

**PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE**  
5:30 p.m., Monday, August 13, 2007  
City Council Chambers  
1207 Palm Boulevard, Isle of Palms, South Carolina

The regular meeting of the Public Safety Committee was held at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, August 13, 2007 in City Council Chambers, City Hall, 1207 Palm Boulevard, Isle of Palms, South Carolina. Present were Chairman Marino, Councilman Buckhannon, Mayor Sottile, Administrator Tucker, Fire Chief Graham, Police Chief Buckhannon and City Clerk Copeland.

1. **Call to Order.** Chairman Marino called the meeting to order and stated that members of the press and the public had been duly notified in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act.

2. **Approval of Prior Meetings Minutes – June 14, 2007**

**MOTION: Mayor Sottile moved for the approval of the minutes of the June 14, 2007 meeting as presented; Councilman Buckhannon seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

3. **Citizens' Comments:**

Mary Pringle, 713 Ocean Boulevard, and Bev Ballow, 3009 Waterway Boulevard, came before the Committee representing The Turtle Team to discuss the problems that they have been finding on the beach on a daily basis. They presented several photos of abandoned tents with the guide wires still attached, chairs and huge holes that are found on the Isle of Palms' beaches every night; they commented that these items present a hazard to people who are walking or running on the beach, as well as to the nesting turtles who may become tangled in the debris or may become confused by it only to crawl back to the ocean without laying their eggs. In addition to the information they have provided to other City committees, Mrs. Ballow has found reports of a child falling into one of these huge holes at another beach, the sides of the hole caving in on her and the child suffocating to death. Mrs. Pringle offered several solutions to the problem; they are

- To redefine the word "debris" in the ordinance to include anything left on the beach overnight;
- Signage to remind everyone to take home what they bring to the beach; and
- To use the Beach Services Officers to educate the public about the dangers they are creating with the huge holes and leaving their gear on the beach.

Councilman Marino responded that, from looking at the pictures, he felt that the issues were serious and must be dealt with, and he was interested to know what suggestions

the Public Works Committee had to offer when the subject was discussed later in the meeting.

**4. Old Business:**

**A. Fire Station #2 Construction Update**

Administrator Tucker reported that the construction is right on schedule; one set of the bay doors was installed today. Chief Graham distributed a picture of the station taken today showing the new doors; the building is looking like the architectural drawings. The Administrator suggested that the Committee set a date and time for a walk through when they could label each of the rooms. The color chosen for the bay doors is not the rust color in the pictures, which will match the trim planned for the building; Chief Graham has confirmed that the doors can be painted that color. The Committee agreed on the rust color.

**B. 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Waterway Boulevard Parking**

Administrator Tucker informed the Committee that she has not heard from DOT on any way that they might assist the City in enforcement or to further discourage people from going there, and the City has done all that it can. Councilman Marino reviewed the options that the Committee had discussed previously

1. The placement of larger barricades;
2. Posting "No Loading or Unloading at the Barricades," and
3. Extending the "No Parking" further up the street.

The Administrator commented that, after explaining the nature of the problem, she had also asked the DOT to evaluate the situation.

**C. Beach Debris and Holes**

Administrator Tucker reported on the Public Works Committee meeting where the subject of beach debris and holes was thoroughly discussed. One idea that came from the meeting was the possibility of tagging the tents, chairs, umbrellas, etc., that have been left on the beach; the message on the tag would be about the adverse effect of leaving such items on the beach. The type tag the Committee was referring to is similar to the destination tags used by the airlines. The other suggestion was for more public education.

The Administrator recounted a conversation she had with Clay McCoy, who is dually employed by the Coastal Carolina and OCRM, about public education on the subject

through the real estate offices, but he has not gotten back to her. She did comment that such an approach does not address the problem with the day visitors to the island. Chief Graham explained that all of this paraphernalia people are taking to the beach is posing a significant problem for the Fire Department as they respond to calls on the beach during the day. They find it difficult to maneuver around the holes, the volleyball nets, tents, etc.; she added primarily they have been using the ATV on the beach for this reason. The Chief reported that they found a hole on the beach large enough to bury the ATV.

Mayor Sottile stated that he favored public education, but he did not necessarily know the best way to do it. The problem is one that is indicative of being at the beach; he felt the real problem is that there are more people coming to the Isle of Palms that ever before. The Mayor related a conversation he had with the Myrtle Beach City Manager; when the Mayor asked him how they handle this problem, the City Manager informed him that they pick it up and put it into the dump. The Mayor suggested that Public Works make more than one weekly trip to the beach to remove this debris.

Chief Buckhannon asked if the City could legally pick up these items from areas that are considered to be private property. He also informed the Committee that the City's ordinances prohibit tagging, especially if there is the chance that the tag could fly off and become debris.

Mayor Sottile expressed his feeling that it is late to be doing anything more than is currently being done and that it would be better to look to actions to be taken in 2008.

Chief Graham suggested that the City use its website for some of this public education.

Councilman Buckhannon suggested that there may be a need to hire a contractor for more frequent debris removal than Public Works can schedule.

Councilman Marino stated that he did not see a need for debris to be redefined in the ordinance; from the pictures, the items definitely would be described as debris. He was very supportive of public education and agreed that tagging was an unnecessary step. He thought that the Beach Services officers should patrol the beach first thing in the mornings, report to Public Works, or a contractor, on problem areas for them to address that day.

He asked that the Committee members ponder the problem to have possible solutions put into place for the 2008 season.

Mayor Sottile asked that the Administrator calculate the additional cost of beach cleaning. He also suggested that this could be an expense that the City will look to Accommodations Taxes to underwrite.

Since Beach Services Officers end their day between 5 and 6 p.m., the issue of removing the debris to eliminate the false crawls by the nesting turtles still exists; Councilman Marino said that a consideration for next year might be staggered hours for the Beach Services Officers.

Administrator Tucker confirmed to Councilman Buckhannon that Public Works removes debris from the beach usually once per week. She commented that, on any given day, one can walk the beach between 5 p.m. and 8:30 p.m. and see set up tents and umbrellas with no one around. You do not know if someone is coming back to get it or if it has been abandoned. The question is when does Public Works remove it; do they wait until it looks like the tents in the pictures?

Councilman Buckhannon said that it might be late in the season, but hurricane season was just beginning. And the beaches would still be active until October, so maybe there was a need to contract to get the debris removed. Councilman Marino said there were ways to work out the finances to get these items removed.

#### **D. Enforcement of Rollout Cart Ordinance**

The Administrator began her comments by saying that the rollout cart ordinance is a problem in two (2) ways; they are as follows:

1. some of these cart live in corrals on the right-of-way; and
2. there are cases on some properties where it is impossible to locate the cart out of sight.

With heavy enforcement, there will be a need for a modification to the ordinance to resolve these problems, and it may be time for the City to take a position on the corrals that are in the right-of-way.

Mayor Sottile commented that he was reluctant for this Committee to take any action since rollout carts come under the purview of the Public Works Committee. The Public Works Committee has made no recommendation on the subject; the Public Safety Committee has become involved only because the Livability Officer has been enforcing the ordinance.

Councilman Buckhannon found it ridiculous to put police officers in charge of rollout carts when he, too, saw it as a Public Works issue. The livability issues of the island should be a focus for all departments and all residents, a source of cohesiveness. He

added that he did not see the position of Livability Officer as one to enforce the rollout cart ordinance.

Mayor Sottile commented that his understanding of a Livability Officer was an officer who enforced the zoning codes of the island, and this is a zoning code. The Administrator explained that rollout carts and Livability became linked because many of the violations related to rollout carts have had to do with rental units where the carts were rolled out at an improper time.

Councilman Marino agreed with Councilman Buckhannon that the Livability issue has a degree of overlap between committees while the Livability Officer is under the command of the Police Chief under the purview of the Public Safety Committee. Based on these facts, he does not see involvement from the Public Safety Committee on the rollout cart ordinance, and, before any action is taken, there must be a recommendation from the Public Works Committee.

## **5. New Business:**

### **A. Short-term Rental – Discussion on Safety Clause**

Administrator Tucker reminded the Committee that, at one time, there had been a safety inspection clause in the short-term rental ordinance, but it was removed. It has since been suggested that the City consult with its attorney about including some kind of safety clause in the application process. This clause will state generally that the owner or agent of the property has inspected it ensuring that the windows are in working condition, that there are no defects and that the smoke detectors work – things of that nature.

Mayor Sottile stated that he did not want to take any action without the attorney's opinion; he also recalled that this subject had been debated during the short-term rental ordinance discussions.

Councilman Marino noted that there is a difference here with what was debated previously in that the original discussions had been related to the City performing inspections. This proposal is for a clause in the rental license application that the owner signs off on stating that the rental property is safe and in good working order.

### **B. Cameron Speed Survey**

Chief Buckhannon stated that, at the request of a resident for stop signs at 32<sup>nd</sup> Avenue (making a four {4} way stop), he had done a speed survey. The Chief noted that he had informed the resident that the placement of stop signs had to go through the

Highway Department; in the course of the conversation, the resident explained that he felt there was a speeding problem on Cameron. Subsequently, Chief Buckhannon set up the City's equipment to determine if there was, in fact, a speeding issue. Over a weeklong period that included two (2) weekends, the results were that two percent (2%) of the vehicles were speeding on Cameron Boulevard, and the Chief does not believe this warrants a stop sign placement. He reminded the Committee that, approximately eighteen (18) months ago, he had requested that 25 mile per hour speed limit signs be posted throughout the island; Cameron Boulevard is currently 30 miles per hour because it is not posted. The Chief repeated that he does not believe that the Highway Department will find that a stop sign is warranted, but they may agree to post Cameron at 25 miles per hour. He suggested that the situation be turned over to the Highway Department for them to study and make recommendations.

Councilman Marino proposed to Chief Buckhannon that enforcement be stepped up in the area of Cameron Boulevard.

Responding to Councilman Buckhannon's inquiry about what the City must do to have Cameron posted at a 25 mile per hour speed limit, Chief Buckhannon stated that the City would need to make a request to the Highway Department; they will either take the City's data or compile their own. Based upon their interpretation of the results, they will determine if the reduced speed limit is warranted.

**MOTION: Mayor Sottile moved to request of the Highway Department to reduce the speed limit to 25 miles per hour along the entire length of Cameron Boulevard; Councilman Buckhannon seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

While still on "New Business," Mayor Sottile expressed his interest in having a roundabout constructed at 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue and Palm Boulevard. He did recall that it had been stated that there was not enough right-of-way there to construct a roundabout, but he noted that he has seen smaller roundabouts in Mount Pleasant. He would like to have the Highway Department officially report on the possibility of having a roundabout at that intersection; the Mayor believes that a roundabout will keep traffic moving in that area and alleviate congestion. Mayor Sottile suggested that possibly Mount Pleasant has taken these areas out of the state road system and constructed these smaller roundabouts on their own.

Administrator Tucker was asked to contact the Highway Department to study this intersection again in conjunction with a roundabout. Should they again report that they cannot build one there, but the City could; then taking the road from the state is something that the City should look into.

Councilman Marino commented that the Highway Department would have its own set of standards for roundabouts, but an engineering firm might be able to design a functional roundabout to different standards.

Administrator Tucker agreed with Mayor Sottile that the City has a grant for traffic studies. She stated her understanding of the issue as a question of whether there are two (2) sets of design standards for roundabouts.

Administrator Tucker recalled an earlier conversation with the Mayor where he stated he was interested in getting information from the Police Department on golf cart citations included in the monthly traffic report. Chief Buckhannon replied that he was currently trying to determine the best way to capture that information. Mayor Sottile said he has noticed that more and more golf carts have been using the beach access paths, particularly along Palm Boulevard; the only one they are allowed to use is 25<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

Councilman Marino remarked that, from the 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade, it was evident that people enjoy their golf carts. He noted that many of the beach access paths, especially at the end of one of the roads along Ocean Boulevard, have almost a full lot of beach access path, and there should be a way that the Public Safety Committee can, in the future, look at providing more golf cart parking on Ocean that is not unfriendly to the habitat.

Chief Graham noted that the golf carts have often been left where they are blocking emergency access to the beach; she added that there are places with a sixty (60) foot right-of-way where golf cart parking could be made available along the side.

## **6. Highlights of Department Reports – June and July 2007**

### **A. Fire Department – Fire Chief Graham**

Chief Graham summarized the June calls as primarily lightning strikes, boats getting loose from docks, many lost children and water rescues; she touched briefly on the assistance the department had given to the City of Charleston related to the Sofa Super Store fire. She reported that training is continuing for all personnel. She informed the Committee that page 23 is a new report, "Volunteer Activity Report;" the Chief was pleased to announce that the City now has approximately fifteen (15) volunteers.

For July the most significant call was to a propane grill fire at 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue according to Chief Graham; she commented that this was the third fire at a house owned by this property owner, but the circumstances were purely coincidental – just bad luck. The Chief reported that the month had generally been quite busy between lost children and lightning strikes, typical summer incidents.

Mayor Sottile noticed in the report that there had been a couple of fires involving pine straw; he was curious to know if there was a way to outlaw pine straw as a landscaping mulch. With the intense heat and the dry days, the pine straw ignites almost immediately when a cigarette is thoughtlessly tossed into it. The results could be disastrous since the straw is placed right against so many homes.

Mayor Sottile took an extra moment to thank the Public Safety Committee, particularly the Fire Department and the staff for all that they did over the past weekend with the shark problem. The personnel stayed with the problem all weekend and did a wonderful job. He commended Chief Graham for coordinating with the local and state agencies to ensure that everything that needed to be done was done.

**B. Police Department – Chief Buckhannon**

Among the highlights for June covered by Chief Buckhannon were an attempted robbery on front beach on June 7 and vandalism on June 14 by several youths that were found to have committed in excess of one hundred fifty (150) similar acts in North Carolina. The Chief reported that arrests have increased substantially over last year. Year to date in 2007, there have been in excess of six hundred (600) arrests, and, for the same period in 2006, there were just over three hundred (300) arrests.

For July, Chief Buckhannon related a July 29 incident involving a car chase that appeared to be a driver under the influence that ended up including officers from Isle of Palms, Mount Pleasant and North Charleston before the spike sticks were put out that blew the suspect's tires. In the end, the suspect was a female who wanted to commit suicide; she was charged with DUI.

Mayor Sottile commented that there was an 86% increase in parking tickets over 2006.

The Chief also reported that there had been a high number of larcenies during the month at twenty-five (25) and six (6) burglaries as well.

Mayor Sottile noted that Livability offenses and Noise Ordinance violations were two (2) separate categories on the report; Chief Buckhannon commented that the Noise Ordinance was not included as Livability offenses in order to better track the infractions.

Through the month of July, the arrests by the City are running three hundred (300) more than the same period in 2006.

Chief Buckhannon announced that Detective Caldwell now has an investigator working with her, the Victims Advocate position.

Chief Buckhannon described a new state reporting requirement on warning violations issued by the City; information that the state is requiring to provide includes gender, ethnicity and age. Since this is such a labor- intensive project, Chief Buckhannon reported that he has been talking with the software vendor to develop a report that will make it easier to file the information with the state.

Councilman Marino had several questions and the first was if the Beach Services Officers run tag checks when they are writing parking tickets on front beach; the Chief replied that they do not. If there were something suspicious, the Beach Services Officer would get an officer who then would run the check; by state law, the Beach Services officers cannot request or receive the information. The second inquiry was to what does the Chief attribute the large increase in the number of arrests over 2006. Chief Buckhannon said that he attributes the increase to the alcohol offenses that have been occurring on the beach. Finally Councilman Marino asked how the Chief felt the Livability Officer was settling in, and the Chief responded that Sergeant O'Donnell is doing well - he has met with the rental companies and has gone through two (2) years of reports to identify the ones that relate to livability.

When asked by Mayor Sottile if the hot-line was working, Chief Buckhannon stated that they were in the process of changing the lines over so that calls ring through to the Livability Officer rather than dispatch. The Livability hotline number is 886-8282.

Councilman Marino wants to have refrigerator magnets with the Livability Hotline number made up to distribute to island residents to have a quick reference when there are livability issues.

Mayor Sottile wanted to know if the Beach Services Officers were authorized to go into island neighborhoods; Chief Buckhannon's response was that they go into the neighborhoods to assist the officers by picking up objects for them, as well as to assist the Animal Control Officer. A second question from the Mayor was if the Beach Services Officers cover the entire length of the beach; the Chief said that, if there are four (4) working together, one (1) is assigned to work the entire beach area. Councilman Marino said, when he is on the beach, he never sees a Beach Patrol officer, but he constantly sees violations occurring. He suggested that it would be a good thing to have two (2) officers to patrol the entirety of the beach.

## **7. Miscellaneous**

Councilman Marino remarked that, given that the City is in the design phase of the Public Safety Building, he asked Administrator Tucker to contact Cole+Russell about "greening" the building to save the City money in operational costs in the long run. Administrator Tucker related a conversation she had with Mark Shoemaker who told her

that many products considered to be energy conserving are items that they commonly use in their designs. He also explained to her that, since Cole+Russell is a LEEDs (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) design firm, they can do what is referred to as a LEEDs audit on the design as it progresses; this will allow the City to see what additional costs are involved to include some of these features, as well as the long-term savings to the City.

Mayor Sottile welcomed Councilman Buckhannon to his first meeting as the new member of the Committee.

The Committee scheduled its next meeting for 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday, September 12, 2007.

Mayor Sottile asked Administrator Tucker to schedule a walk through of Fire Station #2 before the next meeting and to contact the Committee members with the details.

**On a motion from Councilman Buckhannon, the meeting was duly adjourned at 6:55 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted:

John Marino, Chairman