

Madalyn Letellier

From: Alessandra Seiter [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, August 25, 2025 4:57 PM
To: Mayor
Cc: Public Comments; Transportation; JT Scott; Ben Ewen-Campen; Willie Burnley, Jr.; Wilfred Mbah; s [REDACTED]; Jake Wilson
Subject: Union Square Walk Audit Findings & Recommendations
Attachments: PTAC_USQWalkAudit_8-25-25.pdf

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
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Dear Mayor Ballantyne, esteemed City Councilors, and Mobility staff--

I am very happy to share with you the findings and recommendations of the Union Square Walk Audit hosted in April 2025 by the Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC), Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets (SASS), Somerville Commission for Persons with Disabilities (SCPD), the Groundwork Somerville Green Team, and Union Square Main Streets (USMS). Our attached report is the culmination of a community-led assessment of how safe, accessible, comfortable, and inviting it is to walk in Union Square, representing the views of four organizations, six named community members, and 60 attendees of the walk audit itself.

The report offers five high-level recommendations for the entirety of Union Square, 25 short-term recommendations (including 9 we recommend as priority action items), and 11 long-term recommendations for integration into the next phase of the Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes plan.

I am grateful to the organizations and individual community members who made this work possible, those of you who were able to attend the walk audit back in April, and to all of you for considering and helping to push forward the recommendations of those who live in, work in, and love Union Square. Our groups welcome follow-up conversations on these recommendations, and plan to reach back out later this year on the same.

Warmly,
Alessandra Seiter
Chair, Somerville PTAC
Ward 5 Resident

August 25, 2025

Mayor Katjana Ballantyne
93 Highland Ave
Somerville, MA 02143

Union Square Walk Audit Findings & Recommendations

Introduction

Dear Mayor Ballantyne,

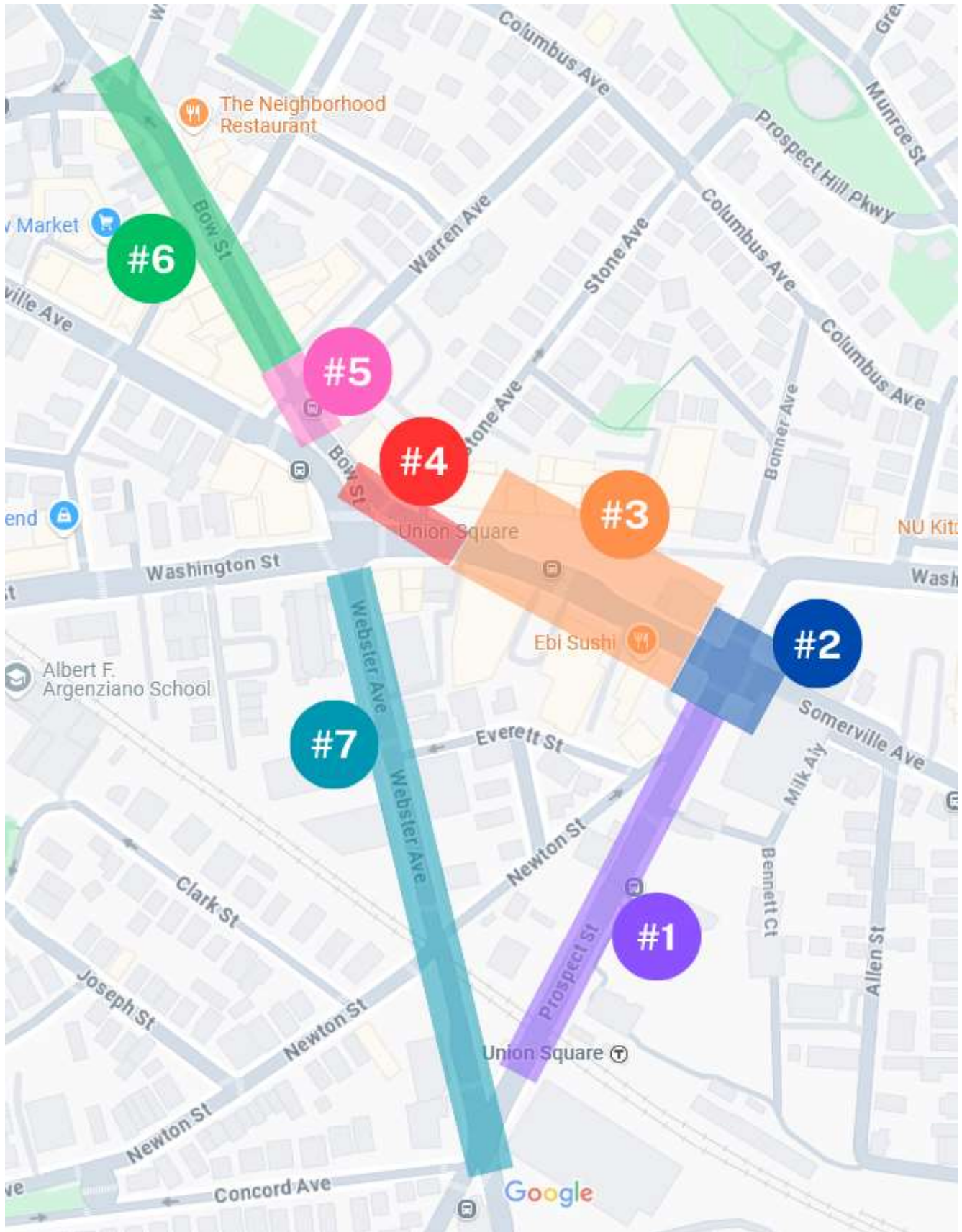
Thank you very much for attending the Union Square Walk Audit hosted on the evening of April 29, 2025, by the Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC) in collaboration with the Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets (SASS), Somerville Commission for Persons with Disabilities (SCPD), the Groundwork Somerville Green Team, and Union Square Main Streets (USMS).

As you experienced, the walk audit was a community-led assessment of how safe, accessible, comfortable, and inviting it is to walk in Union Square. 60 community members joined the walk audit, splitting into three groups to embark on different walking routes through the square. Each route followed the path a real community member might take through the area: a parent picking up their child from the Argenziano School, a teenager walking to and from Somerville High School, and a commuter transferring from the Green Line to one of the four bus routes that run on Somerville Ave. Each walking route had three stopping points where participants completed checklists to record their assessments of various elements of walkability including sidewalk quality, crosswalk safety, signal timing, and amenities. ([See a blank copy of the checklist used on the walk audit.](#)) Along each route, teen collaborators from the Groundwork Somerville Green Team took measurements of three environmental qualities: heat index, air quality, and noise level.

We hosted the walk audit because Union Square is [one of the busiest pedestrian areas citywide](#) and [several high-crash roads intersect there](#). Our goals with the walk audit were to identify opportunities to make this beloved square safer and more comfortable for people walking in the short-term, and to inform the next stages of the [Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes project](#) which is currently at 25% design. While we are excited about the preliminary vision offered by the Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes project, there is currently no timeline for construction. Based on our walk audit, we believe there are several relatively low-cost, high-impact improvements that can be made in the near future regardless of the status of the Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes project.

This letter summarizes the community assessments made on the walk audit of Key Areas of Union Square (Figure 1), makes recommendations for short-term actions to improve safety and walkability in each of these areas, and offers feedback on the plans for these areas as envisioned in the Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes project.

Figure 1: Key Areas of Union Square per the April 29 Walk Audit



Methodology

Each walk audit participant completed a 26-question checklist for each of the three stops on their route. For each question participants could answer Yes, No, or leave the question blank, and offer written comments. Since some intersections were covered by multiple routes, participants assessed eight intersections overall.

After collecting the checklists, for each intersection we tallied the responses to each question and totaled the number of Yes, No, and blank responses. We subtracted the blank responses from the total possible score (number of questions multiplied by completed checklists) for a measure of total question participation. We then calculated the positive and negative responses as percentages of total question participation. Subtracting the negative from the positive response percentages gave us an overall score for each intersection, the average score being 20.18 (Table 1). We also transcribed all written comments and identified the lowest-rated qualities of each intersection, as determined by which checklist questions received the most negative responses.

Finally, we created the Union Square Key Areas map (Figure 1) based on the written comments provided for each intersection. If the comments indicated a clear focus only on the intersection itself, that intersection was assigned its own map area (#2 and #4). If the comments referenced an area inclusive of the intersection and the surrounding area, the entire area referenced was assigned a map area (#3 and #6). If the comments on multiple intersections referenced overlapping surrounding areas, those areas were combined and assigned a single map area (#1 and #7). The outlier is map area #5. Though we did not assess this area on the walk audit, we have a short-term recommendation for improving its safety and walkability based on our own experiences.

As a complementary line of inquiry, the Groundwork Somerville Green Team measured the heat index, air quality, and noise level around Union Square.

Summary Findings & High-Level Recommendations

The intersection of Webster Ave and Prospect St received by far the lowest overall score, trailed by the nearby points on Prospect St at the Green Line station elevator and Bennett Ct. In contrast, the intersection of Webster Ave and Washington St received the highest overall score by far, trailed by the intersection of Somerville Ave and Prospect St. The intersection of Bow St and Wesley Park, the Bow St slip lane, and Somerville Ave at the 87 bus stop received the scores closest to average. It is worth noting that only one out of eight intersections – Webster Ave and Prospect St – received a higher percentage of negative scores than positive. See Table 1 below for details.

The lowest-rated qualities identified most frequently across all eight intersections were:

1. General comfort
2. Time given to cross
3. Sidewalk obstacles
4. Public art availability
5. Sidewalk condition
6. General safety
7. Driver compliance
8. Green space availability

In terms of the environmental qualities measured by the Groundwork Somerville Green Team (Table 2), heat index in the walk audit's Key Areas was significantly higher than the ambient temperature the evening of the walk audit. While the temperature was around 70 F, the heat index in Key Areas averaged 8-11 degrees hotter (Figure 2). This discrepancy means that people walking in Union Square are likely uncomfortably hot even

when the forecast is mild. The hottest areas were those with high levels of car traffic and low levels of shade, including along Somerville Ave. Meanwhile, the coolest areas were those with plenty of green space, trees, and shade from tall buildings, including along Webster St. In contrast to the heat index, air quality in Union Square was quite good – likely to the high winds present the evening of the walk audit (Figure 3). The one area where air quality spiked to an unhealthy level was at Somerville Ave where a bus had been idling. Finally, noise levels in Union Square ranged from moderate to loud – the equivalent of dishwashers to noisy restaurants (Figure 4). The loudest area was at the intersection of Somerville Ave and Prospect St, a highly trafficked location used by all modes of transportation. Based on previous studies of noise pollution, the long-term effects of such noise levels in Union Square could include increased levels of anxiety for residents and decreased levels of pedestrian and cyclist activity.

In terms of accessibility, members of the Somerville Commission for Persons with Disabilities (SCPD) identified several types of concern along each walking route. Some of these concerns are enumerated below, but two broader pieces of feedback apply across the walk audit area. The first is that tactile markings intended to direct people with visual impairments across intersections are often positioned in a confusing manner. That is, rather than pointing directly to the other side of the intersection, the markings frequently point toward the middle of the intersection. This orientation risks misleading people with visual impairments into a dangerous situation, and disempowers them from feeling safe and confident walking independently. The second broad concern is that raised crossings – while a huge safety improvement for sighted users – present dangers to users with visual impairments. Namely, raised crossings often lack tactile markings bordering the walking path, meaning that users with visual impairments risk tripping and falling on the sloped sides of the crossing.

Finally, members of the Groundwork Somerville Green Team offered the general feedback that Union Square doesn't currently feel like a place they want to spend time in. The car traffic in close proximity to seating areas makes the square loud and uncomfortable, and the seating areas that exist are pretty sparse. In addition, Green Team members felt excluded from Union Square because there is very little to do that doesn't require spending money.

High-Level Recommendations for Union Square

See additional, more detailed recommendations in the sections below on walk audit Key Areas.

1. Continue to add infrastructure that prioritizes walking and transit use to reduce the number of cars on the road, thus improving overall safety and environmental comfort for all users.
2. Add more green space and trees to create shade and shield people walking and biking from vehicle exhaust.
3. Ensure all street reconstruction and improvement efforts are fully ADA-compliant, lending special consideration to the position of tactile markings and the accessibility of raised crossings.
4. Offer a robust variety of seating options – from the secluded and personal to the wide and open – interspersed with trees, plants, and public art throughout the square to invite teens and others to linger comfortably and affordably.
5. Work with the MBTA to introduce electric buses on the routes that traverse Union Square, since these buses are quieter and more climate friendly than diesel ones.

Table 1: Walk Audit Intersection Scores (Lowest-Highest) and Lowest-Rated Qualities

Intersection	Key Area	Positive Scores	Negative Scores	Overall Score	Score Diff. from Average	Lowest-Rated Qualities
Webster Ave & Prospect St	7	42.05%	59.49%	-17.44	-37.62	1. Sidewalk condition 2. Sidewalk continuity 3. Time given to cross 4. Signal timing 5. General safety 6. Car speeds 7. Driver compliance 8. Green space availability 9. Seating 10. General comfort
Prospect St & Green Line Station Elevator	1	56.78%	45.58%	10.20	-9.98	1. Sidewalk obstacles 2. General safety 3. Green space availability 4. General comfort
Prospect St & Bennett Ct	1	51.69%	40.45%	11.24	-8.94	1. Car speeds 2. Driver compliance 3. Sidewalk continuity
Bow St & Wesley Park	6	57.07%	41.85%	15.22	-4.96	1. Sidewalk condition 2. Public art availability 3. Sidewalk separation from road 4. Sidewalk obstacles
Bow St Slip Lane	4	61.40%	36.74%	24.65	4.47	1. Sidewalk condition 2. Sidewalk obstacles 3. Green space availability 4. Time given to cross 5. Pedestrian efficiency 6. Public art availability 7. General comfort
Somerville Ave & 87 Bus Stop	3	51.26%	25.21%	26.05	5.87	1. Crossing signal placement 2. Time given to cross 3. General safety 4. General comfort 5. Sidewalk obstacles
Somerville Ave & Prospect St	2	58.92%	28.90%	30.03	9.85	1. Time given to cross 2. Seating 3. Pedestrian efficiency 4. Public art availability 5. General comfort
Webster Ave & Washington St	7	81.50%	20.00%	61.50	41.32	1. Driver compliance 2. Public art availability 3. Audible crossing prompts

Table 2: Environmental Qualities of Walk Audit Key Areas

Key Area	Key Area Description	Heat Index Range (F)	HI Diff. from Ambient Temp (F)	Air Quality Range (PM)	AQ Description	Noise Level Range (dB)	NL Description
1	Prospect St	77-81	+7-11	0-1	Good	63-89	Moderate to Loud
2	Somerville Ave & Prospect St	78-82	+8-12	0-1	Good	72-88	Loud
3	Somerville Ave	78-82	+8-12	0-4	Moderate	n/a	n/a
4	Bow St Slip Lane	79-81	+9-11	0-2	Good	n/a	n/a
5	Bow St & Warren Ave	79-81	+9-11	0-2	Good	64-87	Moderate to Loud
6	Bow St West	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
7	Webster Ave	77-79	+7-9	0-2	Good	65-89	Moderate to Loud

Figure 2: Heat Index in Union Square during Walk Audit

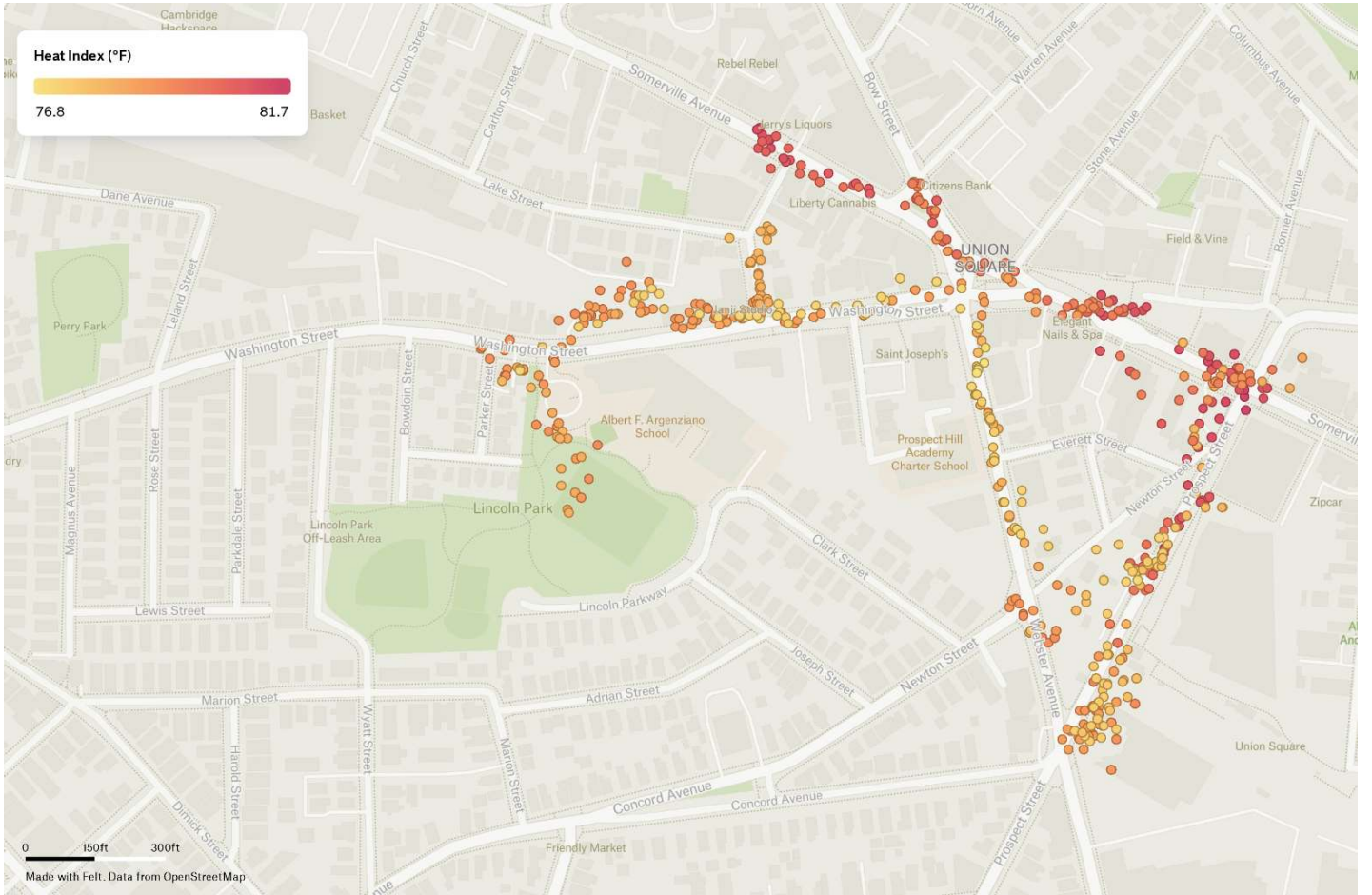


Figure 3: Air Quality in Union Square during Walk Audit

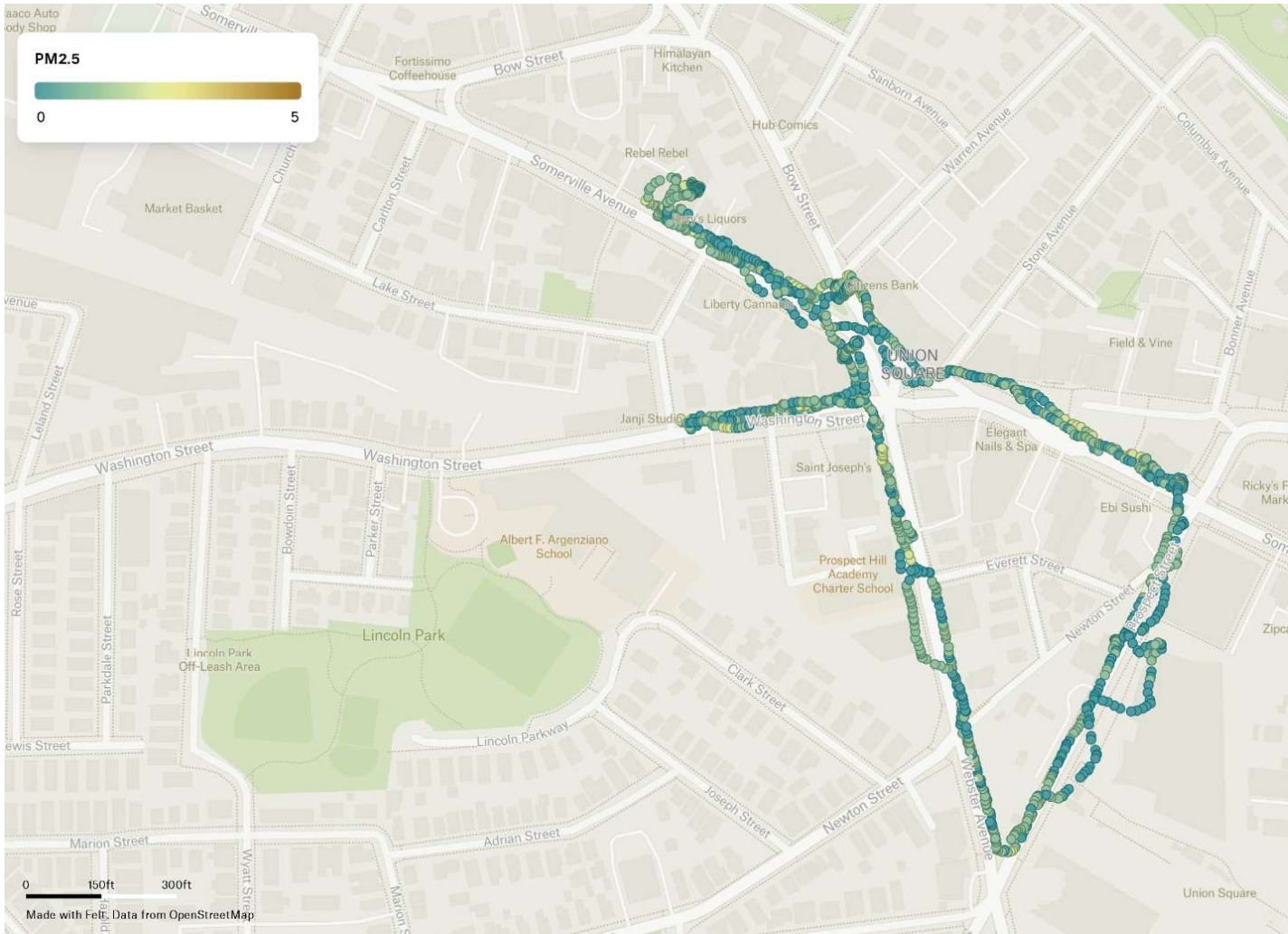
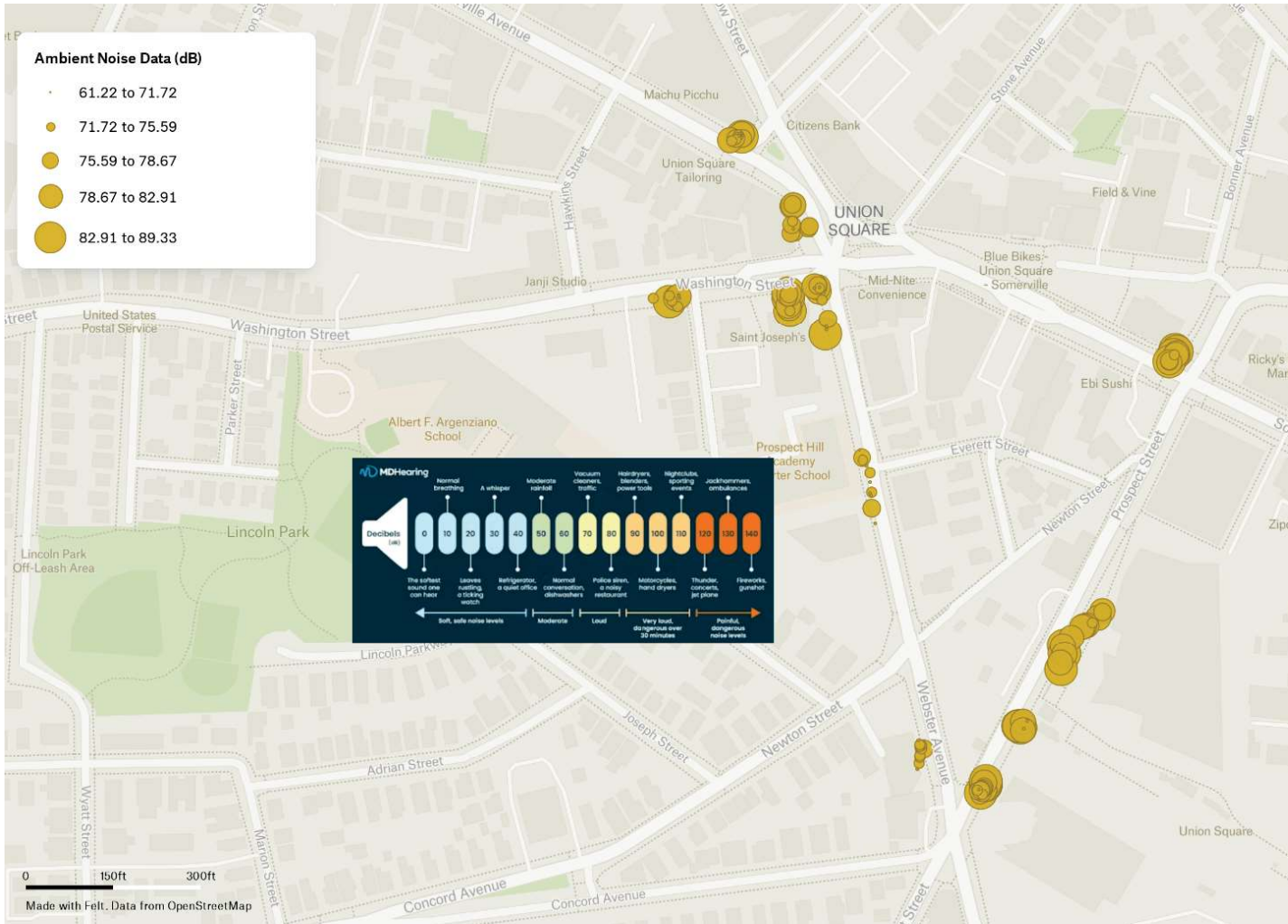


Figure 4: Noise Level in Union Square during Walk Audit



Findings & Recommendations by Key Area

We are offering 25 short-term recommendations and 11 long-term recommendations for integration into the next phase of the Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes plan. Since we realize the City cannot accomplish 25 short-term projects immediately, we have marked our 9 priority short-term recommendations as **Priority Recommendations**. For long-term recommendations, we are happy to follow the existing prioritization framework laid out in the Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes plan.

Key Area #1: Prospect St between Green Line Station Elevator and Somerville Ave

Included Intersection	Standing	Positive Scores	Negative Scores	Overall Score	Score Diff. from Average	Lowest-Rated Qualities
Prospect St & Green Line Station Elevator	2nd-Lowest Rated	56.78%	45.58%	10.20	-9.98	1. Sidewalk obstacles 2. General safety 3. Green space availability 4. General comfort
Prospect St & Bennett Ct	3rd-Lowest Rated	51.69%	40.45%	11.24	-8.94	1. Car speeds 2. Driver compliance 3. Sidewalk continuity

The stretch of Prospect St between the Green Line station elevator and Somerville Ave received some of the most negative assessments of the entire walk audit. Participants noted that the sidewalk felt very narrow near Webster Ave, especially given the speeds of cars traveling right next to it. Participants also observed a clear desire to cross Prospect St mid-block, since the crossings at Webster Ave and Somerville Ave are 200–400 ft away depending on where you exit the Green Line station. This desire is only exacerbated by the long crossing wait times pedestrians experience at Somerville Ave and Prospect St (see details below under Key Area #2). Further north, participants noticed that the tactile pads at Bennett Ct were too narrow to be reliably noticed by those using white canes. Finally, participants observed a need for additional wayfinding and amenities. In particular, they found it disorienting to ascend the stairs or elevator from the Green Line station to Prospect St and arrive in a nondescript location. They also indicated not wanting to spend time near the Green Line station despite the recent construction of the nearby plaza.

Given these assessments, we are very happy that Prospect St is set to be reconstructed in Phase 1 of the Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes project. We are particularly looking forward to having the sidewalks widened, a raised crosswalk installed at Bennett Ct, and bus lanes implemented. Bus lanes will both expedite transit service and provide an additional buffer between the sidewalks and constant motor vehicle traffic.

Short-Term Recommendations

- **Priority Recommendation:** Create a temporary mid-block crossing across Prospect St, either at the Green Line station elevator or at Bennett Ct, thus restoring the crossing that was present during recent construction in the area.
- Replace the narrow tactile pads at Bennett Ct with wider ones.
- Add a clearly visible wayfinding sign or banner to the fence on the west side of Prospect St opposite the Green Line station elevator (see Figure 2 for a rough mockup), as well as to the interior of the elevator.
- Add planters, more tables/seating, and temporary art installations to break up the wide open space next to the Green Line station and make the area more inviting.

Figure 5: Rough Mockup of Suggested Wayfinding Sign on Prospect St



Long-Term Recommendations to Integrate into Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes

- Put the utilities on Prospect St near Webster Ave underground to free up additional room on sidewalks.
- Add a wayfinding pillar similar to the ones recently installed throughout Union Square between the Green Line station elevator and stairs.
- Further activate the area next to the Green Line station with permanent public art installations, greenery, and tables/seating.

Key Area #2: Somerville Ave and Prospect St Intersection

Included Intersection	Standing	Positive Scores	Negative Scores	Overall Score	Score Diff. from Average	Lowest-Rated Qualities
Somerville Ave & Prospect St	2nd-Highest Rated	58.92%	28.90%	30.03	9.85	1. Time given to cross 2. Seating 3. Pedestrian efficiency 4. Public art availability 5. General comfort

While the intersection of Somerville Ave and Prospect St was one of the highest rated of the walk audit, it also had a clear and loud consensus on what should be improved: pedestrian signal timing and phasing. Participants waited far too long to cross the intersection and when they finally could, the crossing time was too short for comfort – especially for older individuals or those with mobility impairments. What’s more, to cross from the intersection’s southeastern corner near the Green Line station to the northwestern corner near the former Somerville Media Center, participants had to endure this long wait twice: once to cross Somerville Ave, and once to cross Prospect St. For those transferring from the Green Line to the 87, 109, or 91 buses, this movement is critical. Additionally, the audible crossing prompts only beeped rather than announce the street pedestrians were about to cross, which is necessary information for pedestrians with visual impairments. Finally, while this walk audit wasn’t focused on improvements for people biking, some participants noted that there is no painted bike box to facilitate a left turn from Somerville Ave onto Prospect St.

Short-Term Recommendations

- **Priority Recommendation:** Implement a pedestrian-only phase to enable people to cross once diagonally.
 - If the above is not possible, add wayfinding indicating to pedestrians coming from the Green Line station that they can save time by crossing Prospect St first then using the mid-block crossing at the 87/109/91 bus stop to continue traveling through the square.
 - Ensure any pedestrian-only phase offers enough time to cross comfortably, especially for older individuals or those with mobility impairments.
- **Priority recommendation:** Implement transit signal priority.
- Add street identification to the audible crossing prompts.
- Add a painted bike box at the northwest corner of this intersection to facilitate a left turn from Somerville Ave onto Prospect St for people biking.

Long-Term Recommendation to Integrate into Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes

- Holistically rethink how streets fit together at this intersection so as to avoid delays and confusion for people walking and taking the bus.

Key Area #3: Union Square Plaza on Somerville Ave

Included Intersection	Standing	Positive Scores	Negative Scores	Overall Score	Score Diff. from Average	Lowest-Rated Qualities
Somerville Ave & 87 Bus Stop	3rd-Highest Rated	51.26%	25.21%	26.05	5.87	1. Crossing signal placement 2. Time given to cross 3. General safety 4. General comfort 5. Sidewalk obstacles

While participants rated the area around the Somerville Ave at Stone Ave bus stop ([stop #2612](#)) relatively highly, they also expressed confusion about pedestrian paths around the bus stop and into the main plaza. The bus stop is located directly adjacent to the protected bike lane, which makes it easy to confuse the bike lane for the sidewalk. This gives pedestrians traveling westbound two choices: walk in the bike lane, or walk into the plaza's open space and try to find their way to the continuation of the sidewalk. Additionally, many participants noted the significant obstacles pedestrians face when traveling west through the main plaza, especially starting in front of El Potro. There, a series of large Honey Locust tree pits create pinch points for pedestrians passing one another and their roots present tripping hazards.

The Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes project envisions converting the parking lot currently adjacent to the main plaza into an outdoor dining area, extending the plaza west past El Potro and into Bow St, and converting Somerville Ave from Webster Ave to Prospect St into a two-way curbless street. While we support this vision – especially the plaza extension – we think that the increased variety of uses in this area will make wayfinding and tactile indicators particularly important in the long-term.

Short-Term Recommendations

- **Priority Recommendation:** Cover the roots of the five Honey Locust trees in front of El Potro with pervious material.
- **Priority Recommendation:** Activate the plaza with a variety of seating options, tables, and temporary public art – similar to the [Gilman Square Pop-Up](#).
- Add paint and tactical markings to the sidewalk and wayfinding signage to distinguish between the bus stop waiting area and the plaza, and to offer pedestrians a clear path through the plaza.
- Add a signal activation button to the pedestrian refuge in the middle of the mid-block crossing, adding to the two buttons on either side of the crossing.

Long-Term Recommendations to Integrate into Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes

- Move the bus shelter closer to the roadway to ease access for riders and route the protected bike lane behind it.
- Offer a robust variety of seating options – from the secluded and personal to the wide and open – interspersed with trees, plants, and public art throughout the square to invite teens and others to linger comfortably.

Key Area #4: Bow St Slip Lane off Somerville Ave

Included Intersection	Standing	Positive Scores	Negative Scores	Overall Score	Score Diff. from Average	Lowest-Rated Qualities
Bow St Slip Lane	4th-Highest Rated	61.40%	36.74%	24.65	4.47	1. Sidewalk condition 2. Sidewalk obstacles 3. Green space availability 4. Time given to cross 5. Pedestrian efficiency 6. Public art availability 7. General comfort

Walk audit participants ranked the Bow St slip lane near the middle of the pack relative to other areas of Union Square. However, as with the intersection of Somerville Ave and Prospect St, there was clear and strong consensus on what should be done: close the slip lane. Participants found the area around the slip lane to be quite dangerous given the confusion drivers seemed to have when navigating it. Two participants described the area as a “free for all,” observing drivers ignoring the crosswalk in the slip lane in part due to ambiguous signalization. Adding to the confusion – especially for pedestrians with visual impairments – was the extremely low volume of the audible crossing prompts and the fact that they only beeped rather than announcing the street being crossed.

That said, we were thrilled to see the recently installed signs indicating the appropriate place for drivers to stop on red. PTAC members toured the area in November 2024 in preparation for the walk audit, and intended to make exactly that recommendation to the City as part of this letter. It is wonderful that we no longer have to!

We are also very happy that the slip lane is set to be closed as part of the Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes project and converted into additional plaza space along with the adjacent traffic island. However, we are nervous that this important change isn’t set to happen until Phase 2 of the project. We have seen the closure of a slip lane happen elsewhere in Somerville – Highland Ave in Davis Square – using temporary materials outside the context of a larger project. We urge the City to implement a similar treatment here.

Short-Term Recommendations

- Implement a pilot project to close the Bow St slip lane using temporary materials like jersey barriers, similar to how the City handled the Highland Ave slip lane in Davis Square. We recommend implementing temporary traffic-calming features at Stone Ave as part of this pilot, to mitigate any hasty driver behavior that might result as people become familiar with the changes.
- Make the audible crossing prompts louder and add street identification to them.

Key Area #5: Bow St and Warren Ave Intersection

While walk audit participants didn't assess the intersection of Bow St and Warren Ave, based on our own experiences we find this intersection to be confusing and dangerous. We have observed drivers using the slip lane from Somerville Ave not stopping for pedestrians, and drivers traveling westbound on Bow St running the red light. Additionally, we see this intersection backed up considerably during morning and afternoon peak periods, adding to its confusion and danger. We think a key reason for this confusion is the mix of signals and signage: the slip lane from Somerville Ave has a stop sign, while westbound traffic has a RYG signal. This means that while westbound traffic has the red light, there is little incentive for drivers using the slip lane to obey the stop sign even if a pedestrian is trying to cross since the drivers want to get through the intersection before the opposing light turns green. While we are excited this slip lane will be closed, the main plaza extended through Bow St, and Warren Ave dead-ended as part of the Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes project, we recommend that the City replace the mixed signals and signs with all-way stop signs in the short term.

Short-Term Recommendations

- **Priority Recommendation:** Replace the mixed signals and signs with all-way stop signs.

Key Area #6: Bow St between Warren Ave and Wesley Park

Included Intersection	Standing	Positive Scores	Negative Scores	Overall Score	Score Diff. from Average	Lowest-Rated Qualities
Bow St & Wesley Park	4th-Lowest Rated	57.07%	41.85%	15.22	-4.96	1. Sidewalk condition 2. Public art availability 3. Sidewalk separation from road 4. Sidewalk obstacles

Walk audit participants ranked the stretch of Bow St between Warren Ave and Wesley Park near the middle of the pack relative to other areas of Union Square. They primarily commented on the quality of the sidewalks, noting their unevenness, inconsistency of materials, narrowness, and abundance of obstacles like tree roots and utility poles. Participants also noted that most crosswalk markings in the area are either faded or unclear, and that tactile pads are missing at several crossings.

In the short term, we are eagerly looking forward to the [reconstruction of Bow St and Walnut St](#) set to begin later this year which will install a raised crossing and new crosswalk. In the Union Square Plaza and Streetscape vision, we are excited that most of Bow St will be converted into an extension of the main plaza, that utilities are set to go underground to free up sidewalk space, and that public art will be installed. We are unclear on whether the small park on Bow St near Wesley Park will remain usable once the roundabout is installed in that area, and urge the City to ensure sufficient green space is maintained in the area.

Short-Term Recommendations

- Install tactile pads at the crossings where missing.
- Repaint crosswalk markings where faded.

Long-Term Recommendations to Integrate into Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes

- Ensure that if the small park on Bow St near Wesley Park is no longer accessible because of the planned roundabout, it is replaced with another nearby green space of equal or better quality.

Key Area #7: Webster Ave between Prospect St and Washington St

Included Intersection	Standing	Positive Scores	Negative Scores	Overall Score	Score Diff. from Average	Lowest-Rated Qualities
Webster Ave & Prospect St	Lowest Rated	42.05%	59.49%	-17.44	-37.62	1. Sidewalk condition 2. Sidewalk continuity 3. Time given to cross 4. Signal timing 5. General safety 6. Car speeds 7. Driver compliance 8. Green space availability 9. Seating 10. General comfort
Webster Ave & Washington St	Highest Rated	81.50%	20.00%	61.50	41.32	1. Driver compliance 2. Public art availability 3. Audible crossing prompts

Webster Ave is an interesting corridor by the standards of our walk audit because it's home to the lowest and highest rated intersections. While participants expressed general contentment with the intersection of Webster Ave and Washington Street, its nearby counterpart was the only intersection of the walk audit to receive more negative scores than positive.

Key comments on Webster Ave and Washington St concerned Prospect Hill Academy's pickup/drop-off times, during which cars often block the bike lane. Participants also noticed that at the crossing from Gracie's to St. Joseph's Church, there is no audible prompt upon pressing the button and the tactile pad is not well-aligned with the rest of the crossing. In the other direction, across Somerville Ave and Bow St, the pedestrian signal creates confusion because it counts down to zero then displays a walk sign and restarts the count. All that said, participants expressed a resounding appreciation for the wide, amenity-rich sidewalk area in front of Gracie's, with one participant describing it as "AWESOME" on their checklist.

Regarding the intersection of Webster Ave and Prospect St, participants summarized their discontent in the comment that the area feels like a highway with pedestrians as an afterthought. Here, pedestrians have to endure long wait times only to rush across during a relatively short pedestrian phase, high levels of driver noncompliance (especially with those taking right turns on red), sidewalk obstacles including utilities, an unwelcoming metal guardrail, and narrow sidewalks on Webster Ave. During the walk audit, the narrow, crowded sidewalks and short pedestrian cycle teams meant that it took three light cycles for a group of 18 participants to successfully traverse the intersection from the east side of Prospect Street to the west side of Webster Ave.

We are looking forward to the conversion of the skewed Newton St intersection into two T-shaped intersections as part of [MassDOT's Webster Ave bridge replacement project](#). We are also thrilled that the Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes project envisions a T-shaped intersection at Prospect St and raised crosswalks on all other streets crossing Webster Ave.

Finally, while beyond the scope of our walk audit, participants noted that Newton St and Clark St are heavily used as pedestrian routes between Union Square and the Argenziano School/Lincoln Park. They shared stories of sidewalks on these streets being too narrow and obstructed for the number of people who use the street, many of whom are pushing strollers or walking with small children.

Short-Term Recommendations

- **Priority Recommendation:** Increase the length of the pedestrian phase at Webster Ave and Prospect St to allow pedestrians to comfortably cross, including diagonally.
- **Priority Recommendation:** Increase the frequency of the pedestrian phase at Webster Ave and Prospect St.
- **Priority Recommendation:** Install "No Turn on Red" signs at Webster Ave and Prospect St.
- Replace the soft plastic tactile pads at Webster Ave and Prospect St with metal ones to increase durability.
- Combine the two light cycles across Somerville Ave and Bow St into a single cycle of the same length.
- Add an audible prompt to the southbound crossing at Webster Ave and Washington St, from Gracie's to St. Joseph's Church.

Long-Term Recommendations to Integrate into Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes

- Install a designated pickup/drop-off area in front of Prospect Hill Academy to reserve parking spaces in the morning and afternoon so cars don't block the bike lanes.
- Widen and reconstruct all sidewalks on Webster Ave, including at the Prospect St intersection.
- Put utilities underground.
- Replace the metal guardrail with a green buffer or another pedestrian-centric separator.

Thank you again for attending our walk audit, and for your continued consideration of this beloved square. We look forward to engaging further on the short-term recommendations we've offered, on the Union Square Plaza and Streetscapes project, and on the other exciting projects noted throughout this letter.

Sincerely,

Somerville Pedestrian & Transit Advisory Committee (PTAC)
Somerville Alliance for Safe Streets (SASS)
Somerville Commission for Persons with Disabilities (SCPD)
Groundwork Somerville Green Team
Luis Catan, Somerville resident
Andre Comella, Ward 2, Union Square Neighborhood Council (USNC) Board Member
Michael Katz, Somerville resident
Cortney Kirk, Somerville resident
Jon Link, Ward 3, Candidate for City Council
Joshua Michel, Ward 2

CC: OSPCD Mobility, City of Somerville
Jefferson Thomas (J.T.) Scott, Ward Two City Councilor, City of Somerville
Ben Ewen-Campen, Ward Three City Councilor, City of Somerville
Willie Burnley Jr., City Councilor At Large, City of Somerville
Wilfred N. Mbah, City Councilor At Large, City of Somerville
Kristen Strezo, City Councilor At Large, City of Somerville
Jake Wilson, City Councilor At Large, City of Somerville