

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

Friday, May 1, 2015

A meeting of the Public Safety Committee of Council was held at 4:00 p.m., Friday, May 1, 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 Pat O'Neil and Mary Jane Watson. Staff included Administrator Benke, Police Chief Howard, Fire Chief Stith and Asst. to Administrator Darrow.

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 28 audience members and 1 media in attendance).

II. Parking Restrictions in Commercial District

Chair Clark stated the Committee's goal today was to review the current traffic and parking conditions in the Community Commercial District from a safety standpoint, and, provide for public feedback on the same. He noted that last fall (November 13, 2014), the Committee discussed the managed/paid parking concept; however, that topic was not included on this meeting's agenda. He asked residents to focus comments on general issues related to parking and traffic in the CCD.

Chair Clark opened the floor for public comments (2 minutes each).

Public Comments:

Elizabeth Tezza, 2220 Atlantic Avenue, SI

- Commented she lives at the corner of Atlantic and Station 22 ½
- Observed the many safety considerations a driver must make at the corner of Middle/Station 22 ½: pedestrian crossing both street intersections, multiple vehicle options at the intersection (left/right turns, proceed straight), bicyclists riding through or making similar turn choices as vehicles, vehicles entering/exiting the gas station at two curb cuts immediately at the stop sign intersection, jay-walkers between the restaurants and vehicles parking or leaving from parallel parking spots as well as perpendicular parking spots, all in a very congested restaurant/commercial area.
- Recommended the following (referenced her April 30, 2015 email to Mayor O'Neil):
 - Re-install 4-way stop at Middle/Station 22 ½
 - Close Station 22 ½ from Middle Street to I'On Avenue, reducing turn options at Middle/Station 22 ½ intersection
 - Allow for bicycle and golf cart parking only on the block of Station 22 ½ between Middle Street and I'On Avenue

Michael Knoll, 1318 Middle Street, SI

- Lives near the Fort Moultrie area and makes the right from Station 22 ½ to Middle Street daily to get home, having to navigate the congestion in the CCD.

- Has often observed vehicles stopping in the middle of the most heavily congested areas of the CCD, close the Middle-Station 22 ½ intersection, to discharge passengers at a restaurant before seeking a parking space. Noted this creates a bottleneck near the intersection even in good traffic conditions.
- Suggested eliminating some Middle Street parking spaces and creating valet parking spaces, similar to what he has seen in South Beach, Florida, that would allow people to drop off passengers and have vehicle parked away from the restaurant.

Wayne Stelljes, 3104 I'On Avenue, SI

- Recommended giving safety chiefs wide latitude to manage a temporary closure of Middle Street, based upon traffic flow.
- Recommended removing parking on one side of Middle Street (Poe's Tavern restaurant side) from Station 22 ½ - 22 Streets and close one side of Middle Street from Station 21-20 ½ Streets (Obstinate Daughter restaurant side).

Ann Osborne Kilpatrick, 1718 Middle Street, SI

- Expressed appreciation that the Town is working to prepare for the impact of Spring/Summer tourists on the Island.
- Echoed traffic concerns about the CCD area as expressed by other residents.
- Supports traffic and pedestrian safety measures along Middle Street in the CCD area.

Tim Reese, 305 Station 20 Street, SI

- Recommended blocking parking from Station 22 ½ - 22 (Poe's Tavern side) year-round.
- Suggested the Town should give consideration to the impact of resident patron parking on Jasper Street, between Station 22 ½ - 22 (aka Short Jasper). Recommended restaurant owners collaborate to explore available lots for patron parking.

Rusty Bennett, 3124 Marshall Boulevard, SI

- Noted he was the only business owner from the CCD in attendance today; noted other restaurant owners were currently working at their restaurants during this busy Friday afternoon.
- Stated that three dozen parking spaces have been reduced over the last two years, due to temporary seasonal parking restrictions on Middle Street and/or "one-side only" parking restrictions on I'On and Atlantic Avenues.
- He spoke with Robert Clarke of SCDOT and relayed that Mr. Clarke advised he was unaware of other SC municipalities who have blocked parking spaces to allow safety vehicle access, as Sullivan's Island has done in the past.
- Submitted that whether parking spaces were removed from Middle Street near his restaurant (Poe's Tavern), emergency vehicles would still be delayed as tourist traffic, bridge openings and other pressures contribute to delayed response times. He noted that all municipalities have to deal with emergency vehicles navigating traffic and congestion. It is a universal challenge for all communities.
- Noted that removing parking spaces on Middle Street would push restaurant patrons to resident streets. Such a change would move the patron traffic from the desired location

(restaurants) to undesired areas (residential streets), contrary to what resident have wanted and which the Town has tried to avoid in the past.

- Submitted traffic flow would not be enhanced by removing parking. On-street parking has often been used as means to suppress traffic speeds.
- Expressed support for a professional traffic engineer reviewing the traffic and parking situation, and, providing the Town expert feedback.
- Stated he did not want to see an emotion-based decision made on parking and traffic in the CCD in lieu of a rational approach to the issue with decisions based upon sound professional and scientific information.

Mark Tanenbaum, 406 Station 12, SI

- Noted he has lived on the Island for 42 years and in the Station 12/13 area for 8 years.
- During his years on Sullivan’s Island, the Charleston metropolitan area population has grown over the past two decades from 50,000 to over 700,000 people. This sustained population growth does, and will continue to, impact the Town and strain its resources.
- Agreed with Mr. Bennett that a more congested CCD, with full parking spaces, slows down traffic speeds. Recalled 15 years ago writing a letter to Council expressing his concern about speeding vehicles racing along the CCD.
- Stated the Town needs to recognize, when it makes decisions, that it is a suburb of the Charleston area and will never be a small, stand-alone barrier Island community again.

Everett Presson, 1718 Otis Pickett Court, SI

- Recommended Town remove the perpendicular parking along Middle Street (Dunleavy’s Pub/Home Team BBQ side) and replace it with a sidewalk and parallel parking spaces. Noted there are currently 25 parking spaces that back in/out onto Middle Street from the perpendicular slanted parking spaces. These vehicles back out tail-first, often unable to see vehicles and bicycles traveling along Middle Street in this heavily congested area. These vehicles backing up often block both lanes of traffic and contribute to a bottleneck near the Middle Street/Station 22 ½ intersection.
- Recalled that the CCD Master Plan study (circa 2008/2009), for which the Town paid close to \$100,000, recommended removing the perpendicular parking spaces along Middle Street for safety reasons.

Mark Howard, 1820 Central Avenue, SI

- Recommended some inexpensive ideas for traffic on Middle Street:
 - Place a crosswalk in front of Poe’s Tavern (many jaywalk across the street here);
 - Maximize the number of light poles on the street and ensure they work;
 - Consider a designated parking lot for CCD traffic, such as the Town lot at Battery Jasper.
 - Maximize parking on the municipal campus, as the Town moves toward new Town Hall/Police Station construction, gate the parking lot and charge for parking.

Alice Morrissey, 1652 Thompson, SI

Sang a David Matthew Band tune modifying the words to express her concern about parking and traffic problems in the CCD and Island-wide.

Committee Discussion:

Administrator Benke provided a brief background to this issue:

- The police and fire chiefs raised safety concerns regarding the ability to move emergency vehicles through the CCD area and off-Island via the CCD area, in response to on-Island, and in support of off-Island, emergency calls.
- The Town has communicated with SCDOT on this issue. Robert Clarke has given SCDOT's blessing for the Town to take whatever measures it feels is appropriate to increase safety. The Town has been given wide latitude of discretion and options along DOT streets when changes are made to increase safety.
- In response to Mr. Howard's suggestion, cross-walks are not allowed mid-block, per SCDOT. As such, a crosswalk cannot be placed at Poe's Tavern.
- Noted that the parking and traffic design in the CCD area, particularly on Middle Street between Stations 22 ½ - 20 are based upon a 1930's traffic design. This design is ill equipped for 2015 vehicle sizes and traffic counts.
- He noted that Mt. Pleasant's population is now at 68,000 people and increasing.
- Traffic at Middle Street and Station 22 ½ have pedestrian crossings, bicycle maneuvering and multiple traffic options at present, as mentioned by Ms. Tezza earlier.

Public Comments:

Sarah Church, 2215 I'On Avenue, SI

- Suggested the Town could convert the parking area in front of Dunleavy's – Taco Mamacitas (currently perpendicular parking) to golf cart parking only, parallel parking.

Administrator Benke assured the audience and Committee that SCDOT would support eliminating the current perpendicular parking spaces along Middle Street, should the Town want to entertain this concept.

Karen Coste, 322 Station 19 Street, SI

- Noted the concept of making I'On Avenue a one-way street and asked if the Town has recently discussed this option.

Administrator Benke responded that approximately 15 years ago there was some discussion about making I'On Avenue a one-way street and, during the CCD study in 2008/2009, resident feedback was against making I'On Avenue one-way.

Chair Clark noted that two-way traffic on I'On Avenue encourages slower traffic speeds.

Mary Louise Ramsdale, 3122 I'On Avenue, SI

- Stressed need for police to work harder on traffic enforcement. Noted Jasper Street temporary summer traffic adjustments were not in force last weekend (turn only lane signs).

Staff noted the Committee has included summer traffic control measures as the next agenda item.

Gary Visser, 2924 Middle Street, SI

- Recalled that during the CCD study (circa 2008/2009) it was noted that parking in the CCD contributing to deterring traffic speeds. Submitted that parking plans for the restaurants need to be viewed and addressed as an annual activity.

Jerry Kaynard, 2501 Atlantic Avenue, SI

- Noted the significant congestion that occurs in downtown Charleston, particularly the tourist areas near Market Street and King/East Bay. Noted there is a lead public safety vehicle (police or fire) in front of the emergency vehicles whose job is to clear the traffic.
- Submitted that this idea could be part of the Town's protocol, particularly for ambulance assist.
- The CCD study (circa 2008/2009) identified the perpendicular parking spaces, with cars backing up onto one or both lanes of Middle Street, as major problems to traffic flow and safety in the CCD.

Chief Stith noted that the fire department does usually escort inbound ambulances from the gas station intersection to the call location.

Tim Reese, 305 Station 20 Street, SI

- Supports eliminating perpendicular parking in favor of installing curbs, sidewalks and parallel parking on Middle Street.
- Believes the Town, in front of the restaurants on Middle Street with perpendicular parking, should mimic the Town of Mt. Pleasant's solution for Coleman Boulevard: create "cut in" parking space alleys and/or park vehicles behind the restaurant.

Mark Tanenbaum, 406 Station 12, SI

- Asked Staff if the perpendicular parking spaces were located on private parking.
- Reiterated his opinion that parked cars slow traffic in the CCD.

Administrator Benke clarified that vehicles parking in the perpendicular spaces are located on parking spaces that are 50/50 private and Town owned. Half of the vehicle is located on private property and half the vehicle is parked on Town owned property.

Mark Tanenbaum, 406 Station 12, SI

Mr. Tanenbaum submitted that changing perpendicular parking to sidewalk and parallel parking would likely not require adverse action against the private property owner (i.e. condemnation under imminent domain action).

Ann Osborne Kilpatrick, 1718 Middle Street, SI

- Questioned how an injured person would be currently transported off the Town should an emergency vehicle not be able to get on or off the Island, due to traffic.

Chief Stith clarified that helicopters are used for transportation off the Island of serious injuries.

Jeff Hunter, Poe's Tavern, SI

- Submitted that the perpendicular parking spaces account for 99% of the issues and safety problems in the CCD.

Staff Comment/Recommendation:

Administrator Benke:

- Based upon a public safety standpoint, staff recommends to the Committee:
 - Block parking on Middle Street from Station 22 ½ - Station 22 on the marsh-side (gas station and Poe's Tavern side): 23 parking spaces
 - Block parking on Middle Street from Station 21 – Station 20 ½ on the seaward side (Graham lot past Obstinate Daughter Restaurant to the Post Office): 20-24 parking spaces
- Parking spaces would be blocked at the discretion of the Police and/or Fire Chief.
- Town engage consultant services to provide engineering data and recommendations: Conduct vehicle counts, identify traffic direction of travel and other traffic analysis to identify long term strategy suggestions for Town Council.

Tim Reese, 305 Station 20 Street, SI

- Suggested Town help fast track parking discussion with owners, with Council tasking the Planning Commission to look at zoning changes, if needed to accomplish parking lots.

Ann Osborne Kilpatrick, 1718 Middle Street, SI

- Suggested adding recommendation that the Town collaborate closely with Isle of Palms to share resources (i.e. traffic consultant) and create mutual traffic/parking solutions.

Mayor O'Neil asked Administrator to clarify the nature and scope of consultant work Staff recommends Council retain. Administrator Benke clarified that Staff recommends retaining a traffic consultant to conduct traffic counts, perform traffic engineering and study traffic trends in the area.

Committee Discussion:

Parking spaces along Middle Street between Station 22 ½ - 22 (Poe's Tavern side)

Chair Clark: Removing parking spaces on this side of Middle Street has worked in past; pointed to increased visibility of pedestrian crossing, for vehicles and pedestrians alike.

Councilwoman Watson: If Town plans to remove parking, she recommends doing this year-round to condition Island visitors to the parking change.

Mayor O'Neil: Recommended a short term drop-off/pick-up or loading zone section, perhaps in front of Poe's Tavern.

MOTION: Councilwoman Watson recommended to Council that, for safety reasons, parking along Middle Street be modified as follows: (a) year-round block parking on Middle Street from Station 22 ½ - Station 22 adjacent to the westbound lane (gas station and Poe’s Tavern side): 23 parking spaces; and (b) year-round block parking on Middle Street from Station 21 – Station 20 ½ adjacent to the eastbound lane (Graham lot past Obstinate Daughter Restaurant to the Post Office): 20-24 parking spaces; (c) consideration for a drop off lane for patron loading/unloading; seconded by Mayor O’Neil.

Discussion:

Fire Chief Stith: Noted that drop off should be restaurant patrons, not all delivery trucks on the Island. His primary concern is emergency access through the street.

Mayor O’Neil: Recommended Staff include sufficient signage in the CCD encouraging and directing visitors to the parking lot at Battery Thompson.

Residents offered suggestions that Town move forward on shared parking lots for restaurants, removing perpendicular parking in favor of establishing a sidewalk and parallel parking. Committee members noted that these concepts will be fully explored moving forward. At present the Committee wants to recommend to Council a work-able, immediate option to mitigate congestion and safety issues in the CCD, as outlined in the aforementioned motion.

CALL FOR THE QUESTION: MOTION UNANIMOUSLY PASSED.

[Committee re-affirmed its earlier discussion and recommendation to Council that the Town retain a traffic engineering consultant to conduct traffic counts and provide transportation analysis data for the Town.]

III. Summer Traffic Control Measures

Administrator Benke reviewed traffic control measures the Town can take:

1. Coordinate with Town of Mt. Pleasant on the timing of lights at the intersections of McCants/Rifle Range Road, Ben Sawyer Boulevard/Rifle Range Road, and Chuck Dawley/Coleman Boulevard (Royall Hardware area). **Action already being taken.**
2. Hire additional deputies from Charleston County. **Action already being taken – number of deputies available from Charleston County varies each weekend.**
3. Establish signs to alert drivers that to a “no left turn” onto Middle Street from Jasper Boulevard during high travel season. **Action will begin this weekend.**
4. Coordinate with Isle of Palms for traffic control measures when there are accidents on Sullivan’s Island and, in turn, Isle of Palms. **Action already being taken – note there**

are limited options for Staff when accidents create traffic jams on either Island or bridges.

5. Ben Sawyer Bridge coordination. **Action that can be taken is already being taken. During an accident or emergency, the Town can and does “lock down” the bridge for emergency vehicle access. Ben Sawyer Bridge is one of 140 bridges along the ICW from Norfolk, Virginia to Miami Florida. The bridge summer open/close schedule is the most favorable of the times available. Administrator noted the bridge must, as a rule, open on demand for watercraft, allowing for free travel along the ICW.**

6. Coordinate with Mt. Pleasant Traffic Division Supervisor for Mt. Pleasant officers to work traffic detail on the Ben Sawyer/Coleman Boulevard lights when Sullivan’s Island has an accident. **Action/coordination starts this weekend.**

Chuck Gallis, 1817 Back Street, SI

- Commented that stepped up enforcement of alcohol on the beach would also impact traffic, noting that beachgoers seeking to drink and perhaps drive are generators of traffic problems.

Chief Howard noted that the Beach Services Officers begin patrolling the beach this weekend.

Wayne Stelljes, 3104 I’On Avenue, SI

- Recommended Town think hard about commercial loading zones, noting these vehicles obstruct traffic flow through the busy CCD area.
- Thanked the Administrator and Staff for facilitating SCDOT quick remedy to vehicles entering the wrong way into Thomson Park at Breach Inlet, creating a safety hazard.

Administrator Benke noted that Committee proposed consideration of a drop-off area for patrons, not a loading zone. He submitted a “no parking sign” in the drop-off area should suffice to prevent parked commercial delivery trucks.

IV. Pedestrian Safety Education

Mayor O’Neil:

- Observed the CCD blocks, particularly around the restaurant core, are treated like a pedestrian mall with people drifting across the street to restaurants and bars.
- He acknowledged this is a universal problem held by many neighborhood commercial and/or tourist driven locations. Asked what the Town could do to promote pedestrian safety education.

Chief Howard: Noted that there is no law that states a person may not cross in the middle of a street block.

Councilwoman Watson: Suggested the Town solicit businesses to assist with spreading pedestrian safety.

Mayor O’Neil: Noted that, for now, the police force could step up dialogue with people not using the crosswalks, warning them of safety dangers and encouraging them to use the crosswalks.

IV. Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned (Councilmember O’Neil motion; Councilmember Watson seconded; unanimous approval) at approximately 5:35p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Chauncey Clark, Chair
Public Safety Committee

Approved at the May 4, 2015 Council Workshop