has supported the Somerville Homeless Coalition & Fenway/Access through the OD2A grant since January 2020 (ending June 2023) providing them with funding to support outreach staff positions that connect individuals to various supports and services including mental health services, while also conducting overdose prevention outreach and trainings. HHS also provides Narcan and other free harm reduction supplies like fentanyl test strips and syringe disposal containers to these partners to distribute to individuals experiencing homelessness and/or housing insecurity.
 - In FY23, funds from both HHS and the Marijuana Stabilization Fund were utilized for the initial Safe Consumption Site (SCS) feasibility study done with Fenway Health. Safe consumption site planning work continues, and we anticipate requests for funding this important project in the FY24 budget.

Public Safety

- Firehouses:
 - I have instructed City staff to lay out a plan for renovations necessary to our firehouses. This issue is a high priority for me, and I intend to move forward soon.
 -

Council Request-That the FY 2023 Budget include meaningful investment towards establishing non-police first responder programs for non-criminal emergencies.

- The following efforts to address the above request are underway:
 - Establishment of the Public Safety for All Task Force
 - Public Safety for All applications opened the week of January 23, (open for 30 days)
 - The mission of this task force is as follows:
 - The Public Safety for All Task Force is part of a community-driven process to develop recommendations for a new infrastructure of public safety in Somerville.
 - These recommendations will inform the adoption of an alternative, co-response and/or unarmed response model to address calls for service and identified public safety needs in the City of Somerville.
 - The Public Safety for All Survey & focus groups
 - The Public Safety for All survey is gathering critical feedback from diverse community members who live and work in Somerville.

- The ongoing Community Visioning Focus Group Sessions are designed to hear about lived experiences, concerns and recommendations from community members.
- To date more than 60 hours of focus groups have been conducted with over 150 people and we have received more than 1,150 survey responses from Somerville constituents.
 - Establishment of the Civilian Oversight Task Force
 - The application period for the Task Force opened on January 13 (open for 30 days)
 - The Civilian Oversight series launched January 19. Focused on education and awareness-based community engagement, it is open to anyone who would like to learn more.
 - First webinar: Civilian Oversight 101, January 19
 - Second webinar: Civilian Oversight 101, Multilingual session, February 9
 - The Civilian Oversight Task Force will create recommendations to inform decision-making on a viable model for a Civilian Oversight body for the City of Somerville.
 - This Task Force will be trained, informed, and knowledgeable about what a Civilian Oversight board is and how it functions across different models. The task force will align this knowledge and lean on evidence-based research and data to support the needs of Somerville as a city and as voiced by its constituents.
- National, regional, and local research and data-gathering has been ongoing to inform the establishment of the above task forces and their frameworks. Locally, this has included interviews and surveying of both internal city departments (OHS, HHS, Council on Aging, Parks and Rec, COHR, etc.) and local partners that play a role in the public safety of Somerville residents, including but not limited to:
 - CAAS, SCC, SHA, Mystic Learning Center, Somerville YMCA, Cambridge Somerville Legal Services, Somerville Family Learning Collaborative (SFLC)/Parent Information Center, the Welcome Project, and many more.

Social Services

Council Requests-That the FY 2023 budget include additional funding for Parks and Recreation for additional staff and programming, including a focus on after school and out of school time.

That the FY 2023 Budget include a community center created with community input.

- With the use of Parks and Recreation general funds and ARPA funds, for the first time in Somerville two Teen Spaces were established that are currently open: We have over 160 teens registered at the Edgerly Teen Space, which is open Monday-Friday from 2 to 8 p.m. We have more than 20 teens registered at the Powder House space, which is open Monday, Tuesday, and Friday and offers LGBTQ+ programming.
- Additionally, via a youth-centered outreach process, youth consultants were hired and outreach to teens conducted to gather their input and preferences for the shape, purpose, and offerings of a teen center. They requested multiple smaller centers with youth employees, food, different aged-based programming for middle and high school students, and other features that will all shape expansion of this effort.
- Enhanced out-of-school-time programming in our schools has been supported through new and expanded partnerships and a blended funding approach.
- This Administration is looking forward to releasing the Capital Investment Plan (CIP) shortly, which will include additional investments toward a community center.
- Additional social service investments:

- Additional funds were allocated to expand availability of the SNAP match program at three Somerville farmer's markets.
- Expanded support and collaboration with community partner agencies such as the Somerville Homeless Coalition (SHC)
- HHS has served as a conduit for ARPA funding to Community-Based Organizations, particularly SHC which the City is partnering with to open an engagement center.
- Participatory Budgeting:
 - Participatory Budgeting – For the first time in Somerville, funds have been dedicated for Participatory Budgeting. \$1 million was set aside in November, and since then a Working Group made up of 11 residents and one city councilor has been developing policies and practices for an equitable and inclusive rollout. After the conclusion of these meetings in January, Participatory Budgeting will launch in Spring 2023 with a campaign for Somerville residents ages 12 and older to submit ideas of how the \$1 million should be spent to improve the city. Residents will be able to identify their own priorities in this area as well as others via this initiative.

Administrative Capacity

Council Requests-That the Administration create an NU12 position in the City Clerk budget for a Meetings and Minutes Clerk.

That the FY 2023 budget contain funding for hiring additional ISD inspectors, including evenings, weekends and holidays.

- The City enhanced support for boards and commissions with the establishment of a new clerk position. The Administrative Assistant – Boards and Commissions is a newly created position that will assist the City Clerk in the administration of the City's many Boards and Commissions with tasks such as organizing and maintaining required member documents, working with staff to make meeting materials available and accessible, providing training for liaisons and members, and serving as a resource for member and staff questions.
- Inspectional Services capacity has been a critical priority for the Council and City. The FY23 budget included the addition of an additional Electrical Inspector, an Operations Manager, and an ISD Liaison. These positions were requested by staff as the highest value improvements for efficiency, customer service, and continued evolution of this critical department.
- Rodent control efforts accelerated in FY23 with an expansion of the Inspectional Service department's SMART rodent control program and the addition of a Senior Rodent Control Officer in Inspectional Services.
- Additional administrative/hiring capacity:
 - Human Resources staffing for FY23 included additional recruitment and project management staff. We continue to evaluate the existing systems and workload of this critical support department.

Housing & Land Use

Council Requests-That the FY 2023 Budget create an affordable housing acquisition fund, and also pursue each of the affordable housing strategies discussed by the Finance Committee of March 30, 2022.

That the FY 2023 Budget contain additional funding for the Office of Housing Stability.

- Somerville's first Early Acquisition Fund for the purchase and conversion of properties to affordable housing was established and seeded with \$8.3 million.
- Additional staff and outreach capacity added:
 - In response to the increasingly high level of the service needs of Somerville residents regarding housing stability matters, OHS was allocated additional funds to add a much-needed Client Services Manager position to its staff in FY23. Existing staff was promoted to the position, and we have now backfilled their former case management position so that OHS is fully staffed under the FY23 budget allocation.
 - OHS and the Housing Division jointly hired an Administrative Assistant, which has increased the overall efficiency of both divisions.
 - OHS increased its printing and mailing budget, and partnered with the Communications Dept. on the citywide mailing updating residents on post-eviction moratorium housing protections and resources.
- Increased funding for affordable housing programs was allocated in the following ways:
 - Flexible Rental and Mortgage Assistance -- An additional \$3.4 million was allocated during FY23 for flexible rental and mortgage assistance (both arrears and prospective assistance) through the Flex-ARPA programs administered by CAAS and SHC for an overall total of \$4.4 million for the Flex-ARPA program. Local rental assistance funding is particularly important to assisting Somerville's immigrant residents and families who often do not qualify for State or Federal supports.
 - Municipal Voucher Program (MVP) – Funding for Somerville's first voucher program has been committed for a five-year period through City, Affordable Housing Trust, and ARPA resources. The RFP for program development and administration and housing search and stabilization services for participants should be released by the end of January 2023. We anticipate the start-up of phase of this program (assuming there are bidders with the right experience to run the program) coming online during FY23. The first three to four months of the program will be program development and readiness before the program is fully launched.
- 100 Homes updates
 - A key component of progress on 100 Homes has been expanded internal capacity gained through the hiring of the new role of Housing Development Program Manager. They have now worked with Housing Division staff and Somerville Community Corporation (SCC) to build on and continue implementation of program assessment recommendations developed with SCC in FY22. One concrete result of those efforts was SCC's first acquisition under the program in over a year, involving the acquisition of a 4-unit property at 184 Broadway -- a purchase that preserved at-risk tenancies, while creating 4 units of housing affordable in perpetuity and no longer subject to speculative purchase and displacement activity than can result from it.
 - Another major area of 100 Homes activity during FY23 has been SCC's work on a request for ARPA funding to stabilize properties in its previously existing 100 Homes portfolio. That request is expected soon and is intended to help position SCC for continued work acquiring properties based on underwriting and operating guidelines updated to ensure acquisition and maintenance of high-quality residential units.

Vulnerable Populations

Based on our review of the priorities, the Council had a significant number of orders related to seniors including:

That the FY-23 budget include funding to increase technology resources, like laptops and tablets, to allow the Council on Aging to increase its learning programs that utilize these resources.

That the FY-23 budget include funding to implement the Senior Transportation program to ensure adults 65 and older have access to transportation for groceries, pharmacies, and non-urgent medical appointments.

- The Council on Aging established and equipped a Technology Center, which provides individual and group learning opportunities, allows for drop-in hours, and assists seniors with critical online needs such as providing space and assistance for logging onto telehealth appointments.
- This fiscal year alone, The Council on Aging has provided more than 3,000 rides for seniors to receive medical care, to obtain critical prescriptions, and to purchase nutritious food from grocery stores and farmer's markets thru the Senior Taxi Program, currently funded by ARPA funds. Income-eligible seniors also have access to the CAAS Free Transit Program mentioned above.
- The Council on Aging expanded their fitness programming from a general exercise program to include line dancing, healthy steps, gentle exercises to live music, Chi Kung, and walking clubs. Additionally, four new virtual physical fitness options have been created and two new in-person locations have been added. This fiscal year, all fitness programming is offered at no cost to our residents.

Council Request- That the FY 2023 budget include resources to implement a comprehensive language justice and language access plan, led by the SomerViva Office of Immigrant Affairs.

- Language Access Plan:
 - Somerville is working to establish its first ever Language Access Plan
 - SomerViva has joined language access professional networks to learn about best practices from other municipalities in Massachusetts and nationwide.
 - SomerViva has met with 15+ departments and continues to meet with additional departments to identify needs, challenges, resources, and gaps in language access. Meetings with other stakeholders including community partners and residents are actively being planned. The outcome of these meetings will inform the language access plan.
 - SomerViva continues to further develop and refine the language access request process and quality assurance process.
 - SomerViva consulted on and fulfilled 2,110 translation and interpretation requests since the start of the fiscal year, a rate double that compared to the previous fiscal year.

Council request- ensuring all City meetings open to the public are hosted in an online platform that enables interpretation support.

- A vendor for a CART (captioning) contract has been selected and next steps regarding executing a contract are underway. We expect to be up and running in four languages in the coming months. This captioning will be provided directly through the live stream/feed, rather than through the meeting platform.
- Additionally, Zoom has been selected for our online platform and is expected to be rolled out in early Spring 2023. As previously indicated, we will be returning to the Council for a supplemental appropriation for this purpose.

Council Request- ensuring a reliable, high-functioning hybrid meeting capability for the City Council Chambers for the purpose of holding hybrid public meetings

- One issue that was resolved prior to this request was that the hybrid software, installed by CityTV in the Chamber in Feb. 2022 as part of a hybrid system, wasn't fully communicating with the Wi-Fi that is in the chamber. To address this, CityTV had the hybrid system hardwired, bypassing the Wi-Fi. This was done in April 2022. Since then, the issues we were having (i.e., the audio cutting out), have been resolved.
- IT is taking on the challenge of outfitting the meeting spaces with monitors and conference systems for hybrid meetings. Testing will then need to be done before bringing these online, but work is underway.

Council Request-That the amount of \$4,500 be added to the Libraries Department for the purchase of a Braille printer.

Following extensive research and collaboration with local partners such as City of Cambridge and Perkins School for the Blind, the following steps will be taken to address this goal:

1. Rent a Braille machine from Perkins for the year and set out clear measurables to be able to conduct cost benefit analysis of owning a braille embosser.
2. Create a clear communication plan to the public that outlines:
 - i. Use of the embosser
 - ii. Ways to request accommodations for braille
 - iii. Timelines for meeting the request
3. Determine final location for the braille embosser. Considerations related to making this decision are the size of the braille embosser and the noise level when it is printing.
 - i. Library
 - ii. Other Location
4. Determine the staffing needs and capacity in the first year of the pilot.
 - i. Responsible parties
 - ii. Training for staff
 - iii. Quality assurance person (confidentiality)
 - iv. Process flow of meeting requests and addressing challenges related to the braille embosser.
 - v. Customer service standards, elevating a good user experience
 - vi. Timeliness of meeting accommodation request with meeting or document referenced

The Built Environment

- Capital Plan - A revised and updated Capital Investment Plan will be shared with the Council and public in early 2023, and I look forward to sharing this important road map or the future with the community.

Next Steps

Mid-Year Financial Presentation

Per ordinance 2022-07, the Director of Finance and staff are preparing a mid-year report of the City's budget performance. This presentation will share an update of year-to-date performance for expenditures and revenue along with supplemental information on debt, the tax levy, free cash, and all subjects outlined in City ordinance.

Public Listening Session(s)

We are currently scheduling a virtual public listening session in order to give residents the opportunity to share their ideas and priorities for the FY24 budget. This event is anticipated in early spring 2023. This will complement the spring City Hall Community Meetings (formerly ResiStat) schedule, which will directly engage residents on issues of interest.

Continued Discussions in Committee

Finance and Administration staff look forward to continuing conversations on budget topics in the Finance Committee over the coming months and are prepared to make themselves available for these critical discussions. Please reach out to Finance Director Ed Bean and Budget Director Mike Mastrobuoni to discuss topics of interest.

-END-