City of Somerville

Somerville, MA

Mayor Katjana Ballantyne

Pledge Summary

Somerville is a dense urban area near Boston with approximately 81,000 residents in 4 square miles. The City has many urban parks, but few large open spaces. The City's administration, City staff, and many residents care deeply about the role a city can play to support the monarch butterfly conservation--even in backyards and small gardens. In 2024, the City published its "Somerville Pollinator Action Plan." The document outlines specific ways that residents and City staff can create habitat and support local pollinator populations.

Action Items Committed for 2025

Program and Demonstration Gardens

- Display educational signage at monarch gardens and pollinator habitat.
- Host or support a native seed or plant sale, giveaway or swap.
- Plant or maintain a monarch and pollinator-friendly demonstration garden at City Hall or another prominent or culturally significant community location.
- Add or maintain native milkweed and nectar-producing plants in gardens in the community.
- Launch, expand, or continue an invasive species removal program that will support the re-establishment of native habitat for monarch butterflies and other pollinators.

Systems Change

- Integrate monarch butterfly conservation into the city’s Park Master Plan, Sustainability Plan, Climate Resiliency Plan or other city plans.
- Reduce or eliminate the use of herbicides, pesticides, or other chemicals that are harmful to monarchs and pollinators and urban wildlife.

Communications and Convening

- Engage with developers, planners, landscape architects, and other community leaders and organizers engaged in planning processes to identify opportunities to create monarch habitat.
- Launch or maintain a public communication effort to encourage residents to plant monarch gardens at their homes or in their neighborhoods. (If you have community members who speak a language other than English, we encourage you to also communicate in that language; Champion Pledges must communicate in that language.)
- Engage with gardening leaders and partners (e.g., Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, Nature Centers, Native Plant Society Chapters , other long-standing and influential community leaders) to support monarch butterfly conservation.

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- Create a community-driven educational conservation strategy, initiative, or practice that focuses on and benefits local, underserved residents.
- Engage with city parks and recreation, public works, sustainability, and other relevant staff to identify opportunities to revise and maintain mowing programs and milkweed / native nectar plant planting programs.

Past Pledge Archive

Mayor Name	Program Year	Pledge Date	Achievement
Mayor Jake Wilson	2026	2/23/2026	
Mayor Katjana Ballantyne	2025	3/10/2025	Leadership Circle
Mayor Katjana Ballantyne	2024	8/12/2024	
Mayor Katjana Ballantyne	2022	3/8/2022	

Action Items

In total, how many acres of monarch habitat have been created in your city in the last 12 months? Please limit your answer to only the number of acres in the answer field below (e.g., 3). Note: 1 acre = roughly the size of a football field.

1.08

What was your community's motivation for taking and continuing to work on the Mayors' Monarch Pledge?

The City has been dedicated to cultivating habitat for monarchs and other pollinators in its dense urban environment for many years. This motivation comes from community members, City staff, City Councilors, and Mayors. Between 2022-24, the City developed a Pollinator Action Plan under the direction of Mayor Ballantyne which set clear action items that staff began to implement in 2025.

What resources have been most helpful to you thus far and what new resources would you like to see to help meet your goals? What resources would be useful to help expand equitable engagement in community processes and access to high-quality, usable nature?

The Somerville Pollinator Action Plan relied heavily on data from iNaturalist and locally collected citizen science observations. These informed planting plans in the Pollinator Action Plan. Staff will continue to use the resources that came from that planning process. Recommendations for how to engage with residents that don't speak English or are scared of bees/wasps would be most helpful to improving our outreach.

In total, how many individuals have been reached through the Mayors' Monarch Pledge in your community this year (Jan-Dec)? Please limit your answer to only the number of individuals reached in the answer field below (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only.).

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120

Where was the habitat created this year? Example locations may include residences, schools, places of worship, rights-of-way, roadsides, community gardens, shared public spaces, and more.

The City is trying to improve habitat quality in existing parks and adding habitat when parks are renovated or built anew. Much of the land in Somerville is privately owned, so outreach efforts are trying to get the Pollinator Action Plan recommendations into the hands of property owners and renters.

How are you leveraging the Mayors' Monarch Pledge program to engage marginalized communities, such as low-income communities or communities of color?

Given the amount of private property in Somerville, engaging residents of all backgrounds is key to making an impact on pollinator populations. The resources in the Pollinator Action Plan attempt to make planting a garden and caring for it easier (doing less is more!). This is key for folks who may have multiple jobs, families, and limited time. Staff and community groups continue to try to make these resources available to as many people as possible.

Of the total number of individuals engaged, how many youth (0-18) were reached through the Mayors' Monarch Pledge in your community this year (Jan. - Dec.)? If none, please write 0." (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only.)

20

What else should we know about your monarch butterfly conservation efforts over the last year?

2025 was the first year of implementing proposals made in the 2024 Somerville Pollinator Action Plan. Hundreds of plants were planted and resources distributed. City staff continue these efforts in 2026.

Selected Action Items

Engage with city parks and recreation, public works, sustainability, and other relevant staff to identify opportunities to revise and maintain mowing programs and milkweed / native nectar plant planting programs.

Please describe the extent of engagement with these groups and revisions/maintenance implemented for mowing or planting programs.

Interdepartmental staff (including DPW) meet quarterly to discuss implementation of the Somerville Pollinator Action Plan recommendations. In 2025, City staff discussed areas where mowing could be reduced, areas where leaves could remain in garden beds, and where perennials could be left uncut in the winter. The City also hired a maintenance

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company with expertise in pollinator habitat to maintain 12 parks in Somerville. That contract reflects the maintenance guidelines from the Pollinator Action Plan.

How many community organizations and groups participated? Please list them below.

Community organizations and groups (Earthwise Aware, the Somerville Growing Center, the Somerville Garden Club, and Green & Open Somerville) participated in the development of the Pollinator Action Plan and its recommendations in 2023-2024.

Engage with gardening leaders and partners (e.g., Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, Nature Centers, Native Plant Society Chapters , other long-standing and influential community leaders) to support monarch butterfly conservation.

Please describe the extent of engagement with these groups and their monarch butterfly conservation efforts.

The Somerville Garden Club and Somerville Community Growing Center worked throughout 2025 to share information and plants with community members that would increase habitat in Somerville. City of Somerville staff developed outreach materials, had them printed, and distributed them to these groups to support events. City staff helped to promote other local monarch-supporting events, including Earthwise Aware citizen science data collection trainings.

How many community organizations and groups participated? Please list them below.

Somerville Garden Club and Somerville Community Growing Center.

Host or support a native seed or plant sale, giveaway or swap.

How many people attended your event? (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only)

80

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to host the event?

Urban Forestry Committee

How many plants were sold and/or given away at your event? (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only)

200 plugs

Plant or maintain a monarch and pollinator-friendly demonstration garden at City Hall or another prominent or culturally significant community location.

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Where is the demonstration garden located and how does this location relate to the cultural significance of the monarch (if relevant)? (Please provide an address or coordinates, if possible)

Somerville City Hall, 93 Highland Ave, Somerville MA

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

Landscape designer and installer: Offshoots, Inc.

Upload any relevant documents, images, or other attachments related to your effort on this action.

Kennen_072025.jpeg

What is the size of the demonstration garden (in acres)? Please limit your answer to only the number of acres in the answer field below (e.g., 0.5 acres). For reference, 1 acre = 43,560 square feet and is about the size of a football field without the end zones. Note: 1 acre = roughly the size of a football field.

.02

Launch, expand, or continue an invasive species removal program that will support the re-establishment of native habitat for monarch butterflies and other pollinators.

What is the total acreage of land treated to remove invasive plants? Note: 1 acre = roughly the size of a football field.

0

Please describe the extent of revisions or maintenance to invasive species removal programs, as well as the practices or techniques used to remove the invasive plants.

Every year the City actively promotes community involvement in the removal of black swallow-wort. The City does not own large swaths of land, so it relies on the engagement of citizens to remove invasive plants from their own private properties. The City gets the word out through fliers, doorhangers, social media posts, and information on their website. The City also updated its invasive species webpage in 2025 (https://www.somervillema.gov/invasive) to include more resources and information for residents. The City's horticultural maintenance contract includes the removal of invasive plants and invasive removal is always a part of any park renovation or new construction.

Reduce or eliminate the use of herbicides, pesticides, or other chemicals that are harmful to monarchs and pollinators and urban wildlife.

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What is the status of this action? Please limit your answer to either "complete" or "in progress" in the answer field below.

In progress

If this action is In Progress, please describe your progress and a target date when you plan to complete action.

The City does not apply pesticides to its plantings. The City also encourages others to do the same in the Somerville Pollinator Action Plan and its accompanying outreach materials. However, many park construction contractors purchase plants from nurseries that treat plants with pesticides. The City encourages contractors to purchase plants from nurseries that do not treat their plants with neonicotinoids, but in 2025 this was not a requirement. Any plants purchased directly by City staff were sourced from nurseries that do not use neonicotinoids. City staff have also engaged with local designers and garden installers to encourage conversations in the industry about removing neonicotinoids from nursery use. The City will work in 2026 to pilot new specifications for contractors that require them to try and find plants from nurseries that do not use neonicotinoids. Removing pesticides from the nursery industry will remain a state & national effort and City staff and many community members are committed to supporting this effort.

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

Green & Open Somerville, Boston Society for Landscape Architects, Offshoots, Inc.

Add or maintain native milkweed and nectar-producing plants in gardens in the community.

How many plants were planted? (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only)

3763

Please describe your effort in completing this action.

In 2025, the City finished three large pollinator plantings in new park construction projects. They also supplemented existing plantings in parks in early summer and fall with milkweed and other nectar-producing plants. Additionally, the City plants 350 trees a year, some of which support butterflies, and new green infrastructure with pollinator plantings were installed along multiple streets as part of the Spring Hill Sewer Separation project. Finally, the City hired a maintenance company with expertise in pollinator habitat to maintain the pollinator gardens in 12 parks. That maintenance contract reflects the pollinator-friendly guidelines from the Pollinator Action Plan and is intended to care for the planting investments made in 2025 and before that will support monarch butterflies and other pollinators.

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

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Local landscape designers, landscapers, multiple City departments and DPW

Launch or maintain a public communication effort to encourage residents to plant monarch gardens at their homes or in their neighborhoods. (If you have community members who speak a language other than English, we encourage you to also communicate in that language; Champion Pledges must communicate in that language.)

Upload any relevant documents, images, or other attachments related to your effort on this action.

FINAL-Offshoots-SPAP-ResidentToolKit-CoS_online.pdf

Please describe the methods of public communication below (e.g., printed materials, social media, print media).

The City designed, wrote, and printed a PDF booklet that distilled our 2025 Somerville Pollinator Action Plan down into key ideas and actions. This booklet and "top plant" handouts were shared at community events throughout the year. Social media posts promoted pollinator-friendly garden maintenance strategies.

Engage with developers, planners, landscape architects, and other community leaders and organizers engaged in planning processes to identify opportunities to create monarch habitat.

Please describe the extent of engagement with these groups and associated opportunities to create monarch habitat.

City of Somerville staff in the Public Space & Urban Forestry division work to renovate and design new parks. They contract with planners and landscape architects to develop park designs and encourage the use of the Somerville Pollinator Action Plan's data and plant lists. The Plan's monarch-supporting garden designs inspired planting palettes for three parks that opened in 2025 and two more that are under design and will be installed in future years. City staff also make recommendations to developers to plant species that pollinators love on their private property when possible.

Create a community-driven educational conservation strategy, initiative, or practice that focuses on and benefits local, underserved residents.

Please describe the process to create the strategy , the strategy goals and content, and/or results of implementation. Please also identify who was engaged in this process, what partnerships were established, and how you engaged these groups. Provide a link, if possible.

The Somerville Pollinator Action Plan (2024) includes abundant resources for residents to make planting and maintaining a pollinator garden easy. The concise booklet (2025) tries to distill this information down for those who aren't interested in reading the larger plan. These

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booklets were distributed at community events throughout 2025. Community groups like the Somerville Community Growing Center and the Garden Club ran planting workshops in 2025 where they distributed Somerville Pollinator Action Plan signage and the plan resources to traditionally underserved groups. City staff also began conversations with immigrant community liaisons in 2025 and will continue the work in 2026 to make the SPAP resources more available to groups that speak language other than English.

Display educational signage at monarch gardens and pollinator habitat.

How many garden signs are being displayed and where are they located? (Enter WHOLE NUMBERS only)

40

Please describe the educational information on the sign(s), and provide any links to externally purchased sign(s).

The City installed two pollinator garden signs at Junction Park which opened in 2025 to educate visitors about the pollinator garden planting design and which pollinators they may see. Additionally, it launched a Somerville Pollinator Action Plan sign program (with custom signs) where residents who have met certain pollinator garden quality criteria (https://forms.gle/ZE9TwaV4Q2UHCUpg8) can receive a free pollinator champion sign. These signs were distributed to 17 households and put in City gardens with pollinator plantings. "Leave the leaves" signs and "No Mow May/Low Mow Summer" were also put up in City properties by DPW.

Upload any relevant documents, images, or other attachments related to your effort on this action.

Pledge_snapshot.PNG

Integrate monarch butterfly conservation into the city’s Park Master Plan, Sustainability Plan, Climate Resiliency Plan or other city plans.

What community organizations, groups, or leaders (if any) did you partner with or engage to complete this effort?

Many City departments and individuals shared their desires/needs for the development of the Open Space & Recreation Plan. The plan also reflected a resident's presentation on the importance of integrating biodiversity into City goals after going through the City's Climate Ambassador program.

What is the status of this action? Please limit your answer to either "complete" or "in progress" in the answer field below.

Complete

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If this action is Complete, please include the date it was completed and share a 1-2 sentence description. Please include a copy of the policy by uploading or linking below.

In 2025, the City published its Open Space & Recreation Plan. This document reflected biodiversity goals that include implementing the recommendations of the Somerville Pollinator Action Plan. https://voice.somervillema.gov/open-space-and-recreation-plan-update and https://voice.somervillema.gov/somerville-pollinator-action-plan

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