

TOWN OF SULLIVAN'S ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, April 17, 2014

A meeting of the Public Safety Committee of Council was held at 8:30 a.m., Thursday, April 17, 2014 at Town Hall, 2050-B Middle Street all requirements of the Freedom of Information Act having been satisfied. Present were Committee members, Chauncey Clark, Chair, Council members Pat O'Neil and Mary Jane Watson. Staff included Administrator Benke, Fire Chief Stith and Fire Chief Howard.

I. Call to Order. Chair Clark called the meeting to order, stated the press and public were duly notified pursuant to state law and noted all members were present. Approximately six people were in the audience; no media.

II. Approval of Minutes – March 18, 2014

Councilwoman Watson noted she was present by phone at the March 18, 2014 meeting and suggested minutes should reflect the same. The Committee also noted that the motion to recommend to Council to proceed with an RFP for a ladder truck was not captured on the March 18th recording, but was a motion made and duly passed by the Committee.

MOTION: Pat O'Neil moved to approve the March 18, 2014 minutes with the following amendments: (1) Note that Council Councilwoman Watson was present via telephone; (2) include the following motion regarding a fire ladder truck: Councilman O'Neil made a motion to recommend that Council allow Staff to proceed with finalizing and publishing the RFP for a 95 ft. platform ladder truck for the fire department; seconded by Chair Clark; no discussion; motion unanimously passed.

Seconded by Councilwoman Watson. MOTION UNANIMOUSLY PASSED.

III. General Discussion: St. Patrick's Day Event Celebration

Chair Clark indicated this meeting would be an opportunity to review the 2014 St. Patrick's Day celebration, discuss measures that were successful and what needs improvement and brainstorm ideas for the future.

Staff Report – Issues/Concerns

Police Chief Howard

- Road closures were recommended by Staff for past years as a safety measure for pedestrians and vehicular traffic. However, this closure has created unintended consequences.
- The road closure has opened up a party area that has grown and the crowd has gotten too big and disrespectful. He reported the following problems with the 2014 party-goers:
 - Items thrown at an officer, another officer assaulted and one officer was almost bitten (by a human).
 - More arrests reported this year and more people taken off the Island by ambulance because they were so drunk they could not state their names (four arrests and three ambulatory party-goers this year).

- Overall event size: recommends scaling back event for 2015;
- Control points: consider possibility of barricading or fencing event area similar to the Cooper River Bridge run, if event size can be controlled;
- Crowd control: Recommends issuing tickets or some control mechanism to control the maximum number of participants.

Fire Chief Stith

- A sufficient quantity of portable toilets is needed, but acknowledged that forecasting a sufficient number of toilets can be problematic.
- Traffic flow and traffic/parking plan seemed sufficient.
- Party-goers bringing alcoholic cans to the event needs to be addressed.
- Trash – cans were placed in the middle of the closed street sections, which helped with debris collection.

Administrator Benke

- Concerned with the crowd size relative to patrol officers, and, the challenges that come with controlling a growing crowd if a big altercation were to start;
- Bathrooms – suggested some portable toilets further along Middle Street.

Councilwoman Watson reported the family event in the Stith Park went well, with over 350 in attendance. She supported the continuation of holding the family event before street closures.

Councilman O’Neil commended the businesses for its preparation and security measures, noting the businesses cannot predict the type of crowd that will attend the event.

Chair Clark solicited feedback from audience members (crowd control measures, types and quantity of alcoholic beverages served, etc.).

Rusty Bennett, co-owner of Poe’s Tavern

- Bathrooms – recommended increasing strategically located portable toilets.
- Crowd – Poe’s Tavern had six personnel assigned to security at its site and reported no problems. Recommended additional security staff at the other venues.
- Police presence – recommended additional police presence walking the streets.

Aaron Siege

- Crowd control & alcohol: suggested having a variety of ID check points at the venue with wristbands to help patrol officers identify those consuming alcohol.

Bill Dunleavy, Dunleavy’s Tavern

- Supported establishing control over alcohol brought to the event, possibly through checkpoints.
- Submitted liquor shots should not be sold at any venue as it increased the speed at which people became inebriated (“wasted”).

Aaron Siegel

- Submitted wrist bands should be consistent across venues and distributed at designated checkpoints.

Rusty Bennett

- Noted Poe’s Tavern conducted its own ID check before allowing alcohol sales at its venue.

Aaron Siegel

- Submitted that there should be a control on how many alcoholic beverages may be sold to an individual at one time, perhaps 2 beverages maximum.

Administrator Benke noted the gas station’s business was severely impacted by the street closure for this event, and, the owner allows the Town to use part of the parking lot to stage Town emergency vehicles.

Rusty Bennett

- Noted the gas station personnel do not assess the level of inebriation, like the business venues does, for alcohol purchasers who buy a 12-pack of beer and consume it off-site.
- Indicated he would support the concept of the gas station participating in the event by selling hot dogs and alcohol. The owner would be required to enact the same alcohol sales and monitoring controls as the participating restaurants.

Chair Clark mentioned some additional concepts: adding tables and seating, including food sales outside, seeking ways to include families in the event, considering enhancements like a parade and bagpipes. He would like to see ideas to help turn the event toward a family-centric celebration instead of a drinking party. Chair Clark asked the businesses to communicate with each other and provide the Town with an event plan, and, Town staff would do the same. He would like the Committee to discuss the event again to develop a comprehensive event plan before the end of the summer.

Councilman O’Neil noted that the success of this St. Patrick’s Day event has attracted larger crowds each year. He suggested the businesses and Town approach this event with a new perspective, to design an event plan that would work for the residents. The Committee discussed ways to combine elements of the Town’s family friendly Park event into the business district street celebration.

IV. General Discussion: Police Department Use of Conducted Electrical Weapons

The Committee noted that the Committee’s agenda has included potential electrical weapons (tasers) for Police Officers for years. Chair Clark noted that the Town’s police personnel have been trained in the use of electrical weapons.

MOTION: Councilman O’Neil moved to recommend to Council that it authorize the Police Department to purchase, train and utilize electrical weapons; seconded by Councilwoman Watson. MOTION UNANIMOUSLY PASSED.

Police Chief Howard noted that the Charleston County officers carry tasers and Isle of Palms was close to approving tasers. Chair O’Neil clarified that tasers would be used only when someone is threatening a patrol officer or someone else. Police Chief Howard noted he had a written policy on electronic weapons that he would send to the Committee.

Administrator Benke noted that the premise of the taser is that the officer is not putting his hands on a combative person and reduces exposure to Worker’s Compensation claims.

V. General Discussion: Hurricane Preparation

Chair Clark noted the Town has a 43 page hurricane preparedness guide for citizens (on Town's website). He noted the concern is that residents would not be inclined to read the guides. He asked the Committee to brainstorm ideas to encourage the following: (1) citizen preparation; (2) post-disaster education.

Chair Clark noted that many Island residents have not grown up in this area and may not have a good understanding of what should be expected in a hurricane. The Committee discussed ideas to help residents prepare for event and post-event realities, including the fact that a hurricane could preclude residents from returning the Island for some time.

Administrator Benke identified three elements to Hurricane Preparation:

1. Pre-disaster event preparedness – an annual activity for resident and Town staff
2. Post- disaster event reaction – varies based upon size of hurricane
3. Citizen involvement in preparation and process

Chair Clark asked Committee and Staff to gather ideas and input for Hurricane Preparation.

Councilwoman Watson left the meeting at this time

Administrator Benke submitted the first step should be concentrating on the Town's development of a well-formulated disaster preparation plan and disaster recovery plan. He noted that the cities of Folly Beach, Kiawah and Seabrook have an outside consultant create a municipal disaster preparedness and recovery guide.

Administrator Benke noted that the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) provides good information for residents. Fire Chief Stith noted that the joint Sullivan's Island and Isle of Palms Disaster Preparedness Expo is on May 21, 2014. This is the first time the Expo has been held when CCSD schools are in session, and, the Town will send home flyers with the SIES children just before the event.

The Committee will retain Hurricane Preparation on its agenda and include a review of protocols/policies for allowing residents/public to return to the Island after a hurricane.

VI. Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:40 a.m. (Councilman O'Neil motioned; Chair Clark seconded; unanimously passed).

Respectfully submitted,
Chauncey Clark, Chair
Public Safety Committee

Approved at the April 22, 2014 Regular Council Meeting