



Traffic and Parking FAQs

(Updated August 12, 2009)



On May 21, 2009, the Somerville Traffic Commission passed several regulatory changes affecting parking in the City of Somerville. These included changes to the Residential Permit Parking Program, parking meter rates and hours of operation, and the creation of parking meter zones. These changes, as well as additional changes currently before the Traffic Commission, are designed to improve parking design in the City of Somerville by increasing parking space turnover through better pricing policies, to encourage better compliance with state registration and excise rules, and to expand the number of spaces available to residents. The Traffic Commission believes that these changes are in the best interest of both the business community and residents of the City of Somerville.

Question: *What's changing in Somerville's parking regulations?*

Answer: The price of metered parking has gone to \$1/hour, and meters are in operation from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Somerville is also moving this fall to extend resident permit parking – already in place for 2/3s of streets – to the entire city. The City is adding new meters to some commercial areas that need more customer parking. Later this year, parking kiosks that accept credit and debit cards, as well as city ParkCards, will replace meters in several city-operated parking lots and, eventually, on some curbs in the heart of our busiest business districts. Many of our main thoroughfares will have a flexible version of resident permit parking that allows for unpermitted parking from 8:00 a.m. to 2:30 a.m. Monday thru Saturday.

Question: *How do these changes affect residents?*

Answer: For most residents, who already live on streets covered with resident permit parking, the only change will be higher rates when using parking meters. (But three quarters of Somerville's metered parking is used by non-residents.) Residents who live on city streets not yet under permit regulations will have to get parking stickers for their cars and visitor permits for their visitors, but they will also be able to park on a much wider range of streets – the new permits are good in any legal, non-metered space. Residents on permitted streets can always get special event permits for large parties. The permits are \$1 each; for more information, please call 311. Residents are also encouraged to buy ParkCards, available at the Office of Traffic and Parking (133 Holland Street) and City Hall (93 Highland Ave) – and coming soon to local merchants. ParkCards are rechargeable, come in \$20 or \$50 sizes, and work in every meter in the city. They save users the trouble of carrying quarters – and, best of all, they allow parkers to reclaim the unused portion of their time when they leave, so you pay only for the time you actually use.

Question: *How do these changes affect businesses?*

Answer: Customers will pay more for parking, but will also have more access to more parking spaces at more times of day. Through new “second shift” business permits and extended day business permits, employees and business owners (including artists who rent loft or studio space in Somerville) will have access to parking without competing for the metered and unpermitted spaces their customers need. With many main thoroughfares continuing to stay outside resident permit parking rules from 8 a.m. to 2:30 a.m., there will be plenty of day and evening parking for customers and visitors to businesses outside our business districts.

Question: *What about businesses, non-profit arts groups, and other organizations with special needs?*

Answer: The Department of Traffic and Parking will work to develop special signage, permits, metering or other solutions to assist organizations that are open early, or operate only occasionally or at unusual times. Any individual or group falling into this category, including communities of faith (churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, etc.) should call 311 for more information and to make an appointment to meet with Traffic and Parking officials.

Question: *What are “main thoroughfares” and how are their parking regulations different?*

Answer: The City plans to have 20 major streets designated as “Resident Permit Parking Only between 2:30 am and 8:00 a.m. with non-permitted 2 hour parking and unrestricted permit parking during other times. What that means is that, except for the predawn hours of the night and early morning, these streets will keep the same parking rules they currently have, providing more curbside parking for visitors throughout the city. The planned list of “major thoroughfares” is as follows: Broadway; Medford St.; Highland Ave; Holland St; Elm St.; Somerville Ave; Beacon St.; Washington St.; College Ave from Powderhouse Rotary to Morrison Ave.; portions of Lowell St from Richardson St to Medford St.; Boston Ave from Pearson Ave to Broadway; portions of Vernon St.; Central St from Summer St to Highland Ave. and from Cleveland St to Monmouth St.; Westwood St from Central St to the Somerville Museum; Pearl St. from Medford St to Bradley St.; Summer St from School St to Prescott St.; School St. from Knapp St to Somerville Ave; Walnut St from Bow St to Sanborn St; Cross St. from Broadway to McGrath Highway and Bonner Ave from Somerville Ave to Homer Square.

Question: *Why is the City making these changes?*

Answer:

- Because parking is very important to residents and businesses alike, but it’s a scarce resource and growing scarcer.
- Because people who live in Somerville should register their cars in Somerville and pay their excise taxes here.
- Because two thirds of the city already enjoys the benefits of permit parking, and Somerville is seeing more and more commuters and other non-residents parking on our city streets not to shop, dine or visit, but to commute – a problem that will only grow worse with the coming of the Green Line Extension.
- Because parking studies – including a study done here in Somerville – show that better pricing and demand management can actually increase the number of spaces available for business and entertainment-related parking at the times they are most needed.

- Because, even after cutting dollars and people, and asking many employees and all retirees to pay a greater share of their healthcare costs, the city needs the extra annual revenue – about \$1.75 million – that comes from managing parking resources more efficiently.

Question: *Who made these proposals in the first place?*

Answer: There were two principal sources for these policy recommendations:

- The first was the may 2009 Report of the Financial Advisory Committee (FAC), a special panel convened by Mayor Curtatone to help the City develop a plan to cope with deep, unexpected cuts in state aid. Among many recommendations about how to save money and increase revenue, the FAC called upon the City to “Implement city-wide residential permit parking” and “Increase rates and extend hours of operations for metered parking.”
- The second was an independent 2008 study conducted by local planner and parking specialist Mark Chase with assistance from Tufts University students. That study recommended that public parking spaces in the city should be re-priced by location and time of day “to insure that there’s always some parking available – roughly that one in every seven spaces is free.” The city is working to apply this standard wherever it is needed throughout Somerville.

Copies of these reports are available for download on the Parking Policy Changes Web page linked to the homepage of the City’s website, www.somervillema.gov

Question: *How can I provide testimony about parking changes?*

Answer: The Traffic Commission holds monthly public meetings with advance notice given on the City’s website and in the local newspapers. When the Traffic Commission takes up new business, the Chair of the Commission may choose to take comments from interested parties, but the Commission’s meetings are not public hearings. If an action of the Traffic Commission is challenged by public petition under the terms of Article VII of the City Charter Appendix (1978), the Traffic Board schedules a hearing prior to voting on whether to rescind or ratify the Commission’s actions.

Question: *Where can I find information about Traffic and Parking regulations and permits?*

Answer: Call 311 for information. The City of Somerville’s website is continually updated with new information. Please visit us at www.somervillema.gov.

Question: *Can plumbers, electricians, and other tradesmen working in my residence park on my block?*

Answer: Yes. If they are there to do short-term jobs (one or two days) they can use your Visitor Permit. If they will be working on longer term projects, they can go to Traffic and Parking to get their own temporary permit for the duration of the job.

Question: *How will residents be made aware of changes to residential permit parking?*

Answer: These changes have been well publicized by the Traffic Commission as well as several press releases issued by the City. Additionally, Traffic & Parking will be flyering the City to announce the changes over the next weeks and months.

Question: *Will the vote to adopt citywide permit parking be fully implemented and enforced on August 1st?*

Answer: No, implementation will *begin* on August 1st with the installation of new signage on affected streets. Once the signs are in place, the residents and businesses in the areas will be notified by hand-delivered flyer and by the City's Connect CTY mass notification system. Then, and only then, will enforcement begin. Actual implementation dates will vary by location.

Question: *Will private ways be affected by these changes in parking regulations?*

Answer: No. Private ways are not subject to city parking regulations, and it is up to abutters to develop and enforce their own parking policies. (Please note, however, that – as abutters to permitted public ways – residents of homes on private ways are eligible for visitors permits.

Question: *If I live on a street that will come under permit parking regulations as a result of these changes, how soon can I get a resident parking permit(s) for my vehicle(s) and visitor permits for friends, family or tradespeople visiting my home?*

Answer: You can get your permits right away. (And having a City of Somerville resident permit sticker on your vehicle allows you to park not only on your home street but on any permit parking street in the City.)

Question: *What about if I'm having a large gathering – a graduation party, a wedding, a big cookout, a family reunion etc.?*

Answer: Traffic and Parking will be happy to issue special event permits as needed. Each permit cost a dollar and is valid for one vehicle for one event.

Question: *Besides metered spaces, will there be any curbside spaces in the City were unpermitted vehicles can park without getting a ticket?*

Answer: Yes. To support daily visitors and customers, the City has called for eighteen main thoroughfares to change to Resident Permit Parking between 2:30 am and 10 am only with all other parking policies on those streets to remain as they are today.