



2025 Municipal Candidate Questionnaire

Name: Katjana Ballantyne

Office Sought: reelect Mayor of Somerville

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(A) Your Candidacy

1. What would be your top three priorities if elected to serve?

I am committed to continuing our progress and addressing the pressing needs of our community. Over the next two years, my administration will focus on three key priorities that I believe are essential for a thriving and equitable Somerville.

- Expanding Affordable Housing: I am committed to ensuring housing stability and fighting displacement in Somerville.
- Investing in People, Building Equity, and Inclusion: This priority encompasses a wide range of initiatives focused on supporting residents across all generations, including strengthening schools, advancing ADA accessibility, expanding workforce development, delivering strong fiscal management, investing in the workforce with pay equity, fair wages and benefits, investing in local infrastructure, addressing homelessness, promoting inclusive governance, and fostering environmental stewardship.
- Addressing Climate Change and Investing in Environmental Stewardship: I am a strong proponent of climate action, striving to make Somerville a leader in sustainability and green initiatives.

My agenda also stresses the importance of an inclusive and open government.

2. What qualifies you to hold this office?

I have served 4 years, as mayor, eight years on the City Council and was twice elected City Council President. I have tri-sector leadership experience as a business executive, non-profit CEO, and as a community organizer. I have proven leadership experience in the private, non-profit and government sectors, which qualify me uniquely to understand and align the incentives and strengths of all stakeholders to solve complex problems. My leadership experience in business and local government has taught me to value inclusive leadership, which creates buy-in, shared purpose, enthusiasm, and better results. Inclusive leadership gets results.

In the non-profit sector I have over 2 decades of work in affordable housing creation, workforce development and economic development at JPND, Alternatives for Community Environment, and leading a violence prevention organization for at risk youth.

My financial leadership and reforms in City Hall earned Somerville her first triple A bond rating, which was just renewed for the third year in a row. This is a first in Somerville history. I've reduced our cost to borrow, so I've been able to tackle many large infrastructure projects that are long overdue. I added financial staff to some of the largest departments to control costs, and developed a "free cash policy" to build up reserves.

My most recent budget protects core services—education & youth services, senior and veterans' services, trash & recycling pickup, libraries, —while also delivering bold action on affordability, on rebuilding our aging infrastructure, on climate, increasing parks and green spaces, and escalating my war on rats.

3. What is the one policy you've seen pioneered in another city that you'd most like to adopt locally?

Congestion pricing for traffic and pollution reduction involves charging drivers a fee to enter designated zones, typically city centers, during peak hours. The goal is to reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, and **encourage the use of public transportation**. Revenues generated can then be invested in improving public transit. Cities like London, Stockholm, Singapore, and, most recently, **New York City**, have successfully implemented congestion pricing. These cities have observed reductions in traffic volume and improved public transit efficiency. If designed, a congestion pricing scheme could help ease traffic gridlock, reduce air pollution, and generate revenue for crucial

investments in public transportation infrastructure, making our city more livable and sustainable.

(B) Open-Ended Policy Questions

1. Given state law, municipalities in Massachusetts are limited in their taxing power. What opportunities do you see for the city to raise revenue to support essential city services?

For the immediate future Somerville needs to be afforded the right from the state to gain flexibility “The Municipal Empowerment Act” which is designed to provide local governments with greater freedoms and flexibilities such as increases to the local meals and lodging tax ceilings, a new Motor Vehicle Excise surcharge local option that can benefit every city and town in the Commonwealth.

For our future my administration has planned the underutilized areas of Somerville, such as; Brickbottom, SomerNova, and portions of Middlesex Ave/Assembly Sq. into mixed use, transit oriented design. For the city these neighborhoods will yield \$255M in community benefits into the Affordable Housing Trust Fund to create more affordable housing, and Jobs Trust Fund to train residents for future jobs.

2. What are your top priorities for ensuring that all students in your city can receive a high-quality public education?

As both a parent of two daughters educated in Somerville schools and as Mayor I have made education one of our top priorities. Rather than impose cuts as has happened in other communities, over the past three years I’ve increased the school budget. At the heart of my most recent FY26 budget is a 7.4% increase in school funding, continuing a three-year pattern of growth that totals a 34% rise in school funding since I took office. Last year I added more than 35 full-time positions to Somerville Public Schools.

I have also invested heavily in expanded after-school programs and new youth opportunities, and started a school year expansion of the Mayor’s Summer Jobs Program.

Not all students start out with the same resources or building blocks - and we see persistent disparities along racial and socioeconomic lines.

The Superintendent has shared that SPS has begun a multi-year curricular rollout where we are selecting and implementing high quality instructional materials across grade levels and subject areas. High quality Instructional Materials (HQIM) refers to materials aligned to standards, with clear learning objectives, that are evidenced-based.

According to the SPS administration they feel providing HQIM is the first step in closing the learning gap. Knowing that all children learn at different levels but with HQIM in place and with an equity basis there will be progress. This multi year roll out, collecting data and drilling down to sub-categories will help refine and develop strategies to make progress.

Looking to the future, investing in youth doesn't stop at the classroom. My administration has expanded after-school programs and new youth opportunities. We've hired more students than ever, over 25% increase to the Mayor's Summer Jobs Program, and have now started a school year jobs expansion.

In addition, I believe that our model for education should be expansive. Just as we educate the whole child in intellectual, emotional, social and physical growth, our schools should be part of their broader community. I am working to enhance adult education and forge partnerships with businesses, universities, and organizations. With this work, we can better plan for today's students and for tomorrow's learning needs.

Finally, I want to prioritize the needs of the students and families who need our community's support the most. From our trans and LGBTQIA+ youth to undocumented students and families, to students who worry that they'll be discriminated against just for being who they are. I plan to continue to fight for their rights and expand our services to meet their needs.

3. What can your city do to help protect immigrant communities under attack from ICE and ensure genuine community safety?

I did not wait for the inauguration to support our immigrant community. Immediately following the November 2024 election I invested in resources and information for our residents.. We started training residents in "Know Your Rights trainings and helping mixed status families to fill our guardianship papers, and added legal resources.

After Trump issued an Executive Order to go after Sanctuary Cities, then I sued the Trump administration for violating the Constitution. It is unconstitutional

to claw back federal funds, which Congress has granted, and it is unconstitutional to use our local police for immigration efforts, mass deportation efforts.

To resist the current attack on our Somerville values, to protect the constitutional rights of our neighbors, and to resist the federal threats of economic extortion, I chose to stand for the constitution and the rule of law.... and I am suing the Trump Administration. Somerville follows all state and federal laws. We will not succumb to bullying tactics that threaten the health and safety of our residents. The federal administration must honor the Constitution and follow the law. This is not something we should have to fight for in court but, sadly, it is what I am stepping up to do, because our shared values demand it.

We have also provided [resources](#) for people to be informed of their rights and opportunities, made available in several languages.

4. What are your top three policy priorities for making your city climate-resilient, and how would you ensure that equity is at the center of any such efforts?

<https://katjana.org/en/combating-climate-change-issues>
<https://katjana.org/en/leadership/combating-climate-change>

I initiated and implemented an historic, nationally acclaimed first ever Pollinator Action Plan for an urban ecosystem, expanding our environmental stewardship to the smallest of creatures, like butterflies and honeybees.

We opened or expanded four public green spaces and broke ground on the Dilboy Athletic Auxiliary Fields and a new pocket park at 217 Somerville Ave, planting more than 1,300 new trees, following our native species ordinance, (which I proposed as a councilor). I raised our climate goals from targeting just Net Zero—to be Carbon Negative by 2050.

As for equity, that has been one of the hallmarks of my administration. We celebrate our diversity by supporting immigrant & LGBTQ+ rights and we have expanded our Language Justice and Access staffing to ensure language is not a barrier to accessing City services and civic life. And we have passed historic union contracts for pay equity, which for some contracts is a first in 70 years

5. What steps would you take to reduce dependence on cars and better facilitate the ability of city residents to safely get around by walking, biking, or public transit?

We have been creating safe, accessible, complete streets that prioritize residents and local businesses so they can move around Somerville safely instead of prioritizing commuters who are just driving through. In addition we have been rebuilding streets to accommodate multiple transportation modes including bus and bike lanes, shared curbs, traffic calming, and hands-free pedestrian signals. These features make moving around Somerville safer and more efficient for everyone, including children, mature adults, and people with disabilities. My focus on transportation has earned Somerville's ranking as one of America's Top Eco-Friendly Cities for Car-Free Transit, by Local Logic and Realtor.com, for walking, biking, and commuting without a car.

I also walk the talk. Seventeen years ago, my family of four intentionally decided to not own a car. We walk, bike, and public transit. We use car share as a last resort.

6. What policies will you advocate for to ensure that your city can be a place that is affordable for residents to live at any stage of life?

I have added 974 new affordable housing units to the development pipeline. I distributed over \$9 million in rental assistance and housing vouchers to help families stay in Somerville. My administration has completed the Clarendon Hill redevelopment Apartments, 168 new, affordable family homes. These will be efficient and fossil fuel free.

- Increased the Council on Aging's capacity, programming, and supports for both seniors and caregivers
- Is suing the Trump administration to preserve funding for Seniors' benefits
- Taking on senior homelessness with our Older Adults Bridge Program. The Bridge program allows us to provide financial and social services to keep low-income seniors in their homes while they transition to subsidized housing
- Supports lifelong learning and aging in place, we increased the Council on Aging's capacity, programming, and supports for both seniors and caregivers
- Presents resources for health care, housing, and social enrichment for our seniors, to make Somerville a state and national model of an age-friendly, urban environment

7. [If relevant] How would you assess your city's MBTA Communities Act rezoning efforts so far?

Somerville is the most densely populated city in Massachusetts. We are already in full compliance with regard to zoning near bus and subway routes. And I fully support the intent of this legislation.

8. What strategies would you employ to resist federal overreach from the Trump Administration while protecting critical services and funding for residents?

As noted above I have filed suit against the Trump Administration and in July sought a preliminary injunction. Somerville has a proud history as a sanctuary city and was initially on the Department of Homeland Security's list of targeted cities. It was removed in its most recent iteration. As a leader of a sanctuary city, a naturalized citizen I will not let my community be bullied into going back on our values.

9. How would you model transparency and accountability if elected?

Communications & Community engagement

We've made it easy for anyone wanting to keep up with the actions of the Somerville city government. We provide general and specialized in 20 newsletters in English and plus 5 languages. I also host 20 community meetings, plus with various cultural groups and senior communities monthly throughout the city on a regular basis.

Data:

Emphasis on Data and Open Data Portal: The city of Somerville has an Open Data Portal that provides public access to various datasets including public safety data (e.g., crime reports, traffic citations), health and wellbeing, transportation, and demographics. This portal aligns with the city's commitment to transparency by sharing data with the community.

Multiple engagement channels In Somerville employs a diverse range of methods to reach residents and solicit their input, including:

- Community meetings
- Surveys
- Task forces and listening sessions
- Coffee hours and staff availability at events
- Email updates
- The 311 Constituent Service Center
- Dedicated efforts by the city's multilingual Equity Outreach Team
- Collaborating with community partners
- Beyond traditional outreach, Somerville leverages eGovernment technologies like online forums ([Link: SomerVoice (.gov) <https://voice.somervillema.gov/learn-about-somervoice>]), social media, and video streaming to expand access to information and facilitate resident participation.

Participatory budgeting Somerville empowers residents to directly influence how public funds are spent.

(C) Yes/No Policy Questions

1. Do you oppose the expansion of charter schools? **YES**
2. Do you support the creation of an unarmed, community-based emergency response program, separate from the Police Department, to respond to mental and behavioral health crises? **YES**
3. If your community has not already, do you support adopting the new specialized stretch code, which would require new construction and major renovations to be built to a very high-efficiency standard with all-electric (as opposed to fossil fuel) heating and cooling systems? **YES Already have**
4. Do you support fare-free public transit? **YES**
5. Do you support the expansion of the network of permanent, protected bike lanes in your city? **YES**
6. Would you support a home rule petition to establish a small transfer fee on high-end real estate transactions to create dedicated funding for affordable housing production and preservation? **YES I have already submitted a Home Rule Petition to do this in 2018, and continue to resubmit with every new term.**
7. Would you support a home rule petition to enable the city to stabilize rents? **YES I did as a City Councilor, and was the first action as Mayor to give testimony, and recently on July 28, 2025 spoke at the State House for the rally for rent stabilization.**
8. According to the American Library Association, in 2022 there were at least 45 attempts to restrict access to books in MA schools, disproportionately books that speak to the experiences of LGBTQ students and students of color. Would you oppose such book-banning efforts if they occurred in your city? **YES, and I have already voiced my concern on this publicly in my speaking remarks.**

(D) Additional Comments

(Use this space to make any final comments you deem important for progressive voters assessing your candidacy.)

Although we face uncertain times, I see both challenges and opportunities. I am optimistic because we are an excellent team that includes our residents, our talented, local activists, local businesses, local labor unions, and our coalition of elected state and federal officials. We all know from experience that we can accomplish our goals with the right leadership, and by working together to keep making Somerville a city where we can all thrive together.