

COMMITTEE ON INFRASTRUCTURE

JUNE 22, 2016

A meeting of the Committee on Infrastructure was held Wednesday, June 22, 2016, at 7:01 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chamber.

Alderman-at-Large Mark S. Cookson, Chair, presided.

Members of Committee present: Alderman David Schoneman, Vice Chair
Alderman Richard A. Dowd
Alderman Tom Lopez

Members not in Attendance: Alderman Sean M. McGuinness

Also in Attendance: Alderman Ken Siegel

PUBLIC COMMENT - None

COMMUNICATIONS

From: Sarah Marchant, Community Development Division Director & Madeleine Minueau,
Waterways Manager
Re: Update on Hydropower Projects

**MOTION BY ALDERMAN SCHONEMAN TO ACCEPT AND PLACE ON FILE
MOTION CARRIED**

From: Tim Cummings, Economic Development Director
Re: Informational Briefing on Court Street Oval

**MOTION BY ALDERMAN SCHONEMAN TO SUSPEND THE RULES TO ALLOW THE ACCEPTANCE OF
A COMMUNICATION THAT WAS PROVIDED AFTER THE AGENDA WAS PREPARED
MOTION CARRIED**

**MOTION BY ALDERMAN SCHONEMAN TO ACCEPT AND PLACE ON FILE
MOTION CARRIED**

DISCUSSION

Update on Hydropower Projects

Ms. Sarah Marchant, Community Development Division Director

The whole hydropower process has come to Infrastructure Committee and we promised you an update so I just want to quickly brief you on where we are at. We went out for a RFP in February for an operator. The idea was to come up with a much more solid costs of operations that we are expecting with taking on Mine Falls and Jackson so we know the overall revenues so that as we have the discussion this fall on what to do with the Mine Falls facility we could give you some real numbers and to make sure that we are ready for the December ending of the contract with the existing operator at Jackson Falls. We've gone through the RFP process and you will be seeing something shortly at the Finance Committee. We are working on the contract negotiations right now but we did have pretty much every player in the northeast and some national ones that came so we were happy with the turnout. We had six proposals and we've interviewed three and had some

very competitive proposals. We are looking right in the ballpark or a little bit less of what was anticipated in the previous study that we went through with John Levine.

The second piece is that when the legislation came through last year to purchase Mine Falls it had a purchase date of December of 2016. The lease allows for the purchase period to be no sooner than one year which is that date and no later than two years. Based on the length of communication and time that it's taking to negotiate the purchase and sale, we think it's prudent at this point to look at a purchase date of no later than December of 2017. It is a complicated process and quite frankly Eagle Creek is making money off of this project right now and is not in the mood to hurry. We are hoping that it will be before then but we don't want to have to come back to you and amend so you will shortly see legislation to amend that date. I am happy to answer any questions that you have.

Alderman Dowd

Are we actively starting the process with them now so that we can make sure it doesn't go beyond December of 2017?

Ms. Marchant

Absolutely, we are very actively negotiating a purchase and sales. We are actually hoping for next April but in case there are more legal issues we want to extend it through December just to give us the full window. The lease says it has to be done by December of 2017.

Alderman Dowd

As I understand it they have not balked at any of the things we have told them to fix.

Ms. Marchant

They have not necessarily agreed to do them all but we will have a full update for you later in June with where we are at once we have the purchase and sales negotiated. We do believe that anything they do or don't do, we will make sure that it comes out through the purchase and sale process. The fish lift is underway and instead of the \$1 million plus that it was expected to cost with the competitive bidding process we are looking at under \$400,000 so there are substantial savings there. We do expect that to be constructed in the next year or so which will certainly be a help in the re-licensing process and working with some of the other dam operators.

Alderman Siegel

Ms. Marchant, what's going on with some of the electrical deficiencies that were at the dam? I know that when the inspection was done there were some dangerous conditions that were identified and there was some disagreement about who was going to pay to upgrading all of that.

Ms. Marchant

The part of the electrical upgrades we were originally told would be fixed with the fish lift and that is going forward. We have repeatedly requested and asked to make sure that those will be fixed with the fish lift process. We have not gotten confirmation of those yet. Eagle Creek does not believe that they are as hazardous as we believe but those are absolutely high on the list.

Alderman Cookson

Director Marchant, do you have any additional comments?

Ms. Marchant

No, thank you very much.

Courthouse Oval Project

Mr. Tim Cummings, Economic Development Director

I want to clarify that this is not the Court Street Project but the Court House Oval Project.

I put together an overview, a one-pager that is on your desks this evening. Hopefully it will help to orientate the conversation as I go through the slide show.

The following slides will demonstrate a temporary street encumbrance which will allow us to create a small urban park. Approval was sought from the Board of Public Works for up to one year with the understanding that this project would be closely monitored and if any issues arose that it would be stopped. Essentially the project is the creation of an urban park with active programming being developed over the warmer months to help activate the area. Outreach to the local community was made and we spoke with abutters and local stakeholders and a couple of those folks have actually decided to take us up on our offer to help activate the area this summer with some programming with events. The short-term goal is to assess the ability to look at this area slightly differently as we incorporate some traffic calming measures into the area and we ultimately want to observe what the traffic may be for Factory and Walnut Street. As this process has unfolded I know a couple of issues have come up that I just want to make sure I speak on. I know that the Hellenic Monument, it was asked of us if there would be any disruption of that and that is not the case. We want to make sure that the area is accessible and there is safe crossing. This was unanimously approved on June 7th by the Board of Public Works.

The first slide is an aerial of the area and you can see that there are safe crossings along the oval area. We are looking to cut off that intersection (where the minivan is) and push people down to the further intersection of Factory Street and create some green space and activate the area. This shows you what it will look like and what the concept is.

How did this come to be? I pulled a case study that is very appropriate and applicable to this and it came from the Mayor's Institute of City Design which Mayor Donchess attended this conference in February of 2016. This issue was discussed at the conference and essentially the idea was very parallel to an intersection repair that occurred in Brooklyn, NY and as you can see in 2007 and then a month or so later this type new use or adaptive reuse of the roadway to try to help create a sense of place.

I am happy to answer any questions.

Alderman Dowd

When you showed that one, is that just going to put the planters and leave the asphalt or are you going to dig up the asphalt and put turf?

Mr. Cummings

To be clear, this is temporary. There will be some painting and there will be planters.

Alderman Schoneman

Is this a pre-cursor to a larger re-design that's contemplated down there? We've heard talk of getting rid of the oval altogether and making a grid pattern.

Mr. Cummings

Yes and no. I wouldn't want to rush into that conversation, I think we would want to first observe the area and see what we could do. The short-term is no but the long-term goal ultimately would be, if we could, to reintroduce the grid system and being in economic development I love the idea of creating more taxable land and try to attract a higher value in the downtown if possible. If there is a way to square off that area and create some development sites that would definitely something in the long-term that should be looked at but as of today we just want to see what the queuing and stacking is like on Factory Street.

Alderman Schoneman

Do we have a sense of what the traffic volume is around that section of the oval? I use it a lot to get over to the Broad Street Parkway for instance so if there is a lot of traffic going around that arc now and it's going to be going up to the stop sign, I know it's just an illustration but it shows a lot of people queuing up just so people can see where the curb is.

Mr. Cummings

That's right.

Alderman Schoneman

Do we know what kind of volume there is?

Mr. Cummings

I don't but I am sure I can get that to you.

Alderman Dowd

Do you know where the property line is for that building that was just purchased by someone? Is the property line the curbed edge of that street or is it closer into that building? The reason I ask is if long-term this worked out and the city owned that land then you could put benches and make it friendly.

Mr. Cummings

James Vayo is here with me and he may know. My belief is that the parcel line is with the oval if that is what you are referring to.

Chairman Cookson

Mr. Vayo, do you have anything to add to that particular question?

Mr. James Vayo, Downtown Specialist

Yes, the property line approximately falls in the inscribed edge of the sidewalk within the oval.

Alderman Siegel

Mr. Cummings, who is paying for this?

Mr. Cummings

There is minimal cost being associated with this project. Ultimately some money will come from DPW and from Economic Development Department if need be but the painting, my understanding is that it is being donated by a local business owner and the planters are being a repurposing of planters that are already in existence. We are really boot strapping this project to make sure there will be minimal costs associated with it.

Alderman Siegel

So I would imagine it would be Nashua Wallpaper & Paint that would be supplying the paint given that they are across the street?

Mr. Cummings

I believe that is correct.

Alderman Lopez

I heard an objection that a car pulling out of High Street taking a right would have to pull across multiple lanes of traffic in order to take a left if they are trying to go where as now they can go right through the oval. How will this impact that?

Mr. Cummings

Are you asking if they can cut across two or three lanes of traffic and go right into the oval as opposed to going up and making a right and then making a left?

Alderman Lopez

After the changes that is what they would have to do in that space of time, correct?

Mr. Cummings

That is correct. To get to the broader more philosophical point of this, we are talking about traffic calming so essentially we are trying to slow the cars down in this area and relook at the area a little bit differently so yes, going from A to B in a straight line is probably the fastest most efficient way to do something but the goal here when you are talking about the inner core is let's look at possibly moving the cars in a little bit more methodical and slow manner.

Alderman Lopez

I have a lot of experience on that oval because I am the Alderman for Ward 4 and I am a pedestrian and I am constantly crossing it to get to somewhere. From a pedestrian standpoint having that large section of land makes it so you don't have to cross as long a distance. As you are going from High Street to the other side you are constantly looking out in every direction because you don't know whether people can see you. By making this change you are creating a straightaway where you can see further down the road in either direction as a pedestrian, at least. I think it makes a lot of sense from a traffic calming perspective because I have seen many cars come flying down High Street through, it's a street essentially but it is surrounded on either side by large parking lots and one of the abutters is a clinic and there are a lot of people with disabilities that are slowly making their way across High Street and people are tearing out of the garage shooting through the oval and it can be difficult sometimes. I am not necessarily opposed to that traffic calming concept; I just wanted to make sure that it wasn't being traded for making that part of the intersection more tense because that intersection is also pretty much a blind intersection for pedestrians anyway. So are people going to have

to worry about a car screeching across three lanes of traffic to make a left?

Mr. Cummings

Again, we are not really going to know until we start to look at it and observe the area so that's the point of this being a temporary project. Once we have the data we can make a more permanent or refined plan.

Chairman Cookson

Director Cummings, do you have any perspective on traffic flows for example on High Street or even Water Street that may impact this particular intersection?

Mr. Cummings

Going back to the earlier comment regarding volumes, I would be more than happy to try to pull out what we have on file and address that question. All I can tell you is anecdotally, which I am hesitant to do just because of my lack of experience being here but it does not appear at this time to be a high volume area.

Chairman Cookson

In addition to this project, do we have plans for Water Street in the foreseeable future in terms of direction or flow?

Mr. Cummings

Not that I am aware of.

Chairman Cookson

Okay so it would continue to be two-way. I have seen different plans and I don't know if it was part of the Performing arts center which might alter traffic on Water Street. I know those designs are very premature right now but would be one of the things that I would be curious about.

Mr. Cummings

I will definitely make sure that is brought into this project as a variable.

Chairman Cookson

I could see this particular intersection working well because I believe that the only west bound traffic would be coming from Water Street itself. If this intersection was just a left turn and a right turn to get back to either Factory or High Street that left turn traffic necessarily wouldn't have to queue up.

Alderman Dowd

That road that you see behind the oval, is that city owned?

Mr. Cummings

Do you mean Chestnut Street?

Alderman Dowd

The top left corner.

Mr. Cummings

My belief is that would be a public way that we own but I will double check.

Alderman Dowd

If that's true and there's ultimately work done you could move the traffic to that road and make it a little wider and have a bigger green area.

Mr. Cummings

Yes, absolutely, that would be a plausible. I would remiss not to point if in the long-term we could talk about developing a building envelope that would be big enough to support development I would love to add new growth.

Alderman Lopez

You had mentioned having summertime programming in that space, would you do something like a skating rink?

Mr. Cummings

That's a great question, I don't know what the measurements would be for a skating rink and I would also want to think through the logistics of that. You raise a good point that we could activate the space throughout the colder months if appropriate.

Chairman Cookson

If you look at that area to the north as we just discussed, and you look at Factory and Chestnut and sort of broaden that area north; I'm looking at the south end now and not that I am promoting or suggesting but I am curious, as the oval comes back around on the south end, isn't the same applicable to that particular area?

Mr. Cummings

Yes. With that being said I would want to make sure that we were in that internally by our DPW Engineering Department but I agree with your logic.

Chairman Cookson

Finally, I am referencing the memorandum that you provided and you indicated that this was unanimously approved on June 7th by the Board of Public Works. We know that this is a temporary street encumbrance project for one year. When does the year begin?

Mr. Cummings

My understanding is from the votes that were taken...

Chairman Cookson

So it was June 7th of 2016?

Mr. Cummings

That's right.

Chairman Cookson

With that being said, when is it that you expect the project to actually begin and for the road to be cornered off?

Mr. Cummings

Within the next couple of weeks, I believe it's going into the DPW's programming to be done within the next two weeks. I know the Economic Development Department along with James Vayo has been working actively to help program the area over the next four to six weeks and I believe that would start in the beginning of July, I think it's July 6th.

Chairman Cookson

We would be able to enjoy this particular area after July 6th or a couple of weeks after July 6th and maybe ultimately being available to the public sometime in the end of July or beginning of August?

Mr. Cummings

I would back that up a little bit and say that it should be available to the public for early July. I don't want to speak for DPW but I believe the project completion date is July 6th.

Chairman Cookson

Director Fauteux I know that you are sitting in the audience, would you like to speak?

Ms. Fauteux

First, the encumbrance begins when the street is closed so it doesn't begin when the vote was taken so I just wanted to clarify that. We do hope to have the work done by July 6th but there are some things that need to happen before that. We have to make sure that the public is notified well in advance of the closure for safety reasons. We do have to be able to adequately block off the streets for safety reasons so we are working with James Vayo and Director Cummings to make that happen but I would say mid-July rather than July 6th because there are quite a few things that need to happen.

Chairman Cookson

Who is actually doing the painting, is it our staff?

Ms. Fauteux

Our street department staff will be doing the painting which we can do very efficiently and the paint will be donated and we will use the same sprayer that we use for our crosswalks. It won't take a lot of time to do it.

Alderman Dowd

Director Fauteux, for the first couple of weeks that it's open you are going to have the planters there. Are you considering putting a flashing light for the people who are just arbitrarily zipping around that thing will know that something is there?

Ms. Fauteux

We are going to have do not enter signs and we are going to have a message board that will notify the change in traffic pattern and also, we are going to use risers or tree wells which are round structures that are about 4' high and about 4' in diameter. We will use those as planters and they are going to be painted and James Vayo is working on something sort of unique to have those painted but that's what we will be using to block off the streets. We can reuse the risers.

Chairman Cookson

Are there any other questions for Director Cummings regarding the oval? Thank you for coming and we appreciate the update and we look forward to the experience. I guess the only comment that I will make is that once the road gets encumbered and that year starts we would certainly love to have you back for a post evaluation of the area. That brings me to one additional question, you indicate that the project will be closely monitored and if any issues arise it will be stopped so my question is what could make this stop?

Mr. Cummings

I am concerned about traffic and flow and I want to have an internal conversation with the technical staff to make sure that they are okay with it once we actually have some observations.

Chairman Cookson

What type of frequency do you anticipate for your observations?

Mr. Cummings

At least daily as this adjustment goes out. I suspect myself and James Vayo and DPW will be looking at it.

Chairman Cookson

Alright so I would like to rephrase my request to not wait for an entire year. If you are going to be observing these daily then I think maybe let it run for maybe 90 days and see what it looks like and what impact it's having. Is that a fair frequency for this committee? Do we want to do 30, 60 or days?

Alderman Lopez

I think we are likely to see something happening as it happens and so if there was a problem we could bring it up sooner and if not it could just be a periodic check-in.

Chairman Cookson

Director Cummings, what would you suggest?

Mr. Cummings

My though process is if we see a problem we will see it almost immediately so I am going to know pretty

quickly how this is working out. I would think that we could do something in a six to eight week timeframe or there about and have some comments for you and I think that would work out and that would bring us to almost the end of summer. My other concern in the back of my mind is as the weather changes I want to make sure there is an observation then. I'm getting a little ahead of myself but I also want to make sure that is addressed. I would make a recommendation of six weeks from now to give you a status update on the entire project. I know a condition of approval was that we would also give a report to the Board of Public Works.

Chairman Cookson

I think we would be happy to just be copied on the report that's provided to the Board of Public Works. I don't think we are asking for any additional type of information so there's no need for you to generate two reports. Why don't we just plan on reconvening in about six weeks. We will coordinate with the administrative office and make sure that you are on our agenda.

Mr. Cummings

Sure.

Chairman Cookson

Thank you Director Cummings

Parking at 85 and 85 ½ West Hollis Street

Alderman Lopez

I am getting dueling requests from constituents. One is by the owner of the new building that went in, they are looking for parking for their tenants so their tenants can park closer to the building and then I am also getting complaints from the surrounding neighbors on those roads that those streets already have too many people parking on them. I took a look at it myself in the evening time and they are very densely packed. My concern is that if we just add the variance and extend the on-street parking as was suggested by the property owners then it's going to fill up again and then even more people are going to be unhappy. I was not aware personally that there is a difference between certain zones where people can apply for a parking permit and then also having different areas where it's physically painted that they can park in until Alderman Schoneman addressed an issue in his Ward where that became evident. I was wondering if more experienced Aldermen have a resolution for this? I asked the City Clerk's office to make a map of where people are allowed to park to find out if there were clusters of people in certain areas; some areas that maybe don't have a lot of utilizers, is it because the streets that are very densely packed have people on the other side, a lot of people that have registered for on-street parking. I haven't actually gotten that back yet but essentially I want to figure out how somebody who is living in a dense, urban area like this can do on-street parking even though you may actually have multiple apartments stacked vertically and everyone wants to be within walking distance in that same area.

Chairman Cookson

So the two streets that you are making reference to are Pine Street and Wilder Street?

Alderman Lopez

Yes, Pine Street is the one that I've had the constituent complaints. I don't think I've heard anything from Wilder.

Chairman Cookson

Wilder is to the west of the location; 85 and 85 ½ West Hollis Street. Do we know if there is parking on Wilder Street?

Alderman Lopez

I don't know off hand.

Chairman Cookson

Okay so we would have to look at the resolution to identify whether they have overnight parking and is it overnight parking that you are particularly interested in or just parking in general?

Alderman Lopez

It's overnight because people living in the apartment buildings apparently have to go to the garage or park much further away. I'm not sure what arrangement was there before the property owners redeveloped it or if there was any parking at all because I think it may have been before on-street parking was put in that they redeveloped it.

Alderman Schoneman

It looks like there is a parking lot just to the west of 85, is that owned by the property owners?

Alderman Lopez

I don't think it's owned by the property owner but it may be owned by a different property owner.

Alderman Schoneman

One thing that's been done in various places around the city is contract parking. I know that happens in my neighborhood where there is limited parking for a building that has a number of units in it. That landlord actually leases spaces from an adjacent property owner and then essentially sub-leases them to the tenant of the unit that's looking for a place to park as a way to get someone off the street and really close.

Alderman Lopez

So I could suggest that they speak with that property owner and see if they are interested in that.

Alderman Schoneman

It might not be a bad idea, I only see one car in this picture and again, it's just one satellite pass or whatever but it looks like it's a fairly large open area that may have sufficient room.

Overnight parking spaces are painted on the street but I don't see painted spaces, this must be an old picture. Wilder Street looks too narrow for parking.

Alderman Lopez

I think parking stops at Palm Street.

Chairman Cookson

I think you are correct. I know at least when you are north of West Hollis Street but I'm not sure about south of West Hollis Street so maybe it's a good idea for us to get the overnight parking legislation and just take a look at how it's defined and then to Alderman Schoneman's point, maybe there are some other opportunities but between the two of those I think we can get a pretty good grasp of what is available to them without overburdening Pine Street south of West Hollis Street.

Alderman Lopez

I understand the value of the on-street parking, especially in the wintertime where people had to walk to the parking garage at 4:00 a.m. to get to work and it was creating a hardship. I don't want to take any parking away from people who really need it but I also don't necessarily think it's fair for people who have property have it completely blocked off by other people's cars. I want to find a way to balance everything.

Chairman Cookson

I know that when we agreed to the overnight parking I thought that we had made a request to understand how it was being utilized. I know at one we extended the year -long overnight parking experience but I'm not sure we've gotten any additional updates from the City Clerk's office with regard to how it's being utilized and to Alderman Lopez's point and the request you made of the clerk's office where it's being utilized.

Alderman Lopez

I think the density of permits being issued relative to the available ground space is important so if there are places where 40 people within a block can apply for a permit but there's only 20 spaces then that means those people are moving over to the next block. Making sure that passes are being updated and people are still living in that area; even that they are being used where they are supposed to be used. Is there a marking on the passes that says you are supposed to be on this street or in this area?

Chairman Cookson

I don't believe that they restrict it to that only because they are able to utilize any space that's available overnight as long as they have a pass. I think there are abundant spaces available for the number of people who have permits but I think we should double check with our City Clerk and see if we can get an update.

Alderman Dowd

The other thing is that if we were going to allow additional parking on West Hollis Street and we did all of the overnight parking and we asked the police department and the fire department for their input, I don't know if they would have any issues with parking in that spot but at least we should probably check with them.

Chairman Cookson

I think West Hollis Street we would probably like to maintain the width.

Alderman Dowd

There are places where it would get very narrow with parking on both sides.

Chairman Cookson

Correct.

Alderman Lopez

You would have to keep the visibility of people crossing the road in mind too.

Chairman Cookson

So the plan of attack, gentlemen, is to request some information from the City Clerk's office, utilization and density and get a copy of the legislation so we can map out where all of the parking spaces are. I believe the DPW at one point in time had provided us a map or maybe it was Angelo Marino, a map of all of the overnight parking spaces within this particular area. Let's go ahead and request that information. We will gather it and distribute it and we can throw ideas back and forth; this doesn't necessarily have to be part of the public record.

Alderman Lopez

I appreciate that.

Alderman Schoneman

How many vehicles are at the 85 and 85 ½ West Hollis Street that they are asking for?

Alderman Lopez

I believe that they are asking for between seven and nine.

PETITIONS – None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS – None

NEW BUSINESS - None

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Alderman Lopez

Does the Infrastructure Committee usually have things like that oval because that kind of space transformation was interesting.

Chairman Cookson

My understanding is that it is under the purview of public works but as a courtesy it was provided to us. I think there might be some other opportunities for us to be engaged as we start having dialogue about conversion of one-way streets to two-way streets and downtown traffic flow.

Alderman Dowd

A temporary encumbrance becomes permanent when closing the street and then it comes here.

PUBLIC COMMENT - None

REMARKS BY THE ALDERMEN - None

POSSIBLE NON-PUBLIC SESSION

ADJOURNMENT

**MOTION BY ALDERMAN DOWD TO ADJOURN
MOTION CARRIED**

The meeting was declared closed at 7:55 p.m.

Alderman David Schoneman
Committee Clerk, Pro-tem