

Madalyn Letellier

From: Alessandra Seiter [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, November 17, 2023 12:55 PM
To: Ben Ewen-Campen; Judy Pineda Neufeld; strezoatlarge@gmail.com; Willie Burnley, Jr.; Charlotte Kelly; Jake Wilson; Matthew McLaughlin; JT Scott; Jesse Clingan; Beatriz Gomez-Mouakad; Lance Davis; will@willmbah.com; naimaforsomerville@gmail.com
Cc: Mayor; City Clerk Contact; Public Comments; Transportation; ADA; Engineering
Subject: Comments on the proposed Safe Streets Ordinance from the Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC)
Attachments: PTAC_SafeStreetsOrdinance_November2023.pdf
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Dear Somerville City Councilors and Councilors-Elect--

Please find attached a letter from the Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC) commenting on the Safe Streets Ordinance introduced by Councilor Burnley Jr. on September 28, 2023 and currently under consideration by the Legislative Matters Committee chaired by Councilor Davis.

Many thanks for your consideration and commitment to creating safer, more functional, and more equitable streets in Somerville.

Sincerely,

[Alessandra Seiter](#) (she/they)
Community Engagement Librarian // [Harvard Kennedy School](#)
Chair // [Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee \(PTAC\)](#)
Member // [Somerville Municipal Compensation Advisory Board](#)



November 17, 2023

Somerville City Council
93 Highland Ave
Somerville, MA 02143

Dear President Ewen-Campen; Vice President Pineda Neufeld; Councilors Strezo, Burnley Jr., Kelly, Wilson, McLaughlin, Scott, Clingan, Gomez Mouakad, and Davis; and Councilors-Elect Mbah and Sait,

The Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC) is writing regarding the Safe Streets Ordinance¹ introduced by Councilor Burnley Jr. on September 28, 2023 and currently under consideration by the Legislative Matters Committee chaired by Councilor Davis. If passed, the Safe Streets Ordinance would amend the City's Complete Streets Ordinance² passed in 2014. We are excited about the proposed ordinance and its potential to accelerate the implementation of safe infrastructure for vulnerable road users, especially given the success of Cambridge's similar Cycling Safety Ordinance³ passed in 2019. We support the passage of a finalized version of this ordinance crafted in collaboration with relevant City departments. We also see an opportunity to strengthen the elements of the draft ordinance that address pedestrian, transit, and accessible infrastructure. Doing so would put the full force of the law behind a holistic approach to safe streets, encompassing and going beyond protected bike lanes. We would be happy to see these changes in an initial passage or future version of the ordinance.

The main goal of the Safe Streets Ordinance as currently written is "to expedite protected bike lanes." To accomplish this goal, the ordinance establishes a requirement that Somerville's street reconstruction projects implement protected bike lanes as specified in the Bicycle Network Plan⁴, an annual target the City must meet for implementing protected bike lanes, and a deadline of December 31, 2030 for implementing a total mileage goal of protected bike lanes⁵. We support these measures and believe they will help make Somerville's streets safer for all users. We encourage the Council to strengthen these measures by codifying the priority streets identified in the Bicycle Network Plan in the ordinance itself, mirroring Cambridge's effective approach of designating timelines for specific streets of high need.

The proposed Safe Streets Ordinance also includes short sections on Pedestrian Improvements (Sec. 12-116.4) and Accessible Parking (Sec. 12-116.3). Compared with the detail and gravity of the ordinance's bicycle-focused measures, however, these sections will not have much impact on expanding pedestrian and accessible infrastructure in Somerville. The Pedestrian Improvements section only mandates that an evaluation of sidewalk and crosswalk conditions be part of street improvement projects, specifying that repairs should be made "where necessary" without identifying evaluation criteria or encouraging improvements beyond maintenance. The Accessible Parking section mandates that the number of accessible parking spaces be maintained or increased whenever a separate bicycle facility is installed, but the ordinance does not otherwise encourage the expansion of

¹ Burnley Jr., Willie. [Safe Streets Ordinance](#), Pub. L. No. 23-1461 (2023).

² Somerville City Council. [Complete Streets Ordinance](#), Code of Ordinances § 12-116 (2014).

³ Cambridge City Council. [Cycling Safety Ordinance](#), 12.22 Code of Ordinances § (2019).

⁴ City of Somerville. "[Bike Somerville: City of Somerville Bicycle Network Plan](#)." Somerville, MA: City of Somerville, April 2023.

⁵ OSPCD Mobility. "[October 2023 PTAC Meeting: City Update](#)." Presented at the October 2023 meeting of the Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC), Somerville, MA, October 19, 2023.

accessible infrastructure. Finally, the ordinance as written does not include provisions for transit infrastructure beyond what is already in the 2014 Complete Streets Ordinance.

The proposed Safe Streets Ordinance works symbiotically with the Bicycle Network Plan, giving legal weight and accountability to a critical document that should not be diluted, ignored, or even scrapped by a future mayoral administration. We think the ordinance should give similar legal weight and accountability to other City documents that put forth comprehensive visions for pedestrian, transit, and accessible infrastructure. An expanded version of the ordinance could do so in three ways:

1. **Codify and strengthen the goal for streets redesigned as part of the Bicycle Network Plan to be safer and more functional for all road users.** Mandate that if a street is included in the Bicycle Network Plan, when it is redesigned it must include pedestrian and accessibility improvements (not just repairs) in line with NACTO guidelines⁶ and ADA standards⁷.
2. **Incorporate stronger versions of the quantifiable goals in Somerville's Vision Zero Action Plan⁸.** The 2020 Vision Zero Action Plan sets at least 12 quantifiable goals for annual improvements to pedestrian, transit, and accessible infrastructure. For example, it calls for 2 miles of sidewalk reconstruction per year, consistent with the City's ADA Transition Plan; quick-build safety improvements to 5 major intersections per year; and permanent improvements to 2 major intersections per year. A full list of the VZ Action Plan's annual quantifiable infrastructure goals is included in Appendix A of this letter. These goals, however, set Somerville on a *very slow* course for improvement: with 250 sidewalk miles⁹ in Somerville, 2 miles amounts to 0.8% annual renewal, or 125 years to complete. With 548 intersections¹⁰ in Somerville, 7 intersections amount to 1.3% annual improvement, or 76 years to complete. We encourage the City to increase these goals commensurate with the average lifetime of each piece of infrastructure. With the VZ Action Plan nearing 5 years of age, the time is ripe for revisiting.
3. **Ground these stronger Vision Zero goals in existing plans for pedestrian, transit, and accessible infrastructure.** Use the Pavement and Sidewalk Management Program¹¹, updated ADA Transition Plan¹², and MBTA Bus Network Redesign¹³ to identify priority corridors for redesign, in addition to or overlapping with those identified in the Bicycle Network Plan. Time the redesign of these priority streets based on updated Vision Zero goals. Mandate that when redesigned, these priority streets must include pedestrian and accessibility improvements (not just repairs) in line with NACTO guidelines and ADA standards. For streets included in the MBTA Bus Network Redesign, mandate that when redesigned these streets must also include transit improvements in line with NACTO guidelines and ADA standards.
4. **Incorporate the following measurable goals for multi-modal transportation improvements by 2050 (at the latest).** There are improvements that currently fall outside of official plans, but that we would love to see the City commit to on an official timeline. These improvements include seating and weather

⁶ National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO). "[Urban Street Design Guide](#)." New York, NY: NACTO, April 8, 2015.

⁷ U.S. Department of Justice - Civil Rights Division. "[ADA Standards for Accessible Design](#)." ADA.gov. Accessed November 6, 2023.

⁸ City of Somerville. "[Vision Zero Somerville: Action Plan 2020](#)." Somerville, MA, 2020.

⁹ City of Somerville. "[Walking Routes in Somerville](#)." City of Somerville, 2019.

¹⁰ City of Somerville Traffic Commission. "[Traffic Regulations](#)" (2023).

¹¹ Department of Infrastructure & Asset Management. "[Pavement and Sidewalk Management Program](#)." Somerville, MA: City of Somerville, n.d.

¹² Department of Racial & Social Justice. "[Somerville Announces Americans with Disabilities Act Community Survey](#)." City of Somerville. Accessed November 6, 2023.

¹³ MassDOT and Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). "[MBTA Bus Network Redesign: Final Report](#)." Boston, MA: MBTA, February 2023.

coverage at all bus stops; a north-south transit connector to fill gaps in Somerville's bus and train service; raised crossings at all high-traffic intersections; clear corners at all intersections; a pedestrianized Elm Street and other pedestrian-only streets/plazas; professional snow-clearing for all sidewalks; and the long-awaited grounding of McGrath Highway within 10 years (since we have already waited a decade)¹⁴.

In addition to these provisions, we support including language in an updated ordinance which specifies that parking loss is not an adequate reason why the safe infrastructure envisioned in these plans cannot be implemented. A version of this language is included in Cambridge's Cycling Safety Ordinance (Section 12.22.040, following point E). We also support a public hearing or other community engagement process on this ordinance.

More broadly, we encourage the Council to consider comprehensive mobility goals looking backward from a point in time. What do we want Somerville's mobility infrastructure to look like in 2050? Do we still want to be debating poor sidewalk conditions, ADA non-compliance, slow and weather-inappropriate bus infrastructure and beyond in 30 years? Even more importantly, do we want our community to be plagued by death, injury, and weak social ties at the hands of problems that are anything but inevitable? By structuring a reasonable rate of yearly improvements to achieve a bold vision, we can overcome the dangerous conditions of infrastructure depreciation and create a city that facilitates the comfortable and joyful movement of all community members.

Thank you all for your consideration and commitment to creating safer, more functional, and more equitable streets in Somerville.

Sincerely,
The Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC)

Ted Alexander	Christopher Ferry
Ginny Alverson	Vitor Pamplona, <i>Vice Chair</i>
Caroline Bodager	Zach Rosenberg
Meredith Brown	Alessandra Seiter, <i>Chair</i>
Laura Evans	Carole Voulgaris, <i>Secretary</i>

CC: Katjana Ballantyne, Mayor of Somerville
City Clerk, City of Somerville
OSPCD Mobility, City of Somerville
RSJ Accessibility Services, City of Somerville
IAM Engineering, City of Somerville

¹⁴ MassDOT, McMahon Associates, Nelson\Nygaard, Regina Villa Associates, GLC, HDR Engineering, and Utile, Inc. "[Grounding McGrath: Determining the Future of the Route 28 Corridor: Final Report.](#)" Somerville, MA: MassDOT, December 2013.

Appendix A

Annual quantifiable infrastructure goals set in Somerville's 2020 Vision Zero Action Plan:

1. 2 miles of sidewalk reconstruction, consistent with the City's ADA Transition Plan.
2. Quick-build intersection safety improvements to 5 major intersections.
3. Permanent safety improvements to 2 major intersections.
4. Quick-build traffic calming improvements at 2 gateway locations on residential streets.
5. Quick-build traffic calming improvements at 2 mid-block locations on residential streets.
6. Permanent traffic calming improvements at 4 locations on residential streets.
7. Quick-build or permanent improvements at 3 existing or new mid-block crosswalks.
8. Permanent safety or accessibility improvements at 3 bus stops.
9. Permanent safety or accessibility improvements at 1 location within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of a rapid transit station.
10. Permanent safety or accessibility improvements at 1 location within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of a school or crossing guard location.
11. Enhancement of 3 existing Neighborways streets or designation of new Neighborways streets.
12. Timing and/or phasing improvements to 2 traffic signals.