

BOROUGH OF WEST READING TRAFFIC & INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

JULY 10, 2024

The Borough of West Reading Traffic & Infrastructure Committee met on Wednesday, July 10, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. at Borough Hall with the following persons present: Chairman Christopher Lincoln; Council Member Patrick Kaag; Mayor Samantha Kaag; Code Department Manager and Fire Chief Chad Moyer; Chief of Police Richard Tornielli; Public Works Director Kerry Grassley; and Borough Secretary Cynthia Madeira.

Visitors:

Karen Livingood, Resident	James Rogers, Resident
Maureen Hasty, Resident	Tyler Ashman, Parking Enforcement Officer
Megan Gardo, Walker Consultants	William Rhodin, Walker Consultants
Leonard Bilger, Western Berks Water Authority	Matthew Walborn, Western Berks Water Authority
Michael Hart, Resident & Western Berks Water Authority Board Member (arrived at 6:20 p.m.)	

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Lincoln at 6:00 p.m.

Presentation

Walker Consultants – Mr. Lincoln noted previous committee discussions to revise the scope of the permit parking program to increase effectiveness and introduced members of Walker Consultants to assist in evaluating and defining an effective program. The current program was crafted to prohibit hospital staff from parking on residential streets for extended periods of time. Two problem areas noted were side streets adjacent to Penn Avenue and the area of the elementary school. Complaints have been received from residents who cannot obtain a permit because their address does not front a designated permit parking street. Ms. Gardo recommended performing a study that would identify existing conditions to determine where and when there are issues and to survey residents to identify the challenges they are experiencing. Criteria to qualify for a parking permit would need to be established, and it was recommended as a best practice to limit the number of permits per household based on off-street parking capabilities. New software is available to facilitate online permitting, annual renewals, and mobile license plate reading that would improve efficiency of the program. Mr. Lincoln requested a ballpark figure to perform this type of study to research funding options within the current budget and obtain feedback from Borough Council on how to proceed.

Mr. Hart joined the meeting and Ms. Gardo and Mr. Rhodin departed the meeting at 6:20 p.m.

Western Berks Water Authority – A packet of information was provided to committee members with an overview provided by Mr. Bilger who noted declining water sales during the last twenty years, caused in part to changes in operations with the borough's two largest customers the hospital and recently R.M. Palmer. Operating expenses increased drastically during the last few years and emerging contaminants are requiring upgrades to their plant infrastructure. The forever chemical compound known as PFAS that cycles from the manufacturing plant to the wastewater treatment plant, and water intake is being regulated by the state and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for maximum contaminant level goals in drinking water. Mr. Bilger indicated that rates will be increasing drastically and offered to answer resident questions on rate increases. Mr. Lincoln inquired as to grant funding opportunities to offset infrastructure improvements costs. Mr. Bilger noted that funding of projects with goals below the state regulations are not being accepted by PENNVEST. Western Berks Water Authority's goal is zero contaminants.

Mr. Hart, Mr. Bilger, and Mr. Walborn departed the meeting at 6:59 p.m.

Public Comment

Mr. Rogers spoke again of parking within the 500 block of Grape Street as a public safety issue in the event of a fire. He thought that an additional six parking spaces could be created on Chestnut Street for the overflow from prohibiting parking on Grape Street. He then shared two incidents where a tagged abandoned vehicle was allowed to remain beyond the allotted seven days due to an officer on vacation. Chief Tornielli noted priority and staffing issues and will review the internal process. Mr. Rogers also noted a pedestrian safety issue at the intersection of Sixth and Reading Avenues.

Mrs. Hasty shared that large planters are placed in front of various pedestrian crosswalk buttons along Penn Avenue. Staff will review and communicate with the appropriate business owners to ensure that access to these areas remains clear. Mrs. Hasty also noted that the new vinyl traffic box covers make it difficult to locate the pedestrian crossing button, possibly a blank area could be created around the button for ease of identification. She also inquired as to implementing an instant change for pedestrian crossings similar to State Hill Road. Mr. Lincoln plans to review the state signal permits for potential changes.

Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the Traffic and Infrastructure Committee minutes of May 8, 2024. **Moved** by Mr. Grassley and seconded by Chief Tornielli. **Motion carried.**

New Business

MORE Grant Program – An opportunity is available for grant funded level 2 energy audits to borough buildings. The recommended improvements within these audits could then be funded through a low to no cost MORE Loan to implement energy system upgrades. It was recommended to perform energy audits to the Borough Hall, Fire House, and Bicentennial House buildings.

Motion to recommend Borough Council to move forward with applying for an updated energy audit grant of the municipal owned Borough Hall, Fire House, and Bicentennial House buildings. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Grassley. **Motion carried.**

Parking Prohibited at All Times – The list of prohibited parking areas within Section 430-21 were reviewed noting the following:

- Clark Alley from Spruce Street to Franklin Street was reviewed noting a dual regulation of permit parking from Spruce Street to Cherry Street. It was decided to remove the permit parking designation and post no parking signs to allow trash and fire truck access and easier navigation to driveways.
- Grape Street was reviewed from Yarnell Street to Sixth Avenue for driveway access, emergency vehicle access, plowing and trash removal tasks. Mr. Moyer shared that the cartway within the 500 block is 16' wide with a 2' wide pedestrian right-of-way which indicates that vehicles parked within this alley are entirely parked within rights-of-way. It was noted that the portion between Sixth Avenue and Clark Alley is posted as no winter maintenance, is not an area of trash collection nor do emergency services need access to this roadway, therefore parking within this block could remain unchanged. Chief Moyer noted that fire truck access to structures on Grape Street between Yarnell Street and Third Avenue is impossible with vehicles parked within the roadway. It was recommended to restrict parking on Grape Street from Yarnell Street to Sixth Avenue.

Motion to recommend Borough Council to approve amendments to Section 430-21 Parking Prohibited at All Times. **Moved** by Mr. Grassley and seconded by Chief Tornielli. **Motion carried.**

Old Business

Yarnell Street Parking – Previous discussions that resulted in plans to ease access onto Grape Street from Yarnell Street by shifting parking stall lines on the west side closer to Chestnut Street were recommended to remain unchanged to allow fire truck access onto Yarnell Street.

Experimental Parking Regulations – The experimental parking regulations along the 300 block of South Seventh Avenue and Penn Avenue have been in place for nearly 90 days. Prior to recommending adoption next week Mr. Lincoln inquired as to any feedback that may have been received. It was noted that the UGI construction activity along Penn Avenue may not have allowed a true test period. Mr. Ashman indicated that there is more turnover within the 20-minute spaces on Penn Avenue. The changes along South Seventh Avenue were noted by Mr. Ashman to relieve complaints from the pharmacy. However, there has been an uptick in handicapped parking space violations.

Based on the lack of specific complaints received regarding experimental parking regulations a motion was made recommending Borough Council to make the experimental parking regulations permanent. **Moved** by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Grassley. **Motion carried.**

Reading and Sixth Avenues Traffic Study Update – Mr. Lincoln shared that a report was received this afternoon from the Local Technical Assistance Program regarding their recent traffic study. Traffic data was shared noting that the 85th percentile speed approaching the Sixth Avenue intersection on Reading Avenue in each direction was 29 MPH which is less than 5 MPH over the posted speed limit. The average volume of vehicles traveling each direction on Reading Avenue was roughly 6,000 per day. On North Sixth Avenue speed was not an issue and the average daily traffic flow was roughly 630 vehicles per day. The threshold requirements were not met to install a traffic signal at this intersection. A roundabout was recommended, however, there is not sufficient space to create a roundabout. Crash data was reviewed for the past five years noting four reported crashes, of which three resulted in injuries. The three crashes were vehicles traveling northbound on North Sixth Avenue proceeding without clearance. Line of sight seems to be the cause of these crashes. Alternate safety improvements to the intersection were discussed such as establishing a right turn only from North Sixth Avenue onto Reading Avenue and limiting the direction of travel, which would require a change in the PennDOT signal permit at Penn Avenue. Mr. Rogers recommended installing stop signs on Reading Avenue, noting other less busy intersections that are four-way stops. Mr. Lincoln indicated that regulations were different when those signs were installed. It was recommended to refresh the pedestrian crosswalks for better pedestrian visibility. The full report will be reviewed for further discussion in the future.

Delaney Circle Update – Movement of memorial items to the park was recommended while funding of the garden is established. Chief Tornielli will communicate with the family as to plans to temporarily relocate these items until the garden is created.

Trial Sidewalk Replacement Program Update – A location on Fourth Avenue and Franklin Street has recently been identified as locations to replace sidewalk panels this year. Mr. Moyer indicated that before and after images will be shared with a tally of costs associated with this year's workload. Mr. Moyer is hopeful that the success of this trial program will allow the moratorium to be lifted to address areas where existing trees are a factor.

Public Comment

Mr. Rogers inquired as to the trash placement alongside the restaurant at 36 North Sixth Avenue within the grass alley right-of-way. Mr. Moyer indicated that a prior department manager allowed this placement due to the lack of suitable space. A reminder is needed occasionally to keep materials in a single line adjacent to the building. It was noted that 449 Penn Avenue has a similar issue.

Mr. Lincoln inquired as to cone placement on the southwest corner of South Fourth Avenue at Penn Avenue. It was noted that the new business at 400 Penn Avenue is generating additional foot traffic and possibly refreshing the yellow curb and installing a no parking sign would assist in deterring parking near this narrow roadway.

Adjournment

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 8:33 p.m. by Mr. Kaag and seconded by Mr. Grassley.

Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Madeira
Borough Secretary