



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
CLERK OF COMMITTEES

January 11, 2021
REPORT OF THE TRAFFIC AND PARKING COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Mark Niedergang	Chair	Present	
Jesse Clingan	Vice Chair	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Ward Seven City Councilor	Present	

Others present: Khushbu Webber-Mayor's Office, Brad Rawson-OSPCD, Adam Polinski-OSPCD, Justin Schreiber-OSPCD and Lauren Racaniello-Mayor's Office; about 15-20 members of the public.

The meeting was held virtually and was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chairperson Niedergang and adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Approval of the December 7, 2020 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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Strategic Planning

210893: That the Mayor submit a supplemental budget request to immediately add staff and funding to the Mobility Division for traffic calming, and increase its staff and funding by at least 50% in FY22.

Mr. Rawson provided historical context about the Mobility Division and how he's seen growth over the past years. He stated they started out with 2.5 FTE and today they have 5 FTE's. The Infrastructure and Asset Management Dept and Engineering have grown in capacity, as well. The Mayor has directed them to work on a series of options to include staffing and consultancy for the budget to be presented to him in a couple of weeks. They are working with a degree of urgency.

Councilor Ballantyne stated that she's not convinced these things will be done unless she sees the money in the budget or the funds are captured in a CIP (Capital Improvement Project).

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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206691: That the Director of SPCD prioritize for this Board the traffic calming projects in

the City, and the process to determine those priorities.

The Chair stated it's not clear what the highest priorities are for the city. It would be important for the public to see and understand the priorities. The Councilors have residents coming to them asking for streets to be fixed. Mr. Rawson stated that in the early part of the year, they will have a list of priority items and areas. Mr. Polinski stated he's been spending a lot of time over the last 5 years and with the Vision Zero Task Force highlighting injury areas that are of urgent priority for the city. They have been focusing their attention on where the highest number of crashes have occurred during the years 2014-2018 and where the greatest safety concerns are in Somerville. The crash data highlights all the major streets, and those areas need to be their primary focus. (See attached slide.) But Mr. Polinski said there is also a need to focus more on side streets and to use any opportunities to address residents' concerns and make improvements. To that end, they are collecting data that details how many people are walking, biking and commuting through the areas and will be looking for more opportunities to fix neighborhood streets.

Councilor Clingan talked about the dangerous conditions on side streets and additional resources needed. Mr. Rawson stated his staff is out morning, noon and night to make sure the streets are safer. The Mayor has asked for a recommendation for a uniform, standard version for street construction projects such as , crosswalks, curb extensions, traffic calming tables, speed bumps, etc. which generate speed reductions. Mr. Rawson stated they are looking to get standard engineering designs for curb extensions and other interventions that can be stand-alone projects instead of limiting such improvements to only when there are major street reconstruction projects happening.

Councilor Ballantyne stated there is a disconnect between goals and process and outcomes for some of the major projects that are in the CIP. She stated that goals for Vision Zero are not necessary implemented as they are stated in that plan. People are disappointed the goals in Vision Zero cannot be implemented. The priority was said to be infrastructure. She would like to come back to this discussion in the future.

Councilor Niedergang remarked that he believes the staff is listening to what the community is saying about the Spring Hill Sewer Separation plans for reconstructing Highland Avenue and there have been robust discussions about Highland Avenue. There is still a long way to go with this project and he is looking forward to and expecting much better and more detailed bicycle infrastructure in that project at the next community meeting when revised plans are shown.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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207499: That the Administration respond to the requests outlined in the attached resident petition, organized by the Pedestrian and Transit Advocacy Group, to accelerate traffic calming investments and improve coordination and oversight.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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207996: 8 residents submitting comments re: #207499, a proposal to accelerate traffic calming investments.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

Potential Solutions to Traffic Dangers

210965: That the Director of SPCD report to this Council in writing by December 4, and discuss with the Traffic and Parking Committee at its next meeting on December 7, what the plan is for replacing flex posts when they are knocked over or displaced.

Mr. Polinski discussed items 6 and 7 together. They have been collecting information about the status of these tools with great participation from the community. He stated they have been focused more on expansion of the system to date and this year they are documenting more where all the posts are located. They made progress with a GIS database and have given this to DPW so they can replace the posts when necessary. They are still in the works developing a standard operating procedure and working to have a more concrete plan. The city may decide to hire a contractor to replace the posts.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210894: That the Administration expand and maintain the use of bollards and other pedestrian safety measures citywide so they are replaced immediately as needed.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

210966: That the Director of SPCD report to this Council why there are still so few speed bumps in the city, especially since the ones deployed on Powder House Boulevard seem to be making a dangerous area safer for pedestrians.

Items 210966 and 210967 were discussed together.

Mr. Rawson the Administration is not opposed to installing speed bumps. He stated the city piloted their first asphalt speed bumps on Powderhouse Blvd and also recently installed some speed bumps on a side street near Beacon Street. He said they are aware of and working on Somerville's version of the Detroit speed hump program. Mr. Rawson's team is working on customizing the strategy for all 7 wards of the city.

Councilor Ballantyne asked for clarification on Holland Street and College Ave that asphalt speed tables could be constructed at Cameron Avenue to make cars slow down. Mr. Polinski stated that a traffic-calming table there could not be as high as the one on Curtis Street at Raymond, but this is possible with a 20 ft flat section that tapers down towards the curbs.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210967: That the Director of SPCD explain to this Council in writing the Administration's opposition to deploying speed bumps, with less than a half-dozen installed citywide.

Items 210966 and 210967 were discussed together.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

210993: That the Director of SPCD review the attached presentation by Zachary Rosenberg, Chair of the Pedestrian and Transit Advisory Committee, and report to the Traffic and Parking Committee how the successful traffic calming measures implemented in the Netherlands can be replicated here.

Mr. Schreiber stated that Mobility wants to have a broad range of different tools in their toolbox and have discussed the pros and cons of what they use in the Netherlands and looked carefully at Mr. Rosenberg's suggestions. They are using some similar designs at College and Kidder Avenues.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

Other Issues

210988: That the Directors of Finance, Infrastructure and Asset Management, and SPCD provide a progress report for the Vision Zero Action Plan 2020 as outlined in the attached spreadsheet.

Mr. Rawson stated that he is ready to share materials to answer many questions from the Committee about progress on Vision Zero goals. This is a process that will take a couple of months to complete. The plan was finalized in early 2020. He showed a slide, a table that listed progress on a number of Vision Zero goals.(See attached slide.)

Councilor Ballantyne stated she will not consider this item complete until CIP priorities reflect it and the city's Finance director reports to the Council on what funds will be made available to achieve the Vision Zero goals. She stated there were two columns that she and Mr. Rosenberg put in the table they submitted with this item and that those columns are missing from the Mobility slide/table and she asked why this information is missing.

Mr. Schreiber stated the list in their table focused only on street design objectives. There are other overall objectives that are just as important. They have been spending time on those Vision Zero action plan goals and now are looking at what else needs to be accomplished. He discussed large curb extensions, new crossing areas and permanent traffic calming on residential streets such as in the Prospect Hill area. Mr. Schreiber stated that permanent improvements take more time. The 2020 evaluation will feed into their plans for 2021.

Chair Niedergang would like a committee of people to work with the departments to overview progress, share the information, look at the bigger picture and report out to the community. Such a committee was supposed to be put together and has not happened yet, he said. Mr. Rawson stated they are currently working to schedule those sessions. He stated that many of the public health and safety staff were focused on COVID this past year so were not available. Mr. Schreiber stated the purpose is to have all the right people in the room to be able to make progress. They are having regular meetings with core departments and will be launching the Vision Zero working group soon. There will be members of the public included.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

211052: That the Director of SomerStat, the Director of SPCD, and the Director of Parking re-convene the Parking Study Task Force in January 2021.

Mr. Rawson stated that their team is working on a new work plan. They will be reaching out to Chair Niedergang and Councilor Mbah but they do not have consulting resources that were going to do a lot of the work at this time. Mr. Rawson stated that City staff were doing their best to collect data. There is a meeting later this week.

Chair Niedergang stated it might make sense to bring the Task Force together now to start looking at policy options and what can be done without the extensive data collection that is part of the plan. Some steps can be taken that could make a big difference in peoples' lives. For example, with the 5 Green Line Extension stations opening this year, parking around them may be a major concern of residents in those neighborhoods. Ms. Webber stated they have been in discussions to reconvene the parking study TF and there have been some funds set aside. It was stated that part of the scope for the previous RFP was to include analysis of all the parking in the city. It would not be an accurate analysis with the current COVID-19 situation, since most residents are working from home. Additionally, it has been challenging to identify the parameters for the city's parking needs. Chair Niedergang stated there are changes to make without doing extensive study and he believes the work should move forward with whatever is feasible.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210989: That the Director of SPCD advise the Ward 7 Councilor when they will implement the Mobility Plan for West Broadway (from Route 16 to Holland Street), to create a dedicated bus lane.

The Chair mentioned that this was discussed at last meeting and he put it back on agenda for updates. Mr. Rawson understands the desire to move the process forward. He said that his staff have directed the consultants to find a quick tool kit for traffic light upgrades and parking changes.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Dangerous Intersections and Roadways

210898: That the Director of SPCD update the Ward 6 Councilor on any plans to further improve pedestrian safety at the intersection of Willow Avenue, Elm Street and Beech Street, possibly with a center island and bump outs.

Items 210898 and 202108 were discussed together.

The Chair said that he realizes that this area also involves the City of Cambridge which makes it more difficult to move forward, but this is his primary area of concern in and around his ward. Mr. Rawson stated he understands that this area is dangerous. He said that since the last meeting, they have asked the Mayor for funds in the Capital Investment Plan (CIP) which would allow them to deploy certain recommendations to that area. Additionally, they are working on quick-build kit. Mr. Rawson's team is working with DPW to use flex posts. They also have been in conversations with the City of Cambridge on civil engineering designs.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

202108: That the Administration work with the City of Cambridge to improve pedestrian safety at the intersections of Elm Street with Beech Street and Willow Avenue, including consideration of a Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon.

Items 210898 and 202108 were discussed together.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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208008: That the Director of SPCD implement traffic calming and pedestrian and cyclist safety measures on Broadway from Powder House Circle to Teele Square.

Chair Niedergang received emails from residents who are very concerned about safety in this area of Broadway, especially the poor lighting. Mr. Rawson stated the staff see opportunity in using traffic calming tools there. In 2020, they used flex posts in the center line area. This has been a helpful exercise for quick-build tools. The teams are working with engineering for a city-wide program of center islands for a couple of locations on Broadway including at Wallace and Simpson. They are in the early stages for the design details and will pilot with flex posts initially. This part of Broadway is on the schedule for repaving and sidewalk reconstruction in a few years and that will provide an opportunity for major reconstruction of the roadway and much more significant traffic calming interventions.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211053: That the Director of SPCD report to this Council on traffic calming for the stretch of Broadway between the Ball Square Bridge and Cedar Street.

Chair Niedergang asked what can be done for this area that remains a high-speed corridor. Mr. Rawson stated that in 2020, they worked with the MBTA to eliminate the right-hand turn lane heading towards Ball Square to get on Boston Ave and doubled the width of the sidewalk which had a huge traffic calming impact. The bike lanes and the striping and painting on the bridge are helping with traffic calming, as is a crosswalk that was repainted. There will be more road painting done to further narrow the street and slow traffic. There will also be more flexposts deployed, as was done at Winchester and Albion Streets on the Medford side of Broadway. They are now looking also at possibly removing the right hand turn lane heading east from Broadway onto Cedar Street, as that is clearly not working and is not safe. One possibility is to extend back towards the bridge past Wilson Avenue the bike lane that starts in front of Trum Field with the protected bike lane at the curb and the parking on the street side of the bike lane. This would narrow the roadway and provide more protection for cyclists and pedestrians.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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210738: That the Director of SPCD report to this Council, no later than December 22, 2020, the Administration's response to the traffic calming petition submitted by 10 residents of Rogers Avenue between Kidder Avenue and Boston Avenue/Broadway.

Chair Niedergang mentioned that he will be filing a policy order for traffic planning and calming around all 5 Green Line Extension stations that will be opening later this year. He said that drivers go too fast on Rogers and Boston Avenues. Mr. Rawson stated that Mobility staff

will be in touch with the Rogers Ave. residents who filed the petition to do a site visit and will speak with residents about their concerns at the site, in a socially-distanced way of course. They will communicate some changes they are working on for the Ball Square area with the GLX construction team. Mr. Rawson stated there will be curb extensions wrapping around Kelley's Diner which should slow traffic entering Rogers. They are also concerned about Boston Ave, which is extremely wide near Ball Square, for no good reason. An MIT student, working with the community, developed some designs to use some parts of Boston Ave as open space and they are looking at those ideas for the future.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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Housekeeping -- Items to be completed if no objection

210827: That the Director of Parking install a NO PARKING HERE TO CORNER sign on Forster Street at the Central Street end of the roadway.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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209442: That the Director of SPCD add more bike racks to the West Somerville Neighborhood School.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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208383: That the Director of SPCD install sturdy steel posts around the southeast corner of Nunziato Park, in light of the May 25 car crash that sent a vehicle through the fence and into the picnic tables where children often gather.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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205448: That the Director of SPCD provide recommendations on making the intersection of Summer and Central Streets safer for pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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207723: That the Administration discuss thoughts on negotiating with the MBTA for discounted or free fare for children and low-income adults by sharing or bearing the cost of the passes.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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207918: That the Director of Traffic and Parking urgently prioritize pedestrian safety at the intersection of Walnut Street and Highland Avenue, which was identified as one of the most unsafe intersections in the city.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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208045: That the Director of SPCD update the Ward 3 City Councilor on plans for raised crosswalks on Summer Street at Belmont and/or Lowell Streets, as well as other nearby traffic calming improvements.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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208684: That the Administration report on how the City could lobby for a wider width for the proposed bridge from Everett to Draw 7 Park.

The Chair stated that many emails were received from constituents about this bridge and that the Administration responded that nothing has happened on this item. Mr. Rawson stated that not a lot has changed since the discussion a few months back. Right now, DCR and Encore casino are to bring the design of bridge to advanced conceptual design. He acknowledged that the width could be more generous.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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208923: That the Director of SPCD or the Director of SomerStat develop an estimate of funding required to pay for or subsidize MBTA fares for residents of different income levels and ages.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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208275: That the Traffic Commission approve the creation of a crosswalk at 45 Beacon Street.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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