

MEETING MINUTES

PARKING and TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

8:00 A.M. – June 4, 2020

Remote Meeting Via Zoom Conference Call

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman Peter Whelan called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

II. ATTENDANCE BY ROLL CALL:

Members Present:

City Councilor/Chairman, Peter Whelan
Public Works Director, Peter Rice
Planning Director, Juliet Walker
Fire Chief, Todd Germain
Police Captain, Mark Newport
Member, Mary Lou McElwain
Member, Steve Pesci
Member, Jonathan Sandberg
Member, Harold Whitehouse
Alt. Member, Erica Wygonik

City Staff Present:

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

III. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Gerald Duffy spoke in support of the recommended changes to the Middle Street bike lanes presented by staff and that they be sent to the City Council. He spoke about the importance of education, enforcement and environment (infrastructure). He asked the Committee and the City Council to stay the course on this project.

Adrienne Harrison spoke in support of the all-way stop at Broad Street and Highland Street. She thanked Eric Eby for the quality of work he put into his assessment. Ms. Harrison and several neighbors submitted emails requesting the all-way stop. They have safety concerns for the children in the neighborhood. She also spoke in support of the recommended changes to the Middle Street bike lanes.

Matt Glenn spoke in support of the Middle Street bike lanes and the Islington Street construction project. He fully supports the plan put forth by City staff and spoke in support of extending the network of bike lanes. He stated the improvements on Islington Street are overdue and should not be delayed.

Ann Poubeau spoke in support of the Middle Street bike lanes and provided five reasons for her support. She also supports the Islington Street construction project and the improvements in front of the White Heron.

Kristie Jorgensen spoke in opposition to the Middle Street bike lanes project. She stated in her opinion the project is misguided and poorly executed. She stated she supports cycling but does not support the project. Safety, sight lines, underutilization and lack of on-street parking

need to be addressed. Ms. Jorgensen sent an email outlining her views and opinions of the project to Chairman Whelan and it was forwarded to the Committee. It also included a photo of her driveway view of Middle Street traffic.

Ned Raynolds spoke in support of the Middle Street bike lanes. He is in full support of the recommended changes proposed by staff.

CJ Fleck spoke in support of the Middle Street bike lanes. Protected bike lanes improve safety. He stated we should focus on improvements and making the project better instead of tearing it down.

David Allen is a resident and a board member of SABR (Seacoast Area Bicycle Riders). He supports the Middle Street bike lanes and the recommended modifications. The bike lanes provide safety for the experienced bicyclists and now for all the new riders due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Allen also spoke in support of the Islington Street construction project.

Thomas Gruen asked the Committee to consider an alternative proposal. Keep the first and longest component of the bike lane from the High School to Lincoln Avenue in its current form. Start the sharrows portion at Lincoln Avenue instead of Highland Street, allowing curbside parking on both sides of Middle Street. It would affect about 1,600 feet of the bike lane, simplify the entire corridor from three sections to two sections, allow for safe parking for the Middle Street residents along this portion of the route, and eliminate the current conflict. Mr. Gruen sent an email detailing his proposal to City staff.

Jason Combs spoke in support of the Middle Street bike lanes. He is concerned about vehicular speed and volume on Middle Road, where he lives, and the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists.

Josh Pierce is a resident and the general manager at Papa Wheelies. He spoke in support of the Middle Street bike lanes. He stated recreation bike sales are unprecedented. There are many new riders in our community and the bike lanes create a safe space for these new riders.

Charles Griffin spoke to the Middle Street bike lanes. He stated installation of bicycle logos and "May Use Full Lane" signage is all that is necessary for safety along the entire length of the project. He requested the Committee recommend "a bollard-free summer" to the City Council. He asked about the federal funding and if the penalties were disclosed when the decision was made to support the project. He asked if all or part of the funding would need to be returned if logos and signage were to be installed instead of using bollards.

IV. FINANCIAL REPORT:

Harold Whitehouse moved to accept the financial report as presented, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. **On a roll call vote 9-0, motion passed.**

V. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Recommended changes to Middle Street bike lanes, by City staff. Planning Director Walker provided a brief summary. At the City Council's request, City staff held a public meeting on March 12, 2020. The public shared their concerns, comments, and suggestions for improvements. The public comments and statements were provided in the PTS packet and

will be posted on the project webpage. She encouraged people to review the comprehensive project webpage. The City was required to follow a very specific process required by New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT). The process required three alternatives and an engineering study. The first recommendation for the grant was to do traditional bike lanes, but through the public process staff heard from a lot of people who wanted more protection and separation. The result was the preferred alternative, which was a combination of a protected bike lane and a buffered bike lane. It was accepted and voted on by the City Council.

The design and planning process included public meetings, presentations to PTS, parking counts, notifying residents about parking changes, and a final approval by the NHDOT Bureau of Traffic. Planning Director Walker stated it was a long process, but required by the Local Public Agency (LPA) program through NHDOT in order to get the grant funding.

After the meeting in March, the COVID-19 pandemic stopped all work. A meeting was held between Public Works, Planning, Fire and Police to discuss possible modifications to the bike lanes this year. Given the current context of the COVID-19 emergency, staff agreed that substantial changes to the bike lane design should not be a City priority at this time, and staff jointly agreed to recommend low cost modifications to the bike lanes for the coming season. The modifications are outlined in the memorandum on page 2. Modifications include re-installing a limited number of flex post bollards at all intersections and at start of on-street parking areas, removing on-street parking at intersections to improve sight lines, restriping areas, and reducing posted speed limit to 25 mph.

Substantial changes to the bike lanes would require a substantial investment from the City, and would require returning federal funds to the government. Planning Director Walker has asked for clarification from NHDOT on the extent of allowable changes and the quantity of funds that would need to be returned and she will report back to the City Council once guidance has been provided.

Mary Lou McElwain moved to endorse recommended changes to the bike lanes for spring and summer, and send to City Council for approval, seconded by Steve Pesci.

Mary Lou McElwain supports the bike lanes and that the recommendations from staff will make it safer. She spoke to sight line improvements needed at Cass Street, Aldrich Street and Cabot Street. Debris in the bike lanes is also an issue. Tree branches are blocking visibility.

Harold Whitehouse asked if the City has the right to change the configuration of U.S. Route 1. He supports holding another public meeting and Charles Griffin's idea of "a bollard-free summer". He stated he would reluctantly support the motion.

Erica Wygonik thanked staff for their data driven decisions and supports their recommendations. She spoke to infrastructure improvements needed to make the more dramatic changes suggested by the public and how the costs to do the work would be significant. She recommends using the taller flexpost bollards to reduce vehicle speeds. Bollards should also be installed at locations where vehicles enter onto Middle Street to avoid clipping the bike lane.

Jonathan Sandberg supports the motion and staff recommendations. He spoke to decreased traffic because of COVID-19 and the bike lane usage. He asked staff to look at the intersection of Lafayette Road and Greenleaf Avenue because cyclists get cut off there.

Steve Pesci supports staff recommendations for 2020, the longer-term changes and ongoing data collection proposed in the memorandum. He stated he has looked at the concerns raised by the opponents and is empathetic. He agrees sight lines and visibility are issues of greatest concern. He presented some possible solutions. Mr. Pesci thanked the public for their comments but feels staff is being unfairly criticized by some opponents. Staff has worked diligently and listened to the public.

Mary Lou McElwain concurred with Steve Pesci's comments and concerns. She spoke to concerns about aesthetics on Middle Street and requested the bollards be placed at the Lafayette Road and Greenleaf Avenue intersection. She thanked staff for their work.

Harold Whitehouse requested the agenda item be delayed for one or two months. He stated now is not the time to make changes. He thanked staff for their work but is hesitant to move forward now.

Chairman Whelan thanked the staff for their work and efforts. He stated he is very sympathetic to the residents who live on Middle Street. He has received photos from residents concerned about sight lines and driveways. He supports bike lanes. He is concerned about the area between Lincoln Avenue and Highland Street. He stated he would rather do nothing for a little while and revisit at a later date.

Harold Whitehouse moved to table action item until the August PTS meeting. It was seconded by Chairman Whelan. Harold Whitehouse stated a decision should be delayed for two months until things get back to normal.

Steve Pesci stated the biggest sense of urgency raised by opponents to the design is that it is unsafe. It runs counter to the argument of let's not do anything for two months. If it is truly unsafe, staff has recommended changes to improve the safety. He stated it is not relevant to COVID-19. The motion to table does not respond to the logic of the critics who say it is unsafe. Let's focus on safety and move forward.

Erica Wygonik supported Steve Pesci's comments. She stated the COVID-19 situation promotes moving this forward now. Children are home, the summer weather is encouraging more outdoor activities and now is the time to provide the safest environment for the community.

Police Captain Newport stated he would oppose tabling the action item because of safety concerns for more inexperienced cyclists. He stated accidents on that stretch of Middle Street have been minor compared to years without bike lanes and the lanes make people pay attention.

Mary Lou McElwain clarified her motion is for all staff recommended changes to bike lanes. She is very concerned about safety.

Fire Chief Germain stated he would oppose tabling for two months with all due respect. He endorses the recommended changes by staff and wants to see them implemented. He lives in

the area and understands concerns from opponents, but also hears from neighbors who find the bike lanes safer for families riding together.

On a roll call 1-8, motion failed to table action item until the August PTS meeting. Harold Whitehouse voted in favor. Chairman Whelan, Public Works Director Rice, Planning Director Walker, Fire Chief Germain, Police Captain Newport, Mary Lou McElwain, Steve Pesci and Jonathan Sandberg voted opposed.

Chairman Whelan restated the motion. The motion is to move to endorse all staff's recommended changes to bike lanes and send to City Council for approval.

On a roll call 8-1, motion passed.

Public Works Director Rice, Planning Director Walker, Fire Chief Germain, Police Captain Newport, Mary Lou McElwain, Steve Pesci, Jonathan Sandberg and Harold Whitehouse voted in favor. Chairman Whelan voted opposed.

Steve Pesci had to leave the meeting. Erica Wygonik will be voting on all remaining agenda items.

B. Proposed Stay and Pay graduated parking meter rates, by DPW. Parking Director Ben Fletcher provided an overview of the Parking Division services. He stated there is a common misconception that decisions are based on revenue generation, but they are really based on behavior management. He stated in the current economic climate there is triple digit demand and occupancy. Pricing drives demand, and therefore occupancy. Data suggest that areas above the targeted 85% occupancy threshold should carry a price point that generates the desired demand and occupancy.

The Stay and Pay concept puts the power and decision making in the hands of the consumer and is in line with the 2012 Parking Principles.

It can ensure the most desirable on-street and lot spaces are available to both short and long-term customers. It utilizes an economic incentive to encourage a turn at the 3-hour point. The method satisfies the needs of short-term and long-term users by creating a price structure that allows for an inexpensive short-term stay, then advances the price curve to adjust for highly-motivated longer term users.

Parking Director Fletcher spoke to the Stay and Pay implementation in Dover. It has been a successful program.

Recommendations presented include a \$3.00 an hour public rate increase in the High Occupancy Zone (ON-STREET ZONE A) for the third hour of occupancy and beyond. A \$1.50 an hour public rate increase is proposed for ON-STREET ZONE B/C for the third hour of occupancy and beyond. The resident rate increase in the High Occupancy Zone (ON-STREET ZONE A) is \$0.50 for the third hour and an additional \$0.50 for the fourth hour of occupancy. The resident rate increase in ON-STREET ZONE B/C is the same as ZONE A. Data tables have been provided on page 50 of the packet detailing the current rates, proposed public rates and resident rates.

Public Works Director Rice moved to approve proposed graduated parking meter rates, seconded by Harold Whitehouse.

Erica Wygonik asked for the rationale behind the rate increase after three hours of occupancy. Parking Director Fletcher said the rate could be adjusted after *any* hour of occupancy. The data utilization model shows most drivers stay between two and three hours. The maximum time currently allowed at the meter is three hours.

Jonathan Sandberg asked how it would work. Parking Director Fletcher stated the initial process would remain the same, but with this system the occupant can stay as long as desired by feeding the meter or paying by using the smartphone app. Residents will continue to receive a discounted rate by using the app.

The Committee discussed the process, logistics and benefits of using the Stay and Pay concept. Data collection will continue through the program and modifications can be proposed based on the findings.

On a roll call 9-0, motion passed.

C. Request for All-Way STOP at intersection of Broad Street and Highland Street, by residents of area. Public Works Director Rice moved to approve request for all-way STOP control at the intersection of Broad Street and Highland Street, seconded by Fire Chief Germain. Mary Lou McElwain stated she's noticed that children are not paying attention at stop signs and education is needed.

On a roll call 9-0, motion passed.

D. Request for flashing beacon at intersection of Woodbury Avenue and Dennett Street, by Harold Whitehouse. Harold Whitehouse moved to request report back from staff at future meeting, seconded by Public Works Director Rice.

Harold Whitehouse spoke to the fatal accident that happened in March 2020. He expressed concern about traffic and volumes due to future developments and activity in the area. He asked if a traffic signal could be installed. Public Works Director Rice and Eric Eby stated the area does not warrant a traffic signal. All development projects were taken into consideration to reach that conclusion. The request for a flashing beacon at the intersection will be studied and staff will report back at a future meeting.

Harold Whitehouse asked that his concerns for safety be noted in the meeting minutes. Police Captain Newport confirmed that the accident was due to the driver's operation and not the design of the roadway, traffic or signage.

Jonathan Sandberg asked if the yellow bollards would be reinstalled at Thornton Street and Bartlett Street. Eric Eby stated the residents do not want them reinstalled at this time.

On a roll call 9-0, motion passed.

E. Request to improve safety at intersection of Boss Avenue and Sunset Road, due to limited sight lines, by Sarah Lynch. Public Works Director Rice moved to request report back from staff at future meeting, seconded by Planning Director Walker.

On a roll call 9-0, motion passed.

VI. OLD BUSINESS:

No Old Business items.

VII. INFORMATIONAL:

A. Islington Street construction update.

This agenda item was referred to PTS Committee by the City Council. At the June 1, 2020 City Council meeting, the Council voted to refer this item to this Committee for a report back.

Chairman Whelan stated staff provided documentation showing that the project was previously approved by the PTS Committee and the City Council. It has been an ongoing project for several years. Eric Eby stated the studies show that the temporary crosswalk and bump-out when in place, improved traffic safety and flow and pedestrian safety. It did not delay traffic at the intersection of Islington Street and Bartlett Street. The PTS Committee previously voted to make it both a temporary feature and a permanent part of the reconstruction project, which is currently under construction.

Planning Director Walker spoke to the project planning. It was multidisciplinary with multidepartment input. Many meetings were held on the project design. Discussions about the crosswalk and bump-out at the White Heron, the road width and accommodations for bicyclists were all made. The City staff used the Complete Street Policy to guide the project. Staff conducted an extensive review of the project from a multidisciplinary aspect and previously elected City Councils have voted on the project.

Mary Lou McElwain asked about the bump-out design and safety for cyclists. Eric Eby spoke to the gradual curb taper layout and how the revised curbing design will give more width for cyclists.

Erica Wygonik moved to recommend the Islington Street construction project continue as planned and contracted, seconded by Jonathan Sandberg.

On a roll call 9-0, motion passed.

C. Traffic volumes during pandemic. Eric Eby included two graphs provided in the packet on pages 97 and 98. The data shows traffic volumes dropped off at the depths of the pandemic to a third of the normal traffic volumes. However, traffic is quickly coming back to normal volumes.

Planning Director Walker stated staff now has the technology to count bicyclists using the bike lanes at the South Street and Lafayette Road signal. The initial data showed that bicycle levels are similar to 2019 during the same time period. Eric Eby explained the new video detection technology installed at the signal.

B. Maplewood Avenue traffic signal changes project status update. Eric Eby explained the concurrent pedestrian phasing changes to the downtown signal. Pedestrians will cross with the parallel vehicle traffic. Vehicles turning across the pedestrian crosswalks must yield to pedestrians in the crosswalk. Delays will be reduced for pedestrians and vehicles. Because it will be new to the community, public outreach and education will be done.

The project is scheduled to start on June 22, 2020. The project will include new equipment and crosswalks will be ADA compliant.

Public Works Director Rice spoke to the Leading Pedestrian Interval (LPI), which gives the pedestrian a few seconds head start when entering the intersection. This project addresses complaints from pedestrians and drivers about long wait times.

C. Omnibus. Eric Eby is working with the Legal Department on the omnibus for City Council approval and will report back with a summary at a future meeting.

D. PTS Open Action Items. No action taken.

VIII. MISCELLANEOUS:

Harold Whitehouse asked about future meetings and requested the PTS Committee meet in July and August. The Committee will be notified about future meeting formats and dates.

IX. ADJOURNMENT:

Harold Whitehouse moved to adjourn at 10:16 a.m., seconded by Fire Chief Germain. **On a roll call 9-0, motion passed.**

Respectfully submitted by:

Amy Chastain
Secretary to the Committee