

December 13, 2020

Salem Traffic and Parking Commission
City Hall Annex
98 Washington Street
Salem, Massachusetts 01970

RE: Dangerous and Confusing Pedestrian Crossing at North/Essex/Summer Street Intersection

Dear Members of the Salem Traffic and Parking Commission,

As a group of Salem residents who use and observe the pedestrian crossing signals at the intersection of North, Essex and Summer Street on a daily basis, we are writing this letter to oppose the use of concurrent pedestrian and vehicular traffic signals at this intersection. After 5 months of personal experience as pedestrians and drivers traversing the North, Essex and Summer Street intersection, we find the concurrent traffic signals extremely dangerous and confusing. We understand and appreciate the City of Salem's efforts to want to improve the vehicular traffic flow on a very congested section of Route 114 comprised of North, Summer and Norman Streets. That said, it is our finding that the concurrent signals threaten the physical and emotional well-being of Salem's residents and visitors.

Prior to June 2020, pedestrian activation of the crossing signal at the intersection of North and Essex Street provided an **exclusive WALK signal** allowing pedestrians to cross with some sense of security that they would not be hit by a moving vehicle. Unfortunately, since June 2020, the eastbound vehicular traffic on Essex Street is getting a green light concurrently with the pedestrian walk signal. **As a result, during the last 17 seconds of the WALK signal, pedestrians crossing North, Summer or Essex Streets are put in harm's way as vehicles are simultaneously passing through their respective crosswalks.**

We have many concerns about the use of concurrent traffic signals at the very busy Essex/North/Summer Street intersection including the following:

- The North/Essex/Summer Street intersection is one of the most important access points for pedestrians and vehicles leading to Salem's downtown business, judicial, transportation, cultural, shopping, hospitality and recreational establishments and facilities.
- Visitors not familiar with this intersection and its concurrent signals travel from around the world to visit the Witch House, McIntire District, Captain Driver Memorial, Ropes Garden, Atheneum, and the First Church all of which are located near this crossing site.
- Local residents visiting the libraries, YMCA, restaurants, pharmacies, churches, court houses and commuter rail station must traverse this intersection multiple times per day.

- The numerous traffic signs posted to warn drivers of pedestrians in the crosswalks during concurrent signaling are confusing to both pedestrians and drivers. People tend to pay attention to the traffic lights rather than focus on superfluous signage cluttering an intersection.
- The concurrent signaling at this intersection is contrary to the objectives of some of Salem's most outstanding initiatives including **Salem for All Ages, WalkBoston Communities, Mass in Motion, Complete Streets, Salem's Mode Shift Program, and more recently, Shop Local**
- Hundreds of tour groups cross this intersection during the day and evening hours during the tourist season.
- This intersection lies within a **School Zone** as designated by the orange sign “**School Zone Ahead**” located on North Street less than 50 feet away from Essex Street.
- The North Shore Y daycare and after-school programs as well as the Henny Penny Nursery School are located within 300 feet of the North/Essex/Summer Street intersection. Furthermore, several elementary students from the Federal Street Neighborhood get the bus to get to school outside the YMCA on Sewell Street and must use this crossing during the school year.
- There are currently no speed limit signs on North, Essex and Summer Streets in the vicinity of this intersection to slow vehicles down as they approach the intersection
- There were no public hearings or notifications of the change to concurrent traffic signals prior to their installation at this intersection resulting in a trial by error method of dealing with this significant and unsafe change.
- Concurrent signaling at this intersection is especially dangerous for children, persons with disabilities, the elderly, parents with strollers and dog walkers.
- Many bicyclists traveling on Essex Street count on an exclusive walk signal to cross this intersection. For motorists making a left hand turn from Essex onto North Street with a concurrent signal it is very difficult to avoid hitting a bicyclist who is speeding across the intersection, despite due care on the part of the motorist.

As concerned residents, a number of us have made bona fide attempts to communicate and work with City officials to improve the safety of crossing the North/Essex/Summer Street intersection. Such attempts have included the following:

- Since June 22, 2020 we have sent emails to the Ward 2 Councilor, Christine Madore, Salem Councilors-At-Large, Mayor Driscoll, Traffic Department staff, City Electrician, Traffic and Parking Commissioners and Salem Police Department Traffic and Parking Division apprising them of the danger we observe with the newly instituted concurrent signals.
- On August 20, 2020 we attended a site visit at the intersection to discuss the hazards and issues of the new concurrent traffic signals with John Giardi of the Electrical Department and Councilor Madore.
- On October 22, 2020, several of us attended the Zoom meeting of the Traffic and Parking Commission to share our concerns about public safety and the use of concurrent traffic signals at the “Witch House” intersection.

- In more recent weeks, we have had several telephone conversations with Lieutenant Tucker of the Salem Police Traffic and Parking Division. Lieutenant Tucker recommended that we ask the Traffic and Parking Commission to be put on its next meeting agenda.

In closing, it is important to note that none of us claims to be traffic experts nor are we schooled in basic signal timing procedure and controller parameters. That said, the individual experiences that we have had trying to cross at the North/Essex/Summer Street intersection have been too frightful to ignore. We believe that the traffic volume and number of pedestrians that use this intersection are too large for concurrent signaling to be safe.

We look forward to continuing our efforts to work with the City of Salem to remedy this urgent public safety hazard as soon as possible.

Most Sincerely,