

Toward a more friendly city for Senior Citizens.

Americans age 55 and older walk for therapeutic exercise frequently. Making streets safer for the entire population means accommodating the older citizens in road and sidewalk design. Just as Somerville is bike friendly, so also it must become pedestrian-friendly.

Older pedestrians are more likely to be killed in a traffic accident than younger people. Those over 65 make up only 12.6 percent of the population yet account for nearly 20 percent of all pedestrians killed between 2005 and 2007 according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Somerville is a densely populated city, second to New York where seniors account for some 39 percent of pedestrian fatalities.

Several key factors in street design for seniors are:

Slowing traffic speed and reconfiguring pedestrian crossings. Speeding vehicles increase the injury severity of an injury and fatality likelihood. A pedestrian struck by a car traveling at 30 mph has about an 80% chance of surviving the crash, but at 45 mph the chance drops to about 50-50.

Traffic lights should be calibrated to accommodate pedestrians with ambulation aids who need extra time to cross. Older pedestrians—particularly those using walkers, canes or wheelchairs are disadvantaged by traffic signals. The signal time for pedestrians is typically calculated by dividing street width by an assumed walking speed of four feet per second. Most older people walk closer to three feet per second, and those with mobility aides might move as slowly as 2.5 feet per second. This is therefore not adequate timing. Also, by adding a “*lead pedestrian interval*” which is a green “walk” signal a few seconds before vehicles get a their green light enables pedestrians to have a head start to cross before turning traffic has an opportunity to obstruct their path.

Providing clear lines of sight at crosswalks, ensuring that curb-cuts at the crosswalks are smooth and have the ADA stipple pads installed is essential. Lips at such curb-cuts are trip / fall hazards.

Providing adequate lighting. Adding LED flashing warning lights at crosswalks where there are no traffic signals provides warning to approaching drivers. Adding these in DC immediately increased the likelihood of vehicles yielding to pedestrians from 26% to 80%.

Simply changing the street lights from a street light consistent with a line of street lights into a down flood light to illuminate crosswalks adds significant visibility protection at nights and in inclement weather. This can use existing light poles with a simple change of the light unit.

Painting the crosswalks with high visibility paint that provides a contrast in all weather conditions, along with appropriate signage is also helpful.

(Insert above in page 55 - Many sidewalks, crosswalks, and bus stops across the city are not fully accessible. This challenge is exacerbated by winter weather, overgrown shrubs, extreme

heat and flooding. Somerville's ASA backlog is estimated at \$75 million just to bring existing infrastructure up to standard. Vulnerable transportation users like seniors, persons with cognitive disabilities, vision, and mobility-impaired persons must be included in creating and improving safe methods of transportation. Improving safety for vulnerable road users will improve safety for everyone. For example, retiming Davis Square's main intersection gave pedestrians 8 more pedestrian signals over the course of an hour.

As the population ages, so the need to accommodate their special needs also increases. Senior citizens need to have increased access to healthcare services, adaptive technologies for their homes and streets and public spaces that are ambulation friendly.

Facilitating and increasing access to healthcare services includes the availability of affordable transport of seniors to healthcare providers. Such transport may need be specialized for those with limited ambulation function so affordable wheelchair vans will need to be available. Further, any citizen with limited ambulation should have the ability to move to all community facilities, including shops, and this calls for expansion of handicap restricted parking and low to zero threshold to building entrances.

Variations in height as a bump-up or (frost or tree root) heave from a concrete pathways segment or brick (on a paved walk) that is more than ¼" should be removed and the sidewalk reprofiled. Any gaps, tree roots, or other obstructions should be remedied to render a smooth, clear walkway. Bricks are preferred over concrete slabs for sidewalks as they tend to meld to the curves of the underlying surface better than slabs of concrete which present bump-up cornices that can defeat ambulation aids. There should be zero threshold steps between surfaces to enable ease of ambulation with an ambulation aid to reduce risk of trips and falls. Adopt AARP access standards for elderly persons)

(Add to page 12 implementation strategies -

"Study our open spaces to ensure they are accessible to pedestrians and do not have significant barriers. Use "Safe routes to parks as a model for park access ")

Benches to enable a senior citizen – or others – to rest should be placed on the sidewalk at every bus stop and at specified distances along public ways to enable people to rest.

Snow clearance should be contracted for not just roads but also the intersection of roads where crosswalks exist. Currently these are treacherous in snow / ice conditions and are seldom cleared and often when cleared become ponds of ice water. These need to be cleared just as importantly as the roads so that the sidewalks/crosswalks can be negotiated.

Adaptive technologies can be applied to any residence, business and public facility. These adaptive technologies include wider doorways (for wheelchair access), handrails, audible traffic signals (for sight impaired seniors) and zero threshold between different surfaces. ADA compliant grades in public ways, handrails, anti-slip surfaces free of clutter to limit fall risk

High friction walkways that have a surface that is even and that are cleared of snow and ice during snow season

All affordable housing to be built to Universal Design to accommodate elders with disabilities as well as the general public. (Seniors with limited resources make a high percentage of affordable housing applicants). Expanding door widths to 42" from the 38" current standard enhances wheelchair access for bariatric citizens. *(Insert page 46 – “Aim for Universal Design. Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. Using these concepts will make our housing accessible for everyone”.*

Traffic calming measures for crosswalks as citizens with limited ambulation may be slow in crossing roadways.

install LED flashers that alert motorists when pedestrians are in a crosswalk. In just six months, the lights have increased the likelihood of vehicles yielding to pedestrians from 26 percent to 80 percent in pilot areas around the city.

Adopt sustainable communication in order to deliver messages and information compatibly with residents' capabilities. The current generation of 60+ is transitional, some use email but not FB or may not want the exposure and lack of privacy. Publicity and outreach should be customized to potential audiences, including non- English speakers. *(Page 12 Implementation Strategies add to*

*“Create a **CENTRALIZED SOURCE OF INFORMATION** about all public processes and initiatives, which outlines the planned meetings, the timeline, and clearly shows key milestones, opportunities for involvement, and decision points. Update this outline when the process changes. As part of this, define a standard structure for communicating the purpose of meetings (presentation only, public comments, non-binding vote, binding vote, etc.) that is included in its posting.”)*

Raise awareness of population demographic changes and how they impact the city's perspective on who to serve. Somerville is becoming noticeably younger, and richer, while the over 60 population and especially the over 70 population, are getting smaller and more likely to be on a fixed income. All ages should be considered in addressing the city population. This also means the development of cross-generational connections. These could include setting up a chore service, snow removal assistance, etc., which could be facilitated by the COA/Dept of Social Services and Schools. These agencies could be potent resources for linking older residents with the school aged population. Students' labor need not be valued at zero—many people would gladly pay for many services.

Promote longevity in Somerville: the slogan - Somerville being a city to live, work, and raise a family in should also have a 'stay in / age in' component in it. This would address the diminishing older population who are selling out family homes that are being converted to 'luxury' condos. (Add to page 35 – “**Fight displacement.** One of the largest threats to the community ties that we value so much is the rapid displacement of existing residents. When a

long-time resident or family is displaced from Somerville, not only are their ties severed, but the entire fabric of community ties gets weaker. We should prioritize helping Somerville residents who want to stay in the city do so and lend extra support to those communities most at risk.”)