

## Somerville Parents and Guardians ResiStat Meeting Notes March 8, 2008 – J. F. Kennedy School

### **City Officials Present:**

Stephanie Hirsch, SomerStat Director

Ethan Field, ResiStat Analyst

Arn Franzen, Director of Parks and Open Spaces

Nancy Milnor, Public Libraries Director.

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### **Updates:**

Ethan Field gave updates on issues raised at the previous meeting about Somerville Schools (see presentation).

- A resident asked about how to resolve **scheduling conflicts** when sports teams from outside the City use the pool during regular **swim hours**.
- In response to the conversation about the upcoming overhaul of the City's web site and calendar: A resident asked about **how to coordinate the numerous email lists** for residents, both City-managed and resident-managed. City staff responded that the new web site will consolidate some of the City-based lists, though it's important that residents be able to host and maintain their own discussions.
- Another resident said that we need to remain aware of **the digital divide**, and that many people still do not have internet access. City staff responded that the schools' primary method of communication is still sending information home in students' backpacks. The forays into email have been recent and are intended to complement, not replace, existing outreach.

### **Next Steps for City Staff:**

- Investigate pool scheduling conflicts, determine official policy, and whether or not it is being followed.
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### **Parks and Open Spaces:**

Arn Franzen reviewed this spring's upcoming process for updating the City's State-mandated Open Space Plan. (see presentation).

- **The 2002-2008 OSRP** is available at <http://www.somervillema.gov/CityBigPlans.cfm>
- A resident mentioned that the individual parks are fine, but that it would be nice to have some kind of recommended **chain of parks**, where families could go from park to park on a nice Saturday afternoon.
- A resident wanted **more details on each park** – which ones have playgrounds? Which ones have basketball courts? etc. Arn Franzen responded that the City conducted a complete inventory of the parks last year, and would likely be making that kind of information available as part of the new web site. Residents suggested that such an inventory should include *all* public space, including parks and fields not managed by the City.

- City staff observed that **land acquisition** for making new parks is generally prohibitively expensive. Another resident mentioned having worked with the Trust for Public Land, and organization which helps communities acquire donated land for public use.
- Multiple residents reiterated their request for **more indoor or sheltered play spaces**. Residents observed that parks are only useful in some kinds of weather. They suggested that having an outdoor park with a covered shelter would offer something valuable. They suggested that this should be integrated into the new ORSP. They also suggested that the indoor recreation spaces (including pools, open gym times at schools, etc.) should be listed on any recreational spaces inventory the City does. Another resident said it seemed like many of the indoor play spaces available were **only open during the work day**, which she said seemed to assume a non-working parent or home child care. This resident suggested that such a system had an economic and child-age cutoff.
- Residents suggested that **more trees** should have been planted as a part of the Summer Street construction. Another resident mentioned that the City might be able to offset some of its tree-planting costs by **having residents plant "Memorial" or "Milestone" trees**, planted in remembrance of a late relative, or in honor of an important neighborhood or family anniversary. The family could donate for the cost of the tree and a small plaque.

#### **Next Steps for City Staff:**

- Email out the online survey for the new OSRP when is available.
- As part of new web site, create searchable or indexed inventory of parks and the various features each one contains. Include all public space, not just City-managed. Solicit recommendations for possible "park walks" -- routes which parents can walk which take them by multiple parks.
- Similarly to (or together with) the previous suggestion, inventory all *indoor* public play space. Continue to explore possibilities for increasing the amount of or hours for such space.
- As a part of the Mayor's goal of expanding the City's total tree canopy by 20% over four years, explore the possibility of giving residents the option to sponsor or dedicate a tree as a memorial or a milestone.

#### **Next Steps for Residents:**

- Watch for the online OSRP survey, and give feedback when it is available.

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#### **Libraries: <http://www.somervillepubliclibrary.org/index.html>**

Nancy Milnor reviewed program and renovation plans for the City's Public Libraries. (see presentation).

- Nancy Milnor reported that the leaks at the Main Branch Library had been addressed, clearing the way for **major renovations** in coming years for both the exterior and interior: Roof, masonry, ornament, plaster replacement, painting, carpet. She reported that Central Hill Park (the park space in front of the Library and the High School) is also scheduled for renovation in the next few years.

- Nancy Milnor also suggested that the City may look into the possibility of a **new library facility** in the future. However, it may not be a new library building as one might traditionally think of it. The paradigm of a 'library' as a physical building that stores books is becoming a thing of the past. With online technology and faster inter-library loan available, public libraries are focusing more on programming than on physical site and inventory. She announced that the Somerville Libraries recently received a \$40,000 matching grant from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners. The grant will be used for planning and design of a new building space as described above.
- A resident wondered if the Library could have its own **dedicated maintenance staff**. City staff responded that because of the specializations involved (electrical, masonry, etc.) it's more efficient to have the DPW manage all City building work and send specialists where they're most needed on a given day.
- A resident mentioned the Library's newsletter and added, "While you don't have to **be a Friend of the Somerville Public Library** to get the newsletter, it's a great way to stay informed!" This resident also suggested that the Friends have a lot of influence in how library programming happens.
- Nancy Milnor highlighted the popularity of the **free classes in English for Speakers of Other Languages** offered at the library. They do not require any registration or showing any identification. The classes are primarily drop-in and conversational, and regularly get around 30-40 participants.
- A resident suggested that Library **hours should be longer in the winter**, so that kids have a place to go outside the home when the weather is cold.
- Somerville residents mentioned **libraries in other cities** which could be potential models to look at for ideas:
  - Middle Country Public Library in Centerreach, NY. <http://www.mcpl.lib.ny.us/>
  - Salt Lake City Public Library: <http://www.slcppl.lib.ut.us>
- A resident wanted to know more about the **Spanish-singing sessions for kids**, and if more of those could be available.

#### **Next Steps for City Staff:**

- Continue to work towards expanding hours at branch libraries and hours in the winter. SomerStat is currently analyzing circulation activity by hour of day and may have recommendations for best use.
- Look at other municipal library systems for best practices as City moves forward with library grant.

#### **Next Steps for Residents:**

- Subscribe to the library newsletter, and even become a Friend of the SPL.