

City of Salem
Traffic and Parking Commission
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, October 22, 2020

A meeting of the Salem Traffic and Parking Commission was held remotely on Thursday, October 22, 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, §20, 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, Director of Traffic and Parking David Kucharsky, Assistant Director Nick Downing, Mobility Coordinator Russell Findley, and Neighborways Design Consultant Jessica Mortell. **Absent:** Commission Lt. David Tucker and Commissioner Todd Waller

CALL OF MEETING

The meeting was called to order at 6:32pm by Commission Chair Shallop. Chair Shallop explains how members of the public may participate during the remote meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Commission Chair Shallop opens the floor to public comment.

Ward 2 City Councilor Christine Madore introduces herself and expresses concerns regarding the traffic signal at Essex Street and North Street in front of the Witch House. Councilor Madore notes the new signal cycle was installed several months ago, and that there has been considerable feedback that the cycle is not favorable to pedestrians and rather unsafe. Councilor Madore explains that traffic turning left from Essex to North Street is allowed while the pedestrian crossing light is on, which is problematic. While there is interval timing that allows pedestrians to get a small head start, it is not adequate and can be difficult when drivers are not paying attention. Ms. Madore adds that visitors and residents alike have commented that the signal is confusing and dangerous. Councilor Madore suggests a change to improve safety, whereby the left hand turn is either eliminated or not allowed while the pedestrian cross light is on.

Chair Shallop indicates the matter is on the agenda and that members of the public may either comment now, or provide comment on the issue when it is being discussed by the Board

Lori Hartt of 114 Federal Street introduces herself, and states she will provide comment later on when the North Street and Essex Street issue is discussed.

Cindy Johnson introduces herself but does not provide an address. Ms. Johnson states she would like to comment on the North and Essex intersection, noting that it is a very busy

and popular intersection. She explains that many individuals cross this intersection to get to the local YMCA, and that it is the first intersection that children cross when leaving the McIntire District. Ms. Johnson states the intersection must be safe for children, residents, and tourists alike. The current condition, according to Ms. Johnson, is unsafe as drivers turning left are not yielding to pedestrians. The situation is particularly difficult for the elderly and disabled. Ms. Johnson adds that drivers will often honk, creating an intense situation for all involved. Ms. Johnson suggests there be an exclusive walk setting as there was previously.

Councilor at Large Ty Hapworth of 6 Brown Street introduces himself. Councilor Hapworth speaks in support of Vice Chair Papetti's previous conversation regarding traffic calming prioritization and engagement with the public. Mr. Hapworth notes that other councilors have discussed prioritizing around schools, parks, and other areas, and that he has heard many people indicate there are issues with speeding in various neighborhoods. He states it will be great to have information on the department's website so that the public can see what projects are open and in the pipeline.

NEW/OLD BUSINESS

Salem Shared Streets Pilot Update

Mr. Kucharsky introduces Jessica Mortell from Neighborways, noting that they worked together on the pilot as well as the presentation for the Shared Streets update. Mr. Kucharsky discusses the project timeline with the initiation in June and July through implementation, and eventual end of the pilot in September, with removal of the speed cushions planned for the Fall/Winter of 2020 once snowfall begins. The Pilot utilized grant opportunities through the Solomon Foundation, looked at potential roadway candidates, assessed which serve vulnerable populations, and ultimately identified four streets (Peabody, Ward, Fairfield, Buffum, and Chestnut). Turning onto the streets was limited to local traffic only on weekends (Friday through Sunday). Data was collected over the summer prior to implementation as well as during the pilot. Additional data collection and data analysis will provide more insight. Mr. Kucharsky states the next steps for Spring and Summer 2021 will be to use the data and analysis to make improvements going forward.

Jessica Mortell introduces herself and provides an overview of the pilot goals, which were to lower traffic speeds and volumes on residential streets, provide space for social distancing, create places that are comfortable and welcoming to walkers, bikers, etc., and to collect data and public feedback. Ms. Mortell next discusses the importance of reducing car speeds, noting that an accident with a pedestrian only has a 50 percent chance of survival if the car is traveling 30 mph, compared to 90 percent if traveling 20 mph. In addition to the increase in safety from lowered speeds, Ms. Mortell discusses the selection criteria used to inform the pilot and street locations, such as speed and volume data, identification of vulnerable populations, income, connectivity to essential services, etc. The pilot utilized many tools, such as temporary speed humps, placemaking elements such as planters, visibility items like cones and flex posts, curb extensions, and traffic diversions.

With respect to community engagement Ms. Mortell explains there were several Commission meetings, four community walk audits, fliers in both English and Spanish, a public input website, and social media posts. A project survey extends until November first.

Ms. Mortell explains the pilot was made possible through partnerships with the City, MassDOT, residents, and the private sector (Barr Foundation, Solomon Foundation, Neighborways Design).

Ms. Mortell next discusses the study findings to date. Speed and volume data were collected before and during the pilot, and feedback from the public provided qualitative data. Ms. Mortell indicates on average there was a 56 percent reduction in volume on weekends, with Chestnut Street having the most significant reduction at 63 percent. Speeds showed an average decrease of about 5 miles per hour, and there was a significant decrease in the max speed observed. With respect to public input, 63 percent of respondents supported the pilot while 36 percent did not. While most feedback indicated support for speed reduction, there were concerns expressed about traffic diversion, aesthetics, and how streets were chosen. Abutting residents were found to be more in favor of the pilot, and with the feedback provided Ms. Mortell contends that 90 new streets have been nominated.

Mr. Kucharsky discusses some of the lessons learned from the pilot. He notes that there were challenges regarding staff capacity, materials used, and placement of signs and barriers. Mr. Kucharsky maintains an important takeaway was that neighborhood support and participation is key. Community engagement should take place early and often, and data collection should be clearly defined to examine impacts to the piloted streets and adjacent streets as well. Mr. Kucharsky indicates there may be a more zone based approach going forward, where neighborhood areas are examined rather than just individual roadways.

Regarding program vision, Mr. Kucharsky explains there are plans for city-wide traffic calming through the implementation of shared streets, ordinance changes, capital construction projects, and policy changes over time. The next steps after the public survey closes involves refining the evaluation criteria. Materials used will be removed and stored by the first snowfall. Mr. Kucharsky notes staff will work with residents to revise plans and propose new projects to the Commission over winter. New projects will hopefully be implemented in Spring 2021.

Vice Chair Papetti thanks staff for their work, and asks where the speed sensors were located and how the locations were determined. Mr. Kucharsky explains the sensors were on utility poles and not too close to intersections. He notes that staff will be cognizant of locations in the future. Mr. Papetti notes that the speed humps have been effective, despite being a little tricky for bikes, but that otherwise the pilot seems to have gone well.

Commissioner Seidel thanks staff and Ms. Mortell for the presentation, and states she appreciates the data and thought process regarding plans going forward. Chair Shallop indicates she is also excited to see the program continue to move forward.

Chair Shallop opens the floor to public comment.

Lori Hart of 114 Federal Street comments that the shared streets program seems to have gone well. Ms. Hartt states she likes the idea of taking a more holistic approach going forward, and suggests looking at Federal Street as an option for traffic calming in the future.

Alan Hanscom from SATV introduces himself and suggests that when streets are being selected for future projects the Disability Commission be consulted, as they have a number of intersections and streets that are problematic.

Constance Arlander of 91 Federal Street introduces herself and thanks staff for the presentation. Ms. Arlander asks if any data was collected with respect to the Witch House intersection when Chestnut was closed, as she noticed there were many more cars at the intersection. Mr. Kucharsky notes that volume data was collected on Essex Street, but not that particular intersection.

Annie Harris of 28 ½ Chestnut Street introduces herself and states she appreciates the data presented. Ms. Harris opines that the experience on Chestnut Street seemed successful as traffic slowed down and the narrowing of the street created safe spaces for people to walk, bike, and skateboard. Ms. Harris says she would love to see even more done, particularly in neighboring streets.

Neighborhood Traffic Calming Prioritization

Mr. Downing explains the Traffic Calming Program (“TCP”) has been ongoing and provides an update. The TCP was launched 2.5 years ago to identify smaller, less expensive projects that can be implemented quickly to improve roadway safety for all users. The approach has been two-pronged, with resident and staff driven projects. Mr. Downing explains there is a rolling application process that previously did not have any prioritization or criteria to evaluate individual proposals, or any criteria to evaluate whether intervention was successful. Mr. Downing indicates staff have learned many lessons throughout the process and articulates the more important ones. Every project requires coordination between multiple City departments, such as Traffic and Parking, Engineering, DPS, and Salem Police. Even small projects, Mr. Downing notes, require detailed technical drawings to ensure proper completion. Mr. Downing explains that the need for traffic calming is city-wide, and that efforts should not be limited to any one area or program. And finally, Mr. Downing notes that staff have limited time and resources for implementation.

With respect to program management changes, Mr. Downing states that applicants should have clear expectations once an application is submitted. First, speed and volume data are collected, followed by a street diagnostic which includes an assessment of existing traffic

ordinances and signage. Next, a crash history for the previous five years is compiled, and Engineering and DPS are asked about upcoming road projects. Mr. Downing explains that with the open rolling application process, projects will not always line up with the traditional construction season. Due to limited funding and resources, going forward there may need to be a limited number of projects implemented per year, but Mr. Downing indicates there will always be two simultaneous tracks occurring: projects being implemented, and project applications being reviewed.

Mr. Downing explains that staff have developed a prioritization tool, which he shares with the Commission. Mr. Downing introduces Russell Findley, who is the main GIS staff person who worked on the prioritization model.

Mr. Findley discusses the traffic calming priority tool, noting that it develops weighted scores that take into account crashes, income levels, schools, parks, public transportation, essential services, environmental justice, and many other data elements. The model can be updated and tweaked as desired, and much of the data is based on U.S. Census data. Streets are identified as high or low priority on a five point scale where one (1) indicates a high priority, and five (5) indicates low priority.

Mr. Downing explains that additional data will be folded into the prioritization model, such as volume, speed limits versus travelled speeds, and roadway classifications, once the appropriate weighting and scoring is determined.

Mr. Kucharsky explains the three main sources of funding are City funds from the operating budget and CIP, state and institutional grants, and TNC funds. Mr. Kucharsky discusses additional budgetary considerations, noting that projects often require ongoing maintenance and implementation. Mr. Kucharsky also suggests there may be a need for an on-call traffic engineering safety design contract to allow for smaller projects to be designed and implemented more quickly.

Mr. Downing asks the Commission what role they would like to play in the process. Mr. Downing suggests they could select projects from a global list, select projects from a list initially culled by staff, or any other manner of input in the process of prioritizing and selection projects.

Chair Shallop thanks staff for the presentation and comments that it is a great project and tool.

Commissioner Seidel asks about anticipated number of projects to review, and Mr. Downing notes there are currently 15 or 16 currently in the pipeline, and that six have been completed. There will likely be an uptick based on increased interest in this type of work through the Shared Streets Pilot, so staff expects to see more. Mr. Downing suggests the Commission begin thinking about whether some projects will need to receive a rejection. While no projects have ever been rejected, there are some that may consistently be at the bottom of the priority list based on the weighting and staff/Commission input. As

such, Mr. Downing suggest the Commission think about what should be done for those kinds of projects.

Vice Chair Papetti suggests there may be an equity issue if staff relies on requests from the public, as it would likely be requests from people with free time, resources, and access to local councilors. Mr. Papetti suggest looking at all the data to make decisions holistically, and stresses that safety issues be examined.

Chair Shallop agrees with Mr. Papetti, and states the Commission might be able to help identify projects that are not just based on proposals/applications. Ms. Shallop thanks Mr. Findley for the map and prioritization tool.

Mr. Kucharsky thanks the Commission for their helpful feedback. He notes that more technical expertise from consultants and more funding will likely be needed, but that staff are making their case and using tools to identify the resources needed.

Vice Chair Papetti notes there is not much info on the City website about the program Vice Chair Papetti suggests it would be helpful to have a running list of actual projects, perhaps separated by applications received, applications in process, applications completed, and those not yet funded. Mr. Papetti contends making the information more public could help in requesting more funds. He notes that last year the amount in the CIP was only \$50,000 to \$75,000 dollars for traffic calming. The program could easily be quadrupled, as currently it is very small portion of the City's budget but has a large impact.

Chair Shallop opens the floor to public comment.

Ward 3 Councilor Patricia Morsillo introduces herself. Councilor Morsillo states she has submitted three applications for street calming, and suggests applications need to be used in combination with data and maps to prioritize projects. Ms. Morsillo also suggest putting the map with prioritization on the City website. Councilor Morsillo stresses transparency with respect to existing and potential future projects.

Chair Shallop and staff briefly discuss putting the map of projects and prioritization on the City website.

Request for Traffic Ordinance Recommendation (Regarding changes to intersection of Essex and North Street)

Mr. Kucharsky explains that Councilor Madore contacted staff with two requests/suggestions: (1) the feasibility and impact of eliminating the left turn from Essex Street onto North Street; and (2) restoring the "No Turn on Red" sign from North onto Essex Street. Mr. Kucharsky indicates staff reached out to Tool Design to get input, and that they determined the "No Turn on Red" sign could go back. John Giardi, City Electrician, will reinstall the signage. Regarding the left turn from Essex Street onto North Street, Mr. Kucharsky states that data will need to be examined to determine the downstream effect,

and any other nearby impacts from the change. Mr. Kucharsky indicates the new signal pattern was intended to improve overall circulation on North Street, as there was significant backup beyond the roundabout. While the intent were improvements, he acknowledges there are issues. Mr. Kucharsky explains that Mr. Giardi, Mr. Downing, and Councilor Madore will be going to the intersection to discuss what some options might be.

Chair Shallop states it sounds like a few more steps are required before the Commission makes a recommendation. Mr. Kucharsky asks if the Commission has any preliminary feedback.

Chair Shallop indicates she is in favor of returning the “No Turn on Red” sign, but asks for clarification regarding the elimination of the left turn arrow from Essex onto North Street. Mr. Kucharsky explains a bit more, and notes that the intersection will undergo geometric improvements in the future, and that staff can examine the traffic implications stemming from the proposed change with the existing and proposed geometry. There is a brief discussion, and Mr. Kucharsky explains the Councilor’s recommendation was to eliminate the left turn. Vice Papetti offers that the issue seems to be the concurrent pedestrian walk signal with the left turn signal.

Chair Shallop suggests staff return to the Commission soon with more observations and data collection, as well as recommendations. Mr. Kucharsky indicates he will get further information from tomorrow’s meeting at the intersection. Ms. Shallop acknowledges that there is a big issue for pedestrians that needs to be looked at holistically.

Chair Shallop opens the floor to public comment.

Lori Hart of 114 Federal Street states she walks through the intersection multiple times a day, and recommends the pedestrian walk sign be exclusive with all traffic lights on red. Ms. Hart contends that drivers are not getting used to the change, and that this particular intersection is difficult because of the high traffic and Witch House. Ms. Hart discusses the dangers of the intersection and the current situation with the walk light and left turn overlapping. Ms. Hart opines that the signal change has benefited cars at the expense of pedestrian safety. Ms. Hart emphasizes that she is not opposed to the left turn onto North Street existing, but that the green light should not occur at the same time as the pedestrian walk signal. Ms. Hart suggests an exclusive walk light is necessary for pedestrian safety.

Councilor Madore provides additional context and history regarding the intersection, signal change, and her request. Councilor Madore explains she was on site at the intersection with John Giardi and a member of the neighborhood two months ago to observe the traffic flow and pedestrian patterns. Ms. Madore states it seems like the change in the signal was indeed to accommodate traffic flow at the expense of pedestrian safety. Councilor Madore contends she advocated for the signal to be changed to improve safety, and in the alternative for traffic flow itself to change. At the time, Ms. Madore explains Mr. Giardi was unwilling to change the pedestrian signal further, which is why she proposed eliminating the left hand turn onto North Street. She indicates the smart signal system that was installed had a big unexpected impact on pedestrian safety, and wonders if there may be

some low hanging fruit or simple changes to improve safety while we wait for a full on study of the intersection. Ms. Madore hopes upcoming onsite meeting is productive and helpful. As is, Ms. Madore states, this intersection is not walkable, despite Salem being known as a very walkable city.

Constance Arlander of 91 Federal Street introduces herself as the neighborhood member that met with Councilor Madore and John Giardi two months prior. Ms. Arlander maintains this intersection has been dangerous for two months, and that while it is great that the Commission is discussing this tonight, something must be done now. Ms. Arlander notes that residents and tourists need that intersection to be safe, and hopes that the signal could be changed to allow pedestrians to walk all the way across the street before motorists can start turning. Ms. Arlander describes various stressful situations at the intersection, and contends it will not be long before someone is hurt.

Annie Harris (no address provided) introduces herself. Ms. Harris states there is a lot of agreement that having an exclusive walk light for pedestrians would be a good solution. Ms. Harris expresses concern regarding the elimination of the left hand turn onto North Street altogether, but fully supports the exclusive walk light option, as it was prior to the signal change.

Commissioner Seidel asks if it might make sense to temporarily divert pedestrian traffic to the other side of the street to allow for safe crossing without impeding traffic flow, until the issue can be resolved.

Chair Shallop acknowledges there must be a balance between traffic flow and pedestrian crossing as it is a popular intersection for both cars and pedestrians. Chair Shallop indicates she would not like the left turn to disappear entirely, but recognizes something must be done about the crossing issue. Chair Shallop states she would be in favor of having the exclusive pedestrian walk light return.

Vice Chair Papetti notes this is the first time he is hearing about this particular intersection issue, and states it would be helpful in the future to be provided background materials prior to meetings to understand the issues ahead of time. Mr. Papetti maintains that if this was determined to be a safety issue two months ago, it is unclear why the remedy of reverting to the old signal pattern until a long term solution can be determined has not been put forth. Mr. Papetti hopes that this issue will be resolved in the short term as it is a big safety concern, and that he would not like to have to see it come before the Commission again in the future. Vice Chair Papetti states there is no acceptable compromise between human life and traffic flows. Mr. Papetti reminds the Commission that we will never fully alleviate traffic congestion in Salem, and that safety for pedestrians should be the priority.

Mr. Kucharsky explains he is unfamiliar with how smart signals work and what their capabilities are, but that there will be full discussions at the meeting tomorrow. He indicates he will ask Mr. Giardi about the feasibility of allowing an exclusive pedestrian walk light.

Vice Chair Papetti recalls that when the City began procuring smart signals three years ago he read news articles about how the new signals de-prioritized pedestrians in other cities. Mr. Papetti suggests it would be helpful for the City to research and understand such new technologies prior to implementation, particularly in light of their expense and safety issues.

Councilor Madore explains that she submitted this to the Commission two months ago after her frustrations, particularly pursuant to hearing from Mr. Giardi that a simple fix was not possible. Ms. Madore indicates she felt the issue needed to be higher profile and before the Commission since they are generally advocates for pedestrian safety. Councilor Madore requests an official recommendation from the Commission to support a change for safety.

Chair Shallop asks who is responsible for decisions about traffic flow, and Mr. Kucharsky indicates it falls under the purview of John Giardi, the city electrician. There is a brief discussion regarding city electricians managing traffic signals, and Mr. Downing states it is not uncommon in some cities. Chair Shallop suggests City Councilors think about how a change can be made so that the city electrician is not the sole person responsible for traffic signal changes and upgrades.

Tammy from Salem Trolley, 8 Central Street introduces herself and informs the Commission that a pedestrian was in fact hit at the intersection today around 3PM to 3:30PM.

Ward 6 Councilor Megan Riccardi introduces herself and states that she recently spoke with a North Street resident about the intersection. Councilor Riccardi indicates another smart signal was installed farther up North Street and that there were similar problems regarding inadequate time for pedestrians to cross. Ms. Riccardi says safety is a big concern, and that she fully supports the exclusive pedestrian crossing option, noting that removing the left hand turn would cut off the ability to travel to North Salem from Highland Avenue.

Chair Shallop encourages Mr. Kucharsky to converse with the Mayor to figure out a process to remedy some of these issues going forward, and that in the meantime something should be done as soon as possible to address the pedestrian crossing safety. Mr. Kucharsky indicates staff will try to expedite a solution, and work toward the suggested implementation of an exclusive pedestrian walk light.

OTHER BUSINESS THAT MAY LEGALLY COME BEFORE THE COMMISSION

None.

UPCOMING MEETINGS SCHEDULE

The next meeting is scheduled for November 19, 2020.

MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL

The Commission reviews the minutes for the September 17, 2020 meeting.

Motion and Vote: *On a motion duly made by Commissioner Seidel and seconded by Vice Chair Papetti, the Traffic and Parking Commission moves to approve the meeting minutes from September 17, 2020 as amended. **The vote is three (3) 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 8:24 PM.