



Highland Ave. Redesign July 2023 Update Frequently Asked Questions

Why isn't the Highland Ave. Redesign incorporated into the Spring Hill Sewer Separation?

While a streetscape redesign of Highland Ave. was originally included in the [sewer separation project](#), the initial design fell short of the community's expectations and did not include protected bike lanes. Since updating this design would require substantial time, resources, and community process, the redesign of Highland Ave. [was broken out into a separate project in early 2021](#) as critical underground infrastructure improvements could not wait for the redesign process.

The future redesign of Highland Ave. will still benefit from the sewer separation work as information on the location of all new utilities will help inform the feasibility of future designs.

The Spring Hill Sewer Separation project will still bring a substantial increase in protected bike facilities (along Summer St. and Central St.) and other traffic safety interventions to the neighborhood.

What is the current plan for paving Highland Ave. in FY24?

Following underground utility work along Highland Ave. (currently underway), the City has allocated funds in fiscal year '24 (July 2023 to July 2024) for paving the two travel lanes of the roadway (approximately 28' wide).

This partial paving which does not include the parking areas is intended to restore the road surface travel areas for all users after construction of the sewer separation project is complete. This is an interim measure to support safe travel until the full reconstruction of Highland Ave.

Why is the City not pursuing a quick-build solution for Highland Ave. following repaving?

Quick-build construction emphasizes movable and changeable materials. When compared to full-scale reconstruction, quick-build projects are faster and cheaper to implement, and they retain flexibility for future changes. Projects of this type are a critical part of Somerville's Bicycle Network Plan.

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However, despite their name, quick-build projects typically take an average of 12 months and require significant resources and staff time. Given the average timeline, pursuing quick-build improvements on Highland Ave. now would divert resources from other ongoing and planned street safety efforts with longer useful lifespans to a project with a short lifespan set to be replaced by the permanent redesign shortly afterward. Our intention is to advance safety and Vision Zero goals city wide, and this strategic approach will offer the maximum citywide safety impact for our road users over time.

The City is thus committed to a permanent street reconstruction of Highland Ave. as the best path to delivering lasting improvements to safety and accessibility for all road users.

Why not restart the community engagement process now?

The City is committed to rebuilding Highland Avenue with protected bike lanes, and other street safety features. These changes mean that only one parking lane can be provided on the Highland Ave. of the future instead of the two that exist today. The next phase of community engagement and design will evaluate strategies to ensure that there are safe options for commercial loading, short- and long-term parking, and MBTA bus access.

Unlike some community discussions that just require a room and city staff to host them, street redesign requires paying for the support of specialized consultants to support the process. Street reconstruction projects like Highland Avenue require consulting engineers to produce construction drawings for utilities and streetscape elements and more. Our experience is that community engagement for street redesign works best when the City's engineering consultants are on board to hear community feedback and respond during the design development process. The City anticipates seeking the funding for these consultants in late 2023 through the annual update of our Capital Investment Plan, and the next phase of engagement will begin once that funding is approved and available.

How can I stay up to date?

To stay up to date on the Highland Ave. Redesign project please subscribe to the [Mobility Monthly Newsletter](#). All updates related to the project will be shared there and on the project website.