



Public Safety & Transportation Committee Report

City of Newton **In City Council**

Wednesday, September 9, 2020

Present: Councilors Auchincloss (Chair), Downs (Vice-Chair), Malakie, Lipof, Grossman, Markiewicz and Bowman

Absent: Councilor Ciccone

Also Present: Councilors Wright and Humphrey

City Staff: Jason Sobel, Director of Transportation; Nicole Freedman, Director of Transportation Planning and Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer

Others Present: NewTV

#329-20 Resolution to the DCR about establishing a shared street pilot for Quinobequin Road

COUNCILORS DOWNS, ACUCHINCLOSS, BOWMAN, HUMPHREY, NOEL, LAREDO LEARY AND CROSSLEY requesting a resolution to the Department of Conservation and Recreation about establishing a shared street pilot for Quinobequin Road.

Action: Public Safety & Transportation Approved 7-0

Note: On September 2, 2020, Councilor Crossley requested her name be added to this item as a co-docketer.

Jason Sobel, Director of Transportation and Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer joined the Committee for discussion on this item.

Vice-Chair Downs stated that a draft resolution was attached to the agenda and is attached to this report.

Mr. Yeo stated that at a prior meeting, this Committee determined that a resolution would be created requesting that DCR consider the City's request of a pilot to close Quinobequin Road or a portion of it. If City Council approves this item, the City would work with the DCR as Quinobequin Road is a DCR road. The DCR would conduct a public meeting with neighbors determining if they should move forward on making Quinobequin a shared street. The neighborhood has discussed this request and have different opinions with pros and cons.

Vice-Chair Downs stated that the Committee today, received emails and letters in support of approving this item, attached to this report. She then opened the discussion to members of the public who were present.

Ms. Maureen Reilly Meagher stated that she and the neighbors are in support of this resolution. Ms. Meagher said that she canvassed the neighbors over the holiday weekend, and although many were away, every single household who answered their door, signed the resolution in support. She does not know of any neighbors objecting this idea. She then asked what are the objections? Vice-Chair Downs answered that she has not heard of any objections and is hopeful DCR will begin the discussion, if this item is approved. Ms. Meagher then stated that there are no contiguous sidewalks and little distance between the stripes outer edge of the driving lane and edge of asphalt. Several years ago, the Executive Department and Representative Balsler supported reducing the speed limit to 25 miles per hour on Quinobequin Road, which was approved but 25 miles per hour remains above the suggested required speed limit for completing shared street ideas. The shared street idea would be on the weekend and the neighbors would engage with the road and park on the weekend. Perhaps this item would help with how people think of the road and park. The resolution is a hopeful way to create a paved way to access destinations.

Mr. Sobel stated that the City could begin with an outreach to DCR to begin conversation. Mr. Sobel supports moving forward to engage conversation with the DCR.

Councilors questions and answers:

- Please define the potential opportunities. Would Quinobequin Road have a full road closure or a combination? Vice-Chair Downs answered that there are a number of driveways on Quinobequin Road, this docket item is an envision for a process of a shared street pilot. During the beginning of the pandemic there was little traffic volumes. The resolution would allow local traffic, but restricting Quinobequin Road to others. Quinobequin Road is used as a cut-through road for Routes 9, 128 and 16.

Councilors comments and suggestions:

- DCR would have to determine the days and hours, because it is their roadway. If approved, allow the DCR work out the fine details.
- It is hopeful, Committee members will support this docket item to expand options for access to really wonderful park space which is difficult now because of trail quality.
- A Councilor stated that the only objection heard was that Quinobequin Road is used to access the hospital or Route 9 in a “super-fast” way. The access to the park land should take precedence rather than how drivers drive especially during weekend closures. This docket item is a good choice to access public ways.

The discussion was closed. Vice-Chair Downs recited the resolution for Committee members and the public. Without further discussion, Councilor Markiewicz made a motion to approve this item. Committee members agreed 7-0.

#187-20 Requesting a discussion with the Administration about Vision Zero
PUBLIC SAFETY & TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE requesting a discussion with the Administration about Vision Zero and whether it should be implemented in Newton as a strategy to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries on Newton's streets and sidewalks moving towards safe, healthy, equitable mobility for all.

Action: Public Safety & Transportation No Action Necessary 7-0

Note: Jason Sobel, Director of Transportation; Nicole Freedman, Director of Transportation, Planning and Jonathan Yeo, Chief Operating Officer joined the committee for discussion on this item.

Mr. Yeo stated that no official decisions have been made about officially implementing Vision Zero in the City of Newton.

Ms. Freedman stated that discussions have taken place regarding Vision Zero in the City. Vision Zero has two parts. First, the adoption of a resolution including a target date and zero fatalities in a certain time period. Second, implementation to achieve the Vision Zero goal. Complete streets is quite similar to Vision Zero. The approach is data driven making Vision Zero unique and data driven including working with the Police Department. Priorities include analysis of crash locations and what happens with crashes.

Ms. Freedman then stated that she has spoken with Mr. Yeo regarding the opportunity to include a Vision Zero discussion when interviewing for the new Police Chief position. Mr. Yeo stated that the cooperation and the heavy involvement of the Police Department is critical. The Police Department has been working with the Executive, Planning and Department Public Works Departments with traffic and pedestrian safety. To implement Vision Zero or something similar would require a lot of work for these departments. This is an opportunity to raise Vision Zero in the Police Chief interview process with the candidate's knowledge, desire and interest for Vision Zero or something similar.

Mr. Yeo asked Mr. Sobel to describe high crash zones, what type of information is received on intersection issues and how does the City decide to intervene with traffic calming or specific pedestrian zone issues. Mr. Sobel answered that the traffic calming process reviews, evaluates and prioritizes the roads and is a good first step model that can be expanded. Traffic calming reviews crashes, speeds, traffic volumes, pedestrian volumes, generators, where the demand is and whether the location is close to schools or an MBTA station and other facilities. These measures have provided good framework for traffic calming. Ideas and data driven processes could be expanded to look at larger transportation systems and how traffic calming data is used to coordinate with the Police Department to identify high location areas, rather than just responding when instances occur would be the goal.

Ms. Freedman stated that if Vision Zero is implemented, the design would be the most proactive tool in the tool kit. Traffic calming is data driven. Vision Zero is a real goal to be proactive analyzing data and identifying hot spots including intersections and neighborhood roads.

There is also an element to review crashes on regular basis. Data is restored, retrieved and saved in the most useful type of format. All systems would be reviewed and adjusted.

Chair Auchincloss opened the discussion to members of the public who were present.

Mr. Mike Halle spoke on behalf of Newton Transportation Advisory Group (TAG). He stated that TAG proposed Vision Zero as a public safety transportation legislative priority. Vision Zero is an important priority, a multi-national effort to end tragedies on roadways and to improve people's lives. Vision Zero compliments the complete streets philosophy restoring street scape design. Vision Zero provides purpose, the most important reason is safety. When Vision Zero was discussed in February, we learned a vehicle killed a dog and three crashes involved pedestrians in cross walks. This caused outrage. The City benefits implementing Vision Zero which offers concern, outrage and accountability. If there is no response, people feel streets are not safe. Vision Zero may include some removal of parking spaces. Vision Zero should be framed in simple and understandable terms and hopefully leads to Federal and State funding to support Vision Zero.

Councilors questions and answers:

- How would Newton react to traffic cameras, is Newton committed to implementing traffic cameras and is funding available?
- Has the City considered lowering default speed limits throughout the City?
- Can data analysis be completed and implemented with the number of current staff?
- Do others find Vision Zero website difficult to understand?

A Councilor answered that the beauty of Vision Zero provides a goal and a clear process on addressing crashes when they occur. Newton is still working on how they respond. Those questions should be asked down the road, once a goal is established. We are in the beginning stages. The City would have to review funding and staffing. Yes, the Vision Zero website is difficult to understand. The Vision Zero coalition is helpful.

- It is frustrating not being able to obtain crash data. Can this issue be resolved? Is there a reason why the City cannot do it? Data and resources are necessary. Traffic calming is important. Mr. Sobel answered that he cannot speak for the Police Department. He has worked with the Police Department on improving access to individual crash records and reporting. He feels the City has relatively good access to crash records. The compiled map of the City's hot spots shows patterns and easily accessible on geographic locations.
- Please clarify what it means when data is lost at the end of year. Is there no record from one to two years ago? Data just doesn't evaporate. A Councilor answered that data does not evaporate. Data can be requested through the Police Department or the State. Unfortunately, there is a one to two-year delay with the current data. Data should be easily accessible and available. This problem should be resolved. Data provides individual crashes and how to prevent similar crashes. It was said that the data map on the Police Department website changes as the year changes.

Mr. Mike Halle stated that he has tried to do data mining on the reports unsuccessfully. Until recently, police reports were available by text. Mr. Halle would like the information to be

entered into the database allowing a person to use search engines, which is now impossible. Data has to be more systematic as it is important in long-term planning.

Councilors comments and suggestions:

- Many people want to defund the Newton Police Department, but Mr. Yeo said that the Newton Police Department would be greatly involved in Vision Zero.
- When this Committee discussed the West Newton design plan with the Newton Police and Fire Departments, it was stated that it is important to have sidewalks and bike lanes rather than 6 feet extra travel space to allow fire trucks to pass.
- Vision Zero is a comprehensive plan. In order to improve data, we should be able to request how many bicycle and pedestrian crashes have taken place over the past five years. Data should be available on locations and the reasons for these accidents. It is difficult to understand what is being looked at. Data is captured, but on January 1, or when a pedestrian is hit, that data is made difficult to find. The process of collecting data has to be done better.
- Vision Zero promotes safety and sets clear priorities making the City more bikeable and walkable.
- The City should be monitoring speed volumes and identifying locations with persistent speeding issues.
- It was stated that this administration has done a good job with adding traffic calming into the budget. Funding is necessary to get Vision Zero started.
- It is important to understand what happens in crashes and use that style of crash to prevent the same type of incident in the future.

Vice-Chair Downs provided a PowerPoint presentation, attached to this report. The PowerPoint depicted Vision Zero's progress and challenges in the Cities of Somerville and Boston. Somerville included a one-year progress report. Boston included their experience over three years. The charts are an organized way to think about how to handle road safety and the beginning stages.

Councilor Bowman noted that she has a report from Portland, Oregon indicating that they had a discussion with the National Association City Transportation Officials (NACTO) and the Portland Fire Chief who adopted Vision Zero. The Fire Chief determined the important aspects for everyone's safety is to make roads safer for bicyclists, pedestrians including safer sidewalks and implementing slower speed limits. The Fire Chief's biggest concern is to get people exercising which would reduce their emergency calls and reduce the number of crashes. This report will be forwarded to Council members.

Mr. Yeo stated that on October 19, 2020, the Executive Department will be discussing a long-range forecast update with the City Council. Vision Zero requires resources, staff time and Police Department coordination. The Police Department has one software system that manages pieces of the department. The software system is not easy to tweak, but this does not mean the City cannot do a better job of collecting information.

Mr. Yeo asked Mr. Sobel what type of data he had for the past five years? Mr. Sobel answered that he has access to individual crash reports and data. It is difficult to identify trends and patterns the way data is currently presented.

A Councilor asked if the Committee could move forward docketing a resolution supportive of Vision Zero. Chair Auchincloss polled Committee members asking if they were favorable of a Vision Zero Resolution. Committee members agreed 7-0.

Committee members were provided with Newton Transportation Group (TAG), Bike Newton Steering Committee, Newton Safe Routes to School Task Force letters and constituent emails received in support of this item, attached to this report.

Without further discussion, Councilor Auchincloss made a motion to vote no action necessary. Committee members agreed 7-0.

Referred to Zoning & Planning and Public Safety Committees

#301-20

Request for a discussion on the impact of outdoor fuel burning

COUNCILORS KELLEY, CROSSLEY, LEARY, NORTON, WRIGHT, MALAKIE, DOWNS, AND BOWMAN requesting a discussion with the Planning Department, Fire Department, and Sustainability Team on the impacts of fuel-burning outdoor fireplaces, chimneys, fire pits, pizza ovens, etc., including setback and maximum lot coverage requirements, air quality/pollution, and fire protection in relation to permitting, zoning enforcement, fire code, and Newton's Climate Action Plan.

Zoning & Planning voted No Action Necessary 8-0, on 08/13/20

Action:

Public Safety & Transportation No Action Necessary 7-0

Note: Chair Auchincloss stated that at the request of several docketers, this item will be voted no action necessary.

Without discussion, Councilor Auchincloss made a motion to vote no action necessary. Committee members agreed 7-0.

At approximately 8:10 p.m., the Committee adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Jacob D. Auchincloss, Chair