



February 2024 Meeting Minutes

Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC)

Mayor Katjana Ballantyne

Meeting Information

Thursday, February 15, 2024, 6:30-8:00 PM

This meeting will be hybrid:

- **In-person meeting location:** Somerville Public Library, Central Library, 79 Highland Ave.
- **Zoom info to join remotely via computers, tablets, and smartphones:**
 - <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89181225932?pwd=aWpoL2FtaUh3aGdVbHNhRWUJmeDRNQTO9>
 - Passcode: 152274
 - Or join by phone:
 - Dial (for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location):
 - US: +1 646 558 8656
 - Webinar ID: 891 8122 5932
 - Passcode: 152274
 - International numbers available: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/kcVy69ROJG>

Members

* = present

1. Ted Alexander
2. Ginny Alverson
3. Caroline Bodager
4. Meredith Brown
5. Laura Evans
6. Christopher Ferry
7. Vitor Pamplona (Vice Chair)
8. Zach Rosenberg
9. Alessandra Seiter (Chair)
10. Carole Voulgaris (Secretary)
11. Will Mbah (Ex Officio, City Council - At Large)

12. Lauren Craik (Ex Officio, OSPCD Mobility)
13. Justin Schreiber (Ex Officio, OSPCD Mobility)

Guests

1. Preston Gutelis (Somerville community member)
2. Zav P. (Somerville community member)
3. Nick Mellis (Somerville community member)
4. Talia (Somerville community member)
5. Karen Molloy (Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets (SASS) and Somerville Transit Equity Partnership (STEP))

Acting Secretary

Zach Rosenberg

Call to Order

6:32 PM

Agenda

Procedural Business

1. Intros
2. Vote on Jan Minutes
 - a. January Minutes Approved

Subcommittee Updates

1. Engineering and Eval
 - a. Met with Adam and provided comments and questions on the upcoming intersection improvements
2. Education and Engagement
 - a. Met with Kate and discussed the draft mobility plan for community engagement
3. Policy and enforcement
 - a. didn't meet

Davis Square Commercial Area Plan

1. The Davis Square plan has been around in different forms since 2013
 - a. Current process restarted in 2020 focused on the commercial center
 - b. A visioning plan for future decades
2. Main mobility recommendations
 - a. prioritize mass transit
 - i. bus network redesign
 - ii. comfortable stops with shelters
 - iii. bus priority lanes
 - b. Encourage Electric Vehicles
 - c. Reprioritize Curb Space

- i. consistency with parking study
 - ii. Less emphasis on vehicle storage
 - iii. more emphasis on short term use, active use, and mobility use
- d. parking management
 - i. expand commercial loading opportunities
 - ii. better manage ride hail and food delivery
 - iii. demand based metering
 - iv. leverage side streets for short term parking
 - v. leverage private off-street parking lots
- e. implement signal improvements
- f. implement bike network plan
- g. improve sidewalk conditions
 - i. concrete w/ brick accent standard

3. Civic spaces

- a. slip lane
 - i. permanent removal of slip lane and reconstruction as welcoming plaza that can serve as an extension of statue plaza
 - ii. permanent public seating and tables
 - iii. dense tree canopy
- b. Elmway!
 - i. convert a section of Elm from the main intersection to Bowers and Grove primarily for pedestrian use
 - ii. commercial loading could be accommodated during off-peak
 - iii. bicycle access could be
- c. Cutter Plaza
 - i. convert small parking lot into a civic space that could serve as a gateway into Davis sq
 - ii. Could incorporate first block of summer
 - iii. Space could be more of a pocket park

4. Discussion

- a. Question on auto rising bollards as a possibility - are there any regs against those, since we don't really see much of them?
 - i. Not to Kate's knowledge, there are some around but it depends on usage
 - ii. no firm design
 - iii. Ted in Support!
- b. Vitor: Have we thought about doing a tunnel under Davis (Somerville Tiny Dig!) and moving busses and traffic below davis in order to open up Elm to pedestrians
 - i. Hasn't been considered - would be a big, and expensive project, but will take that back for consideration
- c. Nick: What would be the impact to Highland if Elm gets closed to cars
 - i. Highland would be converted to 2-way travel, also designated to get bike lanes
 - ii. Part of the goal is the simplify the Davis intersection as well, since it's very complicated
- d. Christopher: If we are turning Elm into mostly pedestrian, could we work with buildings to create shade scrims? In the heat sometimes people avoid outdoor seating that is directly in the sun as-is.
- e. Alessandra: Is there more space for trees?
 - i. Yes if Elm is mostly pedestrianized there could be more opportunity for tree space

- f. Ted: Have you done any modeling on changes to moving the bus on highland rather than Elm
 - i. Not yet, but with this and
 - ii. Might actually might make rides smoother for buses, since right now it's tough to get them down elm. But the city will work with the MBTA on taking this into account.
- g. Vitor: Have we considered moving bus routes out of the center of the square and around any side streets?
 - i. Highland does seem like the direct route, and with the bus turning radius it might be difficult to
- h. Any feedback on the ticketing camera for the bus stop on Elm?
 - i. We also might be able to have Bollards that open automatically for Busses if we want to keep them still on Elm, even if cars can't
 - ii. Traffic and Parking presented an update on the traffic stick in Nov
 - iii. Also the 88 currently has to go to Elm to go on Highland, so that could be more efficient.
- i. Karen: Davis Square headhouse elevator - Is there an opportunity to change or advocate for an updated headhouse? What is happening there?
 - i. In a prior meeting the MBTA presented plans for the Davis Headhouse, and we advocated for a design that gets us the accessibility we need while also preserving the pedestrian experience. PTAC has a letter on on our website
- j. Could the headhouse also include the whole structure? Would there be a possibility of integrating commercial space, to better use the space above and possibly raise more money for a better design?
- k. Vitor: Are we thinking through ways of connecting the community path through Davis
 - i. Some designs have been proposed
- l. Alessandra: In the past there was apparently a temp Cutter Plaza, and it seemed like people enjoyed it. Do we know why that hasn't happened since?
 - i. Not sure, will get back to us on that.
- m. Alessandra: There is a parking lot that shows low utilization space. Is there a possibility to turn that into a dedicated pickup/dropoff space?
 - i. It's all on the table
 - ii. Do we know of any precedents? In Vegas there are very specific spots that ride-share apps must use
 - iii. Davis used to have a small pickup/dropoff zone before it became a bike lane
 - iv. Assembly seemed like it had a designated spot at one time for pickup/dropoff
- n. The deliveries and stopping really impacts the air quality in Davis and Elm so this could help. Also, is there any reason why we don't really have more bike delivery in Somerville? It's pretty compact, it should be a good place
- o. Elm street pedestrian dining is also impacted by buses passing close by - it's unpleasant.

5. Davis Signal Improvements

- a. joint project with the MBTA to move busses through the intersection more efficiently
- b. Davis Square curbs
- c. Traffic signal phasing changes for pedestrian improvements
- d. Traffic signal improvements
 - i. add flashing yellow for right turn from college onto holland
 - ii. add flashing yellow arrow for left
- e. Street markings
- f. Still to come

- i. transit signal software that will be able to make small change to timing to get approaching buses through intersection quicker
 - ii. Evaluation and observations
 - iii.
- g. Phasing plan is shortened, allows people to walk more quickly with less waiting
 - i. about 100 second phases
 - ii. Have long lead pedestrian intervals
- h. Discussion
 - i. Zach: The crossings across Elm is pretty scary
 - 1. at the start of phase 4 it seems like cars coming from college are still in the intersection and moving quickly
 - 2. Also it seems like vehicles turning left from highland make that turn very quickly, and seem like they aren't expecting peds in the middle of the street so it feels dangerous.
 - ii. Caroline: in phase 3 and 4 it seems like cars are backing up a lot, so they need to feel like they should take the left turn more quickly to make it
 - 1. Backup on highland has really increased, need more signage on the highland crosswalk?
 - iii. Alessandra: We are hoping to do a follow up on the signal improvements

MBTA Proposed Fare Changes

1. MBTA Low Income Fare Proposal
 - a. new program would provide riders 26-64, non-disabled and have low income with reduced fares, approx 50% off, or link pass for \$30/mo
 - b. Proposed program is a multi-secretariat effort with EOHHS and RMV
 - c. MBTA partnering with third-party community based partners to manage in-person customer service and eligibility verification
 - d. Program participants will be able to enroll through existing low income programs, with cutoff at 200% of federal poverty line
 - e. Applies to all MBTA modes
 - f. Next steps
 - i. MBTA currently seeking public comment
 - ii. Upcoming MBTA meetings, public comment due Feb 29th
2. Discussion
 - a. Is there a system to cap the reduced fares of someone - for example if they spent \$30 dollars in a month on fares then they would be converted to a monthly pass
 - i. NYC does a similar thing with a weekly cap
 - ii. They use the same vendor as we are getting with AFC2, so we should have the technical capability
 - b. Could there be a way to avoid fares with very quick trips, since they cost the same as longer ones
 - i. maybe like transfer fares?
 - c. Is this a scaling up of what the city does today?
 - i. Our offering was an ARPA pilot, so our time was limited for the budget for our program.
 - d. Question on if a City or community partner could buy and give out reduced fare passes, so the city could pay less for the free MBTA cards we provide

- i. We currently buy MBTA passes at \$90/mo
- e. The commuter rail passes are very expensive and often serve low income riders so that's an important part of this. Also reduced commuter rail fares could help people take the commuter rail instead of cheaper, and slower/less efficient buses.

2023 PTAC Annual Report Draft

- 1. Alessandra: Motion to publish the report
 - a. Approved!!

Final Items

Action Items from Meeting

- 1. n/a

Meeting Ended

7:57 PM