**City of Salem**

**Traffic and Parking Commission**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, February 21, 2019**

A meeting of the Salem Traffic and Parking Commission was held on Thursday, February 21, 2019 at 6:30pm at 98 Washington Street, Salem, MA. Present were Commission Chair Tanya Stepasiuk, Commission Vice-Chair Eric Papetti, Commissioner Robin Seidel, and Commissioner Lt. David Tucker. Director David Kucharsky was also present.

**CALL OF MEETING**

The meeting was called to order at 6:35pm.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

No public comments.

**NEW / OLD BUSINESS**

Before beginning, Director Kucharsky gave a brief update noting that city staff are still meeting with the consultant regarding the Essex Street Reconstruction Project. There is an ongoing assessment of the trees along the roadway, but nothing new to report.

* Salem Willows Concept Plan

Director Kucharsky informed the Commission that some meetings had taken place with the Park and Recreation Commission the latest one occurring on Tuesday, February 19th. He said the project started to address the Hill by Restaurant Row and Fort Avenue where a lot of parking takes place. He explained that the soil is eroding, and he wanted the Commission aware of this project from the beginning. He presented some parking concept plans created by the consultant indicating there are currently 150 approved spaces and 80 unapproved spaces, with 26 spaces at the yacht club. Chair Stepasiuk asked about approved versus non-approved parking and the Director explained that are areas both on the Hill as well as along Restaurant Row that that do not clearly define where parking should and should not occur.

Director Kucharsky reiterated that the project began as attempt to address the erosion issues occurring on the Hill as a result of the ad-hoc parking that was occurring. Based on feedback received from the public, staff began to look at the overall parking and traffic conditions in the area which included discussions about possibly converting Restaurant Row into a parking lot within the park in an effort to provide better connectivity between the waterfront and the existing park. He stressed that these were just preliminary discussions and nothing concrete has been decided.

The Director noted that after extensive research, the yacht club parking area belongs to the City and any future plans will have the area revert back to green space. This led to a discussion about charging for parking and whether a resident rate could be provided. Director Kucharsky stated that the city’s current pay by phone app, Passport, is capable of differentiating between visitors and residents. Vice Chair Papetti asked if the parking over by the arcade was included in the number of spaces listed and if not, he suggested including that area to figure out the total parking needs of the area. Director Kucharsky said that those numbers were not included in the plans he shared but they would be included as part of a traffic and parking analysis that hopefully will take place this spring and/or summer to get a sense of the activity. He went on to say that pedestrian traffic is another topic for discussion as crosswalks and sidewalks are much needed. Vice Chair Papetti said there is a sign by the arcade that says all the money is used towards the upkeep of the Willows and he was curious to know how strictly that money was accounted for and if there’s a possibility for growth, suggesting the revenue garnered from paid parking could be used to maintain the park. Director Kucharsky indicated that the money goes to the Recreation Department and it is the only paid lot that is not under the Traffic and Parking Department’s jurisdiction.

Chair Stepasiuk asked for Lt. Tucker’s input. The Lieutenant said there weren’t too many issues in the area, only when it comes to big events where a car is blocked in etc. and said this is a step in the right direction. Director Kucharsky noted that there are 90 spaces by Fort Lee. Lt. Tucker said this area is used as a snow dump during the winter. Chair Stepasuik said data collection is important and thought overall it is a good idea to start this project. Director Kucharsky said they would work on where they would locate the data collectors to capture movements. He asked the Commission to keep this on their radar and any suggestions they might have would be welcome. He said the Capital Projects and Municipal Operations Department was seeking additional funds to finish the design of the Hill as well as to move forward with the traffic and parking study.

*PUBLIC COMMENT*

*Ann LeBlanc, 21 Naples Street* asked how the number of spaces compare currently to what the future plans would be. Director Kucharsky explained that the concept identified approximately 133 spaces but as it is an early sketch this could change as well as the configuration along Restaurant Row. He said there are currently 150 approved spaces and 80 unapproved, 26 yacht spaces and 10 motorbikes spaces. He explained that there are ideas to make the motorbike space area a turnout area where one could unload equipment for an event and then go park their car. Chair Stepasiuk asked if the Yacht club had been notified and the Director said yes.

*Laurie Albury, 11 Beech Avenue* gave a brief history of the Hill, she said it became a snow dump zone and this eroded and damaged the ledge, this is what they are trying to repair as it’s running off into the streets. She said that during events at the Willows, people just park anywhere they want ignoring resident parking signs. She said there are parking meters that only cost 25 cents an hour but they are rarely paid and it is mostly members of the yacht club that park at the meters, and that is why they don’t utilize the parking along the ocean so the thought was instead of parking along by the water where it is also eroding, why not put some plantings and grasses to keep the land from falling into the ocean. She also said it was a big problem having no curbs, people drive through onto the grass.

*Eric Stafford, 31 Water Street* asked if there was a reason why the parking spaces that are available at Fort Lee and Fort Avenue by the sewer treatment plant are not included. He said that if it’s a concern about losing 5 or 10 spaces it would be less of an impact if you look at the total parking available. Resident *Laurie Albury* explained the reason was they were only asked to look at the site by the Hill. Chair said that Eric’s point was valid and would be taken into consideration by the Commission.

*Ann LeBlanc* asked that the Commission take into consideration the citizens of Salem, she felt residents should have free parking as a right. Chair Stepasiuk asked Director Kucharsky when he thought there might be an update on this project. The Director said he will follow up next week with staff to see what the next steps are and will be providing input towards a scope of work to conduct traffic and parking data collection. He said he would keep the Commission updated.

* Sculpture Plaza at Congress/Ward and Peabody Street

Director Kucharsky and Lt. Tucker met with the North Shore Community Development Coalition (NSCDC), who would like to install a Sculpture Plaza and add some paint to the asphalt to minimize the pavement at the Congress, Ward and Peabody intersection. He explained that it was part of an overall project to improve the Point neighborhood. The Director provided a slide presentation of the current conditions and traffic flow at the intersection.

The NSCDC has proposed converting a portion of Ward Street (Peabody Street to Congress Street) from a two-way road to a one-way road westbound. Director Kucharsky explained that this would preclude left turns onto Ward from Peabody. The Director shared some findings from a traffic study that had been conducted as part of a 40B housing development on Peabody Street. The analysis was conducted in April 2017 and identified the intersection of Congress and Ward as having a high crash rate from 2012 to 2014 which was higher than the District or State average. The proposed conversion could potentially reduce the number of crashes occurring at the intersection, however a lot of traffic comes down Peabody Street to get to Shetland Park, he said they would have to get a sense of where the traffic would go if the conversion is implemented.

Other design elements suggested by the NSCDC was to create a green area where people could sit with murals painted on large storage cubes. These cubes could be used to store equipment over the winter months. Chair Stepsiuk asked if this would be a permanent installation. Director Kucharsky said initially it is proposed using temporary materials including paint and flex posts but if successful could eventually become a permanent installation. Commissioner Seidel asked who would maintain the murals in the city right-of-way. Director Kucharsky said that he believed the NSCDC would but would confirm that. Vice Chair Papetti asked if this should be considered as an application under the Traffic Calming Program. Director Kucharsky said the NSCDC has asked for the Traffic & Parking Commission’s input for approval of this configuration. Lt. Tucker suggested they collect additional traffic data to determine how much traffic is currently on Peabody Street. Commissioner Papetti agreed and said the one-way option could turn out to be a better solution, he mentioned the Endicott Street reversal and how well that worked. Commissioner Seidel said she liked the idea, as it would create more foot traffic in the area. Chair Stepasiuk asked what are the next steps. Director Kucharsky said that collecting data was key and reaching out to the residents on Peabody Street for input as well as looking at the other intersections in the neighborhood for potential issues. He said he would keep the Commission updated.

* Washington Street Bus Stop Relocation

Due to the upcoming demolition and construction at 65 Washington Street, the MBTA bus stop needs to be temporarily relocated. Director Kucharsky presented to the Commission the proposed new location from the MBTA, the new temporary location would be 87 Washington Street (Opus Restaurant). He explained that there is no ordinance needed and although four meters would need to be moved, he planned to offset that by adding additional metered spaces further north on Washington Street past Federal. There is no set timeline at this stage. Lt. Tucker said that this was a safer location. Chair Stepasuik said the Commission are generally supportive of such a move.

* MBTA Better Bus Project Recommendations

Director Kucharsky discussed the proposed MBTA changes to routes 455 and 459. He said this discussion was proposed by Vice Chair Papetti who asked for it to be brought before the Commission. The MBTA has been evaluating all of their bus routes and have developed a first round of proposals that can be implemented at a relatively low cost. This proposal involves removing the 459 express service from Salem Depot to Boston and creating a more robust 455 local service from Salem Depot to Wonderland. He said they did a full analysis of both routes, which helped them create this proposal and then an analysis of what the trade-offs would be if this would go forward. There is a public comment period that closes on March 13th. He asked that if the Commission is inclined, he would be happy to put together a letter of support as part of the public comment, he said he believes we are in support of the proposal but to also have a continued discussion to further augment the 455 route as it goes forward, consolidating stops if necessary, changing routes etc.

Vice Chair Papetti added that this was the first phase where the MBTA is basically trying to spend the same amount of money on each bus route and figure out if they can get more frequent service or better service hours by making the routes more efficient. He said this is one of the better options the MBTA has come up with. By doing this it will improve the service dramatically. Vice Chair Papetti noted he would like to see a similar change proposed for the Route 450 and 456 lines, which run mainly down Highland Avenue and asked if that could be incorporated into a letter of support. He also proposed that the letter should indicate the city’s willingness to work with the MBTA moving forward to develop improvements for all the buses serving Salem and adjacent communities.

Commissioner Seidel added that she is currently working with the City of Cambridge and their bus project. She said they have been working proactively with the MBTA and that the City has committed to creating better bus stops. She suggested using their findings as a launching pad. Chair Stepasuik believed this to be a good idea. She also suggested Commissioner Papetti work with Director Kucharsky on drafting a letter of support for this project.

*PUBLIC COMMENT*

*Perla Piguoro, 34 Boardman Street* noted she used to ride the bus to Boston and wanted to know if the fare would change for the route to Wonderland. Director Kucharsky said the fare would be local as opposed to the express fare to Boston. She also noted the routes today serve specific areas such as Shetland Park and that there is a high ridership of people that use this stop all the time and believes it is an important one.

* Request for Traffic Ordinance Recommendations: Gedney Street & Holyoke Square

Director Kucharsky said that he had brought to the Commission the recommendation of implementing 2 hour limited parking to the west side of Holyoke Square a few months ago. The recommendation had been brought forward to respond to recent changes to a parking easement along the westside of Holyoke Square as part of the host community agreement with CDX Analytics. While developing the proposed ordinance changes he realized that in Chapter 42 of the Ordinance, there was a specific section about reserved parking at Holyoke Square. He has drafted language which suggests repealing the existing language and replacing it to reflect that the easement is only applicable to the spaces that are currently on Norman Street and no longer on Holyoke. The proposed language has been submitted to the City Solicitor for review and accuracy. He said the proposed changes would also be looking to repeal the Holyoke Square parking time limited monthly zones.

Director Kucharsky requested guidance as to whether the ordinance recommendation be packaged with previous recommendations pertaining to parking on Gedney St or be submitted on its’ own. Chair Stepasiuk noted the Gedney St recommendations had been submitted last year but no action had been taken to date by the City Council. She expressed concern that if submitted on it’s own it might languish within the City Council as well. Vice Chair Papetti asked if there were any objections from the City Council to the original plan, and said he thought it should be packaged and resubmitted. Commissioner Seidel also agreed that it would be better to package it for resubmittal.

Director Kucharsky also notified the Commission that Councilor Dibble had suggested to him making Holyoke Square a one-way street to create angled parking on both sides. Commissioner Seidel believed it should not be used in this way but instead be improved for residents with better sidewalks. The Chair and Vice Chair agreed with this. Lt. Tucker said there is a need for parking options and went on to explain that Gedney Street is not utilized all that much compared with other streets. Chair Stepasuik was curious as to why the need to create the street as a one way. Director Kucharsky responded that the additional parking created with the one-way could be used to off-set any loss of parking in Riley Plaza associated with the carnival.

Chair Stepasiuk asked for a vote.

**VOTE:**

Vice Chair Papetti made a motion to resubmit the original ordinance recommendation and include the recent recommendation pertaining to parking along the westside of Holyoke Square. Commissioner Seidel seconded the motion. All were in favor, and so the motion passed.

* Riley Plaza: Carnival location

Director Kucharsky explained that Mayor Driscoll submitted a letter to the City Council to determine a preferred location for the carnival. He said the City is currently looking at Salem Common or Riley Plaza; If Riley Plaza is the preferred site, the Mayor would like a pilot of the carnival be held to coincide with the Salem Arts Festival, June 5th through June 10th, to evaluate any impacts to traffic, parking and pedestrian patterns. Director Kucharsky said he brought it to the Commission to see if they preferred where the carnival took place. The results of a resident survey were shared which indicated that a majority of resident’s support Salem Common as the desired location. Chair Stepasuik said Salem Common is the better choice, as it is the least disruptive and as it is a common, that is what it is designed for. Lt. Tucker said the Salem Common is the better choice, and that Riley Plaza is smaller with too much pedestrian traffic. He said this is a public safety issue. Vice Chair Papetti said that both could work through appropriate implementation. He said the roundabout at Riley Plaza could be improved. Lt. Tucker asked how many spaces at Riley Plaza would be lost if the carnival were to take place there. Director Kucharsky informed him that three handicap spaces, eleven metered spaces and thirty-six zone 1 permit spaces. Chair Stepasuik asked if the Mayor or Council wanted a recommendation. The Commission decided that they weren’t in a position to give a recommendation on this.

**2019 Priorities and Meeting Calendar:** Director Kucharsky discussed with the Commission the priorities for 2019, he said he had looked at the 2018 priorities which he shared with the Commission. They were the following:

1. **Traffic and Parking Regulations**
2. **Resident/Visitor Parking Policy Changes**
3. **Neighborhood Traffic Calming**
4. **Citywide Circulation Study**
5. **Downtown Parking Strategy**

Mr. Kucharsky noted that he is in the process of putting together a framework for the Traffic & Parking Regulations which will identify how regulations and ordinance amendments will be brought forward by the Commission. The second item, resident/ visitor parking policy changes, is currently being developed by the consultants from Nelson Nygaard. They are in the process of developing potential recommendations and completing a case study of other communities across the country. Chair Stepasiuk said that she knew Nick Downing was working on this and she asked if he would take this over when he returns. Director Kucharsky indicates yes, the intent is to assign certain tasks to Mr. Downing once he returns to work.

The neighborhood traffic calming program was launched last spring and the goal now is to ensure the execution of some of the projects identified by the program including the pedestrian improvements proposed at Chestnut and Pickering, installation of flex posts at intersection of Endicott and Margin and the pilot roundabout at Norman, Chestnut and Summer Streets. Chair Stepasiuk said she knew that the Bridge Street Neck association were working on a traffic calming submission last evening.

Director Kucharsky said he is also working with the Police and Engineering department on purchasing traffic data collection equipment.

Regarding the Citywide Circulation study, Commissioner Seidel said she would like to create a master pedestrian plan similar to the master bike plan. Director Kucharsky noted the city is about to embark on conducting an American Disabilities Act (ADA) self-assessment and transition plan. Hopes this effort can provide some information for a pedestrian plan. He said that the Engineering Department is working with a consultant to assess every sidewalk and pedestrian ramp, the findings of which will be incorporated into the ADA plan. Chair Stepasiuk thought it best to hold off on the pedestrian study plan and focus on the ADA transition plan.

Chair Stepasiuk asked if there was more to be done strategically on downtown parking. Director Kucharsky said the Mayor currently has one priority, to establish a parking benefit district and maybe that is a goal the Commission could support which would involve working with the City Council. Establishing the district could help fund infrastructure improvements that would benefit the pedestrian circulation in the downtown area. Chair Stepasiuk said to put that as a priority for the coming year. She said they should do the research to come up with a concept about what it would look like. Director Kucharsky said he had been in discussions with the Finance Director looking at the revenue that has come in since the new rates were implemented last year to see how much revenue is coming in, he thought a percentage of the revenue could be applied to this district once established.

Vice Chair Papetti said he understands the desire for a parking benefits district but he

was not satisfied with where the transportation budgeting is in the City, he said there are departmental budgets and there is the CIP but no overall transportation budget. He said that is a priority for him. Chair Stepasiuk asked if other cities ever conceptualize it in that way. Vice Chair Papetti said he was not sure, he said he has seen other cities that are bigger, that aggregate data in a way that one can understand it. He said the City of Boston’s budget website is amazing and he understood the City does not have the resources to put that together. Chair Stepasiuk said even if it’s just tagging line items that there are transportation line items that can be aggregated elsewhere. Vice Chair Papetti agreed and said at a higher level for people like them and for the general public to understand, here is how much money our transportation system generates through parking and fines and here is how much we spend. He would like the City to be fluid about them and said if we do not have enough staff, can we hire more staff. He said laying that out is key. Chair Stepasiuk said what the Vice Chair was looking for is complicated but that does not mean it can’t be done, she asked if this was a priority and could they work with the budget office to figure out what the line items are; whether they are a DPS line item or the Traffic and Parking Department and are there ones that make sense to combine Vice Chair Papetti does not expect any of this to be available next month but that is why he has requested it be on the meeting calendar, to bring it into focus more each year.

Chair Stepasiuk requested that moving forward, could the Director provide the Traffic and Parking Department’s budget and capital project requests in advance of them being submitted to Mayor. She said the Commission was thinking that late Fall 2020 would be the target for the Director to put this together. Vice Chair Papetti noted that they have had issues in the past of not understanding what’s going on with the budget.

Director Kucharsky presented a list of ordinance recommendations the Commission had made last year in an effort to identify when they should be scheduled for this upcoming year and moving forward. He stressed that it was mostly recommendations surrounding Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Chair Stepasiuk asked that some budget markers be inserted into this.

Vice Chair Papetti referenced the budget cycle and how far ahead they needed to be, he asked if after the October festivities was a good time to revisit the DPS operations with respect to snow removal for vehicles and pedestrians as he had not seen any improvement since he had moved to Salem. Chair agreed and said it would be a good idea to have Dave Knowlton attend if possible after the October holiday. Vice Chair Papetti also suggested a meeting just before and after the Haunted Happenings event. As well as perhaps once the university opens for the school year to identify any changes that may occur in parking. Lastly Vice Chair Papetti requested further discussions/input about annual striping/paving of roads. Commissioner Seidel added to the list for further discussion the traffic issues on summer weekends, as they have been increasingly busy, she said last year she believed there was 100% utilization in the garages.

Chair Stepasiuk recapped some of the identified 2019 priorities noting that the parking benefits district should be added, neighborhood traffic calming program should be continued and focusing on the ADA transition plan.

Director Kucharsky mentioned the Mayor’s initiative to establish a shuttle service. Commissioner Seidel said she would like the Commission to have a goal of developing a more sustainable transportation system. She would like for Salem to be the leader and not the follower in this arena, suggesting we look at what Cambridge and Somerville are doing. She said she would provide some materials at the next meeting. Director Kucharsky informed the Commission that the City had established a transportation enhancement fund in anticipation of the marijuana dispensary agreements, he said 1% would go towards transportation and given the number of dispensary’s that are planned along with the Uber/Lyft tax money, he said the Mayor is hoping to fund the shuttle with some of this revenue.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Stepasiuk asked for a motion to adjourn. On a motion duly made by Commissioner Seidel and seconded by Vice-Chair Papetti, the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn at 7:45pm.