

City of Salem
Joint Meeting of the Traffic and Parking Commission and OLLA
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, February 1, 2024

A joint meeting of the Salem Traffic and Parking Commission and the Salem City Council Committee on Ordinances, Licenses, and Legal Affairs co-posted Committee of the Whole was held in-person on Thursday, February 1, 2024, at 6:00pm, in accordance with Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023.

Present: Traffic and Parking: Chair Jaime Garmendia, Commissioner Jeff Swartz, Commissioner Brendan Casey, Commissioner Lt. David Tucker, Commissioner Erin Turowski (present virtually via Zoom), and Director of Traffic David Kucharsky.
Absent: None.

CALL OF MEETING

The meeting was called to order at 6:02pm by Chair Garmendia and City Councillor Morsillo.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Acting Chair Garmendia opens the floor to public comment.

NEW/OLD BUSINESS

Right Turn on Red

The purpose of the joint meeting of the Traffic and Parking Commission and the Committee on Ordinances, Licenses, and Legal Affairs (OLLA) is to introduce a study and discussion of right-on-red ordinances and State laws for all traffic signals in the City of Salem.

Chair Garmendia introduced all members of the Traffic and Parking Commission.

Chair Morsillo provides background information and notes that the City has no control over the State-owned traffic signals, but there will be discussions as to where removing right-turn-on red permissions makes sense from a safety perspective. She discusses the data collection conducted by Mr. Kucharsky and Traffic and Parking Department staff, noting he provided data on every traffic signal (both City and State), as well as discrepancies between what is in the ordinance and what is signed/exists. Councillor Morsillo explains that right-on-red became legal in Massachusetts in 1980, and Massachusetts was the last state in the country to allow it. The decision was tied to the ability to receive Federal funds. Each city can determine which intersections allowed it, and some cities, like New York City, have never allowed right-turns on red. The reason for allowing right-on-red, Councillor Morsillo explains, is to reduce idling at signals and therefore reduce gas consumption. This was

relevant at the time it was made legal because of the oil embargo of the 1970's. Councillor Morsillo indicates that data suggests that allowing right turns on red was nothing more than a feel-good measure, with no evidence that it has resulted in less gas consumption or pollution. A 1982 study did show, however, increases in pedestrian and bicycle crashes, such as a 40 percent increase in pedestrian crashes and 82 percent increase in bicycle crashes for New York state, a 107 percent and 72 percent increase in pedestrian and bicycle crashes, respectively, in Wisconsin and similar increases elsewhere (data from 1982). Councillor Morsillo suggests this shows it has been a problem for safety from the beginning. She notes many drivers slow down rather than stopping at red lights, and drivers focus on looking only left to see when they can weave into traffic, rather than looking right or straight ahead until it is too late. Councillor Morsillo discusses next steps, indicating that one of the first goals will be to fix discrepancies between ordinances and signage.

Mr. Kucharsky discusses working with staff to inventory the traffic signals in the City. There are currently 46 traffic signals in the City, 32 under the jurisdiction of the City, while the other 14 are under State jurisdiction. Mr. Kucharsky describes the map showing the city intersections and traffic signals, noting green arrows indicate approaches where it is in the ordinance that a right-turn-on-red is restricted and signed correctly. There are 9 such locations. Pink/purple arrows indicate approaches where right-turn-on-red is not in the ordinance, but it is signed in the field. There are 10 such locations under Salem jurisdiction and 7 under State jurisdiction. Blue arrows represent approaches where it is in the ordinance, but it is not signed. There are 10 such approaches under City jurisdiction. Light brown arrows indicate approaches where it is neither in the ordinance nor signed, so a right-turn-on-red is permitted. There are 52 such locations under City jurisdiction and 28 under State jurisdiction. Mr. Kucharsky also notes there are three intersections with signage indicating "Right Turn on Red After Stop," and the validity of those signs are being investigated.

Mr. Kucharsky states that once data was collected, he and staff worked with Lt. Tucker to identify crashes that occurred at these intersections, focusing specifically on ones involving pedestrians and cyclists. The numbers in circles on the map represent collisions between October 1, 2017, to July 3, 2023. There was a total of 840 crashes during this time period at the study intersections, 42 crashes included pedestrians or cyclists. Mr. Kucharsky also presents the most up to date Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) guidelines regarding no turn on red signs and the types of conditions that should exist prior to installing such signage. They include 1) inadequate sight distance for vehicles approaching from the left or right; 2) if the geometric or operational characteristics of the intersection might result in unexpected conflicts; 3) if there is an exclusive pedestrian or bicycle phase; 4) if there is an unacceptable number of conflicting pedestrian movements with right-turn-on-red maneuvers; 5) more than three right-turn-on-red crashes reported in a 12-month period for a particular approach; and 6) the skew angle of the roadway creates difficulty for drivers to see traffic approaching from their left or right. He next provides specific examples and discusses various intersections. More information behind intersection crashes is being sought.

Councillors ask clarifying questions regarding the data to Mr. Kucharsky and Commissioner Lt. Tucker. Lt. Tucker explains that crash data is still being looked at in more detail, but that so far in the downtown area, they have identified three collisions where a vehicle turned right-on-red and struck a pedestrian or cyclist. Councillor Stott clarifies that with no signage a right on red is allowed, and that if it is in the ordinance and signed that means there is no right-turn-on-red allowed. Councillor Stott also asks if staff can identify how many of the signals are smart signals. Councillor Merkel asks if it is correct that there have not been any right-turn-on-reds disallowed because of the rule regarding more than three crashes in a 12-month period, and Mr. Kucharsky confirms, but notes the crash data ends in July 2023. Councillor Cohen provides anecdotal evidence of non-geometric intersections that have right-on-red after stop, but it seems when people are confused, they do not go anywhere. He also identifies intersections he believes are problematic, and notes that we do not seem to have much data regarding the signs that say "Right on Red after Stop." Councillor Jerzylo asks about additional traffic calming measures and safety measures for intersections. Councillor Cohen suggests signal coordination will be an important component of making the intersections safer as well. Councillor Davis notes in Washington D.C. and in Maryland there was a significant decrease in vehicle/pedestrian/cyclist collisions of 40 to 90 percent, as well as the severity of the collisions associated with removing the right-turn-on-red. Councillor Watson-Felt asks how durations are set for pedestrian crossings, including the time between a change in signal and when a button is pushed. She notes the intersection of North Street and Federal Street, which has a no right-on-red restriction, whereas a pedestrian can wait quite a long time for the signal to change, which might encourage people to cross without waiting. Councillor Watson-Felt suggests intersections like this create a situation where people are turning right-on-red illegally and people are crossing without signals, causing more opportunities for collisions and conflict. Mr. Kucharsky states traffic engineers adjust the timing based on data, and he notes that this particular intersection is being worked on by the City to coordinate the signals along the North Street corridor. Councillor Morsillo discusses the impetus for bringing forth the order some more, and specifically notes the intersection at Riley Plaza as one where the issue of right on red causes confusion, honking, and potential conflict. Councillor Harvey asks about combination red and yellow lights, and Lt. Tucker states they are no longer standard. Councillors continue to discuss the matter generally and other potential measures, such as rumble strips, raised crosswalks, or other interventions to promote drivers to stop appropriately and follow the law. Councillor Stott discusses enforcement as an issue, and notes while there are staffing issues, she suggests considering cameras at intersections like in the state of California which assist with enforcement.

Chair Garmendia discusses various tools for modifying driver behavior and notes that cleaning up the ordinances will be good regardless. He agrees that enforcement is an important component as well. The Commissioners discuss next steps with Mr. Kucharsky. Commissioner Casey notes that "Right Turn on Red After Stop" signs can be confusing, because they seem to suggest that at other intersections, a stop is not needed before turning right on red. Commissioner Turowski notes that the laws were passed decades ago, and since then, the vehicles being driven are larger and heavier, and therefore more dangerous.

Councillor Morsillo opens the floor to public comment.

Steve Kapantais of Wisteria Street introduces himself and notes he is one of the pedestrians that was hit by a car going right-on-red. He suggests it is great that the discussion has been going beyond just red lights and right turns, and the focus on pedestrian safety is important.

Councillor Morsillo indicates the map will be split into three sections and will be reviewed over three meetings, and that the review will be signal-by-signal. The next meetings will be February 15, February 29, and March 7th. Chair Garmendia asks that the meetings be co-posted with the Traffic and Parking Commission, and Councilor Morsillo agrees.

OTHER BUSINESS THAT MAY LEGALLY COME BEFORE THE COMMISSION

None.

UPCOMING MEETINGS SCHEDULE

The next joint meeting is scheduled for February 15, 2024, at 6:00PM.

MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL

None.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion duly made by Commissioner Turowski and seconded by Commissioner Casey the joint meeting of the Traffic and Parking Commission and OLLA was adjourned at 7:26 PM.