TRAFFIC COMMISSION MEETING

March 28th, 2018

IN ATTENDANCE: Chair Elena Proakis Ellis, Alderman Bob Boisselle, Dan Krechmer, Tom Rossi, Elizabeth Peart, Jeff Parenti, John Vetere, Sgt. Jon Goc, Chief Lyle and Amy Heidebrecht – Clerk

Meeting opened at 5:32 PM

I. Continued Business:

1. Approve minutes from December 20, 2017

   John Vetere makes a motion to approve minutes. Tom Rossi seconds. All approve. Minutes from December 20th, 2017 are approved.

2. Update on Dell Avenue and East Foster Street data from December 20th, 2017

   Sgt. Goc collected data coming up Foster Street from Main Street towards Dell Avenue in order to catch the highest traffic volume at the intersection. Chair Proakis Ellis explains that there was a volume of 29,114 cars over the ten day period which translates to an average of 2,911 cars per day, 121 cars per hour and on average 2 cars per minute. According to the reports the average speed of cars was 26 MPH and the 85th percentile speed was 30 MPH. Liz Peart further explains what warrants a four-way stop sign. For example, if you have five or more crashes in a twelve week period that would be a reason to examine an intersection. Sgt. Goc has recorded that we have nine crashes over the past five years. Liz further explains that in terms of volume, we would need at least 300 vehicles per hour for any eight hour period on an average day to warrant a four-way stop at an intersection.

   Chief Lyle makes a motion to deny the request for a four-way stop at the intersection of Dell Avenue and East Foster Street. John Vetere seconds. All approve to deny the request. Motion carries.

II. New Business:

1. Request to discuss traffic circulation at Highlands Commuter Rail Stop, Nason Drive, Ashburton Place and the Steele House

   John Vetere makes a motion to open public participation. Tom Rossi seconds. All in favor. Public participation opens at 5:40 PM.
Arthur Defabio from 53 Greenwood Street points out that Ashburton Place is not a thru way. He says that the intersection of Greenwood Street and Franklin Street is a very difficult area to navigate and he does not know how anyone at the Steele House pulls out because it seems impossible. He explains that vehicles travel at 50 MPH, on the wrong side of the road, to try to bypass traffic and cut through in that area. He says that people use the window at Mother’s Pizza as a reflective surface to see oncoming traffic when pulling onto Franklin from Greenwood. He explains that from 7:40 AM to 8:30 AM traffic is backed up on Greenwood Street past Woodland Avenue going towards Linden Street. He also says that there is a new building going up in Stoneham that will potentially add 400 vehicles to an area where the streets are already very confined. He suggests adding a light that can be set differently for specific times of the day.

Alderman John Tramontozzi from 794 Franklin Street agrees with what Arthur Defabio say and suggests that we add a "Not a Thru Way" sign to Nason Drive.

Jean Bartholomew from 82 Greenwood Street says she has lived there for 40 years and cannot get out of her driveway because vehicles are speeding by so fast. She has had cars pass her on Greenwood Street when she is driving the speed limit. She says that cars do not even tap their breaks while going past the Melrose Cares and 25 MPH signs. She mentions that cars that are parked in the lot behind Mother’s sometimes try to back out onto Franklin Street which is very dangerous. Jean also reports that the Nason Drive sign is no longer there.

Alderman Boisselle motions close public participation. Tom Rossi seconds. All in favor. Public participation closed at 5:53 PM.

Chair Proakis Ellis states that Nason Drive is a private way and makes the suggestion that we could put a yellow "Not a Thru Way" advisory sign there. Tom Rossi says that the only property there is the Steele House, which is run by the Melrose Housing Authority.

Sgt. Goc comments that he lives in Wakefield and explains how he commutes through Nason Drive every day to get to work because the sight lines at Franklin Street to take a left from Greenwood Street are so dangerous. Sgt. Goc pulled the accident data and from 2008 to 2015 there were 11 recorded accidents at the Greenwood Street and Franklin Street intersection. He adds that from 2016 until mid-March of 2018 we have had 10 reported accidents. He says that it is almost four times the number of accidents since the construction was done in that area, and you have to edge out to the middle of Franklin Street to get out, which is why there are so many accidents. He mentions that he has an SUV and it would be very difficult in a sedan. Sgt. Goc suggest that we extend the sidewalk, perhaps add outdoor restaurant seating, and remove the parking spots to help with the sight lines.

Liz Peart says that the condition has not changed because the buildings have not moved. She adds that the sight lines for pedestrians have improved. Chair Proakis Ellis speaks with Arthur from 53 Greenwood Street about how the widening of the sidewalks was intentional for traffic calming. She says she likes the idea of adding restaurant seating and removing the last two parking spots. She also asks Sgt. Goc to look into what the nature of the accidents were. Tom Rossi asks what time these accidents are happening.
Sgt. Goc says that he will do more research. Tom suggests that we might have to restrict parking in front of the businesses at Greenwood Street and Franklin Street.

Chief Lyle makes a motion to table. John Vetere seconds. All in favor. Motion is tabled and will be added to the June meeting upon further research.

2. Request by resident to reduce traffic/restrict buses on Woodland Avenue

Tom Rossi makes a motion to open public participation. Dan Krechmer seconds. Public participation opens at 6:12 PM.

Debbie Newman from 8 Clifton Park thanks the Police Department for talking to the bus company about not using Woodland Avenue as a cut through. She also says that she does not consider this agenda item "new business" because we were here two and a half years ago discussing the same issue. She states that they were given a stop sign at Botolph Street, which did not solve the issues, and nothing else has been done since. She explains that the area is very dangerous for pedestrians walking from 7:20 AM to 8:00 AM and around 2:30 PM. She continues that people are using Woodland Avenue coming from Greenwood Street and Franklin Street as a way to avoid traffic.

Chief Lyle asks how the evening commute is in that area. The residents say that it is not an issue. They say that the buses from Stoneham High School and the Vocational School cut through there, but that has improved since the Police Department spoke with the bus company. Debbie says that other vehicles still cut through there ever since the City directed traffic there during construction in the Highlands. She mentions that it used to be a secret that you could get to Wakefield through there.

Paula Byrne has lived 88 Woodland Avenue for 30 years and says that she never had an issue with walking in her neighborhood until recently. She explains that she has almost been hit by a car three times in the past four months near her house. She says that vehicles speed and that sight lines are difficult because of the hill. She mentions that she was not in the street when she was almost hit, she says they drive up onto lawns and sidewalks because there are no curbs. She adds that she takes her dog in the car to Rite Aid instead of walking in her neighborhood because she is afraid of getting hit by a car. She remarks that the Eastern Bus Company no longer uses her street as a cut through thanks to Chief Lyle calling the bus company. She states that she did some research through the US Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration and that the statistics show that fatal accidents are usually 20 MPH or over. She reiterates that she is concerned because vehicles are speeding down her street at over 20 MPH. She continues that before the project in the Highlands, the neighborhood was quiet and now traffic and speed have increased in her area. She says that she hopes the City will put up signs or do something to stop the cars speeding down her street.

Rich O'Gara of 68 Woodland Avenue says there are more people and more traffic in the area. He works with Geographic Information Systems and he spends more time at home since getting hit by a car on West Wyoming Avenue by a driver who was looking at a cell phone and missed the stop sign. Regarding the issues on the street, he says
that it is a combination of a better economy, increased population, and there is more traffic in the area. He explains that there is a lack of visibility because of the cutouts of the buildings. He says that people do not want to face the Greenwood Street and Franklin Street intersection. He continues that we do not want cars to stop, that we want cars to slow down and we want traffic calming. He suggests that the curve needs to be a higher radius and perhaps we research a tracking signal that takes the commuter rail traffic into consideration. He says that 27 cars went by from 2:30 PM to 2:35 PM. He volunteers to help with any GIS analysis that needs to be done.

Alderman Tramontozi suggests that we add a "No Right Hand Turn" going from Greenwood Street onto Woodland Avenue in the morning from 7:00 AM to 9:00 AM and then a "No Left Hand Turn" on Franklin Street going towards Woodland Avenue in the afternoon around 2:00 PM.

Carole Alton from 21 Woodland Avenue is concerned that if we add the sign suggested by Alderman Tramontozi that it will just push traffic onto Botolph Street. She further explains that there are children who walk to school in that area and she believes that it is dangerous for them. She goes on to say that she has had cars and a trash truck drive up on her lawn while trying to make the turn. She has photos (see attached) and suggests adding curbing to that area.

Arthur Defabio from 53 Greenwood Street says that putting up signs with time restrictions is going to push them over to the dangerous intersection we discussed earlier. He mentions that the buses that were using Woodland Avenue are now rerouted to Greenwood Street and that this ties into the engine braking item on the agenda because these vehicles are going to be forced to brake rapidly. He says that this is an issue with enforcement because they are traveling at an excessive speed.

Tom Rossi makes a motion to close public participation. Dan Krechmer seconds. All in favor. Public participation is closed at 6:43 PM.

Chair Proakis Ellis explains that National Grid will be doing work in the Woodland Avenue area soon and the paving will be done in the fall. She adds that the City is pursuing a road bond for $1.5 Million for this year and if we can fit curbing on Woodland Avenue as part of that project we intend to. Chief Lyle suggests that we do a study on Franklin Street while Woodland Avenue is closed down for traffic during gas work.

Regarding the turning restrictions, Chair Proakis Ellis comments that the residents of that neighborhood are highly unlikely to be needing to take a right turn from Greenwood Street onto Woodland Avenue from 7:00 AM to 9:00 AM, whereas people in that neighborhood trying to turn back in from Franklin Street during the school hours would be much more of a concern. Tom Rossi has concerns that turn restrictions will add more people to the Greenwood Street and Franklin Street intersection. He thinks that we need to take a closer look at that intersection before adding turn restrictions.
Tom says that there is a blind rise at the Clifton Park area. Chair Proakis Ellis mentions that they were considering a stop sign but realized that would not solve their issue. She had discussed with Chief Lyle and decided that the only true way to solve the issue would be to make Clifton Park a one way, so that no one is coming out on the more dangerous end with the blind rise.

John Vetere asks if we can hire a consultant to come up with a proposal on how to solve this issue. Chair Proakis Ellis says that we can ask Stantec to review Greenwood Street and Franklin Street as well as Vinton Street and Franklin Street. Liz Peart asks if Sgt. Goc can pull some traffic counts and speed data and if Stantec could do some turning movement intersection counts. Chief Lyle suggests that we ask the consulting company that we hired for the construction on Franklin Street back to take a look at this for free.

John Vetere makes a motion to table the item until we have more data. Chief Lyle seconds. All in favor. Motion carries.

3. Request by Fire Chief and resident to extend the current fire lane that runs along Steven’s Place around the corner to encompass the frontage of 8 Eastman Place (on Eastman Place)

Chair Proakis Ellis reads a letter from David Lucas (see attached).

Jeff Parenti makes a motion to open public participation. Liz Peart seconds. All in favor. Public participation opens at 7:01 PM.

Dave Adario for 8 Eastman Place says that fire trucks cannot make the turn and asks that we extend the fire lane as suggested in the request. He says that Fields Court is 12 feet wide and Eastman Place is 15 feet wide with a 12 inch strip of land in between them where a fence used to be. He continues that the Chief’s request is just to extend the fire lane that already exists in that area.

Alderman Peter Mortimer speaks in favor of extending the fire lane. He says that there is a parking lot and cars coming in from Main Street, so that area can become congested. Alderman Mortimer adds that the street is too narrow to have cars parked along the fence.

Alderman Tramontozzi agrees with everything that Alderman Mortimer and Dave Adario said. He is also in favor of extending the fire lane.

Liz Peart makes a motion to close public participation. Tom Rossi seconds. All in favor. Public participation closes at 7:10 PM.

Chair Proakis Ellis reads the original email from Chief Leary (see attached) and shares an aerial map with the Commission that shows the radius of the turn for a typical fire truck (see attached). She goes over the parking issues in the area and suggests that we extend the fire lane 50 feet on the north side of Eastman Place in order to preserve some street parking while still allowing what appears to be an adequate turning radius. Tom Rossi agrees that we could try this and we could always extend the fire lane more as needed.
Tom Rossi makes a motion to extend the fire lane 50 feet on the north side of Eastman Place. Chief Lyle seconds. All in favor. Motion passes at 7:22 PM.

4. Request by resident to add Truck Route signs at the intersection of Main Street and Upham Street

Chair Proakis Ellis provides some history on this item and shares the photos of the Truck Route sign options proposed by the resident (see attached). Jeff Parenti asks the Commission to go over what they consider to be a truck. He also asks for them explain what the powers of the Commission are regarding this item and item 5 on the agenda. Chair Proakis Ellis explains that MassDOT shows the Lynn Fells Parkway as a truck route, but the DCR prohibits trucks from the Lynn Fells Parkway. She states that the Commission does not have the jurisdiction to declare truck routes, this is something that needs to go through MassDOT. She further explains that it is within our purview to request a truck prohibition from MassDOT, but we do not approve truck routes. The Commission can approve signs to reinforce an existing truck route and can also make a recommendation to MassDOT. She adds that we included this on the agenda because there were a number of residents that seemed interested in this item and she thinks this is a good forum for them. She adds that the data provided by the resident categorizes trucks as light trucks, buses, articulated trucks and single unit heavy trucks.

John Vetere motions to open public participation for Items 4 and 5. Bob Boisselle seconds. All in favor. Public participation opens at 7:35 PM.

Jacquelyn and Tim Fitzpatrick from 387 Upham Street speak in favor of adding truck route signs and prohibiting “engine braking.” Jacquelyn says she understands that she lives on a busy street, but she is hoping we can do something to help. Tim says that he learned in school that anything over 28,000 pounds is considered a truck. He says that they get woken up in the middle of the night from trucks hitting manholes and that he has had to rescue someone from a burning car. He continues to explain that it is nearly impossible to cross Upham Street. He adds that someone has added flags for residents to wave around to try and cross the street. He asks the Commission to do a master traffic study.

Rosalind D’Amico from 251 Howard Street says that she is concerned that if the City limits trucks on Upham Street that they will move to Howard Street or other streets.

Lucia Rossi from 481 Upham Street says that there have been several accidents in front of her house due to speed and that cars continuously drive over her lawn. She says that no kids ride their bikes and no one walks their dogs because it is so dangerous. She also explains that she has no sidewalks on her side of the street so she has to cross the street to walk to church. She says that enforcement is the issue and asks the police to come out and ticket drivers who are speeding.

Jonathan Place from 328 Upham Street says that Upham is a thickly settled street and asks the police to come out at ticket cars that are speeding. He says that he has been complaining about it for 20 years and that he has received no help from the City or his
Alderman. He says that the City needs money and that citations can help with that as well as enforce consequences on speeding drivers.

Sgt. Goc asks if we can keep the public participation portion to trucks specifically, because that is what is on the agenda. He explains that the Commission has already discussed the speeding issue on Upham Street thoroughly at previous meetings.

Donna Mulrenan from 279 Howard Street speaks in opposition of Items 4 and 5. She says that if we restrict trucks on Upham Street, they will be pushed to her street and she does not want that to happen.

Lauren Grymek from 19 Morgan Street asks the Commission to notify businesses before putting up new signs regarding truck routes or changing truck routes. She is the Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce and says that this will have an impact on local businesses that use trucks. Lauren volunteers to be the liaison between the City and the local businesses regarding this issue. She explains that a lot of these trucks are delivering to downtown Melrose and then are going to other areas to deliver. She says that they have a route that they are following and changes would impact their travel time. She believes that the owners of the local businesses are not aware of the concerns she has heard tonight. She thinks that if she speaks to them that they would be willing to talk to their truck vendors about this. She explains that a lot of the local business owners are Melrose residents themselves and would like to help out their neighbors and customers that frequent their establishments.

Joe Guarino is a resident of Melrose, is the on the Board of Directors for the Chamber of Commerce, and is the owner LCM Plus which is located in downtown Melrose. He is opposed to adding truck route signs. He thinks that this will hurt downtown and believes that the residents and businesses would suffer if we did not allow trucks on Upham Street. He says they are using Upham Street to provide goods and services to us, not to cut through to go to a neighboring town. He thinks that putting trucks on other neighboring streets could become a safety issue. He adds that he has seen a police cruiser out there at three different times over the past 24 hours, so he does not believe that it is an enforcement issue. He adds that the engine braking could be a City ordinance, but he hopes that the Commission will collect more data and notify local businesses before changing the truck routes or adding signs.

Ryan Bagwell from 444 Upham Street speaks in favor of both items. He agrees that trucks provide a valuable service and he believes that they should use designated truck routes. He says that Upham Street is purely residential, unlike Main Street, Franklin Street and actual truck routes through Melrose. He believes that those are the most appropriate routes for these types of vehicles. He talks about the traffic counts taken last summer and how it looks like there are more heavy vehicles on Upham Street than there are on any of the designated truck routes. He explains more about the signs and that they are advisory and are not enforceable, but he thinks they could provide some relief to Upham Street.

John Vetere moves to close public participation. Tom Rossi seconds. All in favor. Public participation closes at 8:06 PM.
Chair Proakis Ellis says that Upham Street is not a truck route, but neither is Grove Street, Wyoming Avenue, Foster Street or Franklin Street. She explains that we receive a lot of criticism for sign pollution in Melrose and if we put up signs on Main Street at Upham, how do we justify not doing them for all the streets. Tom Rossi states that there are only two routes from Saugus, not including the Fellsway. Because of that, any truck that sees the sign will end up on Howard Street or perhaps they will go through Wakefield. Chief Lyle agrees that adding the signs is not fair to the other streets and opens a bigger issue of pushing trucks to neighboring towns. He adds that Lebanon Street is restricted. Dan Krechmer and John Vetere suggest talking to the hospital and other local businesses. Liz Peart says that according to the data, there are a dozen trucks between midnight and 6:00 AM. She adds that the bulk of the trucks trips are between 6:00 AM and 3:00 PM with an overall percentage of 2.2%. She continues to explain that this is a not high percentage of trucks when you consider the volume of the street which is around 17,000 vehicles. She agrees that is a lot of trips on a Melrose Street, but Upham Street is an arterial connected to Route 1 that serves the town and we need that. Jeff Parenti says that truck route planning should not be done on a local level. He says truck route planning needs to be done on a regional level so you do not upset the neighboring towns by sending more trucks in their direction. Jeff says that if we think this is a growing problem, we should look at it on a bigger scale not just something that is affecting one street. Chair Proakis Ellis reminds the Commission that there were several letters sent prior to this meeting from residents on Upham Street (see attached), and the majority of them were in support of agenda items 4 and 5.

John Vetere makes a motion to deny item 4. Chief Lyle seconds. All in favor. Motion carries at 8:21 PM.

5. Resident request to amend the Traffic Code to prohibit “engine braking” on City roads

Chair Proakis Ellis provides some history on this item from other cities and towns. She mentions that some cities do not have a Traffic Commission. During her research she found that the fines range from $200 to $300 and that in Salem and Holyoke it was the City Council that enacted the legislation. She says that she has contacted the City Solicitor to get an opinion as to whether this is a Traffic Commission item or a Board of Aldermen issue. She did not find any indication that there were any benefits to prohibiting engine braking aside from the noise reduction. She explains that when a truck is carrying a full load, engine braking helps them to slow down without extensive wear on their friction brakes. Excessive wear on friction brakes can cause them to be less effective when you are trying to stop a vehicle in other situations. She says that she has some safety concerns and there will be some financial impact to the trucking industry to not allow them to use this system that is designed to reduce the wear on their brakes. She reads the ordinance from the City of Northampton (see attached) as an example that she liked if we do move forward with approving this item. She says that State Law prohibits offensive or illegal motor vehicle operation and provides specific requirements for mufflers and other equipment. The State can enforce through State regulation and the City can consider to enforce through City regulation. Tom Rossi and Dan Krechmer talk about noise ordinances and how we determine what is considered “loud.” Chair Proakis Ellis said that it would be a specific decibel. Sgt. Goc comments that the complaints that they receive are about the DPW doing snow removal up and
down the street, or paving contractors with a loose gate, or a manhole that has come loose. He says that to his knowledge he has never heard a resident complain specifically about “engine braking.” He also says that someone would need to be trained on how to measure this in order to be able to enforce it.

Tom Rossi makes a motion to place on file. John Vetere seconds. All in favor except Dan Krechmer. Motion carries.

III. Discussion Items:

1. Chair Proakis Ellis informs the Commission that the City has purchased four illuminated speed signs and they are scheduled to go up soon. Two will go on West Emerson Street in each direction, one will be on Grove Street, and one will be on Sylvan Street.

2. Chair Proakis Ellis provides an update on the Stantec signage memo. The City is not allowed to put up the white 25 MPH signs without doing a traffic study. The City can put up the yellow advisory Thickly Settled 25 MPH signs at will.

John Vetere makes a motion to adjourn the meeting. Chief Lyle seconds. All in favor. Meeting adjourns at 8:46 PM.