

CITY COUNCIL
COMMUNITY PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION
COMMITTEE MINUTES

August 27, 2020

The City Council Community Planning and Transportation Committee of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met at 4:02 p.m. in a virtual meeting hosted in the Conference Room on the 27th day of August, 2020, and notice and agenda of the meeting were posted in the Municipal Building at 201 West Gray 48 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

PRESENT: Councilmember Hall, Peacock, Petrone and
Chairman Holman

ABSENT: Councilmember Bierman

OTHERS PRESENT: Mr. Paul D'Andrea, Capital Projects Engineer
Ms. Jane Hudson, Director of Planning and
Community Development
Mr. Taylor Johnson, Public Transit Coordinator
Ms. Sara Kaplan, Retail Coordinator
Ms. Beth Muckala, Assistant City Attorney
Mr. Shawn O'Leary, Director of Public Works
Mr. Darrel Pyle, City Manager
Mr. David Riesland, Traffic Engineer
Mr. Scott Sturtz, City Engineer
Ms. Kathryn Walker, City Attorney
Mr. Tim Vermillion, Parks Forrester
Ms. Syndi Runyon, Administrative Technician IV

Item 1, being:

PUBLIC TRANSIT RIDERSHIP REPORT FOR THE MONTH OF JULY 2020.

Chairman Holman said the Community Planning and Transportation Committee (CPTC) meets every fourth Thursday at 4:00 p.m. to review the monthly report for public transit ridership and discusses issues relevant to the public transit system as well as other transportation and planning issues.

Mr. Taylor Johnson, Public Transit Coordinator, said the fixed route service transported 15,128 passengers in July, which is a 15% decrease compared to July 2020, and the daily average ridership was 658, a decrease of 18%. For the month of July, the fixed route service transported 359 passengers with wheelchairs and 681 passengers with bicycles.

Item 1, continued:

The paratransit service transported 1,003 passengers in July, a decrease of 51% compared to June 2020, and average daily ridership was 54, a decrease of 50%. For the month of July, the paratransit service had 0% requested trips that were denied due to capacity.

Mr. Johnson highlighted transit activities and said Council approved a contract with Nelson/Nygaard Consulting Associates, Inc., (Nelson/Nygaard) that includes traditional planning of short, medium, and long term service and capital recommendations. Staff has had two biweekly meetings with Nelson/Nygaard and has worked to provide data to evaluate and provide insight into the current system as well as to design a unique branding for the plan update. He said outreach is always an important part of any planning study or updating any document that concerns the public, but more important is finding a way to obtain public comments in a virtual meeting setting so Staff is working on an outreach plan and expects to have a draft in the next few weeks.

Mr. Johnson said Saturday service was operated on August 15, 2020, for the first time since January 2019, and August 10, 2020, was the first day EMBARK OKC solely operated the Norman to Oklahoma City route and has expanded that Monday through Friday route to nine runs instead of six. City Staff was notified the City's competitive grant application for funding assistance for a vehicle wash facility and Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) replacement vehicles was not awarded. Mr. Johnson said Staff is working on submitting a competitive grant application to the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) for funding assistance for a battery electric bus through funds available for over the road vehicles as a part of Oklahoma's portion of the National Volkswagen Emission settlement. He said the settlement dedicated approximately \$3.5 million for on the road vehicles and transit is lumped into that and a single bus could cost \$900,000 to \$1 million so that money will not go a long way for all the entities that will be applying for it, but Staff is confident the City will receive some of that money.

Items submitted for the record

1. Public Transportation Monthly Report for July 2020
2. Norman Transit Ridership Totals for July 2020

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Item 2, being:

CONTINUED DISCUSSION REGARDING TEMPORARY USE OF PARKING LOTS AND/OR SPACES FOR OUTDOOR DINING USES.

Chairman Holman said many cities have been utilizing parking lots and/or spaces for outdoor dining even before COVID 19 (COVID) to encourage more outdoor dining, but it has become even more popular since COVID. He said some States are not allowing indoor dining so restaurants are converting parking spaces and parking lots into temporary outdoor dining areas. He said this was discussed at the last meeting and the Committee requested that Staff research other cities, specifically Boulder, Colorado, (Boulder) and bring back policy recommendations.

Item 2, continued:

Ms. Kathryn Walker, City Attorney, said across the country, cities are getting creative to help small businesses impacted by COVID restrictions and a number of cities have been utilizing parking lots/spaces to extend the dining areas for restaurants for additional spacing and capacity. She said Boulder's temporary outdoor expansion in public rights-of-way (ROW) and private spaces allowed for a number of commercial uses (restaurants, retail, office, personal service, etc.)

Boulder requires a revocable permit issued by the City Manager who evaluates the application based on public health, safety, welfare impacts; balance of needs of commercial uses to have an economically viable use with needs of surrounding property owners; access to utility infrastructure; adequate access through the area; health/convenience of business, employees, customers, residents, and visitors; term of permit; hours of operation; and impacts to others in the area. She said the initial order expires September 30, 2020.

Fort Collins, Colorado (Fort Collins) allows outdoor dining on City or private property adjacent to or in the immediate vicinity of the fixed location for restaurants, licensed liquor establishments, and retail establishments. A revocable permit is issued by the City Engineer who evaluates the application based on whether or not the business is up to date on its licensing and City requirements; if the closure is safe; if the applicant sufficiently mitigates impact to the public's ability to safely and conveniently bypass the proposed closure; compliance with applicable laws, including American with Disabilities Act (ADA); if adequate emergency access is maintained; and if its is compatible with other activities in the vicinity. Ms. Walker said the initial order expires on September 27, 2020.

Stillwater, Oklahoma, has a temporary outdoor expansion in adjacent public ways and parking lot allowed for restaurants and bars. A revocable permit is issued by the City Manager who evaluates the application based on a permanent location within City; whether the business is up to date on licensing and permits required; must have liability insurance to indemnify the City; the extended service area is limited to immediately adjacent to the sidewalk, on-street parking area, and/or private lot; if the area is enclosed by physical barrier to separate service area from public ROW and access is denied to persons who are not customers; tables, chairs, and equipment within barriers must be physically distanced; and ADA access into extended service area is required. Ms. Walker said the initial order expires November 30, 2020.

Ms. Walker said the City of Norman has a special event permit for outdoor festivals, gatherings, etc., anticipated to last more than two hours, open to the public, with 1,000 or more people anticipated to attend. The permit allows for street closures and barricades to operate within the special event area. The City also has parking variance permits that allow the closure of parking spaces and are evaluated by the Police Department and must allow adequate emergency and pedestrian access. Another permit issued by the City is the Sidewalk Dining Permit that allows restaurants to have tables and chairs on the sidewalk adjacent to the business, but public access along the sidewalk must be maintained.

Item 2, continued;

Issues to consider include safety – sidewalk must remain accessible and dining areas must be protected from traffic; loss of public parking; up to date licensing – Alcohol Beverage Law Enforcement (ABLE) license laws require diners must be in front of the licensed premise; coordination with adjacent properties; revocable permit regulations; safety barriers; adequate access to expansion area; social distancing; insurance/indemnification; what department will approve permit; and an expiration date (Norman's mask ordinance expires November 30, 2020).

Ms. Walker said a revocable permit would most likely be the best option for Norman, which would require businesses to provide safety barriers. She said evaluation by the Police Department will be necessary as well as by Public Works for traffic and emergency service issues.

Chairman Holman said the Center City Form Based Code (CCFBC) identifies parking spaces/parking lots (parklets) and the concept drawings of a two-way Gray Street depicts angled parking spaces being used as restaurant outdoor seating.

Councilmember Hall said she likes linking the temporary aspect of the permit to the end of the mask ordinance expiration of November 30th as well as the social distancing piece because it needs to be clear this proposal is not allowing more people to gather, this proposal is supposed to help businesses spread people out more. She asked if the businesses would decide the type of barrier they want since they will be paying for them or would the City have a standard requirement on the type of barriers that are expected to be provided. Ms. Walker said, ideally, the City would create standards for expectation for barriers to be used to ensure safety. Councilmember Hall said the insurance is important as well. She asked if there is a reason the City Manager would not be the person approving the permits and Ms. Walker said the application needs to be reviewed by other departments, but the City Manager could have the final say.

Councilmember Hall asked if the Sidewalk Dining Permits are citywide or concentrated in the more walkable areas, such as downtown or Campus Corner, and Ms. Brenda Hall, City Clerk, said the permits currently issued are in Downtown Norman and Campus Corner. Ms. Hall said Campus Corner is pretty limited because their sidewalks are not wide enough to have tables and chairs and still meet the pedestrian access footage of five feet. She said corner businesses have a little more room and are able to take advantage of the permit.

Councilmember Hall said she would prefer limiting revocable permits to restaurants and bars because she has not heard of any particular issues with overcrowding problems in retail businesses.

Councilmember Petrone said she likes the outdoor dining aspect, but is concerned about what could happen after dark if drivers cannot see diners and suggested Light Emitting Diodes (LED) lighting or some type of flashing warning lights be required around the outdoor dining areas. She said it will become dark earlier once daylight savings time begins on November 1, 2020, and Chairman Holman agreed that barriers should have some type of lighting or reflective devices approved by Public Works.

Item 2, continued:

Chairman Holman asked if this proposal should move to full Council and members said yes.

Councilmember Peacock said it can be presented to full Council, but he would like to have more clarification in the standards on how bright the lighting should be, the type of barriers that would be appropriate, etc.

Items submitted for the record

1. PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Utilizing Parking Spaces for Outdoor Dining during COVID," dated August 27, 2020

Item 3, being:

CONTINUED DISCUSSION REGARDING FEMALE COTTONWOOD, BRADFORD PEAR, AND RED CEDAR TREES ON PUBLIC PROPERTY.

Chairman Holman said the Committee discussed some ideas for the removal of Cottonwoods, Bradford Pears, and Red Cedar trees on public property as well as ways to assist on private property if the trees are a health or safety hazard.

Mr. Tim Vermillion, City Forrester, provided background information on this item and said he was contacted by several people in Eagle Cliff and Hall Park Additions regarding female cottonwoods (females are the only ones that cast seeds) casting cotton seeds and a lot of people were unable to handle removal themselves. He said there is one lady who is pregnant with small children and her husband is on the road a lot and her gutters, yard, heat/air unit, etc., are full of cottonwood seeds. He visited her to examine the tree and it is healthy and on private property, so her told her the City could not remove the tree. He said the City can probably remove cottonwood trees on public property especially if they are causing problems with people who have health issues, e.g., allergies, asthma, and other respiratory illnesses, but he does not feel comfortable cutting down a cottonwood on private property just because the neighborhood does not like the seeds they cast. He suggested the property owners contact their Council person. He said it is hard to discern whether a cottonwood is male or female until it starts casting seeds so if the City did have a program, Staff would need to identify which trees are casting their seeds and mark them for future removal on public property if that is Council's directive.

Mr. Vermillion said he has identified different alternatives that include do nothing; remove the trees that are causing problems from public property; provide vouchers for homeowners to replace a removed tree if on private property; develop a fund or volunteer group to help those who can demonstrate a real need to have someone clean their compressors, gutters, etc.; or request Homeowner Association's (HOAs) to fund the removal on a case by case basis with a neighborhood vote. He has not spoken to one single person other than the one constituent in Eagle Cliff that is in favor of removing Cottonwood trees and the Tree Board feels this issue to be a slippery slope.

Item 3, continued:

Mr. Vermillion said the City is currently clearing out all invasive trees in Ruby Grant Park, including Bradford Pears, Cottonwoods, and Red Cedar. He said through invasive tree ratification throughout City properties, the City is stopping these species from invading surrounding areas. He said the City uses environmental documents to indicate what constitutes a significant impact and ways to mitigate that problem. He said the Cottonwood in Eagle Cliff is having a significant impact to the property owner, but does not know what the right thing to do would be in this situation or what the City is capable of doing on private property.

Mr. Vermillion said he discussed the issue with an Urban Forester and his assistant and they were very adamantly against the idea of removing healthy female Cottonwoods on public property. He reviewed other cities and most cities simply ban certain species of trees from being part of City projects and some cities enforce the ban on private property as well. He said the Red Cedar is an ill mannered tree that generally takes over abandoned fields and wild Bradford Pears are more aggressive than Red Cedars.

Chairman Holman said he would like to pursue some type of tree replacement program or creating a fund (private, public, or both) to help people who are unable to eradicate the problem themselves. He likes the idea of asking HOA's to remove trees with a vote, but a lot of neighborhoods do not have an HOA.

Councilmember Peacock said, in terms of a private partnership, this seems like a perfect opportunity for the electric companies to step up and garner some good will or positive public relations (PR) for all the trees removals they have been doing in Norman in recent years. He commended Mr. Vermillion's efforts on Red Cedar eradication. Chairman Holman said he likes the idea of reaching out to the electric company to see what their ability to help would be.

Councilmember Petrone said she is interested in developing an ordinance on landscaping that would ban and phase out certain plants, shrubs, and trees, specifically Bradford Pears and Red Cedar. She would also like to explore a voucher program to replace nuisance trees. Mr. Vermillion said Bradford Pears have been off of the landscaping approved tree list since 2002, but maybe people are planting them because they do not know they are not allowed. He asked how the City could encourage private citizens not to plant them other than public awareness and Councilmember Petrone suggested Norman ban businesses from selling the trees within the City limits.

Mr. Vermillion said he spoke with representatives of Oklahoma Electric Cooperative (OEC) regarding their voucher program and they give property owners a gift card from Marcum's Nursery or other landscaping company if the condition warrants a replacement tree. He said he will approach OEC and Oklahoma Gas and Electric Company (OG&E) to see if they have interest in sponsoring a program to replace female Cottonwoods that are causing problems for property owners on an individual basis.

Item 3, continued:

Councilmember Peacock suggested seeking volunteers to help property owner's clean gutters and heat and air units impacted by Cottonwood seeds. Councilmember Hall said that is a good idea and she would like to find someone to help the constituent in Eagle Cliff.

Chairman Holman said the Committee may want to continue discussing this issue in regards to creating general policies on trees and landscaping requirements. Mr. Vermillion said he will work with electric companies and Park Staff and forward information to the Committee. Chairman Holman said he would like to have an update next month.

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Item 4, being:

DISCUSSION REGARDING ON-STREET PARKING RESTRICTION ON LINCOLN AVENUE, IOWA STREET, AND ACRES STREET.

Chairman Holman said due to time constraints, this item will be postponed to the next available date.

Items submitted for the record

1. PowerPoint presentation entitled, "City of Norman On Street Parking Restrictions," presented by Shawn O'Leary, P.E., Director of Public Works, and Davie Riesland, P.E., Traffic Engineer, dated August 27, 2020

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Item 5, being:

DISCUSSION REGARDING A PORTER CORRIDOR ROAD DIET.

Mr. Shawn O'Leary, Director of Public Works, said modeling of the Porter Avenue corridor was last performed in 2010, between Acres Street and Alameda Street. The traffic data contained within the 2010 models is very old and does not include a number of important elements, such as a completed Central Library, a potential two-way condition on Gray Street to the west of Porter Avenue, and redevelopment of the Norman Regional Hospital (NRH) Porter Campus to a future more intensive use.

Mr. O'Leary said Staff made changes to the modeling that included increasing traffic volumes at the Acres Street intersection to replicate the completion of the new Central Library; increasing traffic volumes at the Johnson Street intersection to replicate the redevelopment of the NRH Porter Campus location into a more intense land use; increasing the volumes along the Porter Avenue corridor as well as the intersecting streets to reflect growth that occurred since 2010; extending the 2010 model north to Robinson Street by adding links and nodes; and focusing on the post meridian (p.m.) peak period, as the busiest, to compare a three lane versus a four lane traffic model cross-section on Porter Avenue.

Item 5, continued:

Mr. O'Leary said Staff ran Synchro Simulation scenarios for three lanes and four lanes along Porter Avenue corridor that included a Level-of-Service (LOS) summary. He said LOS is a grading system for traffic modeling with A being the best and F being the worst scenario. He said cross street scores along the Porter Corridor include Robinson Street – F for three lanes/D for four lanes; Johnson Street – C for three lanes/A for four lanes; Acres Street – B for three lanes/B for four lanes; Gray Street – E for three lanes/D for four lanes; Main Street – D for three lanes/B for four lanes; Eufaula Street – E for three lanes/B for four lanes; and Alameda Street – D for three lanes/D for four lanes. Mr. David Riesland, Traffic Engineer, demonstrated traffic simulation models on these streets.

Chairman Holman said the long term vision for Main and Gray Streets is conversion to two-way. He said he would keep Porter Avenue as is for now from Johnson Street north to Robinson Street.

Chairman Holman said he works on Porter Avenue at Eufaula Street and watches that intersection all day and the lack of a left turn signal and lack of dedicated left turn lane causes vehicles to stack up on Eufaula. He said it is really problematic not having a left turn arrow on any of the intersections along Porter Avenue, except at Gray Street. Mr. Riesland said Staff can evaluate the intersections for a left turn arrow.

Chairman Holman asked what the traffic volume is like at other times beside peak traffic and Mr. Riesland said the p.m. peak is the heaviest of the peak periods and Staff does not have information on non-peak hours. Chairman Holman said he would like to see non-peak traffic conditions because the City is trying to make Porter Avenue safer for pedestrians so Council is interested in what traffic is like on Porter Avenue the rest of the day to determine if it merits being four lanes. He would like to see the traffic model for off peak hours and Mr. O'Leary said Staff can provide that information, but it is not the standard practice in municipal design of roads.

Councilmember Hall said she respects the work Traffic Engineers do and the modeling is amazing, but it is important to look towards the future, which is what Staff is doing; however, there seems to be conflict in moving vehicles along Porter Avenue and being pedestrian friendly. She said the City is really trying to accomplish something special along this corridor that has been discussed for over ten years and a lot changes have taken place over that time. She wants to see all options so Council can do everything possible to make Porter Avenue a pedestrian friendly corridor. She asked what variables Staff considered for the NRH Porter Campus traffic increase because it is pretty busy right now. Mr. Riesland said the NRH Porter Campus conceptual plan makes it clear this will be more than just a hospital, it will also include a Senior Wellness Center adding to the already heavy traffic in that area. Councilmember Hall said a three lane roadway is something that should be considered.

Item 5, continued:

Mr. O'Leary said in 2010, Council was very interested in a Porter Avenue road diet and that is what Staff has studied. He said the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) adopted in May 2014, outlines a number of items that need to be addressed first in order to make a road diet work that includes extending James Garner Avenue north of Acres Street; keeping Gray and Main Streets one-way and extending the one-way couplet east to the Carter Avenue Roundabout; and creating a new north/south one-way couplet using Peters Avenue and Crawford Avenue between Alameda Street and Acres Street. He said given the fact that a number of elements specifically identified in the CTP are not complete, e.g., James Garner is not complete from Acres Street to Flood Avenue north of Robinson Street; with Gray Street proposed for two-way conversion, there seems no chance of extending the Main and Gray Streets one-way couplet east to the roundabout; and there has been no appetite for the creation of the one-way north/south couplet of Peters and Crawford Avenues. He said also given the fact that significant development has or is anticipated to occur and given the operational problems that can occur outside of the road diet area it may be time to call time out on a proposed Porter Avenue road diet.

Councilmembers Peacock and Petrone left the meeting at 5:15 p.m.

Mr. O'Leary said recent decisions to deviate from the CTP (like the elimination of the one-way couplet on Main and Gray Streets), the unlikely creation of a one-way couplet on Crawford and Peters Avenues, and recent land use changes (the Central Library) and future land use changes (NRH Porter Campus) raise questions about the viability of a road diet on Porter Avenue. The more recent Porter Avenue and Acres Street traffic study offers a more current view of traffic operation on the Porter Avenue corridor and recommended a five lane section at this intersection. He said Porter Avenue carries an average daily traffic (ADT) of 16,310 vehicles per day in the segment between Acres Street and Robinson Street. Two lane roadways with a continuous two-way left turn lane operates at a LOS-C when the volume is less than 12,000 vehicles per day and become congested at a LOS-E when the volume reaches 19,100 vehicles per day (this is consistent with LOS predicted by today's models).

Chairman Holman said if the City is purchasing new overhead traffic signals and they are calibrated for the current configuration, what would be the cost of replacing those if the City went with a three lanes. He said the City was not anticipating repaving the street, but now that there might be potential for federal funding for repaving Porter Avenue this could provide an opportunity to stripe the street the City wants whether that is three lanes or four lanes. Mr. Riesland said the traffic signal changes can be handled in-house by changing the signal head, which is not that expensive (approximately \$200 per signal head). Mr. O'Leary said federal funding is based on capacity and traffic, not pedestrians, and federal funding cannot be obtained for projects that are LOS of E or F so that is something that will need to be discussed. He said as far as striping, that is an easy thing to do and can be changed at any point, but is easier to do when doing the overlay. He said there are so many things happening downtown around Porter Avenue corridor that it is hard to predict how traffic will be affected.

Item 5, continued:

Councilmember Hall asked Mr. O'Leary to explain how the road diet transition would work with the Porter Avenue and Acres Street intersection and Mr. O'Leary said Porter Avenue would be transition from four lanes to three lanes at Acres and Gray Street then transition to five lanes at Alameda Street.

Mr. O'Leary said in four or five years, the City will have a good idea of the impact to Porter Avenue when James Garner Avenue is extended and the NRH Porter Campus is completed. He said the Porter Avenue Streetscape Project scored well on federal funding because it includes multi-modal improvements that includes ADA sidewalks, improved lighting, and an improved intersection at Acres Street and Porter Avenue. He said the bus route is also an important element in the project because heavier bus traffic on a corridor leads away from a road diet, not to it. He said Lindsey Street has turnouts for busses so that could be considered for Porter Avenue.

Councilmember Hall asked if there would be enough room for turnouts for the busses and should the City be thinking about incorporating that into the project and if so how would that affect federal funding? Mr. O'Leary said it would be a plus, but there is very little space to work with on Porter Avenue and it may be difficult to obtain more ROW on the corridor for bus turnouts.

Councilmember Hall asked if the three lane option would allow for bicycle lanes and Mr. O'Leary said there is very little width right now and a bicycle lane would need three to four feet of that width so more ROW would be needed. Councilmember Hall said there is a lot of interest for bicycle lanes on Porter Avenue.

Chairman Holman asked how long Council has to make a final decision on the road diet and Mr. O'Leary said nothing the City is doing precludes Council from making that decision at any time in the future. He does think if the City pursues federal funding then that will hurt the overlay federal funding because the federal government wants more capacity not less and the City would have to prove to ODOT that the City is repaving the road for today's capacity as well as a 20-year projection of traffic that consists of four or five lanes, not three.

Chairman Holman said he supports exploring federal funding for the project to see whether or not Council is interested and leaving Porter Avenue as is as well as waiting to see how James Garner Avenue, NRH Porter Campus, Gray Street two-way conversion, and Acres Street and Porter Avenue Intersection improvements will affect traffic volume on Porter Avenue.

Councilmember Hall said because of new scoring variables in competing for federal funding that might affect the Porter Streetscape Project she is also interested in having a Study Session to bring new Councilmembers up-to-date of current projects. Mr. O'Leary said he would be happy to present Porter Avenue information to the entire Council.

Councilmember Hall said she considers traffic calming and creating a pedestrian friendly environment on Porter Avenue a high priority. She said any project in Core Norman should have emphasis on pedestrian safety and multi-modal opportunities and Mr. O'Leary said these are basic principles of the Transportation Plan.

Item 5, continued:

Chairman Holman said Porter Avenue should eventually be three lanes in the future, but he absolutely respects and trust Staff's opinion/recommendation and by trying to walk between constituents concerns and Staff's recommendations he believes the City will get there. He would also like an update for full Council once new Councilmembers are seated.

Items submitted for the record

1. PowerPoint presentation entitled, "City of Norman Porter Avenue Traffic Modeling," presented by Shawn O'Leary, P.E., Director of Public Works, and Davie Riesland, P.E., Traffic Engineer, dated August 27, 2020

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Item 6, being:

MISCELLANEOUS COMMENTS.

None

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The meeting adjourned at 5:57 p.m.