

MEETING MINUTES

PARKING and TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

8:00 A.M. – December 10, 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

Mary Lou McElwain

Steve Pesci

Jonathan Sandberg

Harold Whitehouse

Erica Wygonik (Alternate)

Absent:

Police Captain Mike Maloney

City Staff Present:

Parking and Transportation Engineer Eric Eby

Parking Director Ben Fletcher

Planning Director Juliet Walker

III. FINANCIAL REPORT:

Mary Lou McElwain moved to accept and approve the financial report dated October 31, 2020 as presented, seconded by City Manager Karen Conard. **On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 8-0.**

Harold Whitehouse joined the meeting after this vote was taken.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Liza Hewitt thanked the Committee and DPW staff for the attention they have given to the neighborhood and attending to the short-term suggestions that were made during the neighborhood traffic calming meeting.

Andrea Ardito spoke to the Albany Street parking and Maplewood Avenue at Northwest Street traffic calming efforts. Ms. Ardito commented that the proposal for Albany Street was a good compromise because it helps to move traffic and retains parking spots for the businesses. She also thanked the Committee and DPW staff for the quick work installing the speed indicator signs on Maplewood Avenue. They have made a difference.

Lee Frank spoke to the Madison Street parking agenda item. Mr. Frank requested that the Committee not remove parking across the street from his residence. It has been an issue for

years on Madison Street. Mr. Frank spoke to what has been done in the past. He mentioned that a curb installation project was in the City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). He stated parking would become a bigger problem by eliminating any parking in this area.

V. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Madison Street, request to prohibit parking on west side between Lovell Street and State Street, by Paul Burton. Eric Eby commented that the request was to remove the parking in front of the apartment building. Cars parked there make it tight for traffic to get through, but they do get through. The advantage of having parking out there is that it is a traffic calming measure. It's a high demand parking area. There has been talk about putting temporary gravel out there to allow for cars to park further off the road. There is a CIP project to install curbing. Eric Eby stated that at this time there is no recommendation for further action.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that this was a short street with a lot of residents. The on-street parking is important for the residents in this area. Because the grass area the cars are parking on is in the City right-of-way, then the parking should not be removed.

Erika Wygonik questioned what the reason was for the request. There needs to be a good reason to take away parking. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that Mr. Burton was concerned about the grass being torn up and creating a muddy area on his property.

Steve Pesci questioned the status of the CIP project. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that it was slated for 2025. Chairman Peter Whelan commented that it was a dense neighborhood, so parking on both sides of the street is utilized frequently. He suggested the neighborhood speak at a City Council meeting to try to move the CIP project forward.

Erika Wygonik questioned the right-of-way width. Eric Eby responded that he did not know exactly, but it was wide enough for traffic travel with cars parked on both sides.

Steve Pesci questioned if there was a partnership opportunity between the City and the private citizen to share the cost. Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that Mr. Burton has not indicated interest in a partnership.

Steve Pesci moved to table this request to the next meeting, seconded by Public Works Director Peter Rice.

Public Works Director Peter Rice stated that the DPW has a lot on its plate and they are short staffed. It's pretty clear what is needed here and what's expected. Further discussions would not be fruitful. If the neighborhood wants to push forward, then they can speak to it in the public process. The neighborhood and owner can drive the next steps.

Steve Pesci withdrew his motion. Public Works Director Peter Rice withdrew his second.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that the neighborhood should work together on this. It sounds as if there has not been a lot of communication up to now. The owner should work with the neighbors to figure out how to keep this area cleaned up.

Harold Whitehouse stated that City Councilors at recent meetings have asked why parking is being eliminated in neighborhoods. They are concerned about parking being taken away.

Chairman Peter Whelan commented that no action was needed at this time.

VI. OLD BUSINESS:

A. Report back on recommendations for traffic calming measures for South Street, from Lafayette Road to Marcy Street. Eric Eby commented that they will be doing traffic and speed measurements for the entire corridor of South Street as equipment becomes available. The intent is to get a good handle on what the speed is in different areas of the road before recommending appropriate traffic calming measures. There will be a report back to the Committee at a future meeting.

Harold Whitehouse commented that the island by Plaza 800 on Islington Street has slowed traffic and he recommends installing an island on South Street.

Erika Wygonik commented that it may make sense to install a rapid flashing beacon at the high school to support students crossing when a crossing guard is not on duty. Student safety is important in this area.

Mary Lou McElwain moved to conduct speed limit studies, report back on recommended speed limits and install speed feedback signs on an interim basis, seconded by Harold Whitehouse. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

B. Parking concerns on Albany Street between Brewery Lane and Cass Street. Eric Eby commented that this alternative would prohibit parking within 30 feet of the Brewery Lane intersection, which is in compliance with State law and Portsmouth ordinances. A no parking sign would be added to the area where parking is prohibited. Parking would still be allowed in front of the businesses. There is an existing no parking sign on Albany Street near the Cass Street intersection and it will remain.

Erika Wygonik commented that last month's proposal involved a lane shift and there was concern by business owners that it would impact snow removal and loading areas. Those issues may be manageable with a time limit on the parking spots. Mr. Eby commented that a time limit would require an ordinance change. The current no parking proposal can be implemented right away.

Harold Whitehouse commented that they should look at putting in a stop sign at the intersection of Cass Street, Chevrolet Ave and Lovell Street.

Harold Whitehouse moved to prohibit parking on Albany Street for 30 feet east of Brewery Lane, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

VII. INFORMATIONAL:

A. Report back on traffic calming meeting with Middle road residents. Eric Eby commented that they moved the speed limit sign to be by itself and put in a speed feedback sign in the opposite direction. They are continuing to look at the full corridor in

order to develop an overall traffic calming plan. A meeting with residents will be scheduled after the plan has been developed. Staff will provide a report back to the Committee.

B. Report back on traffic calming meeting with Banfield Road residents.

Eric Eby commented that they met with residents. He stated that there could be more speeding after the roadway was recently paved due to the culvert project. The neighborhood would like to see a speed table installed. There is also a possibility of installing an all-way stop at the intersections of Banfield Road and Heritage Avenue, and Banfield Road at Constitution Avenue. Eric Eby was looking at that data now and he will provide a report back with recommendations to the Committee at a future meeting.

C. Aldrich Road neighborhood traffic calming meeting to be scheduled.

Eric Eby commented that they need to reach out to the neighborhood committee and residents that signed the petition. He expects a meeting will be scheduled in January to discuss their concerns.

D. Monthly accident report from Police. No Committee discussion.

E. Traffic volumes during pandemic. Eric Eby commented that the data shows the traffic has been weather dependent. Traffic goes down with snow or rain and increases when it is nice. The volume is still running at 80-85% of last year. There is less bike usage as the weather gets colder. Daily bike usage of the bike lanes on Lafayette Road at South Street is in the single digits on average, which is typical for this time of year.

VIII. MISCELLANEOUS:

A. Maplewood Avenue at Congress Street, Islington Street and Middle Street intersection. Concerns regarding new pedestrian traffic signal phasing, by Mary Lou McElwain.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that she has had two close encounters with the new pedestrian signal system at Congress Street. She was concerned about all pedestrians, especially those with disabilities, trying to cross at that intersection. She suggested moving the yield to pedestrians crossing signs next to the traffic lights, so vehicles can see both at the same time.

Chairman Peter Whelan commented that he has also had concerned citizens call him about this intersection. Eric Eby commented that the intersection used to stop all traffic to allow pedestrians at each corner to cross at once. There was a lot of delay for traffic and pedestrians with that model. It was very inefficient. Now that the area on the other side of Maplewood Avenue has been redeveloped, there is increased activity. This new system allows people to cross at the same time as vehicles. It is all in compliance with State and Federal regulations. Drivers are not used to the change and go without looking for pedestrians. The signs can be moved lower as suggested. Another option would be to install a flashing yellow right arrow at the Islington Street approach. The yellow flashing arrow would activate when the pedestrian button is pushed. A green arrow would appear when the pedestrian button is not pushed. It already works in a similar way on the Maplewood Avenue approach. A lot of pedestrians are not aware of which button to push or if they should push any button. It is still a learning process for everyone.

Chairman Peter Whelan questioned if there was a delay to give pedestrians a head start. Eric Eby confirmed that there was a 5 second delay to vehicle traffic that has been increased to a 7 second delay.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if the pedestrian had the right of way in the crosswalk. Eric Eby confirmed that they did if the walk signal is on, then the traffic must yield to pedestrians in the crosswalk. If they are walking without the walk signal, then they do not have the right of way.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that it was important for drivers to pay attention to pedestrians in the crosswalk and suggested more outreach may be needed. Eric Eby commented that the new set up reduces delay for pedestrians as well as drivers. Pedestrians and drivers both need to pay attention. Public Works Director Peter Rice agreed that additional outreach could be beneficial, but they have been doing public outreach for about a year. Moving the signage will help.

Jonathan Sandberg suggested looking at other communities that use this signal to compare education and data on the intersection usage.

Erika Wygonik commented that the City gets a lot of visiting traffic as well. It may make sense to reintroduce a variable message sign to remind visitors about how it works. She questioned if there was any data on crashes at that intersection. Eric Eby commented that he was not aware of any accidents. Chairman Peter Whelan suggested adding a camera at that intersection to look at the behavior and observe how everything was working. Eric Eby agreed.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if the date for the January meeting was going to be moved. Eric Eby responded that it has been moved to January 14, 2021 to accommodate schedules.

Steve Pesci thanked Eric Eby for his work on the Committee. He commented that the Congress Street traffic signal should be consistent and patterned with the two on Maplewood Avenue.

Steve Pesci echoed the positive comments made earlier on the Islington Street improvements. He expressed concerns about Jewel Court. During construction there was an east bound stop line set way back. Now that is gone. Steve Pesci almost witnessed an accident as a car came out of Bartlett Street and tried to make a quick left onto Jewel Court barely missing two cars. The Committee should look to see if Jewel Court should be a right turn in and right turn out only access point onto Islington Street.

IX. ADJOURNMENT:

Mary Lou McElwain moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 a.m., seconded by Erika Wygonik. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

Respectfully submitted by:

Becky Frey
PTS Recording Secretary