



## **Union Square Utility and Streetscape Improvements Study and Design**

### **Public Meeting #2**

### **SUMMARY MINUTES**

**LOCATION OF MEETING:** Argenziano School, 290 Washington Street Somerville, MA

**DATE/TIME OF MEETING:** Wednesday January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2014 from 6:30pm- 8:30pm

**ATTENDANCE:** Sign in sheets (Attachment A)

---

**PROJECT TEAM:**

Hayes Morrison- City of Somerville  
Melissa Miguel- City of Somerville  
Sara Spicer- City of Somerville  
Rachel Burckardt- Parsons Brinckerhoff  
Joanne Frascella- Parsons Brinckerhoff  
Kristen Torrance- Parsons Brinckerhoff  
Nick Schmidt- Parsons Brinckerhoff  
Lisa Chandler- Parsons Brinckerhoff  
Rebecca Hanson- Parsons Brinckerhoff  
Deneen Crosby- CSS  
Patrick Baxter- Toole Design Group

---

**PURPOSE/SUBJECT:** To provide an overview of the project, recap of the first public meeting, and get feedback and brainstorm ideas for specific improvements related to pedestrians, bicyclists, , transit connections, auto traffic and streetscape.

#### **WELCOME**

Hayes Morrison, City of Somerville, started the meeting and welcomed attendees. She provided an overview of the meeting and the agenda, which included a project overview, project update, recap of the previous meeting, major alternatives and recommendations from past studies, and a break out session to focus on improved pedestrian, bicycle, transit, roadway connections and improvements to the plaza. Ms. Morrison then introduced the City of Somerville's team and project team and described the roles of each firm. She also introduced the recently announced Citizens Advisory Committee and each of the members in attendance introduced themselves. She then introduced Rachel Burckardt to provide an overview of the project and an update since the first public meeting.



## **PRESENTATION**

### **Project Overview and Project Update**

Rachel Burckardt began by introducing the PB Team and subconsultants. She then described the scope and process for the study. She presented maps of the study area and regional connectivity beyond Union Square and explained that the project would include utilities, transportation, public space, and would consider the impacts of development.

Ms. Burckardt explained that the utilities portion of the study would identify existing deficiencies, develop and evaluate alternatives, develop recommendations, and ultimately prepare preliminary design drawings. She explained that there would be separate public meetings for the utility design process.

She then described the public outreach process that began in November 2013 with the first public meeting and will continue through Winter 2014. She explained that for the next series of public meetings would involve Team Better Block to work with the community to create live demonstrations of some of the alternatives. Actual design of the Study Area will then begin in late Summer or early Fall of 2014.

Ms. Burckardt then provided an update of team activities since the first public meeting. Aerial survey is now complete, the ground survey is underway, and soil borings will start in February. The review of existing utility data is ongoing. Ms. Burckardt introduced Joanne Frascella, to present a recap of the first public meeting.

### **Recap of First Meeting**

Joanne Frascella described the focus of the first public meeting on identifying issues and opportunities. Community participants were asked to identify what they wanted to see in Union Square. The following common themes were identified:

- Improve connections and safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, bus connections, and traffic
- Improve community building including public space, neighborhood activity, business, and future development
- Integrate the new Union Square Station into the square and improve access
- Improve infrastructure including stormwater, sewer system, and water supply
- Encourage sustainability by promoting alternative modes of travel and reducing reliance on automobiles



She explained that the handout was a complete list of comments received at the previous meeting. She noted that the handout also included recommendations from previous studies. The handout was color coded to represent the team's preliminary assessment of ideas that have consensus, ideas that need to be studied further, and ideas that are outside the scope of this specific project. She asked community members to comment to confirm or disagree with this preliminary assessment.

Ms. Frascella then turned the presentation back to Rachel Burckardt and Kristen Torrance to introduce the major alternatives from past studies for roadways and plaza improvements and opportunities to improve pedestrians, bicycle, and transit access. Rachel explained that the break out session would focus on these five topics..

### **Topic 1- Prospect and Webster Alternatives**

Ms. Torrance introduced the concept of one-way versus two-way traffic on Webster Avenue and Prospect Street. She explained that currently the two streets are one-way which result in considerable indirect routing of traffic thru Union Square. She explained that approximately 50% of traffic coming south on Washington Street in the morning is traveling south of Somerville Avenue, which requires making a right turn onto Somerville Avenue and then a left turn onto Webster Avenue since Prospect is one-way northbound approaching Somerville Avenue.

She explained that one of the major criteria used to measure traffic flow is level of service (LOS) which is a measure of delay that a driver experiences going through the intersection. LOS is based on a scale of A-F where A is free flow traffic and F is over capacity and drivers experience considerable delay. Typically, the goal LOS for an urban area is LOS D which represents stable flow. She explained how Webster Avenue and Somerville Avenue is currently a LOS E in the AM and PM peak and Prospect Avenue and Somerville Avenue is currently a LOS F in the AM and PM peak. In addition to existing operational deficiencies, she explained that crash rates at both intersections are above the state average which results in safety concerns.

Ms. Torrance then described how the previous study was able to improve the LOS to C or D at the intersection with the conversion to two-way street. Prospect Street and Webster Avenue would both have one lane in each direction with turn lanes at the intersections where necessary. There's also potential for wider sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and/or parking. She explained that traffic counts would be taken in the spring to update the analysis from the previous report.

### **Topic 2- Plaza Expansion Alternatives**

Ms. Burckardt then introduced the plaza expansion alternatives. She explained that currently there is 7,200 square feet of open space between the existing parking lot and Somerville Avenue which is used for Farmers Markets.



One alternative would be to return Washington Street to two way traffic connecting through the existing parking lot to the Webster Avenue intersection. The remaining portion of Somerville Avenue between Webster Avenue and Prospect Street could be converted into a Woonerf with an emphasis on bicycle and pedestrian space.

A second alternative would be to expand the existing plaza by eliminating some of the parking to create more opportunities for improved public space. It would also modify the intersection of Somerville Avenue/Washington Street/Webster Avenue to eliminate the channelized right turn and create wider sidewalks and more open space of the east side of Somerville Avenue.

The third alternative would be a further expansion of the plaza area by eliminating the parking in the existing plaza and widening the sidewalks for more open space.

She introduced Deneen Crosby who would the break out group on the plaza.

### **Topic 3- Pedestrians**

Ms. Torrance then explained issues related to improving pedestrian connections in the Study Area. Comments from the previous meeting concerned the difficulty of crossing at existing crosswalks. These comments noted that although there were plenty of crosswalks, the distances were long and the lights were too short. In order to improve crossings, she explained that there are three primary approaches:

- Improve signals (Better signal timing for pedestrian, evaluate exclusive vs. concurrent timings, and upgrade all the equipment so it functions properly)
- Improve safety/visibility with raised crosswalks
- Reduce crossing distance curb extensions

She introduced Lisa Chandler and Nick Schmidt who would lead the discussion on pedestrians during the breakout session.

### **Topic 4- Bicyclists**

Ms. Torrance then introduced the fourth topic which was bicycle improvements . She explained that there are two primary concerns expressed in comments. The first concern was overall connectivity in the Square. Washington Street and Somerville Avenue both have sections with bicycle lanes that transition to shared lane markings and back to bicycle lanes, while areas such as Webster Avenue and Prospect Street currently have no bicycle facilities. The second concern is the difficulty with many of the left and right turns at the intersections. Prospect Street to Somerville Avenue and Somerville Avenue to Webster Avenue, are two of the intersections that were noted in these comments.



She explained that there are several ways to improve bicycle facilities, but we will need to look at the cross-section and determine the best way to accommodate bicyclists. Some of the options are:

- Cycle Track- Dedicated bicycle facility that is separate from vehicles, pedestrians, and parked cars
- Bicycle Lane with Buffer- Can help create more dedicated space without physical barrier from traffic. The buffer can be between the bike lane and travel lane or between bike lane and parked cars to keep cyclists out of door zone.
- Bike boxes at intersections to improve bicycle turning movement by allowing them to get in front of vehicles.

In addition to bike facilities she explained how we also have the opportunity to look at ways to incorporate bicycle parking. For example bicycle corrals can accommodate 10-20 bicycles in the space that was previously occupied by one car.

She introduced Patrick Baxter who would lead the discussion on bicycle facilities during the breakout groups.

#### **Topic 5- Transit Connections**

Ms. Burckardt then introduced the final topic area on transit connections. She explained how one of the major challenges of the location of the new Union Square Station is that although it is only two blocks from the Square there is a lack of visual orientation. While Prospect Street is a more direct route into the Square more identity can be seen from Webster Avenue.

She also discussed that there is an opportunity to improve bus connections to the new station. The conversion of Webster Avenue and Prospect Street to two-way would provide an opportunity to allow all buses to stop on Prospect Street and provide a direct connection to the Station.

Ms. Burckardt would lead the discussion on transit connections during the breakout groups.

#### **Breakout Groups**

Ms. Frascella then explained how the breakout groups would work. There were five groups to discuss the topic areas introduced in the presentations. After five minutes the leaders would rotate to a new group so that everyone would participate in the discussion of each topic. Attendees were provided handouts for each topic area and asked to make comments and return them to the team.

#### **Q & A**

An attendee asked if the presentation and handouts would be online for further review. Ms. Morrison responded that an email with a link to the materials would be sent out to all attendees on the sign-in



sheet next week. She noted that it will be online on the City of Somerville or Somerville by Design website.

**Attachments:**

**Attachment A - Sign in sheets**

**Attachment B - Break Out Session Comments**

**Attachment C - Handout**



Public Meeting January 29, 2014

Name	Street Address	City	State	Email
Jane Betarke		Chelsea	MA	jtatarke@deweysquare.com
Jean McConnis	26 Bow St.	Som	MA	514 02143@gmail.com
Kristin Chase	"	"	"	KRISTINCHASE@POST.HARTFORD.EDU
Mark Niedergang	29 Cornell St	Som	MA 02143	m.niedergang@concord.net
Steve Mulder	42 Stone Ave	"	"	smulder@ren.com
Philp Parsons	20 Bow Ave	Somerville	MA	PHILIPPARSONS@GMAIL.COM
Anake Child	42 Harding St	Cambridge	MA	anake.a.m.child@gmail.com
Daniel Loss	64 Putnam St #2	Somerville	MA	danny.loss@gmail.com
MARK HOWLAND	15 PLEASANT AVE	SOMERVILLE	MA	markhowlandarchitecture.com
SHAWN HOCKERT	31 LAKE ST	SOMERVILLE	MA	shockert@seacrestfoods.com
Miranda Elmors	31 Lake St.	Somerville	MA	miranda.elmorsi@gmail.com
Gregory Jenkins	16 Pleasant St	Somerville		
DIMITRI KOUNTOUROGIAN	28 DICKINSON ST A	Somerville MA		dimitri@gmail.com
Bonnie Tommaso	41 Greenville	Somerville	MA	bonnie.jane@gmail.com
Alan Moore	23 Cherry St.	"	02144	alan@porthfriends.org



Public Meeting January 29, 2014

Name	Street Address	City	State	Email
Cherilyn Mancini	11 Vinal Ave	Somerville		Kimancini@Comcast.net
Sam Engelstad	34 Columbus Ave	Somerville		sengelstad@mac.com
Susan Callahan	13 Hammond St	Somerville 02143		SusanCallahan@Comcast.net
Bob McWaters	218A Summer St	Somerville		BMcWaters17@gmail.com
<del>MARK SARDINA</del>	<del>86 WALNUT STREET</del>	<del>NATICK</del>		<del>MSARDINA@ELKUSMANPEPI.COM</del>
Lucas Rogers	11 Westwood Rd	Somerville		beaconluc@gmail.com
Aja Bresler	149 Gull St	"		abresler@prospecthillacademy.org
IGNACE TURIN	123 Lincoln Pkwy	"		dbturin@gmail.com
Jocelyn Siegel	56 Vinal Ave	Somerville		jsiegel50@gmail.com
BRAD SHALOM	2 WESTWOOD Rd	"		bradley.swallow@gmail.com
Rebecca Rogers	64 Putnam St	Somerville		rebecca.e.rogers@gmail
TIM TALVIN	30 BOSTON ST	Somerville		ttalvine@gmail.com
SITU TALVIN	"	"		shubear "
Matthew Forsythe	37 Stone	"		matth@ross.wisc.edu
Heather Van Aarts	1 Fitzburg	"		hvanar@comcast.com



**Attachment B- Breakout Group Comments**

**Topic 1- Prospect and Webster Alternatives**

- Make Prospect and Webster two-way
- Slow down traffic
- Think of creative ways to reduce and/or eliminate truck traffic
- This seems like an obvious decision, can it be done sooner rather than waiting for all pieces of the project at once
- The Charter School on Webster Avenue is a big concern because parents dropping off/picking up children can block the road if there is only one lane of traffic in each direction
- Conduct observations of school traffic and incorporate into design
- Accommodate bicyclists
- Turn radius from Prospect Street to Webster Street may be difficult to make turn (especially for truck or bus)
- Evaluate how to accommodate Newton Street (currently a lot of left turns from Newton to Prospect that will be difficult to make it crossing a lane of southbound traffic)

**Topic 2- Plaza Expansion Alternatives**

- Rotary?
- Level of service is not the issue – quality of urban experience is
- Plan for good urban design
- Where will traffic flow – Cambridge Street backs up
- Keep sight of McGrath changes
- Don't plan anything that McGrath can't handle
- Existing
  - This is a mess. In favor of getting rid of slip lane – would be more ordered (Intersection of Somerville Ave and Washington St)
  - We're building garages – get rid of parking
  - Flexible area is good (Parking Area)
  - It's not broke. I like the way it is
  - Big events, we close it all off
- (2-Way Washington + Woonerf)
  - Good that you can get through if Woonerf is closed (Washington St. and Somerville Ave.)
  - Stop here good (Intersection of Washington St. and Prospect St.)



- This connection works better if Washington connects through (Between SCAT and Ricky's Flowers)
- Very little (none) support for this scheme
- This will spread traffic
- This street would never be closed – too many businesses (Somerville Ave between Washington and Prospect)
- Encourages speed
- Default is vehicle, this would create an island – not a plaza
- 95% just a ride – no intention to slow traffic
- Plaza South – not good orientation
- Like something flexible
- With 2 way can you close the whole piece or make roads smaller
- Why do you need this? (Somerville Ave between Washington and Prospect)
- This assumes 1 way Webster and Prospect not needed
- Sporadically cut off, less safe
- People come from north cross Wash., not safe
- This benefits traffic at cost of plaza
- This is loss of plaza space – against this
- Expand Existing 1
  - Mini student study on pavements
- Expand Existing 2
  - Where is parking garage?
  - Usual link for plazas
  - Maybe library here (Ricky's Flowers)
  - Post office to become performing arts?
  - This one almost gets it
  - Why not connect and no road
  - Early deliveries here (The Independent)
  - Too much traffic
  - Don't make friendly to through traffic
  - The more pedestrian use the better

### **Topic 3- Pedestrians**

- There is no Bow Street crosswalk at Walnut Street.
- Hard to see pedestrians crossing at Webster Avenue and Newton Street because the sidewalk guard rail blocks drivers' vision at this high speed turn.
- Difficult crossing Prospect Street at intersection with Webster Avenue.



- While curb bulb outs were installed at the Bow Street and Walnut Street intersection, they were originally to be larger. However, before installation the Fire Department insisted they be trimmed back from their original design to allow for better access.
- Somerville Avenue crosswalks at the Prospect Street intersection are difficult for pedestrians because of inadequate timing. Leading pedestrian interval would help at these crosswalks.
- Pedestrian desire line mid-block on Somerville Avenue to and from the plaza near the west end of the parking lot. The parking lot makes it feel like the plaza is ending, so for pedestrians it is a natural place to cross the street.
- It takes too long to cross the east-side crosswalk on Somerville Avenue/Washington Street at the Webster Avenue intersection. The timing of the intersection walk signals encourage pedestrians to instead cross around the intersection in a counter-clockwise route instead of the direct route that they prefer to walk.
- If the Woonerf design is chosen, vehicle signage will be very important to alert drivers how to travel in Union Square, which is a regional destination for restaurants and attracts drivers who are not familiar with the area.
- Crossing Webster Avenue along Newton Street is a visibility issue.
- Will walk signals be push-button activated or automatic with concurrent vehicle green time? Prefer automatic concurrent walk signals.
- Observe pedestrians at the Washington Street/Somerville Avenue/Webster Avenue intersection to see desire lines, and design pedestrian signals to accommodate these desire lines.
- There will be a pedestrian desire line to cross Prospect Street directly in front of the T station entrance once it is opened.
- Will crosswalk locations identified in this study be sufficient for future buildout of the Union Square area? Union Square will change, and crossings should be able to accommodate this change. Should crosswalks be finalized before development occurs?
- There is a pedestrian desire line over Bow Street at the Walnut Street intersection.
- Drivers are making left turns from Somerville Avenue to cut through alleys to reach Walnut Avenue.
- There is a pedestrian desire line to cross Washington Street at the kink at the Bonner Avenue/plaza parking intersection. There are no crosswalks here.
- The fact that pedestrian crossings are unfriendly reflects that the entire Union Square area is pedestrian unfriendly.
- Trucks may prohibit an intersection table at the Washington Street/plaza parking entrance/Bonner Avenue intersection.
- Pedestrian and bike safety should be the number one priority for this project. LOS values should be at the bottom of the list.
- Provide ground-level access to the T station by construction a walkway between the substation and Prospect Street bridge, and then connect to the T station under Prospect Street.
- Is Prospect Street sidewalk widening being studied as part of this project?



- Webster Avenue is an important pick-up and drop-off point for Prospect Hill Academy Charter School. Sidewalks should be widened to accommodate pedestrian traffic and student pick-up/drop-off
- Prospect Street and Washington Street intersection problematic for pedestrians.
- Pedestrian desire line midblock on Bow Street just west of Bow Street/Somerville Avenue intersection.
- Poorly coordinated pedestrian signals at Bow Street crosswalk by bank. There are natural breaks in traffic to easily cross before the walk signal is activated. But because pedestrians have pressed the button to activate the walk signal and they have already crossed before the signal is activated, drivers are stopped for no one in the crosswalk. There are no breaks in this signal and pedestrians have to cross the long distance at one time.
- Curb bulb outs are needed on the west-side Newton Street crosswalk at the Webster Avenue intersection. Drivers' view of pedestrians is obscured by guard rail.
- Deck over the tracks between Prospect Street and Webster Avenue for better pedestrian connection.
- Many fast and scary right-turns onto Walnut Street that are dangerous for pedestrians. Slow down these turning drivers with flashing beacons.
- Walnut Street is one way, but bicyclists quickly ride down the hill in the wrong direction, which is dangerous for pedestrians.
- The east-side crosswalk at the Washington Street/Webster Avenue/Somerville Avenue intersection takes a long time to cross because of poor walk signal timing.
- Crosswalk signal timing should take into account different traffic patterns that vary considerably between weekdays vs. weekends, and school vs. no school.
- Market Basket crosswalks always bad and busy with traffic. Too many cars in the parking lot at all times. Create back access to parking lot?
- Drivers do not pay attention to pedestrians on Washington Street between the police station and McGrath Highway.
- Need pedestrian crossings on Somerville Avenue in the vicinity of Target.
- Difficult to cross Washington Street and Somerville Avenue in the eastern end of the study area.
- Think about how to connect Union Square to the upcoming community path for pedestrians.
- Not many safe pedestrian paths from Prospect Hill to east side of study area (near Target/McGrath)

#### **Topic 4- Bicyclists**

- Connections to schools.
- CT on Washington
- Buffer cars or CT (Prospect Street)
- Community Path Connect



- Issues by Market Basket.
- Wrong way cyclist on Bow.
- Turn box on Prospect
- Parking protected cycle track.
- Bike Connection to Washington St. Station.
- Tough (Warren Ave at Bow St and Somerville Ave)
- Widen Prospect Bridge??
- Important to provide some connections to bikes as cars.
- Missing links in past plans. – turns.
- CT from Prospect
- 2-Way Webster – Less room for bikes
- Reconsider parking on Webster.
- Amazing bike facility on Prospect? CT
- Connection to Boynton Yards.
- Plaza Option with Woonerf connection to Prospect.
- 2-Way on Somerville Ave improve intersection operations.
  - Better urban environment
- Buffered Bike Lane on Somerville Ave.
- Connect to Community Path – Washington St.
- Some users cut through lot/plaza
- Cars confused at Bow St. Driving in BL
- Cars backing into angle parking block bike lane.

#### **Topic 5- Transit Connections**

- MBTA Bus Routes in Union Square
  - Stops near businesses.
  - Why 87 diversion-ride to Lechemere
  - Consolidate Stops
  - Multiple opportunities with multiple buses at one stop.
  - Spider diagram with actual walking time – crossing streets
  - Residents want one-way (Line 91)
- Difficult Connections: Transit
  - Central Sq. moves towards the Station? Traditional Ctr. Of Sq. is west.
  - To split or not to split ped. Traffic?
  - Ped. Access (CT between Prospect St. and Somerville Ave.
  - Prospect is more direct.
  - Deck over (Area between Webster and Prospect)
  - Needs vent. element (Station)



- Connection to Inman Sq.
- Monument Signs, Sculpture (NSTAR Substation)
- How to make Webster better
- Is S.S. movable?
- 2<sup>nd</sup> ped. entrance to Preserve
- Lower Level – at grade (Station)
- Ped. Overpass (Between Station and Webster)
- Bus unloading area (Corner of Prospect and Webster)
- Improved Connections: Transit
  - Plaza and Bike Parking (Between Prospect and Webster)
  - No place to drop off people
  - Double width of SW and street trees
  - Future Landmark Building (Prospect and Somerville)
  - PO as landmark (Prospect and Somerville)
  - Add Prominence
  - Ped. Way (Connecting Prospect and Somerville)
  - PO as focal point – enhance
  - Art Competition
  - Bid off Parts
  - Ped Bridge (Between Prospect and Webster)
  - Plaza (Corner of Prospect and Webster)
  - Mural directing flow to Square
  - Directions to Inman
  - History of Union Square
    - Past Moving to Present
  - Lighting is key
  - Higher than cars
  - Brass items to lead you
  - Art in station and transition into Square
  - Something in S.W. to lead you to Square