

**SPECIAL MEETING
BOARD OF MAYOR AND ALDERMEN
(ROAD HEARING)
February 15, 2022 at 6:00 PM**

Mayor Craig called the meeting to order.

The Clerk called the roll.

Present: Aldermen Cavanaugh, Stewart, Long, Fajardo, T. Sapienza, Sharonov, Trisciani, Heath, E. Sapienza, Barry, Gamache, George-Kelly

Mayor Craig advised that the purpose of the road hearing is to hear those wishing to speak in favor of or in opposition to the proposed street discontinuance petition, followed by viewing the area petitioned and a determination of the action to be taken on such petition. The Public Works Director will be requested to make a presentation, following which, those wishing to speak in favor will be heard, followed by those wishing to speak in opposition. Anyone wishing to speak must first step to the nearest microphone when recognized and state his/her name and address in a clear, loud voice for the record. Each person will be given only one opportunity to speak, comments are to be limited to three minutes and any questions must be directed to the Chair.

1. Petition to discontinue a portion of West Central Street.
(Note: Attached please find a letter from the owner of the DoubleTree by Hilton and Center of NH Parking Garage stating opposition to the petition.)

Mayor Craig requested that the Public Works Director make a presentation.

Kevin Sheppard, Public Works Director, stated the portion of West Central Street was originally laid out as a 56' wide street by the BMA on November 15, 1921. Another portion of this street was discontinued from Elm Street to a point 615.93' west of Elm Street. The Department of Public Works does not oppose the discontinuance petition with the condition that easement rights are reserved for repair or replacement of all utilities within the petitioned area. After consultation with the Planning and Community Development Department, I would note that variances or a lot merger would likely be required should the applicant move forward with the improvements as shown on the plan as part of this submission.

Alderman T. Sapienza asked so do you not support this or just not have an opinion.

Mr. Sheppard answered what we typically do is take a look at it in relation to how it affects the Public Works operations and maintenance. That is what this letter is based on.

Alderman T. Sapienza asked so right now you can plow through correct and now if we do this you are going to have a dead-end instead of a through street.

Mr. Sheppard replied correct.

Alderman T. Sapienza asked is that going to make it more difficult for plowing.

Mr. Sheppard responded we worked with the engineer on that as far as where we would push snow and how we would push snow in that area. Obviously pushing to a dead-end is a little bit more work but we also took a look at the improvements that were being proposed as part of this. It is something that we can work with.

Mayor Craig called for those wishing to speak in favor of the petition.

Robert Duval, 21 Golden Gate Drive, stated:

I am an engineer with TFMoran. I started working with Travis York, the owner of the 724 Cigar Building at 175 Canal Street back in September on this project. At that time, Mr. York approached me and suggested the idea since he was in the process of purchasing the building across the street that it would be nice to create a campus of the two buildings since he would own both sides of the street essentially. So when he occupied that building with his own business, his employees could walk back and forth safely without having to cross the street as long as we could preserve the number of parking spaces and make it an attractive park-like atmosphere so that his employees, in addition to having a safe place to cross the street would have a place to unwind in the middle of the day. It would be a green space that would add to the beauty of the neighborhood and increase the value of his properties and the whole neighborhood by

creating this pocket park. Right now, that area is really a loading zone for the back of several businesses. We came up with a plan that you should have in your packet showing how this could be done. I think it is going to be an attractive facility. There is a lot of grade on that street so you are actually sitting up high when you are in that little campus area courtyard. You would get a nice view across the tops of the corporation housing across the street and the river and the west side. It would be a very attractive place and a unique opportunity for the city to put some greenery in a place where it is conspicuously absent. We did this and I told him that it was important that we work with the city staff, including Kevin Sheppard, Peter Lennon from the Fire Department, and Guy Chabot from Water Works to make sure that all the city departments would be in support of this. We worked with them and I have emails from each of those people. I got one in December from Kevin expressing "the plan looks fine" and in November from Water Works saying "the plan looks good" and back in October from Peter Lennon stating "no issues with the proposed plan." After checking with city staff and city departments to make sure that there were no practical reasons this couldn't go forward, we approached the abutters. Travis spoke personally with Kim Roy, the general manager of the hotel and Malcolm the manager of the garage. He showed Kim the plan and began some correspondence with her that goes back to September 30. Over the ensuing three or four months, there was some positive feedback including, and I quote "thank you for sending the plans. The concept is beautiful and we will forward this to our ownership with a request for support." We were thinking that the only other affected being the hotel and the garage because of the nature of the street which you will see shortly, that we were in pretty good shape. The two principle buildings would be owned by Mr. York and then the other building is the back entrance to the garage and then up a flight of stairs to the back parking lot of the Armory. We are preserving a walkway from that parking lot and from the back entrance of the garage all the way down to Canal Street. So the existing sidewalk stays in place. We are replacing the utilities and improving the drainage. As Kevin alluded to, we are putting in a truck turnaround at the garage exit for plows to make sure it is easy to plow in and out of there. We have addressed those issues and we thought we had the support of the abutters and that is why we brought this to the CIP Committee a few weeks ago where we received unanimous support. At that point we were advised by a letter from Mr. Vinios that he

wasn't entirely in support. Not wanting to let it rest at that, we spoke again to Kim and asked her to put us in touch with him. She said we should be hearing from him shortly and then fast forward to just a few days ago when we received the second letter of concern and yesterday an email concerning traffic and the use of the garage and so forth. Since this is my one opportunity to speak, I thought I would address the concerns of Mr. Vinios. Frankly, I understand his concern as an abutting property owner. Abutting property owners typically are concerned with anything that may affect their property. I am sure that Mr. Vinios is sincere that he feels there will be negative effects but as an engineer who does this kind of work all over the city and all over this state and other states, and in particular I do a lot of traffic work in the city and elsewhere, I don't see any traffic impacts to the exit of the garage. The north/south portion of W. Central Street is a more direct route that winds gently up to Pleasant Street. At Pleasant Street you can go left and right. You have a signal at the left and the right brings you up to Elm Street which gives you far more opportunity to continue your travel then going out the garage and making an immediate left down to Canal where you can only take a right turn northbound. You could eventually get to where you had already been if you just continue out to Pleasant Street but it is less direct and has less opportunities and is certainly the less valuable of the two approaches. In addition, both Pleasant and W. Central Street are 35' wide curb to curb. Both have parking on both sides. If anything, Pleasant Street is less steep than the upper portion of W. Central Street. Pleasant Street is equally as good and for the previous reasons better as an exit from the garage than W. Central Street. Lastly, just today I received a copy of traffic counts provided by Mr. Vinios. In taking a brief look at these traffic counts, you can see and his own records support this, that only about one out of five cars uses the W. Central Street entrance and exit versus the other. By far, the greatest proportion uses Granite Street but some of us will come in at the hotel. Of those, if you do the math only 11% of the garage traffic exits on W. Central Street. So about one out of ten. There are about 700 cars in that garage. If the garage is completely full and they all decided to leave at once, that means there would be about 77 cars that would be going out at the W. Central Street exit. Now 77 cars, if it took an hour, would be 77 cars an hour. There are a few thousand cars an hour on Canal Street, not to mention Pleasant Street. It is a tiny fraction of the traffic. I have used it myself and probably everybody in this room has

used that exit from time-to-time. The delay is not after going through the gate. The wait is waiting to pay. Once you get through that gate, you are essentially out. We are talking about, mind you, one car per minute. So with a minute between cars exiting, there is not a whole lot of impact on the adjacent street. At this point, I would be happy to answer any questions of the Board.

Alderman Trisciani asked when you are exiting the garage...I have been here all my life and I have used that garage a million times and it wasn't until my husband worked in the Cigar Factory that I even knew that other exit existed to get out onto W. Central Street. There is no signage that evens direct regular traffic. That exit of the garage is mainly reserved for card holders correct? Are you able to speak to that?

Mr. Duval answered I am not familiar with the operations of the garage but I know when there is a big event they open that exit up as well. I have used it and I am not a card holder. You can just pay cash at that gate.

Alderman Fajardo stated I noted that the abutter commented on periodic road closure for maintenance that happens on the Granite Street side. Do we have any sense of the frequency of that? I guess the sort of emergency nature if they had to just exit out of that one egress do we know the frequency of the closure or the frequency of emergencies that have happened historically?

Mr. Duval replied are you asking about the closure of Pleasant Street.

Alderman Fajardo stated I thought he was referring to Granite Street but I could be wrong. He referenced general road maintenance that sometimes impacts one of the exits leading to them having only one functioning exit at that time. I am trying to understand the potential extent of that issue because it does seem like a possible safety issue.

Mr. Duval stated the main entrance to the garage is on Granite Street. There is a left-turn pocket and of course a right-turn where traffic can go in. There are two lanes in

and two lanes out. The secondary exit is the one we are talking about in the back at the lowest level just behind the 724 building where there is one lane out. It is sometimes closed so I guess on any given day it may or may not be open in the first place. There is also a second entrance on the hotel side. By far, most traffic is using the front entrance which is designed for much higher capacity and that is what their own numbers show which you would expect. The back entrance is I think used mainly by lease holders who are parking there on a regular basis. It is an easy way in and out. You are away from most of the traffic. It is good to have those two and it is also good to have the third one at the hotel. If there were a problem, those three ways could be used as all exits and there would be a lot more capacity on Granite Street and some capacity at the hotel. It is nice to have the third one at the bottom. This does not affect that. That will be open at all times.

Mayor Craig stated I just want to note that we have five more speakers and we have to leave here at 6:30 PM in order to get back at 7 PM.

Alderman T. Sapienza asked is the walkway you mentioned a pedestrian way and for the public.

Mr. Duval answered yes.

Alderman T. Sapienza asked is that protected with an easement.

Mr. Duval replied it will be.

Alderman T. Sapienza asked would the walkway be in the deed.

Emily Rice, Solicitor, responded I don't know the answer to that.

Mr. Duval stated it is not now because right now it is a public street. As part of the closure plan, there will be an easement in the deed that keeps that in favor of the public just as the easements in favor of the city for the utilities will be in place in the deed.

Alderman T. Sapienza asked will this vote be contingent on that.

Mayor Craig answered if that is what you want to include in the motion.

Alderman Stewart stated thank you Mr. Duval. I just wanted to confirm that you said Peter Lennon, the Fire Marshal, said the plan as presented to him was good right. He had no safety concerns?

Mr. Duval answered yes. I do have that.

Matthew Doyle, 28 Mulberry Lane, Bedford stated:

I am the Executive Producer and Co-Founder of Big Brick Productions which is housed in what is currently the 724 Cigar Factory building. We are looking to potentially be moving into the space in the building across the street. My office sits right on W. Central Street. I am at street level and my window looks out over that street daily and I have been there for the past five years. What Travis and the team are talking about doing would beautify that space if we were able to kind of close that street down and turn it into a more campus environment. For me as a person that is running a business and hoping to open a large content studio over there, this would be tremendous. We often have clients that come from out-of-state. We do a lot of work with some national brands. We do TV products and documentaries and branding content for folks like ESPN, New Balance, and Red Bull and often have a bunch of people up at the office. We have added suites and things like that. Folks that are typically used to coming in and working in places in Boston and New York City...we are thankful that we have great relationships and people come to us to do that type of content as well. For me as somebody who is trying to continue to grow that business and have a place like that, to have the front side of that content studio look like a really great and welcoming space for folks in my industry would be really good. Again, anything we can do to try to make that happen would be wonderful. I will be brief and let other folks talk but that is my point of view.

Travis York, 138 Shaw Street, stated:

Thank you for your time and efforts in listening to all of this. I am the owner of the 724 Cigar building with my brothers. Our family has owned property in Manchester since the 60's including the Cigar building from 1960 through 1980. My brothers and I bought it back in 2015. I have invested significant money in the building. We also won a bunch of preservation awards that we are really proud of and the building has been 100% occupied for a number of years, largely with creative-minded companies including a few of my own and a few of my brothers. We have had our eyes on 215 Canal Street for about four years and have been in active conversations with the tenant and owner. Candidly, it is an underutilized piece of property for our city. It is an industrial building and has been non-descript. We recognized the opportunity to put our video and content production services over there and recognized pretty quickly that as West Central Street was discontinued a number of years ago further towards the city center, discontinuing the rest of it would really be a better use for the city to ultimately create what is in line with the Master Plan and create a unique opportunity with the beautification of green space and walkways allowing the public to walk from downtown to the millyard and really creating an environment where people can feel inspired and be right in downtown Manchester having a piece of nature and quiet. Our view is that West Central Street, and you will see when you go there, is entirely redundant to Pleasant Street. They are both similar in width and they both have parking on both sides, however Pleasant Street goes up to Elm Street and down to Canal Street where there is a signal. As you have heard people say today, we don't have any intention of negatively impacting that back exit to the parking garage. We just feel that you don't need redundancy over there when we have a unique opportunity to beautify the city for everybody and do something that is going to live much longer term than the few situations that are being referenced by our naysayers. I would be happy to answer any questions. We are enthusiastic about the possibility there and what it could do to help transform that part of the city.

Donald Eaton, 17 Appledore Road, Bedford stated:

I work at 175 Canal Street building and I have been a professional in downtown Manchester for just over 30 years. We started on Elm Street and about 11 years ago we moved down to the Cigar building. I have watched the transformation of Manchester

over the years and it has been fantastic. The downtown Manchester area and the millyard have been improved in a number of ways and there are a number of areas in Manchester that I think could continue to be improved and this is one of them. When you look at the 215 Canal building, it looks out of place. It looks like an industrial building in a sea of housing and office buildings and so forth. I think what the York family intends to do is a tremendous addition to the city for that building and that area in general with the discontinuance of this street that as Travis said is quite redundant. Thank you.

John Dignam, 215 Canal Street, stated:

I am the current occupant of the building at 215 Canal Street that they are trying to renovate. We are defense contractors. Our customers are not from Manchester. We have been in Manchester since 1996. We started on Dow Street and then we were above and below Dyn and they chased us out of that space. It was your brother, Travis, who chased us out of that space. We are now at 215 Canal Street and actually we are outgrowing the space. The building itself is a great structure but it needs a lot of renovation and a lot of work. The previous owner didn't put anything into the building and I think just witnessing what Travis and his brothers have done at 175 would enhance the neighborhood. Someone had asked about shutdowns and the only time the area has been shut down is during the Presidential Primaries when the Secret Service comes in and shuts down the streets. That is the only time the street has been shut down. We have been there late at night and after the garage has been opened. There is some traffic but most of it ends up going towards Elm Street or goes back into the hotel itself as opposed to going all the way around the block. There really haven't been any major issues on the street. It really is a dead street.

Ashley Oberg, 461A Straw Road stated:

My company's office is in the 175 Canal Street building and we have been there a few years. We have continued to grow immensely and draw more employees and I think this would just be a huge advantage to have a nice campus space and green space. Also, I have a barre studio up on Elm Street and am considering moving into the new space at 215 Canal Street. One of the things that excited me about the potential move

is the safety of parking for my clients. That is huge and something that I was looking forward to as well as the opportunity to conduct business outside for both of these businesses that I work at. I think it is an immense opportunity to jump start the city plan of adding green space to the city in a spot that really needs it. I think it would be a huge asset to the city so I am in support of it.

Mayor Craig called for those wishing to speak in opposition to the petition.

John Deachman, Craig & Deachman Associates, stated:

I am an attorney and I represent Lou Vinios. The Vinios family operates the DoubleTree Hotel and the adjacent parking garage. In your materials somewhere you will find my client's letter objecting to this proposal. To summarize, this is a safety issue. The garage has only two exits. One at Granite Street and one at West Central Street. You are considering closing half of one of those exits. My client's experience running this garage for years is that cars get backed up inside that facility. In the unlikely event that Granite Street is closed for maintenance or water breaks or whatever it is, the only exit remaining would be West Central Street. God forbid there is ever an emergency. You also have some additional information I think that was alluded to earlier. It is a spreadsheet regarding traffic counts. This shows that yes in fact in the pre-Covid years that we all anticipate we will get back to, there were over 500,000 trips in and out of that garage. Now it is true as was pointed out that only 100,000 or so of those go through the West Central exit. That is under normal operating procedures. Again, if that garage is packed during an event and there is a problem and folks cannot get out onto Granite Street, this is it. If this proposal were accepted, everyone would have to go down that narrow street and turn onto Pleasant with parking on both sides. It is our position that at a minimum it seems prudent given the volume of traffic and the safety implications that the applicant be asked to put forth a traffic study and preferably one that takes into account event parking. For those reasons and the ones in my client's letter, we oppose this proposal.

Lou Vinios stated:

When I was 24 years old, 40 years ago, my father and I walked around the city with Mayor Stanton and got the money to build that hotel. I have been here a long time too, not since the 60's like Travis' family but for a long time. I just don't like the idea of taking away an option on the way out. I think the last two years as we all know have been nothing like normal. In the normal years, the traffic is three times what it has been the last two years so whatever observations have been made about what happens on those streets, it is all anecdotal. There is no real data that we have looked at. I have supplied what I could get over the weekend. I just thought of this and said I should get it and we should look at it. We had a computer glitch and it didn't allow me to get 2019 through 2020 on the lanes but there is plenty of information available. At the very least I would like to look at it more deeply before a decision is made. I had one phone conversation with Travis. I haven't met him personally yet but I am sure I will sooner rather than later. We agreed on the phone to disagree. We agreed that it was a miscommunication and he was talking to other people when he should have been talking to me. He was talking to the managers who work for the management company who manage the properties, not the owners. If they had just gone to the abutters list, they could have found me and called me. When I got the letter it became real and here I am.

Alderman Trisciani stated I have a few questions for you. One is the statement that you just made. This has been going on since September. Are there no protocols in place where the management company managing the hotel notify you when something like this happens? What gave them the idea that they could speak and not talk to you about this?

Mr. Vinios replied I can't answer that. All I can tell you is that Kim Roy who a lot of you know who is a wonderful woman and she works very hard and is great at her job did tell Travis that she thought the plan was beautiful. At some point it should have gotten to me. I saw the plan at one point but it wasn't real until I got the letter saying there was going to be this hearing.

Alderman Trisciani stated so since you have owned the hotel, what percentage of time has there been anything other than...I think we did mention maybe a motorcade which happens in NH but what percentage of time have you had a situation where people could not exit the garage due to some sort of issue with the streets.

Mr. Vinios responded I can't answer that.

Alderman Trisciani stated well that was one of your points so I would have hoped you had the data. The other piece, and again you may not have this, but when it comes to a back-up I know in the many times I have parked in that garage for events because we have lots of huge events there, how many times is the back-up in the garage having to pay to get out versus on the streets? I think usually once you get out of the garage no matter which exit you are using the streets have always remained pretty clear to get traffic through quickly.

Mr. Deachman stated I don't think anyone contests that when the garage is full and open and running well that there are normal back-ups with that system but that is not our concern. Our concern is if there is a problem or if there is a fire or if there is an active shooting and people are lined up in vehicles...

Alderman Trisciani interjected I am going to stop you right there. If there is a fire or an active shooter are you going to funnel people to their cars to have them drive out of the garage? I am challenging the data. You are asking for a traffic report on data that maybe you should be providing. It just feels like there is a disconnect with what has happened.

Mr. Deachman replied we are not the applicant.

Alderman Long stated with respect to parking on both sides of the street, on the north and south part of West Central Street, would it make it easier for you if there was no parking on either side of that street.

Mr. Deachman stated I suspect that there are some changes that could be made around the edges that would be helpful. We feel like we don't have the complete information. A traffic study is something we get all the time when we are planning land use. It doesn't seem like it would be that challenging to get that. Maybe then we could all have an opportunity to look at it and maybe some good options like that would come out of it.

Alderman Long asked do you agree with what Mr. Duval said that one out of five cars exit on West Central Street.

Mr. Deachman answered 1/5 of the cars approximately use that exit and if you do the math 63,000 cars out of 560,000 in 2018 existed West Central Street. That is 10%.

Alderman Long asked in your opinion is there anything that can be done so that you wouldn't be opposed to this project.

Mr. Deachman stated I think we could work on it but I am not prepared to say I am in favor of what is proposed right now. I am not saying that it is impossible. Could the plaza be developed and designed in a way so that a vehicle could pass in an emergency? I don't know. I am not smart enough to think of all of that right now but yes I think there could be an accommodation.

Alderman Barry stated in looking at the map of where the garage is and where people choose to exit and whether they go straight across to Pleasant Street or take a left to go on West Central Street, my choice more than likely would be to go straight and take either a left or right onto Pleasant Street because at least you have lights there and it is a lot safer than going down West Central. You still have an access point. These people that are leaving the garage can still go down that street that leads to Pleasant and then they will have the option of either taking a right on Pleasant to go to Elm or a left on Pleasant to go to Canal. So they still have access to get out of there which is probably better access anyway.

Alderman Stewart stated that was my point too. If I heard you correctly, it sounded like you were alleging that we were going to go from two exits down to one exit but it sounds like there will still be two exits as far as I understand it.

Mr. Deachman stated I was trying to carve in that we were going to go from two exits to one and a half.

Alderman Stewart stated I don't know if you can have half an exit. I think it is still two exits.

*On motion of **Alderman Long**, duly seconded by **Alderman T. Sapienza**, it was voted to recess the hearing and proceed to view the areas identified in the petition as presented.*

Mayor Craig called the meeting back to order at the site of the petition.

Petition to discontinue a portion of West Central Street.

*On motion of **Alderman Long**, duly seconded by **Alderman George-Kelly**, it was voted to approve the petition to discontinue a portion of West Central Street with the condition that the easement rights are reserved for repair or replacement of all utilities and the pedestrian walkway.*

*This being a special meeting of the Board, no further business can be presented and on motion of **Alderman Fajardo**, duly seconded by **Alderman Long**, it was voted to adjourn.*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matthew Harmond". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

City Clerk