Public Safety & Transportation Committee Report

City of Newton
In City Council

Wednesday, January 22, 2025

Present: Councilors Grossman (Chair), Lucas, Block, Bixby, Lipof and Wright

Absent: Councilors Greenberg and Downs

City Staff: David Koses, Traffic Council Chair and Chief George McMains, Newton Police Department

All agendas and reports, both past and present, can be found at the following link: https://www.newtonma.gov/government/city-clerk/city-council/council-standing-committees/public-safety-transportation-committee

For more information regarding this meeting, a video recording can be found at the following link: https://youtu.be/yKP96qR_IHk

#3-25 **Providing the Annual Report of the work of Traffic Council for 2024**
DAVID KOSES, TRAFFIC COUNCIL CHAIR providing the Annual Report of the work of the Traffic Council for 2024.

Action: **Public Safety & Transportation No Action Necessary 6-0**

Note: Mr. Koses joined the Committee.

Mr. Koses reviewed with Committee members the work of Traffic Council in 2024; this material was attached to the agenda. A summary of 2024 Traffic Council actions is attached. Mr. Koses said that during 2024, Traffic Council held 10 meetings. Traffic Council heard 59 items and took action on 49 items, 10 of which are still being held. Three docket items were denied in 2024. Zero items were appealed to City Council. One new parking district was created in the Charlesbank Road area. Traffic Council approved 16 administrative changes to the traffic and parking regulations.

Questions and answers:
The majority of items are docketed by staff or Councilors. Are residents only docketing a small number of items? Mr. Koses answered yes, many times staff dockets items on behalf of residents requests.

The majority of Traffic Council items were approved, is this because they were pre-researched by DPW staff? Mr. Koses answered yes, most requests are reasonable. Sometimes an item is changed before it is docketed in a way that seems more likely to be approved.

Please explain the coordination between Traffic Council and the School Department on school and solar panel projects. Mr. Koses explained that that there is a lot of coordination and thought in advance between the Planning Department, School Department, Councilors, and DPW on school projects. Chair Grossman added that once preliminary ideas come to fruition, the ideas go through the public meeting process.

Mr. Koses asked Committee members if they would like him to continue producing the Traffic Council Annual Report? Chair Grossman answered yes; the information is useful, the Committee appreciates the yearly check in, and like the update as to what Traffic Council has been working on. Councilor Wright agreed.

Council members thanked Mr. Koses and Traffic Division staff for their diligence.

Councilor Block made a motion to vote no action necessary. Committee members agreed 6-0.

#123-24 **Requesting a regular discussion with the Police Department**
COUNCILOR GROSSMAN requesting regular discussion with the Police Department of police data, including crashes, types of calls, numbers and dispositions.
Public Safety & Transportation Held 6-0 on 05/08/24

Action: **Public Safety & Transportation Held 6-0**

Note: Chief McMains joined the Committee.

Chief McMains provided 2024 graphs on crime stats, crashes, arrests, OUIs, domestics, citation demographics for Newton only, citation demographics generally, arrests by race, arrests by race for Newton only, domestic disputes and mental health calls; this material was attached to the agenda.

Car Breaks - Car breaks were up approximately 63% last year. 71% were unlocked vehicles. 72% happened overnight. This does not happen every year, but it comes in in cycles, and oftentimes, people target unlocked doors. This is not a crime unique to Newton.

Residential Burglaries - Residential breaks were up 117% last year. In 2023, there were 18. In 2024, there were 39. Entry point is usually at the back of the house. There's no real target for any of the break ins. The targets appear to be jewelry, valuables and cash. There's no significant target we can identify based on our stats. This is not a crime unique to Newton.

Hate Crimes - In 2023, we had 1 hate crime. In 2024, we had 7 hate crimes.

Hate Incidents - In 2023, we had 49 hate incidents. In 2024, we had 67 hate incidents, which typically are speech that don't amount to a crime, but yet have an underlying flavor of bias.

Calls for Service - We do a significant number of directed patrols each year, based on information we've found to be concerning or from residents' complaints or suggestions that they would like additional services or drive-bys.

Pedestrian Crashes, Bicycle Crashes and Car Crashes: Pedestrian crashes down 13, a 30% decrease. Bicycle crashes up 6, a 27% increase. Car crashes up 78, a 6% increase. There's no pattern to crashes. We have many crashes on Washington Street. This year, there was a significant number of accidents at Franklin Street and Waverley Avenue. More than half the number of crashes were at intersections or in parking lots. There were many crashes in the Newton Wellesley Hospital parking lot. We have cited bicyclists and drivers for infractions. Many crashes happen due to driver inattentiveness. The city implements traffic calming measures, yet we still have crashes in the same locations. This year, several grants allowed us to conduct traffic enforcement and we've written a significant number of tickets. Police presence deters crashes, but they still occur when the police are not present.

Questions, answers and comments:
Regarding residential burglaries, do you find patterns in neighborhoods where they occur? What are some of the common factors? Are people leaving doors and/or windows unlocked, or are they high-tech entries? Chief McMains answered that they're not typically high-tech entries. They cut screens, break windows, and find doors unlocked. We often find that they will do a drive-by, seeing no lights, they'll come back. Burglars look for Ring cameras, motion sensors, and motion lights. Burglars can do a lot of damage to a house in 15 minutes. We don't have time frames or patterns for house breaks. Typically, houses are not alarmed. Residential burglaries have been in different areas in the city.

How do burglars know houses are not alarmed? Chief McMains answered that he doesn't think they necessarily know a house is not alarmed, but they look through a window or door. Some residents have ADT security signs hoping to deter break ins. We drive through neighborhoods and there is a chance they see us coming and will hide. The best avenue is to have Ring cameras and motion lights to deter burglars.

We had an issue with a Halloween Block Party closure. How will you determine which streets will be closed in the future and which ones won't? Will Halloween block parties be limited? Chief McMains answered that there's a number of factors considered when allowing block parties. The important step is neighborhood notification. We want to ensure that the neighborhood will not be put out by closing the street. He is not aware on the number of streets requesting Halloween block parties. He will provide this information. His concern is that it is necessary to respond to a call. If we close a street, the Fire Department and ambulances must be rerouted.

Is it true that you, as the new Police Chief will concentrate on vehicle enforcement? Chief McMains answered it's important to enforce. Money citations depend on a driver's history and the factors why we stopped them. Education is important. If we can stop a driver from creating a violation by talking that's ideally what we like to do.

Regarding crashes, is the information available by ward locations? Chief McMains answered that it is not broken down by ward. The LexisNexis report management system is able to create real time maps which we can review showing hotspots and factors that resulted in crashes. In the future this information will be available to the public.

Councilor Block offered to create a crash data spreadsheet for the past year on bike, vehicle, and pedestrian crash locations.

Mental health calls have doubled since 2014. How do officers respond to mental health calls? Chief McMains answered that our social worker and Sgt. Rooney working in the problem oriented police unit (POP Unit) do follow up. We also work with Health and Human Services to provide services. All officers are trained in mental health calls, but not to the extent of the social worker. We offer services and follow up. It is taxing on officers to respond to some calls. Sometimes we rely on the medics for help or complete a Section 12 to people for evaluation. In the last 15 to 20 years, mental health calls have increased.

Is one social worker enough to handle the number of mental health calls? Chief McMains answered yes and no. Most calls are follow-up calls. The social worker and Sgt. Rooney feel they have it well handled. We do desire a social worker 24/7.

The number of total calls for service have increased since 2019, the number of directed patrols have decreased. Why does this trend exist? Chief McMains answered that he doesn't know why these trends are happening. If we respond to calls for service, we can't do direct patrols.

Commercial robberies were down, are there particular prevention steps working? Chief McMains answered that commercial breaks are different than residential breaks. Commercial buildings typically have alarm systems making it a deterrent for burglars.

Was the summer Safe Sidewalks program successful? Chief McMains answered Operations Safe Sidewalks went very well. We received 10-15 letters from residents and business owners appreciating our efforts. This year, we'll try having more officers do community outreach.

Will LexisNexis information be available? Chief McMains answered each week the department puts crime statistics on social media. I don't know how best to put that information out on LexisNexis. We're happy to take ideas and suggestions.

Are residential and commercial breaks usually at night? Chief McMains answered yes, most times when residents are not home.

In closing, Chief McMains stated that he is open to ideas on community outreach. We have not received a large response on our surveys in the past.

Chair Grossman asked Chief McMains to reach out if there are topics he would like to discuss and where we can partner to increase the safety and wellness of our residents.

Committee members thanked the Police Department for their diligence.

Without further discussion, Councilor Lipof made a motion to hold. Committee members agreed 6-0.

The Committee adjourned at 8:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Becky Grossman, Chair

APPENDIX A: Summary of 2024 Traffic Council Actions

Traffic Council Meetings	Number: 10	
Distribution by Vote	**Number**	**Pct**
No Action Necessary	*6*	10%
Approved	*40*	68%
Approved as Amended	*0*	0%
Denied	*3*	5%
Heard in 2024, Held, and still being held at end of 2024	*10*	17%
Total Number of Items Heard:	*59*	100%
Trials Undertaken in 2024	5	8%
Distribution of Items by Ward	**Number**	**Pct**
1	*12*	20%
2	*8*	14%
3	*7*	12%
4	*6*	10%
5	*2*	3%
6	*8*	14%
7	*0*	0%
8	*6*	10%
Multiple Wards	*10*	17%
Total Number of Items Heard:	59	100%
Appeals of Traffic Council Decisions	0	0%
Backlog during 2024	**# of Items**	**Date**
Average	18	
Minimum Backlog	11	2/17/24
Maximum Backlog	28	11/21/24