

## Somerville Parents ResiStat Meeting Notes Summary - October 27, 2007

### Schools:

- Many parents are concerned about the overall quality of the schools, especially the High School. This group values diversity, values public education, but are concerned that there is not a long-term strategic plan for improving schools. A resident commented that Somerville can and should be a leader in modeling change.
- Parents would like to see Somerville excel in special areas as well:
  - ESL Programs in schools – are we serving everyone in the population well?
  - Special Needs programs in particular need examination/improvement.
  - City needs strong after school programs.
  - Would like to see great physical education programs.
  - Need to improve middle school experience.
- Schools are much better than people think – it's primarily an image problem. It would be great to have more data than just the MCAS, since the MCAS are hard to interpret and discouraging.
- Parents said that there are some good models in the system (Capuano School, the Choice Program) and good teachers and coaches out there – let's expand on things that work well.
- Many school-aged parents reported high satisfaction with the schools their children are attending, including the Kennedy, High School. One person reported that he has heard schools are better in Somerville than in Cambridge. Another reported that the diversity within the schools has been a great experience for their child. Another parent reported that it's possible to have a great experience, and it helps and/or is necessary to get involved.

#### *City Response:*

- The Mayor said that he will work with the Superintendent and the School Committee to find a way to address parents' suggestions about schools.

### Housing:

- The City needs more housing that is geared towards growing families, dividing homes into condos is not helpful. Zoning should be family-friendly. Also, we need more housing that is affordable for families.

#### *City Response:*

- The Mayor said that at a future meeting we should have the Director of Strategic Planning and Community Development to explore how we could use zoning to increase family-oriented housing.

### Programs:

- Parents want after-school and summer programs for kids, plus things for kids to be able to go and do in the neighborhood. Parents want programs in winter.

### Streets & Traffic:

- The City should explore traffic calming options, especially on major streets. There needs to be increased enforcement of crosswalks -- they are not always respected by drivers.
- Traffic noise is also a problem.
- It's impossible to get around with a stroller during the winter.
- Parents would like to see an improvement in bike safety, through extension of the bike path and creation of bike lanes. In general, there should be better ways to get to school.
- Parents would like to see and give input to SafeSTART traffic report, a study on improving traffic safety in the City recently completed by the City.

#### *City Response:*

- The Mayor said we'll send out the SafeSTART report and solicit feedback.
- The options being explored include: Raised intersections, crosswalks, and bollards (posts in the middle of the road which mark crosswalks).

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### **Welcome Kit, Parent Resources, and Volunteerism:**

- Coming into the city or being a parent for the first time, it's hard to find out what's available for families. The website does not give much info.
- One idea is to create a Welcome Kit for new families and families moving in to the city.
- The City could establish a mentoring program, so that more experienced parents tell new parents about options and city resources available.
- The City should make it easier for parents who want to get involved and help to do so. Parents need to be involved in decision-making.

#### *City Response:*

- The Mayor said that a welcome kit and coordination or promotion of volunteerism are great ideas. We'll solicit input to figure out how to implement them.

### **Parks & Open Spaces:**

- The City needs more trees and better playgrounds.
- A parent suggested creating snow park for kids to play in.
- Cleanliness around the city is not consistent.
- Parks are good as community meeting places. The City should empower neighborhood park associations, including having bulletin boards to share neighborhood information. Groups could organize regular park clean-ups.
- Parks should include play structures that are functional – the new parks, like Perry, have play equipment that's not that interesting to kids, so less functional.

#### *City Response:*

- The Mayor encouraged attendees to call 311 if they notice any problems in parks or anywhere in city.
- Also note, the City plans to install bulletin boards in each park and can involve parents in design plans for future parks.

### **Community Center:**

- Families would benefit from having indoor space for programming and activities for people of all ages
- The City should look into building a recreation facility, perhaps with a pool, with space for teen programs and senior programs, play space for younger children, and child care.
- This center would need a good location, with transportation available.

#### *City Response:*

- The Mayor reported that the City is now doing a citywide study of all facilities and parks/open space to explore options.

### **Libraries:**

- Parents want to have Branch Libraries open later and on weekends.

#### *City Response:*

- The Mayor said we'd price this out for consideration in the next budget cycle.

### **Meeting:**

- Good to have meeting, but this group does not represent the diversity of the city.
- There was a suggestion of nametags for the next meeting.

#### *City Response:*

- The Mayor said he'd work with the multi-cultural commission to reach out across the City.
- Also note, the initiative is explicitly targeted to solicit feedback from all communities in Somerville.