

21st Century Achievements

August 2006

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In a ten-minute, cable-televised presentation to the Board of Aldermen and the people of Somerville, the Chamber of Commerce presented its approach to the 21st Century.

The presentation sought to turn Somerville's attention to our "economic waterfront" the world class addresses of Boston and Cambridge. In summarizing its view, the Chamber concluded that Somerville "has the best house on the beach." It was May, 1995.

Since that time, the community, city government, and the Chamber have indeed changed their outlook.

To help effect that change in Somerville's economic outlook, the governance and organization of the Chamber, itself, changed significantly.

Comparing the Chamber then and now, we have all new officers and, of the thirty, three-year seats on the Board, twenty-nine new directors. The Board's character and composition have changed as well. There are: twice as many women directors and the average age of a director is younger than ten years ago. There are a greater variety of industries and a greater number and variety of advanced degrees represented on the Board.

Old committees were dissolved. New committees with new missions were created.

To focus the Chamber on Somerville, our state and federal relations committees were disbanded. To help envision and advance Somerville in the world-class milieu of Boston and Cambridge, our New Group of economic leaders was established.

The Board also introduced a new, additional way for members to participate and make things happen. Members were invited to propose the formation of Business Interest Groups by business district or industry to be served by the Chamber without any further dues or fees.

In the midst of these changes, the Chamber has maintained a small, but extraordinary, pool of experience, knowledge and skills by continuing the tradition of service by the Board's Past Chairs. Rather than bidding Somerville and the Chamber and all the new changes a courteous farewell, these past chairs have enthusiastically and generously embraced the new century of progress. Together -- the past chairs, old and new members, new officers, new directors, the New Group -- created a new Chamber.

This Chamber model has had no political campaign election activity. The Chamber has not been affiliated with any political action committee. The Chamber's full-time staff has not made a political contribution to any incumbent in, or candidate for, the Mayor's office or the Board of Aldermen.

Instead, the Chamber has adhered to a new philosophy:

Our degree of influence shall be found on the merits in the quality of our proposals and the validity of our positions as determined by and through a civil dialogue with the people of Somerville, and their elected officials.

The common ground of business and residential neighbors is our urban quality of life. The Chamber has stated the fundamentals of this common ground time and again:

The three cornerstones of an urban quality of life are public works, public safety, and public education.

Thus progress, for the community and the chamber, involves an enlightened, mutual interest in making this city an even greater place to live, work, play, study, and shop – to bring life to our streets, to bring jobs to our community, to bring prosperity to our businesses and to bring a sufficient commercial tax base to our city treasury.

Through the administrations of four mayors and the terms of twenty-four different individuals who have served as aldermen, the Chamber of Commerce has been greeted cordially, listened to seriously, and measured accordingly in nearly every encounter with these twenty-eight representatives of the people of Somerville.

We hope we have conducted ourselves in kind.

Through this challenging, bright, positive, progressive, and productive community environment, here are some of the membership-driven achievements of the board, committees, and groups in the Chamber's 21st Century paradigm.

Promoted Somerville

Coined...

“Somerville is closer to downtown Boston than most of the City of Boston”

“Somerville is the middle of The Brainpower Triangle – MIT, Tufts, Harvard”

“Somerville is Cambridge for 1/3rd off”

“Somerville: New England's Next Business Address”

“The Zakim and new tunnels are the \$14B driveway to Somerville”

“Completing the Hub” title of the City's case for the Green Line extension

“The region recognizes Dining & Nightlife as the jewel of our economy”

“Union Square has the most genuine international flavor in New England”

“Union Square is next to everywhere”

“Broadway is our premier business boulevard – a string of pearls.”

“We have more to teach the Commonwealth about housing than they have to teach us”

Helped coin “Union Square: Lively historic crossroads”

Helped fund, design, and distribute Union Square's first modern logo

Contributed to Somerville Journal's "Destination Somerville: The economic allure.."
Won 15-seconds of fame for "Gateway Park" (if Fenway Park had to be abandoned)
Gave the interview that led to Banker & Tradesman's "Somerville Makes its Pitch"
Answered an Utne writer's questions that led to "Davis Square, one of the hippest..."
Gave the interview/site visit that led to the Globe's "Running hard for Number 3"
Co-authored with Cambridge Chamber, BBJ editorial that defined "three-city urban core"
Helped produce the first consumer map of Somerville and the urban core
Arranged the mayoral & business delegation that won the Boston Globe editorial "Hot"
Gave the intro & tour that led to the Globe's "Somerville, MA The New Power Address"
Fielded hundreds of inquiries from reporters and writers
Distributed CDs to 2,500 key regional players in real estate planning, development & finance
Provided dozens of windshield & walking tours to developers, investors, writers, planners
Connected TV producers to business districts and individual businesses
Presented Somerville to an international audience at the Hynes' Cities Pavilion
Conducted the all day workshop & bus tour of Somerville that was talked about in Paris.
Brought key regional developers, opinion leaders, government officials to local forums

Advanced Somerville development, transportation, & innovation

Served on Mayor Capuano's committee that positioned the city for the 21st Century
Served on Mayor Kelly Gay's committee that generated "The Next Business Address"
Served on Mayor Curtatone's committee that produced "Advancing Somerville"
Served on Mayor-Boston Society of Architects-Herb Chambers committee "Edge as Center"
Defined the city's "Boston-Cambridge Development Zone" (nearly 1,000 acres)
Propounded that this zone can produce 7,000 workforce housing units
Propounded that this zone can produce 7M square feet of commercial development
Propounded that this zone can produce \$3B in new development for city tax base
Propounded that this zone is the way to the City of Somerville's fiscal sustainability
Provided early advocacy for the Green Line extension
Asked the state to simply give Somerville the kind of service we had in 1906
Helped rally extraordinary business and resident turnouts for Green Line hearings
Forecasted (first) the Green Line ridership
Helped bring a second hotel here (Tage Inn, now La Quinta)
Helped establish a new, 200-seat theater (Jimmy Tingle's Off Broadway Theater)
Helped speed permitting of a 400,000 square foot development (Inner Belt Road)
Helped route multi-carrier, high-bandwidth, fiber optic through city (dividends for years)
Helped incubate MIT spinoff iRobot (now NASDAQ: IRBT, Burlington-based)
Helped keep employers here, including an international leader in industrial design
Helped establish new Beer & Wine licenses for fine dining & nightlife
Helped put nightlife hours on a level playing field with Boston & Cambridge
Helped shape AssemblySq plan (1st to say site was grade adequate & standard T distance)
Helped study new access alternatives to and from the Inner Belt / Brickbottom area
Recommended "make that old fire station and SCAT building a showpiece" in Union Square
Served on Boston's Rutherford Avenue Study Committee
Served on greater Boston's Urban Ring Study
Served on various traffic and parking planning studies

Buttressed Somerville's city government and its leaders

Helped explain unique challenges of “New England’s most densely populated city”
Distinguished Somerville as “The most urban population with the least urban economy”
Contrasted Somerville’s per capita budget with Boston, Cambridge, Chelsea
Distinguished Somerville as “The leanest municipal government” \$1000 less per capita
Boasted of our police helping to keep a crime rate lower than our urban neighbors
Boasted of our public school students outperforming their urban neighbors
Boasted of our public works when it has kept pace or outperformed our neighbors
Assisted two mayoral transition committees
Testified at over two hundred city board, commission, & committee meetings and hearings
Provided testimony to & prepped a tour for Standard & Poor, & Moody reps (A1 rating)
Endorsed BOA President Heuston’s call for innovations in legislative management
Chose not to contest fiscal measures saving: infrastructure, a school, cops...
Assert that our Board of Aldermen could beat the Boston City Council in a college bowl

Supported Somerville's public schools

Became a full partner with our public schools
Created workshops to teach basic interviewing and job skills
Helped launch and sustain the Adopt-a-school program
Helped launch and sustain the Somerville Vocational High School Advisory Board
Established a workforce needs assessment partnership with Bunker Hill Community College

Responded to special moments with special events and actions

After Mayor Capuano won the 8th CD - the Great Debate for Mayor at the Somerville Theater
As three mayoral candidates clashed - the Boston Business Journal Debate at Holiday Inn
When two came close – The groundbreaking debate at Jimmy Tingle’s

Improved Somerville's urban environment and quality of life

Helped introduce promote and expand Adopt a spot
Advised the city on crosswalk, bumpout, bus stop, loading zone, HP, & barrel locations
Served on the city’s task force on sanitation improvements
Served on the city’s local emergency planning committee
Advocated for sidewalk seating dining and nightlife
Participated in and supported numerous annual Spring Clean Ups
Implemented the demo project and helped bring year-round white lights to Davis Sq
Helped introduce Zipcars across the city
Stopped a second trash transfer facility
Endorsed a state-wide smoking ban; opposed & slowed a premature and costly local ban
Gave interviews for student projects at SHS, Tufts, Harvard, MIT, BU, UMass, Northeastern...
Helped support and promote ArtBeat, Windows Project,

Helped (never nearly enough) youth, senior, cultural, environmental orgs and events
Helped co-found and lead Groundworks Somerville

Discouraged uncompetitive business costs and regulations

Provided technical assistance for municipal compensation review
Provided technical assistance for municipal property review
Helped protect scores of local businesses from a local minimum wage
Helped reach a compromise on police details hike
Helped rollback parking meter fees
Won reconsideration on taxing car-sharing

Introduced signature events and publications

Helped bring the annual “American Cup Criterion” bicycle race (too shortlived)
Began and continue “The Fall Classic Golf Tournament”
Helped found and sustain “The Taste of Somerville”
Founded and sustain the annual “A Wine & Chocolate Affair to Remember”
Launched and sustain a new bimonthly series “Business After Hours”
Launched the new “Business Town Meeting” series
Helping to launch Davis Square’s new “Honk Festival”
Launched the weekly “Monday Morning Fax” now “The Monday Morning Post”
-- If you would like the weekly link, email smackey@somervillechamber.org

Made thousands of one-on-one connections

The Chamber staff has made thousands of connections by phone, email, and in person. The Chamber has distributed thousands of annual membership directories and buyers guides. Add to that all the connections made through the 45-member board, and all the members in committees and BIGs and you have so many kinds of connections that the staff has nicknames for some:

“Bingo” I am looking...
to start a...to relocate...to build...

“A rec” Would you recommend a place to...
...eat...stay...buy...build...broker...order...fix...etc ?

“Whatchamacallits” Would you know the name of a place...I was told about...I read about...I saw on tv...I heard on the radio...I was at last weekend (You would be surprised how often people forget or do not catch a name. On that last example, the person always sounds like he or she had a really great time)

“Lost” How do I get to _____ I will be landing at Logan...I am driving from Kansas... I am at Lowell & Princeton streets (cell phone). Callers are usually headed to a theater...a restaurant...a business appointment...a job interview etc.)

“Parent” My son/daughter is going to be a freshman...how’s the crime rate...
(Somerville is a densely populated city and visitors and residents should take the same precautions they would in any city. But, Somerville’s crime rate is lower than Boston and Cambridge.)

“Civics” Where is...city hall...traffic & parking...Precinct 2...?
How do I...register to vote...register my car...?
How do I get a parking permit?
Please connect me to the office of
... development...licenses... permits...etc ?

“Globetrotter” I’m going to _____. Is there a chamber there?
(Usually, yes.)

Example...
Chambre de Commerce et D’Industrie de Paris
[founded in 1803 by Napoleon Bonaparte]

“Deal or No Deal” Is _____ a member of the Somerville Chamber of Commerce?
This question is often part of a common, business background check to determine the standing of an unfamiliar company such as a goods provider, contractor, or consultant. .
Our answer is “Yes. _____ is a member in good standing!” or
“I’m sorry. No. _____ is not a member.”

In this digital, fast company world, you may view any organization as irrelevant. In a reflex, you may dismiss an association with an old-fashioned name like “chamber of commerce” as your “grandfathers’ organization.”

The age of this chamber may certainly qualify as from your grandparents’ era. In 2006, the Somerville Chamber of Commerce is celebrating its 60th year.

But we would rather encourage a different outlook.

Our new century is only “6.”

We believe in the relevance of a dynamic, prosperous, responsible business community as an essential ingredient of Somerville’s urban quality of life.

We believe that our “grandparent’s organization” – The Somerville Chamber of Commerce -- can be our “grandchildren’s organization.”

We intend to help make it so.

You can too.

