

**- MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE
PEDESTRIAN AND TRAFFIC SAFETY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 9, 2021
7:00 P.M.
VIA ZOOM TELECONFERENCE**

Present via Zoom teleconference:

Ex-Officio Members: First Selectman Melissa M. Mack and Traffic Commission Members Joseph Blake and Jason Trombly

Ex-Officio Members Absent: Jack Quinn

Committee Members: Tracy Hespelt, Matthew Pafford, Melien Lavoie, Amy Hill, Ted Ruddock, Andrew Krar, William Steinka, Carol Underwood, Steve White and Joann Yates

Committee Members Absent: Susan Herbert and Andrew Gray

Also Present via Zoom teleconference: Police Chief Brown, Director of Planning and Development Bill Hawkins and Town Engineer Karen Isherwood

First Selectman Mack called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm, thanked the group for their willingness to join the committee and asked all to join her in the Pledge of Allegiance.

First Selectman Mack explained that the goal of the committee was to have a broad cross-section of the community represented to address the town-wide issue. We left some vacancies in the event new members from underrepresented areas of our town decide to get involved. The maximum number of committee members will be capped at twenty-one; currently there are 17 members.

Roll Call and Introduction of Committee Members

First Selectman Mack asked for each member to identify themselves, tell the group where they live and what they hope will be addressed by the committee's work. Regular members include:

- **Tracy Hespelt** – Copperhill Road, West Suffield
- **Matthew Pafford** – Wren Drive, Suffield
- **Melien Lavoie** – South Stone Street, West Suffield
- **Amy Hill** – North Main Street
- **Ted Ruddock** – High Street, Suffield
- **Andrew Krar** – Somerwynd Lane, Suffield
- **William Steinka** – Halladay Drive, West Suffield
- **Carol Underwood** – Thompsonville Road, Suffield
- **Steve White** – South Main Street, Suffield
- **Matt Auchy** – Mapleton Avenue, Suffield

First Selectman Mack thanked all members for sharing their goals for the committee and noted that there are three additional ex-officio members, appointed by the Police Commission, who make up the Local

Traffic Authority; a subcommittee of the Police Commission. She invited Police Chief Brown to address the committee and explain the role of the Local Traffic Authority in town.

Chief Brown explained that the Local Traffic Authority are the decision makers when it comes to issues such as placement of signs and the changing of traffic control devices throughout town. Typically, they only deal with local roads, as the state roads are controlled by the Office of State Traffic Administration; however, some of our town roads are controlled by the state where installation of certain signs is concerned. The Chief's goal for this committee is to develop a plan and provide some recommendations. The purpose of the Local Traffic Authority is to approve such plan and if funding is required they will act as spokespeople; to be representatives to not only the Board of Selectmen but eventually to the Board of Finance.

First Selectman Mack thanked the members of the Police Commission who have graciously offered to assist the committee and introduced them as Jason Trombly, Joe Blake and Jack Quinn. Mr. Trombly and Mr. Blake each provided a brief personal overview for the committee; Mr. Quinn was not in attendance. Additional committee member, Joann Yates of Broadleaf Circle, addressed the group and provided her background and hopes for the committee.

Introduction of new Town Engineer Karen Isherwood

First Selectman Mack introduced the new Town Engineer, Karen Isherwood and gave a brief overview:

- Former Deputy Town Engineer in Bloomfield
- Licensed professional engineer with years of experience in all aspects of civil engineering
- Started with the Town of Suffield about six weeks ago replacing Gerry Turbet who retired after 32 years of service.
- She hasn't missed a beat since starting and is eager to make a difference and First Selectman Mack is confident that Mrs. Isherwood will be instrumental in achieving the mission of this committee.
- **Mrs. Isherwood** addressed the committee and said she is very happy and anxious to get on board with a number of these projects to try and focus some of our infrastructure improvements to address a lot of the comments being brought up today.

Overview of Committee Charge and Background

First Selectman Mack read the charge as adopted by the Board of Selectmen:

"To evaluate and make recommendations to the Board of Selectmen addressing pedestrian and traffic safety and infrastructure needs town-wide in a comprehensive way that will allow the Town to plan for expenditures and other actions."

The ultimate goal is to solve the traffic problem, using as many resources as possible, in our quest to achieve this goal. The question is where to start.

First Selectman Mack offered the following background information:

Traffic Committee

Truck traffic and pedestrian safety has been an issue that the town has struggled with for decades. Suffield has historically addressed problems on a case-by-case basis with no comprehensive plan. A few years ago we invited engineers from the CT Department of Transportation (CT DOT) to visit Suffield. We drove them around and expressed the traffic challenges augmented by so many state roads traversing

town. The CT DOT was receptive to our input but made very clear their position that *state roads are meant for cars and trucks*.

There was a study prepared in 2002 by the Capitol Region Council of Government entitled the “Bradley Area Transportation Study”, which recommended the creation of a “Northern Bradley Connector Roadway” from Bradley International Airport to the Route 190 Bridge, bypassing Suffield altogether. The report stated that “the new connector will provide much-needed direct access for industrial/commercial parcels on and adjacent to Bradley International Airport. It will also distribute traffic and help preserve residential and historic areas from increased congestion as the airport develops.” Suffield did not take a proactive approach in 2002 and the land that would have been utilized is now a residential neighborhood.

In 2017, First Selectman Mack requested that we reach out to CROG about the possibility of updating the Bradley Area Transportation Study. At the time, no funding was available and no requests for such studies have come out since then. We are planning on follow up now on this with CROG because here we are now, in 2021, and everything the study predicted has come true, with a town-wide traffic issue that will increase not only with our regular growth but also as Bradley International Airport continues its expansion in support of strengthening Connecticut’s economy.

What has been done by the Town over the last five years on this issue?

Speeding, Signage and traffic quieting

A town-wide signage review and remediation project was conducted with the UConn Circuit Safety Rider, the Suffield Police and Highway Departments. In 2018 they corrected over 400 incorrect or illegal signage issues (including authorized speed limits) town-wide.

Prior to First Selectman Mack’s first term, in 2015, the Town installed speed tables on South Stone Street. The Town received a lot of negative feedback on them over the last five years. First Selectman Mack requested the local traffic authority to consider the issue and the resident input. The local traffic authority consented to the Highway Department’s removal of the Speed Tables from South Stone Street last year, however, we still need to address the issues that precipitated the installation of them in the first place.

Your Speed Sign Trailers, Crosswalks and Rectangular Flashing Beacons

Chief Brown provided the following update:

- 3 components to Traffic Safety: Education, Engineering and Enforcement
- Town must use data to justify all actions taken
- “Your Speed” sign trailers in various hot spots in town – ability to count number of vehicles and provide details which allow the police to determine where the enforcement should be taking place and when in order to be most effective
- In a three-month time period over 1 million cars were recorded coming through the center of our town which indicates a significant volume of traffic to deal with
- We need to develop systematic policies to be consistent amongst the neighborhoods while keeping in mind that what we do in one location may have an impact on another which poses a difficult task moving forward
- The Traffic Circuit Safety Rider is willing to come and address the group at a future meeting in order to provide education on safety conditions and traffic laws in the Town of Suffield
- Talking to our neighbors and friends is also important as over 46% of all traffic stops are our own Town residents

- Engineering assistance from UCONN as well as working with our new Town Engineer and our Director of Planning and Development will also help on future traffic issues

First Selectman Mack provided a few additional traffic measures that have been undertaken or will be in the near future:

- Crosswalks in road and outside road have been updated town wide. Additional crosswalks and rectangular flashing beacons will be installed at some sidewalks in town as part of the sidewalk projects and at Bridge Street crossing.
- Pavement markings and centerline rumble strips have been installed on various Town and State roads.
- Town has reached out to the trucking companies near the airport to request that in bills of lading the truck drivers be asked to head toward Route 20 to go north instead of using GPS which directs them through town. This was received with mixed reviews and a few suggestions to go pound sand.

Chief Brown provided an update on Suffield Police Department's work with the CT Commercial Motor Vehicle Safety Unit.

- 3 different levels of inspection to check on the safety of the commercial trucks
- The unit has been out on several occasions with differing results: no violations, some violations and violations significant enough to take the vehicle out of service
- They will continue to provide inspections on a routine ongoing basis
- Traffic blitzes have also been conducted in areas known to be "speeding hotspots." This entails working with the State Police Traffic Unit as well as the CT Commercial Motor Vehicle Safety Unit.

Infrastructure

- The new Dustin L. Doyon Memorial Bridge, formerly known as the Remington Street Bridge, was redesigned with a goal of traffic quieting. The curve in the bridge was designed specifically to deter speeding.
- We have two sidewalk projects underway to address pedestrian safety issues:
 - Mountain Road Multi-use trail
 - Mapleton Avenue/ Thompsonville Sidewalk project.

Town Engineer Karen Isherwood provided the following updates:

- Mountain Road Multi-Use Trail
 - Design completed by SLR.
 - SLR submitted final plans to DOT for review.
 - Waiting for final project authorization letter.
 - Upon approval – put out to bid in early March
 - Bids returned early April
 - Town anticipates start of construction to begin in May
 - Goal is to have project completed prior to beginning of school year in September
- Mapleton Avenue/Thompsonville Sidewalk Project
 - We are in the planning phase right now.
 - Currently preparing bid solicitations to get the project designed

- We have been awarded a Community Connectivity Grant; maximum \$400,000.

First Selectman Mack asked if there will be community hearing engagements in the process of implementing these two sidewalks so that the community will be made aware that the sidewalks are being installed and that our Town Ordinance requires homeowners to keep the areas in front of their residences clear of snow, ice, etc.

Ms. Isherwood explained that this could definitely be done, in addition to posting the information on the website and sending letters to those who will be impacted.

Amy Hill (Committee Member) asked about the exact locations of the sidewalks.

Ms. Isherwood explained that the Mapleton Avenue/Thompsonville Sidewalk will start at North Main Street, continuing east on Mapleton Avenue on the south side and as it hits the intersection with Thompsonville Road it will continue on that side all the way to Rawlins Brook Road; approximately 7,800 linear feet. The Mountain Road project will begin at the Suffield Middle School traveling west on the north side all the way to Sheldon Street. There will be an additional 300 feet farther west on Mountain Road to get through the Police Station to the A.W. Spaulding Elementary School.

First Selectman Mack stated that when the project is complete people will be able to basically walk from the Valero gas station on East Street, hop across the street and follow the sidewalk all the way to Suffield High School and/or the Suffield Police Department. The goal is to connect people to the Town Center.

CRCOG Transportation Committee

Director of Planning and Development Bill Hawkins provided the following update on this committee:

- Committee meets monthly
- Suffield has been a member for over 15 years
- Committee guides transportation planning in the Capital Region
- They review projects and are eligible for state and federal funding
- Suffield has reaped the benefits of some of their programs and funding sources
- Director Hawkins has been a member and the Town Engineer will be taking over the attendance of these meetings for Suffield

Director Hawkins discussed the Complete Streets Plan Draft and how it works, noting that the formal adoption of the plan has been held up due to COVID-19. He also touched on the CRCOG Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans (2008) as well as the Regional Transportation Safety Plan (2020).

What are the next steps?

First Selectman Mack explained that we will need a comprehensive plan to address traffic and pedestrian public safety issues town-wide to avoid pushing one problem to another area of town. This will require input from the Town and the State, our State, and, possibly, Federal legislators, residents and a multidiscipline approach involving multiple town departments, police enforcement, infrastructure investment, etc. She noted that the Board of Selectmen agreed that it is important that we have members from many different areas of Town representing all of Suffield's stakeholders. First Selectman Mack also reached out to the CT Conference of Municipalities for guidance and resources on addressing traffic issues. They responded with a tool kit that she has shared with all members as well as additional

information showing programs the state has offered. The committee's work will be guided by the Traffic Engineering Consultant we are hiring to assist us with this process.

RFP for Traffic Engineering Consultant: Scope of work and status

Town Engineer Karen Isherwood provided the following overview:

- 6 proposals were received for the Traffic Engineering Consultant
- Scope of work is broken up into different phases
 - Data collection – review all available information
 - Data analysis and preliminary reports – provide the town with summary reports with perceived locations of traffic concerns and listing them by type
 - Traffic Monitoring and Field Observations – taking information from the data collection and analysis and looking at areas that they feel need additional study. They will take the information they collected from the new counts and compare it to the data they already had on file
 - Traffic Calming – based on the monitoring and review comments provided by all the previous steps a table will be created with type of traffic concerns, recommendations and approximate costs. They will also need to look at State Roads which is a bit different. They will need to come up with some preliminary locations where they can go to the DOT and see if they are amenable to traffic calming in that particular area. Expected recommendations such as speed humps, medians, bump-outs (extending curbing in order to shorten the length of a crosswalk), traffic circles, road diets and other traffic calming measures should be included as well.
 - Preliminary discussion with DOT – obtain feedback from them.
 - Traffic Study Final Report – summarize findings, prioritize list of improvements and provide cost estimates.
- The plan is to “short-list” from the 6 proposals to either 2 or 3 firms and check all references.
- Ms. Isherwood plans to review each firm's projects over the last five years and compare their cost estimates at the beginning to what the project ultimately cost to determine whether they were able to remain within their budgets or if they put out a low price and then added aggressively throughout the actual project.
- The town will proceed with this study subject to available funding.
- The cost range is between \$55,220 and \$118,620, discounting the outlier which is \$170,000.

Andrew Krar asked what the budget is for this Traffic Study.

First Selectman Mack said they chose not to put in a specific dollar amount and explained the rationale for leaving it open ended.

Ms. Isherwood stated she would like to keep it under \$100,000 and feels she should be able to do so.

Discussion of relevant legislative proposals

State Representative Tami Zawistowski addressed the group and thanked First Selectman Mack for inviting her to this meeting. She also expressed her thanks to the members of the committee who are volunteering their time and expertise to this effort and she feels they have an opportunity to really make a difference in town.

The following overview was provided:

- Representative Zawistowski represents the entire towns of Suffield and East Granby and also represents a portion of Windsor
- The traffic issues being discussed this evening are also happening in the other towns within her district
- Representative Zawistowski serves on the Appropriations Committee, the Planning and Development Committee and is starting her 7th year on the Transportation Committee
- The Transportation Committee covers many areas and a range of issues.
- Representative Zawistowski mentioned CT House Bill #5429 which will be of interest to this Committee. She explained it as “*An Act Concerning Pedestrian Safety, Vision Zero Council, Speed Limits in Municipalities, Fines and Charges For Certain Violations, The Greenways Commemorative Account and Maintenance Work Zone and School Zone Safety Enforcement.*”
- CT House Bill #5429 requires 8 different things:
 - 1) require motorists to grant the right-of-way to pedestrians who affirmatively indicate their intention to cross the road in a crosswalk;
 - 2) increase the fine for operating a motor vehicle while using a hand-held mobile telephone or electronic device;
 - 3) increase the additional fee provided to municipalities for certain traffic violations;
 - 4) establish a fine for opening the door of a motor vehicle in a way that impedes the travel of a pedestrian or a person riding a bicycle;
 - 5) allow local traffic authorities to establish speed limits and pedestrian safety zones;
 - 6) establish the greenways commemorative account;
 - 7) allow the use of automated traffic enforcement safety devices within maintenance work zones; and
 - 8) establish a pilot program to use automated traffic enforcement safety devices in school zones.
- This is not the final bill as citizen input is still being collected. She also mentioned one other bill that relates to sidewalks, although it is not up for public hearing yet.

First Selectman Mack asked if there will be any funding sources coming down the pike that may help us address some of our infrastructure needs. Representative Zawistowski did not have anything definitive but promised to keep us apprised of any news.

Consideration of regular meeting schedule

First Selectman Mack noted that with such a large group it may be difficult to find a date and time that will work for all but said her assistant will be reaching out to find out via email to poll the group as to which days and times are best for people. The meeting schedule may alternate as far as the day of the week in order to provide an opportunity for as many members to attend as possible.

Member/Public Comment

Steve White (Member) – Lives on South Main Street and wondered what it would take to close the road at the end of the bridge on South Main Street, as it is not a state road. Ms. Isherwood responded that she was unsure if that was possible, but noted that we must be cognizant that any traffic measure or road closure that is undertaken will ultimately impact another neighborhood.

Ms. Isherwood provided some detail about the possibility of a road diet on Route 75, however, still cautioned on making any diversions and the impacts to other neighborhoods.

Chief Brown addressed Mr. White's question and noted that his only concern is if he was to sever that road, emergency response times would be increased as they would need to find alternative routes.

Melien Lavoie (Member) wanted to know how high on the priority list South Stone Street was and explained her concerns with large tractor trailer trucks and the infrastructure of the road. As it is a state route, she is wondering if the state would be responsible for fixing the infrastructure.

Ms. Isherwood said she believes South Stone is actually a town road and explained that we cannot necessarily divert construction or large trucks off the road. She said she is hopeful that the upcoming study will provide us with some good ideas that will work effectively.

Representative Zawistowski mentioned that weight restrictions may be applicable if South Stone is not a state road.

Chief Brown said he had spoken with DOT about the weight restriction possibility and it does not qualify.

Representative Zawistowski suggested she might be able to help Chief Brown.

Carol Underwood (Member) expressed her appreciation for the comments from the Town Engineer. Ms. Underwood also gave her thoughts on Bill 5429 as she was able to review it and listened to some of the testimony. She also gave her thoughts on the traffic in her neighborhood and the methods we currently have in place for handling our issues.

First Selectman Mack explained that the reason this particular committee is so large is because in order to tackle the traffic issues it will require the expertise of many people, including the Town Planner who will be able to provide information on planning options available from the State; Town Engineer who will be our new CRCOG Traffic Committee member, Representative Zawistowski who will keep us informed at the state level, Chief Brown who will provide input from the law enforcement side as well as the Traffic Consultant who will be hired to assist the town. Most importantly, will be the input from the residents of the community who have volunteered their time to be a part of this committee and can represent various areas across the town.

Joe Blake (Local Traffic Authority/Member) wanted to applaud the First Selectman and all who spoke this evening. He appreciated how well organized the meeting was, considering the size of the group, and feels that there was a lot of great information provided.

Steve White motioned to adjourn; William Steinka seconded. Meeting was adjourned at 8:16 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Kristen O. Lambert
Recording Secretary

