MEETING MINUTES

PARKING and TRAFFIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

Portsmouth, NH

CONFERENCE ROOM A

CITY HALL, MUNICIPAL COMPLEX, 1 JUNKINS AVENUE

*Members of the public also have the option to join the meeting over Zoom (See below for more details)**

8:00 AM **MINUTES** **November 16, 2021**

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Peter Whelan called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

II. ATTENDANCE

Members Present:
City Councilor/Chairman Peter Whelan
City Manager Karen Conard
Public Works Director Peter Rice
Fire Chief Todd Germain
Police Captain Mike Maloney
Mary Lou McElwain
Steve Pesci
Mark Syracusa
Harold Whitehouse
Erica Wygonik (Alternate)

Absent

City Staff Present:
Parking Director Benjaminjamin Fletcher

III. FINANCIAL REPORT

Harold Whitehouse moved to accept the Financial Report dated October 31, 2021, and place on file, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

IV. PUBLIC COMMENT (15 MINUTES)

Michelle Wirth of 439 Hanover St. spoke to the Islington Creek Neighborhood Parking Program. Ms. Wirth commented that before the parking program she and her family could park in front of their house on the street. There are four drivers in the household and 6 cars. They are only allowed to park 4 cars. The extra cars park on State St. Ms. Wirth commented that they should be able to park as many cars as they need on their street. Ms. Wirth has incorrectly received 4 parking tickets in the past 3 months

and had to come to City Hall to have them voided. The number of parking tickets issued should not be a metric used when evaluating the success of the program. The program is a waste of city money and resources. This neighborhood has enough parking, and the Foundry Garage is close by. The ordinance already says that parking in this area is for residents only, so a parking program was already in place. The residents should just have transfer station stickers and the city needs to enforce it.

Charlie Moreno of 50 Cornwall St. echoed Ms. Wirth's comments. Parking in this area was not a problem before. Mr. Moreno rents out a 6-bedroom house. The city worked with him to ensure all of his tenants could park in the neighborhood with this program. However, there are not enough visitor passes for the people that live there. This is a costly program. The city could be using this money in better ways. Portsmouth is not a big city, and this is not needed. It is hard for Mr. Moreno and the contractors working on his house to accomplish what they need to in the 2-hour parking window.

Ken Goldman of 271 Islington St. also spoke to the Islington Creek Neighborhood Parking Program. Mr. Goldman commented that it was unclear what the measures of success are for this program. Some of these side streets have more cars parking now than they did before. It is unclear who will bear the cost of this program if it continues in the future. The community would probably vote to continue the program because right now it's free. It should be clear whether there will be a cost of not if this continues. They should not need to provide vehicle information for guest passes.

Elizabeth Bratter, owner of 159 McDonough St. commented that the Islington Creek Neighborhood Parking Program meetings should take place in the evening so people can come to speak on it. The program is right on target budget wise. It was clear that a lot of people needed passes for just guests. People who have passes are using their driveway parking. Now Ms. Bratter can park on the same block as her house. The parking enforcement has made that end of the street more organized and kept it clear for fire access.

Matthew Glenn of 34 Harrison Ave. commented that they should not have car doors open in the bike lanes. It is good to have the Maplewood Ave complete street program which is in the CIP. Mr. Glenn requested that the intersection with Borthwick Ave., Hodgson Way, and Route 1 go on the agenda in September. At the time there wasn't a crosswalk signal there, but now there is on one side of the multi-use path. The crosswalk does function pretty well, but it does cross 6 lanes of traffic. It would be good to have a connection from the multi-use path to Dondero Foley Way and the rail trial. It had been identified by the Planning Department as the preferred route. Crossing from Borthwick Ave. to Hodgson Way is a large radius and has a curve. It is tough visibility for cars. Mr. Glenn reached out to Joe Johnson at GPI and he had some suggestions for the area. Mr. Glenn noted that he would forward them to the Committee.

Chairman Peter Whelan suspended the rules to bring forward VII. Informational Item E. Status of the Fleet Street Area Reconstruction Project to the first item in the agenda.

V. SITE VISITS

South Street @ Broad Street – Proposed RRFB. Chairman Peter Whelan noted that this would be discussed under New Business.

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VI. NEW BUSINESS

(No public comment during Committee discussion without Committee approval.)

A. Request for traffic calming measures on Harding Road. Staff presentation of speed data.

Parking Director Benjamin Fletcher commented that this was requested by the residents. A speed monitoring device was installed. The speed limit is 20 mph. The average speed is 23 mph and the 85th percentile is 28 mph. No further action is recommended at this time. Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to place results of study on file, seconded by Harold Whitehouse. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

B. Discussion of a default 25mph speed limit on all streets throughout Portsmouth. Presentation by Staff Engineer.

Tyler Reese from the DPW provided a map with all of the current speed limits in Portsmouth. All of the streets in gray are the state default of 30 mph state. Not all of the signed speed limits match what is recognized in the ordinance. The Committee can use this to have a discussion on the citywide speed limit idea and what that would look like.

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that Steve Pesci had previously requested a review of the speed limits throughout the city to see if it was appropriate to implement a citywide speed limit. That may not be appropriate for this city. Some streets should be 25 mph, but others are appropriately set at 30 mph. One size fits all may not be the best approach. The Committee should review the classifications of roads and see how that fits with the speed limits.

Steve Pesci noted that it was good to have the map and identify the discrepancies in the ordinance. There should not be a blanket speed limit across town, but it would be good to have a downtown speed limit. Steve Pesci agreed that there were a lot of areas outside the downtown core where 25 mph would be inappropriately low.

Erika Wygonik noted that 30 mph should not be the default for residential roads. It would be good to go through the classification of roads and look at the speed limits from that perspective.

Chairman Peter Whelan suggested that Steve Pesci and Erika Wygonik could form a subcommittee to come up with a set of recommendations.

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that it would be good to clean up the ordinance and make any changes all at once if possible.

Steve Pesci commented that he was happy to take this on and questioned if Pease fell under Portsmouth's jurisdiction for speed limits. Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that they would need to coordinate with the Pease Development Authority if they wanted to adjust any speed limits.

Public Works Director Peter Rice moved to create a study group to further investigate all of Portsmouth's Street inventory and make recommendations, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. On a unanimous roll call, motion passed 9-0.

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C. Request for RRFB at crosswalk located at South Street and Broad Street. (Site Walk Item)

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that the southern side of the sidewalk was being heaved up by large trees. There is no way the trees will be removed, and the abutting property owners are not interested in relinquishing property to move the sidewalk. They want to eliminate the sidewalk and loam and seed it. This signalized crosswalk is proposed to create a safe path to get to the signalized intersection. It is not ideal to have it so close to the intersection; however, it will be safer for students to cross here. This will prevent students from darting between cars.

Erika Wygonik agreed that the sidewalk was not safe, and the right of way was narrow. There is some distance between this location and the signal. People will cross here.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that she used that crosswalk often and did not think it was a safe area. If RRFP helps one person cross great. They are not used consistently through the city. People just zip across the streets. The city needs to educate the residents to make sure people are using them for safety.

Mark Syracusa questioned if the property owners were willing to move their fence or if they could remove the trees. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded they were not, and the trees will not be removed. Mark Syracusa was concerned about pedestrians not being able to see cars coming from the right. In the short term the city could put in signage and paint the street to make cars more aware.

Public Works Peter Rice commented that the flashing signage is less than 15k. It is still a lot of money, but it is not 26k. There is additional signage there now, but they can add paint. Trees and visibility do come into play. The issue is that cars coming from the right can't see the pedestrians. The trees aren't causing that issue it is the queued cars. The flashing beacon will make people aware there is a crossing there. Mark Syracusa suggested using signage and paint in the short term and install the signal in the spring.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that they addressed this intersection a few years ago and questioned if some of that information could be brought forward again. There is a bigger picture, and it would be good to understand what is happening at the intersection. There is a lot of traffic on South St., and it would be good to make it safer for the pedestrians.

Chairman Peter Whelan suggested continuing this to the next meeting so staff could return with some recommendations.

Erika Wygonik noted that it was close to a signal but not beyond what's acceptable. They would want to see good use of the crosswalk. It's a good connection point for 3 downtown schools in the district. The RRFB would help increase visibility. When looking at numbers, they need to consider the number of people currently crossing here and the number of people crossing at the signal. This would consolidate those crossings at this location. Given the tradeoffs it makes sense to put an RRFB here.

Mary Lou McElwain moved to have staff report back, seconded by Mary Syracusa. On a unanimous roll call vote, motion passed 9-0.

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D. Conversion of Three (3) open parking spaces on Market Street at Russell from Zone B.
Sample Motion: Draft Ordinance Change to Chapter 7 to Convert to Zone B

Parking Director Benjamin Fletcher commented that these parking spots were created when the park went in. These three new spaces were observed over the summer, and it was found that they were being used by people working downtown. The stay and pay program is resulting in 91% of users moving on within 3 hours. This proposal is to convert these spaces to that program. This change will have the desired effect and make the spaces available for those who want to visit the park.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that this tied into Tom Morgan's letter regarding bike safety in this area. Mary Lou McElwain questioned if there should even be parking there. It is not very safe, and the city may not need it.

Chairman Peter Whelan commented that the 3 spots there are for the park overlooking the Mill Pond. The spaces are always filled not because it's free.

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that if they implement the fee and find no cars are parking there, then that will show the spaces area not needed. Bike lanes adjacent to parked cars have the risk of a dooring incident. Both bicyclists and motorists have to be aware. If the spaces aren't needed at all, then it is reasonable to talk about eliminating them. There have been requests for more parking because it is wide enough. Mary Lou McElwain commented that she did not think the spaces were needed and that the bike lane there was not safe. Public Works Director Peter Rice clarified that the bike lane was designed per the requirements of a safe bike lanes. The width is appropriate to accommodate a bike and a car door opening.

Mary Lou McElwain commented that they should evaluate if the spaces are needed or not before adding the expense of putting in meters. Parking Director Benjamin Fletcher commented that they had meters in stock that are available for use.

City Manager Karen Conard moved to have Staff draft an ordinance change to facilitate adding to Zone B Rice, seconded by Public Works Director Peter Rice. On a roll call vote, motion passed 8-1. Mary Lou McElwain opposed.

VII. OLD BUSINESS

A. Request to Review Raynes/Vaughan as One Way. Staff working to introduce concept to abutters.

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that they were in the process of looking at converting this to a one-way street moving forward. They have heard back from the majority of businesses, and they are in favor. This change would add 4 more parking spaces. This was done as a pilot during construction, and they found it worked well. Before this Committee does a final vote, they would like to have a public meeting to give people an opportunity to speak to it.

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B. Discussion of Sharing Loading Zones as Parking Inventory at Designated Times. Staff working to introduce concept to local businesses through EDC. **Sample Motion: Move to Approve and Refer to Council for First Reading.**

Chairman Peter Whelan commented that loading zone inventory and recommendations were in the packet.

Parking Director Benjamin Fletcher commented that the goal was to recapture some of the space. The recommendations that are listed in the packet are based on data collected by their intern last summer. Some would remain the same, some would become shared parking after 3 pm, and some would be eliminated completely because there is no commercial use at all. Chairman Peter Whelan clarified that they would gain 39 spaces with these recommendations.

Mary Lou McElwain noted that some trucks don't use any of the loading zones. Parking Director Benjamin Fletcher commented that they stop them when they can.

Public Works Director Peter Rice noted that if this was approved by this Committee and City Council it would be implemented as a pilot program for a year. There would be opportunities to make changes if needed. This is a good opportunity to gain parking spaces that are currently off limits during peak demand.

Erika Wygonik questioned if there was anything different from what was brought forward before. Parking Director Benjamin Fletcher responded that he highlighted loading zones that did not have any proposed changes.

Chairman Peter Whelan noted that most deliveries happen in the morning and at done before 3 pm.

Mary Lou McElwain moved to recommend changes to time of use to Council; refer for First Reading, seconded by Harold Whitehouse. On a unanimous roll call vote, motion passed 9-0.

C. Middle Street/Middle Road Traffic Calming

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that this was a pilot effort looking for calming opportunities. There is money in the CIP for 2023 to implement some of the changes. Prior to any permanent change they would come back to PTS and have more neighborhood discussions. This intersection modification has been well received. The intent would be to keep the configuration through the winter with a couple jersey barriers.

Harold Whitehouse questioned if they needed state approval to do this. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that they did not. It was part of the city compact.

Erika Wygonik noted that it was a good change, and they should keep it. They should ensure that bikers can still use the corner with the jersey barriers in place.

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Chairman Peter Whelan questioned if they needed a motion for this. Public Works Director Peter Rice responded that they did not. This was just informational.

D. Request for speed assessment at Aldrich and Boss. Staff presentation of speed data.

Parking Director Benjamin Fletcher commented that this was a continuation of the speed assessment done prior to the speed table being placed. The results from the 2020 study were that the speed limit was 20 mph, the average speed was 24 mph, and the 85th percentile was 29 mph. The speed table was installed in September of this year. Results from the study after the speed table was installed showed that the average speed was 24 mph and the 85th percentile was 28 mph.

VIII. INFORMATIONAL

A. Monthly Accident Report from PD

Police Captain Mike Maloney commented that there were 74 total crashes. 45 of them were reportable crashes and one motor vehicle accident that involved a pedestrian.

B. Bike and Vehicular Traffic Volume Data

Parking Director Benjamin Fletcher commented that this was a continuation of the information received from the Market St. and Nobles Island camera. Traffic is starting to dip as the season starts to change. The bike traffic is not the same volume as a few years ago but the gap is closing.

Harold Whitehouse commented that he thought changing the Middle St. bike lane was working. Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that this was currently under review. The modification to the bike lane was proposed as a pilot effort and will be monitored for 6 months. They are working with an engineering firm to evaluate the data and come back with recommendations. Anecdotally there have been less complaints, but the speed data has gone up and the intersections are being impacted. People talk about concerns of bikes next to car doors. This situation has been created here. There are pros and cons to it. It will be good to see what the review results are. Lincoln Ave. has been painted out as an alternate route and that is good. The additional crosswalk near Aldrich Rd. is also good. They need to look at the whole road. It is more than just the bike lanes. It is more challenging coming off some of the side streets with this bike lane change.

C. NPP Mid-Pilot Report Back

Parking Director Benjamin Fletcher commented that they have seen relative success of this pilot program. The concept of the project was introduced in 2017 because there was the perception that downtown employees were parking for free in this area. That was prior to the garage and downtown parking program. Residents are allowed up to 3 permits per household and one guest permit. Residents who don't live in the neighborhood can have a single pass if they want as well. The total passes issued is 381 and 34 of those passes are for residents outside the neighborhood. There have also been 191 guest passes issued. That is a total of 572 passes, which is a lot more than the 251-space parking availability in the neighborhood. The supply vs. demand is upside down, but they have observed people using their driveways to alleviate the burden.

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The garage has opened, and the downtown employee parking program provides a discounted parking option. Users of this program have increased each month. In the summer of 2020, there were 125 in the program. At the launch of the Pilot on 8.4.21 there were 377 total users. Employees took advantage of the program before the pilot launch. There was another assumption that people who had been parking in the neighborhood would migrate to surrounding areas and the Foundry Garage and Bridge St. Lot would see an increase in volume. That has not been the case. The Foundry Garage and Bridge St. Lot have remained consistent. That lends more weight to the belief that downtown workers are no longer the primary users of the parked cars in the neighborhood. The pilot neighborhood inventory has shown an increase in 12 spaces available since it began. Those spaces have been more on the west side of the neighborhood.

Citations for cars parked longer than 2 hours were mostly issued in August. There have been a total of 254 tickets issued through the pilot and 40 of them were warnings. It was estimated that the program will cost $54K for the pilot and $100K per year. Some of that includes one-time purchases like signage. The remaining costs are ongoing administration, enforcement, mileage, and supply costs. As of October 26th, the program has spent $36,729.12.

Erika Wygonik questioned what total spaces gained meant. Parking Director Benjamin Fletcher clarified that they were seeing 12 spaces open that weren't open before. There are 251 spaces total.

Chairman Peter Whelan questioned if the Rock St. area gained inventory. Parking Director Benjamin Fletcher responded that anecdotally it seems there's more space. People have said there is. One speaker today had said the opposite. That area has limited inventory and a lot of housing. The cars utilizing those spaces were predictably the people who live there.

Chairman Peter Whelan commented that they should have this meeting at night so people can participate in the presentation and discussion. Chairman Peter Whelan questioned if they needed to make any changes to the program. Parking Director Benjamin Fletcher responded that they haven't seen anything that needs immediate attention. They could discontinue the license plate requirement for visitors if they wanted.

City Manager Conard noted that they will work with staff to coordinate an evening meeting. They will try to do it before the next PTS meeting.

City Manager Karen Conard moved to hold Public Input meeting during evening hours to discuss mid-Pilot metrics, seconded by Public Works Director Peter Rice. On a unanimous roll call vote, motion passed 9-0.

D. Report Back on Intersection of Borthwick and Route 1

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that the contractor was working on it yesterday. All topics that were raised are part of the CIP. This should just be put on file as informational.

E. Status of the Fleet Street Area Reconstruction Project

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Zach Cronin from the DPW and Dan Rochette from Underwood Engineers spoke to the presentation. Mr. Cronin noted that the purpose of the presentation was to start a dialogue and show conceptual options. Fleet St. is part of the EPA consent decree, and they are required to complete a sewer separation project on Fleet St. There has been a little bit of outreach with the public about what people would want to see or not want to see when the street is redone. There has also been open office hours with Underwood Engineers. There have been comments about whether or not to make it one way or two way, make utilities underground, provide ADA access, and create wider sidewalks.

There has also been comments about improving trash removal, adding more greens spaces, and improving drainage and lighting. Moving forward they would like to get additional public input and display posters downtown to get more public comment. There are three different traffic concepts. The first is a two-way street without parking. The second is a one-way street with parking and one wider sidewalk for green space. The third is a one-way traffic without parking and wider sidewalks for green space. There is also always the option to just replace the utilities and street in kind. This is a unique opportunity to look at things that can be improved. The one-way options would allow them to remove the left-hand turn lane. That will allow for more diagonal parking in Market Square. The proposed schedule is to display the posters this month and leave them displayed through the end of the year. Then the information will be compiled, and they will come back to this Committee with a preferred layout and design in 2022. Construction could begin in 2023.

Public Works Director Peter Rice commented that the intent is to have a poster with all 3 options on the same posterboard.

Harold Whitehouse noted that the Music Hall has a lot of large vehicles that go to it and questioned if that had been considered for turning movements and sightlines. Mr. Cronin responded that they have had some traffic engineers look and investigate the area and they can bring that up.

Erika Wygonik questioned what would be displayed on the posters and if this would be advertised more than just on the posters. Mr. Cronin responded that the posters would advertise that the city needs input and direct people to the web site. Public Works Peter Rice added this will also be advertised on the city web site and included in the city newsletter. The poster is part of a larger outreach. They have piloted sections of Fleet St. as one way during Covid and have not had a problem. The truck turning radius will be critical. Often times they hear people were unaware of proposed changes. The goal is to make sure people are aware and can speak to it.

Mary Lou McElwain questioned if all the businesses in the area have been involved in the planning. Parking should not increase in Market Square because they are trying to reduce the number of cars going through the center of town looking for parking. Mr. Cronin responded that they have reached out to businesses in addition to the outreach and had the open office hours. They can accommodate parking in Market Square or not. This presentation is just to open a dialogue.

Erika Wygonik noted that they should make extra posters to bring to big events in the city. City Manager Karen Conard confirmed they could do that. This will also be advertised on the web site, channel 22, and the library.

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Mr. Rochette noted that the additional diagonal parking in Market Square could be anything. The intent was to show that open space was available. They could widen the sidewalk and make it an area for pedestrians.

Chairman Peter Whelan questioned if they knew how the construction would be sequenced. Mr. Rochette responded that was far out, but they would most likely go one block at a time. Public Works Director Peter Rice added that they would probably try to do something similar to the experience on State St. because it was a good one. They shut down construction early on Fridays, so businesses could have better sales on the weekend. It took longer but it was a more inclusive in process and was less disruptive.

F. Discussion on Whether to Hold December PTS Currently Scheduled for 12.2.21

Chairman Peter Whelan questioned if they should have a meeting in December or not. This meeting is happening mid-November, so it probably is not needed. Harold Whitehouse commented that it could be the Chairman's decision.

IX. MISCELLANEOUS

A. Additional letter from Tom Morgan regarding Maplewood and Market.

Chairman Peter Whelan confirmed they received a letter from Tom Morgan.

Harold Whitehouse moved to place on file, seconded by Public Works Director Peter Rice. On a unanimous roll call vote, motion passed 9-0.

Mary Lou McElwain requested adding a stop sign at Marcy St. and Mechanic St. There is a stop sign there now but people stop and whip through. It is especially unsafe for cyclists coming down Marcy St. They should add a stand-alone stop sign right at the crosswalk there. Public Works Director Peter Rice suggested that they revisit the information Eric Eby gathered when he looked at this. Public Works Director Peter Rice rides this intersection all the time. He is aware of that comment but has not experienced that. Cyclists have the responsibility to pay attention in tight areas. Mary Lou McElwain commented that the fence makes it difficult to see a car coming up to the intersection. Public Works Director Peter Rice noted that they could revisit this discussion.

Mary Lou McElwain was concerned about the safety of the crossing guards in heavy, fast traffic. Public Works Director Peter Rice noted that was DPW's responsibility because it was operational.

Mary Lou McElwain requested that they make sure to treat the sidewalks surrounding the Foundry Garage during the winter to keep the access safe for pedestrians.

Erika Wygonik requested that they move the meeting to 8:15 instead of 8:00. It would be easier for her and other parents to come to the meeting after school drop off. Mark Syracuse noted that any time after 3 pm would work better. Chairman Peter Whelan commented that they could discuss this with the new chairman. It may make sense to rotate the meetings, so some are in the morning, and some are in the evening.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Harold Whitehouse moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:42 am, seconded by Mary Lou McElwain. On a unanimous roll call vote, motion passed 9-0.

**Members of the public also have the option to join the meeting over Zoom, a unique meeting ID and password will be provided once you register. To register, click on the link below or copy and paste this into your web browser: https://us06web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_oBYZTg4WSgGfK7_CCr6vLQ*

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