



## October 2024 Meeting Minutes

Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC)

Mayor Katjana Ballantyne

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### Meeting Information

Thursday, October 17, 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=aWpoL2FtaUh3aGdVbHNRWUJmeDRNQOT09>

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. Sgt Michael McCarey, *Somerville Police Department*
2. Joel Paul, *Somerville Community Member*
3. Sarah, *Somerville Community Member, Ward 2*
4. Sheila, *Tufts graduate student*

## Acting Secretary

Carole Voulgaris

## Call to Order

6:31pm

## Agenda

### Procedural Business (10 Minutes)

- Roll call and guest introductions
- Vote on September draft minutes
  - Motion to approve: Alessandra
    - Passed
- Next meeting date changed to November 14 (2nd rather than 3rd Thursday)
- Can people come to a meeting on December 19?
  - Yes. We will keep that date for December

### Subcommittee Updates (15 Minutes)

- Community Events
  - Met on October 2, with the following members
    - Alessandra
    - Ted
    - Barabra
    - Preston
  - Plan to meet first Wednesday of every month
  - Monster Mash coming up on Oct 20, Ted, Alessandra and Barbara will be tabling
  - Community walk the following day (Oct 21) on Wester Pearl St
    - 6-8pm meet in Gilman Square
- Design Review

- Have not met this month
- Meeting scheduled for October 31.
  - Discuss Western Pearl and Broadway redesign
- Special Projects
  - Will be led by Rob, but currently on hold.

## Officer Elections (10 Minutes)

- We will vote on the members who have nominated themselves/been nominated for PTAC's Officer positions, including Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and Digital Communications Officer.
  - Alessandra: Chair
  - Vitor: Vice Chair
  - Brenda: Secretary
  - Satoko: Communication
- Note from Ginny: Importance of making sure all material is available as machine-readable text and that material can be in braille when possible.
  - Ginny would like to assist Satoko/Rob on accessible communication if possible.
- Alessandra moves to elect officers
  - Ted seconds
  - Unanimous vote in favor

## Discussion with Somerville Police Department (50 Minutes)

- Sgt McCarey oversees the road municipal safety grant
- They are trying to include the community in making decisions about how to approach road safety
- There was some discussion in the spring just days before the previous grant proposal was submitted
- The committee provided questions for this meeting that Sgt McCarey will discuss and also summarize what's been happening with the grant so far.
- Municipal Road Safety grant
  - No match competitive grant by the state using Federal funds
  - Intent is to offer flexibility on strategies to improve road safety
  - Possible strategies include
    - High visibility enforcement
    - Pedestrian/cyclist enforcement
    - Others
  - Proposal ratings are based on
    - How inventive strategies area
    - How grants have been used in the past.
  - Types of strategies
    - Goal of enforcement is to discourage dangerous activity
    - Specific speed-related safety equipment
      - Measurement devices, including feedback signs
    - Non-enforcement
      - This is one the executive office has been encouraging more of
      - Focus is on enhancing community awareness
      - Officers' knowledge and skills
      - Giving away coloring books, helmets, reflective clothing, etc

- Grantor chooses on a yearly basis what campaigns they want and in what month which campaigns will be rolled out
  - September: Crosswalk safety (e.g. around schools)
  - January: Impaired driving
  - This year (Nov 2024 - October 2025)
    - Impaired driving in December
    - Other campaigns in other months
  - Somerville has elected to take part in all the campaigns, but funds can be allocated flexibly among those campaigns.
  - Campaigns may coincide with new traffic laws (e.g. distracted driving campaigns coinciding with new laws around cell phone use)
- Somerville has been participating in applying for these grants for over 14 years.
- Past uses have includes
  - speed
  - impaired driving
  - hands-free
  - There has been a move towards education, such as pamphlet disbursement
- This year: 64,000 in across four different categories.
  - \$30,324 for traffic safety enforcement
  - \$10,775 for traffic safety equipment
    - Breathalizers, speed feedback signs
  - \$11,020 for ped/bike safety enforcement
  - \$3,324 non-enforcement
    - Reflective bands, helmets, pamphlets
  - \$4,560
- Committee question: Could the money be used for bike patrols?
  - Kind of.
  - Grant can't pay for new bikes, but we can use the bikes we already have.
  - There used to be 2 officers per shift on bikes.
    - Less of that now because of lack of staffing
  - One bicycle unit was disbanded 3 years ago
- How has SPD changed its approach in response to community feedback?
  - A previous grant was rejected because it used quotas for enforcement
  - In 2023 there was an effective campaign doing bicycle enforcement on Beacon
    - The council responded with a resolution to change that type of enforcement
    - Focus is now on cross-walk and red light enforcement of vehicles who ignore vulnerable road users
    - Current soft policy is to focus on greivous safety violations rather than on "Idaho stops"
    - Focus is on cyclists who do not show caution around pedestrians and other vulnerable road users
- Focus in recent years has shifted from fines to education
  - Focus on
    - Speeding
    - Red lights
    - J-turns
  - Trying to get people to voluntarily abide by the rules of the road

- Goal with youth is to form relationships so that police are seen as a resource rather than an adversary
- 1829: 9 pillars of policing
  - People are police and police are people
  - Public dictates what is important to them and police have a responsibility to respond to those issues.
  - “What do I want as a community member”
- Future goals of traffic enforcement
  - Safety: For road users and pedestrians to feel safe in their community
  - Trying to find creative ways to meet those goals, through being better community members
  - Things it would be nice to bring back
    - Classes for kids on how to ride a bike
    - Bike rodeos
    - More deployments of bicycle patrols, for example on the community path
    - This all requires money and manpower, and we’re short on both
- Is automated enforcement possible?
  - It is not currently legal, although the state has bills moving forward that might allow that if passed, and automated enforcement would be evaluated at that time?
- Question: Can you talk more about why bike patrols were disbanded?
  - There was an incident, and the city decided it would be better not to continue the bike patrol
- Question: What can SPD do to make bicycles audible for those who are blind.
  - Next year’s grant could include some type of device (remember the cards we used to put in our bike spokes when we were kids?) Distributing bells, etc
- Question: Bicycle patrols aren’t just to meet climate goals. The thought is that officers who have a lot of experience riding bikes might have a better understanding of what it’s like to navigate the city on a bike.
  - True, also, there are parts of the city that are inaccessible by cruisers/cars.
  - Sgt McCarey will report back that the committee is supportive of bike patrols
  - The city must have at least 7 cruisers on patrol, so any bike patrols would be above and beyond that
    - Question: Is it an SPD policy that patrols have to be in cars? Where is that policy written down?
      - Bicycles can’t carry the same equipment and cars have better response times
        - Not that there are a lot of times/places where bikes are quite a bit faster than cars.
      - This is something we can bring back to the chief
- Comment: Thank you for speed notification signs. They help.
- Question: How do you measure success? Particularly with respect to the effectiveness of signs vs warnings
  - Just seeing the blue lights affects more than just the person being pulled over.
  - Every year that we apply for the grant, we have to include statistics on crashes (in various categories)
  - The state looks for trends to see if those numbers improve in locations where a grant was deployed.
  - We do see that some crash numbers increase in years when we don’t have the grant.
- Question: Does pedestrian enforcement necessarily mean giving citations to pedestrians or also to drivers who endanger pedestrians
  - Three categories

- Vehicles against pedestrians (mostly crosswalks)
  - Vehicles against bicycles (J turns, bike lanes)
  - Bicycle compliance with traffic laws (Idaho stops are not deprioritized).
- The more well-rounded you are in your grant for this year, the better you will do in your application for next year. The state wants to see all three categories.
- With those three elements, the cars vs. bicycles, if officers see a violation of a car vs bicycle, they need to pull the vehicle over. It is hard to find those - you usually only see them if they result in a collision.
- If there is a collision, if we can assign blame to a driver, we hold them accountable
- We like to do the crosswalk enforcement during the September back-to-school period.
- Question: Has the city not already approved the FY25 grant
  - Not yet. FY24 was approved and completed.
- Question: Has there ever been bus lane enforcement with this grant?
  - Not yet. This is a statewide grant, and a lot of communities don't have bus lanes to enforce.
  - You can use 311 to send updates to the traffic units so you can indicate if there are times and places where you see a lot of violations
- Question: If someone is driving/parking in the bike lane, is that SPD or traffic/parking?
  - That is often delivery drivers, so they are hard to catch before they leave.
- Question: It seems unintuitive that enforcing crosswalk violations is less effective
  - There has been a shift from enforcement to education and numbers of collisions and deaths haven't really risen.
  - Just getting a warning will remind someone for a long time.
- Question: We've talked about double-parking on Elm Street. Could that be an opportunity for education
  - We have deployed officers there on Friday/Saturday nights. That isn't something we can use the grant money for.
  - Again, we do value community feedback on where officers should be deployed. That is really useful to the department
- Question: Thanking about the back-to-school campaigns and those who might not be aware. Who do you proactively get information out to people (crossing-guards, etc)?
  - We do use statistical analysis of citations by all officers
    - Where do we see violations, complaints (e.g. 311) and where are there accidents.
- FY24 Grant
  - Was approved in late June 2024, when the grant was almost over
  - Of the \$60,000 grant, we were able to use just over \$50,000
    - Some things we couldn't purchase because they have to be in the inventory before July 1
      - Speed monitoring equipment, for example
    - We did 1092 motor vehicle stops in the speed campaign
    - 16 hours of non-enforcement community engagement.
      - Including the Night Out event
    - Gave out 500 lighted safety bracelets
      - They are rechargeable and would be good for pedestrians, cyclists, children etc. They were really popular.
    - Gave out over 1,000 educational pamphlets.
  - For the 2025 grant
    - Traffic enforcement: 400 hours, \$30,000

- Traffic safety equipment: 2 handheld LIDAR units, 4 portable breathalizes, and one speed feedback sign
- 140 hours for pedestrian/cyclist safety
- Hours to attend up to 5 events like Somerstreet
- Purchase 60 bike helmets to give out at those events.
- If you know of traffic-related violation issues that should inform officer deployment, you can reach out via 311
  - What is the appropriate category on 311 for things like crosswalk violations?
    - When you call, just say it's a violation
    - We're working with them to make a category for that in the online system.
- Question: Do you have to return unused funds to the state?
  - Yes, you're reimbursed for the funds you use
  - It is made available for future grants?
- Question: On the automated enforcement side, a city councilor has mentioned that pilots of automated enforcement may be possible with those bills going through. Is a pilot feasible?
  - That's probably a discussion for another day. Happy to engage stakeholders in that discussion. It would need to involve the city solicitors.
- Question: If there was something you could change about city policy to make it easier for you to do your job, what might it be?
  - SPD wants the citizens to trust the department. Usually, when people meet a police officer, it's not a pleasant thing. We'd like to be seen more as partners in creating a safer community.
  - It would be good to see trust going both ways between the community and the department. If an officer feels he's doing his job well and it's received well, he's more apt to take the extra steps that build strong community relationships.
- Question: You mentioned staffing issues. Is it an issue with people not applying, or there just not being funding.
  - A lot of it is not having enough people applying to police officers. It used to be very selective. The last several years have been rocky. People today can work from home and make the same salary that a police officer does.
  - It would nice if people wanted to be police because they want to be the person who is there when someone needs help.
  - It would be nice to have 40 applicants fighting for 10 positions. It's not like that now, but hopefully that will change
- Question: Is there an ability to hire for a specific role (like the bike patrol)
  - The more diverse a police department is (the more different types of roles) the more applicants you can get.
  - Applicants want to go to a department that is diverse, community engages, has the backing of the community, and has a wide diversity of roles.
  - Salary is nice, but those other components go a long way towards attracting new officers.
  - We are funded for 98 officers, and with the three that are currently coming up through the academy, we'll be up to 93.
- To engage the community, there needs to be enough staff that they can be out in the community proactively engaging with people rather than just responding to events
- I wish the police shows on TV did a better job of depicting what police do every day

- Comment: One criticism is that the police don't fully understand the needs of the disability community
  - That is true, SPD is eager to have conversations with members of the disability community.
  - They recently had training on how to interact with people who communicate through sign language
  - There are programs that have been in development for a while for officers to learn how to engage people with different abilities, including those with Autism and dementia, etc. Officers are willing to do the work - training and funding is needed
  - It could be useful to have a meeting with the Disability Commission.
    - Sgt McCarey can connect Ginny with the three officers who do that type of community engagement.
  - The department has annual trainings and there are hour-long modules that can be on topics like this.
    - Pauline did something like this with the Somerville Fire Department
- Question: Crossing guards. Status of crossing guard program
  - They are very understaffed. There is an ability to double the number of crossing guards, the shortage is from people not applying. It is part-time work in the middle of the day, so the schedule doesn't work for many people.
  - Once all the schools are covered, we could look at taking on other locations like McGrath Highway.
  - The program is designed for unaccompanied school-age children. We are so understaffed, we try to focus on the big intersections that are closest to the schools.
  - If you can put out the work that Somerville is looking for crossing guards, that could help.

Meeting Ended

7:55