

TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

January 28, 2025

A meeting of the Traffic and Transportation Committee was held on this date beginning at 2:03 p.m. in person in the Council Chambers at 80 Broad Street and over Zoom.

Committee Members: Councilmember Michael Seekings (Chair), Councilmember Karl Brady (Vice-Chair), Councilmember William Dudley Gregorie, Councilmember Jim McBride (Virtual), and Mayor William S. Cogswell

Also Present: Michael Mathis, Robert Somerville, Elizabeth Dieck, Josh Martin, Magalie Creech, Amy Wharton, Christopher Morgan, Nathan Dittman, Josh Spencer, Councilmember Bowden, Melissa Cruthirds, Julia Copeland, Natalie Snow, Andreas Jansson, and Donna Constance

Chair Seekings called the meeting to order.

Invocation

The meeting was opened with a moment of silence led by Chair Seekings.

Approval of the November 26, 2024 minutes

On a motion by Councilmember Brady, seconded by Mayor Cogswell, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes from the November 26, 2024, Traffic and Transportation Committee meeting.

Authorization for Lowline Project

Mayor Cogswell said the Lowline Project was for a multi-path from Mount Pleasant Street to Marion Square to provide a linear park and bike pad access for City residents and visitors. Phase 1 would go from Mount Pleasant Street to Line Street, costing \$15 million. Phase 2 would start from Line Street to Marion Square which the private sector would be funding because it is tied into several multi-million-dollar redevelopment initiatives. Currently, there is \$30 million in the TIF, with the ability to borrow another \$30 million, which gives them \$60 million to invest and enough money to do significant projects in the community.

Councilmember Gregorie asked if they knew how much the Cooper River TIF money was spent on the immediate area.

Mayor Cogswell said a \$12 million bond was issued, and \$3 million was allocated for affordable housing for \$15 million.

Councilmember Gregorie said the \$3 million project was not in the immediate area. The TIF resulted from the blight in a specific area, and based on those numbers, most of those dollars would be outside the immediate area where the TIF was configured.

Mayor Cogswell said affordable housing was within proximity as long as it impacted the TIF.

Councilmember Gregorie said he would support the Lowline Project while the projects were contiguous, but there were serious drainage issues within that TIF District.

Mayor Cogswell said numbers were being put together for the short and long term. The short-term goal for Cooper Jackson would be to bridge the gap in some of the funding being contemplated with TIF funds. The long-term goal of flooding would depend on what happens with the Army Corps. They did not want to implement improvements without knowing what would happen to New Market Creek and whether or not there would be protection there versus what would happen in terms of storm surges and flooding protection.

Councilmember Gregorie said he would like to see the grand plan for the TIF district related to water. The water needed to be dealt with in that district, and they needed a comprehensive plan concerning the TIF District and the contiguous areas.

Councilmember McBride said they received positive feedback from constituents in that area. They were concerned that the Bridge Spot Skate Park would not be affected by the plan from the City's perspective, and no plan from the City's perspective with the Lowline Project would negatively impact the Bridge Spot Skate Park.

Chair Seekings agreed about the water and pointed out that the idea with TIF districts was to take an area that had challenges.

Mayor Cogswell said it was not \$45 million for the Lowline it was \$15 million.

On a motion by Mayor Cogswell, seconded by Councilmember McBride, the Committee voted to move this to the Ways and Means City Council as an approved matter from the Committee. Councilmember Gregorie abstained from the vote.

Authorization for the Mayor to Sign Lease Agreement With State Ports Authority to use Parking Lot for Food & Beverage Service Employees

Ms. Copeland said this was for 70 parking spaces in Lot B near the port. The port agreed to give them the site for no charge, and they would be responsible for the maintenance of the lot itself and any potholes or fence repairs.

On a motion by Mayor Cogswell, seconded by Councilmember Brady, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the Sign Lease Agreement with the State Ports Authority for Lot B for Food & Beverage Service.

Resolution Supporting Charleston County's Better North Bridge Application for USDOT 2025 RAISE Grant

Councilmember Gregorie asked if they were obligated to participate financially in this project.

Chair Seekings said no. They communicated to the chairman and the rest of the council that they supported them in applying for and pursuing the grant.

On a motion by Councilmember Brady, seconded by Mayor Cogswell, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the Resolution Supporting Charleston County's North Bridge for the USDOT 2025 RAISE Grant.

Discussion - Golf Carts on Multi-use paths

Ms. Dieck said a State statute prohibited golf carts on multi-use paths. The City installed bollards to prevent golf carts from using multi-use paths. The residents and Councilmember Bowden

expressed interest in exploring an ordinance allowing golf carts to utilize the multi-use path near Drayton Hall Elementary School because of traffic issues.

Councilmember Gregorie asked if a precedence would be set.

Ms. Dieck said they were working with Legal to ensure they were being strategic and how they would evaluate this if it became a problem.

Councilmember Brady asked if this would extend to the Bees Ferry Roads multi-use path or if it was restricted to the area mentioned.

Ms. Dieck said they needed to be strategic and surgical in their approach because it could become problematic with the number of golf carts out there, and all paths could not be open to allow that kind of traffic.

Councilmember Brady said this was a high-traffic corridor that could be traffic-alleviating by allowing more people to use golf carts.

Ms. Dieck said they needed a holistic approach to proceed and to consider all concerns.

Councilmember Bowden said they needed to enumerate the Ashley River bike path in the ordinance required by State law. Because this was a congested area, Councilmember Shealy spoke of the brake light parade which extended further than Glenn McConnell and down 61. With more houses being built, they needed a creative solution to an intractable problem made worse by forcing cars back onto the road at peak times. The State law had other protections, they could not be more than four miles from their house, must have insurance, and must be registered. An ordinance should include protection for pedestrians and bikers, and those on golf carts would need to yield to those folks to remain safe and freely use.

Mayor Cogswell said they needed to be thoughtful because this was unique in certain areas versus others. They did not want to set a precedent because it impacted the districts of Councilmember Bowden, Councilmember Shealy, and Councilmember Brady. Balance was needed for bike and ped riders to be safe with golf carts so they could coexist in those districts.

Chair Seekings asked if the State statute defines multi-use path.

Councilmember Bowden said golf carts were allowed on roads less than 35 per hour, but Cities by ordinance could add paths off the road under certain conditions if they were more than four feet off the road or were separated by a concrete curb.

Chair Seekings asked if they could add the allowance of vehicles other than bike-ped or add them as restrictive.

Councilmember Bowden said they could add them just case by case one by one so they knew enumerating the Ashley River bike path would not create any right to have a golf cart anywhere that was not already allowed.

Chair Seekings said they would need to look at the State statute and ensure that anything they do is not a Citywide precedent.

Adoption of Amendment to Sec. 19-125, Restricting Bicycles on Battery Seawall

On a motion by Mayor Cogswell, seconded by Councilmember Brady, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the Adoption of Amendment to Sec. 19-125, Restricting Bicycles on Battery Seawall.

Request Support for Bloomberg Asphalt Art Grant Application

Mr. Mathis said they submitted a request for an application for \$100,000 to Bloomberg for the Asphalt Art Initiative and requested approval.

On a motion by Mayor Cogswell, seconded by Councilmember McBride, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the Bloomberg Asphalt Art Grant Application.

Request Approval of Increase in Meter Bag Fees

On a motion by Councilmember Gregorie, seconded by Councilmember Brady, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the Increase in Meter Bag Fees from \$18 to \$27.

Update of Parking Meter Installation from Flowbird Parking

Mr. Somerville said Natalie Snow and Andreas Jansson were with Flowbird and the City's current vendor who handled all the on-street parking meters. They were there to give an update on where they were with the installation.

Ms. Snow said they started the deployment of the new parking meters, the pay stations rollout of the app, and the Text Park feature. Even with 700 meters being delivered and installed, they ran into supply chain challenges because of the port shutdown and the hurricanes, which caused delays in getting the remaining meters installed. They were working with the Parking Department and Philtek Service to dedicate a plan to update batteries and install meters by March. They knew it was not ideal to have older Civic Smart Meters deployed, especially in the outlining areas. They had battery problems with the new meters from being able to change the rates remotely and understood what the hardware delays had caused. They worked actively with their suppliers, Mr. Mathis and Mr. Somerville, and their local field technicians to have a plan for everything working accordingly.

Mayor Cogswell asked if they would have this fixed by March.

Ms. Snow said yes. They were expecting 100 batteries to replace the outdated batteries, and every week after that 125 to 150 batteries would be sent in rotation for the field service techs to start those replacements.

Mayor Cogswell asked if they had a contract with Flowbird and when this started.

Chair Seekings said this was a three-year contract, they were two years into this contract in April.

Mayor Cogswell asked if they were already two years in, and why it took until March to get up and running.

Ms. Snow said implementation or installation did not start until February 2024 to get the remaining meters installed and upgraded.

Mayor Cogswell asked if they were pro-rated on the contract or if it was a full contract.

Ms. Snow said they did not have to pay for anything that had not been delivered.

Councilmember Brady asked under the old meters people whether they could pay for minute increments versus the current system where the minimum charge was an hour.

Ms. Snow said yes but that was a configuration setting with a minimum charge set by the City because all the meters and pay stations were credit cards only. The City was responsible for covering their liabilities if the credit card processor charged an ex-amount of dollars for every transaction a credit card was swiped, or they would lose money, whereas the old meters accepted coins. This could be changed if they wanted to have a credit card minimum if they wanted to be profitable and make money off of parking.

Councilmember Brady asked if they could figure out a break-even point and make that the minimum as opposed to making someone pay for the whole hour as the minimum.

Chair Seekings asked if there were 1,220 meters in the City.

Ms. Snow asked currently.

Chair Seekings said there were about 1,500 meters and after everything was switched out there were approximately 1,200 meters with 700 of those being installed. Between his district and Councilmember Gregorie's district, the meters were beeping because the batteries were not working, and were offline. For them as a City, parking fees were their biggest source of revenue. As a result of Flowbird's slowness in installing meter heads, they lost revenue. They wanted this fixed, and they wanted assurance other than them saying this would be done by March 1st. What sold the committee on Flowbird was the ease of use, the reliability, and the advancement in technology, which they had not seen any of. They had a Smart Card used by locals, they would swipe their card onto the meters and get money back, but the cards were not working.

Mr. Mathis said they did have a version of the Smart Card, but it did not provide a refund with the new meters.

Chair Seekings said improvement was needed on the service end because having only 700 meters installed in two years was unacceptable. He asked if they were having battery issues with the meters.

Ms. Snow said they were having battery issues but found a different battery manufacturer and those were currently being installed. They were getting the proper batteries with solar panels, so they were not just dependent on battery operations.

Councilmember Gregorie asked if the meters could be electronically monitored and when the battery had died.

Mr. Jansson said yes because they were connected to a wireless data modem.

Chair Seekings asked how many red lights came up.

Mr. Jasson said 300 meters had low and dead batteries and communication failures.

Councilmember Gregorie asked how long the battery life was.

Mr. Jasson said 3 to 5 years.

Councilmember Gregorie asked if they did a cost-benefit analysis that showed what the City was saving by eliminating staff who monitored and emptied the old meters.

Ms. Snow said collections were handled by a company called ABM.

Mr. Jansson said all municipalities that did coin collection had one of the larger staff components that collect, process, deposit, and reconcile which were being phased out by bigger Cities.

Presentation - Senate Street Request for Conversion of Street from Two-way to One-way

Ms. Story said Senate Street was a narrow residential street between Huger and Congress Street. The narrowness and speed of traffic created a safety concern for neighborhood residents. A neighborhood representative and Councilmember Mitchell approved a petition to convert to one-way operations. They also conducted a traffic study, and it was decided that going from the two-way to a one-way northbound was the best way to improve safety.

Chair Seekings asked if Councilmember Mitchell was briefed on this matter.

Mr. Somerville said they reached out to Councilmember Mitchell and gave his support.

Chair Seekings asked if there was a reason why no action was required.

Mr. Mathis said this needed to go through a public hearing process and would be returned to Traffic and Transportation in February.

Presentation - River Road Roundabout and New CCSD School

Councilmember McBride said this was an important issue. Even if the school, the roundabout, and all the traffic road improvements were done on time, they were concerned about the impact this would have on the community around the school and the safety of the traffic that would be added to Upper River Road.

The Johns Island Elementary School is scheduled to open in August 2025, located at River Road between Main & Maybank. The school would house 700 new students (2nd through 5th grade) they estimated about 200 extra cars per day, plus school buses on an already high-traffic and dangerous road. In the current plan, improvements were made, but they needed to look at other options and make new recommendations to the SCDOT and Charleston County. The road was already congested and dangerous and adding 700 new students, school buses, and cars, made for a more dangerous situation.

The roundabout when completed would help, but the rest of River Road was not addressed. River Road was an SCDOT road, not owned or managed by the City. They needed to lobby to get the SCDOT to make safety improvements on River Road instead of putting in the roundabout. Another way to curtail traffic going through these neighborhoods was to put in a speed hump because the school was going to add a tremendous amount of traffic on an already heavily trafficked road. The SCDOT could make more improvements on River Road that could delay the roundabout, and the traffic improvements may not be ready before the August opening.

Mr. Wallace said the SCDOT required curbing the gutter back to the project limits for the roundabout that extended back to the boundaries, and the property lines. The CCSD was concerned about the school not opening in time because they did not have permits. They met with the project team to discuss a Plan B to open the school. They looked at not installing the roundabout or turning lanes on Brownswood and River Roads. Presently, there was one turning lane on River to go left to right, but mitigation required two turn lanes that would need to be installed before the school opens. Also, a turn lane on Brownswood Road turning onto River was part of the mitigation.

Mayor Cogswell asked if they felt the roundabout and turning lanes would not be completed for Brownswood and River Roads.

Mr. Wallace said there was a potential that they would not have either of those mitigation efforts installed.

Mayor Cogswell asked if this was additional work from the original permit that the DOT was making them do or part of their original permit.

Mr. Wallace said it was not clear. They reviewed and approved both the traffic study and site plan but in terms of the actual offsite mitigation, since this was the DOT right away, they would let them take the lead on the permitting process. The DOT told them they needed to put in a curb and gutter for the roundabout and to the project limits for River Road.

Mayor Cogswell asked when they provided the permit for them to start construction it did not refer to the roundabout or the turn lanes.

Mr. Wallace said that was correct and let the DOT permit that and they permitted the actual site plan and the neighborhood work. They tied the certificate of construction completion to the offsite mitigation that was being installed.

Chair Seekings asked did they had a hook that allowed them to not let the school open until the mitigation was complete.

Mr. Wallace said yes.

Mayor Cogswell said they had a letter that was going out to the school board informing them that this was a concern and that unless they heard they had a viable plan, they would hold by the permit requirements for the TCO2.

Chair Seekings asked if the mitigation plan included a lighting plan that went with it.

Mr. Wallace said it did not. In terms of the traffic calming and speed humps in the neighborhood, they told the CCSD to go and engage with the residents to get their signatures so they could have the signatures ahead of time. When they tried to include traffic calming in the past as part of a proposed development, the Fire Department pushed back because there was no proven need to put traffic calming in.

Mayor Cogswell asked where they were in that process.

Mr. Wallace said they were still in that process. They did not give him an exact update.

Councilmember Gregorie said there was the potential they could have the school completed but not ready for use.

Mr. Wallace said they were confident the school would be available for use by the start of the school year but not the offsite mitigation.

Chair Seekings said this would have to be a decision they would make as to whether or not to give them a CO if the mitigation was not complete.

Councilmember McBride agreed they could not open the school until the mitigation measures were implemented.

Councilmember Brady said they had to look at this holistically. If the school was allowed to open without mitigation and traffic started to back up to River Road with a left turn onto Main Road this would be completely exacerbated, and impact the flow on Savannah Highway. They needed to put pressure on mitigation because of the broader impacts throughout the grid.

Chair Seekings said they did not see a future with the school opening without mitigation being completed.

Councilmember McBride said even with all the mitigation measures in place there was rapid growth on John's Island and West Ashley and infrastructure was behind across the board. But if this school opens, even if things were going as planned, this will significantly impact that part of River Road.

Executive Session pursuant to S.C. Code Sec. 30-4-70(a) to receive update and legal advice regarding proposed settlements regarding the Avondale Intersection Improvements.

On a motion by Councilmember Brady, seconded by Mayor Cogswell, the Committee voted unanimously to go into Executive Sessions at 3:14 p.m.

On a motion by Councilmember Brady, seconded by Mayor Cogswell, the Committee voted unanimously to come out of Executive Sessions at 3:23 p.m. No action was taken.

With no further business, the Committee adjourned the meeting at 3:24 p.m.

Clerk of Council's Office

Donna Constance