CIVILIAN OVERSIGHT OF POLICE
COMMUNITY MEETING

March 24, 2021
https://www.somervillema.gov/civilianoversight

For our attendees participating virtually who would like to access this meeting in a language other than English, please follow these instructions:

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Agenda

Actively Listen
• Ayerim Decena (City Council Legislative & Policy Analyst)
• Community Presenters

Reflect

Engage
• civilianoversight@somervillema.gov
• Sign up to attend a smaller-group discussion:
  • Email CivilianOversight@somervilleMA.gov
• Send written comments to CityCouncil@SomervilleMA.gov
Common Goals of Civilian Oversight

- Improve public trust
- Ensure accessible complaint process
- Increase transparency
- Promote thorough and fair investigations
- Deter police misconduct
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Reimagining Policing in Somerville

In recent years, the City Council has undertaken multiple initiatives related to policing and public safety, including:

- “Welcoming City” Ordinance
- Surveillance Oversight & Face Recognition Ban
- Overhauling the confirmation process
- Formally rescinding outdated “gang ordinance”

In 2020, following widespread protests and advocacy, the City Council and Mayor’s Office committed to additional reforms, including:

- Re-invested ~7.7% of proposed FY21 SPD budget to other social services
- “Re-imagining police” process: creating a non-police response to non-violent emergencies
- Establish Civilian Oversight of Police
- More info: https://www.somervillema.gov/policereform
Somerville residents overwhelmingly support Civilian Oversight of Police

“Somerville residents are overwhelmingly in favor of establishing a Civilian Review Board to oversee the Somerville Police Department. 81% of Somerville residents support establishing such a board and just 6% oppose it; 13% were not sure.”

Tufts University survey of 618 randomly-selected Somerville residents, Oct-Nov 2020
https://tischcollege.tufts.edu/sites/default/files/Somerville_policing_report.pdf
Civilian Oversight can mean different things in different communities

The National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (NACOLE):

There are over 150 Civilian Oversight agencies in the country, including four in Massachusetts.

What these oversight agencies have in common:

“Community-member based review boards where complainants are given a place to voice concerns outside of the law enforcement agency.”
Common Goals of Civilian Oversight

- Improve public trust
- Ensure accessible complaint process
- Increase transparency
- Promote thorough and fair investigations
- Deter police misconduct
Today, complaints and allegations about Somerville Police are investigated by SPD

“More than two-thirds of Somerville residents indicated that the Civilian Review Board should have the power to investigate ‘allegations of excessive force and abuse’ as well as any police shootings.”

Tufts University survey of 618 randomly-selected Somerville residents, Oct-Nov 2020

https://tischcollege.tufts.edu/sites/default/files/Somerville_policing_report.pdf
There are four basic models of Civilian Oversight:

- Review-Focused models
- Investigative Models
- Auditor/Monitor Models
- Hybrid Models

The City Council wants to know what YOU want to see in a Civilian Oversight Agency in Somerville.
Review-Focused Models

Individual board that is authorized to review completed internal affairs investigations.

- Led by community members
- Typically rely on police investigations
- Receive complaints directly from community
- Issue agreement or disagreement with internal affairs findings

Cities with Review-Focused Committees:
- Boise, ID
- Cambridge, MA
- Detroit, MI
- Indianapolis, IN
- Kansas City, MO
Investigative Models

Independent board that conducts investigations into community complaints and internal affairs investigations.

- Conduct own investigations led by professional investigators
- May receive complaints directly from community
- Scope of authority is wide
- Can recommend disciplinary actions to police department

Cities with Investigative Committees:
- Albuquerque, NM
- Atlanta, GA
- Chicago, IL
- Oakland, CA
- San Diego, CA
Auditor/Monitor Models

Boards with ongoing monitoring or auditing authority over the police department.

- May receive complaints directly from community
- Focus on large-scale systemic reform
- May investigate internal police complaints/files
- Analyzes trends and patterns of police conduct

Cities with Auditor/Monitor Committees:
- Austin, TX
- Denver, CO
- Fairfax County, VA
- New Orleans, LA
- New York, NY
Hybrid Models

Focus is on an oversight agency that works best for an individual community.

➢ Combine aspects of other models

➢ Structure derived from desired authority and function

➢ Considers social, cultural, economic, and political uniqueness of community
Civilian Oversight Models:

- Review-Focused models
- Investigative Models
- Auditor/Monitor Models
- Hybrid Models

The City Council wants to know what YOU want to see in a Civilian Oversight Agency in Somerville.

Please fill out this survey to provide your thoughts on Civilian Oversight in Somerville and check out the Somerville website for more information!
Why is diverse community engagement so important for Community Oversight?

Community Input & Participation

❖ Community members play a role in oversight: serving on the board/commission, holding City accountable, helping shape the process.

❖ Can lead to new, collaborative strategies for public safety

❖ This type of agency only works with active on-going participation from the diverse members of our community.

Please fill out this survey to provide your thoughts on Civilian Oversight in Somerville and check out the Somerville website for more information!
Outline of tonight’s meeting

• Presentation: What is Civilian Oversight of Police?

• Community Panel

• Next steps: How to get involved
  
  • Sign up to attend a smaller-group discussion:
    • Email CivilianOversight@somervilleMA.gov
  
  • Take our online survey: www.SomervilleMA.gov/CivilianOversight
  
  • Send written comments to CityCouncil@SomervilleMA.gov
Community Speaks

• Reflect
Engage

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