

**PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING
PARKING CAPACITY AND STRATEGIC PLAN
October 3, 2018**

Attendance: Carrie Krasnow, Vice President/Principal, Walker Associates
Brian Bartholomew, Senior Consultant, Walker Associates

Staff: Kathryn Hebert, Director of Transportation Parking and Mobility
Michael Yeosock, Assistant Director Transportation Parking and
Mobility
Vanessa Valadares, DPW Senior Civil Engineer

Others: Michael Harden, Vice Chairman, Norwalk Parking Authority
Eric Rains, Norwalk Parking Authority
Tom Vetter, Norwalk Parking Authority
Jud Aley, Norwalk Parking Authority
George Tsiranides, Norwalk Common Council
Jim Anderson
Luis Solis
Diane Cece
Roberta DiBiscglie
Jim Blair
Johnnie Weldon
Michael Maguire
Gail Lasardo
Bill LaRose
Barbara LaRose
Jackie Lightfield
Debora Goldstein
Darlene Young
Lynn Naring
Samuel Pride

Ms. Hebert came forward and introduced herself and said that she is the Director of Transportation Parking and Mobility and thanked everyone for coming out to discuss the citywide parking capacity and strategic plan. She provided a brief background of the plan and said a few years ago collectively they were being approached by local business's

requesting assistance for the increasing demand in parking citywide. It had become clear we could not take each request individually and would need to look at it more comprehensively and parking is a vital part of the city and it is critical to the economic development in helping to drive business. She said the goal is to create a comprehensive plan that will provide the city and the Parking Authority near and long-term solutions, and to also create the framework that will help articulate and clarify a vision and approach to parking in Norwalk. The development of the parking plan works jointly with the POCD and the Redevelopment Agency outlined plans for the city's future, and with Norwalk Tomorrow which was created a year ago as a collaborative communication platform where updated information is posted and comments are received for all three plans, and she encouraged anyone who has not yet signed up for Norwalk Tomorrow to do so. She said that Mayor Rilling had appointed a steering committee at the end of 2016 to help direct the elements and goals of the parking study, and the Parking Authority had gone through an RFP process and received and interviewed several consultants through a selection committee and Walker Consultants were chosen to perform a study and provide recommendations and are pleased to be partnering with them on this very critical citywide plan. She said that this meeting is informal and is an opportunity to hear from the public about parking in Norwalk and the input is very critical to the parking study.

Ms. Krasnow said within the study they are trying to get a broad overview of the parking system, and help the city plan for efficiency in the current times and to grow into the future as the city grows and changes. She said in part of what they are looking at is how the supply and demand works, where parking is in short supply, where this is an ample supply and where things can be adjusted to make things better for the people who use the parking system. She said they are also looking at the ways the parking is managed and different things that can help create solutions to the problems that are seen and to help balance and create efficiently to create a high function parking system.

Mr. Bartholomew asked what the overall opinion of parking is and the overall parking experience.

Mr. Solis asked if parking is accumulative for on street parking in the Wall Street area.

Ms. Hebert said that is not the policy and there is a two hour limit but we do not want people jockeying their cars around and we want to encourage turnover, but also want to be sure there is enough parking for the business community and that will be a part of the scope for the study. Ms. Lightfield asked if the Wall and Main Street areas have been divided into different zones. Ms. Hebert said "yes" and it is very difficult to create turnover on the street and it is absolutely necessary for the business community and the

current policy needs to be reviewed and evaluated because we do not want to ticket customers that are coming for businesses.

Ms. Goldstein stated the things she finds disturbing about the parking in Norwalk are when you are making a decision on where to park you don't know how much you will have to pay, and that most municipal lots give some indicator as to what the cost per hour to park is and none of the signage does that. She said it is intrusive to track people parking by their license plate and it is intimidating, she said she also finds the coinless technology discriminatory for people who do not have smartphones or relationships with their banks that allow them to do this and there should be a way to have the ability to pay with cash because everyone who uses the business and the parking should be treated the same regardless of their method of payment.

Ms. Cece stated that the plan was originally called the citywide parking study and plan and that it would be helpful to explain what the geographic area is that this covers, and what the impact will be in residential neighborhoods, and whether the plan will address residential on street parking in neighborhoods or if it will only address metered and paid parking. She said that it would be helpful that the feedback that they have gotten is shared and what is being focused on. She said that she is concerned that the goal of the plan will be used to inform the POCD as well as neighborhood updates and that should be the other way around and it should be the city's vision of the master plan and development inform and dictate going forward what would be the best scope for parking, and how it is managed throughout the city. Mr. Bartholomew said that they are doing the study in tandem with the POCD and the RDA and the recommendations and to date they have made no recommendations have been made and they are still in the information gathering mode.

Ms. Weldon stated that she lives in Liberty Square and she also has property of West Avenue and said that there are already things currently in existence and there is only parking on one side of Orchard Street and asked if that is temporary or permanent. Mr. Bartholomew said they will be looking at that and all policies and procedures that are currently in place. Ms. Weldon said there are now residents that are scrambling for parking and there is a big issue with parking and people are very frustrated. She stated that she has lived in Liberty Square for 11 years and she understands they want to beautify Liberty Square which she has not problem with because beautification is a beautiful thing but her issue is now they are looking for residents to pay for parking and she thinks that is terrible.

Ms. DiBiscglie said that she is a resident of East Norwalk and she also owns and operates a small business in East Norwalk and she tries to have car free days as much as possible but the sidewalks are dangerous and incredibly unsafe. She also said there are many multifamily homes in East Norwalk which creates a parking situation and there is a parking lot at Veterans Park that is never open. She said in her opinions the parking situation in Norwalk is dismal and there are other cities that issue residential permit parking and she strongly urges to consider this.

It was stated that the parking at the libraries and post office is horrendous and if the city expects people to walk the sidewalks are a big deal and the sidewalks in front of homeowners and businesses who should maintain the sidewalks don't so they sidewalks can't be used. Mr. Bartholomew said that he understands that the city has taken some action in increasing the parking at the main library and asked if that has improved the situation at that library at all. It was stated that it has improved slightly. Mr. Bartholomew asked if the Yankee Doodle Garage is too far to park for the library. It was stated that it is probably too far.

Mr. Maguire said he owns a business at 64 Wall Street and there is a lack of a grace period for metered parking. He said if he is parked he is in the area transacting business in Norwalk and suggested premium parking or a reduced rate rather than issuing parking tickets, and almost of people have stopped going to SONO because of the parking practices. He said retail needs parking spaces and that meters are needed to be back in the Wall Street area which would kick start retail.

Ms. Goldstein suggested benchmarking the parking rates to other municipalities as well as benchmarking the parking lots to the public facilities. She said she had once benchmarked what Norwalk was charging per hour and she had looked at the New York City parking rates and we were charging the same amount per hour for on street parking as Brooklyn. She said the idea of how far people need to walk if they were to park at a facility is not always the factor, and if people are spending money on an activity and now they have to pay for parking they are going to go someplace else where they don't have to pay to park because it's a premium on the activity regardless of how close or far away the garage is it costs money. Mr. Bartholomew said that a rate analysis will also be done. Mr. Maguire said that when the benchmarking is done that it be compared to the grand list.

Ms. Lasardo stated that it will be a hardship for the business owners, tenants and residents at Liberty Square just to install 58 parking spaces give them immunity and let them make a living.

Mr. Bartholomew asked if there is any value to improvements within the downtown area for bicycle use. Ms. DiBiscglie said in her opinion the way that it exists now is pretty good and funds would be much better allocated for sidewalks with the exception of additional bike racks. Mr. Bartholomew asked if complaints have been made to the city regarding sidewalks. Ms. DiBiscglie said “yes” and the issue is enforcement and accountability that to her is very frustrating and it has been an issue for her for over 12 years.

Mr. Anderson said that in the recommendations that the signs should be clear and easy to read.

Ms. Lasardo said that Ms. Valadares was quoted in the Norwalk Hour regarding the drainage project at Liberty Square that two electrical conduits and two pay stations will be installed and asked why that is. Mr. Bartholomew said that after all of the information is gathered that will meet with the city and the Parking Authority and go through all of the issues. Ms. Valadares said that everything that is being done is to envision the future but how it will be managed will be decided by the Parking Authority which has not yet been decided. Ms. Hebert said there will be another meeting with the Parking Authority to discuss Liberty Square.

Ms. Cece asked what the geographic area that the study will address. Mr. Bartholomew said the scope of their work it states citywide. Ms. Hebert said that when this was discussed in 2016 it was clear and would not be limited to what the Parking Authority manages and would look at other areas in the city because there are a lot of parking needs citywide and they are not just limited to the urban core or the railroad stations. Ms. Cece asked if the Parking Authority will be taking over parking in the beaches and in the parks. Ms. Hebert said there is no plan that she is aware of that the Parking Authority will be taking over the beach or recreation area in the city as of today. Ms. Cece also said in other municipalities that have projects of the size of Liberty Square that a moratorium is put in place and this is perhaps should have been done for Liberty Square in absence of the study being completed.

Ms. Young stated she would like to know what the scope of work is and what the area is and she lives in an area that is residential in South Norwalk and it is currently going through a major overhaul. She said that they have issues with not enough parking, on-street parking, one way streets and the traffic lights are horrible. She asked if the Parking Authority will be managing on-street parking in residential areas. Ms. Hebert said that is something that Walker will be evaluating. Ms. Young said on Hanford Place where there

is a development that the Redevelopment Agency had built and there are on street parking meters and she asked how you can live on a street that has parking meters.

Mr. Solis said that he own property and he provides parking for his tenants but what about the rental properties that have multiple people living in one house. He said that parking is a huge issue and we need to figure it out and clean it up and that is the issue.

Mr. Bartholomew asked there would be any value to a shuttle system circulating in the business district. Mr. Solis said absolutely as well as a wheel trolley. Ms. DiBiscglie said it would also be good at the train stations. Ms. Hebert said that will be looked into comprehensively from a mobility point of view. Ms. DiBiscglie suggested that it be done before all of the development as opposed to after. Mr. Price said that a trolley or circulator would be a great service for Norwalk.

Mr. Bartholomew asked the business owners if a lot of their clients are using Lyft and Uber Mr. Solis said a lot of the younger crowd does but maybe if there was an inner transportation service we would not have all of the parking issues that we do. Mr. Anderson said that the CITI bike program that is in New York is a great program.

Ms. Cece said that most of the commuter lots are empty in the evening hours as well as on the weekends and she suggested that the Parking Authority offer free parking to the business owners so people can go to the business's and the restaurants at night. Mr. Maguire also suggested angled parking in the Wall Street area.

Ms. Naring said she lives in the South Norwalk area and the problem she is having is the people who do not want to pay for parking are moving into the residential neighborhoods and it is taking all of the residential parking. She said that business owners are also leaving their commercial vehicles on the street taking up the residential parking spaces and one has been there for over five weeks. Ms. Lightfield said that there is no ordinance that makes the distinction between commercial or privately owned trucks or cars and if they are legally registered they have the right to park on the street. Ms. Hebert said that will be looked into.

Ms. Cece suggested that during snow removal operations that the snow is not pushed into parking spaces. Ms. Goldstein also said that during plowing of the East Norwalk Railroad Station that snow is being plowed into the handicapped parking spaces.

Mr. Bartholomew asked the business owners if they think there are a significant number of loading zones throughout the city. Mr. Blair said "no" not in Liberty Square and there

are trucks unloading all day long and that it is a tough situation but the truckdrivers are accommodating when people need to get of their parking spaces.

Ms. Cece suggested looking at two of the fundamental reasons they may be impacting a lot of the parking issues in the neighborhoods and around the train stations, and look at reducing the illegal commuter parking and housing where there are too many tenants and see if that would free up a substantial amount of parking.

Mr. Blair said that parking in Norwalk would be a lot better if it were reasonable in price and people at night want to use the downtown areas but they do not want to have to pay for parking and they can go to a mall or across town and park for free. He said the signage in the downtown lots is also very confusing and there is nothing that is simple about parking and there is no standard throughout Norwalk. He said he owns a business in Liberty Square and there is nowhere else to park and people go to them and only them and it is like a strip mall and people are coming in to do something and then leave. He said by installing the paystations the city will make money and he did not think that's what the parking was about, and he thought it was to move vehicles and that does not seem to be the case and parking should be free and not constantly being ticketed. He said that the paid parking will create a problem for the business's but the construction will be a major problem and between the two will devastate them and the city should think about that prior to moving forward. He also said that once the Walk Bridge project is complete in the next five years the city will most likely have to redo the lot again and the city should think about that because that is a waste of money. Ms. Cece said that Walker is in a unique position address this ahead of any plan and suggested they devote some effort to this issue because the city is pushing ahead with this project and it will have a great impact of the area. Ms. DiBiscggle said the city should also be urged to do a strategic analysis before decisions are made that will have a huge impact. Mr. LaRose asked if Liberty Square will still be closed for 30 days. Ms. Hebert said "yes" and the drainage and paving project is already in place to install the paystations and lighting. Ms. Lightfield said that the city had installed parking meter poles in the Wall Street area over 15 years ago and they have yet to put the meters in, and what they are talking about is installing a conduit in the eventually that they need to put in some sort of paystation and Liberty Square has numerous parking problems in addition to flooding and she is sure the Parking Authority will hold a special meeting about Liberty Square parking issues and needs at some point and share that information.

Ms.Hebert thanked everyone for attending and for their input.

