

SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING

5:30 p.m., Monday, November 3, 2014

A Special Meeting of City Council was held at 5:30 p.m., Monday, November 3, 2014 in Council Chambers of City Hall, 1207 Palm Boulevard, Isle of Palms, South Carolina. Attending the meeting were Councilmembers Bergwerf, Bettelli, Buckhannon, Carroll, Ferencz, Harrington, Loftus and Ward, Mayor Cronin, Administrator Tucker, City Attorney Halversen, Assistant Administrator Dziuban and City Clerk Copeland; a quorum was present to conduct business.

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

2. Discussion of Beach Access Management Parking Plan

Mayor Cronin noted that Council has heard and understood the information Stantec has presented and has been informed of what the plan would be if the City gets all of the necessary approvals. To refresh everyone's memory, the Mayor stated that visitor parking would be through a parking pass program; the passes could be purchased online through an app and, with that pass, the visitors could legally park anywhere on the island. The passes would be seasonal, weekly or daily. At the workshop on October 2nd, Councilmembers heard from the citizens and they were clear in their message that, if the residents cannot get "free" passes, they do not want the City to do anything. Having sampled several people in the legislature, the Mayor said that the City would get support from them to satisfy the residents. The Mayor commented that he does not have a solution for guests of island residents or weekly renters; currently that would require a pass. If Council agrees, the City could isolate and create geographic areas like Columbia and the City of Charleston have done, but that plan has its own set of issues. Council does not want to inhibit residents from one (1) part of the island from parking anywhere else on the island. Mayor Cronin related that the City has also gotten support for and possible legislative action to get golf cart parking only areas on the avenues and maybe in spots along Palm Boulevard.

The Mayor then asked that each member of Council to express his understanding of what citizens had to say, the direction the City is heading and anything else worthy of being shared.

Councilmember Bettelli said that he thought residents had a lot of good comments and good ideas; the first issue he picked up on was that the City should allow parking on one (1) side of the road Ocean Boulevard; he does not see a reason to carve out a special exemption for one (1) piece of the island when the balance of the island "is burdened" with parking. The Councilmember endorsed residents getting two (2) parking passes at no charge for their family; he expressed the need for parking passes at rental properties where there is insufficient parking when several families rent together. Councilmember Bettelli also said that there is not enough golf cart parking on the island, but some provision needs to be made for parking passes for golf carts.

Councilmember Carroll stated that residents, property owners and long-time renters should get parking passes at no-charge; he, too, would like to see more golf cart parking. He stated that he was not in favor of parking on Ocean Boulevard; he likes that one (1) street looks pristine. In addition, he said he would like to see resident-only parking on the avenues on the north end of the island; the haphazard way that beach-goers park on both sides of the street makes it almost impossible for emergency vehicles to access the beach.

Councilmember Bergwerf voiced the opinion that the effectiveness of the parking program will truly be felt in the future as construction continues in Mount Pleasant. As a resident of Ocean Boulevard, she pointed out that there are no sidewalks from Sixth to First Avenue so people walk on the street; if the City was to allow parking, it would create a safety issue. She said that she considers this parking plan to be a work-in-progress that will be fine-tuned for years. The Councilmember asked what the magic number (of parking passes) was to be based on the data Stantec gathered. She supported golf cart passes and more golf cart parking, and she agreed with the Mayor that no one has offered a workable plan for residents' guests.

Councilmember Ward stated that a parking plan should not negatively impact the island's residents in any way; he suggested having rearview, hanging tags for island residents' guests. He voiced agreement with earlier comments except for Ocean Boulevard.

Councilmember Buckhannon reiterated that he does not know how the City can limit the number of people coming to the island from May through September; people will continue to come here, park where ever they can and likely get a ticket. For him, parking has become a safety issue on the island; he continues to support parking four (4) feet from the road's edge; a problem arises when a car is parked within the four (4) feet, gets a ticket and creates a safety issue as it stays parked for the day. He favored a more aggressive approach to enforcement. The Councilmember questioned how this plan would affect the businesses along J.C. Long; typically cars are parked in the right-of-way. Will the parking plan eliminate that parking? Will the patrons of those businesses be ticketed for visiting the restaurants? He asked that Councilmembers look at current parking on 27th, 28th and 29th Avenues. In his opinion, answers need to come from the City and SCDOT; he also was skeptical that the state would actually help the island with golf cart parking.

Councilmember Loftus stated that he was in favor of creating a parking overlay district that would include Palm Boulevard to 41st Avenue; this area would be the only place visitors can legally park outside of the commercial area. He recommended managing the parking on J.C. Long with meters; parking at the Recreation Center should be open to all parking. On the subject of residents' guests, he suggested an online system where residents could register their guests' vehicles, and the Councilmember wanted to remove all parking from the neighborhoods. Enforcement would be simple with the overlay district; cars parked outside the overlay district, i.e. Palm Boulevard, the Rec and J.C. Long Boulevard, would be ticketed. Another suggestion was to increase the ticket fees to fifty dollars (\$50.00). Rather than two (2) passes per residence, he recommended that all resident vehicles be in the system for easy identification by scanners.

Councilmember Ferencz said that the parking overlay district spelled out by Councilmember Loftus was a good plan and probably the simplest by establishing parking and no parking zones. She understood from residents that they want parking out of the neighborhoods. From discussions of parking pass program, parking with a pass will be allowed anywhere on the island as long as the vehicle is four (4) feet from the road; she voiced the opinion that such a program has many flaws. The Councilmember stated that Stantec should take all of the comments from the Public Hearing and Council's recent meetings and develop a workable plan for the City.

Councilmember Harrington said that he saw the program as one (1) that will require study and tweaking for the first few years; he agreed with Councilmember Bergwerf that the number of tickets to sell was the “most important variable that Council must deal with.” He noted that the City must find a way to provide parking passes at no charge to the residents. Any program the City decides upon must be fair, and, to him, that means opening Ocean Boulevard to parking on the ocean side.

Mayor Cronin referred to Councilmember Ward’s thought of using a hanging tag to identify residents’ guests; issues raised are that the tags would have to be printed, how many would the City need and how these residents would get the tags. There is also the situation that not all island residents have a computer and printer, and some are completely computer ignorant. It is a complex problem that will not be solved with a simple application. The Mayor added that he thought the passes should be web-based and accessible through an app or home computer, but he was confused about what to do for residents. And he wondered how to get it done for the next beach season.

Councilmember Bergwerf was in favor of signage on J.C. Long, at the Recreation Center and at churches saying that they are not for beach access parking. She also liked Councilmember Ward’s suggestion to have hang tags for identifying guests.

The Mayor reminded Council that there can be a difference between the resident and the property owner, second home owners.

The Mayor also clarified that the commercial district, including J.C. Long, would not be impacted by any parking plan the City chooses.

Councilmember Bergwerf stated that hang tags should also be issued to nurses who are employed on the island; another idea discussed was parallel parking on Palm Boulevard. In her opinion, the four (4) foot rule will not work for the entire island; she referred to residents on Carolina and Charleston who would no longer be allowed to park at their homes.

Mayor Cronin informed Council that a dialogue has been started to establish the four (4) foot rule a requirement for parking on the land-side of Palm Boulevard; this issue must be approved by the state legislature.

Summarizing the overlay district, the Mayor explained that parking with a pass would only be allowed on Palm Boulevard.

Councilmember Loftus stated that the City has the right to regulate parking in the municipality, and the Mayor added “fairly for all residents of the State of South Carolina.”

For Councilmember Loftus the key to the program is to keep it simple, which the overlay does; in addition, it addresses the residents’ issue of not being charged extra for a parking pass, takes parking out of the neighborhoods and is easily enforceable.

Councilmember Bergwerf remarked that Council needs to start with the number of passes that will be issued in 2015; she thought that Council would get a lot of pushback from residents if parking is restricted to Palm Boulevard.

Mayor Cronin summarized that all residents and property owners would have their vehicles registered, and another system would be required for dealing with guests.

Councilmember Bergwerf added that property owners would receive as many hang tags as they have rights-of-way parking spaces on their property. The tags become the residents' responsibility to give to their guests and get them back again.

Councilmember Loftus preferred a mechanism that allows people to plan ahead and via an app, the internet or at the Police Department to register guests.

Administrator Tucker stated that Council needs to refine what they want in a parking system before going to a vendor to find out if their system can do those things. Based on the technology available today, the Administrator was optimistic that a system can be designed to meet the City's needs; she noted that one (1) vendor indicated that their specialty is designing something specific for individual clients.

Councilmember Bergwerf said that she understood the original plan to be that anywhere it is legal to park today will be a legal place to park under the pass system; the pass system only limits the number of vehicles that can legally park each day.

Councilmember Ward noted that there were nine (9) different opinions about how the plan should move forward, noting that it will not be possible for everyone to be happy. He suggested that each Councilmember jot down his/her key bullet points and to email them to the Mayor for the next meeting. From those key points he thought Council could find a consensus for a concrete plan.

When the discussion made its way back to parking on Ocean Boulevard, Administrator Tucker recalled that Council has talked about parking on Ocean before and there was no consensus in favor of parking on Ocean. She also reminded Council that support for parking on Ocean Boulevard was one (1) of the questions Stantec asked when it individually met with Councilmembers; there was not a majority of Council in favor of opening Ocean Boulevard; therefore it was not included in their plan.

Additionally, the Administrator stated that Council needed to take all of their ideas and formulate them into as much of the structure of the City of Charleston's ordinance as possible. Having sent Council copies of the Charleston ordinance, she encouraged Councilmembers to read the structure because, in addition to a beach access parking overlay district, Council would want to create a residential parking district in an effort to model the City's ordinance after Charleston's ordinance.

Following the City of Charleston ordinance that has been tested and approved by SCDOT gives the City the greatest chance of success.

Attorney Halversen noted that the ordinances from the City of Charleston and Columbia address the issues of guests and persons who would come to one's home to assist with someone or to repair or building something.

Councilmember Buckhannon commented that the guest situation only applies to those on the ocean-side of the island; if everyone is forced to get a pass for their guests, it will put a burden or inconvenience to the residents not affected by beach access parking.

Councilmembers Buckhannon and Harrington stated that they do not know why there is no parking on Ocean; Councilmember Buckhannon noted that parking on Ocean between first and third encourages people to go to a location on the beach where they cannot swim.

Administrator Tucker commented that SCDOT could take out all of the NO PARKING signs on Ocean since she thinks it is a SCDOT road despite the outcome of Council's vote.

MOTION: Councilmember Loftus moved to include parking on the ocean-side of Ocean Boulevard in the beach access parking plan; Councilmember Harrington seconded.

Councilmember Bettelli stated that he thought this action was fair and that, if the City succeeds in reducing the number of vehicles parked on the island, the parking will be more spread out.

If this motion passes, the City would make a request to SCDOT to allow parking, citing reasons to do so, and SCDOT would grant the approval if it agrees with the argument.

In Councilmember Carroll's opinion, this motion would open up more of the island to visitor parking.

Councilmember Loftus countered that the parking plan was intended to reduce parking on the island; the net effect is to have less parking on the island.

Councilmember Buckhannon reiterated said that Council has been working to eliminate parking.

VOTE: The motion FAILED on a vote of 4 to 5; Councilmembers Bergwerf, Buckhannon, Carroll, Ward and Mayor Cronin cast dissenting votes.

Returning to the discussion of a parking overlay district, Administrator Tucker suggested that it should only include the areas where parking has been approved in the Beach Management Plan. The areas included would take away some of the parallel streets, any of the parallel streets along Palm and would include some small areas of the perpendicular streets between Third and Tenth.

Councilmember Bergwerf asked whether cars parking in the overlay district would need to buy passes and she was told that they would.

Councilmember Loftus stated that he would support parking on Palm north of Wild Dunes.

According to the Beach Management Plan, there are parking spaces identified between 41st and 56th Avenues, some of which are on Palm and some on the streets. The Administrator said that they would be a part of the parking plan assuming the Beach Management Plan was the basis.

Councilmember Buckhannon indicated that parking on the avenues at the north end of the island should be looked at again; parking on both sides of these narrow streets creates a public safety issue. People cannot park four (4) feet from the road's edge and it is extremely difficult for emergency vehicles to access the beach.

Councilmember Bergwerf pointed out that there is plenty of space for parking on the land-side of Palm on the north end of the island.

In Councilmember Bergwerf's opinion, if SCDOT rejects the overlay parking district, Council is back to the plan to sell a limited number of passes; she voiced concern that Council was not going to act.

Administrator Tucker stated that, if parking is not allowed on the numbered streets between 42nd and Wild Dunes, SCDOT might use that to disallow the program since there are beach accesses in that stretch of Palm Boulevard. Although there is room for parking on Palm, it may be too far to the beach to meet the requirements of the Beach Management Plan. The area of Palm in the vicinity that is a part of the Beach Management Plan is 56th and 57th Avenues.

The Administrator expressed a preference for immediate meetings because staff needs time to get approvals and to implement the plan; if Council wants the parking plan be in effect for the 2015 season, the more that can be finalized the better in order to get the appropriate ordinances passed and the necessary permissions.

Councilmember Loftus asked that Director Kerr be charged with producing a map of the parking overlay district for the next meeting.

The next meeting scheduled for Tuesday, November 11th was re-scheduled to 3:00 p.m., Friday, November 14th.

Recapping the meeting, Councilmember Bergwerf stated that the parking overlay plan protects the residents and the commercial district remains in compliance with the Beach Management Plan.

In addition to a map showing the parking overlay district and the residential districts, Administrator Tucker asked if Council would be interested in a draft ordinance to look at the mechanics of how it will operate; Council responded in the affirmative.

The Mayor noted that, when Council gets into the details of the plan, it must decide on the number of passes to be sold, the price to be charged, the implementation and the use of hang tags for guests, etc.; another issue to be discussed is enforcement as well as a communications program.

Mayor Cronin stated that, if the Beach Preservation Act referendum passes, the Beach Management Plan will become moot since the City will not be looking to the State. Administrator Tucker cautioned him that, after a major storm, the City may need the federal funds.

3. Adjourn

MOTION: Councilmember Bergwerf moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:00 p.m.; Councilmember Buckhannon seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Respectfully submitted:

Marie Copeland
City Clerk