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SEASON'S GREETINGS

From the Publisher and Staff of
The Somerville Times

'A long time coming' – Winter Hill neighbors cheer start of Star Market demolition



The long-awaited partial demolition of the old Star Market building took place last week, with crowds gathering to cheer on the activities. — Photo by Bobbie Toner

By Jeffrey Shwom

The first pieces of roofing at a former Star Market came down Saturday, symbolizing the start of a multiyear housing and mixed-use building project on Winter Hill.

A crowd gathered across the street at Winter Hill Brewing cheered the first pulls of a construction excavator's claw to the facade of the long-closed grocery store at 299 Broadway [1].

"This has been a long time coming," said Winter Hill Brewing owner Bert Holdredge at the neighborhood demolition party he hosted at his taproom and coffee bar. "I never thought I'd *Continued on page 4*

Somerville Kiwanis join other local clubs for 'Toys For Tots' drive

On Thursday, December 11, Somerville Kiwanis Club members were joined by our good friends from the Somerville Rotary Club and Somerville Lions Club for our annual Toys For Tots luncheon meeting at the Burren Restaurant in Davis Square. Two members of the Marine Corps joined us for this special tri-club meeting.

Everyone attending brought unwrapped toys for donating to the United States Marine Corps, Toys For Tots program. In addition to more than two hundred fifty new, unwrapped toys, the Marines were presented with a donation to Toys for Tots of \$2,500 from Middlesex Federal Savings Bank, which was presented by Vice President Adam Portney, who is also a Somerville Kiwanis member. The Toys for Tots drive is in addition to more than 200 toys that were delivered to the *Continued on page 10*



Program Chairman James Lynch, Marine Corps members Sergeant Ulises Tapia and Gunnery Sergeant Miguel Guzman, and Kiwanis member Adam Portney.

— Photos courtesy of Somerville Kiwanis Club

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The views and opinions expressed in Newstalk do not necessarily reflect those of The Somerville Times, its publisher or staff. The column has many contributors.

The publishers, staff, and everyone associated with *The Somerville Times* wish one and all a very **Happy Holiday, Merry Christmas,** and **Happy Hanukkah,** as well as a prosperous and healthy **New Year** in 2026.








The *Somerville Times*' staff is taking a small holiday break from the print edition next week. The next issue coming out will be on **December 31**. We will still be running the website and will be posting anything that comes in that week. We wish to thank all our readers for your support this past year. We are truly grateful. Don't forget, you can go online to our website and register for a free subscription to the paper.

Low-income households may be eligible to receive help with winter heating costs through the **Home Energy Assistance Program**. This program serves residents of Somerville and Cambridge. Participants receive assistance with their heating costs **between November 1 and April 30**. Learn more about the program, check if you qualify, and apply for assistance today at somerville-ma.gov/heatingassistance.

Happy birthday for the next two weeks while we are on break: Happy birthday to **Zachary Atwell**, who is celebrating this week. Happy birthday to a great person and great friend, **Monica Calvo**. We wish her a very happy birthday. Happy *Continued on page 7*

Somerville Weather Forecast

for the week of December 17 – December 23 as provided by the National Weather Service

DAY	CONDITIONS	HIGH/LOW	PRECIPITATION	HUMIDITY	WIND
 Wednesday <i>December 17</i>	Partly Cloudy	45°/30°	5%	3%	SW 15 mph
 Thursday <i>December 18</i>	Partly Cloudy	45°/41°	7%	4%	SW 9 mph
 Friday <i>December 19</i>	Rain	57°/28°	88%	61%	SW 20 mph
 Saturday <i>December 20</i>	Partly Cloudy	36°/30°	2%	1%	W 9 mph
 Sunday <i>December 21</i>	Partly Cloudy	45°/25°	16%	9%	WSW 11 mph
 Monday <i>December 22</i>	Partly Cloudy	37°/23°	14%	7%	WNW 12 mph
 Tuesday <i>December 23</i>	Partly Cloudy	37°/26°	12%	8%	SW 13 mph

NOTE: Conditions subject to change. Always check a daily forecast prior to activities that can be affected by the weather.

TheSomervilleTimes.com Comments of the Week

Response to: **Somerville City Councilor Matthew McLaughlin announces candidacy for State Senate**

Lawrence Gregory says:

Good luck Matt before you leave current position can we do something about traffic on Mount Vernon Street

Response to: **City Councilors pass divestment resolution**

Winter Hill Barney says:

"Strezo!" needs to go. If opposing collective punishment, ethnic cleansing, and genocide is "divisive" so be it.

Log onto TheSomervilleTimes.com to leave your own comments

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Important resources for families

If your family needs a little extra support right now, please find a concise list of food resources on the Somerville Public Schools website: <https://somerville.k12.ma.us/food-resources>

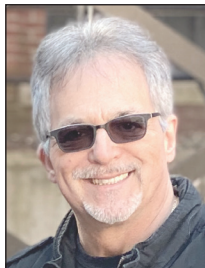
Your child's school liaison can also help with more complicated issues, including access to cold-weather clothing, and can connect families with local services offering assistance: <https://somerville.k12.ma.us/district-departments/somerville-family-learning-collaborative-sflc/school-based-family-and-community>.



Life in the **VILLE** by Jimmy Del Ponte

The views and opinions expressed in the commentaries and letters to the Editor of The Somerville Times do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of The Somerville Times, its publishers or staff.

The Enchanted Village



The Enchanted Village at Jordan Marsh, which had been there since the 1940s, closed in 1972. It reopened again at Jordan's Furniture in Avon in 1990. Here

are some memories of the wonderful Christmas tradition. The animatronic vintage Christmas-themed scenes are part of my childhood holiday memories. The following recollections are from those who remember those magical visits to The Enchanted Village.

I remember going there with my mom. After visiting with Santa, they gave you a sturdy toy! Not a cheap coloring book like they give today! I remember getting a tea set one year and a toy cleaning set another year (carpet sweeper, broom, etc. – they actually worked). Then after-wards, we would either go to Jordan's or Filene's luncheonette for lunch! Also, we would look at the Christmas windows of Jordan's, Filene's, and Gilchrist's! Great times.

Enchanted Village was so awesome.

Blueberry muffins were the best. I still have my sparkling Christmas stocking from Jordan Marsh. We would go every year and take our picture with Santa Claus, then walk and see the lights through the Boston Common, and to dinner at Marliare's.

Jordan Marsh had an enormous toy carousel on the way to see Santa. To this day, I remember it. I wanted that toy throughout my childhood. We would also stop at the bakery for blueberry muffins!

Magic! Going into Boston with my mom to see it. Then seeing Santa after! It was amazing, I loved every minute of it.

So vivid! I went in every year with my Yiayia. Jordan's furniture in Avon actually has the Enchanted Village. I took my son back a few years ago, not expecting it to be the same. Once I saw them, I couldn't stop smiling from ear to ear at the flood of memories.

My mom took me and my sisters every year and was always amazed by the whole village, but I liked meeting Santa and having our picture taken with him.

Getting all dressed up and taking the train in. All the beautiful window displays



are before you even get into the village.

My paternal grandmother, who lived with us, took me to Boston to see Santa every year. After I saw Santa, she took me to the toy section to pick out any doll I wanted. I remember Vogue Dolls were the ones to get, so that's what I got. We would then stop at Kresge to buy a BBQ ro-tis-

serie chicken to bring home with us. One of my best memories with the best grandmother ever!

Dressing the three kids in their Sunday best and going into Boston to wait in a long line to see the beautiful Christmas display.

I worked at Jordan Marsh at Downtown Crossing as a stock boy *Continued on page 15*

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Money Map Tip of the Week

By Vincent Hicks, CPA

Q: How does culture impact our money habits?

A: Culture shapes how we think about money—and that shapes how we use it. While we all inherit certain financial attitudes, we also have the power to question, adapt, and evolve them.

Here are a few ways culture shows up—and how you might shift the narrative:

• **Saving vs. Spending:** Some are taught to save obsessively. Others see money as something to enjoy or share. A healthier lens: spend in alignment with your values and long-term goals.

• **Debt Attitudes:** For some, debt is routine. For others, it's taboo. But used carefully, debt can be a tool—especially for building credit, investing in education, or starting a business.

• **Talking About Money:** In many families, money is a private or even taboo topic. But open, informed conversations can reduce stress and lead to smarter planning.

• **Generational Support:** Some cultures emphasize caring for elders; others expect independence. Whichever your norm, setting clear expectations can protect relationships and financial stability.

Culture influences us, but it doesn't define us. Building a healthy financial culture is a

step-by-step process—and every shift you make is a step toward more control and confidence.

Any questions? I'd be happy to help.

I'm Vincent Hicks, CPA, based in Somerville with over 20 years of experience. Reach out at vhicksconnect@gmail.com or (859) 553-0788.

Disclaimer: This column provides general financial information and should not be considered legal, investment, or tax advice. Individual situations vary. Always consult a qualified professional for personalized guidance.



'A long time coming' – Winter Hill neighbors cheer start of Star Market demolition

CONT. FROM PG 1

see this day.”

Noting the nearly 3 acres of “blight,” Holdredge said he supported the project “in an area that needs a little bit of rejuvenation” and a city that “desperately needs housing.”

Mark Development and its partners, Beacon Communities and RISE Together, plan for the 2.6-acre parcel to hold two mixed-use buildings with 288 apartments and retail, outdoor community gathering areas, and an arts and creative civic enterprise space, according to the project website [2]. Around half of the homes will be affordable, meaning they will be offered only to households earning 80% or below of the area median income.

The whole building is expected to be demolished within a week, and a formal ground-breaking ceremony and project kickoff will be held early next year, representatives of the developers said.

Mayor-elect Jake Wilson, who lives less than two-tenths of a mile from the site, spoke of 299 Broadway as a model project to help ease an affordable housing shortage in Somerville.

“We have a goal of getting 20% affordable in [all of] Somerville. Mathematically, we all know we will never get there if every project is that 20% minimum inclusionary

zoning,” Wilson said. “That is why we need projects like this that can push us toward that goal.”

The Winter Hill Brewing party drew project neighbors, politicians, and community supporters, and mixed the festive with the civic. Resident Katie Scull said her group of friends – including a dog adorned in a Christmas sweater – came for a “fun hangout and fun Somerville thing to do in the morning.” Among them, though, was Joey Gardner, who lives about two blocks from the project site and said he was “pretty excited for this project to commence.”

“It's kind of sad to have so many blighted areas in the region, so it's kind of cool to see housing come in,” Gardner said.

Gardner said he would be happy to see the developers deliver third spaces – social gathering spaces outside of the home. The project includes 15,000 square feet of plaza and park space for civic use, 3,000 square feet of community and “flexible meeting” space, and an arts and creative enterprise space.

Event co-host and city councilor Jesse Clingan said that when he first ran for office in 2017, “every single door I went to brought up ‘What's going to happen with the old Star Market?’ For this to be finally happening for the city is huge for



— Photo by Jeffrey Shwom

this community.”

Clingan was hopeful that community input during the public process would be included in the final project. “A lot of the things that were in the original neighborhood plan for Winter Hill have been incorporated,” he said, citing a public corridor between the two buildings that goes to a public park on Sewall Street. The Winter Hill Neighborhood Plan [3] was adopted in 2016 with priorities of rejuvenating Broadway as a commercial main street and “to reconnect Winter Hill to the rest of the

city” physically and culturally.

Links:

- [1] https://www.google.com/search?q=299+Broadway,+Somerville,+MA+02145&shndl=40&shem=bdscl,damc,shrtsdl&source=sh/x/loc/geo/m1/1&kgs=150d25101f95ab0c&utm_source=bdscl,damc,shrtsdl,sh/x/loc/geo/m1/1
- [2] <https://www.299broadwaysomerville.com/>
- [3] <https://voice.somervillema.gov/winter-hill-plan-implementation>

MLPAC Meeting

January 13, 2026. 6:00-7:30pm, East Somerville Community School.

Join other parents of multilingual learners and discuss their social and academic needs. This is a great opportunity to meet other families, build leadership skills, and enjoy great conversation.

Dinner and child care will be provided.

Please email Gladys Valle with your questions: gvalle@k12.somerville.ma.us



Committee approves \$6 million for street and sidewalk reconstruction projects

By Jordan Pagkalinawan

As part of its final meeting of the year, the Somerville Finance Committee met on December 9 to approve funding for various city improvement projects, namely the 2026 Street Resurfacing Program, as well as several monetary and property gifts. The committee also heard updates on recent funding cuts and a potential requirement to cooperate with immigration authorities as part of future Urban and Safety Initiative (UASI) grants.

Street improvement projects

The committee began by approving the authorization of \$3.05 million in bonds toward the 2026 Street Resurfacing Program and appropriating another \$3 million from the Street Reconstruction & Resurfacing Stabilization Fund to the same cause. Director of Finance and Administration Michael Richards explained that both requests are among five sources that will be used to fund the 2026 Street Resurfacing Program, which includes two projects: the “Annual Streets Reconstruction Project” and the upgrades to West Pearl Street.

The Annual Streets Reconstruction Project will include a full-street reconstruction on Holyoke Road from Elm Street East to Elm Street West, Grandview Avenue from Walnut Street to Vinal Avenue, and Aldersey Street from Walnut Street to Vinal Avenue. A sidewalk-only reconstruction is set for Prescott Street from Summer Street to Highland Avenue, and a partial pave will occur on Putnam Street from Summer to Highland.

The West Pearl Street reconstruction will take place from Medford Street to MacGrath Highway. Postlewaite said the city is expected to go out to bid by mid-to-late winter, with the potential to break ground by late summer or early fall.

Postlewaite explained that the Annual Streets Resurfacing Project is “a quick project to get out the door” using state funds, while the bond authorization and stabilization fund will “primarily” support the West Pearl Complete Streets Project.

“We are currently wrapping up design with our consultant,” he said. “We have done a number of public outreach programs to discuss the project with the community, and that’s why we’ve broken these up into two separate projects, so that we could expedite both of them on the time scale that was best suited for the design

scale on each.”

He added that “a portion of funds” will address several ADA-related upgrades to sidewalks, curb ramps, and tree pits, the last of which would cover roots with gravel for a slip-resistant surface.

Appropriated funds

The committee then addressed several “delinquent electricity bills” for the Dillboy Enterprise Fund Electricity Account by appropriating \$205,000 from the Dilboy Field Enterprise Fund Retained Earnings and \$225,000 from the Unreserved Fund Balance. Chief of Staff Nikki Spencer explained that because of several changes to the Parks and Recreation department, the city was unable to transfer all bills to the Department of Public Works. To centralize electricity accounts and pay bills in a timely manner, city auditor Ed Bean said department heads are expected to use electronic mailboxes “to facilitate payment.”

Roughly \$10,600 was appropriated from the Unresolved Fund Balance to the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Fund to amend unallowable offenses. Additionally, the committee appropriated nearly \$6,800 from the Medicinal Marijuana Stabilization Fund to cover an increased workload for the Out of School Time [1] Coordinator, according to SomerPromise Director Christopher Hosman.

Gifts, grants, and contracts

The committee then authorized a consolidated “Gift Account” for the Veteran Services Department so they could accept four donations for the Veterans Holiday Season and support veterans in need of financial assistance. They also approved a \$370 gift from the Tufts University Softball team to the Health and Human Services Mobile Farmers Market Revolving Fund.

A \$22,570 grant from the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security was accepted to go toward the Somerville Police Department in order to replace three mobile data terminals, which are computers installed in police cruisers. SPD’s Director of Finance and Administration, Emily Wisdom, noted that these funds came from the state, and the department was able to purchase three of the five requested mobile data terminals with the funds. Councilor J.T. Scott and Councilor Wilfred Mbah expressed concern that the funds were directed to upgrade the mobile terminals in SPD cruisers instead of those used by the Somerville Housing Authority.

“I would hope this comment would di-



rect the administration to reconsider where those terminals go,” Scott said. “If we can only get them into one place, I’d much rather they go into the SHA cruisers rather than upgrading our SPD [cruisers].”

Following that discussion, the committee approved a gift of property at 17 Inner Belt Road from members of the RCD Foundation, which would go from a trustee to the Council on Aging, according to attorney Catherine Lester Salchert. Councilor Jesse Clingan appreciated the gift and its intention to ensure the Council on Aging has a permanent home. Councilor Willie Burnley Jr. said he hopes that the city’s current and future administrations can “work proactively” with the property’s numerous tenants to determine “the future of the building and how it can best serve the city and the public.”

A utility easement of approximately 200 square feet was approved for the NStar Electric Company at Boynton Yards. According to Salchert, the easement would be required to operate electric lines for 600 Windsor Place.

Transfer and prior-year invoice

The committee approved a \$150 transfer from the Office of Immigrant Affairs Neighborhood Improvement Council Account to the Somerville Public Schools Food Services Account for the Latin American and Caribbean Heritage Celebration.

Nearly \$148 of a prior-year invoice was approved for the Department of Health and Human Services Program Supplies and Materials Account for meeting snacks.

The committee also approved a resolution supporting the Massachusetts Water Resource Authority, which is committing additional resources to stormwater management.

Financial implications of Public Safety for All program

Legislative Liaison Kimberly Hunter updated the committee on the progress of the Public Safety for All project, saying that the program manager was hired over the summer and has met with staff to sustainably build out the program’s next steps. The program’s current recommendations include understanding the costs of hiring additional officers, utilizing body cameras, and implementing a “co-response model.”

“Those conversations have included how that would be funded—both the mid-term and long-term—with both the city’s current resources or with potential external funding sources,” she said. “There are no conclusions at this time. We’re excited to get the results of that conversation in the new year.”

Councilor Burnley, who submitted this item, said he sought further clarity on the program’s financial implications, adding that he would follow up with the next city council via memo.

Impacts of federal funding cuts on grants, programs, and services

Hunter acknowledged that federal funding has been “tumultuous” this year, with higher education and research nonprofits feeling the brunt of those impacts. As for local governments, she noted that while there have been no freezes in funding, there have been several delays in the process due to staff reductions from the federal government shutdown.

In response to Burnley’s clarifying question on the funding of the McGrath Highway project, Hunter said that the state has experienced “significant delays” that have led to “funding” *Continued on page 9*

Beacon Hill Roll Call



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Beacon Hill Roll Call can also be viewed on our website at www.thesomervilletimes.com

THE HOUSE AND SENATE: There were no roll call votes in the House or Senate last week. This week, *Beacon Hill Roll Call* reports local representatives' roll call attendance records for the 2025 session through December 12.

The House has held 116 roll calls in the 2025 session. *Beacon Hill Roll Call* tabulates the number of roll calls on which each representative voted and then calculates that number as a percentage of the total roll call votes held. That percentage is the number referred to as the roll call attendance record.

Oftentimes a representative is not able to attend only one or two sessions during which roll calls are held, but since there are sometimes multiple roll calls on each one of those days, the number of roll calls they missed can be high even though they only missed one or two sessions.

Eighty-eight (55.3 percent) out of 159 representatives did not miss any roll call votes and had a 100 percent roll call attendance record.

Seventy-one (44.7 percent) out of 159 representatives missed one or more roll call votes.

The representatives who missed the most roll calls are Reps. John Lawn (D-Watertown) and Marcus Vaughn (R-Wrentham) who each missed 22 roll calls (81.0 percent roll call attendance record).

Rounding out the top 15 representatives who missed the most roll call votes are:

Nicholas Boldyga (R-Southwick) who missed 20 roll calls (82.7 percent roll call attendance record); Christopher Flanagan (D-Dennis); Judith Garcia (D-Chelsea); Richard Haggerty (D-Woburn); Mary Keefe (D-Worcester); Chynah Tyler (D-Roxbury); and Thomas Walsh (D-Peabody) who each missed 19 roll calls (83.6 percent roll call attendance record.)

Marjorie Decker (D-Cambridge) and John Gaskey (R-Carver) who each missed 18 roll calls (84.4 percent roll call attendance record.)

Patrick Kearney (D-Scituate) who missed 16 roll calls (86.2 percent roll call attendance record); Tram Nguyen (D-Andover); and Joseph McKenna (R-Sutton) who each missed 15 roll calls (87.0 percent roll call attendance record).

Lisa Field (D-Taunton) who missed 15 roll calls (72.2 percent roll call attendance record). Rep. Field won a special election to fill a vacant House seat. She has only been

a representative for 54 roll calls, not all 116 roll calls, and therefore her percentage of roll calls attended is different from Reps. Nguyen and McKenna who both also missed 15 roll calls but have been in office for all 116 roll calls.

Beacon Hill Roll Call contacted all 15 representatives and asked them why they missed some roll calls:

Eight representatives did not respond last week to repeated requests asking them to explain their absences. They are Reps. John Lawn, Marcus Vaughn, Christopher Flanagan, Mary Keefe, Chynah Tyler, Tom Walsh, Patrick Kearney and Tram Nguyen.

Seven representatives responded either last week and/or when they were asked the same questions in August, when they were also among the representatives who missed the most roll calls.

Nicholas Boldyga did not respond last week but responded in August: "A couple of days were missed due to health-related issues in my immediate family. My responsibilities as a father of three young children came first on those days. Unfortunately, unlike the Senate that allows for fully remote participation on all levels, House rules make it difficult to even vote remotely."

Judith Garcia responded in August and last week with the same statement: "I missed two days due to illness and two days on official business with the Chelsea delegation, participating in the National All-America City competition in Denver, Colorado, which Chelsea won. One of those four days included 13 roll calls, so it's important for readers to know that multiple roll calls in a single day do not equal multiple absences."

Richard Haggerty responded in August and last week:

In August, he responded, "I missed a single day of voting this session on February 6, 2025, when I was unfortunately not able to attend a session due to a family commitment." Last week he responded: "I have submitted statements of support for each piece of legislation the House passed to the House Clerk's Office after missing four engrossment votes this session due to a family commitment."

Marjorie Decker responded last week: "The votes I missed were due to family emergencies, and I sent a letter to the House Clerk's stating how I would have voted for each of the two formal sessions I was not able to attend."

John Gaskey responded in August and last week:

In August, he responded: "[Thirteen roll calls] were on the

same day. I was out of town and unavailable. [Three more roll calls] were on the same day [that I was] involved with a delicate constituent issue and chose not to attend, determining it was more important to assist constituents in need than to throw a 'No' vote at something I don't think should be legal."

Last week he responded, "The question has no context and is without merit. The way voting happens, as you know, missing one day has the potential to make it look like a legislator ... has missed 20 percent of votes taken. That being said, I answered this question earlier in the year and since, not sure if I missed anything or not. If I did, it's likely because of personal reasons."

Joseph McKenna responded last week: "I missed a formal session due to a long-scheduled family trip where I visited immediate family from across the country who I see very infrequently. Though I only missed one day of session, it unfortunately was budget veto override voting, so [it] was a day with the highest number of actual individual votes. Unfortunately, leadership's ongoing strategy of not scheduling formal sessions until late the Friday before, and further in holding the session agenda until the day before, makes it impossible to avoid such unfortunate occurrences."

Lisa Field responded last week: "In 2024, I committed to a trip to Rome and the Vatican to celebrate the Jubilee Year 2025. The House scheduled a formal session while I was traveling. I missed one day of formal session, but the House took up several votes that day."

REPRESENTATIVES' 2025 ROLL CALL ATTENDANCE RECORDS THROUGH DECEMBER 12, 2025

Here are the 2025 roll call attendance records of local representatives through December 12. The attendance records are based on 116 roll calls.

The percentage listed next to the representative's name is the percentage of roll call votes on which the senator voted. The number in parentheses represents the number of roll calls that he or she missed.

Rep. Christine Barber	93.9 percent (7)
Rep. Mike Connolly	100 percent (0)
Rep. Erika Uyterhoeven	90.5 percent (11)

QUOTABLE QUOTES

"With President Trump repeatedly attacking the programs that help Massachusetts families afford food, programs like these will increase the supply *Continued on page 18*

COMMENTARY

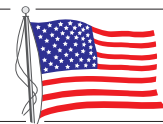
SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Illustrated by Jim Clark



Best holiday wishes from all of us here at The Times.

Our View Of The Times



The holidays can be a pain for a lot of people. It is especially difficult this year as we all contend with the challenges that we have dealt with lately.

But when it comes to this time of year, the headaches should really serve as a reminder of the importance of why the daily routine should come to a grinding halt sometimes for a greater spiritual good.

Many of us are rushing around trying

to get everything done in time for Christmas. We scramble around day in and day out, though, with every detail of our lives so seemingly critical. What this time of year should remind us of, however, is that sometimes it's OK, if not absolutely essential, to just put the routine on hold, take a step back and reassess what truly matters in our lives.

Whether your family is made up of

blood relatives or the friends who are there to celebrate your achievements with you and comfort you in your defeats, this is the time to simply pause, if just for a moment, and be thankful for them. Not everyone has money for the latest gadget, but almost all of us at least have one thing that matters more to us than being at work at nine on the dot.

Whatever gifts you may receive this

Christmas, and whatever gifts you may give, at least give yourself the gift of taking a second to breathe deeply and enjoy whatever it is in your life that brings you true happiness.

Carry these thoughts into the new year and the winter months will go by much more easily for you. Better times are coming, so let's celebrate that along with our many other blessings.

Newstalk CONT. FROM PG 2

birthday to Middlesex South Register of Deeds and Somerville resident, **Maria C. Curtatone**. We wish her a very happy birthday. We wish all of our Facebook friends, such as **Glenn DiMasse, Toni Guarino, Lori Courtney, Erica Voolich, Fallon Leigh O'Brien, Natalia Caliman, Caddy Villen, Liz-Mary Jelinek, Caroline C. Carafotes, Richard Murphy, and Bob Cammarata**, a very happy birthday. We hope everyone has a great day. To all the others we may have missed, we sincerely wish them the very best of birthdays.

Somerville Illuminations began on De-

ember 12. Admire Somerville's best and brightest holiday lights. Take a self-guided tour using the published map. Visit www.somervilleartscouncil.org/events/illuminations2025 to access the map and for more information.

Our condolences go out to the family and friends of **Carol A. (McKenna) Antonelli**, who passed away on December 11. Carol was employed by the **City of Somerville** as the **Superintendent of the Water Department**. Services will be held in the **George L. Doherty Funeral Home, 855 Broadway (Powder House Sq.) Somerville on Wednesday, Decem-**

ber 17, from 4 to 7 p.m. Relatives and friends are invited to attend. A **Funeral Mass** will be celebrated in **St. Raphael Church, 512 High Street, Medford, on Thursday, December 18, at 11 a.m.** Relatives and friends are asked to meet at the church. See the full obituary: <https://www.dohertyfuneralservice.com/obituary/carol-antonelli>

Somerville Stitch Club takes place next **Wednesday, December 17, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.** at the **Somerville Public Library, West Branch**. Sewing machines available. Bring your project and get those holiday gifts finished. There will be

snacks and new friends. Free entry, all ages and skill levels.

Somerville Police have issued a warning of **identity fraud**. In the past few months, several residents have reported becoming victims of identity fraud, specifically involving fraudulent applications for FAFSA (Federal Student Aid). In these cases, victims had never applied for FAFSA and had no connection to the schools listed in the fraudulent applications. Please remain vigilant by regularly reviewing your credit reports and staying alert to potential scams. If you notice any suspicious activity, report it immediately. *Continued on page 21*

FUN & GAMES

Ms. Cam's

Olio

Olio - (noun) A miscellaneous mixture, hodgepodge

#1002

- Who spies on kids and reports back to Santa?
- What chant is traditionally sung during the lighting of the Menorah?
- What is the shamash, and what is its purpose in the menorah?
- What type of oil was used to light the menorah in the Temple?
- In modern times, which city has the world's largest menorah?
- How many ghosts show up in *A Christmas Carol*?
- What words follow "Silent night" in the song?
- Which branch of the military runs Toys for Tots?
- Which Christmas song was recorded by Jose Feliciano in 1970?
- The first artificial Christmas tree was made from what?
- What is the name of Rudolph's girlfriend?
- How many gifts in total were given in *The Twelve Days of Christmas* song?

Answers on page 14

The Somerville Times Useless Facts of the Week

- Your stomach produces a new layer of mucus every two weeks.
- Right handed people, on average, live nine years longer.

STATEPOINT CROSSWORD YEAR-IN-REVIEW

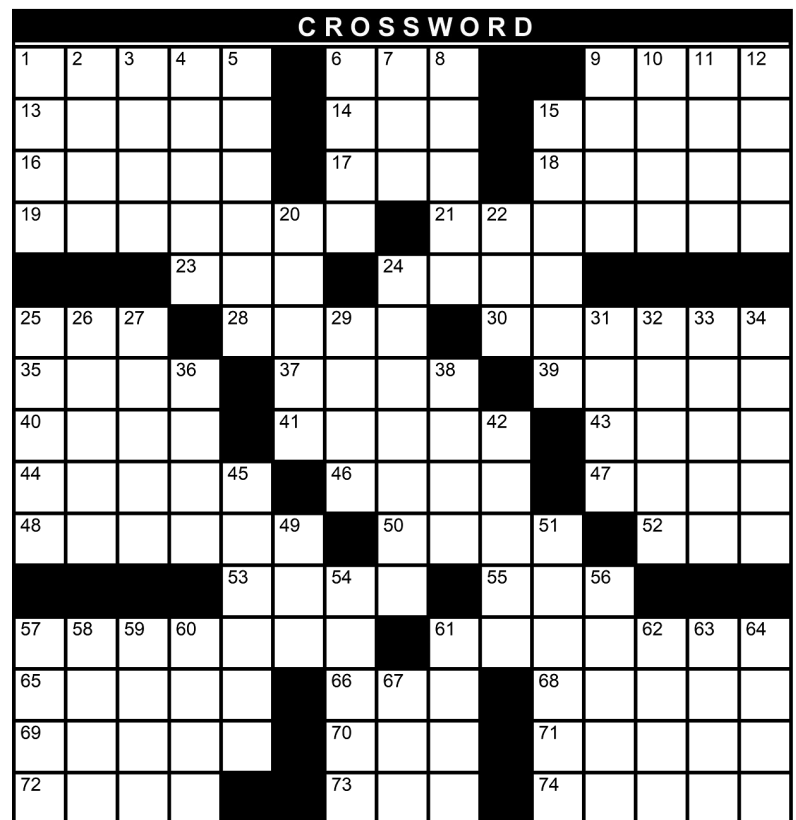
ACROSS

- W.E.B Du Bois' org.
- Rascal
- Ho-hum
- "Pomp and Circumstance" composer
- Tropical constrictor
- Forgo
- Tequila source
- + or - atom
- Reason by deduction
- Trade war "weapon," pl.
- 2025 MLB World Series winners
- ____-tzu
- C&H crop
- Dunce
- Western necktie
- Catch in a snare
- Ginger cookie
- Master of his castle
- Use a razor
- British slang for donkey
- Arch and ball locations
- Winglike
- March celebrants
- Arthur Sze, 2025 ____ Laureate
- Dam-like structure
- *Beyoncé's "Cowboy ____," 2025 Grammy winner
- King Kong and Curious George, e.g.
- Like a fox
- What Pinocchio did
- Florida Panthers won this org.'s '25 championship
- "Wicked: ____"
- Late environmentalist and chimpanzee expert
- German submarine destroyer
- 2025 Ryder Cup loser
- Manuscript sheet
- Brazilian coins
- Roll-your-own one, for short
- To the left, on a boat
- Orpheus' instrument
- Geological time period
- They are cut by Federal Reserve

- Ready to be assembled
- Avian wader
- Farm sound
- China's goodwill "____ diplomacy"
- Collision, onomatopoeically speaking
- Taylor Swift's "The ____ of a Showgirl"
- Affirm solemnly
- Third-person possessive pronoun
- Makes broader
- Why do they fall in love?
- Aryna Sabalenka's seed
- Auto contents
- Pertaining to osmium
- 2025 Academy Awards Best Picture winner
- Faquir, alt. spelling
- Pilot's stunt
- Spring event
- Pneumonia symptom, pl.
- Be of use

DOWN

- At room temperature, bar order
- Algae, sing.
- Petri dish filler
- Raise trivial objections





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Soultion to last week's crossword puzzle:



- Blue Origin's 2025 singing passenger
- Boll weevil, e.g.
- ____ Seek
- Shorthand typist, for short
- Serfs
- 2016 Olympics host, for short
- Ram's horn at a synagogue
- Draw a conclusion
- Parkinson's disease drug
- Roll up
- Heed
- Lion sound
- Dorothy's last name
- *Lady of "The Mayhem Ball"
- Tons (2 words)
- Lira, pl.
- Land parcels
- *Gary Oldman received this honorific in 2025

Solution in the next edition of The Somerville Times.

OBITUARY

Carol A. (McKenna) Antonelli



Carol A. (McKenna) Antonelli, of Medford, passed away on December 11, 2025, surrounded by the love of her husband Richard and daughter Kara, she was just 67. Born and raised in Somerville, Carol was the youngest of eight children born to Evelyn and James McKenna.

She began her public service career starting with the City of Somerville, where she retired as the Superintendent of the Water Department, she also worked as the business manager for the Town of Wakefield DPW and served on the Advisory Board for the Massachusetts Water Re-

sources Authority. Above all, Carol was a devoted wife and mother.

The beloved wife of Richard J. Antonelli, the couple married in St. Clement Church and celebrated nearly 50 years together. She is the devoted mother of Kara Moreira and her husband Nick of Reading and the loving “Nanny” of Madison. Dear sister of James F. McKenna and his wife Andrea, Elena Powell and husband Edwin, Mary McKenna, Evelyn McKenna, Irene Thompson and her husband Richard, Gael Niles and her husband Paul and the late John J. McKenna, sister-in-law to the extended Antonelli families and a loving aunt to many nieces and nephews.

Carol and Richard enjoyed traveling together, time spent at the beaches of Aruba, Cape Cod – especially Brewster and West Yarmouth. She loved shopping, keeping active and fit, and the many Girl’s trips with Kara, her sisters and many dear friends over the years.

She bravely battled early onset dementia for many years, and Richard and Kara are grateful to the staff and aides of Atria at Maplewood for the love and care shown to her these last few years. Carol will be remembered by so many for her beauty, both inside and out.

Visiting Hours will be held in the George L. Doherty Funeral Home, 855 Broadway (Powder House Sq.) Somerville on Wednesday, December 17th from 4:00PM to 7:00PM. Relatives and friends are invited to attend.

A Funeral Mass will be celebrated in St. Raphael Church, 512 High Street, Medford on Thursday, December 18th at 11:00AM, relatives and friends are asked to meet at church.

A Private burial will take place at Oak Grove Cemetery, Medford.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Carol’s honor can be made to her beloved St. Raphael Parish, 512 High Street, Medford, MA 02155.

Committee approves \$6 million for street and sidewalk reconstruction projects

CONT. FROM PG 5

uncertainty.” However, the \$43 million MassDOT grant for McGrath Highway [2] is “moving forward as planned,” she said.

Potential ICE cooperation with future UASI grants

The committee’s final three agenda items focused on potential requirements [3] to cooperate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement as part of future UASI grants. Hunter said that the city is continuing to wait on the state, since they applied for the federal grants and would be responsible for distributing the funds if accepted. She noted that a meeting between the state and UASI originally scheduled for December has been postponed to January.

“We expect an update in the new year on what steps the state is taking, and then we can make

a decision as a city from there,” Hunter said.

Committee Chair and Mayor-elect Jake Wilson said that the Law Department and Mayor’s Office must “[run] a fine-tooth comb over these obligations that we’re potentially signing up for, and making sure that we’re not agreeing to anything that’s out of step with our values as a community.”

“I’ll commit to making sure that that’s happening,” Wilson said. “I’ll also commit to making sure that this council stays updated on any changes that do come in.”

Before adjourning, Wilson expressed his gratitude to his fellow councilors and the general public as he finished his final Finance Committee meeting and ended his four-year run as chairman.

“This committee met more

than any other committee over [four years]. We processed more items than any other committee during that time. We do the work,” he said. “You [councilors] all gave up a lot of your Junes to do budget season, and it’s a big deal. I just really appreciate it. I hope the public appreciates the work you all gave, and just really, really appreciate you serving on Finance with me.”

Links:

- [1] <https://somerville.k12.ma.us/district-departments/out-school-time-programming>
- [2] <https://www.somervillema.gov/news/grounding-mc-grath-boulevard-project-receive-more-43-million-federal-funding>
- [3] <https://www.thesomerville-times.com/archives/143030>

**The Somerville Times
Historical Fact of the Week**



Eagle feathers #344

This article first appeared in the April 13, 2016, edition of The Somerville Times.

Out of Many, One

By Bob (Monty) Doherty

Most people realize that Somerville is and always has been a land of immigrants. If you didn’t come from a foreign country, then your ancestors probably did. Early on they came here in what was called the great migration, which took place during the 1620’s and 1630’s. Governor John Winthrop and his Puritan followers were looking for the “pot of gold” at the end of the rainbow ... freedom of life and religion.



They sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to America under a flag that represented two nations, England and Scotland. The English flag was the red cross of Saint George on a white field.

The Scottish flag was the white X-shaped cross of Saint Andrew on a field of blue.

These symbols were reminiscent of the Crusades. In 1607 the overlapping of these two flags produced a new flag, The Union Jack. It was the first flag of Great Britain.



A century and a half later at the outbreak of our revolution, Americans were unsure of complete separation from the motherland. Leaders combined the British Union Jack with 13 stripes representing the American colonies to form America’s first colonial flag, the Grand Union. This flag had seven stripes of red alternating with six stripes of white and was first flown at the fort on Prospect Hill. It was raised on a 76-foot flagpole, fashioned from the mast of the captured English ship, HMS Diana.

On January 1, 1776, the first day of the “Spirit of 76,” in the presence of General George Washington and his troops, a flag-raising ceremony gave birth to the American Army. In the ensuing eight-year war, the British lost its hold on our country and on our flag. Early on, as time went by and our country grew, stars

Continued on page 17

LEGAL NOTICES

Legal Notices can also be viewed on our website at www.thesomervilletimes.com

City of Somerville
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
City Hall, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) will hold a virtual public hearing on **Tuesday, January 6, 2026**, at 6:00pm through Zoom.

Pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025, this meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission will be conducted via remote participation. A recording of these proceedings can be found online here: <https://www.somervillema.gov/meetingdocs>.

TO USE A COMPUTER

Link:
https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_ZoBdwDF8Sx-8D0h_jj30xg

TO CALL IN

Attendees must register for the meeting online in order for a call-in number to be emailed to them by Zoom.

The Historic Preservation Commission will consider the following pursuant to the Historic Districts Act, Chapter 40C of the Massachusetts General Laws, as amended, and/or the City of Somerville Code of Ordinances, Pt. II, Chap. 7, Sections 7-16 – 7-28.

Alterations to Local Historic District (LHD) Properties

25 Atherton Street Applicant: Christine Strout- IRB Real Estate
Owner: Carr Schoolhouse Condominium Trust
The Applicant seeks a Certificate of Appropriateness to alter an LHD property by constructing a retaining wall and two patios.

Development review application submittal materials and other documentation may be viewed online at <https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/historic-preservation/hpc-cases>. Interested persons may provide comments to the Historic Preservation Commission at the hearing or by submitting written comments by email to historic@somervillema.gov.

12/10/25, 12/17/25 The Somerville Times



CITY OF SOMERVILLE
PROCUREMENT AND CONTRACTING SERVICES DEPARTMENT
IFB #26-30

The City of Somerville, through the Procurement and Contracting Services Department, invites sealed bids for:

Street Sweeping Services

An Invitation for Bid may be obtained online at www.bidexpress.com, <https://www.somervillema.gov/procurement>, or PCS Department, Somerville City Hall, 93 Highland Ave., Somerville, MA, 02143 on or after **12/22/2025**. Sealed bids will be received at above office until: **01/22/2026: 2:00PM EST**. The Chief Procurement Officer reserves right to reject any or all proposals if, in her sole judgment, the best interest of the City of Somerville would be served by so doing.

Please contact PCS Department at Lcarroll@somervillema.gov for more information.

5% Bid deposit required.

Logan Carroll
Procurement Manager
617-625-6600 x3407

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THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
DIVISION OF BANKS

Brazil Starr, Inc., Somerville, Massachusetts has petitioned the Commissioner of Banks for permission to operate as a check casher at 29 Bow Street, Somerville, Massachusetts, pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws chapter 169A. The Division of Banks is establishing a public comment period on this petition from Monday, December 15, 2025 through Monday, December 29, 2025. Any objections or comments concerning this proposal must be filed with the Division of Banks by Monday, December 29, 2025 via email to Deputy Commissioner Aimee Desai at Aimee.Desai@mass.gov. The petitioner's application and all communications relative to the application are available for public inspection upon request.

Mary L. Gallagher
Commissioner of Banks

12/17/25 The Somerville Times

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Somerville Kiwanis join other local clubs for 'Toys For Tots' drive

CONT. FROM PG 1

Community Action Agency of Somerville (CAAS) Head Start program for children of low-income families.

Our meeting began with, as always, the pledge of allegiance and opening prayer, followed by a wonderful lunch and a brief thank you message from Gunnery Sergeant Miguel Guzman.

We also held our first Lucky K drawing of this administrative year, which raises funds for our annual scholarship program. Program Chair Past President Charlie Ball thanked everyone for their support of the Lucky K program, especially Past President and Distinguished Secretary Emeritus Bob Nissenbaum, who every year sells more than 150 tickets in support of this program.

At the end of the meeting, the members loaded the Marine's van with all of the donated toys, which will make Christmas a little happier for children in need in our

area. President Tom Austin and Co-President Dawn Austin thanked the Kiwanis members and our Lions and Rotary Club friends for their support, and special thanks to today's Marine guests, Sergeant Ulises Tapia and Gunnery Sergeant Miguel Guzman, who are both active-duty Marines. Also, very special thanks to Program Chairman Distinguished Past President Jay Lynch for another successful toy drive. DPP Jay has coordinated the Toys for Tots effort since 1993.

The Kiwanis Club of Somerville is celebrating its 100th year of community service. From the very beginning, service to underprivileged children and children in need of assistance became a core mission of the Kiwanis Club of Somerville. The first Christmas of the club's existence was marked by a special party and toys for these children in need. The tradition of providing for



An assortment of the more than 250 toys donated by members of the three service clubs to the Toys for Tots Program.

children at the Christmas holiday season continues to be carried on annually to this day, with the club assisting the

children served by the Toys for Tots and Head Start programs.

— Somerville Kiwanis Club

Mayor Ballantyne delivers end-of-term report

By Harry Kane

In one of the most challenging periods of our nation's history, Mayor Katjana Ballantyne's administration was a beacon of hope that guided the community to heal after the pandemic. The team will pass the torch on to the Wilson administration in the new year.

Mayor Ballantyne addressed the Somerville City Council on December 11 with an end-of-term mayoral report that summarizes the administration's achievements and progress on major projects and initiatives.

"When I first ran for mayor, I laid out a vision of an inclusive and equitable city where we can all thrive together," said Mayor Ballantyne. "That vision has guided every major choice over the past four years."

She thanked city councilors, city staff, community partners, and residents for their commitment to serving Somerville and shaping the path forward.

One of the highlights Mayor Ballantyne spoke about was the strengthening of community engagement through participatory budgeting, a democratic process that allows residents to decide directly how to spend a portion of the city's capital funds.

"My administration intensified outreach, built trust, and made inclusive engagement the expectation, not the exception," said Mayor Ballantyne.

Next, she turned to anti-displacement efforts and the Public Safety for All Initiative, as beneficial programs that engage with the community through the City of Somerville's Department of Racial and Social Justice (RSJ).

Voters decided on a new city charter in the November election, and budget priorities codified in the charter established core financial values and rules. The mayor pointed out that she sought input from city councilors for recommendations on budget priorities.

Looking back at the ARPA money from the pandemic years, the mayor said the city used approximately \$44 million toward infrastructure and approximately \$35 million toward equity initiatives for the city's most vulnerable residents.

The administration delivered a landmark contract with the Somerville Municipal Employees Union (SMEU) Unit B that included unprecedented wage increases.

"That is lasting pay equity," said Mayor Ballantyne.

To deliver on progressive values and help the city thrive, bringing in commercial development helped diversify the revenue base and relieve the burden off the residential property owners.

"My administration planned strategically for commercial development rather than leaving growth to chance," said Mayor Ballantyne. "We developed tough tech zoning that established a model for supporting both commercial innovation and creative enterprises."

The four new zoning amendments signed into law cleared the path for a transformational new master plan at SomerNova, the 7.4-acre innovation campus in Union Square that will shape Somerville's economic future.

Somerville is now positioned to generate roughly \$255 million that will go toward



Somerville Mayor Katjana Ballantyne spoke of the many accomplishments that her administration achieved in an address to the City Council last Thursday.

affordable housing, job creation, resources for schools and core services, according to the administration.

A recap of the vital transportation infrastructure achievements includes 13 built or upgraded parks, strengthened street safety, and a decrease in crash data.

The mayor emphasized the importance of the Climate Forward plan and the groundbreaking Somerville Pollinator Action Plan. "Our natural environment is healthier, our built environment is safer, and our systems are more prepared for the future than they were 4 years ago."

The mayor then spotlighted a nearly 30 percent "historic" increase in budgeting for public schools that was invested over 4 years.

The administration worked hard to prioritize the safety and well-being of all residents, explained the mayor, especially the youths, seniors, immigrants, residents experiencing homelessness, and people with disabilities.

Lastly, Somerville filed a federal lawsuit in February against the Trump administration regarding mass deportation, and she stressed the importance of maintaining the values of a sanctuary city.

Lance L. Davis, Ward 6 City Councilor and President of the City Council, commended outgoing Mayor Ballantyne with a citation for her outstanding service to the people of Somerville as Mayor from 2022 to 2025. "Thank you for your many, many years of service," said Councilor Davis.

Apply today for creative space at Somerville's Armory

Mayor Katjana Ballantyne is announcing that the city is now accepting Requests for Proposals (RFPs) from arts and creative enterprises interested in leasing space at the city-owned Armory at 191 Highland Ave.

This marks the next major step following the release of the Armory Master Plan, which outlines the community's vision for a vibrant, public arts center for years to come.

The RFP will remain open for three months. Full details on eligibility, available spaces, lease terms, evaluation criteria, and how to submit a proposal are available on the Armory Master Plan SomerVoice page, which will serve as the primary hub for this process: voice.somervillema.gov/armory-master-plan.

To help demystify the RFP process, the SomerVoice page (<https://voice.somervillema.gov/armory-master-plan>) will include a range of user-friendly materials, including:

- Building floor plans and a selection of photos
- A walkthrough timeline outlining each step from application to selection
- An RFP checklist to help applicants prepare strong submissions
- Building rules and a sample lease to clarify expectations up front
- FAQs and channels for submitting bidder questions

To help applicants feel confident throughout the process, the city will soon offer building tours, Q&As, and workshops. Subscribe to project updates on the SomerVoice page to be the first to know when new resources are posted. The full RFP is available on the SomerVoice page and at somervillema.gov/procurement.



Council on Aging's Holiday Luncheon

Somerville's Council on Aging held its Holiday Luncheon on Thursday, December 11, at the Dilboy Post, 351 Summer Street. Along with Mayor Katjana Ballantyne and other city officials, the Somerville Police Department also helped seniors celebrate the holidays while giving them helpful tips to stay safe against scammers who are targeting our community.





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Ms. Cam's

Olio

Answers

From page 8

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| 1. Elf on a Shelf | 6. Four |
| 2. Hanerot Halalu | 7. holy night |
| 3. It is the "helper" candle used to light the other candles | 8. The Marines |
| 4. Pure olive oil | 9. Feliz Navidad |
| 5. Grand Army Plaza in Manhattan, New York City | 10. Goose feathers |
| | 11. Clarice |
| | 12. 364 |

COMMENTARY

The views and opinions expressed in the commentaries and letters to the Editor of The Somerville Times do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of The Somerville Times, its publishers or staff.

Somerville's affordability crisis

Note: The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the positions of their respective employers.

Somerville residents identify their greatest challenge as the struggle to pay escalating housing costs. Our city's leaders describe this as a "housing crisis." But since 2020, the developers have built something like 3,000 new housing units.

These units remain beyond the means of people who live here. Indeed, planning staff acknowledges that, "Assembly Square has housing, but the units are largely rented by single occupants who only live in them during the work-week." Add to that the units that are master-leased by sovereign governments for visiting students, businesspeople, diplomats, and healthcare tourists.

A moment's reflection should suggest that any Somerville resident who can afford to pay \$4,000-to-5,000 per month for a two-bedroom apartment is already living in one. So we are building homes for people who have never lived here, while driving up costs for people who do.

We do not have a "housing crisis." We have an affordability crisis.

Last month city councilors heard that escalating housing costs are displacing Latinos, African Americans, and families. Between 2012 and 2022, the number of children living in Somerville declined by 18%. And "the for-sale home market is out of reach for households earning at or below 120% of the AMI in the city." That is, \$178,680.

The messenger was a consultant retained by the City to write its five-year housing needs assessment. Asked to make recommendations on the Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance (IZO), he report-

ed that at present market-rate housing developers are not moving forward with projects, because investors are demanding even higher profit.

Somerville's IZO requires that 20% of new housing units in a development of four or more be permanently affordable. The consultant recommended that the Council consider lowering this requirement to 10-to-15%.

Astonishingly, Strategic Planning and Community Development Director Tom Galligani encouraged councilors to consider incentivizing luxury-housing developers to build more of the same by giving them tax abatements.

The city's comprehensive plan is supposed to guide land-use planning and zoning. It set a 2040 goal of 20% of Somerville housing stock being permanently affordable. When it was adopted five years ago, that figure was 9.7%. Today it is 8.9%.

Those who are creating and enforcing zoning policy here don't seem to realize that 20% is a fraction. If we continually increase the 100% denominator, we will chase the 20% numerator until we have no more land to develop—all the faster when the 20% requirement applies to an ever-smaller fraction of new development.

These city officials appear to be influenced by a years-long campaign to persuade them—and residents—to misapply the neoclassical supply-and-demand principle to Somerville. But the market to which the principle rightly applies is the 5-million-person Metropolitan Statistical Area. Boston and Cambridge alone would have to build 750,000 units to house their workforce.

Moreover, the people who built our city and have since been priced out of it made

it among the most desirable places to live in Greater Boston. Housing costs here are rising at a faster rate than in surrounding communities.

Boosting market-rate housing production here would not lower prices for generations, if then. But it would ensure that the city continually increases residential property taxes.

A corollary of Somerville's densest-city-in-New-England status is that it has the least amount of remaining developable land. For sixty years we have solved other communities' housing challenges by converting our commercial uses to residential ones and building more market-rate housing units.

This left us with a structural fiscal deficit. Housing pays 58% the tax rate that commercial properties pay and generates twice the municipal costs. But only 18.6% of Somerville's property value is commercial, even though these properties pay 32.6% of the total tax levy.

So Somerville has never enjoyed the level of municipal services that surrounding cities do. And decades of deferred maintenance have brought every class of our infrastructure to the end of its useful life.

As debt service on must-do infrastructure investments increases, our unbalanced land-use pattern will put ever more pressure on residential taxes, and in turn, housing costs, cementing the city's status as an affluent and increasingly childless and homogenous enclave.

In a related development, it now appears that McGrath Highway will become an at-grade boulevard. When it was built, it isolated the city's poorest neighborhood. It reduced East Somerville neighbors' quality of life, blighted their properties, un-

dermined their safety, and damaged their neighborhood economy.

With the prospect of these burdens being lifted, displaced long-term residents are denied the benefits. While conversations about the highway's redesigned green space and bike lanes are nice, focusing on how to deliver housing stability and home ownership to the dispossessed would appeal more to our sense of justice. Instead, we are enjoined to build more unaffordable housing.

Ultimately, there is virtually nothing that Somerville alone can do to counter the region's formidable housing-market forces. Instead, we could work to fulfill SomerVision's housing goal by permanently removing a portion of our housing stock from the inflationary spiral.

Paying for this—and to meet our city's needs—would require zoning developable land that can reasonably host commercial development for that specified purpose, even though this moment in the economic cycle is producing little-to-no new commercial development. Waiting for re-newed demand would require the foresight, courage, and discipline that our city's leaders proved incapable of over the last 150 years but would better serve their constituents.

Or, we could keep building luxury housing for affluent people who don't live here, and expect a different outcome.

Ben Baldwin, Executive Director
Somerville Community Land Trust

David Gibbs, Executive Director
Community Action Agency of Somerville

Gonzalo Puigbo, CEO
Somerville Community Corporation

The Enchanted Village

CONT. FROM PG 3

in the China department, and I remember them setting up the Enchanted Village, and I got a first-hand taste of the blueberry muffins when they came out of the ovens. Oh, what memories of the old days!

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this story.



SSEPAC receives citation, launches new fundraising organization

By The Times Staff

The journey of nurturing children with special needs starts with inclusion.

The Somerville Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SSEPAC) received a citation for its steadfast commitment and dedication to defending the rights of Somerville student learners.

“Over the past year, the group was revitalized,” said At-Large City Councilor Kristen E. Strezo at the City Council meeting on December 11.

In addition to the citation, the group spoke about the launch of its new 501(c)(3) charitable organization called Friends of Somerville SEPAC (FoSSEPAC), a nonprofit organization recently formed for the purpose of raising funds to help the group with its goals of “empowering and supporting families in the community.”

Councilor Strezo thanked the team for creating an inclusive environment in the community. “Their lives have changed in such a positive way because of your presence, because of your advocacy.”

The group’s mission is to “facilitate com-

munication between students, parents, community members, administrators, and the School Committee, for the purpose of improving the quality of district-wide special education policies, programs, and practices,” according to their website.

The parent-led group helps facilitate Individualized Education Programs for students needing specialized instruction and 504 Plans that provide accommodations for students with disabilities, explained Councilor Strezo.

“We are deeply honored to receive this recognition on behalf of the Somerville SEPAC,” said Jessica Perez Adams, a parent representative on the team.

“This public recognition is so meaningful, and we see it as one step of what we hope will be many toward full inclusivity in our city,” said Meredith Brown, a parent of two Winter Hill students, one of whom is going through the IEP process now.

“We’re also excited to launch our new fundraising organization, the Friends of Somerville SEPAC and its board,” said Charlotte Walker, an East Somerville Community School SEPAC representa-



The city honored SSEPAC with a special citation at its latest meeting, acknowledging the tremendous job the organization does in supporting the student population in the community

tive and parent of two children with learning and sensory differences.

“Through this new 501(c)(3), we’ll be able to provide financial support for expanded Somerville SEPAC programming and collaborations, like workshops for families and school staff alike, expanding outreach and community initiatives,” said Walker. “We’re encouraged by this mo-

mentum and remain committed to working together to fulfill the important promise of equity that Somerville has made.”

Your donation powers the Somerville SEPAC’s mission to provide workshops, advocacy, and community support.

The Friends of Somerville SEPAC (FoSSEPAC) website: <https://somervillesepac.wixsite.com/sepac/fossepac>

Somerville Fire Department promotions



Seven promotions for the Somerville Fire Department took place at the City Council meeting on Thursday, December 11. The promotions included one Deputy Chief, one District Chief, two Captains, and three Lieutenants. The new officers are Deputy Chief Steven Mauras, District Chief Marc Ardolino, Captains Jay McKenzie and Andrew Patriquin, and Lieutenants Nicholas Halloran, Raymond Busi, and Ronald Hampton. Pictured L to R: District Chief Marc Ardolino, Lt. Ronald Hampton, Lt. Raymond Busi, Capt. Jay McKenzie, Assistant Chief Sean Tierney, Mayor Katjana Ballantyne, Chief Charles Breen, Deputy Chief Steven Mauras, Lt. Nicholas Halloran, and Capt. Andrew Patriquin.

2025 Fall Adult Softball League Champions



Congratulations to Somerville Recreation 2025 Fall Adult Softball League Champions, Advance Tire. After decades of being in the playoffs, fighting their season through, and maintaining the hard work ethic their captain, Rick Ferraina, instills on this team, this has been Advance Tire’s first championship in their hometown.

Somerville's annual Menorah lighting ceremony

The City of Somerville hosted a festive Menorah lighting in front of City Hall on Monday, December 15. Mayor Katjana Ballantyne, City Councilor at-Large Kristen Strezo, along with Rabbi Eliana, led everyone in a joyous community event with singing, dancing, Chanukah treats, and special gifts for children. Community members of all ages braved the cold to attend the special event.

— Photos by Bobbie Toner



Somerville's Emergency Overnight Warming Center opens

The Emergency Overnight Warming Center is available only to adults experiencing homelessness. Families or individuals with children seeking shelter should contact the Somerville Office of Housing Stability at 617-625-6600, Ext. 2581, for referrals to family-specific resources and shelters.

Supply Donations Welcome

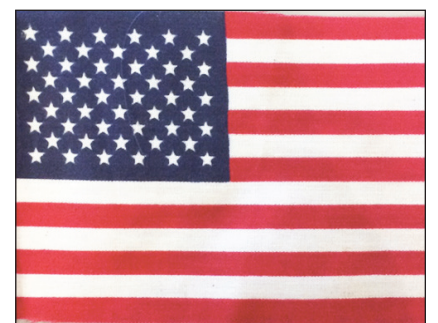
Community members interested in supporting the Emergency Overnight Warming Center can donate supplies such as cleaning and hygiene supplies, shelf-stable foods (unopened and unexpired), gift cards, and more. Donations can be dropped off at Housing Families, 919 Eastern Avenue, Malden (our contracted nonprofit warming center operator). For information on donating, please email warmingcenter@somervillema.gov.

For more information about Somerville's Emergency Overnight Warming Center, visit somervillema.gov/warmingcenter or email warmingcenter@somervillema.gov.

Historical Fact

CONT. FROM PG 9

replaced the British Union Jack. Today our flag has a sea of fifty stars, which complement the original thirteen stripes of the Somerville Standard. They both bring to life the image of the American motto, E pluribus unum ... out of many, one.



Join the Somerville Mayor's Appointments Advisory Committee

The City of Somerville is seeking one new member to join the Mayor's Appointments Advisory Committee (AAC). If you care about fairness, transparency, and community voice in local government, this is a great opportunity to make a meaningful impact. The AAC plays a key role in strengthening how Somerville selects members for its regulatory and decision-making boards and commissions. By helping review applicants and recommend finalists, AAC members ensure that appointments reflect the needs, values, and diversity of our community.

What Is the AAC?

The Mayor's Appointments Advisory Committee is a five-person, volunteer body that makes nonpartisan, informed recommendations for appointments to 14 City boards and commissions. The full list of boards and commissions is available online: somervillema.gov/departments/appointments-advisory-committee. AAC members review applications, interview finalists, and recommend two candidates for each vacancy to the Mayor, who then advances one nominee to the City Council for confirmation.

Who Can Join?

Ideal candidates are:

- Interested in learning about local government
- Thoughtful, fair, and community-driven
- Interested in people and process
- Motivated to contribute to transparent, equitable decision-making
- Individuals with backgrounds in law, recruitment, human resources, or human services are strongly encouraged to apply, but these experiences are not required.

This is a volunteer position.

What Is the Time Commitment?

The AAC meets only when there are openings on the boards or commissions under its purview.

When active vacancies exist, the AAC typically meets bi-weekly on Wednesdays from 7–9 p.m. Meetings are held virtually. Additional time may be needed for reviewing applications and interview materials.

What Is the Appointment Process?

Members are appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council.

How Do I Apply?

Applications will be considered until the position is filled. To apply please provide a:

Resume

Statement of Interest or Cover Letter

Ways to Apply

- Online: somervillema.gov/besomerville
- Email: Send materials to Careers@somervillema.gov with the subject line: "AAC Member Application"
- Mail: City Hall – Attn: HR / Kristen Hill, 93 Highland Ave., Somerville, MA 02143

Questions?

Email Kristen Hill, Recruitment & Retention Manager at KHill@somervillema.gov



Beacon Hill Roll Call

CONT. FROM PG 6

of locally grown healthy, affordable food. These awards are supporting local jobs, farmers and small food businesses that keep money circulating in our local economy and provide essential food for the people of Massachusetts." — Gov. Maura Healey announcing \$779,458 in funding to improve food access in underserved communities throughout Massachusetts, by increasing local food production which will support the growth of urban farms, community gardens and food business operations, targeting areas that struggle with food insecurity.

HOW LONG WAS LAST WEEK'S SESSION?

Beacon Hill Roll Call tracks the length of time that the House and Senate were in session each week. Many legislators say that legislative sessions are only one aspect of

the Legislature's job and that a lot of important work is done outside of the House and Senate chambers. They note that their jobs also involve committee work, research, constituent work and other matters that are important to their districts.

Critics say that the Legislature does not meet regularly or long enough to debate and vote in public view on the thousands of pieces of legislation that have been filed. They note that the infrequency and brief length of sessions are misguided and lead to irresponsible late-night sessions and a mad rush to act on dozens of bills in the days immediately preceding the end of an annual session. During the week of December 8-12, the House met for a total of 16 minutes and the Senate met for a total of 39 minutes.

Mon. Dec. 8

House 11:00 a.m. to 11:06 a.m.
Senate 11:21 a.m. to 11:49 a.m.

Tues. Dec. 9

No House session
No Senate session

Wed. Dec. 10

No House session
No Senate session

Thurs. Dec. 11

House 11:00 a.m. to 11:10 a.m.
Senate 11:28 a.m. to 11:39 a.m.

Fri. Dec. 12

No House session
No Senate session.

Bob Katzen welcomes feedback at bob@beaconhillrollcall.com

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Somerville Fair Housing Commission Question of the week



Q: I own a two-family home in Somerville. I live upstairs and rent out the downstairs apartment. Do all the Fair Housing rules apply to me?

A: Some Fair Housing rules definitely do apply to you. There are no exemptions for discriminating on the basis of receiving public assistance (e.g., TAFDC, Medicaid) or receiving a housing subsidy (e.g., Section 8). If your tenants can pay the rent, it doesn't matter where the money is coming from.

About the other rules: "As written, the FHA covers most — but not all — housing. Some exemptions to coverage under the FHA include:

(a) owner-occupied buildings with no more than four units (which is commonly known as the Mrs. Murphy exemption);

(b) single family housing sold or rented without the use of a broker if the private individual owner does not own more than three such single family homes at one time; or

(c) housing operated by organizations and private clubs that limit occupancy to members."

(Source: Attorney Scott Badami)

Remember, though: you can choose NOT to discriminate whether or not the rules apply to you. Fair Housing makes Somerville a better place to live.

The Somerville Fair Housing Commission generally meets on the fourth Thursday of each month at 3 p.m. online. Call 617-625-6600 ext. 2578 for the login information.

A **GoFundMe** has been launched by our own **Doug Holder** to help keep **The Somerville Times** free and thriving. Every dollar helps us stay independent and serve our community.

To donate visit:

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-the-somerville-times>

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Somerville through the eyes of Denise



Peace... — Photo by Denise Provost

BOBBY'S DAD JOKES CORNER

By Bobbygeorge Potaris



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On This Day in History

December 17

1398 – Tamerlane's Mongols destroy the army of Mahmud Tughluk, Sultan of Delhi, at Panipat.

1886 – At a Christmas party, Sam Starr (husband to infamous outlaw queen Belle Starr) shoots his old enemy Frank West, but is fatally wounded himself.

1903 – Near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, Orville and Wilbur Wright make the first successful flight in history of a self-propelled, heavier-than-air aircraft.

1944 – U.S. approves end to internment of Japanese Americans.

1948 – The Smithsonian Institution accepts the Kitty Hawk – the Wright brothers' plane.

1981 – Red Brigade terrorists kidnap Brigadier General James Dozier, the highest-ranking U.S. NATO officer in Italy.

1989 – *The Simpsons*, television's longest-running animated series, makes its U.S. debut.

2010 – Mohamed Bouazizi immolates himself, the catalyst for the Tunisian revolution and the subsequent Arab Spring.

Newstalk CONT. FROM PG 7

Don't miss the **2025 SHS Winter Concert and Art Show** on **December 18**. Enjoy music performed by the Somerville High School Chorus, Orchestra, Band, World Percussion Ensemble, Jazz Band, and Guitar Class. Artwork from current High School art students will be on display, and select ceramics pieces will also be available for purchase. All staff, family, and friends of the Somerville Public Schools community are invited to join an evening celebrating the arts. 5 p.m. Art Exhibit, 6:30 p.m. Concert. **Somerville High School**, 81 Highland Avenue.

Each December, the city celebrates the season of giving by supporting **local holiday gift drives**. Check the city website (somervillema.gov/news) or sign up for the city e-newsletter at www.somervillema.gov/subscribe for details on how you can contribute.

Support local businesses this holiday season. There are lots of ways to support small businesses, and not all of them require purchases. Sharing your favorite places with friends, showing support on social media, and even window shopping are all low-cost ways to support your local businesses. Learn more about shopping small this winter by visiting www.somervillema.gov/loyaltolocal.

Free all-ages flu and COVID-19 vaccine clinic on **Thursday, December 18**, at **City Hall Annex** (50 Evergreen Ave) from 3 to 6:30 p.m. No cost, no insurance needed. Everyone is welcome. Protect yourself, your loved ones, and our community this season. Learn more and register at somervillema.gov/vaccinations.

The trailer for *Voices of Somerville*, produced by **Olivia Huang**, can be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGKV2LhT7WA>. It concerns the voices of poets from Somerville and others in the area. The movie includes Somerville residents **Gloria Mindock**, **Doug Holder**, **Lloyd Schwartz** (Somerville Poet Laureate), **Denise Provost**, and others. The full movie will be released next month.

School meals are free for all students. Nutritious breakfast and lunch are free for all

students in **Somerville Public Schools**. Breakfast starts at 8:15 a.m. for prekindergarten students, at 7:30 a.m. for students in grades K–8, and at 7:15 a.m. at **Somerville High School** and **Next Wave/Full Circle**. Check out the menu: <https://linq-connect.com/public/menu/FE53U3>.

The **East Somerville Holiday Gift Guide** is here. This guide was made to help you shop local and laugh a little along the way. Support small businesses, skip the stress, and find gifts with real East Somerville flavor. Visit: <https://www.eastsomervillemainstreets.org/>. Shop local. Support your neighbors.

Some reminders for the **2025/2026 snow season**: Snow emergency parking is on the **odd side of the street all winter**, unless posted signage says differently. Sign up for alerts or update your information at somerville-ma.gov/alerts. You can call 311 (617-666-3311) if you need assistance. Flashing blue lights at major intersections indicate a snow emergency. Snow emergencies are announced on the city's website, social media feeds, City TV, and via information shared with local media. Property owners are responsible for clearing snow from sidewalks within six daylight hours of the end of snowfall. For more information on the city's snow policies, visit somervillema.gov/snow.

The **Connexion closet** is accepting clothing donations, all seasons, all genders, and all sizes. The most wanted items are pants and jackets. You can drop off donations at **Connexion, 149 Broadway**. Please make sure you leave donations inside the building with a label that says, "For Connexion closet." Need clothes? The Connexion closet opens Mondays and Fridays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Wednesdays 4 to 6 p.m. Want to donate and can't drop it off? Email closet@connexionumc.org to coordinate a pickup. Questions email: closet@connexionumc.org.

Somerville's **Teen Shoveling Program** is back for the 2025/26 season, providing a paid opportunity for youth to assist local seniors and homeowners with disabilities in clearing snow after a storm. The program is available for teens aged 14 to 19 years old. All interested youths must

submit an application. Youths aged 18 or 19 must also submit a CORI form. For questions and to learn more, visit somervillema.gov/shoveling, contact **Daniel Harris** at dharris@somervillema.gov or 617-625-6600 ext. 2406, or 311 by phone (617-666-3311), email, text, mobile app, chat, social media, web, and more at somervillema.gov/311.

Shop 50+ artisan, maker, and vintage vendors at **Small Mart Holiday Markets** on **December 20**, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the **Crystal Ballroom**, Davis Sq. Small Mart brings together over 50 artisan, maker, and vintage vendors offering unique, thoughtfully made gifts. You'll find hand-printed art, cozy ceramics, standout vintage fashion, and locally crafted goods that make giving (and shopping) feel good.

The **City of Somerville** wants to learn more about **how your child commutes to school**. Please consider completing this survey for each of your children: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/8WVDCBP>

Tour any of **Somerville Public Schools' Prekindergarten to Grade 8**. January tour dates: **January 8, 2026**, 9:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., and 12:00 p.m., **January 27, 2026**, 9:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., and 12:00 p.m. Learn more: <https://somerville.k12.ma.us/tours>

For anyone in need of **food resources**, go to the **Somerville Food Coalition's website**: www.https://bit.ly/4ocj6NB. Free local pantries, community meals, community fridges, and more. Find more information at <https://www.somervillema.gov/snap>. Here are some locations where you can find free food at **Somerville's Community Fridges** can be found at 35 Prospect St., **Elizabeth Peabody House**, 275-277 Broadway, **St. Clements**, across from 29 St. Clements Road. Donations are welcome at these locations.

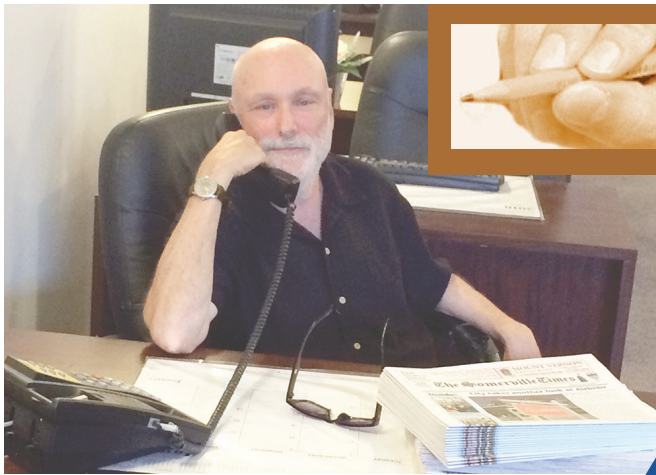
The **Center for Arts at the Armory**, 191 Highland Ave., will host and manage the **16th Annual Somerville Winter Farmers Market (SWFM)** every Saturday beginning **November 1 through April 11**, 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. This weekly market offers the best locally grown and

regionally produced agricultural items, including vegetable produce, cheese, eggs, meats, fish, breads, pastries, and sweets. In addition to cash, credit, and debit, SNAP / EBT is also accepted at the market. CAA raises funds to be able to provide a \$15 match so that SNAP / EBT for every SNAP/EBT customer who spends at least \$15 of their SNAP/EBT dollars at the market. The market is also participating in the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), which allows qualifying customers to receive between \$40 – \$80 worth of free farm-fresh fruits and vegetables from participating HIP vendors. To learn more and for a complete listing of vendors, weekly specials, and live entertainment, please visit www.somwintermarket.org.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our **Arts Editor, Doug Holder**, for setting up a GoFundMe campaign for The Somerville Times. With the cost of printing going up and a lack of businesses having the resources to advertise, free papers feel the effect. We sincerely thank all who have already contributed and thank any future contributors. If you are interested in helping, please visit <https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-the-somerville-times>. Or if anyone is interested in advertising, please contact Bobbietoner@aol.com. We offer great discounts to help our advertisers be able to advertise. Thank you all so much for your support!

Through the generosity of the **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)** and under the direction of **Mayor Ballantyne**, the **Council on Aging** can provide **Durable Medical Equipment** at no cost to Somerville residents. Residents with a documented need for medical equipment must be over the age of 60 or have a permanent disability and must be otherwise unable to afford or access needed medical equipment. For additional information or for an application, please contact **Debby Higgins** at 617-625-6600, ext. 2321.

Don't forget, if you would like to subscribe to receive a **digital edition** of our paper, go directly online to our website, over to the right side, and fill out your email address to receive a free, full PDF copy of the paper.



OFF THE SHELF

by Doug Holder

Vijaya Sundaram: A Poet who reverberates and celebrates

As the publisher for the Ibbetson Street Press, I am glad that we are going to release a book of poetry titled *Reverberations* by former Medford Poet Laureate and New England Poetry Club advisory board member Vijaya Sundaram. I caught up recently with Sundaram for an interview.

Doug Holder: This collection of poetry embraces the senses with food, nature, etc. It is imbued with a sensibility of celebration even in the midst of loss. Explain.

Vijaya Sundaram: Thank you, Doug. Yes, I cannot help but celebrate life, both the inner life of the imagination and spirit, and the outer life of the senses. Sometimes, I dwell morosely on death, and fondly contemplate Lao Tzu's concept of Inaction, especially when I see how horribly our world is being treated by rapacious capitalists, climate change denialists, and genocidal maniacs. However, I also know that I cannot live in that mindscape, nor give in to despair – and that's because my immediate, personal world is beautiful. I love everything – the trees whose green soothes me on jangled days, my dog's snout, earnest and scientific as she inspects everything, my husband's voice in the other room when he teaches Indian music, our offspring's joyful presence in our lives, my own guitar and singing, the silly dog and cat reels online that distract me from human horrors, my students and our interactions when I teach, writing poetry, doing visual art, seeing the comedy in the midst of tragedy, seeing the kindness of friends, neighbors, strangers, the goodness of those who give freely, despite their own lack. Sorry, I'm getting carried away here! In short, yes, I celebrate life, even as I contemplate death.

DH: Your father appears in the book, and he was quite the punster (my dad was too). Do you think his play with words influenced your own work?

VS: My dad's punning sensibilities definitely influenced all of us at home. He was always good for a chuckle, silly jokes, and belly-heaving laughs. He was



able to laugh through decades of pain and taught us what it means to be fully human and experience moments of happiness in that way.

In my daily life, I pun in response to other punsters; I pun from time to time, but not necessarily for laughs, although there's the accidental fun-pun. My husband, Warren, and offspring Sharada also pun. Warren is a brilliant and hilarious punster, himself. We all love punning – I guess a family that puns together stays together! However, I don't think it influenced my written work, which tends to be more serious and rarely indulges in puns.

DH: It seems that your poems flow easily between the hard shell of the earth and their transcendence from it. Explain.

VS: What a beautiful observation! For me, the membrane between the Seen and the Unseen is thin. I know I sound all mystical and super-Indian when I say it, but it's always been true for me – I used to "see" things when I was young; the walls *Continued on page 23*

Lyrical

SOMERVILLE

edited by Doug Holder

Somerville poet Jesse Diamond delivers a poem she wrote 40 years ago.

Proud Mary and the Latest Killing for John Lennon

Proud Mary rides the train from Concord
when she gets on she's talking
and she doesn't stop until she gets off

But even then she goes on and on i think
Mary's a pain
she is a pain a pain the way the court jester was or the fool

She knows just how to get me today i was correcting homework when she
interrupted wanting to know directions somewhere

When i said i didn't know them she just kept on talking
I started getting irritated and upset i suppose i was already upset

With this latest killing i told her she was
interrupting my work and she had the nerve to tell me i wasn't working

What are you a teacher she said teaching isn't work
Getting down on your knees is work being on your knees

Scrubbing floors is work bringing up four children like i did is work
What you do isn't work it just makes your brain sweat that's all

Don't be so down in the mouth your life's not so bad
Youve got a good thing going

When we got off the train Mary went her way and i went mine
I noticed her thick legs in dark hose i wondered if she was going to work

If her legs were thick from scrubbing floors from being down
on her hands and knees, i started to think she's right

My life is good i should smile more but i was irritated and
Upset at the latest killing of a good man



This damn country is so violent it teaches violence on tv
in the movies Get a gun bang bang

Send our sons to war bang bang
Shoot their legs off bam bam

Blow their heads-up BAM!
Be a man Be A Man BE A MAN!

I went into the diner by train stop i shook the jukebox

BRING HIM BACK! i cried

Mary don't you know this latest killing brings me down
cause all those strawberry fields are gone gone forever

gettin high gettin high
gettin high

— Jesse Diamond

Somerville Police public service announcement: Package thefts

As the holidays approach, package thefts are likely to rise. Over the past few months, there have been 22 package thefts reported in Somerville. Please see the ways to prevent package thefts:

- ✦ Request digital notifications for your deliveries.
- ✦ Schedule delivery when you'll be home to receive the package.
- ✦ Require a signature to avoid your package being left unattended.
- ✦ Choose in-store pickup if available.
- ✦ Direct the delivering agency to leave the packages in a secure location.
- ✦ Install security cameras outside your home where packages may be delivered.
- ✦ Request a vacation hold on your deliveries if you plan on traveling.

— Somerville Police Department



Off The Shelf CONT. FROM PG 22

between my waking and dreaming worlds were osmotic. I am not an adherent of any particular spiritual belief or practice, except my own, self-generated, secret one. I know that life is an accident, and yet, in this amazing accident, we found consciousness, and developed morality, conscience, a spirit of inquiry. To me, that is the most breathtakingly magical thing, no matter how scientifically it can be explained – and yes, I love science, and prefer it to the mumbo-jumbo of religion, though religion can be compelling in its way for those who need it, and it cannot be slighted or denied.

So, going back to poetry, when I write, that “lift” from the mundane to the sublime writes itself into a poem – sometimes, I consciously try to subvert it, because it always wants to go there, but I end up surrendering to the impulse.

DH: Getting back to food. I love Indian food. Whenever I have it, I feel this strange sense of contentment ... the curry speaks to me. Some people think food is trivial. Not you, evidently!

VS: Ah, yes! I LOVE food. I think of it often. It's terrible, because I have to now be careful, pay attention to my health and all that, as I edge slowly towards the abyss (I'm only half-kidding!)

Food is the ultimate comfort; it's no surprise that some of us gain weight as we get older (I have!) – when the world seems to be going down the wrong tube, at least food is there to comfort and console, despite its dangers. Oh, and Indian food is the best – it wakes you up; it cozies up to your taste buds; it reminds you that life is worth living (even if it's only for that half-hour or hour when you're eating). It reminds you that the pleasures of the palate are things to rejoice in, to share. And it definitely gives one that “strange sense of contentment” as you so eloquently put it!

DH: It seems we are so divorced from nature these days, but you seem to be one with it. Does your Hindu background contribute to this? You seem to have a love relationship with flowers, etc.

VS: Being out among trees, flowers, the woods, a pond – any and all of it has always made me feel as if I'm stepping out of my own narrowly defined self, stepping out of the borders of my body. I'm hopeless about remembering the names of various flowers; I have to look up books or the Internet to remind myself of their names. I do love flowers, but I wish I were a more disciplined

gardener! Also, when I walk in the Fells and trip over root systems on the slopes, I am struck time and again by how all those roots hold the earth together. When I read what Suzanne Simard wrote about trees, or when I read the research done by others about how mycelium works underground, connecting trees to each other, taking nutrients from mother trees to younger ones, I was, and am filled with a kind of holy awe. When I step on roots in the forest, I thank them, and offer thanks to the earth that's holding them, and being held together by them. Sounds silly, yes? Nevertheless, I whisper my gratitude to them all (when people cannot hear me). I am always reminded that I am part of it. When I was young, I loved looking up at the gold and green of sunlit mango and neem trees around me, and wanting to become them, to become a sun-filled leaf or branch, or the whole tree. I used to read a lot of William Wordsworth, and his poems about nature are a deep part of my poetic DNA. Apart from that, I used to delve deep into Greek and Roman mythology as a pre-teen, and remember being quite struck by the myth of Daphne, who turned into a laurel tree trying to escape Apollo's clutches. I also loved reading the story of Hyacinthus (another Apollo-struck victim, sort of), and Narcissus – both turning into flowers, the latter into a rather self-obsessed one, ha-ha.

To answer your question, it's not really a part of my Hindu background, though – or maybe, it's part of some mystical part of my ancient Hindu background of which I might be unaware. Mostly, it comes from how I feel, and from absorbing poets like Wordsworth, Keats, Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Christina Rossetti, Rabindranath Tagore, Oscar Wilde, Tennyson, and other writers who influenced me when I was young.

DH: Why should we read your book?

VS: I loved writing it, and love what's in it, and want to share it with others. No, I don't think it's some sort of unseemly pride, or anything like that – just the need to share what I have seen, or been, or felt. Poets did that for me, and still do that for me. We need to emit what light we have, and absorb more poetry, more beauty, more love, more of the good parts of ourselves out in the world.

Seaweed

When everything's been said.
And yet, I haven't said it all.

Should I speak?

And why?

What need is there?

Surely it is silence I crave.

All this noise, a railing

Against encroaching night,

Drives a stake into my eyes.

Eyes closed at night,

I wonder and wonder.

Lines from Prez's “Lady Be Good” solo

Run around like rats in a maze

Within my forlorn cranium,

Where tangled thoughts,

And sudden sorrows

Float like detached balloons.

Recycled lines from songs

Pound against my dovetail joints,

So that the sutures threaten

To come undone.

If I speak, it is to reveal

And yet, I wish to stay secret –

A decorator crab, seen and unseen,

Covering its shell with seaweed and seaglass,

Hiding within its little garden,

Hoping not to be noticed,

And yet, decorating away.

The pull and push

The yearning and repulsion

The silence and the speech,

Keep me tied to this post.

Untie me, let me go free,

And when I let go,

I shall walk on the waves,

Then sink below, and I shall

Bury me in sand under the sea

So I will hear the heaving of the waves

The endless sigh, its rise and fall,

And the comings and goings

Of silent, secret creatures,

And be glad of the company.

There, the music will filter

Through my ears, and escape,

Like strands of seaweed,

Floating under a full moon

With shimmering algae.

— Vijaya Sundaram



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