

MEETING MINUTES

PARKING and TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

8:00 A.M. – November 7, 2019

City Hall – Conference Room A

I. CALL TO ORDER:

At 8:00 a.m., Chairman Doug Roberts called the meeting to order.

II. ROLL CALL:

Members Present:

Chairman, Doug Roberts
Public Works Director, Peter Rice
Planning Director, Juliet Walker
Fire Chief, Todd Germain
Police Captain, Mike Maloney
Member, Mary Lou McElwain
Member, Steve Pesci
Alt. Member, Jonathan Sandberg

City Staff Present:

Parking and Transportation Engineer, Eric Eby
Parking Director, Ben Fletcher

Absent:

Member, Harold Whitehouse
Member, Ralph DiBernado

Chairman Roberts announced Ralph DiBernado's resignation effective today.

III. ACCEPTANCE OF THE MINUTES:

There were no objections to the emailed minutes, so they were approved ahead of the meeting by the Committee members. The minutes were approved by the City Council on October 28, 2019.

IV. FINANCIAL REPORT:

Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to accept the financial report dated September 30, 2019, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. **Motion passed 8-0.**

V. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Diane Schaefer, resident, spoke to agenda item IX.D. Ms. Schaefer requested crosswalks be installed on Middle Street between Cass Street and Lincoln Street. It is a busy area with a lot of traffic and pedestrians. The new developments that are being built in the area will only make it busier.

Molly Wilson, resident, spoke to agenda item VIII.B. Ms. Wilson talked about the neighborhoods concerns about traffic volumes and speed on South Street. Ms. Wilson spoke in favor of lowering the speed limit on South Street.

Valerie Rochon, Chief Collaborator at Chamber Collaborative of Greater Portsmouth, spoke to agenda item VII.C. Ms. Rochon spoke in favor of the COAST proposal to expand their bus route and eliminate 4 parking spaces near the Hanover Garage. Transportation is needed for downtown workers.

Charles Eldredge, resident, spoke to agenda item VIII.B. Mr. Eldredge spoke in favor of lowering the speed limit on that section of South Street.

Brendan McNamara, designer for the 15 Middle Street project, spoke to agenda item VIII.A. Mr. McNamara commented that the building is no longer viable for the current use, so the proposal is to create a 28-room hotel. The building will be preserved and utilized. The team has been working with the City to provide a plan with minimal traffic impacts. They have negotiated private parking locations for the valet service. The proposal also includes overflow queue spaces.

Elizabeth Bratter, property owner, spoke to agenda item VIII.A. Ms. Bratter commented that the 15 Middle Street intersection was tough because it is very busy. Ms. Bratter suggested that they provide a van that shuttles customers from a specific leased parking area to the hotel and back instead of valet. This option would encourage guests to walk more, and the van could transport more than one group of guests at a time.

Chairman Doug Roberts noted that he received a letter from Marc Stettner talking about the changes to Maplewood Avenue and Edmond Avenue. He also noted that Ms. Bratter had submitted a letter to the Committee, but it was not received in time for packet distribution.

Susan Regan, resident, spoke to agenda item VII.A. She stated the previous owner of the building put a fence on City property. The new owners were supposed to remove it, and they have not. The fence causes issues for Ms. Regan's tenants' parking. Ms. Regan supports agenda item VII.A.

Stuart Kahl, resident, spoke to agenda item VIII.B. Mr. Kahl noted that there was not a speed limit sign across from Spinney Road. That would be a good place to put in a speed limit sign.

VI. PRESENTATION:

A. COAST bus service changes for Hanover Street bus stop, by COAST.

Michael Williams, COAST Director of Operations, spoke to the proposed bus service changes. COAST currently operates 4 routes in the City, and the proposal would expand that to 7 routes. Approximately 124,880 rides started or ended in Portsmouth this year, and Portsmouth is a major contributor to COAST. The goal of the change is to speed up travel between the northern communities and Portsmouth. For example, it currently takes 90 minutes to get from Rochester to Portsmouth. The new plan would make it 45 minutes. All of the routes run hourly and come into some part of the downtown. The Hanover location is important because of all the connections that take place at that location. COAST currently uses Market Square for connections, but it is not large enough. COAST needs the current bus stop and 4 parking spaces on Hanover Street to accommodate 6 vehicles to make the convenient connections. Most COAST customers are using this transportation to get to their place of employment.

The goal is to make COAST an attractive mode of transportation to help alleviate congestion in the downtown. The Market Square stop would remain under this proposal, but it would not be used for connections.

Mary Lou McElwain requested more information about the new route going over to Kittery. Michael Williams responded that COAST runs limited shuttles to the Shipyard today. The new connection will run hourly from 6:30 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Steve Pesci questioned if there would be stops at Kittery Foreside and Badger's Island as well. Michael Williams confirmed there were several new proposed stops in Kittery, and they were meeting with the town officials to finalize them.

Jonathan Sandberg questioned if they considered micro-transit in their plans. Michael Williams responded in general micro-transit can be very expensive. COAST provides on-demand service for seniors and people with disabilities, but require them to make a reservation a day in advance. Planning Director Juliet Walker added that the presentation for micro-transit was not intending to replace or duplicate current services. The goal would be to have the micro-transit fill in gaps in the overall service.

Mary Lou McElwain supported the plan and thought it would increase ridership and reduce parking needs in the City. Mary Lou McElwain questioned how long buses would be idling on Hanover Street because that could be a concern. Michael Williams responded that they would not idle for any longer than a few minutes at the top of each hour. COAST abides by the New Hampshire idling laws and put a lot of care into maintaining the emissions controls on their vehicles.

Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to consider agenda item VII.C. out of order, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. **Motion passed 8-0.**

Hanover Street, request to eliminate four parking spaces next to Hanover Garage, to enlarge bus stop area, by COAST. Chairman Doug Roberts supported the proposed plan.

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that tax dollars do not go toward funding this program. It is supported by revenue from the parking fund. This transportation is part of the City's overall program. Supporting this proposal is consistent with the overall program.

Jonathan Sandberg suggested adding another bus shelter and a bike rack at the Hanover Street stop.

Steve Pesci supported the motion and recommended that the signage is clear that the corridor should be used by transit vehicles, and at least one sign should reference the state regulations for idling.

Mary Lou McElwain moved to eliminate four parking spaces on the east side of Hanover

Street immediately north of Fleet Street to enlarge bus stop area, seconded by Public Works Director Peter Rice. **Motion passed 8-0.**

VII. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Dearborn Street, request to prohibit parking in last space next to water's edge. Mary Lou McElwain commented that she supported removing the parking space and installing a No Parking sign.

Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to prohibit parking in last space next to water's edge on Dearborn Street, seconded by Planning Director Juliet Walker. **Motion passed 8-0.**

B. Sagamore Avenue, south of Sagamore Grove, request for No Parking on west side of roadway. Steve Pesci moved to refer to staff to notify abutters and report back at future meeting, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. **Motion passed 8-0.**

VIII. OLD BUSINESS:

A. Report back: 15 Middle Street, request for valet parking on Porter Street. Eric Eby commented that he and Ben Fletcher met with the applicant in the field, and they made revisions to the plan as a result of that meeting. The revisions include the 3 additional parking spaces on Porter Street for traffic queuing. There are other concerns on Porter Street that are outside of the applicant's control.

Chairman Doug Roberts commented that he was concerned because it was a proposed 28-room hotel and restaurant. Crossing Middle Street can be difficult and there is a loading zone right next to the proposed valet parking.

Mary Lou McElwain was concerned about pedestrian traffic in that area especially when the Music Hall has events. It is also between two very busy traffic lights.

Jonathan Sandberg questioned if it would be possible to make it a no left turn from Middle Street on to Porter Street to help traffic circulation. Eric Eby responded that has not been discussed. Planning Director Juliet Walker added that it would be difficult to enforce without making structural changes to that intersection.

Steve Pesci was concerned because it was a hotel and they would be hosting a lot of out of town guests who would not be aware of all of the surroundings. It is a challenging site in a busy area, and that is concerning.

Fire Chief Todd Germain commented that the developer has addressed the fire access concerns at the site in the plan. Fire Chief Todd Germain was concerned about the potential queuing on Middle Street because that is a major corridor for the Fire Department to get to the north side of town. The applicants still need to work to address the queuing on Middle Street.

Police Captain Mike Maloney agreed with the Fire Chief's concerns about the queuing. The overall change to the building was not a concern.

Chairman Doug Roberts commented that he was sympathetic because it was a difficult building to find a use for, but still had concerns about the traffic problems that may arise.

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that they should address the traffic concerns on Middle Street and the loading zone on Porter Street. The developer has made sincere efforts to address some of the concerns so far, but some are still outstanding.

Steve Pesci added that there were concerns about the Middle Street, Islington Street, and Congress Street intersection as well.

Chairman Doug Roberts noted that density reduction of the project may help.

Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to table the request to allow the developer time to address the concerns presented by the Committee, seconded by Planning Director Juliet walker. **Motion passed 8-0.**

B. South Street, report back on traffic calming request.

Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to lower the speed limit on the section of South Street between Middle Road and Lafayette Road to 25 mph, seconded by Planning Director Juliet Walker.

Eric Eby commented that they have been working on this with the neighbors in the area for a year. They measured speeds on the roadway and found that most cars were not exceeding the 30 mph speed limit. They were traveling in the 25 mph range. There is no sidewalk on one side and there is a school and park in the area, so there is justification to lower the speed limit. This change would go from the Middle Road and South Street intersection to the Lafayette Road and South Street intersection.

Planning Director Juliet Walker added that they discussed other traffic calming measures with the neighborhood that would be implemented in the long-term. This is one part of an overall solution.

Fire Chief Todd Germain questioned if there was a plan to make it a T-intersection in the future. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that they would have to review it.

Mary Lou McElwain questioned if the speed limit on Middle Road should be lowered as well to be consistent. Eric Eby responded that they could report back on it.

Steve Pesci commented that the gateway points like this one should be consistent in speed to let people know they are entering the downtown area.

Chairman Doug Roberts amended the motion to lower the speed limit on the section of South Street between Middle Road and Lafayette Road to 25 mph and staff to report back on changing the speed limit on Middle Road, seconded by Planning Director Juliet Walker. **Motion passed 8-0.**

IX. INFORMATIONAL:

A. Bike lane flex posts, bike corrals, and Zagster stations to be removed for winter prior to Thanksgiving. No Committee discussion.

B. Woodbury Ave bridge to reopen November 11th. No Committee discussion.

C. I-95 northbound on-ramp from Market Street to be closed until Memorial Day, as soon as Woodbury Ave bridge opens. No Committee discussion.

D. Request for crosswalks across Middle Street between Lincoln Street and Cass Street. Chairman Doug Roberts noted that staff will report back on this item.

E. Quarterly Accident Report by Police Captain Mark Newport.

Police Captain Mike Maloney reviewed the report. The City is not trending any higher or lower with the motor vehicle categories. The City averages around 10-15 reportable accidents per week. A reportable accident is anything with damage more than \$1,000.00. The month of October was trending normal.

Chairman Doug Roberts questioned if the Department had any ideas on how to reduce the number of accidents. Police Captain Mike Maloney responded that is one of the Department's biggest goals every year. A lot of the additional patrols used for enforcement are funded by highway safety grants. The additional enforcement from 2018-2019 helped to reduce traffic accidents by 20% and reduced injuries in accidents by 13 accidents compared to previous years. Traffic enforcement and education are two main factors in reducing accidents. The Department did not get the same amount in highway safety grants for this year and part of the reason for that is because there was a reduction in injury crashes.

Jonathan Sandberg questioned if the Department had correlated the number of hours spent on enforcement and the reduction in crashes. Police Captain Mike Maloney responded that they have the data, so they could do that. Jonathan Sandberg commented that it could be used to help identify hot spots for enforcement. Police Captain Mike Maloney responded that a lot of the enforcement is focused on the downtown specifically for the hands-free enforcement. Speed is everyone's main concern, so enforcement is not confined to one area.

Steve Pesci added that the overall traffic is increasing, so seeing a reduction in accidents is even more impressive.

F. PTS Open Action Items. No Committee discussion.

X. MISCELLANEOUS:

Public Works Director Peter Rice acknowledged Ralph DiBernardo's outstanding service to the Committee and the City. His civic-mindedness and commitment to the City needs to be noted and is greatly appreciated.

Chairman Doug Roberts proposed requesting a budget line item to buy a stock of pedestrian flashers to have available for areas in the City when needed. This Committee could request that the administration make these available, so it can be a

decision based on safety not financing. Public Works Director responded that they have done that. They have looked at the budget and funding has been requested.

Mary Lou McElwain requested that the flashing speed limit signs also be included in budget requests. Public Works has installed some, and the Police Department has installed others. There should be coordination between the departments. They are effective. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that has also been identified for potential funding. Physical cost is not the only factor. Staff time and maintenance also need to be considered.

Planning Director Juliet Walker highlighted the traffic calming program application. It will now be available online and go into the records system. That will hopefully encourage people to utilize the application more and create a document trail for the request. The application is available online here:
<https://portsmouthnh.viewpointcloud.com/categories/1079/record-types/6450>

Mary Lou McElwain commented that she had concerns about crosswalks in the City and requested that the Committee talk about it in a future meeting.

Planning Director Juliet Walker reminded the Committee that there was a presentation on micro-transit the next day. No immediate action was expected, but a joint taskforce may be formed as a result of the meeting. The meeting would be recorded and available online.

XI. ADJOURNMENT:

Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to adjourn at 9:21 a.m., seconded by Steve Pesci. **Motion passed 8-0.**

Respectfully submitted by:

Becky Frey
PTS Recording Secretary