

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

Thursday, January 28, 2016

A meeting of the Public Safety Committee of Council was held at 8:30 a.m., Thursday, January 28, 2016 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, Fire Chief Stith, Zoning Administrator Henderson 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 that all Committee members were present. Approximately five residents and four media members (Island Eye News, Moultrie News, Post & Courier News and Channel 5) were in attendance.

II. Coyotes

Committee members received a staff update from Administrator Benke and Police Chief Howard regarding the coyote presence on the Island and the Town's management activity:

- No incidents to report of aggressive contact between coyotes and humans, to date.
- A dog was attacked in a neighborhood recently. The Town cannot confirm it was a coyote attack on the dog as there were no witnesses to the incident.
- Police staff continues tracking and mapping reported coyote sightings over the past year. The Town has, for approximately one year, set box traps on Town property identified from the sighting analysis; however, no coyotes have been caught.

The Town of Sullivan's Island has an established Plan, crafted with assistance from the SC Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), for co-existing with coyotes.

Soft-leg traps

- The next step in the Plan, should Police Chief Howard deem it necessary, is the use of soft-leg traps on Town-owned property.
- This strategy would require the Town to obtain a depredation permit from SCDNR prior to placement.
- The Town would place soft-leg traps in more isolated/remote areas of the Island, not heavily populated or trafficked sites. Appropriate safety signage would be installed to warn people that trapping was underway.
- Administrator Benke and Police Chief Howard have completed interviews with a short-list of trapper vendors. The next step is to obtain depredation permits from SCDNR.
- It was noted residents are allowed to use soft-leg traps on private property and many have done so, using some of the same potential vendors the Town interviewed.

Committee Discussion:

Councilmember Church expressed her objection to the use of soft-leg traps. Her concerns included:

- Safety to children and pets who might be injured by the traps;

- Other wildlife being injured from the traps;
- The use of soft-leg traps now may be premature; noted that the coyote population traditionally begins its annual retreat at this point;
- This trapping method is inhumane to the coyote.

Committee Member inquiries:

- Safety incidents with soft-leg traps on private property;
- Frequency trappers would check traps, and, potential use of web-cameras

Chief Howard reported that the only incident of which he was aware involved a dog (Labrador) trapped in a soft-leg trap. He was released and returned to his owner unharmed.

Administrator Benke noted that trappers would check the traps every 24 hours. Use of web-cameras could be investigated, but the feasibility in using these devices would depend upon the location of traps. He noted that trappers have advised against checking traps more than once every 24 hours as every check leaves traces of human scent that deters coyotes from moving toward the traps.

Committee members agreed that the primary concern was for the safety of children and family pets. The majority of the Committee agreed the use of soft-leg traps was the appropriate next step, noting Councilmember Church's opposition.

Committee acknowledged that the Police Chief had the discretion and was authorized, under the Town Plan, to move toward the use of soft-leg traps. This activity did not require an affirmative vote from the Public Safety Committee or Town Council.

Chair Clark invited residents to offer comments; no comments made

III. Parking Plan Summer 2016

Chair Clark made introductory comments

- The Town continues work toward a policy on an island-wide parking plan to include a parking and traffic analysis conducted last year at Town Council's direction.
- Meanwhile, neighboring City of Isle of Palms announced it will execute its parking plan this year, restricting visitor parking to its City.
- Submitted it was important for Sullivan's Island to keep pace with Isle of Palm's parking plan activity as the Town's parking and traffic flow will certainly be impacted by Isle of Palm's parking changes.

Administrator Benke provided Staff report:

Background

- Noted the Town began studying parking in 2008-2009, initially from a potential revenue perspective.
 - Town evaluations of staff expenses and general obligation fund expenditures identified a significant percentage of Town monies were used to manage the

- impact of visitor/tourist-related activity: traffic and parking, beach path repairs, patrol presence, fire and rescue operations, sanitation/debris removal, etc.
 - Conversely, the Town receives very little revenue associated with tourist/visitor activity (i.e. Accommodations Tax), particularly compared to other beach communities. The Town has no bed-breakfast or hotels, a very limited pool of vacation rentals, a small commercial district with a handful of restaurants and does not maintain paid municipal parking lots or other paid parking spaces.
- The more important focus for the Town is providing good public safety services to residents and the influx of Town visitors who frequent the Island through the “tourist/high” season:
 - Traffic control and law enforcement protection
 - Search and rescue operations for water and beach incidents, in addition to medical calls and fire suppression activity.
 - Ability to navigate emergency vehicle through streets and on/off the Island remains a critical concern for the public safety chiefs.
- External pressures on the Town’s public safety and public works department operations have increased over the decades as the tri-county area population has grown:
 - 1972-1973:
 - It was common to see bumper-bumper cars from the Island down the Ben Sawyer Causeway to Shem Creek bridge in Mt. Pleasant.
 - At that time Sullivan’s Island was the only way to access Isle of Palms
 - Mt. Pleasant’s population was approximately 6,200 people and Sullivan’s Island had approximately 1,400 residents
 - 1990’s:
 - Isle of Palms Connector opened to provide a direct route to Isle of Palms beaches from Mt. Pleasant. This relieved some pressure on Sullivan’s Island beach traffic.
 - 2010:
 - Mt. Pleasant’s population tops 68,000 residents while Sullivan’s Island’s population has grown to approximately 1,800 people. The only two places for East Cooper residents to go to the beach continue to be Isle of Palms and Sullivan’s Island.
 - Tri-county area continues to experience dramatic population increases as well, adding to the pressure of weekend visitors to the Island.

Parking Plan Study:

- First Step: evaluate the potential supply of Town parking spaces.
 - Staff identified a maximum of 4,967 parking spaces:
 - Approximately 2,280 parking spaces are seaside of Middle Street
 - Approximately 2,229 parking spaces are marsh-side of Middle Street
 - 458 spaces are on I’On Avenue

[NOTE: Some of those spaces have obstructions and other right-of-way conditions (i.e. ditches) that would have to be addressed in order to reach this maximum parking number]

- Second Step: evaluate traffic flow and quantify parking demand
 - In 2015 the Town retained Stantec Consulting Services to conduct a parking/traffic study of the Island. These are the same traffic engineers Isle of Palms used for its traffic and parking study.
 - Stantec's 2015 study findings:
 - An average of 1,565 cars are parked on Sullivan's Island in peak summer afternoons
 - Bottle-neck intersections see degradation of service: Middle Street and Hwy 703, Jasper Boulevard and Hwy 703)
 - Caveat: it was not possible to differentiate between resident and visitor cars, and, difficult to evaluate through traffic travelling to Isle of Palms.
 - Town staff estimate an average of three (3) people in each car, which brings 4,695 extra people on the Island. This influx increases the Town's population temporarily to almost 6,500 during the summer peak period.
- Noted that the population increase from 1,800 to 6,500 significantly impacts public safety
- The Town's streets were designed and installed in the late 1940's to accommodate post-WWII traffic demands. The roads were not designed for, nor can they adequately accommodate the impact of contemporary traffic volumes and vehicle configurations.

Parking and Traffic

What the Town cannot control that negatively impacts traffic flow and levels of service:

- Traffic accidents occurring on the Island, Ben Sawyer Causeway, Isle of Palms, Isle of Palms Connector or in Mount Pleasant on Coleman Boulevard;
- Frequency of Ben Sawyer Bridge openings and closings.

What the Town can do:

- Manage how cars are parked on the Island, to allow for a good flow for public safety vehicles and resident vehicles;
- Manage how many visitor cars can park on the Island
- Mitigate the impact that the Isle of Palm's 2016 parking plan, which reduces visitor parking spaces, will have on Sullivan's Island's parking demands (could potentially increase parking demands on the Town by approximately another 1,500 visitors)

Parking Plan Map

Administrator Benke and Zoning Administrator Henderson provided an overview of the parking maps created through the Town's GIS program.

- Staff used the SCDOT parking restrictions as a baseline to build parking spaces on a potential parking plan map.
- Some parking spaces were marked for elimination due to right-of-way conditions that made parking vehicles problematic.
- Opportunities for golf cart parking were identified and mapped. Golf cart only parking was identified along some of the most popular beach access paths to facilitate public safety apparatus and personnel access to the beach for rescue/safety operations.

- Town evaluated spaces with the understanding that all four-wheels of a vehicle would be off the pavement and on the right-of-way.
- Sullivan's Island Elementary School parking was not included in the parking inventory, but could be included if desired.

Chief Stith:

- Recommended restricting parking (vehicle and golf carts) to one-side of the road, only, on all roads where visitor parking is allowed. This would provide the opportunity for cars to pull off the road onto rights-of-way when emergency vehicles have to navigate streets for an emergency call.

Committee Discussion:

- Suggested Middle Street (North) should be opened to parking spaces, to help encourage disbursement of visitor parking throughout the Island. Currently Middle Street (South) bears the brunt of visitor parking demands on Middle Street.
- Discussed value of removing parking along I'On Street as the ditches and narrow roads make on-street visitor parking a problem.
- Encourage golf-cart parking spaces near the beach accesses.
- Endorse municipal ordinance to require four-wheels off the pavement/road for parked vehicles on public rights-of-way.
- Requested analysis of available parking space quantity for the following scenarios:
 - Open parking to Middle Street (North);
 - Restrict parking to one-side of street island-wide;
 - Remove parking option from the staff identified restricted areas where right-of-way conditions make parking problematic;
 - Retain golf cart spaces, running parking numbers for one-side of street only golf cart parking.
- Identify any additional problem areas for parking. One example might be residences where property owners rely upon on-street parking due to lot configuration and house access. The Town may have to develop some limited resident-only parking sticker plan for residents in this situation.
- Noted that, while SCDOT has to approve any changes to a Town Parking Plan, the Town has the flexibility to modify the Plan as needed, based upon assessments made during the implementation phase.
- Committee acknowledged that an island-wide Parking Plan would be an approach that is fair to the visitors of Sullivan's Island, flexible enough for Council to evaluate its efficacy and modify if necessary, and ensure public safety services can be properly and efficiently provided to residents and visitors during the busy summer season.

Staff clarified the Parking Plan would be in effect for the entire year, not just the summer season.

Next Steps:

Staff indicated they would have the mapping modified and reanalyze parking space quantity based upon the aforementioned scenarios. This information and proposed ordinance language (to require four-wheels off the road/pavement) would be ready for the February Council Workshop meeting next week (Monday, February 1, 2016).

It was estimated approximately 2,000 parking spaces might be available given the aforementioned scenario changes; however, a better estimate would be available at the February 1, 2016 Council Workshop.

Committee discussed advertising a final proposed parking plan to the public to give residents the opportunity to review it and provide feedback. Staff will work with Stantec to have the consultant modify the proposed Parking Plan Map. This will give the Town current information to provide to the public and SCDOT. It was noted SCDOT will have to approve a Town Parking Plan before Town implementation.

Chair Clark invited residents to offer comments.

Public Comments

Mike Walsh, 2530 I'On Avenue

- Noted he re-sent an email to Council that he emailed approximately one year ago [*he did not circulate copies of the email or provide a copy to the recording secretary for inclusion with these minutes*]
 - His letter centered on the blatant parking violations, debris and the general negative impact of visitors during the Polar Bear Plunge 2015.
- Enforcement: advocated for strong enforcement of this Parking Plan when implemented. Submitted enforcement will be the single most significant factor in the success or failure of this Plan.
- Economic Component: questioned why Town Council will not pursue the potential for revenue from the parking plan (charge for parking at least in some sections). Noted that in northeastern states, municipalities push visitors to park near the beach in municipal lots and charge \$25/car. Submitted the Town should attempt to mitigate the cost of visitors on the Island.
- Endorses one-side of street only parking: noted he lives at the corner of Station 26 & I'On Avenue. Currently his yard from corner to corner is full of beach visitor cars on warm weekends. He and his wife choose to keep their lawn free of fencing and should not be mandated to install fencing to prevent people from moving cars onto their lawns. Currently he places garbage cans at the end of his driveway to prevent cars from blocking ingress/egress.

No other public comments offered

Staff will provide a presentation to Council at its February 1, 2016 Workshop, and, continue work with Stantec on the proposed Parking Plan Map modifications.

IV. Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned (Mayor O'Neil motion; Councilmember Church seconded; unanimous approval) at approximately 9:45a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Chauncey Clark, Chair
Public Safety Committee

For review/approval at the February 1, 2016 Council Workshop