

**City of Salem Massachusetts  
Public Meeting Minutes**

<b>Board or Committee:</b>	<b>Redevelopment Authority, Regular Meeting</b>
<b>Date and Time:</b>	<b>Wednesday, February 8, 2023, at 6:00 pm</b>
<b>Meeting Location:</b>	<b>Virtual Zoom Meeting</b>
<b>SRA Members Present:</b>	<b>Chair Grace Napolitano, David Guarino, Christine Madore, Dean Rubin, Cynthia Nina-Soto,</b>
<b>SRA Members Absent:</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>Others Present:</b>	<b>Tom Daniel – Director of Planning and Community Development</b>
<b>Traffic and Parking Commission:</b>	<b>Tanya Shallop, David Kucharsky, Jeff Swartz, Eric Papetti</b>
<b>Traffic and Parking Commission Members Absent:</b>	<b>Jaime Garmendia, Lt. David Tucker (Salem Police Dept.)</b>
<b>Recorder:</b>	<b>Colleen Brewster</b>

### **City Initiatives**

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1. Downtown Parking Analysis – Introduction to the project team from Stantec and a brief presentation of project goals, objectives, and analysis methods.
  - a. The Traffic and Parking Commission members were invited to participate in the agenda item.

Michael Clark, Stantec and Christina Hodge, Project Manager, were present to discuss the project.

Mr. Daniel stated that several years ago ULI looked into future development opportunities in the northern downtown area, including the Church Street parking lot and the downtown garage. They also led to conversation about parking needs around the downtown. That is the origin for the study with Stantec but at a high conceptual level.

Mr. Clark stated that there are 3 key aspects of input, 1- how the parking system is being used today by residents, employees, and tourists, 2- What is the infrastructure, and can it continue to be utilized, and 3- What are the future development opportunities to define the cities future approach to parking. They reviewed the current uses of sites, changes in trends of multi-modal travel, technological changes, and changes to parking structures with preliminary designs for the future. The study area included Museum Place Garage and Church Street lot as the main focus due to capacity and location, and how they impact the parcels in the community. They also reviewed parking areas outside the central downtown for potential redevelopment for parking demand; Universal Steel, Riley Plaza, Klopp Alley/Front Street, and South Harbor Garage. Parking at Hawthorne Hotel was also reviewed despite it being privately owned. Mr. Daniel noted that Mr. Harrington (Hawthorne Hotel) agreed to be part of the study.

Mr. Clark noted that the 2017 ULI Panel recommended Museum Place and Church Street be studied in tandem and since that panel there has been momentum to redevelop the

MBTA lot. They are using the guidelines of the SRA Downtown Renewal Plan for the planning and direction of the study.

Mr. Clark noted that they reviewed annual parking revenues trends, along with the 2018 rate increase despite the Covid-19 impact. They are not looking to increase or decrease revenue, but to sustain the momentum and not affect the city's revenue sources.

### Tasks

1. Analysis of Museum Place and South Harbor Garages (recent capital projects): Evaluate their effects toward on- and off-street parking, impact on remaining parking supply, existing conditions assessments, with a review of occupancy counts, types of parking passes being used, who the passholders are, and revenue.
2. Analysis of existing and protected future market conditions: Are there better uses for the site – redevelopment, potential future demands of the site, develop model for anticipated parking occupancy, with a review of development patterns, and research alternative development sites: 38 Norman Street, Jerry's Development, 253-259 Essex Street, Tabernacle Redevelopment, The Exchange Salem, 65 Washington Street, North Shore CDC Church Conversion, El Centro, and the Shetland Park Redevelopment.
3. Existing Condition of Alternative Parking Sites: Assess site capacity, due diligence studies, evaluate zoning requirements, connections and access, public realm features on adjacent sites, with a review of existing surveys, physical aspects, zoning limitations, work permits, and past planning documents.
4. Buildout and Parking Capacity Development: Create a minimum of two development option renderings for each site locating entrances, ramps, and stairs, estimate flow rates, recommend access configurations, identify trade-offs for each proposed project, and identify parking control technology.
5. Public outreach: Attend two public meetings with the SRA and Traffic & Parking Commission (kick-off & final report), respond to and/or incorporate comments, issue final report with the Commission to determine potential phased approach.

Mr. Clark stated that they are in the early stage of this process and the next steps will include continuing to review data, determining parking capacity, maintenance assessments, market conditions, capital plan needs of the city, development opportunities, and technology. They will profile future sites and combine all of it to guide the city in their use of this report.

Mr. Rubin stated that parking is discussed in many projects, including an urgent care facility proposed on the corner of Derby and Lafayette Street, and whether there was sufficient parking for residents and staff. The applicant completed an independent parking analysis and concluded that there are sufficient parking spaces available, not including during the Halloween season. He commented that people don't want to walk to where there is parking. He noted that data collection is critical to determine usage and opportunity and they may learn where the opportunities are. There may be sufficient

parking or parking may need to be relocated to where they want it. He noted that there are other ways to move people through the city such as a free bus service downtown as well as any other initiatives.

Mr. Papetti noted that the data is important but so is human behavior as well as the values they want to enshrine via. policies and infrastructure. Two years ago, the Salem MBTA parking garage with 700 spaces was empty, even in late October. With proper signage and publicity that lot now fills up, and the downtown parking spaces could have been eliminated and a protected bike lane put in place with the uncovered additional capacity. Data is important, but how the city responds to the need for parking says a lot.

Mr. Swartz noted that when he speaks to downtown businesses, employees refer to the goals of an old comprehensive parking plan and he asked if this will be a renewed plan or will this study work along with that older document. Mr. Daniel replied that this study is distinct from that earlier plan. The operational goals are valid for management, but this study investigates the need for parking and development opportunities.

Mr. Kucharsky suggested the need to look at larger assets and development opportunities moving forward.

Ms. Madore stated that using the presentation only, the study seemed centered on capital investments and where a future parking garage may be sited and building a single use garage downtown is the opposite of what should be done given the climate and environmental impacts that come with it. They should think of ways to reduce parking demand and encourage other modes of travel. The study areas highlighted didn't include some of the small municipal lots. Mr. Kucharsky suggested that may have occurred because of the limited parking capacity or they are privately owned. They focused on city owned areas with opportunities for development. Ms. Madore noted that she sits on the board of the Salem YMCA, and they are looking to renovate and expand the footprint, and the Sewall Street parking lot has always been difficult to navigate. She raised concerns with future development that would affect parking demand and encouraged the inclusion of Sewall and Crombie Street lots in the study to better assess the impact. Mr. Kucharsky replied that the scope for Stantec has already been set.

Ms. Madore asked if parking counts will be done or if existing data will be used. Mr. Kucharsky replied that the city will provide data from garage gates, kiosks, etc. Ms. Madore suggested that the Crombie Street lot which has a kiosk should be included. She asked if zoning changes are being considered based on utilization rate of the study. Mr. Daniel replied no, but it could be a suggestion, and this will not be an exploratory analysis of zoning. Ms. Madore stated that this parking analysis should be conducted with future land uses in mind. She hoped to see concrete data to inform future zoning changes.

Ms. Madore raised concerns about holding only two public meetings and asked if the Chamber or groups downtown will be interviewed. Mr. Clark replied yes. Mr. Daniel noted that that is not part of this scope, this is analysis only for the city to use going forward and a public engagement would be part of a future study.

Ms. Madore asked if there a way to determine where the demand is coming from and who was utilizing the parking: downtown residents, vs. residents not downtown, vs. employees, and whether only seasonal trends like summer or October would be used, noting that some residents downtown must live with this year-round. Mr. Kucharsky replied that they can obtain information on when residents are using the lots but don't require that information when people are parking. That would require additional study. Ms. Madore noted that people arrive many ways and their arrival method should be captured and included. She suggested tracking license plates. She asked if a parking structure location was given as part of this study. Mr. Daniel replied that prior to the ULI study, the Church Street lot is something the city and community said can be put to better use. As an important resource, the SRA could request in an RFP that the site include shared parking. ULI highlighted that the Museum Place Garage has utilized capital project funds, but it will become obsolete, and the City will need to look at the two sites as a whole. Mr. Kucharsky agreed. Ms. Shallop raised concerns with only meeting with them once more before seeing the results of this study and requested another meeting in a couple months to make more comments. Mr. Swartz and Mr. Papetti agreed.

#### Traffic and Parking Commission Adjournment

**VOTE:** Papetti made a motion to adjourn the Traffic and Parking Commission portion of the meeting. Seconded by: Swartz.

Roll Call: Kucharsky, Swartz, Papetti, and Shallop. 4-0 in favor.

Ms. Madore thanked Mr. Daniel for the context. She felt that an additional parking garage would be excessive but finding ideal locations to help with parking loss would be best. Mr. Daniel noted that supply needs to be created somewhere and not necessarily with the same approach, and a shared facility could meet new needs and provide adequate supply.

Mr. Guarino suggested that data from the MBTA lot be included, if it isn't already, as well as the parking spaces along Bridge Street. Mr. Clark agreed to investigate the MBTA lot data. Mr. Guarino agreed with Madore's comments, asked about to reach out to Museum Place Mall owners about selling the land, which is a known source of frustration due to their non-responsiveness. Mr. Daniel replied that it would be necessary for a redevelopment component, but it may not be useful at this time. Analysis will help with timelines and what would make sense. The owner has been consistent about his plans for the property. Mr. Guarino encouraged the city to expand the scope or engage the public, residents, visitors, businesses, etc. and to also determine the community's thoughts.

Ms. Nina-Soto agreed with many of the comments made. She was in favor of reducing the number of vehicles downtown and suggested that the city track who is parking in these spaces since residents say they have no parking when new developments are in the works. They should also track the time of day they arrive, length of stay, and include the individual parking meters downtown, not just the parking garages. Parking apps include license plates and could be tracked. Regarding shuttle services, the bulk of the study is vehicles entering rather than mitigating that and encouraging people to not bring vehicles into Salem. The City uses shuttles downtown throughout the year and not just the Halloween season. She suggested that after the study's completion, whether the parking

allotment be tracked with new developments that state they will utilize parking on these various lots, since approvals are happening without close tracking of utilization data. Mr. Daniel replied that the information from new developments is captured in the analysis even if the passes haven't been sold. The shuttle could be suggested by Stantec but a complex study is not included in this scope of the current study. There are many items related to this topic that can be included now or in the future. Mr. Clark noted that they are interested in the data in terms of demand and are not using peak demand such as Halloween. They are also not looking at a meter-by-meter perspective at this time. Ms. Nina-Soto asked if that data can be pulled from the Passport app. Mr. Daniel replied that he is unfamiliar with how that info is captured but will ask Mr. Kucharsky.

Public Comment:

No one in the assembly wished to speak.

### **Executive Director's Report**

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Mr. Daniel stated:

Refer to Old/New Business

### **Projects in the Urban Renewal Area**

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#### **1. 311 Derby Street:** Request to Appeal DRB Recommendation for American Flatbread sign.

Jim Harrison (owner) and Jim Withrow (All About Signs) were present to discuss the project.

Mr. Daniel stated that several years ago, to streamline the signage application process, signs could be revised by the DRB and have approval delegated to him for a recommendation. If an applicant disagreed, they could appeal. Ms. Newhall-Smith noted that Mr. Harrison went to DRB in December, the sign was already installed and the DRB okayed the design but not the night-time illumination, which the applicant would like to allow.

Mr. Harrison stated that they installed the sign without a permit and that their only intention was to change the panel. They didn't change the lumens within the sign, but the sign is existing and decades old. They didn't understand the signage review process and are unsure of what to do, but the gas station light next door has an illuminated sign, but their sign is less offensive. He requested the SRA reconsider the DRB position and allow the illuminated sign to remain.

Mr. Rubin asked if the original flat bread sign was illuminated. Mr. Withrow replied yes, they didn't change anything inside. Mr. Daniel noted that the DRB is concerned with how much of the white sign allows light to shine through, when the previous sign only allowed the lettering to shine through to make the illumination less intense. Mr. Rubin asked if there are objective criteria to use as guidance. Mr. Daniel replied no. The goal is to avoid overly bright illumination and to see if there is now a way to make it work so the sign is not overly bright. The DRB wants a sign's design to make sense. Ms. Newhall-Smith agreed and noted that the previous panel was opaque so the dark sign limited the light and only showed the letters. The DRB can work with applicants to eliminate a glowing white sign.

Mr. Rubin asked about the difficulty of changing the two panels. Mr. Harrison replied that the new panels cost \$7,000 to install and noted that the previous sign was darker but still illuminated.

Mr. Guarino recognizes their location next to the gas station and noted that the Flatbread sign is taller and white which projects more light and shines brighter. Mr. Harrison noted that the gas station, Charlotte Forten Park, and the Walgreens signs are also large and bright. He suggested installing a dimmer. Mr. Withrow noted that LED technology has changed. It used to be piercing light, but current lights have diffusers to limit forward facing light and can highlight the graphics only. He noted that a dimmer could be installed, if necessary, within the next 2 weeks. It will be costly because a dial will be located on the pole. Mr. Harrison noted that they aren't open late and the sign wouldn't stay on overnight, but he wants to find a solution since changing their branding they can't reinstall the old sign.

Mr. Guarino asked if the regulations weren't known beforehand, so it doesn't happen again. Mr. Withrow replied that the same company made this new sign, they considered it existing and the old sign was brittle and needed to be changed. They didn't think a request for approval to replace an existing sign would be necessary. A 50-foot crane was needed to install the new sign, which is 24-feet wide, and not an easy task. He hopes to find a resolution.

Mr. Daniel noted that they are happy to see activity in the restaurant again and asked if the LEDs were replaced. Mr. Withrow replied no, only the face panels.

Mr. Rubin stated that he has sympathy as a former business owner and given there are no guidelines for opacity in the standards how can they be held accountable. He was also bothered by the owner needing to incur additional cost to install a dimmer which the DRB may not find acceptable. Mr. Daniel noted that standard practice for a sign requires a building permit that the applicant must apply for that goes through this process and that includes the change of any sign face. Opacity is not a standard but if a permit was sought that would have been discussed. He feels confident that the DRB would have discussed the proposed sign features. The SRA is being asked to make a decision and that could mean returning to the DRB.

Mr. Harrison was troubled by the original approved sign and a dark non-illuminated sign seems to be the desire. He suggested the sign be turned off at 10PM since it seems no one seems to like the original sign. Ms. Newhall-Smith noted that the Board was okay with the sign design and that the issue is not entirely the internal illumination, it's that a white panel was installed which glows a lot when illuminated.

Ms. Nina-Soto asked if the alternate solution of external rather than internal illumination has been reconsidered such as installing LED's around it. Mr. Withrow replied that a 24-foot wide light bar mounted on top extended about 1-foot past the face of the sign would cost approximately \$4,000 for each side, and it would be large and unsightly. Ms. Nina-Soto suggested LED perimeter lighting. Mr. Withrow replied that it wouldn't be effective in illuminating the sign and that only a ring of light would be visible.

Mr. Madore reiterated that the design standards do not like to see white as the background of a sign. Other applicants have asked for forgiveness and the SRA doesn't like to set that precedent. She suggested the white parts be painted and noted that she would be comfortable to appeal the

decision and not have a white background. Mr. Rubin noted that the white background can't be painted over.

Mr. Harrison asked if there was any interest in installing a dimmer or turning off the light at a certain time. Mr. Rubin replied that while he is open to it, the DRB may still disagree. Mr. Harrison asked if the SRA could overrule the DRB. Chair Napolitano replied yes, but the DRB recommendations carry a lot of weight since they are an advisory board of architects and designers. Mr. Daniel noted that if the DRB could determine the appropriate dimmed level the SRA could suggest a combination of a dimmer and turning the sign off at a certain time. The Board discussed the appeal and possible rejection that would restart the process with a new application. Ms. Newhall-Smith suggested keeping the sign without illuminating to resolve the issue. Ms. Nina-Soto noted that going against the DRB request also sets a precedent for a white illuminated sign.

Public Comment:

No one in the assembly wished to speak.

**VOTE:** Motion made a motion to reject the applicant's appeal of the DRB's recommendation.

Seconded by: Madore.

Roll Call: Guarino, Madore, Nina-Soto, Rubin, and Napolitano. 5-0 in favor.

## **New / Old Business**

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Mr. Daniel stated:

1. Old Town Hall: Black Diaspora Cultural Program going on all month from Salem United. It's a different utilization of the space that provides access for different groups as part of the Culture House Program. The City will issue an RFP for uses.
2. Salem So Sweet: This weekend, there is a Chamber event. They applied to Economic Recovery for funding, the city lost some business, new ones opened. The EDA funding supported Main Streets and augmenting events to support Destination Salem marketing and visitors. The Enterprise Center also worked on technical assistance to businesses and the city conducting analysis. The goal was to land in a better place to support different organizations and activities. Destination Salem did a familiarization tour with travel writers from Yankee magazine, Boston Magazine, and a third magazine that will visit and profile Salem in 2024.
3. Ms. Newhall-Smith stated that Couch Dog Brewing at 76 Lafayette Street (former T Mobile location) applied for a business loan through the Planning Department and the Salem Loan Fund was used to purchase brewing equipment and building out their tasting room. Their twist is to feature Asian flavors and spices, which is new in Salem. They will have pick-up and take-home beer and will allow people to bring in food in the tasting room. They hope to open in the spring and are seeking signage. Mr. Daniel noted that Ms. Newhall-Smith has been managing the Salem Loan Fund, which was established with Mill City Capital funded by private banks.
4. Ms. Newhall-Smith stated that they closed on a loan to Daily Table, at 135 Lafayette. They hope to open in April and pulled permits for the interior build-out.

Redevelopment of the Historic Courthouses and the Crescent Lot: Update on Project Status

Mr. Daniel stated:

The Conservation Commission approved the project. Regarding the courthouse, they are working with the developer on their pre-development grant, they continue to work with DCAMM, and hope to close on the MBTA sliver parcel by April.

SRA Financials: Received and filed.

### **Approval of Minutes**

1. Review of January 11, 2023, Regular Meeting Minutes

**VOTE**: Nina-Soto made a motion to approve the January 11, 2023, with Rubin's edits. Seconded by: Rubin

Roll Call: Guarino, Madore, Nina-Soto, Rubin, and Napolitano. 5-0 in favor.

### **Other**

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Mr. Rubin stated that he will join the Charlotte Forten Advisory Committee which will meet tomorrow night via Zoom.

### **Adjournment**

**VOTE**: Rubin made a motion to adjourn the regular meeting. Seconded by: Guarino.

Roll Call: Guarino, Madore, Nina-Soto, Rubin, and Napolitano. 5-0 in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 7:55PM.

Know your rights under the Open Meeting Law M.G.L. c. 39 §23B and City Ordinance Sections 2-028 through 2-2033