

Candidate name (first and last):	Mary Cassesso
Office the candidate is seeking:	Mayor of Somerville
1. In your role as mayor, how do you plan to work with the statewide delegation to advance your policy priorities, and what are your specific state policy priorities related to transportation, housing, and climate? [1200 character limit]	<p>I have deep relationships at the local and state levels that I plan to leverage to make sure that sound barriers and safety measures are brought to McGrath and I-93. Since I was a young girl, protesting the construction of I-93, highway justice has been a personal concern. Highway justice is a racial, social and health justice issue. In collaboration with organizations like Somerville Stands Together and SASS, I will work to make sure our roads in Somerville are less car-centric, so cyclists and pedestrians have safe means of travel. It is important that the Mayor of Somerville advocates for the maintenance of T Stations to ensure their reliability and safety.</p> <p>My top three priorities are health equity, affordable housing, and climate justice. Housing and climate change are public health crises and need to be recognized as such. My policies intertwine to execute changes that need will address our public health infrastructure, affordable housing, and climate change simultaneously. I.e advocating for affordable housing renovations, we need deep energy retrofitting, and when building new affordable housing units need electrified heating/cooling systems instead of natural gas.</p>
2. How do you see transportation, housing, and climate issues connecting and how will you work to align them if elected? [600 character limit]	There is a question of equity that lies at the heart of all three of these issues, a demand for fair treatment and proper attention that I will not overlook as mayor. Building housing in conjunction with the new Green Line, ensure that new housing is built with an eye towards net-zero emissions. Failing to address these issues deepens inequities with unaffordable housing (mixed with centuries of institutionalized discrimination), limits ability to commute to find better employment, etc. Marginalized communities are most affected by climate change.
3. In recent years, the City of Somerville has had strong Mayoral leadership on transportation issues that has been crucial in moving key projects. Often street projects designed to improve safety and public transit infrastructure face opposition due to removing on-street parking or reducing the number of vehicle travel lanes. As Mayor, how will you be a strong advocate and leader on transportation issues amidst pushback? [1200 character limit]	As a non-driver myself I am attuned to the needs of our pedestrians, cyclists, and bus-takers. Street congestion can be largely attributed to commuters who use Somerville as nothing but a pass-through. The pandemic, showed us a potential future that the reduction in commuters made possible. As restaurants built outside-dining that encroached onto streets, a potential future for a more vibrant and neighborly Somerville was revealed. Part of achieving that goal of a better Somerville will include stringent traffic and pedestrian safety measures, improved bus and bike lanes, and encouraging a more walking-friendly city where our busy sidewalks accommodate shoppers patronizing local businesses and frequenting local restaurants, reducing those businesses' needs for street parking. I will be a strong advocate for these measures because I have always respectfully stood up for my views against resolute opposition, from both individuals and organized special-interest groups, over my more than 30 years as an executive leader. I am seasoned in standing up to pushback and delivering results, preparing me to do just that as mayor.
1a. Which of the following modes of transportation do you use regularly in Somerville? (Check the top 3.)	Subway, Walking, Carpool
1b. What types of housing have you lived in or owned throughout your life? (Check all that apply.)	Duplex/Triple-decker, As a renter, As a landlord, Single-family home, Grew up in 3 family home. Now I am a homeowner.
1. Somerville has just initiated a process to create a citywide bicycle network plan which will show how street space will be allocated to create bike infrastructure for people of all ages and abilities. How will you work to ensure that this network will be built in a timely manner? [1200 character limit]	I believe in the creation and expansion of our bicycle network, and I'll see that plan to fruition as mayor. There are three crucial components at question here: the creation of new bike lanes, the upkeep of existing lanes, and building protected bike lanes in needed areas and throughways to protect our bicyclists. I will ensure that the DPW, IAM, the Engineering Department, and the Mobility Department prioritize bike lane infrastructure. I will work with the city council so that these departments have the funding necessary to meet their directives. Choosing locations for protected bike lanes with the city's Bicycle Committee among other departments and stakeholders, we will effectively protect cyclists in the most dangerous intersections, turns, and large streets. Building and maintaining our bike lanes, in tandem with our bus lanes and improved sidewalks, will help to reduce our ecological footprint while simultaneously making Somerville livelier and healthier. Lastly, I will make sure this is a regional and state effort.
2. What strategies do you support to improve accessible pedestrian infrastructure, particularly for those with vision impairments or using mobility assistive devices? [1200 character limit]	As Mayor, I will promote all ADA recommendations and work closely with our Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to address discrimination in our physical infrastructure. Our roads and walkways need to be accessible for all who live in Somerville. Specifically, I would improve our sidewalks to include more ramps, tactile pavements, and audible walk signals. Sidewalks also need to be better maintained so that tree roots do not uproot pavestones. Traffic calming measures need to be placed to increase the safety for folks who are visually impaired and/or using mobility assistive devices. If elected Mayor, I would be inaugurated in January. Therefore, one of my first actions will be to work with DPW to make sure there are services to assist with sidewalk snow clearing so mobility around the city is not inhibited.
3. SomerVision 2040 mobility goals include reducing Vehicle Miles Travelled (VMT) and prioritizing walking, biking, and transit access. How will you continue to implement the City's Complete Streets Ordinance for both short-term and long-term projects? [1200 character limit]	I plan to use the City's Complete Streets Ordinance holistic lens to make sure our short-term goals/projects lead to our long-term goal of reducing the use of fossil fuels and increasing safe travel for all citizens of Somerville and those who pass through Somerville. Through participatory policymaking, I want to make sure inclusion and equity are prioritized as we create short-term goals, we must bring voices to the table that have historically been overlooked. Again, I'd like to include the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Strategic Planning, Community Development, DPW, etc. to provide appropriate accommodations for folks utilizing public transportation, walkways and bikes. To succeed, I also plan to use my deep relationships and network to work regionally to advance SomerVisions2040 mobility goals because safe streets should continue into our neighboring communities where so many work, visit, etc.
4. Some of the more dangerous roads in Somerville are owned by state agencies, including McGrath Highway and Mystic Avenue. How will you work with and push state agencies, such as MassDOT and DCR, to make much needed changes to improve safety along busy corridors? [1200 character limit]	The unsafe conditions of McGrath and Mystic Ave are unacceptable. I will use my relationships with state agencies and MassDOT to advance safety changes to these areas. I have a long history of working regionally and at the state level to executive long-overlooked projects that promote equity within our community. I will work with neighbors to make sure the solutions that work best for our community are executed.
5. While the MBTA controls bus service, the City of Somerville controls the streets the buses operate on. How would you accelerate bus service and bus priority infrastructure? [1200 character limit]	Firstly, though the state, not the mayor, exercises control over MBTA buses, I will be a strong advocate for increased and improved public transportation in my role as an elected city leader, arguing before the General Court and the Governor as needed to strengthen our MBTA buses. Secondly, in my role as an executive, we will pursue traffic signal priority for buses, make bus stops and curbs more accessible, improve the quality of the seating and weather-protection near bus stops, and work to preserve bus lanes during road reconstruction as much as possible.
6. Through the Bus Network Redesign process, how would you ensure those who need bus service are able to provide feedback and have their needs heard through the process? [1200 character limit]	As Mayor, I will increase transparency and accountability at all levels of government. And this begins with how we treat our citizens. We need to make sure meetings are held in the communities that are most affected. Meetings need to be recorded and minutes need to be taken to be listed publicly so that folks who cannot attend the meeting because they do not have proper childcare, work 2-3 jobs, etc., can view it at their convenience. Any and all calls/emails that come to City Hall that provide questions, comments, concerns about busing need to be followed up on to build trust, promote inclusiveness and good customer service. I will hire folks, like me, who are empathetic and hardworking public servants who will actively seek public participation so that needs are met.
7. Living near high traffic roadways causes public health issues, such as increased rates of asthma, due to the pollution caused by vehicle traffic. In Somerville, environmental justice communities experience the burden of bordering I-93. How would you work to mitigate and address issues of health equity in these communities that result from car traffic? [1200 character limit]	My first political action was opposing the construction of I-93 and the razing of houses in East Somerville. I saw the horrible impacts on the health of my community when those opposition efforts failed. Pollution and sound mitigation efforts are a means of combating the harmful effects of I-93, and I support them, but it is no salve for the negative health impacts already inflicted upon the people of East Somerville (Wards 1 and 4), which is why I support a continuum of care to, as best as possible, prevent and treat adverse health outcomes that I-93 has brought upon Somervillens.
8. The MA state legislature is considering creating a new dedicated governance board for the MBTA, emulating the Fiscal and Management Control Board (FMCB). Given this, how would you utilize the board meetings to advocate on important issues that might be outside the City's control? [1200 character limit]	As Mayor, I would advocate and make sure a Somerville representative has a seat on that board. The needs of Somerville need to be represented to make sure that buses are reliable. In an effort to mitigate climate change, we need to encourage the use of public transportation. To attract folks to this option, we need to make sure buses run frequently and on-time, and are accessible and affordable.

<p>9. Somerville is expected to get tens of millions of stimulus dollars from the federal government. How would you prioritize spending those funds, and how would housing and transportation priorities fit into that plan? [1200 character limit]</p>	<p>The stimulus funds coming to Somerville will help to fund projects that will fulfill my commitments to ensure health equity and public health so that we can continue our efforts to fight COVID, as well as the disproportionate negative effects it has had on our vulnerable community members. This will include the expansion of affordable housing in which I will support the Community Land Trust Fund, Affordable Housing Trust Fund, non-profit affordable housing developers, 100 Homes program, and protect existing "community-owned" housing, such as public housing, publicly subsidized housing, non-profit owned housing, and housing with expiring deed restrictions. We saw during the pandemic that a lack of internet access inhibited some students' learning. I want to fix that and make sure every family has access to the internet to improve equity within our human infrastructure. It's important to increase green job opportunities and training so that more folks have access to good benefits and wages while supporting the community's transition to a more sustainable lifestyle. The funds will be used to promote the goals of Somerville and regional initiatives like Somerville's Green New Deal and SASS so that our streets get the attention they deserve to create safe bike lanes, traffic calming measures, updated sidewalks, etc. The previously mentioned organizations have created proposals that entwine the importance of housing, health, and sustainability, all priorities of mine.</p>
<p>10. What do you propose Somerville should do with the \$30M community contribution for Green Line Extension that is being returned? [1200 character limit]</p>	<p>My priority is solving the topography challenges where are our T stations are located to make sure public transit is accessible for all. In addition, we'll continue with the commitment I've made to safer sidewalks, slower car travel, more bike lanes, by creating more traffic calming and safety measures.</p>
<p>11. A recent report from the MBTA found that the Green Line Extension (GLX) project will largely benefit higher-income, white residents, after an initial study 10 years ago determined the project would benefit environmental justice communities slightly more. How would you ensure that lower-income residents continue to benefit from transportation improvements and have access to affordable housing near transportation? [1200 character limit]</p>	<p>This is an example of where the gap between idea and implementation can widen into a chasm in which the same people who have historically benefited the most from public works - the wealthy - can end up benefiting disproportionately again in the absence of strong safeguards, since they are the entities most prepared to take advantage of newly-presented opportunities. Certain programs and offices like the Condo Conversion Ordinance, the Office of Housing Stability, our inclusionary housing program, and the Fair Housing Commission must be contributed to make the housing we are going to build around the GLX stations affordable and provide homes for individuals and families who do not have the means to live in Somerville otherwise. There is more that we can and must do beyond our existing systems to ensure this, however. The best time to do this work is before projects are approved, before shovels are in the ground. Making building affordable housing units, with strong tenant protections, a requirement for bidders.</p>
<p>12. In a new housing development where space is limited, and parking adds substantially to the cost, how would you prioritize space/think about tradeoffs (between more units, parking, open space, etc.)? What would you do in the face of community opposition to developments that seek to balance these priorities? [1200 character limit]</p>	<p>Parking spaces, especially above-ground parking spaces, should not be the determining factor in reducing the number of units or the amount of green space in future developments. Improvements in transit quality and availability, as well as encouraging a walkable Somerville should depress residents' requirement for and reliance upon cars. In a debate between more units and more parking, units must win out. Green spaces, meanwhile, are essential for a neighborhood to thrive, and for prospective developments. They are also a crucial component in convincing the community to support the proposal, as the existing community members want local green spaces. Future developments can and should reduce car dependency and community opposition by including, when feasible, retail options that meet a community's needs, including grocery stores and pharmacies. This has numerous benefits, from improving local access to fresh food to reducing car use (and thereby improving traffic and traffic safety) among nearby residents.</p>
<p>13. Somerville's inclusionary housing program requires that new developments of over 18 units include at least 20% of the new units be affordable and income-restricted. There is conversation about increasing the program's percentage; however, experience and research around the country has shown that setting the percentage too high can actually reduce the total number of new affordable units built. Would you support a new 12 unit building where 50% of the units are affordable over a 60 unit building where 20% of the units are affordable? Why? [1200 character limit]</p>	<p>I have long championed affordable housing, for 30 years I have sat on the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, and worked as a senior administrative and financial officer in the Housing and Community Development Department during the administration of Governor Michael Dukakis. I will create new affordable housing through 20% Inclusionary Zoning and new publicly subsidized affordable housing. Pursuing this goal, in addition to my other policies to ensure affordable housing, such as preserving the naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH) to preserve 1000 affordable units over the next 10 years, protecting community-owned housing, publicly subsidized housing, non-profit housing, and using the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC), Section 8, the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP), I believe we can achieve our goal to have 15% of total homes in the city be deed-restricted affordable units within 10 years. Before increasing the percentage, I would pursue other options to balance.</p>
<p>14. Increasing density is one of the goals of SomerVision to advance the housing stock and affordability, but Somerville's zoning code restricts how dense housing can be built. There's also pushback because Somerville is already "the densest city in New England" with ~80% of the city made up of two and three family houses. How would you address pushback and ensure that Somerville can meet its density goals set goals in SomerVision 2040? [1200 character limit]</p>	<p>I have more than a 30 year track record demonstrating my commitment to affordable housing. The new green line transit provides new opportunity to increase density and affordable housing while providing more mobility opportunities. Increased density at transit stations also helps us to respond to climate change by providing convenient cleaner public transportation coupled with increasing bike lanes. The new zoning should be further explored because zoning needs to be consistent for those working with the city.</p>
<p>15. What actions or policies that fall under existing municipal powers (i.e., do not require a home rule petition) do you support to help prevent displacement? [1200 character limit]</p>	<p>I will work tirelessly to prevent displacement. By honoring Affordable Housing Overlay District zoning, the opportunity to increase the number of affordable units exists because of the incentives in place. I will use the funds available to financially assist folks who have experienced (or are still experiencing) financial loss due to the pandemic. Additionally, there is an array of Fair Housing policies that have been created to protect housing rights but the outcomes have not been sufficient to address the needs in communities. Even though Fair Housing laws exist, the critical component often lacking is enforcement, which can keep families with portable subsidies from being able to rent in Somerville. Providing equal access to the amenities and resources in Somerville to households from diverse backgrounds is a critical goal, and in many ways a lack of affordable options can act as a de facto Fair Housing barrier. While this is an issue in Somerville, it is also an issue regionally. We must work together with Boston, Cambridge, and other neighboring cities to stabilize affordable rental and buying opportunities.</p>
<p>1. The Massachusetts Vision Zero Coalition supports the removal of direct policing from Vision Zero goals, citing issues of equity and a lack of effectiveness in improving safety. You can read about these issues in the Vision Zero Somerville 2020 Report Card and the Coalition Statement on Gov. Baker Administration's Road Safety Legislation. Do you support removing police enforcement from Vision Zero?</p>	<p>Strongly Support</p>
<p>Please explain. [300 character limit]</p>	<p>I will prioritize the management of successful implementation of Vision Zero's goals through planning and careful hiring decisions to apply a "safe systems approach".</p>
<p>2. Police details are often required for construction projects and open streets events -- it would save money and create jobs if community members were allowed to do this work. Civilian flaggers were first authorized in 2008 to help fill these roles in Massachusetts; nevertheless, these projects and events are still primarily staffed by police on overtime, and detail requests often go unfilled entirely. Do you support reducing police involvement in streets-related projects and events?</p>	<p>Strongly Support</p>
<p>Please explain. [300 character limit]</p>	<p>Communities who have staffed community members to do this work have experienced success and it is certainly an opportunity to create more jobs.</p>
<p>3. One key strategy that has been proven to effectively reduce speeding, improve safety, and remove racial bias in traffic enforcement in other states and countries is automated enforcement (i.e., speed cameras and red-light cameras). The MA Vision Zero Coalition is specifically supportive of the following bills due to their strong protections around equity and data privacy, H.2426, H.2532, S.1545. If the State House passes this automated enforcement legislation and allows cities & towns to opt-in to a speed or red-light camera program, would you support your municipality using this tool?</p>	<p>Strongly Support</p>
<p>Please explain. [300 character limit]</p>	<p>I support Automated Enforcement because it is a low-cost and effective option to enforce speed limits, especially in school zones and other areas with high foot traffic. Additionally, I would also make certain privacy is upheld.</p>

<p>4. Do you support filing a home rule petition for the City of Somerville to implement automated enforcement within the municipality if legislation is not passed at the state level? If you are supportive, please describe how you would ensure the crucial equity and data provisions are included in the petition.</p> <p>Please explain. [300 character limit]</p>	<p>Strongly Support</p> <p>Yes, as previously mentioned, I believe Automated Enforcement is important to pursue because it is a low-cost and effective option to enforce speed limits which will increase the safety of our streets. Again, I would also make certain privacy is upheld.</p>
<p>5. Many injuries from traffic crashes happen on busier arterial roads. Do you support traffic calming for high-crash intersections and roadways of arterials to prevent crashes and save lives, even when it means taking away parking or travel lanes?</p> <p>Please explain. [300 character limit]</p>	<p>Strongly Support</p> <p>To increased safety for our citizens and transition to green infrastructure to mitigate and adapt to climate change. It's a win-win.</p>
<p>6. Mode shift occurs when people get out of their cars and choose other ways of getting around. Do you support the City's SomerVision 2040 goal of reducing vehicular traffic so that 75% of work commutes are made via non-car mode by 2040?</p> <p>Please explain. [300 character limit]</p>	<p>Strongly Support</p> <p>To reduce vehicular traffic and increase greener modes of transportation, I believe there needs to be aggressive action and incentives to ensure all goals are met. I am the candidate that has the most experience creating diverse and knowledgeable teams to implement initiatives to get the work done.</p>
<p>7. To achieve many of Somerville's stated goals in Vision Zero and SomerVision 2040, additional curb space will need to be reallocated from parking to create safe bike infrastructure, bus lanes, and pedestrian improvements. The current price for residential parking permits in Somerville is approximately \$3.33 a month, while the market rate for off street parking is much higher. Do you support raising the annual fee for residential parking permits?</p> <p>Please explain. [300 character limit]</p>	<p>Strongly Support</p> <p>I support financially de-incentivizing behavior that contributes to our greenhouse gas emissions. Exceptions will be made for low-income and other eligible residents.</p>
<p>8. Do you support free bus service on the MBTA, and a low-income fare option for other public transit options?</p> <p>Please explain. [300 character limit]</p>	<p>Strongly Support</p> <p>As part of my public health and education policies, I include that access to social services is just as important as the service itself. I believe in equitable access to social resources and that includes transportation for all regardless of income.</p>
<p>9. Are you supportive of an ordinance similar to Cambridge's Cycling Safety Ordinance which would require protected bike lanes designated in the upcoming bike plan to be built on city streets when they are being reconstructed?</p> <p>Please explain. [300 character limit]</p>	<p>Strongly Support</p> <p>I am confident my deep relationships and network throughout the Greater Boston area will be valuable in my pursuit to regionally construct bike lanes to meet the needs of our community.</p>
<p>Adding parking to housing developments is expensive and increases the cost of housing. Mandatory parking minimums for new developments near MBTA train stops have been eliminated. Do you support eliminating parking minimums city-wide?</p> <p>Please explain. [300 character limit]</p>	<p>Strongly Support</p> <p>I support analysis on the number of parking minimums and we must make certain we're not hurting small and local businesses, people with disabilities and older adults in this venture.</p>
<p>11. Improvements to affordable housing in Somerville requires not only increasing production and allocation, but also increasing the amount of housing that will maintain its affordable status in perpetuity. Do you support the goal of making 20% of Somerville's housing stock affordable in perpetuity by 2040?</p> <p>Please explain. [300 character limit]</p>	<p>Strongly Support</p>
<p>12. The Community Preservation Act (CPA) adds a 1.5% surcharge on net property taxes and qualifies the city to receive matching funds from the statewide Community Preservation Trust Fund to help support affordable housing in Somerville. It received a 76% approval as a ballot question in 2015. Do you support increasing this surcharge to further support affordable housing as part of CPA?</p> <p>Please explain. [300 character limit]</p>	<p>Strongly Support</p> <p>Yes, increasing the avenues in which we achieve an adequate amount of affordable housing needs to be explored.</p>