



SOMERVILLE PEDESTRIAN AND TRANSIT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (PTAC) AUGUST 2023 MEETING MINUTES

MAYOR KATJANA BALLANTYNE

Thursday, August 24, 2023, 6:30 – 8:00 PM

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82078415760?pwd=ZFFldHRmNWp6NmtpZUNYT0JYbmhjdz09>

Meeting ID: 820 7841 5760

Passcode: 319008

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Community Representatives:

*Ted Alexander
*Ginny Alverson
*Caroline Bodager
*Meredith Brown
Laura Evans
*Christopher Ferry
*Vitor Pamplona, *Vice-Chair*
*Zach Rosenberg
*Alessandra Seiter, *Chair*
Carole Voulgaris, *Secretary*

Ex Officio:

Beatriz Gómez Mouakad, *City Council - Ward 5*
*Lauren Craik, *OSPCD Mobility*
*Justin Schreiber, *OSPCD Mobility*

*= present

Guests:

James Donovan, *Captain, Somerville Police Department*
3 members of the public

Acting Secretary: Caroline Bodager

Call to order: 6:35

Procedural Business (10 minutes)

1. Administrative
 - a. Change to Zoom
 - b. Interest in hybrid meetings?

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- i. Mobility will find a space, hopefully at the Somerville Public Library.
 - ii. Some interest from committee members.
 - iii. Alessandra proposes trying it out, planning to hold September's meeting remotely and try to start hybrid meetings in October.
- c. Call for SRTS volunteers
 - i. Mobility joined the Education & Engagement meeting last month to see if any PTAC members would be interested in volunteering on a Safe Routes to School effort for Winter Hill families who will be at Edgerly/Capuano this year.
 - ii. There's not a formal volunteer process but if anyone is interested they can reach out to Lauren Craik who can connect folks with Winter Hill PTA members.
- d. July minutes
 - i. Alessandra motions to approve, Ginny second.
 - ii. Minutes pass unanimously.

Subcommittee Updates (10 min)

- 1. Engineering & Evaluation
 - a. Met this past Tuesday.
 - b. Discussed Tufts Street.
 - c. Put together notes, comments and questions to be discussed in more detail at the September meeting.
- 2. Policy & Enforcement
 - a. Met last night.
 - b. Discussed Tufts Street, enforcement, bus access for folks with visual impairments, and fee structures for outdoor dining.
- 3. Education & Engagement
 - a. See above for SRTS discussion with Mobility.
 - b. August 31 - walk on Tufts Street.
 - c. September 17 - tabling at SomerStreets.

Discussion with Somerville Police Department on Traffic Enforcement (55 minutes)

- 1. Captain Donovan addressed a set of prepared questions:
 - a. What is SPD's approach to education and enforcement of pedestrians and cyclists?
 - i. There's no limit to the amount of education the SPD wants to put into pedestrian and cyclist behavior, but budget cuts have made it difficult to fill open positions. Our priority is to staff 911 vehicles.
 - ii. The goal is not enforcement unless people are committing repeat offenses of egregious behavior. Education is the priority, not punishment.
 - iii. Of all our bicycle citations last year, 10% were money citations and 90% were warnings.
 - b. If a pedestrian or cyclist is pulled over, what are their rights vs. obligations (e.g., showing ID)?
 - i. They don't need to show identification but they are required to identify themselves by name, date of birth, and address. If they don't provide this

- information, it's a criminal offense and they can be arrested. I've only seen this happen once in my 20-year career.
- ii. If you get a warning as a cyclist, it doesn't go on your record. It's recorded internally in SPD's database to help us track what we're doing, especially for our grant funders (e.g., the State Municipal Road Safety Grant).
 - c. Is education focused on pedestrians and cyclists or drivers?
 - i. Outside of the Municipal Road Safety Grant, SPD doesn't have the staffing or bandwidth to do pedestrian/cycling enforcement.
 - ii. Everything that happens outside the grant is focused on motor vehicles. Every officer does enforcement, but the Traffic Unit is solely responsible for monitoring traffic. The unit has been cut from 5 to 3 officers. They write the majority of SPD's citations.
 - iii. SPD bought two radar speed signs with the Grant to monitor driver behavior.
 - iv. SPD looks for distracted/impaired driving but they don't do sobriety checks (that's the State).
 - d. Why is education happening in the streets rather than at community events?
 - i. Some of it is the SPD's fault because we're not at the events, but part of it is that it's hard to get SPD staff to work on the weekends.
 - ii. Another part is that we like to engage people where their behavior is happening. If we hand out pamphlets at events they get thrown away.
 - iii. We chose areas for cyclist engagement based on high-traffic corridors.
 - iv. In the past year there have been 300 bicycle stops and 2 of them were monetary fines.
 - e. Is there a possibility or desire to collaborate with others in the city to have specific subject matter expertise?
 - i. SPD would love to collaborate with PTAC and the Bike Committee when the Municipal Road Safety Grant is next open for applications. "This is your grant, this is not our grant."
 - ii. Some eligible activities don't involve enforcement at all, such as creating a memorial for folks who were killed in traffic crashes.
 - f. What is SPD's definition of success when it comes to traffic safety and enforcement?
 - i. Vision Zero is the ultimate success - having a full year with no fatalities and no serious injuries.
 - g. What data are the SPD collecting and what are the general trends on traffic safety?
 - i. MassDOT crash portal, traffic reports in Somerville open portal.
 - h. What is SPD's capacity to implement automated enforcement in the future?
 - i. That's pretty far out and SPD hasn't taken a position on it but if it will increase public safety then I'd probably support it.
 - ii. There are some privacy concerns as well as logistical considerations (how long would data be stored, where would cameras be placed, who would pay for it)

2. PowerPoint slides on SPD data

- a. Non-motorist-involved crashes increased in 2022 but are still trending downwards in the long-term.
 - i. In 2023 there were 77 non-motorist-involved crashes, an increase compared with 2020 and 2021. Totals are still lower than 2017 - 2019. Recent increases are seen in all non-motorist types.
- b. First 6 months of 2023 mirror annual trends, though scooter incidents have been increasing.
- c. Non-motorist serious injuries are trending downwards but there have been 3 fatalities in the past 5 years.
 - i. Mobility and Engineering have been doing an excellent job of redesigning our streets to make them safer.
- d. Crashes in Somerville tend to be concentrated in high-volume areas:
 - i. Somerville Ave
 - ii. Holland St north of Davis Square
 - iii. Highland Ave between McGrath Hwy and Lowell St
 - iv. Washington St between McGrath Hwy and Union Square
 - v. Broadway between McGrath Hwy and Temple St
- e. *Mobility jumps in:* It might be a myth that the majority of traffic in Somerville is cut-through. Originally the data collected via cell towers indicated this, but Mobility is working on an updated analysis with a more reliable data collection methodology.
- f. Total SPD citations have fluctuated based on external factors.
 - i. Citations plummeted during the height of the pandemic, rebounded with renewed effort in 2021, then dropped in 2022 due to staffing shortages.
 - ii. Top 5 violations in 2023:
 - 1. Failure to stop or yield
 - 2. No inspection sticker
 - 3. Texting and driving
 - 4. Speeding
 - 5. Improper operation of a motor vehicle
 - iii. In 2023, there has been an increase in crosswalk violations, texting and driving, and bike violations (the Municipal Road Safety Grant has significantly increased the number of bike citations).
 - 1. Outside of the Grant, the SPD doesn't do bike enforcement - we just don't have the bandwidth.

3. Open discussion:

- a. Christopher: You had mentioned problems with staffing, there seem to be many fewer bike patrols but the Community Path has doubled in length. Are there plans to patrol that area more?
 - i. SPD would love to do bike and foot patrol. Still staffing issues and budget constraints.
- b. Christopher: Seven patrol cars, do they need to be cars? Why not bikes, or at least smaller cars?

- i. Yes, SPD needs to be in cars. Equipment in the vehicles. Ford Explorers, SUV, but smaller than most. They have to carry equipment and get through snow. Next fleet of cars will be hybrid. SPD has two ATVs, small vehicles for Community Path, etc.
- c. Vitor: What are your thoughts on bus lane enforcement, especially against speeding in the bus lane?
 - i. We have bus lane enforcement. If you report it, SPD can dedicate resources to it for a period of time, but they have limited resources.
- d. How do you respond quickly to a Community Path emergency?
 - i. If they can't get there by ATV, then by foot. Access in the distant future is planned to be added between Washington St and Cambridge.
- 4. Alessandra: Have you ever stopped a pedestrian and if so what for?
 - a. We don't stop pedestrians but we do talk to them when they're already stopped, such as when they're waiting to cross an intersection. We hand out "goodie bags" with reflective bracelets and educational materials funded through the Municipal Road Safety Grant.
- 5. Alessandra: It sounds like you'll continue to apply for the Municipal Road Safety Grant. What is your goal with this grant?
 - a. Every year we have this grant we are going to improve on it. More community involvement and feedback.
- 6. Ginny: What can you SPD do to help bikes alert those with visual impairments to let them know they are coming?
 - a. SPD has a presence around the most congested areas and overall they are working on enforcement. Outside of the grant, they don't have the opportunity to do bike enforcement.
- 7. Guest: Given that enforcement must be selective, can we focus only on violations that are proven to be unsafe, such as bicycles that blow through red lights when there is a lot of traffic rather than a cyclist at a quiet intersection who looks both ways and proceeds without impeding others?
 - a. Generally the law is the law but the SPD wouldn't be opposed to this kind of approach if it's what the community wanted. SPD has been looking into data on the Idaho Stop, following the Council resolution introduced by Councilors Ewen-Campen and Wilson.

Other Business (5 minutes)

- 1. None

Meeting ended: 8:00