



August 2025 Meeting Minutes

Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC)

Mayor Katjana Ballantyne

Meeting Information

Thursday, August 21, 6:30-8:00 PM

This meeting will be hybrid:

- **In-person meeting location:** 101 South Street, Somerville, MA 02143.
- **Zoom info to join remotely via computers, tablets, and smartphones:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89181225932?pwd=aWpoL2FtaUh3aGdVbHNRWUJmeDRNQT09>

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/u/kcVy69ROJG>

Members

* = present

1. Ted Alexander
2. Ginny Alverson *
3. Caroline Bodager
4. Meredith Brown
5. Laura Evans
6. Christopher Ferry *
7. Preston Gutelius *
8. Satoko Hirai (Digital Communications Office) *
9. Brenda Marvin (Secretary)
10. Steven Mulder*

11. Barbara Myers*
12. Bianca Norkunas
13. Vitor Pamplona (Vice Chair)*
14. Zach Rosenberg
15. Alessandra Seiter (Chair)*
16. Robert Stanzel
17. Carole Voulgaris
18. Mackenzie Webb*
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. Kenzie Ballard (Groundwork Somerville)
2. Christopher Morris (Student)
3. Isa Membreno (Green Team)
4. Yadhira Santos (Green Team)

Acting Secretary

Barbara Myers

Call to Order

6:30 pm

Agenda

Procedural Business (10 min)

Please sign up to take minutes. Serving as Acting Secretary is a requirement of PTAC membership.

Renewals of membership will be conducted. Members whose attendance is less than 50% of meetings will be surveyed to determine if they wish to remain on the committee. New members may be recruited if needed.

Subcommittee Updates (10 min)

1. Community Events

The Union Square Walk letter and next steps will be discussed at this PTAC meeting.

There are three fall tabling events. Thanks to those who have already signed up. Others are welcome to sign up and table.

Saturday, September 13, 12-6 pm. Gilman Square Arts & Music Festival

Saturday, October 4, 9am-1pm. Union Square Farmers Market with Bike Committee

Sunday, October 19, 2-6 pm. SomerStreets: Monster Mash

2. Design Review will meet to discuss the Western Pearl Street updates.

Discussion & Vote on Union Square Walk Audit Letter (20 min)

1. In late April 2025, PTAC, in collaboration with the Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets (SASS), Somerville Commission for Persons with Disabilities (SCPD), the Groundwork Somerville Green Team and Union Square Main Streets (USMS), hosted a walk audit in Union Square. 60 community members joined to assess the safety, accessibility and comfort of walking in the area.
2. Based on the collaborative findings of the walk audit, a letter was written identifying short- and long-term recommendations for improving the walkability of Union Square.
3. The letter has been reviewed by walk audit collaborators and participants and at this meeting a vote will be taken as to whether to send it to the Mayor, Mobility and City Councilors.
4. Alessandra made special mention of the contribution of the Green Team, including collecting data about the heat index.

Alessandra presented the letter to PTAC in great detail. The walk was divided into 7 key areas and recommendations were made for each area.

The areas are:

1. Prospect Street and Green Line Station Elevator
2. Somerville Avenue and Prospect Street
3. Somerville Avenue
4. Bow Street Slip Lane
5. Bow Street and Warren Avenue
6. Bow Street West
7. Webster Avenue (from Washington to Prospect)

Each area was scored for comfort and walk experience.

The letter includes a table summarizing the scores and is attached.

The area ranked the lowest was Webster Avenue and Prospect Street. Its low ranking qualities include sidewalk condition and continuity, time given to cross the street, signal timing, general safety, car speeds, driver compliance, green space availability, seating and general comfort.

Other factors considered throughout the walk audit were noise level and concerns for people with disabilities include tactile markings in general and the need at raised crossings for tactile markings on the sides of the elevation.

The Green Team measured environmental quality and identified areas with heat index 8-11 degrees hotter than the average and therefore in need of greenery and less asphalt. The only area with poor air quality was near an idling bus. The Green Team felt that in general Union Square is not inviting. Seating is uncomfortable and in loud areas and there is little to do that doesn't involve spending money.

There is a need throughout the Square for trees, green space, seating options, and electric buses, which will be quieter and more ecological.

The letter is very detailed and thorough and Alessandra gave a very complete summary. A few highlights include:

Key recommendations for area 1:

Short-term-midblock crosswalk, replace tactile pads, wayfinding sign, planters, tables, art
Long- term -utilities underground, wayfinding pillars, art installation

Area 2-Took too long to cross. Need a pedestrian only phase allowing diagonal crossing. Audible crossing needs to identify which street it is safe to cross.

Area 3 Plaza

Short-term-tactile markings and paint the existing markings, cover tree roots, replace broken bench.
Long-term-Bus shelter closer to the roadway.

Area 4

Short-term – better signage (This has happened since the audit).
Long-term-eliminate the slip lane.

Area 5

Signals, and an all-way stop sign.

Area 6

Short-term-tactile pads, repaint cross walk.
Long-term-replace the park.

Area 7

Increase length of pedestrian phase and the frequency for crossing, single phase countdown in crosswalk.

Long-term –drop off area in front of the school and utilities underground.

A discussion followed.

Christopher Ferry: Good job.

Steve Mulder: Congratulations. All my items are on the list. Is this in priority order? Could we prioritize?

Alessandra Seiter responded by asking the group about priority items and asked Mobility about the status of the Union Square project.

Kate White responded that it has not been confirmed yet. There are 4 phases of the project beginning with Webster.

VItor Pamplona asked if anything could be part of a quickbuild.

Justin Schreiber responded there is a possibility of quickbuild. Prioritization is critical. The letter is incredible.

Kate: commented positively on the coordination with other organizations.

Kenzie Ballard commented that Union Square Plaza has such potential for art, good seating in front of Gracie's, good trash cans. A tree root breaks up the sidewalk.

Justin Schreiber: Call 311 about cracked sidewalks.

Kate White: the broken bench has been removed.

Kenzie commented that at Webster/Bow traffic backs up. A signal change is needed right in front of the church.

Kate commented on afternoon congestion. Cars back up picking up at school.

A further comment was that the sidewalk is skinny and bumpy and many cyclists ride on the sidewalk.

Alessandra asked if there were objections and motioned to vote to send it to the Mayor, with cc to mobility.

Satoko Hirai: seconded.

Motion passed unanimously.

Presentation on Mobility/Groundwork Youth Engagement (45 min)

Kate White presented on Groundworks Somerville & Mobility Division Summer Youth Workshops, In early 2025, Mobility and Directors Kenzie Ballard and Em Plotkin of Groundworks Somerville met to develop a workshop series for the Summer Green Team.

The workshops were to focus on identifying priorities for our streets, learning about what design tools we can use, evaluating a street slated for reconstruction, and then developing street redesign proposals. The Western Pearl Street redesign was used.

Mobility also held street design and community engagement planning focused workshops for the following Mayor's Summer Jobs Programs: Climate Cohort, Racial and Social Justice Cohort.

Two members of the Green Team (Isa Membreno and Yadhira Santos) presented their experience and thoughts. They spoke of Mobility and the Vision Zero goal, safety, connections with youth, learning about government, and feeling encouraged to share their opinions with people eager to listen to them.

First, they created their dream roads, which was a fun, creative activity.

Yadhira spoke of walking Washington street, and stopping to talk about what they saw. She was impressed with the Mobility staff.

The students' favorite feature was blue paint in the bike lanes and the way traffic lights sense emergency vehicles and stop other traffic.

The group did a walk audit of Broadway around Trum Field using their new knowledge. They remarked that they saw a lot of cars speeding.

Air quality and heat index data was studied by the group. The city could install green infrastructure. The heat index was higher around intersections with gas stations.

The group appreciated the efforts of Mobility in the Broadway redesign. They saw what Mobility was able to do on a large, busy street.

Reflections of the students were that Mobility engaged with and cared about the students and their voices. The students felt they were treated like coworkers.

Priorities:

Walkers – Crosswalk infrastructure, improved sidewalks

Bikers – More protected bike lanes

Bus riders - More accessible stops, shelters with greenery, shade and seats, floating bus stops

Drivers – More raised crosswalks and bumpouts to slow drivers

General – Prioritize accessibility, more trees and greenery, bumpouts around tree roots

Next steps - Detailed walk audits. Transform hyperlocal climate data into solutions.

Alessandra: Do you see streets differently now?

The students answered that they look around more and feel that they contributed to changes.

Christopher asked what things they learned surprised them?

The students answered that in joining Green Team they felt they had to be overly green, but saw that even drivers' convenience matters or recommendations are not realistic. They recognized a need to consider a lot of things in making decisions.

Alessandra: Will you stay involved?

The students say that they sign up for anything and would like more workshops. Isa is starting college in a couple of days but will get involved again.

Preston Gutelius asked if they talk to their friends and families about this work.

The students answered that they do that all the time.

Kenzie said the group is always looking for problems and areas that could be green.

Kate stated that the staff learned so much from the students. She mentioned the gas stations on Broadway where the heat index is high. She said the back and forth is tremendous and Mobility is now talking about the heat index and not just safety.

Kenzie: Cool spaces are safe spaces.

Christopher: Heat index ties to Vision Zero and lives lost.

Kate mentioned seeing a bus shelter that wasn't providing safety and comfort.

Final Items

Preston asked that the July minutes be voted on and they were approved.

Meeting Ended

7:29 pm