

City of Salem
Traffic and Parking Commission
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, March 27, 2024

A meeting of the Salem Traffic and Parking Commission was held remotely on Wednesday, March 27, 2024, at 6:00pm, in accordance with Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2023.

Present: Traffic and Parking: Chair Jaime Garmendia, Commissioner Jeff Swartz, Commissioner Brendan Casey, Commissioner Lt. David Tucker, Commissioner Erin Turowski, Director of Traffic & Parking David Kucharsky, and Assistant Transportation Director Christina Hodge. **Absent:** None

CALL OF MEETING

The meeting was called to order at 6:02pm by Chair Garmendia. Mr. Garmendia explains how members of the public may participate during the remote meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Chair Garmendia opens the floor to public comment.

Brianna Kenny, of 14 Hardy Street, introduces herself and states she cannot stay at the meeting long but wanted to comment on the Essex Street proposal. Ms. Kenny indicates she is not in favor of the one-way proposal because it would force more traffic one-way down Derby Street, which will be exacerbated by construction activity related to the wind port. She notes that it would make things particularly difficult during October for her and other residents on the ladder streets between Essex Street and Derby Street.

Eric Vaga, of 59 Essex Street, introduces himself and questions the rationale behind making Essex Street and Brown Street each one-way. Mr. Vaga indicates he has not heard a reason for the proposal. Mr. Vaga states he needs Essex Street to be both directions, and his wife uses Brown Street to take their daughter to and from daycare. He contends that making these streets one-way would be a hassle.

Biff Michaud introduces himself as the CEO of the Witch Museum on Brown Street. Mr. Michaud states he worked with the previous DPW director and former police lieutenant in charge of traffic. He states that 800,000 people visit in and out per day in the height of the season. Mr. Michaud states there used to be 25-50 near misses a day with people crossing from the museum to the statue before the street and striping reconfigurations in recent years where now you turn left or right from the right side of the statue. Mr. Michaud maintains that since the more recent configuration there have not been any issues or close calls. He concludes that he is completely opposed to any change to Brown Street.

Victoria Crisp, of 1 Kimball Court, introduces herself and states she is surprised that these studies were commissioned. Ms. Crisp indicates she was unaware of them and that she is

interested in the background and why the proposals are even being discussed. She questions how this is a priority given the other issues in the City regarding parking and traffic. Ms. Crisp also notes that making Brown Street one way would make getting to and from her home more difficult.

David Sherf, of 14 Brown Street, introduces himself and states he has a commitment and cannot stay. He states he is opposed to making Brown Street a one-way, stating it would force him and his clients to come down Washington Street, which is already very busy, particularly in October. Mr. Sherf suggests other businesses and individuals on Brown Street are also opposed to the proposed change to make it one-way. He also notes that he was unaware this was even being studied until a week ago.

NEW/OLD BUSINESS

Director's Update

Mr. Kucharsky states that Salem is working with Beverly and Danvers to expand Salem Skipper service, utilizing \$2.3 million grant received with the help of Congressman Moulton's office. Mr. Kucharsky indicates the City was also awarded a contract to introduce a fully actuated traffic signal at the intersection of Jefferson Avenue and Willson Street. There will be a kickoff meeting with a contractor and other departments to begin work shortly. Lastly, Mr. Kucharsky notes that plans for the Washington Street sidewalk extension in front of Ledger and Boston Burger are being finalized. Updated plans will be presented soon.

MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL

Chair Garmendia asks for the Commission to approve the outstanding minutes before the first agenda item.

December 13, 2023

January 10, 2024

February 1, 2024 (Joint OLLA Meeting)

February 15, 2024 (Joint OLLA Meeting)

February 29, 2024 (Joint OLLA Meeting)

Motion and Vote: Commissioner Swartz motions to approve the minutes for the December 13, 2023, January 10, 2024, February 1, 2024, February 15, 2024, and February 29, 2024, meetings of the Traffic and Parking Commission as drafted. Commissioner Turowski seconds the motion. **The vote is five (5) in favor and none (0) opposed, the motion passes.**

NEW/OLD BUSINESS (CONTINUED)

Essex Street One-way Study

Mr. Kucharsky provides some background, and explains last year he, Lt. Tucker, and other Department staff were asked to weigh-in on the outdoor dining license for Bella Verona. He indicates it is the only outdoor restaurant dining that involves closing a portion of a travel way (the portion of Essex Street between Union Street and Little Hawthorne Boulevard). It was determined that it was causing some safety issues at the intersection, and the opinion of staff was that it should not continue. Following this determination, several City Councillors including Councillor Hapworth asked that staff look at the possibility of making Essex Street a one-way, not only to deal with the outdoor dining, but also to potentially alleviate other issues like introducing more parking and improving sidewalks. Pursuant to the Councillors' requests, staff worked with VHB consultants to conduct the study.

Laura Castelli, a consultant from VHB, introduces herself and discusses the project scope. She states they were asked to review traffic data to determine the potential implications of converting Essex Street to a one-way. Ms. Castelli explains that three scenarios were considered: Essex Street as a two-way from Hawthorne Boulevard to Webb Street (existing conditions without summer roadway restrictions); Essex Street as a one-way from Union Street to Hawthorne Boulevard (existing conditions with summer roadway conditions); and Essex Street one-way westbound from Forrester Street to Hawthorne Boulevard. The project involved data collection, traffic volume development, and comparative analysis. Ms. Castelli notes there is a difference in counts between September and November and that when Essex Street was in two-way operation in November, 20 vehicles traveled eastbound in the morning and evening peak hours. Overall, traffic volumes are slightly lower in November than in September and turns onto South Washington Square and Derby Street eastbound are slightly higher when one-way traffic was in place, but that it could be related to a seasonality shift. She presents an overhead map of the area and discussing changes in turning patterns during peak conditions.

Chair Garmendia asks what the next steps are and staff recommendations. Mr. Kucharsky states the analysis conducted suggests it could be feasible, but staff would like additional feedback from the Commission and public. He notes that if a portion of Essex were made one-way, additional parking and sidewalk improvements could be introduced. Mr. Kucharsky indicates a recommendation is not necessary tonight if the Commission needs more information, and any recommendation would need to still go before City Council. He also notes that the ordinance allows for City Council to implement something like this on a trial basis, and so the recommendation from the Commission could specify as such.

Commissioner Turowski asks about the potential for increased pedestrian infrastructure, particularly along the parking lots behind the Hawthorn Hotel. Mr. Kucharsky states if the street were one way it would also the space to create sidewalks there pursuant to survey work and other requirements. Commissioner Swartz states he is not comfortable making any recommendation without hearing from more of the public, and he notes the reasoning seems to stem from the outdoor dining road closure. Commissioner Swartz indicates Bella

Verona has not yet applied for the outdoor dining, but furthermore, argues that pedestrian improvements are not a good enough reason to change the circulation of either street. He suggests there could be numerous unforeseen issues and that Essex Street is a main street in town.

Commissioner Casey asks about the trial period and how it would differ from what occurs during the summer. Mr. Kucharsky states there would have to be signage to close a longer portion of Essex Street in one direction.

Commission Lt. Tucker clarifies that Bella Verona applied for outdoor dining this morning. He provides more information regarding a potential trial.

Chair Garmendia opens the floor to public comment.

Toni Duffy, of Daniels Street, introduces herself and states she has lived her most of her life. Ms. Duffy states she would like more detailed information from the presentation if it were to be used to justify making Essex Street one-way, specifically breaking down traffic counts and turns by hour. She also asks about the location of data collection points and suggests there may be some limitations. Ms. Duffy states she opposes the proposal either way. Ms. Castelli suggests that after feedback so far, it may be helpful to gather more data along the other streets rather than the main intersections in the study area. Ms. Duffy states that during October being able to use Essex Street to get to Beverly is very helpful for residents in the neighborhood. Ms. Duffy suggests Salem has too many one-way streets and has never in her three decades of driving considered that Essex Street should become a one-way.

Denise Griffin, of 70 Washington Square East, introduces herself and states she understands the restaurant's desire for outdoor seating but also notes that residents deal with a lot in October with respect to traffic. She suggests that more limits would not be helpful, and also notes that Bella Verona recently expanded their indoor space. Ms. Griffin also contends there will be increased traffic on Forrester Street and Washington South, which she states is scary as a two-way. Ms. Duffy states she is totally opposed to the proposal.

Shelly Alkern, of Curtis Street, introduces herself and echoes the others in opposition. She states she has not heard a case for making Essex Street one-way, and that the proposal would greatly inconvenience her. Ms. Alkern asks that there be more investigation into the impact on side streets if this were to go forward. She also questions why the data was collected September and November, as they are not good representations.

Charles Hildebrandt, of 46 English Street, introduces himself and states he would be in favor of the change. Mr. Hildebrandt indicates he has lived in the neighborhood for almost 40 years and has thought Essex Street should be one-way for safety reasons, long before Bella Verona and outdoor seating. He notes the difficulties with two-way traffic on Washington South, as well as cars entering from Washington Square onto Essex Street.

Kevin McDonald, of 76 Essex Street, introduces himself and asks about the increased parking and more specifics. He also asks what would be done to help with speeding traffic if this were made a one-way. Ms. Castelli states the first step would be for the City to decide what the limits of the project would be, and public versus private property would need to be determined/surveyed, followed by a design process to determine where parking and sidewalks could be introduced or improved. Mr. McDonald states that if it were to increase parking for the residents in the neighborhood that would be a good thing.

Biff Michaud introduces himself again and reiterates his comments and opposition. He also notes that Bella Verona is only open for dinner and that changing the traffic pattern does not make sense.

Anne Trace Clark, of 42 Forrester Street, introduces herself and states she is opposed to the proposal. Ms. Clark suggests traffic would be diverted down Forrester Street, which already can be tricky with the intersection with Washington Square.

Kathy Cullen, of 25 Forrester Street, introduces herself and states she is opposed. She notes the difficulties of the neighborhood and Washington Square traffic and suggests this is a big change to burden residents with for a restaurant whose outdoor patio is rarely full.

Christine Madore introduces herself as a former City Councillor and states she is surprised at the lack of public outreach regarding this study and that it is atypical for the City. She expresses concern that many commenters stated this is the first they had heard of the proposal and indicates she also had not heard about the matter until recently. Ms. Madore asks about the safety outcomes that might result from the proposal, noting that safety should be the main focus but that no information has been provided. Ms. Madore also suggests it might feel like there is little benefit for the neighborhood, while most of the benefit inures to one business.

Chair Garmendia notes this was a preliminary study and the earliest action that would occur with respect to such a proposal, and that that is why it is new information for many. He notes it was put on the agenda to discuss with the public and receive feedback, and that if it were to move forward there would be more work and analyses to be conducted.

Commissioner Swartz seconds some of the concerns and suggests this could be a solution for a problem that does not really exist. Commissioner Swartz and Mr. Kucharsky also clarify that Bella Verona did not request this, but rather, City Council members asked that this be investigated. A preliminary study was conducted, and VHB was hired to study the traffic implications of such a change. Mr. Kucharsky indicates there are no design plans, and this is the first step. Commissioner Swartz emphasizes that he appreciates the outdoor dining in front of Bella Verona, and he notes that some residents have commented positively on the partial closure during the outdoor dining season with the rest of Essex Street open to two-way traffic, but the restaurant did not make this request and should not be the target of any commenter's ire.

Emily Vaga, of 59 Essex Street, introduces herself and expresses her opposition. She also questions why the only options considered were making it one way all the way to Forrester or just the portion to Union. Ms. Vaga states she would be opposed regardless but asks why more options were not considered. She also questions the veracity of the data and asks for more granular data. Ms. Castelli confirms the peak hours were studied.

Steven Gribbin, of 26 Herbert Street, introduces himself and states that the small closure of Essex in the summer has not had a big impact for him or his neighbors. He suggests that if more of Essex Street were closed to two-way traffic it would have an impact on residents.

Janice Sheppard, of 40 Essex Street, introduces herself and states she opposes the proposal. She also questions why the proposal looks all the way down to Forrester Street.

Toni Duffy, of 34 Daniels Street, introduces herself again and reiterates her opposition, noting she also opposes making Brown Street one-way. She also asks if VHB is a stakeholder for transparency reasons.

Thomas Cody, of 54 Memorial Drive, introduces himself and expresses his opposition to the proposal. He states he has no issue with the small portion being one way during the summer for outdoor dining, but that extending the one way would be detrimental.

Micah Hapworth, of 6 Brown Street, introduces herself and states she is unsure what problem is being proposed to be solved by these one-way proposals. Ms. Hapworth states her top priority is pedestrian safety, and that she could be amenable if the reasons and outcomes were focused on pedestrian safety.

Chair Garmendia asks if there is any interest in a recommendation or motion.

Motion and Vote: Commissioner Swartz motions to recommend no further action regarding the potential of making Essex Street a one-way street. Commissioner Turowski seconds the motion. **The vote is five (5) in favor and none (0) opposed, the motion passes.**

Brown Street One-way Study

Mr. Kucharsky states Taylor Dennerlein is present from Toole Design to discuss the potential of making Brown Street one-way eastbound from New Liberty Street to Washington Square North as a way to potentially making crossing in the area safer, particularly from Goodnight Fatty to the Salem Common. The northbound left turn lane and the southbound lane would be removed under this scenario, and it creates opportunities for a wider plaza, bumping out part of the Common. Mr. Kucharsky states this is just the preliminary traffic analysis.

Taylor Dennerlein introduces herself and presents a map of the project area. She discusses the project need and echoes comments from Mr. Kucharsky. Ms. Dennerlein notes the opportunities to enhance pedestrian safety and accessibility along Brown Street and the

intersection with North Washington Square. She discusses origin-destination analysis using StreetLight Data to understand local travel patterns along Brown and intersection streets. Vehicle volumes were collected in September and November during morning and evening peak hours at various intersections. Ms. Dennerlein presents the data and discusses the results, including where traffic would likely divert if Brown Street were one way. The total number of vehicles rerouted during peak times would be 30 in the AM and 100-110 in the PM peaks. She discusses potential intersection delays, which appear to be minimal. The study shows minimal impacts to vehicle operations from the change and recommends conversion with monitoring to implement additional mitigation measures as needed. Ms. Dennerlein discusses next steps if the proposal were to move forward, such as piloting a one-way configuration prior to any permanent changes. This would include meetings, design, and public feedback. Mr. Kucharsky notes there are times during the year when the approach to Brown Street is cut off and he asks Lt. Tucker to speak to that more.

Commissioner Swartz suggests that as important as pedestrian improvements are to this area, but he does not think a traffic rerouting is the way to do it. Mr. Swartz suggests looking at additional changes around the statue before traffic pattern changes. He expresses concerns about circulation impacts. Chair Garmendia notes that something must be done at this intersection for pedestrian safety, and that even if the solution is not making the street one-way, he is open to other ideas. Commissioner Swartz and Commissioner Turowski discuss making the intersection more of a right angle, noting the long distance for pedestrians to cross. Ms. Turowski also suggests looking at increasing a bump-out in front of Goodnight Fatty, and that while she would be in favor of the slip lane going away, she does not think that means Brown Street must become a one way. Lt. Tucker notes queuing issues that could result from discussed changes, and notes that traffic patterns would need to be looked at more closely. He also suggests the option of moving the statue.

Commissioner Casey asks if raised crosswalks were considered or dedicated pedestrian crossings for the Common. He also asks about the potential of eliminating the left turn out of Brown Street onto Washington Square North. Mr. Kucharsky notes more cars would likely go down Howard Street to get to Bridge Street if the left turn were restricted. He also notes that a raised crosswalk here could be difficult because of the volumes of cars that travel through the area.

Chair Garmendia notes that Councillors Watson-Felt and Hapworth were unable to attend but provided written comments. He summarizes their comments, which express concerns about making Brown Street a one-way, but desires to make the area more pedestrian friendly and safe. The comments note being in favor of raised crosswalks.

Chair Garmendia opens the floor to public comment.

Kelly Baldisari, of 19 Washington Square, introduces herself and expresses her opposition to the one-way proposal. She states that no one consulted her as a resident or business, and that it would be a big inconvenience for getting in and out of Kimball Court, which she indicates is deceptively busy. Ms. Baldisari expresses concerns of traffic back-ups, as well as confusion for residents and those new to the City.

Jonathan Berk, of 51 Lafayette Street, introduces himself and states he is not in favor of Brown Street being one-way. Mr. Berk suggests narrowing the road before the crosswalk, so it is only two lanes after the crosswalk going north on Hawthorne. He offers additional suggestions to narrow the street and daylight pedestrians faster to improve safety.

Christine Madore, of 20 Federal Street, introduces herself again and thanks the City for looking at this intersection. She supports whatever the City has in mind to improve the pedestrian safety and experience for this area, but that she is opposed to making Brown Street one-way. Ms. Madore notes it would have big impacts for biking and reduce safety.

Biff Michaud introduces himself again and reiterates his opposition, echoing the points he made previously. He also speaks against bump outs that could interfere with the existing bus parking. Mr. Michaud suggests that safety has improved in the area and that concerns are overstated.

Chair Garmendia suggests a motion for the Commission and staff to pursue further study for safety improvements in the area.

Motion and Vote: Commissioner Turowski motions to recommend further study regarding pedestrian safety at the intersection at a later time. Commissioner Swartz seconds the motion. **The vote is five (5) in favor and none (0) opposed, the motion passes.**

Right Turn on Red Ordinance Recommendations

Chair Garmendia explains that the Traffic and Parking Commission has been meeting jointly with OLLA to discuss the intersections in the City and right turns on red, but he notes it is getting late and asks if there is a motion to move the rest of the agenda to the next meeting.

Motion and Vote: Commissioner Swartz motions to defer the rest of the agenda to the next meeting. Commissioner Turowski seconds the motion. **The vote is five (5) in favor and none (0) opposed, the motion passes.**

OTHER BUSINESS THAT MAY LEGALLY COME BEFORE THE COMMISSION

None.

UPCOMING MEETINGS SCHEDULE

The next meeting is scheduled for April 10, 2024, at 6:00PM.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion duly made by Commissioner Swartz and seconded by Commissioner Turowski the Traffic and Parking Commission meeting was adjourned at 8:33 PM.