

MEETING MINUTES

PARKING and TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

8:00 A.M. – November 1, 2018
City Hall – Conference Room A

I. CALL TO ORDER:

At 8:00 a.m., Chairman Doug Roberts called the meeting to order.

II. ROLL CALL:

Members Present:

Chairman, Doug Roberts
Deputy City Manager, Nancy Colbert Puff
Public Works Director, Peter Rice
Police Captain, Frank Warchol
Fire Chief, Steven Achilles
Member, Ralph DiBernardo
Member, Shari Donnermeyer
Member, Harold Whitehouse
Alternate Member, Steve Pesci

Member Absent:

Member, Mary Lou McElwain

Staff Advisors Present:

Parking and Transportation Engineer, Eric Eby
Parking Director, Ben Fletcher

Fire Chief Steven Achilles re-introduced himself to the Committee. He served on the Committee in the past. He stated he is looking forward to serving and took a moment to recognize Deputy Fire Chief James Heinz's service to the Committee.

III. ACCEPTANCE OF THE MINUTES:

Harold Whitehouse requested that the minutes from the October meeting reflect his full comment about the Middle Street Bike Lane Project. He originally voted against the project, but noted that he would sit back and watch to see how it turns out, and not comment on the project right now.

Harold Whitehouse moved to accept the meeting minutes of the October 4, 2018 meeting as amended, seconded by Public Works Director Peter Rice. **Motion passed 6-0.** Steve Pesci and Fire Chief Steven Achilles abstained from voting because they were not present at the October meeting.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Charles Griffin commented on the new bike lanes on Lafayette Rd. and Middle St. and the legal ramifications of installing the lanes. Mr. Griffin stated he spent 15 days observing bicycle activity during morning peak hours to see how many high school students used the new bike lane to get to school. He observed only 2 cyclists on 2 days, 1 cyclist for 7 days and no one for 6 days.

Mr. Griffin was concerned that the bike lanes put the cyclists on equal footing with motorists in terms of rights and privileges. He stated as a matter of public safety and fundamental fairness, cyclists should have the same responsibilities required of motorists. Mr. Griffin provided a handout containing applicable New Hampshire statutes on motor vehicles and City Ordinance Chapter 7 relating to cyclists on the road. Mr. Griffin believed that the bicycles should be inspected and licensed annually.

Tony Barrett commented that it was already a tough intersection at Greenleaf Avenue and Lafayette Rd. The bike lane and white bollards are making it difficult for two-way traffic to flow on Greenleaf Avenue at the intersection. Mr. Barrett requested that the Committee look at the intersection and area.

Chairman Doug Roberts noted there may be a report on the bike lane next month. He stated any major changes would need approval by the State because the project received federal funding.

Brent Schmitt was present at the October meeting and commented on the aesthetics of the bike lane project on Middle St. He noted that more cars are parking on Cass St. because of the bike lane. He presented the side view mirror from his car. It was struck as a result of the increased traffic. Mr. Schmitt commented that it was a bike lane to nowhere. It did not connect the High School and Middle School like it was originally supposed to do. Mr. Schmitt stated he requested information on why the bike lane ended at Highland, but he has never received it. He thought the bike lane should be extended to the Middle School if it remains.

Cynthia Hart expressed continued concern about speeding on Aldrich Rd. There have been electronic devices installed and they have worked intermittently. Ms. Hart also expressed concern about the sight lines turning from Aldrich Rd. onto Middle St.

Pat Bagley questioned the proposed closure of the south leg of Edward St. Ms. Bagley commented on the bike lanes. She feels that more education was needed for drivers turning right off of Middle St. onto South St. Ms. Bagley thanked Deputy Chief James Heinz for his service on the PTS Committee and welcomed Fire Chief Steven Achilles.

Charles Fleck commended the Committee for putting in the bike lanes. Mr. Fleck appreciates the Middle St. bike lanes for a safer, faster way to get downtown, especially when riding with his family. Mr. Fleck commented that the bike box at the intersection of Middle St. and South St. was still confusing even after watching the videos. Mr. Fleck noted that visibility was low at Cass St. It caused a traffic jam. He also spoke against bike registration for several reasons.

Councilor Rick Becksted spoke as a City Councilor and raised concerns that were sent to him by the public. Some people's cars have slipped on the green paint at the Lafayette Rd. intersection. He is concerned about safety and accidents. The COAST busses don't have a place to pull over and stop on Middle St. because of the bollards. Councilor Becksted also spoke as a resident. He suggested adding solar powered radar speed signs that could be installed at the beginning of neighborhood streets, like Aldrich Rd. He stated the solar powered component would decrease overhead expenditures for departments.

Roger Pederson was concerned with the debris in the bike lanes and stated they are too narrow for a cyclist to weave around the debris and stay in the lane. Today was recycle pickup day. The bins were scattered in the bike lanes. Middle St. was safer without a bike lane because the road was wide enough for bikes and cars. Bike lanes would be better for narrower roads like Middle Rd. or South St.

Laura Kennedy spoke in support of the Aldrich Rd. agenda item. She stated that something permanent needs to be done to help slow traffic.

Vince Lombardi commented that speeding on Aldrich Rd. has been a concern for years. He thanked the Police Department for their presence on Aldrich Rd. Mr. Lombardi suggested re-doing the striping on the road to make it look less like a highway, adding a stop sign at Boss Avenue, or adding speed signs in the middle of the road. The existing bump outs don't get plowed. The street is not cleaned. He thanked the Committee and requested they address the issue.

Brent Schmitt commented that stop signs should be installed on Aldrich Rd. to calm traffic.

Mimi Clark noted that the intersection at Cass St. and Middle St. should be less of a right angle. Cars should be able to ease into traffic. Ms. Clark also noted that cars were crossing the double line now because Middle St. is too narrow. She also does not like the aesthetics of the bike lane on Middle St.

Chairman Doug Roberts noted the concerns about speeding on Aldrich Rd. and acknowledged that traffic calming measures for straight narrow streets in Portsmouth have not always been successful. The early reports on Middle St. show that vehicles are operating at lower speeds.

Harold Whitehouse suggested adding an agenda item after public comment that would allow the Committee to respond to topics presented by public speakers. Chairman Doug Roberts stated some agenda items could be taken out of order, but some topics may require staff research and may need to be addressed at the next meeting. Harold Whitehouse commented that a lot of people were staying just to hear an item being presented later in the meeting.

Deputy City Manager Nancy Colbert Puff moved to hear agenda item VIII.A. Aldrich Road Traffic Calming Program updates next on the agenda, seconded by Harold Whitehouse.

Motion Passed 8-0.

VIII. INFORMATIONAL:

A. Aldrich Road Traffic Calming Program update. Eric Eby provided a status update. Laura Kennedy completed step one of the traffic calming program by collecting petitions of homeowners looking for traffic calming measures to be implemented. A traffic camera will be put at the intersection of Boss Avenue and the speed recorder will continue to collect data. Once data is collected, staff can make recommendations on traffic calming measures. He will provide an update at the next meeting.

Chairman Doug Roberts requested that Eric Eby comment on the street striping. Eric Eby responded that the striping was removed at the Islington end of the street because there were no cut-outs for parking on that end. The road becomes narrower because cars are parked on the street and the striping caused confusion about whether or not cars could go around the parked cars. Removing the rest of the striping on Aldrich Rd. would not help in calming traffic because cars do not park in the travel lanes. The road won't become narrower.

Chairman Doug Roberts questioned if fog lines on the edge of the road made the road seem narrower. Eric Eby confirmed that was correct and they are more visible at night or in bad weather. Chairman Doug Roberts asked about the centerline. Eric Eby responded that it was not as critical except for the curve near Sewall Rd. to keep vehicles in the correct lane.

Chairman Doug Roberts requested clarification on stop sign installation and requirements. Eric Eby referred to the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), which is a Federal Highway Administration requirement. A 3-way or 4-way stop requires fairly equal traffic volumes on each leg of the intersection. He stated there is much more traffic on Aldrich Rd. than there is on Boss Avenue. Since there is very little traffic on the side streets, drivers would roll through the stop signs. It would create another hazardous situation.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if a police cruiser could monitor traffic speed on Aldrich Rd. Police Captain Frank Warchol responded that they have in the past and could do it again. Police Captain Frank Warchol also noted that 75-80% of the complaints received by the PD is about speeding in the City. He stated there are limited resources, which makes monitoring each street all the time impossible. Officers are present in the City and are working to keep the traffic calm.

IV. FINANCIAL REPORT:

Harold Whitehouse moved to accept the financial report dated September 30, 2018, seconded by Public Works Director Peter Rice. **Motion passed 8-0.**

VI. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Request to remove 10 metered parking spaces on Deer Street between Bridge Street and Maplewood Avenue, to accommodate anticipated traffic from new Foundry Place parking garage. Eric Eby commented that this recommendation was brought forward in the traffic study for the new parking garage and new buildings in the area. The study recommended several improvements, which included re-striping Deer St. to provide two lanes heading out of the garage to the Maplewood Avenue signal. In order to get that roadway width, the 10 metered parking spaces would need to be removed. Staff observed traffic exiting the garage last night after the Halloween parade. Traffic backed up from the Maplewood Avenue signal to the garage. Eric Eby recommended giving staff more time to observe the flow on a day-to-day basis, and evaluate when to implement a change.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if Eric Eby would report back at the December meeting. Eric Eby responded that he could report back on it frequently and when the volume levels change and improvements are needed, he will present a recommendation.

Harold Whitehouse noted that this would remove two handicap spaces outside a popular restaurant and they would need to be relocated. Eric Eby clarified that there were two spots, but only one is a handicap space. Public Works Director Peter Rice requested Eric Eby speak to the number of handicap spaces required to be on a public street. Eric Eby responded that by law there are no requirements regarding handicap spaces on public streets at this time. If an eatery has a parking lot, then they are required to provide handicap parking spaces in the lot. Eric Eby stated there are handicap spots in the garage and the spots across the street will remain.

Shari Donnermeyer asked about the number of cars in the new garage on Halloween. Parking Director Ben Fletcher estimated that there were a little over 500 cars in the garage. It was nearly full and free. Shari Donnermeyer asked about the number of cars in the Hanover garage. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that he did not have the official count, but earlier in the evening the total was estimated to be in the 400s.

Steve Pesci thanked staff for their work and commented that the area is going to be a future neighborhood. He stated when evaluating peak traffic flows from the garage, the future neighborhood should be considered.

Shari Donnermeyer moved to table the request to allow time for staff to observe traffic operations along Deer Street after the opening of the garage, seconded by Deputy City Manager Nancy Colbert Puff. **Motion passed 8-0.**

Ralph DiBernardo apologized for being late and stated he would abstain from voting and deferred to Steve Pesci.

B. Request to close leg of Edward Street at Junkins Avenue. Public Works Director Peter Rice stated that this section of roadway has been closed for about 8 months as a result of the Pleasant St. project. It has been observed that the section is a dangerous intersection because of limited sight lines. Edward St. is also not really equipped to be a through street. He added that another important benefit to the closure is that it would connect the William Whipple Memorial to Haven Park. William Whipple signed the

Declaration of Independence. The monument is currently isolated in the little triangle of land and many people do not realize it is there. He also stated there haven't been any complaints about the area being closed due to the Pleasant St. project.

Harold Whitehouse stated he was there yesterday and talked to a gardener working on the property of the woman who lived on the corner. He was told she had not been notified. He said this change could increase traffic at the stop sign, traffic noise and possibly negatively impact her. He expressed concern that she had not been notified.

Harold Whitehouse stated the action item should be delayed until the Pleasant St. project is completed. He is concerned about the restoration of the area and the impact on the soil from the pipes and materials stored at the site. He stated the area should be restored to the condition it was before construction. Public Works Director Pete Rice noted that the only restoration involved would be picking up the construction materials and sweeping the area. Public Works Director Peter Rice stated that contractors are required on all jobs to restore site conditions.

Fire Chief Steven Achilles requested the Committee suspend the rules to allow for public comment from a homeowner on Pleasant St. Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to suspend the rules to allow for public comment, seconded by Shari Donnermeyer. **Motion passed 8-0.**

Ron Bourgeault spoke in favor of the closure because it would greatly reduce traffic. His only concern was to ensure that there was still adequate fire access to the area.

Fire Chief Steven Achilles confirmed there was appropriate fire access, and suggested installing a crosswalk to create clear access to the park. He also supported how the closure would benefit the Whipple Memorial and the park.

Steve Pesci thanked staff for bringing this to the Committee. He supported the road closure and agreed that connecting the Whipple Memorial and the park would be a benefit. He does not support installing parking spaces because it would hinder the opportunity to connect the park and the green space.

Shari Donnermeyer agreed that the homeowner should have been notified, and thought the proposal should be tabled until there was a clear plan on how to close the road.

Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that the reason they were asking for it now was because the contractor working on the Pleasant St. project could do it as part of the existing contract for no added cost. It would be loamed and seeded. In the long term, staff would work to improve connectivity in that area.

Harold Whitehouse noted that area was very picturesque and widely used. He supported adding some parking to the area.

Deputy City Manager Nancy Colbert Puff suggested that the Committee move forward with the proposal after a conversation with the woman on the corner had taken place. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that there was probably some flexibility with

the contractor, so it did not need to be done immediately. It would make sense to put it on hold another month to talk through the details and reach out to the homeowner.

Fire Chief Steven Achilles moved to direct staff to contact neighbor and report back at the December 2018 meeting, seconded by Shari Donnermeyer. **Motion passed 8-0.**

C. Request to amend ordinance to prohibit parking of mopeds and bicycles against monuments outside of parks, by Fire Department. Fire Chief Steven Achilles noted this was especially evident in front of Fire Station 1 on Court St., but he has seen it happen at other monuments in the City. Public Works Director Peter Rice agreed that it detracted from the monuments, and clarified that this would apply to all monuments. Steve Pesci supported this action item, but noted the term monument could be vague.

Fire Chief Steven Achilles moved to amend ordinance Chapter 7, Article V, Section 7.510 G, to add the words “or monuments” and to amend ordinance Chapter 7, Article XVII, Section 7.1702 F, to add the words “or monuments”, seconded by Public Works Director Peter Rice. **Motion Passed 8-0.**

VII. OLD BUSINESS:

No old business.

VIII. INFORMATIONAL:

B. COAST Public Forum. Eric Eby noted that COAST is conducting several public forums to get input on the best way to meet the region’s changing transportation needs. The next meeting is November 8, 2018 at City Hall starting at 6:30 p.m. Harold Whitehouse questioned what they were looking for exactly. Eric Eby responded that they are looking for suggestions on improvements on their service.

C. Neighborhood Traffic Calming request updates:
South Street at Brackett Lane
South Street at Middle Road
South Mill Street at Pickering Avenue

Eric Eby stated three requests have come in. Speeds were recorded and traffic cameras have been installed. Staff is in the process of watching the videos and evaluating the data to determine what needs to be done.

D. PTS Open Action Items. No action required by Committee.

IX. MISCELLANEOUS:

Harold Whitehouse wanted to go into detail about Deputy Fire Chief James Heinz no longer being on the Committee and requested clarification from Fire Chief Steven Achilles. Harold Whitehouse stated that Deputy Fire Chief James Heinz had a lot of knowledge about the Committee, especially about response times. He stated he

consistently agreed with him regarding response times. He greatly values Deputy Fire Chief James Heinz, and expressed his sadness that he would no longer be on the Committee.

Fire Chief Steven Achilles stated he worked with the Fire Commission and made the administrative decision to serve on the PTS Committee. Deputy Fire Chief James Heinz is planning to retire within the next year and a half. There have been discussions for some time about the transition of responsibilities. Fire Chief Steven Achilles adamantly stated that the decision was not a reflection on Deputy Fire Chief James Heinz. He assured the Committee that he would work with them to advocate for public safety and to ensure that fire apparatus response is appropriate.

Steve Pesci noted that there were many comments expressed about the bike lanes. He stated he did not think that registration and safety testing of bicycles was in any way related to the function of the bike lanes. He stated he was not aware of any communities in the region that had this program.

Chairman Doug Roberts agreed that there weren't successful mandatory bike registration programs. He mentioned several cities that have given up on mandatory registration programs. Portsmouth has a voluntary registration program to mainly track stolen bikes. Chairman Doug Roberts was not able to find any statistics on people getting injured from a defective bike. The most common bike injury resulted from a car hitting them.

Police Captain Frank Warchol confirmed officers stop cyclists to address bicycle safety issues when they see it. This is a current practice for the Police Department. He questioned if the community would want officers to use limited resources on bicycle inspections instead of other pressing needs in the community.

Shari Donnermeyer agreed with the concerns expressed and pointed out that it would be expensive for the public to keep up with inspections and registrations.

Public Works Director Peter Rice noted that winter is coming and it is most likely that before the next meeting, most or all of the bollards would be removed and the lag holes would be sealed. The Department is looking at how to best approach snow removal operations.

Harold Whitehouse mentioned that he counted the bikes at the High School and saw very few. Eric Eby clarified that the bike lane to the High School is still being finished and the signal may not have been operational when Harold Whitehouse conducted his observation. He stated he received reports from school staff reporting a lot of initial bike activity; now that the weather is cooler it may be dropping off.

Eric Eby noted that the Woodbury Avenue Bridge is closed for the next 13 months.

X. ADJOURNMENT – at 9:27 a.m., **VOTED** to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted by:

Becky Frey
PTS Recording Secretary