

1) Existing small businesses in Somerville are still reeling from the impacts of COVID-19, layered on top of both private and public construction, and increased market pressure from development. At the same time, a record number of small businesses were started in 2020, many by owners that are a part of marginalized communities.

Using a faux-additional yearly budget of \$2,000,000, please allocate funds to the following budget line items to support these entrepreneurs:

Budget Item	Budgeted Amount
Permitting liaison staff position	90,000
Upgrade to Citizenserve reporting	45,000
Non-emergency, forgivable loans	690,000
Additional "Main Streets" programs	400,000
Additional ISD inspectors (e.g. Building, Electrical, Plumbing)	270,000
Monetary incentives to fill vacant properties	365,000
Translators for business owners applying for business services (e.g. special permit, outdoor dining, personal property taxes)	50,000
Other (please specify):	90,000

Explain your funding choices below:

As a start, it's most important to have direct assistance available to businesses, so I budgeted the largest line item for non-emergency, forgivable loans.

Main Streets programs seem to be working well in East Somerville and Union Square, so I'd support adding programs in West Somerville (Davis and Teele squares) and Central Somerville (Magoun and Ball squares, possibly with Winter and Central hills) and funding the startup of these programs.

Then I'd put \$1,000 a day into a fund to incentivize the owners of vacant commercial properties to fill those with locally-owned small businesses. Reducing the number of vacant commercial properties is great for aesthetics and also grows our small business community, so this is money well spent.

I'd budget for three additional building inspectors to alleviate the backlog of inspections that slow down permitting in the city, a permitting liaison staff person, and a grant writer to help business owners apply for state, federal, and private grants.

Establishing a fund to pay for translation for business orders applying for business services seems like a solid idea, so I'd include funding for that.

And then I'd pay to upgrade Citizenserve to GovPilot, which seems to be the best-in-breed software for municipal services like licensing and permitting.

2) Many businesses in Union Square – and Somerville on the whole – have noted an increase in interactions with unhoused neighbors. Additionally, because the Ruby Rogers Center closed, there are fewer resources available in the community than there were.

Can you describe the steps you would take to ensure Somerville's squares remain open to and safe for all – including our unhoused neighbors?

Using additional yearly budget of \$1,000,000, please allocate funds to the following budget line items:

Budget Item	Budgeted Amount
Non-police emergency action system	470,000
Additional public health outreach workers	150,000
Stand alone public bathrooms (e.g. Portland Loo)	215,000
Conflict resolution training for small businesses	10,000
Dedicated day center	145,000
Replacement of hostile architecture	10,000
Other (please specify):	

Explain your funding choices below:

The big-ticket item here would be a CAHOOTS-style emergency intervention system. I believe you could start up a small-scale version of this program for under \$500,000 in Year 1. I expect the program to be popular and successful, growing each year -- but with cost savings from the public safety budget more than covering this.

To complement that program, I'd hire two public health outreach workers to be out proactively working with our unhoused neighbors and helping them get the assistance they need.

I would have one Portland Loo installed in Union Square and one in Davis Square. It would be great to have community volunteers as attendants for these, as studies show that the locations with attendants tend to work the best.

I'd also fund the creation of a new dedicated day center for the homeless with \$145,000, and look to partner with a nearby house of worship with available space.

Finally, I'd allocate \$10,000 for both conflict resolution training for small business and replacement of hostile architecture, which shouldn't be too cost-prohibitive to address, given that much of it was added on to existing architecture fairly recently.

3) The arts economy is something the city of Somerville talks a lot about. In the past month, Artisan’s Asylum has left Somerville, Central St. Studios closed, and there have been reports of confusion as to the status of tenants at the Armory.

Using additional yearly budget of \$1,000,000, please allocate funds to the following budget line items:

Budget Item	Budgeted Amount
Creation of a “contemporary fine arts” zoning overlay to incentivize studio space	305,000
City subsidy for artist studios in privately-owned buildings	200,000
Artist entrepreneur training and technical assistance	40,000
Permanent public art by artists from marginalized communities	120,000
Infrastructure for festivals like stages and lighting systems	50,000
Artist engagement/communication funding	35,000
Other:	250,000

Explain your funding choices below:

The setbacks suffered by our local arts community in recent years have been tough to swallow, and we need to devote money and energy to protecting our arts scene.

Creating new studio space will be fairly costly, so I support spending the largest chunk of this arts budget on a “contemporary fine arts” zoning overlay. I expect this will be fairly complicated and will require a decent amount of tweaking, but it’s worth the effort to expand our inventory of studio space.

I’d propose the creation of a Department of the Arts to handle the administration of municipal programs like subsidies, commissions, and promotion, with three staff members. This department also would work with the Somerville Arts Council to support art in the city.

A city subsidy for artist studios in private buildings is a great idea, and I’d fund that with \$200,000 from the budget. I’ll bet there are spaces that aren’t habitable currently going unused that could be repurposed as artist studios if the owners were properly incentivized.

To promote art from marginalized communities, I’d spend \$120,000 on commissions to artists and have these works displayed in prominent places in new and existing public spaces.

I’d invest in more of this infrastructure to expand the number of stages and lights at festivals.

Then I’d spend the remaining amounts on entrepreneurial training and technical assistance and artist engagement and communication funding to provides artists with the tools and resources they need to get their work in front of the public.

4) Consider the following:

Small details of this narrative have been changed to protect the identity of the business involved.

Timeline

- In the fall of 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic, an immigrant business owner put in motion a plan to increase the size of their dining room to try and recoup some of their lost capacity and income caused by the pandemic.
- They reached out to the city on August 20th to ask what challenges they might encounter, anticipating an October opening which is when they agreed to start paying rent. They were informed of no potential pitfalls and began their application on September 9th.
- They received conditional approval by the license commission to expand their restaurant on October 4th.
- On November 7th, they contacted several city officials to understand why they had not received a building permit.
- On November 15th they were informed their liquor license approval was never sent to the state for approval due to an administrative error.
- On January 16th, they were informed for the first time that their plan required a variance to proceed. At this time, they decided to close their application.

Costs

- From October through January, they spent
- \$40,000 in rent for a space they were never able to use.
- \$25,000 in architecture and engineering fees.
- \$2,500 on a licensing attorney.

Total: \$67,500

- Additionally, they lost between \$150,000 - \$250,000 in revenue because they were unable to operate during that time.

Please outline your process improvement strategy to ensure this type of issue does not continue to happen to small businesses:

Stories like this are absolutely maddening and we need to do way better as a city.

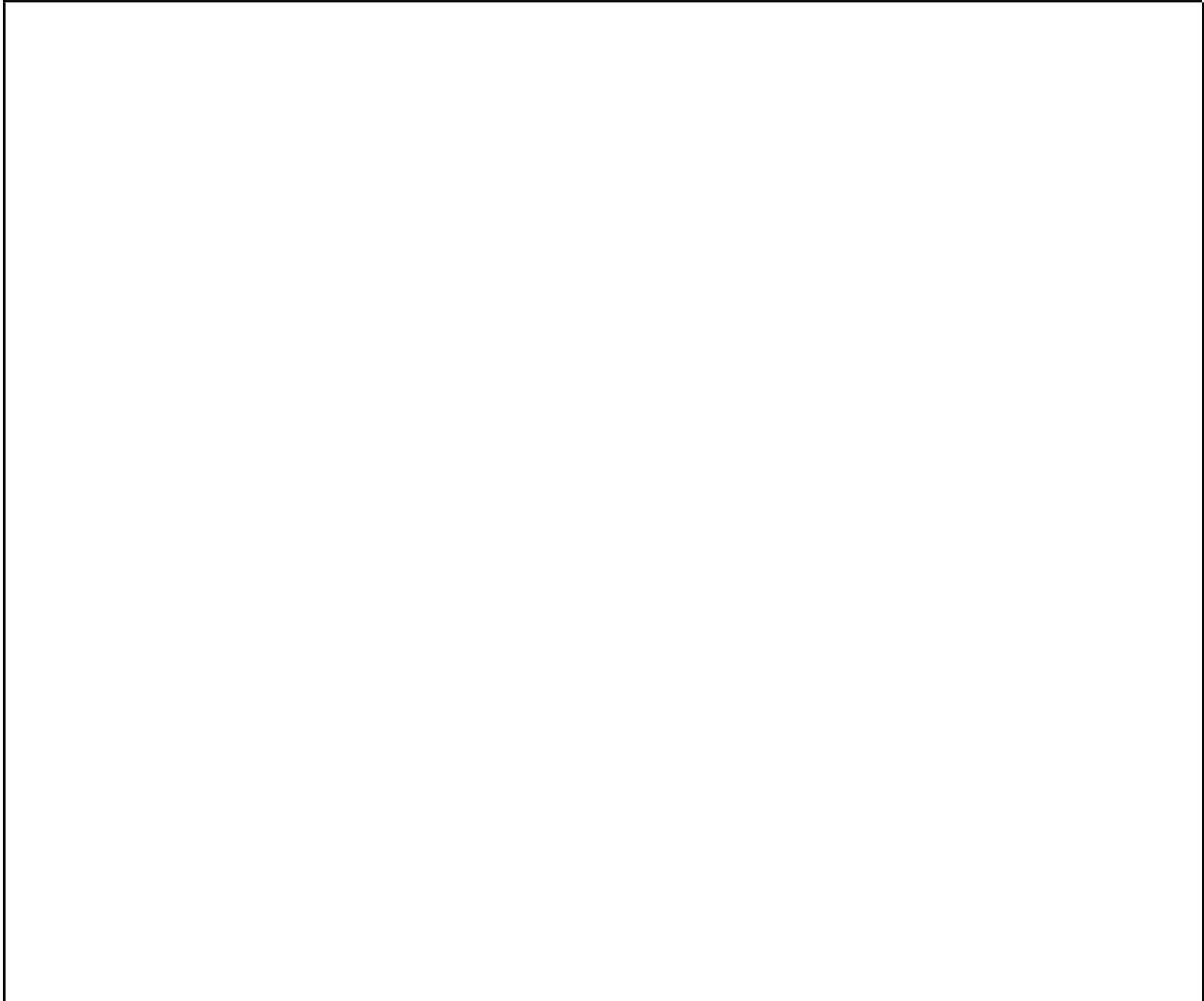
The biggest issue here is that currently the onus is entirely on the business owner to figure out all requirements to be fulfilled -- and even then information they get from the city can be incorrect or misleading. And there doesn't seem to be any accountability on the city's end when it comes to actually completing required tasks for the applicant.

It shouldn't be too hard to come up with standardized checklists for projects like this that lists the contact for each step. There should be an online application system that allows users to track the status of their application and allow city employees to keep track of application components. Reminders could be sent out automatically to the relevant city employee(s) if

part of the application process fails to be completed in a timely fashion.

Additionally, I support the hiring of a Business Liaison at City Hall who can help applicants get started with these applications and shepherd applications through to completion to prevent balls being dropped and businesses suffering like in the example provided here.

Continue your answer below:

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