**City of Salem**

**Traffic and Parking Commission**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, June 7, 2018**

A meeting of the Salem Traffic and Parking Commission was held on Thursday, June 7, 2018 at 6:30pm at 98 Washington Street, Salem, MA. Present were Commission Chair Tanya Stepasiuk, Commission Vice-Chair Eric Papetti, Commissioner Jamie Metsch, Commissioner Lt. Robert Preczewski, and Commissioner Robin Seidel. Acting Director Nicholas Downing was also present.

**CALL OF MEETING**

The meeting was called to order at 6:30pm. Acting Director Downing noted audio of the meeting was being recorded to assist with notes.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Chair Stepasiuk proposed to hold public comment until after the presentation on the rate restructuring had been given, unless members of the public had other unrelated public comments.

Chuck Brunns, 3 River Street commented that the rate changes are probably a good idea, but has an issue with the City not getting all the revenue it could from how lots are being utilized, such as the Universal Steel lot. The lot should not be sold as it is planned to be sold, as it generates revenue for the City and local fundraisers in October. The City should also do more to prevent cars form parking off-street along Bridge Street.

Jim Carney, 1 ½ Cambridge Street lives near Universal Steel, and was curious about the utilization there, and agreed with the previous comments re: the lot.

**NEW / OLD BUSINESS**

In advance of the presentation and discussion of the downtown parking rate restructuring proposal, Chair Stepasiuk clarified the Commission’s role in setting parking rates, with the approval of the Council and Mayor. The Commission’s recommendations go to the Council to be approved, and in determining these rates, the Commission is charged with providing parking at the lowest cost possible.

* Parking Rate Restructuring Proposal

Acting Director Downing presented to the Commission and members of the public on the proposed downtown parking rate restructuring proposal. The City had a comprehensive parking plan and study conducted in 2010 focused on downtown and the immediate areas, looking at utilization, parking demand spilling over into neighborhoods, and what systems should be implemented to address these problems. Some important findings form the study included that the City had ample parking supply that was very underutilized, in large part due to pricing. The garages were much more expensive than on-street, encouraging people to circle to look for cheap parking, and that streets had too many regulations that sometimes disagreed with one another. The study had 10 main recommendations for the City to implement, some of which the City has undertaken, but some of which still need to be more fully implemented. While the study was conducted in 2010, the Traffic and Parking Department is less than 2 years old, and much of the work of the staff to date has been focused on pulling parking utilization together into more easily usable data sets to allow for ongoing, up-to-date utilization. Department staff has been working recently to identify ways to more efficiently stripe existing municipal lots to gain capacity with minimal investment. Smart parking technologies have bene implemented via parking kiosks and smart meters.

Acting Director Downing continued that the City faces a different parking problem today than it did in 2010. Then we had lots of underutilized supply. Today, we have more consistent utilization with limited ways to increase supply, so we need to look to pricing to better manage that demand. The goal is to build off of the 2010 study and maintain the goals and concepts, especially the goal of 15% availability, or 1 open space for every 7. We could gather consistent data for from May to October 2017, which is generally the time with the highest demand.

Acting Director continued his presentation, which can be found online here: <https://www.salem.com/sites/salemma/files/uploads/parking_rate_restructure_presentation_to_tpc_06.07.18.pdf>

Acting Director Downing ended his presentation by noting that this is the second time the Commission has discussed the proposal, and that the Commission will deliberate tonight to provide comments and suggestions for changes to be made to the proposal which will then be analyzed before the next meeting as to what the revenue impacts of any changes to the proposal as written right now would be. Right now, the estimate is net new parking revenue of between $1.3 million and $1.6 million.

Chair Stepasiuk opened the public comment, and asked those providing comment to be mindful of their time, and allowed for factual questions to be answered if they can be answered quickly.

Rinus Oosthoek, Salem Chamber of Commerce thanked the Commission for the work done so far. The 2010 study proposed enforcement until 8pm, but the Council brought that back to 6pm. The plan also called for ongoing utilization that has only happened since the Department was formed, but the data provided so far is not complete for what is being proposed. Rates should be considered at least street by street if not block by block. It should not be done simply by estimation as opposed to hard data. Demand responsive pricing and 15% availability were core to the plan, as was the idea of price differentiation between streets, lots, and garages, and the proposal flattens that by going to only 3 levels. The highest rates now would remain on Federal Street, but we should consider raising the top rate as well. Doubling rates in some areas is concerning without the utilization data to back it up. I would be curious about employee parking at Riley Plaza, and increasing this type of parking downtown somewhere. We should continue to find ways to maximize capacity, including at private lots, especially for overnight and weekend parking. The City should consider identifying a location for a new parking structure, and should consider segregating parking revenue in some way as opposed to let it going into the general fund.

Acting Director Downing responded to clarify that $1.50/hour is, per city ordinance, the highest hourly rate the City can charge for an on-street metered spot, and the Commission could include increasing that rate if it wanted to, but it was not included in this proposal. He added that in the last 5 years, parking revenue in the City not including fines, has not been less than $3.1 million nor more than $3.5 million, and goes directly into the general fund. He added further that he is trying to get more utilization data, but it is difficult without smart meters installed or staff to do the counts.

Charles Brunns, commented re: the Salem Jail parking lot and asked if it would be up and running. Acting Director Downing responded that it should be up and running soon. There were problems with the location of the kiosk, payment for the work, and other issues, but we were told the work will be done within two weeks. Mr. Brunns also asked for information on the Universal Steel lot. Also, places like Portsmouth, NH have Sunday paid parking, and Salem is similar enough that the City should consider it as well. The parking department should be run as a business to squeeze all the possible revenue out of the City’s assets. Acting Director Downing noted that Universal Steel was not included as no change is being proposed there, and Sunday paid parking could be included as well.

Ward 2 Councillor Madore asked if there would be costs associated with this proposal. Acting Director Downing responded that there would be minor costs in terms of some new signage, but much of it is software related so cost would be minimal. Councillor Madore reiterated Mr. Oosthoek’s comments re: flattening the rates as it would remove incentive for people to parking in certain locations.

Giovanni Alabiso, Salem Historical Tours asked about the revenue estimate, and Acting Director Downing commented that while rates would double in some locations, overall revenue would not double as the rates are different at different locations. Mr. Alabiso asked further about the impacts of the seasonality of some of the proposed work this revenue would fund, and concerns about work being done at a time when it impacts local tourism based businesses. Acting Director Downing noted that much of the timing of projects is out of control of the City, but we always work to have projects have as little impact as possible on local businesses.

Chair Stepasiuk moved the conversation to the Commission after public comments were over.

Commissioner Metsch commented that in general the need to increase revenue is obvious, and the proposal in general makes sense. However, I am concerned with flattening the rates too much and just flip flopping our issues. Overall I support an increase, and we can find a way to get there with some slight changes to the proposal.

Commissioner Seidel commented that garage parking is appealing because it is unlimited vs. metered parking which is more limited, so the draw of a garage is the flexibility. Acting Director Downing responded that yes, that was the idea for why we brought the garage rates in line with on-street, so the convenience factor still makes it appealing.

Chair Stepasiuk asked what the typical stay in the garages tends to be. Acting Director Downing responded that he doesn’t have the exact numbers, but would guess Museum Place generally has longer stays when compared to South Harbor.

Vice-Chair Papetti commented that he is generally supportive, but has some questions. It is important to consider 2 equal and important sides of the equation. One is the new revenue, but the other is what that revenue gets spent on, and we have to understand how our capital improvement plan is developed. The proposal would be stronger if we lead with that instead of this is how much we are raising rates. I understand it can’t come together overnight, but laying out what we have spent and what we will be spending is important. Vice-Chair Papetti also expressed concern about somewhat undoing the rate structure policies put in place by the 2010 plan, so we don’t want to encourage circling by flattening the rates. If we need to raise the highest rate to find a balance, we shouldn’t hesitate to do so because City Council has to approve this regardless. Vice-Chair Papetti suggested that the rate increase could be mitigated by extending enforcement hours to 8pm and on Sundays.

Lt. Preczewski commented that he supports the rate increases to support the necessary investments in the parking infrastructure. Increase won’t be popular, but some increases do need to happen. The City should also consider using more angled parking to gain additional parking capacity.

Commissioner Seidel commented that she supports the increases, and we should consider extending enforcement hours and Sundays, and it doesn’t need to be either higher rates or extended hours but could be both, and the City should consider the implementation of a parking benefit district given the amount of investment we need to make.

Chair Stepasiuk agreed with the previous comments about knowing we need an increase, but also being aware of our charge to provide parking at the lowest possible cost, so we need to trim some of this in some places. We should consider Sundays and extending enforcement to 8pm. We should also talk more about residential parking rates and if it is possible and desirable. Increases for the monthly passes might be too large.

Commissioner Metsch proposed breaking the conversation down into pieces including Sundays, 8pm, residential rates, pricing tiers, October rates, and a more general conversation.

Chair Stepasiuk proposed discussing going to 8pm and Sundays. No one in public comments really raised the issue, but the Commission should consider it, and it is an opportunity to make sure spaces turnover during important hours for businesses and restaurants. Commissioner Seidel asked if it impact resident parking. Acting Director Downing clarified that we have limited spaces that are metered during the day and resident overnight, but would impact unofficial resident parking where residents pay for the last portion of the day and keep their cars on street overnight.

Commissioner Metsch commented that in his experience, he sees people feeding the meter beyond enforcement hours already, so there is some expectation from visitors that going to 8pm is tolerable and expected.

Vice Chair Papetti commented that for Sunday enforcement, we should consider it potentially as something that is in place only for a portion of the year, given the seasonality of our demand. Commissioner Metsch commented that with more restaurants, the year round Sunday demand is there. He continued that this would be good for restaurants, and while it might be unpopular with downtown residents, we should still consider it.

Chair Stepasiuk commented she would prefer 8pm enforcement to Sundays if she had to pick between one or the other, and thinks Sunday demand is less than other days so we might not need it. Lt. Preczewski added that if we considered Sundays, we might want to only begin at 12:00pm due to many religious services happening on Sunday mornings. Vice-Chair Papetti commented that we shouldn’t make decisions based on any particular religious services, regardless of they might be the majority. Commissioner Metsch added that Sundays are one of his busiest days with a downtown business, so we can’t leave the idea off the table.

Vice Chair Papetti suggested staff analyze the potential revenue of extending enforcement hours to 8pm and adding Sunday enforcement in advance of the next meeting, and there was general agreement among the Commission that this be presented at the next meeting, and should be analyzed to see if these increases could offset rate increases elsewhere.

Chair Stepasiuk expressed some concern about these changes being included in any proposal as they weren’t part of the initial proposal. Acting Director Downing noted the Commission has another public meeting and then this must all go to the Council as well. Vice Chair Papetti added that he would agree with the Chair if the Commission were the final arbiter, but given the amount of process we have left, there is ample time for these changes to be made public and discussed and changed.

Lt. Preczewski added that no matter what the Commission does, some groups will be opposed to these changes, despite the obvious need. The Commission needs to be sure to propose enough changes so generate enough revenue to support what we need to spend it on.

There was general discussion about how to balance making a recommendation that is above and beyond the amount the Commission committed to find, and what might get lost when it goes to Council. There was agreement the Commission shouldn’t make a recommendation above $850,000 just for the sake of doing it, but it should be based on a system that works, and balances the options of just rate increases, vs. extending enforcement to 8pm or adding Sunday enforcement.

Chair Stepasiuk next opened up a conversation about pricing tiers and the differentiation between on-street and garage pricing. Commissioner Metsch commented that we should consider the convenience factor, but we shouldn’t entirely swap the 2010 plan on its head. There followed a general conversation about the impact of enforcement on demand and turnover, and general agreement that more enforcement is needed. Chair Stepasiuk asked if parking enforcement pays for itself. Acting Director Downing responded that yes, parking enforcement staff brings in approximately 4-5 times their salary cost, and we are seeking additional enforcement in the year’s budget, and will continue to do so in future budgets.

Chair Stepasiuk asked the Commission if we should pursue a bigger bump for the meters and then keep the proposed garage rates, or decrease the garage rate increase and leave the top meter price as is. Commissioner Seidel asked about the garage pricing structure generally, as many other garages do. Acting Director Downing responded that other garages have different structures that charge more for shorter periods of time, but then the effective hourly rate is lower the longer you stay. Commissioner Metsch commented that this began to slide into the October rate discussion as well. Changing out structure could allow the City to make more per space if it encouraged more turnover.

Acting Director Downing commented that he felt increasing the hourly rate beyond what is allowed in ordinance would be too much of a stretch and likely wouldn’t be supported in the Council, but also that raising Washington Street to $1.50/hour is one of the most important parts of the plan, so asked the Commission about what an hourly rate they would be comfortable with for the garages if we wanted to also keep the price differentiation between on-street and the garages. The Commission agreed generally that it shouldn’t be stuck in the idea of a three tier only pricing structure, and moving away from that gives more flexibility to differentiate between different types of parking.

Chair Stepasiuk asked the Commission to consider whether it was supportive of residential rates or not, given that it would be applicable in some places but not others, and how the system of different rates would or would not work. If residents know they get a lower rate in only some places, they might always try to park there. Chair Stepasiuk asked if there was any data about what percent of daily parkers are residents. Acting Director Downing answered that, right now, it isn’t possible to parse out that specific level of data. Chair Stepasiuk expressed support for the concept of resident rates, even if they were half the regular rate, but wasn’t sure if implementing it piecemeal would make sense.

Commissioner Seidel commented that resident rates would likely be supported strongly in City Council. Lt. Preczewski commented that he thought resident rates are not generally expected, and thought the proposal was just for downtown residents, not all Salem residents.

There was general support among the Commissioners for the concept of resident rates, but also general agreement that, for now, the Commission should simplify its proposal and not include resident rates in what it sends to Council, but revisit at a later date when more areas can offer resident rates via kiosks.

Acting Director Downing proposed that at the next meeting, he would be able to present to the Commission the variations on the proposal that had been discussed so far tonight, including revenue estimates and maps showing the proposals.

There was a general discussion among the Commission and general agreement that keeping the garages priced somewhat lower than the nearby on-street metered parking would be preferred to maintain the concepts of the 2010 plan.

Chair Stepasiuk next commented that the Commission should discuss the various monthly parking options and price changes, including garage passes and Riley Plaza passes.

START AT 143:03

**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.