

**City of Salem
Traffic and Parking Commission
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, February 25, 2021**

A joint meeting of the Salem Traffic and Parking Commission and the Salem Bicycling Advisory Committee was held remotely on Thursday, February 25, 2021 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: Traffic and Parking Commission - 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. Bicycling Advisory Committee – Committee Chair Eric Papetti, Tom Devine, Michael Williamson, Colleen Downie, Kylie Sullivan, Jayne O'Leary, John Wathne, and Connor Ryan. **Absent:** None

CALL OF MEETING

The meeting was called to order at 6:03pm by Chair Shallop and Chair Papetti. Mr. Papetti explains how members of the public may participate during the remote meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Bicycling Advisory Committee Chair Papetti opens the floor to public comment.

Lori Hart of 114 Federal Street introduces herself and states she would like to comment on the Essex/North/Summer Street intersection light by the Witch House. Ms. Hart indicates she has been complaining about this safety issue for eight months and that she has commented at the October, December, and January meetings. Ms. Hart contends the intersection is still dangerous, confusing, and frustrating for pedestrians and motorists alike. She notes that a letter was signed by 63 area residents regarding the safety concerns of this traffic light. Ms. Hart states that after the January commission meeting her understanding was that an objective evaluation was going to be conducted and she is wondering if there is an update. Ms. Hart explains the issue is that vehicles get a green light to turn left onto Route 114 from Essex Street at the same time that pedestrians have a walk light to cross the same section of road. As it is a busy intersection, Ms. Hart contends that for the past eight months cars have swerved, beeped, and driven up to her while she has been attempting to cross legally with a walk signal. Ms. Hart expresses her frustration and suggests the light configuration go back to the way it was if the study is not yet complete.

Chair Shallop thanks Ms. Hart for her comments, and states that while this topic is not on the agenda for today's meeting, Mr. Kucharsky can follow up with her after the meeting.

Constance Arlander of 91 Federal Street introduces herself and states she has also been contacting the City, the Police Department, and the Commission since July regarding the Witch House intersection and how dangerous the traffic light configuration is. Ms. Arlander recounts a recent experience crossing the street where a car came within two feet of her while she had a walk signal. Ms. Arlander maintains the situation is unsafe, and respectfully requests, as she did in the prior meeting, that the signal configuration go back to the way it was with a four-way dedicated stop while pedestrians have a walk sign. Ms. Arlander states it would be safer for pedestrians, particularly families, children, and the elderly. Ms. Arlander states she would not like the issue to continue to be pushed from meeting to meeting, and that she would like something done before someone gets hit.

NEW/OLD BUSINESS

North Street Corridor Proposed Upgrades

Toole Design Group and City staff present the proposed preferred concept plan for the upgrades to the North Street Corridor.

Mr. Kucharsky explains that Lydia Hausle from Toole Design Group is here to present the proposed preferred concept plan for the upgrades to the North Street Corridor. She has worked with City staff on the proposed safety improvements. Mr. Kucharsky indicates that Ms. Hausle and staff are seeking feedback from the Commission and Committee, as well as members of the public. He notes the next steps will be to flyer the corridor and notify business about the website for comments and input to iron out final details.

Ms. Hausle introduces herself and provides a brief recap of the Fall 2020 engagement meetings where she and staff spoke with residents and business owners about the improvement plans and had general discussions. Ms. Hausle next presents a map of the area, noting that it runs from the Peabody town line on the Northern limit to the North Street Bridge at the Southern limit.

Ms. Hausle demonstrates the project timeline from 2010 to today with milestones to date, including the 2019 walk audit, public workshops to kick off the design process, and the launching of the website in July 2020. Three public meetings were conducted in Fall 2020 to review early design concepts, and the plan is to continue to develop plans through Winter 2021 and review them with the public to obtain feedback. Ms. Hausle adds that flyers will be distributed to inform individuals how they can comment on the plan, including the website www.publicinput.com/northstreet. The website includes a summary of the engagement process, links to meetings and meeting recordings, existing conditions, data on speeds and crashes, design concepts, and a platform for input. The goal is implementation in Spring 2021.

Ms. Hausle explains the overall approach to the concept designs, noting they wanted to address as many community concerns as possible while prioritizing safety and accessibility. Additionally, designs sought to maintain vehicular access and capacity, maintain accessible parking spaces, and preserve as much on-street parking as possible.

Next, Ms. Hausle shares the three concepts from Fall 2020. Based on the outreach to date, Ms. Hausle contends many people are supportive of measures to slow down traffic, as well the addition of crosswalks and improving existing crossing visibility. There were concerns expressed regarding loss of parking, and some mixed feedback regarding the separated bike lanes. With respect to businesses that provided feedback, Ms. Hausle lists Fix Master, My Barber Shop, Salem Food Store, Essex Vacuum, A+A Services, Shell Gas, Citgo, and others. Businesses were asked about delivery timing and frequency, and the majority indicated they receive deliveries multiple times per week with no real pattern or schedule, while some businesses have zero deliveries. Most of the businesses that do receive deliveries do so on North Street, with some utilizing side streets or parking lots if available. Ms. Hausle explains that businesses were also asked about parking needs for employees and customers, with findings that most businesses have dedicated parking and that customers generally spend thirty minutes or less at most businesses.

Ms. Hausle walks through the current design plans. To enhance crosswalk visibility for pedestrians and motorists, the designs restrict parking in advance of crosswalks. Ms. Hausle also demonstrates the location of two new crosswalks, but notes the designs are not yet complete as they are awaiting a survey. Ms. Hausle points to realigned intersections at Appleton, Orne, and Liberty Hill, where the proposal is to realign these skewed intersections so that cars enter and exit at right angles for better visibility and speed reductions. Some additional elements of the project include traffic calming chicanes, which encourage drivers to slow down with subtle lane shifts, parking that alternates from one side of the street to the other, protected bike lanes, and bus stop improvements.

Ms. Hausle presents additional plan drawings and notes the dimensions of travel lanes, bike lanes, and parking lanes will allow for car doors to open without risking biker safety. Ms. Hausle points out the various points at which parking shifts from one side of the street to the other as well as the location of chicanes and new crosswalks (near the Nursery Street and Dearborn Street intersections). Next Ms. Hausle discusses parking a bit more, noting the existing accessible spaces that will remain, and the addition of a new accessible space.

Ms. Hausle notes there may be parking regulation changes to consider, as they could help mitigate parking loss and ensure that the parking that remains is used efficiently, but states these would need to be policy decisions from the City. Ms. Hausle suggests creating standard one-hour parking or under in the Southern portion of the street where there are more businesses, and perhaps a couple time restricted spaces on side streets. Ms. Hausle also touches upon loading considerations for businesses, as well as emergency access, noting that vehicles will have room to pull over for emergency vehicles. Ms. Hausle provides summary statistics of the proposal such as the addition of 2 crosswalks, removal of eight bus stops and forty-six parking spaces, and the addition of 1.65 miles of bike lane. Ms. Hausle stresses the importance of community outreach and education, particularly since some of these changes represent a big shift from existing conditions.

Chair Papetti thanks Ms. Hausle and staff for the presentation. Mr. Papetti anticipates there may be some concerns, and invites comments and discussion. With respect to crosswalk designs, Mr. Papetti states that if people will need to cross the street to get to their home or

car, the crosswalks must be safe. He adds that the parking regulation suggestions are worth thinking about, particularly after getting feedback from residents and business owners. Mr. Papetti suggests the City should think about how to coordinate the improvements with a bike rack program and Hubway roll out to encourage people to ride bikes and visit the businesses in the area. Mr. Papetti suggests they look at the North Street Bridge area more perhaps to keep the South bound side of North Street one lane to create a safer intersection, while acknowledging there are some questions about coordination with MassDOT.

Mr. Wathne states he is excited about how bicycle-centric the design is, but acknowledges some may have concerns about the loss of parking.

Ms. Sullivan indicates the plans seem exciting and notes it seems easy to understand for drivers and cyclists. Ms. Sullivan adds that she has not heard any discussion about North Street being the main way people come from out of state, particularly in October, and so making sure nothing is confusing is important. Ms. Sullivan also expresses concern that there does not appear to be much parking near School Street where there are several vacant businesses, suggesting commercial spaces may be that much harder to fill if there is no available parking.

Chair Shallop states she is excited for the proposal, and notes she is surprised that most people have been receptive to the chicanes as they are a new concept for Salem. Ms. Hausle explains that the various tapers ensure the transition feels normal rather than jarring, and that while it will be a little different the hope is that it will be easy for drivers to adapt.

Commissioner Seidel asks about left turns with the new shifts, noting there had been some concerns raised previously. Ms. Hausle explains that existing left turn lanes will remain, and that there will be no loss in capacity to queue. She adds that there were some suggestions for a protected left turn signal at the School Street intersection, but that decision would ultimately be up to the City electrician. Mr. Kucharsky indicates he can speak to the City electrician, John Giardi, about concerns.

Ms. Seidel next discusses turning left onto North Street and how difficult that can be at times. Ms. Hausle responds that with traffic hopefully moving slower, it should be easier to make those left turns, but thanks Ms. Seidel for raising that concern.

Mr. Wathne notes that North Street often backs up due to the light patterns, and asks if traffic calming is intended for low traffic times and if lights will be changing at all. Ms. Hausle states they are not changing the lights themselves, and clarifies that speed will continue to be limited during high traffic times by the traffic itself, but the hope is the new designs will lower speeds during off peak hours.

Mr. Williamson asks if there is any way to increase business parking on side streets, and Mr. Kucharsky says staff are exploring that as an option.

Mr. Papetti mentions the proposed development at the Cotaldo property and asks if there is anything that would change the bike lane or crosswalk design in that area. Ms. Hausle indicates it was discussed a bit in meetings, but not much has been proposed related to that project. Mr. Kucharsky suggests that the proposed development should not have any impact on these designs.

Lt. Tucker also notes there is a potential development in the area that may pose an issue in the future. Lt. Tucker agrees with many of the comments made, and contends that at different times of the day North Street is really two different roads – a speedway at some times and gridlock at others. Lt. Tucker hopes these designs will address the speeding, but shares concerns about tightening the road and whether it will make gridlock worse in high traffic times. Lt. Tucker states he is happy with the crosswalk additions.

Ms. Downie states she is excited for the corridor improvements. She notes she lives on School Street and is eager to see the safety improvements in the area for pedestrians and people crossing the street.

Mr. Williamson notes there are many runners in Salem, and asks if the bike path/lane is for runners as well, since running on the sidewalk is not ideal. Ms. Hausle states it probably will not be prohibited, and acknowledges the challenges associated with changing and varied modes of mobility (bikes, scooters, skateboards, etc.). Mr. Kucharsky adds that if the improvements make a safer space for recreational activity all around it would be a good thing. Mr. Papetti indicates he currently sees people running in the parking lanes, and that the improvements will likely be a win for all.

Chair Papetti opens the floor to public comment.

Sam Mercanti (no address given) introduces himself and states the proposal looks great. Mr. Mercanti asks if there will be a summary of the meeting as he joined late. Mr. Kucharsky notes there are minutes being taken as well as a recording, and that the presentation is available for review and public input at www.publicinput.com/northstreet.

Noah Koretz of 10 Woodside Street introduces himself as a North Salem resident, and states he is excited to see his neighborhood and neighbors getting prioritized with respect to safety. Mr. Koretz opines there will not be much disruption to what exists today as they are not removing any lanes, just prioritizing safety. Mr. Koretz states the prioritization of pedestrians and cyclists is great and that he is in favor of the chicanes as well. He adds that all the proposed elements should change the culture of the neighborhood from one you fly through to one you would want to spend time in.

Christy Evans (no address given) thanks Mr. Kucharsky for looking into the issue of turning left off of Mason Street, as people cut through on Buffum Street and speed through the area. Ms. Evans asks to see the images of the chicanes again, and asks about options to take some traffic away from Buffum Street. Ms. Hausle indicates she will connect with Mr. Kucharsky to discuss feasibility. Ms. Evans next asks if the new crosswalks will be lighted and make noises when crossing is allowed. Ms. Hausle responds they will be standard crosswalks

with accessibility features. Ms. Evans states she appreciates the extra crosswalks, but suggests considering more high traffic walking areas, and ensuring visibility as many drivers do not currently stop for crosswalks.

Anne Sterling (no address given) expresses concerns about driving North on North Street and turning left onto School Street during commuter hours, noting there is no legal way to do it. As such, she needs to do a “Jersey turn” or wait until the red light and do a similar maneuver at the end of the queue of traffic, and suggest that be looked at and improved. Ms. Sterling also references the new ambulance depot that is part of a two-part development at Franklin Street, and suggests having ambulances come out across the pedestrian path to the MBTA station will result in collisions. Ms. Sterling suggests adding a signal for pedestrians to cross Franklin Street.

Liz Brott of 22 Larchmont Road introduces herself and thanks Ms. Hausle for the presentation. Ms. Brott states as a cyclist it is nice to see the protected lanes, as it lets drivers know that cyclists belong here too. Ms. Brott notes she is also a business owner in the area, and reiterates the concerns raised by Ms. Sterling regarding crossing around Franklin street. Regarding parking on side streets, Ms. Brott states she cannot imagine metered parking on streets like Dearborn, and that it might restrict access and parking for some homeowners in the area. Regarding one hour parking, Ms. Brott suggests enforcement will be essential. Overall Ms. Brott states she loves the plans, particularly the chicanes, reduced parking, and slower traffic.

Cat (no last name or address provided) echoes support for the plan, noting that she was happily surprised by the presentation. She references traffic calmer measures on Buffum Street over the summer, which she notes seemed to work at first until people got used to it and then sped back up. She asks Ms. Hausle about experiences in Cambridge and other areas with respect to traffic calming, as well as more details regarding the pile-ons. Ms. Hausle responds that experiences differ in different communities based on varied designs and other factors. Ms. Hausle notes that Cambridge Street is similar to North Street in terms of width and other factors, and that a before and after study was conducted related to parking and speed. Ms. Hausle indicates she can find the results and share them with Mr. Kucharsky to potentially get that information on the site. Ms. Hausle next clarifies that the pile-ons or bollards are vertical elements that are intended to do a few things: reinforce slower speeds in a way that paint does not, act as a visual queue to change ahead, and provide a substantial barrier for people in the bike lanes.

Chair Shallop thanks everyone for their comments and questions.

Ms. Hausle thanks everyone for their input and questions, and reminds members of the public there is a website to provide further comment.

Ms. Mercanti provides a final comment stating she thinks the plans look great. Ms. Mercanti states she is from Belgium, and states that in Europe things are crazy right now. She suggests that whatever the final design is it should be cool, great for bikers, and not too harsh on drivers. She suggests there needs to be a balance.

OTHER BUSINESS THAT MAY LEGALLY COME BEFORE THE COMMISSION

None.

UPCOMING MEETINGS SCHEDULE

The next meeting is scheduled for March 18, 2021 at 6:00PM.

MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL

None

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion duly made by Commissioner Wathne and seconded by Commissioner Williamson the joint meeting of the Bicycle Advisory Committee and the Traffic and Parking Commission meeting was adjourned at 7:34 PM.