

Questions for City Councilor Candidate

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Candidate Name

Ari Iaccarino

What are your top three priorities for the city as a City Councilor?

1. More housing 2. Reduce permitting and increase Inspectional Services Department hiring for faster building construction 3. Implement city-wide shoveling and de-icing of sidewalks so residents and visitors can access small businesses and workplaces more easily

What would you as a city councilor put forward to improve safety, cleanliness, and walkability in business districts? In Davis Square what measures would you take to ensure safety for all business and residents?

I was the first candidate to declare that one of my main priorities if elected would be to help implement a city-wide shoveling and de-icing program. The lack of accessibility during winter for people with assistive walking devices, strollers, and even those without is such low-hanging fruit to fix. I also want the city to have an increased trash pickup/sidewalk washing schedule in areas like Davis and other squares. Regarding Davis Square, I believe we should have a safe consumption site somewhere where folks can consume with supportive services out of the public eye. This would not have to be in Davis, but there should be a known place where people can go that's not in one of the only third spaces we have in the city. I'd also like to have a police officer stationed around Davis on foot during popular business hours. I've personally witnessed Officer Edna do a great job of talking to houseless people and ask about if they're signed up for services. This supportive presence and a zero tolerance for drug dealing and violence would help neighbors and patrons feel safe. In the long run, we need more supportive housing, and having this will not only improve perceptions of our squares but also just be the right thing to do as long as the business community stands beside organizations like the Homelessness Coalition and others, especially when well-to-do neighbors try to prevent buildings and services from working. Finally, I would like to be able to get traction going on allowing parking at churches, municipal buildings, and university property after classes/service hours. The Tufts Administrative building has a bunch of spots that patrons could park at and then walk to to get to Davis Square. I believe the Baptist Church on the corner of Morrison Ave has plenty of empty spots throughout most of the week as well. 501c3s and churches have the privilege of conducting services in Somerville, and they need to be part of the parking solution on property that is otherwise unproductive.

Commercial development had been robust in Somerville but with the economic slowdown commercial development and housing developments have ceased. In spite of this slowdown the City Council recently voted to increase linkage fees even though Somerville already had the highest fees including permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages in the State. How are you going to encourage developers to build, rather than go to other cities with lower linkage, fees, permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages? What incentives would you offer?

Reducing inclusionary housing percentages is a non-starter for me; I believe we need to increase inclusionary percentages to have middle class folks as well as the poor and rich. However, one of the main goals of my campaign has been to reduce other permitting not related to safety or overall ecology. Time is money, and I'd like to reduce the time it takes to build. In addition to reducing permitting, I'd like to make sure we hire more Inspectional Services Department (ISD) staff so that it doesn't take forever to build. I'd also be willing to pursue bonded and insured professional engineers as a supplement to continue speeding up building. I'd also like to pursue more mixed zoning, specifically in neighborhood residence (NR) districts, small-scale or creative commercial uses are only possible via a special permit and mostly limited to converting existing nonconforming buildings. I'd like to see a targeted expansion like permitting ground-floor cafés, studios, or flexible workspaces by-right in select NR areas (especially on pedestrian-oriented corners or transit-accessible streets). These would create walkable micro-hubs without altering the fundamental residential character of these neighborhoods, ideally. This may not result in massive building, but more micro commercial activity would make neighborhoods vibrant and friendlier for small businesses.

There is approximately 3 million square feet of life science space that is unoccupied in the city. What are your strategies for filling empty lab spaces?

Another pillar of my platform is to instill a real estate vacancy tax. Our real estate is too valuable to be the target of speculation and other unproductive measures that keep Somerville from growing. If a vacancy tax passes, corporate landlords will need to act in order to avoid said tax.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: The process was done with no public input during the Fourth of July week. Do you feel this was transparent? Would you have done things differently?

Public engagement is always important and builds trust.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: If the City has a goal to make housing more affordable, how does making development take longer and have more risk by doubling the tenant relocation payments and the condo conversion waiting period? Do you agree that condo ownership is a way for first time home buyers to get into Somerville?

I have little to no sympathy for corporate and investor landlords. I do not consider them to be fundamental members of a business community but rather glorified ticket scalpers. (Owner-occupied landlords in houses and small buildings are an entirely different question). I have had multiple friends that have had to leave Somerville because of arbitrary rent increases, and we've all seen small businesses who no longer operate because of high rents. Regarding whether condo ownership is a way for first time home buyers to become home owners in Somerville, I don't think there's currently much of any property in any fashion that is a viable way to become a land-owning member of Somerville unless you're a millionaire or win the housing lottery through the city. I support tenant relocation payments and modest waiting periods. You're uprooting someone from their home. We need less tenants and more home owners; Somerville doesn't need to be a hub for the rich to have a permanent rental portfolio, and we should be prioritizing

builders who want to make money through the act of building rather than acting as glorified ticket scalpers.

How will you ensure that changes to parking, bike lanes, or public transit projects support—not harm—small business foot traffic and customer access?

Let's start with the fact that the City doesn't communicate well or at all with businesses when it comes to street-level projects. I've now spoken to multiple owners, many who do not live in Somerville, who do not understand that Somerville is a special city and not like many suburban areas outside of Boston. We are a heavily bike/pedestrian-friendly city, and that should never be a surprise to a new business when deciding to set up shop here. I'd be happy to work with the Chamber of Commerce to enhance communication around these expectations. In addition, I've spoken to members of the Chamber about their own difficulties in getting the City departments to work with them when it comes to creating and executing plans. This is a product of the current administration and a group of leadership that fundamentally lacks communication skills. I was one of two native-English-speaking content marketing employees for a global company of 3,000 employees -- one of my main responsibilities was to facilitate communication between multiple departments to make sure that projects and marketing assets were accurate, on time, and compelling. I would use my expertise in this to align City Hall with the Chamber and small businesses. A special note: I have committed to doing City Council full time, not part time, and members should keep this in mind when choosing candidates who could potentially represent their interests and spend the time being IN PERSON at City Hall to get things done. In addition, members of the Chamber of Commerce already know that I've helped two local owners connect with the Chamber itself and relevant city councilors because THE BUSINESSES DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THIS WAS AN OPTION. And that's the problem -- we have business owners that have no idea what resources are available to them, so educating these owners is paramount. Most folks in Somerville have no idea who their city councilors are, and it's not surprising that Chamber members also have no idea. I'm here to change that.

Some people and businesses in our community say that we have parking issues. How would you mitigate those concerns or change the situation? On recent changes to streets in Somerville would you require after say 6 months of completing a street project a look back with meetings of the people and businesses in the area to see if these changes solved the problem or created more problem?

We do have parking issues. We need more business and metered parking for longer than two hours. Before any street project commences, I would require the City to have in-person meetings with business owners and residents on the affected street to make sure that the community is heard and that proposals are grounded in reality and not theoreticals. If we do this, then the need for retroactive reflection should be reduced. As I mentioned previously, I would also like to see unproductive parking lots open to the public after classes/service hours. You don't get prime property in Somerville for nothing.

Why is the city significantly adding numerous traffic calming measures throughout various neighborhoods without input from all residents, businesses and religious institutions? What we are hearing is the city conducts listening sessions but are not hearing what is being said. How would you change that?

The answer is in-person tours and physical mail; these are not happening at the frequency they should be. Building trust digitally not at the site in question does not build trust, and we need more trust. Like I've said before, most folks have no idea who their city councilors are, and I would be involved to act as a megaphone for small businesses, and when required, for reason if the city has a point. These traffic calming measures are important, but certain measures seem to have been made even without the support of first responders, which is also concerning to me.

What will you do in your elected role to ensure that everyone including businesses and religious institutions in Somerville have equal access to all City services, resources, programs, and meetings? How will transparency play a role?

Awareness is key. If folks don't know they have tools and resources, then that's a fundamental flaw in communication. I've said previously that we need more physical mail announcing to residents and owners who their city councilors are and what resources are available to them. If elected to city council, I will also make regular visits to stakeholders as part of routine tours of the city, and that's a great time to identify gaps in access and increase connections.

Currently city meetings (virtual) do not have participation features such as raise your hand button, chat features and restrict participants visibility to see who is in the meeting. Do you feel this is open and transparent? Please explain your reasoning. Also, as a City Councilor, would you require that all city meetings including all city council committee and board meetings be held in public with a virtual component and that all elected officials be required to attend in person all meetings in public?

I would like to make sure meetings are transparent and that everyone has the opportunity to participate. I personally like the chat capability because folks bring up great points that leadership can reflect on later or even use in the meeting itself to enhance productivity and quality of said content. I would support all meetings listed in your question to be public with a virtual component as an option. City councilors and elected officials should be attending as many meetings as possible in public; if they aren't, then there's a larger question around presence in the city.

What would you like to see from local associations in terms of working positively and proactively with you and your office? How can organizations like the Somerville Chamber of Commerce be an asset to the new City Councilor?

I'd like to see local association be proactive in reaching out to me to see how I can advance their agendas as long as they conform to good governance and positive outcomes for city residents. I want to make doing business in Somerville easier and a pleasure for small businesses, and I want the Chamber to help me reduce barriers for these important people in our community.

Questions for City Councilor Candidate

Email*

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Candidate Name

Jon Link

What are your top three priorities for the city as a City Councilor?

Affordable housing (and displacement in general), safe streets, supporting our schools

What would you as a city councilor put forward to improve safety, cleanliness, and walkability in business districts? In Davis Square what measures would you take to ensure safety for all business and residents?

Improving safety and walkability in our business districts means addressing root causes while making our squares more welcoming. I support expanding unarmed community responder programs and building stronger partnerships with local organizations, including the Behavioral Health Network, so people in crisis receive care instead of criminalization. This approach makes our districts safer for businesses, workers, and residents alike. At the same time, we must protect our commercial centers from speculative development that drives out small businesses and leaves storefronts vacant. I will advocate for affordable commercial space requirements in new developments, so local businesses can remain anchors of our squares. Vibrant storefronts create steady foot traffic and a stronger sense of safety. Cleanliness and comfort are also key. That means consistent trash pickup, rodent control, reliable lighting, and regular city presence, alongside adding more greenery, trees, and public seating so our squares are places where people want to spend time, not just pass through. In Davis Square specifically, closer collaboration with the MBTA is needed to make areas like Statue Park, Seven Hills Park, and the busway feel safe, clean, and inviting.

Commercial development had been robust in Somerville but with the economic slowdown commercial development and housing developments have ceased. In spite of this slowdown the City Council recently voted to increase linkage fees even though Somerville already had the highest fees including permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages in the State. How are you going to encourage developers to build, rather than go to other cities with lower linkage, fees, permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages? What incentives would you offer?

Development in Somerville should continue, but it has to benefit both residents and businesses to be sustainable. I don't believe the answer is racing other cities to the bottom with fees. Instead, we should offer clear, predictable incentives for projects that meet community needs. For example, I support affordable housing bonuses and zoning flexibility for projects that deliver more deeply affordable units, family-sized housing, or accessible units. On the commercial side, we should offer incentives for developments that provide affordable retail space for local

businesses instead of leaving storefronts vacant or priced beyond reach. Somerville's value proposition has never been that it's the cheapest place to build. It's that we are a vibrant, well-connected community where people want to live, shop, and invest. By focusing on incentives that reward the right kind of development, we can keep Somerville attractive to builders while ensuring growth strengthens, rather than undermines, our neighborhoods and business districts.

There is approximately 3 million square feet of life science space that is unoccupied in the city. What are your strategies for filling empty lab spaces?

The empty lab space in Somerville is the result of speculative overbuilding, not a lack of support from the City. These properties are privately owned, and it would be irresponsible to bail out developers with public dollars when the City is facing serious budget shortfalls. What the City can do is take a smarter approach going forward. We need to diversify commercial development so we are not overexposed to one sector, and ensure that large projects deliver community benefits like affordable housing, local business space, and public realm improvements regardless of what happens in the market. For existing empty spaces, the City can work with property owners to explore interim uses such as affordable artist studios, nonprofit and community space, or short-term business incubators rather than allowing empty buildings to drag down surrounding districts. Long term, the lesson is clear: we need more balanced planning that prioritizes housing and small business vitality alongside commercial development instead of chasing speculative trends.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: The process was done with no public input during the Fourth of July week. Do you feel this was transparent? Would you have done things differently?

The business of the City cannot stop every time there is a holiday week, but on issues as important as the Condo Conversion Ordinance, we owe the public a fair chance to weigh in. In this case, the timing limited community participation and did not feel transparent. I would have scheduled broader outreach and at least one well-publicized hearing before final action, with plain-language summaries and translation so residents could fully understand the changes. Somerville needs strong tenant protections, but we also need a process that people trust.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: If the City has a goal to make housing more affordable, how does making development take longer and have more risk by doubling the tenant relocation payments and the condo conversion waiting period? Do you agree that condo ownership is a way for first time home buyers to get into Somerville?

Condo conversions are one of the biggest drivers of displacement in Somerville. Multifamily homes that once housed several working families are too often converted into single-family condos or luxury units, shrinking our housing supply and driving up rents. Extending relocation payments and waiting periods does not stop responsible development, it ensures tenants are treated fairly and our neighborhoods remain stable. The real solution to high housing costs is building more homes. I support policies that encourage new housing production, including market-rate units, so we expand supply instead of cannibalizing the limited housing stock we already have.

How will you ensure that changes to parking, bike lanes, or public transit projects support—not harm—small business foot traffic and customer access?

Safe, well-designed streets are good for business. Nationally, studies show corridors that added protected bike lanes and transit improvements saw stronger retail outcomes. In New York City, retail sales grew 49% on 9th Avenue after a protected lane and commercial vacancies dropped nearly 50% in Union Square. In Toronto, a detailed study of the Bloor Street bike lane found local businesses saw customer spending rise faster than nearby control areas, and 90% of visitors arrived without a car. In Salt Lake City, bike counts rose 30% and business performance along a new protected lane outpaced citywide trends. Closer to home, Cambridge commissioned a study comparing streets with new separated bike lanes to similar corridors without them. It found no consistent negative effect on business performance — retail rents, vacancies, and employment held steady. In fact, research from Portland State University shows people who walk, bike, or take transit visit more often and spend as much or more per month as drivers. How I will advocate for projects that support, not harm, small-business access:

- Pair street changes with curb management that businesses help design, for example short-term parking, shared loading windows, and pickup zones, which increase turnover and customer access.
- Coordinate delivery and service access early, map loading needs block by block, and adjust hours and signage as needed.
- Ensure there is adequate and appropriate accessible parking for those with limited mobility.
- Mitigate construction impacts with “open for business” wayfinding, temporary loading, and (importantly) proactive communication.
- Track outcomes using data like foot-traffic counts and available sales proxies, then tune designs quickly.
- Add seating, lighting, greenery, and cleanliness measures that make customers stay longer and return more often.

Some people and businesses in our community say that we have parking issues. How would you mitigate those concerns or change the situation? On recent changes to streets in Somerville would you require after say 6 months of completing a street project a look back with meetings of the people and businesses in the area to see if these changes solved the problem or created more problem?

I hear concerns about parking, but the reality is that surface parking is one of the least efficient uses of our limited street space. Our priority should be moving people, not storing cars, while ensuring that accessible parking and essential short-term spaces for deliveries and pickups are always available. When we redesign streets, the focus should be on making them safe, welcoming, and productive for businesses and residents. That means managing curb space more effectively with short-term parking, pickup and delivery zones, and accessible spaces so the same curb can serve far more customers than long-term car storage ever could. As for evaluation, I support looking back at projects, but it takes longer than six months to see how travel patterns, business activity, and neighborhood life adjust. A one-year and/or two-year review with objective data like pedestrian counts, bike counts, transit ridership, and vacancy rates will give us a clearer picture than a premature check-in based only on initial perceptions.

Why is the city significantly adding numerous traffic calming measures throughout various neighborhoods without input from all residents, businesses and religious institutions? What we are hearing is the city conducts listening sessions but are not hearing what is being said. How would you change that?

Traffic calming is about saving lives, and that must remain the City's first priority. Every neighborhood deserves safe streets, and no resident should have to risk their safety because a project stalls. At the same time, the City must do a much better job communicating clearly and early. There are often public input meetings, but they are poorly attended. That suggests the problem is not a lack of process but that residents and businesses are not being reached effectively. I would push for more visible outreach through clear advertising of meetings, multilingual materials, and both in-person and virtual options so people know when and how they can weigh in. Input from residents, businesses, and institutions should shape how traffic calming is designed and implemented, but safety itself cannot be put up for debate. When people see their feedback reflected in design choices, trust in the process improves even if not everyone agrees with every detail.

What will you do in your elected role to ensure that everyone including businesses and religious institutions in Somerville have equal access to all City services, resources, programs, and meetings? How will transparency play a role?

Everyone in Somerville deserves equal access to City services and programs, and that starts with communication. The City must do a better job of making information widely available and easy to understand, through clear outreach, multilingual materials, and publicly accessible data so people can see for themselves how decisions are being made. Transparency is about building open systems that work for everyone. I will push the City to communicate clearly and consistently, and also to ask residents, businesses, and institutions how they prefer to receive updates so we are actually reaching people rather than just checking a box. When information is accessible, predictable, and public, trust in the process grows.

Currently city meetings (virtual) do not have participation features such as raise your hand button, chat features and restrict participants visibility to see who is in the meeting. Do you feel this is open and transparent? Please explain your reasoning. Also, as a City Councilor, would you require that all city meetings including all city council committee and board meetings be held in public with a virtual component and that all elected officials be required to attend in person all meetings in public?

Transparency and accessibility are essential, but they also need to be balanced with running meetings effectively. Not every meeting is meant for public comment, and adding participation features to routine committee work would make it harder for the City to get through business. That said, when public input is expected, the City should use the best available virtual tools and make it clear how residents can participate. I do support requiring that all meetings be publicly accessible, with both in-person and virtual components so more people can attend. But mandating that every elected official attend every meeting in person could backfire by reducing

participation, limiting flexibility, and even risking quorum. The goal should be more transparency and access for the public, paired with meeting structures that allow the City to work efficiently.

What would you like to see from local associations in terms of working positively and proactively with you and your office? How can organizations like the Somerville Chamber of Commerce be an asset to the new City Councilor?

Local associations are most valuable when they serve as a bridge between their members, residents, other organizations, and the City. I would like to see groups like the Chamber bring forward constructive ideas, share insights from their members, and help identify solutions that strengthen both our business districts and our neighborhoods. I see partnerships with associations as an opportunity to better understand day-to-day challenges, communicate more effectively with the business community, and work together on policies that keep Somerville vibrant, welcoming, and inclusive. Many of the changes highlighted in this survey are good and necessary for the safety and well-being of our community, even if they are not perfect. By approaching issues collaboratively and helping to shape how change happens, organizations like the Chamber can be a real asset to both the Council and the city as a whole.

Questions for City Councilor Candidate

Email*

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Candidate Name

Holly Simone

What are your top three priorities for the city as a City Councilor?

Economic development, housing and transportation

What would you as a city councilor put forward to improve safety, cleanliness, and walkability in business districts? In Davis Square what measures would you take to ensure safety for all business and residents?

I would recommend creating a specialized Business District team within DPW that is responsible for ensuring the cleanliness and safety in all business districts in Somerville. This would include escalating repairs of sidewalks, bike lanes and other city infrastructure, including rat mitigation. This team could choose to work alongside our community police officers when necessary, to ensure the safety of this team, and to be visible and approachable to the community and business owners to answer questions and provide any assistance needed.

Commercial development had been robust in Somerville but with the economic slowdown commercial development and housing developments have ceased. In spite of this slowdown the City Council recently voted to increase linkage fees even though Somerville already had the highest fees including permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages in the State. How are you going to encourage developers to build, rather than go to other cities with lower linkage, fees, permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages? What incentives would you offer?

I would propose a review of our surrounding communities permit fee structures, to determine if a clawback provision for meeting job numbers and tax revenue estimates could be implemented to create economic stimulus.

There is approximately 3 million square feet of life science space that is unoccupied in the city. What are your strategies for filling empty lab spaces?

I would seek out local area life science companies with soon to expire leases and offer incentives Tax Increment Financing (TIF) using scaled increases over time to attract and retain quality life science companies. I would include partnerships with SHS for vocational technical training and local businesses to train and hire local labor.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: The process was done with no public input during the Fourth of July week. Do you feel this was transparent? Would you have done things differently?

I do not feel it was transparent, and I would have insisted on more public input and involvement.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: If the City has a goal to make housing more affordable, how does making development take longer and have more risk by doubling the tenant relocation payments and the condo conversion waiting period? Do you agree that condo ownership is a way for first time home buyers to get into Somerville?

The condo conversion ordinance is not designed to create affordable housing it was created as a tool to slow down people from being displaced from what is assumed to be already affordable housing. I do agree that condo ownership can be a way for first time home buyers to stay/move to Somerville.

How will you ensure that changes to parking, bike lanes, or public transit projects support—not harm—small business foot traffic and customer access?

Our 2023 Somerville Bicycle Network plan, and 2050 Vision Zero plan for 88 miles of protected bike lanes, of which less than 10 miles have been completed to date will greatly impact how the curb is utilized. We must look at the impacts of these designs currently on local business and ensure public safety is paramount.

Some people and businesses in our community say that we have parking issues. How would you mitigate those concerns or change the situation? On recent changes to streets in Somerville would you require after say 6 months of completing a street project a look back with meetings of the people and businesses in the area to see if these changes solved the problem or created more problem?

I believe a 6 month post completion review of all city projects, is necessary and beneficial and would insist that the voices of our residents and business owners be heard and responded to. We cannot collect public feedback and continue to disregard it.

Why is the city significantly adding numerous traffic calming measures throughout various neighborhoods without input from all residents, businesses and religious institutions? What we are hearing is the city conducts listening sessions but are not hearing what is being said. How would you change that?

The city is acting upon studies performed in concert with area communities (Boston and Cambridge) to reduce vehicle traffic and increase bike access. I agree that public input is not being heard on most decisions by the administration and would require it be compiled and responded to publicly. This includes being transparent in changes that impact the safety of our first responders who are navigating narrow roads, and numerous traffic calming measures that impact their response time.

What will you do in your elected role to ensure that everyone including businesses and religious institutions in Somerville have equal access to all City services, resources, programs, and meetings? How will transparency play a role?

Transparency and access are key to an effective and open government. I will continue my work towards ensuring this for our businesses and religious institutions.

Currently city meetings (virtual) do not have participation features such as raise your hand button, chat features and restrict participants visibility to see who is in the meeting. Do you feel this is open and transparent? Please explain your reasoning.

Also, as a City Councilor, would you require that all city meetings including all city council committee and board meetings be held in public with a virtual component and that all elected officials be required to attend in person all meetings in public?

I do not feel it is open or transparent to conduct city meetings that do not afford everyone the same information that would be available if it was held in person, including language translation, closed captioning and being able to see each other at all times. Virtual should always be an option however, it does not and should not replace our elected officials being in person.

What would you like to see from local associations in terms of working positively and proactively with you and your office? How can organizations like the Somerville Chamber of Commerce be an asset to the new City Councilor?

If elected I will hold monthly meetings with all residents, businesses and community stakeholders, to hear new ideas, concerns and develop strategies together to move us forward.

Questions for City Councilor Candidate

Email*

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Candidate Name

Michael Murray

What are your top three priorities for the city as a City Councilor?

1. Ending the Pit era in Teele Square. 2. Responding to the rat problems 3. Representing Ward 7 in a focused and responsive way, at city hall.

What would you as a city councilor put forward to improve safety, cleanliness, and walkability in business districts? In Davis Square what measures would you take to ensure safety for all business and residents?

It makes sense to enforce rules that prohibit littering, and the collection of private materials in public space.

Commercial development had been robust in Somerville but with the economic slowdown commercial development and housing developments have ceased. In spite of this slowdown the City Council recently voted to increase linkage fees even though Somerville already had the highest fees including permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages in the State. How are you going to encourage developers to build, rather than go to other cities with lower linkage, fees, permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages? What incentives would you offer? Mostly, we need to pick up the pace of permitting and permit reviews. We may need to hire more city staff to increase the frequency and volume of permitting.

There is approximately 3 million square feet of life science space that is unoccupied in the city. What are your strategies for filling empty lab spaces?

These are not in Ward 7, I take it? If there were significant empty life science space unoccupied in Ward 7, I would start by talking to the property owners. I don't see it as the city's responsibility to fill up office/science space.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: The process was done with no public input during the Fourth of July week. Do you feel this was transparent? Would you have done things differently?

This is not an event I am familiar with.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: If the City has a goal to make housing more affordable, how does making development take longer and have more risk by doubling the tenant relocation payments and the condo conversion waiting period? Do you agree that condo ownership is a way for first time home buyers to get into Somerville?

This question, as worded, doesn't make a lot of sense. I think there may be some missing words? But, your perspective is clear and your point is noted.

How will you ensure that changes to parking, bike lanes, or public transit projects support—not harm—small business foot traffic and customer access?

We need to listen to our businesses. Davis Square has 5 parking lots. Teele has zero parking lots. We should balance the addition of bike lanes with small parking in our squares. Parking is too difficult for potential customers who want to go to stores and restaurants in Teele Square, or stop for something during their trip.

Some people and businesses in our community say that we have parking issues. How would you mitigate those concerns or change the situation? On recent changes to streets in Somerville would you require after say 6 months of completing a street project a look back with meetings of the people and businesses in the area to see if these changes solved the problem or created more problem?

Well, this sounds like a good idea. Sure.

Why is the city significantly adding numerous traffic calming measures throughout various neighborhoods without input from all residents, businesses and religious institutions? What we are hearing is the city conducts listening sessions but are not hearing what is being said. How would you change that?

I'm not sure why, or how accurate that is. I'm not on city council currently.

What will you do in your elected role to ensure that everyone including businesses and religious institutions in Somerville have equal access to all City services, resources, programs, and meetings? How will transparency play a role?

I am running for city council ward 7, and it's a small ward afterall. I plan to be a presence in the ward, and a spokesperson for the ward at City Hall.

Currently city meetings (virtual) do not have participation features such as raise your hand button, chat features and restrict participants visibility to see who is in the meeting. Do you feel this is open and transparent? Please explain your reasoning. Also, as a City Councilor, would you require that all city meetings including all city council committee and board meetings be held in public with a virtual component and that all elected officials be required to attend in person all meetings in public?

Oh, I don't know. I hear your concerns about transparency and functionality. Your language in this question is quite absolute. There are legitimate reasons for closed sessions. And I'm not sure what the last clause of the last sentence means exactly. "All elected officials be required to attend in person all meetings in public?" I'm not sure what you mean by that.

What would you like to see from local associations in terms of working positively and proactively with you and your office? How can organizations like the Somerville Chamber of Commerce be an asset to the new City Councilor?

I will hold office hours, and regular meetings with the business community in ward 7 , if there is interest in regular meetings.

Questions for City Councilor Candidate

Email*

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Candidate Name

Emily Hardt

What are your top three priorities for the city as a City Councilor?

A. Housing affordability: While the housing crisis is not limited to Somerville, it is hitting Somerville especially hard. Because so much of Somerville has been gentrifying for years, the high cost of housing and the development of more and more luxury condos where naturally occurring affordable housing had been, has displaced many long-time residents, immigrant communities, young renters, working class families and so many others. My top priority will be to address the housing affordability crisis: working for more affordable housing, making it easier for first-time homebuyers, supporting tenants and helping seniors stay in their homes. B. Safe streets: We demand a lot from our streets to handle so many cars, trucks, bikes and pedestrians. We need to keep improving our infrastructure to slow cars down and make the streets safer for all forms of transportation and all residents. In this process, it is important to take all voices and needs into account, including small business owners. C. Climate justice: We are already experiencing changes in our climate and it is having an impact on residents, businesses and our infrastructure. Marginalized communities are being impacted especially hard. The more prepared we are for climate changes, the more equitable the impacts will be, and the more resilient our city will be in the years to come.

What would you as a city councilor put forward to improve safety, cleanliness, and walkability in business districts? In Davis Square what measures would you take to ensure safety for all business and residents?

I think we need a combination of police and alternative responders (both trained in de-escalation) to increase safety in and around Davis Square. We also need to help people who are suffering from addictions and those who don't have homes to be able to better access services.

Commercial development had been robust in Somerville but with the economic slowdown commercial development and housing developments have ceased. In spite of this slowdown the City Council recently voted to increase linkage fees even though Somerville already had the highest fees including permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages in the State. How are you going to encourage developers to build, rather than go to other cities with lower linkage, fees, permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages? What incentives would you offer?

We need to improve the permitting process dramatically and reduce the length of reviews, which costs projects an enormous amount of money. Some contractors even refuse to work in Somerville because of our bad reputation for inspectional services. We can also offer incentives to developers, for example density bonuses for affordability.

There is approximately 3 million square feet of life science space that is unoccupied in the city. What are your strategies for filling empty lab spaces?

The reality is that federal cuts to research funding, and the glut of local lab space, mean that at least some of this space will need to be repurposed, whether into commercial or industrial space or housing. We can certainly do more to attract research jobs – and I think we should do our best, but given the larger forces, we will need a variety of approaches.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: The process was done with no public input during the Fourth of July week. Do you feel this was transparent? Would you have done things differently?

I strongly believe that the City needs to operate more transparently and with more input. There's no value in hiding from constituents. We need to hear all voices and come to the best decisions.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: If the City has a goal to make housing more affordable, how does making development take longer and have more risk by doubling the tenant relocation payments and the condo conversion waiting period? Do you agree that condo ownership is a way for first time home buyers to get into Somerville?

I support efforts to increase housing construction in Somerville, for instance through increasing first-time homebuyer programs and offering downpayment assistance. That said, we need to ensure that conversions do not exacerbate displacement. This is an issue that will continue to require careful monitoring and review of its impacts.

How will you ensure that changes to parking, bike lanes, or public transit projects support—not harm—small business foot traffic and customer access?

We need to do more outreach to businesses - not just holding listening sessions but going door to door and actively reaching out to small business owners before decisions are made. I have already started conversations with many of the business owners in Teele Square.

Some people and businesses in our community say that we have parking issues. How would you mitigate those concerns or change the situation? On recent changes to streets in Somerville would you require after say 6 months of completing a street project a look back with meetings of the people and businesses in the area to see if these changes solved the problem or created more problem?

A look-back meeting is a good idea, though we really need to do more to identify potential issues before changes are made, such as outreach. There is not necessarily much that can be done afterwards, although collecting lessons learned is valuable.

Why is the city significantly adding numerous traffic calming measures throughout various neighborhoods without input from all residents, businesses and religious institutions? What we are hearing is the city conducts listening sessions but are not hearing what is being said. How would you change that?

By doing my job as city councilor and going door-to-door to meet with impacted residents and business owners.

What will you do in your elected role to ensure that everyone including businesses and religious institutions in Somerville have equal access to all City services, resources, programs, and meetings? How will transparency play a role?

I am committed to maintaining regular communication with business owners and religious institutions, as well as residents. I see it as my responsibility to form relationships and to be accessible to everyone who is a part of our community. I will also communicate regularly and transparently about what I am working on and what decisions are being made in City Hall.

Currently city meetings (virtual) do not have participation features such as raise your hand button, chat features and restrict participants visibility to see who is in the meeting. Do you feel this is open and transparent? Please explain your reasoning. Also, as a City Councilor, would you require that all city meetings including all city council committee and board meetings be held in public with a virtual component and that all elected officials be required to attend in person all meetings in public?

I understand the reasoning behind limiting some of these features like chat, which can be distracting and cause legal concerns regarding open meeting law, but would push for transparency, for instance, to show attendee lists, to the extent allowed by law. Somerville should follow the state's open meeting law and regulations regarding meeting attendance policies, further restricting beyond that could open up the city to a lawsuit. One thing I would push for is filling the many vacancies that we have on city committees and commissions.

What would you like to see from local associations in terms of working positively and proactively with you and your office? How can organizations like the Somerville Chamber of Commerce be an asset to the new City Councilor?

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with members regularly and to hear from them on any issues of concern. I would certainly like to consult with organizational leadership on policy matters and to gather evidence and opinions.

Questions for City Councilor Candidate

Email*

jason@jasonmackey.org

Candidate Name

Jason Mackey

What are your top three priorities for the city as a City Councilor?

1. Housing: Expanding the overall housing supply, strengthening affordability, and ensuring Somerville remains a place where working families, seniors, and young people can live. 2. City Services: Making government work better for residents by improving constituent services, fixing infrastructure, and holding departments accountable. 3. Civil Rights & Community Safety: Defending vulnerable communities, expanding mental health services, and building a city where everyone feels safe and included.

What would you as a city councilor put forward to improve safety, cleanliness, and walkability in business districts? In Davis Square what measures would you take to ensure safety for all business and residents?

As city councilor, I would put forward a clear, three-part strategy for our business districts: Safety: Expand unarmed crisis response teams and mental health resources, while ensuring a visible, accountable police presence in high-traffic areas. Both workers and customers must feel secure. Cleanliness: Increase city services for trash pickup, rodent control, graffiti removal, and street cleaning. I would push for dedicated public works crews in our business districts and regular power-washing. Walkability: Repair sidewalks, improve lighting, and update crosswalks and curb cuts. Add safe, protected bike lanes where possible, but also preserve convenient loading and short-term parking for customers and deliveries. In Davis Square: Davis Square is one of our most important commercial centers,, and right now, the situation there is often untenable and a disgrace. Businesses are struggling with safety concerns, and residents feel the square is less welcoming than it should be. We cannot criminalize being homeless, but we cannot ignore the problem either. Boston is showing us the way. In 2024, Boston passed a common-sense ordinance banning tents and tarps on public property but paired it with a Coordinated Response Team that offers shelter, safe storage, transportation to services, and only then carefully removes encampments. The message is clear: a tent in a public square is not housing, but we're going to get you help. Somerville should follow this example. We can and must balance compassion with enforcement: no one left behind, and no one allowed to jeopardize public safety or our shared spaces. If we don't act, Davis will continue to deteriorate, and that will ripple across the city. The people in tents deserve more than neglect, and the families and businesses who rely on Davis deserve more than broken promises. As your next Ward 5 City Councilor, I'll insist on urgent action, measurable results, and the strength to enforce our laws.

Commercial development had been robust in Somerville but with the economic slowdown commercial development and housing developments have ceased. In spite of this slowdown the City Council recently voted to increase linkage fees even though Somerville already had the highest fees including permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages in the State. How are you going to encourage developers to build, rather than go to other cities with lower linkage, fees, permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages? What incentives would you offer?

Somerville's long-term vitality depends on continued investment in both commercial space and housing. The recent economic slowdown, paired with the City Council's decision to increase linkage fees despite already having some of the highest fees in Massachusetts, has created a serious challenge. If we want developers to choose Somerville, we need to compete, not price ourselves out of the market. As a councilor, I will push for a balanced approach: Predictability & Transparency: Developers need clear, reliable timelines and processes. I will fight to streamline permitting and eliminate unnecessary red tape so that projects aren't delayed for years. Time is money, and predictability is often just as valuable as incentives. Targeted Incentives: We should consider temporary reductions or tiered linkage fees for projects that break ground in the next 2 to 3 years, especially in under-utilized corridors. Similarly, incentive zoning can reward projects that deliver community benefits; like green building standards, affordable units above the baseline, or critical infrastructure upgrades. Partnerships: We should work directly with anchor employers, universities, and small-business investors to create public-private partnerships that unlock new development while ensuring the community sees real benefit. Commercial & Housing Together: Encouraging mixed-use development keeps our business districts vibrant and spreads risk for developers. I support policies that make it easier to finance projects that combine retail, office, and housing. The bottom line is this: If Somerville continues to stack fees and requirements higher than our neighbors, development will simply go elsewhere. My approach is to keep standards high but make the process clear, competitive, and collaborative. That's how we grow our tax base, expand housing supply, and keep Somerville's economy strong.

There is approximately 3 million square feet of life science space that is unoccupied in the city. What are your strategies for filling empty lab spaces?

With 3 million+ square feet of unoccupied lab space, Somerville faces both a challenge and an opportunity. As a startup founder and early-stage investor, I know how critical space is for young companies to take root. If we position ourselves right, we can compete with Cambridge by making Assembly and Union Square magnets for startups; not just in life sciences, but in climate tech, advanced manufacturing, robotics, and AI. Our heritage as a city that builds is an asset we should lean on. At the same time, market realities are clear: demand for wet lab space has cooled. That's why we must also embrace residential conversions of surplus lab space, just as Boston and New York are doing. Turning underused buildings into housing would address our affordability crisis, expand our tax base, and revitalize neighborhoods. Somerville's path forward is dual: attract and support innovative startups that need affordable, flexible space, while adapting to changing conditions by converting excess lab square footage into homes. That balance is how we'll stay competitive, resilient, and true to our character.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: The process was done with no public input during the Fourth of July week. Do you feel this was transparent? Would you have done things differently?

The way the Condo Conversion Ordinance amendment was pushed through during the Fourth of July week with no real public input was not transparent. Process matters. Rushed decisions erode public trust, regardless of whether you agree with the policy substance. I would have done things differently. First, by ensuring robust public hearings with adequate notice for homeowners, tenants, small landlords, and housing advocates. Second, by using the committee process properly, giving stakeholders and councilors time to evaluate impacts and propose improvements. On substance, I believe protecting tenants from displacement is important, but so is ensuring that property owners have clear, fair, and predictable rules. When ordinances are passed without transparency or buy-in, we end up with policies that create confusion, spark lawsuits, and discourage investment in our housing stock. As a councilor, I will insist that we do this work in the open, with public engagement at the center. Somerville can both protect residents and encourage responsible development, but only if the process is transparent and collaborative.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: If the City has a goal to make housing more affordable, how does making development take longer and have more risk by doubling the tenant relocation payments and the condo conversion waiting period? Do you agree that condo ownership is a way for first time home buyers to get into Somerville?

If the City has a goal of making housing more affordable, then adding delay and risk into the process is counterproductive. By doubling tenant relocation payments and extending the condo conversion waiting period, we make it harder for small property owners to plan and for new housing opportunities to come online. In practice, that slows down development, discourages investment, and limits the choices available to renters and buyers. I also strongly agree that condo ownership is one of the primary ways first-time homebuyers can enter the Somerville market. For many families and young professionals, a condo is the most accessible path to building equity and putting down roots in our community. If we make conversions excessively difficult or unpredictable, we cut off that opportunity. Tenant protections are important, but they must be balanced with policies that encourage responsible ownership and expand the pathways into homeownership. Somerville needs more housing options at all levels, not fewer, and our ordinances should reflect that goal.

How will you ensure that changes to parking, bike lanes, or public transit projects support—not harm—small business foot traffic and customer access?

I believe protected bike lanes that take cyclists out of traffic are one of the best ways to reduce accidents and make our streets safer. I support them. But we cannot ignore the needs of our business owners, especially on corridors like Highland Avenue where the City is planning to remove 50% of parking. That is unacceptable. As a city councilor, I will insist that every transportation project balances safety with access. That means: Protecting Parking and Loading Zones: Safe bike lanes and convenient parking are not mutually exclusive. Customers, families,

and delivery drivers all need reliable access to our business districts. Engaging Business Owners Early: Decisions about design must involve the voices of shopkeepers and restaurateurs who know what their customers need. Measuring Real Impact: After changes are made, the City should monitor the effect on foot traffic and sales, and adjust if small businesses are being harmed. Safe streets and strong small businesses can go hand in hand. But that requires leadership that values both. I will never support plans that sacrifice our business districts in the name of progress.

Some people and businesses in our community say that we have parking issues. How would you mitigate those concerns or change the situation? On recent changes to streets in Somerville would you require after say 6 months of completing a street project a look back with meetings of the people and businesses in the area to see if these changes solved the problem or created more problem?

Parking is a real issue for many of our businesses and residents. Small businesses especially rely on customers being able to stop in easily and on delivery drivers having dependable loading zones. As a city councilor, I would work to mitigate concerns by preserving convenient short-term parking in commercial districts, expanding loading zones, and exploring better signage and technology to help drivers find available spaces more efficiently. I also believe in accountability. On any major street redesign, the City should conduct a formal “look back” within six months of completion. That process should include public meetings with residents and business owners in the affected area to assess whether the changes are solving problems or creating new ones. If the data and feedback show that something is not working, the City must be willing to make adjustments. Good planning does not end when the construction crews leave. Somerville needs a culture of continuous improvement that balances safety, accessibility, and the survival of our small businesses.

Why is the city significantly adding numerous traffic calming measures throughout various neighborhoods without input from all residents, businesses and religious institutions? What we are hearing is the city conducts listening sessions but are not hearing what is being said. How would you change that?

Traffic calming measures can improve safety, but the way Somerville has rolled them out has left too many people feeling ignored. The City often conducts “listening sessions,” but if residents, businesses, and faith institutions do not feel heard, then those sessions are not real engagement. As a city councilor, I would insist on a different approach. That means: Early and Inclusive Outreach: Before designs are finalized, every impacted group, from local businesses to houses of worship to neighborhood associations, should be part of the conversation. Transparency in Decision-Making: The City should clearly explain how feedback was incorporated, and if it was not, why not. Right now, there is a gap between what people say and what the City does, and that undermines trust. Accountability After Implementation: Six months after a major project is completed, I would require a formal review with data on traffic, safety, and business impact, plus public meetings to gather feedback on what is working and what is not. Safety is essential, but so is trust. My approach will be to ensure that Somerville not only builds safer streets but also does so in a way that brings people along, rather than leaving them feeling shut out of the process.

What will you do in your elected role to ensure that everyone including businesses and religious institutions in Somerville have equal access to all City services, resources, programs, and meetings? How will transparency play a role?

Every resident, business, and institution in Somerville deserves equal access to City services, resources, programs, and meetings. Right now, too often people feel that decisions are made in closed circles and that only certain voices are heard. That undermines both trust and effectiveness. As a city councilor, I will: Expand Access: Ensure that meetings and public hearings are scheduled at times when working people, small business owners, and faith leaders can actually attend, not just during business hours. Materials should be published in multiple languages and in clear, plain language. Proactive Outreach: Require City departments to engage directly with businesses and institutions, not just expect them to navigate a complex system on their own. The City should be a partner, not a gatekeeper. Transparency as Standard Practice: Transparency is not optional. I will push for clear reporting on budgets, program eligibility, and project outcomes so that the public can see where money is going and what results we are getting. Equal access and transparency go hand in hand. When people can see the process and participate in it fully, trust grows and outcomes improve. That will be my standard as a councilor.

Currently city meetings (virtual) do not have participation features such as raise your hand button, chat features and restrict participants visibility to see who is in the meeting. Do you feel this is open and transparent? Please explain your reasoning.

Also, as a City Councilor, would you require that all city meetings including all city council committee and board meetings be held in public with a virtual component and that all elected officials be required to attend in person all meetings in public?

Yes, I will push to make all city meetings public with a virtual component, including every City Council committee and board, consistent with Massachusetts Open Meeting Law and the limited exceptions for executive session. My standards: Hybrid by default: Every public meeting offers in-person and virtual access, with a single, easy-to-find link on the city calendar. Real participation tools: Visible attendee list, raise-hand queue, timed speaking slots, and a moderated Q&A chat that is part of the public record. Accessibility: Live captions, language interpretation on request, dial-in phone numbers, and ADA-compliant materials posted at least 48 hours in advance.

Transparency and records: Roll-call attendance published after each meeting, recordings and transcripts posted within 48 hours, all slides and documents archived with timestamps. Business and faith outreach: Direct notice to registered business districts and faith institutions for projects that affect them, plus dedicated office hours to gather feedback before votes. Councilor attendance: Elected officials attend in person for public meetings except for legally valid reasons such as illness, parental or medical leave, disability accommodation, or emergencies. Remote participation is disclosed on the record. Overall, meetings must be easy to find, easy to join, and easy to participate in. That is how we rebuild trust and ensure every resident, business, and religious institution has equal access to city government.

What would you like to see from local associations in terms of working positively and proactively with you and your office? How can organizations like the Somerville Chamber of Commerce be an asset to the new City Councilor?

Local associations are some of the strongest partners a City Councilor can have. As a business owner myself, I know how important it is to hear directly from other business owners about what is working, what is not, and what ideas could make a difference. Associations help amplify those voices and bring them to the table in a constructive way. The Somerville Chamber of Commerce, in particular, can be a critical asset. You unite small businesses, entrepreneurs, and employers who drive our local economy. As a city councilor, I want to work with you to make sure that city policies encourage growth, reduce unnecessary red tape, and strengthen our business districts. I would look to the Chamber to: Provide feedback on legislation and zoning changes so that we understand the real impact on businesses before votes are taken. Help recruit new businesses and investment by promoting Somerville as a competitive and welcoming city not just for small businesses but tech founders and investors. Partner on events, outreach, and networking that connect businesses with residents and foster a stronger community. My door is always open, and I see local associations not as outside voices but as essential partners in ensuring Somerville's economy grows in a way that benefits both businesses and residents.

Questions for City Councilor Candidate

Email*

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Candidate Name

Kristen Strez

What are your top three priorities for the city as a City Councilor?

My priorities for re-election include: - Stable city government and leadership that listens and is responsive to residents' needs. - Making Somerville affordable through rent stabilization, tenant protections, incentivization of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and other new housing, utility bill support, and increased transportation options. - Upholding a walkable, bikeable Somerville with safety initiatives, safe pedestrian pathways, and neighborhood speed-reducing solutions while being mindful of ADA accessibility, parking needs, and small business access.

What would you as a city councilor put forward to improve safety, cleanliness, and walkability in business districts? In Davis Square what measures would you take to ensure safety for all business and residents?

I proudly serve as the City Council representative on the ADA Transition Plan task force which is currently modernizing its outdated ADA Design Plan. I enjoy studying the intricate details of the ADA street design perspective to understand the barriers, needs, approach and the gaps to implementation— to better fight for the necessary changes. I also directly hear from fellow task force members, Commission for Persons with Disabilities commissioners, and directly from senior residents about the challenges they face for independent mobility. Their experiences guide me on ADA accessibility, alongside other Somerville community members. I have walked areas of Somerville alongside the Commission for Persons with Disabilities and some blind members of our visually impaired community, and I've also done so in Davis Square when the streetlights were out, mid-day on a weekday. It was not just dangerous when this was happening, it could have been fatal for a visually impaired person to cross traffic that day in Davis. To address the question, the most pressing need to improve accessible pedestrian infrastructure for this demographic is taking their voices and their experiences seriously in street design. I do not think that is yet happening. We must act collaboratively when it comes to street design. We must honor their lived experiences. This intention is right in SomerVision as it states, "vulnerable transportation users like seniors, persons with cognitive disabilities, vision, and mobility impaired persons must be included in creating and improving safe methods of transportation. Improving safety for vulnerable road users will improve safety for everyone." (page 57). If we do not include all voices, we potentially disenfranchise our fellow community members. I do hear from businesses that there are concerns in Davis Square, sometimes violence or issues with access to storefronts at opening or closing times. Last week a visually impaired resident was attacked on Elm Street in broad daylight. When residents or business owners reach out to me about an incident on their property, I handle the issue personally, and my first call is the Somerville Homeless Coalition (SHC). They have been fantastic partners and strive to bring about a resolution without escalation. We would benefit from better communication between the City and

business owners. I'd like to have even more expanded support with Economic Development and small business support in Somerville. And we should continue to have regular information meetings with city staff and Davis Square businesses.

Commercial development had been robust in Somerville but with the economic slowdown commercial development and housing developments have ceased. In spite of this slowdown the City Council recently voted to increase linkage fees even though Somerville already had the highest fees including permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages in the State. How are you going to encourage developers to build, rather than go to other cities with lower linkage, fees, permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages? What incentives would you offer?

Being in the middle of an innovation, education, and transportation hub will continue to increase desirability of locating developments in Somerville. We can always explore how to continue to build upon our partnership. Although I may not always agree, I will always listen and consider. We had a study that stated we could go up in linkage fees. Linkage fees as a whole help keep Somerville competitive and desirable, and applied linkage fees help all of the community.

There is approximately 3 million square feet of life science space that is unoccupied in the city. What are your strategies for filling empty lab spaces?

As they were built for specific life science use and can't be converted to housing, I am open to a conversation on solutions and creating a solid plan to help repurpose these buildings and with what tenants we can attract.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: The process was done with no public input during the Fourth of July week. Do you feel this was transparent? Would you have done things differently?

I want to continue to be a proactive City Councilor. If the Chamber of Commerce and some residents felt that they were locked out of rightfully sharing their thoughts and experiences, then we can follow up on it. I will absolutely listen to your concerns and perspectives. The Condo Conversion Ordinance is a response to the fact that we have a lot of residents and families in Somerville that are being priced out of this community and who have stated continuously that they want to stay in our city. It is our shared community value in Somerville to fight against displacement. Amending and strengthening the Condo Conversion Ordinance is one tool we have as a community to protect residents from all walks of life from displacement.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: If the City has a goal to make housing more affordable, how does making development take longer and have more risk by doubling the tenant relocation payments and the condo conversion waiting period? Do you agree that condo ownership is a way for first time home buyers to get into Somerville?

I appreciate hearing this perspective, however I'd also like residents from every financial demographic to live in Somerville. Even if I don't always agree with the Chamber of Commerce, I will always listen to and consider your perspective. My goal is always to create intentional policy

that does the most good for all of Somerville. First-time homeownership is very important to me, as is low-income first-time home ownership. Children in our school system should be surrounded by other children from all walks of life; including by income levels and backgrounds. We can have it both ways if we can commit to bringing our perspectives together for the benefit of Somerville.

How will you ensure that changes to parking, bike lanes, or public transit projects support—not harm—small business foot traffic and customer access?

We can balance increased bikeability and transit access goals with the needs of our small businesses. I think small businesses and commercial areas need to be considered in redesign projects. I do hear from residents that they want to shop locally, but they can't find a way to access the businesses and storefronts. ADA accessibility also needs to be considered. I don't believe that street design has to be an either-or situation. I think that we can be intentional with new projects by listening to our business community and the impacts on them. I'm a big cheerleader of our Somerville business community and want them to thrive and grow in Somerville.

Some people and businesses in our community say that we have parking issues. How would you mitigate those concerns or change the situation? On recent changes to streets in Somerville would you require after say 6 months of completing a street project a look back with meetings of the people and businesses in the area to see if these changes solved the problem or created more problem?

New projects must take into consideration the various needs of Somerville residents, some of whom require access to vehicles. Home-based service providers (Visiting Nurses and physical therapists, Meals-on-Wheels, visiting midwives) need to effectively get to their clients in the region and on schedule. The impact on businesses should also certainly be considered. I'm open to having a conversation with you on how we can assess the success of street-changing projects.

Why is the city significantly adding numerous traffic calming measures throughout various neighborhoods without input from all residents, businesses and religious institutions? What we are hearing is the city conducts listening sessions but are not hearing what is being said. How would you change that?

To answer Questions 9, 10, and 11: I am open to finding ways to ensure that everyone participating feels that the process is transparent and fair; I hear you. If a church has a wake or a funeral, they have needs that have to be accommodated. A grieving family has a right to come to a Somerville religious institution to worship, grieve and celebrate, and not be hindered in their ability to do so. They should be able to come into our community if public transportation is outside of their service area.

What will you do in your elected role to ensure that everyone including businesses and religious institutions in Somerville have equal access to all City services, resources, programs, and meetings? How will transparency play a role?

I have continuously advocated to ensure that accessibility is part of the plan for all my meetings. I am the only City Councilor that insists that all meetings I Chair be hybrid - in person and virtual, because I think it's an important service to the community, ensures transparency and invites

accountability. I'll continue to do all I can as a City councilor to make sure that all concerned parties are represented and heard. Inclusivity is a big part of every decision I make.

Currently city meetings (virtual) do not have participation features such as raise your hand button, chat features and restrict participants visibility to see who is in the meeting. Do you feel this is open and transparent? Please explain your reasoning. Also, as a City Councilor, would you require that all city meetings including all city council committee and board meetings be held in public with a virtual component and that all elected officials be required to attend in person all meetings in public?

I agree that this process is not as transparent as it should be. All meetings should be a hybrid of virtual and in-person, with city officials required to attend. If it's a public hearing, we're bound by Open Meeting Law to allow for public comment. Ensuring that constituents can attend city meetings in person will improve visibility and allow them to understand and see the process. I am Chair of the Housing and Community Development Committee, as well as the Equity Committee. Every meeting I have, unless there is a staffing issue, is scheduled to be hybrid (virtual and in-person). This is important to me to ensure transparency and community participation and access for the city process.

What would you like to see from local associations in terms of working positively and proactively with you and your office? How can organizations like the Somerville Chamber of Commerce be an asset to the new City Councilor?

I am always eager to have an open dialogue with our city's local associations. I know many of you, and want to continue working with you for the betterment of our community.

Questions for City Councilor Candidate

Email*

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Candidate Name

Ben Wheeler

What are your top three priorities for the city as a City Councilor?

1) Housing and Community We deserve a Somerville where young people, families, seniors, immigrants, and city staff can stay. I'll support investment in housing—especially affordable housing—and push developers to deliver tangible community benefits like storefronts for local businesses and gathering spaces that strengthen neighborhood life. 2) Supporting Working Families As an educator and dad, I understand the pressures families face. I'll work to expand universal pre-K, use zoning powers to increase access to childcare, and fully fund afterschool programs and youth services. Supporting families also means ensuring our city staff—who provide these services—have strong, fair contracts. 3) Safer Streets and Public Safety Public safety is a progressive issue. We need responsive, accountable policing and trained mental health responders so that every situation gets the right response. I'll champion safer roadways for bikes, cars, and pedestrians, a network of free shuttle buses, and smart traffic lights that ease congestion and make our streets safer for everyone.

What would you as a city councilor put forward to improve safety, cleanliness, and walkability in business districts? In Davis Square what measures would you take to ensure safety for all business and residents?

Safety, cleanliness, and walkability matter immensely to me, especially in areas where residents gather to spend time together, stroll, eat meals and get drinks, and enjoy treats like ice cream. Before putting forward plans to improve the situation, I'd first want to better understand what is and isn't working. I'd like to see more consistent pickup of litter and debris, but I'm not sure if this can be solved with just a bit of staff assignment, if it requires new or additional staff, or if it is something more appropriate to a partnership with merchants' associations or neighborhood councils. Regarding safety in Davis Square, I very much appreciate what Ward 1 Councilor Matt McLaughlin has said: that we need both compassion and accountability. Unhoused people are members of our community, and we should think of "us" when we're discussing this issue, not of "them". And, all of us need to follow a shared set of rules, which include not harassing strangers, and allowing public space to be available to be used by all, not taken over by some. It's easy to say that with enough outreach, this problem will melt away, but the plain fact is that Somerville has a number of clinics where people with drug addiction issues and/or mental health issues can be served, and it's important to me that this be a welcoming place for all who are served here. So how do we deal with the minority of people served, who intimidate other people or take over public space and put up barriers? I think much more active street-level communication and conversations by trained professionals can help, especially if we can expand pathways to housing and treatment. And we do have to back this up with a willingness to insist that public spaces remain safe and welcoming for all. Police should not be our first, second or third answer.

But in some cases, police are necessary, and I think we need to be clear that it does not help the many vulnerable people passing by—women, seniors, LGBTQ folks, people with disabilities, people of color and ethnic groups subject to hate crimes—if they worry about being unsafe when walking through public areas.

Commercial development had been robust in Somerville but with the economic slowdown commercial development and housing developments have ceased. In spite of this slowdown the City Council recently voted to increase linkage fees even though Somerville already had the highest fees including permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages in the State. How are you going to encourage developers to build, rather than go to other cities with lower linkage, fees, permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages? What incentives would you offer?

All of our fees and requirements are intended to strike a balance: they impose cost which does discourage development somewhat, and they use that cost to benefit the broader public and pay for public services. We should always be monitoring whether the cost they impose is so high that the intended benefits aren't being generated in the first place. I'm not eager to revisit these fees and levels, but we should be clear about the outcomes they are designed to achieve, and if we're not getting those outcomes, we should be willing to acknowledge that and adjust. I'm not suggesting new incentives to build, but I applaud the efforts the city has made to provide favorable terms to nonprofit developers, and the willingness of the city to lend support to developments such as the 50% affordable 299 Broadway project.

There is approximately 3 million square feet of life science space that is unoccupied in the city. What are your strategies for filling empty lab spaces?

Some ideas I've heard include allowing short-term uses for artists, nonprofits, co-working, and small businesses; and partnering with universities and vocational schools to use labs for training. I've read that some building lending contracts from banks forbid renting at rates below the levels that the borrowers promised; it might be necessary for the city to step in to appeal to lenders to amend these contracts to allow a broader, and cheaper, range of uses. The key is zoning flexibility and proactive city leadership so these buildings don't drag down neighborhoods, and don't fall into disrepair that becomes a public cost.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: The process was done with no public input during the Fourth of July week. Do you feel this was transparent? Would you have done things differently?

From what multiple homeowners have told me, the expansion of the waiting period for condo conversions from one year to two has had the unintended side effect of moving some homeowners to give up on their own plans for their homes, and to decide to sell to developers. I'm not sure, on balance, whether this change serves renters and affordability, and reduces displacement; but I do think those are very much worthy goals. In this process, it would have been valuable to seek out more public input, in the form of meetings about the change or invitations to speak before the Council or relevant committees. At the end of the day, the Council has been elected to make decisions; but we should make sure the Council has high-quality information,

including perspectives from multiple stakeholders, when decisions may have far-reaching consequences.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: If the City has a goal to make housing more affordable, how does making development take longer and have more risk by doubling the tenant relocation payments and the condo conversion waiting period? Do you agree that condo ownership is a way for first time home buyers to get into Somerville?

Certainly, condo ownership is a way for first time home buyers to purchase homes in Somerville; several of my neighbors are first time homeowners, and their home is a condo. And, there is always a tradeoff in terms of housing stability in the short term when a renter is made to leave so that an apartment can be bought. Extending the waiting period doesn't make housing more affordable, but it does meaningfully maintain affordability for some, while incurring a cost to the property's overall value and development, and to the agency and flexibility (and income) experienced by the existing homeowners. We should explore questions like this in their entirety, whenever we are seeking to understand the real tradeoffs of any policy change.

How will you ensure that changes to parking, bike lanes, or public transit projects support—not harm—small business foot traffic and customer access?

When we redesign streets, we need to keep businesses accessible while making them safer. That means reserving short-term parking and loading zones, testing changes with pilots before they're permanent, and checking back with businesses periodically to see what's working. Better sidewalks, bike lanes, and transit can bring more people to our squares, as well as cars; I'd like to see us take all of these modes seriously when we are considering how to handle mobility near businesses.

Some people and businesses in our community say that we have parking issues. How would you mitigate those concerns or change the situation? On recent changes to streets in Somerville would you require after say 6 months of completing a street project a look back with meetings of the people and businesses in the area to see if these changes solved the problem or created more problem?

I think we need to keep in mind that parking is not just a matter of convenience, it is a matter of accessibility for many people who cannot walk long distances, cannot bike, or find it difficult and dangerous to cross major streets. I'm one of the many people confused about why in some cases we have removed all of the parking on some street, or why we have marked surprisingly large areas as no parking. I'm not sure which specific process changes could best improve the outcomes we are seeing, but I do think we need to revise our processes to ensure we are sourcing perspective from neighbors and businesses who know their nearby streets well, and to ensure we are revisiting work after it is done to understand the effects of what we have changed.

Why is the city significantly adding numerous traffic calming measures throughout various neighborhoods without input from all residents, businesses and religious institutions? What we are hearing is the city conducts listening sessions but are not hearing what is being said. How would you change that?

This is a puzzling question for me, and one where the perspective of city planners and engineers seems at odds with what people feel they are experiencing. I'd like to understand the problem better by digging into which sessions have been happening with the public, and what the results have been. A group of residents of Lexington Ave recently reached out to me and other candidates and officials with a petition to have a more inclusive process for designing the traffic calming and pedestrian safety changes there, and I support these approaches in general (and signed the petition).

What will you do in your elected role to ensure that everyone including businesses and religious institutions in Somerville have equal access to all City services, resources, programs, and meetings? How will transparency play a role?

Equal access has many layers and components, and there aren't always obvious answers for how to improve it. We should certainly have as many meetings be hybrid (in person and watchable/participatable online) as possible; multilingual notices, and live translation when possible; preference for evening scheduling; and ADA compliance. But even if a meeting is available online, not all who wish to participate will be able to; I have hit snags when trying to watch City Council or School Committee meetings, and I know others who have too. So we can't treat access as simply something to check off; we need to revisit it and keep working to expand it. I'm also a fan of "no wrong door" help desk policies at City Hall, so that residents, businesses and community organizations don't get bounced between departments when they need help.

Currently city meetings (virtual) do not have participation features such as raise your hand button, chat features and restrict participants visibility to see who is in the meeting. Do you feel this is open and transparent? Please explain your reasoning. Also, as a City Councilor, would you require that all city meetings including all city council committee and board meetings be held in public with a virtual component and that all elected officials be required to attend in person all meetings in public?

Sorry, I ran out of time for this questionnaire -- I take this question seriously, but in the interests of sleep, I'm going to skip this question (and the next)

What would you like to see from local associations in terms of working positively and proactively with you and your office? How can organizations like the Somerville Chamber of Commerce be an asset to the new City Councilor?

See above. I hope to circle back and answer this question -- sorry for my cutting the questionnaire short.

Questions for City Councilor Candidate

Email*

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Candidate Name

Tuesday Thomas

What are your top three priorities for the city as a City Councilor?

My three priorities reflect what I hear from the neighbors I've talked to. 1. Affordable housing (streamline permitting, encourage gentile density and fast-track multi-family projects and ADUs) 2. Safer streets (protected intersections, targeted enforcement and better bike infrastructure) and 3. Government that actually works to help the people who want to live and work here (less red tape, city hall liaison for residents and preparedness for the end of federal funding).

What would you as a city councilor put forward to improve safety, cleanliness, and walkability in business districts? In Davis Square what measures would you take to ensure safety for all business and residents?

I start by focusing on smart design and solutions, not more rules. First and foremost, our roads need to be in shape with better street paving and level sidewalks. The Urban Forestry department should be included in the discussion to ensure roots don't become disruptive down the road. I will push for protected intersections, starting with Davis Square. I will also push for red light cameras. I would also like to explore the feasibility of synchronized lights on streets like Somerville Ave and Highland. I support smart strategies using evidence-based approaches to make it safer for all of us to get around Somerville. Following the lead of Nick Hancock and his Litter Crew, who volunteered their time to clean up Davis Square. I propose funding a maintenance jobs program that offers day-to-day employment for people in need of work to clean and care for public spaces, like Davis Square, for an immediate positive impact on our neighborhoods. (Similar to the successfully clean-up programs deployed in San Diego, New York City, Portland, New Jersey, etc.) As Councilor At-Large, I would push for a pilot bike patrol program in high-traffic, pedestrian-focused neighborhoods to help to raise the visibility of the police department and enhance their ability to connect with the community in keeping with Somerville's Vision for becoming more bicycle-friendly.

Commercial development had been robust in Somerville but with the economic slowdown commercial development and housing developments have ceased. In spite of this slowdown the City Council recently voted to increase linkage fees even though Somerville already had the highest fees including permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages in the State. How are you going to encourage developers to build, rather than go to other cities with lower linkage, fees, permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages? What incentives would you offer?

Having worked with developers, I know they hate delays and regulations that are inconsistent and unclear, not so much fees. When I interviewed contractors to build a house in Somerville, pretty much everyone complained about the process in this city. I'm a champion of process

improvement and optimization. I want to make building in Somerville to run as smoothly and efficiently as possible. Two of the most powerful incentives for developers are a clear path to building and a solid opportunity to turn a profit. We need to make Somerville a place where developers can count on partnership and shared vision for success. We can be progressive and pro-growth at the same time. As City Councilor At-Large, my focus is to streamline the permitting process and provide better coordination between departments. I will push for creating a City Project Coordinator to provide a single point of contact and act as a facilitator for small and mid-sized developers. This alone could enable developers to avoid months of back-and-forth. I would also push to further expedite permitting for green features, affordable projects and those with community space. Somerville's proximity to Boston and Cambridge along with its public transportation and walkability scores make it ideal for investor value and long-term profitability. As Councilor At-Large, I would push for a pilot program that mirrors Boston's "Compact Living Policy" that allows developers to build smaller units without requiring parking spaces for property adjacent to the T. If developers know they can rent or sell units quickly at a profit, they'll pay higher fees.

There is approximately 3 million square feet of life science space that is unoccupied in the city. What are your strategies for filling empty lab spaces?

Somerville needs to be competitive for life sciences. Streamlining the permitting process can help, whether it's permitting for modifications for lab equipment and installations, or zoning that allows mixed lab/office/residential use. I will push for partnerships with Harvard, MIT and Tufts as well as organizations like Cambridge Innovation Center, but the market has changed and requires a shift in paradigm. Nearly a third of lab space in Greater Boston is vacant. According to the Boston Business Journal earlier this month, "empty lab buildings around Boston are a testament to the biotech industry's boom and bust." In June, Boston.com reported that the development firm Bulfinch is changing up its plans for the site of Needham's former Ford dealership, exploring a pivot to a mixed-use project with hundreds of housing units instead of an office and laboratory complex. As City Councilor at large, I will push for pilot programs to test solutions that include converting proposed lab space into something the community needs, like ground-floor retail and housing. The key is recognizing that not every lab building needs to stay a lab building forever. For targeted and innovative solutions, we need to access the data behind what's working and what's not.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: The process was done with no public input during the Fourth of July week. Do you feel this was transparent? Would you have done things differently?

I do not feel the process behind the Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment was as open or inclusive as it should have been. Good policy requires good process. We can't build trust if we making housing decisions while people are at home barbecuing instead of attending City Council meetings. If I had been on the City Council, I would have worked for a more transparent and inclusive approach. I want to ensure homeowners, renters, advocates, and housing experts are invited to participate. That means: 1. Public listening sessions 2. Publishing plain-language summaries, and 3. Including diverse perspectives If I'm elected to the City Council, I'll fight to restore and strengthen transparency because it's not just about process, it's about trust.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: If the City has a goal to make housing more affordable, how does making development take longer and have more risk by doubling the tenant relocation payments and the condo conversion waiting period? Do you agree that condo ownership is a way for first time home buyers to get into Somerville?

Making development take longer and take on more risk with a longer conversion waiting period seems counter intuitive to a goal to make housing more affordable. I do agree that for many, condo ownership is a way for first time home owners to get into Somerville.

How will you ensure that changes to parking, bike lanes, or public transit projects support—not harm—small business foot traffic and customer access?

To ensure transportation projects support small businesses rather than harm them, we need a collaborative, transparent and proven approach to city planning and transportation projects. The city should be working with and listening to businesses. If I'm elected, I'll push to: 1. Involve small businesses early in the process. That means listening and learning through surveys and one-on-ones. Business owners need to be included on advisory committees to have a say in how construction should be implemented to minimize disruption. (Perhaps by avoiding weekends or peak times during the day.) 2. Mitigate construction issues. Provide clear signage that businesses are still open. Supplement with temporary lots to ensure accessibility. Partner with business organizations to simultaneously market the businesses, the community and the improvement efforts of the city. 3. Implement proven "best of breed" solutions. Prioritize wide, walkable sidewalks protected from construction and loading zones/short-term parking near entrances. Check in regularly with businesses owners to learn what is working and adjust what's not. I believe business owners are not anti-bike lane or anti-transit, they're pro-customer access. A bike lane that brings more customers is great. A bike lane that makes it impossible for elderly customers to visit is a problem we need to solve. The best transportation initiatives make it easier for everyone to get to where they're going, including our amazing small local businesses.

Some people and businesses in our community say that we have parking issues. How would you mitigate those concerns or change the situation? On recent changes to streets in Somerville would you require after say 6 months of completing a street project a look back with meetings of the people and businesses in the area to see if these changes solved the problem or created more problem?

Parking is extremely important to me because it's not just about where you can leave your car, it's about being able to access the things you need. Like so many projects, follow-up needs to be done to make data-driven decisions in the future by learning from successes and making adjustments for improvements going forward. As Councilor At Large, I will push for neighborhood parking studies to understand current usage and better enforcement of existing rules. I'm not talking about expired meters here. I'm talking about the blatant disregard of bike lanes by inconsiderate drivers and delivery vehicles. I will also focus on improving public transit by getting shuttle service running in a loop from Assembly Square to Somerville Ave and reopen talks with the T for micro-transit on the steep Somerville hills that are difficult for the 40-foot buses. Like

any workplace or sports event, after-action reviews are critical. We need to assess what worked and what didn't. That means: 1. Compiling feedback from residents and small businesses 2. Reporting and analyzing costs and impact. 3. A clear path to make adjustments to future projects based on the data collected. I believe we can make changes that are smart, cost-effective and responsible, but only if we stay connected to the people who live and work here.

Why is the city significantly adding numerous traffic calming measures throughout various neighborhoods without input from all residents, businesses and religious institutions? What we are hearing is the city conducts listening sessions but are not hearing what is being said. How would you change that?

Traffic calming should calm traffic, not upset neighbors. I believe the best solutions come from the people who live and work on the streets. Residents, local businesses and religious institutions absolutely should be included. I recently signed a petition for a counterproposal for Lexington Ave that was put together because community members felt they were not included in the execution of what is for them a sub-optimal traffic calming measure. Engineering is a big part of the solution, but so is listening. If I'm elected, I'll push for more transparency, clearer communication and collaboration. It's frustrating when changes are proposed without hearing from the people who will be affected most. As Councilor At Large, I will advocate for: • Neighborhood involvement/consultation for traffic calming and street redesigns, especially near parks, schools and vulnerable pedestrian areas. • Improved communication from city departments with clear updates on why particular designs are chosen and why alternatives are ruled out. • Support for projects like the improvements you're proposing that can be tested and refined. • Making it easier for residents to engage, not just react, in building and maintaining infrastructure because you shouldn't have to start a petition to be heard. City government should act as a partner, not a distant planner. Together we can make our streets safer and our process fairer.

What will you do in your elected role to ensure that everyone including businesses and religious institutions in Somerville have equal access to all City services, resources, programs, and meetings? How will transparency play a role?

Everyone in Somerville should feel seen, heard, and supported — regardless of their age, income, language, ability, or housing status. But too often, important information and services don't reach the very people who need them most. If elected, I will work to change that! Here's how I'll help ensure equal access: 1. Proactive Multilingual Outreach. Somerville is beautifully diverse, but City Hall often communicates in just one language. I'll push for citywide communications, including announcements, public meetings, and key documents to be consistently translated and accessible in the top languages spoken by our residents. 2. Flexible Meeting Formats. Not everyone can attend a 6:00 p.m. meeting in person. I'll advocate for hybrid options, recordings, and meeting materials shared in advance — so more residents can participate on their own time and terms. 3. Dedicated Liaisons for Vulnerable Groups. I believe City departments should include trained liaisons for our immigrant communities, elders, people with disabilities, and those experiencing housing instability. These liaisons can guide people through city services, just as a caseworker would. 4. User-Friendly Platforms. I'll champion improvements to the city website and

digital platforms — making it easier to find services, apply for permits, or attend virtual events without technical hurdles. When information is hard to access, it's the same as being left out. I believe that transparency isn't just about publishing data or livestreaming meetings — it's about building trust by sharing the why behind decisions, not just the what. I'll work to ensure that decisions aren't made behind closed doors and that public input isn't just collected, but clearly reflected in the city's actions. Access and transparency go hand in hand. Together, they form the foundation of a government that truly works for everyone. And that's the kind of Somerville I'm committed to helping build.

Currently city meetings (virtual) do not have participation features such as raise your hand button, chat features and restrict participants visibility to see who is in the meeting. Do you feel this is open and transparent? Please explain your reasoning. Also, as a City Councilor, would you require that all city meetings including all city council committee and board meetings be held in public with a virtual component and that all elected officials be required to attend in person all meetings in public?

The current virtual meeting setup is the bare minimum, not the gold standard. If we're going to ask people to participate in democracy, we need to give them the tools that actually enable participation. Current System Problems • No "raise hand" feature - means people can't signal they want to speak • No chat function - eliminates real-time questions and clarifications • Limited participant visibility - makes it feel like speaking into the void • Poor audio quality - makes it hard to follow complex discussions • No breakout room capability - for working group sessions My Technology Requirements • Full-featured virtual platforms- with raise hand, chat, polling, and screen sharing • Professional audio/video equipment- in council chambers for clear broadcast • Technical support staff - available during all meetings • Multiple device compatibility - works on phones, tablets, and computers Enhanced Participation Features • Real-time polling- for community input on issues • Anonymous question submission- for sensitive topics • Translation services - available in multiple languages • Screen reader compatibility- for visually impaired participants • Mobile accessibility- for people without computer access In-Person Attendance Requirements I believe all elected officials should attend meetings in person unless they have a medical or family emergency. Virtual options are for community participation, not for elected representatives to phone it in. Required Meeting Standards • All council meetings - held in public with virtual component • All committee meetings - open to public participation • All board and commission meetings - with remote access • Emergency meetings - still require community notification and access • Work sessions - open to public observation even if not public comment If we expect residents to engage with city government, we need to make that engagement meaningful and accessible. Half-measures on technology just create half-engaged communities.

What would you like to see from local associations in terms of working positively and proactively with you and your office? How can organizations like the Somerville Chamber of Commerce be an asset to the new City Councilor?

At the end of the day, I believe in local government that listens and collaborates. I see organizations like the Somerville Chamber of Commerce as teammates in building a city that's vibrant, equitable, and responsive to those who live and work here. Somerville is at its best when

we're working together in partnership. As a City Councilor At-Large, I would welcome and encourage active, ongoing collaboration with local associations, neighborhood groups, business networks, and advocacy organizations. As City Councilor At Large, I will focus on 1. Open Lines of Communication. Let me know what's working and what's not. Let's talk early, before frustrations mount or decisions are made in a vacuum. 2. Shared Goals, Shared Solutions - Whether it's streamlining permitting, activating vacant storefronts, or improving parking and signage during construction. I know these groups can help shape practical, equitable solutions. 3. Working Together To Create A Better Somerville – I would encourage all associations to share ideas and create pilot programs and work together on their execution. Local associations bring an expertise and on-the -ground insight that no one can see from behind a desk.

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Candidate Name

Wilfred N. Mbah

What are your top three priorities for the city as a City Councilor?

1. Sustained growth of the housing stock in total and its portion of affordable units – Somerville is one of the cities in Massachusetts that has accomplished growth in its housing stock and in affordable units. This has been done with a combination of (i) zoning and regulatory mechanisms, (ii) contribution of public resources alongside private investment, and (iii) programs of assistance to low-income households. Given the expected limitations of economic activity and investment in the next few years, the city must now explore possible changes in the details and processes of zoning, planning and permitting to minimize delay and costs, and seek out new sources of revenue to keep up the momentum of housing investment and assistance. 2. Environmental protection, preparing for the impacts of climate change and carrying forward the transition to fossil-fuel free energy -- Somerville has kept current with trends in planning and environmental regulation, most recently in adopting the revised state Building Code ("Stretch" Code) to incorporate fossil free energy systems in new construction and in retrofitting older buildings. We have adopted local laws and plans for sustainable resources use and eco-friendly landscape design. We are carrying forward major improvements of our sewers and storm drainage systems. We expect to begin a pilot program of composting. The next stages of our environmental activity will require careful oversight by the City Council to insure that all of these policies and plans are implemented with the best and most cost-efficient methods. We must track progress and encourage residents, businesses and interest groups to keep us aware of the outcomes and impacts. 3. Public safety and a welcoming community -- We have defined the policies and goals of public safety broadly to include reforms of policing, public health, and the regulation of streets, sidewalks and public spaces. We have adopted the principles of un-armed response to emergencies and civilian oversight of policing, and aspire to be a Sanctuary City that welcomes, protects and assists its immigrant population. We have committed to provide effective social assistance to the unhoused, senior citizens, people with disability and young people. The challenge now is to move forward these programs and methods and insure that they function routinely, effectively and equitably. Again, for the City Council the main responsibility will be to exercise oversight and be ready to explore any opportunities for funding, regional cooperation, and working partnerships with institutions and private entities to accomplish our goals.

What would you as a city councilor put forward to improve safety, cleanliness, and walkability in business districts? In Davis Square what measures would you take to ensure safety for all business and residents?

We have made a good start with some of the programs of neighborhood, commercial zone and commercial corridor improvement programs and with street and sidewalk redesign. There is need to both continue with these initiatives already under and to carefully monitor their outcomes in

order to understand what is working well and where changes may best be made. I have supported the policies put into place by Police Chief Benford, since his appointment last year, which have been designed to balance public safety with compassionate care for our unhoused neighbors and people suffering from drug abuse. The Chief has worked to increase police presence in the square and has directed officers to intervene more frequently and decisively against drug dealing and violations of public order. At the same time, the Council has supported parallel efforts by the Housing Stability Department and Public Health to increase social services and improve outreach to identify people in need and connect them to services. The work is not progressing as quickly as anyone would want, given limitations of resources and some pushback to the expansion of homeless shelter improvements and program methods. Nevertheless, I believe that the direction and approaches underway are the best responses.

Commercial development had been robust in Somerville but with the economic slowdown commercial development and housing developments have ceased. In spite of this slowdown the City Council recently voted to increase linkage fees even though Somerville already had the highest fees including permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages in the State. How are you going to encourage developers to build, rather than go to other cities with lower linkage, fees, permit fees and inclusionary housing percentages? What incentives would you offer?

While it may be necessary to re-consider the level of linkage fees or inclusionary requirements, it would be better to look for savings and efficiency gains through simplifying the processes of permitting and zoning/planning approvals. Most studies of the impacts of regulations on development feasibility find that the strongest inhibiting factors are uncertainty -- open-ended timing and unpredictable requirements and outcomes. The level of regulatory fees or taxes may be bothersome but, so long as they are fully predictable, they can be worked in at the start and not hinder a project's momentum. We should be working to make our requirements of linkages, mitigations and protective conditions automatic and uniformly applicable, allowing most standard building types to proceed by right under the zoning. Complex, discretionary and time-consuming incentives such as bonuses as well as visionary master plan processes can be helpful for a few large projects but, realistically, in an urban region like Boston, the development industry and real estate market routinely deliver standard buildings of reasonable quality. There is little evidence that the towns and cities with more complex regulations and discretionary processes achieve superior results.

There is approximately 3 million square feet of life science space that is unoccupied in the city. What are your strategies for filling empty lab spaces?

Two strategies need to be explored. First, it may be best to trust in the market cycle and simply wait the six or seven years for recovery to gain momentum. This may require some adjustments to our regulations to allow empty space to be protected for safety and minimize costs and taxes (to help avoid pushing owners into bankruptcy). We also should look carefully at our zoning, planning and permitting regulations to insure that, once the market begins to revive and building owners come forward with interior outfitting and occupancy plans, these will be able to move quickly and directly. Second, we might try a more aggressive strategy of regulatory adjustments

to allow buildings, constructed for bio-technology, to retrofit for other technologies (such as the “tough tech” that has been enthusiastically promoted as Somerville’s next future vision). A careful discussion with the companies might show that there are some tech enterprises, now in “incubator” and “accelerator” stages, which expect in the near term to move to the next stage, when they will need larger production and research/prototype space. Perhaps the city can help in matching these potential tenants with the vacant building owners. We might then offer to quickly adjust any regulatory/permit barriers and find a few dollars in the stabilization accounts to help push a deal along. What we should avoid doing is jumping on a bandwagon of abstract ideas that would envision wholesale re-classifications of the vacant spaces or a set of punitive measures such as taxes on space kept vacant or forced occupancy of spaces to money-losing entities or pop-ups. Fake “vibrancy” on a street front rarely fools anyone and does not induce the market of real investment and trade/services to occupy a space until the market itself is ready.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: The process was done with no public input during the Fourth of July week. Do you feel this was transparent? Would you have done things differently?

The chronology of consideration of this item shows that it was first introduced by the Mayor to the City Council with full public notice on June 12, 2025 and set for discussion at the Legislative Affairs Committee on July 1, 2025. The committee agreement to the changes sent the item forward to the full City Council on July 10, 2025. However, because the Council members and Mayor had received feedback in the interim, they did not vote and laid over a revised version of the text to August 8, 2025. The fact that the legislative deliberations straddled the holiday does not, in my opinion, discredit the procedure as lacking transparency. Indeed, as was clear from the remarks of Council members on the record that they had received comment from both opponents and proponents of the changes. To accommodate more close scrutiny in light of this commentary, they added a month more to the time period and did not vote as a full Council until August 28, 2025.

The Condo Conversion Ordinance Amendment: If the City has a goal to make housing more affordable, how does making development take longer and have more risk by doubling the tenant relocation payments and the condo conversion waiting period? Do you agree that condo ownership is a way for first time home buyers to get into Somerville?

Condo ownership is indeed one of the ways that enable home purchases by Somerville residents and newcomers to the city. But it operates alongside the variety of other home purchase and home rental options and, because of costs and income variability, the condo option is suitable for a limited group of residents in our city-wide demographic and socio-economic structure. The provisions of the Condo Conversion Ordinance have always had the intent of balancing the needs for (i) investment in renewal of our housing stock; (ii) protection of future condo buyers; and (iii) the needs of existing tenants, facing displacement. The imposition of fees, notice requirements and waiting time are the tools of regulation that the city has used for many years as the ways to calibrate this balance among the interests. I believe that our recent decisions, amending this Ordinance, have struck the proper balance, given the conditions of the city’s economy and the needs of its citizens as a whole.

How will you ensure that changes to parking, bike lanes, or public transit projects support—not harm—small business foot traffic and customer access?

Our methodologies of traffic management and street/sidewalk planning and capital investment now incorporate a variety of procedures of notices, meetings and hearings with community members and abutting owners and tenants, circulation of draft street improvement plans, on-line surveys, etc. In theory, these procedures insure that no interested parties are left out and no possible negative impacts get overlooked and un-mitigated. In reality, these procedures result in records that are chock-full of data and projections, and the statements of public preferences for design and functions. Ideally, these procedures and the records they produce give us the ability to learn lessons by coming back to each project and site when work is done and then monitor and test the results. Is it working? Did we make mistakes? Was some factor overlooked? Have some calculations proven in error? It is the responsibility of the City Council to use its powers of oversight to insure that this learning from experience takes place. It is entirely appropriate for us to request the technical agencies to re-visit any streets and sidewalks that got re-built and re-purposed, to make later adjustments and corrections. We are ready to receive and look carefully at any petition or request from a resident or business

Some people and businesses in our community say that we have parking issues. How would you mitigate those concerns or change the situation? On recent changes to streets in Somerville would you require after say 6 months of completing a street project a look back with meetings of the people and businesses in the area to see if these changes solved the problem or created more problem?

See below for an elaborate response

Why is the city significantly adding numerous traffic calming measures throughout various neighborhoods without input from all residents, businesses and religious institutions?

What we are hearing is the city conducts listening sessions but are not hearing what is being said. How would you change that?

See below for an elaborate response

What will you do in your elected role to ensure that everyone including businesses and religious institutions in Somerville have equal access to all City services, resources, programs, and meetings? How will transparency play a role?

See below for an elaborate response

Currently city meetings (virtual) do not have participation features such as raise your hand button, chat features and restrict participants visibility to see who is in the meeting. Do you feel this is open and transparent? Please explain your reasoning. Also, as a City Councilor, would you require that all city meetings including all city council committee and board meetings be held in public with a virtual component and that all elected officials be required to attend in person all meetings in public?

These questions above all raise the same issue of how well our methods of planning, permit review, and public participation are working to achieve the goals of full citizen engagement and

thorough discussion of issues. As stated above, our methods are intended to insure that all “voices” are heard on all issues. Three trends have influenced our choice of methods in recent years. First, the trend of technology combined with the second trend of social distancing. Almost every household linked in to social media services – with the trend of social distancing since COVID has made it possible for the city to conduct a large part of its operations virtually rather than in person. This has the advantages of allowing more citizens/residents and representatives of businesses and interest groups to take part by the convenient method of virtual meetings. But it has had the corollary result of eliminating many face-to-face meetings and hearings, which disadvantages some people who are more comfortable and effective with this format. The formalities of virtual meetings also tends to dampen spontaneity and, when coupled with a zealous enforcement of the open meetings rules, it tends to reduce the content of discussions to rote and rehearsed declarations rather than the give-and-take of normal conversation. Third, a political trend toward (or back to) direct democracy. At the foundational level of the City Charter and Massachusetts Municipal Law, Somerville moved many years ago from a “town meeting” system to representative democracy and professional agency management. The new communications technologies and various theories of citizen engagement and empowerment, have encouraged the boards and agencies to use more methods of citizen surveys, straw polls, and “empowered” quasi-official committees or councils. In conjunction with strict interpretations of open meetings and open records laws, this often has the effect of turning our regulatory boards and commissions into mediators of public opinion, rather than decision-makers, acting on a full record of technical data, city staff and professional opinions.