

PARKING AUTHORITY MINUTES

MARCH 14, 2005

ATTENDANCE: Urban Mulvehill, Chair; Anowar Shahjahan,
Troy Jellerette, Steven Benkover, Burton Shatz

STAFF: Ed Schmidt, Mayor's Assistant; Frank Del Monaco,
Las Parking;, NPA; Kathryn Hebert, Adm. Mgr.
Public Works; Hal Alvord, Director Public Works

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Mulvehill called the meeting to order at 8:00 p.m. He passed around a sign up sheet for people who planned to speak during the public hearing.

PUBLIC HEARING

Public hearing on the proposed parking rate changes and operating budget for fiscal year 2005-06

Linda Vasquez stated that she is a resident and a mother. She said she would not allow her child to cross such a busy street. She stated that she did not want to spend \$5.00. She said the safety issue was also very prevalent. Ms. Vasquez said she would not want her daughter walking across North Main Street because there is a lot of traffic. There are a lot of cars coming and going. Mr. Mulvehill asked Ms. Vasquez to be more specific about her concerns. She said the street was not safe for middle school aged kids. Mr. Mulvehill asked whether a 45-minute pick up time period would work. Ms. Vasquez said that would work. With regard to the movie theater, she stated that some movies start later than initially scheduled and this could cause problems. Mr. Mulvehill asked whether a 45-minute would be a good enough window of time. Ms. Vasquez agreed, but stated that she did not know how it would work. Mr. Mulvehill asked her whether she would rather have a tax bill on her charge. Ms. Vasquez said that would be okay with her. She also inquired about what would be happening near the Washington Street area. She said she did not like this. Based on the proposals, Mr. Jellerette stated that the first 45 minutes would be free, and then the cost would be \$1.00 per hour. Ms. Vasquez said it was a pain getting out of the area. She said she did not see why people could not just pay more and have it added to the tax bill. Mr. Mulvehill said the budget was \$3m. Ms. Vasquez said the fee should be \$10.

Mr. Mark Wilson stated that he lives on 137 Wash Street. He said he never thought rates would go up and service would go down with regard to the Parking Authority. There have been complaints that the Maritime Center garage is too big. He stated that his biggest concern would be subsidizing the shortfall. Mr. Wilson stated that his money had

already gone into building the Maritime garage. Mr. Mulvehill stated that none of the taxpayers' money went into the building of the Maritime Center.

Mr. Wilson said the Maritime garage used to have a security guard. He said the booth was referred to as the "Lazy Hotel." There is no security whatsoever. The security guards used to patrol the parking lots, which was probably a big cost to the city. This is not a luxury. Mr. Wilson stated that he did not want to subsidize anyone's shortfall. According to him, the Mayor always talks about people paying for what they use. He asserted that he was against free parking at the Maritime lot. He asked whether the city presides over Laz Parking. Mr. Mulvehill said the company works for the city. Mr. Wilson stated that he has actual pictures of the security guards sleeping on duty. Mr. Mulvehill said there was a huge amount of security coverage at a very big expense. Mr. Wilson said his concern was not with the city, but with the fact that costs are going up and service is going down.

Mr. Thomas Becker introduced himself as part of the SoNo Business Association and stated that he understands paid parking is like refuse removal and parking. He said the lot is much cleaner than it was last year. He also stated that snow removal had gone well, but added that he was in disagreement with the rates. He requested that the grace period move from 30 to 45. Mr. Becker said he thought the 45-minute grace period would provide time for drop off. He thanked the administration for their support and recommendation that the ticker spitter and ticket booth be moved as soon as possible. Mr. Mulvehill stated that the Mayor was currently in another meeting in this building and is planning to attend.

Ms. Dana Bilello introduced herself and stated that she was the owner of Tenero Restaurant, which has only been opened for eight or nine months. She reports that her business has slowed down and continues to drop in sales. Ms. Bilello said she has received a lot of phone calls about the parking rates and adds that she does understand that people must pay for parking. She asserts that her business suffers when the customers have concerns about things. Sales are generally higher on the weekends. Security is also another concern. Pan handling is becoming a big problem. Ms. Bilello said she did not know this was a problem when she purchased the building.

Mr. Michael Geake stated that he was a resident at 39 Elwood Avenue. He commended the committee for taking care of concerns. He said the disabled are usually ignored. He said the Webster lot was free. The issue is not with paying, but the accessibility and safety. He stated that his wife is even more disabled than he is. He added that he and his wife would be definite targets walking down the street. He refused to park in the Maritime lot. The facility is not acceptable. Mr. Shahjahan said he understood the concerns. He asked Mr. Geake what he would do differently. Mr. Geake said the area was dark and somewhat deserted. The Maritime was not lit. There are big seclusion issues. Mr. Geake said he preferred to park in the Webster Street lot. He stated that he has witnessed the Maritime lot unattended many times.

Mr. Bentkover stated that the committee has been meeting for years. He said it has been a priority to make sure the city of Norwalk is in compliance with the ADA.

Ms. Jane Gamcsik stated that she was from Glenn & Co Weddings. She stated that she likes Option A and applauds the committee for it. She said she has heard several complaints in the area about parking. She asserted that this was her company's fifth year anniversary. Customers are not happy with parking and paying. Many customers are complaining of people outside the business begging for money, and report feeling intimidated by this. They also feel there should be a reasonable parking fee. Between the months of October and November, Ms. Gamcsik reports only being able to park in her personal space five times. She said she has suggested that customers park at the Maritime lot. According to Ms. Gamcsik, her female clients do not want to have to walk such a long way in high heels.

Mr. Mulvehill said he was aware of all the complaints regarding panhandling, and added that there was no crime if there is no evidence of physical threat. Ms. Gamcsik said her female customers do feel threatened. Mr. Mulvehill said that asking for money was not a crime. Ms. Gamcsik stated that she was trying to give everyone a sense of the reality of the issue. She strongly suggested security.

Mr. Schmidt stated that the SoNo Business Association has been working closely with the Parking Authority to make good resolutions on rates. He said they needed to work on the issues of the quality of life. This needs to be worked on collectively. Ms. Gamcsik said this was a great idea.

Mr. Larry Pellegrini stated that he is the owner of Pellegrini Jewelers. He reports that there have been several complaints about the rate increases. He suggested having meters put back. Customers complain that they must pay for an hour worth of parking when they are just planning to pick something up quickly and leave. Ms. Herbert said there is a 20-minute grace period where people do not have to pay.

With regard to the installation of equipment, Mr. Schmidt said that debit cards are supposed to be issued and people are supposed to get credit for the amount they have already paid. Mr. Pellegrini suggested changing the rate of the meters. Mr. Del Monaco said it was obvious that people rather pay with currency and credit cards. Coins are becoming obsolete. Mr. Pellegrini disagreed with that. Mr. Bentkover said coins would not be the new technology for parking. Mr. Pellegrini asked how much the implementation of the new equipment would cost the city. Mr. Mulvehill said each lot has a certain amount of equipment that will pay for itself in two years time. Most people want to use currency, debit, and credit cards. Mr. Pellegrini said this was the worst thing he has ever seen for parking. Mr. Mulvehill asked how important the existence of parking was to his business. Mr. Pellegrini said it was very important and stated that \$1 was overpriced. Mr. Mulvehill said the first fee increase was the first they have had in 10-15 years. He asserted that people must expect a certain level of discomfort. Downtown Norwalk is artsy and attracts a lot of great activity.

Mayor Knopp stated that the Parking Authority was established to deal with the problems of crushing the burdens of property taxes in the city, as well as for the issue of providing more parking to enhance economic development. It was also established to improve parking services. The result is to establish parking and remove the subsidy that taxpayers

have been paying. It is probably an understatement to say that no one appreciates the shift in paid parking. It is a question of whether users or homeowners have to pay. With regard to the construction of the Maritime garage, there is more parking needed. If there is going to be a \$15m garage, there cannot be free parking a mile away. Mayor Knopp said he felt parking should be removed from the property tax bill. He urged the committee to adopt Option A. He said they have accelerated a capital request to put a second light on the Washington Street exit. There should be redirection of traffic. He thanked the committee members and colleagues for all their hard work. He said he believed this plan would go a long way to solve. He reported that he would also like to accelerate the smart cards. Greenwich does cash for all their infrastructure improvements, whereas Norwalk does bonds. There has been a tremendous urban economic development program. The city is trying to improve services. He urged the committee to accept the plan.

Mr. Irran Massood stated that he was the owner of a Subway restaurant. He said his establishment is losing business because kids are outside of the building fighting, etc. Customers end up parking all the way down the block and have to walk to the restaurant. He said there should be one-hour parking. Mr. Mulvehill asked Mr. Masood if he thought there should be certain areas designated for one-hour parking. Mr. Masood said yes. He said a one-hour break was usually sufficient enough. Mr. Mulvehill said an hour probably would not be enough time to have a sit down lunch at all. Mr. Masood said the issue with the kids trespassing has been a longtime issue. Mr. Mulvehill suggested that Mr. Mulvehill call the police.

Mr. Schmidt said short-term parking in the Webster lot would definitely be looked at. He said working with the SoNo Business Association would be the best way to get things done. Mr. Burton asked whether the policemen at the theater were responsible for patrolling. Ms. Hebert said no and stated that they are hired by Crown Theaters. Mr. Schmidt said the police were definitely aware of what is going on. The police should be a part of the meetings that take place with the SoNo Business Association.

Mr. Drew Kordas stated that he was from Crown Theaters. He said he was in support of Option A. Mr. Jellerette asked whether there were signs at the beginning of Webster lot. Mr. Kordas said yes. He said people claim that they do not see the signs that indicate fees. Mr. Burton asked if there was validation for the full cost of parking. Ms. Herbert said yes. Mr. Kordas said people complained about missing part of the movie as a result of the congestion in the lot. Mr. Kordas there were two complaints from people who had to park at the Maritime garage. He stressed that he was in support of Option A. Mr. Mulvehill asked whether the police officers could patrol a little further. Mr. Kordas said they would only respond if they see something going on.

Mr. Joseph Plescia stated that he was the owner of the Alpine X-Press. He said that he was definitely in favor of Option A. He said his customers have a hard time finding parking during the day and are forced to park by Martin Luther King Boulevard. Mr. Del Monaco said it would make more sense to have people park closer to the building. Mr. Plescia said panhandling was also an issue outside of his establishment and there are unpleasant confrontations going on all day. He said he did not think the debit card idea

would work. He believed they would deter business. Mr. Shahjahan said there were a lot of recommendations made and he thought the new equipment would be a good investment. He stated that the technology has been looked at and good things will definitely happen.

Mr. Kengi Higuchi stated that he was the owner of Kazu Restaurant. He said that he was also in support of Option A. He said he did not like the \$5 fee at night, as his business stays open after 9:00 p.m. Mr. Bentkover asked Mr. Higuchi if he validated. Mr. Higuchi said yes. He also said there was too much traffic to get in and out of the area. Mr. Bentkover said the other booth, located on Washington Street, and would be opened up, which would help to alleviate some of the traffic. Mr. Higuchi said customers complain about getting in from Martin Luther King Street.

Jing Chen stated that she was from the Chinatown Express Restaurant. She stated that temporary parking should be available for people who are just picking food up. Option A is a great option. She reported that panhandling was also an issue outside of the establishment. She said there are people that also come into the restaurant and ask the customers for money. Mr. Mulvehill told her she should not hesitate to call the police. He also suggested scheduling a meeting with the chief of police to find out why they are not responding on time.

Ms. Liz Halpin stated that she was a resident of the city of Norwalk as well as a business owner. She also said she was in support of Option A. Ms. Halpin reported that she frequently eats out with her family on Friday nights. She said lighting is an issue in the lots. Mr. Mulvehill said there had been new lighting installed and asked whether or not they were currently working. Mr. Del Monaco said the yes. Mr. Kordas said the major problem with the lighting is with the Spinnaker building. Halpin also said the machines do not work at the railroad station. She added that the equipment in the service lot does not work.

Mr. Jack Chiaramonto stated that he was from NY Pizza. He said there were always parking spots. He said the best parking spots were at 50 Washington Street. Commercial condominiums have free validated parking. The stores at the end of the street own 17 spots. He said the outdoor dining attracts hoodlums. He stated he would not be held hostage at his own store. Mr. Chiaramonto said the homeless were also another concern in the area. Mr. Bentkover said this was not the forum to handle panhandling. Mr. Mulvehill said they could not just get rid of panhandlers just because they are asking for money.

The Public Hearing was closed at 10:00 p.m.

Special capital appropriation for Webster Parking lot

**** MR. MULVCHILL MOVED APPROVAL TO REQUEST THE SPECIAL CAPITAL APPROPRIATION OF WEBSTER PARKING LOT,**

OPTION A.

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Proposed operating budget update fiscal year 2005-06

Mr. Mulvehill said there would be an adverse budget effect. Mr. Del Monaco asked when this would start. Ms. Hebert said it would start the new rates on April 1st. Mr. Mulvehill asked whether there was a legal requirement to wait. Mr. Del Monaco said it could be done as quickly as possible.

**** MR. MULVEHILL MOVED APPROVAL OF THE SOUTH MAIN PARKING LOT RATES AND BE ADJUSTMENTS BE MADE TO NUMBER OF PUBLIC PARKING SPACES AFTER LAZ EVALUATES USAGE.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Shahjahan said he would like a sign specifying that those specific spaces be only designated for the police officers. Ms. Hebert stated that there would be expenses associated with this. Mr. Bentkover suggested that the committee adopt the rates and allow the scenario to unfold.

**** MR. MULVEHILL MOVED APPROVAL OF THE PROPOSED RAILROAD STATION CONCESSION SERVICES RFP.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Mr. Mulvehill said there was a definite resistance to the price raises. Mr. Shahjahan said the rates should be the same in all parts of Norwalk. He said they needed the complaint statistics from Laz Parking. Mr. Mulvehill said he would put that on the next agenda. Ms. Hebert said the website should be up and running shortly.

Mr. Mulvehill said they needed to find a way to come with a way to pay for parking and have validation as well. With regard to the disabled, Mr. Mulvehill questioned whether there was some sort of identification card that proves someone is disabled. Mr. Bentkover said he did not think there was a law stating that someone needed to provide proof of disability. Mr. Mulvehill said this should be researched.

Mr. Shahjahan said it bothered him that the machines at the trail station were not working. Mr. Mulvehill said they needed to have a report of the frequency of failure. Mr. Del Monaco said the machines are under warranty. Mr. Mulvehill said he would like to have a general idea on when the machines is no working. Mr. Jellerette asked how long they generally take to repair. Mr. Del Monaco said it depended on the nature of the problem. He stated that it was generally a 24-hour time period. Mr. Mulvehill asserted that the people on duty should be able to report when the machines are done. Mr. Burton said that maintenance would be a major aspect of the budget in the future.

At there was no further business; the meeting was adjourned at 10:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michelle Joseph
Telesco Secretarial Services

