

MEETING MINUTES

PARKING and TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

8:00 A.M. – August 6, 2020

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

Planning Director Juliet Walker

Fire Chief Todd Germain

Police Captain Mark Newport

Members: Mary Lou McElwain, Steve Pesci, Jonathan Sandberg,
Harold Whitehouse, Erica Wygonik (Alternate)

Absent:

Public Works Director, Peter Rice

City Staff Present:

Parking and Transportation Engineer, Eric Eby

Parking Director, Ben Fletcher

III. FINANCIAL REPORT:

Harold Whitehouse moved to accept and approve the financial report as presented, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. **On a unanimous roll call, motion passed.**

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Gerald Duffy spoke to the bike lanes on Middle Street. The striping on Middle Street has faded and made the corridor unsafe. It should be restriped.

Mathew Glen spoke to the bike lanes on Middle Street. The accident between the bicyclist and car door was unfortunate. It underlines the need for safer infrastructure for bikes. Multiple cars park in the buffer on a regular basis. There should be a physical barrier to prevent that. The beginning of the lane should go away or the bike lane should start 50 feet away.

Ned Reynolds spoke to the bike lanes on Middle Street. Cars do not park properly at the entrance to the bike lane. They are in the buffer. Trash and recycling bins are in the bike lane as well. There needs to be more action on the bike lane, and more education about the proper way to park.

Allison Bussiere commented on the bike lanes on Middle Street. She lives on Middle Street. The bike lanes have caused a lot of safety concerns. After the bike lane project was installed, a parked vehicle was totaled in front of her home. Entering and exiting driveways is very unsafe and drivers have to watch for pedestrians, bikes and vehicle traffic. Ms. Bussiere and her family are cyclists, but they never use the bike lanes.

Charles Griffin commented on the transparency of the bike lane agenda item. The bike lane accident should have appeared as a business item on the agenda, not an informational item. The public has not had a chance to review the information. Any discussion about this matter

has to present both sides. The public needs to hear from the individuals that investigated the accident as well. This matter needs to be tabled until the September meeting.

Janet Thompson spoke to the Woodbury Avenue one-way section starting at Cottage Street to Bartlett Street. The City needs to resolve the extreme traffic on the one-way section. There is poor visibility because of parked cars on the street. Residents have a hard time backing in and out of driveways. Traffic will increase with the West End Yards development.

Marie Nelson spoke to the bike lanes on Middle Street. The kids aren't using the bike lanes on Middle Street. They use Lincoln Avenue. The road itself has so much debris because the street sweepers can't clean it properly. Vehicle speeding needs to be addressed.

CJ Fleck spoke to the bike lanes on Middle Street. Mr. Fleck echoed the comments of the first three speakers. There needs to be better parking enforcement. Posting information on the City web site is not an effective way to reach people. Bins in the bike lane on trash days is a hazard. Mr. Fleck was in favor of the bike lanes but noted that there was room for improvement on the safety.

Ned Raynolds clarified that the car accident that Ms. Bussiere mentioned was a result of a drunk driver and not due to the bike lanes.

Harold Whitehouse moved to suspend the rules in order to address Agenda Item VII.A. Bike lane accident on Middle Street, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain.

On a unanimous roll call, motion passed.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that this discussion should be about the accident and a full discussion of the bike lane. There were some good points made by the speakers in the public comment period. There will be more vehicle traffic and bike traffic with school starting soon. This should be postponed.

Chairman Peter Whelan agreed that they need a full report on the accident. They need to be transparent about this to let the public see the information and comment on it properly.

Planning Director Juliet Walker commented that they could put something on the agenda as a discussion point. There was no intended action on this item today. It was just a follow up discussion.

Jonathan Sandberg requested clarification if there would be more information for the September meeting or if the public was not informed enough to comment ahead of this meeting. Chairman Peter Whelan responded that the public did not have all of the information to comment on it. Some additional information could be provided.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that they should be talking about the overall safety of the bike lane. They are talking about one accident, but there's a bigger picture to look at as well.

Mary Lou McElwain moved to table the discussion of the bike lane accident on Middle Street with a report back from staff and discuss the safety aspect of the bike lanes at the September 3, 2020 PTS meeting, seconded by Harold Whitehouse.

On a unanimous roll call, motion passed.

Planning Director Juliet Walker clarified the Police Captain and Fire Chief do not have a lot of detail on this episode, but they are happy to provide what they have. There should be a larger discussion about the safety. Staff can propose some potential options. Providing more recent data would help as well. Keep in mind accident reports are only provided for certain accidents.

Police Captain Mark Newport commented that this was not a reportable accident. The car was not moving. They would not have taken an official accident report on this. The fire department was first on the scene.

Fire Chief Todd Germain commented that he will not be at the September meeting. The victim declined transport to the hospital, so there is no medical report on this. The bicyclist was knocked down to the ground by an open passenger side car door and the victim had face lacerations. That's the extent of the fire department's involvement.

Steve Pesci commented that this type of accident is the most common bike/vehicle accidents. It happens where there are bike lanes or not. The dooring is a separate issue from the bike lane safety. A lot of countries are teaching drivers "the Dutch Reach", to open doors with their opposite hand so they are forced to look over their shoulders.

V. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Chapter 7, Article XVII, Sections 7.1701 through 7.1704, Moped Regulations review, by PTS Committee members. Discuss the ordinance as it relates to parking of mopeds, scooters, bikes and other non-licensed motorized, and electric mobility devices on streets and sidewalks.

Chairman Peter Whelan commented that he got a letter from the owner and operator of Port City Mopeds with good feedback. It was distributed to members last night via email.

Jonathan Sandberg commented that the ordinance was good, but the public is not aware of it. This is a problem where people are not following the rules. There should be better signage or public outreach to help solve the problem.

Steve Pesci commented that mopeds should not be able to park on the sidewalk. No one driving a moped and parking is aware of all the sub letters and caveats of the ordinance. They should discuss evolving the policy and street system, and have designated moped parking areas or pods. Some of them may be on sidewalks, but mopeds should be thought of as vehicles.

Mary Lou McElwain agreed with Steve Pesci's comments. She stated she counted numerous mopeds (18) on Monday afternoon and they were all parked on downtown sidewalks. They should revise the moped parking regulations. Some mopeds are as big as motorcycles and take up a lot of sidewalk space.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if this item originated from City Council or this Committee. Chairman Peter Whelan responded that it originated with this Committee. Chairman Peter Whelan received emails and letters from store owners downtown about mopeds parking against their store fronts. It may be best to have a small working group or subcommittee look through the ordinance and make recommendations on changes.

Steve Pesci noted that he was not anti-moped, but they should try to figure out a way to better accommodate them and prevent a bad experience.

Chairman Peter Whelan questioned if there were any volunteers for the subcommittee. Steve Pesci, Mary Lou McElwain, Planning Director Juliet Walker, and Eric Eby volunteered. Planning Director Juliet Walker commented that a parking enforcement staff member should also be included. Chairman Peter Whelan commented that he would reach out to the moped community as well. They can report back at the October meeting.

Chairman Peter Whelan moved to establish a subcommittee to discuss the ordinance as it relates to mopeds and other electric mobility devices with a report back at the October 2020 PTS meeting. The subcommittee will be comprised of PTS members, city staff and members of the moped community (appointed by the Chairman), seconded by Steve Pesci.

On a unanimous roll call, motion passed.

VI. OLD BUSINESS:

A. Report back on request for All-Way STOP at intersection of Thornton Street and Sparhawk Street, by residents of area. Eric Eby commented that he looked at traffic counts, pedestrian volumes and the sight lines. A four-way stop is a good alternative at this location. The sight lines are limited by bushes and trees. The pedestrian and vehicle traffic volumes are equal at that intersection. It is a shared street, so a four-way stop is an ideal solution.

The Committee received an email from Nancy Johnson, neighborhood resident, supporting the All-Way STOP.

Steve Pesci moved to approve an All-Way STOP at intersection of Thornton Street and Sparhawk Street, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain.

On a unanimous roll call, motion passed.

B. Report back on request for flashing beacon at intersection of Woodbury Avenue and Dennett Street, by Harold Whitehouse. Eric Eby commented that the report was in the packet. He evaluated the sight lines at the intersection and consulted previous traffic studies done in the corridor. The traffic volumes don't warrant a traffic signal at that intersection. The next alternative would be a flashing beacon. The accident history shows 6 accidents in the past 5 years. This is not at a level that is out of the ordinary. It is a busy intersection but there are not a lot of accidents. A vehicle must pull over the crosswalk to see what's coming, but they are not in the road. The sight lines are adequate. A flashing beacon is not an appropriate measure. A left-turn lane was identified as being warranted in the Woodbury Avenue traffic study, but was not included in the final design as it would interfere with the left turns onto the Route 1 Bypass northbound ramp. The Cate Street connector will change traffic volumes in that area. The Committee should monitor those changes. The Bypass northbound ramp intersection with Woodbury was also examined as part of this report back. The sight lines are adequate due to the offset alignment of the curblines at the intersection, but if a future construction project adjusts the curblines, measures may be needed to ensure adequate sight lines are provided.

Harold Whitehouse appreciated that they will continue to monitor the situation. The new Senior Activity Center and the Frank Jones development will generate a lot of traffic.

C. Status update on the staff project to graphically display all of the city speed limits.

Eric Eby commented that this was presented at the February meeting. It is a color-coded map showing all the speed limits to see how consistent the speed limits are through the City. It is a good starting point for discussion. There has not been any action taken on this yet, but the Committee can establish next steps.

Planning Director Juliet Walker noted that the City completed a Complete Streets Design Guidelines report and it classifies streets. It may be good to cross reference the report with the map shown today.

Chairman Peter Whelan noted that the Pease speed limits were posted at 35 mph, which seemed high. It was unclear if it was in the City's jurisdiction though.

Steve Pesci noted that it may be good for a smaller group to focus on this and then bring it to the full Committee to review.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that before the subcommittee met all the information should go out to the public via the newspaper and City web site. There will be a big response from residents regarding speed limits. Chairman Peter Whelan commented that they should focus on the complete streets piece first, and then the subcommittee can work with residents in November 2020.

VII. INFORMATIONAL:

B. Traffic volumes during pandemic. Eric Eby provided a graph showing the daily traffic volumes for the intersection of South Street and Lafayette Road from March through July in both 2019 and 2020. He commented that the 2020 traffic dropped off in March and April. Overall the traffic is 80-85% of what it usually is. It's come back from the beginning of the pandemic.

C. PTS Open Action Items. Harold Whitehouse spoke to the closure of Echo Avenue and questioned if it was official.

Fire Chief Todd Germain stated that they were still trying to come up with a permanent but moveable barricade system. That is why it is stalled right now. It is closed now and will remain closed, but the barricade system is still being addressed.

Eric Eby added that they were still in discussions with NHDOT about the closure as well.

VIII. MISCELLANEOUS:

Mary Lou McElwain commented that schools were opening soon and there will be an increase in traffic because parents are being encouraged to drive their kids to school. Managing the traffic flow should be a discussion point at the next meeting. Police Captain Mark Newport commented that they always work with schools on traffic.

Planning Director Juliet Walker clarified the approval process of the meeting minutes. Once they are approved via email by the PTS Committee, the actions and minutes are sent to the City Council and recommended for acceptance and approval. There is only one item voted on today by the PTS Committee that the City Council will need to vote on. It is the All-Way STOP at the intersection of Thornton Street and Sparhawk Street.

Chairman Peter Whelan noted that the PTS Committee members have 72 hours to make changes to the minutes and if there are no changes, then they are deemed approved and sent forward to the City Council. PTS will have an action sheet to clearly show what was voted on in this meeting to keep it clear.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that she received an email from Pat Bagley in regard to a vehicle always parking on Brewery Lane. It is parked legally in the travel lane and happens on a daily basis. Eric Eby commented that this was discussed in March and they were going to erect a temporary NO PARKING sign during the Islington Street detour. However, that detour is not needed yet. Parking on narrow streets is not much of an issue with low traffic, but they can consider implementing no parking on a permanent basis if traffic increases.

Mary Lou McElwain questioned why the detour was a factor. There are other parking spaces for the car in that area. The NO PARKING sign should happen now. Eric Eby responded that this could be brought up at the next meeting.

IX. ADJOURNMENT:

Harold Whitehouse moved to adjourn at 9:21 am, seconded by Erica Wygonik.

On a unanimous roll call, motion passed.

Respectfully submitted by:

Becky Frey
PTS Recording Secretary