

City Council Committee Reports for 2020

DATE: Public Meeting, Thurs., May 14, 2020, 7:00 pm to ca. 8:20 pm

PLACE: via Zoom

RECORDER: Cllr. Jared Eigerman (handwritten notes)

AD HOC COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

<u>Councillors</u>	<u>Attendance</u>
Jared Eigerman, Chair	<i>Yes</i>
Charles Tontar, Member	<i>Yes</i>
Sharif Zeid, Member	<i>Yes</i>
Barry Connell	<i>Yes</i>
Bruce Vogel	<i>Recused</i>
Joseph Devlin	<i>Yes</i>
Afroz Khan	<i>Yes</i>
Heather Shand	<i>Yes</i>
James McCauley	<i>Yes</i>
Christine Wallace	<i>Yes</i>
Byron Lane	<i>Yes</i>

AGENDA ITEMS

ACTION TAKEN

ORD 180 -- Economic Revitalization (sponsors Cllrs. McCauley and Lane)

None. Item remains with Ad Hoc Cmte. on Econ. Dev't and Cmte. of the Whole.

Minutes:

- 1. Cllr. Eigerman (Chair):* Introductory remarks including identification of department heads and other City staff in attendance.
- 2. Cllr. McCauley and Lane:* Described their proposal to close portions of some streets downtown for two-months this summer to allow restaurants to use public ways for seating. Intent is to set a baseline from which we can fill in the details as we go along. Public Safety officials can help us to do it right. Intent is to help the stores and restaurants during this pandemic. (*Clerk Richard Jones:* Proposed order Section B intends to create four Two-Way streets)
- 3. Mayor's Chief of Staff Coogan:* Several departments heads and other City staff available to help put together a reasonable solution in a safe manner. Have been discussing allowing outdoor dining. Staff met as a group yesterday. Appreciate Council putting this into their legislative process. We are trying to come up with a good solution..

4. *Cllr. Zeid:* Has concerns. Disagreement on the Council about when to “reopen” Downtown. Ward 1 does not include Downtown as does Ward 2, but downtown parking and traffic policies have effects on Ward 1. Perhaps, best approach is to close on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights only.
5. *Cllr. Khan:* Favors doing something to help downtown restaurants, but has concerns. Should period be earlier than July 1 to Sept. 1 as proposed? Governor’s expected order of May 18 will influence. There are emergency-access problems to solve. Two-way streets are a good idea. Could expand the idea beyond restaurants to fitness studios and other businesses.
6. *Cllr. Connell:* Habits of residents are not easily changed, such as driving patterns. Glad sponsors took a shot at this. Timing should be tied to automatic review if health and other conditions change. Understood the proposal as making parts of streets two-way.
7. *Cllr. Tontar:* Is there consensus on wanting to attract people to Newburyport from elsewhere? Board of Health must advise. Perhaps, we could eliminate curbside parking. Needs input from Fire Chief and City Marshal. Needs input from all abutting businesses.
8. *Cllr. McCauley:* Liberty, Middle, Essex and Charter Streets would become two-way streets if State Street closed. Changing Charter Street could help prevent Pleasant Street from being landlocked.
9. *Cllr. Devlin:* Alcohol licensing is problematic because of weeks-long processing. Legislation pending to ease this. Which food and beverage operators would really want to do this? Not everyone can make it work economically. Many eateries are likely to fail in the U.S., regardless. Two bodies we need involved are Board of Health and Licensing Board.
10. *Chair Eigerman:* Timing for start of this is up in the air, no question. Still productive to talk about street usage idea, because we need economic stimulus. Governor’s May 18 order will not get down to this level of detail. Traffic and safety is paramount and, yes, complex Downtown, already. All abutters must be consulted before we close a public way to vehicles. Council would only control traffic and parking issues, and leave health and licensing details to Board of Health and Licensing Board. Cannot forget the need for disabled access. Maybe “parklets” are better way to go than closing off streets.
11. *Fire Chief LeClaire:* We cancelled Yankee Homecoming but are going to encourage congregating Downtown? Fire trucks cannot navigate Downtown streets easily, as it is. Barriers must be permanent and immovable. Hard to move and store barrier. If you make streets two-way you must lose some on-street parking. How do we handle bathrooms and trash?
12. *Dep. Chief Bradbury:* Extremely concerned about access by Fire apparatus. Inn Street not really passable, although it is in theory a great idea. Coming up Liberty Street means the turn onto State St is problematic for the ladder truck if anyone has anything out in State Street..

13. *Marshal Murray*: I applaud the effort, but Police Department shares concerns expressed by Fire Department. Overflow of traffic into neighborhoods is troubling. Two-way traffic means loss of much on-street parking. If people come Downtown to recreate over food and drink how will we enforce social distancing?
14. *Dep. DPS Director Tuccolo*: Effort is there and I also applaud that. Permanent barriers are a pain to maneuver. Requires DPS to use trucks.
- [Motion to waive normal Rule to allow Chair to forward diagram by City Engineer to all Councillors by email, by Cllr. Tontar, seconded by Cllr. Khan, and passed 10-0.]
15. *Cllr. Zeid*: Appreciate staff input. Would like to explore as a pilot: one night a week? Something like Cruising the 50's. Couldn't we use parked vehicles to block off streets? Like to explore that idea.
16. *Fire Chief LeClaire*: Barriers must be able to protect pedestrians and diners who are not expecting vehicles, that may come in accidentally or with ill intent. Trial basis allows us to make adjustments
17. *Asst. City Engineer Gagnon*: Described how the diagram was done and how to read it.
18. *Cllr. Devlin*: There would have to be a control point to maintain social distancing. If we only do Friday and Saturday nights restaurants have to be able to put things up and break them down. Massachusetts law forbids there to be a public way through an area serving alcohol. That's why our outdoor seating licenses require contiguity. Therefore, "parklet" idea, as depicted in materials sent earlier today by Chair Eigerman are unworkable.
19. *Cllr. Tontar*: We need to talk with the businesses. Feels effort immense. If you shut street off, what happens to shop that only wants to do curb side pick-up? Before we get into too much detail we need to know what business feel.
20. *Cllr. Khan*: Sketch helpful but should hear from businesses before next meeting.
21. *Cllr. Zeid*: Many restaurants already have outdoor seating and this helps to spread them out. How meeting in in a week to hear public comments on this? Allows us to reach out to people.
22. *Cllr. Connell*: Likes idea of trial basis on weekends. Maybe July 1 to Aug 1. Restaurants can either opt in or out.
23. *Cllr. Shand*: Is a schedule being starting backwards from July 1?
24. *Chair. Eigerman*: Disagrees that restaurants can simply opt in and out because street geometry does not allow all to participate. Cllr. Devlin has identified a fatal flaw: if liquor sales cannot be made to work, then doubts idea will work. Not sure why we would open this

to a public hearing if we cannot surmount that.

Cllr. Zeid: Disagrees that it is insoluble. Can close down street entirely so pedestrians can walk down the middle, and leaving sidewalks for abutting restaurants to use exclusively.

Chair Eigerman: If we close down streets entirely, and give sidewalks over to abutting restaurants, with no public path through their serving areas, then how do we provide new curb cuts to ensure disabled access?

25. *Cllr Murray:* Have you reached out to all the restaurants? Not sure if this was part of Task Force's recent survey

Mayor's Chief of Staff Coogan: It was not. We have sector groups meeting, now, not just Downtown businesses, but citywide. Will get their input on the proposed street closures.

26. *Cllr. Wallace:* Need to hear from businesses. Don't really know what they want.

[Chair Eigerman opened public comment.]

27. *Megan Kinsey, 1 Griffin Court:* Thank you for taking time to sift to all of this. Happy to help you in supporting Downtown businesses. Love to see this help non-restaurants, like my fitness business.

[Chair Eigerman closed public comment.]

[ca 8:20 pm, Motion to adjourn by Cllr. Tontar, seconded by Cllr. Zeid, and passed 3-0.]