



PARKING AUTHORITY
MEETING VIA ZOOM VIRTUAL VIDEOCONFERENCE AND TELECONFERENCE
MAY 13, 2020

ATTENDENCE:	Richard Brescia, Chairman Michael Harden, Vice Chairman 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

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least three hours in advance of the meeting start time. Please email Kathryn Hebert at khebert@norwalkct.org to provide written comment prior to the meeting.

1. DISCUSSION OF NPA RECOVERY PLANS AS WRITTEN.

Mr. Brescia started the meeting by saying this is a special meeting and is a workshop to develop the recovery plan. The public does not participate but can be part of the discussion at the next regularly scheduled meeting on May 27, 2020.

Mayor Rilling provided an update and said they have rolled out the Covid-19 reopening plan yesterday and waited until the State of Connecticut had a plan because we wanted to be consistent with not only the thresholds necessary to move into phases one through four, but also consistent with the terminology that we are using so that people are not confused by the two plans. The Norwalk plan deals mainly with city property and is in four phases, and The State of Connecticut plan deals with businesses and it seems as if at this point in time will be moving forward on May 20, 2020, with opening various businesses. On May 20, 2020 restaurants will be able to open for outside dining only and we are looking at what things we can do to accommodate the restaurants and help them to the greatest degree possible. One of the things we are thinking is closing down some of the roads in some areas and allow dining in the parking space. He said he is waiting for a proposal from the Chief of Economic Development and her staff as to how that can be accommodated. We are trying to move as responsibly as possible with reopening the amenities in the city and the main thing we want to do is to do this in a controlled way so that we don't end up moving too quickly and end up with a resurgence of the virus. He said that his staff will provide the members of the Parking Authority with a copy of the reopening plan.

Mr. Brescia said there are three options on the table for the recovery plan and Mr. Rains and Mr. Aley have spent a lot of time in putting together a gradual rollout which will be the main focus of what is discussed at this meeting.

Ms. Hebert provided an overview of the recovery plan and said the Parking Authority's response to the Covid-19 pandemic began immediately beginning on March 18, 2020, when Mayor Rilling had announced business closures and work at home policies. She said that parking enforcement was suspended beginning March 18, 2020, which included public messaging, bagging the meters and posting free parking signs and parking was suspended system wide through April and May. She said they also reduced expenses and furloughed 39% of the parking staff while continuing to provide essential services for over 4300 on and off street parking spaces, and maintenance and cleaning of the eleven city owned parking assets. Last month the Parking Authority had approved to use their accrued fund balance to cover the projected expense shortfalls up to \$1,446,604. The Governor and Mayor Rilling have targeted May 20, 2020, as a slow and gradual phased in state and city reopening so the Parking Authority is evaluating several recovery scenarios. She said the year to date financials through April 20, 2020 has a balance of \$76,579. Mr. Brescia had requested that Mr. Rains and Mr. Aley to evaluate recovery scenarios and options and recommend a possible plan. She said herself, Mr.

Manousos and Mr. Legesse worked with Mr. Rains and Mr. Aley to assist them in developing their recommendation which balances the financial impact to the Parking Authority's budget and the responsibility to manage city owned parking assets and on street parking, and a responsibility to ensure the net budget and to also include economic development initiatives such as touchless payment and curb management that will assist the businesses with their reopening plans.

Mr. Aley said that we have looked at the different scenarios and have all agreed that option four would be the best choice.

Mr. Rains said that scenario four makes the most sense because it allows for the intake of data as we move beyond the opening of the city and of managed parking which as part of this scenario would be on June 1, 2020, and Mr. Manousos and Mr. Legesse have put together tools in the background that we think will be critical as scenario four plays out. He said it also provides a basis to make further plans as to continue how to respond to the impact of the coronavirus.

Mr. Aley and Mr. Rains presented the four scenarios and Mr. Aley said they have chosen option four because it is easily adjustable as data comes in. Mr. Rains said what they had ultimately agreed on was the changes in the percentage of fees that we were considering, and the reason we thought it was so complicated is how do you send a new message every month that the fees are different than the prior month especially since the progression of this roll out means that in scenarios one through three each month there was an increase from the prior month so they felt it would give the opportunity to create confusion and also frustration. He said scenario four gives us the ability to evaluate the plan related to how people are actually using it instead of making assumption on how it may be used as the next few months play out. Mr. Aley said in scenario four the plan as of today will be effective June 1, 2020, with the hourly rates on the street and in the garages will go back to the full rate and the monthly permits will be discounted. He said the plan is to remove the bags on or around May 20, 2020, and enforcement would begin on or around June 1, 2020 but will be relaxed. He said they also agree that the Parking Authority should meet at least once a month or more if the need arises.

Mr. Rains said that they felt that within scenario four by returning the on street and hourly parking spaces in the parking assets back to full rate we can track how they are used and then make adjustments as needed going forward. He presented the criteria that was used to develop the scenario and was based on the time period of February to December and is intended to follow the path that the state and the city are taking so we are all working together. He said in scenario four there will be no hourly rate changes in on or off street parking and the permits for the assets would be discounted according to the rollout plan, and use the time period from June to September as a time to gather data on how the parking assets are actually being used to establish a baseline to make projections. He said the projections in scenario four don't put us back at our budgeted number in December but it does fall in line with the amount of the fund balance that was approved to be used. He said removing the bags from the meters won't require a vote but they feel it is important to get them removed as soon as possible. He also said they think the Parking Authority needs to assist in the planning and certainly the execution of plans to possibly convert some existing parking spaces to shorter time spaces for delivery services and people to pick up their orders.

Mr. Rains said they feel they need to communicate often and that communication always needs to have an undertone of why managed parking is a good thing and there is a very clear explanation of

the fact that free parking is not free, and the cost that free parking takes on the municipalities and the businesses makes it certainly not free and their objective is to convey that through messaging.

Mr. Harden said that he agrees with scenario and that the bags should be removed from the meters on May 20, 2020, and it is congruent with Mayors May 20, 2020 reopening plan.

Mr. Vetter said he also agrees that the bags should be removed from the meters but is a little hesitate going to 100% for on street fees and parking fees and thinks the Parking Authority will end up getting a back lash. He asked if that happens how long would it take to change the rates on the equipment. Mr. Legesse said it would take a few weeks for the programming as the signage would also need to change. Mr. Aley said the hours can also be adjusted which may be simpler than changing the rates. Mr. Harden suggested to remove the bags from the meters and let people pay at will and not enforce that way we won't see the pushback. Mr. Rains agreed and that that parking enforcement staff will need clarity of how to enforce and to also revisit the courtesy cards.

Mr. Tsirinides said once the parking spaces became free the resident's starting using the spaces and the cars stay there all night and a good part of the day so he agrees that the bags should be removed from the meters sooner rather than later and to let the resident's know that starting in June there will be some sort of enforcement.

Ms. Casey said that the Parking Authority will need to pay particular attention to that if they rates to change over time based on occupancy. She said in general she thinks scenario four looks good and that the key piece is communication and she has been working with the Chamber of Commerce and the Mayor's office to use social media.

Mr. Brescia said he tends to agree with Mr. Vetter in that starting off with the full rate invites a negative response and taking the courtesy card approach to handle the enforcement is a good idea. He said he also thinks the need to communicate is a good idea. He also said he does not think starting on May 20, 2020, is the right thing to do and asked staff how they calculated the revenue. Mr. Rains said they only thing they have suggested for May 20, 2020 was the removal of the bags from the meters and the plan of scenario four is June 1, 2020. Mr. Manousos said the revenue was calculated for every location and then rolled up to the projection models that they had circulated and have create a spreadsheet that can be changed based on demand and occupancy and presented the spreadsheet. Mr. Rains said that Mr. Manousos made the assumption that the demand for parking would return to what it was pre covid-19 right away so the thought was for an incremental increase in rates, but in scenario four we are not assuming the demand will be there which is an important distinction between scenario four and the others and the spreadsheet gives the ability to track whatever the use is and then make determinations.

Mayor Rilling left the meeting at 5:00PM.

Mr. Brescia said he is concerned that we don't have any empirical information on how the public is going to react once the gradual opening takes place and in the background we are trying to protect the fund balance from a business point of view, and because we don't have a sound rational for how people are going to react he is uncomfortable moving it as quickly as what has been discussed. He suggested to continue to do what is currently being done and use the month of June to put together a

public relations campaign explaining what the Parking Authority is going to do and begin with rates at the beginning on July 1, 2020, and use the month of June to communicate. Mr. Aley said they are only suggesting taking the bags off the meters on the street and the lots and the garages be free for transient parkers for now which would help to get some of the residents that are parking on the street to move into the lots and begin to build on the data.

Mr. Brescia said the Parking Authority still needs to come up with a plan to assist the restaurants when outdoor dining begins with curb management.

Mr. Rains said the Parking Authority needs to be careful in whatever decisions we make is potentially drawing down from the limited fund balance.

2. DISCUSSION OF OPTIONS TO REDUCE COSTS TO PROTECT FUND BALANCE

Mr. Brescia said that he and Ms. Hebert met with the Board of Estimate and Taxation and they had asked why the budget had not changed and he send a memo that stated when the budget was put together last December the economy was very different, so when it was put together the Parking Authority had felt that rather than putting an extra burden on the customers that the Parking Authority would pick up the state tax on parking that was applied to Norwalk which was about \$182,000. He said he explained that when that decision was made it was very sustainable and worth doing but obviously times have changed and one of the recommendations that he is going to make for next week is that we rescind that and change our approach and apply the 6.35% to the parking fee which the customer will have to pay and that is one area the Parking Authority can reduce the costs. He said there will also be some tough decisions that will need to be made regarding operational costs and what projects move forward and which ones don't.

Mr. Harden said one of the things that may be missing is that once the bags are removed from the meters a majority of people are going to come back and began paying for parking again so he does think the Parking Authority will begin to see the revenue increase and the enforcement part of the budget is only 13% so by not enforcing will not be too damaging. He said by removing the bags is a first good step and discuss how to increase enforcement going forward instead of worrying about how much we are charging is probably a better way to go. Mr. Rains said he agrees and that a strategy can be developed on how to ease back into enforcement and is a component of the plan but what needs to be agreed on at the next meeting is the rate and discuss the details to be rolled into the scenario so that the wheels could get in motion so that there can be discussions on how to market it. He also said that the sales tax component has been rolled into all the scenarios that were discussed and he agrees that the practice needs to be changed.

Mr. Rains said that scenario four gives the Parking Authority the ability to establish a pricing structure that will not change and he would like to avoid starting off with a message and then get changed the following month.

Mr. Brescia requested that each member of the Parking Authority come with ideas for relaxed enforcement and curb management plan and send it to Ms. Hebert so she can compile the information

and send it out for a discussion at the next meeting. Mr. Rains requested the data that describes the top reasons people get parking tickets. Ms. Casey said it would also help to add the geography to that as well. She also said that she will circulate the executive order that came out in the last 24 hours and there is talk of on street parking and parking in the lots and the city does not have a set policy as far as outdoor dining but there is language that speaks to on street parking and lifting all parking requirements. She said she will continue to update the Parking Authority as policy gets developed. Mr. Brescia also requested any information that she may have on how the public will react to the opening of restaurants etc.

Mr. Brescia said the resident's in the SONO area that are using free the on street parking spaces also needs to be addressed. Mr. Rains said by having the parking spaces never empty is bad for business and he does not feel that delaying it is good for business and that the Parking Authority needs to pick a position and act from it whether it is comfortable or not.

It was the consensus of the Parking Authority that the bags are to be removed from the meters on May 20, 2020.

**** MR. VETTER MOVED TO ADJOURN**

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

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 5:30PM.

**NEXT MEETING WEDNESDAY, MAY 27, 2020 (REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING)
BY ZOOM VIRTUAL VIDEO CONFERENCE AND TELE CONFERENCE.**