Somerville Arts Council Cultural Planning

Pre-planning Exploration Findings

TDC

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Agenda

Agenda review and project context	10 mins
Stakeholder survey findings	25 mins
Focus group findings	10 mins
Implications for cultural planning & discussion	30 mins
Closing and next steps	10 mins

Project goals

- Identify needs and potential solutions as perceived by artists and other stakeholders
  - Assess whether topics should be addressed in cultural planning

- Learn about perceptions of the SAC and its role in the community
  - Gauge if stakeholders equate cultural planning with recommending changes for SAC, the City of Somerville, or in the city writ large

- Educate stakeholders about the flavors of cultural planning
  - Test stakeholder willingness to commit time to a larger planning effort

Reminder: What is cultural planning?

"A cultural plan is a community decision-making process that seeks ways to better support and utilize creative work. Cultural plans explore residents' preferences, the adequacy of public and private structures that support creativity and innovation, and identify specific action steps that can make the community's creative portfolio stronger, more accessible, more sustainable, and more diverse."

− Cultural Plan Framework from the City of Madison, WI

What can cultural planning accomplish?

Identify, clarify, and define where arts and cultural assets, functions, and relationships live within City government

Leverage other city departments towards arts and cultural priorities

Ensure the integration of arts and culture into a comprehensive city plan

Create a platform for political advocacy

Systematically address inequities across an ecosystem

Municipal or City-wide Planning Process

City-wide planning

- Engages stakeholders beyond City government to achieve broad vision for the arts and cultural sector, utilizing the city's full assets and resources
  - What is the city's broad vision for arts and culture over the coming years?
  - What are our collective and individual roles in supporting that vision?
  - What resources and levers are at our disposal to affect this change?

Municipal planning

- Identifies City government's unique role in supporting the sector and takes stock of assets and resources at its disposal
  - How do we as a municipality best serve the arts and culture sector?
  - What is our role amid other organizations, funders, and partners to support and sustain arts and culture?
  - How can we dedicate public resources to support this function?

Project research

- TDC sought to gather information from a diverse, but limited, group of key stakeholders in the arts and culture community to test an appetite for cultural planning AND a willingness to participate.
  - The effort was not a proxy for an inclusive, community-wide cultural planning process.

- Feedback from the May 27 meeting participants informed the design of TDC's research efforts:
  - The stakeholder survey was distributed to a broader swath of community leaders in the arts and culture sector.
  - The focus group planned targeted BIPOC artists and arts leaders.
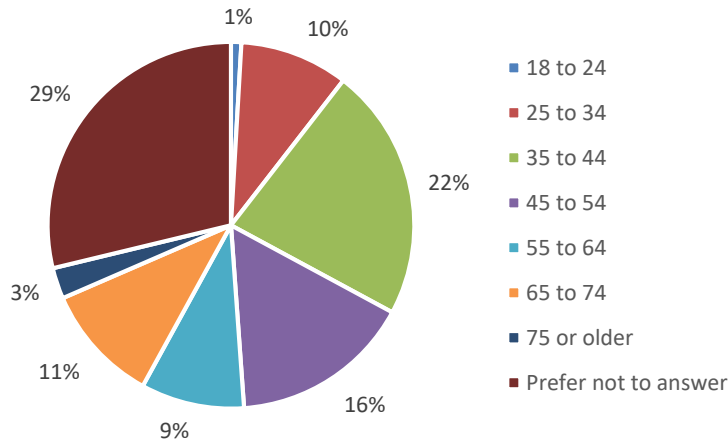
Stakeholder Survey Findings

Survey Methodology

- Survey sought to:
  1. Gauge constituents' priorities for a cultural plan.
  2. Understand who might want to support the SAC in the planning process.
  3. Identify the cross-sector entities that should be included in a planning effort.

- Survey was marketed broadly via email and social media and remained open from July 9-18.

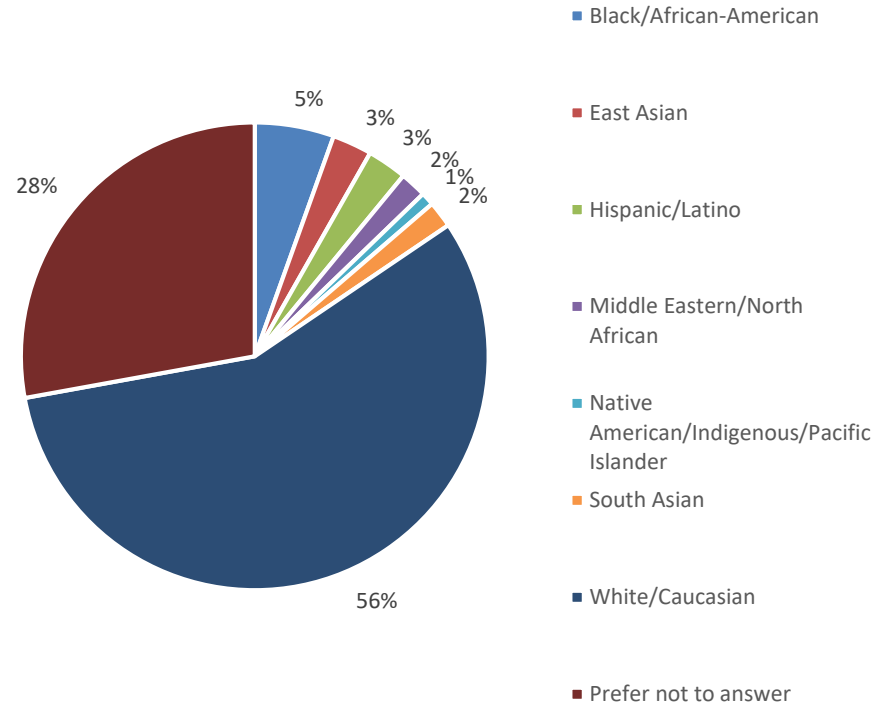- Distributed to SAC networks and those of the initial working group.

Survey Response

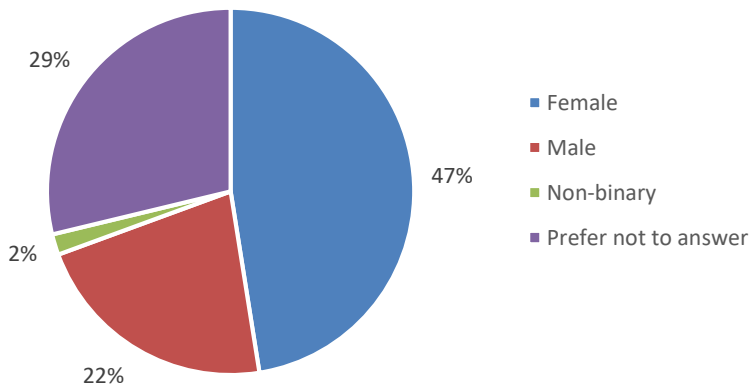- 219 responses: 161 completes (74%) and 58 partials (26%)

Age of Respondents

Legend: 18 to 24 · 25 to 34 · 35 to 44 · 45 to 54 · 55 to 64 · 65 to 74 · 75 or older · Prefer not to answer

Percentages: 1%, 10%, 22%, 16%, 9%, 11%, 3%, 29%

Race/Ethnicity of Respondents

Legend: Black/African-American · East Asian · Hispanic/Latino · Middle Eastern/North African · Native American/Indigenous/Pacific Islander · South Asian · White/Caucasian · Prefer not to answer

Percentages: 5%, 3%, 3%, 2%, 1%, 2%, 56%, 28%

Gender of Respondents

Legend: Female · Male · Non-binary · Prefer not to answer
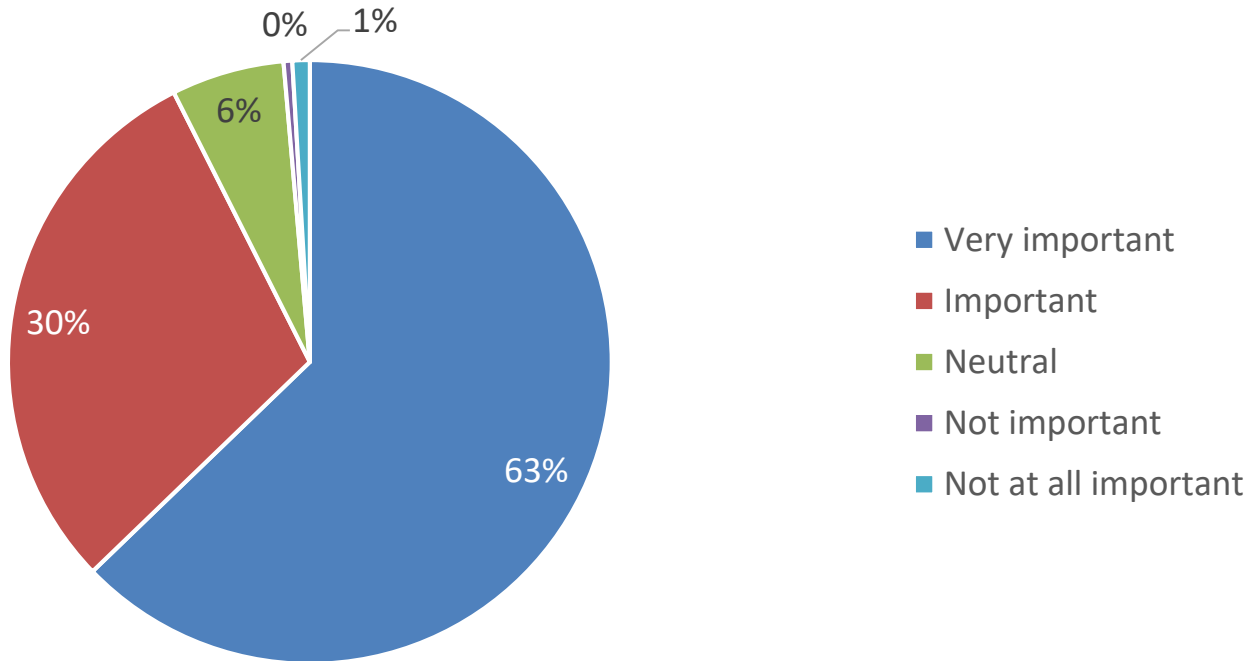
Percentages: 47%, 22%, 2%, 29%

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Survey Response

- 117 Somerville residents (71.8% of respondents)

- Role in the Arts Community
  - Artist: 61
  - Arts Advocate: 19
  - Arts Audience: 28
  - Arts Funder: 2
  - Staff at Arts Organization: 12
  - Other: 40 (most wanted to list multiple identities/affiliations)

- At least 66 Somerville-based arts and cultural organizations represented by respondents

Support for a cultural plan is strong

- 93% of respondents believe it is *very important* or *important* for Somerville to have a cultural plan
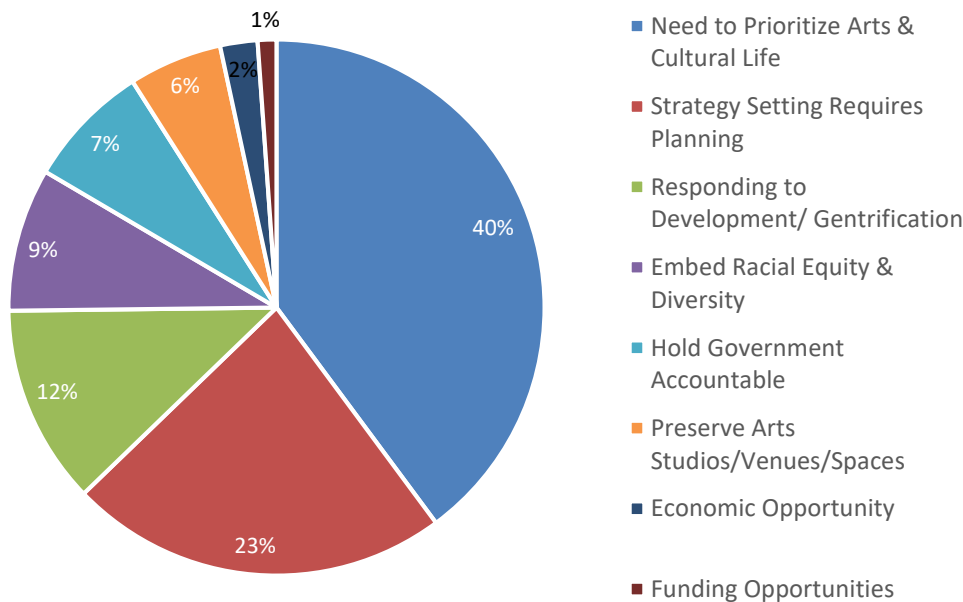
How important is it to you that Somerville has a cultural plan?

Legend:
- Very important
- Important
- Neutral
- Not important
- Not at all important

Pie chart values: 63%, 30%, 6%, 0%, 1%

Prioritizing arts and culture in Somerville

- 40% want Somerville to develop a cultural plan because it would drive the city to prioritize arts and culture, while 23% believe in the inherent usefulness of planning to set priorities and strategy

Why is it important to you that
Somerville has a cultural plan?

- Need to Prioritize Arts & Cultural Life
- Strategy Setting Requires Planning
- Responding to Development/ Gentrification
- Embed Racial Equity & Diversity
- Hold Government Accountable
- Preserve Arts Studios/Venues/Spaces
- Economic Opportunity
- Funding Opportunities

Need to Prioritize Arts & Culture
"Culture is an essential part of the community. It brings us together to experience and learn about our neighbors, the numerous cultures that make up our community with music, art, storytelling, and more."

Strategy setting requires planning
"Because without a plan, the City will not progress along a strategic route. Some areas might be well protected or served and others neglected."

Note: This question was open-ended, giving respondents the opportunity to tell us, in their own words, why a cultural plan is important to them. TDC then read through all responses, found common themes, and coded them into the above categories.

Other motivations for a cultural plan (1)

- **Responding to Development/Gentrification (12%)**
  "Because artists and the arts defined this city for decades and now are being threatened by developers and high cost of housing."

- **Embed Racial Equity & Diversity (9%)**
  "Arts and culture are crucial parts of Somerville's identity, but we risk having this be a very white, upper-middle-class scene with BIPOC creators mostly featured in "ethnic" festivals. We can strive for much greater inclusion."

- **Hold Government Accountable (7%)**
  "Because it will make city government more accountable to the future of the arts in the city. In many ways, I think it's great to have an arts scene be loose and organic. Yet we need a plan to preserve that will still be ANY sort of cultural scene in years to come with pressing gentrification issues."

Other motivations for a cultural plan (2)

- **Preserve Arts Studios/Venues/Spaces (6%)**
"We need to keep Somerville a place where artists (visual and performing) can live, exhibit, and perform."

- **Economic Opportunity (2%)**
"The creative class is proven to be the sustaining economic engine of successful communities."

- **Funding Opportunities (1%)**
"Without a plan, it is harder to justify budget allocations and other resources that are needed to support culture and the arts."

Systemic impact sought after in planning

- Collectively, respondents assign high priority to many outcomes, as can be seen in the close scores listed below
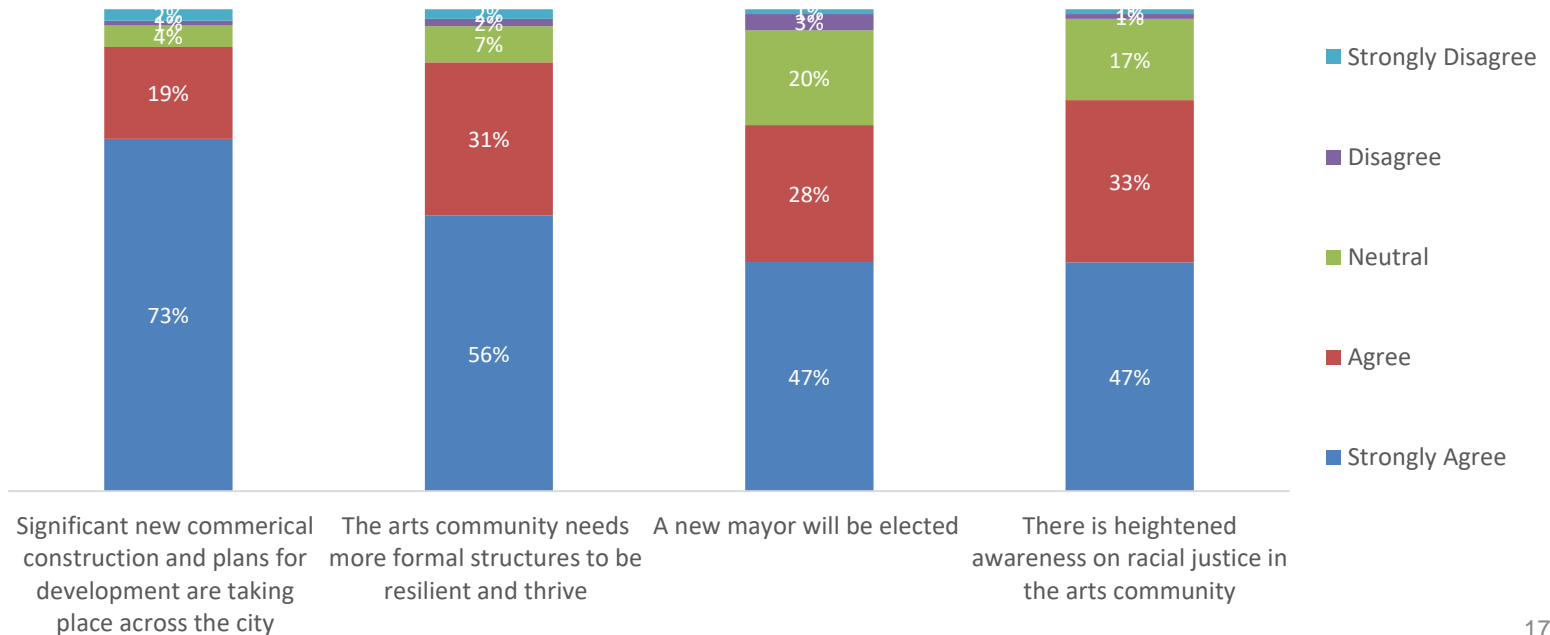
Rank	Score	Outcome
1	414	More venues to perform/display art
2	386	More workspaces for artists
3	343	More support and funding for BIPOC artists and organizations
4	324	Increased grant funding for arts and culture organizations
5	281	Strategy for arts in the school system
6	267	Increased funding for neighborhood-based arts activity
7	261	Increased visibility for Somerville's arts sector
8	258	Housing for artists
9	217	Increased funding for individual artists
10	177	More robust SAC department
11	119	Arts advocacy organization
12	89	Increased arts-based tourism

Note: The score is a weighted calculation that considers how frequently an outcome was ranked high versus low, meaning that when more respondents rank an outcome #1, it will have a higher score.

An urgent need for a cultural plan now

- **92%** of respondents *strongly agree* or *agree* that significant new commercial development and plans for development are driving the need for a cultural plan now

- **87%** of respondents *strongly agree* or *agree* that the arts community needs more formal structures to be resilient and thrive
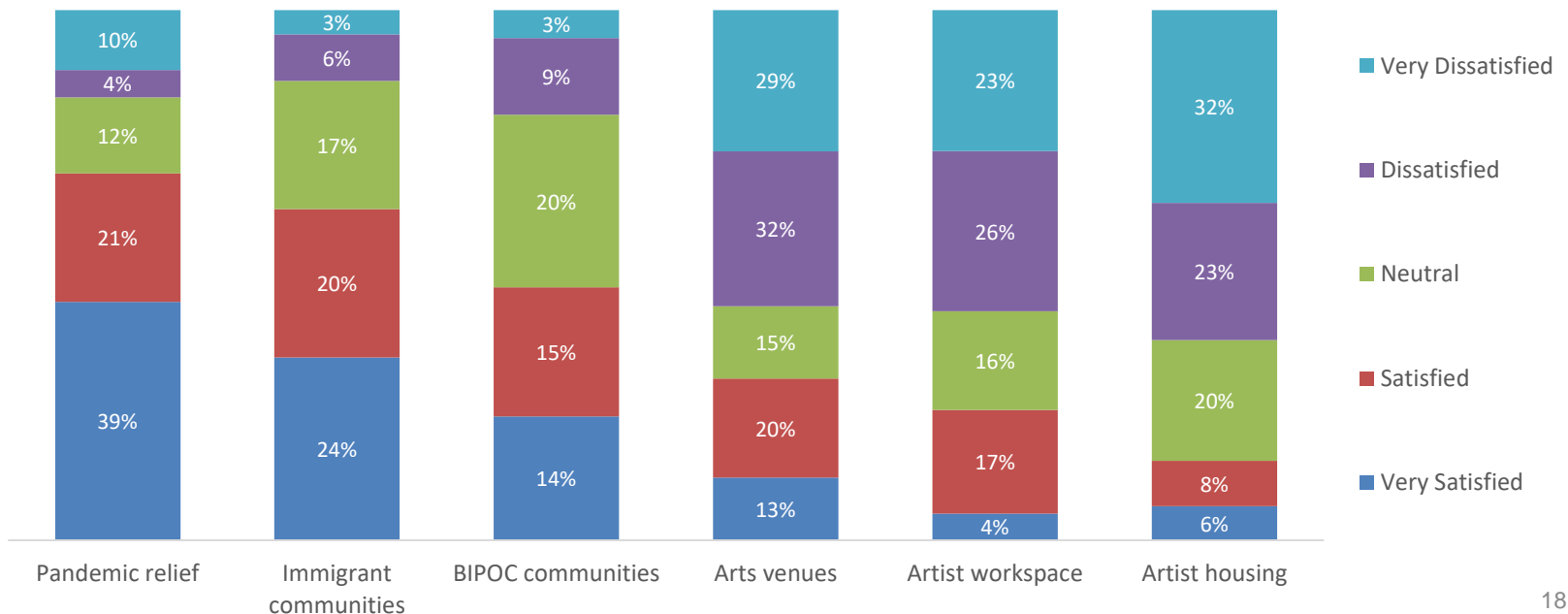
This is an important time to develop a cultural plan because...

	Significant new commercial construction and plans for development are taking place across the city	The arts community needs more formal structures to be resilient and thrive	A new mayor will be elected	There is heightened awareness on racial justice in the arts community
Strongly Disagree	2%	2%	1%	1%
Disagree	1%	2%	3%	
Neutral	4%	7%	20%	17%
Agree	19%	31%	28%	33%
Strongly Agree	73%	56%	47%	47%

Room for growth on satisfaction with SAC

- When aggregating respondents who are *satisfied* or *very satisfied* with the SAC's work, we see the following results:
  - 59% support its pandemic relief work
  - 44% support its work with immigrant communities
  - 29% support its work with BIPOC communities
  - An average of 22% support its work in arts venues, workspaces, and housing
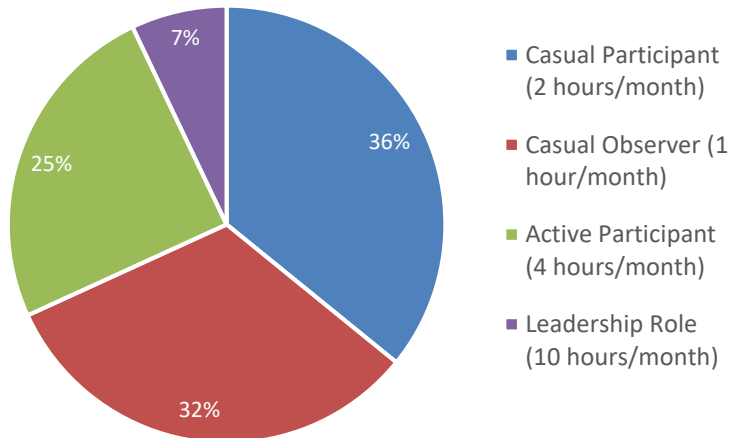
How satisfied are you with SAC's work in the following areas?

Pandemic relief: Very Satisfied 39%, Satisfied 21%, Neutral 12%, Dissatisfied 4%, Very Dissatisfied 10%

Immigrant communities: Very Satisfied 24%, Satisfied 20%, Neutral 17%, Dissatisfied 6%, Very Dissatisfied 3%

BIPOC communities: Very Satisfied 14%, Satisfied 15%, Neutral 20%, Dissatisfied 9%, Very Dissatisfied 3%

Arts venues: Very Satisfied 13%, Satisfied 20%, Neutral 15%, Dissatisfied 32%, Very Dissatisfied 29%

Artist workspace: Very Satisfied 4%, Satisfied 17%, Neutral 16%, Dissatisfied 26%, Very Dissatisfied 23%

Artist housing: Very Satisfied 6%, Satisfied 8%, Neutral 20%, Dissatisfied 23%, Very Dissatisfied 32%

Legend: Very Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Neutral, Satisfied, Very Satisfied

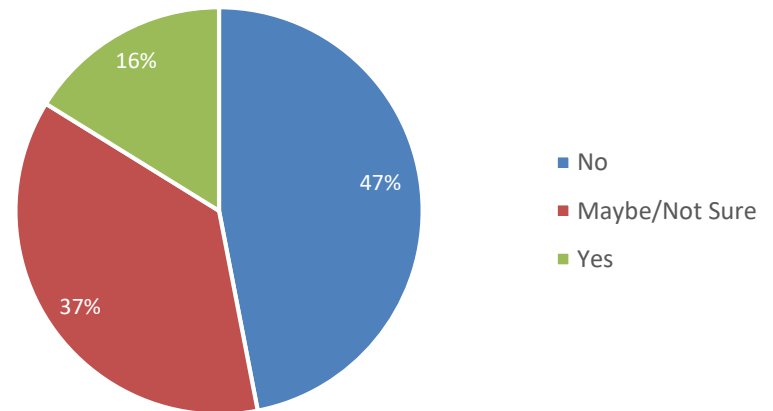# A readiness to participate

- Proposed level of commitment for the cultural planning process:
  - Leadership Role: 14 respondents
  - Active Participant: 49 respondents
  - Casual Participant: 71 respondents
  - Casual Observer: 64 respondents

- Overall, only 16% of respondents unequivocally said that a stipend would make it possible for them to play a leadership role.

- But, 7 of the 14 respondents ready to take on a leadership role said it would (Yes) and 4 said it might (Maybe)

Level of Volunteer Commitment

Would a small stipend make it possible for you to play a leadership role?

Implementing and funding the plan

- Respondents suggested all facets of the community play a role in implementation

  - *"Along with the City and the arts/culture sector itself, educational institutions, community advocacy groups (especially focused on immigrants), supportive businesses, real estate developers and property managers (who might host activities and exhibits), potentially churches as well."*

  - *"SAC, City planning department, Somerville Historic Preservation Commission and department, Somerville Museum, the Armory, representatives from Brickbottom, Joy Street Studios, Vernon St. studios, Mudflat, Washington St. Art Center, the Nave Gallery, Somerville Open Studios, Artisan's Asylum - even though they have moved out of Somerville, they may have good advice and their members should be part of this implementation if possible, Developers should implement the plan as well. Historic re-enactors associated with the Somerville museum and the City should be part of implementation as well. They tell the story of Somerville. Somerville could also be on the freedom trail. Somerville Media Center for the same reason."*

Implementing and funding the plan

- Respondents were less certain on where to seek funding support

- 28% of respondents indicated they were uncertain

- Some thought the responsibility sat with government and business/developers, others suggested private fundraising

  - *Government and businesses, because they've got the money and influence!*
  - *Government; large developers; major corporations who want to do business in Somerville*
  - *Likely a combination of foundations, major corporate donors, and the local business community.*
  - *Museums, collectors, philanthropic businesses...*
  - *MCC, NEFA, The Boston Foundation*
  - *Barr Foundation, MCC Cultural Facilities Fund, NEA Our Town, developers*
  - *It seems like all the new hotels that are popping up would be eager to help fund arts base tourism?*

Focus Group Findings

Focus Group Methodology

- Focus group intended to supplement survey findings with insights from 8 active BIPOC arts leaders in Somerville
  - Took place in-person, outdoors, the evening of September 8, 2021

- Discussion questions included:
  - How do you think a cultural plan could help BIPOC artists in Somerville?
  - What should SAC consider as it begins to design a cultural planning process to ensure that BIPOC artists feel welcome to participate and feel interested in participating?
  - Outside of the usual suspects, what organizations, individuals, or other entities should SAC make sure to engage in planning and in plan implementation?
  - What is your impression of how the arts and creativity manifest in the lives of BIPOC residents? Do you think they will have any interest in participating in cultural planning? Are there sub-groups that you believe should be proactively engaged?
  - Through show of hands, who here is supportive of SAC initiating a cultural planning process? Who is against it? Who is not sure?

Underrepresentation and lack of belonging

- Consensus that BIPOC community does not feel welcomed in all spaces, that the city's culture does not always create a sense of belonging, and that the community histories of BIPOC individuals are not elevated.
  - *"I'm working with an Asian community that is telling me, 'I've been here but there is nothing in Somerville's culture that is representative of us.'"*
  - *"There are very few places where everyone feels welcome. It's relationship building and needs a sense of belonging."*
  - *"New England plus the art world can be super exclusionary."*

- Participants reflected ambivalence when it comes to identity-specific arts.
  - On the one hand, community members want to have an opportunity to celebrate their ethnic cultures.
  - On the other hand, they also desire to be a part of citywide celebrations.

- It was noted by several participants that BIPOC residents often leave Somerville to find culturally relevant arts.

Barriers to participation for BIPOC (1)

- General agreement that Somerville can be segregated when it comes to where people live and congregate.
  - One participant mentioned that there are certain parts of the city no longer feel safe at night ("like a sundown city")

- Gentrification mentioned as one challenge, but not the primary impediment, to BIPOC participation.
  - "Place, history, and shared experience" mentioned as frame to understand what is happening on the ground in term of gentrification.
  - What culture has already been here, but is not seen?

Barriers to participation for BIPOC (2)

- Time
  - Many individuals are working multiple jobs or evening jobs when community events are held
- Childcare needs
- Communication
  - Language and channels
- Perception that local events are not culturally authentic
  - Seen as a "white thing"
- Individual bias or racism
  - Sense that some venues would not rent to BIPOC artists principally because of their race or artform

Centering cultural equity in planning

- Participants hoped that cultural equity and support for BIPOC artists could be prioritized in the cultural plan

- A goal for the cultural plan that particularly resonated with participants was expressed as:

  What do we want the identity of the arts in Somerville to be?

- Participants asked how they and others could more effectively reach specific racial/ethnic groups and how to attract a wider audience for their programs

BIPOC artist development support ideas

- Broad agreement on the power that SAC grants have on BIPOC artists' ability to realize their potential
  - Great appreciation was expressed to SAC for these opportunities

- Participants noted that artists need more support than access to venues
  - **Develop, incubate, and stage** was a proposed model for how the SAC could think about supporting the BIPOC community

- Information sharing was emphasized
  - Raising awareness among BIPOC artists about funding and other opportunities
  - Maintaining a roster of BIPOC artists as a resource for local businesses seeking to hire creatives

- One solution proposed was mediation between artists and those who control space – traditional arts venues but also other businesses such as restaurants.
  - It was noted that BIPOC artists can sometimes be denied access due to biased views on their work, particularly relevant for hip hop artists.

Uplifting existing BIPOC efforts

- Participants mentioned existing entrepreneurial efforts being spearheaded by BIPOC artists, which could get highlighted in a cultural plan

- For example, an artist group has been planning a community-wide event for Juneteenth 2022, its first year as a federal holiday
  - By supporting this effort the city has the opportunity to cement a new tradition among its residents, an experience that can help shift the culture

- There was also broad understanding for how much time and effort is required to launch a premier event, but also an appreciation for its benefits.
  - For instance, planning for the Fluff Festival takes many months from many people and has been happening for decades
  - If this level of effort were directed in service of BIPOC artists it could transform Somerville's culture.

Trust-building and follow-through

- Some expressed concern about how a cultural plan would genuinely integrate the BIPOC perspective
  - *One participant shared that in the past, they have seen how it is often just three or four BIPOC individuals shouldering all of the work to represent the entirety of such a diverse community.*

- Participants had mixed feelings upon hearing that white respondents to the survey expressed a desire to center the voices, interests, and experiences of BIPOC artists
  - They were appreciative and hopeful that real change might occur
  - But, history and past experience have justified skepticism until resources are allocated and decision-making occurs that would indicate real change

Key takeaways

- Nuanced model for supporting artists:
    - **Develop** artists or events to help them grow
    - **Incubate** artists to help them learn the skills, tools to succeed (someone also called it 'infrastructure')
    - **Stage** artists' work and events to uplift them and each community

- Prioritization of community-wide discussion to address the question: *What do we want the identity of the arts in Somerville to be?*

Implications for Planning

Municipal or City-wide Planning Process

City-wide planning

- Engages stakeholders beyond City government to achieve broad vision for the arts and cultural sector, utilizing the city's full assets and resources
  - What is the city's broad vision for arts and culture over the coming years?
  - What are our collective and individual roles in supporting that vision?
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Municipal planning

- Identifies City government's unique role in supporting the sector and takes stock of assets and resources at its disposal
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  - How can we dedicate public resources to support this function?

SAC respondents seek city-wide planning

- General sentiment from respondents that it is the right moment for SAC to facilitate cultural planning
  - Significant new developments threatening arts spaces
  - New mayoral administration and city council on the horizon
  - Existing entrepreneurial efforts by BIPOC artists and other sector collaborations could be leveraged

- Respondents want an inclusive engagement process, centering participation by residents

- Sufficient energy in community to sustain planning (most respondents noted they would be willing to volunteer up to 2 hours/month)

SAC respondents seek city-wide planning

- Respondents wish to see:
  - Arts and culture prioritized across the city
  - A plan for addressing cultural inequity and barriers to participation in the arts by BIPOC residents
  - A plan for addressing diminishing performance and work spaces
  - A response to development and gentrification threatening the livability of Somerville for artists
  - More formal structures to support the arts, in addition to the SAC

- BIPOC participants call for a process that considers the identity of the Somerville arts community through the lens of cultural equity

SAC respondents seek city-wide planning

Desired outcomes of a cultural planning process
More venues to perform/display art
More workspaces for artists
More support and funding for BIPOC artists and organizations
Increased grant funding for arts and culture organizations
Strategy for arts in the school system
Increased funding for neighborhood-based arts activity
Increased visibility for Somerville's arts sector
Housing for artists
Increased funding for individual artists
More robust SAC department
Arts advocacy organization
Increased arts-based tourism

Discussion

- Did anything surprise you about these findings?

- Is there meaning you made of them that we left out?

Next Steps

- Potential pathways forward:

1. Start afresh with an inclusive community research effort to test if other priority areas exist; steer community to lead in a prioritization exercise.

2. Pick 3-4 priority areas to focus on, per per-planning findings, and dedicate planning resources to investigate those areas in greater depth.