

TOWN OF SULLIVAN'S ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, July 16, 2015

A meeting of the Public Safety Committee of Council was held at 6:00 p.m., Thursday, July 16, 2015 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 Mayor Pat O'Neil and Sarah Church. Staff included Administrator Benke, Police Chief Howard and Fire Chief Stith.

1. 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 7 audience members and no media in attendance).

2. General Discussion of Parking Matters

Administrator Benke provided an overview of the growth in Charleston County and the increasing demand these citizens place on the three main area beaches: Sullivan's Island, Isle of Palms and Folly Beach. He cited a recent statistics: approximately 40 people move into the Charleston area daily, and, Mt. Pleasant has 68,000 + residents and grows daily. An in-house parking study (circa summer 2010) identified approximately 1,000-1,500 additional cars bringing approximately 6,000 more passengers to the Island.

He noted the Island is properly staffed to service the public safety needs of less than 1,800 residents. The Town attempts to accommodate the impact of summer traffic by paying for Charleston County deputies to assist, when manpower is available, with traffic control on summer weekends. The growing challenge is to provide adequate safety and response time to residents and visitors, particularly during the summer months, and provide safe traffic flow on/off and through the Island, for both emergency apparatus and leisure vehicles.

a) Town Hall and Police Station Construction

Administrator Benke reported that site work is underway and demolition of the old parking lot between the Fire Station and Stith Park should be completed by the end of this week.

Parking during construction:

Handicap parking: remains in current location, fenced off from construction, with signage directing drivers to the lot from Station 20 ½.

Visitor parking: six spaces marked with 15 minute parking signs on Station 20 ½.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: Staff shall move bicycle rack as early as feasible to allow for bicycle parking on Station 20 ½ during construction.

b) Public right-of-way parking in RS District

1.) Right-of-way restrictions

2.) Paid parking

General discussion of available RS district parking spaces (currently 4,500 in inventory), parking concerns Island-wide and options for managed and/or paid parking moving forward.

Committee noted Isle of Palms received SCDOT and Isle of Palms City Council approval to implement parking restrictions in 2016. The City elected to retain free parking in residential rights-of-ways but will restrict parking along several City roads.

Committee members and Staff expressed that the primary concern for Sullivan’s Island is public safety: emergency apparatus moving through and off the Island, and, adequate personnel to provide a high level of safety to year-round residents, and, the large and increasing quantity of seasonal visitors.

Administrator Benke noted that Staff has been researching the parking and public safety staff issue, looking at various models. He noted that the City of Charleston, during a downtown event, has a formula it uses for police officers: 1,000 extra people = 1 patrol officer. He and Committee members noted that the response demands for Sullivan’s Island police are very different than Charleston patrol cars (i.e. Town police respond to all emergency beach calls).

Administrator Benke summarized the Town’s status on this issue:

- Town knows the number of available off-street parking spaces in RS-District
- Town has a good estimate of general traffic volume on summer weekends (based on neighboring municipal traffic counts and anecdotal observations)
- Town meets the state requirements for access to beach/beach management:
 - Beach Management Plan (in-place)
 - Reasonable and sufficient parking spaces for beach access (state formula driven)

Administrator Benke noted that Staff seeks the following:

- Approval to contract with a traffic engineer to provide traffic counts, before the end of this summer, for strong data to provide to SCDOT with any proposed parking plans/modification requests; and
- Direction from Council on an approach regarding a parking plan: restrict the number of parking spaces or keep current number of spaces and seek revenue (or some combination of the two)

Administrator Benke noted that the traffic engineer’s scope of work would also include consideration of signage at the Island’s entrances and recommendations for parking options along the Community Commercial District (CCD). The Town proposes to use Hospitality or Accommodations tax revenues to pay for the traffic count study.

Committee Discussion topics:

- Whether the Town should pass a local ordinance to require 4-wheels off the road (restricts parking inventory);

- Impact from Isle of Palms 2016 parking plan implementation on Sullivan’s Island;
- Whether the Town wants to get into the business of paid parking;
- Identifying goals with parking plan: manage parking, increase revenue and/or minimize traffic flow on Island?
- Process for parking plan development and implementation will require an extensive amount of public outreach and media relations. Isle of Palms is interested in moving forward in tandem with Sullivan’s Island on this;
- Pros/cons of incremental parking restrictions: considerations include SCDOT/County approvals, public education and outreach, etc. Staff recommended going before SCDOT once for review/approval as the preferred approach.
- Flexibility to establish a variety of parking plan scenarios that can be narrowed as the Town moves through the parking plan study/resident engagement process. Moving forward with paid parking option as one of two or three options would be necessary.

Public Comments:

Mark Howard, 1820 Central Avenue, SI

Proposed a simple parking plan:

- Permit parking on on-side of the street only Island-wide, and, retain current restrictions on other streets where on-street parking is not allowed at all.
- Implement paid parking at municipal owned lots: Battery Thompson, new Town Hall/Police Station, Breach Inlet, etc.
- Accommodate resident golf carts by designating space near beach access paths for carts and/or bicycles.

Peter Kupke, 1758 Atlantic Avenue, SI

- Opined traffic coming-going on the Island is the problem: vehicles attempting to find parking spaces and beach pedestrian traffic crossing streets.
- Encouraged increase use of summer temporary staff to assist the police department in traffic control and parking management.
- Recommended the Town roll out its parking plan before the press in the winter months.

Rita Langley, 1618 Middle Street, SI

- Echoed comments made by Mr. Kupke;
- Recommends reducing parking spaces as a means to reduce congestion

Mark Howard: Paid parking on public streets seems complicated and problematic to execute.

Wayne Stelljes, 3104 I’On Avenue, SI

- Supports ordinance to require 4-wheels off the road; parking on one-side of the road plus other parking restrictions already in place;
- Recommends Town place parking restrictions and let the local (East Cooper) public naturally adapt to the changes.

Bachman Smith, 2724 Jasper Boulevard, SI

- Goal is to reduce traffic and congestion on the Island.
- Method to achieve goal: require 4-wheels off road, confer with safety chiefs for other parking restrictions that will enhance public safety; keep parking free; then aggressively enforce parking restrictions to condition visitors to these parking restrictions.
- Supports retaining a traffic engineer to conduct good traffic counts/traffic flow study; submits the Town should have this done regularly, perhaps every two years. This will enable the Town to work through traffic considerations from a data-driven approach and to supporting future traffic/parking changes made for public safety reasons.

Cheryl Clark, 2119 Pettigrew, SI

- Supports comments made by Mr. Smith
- Suggested Town move quickly to establish restrictions for vehicles to park in the ROW with 4-wheels off the pavement.

Staff noted ordinance consideration should be preceded by a re-evaluation of the ROW's, potential surveying and clearing of vegetation. Also arrangement for proper signage should be secured before Council took action on this concept. Staff further noted that designated golf cart parking near the beach would necessitate a review of the current protected land trust documents, consideration of neighborhood feedback near beach paths and/or consideration for designated sections of streets for golf-cart only parking.

Members of the public suggested restricting parking along I'On Avenue to one-way only. Committee and Staff noted this concept would be part of a larger study, not in the scope of the work submitted for the traffic engineer consultant at present.

GENERAL CONSENSUS (No Motion):

Discuss at Regular Council meeting a recommendation to engage a traffic engineer to conduct a traffic count before the end of this summer, review Island entrance signage, and identify parking options within the Community Commercial District. Further, the Committee would like Staff to review parking for potential restrictions and possible designated golf-cart parking spaces.

c) Commercial District Parking Options

Administrator Benke reviewed the current parking options in the CCD:

- Restricted one-side only on-street parking between Station 22 ½ - Station 22 was instituted in May and is working well for public safety equipment access and traffic flow to Hwy 703/Middle Street (in general);
- CCD overflow parking extends along Middle Street to Station 20 ½ and from Middle Street/Hwy 703 intersection to approximately Stations 23-24.
- Parking accommodations include: post-office (after hours); SIES, Thompson Battery and Town Hall (until recently).

Committee reviewed potential options: change perpendicular parking in CCD to parallel parking and construct a sidewalk; potential parking on RS-zoned lots in CCOD1 and/or CCOD2.

Administrator Benke noted the traffic engineer consultant will be asked to offer CCD parking options as part of the summer 2015 scope of work.

3. Commercial District Policing Policy

Committee discussed the value of foot-patrol of the CCD by Town police, especially during summer weekends and evenings. The foot-patrol or bicycle-patrol would be conducted primarily to provide a police presence that visitors could see, and, allow for police personnel to interface with visitors and business owners.

Chair Clark noted that, during a tour of the Folly Beach public safety area, patrol officers in the business district have bicycles, and, are required to enter each business and introduce himself/herself each day.

Chief Howard stated he was amenable to this concept, but noted manpower considerations are his primary concern. Currently he has two officers per shift on the beach. He would want to ensure a foot-patrol officer retained the ability to quickly respond to an emergency or aid the other officer if he/she issued a back-up/distress call.

Committee suggested the Town could establish a police-only parking spot half-way down CCD on Middle Street, to allow an officer guaranteed parking in the CCD and quick return to the vehicle in the event of a call.

Mayor O’Neil suggested exploring the option of having County deputies conduct more foot-patrol around the major intersections of CCD while they are on-Island.

Public Comments:

(Unidentified) Resident asked about party buses; Staff explained that buses are transportation vehicles and cannot be denied the ability to load/unload passengers onto the Island.

Wayne Stelljes, 3104 I’On Avenue, SI

- Supports increased police presence in the CCD. Recommends Town considers increasing Town Police staff to allow for this enhanced presence.
- Noted that the Town wants to see increased citizen support and services; residents should be prepared to finance sufficient staff to support these growing demands and needs.

IV. Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned (Mayor O’Neil motion; Councilmember Clark seconded; unanimous approval) at approximately 7:45p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Chauncey Clark, Chair
Public Safety Committee

Approved at the July 21, 2015 Regular Council Meeting