Somerville's Design Industry:
Fostering the Creative Economy

A research study for Somerville, Massachusetts, including a qualitative analysis of Somerville's design industry firm leaders

Lauren Nicoll, M.A.
Rappaport Institute Public Policy Fellow
Department of Sociology, Northeastern University

City of Somerville, Mayor's Office of Strategic Planning & Community Development

Monica Lamboy
Executive Director

Rob May
Director, Economic Development

City of Somerville, Somerville Arts Council

Gregory Jenkins
Executive Director

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Section I

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why Somerville Needs the Creative Economy

Somerville should be interested in supporting and attracting design businesses because these firms

- Are located in Somerville already,
- Are growing nationally and regionally,
- Provide good, well-paying jobs.

Creative economy jobs like architecture, landscape architecture, graphic design, interior design, industrial design, and others are a part of a segment of the economy that is expected to grow and be an ever-increasing source of jobs and wealth as manufacturing declines. Creative economy jobs hire educated, talented, skilled workers, who want to live and work in this region, provided they can afford to live and do business here.

Key Research Findings

Design firms in Somerville locate and expand here because of its affordability compared to other cities in the region. Many design firms have migrated from high-priced areas in the region like Cambridge because their rent was so high, and as work shifted to be primarily computer-based, the convenience of being located in Harvard Square was now less important. Designers also noted that they like that they have the option to buy older industrial buildings in Somerville that would not be possible in Boston or Cambridge in the same price range. Somerville is an attractive city because it is proximate to Boston, Cambridge, the airport, and the western suburbs. Somerville has access to an excellent pool of young, highly-educated workers, and workers here like the vitality of the city from its culturally and economically diverse mix of people.

Despite the many advantages of Somerville, designers noted some disadvantages to operating a business here. Many found that transportation issues were a

problem. Streets are hard to navigate for clients and public transportation and parking in some areas of the city are lacking. In a related vein, many owners are concerned about the environment and air quality in Somerville. Some also had complaints about the building permitting process, both for their client's projects and for the construction or remodeling of their own offices. They found it unpredictable, time consuming, too political, and expensive. Finally, some felt that affordability was decreasing in Somerville and were concerned that they would not be able to stay without a concurrent increase in the level of business and living amenities.

Overall, most of the designers were satisfied with their decision to locate in Somerville, and would like to stay. They think that design can flourish in the city in the future if affordability remains reasonable and the city makes an effort to promote their many assets. Somerville designers are optimistic that with the continued support of the arts and the maintenance of economic and cultural diversity, Somerville will be a place that designers want to be.

Policy Recommendations

Policies that grow and sustain the design economy in Somerville benefit the city as a whole since design businesses contribute to a climate of creativity that many people appreciate in a city. In addition many of these policies help not only design businesses but also small businesses in general, spreading the economic impact. The exploration and implementation of the following policies and programs are suggested as follows:

Short-term Strategies

Supporting Design Industry Businesses
- Include architects and designers in the definition of artist for the Union Square Arts Overlay District.
- Publicize learning opportunities.
- Be a resource for the design industry.

Supporting the Design Industry and Small Businesses
- Relieve parking difficulties for clients.
- Address power outage issues.

Mid-term Strategies
Supporting Design Industry Businesses
- Educate the public about good design.
- Communicate City identity.

Supporting the Design Industry and Small Businesses
- Continue work on streamlining the permitting process.
- Finish the Community Bike Path.

Long-term Strategies
Supporting Design Industry Businesses
- Increase opportunities for design firms to purchase buildings.
- Create a business incubator building or district.

Supporting the Design Industry and Small Businesses
- Encourage environmental initiatives.

Ongoing Strategies
Supporting the Design Industry and Small Businesses
- Continue support of the Somerville Arts Council.
- Participate in regional transportation planning efforts**.**

Next Steps

The next steps of this report are to convene designers in the city to discuss the policy suggestions included in this report to discover which areas are highest priorities for them as well as any gaps in their needs that are not addressed here. Meetings with City departments including the Office for Strategic Planning and Community Development, Traffic and Parking, Inspectional Services, and the Mayor's Office should be convened to determine feasibility and the direction of City efforts and resources. Much of the necessary future research and planning could be undertaken by a graduate level intern or fellow. Overall, these issues need to be considered in conjunction with Union Square rezoning planning as well as with all planning for subsequent development of major areas of the city, like Boynton Yards.

Section II

INTRODUCTION

To better understand the importance of this study and the significance of why Somerville should care to attract and retain the creative designers in the city – employers and businessmen and women in fields as diverse as architecture, landscape design, interior design, graphic design, and furniture design and creation – it is necessary to look to the future of the economy in Somerville and our nation. As manufacturing has declined over the past thirty years, the design industry is part of a diverse array of fields that are part of the creative economy that is seen by many as a growing source of good jobs, wealth creation, and new innovations that will help keep the US economy vital.

What is the creative economy?

The term "creative economy" has been steadily gaining recognition during the past ten years, yet it often refers to different ideas. Sometimes it refers strictly to arts and cultural organizations, but sometimes it is used in a broader sense to talk about all types of industries whose workers use creativity to develop ideas like in some science or business occupation (for example, see Richard Florida, 2002). The Somerville consulting firm Mt. Auburn Associates pioneered early research on the creative economy, delineating the term and providing a strong foundation for future research and practice.

A definition that is useful for this research can be found in the Boston Redevelopment Authority's 2005 report on Boston's creative economy, based on the UK Department for Culture, Media, and Sport's 1998 delineation of the creative industries. The creative economy is characterized as follows, "[T]hose activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation. (Boston Redevelopment Authority/Research Division, 2005)." This includes industries where innovative and original goods, services, or intellectual property is created.

In "The Creative Economy: A New Definition" (2007), DeNatale and Wassall go further in this definition to suggest the creative economy exists around a core of cultural occupations and industries that produce and distribute cultural goods, services, and intellectual property, while surrounded by a peripheral circle of jobs and sectors that may be related to production depending on the character of the region and individual enterprise.

To standardize the research on the creative economy, DeNatale and Wassall suggest using the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) to outline the industries to be included in the creative economy definition. Though this system is imperfect for classifying new types of businesses that may straddle or defy industry categories, using NAICS codes facilitates future comparisons. Appendix 1 contains a list of these industries.

This report will focus on the design industry in Somerville. Design encompasses a number of different industries and occupations within the creative economy. The activities of workers in the design industry – architects, graphic designers, furniture designers, landscape architects, and others are found at the core of the definition of the creative economy. Jobs in the design industry require the creativity, skill, and talent in the creation of innovative ideas and designs.

Why is fostering the design industry important?

Sustaining and developing design industry enterprises supports the overall expansion of the creative economy in Somerville. The design industry is a significant part of Massachusetts' own creative economy initiative. A recent report released by the National Endowment for the Arts (2008) found that Massachusetts has the largest per capita population of architects and designers in the country. Because of Somerville's current cluster of design businesses and its affordability and proximity within the Boston metro region, Somerville is uniquely situated to attract design industry enterprises.

As the city moves forward with economic development and manufacturing and low level service work become less desirable land uses, seeking out employers from

within the design industry and supporting the growth of current businesses would be excellent component to economic prosperity for the City of Somerville. Some of the reasons that fostering design in Somerville makes sense include:

1. A design industry cluster exists in Somerville already.

As cities trying to start a "hot" industry cluster like biotech or green energy from scratch can attest, it is much easier to support and grow an industry when employers in that industry are already located in that city and want to be located there. Somerville has the advantage in attracting new businesses because designers already have established firms here – some more than twenty years ago. Table 1 below ranks Somerville among other Massachusetts cities in the number of establishments in the Architectural and Engineering Services industry (Somerville ranks 8th) and Specialized Design Services (Somerville ranks 4th) in 2006. Outside of Cambridge, Somerville has the densest cluster of designers categorized by the Census in the fields of Architecture and Engineering Services and Specialized Design Services within the state. With the services and amenities necessary for the design businesses already established in Somerville, this should leave the city in a good position for the growth of this industry.

Table 1.

Ranking of Massachusetts Cities by Number of Design Establishments

Architectural and Engineering Services				Specialized Design Services			
Rank	City	Establishments	Est. per Sq mile	Rank	City	Establishments	Est. per Sq mile
1	Boston	383	7.91	1	Boston	160	3.31
2	Cambridge	135	21.00	2	Cambridge	39	6.07
3	Newton	66	3.65	3	Newton	22	1.22
4	Waltham	44	3.46	4	Somerville	15	3.66
5	Worcester	41	1.09	5	Brookline	14	2.06
6	Framingham	40	1.59	6	Marblehead	13	2.89
7	Woburn	39	3.07	7	Wellesley	13	1.27
8	Somerville	38	9.27	8	Arlington	12	2.31
9	Burlington	36	3.05	9	Concord	12	0.48
10	Andover	31	1.00	10	Needham	11	0.87

Source: US Census, 2006 ES-202 data

2. The design industry is a growing field.

Between 1997 and 2002, the latest year for which national data is available, the design industry has grown by many measures, even when controlling for inflation. Table 2 shows that profits have grown, employees have become more productive, and employees are paid more in this 5 year time period for both architecture and the industries in the specialized design category, all while the number of firms for both has increased as well. Nationally, the growth of the design firms looks strong, and it is most heavily centered in the regions around New York, San Francisco, and Boston, so Somerville is in a position to take advantage of this growth, as the state level data on the design field shows. Though Massachusetts underwent a recession in 2001 and 2002, many of the figures in Table 2 reflect growth. Both total profits and profits per employee grew for specialized design services, and annual payroll per employee and the number of establishments per million residents grew for specialized design services firms as well as architecture. Another interesting aspect of these figures that supports the first point is that the density of establishments in Massachusetts is much greater than that of the US as a whole, showing that there is more of a cluster that has the potential to attract other new design firms.

Table 2. 1997-2002 Real Growth of Design Fields for the US and Massachusetts	Specialized Design Services				Architecture			
	1997		2002		1997		2002	
Industry Ratios	US	Mass	US	Mass	US	Mass	US	Mass
Total receipts (Mil $)	15,976	461	17,075	501	19,041	1,286	25,240	1,182
Receipts per establishment ($000)	604	669	560	633	924	1,840	1,085	1,533
Receipts per employee ($)	141,337	153,117	145,757	159,297	129,796	160,605	136,097	145,895
Receipts per $ of payroll ($)	3.49	3.37	3.45	3.36	2.63	2.91	2.60	2.44
Annual payroll per employee ($)	40,537	45,427	42,269	47,408	49,423	55,128	52,375	59,785
Employees per establishment	4.3	4.4	3.8	4.0	7.1	11.5	8.0	10.5
Receipts per capita ($)	58	76	59	78	69	211	87	184
Establishments per million residents	97	113	105	123	75	115	80	120

Source: 1997, 2002 Economic Census; 1997 numbers adjusted for inflation

If we examine Somerville on its own, while the size and number of establishments is sensitive on the local level to the state of the economy, the overall trend in the last seven years has been growth in both the number of workers employed in the fields

of architecture and engineering services and specialized design services in Somerville (see Figure 1). The average number of employees per firm has remained fairly steady between the years 2001-2007.

Figure 1.

Size of the Somerville Design Industry, 2001-2007
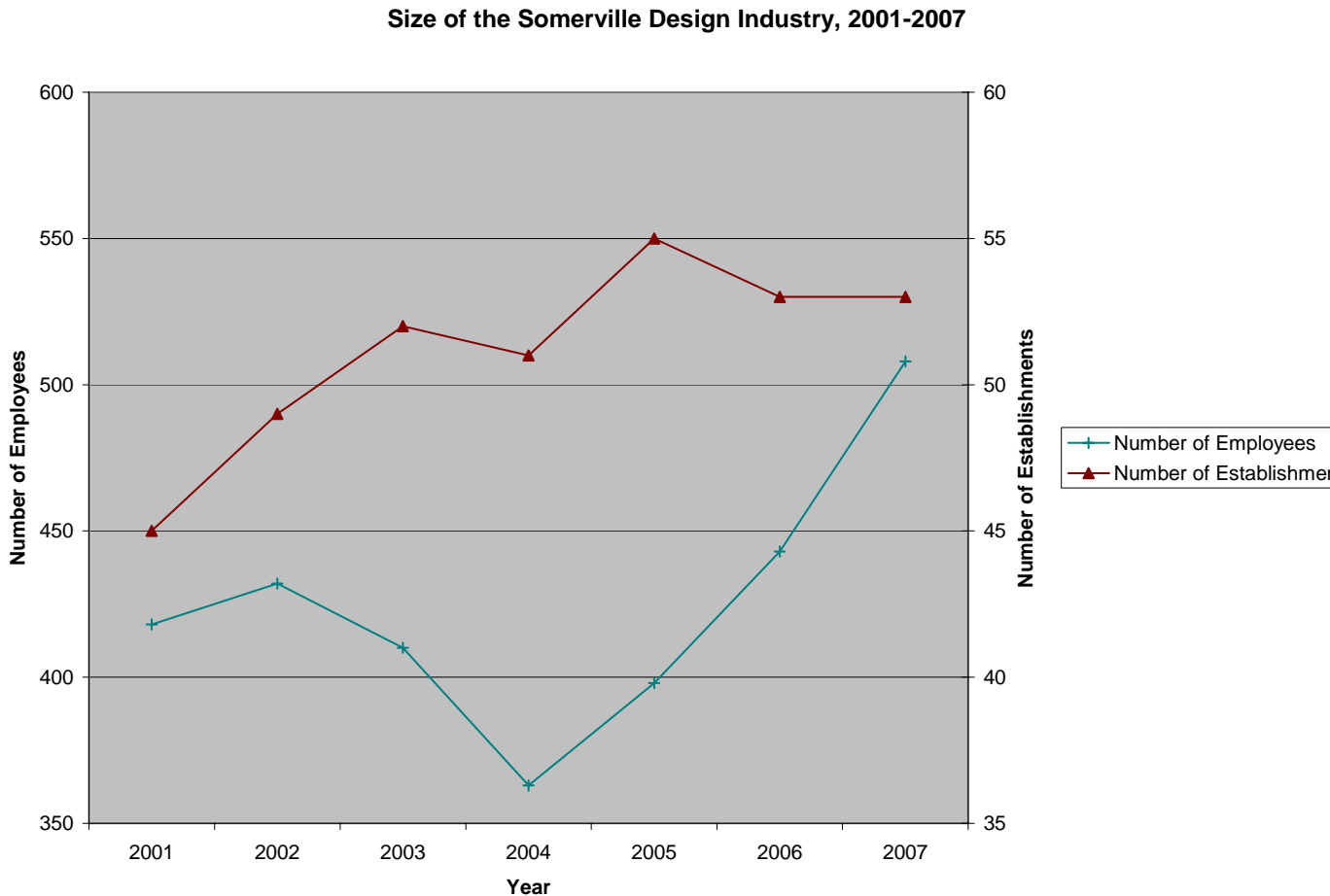
Source: Massachusetts 2001-2007 ES-202 data

3. Workers in the design industry are highly paid.

In 2007, the average employee in the fields of architecture or specialized design services working in Somerville made a yearly salary of $73,424, a 26% increase in salary since 2001, and is 41% higher than the average yearly salary in Somerville, $43,524 (Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, 2008). In 2007, designers were in the 90th percentile of wages in Somerville, among other industries like computer design, physicians' offices, software publishing, and

scientific research. Architecture and design jobs typically require four years of post-secondary education or more, so it is no surprise that in Massachusetts' "knowledge economy," designers are paid well.

Figure 2.

Average Wages for Architectural and Engineering Services and Specialized Design Services in Somerville
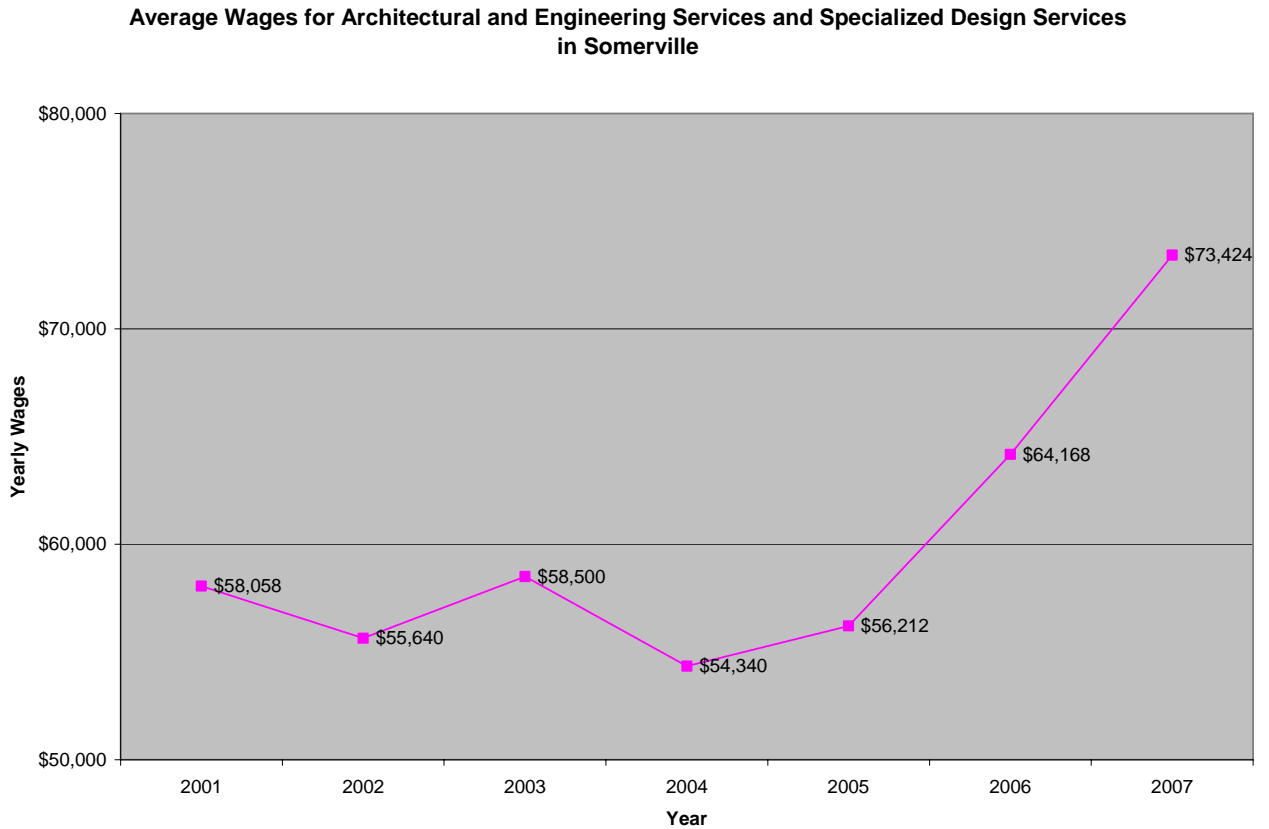
Source: Massachusetts 2001- 2007 ES-202 data

As Somerville moves through the 21st century, a focus on those creative economy industries like design that provide good-paying jobs to highly educated workers is a way to capitalize on the many assets of Somerville and lay the foundation for future economic development. Workers in the creative class are attracted to places like the Boston metro region because of all the cultural, educational, and recreational amenities that the area has to offer. Somerville should work to retain the existing design firms already in the city as they grow and expand so that educated workers in the city do not need to leave the city to find good jobs.

Section III

SOMERVILLE'S DESIGN INDUSTRY

How do we identify the design industry in Somerville?

The most difficult aspect of researching the design industry is the availability of data that correctly characterizes such a diverse field. To accomplish this, data at the highest level of detail was used whenever available. Two main NAICS categories – Architectural and Engineering Services and Specialized Design Services were utilized throughout this study. Table 3 outlines the categories of establishments in each aggregated group.

Table 3.

NAICS Classification of Design Industry Fields

5413 Architectural, Engineering, and Related Services
541310 Architectural Services
541320 Landscape Architectural Services
541330 Engineering Services
541340 Drafting Services
541350 Building Inspection Services
541360 Geophysical Surveying and Mapping Services
541370 Surveying and Mapping (except Geophysical) Services
541380 Testing Laboratories
5414 Specialized Design Services
541410 Interior Design Services
541420 Industrial Design Services
541430 Graphic Design Services
541490 Other Specialized Design Services (Ex. Costume design services, Jewelry design services, Fashion design services, Float design services, Shoe design services, Fur design services, Textile design services)

Source: US Census Bureau

When data was available at the 6-digit level, I analyzed just the architectural services category (541310) along with every classification under the heading of specialized design services (5414). However, data is often not released at this level of detail to protect the privacy of individual establishments, so some charts and tables include information for all firms related to the field of architecture, even ones

that do not technically fall under the definition of a creative industry. However, these firms are necessary for creative firms to provide their services to clients. On the other hand, the government compiles statistics on graphic design firms, yet advertising firms that do much graphic design work are counted elsewhere. Another aspect of this data is that it does not often capture self-employed or very small firms that are exempt from filing their information under unemployment compensation laws, the source for the Massachusetts Employment and Wage (ES-202) reports used here. As you can see, using these categories can be more of an art than a science, but the data used in this report is utilized in much of the research on the creative industries, lending it to be compared and analyzed against other reports.

Another way to identify the design industry in Somerville is through the Employer Locator database available through the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD). This commercial service collects contact information available for Massachusetts business establishments, searchable by city, sector, and industry. This database lists 51 firms in the architectural and engineering services category and 16 firms in the specialized design services category. Many of the firms in this database listed an employee range, found in Table 4. This table indicates that the vast majority of design firms are very small businesses. While most architects will be counted since they are required by law to have a license, many graphic designers working out of their homes or without other employees may not be included in this database. This data source gives us another picture of the design industry in Somerville.

Table 4.

Size of Design Establishment by Employee Ranges in Somerville

| Employee Range | Number of Firms | |
	Architecture and Engineering Services	Specialized Design Services
1-4	32	16
5-9	6	0
10-19	5	0
20-49	4	0
50-99	1	0
100-249	2	0
250-499	1	0

Source: 2008 MA EOLWD InfoUSA database

Another important aspect of this database is the inclusion of addresses for each firm. These addresses were used to create a map of all the architecture and engineering services firms in Somerville, found in Figure 3. This map illustrates how design firms in general are located around Union Square and Davis Square, but perhaps surprisingly, they are not limited to those areas. Since many of the interviews did indeed take place in home offices or offices in industrial buildings, this spread throughout the city makes sense.

Figure 3.

Architecture and Architecture-Related Services in Somerville, 2008
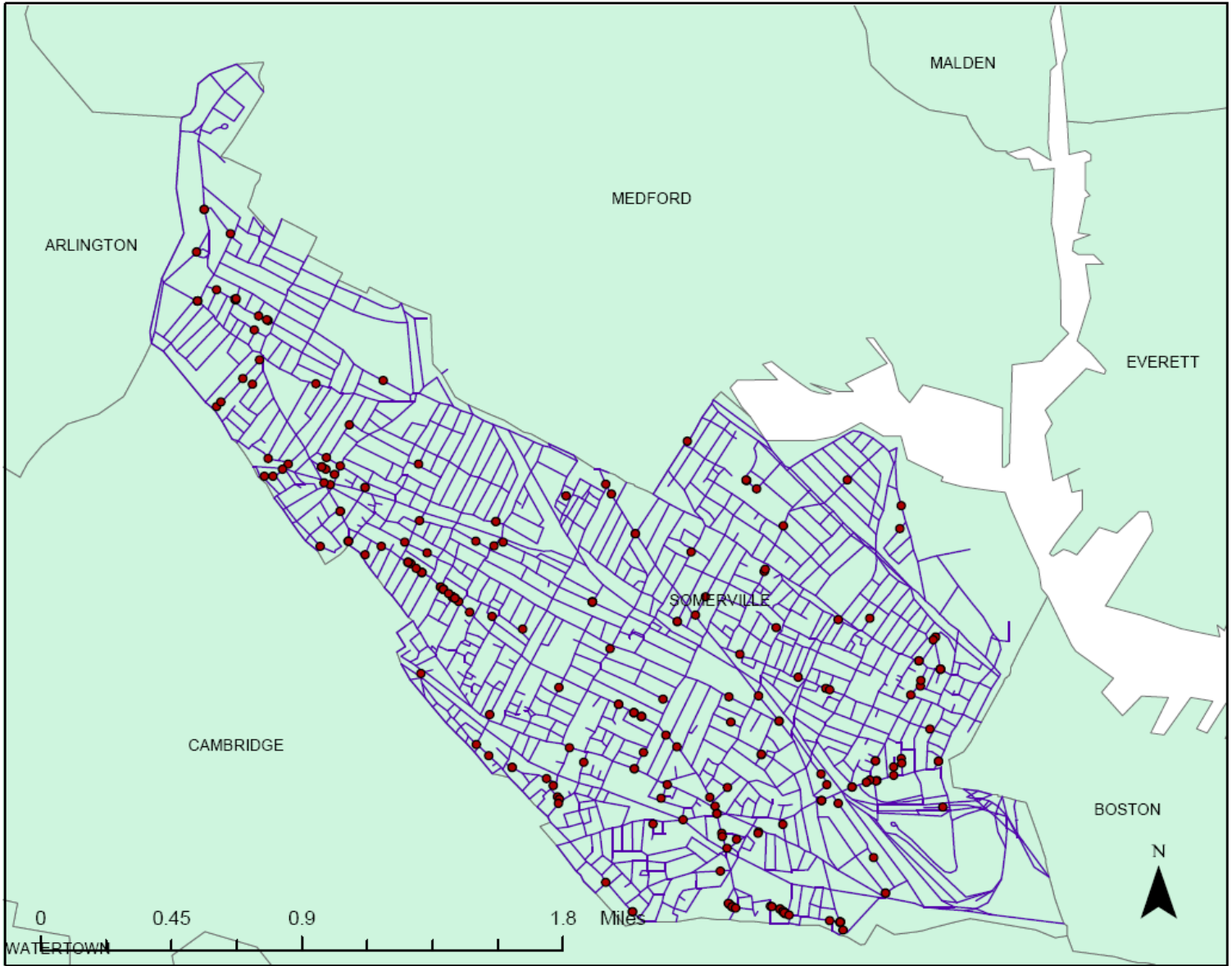
Data Source: InfoUSA Database, Accessed on EOLWD website, 2008

Finally, one last useful source of data on the design industry in Somerville is the US Census Bureau. The business data they collect are useful to give us historical information about their rough locations in Somerville as well as trends in firm size over time. In Figure 4, we can see the USPS zip code boundaries for Somerville. These distinctions are useful because they roughly divide the city into its main neighborhoods. The zip code 02144 covers the Davis Square area, Union Square is contained by 02143, and East Somerville and the Lower Broadway area are located in the 02145 zip code region.

Figure 4. Somerville Map with Zip Code Overlay
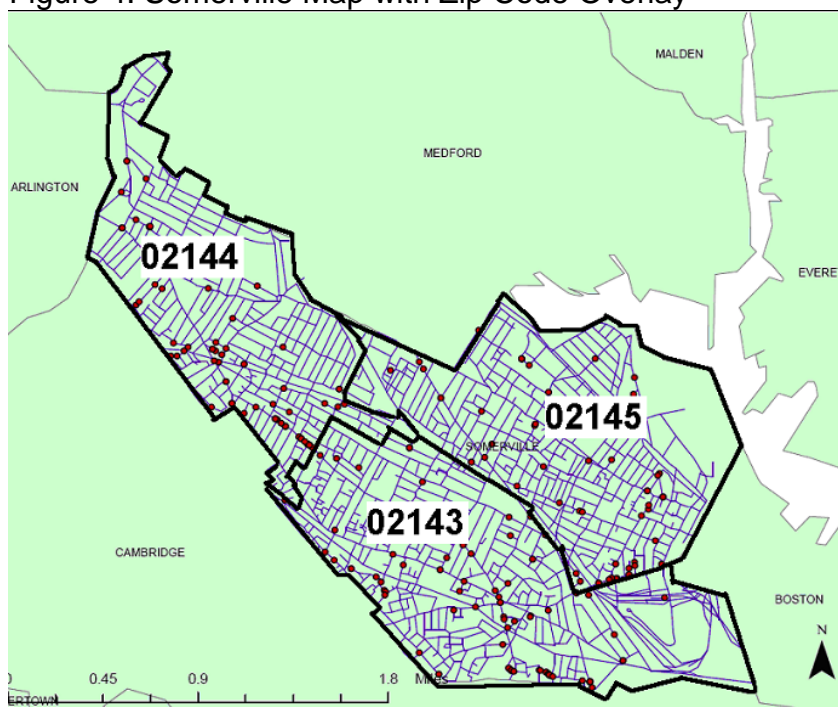
According to the 2002 Economic Census, the latest available year for this data, firms were most likely to be located in the 02143 zip code area, followed by 02144, with a minority of design firms in the 02145 zip code area (see Table 5). In the zip code containing Union Square, 30% of design firms had sales revenue over one million dollars in 2002, while almost 43% of those in Davis Square made that much. There were fewer firms in the Lower Broadway/East Somerville neighborhoods and they made less money. Overall, in 2002, just over half of the operating businesses made under $500,000 and about a third made over $1 million annually. In 2002, 17% (8

firms) of design firms open at the beginning of the year moved or went out of business by the end of 2002.

Table 5. Number of Architecture and Engineering Service and Specialized Design Service Establishments by Sales/Receipts/Revenue for 2002

Size of Establishment by Sales Receipts	02143 - Union Square	02144 - Davis Square	02145 - Broadway/East Somerville	All Somerville
All establishments	22	17	7	46
Establishments operated for the entire year	20	14	4	38
Establishments operated entire year with sales/receipts/revenue less than $100,000	3	2	1	6
Establishments operated entire year with sales/receipts/revenue of $100,000 to $249,999	4	2	1	7
Establishments operated entire year with sales/receipts/revenue of $250,000 to $499,999	4	3	0	7
Establishments operated entire year with sales/receipts/revenue of $500,000 to $999,999	3	1	1	5
Establishments operated entire year with sales/receipts/revenue of $1,000,000 or more	6	6	1	13
Establishments not operated for the entire year	2	3	3	8

Source: 2002 US Economic Census

Table 6 tells us that when 6-digit NAICS code level data is available (i.e., data that represents the most specific industry classification available), it paints a picture of equal popularity between Union and Davis Square for design firms. However, there is a relationship between the size of firms and location since larger firms are more likely to locate in or around Davis Square. There is also a negative relationship between size and location since few businesses are located in the 02145 zip code, and they are also all small businesses. Though this data shows little growth overall, no area had a net loss of businesses.

Table 6. Number of Establishments by Employment-size class for Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Industrial Design, Interior Design, Graphic Design, and Other Design

| ZIP Code | ZIP Code Area | Year | Number of Establishments by Employment-size class | | | | | | Total Establishments |
			1-4	5-9	10-19	20-49	50-99	100-249	
02143	Union Square	1998	7	3	1	2	1	0	14
		2006	7	4	2	0	1	0	14
02144	Davis Square	1998	7	3	2	1	0	1	14
		2006	7	1	3	2	0	1	14
02145	Broadway/East Somerville	1998	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
		2006	4	1	0	0	0	0	5
	All Somerville	1998	19	6	5	3	1	1	35
		2006	20	6	7	2	1	1	37

Source: US Census Bureau Zip Code Business Patterns (NAICS)

Looking at all the data sources together, we can make a number of conclusions. One, the design industry in Somerville is small relative to the other industries located in Somerville, and it is dominated by small firms. However, these firms have grown in employment and profits and are positioned for future economic growth. Furthermore, architecture and design firms can benefit the whole city since their cultural products and the presence of creative firms have the potential to improve the quality of life for a city's residents, attracting more and more educated individuals looking for a creative, stimulating place to work and live. Because numerical data cannot tell us why firms open, grow, prosper, or leave Somerville, the next section will fill in information about this industry through a series of in-depth interviews with a selection of owners representing a variety of types of firms, locations in the city, sizes, workspaces, and client bases.

Section IV

INTERVIEWS WITH SOMERVILLE'S DESIGN INDUSTRY LEADERS

To better understand the needs and opportunities of the design industry in Somerville, twenty-one design business owners were interviewed about their decision to locate in Somerville, their likes and dislikes about the city, and their view on what the City could do to support and grow their industry. This section explains the method of conducting this research as and then presents the findings from the interviews. First, the approach to the research and process are presented here. Second, the main topics drawn from the interviews are explored in depth. Finally, the implications of these findings for Somerville are summarized.

Research Approach and Process

The interviews were designed to inform the policy recommendations for the Somerville creative economy by identifying the factors that led design industry businesses to choose to operate in Somerville, the benefits and drawbacks to working in the city, and the ideas that design industry business owners have for creative industry development in Somerville.

The twenty-one interviews were conducted during the month of July 2008. To create a database of design industry businesses, a variety of sources were used. These include:

- An email sent to the Somerville Arts Council listserv;
- A press release issued by the City of Somerville on the study;
- The Massachusetts Department of Labor and Workforce Development's online database in the categories of "Architecture and Engineering Services" and "Specialized Design Services;"
- Referrals to businesses from Richard Fitzgerald, the current president of the Boston Society of Architects;

- Referrals to businesses from Greg Jenkins, the Executive Director of the Somerville Arts Council;

- Directories of professional organizations for architecture, graphic design, industrial design; the Union Square Main Streets organization; and the Somerville Chamber of Commerce;

- Recommendations from interview subjects to other designers.

A broad spectrum of design industry professionals that have made business location decisions for their firms were interviewed. Interviews were conducted with seven architects running firms of various sizes, from sole proprietorships to large, commercial firms, and of various specialties, such as affordable housing, upscale residential, international mixed use developments, and buildings for public use. Also interviewed were landscape architects and designers, product designers, architects that also produce furniture or other architectural fabrications, graphic designers, and custom furniture designers. Some fifteen men and eight women (two interviews were with pairs of designers) in face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, typically lasting around 45 minutes in their place of work. Most interview subjects allowed me to tape record the interview. The notes and transcripts of these interviews were used to draw out themes and topics that connect them.

What can we learn from firm owners?

<u>Why Firms Locate in Somerville</u>

The universal reason design industry business owners cited for moving to or opening their business in Somerville was affordability. Other common reasons they named were the proximity to Boston, the Western suburbs, and especially Cambridge; the opportunities to buy property in Somerville; the type of work space they desire is available; and if the designer lives or lived in the city, the convenience of having a short commute. However, delving more deeply into these reasons they identified will allow us to better understand the issues that face designers in Somerville.

Affordability

When the design business owners made their location decision, Somerville's greatest asset was affordability. Somerville's lower cost of doing business coupled with good transportation access is a major draw. For design firms looking to operate in the Boston metro region, while "this whole area is extremely expensive" and "it's going higher and higher," as one graphic designer states, compared to Cambridge or Downtown Boston, Somerville is a bargain to business owners concerned about overhead costs. Comparisons to Cambridge came up over and over again in the interviews. An internationally known architect plainly states, "Harvard Square was too expensive. As much as it would have been great to be there, the next station up was Davis Square." He goes on to say that Davis has the "feeling of Cambridge without necessarily having the pay the same rents." Another designer who came to Somerville to buy a building explained,

> *Right now, Somerville is, for the proximity to the city, fairly cost effective. If you just go over the border to Cambridge, you're looking at twenty percent more on space... Just in comparison, when I was looking for a house, the difference was vast. They could be on the same street, and the two houses that were next door to each other; one house is twenty percent more.*

As property values increase, especially when the Green Line extension is operational, Somerville must maintain and increase its level of services and

amenities to businesses or risk losing them to other cities in the region. When asked about his experience working in Davis Square, one longtime architect reflects, "Rents in Davis Square have gone up and probably proportionally, they've gone up at least as much as Harvard Square. Maybe that's just psychological. On the other hand, I would say the quality of being in Davis Square has definitely gone up since we've been here." However, today, unlike twenty years ago, rents in Davis Square are high because it is seen as a desirable, hip neighborhood, and new designers going out on their own will have to pay a premium to work in this popular area. If they wish to work in Somerville, they may have to look to areas in East Somerville like Union Square, where in fact, many of the designers included in this study were located. Another architect with a studio outside of Davis describes what his thought process would be if he was starting a new firm. He says,

> *When I think about when we got here and what we would have to do to find a similar set up in Somerville, we'd be looking in much different parts of Somerville, but we may not be looking in Somerville anymore. We might be looking in Chelsea or Everett, which to a degree are the new frontiers. The thing that those communities suffer from is a lack of really good transportation plans. There's an Orange Line that brushes by Everett, but Chelsea is really isolated in terms of its transportation. I think that when the Green Line comes to Union Square, Somerville will be ubiquitously expensive.*

For the time being though, designers are enjoying cheaper rents than they would find in the surrounding area. Designers recognize that housing affordability is key to Somerville remaining affordable overall, so that the city does not lose its cultural and economic diversity.

Cultural and Economic Diversity

Generally, the designers enjoy the vitality and personality of Somerville generated by such a mix of residents. "I love working here. It's a very vibrant, young community, with a lot of nice cafes and things," remarked a furniture designer. One designer told me that she finds it easier to relate to the community here in Somerville than where she once worked in the Back Bay. A comment by a graphic designer captures this feeling. She describes,

It seemed like Somerville was a place that wasn't as set in stone. You could get involved in things. It felt a little more open. You could have your say. I know my alderman. I love Somerville; I think it's a great place. It feels like it's very equal. There are all kinds of people… One thing I worry about, the more expensive it gets, the less we're going to have of that.

With few exceptions, people are happy operating in Somerville. "The idea of Somerville as a place for designers has increased steadily so now it's really become the new front, the avant-garde of designers. I'm happy to be here, I'm happy to be part of this momentum," states one Somerville architect. Since designers are always looking for inspiration, the mixture of people here is an advantage. A few people explicitly said they do not want Somerville to be another Cambridge, perceived as having a homogeneous, wealthy population. "We don't want to become a mono-economic culture like Cambridge. That would be very detrimental." Similarly, the principal of a firm previously located in Cambridge said, "Harvard Square was gentrifying in a way that we found very unpleasant; it was basically turning into a mall. It was very difficult to work there." Firm owners are looking for neighborhoods that reflect the feel of their work. Many noted the importance of activity and energy to draw on for their design, which can be found in our dense, urban city.

Building Stock

Another advantage of Somerville particular to the design industry is the number and quality of old manufacturing buildings. As manufacturing output decreases in the city, there are a number of successful examples of these buildings being remade into communities or small clusters of artists and design firms. Brickbottom is an obvious example, though there are studios on Vernon Street in the Rogers Foam factory and others scattered around the city. As the City plans for the future, keeping this space affordable for artists along with appropriate industrial sites that may be available in the future should be a priority.

Designers and architects are both typical and atypical of small businesses. One way that they are different is that design firms tend to want an office or studio space that

is "on the edge." They need raw space that they can design to fit their needs. Since design firms are inherently creative, most do not want standard, cookie cutter office space and indeed do not have the overhead to pay typical prices per square foot that businesses with a larger profit margin can pay. One designer went from paying thirty dollars per square foot in Cambridge to less than half of that in an industrial space that he built out himself. Explains another product designer, "I found this place which was a warehouse and they were having trouble renting it. I saw a clean slate and I thought, 'I can start over,' and the landlord was saying 'There's nothing here.'" Another architect that heads a small firm told me about his real estate search. "It's hard to find; we spent a lot of time. I think we spent two or three years trying to find something in Davis Square that fit our needs. Some of the spaces are too small; others are not quite the right fit. This is the type of building that is great for designers."

While many of the people interviewed had no problem finding space suitable for their needs, others expressed uncertainty about where they would end up if their situation changed and they needed to move, despite liking their current location in Somerville. Lease renegotiations were stated as a time to explore other location possibilities, both within and outside of Somerville, especially if the landlord was requesting an increase in rent. Medium and large-sized firms often expressed difficulty finding appropriate space because the options are much more limited in their price range. A partner in a growing design firm said that he didn't know what he would do when he needs to hire more employees. He does not know if he will stay in Somerville since there is not space in his current studio, but he does know that he could never be in a place like a suburban office park. One designer expressed fear that his landlord might try to convert his building from design shops to condos if the prospect of increased profits from the green line extension raising property values becomes too tempting to pass up. As the built landscape of Somerville transforms, it will be important to maintain industrial space for businesses involved in creative design.

Finally, another aspect of Somerville's building stock that is noteworthy is that it has allowed a segment of the design industry to purchase buildings, both industrial and

residential. While this option is not right for all types of firms, affordable building stock allows designers the chance to build equity and grow roots in Somerville. One architect describes his decision to buy,

> *The primary thing was the affordability of being able to do it in the first place. At the time I did that it was right before the dotcom bust. I had very good rental space in Cambridge, it was pretty grubby, but it was inexpensive, but it was looking increasingly like that was precarious and so I said let's give this [buying in Somerville] a whirl. I think that has changed since, but I think it has been a good move. I've enjoyed doing that. It is very convenient.*

Additionally, designers that own their office space benefit the design community because they often sublease space to other designers. The principal of a medium-sized architectural firm laments, "I looked at buying a building in Union Square, and I wish I had; I'm kicking myself because I didn't. It would be great to be able to find buildings like that." Renting or owning, Somerville's designers have found and made space that is affordable, unique, and as we shall see, convenient to all the places they need to go.

Proximity

As previously noted, many of the designers operating in Somerville had founded their business or operated for a time in Cambridge, later moving their business to Somerville. Reasons they relocated range from looking for cheaper rent, looking for more space, or wanting to buy a building instead of renting. Because the majority of the designers in the study work with clients primarily in metro Boston or the Northeast, the proximity to Cambridge, Boston, the airport, and the Western suburbs was important to their decision to locate in Somerville. One graphic design firm owner explained, "Everyone we're working with right at the moment is within thirty miles of the office. The main people we are working with are contractors – writers, graphic designers, photographers, production people, and they're all pretty local as well. I'd say some of them we meet, and others we don't ever even need to meet, we just work with them by phone."

However, the advent of telecommunications and email has not led to the end of the need to meet face-to-face with clients and partners. Indeed, some designers, like a custom cabinetmaker from Somerville, travel extensively to meet with clients and deliver their creations. When he needed more square footage to expand operations, this business owner said he wanted to be in Somerville because of the central location of the city. He could easily receive deliveries, meet with salespeople, and travel to clients in the Western suburbs, Boston, and the North Shore. Even those businesses with clients outside the region like the proximity of Somerville to the airport. As one architect remarked, "A lot of people here have to travel; we love being close to the airport here – that's a huge benefit. If we were farther out it would be a nonstarter for us... This is about as far away from the airport as we'll ever be."

On the other hand, the proximity not only to clients but also fellow designers is also a benefit. Because places like Davis Square are so pedestrian-friendly, featuring numerous cafes and places to stop for coffee, the likelihood increases that designers will run into colleagues and clients, encouraging the exchange of ideas and the feel of community in the area. Two architects in the study regularly ran into each other in Diesel Cafe, a Davis Square coffee shop, and ended up working together on certain projects. Somerville's location is a definite advantage, but it would not be a benefit without a corresponding transportation infrastructure, discussed in the next section.

Transportation

Each designer interviewed had something to say about transportation. Navigating public transportation, parking, and roadways in Somerville are all part of the daily realities for business owners, their clients, and employees. Attitudes about these transportation issues tended to be related to the geographic location of the business in the city. Generally, those businesses located in or around Davis Square were pleased with the forms of transit available to them while those in Union Square or East Somerville were dissatisfied with the bus system, lack of rail transit, and the roads. Davis Square businesses benefit from the Davis Square stop on the Red Line, numerous bus connections, a more direct drive coming from Cambridge, and

metered parking along the street. Businesses in the Union Square neighborhood have no subway stop, only bus routes. Designers also noted that Union Square also has a confusing traffic pattern for those unfamiliar with the area.

Those businesses located along the Red Line use it frequently to get to downtown clients or to meet with other designers on projects, since parking in Cambridge and Boston is so difficult. Says one Davis Square designer, "The Red Line is fabulous. I use the Red Line regularly to meet with clients or get to projects in the City of Boston. I live on the Green Line; it's terrible in comparison. I think that Davis Square is, in part, a great place because of the Red Line. I don't know if we would have come here if it wasn't for the Red Line. A reasonably high percentage of people here use the Red Line or walk." All expressed a desire for the Green Line extension through Somerville to come to fruition. Many designers noted that an advantage of working in Somerville is the proximity to their home. Business owners can save money by having a commute that does not eat up a lot of time or gas.

Beyond driving or taking public transportation to work, some business owners and many of their employees commute by bicycle. As one architect explains why he likes his location in Somerville, "One reason is the bike path which we really like. We try to have a number of younger people working here and the idea that people could bike here is very appealing, and usually a good number of people do that… And we're also right next to the T which is great." Unlike retail, industrial, or businesses that see clients all day, another aspect of design businesses that is fairly unique is that it is easy for them to operate in residential areas. Though residential neighborhoods present some transportation challenges, many design professionals welcome the ability to combine living and workspace. Explains one graphic design firm owner, "One benefit over Cambridge—this was a definitely an issue—is parking, and that is that Somerville does allow on-street parking without a permit." His employees can drive to work and find parking fairly easily in this residential area. However, as we shall see in later sections, not all design industry firm owners had such an easy time with parking and traveling in Somerville.

Labor Pool

The labor pool in the Greater Boston area is excellent for designers. One architect in a medium-sized firm found that one of the advantages of working in Somerville is that he is able to hire young people who live nearby since the rents are lower in Somerville and recent college graduates come from good schools and fill the Boston area. Young designers are active and bring fresh ideas. One architect noted that for a large project, he was able to hire seven talented graduate students from the area with almost no lead-time. The ability to rapidly hire high quality employees is not always available outside of urban areas. For example,

> *You get a much better group of people able to and want to come work here. I had a friend who had an architectural firm in Brockton and it was really frustrating for him. It was hard for him to find people who would come work at his firm… He had a much smaller selection of people willing to come to his office. Almost everyone who interviews here has good feelings about coming here. I think that Davis Square is perceived as a great place to work. We want a place where architects want to be for lunch or dinner since it can be an all night job. We want a place that's safe at night because we have people coming and going at all hours.*

Due to its location within the Boston metro area, Somerville has a competitive advantage relative to other cities around the country because of the concentration of universities and colleges in the region. One architect considers, "We could be located in a variety of places, but I went to graduate school here. So Boston ends up being a good location because we get very high quality people out of Harvard." Finally, people are positive about the Boston region in general, and Somerville benefits from that sentiment. "The city has great design, architecture happening; there is a really good pool of people for this reason. You'll find that here, New York, a couple other cities, but there's a really great density of designers here. A lot of that has to do with the schools and the city itself; people want to be in Boston." Again, because many young designers cannot afford open studios in Boston early in their careers, Somerville is a strong contender for their business.

Designers in Somerville appreciate the effort that the City puts into promoting the arts. "Somerville does great encouragement of the arts. I love the fact that there is tremendous support for the arts." Designers stressed that the efforts of the Somerville Arts Council and programs like ArtsUnion need continued support. They noted that events and activities like these build a buzz about the city and introduce it to visitors from outside Somerville. This enhances the climate for designers looking to work in what is seen as a creative place. The association of Somerville with the arts supports the work for our design businesses in the city. As one Davis Square designer notes, "I do think that all the things like Open Studios for artists and events in Davis Square add up. I think whatever the city can do to encourage these events is a good idea."

Art improves life in the city for everyone. According to one designer, while supporting or expanding the creative knowledge, interest, or ability of the city's residents and workers is not "answering any urgent need for healthcare or housing or food, it's a vital part of keeping people's mental health intact in the city and the state." More than that, it's a potential source of economic activity for Somerville. For example, one graphic designer in the study is also an artist. Dual careers are probable for many of the artists and craftspeople in Somerville, since so many of the skills used in the fine arts can be applied to commercial activities like graphic design or furniture making. Therefore, designers see support for the arts as vital for the synergistic effects created in the realm of design, where art blends with commerce.

What Firms Dislike about Somerville

While design industry firm owners saw many benefits to working in Somerville, the city is not without its detractions. Many people had serious complaints with various aspects of the city, including a lack of resources in East Somerville, transportation and parking issues throughout the city, concerns with city offices and other lesser

issues like unfair taxes and problems with the electricity. In this section, these topics will be explored in more detail.

City Resources

Designers located in East Somerville on the whole had many more complaints than those located around Davis Square.   The city is at risk for losing these designers to other up-and-coming neighborhoods throughout the metro area if these issues are not addressed in the near future. Even though East Somerville is known as a center of artistic activity, some of the negatives of the area can be particularly difficult for businesses with clients who may need to visit the area. "I don't feel great about inviting people to this space even though it's a great space for us to be working in. They're coming through an industrial zone next to a waste disposal plant though an auto body lot. The roads are all potholed; the experience of this particular area is not great," said one designer there. Another East Somerville graphic designer felt similarly. "This particular area, there's a bit of a second class citizen aspect to it with people dumping trash here. It does not seem to be policed much. At times it feels a bit like the stepchild. It's kind of on the fringe. It's more remote." Though it is slowly changing, people dislike the lack of amenities within walking distance for some locations in the city, even areas like Union Square. One designer declared, "This Square is lacking in community amenities. If you look at the kind of stores, it's not designed to be a community place." Another product designer agrees when he describes what he would consider if he changed locations,

> *I would look for a place where it has more creativity, more resources. I think for the long term, you want to be somewhere your employees are going to be pretty jazzed going there. You want to be somewhere people can easily get to from the T. The place I would really like to work is down in the Fort Point area, near South Station. You can get into town or get to the airport easily. It's historically a very creative neighborhood.*

It seems clear that some business owners don't think Union Square has grown into a neighborhood capable of supporting sophisticated businesses quite yet. An industrial designer explains, "I tried to get over to Davis Square for office space: too expensive. Union Square doesn't have that vibe. People clear out after work."

Though it has a lot to offer, there is the perception that Union Square may be missing some basic amenities that make a community feel complete. Though there are plenty of stores with unique offerings in Davis Square, as one landscape architect tells me, "There's not a shortage of restaurants, but there's not a lot of good shops. There are no good clothing stores. There are not a lot of opportunities if you want to do a quick shop for an article of clothing."

Transportation

One drawback to working in Somerville that unites a majority of the designers was their negative opinion about parking in Somerville. Though access to public transportation is important to the quality of life for their employees, the clients of these firms typically arrive by car for meetings and thus need to navigate Somerville streets and find parking. Additionally, while business owners may make an effort to use public transportation to navigate within the metro area, since so many of these businesses have regional clients, cars are necessary to go to the clients who often are located beyond dependable subway access. Parking then becomes an issue for a number of reasons. First, parking tickets are an additional, if unnecessary, business expense for many firms since they pay those received by their clients.

> *A lot of the meter maids here, they're evil. They're doing their job, but whoa. Especially when we were in Davis Square I was getting a lot of tickets. I feel badly for my clients – I end up spending a lot of money in paying tickets… We're here now partly because we have parking space.*

Other designers feel similarly. "I'm convinced that there are video cameras on the second floor on the outside of the building because the second you're past your meter…parking tickets are unforgiving, vindictive." Businesses today are very sensitive to keeping their clients happy. If clients have to struggle to find a building, then park, and then get a big ticket when they leave, it's going to make the trip to Somerville unpleasant. One designer describes this struggle, "Somerville is a very confusing place, very mysterious for some people. Just getting here from Boston, getting out of here. This whole Union Square big loop around where you have to go under the highway – it's very perplexing for people." For businesses in East

Somerville, "The big downside is there's no decent public transportation. Even the buses are confusing. The Green Line coming through is an important thing."

However, even beyond public transportation, businesses find many forms of Somerville's transit system inadequate. Despite the popularity of the Community Bike Path, businesses wonder when this amenity will be completed.

> *We live right near the bike path. Ever since we moved there, they've been talking about extending the bike path. That was eight years ago. How hard is it to do anything? It would really help things. It would increase the value of the whole area.*

Other firm owners think that the city does not "keep up the comfort of the pedestrian or the safety of the pedestrian well enough." For example, one Brickbottom designer noted, "It's very important to get on the Green Line. The sidewalks between Lechmere and Brickbottom are not plowed." Overall, designers and architects in this city are very aware of and spoke astutely about how interconnected the transportation problems are with some of the economic problems of the city.

City Bureaucracy

Another topic that a few of the designers spoke at length about was their difficulties in dealing with the city government, particularly the process of permitting and getting approvals for construction. They found the process to be frustrating and unpredictable. A lack of interdepartmental communication means that those trying to move forward with a project are forced to go from department to department in different parts of the city, left with the burden of repetitive, time-consuming paperwork with no clear instructions on the order or process in which to proceed. Because of the scheduling of community and board meetings, businesses may spend quite a bit of time waiting before they know if they can actually begin work or not. One architect compares Somerville's process to that of Cambridge,

> *I think that in Cambridge there is, despite very difficult politics, and very careful neighbor and abutter and community review processes, there is a way that the projects move through the process and get approved. You have to do all sorts of things and jump through all sorts of hoops, and maybe even*

change your project, but they get approved. Once they're approved, the economics are that it's a valuable location and worth doing. So once you know how to do that, you can proceed with some confidence. It's very frustrating and it's difficult, but you get a project and that's key, because that's what pays the bills. I think in Somerville, I've watched lots of other projects – I've seen many things stall out, and that's really bad for developers. You have to purchase property and you can't afford that to happen. It's very bad, it doesn't work out…. From what I see, I would be advising my clients to stay away. I'd say, let's stick to Cambridge where we know what we can do.

Rather than difficulties with projects for clients, other designers expressed frustration with the process of renovating their own office space. In their eyes, they saw themselves as improving industrial space, yet the regulations, permitting, and inspections cost them money and time to comply. They wondered how business owners without a background in architecture or design would be able to survive this process. Indeed, two business owners both came close to giving up trying to work in Somerville. As one designer explains,

The City of Somerville does everything in its power to make things so absolutely difficult to do anything other than your basic drop ceiling office space. It cost me tens of thousands of dollars extra in things I had to do to please the City and they changed their minds and there were lots of arguments…. In fact, I was probably two hours away from packing it all in, licking my wounds, and going someplace else. I was really quite angry at the City of Somerville for doing it. It cost me weeks and weeks and weeks of time.

Another designer that had to get a special permit to change his space faced frustration with the politics of the process. He ended up waiting six to eight months before he could actually move into the space he had leased. This process almost killed his move to Somerville. Though most business owners interviewed did not face these problems, if the City can streamline the permitting process and make it more predictable, new businesses making a move will take on less risk when choosing to operate in Somerville.

Other Issues

Some lesser problems with the city came up in a few of the interviews as well, including the City's personal property tax on small businesses and frequent power

outages. The personal property tax for small business owners came up because to design business owners, it seems like it does not fit the business model for small creative design firms. Designers' equipment might be very valuable, like computer and printing technology, but it creates value in a different way than the machinery used by other, more traditional forms of business, like an auto mechanic's tools or a baker's oven. One designer states, "One thing that Somerville did do that was annoying is that they found everyone's names and sent assessment forms on everybody's equipment here. It's made for bakeries, it's made for pizza joints, it's made for big places, not for a guy on his computer. And so these poor artists didn't know what they were doing, and someone listed their inventory list of their photography equipment and they turned around and got a $2,000 tax bill based on all this equipment. Everyone got their tax bills and it was really awful."

Another issue mentioned to me was problems with the electricity in Somerville. When the power goes out in a firm that is dominated by computers, no work can get done, resulting in a loss of time and income. Over time, this can add up. One landscape architect noted, "The electricity in Union Square goes off too often. As of this spring, we were ready to pack up and move somewhere else because we couldn't have our computers crash again without warning. I have to send people home, and I don't get recouped from that." Another designer out in Davis Square agrees. "The power fluctuates in the city a lot. When you have fifty computers you can tell the power is really dirty. We get brown outs all the time constantly, so that resets all our clocks." Though these are small issues in scope, the more of them that add up, the less attractive the city is to new design firms, and the less likely current firms are to remain in Somerville when they need to expand.

Design Industry Cluster Relationships

The cluster of designers in this region is both a blessing and a curse. More designers allow cohesive, active industry organizations to flourish, which provides opportunities for collaboration and partnerships. Also, the wealth of interrelated firms here let those doing large-scale projects draw on expert cross-discipline talent from within the region. However, the centripetal forces that draw creative designers

to the city and region also create intense competition. "More architects are here than there is work in Boston – it makes us look outside [the region] to find enough work to keep us sustained," says one sole proprietor.

In recent years, the Main Streets organizations along with the Somerville Chamber of Commerce have done a lot to encourage local residents and businesses to "buy local" when they make purchases. However, for many businesses, especially businesses that provide services to other businesses, the "buy local" message does not benefit them as much. Specialized firms might not have enough potential clients within Somerville to make a noticeable impact on their sales. Since the people and companies located in Somerville just do not have the resources to support every specialized local business, the city needs to facilitate an influx of outside people and businesses to support our native designers by advertising their talent and reaching out to the rest of the state and country. Other designers agreed and said to "bring business from outside Somerville here – that would benefit designers."

Because there are more architects and designers than work to go around, these designers feel this keen competition when they bid for projects at job sites within the Boston region. "In a sense it's very competitive here. When you go up for interviews for projects they have a list of your competitors. It's amazing." However, the close proximity of so many designers is also a benefit. "When you work with an architect it's really nice to be so close in proximity. It's a plus that I'm close by, so I think that's a good selling point. I know there are at least three other landscape architects in Davis Square. There is possible connection but also competition."

Part of the focus of industry cluster research in the past has been on the relationship and location of clients and their suppliers. For most designers, proximity was only a relative concern. Most of the businesses they need to do their work are located in the metro region – though probably not in Somerville. So if there were more suppliers and clients here in Somerville, it would only be a slight benefit over a location elsewhere in the region. New business owners were the most likely to be interested in networking with potential clients or consultants rather than other design

firms, while more established businesses did not necessarily need these types of opportunities. The City should keep these issues in mind as they plan for ways to assist small businesses, especially those in the design field.

<u>What Somerville Can Do</u>

The designers in Somerville suggested a number of creative ways that could help them grow the design industry in Somerville. What emerged from my discussion with these business owners were a collection of small fixes and systemic changes the City would be wise to undertake. Many of these ideas will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Then more concrete strategies for creative economy and design industry business development in Somerville will be examined.

For many businesses, particularly younger businesses, the idea of an incubator building in Somerville is attractive. Since an architect or designer just starting out needs little more than a space to put a computer, the prospect of access to amenities like conference room space, shared tech support, shared Internet access, and shared printing would help them establish their business with more ease. This would help keep overhead low for startup businesses and designers who may have not yet turned a profit.

Other designers had suggestions for ways to assist young businesses and small businesses. One simple request heard from a few architects was to include architect fees in the funds matched by the Storefront Improvement Program (SIP). Right now, the matching funds do not cover professional fees for architects. Business owners get around this by using contractors to design their storefront changes, depriving local architects of local clients. Another way to promote the design industry is to educate the public on how and when to hire an architect or designer, especially those who want to do significant remodeling on their own. One architect suggested a booklet that could be kept at ISD for permit applicants, handed out with the new business packets, or given to people applying for their business certificate.

Another resource for young businesses is small business workshops. However, the City does not need to reinvent the wheel. Outside of Somerville, there are resources like the mentors at SCORE Boston or the Center for Women and Entrepreneurship, among others. Within the city itself, the Somerville Chamber of Commerce and the Union Square Main Streets offer workshops and classes to business owners, but many owners of the small firms in the study were either unaware or uninterested in these offerings. However, there is a need for business workshops especially among new business owners in the design field. While these designers may be highly skilled in their field, they may not have training in all the nuances of running a business. As one skilled designer stated, "I'm doing things that I'm not qualified to do, like accounting. So understanding that, writing a business plan, all of a sudden these things are important." One sole proprietor remarked that she too had to learn as she was going and ended up making a lot of hard mistakes that could have been avoided. Unfortunately, it was often found that from the designers' perspectives, the workshops offered were either too general or too basic.

Additionally, a few designers who have attended workshops in the past stated that the workshop topics do not address issues that would be helpful to the design industry, like liability insurance for architects. Another type of workshop offering is networking. While general networking sessions might not be helpful for design firms, one way that designers do interact and network as part of their professional training is through design charrettes. Somerville could facilitate networking as well as get some ideas about potential redevelopment for particular parcels by sponsoring weekend design charrettes for teams of artists, landscapers, city planners, and architects on design issues for regions or parcels of interest in the city, much like they have done for areas like Brickbottom and Union Square in the past. Depending on the invited groups, sessions like these would also help develop a connection between Somerville and the local universities and help their students discover the city.

Overall, much more could be done to publicize the learning and networking opportunities that are currently available. One designer talks about the marketing of workshops and says, "How do they tell people about this stuff? You have to go looking for it. It does kind of seem like there are many ways for better communication. I know that's easy to say, 'I never saw this brochure', but then on the other hand, I didn't go looking for it. Particularly if they are looking to get more business into the city." The city could also do a better job of reaching out to businesses – especially new businesses – in general. One graphic design firm that moved to Somerville in 2007 has never received any sort of welcome, even though they are a successful firm and do national work. "I don't know if Somerville is any better or worse than anyone else. I'm assuming there's some small business stuff that's going on. Maybe that's the point. If there are small businesses, should they be doing more to access them?"

Though marketing and communication about these offerings are seen as lacking, the presentation of the city's identity is seen as a more serious problem. "I think Somerville could function as a place, but it doesn't communicate its identity. Cambridge has education; it has an aura like San Francisco or Berkeley. Somerville has a lot of little centers but nothing holding it together, nothing concrete." Some simple, concrete suggestions were offered to support the design industry in Somerville. The City could put together and publish a business directory of Somerville designers so they are aware of all the opportunities available to them to work with local designers. Another idea was to advertise in the professional organization regional newsletters, like that of the Boston Society of Architects or the Boston chapter of the Industrial Design Society of America that Somerville welcomes designers.

For businesses of a certain size and at a certain point in the life cycle, buying space makes sense. Giving designers the opportunity to buy through guaranteed loans or providing access to low-interest mortgages would do much to provide a foundation for longevity of creative design in Somerville. Explains one successful architect, "That would be terrific if we could have some equity. The artists come in first, they

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create the value, they're the pioneers, and then they get kicked out." Another suggestion from one designer was for the city to keep an inventory of industrial buildings that could be transformed into the types of spaces attractive to design firms, so this information could be communicated to business owners looking to move or expand in Somerville.

While the City currently does a good job of supporting the arts, some designers felt they could have a larger reach if they also featured design, focusing on public education. Existing programs that show art work in city storefronts or gallery shows in City Hall could show cutting edge building models, photographs of contemporary architecture, or the latest innovations to come from Somerville. As one architect stated, "The venues for people showing their art comes primarily from Open Studios, which is a great event, but I wish there were more opportunities. For example, the Somerville Museum exhibitions are more historical. Take the opportunity to show more contemporary work."

Since transportation came up so frequently in the interviews, any improvements will make a broad impact. As one landscape architect observes, "Transportation issues, if they get tackled and they get solved in a larger long-term plan, then some of the other pieces can fall into place. There are major trains that run through the city that create dead ends so that people can't weave through the fabric of the city. The major roads get heavy with traffic and they cut through say, Union Square here, and then make the square itself difficult." Parking could be addressed with simple fixes in some cases. One designer suggests, "I wouldn't mind having some visitor parking permits the way I do as a resident," thus avoiding the problem of clients getting parking tickets all the time. Other ideas about parking ranged from more metered spaces to the creation of more municipal parking garages.

Another angle from which transportation problems could be tackled is the participation in and lobbying for regional efforts. Somerville is but one part of a larger metropolitan design cluster. Broadly speaking, the benefits of being a part of the Boston metro region design cluster are no different for firms located in Boston,

Cambridge, Somerville, or Brookline. Thus, when opportunities arise to be part of a metropolitan transportation campaign, Somerville should take an active role in these efforts. For example, projects like the Urban Ring would benefit the city. In today's metro regions, commuters increasingly move laterally among cities, rather than from suburb to city along the spokes of the current transportation network to travel among work, home and errands. "I think it's a problem if Somerville doesn't fight for that type of infrastructure," one designer stated. The more attractive the region is to potential firms, the more Somerville benefits.

Connected to transportation issues, many of the designers were interested in environmental sustainability and were conscious of the need to reduce their impact on natural resources. If Somerville makes environmentalism a priority, especially as the City makes decisions to change the built landscape, designers may be attracted to Somerville as a forward-thinking place that shares their values. For example, policies that incentivize green roofs like those programs in Chicago or Philadelphia would have the advantage of benefiting local businesses, improve the air quality and climate, and improve the performance of the sewer system due to reduced storm water runoff. At the very least, continuing to plant trees, and including them prominently in all future streetscapes is a small measure that affects the quality and perception of Somerville's environment.

One of the designers spoke about the "eco-sensibility" of his office. The ability to use public transportation instead of driving is a big benefit for businesses with a culture of environmentalism. Additionally, support for pedestrian and bicycle paths would show a commitment beyond superficial measures. Business owners show concern for the environment itself, but also the effects it has on their workplace surroundings. One designer spoke of her location, "It's a horrible square for traffic. The grit comes through the windows… I definitely feel that when I ride my bike – what are we inhaling here? It's a concern for the health of my employees. A ride in here or in Cambridge is so different." Concerns like these should be further impetus to revise the parking regulations. As one architect notes, "The other thing that's tricky in Somerville is that they have this strange and onerous parking [space]

requirement, which is ludicrous from a green policy point of view and an urban design point of view." This designer is referring the zoning regulations in Somerville that require a certain number of parking spaces for different types and sizes of businesses, regardless of whether these businesses draw clients and customers who walk or rely on public transportation.

From an urban design point of view, continued attention must be paid to the built environment in Somerville. Good urban architecture is inspiring to designers and will draw them to the city. Schools, municipal buildings, and other publicly funded buildings could be created with an eye for great design to show off Somerville as a city committed to its reputation as a locus for the arts.

A way to foster this development would be to examine and revise the mission of the design review committee if necessary. As suggested by one of the architects interviewed, it could function as an educational apparatus, helping to balance the community review process and the tendency for community members to resist change. It could help ensure that good design comes to the city. As one designer noted, "Design is about the future. Designers are by nature futurists. We're always looking to the future. It'd be nice if it felt like the city was doing it too." There is real room for improvement here in Somerville as another designer observed. "It's so bland in the area. It sounds kind of weird. San Francisco has a buzz of creativity... I think, unfortunately, Boston is a very conservative culture. It's difficult for outsiders to break in. It has a conservative approach to the buildings it builds."

Design firm owners in Somerville are eager for change and seem to possess optimism about the direction the city is headed, should it continue to recognize the contributions of the creative economy to the overall economic progress of the city. While many of their suggestions focus specifically on the design economy, many more would be helpful for supporting small businesses in general. Section V goes into these suggestions in more detail.

Conclusions

Design can be a real economic engine. You can see that happening in different communities around the world. Design can actually be used to leverage and improve the quality of a community and give it an identity that's really unique.

Somerville is in a position to become a very attractive city for designers and architects should it choose to make supporting the creative economy a priority. There are a great number of designers and architects in the Boston region due to the metro area design cluster and the quality of the schools in the area. Designers looking to start a firm or move their firm are attracted to Somerville because of its affordability, transportation access, and proximity to the rest of the region. They like the availability of industrial and nontraditional office space. Problems of parking and neighborhood amenities can be a downside to working in Somerville for some business owners. By better marketing the city as a center for design in all that it does and taking steps to maintain affordability, designers can see Somerville as a place that can continue to attract designers and architects well into the future.

To further improve Somerville as an attractive location for design firms and other creative economy businesses, the recommendations in the next section will summarize the issues and suggestions of the business owners and outline a method of action to address these issues. The suggested strategies will position the city for the future in a way that will provide good jobs to Somerville residents and improve the quality of life for all.

Section V

POLICY INITIATIVES FOR THE DESIGN INDUSTRY IN SOMERVILLE

Based on the in-depth interviews with Somerville design business owners, the goals of the following recommendations are:

1. Grow and support the design industry in Somerville as a way to keep and create good jobs and wealth for the city and its residents.
2. Establish Somerville as a center of design activity and innovation, known to design professionals, the Boston region, and the general public.

In order to achieve these objectives, implementation should focus around the broad strategies of maintaining affordability in Somerville, increasing transportation access for all, preserving and increasing the stock of studios and industrial space suitable for conversion to offices, and improving quality of life in Somerville while sustaining cultural and economic diversity in the city.

Many of these strategies are cost-effective for the city because they have benefits beyond the recipients in the design community. Many of the short-term strategies can be undertaken for little money. Each category of strategies is broken down into recommendations that affect primarily the design industry, but also those that support small businesses in general. Policies that benefit the design industry as well as others have the possibility to get the most return on investment. Finally, strategies that support the design industry enhance the creative character of the city, which in turn attracts new, often well-educated members of the workforce to live and work in Somerville.

Short-term Strategies

Supporting Design Industry Businesses

- **Include architects and designers in the definition of artist for the Union Square Arts Overlay District.** By using a broad definition of artist, the City will be doing a great deal to secure the affordability of Union Square for designers. Designers will be an important component to the artistic character

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of the square that the City is trying to stimulate since they are both a creative entity and an economic force that will positively impact the neighborhood economy in a way that artists cannot.

- **Publicize learning opportunities.** The City can use its resources to promote the already-existing business workshops, training sessions, and networking opportunities offered locally by the Main Streets organizations, the Somerville Chamber of Commerce, and other local nonprofits. Consistent outreach to new businesses and small firms can help to tailor these programs to the needs of the City.

- **Be a resource for the design industry.** Somerville could easily show its support for the design industry by providing resources for the community, like publishing a directory of local designers so businesses can use the work of local consultants. They could also provide a booklet to new businesses or residents applying for building permits with information on area designers and some tips on hiring an architect or designer. Another way the City could support the industry is by including architect's fees to the funds that are matched by the Storefront Improvement Program. That way, local businesses can use the services of local professionals and improve the quality of the design of their business façade.

Supporting the Design Industry and Small Businesses

- **Relieve parking difficulties for clients**. Somerville design firms located in areas with metered parking or without dedicated parking spaces could benefit from being issued a single visitors parking permit that allows clients to park in a metered or resident parking space. Since design firms don't have a heavy flow of clients each day, this small measure could eliminate the burden of paying clients' parking tickets without much impact on the City's parking system.

- **Address power outage issues.** Frequent power outages are a major liability for businesses considering a place to move. Since the City is planning on a major increase in density in the Union Square area as the Green Line comes through, the subsequent increase in power usage could be a cause for concern. The City needs to address this issue for current as well as future businesses in Somerville.

Mid-term Strategies

Supporting Design Industry Businesses

- **Educate the public about good design.** The City could continue to sponsor design competitions like the Brickbottom design challenge and then display the winning entries in public spaces like the Somerville Museum, City Hall, or the library. It could also make greater use of the Design Review Committee

to help educate Somerville residents about what aspects of architecture make good design. A city that is filled with people who are knowledgeable about contemporary architecture is more to be able to have developers and designers of buildings make bold, exciting choices that will make Somerville stand out from its peers.

- **Communicate City identity.** To truly make Somerville into a place that is a great place for designers to work, the City must take a holistic look at all the ways it presents itself to the public – through marketing materials to new businesses, its website, signage, streetscapes, etc. If all of these were made with an eye for design, Somerville would reinforce the idea that it is a city that cares about design and designers. The City could also engage in more strategic marketing of itself, for instance advertising its interest in attracting designers in regional trade publications like that of the Boston Society of Architects with a listing of available industrial and unique office spaces.

Supporting the Design Industry and Small Businesses

- **Continue work on streamlined permitting process.** By streamlining the permitting process, Somerville will remove a barrier to locating or expanding in the city. Many businesses cannot afford to wait months through an unpredictable process before knowing if they can proceed with construction or renovation. If other cities in the Boston metro region have fast-track and streamlined permitting systems in place, Somerville will be at a significant competitive disadvantage, particularly if rents are comparable.

- **Finish the Community Bike Path.** For many in the creative economy, lifestyle amenities like bike paths are a factor in choosing a location whether for business or home. Since extending the bike path would increase the ability of residents to walk or travel by bicycle to work, the environmental benefits as well as the added quality of life benefits would help to make Somerville a more attractive place to live and work.

Long-term Strategies

Supporting Design Industry Businesses

- **Increase opportunities for design firms to purchase buildings.** A low-interest or low-fee mortgage program for qualified design firms would allow expanding firms looking to purchase space easier access to office ownership. Design firms that own space rather than renting lend a degree of stability to a neighborhood and contribute to the creative character of the city. A program like this would also serve the purpose of preserving the structure of industrial buildings in Somerville, rather than them being demolished or converted into residential space. A program like this benefits Somerville taxpayers because

it helps buildings be used for desirable uses, rather than industries that may be noisy or polluting.

- **Create a business incubator building or district.** Somerville could be a very attractive place for all the new startups that come out of the area universities if it provided space where young firms could have access to affordable rents, conference room space, and shared Internet, telephone, and tech support. Since new design firms typically have very little money for overhead, an incubator could allow them to exist long enough to gain success and grow. After businesses have outgrown the incubator space, Somerville is much more likely to retain these new businesses than they are to attract new firms to the city. A business incubator building would be especially useful in a building that is currently underutilized.

Supporting the Design Industry and Small Businesses

- **Encourage environmental initiatives.** By looking to the future and making bold choices in energy consumption, building design, and transportation, the city will send a message to progress businesses looking to locate somewhere with similar values. The City could incentivize the relocation of these businesses to Somerville by supporting sustainability in the form of green roofs, the use of renewable energy, and other forward-thinking environmental activities.

Ongoing Strategies

Supporting the Design Industry and Small Businesses

- **Continue support of the Somerville Arts Council.** One of the greatest assets of the city is its strong support for the arts through the efforts of the Somerville Arts Council and its programs like ArtsUnion, Somerville Open Studios, and ArtBeat. The environment that is good for artists is good for designers, and art in the public eye serves to create an energy that designers feed off of. The buzz created about Somerville draws visitors and if that was lost, it is likely that many designers would not find Somerville as vibrant and inspiring.

- **Participate in regional transportation planning efforts.** Continued pressure for the completion of the Green Line and Orange Line is necessary to ensure that transportation in Somerville improves in a timely fashion. In addition, participation in regional transportation planning efforts like those for the Urban Ring is essential. As population continues to shift throughout the metro area, it would be wise for Somerville to consider the ease of transportation between the cities that surround Boston.

Section VI

Appendix I.

Table 1. Core NAICS Codes for Cultural Enterprises

NAICS	Industry
Group 1	**Cultural Goods Production**
323110	Commercial Lithographic Printing
323111	Commercial Gravure Printing
323112	Commercial Flexographic Printing
323113	Commercial Screen Printing
323115	Digital Printing
323117	Books Printing
323119	Other Commercial Printing
323121	Tradebinding and Related Work
323122	Prepress Services
325992	Photographic Film, Paper, Plate, and Chemical Manufacturing
327112	Vitreous China, Fine Earthenware, and Other Pottery Product Manufacturing
327212	Other Pressed and Blown Glass and Glassware Manufacturing
332323	Ornamental and Architectural Metal Work Manufacturing
333293	Printing Machinery and Equipment Manufacturing
334310	Audio and Video Equipment Manufacturing
334612	Prerecorded Compact Disc (except Software), Tape, and Record Reproducing
337212	Custom Architectural Woodwork and Millwork Manufacturing
339911	Jewelry (except Costume) Manufacturing
339912	Silverware and Hollowware Manufacturing
339913	Jewelers' Material and Lapidary Work Manufacturing
339914	Costume Jewelry and Novelty Manufacturing
339942	Lead Pencil and Art Good Manufacturing
339992	Musical Instrument Manufacturing
Group 2	**Cultural Goods Distribution**
423410	Photographic Equipment and Supplies Merchant Wholesalers
423940	Jewelry, Watch, Precious Stone, and Precious Metal Merchant Wholesalers
424110	Printing and Writing Paper Merchant Wholesalers
424920	Book, Periodical, and Newspaper Merchant Wholesalers
443112	Radio, Television, and Other Electronics Stores
443130	Camera and Photographic Supplies Stores
448310	Jewelry Stores
451130	Sewing, Needlework, and Piece Goods Stores
451140	Musical Instrument and Supplies Stores
451211	Book Stores
451220	Prerecorded Tape, Compact Disc, and Record Stores
453920	Art Dealers
712110	Museums
812921	Photofinishing Laboratories (except One-Hour)
812922	One-Hour Photofinishing

Group 3	Intellectual Property Production & Distribution
511110	Newspaper Publishers
511120	Periodical Publishers
511130	Book Publishers
511191	Greeting Card Publishers
511199	All Other Publishers
512110	Motion Picture and Video Production
512120	Motion Picture and Video Distribution
512131	Motion Picture Theaters (except Drive-Ins)
512132	Drive-In Motion Picture Theaters
512191	Teleproduction and Other Postproduction Services
512199	Other Motion Picture and Video Industries
512210	Record Production
512220	Integrated Record Production/Distribution
512230	Music Publishers
512240	Sound Recording Studios
512290	Other Sound Recording Industries
515111	Radio Networks
515112	Radio Stations
515120	Television Broadcasting
515210	Cable and Other Subscription Programming
516110	Internet Publishing and Broadcasting
517510	Cable and Other Program Distribution
519110	News Syndicates
519120	Libraries and Archives
532230	Video Tape and Disc Rental
541310	Architectural Services
541320	Landscape Architectural Services
541340	Drafting Services
541410	Interior Design Services
541420	Industrial Design Services
541430	Graphic Design Services
541490	Other Specialized Design Services
541810	Advertising Agencies
541830	Media Buying Agencies
541840	Media Representatives
541850	Display Advertising
541921	Photography Studios, Portrait
541922	Commercial Photography
611610	Fine Arts Schools
711110	Theater Companies and Dinner Theaters
711120	Dance Companies
711130	Musical Groups and Artists
711190	Other Performing Arts Companies
711510	Independent Artists, Writers, and Performers
712120	Historical Sites
712130	Zoos and Botanical Gardens
712190	Nature Parks and Other Similar Institutions

Appendix II.

Resources for Creative Economy Initiatives

**Creative Economy Association of the North Shore in Massachusetts –
www.ceans.org**
CEANS is an advisory and advocacy organization for creative organizations, businesses and individuals located in the North Shore region. Their website provides research and strategies to support and sustain the creative economy in that region.

Creative Economy Resources - www.nasaa-arts.org/artworks/creativeeconomy_resources.html
The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies has put together this page of recommended resources covering the key concepts and strategies, scholarship on the creative economy, materials from various state arts agencies, and links to organizations promoting the cultural economy.

**Grow Wisconsin Creatively -
www.artswisconsin.org/research/creativeeconomy.cfm**
Expansive, up-to-date listings of creative economy programs that help cities remain competitive in the global economy.

Innovation Philadelphia – www.innovationphiladelphia.com
A unique creative economy initiative that focuses on the for-profit creative industry. Main programs include a creative economy investment fund, a creative economy leadership council, and resources for young professionals, new idea generation, and entrepreneurs.

Mt. Auburn Associates – www.mtauburnassociates.com
An economic development consulting firm located in Somerville with reports on the creative economy in the Berkshires, Louisiana, and New York, and the use of tax incentives for arts-related development.

**New England Foundation for the Arts -
www.nefa.org/projinit/thecreativeecon.html**
One of NEFA's major initiatives has been research and resources on the creative economy, including a series of reports contributing some of the earliest and most thorough information that defines our understanding of the creative economy. Another resource available here is the CultureCount database (www.culturecount.org) which provides a searchable database of New England cultural organizations.

Local Chapters of Design Associations

American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) – http://boston.aiga.org

Boston Society of Architects – http://www.architects.org

Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA) – http://www.idsaboston.org

Appendix III

Somerville Census Arts Information

In 2005, the Arts Council encouraged artists and those working in the creative sector to list their occupation in the annual City Census. Through this outreach, they found that of the 53,298 city residents that returned the census form, 1,759 of those, or approximately 3.3% are involved in the creative sector.

To update this figure for 2007, the occupation classification scheme to identify workers in the creative economy based on the article, "The Creative Economy: A New Definition" (DeNatale and Wassall, 2007) was used, which sets out to provide a standard definition of the creative economy so researchers across the nation can compare findings. The occupations counted here are considered core cultural occupations, and align with 2000 Census occupation categories along with the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) Codes used by the federal government.

In 2007, Somerville received Census forms from 52,243 city residents. Of these citizens, 2,563 listed occupations in the creative economy. This means that 4.9% of this sample of Somerville residents is employed in creative occupations or fields. Due to the nature of self-reported data, these figures are too imprecise for statistical analysis. However, the fact that close to 5% of respondents listed occupations in the creative economy is very useful for city branding efforts to show that Somerville is indeed a creative city.

SOC	Census	Occupation	Count
11-2011	40	Advertising and Promotions Managers	30
11-2031	60	Public Relations Managers	43
17-1011		Architects, Except Landscape and Naval	220
17-1012	1300	Landscape Architects	18
17-3011	[Part of 1540]	Architectural and Civil Drafters	15
19-3091	[Part of 1860]	Anthropologists and Archeologists	5
19-3093	[Part of 1860]	Historians	8
25-1031	[Part of 2200]	Architecture Teachers, Postsecondary	unk[1]

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[1] I was unable to ascertain how many postsecondary teachers are in these cultural fields because most residents self-reported "professor" or "college teacher."

25-1061	[Part of 2200]	Anthropology and Archeology Teachers, Postsecondary	unk
25-1062	[Part of 2200]	Area, Ethnic, and Cultural Studies Teachers, Postsecondary	unk
25-1082	[Part of 2200]	Library Science Teachers, Postsecondary	unk
25-1121	[Part of 2200]	Art, Drama, and Music Teachers, Postsecondary	1
25-1122	[Part of 2200]	Communications Teachers, Postsecondary	unk
25-1123	[Part of 2200]	English Language and Literature Teachers, Postsecondary	unk
25-1124	[Part of 2200]	Foreign Language and Literature Teachers, Postsecondary	unk
25-1125	[Part of 2200]	History Teachers, Postsecondary	1
25-4011		Archivists	13
25-4012		Curators	12
25-4013	2400	Museum Technicians and Conservators	9
25-4021	2430	Librarians	167
25-4031	2440	Library Technicians	3
25-9011	[Part of 2550]	Audio-Visual Collections Specialists	unk[2]
27-1011		Art Directors	18
27-1012		Craft Artists	16
27-1013		Fine Artists, Including Painters, Sculptors, and Illustrators	21
27-1013		Multi-Media Artists and Animators	9
27-1014	2600	Artists and Related Workers, All Other	263
27-1021		Commercial and Industrial Designers	12
27-1022		Fashion Designers	10
27-1023		Floral Designers	17
27-1024		Graphic Designers	212
27-1025		Interior Designers	29
27-1026		Merchandise Displayers and Window Trimmers	unk
27-1027		Set and Exhibit Designers	7
27-1029	2630	Designers, All Other	167
27-2011	2700	Actors	21
27-2012	2710	Producers and Directors	58
27-2031		Dancers	23
27-2032	2740	Choreographers	3
27-2041		Music Directors and Composers	11
27-2042	2750	Musicians and Singers	206
27-2099	2760	Entertainers, Performers, Sports and Related Workers, All Other	14
27-3011		Radio and Television Announcers	4
27-3012	2800	Public Address System and Other Announcers	-
27-3021		Broadcast News Analysts	1
27-3022	2810	Reporters and Correspondents	10
27-3031	2820	Public Relations Specialists	4
27-3041	2830	Editors	240
27-3042	2840	Technical Writers	26
27-3043	2850	Writers and Authors	246
27-3099	2860	Media and Communications Workers, All Other	89
27-4011	2900	Audio and Video Equipment Technicians	14
27-4012		Broadcast Technicians	unk[3]
27-4013		Radio Operators	unk

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[2] Any audio-visual collection specialists living in Somerville are probably included in the "librarian" category.
[3] Many media workers listed the broad category of their job (e.g., broadcasting or TV) so I was unable to categorize them into their exact occupation.

27-4014		Sound Engineering Technicians	7
27-4021	2910	Photographers	60
27-4031		Camera Operators, Television, Video, and Motion Picture	6
27-4032	2920	Film and Video Editors	7
27-4099	2960	Media and Communication Equipment Workers, All Other	9
39-3021	4410	Motion Picture Projectionists	2
39-3092	[Part of 4430]	Costume Attendants	3
39-5091	[Part of 4520]	Makeup Artists, Theatrical and Performance	5
41-3011	4800	Advertising Sales Agents	1
43-4121	5320	Library Assistants, Clerical	44
43-9031	5830	Desktop Publishers	2
49-2097	7120	Electronic Home Entertainment Equip. Installers and Repairers	unk
49-9061	[Part of 7430]	Camera and Photographic Equipment Repairers	-
49-9063	[Part of 7430]	Musical Instrument Repairers and Tuners	2
49-9064	[Part of 7430]	Watch Repairers	-
51-5011		Bindery Workers	2
51-5012	8230	Bookbinders	3
51-9071	8750	Jewelers and Precious Stone and Metal Workers	10
51-9123	[Part of 8810]	Painting, Coating, and Decorating Workers	103
51-9131		Photographic Process Workers	1
51-9132	8830	Photographic Processing Machine Operators	unk[4]

[4] It is possible that people who work in photo processing list retail clerk as their occupation since much of it occurs in retail establishments.