**City of Salem**

**Traffic and Parking Commission**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, May 17, 2018**

A meeting of the Salem Traffic and Parking Commission was held on Thursday, May 17, 2018 at 6:30pm at 98 Washington Street, Salem, MA. Present were Commission Chair Tanya Stepasiuk, Commission Vice-Chair Eric Papetti, Commissioner Jamie Metsch, and Commissioner Robin Seidel. Commissioner Lt. Robert Preczewski was absent. Acting Director Nicholas Downing was also present.

**CALL OF MEETING**

The meeting was called to order at 6:39pm. Acting Director Downing noted audio of the meeting was being recorded to assist with notes.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Joyce Kenney of 285 Lafayette commented to the Commission that while she was waiting for the bus near the Saltonstall School, she witnessed someone park in the bus stop. Acting Director Downing made note of the issue and that he would pass along her concern to the enforcement team.

**NEW / OLD BUSINESS**

Acting Director Downing noted that this was the first meeting without former Director Matt Smith and that he has accepted the role of Acting Director. The position will be posted in June for applicants.

Commissioner Metsch asked a question re: public comment and meeting structure. He noted that the City Council requires all public comment at the beginning of a meeting, whereas the Commission allows comment throughout. While it hasn’t been a concern so far, we may want to formalize the process for when we discuss bigger items. Chair Stepasiauk asked if Commissioner Metsch felt the Commission needed to adopt something formally, and Commission Metsch responded that we may need to, but we don’t have a proposal ready tonight. The Commission generally agreed that a more lenient system is beneficial to residents, but the process may need to be formalized if the Commission draws a large crowd.

* Brown Street and Washington Square North

Acting Director Downing provided a brief update on the issue of the traffic pattern at Brown Street and Washington Square North near the Roger Conant Statue. The Commission has discussed this issue many times and has a recommendation before it that conforms to the legal status of those roads with the road to the north of the statue being Washington Square North and the road to the south being Brown Street. This order would make the current pattern with one-way traffic on either side of the statue enforceable. The recommendation is for a trial period with the modification to the current pattern that would allow for two (2) turning lanes from Brown Street on to Washington Square.

On a motion duly made by Vice-Chair Papetti and seconded by Commissioner Metsch the Commission voted unanimously to recommend to the City Council A trial period lasting up to November 15, 2018 to change the traffic pattern at the intersection of Brown Street, Washington Square North, and Washington Square West.

Washington Square North, from 19 ½ Washington Square North to 2 Brown Street, one way in a southwesterly direction.

Brown Street, from opposite 2 Brown Street to Washington Square West, one way in an easterly direction.

* Motorcoach Parking on Congress Street

Acting Director Downing gave an update on the motorcoach parking discussions the Commission has had previously. Motorcoaches are important to tourism in Salem and to being able to accommodate large numbers of tourists much easier than if all those tourists were driving to Salem. In 2015, 5 motorcoach spaces were removed from the Derby Street area and 4 were added to Holyoke Square, but these spaces were not as highly utilized as we hoped they would be. Those spaces were then removed, and so the city is down some motorcoach spaces from what we had previously. We are trying to find additional spaces in locations where we already have some, specifically on the Congress Street bridge. The staff recommendation would shift the spaces south on Congress Street off the bridge, and could gain an additional bus space. The other 2 items for consideration are bringing spaces back to the triangle on Hawthorn Boulevard and then longer term looking at options at the intersection of Brown Street and New Liberty Street when that intersection gets rebuilt.

Kate Fox from Destination Salem talked about motorcoach parking issues generally, and the important of the industry to tourism in Salem. The spots on Congress Street make a lot of sense, and the industry wants to see the pots on the triangle come back, as shown by the fact that some buses still park there. Whatever changes are made, it is important we make them known to the industry ASAP because it takes time for that information to filter down to the actual drivers. Ms. Fox indicated her support for the Congress Street spaces, as well as returning the spaces to the Hawthorn triangle and the longer term proposal at Brown Street and New Liberty.

There followed a general conversation among the Commissioners and Ms. Fox about motorcoach parking needs generally for Salem. Grouping together spaces all in one location can work, but is difficult given the nature of downtown Salem and where attractions are located. The implementation of pick up and drop off zones was intended to shift where motorcoaches parked for extended time periods, but some stay in the spaces longer. There was discussion about enforcement issues, both in terms of buses staying in spaces too long and cars parking in spaces designated for buses, and the general consensus was better enforcement is needed across the board.

There was general agreement among the Commissioners that action should be taken soon, but that staff should present a drafted recommendation with the needed ordinance changes for the Commission to vote on at a future meeting.

* Use of Skateboards on Streets and Sidewalks

Acting Director Downing gave a brief update on this issue. Last time the Commission discussed this issue, the Commission wanted a simpler ordinance recommendation. The draft language was shared with the Police for their input as well, and felt strongly about including the helmet requirement even though it would be somewhat duplicative.

Vice-Chair Papetti commented that other vehicles are becoming more common, and perhaps more broadly defining the vehicle might be important. Acting Director Downing responded that this definition comes from the proposal from the previous year and is already relatively broad. Vice-Chair Papetti continued that he still worries about being needlessly duplicative, and that the phrase “skateboard for a transportation purpose” is confusing, and there are potential civil liberty issues if residents can call and say someone is skateboarding but not for a transportation purpose. Acting Director Downing responded that it was written that way because of how the current ordinance is written re: “playing at skateboarding.”

On a motion duly made by Vice-Chair Papetti and seconded by Commissioner Metsch the Commission voted unanimously to table this issue for a future meeting and asked staff to work with the Police Department on some language modifications.

* Downtown Parking Rates

Acting Director Downing presented to the Commission a proposal to restructure downtown parking rates. There are lots of different amounts the city charges on an hourly/daily/monthly rate for parking in and around downtown. The Commission has discussed parking rates generally a few times, but never with a specific recommendation in place. This discussion is being moved forward now as a result of the ongoing maintenance needs for our parking infrastructure throughout the City, but especially the Museum Place Garage. Staff had begun compiling data as it related to the idea of a parking benefit district, but the decision was made to propose new parking revenue as part of the budget this year to begin addressing some of these maintenance needs. The goal was to settle on parking rates that are reflective of utilization and keep in place the goals and objectives of the 2010 parking study. The existing rates are a result of that 2010 study. In 2010, we had ample supply but much of it was overpriced and underutilized. Today, we have a different problem in that we have highly utilized assets and demand is outpacing supply at some locations at some times. Today’s problem is different from the problem in 2010, and rate changes today are less about moving demand and more about managing demand via pricing. In terms of this proposal, one goal was to simplify the total number of different rates the City charges for parking in downtown. On the revenue side the goal is to begin generating money for upcoming maintenance needs. We have used conservative estimates in terms of revenue potential to avoid being too overly reliant on assumed revenue down the line. Before he left, former Director Smith spent weeks working on this revenue analysis. The City has 3 or 4 different software systems and they don’t work well with one another, and we tried to present it all in a coherent way. With the proposal as shown in the maps, we estimate a potential revenue increase of $1.6 million above what is brought in right now. While this is a lot of information to process, we have somewhat of a tight deadline as we received the directive from the Mayor’s office that the budget would be submitted with assumption of new parking revenue included in it.

Chair Stepasiuk asked how the proposal came about. Acting Director Downing answered that the combination if ongoing conversations regarding a parking benefit district plus the report about the maintenance needs at the Museum Place Garage lead to the decision to pursue this new revenue as part of this year’s budget. The budget will include an assumption of $850,000 in new parking revenue over last year.

Chair Stepasiuk acknowledged the need to raise rates, but expressed concern with only having one resident present at the meeting and the tight deadline with the budget. This is a big thing to do without more process.

Commissioner Seidel asked if there was any sense of who might be upset about new rates, and Chair Stepasiuk responded that we don’t know, which is why we need more process. Acting Director Downing responded that we have undervalued our parking and a change is needed, but we all know this won’t be a popular proposal no matter what. Also, as we discussed last meeting, as we increase our use of kiosk parking, we can implement resident rates to take the edge off of any proposed increases.

Vice Chair Papetti asked for clarification about whose discretion it is to set parking rates in the City. Acting Director Downing responded that we discussed it with the City Solicitor, and the ordinance that created the Commission set up a process for rates that begins with the Commission and then needs Council approval. Vice Chair Papetti expressed his support for new revenue and appreciation of the analysis conducted so far, but desire to see new revenue go hand in hand with improvements. Commissioner Metsch agreed with need for sales pitch to Council, and that the rates are far overdo for an increase.

There followed a general conversation about what action the Commission should take in light of the short time frame it has been presented with. There was agreement with the utilization and data analysis that has been done so far, but also a desire to see what the revenue impacts would be from different potential scenarios. There was also a generally held desire among the Commissioners to have a more proactive public outreach process for future meetings about this issue. The Commissioners agreed that a middle ground to taking a vote tonight would be to commit to finding at least $850,000 in new parking revenue this fiscal year to support that amount included in the budget, but wait to vote on the specific plan once more analysis has been done and a more proactive outreach process has been conducted. Acting Director Downing agreed that this option would be useful and move the process forward, and committed to working on variations on the proposal for the Commission to consider at its next meetings, as well as working to publicize those meetings as widely as possible.

On a motion duly made by Vice-Chair Papetti and seconded by Commissioner Seidel the Commission voted unanimously to support finding a minimum of $850,000 of new parking revenue for the Fiscal Year 2019 budget based on the staff analysis presented tonight.

* Sewall Street Lot

Acting Director Downing provided an update on the use of spaces in the Sewall Street lot by City inspectors. The Commission had previously recommended using 11 spaces in the lot for that purpose and the plan was to report back later about use. There was miscommunication with the sign department, and more spaces were signed in one location than should have been. The Mayor’s office received a high number of calls and emails about use of the spaces closer to Essex Street, so the signs were removed from there and the 8 spaces on the northern edge of the lot will be maintained for use by the inspectors.

**MEETING MINUTES APPROVAL**

On a motion duly made by Commissioner Metsch and seconded by Commissioner Seidel the Commission voted to approve the minutes from the May 3 meeting.

**ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion duly made by Commissioner Metsch and seconded by Vice-Chair Papetti, the Traffic and Parking Commission meeting was adjourned at 8:48pm.