

**City of Salem
Traffic and Parking Commission
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, July 15, 2021**

A meeting of the Salem Traffic and Parking Commission was held remotely on Thursday, July 15, 2021 at 6:00pm, in accordance with Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021.

Present: Acting Commission Chair Eric Papetti, Commissioner Jeff Swartz, Commissioner Robin Seidel, Director of Traffic and Parking David Kucharsky, and Traffic and Parking Staff Russell Findley **Absent:** Commission Chair Tonya Shallop and Commission Lt. David Tucker

CALL OF MEETING

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm by acting Chair Papetti. My Kucharsky explains how members of the public may participate during the remote meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Eric Nowak of 19 Columbus Avenue introduces himself as a resident of the Willows and indicates he spoke at the last meeting about the dangerous conditions in the area. Mr. Nowak states that other community members also provided input, and asks what the Commission is thinking or planning to do in response to a death that occurred recently in the area. Mr. Nowak contends the Commission did not agree with resident comments, and asks if they are concerned.

Andrew Edmondson of 48 Tremont Street introduces himself and speaks in support of the traffic calming measures for North Salem. Mr. Edmondson acknowledges there is a pilot being conducted in the neighborhood, but notes that Tremont Street was not included. Mr. Edmondson explains that Tremont acts as an artery for commuter traffic in the morning and evenings with lots of speeding, and asks that the street be included in the study.

NEW/OLD BUSINESS

North/Liberty Hill/Symonds Intersection

Staff will review with the Commission some options developed by the consulting firm, Toole Design, which proposes restricting some turning movements at this intersection. These options have been developed in response to some recent crashes that have taken place at the intersection. Staff is seeking input from the Commission and public as to whether implementation of one or a combination of these options should be pursued on a trial basis.

Mr. Kucharsky explains that there were two recent crashes involving cyclists at this intersection. Staff were asked if planned improvements for the area, that were previously delayed to 2022, could be implemented sooner. Staff contacted Toole Design, who developed four potential options for public and Commission feedback. Mr. Kucharsky

explains that all four options convert Liberty Hill Avenue to a right-in/right-out only turn, which was suggested by some community members. The purpose of the change would be to eliminate through movement to Symonds Street, and one implication is that any left hand turns onto or from Liberty Hill would need to be made at the Orne/School signalized intersection.

The first option involves a realignment of Liberty Hill Avenue with painted curb extensions, a hardened centerline on Liberty Hill Avenue and North Street, and curb extensions on Symonds. The second option would involve a major realignment of Liberty Hill Avenue with painted curb extensions, and a triangular diverter on North Street to reinforce the right-in/right-out only movements for Liberty Hill Avenue. Option three would implement a painted median on Liberty Hill Avenue with flex-posts, a smaller curb extension on Liberty Hill Avenue, and the triangular diverter on North Street. The fourth option implements a painted median with flex-posts and smaller curb extension on Liberty Hill Avenue and a hardened centerline on North Street to reinforce desired movements.

Mr. Kucharsky explains that all options utilize ‘Do-Not-Block’ striping at the front of the intersection, and that further analysis of vehicle turns will help determine flex-post placement. He notes that Toole Design consultants suggested the hardened centerline or triangular diverter are important to deter restricted movements. Currently there are no traffic counts to provide an indication of impact. Mr. Kucharsky indicates none of the options include bike accommodations, and that only option four would work with future corridor plans without requiring additional changes. Mr. Kucharsky presents slides and diagrams of the options, as well as the potential traffic diversions on a map. He adds that counts will be conducted before, and then monitored after any changes. Mr. Kucharsky presents the future corridor plan as currently designed as well, and indicates he would like to hear feedback from the neighborhood residents and Commissioners as this would ultimately require Council approval.

Commissioner Seidel acknowledges something needs to be done, but states she has no preference and is interested to hear from the residents themselves. Commissioner Swartz agrees, and states he likes that the options were developed from resident input.

Acting Commission Chair Papetti suggests there are a lot of circulation issues in the area and that it may be difficult to figure out if one of these options will really work without doing further analysis, and perhaps implementation on a trial basis. He states he is unsure how much analysis can be done beyond trying for a couple months. Acting Chair Papetti asks if there are any short-term solutions such as just using flex-posts and painting, stating that approval for larger changes by City Council can take a long time. Mr. Papetti speaks to the dangers and stressful conditions of the intersection.

Commissioner Swartz asks about the two accidents, and Mr. Kucharsky confirms that the cyclists were crossing Symonds Street and were hit by cars trying to cut through from Liberty Hill Avenue, most likely because they were busy looking at traffic attempting to cross North Street.

Chair Papetti opens the floor to public comment.

Anne Sterling of 29 Orchard Street asks about the porkchop shaped diverter in the options and suggests that the armadillos on Fort Avenue seem to be causing problems. She asks if people could potentially run into them at night if they cannot see. Ms. Sterling states she is not in favor of creating a new traffic hazard. Ms. Sterling indicates she travels North Street often and sees people shooting across quickly from Liberty Hill Avenue during infrequent breaks and can see how someone could accidentally hit a biker or pedestrian. She asks if there is anything that can be done to lower the speed of people leaving Liberty Hill Avenue.

Mr. Kucharsky clarifies that the porkchop shape in the plans is just a shape on the ground created by striping and flex posts would be used to provide a vertical element to the area. Commissioner Swartz asks if it is similar to what was done at the corner of Broad and Hathorne with striping and posts, and Mr. Kucharsky confirms.

Commissioner Swartz acknowledges that Symonds is used at a cut through and asks if there is a way to prevent people from going straight across North Street, and only allow left or right hand turns out of Liberty Hill Avenue. He states he is not sure how that could be enforced, however. Mr. Kucharsky states he can discuss the suggestion with Toole Design.

Christopher Patzke of 224 Lafayette Street introduces himself as a registered landscape architect with 22 years of experience, as well as training in street and road design. Mr. Patzke states he is concerned that the interventions do not seem well informed, with many expressions of "I don't know" and "what if's". Mr. Patzke suggests that a temporary solution for months seems excessive, and that any info gathering phase could be shorter. He maintains that people have expectations of what to see and how to drive on a road, and when that changes it can create unsafe conditions regardless of intention, as people do not know how to react to the unfamiliar.

Mr. Papetti asks about the project timeline and additional input needed. Mr. Kucharsky explains that the hope was to get more input from members of the neighborhood tonight. Mr. Kucharsky states the Department is not at full capacity currently, and so staff would like to take the time to get full support before working with consultants on any implementation. The preference would be to have neighborhood support rather than uncertainty, and the plan would be to collect additional data as well.

Acting Chair Papetti states that regardless of neighborhood support or lack thereof, a number of serious crashes and countless near misses justify some intervention here. He suggests that as the project moves forward more people will likely show up with opinions, as they should. Mr. Papetti admits he may be biased as he lives in the neighborhood, but states he thinks intervention is warranted. Chair Papetti notes that many members of the public are in attendance, and he encourages them to email Mr. Kucharsky to weigh in and provide feedback, opinions, and knowledge of any circulation issues that could result from the proposed options. He stresses the point is to get input, not to impose anything on anyone.

Commissioner Seidel notes there are some comments that have been provided in the chat function of Zoom. Mr. Kucharsky offers to read the comments aloud. A comment from

Arthur Sharp of 29 Orchard Street states he turns left off of North Street onto Liberty Hill Avenue frequently, but that he would be willing to give it up for safety. The comment also notes he is unsure how it will help the situation with people crossing North Street from Liberty Hill, but that he would like the intersection to be safer. Mr. Papetti states he is unsure if there is a way to prevent people from crossing North Street that would not also preclude them from turning left on Liberty Hill Avenue, but that these are good comments and questions.

Commissioner Seidel acknowledges the trade offs of the options, and Commissioner Swartz suggests other ways to get out of the neighborhood such as School and Appleton, Woodside, and Nursery Street. He adds that he would love to hear more from residents, but that the tradeoffs seem reasonable.

Mr. Kucharsky notes there is another comment in the chat from Mr. Patzke that states the bigger issue of North Street traffic is not being addressed by any of the options.

Mr. Kucharsky says he will go back to Toole Design and clarify some things, provide the comments thus far, and see if some short-term interventions not related to traffic restrictions would be feasible. Mr. Kucharsky notes that any action would require an order, not an ordinance, and thus would only require a single pass from City Council. Mr. Kucharsky reminds the public that they can email him with additional thoughts and comments.

Request for Traffic Ordinance or Order Recommendation

Mr. Kucharsky explains there is a proposal to introduce either year-round resident permit parking along Ocean Avenue from Summit Avenue to Shore Avenue, or an order introducing resident parking during the month of October. Mr. Kucharsky brings up a map to show the location and explains that the Hocus Pocus house is located here and draws a lot of attention, particularly in October. Last year there were several requests from residents as many tourists would block the street with their cars, get out to take pictures, and generally disrupt the neighborhood. After the requests, staff reviewed existing signage and the ordinance to see what was on the books. Mr. Kucharsky indicates staff discovered this portion of Ocean Avenue only had resident permit parking from Lafayette Street to Summit Avenue, and that the remaining portion of Ocean Avenue was not included. This was passed in 1991. He adds that over the years, signs have been put up and passes have been issued, and so staff would like to formalize what has already been occurring. Every street in this neighborhood has resident permit parking, and Mr. Kucharsky indicates he has received emails and letters in support. He further clarifies that resident permit parking was never taken away, it was just not formally given but acted on in practice. Staff and residents think it should be formalized going forward, and Mr. Kucharsky presents ordinance language to that effect. The language attempts to clean up some things instituted in the 1960's and 1970's that were never rescinded. Mr. Kucharsky notes that one resident suggested implementing 15 minute or restricted parking in one small section near the sea wall for those who may want to get out to take a photo.

Acting Chair Papetti notes it is interesting that the ordinance is from 1991, which was before Hocus Pocus came out.

Commissioner Seidel agrees that the resident parking should be formalized but asks if this will resolve the issue of tourists causing disruption seeking out the house. Commissioner Seidel indicates she likes the idea of 15-minute parking, however she recognizes it may be so widely used that it is possible people would not obey the limitations. Ms. Seidel is in favor of formalizing the parking but reminds the public that this may not resolve the issue of people parking illegally.

Commissioner Swartz agrees with Commissioner Seidel and opines that some option is better than none. Commissioner Swartz expresses concerns regarding the distance of the houses to the seawall, as it is a narrow stretch of street. He asks if it would be an issue if any busses were parking or idling in that location.

Acting Chair Papetti indicates his gut reaction is to not allow any short-term parking on this street but is curious to hear from the public.

Mr. Kucharsky clarifies that currently there is no parking on either side, and that the ordinance language identifies the street as Ocean Avenue but this stretch is actually Shore Avenue. Currently parking is prohibited, and there are bus restriction signs saying they cannot park. Mr. Kucharsky states it would be a question of enforcement. He states the Department will be bringing on two full-time additional staff in August to work Saturdays to Wednesdays to help with monitoring and enforcement.

Commissioner Swartz suggests a natural solution would be to park at Forest River Park, but questions how to incentivize people to do that. Mr. Swartz states he is curious to hear from direct abutters on Shore Avenue.

Acting Chair Papetti opens the floor to public comment.

Chris Patzke of 224 Lafayette Street agrees that residents should have protected parking in the neighborhood in front of their houses. Mr. Patzke echoes some of the Commission concerns, particularly regarding the need for enforcement. As an example of lax enforcement, Mr. Patzke indicates he previously lived on Chestnut Street next to Congressman Seth Moulton, who he claims never purchased a resident parking sticker and constantly had staff and contractors parked in front illegally, but that police never enforced anything when he called. Mr. Patzke states enforcement should be equal and not based on privilege.

Elizabeth Beaver of 13 Ocean Avenue introduces herself and explains that tourists in the neighborhood are a year-round issue, but particularly messy in October. Ms. Beaver contends the signage is not clear, and that recently when poles were removed and replaced, the signage on the original poles were not replaced. Ms. Beaver indicates people take resident spots, often idle in front of the Hocus Pocus house, and sometimes stand in or block the street. Ms. Beaver explains that an elderly couple lives in the house, and that the behavior of tourists can be obnoxious. According to Ms. Beaver, last year was the first year

police monitored the area during October to help mitigate issues. She is in favor of the suggestion of encouraging people to park at Forest River Park, but asks how that message can get to those who are looking for the house. Regarding 15-minute parking, Ms. Beaver fears people will park wherever and take what they can get unless there is towing and strict enforcement. She notes that bus parking is not an issue as tour busses are restricted from the area.

Steve Kapantais of Wisteria Street introduces himself and explains he lives a couple of blocks away. Mr. Kapantais states it does get hectic in the neighborhood, and that he is in favor of any means or creative solution the Commission can come up with to resolve the issue. Ultimately, he believes it comes down to enforcement. Finally, Mr. Kapantais asks what the Commission or City plans to do for anyone that previously received parking tickets over the last years who were illegally fined if the area was not technically resident permit parking.

John Pellecchia of 8 Ocean Avenue introduces himself as living next door to the Hocus Pocus house. Mr. Pellecchia explained the situation has gotten crazy over the past 15 years he has lived here. He contends that tourists often get belligerent, and also notes that last year was the first year any enforcement happened, but only in October. He suggests stricter enforcement going forward. Regarding the prior comment on ticketing, Mr. Pellecchia states he received a ticket two years ago, as did his neighbor. He states he welcomes tourists, but asks that they be limited to foot traffic due to the limited parking in the neighborhood. According to Mr. Pellecchia, some tourists will be coming up to the house and taking pictures while the residents inside are in their 80's and just attempting to live their lives.

Acting Chair Papetti indicates he would support formalizing the ordinance language proposed. He also notes the issue raised regarding ticketing and the ordinance language not matching existing signage is a sticky one, and that in theory he agrees that anyone who received a ticket such a situation may be entitled to some refund, however, this issue is pervasive throughout the City and the Commission and staff have been attempting to align the ordinances and signage over time. Mr. Papetti states the Commission has recognized this issue and requested that City Council convert the City ordinance to regulations so that this issue can be resolved in a quicker and easier fashion. He states that Council has declined such requests, and expresses frustration that the Commission is unable to resolve these types of issues systematically without support from Council.

Commissioner Seidel expresses empathy for those in the neighborhood, noting she herself lives next to the Witch Museum and the past few years have been similarly difficult. She acknowledges October can be a very difficult month for residents, and suggests signage in the area telling drivers to go to Forest River Park to park for the Hocus Pocus house, at least in October.

Commissioner Swartz thanks everyone for the insights provided, and states he is pleased to hear that buses and coaches are not going down into the area. He discusses other potential suggestions, such as changing the pin for the house on Google Maps, while acknowledging

that may be beyond the Commission's scope. Mr. Swartz agrees that enforcement is critical and states he would like to hear more from Commission Lt. Tucker about the matter.

Acting Chair Papetti states the ordinance recommendation formalizes the status quo, and that there seems to be a larger issue of traffic management and enforcement, which Lt. Tucker would need to speak to but is not present. Mr. Papetti suggests voting on the ordinance before the Commission and asking for an update from Lt. Tucker at the next meeting to see what can be done.

Elizabeth Beaver references the police involvement last October, and explains that wooden horses were placed at Summit that said "residents only" and a police officer was stationed nearby actually stopping people to ask where they were going. She states it was effective and much appreciated. Ms. Beaver notes there were still some issues with congestions however, and that the consensus in the neighborhood is that it should be resident permit parking with adequate signage.

John Pellecchia emphasizes that the issue is not just in October, but year-round. Mr. Pellecchia maintains that people double and triple park frequently and disrupt traffic. He acknowledges that there will be no way to resolve the issue completely but notes that police presence last October definitely helped.

Cynthia Jerzylo of 17 Bay View Avenue introduces herself and states that her neighborhood has issues with resident sticker parking as well. She asks where the money from stickers go, and whether it can be used for more enforcement.

Mr. Kucharsky responds that the funds go into the general fund and reiterates that two more full-time enforcement personnel will be starting in August.

Motion and Vote: Commissioner Swartz motions to approve the proposed ordinance language for City Council review. Commissioner Seidel seconds the motion. The vote is three (3) in favor and none (0) opposed. **The motion passes.**

Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program

Mr. Kucharsky explains the Commission Chair requested that staff provide an update on the projects currently in the program and their status. He presents a spreadsheet showing the received project applications, project criteria, project location, and data such as speed limits, demographic information, and speed and crash priority. Mr. Kucharsky indicates staff are still working on budgets and obtaining quotes for a variety of projects. He also points out those projects that have been completed.

Acting Chair Papetti asks what it would take to get a ball park estimate or every traffic calming project in the upper portion of the list for planning purposes, perhaps to include in the CIP or make a grant funding request. Mr. Kucharsky states he could start working on it based on the completed projects with similar interventions and plug in numbers to see cost estimates. Mr. Papetti also asks how the two new positions referenced earlier, and the posting for the Assistant Director position fits together with the traffic calming program.

Mr. Kucharsky states the Assistant Director is responsible for intake and carrying through assessments of traffic calming requests as they come in and oversees those projects.

Commissioner Swartz asks if there is potential to receive state or other transportation grants to tackle multiple issues simultaneously. Mr. Kucharsky explains that some projects were funded entirely with state grants. Mr. Kucharsky and Mr. Swartz briefly discuss the grant process, and Mr. Kucharsky explains that staff try for as many as they can depending on bandwidth.

Acting Chair Papetti opens the floor to public comment.

Chris Patzke of 224 Lafayette Street provides critiques of what has been done to date. Mr. Patzke states the Commission unnecessarily reduced the speed limit to 20 MPH in areas, which is less than what the Commonwealth suggests is reasonable and appropriate. He also argues that speed bumps are unnecessary when average speeds are only one mile per hour over the limit and causes cars to stop abruptly and create traffic. Mr. Patzke opines that the planters in the road are unsightly and merely obstacles for drivers and pedestrians. Mr. Patzke characterizes the interventions as unnecessary measures for non-existent problems, and that traffic has merely been pushed into other areas that previously did not have issues. Mr. Patzke states the consultants were allowed to create and design obstructions that do not consider emergency vehicles or the town trolley. He states interventions have created a less safe environment in a city with numerous existing traffic problems. Mr. Patzke suggests the Commission consider implementing these interventions in other parts of Salem so that other residents can “suffer through this nonsense”.

Catherine Seiferth, 18 Buffum Street introduces herself and explains that people speed up her street all the time. Ms. Seiferth suggests more enforcement is needed, but acknowledges that it is true in many areas and neighborhoods. She states she hopes people take notice of the new speed posting, and that she wishes traffic calming programs started earlier. Ms. Seiferth says she hopes the City continues to do things to make it safer for everyone, and not just for drivers who like to speed.

Eric Nowak of 19 Columbus Avenue asks when the new Columbus Avenue speed limit signs showing 20 MPH will be installed. Mr. Kucharsky indicates he spoke with DPS and that they will be going in in the next day or so.

Andrew Edmondson of 48 Tremont speaks in support of the traffic calming initiatives, and suggests they have been great. Mr. Edmondson states the measures signal to drivers and others who do not live here that these are residential areas. He states it can be terrifying to be a pedestrian with children or biking when cars are speeding over 30 MPH. Referring to the project spreadsheet, Mr. Edmondson states he does not see much on automated enforcement, and wonders if speed cameras have been considered. He adds that he lived in Cambridge a few years ago and the city-wide speed limit was 20 MPH unless otherwise posted. He thinks it worked well and would love to see that here in Salem.

Acting Chair Papetti recalls something going before City Council regarding automatic enforcement, but that they have not reached out to the Commission for input. Mr.

Kucharsky explains that is where Lt. Tucker is this evening, speaking in front of OLLA regarding the issue.

OTHER BUSINESS THAT MAY LEGALLY COME BEFORE THE COMMISSION

Commissioner Seidel asks if there have been any updates on the crescent lot project, as it was recently discussed at a public meeting and some of the feedback referenced having some parking on site at the lot, and some spots being leased from the MBTA garage and the Harbor garage. Ms. Seidel asks everyone to keep an eye on the matter, as utilization of garages is pretty high. She expresses concern regarding the additional usage and giving more of those spots as permanent ones to private developers in the absence of having sufficient parking and using the garages during snow emergencies.

Commissioner Seidel also states this will be her last meeting, and she thanks the other Commissioners and staff. Acting Chair Papetti thanks Commissioner Seidel for serving on the Commission.

Commissioner Swartz said he attended the SRA meeting and heard proposals and feedback regarding the parking, with plans focusing on the MBTA garage and Museum Place garage. He suggests the surface lot on Bridge Street might be more appropriate

Mr. Kucharsky states staff were approached and asked for pre-covid utilization data, so staff are working on getting that to them and hopes to bring further information to the Commission at some point.

UPCOMING MEETINGS SCHEDULE

The next meeting is scheduled for August 19, 2021 at 6:00PM.

MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL

June 17, 2021

Motion and Vote: Commissioner Swartz motions to approve the June 17, 2021 meeting minutes of the Traffic and Parking Commission. Commissioner Seidel seconds the motion. The vote is all in favor. **The motion passes.**

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion duly made by Commissioner Seidel and seconded by Commissioner Swartz the Traffic and Parking Commission meeting was adjourned at 7:38 PM.