

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

Wednesday, December 3, 2014

A meeting of the Public Safety Committee of Council was held at 3:30 p.m., Thursday, December 3, 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, Police Chief Howard and Fire Chief Stith.

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 40 audience members in attendance).

II. General Discussion Coyote Management Plan

A. Management Plan Amendments

Chair Clark provided a framework for the Town's coyote management plan:
Town policy and activity:

- Police monitor and record coyote sightings. Residents should report coyote sightings each and every time by calling consolidated dispatch at (843) 743-7200
- Private Property: Residents may maintain private property. The Town can provide cameras to monitor suspected coyote activity on private property, along with other resource material, if requested.
- Town Property: Town records all sightings and reported coyote activity. Close proximity aggressive coyote activity must occur before Town takes proactive steps to deal with individual coyotes. Cameras are available for Town property surveillance.

Community-coyote co-existence best practices (nationwide):

- Do not create a coyote-friendly environment: food and water left out
- Restrict domestic animal and small children activity to reduce interaction between coyote and animals or children.

Town special considerations:

- Beach and dog-at-large policy draws many visitors to the Island (3,000 dog permits issued last year).
- Beach also attracts thousands of beach-goers with children at play.

For these reasons, the Public Safety Committee continues to examine the Town's coyote management policy.

Committee Discussion:

Councilmember O'Neil requested Police Chief Howard's recommendations as to changing the Town's current level of involvement with coyotes.

Chief Howard commented the current plan identifies the following scenarios for lethal control:
Incidents: Conflict between coyote and human where coyote creates an unsafe situation. A coyote may show aggression without any physical contact.

Attacks: Coyote shows aggression to a human where the human is physically injured by the coyote or as a result of the confrontation.

Chief Howard proposes adding “encounters” in the management plan:

Encounter: an unexpected direct meeting between a human and coyote that is without incident.

An example of Chief Howard’s interpretation: coyote blocks beach path and “stands his ground.”

A siting would be different from an encounter because the coyote would see the human, show deference and leave the area.

Councilmember Watson asked about coyote dens in the public property adjacent to property lines. Police Chief Howard recommended resident call if he/she suspects the coyote mother becomes aggressive or defensive with humans due to the den.

Public Comments:

Wayne Guckenberger, 2105 Pettigrew, SI

- Suggested heavy fines for leaving debris next to full cans at beach paths or at restaurant dumpsters (summertime).
- Questioned if there is a correlation between coyotes and vegetative overgrowth on the Island.

Chiefs Howard and Stith reviewed littering on the beach or paths and enforcement.

Mark Howard, 1820 Central Avenue, SI

- Noted the County boat landings do not provide trash cans and require trash-in/trash-out policy.

George Malanos, Bayonne/Station 26, SI

- Commented on the frequency with which he sees groups of coyotes (daily) and the established coyote paths through the Town properties near houses. He observed the coyotes are well acclimated to humans and human activity.
- Noted he has four grandsons ranging in age from 7 months to 7 years. Commented he used to let the boys run in front of him to the beach but will not do so anymore because of the coyotes.
- Commented he feels like a prisoner in his home and on his own land. In the fall/winter he used to go to the beach near sunset, take pictures and relax until dark. Stated he will no longer do this for fear of coyote attack.
- Noted that the coyotes are running out of food to eat: no rabbits observed on the paths and deer in his yard anymore.
- Submitted a habitat (overgrowth) has been created to encourage the coyotes. Asked if a significant encounter includes missing cats, potentially to coyotes.

- Expressed concern and desire for a more aggressive management policy now before an incident.

Natalie Bluestein, 2408 Goldbug, SI

- Her family lives on the marsh side of the Island and has sighted a coyote lying in wait on the other side of her 5' fence, stalking her therapy dogs while they are at play in the late afternoon (approximately 5PM). This occurs almost nightly and she sees fresh coyote scat around her yard regularly.
- Stith Park and children's playground – her husband has seen fresh scat in this area.

Cheryl Kaynard, 2501 Atlantic, SI

- During Halloween night with trick-or-treaters running around the streets, she observed six coyotes in her backyard. This incident frightened her.

Jerry Kaynard, Councilmember

- Agrees with Mr. Malanos' sentiments. Noted the Town took a "wait and see" approach with coyotes last year, similar situation in November/December 2013.
- The difference between 2013 and 2014, the coyote population has increased, with coyotes observed in packs (6) instead of individual sightings.
- Submits the Town should be more aggressive on this issue. Cited newspaper articles with aggressive recorded coyote incidents in other communities within the country. Other communities have learned to take a multi-faceted approach to control the population of the coyotes.
- Noted that by the time the Town can respond to an aggressive coyote incident, the coyote will be gone and hard to find.

Will Post, 1907 I'On, SI

- Noted Councilmember Kaynard's articles reference mid-west communities. Questioned what research has been done on coyote co-existence and management in the southeast, specifically the East Cooper area.
- Submitted the Town needs to look at coyote management from a long-term approach. Coyotes will continue to come to the Island, swimming to Sullivan's Island if necessary.
- Stated he wants to know how trappers are catching coyotes, noting he does not support leg traps (inhumane).

Committee and public briefly discussed the leg-trap technique for catching coyotes and the danger it can cause to domestic animals.

Andy McFarland, 1850 Flag, SI

- Recounted his experience co-existing with coyotes in Rhode Island. Noted that, once the food supply of squirrels, rabbits and small animals was depleted, coyotes in Rhode Island would jump 5' fences to attack and kill dogs as large as springer spaniels.
- He recalled an incident near his former home where a 9 year girl was attacked by a coyote, dragged into the wood and whose large family dog fought the coyote off the girl.
- He noted that Bristol, Rhode Island began trapping and killing the coyotes (an aggressive control program).

Council member O'Neil noted that many residents have reported sighting coyotes swimming over the marsh area to Sullivan's Island. He suggested intercepting the coyotes at the marsh spoil area before they get to the Island.

George Malanos, Bayonne/Station 26, SI

- Suggested posting signs at every beach path warning visitors that coyotes are present.
- Noted that for every person attacked, the Town assumes liability for negligence for not getting rid of known coyotes.

Karen Coste, Station 19, SI

- Questioned the petition [regarding coyotes] and noted that 34 names represent 0.03% of the Island residents. She submitted the Town is giving usual attention to the opinion of such a few number of residents.
- She suggested an appropriate survey of coyote management should be conducted.

Rob Fico, 2862 Middle, SI

- Sensitive to safety hazards. Noted there are unintended consequences to annihilating a whole species of animals in the ecosystem.

Cross discussion about coyote food sources and wolves being the coyote's natural predator.

Barbara Spell? (unidentified lady), SI

- Expressed support for an island-wide survey on coyote management.

Sally Whitlock, 1715 Atlantic, SI

- Lives adjacent to the Accreted Land. Wants to see the Town moving toward cleaning of the Accreted Land to help control coyote habitats.
- Recalled her past childhood running along the Island. Submitted children today cannot play freely because of the coyotes.

Alice Morrissey, 1652 Thompson, SI

- Quoted John Moore and Margaret Mead: All things are connected to each other; we will not have a society if we destroy the environment.

Nancy Kingmere, 1761 Atlantic, SI

- Stated that she has lived on the Island all her life; she has not visited the beach in a year for fear of coyote confrontation.

Police Chief Howard reviewed the procedures for calling in coyote sightings.

Committee Discussion:

Council member O'Neil noted that nobody has argued against Chief Howard's recommendation to modify management plan to include steps for incidents of coyote-human encounters.

Committee discussed the value of providing data when conducting a survey.

MOTION: Council member O’Neil recommended to Council modification of the Town’s coyote management plan to lowers the threshold for reporting and engaging the police department by inserting “unsafe encounters” as another basis for involving the police department. Strategic Plan (page 1, item 4) would be modified to read: “Implement a program for lethal control, only when it is determined to be necessary for public safety. For example, when the interactions between humans and coyotes change from observations, sightings and encounters to potentially unsafe encounters, incidents or attacks.” Seconded by Council member Watson. MOTION UNANIMOUSLY PASSED.

Chair Clark submitted that coyote signage and surveys might be good next steps. Committee will relay other recommendations to Council.

Unidentified lady suggested cutting Accreted Land/foliage to make coyote habitats more visible.

B. Private Property Protection

Chair Clark: The Town received a request from a private property owner to erect a 7’ fence around his property for the purpose of providing protection from sited coyotes.

Natalie Bluestein, 2408 Goldbug Avenue, SI

- Recalled repeated incidents where a coyote stalks her springer spaniels just outside her 5’ fence (not privacy fence). Her research has identified that coyotes can jump over 6’ fences, in the west people erect 7’ fences with barb wire and erect coyote poles across the fences, attached by steel stands, and roll. The coyote poles keep the animals from grabbing onto the fence and pulling over it. The poles are not obtainable in the southeast and are very expensive.
- Expressed concern for the safety of her animals and family within her fenced yard; requests approval to add 2’ to her existing wooden fence to erect a non-privacy 7’ fence.
- Requests the Town modify the ordinance to allow increased height to fences.

MOTION: Council member O’Neil made a motion to recommend the Planning Commission review potential ordinance modification that allow for 7’ fences; seconded by Council member Watson. MOTION UNANIMOUSLY PASSED.

Council member O’Neil explained the Planning Commission is required to review and hold a public hearing for all changes to the Zoning Ordinance, wherein the Town’s current fence height limitation is located.

III. General Discussion Polar Bear Swim

Chair Clark noted three applications have been received for the January 1, 2015 Polar Bear Swim from: Dunleavy’s, Home Team BBQ and Poe’s Tavern. Town has discussed various road closure options. He noted that, in the past, the Polar Bear Swim crowd has not been the same as the St. Patrick’s Day crowd, the event time is shorter (10AM-4PM), and traffic has not usually been a problem.

Committee discussed various event management scenarios with Police Chief Howard and Fire Chief Stith: Street closure and fencing; parking and traffic flow restrictions.

Both Chiefs recommended leaving Middle Street open and fencing to keep event patrons off the street with controlled sidewalk entry but closing Station 22 ½ street only.

Chair Clark noted that the Town cannot control the crowd numbers. Police Chief Howard suggested that the Town can control how long people remain at the event by restricting the convenience for patrons to loiter all day and drink alcohol.

Committee discussed starting the event later, given patrons will not enter the water until 2:00PM.

Public Comments:

Carol Killough, 1813 Back Street, SI

- Noted the beer trucks in business parking lots contribute to the pressure to place patrons on the sidewalk and street, and, contributes to safety concerns.
- Submitted that restaurants should be able to conduct regular, full activity within the restaurant, but the Town is not responsible for providing an outdoor drinking arena. Beer truck should be prohibited.

Sean Vanderhurt, Home Team BBQ, SI

- Restaurant has a limited amount of space to place items in front of the establishment. Thousands of patrons will attend this family-attended, charity event.
- Noted he does not need this event to make his restaurant sustainable. His establishment conducts the activity to support Special Olympics.
- Submitted that if the Town limits the footprint/scope of activity in front of the stores, some accommodations need to be provided for Home Team BBQ.

Skipper Condon, I'On Avenue, SI

- Identified he is a restaurateur. Noted that Home Team BBQ's 1100sf establishment or another restaurant's 2500sf becomes 8000sf when the fence is moved into the street. Essentially the restaurants become two Home Teams, two Poe's and two Dunleavy's.
- Noted Dunleavy's Restaurant initiated the Polar Bear Swim a long time ago for charitable reasons. Submitted that Polar Bear Swim should be allowed for Dunleavy's, only, and should take place on the side street/Station 22 ½ only.
- Other restaurants should plan events within the building. He does not support the beer trucks, 300+ people crammed into parking lots, etc.
- Commented on the explosive element of St. Patrick's Day – "this is not party central."

Jamie Maher, Dunleavy's

- Dunleavy's has only requested closure of the side street Station 22 ½ from 10AM-4PM, to conduct the family-oriented event originated many years ago.
- He has not requested, and does not support, closing Middle Street.
- He wants to pull the Polar Bear event back to its original nature.

Pat Votava, 2914 Brownell, SI

- Expressed frustration with the published agenda. She changed her flight to Washington, DC in order to attend this meeting because discussion of St. Patrick's Day was specifically mentioned on the Town's agenda.
- Disappointed that she attended the meeting to only learn the item of her particular interest would be moved to a later meeting date.
- Appreciated discussion of animal control...for both agenda items (coyotes and Polar Bear Swim).
- Noted that the Town did not have either the Polar Bear Swim or St. Patrick's Day celebrations on the Island at one time. Questioned if these types of events are even appropriate any longer.
- Noted that in every election cycle, people express the goal of retaining a single-family family-focused, residential community identity. Questioned if either of the two big CCD events advance this goal.
- These two events invite non-residents to the Island for the purpose of drinking and to get drunk, as early as 10AM on New Year's Day.
- She recognized the Polar Bear Swim is advertised as a charity event; however, she has reviewed the contributions over a number of years from this event to Special Olympics. Notwithstanding the Special Olympics charity buckets placed at the beach, the business community does not contribute to the charity based upon a percentage of sales. Rather, the contribution is based upon a subjective amount, and, the businesses are not compelled to make any contribution to Special Olympics. She cited one year wherein one business reaping sales from the event did not donate anything Special Olympics.

George Malanos, Bayonne/Station 26, SI

- Expressed frustration that the quality of life is compromised by fencing residents into yards to avoid coyotes and closing streets to accommodate party-goers.

Mark Howard, 1820 Central Avenue, SI

- Confused by logistics of proposed fence to allow Middle Street to remain open. Submitted that the plan seemed congested, with three walk-ways within half a block.

Cross discussion between Chief Howard, Home Team BBQ and Committee about fencing, crosswalks and safety. Home Team BBQ requested a clear decision whether outside sales will be allowed.

Council member O'Neil questioned whether all sales could be conducted inside (no chairs or tables) with seating outside.

Carol Killough, 1813 Back Street, SI

- A decision needs to be made about outside sales as Poe's Tavern has a parking lot and will bring a beer truck to the event.
- She recommends no outside sales anywhere.

Rita Langley, 1618 Middle Street, SI

- Asked if Dunleavy's is the only restaurant participating in the event, would the impact be smaller.

Police Chief Howard commented that Polar Bear Swim is weather dependent, and is not as big of an impact as the St. Patrick's Day event.

Residents engaged in a fluid conversation with Fire Chief Stith and Police Chief Howard: impact on Island, restaurant participation, safety considerations and the long-term goal for discussing this event. Committee engaged in cross-discussion of fencing along the gutter lines, indistinguishable from the community members' cross-communication.

MOTION: Council member Watson recommended to Council closure of Station 22 ½ from 12Noon-4:00PM, fence line to the gutter both sides of Middle Street and no outside alcohol sales; seconded by Council member O'Neil. MOTION PASSED TWO (2) TO ONE (1).

IV. General Discussion St. Patrick's Day Celebration

Chair Clark noted the annual St. Patrick's Day Celebration activity will be briefly discussed today, reviewing the Committee's April 2013 meeting minutes on this event. The Committee will have a meeting dedicated to this topic on Tuesday, January 13, 2014 Council for detailed discussion.

Summary from Chiefs Stith and Howard regarding Town concerns

Police Chief Howard:

- Parking and traffic flow continues to be a challenge but the Town is addressing this.
- The size of the crowds that St. Patrick's Day draws puts a greater burden on parking and traffic.
- Police officers, when re-opening the streets, had items thrown at them, one officer was assaulted, racial slurs were made to County and Town officers during arrests and, generally, the crowd was very disrespectful and rowdy.

General comments from unidentified residents:

- Do not have the event; houses were burgled the day of the event.
- Can Town have meeting in January have the meeting after 5PM to allow people with jobs to attend the meeting?

Chair Clark moved January 13, 2015 Public Safety Meeting to 4:30PM.

V. Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 5:45p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Chauncey Clark, Chair
Public Safety Committee

Approved at the December 16, 2014 Council Meeting