

Young Somerville Goes Green! Meeting Notes **April 7, 2008 – The Burren, Davis Square**

City Officials Present:

Joseph A. Curtatone, Mayor of Somerville
Rebekah L. Gewirtz, Alderman, Ward 6
Peter Mills, Environmental Programs Manager, Office of Sustainability and the Environment
Vithal Desphande, Environmental Coordinator, Office of Sustainability and the Environment
Jackie Rossetti, Public Information Officer
Ethan Field, ResiStat Analyst

Community Leaders Present:

Mayor's Commission on Energy Use and Climate Change: Andrea Ranger, Eric Becker
Somerville Climate Action and GoGreen Davis Square: Vanessa Rule, Maureen Barillaro, Marla Rhodes, Julia McGuire
Groundwork Somerville and Somerville Community Growing Center: Jennifer Lawrence
Somerville Local First: Joe Grafton
Young Somerville Advisory Group: Ceridwen Cherry, Alyssa Rosen, Greeley O'Connor, Heather Takle, David Thayer

The information packet for the event contains information and a web link for the groups represented. That packet is available online at:

<http://www.somervillema.gov/section.cfm?org=somstat&page=1044>

Representatives from each office and organization spoke briefly to introduce themselves to all participants. After that, participants had the opportunity to move freely and ask questions directly to the Mayor, City staff, and community leaders.

Reflections from the Office of Sustainability and the Environment:

Peter Mills said many participants were interested in learning what other communities have been able to achieve, and then using that knowledge to develop new/additional priorities for Somerville. A variety of information about environmental best practices and initiatives in development elsewhere that could be transferable to Somerville are available at:

<http://www.mayors.org/climateprotection/documents/2007bestpractices-mcps.pdf>

http://greenpolicy.us/Main_Page

<http://www.sustainlane.us/>

Green roofs (and the possibility of doing some in Somerville) were also a topic of conversation. Tufts and Groundwork Somerville are already collaborating on a project this spring, along with Prospect Hill Charter School.

Reflections from the Young Somerville Advisory Group:

Heather Takle said that the renter's dilemma was a main theme of conversation: How do renters do more if they won't necessarily be in this same house long-term? The investment is not worth it for the renter - and the landlord doesn't want to invest. Heather suggested the city needs to offer education and incentives for landlords - send them to www.masssave.com or SCA's website www.somervilleclimateaction.org for more info on what incentives already exist.

Alyssa Rosen also participated in the discussion about renters not being able to have leverage with landlords. I think this is where the YSAG has a point to make to the Mayor. She said it seems like the city is managing its many projects well, but if we could connect landlords with money-saving opportunities we could move sustainability/efficiency into people's homes, which she said it seems the city has not yet focused efforts. She said it sounds like SCA is succeeding in the effort to get folks to consider joining the New England Wind Fund.

A. Greeley O'Connor had an interesting conversation with 3-4 young Somerville residents who are recent transplants from CA and were attending the event because of their strong green cities in CA as main reference point on civic best practices. She heard:

- support for bag tax at grocery stores. (no free plastic bag. 5-10 cent fee for purchase with proceeds to go to green fund)
- desire for higher visibility of the City's current green activities
- request for information on whether "going green" reduces city's available funds for schools, etc. What are the costs/tradeoffs?

Multiple YSAG members talked with Joe Grafton of Somerville Local First:

<http://www.myspace.com/somervillelocalfirst>

They learned that Local First will be actively soliciting businesses to join them. Conversations included the possibility of offering Local First businesses greener maintenance options/upgrades that could serve all local first businesses. The work could be done by local contractors using sustainable products. There was acknowledgement that this might not appeal to businesses as a way of initially promoting Local First, but may be a development idea after the project gets going. At minimum, Local First could help raise local businesses awareness about NSTAR rebates for weatherization, etc. YSAG attendees reported that Somerville Local First is planning a May event.

Reflections from Jennifer Lawrence of Groundwork Somerville and The Growing Center:

Jennifer also noted the widespread sentiment that "there isn't anything that renters can do." However, she also felt that Somerville Climate Action has a great team of people working with renters on easy steps. She said GoGreen Davis Square (of which Groundwork Somerville, SCA and DARBI are founding partners) is currently working on a landlord team in the business community, and suggested trying to work with landlords outside the business community as well. She thinks that the city could do more in this area of working with renters and landlords.

Reflections from Vanessa Rule of Somerville Climate Action and GoGreen Davis Square:

Vanessa reiterated that Local First and GoGreen are collaborating to address the business improvements issue in Davis Square (GoGreen has been working with businesses to help them green up through the NSTAR audits, rebates, etc.) Once they have a good system in place, they plan to expand to include the rest of Somerville. Vanessa agreed that there is a role for the City in reaching out to commercial and residential landlords to educate them about the importance of energy efficiency and weatherization and encourage them to retrofit their properties. She added that this is critical because 46% of the city's carbon footprint is from residential emissions. She mentioned two key ways:

- **Insulation:** Proper insulation of Somerville homes dramatically lowers carbon-emissions, utility bills, and energy-consumption.
 - **Modern Refrigerators:** An old fridge can consume as much as 15% of a household's electricity. Vanessa mentioned existing incentive programs:
 - **NSTAR** offers homeowners a 50% rebate on insulation. The other 50% has a quick return-on-investment from the savings.
 - **Wainwright Bank** has a green loan program for residents that offer lower interest rates for green home capital improvements.
 - **The City of Somerville** administers a Federal HUD lead loan program – a three year loan for de-leading a home at zero interest rate and forgivable after three years of occupancy. Jennifer and Eric Becker (Member of the Mayor's Commission on Energy Use and Climate Change) suggested the City devise something similar for weatherization, but acknowledged that residents may need to lobby the Federal government to create such a program.
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Resident Priorities:

Participants were each given five votes to distribute any way they wished between the options described in the presentation, and added new ones not mentioned in the presentation. These issues will be combined with other neighborhoods' priorities to create a resident budget priorities report. Issues that emerge as the highest priorities will inform the City Departments as they set their goals for the coming year. These departmental goals will determine how each department prioritizes its staff time and budget.

Votes	Issue
15	Ban plastic shopping bags or create a "bag tax"
15	Continue to push State for Green Line Extension
13	More bike lanes on major city streets
13	Improve incentives for renter / landlords improvements
9	Public recycling bins in major business districts
8	Ban sale of bottled water
6	Providing city-wide Wi-Fi
6	Promoting storefront improvement through small business improvement grants
6	"Pay as you Throw" per-bag garbage disposal fee
5	Use city purchasing power to negotiate discounts or rebates for Somerville residents to make homes more environmentally sustainable.
5	Update City lighting with LED like Medford
4	Creation of Affordable housing developments
4	Bigger recycling bins - real bins with lids
3	Purchase of reduced-emission and alternate fuel city vehicles
3	Expanding the number of trees in the city by 20% over four years
3	Utilize porous pavement for driveways and parking lots, etc.
2	Continue to prioritize Somerville Community Path Extension from Cedar Street to Central Street
1	Improved communication about city events and programs
1	Implementing Safe-START pedestrian improvements
1	Unveiling a more user-friendly city website and improved calendar of city events
1	Create incentives for residents to walk / bike / bus / carpool / zipcar.
0	Promote resources for renters and first-time homebuyers