

CITY OF NEWTON

BOARD OF ALDERMEN

TRAFFIC COUNCIL REPORT

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2006

Present: Candace Havens (Chair), David Koses (Planning), Rosalie Myers (Clerk), Sgt. Norcross (Police), Clint Schuckel (Traffic Engineer)

Aldermen present: Mansfield, Sangiolo

**#429-05**      LUCILLE J. BURNS, 830 Washington Street requesting no parking restriction weekdays 7-9 am, for the diagonal parking spaces on the south side of Washington Street just east of Walnut Street to discourage commuter parking (Ward 2).

**ACTION:**      **APPROVED AS AMENDED (4-0)**

**NOTE:**      The petitioner, Lucille Burns was not present to introduce this item.

Clint Schuckel described the existing conditions. On the south side of Washington Street, there are 53 long-term parallel parking spaces and 18 one-hour diagonal parking spaces. In 2000, the Traffic Council voted (5-0) to eliminate a 7-9 am parking restriction on the diagonal spaces and the current request is to reinstate the previous restriction to assure they won't be used by commuters. Upon inspection, Clint Schuckel found that by 9 am, only 31 of the 53 long-term spaces were occupied, although he noted they were recently converted from short-term use and may not have been discovered yet. He concluded that there are sufficient long-term metered spaces at this time and did not recommend approval of the restriction.. He also noted the hours of operation for these meters begin at 9 am whereas elsewhere in the city, meters rates are in effect starting at 8 am. If more long-term parking in the area is needed, he suggested looking at areas east and west of the subject area as possible locations and pointed out that there are entrances to the commuter rail at both ends of this block.

Michelle Carron, an attorney located at 797 Washington Street stressed the need for parking for local businesses. She added that there are no safe crossings nearby for people who park short-term on the north side of Washington Street and, because of the one-hour limit people who park there longer must return to the meters to pay and cross the street again. In the past, she has observed full use of the long-term spacers and felt short-term parking needs to be preserved.

David Koses supported extending the start time for meters and suggested converting some additional one-hour spaces to 12-hour spaces to accommodate more long-term parkers on the southerly side of the street. He questioned whether

one-hour parking was an appropriate time limit for the remainder of the spaces, given the nature of observed use.

Candace Havens expressed concern about the shortcomings of the current parking configuration and metering of spaces and urged they be viewed in a broader context. She suggested all parking on the south side of the street be parallel and long-term and that all parking on the north side be diagonal and short-term. This would provide more short-term parking for local merchants closest to their shops and minimize street crossings. It would also provide long-term commuter/employee parking where people could pay once and park all day.

Traffic Council members agreed that broader solutions to parking in the vicinity should be evaluated for improvements and agreed to look at those in the near future. In response to the current request, it voted (4-0) to recommend a) changing the start time for all meters on this block to 8 am, b) converting six of the one-hour diagonal spaces to 12-hour spaces, and c) changing the remaining twelve one-hour diagonal spaces to 2-hour spaces.

**#431-05** ALD. SANGIOLO on behalf of Yun Ying Fang, 312 Austin Street, Newtonville, requesting a speed reduction from 30 MPH to 25 MPH on Austin Street (Ward 4).

**Note: State approval required**

**ACTION:**

**NAN 4-0**

**NOTE:**

Ald. Sangiolo and resident, YunYing Fang said there is speeding along this street, especially near a curve in the road which is difficult to see at night. Accidents on this road concern the residents and most recently a car ran into a pole. Ms. Fang presented a petition signed by six neighbors who wish to lower the speed limit to reduce accidents.

Clint Schuckel said this road is classified as a minor collector and carries about 1800 cars per day. A recent speed study showed that the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile speed is traveling at 39 miles per hour. In the last six years the police have issued 206 citations and there have been 41 accidents, most at the intersections of Lowell and Walnut Streets. He concluded that the 30 mph speed limit is appropriate based on the speed study, location and street classification and unlikely to be approved by the state, based on their criteria.

A letter from Richard Berger and Ellen Glanz, 39 Hillside Avenue was received that did not support the request to lower the speed limit. They felt this is an enforcement issue that would not be helped by lowering the speed limit.

Traffic Council members discussed alternative ways to address the situation, such as traffic calming devices, which are not yet approved by the Board as well as warning signs, which the Traffic Engineer could install without special approvals. The Traffic Council voted to recommend no action on this item (4-0).

**#469-05**      GINO DESANTIS, 46 Parsons Street, West Newton, requesting parking restriction on Parsons Street (business causing congestion and scarcity of spaces on street). (Ward 3)

**ACTION:**      **NAN 4-0**

**NOTE:**      Gino DeSantis said many cars park on the end of Parsons Street nearest Washington Street and as a result of business activities in a recently renovated house nearby. He has had difficulties renting his property due to lack of street parking for his tenants. He observed the problem seemed specific to this street, since no adjacent streets are congested and there also is ample parking on Washington Street. He would like restrictions on the street that would allow his tenants all-day parking.

Clint Schuckel reported that at four times on different days, there were an average of four cars parked on this 25'-wide street, generally between Washington and Wiswall Streets. He concluded that long-term parking on Parsons Street did not pose a public safety concern since no parking is allowed on the west side of the street which keeps the street clear for emergency access. He noted three signs reminding people not to block driveways as evidence that there has been a parking issue for some time in the area and questioned whether the local business activities described by Mr. DeSantis were allowed by zoning standards. It has generally been the practice of the Traffic Council to protect neighborhoods from being adversely affected by long-term parkers by recommending the least restrictive means first. As such, he recommended no parking from 9-11 am.

Nancy Landry, 64 Parsons Street concurred that parking by patrons on their street has been a serious concern. She asked that the Traffic Council consider a resident parking district for the area and presented some petitions from neighbors supporting such a proposal. Jason Felcher, 62 Parsons agreed the problem has gotten worse in the five years he lived there and would like relief.

Sgt. Norcross pointed out that restrictions on the street would affect all parkers and would not allow residents exclusive use of the curbside spaces.

Since the petitioner did not want his tenants to be restricted from parking on the street and a formal request for a resident parking district had not been accepted for review, the Traffic Council voted to recommend no action be taken on this proposal (4-0).

**#387-05**      ALD. SAMUELSON requesting establishment of alternative "No Parking" zones from 9-11 am and 1-3 pm on side streets in the Highlands that intersect with Lincoln and Walnut Streets (Wards 5 & 6).

PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION IN COMMITTEE

**ACTION:**      **HELD (4-0)**

**NOTE:**      Ald. Samuelson was not available to present this request and Clint Schuckel presented a map showing the existing restrictions on the streets in Newton

Highlands that intersect with Walnut and Lincoln Streets. The Traffic Council discussed options for testing a new type of restriction including: 1) eliminating the no parking restriction on the streets and restricting each street with a 9-11 am restriction on one side and 1-3 pm limit on the other; 2) maintaining existing “No Parking” restrictions on one side of each street and limiting every other street for morning or afternoon use. He noted that any plan for the entire area offer a uniform restriction and be easier to enforce. Since these streets are 24-25’ wide, all agreed that assuring emergency access is important and did not support a situation where cars would block emergency access by parking directly across from one another.

Ald. Mansfield noted that the “No Parking” restrictions were installed as a result of a fire in the neighborhood in which access was an issue. He felt that the existing restrictions work well and need not be fixed. He noted that the new morning restriction on Woodward Street has not invited employee parking later in the day as anticipated and thought it would be prudent to wait and see how new restrictions on Lincoln Street work before taking further action. One-hour parking on Columbus Street serves businesses for short stops and he noted an average of 6-7 cars parked on side streets throughout the area.

David Koses and Candace Havens thought alternating restrictions from street to street while preserving no parking on one side of each would allow some additional parking but not overwhelm the neighborhoods and supported a trial. However, before undertaking such a trial, Traffic Council members wished to further define the scope of trial area, better understand Ald. Samuelson’s vision of how this would work, consider neighborhood input, and see how the Lincoln Street restrictions work first. The Traffic Council took action to hold this item (4-0).

**#386-05** ALD. SAMUELSON requesting an ordinance to require Board of Aldermen approval through the Traffic Council of new crosswalk locations.

**ACTION:** **APPROVED 4-0; REQUEST RECOMMITAL TO PUBLIC SAFETY/TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE FOR REVIEW OF DRAFT CROSSWALK POLICY**

**NOTE:** Ald. Samuelson was not present to introduce the request and Candace Havens introduced the item by recapping existing conditions. At the present time, crosswalks are installed at the discretion of the Public Works Department. Other traffic control devices are reviewed and approved by the Traffic Council and Board of Aldermen. Yet, crosswalks often are considered in the context of other related controls and conditions. Citizen input on crosswalks is usually received in the form of individual complaints, but there is no forum for hearing about observations from neighborhoods at large. The proposal is intended to coordinate review of crosswalks with related traffic devices in a public forum and to provide clear and consistent standards for their design and installation. The

current proposal for change includes Traffic Council review with final approval by either the Traffic Council or Board.

Clint Schuckel reviewed the Town of Brookline's Crosswalk Policy and Design Guidelines and added some thoughts about concerns particular to Newton. The guidelines generally advocate for installation of crosswalks where there are concentrations of pedestrian activity, including at signs and signals signs and where there might otherwise be confusion about where to cross. They define inappropriate/unsafe situations and include design standards for width, striping, and materials to be used. They suggest installation of crosswalks at the time of street reconstruction, where ADA ramps are existing, where there is adequate sight distance, 300 feet from existing crosswalks, where there are between 3,000 and 9,000 cars per day, and at least 20 pedestrians at peak hour. Consideration is also given to walk-to-school routes and for locations for in-street signs and where sidewalks or adequate shoulders exist for use by pedestrians. He noted the possibility of using different types of pavements to identify village centers and school zones, as examples.

Overall the Traffic Council supported adoption of a review process and the proposed guidelines. All agreed to forward their edits to Clint to incorporate in the document before forwarding to the Board for consideration (4-0).

**#31-06**

CANDACE HAVENS requesting consideration of changes to the City Ordinance regarding parking meter rates to include:

- a. long-term rates competitive with MBTA rates (suggest 35-50 cents/hour)
- b. short-term rates at twice the rate of long-term rates (suggest 70 cents-\$1/hour)

**ACTION:**

**APPROVED 4-0; REQUEST RECOMMITAL TO PUBLIC SAFETY/TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE FOR REVIEW OF PROPOSED PARKING METER RATES**

**NOTE:**

Candace Havens described the existing rate structure and proposed revisions for parking meters. The ordinance mandates curbside parking at 50 cents an hour and parking in lots at 25 cents per hour. Where parking lots are not central to village centers, this rate structure generally gives a price break to those who park farther to their destinations and charges a higher rate for the most convenient spaces. However, she pointed out that a two-tiered structure could be used more effectively if aligned with time limits rather than curbs and lots. She cited examples, such as in Newton Centre where parking has not been optimized as a result of the existing code. For example, the "Triangle" lot costs 25 cents an hour although it is nearly as close to businesses as curbside spaces. Recently-approved curbside parking meters on Bowen Street are on the edge of Newton Centre business area and could serve employees, but may not attract them at 50 cents an hour (\$4/day) because it would be cheaper and more convenient for them to park closer to the village center and pay 25 cents an hour (\$2/day). Conversely, the revised rate structure offers an incentive for employees to enjoy a discount and a short walk and vacate the more convenient short-term spaces for

use by local patrons. Overall, such a strategy better serves both long- and short-term parkers as well as merchants.

Chair Havens presented a comparison of meter rates in downtown Boston, Brighton, Brookline, Cambridge, Needham, Somerville, Waltham and Wellesley which ranged from no charge to \$1/hour for short-term parking. The rates for long-term parking varied from town to town; some had a flat rate for both short- and long-term parking, others discounted long-term parking; the rates ranged from no fee to \$12 a day. Relative to other cities, Newton's rates fall somewhere in the middle. Wellesley charges residents \$3/day and nonresidents at \$4.50 a day, payable with a debit card.

David Koses advocated for an overall plan for placement of long- and short-term meters to make sure the rate change works properly. He also posed the possibility of a city permit of some sort to make it easier to pay for long-term parking as rates increase. He thought it might be wise to allow for some flexibility in the rate structure for special circumstances and cited meters adjacent to Newton-Wellesley Hospital as an example. He also was concerned that the increase in rates might be punitive. Both he and Sgt. Norcross expressed concern that the rate increases might be damaging for local merchants and scare off customers and/or cause employees to park in the surrounding neighborhoods.

In response to concerns mentioned, Candace Havens explained that the increased rates are intended to help the merchants by securing convenient parking for their customers. She agreed that this is a common concern among merchants but that she has never seen it fail to benefit merchants because it makes it easier for customers to get to their shops and keeps employees out of the most valuable spaces. Unless rates are unusually high, she added that most patrons do not know the parking meter rates but simply put in enough coins to secure the time needed for their visit. Generally, the areas surrounding Newton's village centers already have parking restrictions to discourage long-term parkers.

After a lengthy discussion, the Traffic Council members concurred that lower rates for long-term parking and higher rates for short-term parking is a better strategy for managing parking behavior than allocating cost according to curb or lot locations. It also agreed that review of long- and short-term meter locations in each village is needed to make sure there is a balance of available parking for each in appropriate places. All supported keeping the long-term rate at 25 cents an hour since it is consistent with MBTA rates at \$3 for 12 hours, would not encourage commuter parking from other communities, and would offer a price break and incentive to local all-day parkers. To assure that less-expensive long-term parking is used primarily by long-term parkers, the Council also recommended a six-hour minimum payment (i.e., \$1.50 would be required to get any time). The Council felt the short-term rate should be higher than the long-

term rate to discourage use by employees and commuters and in the range of \$.50 to \$.75.

The Traffic Council voted (4-0) to recommend long-term parking (more than 4 hours) at 25 cents per hour with a 6-hour minimum and short-term rate (4 hours or less) between 50 cents and 75 cents per hour. Documentation about locations of existing meters and revenue implications of proposed changes will be provided prior to review by the Public Safety and Transportation Committee and Finance Committee.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Candace Havens, Chair  
Traffic Council