

From: davidgiacalone dgiacalone@nycap.rr.com 
Subject: Comments on Pedestrian Safety Project Plan (Part 1)

Date: February 1, 2021 at 11:30 AM

To: Christopher R. Wallin cwallin@schenectadyny.gov

Bcc: Stephen Williams swilliams@dailygazette.net, Miles Reed reed@dailygazette.com, pdemola@timesunion.com, gloria kishton gloria.kishton@gmail.com, Lawrence Schmidt schmidttra@aol.com, Emmanuel Maillet emmanuel.maillet@imelavi.fr

D

Dear Mr. Wallin [Chris]:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Pedestrian Safety Project plan presented to the public online on January 19, 2021. For most of 2020 and into this year, I have taken a walk almost daily to our Downtown from the far end of the Stockade, making a circuit creating a rectangle with Union St. and State Street on the north and south, and Washington Avenue and Clinton Street on the west and east. Of course, I often walk up the streets that intersect those streets. My Daily Stroll has made me directly aware of many problems faced by pedestrians in Downtown Schenectady. Below is Part I of my comments on the Pedestrian Safety Project, and the Public Informational Meeting of Jan. 19, 2021. [\[online link\]](#)

This first part of my comments discusses four intersections and Winter Safety. Because of its importance, I will be submitting Part II later today, focusing on the proposal to construct/install “sidewalk/curb extensions” or “safety islands” that I believe would be ineffective in achieving the stated safety goals. The proposed Plan calls for the use of Flush-to-the-Pavement pavers or bricks that would not have vertical curbs, raised sidewalks, or bollards to distinguish the extension/island from the roadway.

1] Erie Boulevard at Union Street. Like Suzy Unger and Daniel Carlson at the Public Information meeting, I was most surprised that Erie Boulevard at Union Street was not on the project list. In my experience, it is deemed the scariest intersection downtown by most people living, working, shopping, or visiting in the Stockade. The intersection has been hazardous to pedestrians (and vehicles) the entire 30 years I have lived in the Stockade, but drivers seem to be more and more oblivious to their responsibilities toward pedestrians.

The explanation that the Erie Boulevard intersections were all improved only a few years ago is not persuasive when great hazards still exist that can be readily mitigated. Furthermore, the proposal does address the corner of Liberty and Union, which received expensive pedestrian safety treatments less than half a year ago.

The biggest problem, I believe, and a possible source of liability for the City, given years of complaints, is that the vehicles are given a green light as soon as the Walk Signal starts. And, they apparently feel entitled to go without yielding to pedestrians in the crosswalk in a very long crosswalk.





When walking toward Lady Liberty from the Stockade side, drivers turning right onto Erie are usually cautious, probably because they start so close to the pedestrian in the crosswalk. However, I must constantly watch for cars traveling at a fast speed turning left from the underpass onto Erie. One reason they are traveling fast, is that they are trying to get around me or cut in front of me without a collision. Often, I stop, somewhat stupefied, and surely looking unhappy. The drivers act as if I am in the wrong, because they do indeed have a green light and seem unaware of nuances such as Right of Way. I get yelled at and given the finger a lot (and I'm not even at City Hall).

Personal Anecdote: On Friday, January 22, at 4:30 pm, when heading east in the crosswalk with the Walk signal, FIVE vehicles came at me in succession, as I tried to get across to Lady Liberty and safety. I needed to stop, as one was trying to cut in front of me. And, I *wanted* to stop to instruct a driver or two on yielding to pedestrians in crosswalks, with the light. I was angry and so were the drivers. Things could have easily gotten out of hand. I was rather shaken as I made it to relative safety. So much for a healthy, relaxing walk.

Coming the other direction, I must constantly glance back over my shoulder and try to walk faster, because vehicles are “breathing down my neck”. (Two years ago, trying to hurry, I tore the meniscus in my right knee and needed months of physical therapy.)

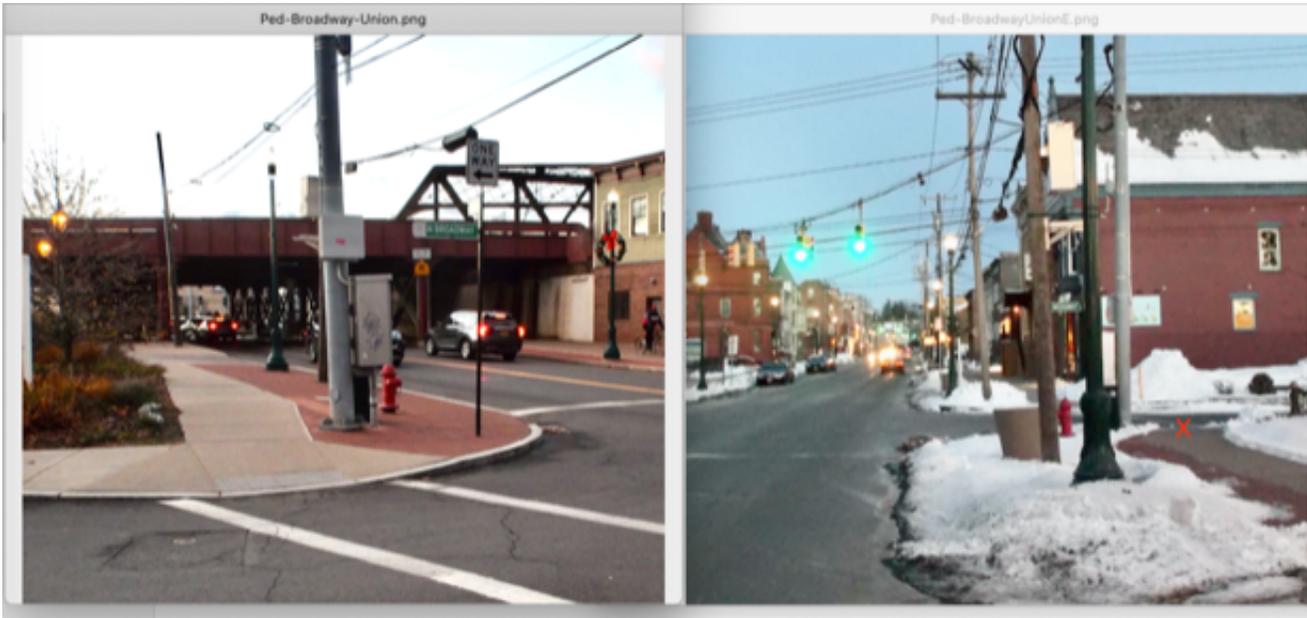
Ironically, pedestrians who wait a moment after they get the walk signal, in fear of the frequent red-light runners, are at an additional disadvantage, as the oncoming turners see a greater opportunity to slip by.

As a relatively spry Senior Citizen, I feel fortunate compared to others with physical limitations that slow them down, limit sight or hearing, or require lots of forward attention to move forward. But, I confess to feeling foolhardy for crossing so often at Union St. and Erie Boulevard.

- **SUGGESTIONS:** For the lengthy crosswalks at this intersection to be safely navigated on foot (or in wheelchairs and similar devices) there must be a **leading pedestrian interval (LPI)** to give pedestrians an advance walk signal before the motorists get a green light. Or, as at State and Erie, all lights should remain red and no turns allowed during the walk signal cycle. Signs declaring “Yield to Pedestrians in the Crosswalk” would also help.

21 N Broadway at Union Street next to the Centre Street Pub has fast-moving traffic

2] **N. Broadway at Union Street**, next to the Centre Street Pub, has fast moving traffic turning south from Union St., not expecting traffic coming out of Broadway, which is one-way heading north. Due to poles and a utility box, drivers coming east from Erie Blvd. and the train underpass can have a difficult time seeing pedestrians, and pedestrians have their back to that traffic as well as obstacles blocking their view. Photos below. Vehicles making a left from Union onto N. Broadway are often taking the turn at speed.



- SUGGESTION: A sign for both directions saying “Yield to Pedestrians in Crosswalk” might be a sufficient reminder.

3] **Broadway at Liberty St.** Despite short cross walks, this busy intersection, with workers, shoppers, theater-goers, train station seekers, and pub patrons, has long-needed pedestrian call buttons. I'm glad that State money has finally gotten City Hall to do something about it. Traffic often comes fast from under the train trestle, on a curve that does not allow them to see pedestrians on the crosswalk or at the curb until close to the intersection.

- SUGGESTION: In addition to the call buttons, a sign is needed for vehicles entering the tunnel from Erie Blvd. or the Train Station, indicating Crosswalk Ahead - Yield to Pedestrians.

4] **State at Erie Boulevard:** The four-way red light and No Turn on Red signs make this intersection safer than Erie at Union for those who wait for the walk signal, so long as snow and slush and deep puddles are not lining the curb or blocking access to the call button. I wonder, however, if pedestrians (say those going from Electric City apartments to “Wall Street” or the train station) could be allowed to cross diagonally, to save time and prevent having to wait for a second walk signal.

5] **Protect Winter Pedestrians.** Even when the roadways are cleared relatively quickly, it is unacceptable for so many corners, crosswalks, and access ramps in a small “walkable” Downtown (all a stone’s throw from City Hall) to be unsafe long after a snowstorm. In addition, far too many sidewalks are left uncleared or iced-over long after the snow stops.

causing hazards or inconvenience for pedestrians. And people on foot in the streets due to uncleared sidewalks and corners are a hazard for vehicles as well as themselves.

Dollars are fungible. Even if snow clearance cannot be fit into any of the fundable categories for the \$1 million from the State available under this program, dollars will have been saved that should have been spent on pedestrian safety this year. It seems to be time for the City to earmark funds specifically for a work detail that does a circuit of the Downtown intersections and corners frequently during and after a snow storm. Perhaps, as vaguely promised, Smart City surveillance could pinpoint such needed locations, but the area is small enough to be covered by a crew with shovels and ice breakers on a regular schedule.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Part II will be coming along this afternoon.

David Giacalone