

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
5:00 p.m., Monday, October 7, 2013

The regular meeting of the Public Safety Committee was held at 5:00 p.m., Monday, October 7, 2013 in Council Chambers of City Hall, 1207 Palm Boulevard, Isle of Palms, South Carolina. Attending the meeting were Councilmember Bergwerf, Mayor Cronin, Chair Bettelli, Administrator Tucker, Fire Chief Graham, Police Chief Buckhannon and City Clerk Copeland; a quorum was present to conduct business.

1. Chair Bettelli 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: Mayor Cronin moved to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of September 9, 2013 as submitted; Councilmember Bergwerf seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

3. **Citizens' Comments – None**

4. **Old Business**

A. Status of Fire Department Staffing

Battalion Chief Jason Smith again joined Chief Graham for the presentation to the Committee; she again had a handout for the Committee with changes from the last meeting. (A copy of the handout is attached to the historical record of the meeting.) The topics for discussion are an additional firefighter for Station 2, adjusted salary ranges for all fire positions and the amount available for performance-based raises not keeping pace with the economy since the elimination of the COLA.

The presentation started with a review of the current staffing levels and equipment assigned to both Station 1 and Station 2; additionally the Chief explained the difference in call responses between the two (2) stations. Despite providing a lot of training, it is evident that the City cannot mirror the response offered at the two (2) stations. The Chief reiterated the fact that having one (1) additional fire-fighter per shift at Station 2 will reduce the number of medical assist calls that the ninety-five foot (95 ft.) ladder truck responds to, will reduce the wear-and-tear on the vehicle, reduce the cost of tires and reduce the time the vehicle is out of service. Battalion Chief Smith noted that, in a structure fire in District 2, the captain is riding in the engine and will be the person assigned to the hydrant, i.e. the most experienced person on the team is assigned to one of the most menial jobs at the scene and not able to get inside to attack the fire for a minimum of three to five (3-5) minutes. An additional firefighter at Station 2 frees-up the officer to begin the interior attack much quicker.

On the subject of staffing losses between September 2012 and September 2013, a total of eleven (11) full-time fire personnel have left the IOP Fire Department; these eleven (11) persons had a total of forty-four (44) years of "island" experience and approximately ten thousand five hundred sixty (10,560) hours of training. Battalion Chief Smith stated that the island is losing personnel faster than it can train them. The loss of experienced personnel has made it difficult

to fill positions above the rank of firefighter; the positions vacated include two (2) engineers, four (4) officers and five (5) firefighters qualified for promotion to engineer.

Administrator Tucker asked if any of the people who have left have indicated that they left for any reason other than salary. Chief Graham stated that salary has definitely been a major factor, but the Department has also had some disgruntled employees who created moral issues. The Administrator recalled that disciplinary issues in the Department caused persons to seek alternate employment as well.

Battalion Chief Smith indicated that the Isle of Palms Fire Department is becoming a training ground for other local departments. Often when firefighters go to other local departments for training, they are actively recruited; it is also through these training classes that the pay inequities have come to light. Because the City does a lot of training and has the variety of calls, IOP firefighters are very attractive to other departments.

Battalion Chief Smith explained that it takes three (3) summers of training to become a seasoned member of the Isle of Palms Fire Department. The first year is familiarization, i.e. getting to know the island, the surrounding waterways, the types of structures on the island, etc. as well as a high level of medical training. Year 2 provides the firefighter with supervised direction, and in Year 3, the firefighter has only limited supervision. With the retention problem the Department is experiencing, it is in a continuous cycle of basic training; this can be frustrating to the more-seasoned who are not getting the additional training to prepare them for officer positions. The retention must be addressed because the safety of the residents of the island and visitors to the island is at risk.

The lack of experience is translating to safety issues; Battalion Chief Smith reported that on his crew of three (3), no one has run a water rescue and they have been exposed to less than three (3) interior structure fires. He noted that the Isle of Palms hires only firefighters who have completed the Fire Academy; they have the necessary certifications, but may have no experience.

Chief Graham reported that the City has lost personnel to Mount Pleasant and may lose more since Mount Pleasant is building another station that will require twenty (20) firefighters to staff it. Battalion Chief Smith added that most of the local departments are continuing to expand, i.e. the City of Charleston, North Charleston and Mount Pleasant. Nine (9) members of the IOP Fire Department have been interviewed by the City of Charleston and North Charleston.

In an effort to reverse the present trend, the first recommendation is to increase the staffing level at Station 2 by one (1) firefighter per shift for a total of three (3) employees effective November 1, 2013. The proposed budgetary impact for FY14 to add these firefighters, using the new wage ranges, is estimated to be one hundred three thousand four hundred twenty-seven dollars (\$103,427) which includes salary, scheduled overtime, fringe benefits, bunker gear, uniforms and physicals.

The second recommendation is to increase the wage ranges for all positions in the Fire Department by ten percent (10%) effective November 1, 2013. The budgetary impact of this

action on the FY14 budget is projected to be forty-seven thousand forty-two dollars (\$47,042) including scheduled overtime and fringe benefits.

The third and final recommendation is to increase the existing three percent (3%) merit pool by adding three percent (3%). If this action were to apply only to the Fire Department, the approximately budgetary impact for FY14 is eighteen thousand two hundred fifty-one dollars (\$18,251); if the increase applies to all City departments, the approximate budgetary impact for FY14 is fifty-four thousand seven hundred sixty-one dollars (\$54,761). This assumes that the increase would go into effect January 1, 2014.

Administrator Tucker noted that, at the Personnel Committee, there was discussion about changing the merit-based raises rather than reinstating the cost of living (COLA). The information is being presented in this manner because there was not a consensus in the Personnel Committee to re-introduce the COLA, but they did understand how the merit pool of three percent (3%) did not allow enough of a substantial raise to the performers to keep pace with other expenses increasing and the cost of living. It is likely that the merit pool should have been larger or increasing over the years in order for IOP Fire Department wages to maintain parity with other local departments. The other alternative is to reinstate the cost of living and, for those who have been employed since it was dropped, to make a retroactive increase based on what the cost of living was back to that year. The Personnel Committee did not make a recommendation to reinstate the cost of living increases but talked in terms of preferring performance-based increases.

Chair Bettelli noted that the Personnel Committee had a wide range of views on either a cost of living or STEP. The Chair stated that he sees the STEP differently from the cost of living, because, with a STEP, the Department could build on training hours to give an increase and was something that the City should look at in the future.

Captain Bullock stated that the City did have a STEP program in the past, but no increases were tied to employee evaluations.

Chief Graham explained they arrived at the new wage ranges by taking the average of the entry level pay for the local departments and the number falls in line at a ten percent (10%) increase across the board.

Mayor Cronin asked whether ten percent (10%) was enough.

Administrator Tucker responded that this was the reason that the Committee was being presented three (3) recommendations to eliminate the problem.

Battalion Chief Smith reviewed the pay voucher from a firefighter who recently left the department; this firefighter had a bachelor's degree and seven (7) years' experience prior to coming to the island. His net pay for two (2) weeks' work was seven hundred thirty-six dollars (\$736). He then described a firefighter on his crew who does not participate in the dinner rotation because he cannot afford to do so. Whether ten percent (10%) is enough is unknown, but it will make the City competitive again.

The call breakdown between Districts 1 and 2 were provided to the Committee, and Chief Graham noted that the number of calls is not equal between the two (2) stations, but she stated that the two (2) full cardiac arrests in the past week were at Station 2.

On the subject of moral, Battalion Chief Smith reported that the number one issue is the pay scale, and it is talked about very frequently. He indicated that pay is a common topic for discussion when firefighters go to training at other stations or when firefighters come to the island for training. If the recommendations are implemented, they will have a very real impact on the moral of the IOP Fire Department.

MOTION: Mayor Cronin moved to recommend to the Ways and Means Committee to add three (3) additional personnel to Station 1 effective November 1, 2013; Councilmember Bergwerf seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Mayor Cronin asked whether the Personnel Committee had made any recommendation relative to the pay ranges; Administrator Tucker responded that she did not remember the exact language, but the recommendation on two (2) issues was to push it forward to Ways and Means.

As for the increase to the merit pool for FY14, Mayor Cronin made it clear that it would apply City-wide, and the other members of the Committee agreed.

MOTION: Chair Bettelli moved to recommend to the Ways and Means Committee to increase the wage ranges in the Fire Department by 10% for all positions effective November 1, 2013; Councilmember Bergwerf seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

MOTION: Councilmember Bergwerf moved to recommend to the Ways and Means Committee to increase the FY14 merit pool by 3% to 6% City-wide effective January 1, 2014; Chair Bettelli seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Administrator Tucker acknowledged that this discussion was about the Fire Department which is dealing with a significant problem, but she opined that Chief Buckhannon is going to have to do similar research since the Police Department is also experiencing an out-ward migration – two (2) patrol officers have resigned and one (1) possibly will.

Addressing the question “is this enough?” Councilmember Bergwerf asked if this was a situation where the request is for ten percent (10%), but it is countered at six percent (6%) and the agreement is somewhere in between. Other members of the Committee agreed that this is not a negotiation; Chair Bettelli stated that he sees this as what the City needs to do to solve the retention issues in the Fire Department. Administrator Tucker explained that the problem is not just the issue with new hires, but it is through the ranks. The City is so out-of-synch with other local governments that someone would take a demotion at another department in order to increase their salary back up within three (3) years. They are leaving for jobs here to go to entry level positions that are way below what their skill-set in order to make up the salary differential.

Battalion Chief Smith stated that he and Chief Graham are not trying to put a financial burden on the City, but the job and goal of the Fire Department is to make the residents and visitors of the Isle of Palms as safe as possible which requires experience. Administrator Tucker admitted that, if this initiative succeeds, it is going to be a challenge to figure out how to pay for it.

B. Discussion of Parking Lot and Kiosk Hours

Chair Bettelli asked Chief Buckhannon about the results of extending the hours for the municipal parking lots and the enforcement of the kiosks.

According to the Chief in June, the change to 8:00 p.m. “had a tremendous impact on keeping an element out that would come over when things got cheap for them.” Not having to pay for the lots or to park on Front Beach “made it very attractive to them to come to the beach and ruin the atmosphere that [the City] would otherwise expect.” He believes that extending the hours kept that element more inland and away from the Isle of Palms. Chief Buckhannon stated that he has not heard any complaints from Front Beach businesses; in fact, a couple of businesses told him that they were glad the City had acted.

When asked by Mayor Cronin whether the program should be repeated for the 2014 beach season, Chief Buckhannon responded. “I think we should absolutely do it next year and the following year!”

MOTION: Chair Bettelli moved to establish a City-wide practice to extend the closing time for the municipal parking lots and enforcement of the kiosks until 8:00 p.m.; Councilmember Bergwerf seconded.

Chief Buckhannon commented that he does not know whether extending the hours significantly impacted revenue; Administrator Tucker confirmed that there was additional revenue generated.

According to the Administrator, the only complaint received at City Hall was from people who had not taken notice of the signs or who thought the City had not given adequate notification and were ticketed. Most of these complaints were changed to warnings.

VOTE: The motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

6. Highlights of Departmental Reports

Fire Department – Chief Graham

On September 2nd, personnel responded to an area near Awendaw where people had jumped off their boat, and it floated away; they were rescued just prior to a major lightning event. On September 10th, personnel responded to the 1100 block of Ocean Boulevard to a person in full cardiac arrest; he was transported. On September 22nd, personnel responded to a possible fire that turned out to be a grill on the back porch, and, on the 27th, personnel responded to the docks at the Boathouse Restaurant for a boat on fire. Of ninety-five (95) incidents, fifty-one (51) were medical calls.

Police Department – Chief Buckhannon

On September 26th, the Police Department held a “Meet and Greet” in the parking lot of the Citadel Beach House that targeted residents in the 4100 through 5700 blocks of Palm Boulevard; eight (8) residents attended. The next meeting is scheduled for October 25, 2013.

In September, dispatchers responded to a total of thirty-nine hundred five (3,905) calls; of that number three thousand eighty-five (3,085) were for the IOP Police Department. There were three hundred forty-six (346) traffic stops that produced eighty-seven (87) tickets. Officers wrote one hundred thirty-five (135) reports and had twenty-four (24) arrests; fourteen (14) were for liquor law violations. In September, officers received twenty-five (25) noise complaints and issued eighteen (18) citations. Two (2) officers began their training at the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy in Columbia; they will begin their field training in December.

7. Miscellaneous Business

Chair Bettelli announced that the Barrier Island Ecothon will be held on Sunday, October 27, 2013; this is a very low impact event for the island.

The Chair thanked all of the island's public safety personnel who assisted with the Connector Run which was again a very successful event for the island. Traffic was off the island before 10:00 a.m.

Administrator Tucker reported that she received a letter of concern from a resident of 46th Avenue because people are turning right that are headed to Wild Dunes and are turning around on 46th Avenue creating a safety hazard. The Administrator informed the Committee that she has reached out to SCDOT and Stantec, and she has tested two (2) different GPS systems and learned that two (2) systems direct drivers to turn right at what they are describing as 4600 Palm Boulevard. Some tweaking needs to be done to get to the bottom of the problem so that people know to turn left to get into the main gate of Wild Dunes.

Chair Bettelli asked if there was an address for Wild Dunes; Administrator Tucker said that it is listed both as 4600 Palm Boulevard and 5757 Palm Boulevard.

The Administrator also informed the Committee that the Coast guard would be training off the coast of the Isle of Palms and Sullivan's Island in October, November, December and into 2014.

The subject of the virus-infected dolphins moving down the Atlantic coast came up, and Chair Bettelli voiced the opinion that the Public Works staff would assist with the removal of the carcasses from the beach. Councilmember Bergwerf said that there is one (1) man who is still responding, but he is serving the entire state. Once the government is up-and-running again, there will be two (2) people.

Administrator Tucker reported that she has communicated with the Public Works, Fire and Police Departments today about the problem and stated that the first priority was to keep the public away because the disease is communicable to humans. The proper management of the body is the next problem if the City does not have someone who will take it off the island and

take responsibility for it. The Administrator voiced her concern over how to deal with two (2) protocols, i.e. a body that washes ashore that is not yet dead and the proper disposal of a carcass. The Administrator indicated that staff would talk with DHEC and DNR about what protocols to put in place.

Councilmember Bergwerf suggested contacting *The Island Eye* to run a follow-up to brief notice in *The Post and Courier* instructing islands' residents not to touch these animals when encountered on the beach.

Next Meeting Date: 5:00 p.m., Monday, November 11, 2013 in the Conference Room.

8. Executive Session – not needed

9. Adjourn

MOTION: Mayor Cronin moved to adjourn the meeting at 5:15 p.m.; Councilmember Bergwerf seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Respectfully submitted:

Marie Copeland
City Clerk