

PUBLIC SAFETY

Tuesday, June 1, 2021 – 5:55 p.m.

Council Chambers – Olean Municipal Building

Present: Members: Chairman Robinson, Vice Chairman Barnard, Alderman Panus, Alderman Crawford, and Alderman Anastasia. Others: Mayor William Aiello; Ron Richardson, Police Chief; Tim Richardson, Fire Chief, and Tiffany Taylor, Managerial Confidential Administrative Secretary.

1. Roll Call

Alderman Robinson called the meeting to order at 5:55 p.m. and asked that the record show that all committee members were present except Aldermen Witte and Gonzalez, who were excused.

2. Approval of Minutes of the Previous Committee Meetings (Tuesday, April 6, 2021)

A motion to approve the minutes of the April 6, 2021 committee meeting was made by Alderman Robinson, seconded by Alderman Anastasia. Voice vote, ayes all. Motion carried.

3. Unfinished Business

None

4. New Referrals for Consideration

a. Discussion Items

i. Driver / Pedestrian Awareness

Alderman Robinson explained that there are some things that he has noticed around town as he drives, and some things on the Facebook chatter around the City. He explained that there is some legislation on the books and we recently talked about scooters, and these are things that we hope to work on here in the future as a Council. He explained that as far as the safety of our kids, our elderly, and our families who are using our roads today, it is the responsibility of drivers and pedestrians to look out for surroundings and pay attention to where they are going.

Alderman Robinson explained that pedestrian deaths made up sixteen percent of traffic deaths in the U.S. and five states represent 43 percent of accidents in the U.S., one of which is New York. He explained that a majority of these accidents are related to cell phones. Drivers are required to stop for pedestrians in all 50 states. He explained that a lot of traffic circles in the country are two lane, although the ones here in Olean are one lane. When a driver approaches the circle, it is their responsibility to look out for pedestrians and yield to the right of way to

their left of vehicles in the circle. He explained that no stop is required unless you do not have the right of way, and traffic is often backed up at the circles because of drivers who stop instead of yielding.

Alderman Robinson explained that a case study that he found shows that when exercising right of way, a pedestrian has the duty to heed any danger. He explained that the fact that a driver never saw a pedestrian in a crosswalk does not excuse their conduct when a pedestrian is in a crosswalk. When you are driving you are responsible for looking for people. He explained that a lot of us are aware of this but we need to be aware of our surroundings. We have to get away from the complacency of paying attention to our phones or the radio. The Council will need to revisit the City's legislation regarding bikes, scooters and skateboards in the downtown business district. He explained that we need to limit the speed of power equipment and open sidewalks where there is no bike lane available. The object is not to race to the next destination, but to enjoy the ride getting there.

Alderman Crawford explained that perhaps a larger conversation that the Council should entertain at some point in the future is not only the speed limit of scooters, but also the speed limit of 2,000 pound machines that can kill people. He explained that as we move towards the concept of more walkability and bike ability, we need to consider reducing the speed of vehicles to 25 miles per hour or at least have zones with bike boulevards. He explained that cutting five or ten miles per hour off of the speed limit will not add more than one or two minutes to a commute and at the same time, we would be creating a safe environment for people to use multiple modes of travel. He explained that what Alderman Robinson just brought up set a lightbulb off and maybe we need to look at the speed we have for our vehicles.

Mayor Aiello explained that one of the things he remembers from his Police Department days is that more than just drivers and pedestrians seeing what is there, a driver need to see what is to be seen out there. He explained that he thinks that Alderman Robinson is spot on with a lot of this whole thing. New York State makes a lot of laws to do with driving, and one that he is seeing is regarding distracted drivers. There are also distracted pedestrians talking on cell phones or looking at their cell phones while walking down the street, and they can be dangerous as well. He explained that using a cell phone on a bike or scooter can be dangerous as well.

Alderman Crawford explained that he has seen a number of people riding electric scooters with headphones on, and if you can't hear or aren't alert to your surroundings, this is a recipe for disaster. Alderman Panus explained that being on the Council for the last year and a half, he has seen that we are really trying to push the image of walkable city. He explained that maybe a 25 mile per hour speed limit makes sense for the whole city, and he would be interested to see

what people think about that. He explained that if you are going towards walkable, then we should at least think about this. A lot of municipalities in PA have a 25 mile per hour speed limit.

Alderman Panus explained that another important thing is the concept of pedestrians and motorists making eye contact with one another. He explained that people in general do not want to make eye contact with each other, but this is an important thing to do, When you make eye contact people know that you're there, and what you intend on doing. He explained that maybe signs can be put up that say "make eye contact" or something similar to get people in the habit of doing it again.

Alderman Anastasia explained that there aren't too many people that he talks to that are happy with the roundabouts, but they will be here for a long time. He explained that coming off of Route 16 and at West and East State Streets people feel that they have the right of way and do not stop or yield at all. He explained that people come onto the roundabouts at 35 to 40 miles per hour. He is not sure if the Police Department is getting complains about this or how to stop the issue.

Chief Ron Richardson explained that his bigger concern is regarding scooters on the sidewalk. He explained that right now, the department is having a problem handling bicycles and scooters.

Alderman Anastasia explained that the light beacons really get your attention. Down by Tim Hortons and at CVS by the mall he feels that the beacons would be a great safety feature. Alderman Panus mentioned the Pedestrian Safety Action Plan, and Mayor Aiello explained that the crossings will be updated on Constitution Avenue at the trail, at Washington West, on First and North Union, and on Main Street. He explained that these flashing beacons were put in for those with mobility, hearing and sight issues. He knows Mr. Ring has said before that the State absolutely will not allow the flashing beacons at intersections because you would have to flash each intersection, not just one. He explained that more drivers need to be in tune with what is going on. Perhaps enforcement can help. He explained that if we cross the street without lights at areas with the beacons, people do not see you or think that anyone is there. This is the driver's responsibility. He explained that pedestrians at crossings have the right to right of way but they need to see what is coming, too.

Alderman Crawford explained that he has always heard that a pedestrian has a right of way if they are standing at the side of the road, and cars should yield to and stop for the pedestrian. Chief Ron Richardson explained that if they are getting ready to cross and step into traffic and someone drives in front of them, it is a ticket able offense. Mayor Aiello explained that a few years ago we put people out and wrote several tickets for this. Chief Ron Richardson explained

that we would put officers in plain clothes to try and cross the street, and others in uniform to ticket those who cut off the pedestrian.

Alderman Crawford explained that there needs to be a change of mentality for drivers and pedestrians, too. He explained that when he is out with his kids walking or biking, nothing is worse than being on one side of the road crossing and the other lane just keeps driving right through in front of them. He explained that we need to change the image of our City and we need to crack down on this. Chief Ron Richardson explained that Alderman Panus made a really good point that eye contact is good. He explained that maybe we can put something on Facebook for this.

Chief Ron Richardson explained that he will put something together regarding this. He explained that we just want to look out for the safety of residents in Olean, particularly the kid and our elderly.

ii. Improving Olean's Image

Alderman Robinson explained that driver and pedestrian awareness ties into this. He explained that there are numerous things that he has noticed over the years, and he feels that in the wake of the May 25th one year anniversary of the killing of George Floyd we are still trying to find peace and harmony. He explained that the Diversity, Inclusion and Equity committee was just created in Olean, but some places have had them for years. JCC just created theirs, and the Olean School District is working on creating one. He explained that we need to work on teaching real American history and we need to work on making a change, starting with our youth.

Alderman Robinson explained that there is ignorance in the City to think that Olean does not deal with racial injustice, police inequality, and homelessness. He explained that we suffer the same fates as other cities, although not always on the same level. He explained that we are suffering from a lack of jobs and lack of identity. We need to listen to the people and what they want, and encourage new ideas and new strategies. We need to cut back on negativity. He explained that if you are not helping with the solution, that you are a part of the problem. He challenges every resident to make a change. He encourages constructive, not positive, feedback. He explained that the public needs to take feedback and thoughts to their Alderperson to help make Olean better. WE need to start by collaborating with one another to work on Olean's small businesses and improve living standards.

Alderman Robinson explained that we need to have no more status quo. We need to make a change so that we can become the standard in the Southern Tier that everyone will envy. He wants people on I86 to stop in Olean, not drive through Olean. He explained that we need to

start with ourselves and our schools, and improve all facets of the City. He explained that this will not happen overnight.

5. Approval of Committee Reports

None

6. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by Alderman Robinson, seconded by Alderman Anastasia. Voice vote, ayes all. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at approximately 6:15 p.m.