

**City of Salem  
Traffic and Parking Commission  
Meeting Minutes  
Thursday, April 5, 2018**

A meeting of the Salem Traffic and Parking Commission was held on Thursday, April 5, 2018 at 6:30pm at 120 Washington Street, Salem, MA. Present were Commission Chair Tanya Stepasiuk, Commission Vice-Chair Eric Papetti, and Commissioner Jamie Metsch. Director Matt Smith and Assistant Director Nicholas Downing were also present. Commissioner Lt. Robert Preczewski and Commissioner Robin Seidel were absent.

**CALL OF MEETING**

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

Assistant Director Downing shared a brief update from the City Solicitor's office regarding the recording of public meetings by members of the public. Members of the public are allowed to record video and audio from public meetings. If they would like to do so, they must inform the chair public body they will be recording and not interfere with the proceedings. If recording video, the recording must be limited to the members of the public body and the City staff present, not members of the public. The Chair should announce that the meeting is being recorded.

Chair Stepasiuk asked if the Commission should record its meetings. Assistant Director Downing answered that we can, but we need to make sure we follow the appropriate record retention laws. Commissioner Metsch asked if recording would change how the minutes are written. Director Smith answered no, the minutes would be the same. The recording could be used if there were questions about the accuracy of the minutes or seeking clarification about a previous discussion or action. Chair Stepasiuk suggested staff begin using audio recording at the next meeting.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Polly Wilbert of 7 Cedar Street commented that the recently implemented signal timing is not helpful. The longer signals unnecessarily delay traffic longer than it needs to be delayed. There are long back-ups and no pedestrians crossing. This makes drivers try to avoid downtown and brings them through the neighborhoods more frequently.

**TRAFFIC AND PARKING DIRECTOR MONTHLY UPDATE**

Director Smith gave his monthly update. While January and February tend to be lower months overall for revenue compared to the rest of the year, this year we saw a 3% year over year increase for these 2 months, likely driven by high interest at

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PEM's Georgia O'Keefe exhibit. Parking revenue was up 6% while fine revenue was down somewhat, but we are fairly confident this is due to more use of the parking app. South Harbor Garage saw a 100% year over year increase in revenue, which shows the changing usage patterns as the downtown core has extended somewhat further out toward the waterfront. This data shows the obvious October spike, but the winter and summer months are not as divergent as they used to be.

Chair Stepasiuk asked what the total revenue was for the last fiscal or calendar year? Director Smith answered the average the last 5 years has been \$3.1 million, with about  $\frac{3}{4}$  coming from parking revenue and the rest fines, but he does not have the last calendar year compiled. Most cities with similar amounts of paid parking have opposite revenue streams with substantially higher percentage of fine-based revenue.

Chair Stepasiuk asked about South Harbor and pricing. The garage is highly utilized and is very inexpensive compared to other paid parking. Director Smith answered that we are looking at the data now, and it is likely something that will be on an agenda for the Commission soon. Overall, the data is showing that downtown parking is underpriced in some areas, with 95% capacity at peak hours.

Commissioner Metsch asked if part of the reason why the City is the reverse of many in paid parking revenue vs. fines is because we are understaffed for enforcement. Director Smith answered yes, and we are asking for additional enforcement in this year's budget. Additional staff would let us do at least another daily downtown loop if not more.

Director Smith met this week with Dave Knowlton in DPS and was able to update the Local Transportation Improvement Plan (LTIP). We did not receive the ADA planning grant we applied for, but we are seeking the equivalent funding through the CIP process and would supplement with staff time. Commissioner Papetti asked if this would be for the full plan or just transportation needs. Director Smith answered that it would look at all needs, being based on some work that's already been undertaken and working closely with the Commission on Disabilities.

Phase 1 of Canal Street will be wrapping this summer. We also found out the intersection at Canal/Mill/Washington is going to be resurfaced, so we are working on a painting plan to bring the bike lanes all the way to that intersection and potentially connect with the bike path. Commissioner Papetti asked if the second phase of the bike path has been delayed. Director Smith answered it is part of the ongoing negotiation with the Simes development on Canal Street. Ms. Wilbert commented that the Commission may not be aware the Planning Board is requiring the developer to spend money on landscaping for the path, and suggested the Commission and staff work to coordinate efforts so as to not be pursuing different paths on this project. Director Smith responded that he is aware of those negotiations and is working with the staff to the Planning Board to make sure the Commission and the Planning Board are both up to date.

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Chair Stepasiuk asked if the LTIP would be posted regularly? Director Smith answered yes, we want to have it up on the website and regularly updated as we get information.

Director Smith continued with the updates. We have a conceptual design for Boston Street that could potentially include a separated bike lane from the Peabody border to Essex Street. The pinch point is at the Flynn project, but we are working to see if we can find enough space to have a separated facility for the entire length.

Vice-Chair Papetti asked with some of the major projects undertaken recently, is there any internal effort to consider what has gone well or what could be improved in terms of being on budget, on schedule, etc.? Vice-Chair Papetti encouraged staff to think about strategies for successfully moving projects through the TIP process as well as considering standards for things like crosswalks and going beyond ADA toward true universal design. Director Smith responded that there is not a formal internal process right now, but agreed we should pursue one to identify what has and hasn't worked. Many of these projects originated and were designed before the Department was formed, so we have been trying to shape and improve when and where we can when projects are far along. But going forward, hopefully that will change and we will see projects earlier in the process, like with Boston Street being just conceptual designs and drawings. But these conceptual designs can allow us to get on the TIP now and continue to so formal design, rather than go through full design process and get a project on the TIP then wait 3 years for it to be funded.

Director Smith informed the Commission that we would like to proceed with the proposal for a two-way Margin Street pilot. This will come before the Commission at its next meeting or the one after. We are working with a firm on the design now, and the next step would be a formal Commission recommendation for a Council order. The rotary at Swampscott/First is out to bid, with construction to start this summer, and final construction to wrap in Spring 2019.

Director Smith discussed a very conceptual idea with the Commission. In trying to identify ways to use our existing infrastructure, the sidewalk on Bridge Street along the Bell at Salem Station seems like an opportunity. The sidewalk is 10 feet wide from the intersection of Bridge Street and Sargent Ayube Memorial Drive almost all the way to the MBTA station, and 10 feet is the standard width for a multi-use path. This could potentially serve as a multi-use path and connect the path that runs off-street along much of Ayube to the T. Cyclists already use this sidewalk, but formalizing it and signing it appropriately would make it safer for all users.

Vice Chair Papetti supports the idea, and given that the sidewalk is likely not in the CBD, cyclists can use it now, but it is a good idea to formalize that use. Vice Chair Papetti suggested we may need to look at the signal timing of the intersection at Bridge Street and Ayube, and perhaps consider concurrent signal timing there as well. Chair Stepasiuk agreed, noting that this would likely increase use of the path

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on Ayube. Chair Stepasiuk asked that this idea be put on the agenda formally at a future meeting, and Director Smith indicated it would likely come to the Commission in May.

Commissioner Metsch asked about signal timing and an update for the smart signal project and concurrent signals at some intersections. Director Smith responded that in terms of the concurrent signals, many of the intersections didn't have the right wiring to allow for concurrent signal timing, so we are working to have that wiring installed.

Director Smith continued his update. We are moving forward the review of the City's resident and visitor permit parking system. Assistant Director Downing is leading this effort. We have met with 3 Councillors so far, and are working to schedule meetings with the rest, as well as meetings with the neighborhood associations. We do not have a new update on the City's shuttle study right now, but will share one when we do. Vice Chair Papetti asked if we have updates from MassDOT on a number of projects, including \$3 million for structural work on the North Street bridge. Director Smith answered that we have reached out but not received more info yet. He is also unsure about the \$3 million, as he thought that work was already done, but will try to clarify that.

## **NEW / OLD BUSINESS**

- Downtown Valet Parking

Assistant Director Downing provided an update on the Downtown Valet Parking Pilot. The Commission previously made a recommendation to the Council to allow up to 4 spaces on Washington Street to be used as pick-up/drop-off in conjunction with the 2 southernmost rows of Riley Plaza to be used as car storage for a valet parking pilot. That recommendation was sent the Council and referred to OLLA. OLLA met and discussed the proposal and had numerous questions about the proposal and tasked staff with working with the City Solicitor and Procurement Officer to answer them. In terms of liability, the City would not be liable for a patron of a restaurant being overserved and using the valet and then getting into a crash – that liability rests with the restaurant serving that individual. In discussing this with the City Solicitor and Procurement Officer, we learned that to use public spaces for the car storage aspect would trigger the requirement that we go through an RFP process to select a valet vendor. This process could either seek to choose on approved vendor or multiple approved vendors and they would then contract directly with the businesses. Director Downing also shared feedback he has received that as voted by the Commission, the pilot seems to favor at most 1 or 2 businesses over others.

There followed a general conversation about the pilot and how to proceed. There was consensus among the Commissioners to pursue an RFP process that would select multiple approved vendors and encourage multiple locations for potential

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pick-up and drop-off to serve as many businesses as possible. There was also agreement that the spaces proposed for Washington Street could be moved south to the intersection of Washington Street and Front Street. Vice-Chair Papetti suggested that the pick-up drop-off spaces could also potentially serve as loading zones when not being used for valet.

- Essex Street Pedestrian Mall

At the request of Commissioner Metsch, the Commission and the Department have begun looking at some of the traffic and circulation issues along the Essex Street Pedestrian Mall. Department staff met recently with the Engineering team to discuss maintenance costs along the Mall. Maintenance projects tend to be more expensive here than elsewhere due to restrictions regarding storage of supplies and hours the work can be done to minimize impact on the businesses.

There was a large planning effort and discussion about this section of Essex Street approximately 6 years ago, but the effort died away. One of the lasting impacts of that previous effort was the removal of the larger planters.

Commissioner Metsch asked why the previous effort fizzled out. Director Smith answered that as unfortunately often happens in the planning profession, a plan is created but then sits on a shelf and is not implemented. At the staff level, departments throughout the City discuss the various issues with the pedestrian mall such as low foot traffic and general maintenance. We are working with the City's Public Art Planner to identify ways to activate the space, and we applied for a grant to light the system of alleyways running north to south near the pedestrian mall to highlight how much other pedestrian-only space we have. The pedestrian mall itself acts as a barrier for many who would use it but have difficulty because of mobility issues and general accessibility. Delivery hours currently allow trucks and other delivery vehicles on the mall most of the day, acting as another impediment to pedestrians. No matter what direction this conversation goes, there is general agreement that we need guidance for the mall in terms of mobility. Whatever function the mall serves, it needs to be the best possible version.

Vice Chair Papetti asked Commissioner Metsch if he felt the Commission should try to address smaller items related to the pedestrian mall first, or look at everything holistically? Commissioner Metsch answered that he feels addressing smaller issues first makes sense, but we should acknowledge that the environment since the last time this discussion happened has changed dramatically, with more interest in a thriving, bicycle and pedestrian friendly downtown. It would be worthwhile to find the old plan that was drawn up and examine pieces of it that are still applicable.

Director Smith added that the Commission expressing an interest in this idea gives staff the ability to bring it before other City departments and the Mayor, and charges us to educate ourselves to get more background as well.

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Commissioner Metsch commented that he knows multiple business owners on Essex Street who would strongly support some amount of car traffic allowed on this section of Essex Street.

Vice-Chair Papetti commented that we can't keep patching small pieces forever, and part of what made the last effort fail was strong opinions that didn't budge and it was easier to keep doing what we had done.

Chair Stepasiuk suggested the 2010 report be shared with the Commission and discussed at a future meeting.

#### **MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL**

On a motion duly made by Commissioner Metsch and seconded by Vice-Chair Papetti, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the minutes from the March 15, 2018 Traffic and Parking Commission meeting.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion duly made by Commissioner Metsch and seconded by Vice-Chair Papetti, the Traffic and Parking Commission meeting was adjourned at 8:17pm.