

MEETING MINUTES

PARKING and TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

8:00 A.M. – April 8, 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 Darrin Sargent
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:

Mary Lou McElwain questioned if signage advertising the \$1.00 an hour rate at the Foundry Place Garage would go back up near the Sheraton Hotel to help lead people to the garage. Parking Director Ben Fletcher confirmed he would look into it. There is a permanent sign on Market Street at Russell Street. If there is a spare sign, then he would be happy to put it back up.

Steve Pesci noted that there is an annual problem with competing operator signs encroaching in the right-of-ways and sidewalks. City staff should keep on top of that. Parking Director Ben Fletcher confirmed staff would look at the placement of the signs.

Harold Whitehouse moved to accept and approve the financial report dated February 28, 2021 as presented, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. **On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.**

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Iris Estabrook commented that she and her neighbors felt left out of the Islington Creek Parking Program. That concern should be considered.

Tom Morgan commented on the motion passed by City Council recently about the electric vehicle charging stations. The item was referred to this Committee for a report back. Mr. Morgan encouraged the Committee to recommend more stations. Portsmouth is behind

the curve on this. The City should not get in the business of running or operating the electric spaces. However, they should make it easier for private operators to put them in. The DC rapid charging units would also be good to add.

Judy Miller commented that the pedestrian traffic lights along Maplewood Avenue at the Deer Street, Hanover Street, Congress Street need to be reconsidered. The overall idea to move traffic is good but cars are not stopping for pedestrians when they are turning right on red. This crossing is now dangerous for pedestrians. There is a sign that says, "watch for pedestrians." However, this could become a bigger problem as traffic increases for the summer. This whole change favors cars over people. The right turn on red should be changed to no turn on red.

Mark Galvin commented on the Maplewood Avenue intersection as well. Mr. Galvin walks that route every day. That intersection is dangerous for pedestrians. Some police officers have agreed it is dangerous. The intersection was incredibly pedestrian friendly, but now it is not at all. The yellow flashing light can be confusing for drivers. The concrete barriers for outdoor seating will add another layer of complexity.

Kerry Rubinstein commented on the Maplewood Avenue intersection as well. The traffic light changes have made it dangerous for pedestrians. This should be looked at again.

V. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Request for all-way stop at intersection of Court Street and Atkinson Street, by Doug Johnson. Eric Eby commented that people come around that corner fast, so it makes it hard for a resident to back out of their driveway. The building on the corner also limits sightlines at that intersection. The plan is to collect data to evaluate the traffic volumes and take sightline measurements to see if an all-way stop is appropriate.

Mary Lou McElwain moved to discuss the agenda item, seconded by Steve Pesci. **On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.**

Mary Lou McElwain commented that it should be extended down to Washington Street as well. Both Atkinson Street and Washington Street are two-way streets. They are narrow and dangerous at the State Street and Court Street intersections. Staff should look at making them one-way instead of putting up stop signs. That would make it easier. It is a complicated problem.

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that this agenda item was just to discuss the all-way stop. Mary Lou McElwain noted that she was requesting to extend the study. Chairman Peter Whelan noted that they could bring up the one-way request during the miscellaneous section at the end of the meeting.

Erika Wygonik commented that having staff gather data makes the most sense.

Mary Lou McElwain moved to refer to staff to conduct study and report back, seconded by Steve Pesci. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

B. Request to prohibit truck traffic on Bartlett Street once Hodgdon Way (Cate Street Connector) is fully open to traffic in July, by Bill Davis. Eric Eby commented that the truck restriction would be put in place on Bartlett Street. Hodgdon Way is under construction and will connect traffic from the Bypass to Bartlett Street. Opening that roadway will allow trucks to get to Ricci Lumber without traveling Bartlett Street.

Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to follow staff recommendations for discussion purposes, seconded by Steve Pesci. **On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.**

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that truck traffic is currently prohibited on Woodbury Avenue from Dennett Street to Bartlett Street. This action would complete the truck traffic restriction for the rest of the area. Cate Street will be modified this spring with a stop sign at Bartlett Street. The intent is to discourage people from naturally turning right onto Bartlett Street. Initial design for Bartlett Street has been completed. This is part of a larger effort to address the concerns of the residents. These changes will calm traffic and create a more pedestrian friendly environment. Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that the motion should say that this will be implemented as expeditiously as possible instead of immediately.

Chairman Peter Whelan commented that they should ensure all businesses with tractor trailer deliveries are accounted for with this change. Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that most of the truck traffic was box truck deliveries. A truck restriction does not prohibit legitimate deliveries. It just restricts through truck traffic.

Jonathan Sandberg questioned if trucks would still be allowed on Dennett Street. Eric Eby responded that there was already a truck restriction on Dennett Street.

Steve Pesci questioned if the through street could be all one name instead of changing from Cate Street to Hodgdon Way. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that they worked hard to try to resolve that, but the naming must remain as it is. There are existing businesses with longstanding street frontage.

Steve Pesci questioned if the future restriction would cover Woodbury Avenue from the southward ramp. Eric Eby responded that Woodbury Avenue currently has a truck restriction for its entire length. Steve Pesci commented that they should share an image showing the full network of truck restrictions with the public to better inform them.

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that adding signage about the restriction is a good point. They will need to work with the State to coordinate signage.

Erika Wygonik commented that it would be good to see the Cate Street and Bartlett Street intersection redesigned. They need to make sure they are communicating the changes at the traffic decision point. It should be treated like a detour in terms of signage. Erika Wygonik suggested changing the little section of Bartlett Street to Cate Street to make it a more coherent through street. It is understood that it's not as simple, so it may not be possible.

Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to prohibit truck traffic on Bartlett Street as expeditiously as possible, seconded by Steve Pesci. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

VI. OLD BUSINESS:

A. Request for traffic signal at intersection of Lafayette Road and Hoover Drive, by Ken Riley. Eric Eby commented that he contacted NHDOT because it is their road. That intersection is part of their ongoing redesign project. They collected traffic volume information and it does not meet the warrants for a traffic signal. A traffic signal is not included in the design currently. Eric Eby recommended holding off until they can see the NHDOT report. There may be other changes that they propose that improve the situation.

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

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

Eric Eby stated there is a project in the CIP for intersection improvements. A better way to address these concerns is to look at the area with the neighborhood and hold a public input session. That would lead to a better long-term solution rather than just putting in a crosswalk.

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that the area was already approved for modification when the signal was installed at the entrance to the high school. The intent was to create a safe left turn option to get to the Bypass. It is a dangerous intersection to come out onto Lafayette Road. There are poor sightlines and people go too fast. The vote at that time was to look at it in a comprehensive manner. It does not need an additional vote. Public Works Director Peter Rice suggested to move this forward to the public process and use money for intersection improvements when they have more input from the residents.

Harold Whitehouse commented that at one point they were working with the State to "T" that intersection and questioned if that was still an option. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that at one time the City had the opportunity to purchase the property that would have allowed them to "T" the intersection opposite Andrew Jarvis Drive. The City did not buy the property and now it is privately owned.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that they should make sure to effectively inform the neighborhood. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that staff would do that. Jonathan Sandberg commented that they should be conscious of the broader community as well. People will have vested interest because their kids walk that street.

Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to schedule public input session to discuss intersection improvement project at Greenleaf Avenue and Lafayette Road, seconded by Jonathan Sandberg. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

C. Islington Creek resident parking program.

Eric Eby commented that they should have another neighborhood meeting to get public input on the proposed changes.

Public Works Peter Rice moved to schedule a public input neighborhood meeting on April 14, 6:30 PM, seconded by City Manager Karen Conard. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

VII. INFORMATIONAL:**A. Status of Chevrolet Avenue sidewalk, and traffic study.**

Eric Eby commented that the traffic study was underway, and they should be getting the draft of recommendations within the next week or two. There is an ongoing sidewalk project as well. Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that they received requests to extend the sidewalk on Chevrolet Avenue to Cass Street. The challenge before was that the City did not have all of the land rights. They have worked with property owners and recommended a land swap to enable this project to move forward. The land swap recommendations will be going to the Planning Board. They will make a decision and send their recommendation to the City Council. The project will probably be completed by the fall.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if they have evaluated adding another stop sign on Cass Street. Eric Eby responded that was part of the traffic study currently in progress by the consultant.

Chairman Peter Whelan commented that the sidewalk would be a good improvement.

B. Middle Street bike lane status update.

Eric Eby commented that they made changes to the section on Middle Street between Cabot Street and Lincoln Avenue. The bike lane was removed and parking was put back to the curb. The parking restrictions are back to what they were before, and signs will be installed. The handicap space is back in front of the chiropractor's office. Bollards will be installed, and the white lines will be repainted. The bollards will be put in at the big curve on Middle Street approaching Middle Road, the South Street bike boxes, and a couple other intersections to keep vehicles from encroaching on the corners. The speed limit on Middle Street has been reduced to 25 mph.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if they would need to return the money to the State with these changes. City Manager Karen Conard responded that they had a conversation with NHDOT that they are within the 6-month test period and would not be in jeopardy of repaying funds. The City needs to hire an engineer to do a study and come up with the safest design possible.

Mary Lou McElwain questioned if they were putting bollards in at Greenleaf Avenue. Eric Eby confirmed they would be installed at Greenleaf Avenue and Lafayette Road.

Jonathan Sandberg asked what set of criteria or benchmarks would be used to measure the safety success over the next 6 months. City Manager Conard responded that would be addressed by the engineer firm to be hired.

Chairman Peter Whelan commented that it would be helpful to include bike lane counts in the report for each meeting. Eric Eby confirmed he would include that data.

Steve Pesci questioned if that section was scheduled for resurfacing. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that it needs to be done within the next 2 years.

Harold Whitehouse noted that he has received complaints that the bollards are hard to see at night and questioned if they could be painted with reflector paint. Public Works Director

Peter Rice responded that the bollard design meets federal standards. It would not be appropriate to paint them. Chairman Peter Whelan noted that most of them have reflective tape on them. Eric Eby added that they were making an effort to clean the bollards and make them as white as possible before they go out.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that the speed of cars seems to have increased since the bike lane was removed for that one portion. Seeing the data in that area would be important.

C. Islington Street construction update.

Eric Eby commented that work was underway between Albany Street and Dover Street. The one-way detour will go into effect next week. It will be one-way outbound on Islington Street from Cabot Street to Albany Street. The detour will be in effect 24/7 throughout the rest of the construction period. The detour will not run through Jewel Court this year. It will be on Albany Street instead.

D. Outside dining barricade setup, Congress Street loading/parking west of Fleet Street. Eric Eby showed the Committee a graphic of the parking area. A couple years ago the Committee voted to try to restripe Congress Street at Fleet Street to make a right turn only lane. The loading zone will allow parking in that section of Congress Street. It will be a loading zone during the day and then cars can park there outside of the loading zone times. There are barricades in front of the Thirsty Moose area and 15 min parking spaces. It made sense to make the right lane on Congress St. available for parking after the loading zone times. Signs will be posted. Most of the barricades are already up in the downtown area. Portsmouth is using a combination of plastic water filled barriers, blue jersey barriers, and metal fencing for the barricades.

Harold Whitehouse commented that the cement barriers looked good downtown. Eric Eby noted that there were reflector strips on the barricades, so they would show up at night.

Erika Wygonik commented that the City should be careful to enforce the no parking during the loading zone hours. That can be an issue. It is a good idea to share the space, but the parked cars should not cause problems when it is a loading zone. Eric Eby commented that the area will be striped to look like a loading zone, so it is not obvious there is parking there unless the user reads the sign.

Public Works Director Peter Rice questioned if the loading zone time needed to go all the way until 7 p.m. The City should research to see if that time can be changed to an earlier point in the day. Usually, most deliveries are done by 5 p.m. Public Works Director Peter Rice recommended that staff will review the data and adjust the times, if appropriate. Parking Director Ben Fletcher agreed. The City has 83 shared spaces. The plan is to use the new signage in other areas as well to let people know they can park in those spaces after hours. It will provide for more evening parking inventory.

Erika Wygonik agreed that it was good to collect data. Most cities have a window of 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. A loading zone that goes until 7 p.m. is rare. There is plenty of precedent to have a more restrictive window.

Chairman Peter Whelan agreed that most delivery trucks were back in the garage by 3 p.m. Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that they could reach out to the people

who receive deliveries to see when they usually get their deliveries as well. Chairman Peter Whelan questioned if they would have to change the hours by making a change to the ordinance. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that it was codified in the Ordinance, so any change would require 3 readings. Chairman Peter Whelan noted that they should get this item moving as quickly as possible.

E. Locations of speed feedback signs and pedestrian RRFBs.

Eric Eby showed the Committee a color-coded map that showed where all the RRFBs and the portable speed feedback signs were installed in the City. Chairman Peter Whelan commented that it would be nice to see this updated graphic at every meeting.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that she was concerned about moving the speed signs around. They are effective throughout the City. If staff asked neighbors about moving them, then they would hear objections. These should be kept in their locations permanently and they could add more in new locations as needed.

Harold Whitehouse agreed with Mary Lou McElwain. It makes sense to leave them where they are.

Public Works Director Peter Rice was supportive of adding more speed signs and they should be implemented based on available funds.

Chairman Peter Whelan commented that DPW should figure out how many speed signs were needed. It may make sense to have some that move around and some in a permanent location. Public Works Director Peter Rice confirmed they would put together a budget.

Steve Pesci agreed it was a worthwhile investment for safety. It would be good to see a priority list of proposed locations.

Chairman Peter Whelan commented that they did not need a motion for this, and he could put it on the City Council agenda.

F. Monthly accident report from Police Department.

Police Captain Darrin Sargent commented that the report goes back to February. They were still trending low in February. A lot of that was attributed to less cars on the road. In March, there was an uptick in accidents and DWI related accidents.

Jonathan Sandberg questioned if these were just reportable accidents or all of them. Police Captain Darrin Sargent responded that the number 49 represented all crashes. 32 were reportable.

G. PTS Open Action Items.

Chairman Peter Whelan questioned if they would be getting a report back on the Aldrich Road traffic calming measures. Eric Eby confirmed that was correct.

VIII. MISCELLANEOUS:**A. Foundry Garage lighting and distance concerns.**

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that they did light measurements at the Foundry Garage in response to concerns from the Reopen Portsmouth Committee. They replaced the pedestrian lighting with higher wattage light bulbs. That resulted in a significant increase in lighting. Cobra head lights will also be added at Hanover Street and Deer Street. The crosswalks will be painted and an RRFB will be added at the Deer Street and Bridge Street intersection.

Harold Whitehouse commented that the residents of Hill Street complained about lighting when the Foundry Garage first opened, and questioned if this change would create an issue for them. Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that all of the lighting changes made were on the street level only. There was no change to the rest of the garage lighting.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that all winter the sidewalks around the garage were very icy. Sidewalk conditions are as important as the lighting, and they should be better maintained.

B. Holiday info on meters and kiosks.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that it was important that the meters and kiosks recognize free parking on holidays. It is not fair for people to pay on those days.

Harold Whitehouse questioned what the final decision was for the meter expiration. Chairman Peter Whelan responded that it went to City Council and will now be set on the agenda for 3 readings. The public will have an opportunity to comment. It could still be revised. Harold Whitehouse questioned if it was currently \$35. Chairman Peter Whelan confirmed that was correct. Harold Whitehouse questioned if they thought about giving a forgiveness letter for the first violation. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that as part of the appeal proceedings there is a one-time forgiveness policy. The forgiveness is not done automatically, but can be granted on an appeal.

Parking Director Ben Fletcher commented that the meter devices can be programmed to display something different on holidays. However, it does not work well especially with holidays that shift days. The company that operates the meters does not allow the City to change the messaging. It can take days and sometimes weeks to change the messaging. Enforcement does not take place on holidays. Meters are always in effect, but enforcement is not.

Jonathan Sandberg questioned if they could use paper leaflet or signs on the streets as notification. Parking Director Ben Fletcher responded that people would object to permanent signage advertising the holidays and leaflets would be a littering nightmare.

Public Works Director Peter Rice explained that there were a lot of things that staff needs to work on and there is an established program in place. This is how operations have been conducted for years with no issues. He appreciated the idea, but the department has other operational priorities to focus on at this time.

City Manager Karen Conard left meeting the meeting at 9:30 a.m. Erika Wygonik voted in her place for the remainder of the meeting.

Steve Pesci stated that there should be a sunset clause on some of the open action items listed on the report. Some of these items have been dormant for a long time. Steve Pesci also agreed with the public comments about electric vehicle charging stations. The City should be more proactive about planning for them in the future. A 3rd party company should be managing the sales, but Portsmouth should be more aggressive in their approach.

Harold Whitehouse commented that they should consider adding a stop sign at the intersection of Sheafe Street and Chapel Street.

Chairman Peter Whelan commented that they should discuss the public concerns about the Maplewood Avenue intersection changes. The flashing yellow light can be confusing.

Police Captain Darrin Sargent offered his personal opinion that allowing pedestrians to cross and vehicular traffic to go at the same time was problematic.

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that the request to make Washington Street one-way will be reviewed by Eric Eby to determine if it's appropriate. They have the authority at this point to initiate that without having to come back to the Committee. It can be done more expeditiously if they move forward with it and report back. One concern about making Atkinson Street a one-way is that a lot of people use that to access the bridge.

IX. ADJOURNMENT:

Harold Whitehouse moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:40 a.m., seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. **On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.**

Respectfully submitted by:
Becky Frey
PTS Recording Secretary