

BOROUGH OF SOMERVILLE REORGANIZATION MEETING



JANUARY 1, 2024

12:00PM

SOMERVILLE HIGH SCHOOL ~ 222 DAVENPORT STREET
USE ORCHARD STREET ENTRANCE

The Borough of Somerville wishes you and
your family a very ***“Happy and Healthy New Year”!***

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AGENDA

1. **INTRODUCTORY MUSIC** Evan Kunick
Isabella Keller
Henry Szugimala

Directed by: Stephen Loreti
2. **TOWN CRIER:** David Lang
3. **NATIONAL ANTHEM:** David Lang
(Please stand)
4. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Christopher Petrosini, US Army Veteran
(Remain standing)
5. **INVOCATION:** Reverend Donna Stewart
St. Thomas A.M.E. Zion Church
(Remain standing)
6. **CALL OF ROLL 2023** Kevin Sluka, RMC
7. **2023 CITIZEN OF THE YEAR AWARD:**
Presented by Dennis Sullivan
8. **2023 CLOSING REMARKS:** Dennis Sullivan
9. **PRESENTATION BY:** Granville Brady
10. **PRESENTATION BY:** RanD Pitts
11. **OATH OF OFFICE FOR COUNCIL:** THERESA BONNER
Holding Constitution: Kofi Bonner (husband)
Oath administered by County Clerk Steve Peter
12. **OATH OF OFFICE FOR COUNCIL:** GLEN DENYS
Holding Bible: Ruth Denys (wife)
Oath administered by County Clerk Steve Peter
13. **OATH OF OFFICE FOR MAYOR:** BRIAN G. GALLAGHER
Holding Bible: Lisa Gallagher (wife)
On stage: Brian, Annie, Ian & Maura (children), Danni Lynn (Granddaughter)
Oath administered by Congressman Tom Kean, Jr.
14. **OPEN PUBLIC MEETING LAW:** KEVIN SLUKA, RMC
15. **CALL OF ROLL FOR 2024 MAYOR & COUNCIL:** KEVIN SLUKA
16. **ELECTION OF 2024 COUNCIL PRESIDENT:**
(Motion, 2nd and roll call vote required)
17. **STATE OF THE BOROUGH ADDRESS:** MAYOR BRIAN G. GALLAGHER
18. **RECOGNITION OF SOMERVILLE ARMED FORCES PERSONNEL:**
19. **FIRE DEPARTMENT EX-CHIEF PRESENTATION:** ROGER VROOM
20. **OATH OF OFFICE FOR FIRE CHIEF:** DAVE VALLONE, SR.
Holding Bible: Dave (son)
Oath administered by County Clerk Steve Peter
21. **PRESENTATION OF BADGE:** ROGER VROOM

27. GREEN TEAM:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Gina Stravic	1 year	12/31/24
Tania Althoff	1 year	12/31/24
Sarah Arif	1 year	12/31/24
Ava Coppola	1 year	12/31/24
Pamela Dorn	1 year	12/31/24
Paige Greenfield	1 year	12/31/24
Laura Laskowski	1 year	12/31/24
Caitlin Martin	1 year	12/31/24
Melissa Smith-Shell	1 year	12/31/24
Logan Stahl	1 year	12/31/24
Neal Udsen	1 year	12/31/24
John Guarino	1 year	12/31/24
Thomas Auffenorde	1 year	12/31/24

28. CANNABIS CLASS 5:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Brian Gallagher	1 year	12/31/24
Kevin Sluka	1 year	12/31/24
RanD Pitts	1 year	12/31/24
Roger Vroom	1 year	12/31/24

29. APPOINTMENT OF PLANNING BOARD MEMBERS BY COUNCIL:

(Motion and vote required by Council for items #29 through #31)

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Roger Vroom	1 year	12/31/24

30. APPOINTMENT OF ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT BY COUNCIL:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Art Adair	4 year	12/31/27
Eric Alvarez	2 year	12/31/25 (Alternate #1)

31. BOARD OF HEALTH: APPOINTMENT BY COUNCIL:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Mary Hodges	3 year	12/31/26
Karen D'Alonzo	3 year	12/31/26

**32. APPOINTMENT BY MAYOR (ROLL CALL VOTE OF COUNCIL)
REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

(Requires motion and vote for item #32)

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Brian Gallagher	1 year	12/31/24
Glen Denys	1 year	12/31/24
RanD Pitts	1 year	12/31/24
Bernie Navatto	1 year	12/31/24
Mike Kerwin	1 year	12/31/24

33. APPOINTMENT BY MAYOR: (CONSENT OF COUNCIL)

(Requires motion and vote for item #33)

LIBRARY ADVISORY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Mateo Garcia	1 year	12/31/24 (Sup't appointment)
Brian Gallagher	1 year	12/31/24 (Ordinance #2334)
Lauren Watson	5 year	12/31/28

APPOINTMENT OF FIRE APPARATUS DRIVERS:

CENTRAL HOOK & LADDER:	ROBERT LYNN
LINCOLN HOSE:	KARL PARKER ZENOWICH
ENGINE COMPANY No.1	JOE CONDO
WEST END HOSE COMPANY No.3	GLEN THORNE

APPOINTMENT OF RECREATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Tom Scherr	3 year	12/31/26
AJ Smith	3 year	12/31/26
Helen Delpopolo	3 year	12/31/26

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Helene Venizelos	3 year	12/31/26
Sandra Benscoter	3 year	12/31/26
Geoff Keiser	3 year	12/31/26
Geraldine DeSapio	2 year	12/31/25 (Alternate #2)

SOMERSET COUNTY RECYCLING COMMITTEE:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Mark Ibrahim	1 year	12/31/24
Rodney Hadley	1 year	12/31/24

MUNICIPAL ALLIANCE & YOUTH SERVICES COMMISSION:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Jill Gleeson	1 year	12/31/24
Vito Spadea	1 year	12/31/24
Rose Jean-Baptiste	1 year	12/31/24
Nicole DeBiase	1 year	12/31/24
Gregg Puluka	1 year	12/31/24
Jason Kraska	1 year	12/31/24
Theresa Bonner	1 year	12/31/24 (voting member)
Kevin Sluka	1 year	12/31/24

FIRE POLICE:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
James Kirchner	1 year	12/31/24
Kent Buchanan	1 year	12/31/24
Greg Jobin	1 year	12/31/24
Joe Byer	1 year	12/31/24
Peter Fusco	1 year	12/31/24

SOMERSET COUNTY SOLID WASTE ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SWAC):

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Rodney Hadley	1 year	12/31/24 (Mayor's Recommendation)
Kevin Sluka	1 year	12/31/24 (Council Recommendation)

SOMERSET COUNTY BLOCK GRANT COMMITTEE:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Kevin Sluka	1 year	12/31/24
Paige Elster	1 year	12/31/24
Rebekah Harms	1 year	12/31/24 (Alternate #1)

RARITAN RIVER GREENWAY ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Kathy Gerndt	1 year	12/31/24
Rodney Hadley	1 year	12/31/24
Kevin Sluka	1 year	12/31/24

COMMUNITY ANIMAL RESPONSE TEAM

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Kevin Sluka	1 year	12/31/24
Alicia Danis	1 year	12/31/24
Arianna Macey	1 year	12/31/24

NJT RR RARITAN VALLEY RAILROAD COALITION:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Kevin Sluka	1 year	12/31/24

ACCIDENT REVIEW COMMITTEE:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
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Dennis Manning	1 year	12/31/24
Rodney Hadley	1 year	12/31/24
Kevin Sluka	1 year	12/31/24
Jeremy Susser	1 year	12/31/24
Joseph Stitley	1 year	12/31/24
Jim Barry	1 year	12/31/24

REGIONAL CENTER PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Brian Gallagher	1 year	12/31/24 (Executive Committee)
Rick St. Pierre	1 year	12/31/24
Rich Reitman	1 year	12/31/24 (Council Representative)
Deidre Rosinski	1 year	12/31/24

HISTORIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Kelley Allen	1 year	12/31/24
Phil Decker	1 year	12/31/24
James Sommerville	1 year	12/31/24
Marge Sullivan	1 year	12/31/24
Jennifer Young	1 year	12/31/24
Harold Willard	1 year	12/31/24
Brenna Hassinger-Das	1 year	12/31/24
Kristen Anne Gray	1 year	12/31/24
David Edwards	1 year	12/31/24
Ron Czajkowski	1 year	12/31/24
Scott Sweitzer	1 year	12/31/24

UPPER RARITAN WASTEWATER ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Kevin Sluka	1 year	12/31/24
Rodney Hadley	1 year	12/31/24

FIRE MUSEUM COMMITTEE:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Pat Weston	1 year	12/31/24
Rich O’Neill	1 year	12/31/24
Brendan Nally	1 year	12/31/24
Marge Sullivan	1 year	12/31/24
Bryan O’Neill	1 year	12/31/24
Ron Czajkowski	1 year	12/31/24
Kristen Anne Grey	1 year	12/31/24
Rich Reitman	1 year	12/31/24

EMERGENCY SERVICES FACILITIES COMMITTEE:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Dennis Manning	1 year	12/31/24
Brian Iselin	1 year	12/31/24
Robert Wortman	1 year	12/31/24
David Vallone	1 year	12/31/24
Richard O’Neill	1 year	12/31/24
Steve Weinman	1 year	12/31/24
Jim Barry	1 year	12/31/24
Pat Weston	1 year	12/31/24

SOMERSET COUNTY CULTURAL & HERITAGE COMMISSION:

<u>Appointee</u>	<u>Term</u>	<u>Expiration</u>
Les Floyd	1 year	12/31/24

34. MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

35. CONSENT RESOLUTIONS (24-0101-001 THRU 24-0101-036)

24-0101-001 **Establishing 2024 Meeting Procedure**

- Description: the 1st and 3rd Mondays are regular meetings except that we will have meetings on Tuesdays if the preceding Monday is a Holiday. January Meetings will be on the 1st and the 16th. Executive Session starts at 6:00 p.m. and public meeting starts at 7:00 p.m. Check website for adjustments to schedule and for special meetings.
- 24-0101-002 **Designating Official Newspapers**
Description: Identifying the Courier News as the official newspaper and in cases where two newspapers are needed the Star Ledger shall be the 2nd official newspaper.
- 24-0101-003 **Filing Signature with Secretary of State**
Description: Pursuant to state statute the Municipal Clerk is authorized to distribute the Mayor's signature and municipal seal upon request of the Secretary of State.
- 24-0101-004 **Adopting 2024 Holiday Schedule**
Description: establishing the holiday schedule that Borough operations are closed.
- 24-0101-005 **Authorizing Disbursement of Funds for Pension and State Health Benefits prior to Council Approval**
Description: Allows the CFO to make payments to the State of NJ Electronic Payment System at which time bills are received.
- 24-0101-006 **Authorizing Signature**
Description: Allowing the Mayor & Council President to sign checks & other documents.
- 24-0101-007 **Establishing Interest Rate on Delinquent Taxes**
Description: 8% per annum on first \$1,500 and 18% on excess of \$1,500 of the delinquency. Any taxpayer with a delinquency in excess of \$10,000 will also be charged a penalty.
- 24-0101-008 **Establishing Interest Rate on Delinquent Sewer Use Taxes**
Description: 8% per annum on first \$1,500 and 18% on excess of \$1,500 of the delinquency.
- 24-0101-009 **Authorizing the Chief Financial Officer to Wire Transfer Funds for Investment and Payment of Capital Debt**
Description: Allows CFO to wire funds for investment of surplus funds throughout the year.
- 24-0101-010 **Affirming 2024 Borough Officials**
Description: Identifies the position being held by municipal officials.
- 24-0101-011 **Adopting Policy and Procedure Manual**
Description: the manual has been updated and will continue to be updated. Establishes rules and regulations for municipal employees.
- 24-0101-012 **Approving the Hiring of Rebekah Harms as Full Time Deputy Tax Collector effective January 1, 2024**
- 24-0101-013 **Authorizing the Award of a Non-Fair and Open Contract to the Law Offices of Robert Smith to Perform Legal Services as Borough Counsel – Jeremy Solomon**
- 24-0101-014 **Authorizing Appropriations to Cover Debt Service Requirements from January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024**
Description: The temporary budget resolution allows for current fund obligations to be paid. This resolution allows for debt service to be paid.
- 24-0101-015 **Authorizing the Award of a Non-Fair and Open Contract for Accounting Services (Auditor)-PKF O'Connor Davies Accountants and Advisors**
- 24-0101-016 **Authorizing the Award of a Non-Fair and Open**

Contract to the Law Offices of Robert Smith to Perform Legal Services as Prosecutor

- 24-0101-017 **Authorizing the Award of a Non-Fair & Open Contract for Bond Counsel – Gibbons, P.C.**
- 24-0101-018 **Establishing 2024 Current Fund Temporary Budget**
Description: Allows the Borough to initiate operations prior to adoption of budget.
- 24-0101-019 **Authorizing Extraordinary Unspecifiable Services Contract with Driver Associates for Redevelopment Consulting Services to serve as Director of Economic Development**
- 24-0101-020 **Appointing Risk Management Consultant- Brown & Brown**
- 24-0101-021 **Authorizing the Award of a Non-Fair and Open Contract for Labor Counsel and Legal Counsel for Investigative Matters-Rainone Coughlin Minchello Attorneys at Law**
- 24-0101-022 **Authorizing the Execution of a Shared Services Agreement by and between the Borough of Somerville and the Borough of Raritan for Fire Prevention Inspection Services**
- 24-0101-023 **Authorizing Extraordinary Unspecifiable Services Contract with Brown & Brown Insurance for Risk Management Consulting Services to Serve as Risk Manager**
- 24-0101-024 **Authorizing a Shared Service Contract for Printing Services with the County of Somerset**
- 24-0101-025 **Authorizing Application for a Recycling Tonnage Grant for the Tonnage Recycled during Year 2024**
- 24-0101-026 **Appointing Kevin Sluka as the Qualified Purchasing Agent in accordance with N.J.S.A. 40A:11-1 et seq.**
- 24-0101-027 **Authorizing an agreement by and between the Borough of Somerville and Township of Bridgewater for closure of Southside Avenue between Hamilton Street and Dutch Lane during flood events**
- 24-0101-028 **Appointing Fund Commissioner**
- 24-0101-029 **Appointing Kevin Sluka as Public Agency Compliance Officer**
- 24-0101-030 **2023 Parking Utility Temporary Budget**
- 24-0101-031 **Approving a Cash Management Plan to serve as a Guide in Depositing and Investing Funds**
- 24-0101-032 **Authorizing the Award of a Non-Fair and Open Contract for Accounting Services Financial Advisors-Phoenix Advisors, LLC**
- 24-0101-033 **Approving 2024 salary for Non-Union title of Assistant to Chief Financial Officer**
- 24-0101-034 **Authorizing the Award of a Non-Fair and Open Contract for Municipal Accounting Services -Suplee, Clooney & Company**
- 24-0101-035 **Authorizing submission of application for funding through Governor’s Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse**

Accepting the Retirement Resignation of Kevin Collison effective February 1, 2024 (end of business January 31, 2024)

Requests for Proposals were received for the following: The following appointments will be made after interviews are conducted Redevelopment Counsel; Borough Planner; Stormwater Engineer; Environmental Engineer

36. BENEDICTION

Reverend Donna Stewart
St. Thomas A.M.E. Zion Church

37. CLOSING MUSIC:

Evan Kunick
Isabella Keller
Henry Szugimala

38. ADJOURNMENT

KEVIN SLUKA, MUNICIPAL CLERK

MINUTES

TOWN CRIER

David Lang called the meeting to order.

NATIONAL ANTHEM

David Lang led in singing the “Star Spangled Banner.”

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chris Petrosini, US Army Veteran, led the pledge of allegiance.

BLESSING

Rev Donna Stewart, of St. Thomas A.M.E. Zion Church, gave the invocation.

MOMENT OF SILENCE

Mayor Dennis Sullivan asked for a moment of silence for community members who passed away in 2023.

CALL OF ROLL 2023

Present: Mayor Sullivan, Councilmembers Brady, Bonner, Vroom, Mitchell and Pitts.
Councilmember Gina Stravic was excused absent.

2023 CITIZEN OF THE YEAR AWARD:

Mayor Dennis Sullivan introduced Councilman Thompson Mitchell and presented him with a plaque. Councilman Mitchell thanked the mayor and Somerville community.

2023 CLOSING REMARKS - Mayor Dennis Sullivan

Dear Friends, Neighbors, and Invited Guests,

As the holiday season passes into our collective memory, we gather once again to both reflect with pride on the past year here in Somerville and to anticipate the continued success that surely lies ahead.

Progress does not happen overnight, nor does it happen by accident. Hard work and thoughtful decisions by countless individuals and groups have laid the groundwork for the Somerville that we see around us today. Time constraints make it impossible to mention every positive initiative in town now, so I will limit my comments to a few of the more significant highlights of 2023.

Opportunity and optimism continue to define Somerville. People want to live here, businesses want to open here, and private capital wants to invest here. Your local government remains focused on matters of public safety, as evidenced by reduced speed limits throughout town, enhanced signage, and roadway improvements being done in collaboration with our public utility partners.

The long-awaited Emergency Services Complex on Gaston Ave. is well underway and should be in service by the end of 2024. The newly opened Somerville Civic Center has opened its doors, and over time will become the hub of civic engagement and community life so vital to the heartbeat of town.

The privatization of our sanitary sewers will ensure stable user rates and improved system operation for years to come. An aggressive tree planting program, promotion of community gardens, and innovative solar initiatives will not only beautify Somerville but shape the environment we leave for future generations. Borough parks and playgrounds are being rehabilitated with funding from all levels of government, and the return of warmer weather will bring with it the joyful sounds of children at play.

As you travel around Somerville, you will hear welcome sounds of a different sort filling the air. New buildings are rising from sites that lay dormant for too long. A stable municipal tax rate and our willingness to promote public-private partnerships are attracting quality mixed use projects that are reclaiming underutilized properties, attracting new residents, and generating additional revenue for the local budget while bringing new consumer dollars to our already thriving downtown. A changing landscape and new energy will continue to mark Somerville as a vital community that is both proud of its past and confident in its future. Quality of life may be hard to define and equally hard to measure, but it is alive and well within our two square miles.

As I prepared these final remarks as your Mayor, I found myself thinking back to my first trip across the Outerbridge in early September of 1973 as I traveled west for my first day at VanDerveer School. In what was truly a lifetime ago, the bridge toll was fifty cents, gas cost thirty cents a gallon, and I had a full head of hair that actually needed combing! My new Toyota Carolla, with its ninety-eight horsepower motor, pushbutton AM radio, and manual windows, was my daily companion at the start of an adventure that I could never have imagined. Along the way I became a master teacher, a husband, a homeowner, a parent, a community volunteer, a Borough Councilman, a grandparent, and ultimately a mayor.

Over the years I had the good fortune to meet so many good and caring people with whom I worked collaboratively in guiding Somerville through a variety of economic cycles, an unprecedented pandemic, and the challenges presented by an unpredictable and often unforgiving Mother Nature. I may have come to Somerville to teach others, but I have learned a lot from those around me, and for that I will always be grateful.

I wish to express my sincerest appreciation to the voters of Somerville for their support over the last twenty-eight years. Over that time, I spent many hours at Borough Hall in meetings and doing paperwork. As I passed by the gallery of Mayor's portraits, I often thought about my role as a steward of that office and the great responsibility given me by the voters. I hope that I was deserving of that public trust and that my legacy will add to that of those dedicated men and women who preceded and will follow as Somerville continues to thrive.

I offer my heartfelt thanks to my family, and especially to Marge, my loving wife these past forty-seven years. Being married to a public official demands sacrifice, patience, and lots of leftovers, and these I had in abundance! My daughter Heather followed me into the teaching profession. I counted on her editing skills to keep my speeches short, much to the relief of the audience. And finally, my beloved Meredith, whose musical talents were often on display all over Somerville, most especially on this very stage where, fittingly, my public life concludes in a few minutes.

I end with words of encouragement to our incoming Mayor and Council. You have the hopes and dreams of many in your hands. I know you are up to the task. Trust one another and rely on your collective strength and wisdom as challenges arise.

I would offer the following advice penned by the noted American author Ralph Waldo Emerson, and often quoted by another Harvard graduate and one of my personal heroes, Robert F. Kennedy. They gave me strength in time of need, and I hope they will do the same for you: "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." Thank you.

PRESENTATION BY: Granville Brady

Councilman Granville Brady presented Mayor Sullivan with a gavel in appreciation for his service.

PRESENTATION BY: RanD Pitts

Council President RanD Pitts recognized Councilman Brady for his service and presented him with a nameplate. Councilman Brady thanked his wife Carol, the council members, and Mayor Sullivan.

OATH OF OFFICE FOR COUNCIL: Theresa Bonner

Kevin Sluka called Theresa Bonner who was joined by her husband Kofi Bonner. County Clerk Steve Peter administered the oath of office to Councilwoman Theresa Bonner.

OATH OF OFFICE FOR COUNCIL: Glen Denys

Kevin Sluka called Glen Denys and his wife Ruth Denys. County Clerk Steve Peter administered the oath of office to Councilman Glen Denys.

OATH OF OFFICE FOR MAYOR: Brian G. Gallagher

Kevin Sluka called Brian Gallagher, who was joined by his wife Lisa Gallagher, along with several of their children and grandchildren. Congressman Tom Kane Jr. administered the oath of office to Mayor Brian Gallagher.

OPEN PUBLIC MEETING LAW

Kevin Sluka, RMC, read the Open Public Meeting Law statement.

CALL OF ROLL FOR 2024 MAYOR & COUNCIL

Present: Mayor Gallagher, Councilmembers Denys, Bonner, Vroom, Mitchell, and Pitts. Councilmember Gina Stravic was excused absent.

ELECTION OF 2024 COUNCIL PRESIDENT: Roger Vroom

Councilmember	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Bonner		X	X			
Denys			X			
Mitchell			X			
Pitts	X		X			
Stravic						X
Vroom			X			

STATE OF THE BOROUGH ADDRESS - Mayor Brian Gallagher

Citizens of Somerville, honored guests, police, fire, squad and other emergency services personnel, family and friends....welcome to the 2024 Somerville Borough Reorganization.

I'm Back!! I'm back because I love Somerville, and I commit to you today to work tirelessly to ensure that we maintain the quality of life that our residents deserve. What we have accomplished in my first 14 years as Mayor has transformed Somerville into a destination to live, work, and visit. Working across party lines, we engineered a renaissance of Somerville that will continue to benefit the residents of our community for decades to come.

However, the evolution of our borough is never done. The future requires the same visionary efforts that we employed previously, to ensure that the growth is positive and that we are prepared to accommodate all that comes with it.

I stood here exactly 20 years ago and laid out a bold vision for the future of Somerville. 20 years later the results are seen Borough wide. Our community, our 2.5 square miles of awesome, is the envy of towns statewide. We achieved our success through careful planning, public visioning, a council determined to work together, a stick to it spirit, and a shared vision of what Somerville can and should be. However, the playbook created 20 years ago should not be the same playbook we use today...it is again time for creating our next bold, community driven future for the next 20 years, and beyond.

Growth in all facets of our Borough requires those same visionary efforts, to ensure that the future is positive and that we are prepared to embrace that growth. We have great concern for safety, traffic, parking, homelessness, public works, schools, and all the other essential services that must be planned for in the coming years.

So this drives the question....What's Next? What's next for our 2.5 square miles of awesome? What's next for Recreation, Our Neighborhoods, Redevelopment, Main Street, Code Office, Public Works, our relationship With Somerset County, Housing Issues, Infrastructure, Planning....and the list goes on. To achieve continuing success, we must be goals driven. I will task each council person to work with their respective departments, and their liaison committees, to develop 10-year plans for each of their areas of responsibility.

This will create realistic, identifiable targets that can be opportunity driven, rather than reactionary responsive. It will allow the Council to develop strategies to financially phase in...or phase out...potential projects over a longer term. It will provide longer-term funding direction for all of our Departments, and it will allow us to establish priorities of wants versus needs.

I will propose an Infrastructure task force made up of Council members, county officials, and stakeholder residents who have the necessary expertise, to review and recommend to council long-range plans focusing on infrastructure. This includes roads, recreation, public works, technology, and other areas the Council sees fit. This will enable development of 10-year infrastructure improvement plan for every part of our Borough.

Our Planning Board is one of the best in the State. But it is time to stop being a bureaucratic approval body, and return to what they do best...Planning for the long-term future of our Borough.

This will require new and innovative approaches to planning and zoning. I will task the Planning Board to immediately undertake reviews of our Master Plan, our redevelopment plans, the Fair Share Housing issue, and our residential and commercial zoning.

We need to enable residents to easily invest in their property without onerous regulations, inordinate plan reviews, and costs that stop a homeowner's project. We also will enable our business district to better adapt to quickly changing market demands.

There also needs to be a zoning review of all property along the length of Peter's Brook, with short range safety solutions to reduce the danger to residents and our emergency personnel. Then, long range zoning solutions can be implemented that solve the issues of residential and commercial properties in the flood areas. These solutions must respect the rights of private property owners and have the long-term benefit of a safer community for our Borough.

Our community development office is the first face of Somerville government for those who want to invest in their property, whether the homeowner, the entrepreneur, the business owner, the investor or the developer.

The process must be made easier to navigate, quickly adaptable to changing market and housing demands, informative for those that are unfamiliar with the process, and established review fees that do not deter property owners from investing in their own homes or businesses. Nothing drives people away faster than bureaucratic costs or delays. Customer service for the taxpayer, in this administration, is paramount.

We are the County Seat of Somerset County, and we have born that responsibility well. I will work with our County Commissioner partners to address core issues centering on County investment in historic, recreation, infrastructure, marketing needs, and grant funding. We will open discussion on what the plans are for the jail property, to ensure any future use is consistent with the needs of Somerville.

As our Board of Health partner, we need to get the County mental health and addiction services to the people on the street who need this help the most.

Somerville is downtown Somerset County, and our successful downtown needs a cultural and performing arts center and theater, and the County needs to have their name on it.

When one thinks of Recreation services, they typically think of children. While that is a core focus of Somerville's recreation programming and facilities, the larger aspect should be inclusive of everyone.

It is time to revisit the Recreation master plan so we can evaluate our facilities, programming, and overall direction that will center on budgeting for facilities, management, as well as obtaining potential grant funding.

I will also establish a seniors and veterans committee out of the recreation department to focus specifically for the needs of these two groups. We will return the Memorial Day Parade to the streets of Somerville, showing true honor to all those who have served our country.

Many of the quality- of-life issues that our residents are frustrated with center on aspects of safety. Pedestrian safety, traffic speed, increased homeless issues, rise in graffiti, condition of our parks and trails, and the list goes on. These different issues require different solutions, but all relate to a safer and better community for all of Somerville. The Pedestrian Safety committee was dissolved a few years ago, I will re-establish a Public Safety committee to take up specific issues the Borough Council refers to them for vetting, and recommending potential solutions.

The single most important job of an elected official is the safety and security of our citizens. We have a fantastic police force led by Chief Manning that is well trained, friendly, fair, firm and consistent in all they do, they are really good. I jog all over town at all hours, and I can tell you I see them everywhere—they can probably say the same about me!

Regardless of why, our police officers have been without a contract for over a year, and that is unacceptable. This will be resolved with a mutual understanding and agreement...we will craft a contract, together, that recognizes the challenges and increased responsibilities our officers face on a daily basis, always with the Somerville taxpayer in mind.

I will work with the New Jersey Department of Transportation to increase pedestrian safety for our children at the crossing at Vanderveer School. Route 28 is a state highway, and Somerville is a walking district, our children are within inches of vehicles as they try to cross the street every day. It's time the State step up and put road and sidewalk improvements in to ensure their safety.

A retail cannabis store has already been approved for the corner of Gaston Avenue and Rt 22. As I see it, the impact of retail cannabis will potentially be seen most in our children, and in our emergency services. As a result, I will ask the council to dedicate the tax revenue from this store specifically towards recreation to give our kids safe and healthy options; and to police, fire, and rescue squad technology and training, so they can operate in a safer manner so they can all go home at the end of the day.

While brick and mortar are necessary for our emergency services, the daily support of the Mayor and council is the most important. This is what keeps our volunteers responding. We are blessed to have the best in firefighters, and Rescue Squad personnel. I have worked with many Chiefs in both areas over the years, and can honestly say each one has taught me a little bit about this town, and the volunteers that serve her. Our volunteer emergency service personnel are some of the greatest assets we have as a Borough...they are our family, friends, and neighbors. Our job as elected officials is to understand their needs and to support them.

Over the years, Somerville has crafted an incredible, wonderful story of how opportunity is created from the challenges we face. How optimism and a sense of 'we can' is paramount. The test of good government is not in how we react immediately to the challenges we face, but how we move forward from them, long term. Our charge as leaders is to preserve and protect the great spirit we have in Somerville, to nurture it for future generations. We must lead forward with that conviction of purpose.

The task ahead is bold. I look forward to working with Borough Council members to meet this commitment with energy, creativity, cooperation, and dedication. Our promise today is that our 2.5 square miles of awesome has only just begun! Thank you.....God Bless our Somerville, and God Bless the greatest nation on earth...The United States of America!

FIRE DEPARTMENT EX-CHIEF PRESENTATION

Council President Roger Vroom thanked Ex-Chief Robert Wortman for 8 years of service to the Somerville Fire Department and presented him with a badge. Robert Wortman thanked the incoming chiefs and all the volunteer firefighters.

OATH OF OFFICE FOR FIRE CHIEF

Mayor Gallagher called Dave Vallone Sr, who was joined by his son Dave. County Clerk Steve Peter administered the oath of office to Fire Chief Dave Vallone. Fire Chief Vallone said there will be necessary changes this year because of the new Emergency Services Facility. He said the changes are all good and he will help with the transition.

OATH OF OFFICE FOR FIRE DEPARTMENT OFFICERS

Mayor Gallagher called Joseph P. Stitley, Deputy Chief, Jose Rodriguez, 1st Asst. Chief, and Brian Ceponis, 2nd Asst. Chief. County Clerk Steve Peter administered the oath of office.

APPOINTMENT OF STANDING COMMITTEES AND COUNCIL LIAISONS FOR 2024

Mayor Gallagher said he will make the appointments, as listed in the agenda.

APPOINTMENT OF PLANNING BOARD MEMBERS BY MAYOR

Mayor Gallagher appointed Art Akins and Lisa Werner to the Planning Board.

AD-HOC COMMITTEES – APPOINTED BY MAYOR

The mayor said he will appoint members to the Somerville Caring for our Own Committee, Green Team, and Cannabis Class 5, as listed in the agenda.

APPOINTMENT OF PLANNING BOARD MEMBERS BY COUNCIL

The mayor asked for a motion to appoint Roger Vroom to the Planning Board.

Councilmember	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Bonner			X			
Denys			X			
Mitchell			X			
Pitts		X	X			
Stravic						X
Vroom	X		X			

APPOINTMENT OF ZONING BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT BY COUNCIL

The mayor asked for a motion to appoint Art Adair and Eric Alvarez.

Councilmember	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Bonner			X			
Denys			X			
Mitchell		X	X			
Pitts			X			
Stravic						X
Vroom	X		X			

BOARD OF HEALTH: APPOINTMENT BY COUNCIL

The mayor asked for a motion to appoint Mary Hodges and Karen D’Alonzo.

Councilmember	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Bonner			X			
Denys			X			
Mitchell		X	X			
Pitts			X			
Stravic						X
Vroom	X		X			

APPOINTMENT BY MAYOR (ROLL CALL VOTE OF COUNCIL): REDEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Councilmember	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Bonner		X	X			
Denys			X			
Mitchell			X			
Pitts			X			
Stravic						X
Vroom	X		X			

APPOINTMENT BY MAYOR: (CONSENT OF COUNCIL)

The mayor asked for a motion to make the appointments listed on pages 5 – 8 of the agenda.

Councilmember	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Bonner		X	X			
Denys			X			
Mitchell			X			
Pitts			X			
Stravic						X
Vroom	X		X			

MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

The mayor opened the meeting to the public. There were no public comments. The mayor closed the public session.

CONSENT RESOLUTIONS (24-0101-001 THROUGH 24-0101-036)

Councilmember	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
Bonner			X			
Denys			X			
Mitchell			X			
Pitts		X	X			
Stravic						X
Vroom	X		X			

RECOGNITIONS

The mayor thanked the elected officials, borough employees and Somerville volunteers who were present at the reorganization meeting.

BENEDICTION

Rev Donna Stewart St., from Thomas A.M.E. Zion Church, presented the benediction.

ADJOURNMENT

Councilmember Vroom made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Councilmember Pitts, and all voted favorably.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kevin Sluka, RMC