



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: SEPTEMBER 12, 2022

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

THROUGH: JAMES F. PARAJON, CITY MANAGER

FROM: YON LAMBERT, INTERIM DEPUTY CITY MANAGER & DIRECTOR,
TRANSPORTATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

DOCKET TITLE:

Public Hearing and Consideration of an Appeal of the Traffic and Parking Board's July 25, 2022 Decision to Recommend the Removal of Nine Parking Spaces on Polk Street between Pelham Street and Palmer Place. Appellant: Kathleen Burns on behalf of petitioners.

ISSUE: Should City Council uphold the Traffic & Parking Board recommendation to remove nine parking spaces on Polk Avenue between Pelham Street and Palmer Place to support the installation of a sidewalk?

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

1. Concur with the recommendation of the Traffic & Parking Board to remove nine parking spaces on Polk Avenue between Pelham Street and Palmer Place to support the installation of a sidewalk; and
2. Deny the appeal of the Traffic & Parking Board decision as it relates to the Polk Avenue Sidewalk Project.

BACKGROUND: On July 25, 2022, the Traffic & Parking Board considered a staff proposal for parking modifications on Polk Avenue and made a recommendation to remove nine on-street parking spaces on Polk Avenue between Pelham Street and Palmer Place to support the addition of a sidewalk. This sidewalk, filling a gap of 250 feet, was recommended in a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Walk Audit from 2016 (Attachment 1) because of its proximity to Polk Elementary School. A group of residents has filed an appeal of that recommendation requesting that Council reverse or suspend the Traffic & Parking Board decision and consider another alternative. Council will consider both the recommendation of the Traffic & Parking Board and the residents' appeal. The City's adopted Complete Streets Policy is to provide streets that allow for safe and convenient travel for everyone, especially near schools. The Alexandria Mobility Plan also calls for a continuous, connected sidewalk network.

DISCUSSION: Students from both Polk Elementary and Hammond Middle School, along with other neighborhood residents, walk along this section of Polk Avenue and are forced to either walk in the street, or cross the street to access the sidewalk on the south side. On the west end of the street, a pedestrian pathway connects Polk Avenue to the Parkside at Alexandria condominium

community. Residents accessing Polk Avenue from Parkside are led directly into the street, with no sidewalk available to continue east. This part of the street is on a curve, so residents are either forced to walk in the street or cross where sightlines are limited.

The City held a community engagement period from April to July, during which staff received feedback from a number of residents expressing both support and concerns about the sidewalk. Supporters noted having to walk in the street with their children and pets, or cross on a curve with limited visibility of oncoming traffic. The City received letters of support from Polk Elementary, Hammond Middle, Polk Elementary PTAs, and Parkside at Alexandria Condominiums. Concerns included impacts to the natural area, including the proposed removal of five trees, as well as drainage and impacts to parking. A compilation of the community comments to date is in Attachment 2. In response to these comments, staff modified the sidewalk proposal to reduce the impact to trees and reduce new impervious surface. In the revised plan, over 80% of the sidewalk is proposed to be built on existing impervious surface.

On July 25, 2022, staff recommended to the Traffic & Parking Board the removal of nine on-street parking spaces to support the addition of the proposed sidewalk connection. The docket memo with conceptual designs can be viewed in Attachment 3. The Traffic and Parking Board approved the staff recommendation unanimously.

Subsequent to the Traffic & Parking Board Public Hearing, a group of residents submitted a petition to appeal the board's recommendation to City Council (Attachment 4). The appeal requests that City Council reverse the Traffic & Parking Board's July 25 decision to remove nine parking spaces on Polk Avenue.

Due to the width of the street, the proposed sidewalk would replace this parking area, removing nine on-street spaces. Staff determined that the removal of nine spaces could not be avoided without introducing significant impacts to the adjacent natural area. In total, there are over 50 on-street parking spaces on Polk Avenue between North Pelham Street and North Pegram Street, and there four single-family homes, all of which have private driveways. There are over 60 on-street parking spaces available for 27 homes on North Pelham Street, six of which have private driveways. Data was collected for the area on three weeknights and one weekend night between 6:00pm and 9:00pm, with the highest occupancy during the weekend evening. The data show that of the over 50 available on-street parking spaces on Polk Avenue between North Pelham Street and North Pegram Street, only 9 were found to be used at a time. Additional parking was also found to be available on Palmer Place, adjacent to Polk Avenue. Based on observations of the area, there is sufficient parking available to meet the demand, even with the reduction of nine spaces. (Attachment 5) The appeal also requests that, should a modification to Polk Avenue be deemed necessary, Council directs staff to assess an alternative option that would provide crosswalks instead of filling the sidewalk gap. Transportation Engineering staff do not recommend a crosswalk at the intersection of Polk Avenue and North Pelham Street, as the curvature of the roadway and limited sightlines would not allow for a reasonably safe crossing at that location.

The remaining items of the appeal are not applicable to the Traffic & Parking Board's July 25 decision, as the Board did not consider or make recommendations regarding parking districts, parking enforcement, or park planning and development.

FISCAL IMPACT: The removal of parking would result in no cost to the City beyond updating a small number of signs, which would be performed in house. The cost of time and materials would be less than \$2,000. Depending on the final design, the project cost is estimated to be \$75,000 to \$100,000 to cover staff time, the installation of the sidewalk, the driveway apron, and updating signs. The project would be funded through prior-year funding from the Complete Streets CIP Program.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment 1: James Polk Elementary SRTS Report
- Attachment 2: Compiled Community Comments
- Attachment 3: July 25 Traffic & Parking Board Docket for Polk Avenue
- Attachment 4: Petition to Appeal the July 25 Traffic & Parking Board Decision
- Attachment 5: Parking Utilization Study
- Attachment 6: Presentation

STAFF:

- Yon Lambert, Interim Deputy City Manager and Director, T&ES
- Hillary Orr, Deputy Director, T&ES
- Christopher Ziemann, Division Chief, T&ES
- Alexandria Carroll, Complete Streets Program Manager, T&ES