SPECIAL SAFETY ADVISORY AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

A Special Safety Advisory and Transportation Committee Meeting was held on May 12, 2014 at 2:01 p.m. with Chairman Hutchison presiding. Members present were Mr. Dixon (arrived at 2:17 p.m.), Mr. Perza (arrived at 2:06 p.m., departed at 2:36 p.m., returned at 2:42 p.m.), and Mr. Keller. Councilman Anderson was also present.

AGENDA ADDITIONS/DELETIONS

Once a quorum was present, Mr. Keller moved for approval of the agenda, seconded by Mr. Dixon and unanimously carried.

Concerns Related to Permit Parking In Front of Wesley Pre-School and Education Building

Members were advised that the Downtown Dover Partnership (DDP) acquired and renovated the property located at 22-24 W. Loockerman Street. A lease was negotiated with Transcore, the State of Delaware's vendor for E-ZPass, and E-ZPass opened at this location in early March. In order to accommodate E-ZPass employees' parking needs, the DDP included the guarantee of 85 parking spaces in the North Street and Bradford Street parking lots for use by E-ZPass employees. This allocation of parking permits caused the City and DDP to work together to reallocate permit, metered, and free two (2) hour parking within the existing municipal lots managed by the DDP. To balance the need for customer parking with employee parking, the City Manager and City Planner jointly decided to convert 13 parking spaces in what is known as "A-Street Lot" from free two (2) hour parking to permit parking. Without making this change, there would be insufficient parking in the Bradford Street Lot to accommodate both employees and visitors.

The A-Street Lot was utilized for City employee parking for approximately 18 months during the construction of the Dover Public Library. During this time, the City received no complaints and observed no operational issues with this allocation of parking. Prior to, and since designating 13 permit spaces in this area on March 1, 2014, staff continued to monitor this area and regularly observed open parking among the two (2) hour spaces.

Tenants of the Wesley Church Education Building and the Wesley Pre-School expressed concern with the allocation of permit parking in this area, which was previously free two (2) hour parking. No other municipal lot in the area could accommodate the 13 permits. Staff recommended that the permit parking remain as currently configured. If the Committee and Council wished to reconfigure parking in response to the concerns, staff recommended consideration of the following options:

1. Move the mailbox from the current location to the library parking lot near the post office.
2. Remove large holly trees from the landscape island to allow better access to parallel parking spaces on either side of the island. Plant landscaping that has less conflict with vegetation.
3. Move permit parking from the angled parking spaces to the parallel parking spaces on either side of the island. Some permit spaces would still be necessary in the angled parking area.

Mrs. Ann Marie Townshend, Director of Planning and Community Development, explained that there were a total of 24 parking spaces in the area being discussed: 20 parking spaces in the A-Street Lot (13 designated for permit parking, six (6) for two (2) hour free parking, and one (1) for handicapped parking) and four (4) additional two (2) hour free parallel spots on the Loockerman Street side of the median. She noted that if the holly trees located on the median are not trimmed well, inconvenience is caused for those parking in three (3) of the spaces on the south side of the median. She noted that placement of the drive-through mailbox took away one (1) parking space on the south side of the median.

Mrs. Townshend advised members that when the parking needs and availability of the larger area were examined, there was a need to move 13 permit spots from the Barros, McNamara, Malkiewicz and Taylor, PA law firm (located on the corner of Loockerman and State Streets) to the A-Street Lot because they could not be absorbed in the lots on the west side of State Street. Staff talked to the Wesley United Methodist Church a couple of weeks prior to implementing this change and looked at other options; however, they were unable to come up with anything that would resolve the issue.

Mrs. Townshend suggested that members hear what the public has to say regarding this topic and that the matter be referred to staff to determine if other configurations would address the specific problems. She stated that, in order to address the issue, staff needed to understand better the actual concerns to determine if parking was not available or if parking spots were not convenient.

Mr. Hutchison stated his understanding that Wesley United Methodist Church was looking for a compromise whereby three (3) to five (5) parking spaces could be made available. He questioned if the post office box could be placed in an alternative location and if there was some flexibility to provide spaces for the church. He reminded members that the Church had been at its location for well over 100 years, had made contributions to the community, and that the Church also brought business downtown.

Mr. Scott Koenig, City Manager, stated that staff had tried to keep all the permit parking spots adjacent to each other to avoid multiple conflicting messages in terms of signage. He noted that re-striping had been discussed; however, he felt that significant re-striping would likely involve consultation with the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT). Mr. Koenig stated that staff had not looked at alternative sites for the mailbox. He indicated that the site plan for the Dover Public Library anticipated that the mailbox would be put in a spot similar to its previous location; however, this entrance/exit was very congested. He suggested that there may be better alternative locations.

Mr. Anderson expressed his opinion that taking all of the slots in front of the church had caused "angst" and inquired if a few slots could be open to the church and others reserved for permit parking. Responding, Mr. Koenig reiterated that splitting parking designations could cause a need for additional parking signage and difficulties with adherence. He felt the current method provided the easiest, clearest message, but this could be altered if it was Council's wish.

Mr. Perza advised members that he had attended the Wesley Preschool as a child and his daughter now attends the school; therefore he was familiar with the purpose of this portion of the parking lot and the spots used to drop off children. He indicated that he did not see the link between these spots and the parking situation on Loockerman Street two (2) to three (3) blocks west. He felt that the situation should be fixed so as not to disrupt the historic use of Wesley Church and the preschool and stated his desire to find a solution to accomplish this.

Mr. Dave Casto, 8 Gregory Court, Chair of Trustees, Wesley United Methodist Church, explained that he understood what the City was going through and this was one of the reasons that the Church had been willing to compromise from the beginning. However, he felt that perhaps compromising rather than stating that the Church did not want parking permits in this area at all had been a mistake. He asked members to imagine a business or private, non-profit, enterprise that offered many programs suddenly having 10 parking spots in front of their building taken, noting that he was unaware of any other location in the City where this had occurred. Mr. Casto indicated that this came as a shock to the Church, as they were not involved in the planning processes or informed of what was going on. He stated that one (1) meeting was held the morning that related signs were put up, after the signs were erected. Mr. Casto advised members that a number of individuals utilize the building for different programs and that some of these programs would be expanding. He stated that the availability of two (2) hour parking would allow the church to serve the developmentally disabled and to operate its Clothing Closet. He explained that, at times, parking is not available in close proximity to the church. Mr. Casto expressed his opinion that the Barros, McNamara, Malkiewicz, and Taylor, PA law firm should have made arrangements for their own parking when they moved across the street, rather than having parking spots taken from the Church. He advised members that the Church had always been a good partner with the City, allowing use of their parking for Dover Days, the Schwartz Center, etc.

Dr. Joyce Denman, Supervisor of Special Education, Capital School District, explained that the District's Student Transition to Adult Readiness (STAR) program was started during the previous year to serve students aged 18-21 with significant disabilities who are eligible for public school services. Since being in a school facility with students aged 14-18 was deemed inappropriate for these students, the Wesley Education Building site was selected due to its location near the Dover Public Library and close proximity to community events. The first complete successful year for the program had concluded and parents, teachers, and paraprofessionals were pleased with the setting. Dr. Denman stated that service personnel, including a psychologist, speech language pathologist, physical therapist, occupational therapists, and administrators, come to the site for short visits every day to provide services. These individuals are on very tight schedules because they work at several sites and convenient parking is important to allow them to complete 30-minute sessions and go to their next assignment. In addition, food service providers deliver breakfast, and subsequently lunch, at this location each day.

Mr. Alex Vaughan, 509 Dyke Branch Road, Trustee, Wesley United Methodist Church, requested clarification regarding the path that brought those present to the current meeting and what led to the "path that was taken last December" (parking changes that were made in the A-Street Lot). Responding, Mr. Hutchison stated that the City was considering parking spaces needed in the downtown area. He stated that this included Wesley United Methodist Church and that parking was being discussed in this context.

Mr. Vaughan stated that, as a trustee, his interest was from an administrative standpoint. He stated he was aware that the parking spaces had something to do with the Barros, McNamara, Malkiewicz and Taylor, PA law firm, but was also led to believe that it had something to do with the new E-ZPass offices on Loockerman Street. He stated his belief that the history of this parking situation went back many years to when the DDP had facilitated acquiring the former Woolworth's building that now houses E-ZPass. Mr. Vaughan did not understand why the parking concerns being discussed were not addressed at the time this project was undertaken.

Mr. Hutchison stated that the City of Dover and DDP had made a commitment to work with E-ZPass to bring new jobs downtown and to work with the State of Delaware to accomplish this. He expressed his hope that the City could work with Wesley United Methodist Church to get the situation resolved.

Mr. Vaughan hoped this would be the result, but stated concern that the Church was not brought into the conversation in December 2013 when staff began addressing the parking concerns. He felt that the parking issues that caused the reallocation of these spaces began several years ago and that leaving the Church out of the discussion was not good neighborhood relations.

In response, Mr. Hutchison stated that he had discussed this matter earlier in the day with Mrs. Townshend and Mr. Koenig, and they were well on the way to addressing the concerns expressed. Mr. Vaughan stated that the Church was looking forward to being part of the process.

Mr. David Evans, Co-Lay Leader of Wesley United Methodist Church, 388 Clark Farm Road, Smyrna, advised members that approximately 95-96% of the Church's service is work for those less fortunate and this work is done out of the Wesley Education Building. He noted that the Clothing Closet serves hundreds of needy people who do not have clothes and likely do not have cars; therefore, they must be driven to the Clothes Closet where it is difficult to find a parking spot. In addition, he estimated that 20 people come to the building every Tuesday at 7:00 a.m. for a Bible study, noting that, at 68 years old, he is one of the youngest attendees. Mr. Evans advised members that he had pulled a gentleman from the holly bushes referred to previously because he stumbled getting out of his car. He felt that it might not have become an issue and Church representatives would not be attending the meeting if someone had approached them first regarding this matter instead of assuming that the parking spots were not being used, and if the church had explained that 95% of their outreach to needy people was done out of this building. However, he stated that parking was now an issue and a critical need for the individuals who need these services the most.

Mr. Jack Royston, 44 Philchrist Drive, expressed concurrence with the comments of the previous speakers, including the need for better communication "with our friends and neighbors." He stated appreciation for the City taking the time to look into the problem and expressed his hope that it would be resolved in an amicable way.

Reverend Amy Yarnall, 140 Hazel Road, indicated that her views had been expressed and stated her appreciation for the City's consideration of this issue.

Mr. Keller stated that he sympathized with the Church and advised those present that the City would do its very best.

Mr. Hutchison recommended a 45-day delay on the current issue, which would give Mr. Koenig and Mrs. Townshend an opportunity to come back to members with a proposal.

Responding to Mr. Perza regarding the reason for the 45-day time period, Mrs. Townshend stated that the Committee's current special meeting was being held at the beginning of the month rather than the normal meeting date on the fourth Monday of the month. It was planned to bring the issue back to the Committee at the end of June so that staff could sort through possible scenarios.

Mr. Hutchison inquired if something could be done to assist the church in addressing their immediate issues before 45 days. He noted that the correspondence he received regarding this issue indicated a need for three (3) to five (5) parking spaces.

Mrs. Townshend stated that there were on-street parking spaces further west on Loockerman Street adjacent to the building owned by Barros, McNamara, Malkiewicz and Taylor, PA and indicated that some of the permit spaces could be shifted to that area. She stated that five (5) to seven (7), and possibly eight (8) spaces could be accommodated if this area were designated for permit parking. Mr. Koenig stated that this could be done; however, he was unsure what the unintended consequences could be.

Reverend Yarnall advised members that the STAR and Wesley Preschool programs would not be operating at full capacity during the summer and wanted everyone to realize this if studies regarding parking would be conducted in the summertime.

Responding to Mr. Keller as to whether the Barros, McNamara, Malkiewicz and Taylor, PA law firm should also be notified, Mrs. Townshend stated that the law firm was well aware of the issues.

Mr. Perza moved that the matter be remanded back to staff to meet with Wesley Church to consider the needs and assessments that need to be factored in regarding the Church, its school, and its mission and that staff be authorized to proceed with intermediate permit spot adjustments, seconded by Mr. Dixon and unanimously carried.

Discussion - Traffic Concerns on College Road (Request of Westminster Village)

Mrs. Ann Marie Townshend, Director of Planning and Community Development, stated that there had been a request from a resident at Westminster Village to signalize the exit from Westminster Village onto College Road that lines up with North Dover Elementary School. This request was sent to the Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) traffic section to determine if this was something that they could look at and to analyze crash data. DelDOT determined that a signal would not have prevented any of the accidents that occurred at this location and did not find that a signal was warranted. Mrs. Townshend advised members that there were continual issues with congestion and speeding on the stretch of College Road extending from the University Courtyard Apartments to the Woodlands of Fox Hall. She recommended reaching out to the DelDOT traffic section and

the Dover/Kent County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to perform a traffic study in that area to look at traffic counts and measures that could be put in place to help facilitate better flow of traffic. Mrs. Townshend noted that McKee and College Road were both DelDOT roads and that DelDOT would need to implement any changes.

Mr. Hutchison suggested that staff have DelDOT look at the area due to the large number of students walking between the apartments and the University on a daily basis. Mrs. Townshend concurred, stating that pedestrian issues and efficient traffic flow were both concerns in the area.

Update - Dover High School Construction

Mrs. Ann Marie Townshend, Director of Planning and Community Development, stated that the Capital School District (CSD) had been working with the Fire Marshal's Office to complete fire alarm testing so that furniture could be moved into Dover High School later in May. It was hoped that testing would be complete by the end of the current week, and from a building code standpoint, furniture could then be moved in. It was hoped that a temporary Certificate of Occupancy (CO) would be issued in June: however, Mrs. Townshend expressed some concerns, noting that the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) would not agree to a temporary CO until stormwater violations were resolved. She stated that monthly coordination meetings were continuing, with some interim meetings being held regarding stormwater. The stormwater outfall under Route 8 was expected to be finished within the next couple of days, with construction on the east entrance to begin shortly after. Mrs. Townshend stated that staff had advised the CSD that the east entrance did not need to be entirely complete for the temporary CO to be issued, but the school could not open for the year without its completion. The temporary CO would be very specific as to moving in, setting up, and getting things in place. She noted that DelDOT was getting ready to move forward on the sidewalks and installation of the High-Intensity Activated CrossWalk (HAWK) signal. All but one (1) property owner had signed the easements needed and a more difficult route must be taken to acquire the construction easement for this owner's property.

Responding to Mr. Hutchison regarding the stormwater requirements, Mrs. Townshend stated that DNREC was the controlling factor in regard to stormwater issues and that going against DNREC would jeopardize the City's status as a regulated community under the stormwater program. Mrs. Townshend stated that staff was working very closely with DRNEC and EDiS to make sure these issues are resolved as quickly as possible. She noted that wet weather and the very cold and snowy winter had made the project difficult.

Noting that the southern segment of Dover High Drive and its connection to Tribbett Road must be completed before school opens in September, Mr. Hutchison questioned if staff had issued a written document to that effect. Responding, Mrs. Townshend stated that this had not been done because stormwater appeared to be the biggest concern. However, she concurred that the City was at the point that issues related to the roadway should be put in writing because the roadway is critical.

Noting the importance of the safety of the children, Mr. Keller questioned if the completion of sidewalk construction and the installation of the HAWK signal would be required for a CO. Mrs. Townshend stated that these aspects were under DelDOT's control, rather than the CSD's;

however, DelDOT was fairly confident that the HAWK signal and the bulk of the sidewalks would be in place by August. She indicated that no plans had been made to bus the children to school if sidewalks were not completed, but if there were not a safe walking route to school, the CSD would have to provide bus transportation.

Responding to Mr. Hutchison, Mrs. Townshend confirmed that the sidewalks under discussion were on the north side of Route 8. It was her belief that, ultimately, sidewalks would be needed on the south side also, as well as on Mifflin Road.

In response to Mr. Keller, Mrs. Townshend stated her recollection that approximately 200 children would be using the HAWK signal, although parents may transport some of these children.

Mr. Perza questioned if the CSD was aware that they would not be permitted to open the school until all requirements were completed, regardless of whether these requirements were the responsibility of DelDOT or other parties. He expressed the desire to ensure that nothing "slips through the cracks" and that the CSD is made aware of all requirements. Responding, Mrs. Townshend indicated that these requirements had been stated at the coordination meetings during the past three (3) months; however, she concurred that putting them in writing would be worthwhile. She stated that EdiS had assured staff that the project would be complete.

Mr. Perza expressed a desire to intervene and to avoid "finger pointing" and stated that the bottom line is that children cannot go into the school until it is safe, regardless of who gets it done. He stated he wished to create a record now in this regard. Concurring, Mrs. Townshend stated that the City could not sign off on the project if it were not safe.

Mr. Perza moved for adjournment, seconded by Mr. Keller and unanimously carried.

Meeting adjourned at 2:52 p.m.

James L. Hutchison, Sr.
Chairman

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