

Yi-An Huang, City Manager

795 Massachusetts Ave., 1st Floor

Cambridge, MA 02139

By email to: citymanager@cambridgema.gov

cc: Melissa Peters, Acting Assistant City Manager of Community Development
Brooke McKenna, Transportation Commissioner
Kathy Watkins, DPW Commissioner
Nick Schmidt, CDD Transportation Program Manager
Cambridge City Clerk

From: Richard Freierman, Chair, on behalf of the Cambridge Bicycle Committee

February 20, 2025

Dear City Manager Huang,

The City Council has requested a report from the City regarding Garden St and the surrounding streets ([POR 2024 #153](#)). Garden Street was converted to a one way street for automobile traffic with separated bike lanes on either side as a Cycling Safety Ordinance project, with the street segment specifically identified for safety improvements to better connect Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School to the athletic fields at Danehy Park and Russell Field used by the school's sports teams. The Garden Street bike lanes have seen significant use by CRLS students, as well as Harvard students from the Radcliffe Quad dorms, families heading to Graham & Parks on Linnaean Street, and many bikers heading to Harvard Square and connecting to Cambridge Street and Broadway.

The Bicycle Committee would like to go on record as opposing any recommendation for the restoration of two-way motor vehicle traffic on Garden street for the following reasons:

1. Two-way traffic creates a much wider motor vehicle pathway, in which crossing the center line is easy. This encourages excessive speed, often far in excess of the 20 MPH city speed limit. As speed increases, the risk of serious injury or death to pedestrians and cyclists in the event of a crash increases exponentially.
2. The current one-way configuration allows for parking protected bike lanes in some sections, providing a physical barrier that makes the bike lane safer.
3. City staff are currently engaged in a number of very important safety improvement projects around the city, including on Mass Ave., Cambridge Street, Broadway, and Main Street. Any effort to reconfigure Garden Street would delay these essential safety projects and risk unnecessary crashes on those unfinished portions of the bicycle network.

4. The Eversource work on Garden Street is complete, and further delay in repaving will result in failing to correct numerous safety issues, including poor roadway surfaces and lack of proper striping and flexpost installations.
5. There is no clear evidence that the Garden Street design is the cause of increased traffic on nearby side streets. There is a long history of resident concerns with traffic, far pre-dating the Garden Street conversion to one way traffic (see below for details). Also, it's generally acknowledged that traffic overall throughout the region has increased in recent years, with no evidence that local issues are due to bike lanes.

The City arrived at the current Garden Street design after extensive public process and design review. This included a standard three public meeting process for projects like these through the spring and summer of 2022. During the presentations, the public feedback was clear that the community desired saving more parking and was willing to sacrifice a direction of automobile travel. After the second public meeting, the staff generated some new alternatives that took this feedback into account. At the third and final scheduled meeting, the community overwhelmingly preferred the one way concept. As this design was less developed and constituted a major roadway change, the City scheduled a fourth public meeting and open house, conducted more extensive engineering analysis, and increased community outreach. At the added fourth public meeting, the community reiterated their preference for the one-way concept and the City responded to committing to the design for the implementation.

The impetus for POR 2024 #153 focuses on concerns about traffic increases on surrounding streets, but it's not at all clear that the change to Garden Street is the primary cause. The community has been identifying street safety issues in the neighborhood for many years before the 2022 installation of separated bike lanes on Garden St. As evidence, there are numerous Policy Orders requesting the city install various forms of traffic calming, including on Garden St., Raymond St., Walden St., Richdale Ave, Linnaean St., Sherman St., and Concord Ave. See below for a sample of previous Policy Orders and City Manager Agendas referencing these problems and the desire for solutions.

As part of the analysis and implementation options included in the requested report per POR 2024 #153, the Bicycle Committee believes traffic calming solutions throughout the neighborhood would help directly address many of the complaints referenced in #153 and the numerous previous Policy Orders. These problems have long been identified as safety concerns for bicyclists and pedestrians and the current report is an ideal time to plan to finally address all of the known safety issues in the neighborhood. As evidenced by the preponderance of Policy Orders from before the Garden St Safety Improvement Project implementation, making changes to the Garden Street layout will not directly solve the long-term automobile traffic problems in the neighborhood.

Here are just some of the Policy Orders related to neighborhood traffic concerns:

- [POR 2017 #119: Raymond Street and Walden Street traffic calming](#)
- [POR 2018 #52: Traffic calming at intersections of Walden Street with Concord Avenue, Garden Street and Sherman Street](#)
- [POR 2019 #74: Street safety improvements on and along Garden St](#)
- [CMA 2019 #156: Street safety improvements on and along Garden St](#)
- [POR 2019 #281: Raymond Street and adjacent streets speed limit reduction](#)
- [POR 2019 #356: Raymond Street and Walden Street traffic calming](#)
- [POR 2020 #195: Walden Street traffic calming](#)
- [CMA 2020 #261: Walden Street, Raymond Street and Richdale Avenue traffic calming](#)
- [POR 2020 #203: Concord Ave traffic calming](#)
- [POR 2022 #126: Traffic calming requested on Garden Street, Linnaean Street, Sherman Street, Concord Avenue](#)

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Rich Freierman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard Freierman,
Chair, Cambridge Bicycle Committee