



Public Safety & Transportation Committee Report

City of Newton In City Council

Wednesday, June 22, 2022

Present: Councilors Downs (Chair), Markiewicz, Malakie, Bowman, Oliver, Lucas and Grossman

Absent: Councilor Lipof

City Staff: David Koses, Transportation Coordinator, Sergeant Michael Wade, Newton Police Department; Amy Winston, NNHS Vice-Principal; Stephanie Gilman, Director of Planning, Project Management & Sustainability Newton Public Schools

Others Present: Joseph David, Asset Manager, VPNE Parking Solutions; Attorney Frank Stearns, Holland & Knight, LLP; Tom Keady, Vice President, Governmental and Community Affairs and Gabriel Parker, General Manager of Parking and Transportation, Boston College; Jeremy Freudberg, Alternate Resident Member Traffic Council and NewTV

#324-22 Four (4) Bus Licenses renewals for VPNE Parking Solutions, LLC.

VPNE PARKING SOLUTIONS, LLC. requesting triennial renewal of the four bus licenses for VPNE Parking Solutions, LLC. There are no changes proposed from 2021.

Action: Public Safety & Transportation Approved 6-0, Councilor Lucas not voting

Note: Docket items #324-22 and #325-22 were discussed together. Please refer to #325-22 for the report.

#325-22 Two (2) Bus Licenses renewals for Boston College Bus

BOSTON COACH TRANSPORTATION, requesting triennial renewal of the two bus licenses for Boston College. There are no changes proposed from 2021.

- 1) Boston College Law School Routes
- 2) Boston College Main Campus to Boston Route

Action: Public Safety & Transportation Approved 6-0, Councilor Lucas not voting

Note: Docket items #324-22 and #325-22 were discussed together.

Sgt. Wade, Mr. David, Attorney Stearns, Mr. Keady and Mr. Parker joined the Committee for discussion on these items.

VPNE Parking Solutions, LLC.

Mr. David stated that that the program has run successful, there are no changes from last year's license request and is requesting a triennial renewal for four bus licenses.

Sergeant Wade stated that the buses passed City inspection, appropriate paperwork was received and has no objection to a three-year license request.

Chair Downs asked Committee members if they had an objection to approving a triennial renewal. Committee members expressed no concern.

Committee members questions, answers, suggestions and comments:

Are the VPNE buses picking up staff at the Chestnut Hill Mall and going to the hospitals? Mr. David answered yes, the buses pick up across from the mall at the Lifetime Center. The Dana Farber intercampus shuttle transports staff from the individual campuses. Bus service is an amenity to staff.

Last year, we discussed the need to create bike parking, allowing people to bike to the shuttle instead of driving. In the future, we will have a protected bike lane on Hammond Pond Parkway. **Are you open to supporting people biking to the shuttle to access a bus to the medical center?** Mr. David answered yes, and we're willing to explore outfitting the buses with bike carriers to support that effort.

Please explain how VPNE may encourage biking. Mr. David explained that VPNE is contracted through the Dana Farber Hospital. The hospital regularly has incentive programs for the MBTA. People drive and take the "T" into the hospital area. VPNE could work with the hospital on producing a biking survey.

It will be important for people to have bike access next year because of the work on the Green Line stations will make Newton stations inconvenient which may encourage people to bike.

Chair Downs suggested an informal check-in in June 2023 to discuss how VPNE is accommodating bikes. Councilor Bowman stated that she would docket an item. Mr. David agreed.

Boston College Bus

Attorney Stearns stated there are no changes from last year licenses request and is requesting a triennial renewal for Boston College and would be happy to do a one-year check in.

Boston College has returned to pre-pandemic routes. The main shuttles to the Newton campus, shuttle around Cleveland Circle and the weekend shuttles. The former routes are working well.

Attorney Stearns stated that he is happy to collaborate with Councilor Bowman on the research that we see as valuable and necessary to determine when and what is feasible regarding electrification of the buses. It is not feasible now, but Boston College is committed to working on development of factual issues and grant sources.

Sergeant Wade stated that buses passed City inspection, appropriate paperwork was received and has no objection to a three-year license request.

Chair Downs asked Committee members if they had an objection to approving a triennial renewal.

Committee members expressed no concern.

Committee members comments:

I am delighted to hear Boston College is back on a normal schedule for students.

If necessary, Councilor Bowman will docket an item for Boston College to return for an informal check-in for June 2023.

Our main topic of discussion with Boston College is electrification. Councilor Bowman's Task Force is determined to figure out a way to make bus electrification happen.

Councilor Bowman thanked VPNE and Boston College for being supportive of the City's efforts to green transportation and provide people more options. She then stated that she will contact VPNE, Boston College and other shuttle operators for a round table discussion. There are several community and state resources available to promote electrification.

Without further discussion, Councilor Bowman made a motion to approve both VPNE Parking Solutions, LLC and Boston College triennial bus licenses requests. Committee members agreed 6-0, Councilor Lucas not voting.

Referred to Public Safety & Transportation and Finance Committees

#293-22

Review and potential amendment to the Tiger Permit Program

COUNCILORS BOWMAN, ALBRIGHT, DOWNS, NORTON, OLIVER, AND DANBERG seeking a review and potential amendment to the Tiger Parking Permit Program (Sec. TPR-204. Newton North High School Tiger Parking Permits) including a review of the number of permits issued, the lottery process for permits and locations included in the Tiger Parking Permit Program and potential amendment to the fees associated with the Tiger Parking Permit Program.

Finance Held 6-0 on 06/06/22

Public Safety & Transportation Held 7-0 on 06/06/22

Action:

Public Safety & Transportation No Action Necessary 6-0, Councilor Oliver not voting

Note:

Mr. Koses, Sergeant Wade, Ms. Winston and Ms. Gilman joined the Committee for discussion on this item.

Mr. Koses provided a PowerPoint slide, attached.

Ms. Winston stated that she shared Mr. Koses presentation with rising senior class officers who are present tonight to share parking challenges at Newton North High School.

Newton North Students Public Comment:

Clara Lake, Cathy Zhao, Sophia Murphy, and Karen Matsuoka spoke on the Newton North High School Tiger Permit Program.

Students drive to school for a variety of reasons. They feel little can be done to decrease the desire to drive. Increasing the number of permits would decrease the number of students parking illegally, in neighborhoods or teacher lots. They support increasing the number of permits. Many permit spaces remain empty all day. Some seniors were granted permits this year; no juniors are issued permits.

Students drive to get to after school work, pick up siblings, etc. I agree having more permits which may decrease the number of students parking illegally. Allowing Ms. Winston to distribute 30 additional permits to those in need is a good idea.

Finding a place to legally park in time for first period classes adds stress. Allowing additional permits reduces the chance of students illegally parking and receiving a ticket.

At Newton South, there are 145 permits for 145 spaces. Every person who has a permit is guaranteed a space. At Newton North, there are less spaces than permits but spaces remained unused.

Committee members questions, answers, suggestions and comments:

Where in the general fund do the permit fees go? Chair Downs answered the mayor budgets the general fund for line items including schools, fields and maintenance, pensions, salaries, etc. An additional \$25 or \$50 a year from 140 students is nearly invisible in Newton's \$480 million budget. The goal is to ensure the spaces get used, and that there's some equity between high schools. Newton South students are paying \$350 and Newton North students are paying \$25.

Some councilors were surprised to hear that parking permits came to light was because of the inequality between the prices at Newton North and Newton South. When the survey circulated, it included a question on increase in price. A small increase makes sense. If students aren't purchasing permits, they may park illegally. Increasing the number of permits and including flexible permits seems to be a fair solution.

The Newton North Tiger Parking Permit survey is helpful.

Raising the permit fee may discourage students who do use them infrequently and free up permits for those who would use them more.

Do students support raising the permit fee? A student answered the majority of students who are applying for permits are students who actually need them. Increasing the price makes permits less accessible. There are other ways to emphasize that only students who need permits should apply.

Perhaps the student body could write a statement to be included with the permit materials to that effect.

A \$50 is a modest increase. Newton South students pay \$350, a significant difference. The significant deterrent to driving currently is \$5/gallon gas.

What are the key problems students, Ms. Winston and Ms. Gillman want to solve? What are the optimal operations? Ms. Winston answered that Newton North has grown from 1800 to 2100 students. Next year's student population will be similar. The number of parking spaces and permits have not changed. Each year, more and more students do not receive permits. We have heard from families that because of the later school start and end times students are struggling to get to work, etc. increasing the need to drive. I support the idea of increasing the number of permits that are related to need, because we do have students needing permits short-term. An injured student added that she cannot walk to school causing her parent to change their work schedule to accommodate her. Because she was not a senior, she could not apply for a permit. Additional permits issued on an as-needed basis will help students.

Will the proposed increase of 20 permits benefit Newton North? Ms. Winston answered this would bring the percentage of permits/seniors back in the range we had when we opened the new school, which is fair. In the future, it may be necessary to tweak the number of permits.

The Committee may want to set a percentage target of permits based on the number of seniors rather than come before this Committee each year. Perhaps next year, instead of tweaking the number of permits, the Committee can set a percentage. Ms. Winston stated that this makes sense.

How will we gauge if the proposal is successful? Chair Downs answered that it is one of the questions that we're struggling with. She suggested Council pilot modest changes and see what happens. Parity and reducing driving were part of the equation, also reducing neighborhood and staff parking lot parking. This Committee will decide what it is we're solving and what does success look like, after hearing the issues. Newton South fees are retained by the School Department. Newton North fees are paid to the Police Department.

Will DPW review the program? Chair Downs answered yes, this Committee will review the program in the late fall. Ms. Winston added that interested students can continue to collect data to measure what's is and what is not working. Parents are begging her to let their child park somewhere on campus, because they have a broken leg and unfortunately, she can't help them.

Sergeant Wade stated that today, Chief Carmichael expressed where he would like to see the high school take over the issuing permits. The Traffic and Parking Regulations (TPR) state the Chief is in charge of the Tiger Permit program. Chief Carmichael stated if Newton North determines who is receiving the permits, then the school should be responsible for operating the whole program. The NPD can continue to enforce parking violations. Daily, the department receives complaints for illegally parked students in the neighborhoods. Ms. Winston added that the Police Department enforces parking on the roads. Newton North enforces the school parking lot.

Chair Downs suggested the administration of the permits could be negotiated administratively and if needed the Committee could enact any changes to the TPR.

Mr. Koses stated that Traffic Council is looking for a recommendation on the number of permits and flexible permits. On July 21, Traffic Council will be discussing changes to the number of permits issued and possibly additional permits to be distributed by the administration. At a subsequent meeting, Traffic Council will hear if the trial was a success.

Ms. Gilman stated that she discussed the program with the School Transportation steering group on how to measure success, which may be the use of the existing parking spaces. Students are complaining they don't have parking permits and need one for various reasons. We are seeing a very low utilization rate of the existing spaces. We could also measure success with the level of student satisfaction. She supports the flexible permits. The Newton South parking program has five flexible permits for students in need. It's basically having some parity between the two schools.

Could Traffic Council hold a trial of changes to the program, until it is determined if it will work?

Chair Downs answered yes. Traffic Council receives feedback, the number of permits may be tweaked until the right number of permits are reached. It is difficult to know what the right number is. We may want to look at our goals for this program and adjust the number downward in future years. But to start, we can meet the goal of full utilization of spaces before trying to meet a different goal.

Could Traffic Council decision be appealed? Chair Downs answered yes, once the decision is final. During the trial, residents could express concerns or support to Traffic Council.

A big difference between Newton North and Newton South is the parking lot at Newton South identifying assigned spaces. At Newton North students drive around looking for available spaces. Ms. Winston stated that the three Tiger Permit areas are easy to access, they just sit unused. Juniors didn't receive permits and some of them are driving around trying to find a legal place to park near campus, where they don't have to move their car every two hours. Moving these cars into allocated spaces would be helpful to the neighborhood. The first place seniors look for a space is on Hull Street, then Lowell Avenue. Austin Street is their last choice because it's the longest walk.

Councilor Bowman stated that she approached Ms. Winston after receiving parent emails to the Council complaining that there is not enough parking. The primary aim is not to be equitable with Newton South, the primary issue is to ensure a fair permit process. If students are charged \$350 to ride the bus, a \$25 Parking Permit seems too cheap. Allowing students to drive instead of taking the bus is really against the City's climate action goals. Years ago, I started tracking how many students bike to school. At that time, it was approximately 30, today more than 100 bike to Newton North. Councilor Bowman suggested and made a motion for the following three straw votes.

Straw Votes

- 1) Recommendation to Traffic Council supporting twenty additional permits and five transferable placards. Committee members agreed 6-0, Councilor Oliver not voting.
- 2) Recommendation to the Finance Committee supporting increasing the fee from \$25 to \$50. Committee members agreed 5-1-0, Councilor Markiewicz opposed and Councilor Oliver not voting.

3) Direct the Department of Public Works to complete a follow up analysis on parking utilization in late fall. Committee members agreed 6-0, Councilor Oliver not voting.

Councilor Grossman stated she wants to maintain an open mind for the Finance Committee discussion about the fees. There may be strong feelings that \$50 is the proper amount, that's probably where the recommendation will go. There are good arguments for different price ranges.

Councilor Bowman informed students that they could forward their comments to Traffic Council and the Finance Committee.

Without further discussion, Councilor Markiewicz made a motion for no action necessary. Committee members agreed 6-0, Councilor Oliver not voting.

Referred to Public Safety & Transportation and Programs & Services Committees

#181-22 **Seeking a review and potential amendment to the Tiger Parking Permit Program**
COUNCILORS BOWMAN, ALBRIGHT, DOWNS, NORTON, OLIVER AND DANBERG seeking a review and potential amendment to the Tiger Parking Permit Program (Sec. TPR-204, Newton North High School Tiger Parking Permit) including review of the number of permits issued, the lottery process for permits and locations included in the Tiger Permit program.

Programs & Services No Action Necessary 7-0 on 06/22/22

Action: **Public Safety & Transportation No Action Necessary 6-0, Councilor Oliver not voting**

Note: Chair Downs stated that this item is the same item as #293-22 but in error was not referred to the Finance Committee.

Without discussion, Councilor Bowman made a motion to vote no action necessary on this item. Committee members agreed 6-0, Councilor Oliver not voting.

#326-22 **Requesting language modification to the Traffic and Parking Regulations**
COUNCILOR DOWNS requesting to modify the language of Section 19-28 and Chapter 19-30(g), to allow for administrative changes to be made to the Traffic and Parking Regulations (TPR), and to present the administrative changes made each year to City Council as part of the annual report of the work of the Traffic Council.

Action: **Public Safety & Transportation Approved Subject to Second Call 6-0, Councilor Oliver not voting**

Note: Mr. Koses joined the Committee for discussion on this item.

Chair Downs stated that Traffic Council spends time at each meeting clearing up items including stop signs, parking signs, etc. that exist in the field but are not included in the Traffic and Parking Regulations (TPR).

Mr. Koses stated Traffic Council makes many edits yearly to the TPR. Traffic Council removes duplicates, adds things that are in the field and fixes mistakes. With the current process, it is necessary to docket changes, notify residents, write draft TPR language, vote on each item, and wait the 20-days appeal process to correct simple omissions. This docket item will allow staff to make corrections administratively and keep track of changes made. Each year, I will report back to this Committee when I submit the annual report of Traffic Council actions.

The example of Ward Street—where parking signs were erected that were in the regulations but not in the field—came because a resident requested the street signage match the regulations. If we had the administrative authority, we could have just removed that regulation from the TPR, not making any changes to the field. If we thought that it would be better to add or remove signage in the field, we could have docketed it for Traffic Council’s consideration. Mr. Koses stated that any changes in the field would be handled by Traffic Council.

Committee members suggestions, comments, questions and answers:

In your report, please list each change by Ward and provide this every several months or at the end of year when Traffic Council actions are provided.

Rather than list each change at the end of the year, incorporate administrative changes in an addendum on the Traffic Council meeting report. Mr. Koses agreed to adding these changes to the bottom of the agenda, not a report of changes that were approved administratively during the previous month. He would summarize at the end of the year by Ward with Traffic Council actions.

Regarding the Ward Street example, the process that was followed was not good in that case. I am hopeful corrections made administratively will not create problems.

In Section 2 of the draft ordinance language, is there a way to add the concept of a one-way channel of change? What is written should reflect what we're talking about, and ensure we're not inadvertently giving broader discretion, that isn't necessarily reflected in the words. Chair Downs said she would ask the Law Department how to word section 2 to reflect this.

Public Comment:

Jeremy Freudberg, alternate resident member of Traffic Council recommended more frequent notifications to Traffic Council and the Committee. He supported adding a list of administrative changes to the agenda.

Without further discussion, Councilor Grossman made a motion to approve this item subject to second call regarding Section 2 in the draft ordinance with the understanding Chair Downs will communicate with the Law Department. Committee members agreed 6-0, Councilor Oliver not voting.

On June 22, Councilor Downs emailed City Solicitor Giuliani “The Committee would like to know if it would be possible to word the ordinance change to reflect that only items in the field (stop signs already installed, for instance, or parking limitations already out on a street) could be corrected so that

the TPR reflected those, but not the reverse (stops signs, etc. that are in the regulations but not in the field) without a full Traffic Council process”.

The Committee adjourned at 8:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Andreae Downs, Chair

City Council Vote (fees) and City Council Recommendations (permits)

TC34-22

- Finance Committee and City Council to **Vote**: Change the Fee for TIGER permits
 - *Finance Committee vote on X/X/22 to increase fee from \$25/year to \$XX/year.*
- PS&T **Recommendation to Traffic Council**: Increase # of TIGER Permits from 150 to 170.
 - 140 TIGER Permits to be distributed via a lottery by the NPD, as done historically.
 - 30 additional TIGER permits to be managed by the HS Administration.
 - 25/30 of these additional TIGER permits will be **annual stickers**, equivalent to the 140 permits listed above, except that they will be assigned by the HS Administration to specific students. HS Administration will specify students over the school year to the NPD. NPD will subsequently process and manage these TIGER permits and collect the fee, as set by City Council.
 - 5/30 of these additional TIGER permits will be **transferable placards** and will be retained by the HS Administration and distributed to students on an as-needed basis for short-term use. 5 Transferable TIGER placards will be created and managed by the HS Administration and can be used to park **on-campus(?)** or in student TIGER-parking areas, will be called TIGER permits, and will have no fee.
- Parking by TIGER permit (without paying on school days) in the Austin Lot to continue as an ongoing trial, until City Council determines whether to make this trail permanent.
- Pick-Up / Drop-Off zone on Lowell Avenue to continue as part of ongoing trial.