

**City of Keene**  
**New Hampshire**

**MUNICIPAL SERVICES, FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

**Wednesday, July 13, 2016**

**6:00 PM**

**Council Chambers**

**Members Present:**

Janis O. Manwaring, Chair  
Robert J. O'Connor  
Stephen L. Hooper  
Gary P. Lamoureux

**Staff Present:**

Thomas Mullins, City Attorney  
Elizabeth Fox, Assistant City Manager  
Kürt Blomquist, Public Works Director  
Rhett Lamb, ACM/Planning Director  
Don Lussier, City Engineer

**Members Not Present:**

Randy L. Filiault, Vice-Chair

Chair Manwaring called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and explained the procedures of the meeting.

**1) MEMORANDUM AND ORDINANCE – O-2016-12 – Relating to Vehicular Traffic and Public Ways – Don Lussier, City Engineer**

Chair Manwaring recognized Public Works Director Kürt Blomquist. Mr. Blomquist stated that the ordinance in front of the committee would restrict left turning movements from Elliot St. Currently, Elliot Street is one way in a westward direction from Adams St. to Main St. City staff from the Planning, Police, and Public Works Departments have been working together to look at what kinds of changes to make to the crossings to improve the overall efficiency and safety of this area. Over the years, Keene State College (KSC) constructed parking lots and buildings and have increased their activities on the east side of Main St. There has also been an increase in pedestrian crossings in the area between the roundabout down to Gates St. This area of Main Street is a challenge with parking on both sides, and two lanes of traffic going north and south. Drivers and pedestrians are focused on many things at once.

City Engineer Don Lussier stated that the only proposed change that would require City Council action is the restriction of left turn movements from Elliot St. He continued that to describe the overall changes, this came about through an effort with multiple City departments in trying to improve visibility and safety of crosswalks in this area. The plan is intended to be an interim plan. It does not add or change the location of crosswalks. It paints on existing pavement. It does not do anything permanent that would prelude staff from looking at this in a broader context later on.

Mr. Lussier continued that because Main Street is too wide for pedestrians to cross, they are creating a refuge in the center of Main St. They want to create a refuge island by

taking a foot of lane width from each of the four travel lanes. The travel will be diverted very slightly, one or two feet, to the outside of the roadway. The parking width does not change. The plan is to create a 4-foot-wide painted island that will allow a visible safe zone for pedestrians. They also propose some lighting. There is one existing light at each crosswalk, but not at both sides of the street. With the crosswalk closer to the Westwood Center, the light is on the inbound side of Main St. On the Elliot St. crosswalk it is on the outbound side. They propose adding another light on the opposite side at each location. It would not affect infrastructure, as it would be in the grass belt.

Mr. Lussier continued that the more controversial part of the plan is the proposal to eliminate four parking spaces – 2 on the outbound side of Elliot St., one at the Westwood Center outbound side, and one at the inbound side. They recommend this because that is what is required to comply with the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices guidance on sightlines and visibility for pedestrian crosswalks. Cars approaching can see pedestrians and pedestrians do not need to try and look over the hoods of cars. Because the island will be striped with solid yellow lines, it prohibits a left turn out of Elliot St. It is not a significant impediment to users on Elliot St. because the roundabout is just a few hundred feet up the street, so people intending to travel south on Main St. can use the roundabout to do that.

Councilor O'Connor asked what revenue loss would be with eliminating the four spaces. Mr. Lussier replied that he had not looked at that.

Councilor Lamoureux stated that a lot of people have talked about the possibility of rumble strips. He asked if they considered that for this area. Mr. Lussier replied that there will be “yield here to pedestrians” signs, although they will be a little distant from the travel lanes. They discussed rumble strips quite a bit. His personal recommendation is not to include them. They prove to be unpopular for nearby residents and there are maintenance concerns.

Councilor Lamoureux asked what the timing would be. Mr. Lussier replied that they expect to get this done by the end of September. If everything goes smoothly, they could complete the project before the new school year begins, but that is not guaranteed.

Councilor Hooper asked if the island will be painted and not raised. Mr. Lussier replied yes, this is an interim solution, and will have no hard infrastructure like raised curbs. He continued that a signpost will be in the center of Main St. with a “bear right” indication.

Councilor Lamoureux stated that the revenue is \$6.75 per day per space in that area but he thinks these meters are about 68% used.

Chair Manwaring stated that if it is just painted it seems like there is no protection while you are standing there in the middle of the road. Mr. Lussier replied that he would rephrase that to say, they are not asking people to stand in the middle of the road, they are affording people an opportunity to have some sort of highly visible protection in the

center of the road. He continued that it is not intended to be a crash barrier. It is for driver and pedestrian visibility.

Councilor Lamoureux stated that they definitely have a safety issue. He asked if they can eliminate the parking spaces immediately so they can open the area up. Mr. Lussier replied that they can do the signage right away, but the painting will take a bit longer.

Chair Manwaring asked for public comment.

Bob Silk, of 15 Liberty Lane, stated that he likes what he is seeing but he does not think paint will slow people down. He continued that it is a temporary fix. He thinks they need a permanent barrier or island there. He wonders if this is a trial for six months or a year and what will happen if it works. He has concerns about people standing there on a painted highway. Mr. Silk continued he knows someone who was almost hit there and he is scared of traffic on Main Street and pedestrian harm. Restricting left turns is a good idea, but Mr. Silk noted he thinks they should make this a good, solid plan and get it done once and for all. He knows it costs money but if this painted island works, he wants to know how fast they can get it to be a solid island to protect pedestrians more.

Mr. Blomquist stated that this is an interim change. He continued that Mr. Silk's question is what they can do for the long term, and yes, that is where the question lies. One issue is whether this is the right place for crosswalks. Staff put out speed signs to record speeds and numbers of vehicles. In this area north of Gates St., the average speeds were at or below the posted speed limit. Timing-wise, this is a bigger discussion with the community. As you start putting hard medians in, the question is where you can turn around, if you want to make a left turn. From Elliot St. there is the roundabout for people to use, but from other locations it is hard. There will need to be a bigger conversation. There is the Marlboro St. discussion, which includes the east side of Main St. They want to talk more with Keene State College (KSC) because they have a stake in this. KSC has done a lot of work in the area that has increased this. KSC changed their on-campus pathways. People used to cross everywhere on Winchester St. because the pathways from the buildings did not line up with the crosswalks. So they realigned the crosswalks and sidewalks, but now there are distracted pedestrians that can just follow the straight path. They are probably looking at about a year or so for a more permanent solution to this area. There is the budgeting process to consider but they also need to have the larger conversation first. He has questions about whether the crosswalks are appropriate in this location or maybe they need to be adjusted. They need to figure out how to put in the right crosswalks to encourage the pedestrian behavior they are looking for.

Mr. Blomquist continued that staff often talk about the fact that the City can make physical changes (to roadways and infrastructure), but they also need to have enforcement. Police are part of the process. Also, folks from KSC came to a couple meetings and they talked about what they can do to educate staff and students about awareness of crosswalks. There was a tragic incident that occurred there in May, but that was the first in ten years. There have been a lot of close calls, but from a statistical

standpoint, it is relatively low. As they look at how to solve the problem they need to look at what it is they want to solve.

Mr. Blomquist continued that he is concerned about the paint. They talked about putting planters there, and maybe there are other things they could look at. He and other City staff members are looking for feedback. They encourage people to let them know how things are going. He likes the idea of planters, not as a barrier, but more of a visual barrier though Winter would be a challenge. He encourages people to recognize that this is a start. Other questions will start popping up once they start making changes. They sent letters to Elliot St. folks, but they have not heard a lot of feedback from them. They are curious to see how it will be once Wheelock School starts up again – parents might be surprised to find that they cannot turn left off of Elliot St. This whole process could take a year or more, depending on how discussions go.

Chair Manwaring stated that she likes the idea of planters. She continued that someone she knows hit a pedestrian. She would be concerned about stopping in the middle of the street, especially in the evening. The lights would help. Mr. Blomquist replied that if drivers are not paying attention, one lane of traffic stops and the other side might not see that. They are trying to create a space for a pedestrian to pause for a moment to make eye contact with the driver. Public education is so important and he cannot emphasize that enough. Yes, the NH law is for drivers to stop for pedestrians, but you still need to pause for a moment to make sure the drivers approaching you see you and are stopping. White lines are not magical barriers. This will be an experiment and they will need to modify it as needed.

City Attorney Thomas Mullins asked if a permanent “bear right” sign will be installed at the entrance of these painted safe zones. Mr. Lussier replied that they use breakaway sign posts; it is not something that will stop cars, but yes, it will be a sign post in the middle of the painted yellow island. The City Attorney asked if it would be lit. Mr. Lussier replied no, it would be reflective.

Councilor O'Connor made the following motion, which was seconded by Councilor Hooper.

On a vote of 4-0, the Municipal Services, Facilities, and Infrastructure Committee recommends the acceptance of the City Engineer’s memorandum and adoption of Ordinance O-2016-12.

## **2) Adjournment**

Hearing no further business, Chair Manwaring adjourned the meeting at 6:25 PM.

Respectfully submitted by,  
Britta Reida, Minute Taker