



# July 2023 PTAC Meeting City Update

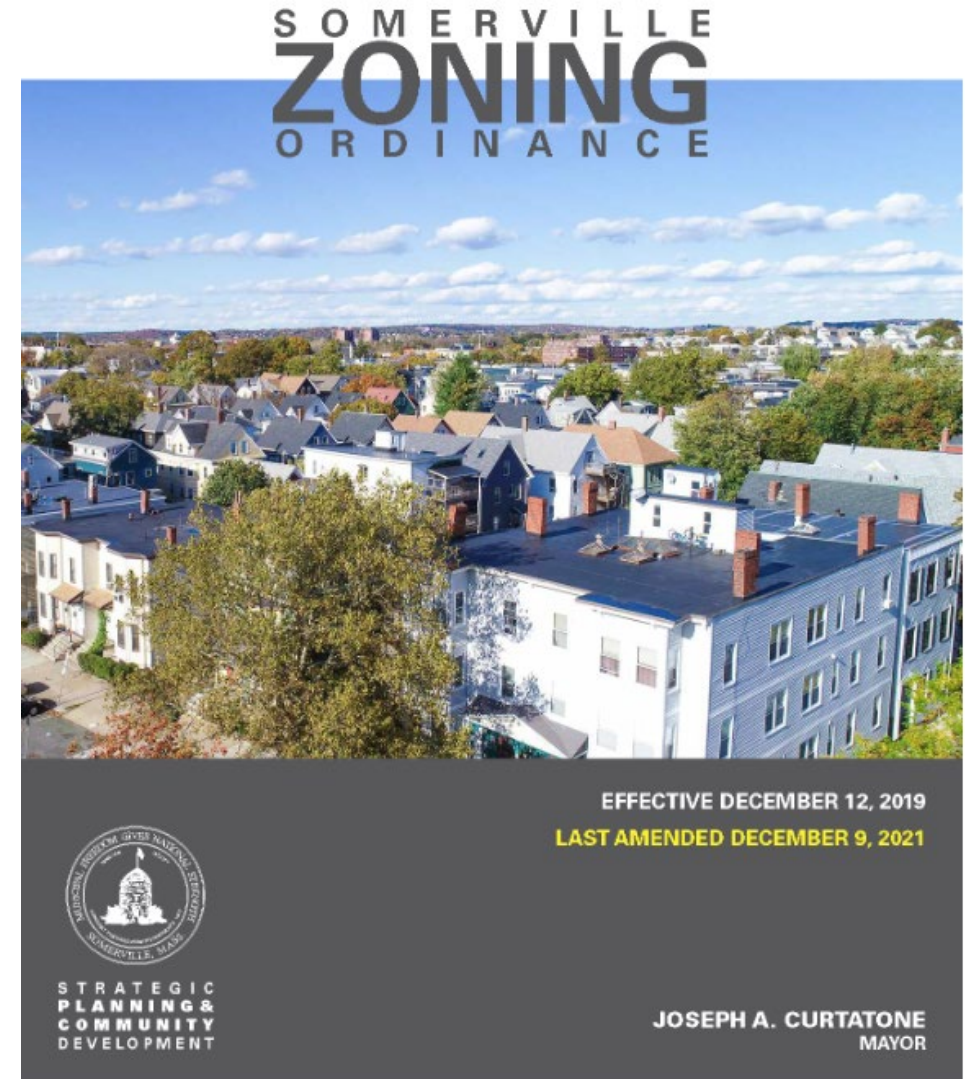
# Development Review 101





# Zoning Basics

- The Somerville Zoning Ordinance (SZO) is a local law that governs the rules and regulations for the use and development of real property:
  - Authority granted to City by Article 89 MA Constitution; enacted in accordance with provisions of Massachusetts General Chapter 40A
  - Is not applicable to real property owned by the city, state, and federal government.
- The SZO was completely overhauled recently, adopted by City Council in late 2019 after more than seven years of process:
  - It is now a hybrid of form-based zoning and other zoning approaches.
  - Form-based zoning prioritizes the size and shape of buildings, in terms of how they relate to each other and to the streetscape.

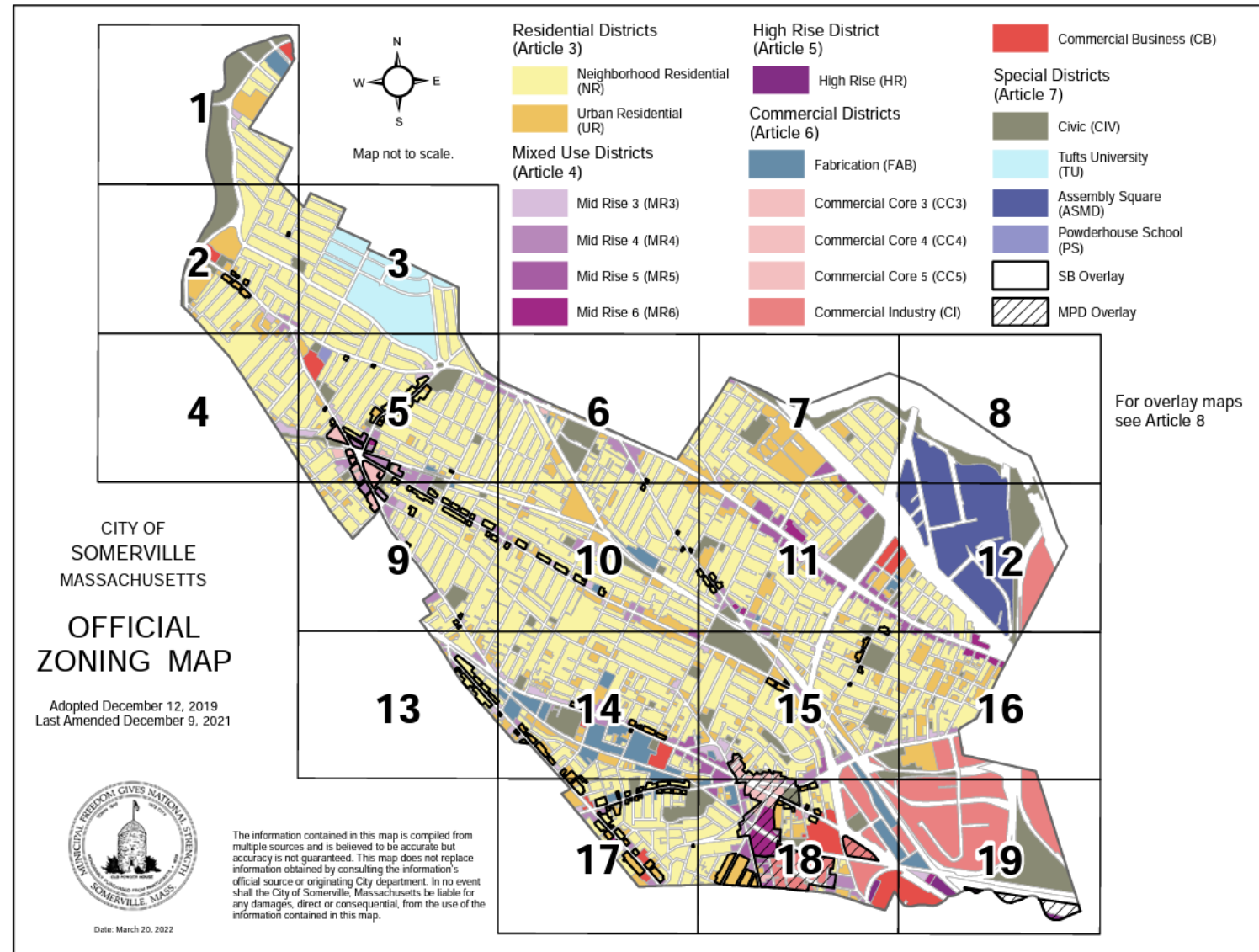


# A sample of SZO “intent” statement related to Mobility:

- To implement the comprehensive plan of the City of Somerville and enforce officially adopted plans and policies.
- To ensure the development of a well-connected thoroughfare network, composed of direct and convenient routes that reinforce Somerville as a walkable, human-scaled urban environment.
- To preserve and expand the city’s walkable network of human scaled thoroughfares and the small block and lot pattern of land division.
- To protect the social, environmental, and economic benefits provided by a walkable development pattern
- To discourage thoroughfares and intersections that limit connectivity, discourage walking, induce traffic congestion, and increase vehicular air pollutant emissions by reducing the number of possible routes of travel and adding unnecessary distance between destinations.
- To require alley-loaded blocks that concentrate “back-of-house” elements such as utility infrastructure, refuse collection, and access to parking and loading in the block interior, to the rear of buildings.
- To develop a comprehensive network of thoroughfares that accommodate multiple modes of transportation, organized in a hierarchy defined by the character of each type.
- To establish parking policies that support transit-oriented development and a walkable, human-scaled urban environment. iii. To un-bundle the cost of off-street parking from the cost of housing, so that housing in Somerville is more affordable. iv. To encourage the use of public transportation, bicycling, and walking in lieu of motor vehicle use when a choice of travel mode exists.

# Zoning Districts and Overlays

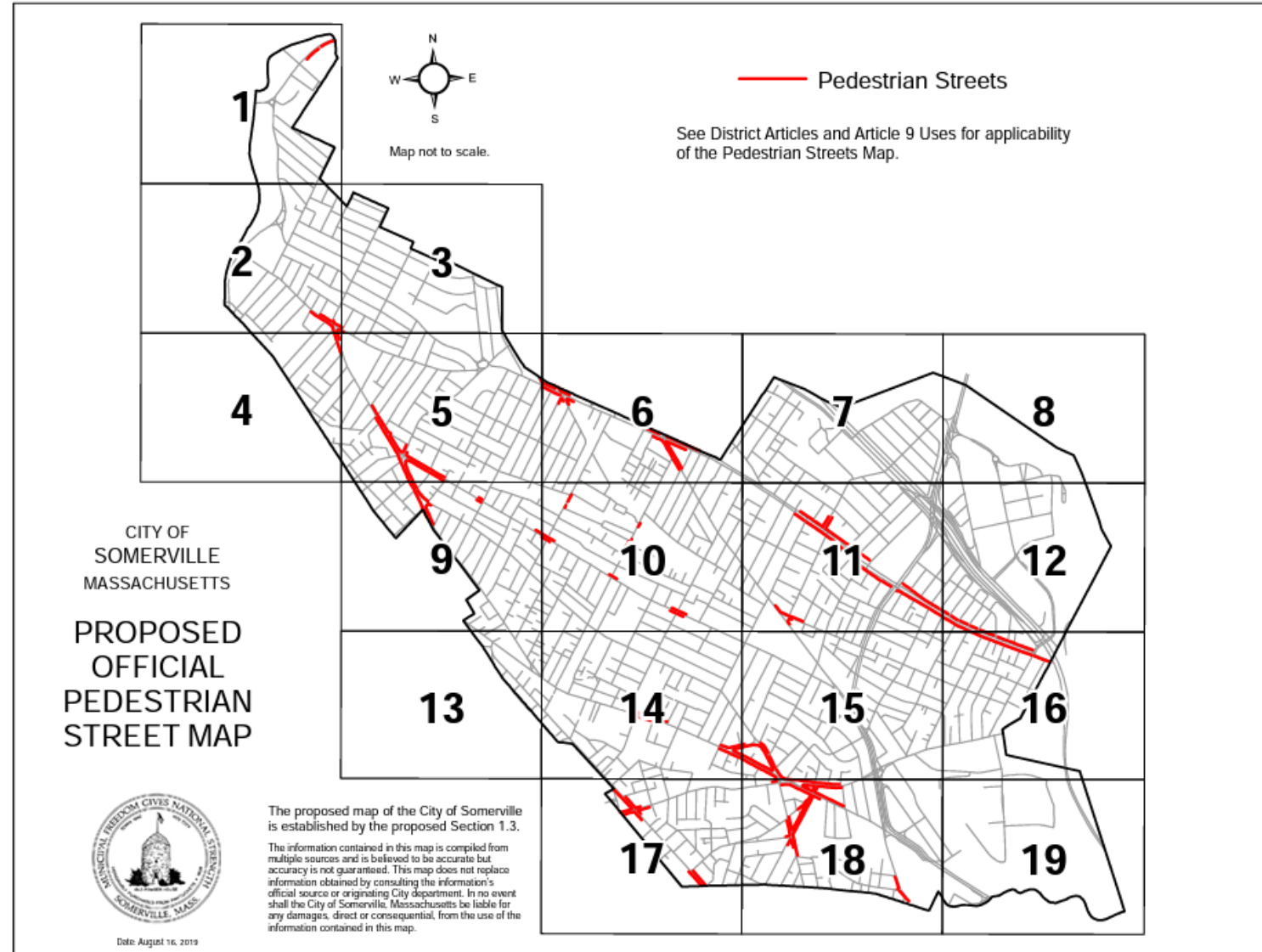
- The SZO splits the city into a series of districts that have different rules and regulations about:
  - What can be built, how it is built, what it must/must not include.
  - How land can be used.
- Each district also allows different building types – this is the main part of the SZO that is ‘form based’.
- Overlay districts are placed on top of the underlying zoning to designate special development rules and regulations in certain areas.
  - For example, certain Master Planned Development areas require construction of new public thoroughfares that were originally envisioned in neighborhood plans.





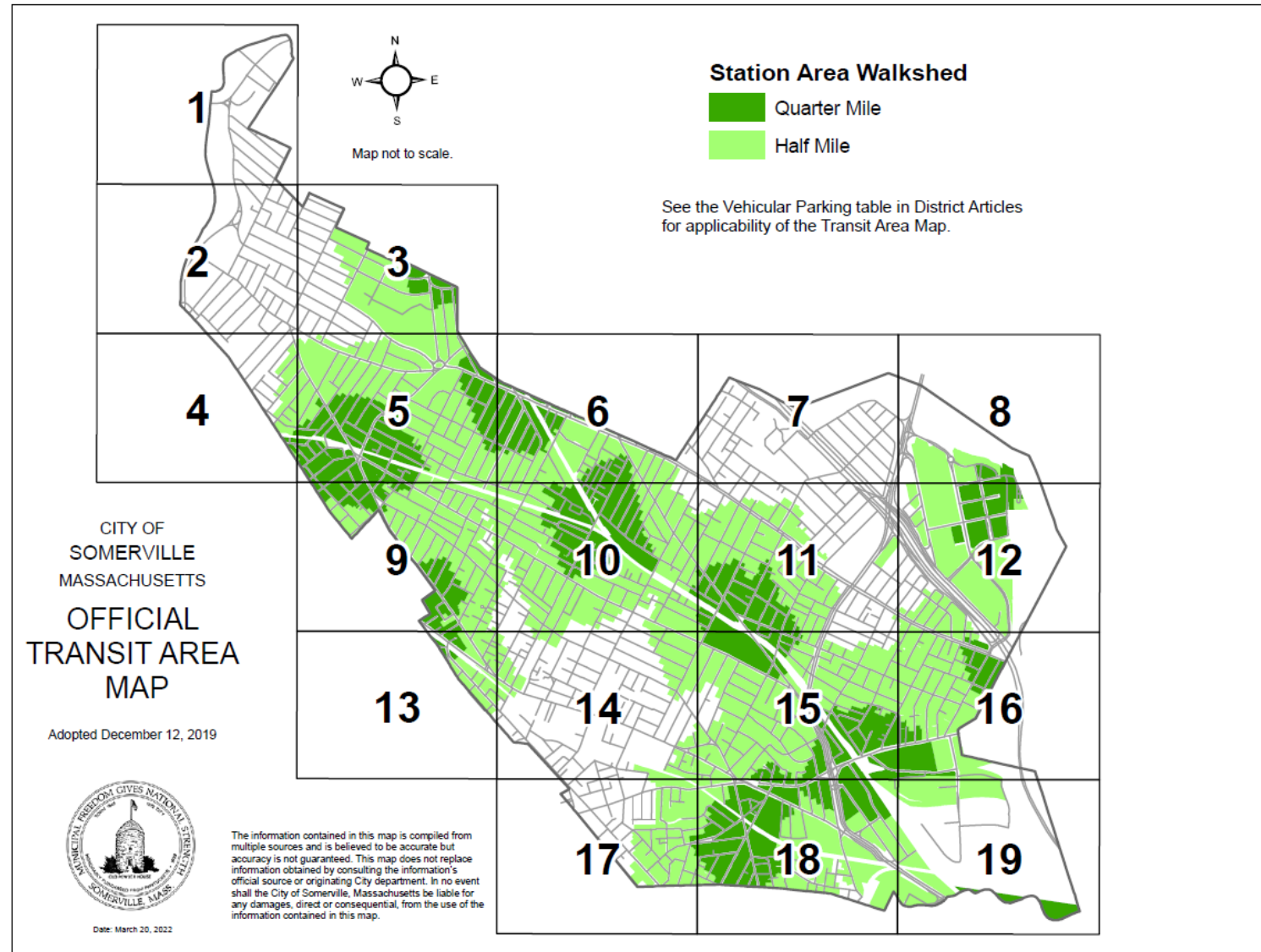
# Pedestrian Streets & Sidewalk Widths

- Pedestrian streets are designated in the SZO, mostly in major commercial squares/corridors and near rapid transit stations:
  - Requires buildings on those lots to ‘face’ the street
  - Requires ground story commercial space
  - Prohibits curb cuts
- Sidewalk Widths
  - For any lot abutting a sidewalk that is less than twelve (12) feet in width, the frontage area must be paved to provide a sidewalk that is at least twelve (12) feet in total width.
  - Does not apply in the UR and NR districts.



# Transit Areas

- Transit Areas in the SZO;
  - All lots within one-quarter (1/4) mile of a transit station for commercial uses and all lots within one-half (1/2) mile of a transit station for residential uses.
- In Transit Areas, new developments are not eligible to participate in the Permit Parking program.
- Certain type of buildings are also permitted by-right in transit areas, whereas they would require site plan approval outside.
- Parking requirements are different inside and outside of Transit Areas, more on that next:



# Parking Requirements

- Each land use proposed for new development has parking requirements for motor vehicle and bicycle parking
- For vehicle parking, there are minimums outside of Transit Areas, and maximums inside transit areas.

Table 4.4.16 Vehicular Parking (continued)

Use Category Specific Use	BICYCLE		MOTOR VEHICLE	
	Short-Term (min)	Long-Term (min)	Within a TRANSIT AREA <sup>1</sup> (max)	Outside of a TRANSIT AREA <sup>1</sup> (min)
<b>Food and Beverage Service</b>				
All Permitted Uses	1 / 1,000 sf	1 / 5,000 sf	1 / 300 sf	1 / 500 sf
<b>Lodging</b>				
Bed & Breakfast	none	2 / 10 rooms	1 / 4 rooms	1 / 4 rooms
Hotel or Hostel	1 / 20 rooms	1 / 10 rooms	1 / 2 rooms	1 / 2 rooms
<b>Office</b>				
Co-Working	1 / 20,000 sf	1 / 3,000 sf	1 / 1,200 sf	1 / 800 sf
General Office	1 / 20,000 sf	1 / 3,000 sf	1 / 900 sf	1 / 650 sf
Research and Development or Laboratory	1 / 20,000 sf	1 / 5,000 sf	1 / 1,000 sf	1 / 1,000 sf
<b>Residential</b>				
Household Living	0.1 / DU	1.0 / DU	1.0 / DU	1.0 / DU
Group Living (except as follows)	0.05 / room	0.5 / room	–	–
Community or Group Residence	–	–	–	–
Dormitory, Fraternity or Sorority	0.1 / room	0.5 / room	.05 / bed	1.0 / 4 beds
Homeless Shelter	–	–	4.0	4.0
Nursing Home/Assisted Living Facility	–	–	1 / 6 beds	1 / 6 beds
Single Room Occupancy Housing	–	–	1 / 6 beds	1 / 4 beds
<b>Retail Sales</b>				
Building/Home Supplies & Equipment	1 / 2,500 sf	1 / 10,000 sf	1 / 1,000 sf	1 / 1,000 sf
Consumer Goods (except as follows)	1 / 2,500 sf	1 / 10,000 sf	1 / 1,500 sf	1 / 750 sf
Fresh Food Market or Grocery Store	1 / 1,000 sf	1 / 10,000 sf	1 / 500 sf	1 / 1,500 sf
Farm/Vendor Market	n/a	n/a	n/a	1 / 1,500 sf

sf - Gross Leasable Square Footage DU - Dwelling Unit RU - Rooming Unit



# Types of Projects

- By-Right Projects
- Projects that require Discretionary Permits
  - Special Permit
  - Master Plan Special Permit
  - Hardship Variance
  - Plan Revisions
- Project that require Administrative Permits
  - Subdivision Plan Approval
  - Site Plan Approval
  - Thoroughfare Permit
  - Civic Space Permit
  - Construction Permits





# Who approves projects?

- Planning Board (PB) is the decision-making authority for:
  - Site Plan Approval or Special Permits in all of the Mid-Rise, High-Rise, and Commercial Core, Civic, Powderhouse School, and Assembly districts;
  - Master Plan Special Permits
  - Subdivision Plans, Thoroughfare Permits & Civic Space Permits
- Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) is the decision-making authority for:
  - Site Plan Approval or a Special Permit in the Neighborhood Residence, Urban Residence, Commercial Industry, Commercial Business, and Tufts University zoning districts
  - All a Hardship Variances and Administrative Appeals.
- The SZO includes specific review criteria for both boards.
- City Staff write reports for each type approval with analysis of each project, and official recommendation (Do Not Approve, Approve, Approve with Condition), and any recommended project conditions.
- After planning approval, City staff review and approve construction permits for buildings, streetscapes, and public spaces.





# Review Procedure

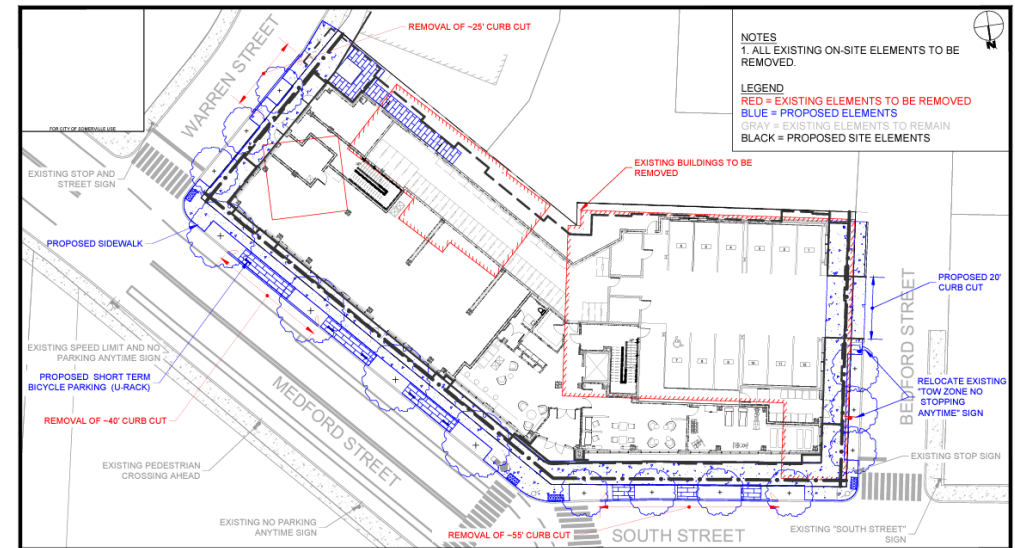
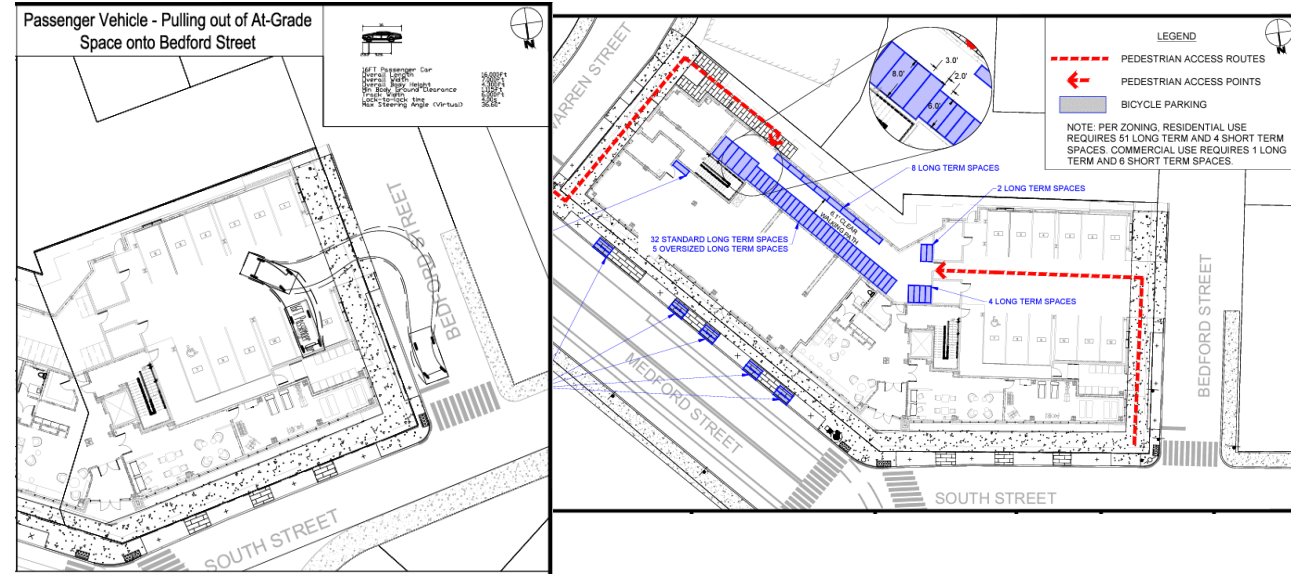
1. Pre-submittal Meeting
2. Neighborhood Meeting(s)
3. Urban Design Commission Design Review
4. Application Submittal and Review
5. Staff Report to PB or ZBA
6. Public Hearing (at PB or ZBA)
7. PB or ZBA Decision
8. Appeal Period
9. Certificate of Decision
10. Certificate of Zoning Compliance
11. Construction Permits (for buildings, streets, and public spaces)





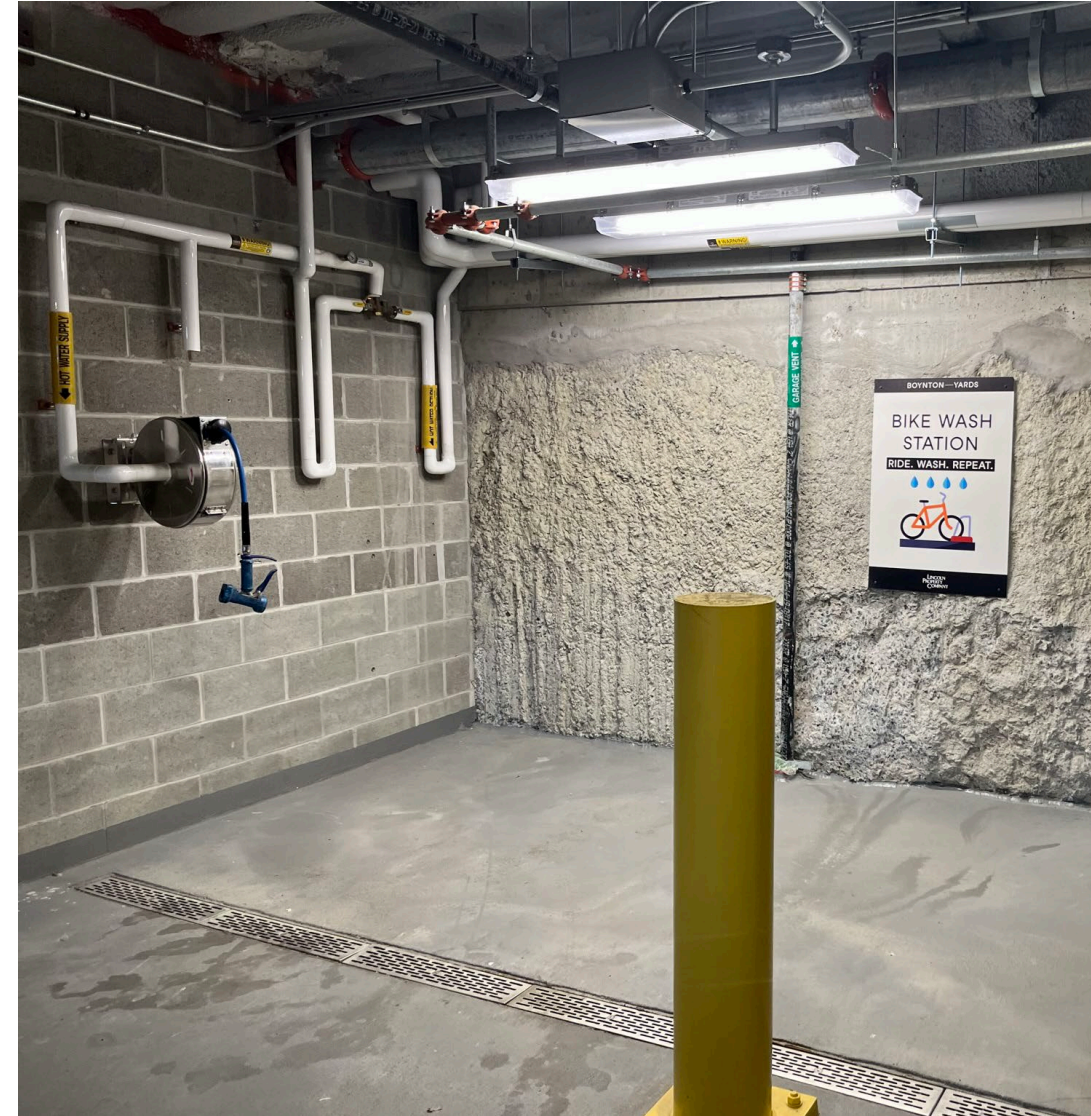
# What does Mobility Require: TAP

- Transportation Access Plan (TAP)
  - All development that is not by-right must submit a Transportation Access Plan.
  - The purpose is to review and illustrate access to a building by pedestrians, bicyclists, and motor vehicles, including delivery and garbage trucks, and identify any transportation and streetscape improvements associated with a proposal.
- Elements of a TAP:
  - Memo summarize the proposal and justifying changes
  - Illustrative Site Plan
  - Transportation Elements Plan
  - Pedestrian Access Plan
  - Bicycle Parking Plan
  - Motor Vehicle Parking Plan
  - Vehicle Movement Plan
- Mobility reviews TAPs for SZO compliance, makes recommendations to improve proposal, and uses TAP to inform the staff report to the PB or ZBA.



# What does Mobility Require: MMP

- Mobility Management Plan (MMP)
  - SZO requires MMPs for
    - buildings with 50,000 square feet or more of commercial space
    - employers with 50 or more employees
    - multi-tenant buildings where the tenants, in total, have 50 or more employees
    - residential buildings with twenty 20 or more dwelling units
    - commercial parking facilities.
  - This means we have separate MMPs for Master plans, buildings, and large tenants within buildings
- Approval is a 60+ day administrative process conducted Mobility prior to a development application.
  - Projects cannot have a complete application without a written commitment to implement their MMP.
  - The Planning Board typically requires compliance in their decision, which is recorded in the Middlesex County Registry of Deeds, attached to the property.
- Components of an MMP:
  - Project Description
  - Draft Transportation Access Plan
  - Local Transportation information
  - Transportation Assumptions
  - Simple trip generation and distribution
  - Commitments for programs and services
  - Mode share commitment





# What does Mobility Require: MMP

- The SZO lists certain MMP elements required for all projects of a certain type, which may include:
  - 50% vehicle based mode share commitment
  - On-site Transportation Coordinators,
  - Annual MMP education sessions; posted/distributed program information
  - Unbundled parking spaces
  - Guaranteed ride home program
  - Pre-tax transit pass purchases
  - Preferential parking for carpool/vanpool
- Through the approval process, Mobility often requires additional plan elements depending on the specific proposal, which may include:
  - 37.5% by 2030 and 25% by 2040 vehicle based mode share and requirements to make changes if this is not achieved
  - Market rate parking pricing
  - Operational parking requirements
  - Bike share memberships/stations
  - Transit passes
  - Shuttle Services
- The SZO requires annual monitoring for MMPs, which includes:
  - Travel surveys of building users
  - Bicycle and vehicle parking utilization.
  - Status updates of MMP program & service implementation.
- Mobility has approved approximately 50 MMPs.
  - We receive our first annual report last month from the 101 South St Boynton Yards Project.





# What does Mobility Require: TIS

- **Transportation Impact Study (TIS)**
  - TIS is an analysis of existing transportation infrastructure and anticipated transportation impacts from a proposed development project
- **Components of TIS**
  - Existing Condition Inventory & Analysis
    - Bike, ped, transit, vehicle infrastructure
    - Parking
    - Crash analysis
    - Data Collection
  - Future Transportation Analysis
    - Bike, ped, transit, vehicle infrastructure
    - Parking analysis
    - Traditional trip generation and LOS
    - Bike + Pedestrian Level of Traffic Stress
  - Project Mitigation
    - Expectation is that mitigation improves non-vehicular modes
  - Transportation Demand Management
    - MMP summary

Intersection/Movement	Existing (2021) Condition					Build (2021) Condition				
	LOS	Delay (s)	V/C Ratio	Queues (ft) 50th %	Queues (ft) 95th %	LOS	Delay (s)	V/C Ratio	Queues (ft) 50th %	Queues (ft) 95th %
left/thru l thru/right										
Somerville Ave WB left	D	38.0	0.45	43	m83	D	38.0	0.45	43	m83
Somerville Ave WB thru	D	35.0	0.49	128	m195	D	35.1	0.49	128	m196
Somerville Ave WB right	E	72.6	0.32	96	m105	E	72.6	0.32	95	m105
Webster Ave NB left/thru/right	E	76.4	0.99	279	m#338	E	81.4	1.02	~285	m#321
Webster Ave SB left l left	D	41.0	0.38	86	125	D	41.0	0.38	86	125
Webster Ave SB thru/right	E	54.7	0.76	182	#299	E	54.7	0.76	185	#299
<b>Prospect Street/Webster Avenue/Concord Avenue</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>76.1</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>80.6</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
Webster Ave NB left	C	31.4	0.17	21	55	C	32.3	0.21	23	60
Webster Ave NB thru/right	E	55.6	0.85	279	#538	E	70.7	0.95	325	#608
Webster Ave SB left	C	32.3	0.60	29	m#134	E	62.5	0.82	30	m#151
Webster Ave SB thru/right	C	20.8	0.59	98	m#371	C	20.8	0.59	98	m#371
Prospect St NE left/thru/right	F	128.8	1.17	~623	#814	F	128.8	1.17	~623	#814
Prospect St SW left/thru/right	E	61.1	0.60	292	m391	E	61.1	0.60	292	m391

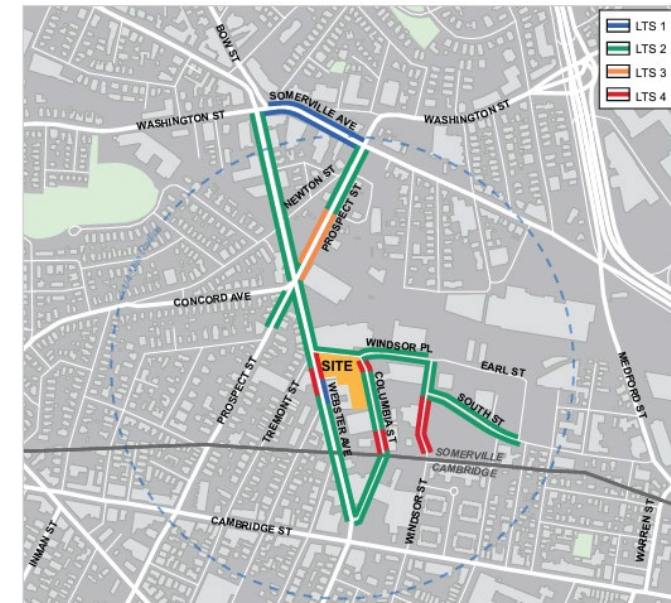
Figure 4. Public Transportation



Figure 1. Study Area Intersections



Figure 19. Pedestrian Level of Traffic Stress - Existing





# Zoning Amendments

- Changes to the SZO can be proposed by the Mayor. They would be discussed in the City Council Land Use Committee and voted on by the full City Council
  - Mobility is working with the Planning & Zoning Division to think about whether there are amendments we would like to propose to the SZO:
    - Bike Parking Dimensional Standards
    - Motor Vehicle Parking Requirements
    - Transit Areas
    - Use provisions for Accessory and Commercial Parking
    - MMP Requirements
- An individual property owner or ten (10) registered voters of the City of Somerville may also petition the Somerville City Council to change the SZO.
- Petitions for amendments can also be submitted by City Council Members, the Planning Board, or the Zoning Board of Appeals.





# Putting it all Together

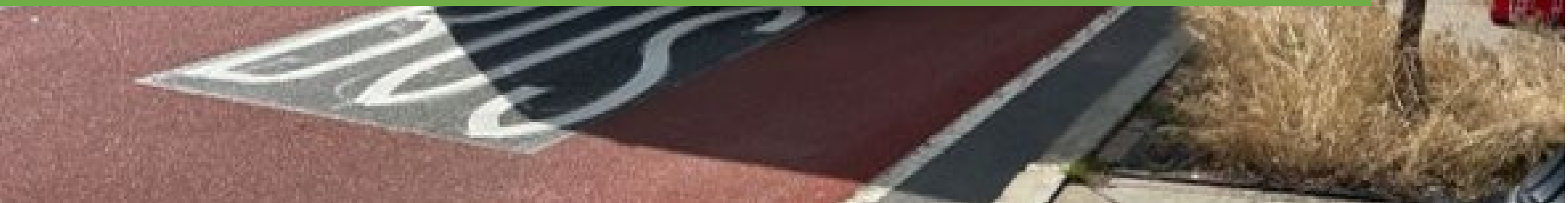
- The Somerville Zoning Ordinance is a law that sets the ground rules and regulations for all development within the city. It is proposed by city staff, debated, adopted, and amended by City Council, and administered by city staff.
- The SZO is written with intent to implement adopted city plans, like SomerVision. Future neighborhood and area plans guide zoning changes that follow.
- Special rules in the SZO like transit areas, pedestrian streets, sidewalk widths, and parking requirements are intended to further many community transportation priorities.
- The Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals are the decision makers, bound by specific criteria. They consider professional recommendations from city staff and exercise their judgement.
- Mobility has three main documents (TAP, MMP, TIS) that it uses to evaluate different types of projects and create agreements about their operation from a transportation perspective.
- This evaluation is guided by our transportation plan and goals, like moving away from single occupancy vehicle trips.







# Project Updates



# Complete Streets Project Updates

- Pearl + 6 ([project page](#))
  - Traffic calming treatments construction continues on:
    - Cross St at Gilman/Oliver
    - Cross St at Everett Ave
    - Oliver St at Glen St
    - Oliver St at Franklin St
  - Sidewalks on Pearl are expected to be complete by the end of the month, with milling and paving operations scheduled to begin the week of August 7<sup>th</sup>



Glen St at Oliver St: Somerville's First Neighborhood Traffic Circle



# Complete Streets Project Updates

- Western Washington Street ([project page](#))
  - Pre-construction abutter flyering was performed in early July
  - Sidewalk reconstruction in the vicinity of the Argenziano School is anticipated to begin the last week of July.
  - It's likely that much of the remaining work will happen in 2024



# Complete Streets Project Updates – Tufts Street

- Reconstruction Project
  - New Pavement and Sidewalks
  - New Bicycle facilities
- Project page: [www.somervillema.gov/tuftsstreet](http://www.somervillema.gov/tuftsstreet)
- Timeline
  - Survey open until Mid-August (see Project page)
  - Conceptual Design Options – Public Meeting End of August
    - Followed by 3-4 weeks of public feedback, including all Committees (Bicycle, Pedestrian and Transit, Persons with Disabilities)
  - Final Concept – Public Meeting Mid-October
    - Followed by 3-4 weeks of public feedback, including all Committees (Bicycle, Pedestrian and Transit, Persons with Disabilities)
  - Final Design – Mid-January
  - Construction - 2024



# Capital Project Updates – Highland Avenue

- Improvements from Cutter to Hamlet



New Drainage



Sewer Repairs



New Water Mains



Improved Traffic  
Signals & Patterns



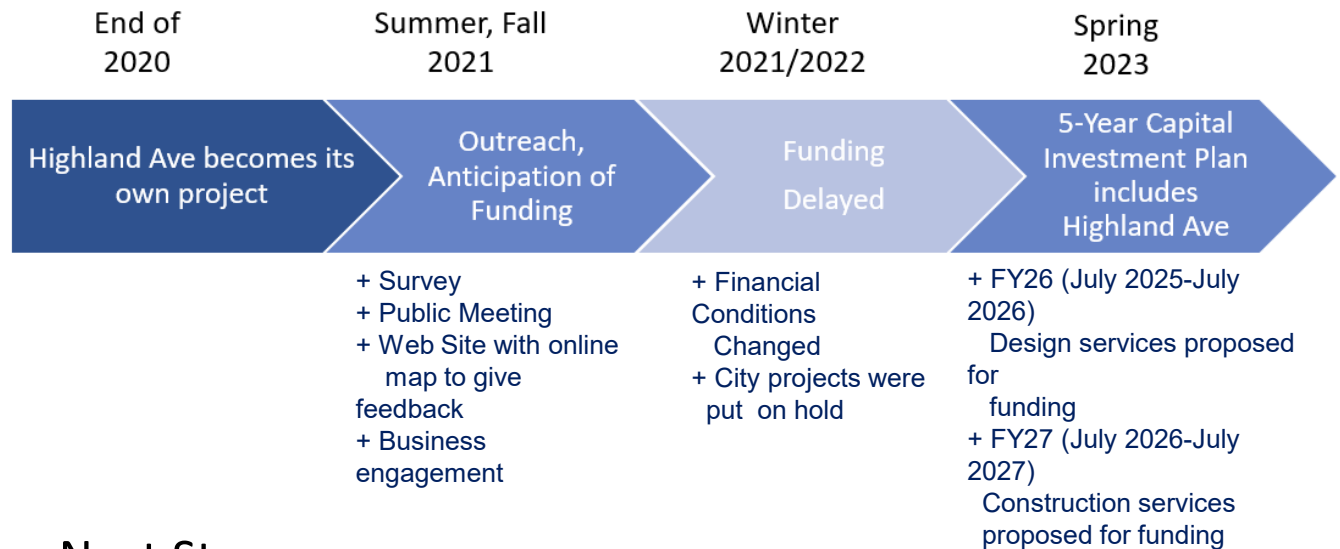
Green Stormwater  
Infrastructure and  
Trees



Mobility  
Improvements

- Project Page:  
[somerillema.gov/highlandave](http://somerillema.gov/highlandave)

- Current Citywide Capital Investment Plan programs design budget in Fiscal Year 2026 (July 2025-July 2026)



- Next Steps
  - Citywide Capital Investment Plan will have annual update in late 2023
  - City will seek opportunity to move Highland Avenue design funds earlier in 5-year plan
  - Restart of community engagement following approval of funds for design services

# Capital Project Updates

- Powder House / Alewife Brook ([project page](#))
  - Ongoing construction activities, new intersection geometry is beginning to take shape
  - Project schedule currently runs through end of 2024
- Somerville Avenue “SAUSI” ([project page](#))
  - Substantially complete!
  - Will be conducting a final walkthrough to flag any final punch list items
- Spring Hill ([project page](#))
  - Summer St - Started surface work last week. Sidewalk replacement will continue for foreseeable future, starting at School and working toward Spring St on the south side. Crew will then switch sides and work back from Spring St to School St. Eversource also continues to perform gas work near Nunziato, and is expected to wrap up by the end of the month.
  - Avon St – Most sidewalk reconstruction is complete
  - Highland Ave – Subsurface work occurring between School St and Walnut St. Eastbound traffic is detoured north at Central St and continues on Medford until it meets Highland Ave.
  - School St – Utility work ongoing through September from Summer up to Highland. Also worked out staging coordination with a developer on School St.
  - Project schedule currently runs through end of 2024
- McGrath Resurfacing ([project storymap](#))
  - Project limits: Broadway to Rufo Road
  - MassDOT contractor continues structural work on bridges
  - Sidewalk, paving and striping activities to follow
  - Potential to complete portions of the paving/striping in 2023



Image: Powder House Blvd looking west to Route 16, 7-13-2023