



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council Traffic and Parking Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, February 26, 2024

6:00 PM

This meeting was held via Zoom, was called to order by Chair Sait at 6:00 pm and adjourned at 6:47 pm with a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Wilson, Pineda Neufeld, Sait), none opposed, and none absent.

Others present: Brad Rawson – Director of Mobility Division, Mayor’s Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD), Natasha Frazier – Assistant Clerk of Committees.

Roll Call

Present: Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait, Ward Seven City Councilor Judy Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Jake Wilson

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [23-1780](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the Traffic and Parking Committee Meeting of November 27, 2023.

RESULT: ACCEPTED
AYE: Ward Five City Councilor Sait, Ward Seven City Councilor Pineda Neufeld and City Councilor At Large Wilson

2. Order (ID # [24-0171](#))
By Councilor Strezo
That the Director of Mobility and the Director of Parking discuss if and where additional Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) walking routes and ADA parking spots have been designated for visitors to the High School, City Hall and the Central Library while Highland Avenue construction is underway and while current routes and ADA parking spots may be inaccessible due to construction.

Brad Rawson, Director of Mobility in OSPCD, provided an overview of the existing inventory of ADA parking on and around the Central Hill campus, which includes City Hall, the high school, and Central Library. He described the existing inventory as comprising 15 ADA designated parking spaces, 7 of which are directly proximate to the front entrance of City Hall. There are also several accessible curb ramps to get to the sidewalk level, as well as a ramp to get into the City Hall building. Additionally, there are 3 designated curbside spaces, which are located on School Street between the Green Line station and Highland Avenue, behind City Hall. There are also 5 designated spaces closer to the library: 1 is on the corner of Highland and Vinal streets, and 4 are located closer to Highland and Walnut to provide access to the library. Mr. Rawson noted that while these spaces may have been designed to ensure access to specific buildings, users of these spaces may use the spaces for any destination, so long as they possess an ADA placard. These spaces are designated ADA placard only spaces 24/7, and enforcement is conducted to ensure the spaces are not misused.

Councilor Wilson inquired as to whether there is a difference in meaning between the terms “ADA Parking” and “Accessible Parking” - or whether they can be used interchangeably. For an official definition, Mr. Rawson deferred to the City’s ADA Coordinator and the Director of Engineering. According to Mr. Rawson, there are differences in meaning between these two terms. An accessible parking space includes specific dimensional requirements for large striped buffers and setbacks to ensure that vehicle lifts and doors of various types can be accommodated. He states that truly accessible parking spaces have larger footprints than standard curbside parking space governed by placards. Councilor Wilson will direct any necessary follow-up to the subject matter experts.

Mr. Rawson noted that City staff regularly monitor ADA-only spaces to understand use patterns of both ADA-only and non-ADA-only spaces. He stated that at present, the data collected indicates that there generally is not a need for more ADA parking spaces in this location beyond what is available at present. He noted that while there are certainly times when demand for spaces exceeds supply, regular monitoring indicates an appropriate utilization ratio, in which the ADA parking spaces are generally at 50% capacity during peak hours. The study will be repeated this Spring.

Chair Sait inquired as to how ADA parking space usage is monitored, how often the studies occur, and when the most recent data is from. Mr. Rawson explained that there is a Spring and Fall data collection cycle in which representative weekdays are selected for monitoring during peak hours, from 6am to 9am. The goal is to understand the conditions for parking in the neighborhood, and what happens as school begins and the workforce arrives to their worksite.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

3. Order
 (ID # [24-0170](#))

By Councilor Strezo

That the Director of Parking establish alternative drop off zones, including reverse direction drop off zones, in front of the City Hall concourse from the hours of 7:30 AM to 8:15 AM and 2:15 PM to 3:00 PM while portions of Highland Avenue are under active construction near the High School, City Hall and the Central Library.

Brad Rawson, Director of Mobility in OSPCD, shared his interpretation of the Order from Councilor Strezo and will follow-up with Councilor Strezo to confirm his interpretation of the Order is correct. Mr. Rawson’s understanding of the Order from Councilor Strezo is that it seeks to ensure the City is preserving critical ADA parking access during future construction on Highland Avenue, should construction be impactful. Mr. Rawson described the construction project as the partial paving of Highland Avenue, which is scheduled for 2024. This may result in current ADA parking spaces being unavailable for 1 to 2 days, as an estimate, and he stated that the City will ensure alternative ADA parking spaces are available on Highland Avenue during the anticipated construction period.

Mr. Rawson stated that there are 15 ADA-only parking spaces around the campus. Seven of these spaces are off street, and eight are on street. Mr. Rawson’s

understanding is that construction management does have an access plan in place during the construction period, and will follow-up to confirm this with the Committee.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

4. Order
(ID # [24-0088](#))

By Councilor Ewen-Campen and Councilor Wilson

That the Director of Engineering install robust, permanent pedestrian crossing signage at the intersection of Vinal and Highland Avenues, given the importance of this crosswalk for High School students and many others.

Brad Rawson, Director of Mobility in OSPCD, thanked Councilors Ewen-Campen and Councilor Wilson for their advocacy on this matter. Mr. Rawson stated that City staff are working with schools, staff, and interdepartmental partners towards short term additional safety measures at this intersection.

He stated that the City has learned that signs do not change behavior, as it is a very common behavior for drivers to turn left onto Highland Avenue eastbound when leaving the concourse, despite a “no left turn” sign that seeks to prevent this. Mr. Rawson stated that the sign by itself is not enough, and that the City is exploring changes to the built environment itself in order to slow down turning traffic and through traffic. Mr. Rawson stated that the City’s is also trying to achieve the goals of slowing down traffic and for traffic to yield to pedestrians in the short-term, until the City can do a bigger reconstruction of Highland Avenue that would also seek to address these goals in the long-term. According to Mr. Rawson, the best short-term solution the City can offer is installing flexible delineators, or “flex posts” this Spring over the double yellow central dividing line, which will be installed this Spring. Mr. Rawson noted that Spring is a seasonal requirement for successful installation of the flex posts.

Councilor Wilson asked if the flex posts will physically block lefthand turns. Mr. Rawson stated that flex posts seek to influence turning movements from Highland to Vinal, and that in his opinion it is unlikely the flex posts will physically block access along the center line and prohibit vehicles from exiting the concourse to go eastbound on Highland Avenue. However, he defers to the interdepartmental staff for an official answer to this question. He reiterated that this is a short-term solution, and that in the long-term the City is looking into constructing raised cross-walks up and down the corridor to slow and discourage through traffic. Mr. Rawson noted that speed is what kills, and speed is associated with failure to yield to pedestrians and cross-walks.

Councilor Wilson asked if it is necessary to wait to build the raised cross-walks until the Highland Avenue redesign project construction, and asked if the City could build the raised cross-walks before then. Councilor Wilson also sought confirmation that the Highland Avenue redesign project is scheduled for 2025.

Mr. Rawson stated that raised cross-walks are more complicated to design and build than speed humps. He does not anticipate the City will be able to build raised cross-walks before the scheduled Highland Ave redesign project. He stated that per the Capital Investment Plan (CIP), the engineering processes begin in fiscal year

2025, dependent on update to the CIP.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked Mr. Rawson about the impacts of the flex posts on emergency vehicles, and whether the City is working with first responders to ensure they will have access on Highland Avenue.

Mr. Rawson confirmed they are coordinating interventions with first responders, including sharing designs and drawings with them, as well as using modeling to see how large vehicles navigate turns and street widths.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

5. Order
(ID # [24-0041](#))

By Councilor Strezo and Councilor Pineda Neufeld

That the Director of Parking ensure that the parking meters in front of the Tufts Administration Building (TAB) are reserved for TAB building visitors with disability placards, Mondays through Fridays from 9:00 AM - 2:00 PM, to assist with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility.

Brad Rawson, Director of Mobility in OSPCD, presented an overview of the off street parking resources the City has been able to organize and prioritize since the City Council approved the lease for the Tufts Administration Building (TAB) at 167 Holland Street last year. The City is working to prioritize access for ADA placard users, as well as for all visitors to the Council on Aging at this site. Mr. Rawson stated that the off-street parking resources offer the best opportunities for users at the TAB building. Whether possessing an ADA placard or not, this off-street space is a better solution than the on-street space on Holland. Mr. Rawson further explained that there have been a series of ADA-only parking spaces in privately owned TAB parking lots for many years. Mr. Rawson presented a map to the Council outlining existing parking spaces and designations by the TAB. Mr. Rawson recommended continuing to direct users to the appropriate spaces as outlined on the map, whether they are arriving with an ADA placard or not. Note: the map consists of parking designations for ADA placard holders and non-ADA placard holders.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld stated that the signage in this area is small and confusing, even for people with access to a mobile phone. Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked what the signage will be for these spots. Mr. Rawson stated that the Tufts signage is tricky for users to navigate and not as clear as the City would like for it to be. The City has worked with Tufts during the leasing agreement process, Tufts allowed the City to use City signage, which the City tested for font size and clarity of language. Mr. Rawson stated that if current signage is leading to confusion or citations, that the City is happy to work with the parking team and Tufts to consider additional changes. Councilor Pineda Neufeld stated that she will walk to the lot tomorrow to see if she has additional suggestions.

Councilor Wilson inquired about the van fleet that is regularly parked in the hourly paid daily visitor parking and asked if it is possible for Tufts to move them elsewhere. Mr. Rawson stated that the vans visible in the map on Holland Street are owned and operated by a local nonprofit with a longstanding history in the community and have been leasing the spots from Tufts for a long time. The nonprofit's fleet operations partially run out of this location. Mr. Rawson stated that in a recent visit to this area, he noticed there were fewer than what is pictured.

Councilor Wilson stated that he typically notices a lot of vans there, and they are parked in spots labeled hourly visitor parking. He figured that perhaps the vans could be moved somewhere where parking is not a premium.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked Mr. Rawson whether the Handicap Accessible Parking on the side of Bright Horizons Daycare overrules daycare drop off & pickup parking. Mr. Rawson stated that his understanding is that these ADA parking spaces are 24/7 ADA parking spaces, and not available for preschool or daycare pickup or drop-off unless parking with a placard. Historically, other spaces have been reserved for Bright Horizons preschool. He stated that he would need to doublecheck though.

Councilor Pineda Neufeld asked if there is a handicap accessible entrance on the side of Bright Horizons building where the ADA parking is, or if someone, potentially in a wheelchair, would need to go around the building to the front entrance to enter it. Mr. Rawson stated that those using ADA parking seeking to access the building would need to go around the side of the building to enter at the front entrance, as there is not an accessible entrance on the side of the building as he recalls. He stated that there are other destinations near the ADA designated parking spaces that could be important to users of those parking spaces. Councilor Pineda Neufeld stated that she is asking this because there is a large sidewalk that is raised from a tree root, and she has tripped on it before as an able-bodied person, and it is a tough spot to put accessible parking. Mr. Rawson noted this and will follow-up.

Chair Sait outlined follow-up items by Director Rawson: Check in on ADA parking to see if available during daycare hours, follow up on current signage quality, follow up on sidewalk issue raised by Councilor Pineda Neufeld.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

- T&P - 2024-02-26 TAB parking regulations (with 24-0041)