

PARKING AUTHORITY MINUTES

JANUARY 25, 2006

ATTENDANCE: Urban Mulvehill, Chairman; Burt Shatz, Anowar Shahjahan, Stephen Bentkover, John Federici,

STAFF: Kathryn Hebert, Administrative Services Manager

OTHER(s): Hal Alvord, DPW Director; Frank Del Monaco, LAZ;
Mayor Richard Moccia

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Mulvehill called the public hearing to order at 6:30 p.m. He asked that all speakers contain their comments to three minutes.

PUBLIC HEARING

Public Hearing on the Proposed Rate Changes.

The following comments by the public have been summarized.

§ Barry Berger stated that he has commuted out of the East Norwalk Train Station for 30 years. The New York bound signs are unpaved and whoever parked there had a chance of getting their car vandalized. There are also problems getting up the hill, so people parked in the factory outlet store. He said there was a parking lot that the school donated, but after the paving was done on the New York side, the city started charging a fee of \$180.00 per year. They said there would be security there, but he hasn't seen any lately. Then the rate was raised to \$240.00, but he wasn't sure when it was raised, but he thought this happened during Mayor Esposito's term. He explained he was present tonight to speak about the parking rates in the city in comparison to the rates that other cities charge ranging from \$220.00 to 300.00. He noted that the Bridgeport Train Station parking lot used to be free, but they just began charging \$260.00 per year, but they have two other lots that are free. Fairfield is over \$350. Overall, he felt that to raise the rate to \$480.00 was out of line with other train stations on the New Haven line and it didn't make sense.

§ Mark Wilson (submitted a written statement into the record). He spoke about the Lower Havilland Parking Lot increase. He asked how they monitored this lot and how many people parked there. Mr. Mulvehill explained that people swipe a card to get in and out, and once that's done, that's it.

Mr. Wilson asked if people were able to park more than one car with the card. He noted there was an unknown car in the lot currently without a sticker. Mr. Mulvehill said the Parking Authority would look into it to make sure that one swiped card was being used for one vehicle.

Mr. Wilson noted that within the past month, it was hard to find a parking spot. He said he noticed there were a lot of out of town cars parked there.

§ Ms. Jackie Lightfield summarized and read her statement that she entered into the record. She spoke about the Webster Parking Lot and said that although she understood revenues needed to increase, there were other ways to do this, such as advertising. She said that to reduce the free grace period from 45 minutes to 30 minutes was unrealistic based on the number of cars that came into the lot. She thought this would trigger a bad publicity hit. She said the fact that they removed the second exit lane was an indication of the problem, but that lane was still important to have due to the traffic jams and congestion. So she thought they needed to readdress that problem and restore the second exit lane. Mr. Mulvehill asked about restoring the lane, he questioned if the lane existed before and now doesn't. Ms. Lightfield said yes, they removed it by putting gates in; she said there was only one lane for entering and exiting.

§ Mr. Louis Avrck talked about the grace period being changed from 45 minutes to 30 minutes. Mr. Mulvehill interjected to clarify that although everyone has read about the change, it didn't mean that it had taken effect yet. Mr. Avrck continued and said he exited the lot last night at 7:00 p.m. and it took 12 minutes to leave, tonight it took him 7 minutes. So by changing the grace period, he said they would have only 5 minutes to get in and out. He explained that his average customer stayed at least 45 minutes in this establishment, so he had a big concern about the change. He thought they should consider keeping the grace period at 45 minutes. He commended LAZ Parking for keeping the parking lot clean.

§ Mr. Vince Capilupo stated that when they snow plowed the lot; customers have to move their cars. Also, there is a walkway under the railroad bridge that is a narrow path, but it's never shoveled and the snow turns to ice. He further noted that at the crosswalk, no one stops and it's a dangerous spot. He expressed that something had to be done. He said that lighting was bad on the factory outlet side. He stressed that if they were paying the fees, then they shouldn't have these concerns. He further noted that currently someone will get a ticket the first day if they violate the grace period, noting this wasn't the policy many years ago. He noted there was also a security issue. Mr. Mulvehill explained the policy was that private security would call for a police response should an incident occur.

§ Mr. Jack Chiarmonete stated that he had a business in South Norwalk. He spoke about the grace period issue and he urged them to leave it as is because he has lost business lately. Also, the doubling of the fees was steep, because some businesses also pay for their employees to park, resulting in over and above costs to the business. He felt they needed to understand that they have a business and they were looking to stay in the black just like the Parking Authority was looking to do. He didn't feel they should take the brunt of the increased fees, noting that the merchants do bring in business revenue to the city. So he asked the commission to keep that in mind.

§ Mr. Peter King said he commuted out of the East Norwalk Train Station. He noted that the lots behind the church and the factory outlet but there is no security coverage in bad weather. He felt this was unfair especially when they were doubling the fees.

§ Mr. Jack Darrow said he was a resident and commuted. He pointed out there was a building and complex for sale near Motor Media and he sent a petition to the state senator to have the city look at increasing the use of parking facilities. He thought that as an inducement to the sale, they could offer a tax abatement, but all he has heard in respect to that matter, was that the Parking Authority was just trying to generate revenue without offering better services. So he felt the city could do something with the sale of the building. Mr. Mulvehill asked who the contact was at the state. The response was that it was Bob Duff. Ms. Hebert noted the information.

§ Ms. Donna Lisa said she purchased her home in South Norwalk, but since then there have been seven deaths outside her front door. She further noted there was also a lot nearby that charged \$5.00 on the weekend. Mr. Mulvehill said they turned that lot over to the police station for their use only.

Ms. Lisa questioned where visitors should park then. Mr. Mulvehill said the rules applied 7 days, 24-hours and there is no meter charge after 6:00 p.m., but if they come into the street cleaning restriction, they should rely on the sign that is posted. He mentioned there was an overall shortage of parking in South Norwalk.

§ Mr. John Nowicki said he commuted from the South Norwalk Station. He had a concern about the increase in the parking fee, noting that he didn't understand it and he thought it was unreasonable.

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Mr. Mulvehill clarified for the record that the comments regarding the parking at the church being donated, the Parking Authority was actually paying \$10,000.00 per year for use by commuters.

§ Ms. Mary Felder stated that it was difficult to get a parking space at the parking lot near Motor Media in the morning. She said there were people that parked there from other cities. She said it was disconcerting to see the rate doubled when they are never assured they will get a space. She went on to say that she feared walking from the lot in the dark. She felt that raising and doubling the rates was ludicrous. Furthermore, there were problems with snow plowing. Mr. Mulvehill said that because of the variety of the owners of the lots, there was a group effort to get them plowed, but the Parking Authority has a limited number of spaces to park in the lot, but they are marked and limited.

§ Ms. Elaine McCarthy said she was a new homeowner in Norwalk. She said she commuted from the East Norwalk station, but she gets nervous walking from the lot; also, under the bridge it's not well lit and signage is unclear as to what's legal parking or not. She noted however that it is a lovely new station, but it's only open mornings. She commented that when she moved to the city, she took into account the commuting costs, but overall there is a safety issue.

§ Ms. Elaine Lamore noted that for people coming in from East Norwalk, on the beach side, the sign into the station was not visible.

§ Mr. Pellegrino stated that charging \$5.00 more for parking tickets was not a good idea. He noted that if someone was a few minutes late getting to the lot, they're charged almost \$15.00 and customers are unhappy with this. She felt that if they left the fee at \$10.00 or

decreased it, it would bring people back to the area.

§ Mr. Richard Erlanger said before the hourly changes, he heard all the complaints from his customers. But he had a concern about the hours changing and of the signs not being clear. He clarified his overall concern was that the changes in parking on Washington Street went from 1 hour to 2 hours. Mr. Mulvehill said that policy would stay in place for now.

§ Ms. Terri Cronin said she had to park in the lot behind the church and as she went through the small drive between the fence and the church, as a woman alone, she found it was completely dark. She mentioned that she encountered a homeless man going through the clothes bin one evening, and although she wasn't harmed, she was afraid. There was also the issue of the dangerous crosswalk. She thought they needed more creative solutions to improve and provide parking to lure more people to the area.

§ Mr. Tony Doumele said that last year the South Norwalk Station had a deficit of \$95k and as a taxpayer and commuter he saw not reason why the taxpayer should have to subsidize the Parking Authority fees. Mr. Mulvehill said when they looked at the budget and deficit; it's against a budgeted number. He said that during the budgeting process they made educated guesses as to the rates that should apply. Also their intention is to run the lots citywide that will benefit the taxpayers.

§ Mr. Steve Nezas said he was an East Norwalk resident that has experienced the tax hike. He pointed out that he and his wife were both commuters, so they were looking at a two-pass increase. Overall, he thought they needed to consider future parking needs for the city. Although a small increase might be acceptable, doubling the fee would be tough. He also noted that the crosswalk was a dangerous spot.

§ Mr. Chris Ford said he was a South Norwalk resident. He said he parked in the North Haviland Lot. He had a concern about the level of service, noting that before LAZ was there, there was a guard there most of the time, but now the guard was only there part time. However, the previous guard was usually asleep when they were there, they are not alert. There is also a lighting issue, noting there was a robbery incident at knifepoint last year, so he would like to see more security and better lighting. Also, when the clean the lot, they need a system implemented for alternative parking for the customers.

§ Ms. Loretta Klavecka said she parked in the North Haviland Lot. She asked about the broken lever dangling that seems to be smashed weekly. Mr. Mulvehill explained they designed the lever to break away when a car approaches, but if it's being damaged intentionally, then it needs to be replaced. Ms. Klavecka asked if the security cameras were in place. Mr. Mulvehill said the older lots have the cameras but they are not operating.

§ Ms. Claudia Wheeler said she used the Lower Haviland Street Lot. She asked about the hours that the security person was on duty. She mentioned it was also a dirty lot with old leaves still there. Mr. Del Monaco said the security person has assigned hours after 6:00 p.m. and those hours vary. But someone is there 7 days per week. Ms. Wheeler mentioned that the lighting was also bad.

§ Ms. Jenn Marco stated that she heard another level would be added to the top of the Haviland Street Lot. Mr. Alvord said there were no plans to do that. Ms. Marco went on to question if they forecasted the cost for the parking pass in terms of future planning. Mr. Mulvehill said there were city agencies that planned for the future in conjunction with consultants. Such as the for the Maritime Lot, this was planned and it was forecasted

how much it would cost, so nothing was really a surprise.

Ms. Marco went on to mention the broken lever. She thought that when it got late, people have a tendency to blaze through the lot and break the lever. So she suggested that a sign be put in place warning people that the lever is there. Mr. Mulvehill acknowledged that was a good idea.

Additional comments were made from the public:

§ The signs on the North Main Street side of the parking lot read 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 a.m., but people still feed the meters. Mr. Mulvehill noted that matter would be addressed.

The public hearing was closed.

INTRODUCTION OF THE NEW PARKING AUTHORITY MEMBER – JOHN FEDERICI

Mayor Moccia thanked Mr. Federici for accepting the position. Mr. Federici stated that he had been sworn in and he was glad to be serving on the commission.

APPROVALS/AUTHORIZATIONS

Approve the Minutes from the Parking Authority meeting held on Wednesday, December 21, 2005

Correction

Page 7; 3rd paragraph from the top, the last sentence where it reads, prior to the election that it was idiotic, should read, prior to the election that it was unrealistic...

**** MR. MULVEHILL MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES AS CORRECTED**

**** MOTION PASSED WITH THREE VOTES IN FAVOR AND TWO ABSTENTIONS
(MR. BENTKOVER AND MR. SHATZ)**

Appoint Vice Chairman of the Parking Authority

Mr. Mulvehill stated that Mr. Bentkover has served on the Parking Authority Commission longer than the chairman has, so he thought he was an appropriate candidate to fill the position.

**** MR. MULVEHILL MOVED APPROVAL OF THE APPOINTMENT OF STEPHEN BENTKOVER AS VICE CHAIRMAN**

**** MR. SHATZ SECONDED**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

DISCUSSION

Finance Director's Report

Ms. Hebert updated and briefly reviewed the report as submitted in the packets. She reviewed the finances through the fiscal year as they were outlined. She said revenue collection was lower than the approved budget. But it was consistent with projections as compared to the same time last year. There was a projected \$155k decrease in permit sales. She pointed it was lower than the approved budget, but again, it was consistent with the actual collections compared to the same time last year. She further noted the parking enforcement revenue was less than budgeted. The year-end projection for parking collections was over \$200k less than budgeted. They were projecting a shortfall of \$582k to the end of the fiscal year, but if the rate changes take effect, that amount will be a little over \$300k.

Mr. Bentkover asked of all the places they sell permits, do they have a fixed amount to sell among the number of parking lots. He questioned whether or not this has maximized. Ms. Hebert said no, they can still sell parking spots. Mr. Del Monaco further reviewed the number of people that park in the lot on an average day.

Mr. Bentkover said in regard to the parking meters, the budget seemed to reflect guess estimates and that they were playing catch up. He thought it was difficult to come up with an accurate budget. Therefore, he felt they needed to adhere to the plan for a year in order to get real numbers. Mr. Mulvehill pointed out that getting real numbers depended on the outcomes for the various lots.

Mr. Shahjahan thought the problem with achieving real numbers was due to not having expert advice on this matter. He noted they've only had recommendations from LAZ and others. Mr. Mulvehill said the changes were not so much a matter of having expertise, but more due to the tone of what's taking place in the lots. But he didn't want to make changes so often that the public was not aware of what is going on.

Mayor Moccia questioned the role of the collection agency in collecting on tickets amounting to \$403k. He pointed out they pay the agency's expenses, plus pay their fee and he didn't think the result was a good ratio outcome. Ms. Hebert noted the collection agency term was until December 2008.

Ms. Hebert updated that a party was interested in space in the Maritime Garage. They received a proposal and they will negotiate after with that party after resolving any issues. But they were looking to lease space and plan to move in March 2006. They will lease the space at a cost of \$2,300 for the first year; and \$2,600 for the next two years. She noted they will still negotiate and report back to the authority at a later date.

Mr. Shahjahan noted that Norwalk Hospital was looking for more parking space long term. Ms. Hebert said she had a discussion with them and let them know when they were ready, they should contact her office.

Ms. Hebert mentioned they were also working to lease space at the old police station.

Mr. Mulvehill asked about the North Water Street Lot item for the month of December. He thought they should be getting closer to \$7k or 8k per month, noting the numbers reported were on the low end. Ms. Hebert pointed out what wasn't reflected were the number of tickets written. They also compared the figures to the last fiscal year and they are ahead.

Mr. Mulvehill asked about revenue available in the capital budget. Ms. Hebert said they went through the capital budget process and received approval for \$325k. She further reviewed monies requested for various improvements and said there was money bonded for the Parking Authority, but for the Webster Street Lot, the \$200k they received went through the special capital appropriation process but it wasn't bonded, but it is available from the cash accrual in the budget. She clarified that there was \$325k in the capital budget and \$200k in the special appropriation budget.

Mr. Alvord explained there were two bids on phase II that entailed the reconfiguration for Webster Lot.

Mr. Shahjahan asked if there was any chance they could look at the idea of placing the booth somewhere else, i.e., the person prepays in one location and exit at another location. Mr. Alvord responded absolutely not, because there isn't enough money left in the budget to do that.

Mr. Mulvehill asked if they could attach a page outlining the capital budgeted items to the report. Ms. Hebert noted this could be done.

Preliminary Operating and Capital Budgets FY 0607

Ms. Hebert said this item was presented to comply with the ordinance. It was a preliminary budget and they worked on it a long time. She said it included all the expense reductions done to date, but it didn't include the proposed rate increases.

Mr. Mulvehill commented it would be good to actually see the previous year compared to the current year, compared month by month. Ms. Hebert pointed out where that information was indicated on the report. She noted they could format it though for easier reading.

Mr. Shahjahan asked where they were at revenue wise without the rate increase reflected. Ms. Hebert said they were \$580k short through the end of the fiscal year. She noted they could put together a spreadsheet to show those numbers.

**** MR. MULVEHILL MOVED TO APPROVE PROCESSING OF THE
PRELIMINARY BUDGET AND PROCEDURE
** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Discussion on the Proposed Rate Changes

**** MR. BENTKOVER MOVED TO TABLE APPROVAL FO THE PROPOSED RATE INCREASED FOR THE PURPOSE OF RECEIVING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE BUDGET. NOTING A VOTE WOULD BE TAKEN AT THE NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING**

Discussion regarding the rate changes began, but Mayor Moccia suggested that they evaluate all the concerns as a whole and make a decision at a later date. All agreed that was the prudent thing to do.

There was some open discussion as it pertained to the free grace period in the Webster Lot and how to rectify the issues surrounding the Crown Theatre, i.e., the queue time to enter and exit the theatre and the arrangement the Parking Authority has with the theatre.

Mr. Mulvehill asked about the signs for movie parking being free. Mr. Del Monaco said they put up the sign only on the weekends, noting that if the Crown Theatre arrangement continued, then they might consider a more permanent sign.

Mr. Shahjahan returned to the matter of the budget and the possibility of having of seeing a deficit next year. He said even if they raised rates, he thought it would be good to have some guidelines as to what they would do in the second or third years. Mayor Moccia replied that he advocated concern about this topic, but until the Maritime yards parcel is complete, they couldn't be sure. He pointed out however that they were never sure that the parking system would be self-sufficient. And as he initially stated, he didn't think it was a realistic approach. So there has to be a better understanding from everyone's perspective so they can move forward.

Mr. Mulvehill commented that as long as it's done in a balanced manner, it should still be beneficial to the taxpayer.

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

Parking Authority December 2005 Operation Report

It was noted that everyone should review this report and that they should e-mail any questions to Ms. Hebert's office.

Mr. Mulvehill asked about equipment failures. Mr. Del Monaco said there was a defect in one of the lots in the pavement when they relocated the equipment, but it was fixed two weeks ago and since then, there hasn't been any problem. Overall, they were more satisfied that the equipment lives up to expectations.

Other Business

Mr. Shahjahan asked about the handling of complaints. Mr. Alvord said they have done everything they could to get people to report problems. They initiated a system where you give a card out to a resident and if they have a complaint about one of the lots, they will be given the card and told to contact customer service.

Mr. Alvord said they would provide a routine report to the Mayor, and the Common Council. But he clarified it has been a pattern for one person to complain numerous times about the same issue and then this gets picked up by other people, making it appear that there is more than one issue.

There was further open discussion regarding complaints in the lots and tracking of those complaints, as well as equipment failures. It was thought that having this information reported would assist them in setting a better policy how to handle them. Mr. Alvord agreed that specific information should be reported, but he felt that having to report on every piece of equipment that may experience temporary failure wasn't necessary. Mr. Shahjahan clarified that he wasn't talking about reporting minute-by-minute failures, but perhaps having five to ten metrics that could be reported on a monthly basis. He thought this way the Parking Authority could act in a more proactive manner. Mr. Bentkover thought that most important was to quantify equipment time down.

Mr. Alvord expressed there were a lot of complaints heard during the public hearing tonight that were completely inaccurate. He explained that specific incidents such as a light bulb being out was often the result of a more serious issue such as an engineering problem that takes more time to address.

Mr. Mulvehill stated there might be some merit into getting a brief report regarding incidents such as these.

OTHER

Action on any item discussed herein
See above

Next Parking Authority meeting:

Wednesday, February 22, 2006/7:30 p.m., Public Works Conference Room

ADJOURNED

**** MR. BENTKOVER MOVED TO ADJOURN**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diane Graham
Telesco Secretarial Services

