

MEETING MINUTES

PARKING and TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

8:00 A.M. – August 1, 2019
City Hall – Council Chambers

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
Fire Chief, Todd Germain
Police Captain, Mark Newport
Member, Ralph DiBernardo
Member, Mary Lou McElwain
Member, Harold Whitehouse
Alt. Member, Jonathan Sandberg

Absent:

Public Works Director, Peter Rice
Member, Steve Pesci

Staff Advisors Present:

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

III. ACCEPTANCE OF THE MINUTES:

Mary Lou McElwain moved to accept the meeting minutes of the June 6, 2019 meeting, seconded by Harold Whitehouse. **Motion passed 7-0.**
Police Captain Mark Newport was not present for vote.

IV. FINANCIAL REPORT:

Mary Lou McElwain requested a report on the Foundry Garage. Parking Director Ben Fletcher provided a graph showing transient revenues from November 2018 to July 2019 for Foundry Garage. He stated the numbers are trending up. It is still below budget, but has improved significantly over the summer.

Harold Whitehouse noted that City Council recommended a flat fee for downtown employees and questioned if it was under consideration. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that he agreed with Councilor Becksted's statements quoted in the paper. However, a rate of \$5 a day would be \$100 a month, which is the price of the monthly pass. Chairman Doug Roberts stated he would be preparing a proposal for discounted rates for downtown employees and residents if they parked on the top floors of the garage.

Ralph DiBernardo complimented Parking Director Ben Fletcher on the budgeting for the year. Ralph DiBernardo noted that they were managing parking with parking funds. Parking Director Ben Fletcher confirmed that was correct.

Jonathan Sandberg questioned if the Foundry Garage wasn't filling up because there was less demand for parking or because people were parking elsewhere. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that parking was a supply and demand model. Street parking is operating at 150%. Hanover Garage is in the 90% range. The price structure of all the parking may need to be adjusted to motivate people to park in the Foundry Garage. There will be more discussion on the issue.

Mary Lou McElwain asked if the free parking and shuttle at Connect Church was taking away from parking at Foundry Garage. She stated there should be more discussion about ancillary parking in Portsmouth and how it effects parking at the Foundry Garage. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that the Connect Church has plans to develop the lot. The City's lease agreement expires in February 2020, but the shuttle ends on Labor Day. Parking Director Ben Fletcher did not anticipate the shuttle would run again next year.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if there was anything in the contract that put a time limit on when the land around the Foundry Garage needed to be developed. Parking Director Ben Fletcher was not sure.

Deputy City Manager Nancy Colbert Puff moved to accept the financial reports dated May 31, 2019 and June 30, 2019, seconded by Ralph DiBernardo. **Motion passed 8-0.**

V. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Marc Stettner spoke to agenda item VII.E. He stated the intent of the motorcycle spots set up in downtown Portsmouth was to attract compact vehicles such as motorcycles. Mr. Stettner opposed the fee of \$2.00 an hour that was approved at the June PTS meeting. He stated the City's Fee Committee should be setting the fee rate. Mr. Stettner submitted a letter questioning if the PTS Committee had the legal authority to set fees. He requested the Committee move to suspend the fee approved in June until the legality questions are resolved by the City's Legal Department.

Jason Combs spoke to traffic volumes and speeding on Middle Road. He stated that because of bridge construction there is an increase in traffic and speeding on Middle Road. Cars are not stopping for pedestrians in the crosswalks. Police Captain Mark Newport confirmed that he would follow up on the police report mentioned by Mr. Combs. Eric Eby stated a traffic camera could be placed on Middle Road to monitor traffic. There is a speed display sign in front of the Chase Home and the crosswalk was recently repainted. Chairman Doug Roberts confirmed that staff would monitor and report back. Mary Lou McElwain supported Mr. Comb's concerns.

Marc Stettner spoke a second time. He suggested raising parking meter fees to direct cars into the lots and garages. He stated the fees needed to be reasonable.

VI. PRESENTATION:

No presentation.

VII. NEW BUSINESS:

Deputy City Manager Nancy Colbert Puff moved to suspend the rules and address agenda item VII.E. next, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. **Motion passed 8-0.**

E. Letter from Marc Stettner regarding dedicated motorcycle, moped and scooter parking. Chairman Doug Roberts noted that Mr. Stettner raised some good points and the Ordinance was a little unclear. It says that if one person on a motorcycle pays for a regular space and parks in it, then other motorcycles can park in the same space for free. Chairman Doug Roberts recommended suspending the current vote in place and consulting the City Attorney to clarify legal issues. In the interim, the Committee could make recommendations on discounted motorcycle parking to staff and suggest a revision to the Ordinance.

Ralph DiBernardo agreed with Mr. Stettner's concerns. Condensing five motorcycle spots into one regular spot is a good idea, however, there is not enough income to be made on these spots to tip the budget. Previously, if one motorcycle displayed a valid ticket for the space then it would cover all the spaces. Ralph DiBernardo supported maintaining that process. Harold Whitehouse agreed.

Chairman Doug Roberts agreed that they should maintain a discount for motorcycles, but how it is executed remains to be determined.

Ralph DiBernardo moved to suspend the previous vote made on June 6, 2019 to establish a fee of \$1.50 per hour when using the ParkMobile App or \$2.00 per hour at the display meter, maximum three hours for the motorcycle-specific spaces in the designated motorcycle parking area and refer to the City's Legal Department and staff for a report back at a future meeting, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain.

Motion Passed 7-1. Harold Whitehouse opposed.

A. Hill Street parking. Eric Eby stated that the Committee voted to prohibit parking on Hill Street last year. City Council removed the item from the Omnibus, which would allow parking on this street once finalized. The roadway is between 15-18 feet wide at the narrowest point. Traffic would be blocked if on street parking was allowed on both sides of the street. He stated the Committee can evaluate if parking should be allowed on some portions, or if it should be totally prohibited.

Ralph DiBernardo noted that this street would not have a sidewalk. If parking was allowed on both sides there would be nowhere for people to walk except for in the street. The Committee has a responsibility to maintain safe streets for cars and pedestrians.

Fire Chief Todd Germain supported the motion as written. If parking were allowed on the street, it would restrict access for fire safety equipment.

Jonathan Sandberg commented that he knows people living on Hill Street. Originally, they were upset to learn they would be losing on street parking, but they understand it is a safety issue.

Eric Eby stated a letter from Elizabeth Bratter dated July 31, 2019 was received and copies were provided to the Committee this morning. She suggested adding parking between Tanner Street and Autumn Street. There is room for two parking spaces, but it would only leave a 12-foot wide travel lane. Chairman Doug Roberts stated the area proposed was where the Fire Department had expressed concern about not having ample room for equipment and maneuvering.

Deputy City Manager Nancy Colbert Puff moved to prohibit parking on both sides of the public portion of Hill Street, between Bridge Street and Autumn Street, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. **Motion passed 8-0.**

B. Request for parking restrictions at the end of Little Harbor Road, by residents of Little Harbor Road. Eric Eby stated that at the site visit on Wednesday the Committee members did not see any cars, but cars are often parked there on the weekends. When cars are parked too close to driveways, it is very difficult for residents to get out. This also creates an emergency vehicle access concern. Parking is currently allowed. The City can monitor and observe and report back on a recommendation.

Harold Whitehouse asked when staff would report back. Eric Eby responded that he anticipated it would be at the next meeting.

Mary Lou McElwain moved to refer to staff for observations and report back at the next meeting, seconded by Deputy City Manager Nancy Colbert Puff. **Motion passed 8-0.**

C. Concerns with speeding vehicles on Little Harbor Road, by Shel Krasker. Eric Eby stated staff had started data collection on Little Harbor Road. If given more time, staff would continue data collection and report back at the next meeting.

Mary Lou McElwain moved to refer to staff for observations and report back at the next meeting, seconded by Police Captain Mark Newport. **Motion passed 8-0.**

D. Change 15-minute space back to 3-hour space on Deer Street opposite High Street. Eric Eby stated the space was voted on last year to create a 15-minute space in front of a retail business. That business has since closed. There is no longer a need for that 15-minute space. It is currently getting very little use, and would provide more revenue as a 3-hour parking spot.

Ralph DiBernardo moved to change time limit from 15 minutes to 3 hours for parking space on Deer Street opposite High Street, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. **Motion passed 8-0.**

VIII. OLD BUSINESS:

A. Request for loading zone on Vaughan Street for 111 Maplewood Avenue building, by the Kane Company. Chairman Doug Roberts noted that in previous discussions the Fire Department expressed concern about a fire hydrant at the location. Eric Eby stated the fire hydrant was moved as part of the construction on Vaughan Street. There is now plenty of room for a loading zone, and the hydrant would not be blocked.

Mary Lou McElwain clarified that it was an open loading zone, and not specifically reserved for Kane Company. Eric Eby responded that was correct. It is time restricted to 6 AM to 9 AM. Ralph DiBernardo asked if it would revert to a regular metered space after the time restriction and Eric Eby confirmed that was correct.

Ralph DiBernardo moved to approve loading zone on south side of Vaughan Street at the corner of Raynes Avenue, with hours of 6 AM to 9 AM, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. **Motion passed 8-0.**

B. Report back, proposed lane use changes at Congress Street and Fleet Street, and Pleasant Street at Market Square. Eric Eby presented an aerial photo showing the layout of the proposed lane changes. The new roadway markings will help drivers know which lane they need to be in to make right hand and left hand turns. The diagram also shows removing one of the left hand turn lanes on Pleasant Street. This will make the area less confusing. This change could be done with painting. These changes would make the traffic flow through the area less confusing. There is a loading zone on Congress Street between Fleet Street and the Vaughan Mall. It creates one through lane in that section of roadway.

Ralph DiBernardo asked that the changes be monitored to ensure they did not create unwanted congestion. Eric Eby confirmed that would be done.

Chairman Doug Roberts stated he supported the changes on Congress Street, but was not sure if he supported the changes on Pleasant Street. The City is looking at capital improvements to Market Square within the next couple of years. He expressed concern about too many changes in a short period.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that pedestrian traffic was already very heavy. If there were ways to make it safer for pedestrians, she would support it. She also supports installing an audio crosswalk at Fleet Street.

Ralph DiBernardo commented that one of the problems with the Pleasant Street crosswalk is the tip down in front of the North Church. People tend to cross at the tip down instead of using the crosswalk.

Harold Whitehouse commented that once pedestrians were in the crosswalk they have the right-of-way, however, they do not seem to abide by the rules.

Chairman Doug Roberts questioned if it made sense to shorten the crosswalk on Pleasant Street with bollards to prevent people from going outside the crosswalk. Eric Eby responded that something like that could be done, but they would have to be careful not to block the on-street parking.

Eric Eby noted that these measures could be taken separately or together depending on what makes sense. Jonathan Sandberg supported the changes and thought they would make the area less confusing.

Chairman Doug Roberts commented that the only way to know if the plan will work is to implement it. Eric Eby stated the plan could be implemented on a trial basis, and staff will evaluate and report back. This plan could help inform future decisions.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if the loading zone in front of Popovers would remain the same. Eric Eby responded that the loading zones would remain as they are.

Fire Chief Todd Germain moved to implement the lane use changes on Congress Street and Fleet Street, and Pleasant Street at Market Square in the fall of 2019 on a trial basis and report back, seconded by Police Captain Mark Newport. **Motion passed 8-0.**

IX. INFORMATIONAL:

A. Neighborhood Parking Program, referral from City Council. Chairman Doug Roberts noted that the City Council decided not to enact the Neighborhood Parking Program. He volunteered to propose an alternative plan. The proposal will come back to the Committee for discussion in the future. Elizabeth Bratter's letter dated July 31, 2019 regarding the NPP was provided to the Committee.

B. Parking Principles Discussion. Chairman Doug Roberts proposed discussing this at the next meeting to allow the Committee more time to review.

C. Funding for pedestrian-activated Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB) on Dutton Avenue near Memorial Bridge parking lot. Eric Eby commented that they have found funding for the Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon. They are in the process of getting quotes for the purchase and installation.

D. Quarterly Accident Report by Police Captain Mark Newport. Police Captain Mark Newport provided an overview of the quarterly accident report. Chairman Doug Roberts noted that accidents were down compared to the past two years. Police Captain Mark Newport commented that there is a lot of construction activity so people could be driving slower. The majority of accidents happen on Lafayette Road and Woodbury Avenue. The Police Department has stepped up enforcement, which has probably contributed to the decline in accidents. Chairman Doug Roberts questioned if they were targeting Lafayette Road specifically. Police Captain Mark Newport responded that most of the accidents on Lafayette were low speed accidents because traffic is bumper to bumper.

Ralph DiBernardo questioned if it was legal to radar for speeds at the Islington Street overpass and have a cruiser further down to pull people over. Police Captain Mark Newport responded that it was legal.

Mary Lou McElwain commented on the tractor-trailer bike accident. There is more tractor-trailer traffic in the City and there should be more awareness. Deputy City Manager Nancy Colbert Puff agreed and commented that mirrors can stick out from vehicles as well.

E. PTS Open Action Items. No Committee discussion.

X. MISCELLANEOUS:

Mary Lou McElwain requested the Committee discuss moped parking in the downtown and the City's policy at a future meeting. There have been mopeds parked on public sidewalks. Chairman Doug Roberts confirmed it would be added to a future agenda.

XI. ADJOURNMENT – Harold Whitehouse moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:05 a.m., seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. **Motion passed 8-0.**

Respectfully submitted by:

Becky Frey
PTS Recording Secretary