

**PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE**  
5:00 p.m., Monday, November 11, 2013

The regular meeting of the Public Safety Committee was held at 5:00 pm. on Monday, November 11, 2013 in the City Hall Conference Room, 1207 Palm Boulevard, Isle of Palms, South Carolina. Attending the meeting were Mayor Cronin, Chair Bettelli, City Administrator Tucker, Fire Chief Graham, Police Chief Buckhannon, Assistant to the City Administrator Dziuban and City Clerk Copeland. Councilmember Bergwerf's absence was excused and 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 October 7, 2013 as submitted; Chair Bettelli seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**3. Citizens' Comments**

On Veteran's Day, Chair Bettelli voiced the City's appreciation to all City employees who are serving or have served their country.

**4. Old Business**

**A. Status of Fire Department Staffing**

Chief Graham distributed a color-coded copy of the schedule of Fire Department employees who have left the City's employment since 2010; the positions highlighted in yellow came to the City as trained EMTs, and those highlighted in green acquired their EMT training as IOP employees. The wages associated with each person who has left the City were also included, covering a five year (5 yr.) period; Chief Graham pointed out that, although the entry level salaries are competitive, salary growth is slow. Administrator Tucker noted that the reason given for leaving the Isle of Palms Fire Department in the majority of cases is more money; in 2013, seven of nine (7 of 9) personnel left the Isle of Palms for more money elsewhere.

In addition, information was included in meeting packets that compared, in detail, salary and benefit differences between the Isle of Palms Fire Department and those offered by the City of Charleston, St. John's Fire District, Sullivan's Island, North Charleston, Mount Pleasant and Charleston County EMTs.

The schedule on the first page compared Isle of Palms' entry level wages for firefighter, engineer, captain and battalion chief with the information provided by the local municipalities listed above; it also indicated whether the local governments give cost of living, merit and/or longevity increases. Since both Mount Pleasant and North Charleston offer EMT bonuses and since most IOP firefighters are EMTs as well, the bonuses were added into the starting wage for those two (2) local departments. Administrator Tucker noted that efforts had been made to make this comparison as equitably as possible; for example, all wages have been converted to reflect the two thousand nine hundred twenty hours (2,920 hrs.) that IOP personnel work in a

year. Chief Graham stated that, of the local governments that pay a cost of living (COLA) increase "sometimes," the decision is made on a year-to-year basis; the last cost of living increase at the Isle of Palms was in 2009. When the IOP entry level firefighter pay is compared to the average for other departments in the area, the City's wage for a firefighter is ten percent (10%) less.

In the subsequent pages of the handout, each municipality that was contacted is individually compared to the Isle of Palms and the health insurance benefit is added to the equation. The City of Isle of Palms pays one hundred percent (100%) of the health insurance premium for employees and fifty percent (50%) for dependents.

In the comparison to the City of Charleston, Administrator Tucker pointed out that Charleston provides seven (7) annual five percent (5%) "step" raises that occur on an employee's anniversary date and are not merit-based; in addition, the "steps" follow an employee if they are promoted, i.e. a firefighter with three (3) steps promoted to engineer would be paid the starting salary for an engineer plus three (3) five percent (5%) steps. Although the insurance plans offered are comparable in benefits, Isle of Palms' fire personnel pay more for dependent health insurance than City of Charleston fire personnel because the City of Charleston makes a larger contribution toward dependent health insurance coverage than the Isle of Palms. Battalion Chief Jason Smith pointed out that the City of Charleston adds five percent (5%) to entry level pay for every level of education above a high school diploma, i.e. five percent (5%) for an Associates Degree, ten percent (10%) for a Bachelors Degree and fifteen percent (15%) for a Masters Degree.

At the moment, St. John's Fire District is not only paying its fire personnel higher wages, but it also offers COLA, merit increases and longevity bonuses, which are paid in December. A firefighter at the Isle of Palms will contribute approximately twenty-one hundred dollars (\$2,100) more for family health insurance coverage than employees of St. John's Fire District.

Starting firefighter salary at Sullivan's Island is more than four thousand dollars (\$4,000) per year higher than the Isle of Palms; Sullivan's Island also has both COLA and merit increases. Sullivan's Island also provides its employees with a wellness benefit of three hundred dollars (\$300) for an individual and six hundred dollars (\$600) for a family; although few employees take advantage of the wellness program, employees do like having the benefit.

The City of North Charleston's entry level wages exceed those of the Isle of Palms from thirty-two hundred dollars (\$3,200) for a firefighter to eight thousand dollars (\$8,000) for a battalion chief. Isle of Palms' fire personnel pay eight hundred dollars (\$800) per year more for employee/spouse health insurance and two thousand dollars (\$2,000) per year for family health insurance than employees of the North Charleston Fire Department.

Items of note for Mount Pleasant include the fact that employees receive a three percent (3%) increase upon the successful completion of the six (6) month probationary period; entry level wages are very comparable to those of the Isle of Palms and only family health insurance coverage is considerably less than that of the Isle of Palms. Administrator Tucker commented that the City does not often lose personnel to Mount Pleasant.

Since the majority of Isle of Palms' firefighters are also EMTs, the starting salary for Charleston County EMTs was determined to be relevant to the discussion. Of note at Charleston County is the fact that they provide a longevity increase of three percent (3%) in years one (1), three (3), five (5), seven (7) and ten (10); the longevity increase moves to six percent (6%) every five (5) years after ten (10). Isle of Palms' fire department personnel pay less for health insurance coverage at every level except family where there is a difference of only one hundred sixty-three dollars (\$163).

The last page of the handout is, in the Administrator's opinion, the most telling of all; it is here that a firefighter's wages are projected out five (5) years in each local government identified and the average is compared to the Isle of Palms. This page clearly illustrates the problem in the Isle of Palms Fire Department as it was originally brought before the Committee. The assumptions on which this data is based are as follows:

- Employee starts 1/1/13 as a firefighter.
- Employee works for 3 years as a firefighter and is then promoted to engineer for years 4 and 5.
- Employee performs at a high level.
- Wage ranges are the amounts listed on page 1 with no increase in ranges over the 5-year period.
- For agencies that give merits, the merits are 3% per year.
- For agencies that give COLAs, the COLAs are 2% per year in years 1, 3 and 5.
- For agencies that give longevity increases, these are included in the computations.

After one (1) year, the Isle of Palms firefighter is making an average of twelve percent (12%) less than his or her counterpart across the region; the difference increases to fourteen percent (14%) after three (3) years.

Administrator Tucker pointed out that the merit pool is not large enough to compensate for the loss of the COLA and for the increased wage deductions employees are seeing in retirement contributions, taxes and insurance premiums.

Chief Graham noted that the Fire Department was also asked to provide additional information on the training investment it has made in the personnel who have resigned; therefore, a list of training courses was provided for each position in the Department with its associated cost in hours. The first page lists the training for a new firefighter that totals five hundred thirty-four (534) hours of time for the firefighter and the supervisor for a total investment of approximately fourteen thousand three hundred thirty-eight dollars (\$14,338.) in the first six (6) months. Continuing to the supervisory position that was vacated, Battalion Chief Smith explained that the cost for the course-work was nine hundred fifty-five dollars (\$955) plus an additional four hundred fifty dollars (\$450) in EMT training. The total investment in a supervisory position including all course work, time invested by both the supervisor and covering employee, turnout gear, physical, uniforms, on-duty training, etc. is in excess of seventy thousand dollars (\$70,000). For one (1) engineer who left, the courses cost a total of nine hundred sixty-one dollars (\$961) plus an additional one hundred seventeen thousand dollars (\$117,000) for other required classes, tuition assistance provided by the City, a worker's compensation claim, on-going EMT training, etc. The City had invested in excess of seventeen thousand dollars

(\$17,000) in the Fire Inspector who stayed with the City one (1) year. For the four (4) individuals who left – a firefighter, a fire inspector, a supervisor and an engineer – the City had a total investment of two hundred twenty-one thousand seven hundred sixty dollars (\$221,760.)

Chair Bettelli thanked Chief Graham, Battalion Chief Smith, Administrator Tucker and Treasurer Suggs for the time and effort put into gathering the research for this presentation; Chief Graham added that Captain Maibach had also been instrumental in providing information for the report.

Administrator Tucker reminded the Chief that, at the Ways and Means Committee meeting, Fire Department staff had also been asked to provide information about the turnover rates of other local fire departments in the area to compare to the City's; Chief Graham stated that they are trying to obtain the information. The Chief indicated that other departments have been reluctant to provide data on their attrition rate, and she is hopeful of getting the information from the state database from the state Fireman's Association.

Mayor Cronin referred to page 9 of 9 in the salary survey handout and noted that the difference between the starting pay at Sullivan's Island is approximately four thousand dollars (\$4,000) higher than the Isle of Palms, but by year three (3) the difference has grown to more than six thousand dollars (\$6,000).

**B. Discussion of Extended Parking Lot and Kiosk Hours related to use of Hurricane Re-entry Stickers as Parking Passes**

Administrator Tucker recalled that this had come back to the Committee from the October Ways and Means Committee meeting when the discussion was held about making the extended hours for the kiosks and parking lots the standard practice. Comments were made that residents had complained about the change and that they wanted to be able to park for free during the hours of 6:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. during the season. At that time, the idea was floated of allowing the hurricane re-entry stickers and Wild Dunes decals to serve as parking passes during those extended hours. The Administrator recalled that, when this idea was discussed before, concerns had been voiced about enforcement and mis-perceptions about how guarded the stickers may or may not be. If the intent is to let people who live on the island to park for free, hurricane re-entry stickers and Wild Dunes decals are issued sometimes to people who are not full-time residents of the island but property owners who live elsewhere and own rental property on the island; stickers have been issued to the employees of businesses, and Wild Dunes stickers have been issued to corporations that own property within the gates. In general, the Administrator voiced her concerns that the issuance of stickers is not as controlled as some may think it is.

Chief Buckhannon stated that he shares the Administrator's concerns over the hurricane stickers and who has them and how they are to be recognized, as well as the legality of the use of the stickers in this manner since they are not readily available to everyone. In addition, the Chief stated that, if the hurricane re-entry stickers are to serve as parking passes to Front Beach kiosks, they should be changed and issued more frequently; they are re-issued now on a five-year (5 yr.) basis.

According to Mayor Cronin, the biggest potential abuse is a non-resident property owner coming to the island in a vehicle with a hurricane sticker and having dinner at a Front Beach restaurant – an act that certainly benefits island businesses. He noted that he did not see any way of determining whether the system is being abused or how badly it is being abused.

Administrator Tucker suggested that this pass should be incorporated into the overall parking management system.

**MOTION: Mayor Cronin moved to recommend to City Council the use of hurricane re-entry stickers and Wild Dunes decals as passes for free parking at the Front Beach kiosks between the hours of 6:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. in the summer months; Chair Bettelli seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

## **5. New Business**

### **A. Consideration of Phase III and Phase IV of Wayfinding Sign Initiative**

Marie Langlois of Stantec's Planning and Landscape Architecture Department and Rick Day were present for this presentation. Ms. Langlois explained that a contributing factor in getting the SCDOT permit for the original wayfinding signs, Phase I, was the City's decision to implement the wayfinding signs over the entire island; Phase II included an island-wide sign inventory.

The task assigned to Phase III is a signage classification system where the information gathered in Phase II will be analyzed to identify exterior vehicular and pedestrian traffic flows and patterns for key user groups and help to define user needs to develop a signage classification system. This system will be provided to the City along with draft conceptual designs; based on the City's input, sign types will be prioritized by importance in preparation for the preliminary signage plan, which initiates Phase IV.

In Phase IV, the tasks are a preliminary signage plan, an opinion of probable costs, a phasing plan, a preliminary wayfinding plan, finalizing the preliminary plan and submission to SCDOT where needed and finally the preparation of bid documents.

Assistant Dziuban reminded the Committee that the FY14 budget includes thirty-one thousand dollars (\$31,000), equally divided between State ATAX and Municipal Accommodations Fees, for Phases III and IV of the wayfinding sign program; the pricing quoted from Stantec is thirty-three hundred twenty dollars (\$3,320) for Phase III and twelve thousand four hundred seventy (\$12,470) for Phase IV, with a total of fifteen thousand seven hundred ninety dollars (\$15,790). Also in the FY14 budget is fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) for signs fabrication that is split between the two (2) accommodations funds.

**MOTION:** Chair Bettelli moved to recommend to Ways and Means Committee approval of the contract with Stantec for Phases III and IV for wayfinding signs in an amount not to exceed \$16,000; Mayor Cronin seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Mayor Cronin stated that he wants Ms. Langlois and Stantec to look into the signage for Battery2Beach; he noted that Charleston County has taken on the project for the local municipalities impacted by the program. The Mayor stated that he wants whatever Stantec does incorporate what Battery2Beach is planning. Ms. Langlois stated that she has spoken with Battery2Beach board members about the City's signage system; they discussed incorporating their sign design and backing it on the City's posts. Mayor Cronin encouraged her to speak with the staff at the County assigned to the Battery2Beach program.

Administrator Tucker reported that the City has a kickoff meeting between staff and the Stantec parking management team has been set.

#### **B. Consideration of Requests for 2015 Transportation Sales Tax (TST) Funds**

The Administrator noted that, although this is an annual occurrence, this year the deadline for request submissions is January 1, 2014, which does not afford the City much of an opportunity for discussion. The requests last year were for the Phase 2 Drainage Project and regulation bike paths from Breach Inlet to 57<sup>th</sup> Avenue and to include the improvement coming off the Connector; the City did not receive any funding for 2014. The Administrator mentioned that discussions had taken place regarding the sidewalk extension on Pavilion Drive; since it would have ended parking in front of "Island Time," it was not pursued. In the interim, "Island Time" has permanently closed its doors, making the sidewalk extension a viable option again.

**MOTION:** Mayor Cronin moved to recommend repeating the 2014 TST request for Phase 2 Drainage, regulation bike paths and the sidewalk extension as a third item; Chair Bettelli seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

If the sidewalk extension is not awarded TST funds, Mayor Cronin suggested that it be a consideration for the FY15 budget.

#### **C. Discussion of Solution to Vehicles Turning Around on 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue**

Administrator Tucker recalled that a host of City officials and employees received a letter from a resident of 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue who had reached her limit with people who turn right onto 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue thinking they are entering Wild Dunes only to have to turn around. The only safe way for a vehicle to turnaround is via a residential driveway; the resident who wrote was involved in a turnaround when a child was almost hit.

City staff confirmed that older GPS systems do direct people to turn right onto 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue to enter Wild Dunes, and they cannot be corrected. The City has worked with Wild Dunes resort and the Wild Dunes Community Association who have agreed to change the address for Wild Dunes to 1 Sundial Circle, causing drivers to turn left into the main gate of Wild Dunes. Now a sign needs to be added to the right side of the road, reminding people to turn left to gain entry to

Wild Dunes and to notify the GPS companies of the address change to 1 Sundial Circle. The City will also communicate with the resident that the City has done all it can to remedy her problem.

Pursuant to subsequent discussion, Administrator Tucker stated that she will contact Wild Dunes to determine if they are interested in sharing the expense for the new sign, but, if they are not willing, the City will pay for the sign fabrication and installation.

**D. Contracts in Excess of \$10,000**

- 1. Award of a contract to Vic Bailey Ford for the budgeted purchase of 1 Ford Utility Police Interceptor (SUV) in the amount of \$26,412, state contract pricing**

**MOTION: Mayor Cronin moved to award a contract to Vic Bailey Ford as detailed above; Chair Bettelli seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

- 2. Award of a contract to Love Chevrolet for the budgeted purchase of 1 Chevrolet Impala in the amount of \$20,332, state contract pricing**

**MOTION: Mayor Cronin moved to award a contract to Love Chevrolet as described above; Chair Bettelli seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

- 3. Award of a contract to Motorola for the budgeted purchase of 2 Digital Vehicular Repeaters with APX6500 Mobile Radios at state contract pricing of \$30,449.44**

**MOTION: Mayor Cronin moved to award a contract to Motorola for the repeaters with radios detailed above; Chair Bettelli seconded.**

Administrator Tucker commented that this price is over-budget, but Chief Graham has a way to absorb the difference. The Chief explained that twenty-four thousand dollars (\$24,000) was budgeted for the repeaters, and the plan had been to re-use the radios that were attached to the repeaters. The new repeaters are capable of the Phase 2 compliance, but the radios which come with them are not, meaning that new radios would be required with Phase 2 compliance. She is recommending buying the new radios at this time with the proceeds of an insurance claim for two (2) walkie-talkies that have been missing for several months and reallocating the funds to pay for installation. The two radios are still serviceable and can be used or sold.

**VOTE: The motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

**6. Highlights of Departmental Reports**

Fire Department – Chief Graham

Personnel responded to a variety of calls in the month of October ranging from a deer and dogs in the ocean on October 14<sup>th</sup> to an eighteen foot (18 ft.) vessel running aground at the north end of Capers Island. Personnel responded to a report of a structure fire on Palm Boulevard on October 25<sup>th</sup>; the fire involving an outside deck had been controlled by a passerby with a garden hose. Personnel responded to fifty (50) calls in the month; twenty-nine (29) of which were EMS calls. For the month of October, the average response time for EMS calls was eleven and a half minutes (11.5 min.) between the Fire Department and EMS arrival on scene. Five (5) fire inspections were performed that found twelve (12) violations. Career personnel received a total of seventeen hundred fifty-nine hours (1,759 hrs.) of training in the month. There were no extraordinary vehicle maintenance expenses for October.

Chair Bettelli asked the Chiefs how the transition to Consolidated Dispatch was going. Chief Graham stated that, in her opinion, the transition was going very well; she was pleased with the way information is shared when something does not appear to be going as it should or how things could be done better. The Chief noted that the change has been a challenge for the Fire Department because they do not have the same dispatcher on every call and are not assigned to the same channel for every call; personnel are concerned how this is going to work in the summer months. Chief Graham added that the move to Consolidated Dispatch has brought its own set of issues as personnel become more acquainted with and accustomed to the new operations. At this time, a call is received and immediately transferred to another channel; the senior person on the call must go to that new channel in order to get the details of the call while still listening for the possibility of another call coming in. The Police Department is not required to do this level of multi-tasking with the radios in the performance of their jobs. Administrator Tucker stated that the City is working with Consolidated Dispatch and hopes to have a couple of dedicated channels for all IOP calls before the season begins in 2014.

For the Police Department, there have been “a couple of hiccups” according to Chief Buckhannon, and the biggest problems have come when an on-island dispatcher goes on break and a call is missed because the backup dispatcher was not in place and listening to the correct channel – the Chief assured the Committee that the situation has been corrected. The Chief commented that one (1) thing that has helped has been the mobile data terminals in patrol cars; if something is missed, the officer can self-dispatch.

In next month's report, Chief Buckhannon stated that he will report on the number of calls coming into the City's dispatch center that are being handed over to the Consolidated Dispatch Center for the police and fire departments of both Isle of Palms and Sullivan's Island. The Chief estimated that the island's dispatch center receives four to six (4-6) calls per day.

Mayor Cronin indicated that he would be interested in knowing how often the City's dispatchers have to intervene to clarify an issue on a call. Chief Buckhannon noted that there were more instances of intervention in the first two (2) weeks of transition than now.



Police Department – Chief Buckhannon

Chief Buckhannon noted that this is the time of year when the Department deals with more domestic issues; on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, officers responded to 27<sup>th</sup> Avenue for a female subject reporting harassment by a former boyfriend who was advised not to have any further contact with the woman. On October 28<sup>th</sup>, officers responded to Ocean Boulevard to a complaint of a physical assault; the female was transported to the hospital for further treatment and the male subject was arrested and transported to the Charleston County Detention Center. A “Meet and Greet” was rescheduled for November 7<sup>th</sup> for the Beachside Community. In October dispatchers responded to four thousand five hundred sixty-eight (4,568) call; three thousand two hundred eighty-eight (3,288) were for the IOP Police Department. Of the six hundred thirty-nine (639) traffic stops, one hundred forty-eight (148) received tickets. The Chief noted that traffic collisions are down by thirty-four percent (34%) in 2013 from 2012. Fifteen (15) arrests were made in the month; seven (7) of them were for traffic offenses. In October, twenty-four (24) noise complaints were received and one (1) citation as written. Two (2) officers are attending the SC Criminal Justice Academy for basic training.

Mayor Cronin commented on finding a deer that had apparently been shot in his neighbor’s yard; he stated that he does not like the idea of someone discharging a firearm on the island. Administrator Tucker noted that discharging a firearm on the island is illegal.

**7. Miscellaneous Business**

Next Meeting Date: 5:00 p.m., Monday, January 13, 2014 in the Conference Room.

Chief Buckhannon stated that the City will have its CALEA on-site beginning December 13<sup>th</sup> through 18<sup>th</sup>; he remarked that the City will be having a “gold standard assessment” which is more interview-driven, i.e. the assessors will be talking to more Councilmembers, City staff members, Departmental personnel and members of the community. The Chief stated that the Department is trying to achieve a new level.

**8. Executive Session – not needed**

**9. Adjourn**

**MOTION: Mayor Cronin moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:00 p.m.; Chair Bettelli seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Respectfully submitted:

Marie Copeland  
City Clerk