

**MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE
SITE REVIEW TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

2:00 P.M.

**CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
MUNICIPAL COMPLEX, 1 JUNKINS AVENUE
PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

NOVEMBER 6, 2002

MEMBERS PRESENT: David M. Holden, Planning Director;
Steve Parkinson, Director of Public Works;
David Allen, Deputy Public Works Director;
Michael Magnant, Deputy Police Chief;
Charlie Jones, Fire Marshal;
Alanson Sturgis, Chairman of the Conservation Commission;
and, David Desfosses, Engineering Technician (Engineering)

ALSO PRESENT: Lucy E. Tillman, Planner 1

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The Chair called the Special Meeting to order at approximately 2:05 p.m. and read the notice into the record.

A. The application of the **City of Portsmouth** for property located at **175 Parrott Avenue** wherein site plan approval is requested for the construction of a two-story 38,000 s.f. ± building for use as a public library with related paving, utilities, landscaping, drainage and associated site improvements including improvements to a municipal parking area. Said property is shown on Assessor Plan 128 as Lots 14 and 15 and lies within the Municipal district.

SPEAKING TO THE APPLICATION:

John O’Leary, Chairman of the New Library Building Committee, addressed the Committee and stated that they were presenting the site on Parrott Avenue as the site that has been selected for the new library. It was his opinion that the site would be adequate for the library infrastructure and, furthermore, that parking would be adequate. He went on to state that any additional traffic associated with the library would not diminish the Levels of Service presently available at the intersections in close proximity to the site.

Mr. O’Leary informed the Committee that the Mayor had appointed a Library Building Committee that had reviewed every possible site available in the City; more specifically, some 14 sites. After reviewing these sites, the Library Building Committee indicated that the site in question was the most appropriate site for the new library. Mr. O’Leary offered that on three occasions only one member of the committee voted against the site adding that all other members felt that the site would be an appropriate one for the library especially after the adult recreation center activities were moved to the Spinnaker facility.

The Director of the Library, Sherm Pridham, addressed the Committee pointing out that a lot of planning had gone into the selection of a site for the new library and expressed his confidence that the Parrott Avenue site would work. The Chair inquired if the site would meet the future needs of the library with the response being in the affirmative.

Tom Amsler, architect, addressed the committee stating that the existing trees would be preserved on the site; that none of the mature trees would have to be cut down pointing out that there would be green area between the library and the residential area. Vehicles would enter and

park on the easterly side. The proposed two-story building will house a children's wing on the left side of the first floor with administrative space on the northerly side. A courtyard will be provided to serve patrons for a quiet study area or just a place to contemplate in the outdoors. The existing line of trees would be maintained on the easterly side.

A representative from Sebago Techniques addressed the Committee and spoke to the handicapped accessible parking that would be provided in an area closest to the main entrance of the building. A pedestrian walkway is planned from Parrott Avenue directly to the main entrance.

Significant improvements will be made to the existing drainage system. A series of catch basins will be connected to the storm drain area in Parrott Avenue.

The preservation of the existing mature trees will comprise the main element of the landscaping program. Some landscaped islands and shade trees will be introduced into the parking area with some shrubs along Parrott Avenue.

John Burke, the City's Parking and Transportation Engineer, addressed the Committee and informed them that Dough Prentiss, the transportation engineer for the new library, was also present. It was Mr. Burke's opinion that the library parking lot had been laid out very efficiently given the geometry of the site. A tremendous benefit, according to Mr. Burke, would be the ability to accommodate on site deliveries and promote drop offs that would, in turn, decrease the need for parking. The driveway access will be one-way in and one-way out.

Mr. Burke did not feel that the library would create a big demand for parking and referred to an average peak weekday usage of 65 parking spaces. He went on to state that a recent survey indicated that 20% of the existing library patrons arrive on foot with an additional 10% being bike riders. It was anticipated that such percentages would continue or be enhanced due to the close proximity to other uses; such as, the Middle School and a residential neighborhood.

Mr. Burke went on to state that the peak use of the library would be after the Middle School lets out; say, 3:30 p.m. when there would be no students next door and very few teachers left. He pointed out that currently the teachers and staff at the Middle School use the municipal parking lot adding that the lot is poorly laid out. Cars park in a random fashion. Current aisle widths do not meet zoning requirements. Dumpsters take up space and bleachers are sitting in the parking lot. It was Mr. Burke's opinion that with some very minor modifications, a tremendous increase could be had to the parking availability at the Middle School. He went on to state that several meetings had been held with the administrators of the School Department; however, the proposal does need to go to the School Board for their approval.

Mr. Burke stated that outside of the library project, he would like to see the improvements made at the Middle School similar to those accomplished at the New Franklin, Dondero and Little Harbor schools. The chain link fence would be moved 25' toward the field and 24' aisles would be provided. The dumpster would be relocated to the far end of the lot. The bleachers would be relocated to the right hand side of the field. Consideration would also be given to one-way traffic and improvement of the sight distance at Rogers Street.

Mr. Burke further explained that in very close proximity to the Middle School is the Middle Street Baptist Church lot that is not being used during the peak hour. Discussions with representatives of the church have been very helpful and they have worked out, at least in principal, some 17 assigned teacher parking spaces. A walkway and a gated access would be provided. In some instances, the assigned parking would be closer to some of the entrances to the school than where teachers currently park.

Mr. Burke spoke to one other area of available parking and that would be the 20 spaces on Parrott Avenue from Rogers towards Richards. Signage on Parrott Avenue would be corrected to indicate that parking is available. It was his opinion that teachers and library employees could use the long term parking spaces.

Mr. Burke noted that there are approximately 102 full and part-time employees of the school creating a need for some 100 spaces.

Doug Prentiss addressed the Committee and spoke to the chaos that exists for some 15 minutes in the morning and in the afternoon as the school buses are loading and unloading and spoke to a separate parent pick-up/drop off area on Rogers Street.

Mr. Prentiss then spoke to the existing Levels of Service for adjacent intersections during the 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. time period. The intersection of Richards and Parrott Avenues experiences a Level of Service B. The Rogers Street/Parrott Avenue intersection has a Level of Service A. Approaching Richards to Middle is a Level of Service E and coming down Austin to Middle is a Level of Service D. It was Mr. Prentiss's opinion that any increase in traffic associated with the new library would not change the existing Levels of Service.

Mr. Prentiss then went on to speak to the relocated curb cut with a one way out and another driveway one way in and to a book drop off area and the installation of some signing to improve traffic circulation. He also spoke to the possibility of using pavement markings.

Mr. Prentiss went on to speak to possible improvements to various intersections; such as, more of a 90 degree angle at the Middle Street intersection. He noted that the Rogers Street/Parrott Avenue intersection has a lot of pavement adding that there is a plan on the books to upgrade and channelize the intersection by putting in a median strip.

Lenny McAuliffe addressed the Committee informing them that he owns property at 177 and 452-460 Richards Avenue adding that his son, Martin, owns property at 111-115 Richards Avenue. It was Mr. McAuliffe's opinion that the issue was traffic; that a major traffic problem would be created. He spoke to the various organizations on Parrott Avenue; such as the parking lot, the Courthouse, the Senior Citizens Center, the Middle School, the ball fields and now, the library. He felt that the City was asking a great deal from one small street. He further felt that most of the traffic would be bumped onto Richards Avenue and mentioned the difficulty that the school buses have in turning left onto Richards Avenue.

Mr. McAuliffe pointed out that many homes on Richards Avenue do not have adequate on-site parking adding that there are some 28 cars that park behind the JFK every night, every Saturday and every Sunday. Mr. McAuliffe expressed his dismay that the residents of Richards Avenue had not been asked where they would park.

Jerry LaPriore of 139D South Street addressed the Committee and referred to the January 24, 2002, meeting of the Planning Board where conditional approval of the Parrott Avenue site as the site for the new library was given with a list of reservations about parking, traffic, water problems, erosion of green space. He went on to state that subsequently on June 3, 2002, the City Council in a 5-4 vote gave its approval of the site with four of the five "yes" votes expressing confidence in the land use boards' process.

Mr. LaPriore expressed his concern that pertinent information had not been made available to the public via the City's website or the local newspapers. He felt that it was extremely premature for the Committee to offer a recommendation at this meeting without allowing access to certain studies and pertinent information. He asked that the Public Hearing be rescheduled until the

public can be properly informed and provided with certain information to consider and research in order to make an informed decision.

The Chair commented that materials are available in the Planning Department office for review adding that he felt the process was a very open process.

Tom Decker of 182 Richards Avenue spoke to the parking issue and wondered if there was a default plan if it turns out that not as many people walk or ride bicycles as is anticipated. It was his fear that the green space/open space would be jeopardized. It was his opinion that if the application before the Committee was for a private commercial project, the plan would not fly. He questioned the integrity of the Technical Advisory Committee and the Planning Board.

Karen Dutcher, a resident of Richards Avenue, was also concerned about the availability of parking noting that the library would have meeting rooms in addition to the usual library patrons.

Paul Messier of 97 Richards Avenue spoke to the flooding that occurs in his back yard expressing his hope that the problems with the drainage would dramatically improve realizing that he may continue to have a problem.

Harold Whitehouse of 58 Humphrey's Court addressed the Committee and stated that he was speaking as a concerned citizen and wondered if a fire lane all around the building would be required and submitted information that he had received from the State Fire Marshal's office.

Tom Kaufold of 53 Rogers Street addressed the Committee and spoke to the poor visibility as one pulls out of Rogers Street onto Court Street. He inquired as to the number of cars going through that area and what the increase would be in numbers in traffic on Rogers Street. He pointed out that when a vehicle pulls out of the Middle School onto Rogers Street, that the vehicle drives up onto the sidewalk in order to make a turn adding that if the curbing is improved, the street would get narrower. He inquired as to why the peak hour was taken on a weekday and not on a weekend.

Ruth Griffin of 479 Richards Avenue addressed the Committee as a property taxpayer of the City of Portsmouth and questioned the plan before the Board relative to parking. It was her opinion that the biggest romance was between the human being and the automobile and that people are prone to parking as close as they can to wherever they are going. It was her belief that the plan would not work. She referred to a survey that was done previously regarding parking and traffic. At the time she thought that the counts were so unreasonable that they must have been from another city. It was her fear that the green space would evaporate inch by inch pointing out that there would be parking here, there and everywhere in order to put a library on a spot that is too small.

Peter Torrey, Business Administrator of the Portsmouth School Department, addressed the Committee stating that the Middle School is an abutter and an interested party. He thought that it would be a good idea to have a library next to a school site. He concurred that the Middle School does create certain traffic problems at certain times of the day. He pointed out that the School Administration was contacted early on in the process and had been included in discussions about the parking. He went on to state that he could not speak for the School Board or the administration; that the process would have to continue; that is, the process of assisting in resolving the haphazard process whereby parking now occurs. He spoke to the three school sites that had been improved and resulted in keeping pedestrians areas separate from buses and keeping the buses separate from intermediate parking. He urged the Committee to continue the process up to and including the School Board.

Tom Morgan of 39 Richards Avenue addressed the Committee and stated that he was in favor of the proposal and thought that it was a great plan. He felt that the library would be an asset to the neighborhood and was confident that the Committee would be successful in mitigating whatever impact there would be on the neighborhood. He pointed out that he had been a resident of Richards Avenue for some twenty years and that he had been at a disadvantage of not having any parking on site. He did not feel that there would be much difference between the JFK and the library.

The Chair made two calls for speakers.

John Burke, the City's Parking and Transportation Engineer, was confident that 176 spaces would be replaced and that there was a possibility that a couple more would be added. He went on to state that he is bothered when he sees parking in the downtown that is not being used; such as, the spaces that are not being used by the various churches.

Doug Prentiss spoke to the fact that the peak hour is on a weekday. With regard to increase in traffic, he estimated that there would be a 3% increase in traffic at the Richards/Middle/Austin intersection which he felt was relatively minor. It was his opinion that the peak hour would have 50 vehicles in and 59 vehicles out.

Mr. Prentiss reiterated the fact that there is a lot of pavement at the Rogers/Parrott intersection. It was his opinion that channelization and signing would put people in the divided paths that they should be in.

The Chair made a third and final call for speakers.

Jerry LaPriore spoke to the waiting period to get onto Middle Street from Richards Avenue. Mr. Prentiss responded that there may be another four seconds of delay (with the library in place) adding that the intersection does not meet the warrants for a traffic signal.

Mr. McAuliffe repeated his question as to where the residents of Richards Avenue would park.

The Chair indicated that it was his understanding that no parking rights had ever been established at the JFK lot. Mr. Burke concurred adding that they have observed six to twelve cars parked on the lot on a daily basis.

Mr. Decker reiterated his concern that there may be miscalculations on the amount of foot traffic and the amount of available parking. Mr. Burke responded that conservative numbers were used to ensure that the library and the Middle School would have sufficient parking.

Mr. Kaufold again spoke to the peak period and the use of the meeting rooms by some 120 people. Mr. Prentiss stated that the national parking standards take into consideration all types of meeting rooms and other activities.

The Chair declared the Public Hearing closed.

DISCUSSION AND DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE:

The Chair inquired if the proposed structure would be located on the existing lot that is known as the JFK lot. Mr. Amsler responded that there had been no movement of property lines and that the structure would be completely sited on the lot.

The Chair asked if the green space would be increased. Mr. Amsler responded that there would be a net increase in green space. He then commented that the stormwater runoff would be collected off the roof into a new storm drain system and that there would be no runoff onto adjacent properties. The entire site will be regraded to get the water into the catch basins. He pointed out that the site is in an area that has a potential for a 500 year storm.

Mr. Holden stated that it was his understanding that the present amount of runoff exceeds the anticipated runoff in a built condition. Mr. Amsler replied in the affirmative.

Mr. Allen offered that some of the flooding that has occurred in the past is the result of a combined system. He pointed out that the area is the primary area that the City will be addressing through the CIP to separate the storm drain and the sewer system. He stated that it is anticipated that the flooding situation would be improved by the various off-site improvements scheduled for the area.

Mr. Desfosses commented that the general design is very good; however, he felt that oil/water separator hoods should be installed inside the catch basins. Mr. Desfosses also spoke to the datum used for the flood elevation.

The Chair returned to Mr. Whitehouse's concern about a fire lane. Fire Marshal Jones submitted a letter from Acting Fire Chief LeClaire concerning the need for a fire lane. The Fire Marshal indicated that the building would be fully sprinklered and that the building could be accessed on three sides with fire hoses.

Mention was made of the lighting plan; that it should be consistent with existing standards and that the glare from the lights should not flow off the property.

Mr. Desfosses asked that the snow storage area be labeled on the plan; that the plan include a detail on the brick pavers; and that the details comply with City standards. With regard to the requirement for a dumpster, the Public Works Director, Steve Parkinson, pointed out that currently there is no dumpster at the library; that any trash and recyclable material would be picked up by the Public Works Department.

Mr. Parkinson noted that typically projects of this type are reviewed by the Traffic/Safety Committee. The comment was made that this application could appear on the November 21st Traffic/Safety Agenda.

Deputy Chief Magnant inquired as to why the traffic was not surveyed on a Saturday. Mr. Burke replied that the traffic on Saturday would be no where close to average. Deputy Chief Magnant stated that he trusted Mr. Burke's opinion and asked if Mr. Burke was satisfied that the site in question and the surrounding area could support any increase in traffic and any required parking. Mr. Burke replied, "absolutely". The Deputy Chief stated that the people have a right to be concerned about the traffic pattern. Mr. Burke felt that making it one-way would make a huge improvement.

The Deputy Chief wondered if the Levels of Service C or below would improve or do no harm. Mr. Prentiss responded that there are two movements at that location below "C" and they are Richards to Middle and taking a left from Austin to Middle. He felt that the Levels would remain the same.

The Deputy Chief wondered if turning movements would improve at the various intersections. Mr. Prentiss responded by stating that one of the concerns is geometry. He spoke to the possibility of cutting back the sidewalk on the westerly side of Richards and improving the sight

distance. He offered that the City could look into the issue of cars parking too close to an intersection.

Mr. Holden stated that it was his understanding that the Levels of Service presently existing would not change under a build-out condition. The reply was in the affirmative. Mr. Holden commented that it is possible that some intersections could be tweaked. Mr. Prentiss responded that some buildings are situated very close to the intersection; for example, Court Street.

Mr. Holden asked to have his memory refreshed as to how the JFK lot had been used. Mr. Parkinson stated that in 1997 two handball courts were taken out; that the parking lot between the Middle School and the JFK was a dirt parking lot. Both parking lots were regraded and striped.

Deputy Chief Magnant and the architect had a discussion on crime prevention procedures and design.

The Chair commented that the plan as presented appeared to meet the requirements of the Site Review Regulations. Fire protection would be adequate. Surface drainage was addressed. Landscaping and open space should be significantly improved. It is anticipated that there would be no increase in flooding. Traffic congestion should be effectively reduced. Curb cuts are being eliminated and the impervious area will be reduced. Potential conflicts are being reduced by eliminating driveways. The Chair went on to point out that the site is very much an urban setting. It was his opinion that the traffic impacts would be minimal with no change in the Levels of Service; that with minor off-site improvements, the functions of the adjacent intersections could be improved.

Mr. Allen moved to approve with stipulations. Mr. Sturgis seconded the motion. In speaking to his motion Mr. Allen stated that it was his opinion that the site met the criteria set forth in the *Site Review Regulations*. He did not feel that there would be any decrease in the Levels of Service at the various intersections. He pointed out that there would be an increase in green space and expressed his confidence that there would not be an issue with drainage.

Mention was made of the significant improvements that had been made at the Little Harbor, Dondero and New Franklin parking lots with some very minor changes; that some significant improvements are proposed for the Middle School that would be a real positive for the entire area. The issue remains of getting concurrence from the School Board.

Fire Marshal Jones concurred that John Burke had done an excellent job with the parking lots for the three elementary schools; that his children attend Dondero School and he was looking forward to the day when they would attend the Middle School and walk to the library.

The motion to recommend approval passed unanimously with the following stipulations:

1. That the site plan be reviewed by the Traffic/Safety Committee with a report back to the Planning Board;
2. That oil/water separators be added to the catch basins;
3. That clarification of the flood zone datum issue be submitted to David Desfosses, Engineering Technician with the Public Works Department;
4. That the site plan include a detail on the brick pavers;
5. That the site plan include a detail on City standards;
6. That the landscaping plan shall be reviewed by Lucy Tillman of the Planning Department;

7. That the building have a master box connection to the Fire Department;
8. That the site plan indicate the snow storage area; and,
9. That the engineer work with the Department of Public Works to ensure proper coverage over the existing drainage system.

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These minutes were taken and transcribed by Barbara B. Driscoll, Administrative Assistant in the Planning Department.