



Traffic Board Public Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, July 12, 2023, 5:30PM

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.

Video recording of the hearing: <https://youtu.be/PHSQDdo9uc?si=wQsTP6xT32YWkoTw>

The meeting began at 5:01 pm and ended at 5:30 pm.

Approval of the February 24, 2022, Traffic Board Public Hearing Minutes

Joan Liu made a motion to approve the February 24, 2022, minutes. Alex Epstein seconded. All members present voted in favor. The motion carried.

Approval of the May 2, 2022, Traffic Board Public Meeting Minutes

Alex Epstein shared that there was a grammatical typo in the minutes.

Alex Epstein made a motion to approve the May 2, 2022, minutes. Joan Liu seconded. All members present voted in favor. The motion carried.

Approval of the December 20, 2022, Traffic Board Public Meeting Minutes

J. Liu stated that they still had questions regarding the implementation of the decision, but no questions regarding the minutes. A. Epstein stated that the Traffic Commission recently adopted an updated pedestrian regulation Article 12-1 as a result of the petition the Traffic Board heard at the December 20 public hearing. A. Epstein stated that discussion on that topic is not within the scope of the agenda item. A. Schuur stated that a recording of that specific Traffic Commission meeting has been posted on the City's website.

Joan Liu made a motion to approve the December 20, 2022, minutes. Alex Epstein seconded. All members present voted in favor. The motion carried.

Approval of the Reappointment of Board Member Schuur

A. Schuur shared that members of the Traffic Board have rolling terms. A. Schuur's term had ended. Board members can continue to serve until the seat is reappointed or filled. A. Schuur requested to be reappointed. The specific seat they hold on the board must be voted on by the two other members of

the Traffic Board. A. Schuur shared the City of Somerville's Code of Ordinances states that, "The Traffic Board consisting of three persons to be appointed as follows. One by the Mayor for a term of one year, one by a majority vote of the City Council for a term of two years, and one by vote of the first two members for a term of three years."

A. Schuur stated that they found this to be confusing because all three current members began less than two years ago, however, the City's Clerk's Office confirmed that terms need to follow when the original terms of the Traffic Board began. Terms are fixed dates, and Chair Schuur's is currently expired.

A. Schuur stated that the other board members will have a discussion about the reappointment and that they are welcome to ask the City Liaison for more information that can be researched and brought back to a future meeting.

J. Liu stated that they have been very pleased with how Chair Schuur participates and runs the board meetings. J. Liu stated they would happily accept Chair Schuur's application to continue to be on the Traffic Board.

A. Epstein shared that they have been entirely satisfied with the performance of Chair Schuur and that they bring a level of professionalism and level-headedness that serves the board well. A. Epstein stated that they fully support the continued appointment of Chair Schuur.

A. Epstein clarified the number of years for the term. The staff liaison confirmed that a reappointment of the seat would be for three years following December 31, 2022.

A. Epstein made a motion endorsing the reappointment of Arah Schuur. Joan Liu seconded. The two members allowed to vote on the appointment of the third seat voted in favor. The motion carried.

Discussion of Board Operations

A. Schuur stated that they have asked the staff liaison to give an overview of how other commissions and committees around the City are considering hybrid public meeting operations.

K. White described feedback received from the City Clerk's Office. The City Clerk shared that the Licensing Commission held a hybrid public meeting in the City Council Chambers using the video conferencing platform GoTo. K. White stated that the City is now moving to using Zoom video conferencing. At the Licensing Commission meeting, participants could either join virtually or in person. Some other cities and towns have provided an in-person option for the commissioners, but members of the public could only join virtually. K. White stated that the only other group in the City who has hosted a hybrid meeting is the City Council.

K. White shared that the Clerk's Office recommended the board to think through how people could sign up to provide public comments and ensure that it works with the virtual technology. K. White stated that any building used for a public meeting must be Americans with Disabilities compliant. The City can provide a list of appropriate buildings. K. White recommended that locations should also be easy to access through public transportation. K. White shared that the Traffic Board is required to host a public hearing within two weeks of receiving a petition and that scheduling an in-person location can be more difficult in that timeframe.

K. White shared that there is no local or state requirement to host a hybrid meeting. Many boards and commissions across the state have been employing either hybrid or virtual meetings because community members are more used to there being a virtual option. The board can still choose to host an in-person only meeting.

J. Liu asked if the City has been tracking participation or attendance of public meetings pre-pandemic when meetings were in person and now with the virtual options. K. White shared that the City doesn't have that specific information at this time. K. White shared that they've received feedback around user experience in hybrid meetings such as poor audio quality if people are not speaking directly into the microphones or poor visual experience is the video isn't picking up different people. K. White stated that the City is exploring testing different equipment and that there could be different options for public meetings versus public hearings.

A. Schuur asked for any evidence of greater diversity of participation with either in-person hybrid or virtual meetings, and for accommodations for translation, interpretation, and other services. K. White stated that they did not have any specific evidence for the City of Somerville but shared that a professor from Boston University analyzed a variety of virtual meetings to see if there was increased diversity and participation. K. White shared that the findings of the report stated larger participation overall but not necessarily increased diversity, and that the largest growth of participation was from higher income community members and older adults.

K. White shared that the Traffic Board is required to host a public hearing but is not limited to just one hearing, and that the board can choose to not vote in that specific public hearing but determine a vote later. Therefore, there could be the option to host one in-person public hearing, and another virtually.

A. Epstein asked if different constituencies are better represented through one method or the other. A. Epstein shared families, shift workers, and people who work long hours are better able to attend through virtual options. A. Epstein shared that attendance appears to be higher at virtual meetings since it conflicts less with other commitments people have in the evenings.

K. White shared in their own experience doing community engagement for the Mobility Division, they received feedback from some older adults that they prefer the in-person connection and find the virtual context difficult. K. White shared that Mobility has received feedback from people who identify as having disabilities that they feel safer joining virtually and prefer there still being a virtual option as there are concerns for immunocompromised people. K. White shared that Mobility has from some community members who may not want to directly participate that they like being able to listen to a meeting and appreciate the virtual option. K. White shared that Mobility is starting to receive more inquiries about wanting more community engagement events to be in person.

A. Schuur asked if interpretation services are more available virtually or in-person. K. White shared that the City's current standard is to have community members request interpreter services seven days prior to the event, but in general, the Office of Immigrant Affairs try to work with any requests that come in even if its not 7 days prior. K. White stated that it is logistically easier to set up virtual interpreters who can also join from any location. In the in-person context, they must be present, and staff must plan for the addition of specialized audio equipment. For hybrid, interpreters need to speak into the microphone for interpretive headsets and the microphone for the virtual meeting.

A. Schuur asked if Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023 regarding virtual meetings is timebound. K. White shared that they did not have that information.

A. Schuur asked if the Traffic Board decided to change from virtual meetings only, would the board need to take a vote to establish this change. K. White recommended that the board should update public hearing regulations if they moved to host hybrid or in-person public hearings but that they are not required to vote.

A. Epstein stated that they do not see a compelling reason to change the mode of participation and that the upsides outweighed the potential downsides.

J. Liu agreed and shared that in their own experience, people not in the room have a very different and negative experience in hybrid meetings. J. Liu would move to keep these meetings solely virtual, but would consider a change if a petition specifically asks for a meeting to be hybrid or in-person.

A. Schuur agreed with the two other members but stated that the board should be open to changing the format if they thought they would get more participation.

J. Liu reiterated the challenge with hosting an in-person public hearing under the two-week Traffic Board requirement. A. Epstein affirmed and shared that virtual meetings better use limited staff resources as well as provide options like closed captioning and automated recordings.

Adjournment

Alex Epstein made a motion to adjourn. Joan Liu seconded the motion. The motion carried.