



## 2025 Municipal Candidate Questionnaire

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### (A) Your Candidacy

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

- a. **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 a steady growth in its housing stock and in units, fixed or subsidized at affordable rents and prices. This is the result of a combination of Zoning mechanisms and regulations, the investment of public resources in housing development and our programs of assistance to low-income households.

Given the regional nature of the housing affordability problem, however, our efforts will continue to fall short of needs and, in the next few years of likely regional economic downturn, keeping the momentum of activity in Somerville may prove difficult. Therefore, the Council must continue to explore all possible opportunities to make more changes in the details of zoning and planning, to find more sources of grant revenue and to direct any local tax surplus funds to housing subsidy.

- b. **Environmental protection, preparing for the impacts of climate change, and carrying forward the policies of transition to fossil-fuel free energy use** -- Somerville has kept current with the trends in planning and environmental regulation. We are among the first Massachusetts cities that have adopted the revised Building Code (the "Stretch" Code), which mandates all electric

energy systems in new construction and provides the blueprint for retrofitting existing older buildings. We have adopted local laws and multi-year plans that require or encourage sustainable resource use and eco-friendly design – including natural water run-off drainage methods; city-sponsored composting; prohibition on use of plastic packaging and utensils by local food services; and others. We have underway a multi-year infrastructure project, replacing our obsolete combined sewer system to a separate sewage and storm drainage system.

The next stages of our environmental activity will require careful oversight to insure that all the legal mandates and regulations are followed and enforced and that the best methods of construction, landscape, building maintenance, sanitation and waste disposal methods get built into both city-sponsored and privately-initiated programs and projects. We must identify and pursue any opportunities to increase the funding for all of these activities.

**Public safety and a welcoming community** – We have defined the policies and goals of public safety broadly, as a combination of reforms of policing, public health and regulations of streets, sidewalks and public spaces. We have put into local law the principles of un-armed response to emergencies and civilian oversight of police operations, the principles of a Sanctuary City that welcomes, protects and aids its immigrant population, and our commitments to provide effective social assistance to the homeless and to help young people avoid gangs or drugs or petty crime.

Moving from the statements of principle and commitments to putting into place the reformed methods and structures that will deliver protective, emergency and community building services now requires on-going oversight, careful attention to details, advocacy and fair mediation and leadership, to bring together different points of view. This is the work that I and other colleagues have been doing even though the gains sometimes seem slow. I promise to keep up the effort.

## **2. What qualifies you to hold this office?**

I have been representing the people of Somerville as their At-large Council member during three terms of office – 2018-2022 and 2024-2025. Before that time, I became involved in civic affairs because of my experience, being welcomed as an immigrant, becoming a citizen through naturalization, becoming a parent, and working with neighbors in the active community of Somerville. I gradually have gained experience and insights into the workings

of government at both local and state level and have built and I am keeping current a network of working relationships.

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

I have been a strong advocate of the initiative to bring back a system of rent control to Somerville. Although the City Council finalized the text and adopted the Home Rule petition for rent stabilization when I was not sitting in 2023, I have worked with my colleagues and our state legislators during 2024 and into this year to try to get action on the bill on Beacon Hill.

Different methods of rent control and stabilization have been used successfully and unsuccessfully in some states and cities around the US. They remain in force today in several cities in other states and, here in Massachusetts, our neighbor Cambridge had the most recent experience. They kept a working system until the early 1990's when state legislation was adopted to end rent control. Recently, Boston and Brookline have also joined with Somerville in drafting new versions of rent stabilization, and all three proposed Home Rule Acts follow similar methods, providing for annual calculation of a maximum rent increase, based on cost-of-living factors.

**(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?**

In recent years, Somerville has found itself in an enviable position among Massachusetts municipalities, in that our property tax base has increased substantially during the period of regional economic growth. During the same years, we have been able to put aside substantial funds in reserves and stabilization accounts, which were derived from budget surpluses, grant funding, zoning linkage programs and mitigations/contributions from development projects. This substantial savings will provide us with a cushion of funding to face a few years with slower economic activity, so long as we prudently manage our finances.

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

In the past few years, we have expanded significantly our support services for non-English language students and have emphasized remedial learning and support for mental health well-being in the aftermath of COVID. These efforts will need to be continued even as funding from the COVID emergency grants has come to an end.

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

Somerville has had in place for many years its Sanctuary City policy and, recently, the City Council has reaffirmed our commitments and expanded several of the supporting services. We have strengthened with more funding our program of legal aid for our residents, who need assistance with immigration proceedings and now with protections from threatened arrest or deportation. Our programs of housing stabilization assistance have also provided some immigrant families with help to pay off rent arrears and with legal assistance to avoid eviction. We also began this year our city housing voucher program, and which has enrolled a first group of low-income families with kids in our schools, who could not qualify for federal or state vouchers. Immigrant status is a bar to federal voucher eligibility, and our program can serve these families. Finally, to help protect our residents from irregular and abusive tactics of immigration enforcement, we have put into place clear guidelines for our police and other city services to avoid cooperation with federal enforcement officers in these types of activities.

**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?**

As chair of the City Council Committee on Open Space, Environment and Energy, I have had the responsibility of leading the review of the revised Climate Forward Plan, which we adopted in April 2024. It sets the city's policy goals for each of the broad areas of environmental improvement and resilience to climate change to achieve net-zero carbon emissions from buildings and vehicles by 2045, and to reduce waste, increase recycling and composting, and reduce use of plastics. It details a program of 77 actions of administration, regulation, capital investment and functional improvements that the city should pursue. In all these areas of the Plan, the analysis of solutions and methods has involved careful consideration of how impacts, costs and benefits will be distributed across income groups, social groups and the different neighborhoods of the city.

Among the recommended actions are: public investments in tree-planting and open space improvements in the areas of oldest housing and former

industrial zones, where lower income people are now concentrated. Similarly, in addition to the large-scale projects to retrofit city schools and large-scale buildings with non-fossil fuel heating and cooling systems, the city is taking the initiative to register rental units and assist landlords and tenants to change their systems to high efficiency and non-fossil heat pumps or similar technologies.

**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?**

These goals and a variety of methods have been adopted in the city's Vision Zero Plan (to eliminate traffic accidents and fatalities), its Bicycle Network Plan, and its Mobility Plan (Somerville Vision 2040). These policy documents have committed the city to on-going programs of street re-design for traffic calming and the provision of safe biking and walking lanes.

We are making significant progress, since the opening of the five new Green Line Extension T-stations to encourage use of the T by commuters, going and coming to work. We have been adding to our Zoning Ordinance provisions for higher density residential and commercial/workplace development clustered in the T-station zones and with minimum and even no parking requirements, to promote transit use.

As a co-founder of Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets, I have fully supported these activities and will be continuing the practical work of monitoring and oversight to insure that these efforts are being realized and are having the intended results.

**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?**

Somerville has developed a comprehensive set of housing policies aimed at keeping the city affordable for residents at all stages of life. Central to this is its nationally recognized inclusionary zoning ordinance, which requires 20% of units in new developments to be income-restricted, serving households across a wide range of income levels. The city also funds affordability through housing linkage fees on large non-residential projects, directing those revenues to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which finances new affordable rental and ownership opportunities. Additional measures include the Community Preservation Act surcharge, targeted zoning reforms that encourage multi-bedroom family units and live/work artist spaces, and creative funding boosts like allocating \$8.3 million from the Green Line Extension stabilization fund toward affordable housing acquisition.

Somerville also invests in direct resident support to prevent displacement and improve housing stability. The Office of Housing Stability acts as a central resource for tenants, homeowners, and those facing eviction. The city recently

launched a Guaranteed Basic Income pilot, providing \$750 per month to low-income families for a year, offering financial flexibility to meet housing and other needs. Looking forward, Somerville is advocating for new tools like a local real estate transfer tax to curb speculation and tax incentives for landlords who maintain affordable rents. Combined with state mechanisms like Chapter 40B, these policies create a layered approach that addresses both the supply of affordable homes and the stability of existing residents, ensuring the city remains inclusive and livable for families, workers, and seniors alike.

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

Somerville is in compliance with the MBTA

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

Agreed - He frequently used executive orders and personnel changes to sidestep established processes, sidelined independent oversight, and attempted to politicize institutions like the Department of Justice. These moves not only blurred the separation of powers but also set dangerous precedents for expanding presidential authority beyond its intended scope.

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

I would model transparency and accountability through leading by example, practicing integrity in governance, acknowledging mistakes when they occur, and always centering my decisions on the long-term well-being of our community. Ensuring that every major decision, policy proposal, and budget allocation is communicated clearly to residents. Strengthen public trust by maintaining an open-door policy for community concerns and holding myself and city departments to measurable outcomes.

**(C) Yes/No Policy Questions**

1. Do you oppose the expansion of charter schools? **YES As a parent whose two kids are being well-educated in the Somerville school system, I am opposed.**
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 I have consistently supported the**

**City Council actions authorizing the creation of a Civilian Oversight Board for our Police and the creation of an un-armed emergency response team.**

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 I have supported and helped to lead to the actions that have put this code into place in Somerville.**
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 Somerville has already drafted and submitted a home rule petition for this.**
7. Would you support a home rule petition to enable the city to stabilize rents? **YES / NO We have already written, adopted and submitted our Home Rule petition to the state legislature.**
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 / NO My kids are avid readers with a wide variety of interest and curiosity.**

**(D) Additional Comments**

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