

Meeting Minutes
State College Borough Council
February 11, 2008

The State College Borough Council met in a work session on Monday, February 11, 2008, in the State College Municipal Building Council Chambers, 243 South Allen Street, State College, PA. Ms. Goreham called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Present: Elizabeth A. Goreham, President of Council
Ronald Filippelli
Donald M. Hahn
Theresa D. Lafer
Silvi Lawrence
Peter Morris
James L. Rosenberger

Also present: Thomas J. Fountaine, II, Borough Manager; Thomas S. Kurtz, Assistant Borough Manager; Roger A. Dunlap, Assistant Borough Manager; Carl R. Hess, Director of Planning; Amy J. Story, Borough Engineer; Mark A. Whitfield, Director of Public Works; Thomas R. King, Chief of Police; Beth A. Johnston, Director of Human Resources; Michael Groff, Finance Director; Cynthia S. Hanscom, Assistant Borough Secretary; members of the media; and other interested observers.

Public Hour. There was no one from the public wishing to speak.

Open Agenda/Projects Report. Mr. Fountaine presented an update on the projects being completed according to the current capital program year.

Mr. Rosenberger asked about the South Atherton Street/South Allen Street signalization and realignment project. He noted the project was expected to cost \$500,000 and asked whether or not the project should be removed from the list. Mr. Fountaine noted that this project was on the agenda for a report.

Mr. Morris asked about a signal at the corner of Blue Course and Whitehall Road. Mr. Fountaine noted that this project was included in the Capital Improvement Program several years ago but was removed when the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PADOT) took on the project to reconstruct Whitehall Road, which would include a signalization at the Blue Course/Whitehall intersection.

Ms. Lawrence noted the projects report showed that the West End plan implementation was on schedule but noted that Council had approved an extension of the contract for completion. She asked if the consultant would be requesting additional funds. Mr. Fountaine said that no request had been received at this time. Ms. Lawrence asked that the consultant provide an update to Council. Mr. Fountaine noted that at the February 15 work session, the consultant would be meeting with Council.

Mr. Hahn noted that he had three items for a future agenda. First, he said he would like Council to revisit the zoning changes that were enacted on East College Avenue between Hiester Street and High Street in regards to height, conditional use for signature development, and parking requirements. Secondly, he asked that Council reconsider the merits of establishing a finance committee of citizens or a subcommittee of Council. Third, he asked that Council consider a joint meeting with the Planning Commission so that both groups have the opportunity to share ideas. Ms. Lafer agreed that a joint meeting would be beneficial.

Council discussed whether Council was interested in discussing the establishment of a finance committee. Ms. Lawrence noted that finance was an important part of Council's role and encouraged this be put on a work session for discussion. Mr. Morris agreed and urged that Council consider a committee that included citizens of the Borough.

Holmes-Foster North-South Bike Route

Ms. Story noted that on December 11, 2007, the Transportation Commission voted to recommend that Sparks Street, from the University lands to Westerly Parkway be designated as an on-street bike route. In addition, connector routes would be established on Prospect Avenue (west bound) and Hamilton Avenue (east bound) between Gill Street and Sparks Street. The connector routes will link the Orchard Park Bike Path, along the State College School District North Building, via Gill Street.

Ms. Story noted that the main issue is the removal of the on-street parking. If Council agrees with the Transportation Commission's recommendation, the next step will be to hold a public hearing on the removal of parking to establish the route. Notice of the hearing will be sent to the residents by conventional mail.

Ms. Lafer asked how many parking spaces would be lost as she was concerned with the residents losing convenient temporary parking. Ms. Story said she did not know the number of

spaces but had taken several photographs at different times of the day and noticed that very few were parking on Sparks Street south of Beaver Avenue. She noted that most lots have alley access.

Mr. Hahn asked who would be notified of the proposed removal of parking. Ms. Story indicated notices would be mailed to every property that faces Sparks Street and those properties that are half the distance of the blocks of intersecting streets.

Mr. Rosenberger asked if, from a safety point of view, it would better to have a permanent path rather than a sign indicating, "share the road". Ms. Story said the bike coalition has indicated that on-street parking increases the danger. She said, in her opinion, a marked bike path without parking is safer.

Ms. Lawrence noted that removing the parked vehicles from the roadway can cause vehicles to travel faster, which created a safety concern for pedestrians as well as bicyclists. She asked if there were statistics for this. Paul Jovanis, vice-chair of the Transportation Commission, said that he had attended a conference within the last two years where it was noted that the removal of on-street parking resulted in a 50 percent reduction in pedestrian crashes. Most accidents occur because a pedestrian walks out in the roadway between parked cars. Ms. Lawrence asked if there was an increase in the speed of vehicles if on-street parking is removed and Mr. Jovanis replied that he had no data on the speed of vehicles.

Mr. Rosenberger asked if a reduction in the speed limit would be legal. Mr. Jovanis noted that to artificially lower the speed limit could create an enforcement issue. Mr. Fountaine added that the Pennsylvania law has restrictions on lowering the speed below 25 mph; he did not believe we would be able to justify a speed limit lower than the current 25 mph limit for Sparks Street.

Mr. Filippelli asked about the usage of the Foster Avenue bikeway. Ms. Story noted that it is being used but the weather has not been conducive to bike riding. She predicted there would be more bicyclists in the spring. Mr. Filippelli stated that as they expand the bikeway there should be data on the usage before removing parking in another neighborhood. He noted that parking may be an issue of perception for the residents.

Ms. Lafer said there should be an increased awareness of the bikeways available. There are many bicyclist that use the sidewalks in the downtown and fail to obey traffic laws.

Mr. Hahn commented that he found himself driving on Foster Avenue more because it was a clear route without the parked vehicles.

Mr. Fountaine concluded that Council would hold a public hearing on the bikeway and the removal of the parking at a future meeting. He added that staff has discussed evaluating the bicycle usage of Foster Avenue later this year.

Foster/Atherton Pedestrian/Bicycle Warning Signal and Pedestrian Refuge Island

Mr. Fountaine said Foster Avenue from South Sparks Street to South Garner Street was designated as the East-West Bike Route for the downtown area in 2007. The project included removing parking and constructing a new path through Central Parklet. The final step in the project is the installation of a pedestrian/bicycle refuge island in Atherton Street to allow for safer crossings at that location. The project will also include an illuminated pedestrian/bike warning signal at the intersection. Installation of the island will also restrict Foster Avenue traffic to right-turn only. Atherton Street traffic would be limited to right turn only and straight through movements. The project will be funded through an Elm Street grant.

Ms. Story introduced Ron Seibert with Trans Associates, the transportation consultant for the project. Mr. Seibert presented plans for the island showing the designated crosswalk area. He noted the project was expected to go to bid in a few weeks.

Mr. Filippelli asked how motorist would be informed of the crossing. Ms. Story replied there would be a mast arm with flashing warning signals, similar to that on Park Avenue at the pedestrian/bicycle crossing.

Mr. Hahn expressed concern with vehicles traveling northbound on Atherton. The traffic goes down to one lane close to the Foster/Atherton intersection. Ms. Lawrence agreed that there were safety concerns. She noted that vehicles do not slow down for the Park Avenue signal. Ms. Story said that the intersection had been studied and currently pedestrians were making the crossing without the signal. The reconstruction will create a safer refuge island for pedestrians.

Ms. Goreham noted that Council and staff had worked diligently to provide an east-west bike route and this was the best compromise. Many residents have appealed to Council to provide a safer way to cross Atherton. She said she believed this would be an improvement.

Mr. Morris asked the status of the request to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PADOT) to lower the speed limit on Atherton Street. Mr. Fountaine replied they had received a

denial from PADOT but have not had the opportunity to discuss alternatives with the Public Works Department.

Allen and Atherton Traffic Signal Project

Mr. Whitfield reported that staff and Council had been working on this project for the last four years. The signal at Allen/Atherton was aging and was one of the oldest in the Borough, installed in 1964. When planning the replacement of the poles, the realignment was considered. Last spring, staff discussed the realignment with Council and addressed many of the concerns with traffic stacking on Allen Street. The realignment would create a T-intersection with Waupelani Drive. This would also allow the signal to interconnect with the Atherton/Westerly signal to keep traffic moving. The signal would be a LED signal, which would allow for battery back-up if the power goes out. The project would include new overhead mast arms as well as handicapped ramps and pedestrian signals. Mr. Whitfield concluded that this project should go to bid in late March with construction beginning in June.

Ms. Lafer asked if the project could be split. She saw a need for the new lights but believed the realignment of Allen Street could be delayed. Mr. Whitfield noted that the realignment was being done at the request of Council. He added that if the signal project and the realignment were separated, the intersection would be deficient because the lanes would not align. The project specifications would change because the mast arms would be the wrong length.

Ms. Lafer asked about the original concept for the realignment of Allen Street. Mr. Whitfield said the realignment would allow the intersection to function more efficiently. Ms. Lafer said that the residential neighborhood may see a few cars queued in the morning but did not see justification in spending \$500,000 so that the neighborhood has an easier way to turn onto Waupelani. Mr. Fountaine noted that the cost for the realignment is negligible in comparison to the intersection improvements for Allen and Atherton.

Mr. Filippelli asked the record of accidents or fatalities at the Atherton/Allen/Waupelani intersection. He said it would be a compelling case to consider the realignment if it were a dangerous intersection. Mr. Seibert noted that a crash investigation over a three to five year period showed 23 crashes, some of which were angle crashes rather than rear-end collisions. He added that left turns are not facing each other at the Allen/Atherton intersection but are off-set from each other. This makes it difficult for vehicles traveling directly across Atherton. The proposed geometric improvement would correct this configuration. Mr. Whitfield added that any time an improvement is not made to an intersection where there are known deficiencies, a liability issue for the municipality is created.

Council discussed other configurations for the intersection if land were taken from the east side of Atherton on the property located at 1207 South Atherton Street (Nittany Office Equipment). Mr. Whitfield noted that from discussions with the previous Council, the configuration shown on the proposed plan was preferred.

Mr. Hahn asked about the accident numbers for the Allen/Waupelani intersection. Mr. Seibert said he did not recall the number but could provide that data to Council. Mr. Fountaine noted that this project was approved as part of the Capital Improvement Plan with prior authority funds. Staff had come prepared to this meeting to make a progress report on the project but was not prepared to present a comprehensive report and justification of the project.

Mr. Rosenberg asked if the bids could be delayed. He suggested the project be done in two phases with the signalization separate from the realignment of the Allen/Waupelani intersection. Mr. Whitfield said the intent was to bid as a single project. Ms. Story said the project could be separated but it would require a substantial amount of work. Mr. Whitfield added that a delay would mean the project would not be completed this year.

Mr. Rosenberger asked about the connection of this project with the rezoning request for the property at 1300 South Allen Street. He suggested that this project be delayed until the rezoning issue was decided. Mr. Fountaine replied that the two projects are not directly related. The realignment would require a taking of land at 1300 South Allen Street.

Council discussed the taking of the land which Ms. story explained would accommodate the queuing of three additional vehicles. Ms. Lawrence said it seemed ridiculous to take land simply to accommodate three cars. Ms. Story explained that there were other safety issues involved with the realignment. Design standards dictate that a "plus" intersection is the safest and most logical. This project would align Allen Street with Aikens Place. Ms. Lafer commented that she agreed the signalization at the Allen/Atherton intersection was old and needed to be replaced but she disagreed with the design standards that this would create a better intersection at Allen/Waupelani.

Dick Gold, 133 East Doris Avenue, said he has lived in the area for 34 years and has never seen an accident at the Allen/Waupelani intersection. He added that he had used the intersection and had no problems making a left turn onto Waupelani Drive. It is rare for there to be more than one vehicle stopped. The safety issue was for pedestrians crossing Atherton Street. Mr. Gold continued by stating another safety problem is vehicles traveling on Waupelani and making the

acute turn onto Allen and into the Uni-Mart parking lot. With the queuing of left-turn traffic, vehicles would need to cross two lanes of traffic to get into the parking lot. Mr. Gold also addressed the issue of vehicle headlights shining into the homes on Aikens Place.

Carol Gold, 133 East Doris Avenue questioned the realignment and the shifting of land and how that would affect the entrance to Uni-Mart. Mr. Whitfield explained the vacant land at the intersection of Allen/Waupelani would remain as an easement or right-of-way and would be maintained as green space. Ms. Gold added that she had never seen an accident at this intersection. Many other residents in her neighborhood questioned the change, she added.

Mr. Fontaine said that he would put this subject on the February 15 work session for further discussion. Additional information would be provided to review the history of the project and the prior Council's conclusions on the project.

Revisions to the Traffic Calming and Street Classification

Mr. Fontaine said that in November 2007 the Transportation Commission completed their work on updating the Traffic Calming and Street Classification Policy. Council received a copy of the draft.

Mr. Seibert presented an overview of the street classification project and explained how the original report was done. He explained how the seven classifications were originally designated and the new report included five classifications. The goal for the street classification update included updating the information and policy on traffic calming measures. He noted that 85 percent of the streets fall within the major and minor local or collector categories and 15 percent were classified as arterials. He noted that all but six streets fall within the norm of this street classification system. He noted the street classification project was first presented to Council back in May and it was requested that staff review the traffic calming policy as part of the study.

Ms. Lawrence asked how the average daily count was determined. Mr. Seibert explained averages were calculated from counts made on a Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, taken when Penn State classes were in session.

Mr. Jovanis explained the study was completed over a four-year period. The numbers collected need to be defensible. Ms. Lafer asked the goal of the reclassification. Mr. Jovanis explained the numbers being collected on the streets prior to the reclassification did not match the classification, which would have suggested unending changes according to the traffic calming policy.

Mr. Whitfield presented recommended revisions to the traffic calming policy. After traffic counts were conducted in 2003 and 2004, it was determined that 31 percent of the streets exceeded their classification. In addition, the original policy did not address the speed of vehicles. Another major change in the policy was that traffic is counted regardless of where the vehicles originated or their destination. The policy included a "toolbox" for traffic calming measures at different levels that suggest mitigation efforts. The policy also addresses bike routes, emergency vehicle routes, speed limits and combining the street classification documents into one document. Mr. Whitfield concluded that this would be scheduled for discussion at a future work session.

Ms. Lawrence asked about the policy for a borough-wide speed limit of 25 mph. Mr. Whitfield explained the policy states that no street would be posted for 25 mph unless a request was made to Council.

Mr. Morris asked about the speed humps on Foster Avenue, Prospect Avenue and Hamilton Avenue and whether or not they had changed the amount of traffic. Mr. Whitfield replied that counts were taken that showed a decrease in the number of vehicles. For example, High Street between Foster Avenue and Beaver Avenue decreased from 504 to 471; and, Foster Avenue went from 1296 to 1057. Ms. Lafer agreed that she had seen a drop in the amount of traffic although she had been doubtful this would occur prior to their installation.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Program – RFP for Professional Service

Mr. Fontaine explained the Capital Improvement Plan included a project for the development of a comprehensive Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Program. The program will be developed by a transportation professional for Council's approval.

Ms. Story stated the first of the draft Request for Proposal was enclosed with the agenda for Council review. She noted staff had met with representatives from the Transportation Commission who had provided edits. She asked that any Council comments be forwarded to her.

ITEMS OF INFORMATION

Mr. Fontaine announced there would be a webinar scheduled for 2:00 p.m. on February 15 following the work session to view greenhouse gas and sustainability information from the Alliance for Innovation.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia S. Hanscom
Assistant Borough Secretary