



SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING
5:00pm, Monday, December 18, 2023
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, Ward, Anderson, Bogosian, Streetman, Popson, Miars, Pierce, and Mayor Pounds

Staff Present: Administrator Fragoso, Director Kerr, various department heads

MOTION: Council Member Ward made a motion to add an update and discussion of beach conditions to the agenda. Council Member Streetman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

2. Purpose

A. Update on the beach restoration efforts and storm update

Administrator Fragoso said, "As you all know, the city was impacted as the entire region was on Sundy due to a nor'easter. We had pretty high water levels recorded in Charleston Harbor of about 9.86. That is the second highest that we've seen since Hugo. So needless to say, we had significant flooding all over the island. Most of the standing water has receded with the exception of some areas of Waterway, Palm Boulevard. We have some standing water in the areas that we typically have around 30th block, but most of the flooding has subsided. So far, most of the impact that we had was on the beach. We had significant beach erosion on the Breach Inlet side between about 108 Ocean and the beach access 3A. We have some properties there where their pools are now exposed and some structural damage. We also had significant beach erosion around Beachwood East. That is, as you all know, an area that was experiencing erosion before the storm and Council had approved some money for us to do some sand scraping and the placement of sandbags. That area has now been expanded from about 11 Beachwood East to 5 Dune Crest. We also saw significant erosion around the Ocean Club. That is an area that was pretty badly impacted before the last beach renourishment project was done in 2018. We had Collins Construction there, the contractor that we have been working with on emergency erosion for the past several weeks since the last storm, and we had them lined up to deploy and being the debris removal operations on the beach in the area where they are going to be working under emergency conditions. So they have started today with the pre-removal there in both locations, and they actually started some beach emergency sand scraping in both areas. We have been in communication and working through with OCRM for the additional emergency orders that we require. We have been back and forth on providing documentation to that extent.

“In the meantime, our Public Works crews did clear some minor debris from the beach between the Sea Cabins pier and 3A. And tomorrow, they will be working north of the pier towards Wild Dunes. We assessed the beach a couple times yesterday and this morning, and there is not significant debris in the middle section of the island. We are seeing most of the damage on each end, the north and the south end. We had some leaks in City buildings. We are still evaluating that nothing major happened. We will have some damage around the grounds of the rec center. The staff spent most of the day cleaning all of that new mulch that was placed in the playground and trying to reuse that and clearing the grounds. So I think we are pretty caught up there.

“We had some washout around the area of 36th Avenue. That is the location of the outfall project, the second outfall that we have been working on. We had some blockage there that will need to be repaired and created some erosion around the drainage pipes that were just installed yesterday. We communicated with SCDOT who quickly deployed teams to the island to help clear some ditches that were clogged. And we submitted another list of locations that we need help with and they are coordinating additional crews that they will be sending our way.

“At a high level, that is where we are. We are prepared to execute a contract with the third-party vendor that we engaged a couple of months ago. If you all recall, we entered into a separate agreement with the debris removal contractor that works for the County. The County has not yet made a determination on a disaster declaration. They are still collecting data from each municipality to see whether or not they meet the threshold for a request for public assistance. We have submitted our estimates of damage, but we have the ability to trigger a contract with that same contractor in the event that they don’t, and we want and need assistance for debris removal. We are in the process of quantifying what that would be and have them start helping our Public Works crews collecting yard debris and miscellaneous as we anticipate we will have an increase as people start clearing out their yards and cleaning out their houses. If they had any flooding, we anticipate to have more than usual in terms of volume, so we want to be caught up with that and provide assistance to our Public Works crews. So we have not yet executed that. I will report to Council in the event that we do need to under an emergency condition and confirm any expense associated with that in terms of the beach.

“We are working with our coastal engineers to determine any additional funding that may be necessary to address the erosion areas. So far, Council has approved \$300,000 for the placement of sandbags at Beachwood East and that was meant to cover 10 homes. Only five had been originally approved for sandbags. Those limits have now been expanded, but we believe that even with the expansion of those limits, we should be very close to the \$300,000 number that Council approved.

“The budget that Council approved earlier last month on the other end, Council had approved \$1.25 million for scraping and trucking in sand with a goal of reaching 50,000 cubic yards of sand. Needless to say, all of that sand that got moved or trucked in and scraped is gone. A lot of the sandbags are now buried. The water breached and covered most of them. So we are evaluating the need to potentially add more sandbags to a wider area...

“As of two minutes before this meeting, we received some information from our engineers that we need to review and determine whether or not we need additional funding. So far, of that \$1.25 million that was approved for that area, we have expended about \$900,000. We are anticipating getting word from SCPRT where we requested a grant to cover 50% of those costs. We anticipate that will be approved, which will allow us to have additional monies in the budget that had already been approved in October for additional funding. At this point, I don’t have enough information in terms of additional costs to request Council for additional funds. We will try to work with the current budget that had been approved by Council, and in the event that we have to go over that under an emergency condition, as the purchasing agent for the City, I have the ability to execute contracts for an emergency condition. So I will report that to City Council, and if we need to get anything approved that will be presented at the January 2 meeting.”

Administrator Fragoso added that the area around the 30th Avenue outfall performed well, but there was some flooding in the surrounding basins. Director Kerr said the storm highlighted the need to elevate Waterway Boulevard to prevent flooding there.

Administrator Fragoso continued, “Debris removal and restoration began today. So they will see the crews working under the emergency orders as they are approved by the State. We have requested the emergency orders to include sand scraping which is the quickest and most efficient way to get some protection quick to those properties...both on Beachwood East and Dune Crest and down at Breach Inlet.” The sandbags approved for Beachwood East are expected to arrive this week and will be ready to be deployed the first week in January.

Council Member Ward asked how Merritt Boulevard performed during the storm.

Director Kerr explained that it was all under water. “So similar to the condition that we kind of described at Waterway where tides of that magnitude, they come over and through people’s yards that are adjacent to the marsh. So we know that those tide valves can hold back until it goes around in somebody’s yard, which is what happened at Fourth and Merritt. But we have four tide valves there that work up until a point, and the only solution that would kind of compete that boundary would be a seawall at the edge of private property all the way around the backside of those houses.”

Regarding sandbags along the beach at Ocean Boulevard, Director Kerr explained, “The sandbags that were there, we have kind of had different iterations. The last sandbags that were placed did their job until this event. We think they performed well. They reduced damage until yesterday, and at that point, that tide overwhelmed them and they really couldn’t do much. I guess the good news is that in yesterday’s event none of them washed away. They all kind of sank. They are clearly there. They haven’t become debris [at Breach Inlet]. Just to clarify, we haven’t been able to put any down at Beachwood East yet. Those are the more customized bags. So those are being made, and they are not in place yet.”

He continued, “Now the erosion line is probably 30 feet landward of where those bags were, but they were doing their job. They were holding back a normal kind of 7 ½ foot tide, but this tide just overwhelmed them. We are going to have remove those. We know that they are, at this point, those bags are not having any effect. They are at sand level and again, they are kind of

now 30 feet out into the surf, so we do have to get those up, and we know that we're going to try to get some level of protection back in place before we come back and excavate those because you have to dig the entire trench out, and as Desiree alluded to, we are having discussions right now with our coastal engineer about the existing elevation of the beach and if sandbags are warranted in today's condition, or if we think we can get past with just scraping between now and the Army Corps project." They anticipate having advice from the coastal engineers soon.

Director Kerr said the bids for the Army Corps' beneficial use project will be opened on December 29. He also shared that Sullivan's Island has agreed to let IOP be the first place that receives sand from that project.

Council Member Popson asked about the property damage at the Ocean Boulevard properties, and Administrator Fragoso said, "What we are operating under and what we have been communicating with those folks that are actively out there working, removing debris. Our contractor is going to be removing debris from the active beach and along the area where they are going to be working. A lot of these properties have damage to their boardwalks that are still attached. That is going to be the responsibility of the property owner and that will allow us to move pretty quickly. There are a lot of properties that are completely exposed and if our contractor is supposed to start detaching and cleaning all that. It will take them weeks before they can start to get some protection, so a lot of these properties already have contractors that are out there working. So we have been communicating and telling them to haul off that debris so that our contractor can quickly mobilize.

B. Discussion and consideration of recommendations from the Administration Committee on the wage and compensation study

Mayor Pounds thanked the Administration Committee for their work on the wage and compensation study recommendations, adding there is no more important investment than in the people who serve the island.

Council Member Bogosian summarized the work of the Committee and the goals of their review: "to develop a compensation proposal for all City employees as a recommendation to City Council that accomplishes the following, and number one is that creates a sustainable philosophy in structure. I don't think we wanted to create something just for right now. We wanted to give some structure to it that could continue on. The second thing we wanted to do is achieve compensation for City employees that is competitive with the surrounding communities for equivalent responsibilities. And the third thing is stays within the City's current budget constraints or identifies funding to achieve what we are talking about here. We did talk about hiring and retention practices. I think that is something that's going to most likely warrant further conversations with the next Administration Committee."

He described their recommendations, noting that more revenue will need to be generated in the future to support this increase. He believes the Committee's recommendations meet the goals they set forth.

Council Member Ward encouraged Council to look to other ways to raise revenue before considering a tax increase. Council Member Bogosian said the Committee discussed a more aggressive use of tourism funds for certain payroll expenses. Council Member Streetman noted that 56% of fire calls are related to tourists and agreed a more aggressive use of tourism funds should be to use to support the payroll increases before considering a tax increase.

Administrator Fragoso shared, “Currently tourism funds in general cover 22% of personnel expenses in the Fire Department and 17% in the Police Department. With the Fire Department particularly, we have really good data that shows the number of calls our folks re responding to, residents versus non-residents. So we have the opportunity to more aggressively utilize tourism dollars to cover additional positions.”

Tourism funds are covering three of the new paramedic positions. Administrator Fragoso recommends using tourism funds to cover the short-term rental coordinator position. “So we have an opportunity to increase those percentages, maybe up to 30%, and I would feel comfortable with that. We always want to maintain the right balance and not leverage them too much because in the event that those dollars go down, we are not going to get rid of the personnel that we cover with those. So I think we have an opportunity to push a little bit there and still be in good shape.”

Administrator Fragoso added that the City’s tax rate is the lowest in the region because they have been able to leverage tourism dollars “for not only operational expenses, for specific projects that not only benefit tourism and visitors, but clearly benefit our residential community as well.”

The payroll changes would be effective 1/1/24 if passed. Mayor Pounds thanked the Committee again for their work. He said tonight’s actions will be the first big step and the next steps will be discussed in the FY25 budget process. He added the dynamic employee marketplace is the need to continue looking at being competitive with surrounding communities.

MOTION: Council Member Bogosian made a motion to” adopt new pay ranges for all City paygrades as recommended by Evergreen in their version 9 document and \$550,000 for the City Administrator to allocate to current employees.” Council Member Ward seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

3. Executive Session

MOTION: Mayor Pounds made a motion to enter into Executive Session according to South Carolina Code Section 30-4-70(a)(1) to discuss the annual performance evaluation of the City Administrator. Council Member Streetman seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

City Council moved into Executive Session at 5:48pm.

City Council returned from Executive Session at 6:13pm. Mayor Pounds said no decisions were made.

10. Adjournment

Council Member Popson made a motion to adjourn. Council Member Streetman seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 6:13pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Nicole DeNeane
City Clerk