

**Citywide Neighborhood Committee
Meeting Minutes for the Ward 2 Forum
September 14, 2021**

The forum, held at the Middle School, was a hybrid with in-person and zoom attendees.

Committee Members Present: Larry Cataldo, Chair, Lori Soloway, Vice Chair, Beth Margeson, Secretary, and Mark Syracuse. Paul Mannle and David Cosgrove were excused.

Elected Officials on the panel: Rick Becksted, Mayor and Jim Splaine, Assistant Mayor

City Officials Present: Karen Conard, City Manager; Mark Newport, Police Chief; William McQuillen, Assistant Fire Chief and Peter Rice, Department of Public Works Director

Elected Officials Attending: Councilor Peter Whelan, Councilor Deaglan McEachern and Councilor Ester Kennedy.

City Staff Present: Stephanie Seacord, Public Information Officer

At 6:35 pm, Larry Cataldo welcomed the attendees and participants.

On behalf of the residents of the Islington Creek neighborhood, he personally thanked the City Manager and Assistant City Attorney Jane Ferrini for their support in helping with filing formal comments to the Federal Surface Transportation Board about problems with Pan Am diesel engine noise and fumes. "Their help allowed us to reach board members with our concerns," he said.

Lori Soloway, the coordinator, introduced the panel: Mayor Rick Becksted, Asst. Mayor Jim Splaine (CNC Member), Karen Conard, Chief Mark Newport, Assistant Fire Chief McQuillen and DPW Director Peter Rice.

The next CNC Meeting will be on Wednesday, October 20, 2021. Lori suggested people get on the CNC mailing list by sending an e-mail to: cncportsmouth@gmail.com.

Each panel member will be giving a brief overview of their departments after which they will field questions from attendees on public safety, public works projects and other issues facing city residents.

Mayor Becksted then made a few brief opening remarks and said he looked forward to answering questions. Assistant Mayor Jim Splaine indicated that he was looking forward to meeting in person and said that the CNC was ready to hear and talk with residents.

City Manager Karen Conard said that she was thrilled to be at her third Ward forum and was looking forward to listening and answering questions that were posed to her prior to the meeting.

Both Chief Newport and Assistant Fire Chief McQuillen said that they were here to answer questions.

Next, Peter Rice addressed the Forum and expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to speak informally with people in this manner. Director Rice presented a slide show that presented information on how to access the Department of Public Works by calling 427-1530, Click N Fix App through phone and desktop, neighborhood traffic calming programs and the ability to reach out to Eric Eby for that, as well as make citizen requests through the Capital Improvement Plan.

He believed that the last time DPW addressed Ward 2 was in 2018 and a lot had been done since then. The overview of projects and the rate of completion was presented to the participants through the slide presentation. He emphasized the ongoing Islington Street project and a number of others that were completed in the past two years. He also mentioned the Neighborhood Parking trial program, recently instituted in the Islington Creek neighborhood.

Questions and Answers:

Ken Goldman asked if there would be a survey or pole to determine the effectiveness of the program. He also inquired about the cost of the program, if it is to be continued in the spring of 2022. Peter Rice said PW is still working on the numbers.

Nicole LaPierre, a resident of Islington Creek, reported on the current status of the program, so far, and asked if the city has any plans to study city-wide parking. She pointed out that most of the problems in various neighborhoods, including her own, stemmed from granting parking variances to developers by the land use board. Without such a study the land use boards would have no guidance as to the problems these variances can and will cause.

Mayor Becksted said that one of his commitments, if elected, was to initiate a trial in the Islington Creek Neighborhood. This was the perfect location to try out a parking program trial. They have been requesting parking relief for years.

David Rheane asked if the city had any idea where cars went that normally parked in Islington Creek before the pilot program. Did they, he asked, use the parking garage, a parking lot, such as Bridge Street or did they find parking spaces in some other neighborhoods where parking was free? This would be a good benchmark for a citywide study.

Andrew Bagley raised a question about the need for more speed tables in the neighborhoods with traffic/speeding problems. Peter Rice stated that there will be two tables scheduled for Middle Road and South Street in FY23. (Speed tables are midblock traffic calming devices that raise the entire wheelbase of a vehicle to reduce its traffic speed.) Rice also outlined the directive on these tables and the importance of resident feedback in making any determinations.

Elizabeth Blatt raised a concern about the lack of building inspectors. She asked if Portsmouth do the proper job if there are too few of them to keep up with the demand. Peter Rice noted the problem and pointed to Acting Assistant City Manager, Suzanne Woodman, who is currently looking into the “holes” in inspection and possible solutions.

Robin Husslage brought up two issues. The first was the Pan Am train problem affecting the Islington Creek neighborhood. The diesel engines idling for hours, the fumes in the neighborhood, rail car switching at all hours, is creating an environmental/health hazard for the neighborhood. She noted that the volume of activity and accompanying noise has increased ten-fold since Pan Am increased its business to the Newington Propane Terminal. It was much less activity 4-5 years ago.

Nicole LaPierre noted the coincidence that this increase in rail activity (noise, horns, idling, etc.) occurred after Pan Am moved in to their “forever” office in the Foundry Garage. Some neighbors are leaving the city because of this problem.

Robin’s second issue addresses the use of buffer zones between two different Character-based Zoning Districts. Case in point: one half for Hill Street is zoned residential and the other half allows for hotels and large mixed commercial structures. It does not make any sense. How can this issue be worked in a more intelligent manner? One of the panelists directed her to the Planning Department.

Barbara Sadick asked how the one-way street directions were determined in Islington Creek? Peter Rice said the direction of traffic in this neighborhood was determined many years ago. (There are a few notable exceptions along Hanover Street in the vicinity of Pearl, Rock and Brewster streets.) Changes in the direction of traffic along streets fall under the Parking and Traffic Safety Committee.

Lori concluded the meeting by thanking all participants. With no further business to discuss, the forum was adjourned at 8:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Larry Cataldo - Chair