

SUMMARY SHEET

Somerville Community Food Assessment Introduction

What are the goals of the 2026 Community Food Assessment?

This report and its recommendations aim to:

- Give readers a **clearer understanding of food access** in Somerville.
- Include a **diverse range of perspectives** and types of information.
- Examine broader components of the food system to identify **connections and potential opportunities to improve food access**.
- Inform future **goal setting and budget planning** related to food access and nutrition security.



Want to learn more?
Find the full
assessment here:



Who is food insecure in Somerville?

- **30% of Somerville residents are food insecure** according to the most recent survey specific to Somerville.
Source: Greater Boston Food Bank, 2023 statewide food insecurity survey.
- **About 19.6% of Somerville residents, or 15,344 people, have low incomes** as measured by incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty line. For 2026, this means an income of \$31,920 or less for a single person or an income of \$66,000 or less for a family of 4.
Source: 2024 American Community Survey data, latest available.

What will OFAHC and the City do next with the Assessment?

- **This Assessment will guide the City's work around food access for the next several years.** OFAHC will lead periodic updates of the information here to inform work and track progress. Want to stay up to date? Updates will always be shared through the Somerville Food Coalition.

What should I think about when reading the assessment?

The report was written with different audiences in mind. Here are some questions you can keep in mind when reading, based on your experiences with food access:

As a resident: There's a lot going on in Somerville! Think about your daily needs and expenses when it comes to eating and feeding others. How do you empathize with some of the ways people on tight budgets navigate the challenge of getting sufficient food? What have you learned from reading this report and where would you like to expand your involvement or get involved?

As a decision maker or funder: What progress has been made on improving food security directly and indirectly? Where else do we need to improve and how can your role support progress?

As staff in a food or social service agency or business: Where does your work fit into this assessment? What can you use in your work?

As a student learning about food systems: What are some strengths of Somerville's food system? How do these real-life data and stories influence your thinking on changing policies, systems, or the environment?

KEY FINDINGS

- **Flexible sources of municipal funding have increased in the past five years** through Community Benefit funds from rapid local development, newly allocated participatory budgeting funds, and federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. The City of Somerville has prioritized using some of these funds for food access and nutrition-related programs.
- While median household income has increased over the past decade, **food insecurity continues** to affect many residents on a regular or episodic basis.
- **Funding is the biggest constraint** on food pantry operations, but food pantries face additional, unique constraints, such as storage and transportation depending on their space and organizational structure.
- **Transportation access remains a barrier** to accessing fresh, culturally relevant, and cost-effective food options.
- **Local control over grocery store placement is limited.** Transporting food to people or transporting people to food is often more feasible.
- Use of emergency food assistance has increased. **Food pantries are experiencing sustained or growing demand**, underscoring the need for consistent and predictable financial support to maintain operations and service quality.
- **SNAP is a key food benefit** for many food insecure residents, but it **can be difficult to enroll** in the program and recertify.
- **Food resources and policies change frequently**, making ongoing communications and Coalition work with partners and the public important so they can stay coordinated and up-to-date.
- Options for stretching food budgets are limited for residents without nutrition benefits. **For individuals who are ineligible for or not enrolled in food assistance programs, few intermediate supports exist** between market food and emergency food assistance.
- Certain populations, such as **high school-aged students and people with disabilities, have unique needs.** These populations are **not well represented** at meetings where gaps in food access are discussed.
- **Urban growing is popular** and can play an important role in connecting people and supporting health. It can also supplement existing food sources.
- Existing infrastructure and **resources are insufficient to meaningfully expand urban agriculture** in Somerville.
- **Ready-made meals are helpful** in supporting low-income residents with limited ability to cook.
- Food literacy and nutrition education have declined in recent years. **Food literacy is a critical component of long-term nutrition security.**
- Diversion of excess retail food is well established, but **consumer-level food waste remains less well documented and addressed.**
- Food rescue operations are a growing part of food waste management but remain less common than other types of processing because **rescue is more logistically challenging.**



Community members chat over their shopping at the Clarendon Hill Towers location of the City of Somerville's Mobile Farmers Market.