

PARKING AUTHORITY
SPECIAL MEETING
NOVEMBER 18, 2019

ATTENDENCE: Richard Brescia, Chairman
Judd Aley
Eric Rains

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

OTHERS: Rita Azrelyant, Consultant
Buckley Ryan
BJ Lawless
Michael Maguire
Marc Alan
Maribeth Becker
Jay Parisi
Sunilkumar Patel
Socrates Hidalgo
Elsa Peterson-Obuchowski
Matt Carlen
Joseph Anacon
Colin Grotheer
Paola Dragovic
Rene Soto
Ken Raftery

DISCUSSION- PARKING MANAGEMENT- WALL STREET DISTRICT

Mr. Brescia said the Parking Authority will be voting on changes at their regular meeting based on input that was provided by the community.

Mr. Aley said that currently paid parking on the street begins at 8:00AM and he rarely sees anyone parking on the street between 8:00AM and 9:00AM., and he has also noticed over the past few years particularly in South Norwalk coffee shops not being able to stay in business. He said he is proposing that the Parking Authority do a pilot program for six months to change the hours of operation to 9:00AM to see if it would help to diversify the retail restaurant base as well as help the office workers and residents in the area.

Mr. Brescia said there will be no charge for parking in the Wall Street area until January 2020 and wanted to use the month of December as a learning period for both the Parking Authority and the consumers that will be parking in the area. Mr. Rains said that even through there will be no charge for parking during the “breaking in period” they are still asking that there is a two hour turnover for parking as it currently is today. Mr. Brescia said that during the month of December that customers should still be registering their

vehicle at the paystation even though there is not charge or they will be subject to receiving a warning ticket which will state that if this had happened after January they would have received a ticket so that people get used to using the paystations.

Mr. Maguire asked why there is a charge for parking in an area that is not economically mature enough to pay for parking and will only be a negative impact on business. He said the original idea for paid parking was because POKO (Wall Street Place) was going to be in the area but that never materialized so in reality is there really a need for paid parking at this point, and last time there was paid parking in the area it was impacting the profit and loss statements for the retailers. He said wouldn't it be logical to let the retailers be the deciding factor and maybe after there is development in the area implement paid parking because until then it will only impact their profit and losses in a negative way. He said unless the Parking Authority can give a solid answer as to the benefit of paid parking it is not a good idea.

Mr. Ryan said they were never asked about turnover and that had come out in a public forum that the reason for paid parking was for turnover, and he as a restaurant owner wants turnover more than anyone but we don't need parking turnover but need to bring people in and make them comfortable and happy. He said dozens of his customers come through the door and said "whose bright idea was this" and that none of it makes sense. He said that Bank of America will mostly likely now leave the area and there has been a bank at that location for over 40 years so what does that tell you about our town. He said the members of the Parking Authority should stop by his establishment at lunch and see there will only be two to three people there for lunch and they are from the offices upstairs. Mr. Aley asked if that was since the paid parking was implemented. Mr. Ryan said "yes". Mr. Lawless said that this has been a direct impact on their business. Mr. Ryan said there is a dentist in the building that has been there for over 40 years and he will now be moving his practice to Darien.

The question was asked why the sensors are being put back in the road and why they couldn't be used to enforce the two hour limit rather than installing the pay stations. Mr. Lawless said there is not paid parking on the street in any of the surrounding towns. Ms. Hebert said the sensors were not installed for enforcement but were related to activity. Mr. Maguire suggested tabling the paid parking until the retailers say that there is an issue regarding turnover and they will have the data of where the issues are from the sensors.

Mr. Carlin said his yoga studio has been there for just over a year and were just getting business traction and he predicts this will be a 6% hit to their profit and losses so it is a serious impact. He said it is not a turnover thing for them and the area simply needs business and he doesn't see the reality lining up with the motivation.

Mr. Maguire said when you do the calculations for renters the parking fees calculate to \$2.00 per square foot so the Parking Authority is carving that right off of the top for most of the office buildings. He said that goes for SONO as well which are higher because the parking fees are higher and are hurting the values of the grand list.

Mr. Brescia said the plan to put in paid parking and to create turnover had nothing to do with POKO or Wall Street Place and it had started over four's years ago when the Parking Authority had decided to reach out to various communities to find out what can be done and his responsibility at the time was to

work on Wall Street. He said they had spoken to several community leaders including Mr. Maguire and one of the complaints that kept coming where that something needs to be done to create turnover because employees and business owners were parking on the street and not moving. He said by implementing a parking fee as low as it is combined with parking in the Yankee Doodle Garage at a reduced rate of .25 cents an hour for transient parkers and reduced from \$38.00 for \$25.00 for permit parkers was to help create turnover because Wall Street will eventually become an active place.

Ms. Obuchowski asked if there will be any free short term parking spaces created because if not she will take her business to Westport. Mr. Brescia said that will be discussed and that Ms. Casey will present will be done regarding the short term parking.

Ms. Casey presented and said the two things that they have heard consistently are related to curbside management as well as the short term parking and they are looking at flex parking areas so between 9:00AM and 12:00PM would be for loading and unloading zone and between 12:00PM and 9:00AM it would be short term 15 minute free parking. This has been implemented in different municipalities and speaks to curbside management for loading and unloading, but also speaks to the short term need for parking. She said that they have looked at six different areas and 14 parking spaces in total. She said that they have tried to identify different areas in the Wall Street neighborhood where they had implemented the parking, and identify and do at least two spots in any given area with the 15 minute free parking to help turnover, and to help businesses and their customers to get in and out. The objective was to address loading and unloading, the 15 minute free parking and an additional two parking spaces that are incremental.

Mr. Maguire said it doesn't seem as though the economics of the businesses in the area have been addressed which are the most critical pieces and the plan is punitive and no one here thinks it will be positive.

Mr. Soto said this would not help his business's because most of his customers come in after 5:00PM as well as the massage studio. He also said people still think they need to pay for parking and it is a stress from them and asked why there are no signs stating that there is no fee for parking.

Mr. Soto said that he disagrees with the paid parking and it does not benefit the community or the business owners and asked what the city is doing to redevelop the area. He said as a person trying to succeed, and the businesses have been doing a great job to try and redevelop the area and they have sacrificed and he has requested to the Mayor to wait another year or two to implement paid parking in the area. He said the Parking Authority is trying to destroy what they have been trying to do and it's not fair.

Mr. Paris said it seems counterintuitive to him to put paid parking into an area that is trying to be redeveloped and grow and asked why the Parking Authority would do this prior to the area being developed. Mr. Brescia said to create turnover. Mr. Paris said that implies there are so many cars that people can't find parking but that is counterintuitive to this area and the turnover is not an issue so why is paid parking being implemented. Mr. Brescia said that the Parking Authority was informed and had done an analysis that turnover was needed. Mr. Paris asked the attendees how many of them were contacted for the study that said they need turnover and asked if the data was shared with the business owners in the community. Mr. Brescia said obviously it was not shared as it should have been.

Mr. Lawless said that the free parking that was extended until January has not been advertised to the public and he constantly sees people paying for parking. Mr. Brescia said it does state that the parking is free on the screen of the paystations.

Mr. Maguire said that everyone in the room wants the area to become viable and it is premature for parking fees at this point and again suggested tabling the paid parking until the retailers say that there is an issue regarding turnover and help the business's to become successful.

Mr. Paris suggested that the members of the Parking Authority should take a walk around and see how the parking was implemented and on River Street where bollards were installed and then signs were strapped to them which were cut leaving jagged sharp edges right around the height of a child. On the light pole outside of the BJ Ryans Banc House there has been a sign that has come loose for over a month.

Mr. Grotheer stated that he does not necessarily have an issue paying for parking if it is a pleasurable experience but part of his frustration is the investment backing of the neighborhood is not there. It would be one thing if the fees were going back into the neighborhood for sidewalk repairs etc. but that is not the case. Mr. Brescia said prior to this the Parking Authority was involed in community development and had started Norwalk Now and initially were using Parking Authority funds to generate business in both the SONO and Wall Street area and eventually it was expanded beyond that. The Parking Authority is taking some of its funds to put into economic development and Ms. Casey has funds that will be invested in the Wall Street area. Ms. Casey said three weeks ago that Mayor Rilling had made an announcement that \$50,000 would be put into a storefront improvement program and it would be dedicated to the Wall Street area for streetscape improvements, and in addition to that there is a \$1.5 million dollar grant from the state to redo the streets and the sidewalks to create outdoor eating areas and establish streetscape elements between Brook Street and Main Street and she will email everyone what those programs are and they are eligible to everyone in the room. She said as of July 1st that five programs were made available and in the FY 2021 budget they will be requesting an additional \$150,000 to continue to make improvements and the funding from a grant will redo all of the streets, sidewalks and streetscape improvements including the historical lighting. She said she knows if feels like nothing has happened in the Wall Street area but with all of the work she does she thinks of Wall Street each and every day to try and improve and revitalize Wall Street. Mr. Raftery asked about the status of the crosswalk. Ms. Casey said that will be done as part of the grant next construction season and that it was always committed to but it wasn't done because they would have had to rip it back out to only have it reinstalled.

Mr. Rains suggested that there be a continual dialogue and not only when there is a topic like this and the Parking Authority is now under Economic Development and will address most of the frustration but that success will depend on dialogue. He said there is a public participation item on each of the Parking Authority agendas and it would be very helpful and may have bridged the gap between some of the earlier information that was given and today. Mr. Allen said there are three paid parking lots in the area and suggested when the permit renewals are sent to include the meeting information with it. He also said that Terrytown is a great example where there is no paid parking after 6:00PM and there is no reason to have it here until the area is revitalized. Mr. Aley said the plan is to have three hour limits after 6:00PM rather than two hour limits which is the same as it is in SONO.

Ms. Becker said she has lived here for over 20 years and she wants the business's to be there because this is her neighborhood and downtown and it is fragile and very frustrating to watch. Whatever can be done

to support the businesses should be done because those of us who live here want a downtown to go to and that the paid parking should be paused because people will go somewhere else including herself where it is free. She also said there is way too much signage. Mr. Brescia said the Parking Authority is also sensitive to that and they had inherited in both SONO and Wall Street a plethora of signs and the Parking Authority along with Economic Development will work together to find a standard.

Mr. Parisi said that they do not want paid parking on January 1st and the Parking Authority should make a commitment to reverse that and be tabled to the future. Mr. Brescia said that will be decided at a Parking Authority meeting and all of the comments from tonight's meeting will be shared with the members of the Parking Authority prior to the meeting and anyone is welcome to attend the meeting. Mr. Parisi asked when the meeting will be held. Mr. Brescia said on Wednesday, November 20th. Ms. Casey clarified that on the way the meeting will work on Wednesday is that it is an official public meeting and at the beginning of the meeting there is a public comment section and each person has three minutes to comment, but the Parking Authority will not respond so the Parking Authority wanted to hold a meeting tonight with everyone so everyone could be heard for more than three minutes because they know there is certain criteria and restraints on which a public comment section needs to be heard. Mr. Soto said it should not be a Parking Authority decision and it is the business owners who have invested in the area.

Mr. Maguire said he doesn't know of an area on Wall Street where meters were needed to keep people moving and until POKO is developed, and the area is too fragile at this point and asked the Parking Authority to take a stance to do no harm because SONO got harmed in the long run and it impacted the grand list and the type of economic development that happened in SONO. The Wall Street area is one of the last areas in Fairfield County that has mom and pop establishments and this is not the time for this.

Mr. Parisi said that Retro Kitchen a lunch spot open up recently and everyone was very happy to have a place to get lunch in the neighborhood and they were closed within three months.

Mr. Parisi said there is a .35 cent surcharge when using the app which he finds insulting and asked if anyone has looked at doing something along the lines of an Ezpass where it can be preloaded. Mr. Lawless said he receives many complaints from his customers regarding the fee on the app and asked what the fee is for. Mr. Brescia said it is a convenience fee and in the SONO area the use of the app has increased each month and has increased 3000% since the start of the program. Mr. Parisi asked who gets the .35 cents. Mr. Brescia said it goes to the app company.

Mr. Parisi said the Parking Authority had told them that the reason for charging for parking was to create turnover, but everyone in the room is saying that turnover is not an issue so he doesn't understand why the January date to implement paid parking can't be tabled. Mr. Aley said because there are three other commissioners that are not at tonight's meeting that will need to vote. Mr. Parisi asked if there will be a vote at the next Parking Authority meeting to table the paid parking. Mr. Brescia said there will be a discussion.

Ms. Casey said there was a public process in which this meeting was called for because the Parking Authority cares what people think, and there was obviously feedback that had come in several years ago because these ideas don't just come out of nowhere so the idea for paid parking came from somewhere and that idea was looked at for over the past four years. She said there needs to be a continual dialogue

because these are things that are being worked on a day to day basis so if there are changes in ideas they need to know that. Mr. Maguire said early on they had said they were going to need parking meters because there was going to be an apartment complex constructed on Isaac and Wall Street but POKO never developed. She said the Parking Authority members realized that there was some discussion about what was going on with the parking which is the reason this meeting was held, but no decisions will be made at this meeting and the reason this meeting was held was because the Parking Authority cares and wants to hear from everyone. She said at the Parking Authority meeting on Wednesday there will be a discussion amongst all of the members of the Parking Authority to come up with a plan. Mr. Parisi said they will do whatever they need to do to have the paid parking reversed.

Mr. Bresica thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. ALEY MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MR. BRESCIA SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:40PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dilene Byrd