

**City of Salem  
Traffic and Parking Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
Monday, April 6, 2020**

A meeting of the Salem Traffic and Parking Commission was held remotely on Monday, April 6, 2020 at 6:30pm, pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, and the Governor's March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place.

**Present:** Commission Chair Tanya Shallop, Commission Vice-Chair Eric Papetti, Commissioner Robin Seidel, Commission Lt. David Tucker, Director of Traffic and Parking David Kucharsky, and Assistant Director Nick Downing. **Absent:** Commissioner Todd Waller.

**CALL OF MEETING**

The meeting was called to order at 6:30pm by Chair Shallop.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Commission Chair Shallop opens the floor to public comment.

*Councilor Ty Hapworth* introduces himself and notes that he is interested in the discussion about street closures related to social distancing and exploring potential options. He states he is happy to support in any way he can as a City Councilor.

*Councilor Megan Riccardi* introduces herself and says she is interested in the street closure discussion as well. Ms. Riccardi also states she is interested in discussions regarding sidewalk traffic, noting that Beverly is implementing bidirectional sidewalks.

**TRAFFIC AND PARKING DIRECTOR UPDATE**

Director of Traffic and Parking David Kucharsky provides updates on the following ongoing projects:

- **Salem Harbor Connector Project**  
Mr. Kucharsky explains that work has continued and contractors have been clearing trees and brush. Mr. Kucharsky met with engineering on site to look at crossings and drainage issues.
- **Normand/Chestnut/Summer Roundabout Project**  
Mr. Kucharsky states the consultant (Stantec) is working on Phase 4, the final phase of the project, which will reset some of the curbs in the area. A full in-depth survey was conducted to determine crosswalk and bumpout locations. Mr. Kucharsky

**Approved at Traffic and Parking Commission on June 25, 2020**

indicates work is proceeding, and explains the intent was to have a public meeting after designs were completed. Once complete he will bring it to the Commission to determine how to proceed.

- **Zagster & Spin**

Mr. Kucharsky indicates Spin scooters have been pulled and removed from the streets for a few weeks. Zagster bikes are still out but currently locked. Mr. Kucharsky reached out to Zagster to learn the reason for leaving the bikes out and is waiting for a reply. He adds that staff is still moving forward with regional procurement for the bike share, with bids due April 21, 2020.

- **Parklets**

Mr. Kucharsky explains that Mr. Downing was able to spearhead putting out an RFP and that KZLA was selected as the vendor. Staff will be having a call to check in and start with the design process for two (2) parklets that KZLA will design and fabricate. Mr. Kucharsky notes staff will work with members of the Commission on Disabilities to make sure the parklets meet all ADA requirements.

- **On Demand Ride Share/City Shuttle Service**

Mr. Kucharsky informs the commission that three vendors were interviewed, and that Via was selected. Negotiations on contract specifics are taking place with a call scheduled for tomorrow. Mr. Kucharsky notes he is unsure when this will launch given the current uncertainties surrounding the pandemic. He adds that Salem State has mentioned being interested in potentially participating in the program.

- **Community Car Share Program**

Mr. Kucharsky states the program is moving forward and that the vendor is GetAround. The contract is being drafted by the purchasing agent with help from the City Solicitor. Mr. Kucharsky explains they are in the process of purchasing hybrid vehicles for the service, potentially hybrid 4WD Ford Escapes.

- **Parking Benefit District**

Mr. Kucharsky explains that he and Mr. Downing have started meeting with consultants to put together a working group and will be sending out a poll to find dates when people can participate. Commissioner Waller will participate, as well as Salem Main Streets, several City Councilors, representatives from the Peabody Essex Museum, downtown neighborhood associations, the planning department, etc. They will be putting together data and working with Stantec to move forward.

Chair Shallop asks about Stantec's role, and Mr. Kucharsky explains they are helping facilitate the working group meetings and providing information about implementation and what funds can go toward.

- **Museum Place Garage Restoration**

Mr. Kucharsky notes he has had calls with the selected vendor, and is looking to mobilize this week so there have been notices indicating the first level of the garage

will be clear with no parking allowed. Upper levels will still be maintained for parking, but the project is moving forward. Mr. Kucharsky says staff are trying to take advantage of current low activity in the garage.

- **Museum Place Garage Elevators**

Mr. Kucharsky states an RFP will be going out for the new interior wrap and lighting for the garage elevators

## **NEW/OLD BUSINESS**

### **Request for Traffic Ordinance Recommendation**

None for consideration at this meeting.

### **Street Closures to Promote Social Distancing**

The Chair and Vice-Chair have requested the Commission discuss and make recommendations for certain streets within the City to be temporarily closed to vehicular traffic to allow for the guidelines related to social distancing to be followed that stipulate individuals should maintain a distance of six (6) feet between themselves and others when outside.

Chair Shallop introduces the topic, and notes that as weather is getting nicer more people have been out and most sidewalks cannot accommodate the 6 foot social distancing requirements. Chair Shallop states she is interested in the perspectives and thoughts of fellow Commissioners and attendees.

Vice Chair Papetti contends that cities across the country and world are closing certain streets to cars and having them open only to pedestrians. Mr. Papetti states walking is essential in Salem and that sidewalks are five feet wide or less. He adds that there has been a decrease in traffic, and that it would make sense to utilize some streets for people to walk safely during social distancing.

Vice Chair Papetti suggests the following options: All out street closures if nearby streets can be used as a bypass (such as Bridge Street); a low speed corridor area (setting an emergency speed limit of 15 mph); and putting out additional pedestrian signals and automatic recalls.

Commissioner Lt. Tucker expresses concern that he would not want to create a situation that draws more people out, noting that blocking streets to traffic might create a “block-party atmosphere”. He states he would not want to inadvertently encourage people to congregate. Lt. Tucker also explains there would need to be some kind of enforcement or monitoring if streets are to be closed. Lt. Tucker acknowledges the issue of small sidewalks, and suggests widening sidewalks by closing off some parking spots, as is done in October.

Commissioner Seidel says she is sympathetic to being stuck inside and wanting to get out and that it would be great to be able to do so in a safe way. Ms. Seidel supports potential closures, as well as the idea of encouraging one-way sidewalk traffic.

Mr. Kucharsky echoes Lt. Tucker's concerns, and wonders if it would create more exposure for workers as well as members of the public. Mr. Kucharsky notes that even just closing roads to local traffic would require additional staff availability for enforcement. He adds that police resources are stretched currently. Mr. Kucharsky indicates he can explore widening sidewalks by coning off some street parking, but also notes that DPS as well as Traffic and Parking are operating with skeleton crews at this time.

Mr. Downing states that in Beverly the city is asking people to walk on the left side of the road facing traffic while on sidewalks to minimize passing conflicts related to social distancing. Chair Shallop asks if that is already in effect, and Mr. Downing says it was a recent announcement, within the last few days. He will reach out to his counterparts in Beverly to see how they are implementing it.

Chair Shallop expresses support for anything that can be done to widen sidewalks. She adds that this is not just for people to exercise, and that there are many in Salem who are carless so getting around needs to be safe.

Lt. Tucker asks if there are specific streets that have been requested to be close. Chair Shallop says anecdotally she has heard suggestions for Derby Street, Bridge Street, and some downtown areas.

Vice Chair Papetti asks Mr. Downing and Mr. Kucharsky if they have talked to John Giardi about what can be done in the short term with electric signals. Mr. Kucharsky says he has not, but plans to check in with him in the next week or two. He will ask what is feasible and for information regarding potential timeframes. Mr. Papetti acknowledges there may be technological issues, but mentions that the city of Providence has put all signals on automatic recall and that their infrastructure is old. Mr. Papetti states that if Providence can do it, it should be a snap for Salem. Automatic pedestrian signals would eliminate the need to push a button, so pedestrians have one less surface to touch. Mr. Papetti suggests other cities have done this as well. Lt. Tucker asks if they sense pedestrians approaching or if they are timed, and Mr. Papetti indicates his understanding is that they added an all-way cycle just for pedestrians. Chair Shallop asks if this is possible in Salem, and Mr. Downing states that it could be easy to add an extra pedestrian cycle on some of the older infrastructure, but that he would need John Giardi's expertise to determine a roll out timeframe. He adds that newer equipment might be easier to modify.

Commissioner Seidel asks if there are one or two things that could be done through social media and messaging regarding pedestrian safety. Mr. Kucharsky says information can be put on the variable message boards downtown. Lt. Tucker indicates DPS has three available.

Chair Shallop asks about the possibility of lowering speed limits. Ms. Shallop notes that with more people walking and distancing, many are walking in the streets. Expanding the sidewalks would be great, but she suggests lowering speed limits where possible as well if enforcement is realistic. Lt. Tucker indicates it may be a big ask to set up signage and that enforcement could be tricky. Chair Shallop asks Lt. Tucker if he has seen many people in the streets lately being an issue and he states he has not witnessed it yet, but will ask other officers about their experience.

Vice Chair Papetti acknowledges there is a lot to consider, and says he does not want to minimize the amount of work it would take to act on any of these options. Mr. Papetti also acknowledges the potential for creating an open streets atmosphere that inadvertently draws people outside. He suggests looking into the National Association of City Transportation Officials, which has a spreadsheet with transportation measures taken in various cities. Vice Chair Papetti says that while he recognizes there is much to contemplate, the status quo is not acceptable. While decision may be tough to consider, he contends that walking is essential and the sidewalks are not large enough.

Chair Shallop opens the floor to public comment.

*Tyler Terry of 22 School Street* introduces himself. Mr. Terry suggests keeping commercial traffic off of Bridge Street, and potentially sending a recommendation to City Council to move Route 1A from Bridge Street to the bypass. Mr. Terry is also in favor of social media posts encouraging one-way sidewalk traffic.

Chair Shallop recognizes the inherent difficulty in wanting some kind of immediate recommendations to improve the situation through operations or police order, acknowledging having limited resources and enforcement. Chair Shallop indicates she would be in favor of anything that can be done, and notes that she likes the idea of slowing down speed limits as she imagines with less traffic people have been speeding.

Vice Chair Papetti asks what kind of speed measuring equipment and counting equipment the city has that is not being used currently. He suggests it could be put out in a way to gather data on actual speeds and traffic. Mr. Kucharsky says the police department has two speed counters, and that there is pedestrian counting equipment as well but it is old and not always reliable. Mr. Kucharsky says he will check if they can be deployed and asked for feedback on where the Commission would like them to go. Lt. Tucker confirms there are two devices for vehicular traffic that can be put out. He will work with Mr. Kucharsky on a list of streets to collect data. Mr. Kucharsky says he will talk to DPS and staff about all the items discussed.

Mr. Downing asks about lowering the speed limit in certain areas, and what would need to be done and what would be feasible. Lt. Tucker says the only way to do it quickly would be to designate a safety zone with a reduced limit. Lt. Tucker says he would need to check to see what streets would have the most benefit.

Vice Chair Papetti asks Lt. Tucker if the Chief of Police has power to enact emergency measures. Lt. Tucker explains that the Chief has a bit of latitude, but has to be able to establish it with an issue and emergency provision. A street would need to be identified and designated as hazardous.

Chair Shallop suggests looking at some of the more narrow streets, and using their limited width as the reason. Chair Shallop suggests Derby Street, and Mr. Kucharsky clarifies that Derby Street is currently designated as a 20 MPH safety zone. Mr. Kucharsky offers that parts of Essex and Washington Street could benefit.

Commissioner Seidel suggests the streets around the Common, as nearby sidewalks are not wide enough and she has seen many people in the streets there.

Lt. Tucker says he will discuss the issue with the Chief of Police. Lt. Tucker indicates he can support widening sidewalks, but reiterates that Salem Police were not in favor of closing streets due to the stated concerns of drawing people out. He also confirms that parking is currently free with no enforcement.

Mr. Downing suggests a recommendation to Chief Butler and/or City Council is needed, to set some of the parameters mentioned regarding street width, vehicular activity, etc. to give staff and the Chief enough to determine what steps can be taken (such as emergency speed limits or widening pedestrian spaces).

Vice Chair Papetti asks Mr. Kucharsky to type up a summary proposal for everyone to review, and he proceeds.

Chair Shallop asks for an update on what the city is anticipating doing with warmer weather on the forefront (specifically with regard to beaches, gatherings, parks, etc.). Lt. Tucker says there are no plans yet in terms of closing parking lots for areas that draw large crowds. Chair Shallop says there will be nice days where everyone wants to go to the Willows, so it would be beneficial to prepare in any way possible, whether that means enforcement or closing off some of the parking to discourage congregations. There is a brief discussion about the recent large gathering at the Willows and closing of beaches.

Vice Chair Papetti says he has ridden his bike recently and appreciates the Fort Avenue bike lane for bikers and walkers.

Mr. Downing says staff are beginning to think ahead for July 4<sup>th</sup> and upcoming Heritage Days, as they will be soon approaching.

Mr. Kucharsky presents the following language: The Traffic and Parking Commission requests that the police Chief or City Council consider establishing an emergency speed limit on certain roadways in the downtown area, as well as instruct staff to widen sidewalks along certain streets by temporarily restricting parking. The Commission recommends the City promote and communicate to the public to encourage pedestrians to travel on the sidewalk against vehicular traffic.

Chair Shallop and Lt. Tucker discuss and provide input. Vice Chair Papetti states he has no strong opinions about how it is communicated but that he likes the idea of one way sidewalk traffic. Chair Shallop agrees.

Vice Chair Papetti suggests taking advantage of reduced traffic to get some work done such as striping, widening or fixing gaps in bike lanes, etc. Chair Shallop states it is difficult to know how long traffic reductions will last, but suggests revisiting the discussion at the next Commission meeting. Mr. Kucharsky asks for suggestions, but notes that most of the budget for this fiscal year has been allocated to other traffic calming projects. Ms. Seidel suggests that consultants might not have much work right now as many projects have been stopped, so there may be a way to take advantage to have them help and move things forward.

Chair Shallop brings the discussion back to Mr. Kucharsky's drafted language, and asks if the Commission is in agreement to send along the recommendation.

Vice Chair Papetti asks if there is support for considering street closures, suggesting Bridge Street as a candidate. Commissioner Seidel suggests putting any available electronic signs coming off the bridge to indicate through-traffic should go straight. Mr. Kucharsky says he will talk to DPS to see what is feasible. Vice Chair Papetti asks about street closures again, and Chair Shallop indicates she is open to studying the possibility of street closures, particularly if situations worsen regarding COVID-19. Mr. Kucharsky offers to add language about evaluating the feasibility of street closures in the future.

**Motion and Vote:** *On a motion duly made by Vice Chair Papetti and seconded by Commissioner Seidel, the Traffic and Parking Commission votes to accept the resolution and recommendations as presented. **The vote is four (4) in favor, the motion passes.***

#### **OTHER BUSINESS THAT MAY LEGALLY COME BEFORE THE COMMISSION**

None

#### **UPCOMING MEETINGS SCHEDULE**

The next meeting is scheduled for April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

#### **MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL**

- January 16, 2020
- February 6, 2020
- February 20, 2020

The Commission reviews the minutes.

**Motion and Vote:** *On a motion duly made by Commissioner Seidel and seconded by Commission Lt. Tucker, the Traffic and Parking Commission votes to approve the meeting*

**Approved at Traffic and Parking Commission on June 25, 2020**



*minutes from January 16, 2020, February 6, 2020, and February 20, 2020. **The Vote is four (4) in favor, and none (0) opposed, the motion passes.***

**ADJOURNMENT**

*On a motion duly made by Vice Chair Papetti and seconded by Commissioner Seidel, the Traffic and Parking Commission meeting was adjourned at 7:53PM.*