



**Special Public Safety Committee
10:00am, Thursday, February 10, 2022
1207 Palm Boulevard, Isle of Palms, SC
and broadcasted live on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/cityofisleofpalms>**

MINUTES

1. Call to order

Present: Council members Hahn, Anderson, and Streetman

Staff Present: Administrator Fragoso, Director Kerr, Interim Chief Briscoe, Chief Cornett, Deputy Chief Hathaway, City Attorney Halversen

Also present: Jennifer Bihl

MOTION: Council Member Streetman made a motion to amend the agenda to allow for Citizen's Comments. Council Member Anderson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

2. Citizen's Comments

Mic Smith, 23rd Avenue, said he would like to see the IOP Connector striped for one lane on, two lanes off, and to remove one set of bike and pedestrian lanes.

3. Purpose – The purpose of the special meeting is to update the Public Safety Committee on the status of discussions between IOP and SCDOT regarding the agreed IOP Connector Study and to discuss two possible scopes of work. The expected outcome of the meeting is for the Committee to agree on the scope of work for the Connector Study.

- A. Set Study Goals
- B. Update on conversations with SCDOT
- C. Discussion of Phase 1 scope
- D. Discussion of Phase 2 scope
- E. Coordination opportunities with Mt. Pleasant, Sullivan's Island, and Charleston County
- F. Recommendations to City Council

Council Member Anderson reviewed the purpose of the meeting. Council Member Hahn said this is not the purpose for which he asked for this meeting. He only wants to speak to the City Attorney in Executive Session about hiring a traffic engineer and possible litigation against SCDOT.

Council Member Anderson said she would like to have the study address emergency access and a hurricane evacuation plan for the Connector as well as the traffic congestion which will require a longer-term study.

Administrator Fragoso said the City has conveyed to SCDOT their disappointment in how the Connector was restriped. The City continues to exchange feedback with SCDOT about the scope of a study they said they would conduct. She explained the purpose of the study is to look at the root causes of the traffic issues and alternatives not only for the Connector but for the full corridor.

Administrator Fragoso stated, “The Secretary agreed to expand the scope of that project in two phases. Phase one would be the original purpose of the study which is what’s on top of mind on the connector and the changes that were done, but also adding a phase two which would look at signal times and intersections, Hungryneck, Rifle Range, and all the way to 17.” She said the last conversation the City had with SCDOT was requesting the scope be expanded to look at all those places and numerous alternatives but they have not yet received the final scope. Originally, SCDOT said they would like to have the study completed within six months.

The City has hired Bihl Engineering to “assist the City throughout this process and to attend these meetings with the City to help us get an understanding.” There will be a kickoff meeting with all the stakeholders to identify the kinds of data that should be looked at. Phase 1 is expected to take six months while Phase 2 will last longer.

Jennifer Bihl of Bihl Engineering introduced herself and reviewed her credentials for the Committee.

3. Executive Session

MOTION: Council Member Streetman made a motion to move into Executive Session in accordance with SC Code §30-4-70(a)(2) to receive legal advice regarding SCDOT’s actions related to the IOP Connector. Council Member Hahn seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The Committee moved into Executive Session at 10:22am.

The Committee returned from Executive Session at 11:14am.

4. Purpose

Council Member Streetman said there were no votes and no action was taken during Executive Session.

Council Member Anderson reviewed Phase 1 of the study. Phase 1 is “where we look at how the Connector was changed in the striping and whether there’s other alternative, whether we return it to the way it was, keep it the way it is now, or look at some alternatives in terms of what’s the best way to meet the needs of the Isle of Palms.” Council members Streetman and Hahn had nothing to add to Phase 1.

The Committee asked Deputy Chief Hathaway to speak about the safety of the Connector. Deputy Chief Hathaway said that traffic is a “tradition” here on the island and it has always been heavy. He said the concerns that Public Safety had about the Connector related to versatility and the ways in which the previous configuration allowed them to respond to incidents on the bridge. He added that since the restriping “we’ve not had any remarkable changes that would indicate that there is a problem thus far, but again, what it has done is change the versatility that we had once before.” Public Safety has observed that the changes to the Connector affect other parts of the island, but there has been nothing remarkable to date.

Council Member Hahn asked why the number of accidents on the connector doubled in 2021. Chief Cornett said that while the island overall experienced a 6% decrease in vehicle collisions, there was a significant increase in collisions on the Connector which he attributes to distracted driving, some of which is likely caused by slower moving traffic and drivers following too closely.

He said there was a 41-second decrease in EMS response time while police and fire response times increased island-wide. He believes traffic congestion played a role in that increased response time. He said one of the department’s goals in 2022 is to work on decreasing that response time. Referring to a graph provided to the Committee, he noted that there were faster EMS response times in March, April, and May, slower response times in June through October, but all overall response times had become faster.

Jennifer Bihl spoke about the scope of Phase 1 of the study. She said it will be more of a “high-level study” that will be very focused on the Connector including the intersection with Palm Boulevard. She said it would be important to review traffic volumes from various times of year and not just the summer because different times of the year bring different traffic concerns. It will be important to start Phase 1 soon so that data from this summer season can be collected. Ms. Beall suggested reviewing the traffic alternatives would be part of a longer-term study. She said including the study of unsignalized intersections would also be in Phase 2. Committee members suggested including the intersections just off of Rifle Range, the Hungryneck Extension, and the Isle of Palms County Park.

Administrator Fragoso said there will be a meeting next week with Charleston County Parks & Recreation to discuss automated payment options for the park to help ease traffic congestion in that area.

Council Member Anderson said it will be important to include the Town of Mt. Pleasant in what is happening so they are “fully on board with it” and to make sure they understand how these studies could be mutually beneficial.

Regarding the addition of hurricane evacuation planning to Phase 1, Administrator Fragoso said SCDOT had developed plans and offered to come to the City to provide training on the new modifications. Ms. Bihl added that the impacts of the changes on the hurricane evacuation plan should be in Phase 1.

Administrator Fragoso said that time is of the essence in getting the scopes of these plans to City Council. She would like to revise the scopes as discussed in today's meeting and present them to City Council at the end of the month. The revised scopes will be included in the agenda for anyone to provide feedback. City Council allocated \$15,000 for Bihl Engineering to advise the City and review the SCDOT study, but more money will need to be allocated for the larger scope of Phase 2, which will be discussed in the FY23 budget process.

MOTION: Council Member Hahn made a motion to recommend to City Council that a letter be sent to SCDOT based on statute 57-8-20 "that the City has not agreed to the changes to the Connector and requests that the Connector be returned to its original striping until such time as an agreed upon change to the Connector can be reached." Council Member Streetman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Council Member Hahn made a motion to recommend to City Council "that an expert be hired to cost no more than \$15,000 to identify all violations of South Carolina statutes, laws, SCDOT regulations, or generally accepted safety requirements on the Connector as it is currently." Council Member Streetman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

5. Adjournment

Council Member Streetman made a motion to adjourn, and Council Member Hahn seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 12:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Nicole DeNeane
City Clerk