

**CITY OF NORWALK
TRAFFIC AUTHORITY
REGULAR MEETING
JULY 20, 2009**

ATTENDANCE: Daniel O'Connor, Chair; Mayor Richard A. Moccia;
Peter Torrano

STAFF: Police Chief Harry Rilling

OTHERS: Atty. Frank Zullo, Timothy Sheehan, Redevelopment
Agency Director; Munro Johnson, Redevelopment Agency;
Hal Alvord, DPW Director; Michael Nickodem, Lucky
Cricket Productions

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman O'Connor called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

PUBLIC HEARING (WALL STREET PROJECT)

Chairman O'Connor asked if any member of the public present would like to speak in favor of the project. No one came forward. He then asked if there was anyone present who would like to speak against the project. No one came forward.

Atty. Zullo, who represents Fairfield County Bank, then spoke. He said that the last time that he and his clients were present there was a difference of opinion as to whether the angled parking on Wall Street would require the drivers to back into the space or just pull in. He said that the bank is not concerned with whether the spaces would be pull in or back in, but wished to express their concerns that this be done quickly so that the bank customer would have access to parking.

Mr. Timothy Sheehan, the Director of the Norwalk Redevelopment Agency, came forward and apologized for not being present at the last meeting when the issue was on the agenda. He said that he was present to convey some of the principals that were behind the reconfiguration of the intersection.

One of the issues that came up during the early planning stages was the realignment and that the islands at the intersection of Mott Avenue, Belden Street, West Avenue and Wall Street were a hold over from horse and buggy days. From a traffic flow standpoint and a pedestrian stand point; these are not something that are helpful. The realignment that was presented at the last meeting was an attempt to begin to better address the organization and alignment of those islands.

One of the underlying concerns was the existing parking and it became obvious that there would be a loss of parking with the traditional parallel parking, so the Agency began to consider angled parking, which would allow for a net increase in parking spaces. This plan requires the bank to have angled parking in front of its facility, After considering all the factors, the angled parking was determined to be a positive issue because of the increase in parking, improved traffic flow and pedestrian safety.

Mr. Dick Linnartz, DPW engineer, came forward and exhibited an aerial view of the intersection under discussion. He said that DPW will be reconfiguring and upgrading all the intersections from Cross and Belden to Martin Luther King Blvd. The intersection under consideration is being addressed individually and will not be covered by the grant funding.

The project will involve eliminating the high speed right turns, eliminating the right turn out of Belden and numerous safety issues, including safe pedestrian crossings.

Mr. Linnartz then reviewed the parking situation, which is currently comprised of 27 spaces. Following the reconfiguration, it will consist of 32 angled spaces. Without angled parking, the number of spaces drops to 24. This allows the merchants to gain retail parking in front of their stores and will give the City more green space, along with traffic and pedestrian safety.

Chairman O'Connor asked if the First Taxing District had been contacted about this. Mr. Linnartz said that they had and that the plan could not be implemented until the final agreement is signed. Mr. Sheehan explained that the Redevelopment Agency was in the process of working with the First District on these issues.

Mr. Linnartz then reviewed the actual configuration of the intersection on the aerial photograph with the Commissioners.

Chairman O'Connor said that he had already requested comments from the public twice and was asking for the third time. No one came forward.

**** MAYOR MOCCIA MOVED TO CLOSE THE PUBLIC HEARING.**

**** MR. TORRANO SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The public hearing on the Wall Street Intersection project closed at 4:15 p.m.

**** MAYOR MOCCIA MOVED TO SUSPEND THE REMAINING TRAFFIC AGENDA TO MOVE TO THE REGULAR POLICE COMMITTEE AGENDA BECAUSE OF THE NUMBER OF RESIDENTS PRESENT.**

- ** MR. TORRANO SECONDED.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The Commission returned to the Traffic Authority Agenda at 4:45 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES
(June 17, 2009)

- ** MAYOR MOCCIA MOVED THE MINUTES OF JUNE 17, 2009.**
- ** COMMISSIONER TORRANO SECONDED.**
- ** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF JUNE 17, 2009 AS SUBMITTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

PERMIT PARKING (TAYLOR FARM) REQUEST FOR TOW AWAY ZONE

Chief Rilling reviewed the situation at Taylor Farm and pointed out that the Permit Parking area has a \$25.00, but that having it designated as a Tow Away Zone also would deter people from using it as public parking.

- ** MAYOR MOCCIA MOVED TO APPROVE THE CREATION OF A TOW AWAY ZONE IN THE PERMIT PARKING AREA AT TAYLOR FARM.**
- ** COMMISSIONER TORRANO SECONDED.**
- ** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

LUCKY CRICKET PRODUCTIONS ROAD CLOSURE REQUEST
(Highview Avenue between George Avenue and Overbrook Road)

Mayor Moccia said that he had asked Lt. Resnick to insure that the neighbors were contacted about this. Mr. Nickodem said that this was in the process of being done. He said that this shoot was for additional photograph and that the last time they had done this, they were able to leave by 3:00 a.m. and there were no complaints.

- ** COMMISSIONER TORRANO MOVED TO APPROVE THE ROAD CLOSURE REQUEST BY LUCKY CRICKET PRODUCTIONS FOR HIGHVIEW AVENUE BETWEEN GEORGE AVENUE AND OVERBROOK ROAD ON TUESDAY, JULY 28, 2009 FROM 6:00 P.M. TO APPROXIMATELY 4:00 A.M. WITH A RAIN DATE OF JULY 28, 2009.**

Mr. Nickodem said that this was the second movie that he had done in Norwalk and that the City was incredibly supportive.

PUBLIC HEARING (WALL STREET PROJECT) CONT'D

**** MAYOR MOCCIA MOVED TO APPROVE THE RECONFIGURATION OF THE PARKING ON WALL STREET AS PRESENTED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS.**

The Mayor said that there had been some concerns expressed about the back in parking, which is new to Norwalk. Commissioner Torrano said that he had just received a report that indicated that most accidents happened when backing up. Commissioner Torrano said that this would be approved because of the angled parking. Mr. Linnartz reviewed the details of how this would be done with the Commission. Chief Rilling said that one of the problems could be when someone wishes to park, if the car behind them is right on their bumper, there will no longer be two lanes of traffic so that the vehicle in the rear can go around the vehicle wishing to park. Commissioner Torrano commented that in two years, if this reconfiguration is not working for the City, it can be changed.

Mayor Moccia said that for the record, all the businesses in the area have been notified of this change and there were no discussions. He stated that there was no one from the public present at the public hearing to raise objections and that Fairfield County Bank has been very cooperative with the City.

**** MR. TORRANO SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

DOT PROJECT TO WIDEN EAST AVENUE AND REBUILD RAILROAD BRIDGE

Mr. Alvord came forward and displayed an aerial view of East Avenue from the northern most tip of the East Avenue Historic Cemetery to the intersection of Colony Street and East Avenue. He explained that the DOT would be replacing the Railroad Bridge on East Avenue. Originally, the plan was to replace the bridge in kind, which would mean that the situation would remain unchanged for another fifty or so years. The City was able to convince the State that the underpass needed to be improved by regarding the road and widening the bridge. Currently there are 10 foot lanes, and some sections that are four lanes, which narrow down to three lanes and narrow again down to two at the underpass. There is no single lane where a vehicle could enter a lane and remain in that lane to pass under the Railroad bridge. The current standard width of lanes is 12 feet, and the City will be widening the current lanes to 11 feet with a two foot shoulder.

Original concerns were expressed about the taking of property. The project was designed and cannot be reduced further while maintaining four lanes of traffic. Apparently, the bigger concern now is the grassy strips, trees, paving and sidewalks.

Mr. Alvord said that there is a growing congestion problem at the Railroad Bridge. A traffic study was done in 1996, with a count of 16,000 average vehicles traveling that section of the study. A projection was done at that time that by 2015, the traffic would increase to 21,000 daily. Counters were put out several weeks ago and the count registered at 21,000 plus already. Some days were up to 30,000, but the traffic has already surpassed 21,000.

The DOT working with Public Works has analyzed a number of scenarios, including a two lane scenario, a three lane scenario, and a four lane scenario. The only scenario that allows the opportunity to deal with the volume of congestion is the four lane scenario.

Mayor Moccia said that his observation was that with all the lane shifting, it was dangerous. He said that he did not believe that making this section of the roadway into four lanes would be a negative issue. He said that he did not believe that people would be getting off at East Avenue just because the road was widened to four lanes. Either the drivers were going to get off onto East Avenue because they had a reason to, or they would continue on their way. The beach visitor numbers have increased because of the concerts, the Boat show and various other events. This section of the roadway needs to be safer. Wherever it is possible to put green strips is fine, but safety is paramount. He said that he was satisfied and the DOT was satisfied. While there have been some vocal arguments against this project, there are also several hundred signatures on a petition supporting the project.

Chairman O'Connor said that he felt that it was necessary and that there was always traffic on East Avenue. In the summer months, when there are festivals, the traffic can be a nightmare and the stretch between Myrtle Street and the Railroad is very hazardous with all the lane shifts.

Commissioner Torrano said that he uses that section of the road frequently and was happy to know that the project would finally be done. He added that he had been a Council representative from that area in the past. The one question he had was regarding the amount of area that the roadway would be expanded. Mr. Alvord said that the total expansion would be eight feet, four feet on each side. This would allow for an increase of one foot in the lanes and a two foot shoulder on each side. He added that it would probably be possible to have more grass strips within the City right of way, in this area than currently exist. There will be a challenge between Raymond Terrace and Myrtle because of the easements on the east side in order to moved the area back. The city has a free tree planting program for the trees located on private property. Other trees that are taken down can be replanted. Mr. Alvord said that the City would like to put the utilities underground because the poles have to be moved anyway. This would also allow for historic street lighting. DPW is still exploring the possibilities.

Commissioner Torrano said that public safety had to be paramount. Mr. Alvord agreed. He added that the original plan called for 72 foot wide roadway, which would have resulted in the taking of property. The current plan fits within the city right of way, other than the location of some easements. However, one group at the most recent meeting where there was public participation was advocating exercising eminent domain to put the grassy strips in. He said that there were things that could be done to restore greenery to make it look even better than today.

Mr. Linnartz then reviewed the safety issues regarding the sideway that currently exists underneath the overpass. He said that the State would be extending the platforms over the underpass, which would allow passengers to exit from all the cars rather than having to move back to the rear cars. Staircases will be added to allow people to exit from one side, go down the stairs, walk under the tracks and return to the platform. With the regrading of the road, a stoplight can be put in at Fort Point Street, along with a crosswalk. This will add greatly to pedestrian safety.

The discussion then moved to the railing along the sidewalk. Mr. Alvord said that he has watched people jump over the railing. Chairman O'Connor asked if the railings could be raised. Mr. Linnartz said that while the City could repair the railing that currently exist, they could not replace them. Doing so would involve installing collapsible railings or crash cushions. Therefore, no railings are proposed.

Commissioner Torrano said that in the papers, it was reported that there were a few vocal people who wanted this broken down into two separate projects. Commissioner Torrano said that he did not see how this could be done. Mr. Alvord said that this discussion had been had with the DOT earlier. While there are two separate project numbers, one for the replacement of the bridge and the second for the roadway improvements, they can't be separated. The DOT told Mr. Alvord that they did not need City support for the bridge. The City went to the DOT and requested the lane increases. If the City isn't committed to improving the road that leads to this, the DOT will just shrug and replace the bridge rather than spending 11.5 million for the improvements. There are other bridges up the line that also need replacement. If this happens, the City will have to live with the same bottleneck situation with the height restrictions for the next fifty odd years.

Commissioner Torrano asked about Fort Point Street. Mr. Alvord said that this project was not easy. The reason that there was no traffic light at Fort Point was because northbound traffic would not be able to see the signal. When the road is regarded, the sight lines will be improved. A light at Fort Point would have to be synchronized with the light at Fitch Street.

**** COMMISSIONER TORRANO MOVED TO SUPPORT THE DOT PROJECT TO WIDEN EAST AVENUE AND REBUILD RAILROAD BRIDGE.
** MAYOR MOCCIA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mayor Moccia asked what the status was regarding the Exit 16 reconfiguration of the traffic lights. Mr. Alvord said that this was being coordinated with the DOT.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MAYOR MOCCIA MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COMMISSIONER TORRANO SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 5:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services