



TOWN OF NEWTOWN
BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS

MINUTES FROM THE BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL MEETING HELD TUESDAY, March 24, 2015
NEWTOWN POLICE DEPARTMENT UPSTAIRS CLASSROOM
3 MAIN STREET, NEWTOWN

**These minutes are not finalized until approved
At the next regularly scheduled meeting.*

Chairman Mangiafico called the special meeting to order at 7 p.m.

PRESENT: Brian Budd, Joel Faxon, Virgil Procaccini, and Paul Mangiafico

ABSENT: Andrew Sachs

ALSO PRESENT: Chief Michael Kehoe, Captain Jose Rios, Borough Warden and member of the Board of Selectman James Gaston, 1 member of the press, and 3 members of the public.

Chairman Mangiafico welcomed those in attendance and explained that the reason for holding the meeting was two-fold to discuss the traffic congestion around the Flag Pole at the intersection of Main Street and Church Hill Road and approve a budget transfer unrelated to the Flag Pole.

The Chairman indicated that the Board had invited Mr. Gaston to take part in the discussion about the intersection around the Flag Pole as he has a tremendous knowledge about it. He suggested that the Board address the Budget Transfer item on the agenda first as Mr. Gaston would be arriving approximately 10 minutes late.

COMMISSION BUSINESS:

Budget Transfer \$1,000 from Equipment to Miscellaneous – Chief Kehoe advised Police Commissioners that the Miscellaneous Account – which had such items under it as case investigations - was over budget by a couple of hundred dollars. He recommended the transfer of \$1,000 from Account 1-101-12-5746-0000 Equipment to Account 1-101-12-5800-0000 Miscellaneous to cover the overages and any additional ones until the end of the fiscal year.

Commissioner Faxon moved to transfer \$1000 from Equipment Account 1-101-12-5746-0000 to Miscellaneous Account 1-101-12-5800-0000. Commissioner Budd seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

At this time Chairman Mangiafico took comments from those in attendance with regards to the items on the agenda.

Charles Zukowski, 4 Cornfield Ridge Road, suggested that the Board consider moving some of the Main Street traffic elsewhere and improve the Wasserman Way bi-pass alternative by increasing the 30 mph speed limit.

Mr. Zukowski told the Board that in 2010 he had exchanged emails with Representative Chris Liddy with regards to why the speed limit was “so slow” on Wasserman Way, as it seemed off. He stated that Rep Liddy had shared information from DOT which included guidelines on how they set the limits and the data they used. He added that DOT concluded the 30 mph limit was reasonable.

Mr. Zukowski said that it seemed it would make sense to reconsider the idea and raise the speed limit.

Chairman Mangiafico indicated that the item had come up at the last meeting and was on the agenda for the Board’s regular March meeting but was cancelled due to snow.

Commissioner Faxon suggested that Wasserman Way East of the Reed School could have a higher speed limit and asked what the typical time frame was to hear back from the State.

Chief Kehoe explained that after the Board sends the State its request, the State does a study which typically takes 6 months. To determine the impact on the area, the Chief said the MUTCD has specific things engineers have to look at to determine speed.

At 7:12 p.m. Chairman Mangiafico called a brief recess until 7:24 p.m. when Mr. Gaston arrived.

Discussion on Main Street and Church Hill Road – Chairman Mangiafico explained that the Board has received a lot of communications with regard to finding a solution to the problem but said he thinks that opinion might not be shared by everyone. He added that some feel that by making minor changes would help and others urged the Board to be very cautious when contacting the State.

Mr. Gaston explained that since the 1950’s the State has indicated it would like to have a 4-lane highway from Bridgeport to Danbury but indicated that didn’t happen for two reasons – the wetlands in Monroe and the Flag Pole in Newtown.

He warned that in Stepney the State had no problem with putting the highway right up to the houses and suggested that if this were to happen in Newtown it would destroy Main Street.

Mr. Gaston reminded the Board that Mae Schmidle had a statute passed that planted the Flag Pole where it is.

He added that every 6 or 7 years for the past 25 years people push to make changes to the intersection, but as soon as the individuals pushing to make changes learn the history they understand; and the issue goes away.

Mr. Gaston advised the Board that a number of years ago the State had a meeting with Monroe about widening the road but never invited Newtown.

Furthermore he reminded Police Commissioners that when the sewers came in, the water company wanted to put them down the tree line and the question came up why not put them down the road. Mr. Gaston said he had a meeting with DOT. He indicated that the DOT suggested that they could put the sewer down the road if the Town moves the Flag Pole.

Mr. Gaston said he told the State official “if we move the Flag Pole you will widen the road anyway” and the State official said of course they would.

According to Mr. Gaston, Housatonic Valley was asked to do a study on Queen Street approximately 7 years ago. He added that the Committee not only decided to do a study of Queen Street but expanded it to see what they could do with the Flag Pole.

Mr. Gaston reported that the Borough also did its own study addressing the issues. He said they left it that if speed bumps were put on Queen Street there would need to be road counts before and after the installation.

Mr. Gaston stated that all have suggested a round-about would mean the taking of the “gold” building at the intersection of the Flag Pole, as well as parking at the meeting house, property at Trinity Church and so forth. He reminded Commissioners that hundreds showed up at the meetings opposed to it and added that finally it was left that a round-about wasn’t a good idea.

In addition, Mr. Gaston recalled that the State wouldn't put traffic lights on the flag pole because it's a 5-way intersection with a steep grade going North up Route 25 creating a significant queuing problem.

Mr. Gaston then suggested that the Board of Burgesses was never made aware there were going to be speed bumps on Queen Street. He said Burgesses became aware when they started fielding complaints from residents about the speed bumps on Queen Street diverting traffic onto Glover and Main Street. Mr. Gaston suggested that there were other options to slow down but not deter traffic such as putting a median in with plantings. Additionally, he said there are 51 signs in a quarter mile on the historic Queen Street with 30 being bright yellow. Mr. Gaston suggested that this was all done without collaboration and now set the stage for the Flag Pole.

According to Mr. Gaston, a number of years ago when the Town was looking at accidents on the various roads in Town— the flag pole wasn't in the top 10. He suggested that rather than address just the Flag Pole the Town should set up an Ad Hoc Committee to address all the roads in Town.

Chairman Mangiafico told Mr. Gaston that he made it sound like they woke up one morning and found speed bumps on Queen Street when the fact was the Board of Police Commissioners had many meetings regarding Speed Tables and considering all other alternatives.

Mr. Gaston replied that never once was the Borough Board of Burgesses informed, nor was there a count done as requested.

Chairman Mangiafico indicated that there were counts done before and after but Mr. Gaston question whether they were done in the same season and the Chairman said he didn't know. Chairman Mangiafico stated that as previously mentioned he agreed that every request to the State had to be done with extreme caution and suggested that if they were going to approach the State they better know exactly what they were looking for.

Mr. Gaston said that there were Borough Board of Burgesses concerns that a member of the Board of Police Commissioners was going to go up to the State representing the traffic in Newtown. He believes the Selectman and the Legislative Council are who speak for the Town. Commissioner Budd asked Mr. Gaston if he was a selectman when he went up to the State and spoke about the sewers and Mr. Gaston said no he was on the Borough Board of Burgesses. Commissioner Budd suggested that if Police Commissioners went up to the State it would be a fact finding mission and they wouldn't go on their own.

Commissioner Budd explained that there was an event that prompted the Speed Tables to be installed on Queen Street after a little boy was struck by a car. He indicated that no matter what enforcement was done the speed of the vehicles went right back up after the police presence went away. Commissioner Budd reassured Mr. Gaston that the Speed Tables were designed to allow people to drive the 25 mph speed limit unlike the speed bumps found in a parking garage.

Commissioner Budd told Mr. Gaston that he had brought up some very valid points with regard to the traffic on other roads being worse than at the flag pole, but the Commissioner suggested that just from the statistical data it was only a matter of time with the volume of traffic that goes through there that something will happen. He agreed that a 4-lane highway was not an option nor was a round-about; and also added that he believed putting paint on the pavement was not a consideration but a traffic light might be - just not on the flag pole.

Mr. Gaston suggested that all over Town people have been hurt and people have been hit. He reminded Police Commissioners they left out one of the key groups – the Borough Board of Burgesses – in the process and now there are carnival colored signs on a historic street. He suggested that there could have been another process that didn't destroy esthetics but that conversation was never had.

Mr. Gaston stressed that traffic lights would destroy Main Street and anyone living on Main Street would never be able to get out of their house and would constantly hear the sounds of trucks braking.

He added that DOT doesn't want to put a traffic light there because it would be a safety hazard and reminded those in attendance that in the past 25 years there hasn't been a fatality at the Flag Pole.

Commissioner Budd said that it's all their responsibility to come up with a course of action. Again, Mr. Gaston stated that an Ad Hoc would report to the Board of Selectman and to the Board of Police Commissioners and suggested that seemed to be the fairest process.

Commissioner Procaccini mentioned that with regard to the accident criteria, what makes Main Street different is that it is a historic district, there is a large volume of traffic and there are several pedestrian crossings. He stressed that his concern was preventing something happening in the future and suggested that the Board of Police Commissioners as the Town's Traffic Authority has the responsibility to recognize the areas that need attention.

Mr. Gaston added that they need to have criteria first to do that.

Commissioner Faxon said the Flag Pole intersection is a different scenario. He added that they definitely don't want to make it a 21st Century intersection, but they don't want a fatality there.

He agreed collaboration is essential.

Mr. Gaston stated that once you make a mistake you lose it and added that he doesn't want to lose the Historic District.

Commissioner Procaccini asked Mr. Gaston if he was against any improvements and Mr. Gaston said it depends on what. The Commissioner then asked Mr. Gaston if he was against trucks and Mr. Gaston said never. Finally he asked him if he was against queuing up turns and Mr. Gaston said he would have to see what the affect would be.

Chairman Mangiafico stated that he took time to observe the traffic at the intersection of the Flag Pole and suggests eliminating left-hand turns of southbound traffic on Main Street onto Church Hill Road at given times.

8:30 pm – Commissioner Mangiafico thanked Mr. Gaston for speaking with them.

Mr. Gaston urged the Chairman to let the Board of Burgesses know if he is going to put it on the agenda again.

Commissioner Faxon moved to adjourn at 8:32 pm. Commissioner Budd seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Ted Swigart, Clerk