



September 2024 Meeting Minutes

Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC)

Mayor Katjana Ballantyne

Meeting Information

Thursday, September 19, 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=aWpoL2FtaUh3aGdVbHNhRWUJmeDRNQQT09>
 - 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. Tim Gilman*
8. Preston Gutelius*
9. Satoko Hirai*
10. Brenda Marvin*

11. Steven Mulder*
12. Barbara Myers*
13. Bianca Norkunas
14. Vitor Pamplona (Vice Chair)*
15. Zach Rosenberg*
16. Alessandra Seiter (Chair)*
17. Robert Stanzel*
18. Carole Voulgaris (Secretary)*
19. Will Mbah (Ex Officio, City Council - At Large)
20. Katherine White (Ex Officio, OSPCD Mobility)
21. Justin Schreiber (Ex Officio, OSPCD Mobility)*

Guests

1. Lillian Worth, OSPCD Mobility, City of Somerville
2. Erin Mullins, Boston University
3. Arah Schuur, Somerville Resident, Ward 6
4. Fred Bernardin, Somerville Resident, Ward 4
5. Jake's AI Notetaker (no response)
6. Joel Paul, Somerville Resident, Ward 4

Acting Secretary

Preston Gutelius

Call to Order

18:32

Agenda

Procedural Business

1. August minutes approved; Motion initiated by Alessandra seconded by Meredith, passed by voice consensus.

Subcommittee Updates

1. Education engagement,
 - a. No meeting this last month, but a walk is planned for Western Pearl Street
 - b. Planning on tabling for Somerstreets (Monster Mash)

Preliminary Discussion on Western Pearl Street Reconstruction

1. Alessandra leading through review of publicly available project plans. Goal that the reconstructed sidewalks and street will make the area safer, more accessible, more sustainable, and more comfortable. Outlining the features of the new public way the interacts with different mobility modes. Noting that there are significant decisions that the city will need to make on how to implement the changes such as the two-way protected bike way.

- a. Big limitation in ROW that will restrict what facilities would be available as a two-way would require the removal of all parking
- b. Timeline, nearly to the period for community feedback
- 2. Discussion: Alessandra opens for committee member thoughts
 - a. Christopher: do we have information on how this will interact with Gilman square plans, both the empty space and how it would connect to station
 - i. Justin responding that there is a plan at 60% that will involve the closing of Medford St, if pearl street is restricted to one way car traffic it will have implications for the plans of nearby areas and add complications
 - b. Brenda: would there be a space/ROW benefit to put the bike lanes together on one side, vs on opposite sides:
 - i. Justin: it would save a few feet, though there are complications with putting the combined bike lanes in along with accessible bus stops
 - c. Ted and Meredith: spoke to the removal of the 80 Bus along this route
 - i. Justin: we don't have details from the MBTA
 - ii. Alessandra: how likely is the MBTA to be responsive to changing the route or adding it to earlier bus network redesigns
 - 1. Justin: the MBTA is likely to request that the bus stops are included in plans
 - d. Fred Bernardin: concerns that people will bike the wrong way if there is only infrastructure for bikes going in one direction
 - e. Rob: discussing if a one-way car traffic would be feasible
 - i. Justin: too soon to be sure, traffic data is being collected, it ties into the larger Gilman square plans
 - ii. Vitor discussing one way direction data
 - f. Alessandra: discussing parking usage and limitations with bike lane infrastructure and bump outs
 - i. Justin: there is some limited data and there will likely be some counts, due to the ROW there will be constraints on what can be done
 - g. Ted: curb cuts and driveway interactions with a two-way bike lane, with the number of driveways would support taking street parking away to support other goals
 - i. Justin: there are a large number of private home driveways, the design is likely to be similar to the Summer Street bike lane where it is set at a height between the sidewalk and road
 - h. Alessandra: requesting feedback on how people feel on giving up Medford St as a community space to allow for pearl to be one-way
 - i. Ted: it would be good to see both options together, seems like it should in theory be possible to close Medford St and make Western Pearl one way.
 - i. Barbara: how much of the parking may be high school teachers due to the lack of a parking lot on site
 - i. Justin: possible as it is in the zone for the School and City Hall
 - j. Alessandra: speaking to how it is necessary to see more information on the two integrated options fully integrated to best give feedback and the need for more 3rd spaces for teenagers in the area especially with the proximity to the school.
 - k. Meredith: we should be sure to speak the parents and other people in Edgerly school community about the implications and their use of the roads
 - l. Vitor: do we have any limitations on emergency vehicles
 - i. Justin: talking to fire dept. and DPW on their needs
 - m. Joel: comment on the 80 bus usage is down to around a third of what it was before

- i. Justin confirming that this have been a factor in the MBTA's considerations to realign the 80
3. Next Steps for PTAC
 - a. Meeting is on Oct 9th
 - b. Christopher and Joel will attend the community meeting
 - c. Community walk needs to have date established
 - i. Mobility prefers October 21st Monday at 6:00p.m.
 - ii. Works for the PTAC group

Preparing for October Meeting with Somerville Police Department

1. Alessandra speaking to how we have had a dialog with SPD in the past and how a representative will be joining next month for a discussion
 - a. Specific goals to discuss the following along with other topics:
 - i. Latest application for Municipal Road Safety Grant
 - ii. How SPD incorporates community feedback in their work
 - iii. SPD's future traffic enforcement goals
 - b. Background on PTAC activities on the relationship between traffic enforcement and street safety

BACKGROUND: PTAC ACTIVITY

In 2023, PTAC explored the relationship between enforcement & street safety with four sets of guests:

- *Somerville Parking Department (May)*
 - Spoke about the regulations they uphold, how they respond to violations (prefer warnings over tickets), and results of the automated parking enforcement pilot in Davis Square (now permanent in front of H Mart).
- *LivableStreets Alliance (June)*
 - Presented 2022 report *Dismantling Law Enforcement's Role in Traffic Safety: A Roadmap for Massachusetts* which included evidence that pretextual traffic stops don't improve road safety, that high-visibility enforcement campaigns have no lasting impact on driver behavior, and that automated enforcement can reduce crashes where cameras are installed.
- *Somerville Mobility (June)*
 - Presented evolving approach to traffic enforcement within Vision Zero framework. Since 2020 release of Vision Zero Action Plan, Mobility has seen a lack of evidence that enforcement effectively improves street safety and has found it difficult to separate traffic enforcement from systemic issues like discriminatory traffic stops and inequitable fines. Currently prefers to educate rather than punish, alongside primary focus on changing the structure of our streets so unsafe behavior is less likely to happen.
- *Somerville Police Department (August)*
 - Presented approach to traffic enforcement. Of SPD's 88 staff members, three were assigned to Traffic Unit which focuses on motor vehicle enforcement. [Between 2017-2023](#), the most frequent citation types by far were no inspection (11,715) and speeding (11,139) with using electronic device while operating motor vehicle making a distant third place (2,750).

- c. PTAC preferences varied from stronger more direct enforcement, modified methods with automation of ticketing, to road design.

From our conversations, we found an array of committee preferences:

- Stronger law enforcement toward dangerous driving behavior (e.g., speeding, noncompliance at crosswalks)
- Modified approaches to traffic enforcement that involve less direct interaction between law enforcement and civilians (e.g., automated ticketing)
- Self-enforcing roads based on design rather than police presence

- d. SPD has again applied for the Municipal Road Safety Grant, which has been used for a variety of uses

- [Grant program from the MA Executive Office of Public Safety and Security](#) that “makes funds available to Massachusetts police departments to address local safety issues.”
- Timeline
 - **May:** Notice of Availability
 - **July 1:** Application Deadline
 - **October:** Award Announcements
 - **November – Following September:** Performance Period
- SPD has used past grants for overtime traffic enforcement, pedestrian and bike enforcement & education, equipment (e.g., speed radar signs), and safety gear (e.g., bike lights & helmets).
- City Council declined to accept the grant funding in February 2022, accepted it in 2023, and narrowly accepted it in 2024.

2. Discussion:

- a. Carole (not audible, coming back to later)
- b. Christopher: was not satisfied by police response on size of vehicles, opportunities to use smaller size vehicles, large ford explorers may not be suitable for our roads. Wanting further push that they break from tradition and pooling with other towns to instead use vehicles that would be smaller and safer for pedestrians.
- c. Carole: we need to clarify what the grant can be spent on, while nearly all officers have driving experience could these grants be used to have officers get bikes for them to ride around or distribute safety equipment. Experience biking the city for police officers may lead to better interactions between SPD and people using bikes.
- i. Alessandra: bike lights and helmets have been purchased before and we should explore if the grant could be used for bikes themselves.
- d. Alessandra: we could explore whether there may be a way to use this grant to provide helmets for the chronically unhoused
- e. Joel: previous discussions (ward 4 meeting) with police have been resistant to spending more time on bicycles. While the officers all spend time driving around in cars, it is unclear how many have ridden a bike recently
- i. Ted: could the grants be used to pay for them to spend time on bikes
- f. Ted: in support for “all of the above” for PTAC preferences from previous discussions. Once someone is pulled over a ticket should probably be given rather than just a warning, much of the hazard from pulling someone over has already happened when giving a warning yet it is an insufficient deterrent and perhaps an opportunity to get some money for the city.
- i. Tim: Noting that it appears there is more room for tickets based on the citation dashboard, the number of speeding citations seems disproportionately low relative to previous years and other citations categories. Feeling there is room for more citations and perhaps the warnings are not effective.

- ii. Meredith: can we get information on why the speeding is clumped to a few geographic areas. There are other areas where some targeted enforcement could potentially make a big difference, locations easily identifiable by residents.
- g. Tim: we should have SPD clarify if warnings are included in the dashboard
- h. Christopher: are there regulations that require that officers be in cars when they are on patrols, SPD may underestimate how quickly a bike can move around the city. Perhaps we can get the police an ebike and fully outfit with equipment and test to see how quickly they can get around the city.
- i. Barbara: regarding the citations, it feels that we are never seeing citations for crosswalk violations, it appears that drivers few crosswalks as optional stopping areas.
 - i. Vitor, the number on the dashboard is unclear whether it is moving violations or parking violations.
- j. Meredith, would like to talk about crossing guards as there are some gaps and inconsistencies with coverage.
- k. Preston: it seems like the city does not enforce No Right on Red as it they are regularly violated and seems ignored by drivers
 - i. Joel: it would be nice to explore remove right on red throughout the city
 - 1. Alessandra: suggests reviewing the meeting from last year where this was discussed in some detail
- l. Alex Epstein: wanted to bring up a question from Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets. for automated stop sign enforcement would be moving violations based on video, law may leave room for some sort of setup. Sent details in email and shared that there may be sufficient precedent. Alex would like feedback from SPD and the new chief on the potential for such a system.
 - i. Alessandra: clarifies that SPD is not on the line till next month

Officer Nominations

- 1. Alessandra opening for officer nominations for Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary
 - a. Brenda is nominated for Secretary (seconded by current Carole)
 - b. Satoko is nominated for Communications Officer
 - c. Alessandra is nominated for Chair (no spoken alternatives)
 - d. Vitor is nominated for Vice Chair (no spoke alternatives)

New Subcommittee Structure Proposal & Vote

1. Alessandra speaking to survey results

SURVEY RESULTS

- 13 responses out of 18 PTAC members (72% response rate)
- Most popular subcommittee ideas:
 - Pedestrian Experience (10)
 - Transit Experience (7)
 - Community Events & Volunteer Recruitment (6)
 - Design Review (5)
- Annual meeting instead of subcommittee:
 - Snow Clearing (7)
 - Parking Management (2)
 - Enforcement Liaising (2)
 - City Council Liaising (2)
- 4 people interested in leading subcommittees
 - **Alessandra:** Community Events & Volunteer Coordination
 - **Satoko:** Community Events & Volunteer Coordination **OR** Digital Communications Officer (preferred role)
 - **Vitor:** Design Review
 - **Zach:** Unspecified, if another lead is needed
- a. Survey was followed by a working group:
 - Alessandra, Barbara, Brenda, Rob, Satoko, Vitor, & Zach (7 members)
 - Difficult to differentiate between Experience subcommittees and PTAC as a whole
 - Preferred focus on clear activities and deliverables
 - Wanted to respect committee members' bandwidth (e.g., not forcing more subcommittees than those interested in leading)

2. New subcommittees proposed to be Community Events and Design Review

- Community Events (*Alessandra*)
 - Plans community walks & tabling opportunities
 - Explores new venues for community interaction based on member interest & bandwidth (e.g., Streetwise)
- Design Review (*Vitor*)
 - Review Mobility's designs for street reconstruction, quick-build, & other projects with a focus on pedestrian & transit experience
 - Writes feedback/support letters on projects
- a. Alessandra: this is essentially our current structure but clarified and with policy and enforcement rolled into regular meetings
- b. Other considerations and committee norms
 - **Annual Meetings**
 - Snow Removal (Winter)
 - Municipal Road Safety Grant review & enforcement check-in with SPD (May/June)
 - **Committee Norms**
 - All members should aim to participate in at least one community event per year.
 - Subcommittee leads can change at any time based on interest and capacity.
 - Individual members should feel free to pursue independent initiatives by either reporting back to the full committee or launching a new subcommittee.
 - Subcommittee leads should have the option to attend Officer/Mobility meetings (monthly on the first Thursday).
- i. Reminder members should be participating in at least one community event per year
- ii. Individual members can feel free to pursue independent initiatives

3. Discussion:

- a. Carole: sharing concern over hitting group quorum for open meeting restrictions
 - i. Alessandra: this could be resolved by removing the requirement that everyone be on a subcommittee
 - ii. Justin: while not technically held to open meeting law we should still be working for compliance
- b. Meredith: there can be engagement without necessarily being involved in the subcommittees (Rob concurs on this view)
- c. Vitor: the two committees proposed are the two we were certain would exist and there is opportunity for additional subcommittees if there is something people are interested in
- d. Carole: the attention for people with limited bandwidth can be more directed to community events and independent initiatives, gives more flexibility and more expectation that people show up
- e. Rob: proposing whether we can create a subcommittee focused on the hot button issues we all encounter, which would be reviewing and organizing these issues into proactive feedback and initiating actions with the city
 - i. Vitor: in support of another committee if Rob is willing to lead it
 - ii. Justin: in support of such a subcommittee so long as things collected and sorted rather sending many items over individually
 - iii. Alessandra: good to collect the items and then discuss with the group to allow for , an opportunity to organize Walk Audits and better address problem areas outside of current projects
- f. Ted and Satoko: confirming that a communications subcommittee is not needed, in role of communications officer Satoko will individually liaise with all the subcommittees
- g. Multiple committee members: brainstorming on new subcommittee name, settle on a tentative name of Special Projects
- h. Alessandra: offering to committee to vote on the three subcommittees (Community Events, Design Review, and Special Projects) and removing subcommittee participation as a requirement for PTAC members as a package
- i. Meredith: asking to clarify if subcommittee membership would be formal
 - i. Alessandra: a specific roster would not be necessary, subcommittee lead could prepare agenda and invite participation by any who are interested
- j. Vitor: should the committees have a minimum size
 - i. Alessandra: perhaps if participation falls too low, we can use that as a sign that a given subcommittee may need to change
 - ii. Vitor: have a few core members that attend regularly would give continuity and some consistency that enough people would show up as compared to invitations each month
- k. Alessandra: requesting a show of hands to establish some core members for each committee that have the intention of attending regularly
 - i. Community Events: Alessandra, Ted, Barbara, Preston
 - ii. Design Review: Vitor, Rob, Preston
 - iii. Special Projects: Rob, Meredith, Barbara, Satoko
- l. Vitor: glad to have baseline participants, less need to consider if enough people will show up
 - i. Meredith: we should still track over time as a roster will not guarantee
- m. Preston: do subcommittee meetings occur on the same day each month, it has not seemed clear, a tool to track intention to participate to monitor if too many people are planning to attend
 - i. Alessandra: generally we have tried to have meetings on the same days and that would be the goal going forward

- ii. Ted: the meetings are typically added to the google calendar ahead of time and should be viewable there.
- n. Alessandra: returning to vote for package on new subcommittee structuring and removal of subcommittee participation requirement
 - i. Ted: seconding motion
 - ii. Voice vote passes, no voiced objections

Other Business

- 1. Lillian: Public comment sharing on the annual data collection on pedestrian and bike count, which helps the city with street design and planning prioritizations, will be sharing information with mailing list
- 2. Alessandra: will send an email on next steps for subcommittees
- 3. Joel: world car free day in Boston upcoming Sunday, maybe we can plan something for next year.

Meeting Ended

19:59