



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CLERK OF COMMITTEES

February 8, 2021

REPORT OF THE TRAFFIC AND PARKING COMMITTEE

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Mark Niedergang	Chair	Present	
Jesse Clingan	Vice Chair	Present	
Katjana Ballantyne	Ward Seven City Councilor	Present	

The meeting was held via GoToWebinar and was called to order by Chair Niedergang at 6:04pm and adjourned at 8:16pm.

Councilor Ballantyne left at 7:45 for another appointment.

Others present: Khushbu Webber - Mayor's Office; Brad Rawson - OSPCD; Alexandra Kleyman - OSPCD; Viola Augustin - OSPCD; Ellen Collins - Personnel; Eric Weisman - Public Works; Deputy Chief Chris Ward - Police; Lieutenant James Polito - Police

Chair Niedergang shared that he and Councilor Mbah are part of a group of more than a dozen residents who have formed the Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets. There are already over 200 signatures on a Declaration and Call to Action. SASS will be holding a virtual Safe Streets Summit on Sunday February 28 from 4-5 PM which they invite all to join.

Approval of the January 11, 2021 Minutes

RESULT:	ACCEPTED
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Strategic Big Picture Issues

210893: That the Mayor submit a supplemental budget request to immediately add staff and funding to the Mobility Division for traffic calming, and increase its staff and funding by at least 50% in FY22.

Mr. Rawson shared that an increased funding request has been submitted to the Mayor, including both staffing and consultancy and implementation budget items.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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206691: That the Director of SPCD prioritize for this Board the traffic calming projects in the City, and the process to determine those priorities.

Mr. Rawson introduced Ms. Kleyman, who is working on the data effort to better prioritize projects. Ms. Kleyman shared that the prioritization of intersections for traffic calming and pedestrian safety for intervention is also a Vision Zero action item. Progress has been made to develop a database of intersections (1,025 of them) and organizing data including risk factors such as crash data, and the equity overlay that the Vision Zero plan calls for. Further specific locations and priorities should be available for the March meeting. Councilor Ballantyne requested that the initiatives also included on the CIP have information about the funding source, as plans and timelines need to be connected to funding.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

210992: That the Mayor and the Chief of Police discuss with this Council why there is so little traffic enforcement conducted by the Police Department, why its Traffic Division has so few officers, and how it plans to address the public safety crisis made obvious with 4 pedestrians killed by motor vehicles in the past 2 years.

Chair Niedergang asked Deputy Chief Ward and Lieutenant Polito how the Police Department is responding to the safety crisis on the City's streets. Deputy Ward shared that there have been four motor vehicle accidents where pedestrians were killed, with two occurring on streets where the Police Department is responsible for the care of and enforcement of those streets. The other two were on streets that are maintained and policed by the State, which supersedes the City's jurisdiction on those roadways. The State also controls the lighting and maintenance of those roadways. The ability of the City to make any changes in those locations is extremely limited. The accidents on Powderhouse Boulevard and College Avenue are within the purview of the Somerville Police Department.

Chair Niedergang emphasized that this is a serious public safety crisis. Deputy Ward noted that Powderhouse Blvd and College Ave, where the incidents occurred, are in the top five among streets where SPD conducts traffic enforcement. Since the accidents, the Police have worked with other City departments to place speed bumps, which have drastically reduced the speed and has been a major factor in reducing the dangers on Powderhouse Blvd. The incident on College Ave was an outlier due to operator error. The traffic investigator who completed the accident reconstruction is one of the best in the state, and concluded that the angle at which the turn was made was a significant factor. He said that the driver was only going eight-and-a-half to nine MPH. Deputy Chief Ward stated that there were no changes that could have been made to the street that would have made a difference.

Chair Niedergang asked for more information about what is being done to prevent future accidents. Lieutenant Polito agreed that this is the last thing the City wants, but there will always be the possibility of a fatal accident. The Traffic Division targets some of the most dangerous areas. Public education about distracted driving and drinking and driving are ongoing. The Traffic Unit is focusing on high visibility traffic enforcement, with citation numbers that are now on par with previous years, despite the pandemic. Enforcement was decreased through September due to COVID, but is now back with health safety protocols in place. More personnel have been added to the Traffic Unit as well, for both day and evening enforcement.

Deputy Ward shared charts representing Non-Motorist-Involved Crashes and Traffic Citations. A major takeaway, he stated, is that solely increasing the issuance of traffic violations is not an effective method of reducing non-motorist-involved crashes. Chair Niedergang stated that he is not convinced of this from the data provided; for example, the number of tickets issued is so low that many motorists do not even realize any enforcement is taking place. Charts for Monthly Traffic Violations depict the decrease at the start of the pandemic and subsequent increase, particularly in January 2021. Lieutenant Polito added that 12k-14k written citations per year has been the average for many years. Further, there are a number of motor vehicle stops where written citations are not

issued but verbal warnings are given. Chair Niedergang expressed that warnings are often not sufficient, and the department should be as strict as possible given that lives are in danger. Lieutenant Polito added that an adversarial relationship created by showing no mercy may not be the best approach for a department in the current climate. Deputy Ward also presented data on Last Half Traffic Enforcement, representing the shift from midnight-8am, and demonstrating that this shift has increased enforcement drastically over the last five years. Chair Niedergang shared concern that the data presented indicate that there have been a decreasing number tickets given during the other two shifts when more vehicles are on the road. He asked whether officers have received training in traffic enforcement when on details or other assignments. Deputy Ward clarified that the main concern is safety, so citations have been issued during details, but it is not something done consistently. It can be difficult to physically stop a motorist in these situations. Lieutenant Polito added that there are times when license plates are noted during details and citations are mailed for other violations such as an expired inspection sticker. Chair Niedergang encouraged all officers to conduct traffic enforcement when they are able.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Dangerous Intersections and Roadways

210898: That the Director of SPCD update the Ward 6 Councilor on any plans to further improve pedestrian safety at the intersection of Willow Avenue, Elm Street and Beech Street, possibly with a center island and bump outs.

Mr. Rawson confirmed that this intersection is a priority and various traffic calming interventions are being considered for the 2021 implementation season. The department has met with partners in Cambridge and at the MBTA, as there are three bus lines that transect this intersection.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

202108: That the Administration work with the City of Cambridge to improve pedestrian safety at the intersections of Elm Street with Beech Street and Willow Avenue, including consideration of a Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon.

See 210898.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

211227: That the Commissioner of Public Works install a temporary speed bump on Sycamore Street between the main entrance and the schoolyard entrance of the Winter Hill School.

Councilor Clingan shared that this was the result of many constituent concerns about speed. He recognized that temporary speed bumps may not be ideal, but something needs to be done in this area. Mr. Rawson noted that some solutions were explored before last year's reconstruction project and can be reevaluated.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

208844: That the Director of SPCD report to this Council on actions, communications and collaboration with State agencies to improve pedestrian safety in the Mystic Avenue area

by I-93, following the death of two pedestrians hit by motor vehicles there.

Chair Niedergang noted that there have been two pedestrian deaths in this area. Ms. Kleyman is the project manager for this area, and shared that the intersection at Shore Drive and Mystic Avenue received funding for pedestrian safety improvements through Mass DOT and the City is working on design, including a pedestrian refuge island, curb bump-outs, and bicycle connections. The project is advancing through the Mass DOT review process. The larger area has received federal funding for construction, and Mass DOT District 4 is completing preliminary design on the project, which should be available soon to be reviewed by the City, advisory committees, and the public. Councilor Clingan asked about the timeline, and Ms. Kleyman clarified that the City is working through the Mass DOT design process and it is unclear whether it will be completed in time to bid for construction within this year.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

209363: That the Director of SPCD discuss implementing a "Don't Block the Box" campaign to ease intersection congestion at locations along Broadway, including McGrath Highway.

Chair Niedergang noted that he has not heard many complaints in the last six months regarding the Broadway bicycle and bus lane changes that were implemented in the fall of 2019. Mr. Rawson noted that there are no major updates, the department continues to monitor the traffic signals. He shared one piece of news that Mass DOT will be updating the signals at Broadway and McGrath Highway and Pearl Street and McGrath Highway.

RESULT:

WORK COMPLETED

GLX-Related and Public Transportation Issues

211135: That the Director of SPCD report to this Council on traffic management and calming plans for the streets and neighborhoods around the five Green Line Extension stations expected to open before the end of this year.

Mr. Rawson introduced Ms. Augustin, the City's project manager for the Green Line Extension (GLX), noting that the presentation focuses on the major intersections related to the stations, but the entire transit ecosystem will be addressed. Ms. Augustin shared slides from the MBTA, which have not been updated but do show the general orientation of the stations. In East Somerville, the Community Path will run on top of the bridge and continue to Cambridge Crossing. The goal is to ensure safe multi-modal access for all stations. East Somerville has already seen some bus and bicycle lane separation and striping completed. The City is also working with the MBTA to improve the bus stop to include a separate waiting area and bus shelter.

The Union Square station will feature a main entrance along Prospect Street, where US2 will build an elevator, though it will not be in service when the station first goes into service. The intersection has already received traffic signal improvements. A separate project to develop the plaza and streetscape is underway, which will upgrade the plaza and larger area in the heart of Union Square. The Gilman Square station will have entrances at School Street and Medford Street, off of the Community Path. There will be an elevator and stairs. All stations will also have bicycle cages and bicycle parking. The Gilman Square station design aims to provide connections to the station with raised crossings, pedestrian zones, and connections to the Community Path. Chair Niedergang confirmed that the Gilman Square Streetscape project is a separate project that the City is paying for. The GLX mitigation required traffic signals and a crosswalk, but the City design takes this further. Many of the

mitigation items have already been implemented and the City is in discussion with the MBTA about changing some of the mitigation plans that are no longer necessary. Councilor Clingan expressed that this area still has room for improvement for accessibility. Ms. Augustin agreed that future connections are not precluded.

Chair Niedergang asked which City staff are responsible for overseeing compliance by the MBTS, GLX Project Team, US2 and others with the many items spelled out in detail in the Memorandum of Agreement (see 210968). Ms. Augustin and Mr. Rawson replied that Mobility is deeply involved in this and the City Solicitor's Office and OSPCD in the person of Attorney Eileen McGettigan are also represented in those discussions.

In Magoun Square, the only access to the station is from the Lowell Street bridge, but there will be an elevator platform. Chair Niedergang asked about the Lowell Street and Vernon Street intersection and Mr. Rawson noted that solutions for traffic calming there will be investigated. The Ball Square station will feature two station entrances, with extensive work on the bridge and protected bicycle lanes created. The right turn lane has already been eliminated, to make a more pedestrian-friendly entrance. Chair Niedergang noted that residents are compiling a petition to address the crosswalks and other pedestrian-safety concerns in the area and Mr. Rawson shared that he is not aware of anything received but the Mobility Department is receptive to residents' ideas.

Ms. Augustin also presented some updates to the Community Path, including a number of access points and crosswalks. The City and others are working with the MBTA to provide ADA accessible crossings, at less than or close to 2% grade, at all the points where the Community Path crosses City streets.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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210968: That the Director of SPCD brief the Traffic and Parking Committee on the work that will be done on our streets and Community Path pursuant to the Memorandum of Agreement with the MBTA and MaDOT, which will provide the city with a \$1,400,000 payment.

See 211135.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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207502: That the Director of SPCD discuss the plans and process to advocate for Somerville transit priorities as part of the MBTA Better Bus Project, including advocacy for a North/South bus route and reduced fares for income-eligible riders, and against fare hikes.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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209606: That the Director of SPCD provide this Council with an update on efforts to implement North/South public transportation services.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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City Employee Driver Training

210975: That the Administration and the Commissioner of Public Works discuss the vehicle training process for all DPW employees and contractors whose job requires them to drive city vehicles.

Mr. Weisman provided the update that the Personnel Department and Public Works have been discussing an overall safety training program, which would include vehicle safety training. Public Works are not the only staff employed by the City that operate vehicles, so it made sense to make it more comprehensive. Ms. Collins added that the major initiative is to implement the Vision Zero plan and work on the culture of safety. Collisions are preventable and good education and safety training are important. The department is exploring how to implement a program for all City staff who drive City vehicles. Mr. Weisman added that the Mobility Department has provided additional ideas, but many off-the-shelf training programs are not designed for these type of vehicles, but rather for trucks, and the right tools are still being sought.

Councilor Ballantyne asked if drivers of City vehicles are aware of Vision Zero, and Ms. Collins noted that managers are and the messaging will filter to staff. The hiring of a new Director in Personnel will aid the process of this long-term effort. Councilor Ballantyne emphasized that the significance of this as a public safety effort must be conveyed to all City staff.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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211128: That the Commissioner of Public Works discuss installing speed limiters on the city's vehicles to monitor speed and ensure that employees are observing speed limits.

Mr. Weisman shared that DPW agrees that there is no reason that Public Works vehicles should ever go above the speed limit, and there are varying technologies that can be installed to ensure this. Some would be useful within the City but could create problems for highway driving for instances such as picking up materials. Some technology will link to GPS systems to convey posted speed limits. These options are currently being explored by the department. Councilor Clingan requested data on City vehicles that have been in accidents.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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Housekeeping -- Items to be completed if no objection

210828: That the Director of SPCD and the Director of Parking remove the parking meters at 315 Broadway.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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211151: Director of Parking responding to items approved at the 12/10/20 meeting.

RESULT:	WORK COMPLETED
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210899: That the Director of SPCD and the Director of Parking implement traffic calming measures on Powder House Terrace.

RESULT:	KEPT IN COMMITTEE
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209808: That the Director of SPCD develop a plan to create parking-separated bike lanes

on East Broadway.

RESULT:

KEPT IN COMMITTEE

Referenced Material:

- Traffic and Last Half Analysis (with 210992)
- 2021-2-8 TP Committee - GLX visuals (with 211135, 210968)