



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

Legislation Text

File #: 24-0327, Version: 1

Agenda Summary

Conveying budget priorities and requests for FY 2025.

Official Text

Dear Mayor Ballantyne:

Thank you for this opportunity to advocate for a number of my top priorities that I hope will be a part of Somerville's FY2025 budget. Housing affordability and anti-displacement work remain the top issues facing our community, and I hope that our budget will reflect this ongoing urgency.

I respectfully encourage you to provide budgetary allocations for the following items:

Seamless continuation of the contract to provide legal assistance to tenants in need, and continued "flex funds" for rental assistance. It is critical that these relatively new - yet now completely essential - programs continue to be fully funded.

Continued support for community organizing via the Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS). The tenant organizing efforts by CAAS over the past several years have been transformative to empower residents who are facing displacement, and it is imperative that these efforts continue to be supported.

Continued support for the Affordable Housing Acquisition Fund. I applaud your action to create and fund the Acquisition Fund, which I understand has been very strongly utilized by multiple affordable housing non-profits. I encourage you to continue this record by increasing the funding available to the acquisition fund.

Sufficient staff capacity to move forward on much anticipated Rental Registry & Energy Disclosure policy. It is my understanding that the Residential Decarbonization Manager position was filled approximately one month ago, and that this staff position will be leading the efforts to finally make progress on the Rental Registry & Energy Disclosure Ordinance that was originally introduced in 2021. I ask that this year's budget include whatever funding is necessary to ensure this work move forward expeditiously in FY25, including funding for any additional technical consulting that is required.

Gilman Square redevelopment: dedicated staff position to prioritize the community-led Gilman Square redevelopment of the Homan's Building site. FY2025 needs to be the year when we finally move forward on a redevelopment plan for the publicly owned land in Gilman's Square. I implore the Administration to create a dedicated staff position with Economic Development to advance this effort. The excellent Economic Development staff has clearly been stretched too thin with other important projects, and Gilman Square redevelopment deserves a dedicated lead to ensure we aren't stuck with a large vacant lot next to our new GLX stop for another decade.

A full time staff position and seed funding to design and implement a municipal composting pilot program. I request \$80,000 for a dedicated staff position, likely within the Office of Sustainability and the Environment, to manage an RFP process for a municipal composting pilot, and at least \$300,000 to implement a municipal composting pilot contract that could be expanded in future years.

Sidewalk snow clearing program expansion: I am thankful to DPW and other departments for their collaborative efforts to establish a pilot sidewalk snow clearing program on School St. and Broadway. Here is how I envision expanding this program: I believe that a relatively modest amount of the annual snow clearing budget (approximately \$200,000) should be used to fund staffing for a program to specifically manage snow clearance on sidewalks in our central business districts, citywide. Ideally, this work could be done in-house by municipal workers.

An police budget that reflects the recommendations of the Somerville PD Staffing Study. The recently completed staffing study (<https://www.somervillema.gov/spd-updates>) included a number of recommended changes to the organizational chart and staffing reorganizations within the department, as well as the establishment of civilian oversight program and the establishment of an unarmed first response force. To date, the Council has not yet been updated on any specific implementation steps. I hope to see an FY25 budget that makes specific and concrete steps towards the implementation of these recommendations.

Funding to establish an Overdose Prevention Center (aka Safe Injection Site, aka Safe Consumption Site.) in calendar year 2024.

Funding to establish a non-police first response force that could respond to non-violent, non-criminal 911 calls. It is my belief that such a program should not be overseen or share a budget with the police department, but of course would collaborate to establish safe and effective procedures.

Continued support for free access to MBTA public transit, including CharlieCards for low income residents, students, teachers and other city staff. These programs, some of which have been ARPA-funded to date, have been essential and I very much hope they can continue to be funded through the general fund.

Thank you again for considering these budget priorities, and I look forward to working with your Administration and my City Council colleagues during this year's budget season.