

A Snapshot of
**Public Space,
Public Life in
Somerville, MA**

Prepared for
City of Somerville

by Gehl Studio
2016

Gehl
Studio New York



Acknowledgments

Prepared by Gehl Studio,
a Gehl Architects company
San Francisco | New York | Copenhagen

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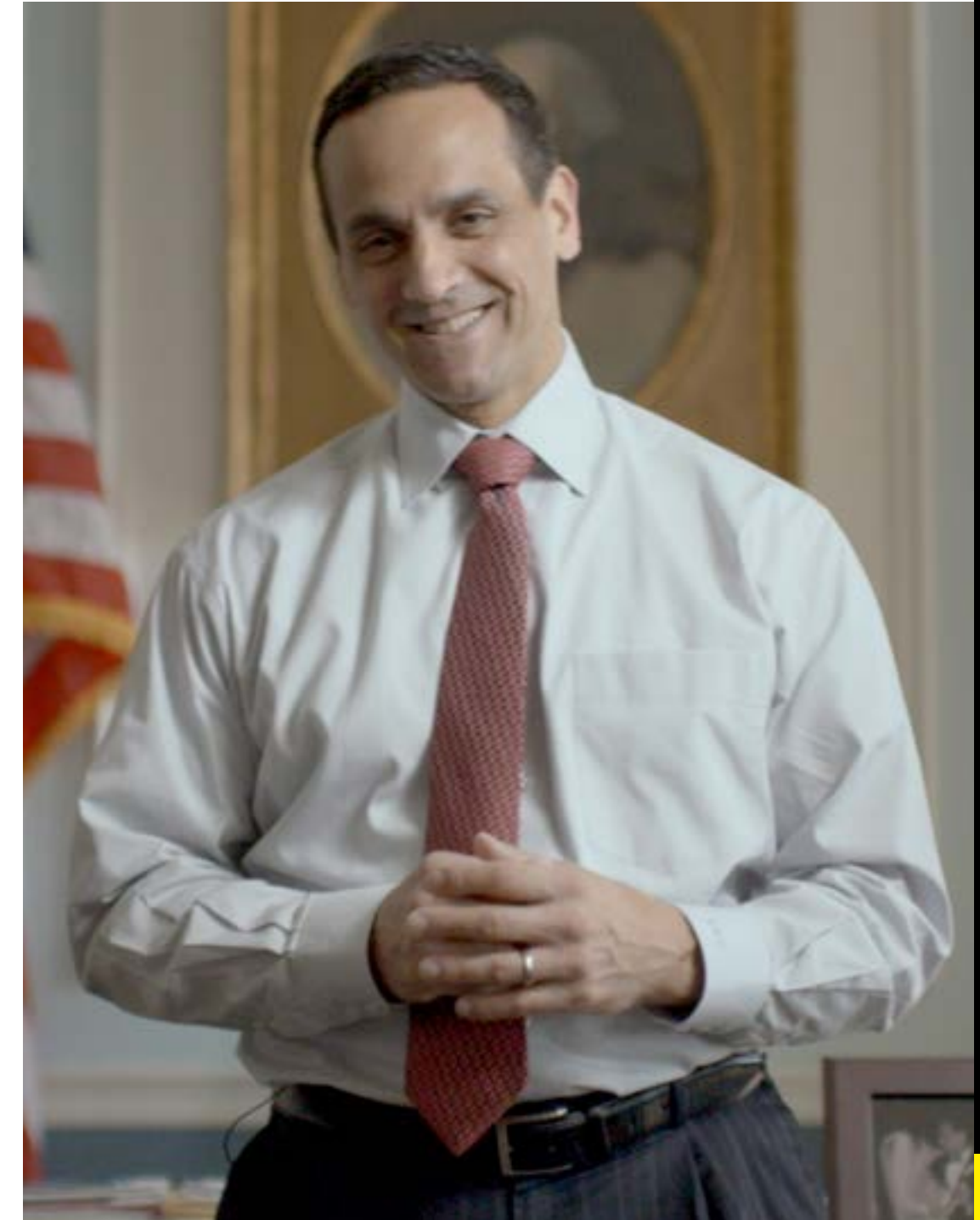
Planning for People

When it comes to planning, we spend a lot of time talking about buildings, infrastructure, and roads. Obviously we have to design carefully to ensure safe, functional designs and reasonable costs. But there is another overarching reason for why we engage in planning. People are our priority. We plan and design to improve our quality of life.

The shape and feel of our city impacts each of us every day. The Somerville community knows what spaces feel good; the sun in their face in Prospect Hill Park, a stroll with their dog along the community path, or shopping in one of our beloved squares. This Public Space Public Life study helps identify the design features that make these places great and will help inform future planning throughout the City.

The methodology used here comes from Jan Gehl. An architect by trade, Gehl was inspired by conversations with his wife, "about why the human side of architecture was not more carefully looked after by the architects, landscape architects, and planners." He has spent his career improving the quality of urban life by re-orienting city design toward the pedestrian and cyclist. I was honored to introduce a screening of his movie, *The Human Scale*, to a packed house at the Somerville Theatre in 2014. I am even more proud to put his ideas into action.

As we seek to bring human-scale thinking to Somerville, this study will help us understand how people live in and enjoy Somerville. It's not enough to just count cars and traffic, we need to quantify what makes our cities great for people. Let's keep working to make Somerville a city built on a human scale.

Part 1

Introduction

Somerville's Public Life and Public Spaces

Somervillians already know what world-class public life looks and feels like

- they lounge in Davis Square with local treats, they enjoy each others company on the banks of the Mystic River, and they stroll along the Community Path. Somerville residents are adept at making their presence known in public spaces - they install local art projects along the Community Path, they share their porches to perform music, not to mention numerous street festivals, parades, and cultural events.

But Somerville's public realm has not kept up with the spirit of its citizens. Large open spaces lie vacant for much of the day. Vibrant urban squares lose their energy in the afternoons. Neighborhoods lack small, well-loved open spaces. Streets discourage walking between squares. Cycling is growing in popularity as a way to travel, but is still male dominated.

The vision for Somerville's public space is for it to meet the demands of its vibrant public life. It's one that envisions Somerville's public spaces hosting a variety of activities that appeal to people of all types and backgrounds; where spaces are evaluated based on their quality and the experience they invite for, not just on their size; and where streets and bike lanes make biking and walking convenient and safe options. It's this public life that will then position the City of Somerville as a leader in people-first design, as well as a destination for people and businesses in the region.



Image: City of Somerville

Background & Context

PSPL will Build on Neighborhood Planning

In 2009 there was a call to residents, help create Somerville's long-range plan. Over four years, the hard work and dedication of a 60 person steering committee and hundreds of participants at public meetings led to SomerVision, the City's first comprehensive plan. The comprehensive plan detailed 39 goals in the following categories: Neighborhoods, Commercial Corridors, Square, and Growth Districts, Resources, Transportation and Infrastructure, and Housing. SomerVision also detailed five metrics known as the SomerVision Numbers: attract 30,000 jobs, create 125 acres of open space, create 6,000 new housing units, ensure that 50% of new trips are by sustainable modes, and that 85% of new development is in transformative areas.

Since the adoption of SomerVision, the creation of Station Area Plans has been a priority for the City. The City has completed plans for Gilman Square, the Lowell Station Area, and Union Square. With each plan, the public realm has been at the forefront of the community's comments and concerns. From wider sidewalks to new parks, the improvements to the public realm have been substantial parts of these plans.

While the City would like to engage each neighborhood with the intention of documenting a neighborhood plan all at once, it simply is not possible. The Citywide Public Space Public Life study surveys areas of the study that we're currently not able to engage and will also help inform any future streetscape and parks project. In addition, City Staff and volunteers have been trained on the Gehl methodology with the intention of continuing to build on the information in this report.

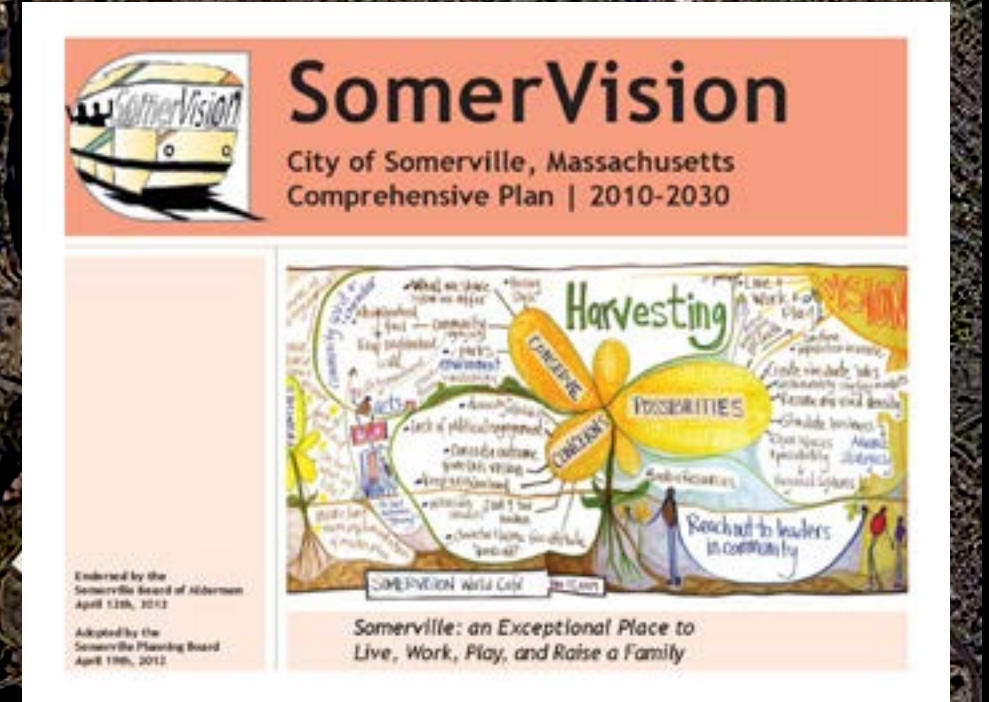
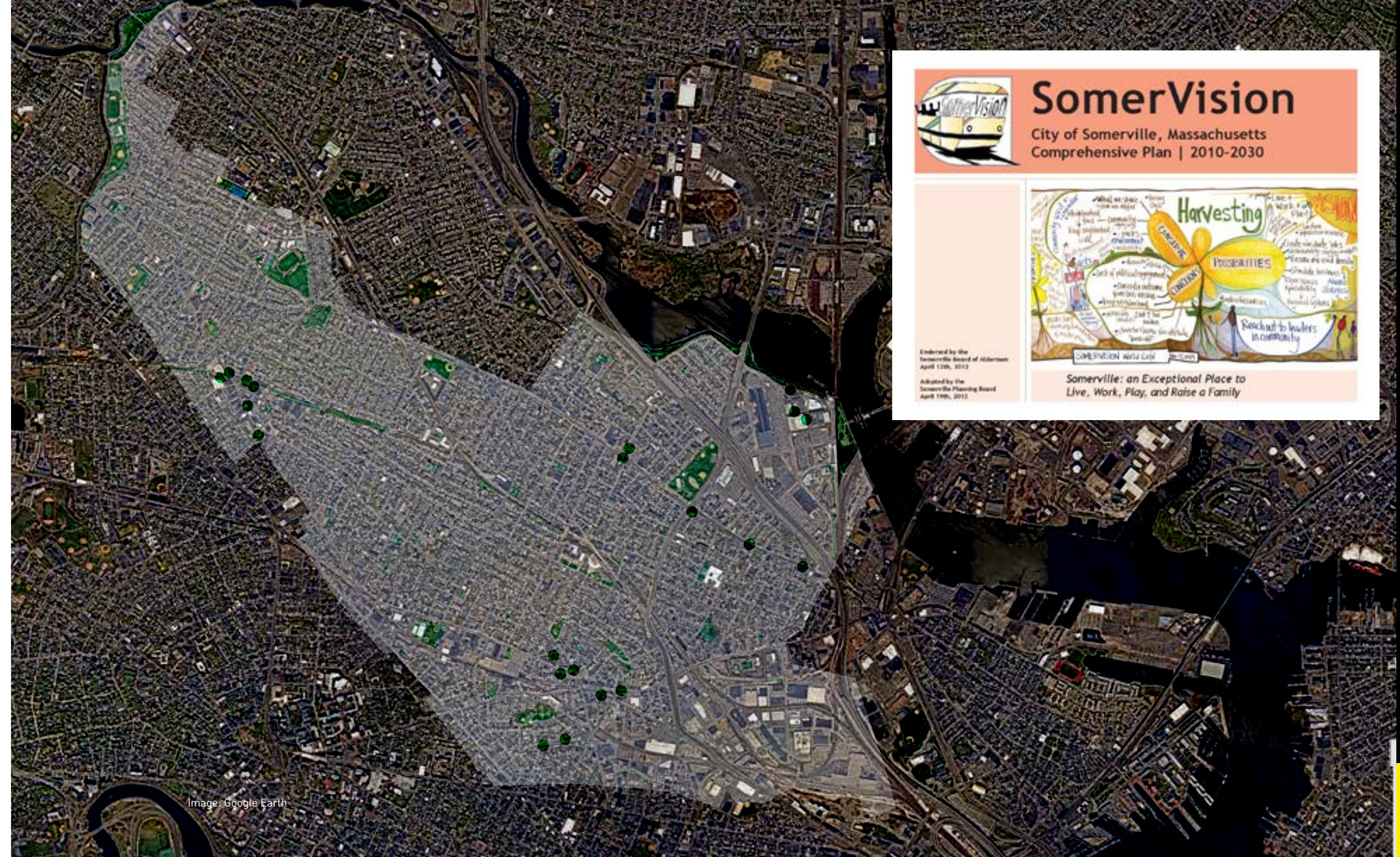


Image: Google Earth

Our Process

Gehl Studio focuses on creating mutually beneficial relationships between people's quality of life and their built environment. Gehl studies how people's senses, movements, interests, and behaviors are influenced by the scale and quality of built form. The Gehl approach starts with this to ensure design is guided by the features of a place that make it welcoming and comfortable from one's first-hand experience.

This work is grounded on **Public Space, Public Life Research**. This initial research was published in Jan Gehl's 1971 book, 'Life Between Buildings', that continues to be a widely used handbook on the relationship between public spaces and social life in cities and has been translated into more than 30 languages. Rooted in enduring methods of measuring the quality of public space and public life, Gehl continues to develop our knowledge regarding how the physical environment influences social interaction by working in cities around the world. We apply this analysis to design places for people and to empower citizens, decision makers, company leaders, and organizations in human-centered design.

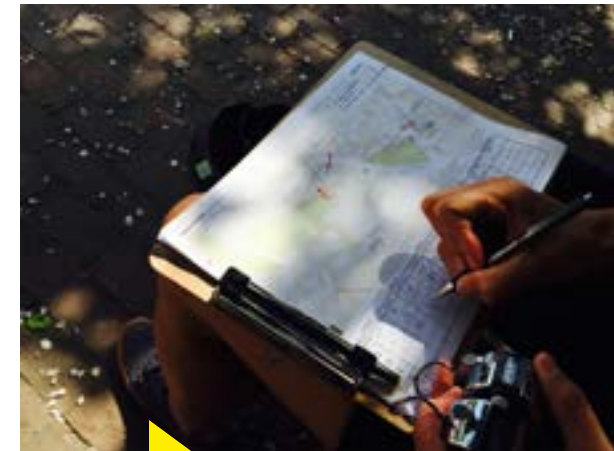


Favorite Place Workshop & Survey

APRIL 2015



Volunteer Training



Public Space, Public Life Survey

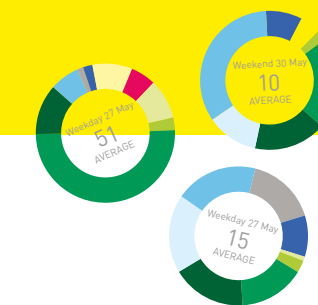
- Training
- Surveying
- Corridor Mapping

MAY 2015

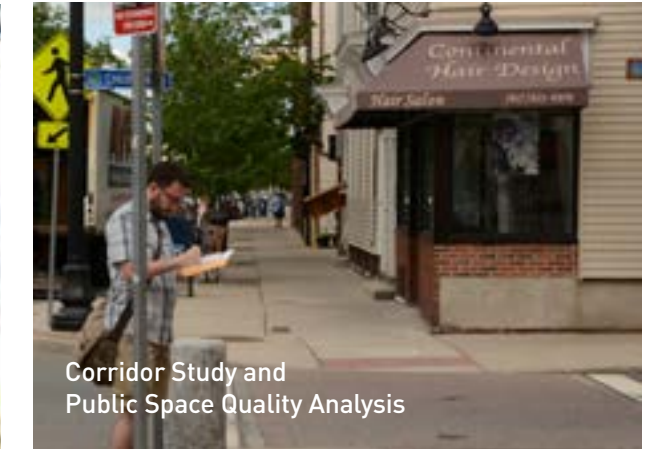


Counting Pedestrians and Cyclists; Observing Public Life

Data Analysis



JUNE 2015



Corridor Study and Public Space Quality Analysis



Report Back & Determine Next Steps

SPRING 2016

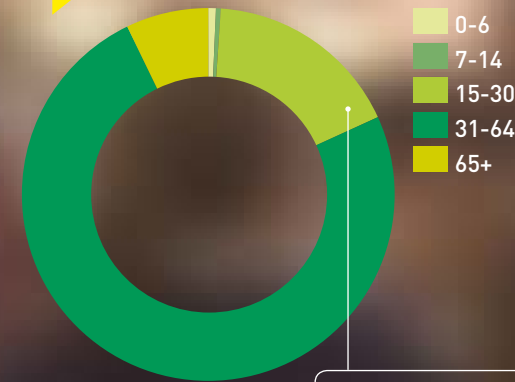
Favorite Places Workshop & Online Survey

When one is asked to think of great public spaces, a few archetypal spaces come to mind: Central Park, Las Ramblas (Barcelona, Spain), Boston Common. These are dramatic, great places, but they are relevant to their contexts: large, old, dense cities. What do these spaces look like in smaller and medium size cities, which cover smaller land area and have street patterns from the 17th through 20th century? Where do people currently feel invited or enjoy spending time? What qualities are missing from these places? From a busy street corner to private courtyards used as public, cities of all sizes have public spaces loved or well-used by residents.

Favorite Place workshops and activities are designed to understand the qualities that make these less-known places thrive and to understand why other public spaces in Somerville might not be performing to their greatest potential. By asking people to share what they love and what leads them to have a great experience in a place we collected feedback that could be applied to developing design principles and guidelines.

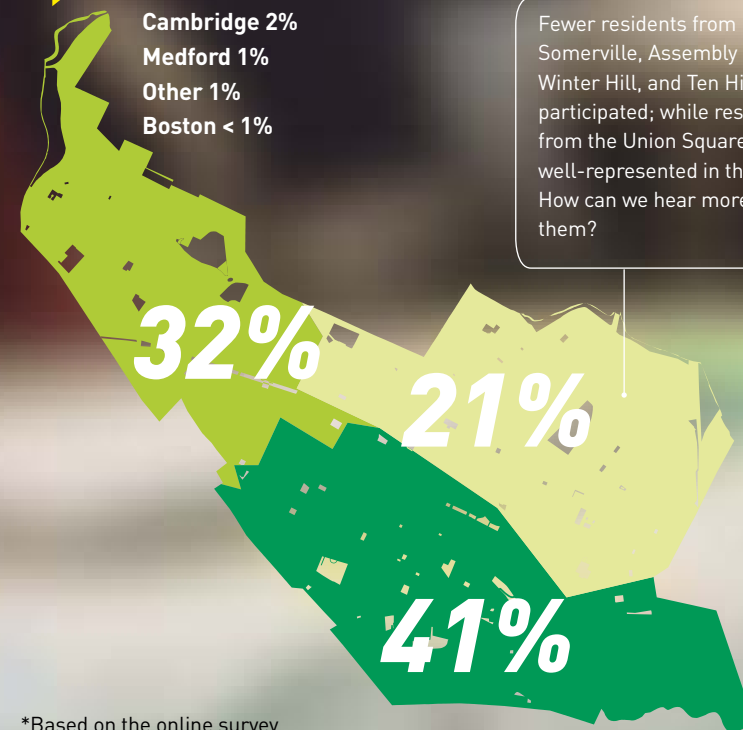
Gehl led a Favorite Place workshop in Somerville in April 2015. This, along with an online survey, helped to reveal the qualities Somerville residents love about the city's public spaces as well as the places that could be improved. The workshop helped to understand what makes Somerville's public life work, and identified survey locations for our Public Space Public Life Survey.

Age of survey participants



Low participation from teens and young adults. Only one side of the story?

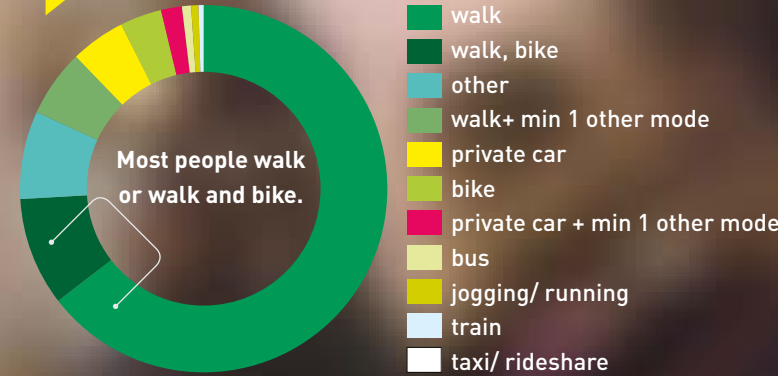
Where survey participants came from



Fewer residents from East Somerville, Assembly Square, Winter Hill, and Ten Hill participated; while residents from the Union Square were well-represented in the survey. How can we hear more from them?

*Based on the online survey

How did the participants get to their favorite places? Most people walked, or walked and bike - indicating that places are close to many favorite places are close to home.

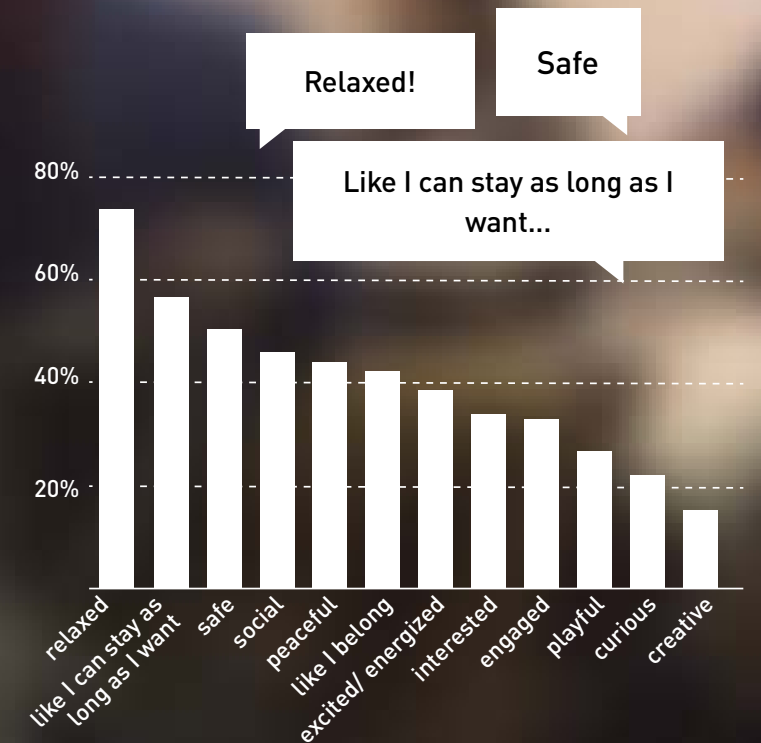


How often did the participants visit their favorite places?



Data from: Favorite Place Workshop, with 75 participants, and an Online Survey that was open for two months, with 270 participants (73% female, 27% male).

How did the participants feel when they visit their favorite places? What qualities evoke these feelings?



What Somerville Loves

The qualities that make favorite places feel you can 'stay as long as you want'

The Somerville residents surveyed loved small and intimate green spaces, being active, and seeing other people. The Community Path and Davis Square were the most popular places, followed by a mix of urban squares and green open spaces.

We learned that there isn't a perfect match between favorite places and great 'quality' (see page 38) - some places with great quality don't have a lot of people and aren't frequently mentioned as favorite places. Quality spaces usually have elements of protection, comfort, and enjoyment.

There is a lack of highly-ranked favorite places in the eastern neighborhoods. This could be due to the fact that only 21% of those surveyed were from East Somerville, Ten Hills, Winter Hill, and Assembly Square and many people's favorite places were those they could walk and bike too. Spaces that are well-used, such as the Mystic Riverfront, wasn't highly ranked among survey respondents.

The findings helped identify the questions to ask during the PSPL Survey, such as: How can access to and activity in Somerville's already great open spaces improve? And how can the existing qualities in Somerville's public spaces be brought in to more places that people love or spend time in?



#1 People



#2 Nature/ Greenery



#3 Food



#4 Walking



#5 Connectivity



#6 Peace & Quiet



#7 Recreation



#8 Kid friendly places



#9 Biking



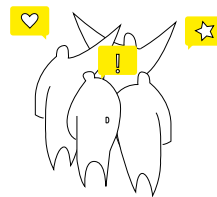
#10 Beauty / Design



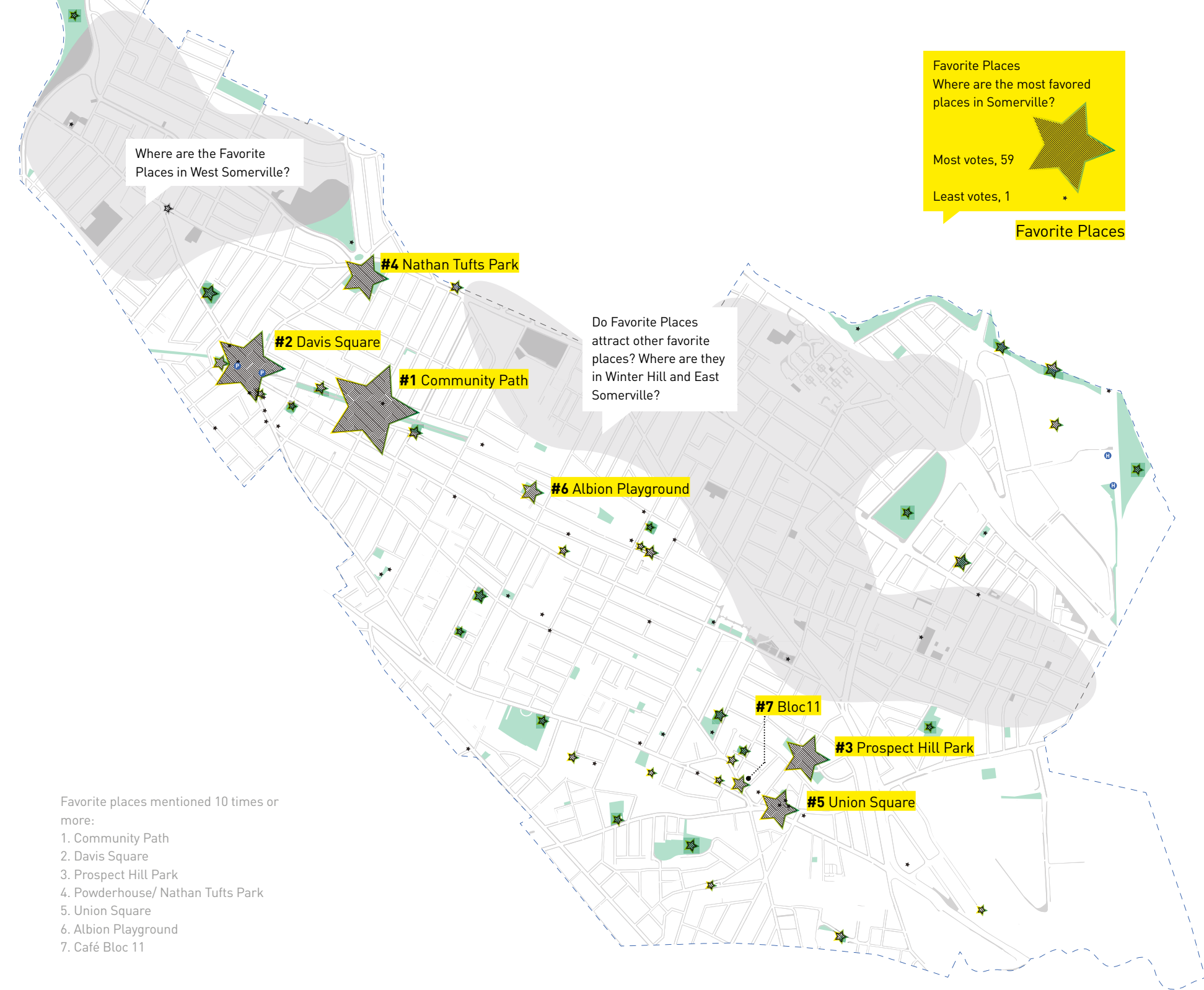
#11 Liveliness



#12 Art & Culture



These are a few of my favorite things! These are the qualities that more than 10% of respondents used to describe the most favored spaces and as the features that make them want to spend time in a place.



What Somervillians do in Public Space

Public Space, Public Life Survey

Created by Gehl Architects over 40 years ago, the survey is a tool to collect people-oriented data. The goal of the survey is to document existing human behavior and use this information to inform the planning and design process, as well as to generate strategies to make a place more livable, walkable, and inviting to all.

The Survey helps to answer: how people use the streets and sidewalks? What types of activity do people engage in? What is the demographic mix? How are certain modes of transport prioritized over others in terms of how space is distributed?

The survey collects data that can show how balanced or not places (sidewalks, streets, plazas) are in terms of range of activity, users, and distribution of space. Gehl analyzes this data and overlays it with local area demographics, public space data, and the vision for public life.



The Somerville PSPL
50 Volunteers
Two days: Wednesday and Saturday
From 7am - 9pm, in May
Five hour shifts
Across the entire city

Public Life Surveying
23 locations to count pedestrian and bicycle movement, as well as the age and gender of those moving
9 locations to document staying activities (i.e. standing and sitting)

Public Space Surveying
Ground level facade mapping at six key corridors
Quality assessment of 28 places

The results of this data are highlighted in the following pages.

Pedestrian Movement

Pedestrian culture is strong in Somerville, especially in the evening and on weekends

In Somerville, People Choose to Walk

Unlike in many cities where pedestrian movement strongly correlates to employment and rush hour patterns, walking occurs more on the weekends in Somerville. Average weekend pedestrian volumes are much higher than weekday, with 550 people per hour walking through a single intersection compared to 350 (weekday). This indicates that pedestrians are choosing to walk in Somerville, and are not just there because of work patterns or demands.

Consistent Movement

Consistent pedestrian activity throughout the day, as well as spikes in the evening at Davis Square during the weekday, in the morning at Union Square farmers market, and in Assembly Square on weekend afternoons indicate that Somerville's public life is not driven by traditional commuting patterns, but instead by choice, programming and untraditional work hours.

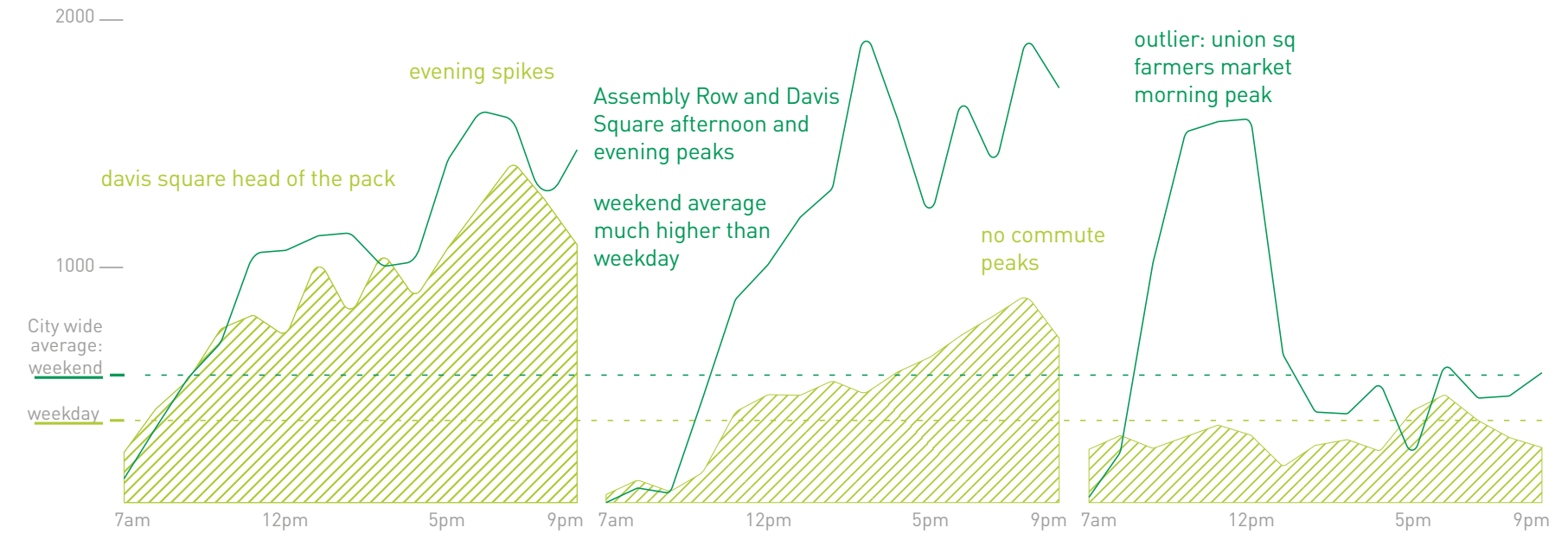
This may be because there are many students and creative economy workers who do not have standard commutes, or because many people drive their cars or bike to jobs outside Somerville.



Pedestrian per hour

Weekday 
Weekend 

Pedestrian Weekday and Weekend Counts at each location, with the highest number for each area.



Davis Square

- has the highest pedestrian volumes by far and is the most consistently busy across weekdays and weekends. Walking rates at Davis Square are similar to those in Center City Philadelphia, at Chestnut & 13th.

Assembly Row

- is together with Davis Square the busiest places in Somerville. It has the highest weekend peaks, it gets the busiest during the late afternoon and evening

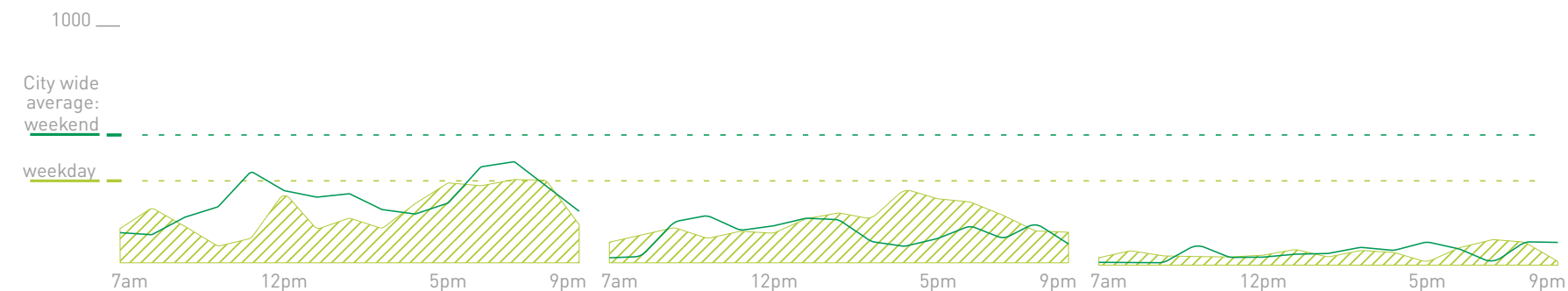
Union Square

- is known as one of the liveliest places, but the pedestrian volumes tell a different story. During the weekday Union Square's pedestrian volume is lower than Somerville city wide average, except in the early evening. Union Square attracts many people for events, like the Farmer's Market, but then loses this energy when the event is over. Union Square can do more to capture this public life, throughout the day.

Pedestrian per hour

Weekday 
Weekend 

Pedestrian Weekday and Weekend Counts at each location, with the highest number for each area.



East Somerville

- has morning, lunch time and evening peaks (between 200 and 400 people, compared to lows of 50 at other hours).

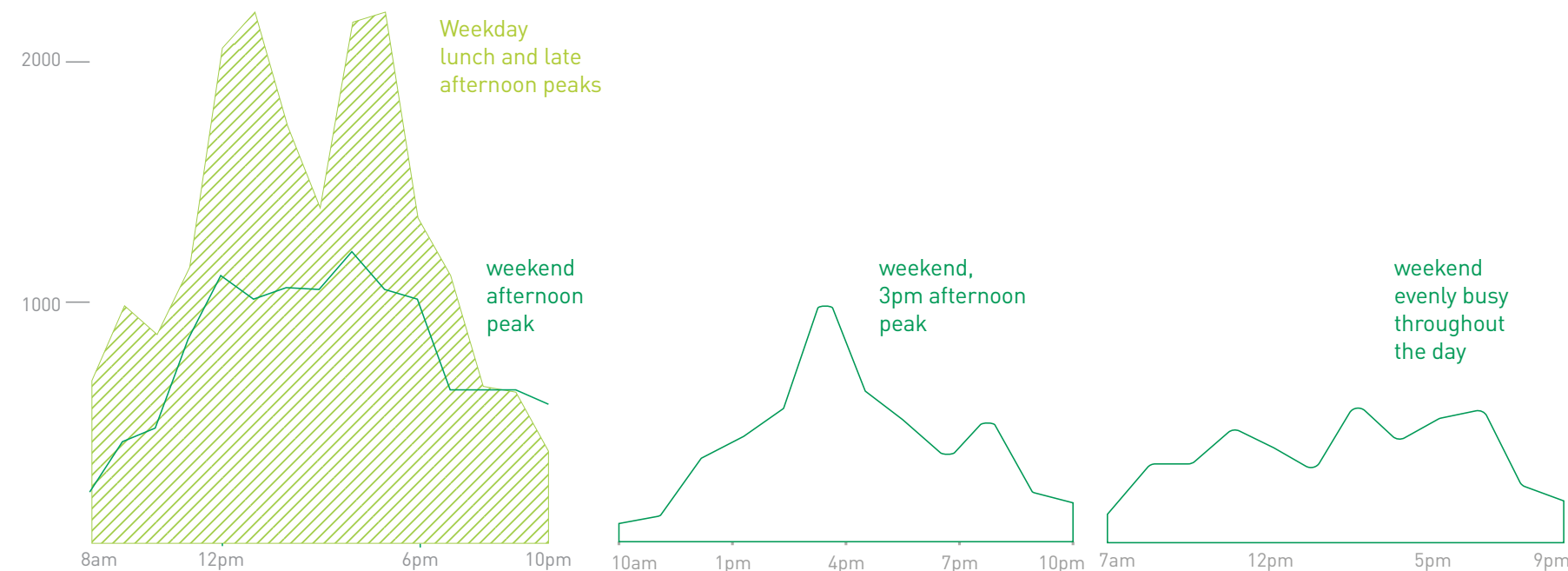
Winter Hill

- an outlier; activity is much higher on a weekday than in the weekend - this may indicate that people are here because they have to be - to commute - but not because they want to walk here. However, it has the lowest average weekend and weekday count other than Concord Square.

Concord Square

- a neighborhood park, not a central corridor.

And how does Somerville compare to:



3rd Ave, Seattle, WA

Compared to weekday and weekend pedestrian flow in Seattle, 3rd Ave, July 2008. A neighborhood of Seattle with a density similar Somerville's. Downtown Seattle's walking patterns are more characteristic of those where pedestrian movement is tied to rush hour and worker patterns, and is higher on weekdays than on weekends - indicating that while pedestrian movement is high for a US city, it is tied to necessity rather than choice.

Short Street, Lexington, KY

Short Street in Lexington, Kentucky is a retail, bar, and restaurant street. The city is currently doing short-term pedestrian improvements to increase pedestrian amenities on the street. Pedestrians peak on the weekend in the mid afternoon which is a typical time of a services oriented street.

San Fernando St, San Jose, CA

San Fernando Street runs next to San Jose State University. The street is primarily residential with a mix of retail and restaurant uses. Activity on the street is steady throughout the day. This pedestrian volume indicated that the street caters to activities needed throughout the day.

Defying crossing signals

Crossing against the light is a team sport!

Pedestrians in Somerville know where they're going, and they're going to get there as fast as they can - whether or not there's a "don't walk" sign in their way.

Some may chalk this up to attitude and culture in New England. Or maybe it's just poor signal timing. Some intersections in Somerville leave barely any time for people to cross the street, even where there is little vehicle traffic during the "don't walk" sign. Pedestrians have taken it upon themselves to determine the best time to cross the street, including families with strollers and groups of friends caravanning against the signal.

Despite apparent empowerment, this culture of pedestrian right-of-way is not supported by the built environment, nor signal timing. In some squares one has to cross up to five sections of zebra striping to reach one's destination. If you get off at the wrong end of the Red Line in Davis, it could take you up to five minutes to get to the exit across the street.

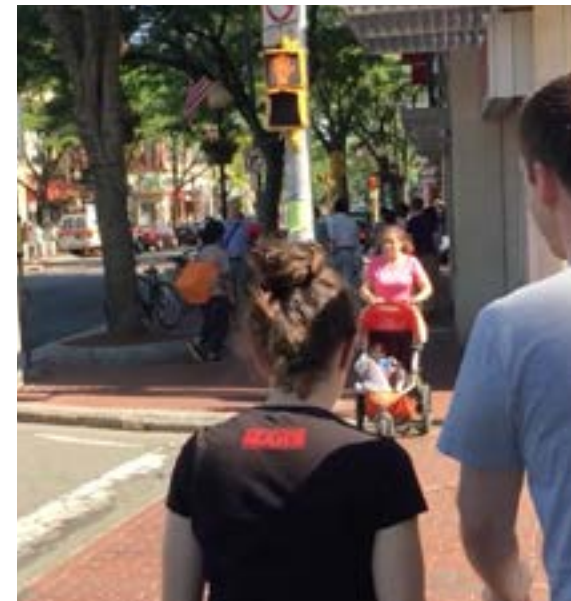
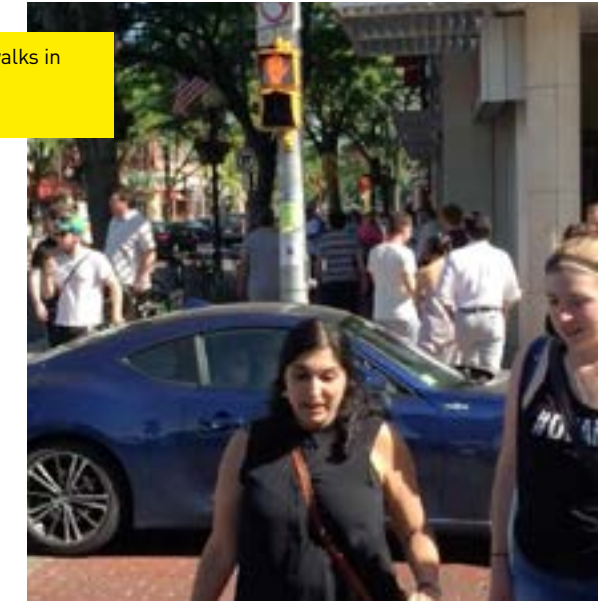
Somerville's pedestrians already know cities are made for people - the public realm and signal timing must respond more to how they move - and reflect a pedestrian-first perspective.



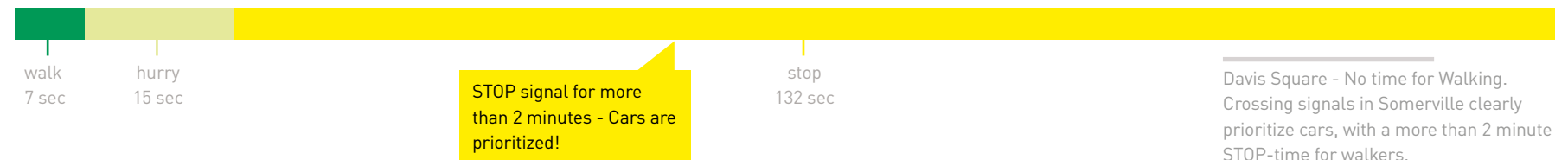
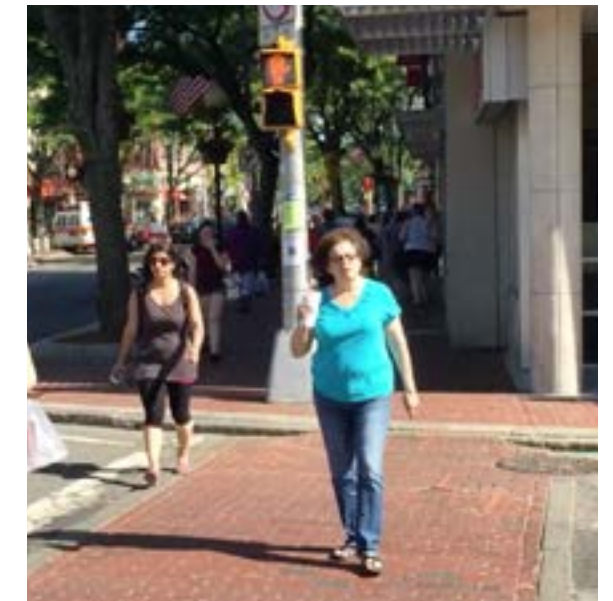
Davis Square



Everybody jaywalks in Somerville



It takes me 20 seconds to cross - how could I wait 2 minutes!?



Davis Square - No time for Walking. Crossing signals in Somerville clearly prioritize cars, with a more than 2 minute STOP-time for walkers.

Biking in Somerville

Growing bike culture, but mostly young men were observed

In Somerville, peak cycling occurs during typical weekday commute hours and on weekend afternoons, indicating it is used for both the necessities of commuting and for recreation and leisure. No matter what time of day, most cyclists are adult men.

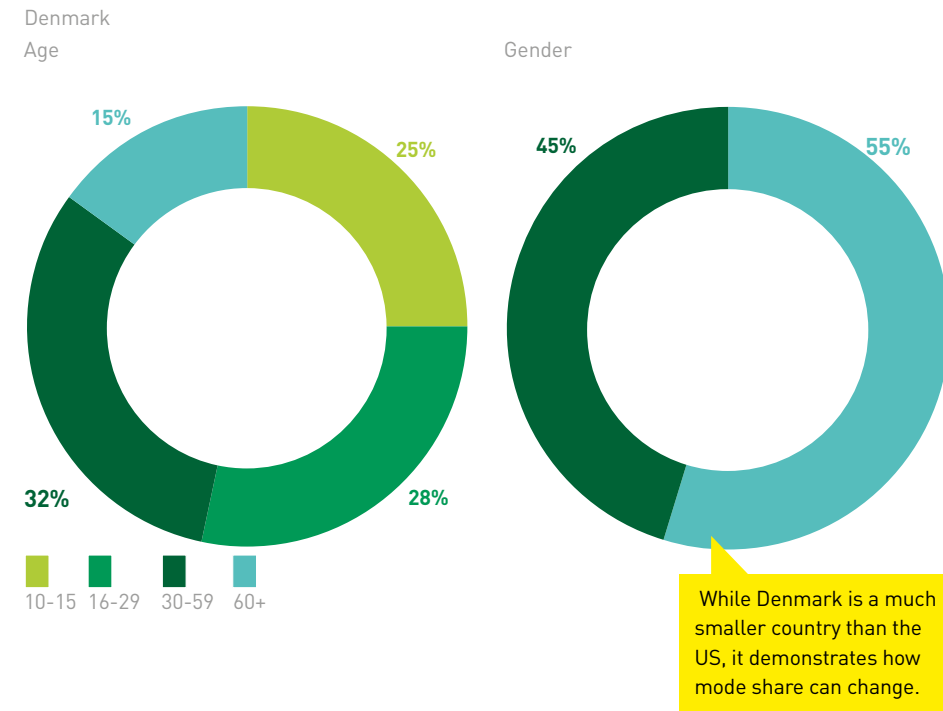
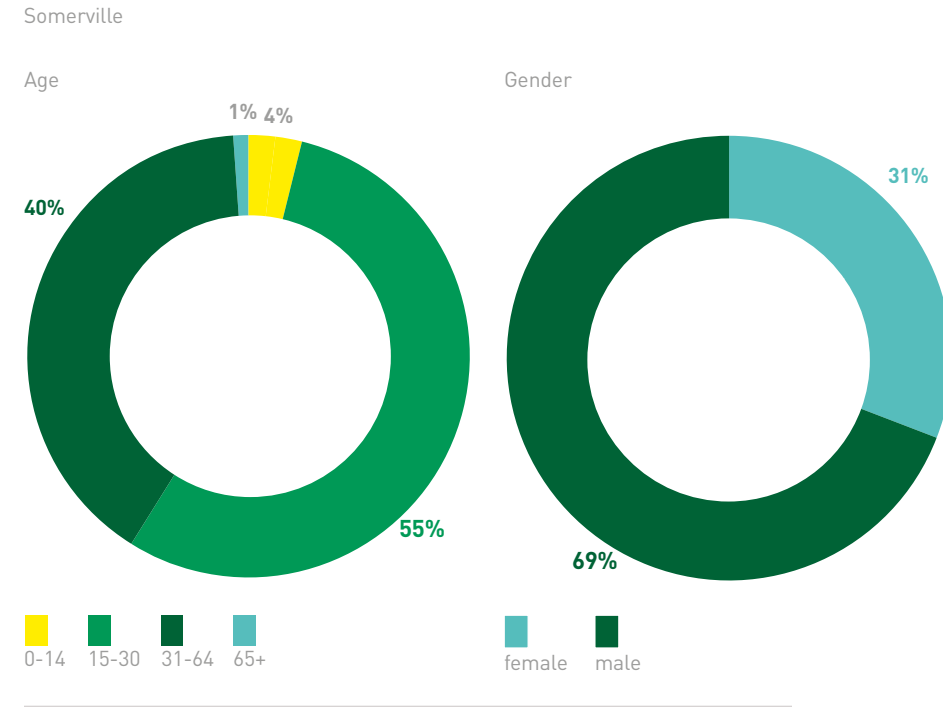
Somerville men appear more invited to bike than women - More than 2/3 of Somerville's cyclists are male. There are places that have more gender parity: Davis, Union, and Assembly have the highest number of female cyclists. East Somerville and Winter Hill have the lowest number of female cyclists - less than 25%.

Somerville's cyclists are mostly young adults and adults. 95% of all cyclists are between 15-64 years old. More than 1/2 of Somerville's cyclists are 15-30. Seniors, young teenagers, and children are underrepresented. This indicates that while cycling rates rise, getting around by bike is still considered a risky activity.

Square by Square Trends

Union Square at Somerville Avenue has the highest average cycling counts of the study areas, with an average of 70 cyclists passing this location each hour. **Davis Square** has the highest peaks, with Holland Street seeing 282 cyclists at 8 am on the weekday and the Community Path seeing 275 cyclists in one peak weekend afternoon hour.

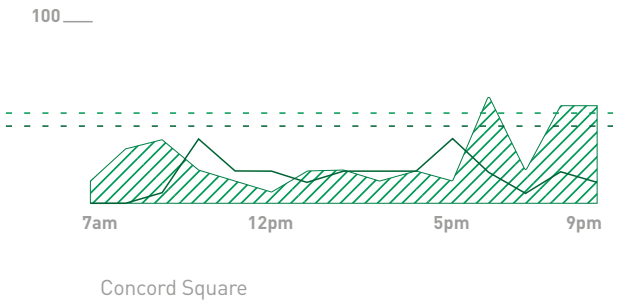
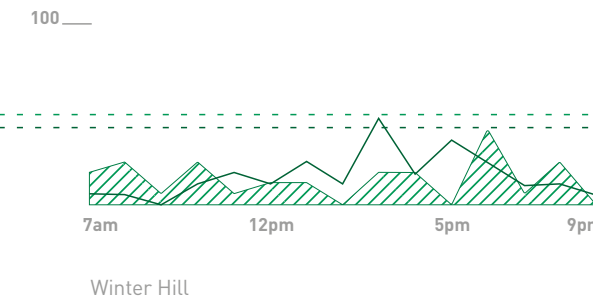
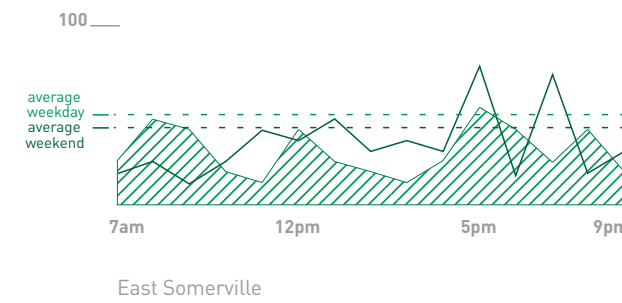
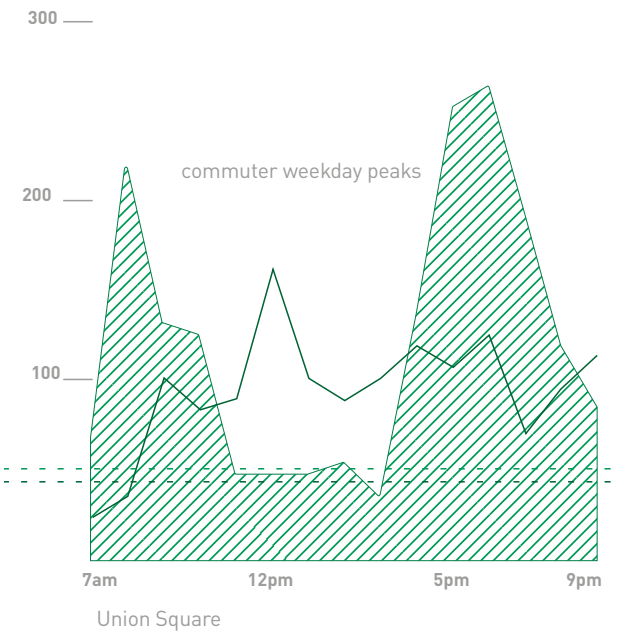
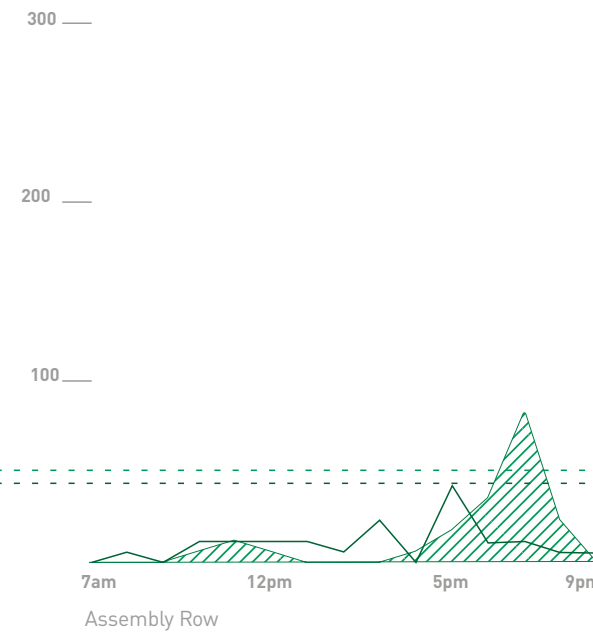
Although **Assembly Square** has some of the highest pedestrian and stationary counts, it has the lowest bike activity in the city. The weekday sees no morning traffic and reaches a moderate peak of 84 cyclists (7 pm) in the evening. This may be that there are few bike commuters to Assembly, but programming attracts bikers in the evening, or because Baxter Riverfront Park is part of a bike path network.



While Denmark is a much smaller country than the US, it demonstrates how mode share can change.



cycling is concentrated around davis square and east somerville.



Cyclists per hour

Weekday

Weekend

Bike weekday and weekend counts at each locations with the highest number for each area. How many cyclists and when and where are the peaks and lows.

Stationary Activity

High peaks of activity, but also low lows

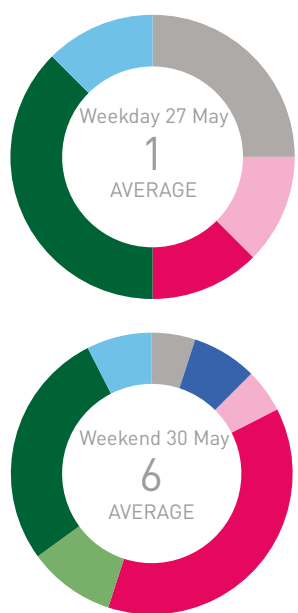
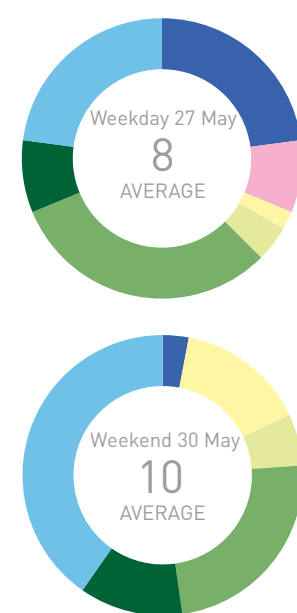
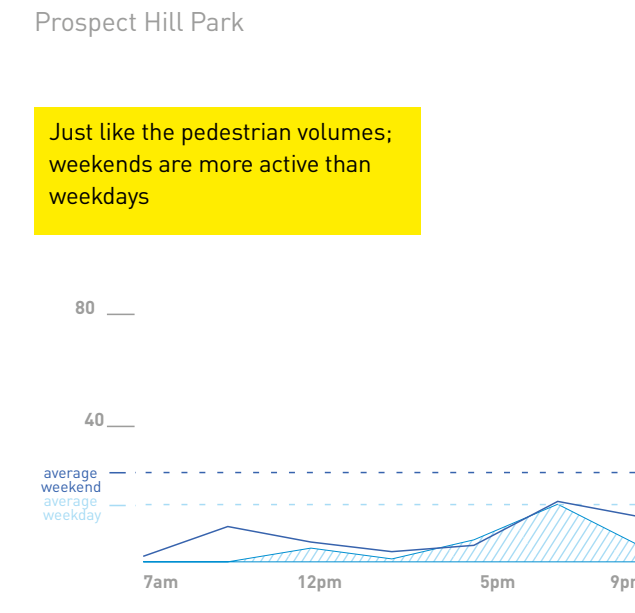
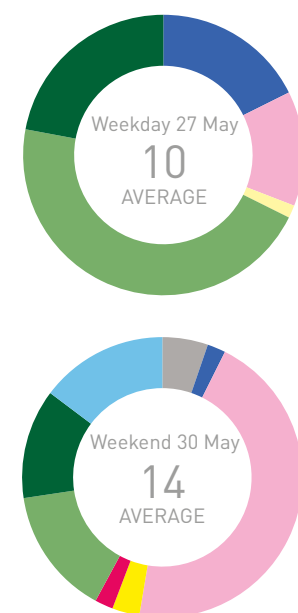
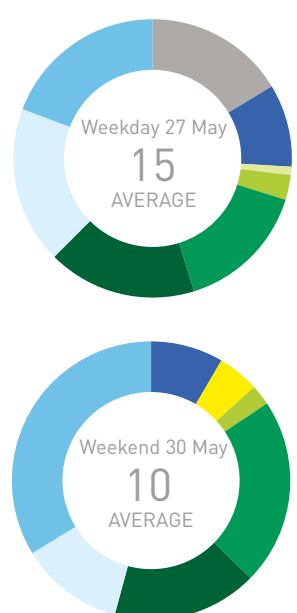
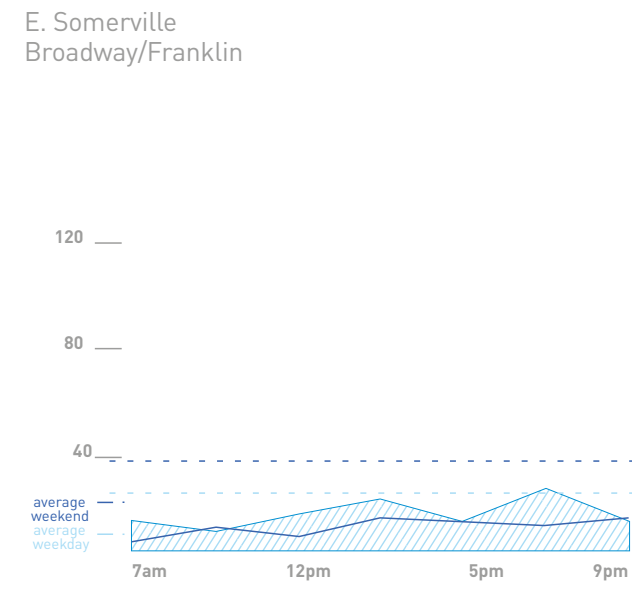
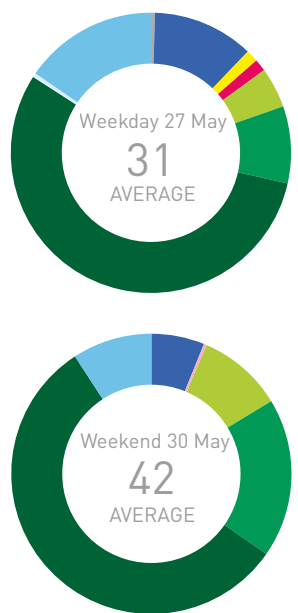
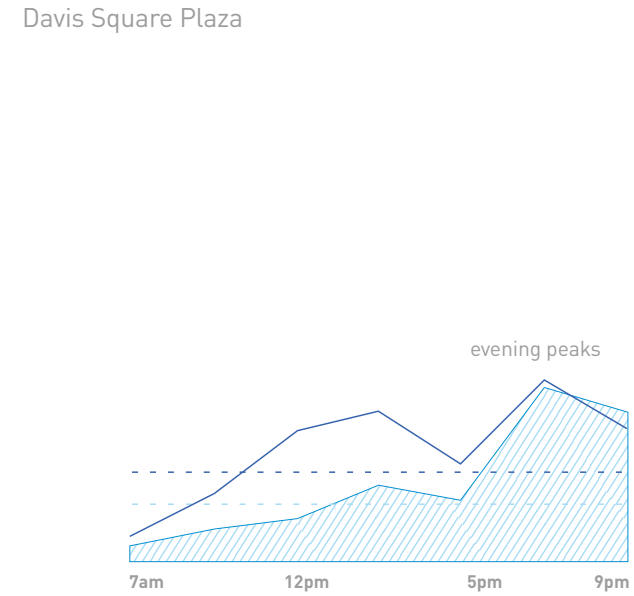
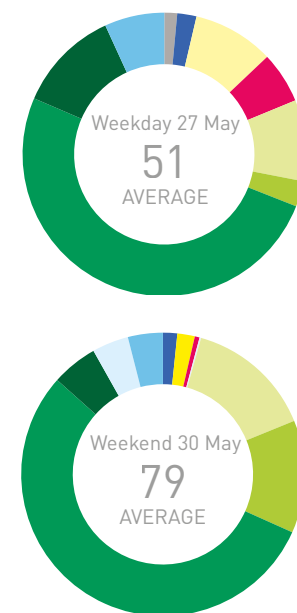
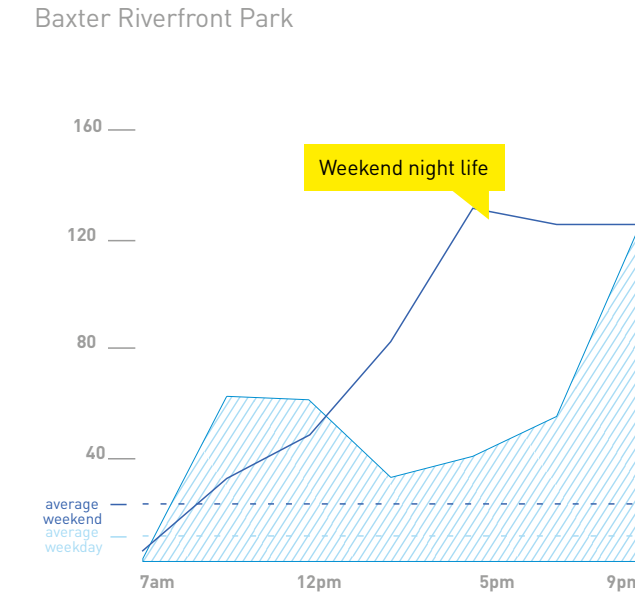
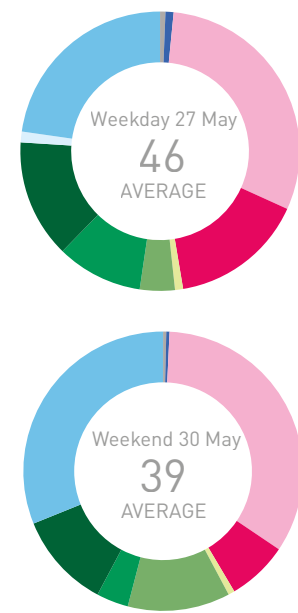
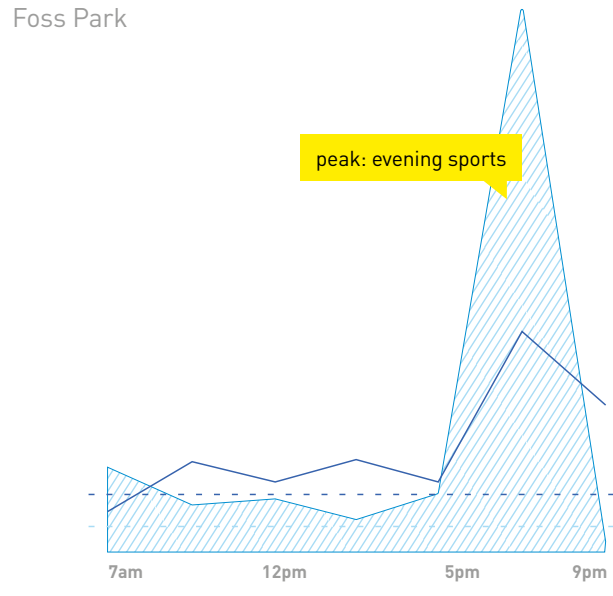
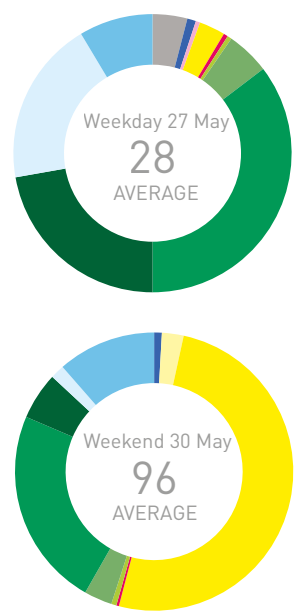
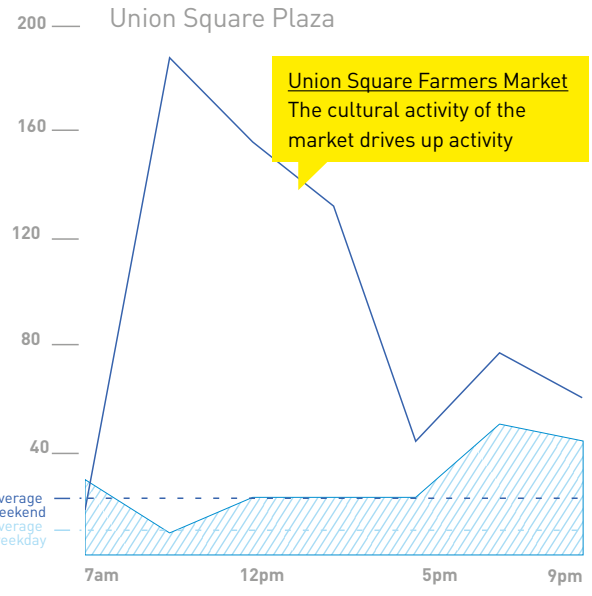
Similar to patterns of pedestrian activity, stationary activities, which include everything from sitting to waiting for transit, peak around events like the Union Square farmer's market, popular natural features like the Mystic Riverfront in Assembly Row, and around strong retail and nightlife offerings, such as those in Davis Square.

There are particularly high staying activities in the evening, indicating that people choose to go out - and stay out - after work hours. On the weekday after 8pm, stationary activity declines, but on the weekend it continues to climb.

Certain places peak at specific times, such as Foss Park in the weekday evening or Union Square on the weekend, then lose steam. Why does this energy drop off and how could this energy be maintained?

One unique highlight is Assembly Row, which has extremely high levels of staying activity: people choose to drive to this place to spend their time. How can the city encourage new development to contribute to this favorite place, and support active mobility networks to make it more accessible so that there is consistent activation all day, not just in the afternoons and weekends?





When are people staying where and what are they doing in the public spaces of Somerville

Standing	Movable Seating	Cultural Activity
Waiting, Transport	Lying Down	Physical Activity
Bench Seating	Children Playing	Sitting/Standing w/ phone
Cafe Seating	Commercial Activity	Working/Meeting
Secondary Seating		

weekday weekend

Pockets of 'Stickiness'

The "stickiness" of a place is a measure of how many people choose to stay versus how many people walk by. A score of 1/2 or .5 would indicate one person staying for every two people walking by. It helps to understand if a place is functioning mainly as a corridor to walk through or as a place that invites people to stop and spend time. Not all places need to be 'sticky' but this measure is one way to evaluate how inviting a place is.

Compared to some of the peak pedestrian and stationary counts, there were few peak "stickiness counts." This may be due to limited space being devoted to pedestrians in busy squares such as Davis - where sidewalks are narrow and much of the land area is devoted to roadbed. If there were more invitations to stop, would they?

Events can contribute to making a place sticky - such as the farmers market Saturday mornings in Union Square. Davis Square, on the other hand, gets stickier at night, when people eat ice cream in the Square or enjoy dinner and drinks at outdoor restaurants and bars. There is more stickiness on the weekdays - when fewer people are walking - than on the weekends. Is this related to a weekday lunch culture? Or to a culture of strolling on weekends?

Many of Somerville's streets are corridors for moving traffic - not places - and until they increase their invitations for people - with seating, trees, and human scale design - and decrease invitations to cars, such as via wide travel lanes and frequent curb cuts - making them places people want to 'stay as long as they want to' will be difficult.



Plaza at Davis Square



McGrath/ Broadway intersection

Location	Stickiness Ratio	
	Weekday 12 pm, 7 pm	Weekend 11 am
Assembly Row	4 staying per 1 walking by	1 staying per 1 walking by
Davis Square Plaza	1 staying per 15 walking by	1 staying per 9 walking by
Foss Park	4 staying per 1 walking by	1 staying per 20 walking by
Seven Hills Park	1 staying per 9 walking by	1 staying per 12 walking by
Union Square	1 staying per 2 walking by	1 staying per 1 walking by



Age & Gender

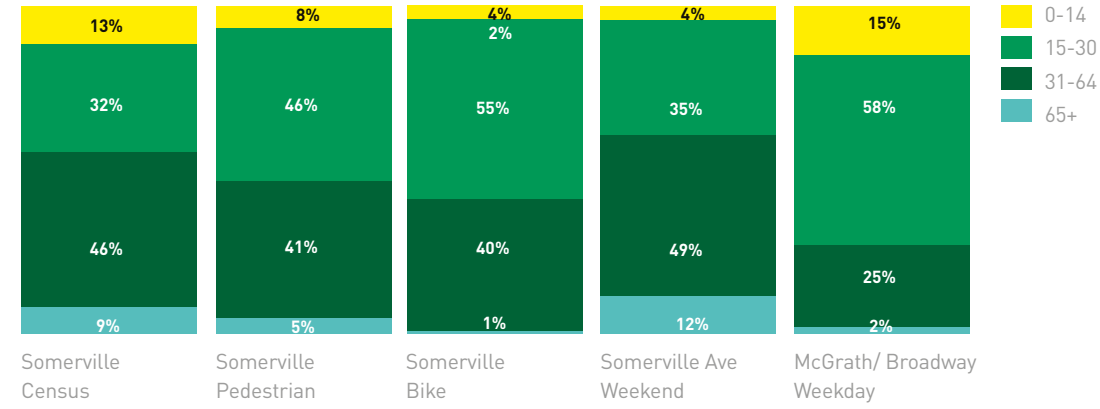
A balance of men and women, with a bit more men in the east and a bit more women in Davis and Assembly (& Union on market days)

Gehl measure the age and gender of people moving through space because making cities accessible to all ages and genders means that the public realm is accessible and safe for all.

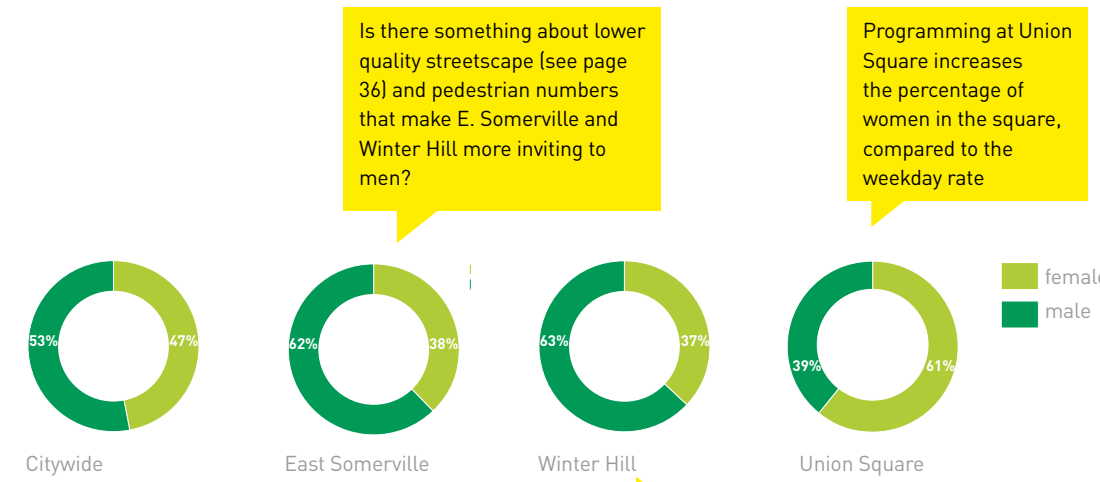
Most places in Somerville are gender-balanced, with slightly more men on average moving through the city. The average gender breakdown for pedestrians in Somerville is 53% men and 47% women.

Several squares have higher rates of women or men: **Davis Square** has the most equal distribution of genders. **Assembly Row** is the only place that is consistently majority women. **Winter Hill** and **East Somerville** are consistently majority men on weekdays and on weekends.

Age breakdown



Gender breakdown: Weekend



Is there something about lower quality streetscape (see page 36) and pedestrian numbers that make E. Somerville and Winter Hill more inviting to men?

Programming at Union Square increases the percentage of women in the square, compared to the weekday rate

Do these trends indicate that men work on the weekend in Winter Hill and East Somerville? And that programming can reverse an imbalance?



Occasionally we found moments of primarily young males in locations across Somerville

Highland Avenue, 3 Little Figs

Corridor Analysis

The City's main streets are 'somewhere in-between' with pleasant stretches

An active public realm encourages people to stroll, to walk farther than they had planned, and to enjoy their journey on foot. Gehl Studio developed a Somerville-specific facade quality index to evaluate how active and engaging a facade was. Activity is based on how open the facade appears, how much it displays a human presence, and how inviting it is to walk further to see more. Below is a summary of the activity and quality of Somerville's key corridors:

Elm Street

There is a concentration of active units around Davis Square. Further away the facades are a mix of boring, pleasant and somewhere in-between, with large stretches of parking lots. Overall, there are few inactive units.

Broadway

There is very mixed facade quality on Broadway, with most falling somewhere in-between pleasant and boring. There are very few active units and the least active are around Central Broadway near Magoun Square, with long stretches of inactive facades. Despite the low quality, there are many green spaces along the way. The most active facades are around Teele Square.

Highland Avenue

A pleasant residential street with few active units, evenly spread out along the street.

Somerville Avenue

Parking and vacant lots, and the inactive units, are the most dominant. There are few active units. Concentration of active and pleasant units around Union Square and the northern merge of Bow St and Somerville Ave.



Active



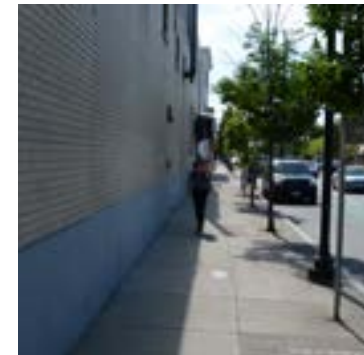
Pleasant



Somewhere in-between



Dull



Inactive



Vacant/ Parking

Somerville frontages:

Washington Street

Overall the facade quality is very poor, with very few active or pleasant units and long stretches of parking/vacant lots. Apart from Union Square, it is in great need of improvement.



Public Space



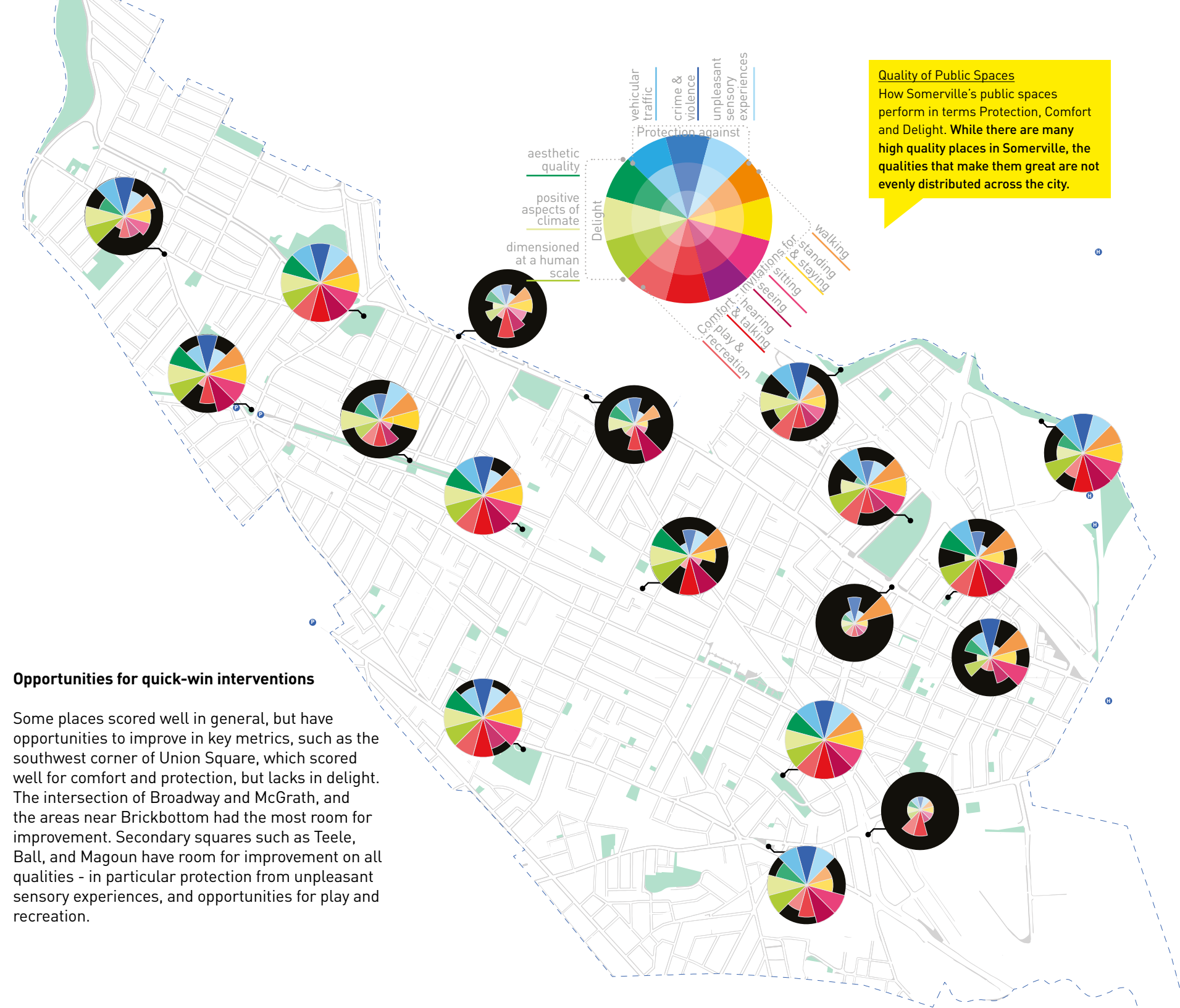
Quality Criteria

An opportunity to spread the love - or quality - around

An inviting place that encourages public life has elements of protection, comfort, and enjoyment. These categories are further detailed into 12 Quality Criteria measured in study areas and key corridors in Somerville. Each category doesn't have to be aced for a place to be inviting, ranking places by these categories can help identify why some work so well, and why others need attention.

Somerville has some high quality large public parks - the Mystic Riverfront, Tufts Park, and Prospect Hill Park - that meet all three categories. Smaller neighborhood parks also score well, such as Conway Park, Albion Playground, and Stone Place Park.

However, there is not a perfect match between Somerville residents' favorite places and the quality criteria, indicating that even favorite places can be improved. Many of these places were more urban than the high-scoring parks, indicating that while Somerville has invested in large and small open green spaces, its streets and squares can be improved. For example, although the Community Path was the most highly ranked favorite place, it doesn't rank very high in terms of comfort and delight.



Opportunities for quick-win interventions

Some places scored well in general, but have opportunities to improve in key metrics, such as the southwest corner of Union Square, which scored well for comfort and protection, but lacks in delight. The intersection of Broadway and McGrath, and the areas near Brickbottom had the most room for improvement. Secondary squares such as Teele, Ball, and Magoun have room for improvement on all qualities - in particular protection from unpleasant sensory experiences, and opportunities for play and recreation.

The Streetscape: Curb Cuts, Trees, & Benches

Curb cuts dominate in Somerville

High quality public life is nurtured by active building frontages and inviting streets. An active streetscape can help pedestrians read the urban landscape: areas with more public life have more active facades and greater walkability and invitations for staying.

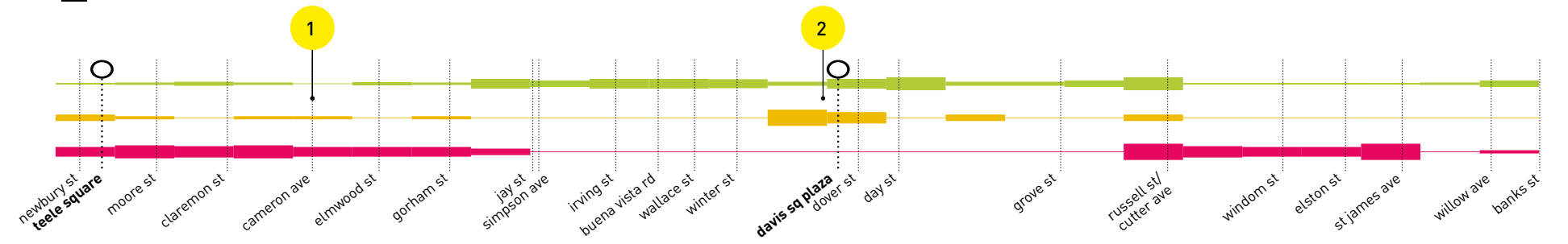
This is true in Somerville. Overall, higher levels of facade activity, quality benches, and street trees, and low levels of curb cuts correlated to more public life. We saw these positive qualities clustered at places like Davis Square. The closer one gets to Davis Square, for example, the higher the concentration of benches and street trees. Curb cuts are also reduced.

Yet, the same is not the case for other squares, such as Teele Square or Union Square if approached on Somerville Avenue. In Davis, one can feel they are approaching the square because of a higher frequency of inviting and walkable elements in the public realm - what if the same was the case for Teele Square? Instead, the only thing that marks one is entering the square is a line of traffic. What if there was a minimum frequency of street trees and benches as one approaches a square?



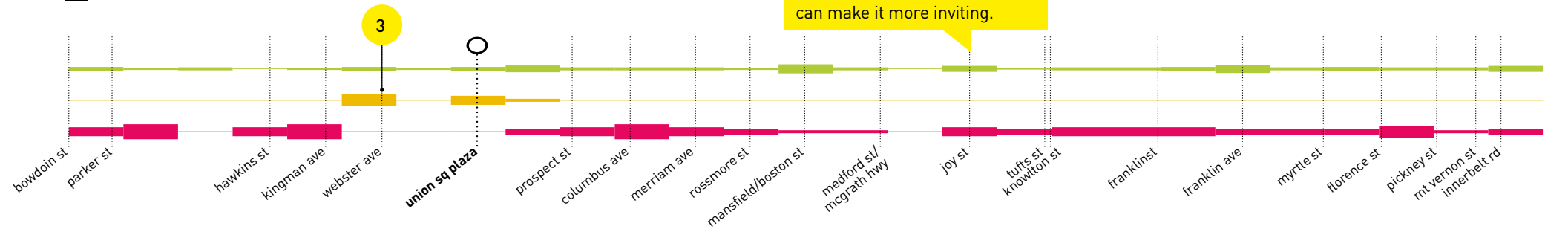
KEY			
	street trees	benches	curb cuts
none	light green line	light yellow line	light pink line
1/200 ft	medium green line	medium yellow line	medium pink line
10/200 ft	dark green line	dark yellow line	dark pink line

HOLLAND/ELM STREET



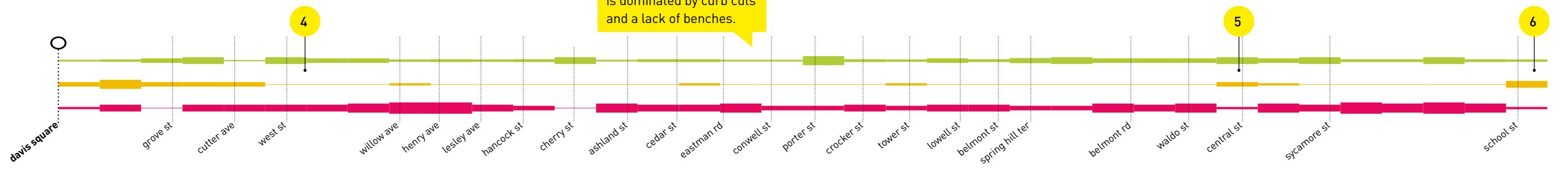
Washington Street is completely stripped of benches except around Union Square. Supplementing the streetscape can make it more inviting.

WASHINGTON STREET



Highland Avenue has plenty of street trees, but is dominated by curb cuts and a lack of benches.

HIGHLAND AVENUE



Gehl and the City evaluated walkability and invitations for staying on five corridors by identifying the level of engagement buildings have with the street and measuring the level of articulation, fenestration, and ability to sense a human presence, the frequency of street trees, the number and quality of benches, and curb cuts.



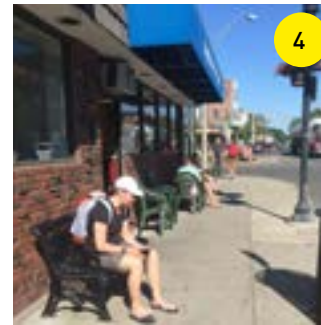
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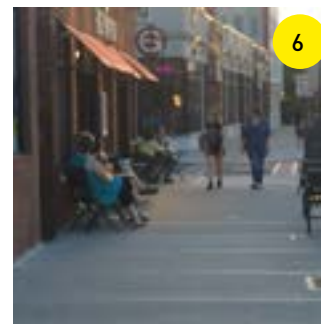
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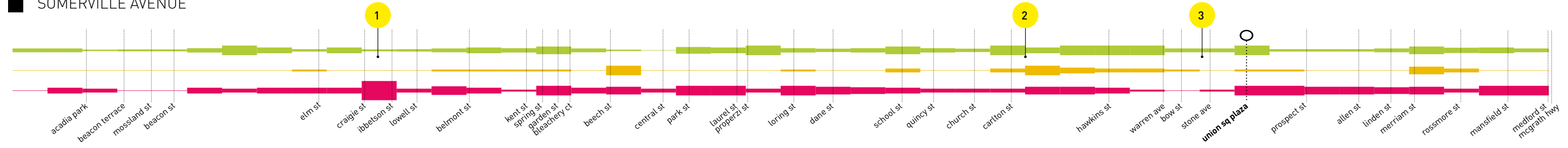


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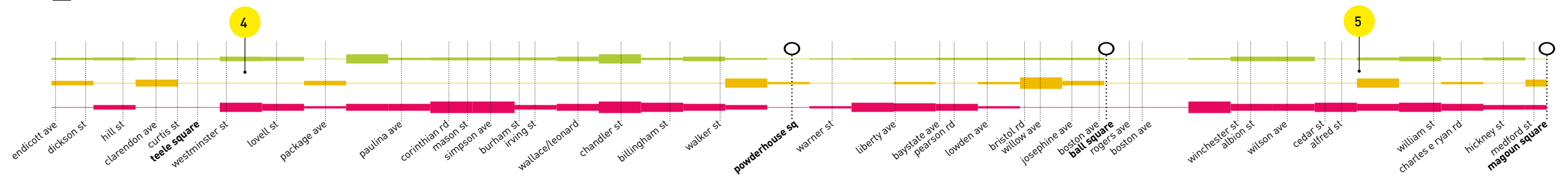
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SOMERVILLE AVENUE

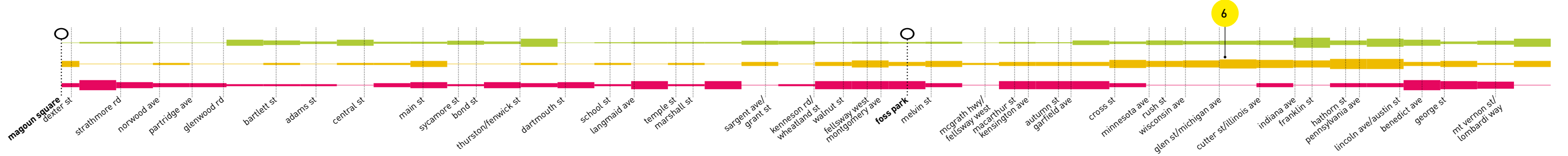


Areas like Broadway west of Magoun Square are dominated by long stretches of curb cuts, a moderate amount of street trees and few clusters of benches. East of Foss Park, the streetscape changes and there are many street trees and seating opportunities. How can these two areas better connect?

WEST BROADWAY



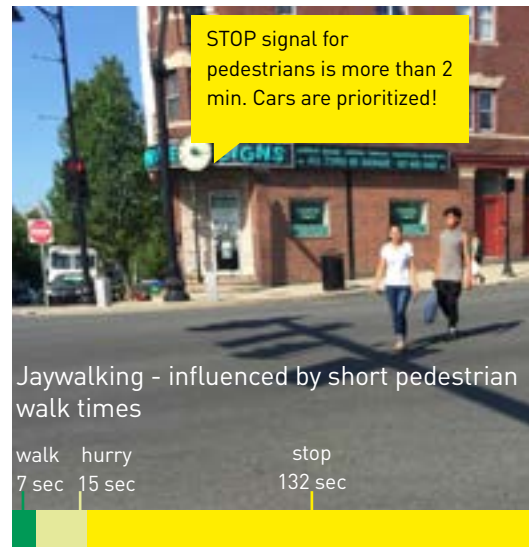
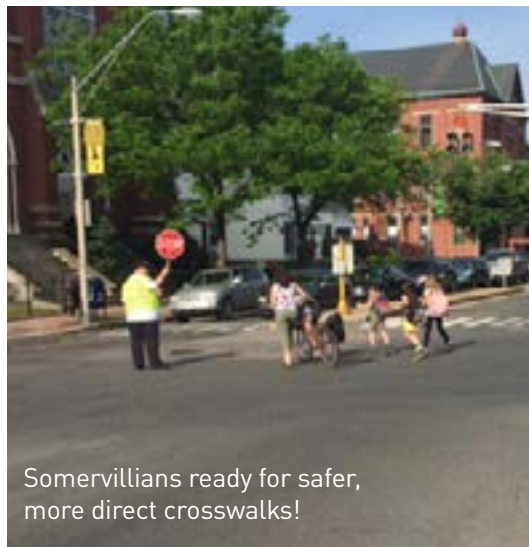
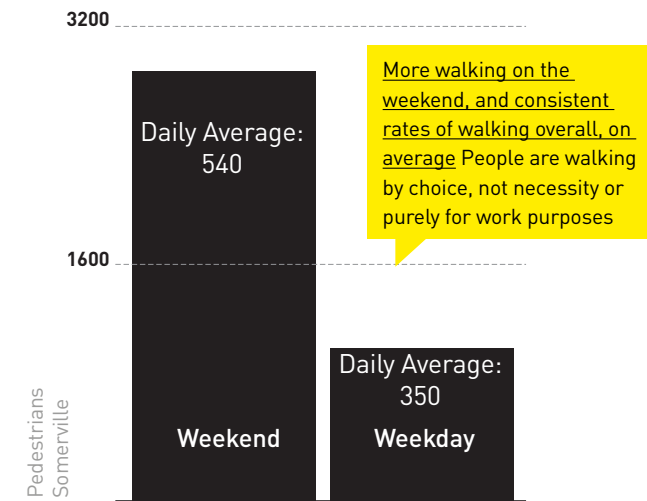
EAST BROADWAY



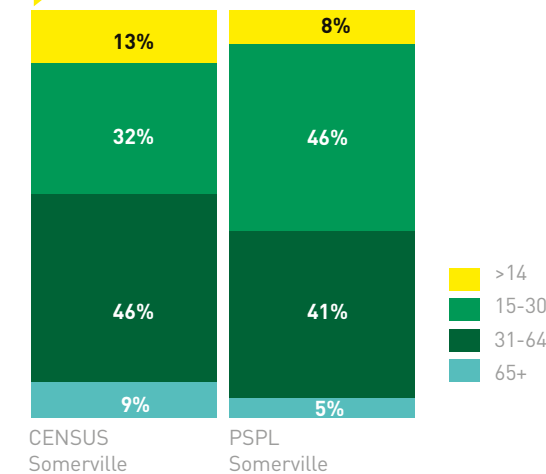
Part 3

The Stories
that Emerge &
Strategies for
Change

1 Somervillians choose to walk! Yet getting from A to B is a struggle



Kids and seniors are under-represented
Only 8% - out of 13% of kids citywide - <14 yrs old and 5% - out of 9% seniors citywide - are represented in Somerville



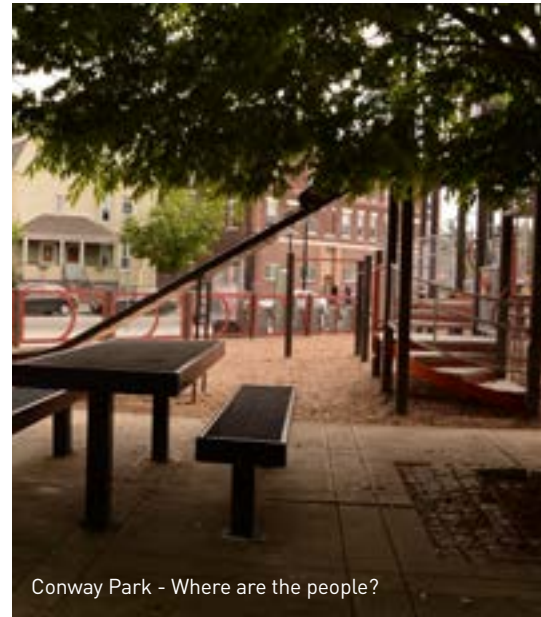
Put the Pedestrian First

- Design for desire lines and consider diagonal crosswalks
- Shorten pedestrian crossings
- Extend the curbs to reduce vehicle turning speeds and shorten crossings
- Green the streets to make them places and not just corridors to move through
- Increase pedestrian signal time
- Add more street seating
- Install high visibility crosswalks

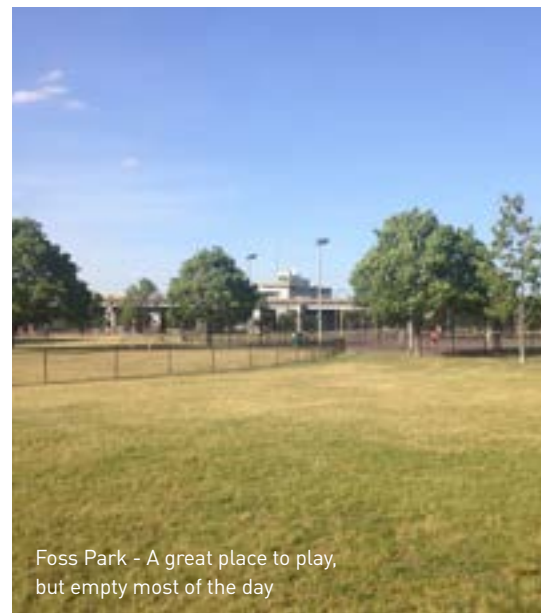


2 People want more open space, but there's already a lot - it's just underused

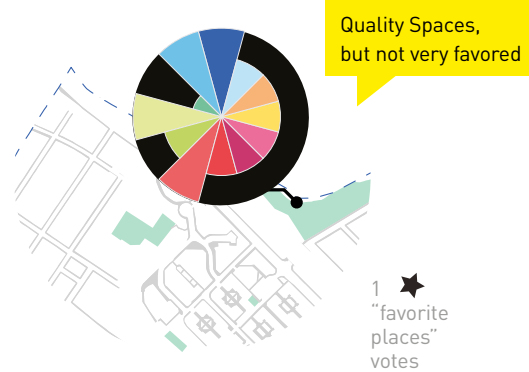
Use What You've Got! Maximize existing open spaces



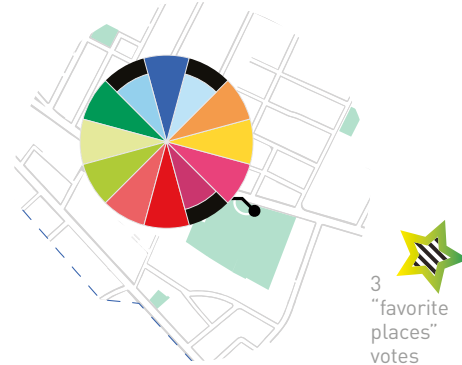
Conway Park - Where are the people?



Foss Park - A great place to play, but empty most of the day



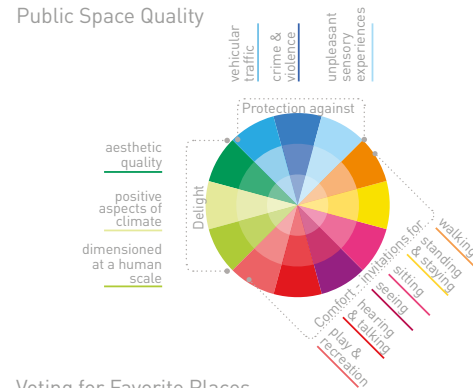
Blessing of the Bay Boathouse



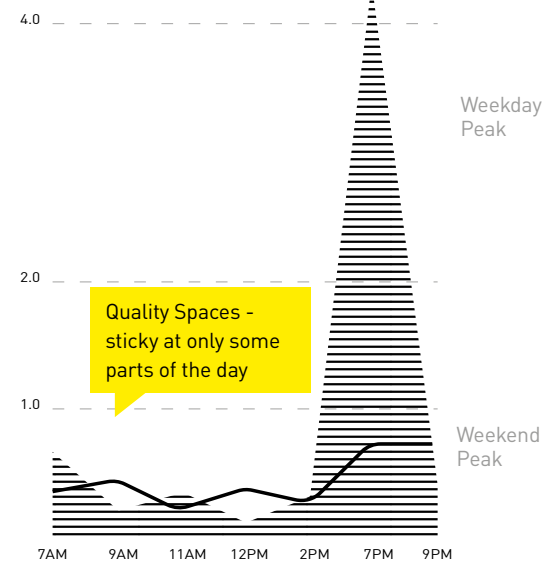
Conway Park



Foss Park



Voting for Favorite Places



Foss Park Stickiness

- Fill in the activity gaps. People like people, so start by amplifying places that have moments of vibrant public life, but that drop off during the day
- Leverage the qualities people love in Somerville to other places - bring the feeling of intimate green space into larger parks, or opportunities for temporary programming, relaxing and people watching to under-used corridors
- Make streets into places that have invitations to stop, sit and relax - such as at bus stops or in front of key destinations - rather than corridors to move quickly from A to B
- Calm traffic on Somerville's streets, such as Broadway, by extending curbs, adding protected bike lanes, and greening the streets

3 Great squares! Though some are indistinct, unwelcoming and hard to walk to



Approaching Magoun Square
Getting lost in traffic on the way to the square



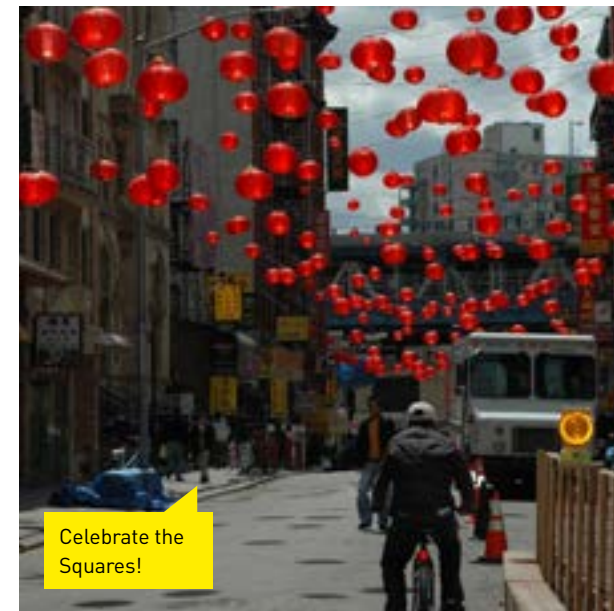
Gateway to Teele Square
Today, lines of cars are the most dominant sign that you're approaching Somerville's squares



Walking to Union from South
Pedestrians compete with cars, driveways and sidewalk obstructions on their way to Union Square

Take down the barriers, Increase invitations

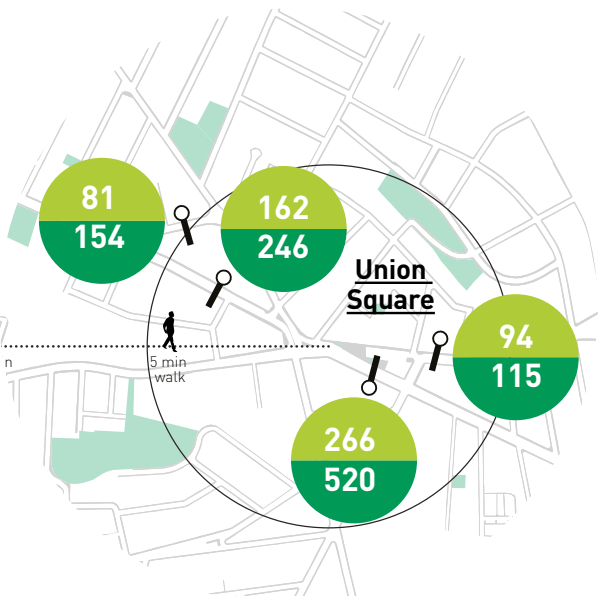
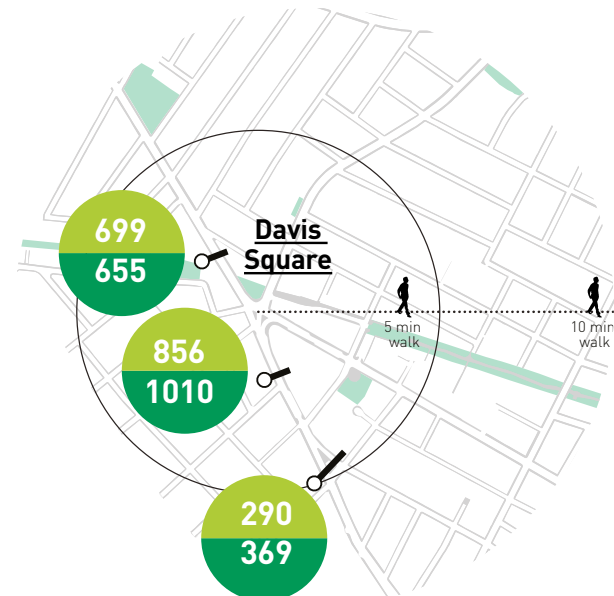
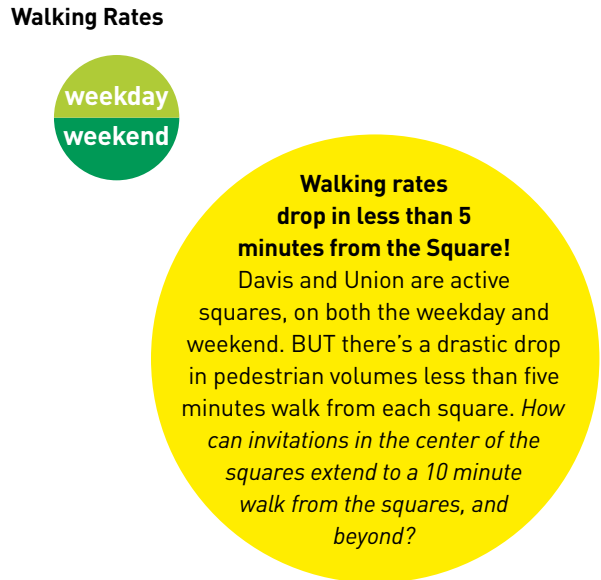
- Install parklets to replace parking along corridors leading into the squares
- Improve wayfinding into the squares and between Somerville's neighborhoods and squares
- Calm traffic at the gateways into the squares - reduce parking to improve pedestrian site lines; add greenery; install protected cycle lanes; extend curbs to reduce turning radii and reduce vehicle speeds; and shorten crosswalks
- Highlight the entryways to the squares



Celebrate the Squares!



Parklets to activate the periphery of the squares



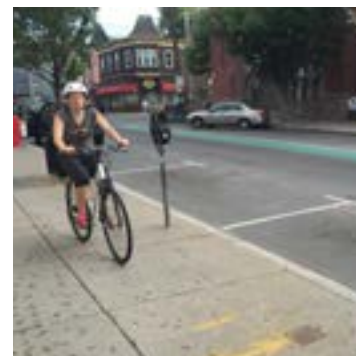
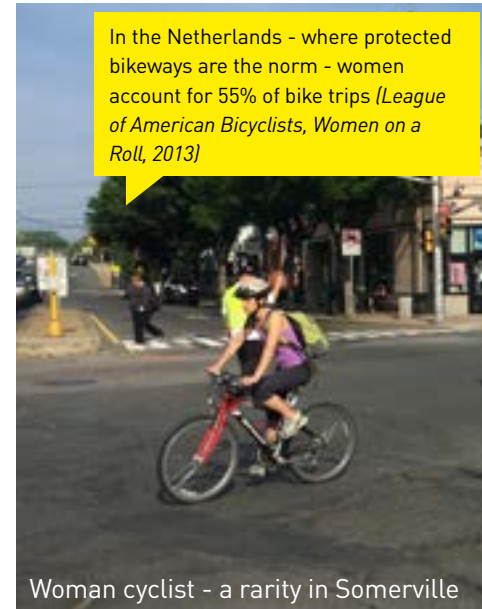
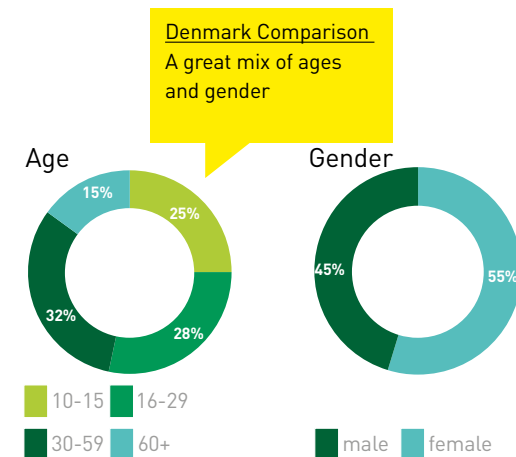
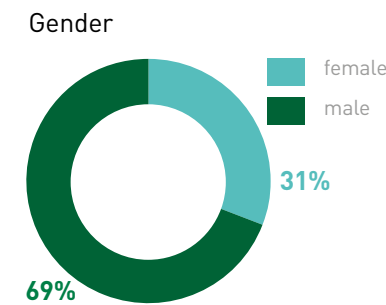
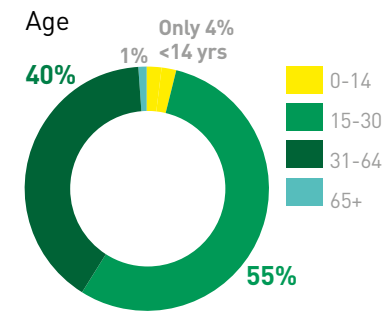
Turn barriers into amenities!

Garden Center

Skate hall

Event venue

4 Growing bike culture, but still an endeavor of the brave



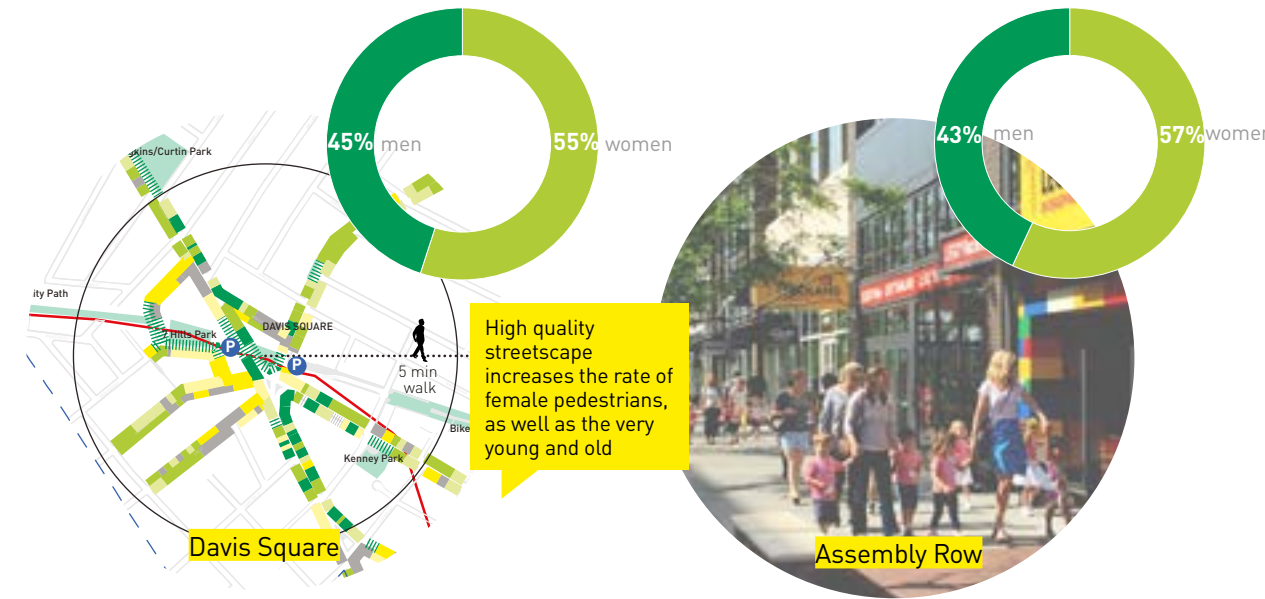
Invite everyone to bike

- Create parking and curb-protected bike lanes that clearly designate where cyclists should be on the road and help prevent against dooring and conflicting with vehicular traffic
- Extend bike lanes through intersections so cyclists - and drivers - know where to be on the road
- Install bike furniture, such as footrests, and bike signals, to make one's journey more comfortable and inviting
- Create high visibility bike parking at key destinations
- Partner with schools, community organizations, and the bike share program to engage women in cycling and host educational workshops and classes

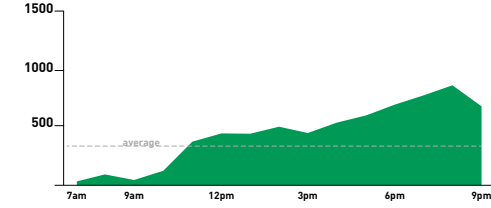
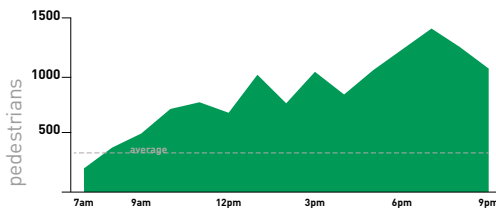
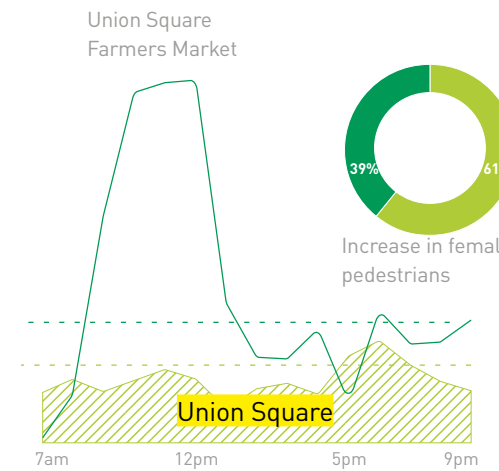


5 Programming invites for more - and more age and gender diverse - street life

► Create opportunities for more activation & programming, in the short- and long-term, that invites for all



In areas without brick and mortar quality, programming helps too!

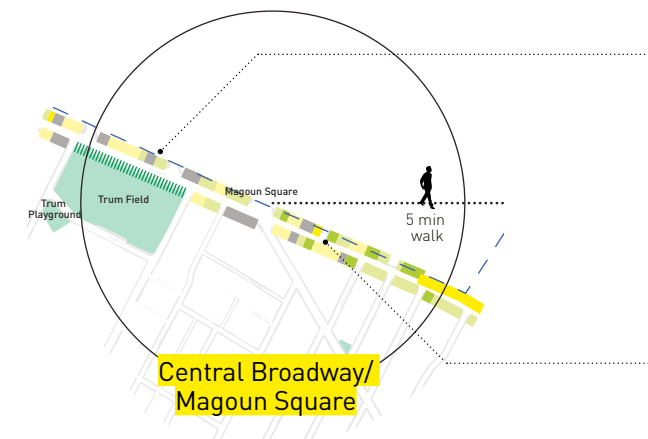


Davis and Assembly Square - the squares with the highest quality streetscapes - in terms of active facades, few curb cuts, high rates of seating or trees, and protection and comfort for pedestrians - have the highest volumes of pedestrians AND the highest number of female pedestrians. They also have higher rates of seniors (Davis) and children (Assembly), compared to the Somerville

average. This is a stark comparison to low-quality squares in East Somerville and Winter Hill, where pedestrians are predominantly male. Quality brick and mortar infrastructure isn't the only thing that attracts this diversity though - Union Square shows that programming can too. The Saturday farmers market increases the rate of women in the square substantially.



- Identify storefronts and street space that can be used for temporary activation and programming, such as exhibits, performances or open spaces
- Create a program that citizens or community groups can apply to as a means to suggesting ideas as well as assisting with maintenance and operations
- Activate under-used street space as pedestrian space that invites for seating and staying
- Use temporary ground-floor activation to test strategies for longer-term designs and development



Part 4

Next Steps:
Improving the
Public Life and
Public Spaces of
Somerville

Maintain the Public Realm

An opportunity to spread the love - or quality - around

The public realm is experienced by everyone. Even drivers to the squares and main streets of Somerville experience the public realm between their parking space and destination. The way we experience the public realm is endless, think about walking the dog, going for a run, strolling to the square, and sunbathing in a park just to name a few.

The public realm should be viewed as a real estate investment for Somerville. Therefore, it should be cared for in the same manner. Property investments are monitored, maintained, and occasionally overhauled. Cleanliness and preventative maintenance are key factors in maximizing the investment to avoiding more costly repairs and more elbow grease in the future.

Somerville was named the Model City by the Boston Globe in 2006 because of the management programs introduced by Mayor Curtatone. As Somerville continues with these programs, adds new programs, and increases tax revenue through commercial development, the City can address deferred maintenance and improve the care of the public realm.



Pilot Projects as a Tool for Change

Measure, Test, Refine

Pilot projects vary in scale, time-frame and typology, but in all cases they are a way to test new solutions at a 1:1 scale. This 1:1 scale invites existing and potential users to engage in the process of changing the city towards their needs and desires.

The content, time-frame and level of investment for a pilot varies depending on the project goals and success criteria. In order to ensure a high level of project success, materials and furnishings should be chosen according to the time-frame and a high level of maintenance should be provided throughout the test period. A pilot project with broken furniture and worn off paint can easily have the opposite of the intended effect and attract negative attention.

Measure, Test, Refine

Pilot projects have proven to be strong political tools for decision making, as they directly show how changes to the public realm affect city life.

They start in areas where public life has been measured and baseline information has been gathered. This baseline information helps to inform what the test should look like. The test then can be measured again, against the baseline public life data to understand impact. The findings from this analysis then inform how the test should be refined for a second iteration or for a more permanent installation. In this context, data collection should happen before and after the pilot implementation.

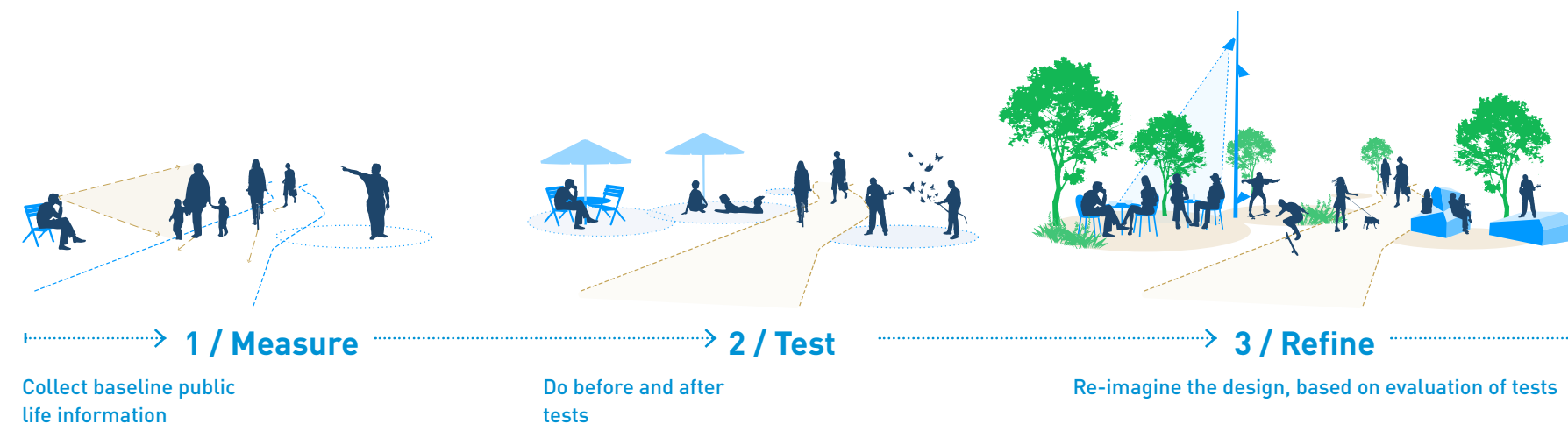
Pilots in Somerville

The City of Somerville isn't new to piloting projects, and has been a leader in experimenting with temporary activation and public space and measuring public opinion over the past decade.

Moving forward, the public space, public life survey data collected in the spring of 2015, and the findings and strategies that it informed, provide a baseline and framework from which to prioritize new projects to enhance Somerville's public realm.

Pilots can also be used to build greater awareness for how open space can be developed by maximizing assets that already exist - the city's streets and sidewalks - by re-purposing them from a people-first perspective and with a focus on user-experience and quality, rather than quantity of square footage created.

Pilot Project Process



Measure What You Care About

Keep Counting People

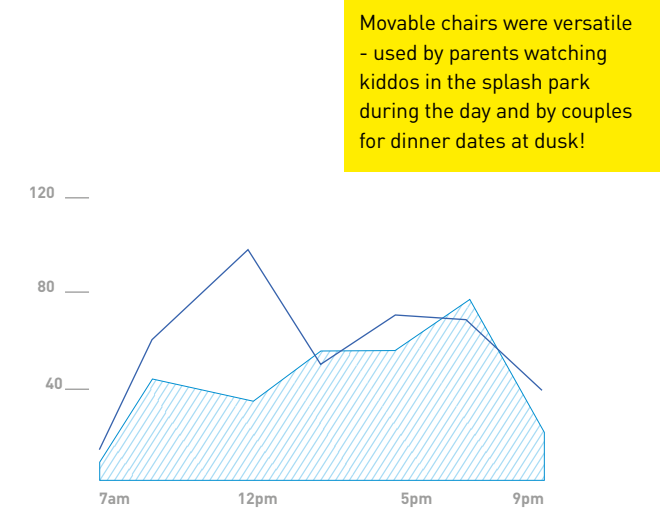
Somerville is building a city for people so they should continue to measure what is cared about. As of right now, the City has this PSPL report and annual bike and pedestrian counts organized by the Transportation and Infrastructure Division.

The City should continue to count what matters - people. By continuing to count the Public Space Public Life Survey can expand into a multi-year data set. In addition to continuing the Gehl methodology, bike and pedestrian counts can be edited to include age and gender data.

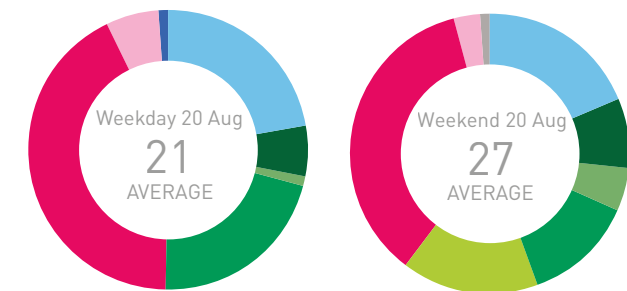
There's also opportunity to collect data for specific projects and how they have changed a space. The city did just that after the renovation of Kenney Park and prior to the installation of movable chairs in the summer of 2015.

William H. Hyte, an early pioneer in the study of human behavior in urban settings said, "Fixed seats deny choice. The designer is saying you sit here and you sit there. This is arrogant of him. People are much better at this than designers." Kenney Park is Somerville's first opportunity to experiment with movable furniture and also its' first success story! The movable furniture increased the stickiness of the park. The data also shows that there was a 20% increase in people visiting the park!

Kenney Park



40% more people were sitting in the park!



When are people staying where and what are they doing in the public spaces of Somerville

After renovation, before moveable chair installation
After moveable chair installation



- Standing
- Waiting, Transport
- Bench Seating
- Cafe Seating
- Secondary Seating
- Movable Seating
- Lying Down
- Children Playing
- Commercial Activity
- Cultural Activity
- Physical Activity
- Sitting/Standing w/ phone
- Working/Meeting

Before



After



