

Traffic Commission Meeting Minutes
November 18, 2021

Meeting was held virtually on Thursday November 18, 2021 at 5:00pm (Please click this link to attend the virtual meeting) <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/232991597>

Attendance: Thomas Graney, Lena Webb, Jill Lathan, Lt. Polito (arrived at 5:12), Mark Niedergang

Staff: Laura Accaputo, Suzanne Rinfret, Justin Schreiber, Brad Rawson, Nancy Bacci

Other: Concerned Highland Av resident, Stephen Mackey

Meeting Ground Rules:

1. Listen to the other side
2. Focus on issues, not personalities
3. Avoid questioning motives
4. Be polite

The Chair went over the meeting ground rules and called the meeting to order at 5:04pm.

The Chair asked the secretary to conduct a roll call vote on each item.

Item #1 – A motion to approve the minutes from the October 14, 2021 Traffic Commission Meeting was made by Mark Niedergang, 2nd by Lena Webb. The secretary called for a roll call vote; Thomas Graney – yes; Mark Niedergang – yes; Lena Webb – yes. The motion passed: 3-0

Item #2 – Request for the Traffic Commission to reaffirm and ratify its approval of all items on the July 15, 2021 agenda with a roll call vote.

- The Chair explained that pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021 this meeting of the Traffic Commission will be conducted via remote participation and an audio recording will be posted on the City of Somerville website. She further stated the TC was notified of an appeal of its actions related to the College Av project, the appeal will be held in a Public Hearing by the Traffic Board. Tonight the TC will hear public comment on the agenda item but she wanted it noted that this meeting is not the venue for the appeal of the project and is just to ratify the previous approval with a roll call vote. She then asked if there were any members of the public that wanted to speak on the item and asked they keep it to two minutes. Hearing none the commission moved forward with the vote.

A motion to approve was made by Thomas Graney, 2nd by Mark Niedergang. The secretary called for a roll call vote; Thomas Graney – yes; Mark Niedergang – yes; Lena Webb – yes. The motion passed: 3-0

Item #3 – Request for Handicapped Parking

a. 8 Linden Av

- Nancy Bacci stated she reviewed the request and recommends approval.

A motion to approve was made by Mark Niedergang, 2nd by Thomas Graney. The secretary called for a roll call vote; Thomas Graney – yes; Mark Niedergang – yes; Lena Webb – yes. The motion passed: 3-0

b. 57 Grant St

- Nancy Bacci stated she reviewed the request and recommends approval.

A motion to approve was made by Mark Niedergang, 2nd by Lena Webb. The secretary called for a roll call vote; Thomas Graney – yes; Mark Niedergang – yes; Lena Webb – yes. The motion passed: 3-0

Lt. Polito joined the meeting at 5:12pm

Item #4 – Request for 20mph Speed Safety Zones

Street	From	To
Lowell St.	Vernon St.	Medford St. (both directions)
Wilton St.	Berwick St.	Lowell St.
Richardson St.	Hinckley St.	Lowell St. (both directions)
Fisk Ave.	Hinckley St.	Lowell St.
Hinckley St.	Broadway	Richardson St. (both directions)
Hinckley St.	Richardson St.	Wilton St.
Nashua St.	Richardson St.	Wilton St. (both directions)
Henderson St.	Richardson St.	Wilton St.
Charles E. Ryan Rd	Broadway	Cutler St. (both directions)
Franey Rd.	Cedar St.	Charles E. Ryan Rd. (both directions)

- Brad Rawson stated the Mobility Department has been working in increments to convert all eligible residential streets to 20mph speed safety zones and this will be the final section.
- Councilor Niedergang stated these streets are in his ward and he is very happy with the request.

A motion to approve was made by Mark Niedergang, 2nd by Lt. Polito. The secretary called for a roll call vote; Thomas Graney – yes; Mark Niedergang – yes; Lena Webb – yes; Lt. Polito – yes. The motion passed: 4-0

Item #5 – Request to make the following parking regulation changes, for a period of one year, relative to parking regulations for city and school staff in the area of City Hall, Somerville High School, and the Central Library:

- a. Request for approximately 15 parking spaces on the north side of Highland Ave, from opposite Putnam St to the City Hall driveway, currently designated as 2 hour parking except by permit, to be regulated as City Hall or School Permit Parking Only from 7AM to 9AM Mon-Fri.
 - b. Request for approximately 12 parking spaces on the north side of Highland Ave, between the entrance and exit to the Somerville High School Driveway, currently designated as 2 hour parking except by permit, to be regulated as City Hall or School Permit Parking Only from 7AM to 9AM Mon-Fri. This change will not apply to the existing ADA spaces along this block until after they are relocated into the Somerville High School concourse.
 - c. Request for approximately 7 parking spaces on the west side of Walnut St, between the Highland Ave and Medford St (except for the existing loading zone), currently unregulated, to be regulated as City Hall or School Permit Parking Only from 7AM to 9AM Mon-Fri and otherwise as two hour parking except by permit.
 - d. Request for approximately 9 parking spaces on the east side of Walnut St, between the Highland Ave and Medford St, currently regulated at No Parking Anytime, to be regulated as City Hall or School Permit Parking Only from 7AM to 9AM Mon-Fri and otherwise as two hour parking except by permit.
 - e. Request for approximately 9 parking spaces on the east side of School St, between Highland Ave and opposite Madison St, currently regulated as City Hall Permit Only 8AM-5PM Mon-Fri, to be regulated as City Hall or School Permit Parking Only from 7AM to 9AM Mon-Fri and otherwise as two hour parking except by permit. This change will not include the existing loading zone or ADA spaces along this block.
- Justin Schreiber explained this request came as the result of the Mobility Department working in conjunction for the past 8 months with representation from city council, school staff, neighborhood residents and city staff to make it easier for teachers to find parking spaces and to take pressure off of the surrounding streets in the neighborhood. He noted non-resident staff receives a City Hall or School permit and this proposal adds 43 spaces restricted specifically for those permit holders between the hours of 7am-9am. Staff arriving at 7am has

difficulty finding parking as most residents haven't left for work yet. After 9am all permits will be allowed.

- The Chair asked what will happen after the year is up and Justin explained the year will give them a chance to see how it is working and give them time to collect data from the GLX and then report back to the TC with a more permanent recommendation.
- A concerned resident from Highland Av stated she believes it is unfair to the people living on this block of Highland Av to be pushed to the side streets. The homes on the side streets have driveways but the 6 condo buildings from Walnut to Vinyl, one of which has over 50 units; do not have off street parking. She also stated when the voters approved the new High School in 2016 it was to include a parking garage for the teachers, the garage was later taken away after a study was done in 2018 saying the side streets could absorb the teachers vehicles. She asked why the study showed the local streets could handle the parking when clearly they can't. She believes there are other solutions to pursue other than pushing families out. She also stated it has been awful to live through all of the construction for the past 4 years and especially difficult with snow on the ground. It is becoming unlivable and several families have already had to leave. She noted that parking is being removed on Highland Av to put in a bike lane, even though there is already a community path, and if they want to promote a no car culture then have the teachers walk, bike or take the MBTA. The residents should not have to pay for the poor decisions and lack of foresight of the city.
- Another concerned resident stated she walks to work and she cannot come back to move her car. She echoed all of the concerns of her neighbor.
- Mark Niedergang stated he consulted with Ward 3 Councilor Ben Ewen-Campen and Councilor at Large Mary Jo Rossetti, both on the HS parking committee, and both support this measure. He is sympathetic to the resident and although what she said is true there is a shortage of parking in this area, partly due to construction vehicles and also because the planning was not done well. However a choice has to be made. The teachers will have more difficulty finding parking so early in the morning and trying to make it to school on time. He then read into the record a letter Councilor Mary Jo Rossetti stating she has heard from teachers who start their day in tears trying to find a parking spot and arriving to school late impacting students and making for low morale. He stated he will support this request as he thinks it is absolutely critical for the teachers to get to class on time.
- The concerned resident stated the teachers should be encouraged to take public transportation and she believes residents that vote and pay taxes should be given more consideration. She stated this was not well advertised and she only found out about the meeting after she was forwarded a newsletter from the Ward 3 councilor. She does not think a vote should be taken at this time.
- Brad Rawson stated staff is working to find compromises that work for as many stakeholders as possible and will be happy to work with the commission members

if they want to make any modifications to the pilot program. This recommendation was made to improve the status quo.

- The Chair asked Brad to address the concerns regarding advertisement for this pilot program and he deferred to the Parking Department. Suzanne Rinfret stated Open Meeting Law requirement is followed, the meeting is posted a week in advance on the city website.
- Stephen Mackey, President of the Chamber of Commerce, stated the problem with the Traffic Commission is it was created by a Home Rule Petition in 1978 and a public hearing is not required. This worked fine back then because the issues weren't as complex. On this matter they are confronted with changing the behavior of school teachers. In the 21st Century the world expects transparency. This 5 member commission can vote on whatever it wants without a public hearing. He holds the Mobility Department to account for hiding behind meetings where they don't have to consider public input
- The Chair asked the commission members for feedback on the possibility of moving these items to the next meeting to give the Mobility Department time to address the concerns of the residents.
- Mark Niedergang stated he thinks there is a lot of validity in Mr. Mackey's comments but they are beside the point to the item before the commission. This is a bad situation around the HS and from the information he received from Councilor Ewen-Campen there is vicious competition between teachers and residents for parking spaces between 7am-9am. This is a partial solution to the problem and is the result of the meetings that consisted of many stakeholders; it is not just from the mobility department. It is an attempt to make the situation better and help the teachers at the HS. For these reasons he would like to vote today and implement the changes as soon as possible.
- Lt. Polito stated the need for the teachers to make it into the classroom on time is the overriding factor for him to support the request. He understands what the resident was relaying and it is a very tough situation with no great solution.
- Lena Webb agrees with Lt. Polito and Mark Niedergang and cannot imagine the stress of the teachers trying to get to a classroom of students on time, she agrees the vote should proceed and she supports the request.
- Tom Graney asked where the teachers will go after 9am and Justin explained that after 9am it is open to all permits. Teachers will not have to move after 9am but all other permits will also be allowed to park there after 9am.
- A concerned Highland Av resident noted once the teacher parks there at 7am they will be there until the end of the school day and the spots will be unusable to residents. In the evening most people won't be able to use them because they will have to vacate them by 7am. She asked them to delay the vote to give residents a chance to speak on it. She also stated the city could have done a much better job on advertising the proposed changes and the meeting. She asked what happened to the results of the parking study that found the streets could absorb the teachers and why are they now short on spaces.

- The Chair thanked the resident and closed the public comment portion of the meeting. She asked Brad to respond to the question regarding the parking study and he deferred to Justin Schreiber.
- Justin explained the most recent study which extended a few blocks around the campus, counted spaces during street sweeping, after snow emergencies, on typical nights and a few rapid counts (counting smaller areas in a shorter time period) and they identified this as being an issue permanently for the teachers. It factored in the capacity available on the streets and how many spaces were removed from the surface lots at the old HS and allocated those spaces to excess capacity on the surrounding streets and concluded there was capacity on the surrounding streets to absorb the teacher parking. He noted this is not creating new parking spaces but just adding more clarity to where those spaces can be found. Teachers can and do continue to park in permit areas around the campus.

A motion to approve Item 5a-e was made by Mark Niedergang, 2nd by Lena Webb. The secretary called for a roll call vote; Thomas Graney – yes; Mark Niedergang – yes; Lena Webb – yes; Lt. Polito – yes. The motion passed: 4-0

Item #6 – Request for approximately 8 parking spaces on the north side of Highland Ave, between Walnut St and the Somerville High School concourse entrance, west of the two existing ADA spaces, to be regulated as metered parking from 8AM-8PM and for the remainder of this block to remain 2 hour parking except by permit.

- Justin Schreiber shared a map of the area with the commission. He explained the Director of the Central Library raised concerns about spaces for library patrons. Adding meters will encourage more turnover than the existing 2 hour restriction does.
- Mark Niedergang stated this makes sense to him and noted he has heard from the Director of the library and trustees regarding parking problems for library patrons and he supports the request.

A motion to approve was made by Mark Niedergang, 2nd by Lt. Polito. The secretary called for a roll call vote; Thomas Graney – yes; Mark Niedergang – yes; Lena Webb – yes; Lt. Polito – yes. The motion passed: 4-0

Item #7 - Request for approximately 4 parking spaces on the north side of Highland Ave, between the Somerville High School concourse exit to the rear of the existing bus stop opposite Putnam St, currently regulated as Pick-up/Drop-off only 7AM-5PM and Permit Parking Only from 5PM to 7AM, to be regulated as Pick-up/Drop-off only 7AM-2PM, No Parking - MBTA Buses Only from 2-3PM, and Permit Parking Only from 3PM to 7AM. Additionally, requesting that the advertising period for this change is waived to address immediate safety issues for Somerville High School students boarding MBTA buses at school dismissal time.

- Justin Schreiber explained the MBTA makes additional trips during the afternoon hour and currently those additional busses are loading students in a travel lane causing a safety

issue. This restriction will allow the busses to pull up to the curb. He also noted every HS student is eligible for a free MBTA pass so there is a lot of demand.

A motion to approve was made by Thomas Graney, 2nd by Lena Webb. The secretary called for a roll call vote; Thomas Graney – yes; Mark Niedergang – yes; Lena Webb – yes; Lt. Polito – yes. The motion passed: 4-0

Item #8 – Request to change the existing fire lanes on Weston Av as follows:

- 30 Weston Av, north side, extends around the corner for seventy feet (70') ending at #28 Weston Av
 - 41 Weston Av, south side, extends for sixty feet (60') to the intersection with Clarendon Av
 - North side of Weston Av at the intersection of Clarendon Av extends westerly for a distance of seventy seven feet (77').
- Thomas Graney stated the Chief requested these changes as fire apparatus has difficulty navigating through this area.

A motion to approve was made by Lena Webb, 2nd by Thomas Graney. The secretary called for a roll call vote; Thomas Graney – yes; Mark Niedergang – yes; Lena Webb – yes; Lt. Polito – yes. The motion passed: 4-0

The Chair thanked the Commission and the members of the public that spoke at the meeting. She stated she is fully aware of the difficulty and stress caused by Items 5-7 to the parents, families and residents involved and looks forward to continuing discussion over the next year of the pilot program. She stated although she understands some may feel their voices have not been heard we do have procedural processes in place and she hopes over the next year we can find some middle ground to support teachers, students and residents.

A motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:04pm was made by Lena Webb, 2nd by Thomas Graney. Motion passed: 4-0

