



Committee on Legislative Matters and the Northampton City Council

Members

Councilor William H. Dwight, Chair

Councilor Gina-Louise Sciarra, Vice Chair

Councilor Rachel Maiore

Councilor John Thorpe

MEETING MINUTES

Date: September 14, 2020, Time: 5:00 pm
Virtual Meeting

1. **Meeting Called to Order:** At 5 p.m., Councilor Dwight called the meeting to order.
2. **Roll Call:** On a roll call, the following councilors were present: Councilor Dwight, Councilor Maiore, Councilor Sciarra and Councilor Thorpe. Also present were Councilor Nash, Councilor Jarrett and Administrative Assistant Laura Krutzler.
4. **Approve Minutes of April 23, 2020 Joint Planning Board/Legislative Matters Committee Meeting**
Councilor Thorpe moved to approve the minutes of April 23, 2020. Councilor Sciarra seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.
5. **Items Referred to Committee**
 - A. **20.014 An Ordinance Relative to Parking on Bridge Street**
Councilor Sciarra moved to forward the ordinance with a positive recommendation. Councilor Maiore seconded.

Two of the parking changes on the agenda are related, Councilor Nash advised. He has been working with the administrative assistant to make sure they come to Legislative Matters at the same time because they have the same objective. They originally would have come to them in April but COVID has thrown everything off schedule.

Last fall, the City Council changed six long-term parking spaces on Bridge Street in front of what many refer to as Augie's (across the street from the Roost) to short-term parking, he reminded. In addition, there were some changes in long-term parking with the closing of the Depot lot, which pushed employees of downtown businesses to look elsewhere. The six spaces in front of Augie's were all designated as long-term parking, but the city had a number of business owners coming to them asking that they *quickly* be converted from long-term to short-term. The council did that, but at the same time, the Transportation and Parking Commission (TPC) began looking for places to replace the loss of those long-term spaces.

One of the proposed sites for creation of new long-term parking is along Bridge Street. Currently, it is unmetered, and it would become metered, long-term parking. He did a lot of outreach with neighboring businesses. Historic Northampton has some worries about how it may impact visitors, he acknowledged. Historic Northampton has some of its own off street parking, and he thinks having some metered spaces there will actually free up spaces for them. As the Ward 3 councilor and the one who helped guide the ordinances through TPC he is comfortable with these moving forward to council for approval, he shared.

The idea of putting meters in is to create turnover. When people are used to having unmetered spaces, it is a bit of a culture change, he allowed. Along the Bridge Street corridor, they already have meters up the street, and the city has been expanding long-term parking on Elm Street along the Smith College campus. This is part of that expansion of long-term parking specifically for downtown employees.

Councilor Sciarra asked if the spaces are currently demarcated in any way.

They are line-striped, Councilor Nash said. The rate is .25 an hour, he noted.

Councilor Thorpe asked if Historic Northampton had any other concerns.

"They were a little squeamish about the change," Councilor Nash acknowledged.

Councilor Sciarra said she knows parents do park in those spots for pick up and drop off at Bridge Street School since the school can be accessed through Historic Northampton. Councilor Nash said he wasn't aware of that.

She is not saying it should preclude them from doing it, Councilor Sciarra clarified. It would be more of a concern for pick-up than for drop-off since the spaces probably would not be occupied early in the morning.

His guess is that it will actually create more opportunity for parking there, Councilor Nash reiterated. Now people park there long term because there is no fee. Installation of a meter is expected to create more turnover.

It is worth noting that currently people can park there without paying so the same problem would present itself for parents, Councilor Dwight observed.

The proposed parking is intended to be supplemental to long-term parking for downtown employees, Councilor Nash stressed. It seems to him that whatever challenges exist for Bridge Street School will remain. They won't be improved but they won't be made worse.

Members asked questions and offered comments. Councilor Maiore asked if tenants use that parking.

Councilor Nash said he doesn't believe residents use it for overnight parking. It would still be free for parking overnight. It is mostly business parking. It looks residential, but most of the buildings have businesses in them.

There are pending tenancy issues, Councilor Dwight conjectured. All up and down that part of Bridge Street, a number of new units that have gone on line that are not yet occupied. He imagines some of the

pressures Councilor Maiore was referring to are going to emerge. It is a good idea to have new parking regulations in effect before people move in, thereby removing an expectation of entitlement. He thinks it is appropriate to remove the unmetered parking at this time with the pressures that exist.

It is an ideal time to add this zone because of COVID, Councilor Nash agreed. They are expecting downtown to revitalize itself at some point and then all their parking pressures to come back. When everybody comes back on board, everything will be in place.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

B. 20.015 An Ordinance Relative to Metered Parking on Pleasant Street, referred by City Council - 9/3/2020

Councilor Nash has framed this for them somewhat already, Councilor Dwight noted.

This came out of the TPC with a positive recommendation but then was held up after it was discovered that, for vehicles entering and leaving Millbank Plaza, sight lines were terrible, Councilor Nash explained. The rework was to expand the 'No Parking' zone adjacent to the exit from the plaza. The parking was reconfigured to take out one of the metered parking spaces, allowing for greater visibility. It was a request of all of the businesses there. Again, the goal is creating a long-term metered parking zone for downtown employees.

By and large, businesses all around there were fine with this moving to long-term parking, he reported. He said he believes it adds about nine spaces.

Councilor Nash confirmed that the spaces are presently not metered. The parking was created as part of the Pleasant Futures Project with the intention at some point to make it long-term.

The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

C. 20.115 An Ordinance Relative to Parking on Middle Street, referred by City Council - 9/3/2020

Councilor Dwight said he is very familiar with this and remembers Councilor Murphy dealing with it for six years.

Councilor Sciarra moved to make a positive recommendation. Councilor Thorpe seconded.

This came out of a larger conversation with residents around Middle Street parking, Councilor Jarrett explained. A neighborhood resident asked him to bring the spot closest to Chestnut Street to the attention of the DPW. The DPW determined that it is not safe if the street is narrowed by snow for cars turning onto Middle Street from Chestnut Street because of a blind spot created by the presence of a building. The change eliminates one of the three non-time-limited spots on the street. He will continue to engage Middle Street residents to see if further changes are necessary, Councilor Jarrett said.

The bigger conversation he's been having is about changes to the time-limited spots, he continued. Two-hour spots were originally put in place along Middle Street to discourage the use of those spots by workers at some of the neighboring businesses. He has heard that the medical center has engaged rental parking from the church nearby. In this case, the change is just a safety issue.

Councilor Sciarra confirmed her understanding that Middle Street will lose one non-time-limited parking space and that two non-time-limited spaces will remain. She asked about making all the spaces time-limited.

Councilor Jarrett said that would be a bigger conversation. The residents are now asking for fewer restrictions. The time limit is difficult for some when they have guests. He thinks more time-limited spaces are not what is needed.

Councilor Maiore asked about turning one of the time-limited spaces into a non-time-limited space. Again, that is part of a larger conversation, Councilor Jarrett suggested.

The current layout is hard won, Councilor Dwight commented. Discussion was ongoing for at least five years and there was a lot of stress. The medical building - 10 Main Street - essentially had overflow parking; its staff would park on Middle Street because they were discouraged from parking in off-street parking and patients were also parking on the street. Residents were upset by the loss of access to parking for themselves and concerned about safety with snow storage when essentially it is rendered a one-lane road. This was a long-established compromise, he volunteered.

Normally this meeting would be attended by about 40 or 50 people to talk about the one space. He can appreciate that residents now are calling for more leniency so apparently the striping and addition of time limits has been satisfactory. Now they want it to loosen up a little bit so they can have access to those spaces for more than two hours. He appreciates Councilor Jarrett's having an ongoing conversation about parking there.

He also appreciates that this is a sight line issue for this one space. "I certainly can support that," he confirmed. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

5. **Public Comment**

Councilor Dwight said it had been pointed out that he had missed public comment. He recognized the presence of Ezekiel Baskin and asked if he was interested in making a public comment.

Mr. Baskin said he did not really have a comment but it was nice to see all their faces.

6. **New Business**

A. **Rescheduling October Meeting (falls on a holiday)**

Councilor Sciarra moved to change the October meeting date from October 12th to October 13th at 5 p.m. Councilor Maiore seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote.

7. **Adjourn**

Councilor Thorpe moved to adjourn. Councilor Sciarra seconded. The motion passed unanimously 4:0 by roll call vote. The meeting was adjourned at 5:39 p.m.

Prepared By:

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