

Mayor's Arts Listening Tour

Dance, Theatre & Performing Artists

Wednesday, August 19, 2026 | 6:00–8:00 PM | Dojo @ Somernova, 15 Properzi Way

6:00–6:05 Arrival

Informal gathering as people settle in. Handouts, agendas, index cards are distributed.

6:05–6:10 Welcome & Opening

Rachel/Mayor

Brief welcome from Rachel/Mayor's office. Introduce format and purpose of the session.

6:10–6:20 Grounding Exercise

Jenny Oliver

Led by Jenny. Brief embodied opener to help the room arrive and settle before discussion.

6:20-6:25 *Move chairs for discussion.*

6:25–6:35 Framing & Landscape: Trust, Values & What We've Heard

Callie

Before we go further: you are seen here, you are heard here. Tonight starts from your lived experience, not a theory about artists. You are the reference point, the expert in the room, and we'll build outward from where your experience overlaps with everyone else's in the room.

What you just participated in in the opening exercise isn't an icebreaker, it's how this community works, through communal practice with reflection, not translation into something more familiar first. From there, our shared reference point: what resources already exist, where the City's role sits, and what we've already heard, from the citywide space survey and tonight's own RSVPs and folks who couldn't make it here tonight. (Full data in handout.)

Popcorn Prompts:

- *One word: **what brought you here tonight?***
- *One word: **what do you hope comes out of this meeting?***

6:35–6:55 Artist Testimony

Emily

2–3 artists speak briefly and directly about their lived experience.

6:55–7:50 Open Discussion

Rachel/Emily

As we talk, think about where your experience touches infrastructure, programming, resources, connectivity, or policy, these are the levers the City actually has to work with.

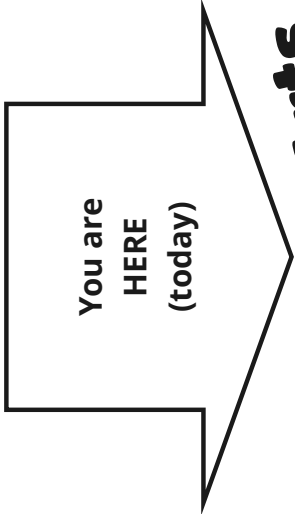
Structured prompts to surface specific, actionable input:

- *What does it mean for artists and the City to build trust together, and what do you actually value in your day-to-day practice?*
- *What's working well for you in your practice right now?*
- *What's the last thing that stopped you from rehearsing or producing something you wanted to make?*
- *What's a specific resource, space, or support you wish existed?*

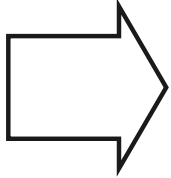
7:50–8:00 Close & Documentation

Rachel/Mayor

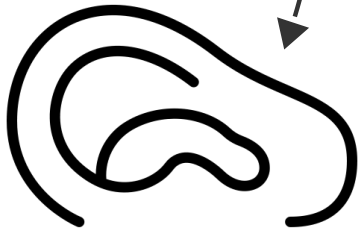
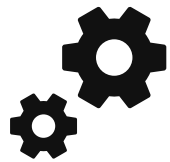
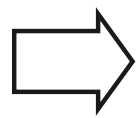
Index cards distributed: side one, **what stuck with you?**; side two, **what you want the City to remember?**. Thank you and close.



Mayor's Arts Listening Tour



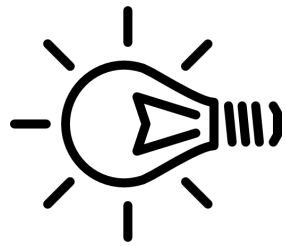
We Heard From YOU



Communicating
Building Trust
Understanding different ways of knowing

Let's listen and collectively discuss...

What's important to Artists? What's the City's role?



What is actionable?

What is foundational?

- Non-attendee feedback form
- Attendee Questions
- 2026 Art Space Survey
- Your engagement with SAC/City
- LCC Grants
- SAC Programs
- Artist Participation

What We Heard: Dance, Theatre & Performing Artists

Findings from RSVP responses and non-attendee submissions
Mayor's Arts Listening Tour — Dance, Theatre & Performing Artists — August 19, 2026

Ahead of and around tonight's session, 27 dance, theatre, and performing artists shared input through event RSVP responses and a separate non-attendee feedback form for those who could not attend. Five findings emerged consistently across both channels.

Top 5 Findings

1. Space scarcity, sharpened by the loss of the Armory's 2nd floor

22 of 27 respondents (81%) raised space or rehearsal availability directly; 7 named the Armory specifically.

Respondents describe a shrinking set of affordable, dance-appropriate spaces in Somerville, with the pending loss of the Armory's 2nd floor cited repeatedly as an active, near-term concern — particularly for theatre groups who may be pushed to compete with dance groups for the remaining 3rd floor space.

2. A widening affordability gap between space costs and what artists can pay

11 of 27 respondents (41%) raised cost or budget constraints directly.

Multiple respondents described rehearsal rates outpacing what they can pay performers, and performance venue costs shrinking how many shows they can produce in a season. Mid-sized groups (4–6 dancers) in particular describe a gap between what's available and what fits their group size and budget.

3. Trust is built through consistent presence and direct communication, not one-off events

6 of 27 respondents (22%) raised communication or trust-building directly.

Respondents describe trust as a product of city officials showing up to artist-produced events, sustained dialogue over time, and follow-through on prior commitments — not primarily as a function of formal outreach or PR.

4. Demand for dedicated funding and residency structures

6 of 27 respondents (22%) raised funding, grants, or residency programs directly.

Recurring, specific requests included reinstating an artist-in-residence program, a low-barrier micro-fund for informal/DIY artistic activity, and continued or expanded Local Cultural Council grant support.

5. Administrative and permitting friction around city-owned space

5 of 27 respondents (19%) raised bureaucracy, permitting, or zoning directly.

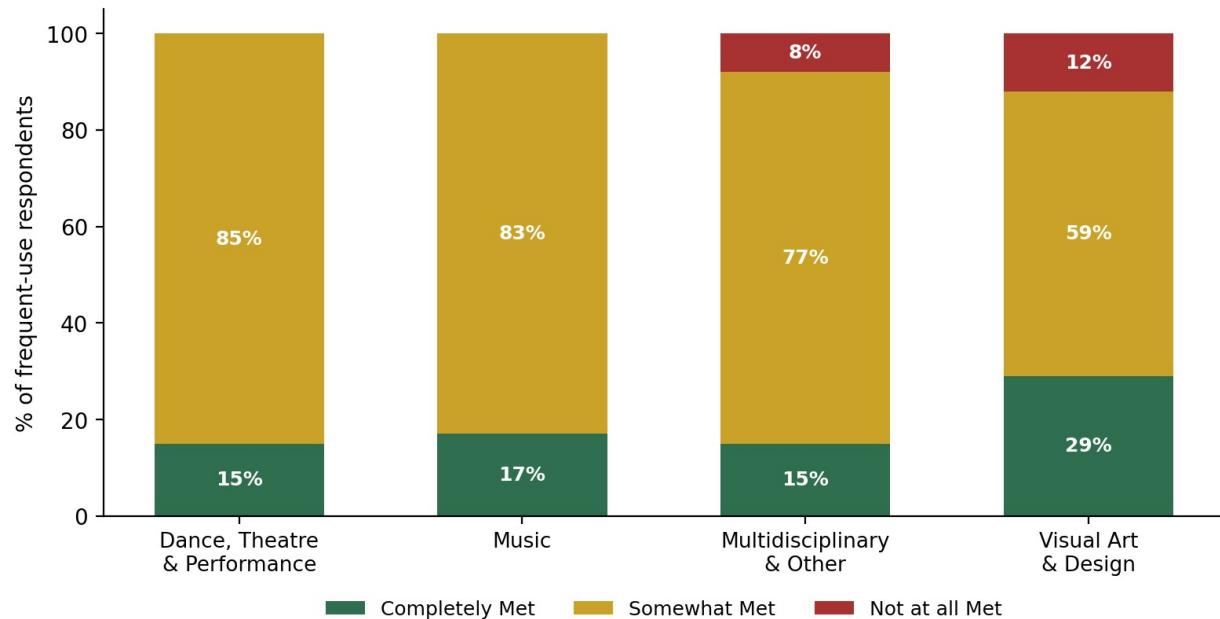
Respondents point to permitting complexity and opaque processes around city-owned space as barriers in their own right, separate from space scarcity itself — several specifically requested simplified, faster access to available city space.

Source: 7 non-attendee written submissions and 20 event RSVP responses collected in connection with the Mayor's Arts Listening Tour for Dance, Theatre & Performing Artists, August 19, 2026.

Art Space Needs Assessment: Space Needs Met by Discipline

City of Somerville Arts Space Needs Assessment Survey — OpenData, July 2026

Are Your Space Needs Currently Being Met? Frequent space users, by discipline



Reading the Chart

Among frequent space users, Dance, Theatre & Performance respondents report 0% "not at all met" — tied with Music as the strongest-performing discipline in the survey on this measure, and ahead of both Multidisciplinary & Other (8% not met) and Visual Art & Design (12% not met).

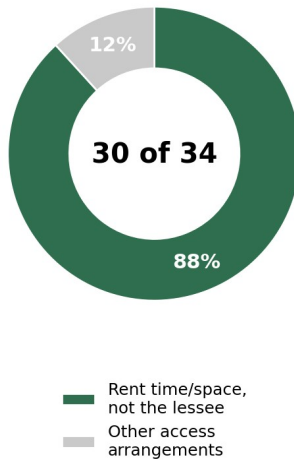
- 100% of Dance, Theatre & Performance frequent users report needs are at least somewhat met.
- Most respondents land in "somewhat met," not "completely met" — the system is functioning, not comfortably ahead.
- SomArt has offered Somerville's dance and performance community dedicated rehearsal space for several years, and may be part of what's contributing to this outcome, though the survey wasn't designed to isolate SomArt's specific effect.

Source: City of Somerville Arts Space Needs Assessment Survey Responses (OpenData, July 2026); SomArt Space, "Dancers' Space Needs, By the Numbers," July 16, 2026.

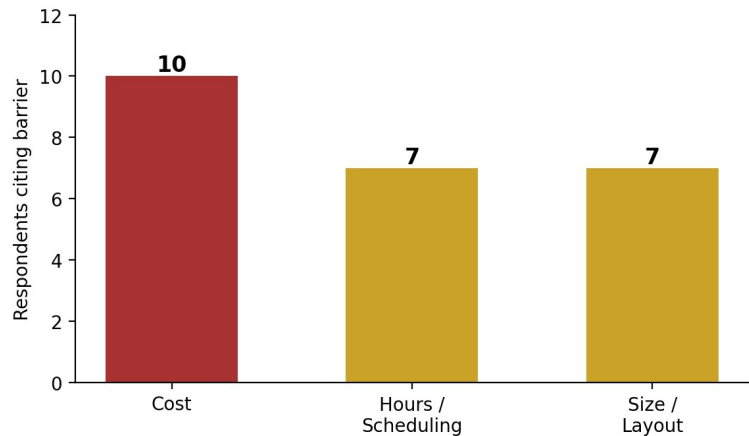
Art Space Needs Assessment: Access Model & Barriers

Dance, Theatre & Performance respondents, frequent space users — City of Somerville Arts Space Needs Assessment Survey

How Frequent Users Access Space



Top Barriers Named by Frequent Users



Reading the Charts

Among Dance, Theatre & Performance respondents who use space frequently:

- 88% (30 of 34) access their space through a rental agreement where they are not the lessee — they are renting time or slots in someone else's space, not signing leases of their own.
- Only 7 of 41 said they actually need dedicated, exclusive space; the rest either don't need it, can share it, or said dedicated space doesn't match how their discipline works.
- Cost is the single largest named barrier (10 respondents), ahead of hours/scheduling and space size or layout (7 each).

What this shows: the shared-space, hourly/seasonal access model isn't a workaround, it's how this community actually operates — and cost, not space type, is the binding constraint on top of it.

Source: City of Somerville Arts Space Needs Assessment Survey Responses (OpenData, July 2026).