Keep Cool Somerville Cooling Strategies Toolkit

Prepared by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council

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MAPC
METROPOLITAN AREA PLANNING COUNCIL

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creating a resilient & carbon neutral somerville

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INTRODUCTION

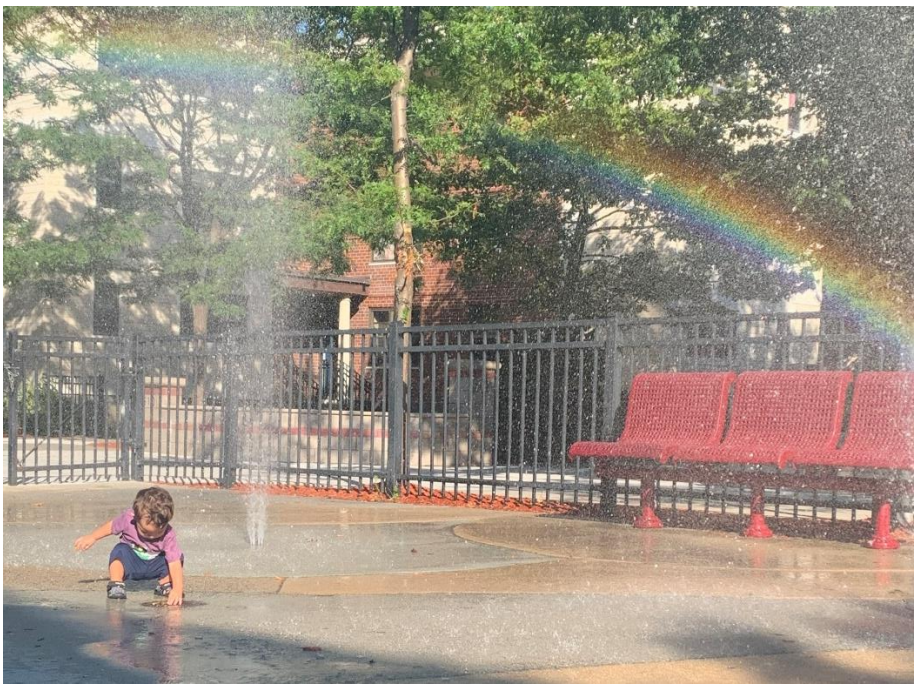

Photo Credit:
Atais Ribeiro, Keep Cool Somerville Photovoice Participant

Project Background

As climate change continues to warm our planet, our neighborhoods can expect hotter summers and more frequent and severe heat waves. The summer of 2020 was among the hottest on record. That summer and fall, the City of Somerville partnered with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council to conduct research on heat preparedness strategies and a series of community engagement activities. The project team sought to understand Somerville residents' and organizations' perceptions of heat-related climate impacts, heat coping mechanisms, and interest in and capacity for heat health interventions. The project team conducted stakeholder interviews, led a photovoice project with resident participants, facilitated resident focus groups, and released a public survey.

The project team used these engagement findings to inform the development of a toolkit of evidence-based and community-supported strategies for long-term summer heat preparedness, with a particular focus on populations most likely to be impacted by extreme heat. The strategies in this toolkit include interventions to promote cooling in people's homes and other community-serving buildings, enhance access to cooling in the public realm, and to empower residents and community groups to mutually address each other's cooling needs.

In 2021, the City of Somerville will build upon this toolkit and the engagement findings to focus on supporting community solutions to address heat. Community organizations and groups will be invited to propose small-scale, pilot projects to improve resilience to heat and a handful of projects will be funded to be implemented over the summer.

COOLING STRATEGIES

COOL BUILDINGS

Improve affordable access to cooling at home.

Strategies 1 - 7, Page 4.

COOL BUILDINGS

Improve the capacity of publicly serving buildings to provide cooling refuge.

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COOL BUILDINGS

Improve access and use of cool, indoor public spaces.

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COOL NEIGHBORHOODS

Integrate cooling infrastructure and amenities into the design of outdoor spaces.

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COOL NEIGHBORHOODS

Enhance programming to promote outdoor cooling.

Strategies 19 - 20, Page 12.

COOL COMMUNITIES

Increase community capacity to promote heat health awareness and access to cooling.

Strategies 21 - 25, Pages 14.

The Keep Cool Somerville Cooling Strategies spreadsheet includes the information summarized in this document as well as additional details about these strategies: equity considerations, description of precedents, success metrics, and links to resources.

COOL BUILDINGS

Improve affordable access to cooling at home.

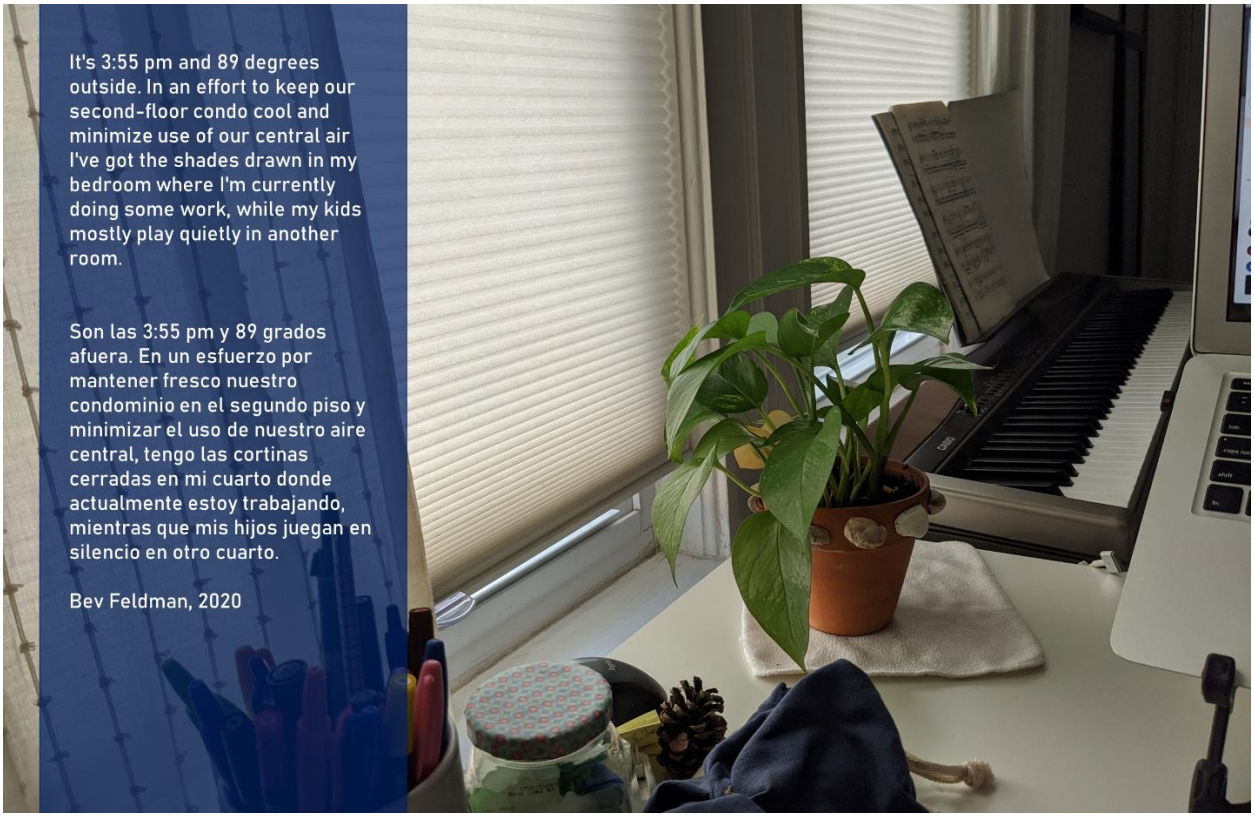

Photo Credit: Bev Feldman, Keep Cool Somerville Photovoice Participant

1. Integrate energy efficiency with healthy home upgrades.

Comprehensive, healthy home upgrades that integrate efficiency measures with other health and safety improvements, such as lead and mold abatement, maximize the potential health co-benefits while leveraging more opportunities for outreach and funding. Most Somerville residents are renters who have limited control over the conditions in the home. Somerville Climate Forward proposes the creation of a rental licensing program, consisting of an energy disclosure requirement. A rental licensing program would require that all rental units be registered with the city and disclose their energy usage to the city and tenants. Integrating energy disclosures would inform prospective tenants about anticipated energy costs, while motivating action by landlords to implement energy upgrades.

Implementation Partners: Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, Housing Division; Inspectional Services Department, Building Division; Rental housing associations; Real estate representatives; Energy utilities

Precedents: Springfield Healthy Homes Program, Boulder SmartRegs Rental Licensing Program

2. Develop home visiting partnerships to expand reach of energy programs.

Home visiting program staff provide a valuable link between medically vulnerable populations and health-supporting resources. They can educate families on heat health risks and prevention measures and can facilitate connections to utility bill assistance and weatherization services. Many home visiting programs also deploy screening and assessment tools that can be modified to include questions related to home cooling needs and heat health risk factors. Conversely, weatherization and energy programs may unknowingly enlist many medically vulnerable individuals who can benefit from referrals to health-related services. Integrating healthy home criteria and questions in home energy audits may also help facilitate additional supports to maximize the health impact of energy programs. Home visiting programs can also support post-home improvement education and evaluation efforts. Partnerships among home visiting, weatherization, and other healthy housing programs have demonstrated significant health and quality of life benefits in communities where they have been deployed.

Implementation Partners: Health and Human Services Department, Visiting Nurses Association, Somerville Cambridge Elder Services, Somerville Family Learning Collaborative, Cambridge Health Alliance, CAP Agencies, Cambridge Fuel Assistance Program, Energy Utilities, MassSave Providers

Precedents: OneTouch Program, Washington Weatherization Plus Health

3. Promote energy efficiency and home cooling through peer-to-peer engagement.

Train and hire residents from frontline communities to conduct peer-to-peer engagement within their neighborhoods and social networks to improve access to energy efficiency, including improvements to enhance in-home cooling. Research on the health impacts of energy efficiency programs has shown that resident education can enhance the impact of efficiency improvements. Peer educators can help market free and low-cost efficiency measures, participate in installation, and follow-up with participating households to ensure they understand how the new features work (e.g., air-source heat pumps, smart thermostats) and what additional measures they can take to prevent heat impacts. Pair engagement with weatherization and energy efficiency workforce training for peer educators to realize co-benefits from green job employment among residents from frontline communities.

Implementation Partners: Youth and Workforce Development Organizations, CAP Agencies, Energy Utilities, MassSave Providers

Precedents: Baltimore Energy Challenge

4. Work with CAP agencies to streamline intake processes for energy programs.

Increase awareness of income eligible energy programs and facilitate participation by working with CAP agencies, utilities, and fuel assistance programs to streamline energy

program intake processes and communications. Community engagement activities consistently support the idea that many Somerville residents and service providers have a difficult time navigating these programs or lack awareness about the programs and about the eligibility criteria. Develop multi-lingual communications materials and integrate enrollment processes into training for outreach partners.

Implementation Partners: CAP Agencies, Eversource, City of Cambridge Fuel Assistance Program, Somerville Housing Division, Office of Immigrant Affairs

5. Advocate to expand LIHEAP assistance to cover cooling costs.

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is a federally funded program that provides eligible households with help paying a portion of their winter heating bills. The increasing costs of cooling homes through hotter summers and longer and more severe heat waves has heightened awareness of utility cost burdens associated with cooling costs. In many states across the country, LIHEAP provides assistance year-round or over two periods, the winter heating season and summer cooling season. In Massachusetts, LIHEAP only aids households during the winter. Expanding LIHEAP to provide assistance in the summer or year-round will help improve outcomes for households who currently ration cooling due to costs. Advocates for expanding the program must also advocate for increasing the overall federal funding allocation to LIHEAP to ensure summer cooling assistance does not take away from winter heating assistance.

Implementation Partners: MMC Climate Task Force, Barr 2020 Extreme Heat Task Force participants, CAP agencies, elected officials

6. Distribute fans and AC units as a low-barrier cooling strategy.

Access to fans and air conditioning are evidence-based methods to prevent heat-related illness, yet many low-income households lack access to this equipment or have inefficient, older units. Distributing fans or AC units is a relatively low-cost intervention and can be leveraged to connect households to energy programs that can deliver more efficient cooling with longer term savings. Some families may be eligible to have an older AC unit swapped out for a newer, more efficient model through a weatherization program. In the summer of 2020, the City of Somerville solicited AC unit donations from the public to distribute to older adults in need. Engagement participants suggested an AC or fan loan program modeled after tool lending libraries, which would give families without off-season storage the option of returning their AC unit or fan at the end of the season. These units can then be loaned out again the following cooling season.

Implementation Partners: Somerville Health and Human Services, Somerville Office of Immigrant Affairs, Somerville Public Library, CAPIC, Cambridge Fuel Assistance Program, Somerville Family Learning Collaborative

Precedent: 2020 COVID-Safe Cooling Grant Program

7. Support older adults with installation and removal of AC units.

Supporting older adults with installation and removal of AC units will help expand access to in-home cooling for people with mobility impairments. The program could be modeled on the Somerville Teen Snow Shoveling Program, which pays teens to shovel out snow at the homes of older adults. Alternatively, older adults could be provided with a small stipend to pay an individual to install and remove an AC unit in their home at the end of the season.

Implementation Partners: Somerville Cambridge Elder Services, Council on Aging

Precedent: Somerville Teen Snow Shoveling Program

Improve the capacity of public serving buildings to provide cooling refuge.

8. Improve energy efficiency in municipal buildings that host community programming, like schools and libraries.

Somerville Climate Forward outlines a process for integrating energy efficiency and renewable energy generation into new and renovated municipal buildings. These upgrades need to prioritize health and safety of building occupants, especially in school buildings and other municipal buildings hosting summer programming. Prioritization may consist of ensuring adequate ventilation and energy-efficient cooling technologies across all new or renovated buildings. Transitional cooling capacity at sites awaiting renovation can be enhanced by increasing outdoor seating and erecting shade canopies to allow for outdoor programming and by installing window or mobile unit AC in indoor spaces.

Implementation Partners: Office of Sustainability and Environment, Capital Projects, Department of Public Works, Somerville Public Schools, Somerville Public Library

9. Support implementation of energy efficiency in community-serving private spaces.

Energy efficiency measures can ensure that community-serving private spaces such as childcare centers, religious buildings, and commercial buildings leased by community-serving organizations can cost-effectively serve the cooling needs of residents throughout the summer. The City can support the implementation of energy upgrades in these spaces through targeted outreach, technical assistance, and incentives, such as small grants to help cover upfront costs with efficiency improvements. The City can encourage property owners to leverage the Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program to help finance upgrades in larger buildings and the Mass Save Small Business Program for smaller sites, such as childcare centers. As transitional measures, the city could support AC procurement and utility costs associated with operating cooling equipment.

Implementation Partners: Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, Commercial and Non-Profit Property Owners, Mass Save Small Business Program

Precedents: Property Assessed Clean Energy, Mass Save Small Business Program

10. Promote cool roofs and building facades on existing buildings.

A cool roof may consist of a green or living roof that uses green infrastructure to store water, reduce heat, and improve air quality, or a reflective roof, which has a finishing surface that reflects light to reduce temperature. Cool roofs can help manage storm water, reduce heating loads in a building, and mitigate urban heat island effect, depending on the type of roof installed. Cool building facades similarly consist of vegetated walls or high albedo wall treatments designed to reflect light and cool the interior of the building. Different approaches might be more applicable for different sites and building typologies. Somerville's updated zoning ordinance includes requirements for roof reflectivity and provides developers points towards a Green Score for integration of green roofs into new buildings. Demonstration projects, targeted outreach, technical assistance, such as design and procurement support, and financial or regulatory incentives may also help promote their adoption in existing buildings.

Implementation Partners: Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, Property Owners

Precedents: New York City CoolRoofs Program, Louisville Cool Roof Rebate Program

Improve access and use of cool, indoor public spaces.

11. Explore ways to incentivize use of informal cooling centers.

Community-serving private spaces can provide an air-conditioned refuge for residents who lack adequate in-home cooling, effectively functioning as informal cooling centers. Malls, theaters, museums, religious buildings, restaurants, shelters, and spaces leased by community-serving organizations can all provide cooling relief. However, the cost of using these spaces or of maintaining them open during heat events can be a barrier to their use among populations at greatest risk of extreme heat impacts. The city should explore providing incentives to owners or lease holders of these spaces in exchange for maintaining spaces open and free to use during heat events. The city can also facilitate their use among residents by working with partners to provide free transportation or entry to these locations. A Somerville Public Library card already provides free admission to several air-conditioned and outdoor cultural attractions. The City should promote these attractions as cooling destinations and remove barriers to their use, such as by providing free transportation or working with partners to organize field trips.

Implementation Partners: Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, Commercial and Non-Profit Property Owners, Business Associations, Somerville Public Library, Community Serving Organizations

Precedent: New York City CoolRoofs Program (free to low-cost options for community-serving buildings)

12. Enhance programming at city-run cooling centers to promote their use.

A cooling center is an air-conditioned public space that has been designated to provide respite and safety during extreme heat events. Publicly owned buildings, such as libraries, schools, or recreation centers are typical locations for cooling centers. Utilization may be highest in multi-purpose spaces, such as senior centers and libraries, where people can access air conditioning while engaging in other activities. Ensuring inclusive, multi-generational programming in cooling centers and branding these spaces appropriately can help overcome the stigma of cooling centers as places for "old people" or spaces where people "just sit around." Community-generated recommendations for these spaces included arts and cultural events, skills-building workshops, meals, free WiFi, and specific spaces for teens. Providing cooling spaces where people can also access phones and computers, laundry, and service providers would enhance the value of these spaces for people experiencing homelessness.

Implementation Partners: Parks and Recreation Department, Somerville Public Libraries, Health and Human Services Department, Somerville Arts Council, Community Groups

COOL NEIGHBORHOODS

Integrate cooling infrastructure and amenities into the design of outdoor spaces.

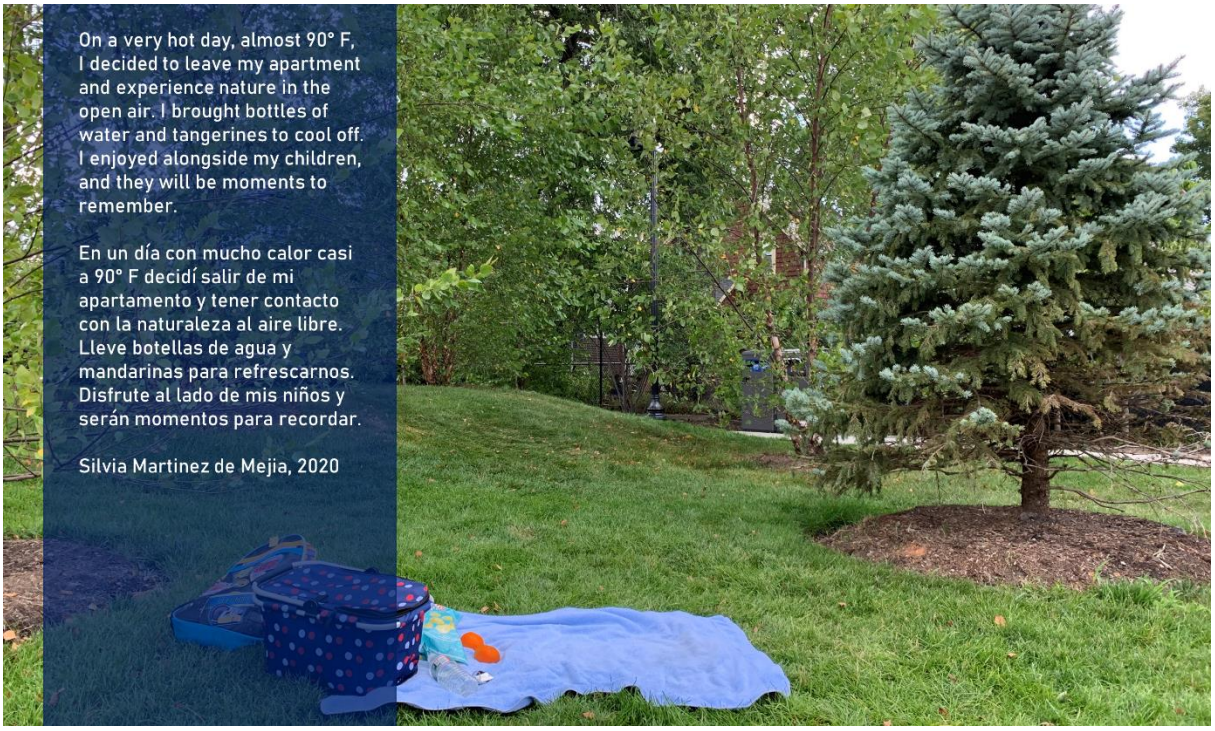

Photo Credit: Silvia Martinez de Mejia, Keep Cool Somerville Photovoice Participant

13. Develop cooling design standards and guidelines for parks and other civic spaces.

Develop specific cooling design standards and guidelines, which developers and designers can apply to new development and to upgrades of parks, commons, plazas, and other civic spaces. The City of Somerville overhauled its zoning ordinance in 2019. The updated ordinance includes several standards and guidelines supportive of urban heat mitigation and resilience, including standards related to on-building shading features, high reflectance building and pavement surfaces, tree canopy, etc. The city can explore opportunities to strengthen measures promoting urban cooling. Based on resident feedback, the City can develop additional guidance and standards related to vegetated and structural shade, water features, drinking fountains, seating, etc. The City can additionally support the integration of these features by developing education materials and training for the urban design commission and planning board members on heat impacts and urban design interventions.

Implementation Partners: Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development

Precedent: New South Wales Shade Guidance

14. Develop a connected network of cool corridors.

Deploy a connected network of cooling features along transit corridors and neighborhood streets to promote walking and cycling, even in hotter weather. Integrate shading, parklets, cool pavements, green infrastructure, seating, and drinking fountains into streetscape improvements. Shading features can be landscaped, such as trees or vegetated screens, or artificial shade structures. Collaborate with MBTA to prioritize bus shading and seating at key destinations, such as bus stops outside grocery stores. Advertise cool corridors using creative wayfinding, maps, and as part of an app that shares location of other cooling amenities and heat health information. Leverage neighborhood planning processes to work with residents and neighborhood groups to identify existing cool routes to connect into the network and hot routes to target for improvements. Facilitate cool corridor planning by developing a catalog of streetscape cooling improvements.

Implementation Partners: Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, Engineering Department, Somerville Arts Council

Precedents: Medellin's Corredores Verdes, Melbourne Cool Routes, Greater Phoenix Nature's Cooling Systems Project

15. Include cooling green infrastructure in routine streetscape upgrades.

Promote shading and evaporative cooling by integrating green infrastructure into routine streetscape upgrades. Evaluate specific green infrastructure interventions and site specific approaches to identify those which have the greatest impact on reducing urban heat island. Integrate measures into the development of a cool corridor network. Develop demonstration projects and integrate into climate change and heat preparedness messaging and education efforts. Conduct pre-and post-intervention monitoring of ambient temperature and thermal comfort to support evaluation and comparison of green infrastructure cooling impact.

Implementation Partners: Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, Engineering Department, Somerville Department of Public Works

Precedents: City of Mesa Low Impact Development Toolkit

16. Expand, preserve, and maintain the urban tree canopy.

Support implementation of the City's recently updated Urban Forest Management Plan, which identifies goals and strategies to expand, preserve, and maintain the City's urban tree canopy. The Urban Forestry Division most recently planted 140 trees during the Fall 2020 planting season. Help the Division maintain adequate resources for these activities and amplify messaging to maintain resident support and engagement in these efforts.

Implementation Partners: Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, Non-profit and corporate tree planting partners

17. Deploy shade structures and other cooling amenities as public art.

Encourage and facilitate the implementation of public art installations and programming that promotes urban cooling. Cooling improvements that can be deployed as public art include shade structures, benches, and water features. Arts programming in public cooling spaces, cultural activities that promote social cohesion, and creative messaging can also help to enhance public safety and awareness and use of cooling resources. The City can help bring together local artists with residents, engineers, landscape architects, and environmental and public health specialists to develop a collective understanding of urban heat risks, opportunities to enhance cooling, and to develop criteria for public art projects deployed as cooling infrastructure. Residents and community groups could be instrumental in identifying sites for cooling art installations through neighborhood planning. Community participation in the design process for these projects can also help ensure that they reflect the cultural preferences and needs of populations at greatest risk to heat impacts.

Implementation Partners: Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, Somerville Department of Public Works, Somerville Arts Council

Precedents: Phoenix SunBLOCK Project, Los Angeles Welcome to Western

18. Develop guidance for homeowners on low-cost home cooling strategies.

Develop guidance for homeowners on home improvements and low-cost measures that can help keep their home cool during the summer and reduce their property's contribution to the urban heat island effect. These measures can include planting and preserving shade trees, opting for high-albedo roofing materials and paints, installing pervious and high-albedo pavement materials, weather stripping doors and sills, covering sunny windows during the day-time heat, etc. Using the Flood Ready Somerville project as a precedent, the City can share this information through a series of infographics, videos, and a checklist. Develop specific messaging and educational materials for landscaping businesses and local contractors who can assist in guiding homeowners towards cooling-related home improvements. Partner with residents and community groups to amplify City messaging about these techniques.

Implementation Partners: Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, Landscape and Construction Businesses, Residential Property Owners

Precedents: Flood Ready Somerville, Canton Resilience at Home Project

Enhance programming to promote outdoor cooling.

19. Monitor and evaluate public pool usage and adapt programming to community needs.

Ensure that public pools remain an accessible and well-maintained cooling asset. Monitoring pool usage and adapt programming and scheduling to meet community needs. Ensure adequate resources for public pool programming, staffing, and maintenance. The City of Somerville operates two public pools, Dilboy and Kennedy Pools, while the Department of

Conservation and Recreation operates a third at Foss Park. Pool attendance currently peaks mid-summer and declines as staff and youth return to school. However, engagement participants advocated for expanding pool hours and season.

Implementation Partners: Parks and Recreation Department

Precedent: Austin My Park, My Pool, My City Artist Residency

20. Deploy cooling pop-ups in parks and shared streets.

Partner with community organizations, neighborhood groups, and artists to design a series of cooling pop-up installations and events in parks, neighborhood streets, and other civic spaces. The City's Parks and Recreation Department already operates a series of popular outdoor water activity days for youth throughout the summer. The City can build upon these efforts to bring temporary cooling relief and play to different locations in the City. Programming should be inclusive of a variety of age groups, abilities, and user preferences. These pop-ups can include temporary and movable shade structures, water play features, shaded outdoor arts and recreation programming, etc. The City can work with neighborhood and community groups to include cooling pop-ups as part of block parties and summer outdoor festivals. Nighttime cultural and arts pop-ups can also be considered to allow for residents to safely cool down outside during the coolest part of the day.

Implementation Partners: Parks and Recreation Department, Public Works Department, Somerville Arts Council, Community Serving Organizations

Precedent: Lexington SplashJAM

Increase community capacity to promote heat health awareness and access to cooling.

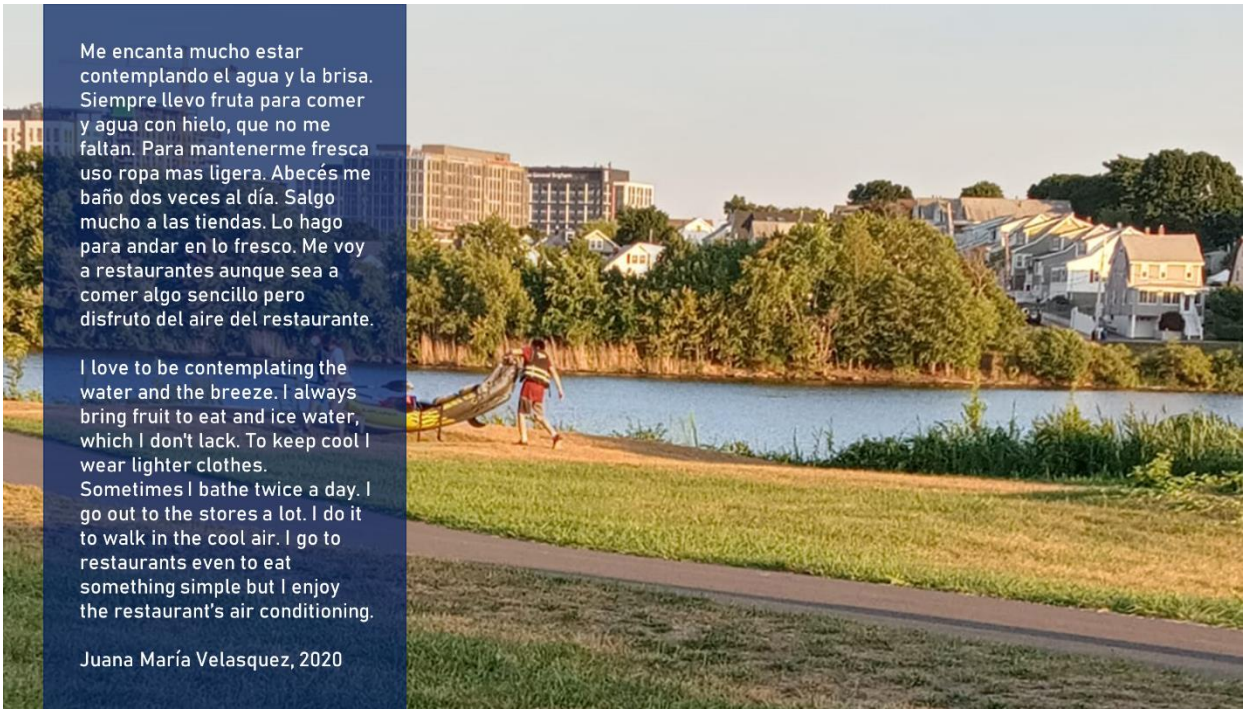

Photo Credit: Juana Maria Velasquez, Keep Cool Somerville Photovoice Participant

21. Develop heat health and energy efficiency training for trusted messengers and neighborhood pods.

Launch a training program for caregivers, social workers, community groups, neighborhood pods, meteorologists, and other trusted messengers to help them recognize the symptoms of heat-related illness and to share information on how to address heat health risk factors. These 'trusted messengers' can amplify city public health communications and more effectively reach frontline communities. Work with frontline communities and messenger audiences to develop training curriculum. Provide stipends to support frontline community participation in training and train-the-trainer models. Increase capacity for climate advocacy and neighborhood change efforts by covering issues beyond heat health first aid and behavior change interventions.

Implementation Partners: Somerville Health and Human Services, Communications and Community Engagement Department, Community based organizations, neighborhood associations, mutual aid groups

Precedents: New York City Home Health Aide Heat Training, MGH Institute of Health Professions Center for Climate Change, Climate Justice, and Health

22. Partner with health providers to screen and connect individuals at higher risk for heat impacts to heat health resources.

Partner with local healthcare providers to screen patients for heat-sensitive health conditions and access to cooling resources. Based on this information, healthcare providers can better educate residents on heat health risks and connect them to interventions to increase patients resilience to heat. Health providers presently screen patients with COVID-19 for food insecurity, which facilitates access to food resources for people in recovery. Similarly, some health providers screen patients for housing insecurity and then connect these patients to housing search or other tenancy supports. Integrating a heat screening protocol into local healthcare will at the very least require health provider training and funding for and coordination of potential interventions.

Implementation Partners: Somerville Health and Human Services, Cambridge Health Alliance

Precedents: Garrison-Trotter Neighborhood Association-led COVID-Safe Cooling Project

23. Engage workers and employers to better understand workplace heat exposures and identify effective interventions.

Workers at risk of extreme heat exposure and health impacts include outdoor workers and workers in hot environments, such as restaurant workers and housekeepers in non-air-conditioned homes. Under OSHA law, employers are responsible for providing workplaces free of known safety hazards. This includes protecting workers from extreme heat. However, these protections are not uniformly upheld and climate change is expanding the number and type of workplaces where extreme heat is a potential hazard, requiring education for workers and employers. The City of Somerville can begin addressing these potential risks by working with unions, labor groups, and responsible employers to identify which worker populations are most at risk and to identify safety measures to incorporate into communications, training, and standards for local workers and employers.

Implementation Partners: Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development, Office of Health and Human Services, Communications and Community Engagement Department, Somerville Worker Center, Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Health and Safety, Somerville Chamber of Commerce

24. Develop creative heat health messaging campaigns.

Develop creative heat health messaging campaigns to share information about extreme heat risks, prevention measures, and resources. Work with community-based organizations and other service providers to amplify messaging and to tailor these messages to specific audiences, including older adults, parents of young children, workers, immigrants, and people with underlying health conditions. Resource and encourage resident-led communications by leveraging residents' existing knowledge. For example, the City could encourage Climate Ambassadors and other resident-led groups to develop a one-minute video series of "cooling coping hacks" to share examples of coping strategies residents shared through the Keep Cool Somerville engagement process. Messaging should be culturally and linguistically inclusive and responsive to norms of immigrant communities from warmer climates. The City and its

partners could post communications materials in highly visible locations, such as bus shelters, store windows, community messaging boards, and social media.

Implementation Partners: Communications and Community Engagement Department, Office of Health and Human Services, Somerville Arts Councill, Somerville Media Center

Precedents: Ahmedabad Heat Action Plan

25. Continue to engage communities most at risk of heat-related health impacts to advance equitable heat preparedness.

Continue to engage with communities most at risk of experience health impacts from climate-driven heat to understand their needs and to leverage their experience and expertise for equitable heat preparedness planning in Somerville. Priority populations should include older adults, people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, low-income families, immigrants, persons with disabilities, people in occupations with high heat exposure, sports and recreation groups, and youth.

Implementation Partners: Council on Aging, Disability Commission, Office of Immigrant Affairs, Somerville Family Learning Collaborative, Health and Human Services, Somerville Homeless Coalition, Parks and Recreation, community-based organizations