

Chair's Notes

Review of Multiple Member Bodies Committee

August 5, 2026 (Version 1.2)

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Introduction

The review of multiple member bodies committee is a new initiative in 2026, part of a broader effort to make more regular and intentional updates to Somerville's governing documents and processes. As the members of the first instance of this committee, we have a unique opportunity to approach this process with a "beginner's mind," and to pioneer an approach that future committee members might find helpful. I therefore believe that there is substantial value in explaining what we knew at the outset, what we learned along the way, and how we chose to approach this task.

This memo describes the context and legal framework in which the committee works, lists bodies both within and outside of our scope, proposes a few guiding principles, and tracks our recommendations. It is intended to clarify my own thinking and support my task, as chair, of guiding the conversation. I intend it to be a living document, evolving and expanding through the committee's work, and perhaps eventually forming some portion of our final report.

This document is solely the work of the chair and is not intended as a communication or resolution of the committee. While it is informed by conversations with many people, the inevitable errors and omissions are mine alone.

Situation

In November of 2025, Somerville adopted a [substantially revised charter](#). Among other changes, the city is now required to periodically review the charter itself, the code of ordinances, and all Multiple Member Bodies (MMBs) within the government. The [charter language](#) says that this review will be accomplished by a special committee that will assess the “function and relevance” of the bodies, potentially recommending combining, dissolving, or even creating bodies. Bodies required under Mass General Law are explicitly out of scope and “shall not be included” in the review.

In February of 2026, the city council passed [an ordinance](#) further refining the role of the review committee. We were convened in April and will produce a report for submission to the city council no later than its first meeting in December. Our report is required to include, in addition to the recommendations specified in the charter, a review of activities of MMBs from recent years, and an assessment of the ability of the city to fill appointments to each body.

The charter [defines MMB’s broadly](#), making three exclusions:

- The city council and its committees
- The school board and its subcommittees
- Advisory or task forces

That third category leaves room for interpretation. If we choose to look only at the *name* of each body, our approach will be incoherent. The city’s bodies are inconsistently named, with “committee,” “commission,” and “board” being used almost interchangeably with “advisory” added seemingly at random. If we were to focus on the word “advisory,” we might exclude most of the bodies in the city (those without direct financial or administrative powers), which would leave the committee with little room to work.

I choose to interpret the third exclusion as follows: *The review should not trouble itself with bodies that are convened to **create a recommendation on a particular decision**, and which **disband when their work is done**.* This is like the “ad-hoc” description used by city staff in an initial presentation to the committee, through some important differences have become apparent since then.

Approach

Several things, summarized below, have become clear to me through the committee’s early meetings, as well as through conversations with city staff, elected officials, members of

MMBs, and interested community members. At a top level, my guiding principles are: **To err on the side of recommending that the city reduce and consolidate the roster of MMBs, and to ensure those that remain have a clear mandate and an obvious alignment with a function or department within the city administration.** This increases the likelihood that the bodies will be effectively staffed and that their recommendations will have an impact.

I have also become keenly aware that there is no possible way for the committee to do a thorough job and review each MMB in detail. I had hoped that our report would be a comprehensive history and analysis that considered the recent membership and activities of every single committee. Instead, bowing to reality, we have had to triage and focus our efforts on bodies where we are likely to recommend changes.

My approach is therefore:

- Identify defunct and outdated bodies and recommend that they be dissolved.
- Identify high-functioning bodies that serve a current purpose and recommend that they be retained.
- Identify groups of bodies that advise and support the same department within the administration, and consider whether they should be merged.
- Focus the committee's research efforts on the bodies that remain.

While this approach will leave blind spots in our analysis by not interviewing every staff liaison and soliciting feedback from members of each body, I feel that it is the best path to completing a report that captures the actionable recommendations within our allotted time.

Observations

We probably have too many MMBs

For the first two meetings of the committee, we did not even have a comprehensive list of the MMBs under consideration. While staff had done an excellent survey, the committee kept discovering new bodies and discussing whether to take them into consideration. This document, in fact, started out as my attempt to create an authoritative list of the bodies we were discussing.

Those early conversations led to the following observations:

- The city is awash in MMBs
- Most of our MMBs are optional, at least from the perspective of state law.

- Each MMB carries a burden of staff time and administrative overhead. While the exact level of effort is challenging to estimate, the city is undoubtedly dedicating several full-time staff equivalents across many more individual employees.
- This sheer volume of MMBs, as currently organized and staffed, is beyond the ability of the city to effectively manage or even to track.
- MMBs operate at varying levels of effectiveness. Some provide actionable guidance and decisions, while others create frustration among staff, committee members, and the communities they are intended to serve.

Department adjacency is one key to effectiveness

At a high level, MMBs can be divided into two categories:

- Bodies that advise and support a city department or function.
- Bodies that advocate for a particular constituency.

The first category has a natural alignment for staffing and support. For example, the Urban Forestry Committee advises Public Space and Urban Forestry. It is staffed by the Senior Landscape Planner. In the course of that person's normal job duties, they will be aware of topics of interest to the committee. When the committee makes recommendations on (in this case) species selection, planting standards, or similar topics that same staff member can often act on them without much, if any, cross-department coordination.

The second category has no clear and natural alignment against a city department, so it is less clear who should be the staff support. Examples include the Women's Commission, the Commission for Persons with Disabilities, the Ethics Commission, and others. The staff who support these committee risk functioning as intermediaries with no direct stake in the committee's work. Staff for these bodies may struggle to gather timely information about relevant city activities and may have no way to act on their recommendations.

Most of the frustration that I, personally, have heard about is associated with this second category. ***This is not to say that these advocacy-based bodies should not exist.*** Rather, I believe that our recommendations should consider these structural challenges and suggest ways to mitigate or overcome them.

MMBs serve a different purpose than city departments

The committee's early recommendations included dissolution of several defunct MMBs that had not met in many years. In some cases, the consensus was that the MMB had been superseded by a city department. For example, the Recreation and Youth Commission could reasonably be thought of as a predecessor to our Department of Parks and

Recreation and the Multicultural Affairs Commission serves substantially the same constituency and function as the Somerville Office of Immigrant Affairs (SOIA).

While I continue to feel that dissolving these groups (which, again, have not met or had a member in years) was the right decision, vice chair Derrick Rice made an important point: Most MMBs operate under open meeting law (OML) and are thus vastly more transparent in their operations than even the most openly run city department. While members of MMBs do serve at the pleasure of the mayor and are usually considered “special” employees of the city – their work on the MMB is not their core livelihood. MMB members are thus freer to surface uncomfortable truths than full-time city staff.

We should keep this in mind when we consider the non-department-adjacent bodies described above.

MMBs are substantially more constrained than external activists

While OML certainly brings daylight, it also comes with constraints. As we have chosen to interpret the law’s guidance, all communication with committee members outside of our meetings must pass through the staff liaison – even for matters like scheduling meetings and soliciting agenda topics. This puts a substantial burden on the staff and slows our conversations. Committee members are blocked from using basic productivity tools like shared network drives and collaborative documents where we can review and comment asynchronously. Combined with the fact that committees are seated and meet at the Mayor’s pleasure – there is certainly still an important role for external activist organizations even after a city committee or commission is formed.

This is also an important consideration for the non-department-adjacent bodies that, in many cases, struggle to make an impact from within the city.

Five Pillars

In our early conversations about this review, legislative liaison Brendan Salisbury shared a framework that he referred to as the “five pillars of good legislation.” I have found this to be a useful way to approach the work of the committee. It asks us to consider, in order:

1. **Necessity:** Is there a specific problem that needs to be solved?
2. **Effectiveness:** Would any MMB, in an ideal world, be able to address it?
3. **Practicality:** Is an effective MMB feasible in the real world?
4. **Legality:** Would the MMB’s recommendations be legal and within the city’s power?
5. **Equity:** Are either the creation or the recommendations of the MMB likely to have a negative impact on any specific populations, particularly the most vulnerable?

Summary of MMBs

MMB's required under MGL

The following bodies are required under Mass General Law. Despite the charter's instruction that these are outside the scope of the committee's review, I feel that it is appropriate to list them here to make a complete and accurate accounting. Beyond merely mentioning these MMBs, I also feel empowered to comment on their activity, membership, and ability of the city to fill vacancies. In cases where the city council has expanded on state law with local ordinances, I believe the committee would be within its scope to suggest changes to those local laws.

	Body	MGL	Ordinance
1	Board of Assessors	MGL: Ch 41, Sec 24	Ord: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 2
2	Board of Health	MGL: Ch 111, Sec 26	Ch: Sec 38
3	Board of Library Trustees	MGL: Ch 78, Sec 11	Ch: Sec 39
4	Somerville Housing Authority (SHA)	MGL: Ch 121B, Sec 3, 5, 5A, 5B, 6, 7, 7A, 8	N/A
5	Licensing Commission	MGL: Ch 128, Sec 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 10A, 10B	Charter: Div 2, Art 3 Ord: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 4
6	Planning Board	MGL: Ch 41, Sec 70 and 81A - 81GG	Ord: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 5 Zoning Ord: 15.7.3
7	Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA)	MGL: Ch 121B, Sec 5	N/A
8	Retirement Board	MGL: Ch 32, Sec 20	N/A
9	Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)	MGL: Ch 40A, Sec 12	Zoning Ord: 15.7.2

MMBs adopted as a local option

Some laws in Massachusetts are available to cities as a "local option." This table lists the bodies that have been adopted by the city council and approved by the mayor. As with the required bodies above, the city council has chosen to expand some of these with local ordinance language. Following my thinking above, these bodies are within the review committee's scope. If a prior council or administration adopted an optional state law, a future one might revisit that decision.

	Body	Year	MGL	Ordinance	Action
10	Affordable Housing Trust Board	2005	MGL: Ch 44, Sec 55C	Ord: Ch 7, Art 5	
11	Arts Council Board	1992	MGL: Ch 10, Sec 58	N/A	
12	Commission for Persons with Disabilities	1992	MGL: Ch 40, Sec 8J	N/A	
13	Community Preservation Committee	2013	MGL: Ch 44B, Sec 5	Ord: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 16	
14	Conservation Commission	1972	MGL: Ch 40, Sec 8C	N/A	

15	Council on Aging	1963	MGL: Ch 40, Sec 8B	Ord: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 8	
16	Municipal Scholarship Committee	1988	MGL: Ch 60, Sec 3C	N/A	
17	Veterans Commission	2006	MGL: Ch 41, Sec 105	Org: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 14	

MMBs defined by ordinance

The largest group of bodies are those that are defined either by ordinance or by home-rule petition that are *not* inherited from state law. Providing clear recommendations about this group will be the substantial portion of the review committee's work.

	Body	Year	Ordinance	Action
18	AIDS commission	1990	Ord: Ch 6, Art 5	Dissolve
19	Bicycle Advisory Committee	2001	Ord: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 11	Merge
20	Biosafety Committee	1994	Ord: Ch 6, Art 4	
21	Board of Election Commissioners	1928	Charter: Div 2, Art 4	
22	Climate Action Commission	2001	Ord: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 12	
23	Commission for Women	1988	Ord: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 10	
24	Condominium Review Board	2019	Ord: Ch 7, Art 4, Sec 7-67	
25	Emergency Management Advisory Council	1963	Ord: Ch 4, Sec 4-7	
26	Ethics Commission	1997	Ord: Ch 15, Art 2, Sec 15-32	Dissolve
27	Fair Housing Commission	1963	Ord: Ch 7, Art 3, Sec 7-46	
28	Gang Advisory Board	2004	MGL: Acts of 2004, Ch 327	Dissolve
29	Historic Preservation Commission	1963	Ord: Ch 7, Art 2, Sec 7-19	
30	Human Rights Commission	1993	Ord: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 6	
31	Multicultural Affairs Commission	2005	Ord: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 13	Dissolve
32	Memorialization Committee	2020	Ord: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 18	
33	Municipal Athletics Facilities Commission	2007	Ord: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 15	Dissolve
34	Municipal Compensation Advisory Board	1963	Ord: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 9	
35	Municipal Job Creation and Retention Fund Board	2018	MGL: Acts of 2016, Ch 199 Ord: Ch 7, Art 8, Sec 7-191	
36	PILOT Advisory Task Force (Final Report)	2020	Ord: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 19	
37	Recreation and Youth Commission	1963	Ord: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 7	Dissolve
38	Traffic Board	1978	Charter: Div 2, Art 7, Sec 6	
39	Traffic Commission	1978	Charter: Div 2, Art 7	
40	Urban Design Commission	2022	Zoning: 15.7.4	
41	Urban Forestry Committee	2019	Ord: Ch 12, Art 6, Sec 12-105	
42	Wage Theft Advisory Committee	2019	Ord: Ch 9, Art 3, Div 2, Sec 9-35	

MMBs not defined by ordinance

Some bodies are mentioned on the city website or in city council minutes, but do not seem to have any governing documents that would define their makeup and scope in a concrete way. These are also clearly within scope for the committee to recommend formally

adopting as persistent MMBs with details in ordinance and administrative code as appropriate.

	Body	Year	Notes	Action
43	Appointments Advisory Committee	2018	Mayoral committee to review applicants and provide advice on members to be appointed to certain bodies. Dissolved as of 2025. (website , city council action)	N/A
44	Armory Advisory Board	2026	Successor to the Armory Advisory Committee, intended to advise on programming, partnerships, and long-term vision (press release)	
45	Children's Cabinet	2017	Support and develop child well-being in Somerville. Dissolved as of 2025 (website)	N/A
46	Pedestrian and Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC)	2020	Mayor appointed body of volunteer community members who advise on street safety and accessibility. (website)	Merge
47	Young Somerville Advisory Group (YSAG)	2007	Mentioned on the city website as a group for residents aged 35 years or younger, to “foster community and civic engagement.” Likely defunct.	

Potential new MMBs

The committee's remit includes suggesting the creation of new MMBs. As a first step towards that, the following bodies have been discussed or suggested either at recent city council meetings or in private conversations with residents and city staff. I include them here as a reminder for future discussion, not as an endorsement or recommendation.

	Body	Action	Action
48	Board of Water Commissioners	Boards of water commissioners are available to towns under MGL Ch 41, Sec 69A . Somerville, being a city, could use this as a model. Doing so would require substantial overhaul of the department of water and sewer. As it stands, the city council is the de-facto board.	
49	LGBTQ Commission	Several individuals have suggested to me in personal communication that the lack of a commission for LGBTQ issues is conspicuous, especially given the variety of other identity groups for whom commissions exist.	
50	Police Oversight Commission	Independent oversight of the police has been a substantial portion of the public conversation since the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020. The city council called for it, The Public Safety for All task force recommended it, and the Wilson administration has committed to rolling it out in early 2027.	

Advisory and Task Forces

Following my interpretation of the charter text above, I choose to interpret “advisory” bodies as those which are intended to advise on a particular topic, publish a report, and then disband. That final step of disbanding has been erratic over the years, and artifacts of

several of these bodies still appear on various city websites. While recommending on the creation or disbanding of task forces is outside the committee's remit – I personally recommend that a cleanup and closure process be followed when the reports are published. This would ensure that the reports are permanently available while reducing future confusion among residents.

	Body	Started	Finished
51	90 Washington Street Civic Advisory Committee (CAC)	2021	Ongoing
52	Anti-Displacement Task Force (ADTF)	2023	2026 (Report)
53	Anti-Violence Working Group	2023	2025 (Report)
54	Armory Advisory Committee / Master Plan Committee	2022	2024 (Report)
55	Charter Review Committee	2021	2022 (Report)
56	Civilian Oversight Task Force	2023	2025 (Report)
57	Gilman Square City Redevelopment Parcels CAC	2022	Ongoing
58	Police Chief Selection Committee	2023	2024 (Website)
59	Public Safety for All Task Force	2022	2025 (Report)
60	Review of MMB Committee	2026	Ongoing
61	Safe Consumption Site Task Force	2019	2021 (Report)
62	Vision Zero Task Force	2019	2020 (Report)
63	Winter / Brown School Construction Advisory Group	2024	2025 (Report)
64	Winter Hill Urban Renewal Plan CAC	2022	2025

Defunct MMBs

An earlier version of this document listed defunct bodies as a standalone table rather than including them in the categories above. On consideration, I found this confusing and unwieldy. I have therefore chosen to include them in the correct categories above and to provide this summary list in addition.

Body	Started	Notes
Appointments Advisory Committee	2018	Mayoral Committee: Disbanded in 2025
Children's Cabinet	2017	Mayoral Committee: Disbanded in 2025
Ethics Commission	1997	No recent meetings
Gang Advisory Board	2004	No recent meetings.
Multicultural Affairs Commission	2005	No recent meetings.
Municipal Athletics Facilities Commission	2007	No recent meetings.
Recreation and Youth Commission	1963	No recent meetings.

Committee Recommendations

This table is not the authoritative record of the committee's recommendations. That is found in the minutes of our meetings and our final report. As with this entire document, this table represents my own notes and thinking on potential recommendations to be made, as well as when votes were taken on preliminary recommendations.

	MMB	Recommendation	Date voted
1	AIDS Commission	Dissolve: These bodies were taken up together on recommendation from staff. All were defunct, with no meetings in recent years. The committee noted overlap with more recent bodies (board of health, park and recreation department) and the dated and punitive language of the gang advisory board.	June 24, 2026
2	Gang Advisory Board		June 24, 2026
3	Multicultural Affairs Commission		June 24, 2026
4	Municipal Athletics Facilities Commission		June 24, 2026
5	Recreation and Youth Commission		June 24, 2026
6	Ethics Commission	Dissolve: Has not met in recent years and overlaps substantially with the state ethics commission. Repeal Ch 15, Art 2, Sec 15-32 through 15-34	July 8, 2026
7	Bicycle Committee and Pedestrian Transit Advisory Committee	Merge: The committee noted complete redundancy in advising the mobility division and recommends that a Mobility Advisory Committee be created with representation to include cyclists, pedestrians, transit users, disabled individuals, elders, and parents of young children. Where appropriate, the relevant MMBs should nominate representatives to serve on that new committee.	July 8, 2026
8	PILOT Advisory Task Force	Dissolve: Update Ch 2, Art 5, Div 19 of the code of ordinances either to indicate that the body has completed its work or that it should be re-formed from time to time to update its findings.	Not yet discussed
9	Interim Urban Design Commission	Dissolve: Repeal Ch 2, Art 5, Div 17 of the code of ordinances.	Not yet discussed
10	Board of Assessors	Update Ch 2 Art 5 Div 2 of the code of ordinances to remove the reference to the outdated "section 36" of the charter. Include in updated administrative code.	Not yet discussed

MMB Details

This section of the document will be populated in greater or lesser detail with my own notes on the details of each MMB. As of this writing, it is incomplete and included here only as a placeholder for future research.

MMBs Required Under MGL

1. Board of Assessors

Function	
Mass General Law	MGL: Ch 41, Sec 24
Ordinance	Charter: Formerly section 38, now undefined Ordinance: Ch 2 Div 2
Website	https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/board-of-assessors
Members	3
Term	3 years
Meetings	As needed
Staff Support	
Recommendation	N/A

2. Board of Health

Function	Establishes rules and regulations related to public health, including body art, removal and transportation of trash, the keeping of hens, and other topics.
Mass General Law	MGL: Ch 111, Sec 26
Ordinance	Charter: Section 38
Website	https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/board-of-health
Members	3
Term	3 years
Meetings	The third Thursday of each month at 6pm
Staff Support	
Recommendation	N/A

3. Board of Library Trustees

Function	Has ‘custody and management’ of the library and reading room, and of all property owned by the town related to them.
Mass General Law	MGL: Ch 78, Sec 11
Ordinance	Charter: Section 39
Website	https://somervillepubliclibrary.org/library/board-trustees/
Members	9
Term	3 years
Meetings	The second Wednesday of each month at 6pm
Staff Support	
Recommendation	N/A

4. Somerville Housing Authority (SHA)

Function	Provides for the clearance of substandard, decadent, or blighted open areas and the provision of housing for families or elderly persons of low income.
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Mass General Law	MGL: Ch 121B, Sec 3, 5, 5A, 5B, 6, 7, 7A, 8
Ordinance	N/A
Website	https://sha-web.org/
Members	5
Term	5 years
Meetings	The third Thursday of each month at 6pm
Staff Support	
Recommendation	N/A

5. Licensing Commission

Function	Issues licenses for hotels and lodging houses, restaurants, entertainment venues, outdoor seating on the public way, and for the sale of alcohol and other intoxicants including marijuana.
Mass General Law	MGL: Ch 128, Sec 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 10A, 10B
Ordinance	Ord: Ch 2, Div 4
Website	https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/licensing-commission
Members	3
Term	6 years
Meetings	The third Tuesday of most months at 6pm.
Staff Support	Office of the City Clerk
Recommendation	N/A

6. Planning Board

Function	The decision-making authority for development in larger and special zoning districts where site plan approval or special permits are required.
Mass General Law	MGL: Ch 41, Sec 70 and 81A - 81GG
Ordinance	Ord: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 5 Zoning: 15.7.3
Website	https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/planning-board
Members	5 members, 2 alternate members
Term	5 years
Meetings	1 st and 3 rd Thursday of most months.
Staff Support	Department of planning, preservation and zoning (PPZ)
Recommendation	N/A

7. Somerville Redevelopment Authority (SRA)

Function	Has the power to declare that an area is substandard, decadent, and/or blighted and may prepare urban renewal plans and recommend eminent domain takings to implement the plan.
Mass General Law	MGL: Ch 121B, Sec 5
Ordinance	N/A
Website	https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/somerville-redevelopment-authority
Members	7 members
Term	5 years
Meetings	1 st Wednesday of the month
Staff Support	Department of planning, preservation and zoning (PPZ)
Recommendation	N/A

8. Retirement Board

Function	Administer pension and other retirement benefits for former city employees.
Mass General Law	MGL: Ch 30, Sec 20
Ordinance	N/A
Website	https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/retirement
Members	5 members
Term	3 years for members who are not ex-officio
Meetings	As needed
Staff Support	Finance Department
Recommendation	N/A

9. Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)

Function	The decision-making authority for all development in neighborhood residence, urban residence, commercial industry, commercial business, and tufts university. Also decides on hardship variances and administrative appeals.
Mass General Law	MGL: Ch 40A, Sec 12 Zoning Ordinance: 15.7.2
Ordinance	N/A
Website	https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/retirement
Members	5 members, 2 alternates
Term	5 years
Meetings	1 st and 3 rd Wednesday of the month
Staff Support	Department of planning, preservation and zoning (PPZ)
Recommendation	N/A

MMBs Adopted from MGL

1. Affordable Housing Trust Fund Board

Function	Manage the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which provides for the creation and preservation of affordable housing in Somerville, for the benefit of low- and moderate-income households.
Mass General Law	MGL: Ch 44, Sec 55C
Ordinance	Ord: Ch 7, Art 5
Website	https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/affordable-housing-trust-fund
Members	From 5 to 9
Term	Indefinite
Meetings	The 2 nd Thursday of the month
Staff Support	Housing
Recommendation	

2. Community Preservation Committee

Function	Manage the allocation of community preservation act funds, including preparing a community preservation plan, preparing an annual budget, and making project recommendations to the city council.
Mass General Law	MGL: Ch 44B, Sec 5
Ordinance	Ord: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 16
Website	https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/community-preservation-act

Members	Nine, including one member apiece from the planning board, the conservation commission, the historical commission, the parks and open space department, the housing authority, and four members of the general public.
Term	Up to two, two year terms for
Meetings	Monthly
Staff Support	Community Preservation Act manager in the office of strategic planning and community development
Recommendation	

3. Conservation Commission

Function	Promote and develop the natural resources and protect the watershed of the city. Conduct research into the city's land, and coordinate the activities of unofficial bodies organized for similar purposes. Oversees the city's community garden program.
Mass General Law	MGL: Ch 40, Sec 8C
Ordinance	N/A
Website	https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/conservation-commission
Members	3-7 under state law (currently seven)
Term	3 years
Meetings	Monthly
Staff Support	Public Space and Urban Forestry
Recommendation	

MMBs Defined by Ordinance

21. Board of Election Commissioners

Function	Oversee the conduct of elections
Mass General Law	N/A
Ordinance	Charter: Div 2, Art 4
Website	https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/election-commission
Members	Four, two from each of the leading political parties.
Term	Three years, except when a mayor's term ends.
Meetings	Monthly
Staff Support	Seemingly N/A
Recommendation	

24. Condominium Review Board

Function	To enforce the provisions of the condominium conversion ordinance by granting or denying condo conversion permits.
Mass General Law	N/A
Ordinance	Ord: Ch 7, Art 4, Sec 7-67
Website	https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/condominium-review-board
Members	Five, plus one alternate. Two homeowners; two tenants; and one elderly, disabled, or low- or moderate-income person.
Term	Three years
Meetings	Monthly
Staff Support	Housing
Recommendation	

29. Historic Preservation Commission

Function	Enforces the historic district ordinance and the demolition review ordinance.
Mass General Law	N/A
Ordinance	Ord: Ch 7, Art 2, Sec 7-19
Website	https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/ospcd/historic-preservation
Members	Seven members, seven alternates. One member submitted by the Somerville Historical Society, an architect, a real estate broker, a city planner, a lawyer, and two citizens.
Term	Three years
Meetings	Twice Monthly
Staff Support	OSPCD
Recommendation	

32. Memorialization Committee

Function	The naming of public buildings, spaces, and streets and policy / procedure around the installation of memorial benches, art work, and other similar objects.
Mass General Law	N/A
Ordinance	Ord: Ch 2, Art 5, Div 18
Website	https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/iam/memorialization-committee
Members	Seven, including representation from the city council, school committee, veterans committee, historic committee, and community members.
Term	Two years
Meetings	Seemingly infrequent
Staff Support	None shown on website
Recommendation	

41. Urban Forestry Committee

Function	Advise on management and maintenance of trees and shrubs on public grounds and public ways.
Mass General Law	N/A
Ordinance	Ord: Ch 12, Art 6, Sec 12-105
Website	https://somervillema.gov/ufc
Members	The city's tree warden (DPW), the senior landscape planner (PSUF), seven adult members of the public and two high-school aged residents.
Term	Not specified
Meetings	Monthly
Staff Support	Public Space and Urban Forestry
Recommendation	

Template

Function	
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Mass General Law	
Ordinance	
Website	
Members	
Term	
Meetings	
Staff Support	
Recommendation	

Appendix: Code and Ordinance Language

Defined Terms

Multiple-member body: Any council, commission, committee, subcommittee or other body consisting of 2 or more persons, whether elected, appointed or otherwise constituted, but not including the city council or its committees, the school committee or its subcommittees or an advisory committee or task force established by the mayor or city council.

Quasi-judicial body: Any multiple-member body which resolves specific disputes, or makes determinations about the rights, obligations or privileges of identifiable parties.

Regulatory body: Any multiple-member body responsible for establishing or enforcing rules or regulations.

Appointments to multiple member bodies

Multiple-Member Bodies ([Section 2-8; subsection b](#)): The mayor shall refer to the city council and simultaneously file with the city clerk, the name of each person the mayor desires to appoint as a member of a multiple-member body. The city council shall have 60 days after the date on which notice of the proposed appointment was filed with the city clerk to vote to approve or reject the appointment; provided, however, that the city council shall not unreasonably withhold approval of the appointment; and provided further, that if the city council does not take action on the appointment within 60 days, the appointment shall be deemed approved. Multiple-member body members may be removed at the discretion of their appointing authority.

1. All appointments to quasi-judicial bodies and regulatory bodies shall be for terms established by administrative order or the General Laws. Any member of a quasi-judicial body or regulatory body appointed to a successive term shall be subject to confirmation by the city council under subsection (b) of section 2-8 upon the expiration of each term.
2. In the event of a vacancy on a multiple-member body where the seat has remained vacant in excess of 1 year and the mayor has not referred to the city council any proposed appointees to fill the vacancy, the city council president may present to the mayor the names of not more than 3 persons as recommendations for appointment. The procedure for selecting names of persons for presentation to the mayor shall be established within the rules of the city council.

3. The mayor shall twice annually, in February and August, post a complete list of the vacancies on all multiple-member bodies, as well as the procedures for individuals to apply to become a member of such bodies. This posting shall be in addition to, and not a substitute for, regular posting for the purpose of filling vacancies as they arise.

Powers of the Mayor

Multiple-Member Bodies (Sec 3-4, subsection a): The mayor shall be, by virtue of the office, a member of every appointed multiple-member body of the city. The mayor may attend any meeting of an appointed multiple-member body of the city, including executive sessions, to participate in the discussions of that body; provided, however, that the mayor shall not have the right to vote on any matter before a multiple-member body which they serve on solely by virtue of their office.

Thanks

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- School Committee Member Andre Green and Councilor JT Scott for conversations about how city committees and commissions interact with the city’s elected bodies.
- Mayor Jake Wilson for the opportunity to serve on the committee.

Version History

Version	Date	Authors	Changes
1.0	June 24, 2026	Chris Dwan	N/A
1.1	June 24, 2026	Chris Dwan	Adjusted language to clarify “exclude from consideration,” corrections on particular committee status
1.2	August 5, 2026	Chris Dwan	Details on additional committees.