



Justin M. Hanrahan
Chief of Police

CITY OF WATERTOWN

TRAFFIC COMMISSION



David Sampson
Sergeant
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Justin Hanrahan, Chair
Ryan Nicholson, Provisional Fire Chief
Gregory St. Louis, Superintendent of Public Works
Steven Magoon, Community Development and Planning
Tyler Glode, City Engineer
Ms. Kelly Gallagher
Mr. Robert Airasian

June 3, 2024

May 29, 2024 Traffic Commission Meeting Minutes

In attendance: Justin Hanrahan, Ryan Nicholson, Gregory St. Louis, Tyler Glode, Kelly Gallagher, Robert Airasian

Traffic Commission members addressed the following items:

Item 1 – Mr. Airasian made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 27, 2024 Commission meeting; Ms. Gallagher seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Item 2 – The Commission reviewed a request by Mr. Manuel Gardea of School Street for the installation of a raised intersection or an All-Way stop on School Street at Maplewood Street. Ms. Ana Enriquez reported that she and Mr. Gardea have lived in Watertown for approximately two years. She noted that traffic volume is very high and the slight incline and curve in the road near Maplewood Street make it difficult to see pedestrians who are crossing School Street. They have seen multiple collisions and consider the area dangerous. She then requested the installation of a raised intersection or a four-way stop.

Sgt. Sampson reported that over the years the police department has received many complaints and concerns about this intersection. A permanent speed feedback sign was installed in the area and in May, 2023 a warrant analysis of the intersection was conducted by McMahon Associates.

Mr. St. Louis reported that School Street is considered an urban arterial road. The DPW steered away from a raised intersection due to the truck traffic on the roadway. In terms of installing an all-way stop, Mr. St. Louis reported that the DPW tends to first work incrementally by upgrading the signage, then using LED signs if needed, then moving to an all-way stop but he was open to discussion about this intersection.

Ms. Kathryn Madden who lives near the intersection and is a member of the Residents' Advisory Committee asked the Commission to consider a raised intersection or all-way stop at the intersection. Ms. Madden was concerned about the high volume of cut-through traffic. She felt that the improvements would be in line with the City's comprehensive plan and Complete Streets design. Ms. Madden referenced the speed tables on Church Street and Waverley Avenue as further justification for a raised intersection.

Chief Nicholson inquired and was informed by Mr. St. Louis that truck volume data for School Street may be available within the Mt. Auburn Street planning documents.

Mr. Airasian cautioned that he observes confusion with the raised tables on Church Street; oftentimes he sees motorists coming to a stop on Church Street because they don't know whether the intersection is under an all-way stop control. Prior to considering a raised table, Mr. Airasian suggested a four-way stop which may be more helpful and cost effective.

Ms. Gallagher agreed with Mr. Airasian's observations on Church Street. Ms. Gallagher also supported an all-way stop as opposed to a raised table.

Mr. Glode was not opposed to implementing a test project with stop signs. If shown to be effective, then the City could move forward with appropriate signage for the area. Mr. Glode tries to avoid using lighted signs in residential areas unless needed.

Sgt. Sampson clarified that there is a difference in roadway use between School Street and Waverley Avenue. Also, the Traffic Commission and police department receive many complaints of speeding vehicles and requests for stop signs to slow traffic. Sgt. Sampson noted that the purpose of stop signs is to clarify the right of way at intersections; stop signs cannot be used as a method to slow traffic. The warrant analysis conducted on School Street noted a sight distance issue for motorists traveling on Maplewood Street. The installation of an experimental four-way stop on School Street could address this issue.

Chief Nicholson made a motion to install an experimental all-way stop on School Street at Maplewood Street; Ms. Gallagher seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. St. Louis noted that the average cost of a raised table is approximately \$350,000. If there is a desire for a raised table, it should be included as a project in the next capital improvement plan.

Item 3 – The Commission reviewed a request by Ms. Dawn Slaven to amend the City's meter hours of operation and rates. Ms. Slaven felt that the meter hours of operation and rates, particularly in the library parking lot were not consistent with practices in neighboring communities. She felt that the community was not adequately notified of the meter changes. Ms. Slaven noted that Watertown's rates at the library lot are higher than rates in neighboring communities with higher median incomes. She found that many municipalities allow a period of free parking or complete free parking in their library lots. She also noted that there is only one hour on select days when parking enforcement is not present, and the library is open. She felt that although the City's overall rates may be consistent with other communities, the library lot is unique and the rates are higher in Watertown than other communities.

Ms. Slaven suggested to:

- allow free parking for up to two hours between 8:00am-7:00pm in the library lot or selected spaces
- reduce the hours of operation to 8:00am – 6:00 pm, or
- Reduce the meter rate to \$.25 for 30 minutes of parking.

Ms. Joan Gumbleton of Falmouth Road reported that she is concerned about electric vehicle charging stations taking spaces in the library lot and that the City is paying for the electricity to charge the vehicles.

Sgt. Sampson explained that in late 2018 the then Town Council directed the Department of Community Development and Planning to create a parking management plan for Watertown and Coolidge Squares and provided the Commission with a brief history of the process.

Mr. Airasian cautioned that providing free parking in a parking lot could have unintended consequences; motorists could try to park there all day to avoid paying meters and take up available parking for library

business. Mr. Airasian was not comfortable making any permanent decisions on the hours of operations and rates without Mr. Magoon being present.

Chiefs Nicholson and Hanrahan agreed with Mr. Airasian. Chief Hanrahan suggested tabling the matter until Mr. Magoon was available.

Mr. St. Louis suggested contacting the Treasurer to determine collections in that lot. Mr. St. Louis' observation is that the turnover rate does not appear to be that high in the library lot. It may be good to look at the capacity of lot versus availability at any given time. Typically, the goal is approximately 20% availability.

Mr. Glode made a motion to continue the discussion during the June, 2024 meeting; Chief Nicholson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

In terms of the EV charging stations, Sgt. Sampson reported that users of the EV spaces are required to pay the meter rates, but the electricity is free. Mr. St. Louis reported that there are grants available through Eversource to help reduce the cost EV station installation. Until such time that the City has a substantial number of EV charging locations, it is more cost effective for the City to pay for the electricity than to set up and manage the software to accept payments. The DPW is working with the City Energy Manager to install more stations.

Item 4 – The Commission reviewed a request by Mr. Kevin Higgins of Fairfield Street for the installation of raised tables on Dexter Avenue. Mr. Higgins read his request letter and asked the Commission to consider raised tables for the roadway.

Ms. Slaven was concerned that speed tables may hamper the fire department's ability to respond to emergencies.

Sgt. Sampson reported that a speed feedback sign is currently posted on Dexter Avenue for northbound traffic. In approximately 4 weeks, the equipment will be moved to capture southbound vehicle speeds.

Ms. Gallagher, Mr. Airasian, and Chief Hanrahan want to review the data from the feedback signs prior to making any decisions about the area.

Mr. Glode noted that traffic on Dexter Ave is likely impacted by road construction in the area. Although the speed data will be helpful, it will be skewed due to the changes in traffic patterns. Higher speeds may be found due in part to drivers being frustrated with construction. Mr. Glode looks forward to seeing the data.

Mr. Glode made a motion to continue the discussion during the September, 2024 meeting; Mr. Airasian seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Item 5 – The Commission reviewed a request by Mr. Joseph Chillemi of 590 Main Street for the installation of cautionary Deaf Person signage in the area. Sgt. Sampson reported that in 2013 Mr. Chillemi lived on Grove Street and received Traffic Commission approval for Deaf Child signage for his then 10-year-old son. The family now lives at 590 Main Street and although his son is no longer a child, Mr. Chillemi is concerned for his son's safety. Mr. Chillemi requested Deafblind signage in the area near his new residence.

To obtain further information about these cautionary signs, Sgt. Sampson spoke with a representative of the traffic engineering firm Tighe and Bond. Sgt. Sampson was informed that these types of signs have been removed from the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways (MUTCD). The cautionary signs were removed from the manual because they were found to be

confusing and vague, and there have been studies that revealed that the signs do not have an effect on driving behavior. No definitions for deaf, blind, etc. are available in the manual because there are varying degrees of deafness, etc. Although municipalities are not restricted from posting these signs, there is also no requirement to do so. Many municipalities/ traffic commissions no longer post these types of signs.

Mr. St. Louis noted that this portion of Main Street is under the care and control of MassDOT.

Ms. Gallagher noted that it has been several years since the signs were originally approved. Ms. Gallagher was not inclined to support the request due to studies showing their lack of effectiveness and other municipalities no longer approving these signs. Ms. Gallagher was concerned about setting a precedence by approving the signs.

Chief Hanrahan agreed with Ms. Gallagher.

Mr. Airasian made a motion to remove the cautionary Deaf Child signage from Grove Street; Chief Nicholson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

In light of the residence being on the state portion of the roadway and common practice has moved away from this type of signage Mr. St. Louis made a motion to deny the request for cautionary Deaf signage on Main Street; Mr. Glode seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Item 6 – The Commission reviewed a request by Sgt. David Sampson of the Watertown Police Department and City Engineer Mr. Tyler Glode to restrict parking on both sides of Highland Avenue from Lexington Street to #55 Highland Avenue. Sgt. Sampson reported that the Highland Avenue road project is nearing completion. The roadway is now clearly defined with granite curbing. One issue that has been identified is that the current parking regulations found in the Traffic Rules and Orders are not reflected on the street. The current regulation is No Parking on both sides from 25 Highland Avenue to 55 Highland Avenue. Current postage signage restricts parking on the north side from Lexington Street to 55 Highland Avenue, and only one sign is posted on the south side of the street. Mr. Glode and Sgt. Sampson assessed the area – due to the sharp crest of the hill and current No Parking postings, a No Parking restriction on both sides of Highland Avenue from Lexington Street to #55 Highland Avenue was requested.

Mr. Glode supported this recommendation.

Mr. Paul Weeden who lives at the corner of Highland Avenue and Lexington Street was opposed to this proposal. Mr. Weeden felt that many driveways have been taken away due to the reconstruction of the roadway and/or access to driveways has been reduced. Mr. Weeden reported that he and his family have always parked on the south side of Highland Avenue prior to the intersection with Lexington Street without an issue.

Mr. George George who owns 27/29 Highland Avenue felt that the City's reconstruction of Highland Avenue was problematic for tenants because they all have cars. Mr. George felt that parking was taken away for tenants. Owners paved areas and provided parking for their tenants. He asked for parking on the south even numbered (south) side of the street. He did not want to lose his tenants and asked the Commission to find a parking solution for his tenants.

Sgt. Sampson reported that during construction, residents on the north side of the street reported that vehicles were now parking on the south side, which they reported never happened before. As a result, people were having difficulty exiting their driveways. In terms of possibly allowing parking on the south side of the street, Sgt. Sampson explained that due to the numerous driveways, there would likely not be adequate distance between driveways for legal parking spaces. There may be an area just west of Olney Street, but a vehicle parked in this location would cause a line of sight issue for motorists attempting to exit Olney Street. Sgt. Sampson reported that the Department has received complaints about vehicles

parking in front of the properties on the north side of the street – The parked vehicles overhang and obstruct the sidewalk, forcing pedestrians into the roadway.

Mr. Airasian reported that when roadways are reconstructed, each property receives a curb cut. Regardless of how the property was used in the past, each property has a designated curb cut and an argument could be made that the residents in this area have been parking improperly for many years. The neighborhood received ample notice of this project. Mr. Airasian agreed that the hill of Highland Avenue is a problem. Outside of Mr. Weeden's driveway there is very little opportunity for on-street parking. Finding a solution for tenant parking on private property is outside of the Traffic Commission's purview.

Ms. Gallagher agreed and noticed that a lot of properties have driveways, perhaps not for 5-6 cars each, but off-street parking is available and the City also allows for remote parking at City owned lots during the parking ban.

Mr. Glode reported that the design development phase for projects such as Highland Avenue take approximately 3-4 years. During that time, there are numerous public forums to try to address concerns. The hope is that these issues could be resolved prior to the post construction phase. Although some property owners now want changes, this was a State funded project – Change requests would be a lengthy complex process. Because of the significant investments by the State and City, there are no plans to revisit the design of this project for at least 15 years.

Chief Hanrahan sympathized with property owners, but driveway parking is beyond the Commission's purview.

Mr. Weeden asked to consider maintaining the space near his home at the end of Highland Avenue.

Ms. Joan Gumbleton asked for better communication to homeowners, so people are aware of proposed parking changes.

Mr. Dennis Holland of Nyack Street wondered what alternatives are available when roadways are reconstructed. When parking is removed on one street, the vehicles will move onto other congested streets.

Chief Nicholson made a motion to restrict parking on both sides of Highland Avenue from Lexington Street to #55 Highland Avenue, with the caveat that the south side of Highland Avenue near Lexington Street be assessed to possibly maintain one on-street parking space; Mr. Airasian seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Item 7 – The Commission reviewed a request by Sgt. David Sampson of the Watertown Police Department and City Engineer Mr. Tyler Glode to establish a school zone on both sides of Belmont Street from Lexington Street to #948 Belmont Street. Mr. Glode reported that in 2023 the City applied for a grant for two speed radar signs; the signs were intended for Belmont Street on each side of the Lexington Delta. Equipment has been delivered. The area was assessed by Mr. Glode and Sgt. Sampson. Ideal locations for the signs were identified. While in the field it was discovered that there were no clear limits of a school zone on Belmont Street. A school zone was outlined in anticipation of a potential approval by the Traffic Commission.

Sgt. Sampson noted that Schedule VI of the Traffic Rules and Orders includes a 20 MPH zone on Belmont Street between Knowles Road and Lexington Street. Sgt. Sampson reported that this is an extremely short distance and it is unreasonable to expect drivers to identify this short distance and slow down in time to abide by the speed limit.

Ms. Gallagher made a motion to establish a school zone on both sides of Belmont Street from Lexington Street to #948 Belmont Street; Mr. Airasian seconded the motion.

During discussion, Ms. Susan Maynard of Belmont Street expressed her concerns about the high number of motorists speeding on Belmont Street. Mr. Glode explained that the speed reader signs will help determine the level of violations on Belmont Street by providing data. Chief Hanrahan reported that since meeting with Ms. Maynard approximately one week prior, the police department has had an increased presence on Belmont Street. Sgt. Sampson reported that a temporary electronic speed feedback sign was installed on Belmont Street in the area of Piermont Street for westbound traffic.

The motion passed unanimously.

Item 8 – The Commission received an informational Presentation by the Department of Public Works regarding the 2024 Watertown Road Program. Mr. John Bobrek from Bobrek Engineering and Construction reported that the project aims to add storm water trenches and tree pits, maximize green space, and align the streets to a standard 24 foot width and 20 foot radii where feasible. The following streets were slated for complete streets improvements:

Bromfield and Buick Streets

Grandview Avenue (also plan to add and or replace ADA crosswalks)

Mangano Court – Chief Nicholson inquired and was informed that the turning radius will be more clearly defined. Chief Nicholson asked for the turning radius diagrams for this area.

Dwight Street – Bringing the project just beyond the City line to establish a clean seam.

George Street – 3 stormwater trenches planned.

The City will put this project out for public procurement in the near future.

Mr. Airasian inquired and was informed by Mr. St. Louis that granite curbing will be installed during the project. The grasscrete on George Street will be removed and the sidewalk will be overhauled. Although the roadways will not be significantly narrowed, they will feel narrower. Mr. Airasian pointed out that there may be issues on Mangano Court regarding additional land near driveways. Similar to past concerns on Walnut Street, he asks that property owners be notified of any changes to their driveway access. Mr. St. Louis reported that property owners will be given notice to have any utility work performed before road construction begins; there is a 5-year moratorium following construction. The notice will include the typical driveway zoning regulations will also be provided. Mr. Glode noted that photos of residents' retaining walls will be taken. Owners will be notified that sidewalks will be constructed up to the walls.

New Business

- a. Sgt. Sampson reported that there will likely be a request to assess the area of Warren Street at Chapman Street and to install raised tables and restrict parking in the area.

Ms. Gallagher made a motion to adjourn; Mr. Airasian seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Sgt. David Sampson

Assistant to the Traffic Commission