

MEETING MINUTES

PARKING and TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

8:00 A.M. – March 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

III. FINANCIAL REPORT:

Harold Whitehouse requested an update on the Foundry Place Garage. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that the Foundry Garage did well in February. Its performance outpaced February of last year. It is a positive result of the Stay and Pay Program. People are parking in the garages in order to stay longer, while 92% of cars parked on the street are still turning over on the third hour.

Harold Whitehouse moved to accept and approve the financial report dated January 31, 2021 as presented, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. **On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.**

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT:

City Councilor Deaglan McEachern commented that he joined the meeting because he has reconsidered his motion made at the February 8, 2021 City Council meeting to install an illuminated sign [Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB)] at the Thornton Street and Bartlett Street location. Something needs to happen with Bartlett Street after the Cate Street development is complete. Staff can take a more detailed look at the corridor after that and take measures to engage the public in a more deliberative fashion.

Elizabeth Bratter supported the parking fine increases to deter bad parking behaviors. Most streets are narrow, and one car parked the wrong way can cause safety issues. The fines are not so the City can make more money. Right now, in many cases, it is cheaper to get a ticket than pay for parking. There is a major parking problem, and it is growing. Someone should be assigned to track parking reductions that are granted for

developments. It should be catalogued and presented to Boards when future parking reductions are considered.

Ken Goldman commented on the Islington Creek Neighborhood Parking Program. People on Islington Street were not included in the original Islington Creek plan because they already have limited on-street parking. Islington Street is still not included in this plan. There needs to be a distinction made between public parking and people who live there parking on the street. He stated the two-tiered fee schedule does not make sense. It would cost more than parking in the Foundry Garage for someone who doesn't live on that street to park there. It should be the same fee. There should also be consideration given to allowing residents to purchase just a guest parking permit.

Liza Hewitt commented that she supported the installation of the RRFB at Middle Road and Essex Avenue. The area was studied by DPW and it meets all the criteria. City Council has found the money to install the RRFB, if it is approved.

Rodney Rodriguez commented that City Council made the decision to go forward with the RRFB on Middle Road and Essex Avenue. Mr. Rodriguez was the victim of the hit-and-run at the crosswalk. So many families try to cross there and it is a headache.

Beth Margeson commented that when the Farmers' Market moved to Little Harbour School, they were able to get No Parking signs installed around the neighborhood. Ms. Margeson requested a similar parking situation for the South End. She requested a report back on event parking and how that could work in the South End.

Robin Husslage spoke in support of the Islington Creek Neighborhood Parking Program. The neighborhood has many narrow streets and small house lots with no driveways. It is challenging to find a parking spot close to home. There needs to be a balance between residents, visitors and commuters. The request is for a pilot program. Without the pilot, they won't know what works for this neighborhood.

V. NEW BUSINESS:

A. City Council request for review of proposed parking fine increases, by Parking Director Ben Fletcher. Parking Director Ben Fletcher commented that these fines have not been looked at since 2013. A lot of fines are lower than the cost of parking for the day. A number of people are choosing to get a \$15 ticket and stay all day. The proposal is to increase the fine to \$50 because of the Stay and Pay Program. Currently, the maximum a person could pay is \$46 to park all day. People have to make a choice to not pay the meter and then be caught by enforcement staff in order to incur the fine. The proposed price is only imposed on drivers who decide to not follow the parking ordinances.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that there was concern from business owners/employees about not getting to the meter in time and getting a fine. Mary Lou McElwain questioned if they were working with the businesses downtown. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that there is a program in place at the Foundry Garage where downtown employees can get parking for 10 hours for \$3.00. There is no reason a downtown employee should be using the meter and having those issues. Presently there are 170 employees actively taking advantage of the program. Some people may not be aware the program exists, but they try to let people know as much as possible.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if the Council made a decision on this issue. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that Council referred this back to the Parking and Traffic Safety Committee for further discussion. The public was concerned that the raised fines would affect low-income people, but that demographic is not a major factor in citation issuance.

Steve Pesci noted that the City has done a lot for downtown employees and parking. He questioned if there was a way to have a similar employee parking program at a higher price for the Hanover Garage. Steve Pesci understood the sticker shock of the proposed fines and questioned if there was a repeat offender fine. Parking Director Ben Fletcher confirmed there was. If a person has \$125 dollars in unpaid citations, then they are subject to immobilization. If a person has 10 or more tickets in a year, then they are subject to increased fines. Steve Pesci commented that the 'expired parking' fines may need to be a little lower initially. They could lower the fine to \$35 but adjust the 'Safety' fines. A lot of safety fines remain at \$15. Lowering the expired parking fines could be balanced out with increasing some of the safety fines.

City Manager Karen Conard commented that there was concern the steep fines apply to everyone and not just the Stay and Pay Program spaces. City Manager Karen Conard questioned if they could separate out the 15- and 30-min spots and adjust the fine. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that they combined the former time limit spaces into the first line of the table. There are not many of them left because Stay and Pay eliminated most of the previous time limits. Adjusted fines are meant to encourage people to behave a certain way.

Chairman Peter Whelan commented that a person's other choice could be to park at the Foundry for \$1.00 an hour or Hanover for \$2.00 an hour. Parking Director Ben Fletcher confirmed that was an option.

Mary Lou McElwain questioned if there could be more available spots for employees in the Hanover Garage. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that on a normal summer day the Hanover Garage would fill fairly regularly. That has not happened over the past year. The Hanover restoration project will make 30% of the garage unavailable for 3 years. Pricing changes were made to try to encourage people to park at the Foundry and walk further.

Steve Pesci commented that the fines were low for habitual offenders. Ten tickets or more is a lot. It should be tightened up to 5-6 in one year. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that would require an ordinance change. He clarified that a fee is set through the Fee Committee and a fine is the result of behavior or action. Either proceeding must go through three readings at the City Council.

Chairman Peter Whelan questioned if someone could get multiple parking tickets for staying all day. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that they were allowed to write three tickets in a day, but it is difficult to get around to a vehicle multiple times in one day. Chairman Peter Whelan questioned how many cars were booted last year for nonpayment of tickets. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that he did not have that figure on hand.

Mary Lou McElwain agreed with Steve Pesci's comment on lowering the parking fine from \$50 to \$35 and looking at adjusting the safety fines. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that he would be happy to address safety fines at a future meeting. The intent of this meeting is to move forward with the four violation categories fines.

Steve Pesci suggested that the fines be lowered from \$50 to \$35 and they should come back with a comprehensive adjustment to the safety fines and frequent offender fines.

Erika Wygonik commented that she was in support of increasing the fines and the proposed number aligns with the overall logic. It makes sense to move forward with this proposal. The sticker shock is understood, and the fine should be adjusted over time. It should be revisited more often to avoid such a big jump. The safety fines are important. Frequent offenses should be more serious. Maybe they could leave a flier that advertises the parking program for employees on repeat offender cars.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if there was an issue with the barricades placed downtown. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that in general it is taking inventory out of the mix. The City's parking is already overcrowded even now. In general, more people are finding space in the garages. People who want to pay the meter will pay. It is just a matter of being able to find an on-street parking space at all.

Jonathan Sandberg commented that the goal should be compliance. It would be helpful to keep track of the rate of citations written and see if the \$35 fine changes that in a meaningful way. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that the assumption was a 40% reduction, if the fine went to \$50.

Public Works Director Peter Rice recommended adjusting the fine for late payment if the initial fine is amended to \$35.

Steve Pesci moved to recommend to the City Council that the parking fine rate be increased as follows: \$35.00 fine and \$55.00 fine after 30 days in each of the four violation categories (session expired, parked in no parking area, emergency snow ban, and commercial loading zones), and request a report back on recommendations to adjust the safety and frequent offender fines at a future meeting, seconded by Harold Whitehouse. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

B. City Council request for review of implementation of Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons at three pedestrian crosswalk locations. (Madison Street at Middle Street, Essex Avenue at Middle Road and Thornton Street at Bartlett Street)

Eric Eby commented that there was a RRFB planned on Middle Street during the bike lane project. They were not installed because of funding. The consultant that recently reviewed the bike lanes recommended the RRFB at Wibird Street. Other low-cost items have been suggested, but the RRFB is more effective and the most expensive. He stated the Madison Street at Middle Street, and Essex Avenue at Middle Road would be appropriate locations for RRFBs. The Thornton Street at Bartlett Street location was tabled at the request of City Councilor McEachern.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if this came out of the capital budget. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that it was existing capital money that had been set aside for pedestrian and bike improvements.

Mary Lou McElwain questioned what the implementation timeline would be for installation. Eric Eby responded that it would be whenever the vendor could do the install. It would be within a couple months when the ground is thawed.

Jonathan Sandberg commented that the bike plan actually shows two RRFB's, one at Wibird Street and another at Madison Street. The consultant recommended the Wibird Street location. Eric Eby responded that Wibird Street was farther south. A lot of people want to cross at Cass Street because it is less of a walk. It makes more sense to spread the beacons out.

Mary Lou McElwain clarified that they were taking the Thornton Street location out of this request. Chairman Peter Whelan confirmed that was correct. There is a 4-way stop sign at the Thornton Street location.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that Wibird Street crosswalk was most used. Eric Eby confirmed the intent is to just put in one on Wibird Street. Installing two beacons too close together is not good practice.

Fire Chief Todd Germain noted that the market across the street draws a lot of foot traffic on Middle Street. Madison Street would be a more direct route for that. Mary Lou McElwain corrected herself and agreed that Madison Street got more foot traffic than Wibird Street. It should go in at Madison Street. Public Works Director Peter Rice agreed that it should go in at Madison Street. That is consistent with the referral from City Council. Chairman Peter Whelan agreed. He noted that he had a letter from 20 residents on Madison Street requesting it be placed there.

Jonathan Sandberg commented that more needed to be done to slow traffic on Middle Street. The crosswalks provide a false sense of security for pedestrians unless other traffic calming measures are implemented.

Eric Eby commented that it may be a bigger challenge to install the RRFB at Madison Street because there is a small sidewalk island at the market and a residential front porch that may block sightlines on the Madison Street side. They would need to look at both locations to see which would work better.

Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to endorse installing Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons at two pedestrian crosswalk locations (Essex Avenue at Middle Road and a safe location on either Madison Street or Wibird Street at Middle Street), seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

C. Request for traffic signal at intersection of Lafayette Road and Hoover Drive, by Ken Riley. Eric Eby commented that residents have requested staff look at putting a traffic signal here. They have talked to the State and would like to have City support before moving forward. The first step would be to collect data and report back.

Erika Wygonik commented that she was concerned about the proximity to West Road and a driveway. That may not be best place for a signal. Eric Eby noted that the State is looking at this area in another project and currently is not proposing a traffic signal at either location, but they can compare data.

Public Works Director Peter Rice noted that this was a State controlled road, so they need State approval. Implementation would be at the City's expense.

Mary Lou McElwain moved to conduct traffic assessment of intersection and report back on findings at future meeting, seconded by Harold Whitehouse.

Steve Pesci commented that he was inclined to oppose the motion. NHDOT conducts the studies on needs in the State roadways. It is premature for the City to interject the cost of this study and project. The City should not be leading on it.

On a roll call vote, motion passed 7-2. Steve Pesci and Chairman Peter Whelan voted opposed.

D. Request for crosswalk on Greenleaf Avenue at Hillside Drive.

Eric Eby commented that this request was from residents with children walking to the High School. They are looking for a safer way to cross Greenleaf Avenue. Cars are traveling fast, there are limited sightlines, and the roadway has a curve. There is a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) project to modify the intersection of Greenleaf Avenue and Lafayette Road, and reduce traffic along Greenleaf Avenue. This project is the best long-term solution rather than install a crosswalk, which could give pedestrians a false sense of security.

Erika Wygonik commented that she had a lot of concerns about people crossing the road as it stands currently. People whip around the corner and a crosswalk would come up quickly. Improving access to pedestrians is important, but it needs to be done in a safe way. She agreed that a comprehensive plan would be the best choice.

Public Works Director Peter Rice stated a vote was taken on this several years ago before the completion of the signalized intersection at the High School. Part of the intent was to provide an alternate approach to avoid utilizing Greenleaf Avenue. This should be looked at in a comprehensive manner. Staff can start the process in examining how the intersection should be reconfigured for an overall safer approach.

Mary Lou McElwain agreed that a comprehensive plan was needed because of the number of children in the area. She hopes the area can be reviewed soon.

Erika Wygonik asked when the physical changes would happen. Eric Eby responded that the more formal adjustments would be part of the CIP project. Erika Wygonik questioned what the CIP timeframe was. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that periodically Council approves intersection improvement funding as part of the CIP process. There is money available to start a study, but not implementation.

Mary Lou McElwain moved to refer to staff to evaluate and report back at future meeting, seconded by Harold Whitehouse. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

E. Request to examine speed of vehicles on Sagamore Avenue approaching the intersection with South Street, by Councilor Kennedy.

Harold Whitehouse moved to refer to staff for report back at future meeting, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

F. Request for Islington Creek Neighborhood Parking Program.

Mary Lou McElwain requested that they discuss this at another meeting. This will be a long discussion and this meeting is running late. This could be scheduled as a special meeting or work session.

Chairman Peter Whelan agreed they should set up a special meeting for the neighborhood to participate in the discussion. The Planning Board just approved a 21-unit micro apartment development with no on-site parking. The owners are required to provide off-street parking to the tenants. The meeting would be to talk about a pilot program.

Steve Pesci agreed that a focused meeting would be important. Many things will need to be tweaked and tried. They will never make everyone happy, but improving the parking situation in the neighborhood is good.

Mary Lou McElwain moved to refer to staff for further review and schedule a meeting with the neighborhood committee in the near future, seconded by Steve Pesci.

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

G. Request for South End Neighborhood Parking Program.

Chairman Peter Whelan stated he would recuse himself from this vote as he lives in the South End Neighborhood.

Public Works Director Peter Rice spoke to his comments at the Citywide Neighborhood Meeting and the comment made by Beth Margeson during the public comment period. He stated the original request was to do what the Little Harbor area did regarding restricted parking. He clarified that the Farmer's Market parking issue was a specific request in an emergency situation. It is a complete restriction of parking on the street. It is not a parking program. A neighborhood parking program would be a better option if the residents want it. These programs are driven by the residents.

Steve Pesci commented the South End went through a neighborhood parking program discussion last year and it failed. This would restart that discussion.

Chairman Whelan commented that he was abstaining from voting, but the neighborhood was divided on it for a lot of reasons. Steve Pesci commented that he was not opposed to revisiting it but questioned if Staff had the resources to have two discussions simultaneously.

Parking Director Ben Fletcher commented that he had the numbers from last summer for the Islington Creek Neighborhood. There is nothing on the South End because they canceled the effort early in the process. They can put resources into making counts in the South End, if so desired.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that the Committee needs to be aware that this will open up a huge discussion of every neighborhood requesting a parking program. They need to prepare for that.

Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to refer to staff to reach out to the neighborhood committee to gather more information, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. On a roll call, motion passed 8-0-1. Chairman Peter Whelan abstained from voting.

VI. OLD BUSINESS:

No old business.

VII. INFORMATIONAL:

A. Report back on the Aldrich Road neighborhood traffic calming meeting.

Eric Eby commented that attendance was good at the February 23rd meeting. Staff heard a lot of concern about speeding. The average speeds were in the low 20's and the higher end was closer to 30 mph. This is not surprising given the characteristic of the road. There was consensus from the neighborhood to add more signage, another speed sign, and speed humps. Eric Eby identified three possible locations for speed humps. There were questions about the speed at one end of the road and more data was included from the other end. The data includes average speeds on the whole road. There was very little traffic going over 40 mph. The road is listed at 20 mph, which is low for that type of roadway.

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that there were concerns brought up about the validity of the data. He clarified that the data provided was multi-directional data. Eric Eby confirmed the data was included in the packet.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if there was room for a roundabout. Eric Eby responded that there was not.

Steve Pesci commented that this was another example of an artificially low speed limit. The City spent a lot of money in that corridor in 2014. It is a relatively safe corridor. It may make sense to do traffic calming, but this is not the most unsafe corridor in the City. Steve Pesci supported a reasonably priced traffic calming installation in this corridor.

Mary Lou McElwain moved to refer to staff to report back on recommendations on traffic calming measures at a future meeting, seconded by Harold Whitehouse. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

B. Congress Street/Maplewood Avenue/Middle Street/Islington Street pedestrian signal changes update. Eric Eby commented that the vendor had been out to change the signal heads. Now there is a flashing yellow right turn arrow if the pedestrian crossing is activated. The YIELD TO PEDESTRIAN signs still need to be lowered to the driver's view. Signage is the last change to be made and will be completed soon.

C. Monthly accident report from Police Department.

Police Captain Mike Maloney commented that there were 96 traffic accidents in January 2021 and of that 34 were reportable. There were no bike accidents. The only pedestrian accident was the pedestrian hit-and-run that is under current investigation. There has been an upward trend in DWIs and DWI related crashes. He applied for and received additional grant funding for pedestrian and DWI safety. There has also been new grant funding approved for media messaging.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that the police log shows a lot of verbal warnings have been given, but not a lot of tickets. Police Captain Mike Maloney confirmed they write hundreds and hundreds of tickets each year. The media release that goes out is 25 pages long and the Police Department does not select the items mentioned in the log.

D. PTS Open Action Items. There was no discussion.

VIII. MISCELLANEOUS:

No miscellaneous agenda items.

IX. ADJOURNMENT:

Harold Whitehouse moved to adjourn the meeting at 10:00 a.m., seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

Respectfully submitted by:

Becky Frey
PTS Recording Secretary