

Citywide Neighborhood Committee  
Ward 3 Forum  
Zoom Meeting September 30, 2020, 6:00 pm

Committee Attendees:

Larry Cataldo, Lori Soloway, Mark Syracuse, Dave Cosgrove, and Beth Margeson. Paul Mannle was unable to attend.

City Staff:

Juliet T. H. Walker, Planning Director for Planning Department Zoom Coordinator  
Karen Conard, City Manager  
Peter H. Rice, Department of Public Works  
Mark Newport, Portsmouth Police Department, Interim Chief of Police  
Todd German, Portsmouth Fire Department Chief  
Assistant Mayor Jim Splaine, Portsmouth City Council

Discussion Items:

The meeting began at 6:05 pm. Larry Cataldo opened the meeting with an announcement that for the first time in years, the Citywide Neighborhood Committee can advocate for individual neighborhoods. The committee will continue to advocate for issues involving more than one neighborhood. He introduced the committee including Lori Soloway, the CNC forum coordinator and moderator for this forum. She made the following points:

- Mission Statement: Advocate for the neighborhoods in Portsmouth, preserve and protect neighborhoods.
- Ward 3 has a new voting location - Portsmouth Senior Center, 125 Cottage Street
- The next forum will be for Ward 1, which will be held in 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2021.
- To get on mailing list for Citywide Neighborhood Committee: [cncportsmouth@gmail.com](mailto:cncportsmouth@gmail.com)

Mark Newport, Portsmouth Police Department, Interim Chief of Police

Captain Newport reported on the enforcement of the new mask Ordinance. He says that there have been no issues, people are being compliant, and the police focus is really on educating the public and encouraging the wearing of masks when can't maintain distance of 6". The police officers are wearing masks and are in the neighborhoods. Looking for areas to address from the public.

Todd German, Portsmouth Fire Department, Chief

Chief Germain said that the fire department has fully adjusted to the new world of rapid response in Covid times. The department has been doing a lot of training during the nicer outside weather. The EMS is going through its certification period. They are planning for fire prevention week in schools and hoping to being able to do that during Covid.

Larry Cataldo asked Police and Fire Chiefs if they have seen measurable uptick in behavioral issues. Both responded that they had but with opening up, it has improved. They note that they are seeing the same people over and over again, a kind of "catch and release" situation, as described by Captain Newport.

In response to a question about the need for additional training, they said that what is needed is additional officers. People are escalating higher and it is requiring multiple officer responses.

The Fire Chief added that EMS professionals are coming under attack in ambulances. The Police Department provided instructions on how to deal with uncooperative patients in the back of ambulances.

Rep. Peter Somssich asked whether the police and fire departments were being overutilized in dealing with mental health issues. Captain Newport said that police do try to connect people with social workers but still needed a police response since social workers do not have the training or equipment to deal with someone who can become violent. Chief Germain noted that people experiencing a mental health crisis are a danger to themselves and others and need to go to hospitals. Captain Newport added that a lot of the calls they get are from hospitals asking for assistance.

#### Karen Conard, City Manager

Manager Conard noted that she is in month 10 of her tenure. She is looking forward to learning about the issues that are important to Ward 3 and noted that she is a new resident of Ward 3 herself.

She addressed questions that were submitted to her before the meeting. She said that in anticipation of the November General election, several thousand ballots were sent out this week.

As for Covid and mental health, she noted that there is no way to know how the mental health problems in Portsmouth compared to other towns in Rockingham County were in comparison with other counties. She noted that there are different forms of mental health services available with remote counseling and that Seacoast Mental Health and Portsmouth Hospital were two local resources.

As for addressing mental health, being able to keep the infection rate down overall and the sacrifices that allow that to happen, means that kids can remain in schools, parents can work, the library is open. In addition, every single department in the city has responded extensively to Covid-19 in addition to regular duties.

#### Peter Rice, Director of DPW

Director Rice noted that Ward 3 is the biggest ward in the city; it encompasses a variety of different neighborhoods, as well as the Pease Development Authority. He then presented an overview of projects in the Third Ward.

He fielded questions about Portsmouth's ability to work with Google;

- That Water Country is still an ongoing challenge, even with the improvements in signage and that drivers utilizing Waze and GoogleMaps complicate matters.
- That overall the volume of traffic on Banfield Road has increased significantly
- That the pending permanent closure of Echo Avenue - estimate timetable of permanent closure of Echo Avenue is pending per DOT's approval.

General Question and Answer Session:

Question from Larry Cataldo from police and fire chief: DV, opioids, are things getting more serious. Haven't noticed a measurable uptick in response. That's what fire chief said.

Rep Somssich had three questions for Director Rice:

1 - What is the status of the project upgrading on the Route 1 corridor from Market Basket to Rye?

Answer: It has come to a halt; it is stalled in the design phase and they don't have funding for the entire stretch. People are divided about it.

2 - Can you reduce the speed limit on Rt. 33 from Plains Avenue to South Street?

Answer: Director Rice corrected him to say that it was Middle Road from Peverly Hill Road. There is a

request to lower the speed limit at Parking, Traffic, and Safety but does not know the status. He noted that this corridor is identified for a traffic calming project in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

### 3 - What are the water demands from Pease Development?

Answer: The demands for water/sewer are in the process of being projected. This is a much larger discussion more appropriate for when those demand numbers are known. Portsmouth is a regional water and sewer provider for the towns of Greenland, New Castle, and Rye.

Walter Hamilton asked about the closing of Ocean Road . Director Rice indicated he did not have an answer on that.

Liza Hewitt brought up that speed and safety on Middle Road is a major issue. She says that she lives at- 726 Middle Road - two doors down from Chase Home and where the speed indicator is. People view it as a central corridor. There are around 140 residences in that area. She has seen a truck clock 55 miles per hour, seen huge dump trucks with drivers on phones, a great deal of speeding, people try to cross road there and box trucks speed by. Asked that the police try and get out there, that she does not see cars being stopped for speeding. It is an accident waiting to happen. Has asked Mr. Eby for the issue to be brought before PTS and it is on the Agenda for next week.

Planning Director Walker is aware of the ongoing concerns and that some interim traffic calming measures have been implemented but that the best way to address speeding is to change the design of the road through the CIP.

Captain Newport admitted that enforcement was down due to Covid but that area is being patrolled more now.

Assistant Mayor Splaine asked about additional signage. Captain Newport said a great deal of signage in that area already.

Director Rice said that the effectiveness of traffic calming measures, such as flashing speed limit signs tend to wear off after a while.

Rep. Somssich said that lowering the speed limit would be the easier way of doing it.

Roy Helsel of 777 Middle road said that traffic is awful.

Peter Somssich: lowering the speed limit is much faster way of doing it.

Monique Shevlin told Director Rice Click 'N Fix is terrific. She lives on stretch of Greenland Road near Greenland near Rt. 33. Through Click 'N Fix, DPW came out to pick up after accidents, and fresh cement that had been dumped. That on Grafton Street, near Pease, everyone uses that road and motorists use it as a dumping ground - littered with alcohol, food trash, and cigarettes, whose responsibility is it?

Director Rice answered that the bike path is the city's responsibility. He rides it regularly and city staff goes down periodically to pick it up but it is an ongoing battle and will advise staff to look into it. Ms. Shevlin complimented Director Rice on the vegetation maintenance and winter plowing.

Meg Kepner asked whether there was any movement on the Cate Street extension at Coakley Road and Route 1. Director Rice and Planning Director Walker said that there is no desire to change that for now, until they see the traffic flow. They are looking to provide safe crossing but not over Route 1 and noted that there are no sidewalks on Coakley

Kelly Shaw expressed frustration with the Zoom meeting format. To Chief Germain, she gave a big shout out to Company C for helping her when she was locked out of her house. She also thanked Director Rice for the work on Banfield Road. But as soon as the crews go home at night, 18 wheelers and box trucks are

flying down road. The new housing units near the Rite Aid near the Yoken's sign, Peverly Hill, Banfield and Route 1 are creating a lot of issues in what is a more rural area and wonders how much can be sustained without enough police officers in the area and no ability to add to the budget.

Karen Conard says that city staff is not only available in this forum but also going forward.

The next forum is scheduled for the first quarter of 2021.

Submitted by Beth Margeson, Acting Secretary of the Citywide Neighborhood Committee