

**START - Central Hill Park:** In 1870, Central Hill was chosen over Prospect Hill to be the Town of Somerville's civic center and the site of its first public park. The 38 acre tract was purchased from Jacob Shepard of Boston for \$38,000. The overall campus has evolved a lot over time. City Hall was originally constructed in 1852 to be Somerville's first high school. It was then enlarged and later altered to its current appearance in 1924. A former fire station, at the corner of Highland and Walnut, was repurposed as an annex to City Hall and removed in 1913 for construction of the current Central Library. The central section of the current High School was built as the English High School in 1895, and the current east and west wings are located where once were the Latin High School (1872) and a library building (1885).



East of the Latin School, the City erected stone battery walls in 1885 within the lines of the "French Redoubt" built by the Revolutionary Army in 1775 as part of the besieging lines of Boston. The park, reduced in size due to the expansion of the high school in 1986, still contains two of the original cannons used in the Civil War and donated by Congress, although some have been relocated to Gettysburg. Also note the Civil War Soldiers and Sailor's Monument, reputed to be the first monument erected by a municipality to the Civil War. Created by Augustus Lukeman, a prominent sculptor and a student of Daniel Chester French with many sculptures south of the Mason-Dixon line, it was dedicated on May 3, 1908. The angel is giving blessings to the Union soldier about to go off to war.

**1: The Somerville Community Growing Center (SGC)** sits on the former site of the Bell School. This 12-room elementary school, designed by Sheperd S. Woodcock, was completed in 1874 and named after Luther Vose Bell. Dr. Bell, a distinguished physician, was the first chair of the Somerville School Board (formed in 1843) and a superintendent of the McLean Asylum. He volunteered to serve in the Union Army as a surgeon of the Eleventh Massachusetts Regiment, and died of illness in 1862 following the Battle of Bull Run.



The SGC was designed and built through the efforts of several small City bodies, known as the Somerville Pride Committee, in the early 1990s.

The Center provides a hands-on learning environment for local youth to learn about the natural world, science, community service, and cultural issues, as well as a unique community garden space for both environmental education programming and cultural performances. Maintained by volunteers the Center is a model for collaboration between city government and local nonprofit and community agencies.

**2: Nunziato Field** was dedicated to recreational use in 1997 and is located on the former Southern Junior High School site. In 1916, the Somerville School Committee voted to establish what became the City's three junior high schools -- the Northeastern, the Southern and the Western. All three were in operation by 1924, and remained in service until 1983, when the City changed to an elementary and high school system. The Southern became the Somerville High School Annex until the 1987-1988 school year, and was demolished shortly thereafter. The western portion of the field is notable as Somerville's first dog park, an off-leash recreational area opened in April 2006.



**3: Prospect Hill Park** was the site of camps and fortifications built after the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775. The Battle of Prospect Hill occurred when colonial forces engaged British troops retreating from Lexington and Concord. The first flag of the United Colonists was raised on January 1, 1776, on the highest point of the hill.

During the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the profile of Prospect Hill was greatly altered due to the removal of soil to infill the nearby Miller's River, south of Union Square. In April 1896, a group of citizens calling themselves the Prospect Hill Park Association was formed in order to preserve the historic site. In 1903, a granite tower was built to commemorate the role of Prospect Hill during the American Revolution. The tower stands at the original height of the hill.



**4:** On the other half of the site, **Corbett-McKenna Park** enjoys a superb panorama of southern Somerville and the Boston skyline. Renovated 2003-2004 the park designers built on two levels to capitalize on the magnificent views, and create a historical theme.

**5 - Zero New Washington Street:** Another popular Off Leash Recreational Area for dogs has been creatively created on an awkwardly shaped and otherwise neglected parcel of land near the Cobble Hill Apartments development. The half-acre fully accessible park was opened in November 2010, with many amenities, including 50 new trees, re-purposed granite curbing from the Somerville Ave reconstruction, LED lighting, and a landscaped community area with tables and chairs.



**6:** A well-used park for many decades, **Glen Park** was totally redesigned and expanded in 2003 in conjunction with the construction of the Capuano Early Childhood Education Center. Several older Italianate houses on Franklin St. were demolished for the major project. Serving the needs of both the school and the larger community, the park now incorporates a community garden, a basketball court, and a turf soccer field. New playground equipment sits alongside new trees, benches, and tables.

**7 - East Somerville Community School:** Following a major fire in 2007, the school and playground area are being rebuilt, with an opening expected in 2013.

**8 - Harris Park:** As part of a land swap recently completed by the City, Harris Park will be relocated from its current unsuitable site (C) next to I-93, to the former site of multiple garages (F) further south on Cross St. E, in closer proximity to the local community, including the Cross Street Youth Center.





**9: Foss Park**, Once known as “Broadway Park,” was laid out by City Engineer Charles Elliott in 1875 on low lying lands near the intersection of Broadway and today’s McGrath Highway. The central feature was a large pond, suitable for swimming and skating. Fears of polio closed the pond in 1949, and it was later filled in.

The park was renamed after Saxton Conant Foss, a Somerville resident and Army Private who died during World War I. Today, it remains one of Somerville’s largest parks featuring a playground, fields for soccer and baseball, courts for tennis and basketball, as well as a swimming pool and spray park.



Two historic stone markers lie within Foss Park showing the locus of the Middlesex Canal which provided a continuous waterway between the nearby Mystic River and the Middlesex River in Lowell. Completed in 1803, the canal was closed in 1851, following the introduction of the Boston & Lowell railroad in the 1840s, making canal travel no longer profitable.

**10: Grimmons Park** lies on the site of the former Grimmons Elementary School, named in commemoration of Charles A. Grimmons, Somerville’s Mayor from 1906 to 1909. Opened to elementary school students in 1930, it was closed in June 1980, along with 4 other elementary schools, due to declining enrollment and the fiscal crisis created by Proposition 2-1/2. The land was sold to a developer for 24 new townhouses, but a



portion was retained to construct the Park, opened in 1984. The historic archway of the former School and a timeline telling the site’s history was incorporated within the design. The park was renovated in 2009, partially funded by a \$1,000,000 grant from IKEA for park improvements throughout Somerville, and received a 2011 Merit Award from the Boston Society of Landscape Architects.

**11: The Blessing of the Bay Boathouse** is named after the seafaring ship commissioned by the first Governor of Massachusetts, John Winthrop. Located where the ship was launched on July 4, 1631, the boathouse hosts the Mystic River Herring Run and Paddle sponsored annually by the Mystic River Watershed Association. This event celebrates the return of the herring to the Mystic River, where they swim upstream to spawn. From here, our route heads upstream along the:

**Mystic River Reservation Bikeway:** The banks of the Mystic River are almost entirely publicly owned, from the Amelia Earhart Dam at the mouth of the Mystic Lakes, making it one of the Commonwealth’s best protected streams. The river has been much altered since the 1800’s when its shores were largely salt marsh. The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) oversees a series of bicycle paths running along both sides of the Mystic River in Somerville and Medford.



**12: Tufts Park (Medford)** is located on Main Street and is 10.6 acres consisting of four softball fields, one youth soccer fields, one basketball court, one tot lot and a swimming pool.

**13: Nathan Tufts Park** has a long and significant history within Somerville. Within it lies the historic Powder House, featured in the City Seal. The Powder House was built in 1704 by John Maillet as a windmill for milling grain from area farmers. In 1747 it was sold to the Province of Massachusetts for storage of gunpowder. The first act of the Revolutionary War took place in 1774 when the British marched from Boston and seized the gunpowder from the local militia here.



In 1818 the Commonwealth sold the land and buildings to farmer Peter Tufts. In 1892 the Tufts family presented the land to the City with the requirement that the park be named after Peter’s son Nathan. The Powder House was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1975, and locally designated as a historic district in 1985. The City undertook major restoration work on it in 2001 and received a Preservation Award from the SHPC in 2002.

From 1935-1936, WPA workers built the Field House within the park using the granite removed from the demolished railroad station known as the Somerville Highlands, which now hosts Lexington Park, a later stop on this tour. Over the years the Field House has housed several City uses, including the Draft Board, the Recreation Dept., and the Traffic and Parking. Dept.

In 2000, the City created a Master Plan for the Park using a State grant and then undertook extensive work to implement it. This project included a hands-on interpretive program that strategically installed historic objects in appropriate sections of the park, representing different land uses over the centuries. A brochure was also produced to highlight the park’s historic features and timeline that can be found in a box on the Field House. The overall project earned the City its first Preservation Award from the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

**14: Hodgkins-Curtin Park** is located on the site of the former school named after William H. Hodgkins, a state senator, Civil War veteran, and the eighth Mayor of Somerville, from 1892-1896. A three-story brick building was constructed in 1896 to replace the small school house previously on site. The school was slated for demolition in January 1973, but fire destroyed it shortly before dismantling happened. The current park is also named for another former Somerville resident, Corporal Donald L. Curtin, who died in 1969 at the tender age of 24, while serving in Vietnam.



At 1.5 acres, it is one of the largest public open spaces in Somerville owned by the City. Renovations completed in 2010 preserve the basic layout of the popular playground, long known as the “Yellow Park.” The ball field accommodates Little League baseball, family outings, City festivals and many public events.

**15 - Linear Park:** Created in the mid-1980s in tandem with the Red Line Extension to Alewife, this mile-long park links Somerville and Cambridge with the Minuteman Bikeway in Arlington, Lexington and points beyond. Similar to how the extension of the railways from Boston through Davis Square in 1870-71 prompted full-scale development of the area thereafter, this new recreational path has encouraged adaptive reuse of many buildings and land area. Several former industrial properties have been converted to new uses on the western end, including the Comfort Pillow factory and M.W. Carr Co. complex into spacious residential units and live-work space, and on the eastern section of the Linear path with the former soap factory to Mix-It Studios.



**16: Seven Hills Park** is named for Somerville's seven previously prominent hills, each of which originally served a different purpose, including dairy farming, apple growing, and residential uses. Opened in 1990 on a former railroad signal site, the ¾-acre park is popular with both residents and visitors alike, who enjoy its welcome open space, central location in the heart of Davis Square, and historical markers. Giant weathervane-like structures hold seven brightly-colored sculptures – an alewife fish, a clock, a cow, a tree, a fort, and two buildings. The objects recall the community's history and evolving land uses in a fun and whimsical way.



**17 - Statue Park:** Situated in the heart of Davis Square, on a site previously occupied by railroad tracks, a control tower and a parking lot, this park takes its name from the statues added to the square in the 1980s as part of the MBTA's Arts on the Line program. The square was substantially reconfigured in the early 1980s during construction of the Red Line Extension from Harvard to Alewife. The statues are based upon actual Davis Square residents, and were ravaged over time by the weather, explaining their unfortunate facial re-castings.



**18:** Located on the edge of Davis Square, **Kenney Park** was named after Marine PFC John J. Kenney, who died too young in February 1969 at age 18 during service in Vietnam.

The site formerly housed the Highland Schoolhouse, built in 1880 and expanded to twelve rooms in 1890. In 1944 the school was renamed after Dr. Herbert Cholerton, a physician at Somerville Hospital. The school was demolished in 1969.



**19: The Somerville Community Path**, which also houses the Bikeway Community Garden, runs along the former route of the Lexington and Arlington Railroad established in 1870, and will eventually connect the Minuteman Bikeway and the Linear Park to the Charles River and downtown Boston. The current 0.8 mile path goes east from Grove Street on the edge of Davis Square to Cedar Street.



The City, in collaboration with the Friends of the Community Path and the MBTA, hopes to extend the path another 2.5 miles eastward alongside the rights-of-way for the MBTA commuter rail and future Green Line Extension. This would add approximately five acres to Somerville's current open space, and enable possibly many new pocket parks and small recreational spaces connected to the path.

**20 - Lexington Park:** As noted earlier this was the site of the former Somerville Highlands station, a granite structure serving the Arlington and Lexington Branch of the Boston & Maine Railroad between 1888 and 1926. It was well positioned for the residents commuting to Boston from the nearby Somerville Highlands subdivision, of mostly one- and two-family houses. The subdivision, constructed on former brickyard land, became well endowed with hundreds of shade trees and a landscaped boulevard that still graces Highland Road.



**21: Morse-Kelley Playground** is located on a former schoolhouse site constructed in 1869 and named in honor of Enoch R. Morse, an influential member of the School Board in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and Charles C. Kelley, a long-standing Superintendent of the Somerville Recreation Commission who died in 1969.



One of the City's two most recently renovated parks (along with **22, Dickerman Playground**, further down Craigie Street – which features both an unusual rounded fieldstone wall and a vibrant mural by local artist Joe Barillaro), the new Morse-Kelley Park features the City's first space designed (at the request of the neighborhood) to explicitly welcome skateboarders, and also includes a community garden, a tot lot, a climbing wall, and new monumental iron gateposts. Both parks are expected to be complete by the end of May and open to the public soon afterward in a grand-opening celebration.

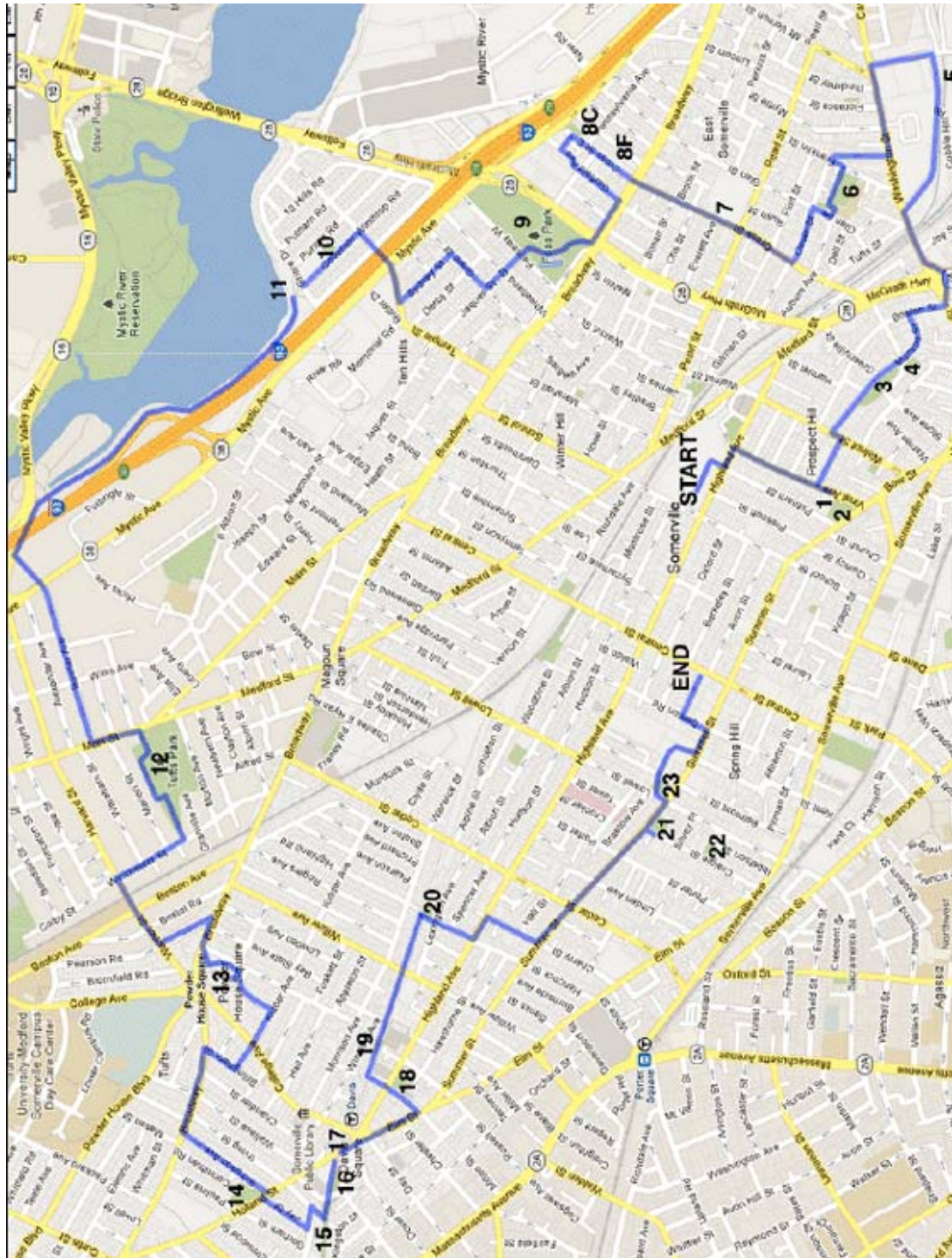


**23: Bailey Park** was built by and named for City Engineer Ernest W. Bailey, designer of Prospect Hill Park and monument, as well as the Armory on Highland Avenue. The site was once part of the estates of Albion M. Prescott and Union Glass Company's Michael J. Doherty. It is also the former site of Somerville's first water tower, built during the administration of Mayor Charles G. Pope in 1889-1891. The tank, 30 feet in



diameter and 100 feet high and estimated to hold about 530,000 gallons, was erected on top of Spring Hill, to provide suitable water pressure to the very highest lands in Somerville. Its water was supplied from a pumping station at the 'City Farm' (now housing the DPW), via Tufts Reservoir near Professor's Row, and ultimately from the Upper Mystic Lake.





## Somerville Parks: Now and Then

11<sup>th</sup> Annual Historic Bike Tour

Sunday, May 20, 2012



Sponsored by the Somerville Bicycle Committee (SBC) and the Somerville Historic Preservation Commission (SHPC). For more information, visit [www.SomervilleBikes.org](http://www.SomervilleBikes.org) & [www.Somervillema.gov/historicpreservation](http://www.Somervillema.gov/historicpreservation).



Credits:

Brochure – Patrick Cooleybeck, John Alan Roderick, and D.J. Chagnon, with Kristi Chase and Brandon Wilson of the SHPC;

Route Map and Cue Sheet – Ron Newman, SBC member. A full map and turn-by-turn cue sheet are printed on a separate sheet and available online at:

[www.SomervilleBikes.org/events](http://www.SomervilleBikes.org/events)

**Joseph A. Curtatone, Mayor**

