

**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
CITY OF WATERTOWN
January 13, 2020
7:00 p.m.**

Mayor Jeffrey M. Smith Presiding

Present: Council Member Sarah V. Compo
Council Member Ryan J. Henry-Wilkinson
Council Member Jesse C.P. Roshia
Council Member Lisa A. Ruggiero
Mayor Smith

Also Present: Richard M. Finn, City Manager

City staff present: Patrick W. Keenan, Michael Delaney, Thomas Maurer

DISCUSSION

Presentation: Fisher Associates - Consultant on Traffic Corridor

City Manager Finn explained that this would be a presentation regarding traffic concerns on Arsenal Street leading into the Square and that the City had a grant which would potentially be a long-term solution. He noted that a resolution regarding this grant expenditure would be brought to Council at the next Council meeting.

Tim Faulkner introduced himself as Senior Transportation Manager of Fisher Associates out of Syracuse. He explained the grant the City had received was one designed to improve air quality and reduce air pollution but, in doing so, would also improve traffic flow through the corridor extending from Massey Street to the Square and including State Street to High Street, Washington Street to Academy Street and Mill Street to Moulton Street and Main Avenue. Mr. Faulkner went on to explain that the plan was to coordinate the signals and the intention was to install a wireless communication system so there would be no digging for installation. He informed Council that once the resolution passed, the timeline would begin with evaluations and a study, then final design completed by this July and a target completion date of July 2021. He added that the work would be through areas controlled by New York State Department of Transportation which would slow progress slightly as the State has its own rules and regulations.

Mayor Smith questioned the point of the City having completed a road diet to slow traffic down through that corridor only to have this work done to speed traffic back up.

Mr. Faulkner explained that the intention was not really speed reduction but traffic flow and he noted that no one likes sitting in traffic and this would reduce backups at intersections, specifically at the Arsenal/Massey and Arsenal/Massey intersections

Mr. Finn stated that the road diet was created primarily to improve safety for pedestrians, adding that the improvement of traffic flow combined with the reduction of lanes in the road diet is meant to achieve a happy medium.

City Engineer Michael Delaney added that the purpose is to achieve smooth flow of traffic.

Mr. Faulkner explained that his company had worked on the Washington Street road diet, where the accident rate was twice the New York State rate with 95 accidents in three years. Since work was completed there, there had been only one pedestrian accident and accidents were down 42% overall.

In response to Mayor Smith's question about how much construction would need to be done, Mr. Faulkner stated it is done through wireless antennas only. He also indicated that, although the overall project would take one and a half years, that the most problematic intersections would be addressed immediately.

Mr. Finn reminded Council that the road diet on Arsenal Street was always planned to be done in phases with the first phase serving as a test. He continued that signage was to be the next step and that traffic may have slowed down once there was snow on the ground covering the painted road markings.

There was a discussion about the current crosswalk situation on Arsenal Street in front of the County buildings where there are two mid-block crossings, including concerns about jaywalking.

Mayor Smith requested flashing crosswalk signage similar to the signage on Washington Street.

In response to Council Member Ruggiero's question regarding some signage issues she recalled from when Council approved the road diet regarding utilities, Mr. Faulkner confirmed that those rectangular rapid flashing beacons (RRFBs) were precluded from installation because of National Grid utilities.

Mr. Delaney indicated that this could be re-examined.

Council Member Henry-Wilkinson asked if the crosswalks could be consolidated and requested accident data for that portion of Arsenal Street.

Council Member Compo pointed out that the pedestrian situation will potentially worsen once the YMCA opens in the former Stream building.

Bus Advertising

Department of Public Works Superintendent Patrick Keenan reviewed for Council the history of advertising on City buses. He stated that in 2005 the City contracted with a local firm to do all the CitiBus advertising with the City receiving a return of 40% of the profits. He stated that in 2008 Council elected to manage the advertising in-house at the same rates the private firm had charged. Mr. Keenan reminded Council that in the past year there had been new buses added and several buses removed from use and with all of these concerns, bus advertising had been pushed aside. He noted that his department had started doing research into bus advertising and discovered that the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) had very specific rules for a fair and open market which involved bidding out the available spaces.

Mayor Smith asked if the restrictions, including no political advertising, which the City had, would still be in place with the new bidding process.

Mr. Keenan indicated that the FTA needed a competitive process and that would have to be decided. He added that they had been in discussion with other cities in New York that sold bus advertising, including

Glens Falls and Buffalo and they all used the same vendor, but he admitted that those cities were a different type of market than Watertown.

Council Member Compo asked that advertising in bus shelters, bus stops and benches be considered as well as the City worked toward a new bus advertising policy.

There was discussion about the types of ads, the number of spaces available, whether ad space would be inside or outside of the buses or both and what to do if spaces were unsold.

Mr. Keenan indicated that in-house ads for the City would occupy those unsold spots as they had in the past.

In response to Council Member Ruggiero's inquiry as to whether there had been a lot of inquiries about the bus ad space, Mr. Keenan said there was one in particular.

Mayor Smith admitted that was him and that he had made use of bus advertising in the past and found it effective and had very reasonable rates. He expressed his concerns that the ads might not be sold and buses would be covered with house ads.

Mr. Keenan informed Council that the City would follow the regulations set by the FTA and, if ads did not sell, the City could attempt to convince them that this is a rural area which would then have a different set of rules and regulations. He noted that Purchasing Manager Dale Morrow was doing FTA training at the moment and she would have some more answers after her training. He added that his department would have more definite information to present to Council within the month.

Work session ended at 7:35 p.m.

Lisa M. Carr

Deputy City Clerk