

somerville

founded/ annexed	population	gross area	population density	housing units	median income
1630/1842	77,478	4.11 sq.mi.	18,851 ppsm	32,477	\$46,315

Information from 2000 U.S. Census data

history

From Somerville's pre-Revolutionary shipbuilding yard — where the first sailing vessel of the Colony was produced — to the present day streets of Davis Square, Somerville has long been a hotspot in the state's and nation's commercial development. The town's location, close to the urban centers of Boston and Charlestown, assured markets for the city's agriculture and dairy products as well as for pottery, bricks and slate. In the nineteenth century, development across the country increased the demand for Somerville's bricks, while the scale of Somerville's meat packing industry earned the town a reputation as the Chicago of New England. The city's population reached its peak during the Second World War when 105,883 people were said to create a density greater than that of Calcutta.

Somerville was originally a part of Charlestown, the first capital of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In the early 1600s, Somerville served as grazing lands for the residents of Charlestown, with only a few scattered permanent settlements. The first governor of the Colony, John Winthrop, had a 600 acre estate on Winter Hill that stretched from Broadway to the Mystic River, where he could hunt bear, deer, lion, and moose. Charlestown (and Somerville) were sold to the settlers by Indian Queen Squaw Sachem in exchange for "twenty and one coats, nineteen fathoms of wampum, three bushels of come."

today

Somerville is the most densely populated community in New England, and boasts a diverse population that speaks over 50 languages. The residents range from blue-collar families, who tend to be concentrated in East Somerville, to college students, hipsters, artists, and young professionals, who live in gentrifying sections bordering Cambridge's Harvard Square and Porter Square as well as Medford's Tufts University. Like Cambridge, Somerville has a large number of squares, with distinct identities:

Ball Square (at the intersection of Boston Ave. and Broadway, located between Powderhouse Square and Magoun Square) is a primarily residential area located on the edge of Tufts University. Ball Square contains a mix of businesses serving the student and academic populations as well as those reflecting the more blue-collar neighborhoods to the east. Paul Revere's famous ride took him through Broadway and Main Streets on his way to Concord on the night of April 18, 1775.

Davis Square (around the intersection of Holland St., Dover St., Elm St., Highland Ave., and College Ave.) was listed in 1997 by the *Utne Reader* as one of the fifteen "hippest places to live" in the United States. The Square and The Someday Café are featured in a song by Jim's Big Ego. Davis is located within walking distance of Tufts University, and offers a mix of restaurants, bars, and cafes along with venues such as Johnny D's and The Somerville Theater. It is served by the Davis Square station on the Red Line.

Magoun Square (at the intersection of Broadway and Medford Streets with the smaller Dexter St.) is a mixed-use urban area close to Tufts University in neighboring Medford. Medford Street crosses into Medford just north of this intersection and becomes Main Street. Magoun Square was named after Thatcher Magoun, a Medford shipbuilding magnate from the nineteenth century.

Teele Square (at the intersection of Broadway, Holland St., and Curtis Ave.) is just down the street from Davis Square, but is becoming a dining destination in its own right.

Union Square (around the intersection of Washington Street and Somerville Avenue, not far from Cambridge's Inman Square) is a primarily residential neighborhood with a number of destination bars (PA's Lounge, The Independent, Tir Na Nog, and Toast), as well as Somerville Community Access Television and the Prospect Hill Monument, where George Washington first raised an early version of the

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U.S. flag. on January 1, 1776. The recent addition of a Saturday morning farmer's market in the square is bringing Davis Square-style gentrification deeper into Somerville, and there is a proposed extension of the Green Line subway into Union Square.

The neighborhood of **Winter Hill** (located north of Highland Ave.), once home to the notorious Irish ganster Whitey Bulger and his Winter Hill Gang, is now famous for its restored Colonial and Victorian homes and ongoing gentrification. The neighborhood has large Brazilian and Portuguese communities, and it is not uncommon to see soccer leagues complete with matching uniforms playing in the large park at the base on Winter Hill.

location

Somerville is located north of Boston, 1.5 miles from the city's financial and commercial districts, and is bordered by Arlington on the west, Medford on the north, Everett and Boston on the east, and Cambridge on the south and southeast. It occupies about 4.1 square miles along the divide between the lower Charles and Mystic River watersheds.

housing stock

During Somerville's industrial heyday, a great number of two family and three family homes were built to accommodate the employees and their families. The double-decker neighborhoods that once housed the factory workers of the 1800's are being renovated, bringing in more young, upwardly mobile professionals and artists attracted to Somerville by its increasing amenities, lifestyle, proximity to Cambridge, and more favorable prices. Prestige addresses include the David Aposhian-designed **Union Place**, and the converted 1873 police station at 50 Bow St. in Union Square.

famous residents

Whitey Bulger • Hal Clement • Henry Kimball Hadley • Alan Hovhaness
• Harry Nelson Pillsbury • John Winthrop

movies & books

Somerville was the filming location for the 1973 movie, *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*. Somerville's academic neighbor, Tufts University, has provided a number of fictional alumni: Benjamin Braddock, played by Dustin Hoffman in the 1967 classic *The Graduate*; Elaine Benes, played by Julia Louis-Dreyfus on *Seinfeld*; Dr. Melfi, psychiatrist to Tony Soprano from *The Sopranos*; and in print, Ken Erdedy, a character in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*.

culture & recreation

Minuteman Bikeway • Prospect Hill • Somerville Museum (1 Westwood Road) • Somerville Community Path • Somerville Public Library

local news sources

Somerville News (somervilleneews.typepad.com)

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