

Young Somerville Advisory Group:

Year End Report and Recommendations

October 20, 2010

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Corey Kritzman, Jorge Quiñones, Chris Speakman, James Stark, and Lauren Tulp.

YSAG is grateful for the support and input from its past members. Views expressed in this report
may not represent views of past members.

I. Young Somerville Advisory Group

November 2009-October 2010

The Young Somerville Advisory Group (YSAG) entered its third year with the addition of numerous members to the group. The group continued pursuing its mission to increase the number of young residents engaged in our civic community, improve the quality of City services offered and increase communication between City government and people aged 21-35.

II. Summation of Continuing Mission

At the opening of the third year, YSAG continued to hold monthly formal meetings with City officials and local nongovernmental organizations to learn more about ongoing and new efforts to improve city services. These meetings provided the group with valuable information as City officials offered presentations and allowed time for questions, comments, and recommendations from the group and public in attendance. In addition to the monthly formal meetings informal meetings were held monthly to continue conversations and prioritize future agenda items.

The group continued to survey its mailing list to help guide discussions with City officials and inform the group of what is important to Young Somerville. Since the last YSAG report, 207 people responded to surveys sent out by the group this year, with an average of 52 per survey. The executive committee, established in 2008-2009, changed membership in 2009-2010 and continues to facilitate meetings and planning with city officials and serve as a direct contact for the City liaison. The writing committee continues to draft newsletters and to work with the Executive Committee to draft the annual YSAG report to the mayor. Finally, YSAG's membership committee continues to assist in reviewing applicants for the group and ensure members meet attendance requirements. In 2009-2010 the membership committee began recommending new members to the executive committee and the City liaison for final approval of membership.

In an effort to reach more young Somerville residents, YSAG members attended various city and community events including ArtBeat and Riverfest, continued to maintain a Facebook promotional page, developed email campaigns, gathered online data through surveys and continued monthly email newsletters. The group was present at two local Trivia Nights at

Magoun's Saloon to help promote civic engagement, and has launched a logo contest to help increase visibility. In addition, the group has also attended various public City meetings, including the June Board of Alderman meeting about the City budget. YSAG is happy to have a representative on the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee and continues to seek other opportunities to connect members with official city planning initiatives. Communication and membership are key goals continuing to the 2010-2011 year.

III. Summation of 2009-10 Meetings

In the meetings listed below YSAG met with the listed City officials to discuss the nature of the work of their department, future projects and submit recommendations directly to the officials.

- a. **December** — Thalia Tringo, Davis Square Area Resident/Business Initiative, and Mimi Graney, Union Square Main Streets
- b. **January** — Mark Alston-Follansbee, Executive Director of the Somerville Homeless Coalition
- c. **February** — Procedural Meeting
- d. **March** — David Lutes, Office of Sustainability & Environment, and Andrea Ranger, Chair of the Commission on Energy Use and Climate Change
- e. **April**— Gretchen Kinder, Coordinator of R&D, Public Information and Grants at Somerville Public Schools
- f. **May** — State of Young Somerville Event planning meeting
- g. **June** — Jennifer Lawrence, Executive Director, Groundwork Somerville
- h. **July** — Michael Meehan, Somerville Director of Communications
- i. **August** — Nicolas Salerno, Chairman, Somerville Elections Commission
- j. **September** — Report planning

IV. 2009 Recommendations Review

Follow up on 2009 recommendations (2009 in *italics*):

- *Add more bike lanes and racks throughout the city to encourage residents to use healthy and environmentally-friendly means of transportation. In addition, move quickly on the Community Bike Path extension project.*
 - This year, more than 100 bike racks were placed throughout Somerville and 10 miles of bike lanes were added throughout the city. Young Somerville continues to support efforts to improve the bike-ability of Somerville.
- *Continue to improve community-policing efforts through programs like the Beat Cop Program, where one Beat Cop is assigned to patrol each ward of the city and is responsible for getting to know their ward.*
 - YSAG is excited to have a new police chief and reaffirms support for community based policing programs as a means to reduce crime. Individual connections with the police officers and the residents in their ward will continue to reduce crime and create community good will and civic engagement.
- *Seek community input regarding new development initiatives and multi-use buildings and ensure that young residents' voices are represented in the planning process.*
 - YSAG continues to support this community-based planning process especially with the recent use of community input in the ongoing development of the Broadway corridor.
- *Locate and establish long-term off-street parking lots or spaces where residents without driveways can safely leave their cars for 1-2 weeks for a reasonable fee. There is currently no place to put a vehicle when going out of town for extended periods of time, and those who do not have someone who can move their car and do not want to get a ticket for street cleaning need a safe alternative place to park their vehicle in the city.*
 - This is still a continuing and substantial problem for many young residents who have no place to park their car in a storm emergency. The current ordinance for 48 hour limit on residential street parking remains a challenge for individuals who are required to travel for work several days at a time when the 21-35 demographic often lives in rental or other residences which do not provide for off-street parking.

V. Recap and 2010 Recommendations

The recommendations below are presented in the order in which they arose, labeled by the month and subject of the pertinent meeting. The recommendations are based upon the policy area highlighted; some include more directly implementable actions and other recommendations present larger policy directions. In the coming year, YSAG hopes to partner with the City on initiatives to implement these recommendations and offer additional feedback to the mayor and City agencies and departments.

Working with Local Community Groups (DARBI/USMS, Somerville Homeless Coalition, Groundwork Somerville)

- The Somerville Homeless Coalition (SHC) supports individuals and families who are homeless or near homeless. The SHC is currently operating during a down economy where corporations are cutting back on donations at the same time the organization is seeing greater need.
 1. We recommend that the City of Somerville continue supporting the SHC by working with developers to include affordable housing and rent controlled units in their development plans, especially in the Green Line extension planning.
 2. In these difficult economic times, we recommend the city work with SHC to develop finance programs for those who may be on the verge of homelessness because of credit or mortgage problems.
 3. We recommend the City increase the public awareness of homelessness in Somerville in an effort to increase community support and donations to SHC and other groups grappling with homelessness.

- The Davis Area Resident and Business Initiative (DARBI) and Union Square Main Streets (USMS) are non-profit organizations focusing on neighbors and businesses that make up the city squares. Creating, sustaining, and strengthening business initiatives within the city will help infuse new growth and also assist those businesses that may be struggling because of a poor economy.

1. YSAG recommends that the city help USMS and DARBI by continuing to increase pedestrian access, support community events and festivals, create incentives for local entrepreneurs and foster locally owned new businesses.
 2. Specifically, the city can increase pedestrian access by conducting an assessment of city squares to examine potential sites where bike lanes can be developed, identify corners where additional crosswalk signals would increase pedestrian safety, and construct larger sidewalks to promote walking as a means of transportation.
- YSAG commends the city's initiative in addressing some of these recommendations on Somerville Avenue. Farmers markets serve as venues for residents to interact with and support local businesses as well as promote healthy lifestyle habits, like walking and eating non-processed foods. Creating incentives for start-ups, adapting zoning to allow commerce to be an option where appropriate, and promoting new business initiatives will help keep the City of Somerville safe and thriving.
 - Groundwork Somerville is a non-profit that works to enhance local green spaces and to create more local opportunities for sustainable living consistent with social justice values. The organization thrives on community involvement and works closely with the city acting as a voice for sustainability.
 1. YSAG recommends that the City of Somerville continue to incorporate Groundwork Somerville opinions on issues such as community park space, community gardens, the Greenline extension, and the Max Pax site into city-planning initiatives.

Environmental Initiatives and a Sustainable City (Sustainability/Environment)

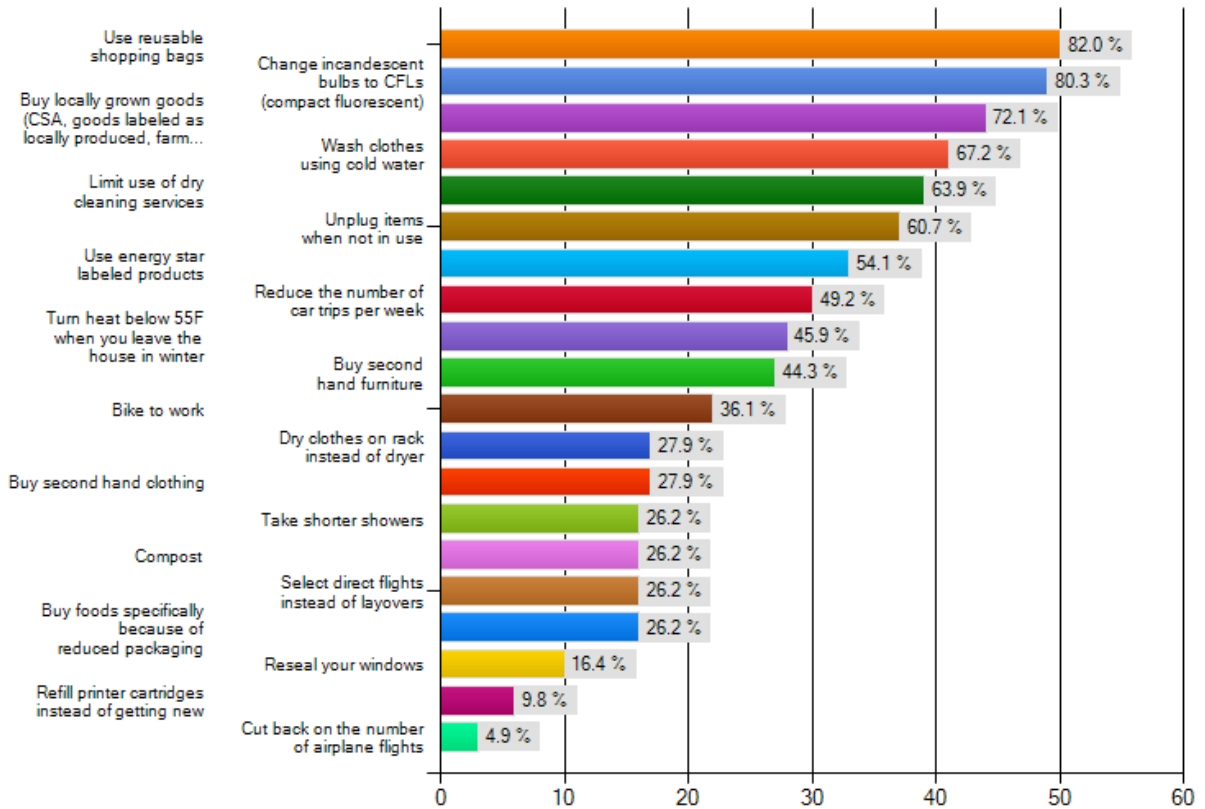
- Based on the survey results and YSAG's meeting with David Lutes, the Environmental Program Manger, and Andrea Ranger, the Climate Change and Energy Use Commission chair, it is evident that the 21-35 year old demographic here in Somerville are enthusiastic about making personal changes to improve the future of our environment and make Somerville a more sustainable place. The city is already taking a lead in this field by piloting single stream recycling in one neighborhood area.

YSAG recommendations:

1. Incentivize landlords to work with Young Somerville renters to make their homes more energy efficient.

-Only 16% of survey respondents noted that they re-seal their windows for energy efficiency purposes.

What measures if any have you taken to reduce your carbon footprint? (Check all that apply)



2. Improve recycling bin access. Recycling bin access recommendations include the following:

- a. Allow landlords to retrieve bins for all of their properties during 1 visit to the DPW.
- b. Consider making recycling bins available at other city locations beyond the DPW building (e.g., Police precincts).

- c. Consider pairing recycling bin availability with voter registration booths at city functions and allow new residents to retrieve recycling bins during these events.
3. Introduce an energy certification program for apartments so that renters can better choose a “green” apartment.
4. Review the survey results questions to numbers 17 and 18 (see Appendix), as residents expressed creative spaces that could potentially be transformed to open space along with other suggestion for initiatives they would like the city to consider. Survey results are found here:
http://www.somervillema.gov/cos_content/documents/Sustainability%20Survey%20results.pdf

Young Residents and Education (Education)

- On April 28 the Young Somerville Advisory Group met at the Michael Capuano Early Childhood Center to hear from Gretchen Kinder, coordinator of Research and Development, Public Information and Grants for Somerville’s school system. Located in East Somerville, the Capuano School was built recently and used many green building techniques, including recycled materials like salvaged tires used for the playground surface. Ms. Kinder gave a detailed overview of the Somerville school system, which features six K-8 schools (Healey, Argenziano, East Somerville Community, Kennedy, West Somerville Neighborhood, Winter Hill Community), one K-6 school (Brown), one pre-K and kindergarten center (Capuano), two alternative programs (Next Wave and Full Circle), and Somerville High School.

Recommendations:

1. We support the City’s goal of expanding foreign language instruction to grades K-8, specifically; enlist community members who speak foreign languages to work as tutors or informal instructors.

2. We feel that City efforts to increase diversity among the teaching staff are commendable and should continue.
3. We applaud the work that has been done on improving the nutritional value of the food in city schools, and encourage that this work continue.
4. Work to expand adult education classes and increase the profile of these classes, especially in preferred classes like culinary arts (53% of respondents were interested in culinary classes).

State of Young Somerville

- On Tuesday, May 25th, the Young Somerville Advisory Group sponsored the annual “State of Young Somerville” address with special guest speaker Mayor Curtatone. This year’s event was held at The Burren in Davis Square and was attended by approximately 70 people and resulted in many more people signing up for the YSAG email list.
- The event began with an opportunity for participants to network and meet YSAG members. Mayor Curtatone then made a brief presentation about the city that focused on issues pertaining directly to Young Somerville. After his presentation The Mayor took questions from the audience, ranging from road construction repairs to the Green Line extension to affordable housing. The mayor made himself available after the Q&A session to talk further with young Somerville residents.
- The event was a great success, raising the profile of YSAG to the greater Somerville community and giving residents an opportunity to talk directly with the mayor. YSAG looks forward to hosting another State of Young Somerville address next year.

Communicating with Young Somerville (Public Information/Communications)

- This summer, YSAG met with Michael Meehan, Somerville Director of Communications. We had a productive discussion about how the city disseminates

information to its residents and how young people can be part of that process. We discussed the city's website, press releases, the 311 and ResiStat systems, and other innovative ways the city is pursuing to ensure that Somerville remains an informed and engaged community.

YSAG recommends:

1. Improve the City's website. Currently, the City website is disorganized and difficult to navigate, often lacking key information about City events and meetings.
2. Continue working with *Somerville Scout*, the two newspapers, websites such as Somerville Voices, and other innovative ways to inform people about city activities. Particularly focus on ways in which young residents can be informed and drawn into the process.

Young Residents and Local Elections (Elections)

- YSAG met with Nick Salerno of the Somerville Elections Committee to learn about the current voting processes, the voting demographics for Somerville, and how YSAG might help bolster voter turn-out. Prior to the meeting YSAG conducted a survey of Somerville citizens in the 21-35 age group about their voting habits. 91% of respondents are registered to vote – the explanations for not voting varied from remaining registered in another state for tuition reasons to there not being an election the constituent felt motivated to vote in. However, 93% of respondents plan to vote this coming November.
- While Somerville has impressive voter turn-out for national elections, participation by the under-40 cohort in local elections continues to lag. This is consistent with our survey results where only 60% of the respondents said they have ever voted in a municipal election (not including 2008). The Elections Committee has increased advertisement of upcoming elections and registration deadlines including posted notices on wooden easels

throughout the city. YSAG commends these efforts and plans to contribute by posting upcoming elections events on our Facebook page.

- Finally, YSAG learned about the opportunities for participation in the election process – besides voting. The elections committee regularly recruits paid-volunteers to assist at local precincts during an election. Because this requires a full day commitment, the majority of election-helpers are retired.
 1. YSAG recommends that the City expand the roles available in the run-ups for elections, for example, City sponsored voter registration drives conducted by volunteers, and volunteer based election notification activities.

Young Somerville in 2011 – Goals and Recommendations to the City

1. Increase civic engagement of 21 to 35 year-old residents of Somerville.
2. Continue to augment formal membership in YSAG and the number of Somerville young adults we reach.
3. Use Young Somerville Advisory Group as an ongoing resource for building the new city website.
 - a. Young Somerville (the 21 to 35 year-old demographic) will be among the largest groups that will be using the City website and our interest in seeing it move forward and be completed is only continuing to grow. By using input from Young Somerville, the City will be able to understand the functions that need to be included in the site while making sure that those that will use it most will have their voices heard. YSAG is willing to serve as a sounding board, a focus group, and a review component of new designs.
4. Deliver questions to Young Somerville Advisory Group.
 - a. YSAG is an important resource that should be used more readily as a source for answers to the City's policy initiatives. YSAG is ready, willing and able to deliver speedy and substantive answers to help the City guide policy. The network of individuals in the represented demographic of residents has expanded beyond the formal membership in the past years and will continue to grow as the

Advisory Group continues to develop roots in the community. Beyond opinions of the individuals who serve as formal members the Group regularly conducts surveys of peers to bring in a representative response from a large group.

VI. Conclusion

The City of Somerville has many municipal departments and non-governmental organizations working together to make Somerville a better place to live for current residents and attract new residents to establish their lives in the city. In the past year, the Young Somerville Advisory Group heard from a number of these groups to help understand how Somerville is moving into the future. Our recommendations contained within this document have outlined a wide range of ideas that will help guide Somerville's future. The Young Somerville Advisory Group stands at the ready to make recommendations to the city government about how best to serve the 21 to 35 year-old demographic in the immediate future and long-term development.

VII. Appendix

Open answers for the Office of Environment and Sustainability survey:

17. Do you have any areas in mind in Somerville that could be used as "green space"?

The large industrial site that was just torn down off of Central street near the route for the proposed bike path extension.
73 Webster Avenue
http://bit.ly/9hO3Jq
New bike path extension near albion street
More Green Roofs ala Cambridge Center Roof Garden near Kendall.
Extend the bike path past Cedar Street, Vacant lot and parking lot behind the VFW/Winter Hill Bank on Summer Street, tear down Target and build a park
Yes--next to 55 Properzi Way there's an empty lot that would be perfect, and across from 80 Webster Ave there's another one.
The old gas station at the corner of Beacon/Oxford. The space next to Rosebud, that is starting to have something happening to it. The parking lot behind Century Bank.
No, but I'd sure love to see more "green spaces" around town!
By the former star market on broadway.
every flat roofed building / school building / office building etc... could use a green roof. That way you increase your green space, reduce your carbon foot print, save on heating building, reduce energy loss and don't sacrifice ground level space needed for businesses or residences.
Somerville definitely needs more green space. There is an empty lot between Cedar, Lowell, and Princeton St that would make a nice park.
I don't know where, but I like the idea and love to use the spaces that are already there (park north of Davis and Danehy Park)...
inner belt
Not sure.
No
no, but I would love to see some.
The derilict gas station at the end of Beacon street.

18. Please explain any sustainability initiatives you would like to see take place in Somerville or any questions you have for the Somerville Office of Sustainability and Environment:

Somerville could do a study of its traffic patterns to see how they impact idling of cars and overall gas usage. Sometimes it seems like you have to drive an extra mile in Somerville because of 1 way streets, all these miles will add up. Maybe if we had easier routes to get through town, we might be able to save a little time and gas.
Can I vote triple for Single Stream? I was so jealous when my ward didn't get the pilot project.
Proper bike racks on traffic signs or otherwise, around residential neighborhood.
Tips on how to reduce energy use easily available online.
CITY-WIDE COMPOSTING!!! Seattle has it. It can make a huge difference.
Also, educating the trash and recycling people to communicate when people are doing it wrong and recycle as much as possible.

Better advertising of rain barrels program. Incentives for backyard bees/chickens/produce.
Street composting, single stream, fix the damn recycling program to offer more bins to people and let us put paper in bins, have the idiots who run the trash trucks stop throwing recyclables into the trash (fire them, or throw them in the trash too for ruining our future).
Alternative energy seminars and opportunities for homeowners.
I would like to see recycling picked up even if it is placed next to the bin, we had 7 bags of recycling once, which were rejected because we couldn't fit them into the recycling bins, and were taken by the trash collectors. How about having the "Green Festival" outdoors in a main square, like Davis or Union square..... how about more public recycle bins next to EVERY trash can..... pilot program encouraging local businesses to compost, and then using that for fertilizer/tea for all public space gardening
I'd like to see Somerville enter into long term contracts for solar arrays (Power Purchase Agreements). I'd also like to see city interaction with landlords to raise the bar on weatherization on apartments that are rented. I'd like to see a level of effort for bulk purchasing energy efficiency equipment for municipal building, but also so residents could buy from the city at a reduced rate (this could be CFLs, refrigerators, etc.) I'd like to see a movement to replace all refrigerators over 15 years old in all of Somerville. Green roof initiative following in the footsteps of the Prospect Hill Academy model. Bike share pilot during summer months (this would be inexpensive to try).
Even more bike racks! More community garden space.
Increased public gardening space. Thanks for considering these issues.
I would like to see Somerville consider PACE Bonds for residential and commercial green energy improvements. http://www.pacenow.org/
education programs/events around town or in conjunction with other events so residents can learn more about this.
I would love to see more parks and green spaces. Farmers markets would be great for getting local produce. Encourage home recycling.
Furniture swaps!!! Or community garage sales. A lot of us have hand me down furniture that we used in college and are ready to get rid of...
Allow electricity costs to transparently and simply (ie end favored green industries) reflect the negative externalities of emissions, and allow people to make decisions based on this.
bike storage facility at the union of somerville community path and green line extension. additional bike/multi-use paths connecting to green line.
I would love to see some of the roads repaired to make biking more pleasant. Streets with a lot of potholes and bumps, like Somerville Ave, are particularly in need of service.
more recycling/composting opportunities
Single Stream Recycling!!
I would love to have some community vegetable gardens. I'm not sure if these exist in Somerville. Perhaps some sort of system where you pay a monthly membership fee and can maintain your own little section of vegetables? I also think it would be great to incorporate more food from farmers markets into school systems. A lot of school districts around the country are implementing programs like this as an alternative to the processed food served in most schools, and to help support local growers.
Trash/Recycling service should be more thorough/careful - they constantly leave behind remnants that don't make it from the curbside bins into the truck on the first try (e.g. bottles, cardboard, etc.), which sort of defeats the purpose of recycling!