

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

5:30 p.m., Tuesday, September 13, 2011

The regular meeting of the Public Safety Committee was held at 5:30 p.m., Tuesday, September 13, 2011 in Council Chambers of City Hall, 1207 Palm Boulevard, Isle of Palms, South Carolina. Attending the meeting were Councilmember Bergwerf, Vice Chair Loftus, City Administrator Tucker, Fire Chief Graham, Police Chief Buckhannon and City Clerk Copeland; Chair Bettelli's absence was excused. A quorum was present to conduct business.

1. Vice Chair Loftus 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. Approval of Previous Meeting's Minutes

MOTION: Councilmember Bergwerf moved to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of August 2, 2011 as submitted; Vice Chair Loftus seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

3. **Citizens' Comments** – None

4. **Old Business** – None

5. **New Business**

Consideration of Award of Contracts in Excess of \$10,000 - None

Reflecting on the island's recent brush with Hurricane Irene and the way surfers rushed to experience the wave-action, Councilmember Bergwerf expressed her concerns over the City's responsibility for public safety personnel when people choose to put their own safety at risk. Chief Graham was asked how many water calls Fire Department personnel had responded to; the Chief stated that the Department had received eight (8) calls, but had not respond to all.

Councilmember Bergwerf asked if people should go into the water once the hurricane flags are raised and what other local governments do in similar circumstances.

Chief Graham expressed her opinion that people might be more responsive to calls to stay out of the water if the County government issued the warning for all of the local governments. The Chief stated that, with only the Isle of Palms issuing a warning, people were prone to go to other beaches in the area.

Councilmember Bergwerf voiced the fear that City personnel may go into the water to save someone, but get into trouble and need rescuing themselves, or worse.

Dave Crosby, President of Sea Cabins, authorized Chief Graham to close the Sea Cabins' pier if people were seen jumping from the pier or if the pier appeared to be unsafe. Chief Buckhannon explained that a problem with closing the pier meant that personnel had to be assigned to keep people off.

Chief Graham asked if the pier closing was posted whether people could be cited for trespassing; Chief Buckhannon said that technically they could, but the existing signs that the pier is for Sea Cabins' residents do not keep people off.

Administrator Tucker expressed her opinion that the news media had not helped the situation with their reporting from the beach, which drew people to the beach to be seen on camera.

Vice Chair Loftus noted that the advances in technology created a set of issues in that people could notify their friends of the surf conditions instantly and accompany with video.

Chief Graham suggested that storm education should begin earlier in the year and well before a storm is imminent; she recommended putting signage in all of the surf shops and anywhere that bathing suits are sold.

Vice Chair Loftus questioned the possibility of shutting down the Connector and allowing only those with hurricane stickers on the island. Administrator Tucker related that, after Hurricane Floyd had passed and the "all clear" announcement had been made, high surf continued and surfers rushed into the water.

The Administrator that she would support Chief Graham's suggestion that Charleston County make the announcement that people who go into the surf do so at their own risk; Chief Buckhannon again expressed concern about enforcement.

Chief Graham proposed that community coordination could be provided from Charleston County's Emergency Management Division. The Chief recalled the success and effectiveness of fire prevention training through the elementary schools and suggested that hurricane education and safety follow a similar course beginning with Hurricane Week.

6. Highlights of Departmental Reports

Fire Department – Chief Graham

Chief Graham reported on an incident that occurred on July 30th involving a golf cart that rolled over, seriously injuring a fourteen (14) year old; she spent approximately three (3) weeks in the hospital in Charleston before being transported home to Illinois. According to Chief Buckhannon, the driver was of legal age, but the contract for the vehicle was broken in that the contract stipulated a driver of twenty-one (21) years of age.

On August 12th, the Fire Department responded to a residence on Forest Trail that was fully engulfed in flames upon arrival. Assistance was provided by the IOP Police Department and fire departments from Sullivan's Island, Awendaw, Mount Pleasant, as well as Charleston County EMS; the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) assisted with the fire investigation.

Fire Department personnel responded to a possible lightning strike on Palm Boulevard on August 22; the Public Safety Building also sustained a lightning strike that caused a power surge damaging the HVAC on the third floor.

In response to a call for a swimmer in distress on August 24th, the U.S. Coast Guard search helicopter was requested; the swimmer managed to return to his residence uninjured and unassisted.

On August 26th, the day Irene passed offshore, two Fire Department jet skis responded to a surfer in distress in the ocean between 2nd Avenue and Breach Inlet. Due to surf conditions, Sullivan's Island was asked to launch their watercraft as back-up. Both watercraft made contact with the surfer and assisted him back to shore.

During the month of August, Fire Department personnel responded to one hundred forty-four (144) incidents; seventy-eight (78) of the calls were for EMS. The Fire Inspector performed sixty-three (63) inspections in the month and found sixty-one (61) violations. All personnel participated in training presented by representatives from the helicopter transport agency and, the helicopter landed at the Recreation Center. Vehicle maintenance was high due to the replacement of four (4) tires and the annual HVAC maintenance contract renewal. As Irene moved closer, all residents in the Emergency Preparedness Priority Assistance List were contacted to determine their store preparations assistance needs.

On the subject of communications, Chief Graham reported that the cut-over remains on schedule for the end of 2011. The Chief has been appointed Chair of the newly formed Fire/EMS/Rescue Dispatch Review Committee that will serve under the Operations Committee of the Charleston County 911 Consolidated Dispatch Board.

Police Department – Chief Buckhannon

Chief Buckhannon reported that, on August 10, a female employee of a local restaurant described how a coworker had pointed, what she believed to be, a pistol at her outside of the business. When the suspect was located by police, he had a pellet-type handgun; he faces assault charges from the incident.

On August 14, a resident reported another scam on Craigslist where she had corresponded with an individual about renting an apartment in Florida; while doing additional research on the apartment, she learned that the individual she had communicated with was not the owner and that the apartment was not for rent.

During the month, dispatchers received forty-four hundred sixty (4,460) calls, and thirty-four hundred three (3,403) were for the Police Department. Officers responded to thirteen hundred twenty-seven (1,327) service calls, which is an increase of five percent (5%) over 2010. Two hundred forty-one (241) traffic stops resulted in eighty-five (85) citations being written. A total of eighteen (18) arrests were made in August; four (4) were alcohol-related and nine (9) were traffic-related.

The Department has three (3) new officers who are currently at the Academy; two (2) are going through the twelve (12) week course, and one (1) is experienced, so he is attending the six (6) week course. The majority of training hours were courses the new patrol officers had to complete prior to attending the academy.

In August twelve (12) noise and three (3) unkempt lot complaints were made.

7. Executive Session – not needed

8. Miscellaneous Business

Vice Chair Loftus asked Chief Buckhannon about the distance kite boarders were to keep from swimmers; the Chief stated that the kite boarders were to keep a distance of one hundred (100) feet. In addition, the Chief commented that the City had placed signs all along Ocean Boulevard reminding the kite boarders of that regulation. Responding to the Vice Chair's inquiry about the frequency of citations issued, Chief Buckhannon stated that citations are issued infrequently because the patrol officers are not in the water. When an officer is successful in hailing in a kite boarder, a warning is typically given. The Chief indicated that the majority of kite boarders are in the vicinity between Breach Inlet and 9th Avenue; fewer kite boarders are found on the other end of the island because of the difference in wave action.

Next Meeting Date: 5:30 p.m., Thursday, October 6, 2011 at the Public Safety Building

9. Adjourn

MOTION: Councilmember Bergwerf moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:12 p.m.; Vice Chair Loftus seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Respectfully submitted:

Marie Copeland
City Clerk