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December 5, 2016

John J. Long, City Clerk
City of Somerville
City Hall
93 Highland Avenue
Somerville, MA 02143

Re: Traffic Changes in Inman Square

Dear Mr. Long:

Thank you very much for your invitation to appear before the Somerville Board of Aldermen to provide additional details on the recent traffic changes that we have implemented in Inman Square. Based on the current status of the implementation of these changes, I felt that it would be most productive to provide you and the Board of Aldermen with a written update that should give you a more complete understanding of the motivation behind these changes. Additional details and links to relevant presentations are available online at the following link:
<http://www.cambridgema.gov/traffic/engineeringplanning/activeengineeringprojects/inmansquaretransportationsafety>

Over the summer of 2015, the City of Cambridge initiated a study of traffic safety in Inman Square, based on concerns we had received from all users of the square, including pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders, and drivers. Given the complexity of the intersection and the volume of roadway users, the study included a very thorough data collection effort, along with an analysis of potential improvement options. This analysis also made it clear that addressing the safety and operational concerns in Inman Square would require more than simply retiming the traffic signals, and led us to begin considering more fundamental changes to the design of Inman Square. The results of this initial study were presented at a public meeting at the Cambridge Hospital on June 22, 2016. Information on this meeting (including a video recording of the presentation) is available online from the link above.

As many members of the Board of Aldermen are likely aware, on the following day (June 23) Amanda Phillips was killed while riding her bicycle through Inman Square. While the exact circumstances of this crash are still under investigation by the State Police, this tragic incident highlighted the need to take immediate action to improve safety for all users of Inman Square. Based on the initial results of the study, along with multiple site visits and discussions with users, the following action plan was developed:

- Mark the bicycle lanes on Hampshire Street through the intersection with Cambridge Street, to provide clearer directions for drivers and cyclists on this very busy bicycle route that connects Somerville, Cambridge, and Boston.
- Install “green-backed” shared lane markings on Cambridge Street to better direct cyclists as they approach and travel through the intersection, while reminding drivers to watch for cyclists.
- Add “Bicycles May Use Full Lane” and “Yield to Pedestrians and Bicycles When Turning” signs on the appropriate roadway approaches.
- Ban left turns from Hampshire Street to Cambridge Street in both directions, as well as from Cambridge Street westbound to Antrim Street. This is intended to reduce the overall level of confusion within Inman Square, create more predictable travel paths for drivers and cyclists, and help to avoid the sideswipe crashes that the original study identified as the most common type of crash in the square.

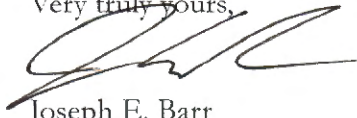
The bicycle markings were installed over the summer, while the left turn bans went into effect on November 3, 2016 (the additional signs will be installed in the near future). We realize that these turn restrictions may inconvenience those traveling through Inman Square, particularly those that live, work, or are visiting destinations in the immediate area. However, we believe that this a necessary tradeoff to create a safer Inman Square, and the feedback we have received has been generally positive.

To allow us to understand the impact of the left turns restrictions, we performed additional traffic data collection prior to the restrictions going into effect. Combined with the data collected as part of the original study, this provided us with a picture of traffic volumes before implementation, and we will then collect after implementation data for comparison. However, we do not intend to collect that additional data until January, to provide some time for drivers to adjust to the new restrictions and for overall traffic patterns to settle out. Based on this before and after comparison, we will determine whether additional adjustments are needed to improve the operation of the traffic in and around Inman Square. Areas of particular concern include the operation of Prospect Street (which is the primary alternate route for cars that can no longer turn left at Inman Square), additional traffic on residential streets, and access to local destinations. We are continuing to monitor the operation of the Inman Square area, and will be able to draw more concrete conclusions once we complete additional data collection early next year. I am happy to share the results of that analysis once we have completed our review.

In parallel with these immediate improvements, we are also working to develop a somewhat longer-term plan for a more substantial revision to traffic patterns in the square, based on the study results that were presented at the June 22 meeting. We have retained a design consultant to develop these plans, and are hopeful to complete design by the middle of next year, with a goal of beginning construction in the fall of 2017. This design effort will include substantial public engagement, and we will notify the Board of Aldermen, Mayor Curtatone, City of Somerville staff, and local residents of these engagement opportunities, so that there is ample opportunity to provide feedback on design concepts as they are being developed.

I hope that this provides you and the Board of Aldermen with the clarifying information needed to allow you to better understand the situation. Should you have any additional questions, I can be reached at 617-349-4743 or jbarr@cambridgema.gov.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Barr', written over the closing text.

Joseph E. Barr
Director

cc: L. DePasquale, Cambridge City Manager
J. Curtatone, Mayor of Somerville
S. Rinfret, Director of Traffic and Parking, City of Somerville
B. Rawson, Director of Transportation and Infrastructure, City of Somerville