

AMENDED MEETING MINUTES

PARKING and TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

8:00 A.M. – April 4, 2019
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, Mary Lou McElwain
Member, Harold Whitehouse
Alternate Member, Steve Pesci

Staff Advisors Present:

Parking and Transportation Engineer, Eric Eby
Parking Director, Ben Fletcher
Planning Director, Juliet Walker

III. ACCEPTANCE OF THE MINUTES:

Ralph DiBernardo moved to accept the meeting minutes of the March 7, 2019 meeting, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. **Motion passed 9-0.**

IV. FINANCIAL REPORT:

Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to accept the financial report dated February 28, 2019, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. **Motion passed 9-0.**

V. PUBLIC COMMENT:

City Councilor Rick Becksted expressed concern about the crosswalk at Middle Road and Essex Street. Cars do not stop to let pedestrians cross. There should be a flashing pedestrian crosswalk sign installed at the crosswalk. He also requested that the City install the least amount of bollards required for the bike lane. Construction is about to begin on Islington Street, which means people will avoid taking that route. The turns from the side streets will be very important to get on and off Middle Street. People will be using them to avoid Islington Street construction.

Charles Griffin echoed Mr. Becksted's comments about the bollards. People have had time to adjust over the mild winter.

VI. PRESENTATION:

No presentation.

VII. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Loading Zone ordinance update. Formal recognition of all signed loading zones and to allow use of all loading zones by noncommercial vehicles with loading zone permits. Eric Eby commented that this effort was undertaken to clarify and clean up the Ordinance to reflect what was happening in the field. The City worked with the Legal Department to do a complete rewrite. There were no new loading zones added and no loading zones removed. The characteristics of a loading zone were clarified. The City has some 24-hour loading zones and some time restrictive loading zones, which are active loading zones from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Both types of loading zones have a 30-minute time limit. There is a commercial loading zone permit program, which allows cars without commercial plates to apply for a loading zone permit. This is typically a business owner that needs to make frequent deliveries to their business. The Ordinance had a section that stated that no more than 10 minutes could pass without activity in the loading zone. This has proven to be too hard to enforce, and many people needed more than 10 minutes. That section has been removed from the Ordinance. The loading zone on Bow Street was changed to a 24-hour loading zone. Mr. Eby pointed out a loading zone on State Street that was being proposed to change to a time restricted loading zone to allow for parking at night. The 24-hour loading zone on Pleasant Street and Maplewood Avenue and two time-restricted zones on Congress Street were never added to the Ordinance, so now they are included. The loading zone on Chestnut Street was changed from a time-restricted zone to a 24-hour zone.

Steve Pesci commented that the zones are frequently used by rideshare services like Uber. He questioned how this Ordinance related to rideshare services loading and unloading in the zones. Police Captain Frank Warchol stated the Police Department handles enforcement of rideshares using loading zones.

Mary Lou McElwain clarified whether or not the Market Street Extension loading zone was included in the Ordinance. Eric Eby confirmed that it was and nothing was changing with that loading zone. Mary Lou McElwain questioned if there was a charge for the permit. City staff responded that it was \$50 per year and there is a proposed increase to \$100 per year.

Mary Lou McElwain questioned if the parking outside the restricted loading zone hours was free. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that it had not been addressed specifically. Public Works Director Peter Rice suggested adding signage and requiring people to pay for the spots at a nearby pay and display meter. Chairman Doug Roberts suggested that staff could look into that. Parking Director Ben Fletcher agreed and noted that it would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Shari Donnermeyer pointed out that it's a confusing area, and people would not automatically know they would have to pay for that spot between 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. Public Works Director Pete Rice confirmed that staff would look into it and report back.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if the Police would be able to enforce this and requested a report back in May. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that the Parking

Division would be in charge of enforcement. The Police are notified if a car is towed. Chairman Doug Roberts confirmed that staff could give a report in May on how it is working.

Ralph DiBernardo pointed out that there were two issues. One was metering the space between 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and the other was that cars could park in the loading zone after 7 p.m. for the night. Public Works Director Peter Rice pointed out that cars are currently parking in loading zones after 7 p.m. and this is not a change.

Ralph DiBernardo questioned if there was anything in the loading zone permit that prevented them from using it as a freebie parking spot throughout the City. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that the particular zone is not defined in the permit. Public Works Director Peter Rice added that there is a 30-minute time limit with the permit, and they have issued citations for people who were not using it properly.

Chairman Doug Roberts pointed out that one of the photos on Congress Street showed a truck in the loading zone and a truck across from the loading zone also making a delivery. It is very common for a truck to park there and block the left turn lane.

Fire Chief Steven Achilles suggested aligning the times of the restricted loading zone and the metered parking, so that there would not be an hour gap of metered parking required.

Mary Lou McElwain noted that there is often a truck parked at the loading zone at the State Street and Atkinson Street intersection. It impacts the visibility for cars trying to turn. Eric Eby commented that there was a bump out behind the loading zone, so it takes up the entire space between Atkinson Street and the bump out. Mary Lou McElwain was concerned about that loading zone. Eric Eby noted that was one of the only loading zones in that area, so it is used often.

Ralph DiBernardo moved to accept proposed changes to Chapter 7 Sections 7.601, 7.602, 7.603 and 7.604, seconded by Harold Whitehouse. **Motion passed 9-0.**

B. Congress Street at Fleet Street lane use change.

Eric Eby commented that this went along with making the loading zone on Congress Street official between Fleet Street and the Vaughan Mall. When there is a car in the loading zone it can block the through lane and force cars to merge quickly. The proposal is to make that lane a right turn only and keep all the through traffic in the unblocked lane. The intersection at Maplewood Avenue has one through lane and a turn only lane on either side. This change would make the Fleet Street intersection consistent with that one. The proposal is to take off the arrowhead for the through lane. Then add a right turn only signage at the intersection. The scenario was run through the downtown traffic simulation model. It showed that traffic would back up in the through lane, but not all the way to Market Square. It would not cause a gridlock. The change would be monitored, and if there were too many backups the paint can be changed back.

Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to change the shared through/right-turn lane on Congress Street at Fleet Street to an exclusive right-turn lane for discussion purposes, seconded by Harold Whitehouse.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if all of the NO TURN ON RED signs would remain. Eric Eby confirmed that was correct.

Public Works Director Peter Rice thought that it was a needed change, but there was probably more change needed than just this one intersection. This would be a good opportunity to consider making Pleasant Street one lane coming into Market Square and have Daniel Street be one lane through Market Square. The two lanes on either side can become queues for parking and turn lanes. Public Works Director Peter Rice requested that Eric Eby look at that idea, and report back at the next meeting before they initiate the change.

Harold Whitehouse commented that would be a radical change. This proposed change should be put in and the other suggestions should be looked at more by staff.

Ralph DiBernardo questioned how much time would be appropriate to look at this change and the Pleasant Street change and report back. Eric Eby responded that 60 days would be best.

Deputy City Manager Nancy Colbert Puff commented that all of the businesses in the area should be notified about the proposed changes, so they are aware of the impact.

Chairman Doug Roberts did not necessarily think that the items were linked together. It could be possible to implement them incrementally.

Ralph DiBernardo moved to amend the motion to allow staff time to investigate the right turn only lane and making Pleasant Street one lane into Market Square, seconded by Public Works Director Peter Rice. Motion Passed 7-2. Harold Whitehouse and Chairman Doug Roberts opposed the amendment because they did not think the changes needed to be tied together.

The Committee voted on the motion to allow staff time to investigate the right turn only lane and making Pleasant Street one lane into Market Square. **Motion Passed 8-1.** Harold Whitehouse voted opposed.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS:

No old business.

IX. INFORMATIONAL:

A. Annual Pavement Marking Painting update.

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that last year there were some staffing issues, so they were not able to get as much painting done as they had hoped. This year the City has been working closely with the contracted service provider and internal staffing to make up for last year. Crosswalks are the main focus. The contractor agreement has been expanded to include crosswalks and other delineating features.

Painting is impacted by temperature and moisture. It has to be dry and temperatures have to be above 50 degrees.

Chairman Doug Roberts questioned if the crosswalk lines would be expanded from 6 feet wide to 8 feet wide. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that the policy would be to maintain the 6-foot width in the slow speed areas. The crosswalks will be widened in the high-speed areas.

Mary Lou McElwain was concerned that crosswalks that were impacted by construction sites were not being replaced. Public Works Director Peter Rice stated he would be happy to meet with members to discuss the issue. Mary Lou McElwain clarified that her comment was that she thought Unitil would be participating in the reconstruction costs.

B. Middle Street bike lane update.

Planning Director Juliet Walker talked about their plans for the 2019 season roll out. When the bike lane was implemented last fall it had the full design including the flex-post bollards. The bollards were removed in the winter in part to allow for snow clearing. It also provided an opportunity to revisit the design. The City has reviewed public comments and taken them into consideration. The bike lane is designed to support the safety of the bikers as well as the travelers along the bike lanes. The goal is to ensure there are no cars drifting into the bike lanes. The bollards and buffers were added to create a barrier. This helps promote safety for bicyclists who may not be comfortable mixing with traffic. The intent is to encourage more use of the bike lane through the design. A full year will be required to monitor the traffic and bike lane usage in all seasons to accurately report back on the design. There will be no flex-post bollards installed until early June. Traffic will be monitored from April 15th to May 15th as the bike lane usage increases. There will be a reduced number of bollards installed in early June. All of the lines will be repainted as part of the citywide striping program. There will be 60 bollards installed this year. Last year there were about 130 bollards. The new bollards will be shorter, more flexible, and easier to install and remove. The distance between them will be approximately 80 feet. They will be installed in places where the buffer is narrow, at intersections, and at the start and end of on-street parking. They will be placed inside the buffer where possible. The City is evaluating if one parking space should be removed at the Aldrich intersection. That will be decided based on the traffic monitoring results. The monitoring will include traffic speeds, traffic behavior at side streets and intersections, pedestrian and bike counts, and parking counts. The City will work in collaboration with the Police Department and social media to ensure the messaging about the bollard installation is clear and accessible.

Chairman Doug Roberts thought this was a very thoughtful response to the criticism.

Steve Pesci agreed and thanked the staff for their efforts. A marginal amount of bollards are beneficial and do improve safety. A reasonable amount of them are necessary for this project. Shari Donnermeyer agreed.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if the vendor was taking back the old bollards, and asked about the additional cost of the change. Planning Director Juliet Walker responded that she could report back to the Committee next month. The City was not happy with the bollards from last year. Their quality was sub-standard.

Ralph DiBernardo commented that cars often straddle the yellow line on Middle Street to avoid the bike lane and bollards. In addition, people confuse the first set of parking spots on Cabot Street with a travel lane. It should be better defined as parking. Planning Director Juliet Walker confirmed that was a location that bollards will be reinstalled. Police Captain Frank Warchol noted that moving the bollards into the buffer will give the road about 4 feet on each lane, so that should help with the yellow line crossing. Planning Director Juliet Walker added that they would continue to observe the behavior and noted that when the City repaves Middle Street there will be more opportunity to make changes.

Fire Chief Steven Achilles introduced Captain Todd Germain in the audience and noted that he would be representing the Fire Department starting with the next meeting. Fire Chief Steven Achilles is retiring and resigning from the Fire Department to take another position. Public Works Director Peter Rice thanked Fire Chief Steven Achilles for his contributions to the City.

Public Works Director Peter Rice stated he met with Ward 1. The neighborhood had requested a traffic calming process be initiated in their area. They have gone through a series of proposals, and the most recent one to be presented to the Ward 1 Neighborhood Committee involves a significant amount of bollards.

Public Works Director Peter Rice also stated the City is exploring installing parking meters in the Prescott Park lot. There are currently 20 free parking spaces.

Ralph DiBernardo moved to continue the outstanding agenda items to the May 2, 2019 meeting, seconded by Public Works Director Peter Rice. **Motion passed 9-0.**

X. ADJOURNMENT – at 8:58 a.m., VOTED to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted by:

Becky Frey
PTS Recording Secretary