

MEETING MINUTES

PARKING and TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

8:00 A.M. – November 5, 2020

Remote Meeting via Zoom

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

City Manager Karen Conard

Public Works Director Peter Rice

Fire Chief Todd Germain

Police Captain Mike Maloney

Mary Lou McElwain

Steve Pesci

Jonathan Sandberg

Harold Whitehouse

Erica Wygonik (Alternate)

City Staff Present:

Parking and Transportation Engineer Eric Eby

Parking Director Ben Fletcher

Planning Director Juliet Walker

III. FINANCIAL REPORT:

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

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Janet Thompson spoke to Woodbury Avenue and Bartlett Street. She commented that she was concerned about the corner intersection with the guardrail because people go around it at a high speed. She opposes installing chokers because that would remove on-street parking. The residents don't want to remove parking. Too many cars are going down Bartlett Street.

Liza Hewitt spoke to Middle Road traffic calming. She supported trying a pilot program, but hoped that lowering the speed limit was still being considered. The traffic calming measures should apply to the entire road.

Janelle Clark spoke to Middle Road traffic calming. She thanked the Committee for coming up with traffic calming options and asked if they could be extended to Lafayette Park to make it a safer walk for pedestrians. The data presented looked like most cars were going 30 mph or higher. The speed limit should be lowered to 25 mph. It is a densely populated street with a lot of children.

Carl Diemer spoke to Aldrich Road traffic calming. He spoke to the neighborhood petition sent to the Committee about the speeding issue on Aldrich Road. Mr. Diemer requested the

installation of stop signs or speed tables to help slow traffic. Neighbors are concerned and would like the traffic calmed. The speed limit signs installed do not seem to have slowed traffic. Police monitoring is not a long-term solution.

Vince Lombardi spoke to Aldrich Road traffic calming. He echoed Mr. Diemer's comments. They got signatures from most Aldrich Road residents in order to get action on this traffic calming measure. Mr. Lombardi thought the speed tables were a good solution because they don't need enforcement.

Andrea Ardito spoke to the Albany Street parking issue. She commented that the stores were not aware of the three-space option until it was presented on the agenda. This will not work because the private plow for that property will not be able to access the area during snow fall. The two businesses also have large pieces of furniture coming in and out of the stores. The option presented would not work.

Alison Petersen spoke to Maplewood Avenue at Northwest Street traffic calming. She commented that cars are speeding on Maplewood Avenue heading toward the Bypass. The City completed work on Maplewood Avenue with speed bumps and signs flashing speeds. These measures could help this section of Maplewood Avenue. The crosswalk at Dennett Street seems to be ignored. Cars do not stop for pedestrians.

Carl Diemer spoke a second time about Islington Street traffic. He commented that the impact of the construction and density on Islington Street has created a big change in the traffic pattern. That should be considered when reviewing the Aldrich Road traffic calming request.

Kristen Wilson spoke to the Albany Street parking. She reiterated Ms. Ardito's comments. The three-space option will not work because of the plow and other issues mentioned.

Andrea Ardito spoke a second time about the Maplewood Avenue at Northwest Street traffic calming request. She supported Ms. Peterson's comments. The cars are speeding and calming would be appreciated.

V. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Request for crosswalk on South Street at Haven Road, by anonymous sender via Portsmouth Click N' Fix. Eric Eby commented that the request was for a crosswalk on South Street at Haven Road. He stated sightlines are not great because of a bend in the road. There are crosswalks on South Street in that area. The crosswalk at South Street and Clough Drive has a crossing guard during school hours. He did not observe many pedestrians trying to cross at this location. Too many crosswalks too close together can be problematic. The recommendation right now is to place the request on file.

Harold Whitehouse commented that this area should be monitored because the farmers market is in Little Harbor School area now and it is busy. City Manager Karen Conard commented that the farmer's market was temporarily located at the school. The intention is to move it back to the original location next year.

Erica Wygonik commented that sightlines are better here than at Bracket Lane. However, having crosswalks too close together would be problematic. A crosswalk can give a false

sense of safety. If there is more growth it may make sense to put in a sidewalk on South Street on that side.

Steve Pesci agreed with previous comments. This is not an appropriate spot for a crosswalk. The City should be looking at sidewalks on the south side of the street.

Harold Whitehouse moved to place request on file, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

B. Request for 30 minute spaces on Court Street near Fleet Street, by Portsmouth Housing Authority (PHA). Eric Eby commented that the three spaces would be in front of the Feaster Apartments on Court Street. New construction has taken up a lot of room on-site, so there is not a lot of area for people to park. The request is to change the meters to 30-minute parking for two spaces. The third space would be a handicap space.

Public Works Director Peter Rice questioned if the request was temporary. Eric Eby confirmed that it was a temporary request while construction was happening on-site.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if the proposed time was long enough. Portsmouth Housing Authority Director Craig Welch responded that the purpose of these spots would be to allow for Feaster Apartment residents to have spaces for pick-ups and drop offs. The spaces would not be accommodating any construction traffic.

Erica Wygonik questioned if this would negatively impact other business in the area. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that there was good parking inventory along the street and the Parrot Avenue parking lot is nearby.

Chairman Peter Whelan supported this request because it would be a convenience for the Feaster residents.

Mary Lou McElwain also supported the request. It is important for the Feaster residents to have a space for pick-ups and drop offs. She questioned if these spaces would be reserved for Feaster residents. Chairman Peter Whelan responded that the 30-minute time limit would create enough turnover.

Erica Wygonik questioned if the handicap space would also have a 30-minute time limit. Chairman Peter Whelan responded that it would not.

Steve Pesci moved to temporarily designate two spaces as 30-minute parking and one space as handicapped parking in front of the Feaster Apartments during construction, which should be complete in April 2022, seconded by Harold Whitehouse. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

C. Request for traffic calming on Maplewood Avenue at Northwest Street, by Alison Petersen. Eric Eby commented that they put out a traffic recorder and got speed and traffic volume data. The average speed is 26 mph and the 85th percentile is 30 mph. On average, cars are traveling near the speed limit, with some high-speed exceptions. Speed tables are not appropriate for arterial roadways. Adding more signage, striping or bollards would be more appropriate.

Public Works Director Peter Rice requested that Eric Eby explain who defines the type of road. Eric Eby responded the functional classification is set by the State and regional planning commission so that roads are treated and funded equally throughout the nation. It's not something the City can change on its own unless something about the roadway significantly changed.

Harold Whitehouse commented that the raised pavement on Woodbury Avenue is working. It may make sense to have money in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for raised pavement citywide.

Steve Pesci requested that Eric Eby give an explanation of the 85th percentile speed. Eric Eby responded that the 85th percentile means that 85% of traffic is traveling at that speed or slower. Only 15% is traveling faster. That method is used to set speed limits on roadways. If the City followed that standard for this road, then the speed limit would be 30 mph instead of 25 mph. Eric Eby clarified that he was not suggesting raising the speed limit.

Chairman Peter Whelan questioned if there was a plan to replace the Maplewood Avenue Bridge. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that it was listed as a high priority bridge by the State. The challenge is the State bridge funding is a decade or two out. The City will likely need to do interim repairs to the bridge. Those are in design now and they have recommendations coming from the engineers. There will not be any streetscape improvements. There are utility lines that go through there so getting 80% covered by the State is a huge benefit to the City. Maplewood Avenue has the final pavement completed and the striping and pavement markings will be done when it is warm enough. The intent is when the bridge project is done the balance of the roadway will be completed as well. There are a lot of demands out there for improvement and it's expensive. Speed tables are expensive and they require maintenance.

Jonathan Sandberg commented that it was a scary corridor because of the sightlines. The sidewalk is too narrow. Barrels or bollards may be appropriate here to slow cars and make pedestrians feel safe. He questioned if the designation of arterial continues for the whole of Maplewood Avenue or just the section between the Bypass. Eric Eby responded that it was an arterial classification from the Bypass into town. The other side of the Bypass is classified as a collector. That's why speed tables are allowed because the traffic volumes are less.

Chairman Peter Whelan questioned if a light at that intersection would be appropriate. Eric Eby responded that there were concerns about the grade approaching it. There is not a lot of side street traffic, so it may not meet the minimum volume warrants.

Steve Pesci questioned if there were dynamic speed signs in that area. Eric Eby responded that there were not. Steve Pesci noted that may be a quick and somewhat inexpensive strategy. Eric Eby agreed.

Chairman Peter Whelan agreed they should try the dynamic speed sign and monitor from there.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that the speed limit sign should be at the same site as the dynamic sign. Then drivers know what speed they are driving and what the speed limit is. The dynamic speed limit signs in Portsmouth are too small and a lot of the times are not working. Eric Eby confirmed they were required to put the sign near a posted speed limit sign.

D. Coakley Road traffic calming request, by Mary Kepner. Eric Eby commented that this location is off the Bypass and runs parallel to Borthwick Avenue. A traffic counter was installed to monitor traffic. Data shows that the average speed was 22 mph and the 85th percentile was 29 mph. The posted speed is 20 mph, but the Ordinance is not listed as 20 mph, so it would be 30 mph by default. The long roadway lends to speeding. The cars going in the area are residents because the road is a closed loop. Cars tend to go 30 mph coming into the neighborhood and 20 mph going out. This could be addressed by making the official speed limit 20 mph. The City could try traffic calming by diverting traffic at the intersection to go down the loop in a one-way pattern.

Steve Pesci noted that they were trying to avoid 20 mph speed limits because it was below the State minimum. Eric Eby agreed that 25 mph would be a more appropriate speed limit.

Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to place request on file, seconded by Harold Whitehouse.

On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

E. Request for South Street traffic calming near Mt. Vernon Street, by Mary Lou McElwain. Eric Eby commented that residents are concerned about speed in this area. The traffic recorder showed that traffic on the curve is speeding. The average speed is 25 mph, the 85th percentile speed is 29 mph, and speed limit is 20 mph. The City could paint the 20 mph in large pavement markings on the street.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that speeds used to be enforced better than it has been in the past 6 years. The volume of traffic throughout the City has increased. Enforcement is important. A slow down sign could be painted on the pavement. The street needs a dynamic speed limit sign. It should be similar to the signs in Kittery on Route 1 near the Lion's Club. Pedestrian traffic has increased due to the pandemic. This is a safety concern for residents and pedestrians.

Harold Whitehouse asked if the City had durable paint for the roadway markings. Public Works Director Peter Rice confirmed they did and explained the difference between the two types of pavement markings available.

Erica Wygonik agreed that people go around the corner too fast and sightlines are constrained. The data here is similar to the data on Coakley Road. Feedback signs are a good idea. The road is already narrow and people still go fast. The Committee has talked about mapping speeds in town and what that would mean for standardizing speeds in the future.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that there are three schools on South Street, which lends to a lot of pedestrian traffic. The difference between Coakley Road and South Street is the high usage of sidewalks and the street. People park on both sides of South Street from New Castle Avenue to Junkins Avenue. People use that as a traffic calming tactic, but it does not seem to do anything. She expressed concerned for pedestrian and bicycle traffic on South Street.

Steve Pesci commented that this highlights the hierarchy of speeds issue. South Street is 20 mph, which is artificially low. It should be 25 mph. People are desensitized to the excess

posting of artificially low speed limits signs. However, this section, from Junkins to Marcy, should be 20 mph. Maybe the rest of South Street should not.

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that there is commercial truck traffic along this roadway. Whatever treatments are applied need to accommodate the large trucks that use South Street to access New Castle.

Harold Whitehouse requested assigning a police car for enforcement on a part-time basis. Police Captain Mike Maloney confirmed that could be done.

Mary Lou McElwain noted that a free-standing speed feedback sign should be installed to monitor the area. She requested that the people driving City vehicles drive the speed limit to help set an example for the public.

**Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to suspend the rules to allow public comment, seconded by City Manager Karen Conard.
On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.**

Councilor Petra Huda commented that the Committee should consider the whole area when considering South Street. There are trucks using roads out to New Castle. They have to use South Street now because Pleasant Street is too narrow. The whole area should be considered.

Chairman Peter Whelan noted that big trucks cannot go over the bridge from Rye, so this is the only way for them to get to New Castle.

Guy Spiers commented that there was a lot of pedestrian traffic. It's hard to get out in either direction because traffic is too busy. Mr. Spiers supported controlling traffic.

**Mary Lou McElwain moved to refer to staff for recommendations for the entire length of South Street and report back at the next meeting for further discussion, seconded by Harold Whitehouse.
On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.**

VI. OLD BUSINESS:

A. Report back on intermediate plans to address parking concerns on Albany Street between Brewery Lane and Cass Street. Chairman Peter Whelan noted that the Committee got feedback during public comment. This item should be tabled to the next meeting.

**Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to table until the next meeting, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain.
On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.**

B. Report back on short-term traffic calming measures for Bartlett Street area.
Eric Eby commented that the posted speed is 20 mph. The average speed was 25-29 mph. He stated 25 mph is probably a more appropriate speed limit. People are running the four-way stop sign at Bartlett Street and Thornton Street because the traffic volumes are so different. There is so much more traffic on Bartlett Street than the other side streets. They can reinforce the four-way stop by installing a stop ahead sign on Bartlett Street at Meredith Way and

installing a second stop sign on the other side of the street of Bartlett Street and Thornton Street. He stated it has been hard to get a consensus from the neighborhood about measures they want to see implemented.

Jonathan Sandberg commented it would be good to see something more aggressive. The bollards that were installed last year were good. Bollards provided a sense of security. Signage won't hurt but it is not enough.

Steve Pesci commented that if more vehicles did the full truck route, then it would alleviate the amount of turns onto Thornton Street. Jonathan Sandberg commented that cars turn left to eliminate an extra stop sign. Eric Eby added that they looked at ways to keep traffic on Bartlett Street. Thornton Street is listed in the Ordinance as a one-way street, but when that was proposed there was resistance from the residents. The people leading the neighborhood group requested that the bollards not be used.

**Harold Whitehouse moved to implement recommendations by staff for additional signage on Bartlett Street, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain.
On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.**

C. Report back on traffic volumes and speeds on Woodbury Avenue at Cottage Street.
Eric Eby commented that the traffic camera was installed to count traffic and observe speeds. The average speed was 18 mph and the 85th percentile speed was 21 mph. The fastest speed recorded was at 33 mph. The problem is that the blind corner has a lot of traffic. A two-way stop at Cottage Street would not be appropriate because there is four times more traffic on Woodbury Avenue than Cottage Street. There is no recommendation at this point because the data is not showing a speed issue and the traffic volume doesn't justify a two-way stop. Residents were opposed to chokers because it would remove on-street parking.

Jonathan Sandberg commented that they should put chokers further up Woodbury Avenue. He stated it would slow down cars before the curve.

Steve Pesci commented that they should evaluate this issue after the Cate Street connector is open.

**Harold Whitehouse moved to place request on file, seconded by Steve Pesci.
On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.**

D. Report back on temporary speed reduction pilot measures for Middle Road.
Eric Eby commented that the posted speed is 30 mph. The average recorded speed was 33 mph and the 85th percentile speed was 38 mph. Speeds are in excess of 30 mph. Middle Road is an arterial road carrying traffic from the highway into town. Installing barrels or bollards could slow down vehicles. They can be on the side or in the middle of the road. Bollards could narrow lanes from 11 feet to 10 feet. Another option could include bollards and signage to make a pinch point.

Harold Whitehouse requested the City move slow on this issue because of how some residents feel about bollards.

Jonathan Sandberg agreed that they should bring this to the neighborhood and let them decide. He questioned if the City could install something more appealing than bollards. Public

Works Director Peter Rice responded that all measures must be compliant with the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD).

Erica Wygonik spoke in favor of the ideas presented. She commented that they should consider installing a crosswalk where the green paint markings at the bump-out are shown.

Mary Lou McElwain requested that the Committee members be invited to the neighborhood meeting.

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that the goal was to have the neighborhood meeting before the next PTS meeting. He stated staff will schedule the neighborhood meeting to discuss traffic calming options presented and report back at the next PTS meeting.

E. Report back on previous traffic calming requests and recommendations for Aldrich Road. Eric Eby commented that they measured speeds at 25-30 mph. He stated stop signs should not be used as traffic calming measures. Speed tables on Maplewood Avenue are effective at lowering speeds to 25-30 mph. Presently, speeds on Aldrich Road are at 25-30 mph. He stated the speed limit signs were made larger and the yellow centerline was removed to make it look less like a highway. It's a nice straight road with 1,000 cars a day because it connects two arterial roads. There were traffic calming measures proposed about 10 years ago, but those weren't implemented because residents didn't express their approval at the time. The City can install barrels down the middle of the road to slow traffic speeds.

Chairman Peter Whelan commented that they needed to meet with neighborhood to discuss.

Harold Whitehouse requested that a police cruiser be stationed there for a period of time to monitor speeding.

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that this was an interesting historical example of traffic calming measures process. This road was the first to go through major traffic calming design efforts. The City did major reconstruction of the roadway and brought a number of alternatives to residents like a median strip. At the time residents were adamantly against it. This is an example of the challenges the City faces. State Street was narrowed in certain places, which people were also against. However, after a while it became normal. Issues like this are challenging for residents and equally challenging for staff. Some of these actions may be perceived as excessive initially, but will actually make a positive difference.

Steve Pesci commented that it was good to have the historical perspective. The City spent a lot of money on that corridor and the data doesn't support the speeding concerns.

Mary Lou McElwain requested that police enforcement be included when discussing speeding concerns. Speed is always a major issue and law enforcement should be included in all discussions.

Staff will schedule a neighborhood meeting to discuss traffic calming options presented and report back at the next meeting.

Chairman Peter Whelan noted that they needed to wrap up the meeting because several members needed to leave for another meeting.

VII. INFORMATIONAL:

- A. Middle Street bike lane peer review status. No Committee discussion.
- B. Intersection of Marcy Street and Mechanic Street. No Committee discussion.
- C. Monthly accident report, by Police Captain Mike Maloney. No Committee discussion.
- D. PTS Open Action Items. No Committee discussion.

VIII. MISCELLANEOUS:

- A. December meeting date. Staff will contact members about the December meeting date.

IX. ADJOURNMENT:

Jonathan Sandberg moved to adjourn at 10:05 a.m., seconded by Harold Whitehouse.
On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

Respectfully submitted by:

Becky Frey
PTS Recording Secretary