



CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS CITY COUNCIL

JUDY PINEDA NEUFELD
WARD SEVEN CITY COUNCILOR

To: Honorable Members of the City Council
From: Judy Pineda Neufeld, Ward 7 City Councilor
RE: An Update from the Parking and Curb Study Task Force
Date: December 5, 2022

Honorable Members of the City Council:

As the City Council representative on the Parking Study Task Force, I'd like to submit an update on the work of the Task Force since my last update in April, 2022.

Background:

The Citywide Parking & Curb Use Study seeks to produce a comprehensive set of recommendations that will guide the City in bringing our parking policies and regulations in alignment with our goals, community values, and future needs. The Parking and Mobility Departments are working closely together to manage this study. In the fall of 2019, the Parking Study Task Force was created to serve as an advisory group for the study. It is made up of approximately 20 members, including representatives from the Parking Department, Mobility, Engineering, Economic Development, ADA Coordinator, SomerStat, Office of Sustainability and Environment, Police and Fire, Council on Aging, Commission for Persons with Disabilities, business owner, Bicycle Advisory Committee, Pedestrian and Transit Advisory Committee, Neighborways community representative, inclusionary housing representative, and the City Council. The city selected consultant Nelson\Nygaard in July 2021 for this one-year study.

Final Report

The City-Wide Parking and Curb Study was completed this Fall and a 102-page Final Report was presented on October 19th. You can view the video of this meeting and read through the Parking Study Final Report here: <https://voice.somervillema.gov/parking-study>. The report recommends a five-year implementation that prioritizes the following strategy recommendations.

Strategy Recommendations:

Maximize Curb Effectiveness

Maximizing curb effectiveness means taking full advantage of Somerville's limited curb resources by putting the right curb regulations in the right places at the right times across the city. Policy, regulation, and pricing must intuitively match people with curb functions that meet the needs of their activity type. Flexibility to adapt to changing demands throughout the day, season, and year is woven into this study's recommended strategies.

Improve Pickup / Drop-Off

Passenger pickup and drop-off activities increasingly contribute to growing incidences of double parking, blocked crosswalks, and obstructed bike lanes in Somerville's busy squares and main streets. Ride-hailing activities will become more challenging as deliveries and street dining compete for the limited available passenger loading space. Enhancing the experience and coordination of pickup and dropoff activities will reduce conflicts and improve safety for Somerville's residents and visitors.

Improve Commercial Loading Availability

Loading activities increasingly contribute to worsening street operations. As demand for loading and takeout activities continues to grow, incidences of double parking, improper loading, and unsafe loading in pedestrian or bicycle infrastructure will also grow. Improving commercial loading with curb management must remain front and center in Somerville's curb strategy to mitigate disheartening safety and emissions trends.

Support Local Businesses

Somerville's local businesses rely on curb space to receive critical goods and support customer and employee access. As available curb space becomes more scarce, Somerville's local businesses must be supported with regulations and processes which allow them to thrive. Small businesses, employees, and their customers should be considered priority users of curb spaces in commercial areas of the city.

Give People More Space

Providing outdoor space for dining, recreation, artistic expression, and active street installations supports Somerville's goals for vibrancy, economic growth, and public health. Outside of public parks, the curb space is the most likely portion of public space that can provide additional people space; smart curb management means providing this space strategically and in a manner which avoids conflicts with other modes.

Decrease Drive Alone Mode Share and Vehicle Miles Travelled

Carbon emissions from gas-powered vehicle on Somerville's streets comprise a large portion of total emissions. Decreasing the percentage of people who drive alone to their destinations and decreasing the total number of miles travelled by vehicles in Somerville will reduce emissions and support a healthier climate future. Somerville's curb spaces should be regulated in a way which does not incentivize excess automobile travel when other transportation modes can function more sustainably.

Expand the Bike Network, Safety and Access

Bicycles continue to grow in popularity across Somerville, with 7% of commuting residents riding to work. Protecting and supporting safe riding will ensure that users of all ages and abilities can ride without harm to work, shopping, appointments, and recreational activities across the city and beyond. Somerville's curb space should be managed in a way that provides adequate space for critical bicycle infrastructure and minimizes dangerous conflicts between bicyclists and other modes, including goods delivery and ride-hails. This will further support Somerville's Bicycle Network Plan.

Improve Transit Performance and Access

The MBTA and other transit operations can increase reliability and ridership by providing more efficient services that take advantage of priority infrastructure. Effective curb management should provide transit priority on the most valuable routes and ensure that all passengers can easily access and ride buses and other transit vehicles. Addressing curb management to improve transit service will be key to enabling Somerville's Transit Network Plan

Ensure Accessibility for All

Somerville's curbside must serve all Somerville residents and visitors, regardless of how they choose to or need to travel. Limited curb spaces must be prioritized for those who need them the most, and curb and parking policies must consider the needs of residents with mobility limitations.

Promote Equity and Inclusion

Somerville's curb policies must consider the needs of residents and visitors with specific mobility needs, lower incomes, unique living arrangements, work requirements, and other special needs and statuses. Curb policies should be nuanced enough to ensure that these groups are not faced with inequitable mobility challenges while remaining simple enough to implement and explain to a diverse community.

Improve Transparency in Decision-Making

Effective curb management relies on investment from the community. Somerville's curb management regulations, administration, and enforcement should be developed transparently and with sufficient input from diverse members of the public.

Community Outreach:

Public outreach was the critical and continuous element of the study process. Members of the public and key stakeholders were engaged through a variety of means throughout the study to set the vision and goals for the future, gather feedback on existing conditions, identify key issues and opportunities, and vet recommendations.

The public was primarily engaged through the following means:

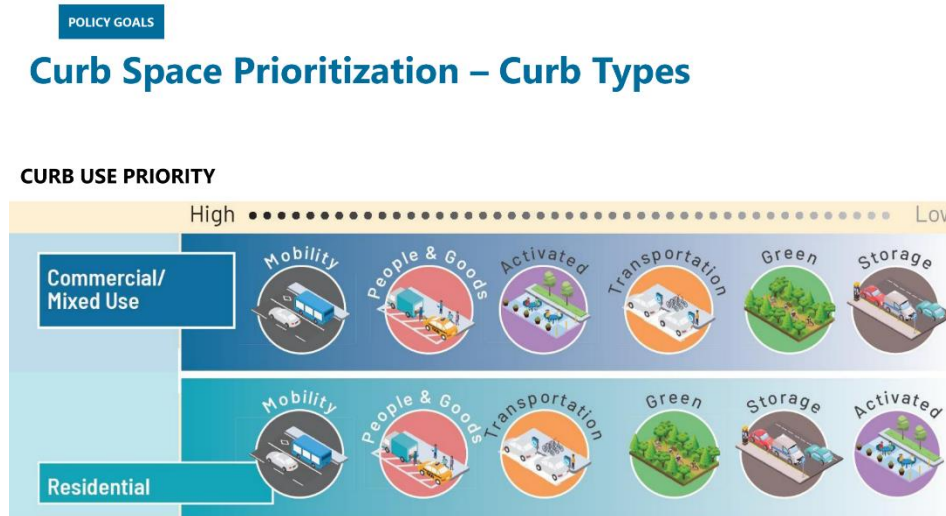
1. Parking and Curb Use Survey made available to the public between November 2021 and January 2022. The survey asked respondents a range of questions to understand how they currently interact with the curb system, what their priorities are for future regulation of the curb, and their tolerance for some high-level policies proposals that would be considered later in the planning process.
2. Existing Conditions and Goals Public Meeting held in two sessions on November 9th and 10th, 2021 and attended by 147 people across both sessions.
3. Draft Recommendations Public Meeting held in two sessions on June 27th and 29th, 2022 to present key findings from the curb inventory and utilization analyses, develop consensus around key objectives and the curb prioritization framework, present draft recommendations, and gather feedback on key strategies to solve issues identified

throughout the process.

4. Policy Recommendations Survey to gather feedback on draft recommendations. 2,170 responses were gathered through this survey.
5. Final Report shared at virtual community meeting on October 19, 2022 that covered: overview of the final report, parking and curb policy key issues and opportunities, curb management strategies, public input on draft study recommendations, and next steps for the City of Somerville.
6. Business Town Hall meeting to share details about the Curb Profile and discuss business-specific draft recommendations with local business owners and workers.
7. Tabling conducted at the Union Square Farmers' Market and Holland Street Mobile Market to share draft recommendations and promote the feedback survey.
8. Promoted survey opportunities through City digital communications channels such as the City newsletter, Mobility Division newsletter, and social media.

What's Next

It's important to note that this important report provided a set of strategy recommendations and implementation priorities, but it is now up to the City to make some decisions on how to prioritize this set of recommendations and priorities. The City Council will be receiving a more focused briefing from the Parking team early in 2023, including presenting the Curb Prioritization framework (below) for us to discuss and endorse as an approach.



Sincerely,

Judy Pineda Neufeld
Ward 7 City Councilor