

Davis Square Neighborhood Priorities Meeting Notes

ResiStat Meeting – May 12, 2008

City Officials Present:

Joseph A. Curtatone, Mayor of Somerville
Rebekah L. Gewirtz, Ward 6 Alderman
Anthony Holloway, Chief of Police
Capt. John O'Connor, Somerville Police Department
Stephanie Hirsch, SomerStat Director
Ethan Field, ResiStat Analyst

Presentation:

Ethan Field presented residents with an overview of the city's budget and the process by which it is created every year. (See presentation for details.) Mayor Curtatone, Alderman Gewirtz, and Stephanie Hirsch also filled in details.

- A resident asked whether or not external grants were listed as sources of revenue and if the corresponding grant expenditures appear as expenses. Stephanie Hirsch responded that currently grant income and expenditures are not included, because doing so would be much more complicated than it might seem (different fiscal years, multi-year grant periods, etc.). However, this is a goal of our Finance Director.
- A resident suggested that it would be interesting to look at expenditures by neighborhood. City staff agreed that this would be interesting and we hope to be able to do it as cost accounting becomes easier with better data management systems.
- A resident suggested that the city needs to employ one or more grant writers, who will be able to bring in money for particular projects.
- On seeing the level of expenditures on employee health insurance, a resident asked whether or not the city had looked into buying in to the new statewide health insurance plan. The Mayor responded that as the option is currently designed, it is not feasible for the city. He said the real savings are in plan design, and that's where the city hopes to save money as time goes on.
- A resident asked if we had data on how Somerville's spending on health insurance compared with other municipalities. The data is available on the Mass. Dept. of Revenue Municipal Databank: <http://www.dls.state.ma.us>. However, the Mayor added that it's difficult to compare municipalities, because of the different budget size, staff size, insurance cost-coding by zip code, etc.
- A resident asked about how the schools fit in to the city budget process. The Mayor explained that the Superintendent shares information with the Mayor about all funding received from Federal, State, and grant sources, and lets the Mayor know what is needed from the city to bridge any gap between revenue and expense. The Mayor proposes and the Board of Aldermen approves changes to the Schools' 'bottom line', but they do not manage or approve any line-level changes. However, the Mayor and the BOA President are also both *ex-officio* members of the School Committee and share feedback and ideas in that capacity.
- A resident and former Director of Human Services for the city said that the city needs to fully staff its human services commissions (Human Rights, Multicultural, Women's,

GBLT, Disabilities). She noted that these commissions do great work sponsoring events that bring together community members and agency leaders, and that they could be even more of an asset to the city if they had full staff support. She felt that staff support for the Disabilities Commission in particular was insufficient, and pointed out that having a fully-staffed and functioning Disabilities Commission is mandated by law. She also said that restoring funding for these and other human services functions which were significantly reduced following the massive State funding cuts of 2002-2003 should be a top priority for the city.

Resident Priorities:

Residents 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 neighborhood or City-wide priorities will inform the City Departments as they set their goals for the upcoming year. These departmental goals determine how each department prioritizes its staff time, budget, and seeking outside funding.

Votes	Rank	Issue
10	1	Increase amount of job and recreational opportunities for youth in the summer
8	2	Improve pedestrian and bike safety on Willow Ave between Elm and Summer
7	3	Police officers should be based in schools, and students should get to know specific officers
6	4	Address home break-ins
5	5	Fully staff all human services commissions
5	5	Pursue absentee landlords who do not clear snow from their sidewalks
4	7	Increase tree canopy and create a tree-preservation ordinance
3	8	Create partnership with Tufts to create job-readiness programs for youth and adults
3	8	Upgrade city web site
2	10	Provide incentives for home energy efficiency
2	10	Do more data analysis on environmental cost-savings issues, and offer incentives to employees for finding cost-savings
2	10	Increase enforcement of the trash ordinance
2	10	Bury city utility lines
1	14	Skills training and ESL classes
1	14	Explore the possibility of creating a non-resident parking permit for human service providers who work in the city
1	14	Involve experienced, knowledgeable area resident voices in the Davis Square Hotel Advisory Group.
1	14	Do an inventory of raised and broken bricks on sidewalks in Davis Square and address the problem.
1	14	Place emergency call boxes on the community path
1	14	Make info about the property tax deferral program and its benefits to seniors more readily accessible.
1	14	Address motor vehicle break-ins
1	14	Upgrade the corner sidewalk ramps at Russell/Elm/Cutter/Summer to be ADA-compliant
1	14	Increase the number of police officers on foot and on bikes
0		Fully fund police and fire departments
0		Increase resident participation in developing metrics for city performance
0		Initiate a One Book One Somerville program
0		Require stores over 5000 square feet to provide plastic bag recycling

0	Place holiday lights in Powderhouse Park in the winter
0	Address noise concerns in Davis Square especially on Friday and Saturday nights
0	Address pedestrian and bike safety concerns at both ends of Wallace and Irving Streets
0	Address and reduce double-parking in Davis Sqaure, particularly by commercial delivery trucks