

City of Salem
Joint Meeting of the Traffic and Parking Commission and OLLA
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, February 29, 2024

A joint meeting of the Salem Traffic and Parking Commission and the Salem City Council Committee on Ordinances, Licenses, and Legal Affairs, was held in-person on Thursday, February 29, 2024, at 6:30pm at City Council Chambers with remote attendance available via Zoom 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, and Director of Traffic & Parking David Kucharsky. **Absent:** None.

CALL OF MEETING

The meeting was called to order at 6:36pm by Chair Garmendia and City Councillor Morsillo.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Acting Chair Garmendia opens the floor to public comment but there is none.

NEW/OLD BUSINESS

Right Turn on Red

The joint meeting of the traffic and parking commission and OLLA is to continue discussion of right-on-red ordinances and State laws for all traffic lights in the City of Salem.

Councillor Morsillo explains tonight the discussion will focus on Northwest Salem.

Mr. Kucharsky presents a map of the area and states there are a total of 29 traffic signals to be reviewed, with some being under MassDOT jurisdiction and some under City jurisdiction. He first discusses the intersection of Jefferson Street and Dove Street, noting three of the approaches are neither signed nor in the ordinance, and the west bound approach is in the ordinance but lacks signage. This intersection had four crashes in the last 12 months. Commissioner Lt. Tucker provides crash data, noting that none pertained to right turns on red.

Councillor Harvey suggest the discussion of right turn on red has at times gone beyond the original scope of the topic, and further suggests that compared to the traffic volumes, these numbers of incidents are minuscule. Councillor Harvey offers a motion to discharge the matter from OLLA and to send it over to Public Health and Safety. Mr. Harvey also

recommends that if Councillors have certain intersections that they have specific concerns over, they bring them to the attention of Mr. Kucharsky.

Councillor Davis asks for clarification as to why it would make more sense to be in OLLA, and what the process would be if the matter were discharged and sent to Public Health and Safety.

Councillor Watson-Felt explains some background information, noting there was a unanimous vote to send the matter to OLLA because it has to do with potential changes to ordinances. At that time there was no discussion of sending the issue to Public Health and Safety. If it goes to Public Health and Safety, it would be up to the chair of that committee how to proceed. Councillor Watson-Felt suggests this discussion has been well under way and is important, and notes that this last intersection had no detailed discussions of the individual crashes as they were not related to right on red. She contends this is pertinent and relevant for OLLA review. The motion is discussed in more detail, and Councillor Watson-Felt suggests there are multiple issues here including ordinance and signage cleanup, understanding where right turn on red is appropriate, enforcement, public awareness, safety, etc. She agrees with Councillor Harvey that this should be a broader, more City-wide conversation, and that should eventually turn into ordinances that OLLA can take action on. Councillor Merkel agrees with the comments that the conversation has branched out organically, however she states time has already been spent and relevant information presented. Councillor Merkel suggests it would derail something already in motion to discharge the matter. Councillor Harvey suggests discussions of traffic volume and other things not specifically focused on right turn on red is not sticking to the agenda and misleading to the public. Councillor Morsillo asks how right turn on red can be discussed without the mention or consideration of traffic patterns. Councillor Morsillo and Councillor Harvey continue to disagree on how the discussion should proceed. Councillor Watson-Felt suggests a compromise where all this data and information be presented to OLLA alongside specific recommendations from Traffic and Parking to determine what changes need to be made. Councillor Morsillo suggests perhaps rather than discussing crash data, Lt. Tucker could provide a recommendation for any light, or whether more information is needed. She also notes the downtown area will be the heaviest lift and that that meeting will need to be rescheduled and further suggests that for that meeting Mr. Kucharsky or Lt. Tucker come with specific recommendations to the extent there are any. Councillor Watson-Felt agrees with the suggested approach. Councillor Prosniewski states he is surprised at how few crashes there are at intersections, which he suggests means the experts on the matter are doing their jobs. Councillor Prosniewski asserts that every ward councillor knows their intersections and their constituent concerns, and that they are experts on that as well, but that OLLA members specifically are not experts here. He suggests the recommendations come from Traffic and Parking, go to Public Health and Safety, and then OLLA can vote on ordinance changes. He suggests this would not derail, but rather enhance the process. Councillor Stott states as a Ward Councillor it is hard to get issues brought forth individually because of how many there are, and so she states she appreciates the current format and discussion. She acknowledges the process may not be perfect, but states it is because it has not been done before. OLLA members and councillors continue to discuss the issue generally and the order to study right on red at intersections.

Councillor Morsillo calls a vote on the motion to discharge the matter from OLLA. The vote is one in favor and one opposed. The motion fails.

Mr. Kucharsky explains the City received a Federal Safe Streets for All grant and to begin a broader discussion and create an action plan for the entire City and would look at roads and intersections. It will be an 18-to-20-month long process with stakeholders and consultants.

Mr. Kucharsky next discusses the intersection of Highland Avenue and the Salem Hospital entrance, where both approaches are in the ordinance but not signed. Traffic and Parking will work with DPS on correcting the signage. The intersection has had two crashes, and Lt. Tucker states there were no right on red crashes. Mr. Kucharsky discusses the next intersection travelling north along Highland Avenue with Jackson Street and Essex Street, which is both signed and in the ordinance with one right on red crash in 2023. According to Lt. Tucker, the vehicle was turning right from Jackson Street onto Essex Street. There was another in 2022. Councillor Morsillo suggests looking at sign placement for this intersection. Mr. Kucharsky discusses the intersection of Essex Street and Boston Street next, where there are three approaches, two of which are signed and in the ordinance, while the east bound approach is neither signed nor in the ordinance. There are no right on red related crashes here. Mr. Kucharsky indicates the next intersection on Boston Street was recently redone and all three approaches have right turn on red restrictions and are signed. Lt. Tucker states none of the five crashes here relate to right on red turns in the last year. The most recent was in 2021. Councillor Stott suggests additional striping at this intersection. Next Mr. Kucharsky discusses the intersection of Boston Street at Grove Street and Nichols Street, which is an offset intersection. He states he has received many emails regarding this interaction, and that there are two approaches with signage but not in the ordinance. There were no right on red crashes here. Mr. Kucharsky discusses the intersection of Essex Street and Flint Street, which has three approaches, none of which have right on red signage or in the ordinance. There are no right on red crashes. For Flint and Bridge Streets, the northeast bound approach is signed but not in the ordinance, and the other three have no signage and are not in the ordinance. Mr. Kucharsky notes this intersection was also recently redone and recommends updating the ordinance to reflect the signage.

Next Mr. Kucharsky discusses the intersection at North Street and Mason Street, where the northeast approach has a right on red sign, and the southbound is not signed or in the ordinance. None of the crashes here were related to right on red turns. Mr. Kucharsky also discusses the intersection of School, Appleton, Orne, and North Streets. Here, the School Street approach is in the ordinance but not signed, the northbound approach is not in the ordinance and not signed, the southbound approach is signed and in the ordinance, and the southwestbound approach is neither signed or in the ordinance. There were no right on red crashes here according to Commissioner Lt. Tucker. They both indicate this intersection warrants further investigation and discussion. Councillors and Commission members discuss this intersection and additional concerns.

Commissioner Lt. Tucker recommends that the Traffic and Parking Commission meet to discuss the downtown intersections first prior to bringing recommendations forth to OLLA. Councillor Morsillo states that would work well, and the Councillors and Commissioners agree. They all discuss rescheduling the third OLLA meeting.

Councillor Morsillo opens the floor to public comment.

City Electrician Mr. Giardi speaks and notes that the City is in the process of updating to smart signaling, and that some of the decisions that come out of this process may interfere with the smart signal program. He states the plan is to move towards concurrent signals on main arteries to help move vehicle and pedestrian traffic. Mr. Giardi indicates he has handouts regarding the smart signal program and hands them out. He stresses careful planning and coordination.

Councillors and Commissioners continue to discuss the next steps, and the Safe Streets for All grant. Councillors motion to keep the matter in committee.

OTHER BUSINESS THAT MAY LEGALLY COME BEFORE THE COMMISSION

None.

UPCOMING MEETINGS SCHEDULE

The Traffic and Parking Commission meeting is scheduled for March 13, 2024, at 6:00PM.

MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL

None.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion duly made by Councillor Watson-Felt the joint meeting of the Traffic and Parking Commission and OLLA was adjourned at 7:45 PM.