

**City of Salem
Traffic and Parking Commission
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, December 17, 2020**

A meeting of the Salem Traffic and Parking Commission was held remotely on Thursday, December 17, 2020 at 6:00pm, 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, Commission Lt. David Tucker Director of Traffic and Parking David Kucharsky, Assistant Director Nick Downing, and Toole Design Consultant Lydia Hausle **Absent:** Commissioner Todd Waller

CALL OF MEETING

The meeting was called to order at 6:06pm 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, but there is none.

NEW/OLD BUSINESS

Mobility Services Update (bikeshare, carshare, and rideshare programs)

Mr. Kucharsky provides updates regarding several City mobility services and programs. Mr. Kucharsky indicates the City's rideshare program launched the day prior, and that the City is working with the company Via. There are four vehicles, two Chrysler Pacificas and two Dodge Caravans, which are wheelchair accessible. Mr. Kucharsky explains that users can book trips through an app on their phone or by visiting www.salemskipper.com. Mr. Kucharsky states the cost is \$2 a ride for most people, and that there is a \$1 discount for seniors, middle and high school students, and those with accessibility issues. Salem is working closely with Via regarding safety protocols given the current pandemic. Riders and drivers must use masks, partitions have been installed, and capacity has been reduced to 50 percent, which is a maximum of three people. As part of the program launch, the first ten trips between now and February 16, 2021 are free. Mr. Kucharsky explains the website has FAQs and more information about the service, and that it can be used anywhere within the City limits. When a trip is requested, dispatching software notifies the user to meet the vehicle at a nearby location and proceeds to take the user to their destination. Mr. Kucharsky notes that if there are multiple bookings, the system is algorithm based and can determine when to pick up or assign another vehicle to pick up a rider. Data from the trips will be reviewed to help determine demand and utilization. Mr. Kucharsky explains the

program is partially funded through a MassDOT grant, as well as some of the cannabis funds the City receives and funds from the community agreement with Footprint.

Vice Chair Papetti thanks Mr. Kucharsky and staff for their work, and states he would like to make sure everyone understands what the service is, has appropriate expectations of what it could become. Mr. Papetti asks what the contract term and total budget are, and Mr. Kucharsky responds that they are nine months and \$420,000, respectively. Mr. Kucharsky adds that staff have begun filing for additional funding with the state, and that if awarded it would kick in when this current contract ends.

Vice Chair Papetti asks what kind of performance metrics will be tracked and how effectiveness will be evaluated. Mr. Kucharsky indicates he does not have the information available at the moment, but that he can share it with the Commission. Mr. Kucharsky states the hope is to see increased ridership over time. Mr. Papetti suggests that at the next meeting the Commission and staff have a more in depth discussion regarding metrics and evaluation.

Commissioner Seidel asks about the vehicles, specifically whether hybrid or electric vehicles were considered. Ms. Seidel is in favor of the program but would like to see it be as sustainable as possible, and suggests looking into hybrid or electric vehicles in future rounds of contracts.

Mr. Kucharsky next discusses the Community Car Share program, which the City is running with the company Getaround. The City Solicitor and purchasing agent are currently working to finalize the contract, and another vendor will be obtained to deal with vehicle maintenance. Mr. Kucharsky explains there are ten Ford Escape hybrid vehicles located at five locations in the City. Two are in the Museum Place garage, two are at the Blaney Street Wharf, two are at the crescent lot near the MBTA commuter rail station, two are at Rainbow Terrace, and the last two are at Pequot Highlands. Once the program is ready it will be promoted, and Mr. Kucharsky notes it is available to anyone in the City at a low hourly cost to rent, somewhere around \$6 to \$8 per hour. This will provide additional options for households with no cars or only one vehicle.

Mr. Kucharsky next explains that there is currently no Bike Share program, as the company that ran it, Zagster, went under earlier this year. Staff are working to submit a grant request to the state with the goal of getting money to re-establish a bike share for the City. The hope is to have a new program running by May if not sooner.

Vice Chair Papetti asks if staff are working with MAPC on the request, and Mr. Kucharsky indicates they are.

Chair Shallop thanks Mr. Kucharsky for the updates, and opens the floor to public comment, but there is none.

Neighborhood Traffic Calming:

Fort Avenue at Columbus Avenue

Mr. Kucharsky introduces Lydia Hausle from Toole Design, and explains that she will present conceptual designs for potential traffic calming measures at the intersection of Fort Avenue and Columbus Avenue. Mr. Kucharsky indicates a petition was received in March 2019 asking for the intersection to be examined, and that Toole Design was contracted to look into how speeds could be reduced. Mr. Kucharsky states that residents had many concerns regarding speeding and turning onto Fort Avenue. Mr. Kucharsky notes that Lt. Tucker placed speed and volume counters at the intersection and captured speeds in the high 50's, almost 60mph on the road. Mr. Kucharsky explains that Ms. Hausle developed some concepts to hinder the speeding, and that staff are looking for feedback from the Commission.

Ms. Hausle introduces herself and begins the presentation. Ms. Hausle demonstrates the existing condition of the intersection, and presents photographs of the area. Ms. Hausle next presents the following two concepts, with renderings:

Concept Idea 1: This proposal realigns the intersections and creates two smaller intersections where Columbus Square and Columbus Avenue come off from Fort Avenue. There is an entry and exit point from Columbus Avenue, and a small one-way segment exiting Fort Avenue to go onto Columbus. Ms. Hausle explains that small hatched areas will create space for people driving to pull out farther for better visibility. Ms. Hausle indicates the rest of Columbus Avenue would be maintained for two-way traffic, and that there would be no change to parking conditions on Columbus Avenue.

Concept Idea 2: This proposal simplifies the intersection and consolidates all movements to one intersection. Ms. Hausle explains the existing slip lane would be closed under this concept, and that access to and from Columbus Square would be consolidated to Winter Island Road. No driveways on Columbus Square would be impacted, but one or two parking spots on the street may be eliminated. Ms. Hausle indicates there would be no change to parking or direction of traffic on Columbus Avenue.

Ms. Hausle presents both concepts side by side for comparison.

Chair Shallop thanks Ms. Hausle for the presentation and opens the floor to comments and questions from the Commissioners.

Commissioner Seidel indicates she has some initial opinions, but would like to hear from residents and Ward Councilors first.

Vice Chair Papetti states he believes there are pros and cons to both concepts, and is, curious to hear what Councilor McCarthy and residents have to say. Mr. Papetti suggests taking a harder look at bike lane striping and refining them.

Chair Shallop asks Lt. Tucker if he has any comments. Lt. Tucker states the intersection warrants improvement, and acknowledges there are pros and cons associated with each concept, but that they seem like cost effective measures that can be taken.

Chair Shallop asks if the proposals are temporary changes. Ms. Hausle states they are, as the attempt was to identify a low cost approach. Ms. Hausle contends that additional surface treatments have been discussed, but that for now this would be a trial face. Something more permanent with full scale reconstruction could be done in the future.

Mr. Kucharsky confirms that the painting/hatching would be the initial low cost approach, and that feedback from residents could be used to refine and further develop more permanent plans.

Mr. Downing notes there are questions submitted Q&A question regarding making Columbus Avenue one way. Ms. Hausle indicates the idea was discussed early on, but that there was a sense that it would not be received well by residents. Moreover, Ms. Hausle notes that turning the street into a one way would require council approval.

Chair Shallop opens the floor to public comment.

Eric Nowak of 19 Columbus Avenue introduces himself. Mr. Nowak indicates speeding is definitely an issue in the neighborhood. Regarding Concept 1, Mr. Nowak states that some of the hatching would take away resident sticker parking on Fort Avenue. He also notes that even with the hatching, it might be difficult to see traffic when pulling out of Columbus Avenue. Mr. Nowak also states that the narrowing of Fort Avenue does not seem too feasible. Regarding Concept 2, Mr. Nowak states he likes the idea of taking a turn to enter and leave the street, but does not agree with taking away parking on Columbus square. He notes that parking is a commodity in the City, and that people rely on the spots that exist so he would not be in favor in eliminating any existing spots. Additionally, Mr. Nowak states that he understands that hatching is cost effective, but states that people drive over existing hatching and do not acknowledge them, so he has concerns that people will just drive over any new ones. He notes that the reflective cones put out on Winter Island Road are already in the gutter. Mr. Nowak suggests a speed bump or raised crosswalk might be a good way to slow people down. He adds that he is not in favor of making Columbus Avenue a one way, as the street is wide, and it would require coordination as some streets coming off the Avenue are already one way.

Seth Whitten of 2 Dustin Street introduces himself. Mr. Whitten states he likes the hard turn onto Columbus Avenue, but suggests that unless it is a physical barrier drivers will just go over any hatching. Ms. Hausle and Mr. Whitten discuss the hatched areas, and how the low cost solutions thus far have not been very successful. Ms. Hausle explains that other options can be explored such as jersey barriers, green space, etc.

Chair Shallop reminds the audience that this is part of the Traffic Calming Program which has a limited budget that must be spread across multiple projects, so a lot of the plans

involve low-cost experimentation. Chair Shallop states that more permanent changes can be explored based on initial efforts.

Mr. Downing notes a question in the Q&A regarding changing the island so that pulling out of Columbus would require turning right a bit before turning left onto Fort Avenue. Ms. Hausle states that would be similar to Concept 2.

Richard Roderich of Sutton Avenue introduces himself. Mr. Roderich suggests that Concept 1 could be problematic because of traffic exiting Columbus Avenue through the slip street/lane. Mr. Roderich also states that any additional vegetation would block drivers views taking a left and would be against that. Regarding Concept 2, Mr. Roderich says the proposal would be viable if the slip lane were converted to green space. Mr. Roderich suggest Concept 1 will result in more accidents for those turning left onto Fort Avenue.

Chair Shallop asks about potential ways to block the slip lane, such as planters. Mr. Kucharsky indicates it could be a temporary measure. As there is a limited budget, he explains that tactical work is done first and then adjusted as needed. Anything more involved would require a full survey to understand grades, drainage, curb lines, effect on water flow, etc. Mr. Kucharsky also indicates that other grants can be explored for more long term solutions. He adds that raised crosswalks are being contemplated by the Engineering Department further up Columbus Avenue at Dustin Street and Lowell Street.

Ward 1 Councilor Robert McCarthy introduces himself and thanks staff and Ms. Hausle for the presentation. Councilor McCarthy acknowledges there are pros and cons to both concepts, and that it would ultimately be up to the neighbors to build consensus. Mr. McCarthy suggests exploring ways to merge the two concepts together and take the best elements of each. He is in favor of the one entrance idea in Concept 2, and likes the idea of additional green space where the slip lane is. Councilor McCarthy stresses that parking on Columbus Square should be maintained. The biggest problem with the area, Mr. McCarthy suggests, is that there is a lot of asphalt and open area, and some of it will need to be limited or restricted in order to get drivers to slow down.

Chair Shallop asks what the next steps would be, and Mr. Kucharsky states staff will go over the feedback with Ms. Hausle and further develop ideas to bring back to the Commission. Neighbors and Councilors will be invited to provide additional feedback on how to address the speeding issue.

Commissioner Seidel states she appreciates the input, and that she has similar concerns as those already expressed. Ms. Seidel is not in favor of the closing of Columbus Square in Concept 2, and suggests some kind of hybrid between the two concepts might work well. Commissioner Seidel agrees that a physical barrier will be needed as people will likely drive over hatched areas, noting that she saw similar behavior with the traffic circle at Chestnut Street.

Vice Chair Papetti also thanks the presenters, and notes that a key issue seems to be making sure residents on Columbus Square are accommodated. Mr. Papetti asks if anyone

from Columbus Square provided comment, and Mr. Downing states there were none. Vice Chair Papetti suggests discussing options with residents to see what works for them. Mr. Papetti acknowledges that Concept 2 seems to have potential if it can be made to work for all abutters.

Ms. Hausle thanks the Commission and public for the helpful feedback.

Request for Traffic Ordinance Recommendation

Beaver Street One Way

Mr. Downing presents a map of the area for discussion regarding the proposal to extend the one-way restriction on Beaver Street with new ordinance language.

Mr. Kucharsky explains the issue was brought to staff's attention by property owner Mr. McDonald, who was concerned that the portion of Beaver Street from Silver to Safford is still a two-way street. Staff met with Mr. McDonald, Councilor Riccardi, and Lt. Tucker to discuss the narrowness of the street, and the proposal. Mr. Kucharsky contends the street warrants becoming one-way, and that after speaking to the Ward Councilors and residents in the area they all appear to be in favor of the change. Mr. Kucharsky notes that some residents thought it already was one way. He also explains that the area is bisected by two Wards. Mr. Kucharsky states the change would improve safety, and that if the Commission approves it would be submitted to City Council, and then move forward with DPS to work on proper signage.

Chair Shallop asks if the whole neighborhood is on board or if staff only heard from some residents. Ms. Shallop also asks Lt. Tucker to provide comment.

Commission Lt. Tucker states the change would only directly affect three addresses, and that there is no logistical reason not to go forward with the change. He explains the traffic patterns in the area, and suggests there is no downside.

Vice Chair Papetti asks for clarification on the proposal and traffic on Safford and Watson. Mr. Kucharsky confirms that Safford and Watson are two-way streets. Lt. Tucker provides additional comments on the movement of traffic in the area.

Chair Shallop opens the floor to public comment.

Ward 6 Councilor Riccardi introduces herself and explains that she spoke with residents in the area and that no one is against the change. Councilor Riccardi also confirms that one resident thought it already was one-way.

Mr. Downing presents the ordinance language and explains that the new ordinance replaces two existing ones.

Vice Chair Papetti asks if Ward Councilor Flynn is in favor, and Mr. Kucharsky confirms he is.

Chair Shallop asks if any Commissioners would like to propose a motion.

Motion and Vote: *On a motion duly made by Commissioner Seidel and seconded by Vice Chair Papetti, the Traffic and Parking Commission moves to recommend the proposed ordinance language to City Council. The vote is four (4) in favor, and none (0) opposed. The motion passes.*

OTHER BUSINESS THAT MAY LEGALLY COME BEFORE THE COMMISSION

Additional Public Comment

Chair Shallop opens a second public comment period as the time of the meeting changed from 6:30PM to 6:00PM, and some members of the public were not aware.

Lori Hart of 114 Federal Street introduces herself, and expresses concern regarding the safety of the Witch House intersection, particularly with respect to the walk light. Ms. Hart states she is looking forward to meeting with staff the following week at the intersection to discuss some of the issues. Ms. Hart notes that Commissioners appeared to be concerned at the October meeting, and asks if any of them have gone to the intersection to actually observe the traffic and conditions. Ms. Hart maintains she has been complaining for six months and the intersection still seems unsafe to cross. She adds that she is not a slow walker, but still gets beeped at or cut off by cars when she has a walk sign. Ms. Hart suggests the intersection is too busy to have a concurrent walk signal and left turn. Ms. Hart says she would love to see the signal go back to the way it was so people can cross without worrying about safety.

Chair Shallop asks Mr. Kucharsky about the referenced upcoming meeting, and Mr. Kucharsky explains a meeting is being scheduled for the following week with residents, staff and the Ward Councilor to discuss the issue.

Constance Arlander of 91 Federal Street introduces herself and states she has the same concerns as Ms. Hart. Ms. Arlander states she brought the issue to the Salem Police Department in July and has since met with Councilor Madore and John Giardi. Ms. Arlander expresses frustration that nothing has changed to make the intersection safer for walkers. She claims Salem is a walking city, but that this intersection is dangerous for walkers. Ms. Arlander asks whether a traffic survey was conducted prior to the concurrent signal being implemented.

The public comment period ends.

Other

Mr. Downing announces the Traffic and Parking Department is now on twitter as SalemMATPD, and suggests members of the public follow the account for news, info, and updates.

Chair Shallop takes a moment to express thanks to the all the crew and workers who helped with the snowstorm. Chair Shallop also asks that there be an update on the Witch House intersection safety issue at the next Commission meeting.

Vice Chair Papetti asks that the next meeting provide an update on the status of the return of bus shelters.

UPCOMING MEETINGS SCHEDULE

The next meeting is scheduled for January 21, 2021.

MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL

The Commission discusses that they will push the approval of meeting minutes to the next meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion duly made by Vice Chair Papetti and seconded by Commissioner Seidel, the Traffic and Parking Commission meeting was adjourned at 7:17 PM.