



# *District 2 Town Meeting*

## *CITY COUNCIL*

### **SUMMARY**

**January 25, 2023**

**7:00 P.M.**

**St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
16<sup>th</sup> & Perkiomen**

#### **CITY OFFICIALS PRESENT:**

M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, L. Kelleher, W. Heim, K. Zeiber, S. Harrity, J. Stoudt, R. Bradley, C. Torres, J. Kelly, N. Matz, B. Ganster, E. Moran, F. Freytiz

#### **OTHERS PRESENT:**

C. Johnson, C. Kehler, 2 representatives from Republic and 11 neighborhood residents

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm and thanked everyone for attending despite the weather. She asked all present to introduce themselves. She stated that Mr. Matz, the Reading Parking Authority (RPA) Executive Director will make a presentation which will be followed by a question/answer and comment period.

Mr. Ganster, RPA Director of Operations, handed out packets containing a memo from Mr. Matz, a memo from the McCarthy Traffic Engineer and several plans of the affected neighborhoods.

Mr. Matz explained the proposal to change Cotton St from a two-way, two travel lane street with parking on the south side, to a one-way, one travel lane westward bound street with parking on both sides and to change South Street from a two-way street with parking on the north side to a one-way eastbound street with no change in parking.

Mr. Matz explained that due to the severe parking stress in neighborhoods city-wide, especially East Reading, the mayor asked the RPA to evaluate various areas to determine if parking relief could be provided. He described the broad team he assembled to evaluate various neighborhoods. He noted that in the recent past the RPA has been acquiring vacant lots and converting them to off-street parking.

Mr. Matz stated that when evaluating the East Reading neighborhoods the RPA first considered converting the former East Reading Pool to an off- street parking lot. However, when the estimate came in at approximately \$1M that plan was abandoned due to the cost that would serve only the two block radius around the former pool property.

Mr. Matz stated that an additional evaluation of the area identified that 180 new parking spaces could be created by changing Cotton Street to be a one-way, one lane westward bound street with parking on both sides. Due to the varying and narrow width of South Street, that two-way street needs to be converted to a one-way eastward bound street with no change in parking. No changes are recommended for Fairview Street.

Mr. Matz described the team that evaluated this plan and he called the group's attention to the memo from the Traffic Engineer and the plans in the packets that were distributed. He noted that the Traffic Engineer completed a traffic study on Cotton Street over varying periods of times, locations and days to determine how heavily this street is used. He stated that Cotton Street is not considered a major traffic artery. The Traffic Engineer believes that the proposed change will increase safety, as traffic will be forced to slow down due to the narrower travel lane with parked cars on both sides of the street. He added that there are stop signs on each corner.

Mr. Matz explained the plans distributed. A citizen noted that the plans do not depict any BARTA bus stops. Mr. Matz agreed, noting that the RPA is currently holding meetings with BARTA to address their needs.

The citizen noted that BARTA Route 19, located on Cotton St., is one of the heaviest BARTA routes, running every half hour, as many neighborhood residents depend on this Cotton St route. She stated that having parking on both sides of Cotton Street will cause changes to the manner in which people enter and exit the buses and will sometimes force people to enter/exit between parked cars. She also noted that due to this heavily populated area and the unwillingness of some to obey the law, the bus will often need to double-park which will create unsafe situations for riders.

Mr. Matz again stated that meetings with BARTA are taking place to determine BARTA's route needs.

The Solid Waste Division Manager noted the attendance of Republic supervisors who are concerned about the proposed changes and the difficulties that will be created for the trash and recycling trucks on collection day – difficulty making the tight turns with the trucks and the back-up in traffic that will be caused on the entire stretch of Cotton Street from S 19<sup>th</sup> to S 9<sup>th</sup> Streets during the separate trash pickups and recycling pickups.

The Republic supervisors agreed with the statement, noting that the turning radius will be very difficult for both Republic trucks and for fire apparatus.

Mr. Matz stated that he accompanied fire personnel when they drove the proposed route in the 110' ladder truck and the truck had no difficulty making the turn. Later in the meeting, when responding to a question from a resident about fire apparatus, Chief Stoudt stated that the shortest piece of apparatus is 29', the average length is 47' and 59' and these trucks will have problems with the turning radius. The truck described by Mr. Matz is driven by two firefighters (one in the front and one in the rear) and this truck can handle almost any turning radius.

Mr. Ganster stated that in other areas of the City, Republic calls the RPA 24 hour enforcement line when they are nearing an area with known parking issues that create impediments for Republic vehicles. RPA then tickets or tows vehicles to eliminate the problems. He suggested doing the same in this area.

A citizen inquired if the traffic study was done during varying times and inquired if those making the decisions have personally been in the neighborhood to experience the conditions that exist currently.

Mr. Matz stated that the installation of parking stall lines on Cotton Street will stop people from parking in the intersection areas which will eliminate the proposed issues with the turning radius. He noted that the RPA found this to be true when assessing parking in the pilot program areas. He added that parking violations in the pilot areas were minimal compared to the city-wide average. He stated that the stalls will extend 7' from the curb line and will be 20' in length.

A citizen noted the great number of businesses – bars, restaurants, bodegas, etc. – that exist on this 10 block Cotton Street neighborhood. He noted that most delivery trucks double park which will completely block traffic. He also noted the problems that will be created after snow storms, from cars being buried by plows to people on both sides having to dig their vehicles out with no location to store the snow.

Mr. Matz stated that similar situations exist on other City half streets such as Mulberry, Moss, and Locust. He stated that the traffic study was conducted over a broad range of time, which identified that Cotton Street was most heavily used during specific periods of time; however, those periods of time were not mentioned. He stated that a traffic count showed 1358 vehicles traveling Cotton Street daily going east and approximately 1700 traveling west.

A citizen questioned where this flow of traffic would be diverted to. He noted that creating 180 parking spaces would create a severe problem when street sweeping occurs. He expressed the belief that the proposed traffic change will push traffic into other neighborhoods and create new neighborhood safety problems.

A citizen agreed that additional traffic congestion would occur in new neighborhoods. He questioned if those making this decision are familiar with how traffic would be diverted into new neighborhoods. He noted that although the RPA claims to be solving the safety issues on Cotton Street; however, those safety issues are being moved into unprepared neighborhoods.

The Public Property Manager agreed with the turning radius problems that will be created for Republic trucks and other large delivery and service vehicles. He added that the traffic study cannot predict all challenges that will be created on Cotton Street and for streets where traffic will be diverted to. He noted that if the proposed changes are made there will be a lengthy adaption period for those residing in the affected neighborhoods.

In response to a question from a citizen, Mr. Matz stated that the 180 parking spaces shown on the plans does not consider BARTA's need for bus stops along Cotton Street.

A citizen noted that BARTA Route 19 runs every half hour and is heavily used by residents in this neighborhood and noted the problems that will exist by having only one lane of traffic on Cotton Street.

A citizen described the high number of delivery trucks that choose to double park. He noted that with one lane of traffic, traffic will be totally blocked.

Mr. Matz noted the need to call for enforcement when and if double parking occurs. He noted that Reading's parking problems have existed for decades and the RPA is now attempting to find solutions.

A citizen noted the large number of children who live on Fairview Street and who visit the playground on Fairview Street. He questioned if the Traffic Engineer considered these shifts in traffic and the impediments and resulting safety issues.

A citizen reviewed the new disjointed routes vehicles will need to use when traveling east and west through East Reading and the inconvenience this will create.

A citizen suggested building a parking garage rather than making the proposed changes. She also noted that the viewpoint of walkers differs from those who drive. Mr. Matz stated that on average parking garages cost \$35 per planned space and he predicted that a garage to serve this area would cost \$30M. He added that generally garages serve a two block radius due to people's reluctance to walk farther than that. The same problem was identified at the former East Reading Pool.

There were no further comments/questions.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz thanked all who attended for the respectful dialog. She noted that there will be at least one more meeting on this proposed change. She stated that a virtual meeting is being planned with BCTV for late February.

A citizen complained that comment is being stopped.

A citizen inquired if those residing on the half streets were invited. Ms. Kelleher stated that more than 500 flyers were mailed two Fridays ago to “residents” living on Cotton and South Streets.

A citizen stated that he just received the flyer in the mail. Ms. Kelleher again stated that the mailing went out two Fridays ago and the City has no control of the mail beyond that.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the various ways tonight’s meeting was publicized, including articles and stories in the news media. She opened the floor for additional comment.

A citizen expressed the belief that the change proposed for Cotton Street will force BARTA to relocate Route 19 which will cause problems for those who rely on this service. He stated that he is a former tractor trailer driver and that large trucks will not be able to handle the turning radiuses that the changes will create. He noted the tractors that regularly deliver to the former Diamond Brothers property and to Reading Plating and Polishing will have access problems. He described the number of large trucks that regularly deliver to the many businesses located on Cotton Street.

A citizen noted that Mr. Matz’ previous statement that Cotton Street is not a major traffic artery is incorrect. He again noted the traffic problems that will be created by large trucks attempting to navigate the new small turning radiuses and examples of the new routes people will be forced to use which will add time and inconvenience to their travels. He noted that the problem the large trucks will have will also impact fire apparatus.

The citizen questioned Chief Stoudt about the size of the Department’s apparatus and approximate number of fire calls to the area on a weekly basis. The Chief stated that there are at least a half dozen fire calls to the area each week. He agreed with the potential turning radius problems for fire apparatus, apart from the large apparatus that has a firefighter steering the front and back of the apparatus. He noted that the Department’s average vehicles are 29’, 47’ and 59’ in length. He also agreed that changing Cotton Street to one-way westbound will also increase the call time for the Department as apparatus will need to re-route to a less direct course.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted that the Fairview School, located in this neighborhood, is used by students across the county who are delivered and picked up by numerous District owned buses. She stated that the buses will also be impacted by the traffic changes and the turning radius changes.

In response to a statement from a citizen, Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the next meeting announcement will be expanded to half street residents. She stated that the meeting minutes and other information about these changes will be added to the City's website. She stated that there will be a virtual meeting and possibly one additional in-person meeting located near the area that adjoins with District 1.

A citizen stated that she is opposed to this proposal as it will create a variety of new safety issues and inconveniences for those who need to travel through East Reading in both directions. She noted that the residents in the 9<sup>th</sup> and Cotton area elected to get residential parking permits to resolve their parking stress. She expressed the belief that this plan will not solve parking problems.

No one else expressed the desire to speak and Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz adjourned the meeting at approximately 8:25 pm.

*Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk*