

## Madalyn Letellier

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**From:** Nicholas LaFleur [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 25, 2024 1:44 PM  
**To:** All City Council; Construction; Public Comments  
**Cc:** JT Scott; Mayor  
**Subject:** Action Required - Construction Chaos in Somerville needs to end.

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To Whom It Concerns:

I am writing to express my frustration with the ongoing construction projects in Somerville, particularly those on Summer Street, Highland Avenue, and Washington Street between Beacon Avenue and Union Square. The overlap of these significant projects is lowering the quality of life for anyone living near these projects, which cover a significant area of town.

For months, Summer Street and Highland Avenue have been torn up, causing significant disruptions. Until recently, there had been no improvements despite the considerable inconvenience of poor road quality, lack of parking, and often, the absence of sidewalks or bike lanes.

Currently, on Washington Street, multiple construction projects in a small area have effectively closed the street and both sidewalks for 6+ weeks, causing inconvenience and raising safety concerns.

There is rarely a police officer or even a construction worker guiding traffic around road-blocking projects. Workers actively block sidewalks, bike lanes, and parking without any accountability, often blocking all means of passing the construction zone on foot.

This lack of oversight and poor planning is unacceptable in our city and it's not a new problem. These issues reflect a larger problem with the city not considering the impact of large-scale projects, properly vetting construction vendors, or giving adequate consideration to functional design and city planning. The Green Line Extension project, for example, faced delays of over a year due to mismanagement and construction failures, such as the need to widen more than two-thirds of the newly laid tracks due to oversight failures within a year of opening service. These problems could have been prevented with proper attention to the projects.

The city's inability to hire vendors that complete large projects on time, under budget, and safely is concerning. This negligence shows a disregard for residents' safety and well-being.

We need immediate changes in how construction projects are managed, and they must be coordinated to prevent citywide disruptions. I urge the City Council to take immediate action to address these issues and **hold those responsible accountable for this mismanagement.**

The residents of Somerville deserve better. It is time for the City Council to act responsibly and address these critical issues or we'll vote for someone who will.

I look forward to hearing what actions have been taken.

Sincerely,

Nick LaFleur

Ward 2

## Madalyn Letellier

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**From:** Nicholas LaFleur [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, July 30, 2024 9:48 AM  
**To:** Nick Alakel  
**Cc:** JT Scott; Mayor; All City Council; Construction; Public Comments  
**Subject:** Re: Action Required - Construction Chaos in Somerville needs to end.

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Hi Nick,

Thanks for the information. However, I already looked at the construction website and much of that was not relevant to my original message.

While I agree that construction is always frustrating and frequently a nuisance, this government is not doing enough to manage the impact on the city-level.

There appears to be zero staggering of projects or a meta-evaluation on their impact on a city-wide scale. This government exists to serve the people of this city, not business interests, and frankly that's not coming across from the haphazard way this department manages projects.

- Did it make sense to leave both Highland Ave and the parallel Summer Street completely torn up for months?
  - No.
- Does making nearly a mile of Washington Street barely passable as an able-bodied pedestrian for over six weeks ) make sense—instead of working on the project one or two blocks at a time?
  - Absolutely not.
  - Extra “no” for the ironic twist this construction is for ADA compliance.
- Do we need several non-critical construction projects active while many main residential are completely impassible?
  - Still no

I understand the scope of the Green Line extension may have been beyond the direct control of the city of Somerville, but I'm willing to bet the city was involved in the poorly designed bike lane extension that runs along it. But again, my purpose is not to nitpick specific projects, but rather to illustrate the ongoing issue this city has with prioritization and design of new construction. I am trying to push for a change in how the city manages these projects moving forward.

Finally, a point you left unaddressed. What accountability does the city employ to make sure their vendors are finishing all these various projects are ending on time and under budget? How much did Somerville receive from GLX in penalties for the several delays in opening and the track widening?

Please, tell me how the city government is actually standing up for the interests of the PEOPLE when large-scale projects inevitably have issues.

I look forward to hearing what accountability will be held for all the ongoing projects when they inevitably run over on budget or time.

Nick

On Jul 26, 2024, at 3:57 PM, Nick Alakel [REDACTED] wrote:

Hello Nick,

Thank you for your email. It has been shared with the Mayor as well as staff from the City's Engineering Division who have asked that I respond on their behalf.

The Mayor and City staff fully understand that living around substantial construction can be very challenging—nowhere in the City is this currently more true than on Spring Hill or on western Washington Street. It's critically important that we hear from residents such as yourself while work is underway, and we appreciate you reaching out and sharing your experience.

Ensuring the safety of both community members and workers is always our priority when undertaking streetscape and safety improvement projects throughout the city, and our hired contractors are similarly committed to prioritizing safety above all else. Additionally, while we do certainly consider and work to limit the amount of work on our roadways at any given time, there are multiple urgent needs relating to our city's built environment that we are moving to address.

I've included more information on each of these elements below.

#### *Preserving Safety and Maintaining Access During Construction*

All construction in Somerville is approved by the City's Engineering Division—this includes both public and private work. Part of this permitting process involves our traffic engineers and project managers working with contractors to develop traffic management plans designed to allow work to proceed safely and direct traffic around construction zones. These plans include detailed requirements for signage, police details, etc.

While sometimes preserving safety requires us to close certain sections of sidewalk, bike lane, or roadway, our staff work with contractors to provide alternatives and maintain access to homes and businesses while work is underway. These alternative routes will often require detours using other city streets and require people walking to use sidewalks on the other side of the street. We certainly recognize this can be inconvenient, adding time to commutes and requiring people to adjust their daily routines. We empathize with this and appreciate the community's understanding and patience while work is underway.

#### *Project Objectives and How They Relate to City Goals*

Both of the projects you reference—the [Spring Hill Sewer Separation](#) and the [Western Washington Street Safety and Mobility Improvements](#) project are critically important to our pursuit of important city goals and needs.

Through the Spring Hill Sewer Separation project, the City has been modernizing the neighborhood's entire sewer, drainage, and water infrastructure—replacing an outdated system much of which was constructed in the late 1800s. This work is critical to reducing flooding and water pollution throughout the City. These underground utility improvements may not be as visible (so it can look like nothing is happening), and they certainly do disturb the roadway, but they are essential to core services in our City. On the above-ground side, Summer Street is scheduled for final paving this fall and eastern Highland Avenue is currently in the midst of [interim repaving](#) prior to a [full, multi-modal streetscape redesign and reconstruction](#).

Meanwhile work on western Washington Street includes reconstructing all sidewalks ensuring full ADA accessibility, repaving the road, and installing mobility improvements to increase the safety and comfort of people walking, wheeling, biking, and driving. This work is being undertaken in pursuit of our [Vision Zero Goals](#), which aim to eliminate fatalities and serious injuries from our transportation system by making our streets safer and more accessible for people of all ages and abilities.

Additionally, I do want to acknowledge that while the City fought for the Green Line Extension project as a vital expansion of public transit, it was not a City-led construction project meaning the City was in no way involved in contractor selection, though we are grateful to the teams that managed that massive project and then worked to address the rail issue that emerged.

I encourage you to sign-up for [City Alerts](#) and [our construction newsletter](#) for regular updates about ongoing and upcoming work. And If you do, spot any specific concerns in real time, please always feel free to contact us at [construction@somervillema.gov](mailto:construction@somervillema.gov) or via 311 as we have staff available to swiftly check in on and address any issues.

Again, the Mayor and City Staff would like to thank you for your message. Construction can be inconvenient and frustrating, but please be assured it is being managed with great care and with the ultimate goal of making Somerville a better, safer, more sustainable place to live.

Best,

Nick

**Nick Alakel** (he/him)  
Public Information Officer, Construction  
Dept of Communications and Community Engagement  
93 Highland Ave., Somerville MA 02143  
[REDACTED]

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Nick LaFleur

Ward 2

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