

**Alderman Ward 6 Candidate Rebekah Gewirtz's Responses
to Questions for Aldermanic Candidates**

1. **Jobs** - As you know, a lot of people in East Somerville need work, or need better jobs. This was the #1 priority at last year's East Somerville Initiative that involved hundreds of residents and businesses in setting priorities. As Alderman, how would you try to make sure that local residents get hired for jobs that are created by new development and businesses moving into town, for example Ikea and Assembly Square?
It's important that Ikea hold true to its commitment to support residents in East Somerville by providing jobs to this community first before seeking other candidates. Ikea is going to create significant pressure on our entire city in terms of traffic and congestion and its incumbent on the company to make good on its commitment to our residents.
2. **East Somerville Community School** - As Alderman, what would you do to move forward the rebuilding of the East Somerville Community School? Parents and the community were promised that the school would be rebuilt, and now almost 2 year later there has been little progress and no rebuilding on the horizon. Having ESCS students scattered among 3 schools has caused great hardship for families and has been a lot for the community as well.
I support the rebuilding of the East Somerville Community School and have worked to make sure we have funding to support the construction. Ultimately, our school-aged population has gone down over time but we have a lot of kids in East Somerville that need a school that is accessible to them and we have an obligation as a community to make sure we provide that. Similarly, I believe the same holds true for West Somerville where we have an obligation to provide accessible elementary schools like the Brown School to children from the western part of the city. Education must continue to be a top priority in city government.
3. **Traffic on lower Broadway, & pedestrian and bike access:**
 - Do you support the redesign of McGrath Highway to remove the T overpass from Twin Cities to Union Square and replace it with an at-grade boulevard?
Yes.
 - What would you do to improve safety for pedestrians and bike riders in East Somerville? In particular, please address difficulty in crossing McGrath Highway and the increase in traffic that will result when the IKEA store is opened at Assembly Square.
It would make sense to extend the walk lights across Broadway so pedestrians have a better chance of being able to safely cross such a busy street. I also think Ikea and FRIT should work with the community to create traffic calming measures that make walking safer and easier for residents of East Somerville and for others using the area.
 - Would you support or object to a commuter rail stop at Sullivan Square that is being considered by EOT? Please address concerns about increasing air pollution from stopping the diesel trains and an increase in people boarding the Orange Line at Sullivan that would result from this change.

Generally speaking, I support more transit opportunities in Somerville especially since we have about eight rail lines that run through the city and only one actual stop in Davis Square. However, commuter rail lines are somewhat different as the diesel trains can produce more pollution when they stop and start, possibly negating the positive environmental and neighborhood impacts of having a stop in the first place. If a study were to show that a significant number of Somerville residents would benefit from a commuter rail stop at Sullivan Station I would be inclined to support it, but only if we first initiated such a study and explored the costs and benefits carefully.

4. **Anti-displacement plan** - With development in Assembly Square and the coming of the Green Line to Somerville, residents are concerned that low to moderate income Somervillians may be priced out of Somerville. Would you support a City role in the development of an anti-displacement plan to preserve, defend and promote affordable rental and home ownership? What should that plan include?

Yes. As chair of the Housing and Community Development committee and the Board of Aldermen's ad hoc representative to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, I have been a strong supporter of increased affordable housing opportunities in the city. In particular, I have advocated for the city to explore affordable housing in advance of the Green Line extension so we can be sure long time residents, those who helped to build our community, have the opportunity to stay even when housing values increase as a result of increased T stops. Davis Square benefited tremendously from the Red Line station in Davis Square but we have seen many long time residents pushed out as property values (and therefore increased property assessments) have priced them out. I have advocated strongly that as the city initiates the comprehensive citywide plan affordable housing in advance of the Green Line be a top priority and that we work with our community partners like the Somerville Community Corporation to ensure this becomes not just something nice to talk about but a reality.

5. **Policies for affordable housing** – As Alderman, would you support strengthening city policies, such as
- Increasing the percentage of **inclusionary zoning** in new housing development, and deepening affordability by using Somerville incomes rather than the greater Boston region's incomes as the standard;

The current percentage in our inclusionary zoning ordinance is relatively high - for every eight units built, one must be affordable. However, I have seen developers in Ward 6 skirt this requirement. In one case a developer proposed a building with 7 units that easily could have had 8 or more in a prime location, thereby avoiding the inclusionary requirement. I would be open to talking about increasing the percentage to prevent this from happening. We need to work to create more affordable housing opportunities in new developments coming into our neighborhoods and our inclusionary ordinance should not be sidestepped. I would also support using Somerville incomes rather than the greater Boston region's income standard since that is what's relevant to our community.

- Lowering the threshold for **linkage** and closing loopholes, so that more commercial development will better fund more affordable housing?

Yes.

6. **Expiring use** - In Somerville, over 370 units of affordable housing in so-called “expiring use” buildings could be at risk in the next year, including two buildings in East Somerville. Would you actively campaign to preserve these homes through local negotiation, and lobbying for state and federal legislation?

Absolutely.

7. **Gentrification** -

○ What does the word “gentrification” mean to you?

“Gentrification” tends to have a negative connotation meaning a neighborhood changes for the worse when newer wealthier people move in, increasing home values and pushing people out. I think this can certainly be a problem in some neighborhoods and we need to work to prevent displacement through city programs and smart community planning. But I also generally think that our neighborhoods are stronger when we welcome new people because in turn new people then want to give back to and engage in the community. I have worked hard in my two terms in office to bring people together, both those who are newer to the area and those who have been in Somerville their whole lives. I believe we share more in common than not and we all want our community to be a safe and supportive place where our families can thrive.

○ How will future developments affect the working families of Somerville?

That very much depends on the role we play in these developments. As active residents we can lay out the kind of community we want to see in the future and I have strongly advocated for this in the Davis Square area. We are in an era where big boxes are taking over our unique outdoor spaces making them look like generic malls. I don’t think those kinds of spaces make us stronger and more vibrant in the way small locally owned independent businesses do. I’m looking forward to beginning a visioning process in Davis Square - and for the citywide visioning process to begin in earnest - so we can start to make these choices and determine our own future together.

○ Would you support affordable housing being built in your neighborhood?

Absolutely. I have supported and advocated for affordable housing throughout the time I have been in office (and before) and I will continue to do so in the future. Davis, Ball, and Porter Squares should not be only for wealthy people - people with low and middle incomes should also have the opportunity to live in Ward 6.

○ A large majority of residents in Somerville are renters. What are your feelings about the recently tabled Condo Conversion ordinance?

As you might imagine, I have a lot of feelings about this since at the request of Mayor Curtatone I spent over 18 months chairing the working group that authored this ordinance. Many people said we’d never be able to come to consensus on our working group, which was made up of two representatives from the real estate community and two representatives of the tenants advocacy community and dedicated city staff. People said that the real estate interests and the advocates for tenant’s rights simply had fundamentally different missions and goals that were by nature opposing. I was

so proud when we proved that sentiment wrong – painstakingly, deliberately, and thoughtfully coming to agreement. Unfortunately, an outside group bent on removing all regulations in Somerville spread misinformation and in some cases flat out lies about what the ordinance would do. Even though the city held multiple informational sessions for realtors, residents, and anyone else who was interested, this misinformation created an atmosphere that made it impossible to move forward at that time. I was very disappointed by this since we crafted a smart and workable ordinance that would benefit not just renters but landlords as well by providing clear guidelines for all and actually *decreasing* restrictions for 90% of property owners in Somerville. I anticipate it will come up again in the future and I look forward to the Board of Aldermen deliberating over it and ultimately passing it.

8. **The Green line extension** - The Green Line will drastically change our community, enhancing access to rapid transit. What are some concrete ways that you could engage the community in land-use planning regarding the extension of the Green Line to Somerville, specifically focusing on those community members historically not engaged in urban planning?

In terms of engaging those who have historically been left out of planning in the city, I think Somerville needs to work as hard as possible and be innovative and thoughtful about how to engage these residents. Whether they are immigrants or low income individuals or families that just don't have the time or resources to be able to participate in community planning processes, we need to make sure to include everyone. Some ways we can do this are by ensuring representation of underrepresented groups on the citywide comprehensive planning steering committee; by going to neighborhoods that are traditionally disaffected and having presentations and group meetings at times that make it possible for people to participate; and by engaging new groups like Centro Presente to partner with the city to make sure the immigrant voice is front and center in our deliberations about this exciting time in the future of our community.