

City of Salem, Massachusetts



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City Ordinance Sections 2-2028 through 2-2033."**

The City Council Committee on Ordinances, Licenses and Legal Affairs co-posted Committee of the Whole

met in the Council Chamber on August 13, 2026 at 6:00 P.M.

for the purpose of discussing the matters(s) listed below. Notice of this meeting was posted on

July 29, 2026 at 8:20 A.M.

(This meeting is being recorded)

ATTENDANCE

OLLA – Varela (chair), Hapworth and Holappa. **COW** – Turowski and Merkl. **From the city** – David Kucharsky, Director of Transportation Department and Deputy Fire Chief Peter Schaeublin.

ABSENT WERE: **OLLA** – Prosniewski and Smith. **COW** – Davis, King, Flynn and Sydoriak.

#331 Ordinance Relative to Traffic, Ch 42, Sec. 13B – Fire Lanes, Beach and Sutton Ave (s)

Turowski - The discussion focused on establishing a redundant emergency access route to the Willows in case Columbus Avenue becomes inaccessible during catastrophic flooding or other emergencies. The issue arose after a flooding event on Columbus Avenue prevented fire department access to a house fire in the neighborhood. Although a new seawall is expected to reduce future flooding risks, officials emphasized the need for an alternative route because emergencies can occur unexpectedly.

The proposed route would use an existing path through the Willows on public property. A stone bollard that previously restricted vehicle access has been removed, creating sufficient width for emergency vehicles. However, the corner near Beach and Sutton Avenues is currently used for resident parking, with as many as six vehicles sometimes parked there illegally, and the nearby fire hydrant has also been blocked.

The Fire Department has proposed establishing two designated fire lanes/no-parking areas at the intersection to ensure emergency vehicles can pass. This would result in a net loss of approximately two legal parking spaces, one at each end of the corner. An alternative route through Island Avenue was considered, but that access point involves private property and additional concerns about the width of the passage. As a result, using the existing public path through the Willows was presented as the most practical solution.

Kucharsky – He explained that they removed existing bollards which is intended to restore emergency vehicle access through the area. The current configuration has vehicles parked perpendicular to the street, effectively using the area as a parking lot, including an illegal encroachment near a fire hydrant. State law prohibits parking within 10 feet of a hydrant.

The proposed fire lane would primarily make the corner accessible to emergency vehicles. He estimated that at most two to three spaces would be lost, and those spaces would not be legally permitted parking spaces because of the hydrant and fire-access requirements. He emphasized that the change is specifically intended to ensure emergency services can reach the neighborhood when needed. He also noted that Sutton Street and Beach Street would remain resident-permit streets; the proposal would only open up the corner to provide the necessary emergency access.

Discussion

The discussion centered on the proposed emergency access route to the Willows/Sutton & Beach Avenue area and the goal of providing emergency vehicles with a reliable way to reach the neighborhood when the primary roads are affected by flooding or other emergencies.

The proposal was reviewed as a way to improve emergency response and public safety, particularly when flooding can limit access to portions of the neighborhood. The discussion considered how an emergency vehicle would travel through the proposed route and the physical constraints of the area, including narrow sections and the connection between the Willows parking area, the beach, and Sutton & Beach Avenue.

A significant part of the discussion involved seasonal and operational challenges. The committee considered how the route would function during snow and flooding and the need to ensure that emergency vehicles could actually use the access when necessary. Questions were raised about snow removal, maintaining adequate clearance, and preventing snow from being deposited in locations that could block the route.

The discussion also addressed the impact on nearby residents, including parking and access to their homes. There was consideration of how the emergency access designation could affect existing parking arrangements and whether accommodations would be needed for residents, particularly those living along or immediately adjacent to the proposed route.

Alternative access options were also considered, including Island Avenue and other potential connections, but these presented challenges involving private property and feasibility.

The committee also discussed the need for clear procedures governing use of the emergency access. This included determining when the route would be activated, how residents would be notified, and who would be responsible for opening, maintaining, and keeping the route clear for emergency vehicles.

Overall, the discussion indicated general support for improving emergency access to the Willows, while recognizing that the proposed route would need careful planning, ongoing maintenance, clear operational responsibilities, and consideration of resident impacts. The central issue was ensuring that the emergency route would be genuinely usable during poor conditions, particularly flooding and winter weather, when emergency access is most important.

Public Comment Summary

Public comment focused primarily on the feasibility and safety of the proposed emergency access route to the Willows/Sutton & Beach Avenue area, particularly during winter and flooding conditions.

Brian Hennessy, a longtime Sutton Avenue resident, said he supports having emergency vehicle access to the Willows but questioned whether the proposed route would actually work when it is most needed. He said he has never had difficulty accessing his home because vehicles can generally use Bayview Avenue and Sutton Avenue, even during limited flooding. His major concern was winter snow accumulation, describing snowdrifts along the proposed path that can reach 50–60 feet wide and approximately four feet deep and remain for four or five months. He stated that an ambulance or fire truck would not be able to get through such conditions. Hennessy suggested exploring alternatives, including emergency access through the parking lot behind the skee-ball building, which he said is at a higher elevation and could potentially connect Bayview Avenue to Sutton Avenue through a gate or removable fence. He also mentioned Island Avenue as another possible option, although he understood that private property issues prevented that route.

Cynthia Jerzylo, who said she has worked on the project for more than five years, emphasized that the goal should be to help residents without negatively affecting them. She supported concerns about the snowdrifts and questioned whether the city would be able to keep the proposed access route plowed throughout the winter. She also raised a concern about parking for elderly residents at One Beach Avenue, asking whether the plan could preserve at least one parking space in front of their home. She noted that Island Avenue had originally been viewed as the most practical emergency access option but was rejected by the city.

Judith White focused on communication and maintenance responsibilities. She asked whether residents would receive advance notification when the proposed emergency access route needed to be used, beyond existing snow-emergency parking notifications. She suggested an alert system so residents directly affected by emergency vehicle access would know when the route was being activated. White also asked who would be responsible for ensuring that emergency vehicles could travel the entire route from the Willows parking lot through the beach area and the narrow section near Beach Avenue. She specifically questioned who would make sure snowplowing did not leave large piles of snow blocking the access point.

Overall, commenters generally supported the goal of providing emergency access but raised significant concerns about whether the proposed route would remain usable during snow, snowdrifts, flooding, and other conditions when emergency access would be most critical. They urged the city to consider alternative routes, maintain adequate resident parking, establish clear notification procedures, and assign responsibility for keeping the emergency route passable.

Deputy Fire Chief Schaeublin agreed that Sutton Avenue & Beach Avenue were the best option and that the emergency vehicles could fit down the streets.

Vote

Hapworth motioned to send the ordinance to the full City Council with a positive recommendation for first passage at the next council meeting. It was seconded by Holappa and motion carried 3-0.

on the motion of C. Hapworth, the meeting adjourned at 6:25 P.M.

Andrew Varela

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(Chairperson)