



Traffic Board Public Hearing Minutes

Thursday, February 24, 2022, 6:00PM

Virtual meeting

Traffic Board Members in attendance: Arah Schuur (Chair), Alex Epstein, Joan Liu

Board Members absent: none

City Staff: Kate White from the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD) as Traffic Board Staff Liaison; Brad Rawson, Director of Mobility, OSPCD; Justin Schreiber, Transportation Planner, OSPCD.

Video recording of the hearing: https://youtu.be/_CfkkeGjZMs

Link to the written testimony: <https://www.somervillema.gov/events/2022/02/24/traffic-board-public-hearing>

The meeting began at 6:00 pm and ended at 8:14 pm.

Traffic Board Public Hearing regarding the Somerville Traffic Commission actions at the meeting on November 18, 2021 (Agenda Items 5a-d and 6), making parking regulatory changes for one year for City and school staff on Central Hill, near City Hall, Somerville High School, and the Central Library.

The Chair shared that if the Traffic Board receives a petition relative to a rule or regulation approved by the Traffic Commission, the Traffic Board will host a public hearing and determine by majority vote whether to avoid or affirm the adoption, alteration or repeal of the rule or regulation.

The Traffic Board received an appeal describing the following:

“We the undersigned registered voters of the City of Somerville hereby petition the Somerville Traffic Board to conduct a Public Hearing regarding the Somerville Traffic Commission November 18, 2021, actions making parking regulation changes to Highland Ave to create designated parking for Somerville High School, City Hall staff, and metered parking in front of the Central Library (Agenda items 5 a-d, Item 6).

There was 1) inadequate notice of the meeting to people most affected; 2) previous proposals to address elimination of parking due to high school construction (as early as 8/2019) did not include designated teacher/staff parking in residential spots as a solution; 3) Only 2 residents were part of the working group responding to the pilot proposal despite hundreds of people being affected; 4) the 7am start time of designated teacher/staff parking spots is incompatible with morning turnover (residents have not left when teachers arrive); 5) there was insufficient time to let the alternative parking

proposals suggested to the public in August 2019 play out such as blue bikes, public transit, satellite parking lots.

We believe neighborhood residents, who vote, pay taxes, patronize businesses, and call Highland Ave and surrounding streets their home will be harmed by severely limited parking. The city is creating even more inequality by restricting parking and making it harder for people to go to work. Somerville's general welfare will be harmed by the Commission's actions."

The Chair reiterated the Traffic Board Public Hearing Rules and Regulations approved by the board on October 19, 2021.

As project proponent, the City of Somerville provided a brief presentation prior to the opening of public testimony.

Project Proponent Presentation

Brad Rawson, Director of Mobility for the City of Somerville, provided background information regarding the Central Hill Campus Plan. For the construction of the Somerville High School project and the related open space and playground facilities, most of the historic parking facilities for the Central Hill campus was eliminated. In the development of this plan, the City convened a working group and held a series of public meetings overtime to gather input and share information about managing mobility and parking resources.

B. Rawson described how the City commissioned a series of parking studies focused on the neighborhood around the Central Hill campus including City Hall, Somerville High School (SHS) and the Central Branch Library. The first study was conducted in 2017. The second study was conducted in 2018 and captured changes associated with the first phase of high school construction. Both studies concluded that on-street parking resources in the area were sufficient to meet demand from parking uses displaced from surface parking lots on the campus. The studies also recommended policies to better manage demand for the driving and parking public such as zonal parking for municipal workforce, and incentives to encourage people to travel more by walking, taking transit or biking.

B. Rawson described how the City worked on efforts to increase parking capacity in the surrounding neighborhoods. This included formal requests for proposals from private property owners who might be interested in leasing surface parking lots, but the City was not able to get any viable private partners.

B. Rawson shared how the City worked to increase off-site off-street parking facilities that the City controls such as the lot at the corner of Medford Street and School Street that is capable of handling 16 parking spaces. Other off-site lots included city-owned facilities in East Somerville and Winter Hill to test out whether municipal workforce would use these satellite lots, and then use mass transit, walking, or biking to travel to Central Hill. Staff usage of these satellite lots was low, and the pilot was considered unsuccessful.

B. Rawson described testing a zonal parking program for City Hall, SHS, and Central Branch Library workforce where workers would be assigned to one of the neighborhood's sub-districts to reduce pressure on any given neighborhood street. Outside of this program, the City was successful in working with the MBTA to increase bus frequency along Highland Avenue, especially with the Route 90 service.

B. Rawson shared that the City invested in a free student transit pass program providing unrestricted bus, subway and Zone 1 and 1A commuter rail access for 1,400 SHS, Full Circle, and Next Wave students. The City also expanded the number of Bluebikes stations around the campus and provided free memberships for municipal workforce.

B. Rawson stated that the City is committed to continuing to manage these resources and to balance the needs of all stakeholders. The City looks forward to the opening of the MBTA's Green Line project, community path extension, and completing bridge reconstruction and associated utility work on School and Medford Street bridges. The bridges will create more curbside parking choices. The City-owned Homan's site may be increased in size as the Green Line construction wraps up. It is anticipated that there may be public garage parking opportunities as part of the integrated redevelopment in Gilman Square.

Justin Schreiber, Transportation Planner for the City of Somerville, presented a summary of the Central Hill Parking Pilot. J. Schreiber stated that the Traffic Commission November 18, 2021, Agenda Item #5, is about creating a Central Campus Parking Zone. Parking spaces would require City Hall or SHS permits from 7am to 9am on weekdays during the school year. All parking permits would be permitted after 9am. These new regulations would apply to approximately 52 spaces on Highland Avenue, Walnut Street, School Street, and Medford Street. 43 spaces were previously 2 hour or resident permit only during the day with resident permit parking only overnight. The remaining spaces on School Street were previously City Hall permit only that would be expanded to include school permits.

J. Schreiber stated that the proposal does not provide for all campus staff parking but is intended to provide some predictability on the locations of where staff parking can be found. The proposal is intended to reduce the pressure on heavily used side streets. The pilot was proposed to last one year to allow City staff to collect data and evaluate the impact of the pilot.

J. Schreiber described Agenda Item #6 regarding eight proposed parking meters in front of the central library active from 8am to 8pm. Spaces would revert to resident permit parking from 8pm to 8am. Spaces were previously 2-hour except by permit and resident permit only late at night.

Suzanne Rinfret, Director of Parking for the City of Somerville, described the November 18, 2021, Traffic Commission meeting posting, which included the meeting notice being posted to the City Calendar on November 11, 2021. The meeting agenda was posted on November 15, 2021. S. Rinfret stated that the City typically sends out the calendar notice a week in advance.

S. Rinfret shared that pre-registration was not required to attend the virtual meeting, and the meeting could be accessed by web or phone. The meeting was recorded and posted on the City website. At the meeting, following commissioner and public comment, the commission voted to approve the proposal. The regulations were advertised for three weeks with notices in the Somerville Times and Somerville News Weekly, as required, before taking effect. Implementation began in the last week of January but was not completed due to weather. Work was halted upon receipt of the petition. Meters were not installed but the new 7am-9am regulation signs were installed.

Traffic Board Discussion of Project Proponent Presentation

J. Liu asked if any of the regulations were in effect. J. Schreiber answered that portions of Agenda Item #5 are in effect. City staff were able to hang signs on existing poles but were not able to create new

signposts. Most of the spaces along Highland Ave are under the new regulations but not on one side of Walnut Street or both sides of School Street. Agenda Item #6 is not in effect because it requires new meter poles.

A. Schuur asked for City staff to clarify when the one-year of the pilot began if all work was not completed. J. Schreiber described how the City does not consider the pilot to have started without all the regulations in place. The City was planning communications roll out to staff to make them aware of the spaces but have not yet.

J. Liu asked for clarity on evaluation at the end of the pilot. J. Schreiber described that the main goal is to ensure that the spaces are being used and that the minimum needed is being dedicated. The City would not want spaces to go unused and then not be available for other uses during that time.

A. Schuur asked for more information on the policies to be implemented. B. Rawson described that all policy options are anticipated to be implemented and will be part of the evaluation and data collected to understand the ongoing needs of the Central Hill campus.

J. Liu asked if there had been a retrospective to understand why the satellite lots saw low utilization. J. Schreiber described how the lot at Foss Park is approximately a 15-minute walk and the lot at Cobble Hill was approximately 18-minute walk. Cobble Hill had the Route 88 and Route 90 buses within walking distance. J. Schreiber described that one of the main reasons there was low utilization was people who have the resident or school permits are permitted to park in resident permit parking areas. There is not much incentive to park further away, especially when they need to report to work by a certain time. Staff believe that the sites were not competitive with residential permit parking options on Central Hill.

J. Liu asked if it made sense to open the satellite parking lots to residents affected. J. Schreiber described that Foss Park is already designated for resident permits. Cobble Hill is only 10 spaces and parking utilization on that street is relatively low.

A. Epstein shared that they had heard that some SHS students may be driving to school. A. Epstein asked if staff had data on how students and staff travel to work. B. Rawson described that staff do not have good data on how SHS students travel to school, but hope gather more data for evaluation. B. Rawson described that any Somerville resident, including students, can park in any space designated as resident permit parking.

A. Epstein asked to clarify if members of school and city staff were aware since no outreach had been done for the implementation of the pilot. J. Schreiber stated that the pilot was not formally announced with a detailed map but that people with city hall and school permits have been utilizing the newly designated spaces.

J. Liu stated that one of the public written comments included a photo of the low utilization during winter holiday. J. Liu asked if residents are allowed to use these parking spots during school holidays and if residents are aware of this. J. Schreiber described that the intent is for the spaces to be targeted to when school staff must arrive at SHS. J. Schreiber shared that the Parking Department have only enforced the new regulations during school times. City staff can make that clearer on the regulatory signs.

A. Schuur asked how staff used the parking studies to inform the pilot. J. Schreiber described how the studies were used to understand neighborhood overnight parking and determine if there were enough spaces to accommodate the loss of spaces in the campus. The City hired consultants who went block by block counting spaces in the overnight peak period to see if they could distribute the demand throughout the neighborhood. J. Schreiber described how capacity is sprinkled throughout the neighborhood and this pilot was a strategy to concentrate some of the demand. J. Schreiber also shared that there were complaints from a small number of streets that were taking the brunt of cars circling in the morning.

A. Schuur asked how many surface spaces were removed in the redesign. B. Rawson stated that there were approximately 250 surface parking spaces over several different lots stretching from the Central Library to the back lot near the corner of School Street, Madison and Montrose. After construction is completed, the final design includes approximately 85 surface parking spaces. The majority of spaces have been primarily converted to green and open space. A. Schuur confirmed that the studies aimed to look accommodate the 165 spaces removed. J. Schreiber confirmed that the pilot aims to accommodate 52 spaces.

J. Liu asked if there was a reason why the designated spaces surrounded the perimeter of the school. J. Schreiber stated that the intent was to take some of the pressure off side streets and not to locate these reserve spaces directly in front of homes.

J. Liu asked for clarification on Agenda #5d where the request for nine spaces on the east of Walnut Street were regulated as no parking at any time. J. Liu stated that the petition seemingly counts this as part of their approximately 50 spots that were removed but this was previously designated as no parking anytime. J. Schreiber described that those spaces were removed during the closure of the Medford Street and School Street bridges. The spaces were previously resident permit parking spaces that were temporarily removed.

J. Liu asked for the reasoning for 7am to 9am. J. Schreiber described that SHS start time is 7:15am. The latest the regulation could begin was 7am. City Hall opens at 8:30am. Therefore, the two-hour time frame was established to allow for enforcement.

A. Schuur asked to confirm that there was public comment at the November 18, 2021, Traffic Commission meeting. S. Rinfret affirmed that there was public comment at the meeting.

J. Liu asked about the impact of a snow emergency on the regulations. S. Rinfret stated that residents could keep their vehicles in the City Hall/SHS spaces during a snow emergency because school is canceled during snow emergencies.

A. Epstein asked if there was any documentation on the rate of teacher late arrival. J. Schreiber stated that this issue was described in working group meetings and there were teachers arriving late due to parking issues and would call the main office to let them know. B. Rawson added that an educator would ask the main office for coverage at bell time if that person was unable to get to their classroom. The main office would then work to ensure appropriate coverage.

J. Liu asked to why, in this petition, was an appeal of Agenda #6 being considered since the Traffic Board only hears petition within 30 days of the decision or more than 30 days after implementation. B. Rawson

stated that it was staff's recommendation to have one hearing to hear all the appeal rather than require two sets of petitions and hearings.

A. Epstein asked if changes to the signs could be included in the scope. J. Schreiber affirmed and stated that Mobility and the Parking Department can work together to brainstorm how to best list the three signs on one pole.

J. Liu asked about an earlier check-in on the pilot prior to the pilot reaching a full year. B. Rawson stated that staff are open to convening the working group and a larger community meeting and can modify the regulations. B. Rawson stated that conditions are changing as Green Line construction nears completion with an anticipated check point in springtime.

A. Epstein asked if staff could measure how those new amenities effect behavior. B. Rawson stated that if new amenities come online in the spring and allow staff to do evaluation in the fall, City staff are committed to modifying based on new information, user feedback, and quantitative data.

J. Liu stated that there is value in evaluating whether all those spaces need to be on Highland Ave or if some could be put on side streets, especially where there are resident driveways. There are less driveways on Highland.

A. Epstein asked if the parking studies only focused on on-street parking or did the studies consider private off-street parking. J. Schreiber stated that the studies did not consider utilization of private driveways.

Public Testimony

A. Schuur stated that prior to the public hearing, the Traffic Board received written testimony from 32 people.

Danielle Angelilo, 17 Pleasant Ave, stated that they had contacted Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen and shared that during peak construction and school being in session, their driveway had been blocked by a teacher. They've called the police to see if there was anything they could do. D. Angelilo chose not to have the teacher's car towed because they had another mode of transportation available. D. Angelilo described that they've had issues with their street not being swept and that Parking Control Officers didn't ticket since the vehicles belonged to teachers. D. Angelilo asked for clarification on regulations being in place during summer sessions. D. Angelilo asked for the number of spots eliminated in the SHS redesign.

Brett Sillari, 205 Highland Ave, stated their opposition to parking being removed on Highland Ave. B. Sillari shared that teachers deserve an off-street parking site in front of SHS or at a parking garage. B. Sillari stated that ,any travel far distances and should be able to park their cars safely. B. Sillari stated that city streets should be reserved for resident parking.

Don Davis, 148 School Street, shared concern about the new staff parking spots and the impact on Montrose Street and Madison Street. D. Davis stated that outside of school, there isn't enough parking, and that they sometimes refuse to drive their kids so as not to lose an on-street spot. D. Davis stated that there is no concern for residents and the City's answer is to bike. D. Davis asked for the restoration of the surface lot instead of an athletic field to benefit the teachers and residents.

Daria Domin, 42 Highland Ave, shared that they lived through the SHS construction for the past three years and that it made it difficult for them to park. D. Domin shared that they have 2 small children. When construction began their children were one and three years old. D. Domin stated that their husband is a bike commuter and they don't mind walking but they need a car. D. Domin stated that the parking solutions provided by the City in 2019 did not include designated parking spots for teachers and staff. D. Domin shared that they heard through Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen's newsletter that in November 2021, the Traffic Commission will vote on designated 50 spots for teachers and staff. Prior to this decision, there were public hearings and space for residents to provide input, but this initiative should have received more public input. D. Domin shared that there were only two residents on the Central Hill Working Group. The 7:00am – 9:00am designation is not compatible with resident turnover. Residents cannot park there after work unless they plan to leave by 7:00am the next day, which is difficult for many families.

Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen shared his support for the teacher and staff spots on Highland Ave. B. Ewen Campen stated that the designation is necessary but that it is clear at this hearing and in the comments he's heard over the last year that there are many constituents in Ward 3 who are strongly opposed to the pilot. B. Ewen-Campen shared that a lot of the Highland Ave residents do not have street parking and have been dealing with the increasingly tight parking challenges around SHS. B. Ewen-Campen stated that he believes it was a mistake to not build a parking structure for teachers, but it is now the responsibility of the Mobility Staff, City Council, Mayor's Office, and the Parking Department to deal with the current circumstances. B. Ewen-Campen shared that by providing some predictability about where teachers and staff can park is going to reduce some of the chaos on neighborhood streets. B. Ewen-Campen emphasized that this is part of a larger strategy with Bluebikes and public transit to minimize the number of people who need to drive to school. B. Ewen-Campen stated that it is a major disservice to the students at SHS if the City does not do everything it can to ensure the school can function.

Atlas Larson, 34 Belknap Street, representing Bostonian Florist, shared that while providing parking on streets for SHS and City Hall staff is beneficial, it also limits parking for surrounding businesses which have been negatively impacted by multiple waves of COVID. A. Larson asked about strategies to offset the effects of limiting parking, for clarity on the time of year that parking studies were conducted, how parking impacts effect surrounding property owners, and impacts on people with disabilities.

Stephanie Galaitsi stated their support for the pilot. S. Galaitsi shared that the City should be doing all it can do for teachers. S. Galaitsi described that the designation reduces the amount of people cruising neighborhood streets for parking.

Denise Waddington, 123 Highland Ave, stated that it was a huge mistake to not provide parking in the planning process of the new SHS. It is a disservice to the educators, students and residents. D. Waddington asked if other real estate around the High School that could be utilized for additional parking and if staff have factored in the new work from home patterns. D. Waddington asked about flexibility in street cleaning schedules. They described that they have limited mobility and can't walk, ride a bike, or take public transportation.

Anita, resident, and business owner at 92 Highland Ave, described the challenges with parking since the SHS construction began and the closure of School Street. Anita shared their appreciation for the teachers and their parking needs, but they feel that it is unfair to business owners and residents. Anita

described the space designated for school vans only but inquired about why they didn't use the concourse for vans. Anita described how they lost business due to the parking issues and COVID. Anita described that they have handicapped customers who travel to their business.

Cynthia Devereaux, 82 Highland Avenue, shared their concern about the area becoming a parking lot. With the investment into the new Green Line they were excited for the area to become more dynamic with more higher quality businesses. C. Devereaux described that there needs to be pick up and drop off for restaurants and stores, spaces for turnover and not parking all day. C. Devereaux stated their concern for eliminating parking and the lack of transparency in the pilot. C. Devereaux inquired about other parking opportunities now with the new Green Line and more.

Jeremy, educator, shared their appreciation for the kind comments towards teachers. Jeremy described that the teachers did not opt to lose parking and that they used to come to work stress-free. Jeremy shared that it has been hard after the pandemic and now they worry about parking to the point where people have had their side view mirrors swiped off or received tickets. Jeremy shared their openness to solutions but conveyed that teachers have been frustrated and come to work 45 minutes early to try to find a spot.

Jon Sillari, 9 Forster Street, manages 92 Highland Ave and 66 Highland Ave and shared that there has not been enough transparency with this pilot and that it is a common trend of the Mobility Team. J. Sillari shared that he was one of the petitioners and he was given three business days' notice of the public hearing. J. Sillari described that more people would have attended the hearing with more notice. J. Sillari shared that overnight parking is impossible for their tenants. J. Sillari conveyed that City staff didn't communicate the changes and provide enough signage.

Sophia Melinopoulos, 25 Highland Avenue, asked if city staff were considering senior citizens that live in the area. S. Melinopoulos described how they need home health aides, prescription deliveries, nurse visits, and those services need parking options. S. Melinopoulos stated that teachers and students would prefer to have parking instead of the green space in front of SHS. Parking could be constructed there instead of taking it away from senior citizens and homeowners.

Lisa Brewster-Cook, 183 Washington Street in Arlington and a teacher at SHS, described that staff didn't use the satellite lots for a number of reasons. People who need them most are the ones who arrive last because of childcare drop-offs, distance from school, and various other reasons. L. Brewster-Cook described that the continued road closures of School and Medford Streets also impact access to satellite sites. L. Brewster-Cook described that it is ableist to push public transportation or riding bikes to everyone. L. Brewster-Cook described that there are not enough substitutes on a regular school day. L. Brewster-Cook stated that they were on the Parking Working Group since it started four years prior. The recommendations put forward in the pilot were not what they recommended.

George Schneeloch, 81 School Street, shared their support for the City not building the garage in the new SHS. The garage was estimated to cost \$50 million, and that money can be spent more wisely. G. Schneeloch reiterated their support for the City prioritizing parking for teachers since many need to drive and they are paid poorly by the City so they have to live farther away. Teachers and students have access to free T passes which should help reduce the demand for parking. G. Schneeloch stated that that they take the bus every day and encourages other neighbors to do so, in addition to taking the new Green Line when it opens. G. Schneeloch stated that with the high price of cars and gas, it's a unique

opportunity for residents to think about shifting to taking the MBTA. G. Schneeloch shared that decisions should be made to benefit the community's kids.

Susan C. Evers, 30 Summit Ave, shared that all the streets between Vinal Ave and Walnut Street are impacted every school day by people coming and parking in the neighborhood making parking difficult for residents. S. Evers described that new developments cause more demand during construction and after. S. Evers also shared that the new Green Line will increase parking demand. S. Evers asked for more permanent parking options for teachers, such as satellite sites with shuttles and asked about communication on the evaluation of the pilot.

Jack Connolly, 17 Winslow Ave, stated their concern about the Traffic Board hosting another public hearing in response to an appeal of a Traffic Commission decision, which for the previous 10 years, the Traffic Board had been dormant. J. Connolly shared that the same concerns about parking on Highland Ave were described on College Ave regarding the removal of parking. J. Connolly stated that the City is conducting a citywide parking study and inquired about why decisions about parking were being made when the study is not complete. J. Connolly conveyed that the residents of the community have been discriminated against and that teachers need parking. J. Connolly stated that he is a member of the Chamber of Commerce and that they were not contacted by Economic Development regarding this hearing.

Vicky Cochran, 172 Crookstall Road in Newton and a new teacher of SHS, conveyed their empathy for the residents. V. Cochran stated that they agreed with many of the statements shared at the hearing especially for the seniors who need rides and medicines. V. Cochran stated that some folks aren't driving as much but the MBTA is not always a functional option. V. Cochran shared that teachers need an alternative non-shuttle-based option and reiterated that information needs to be conveyed at the staff level.

Carl Verch, 80 Highland Avenue, described their neighbors who have mobility impairments and need their cars. C. Verch commented on the communication of the initiative and shared that most of their neighbors learned about the regulation changes by getting a ticket the last couple of weeks. C. Verch shared their sympathy for the teachers and suggested that there should have been a parking garage considered in the SHS construction.

Theresa Brown, Summit Avenue, shared that they feel like they are being forced out of Somerville. T. Brown commented that they are worried about parking every time they run errands or leave home. T. Brown requested that street cleaning be moved to the evening hours. T. Brown requested that in studying the impact, could the increase in parking tickets be reviewed. T. Brown shared their concerns about the communication of the public hearing notice.

Aaron S. Weber, 32 Summit Avenue, commented that parking has not been a problem during construction. A. Weber shared that they sometimes see teacher or construction vehicles on Summit Avenue but not frequently. A. Weber commented that replacing the proposed green space with parking would cause immense concern by the people a part of Green and Open Somerville, and by the people who participated in SomerVision 2040. A. Weber shared that SomerVision 2040 consisted of an exhaustive process of community engagement and determined that the city's goals are to reduce car dependency and increase green space. A. Weber described that they have only had difficulty parking directly on Summit Avenue during a snow emergency.

Crystal H, commented that there doesn't appear to be a solution that community members can agree on. C. H. described that there are conflicting priorities such as people with disabilities have access needs, teachers need to be able to get to work, residents have families, seniors have home aids. C. H. urged people to come together to find solutions. C. H. shared that in their work as part of Mutual Aid of Medford and Somerville (MAMAS) that everyone has needs and everyone has something to offer. C. H. suggested that residents could rent or offer up their driveways and that residents could share cars. C. H. affirmed their support of SomerVision 2040.

Tom Lamar, 17 Cross Street, shared their support of the pilot and asked the Traffic Board to reject the appeal. T. Lamar commented that it was a thoughtful compromise to prioritize parking for teachers for two hours a day and allow general availability for 22 hours a day. T. Lamar responded to the comments about increased demand as new developments are constructed and shared that any building built without many off-street parking spaces will be ineligible for resident parking permits. T. Lamar responded to the comment about the Chamber of Commerce being unaware and shared that in review of the Traffic Commission meeting minutes, the President of the Chamber of Commerce commented in the discussion.

Cassandra Verch, 80 Highland Avenue, Apt. 203, shared their opposition to the pilot project. C. Verch shared their confusion about the SHS construction and if a parking garage was included and then removed from the proposed designs. C. Verch stated that they work with adults ranging in ages 16 to 80 with disabilities and voiced that their needs are not being heard.

Deb Sawin, 66 Putnam Street, member of the working committee, commented that this proposal is unfair to the neighbors. D. Sawin shared that City Hall and High School staff have been given permits to park in the residential neighborhood. D. Sawin stated that this diluted the spaces that are available to the residents. D. Sawin stated that once teachers park in the designated spaces, it makes them unavailable to residents and businesses until 4pm. D. Sawin stated that they were sympathetic to the teachers but state that this will be an additional imposition to the owners. D. Sawin stated their opposition to the pilot.

Ahmed, Highland Ave, commented that they've had difficulty finding parking during street cleaning days and the pilot makes it more difficult.

Recess

Arah Schuur made a motion to take a 10-minute recess. Joan Liu seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Traffic Board Discussion

A. Schuur stated that streets and curbs are public property and that they are owned by the City. The goal is to manage them to optimize the public good. A. Schuur shared that the board heard in public testimony that there are not many options accepted by community members but that the City made a good faith effort to balance resident needs with the dire need of teachers to get to work on time and educate Somerville students. A. Schuur stated that the City conducted two parking studies that looked at parking utilization in the neighborhood and the 150 displaced spots from the former SHS parking lots. The project is a one-year pilot and that a permanent solution must balance other solutions including the opening of the new Green Line.

J. Liu reiterated the challenge of the issue. J. Liu wanted to re-emphasize that community members are allowed to park in the teacher parking spots during those hours on non-school days. J. Liu affirmed the suggestion to change the time of street cleaning. J. Liu responded to comments about accessibility and wanted clarity on accessible spaces being retained. J. Liu urged the City to work with the business who shared that many of their customers have disabilities and to consider an additional accessible spot.

A. Epstein shared that they reviewed the Traffic Commission recording and read the meeting minutes and did not see any evidence that any of the rules or processes that are currently in place for operating the Traffic Commission were not done properly. A. Epstein suggested that the Traffic Commission could work to better publicize its work and preview key issues. A. Epstein stated that there are important decisions that come before the Traffic Commission, and it would be worthy of publicizing and increasing stakeholder awareness. A. Epstein voiced sympathy for public commenters but stated that the quality of the educational experience at schools affects everyone at a city level. A. Epstein stated that this takes priority over more local issues. Regarding public space, storing private vehicles in a public space can be a tragedy of the commons where low-cost parking can overburden the allocated space.

A. Epstein affirmed the city's pilot project and plans to evaluate the performance of the pilot. A. Epstein stated that the students and faculty have faced many challenges during the pandemic with absenteeism and other issues. A. Epstein stated that they are in support of efforts to make the educational experience reliable and high quality.

A. Schuur reiterated that the City's Parking Department, Mobility Division, and Traffic Commission followed the rules and regulations but changes to parking regulations have become more frequent, wide-reaching, and fraught for lots of different parties over the past couple of years. A. Schuur stated that with SomerVision, Vision Zero, and Climate Forward, these trends will continue. A. Schuur encouraged the City to maximize outreach and transparency so that everyone has a chance to be heard in the decision-making process. A. Schuur echoed the City's willingness to be flexible on the pilot and evaluation process.

J. Liu stated that although the City met the regulations needed for this meeting, they wished the City would go above and beyond with using new tools like social media or knocking on doors. J. Liu reiterated for meeting attendees that the Traffic Commission meets every second Thursday of every month and that meeting details can be found on the city website.

J. Liu shared that this pilot doesn't provide 50 new spots but gives some certainty for teachers on where to look for parking spots first before they go elsewhere and circle the neighborhood. Two potential solutions that could be reviewed are to increase the number of T passes for students and to look for potential teacher parking spots on other streets rather than just Highland Ave. J. Liu suggested a public hearing on the outcome of the pilot.

A. Epstein shared that it is not the Traffic Board's role to serve as a second opinion or to offer an alternative opinion to the Traffic Commission when the substance of the decision isn't met well by constituents. A. Epstein stated that improving the awareness process of the Traffic Commission would be more beneficial. A. Epstein stated that this is the second Traffic Board meeting where a large substance of the petition has been about insufficient notice in addition to dissatisfaction with the decision of the Traffic Commission.

A. Epstein stated that the transit area parking restriction for on-street parking in Chapter 11.2 Section 7 of the Zoning Ordinance appears to affect most of the area where this pilot is in place. Therefore, new developments on Highland Avenue will not have on-street parking permit privilege and demand for those spaces will go down over time.

Vote

Arah Schuur made a motion to affirm the one-year parking regulation changes approved by the Somerville Traffic Commission on November 18, 2021. Alex Epstein seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Adjournment

Arah Schuur made a motion to adjourn. Joan Liu seconded the motion. The motion carried.