

City of Salem, Massachusetts



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City Ordinance Sections 2-2028 through 2-2033."**

The City Council Committee on Ordinances, Licenses and Legal Affairs

met in the Council Chamber on April 1, 2021 at 6:00 P.M.

for the purpose of discussing the matters(s) listed below. Notice of this meeting was posted on

March 24, 2021 at 4:21 P.M.

(This meeting is being recorded)

ATTENDANCE

ABSENT WERE: None

Also in attendance: Beth Renard, City Solicitor; Ilene Simons, City Clerk; Acting Chief Dennis King; Lt. David Tucker; Officer Roberson Troncoso; Laura Assade, Mayor's Office; Deb Jackson, Director of Assessing; Tom Daniel, Director of Planning and Community Development; Maureen Fisher, Assistant City Clerk

SUBJECT(S)

#93 Ordinance Amending Taxi Cabs and Liveries

Beth Rennard explains that this is the first in a series of upcoming changes to the taxi ordinance. This specifically addresses the number of taxi and livery licenses. The proposed change is to decrease the number of taxi licenses from 50 to 35, and increase the number of livery licenses from 35 to 50. (Councilor Sargent joins the meeting during this introduction.)

Laura Assade speaks about the introduction of the Salem Skipper, a ride share program for Salem residents. Initial fares are free (up to 4 now), then fares are set at \$1 for seniors and students, \$2 for all others. The operation is limited to rides within Salem, Monday-Friday until 7 PM, Saturday until 5 or 6 PM. Cab companies charge riders between \$5 and \$7 per ride, and the service is door to door, and very often scheduled in advance. The Skipper sets pickup locations based on the destination, so some walking is required. The taxi companies reached out to Laura to talk about how to make changes to keep their businesses going, especially during the pandemic. Operating as a livery means they don't need to pay the high insurance rates required of taxis. They felt that an additional ride share option, on top of the decreased operation during COVID, would damage their businesses.

Lt. Tucker discusses the differences between taxi and livery licenses. Taxis can be hailed from the street, or wait at a stand, at the MBTA station for instance. Taxis are supposed to be a metered ride. Liveries are pre-arranged, usually a longer ride. The ordinance calls for a \$30 minimum ride for a livery. Very few people are hailing a taxi, and instead are scheduling a taxi ride for appointments in advance. Both are operated more as a livery service. Even the taxis operate on a set fee, which benefits the customer. In town the ride in either a taxi or livery is \$5 or \$6, and they do give discounts to seniors or students. In some cases, taxis aren't really using the meter, and are in fact undercharging the customer. The larger issue with taxis is the cost of

insurance, which has doubled or nearly doubled, which is unsustainable to the companies. They find themselves operation more as a livery, so why not use a livery license. More changes may be coming to the Council to address other issues.

Ilene Simons asks what other parts of the ordinance will need to be changed? The City Clerk and the Police Department do much of the work to license the taxis and liveries.

Councilor Sargent asks if there will be a switch to a livery license but continue to behave like a taxi. Lt. Tucker replies: no, they will need to act like a livery. Some companies may want a mix of taxis and liveries.

Councilor Sargent asks if the freed-up taxi licenses will be available for others who may want a taxi license. Lt. Tucker says that depending on what happens with the numbers, there will be open licenses. Councilor Sargent asked why the numbers need to change. Lt. Tucker explains that the majority would like the livery license, so the city needs more of those and fewer taxis. It will also allow a small company to open in Salem to get a livery or taxi license.

Officer Troncoso explains that the PD inspects the taxis, makes sure the meters are operational and everything is legal. Not using the meters allows the taxi operators to charge users less. Councilor Sargent wants to make sure there is a maximum price to go from point A to point B in Salem. Officer Troncoso explains that the police department gets any customer complaints regarding overcharging, which is immediately addressed with the taxi company which takes care of refunding the overcharge amount.

Acting Chief King adds that any final language regarding fees should be consistent with a maximum ride price within the city. Lt. Tucker and Officer Troncoso have done a lot of work with the taxi operators, and the PD will not allow liveries to act like cabs and vice versa. The intention is to keep the regulation in place, just make modifications.

Councilor Dominguez feels that the conversation about how the Salem Skipper could affect the taxi companies should have happened before the Skipper was introduced. The regulations need to be updated to better reflect the times. He met with the taxi companies several times and understands that they have several issues that need to be addressed. This is only part of what they need for success.

Beth Rennard adds that this is the first step in assisting these companies. They are running up against the cap on liveries, and increasing the cap will go a long way in allowing them to have flexibility in their business models. The PD, taxi companies and Beth will be looking at other changes, but this change in numbers of licenses will go a long way in giving the taxi companies the flexibility they need right now.

Councilor Dominguez asks about the maximum number of rides per year per person for the Salem Skipper. Laura Assade states that they are unlimited in the number of rides, and if the customers have proper codes, the number of free rides is not limited.

Councilor Morsillo asks how customers get the codes for free rides. Laura Assade explained that new customers get a number of free rides as an incentive to join the service. It started at 10, but now is 4 free rides for new customers. You can refer someone to the service, and you and the referral will get some free rides. This is similar to other ride share programs, as a way to increase the user base.

Councilor Dominguez asks for clarity on the number of licenses. This order is to increase the livery licenses from 35 to 50 and decrease the taxi licenses from 50 to 35.

Ilene Simons asks for clarification on the licensing process. Officer Troncoso explains that the current taxi license holders will remain unless they want to reapply for a livery license. The vehicle will be reinspected at that time. Taxi companies need to maintain taxis to operate liveries in the city of Salem.

Councilor Dominguez moves to refer this to the full council with a recommendation for first passage by roll call vote, seconded by Councilor Hapworth. Motion passes: 5-0.

#75 Naming of Streets

Ilene Simons explains that some streets have not been accepted by the Council for approval of their names, because there is a breakdown in the process. This happens every few years. By ordinance, the names of streets must be approved by the City Council, and she is looking for a way to make this process more efficient and failproof.

Beth Rennard offers that she spoke to the Planning Department and IT department and feels that they have a solution to the problem. The city has permitting software to automate the application process for developers, and this will be incorporated as a requirement in the process. They are still working out the best place to insert this so that it does not slip through the cracks.

Councilor Prosniewski states that he was under the impression that developers submitted the names of the new streets for approval. He did not realize the Council needed to approve the streets. He thinks the public should be more connected to the process. Street names should reflect the history of Salem. For example, the Jefferson Apartments on the old Parker Brothers site could have been named after Monopoly spaces, or other games as a nod to the history of the site. It should be a more open process for public input. This issue should be taken more seriously, not arbitrarily.

Ilene Simons adds that back in 1997, this issue of naming of streets came up. There was a desire to have more historic and appropriate names. A list was drawn up, based on nautical history of ship captains and vessel names. This is seen in the streets off Whalers Lane. This issue comes up every decade or so. She thinks that keeping the historical significance in mind when naming streets is important.

Councilor Sargent speaks about the redundancy in street names, i.e, Maple Street and Maple Avenue on different sides of the city. It causes confusion and should be avoided. Naming categories in neighborhoods is important, like the presidents' area, or the tree names area of the city. Maybe when someone applies for a building permit, it should trigger the street naming process for approval by the City Council.

Councilor Morsillo asks if both the City Clerk and the City Attorney will be looking through and finding the streets that need approval, those that have slipped through the cracks. Ilene asks how the Council wants to move ahead. Changing a name that has been there for years would be very difficult at this point, but catching new streets now, before they have been established is the best option. Councilor Morsillo and Councilor Sargent ask that the process include a check for redundancy before it comes to the City Council.

Councilor Dominguez ask that we keep in mind the diversity in the city, and have that reflected in street names.

Councilor Prosniewski asks where the conversation about street names should happen within the Council, in Government Services, OLLA, or Community and Economic Development. The consensus is that Government Services is the best place to have the discussion. Councilor Hapworth asks for a justification for the name to be included, along with a redundancy check and public safety approval with the City Council order.

Councilor Morsillo puts forward that the committee can keep the item in committee until the process is finalized and then meet again to be updated, or the committee can refer it back to the Council with a recommendation that the City Clerk and City Solicitor finalize the process themselves. Beth Rennard feels that they can go ahead and resolve it internally. Ilene Simons agrees that since it is a process, she and Beth Rennard can finish the process together, with no need to keep this in committee. She will email the final process to the City Council as an update.

Councilor Dominguez moves that this be referred to the full Council with a recommendation that the City Clerk and the City Solicitor work together to finalize the procedure, seconded by Councilor Hapworth. Motion passes: 5-0

On the motion of C. Sargent the meeting adjourned at 7:05 P.M.



(Chairperson)