



November 2024 Meeting Minutes

Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC)

Mayor Katjana Ballantyne

Meeting Information

Thursday, November 14, 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=aWpoL2FtaUh3aGdVbHNRWUJmeDRNQTO9>
 - 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. Eric Weissman, *Director of Operations, Somerville Department of Public Works*
2. Eilish, *Somerville resident (Union Square)*

Acting Secretary

Brenda Marvin

Call to Order

6:30 p.m.

Agenda

Procedural Business

- Roll call and guest introductions
- Vote on October draft minutes
 - Motion to approve: Alessandra
 - Passed
- Next meeting date is on December 19th. Can people make that work?
 - Timing works for committee members

Subcommittee Updates

- Community events rundown- updates from Alessandra Seiter
 - The committee tabled at Monster Mash with Mobility and the bikes committee.
 - People shared their favorite places to walk
 - There was a community walk on Western Pearl attended by 10-15 people. Committee members will summarize the findings when we get to that agenda item.
 - The committee held their second meeting as a walk in Union Square in preparation for a walk audit in the area and to focus on a few key crossings. They got some good data.
 - At the committee's next meeting they plan to review the Streetscape plan.
- Design committee updates - Vitor Pamplona
 - The committee did meet after rescheduling from Halloween.

- They discussed both the West Pearl and West Broadway.
 - They were very happy with where we are going in both plans.
- Special projects with Rob is on hold.

Snow Clearing for People Walking and Taking Transit with DPW

- Alessandra Seiter - this is our annual update on snow clearing. I will hand it over to Eric Weissman from the city of Somerville DPW.
- Eric Weissman - thanks for having me, I am the DPW Operations Director. I'm going to take you through and give an overview of snow ops and the plan for this year. There are a few changes for this year, including an update on the enhanced removal quarters.
 - I'll give you a typical storm timeline. All storms are different. It is a guessing game when it will start, the key impacts. This is an example of an ideal winter storm.
 - Before the storm we pretreat key streets and sidewalks. During the storm we repeatedly plow routes, which includes streets and separated bike infrastructure, schools, playgrounds, parks, and public buildings.
 - By 6 daylight hours after the storm, enforcement removes snow from key corridors, Broadway and School Street.
 - Additional 311 requests are addressed.
 - I want to highlight some changes.
 - The department added capacity to the brine program, which just started to roll out last year.
 - Beet juice will reduce use of salt and it is less caustic. It is good for pretreatment.
 - With Mobility we added additional protected bike facilities.
 - Other new infrastructure includes speed humps and bump outs and extended curbs.
 - We have a snow drill exercise where we bring drivers in so drivers are familiar with the roads.
 - These are contractors. The drill is low stakes with no snow so they can see the changes.
 - Community path maintenance will be difficult due to narrow design.
 - Last year we ran some of our own equipment and machines and some contractor's equipment.
 - In heavy snow we may not be able to clear the entire path.
 - It is still a learning process. We did not have a very heavy snowfall.
 - When does the DPW do snow removal? There are 3 general thresholds.
 - When there are 6 inches or more of snow, depending on weather conditions, the Commissioner will issue the order to remove snow around schools and clear some bus stops.
 - At 12 inches we clear bus stops, schools and public buildings.
 - Beyond 24 inches we expand into main and side streets.*
 - Inspectional Services (ISD) has priorities for sidewalks. The highest priority is for elder facilities, childcare facilities, Broadway and School Street.
 - For 311s tickets are issued via door hangers and mail.
- Whose responsibility is snow removal for city streets, city property, parks and playgrounds, bridges, bus stops, ramps, schools?
 - The state is responsible for state roads, Alewife Brook Parkway and McGrath Highway.
 - The MBTA does T stops and some bus stops.

- Property owners are responsible for curb ramps and sidewalks.
 - For FY24 we piloted a sidewalk snow removal program on Broadway and School Street and conducted outreach.
 - After 6 hours of daylight ISD issues citations and then the DPW clears for properties in violation.
 - We did have a 4 inch storm in 2024.
 - We did the pilot and issued citations to 23 properties that same day, Jan 9, 2024.
- The Vision Zero crew is fully staffed.
 - We have a foreman now.
 - They continue to work on data collection and continue to try to be better communicators.
- Christopher Ferry: for the community path you say it might be closed after snow. How would that be indicated?
- Eric: We will work with Communications. There would be horses or trucks on either end of the path. We will see what works operationally. It is especially important to remove ballards. .
- Christopher: Do you need to coordinate with Cambridge?
- Eric: We got a bad deal where we are responsible with that little stretch that goes through Cambridge.
- Laura Evans: How many citations are issued for residents who don't clear sidewalks that aren't in the priority area?
- Eric: I don't know, but I think it would be easy for ISD to report. I could ask and have Mobility report back.
- Laura: It is frustrating that streets can get cleared but pedestrians wait 6 hours. Makes it seem like the Sidewalk Snow Clearing Pilot is driven by the revenue rather than the desire to improve mobility and safety for people walking.
- Eric: I understand the feedback 100%. Aside from revenue, we don't have a mobilized workforce that can clear sidewalks. Enforcement is the best tool to motivate people. I wish the property owner's expectations were the same.
- Eilish: I live in Union Square. I came in late, so apologies if this was already addressed. The people doing snow removal are they DPW or are they contracted?
 - Eric: For the sidewalks on Broadway and School Street last year was the first season we tried to do it in house. It worked out really well with our own equipment and staff.
 - Eilish: How many people are doing the work?
 - Eric: The first year we had 4-6 staff and some small equipment. There were bigger storms in 2022. This time we had a single person with a piece of equipment. They took the list and shot down the road and did it in an evening. They started at the end of the work day and finished at midnight.
- Eilish: For anyone who is concerned that it isn't fast enough, do we need to raise taxes for more than one person?
 - Eric: That was for a storm between 4-6 inches. For a heavier storm we would mobilize more staff.
- Eilish: Is this part of the work that hires students under 18? Would that ever be part of this or is it only used for other areas?
 - Eric: I'm not an expert in the youth shoveling program. Residents with mobility impairments are matched with students who shovel one or more properties in need of shoveling support. It is private property.

- Justin Schreiber: For clarification on what Eric is saying, they mobilized one person last year out of a 6-person team they have staffed to clear sidewalks. If it were a heavier snow, this full team would have other snow clearing responsibilities.
 - Eric: Yes, they would be using a trackless tractor and sander. It allows you to both clear snow and apply deicer. That person would be doing city buildings.
- Vitor Pamplona: What is the priority for bus stops? How are they prioritized?
 - Eric: We have 4 lists for bus stops divided geographically. They are given to contractors or city staff. We try to do all of the list at the same time. We don't have a priority. We tell them to clear all of these bus stops and try to do it in 1-2 days. At this point we are not saying these are the key bus stops. It sounds like a great idea.
- Alessandra: Why is the MBTA only responsible for some bus stops?
 - Justin: They are not responsible for any but they have chosen key routes. Even for the city it is not legally required.
 - Eric: When I started the conventional wisdom was that the MBTA was responsible but they didn't do it. I'm not sure that's true. We do the bus shelters now.
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- Eilish: There has been an ongoing effort to redesign bus routes. Do you have any idea when the next set of buses might change? I am asking in regards to the snow removal. For the 86 are there more bus shelters? Do we know if that is happening?
 - Justin: Yes, they are doing things, mainly in Chelsea and Everett. The 86 is going to become the 109 (a high-frequency route). It will stop at Harvard but go further on the other side.
 - Eilish: Does it change the number of shelters?
 - Justin: If you Google it, it will give you the numbers about new shelters.

Western Pearl Street: Design Directions

- Justin provides an overview of the design.
 - Justin: Option 1 will install protected bike lanes, keeps traffic both ways and removes all parking on Western Pearl Street.
 - It meets the bike network plan vision and keeps open flexibility to pedestrianize the Medford Street Bridge, which came out of Gilman Square Streetscape plan.
 - Closing the bridge means losing an option for an accessible path to the MBTA stop.
 - There will be no curbside parking or loading, no bump outs, no curb extensions and no floating bus stops.
 - Option 2 will make the street one way for cars, bike lanes in both directions, have a flex zone parking lane where we could put bumpouts, floating bus stops and curb extensions.
 - The drawback is that we could not close Medford Street Bridge.
 - It would require a lot of traffic analysis.
 - How bad are the cues at traffic lights?
 - Congestion is part of this plan.
 - Option 3 has a bike lane in one direction that is unprotected. The street is 2-way for cars and there is parking.
 - We can close the bridge, but we need an alternate bike route.
 - Could it be Medford Street?
 - Are there other options? We want to limit the detour to 5 minutes.
- Alessandra: The 80 bus runs down Pearl, but at some point it is set to not run there. The MBTA asked us to design it as if there were a bus there.

- Vitor: We discussed the project during the Design meeting. It is a hard decision. None of the options are super nice. Ideally we want to keep parking and dual bike lanes. We were preferring the 1-way option for cars. We got there by looking at the street and the walking experience. There was a lot of speeding coming straight off of McGrath Highway. Having a 1-way lane from West Somerville to McGrath fixes that problem. It seems to be the best choice. There are some options for bus stops and we could implement speed controlling options. It allows for some drop off and pickup locations. Area business owners mentioned that. It is hard because that option means not closing Medford Street Bridge. That would be 1-way as well. We would like to get the full committee's feedback. This street will be used to connect back to the community path. Bikers will go from McGrath to Davis. If they want to go to East Somerville they will need to cross McGrath and join from that side. We might not need a 2-way lane for bikes. The plan is not accounting for the changes on McGrath. People will struggle to find routes. How can they connect through Pearl Street in a nice way?
- Alessandra: During the community walk we were interested in adding more crosswalks, such as one at Wigglesworth and James Streets. It would be lovely to have raised crossings to help mitigate some traffic. Walnut Street is signalized. Should it be converted to a stop sign? Doing that would prevent people walking from waiting too long. It might prevent speeding through the intersection since you always need to stop. The crosswalks could be realigned to street corners. We stopped at the gas station at the corner and observed dangerous behavior. The parking lot and gas station has a prohibited left turn. The sign says it is prohibited. We observed that the trees needed larger tree wells. There were a lot of concerns around Medford Street like drivers speeding through the stop sign. It has turned into kind of a slip lane. With the 80 bus it might not be the biggest bang for our buck to invest in floating bus stops if the bus will not run in 10 years. We questioned whether it was worthwhile. The flex space that Justin mentioned in options 2 and 3 could allow curb extensions, wide sidewalks, loading zones, planting zones and tree bumpouts. I would hate to lose the pedestrianized option for Medford Street and additional open space for high school. I would love to leave those possibilities open. I'm leaning in favor of option 3.
- Satuko Hirai: For option 2 have you decided whether the street will go 1-way East or West?
 - Justin: We haven't decided yet.
 - Vitor: It should point towards McGrath.
- Satuko: In a car, how would you get into that neighborhood?
 - Justin: You could use Medford Street, Walnut, also McGrath. We are TBD on the street direction.
 - Vitor: On Walnut we don't know about the bike facilities.
- Bianca Norkunas: For the Medford Street Bridge project, how likely is it and what would be the timing?
 - Justin: It is 60% through the design review. It was paused. There is no funding for the project. It is on the city's radar for redevelopment. There were timing issues and economic issues, but the Gilman Square Neighborhood Association is pushing for it
- Alessandra: I'm looking at a map. What would be the bike route between Medford Street and Pearl?
 - Justin: We are adding a separate bike path on McGrath. There is also Walnut Street, but it is not 2-way protected. It should be perfectly acceptable.
- Vitor: Does anyone prefer option 1?
- Satuko: How much parking is on Pearl now?
 - Justin: There is parking on one side and a small section with parking kept on both sides. We are not proposing 2 sides.

- Chris: When we did the walk, we did a count. There was more concern about loading and drop offs. There are commercial buildings, a daycare, convenience store, and a laundromat. There could be a restaurant in the future. I'm leaning toward option 3.
- Alessandra: I'm hearing enthusiasm for options 2 and 3.
- Barbara: How significant is it if we don't meet the bike plan?
 - Justin: It is an ordinance. If we need to change the plan we need to provide an alternative.
- Kate White: They are all feasible.
 - Zach Rosenberg: I'm leaning toward option 3. I like keeping the bridge and having open space.
 - Bianca: I'm also leaning toward option 3.
 - Satuko: I like 3.
 - Alessandra: I'm hearing strong support for 3. Do we want to vote? We've clearly given mobility a lot of feedback.
- Vitor: On option 3 could we switch which side the parking is on?
 - Justin: We showed a picture of Sarma getting a delivery with a truck on the sidewalk. We could change sides. Also, the floating bus stops allow for more parking. A regular bus stop is 100ft., floating is 40ft.
- Alessandra. If floating bus stops are added, can they be converted?
 - Justin: Yes, it is basically a bump out. The easiest way is adding street furniture or bike racks. We don't know when the bus will change. We don't know 100% how the MBTA would react to option 2.
 - Vitor: the committee preferred opt 2 with the bus away. What is the timing on the bus changes?
 - Justin: It would be 2026 or 2027.
 - Brenda: So the MBTA would have time to adjust.
 - Justin: Yes, but it is a tricky route.
 - Vitor: Do we expect more bikers to use Medford Street or Pearl?
 - Justin: I'm not sure. It depends on where they are coming from. There is likely to be more use on both streets.
 - Alessandra: option 3 had the strongest support with some support for option 2.

West Broadway: 80% Design Review

- Alessandra: These are the updated designs. We hosted a community walk along West Pearl in April. We reviewed the earlier plans in committee in May and sent a letter. There are no concerns with the updated designs. In June with our comments letter we supported the plan and said we were excited about raised crossing and other features. Our suggestions included bus shelters and schedules and textural design to delineate walkers and bikers. There was a preference for a medium crossing island. The new design does not include it. There was mixed community response and it could be an issue for emergency vehicles. There is a curb extension for traffic calming instead. A raised block between Endicott and Russell is included. There was community support beyond the committee. It will connect the two streets, which are both future neighborways.
- Vitor: I'm very happy with the changes. The plan looks great. The only concern is how backed up buses will be since it is one way. It might make the commuting experience a little worse. Floating bus stops would maintain the bus's position in line. Where should they put the Blue Bikes?
- Christopher: I like the design. Keep going with it.
- Vitor: This is easier than West Pearl Street,
 - Kate: You would think so.

- Vitor: are there two parking spaces?
 - Kate: We had feedback from the businesses. Several have 1 hour appointments. Heading Eastbound there is a slight shift in the yellow line. We thought this could work.
- Alessandra: There wasn't a ton of data on treatments like this elsewhere.
 - Kate: We are a fan of trying new things. Maybe we can create the research for future projects.
- Alessandra: Does anybody have concerns they would like to see addressed? I consider that an endorsement.
 - Kate: Thank you very much. We are excited to get to this stage.

Other Business

- Public comment

Final Items

Action Items from Meeting

- For the next meeting in December we can reflect on the past year. Thank you all!

Meeting Ended

7:56pm ET