

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
5:00 p.m., Monday, October 5, 2009

The Public Safety Committee held its regular meeting at 5:00 p.m. on Monday, October 5, 2009 in the Training Room of the Public Safety Building, 30 J.C. Long Boulevard, Isle of Palms, South Carolina. Attending the meeting were Committee members Bettelli and Loftus, Chairman Buckhannon, Fire Chief Graham, Police Chief Buckhannon, Assistant to the Administrator Dziuban and City Clerk Copeland.

1. Chairman Buckhannon 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: Councilman Bettelli moved to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of September 9, 2009 as submitted; Councilman Loftus seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

3. Citizens' Comments

Sylvia Sherwood, 28 Beachside Drive, came before the Committee seeking support for extending the hours that dogs would be allowed on the beach unleashed. She indicated that she had researched the regulations at neighboring Sullivan's Island and learned that dogs are allowed on the beach unleashed until noon, but Sullivan's Island also has a twenty-five dollars (\$25) license fee for all dogs, including non-residents. As Daylight's Savings Time will soon end, it will be dark in the evenings when dogs would be allowed on the beach, and presently it is dark in the morning. Mrs. Sherwood noted that those she meets on the beach with their dogs have become friends, and the dogs have become friends; in addition all of the owners are very attentive to their dogs. She reported that, frequently when she goes to the beach in the winter, there is no one there.

Councilman Loftus asked her what changes she would like the City to make.

Mrs. Sherwood responded that she would like to see the morning hours extended to noon and that there were others who would like to see more hours in the evening.

Mark Schreiber, 17 Sand Dune Lane and a resident since 1996, reported that the pooper-scooper receptacle at 21st Avenue was usually empty. He reported that he has not heard of any instances where dogs chased people on the beach. Mr. Schreiber suggested that the hours be extended beginning just after Labor Day in September to prior to Memorial Day in May.

Chairman Buckhannon thanked the speakers for their comments and noted that the subject would be discussed later in the meeting.

4. Old Business

A. Update on Public Safety Building

Assistant Dziuban asked if the continued listing of this topic on the agenda was productive. She also thanked everyone for their contributions in making the ribbon cutting for the Public Safety Building a success; she noted that photographs of the event are on the City's website. Mashburn continues to work on punch-list items, and the City staff continues to get training on the maintenance of certain mechanical equipment in the building.

Councilman Loftus asked exactly how much remained on the punch-list. Chief Buckhannon responded that all of the major items had been addressed; only a few small things remained. He repeated that training on warranty equipment is ongoing. Chief Graham reported that the washer extractor that is used for cleaning gear must be removed and re-installed before it can be used.

Chairman Buckhannon agreed that the subject did not need to be a continuing agenda item.

B. Update on 41st Avenue and Palm Boulevard Intersection

Chairman Buckhannon stated that the Administrator was developing an RFP for the project to obtain the services of a civil engineer to complete the plans for submission to SC DOT.

5. New Business

A. Consideration of extending off-leash hours for dogs in the evenings during the winter month

Chairman Buckhannon related that there had been discussions on this subject in the past; he asked Chief Buckhannon to provide some history on these discussions. The Chief said that he had indicated to City Council that this was a Council decision since it was a matter of quality of life for residents. He stated that any changes would not change the Police Department's operations, but he did think that an increase in the current two-dollar (\$2.00) tag fee would need to be increased. He reported that two dollars (\$2.00) barely covers the cost of the tag. The only problems Chief Buckhannon recalled were typically from people who were not dog lovers who were intimidated when dogs came up to them on the beach; he did not remember an instance when a beachgoer had been attacked by an off-leash dog.

Councilman Loftus asked Chief Buckhannon to estimate the percent of dogs that were local as opposed to off island; the Chief "guess-timated" that sixty-five percent were island residents. The Chief noted that it would be difficult to get to our beaches early in the morning and still get to work, while extending the hours in the evening could draw dog owners from off of the island.

Councilman Bettelli reported that Sullivan's Island does not allow dogs to be off-leash in the afternoons; the only off-leash hours in the summer are 5 a.m. to 10 a.m. and, in the winter, 5 a.m. until noon. Due to the summer heat, Councilman Bettelli was firm in his opinion that dogs not be allowed on the beach between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.; he stated that there were many visitors to the beach who underestimated the affect of the heat and the sun on their dogs and did not come to the beach prepared. Concluding, Councilman Bettelli expressed his support for

both extending the hours for dogs to be off-leash on the beach and for an increase in the fees for dog licensing.

Chairman Buckhannon commented on the need to keep the receptacles at 21st Avenue filled; he encouraged the dog owners present to call when they find any of the receptacles empty so the City can re-fill them. He added his voice to those supporting extended hours for the dogs to run free on the beach.

Betsy Michaels, 21 Fifth Avenue, arrived late, but Chairman Buckhannon allowed her the opportunity of express her opinions on the subject of extending the hours. She noted that many dog owners work and find it difficult to get up early enough to walk their dogs on the beach during the hours allowed. She suggested that to extend the hours to an hour before sundown, but the Committee was quick to respond that sundown was too subjective. Ms. Michaels' second suggestion was to allow extended hours for the dogs to 10 a.m. beginning October 1 when the Front Beach meters are covered and the bulk of the island's visitors have gone.

Councilman Taylor, speaking as a citizen of the island and a dog owner, stated that he thought the percentage of dogs on the beach belonging to residents was much closer to ninety percent (90%). He said he thought people would not balk at paying a higher fee for the dog licenses, and he suggested that a second scooper be placed at 21st Avenue if that would eliminate the problems there. Councilman Taylor also suggested the hours be changed to 6 p.m. to 10 a.m. in the off-season for dogs to be allowed on the beach without a leash.

Chairman Buckhannon thought the proposal for hours 4p.m. to 10 a.m. was a good one in that it would eliminate a lot of the confusion that exists by splitting the hours as they have been.

Chief Buckhannon stated that the date of April 1 had been selected because the vacationers begin with the Bridge Run in April.

MOTION: Councilman Loftus moved to recommend to City Council to adjust the hours that dogs are allowed off-leash on the beach to 4 p.m. to 10 a.m. from September 15 to April 1; Chairman Buckhannon seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

B. Consideration of lowering the speed limit to 30 mph to the Wild Dunes' gate and the addition of a crosswalk at 43rd Avenue

Chairman Buckhannon noted that this proposal came from Councilman Taylor and asked Councilman Taylor explain his request and the reasoning behind it.

Councilman Taylor recounted that in 1994 City Council had been presented with a petition from residents from about 48th Avenue requesting that the speed limit be lowered on Palm Boulevard to 30 mph from 48th Avenue to 57th Avenue. The City Council debate centered on having varying speed limits on Palm Boulevard – from 40 mph on one end to 35 mph to 30 mph, and the decision was made to make the speed limit on Palm Boulevard 30mph between 48th and 57th Avenues.

In looking at the modifications being made at 41st Avenue to keep traffic flowing and watching the people trying to access the beach from the Wildwood area, Councilman Taylor expressed his opinion that it was time to have a uniform speed limit on Palm Boulevard beginning at 41st Avenue. Councilman Taylor related that adding to the confusion, there is a speed limit sign indicating 35 mph on the beach side just past 42nd Avenue and returning to 30 mph at 48th Avenue. He indicated that he had conferred with Chief Buckhannon about an appropriate speed and, as a result of that conversation, would like to recommend that 30 mph be adopted from 41st Avenue down the length of Palm Boulevard.

In addition, Councilman Taylor proposing a crosswalk at 43rd Avenue to serve residents on the back of the island in the Wildwood Road area to add to their safety in accessing the beach.

Chief Buckhannon agreed that the 35 mph sign needed to be removed; he did point out that, according to state law, in the absence of signs, the speed limit in residential neighborhoods is 30 mph. Since this portion of Palm Boulevard is no longer part of Highway 703, it is a residential street.

MOTION: Councilman Bettelli moved to recommend to City Council a request to SC DOT to reduce the speed limit to 30 mph on Palm Boulevard from 41st Avenue to Wild Dunes' Gate 2 and to construct a crosswalk on Palm Boulevard at 43rd Avenue; Chairman Buckhannon seconded.

Councilman Loftus expressed his reluctance to support this speed limit and asked if the motion could be divided into two (2) separate motions. Chairman Buckhannon stated that this motion was to get on the City Council agenda, but that it could be separated for the City Council agenda.

Call for the Question: The motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

C. Consideration of Award of Contract to ICS for Training Pit in the amount of \$2,232.42

Chief Graham corrected a typographical error on the agenda – ICS should UCS. She stated that in addition to being referred to as a training pit it is also referred to as a crash pit/pad; it is used as a safety feature for repelling training and falling out of windows. Although not a budgeted expense, the Chief suggested transferring funds from training expense to cover the cost; the loss to the training expense would be made up by doing more in-house training.

MOTION: Councilman Loftus moved to recommend approval of awarding a contract to UCS in the amount of \$2,232.42 for a training pit; Chairman Buckhannon seconded.

Chairman Buckhannon asked for re-confirmation from Chief Graham that this was not an additional expenditure, and she did confirm. Councilman Bettelli was concerned about storage space, but the Chief explained that there was plenty of storage beneath the training platform.

Call for the Question: The motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

6. Highlights of Departmental Reports

Fire Department Report

Among the highlights, Chief Graham reported that on September 6, the Department had responded to a call from a boater in distress; the boater had gotten into the oyster beds between Goat Island and Grey Bay. The jetski could not reach him and the boater ended up being rescued by helicopter. The Fire Department responded to a total of eighty-two (82) calls in September. There was one (1) vehicle maintenance expense of note during the month where the ladder slides had to be replaced on Tower 1 that cost over one thousand dollars (\$1,000).

She pointed out the following personnel for their “over and above the call” efforts preparing for the ribbon cutting:

- Engineer Ciappa and Firefighter Pesature for the “Sparky Room;”
- Lt. Eagle, Engineer Hathaway, Engineer Burnette and Firefighter Hommel for the giant table on the 3rd floor; and
- Engineer Lawrence ensuring the new truck was ready for showing at the grand opening.

Congratulations went to Engineers Puckhaber, Lawrence and Everett for a one thousand dollar (\$1,000) grant they were awarded by WalMart to purchase new CPR equipment.

Chief Graham reported that she has been contacted by the Director of the Consolidated Dispatch asking that the Fire Department go to the consolidated dispatching in January 2010 and in advance of the Police Department.

Clerk Copeland interjected that she would be attending a meeting on Wednesday, October 7 related to human resource aspects of the consolidated dispatch program. Chairman Buckhannon asked that Chief Buckhannon be prepared to update the Committee on progress with that program at the next meeting.

Police Department Report

Chief Buckhannon reported that there had been a domestic dispute on September 6 where the woman was stabbed multiple times by the estranged husband; she was transported to MUSC Trauma Unit, and the suspect was charged with Assault and Battery with Intent to Kill and transported to the Detention Center. During the month of September, the dispatchers received four thousand twenty-three (4,023) calls. Since activity on the island has calmed down, Police officers received a total on one hundred thirty-nine hours of training; three (3) officers completed the Datamaster Operator Certification. For livability issues, ten (10) noise complaints were received; of those complaints, eight (8) calls were from short-term rentals by agencies and six (6) calls were from owner-operated short-term rental units.

Chief Buckhannon announced that there would be some nationally certified training classes held at the new Public Safety Building; he stated that the offer to use the City’s facility has been made to the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy for regional training. As the host location, there will be no cost to IOP officers who participate.

When asked by Councilman Loftus if the Department was fully staffed, Chief Buckhannon responded that the Department is actually down three (3) employees – one of whom has been on active duty for two years and has received orders for another two years. The Chief reported that he received in excess of sixty (60) applications for the openings; thirty-five (35) were given physical agility and written tests. The number is down to eleven (11) to be interviewed as a result of not passing the tests or from the fact that information on their applications did not match up with the background checks.

7. Miscellaneous Business

Councilman Bettelli reminded everyone of the Fire Parade at 4:30 p.m., Wednesday, October 7, 2009. This year it will start at the Public Safety Building and wind its way to Sullivan's Island for fun, food and games.

Next Meeting Date: 5 p.m., Thursday, November 5, 2009

8. Adjourn

MOTION: Councilman Bettelli moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:13 p.m.; Chairman Buckhannon seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Respectfully submitted:

Marie Copeland
City Clerk