

PARKING AUTHORITY MINUTES

OCTOBER 26, 2005

ATTENDANCE: Urban Mulvehill, Chairman; Stephen Bentkover; Troy Jellerette; Burt Shatz.

STAFF: Katherine Hebert, Administrative Services Manager

OTHERS: Hal Alvord, DPW Director; Kevin Poruban, Common Council

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Mulvehill called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

There were a number of people in attendance who wished to address the Parking Authority in order to continue the previous month's discussion about parking problems in the Webster Street Parking Lot. Mr. Mulvehill stated that, although it was not a public meeting as such, he would allow members of the public to speak if they had something they wanted to say to the Parking Authority. Mr. Mulvehill said that during the last meeting there were so many comments that the meeting went on until midnight and they didn't have much time to attend to their regular business, so he said that the Parking Authority would attend to business first and then he would allow a small portion of time for public speaking.

APPROVALS/AUTHORIZATIONS

2. Approve the minutes from the Parking Authority meeting held Wednesday, September 28, 2005.

Mr. Mulvehill stated that the secretary did a heroic job of recording the comments of the public. He said he was surprised that this had been done because they ordinarily don't try to capture the public comments, and felt that in certain respects it's hard for them to be certain as to the accuracy of the comments. Also the people who spoke don't get a chance to review it. Mr. Mulvehill said that since obviously a lot of work went into it, he felt the Authority should read it as part of the minutes, but in the future he would advise the secretary that this part of the meeting doesn't have to be recorded. Mr. Bentkover said he felt the secretary did an incredible job of getting a sense of what was said and that it was well stated without emotional embellishment.

Corrections to the minutes are as follows:

Page 1, 3rd paragraph, second sentence: Mr. Mulvehill asked that the sentence in bold print, beginning with "The statement highlighted....," be eliminated in its entirety and the entire first page be resubmitted.

Page 1; footnote: The numbering of pages should be changed from “Page 1 of 1, Page 2 of 2” etc., to “Page 1 of 9, Page 2 of 9” etc.

Page 2; 2nd paragraph; second sentence: Change “two minute queuing” to “two to three minute queuing.”

Page 6; 3rd paragraph; last sentence: Change to read, “Mr. Mulvehill said no, the Parking Authority received the revenue.”

Page 7; 4th paragraph; second sentence: should read “they don’t want to see anyone go out of business.”

**** MR. BENTKOVER MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 28, 2005 MEETING AS CORRECTED.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

DISCUSSION

3. Parking Authority October 2005 Operating Report

This item was taken out of agenda order by request of Mr. Mulvehill.

Ms. Hebert presented a graph showing increased useage at the Maritime Garage during the late afternoon and evening periods and has performed well ahead of budgeted revenue estimates for September.

The wireless communication equipment for the Webster Street Lot should be completely installed by the end of October. Ms. Hebert reported that demand at this lot continues to increase, due to improving attendance at Crown Theatre and the popularity of SoNo’s clubs and restaurants in general. However, she reported that the SoNo merchants haven’t shown much interest in participating in the validation plan that has been offered.

The Haviland Street lot, was converted to to pay-by-space and has been received very well. The North Water Street lot will be converted to pay-by-space within the next few weeks. The South Main Street lot at Police headquarters continues to be monitored to determine existing and future demands. The Traffic Authority approved the on-street time limit change from one hour to two hours on Washington Street. Signage is planned to notify citizens of the change.

Ms. Hebert reported that the South Norwalk RR Station lot on the eastbound side will change its operation in order to accommodate the increasing parking demands by November 1, 2005, which will result in staff issuing \$6.50 tickets to each vehicle parked in the lot as had been done prior to the revenue control equipment being installed. People using the lot on a daily basis mail in their payments or they accrue penalties. Mr. Bentkover remarked that the Town of Westport inserts envelopes under the windshield wipers on vehicles for this purpose. Mr. Mulvehill recommended good signage be installed for notification. Ms. Hebert said that the demand for parking at the RR station was staggering and they had to expand transient parking into the lot because the garage can’t hold all who attempt to use it now.

The report stated an average 95% occupancy rate between all three lots that are part of the East Norwalk RR Station parking area. The E-Park program working so well at the South Norwalk RR Station will be expanded to the East Norwalk RR Station lot permit holders beginning Dec. 1, 2005.

Two hour parking limits were approved for the Wall Street area by the Traffic Authority and signage will change to notify motorists. Mr. Mulvehill said that there are ongoing discussions between the Mayor and the Chamber of Commerce regarding the on-street parking rates on Wall Street.

The Yankee Doodle Garage pay-by-space units are working. Credit card payments should be accepted after the installation of the wireless equipment around the beginning of November. Once this is installed, the entire wireless system will go online at all lots at the same time. DPW will be striping the rest of the facility in the next few weeks.

Ms. Hebert reported that requests for parking permits has increased. She said that enforcement of parking regulations is going well and that the police have been issued new hand-held units and have had training in how to use them, although they haven't begun utilizing them and are still writing parking tickets by hand. She said that they are still requesting orders for paper tickets and she was unsure why the police department hasn't started using the new units yet.

Ms. Hebert reported that new uniforms have been purchased for LAZ employees to wear in the evenings. They are scheduled to be delivered in the next few weeks. The uniforms consist of bright orange vests and jackets with reflective strips. Mr. Mulvehill asked if everyone had heard about the LAZ employee who was hit by a police cruiser in a parking lot as the officer responded to a call.

5. Staff Report

a. Status Financial Report

August and September permit revenues show a decrease compared to the approved budget, which was thought to be due to people purchasing annual permits in July, although in the Wall Street area the number of permits sold in August increased over the number purchased in July. Transient revenues for August and September have increased over \$25,000 and \$17,263 respectively, compared to the approved budget for the same months. This is most likely due to increased patronage of the SoNo area and increased activity in the Wall Street area. Meter revenue is right on target for August, although slightly decreased in September.

Parking Enforcement revenue decreased compared to the budget but increased compared to July, a result of added tickets issued. This appears to be a trend, which will probably level off. Parking ticket collection rates is at 85% and most people pay the original fine. This may also increase as people can now pay their parking tickets online. Collection of older outstanding parking fines is still ongoing.

Expenses are higher than had been expected because of higher payroll needs, repair and maintenance for all parking facilities, signage changes, inventory for pay stations and other utility expenses for July and August. Utility payments are higher probably due to use of air conditioning in the SoNo RR Station and will be monitored every month. Security invoices weren't submitted for payment in time to be reconciled and were not posted in the September statement.

First quarter budget shortfall is \$28,656, which doesn't include expected transient revenues from the Yankee Doodle Garage. That will be a positive impact expected next quarter instead. Revenue collections continue to be strong.

b. Status Capital Projects

The BET, Planning Commission and Common Council all approved a Special Appropriation of \$110,000 for increased lighting on the streets and to replace/install lighting under bridges on Ann, Marshall and North Water Streets. The original request also included funds to restore two historic lights on Ann Street and four historic lights on North Water Street. A scope of work is being developed in order to select a design engineer.

At the Webster Street Lot, Phase I improvements on the MLK Drive side have been completed by Deering Construction. The entrance spitter was moved back, a new driveway entrance/exit to the Crown Theatre parking area was created. Also included was a new cashier booth and the revenue control equipment was relocated to make entering and exiting the lot easier during peak hours. The wireless system should be in place by the end of October and will assist the parking operator to monitor the equipment. Phase II has been put on hold until the feasibility study is completed and the method of operating the Webster Street Lot is determined. Phase III includes relocation of dumpsters into strategically located areas and will require property owner coordination. Landscape and maintenance sponsoring is being pursued for the MLK Drive and Washington Street entrance/exit areas.

After the Phase II design effort for Webster Street is completed, the emphasis will be on replacing the roof, improving drainage and repairing concrete at the Yankee Doodle Garage.

Improvements to be made at the South Norwalk RR Station Eastbound side will include repairing curbing, repaving, striping parking spaces and installing a new crosswalk. Discussions between the Project Engineer and the contractor have taken place and the work should be completed in November. Ms. Hebert described the beautification project for the Authority.

c. Status Website

There was no discussion on this item.

Mr. Mulvehill requested the Authority recess for a period of two minutes to prepare for the public speaking portion of the meeting.

OTHER

6. Action on any item discussed herein.

At this time Mr. Mulvehill called the members of the public into the meeting. He stated that many of them had been at the previous month's meeting and had expressed their comments at this time. He was allowing a total of thirty minutes for everyone's statements and asked that each person be brief and that only fresh, previously unheard comments be expressed.

The Parking Authority heard comments from Richard Moccia; Nicholas Pacella, President, SoNo Business Association; Ms. Munoz, owner, Bistro du Soleil; Dana Bilello, owner, Tenero Restaurant; Jack Chiarmonite, owner, New York Pizza; John Romano; Jackie Lightfield, Norwalk Zoning Commission member; Donna Schlegel, Maritime Aquarium; Lewis Avrck, owner, Avrck Furniture.

The public speaking portion of the meeting was closed at 10:00 p.m.

The Parking Authority had a brief discussion of the topics that were brought up by the members of the public. Mr. Shatz said they should speak to LAZ regarding the lack of good customer service. Mr. Jellerette said he hadn't experienced any problems himself, but obviously there have been problems, based on what he heard this evening. Mr. Alvord said that, on the topic of security in the parking garages, they could put security guards in the garages but what would they gain from that. Also, there seems to be a lack of understanding between parking security and police security which what the public is truly looking for. In response to the public's comment about no panic buttons in the Maritime Garage, he stated that there are twenty-eight panic buttons with blue lights. Mr. Shatz said the presence of a person in the garages might be enough to deter potential problems. Mr. Jellerette said that he had been in a garage with his child at 6:30 in the evening and there was no one else around which made him feel uneasy and he could understand how someone could feel that security could be improved. Mr. Bentkover said it seemed to be systematic and has to be addressed. He said we do have problems, now we have to find a way to fix them. Mr. Mulvehill said that they should concentrate on the specifics, which include lighting, parking limits changed to two hours, stop collecting at meters in South Norwalk after 8:00 p.m. instead of 6:00 p.m. on Washington and North Main Streets.

**** MR. BENTKOVER MOVED TO SUSPEND COLLECTION AT PARKING METERS ON NORTH MAIN STREET AND WASHINGTON STREET AFTER 6:00 P.M., SEVEN DAYS PER WEEK, EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY, THROUGH FEBRUARY 1, 2006.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Mulvehill brought up parking spaces in front of Pelican Restaurant on North Main Street, alongside the Maritime Garage. He said the Mayor would like the fifteen-minute time limitation removed after 6:00 p.m. Mr. Mulvehill suggested they install meters and remove the fifteen minute limitation altogether. After a brief discussion it was agreed that the fifteen-minute limitation should be removed.

**** MR. BENTKOVER MOVED TO RECOMMEND THE INSTALLATION OF PARKING METERS OUTSIDE PELICAN RESTAURANT ON NORTH WATER STREET AND THAT THE METERS NOT BE FED AFTER 6:00 P.M., SEVEN DAYS PER WEEK, THROUGH FEBRUARY 1, 2006.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Bentkover said he will set up a meeting with SoNo merchants to discuss a holiday rate. He said he will have a proposal ready for the November 16 meeting.

7. Approve a Feasibility Study

Mr. Bentkover said they need to create a budget for the feasibility study. Mr. Alvord said that if they can keep the cost under \$10,000.00, they can hire someone and begin work right away, but if the cost is over \$10,000.00 they will have to put it out to bid and it will be January before they even get an answer. He said it will cost approximately \$651,000.00 to remove the ticket booths and install pay-by-space equipment in the Webster Street Lot. Mr. Bentkover felt they should hold up the feasibility study until the November 16 meeting when he has the results of the discussion with the SoNo merchants. Mr. Alvord said that no one has told him the goal of the parking system has moved away from the idea that parking pays for itself.

Mr. Mulvehill said there are advantages of a cashiering method of operation, in that people can remain in their cars in bad weather instead of having to stand in rain or snow to use the pay by space equipment while they pay. Mr. Bentkover suggested partnering with one of the area merchants while they try to find a way to solve the problems in the Webster Street Lot since the merchants are the ones complaining most vocally about the situation. He said they need to determine what is the best way to get people in and out of the facility. Mr. Shatz said that the parking rates are more important than getting people in and out of the lot. Mr. Jellerette said he received a call from a resident who said that she would rather have her taxes increased to cover the cost of a parking permit than have to pay all the time.

The Parking Authority recessed for a two-minute break at 10:53 p.m. They returned at 10:55 p.m.

**** MR. MULVEHILL MOVED THAT THE PARKING AUTHORITY CONDUCT A FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR IMPLEMENTING A PAY-BY-SPACE SYSTEM IN THE WEBSTER PARKING LOT TO DETERMINE THE OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS, COST, ENFORCEMENT, PRICING STRUCTURE, CONFORMATION WITH LEGAL REQUIREMENTS OF THE PROPERTY OWNERS**

AND TO THE CONTRACT WITH CROWN THEATRES, COMPARING PAY-BY-SPACE SYSTEM WITH A GATED CONTROL SYSTEM AT THE WEBSTER STREET LOT, TO FURTHER ENHANCE THE OPERATION OF THE WEBSTER PARKING LOT. INTERIM REPORT SHALL BE SUBMITTED TO THE PARKING AUTHORITY AT ITS REGULAR MEETING ON NOVEMBER 16, 2005 AND THE FINAL REPORT ON OR BEFORE THE PARKING AUTHORITY MEETING ON DECEMBER 21, 2005.

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Poruban asked if the Authority has ever considered divesting Norwalk of the Webster Street lot. Mr. Mulvehill said he had suggested that idea to the merchants for a price of approximately \$500,000 per year. He said it was not received very well. Mr. Alvord recommended the Authority hire Desman Associates to do the feasibility study. Mr. Bentkover said he did not like dealing with Desmond Associates and that he has experienced past problems with this company. He stated he would abstain from voting on this.

**** MR. MULVEHILL MOVED TO HIRE DESMAN ASSOCIATES TO DO THE FEASIBILITY STUDY.**

**** MOTION PASSED WITH ONE ABSTENTION (MR. BENTKOVER).**

7. Next Parking Authority meeting.

The next Parking Authority meeting is scheduled for November 16, 2005.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda J. Hayes
Telesco Secretarial Services