

CITY OF NORWALK
TRAFFIC AUTHORITY
REGULAR MEETING
BY VIDEO CONFERENCE AND TELECONFERENCE
DECEMBER 18, 2023

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Members of the public who wish to provide public comment are encouraged to submit those via e-mail in advance of the meeting. For these comments to be read into the record, they should be submitted at least three hours in advance of the meeting start time. Please email Garrett Bolella at gbolella@norwalkct.gov to provide written comment prior to the meeting.

ATTENDANCE: Mayor Rilling; Commissioner Lopez; Commissioner Collier-Clemmons

STAFF: Chief James Walsh; Deputy Chief Terry Blake; Deputy Chief Melissa Lepore, Deputy Chief James Dinho; Jessica Vonashek, Chief of Economic and Community Development; James Travers, Director, TMP; Garrett Bolella, Asst. Director, TMP; Nathan Fankhanel, Junior Engineer, TMP

OTHER: Kevin Smith, Henley Street Marketing, LLC.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Rilling called the meeting to order at 4:00PM.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

1. DISCUSSION/VOTE TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF NOVEMBER 20, 2023

**** COMMISSIONER LOPEZ MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF
NOVEMBER 20, 2023, AS SUBMITTED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

2. DISCUSSION/VOTE TO APPROVE THE NORWALK TRAFFIC AUTHORITY MEETING DATES FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2024

**** COMMISSIONER COLLIER-CLEMMONS MOVED TO APPROVE THE NORWALK
TRAFFIC AUTHORITY MEETING DATES FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2024.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

3. DISCUSSION/VOTE PRESENTATION ON LEGAL GOLF CARTS ON NORWALK'S STREET

Commissioner Collier-Clemmons moved the item for discussion.

Mr. Smith introduced himself and said he is representing Connecticut Custom Carts which is a golf cart dealership that is based in Norwalk, and the sponsor of the proposed regulation permitting the use of golf carts in specific shoreline neighborhoods in Norwalk.

Mr. Smith presented a summary of the proposal and said that street legal golf carts are popular all over the country and provide tangible benefits for the people in the communities where they are legal, and there are eight towns and cities in Connecticut that already have regulations in place. He said there was a study performed that ranked the social benefits of regulating golf carts which included recreation and exercise, alternative transportation, transportation for the elderly, transportation for the disabled, reducing air pollution, and a way to meet neighbors. He said they did a deep dive into the existing proposals in Connecticut and spoke to the Connecticut towns that have regulations and they have said the regulations are well received in the communities where they were enacted, the rest of the town has not been impacted by the regulation, they have not been a burden on the Police Department, and there have been no accidents reported since the regulations were enacted. He said according to the Connecticut Crash Data Repository there are only eight golf cart accidents per year and only 1.5 per year in the towns that have a regulation in place.

Mayor Rilling asked out of the eight towns that have the regulation what is the largest population. Mr. Smith said it is Stratford. Mayor Rilling asked for confirmation that golf carts would not be permitted on any street that has a speed limit of 25MPH or more. Mr. Smith said they would not be allowed on any street that has a posted speed limit of more than 25MPH. Mayor Rilling asked what the largest population is nationwide of the town/cities that have enacted the regulation. Mr. Smith said he would research that and report back to the commission. Mayor Rilling asked if golf carts are subject to parking tickets. Mr. Smith said “yes”, and the statute permits the Traffic Authority to set violations that are based on their existing statute or any other conditions/limitations that are set by the Traffic Authority for the operation of golf carts. Mayor Rilling asked what type of registration is issued for golf carts. Mr. Smith said often times it is done via sticker that is provided to the owner of the golf cart however, he has seen where license plates have been provided as well so it would be up to the town.

Commissioner Collier-Clemmons asked for confirmation that the golf carts are allowed to be used at night. Mr. Smith said “yes” that is correct and that is per the state statute. Commissioner Collier-Clemmons asked how driving a golf cart gives one exercise as was mentioned in the study. Mr. Smith said it was more about getting to recreational facilities. Commissioner Collier-Clemmons said according to the proposal these carts would only be used in beach communities and on certain streets in Norwalk and those streets would not include them getting to gyms. Commissioner Collier-Clemmons asked if the city would be responsible for drawing up the regulations for registration, doing the registration, issuing the registration plates, and having them renewed. Mr. Smith said “yes”, and the registration and the proposed forms are in draft form in the packet that was provided to the commissioners.

Commissioner Lopez asked if there is a specific time at night that golf carts would not be allowed to be used. Mr. Smith said the way that many of the municipalities have handled that is to say 30 minutes prior to sundown. Commissioner Lopez said he would imagine there would be additional costs to the city to administer the registration process. Mr. Smith said that is correct but in speaking to the administrators of the communities that already have the regulation in place they said that it was not an additional burden on them and that he is happy to share the surveys with the commission. He also said that all the communities that have enacted the regulation have some sort of fee for the registration and each town/city can determine what that fee is. He also said that the question of property tax should also be explored and that there can be some additional revenues for the program based on that. Commissioner Lopez asked if there is any requirement for training. Mr. Smith said “no” but there are most likely some entrepreneurial people that may be interested in providing training for golf cart use if that is something the commission thought is necessary as part of the regulation.

Commissioner Collier-Clemmons asked if any of the cities have minimum or maximum age limits for operating the golf carts or is that up to the municipality. Mr. Smith said not that he is aware but according to the state statute the operator of the golf cart must carry a valid operator drivers license and that is included in their proposal. Commissioner Collier-Clemmons said that when Mr. Smith gathers the information that has been requested by the commission from the towns that already have the regulation in place that the size of the cities be included and the known cost that they have incurred from implementing the regulation.

Chief Walsh said that he has researched the packet that was provided to the commission and his concerns for the proposal are the population and traffic density in Norwalk, and over the past few years have seen a large increase in beach traffic on the weekends and there is probably over 100,000 in Norwalk in the summer based on the attractions and events that are held. He said his second concern is the comingling of roads that have the 25 MPH speed limits versus the streets that have no posting and can be driven up to 30MPH. He said the biggest issue was that this company started in East Norwalk last year and the police

have had problems with them all summer long after many discussions and many warnings, people were still not doing what they were told. He said that some of the people that were on the ground floor of this proposal were pushing golf carts out to Norwalk city roads without doing it the proper way and there were issues.

Asst. Chief Blake said that he echoes Chief Walsh's comments and that this has been discussed by the Chief and the Deputy Chiefs at length as there were a lot of issues around the beach and Rowayton with golf carts. Deputy Chief Dinho agreed and said that this would be an added issue in the winter and would be enticing to the younger generation to be driven in the snow. Deputy Chief Lepore agreed and said that Beach Road is a very busy road in the summer including pedestrians and cyclists so there could be some safety concerns.

Mr. Travers said TMP is undertaking the effort for a complete streets legislation and design manual on how the roads are used and he is concerned about the number of modes of transportation that will be added particularly on the tighter roads. Mr. Bolella said the two concerns of TMP are connectivity as well as the density of traffic.

Mayor Rilling asked what the top speed of a golf cart is. Mr. Smith said 25MPH but he believes there is a way to get them up to 28MPH.

Mr. Smith thanked Chief Walsh for the concerns that he mentioned but he is uncertain on how many of the golf carts that were stopped for violations were already owned by current residents that predated Connecticut Custom Carts. Chief Walsh said the issue he is referring to was in East Norwalk where the Connecticut Custom Carts is located and last year it became a problem when the golf carts were being introduced to the East Norwalk area out of the Cove Marina area. Mr. Smith also said that regulations can be put in place regarding the use of carts during inclement weather.

Mayor Rilling said there are significant safety concerns from the Traffic Authority as well as the Police Department so he will not call for a vote at this time and it will be discussed as the commission receives more information and come to a determination in the relatively near future.

4. DISCUSSION- FOLLOW-UP ON APPROVAL OF "NO PARKING" ON BELMONT PLACE

Mr. Bolella said this item was brought to the commission at the last meeting and was approved subject to reaching out to the neighborhood, so a letter was sent to all the residents as a follow up explaining the process and timeline of the project, and asking to reach out if there are any questions or concerns and they did not receive any from any of the residents.

5. DISCUSSION/VOTE- APPROVAL OF "NO PARKING REGULATION" ON LUFBERRY AVENUE

Mr. Fankhanel said this item was brought to the attention of TMP through the customer service center and had multiple requests for Lufberry Avenue and the specific issue is parked cars on the bend of the street which cause a sightline issue up toward route 1 and have had issues with accidents in the past. He said they are proposing a parking restriction and the three residents that will be affected were notified of the proposed parking restriction and they received two letters of support, and one letter opposing it but that was from the resident that is causing the issue with the parking on the street. He said during the field

inspections there were numerous residents of the neighborhood that approached staff asking if they were here to fix the parking. Commissioner Collier-Clemmons asked if the residents that approached staff during the field inspections are the same residents that received the letters. Mr. Fankhanel said “no” they were not. Commissioner Lopez asked how many accidents occurred in this location. Mr. Fankhanel said there were three in the past five years and although that does not seem like many this is a very low speed residential street.

**** COMMISSIONER LOPEZ MOVED TO APPROVE NO PARKING REGULATION” ON LUFBERRY AVENUE.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

ADJOURNMENT

**** COMMISSIONER COLLIER- CLEMMONS MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 4:55PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dilene Byrd