

Somerville Public Library

Strategic Plan

Fiscal Years 2027-2031

Submitted By:



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A Note from Our Director

In September 2019, I quietly celebrated the completion of our previous strategic plan. It was one of my first major projects as a new library director, and I really wanted to get it right. It felt great to have an engaged committee guided by a public library consultant whose approach aligned with ours. We used broad brushstrokes, believing it would give us room to explore, adapt, and be creative.

Six months later, Covid-19 shuttered our libraries for three months. We pivoted to online story times and contactless pickup, staggered staffing schedules and added personal protective equipment, and created an outdoor Wi-Fi popup. This was not how I imagined we'd be testing out our new plan, but I'm grateful and proud of meeting the needs of our library community during such an unprecedented time.

Six years later we are all still moving forward in an era of unprecedented change, and it's time to present a new strategic plan. We started the process as we did last time - with a stellar committee and public library consultant and together we identified ways to go further in our planning. Improvements to the survey and its distribution more than doubled the number of responses. Introducing virtual focus groups and interviews made participation easier and resulted in more feedback. Utilizing data from prior years added context when processing the feedback we received. The end result is, I believe, a thoughtful and informed strategic plan that provides clear direction while still encouraging creativity, exploration, and innovation.

If you served on the committee, consulted, took the survey, or participated in a focus group or interview, thank you! Appreciate you so much!

Respectfully,

Cathy

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Approved by Somerville Public Library Board of Trustees, July 1, 2026.

Introduction

The Somerville Public Library Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2027–2031 sets a clear direction for how we will serve a growing and evolving community. With three locations—the Central Library at 79 Highland Avenue, the East Branch at 115 Broadway, and the West Branch at 40 College Avenue, we serve more than eighty thousand people. This plan reflects a shared commitment to ensuring that each library location continues to be a welcoming, accessible, and responsive community resource.

Since our previous plan was introduced, the Somerville community has demonstrated an increased need for social services, expanded expectations for public spaces, and evolving demands for both traditional and innovative library services. This strategic plan responds directly to those shifts while staying grounded in our core mission, values, and commitment to excellent customer service

This plan sets a clear and focused direction for the future, reflecting a thoughtful planning process grounded in community input, data, and best practices while aligning with the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners' requirements.

We undertook this planning effort to set priorities, guide decision-making, and ensure responsible stewardship of public resources. A well-defined plan supports clear focus, accountability, and measurable progress, while also strengthening our ability to secure funding and partnerships.

Ultimately, this strategic plan is a roadmap that positions the Somerville Public Library to remain an essential part of community life for years to come.

Our Community

Somerville

Somerville, Massachusetts, is a vibrant city located three miles north of Boston. Home to more than eighty thousand residents in just over four square miles, Somerville is the most densely populated community in New England.

80,549

people live in
Somerville

25%

were born outside
the United States

68%

have a bachelor's
degree or higher

10%

have incomes below the
federal poverty level

66% of Households Are Renters

Renters

66%

Owners

34%

**29% of Residents Speak a Language
Other Than English at Home**

English **71%**

Spanish **9%**

Other
Indo-European **14%**

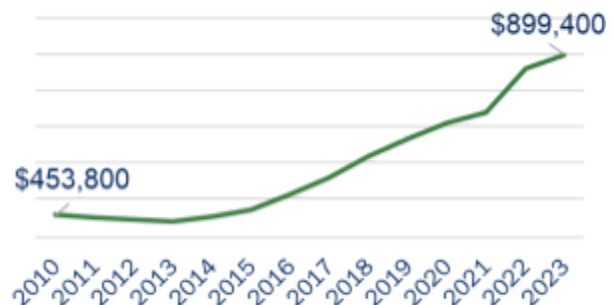
Asian and
Pacific Island **5%**

Others **2%**

**Median Household Income
Increased 47% from 2010 to 2023**



**Median Home Value Increased by
98%**



Source: American Community Survey 2019-2023 5-year estimates.

Our Community

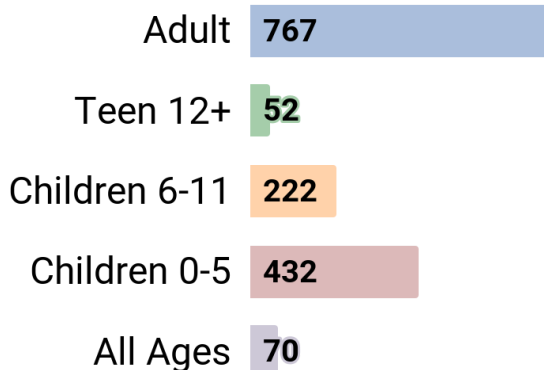
Our Library

The Somerville Public Library is at the heart of the Somerville community, with **41,470** residents holding library cards. Somerville Public Library has locations in the central, east, and west parts of the city. In 2025, all of our locations combined welcomed more than three hundred thousand visitors.

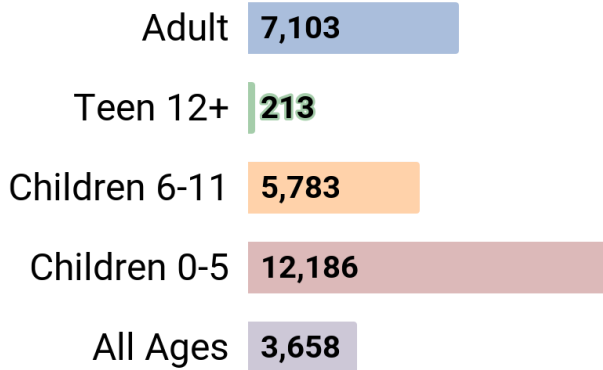
In 2025, we circulated **321,056** physical books, **123,685** e-books and e-audiobooks, **43,725** audio/visual materials, and **2,882** Library of Things and technology items across three locations and online.

New library card registrations increased 88% over the last five years, from **2,955** in 2021 to **5,543** in 2025.

We Offered 1,543 Programs in Fiscal Year 2025



28,943 People Attended Fiscal Year 2025 Programs



Source: LibraryIQ & Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners.

Our Planning Process

The Somerville Public Library conducted a multi-phase strategic planning process from June 2025 through July 2026 to develop our Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2027–2031. Barbara Alevras, PMP, of Sage Consulting Services, was engaged to support our Library Director and guide the process. The process included project planning, community assessment, data synthesis, development of plan components, drafting, internal approval, and formal submission. The approach emphasized inclusivity, objectivity, and transparency, and aligned with the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners' requirements.

We gathered and analyzed a wide range of input, combining community feedback with objective data to understand current needs and anticipate future priorities. Staff, trustees, community members, city administration representatives, and diverse community organizations all contributed valuable perspectives that shaped the direction of this plan.

This process ensured that the resulting strategic plan reflects documented community needs, measurable priorities, and a clear framework for implementation and accountability.

Project Timeline

June - July 2025

Establish goals, define scope, develop timeline, and identify stakeholders.

August - October 2025

Launch community engagement activities: Community Survey, Adult Focus Group and Teen Empowerment Focus Groups, Stakeholder Interviews, and Staff and Board of Trustees SOAR Exercises.

November - December 2025

Complete data collection.

November 2025 - January 2026

Analyze and synthesize all data, identifying key themes and priorities.

January - April 2026

Develop strategic plan components, including mission, values, goals, and objectives.

April - June 2026

Draft strategic plan document.

July 2026

Seek review and approval from the Board of Trustees. Submit plan to MBLC.

What We Learned

Community feedback consistently highlighted the importance of welcoming spaces, equitable access, relevant programs, and strong community connections. Input from visitors also underscored an expectation that we balance trusted core services, such as collections and research support, with new technologies, innovative programs, and evolving partnerships. Together, these themes helped shape the priorities reflected in this plan.

Key areas of focus that emerged include:

Access and Convenience

Community members value equitable access, convenient hours, responsive services, and easy access to spaces, materials, and technologies.

Community Connection

Residents see us as a trusted community hub and want us to deepen partnerships, strengthen their sense of belonging, and expand opportunities for connection.

Inclusive Services

Community members want us to serve diverse needs, reduce barriers, and ensure services, collections, and programs remain welcoming and accessible to all.



Learning and Discovery

Residents value lifelong learning, strong collections, and engaging programs that support curiosity, creativity, and personal growth.

Modern Spaces

Feedback emphasized the importance of safe, flexible, and inviting spaces that support comfort, collaboration, and evolving community use.

Outreach and Awareness

Community members want stronger communication, broader outreach, and greater awareness of library resources, services, and opportunities.



This plan reflects those priorities while recognizing the need for careful stewardship of time, staff capacity, and financial resources to achieve meaningful impact.

It builds on our strengths while responding to evolving community needs, including growing demand for support services, flexible spaces, and both traditional and innovative offerings.

Our Plan

Mission Statement

The Somerville Public Library is a welcoming space that engages and empowers all. We connect our community to information, ideas, and each other through lifelong learning opportunities.

Core Values

Intellectual Freedom

We believe that free, unrestricted, and confidential access to information is a fundamental principle of a functioning democracy, and that supporting freedom of thought, belief, and expression contributes to a diversity of knowledge and informed participation in civic life.

Lifelong Curiosity and Discovery

We support lifelong learning by providing materials, programs, services, and experiences that enable people to explore, learn, and connect with one another.

Inclusion

We understand the harm caused by systems of oppression and inequity and seek to promote and support diversity of opinion, experience, culture, race, gender, gender expression, sexuality, and language.

Community Connector

We recognize that the collective effort of many in a community is what nurtures and sustains a healthy society. We are committed to networking and collaborating with other community members, institutions, and resources to support library visitors and the community at large.

Our Plan

Core Values (continued)

Service

Our knowledgeable and skilled staff is dedicated to providing excellent library experiences. Visitors can count on courteous staff who are informed about library policies, services, and best practices.

Safety

We strive to provide public spaces that are clean, safe, and well-maintained.

Customer Service Standards

The Somerville Public Library is committed to creating a welcoming, inclusive, and trusted experience for all members of our community. Every staff interaction reflects our shared values of respect, integrity, and service excellence.

Library staff will:

- Greet and assist visitors with courtesy and respect.
- Listen attentively, communicate clearly, and provide accurate information.
- Collaborate with colleagues to deliver consistent, high-quality service.
- Protect the privacy and confidentiality of library users.
- Exercise good judgment in resolving issues.
- Inform supervisors of issues in a timely manner.
- Continue to learn and remain informed about library policies, services, and best practices.



Our Plan

Strategic Goals and Supporting Objectives

Goal 1: Invest in Library Spaces

Provide modern, flexible facilities that meet evolving community needs.

Supporting Objectives:

1. Plan, renovate, and expand facilities to support collections, programs, technology, research, and community space for all ages.
2. Create safe, flexible, accessible, and welcoming spaces for individual and community use.
3. Improve comfort, layout, and functionality to align with current expectations.
4. Integrate library priorities into the municipal capital planning process.
5. Pursue capital funding through grants, partnerships, and donations.
6. Engage the community in planning and decision-making for future improvements.

Goal 2: Expand Access

Ensure equitable, reliable, and convenient access to library services.

Supporting Objectives:

1. Align service hours with community needs.
2. Increase availability of spaces for community use beyond standard library hours.
3. Use data to increase engagement with collections, programs, and services.
4. Partner with municipal departments to expand reach and leverage shared resources.
5. Improve accessibility through clear signage, wayfinding, and online information.

Goal 3: Boost Awareness and Engagement

Promote the library to maximize community awareness, use, and impact.

Supporting Objectives:

1. Use data to target outreach and promotion of programs, services, and resources.
2. Promote services and resources available remotely.
3. Clearly communicate hours, services, spaces, and initiatives.
4. Regularly assess community awareness and adjust communication strategies.
5. Strengthen relationships with community stakeholders.

Goal 4: Elevate Position as a Critical Community Resource

Strengthen the library's role as a trusted, inclusive space for all visitors and employees.

Supporting Objectives:

1. Explore opportunities to partner and collaborate with local organizations, businesses, and city departments.
2. Offer programs that reflect the community's diversity, interests, and expertise.
3. Build community by fostering a welcoming, inclusive environment for all ages and backgrounds.
4. Design spaces that support community needs across all life stages.
5. Invest in staff development to ensure excellent service and visitor experiences.
6. Support a positive workplace culture that reflects the library's mission, values, and customer service standards.

Our Plan

Action Plan

Our annual action plan is a separate, supplemental document that supports implementation of this strategic plan.



Prepared in accordance with the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners' requirements, the action plan supports ongoing evaluation, accountability, and annual reporting, while helping maintain our library's eligibility for state certification and grant opportunities.

Developed and updated annually to cover the upcoming fiscal year, each action plan translates the strategic plan's long-term goals and objectives into specific annual priorities, activities, timelines, and staff responsibilities.



Conclusion

Acknowledgements

We extend our sincere appreciation to the many individuals and groups who contributed their time, perspectives, and expertise to the development of this strategic plan. This includes the Board of Trustees, Strategic Planning Committee members, staff, volunteers, and Friends of the Library members, as well as community stakeholders who participated in interviews, focus groups, and surveys.

We are especially grateful to the hundreds of community members whose feedback helped shape the plan's priorities and direction. Their collective input ensured that this strategic plan reflects the needs, values, and aspirations of the community it serves.



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Appendices

Following is a list of Strategic Plan document appendices. They are available for download and review.

Appendix A – Adult Focus Group Summary Report

Appendix B – Community Interviews Summary Report

Appendix C – Community Survey 2025 Highlights Report

Appendix D – SOAR Analysis Summary Results Report 2025

Appendix E – Staff Survey Summary Results Report 2025

Appendix F – Teen Empowerment Focus Group Summary Report 2025

Appendix G – Board of Trustees SOAR Strategic Planning Activity Report

