

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

5:00 p.m., Tuesday, July 7, 2009

The regular meeting of the Public Safety Committee was held at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, July 7, 2009 in Council Chambers of City Hall, 1207 Palm Boulevard, Isle of Palms, South Carolina. Attending the meeting were Chairman Buckhannon, Councilmen Bettelli and Loftus, City Administrator Tucker, Fire Chief Graham, Police Chief Buckhannon 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 Loftus moved to defer approval of the minutes of the regular meeting of June 2, 2009 until the next meeting; Councilman Bettelli seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

3. Citizens' Comments

Noel Scott, 6809 Back Bay Drive, reviewed the evolution of the 41st Avenue and Palm Boulevard intersection from August 2007 when a roundabout was suggested to the demonstration project that is currently in place. He then reported on the overwhelmingly positive response he received to an email he sent to many Wild Dunes residents about the current configuration of the intersection. In conclusion, he asked that the Committee agree tonight to propose to City Council at the July meeting that the SC DOT demonstration project be made permanent.

Gary Lauderdale of 30 Yacht Harbor Court introduced himself as the President of the Wild Dunes Community Association; he stated that he was present at this meeting as their representative. He complimented the Public Safety Committee for addressing the problems with the 41st Avenue and Palm Boulevard intersection; from the perspective of his board members and residents of Wild Dunes with whom he has spoken, the present configuration is working well and should remain. He stated that he has spoken with representatives of the Wild Dunes Resort who agree that the intersection is working well as it currently exists and helps their operation.

Gary Frank, 31 Yacht Harbor Court, stated that he has lived on the island since 1985 and that he has seen a lot of changes over the years. He commented that road changes usually take place for two (2) reasons, i.e. safety and traffic flow, which may cause an inconvenience for some. He stated that, since the last "fix" was put in place (the arrows indicating which lane stops and which lane yields), traffic flows very well and the project has cost the City a minimal amount of money; therefore, he stated that he firmly supports making the demonstration project permanent.

John Petzold, 14 Lake Village Lane, stated that he has been a resident since 1991. He noted that he has been involved with traffic engineering as a member of the state highway department in another state, and he has done traffic relocation studies with cities he represented; with that background, he expressed his opinion that a roundabout could not be constructed at 41st Avenue and Palm Boulevard because there is not enough space. He also reported that the

traffic flow through the intersection is quite good with the present configuration. Mr. Petzold also stated that there are fewer “near misses” in his opinion. In conclusion, he stated that he thought “it was one of the neatest things y’all have done down here.”

Joe Bianco, 9 Fairway Village, simply stated “the three-way stop is just so much better.”

Mark Bennett, 32 Yacht Harbor Court, did not know why there had to be so much consideration because the demonstration project has made “a world of difference” in the intersection in terms of traffic flow.

Bill Higgs, 6 Marsh Island Lane, added that, since the project is working, there is no reason to change it.

MOTION: Councilman Bettelli moved to suspend the rules to discuss *New Business – 41st Avenue and Palm Boulevard Intersection* at this time; Councilman Loftus seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

MOTION: Councilman Bettelli moved to present to City Council a request to the South Carolina Department of Transportation to make the 41st Avenue and Palm Boulevard intersection demonstration project permanent and to request also that the closure of Cameron Boulevard at 41st Avenue be made permanent to allow the STOP sign to be moved allowing better visibility for drivers; Councilman Loftus seconded.

Councilman Loftus recounted that the demonstration project has been in place since September 2008; therefore, it has been thoroughly tested both in-season and out. He stated that, for those who prefer a roundabout, it could still be done at some point in the future, but this configuration is working and should be made permanent. He did inform the public present, that nothing can be done to aesthetically improve the intersection until it has been formally approved by City Council.

Councilman Bettelli stated that the Committee did not doubt that the project was working, but the testing procedures had to be completed. He agreed with finalizing the project, but wanted to be certain that it was properly completed when the time comes.

Chairman Buckhannon commented that he seldom has cause to travel through the 41st Avenue and Palm Boulevard intersection; therefore, he has based his decision on reports from Chief Graham and Chief Buckhannon. He was told by both that there have not been any significant issues related to the reconfiguration, and he is, therefore, comfortable in supporting the motion.

Call for the Question: The motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

4. Old Business

A. Update on Public Safety Building

Administrator Tucker informed the Committee that there had been a progress meeting earlier in the day where the items remaining to be done were reviewed, as well as the punch-list that has been developed. She indicated that there is the possibility that the Certificate of Occupancy will be issued toward the end of the week; if that happens, occupation of the building could begin around the middle of next week. One of the primary items yet to be completed is the activation of communications equipment. The Administrator encouraged everyone to take the time to ride by as the site now looks like a public building, not a construction site.

Chairman Buckhannon asked if any change orders had come in; Administrator Tucker responded that she had received the change order today for the change directive that was approved at the June meeting. She stated that she anticipates an additional change order representing the final reconciliation on rain days.

Councilman Loftus asked Chief Buckhannon if a seamless transition of communications was expected from City Hall to the Public Safety Building. The Chief stated that there would be some down time with the 911 system during which time the City's 911 service will be on an automatic transfer to Mount Pleasant. There will be a delay in moving the dispatchers to the new building of two to three (2-3) weeks, but all of the radio and phone equipment will be set up in the new building. With the type of system that is being installed, everyone will be working off of the same regardless of physical location.

Councilman Loftus suggested that the ribbon cutting take place in the evening, around 6:00 to 6:30 p.m., to allow residents to return to the island from work and still come to the celebration.

B. Status of Two (2) Hour Parking Signs

Chief Buckhannon reported that he had been assured by SC DOT that the work order was placed last month, and they have a thirty (30) day turnaround on their purchase orders, plus the week the order is placed. With the time that has lapsed, the signs should be installed by Friday of this week.

Reference was made by Chairman Buckhannon that Chief Buckhannon and Administrator Tucker should initiate whatever they can as early as possible to get the 41st Avenue and Palm Boulevard project completed because the highway department does not have the sense of urgency about the project that the City has.

Administrator Tucker stated that there are complications to that project that she did not voice earlier; they are as follows:

- 1) Where does the legal responsibility lie for permanently closing Cameron Boulevard with SC DOT or the City of Isle of Palms?
- 2) Based on the City's dissatisfaction with DOT's design for the end of 25th Avenue, the City has requested a sketch of the finished product before any work is done.

- 3) DOT has been asked to study the feasibility of a roundabout considering the permanent closure of Cameron Boulevard, which was not considered previously.

The Administrator commented that these were outstanding requests with SC DOT for which she has not received responses.

Councilman Bettelli reminded the Committee that they had learned that school buses were stopping at the Cameron Boulevard barricade, moving it to pass through and replacing it each day. School will start in just over a month; therefore, the City needs to inform school district and/or the bus contractor of the City's plans for Cameron Boulevard.

Councilman Loftus asked if someone from the City would be present when the two (2) hour parking signs are installed on 25th Avenue to ensure that they are placed where the City wants them; Chief Buckhannon stated that he hoped they would contact him before they put the signs in the ground.

6. Highlights of Departmental Reports for June 2009

Fire Department

Chief Graham reported that the Fire Department had responded to two (2) lightning strikes during the month; in both cases there was damage to the homes, but no fire. The Department responded to one hundred twenty-four (124) calls during the month; of that total, fifty-six (56) were EMS calls. In back-flushing, training, testing and fires, the Department used approximately forty-five thousand (45,000) gallons of water. There was some vehicle maintenance expense in the month of June, part of which was the replacement of the pump panel that shorted out on Truck 1.

On the subject of the digital radios, Chief Graham reported on a meeting of the East Cooper area departments to discuss the problems they are experiencing East of the Cooper; among those in attendance was the Quality Control person for Motorola's southeastern division. Problems are continuing, but she stated that Charleston County Mobile Communications and the users are working well together. The new user group advisory board – that has been established as a result of this meeting – will meet again on July 19th; it will include fire, police, EMS and other agencies involved in public safety; as users, they will help to steer the future of the digital radio system. As currently established, the users' group must sign to agree with the terms before Charleston County can sign the contract.

Chief Graham was asked if the Communications on Wheels (COW), that Charleston County brought in from Texas as a temporary fix to the City's radio problems, had been used over the July 4th weekend. She explained that it had not been used because the purpose for which it was designed to work was not the way that the City needed it to work. The COW would have worked well in a small radius, but the City would have been off of its channel, off its systems – there were too many unanswered questions to justify its use.

Chairman Buckhannon inquired about how the July 4th weekend had been for the Fire Department; Chief Graham answered that there was a lot of radio traffic. They got a good bit of what they interpreted as interference, but some of it could be attributed to the increased traffic of the holiday, the heat and the moisture in the air. She stated that there had been difficulties with calls on the beach during the evening, but they worked through them, and the difficulties were reported.

Police Department

Chief Buckhannon began his report by recounting an incident on June 10th in Wild Dunes where an off-duty patrol officer apprehended an individual suspected of burglarizing a home before he could leave the island or dispose of the items he had taken. The suspect was also driving a stolen vehicle from Florence County; after a bond hearing, where the individual was charged with possession of stolen property, burglary and possession of a stolen vehicle, he was extradited to Florence County.

The Chief reported that, on June 29th, the City Hall building was hit by lightening; there was some equipment damage that took the 911 system down and a server blew up.

Regarding Livability, Chief Buckhannon stated that there had been sixty-one (61) reports; twenty-nine (29) involved short-term rentals, ten (10) involved excessive noise and fourteen (14) related to garbage cans. Twenty-four (24) calls involved the homes of island residents.

In conclusion, Chief Buckhannon distributed the traffic report for the July 4th weekend that has the traffic counts from 2002 through 2009; the traffic in 2009 was comparable to that of 2008. The reports indicated that the traffic was greater on July 3rd than on July 4th.

Councilman Loftus asked the two (2) Chiefs to give brief reports on the July 4th weekend. Chief Buckhannon stated that it had been a busy weekend for the Police Department, especially related to parking – many citations were issued. He noted that there were minimal problems on Saturday night for the fireworks display, but there had been some problems before the fireworks with people who were intoxicated. He and Chief Graham reported that there had been twelve missing children during the day on Saturday. After the fireworks, Front Beach was cleared by 10:30 p.m., but a two-car accident and a four-car accident on the Connector brought traffic to a stop, and, in addition, someone tried to make a u-turn to avoid the traffic and ended up in the ditch and halfway in the road blocking one lane of traffic. Ultimately, traffic cleared about midnight.

Chief Graham stated that the day had been fairly eventful, but nothing terrible happened, which she thought was amazing with the number of people who were on the island.

Another item of note from Chief Graham was that the Fire Department pickup truck was on the Connector following up on the boat that was stuck in the marsh when the truck was struck by a vehicle; the driver did not stop, but continued on her way. The Chief said that vehicle was a dark colored Jeep, and the accident blew out the windows, but no one has come forward. There was minimal damage to the Fire Department's truck.

7. Miscellaneous Business

Administrator Tucker announced that a disaster preparedness event has been scheduled for July 22, 2009 at the Sullivan's Island Fire Station. The Isle of Palms and Sullivan's Island have alternately hosted the event, but, with the all of the activity surrounding the Public Safety Building, the City did not feel it could host the event this year. A tentative date has been set for the 2010 Disaster Preparedness Expo in the new Public Safety Building of Friday, June 11. The Administrator commented that she had received feedback from Councilman Loftus that he did not think Friday was a good idea, so she encouraged members of the Committee to recommend an alternate day. She added that Friday had been selected because historically Friday evening expos have had the best attendance.

Councilman Loftus asked whether the next meeting could be held in the new building; the suggestion was met with enthusiasm.

Next Meeting Date: 5:00 p.m., Tuesday, August 11, 2009, in Public Safety Building.

8. Adjourn

MOTION: Chairman Buckhannon moved to adjourn at 5:52 p.m.; Councilman Bettelli seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Respectfully submitted:

Marie Copeland
City Clerk