



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Traffic and Parking Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, November 27, 2023

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom and was called to order by Chair Gomez Mouakad at 6:00 p.m. and adjourned at 7:49 p.m. on a Roll Call Vote: 3 in favor (Councilors Gomez Mouakad, Wilson, Ewen-Campen), 0 opposed, 0 absent.

Others present:

Michael Potere – Assistant Clerk of Committees; Brad Rawson – Director of Mobility (OSPCD).

Roll Call

Present: Chairperson Beatriz Gomez Mouakad , Vice Chair Jake Wilson and Ben Ewen-Campen

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-1414](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Traffic and Parking Committee Meeting of September 18, 2023.

RESULT: ACCEPTED

AYE: Chairperson Gomez Mouakad, Vice Chair Wilson and Ward Three City Councilor Ewen-Campen

Studies and Policy

2. Order (ID # [22-1599](#))
By Councilor Wilson and Councilor Kelly
That the Director of Mobility provide documentation of the current process for determining the locations of traffic calming measures, and communicate this information to the public via the website.

This Item was taken together with Item 3 (ID # 22-1600).

Councilor Wilson explained that the purpose of this Item is to help clarify for the city’s residents the best ways to communicate traffic calming requests to the city, and to provide information regarding the same on the city’s website. Chair Gomez Mouakad noted the importance of the issue of traffic calming, and added that the process as it currently stands can be confusing to residents, and that the goal should be to make the submission of feedback easier and more understandable.

Director Rawson presented a slideshow, which is attached to this Item. Director Rawson explained that the department has implemented a live landing page on the website for traffic calming, and which includes information regarding how those treatments are evaluated and planned. Director Rawson also explained that the department is working to develop an interactive “work in progress” map on the website so residents can see

the status of completed, in-progress, and planned construction. Director Rawson noted that future construction is still in the planning stages, and that this is typically the time of year that such planning takes place, as construction slows during the winter months. Director Rawson continued that the department is averaging the completion of approximately 50 traffic calming treatments per year, and noted that this number reflects actual, permanent construction, as opposed to “quickbuild” treatments.

Regarding the information specifically requested in this Item, Director Rawson explained that the department is working on presentations intended for the public that more fully and clearly explain how residents can effectively advocate for traffic calming measures, and how the department communicates the ways in which it collects data and prioritizes construction. Director Rawson continued by explaining that, currently, residents have several ways to request traffic calming measures: traffic calming petitions; 3-1-1 requests; requests through their City Councilors; and direct communication with department representatives at community meetings and pop-up events. Director Rawson stated that the department’s goal is to streamline the information received from these sources and funnel them into the same evaluative process, to make that process clearer and fairer, and to make sure residents who may not have the resources to effectively advocate for treatments are not excluded from proper consideration.

Councilor Ewen-Campen expressed support for the progress the department has made in evaluating and implementing traffic calming measures throughout the city, and expressed support for a system moving forward that does not exclude residents who may not be as readily able to advocate for themselves. Councilor Ewen-Campen stated that residents are right to be concerned with how long it takes to construct these treatments, and explained that, in response to this Item, clearly communicating with residents about the process and providing additional transparency will aid in explaining how these decisions are made and demonstrate that the city is listening to their concerns.

Chair Gomez Mouakad requested a separate slide to reflect how decisions are made in relation to schools, and that schools should be given special consideration given the significant importance of safety involving the city’s students. Chair Gomez Mouakad also requested that the department publish a comprehensive list of the projects that are in the queue for construction for a given year. Chair Gomez Mouakad continued that the department should also clearly communicate to residents that decisions are made based on data and behaviors alike, and that the importance of data in these decisions cannot be overlooked. Finally, in comparing the flow of traffic to water, Chair Gomez Mouakad noted that the department should also communicate that it makes decisions based on how building traffic calming treatments would divert traffic to other streets.

Councilor Wilson expressed support for Director Rawson's presentation, and agreed with the sentiment that underrepresented portions of the city's population should not be excluded or undervalued in the evaluation process.

Councilor Wilson asked how the department balances data as compared to the volume and intensity of resident requests, and Director Rawson responded that those considerations are taken together and in conjunction with other factors, such as planned development, ADA compliance and Somerville's ADA Transition Plan, water and sewer lines, traffic diversion and the increasing use of interactive navigation maps, private gas and telecom lines, and Somerville's Vision Zero Plan. Chair Gomez Mouakad noted that resident input is an important factor because it reveals behavioral change, but that residents who are the most vocal may not represent a broader portion of the population, who may be less engaged due to language, cultural, or socioeconomic factors.

Chair Gomez Mouakad also requested that the department look into communicating not only the process for requesting traffic calming measures, but also an estimate for the time it may take for that work to be completed. Director Rawson noted that the department is increasing its communications capacity and has added two new staff members to focus on improving its communications outreach and engagement.

Councilor Wilson asked about how many traffic calming measures have been completed compared to the overall number desired throughout the city, and Director Rawson replied that the answer is complex and that the number of potentially desirable traffic calming measures must also be evaluated in conjunction with emergency response and snow removal, for example, and may ultimately be declined after such an analysis is complete.

Chair Gomez Mouakad noted that it may make sense for the city to hire people who can work on some of these traffic calming measures in-house.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

3. Order
(ID # [22-1600](#))

By Councilor Wilson and Councilor Davis

That the Director of Engineering provide documentation of the current process for determining the street selection for Fall and partial repaving, and communicate this information via the website.

This Item was taken together with Item 2 (ID # 22-1599).

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Traffic Calming

- 4. Order
(ID # [23-0902](#))

By Councilor Gomez Mouakad and Councilor Pineda Neufeld
That the Director of Mobility, Director of Engineering, Director of Parking, and Commissioner of Public Works establish criteria and guidelines for Council orders to be submitted for traffic calming and mobility related issues and items that should be submitted to 311 to ensure the City Council is addressing larger mobility strategic planning issues.

Chair Gomez Mouakad explained that this Item reflects an interest in decreasing the number of smaller maintenance issues from being advanced to this Committee through Orders.

Director Rawson stated that the department is working on communicating with residents about the ways to submit these requests, and noted that part of the consideration will be if the request requires an engineering study or judgment, and that those requiring judgment would be more likely to come before this Committee.

Councilor Ewen-Campen expressed support for placing resident requests before the Committee using Orders because that it one of the primary ways a City Councilor can formally bring an issue before the administration, and that discussion on seemingly small matters can provide an overall benefit to the broader conversation.

Chair Gomez Mouakad clarified that the Item is more about exploring ways to streamline managing the business of the Committee in an effort to avoid diverting its limited resources away from other important topics.

Director Rawson noted that the increase in department staffing will allow additional work to be done to make the most efficient and effective way for a resident to place a request more clearly explained in the city’s published materials.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

- 5. Order
(ID # [23-1281](#))

By Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Scott, Councilor Strezo, Councilor Wilson, Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Kelly
That the Director of Mobility design traffic calming infrastructure for Laurel Street, which sees large volumes of high speed, one-way traffic down a steep hill.

Councilor Ewen-Campen requested an update regarding traffic calming for Laurel Street, and Director Rawson responded that the decisions regarding which projects will be completed next year will be discussed during this winter’s planning period, and that Laurel Street is a strong candidate.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

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6. Order (ID # [23-1361](#)) By Councilor Clingan
That the Director of Engineering place speed humps on School Street, between Broadway and Medford Street.
- Councilor Wilson explained that this is an issue that receives a substantial amount of constituent feedback, including on social media platforms, and asked why this particular street does not naturally facilitate traffic calming due to it being narrow and bidirectional. Director Rawson responded by stating that School Street has been identified as part of the bike network plan and will be receiving attention in the coming years, and that one goal will be to include additional ADA compliant crosswalks on it. Chair Gomez Mouakad added that this street is located near a school, and emphasized the importance of safe crosswalks.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
7. Order (ID # [23-0215](#)) By Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Wilson
That the Director of Mobility consider adding speed humps to Clarendon Avenue to slow down cut-through traffic from Broadway to Massachusetts Avenue.
- Director Rawson indicated that this is being considered as part of a five-year street and sidewalk project, in which the major streets creating the cut-through on Clarendon Avenue will be rebuilt, and that this will likely be worked into that plan.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
8. Order (ID # [23-0097](#)) By Councilor Pineda Neufeld and Councilor Wilson
That the Mobility Department consider adding speed humps or other traffic calming measures to Packard Avenue.
- Chair Gomez Mouakad requested that the department create a map so that staff can track and follow requests like this that are brought to it through Orders in this Committee, and Councilor Wilson asked that it also include petitions; Director Rawson replied that such a map can and will be created.
- Director Rawson stated that Packard Avenue is also on the department's "watch list."
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
9. Order (ID # [23-1509](#)) By Councilor Strezo and Councilor Ewen-Campen
That the Director of Engineering consider installing speed humps and additional traffic calming measures to address excessive speed and cut-through traffic on Warren Avenue.
- Councilor Ewen-Campen explained that this street causes traffic-related
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problems due to its narrowness, and that although speed humps may not be the way to correct those problems, the department should give this street some consideration to relieve them. Director Rawson responded that issues like this are given consideration when the department evaluates how to make improvements to surrounding intersections, and will do so with Warren Avenue in conjunction with an ADA analysis of the intersection of Warren at Bow Street.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

10. Order
(ID # [23-0240](#))

By Councilor McLaughlin, Councilor Wilson and Councilor Scott That the Director of Mobility prioritize the intersection of Broadway, Lombardi Way and Mt. Vernon Street for traffic calming measures.

Councilor Wilson explained that this intersection is extremely confusing and can cause massive traffic delays, and asked if its traffic signal is controlled by the city or the state. Director Rawson replied that the city controls that traffic signal, but that its timing is must be approved by the state due to the intersection's connection to Interstate 93, and added that the intersection was designed before the development of Assembly Square, which has contributed to a previously unanticipated increase in traffic volume at that location. Director Rawson continued that this intersection is also being evaluated by the MBTA to improve bus transportation, and that it is being actively evaluated by the department for improvements. Chair Gomez Mouakad summarized that improving signaling at this intersection is challenging because it must be coordinated with the state, and that it is being evaluated for improvement for bus travel and pedestrian safety as well.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

11. Order
(ID # [23-1665](#))

By Councilor Ewen-Campen, Councilor Burnley Jr. and Councilor Wilson That the Director of Engineering relocate the western curb cut where the Community Path crosses School Street so it simply goes straight.

Councilor Ewen-Campen explained that this turn receives a lot of negative constituent feedback, and that the department has previously explained that it has been working on a better solution, but that was complicated because it is associated with the state Green Line Extension (GLX) project. Councilor Ewen-Campen asked why the curb could not just simply be moved, and Director Rawson stated that Director Postlewaite would be better able to answer that question, but that the main issue is that the Community Path needs to be accessible, and that when it was constructed, instead of constructing a ramp, the MBTA chose the less expensive option of making it a turn. Director Rawson continued that a current proposed solution is to request approval from the state to complete the desired improvements because the city cannot act unilaterally to alter the bridge.

Councilor Ewen-Campen asked why it would be so difficult to move the

curb 10-feet closer to the bridge, and Director Rawson explained that the entire slope of the path would need to be reconstructed to comply with its accessibility requirements.

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked if there was potentially a temporary solution that could be implemented, such as removing the nearby yellow posts.

Chair Gomez Mouakad asked for a written report to be drafted regarding this issue because it comes up so frequently.

Director Rawson explained that the city did everything it could to avoid having the bridge constructed this way when it was being developed, and that the department continues to work actively with the state to find a solution.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED