

SPECIAL JOINT MEETING
City Council and Planning Commission
6:00 p.m., Wednesday, May 11, 2011

The Planning Commission and City Council held a Special Joint Meeting at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, May 11, 2011 in Council Chambers of City Hall, 1207 Palm Boulevard, Isle of Palms, South Carolina. Attending the meeting were Councilmembers Bergwerf, Bettelli, Buckhannon, Duffy, Loftus, Piening and Thomas, Mayor Cronin, Planning Commission members Bev Ballow, David Cohen, Ron Denton, Pete Doherty, Diane Oltorik and Noel Scott, City Administrator Tucker, Building Director Kerr, Assistant to the Administrator Dziuban and City Clerk Copeland.

1. Mayor Cronin called the meeting to order and acknowledged that the press and public had been duly notified of the meeting in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act.

2. Discussion of Parking Management

Director Kerr stated that he and the Planning Commission had left the joint meeting held in the fall with the impression that City Council agreed with the concepts they thought important to include in a parking management plan and that City Council wanted them to start generating an actual plan to be implemented. For this meeting, the Planning Commission has more concrete information that they want to impart to the Council for additional feedback. The Planning Commission's plan has four (4) major components; they are

- 1) To open up nodes of parking, holding approximately ten (10) vehicles, on the ocean side of Ocean Boulevard where the public accesses are sixty-foot (60 ft.) wide rights-of-way that extend to the ocean (a conceptual sketch was included in the meeting packet);
- 2) To continue to allow parking along Palm Boulevard, but how it will be done has yet to be determined; parking at the ends of the avenues between 41st and 57th Avenue would continue;
- 3) To charge non-residents for parking in the areas already specified as allowed for parking a fee to park similar to that charged in the commercial district;
- 4) To eliminate all non-resident beach parking from all other portions of the island.

Director Kerr acknowledged that a myriad of details remain to be ironed out, but the Planning Commission wanted to know that they are headed in a direction supported by City Council before going forward.

At the previous joint meeting, the concept of chalking a white line four (4) feet from the pavement on a section of Palm Boulevard was discussed to see if visitors would understand where they should park. Mayor Cronin reported that the experiment had been done, and he offered photographs of the results for the group to see. In addition, he had photographs of vehicles parked in areas without the chalk line that were obviously too close to the roadway, vehicles parked with tires on the roadway and vehicles parked too near the intersection interfering with a driver's line of sight.

Parking too close to the intersections was a problem on Carolina, so the City had signs erected that state "No Parking Here to Corner" that have worked well; similar signs have been requested for Charleston Boulevard and a long stretch of Palm Boulevard. Mayor Cronin stated that he

expects these signs to move parking to the center of each block and farther down Palm Boulevard.

Mayor Cronin continued by stating that the island has just over seven (7) miles of beach, and, by removing the inlets, just over six (6) miles of active beach. The active beach area, by zoning districts, is the two (2) Single-family Residential (SR) districts on either side of the commercial district making up three and three quarter (3¾) miles and encompassing twenty-one hundred nine (2,109) properties, the General Commercial district which is thirty-five hundredths (0.35) of a mile and three hundred forty-two (342) properties, and the Planned Development District (PDD) with two (2) miles of beach and two thousand sixty-one (2,061) properties.

In the Commercial District, the City has one hundred thirty-five (135) metered spaces, the City parking lots averaging three hundred thirty-four (334) vehicles on an average day and the County park that averages two hundred twenty-five (225) cars; the total number of cars in the Commercial District on an average day are one thousand forty (1,040). In the Mayor's opinion, these average numbers mean that the City does not need to consider a parking garage in the near future; his logic is that there is not enough beach to accommodate any more people even if there were more spaces in which to park in that area.

On the other hand, the Planning Commission estimates that between five hundred and six hundred (500-600) cars are parking between 21st and 57th Avenues on a busy day.

Mayor Cronin opened discussion on the four (4) points of the parking plan proposed by the Planning Commission, beginning with the parking nodes on Ocean Boulevard.

1) Parking Nodes on Ocean Boulevard

Director Kerr commented that five (5) of the sixty-foot (60 ft.) rights-of-way are at the ends of the avenues between 2nd Avenue and 9th Avenue; the remaining three (3) are forty feet (40 ft.) wide. The depiction of a parking node in the meeting packet is laid out for one (1) of the wider accesses; the forty-foot (40 ft.) rights-of-way would require slightly different configuration. The illustration also has a ten-foot (10 ft.) buffer on either side of the parking; the buffering is a challenge for the smaller nodes.

Councilmember Duffy asked the Director if angled parking had been considered versus parallel. Director Kerr responded that the smaller nodes must accommodate six (6) vehicles to comply with the Beach Management Plan; therefore, either angled or parallel will work.

Councilmember Buckhannon queried whether the smaller nodes could be limited to electric vehicle parking; the Director stated that he is unsure how OCRM defines the word "vehicle" and was, therefore, hesitant to give a definitive answer.

Mayor Cronin asked Director Kerr to explain what would need to be done structurally to these sites to make them suitable for parking. Generally the soil at each is sandy and the grade is undulating; therefore each site would require grading, the addition of some type of surface and the delineation of spaces. In addition, each site would need whatever work was necessary to accommodate method of payment and an encroachment permit for the space that was in the

state right-of-way. The Director assured the group that all work would take place well outside of the OCRM jurisdictional area relative to the OCRM critical line

Director Kerr pointed out on the parking node drawing that the seaward-most vehicles would not be visible from the beach-front residential porches.

The subject changed to one identifying vehicles belonging to property owners or long-term renters; Mr. Denton stated that the Planning Commission had thought that this process would logically become an extension of the hurricane re-entry stickers. Administrator Tucker recommended that, if the current stickers were to be the mechanism, the City should expire all that have been issued and re-issue a different sticker to serve this dual purpose. Presently stickers are issued to non-resident businesses who would want to determine the status of their operation following a hurricane; these stickers should be readily distinguishable from resident stickers.

Councilmember Bettelli asked the Director how many parking spaces were required to make Ocean Boulevard compliant with the Beach Management Plan; Director Kerr responded that six (6) spaces were required for each beach access. The Councilmember then asked why the Planning Commission was looking at ten (10) parking spaces for these nodes versus staying with the minimum of six (6) to reduce the impact on Ocean Boulevard. Councilmember Bettelli was told that parking within five hundred (500) feet of a beach access had been included in the Beach Management Plan, which counted space on Carolina and Charleston. Councilmember Bettelli stated his point as being that the nodes, as presented, offered more parking than currently is available; to reduce the nodes to accommodate six (6) vehicles would still meet the requirements of the Beach Management Plan and reduce the visibility from the houses along side.

Director Kerr commented that the Planning Commission had wrestled with the question "What is the right number of cars?" Concepts they dealt with were as follows:

- Provide spaces for the same number of cars that can conceptually park on the island today;
- Provide enough spaces for the number of cars that are defined in the Beach Management Plan; or
- Provide enough spaces for the number of cars that visit the island on an average busy day.

According to the Director, the Planning Commission chose to provide parking spaces for the average busy day at the Isle of Palms; in the Director's opinion, to reduce the nodes to six (6) spaces would not meet that goal for the Planning Commission.

Councilmember Loftus recalled the demographics presented in the most recent census that the number of people moving into the Low Country and visiting the beaches will continue to increase in coming years.

Mayor Cronin expressed satisfaction with the illustration of the parking node and stated that spaces should be dedicated for golf carts.

Mayor Cronin and Councilmember Loftus agreed that the parking nodes were a creative approach to spreading out the parking and remove cars from the avenues. The Mayor stated that this proposal needs to be made more public so that the property owners on Ocean Boulevard are made aware of the direction the parking management initiative is taking.

Director Kerr explained that, once the Planning Commission gets City Council's approval of the concepts, their strategy is to hold another public forum to present a plan to the residents. When that phase is complete, the plan will be presented to City Council for them to address before implementation.

2) Parking on Palm Boulevard

The Director stated that, although the Planning Commission has not come to a consensus about how parking should be accomplished on Palm Boulevard, they do agree that parking should be allowed on Palm Boulevard and that visitors should be required to pay for that privilege.

Mayor Cronin described the need to insure that visitors park four (4) feet from the roadway on the both sides of Palm and that vehicles be kept the required distance from intersections. The Mayor expressed hope that, by pushing cars to the middle of the blocks and off the avenues, they will not be so bunched up, and parking will be extended farther down Palm.

Mr. Scott commented that surfers will continue to congregate in the areas that are best for surfing.

Councilmember Bergwerf expressed her opinion that parking on Palm should be limited to the ocean-side of the road, leaving the non-ocean side for residents. Mr. Scott countered that such a limitation in the area of 41st Avenue and the City remain in compliance with the Beach Management Plan without requiring the removal of all obstructions in the right-of-way.

Mr. Cohen voiced concern over the parking management concepts being discussed because the City has a Beach Management Plan in place that describes a given number of parking spaces and the concepts reduce that number; he is uncertain about the impact on the Beach Management Plan from the Planning Commission's work.

Based on past experience, Administrator Tucker explained that the City's Beach Management Plan is reviewed periodically to determine whether the City is following its own directives. If certain incentives are not being met, OCRM may cite the City for potentially being out of compliance; the City has the opportunity to rebut the claims. At that time, OCRM determines whether the City's Beach Management Plan is approved or not.

Councilmember Bergwerf commented that the City has only had a Beach Management Plan in recent years and asked what the status was prior to that. Administrator Tucker stated that state beach-related funds are not available to beach communities without a management plan.

Based on communications with Chris Jones, the City's beach renourishment consultant, the City provides ten to twelve (10-12) times the number of parking spaces the state requires.

Mr. Cohen posed two (2) questions to the Council, and they were:

- To limit parking to the ocean-side of Palm without removing the obstructions in the right-of-way would reduce parking by fifty percent on Palm Boulevard; is that the direction City Council is giving?
- How much does City Council want to reduce the parking along Palm Boulevard?

Administrator Tucker commented that, if the City makes its rules too restrictive, people will opt to pay the ticket and park illegally.

Mayor Cronin read the following from the April Planning Commission meeting:

“The goal of the City’s parking strategy should be to more evenly distribute the beach traffic across all parts of the beach and to keep roadways, not immediately adjacent to the ocean, free of non-resident beach traffic and parking.”

Councilmember Loftus stated that he, too, supported parking only on the ocean-side of Palm Boulevard with resident and golf cart parking on the landside. He also stated there should be flexibility to accommodate periods when the City knows it will be inundated with visitors, i.e. Memorial Day, July 4th and Labor Day, by allowing visitor parking on the landside on Palm, as well.

Mr. Schoultz remarked that 25th Avenue has become a major thoroughfare for both vehicles and pedestrians and expressed concern about those who park and walk there. He asked if the City would consider putting a double chalk line at the corners 25th Avenue to prevent parking. Mayor Cronin stated that he was not opposed to experimenting.

When the Mayor brought up the subject of obstructions in the right-of-way, Councilmember Bergwerf stated that she thought the obstructions would be a non-issue once resident-only parking for the majority of the island was established. Mayor Cronin noted that a lot of right-of-way obstructions exist along Palm Boulevard and on the avenues between 41st and 57th Avenue.

As the subject segued to the area between 41st and 57th Avenue, Councilmember Duffy voiced the opinion that 42nd Avenue was the only finger street that the City should continue to maintain because the City has allowed parking there for a long time. Councilmember Duffy also suggested that, since public access should extend five hundred (500) feet from a beach access, parking should be allowed on the Waterway Boulevard side of Palm in that area as well; he contended that the finger streets were residential streets where resident-only parking should be allowed. In addition, Councilmember Duffy commented that emergency vehicles have a difficult time getting through the parked vehicles on the finger streets.

Mayor Cronin stated that he thought a focus of the parking issue was to ensure the safety of visitors when they come to the beach and he thought the finger streets to be among the safest. Councilmember Bergwerf said she thought the focus was the quality of life for the residents and limiting the number of cars – no matter how safe.

Mayor Cronin expressed disagreement with Councilmember Duffy; the Mayor stated that the right-of-way is sufficient for cars to park safely, well off the roadway and not on private property.

Mr. Scott stated that, around 56th and 57th Avenues, cars would have to be parked on Palm to accommodate the Beach Management Plan. Director Kerr agreed that the road rights-of-way to the beach do not exist beyond 53rd Avenue.

Councilmember Loftus voiced his opinion that parking on the finger streets was the same as parking on Carolina and Charleston. Administrator Tucker remarked that, on the DOT roads, they will require enough space for a vehicle to perform a three-point turn at the ends of the streets.

Director Kerr asked Council whether they would prefer for him model parking at the ends of the avenues after the parking at 42nd Avenue considering the Beach Management Plan. Councilmember Duffy agreed that spacing similar to 42nd Avenue would be acceptable.

The subject again shifted to obstructions in the right-of-way, and Councilmember Loftus stated that the City should be vigilant with new construction that obstructions are not put in the rights-of-way. Councilmember Bettelli agreed that enforcement was the key to compliance, and he recommended the systematic removal of these obstructions throughout the island.

Councilmember Bergwerf stated that City should not get involved in this issue; she again commented that these obstructions would be a non-issue once the City mandated resident-only parking in the neighborhoods. Ms. Oltorik questioned that the obstructions on Palm Boulevard should be addressed because they are a major impediment to the concept of ocean-side parking only.

Administrator Tucker explained that, although removing the obstructions sounds like a simple task, it is a complicated one. Several years ago, the City went through a lengthy process about what the City had the right to enforce and what the City was reliant upon SCDOT to enforce. The Administrator related that the Building Department was currently involved in attempting to carry out the directive from Council to prevent new obstructions at properties on either end of the island; Director Kerr stated that he has learned that the City does not have the authority that it would like to have.

Mayor Cronin asked whether SCDOT would be willing to give the City the authority to manage their rights-of-way; Administrator Tucker reminded the Mayor that two (2) different, legal documents govern the rights-of-way. One (1) of these documents would clearly give the City the authority, but the other is not as clear, and the City has never gotten a clear interpretation from DOT as to which document applies to which roads.

Mayor Cronin and Administrator Tucker confirmed that SCDOT has issued encroachment permits for some of the obstructions on some properties on the island. Councilmember Buckhannon recalled that the City had to make a formal request to SCDOT to stop issuing encroachment permits for multiple curb cuts to property on Palm Boulevard; Mayor Cronin

clarified the process in that SCDOT will seek the City's approval before considering dual curb cuts on the island.

Mayor Cronin encouraged the City staff to pursue the means to have the authority to stop new right-of-way obstructions; the City Administrator responded that an action of Council was what was needed.

According to the Administrator, ordinances were drafted at one time to accomplish this task, and portions of them were passed. Administrator Tucker stated that, if this was the will of Council, she would be willing to present the ordinances for review.

From the ordinances passed several years ago, the City was clearly given the authority to prevent obstructions in the right-of-way for City owned streets.

3) Pay to Park

Mayor Cronin remarked that he was under the impression that everyone was in agreement with charging some dollar figure to park in the designated areas of the island; details about how much and daily, weekly, monthly or seasonally will be worked out in the future.

4) Restrict Non-resident Parking on the Avenues

Mayor Cronin expressed concern that accomplishing this section of the parking management plan would be difficult; he described a scenario where a resident was hosting a child's birthday party and parents were lining the street to deliver and pick up their child(ren). The Mayor said that many people come to the island for only a few hours to visit friends, family, etc., to attend a wedding or party or to attend an event at the Recreation Center.

Councilmember Loftus stated that, based on the discussion, Council agreed with the principles set forth by the Planning Commission; therefore, he was interested in establishing a timeline for presenting it to island residents and for implementing.

Director Kerr reported that the Planning Commission had debated timing for implementation and had agreed that the plan conceivably could be done in 2012, but that it would be less than perfect; whereas a 2013 implementation was more realistic.

Administrator Tucker stated that many steps remained to be considered and taken before implementation of this parking plan, for instance, estimates of the cost of implementation and coordination with various other entities. The Administrator suggested that the City would be more successful with implementation if the parking plan were to be phased.

Councilmember Piening stated that implementation should begin in 2012; he commented that residents become frustrated with government when there is talk and no action.

Councilmember Bettelli expressed his opinion that residents on Carolina are experiencing the problems now; therefore, he thought it should be a priority.

Mayor Cronin suggested that the City look at having the nodes on Ocean Boulevard in place a year from now. Administrator Tucker stated that, assuming this is the goal, a budget for this phase will need to be established, which means changing the FY12 budget to incorporate some of the expenses that will be incurred, and hiring a design engineer to do the portions of the project that will take place on the ground.

At this point, Administrator Tucker summarized the task assigned to her and Director Kerr as the implementation of the parking nodes on the ocean-side of Ocean Boulevard to include the cost of the physical improvements, expenses associated with the mode of payment and the personnel to accomplish the task.

Councilmember Loftus suggested that resident-only parking for Charleston and Carolina coincide with the implementation of the parking nodes on Ocean Boulevard.

Councilmember Duffy insisted that the overall plan needed to be developed for presentation to residents.

Director Kerr again brought up the subject of how much City Council wanted to reduce the volume of cars parked along Palm Boulevard, because allowing visitor parking on the ocean-side and resident-only parking on the land-side would substantially reduce the parking for visitors. Mayor Cronin stated that he would be content to continue to accommodate the numbers that are on the island currently, but distribute them more evenly down Palm Boulevard, and he supported visitor parking on both sides of the road. Councilmember Duffy agreed that parking should be sufficient to accommodate a typical, busy weekend on the island, but he would be happier if that could be accomplished by parking on the ocean-side of Palm.

Councilmember Bergwerf remarked that everyone wanted to drive visitor parking to the City lots, but, for that to happen, better signage was necessary. Administrator Tucker recounted that the signage for the parking lots had been discussed in a Real Property Committee meeting with the manager of the lots; the Committee had asked the lot manager to determine the best location for signage, and he has not delivered that information to the Committee for further action.

Mayor Cronin closed the meeting at 8 p.m.