



## CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

### CITY COUNCIL

CHARLOTTE KELLY

CITY COUNCILOR AT LARGE

To: Honorable Mayor Katjana Ballantyne and Members of the City Council

From: Charlotte Kelly, City Councilor-At-Large

RE: Request for input on priorities for FY23 Budget (Item # 23-0159)

Date: March 21, 2023

Honorable Mayor Ballantyne and members of the City Council:

I want to start by thanking the thousands of residents, workers, and members of our community with whom I've been in dialogue over the past two years. I want to thank the advocates, the organizers, the neighbors living on the frontlines of the crises facing Somerville, and the countless organizations, community groups, and leaders who helped contribute to these budget priorities. Last year, I submitted a memo with 23 budget priorities addressing problems and proposing solutions to the issues residents faced in the areas of health and wellbeing, employment and equity, and housing. Almost all of these budget priorities were not funded in the FY23 Budget but the critical issues they were proposed to address still remain. While I have not resubmitted each of those priorities as individual items this year, I ask the administration to reconsider item **#213453** and review each of my prior 23 funding priorities.

In an effort to more clearly and effectively outline my priorities, this year I have drafted specific, concrete, and actionable recommendations in the areas of housing, rodents, and alternative emergency response. Drawing on my experiences as chair of the Public Health and Public Safety Committee, chair of the Rodent Issues Committee, and the council's representative on the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, as well as initiatives put forward by residents, I believe my proposals provide a clear vision of what is possible in Somerville. Each program is ambitious but implementable based on the economic revenue generated in previous fiscal years. Each program is detailed with significant room for modifications. Each program is built on already existing infrastructure in Somerville. Each program is not only possible but necessary.

I believe it is the duty of our municipal government to work to address these unmet needs through broadly expanded universal public goods and services. Budgets are statements of our values, moral

documents that tell us what our community believes to be a problem and what we believe to be a priority. Somerville's next municipal budget must move us towards enacting a vision of what we deserve and know is possible.

I've advocated for more just local, state, and federal budgets for over a decade. I have seen governments excel at meeting the needs of their residents through invaluable public services, and I have seen governments fall woefully short. Somerville is in an unprecedented financial moment with more than \$60 million sitting in stabilization funds and reserves, \$39 million in new free cash, and unexpected high revenue coming into the city for the foreseeable future. Yet, neighbors are pushed out by rising rents, community spaces are forced to close their doors, and the basic needs of our residents remain overwhelmingly unmet. The acute crises our residents face coupled with our municipal economic prosperity create an opportunity for Somerville to fill a massive gap and provide desperately needed public goods to our residents.

Too often elected officials say their constituents' priorities are not possible because of a lack of money, time, or other resources when the real problem is a lack of political will and courage to truly tackle the issues our communities face. I believe Somerville can continue to be a leader on issues of housing and rodent mitigation, while joining in the wave of other municipalities pursuing critically needed alternatives to police. I submit these budget resolutions in the spirit of meeting this unprecedented moment with the political will and courage to do more for our residents.

Charlotte Kelly  
City Councilor At-Large

## **Housing**

Without major investments, the housing crisis in Somerville will continue to deepen and widen its impact, swallowing up neighborhoods and whole communities leaving nothing but multimillion dollar condos and lab buildings in its place. We need to build out our emergency response resources for people who urgently and unexpectedly need housing services. We need to protect our residents with resources to stay in their homes like flex funds and legal counsel. We need to expand our affordable housing offers to ensure our neighbors can stay in Somerville for the long run. **Below is a summary of investments detailed in the attached memo:**

1. \$8 million for flexible rental assistance to continue meeting the urgent needs of low-income and immigrant tenants facing eviction and displacement.
2. \$1.7 million for a program to secure hotel rooms for vulnerable people. This program provides short term shelter for newly arrived immigrants, people experiencing emergency housing such as fires, and unhoused who cannot find space in local shelters.
3. \$2 million invested in the new Municipal Voucher Program (MVP), potentially adding up to 20 more vouchers to the current 35 planned in the program.

4. \$400,000 for OHS Legal services to increase legal assistance to tenants and qualifying for adjusting the income qualification to be inclusive of tenants who are at or below 110% AMI
5. \$8 million to the Early Acquisition Trust Fund to increase the supply of permanently affordable housing in Somerville.

### **Alternative Emergency Response**

Residents continue to identify the need for alternative public safety methods when responding to calls for assistance that do not require a weapon. As this Council heard at the meeting of the Public Health and Public Safety Committee on February 27th, dozens of cities across Massachusetts and around the US have fully operational alternative emergency response teams in their communities. Every day that passes without systemic, structural change is another day that our city fails to provide our residents with meaningful alternatives to policing. Building out an alternative emergency response is not only possible but necessary. **Below is a summary of investments detailed in the attached memo:**

6. \$50k for program design to create standard operating procedure, guidelines and documents for program set up
7. \$900k for Emergency response personnel including Director, admin support, and eight responders Responders
8. \$300k for mediation response unit including case manager and three caseworkers
9. \$120k for space rental, office supplies, and additional resources for the upstart of a program

### **Rodents**

Uncontrolled urban rodent populations are a public health and safety issue. It is unacceptable for a single person in a community like Somerville to contract disease from rats or to live in a home that is unsafe due to compromised electrical wiring. Expanding our rodent control efforts is a worthwhile and cost effective way to improve our community. **Below is a summary of investments detailed in the attached memo:**

10. \$177,000 in salaries for two new inspectors
11. \$160,000 SMART Box expansion for 100 new boxes at \$400 start up cost + \$1200/year service contract
12. \$5,200 Carbon Monoxide Rodent Control Device (x2) based on cost of GopherX Burrowing Rodent Control Device commercial unit
13. \$22,800 for additional printing and postage for communications regarding rodent mitigation and postage