

PARKING AUTHORITY
SPECIAL MEETING VIA ZOOM VIRTUAL VIDEOCONFERENCE AND TELECONFERENCE
APRIL 15, 2020

ATTENDENCE: Richard Brescia, Chairman
Michael Harden, Vice Chairman
Mayor Rilling
Jud Aley
Eric Rains
Tom Vetter

STAFF: Jessica Casey, Chief of Economic and Community Development
Kathryn Hebert, Director, Transportation, Mobility and Parking

OTHERS: Stathis Manousos, LAZ Parking
Rocky Legesse, LAZ Parking

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Brescia called the meeting to order at 4:04PM. He called the roll and everyone listed on the attendance was present via video conference.

Mr. Brescia provided an overview of the meeting and said that it will be a work session to discuss a near and long term plan to cope with COVID-19. He said this meeting is to determine the verbiage for the action that will be taken at the regular Parking Authority meeting which will be held on Wednesday, April 22, 2020.

Mayor Rilling thanked the Parking Authority for serving in this capacity and that they have a challenge before them to make parking as friendly as possible not only to our customers but to our business's. He provided an update on the COVID-19 pandemic and said we are in some challenging times as well as an historic moment, Norwalk had leaped out in front early on for the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the State of Connecticut, and had more positive cases than any other community due to a variety of reason. Stamford has now surpassed Norwalk in the number of cases as has Bridgeport and not far behind is Danbury, Waterbury and New Haven and are seeing the spread move from Fairfield County to other areas where they had few cases if any. He said the latest information he has is that yesterday there were 773 cases in Norwalk and today have 841 so there are 68 new cases today and five more deaths for a total of 41 deaths of our citizens in the City of Norwalk and it is so unfortunate that we see this happening. We are nowhere near out of the woods and he hopes that schools do no reopen on May 20th and will also be looking at cancelling many of the events that are scheduled because the challenge before us is to determine when is the right time to ease back in "normal" or to continue with the restrictions that

have been put in place. New York and Connecticut are leading the charge on what needs to be done and making the tough decisions that have to be made and social distancing is the single most effective way of stopping the spread. When I look at May 20th that perhaps at the very best we may see an easing of some of the restrictions based on what it seen throughout Fairfield County and to make a decision that he feels would be appropriate it would have to be a period of approximately 14 days from the last positive case or maybe longer. He said he knows the businesses are suffering and Ms. Casey is working with Ms. Church and they are working with the local businesses to try and provide resources to sustain them through this very challenging time. He said the Parking Authority has a task ahead to figure out what to do for the month of May and perhaps beyond but said he can't stress strongly enough that we are far from over this situation and the biggest danger we now have is complacency or a false sense of security. He again thanked the Parking Authority for all that they are doing.

Mayor Rilling left the meeting at 4:18PM.

**1. APPROVE THE MINUTES FROM THE SPECIAL PARKING AUTHORITY MEETING
HELD ON TUESDAY, MARCH 24, 2020.**

****MR. HARDEN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES AS SUBMITTED.**

**** MR. ALEY SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

2. DISCUSSION ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19:

a. Parking Count Activity

Mr. Brescia said the Parking Authority has made an impact in trying to help people with the costs regarding parking and will be dealing with that in the future. He said that Mr. Legesse and Mr. Mancuso had done a count on the parking activity. Ms. Hebert provided an overview on the counts and said the team had done occupancy counts between March 25th and April 11th and most of our facilities are underutilized expect for the locations that were identified, and in those areas people were parking over eight hours and have received complaints from the businesses on Knight Street regarding people parking on sidewalks blocking access to their driveways. She said at the other facilities the lengths of stays were less than two hours.

b. Operating Budget

Mr. Brescia said that two budgets were laid out that were put together by Ms. Hebert, Mr. Legesse and Mr. Manousos and they are helpful tools to get an idea of where we are and where we may be going. Mr. Harden said that he had met with staff and some members of the Parking Authority to review the budget and determine how to return to some sense of normalcy and asked Ms. Hebert to review the budgets that were put together. Ms. Hebert said staff has put together a couple of options for the Parking Authority to consider, and were tasked with coming up with a plan based on information and data that we have today through September on the impact of COVID-19 on the Parking Authority operation and budget, and to consider something that will give the community some relief during this time and a recommended recovery plan while at the same time provide essential services. The first option is a reduction in revenue of \$2,736,245.00 that includes the no parking fees for April and May and a recovery period between June and September of 50% of the fees during that time. It also includes expense reductions of \$952,993.00 which includes a decrease in staffing of 39% during April and May. This then gives a net revenue shortfall at the end of \$1,454,383 and does include the net revenue that the Parking Authority had at the end of February of \$614,946. She said that option two is a total revenue reduction of

\$2,365,186. and also includes no parking fees during April and May and a recovery period between June and September of 50% in June; 60% in July; 70% in August and 80% in September. The expense reduction is \$933,596 which includes the 39% decrease in staffing. There is a \$19,397 between the two expense decreases and the difference is due to the calculation from the insurance liability that is driven by revenue collections and option two gives a net revenue shortfall of \$1,102,721. She said the two options are staff's recommendation based on the information and data that we have today.

Mr. Aley said he prefers option two and is somewhat close to what he and Mr. Rains had come up with and is a more gradual implementation of rates which will be helpful to the business's. He said he thinks that option one is too much too soon.

Mr. Rains said one of the challenges is a timeframe and if right now is hopefully the worst of it and there is a lot of pent up activity and people are ready to get back out so he does not see a huge advantage in going too slowly with ramping back up for the Parking Authority if social activity outpaces us to the point where we will then have to ask ourselves questions about enforcement. He said regardless of which version of the plans we decide to choose there is an underlying condition that we need to evaluate closely as we go along to see if we are going too fast or too slow, and the safest thing in his mind right now is to go slower so we are not outpacing the recovery and the option that takes the slower road is the way to go right now but will need a constant reevaluation.

Mr. Vetter said he suspects that we may be looking at June as being a slow time and may end of suspending the paid parking through that month but the Parking Authority will be meeting before then and can reevaluate what steps to take. He said there is going to be a lot of pent up demand and the Parking Authority should not be too generous with the parking reductions at that point.

** Mr. Vetter left the meeting at 4:34PM.

Mr. Harden said what the Parking Authority is doing is coming up with a few scenarios and getting them ready to be in place as well as the discussion on the fund balance and to have a plan based on how this starts to ramp back up.

Mr. Brescia said the impact we can make is helping people deal with the financial impact but the most important thing is the health issue. He said the continuation of no charge should be carried through May as well as is included in the plan that staff had put together. He said that he agrees that June sounds dicey but he is not sure of how pent up the issue is for people who want to come out and go to restaurants. He said he knows there is pent up energy that the restaurants want to open and he feels for them but he thinks it will be done very gradual before people start going into a collegial environment. He said there will be another special meeting held in May prior the regularly scheduled meeting because the Parking Authority will be constantly be reevaluating and will then discuss June and will look at a recovery plan which he thinks is important to move forward.

c. Recovery Plan

Mr. Rains said as he and Mr. Aley have discussed and have agreed there needs to be uniform policies across all areas of the city, and one of the challenges will be with the restaurants in particular because they will recover at different rates and if that is the case there will be an uneven demand for parking so having a uniform policy may be challenging which makes the case for a more gradual rollout as opposed to one that is quicker.

Mr. Aley discussed the chart that he had sent of the percentage of normal parking rates which includes discounting the rate in June and July 75%; in August 50%; September and October 25%; and be back at the full rates in November. He said that he and Mr. Rains had come up with a plan for permit holders that includes if existing permit holders can't afford to pay that they be placed on a wait list, and if someone wants to purchase a new permit it will be at the discounted rates and they are proposing the sooner someone would like to purchase the cheaper it will be and if they wait until November they will be paying the full rate. Mr. Rains also suggested to maintaining pick up and drop off zones along the curb that would be strictly used for delivery drivers or pick up as the parking demands increase as a result of increased business activity.

Mr. Brescia said at the last meeting Mr. Tsiranides had asked if the Parking Authority is planning to do anything for the businesses once the restrictions are lifted. Ms. Casey said she has been working with a number of different businesses mostly so far in coordinating what is available through Federal government and what is available through the state. There is also a unique opportunity through marketing and promotions to help the businesses in the city get elevated so when things are up and running can advocate for them and make sure they are in the best place possible for being successful and having continued success in the future. She said one of the things they are thinking of is the power and opportunity of using Norwalk Now as the marketing promotional base for local restaurants and also a parallel approach which consists of working with a group of people or an agency that can focus on providing city events that are more consistent.

d. Use of NPA Fund Balance to cover budget shortfalls for FYE 20 and first quarter FY 21.

Ms. Hebert said the audited fund balance at the end of fiscal year 2019 is \$2,840, 024 so the shortfall from the options would be covered by that at this point. She said she does not recommend to zero out the fund balance and the Parking Authority would have to approve the use of their fund balance at next week's meeting to be able to use the funds as part of their budget. Mr. Brescia asked if there will need to be a specific number to approve. Ms. Hebert said "yes". Mr. Brescia asked if the number can be added onto in the future if needed. Ms. Hebert said "yes". Mr. Rains asked if some consideration should be given for what Ms. Casey may need from the fund balance to help with some of the events for the recovery. Ms. Hebert said "yes" and that the Parking Authority had originally approved a line item for parking programs of \$ 200,000 so the cash flow between April and September reduces that by 50% so there are still funds available. Mr. Brescia asked if option two was chosen if the fund balance request would be \$1 million dollars. Ms. Hebert said just over that because even though our analysis included a decrease in expenses of close to \$1 million dollars there is not enough revenue to cover the other expenses and she recommend that the Parking Authority as well as staff continue to evaluate with the updated information and data that is received. Mr. Brescia suggested that Ms. Hebert draft a motion for next week's meeting that includes a not to exceed \$1.5 million dollar amount.

3. NEXT MEETING:

Wednesday, April 22, 2020 at 4:00PM (regularly scheduled meeting by Zoom Virtual Video Conference and Teleconference.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. RAINS MOVED TO ADJOURN**

**** MR. ALEY SECONDED THE MOTION**

The meeting adjourned at 5:10PM.