

PARKING AUTHORITY MINUTES

SEPTEMBER 28, 2005

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

STAFF: Kathryn Hebert, Administrative Services Manager

OTHER(s): Hal Alvord, DPW Director

CALL TO ORDER

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Mr. Mulvehill stated that normally, when they hold a public hearing session, a legal notice is advertised. However, they decided that they would elicit input from the public regarding parking at the Webster Street Lot. He asked all those present to speak to please limit their comments to a couple of minutes and to adhere to the related topic.

The Chairman read Mayor Knopp's press release dated September 27, 2005 into the record. The Chairman stated that they appreciated the Mayor's input.

PUBLIC SPEAKING SESSION

§ John Romano stated he was a local business owner. He spoke about not really seeing any savings on taxes. He said that he was also a handicapped person and there wasn't a good facility in the area to accommodate handicapped persons. He said it was less expensive to park in another city such as Stamford, noting that he frequents that area more for entertainment than he does in Norwalk. He felt the so called concessions being made by the Mayor were politically driven.

Mr. Mulvehill responded to the comment concerning immediacy. He said the Mayor made it clear he would like to do something soon to improve the problem. But this is based on the cost of new equipment and how to implement the parking validations and also how to provide parking to people that own spaces. He noted that the evaluation that was conducted was done in the most efficient way.

§ Richard Leonard, Porterhouse Steakhouse, said he was a business owner. He said he was a victim of lack of parking for his customers. He pointed out that he hasn't seen any

improvement and he felt they were going right back to where they were before this all happened and that didn't work either.

Mr. Mulvehill said when he visited the lot recently; he found it to be completely full. He said he also found there was only a two minute queuing for cars.

§ Santos Silvestro said he was a patron in the SoNo area. He relayed that he recently visited a restaurant for a short period of time, but he received a ticket when he left. He pointed out that the meters were too dark to be noticeable. He expressed that people are being chased out of South Norwalk and that parking was a big issue.

§ Larry Pelligrini, Pelligrini Jewlers asked if the Parking Authority controlled prices for parking. Mr. Pelligrini questioned why people pay more for parking in South Norwalk than they do in Norwalk. He felt there should be some kind of a universal price structure.

Mr. Mulvehill said the philosophy they were trying to follow, was so there was turnover for on-street spaces, and so people wouldn't park there all day. He said a proposal was made to continue that up to 6:00 p.m. or later. He emphasized that on-street parking turnover was crucial for short term parking for customers.

§ John Muro, Absolutely Phenomenal Video, said he owned a business on Washington Street. He explained that his clients utilize parking on the street. He thought that restaurants deserved a break and parking on night should be abolished that would at least allow people to enjoy the area while shopping and walking around without worrying about the meter expiring. He said he heard complaints all the time regarding this, but he was present tonight to support the other merchants. He said he was in favor of no ticketing at night.

Mr. Shahazaran asked if he experienced parking issues before the new policy was in place. Mr. Muro said that most of his clients are in and out pretty quick, but the costs were a lot lower in the past. He pointed out that ticketing on the street sent a negative message. If his clients need long term parking he sends them to the parking lot adjacent to Amberjacks operated by G&B parking where it is convenient even though it costs \$10 to park there.

§ Dick Mocciae stated that the \$422k in ticket revenue translated to approximately 4,000 tickets being issued. Mr. Mocciae stated that he has seen LAZ people ticketing within five minutes of someone leaving their car. He felt they needed to do something to bring business back to the area. And he thought they had to look at the situation on Main Avenue and Wall Street.

§ Bernardo Munoz, Bistro de Soliel, said he was a restaurant owner. He said it was a family business and they were looking to be part of the gourmet restaurant environment in Norwalk. He stated he has experienced that out of town people visiting has decreased and this affects patrons coming to his business. He said they were experiencing too many losses. He further pointed out that with rent and taxes going up, that's enough. But now

parking is going up too, making the situation worse. Mr. Mulvehill asked what problems he was having with parking. Mr. Munoz said they need more parking and the prices are too high and weekend parking should be free. He said they needed a solution to the problem very soon. He further mentioned the problem with employees incurring the expense to park. Mr. Mulvehill said there was a special program for employees to park in the Maritime Garage. Mr. Munoz was not aware of that. Mr. Munoz said that his customers don't come back if they don't find a parking space. The main issue is the ticketing.

Mr. Mulvehill commented that they wanted to make sure the parking system worked. He noted that the pay-by-space has potential for a substantial increase in the number of parking tickets, so each version of how they should handle the parking has pros and cons.

§ Dana Bilello, Tenero Restaurant, said she was a new business owner and runs a lunch business. Mr. Mulvehill asked her if the concept of the 1 or 2 hour parking limitation was a good thing or if it should be eliminated. Ms. Bilello said her diners usually stay an hour or more, but she felt the system of meters worked better before. She expressed that she was not aware the system would be changed until she read about it in the newspaper. She didn't think the booths were working and she said that customers complain more about the inconvenience of them.

Mr. Mulvehill pointed out that they have gotten the wait time down from 14 minutes to 7 minutes, so progress is being made.

§ Joe Plescia said he owned Alpine Express. He said there wasn't a big problem during the day for him, but it was a personal inconvenience for him, because all the parking spots seem to be reserved permitted spaces, particularly in front of 50 Washington Street. Mr. Mulvehill said that in conjunction with the reconfiguration of the lot, the plan was to move permit parking further away, so customers can be preferred over owners/long term parkers. Mr. Plescia was concerned that if we took out the booths, we would replace one system for a worse one. Before we just took out the booths we really need to evaluate all systems.

§ Ken Barry said he was the owner of the Rattlesnake Bar & Grill. He said he was having a bad year business wise. He shared that when he has a drop in business and everyone is down double digits, there is a universal problem. In this case, the parking costs and the parking inconvenience. He said that in the past year, he felt that South Norwalk has gone to being very competitive to uncompetitive as compared to the towns of Stamford or Westport. He felt they need to swing the pendulum back the other way to balance out the situation. He said he would like to see a no parking fee after 6:00 p.m. and free on Sunday. He noted the 2-hour meters during day were okay. He mentioned that he was aware of the employee parking discount, but it's inconvenient in terms of safety. Mr. Mulvehill said they were looking at getting more presence in the Maritime Garage for security purposes.

Mr. Mulvehill asked if he had a sense industry wide of how restaurants were doing this year. He shared that his research showed that business was down by 20% nationwide for varied reasons. And he noted that gas prices also has an impact on businesses, where this wasn't the case three months ago. He agreed with an earlier comment that if someone has a bad experience at a business, this affects recurrent business.

Jack Chiarmonte, NY Pizza, stated that meter parking was inconsistent. He spoke about the feasibility study that was requested by the Mayor, pointing out that this should have been done before any parking system was implemented. He questioned who will pay for the ticket booths. He said they needed to remove the gates and reduce fees. He pointed out that Mayor Knopp's means of resolving the issue was an insult to him and other merchants.

Mr. Mulvehill said that there was a proposal to eliminate the 2-hour parking. He asked if this would negatively impact his business. Mr. Chiarmonte said it doesn't really impact his business one way or another..

§ Mr. Kenji Higuayi, Kazu, said he owned a business on North Main Street. He said he has seen parking empty at night. He spoke about the sales taxes he pays and the portion that goes to the state. He said he offers parking validation since he is part of the Crown Theater property which are entitled to the parking validation system, but other businesses don't.

Mr. Mulvehill asked him his feeling about the 2-hour limitation. Mr. Kengi said it didn't affect his business.

§ Ms. Kim said she owned a nail salon. She said her customers had a hard time getting in and out of the parking lot. She said customers complain about paying fees for a very short time at her establishment.

§ Fen Chun of China Express agreed with Ms. Kim. He said he had a problem with parking from day one. He spoke about the parking booth problem, noting that they have lost customers because of it. He pointed out he doesn't get many customers after 6:00 p.m. Mr. Mulvehill asked if he advertised that the first 45 minutes were free. Mr. Chun said they indicated that on their menus, but everything was done too late and now their business was suffering. Mr. Mulvehill explained the lot was being staffed by supervisors to improve the situation.

§ Richard Erlanger said he owned a retail business in the area. He said he was there during the day and late at night. But specifically there is a problem on Sunday's because when people visit and don't see any parking available, they don't stop. He suggested renaming the Haviland Street Lot to a more appropriate name as well as Webster Parking Lot.. He said he noticed that within the last year, no one wanders along Washington Street anymore. Mr. Mulvehill asked why he thought this was. Mr. Erlanger said it was because of the short time limit for parking. Mr. Mulvehill asked if he felt the flat rate parking fee was working. Mr. Erlanger said this was a matter of perception, but people know the area as a difficult place to park.

Mr. Mulvehill asked if he was in favor of the 2-hour parking limit. Mr. Erlanger said he was in favor of it.

Mr. Erlanger also spoke to the matter of there being no on-street handicap parking. Mr. Mulvehill said there wasn't any, noting it would be difficult to create due to the existing sidewalks and curbing requirements. Mr. Erlanger made a suggestion that a trolley system could be implemented. This would allow people to see the area and it may encourage them to frequent the area more. He further suggested that perhaps they could charge \$2.00 per day for the ride. Mr. Mulvehill said the trolley suggestion was a Transit Authority matter, noting that it would be mentioned to them.

§ Nick Pacella. President of the SoNo Business Association, said a shuttle service from the train station to the Maritime Garage could be done late enough to accommodate employees. He felt this would cut down on over parking in the Webster Street Lot. He went on to say that before anything happen, such as taking out the booths and replacing with pay by space, we needed to evaluate and analyze this recommendation as to the pros and cons of each system.

§ Joe Bruno said he was the owner of Pasta Nostra. He said he was not terribly impacted by the parking situation, because most of his customers use the private parking lot across the street from his restaurant adjacent to Amberjacks operated by G&B parking. But he relayed that just because he wasn't affected, he said that South Norwalk was subsidizing the City of Norwalk in many ways. He felt that South Norwalk was a money generator, but there was lack of planning from the administration and this was a problem. He said he was present because others were affected and didn't like what he saw. He said he was shocked at how much other merchants were affected. He pointed out that businesses rely on profit from their business for income. He further pointed out that he was not only a business owner, but he was also a frequent customer of another area restaurant. He shared a story where he had dinner at a restaurant in the area and had his parking ticket validated, but when he went to leave the parking lot, the validation wasn't honored. He stated that if the matter wasn't improved businesses would suffer.

Mr. Bruno went on to express that it was the city's claim that the parking lots suffered a monetary lost, but yet they bring in an outside company to run the lots. Mr. Mulvehill said the parking system was costing taxpayer's money and there was a question of whether they should hire LAZ or handle it in-house. They looked at what was the most efficient way to maintain the lots, and there was a feeling that an outside company with experience could do more efficiently than in-house staff could.

Mr. Mulvehill questioned if there was a way to run a parking lot that charges market rates that can accommodate a fast food restaurant in the interior of space. Mr. Bruno said he didn't have the answer to that. But he said they needed to consider the consequences of the parking system because it was tough on the small business owner. Overall, the system has to be accommodating.

§ Walter McLaughlin said the parking system has been in place for a year and it hasn't worked from the beginning. He felt they should scrap the system, do a study and do it right from the beginning. He pointed out the merchants are taking a beating and he thought that if businesses end up leaving the city, they won't return. He stressed that it was a hassle to park at the movie theatre.

§ Nick Kydes said he was a merchant in Norwalk. He spoke about the threat of raising taxes, noting that they still increase. He pointed out that the meters were a nuisance tax, stressing that merchants also pay other taxes. So the issue that taxpayers are subsidizing parking was a problem because it was driving a wedge between the city and merchants. He questioned why they can't do what the towns of Wilton, Westport and New Canaan were doing. He said that ticketing after 6:00 p.m. was ridiculous and it puts a damper on a nice evening. He further noted that the area was becoming a ghost town. So he hoped they could find a solution to bring patrons back.

Mr. Mulvehill asked him if by reducing fees and eliminating revenue from the parking facilities, where would they make up the difference. Mr. Kydes asked if LAZ was making money. Mr. Mulvehill said no, the Parking Authority receives the revenue and how would Mr. Kydes make up any revenue shortfall.

Mr. Mulvehill repeated the question. Mr. Kydes did not answer the question and said that taxes were still going up.

§ Mario Fontana said he owned Habana and Ocean Drive Restaurant. He said his restaurant has an entrance to the Webster Street Lot. He felt the situation boiled down to the merchants being distressed about the situation and it was up to them to convince the Parking Authority that this was a real issue of survival. He said that hopefully, the committee weighed the fact that rate payers should not subsidize the parking lot. He pointed out it would be knee jerk reaction and the possibility of creating a "lights off" effect in Norwalk. He further pointed out that many merchants were contiguous to the Webster Street Lot, but the only solution was to remove the gates. He expressed that they needed to erase the impression to diners that they will have difficulty getting to the establishment they would like to patronize. Again, the gate was a big problem and it needs to be taken down. He said there should also be a 2-hour meter limit and after 6:00 p.m. should be free.

Mr. Mulvehill asked what he thought the per customer trend was for spending, i.e., are they spending less per person. Mr. Fontana said he found that people were spending a few dollars more when they do come in.

§ Mike Barnes said he was the owner of the billiards hall. He expressed he was looking to be a part of the community and basically attended tonight to introduce himself to the community. He spoke about the gate system and said it wasn't so much a fact of getting people out of the gate faster, but it was an issue of getting them back in. He pointed out

that he has seen the situation decline and he thought they should have studied the matter before the system went into place.

§ Hal Cleveland, President and CEO of Crown Theaters, said he was present to represent the Crown Theatre. He stated that the parking system hasn't worked; pointing out that it is the theater destination that brings people to South Norwalk and other businesses. He updated that they entered into an agreement with the Parking Authority that parking would be free in the Maritime Garage, but not as many people use as originally projected because of perceived safety issues. He stressed that the system was not working and people were not willing to wait 15 minutes to get out the parking lot. At this point he didn't think the gates were working, however he also said the matter needed to be studied to find out what would work. Overall, he said the movie industry was not having a good year, and this has been very prevalent for the theatre in Norwalk.

Mr. Mulvehill asked if anything could be done to improve security for people coming from the theatre. Mr. Cleveland said that people were not willing to make the walk to the Maritime Garage Lot and they preferred to walk to the Webster Street Lot because it is within their visual view; so perception was an issue. He also thought that lighting in the garage was an issue. And he said that a police officer's presence will certainly help the problem.

Mr. Mulvehill was asked if he believed the Parking Authority had done an overall good job with the parking situation. Mr. Mulvehill responded that he has lived in South Norwalk for 40 years. He shared that he was living there when Norwalk turned around. He expressed that the Parking Authority job was much broader than just parking. There were bond obligations to be met etc., so the perspective they focused on as a group he thought had been very good. He reiterated that the Mayor has made it clear that he would like to see a solution real soon.

Mr. Bentkover stated that the Parking Authority members worked and lived in Norwalk and they are also patrons of the area businesses. He expressed that they were looking to do the right thing because they don't want to see anyone go out of business. He pointed out they were well aware of the problem..

§ Ken Poruban, Chairman of the Public Works Committee to the Common Council, relayed that he thought there was a marketing problem, about the perception of what is going on in South Norwalk in terms of the parking situation. So perception needs to be addressed. Mr. Mulvehill agreed that perception was a problem, noting that negative publicity only hurts the situation.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES - August 16, 2005

**** MR. BENTKOVER MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

AUTHORIZE THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARKING AUTHORITY, URBAN MULVEHILL TO EXECUTE AN AMENDMENT TO THE AGREEMENT WITH CROWN THEATERS JOINTLY WITH THE REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY EXTENDING THE TERMS OF THE AGREEMENT THROUGH SEPTEMBER 30, 2006

** MR. BENTKOVER MOVED APPROVAL
** MR. JELLERETTE SECONDED
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

REQUEST FROM THE REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY TO AUTHORIZE THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PARKING AUTHORITY, URBAN MULVEHILL TO EXECUTE AN AGREEMENT WITH FAIRFIELD COUNTY SAVINGS BANK TO LEASE 10 PARKING SPACES IN THE ISAACS PARKING LOT

Mr. Sheehan stated that Fairfield County Bank was looking to lease 10 spaces. He pointed out on the plan where they want spaces with signage and they will be paying for the signage both on the poles on the parking spaces. He said the spaces would be in the Isaacs Lot. They were asking to remove the meters at Parking Authority cost. No special enforcement would be required.

** MR. BENTKOVER MOVED APPROVAL
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

Mr. Alvord said that they were looking for direction from the Parking Authority.

There was further discussion regarding the possibility of relocating the booths. It was further stated that there were many issues that needed to be addressed.

There was more open discussion regarding short term solutions until a long term solution could be addressed.

ADJOURNMENT

** MR. MULVEHILL MADE A MOTION TO ADJOURN
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

The meeting adjourned at 11:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Graham
Telesco Secretarial Services

