

Young Somerville ResiStat Meeting Notes January 29, 2008 – Toast Lounge, Union Square

City Officials Present:

- Jessie Baker, Senior SomerStat Analyst
- Madeleine Masters, Planning Director
- Jaclyn Rossetti, Public Information Officer
- Ethan Field, ResiStat Analyst

Below are the notes from both the discussion and the feedback forms we received. At the bottom there is a list of "Next Steps for City Staff."

1) What topic(s) most interested you?

Residents were most interested in City Initiatives and projects, with Non-Governmental Community Groups a distant second. There was also some interest in Boards, Commissions and Committees. Residents were particularly interested in:

- Somerville Climate Action and the "greening" of Somerville (x3)
- Park redevelopment (x2)
- Assembly Square and IKEA
- Transportation and housing costs.
- Maintaining and improving Somerville's livability and walkability: A couple reported buying a condo in Somerville for more money and less space than they would have had in Medford or Malden, because Somerville's walkability made it more appealing.
- Green Line Extension
- Participating! ResiStat, getting neighbors together, improving the quality of life. What help is needed?

2) What did you learn about tonight that you wish you'd known about before?

Residents mentioned:

- 311 (x2)
- The Women's Commission
- Didn't realize there were some many Commissions.
- Community groups and possibilities for getting involved
- Programming available on SCAT (Somerville Community Access Television)
- That you can request a tree in your neighborhood

3) What do you see as the biggest barriers to young adult participation in civic and community life? What can the City do to improve that participation?

The major barriers to involvement residents mentioned were:

- **Lack of awareness** was overwhelmingly seen as the biggest barrier. It is a challenge to get specific information to the people who want that specific information, without overwhelming everyone with every piece of information.
- **Time constraints** (work, school, kids)

- **Lack of identification with Somerville:** Residents don't see the point of getting involved/invested. Many are still voting where they grew up because they feel more connected there.

Suggestions for overcoming these barriers included:

- **The website** was mentioned as being very difficult to navigate and not having current or useful information. Residents requested the City improve its website and offer newsletters with updates tailored to individual subscribers' interests. Specifically mentioned were: more available and updated schedules of meetings and agendas, zoning information, calendar of events information, City Yard Waste schedule (and other yearly schedules). Residents suggested the City could have City/Mayor's office **blogs with RSS feeds**, and/or Board and Committee minutes posted as RSS feeds
- Residents recommended that the city publish a **quarterly or bi-annual newsletter** that details the initiatives of the administration. Residents said they hear about them in ad hoc ways but there is no regular publication of these advancements. Residents also recommended that these be distributed by volunteers to each unit in the city (this would cut down on postage costs, get volunteers involved, and ensure that renters also have access to the information.)
- When signing up for **Connect-CTY calls** (like residents receive for snow emergencies) should have the option to get **Young Somerville specific calls**. (City Note: This is already possible.)
- Residents recommended using **postings in public spaces**, such as newspapers, flyers, tabling at markets, sandwich boards at major intersections (as are used on election day.)
- Residents recommended **using current technology and networking sites** like Facebook and MySpace. A resident also suggested more city employee presence on local blogs like Davis Square LiveJournal. Participant said that it's great to know the actual city policy when there are questions and that it is nice to know that the city is listening.
- Residents recommended **more fun events** like State of Young Somerville, and events specific to young people. Schedule and announce meetings well in advance.
- Recommend that the city **limit the number of emails sent** about events (maybe one scheduling email and one reminder email.) If too many are sent, recipients tend to disregard the messages.

4) Do you plan on becoming more involved than you have been in the past? How?

Residents expressed interest in getting more involved, but hadn't decided exactly how yet. They suggested that it would be helpful to know what specific needs there were for volunteering. Young Somerville advisory group members were interested in continuing to pursue their respective projects

Ideas from Discussion:

Specific ideas/questions that came from residents during the discussion:

- One group would like to see Somerville **ban plastic bags** (or impose a "bag tax") at supermarkets like San Francisco has.
- Another group suggested that the City provide **opportunities for homeowners to be more environmentally friendly** (greater purchasing power for electricity, discounts or rebates for green-friendly purchases or installations in their homes, etc.)
- A group suggested placing **public recycling bins** next to trash barrels (esp. for newspapers) and increasing recycling information (esp. to landlords)
- A resident asked: Is there an organized approach to composting in Somerville? This resident suggested that **residents could produce compost and give to the City** to put in parks and gardens. (City Note: The city does provide low-cost home composting bins: <http://www.somervillema.gov/Section.cfm?org=Environ&page=542>)
- A resident said they thought the **Somerville West Branch library** was in need of renovation and improvements.
- A resident indicated they didn't like the **statues in Davis Square and Seven Hills Park** and asked if they could be removed.
- A resident asked about what the **voting breakdowns for the age brackets** are. (City Note: We do have access to this data.)
- Residents requested more specific information about exactly **where help is most needed**; where can they plug in?

Next Steps for City Staff:

- Continue developing plans for integrated City calendar with newsletter function, as apart of the new City web site.
- Solicit Young Somerville input for the Open Space and Recreation plan in the City.
- Place a Connect-CTY call to Young Somerville members before the next meeting.
- Pass on "greening" suggestions to the City's Office of Sustainability and the Environment.
- Keep the Young Somerville email list posted with updates about hot topics like IKEA, the Green Line Extension,
- Research voter information broken down by age for both the November and the February election.