

**City of Northampton, MA
Transportation and Parking Commission**

March 19, 2019

MEETING MINUTES

Submitted by: Beth A. Kaplowitt

1. Councilor Jim Nash called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m. and announced that there would be audio/video recording of this meeting.
2. Members present and absent/introductions:

| Member | Present | Time if arriving late or leaving early |
|---|----------------|---|
| Councilor Jim Nash, Chair | X | |
| Councilor Gina-Louise Sciarra, Vice Chair | X | |
| Donna LaScaleia, DPW Director | Absent | |
| Jody Kasper, Chief of Police | X | Arrived at 4:33 p.m. |
| Wayne Feiden, Director of Planning and Sustainability | X | |
| David Pomerantz, Director of Central Services | X | |
| Debin Bruce, Citizen | X | |
| Gary Hartwell, Citizen | X | |
| Adam Novitt, Citizen | X | |
| Jami Albro-Fisher, Citizen | Absent | |
| Alan Verson, Planning Board | X | |
| Staff | Present | Time if arriving late or leaving early |
| Nanci Forrestall, Parking Enforcement | X | |
| Maggie Chan, Traffic Engineer | X | |
| Beth A. Kaplowitt, DPW Clerk | X | |

3. Brief promotion of Pace Car Program:
 - Councilor Nash said that he put a Pace Car sticker on his vehicle yesterday, which means that he is pledging to drive the speed limit everywhere in the City. He and Councilor Sciarra urged everyone to join the program by filling out an application and picking up a sticker at the Department of Public Works (DPW).
4. Public comment:
 - Joan Weigele of 47 Chestnut Street said that she wanted an update on the status of the street lining policy. She has been requesting remediation plan details for the area near the Pie Bar. She is also a bus rider and she thinks that anyone who makes decisions about Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) bus routes should commit to using a route for a week to see how it works with their schedule;

- Marcia Holden of 22 East Street said that Councilors Nash and Sciarra encouraged her to attend this meeting. She belongs to a group of 8 - 10 people who meet regularly to discuss issues of pedestrian safety, such as:
 - ❖ Walking is an important form of exercise for the City’s aging population;
 - ❖ The McCormick Building bridge needs to be kept clear of snow – would like a clarification of who is responsible for doing it;
 - ❖ When passing the library while heading toward downtown, there is a very dangerous curve;
 - ❖ Cars park on Main Street in such a way that it is hard to safely enter a crosswalk due to blind spots;
 - ❖ There are also blind spots in front of Pulaski Park;
 - ❖ They suggest that the City look to crosswalks near the Common in downtown Amherst for an example of effective crosswalks;
 - ❖ Would like more clear signage at the lights at the intersection of Elm Street and Route 10 – it is unclear when turning right from Elm Street onto Route 10 if drivers need to stop or not before turning right;
 - ❖ Councilor Sciarra said that she would follow up regarding the snow removal issues on the McCormick Building bridge.

3. Approval of minutes from the previous meeting:

| Motion: | Motion by: | Second: | Vote: |
|---|---------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| To approve the minutes from the January 15, 2019 meeting. | Gary Hartwell | Gina-Louise Sciarra | Yes, 8 No, 0 Abstain, 0 |

4. Reports from departments and subcommittees/announcements/presentations:

- Department of Public Works (DPW) Updates – Traffic Engineer Maggie Chan:
 - **Roadway Improvement Projects**
 - a. The Burts Pit Road improvements project has been awarded to Palmer Paving for approximately \$1.4 million. This project includes repaving approximately 1.7 miles of roadway from Clement Street to Forest Glen Drive. This project is expected to commence in the spring;
 - b. Bids will be opened for the Bridge Road and Glendale Road paving project on March 27th. This project includes repaving approximately 2.4 miles of roadway, curb work, and drainage improvements;
 - c. The DPW is working on plans and specifications for Spring Street from Florence Road to Meadow Street and Colonel LaValley Lane to Dimock Street. This project is expected to bid in the spring;
 - **Jackson Street Signal Upgrades**
 - a. Dagle Electrical Construction Corp has begun installing the new traffic signal mast arm and signal heads.
- Department of Planning and Sustainability Updates – Director Wayne Feiden:

- There was a meeting today with engineers from Tool Design regarding the kickoff of the 6 – 10 year process (a \$10 million project) to totally re-design Main Street to make it more pedestrian and bike friendly;
 - Valley Bike opens April 1st for the season. There will be one new station on Conz Street which should be ready around July 1st;
 - Construction of the Rocky Hill Greenway bike path which will run from Route 10 to Route 66 is expected to take place from 2020 – 2022;
 - The state will pay for both the design and construction of the Bridge Street School area renovations to address pedestrian safety.
- Some audience members expressed frustration/concerns about why line striping policy updates have not been on the agenda. Councilor Nash said that he has been in discussions with Director LaScaleia but did not have a specific time by which they would be finished. It will be on the TPC agenda when they are ready to bring the policy forward. The residents said that they feel that they are being put off because they are aware that changes have been made elsewhere, such as on Middle Street. Councilor Nash suggested that individuals contact their City Councilor to approach TPC with a specific proposal. He added that any policy must match up with the actual Ordinance so that inconsistencies are not created as they have been in the past, and that things go forward in the proper manner. Audience members said they feel like things are further behind now than they were in the fall – they are really feeling frustrated and want a timeline.

5. Matters before the Commission:

a. PVTA Presentation:

Price Armstrong (PVTA) came to update the TPC regarding the following topics. Alex Forrest [Transit Planner from the Planning Commission] and Jamin Carroll [Director of Operations for Valley Area Transit (VATCo)] also were present;

- Price opened his presentation with an overview of Northampton’s bus routes;
- Ridership trends in Northampton and around the area:
 - ❖ Ridership has been declining both system-wide and nationally;
 - ❖ This year-to-date it has declined 4 – 5%;
 - ❖ Price said that the Coolidge Bridge over the Connecticut River is the choke point for Hampshire County. MassDOT is not planning to build any new bridges over the Connecticut River, and there are no plans currently to implement any kind of “bus rapid transit” measures such as they have in Boston, so transit is considered to be the future for Northampton. Traffic congestion cannot be eased by capacity enhancements (no matter how many lanes might be added to Route 9, the choke point remains), so a variety of options are being considered;
 - ❖ PVTA believes that a better economy and low gas prices have contributed to declining ridership. Councilor Nash asked if the ridership drop has plateaued, and Price replied that if the economy stays good and gas prices stay low, they expect the ridership drop will continue. He added that the MassDOT RTA task force report recommended funding of \$90 million, which would result in no reduction in services; any budgeted amount lower than that would lead to cuts in service and a further decline in ridership;
 - ❖ Nanci Forrestall asked about ways that PVTA is targeting areas that have a population who cannot afford cars. Price said that in areas with a high number of

- ❖ “dependent riders” such as Amherst or Springfield, buses are scheduled to run every 15 minutes;
 - ❖ Price said that they strive for better reliability, frequency and span of service.
- Proposed change in the R44 route:
 - ❖ The current route has a horseshoe shape, going from Florence Heights to King Street to downtown to Salvo House to the House of Corrections. It runs once an hour on weekdays. It takes two hours for one bus to traverse this route, and there are two buses on the route;
 - ❖ They have been looking ahead at expected trends of new cohousing communities being planned for the area, as well as an expected increase of refugee tenants being housed in the area;
 - ❖ They are considering splitting the horseshoe into two separate routes, one going clockwise, and one going counterclockwise. Since they probably can’t add a third or fourth bus, this would increase the length of each route from 60 minutes to 70 minutes;
 - ❖ They intend to make a formal proposal and then schedule a public meeting to solicit broader input. If there are no major objections, they would like to launch a one-year pilot of the new service and track the results. They realize that ridership will be low no matter what, but they want to provide service to the area;
 - ❖ They are thinking of late July/early August of 2019 as a proposed start date;
 - ❖ Their preferred method to solicit follow-up public comment on the new route would be to send staff out to talk to riders for several hours both in the morning and the afternoon at the Academy of Music bus stop after the new route has been in place for a while;
 - ❖ If a pilot program is approved, they would post notices of the change at every stop that will be affected, on every bus, and on social media and the PVTA website.
- Proposed pairing of B43 bus stops at the Post Office (312-114 schedule xiii bus stops list all current stops):
 - ❖ B43 is an amazingly efficient route which consistently performs above benchmarks;
 - ❖ They are requesting that the inbound stop from Bridge Street to the Post Office (neither of which is currently paired) be moved to the opposite side of the street, in front of the shopping center housing Talbots and the Baker’s Pin;
 - ❖ Councilor Nash said that he and Director LaScaleia looked at this on the GIS system and their assessment is that it looks both possible and as if it would be a good location;
 - ❖ Price recommends that they put a temporary stop at that location, while working with the TPC and/or the City Council to clean up the Ordinances, and with the DPW regarding Dig Safe issues. The PVTA can’t pour concrete pads until this summer in any case, as they need to procure a contract. Traffic Engineer Chan said that she is not sure of the process for installing a temporary stop. Councilor Nash suggested that the PVTA meet with Director LaScaleia and develop a proposal to bring back to the TPC.

b. Reports from Administrators:

- Councilor Nash noted that this topic has been covered in 6 a.

c. Discussion of 19.011 An Ordinance Relative to Bicycle Share Services (originally submitted 11/29/2018 as 18.205 An Ordinance Relative to Bicycle Share Services but later withdrawn):

- Director Feiden gave an overview of the Ordinance. They have looked at the experiences of other medium/large cities in the last year, where scooters and bike shares have been increasingly prevalent. There are concerns that if a new system came to Northampton, our Valley Bike Share program could be cannibalized;
- The Ordinance says that no scooters will be allowed now and no additional bike share programs in the central downtown area will be allowed;
- Councilor Nash did a reading of the Ordinance (bold headings only), and then he and Director Feiden gave a summary and further explanations;
- Debin Bruce suggested that the Ordinance should go to the Bicycle/Pedestrian sub-committee before TPC votes on it;
- Discussion continued regarding ways to protect the City from new businesses coming in before we have prepared for them;
- City Solicitor Seewald has already signed off on the Ordinance. If TPC sends it on to City Council with a positive recommendation, there will still be plenty of time for modifications.

| Motion: | Motion by: | Second: | Vote: |
|--|---------------------|--------------|-------------------------------|
| To send 19.011 An Ordinance Relative to Bicycle Share Services to City Council with a positive recommendation. | Gina-Louise Sciarra | Wayne Feiden | Yes, 9 No, 0 Abstain, 0 |

d. NETA traffic and parking updates:

- Chief Kasper brought up the following:
 - ❖ She was contacted by Pleasant Journey Used Cars. They have concerns that some of their customers cannot access their lot, and that non-customers are cutting through their lot;
 - ❖ Now that Fulton Avenue is open one-way westbound, traffic (both vehicle and pedestrian) has remained steady and may increase with the warm weather;
 - ❖ The annual Extravaganja event is scheduled for April 20, 2019. It will most likely be at the Three County Fairgrounds. The Police Department is expecting it to be a challenging day, as organizers are expecting 20,000 – 25,000 attendees. Even attendance of 15,000 strains the capacity of the City’s streets.
 - ❖ Minor fender-bender vehicle accidents have been ongoing in the area.

e. Ordinance relative to Parking on Main Street in Florence:

- Councilor Nash gave a brief summary: Rich Cooper of Cooper’s Corner requested 15 minute spaces be designated in front of his business;
 - ❖ The DPW has a proposal and both Rich Cooper and Councilor Murphy are happy with it;

- ❖ Traffic Engineer Chan explained that they chose to designate the 15 minute spaces as the ones closest to the intersection as those would be the easiest for vehicles to pull into.

| Motion: | Motion by: | Second: | Vote: |
|--|-----------------|-------------|-------------------------------|
| To send 19.XXX An Ordinance Relative to Parking on Main Street to City Council with a positive recommendation. | David Pomerantz | Jody Kasper | Yes, 9 No, 0 Abstain, 0 |

f. Update on parking situation at Bridge Street School:

- Fifteen Minute Parking Space on Union Street
 - ❖ Councilor Nash said that this has gone to City Council, and before the second reading there was pushback from neighbors asking why a 15 minute space is needed on Union Street when there is short-term parking available right in the schoolyard that is currently being taken up by staff. Councilor Nash went back to the principal, who decided that due to programming changes, those spaces could once again be made available to parents for short-term parking. As a result, the City Council voted it down on the second reading, but the issue is resolved;
- Relocating Bus Stop at Lampron Park
 - ❖ This bus stop is technically illegal right now because it is not in the City Ordinance;
- Remove erroneous “No Parking” sign on Bridge Street next to cemetery
 - ❖ The DPW has removed this sign;
- Discussion of parking on Parsons Street
 - ❖ Councilors Nash and Sciarra have been hearing from parents who want to talk about what’s going on (for example, there is lots of illegal stopping, as well as other issues);
 - ❖ One side of the street is clearly marked, but on the other side (the Lampron Park side) infractions have been tolerated;
 - ❖ Councilors Nash & Sciarra met with Chief Kasper, Mayor Narkewicz and Nanci Forrestall and will be coming up with a proposal over the next couple of months;
 - ❖ Councilor Sciarra said that the discussion has become more urgent because there have recently been two small accidents involving buses.

g. Update on Ordinance relative to Handicap Parking Space on Pleasant Street

- Neither Millennium Package Store nor Roberto’s Restaurant like this proposal. They would prefer the space to be on the other side of the intersection of Kingsley Avenue right by Roberto’s;
- Director LaScaleia has previously said that the DPW cannot recommend a handicap space near a raised crosswalk;
- It has been sent to the Committee on Disability for their opinion. They are expected to do a site visit and come up with a recommendation. Councilor Nash and Director LaScaleia have agreed that they will go with the Committee on Disability’s recommendation as they are the experts. The Ordinance is expected to be back on the TPC agenda for the April 16, 2019 meeting.

6. New Business

- Councilor Nash brought up the fact that the April TPC meeting is scheduled during the school break, and he is already aware that there are three members who will not be able to attend. He requested that all members contact him as soon as they can so that he can determine if the meeting needs to be rescheduled due to lack of a quorum;
- Next month, trains will be coming to the Valley (from Greenfield to Springfield to Hartford).

7. Adjourned at 5:58 p.m.

| Motion | Motion by: | Second: | Vote: |
|----------|---------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|
| Adjourn. | Gina-Louise Sciarra | Jody Kasper | Yes, 9 No, 0 Abstain, 0 |