

MEETING MINUTES

PARKING and TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

8:00 A.M. – February 4, 2021

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:

Parking Director Ben Fletcher commented that revenues are doing better than the revised budget, but it is still off compared to the original budget.

Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to accept and approve the financial report dated December 31, 2020 as presented, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. **On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.**

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Kelly Shaw commented on the Banfield Road project. Ms. Shaw thanked the City for helping to move the project along. Ms. Shaw commented that she hoped the three way stops and other traffic calming measures moved forward.

Liza Hewitt thanked staff for meeting with the neighborhood to discuss Middle Road traffic calming measures. She stated it will be interesting to see how the neighborhood feedback was incorporated into the final plans. A resident was involved in a hit and run at the Essex Avenue crosswalk. It would be good to install a Rapid Flashing Beacon (RFB) at that crosswalk. There should be more discussion about this. Bollards and bump-outs are only 3-season solutions because they are removed for the winter.

Jason Combs echoed Ms. Hewitt's comments. It was good for residents to give feedback. It will be interesting to see how the feedback is incorporated.

Rodney Rodriguez commented that he was the victim of the hit and run. Mr. Rodriguez thanked the staff for giving residents the opportunity to provide feedback. The goal is to make sure everyone is safe when traversing the street. It would be good to see a RFB at the Essex Avenue crosswalk.

Patrick Lyons echoed the previous comments regarding Middle Road traffic calming measures. Mr. Lyons appreciated the City putting a lot of effort into this effort. He has a child who is deaf and blind, so speed is a real challenge.

V. NEW BUSINESS:

No new business agenda items.

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 conducted speed and volume studies at six locations along the South Street corridor. The average speeds were in the range of 25-30 mph on the lower end and the upper end had average speeds of 22-25 mph. The 85th percentile was 31-32 mph in the lower end and in the upper 20s mph for the upper end. The posted speed limit is 20 mph. By State law, a road like this should be 30-mph. The current speed limit is not consistent with State law. A reasonable speed would be 25-30 mph. South Street is classified as an arterial roadway and it is narrow. That limits the traffic calming options. Speed feedback signs, like the one before New Castle Avenue, can be added in other areas of the corridor. Bollards can be added, or the speed limit could be painted onto the road. The road is not wide enough to put in islands at the intersections. This data is being presented to the Committee to see if they had any ideas or thoughts. There is no staff recommendation at this time. It could be argued that speeding is not the problem. South Street has a speed limit problem. The 20-mph speed limit is inappropriate, but they do want to make sure vehicle speeds are lower near the schools when lights are flashing.

Erica Wygonik questioned if the school flashing lights were consistent with the current school times given the COVID-19 schedule. Eric Eby responded that the schools are in charge of the flashing signs, but he could check with them. Erica Wygonik commented that school access is the biggest concern. It is good to make sure they are doing what they can to slow speeds. The current speeds on the road are not out of character for the road itself, but there are schools and pedestrians in the area. It is a simple thing to make sure the flashing signs are activated at the appropriate times.

Harold Whitehouse mentioned the playground on the corner of South School Street and questioned if ripples in the roadway could be installed in that area. Mr. Eby responded that rumble strips are very effective in getting drivers attention, but they do make noise. When they are installed in residential areas, then they typically get complaints from residents.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that she and the neighbors appreciated the attention paid to this corridor. She noticed the studies were conducted during different years, and the most recent one was done in the winter. Traffic increases in warmer weather. There has also

been less traffic with schools not being open 5 days a week. The flashing speed limit sign has been very effective. More of them should be installed along the corridor. It would be good to see a flashing pedestrian sign like the one at Clough Drive near the playground on South School Street. People cross there often and don't use the RFB placed there. It would be good to have more police patrol on South Street issuing tickets and not just giving warnings.

Steve Pesci commented that they should rethink some of the 20-mph speed limits in the City. South Street should be more in line with State law and be 25-mph. It would allow police to better enforce this street. The speed limit of 20-mph is so impractical it's not having any effect. As the Committee looks at the speed limit network, the 20-mph zones should be limited to the dense downtown pedestrian area. Painting the speed limit in the roadway at the gateway is a good idea.

Erica Wygonik commented that the 20-mph speed limit signs are not to the current sign standards. They are too small and not retro reflective. She stated up to date signage could go a long way toward speed awareness as well.

Jonathan Sandberg commented that there may be an opportunity to engage the students at the Little Harbour School in a sign campaign. Students can create signs asking drivers to slow down.

Harold Whitehouse commented that his car has a bumper sticker saying that he is the "pace car" and it is effective.

Chairman Peter Whelan questioned if student signage would be effective. Eric Eby confirmed they could be. Signage could be posted in lawns abutting South Street. They could be similar to the "drive like your kids live here" signs.

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that he would contact the art teacher at Little Harbour School about the idea. It would be good to reach out to the PTO for funding.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that she would be willing to coordinate with the art teacher.

Erica Wygonik noted that the PTO has been looking for remote friendly activities, so this could be a good idea for that.

B. Report back on recommendations for traffic calming measures for Banfield Road.

Eric Eby commented that they met with residents in November and conducted traffic counts and speed studies at Constitution Avenue and Heritage Avenue. Predominate flow is on Banfield Road with lower volumes on the side streets. Normally it is ideal to have a similar volume on all roads or at least a 60/40 split. The volumes in this area don't support that. However, there are limited sight lines at these corners, so an all-way stop is recommended because of that safety issue. Constitution Avenue is busy when Water Country is open in the summer. The alternative would be to remove more vegetation and work with neighbors for easements. An all-way stop at those locations would help to improve safety. The next idea would be to install a speed table halfway between Ocean Road and Heritage Avenue intersections. A speed feedback sign can be added on the road as well. Traffic calming

measures are concentrated on the area of the road that is mostly residential. These proposed measures can be incorporated into the consultant's contract.

Jonathan Sandberg noted that it would be helpful to add a pedestrian crossing sign at the rail trail to warn motorists. Eric Eby confirmed that they could put up a temporary sign until the rail trail becomes official.

Steve Pesci questioned if one of the all-way stops had a higher priority over the other. Eric Eby responded that the volume is steady at Heritage Avenue. However, the sight lines are limited at both locations. Both could use the all-way stop signs for safety improvements. It is a low-cost measure. Constitution Avenue is a higher priority in the summer, otherwise they are both equal priorities.

Steve Pesci questioned if the speed table would be okay for fire access. Fire Chief Todd Germain responded that the speed table was not a concern. It slows the truck down, but only temporarily. Eric Eby added that the speed table is designed for speeds of 25-30 mph. It is similar to the one on Maplewood Avenue. Fire Chief Todd Germain noted that this route was rarely used as a response route for Fire Station 2.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if snowplows would be impacted by the speed table. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that he has not received any negative feedback from operating staff.

Mary Lou McElwain moved to present the report to the City Council with additional signage for pedestrian and bicycle crossings on Banfield Road, seconded by Harold Whitehouse. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

C. Report back on recommendations for traffic calming measures for Middle Road.
Eric Eby commented that they met with the neighborhood and presented their overall plan. The residents provided feedback that was included in revised plans. A bump-out with temporary bollards was proposed at Leavitt Avenue to see how it works. That would create a pinch point coming into the neighborhood. A diamond warning sign would be installed at the entrance to the residential area warning cars that they were entering a residential area. Further down the corridor there would be bump-outs in the long straight away. Pedestrian flags are proposed at the Riverbrook Condos crosswalk. This was not brought up with the neighborhood, but it could be considered. It's a low-cost improvement. Yellow flex posts down the middle of the road were proposed in one section. A speed feedback sign at the Chase Home driveway was also proposed. Mr. Eby stated the neighborhood did not want flex posts, so they were removed. The speed feedback sign was kept. Pedestrian flags could be added at the Essex Avenue location. There is no funding to include the flashing beacons. There were proposed flex posts at the intersection with South Street. However, based on residential feedback the flex posts were removed. There is a proposed yield sign in the middle of the crosswalk on Middle Road near South Street. As far as long-term solutions go, the intersection at Middle Road and South Street might be able to be reconstructed into a roundabout or a "T" intersection. Right now, traffic can take a turn onto South Street at 30-mph. A "T" intersection would force traffic to slow down as they turn. Bump-outs with flex post bollards are proposed at the intersection with Spinney Road. The bump-outs would create a pinch point and bring drivers' attention to the crosswalk. Another bump-out was added on the other side of the roadway as well. Bollards were not well received by the

neighborhood, so the plan was revised to eliminate most of them. The bump-out near the crosswalk will ensure people will not park too close to the crosswalk. The last intersection had a high rate of speed for traffic coming down Middle Street onto Middle Road. In the summer there are bollards for the bike lane that help to reduce speeds. Overall a "T" intersection configuration would be the best solution. There is enough width right now in the road to allow two-way traffic on one side of the island. It would force traffic to slow down for a right turn. Signage can be installed, and access to the other side of the island can be blocked off. This measure can be done quickly and easily.

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that this is a pilot project. It is being proposed in order to collect data and better inform a permanent project. Initial funding will come in fiscal year 2022, but the bulk of funding will come in fiscal year 2024. This is an opportunity to see if options work and give the neighborhood the opportunity to see if they like it or not. The green shading on the plan will not be painted areas. There will be bollards in those locations.

Chairman Peter Whelan noted that this was discussed at length with the neighborhood. The neighborhood was informed that this is a pilot project, so if something goes wrong it can be changed. It is a great way to look at the corridor and try something new. He stated the pedestrian hit and run in the crosswalk was unacceptable, and changes need to be made.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if the flashing beacons would be funded from a grant or the operating budget. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded the beacons would be funded from the operating budget. They are not currently budgeted.

Steve Pesci commented that the revised plan was a good pilot project. The pedestrian flags would be a good use. They are currently used in front of the Durham Town Hall. It is a low cost, effective tool.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that she was not in favor of the bump-outs because they are very difficult for cyclists to maneuver around.

Jonathan Sandberg commented that making the Middle Road/Middle Street a "T" intersection would be a good solution sooner rather than later. That area is especially hazardous for cyclists. It would be good to see the area addressed.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if the area was all city-owned property. Public Works Director Peter Rice confirmed it was.

Mary Lou McElwain commended Eric Eby and his team for the good work on this pilot project. The neighbors have given great feedback. It will be a positive step for the neighborhood.

Chairman Peter Whelan agreed that the team did a good job and questioned when these measures could be implemented. Eric Eby responded that, depending on funding, it would likely be in the spring.

Erica Wygonik questioned if the bump-outs at the Spinney Road intersection were offset from the pedestrian crosswalk because of driveway access and truck turning movements. Eric

Eby confirmed that was correct. Erica Wygonik noted that the bump-outs don't shorten the crossing distance. Eric Eby responded that it does a little on one side because pedestrians can walk out to the edge of the bump-out.

Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to move the pilot program forward to the City Council for their acceptance, seconded by Steve Pesci. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

VII. INFORMATIONAL:

A. Aldrich Road neighborhood traffic calming meeting scheduled for February 23, 2021 at 6:30 PM. Eric Eby commented that notices were mailed to the neighborhood. The meeting will be to discuss possible traffic calming measures.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if the meeting would be broadcasted live on Channel 22. Public Works Director Peter Rice stated he could join the meeting via Zoom.

B. Congress Street/Maplewood Avenue/Middle Street/Islington Street pedestrian signal changes update. Eric Eby commented that the signal contractor will be installing a flashing right turn arrow. It will bring awareness to the traffic turning right that they should look for pedestrians. Signage warning traffic to look for pedestrians will be moved to eye level.

Jonathan Sandberg commented that he passes through the intersection twice a day. The most dangerous point is going past Discover Portsmouth trying to cross Islington Street. Cars coming from Islington Street turning right onto Middle Street do not look for pedestrians. The shrubs around Discover Portsmouth hide the sidewalk. The sidewalk should be pushed further into the intersection to force cars to go wider and pay more attention.

Mary Lou McElwain agreed it is a dangerous intersection. She was almost hit by a car at the intersection. She thanked Eric Eby for taking action.

C. Brewery Lane/Chevrolet Avenue area traffic study update. Eric Eby commented that they have a contract in place with a consultant. The firm will be conducting traffic, pedestrian and truck traffic observations for the area. This will be a holistic look at the area in order to improve traffic and pedestrian flow. Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that they were using previously appropriated funding for this study.

D. Peeverly Hill Road Complete Streets project update. Eric Eby commented that there would be another public meeting on February 17, 2021. Notices were mailed. There is a completed preliminary design on this project that is ready to be submitted to NHDOT. Before it is submitted, staff will meet with the neighborhood to make sure they are comfortable with the plan because it does involve easements. It is good to make sure everyone is on board because federal funding will be used.

Chairman Peter Whelan questioned if this would come back to PTS after the neighborhood meeting. Public Works Director Peter Rice noted that the intent was to report back to City Council because the additional meeting was their request.

E. Middle Street bike lanes status update.

Eric Eby commented that the City hired a peer review consultant to look at the current implementation and consider changes proposed by the City Council. The consultant made a presentation to the City Council and recommended not changing the parked car position because it provides protection to cyclists. There was a recommendation for improvements to the bike lanes with flashing pedestrian lights and bollards to improve sight lines and safety.

Public Works Director Peter Rice clarified that this was for a section of the bike lane and not the entire bike lane corridor.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if the City would have to return the federal monies if they did not comply by the design. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that there were no final decisions made. The State would consider it once they saw something concrete. It was implied by NHDOT staff that the money would go back if major changes were made.

F. Bicycle traffic volumes on Lafayette Road at South Street.

Eric Eby commented that the bike traffic during the winter has consistently been in the single digits on the bike lanes. There is continuous use even in the winter.

Erica Wygonik commented that it was important to make sure that the snow was cleared as much as possible to keep the bike lanes safe.

G. Traffic volumes during pandemic.

Eric Eby commented that the traffic volumes were holding steady at 80-85% of the pre-pandemic levels.

H. Monthly accident report from Police Department.

Police Captain Mike Maloney clarified that he did not include non-reportable accidents in the most recent report. The past reports included both reportable and non-reportable. Because of that it looks like a 50% drop, but that's because non-reportable accidents were included in previous reports. Police Captain Mike Maloney questioned if the Committee wanted both types of accidents included in the report.

Jonathan Sandberg commented that it should be consistent to be a fair comparison. Police Captain Mike Maloney noted that 25% of all City accidents occurred in parking lots. The report can be run both ways as well.

Erica Wygonik commented that a report with reportable crashes is a nice standard, but it would be helpful to understand how the numbers relate to past years. Erica Wygonik questioned if reportable crashes included any bike and pedestrian accidents. Police Captain Mike Maloney confirmed those were always reportable.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that she did not remember reading or hearing about the pedestrian hit and run accident. It is important to report those because the community should know about it.

Police Captain Mike Maloney commented that this was still an open criminal investigation, so he could not share a lot of information.

I. PTS Open Action Items. No Committee discussion.

VIII. MISCELLANEOUS:

Mary Lou McElwain commented that she received an email from Doug Roberts about complaints about residents being overcharged at the parking garages because of the snow parking ban. She asked why the parking meters were still charging on holidays. She also noticed the crossing guards were not consistently using the flashing stop signs.

Parking Director Ben Fletcher explained what happened regarding the person who believed they were overcharged at the parking garage. He addressed the flashing stop signs used by the crossing guards. He also stated there are 9 holidays where the City does not conduct enforcement. The meter vendors do not allow the City to handle messaging on the machines. It is difficult to get the vendor to change the display in a timely fashion for that specific day.

Chairman Peter Whelan noted that he received a letter from Abby Frank who lives at 169 Madison Street. She was concerned about the crossing at Madison Street and Middle Street. Ms. Frank requested that a flashing crosswalk sign be added at the crosswalk. Eric Eby stated the crosswalk has been identified, but there is no funding for improvements. This concern is noted, and they will see what they can do with funding at a future time. Jonathan Sandberg noted that this could be another location where they try the pedestrian flags.

Eric Eby commented that he received a request this week for a crosswalk on Greenleaf Avenue by Hillside Drive. This will be presented to the Committee with a report back at a future meeting.

IX. ADJOURNMENT:

Harold Whitehouse moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:26 a.m., seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

Respectfully submitted by:

Becky Frey
PTS Recording Secretary