

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE
5:00 p.m., Thursday, November 5, 2009

The regular meeting of the Public Safety Committee was held at 5:00 p.m., Thursday, November 5, 2009 in the second floor Training Room of the Public Safety Building, 30 J.C. Long Boulevard, Isle of Palms, South Carolina. Attending the meeting were Councilmembers Bettelli and Loftus, Chair Buckhannon, City Administrator Tucker, Fire Chief Graham, Police Chief Buckhannon, Assistant to the Administrator Dziuban and City Clerk Copeland.

1. Chair Buckhannon called the meeting to order and acknowledged that the press and the 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 approve the minutes of the regular meeting of October 5, 2009 as submitted; Councilman Bettelli seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

3. **Citizens' Comments** - None

4. Old Business

A. Update on Public Safety Building

Administrator Tucker noted that the primary concern has been the heating and air conditioning system in the Public Safety Building; testing has been done that revealed that the system was not receiving proper power, and the necessary adjustment has been made. Subsequently a second testing has been done, and the City is awaiting the status of the HVAC testing and balancing reports and adjustments. Other items from the punch-list being addressed include the repair of the extractor installation, repairing power to the solar water heater, tile base repair in the lobby, window trim installation in the apparatus bay, installation of panic strip devices in the prisoner processing and sally port, and finishing/sealing the wall finish in the upper training tower. The Administrator commented to the Chiefs that Cole+Russell has requested feedback from the City about how the HVAC is functioning; Chief Graham noted they might not have feedback for Cole+Russell until next year since the weather had changed.

B. Update on RFP for Civil Engineering for 41st Avenue & Palm Intersection

Administrator Tucker reported that the sealed bid opening is scheduled for Wednesday, November 11 at 2 p.m. for the civil engineering for the 41st Avenue and Palm Boulevard intersection.

C. Update on 21st Avenue Sidewalk

Administrator Tucker related that the City had gotten an update from SC DOT on the project today; she indicated that she had commented to them about the section that appears not to be completed around the Lutheran Retreat Center. She was told SC DOT would be on the island today to complete the project, but she stated that she had not seen anyone.

D. Status of 41st Avenue Repaving

The Administrator reported that the Isle of Palms Water and Sewer Commission has an infrastructure replacement project on 41st Avenue; as a result, they requested a postponement of the repaving by Charleston County that has been granted. The complication with the delay is that the County will move on to other projects and getting them back to this task may be a challenge.

Councilman Bettelli informed the Public Safety Committee that the City had received fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) from the Charleston County transportation sales taxes to replace the Lauden Street outfall. He indicated to Chief Buckhannon that the work could precipitate the closure of Waterway Boulevard for some period of time as the culvert under the road is replaced. Assistant Dziuban stated that the RFP had been issued and that bids were due around the first of December.

Councilman Loftus asked about the latest developments on the bridge/road and waterway closure for the replacement of the Ben Sawyer Bridge. Administrator Tucker noted that the time remains in flux, but the Intracoastal Waterway will close first to be followed by the bridge and road. She did report that she had been copied on communication documenting that Mount Pleasant had indicated to the contractor that it is the contractor's responsibility to provide assistance in managing the traffic at the Connector and Rifle Range Road.

5. New Business

A. Consideration of Addendum to Consolidated Dispatch Agreement

Chief Buckhannon stated that the City of Charleston had not originally planned to join the Consolidated Dispatch program, but, between the new Fire and Police Chiefs, the City of Charleston has reconsidered and decided to become a member of the Consolidated Dispatch Center. The addendum is the instrument that makes Charleston County a partner in the project.

Councilman Bettelli asked Chief Buckhannon whether the Chief thought the island representation on the board was sufficient, and Chief Buckhannon stated that he was still satisfied.

Chief Buckhannon notified the Committee that the County had closed on a fifteen-acre (15 acre) parcel of land in the Ladson area where a fifteen million dollar (\$15,000,000) dispatch center will be constructed and that the County had signed the contract for a unified CAD system across Charleston County. With that system, Chief Buckhannon stated that there was the possibility that Consolidated Dispatching could go out to other jurisdictions prior to the cutover; he reported that several jurisdictions would be transitioning to the Consolidated Dispatch Center on Leeds Avenue in January 2010.

Administrator Tucker reminded the Committee that, as transition occurs for IOP, the City will be required to reimburse Charleston County for wages and fringes for the City's dispatchers, according to the present setup; she also noted that Charleston County has a higher pay scale than the City's, so there will be a fiscal impact to the City as a result of making the change.

MOTION: Councilman Loftus moved to recommend to City Council the approval of the Addendum to the Consolidated Dispatch Agreement; Councilman Bettelli seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

B. Discussion of Livability Hotline

Chair Buckhannon commented that Councilman Loftus had requested that this topic be on the agenda for this meeting.

Councilman Loftus recalled that there had been discussions about obtaining and distributing refrigerator magnets with the phone number of the Livability Hotline, and he inquired about the status. Chair Buckhannon did not recall that the staff had been directed to proceed with that initiative.

Chair Buckhannon asked Chief Buckhannon to explain the processes that occur when a livability complaint is called into the hotline. The Chief stated that, when a call comes into the Police Department on the Livability Hotline number (886-8282), Sergeant Meekins answers, if he is on duty, or dispatcher answers if he is not; calls to the Livability Hotline are always answered by a person. If the Sergeant is in the office, he will take the information and either respond to the call or inform the caller what needs to be done. If he is not in the office and the dispatcher answers, the call is screened to determine what services are needed; if an immediate response is needed, an officer is sent out. If an immediate response is not warranted, the caller can leave a voice mail for Sergeant Meekins to return the call or can leave the critical information with the dispatcher. The Chief noted that Sergeant Meekins in the office at varying times; he does not maintain a Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. schedule.

Chair Buckhannon asked how quickly Sergeant Meekins responded if another officer were dispatched to the scene; Chief Buckhannon stated that, if the call were an actual livability complaint, it would be flagged by the Incident Report System and the Sergeant would follow-up as soon as he returned to the office; Sergeant Meekins will contact the complainants, the victims as well as those accused of the violation. Sergeant Meekins reports violations to the rental agencies and the property owners.

Chief Buckhannon noted that the City's dispatchers have the Livability Sergeant's work schedule to be able to tell callers when they could anticipate follow-up from the Sergeant should the call not require immediate assistance. The Chief added that the policy of the Department is that a report is written for every noise complaint, and Sergeant Meekins is required to read every report, noise or otherwise, that is written when he is off duty.

Councilman Loftus asked what residents were being told about how to report, for instance, a noise complaint; Chief Buckhannon replied that residents could call 911, 886-6522 or 886-8282, but to make the call. Councilman Loftus repeated that the process was for residents to call the Police so that action could be taken to eliminate the problem.

Councilman Loftus reported that, as he talked with residents during the recent campaign, he was told two (2) island rental agencies had told residents to call their offices rather than the

Livability Hotline to handle the problems. As the City was working to resolve the livability issues on the island, these rental companies may be attempting to circumvent the system; Councilman Loftus stated that he would encourage any support the rental companies could provide, but their efforts should be in cooperation with the Police Department, not to bypass the Police Department's involvement. The Councilman suggested that letters be sent to the rental agencies reiterating the fact that they need to follow the proper process of reporting Livability issues and not to ask residents call their offices rather than the Police Department when a problem occurs. Chief Buckhannon assured Councilman Loftus that Sergeant Meekins would meet with the rental companies referenced, but he commented that, if residents choose to contact a rental agency and not the Police Department, he could not control those occurrences. Councilman Loftus expressed his opinion that this situation was the very reason that the magnets should be obtained and distributed.

Councilman Bettelli remarked that no action had been taken on the magnets because there was no budget for the magnets, but he did indicate that he thought it appropriate to, at least, find out what the cost would be to get them although mailing them to residents would be a substantial expense to the City. In the meantime, Councilman Bettelli stated that he would ask the Water and Sewer Commission to post the Livability Hotline number in their next billing.

Administrator Tucker commented that there was no way for the City to get a handle on the chronic livability issues if the City did not have the information. If there have been multiple complaints at a specific residence, but only one (1) of those calls was made to the Police Department; the only record the City has related to one (1) complaint for that property.

C. Consideration of Increasing Dog License Fees

Chair Buckhannon noted that an increase in the dog licensing fees was brought up in correlation to the increased hours that dogs will be allowed on the beach off-leash; the questions before the Committee include the following:

- Should the fee be increased from the current two dollars (\$2.00)?
- How much should the fee be increased to?
- To whom should the fee apply?

Councilman Bettelli suggested that ten dollars (\$10.00) was a reasonable fee to charge. Sullivan's Island presently charges twenty-five dollars (\$25.00) for any dog to go onto its beach, and Councilman Loftus stated that he had heard a rumor that they were going to increase it.

Councilman Bettelli voiced concern that people who would be unwilling to pay the Sullivan's Island fee would bring their dogs to Isle of Palms, thereby creating more waste and increased pooper-scooper expense to the City.

Chair Buckhannon had learned that three hundred ninety-eight (398) dog tags had been issued by the City of Isle of Palms in the past year, but Councilman Loftus speculated that there were far more dogs on the island than tags that had been sold.

Councilman Loftus said he supported increasing the license fee and that he thought all dogs should be required to have licenses to be allowed on the beach. Having spoken with the Sullivan's Island Police Chief earlier in the afternoon, Chief Buckhannon confirmed that Sullivan's Island was going to increase its dog license fee to thirty-five dollars (\$35.00) for non-resident dogs in November; he also reported that Sullivan's Island does not use a tag, but rather a brightly colored collar that can be seen at a distance, that has a four (4) digit number and the year printed on it; the color is changed every year. The collars cost approximately two dollars (\$2.00) each. In 2008, Sullivan's Island issued in excess of two thousand (2,000) collars; dogs are allowed off-leash in the off-season from 5 a.m. until noon. At Sullivan's Island, in-season, dogs are allowed on the beach off-leash from 5 a.m. until 10 a.m., not allowed on the beach at all from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m., and on the beach and on-leash from 6 p.m. until 5 a.m. Based on the above information, Chief Buckhannon expressed anticipation that the Isle of Palms would pick up quite a few people from other jurisdictions with the change in the hours much less the differences in licensing.

Visitors, even Saturday day-trippers, could go to the Police Department Monday through Friday to purchase the license assuming the dog owner has proof of inoculations; on weekends, the dispatchers assume this responsibility. Assistant Dziuban stated that, in order to get a dog license on Sullivan's Island, the owner must sign an affidavit stating that the dog has never been aggressive or bitten anyone.

Chair Buckhannon noted that the City had budgeted ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) for pooper-scoopers and bags and had spent less than one hundred dollars (\$100) for the tags.

Chief Buckhannon was charged with finding out Sullivan's Island processes dog licensing on the weekend and determining what would be involved for the City to issue licenses to all dogs that come to the beach to report at the next meeting.

D. Reclassification of Assistant Chief Position in Fire Department

Chair Buckhannon recalled that this position has been in the Fire Department for some period of time, has remained vacant in recent years, but has continued to be a budgeted position.

Chief Graham provided a brief history of the Fire Inspector position; a copy of which is attached to the historical record of this meeting as Exhibit A. The Chief noted that the codes are constantly changing, as this Committee saw during the construction of the Public Safety Building. Administrator Tucker commented that most Fire Departments have a dedicated person to perform fire inspections.

Chief Graham noted that the salary of the Assistant Chief position had remained relatively stagnant in recent years. On page 2 of the Chief's handout was the current wage information for the positions of captain, lieutenant and engineer; the Assistant Chief's position should parallel a captain's position for salary. In addition, Chief Graham had obtained the fringe costs associated with filling the position of Fire Inspector that total eighteen thousand fourteen dollars (\$18,014); the Administrator restated that this wage was included in the Department's budget.

Chief Graham added that she was not away from the island enough to justify filling the position of Assistant Chief, but the City would benefit greatly from having a full-time Fire Inspector. Among those benefits are the following:

- Routine, scheduled inspections with the appropriate follow-up;
- Consistency of inspections;
- Higher level of competence;
- Improved record-keeping; and
- Reduction of risks to business occupants, firefighters and the general public.

In response to Councilman Bettelli's inquiry, Chief Graham stated she has made it a practice to bring new hires into the Department at the bottom or near bottom of the wage range for the position.

Councilman Bettelli clarified the action to be taken by the Committee as one where the position of Assistant Chief was eliminated and the position of Fire Inspector was added. Should the Public Safety approve Chief Graham's request, the recommendation would go to the Personnel Committee for their approval of the change and the associated job description.

Councilman Loftus complimented Chief Graham for the growth and development of the Fire Department staff. The Councilman asked whether the Chief would fill the position from within the Department or look outside; she stated that she had three (3) persons who met the requirements to fill the position, and one (1) who was interested in it.

MOTION: Councilman Bettelli moved to recommend to the Personnel Committee to eliminate the position of Assistant Fire Chief and to create the position of Fire Inspector; Chair Buckhannon seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Before proceeding, Administrator Tucker informed the Committee that an administrative staff member would be going out on Family Medical Leave; a substitute from Kelly Services has been brought to cover until the Family Medical Leave situation resolves itself. Chair Buckhannon noted that there were also a couple of employees who were out of work due to work-related injuries.

E. Award of Contracts in Excess of \$10,000 - None

6. Highlights of Department Reports for October 2009

A. Fire Department – Chief Graham

Chief Graham reported that there had been a total of fifty-four (54) calls in the month, and thirty-one (31) of them were EMS calls. In addition, nine (9) fire inspections were performed in which thirty-six (36) violations had been found; she told the Committee that there were nearly two hundred (200) commercial businesses on the island, each of which should be inspected quarterly.

The Chief commented to a couple of major expenses listed on the vehicle maintenance report. These expenses were the replacement of tires for Tower 1 and one (1) of the trucks and the replacement of the pump panel control module for Tower 1. Chief Graham stated that the Department was experiencing problems with several of the computer parts on the equipment from the equipment having been exposed to the elements during the construction. Through written and practical testing, the following promotions occurred during the month:

Lieutenant Shaun Gadsden to Captain,
Engineer Richard Hathaway to Lieutenant, and
Firefighter Bill Pesature to Engineer.

On the subject of the radios, Chief Graham reported that Charleston County is expected to receive the upgrade quote from Motorola on November 10, 2009; the quote is for all of the upgrades recommended for the County. The upgrades were originally planned to be implemented in two (2) phases, but are now planned for three (3).

B. Police Department – Chief Buckhannon

Chief Buckhannon reported that the detectives had identified and apprehended a caretaker accused of forging over one hundred ten thousand dollars (\$110,000) in checks, in a case that was originally reported in September.

In October, officers made two hundred seventy (270) traffic stops and eighty-three (83) of them resulted in citations. The Chief noted that the majority of the forty-five (45) livability offenses were related to garbage can violations immediately following the change to one (1) pickup per week. Of the thirty-five (35) arrests made in October, sixteen (16) were for traffic offenses. Chief Buckhannon indicated that there were five (5) noise citations issued for the month; all were assigned court dates for next week.

7. Miscellaneous Business

Next Meeting Date: 5 p.m., Thursday, January 7, 2010

8. Adjourn

MOTION: Councilman Loftus moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:23 p.m.; Councilman Bettelli seconded and the motion PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Respectfully submitted:

Marie Copeland
City Clerk