



Jacque Columbia, Environmental and Zoning Inspector with the City of Portsmouth is our guest speaker at our June 17, 2021, OTPCL meeting. Thank you for submitting your questions for her prior to the meeting. Please find below, Ms. Columbia responses. As a League, we can discuss and determine next steps for some of these issues.

1. WATER AND SEWER REPAIR PROJECT: When will the water and sewer Phase 2 work begin? Which streets will be affected? Where can we see the timelines and announcements for this project? Second part, what is going to be done to rectify "Middle Street Lake" that was caused by the last repair project that did not include proper drainage for the corner of North and Middle?

**Reply to Question 1:**

**There are two projects for Phase 2, 2A and 2B. Project 2A is completed. A map showing the extent of Project 2B is attached. Project 2B is bid ready; however, it has not been advertised due to Utilities capital projects being on-hold over the past fiscal year. At this point, we have no estimate on when Project 2B work will begin. It is possible that work could begin in the summer of 2022; however, this is contingent on our FY22 Capital Improvement Plan, which is in the process of being prepared.**

**Mr. James Wright may have some information on the "Middle Street Lake".**

2. COURT STREET DRAINAGE: Rumor is that Court street drainage ditches are going to be installed (good) but that the trees and the granite curbs are going to be removed. Are new trees being planted to replace the removed one? The granite curbs are historic - how do we ensure they will be maintained/replaced?

**Reply to Question 2:**

**The Court Street Green Street project will not be adding drainage ditches.**

**It will add a landscaped center median with some bio retention facilities for storm water management, bio retention facilities within the sidewalk, bike lanes and some other improvements. The granite is to be reused or replaced as appropriate. Some trees will be lost.**

**It was also noted by Engineering that the lane width along Court Street would be reduced by adding a center median as part of the Court Street Green Street project, which is scheduled to start in the next few months. This will likely make the roadway less enticing.**

3. FLOOD MITIGATION: A large grant was won by Portsmouth to install a pumping station on Dinwiddie over a year ago. When will this project begin work? If there is no schedule, whom can we press to get this project underway?



**Reply to Question 3:**

**This is what I have found out so far in reference to the pump station that is planned for 301 Washington Street: The FEMA official grant award was just received last week. The City is in the process of determining how the grant requirements will affect the project specifications and the schedule. This will take approximately 30-45 days.**

4. STREET CLEANING: Most of our streets and gutters are never cleaned by the street cleaner - he comes down the middle of the street because we side-street park. The street-cleaning schedule online is too broad (scheduled by the week instead of the day) and there is no warning for people to move their cars. Most cities have signs that say to remove their car on the X day of the month on one side of the street, and a Y day of the month on the other side of the street. This has been a persistent issue that has been brought up many times. What are the next steps to get a street cleaning schedule that is by day and published?

**Reply to Question 4:**

**A Street Sweeping schedule is posted on all of the City's social media sites and the web page, as well as sent out as an e-blast. Due to factors such as weather and mechanical issues with the sweepers, providing a day and time that street sweeping will occur in an area is not feasible.**

5. FISHING ON SEAWALL: People fishing along the Seawall in the Linear Park has gotten much worse - it is difficult to walk the seawall in this area at high tide with all of the gear and debris. Additionally, hooks and bait are often left on the ground, posing a safety issue for those of us walking our dogs. There have also been more complaints with drinking while fishing and leaving glass bottles and trash along the seawall. Lastly, some are parking in Linear Park to fish. There used to be "No Fishing" signs but they have been removed. What is the regulation for fishing along the Seawall and how can we get it re-posted and enforced?

**Reply to Question 5:**

**At this time, it has been stated that the "no fishing" signs are not going to be replaced.**

6. ABSENTEE (OR NEGLECTFUL) LANDLORDS: Numerous properties owned by absentee property owners (or not occupied) are falling into disrepair. Is it best for us to notify you directly regarding such property? How is the enforcement of repair handled by the city?

**Reply to Question 6:**

**Yes, please contact me in reference to any properties that you feel are in need of repair (vacant or occupied). In addition, if any addresses could be given to me for the said properties, that would be greatly appreciated, and I can look at my case notes for each. Vacant or occupied, a 30-Day Notice of Violation is sent out. After the 30 days (prior to COVID), we would send the owner to an Administrative Hearing. Those take place once a month on a Wednesday. Once that time has passed**



and if the owner still has not complied, we send a Final Property Maintenance letter, letting the owner know that our next step is Court proceedings. This is usually a 45-day process due to obtaining the summons and having the owner physically served. Our cases are criminal cases, and they require the owner to be physically served. The summons may not be posted on the door, so this takes additional time.

7. LITTER: There has been a noticeable decline in city workers emptying the park trash cans (especially at Red Lion Park and Greenwich Park) as well as picking up litter around city property, such as the old Holiday Inn site. Additionally, there seems to be no enforcement for businesses to pick up the litter around their buildings (notably the corner of North and Effingham - the Starbucks dumpsters are routinely overflowing, and the trash blows down the street). Who do we call to enforce litter pickup in these areas? Who can fine the business for not picking up the litter on their property? Is more being done to hire more city employees to pick up trash? Has the city looked into programs that hire the homeless to pick up trash for cash, as done in other metropolitan areas?

**Reply to Question 7:**

If you notice a commercial or residential property that has overflowing trash or debris, you may contact me.

Per Parks and Recreation, this is their response to your question: We routinely empty the park trashcans and pick up litter throughout the city. Since COVID, the amount of trash and litter in the nation, not just Portsmouth, has more than quadrupled. There are several Pilot articles that speak to this in some of our neighboring cities, and several national news outlets that have similar reports.

Because of this, we have even reassigned an entire crew just for trash and litter detail. We have also been emptying park trashcans at the same rate or even more often than usual. Additionally, we are still trying to hire additional part-time, full-time, and temporary staff to assist with this ongoing task.

8. LARGE SERVICE TRUCKS: Large trucks used to be banned from using Court St. as a thoroughfare. Lately Dollar General Semi-trucks as well as large food service trucks have rumbled down our street repeatedly. What can be done to prevent these large trucks from using Court Street as a cut-through?

**Reply to Question 8:**

The Portsmouth Police Department has been notified and it was stated that they will be monitoring the area.

It was also noted by Engineering that the lane width along Court Street would be reduced by adding a center median as part of the Court Street Green Street project, which is scheduled to start in the next few months. This will likely make the roadway less enticing.



9. BUILDING PERMIT PROCESS: What is the process for getting approval for residential work or construction in Olde Towne? Do external repairs "in kind" need to go to the Historic Preservation Board? Where can the process be found?

**Reply to Question 9:**

**The first step is to contact the Planning Department so that any in-kind work can be given a Certificate of Appropriates.**

**Noted by planning "in-kind" replace needs approval from our office. We usually issue a certificate same day OR at max within 24hr. Only on exterior repairs.**

**If there will be work that may require a Building Permit or a Zoning Clearance, then the next step will be directed to Zoning and then Building for a Permit. If there are significant changes to be made that require approval from the Planning Commission or HPC, then they will be scheduled and required through the Planning Department. This information is available on our City website or by contacting Building at 393-8522, Planning and Zoning at 393-8836.**

10. CONDEMNED BUILDING: 329 Dinwiddie has been condemned and abandoned for over two years. What is the plan to remove or rebuild that house?

**Reply to Question 10:**

**I currently have an active case for this parcel. This property is currently being maintained by the lien holder. They recently replaced the fence and are making efforts to repair the front porch. It was condemned several years ago due to it was being occupied without water. The front door has been secured and boarded and at this time, there are no plans in place to remove or rebuild.**