

**PORTSMOUTH
TRAFFIC & SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING
9:00 AM – Thursday, September 16, 2004
City Hall - Council Chambers**

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Ralph DiBernardo, Vice Chair called the meeting to order at approximately 8:05 a.m.

II: ROLL CALL:

Members Present:

Ralph DiBernardo, Vice Chairman
John Burke, Parking & Transportation Director
Deputy Police Chief Dave Young

Ted Gray, Member
Ron Cypher, Member
Herb Bunnell, Member
Jonathan Bailey, Member

III. ACCEPTANCE OF THE MINUTES:

Ralph DiBernardo made a correction on a motion he made for the 62 Deer Street Driveway item. It should have read: **Motion** made by Ralph DiBernardo to deny the request for a driveway at 62 Deer Street as opposed to denying the reconsideration since we had already reconsidered it.

IT WAS VOTED on a Motion by Ted Gray to accept the minutes of the Traffic & Safety Committee meeting of August 19, 2004 as corrected. Seconded by Ron Cypher. Motion passed.

MOTION made by Ron Cypher to suspend the rules and move Item D under New Business to first on the list given the time constraints to members of the public. Seconded by Ted Gray. Motion passed.

V. (D) Thaxter/Islington St. – Resident request to extend corner clearance – Deputy Police Chief Dave Young stated that the onsite committee reviewed the intersection where there is concern for the safety of vehicles exiting Thaxter Road to make a left since the sight line is blocked by vehicles parked on Islington Street. The residents would like to have the parking spots removed in order to ensure a safe line of sight to traffic.

Jim Noucas, 64 Thaxter Road presented the Committee with photographs of the intersection and the line of sight when cars are parked along Islington Street. He stated that in addition to traffic entering and exiting Thaxter Road there are two other traffic areas that a driver must be concerned with - one being the gas station across the street from the intersection and the other from Spinney Road. With vehicles parked along Islington Street the problems are compounded. Mr. Noucas also provided videotape to John Burke. Deputy Chairman Ralph DiBernardo stated the photos were informative.

Kevin Semprini 954 Islington Street, Portsmouth citizen and police officer - lives directly in front of the intersection in question. Officer Semprini stated that he

and Mr. Noucas were speaking representing the neighborhood. Many residents have expressed their concerns and fears about the intersection.

Ralph DiBernardo asked Kevin, as the property owner fronting Islington St. and the onstreet parking in question, for the record, if he would not object to parking being eliminated from in front of his property? Officer Semprini answered that he is 100% in agreement with the elimination of the parking spaces. He noted that the same vehicles tend to park out front and when a box truck does it, you cannot see at all. He noted that there is plenty of parking available across the street.

Ted Gray asked Kevin Semprini how he classifies this intersection as anything different than those on Middle Street say at Cabot Street. Officer Semprini stated that at the Thaxter/Islington intersection, you have traffic inbound and outbound, as well as traffic coming from a busy gas station and from Spinney Road.

Kevin Guy 303 Thaxter Road stated that he has used this intersection for over 25 years and there has never been a problem until the past 6 to 8 months when they started parking between Spinney and Thaxter. He noted that when the Ambit gas station across the street has its nickel off special on Thursdays, cars beginning backing into the street. Eliminating the two parking spaces is needed for safety.

Ralph DiBernardo stated that eliminating parking is not totally a Traffic & Safety issue and suggested the possibility of referring it to the Parking Committee. John Burke stated that safety overrides utilization issues and therefore the recommendation is appropriate from Traffic & Safety.

MOTION made by Herb Bunnell to eliminate parking on the easterly side of Islington Street from Spinney Road to Thaxter Road. Seconded by Ron Cypher. Motion passed.

(Back to the Agenda Order)

IV. CORRESPONDENCE:

- (A) Traffic Signal/Walk Clearance Intervals – Resident letter of 9/3/04 and Parking & Transportation Division response 9/8/04.
- (B) Pevery Hill Road/Greenleaf Ave sight distance – Parking & Transportation Division letter of 9/8/04.
- (C) Middle Street/Mendum Avenue Crosswalk – Parking & Transportation Division letter of 9/8/04.

John Burke noted that items IV. B & C were follow-up correspondence to action items at last month's meeting. He noted that IV.A. was in response to resident's questions pertaining to walk clearance intervals at downtown traffic signals.

V. NEW BUSINESS:

- (A) 136/137 Cabot Street – Residents request for No Parking – 7/28/04 email and 8/3/04 letter – Ron Cypher referred to the on-site review noting that just about

everything that was stated in both letters from Mr. Desfosses and Mr. Gerard took place while we were onsite.

MOTION made by Ron Cypher to line three parking spaces in front of the store, post signs “Do Not Block Driveway” in front of Mr. Desfosses and Mr. Gerard’s driveways, and refer to Parking Committee for enforcement of the 15 minute parking zone. Seconded by Ted Gray. Motion passed.

John Burke referred to the 15-minute parking per Ordinance that is currently in front of the store. He stated that the referral to Parking Committee was to determine if civilian enforcement should cover this area.

- (B) 221 Woodbury Avenue – Resident request for crosswalk – 8/4/04 email – Jonathan Bailey referred to the on-site stating that the residents concern is crossing Woodbury Avenue at Thornton Street against traffic with no protection from a crosswalk. The sight lines out of town were good and clear but the sight lines towards town were very short. The only way to make the crosswalk legal would be to eliminate a significant amount of parking on Woodbury Ave. and even that it wasn’t necessarily going to provide much protection for this crosswalk. Another concern the committee had was that the proposed crosswalk would not connect to sidewalks since there was not sidewalk on one side of Woodbury Ave. He noted that if the City’s plan for opening up Cate Street to the Route 1 Bypass occurs, traffic and pedestrian safety on Woodbury would improve dramatically. He noted that this concern should be addressed in the city’s master planning efforts.

MOTION made by Jonathan Bailey to place on file. Seconded by Deputy Police Chief Young. Motion passed.

John Burke stated that Federal Highway has recently come out with revised crosswalk placement warrants, which are much more conservative than in the past. He noted that several communities have begun crosswalk elimination programs where crosswalks were installed with improper sight distance or where speeds were high or on multiple lane highways. The FHWA warrants are presented in a nice chart showing factors such as sight distance, posted speeds and number of lanes. John will bring this to a future committee meeting.

Ted Gray stated that people look at crosswalks as a cure all for pedestrians regardless of site distance, speed limits and number of lanes and this is not so.

John Burke noted that a Bike/Pedestrian Plan will be developed by the City after the Master Plan process ends and one of the things that will be done is a complete crosswalk inventory and review citywide.

- (C) Dodge Ave./Rte. 33 – Resident concern – sight distance – 8/4/04 email – Jonathan Bailey stated that there are two properties next to each other, both in the same family. He has been in contact with them about the hedges and will report back to the committee on his findings. John Burke noted that the City had trimmed the hedges yesterday to improve sight distance.

MOTION made by Jonathan Bailey to table until the November meeting. Seconded by Deputy Police Chief Young. Motion passed.

VI. OTHER BUSINESS:

- (A) South/Sagamore – Pedestrian Concerns - Peter Torrey of the Portsmouth School Department spoke representing concerns of residents of the Little Harbor School area. He noted that the concerns were that elementary age children cross this very dangerous intersection to go to Little Harbor School. The crossing guard is there, however vehicles do not slow down nor yield to pedestrians all the time even with a guard there. The crossing guard alone is not a sufficient safety measure. A petition was distributed to the Committee members, which was received after the Agenda had gone out, requesting that the city address this issue and that a police officer be visibly present along with the crossing guard until adequate safety changes are made. Peter Torrey thanked the Committee for consideration and introduced resident Sheila Jenkins.

Sheila Jenkins of 434 Broad Street stated that she has 6 children in the Portsmouth School system, all using this intersection. She has great concern along with other parents that this intersection the way it is now is too dangerous for kids to cross. She stated that there are no delineated sidewalks on one side, there have been a number of accidents and a child was hit last year. She would like to see an activated push button installed there as soon as possible so the kids have exclusive use of that intersection and all cars come to a stop. She asked that John Burke do a study to see how we can make this as safe as possible.

Robin Burdick, Principal of Little Harbour School stated that she and Peter were present to join the community of parents and work together with all our agencies to make the intersection safer for our kids. She stated that she encourages parents to walk their children to school, so we have created this. If everyone drives we have other problems. She noted that there is an increase in the number of walkers to school from this area in recent years.

John Burke stated that the good news is that the traffic signal upgrade is programmed in the City's capital plan for next year so an upgraded signal set could be in place as early as next fall. John noted that the intersection had been successfully controlled by a crossing guard for many years for school opening and closing, however, he was understanding from the Principal of Little Harbour that the number of children walking to school in the south end has increased in recent years. He was fully supportive of these efforts and echoed the need for making these routes safe. John suggested that a subcommittee be formed to include the School, Police and Public Works Departments as well as representatives of the parents to review the intersection and crossing guard operations and to develop strategies and safety improvements that can be implemented in advance of the signal project next year.

Ralph DiBernardo asked what the cost of upgrading the signal was. John noted that individual intersection improvements could range from \$50 to \$150,000 depending on what is involved. The City has been steadily upgrading its antiquated signal system over the past 6 years and has made great progress. John

noted that signal improvements however, are only one measure to improve pedestrian safety. At school crossings there is also the need for operational and educational strategies as well. The human element is extremely important.

Ted Gray suggested involving the crossing guards at this meeting. Deputy Police Chief Young stated that he has received a briefing from the crossing guard who works at this intersection. The Deputy Chief offered to coordinate the meeting.

Ralph DiBernardo asked if anyone from the Committee would like to be on this sub-committee. Jonathan Bailey said he would like to.

MOTION made by Deputy Police Chief Young that a meeting be held with John Burke, Deputy Chief Young, Jonathan Bailey, school parents and school officials to sit down and discuss the issues. Seconded by Ron Cypher. Motion Passed.

Ralph DiBernardo stated that part of what has changed at this intersection is likely an increase in vehicle traffic as well as pedestrian traffic. He noted that the Committee has taken action to reduce traffic in this area noting that when the Wentworth Hotel was rebuilt, the Committee reached agreement with the developers to reroute their visitors from what was planned (through the city) to Route 33.

John Burke stated that this approach for working with the stakeholders and involving the community was a good model for the Committee to use in the future. He noted that there are a lot of capital improvements planned throughout the city to improve safety, however, it does not mean we have to wait until these projects are developed to gain relief. There are often times many low cost operational things that can be done that are as successful in improving safety as major infrastructure upgrades.

Peter Torrey agreed that the process was a good one and looked forward to working with those involved.

VII. INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:

- (A) Peeverly Hill Road/Middle Road – traffic signal change – 9/2/04 notification of operational changes – John Burke stated that the signals have been modified at Peeverly/Middle Roads to eliminate some conflicting movements. If anyone has specific questions regarding these modifications he would be happy to address them.

VII. ADJOURNMENT:

MOTION made by Ted Gray to adjourn. Seconded by Jonathan Bailey. Motion Passed.

Respectfully submitted: _____
Elaine E. Boucas