
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION:

The City of Somerville's Five-Year Consolidated Plan ("Consolidated Plan") for the time period of April 1, 2008 to March 31st 2013 has been prepared to meet requirements issued by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The Consolidated Plan is a comprehensive analysis of community needs eligible for HUD funding as well as a summary of strategies to address those needs. Its focus is on low- and moderate-income individuals, families, and areas of the city in alignment with the goals of HUD's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnership, and Emergency Shelter Grant programs. The City's Consolidated Plan is designed to serve as a resource for all City Departments, local and regional organizations, and Somerville residents as they plan for the future. In addition, the plan will assist the Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD) as it formulates Annual Action Plans that identify how the HUD funds included in the Consolidated Plan will be spent over the upcoming program year.

The development of the Consolidated Plan was an intensive collaborative planning process begun in the summer of 2007. During the summer months, City staff initiated data analysis of the 2000 census and identified trends relevant to its long-range planning efforts. Over the course of the fall, the City hosted three public hearings (located in East Somerville, Union Square, and West Somerville) where OSPCD staff shared findings from the census data, highlighted accomplishments from the 2003-2007 Consolidated Plan and listened as the community identified additional trends and needs. The City then hosted focus groups in the areas of housing, economic development, transportation, parks, historic preservation, and public services to coordinate efforts with local leaders and stakeholders and develop priorities.

Over the next five years, the City anticipates receiving an estimated \$24.7 million from HUD through the combination of Community Development Block Grants, HOME Funds, and Emergency Shelter Grants. Through the community-driven planning process of public hearings, focus groups, and collaborations with area agencies, the City has established a unified vision for the allocation of these resources over the next five years.

SOMERVILLE: PAST AND PRESENT

Somerville is a city located in Middlesex County, Massachusetts, just two miles north of Boston's financial and commercial districts and 3.5 miles from Logan International Airport. Occupying slightly over 4 square miles, its population of 77,478 (as of the 2000 census) makes Somerville the most densely populated community in New England. The City shares its southern border with Cambridge and the MBTA Red Line connects Davis Square to Cambridge and Boston.

Somerville was first settled in 1630 as a part of Charlestown. When it was established as an independent township in 1842, Somerville was still largely rural. Somerville's web of streets developed at a time when land travel was by horse or on foot encouraging close spacing of residential, retail and business areas. Trolley lines developed in the 1870s and reached their peak capacity in 1917. The introduction of streetcar lines had by far the greatest impact on early residential and commercial development. The population increased six-fold between 1870 and 1915 with almost half of the residential construction taking place between 1890 and 1950 (most of it in the Davis Square, Powder House and West Somerville areas). This intense development and

subdivision pattern resulted in Somerville's exceptionally dense population patterns¹, and left the City with little remaining available land for public parks.

The introduction of the private automobile created a need for expanded capacity on roads leading through Somerville to Boston and the City's rail lines were eventually supplanted by autos and bus service. The Alewife Brook and Fells Parkways, originally conceived in the 1890's as a means for city residents to reach the metropolitan parks, evolved into commuter routes for suburban drivers, greatly diminishing the opportunity for Somerville residents to enjoy the parklands.

During the Early Modern Period (1915-1930), Somerville's industries consolidated rather than expanded and the period's most important enterprises were meatpacking, dairy processing, ice and food distribution, and car assembly. Somerville's location adjacent to Boston and its proximity to rail and road transportation made it an ideal location for distribution facilities. These industries flourished for quite some time. However, during the mid-1980's to the late 1990's, like many U.S. cities, industrial and manufacturing companies left the area to be replaced by service and business uses.

Today, Somerville is a diverse, dense, walkable, community that offers comparatively affordable housing. Given the City's convenient location near numerous educational institutions, including three of the nation's leading institutions of higher learning, Tufts, Harvard, and MIT, it comes as no surprise that college students make up roughly 15% of the population. The city is also home to many recent immigrants. In fact, roughly 14% of all Somerville residents entered the U.S. in 1990 or later. The creative class – designers, artists, architects, software engineers – has become an important aspect of the growing economy in Somerville, as has the new immigrant class, with a strong entrepreneurial vision that produces new retail and service businesses. The enhancement and encouragement of these two groups, as well as the support of the traditional neighborhood districts that they service will all play important roles in the creation and growth of a robust economy for the residents of Somerville in the future.

Several major regional arterials and four regional rail lines also transect Somerville. This infrastructure provides substantial access to Boston from north and east, but the corridors isolate many neighborhoods within Somerville from the rest of the community. Parks and open space in some areas of the city stand separate from their nearest residential neighbors – isolated by heavy rail lines or limited access highways. In other parts of the city, however, significant progress has been made in the effort to reconnect previously isolated neighborhoods and to enhance recreational corridors for the city as a whole.

TRENDS OF THE FUTURE:

The Consolidated Planning process provided an opportunity for comprehensive review of census data and collaboration with the community in order to identify anticipated future trends. Some of these trends are already apparent today and are likely to become even more important in years to come. In order to meet Somerville's evolving needs, these future trends must be acknowledged and incorporated into the long range planning process. They, and the strategies required to fulfill them, have been carefully woven into the Consolidated Plan document.

¹ 29.45 people/acre; 2000 U.S. Census

1. CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

In order for the City to provide high quality services to a rapidly evolving community, a successful consolidated Plan must identify anticipated changes in municipal demographics. Census data can point to some, but by no means all, of these trends: community input is also critical to understanding these trends – and the opportunities and challenges they may present.

The “graying” of the U.S. population is a well-documented national trend. According to the Administration of Aging², as of the year 2000, individuals sixty-five and above represented 12.4% of the population. However, by the year 2030 this group is projected to grow to approximately 20% of the total population. This trend has obvious implications on municipal strategies related to housing, workforce development, and transportation to name a few. Due to the large number of students and young professionals in Somerville, the local demographic trend is not anticipated to be as dramatic as that of the national level. Still, this is an important trend and the City is committed to continue to provide a high level of support and service to our aging population. As the aging population expands, this will likely be reflected in a growth of the disabled community. While the City has always had a sharp focus on issues related to the disabled community, the demand for these services is anticipated to increase.

A well established and growing demographic group in Somerville is the immigrant community. Somerville has long been a gateway community for newcomers to the U.S. In fact, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, 29% of Somerville residents were born in a foreign country, and nearly 36% speak a language other than English. Among these households, it is estimated that more than 50 languages are spoken citywide. This is a tremendous asset to the community and adds to the rich diversity of which Somerville is so justly proud.

2. AFFORDABLE HOUSING / FORECLOSURE PREVENTION

The average price of homes in Somerville peaked in 2005 at \$435,000 and has been on the decline since then. These recent market conditions and a surge in predatory lending practices have contributed to a troubling nationwide trend of increased home foreclosure rates. While Somerville has not seen home foreclosures at rates as high as the rest of the nation, it is not immune to this problem either. The City has seen a rise in the number of requests for Home Rehabilitation Loans, suggesting that some homeowners are choosing to stay in their current homes longer. For others, unmanageable home loans dictate foreclosure as the only option.

At the same time, however, these market conditions have resulted in an increased number of affordable home ownership options, particularly in East Somerville: as some housing prices drop, more homes move into a price range that meets the guidelines of affordable housing. Yet even with this additional affordable housing, the cost of housing in Somerville continues to be a concern. As of the 2000 census, 32% of Somerville households indicated that they expend more than 30% of their income on housing and 15% spend more than 50% of their income on housing. It is clear that supply of affordable housing remains significantly below the demand and is of critical importance to the future of the city.

² Administration on Aging, Department of Health and Human Services; Web Site: <http://www.aoa.gov/prof/Statistics/statistics.asp>

3. TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Today in Davis Square – the site of an existing Red Line rapid transit station and bus node – over 40% of residents travel to work by public transit. This tremendous level of ridership reduces pollution and congestion, promotes an active healthy community, and improves the economic vitality of the surrounding area. Over the next decade, tens of thousands of Somerville residents will experience the opening of a new Green Line light rail or Orange Line rapid transit stop within walking distance of their homes. This transformation will spread these benefits throughout the entire city and change the way that people in Somerville live, work, and play. In addition, it will provide a tremendous opportunity for the City to create vibrant transit oriented developments that will increase ridership, promote healthy lifestyles and add to the city’s tax base.

This vision of a revived rail and transit network in Somerville received a major boost in the fall of 2007 when Governor Deval Patrick announced that his administration would fulfill, and even accelerate, a commitment made in 2006 by outgoing Governor Mitt Romney to complete the Green Line Extension by no later than 2014. With this commitment came a promise of \$700 million to complete the design and construction of the Green Line Extension. In response, the City has proposed to expand the Union Square Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area (NRSA) to include more of the anticipated Green Line stations. This will allow the City more flexibility to program HUD resources towards the focused planning of areas that will be close to future Green Line stops.

The new Orange Line station at Assembly Square is also on track for design and construction over the next decade. The estimated \$40 million project will be paid for using the combined resources of a \$25 million set-aside in federal ISTEA funds secured by Congressman Michael Capuano, and a \$15 million contribution made jointly by Federal Realty Investment Trust and IKEA. The Orange Line station at Assembly Square is the linchpin of a new 66.5 acre mixed-use development along the banks of the Mystic River that is a regional showcase of Smart Growth techniques. When complete, the new development will include a riverfront park, 2100 residential units, 1.75 million square feet of office and 1,150,800 square feet of retail space (including the existing Marketplace and a proposed IKEA store), and a 200-room hotel. This project is anticipated to be built out by 2019.

These future developments are well aligned with the City’s “Shape up Somerville” (SUS) initiative. “Shape up Somerville” is a city-wide campaign to increase daily physical activity and healthy eating through programming, physical infrastructure improvements, and policy work. SUS and planning efforts around the new T-stops will work hand-in-hand to promote a stronger healthier Somerville.

4. SUSTAINABILITY

With rising costs of energy, improvements in clean technology and a shift in public consciousness, sustainability is now at the forefront of economic development as well as an enhanced quality of life in urban neighborhoods. The City of Somerville has already taken significant steps to build these trends into its long- and mid-term planning. In April of 2007, the City’s Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE) published its first “Environmental Strategic Plan.” This plan outlines strategies related to resource conservation, environmental protection, transportation & infrastructure, land use & open space, economic development, and community education. The Mayor’s Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development works in collaboration with OSE to educate developers and promote sustainable development throughout the city.

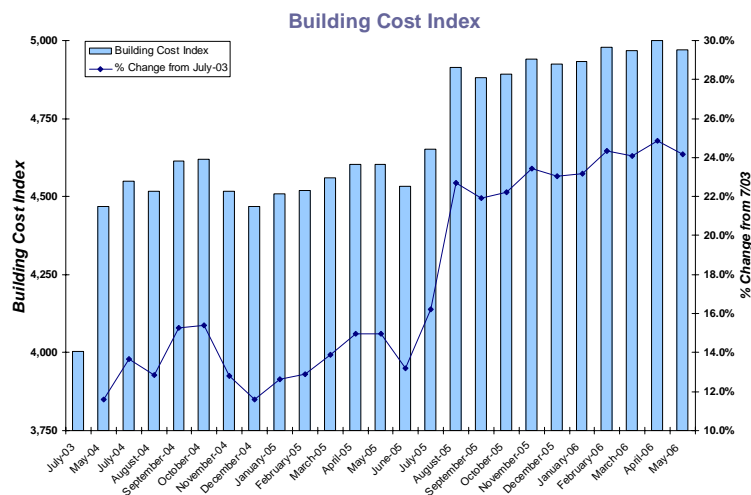
The proposed IKEA store in Assembly Square, scheduled to open in the fall of 2009, is one example of the type of sustainable development techniques the city would like to promote. The IKEA building will include a 2 acre green roof, dramatically reducing storm runoff volume and peak flow rates and conserving energy by moderating temperature on the roof and surrounding areas. In addition, IKEA has committed to fulfilling the requirements to become LEED certified by the US Green Building Council.

As developers increasingly agree that the long-term economic benefits of sustainable developments outweigh the associated costs, the City expects this trend to accelerate at a rapid pace. Private sector adoption of new sustainability standards and strategies should be further enhanced by the rapidly increasing demand for green buildings from the consumer market.

5. RISING COSTS OF CONSTRUCTION

Rising construction costs have had an undeniably negative impact on public construction projects across the nation during the past several years. Skanska, an internationally recognized construction firm, breaks down the cost of inflation into eleven different construction categories and predicts overall construction inflation to be 10% in 2006 alone.³ Below is a table that demonstrates that rising cost of construction inflation using the Engineering News Record statistics from July 2003 to May 2006.

These rising costs adversely affect a variety of initiatives at the municipal level, including parks reconstruction projects, affordable housing projects, municipal building improvements, and transportation improvements (to name only a few).



ORGANIZATION OF THIS DOCUMENT:

This document contains ten major sections. Sections 1-6 provide detailed information about specific disciplines within the City’s community development team. These include:

1. Housing
2. Economic Development & Long Range Planning
3. Parks & Open Space
4. Transportation & Infrastructure
5. Historic Preservation
6. Public Services

³ “Pricing Trends and Alerts.” Skanska. January 9, 2006 issue.

For each of these topics, these sections provide:

- A review of the previous Consolidated Plan goals;
- A needs and gap analysis;
- Identification of obstacles to meeting underserved needs;
- Proposed goals and strategies for the next five years; and
- Identification of priorities during that same time period.

Sections 7-8 focus on the City's two Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Areas (NRSAs). Section 7 contains information describing the East Somerville NRSA, and section 8 contains information about the Union Square NRSA. These sections include:

- Boundary maps of each area;
- A review of accomplishments in these areas over the last five years, and
- Proposed goals and priorities.

The last two sections of the Consolidated Plan, sections 9-10, present two independent action plans. Section nine is an anti-poverty strategy that summarizes the City's goals and strategies for reducing poverty within Somerville over the next five years. Section ten is a public participation plan that outlines the strategies the City will use to engage the community as the Consolidated Plan is implemented over the next five years. The appendices provide a variety of useful maps, data, and background information for reference.

GOALS:

Section One: Housing

1. Maintain and Improve Housing Stock.
2. Create New Affordable Housing.
3. Increase Affordability of Rental Housing.
4. Increase Affordable Homeownership.
5. Prevent and End Homelessness.
6. Remove Barriers to Housing.

Section Two: Economic and Community Development:

1. Encourage investment and development in underutilized areas of the City.
2. Enhance vitality of existing commercial districts through support of existing businesses and attraction of others to support a healthy business mix.
3. Increase local job opportunities.
4. Enhance skills and abilities of Somerville residents.
5. Build a partnership between City Hall and community members to encourage public participation in economic development initiatives.

Section Three: Transportation and Infrastructure

1. Improve rail transit service to improve connectivity throughout the region for residents and businesses.
2. Improve bus service within Somerville and connecting to surrounding communities.
3. Enhance streetscapes, road and intersections to increase vitality in identified commercial districts.
4. Reduce barriers dividing neighborhoods and districts in Somerville.
5. Improve pedestrian and bicycle accessibility in the City to support active transportation alternatives.

6. Improve infrastructure to comply with ADA requirements.
7. Increase Somerville's role in regional transportation planning.
8. Improve basic utility infrastructure within Somerville.

Section Four: Parks and Open Space

1. Renovate existing parks and open spaces to improve condition of Somerville's recreational areas and ensure attractive, safe, and accessible public lands.
2. Secure more land to expand Somerville's total open space acreage and ensure access to open space in every neighborhood.
3. Analyze and improve access for persons with disabilities to parks and open space, as part of ongoing ADA compliance.
4. Increase tree canopy and green spaces to promote urban health and sustainability, and reduce the heat island effect.
5. Increase Off-Leash Recreational Area (OLRA) opportunities throughout the city.
6. Raise the bar for sustainable design and building practices in city parks and open space projects.
7. Reduce brownfields and convert to more desirable uses.
8. Improve accountability and set departmental vision through a series of strategic planning documents.

Section Five: Public Services

1. Provide opportunities for residents to improve their economic, social and political situation.
2. Provide children with the best opportunities to live healthy and productive lives.
3. Provide education and leadership opportunities for youth to become involved in the community.
4. Provide comprehensive programs for low-income individuals and families who are having difficulty meeting their basic needs.
5. Prevent homelessness by providing interpersonal and systematic supports to undermine the causes of homelessness.
6. Provide services to support the elderly and persons with disabilities of all ages.

Section Six: Historic Preservation

1. Inventory and document existing historically and architecturally significant resources.
2. Ensure that City policies, regulations, and procedures support the maintenance of significant resources.
3. Develop and implement programs that encourage the improvement of significant resources.
4. Stabilize and support the character of individual neighborhoods.
5. Highlight Somerville's unique assets to its residents, businesses, and outside visitors.

Section Seven: East Somerville NRSA

1. Increase supply of permanently affordable housing stock.
2. Increase economic opportunities for East Somerville residents and businesses.
3. Increase recreational opportunities for East Somerville residents.
4. Increase attractiveness of East Somerville places.
5. Improve access to and from East Somerville without impairing quality of life for residents.

Section Eight: Union Square NRSA

1. Increase permanently affordable housing stock.
2. Increase economic opportunities in Union Square residents and businesses.
3. Increase recreational opportunities for Union Square residents.

4. Increase attractiveness of Union Square places.
5. Improve Union Square infrastructure, including transportation, utilities, parking, etc. without impairing quality of life for residents.
6. Improve status of historic areas.

CONCLUSION:

Over the course of the next five years, the City of Somerville faces a variety of exciting opportunities and challenging issues. Even with its many geographic, cultural, social and workforce advantages, one of the City's greatest challenges will be to respond at a pace fast enough to capture all of the economic opportunities available. The City of Somerville strives to be at the forefront of municipal innovation and best practices. In fact, Somerville recently received national recognition as a model of innovation and efficiency for the implementation of a 311 constituent service telephone and Internet help center for city residents and the implementation of a data-driven performance management system called "Somestat". Somerville was the first city in the country to employ both a 311 service line *and* Connect-CTY mass notification (high-speed reverse 911) technology. With these innovative programs and the City's aggressive search for new, mixed-use development projects, Somerville has been recognized by the *Boston Globe Magazine* as "the best run city in the Commonwealth."⁴ Over the next five years, Somerville will continue this tradition of innovation and creativity as the cornerstone of its ongoing effort to ensure that this dynamic and fast-evolving community remains a great place to live, work and play for generations to come.

⁴ "The Model City", Boston Globe, May 14, 2006 issue.