



The Town of Hilton Head Island Regular Public Safety Committee Meeting

Monday, December 5, 2011

10:00 a.m. – Benjamin M. Racusin Council Chambers

AGENDA

As a Courtesy to Others Please Turn Off All Cell Phones and Pagers during the Meeting

- 1. Call to Order**
- 2. Freedom of Information Act Compliance**
Public notification of this meeting has been published, posted, and mailed in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act and the Town of Hilton Head Island requirements.
- 3. Approval of Minutes**
 - a. Regular Public Safety Committee Meeting of November 7, 2011
- 4. Unfinished Business**
 - a. Speed Limit Treatment on the Charles E. Fraser Toll Bridge and Palmetto Bay Road
- 5. New Business**
 - a. Pedestrian Safety Comments – Frank Babel
- 6. Adjournment**

Please note that a quorum of Town Council may result if four (4) or more of Town Council members attend this meeting.

TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE REGULAR MEETING

Date: November 7, 2011

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Members Present: Bill Harkins, *Chairman*; Lee Edwards; Kim Likins

Members Absent: None

Town Staff Present: Lavarn Lucas, *Fire Chief*; Ed Boring, *Deputy Fire Chief – Support Services*; Marcy Benson, *Senior Grants Administrator*; Charles Cousins, *Director of Community Development*; Scott Liggett, *Director of Public Projects and Facilities/Chief Engineer*; Darrin Shoemaker, *Traffic & Transportation Engineer*; Jeff Buckalew, *Town Engineer*; Rene Phillips, *Website/Court Systems Administrator*; and Lynn Buchman, *Administrative Assistant*

Others Present: Ken Heitzke, *Council Member/Mayor Pro-Tem*; Bill Ferguson, *Council Member*; Captain Toby McSwain, *BCSO*; Frank Babel

Media Present: Tom Barton, *Island Packet*

1. Call to Order

2. Freedom of Information Act Compliance

Public notification of this meeting has been published, posted, and mailed in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act and the Town of Hilton Head Island requirements.

3. Approval of Minutes

a. Special Public Safety Committee Meeting of October 25, 2011

Motion to approve the minutes of the October 25, 2011 Special Public Safety Committee meeting was made by Kim Likins and seconded by Lee Edwards. The Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

4. Unfinished Business

a. Consideration of a Recommendation for the Port Security Grant Program

Chief Lavarn Lucas appeared to answer the questions remaining from the previous meeting.

As to income generation from the boat, he pointed out that the EMS bill for water emergencies would be the same, as the ambulance would still be picking up the patient at a dock for transport. No additional revenue would be collected unless the Town implements a new fee, which he was not recommending.

Chief Lucas explained that while a cost sharing agreement with Beaufort County was possible, he did not feel it was in the best interests of the Town. In his opinion the loss of overall control of the resource to another entity providing limited infusion of funds would not be beneficial.

Looking back at the Fire and Rescue budget, Chief Lucas stated he had found a way to make the expenses and operation of the boat budget neutral with no needed increase in the budget.

He reiterated his feelings that there was a need for the boat to protect the environment and control fuel spills, with a statutory requirement to provide such protection by fire and rescue. In addition, he pointed out that the Master Plan provided that when there was a need and alternative funding available, the Council would review the request, which support he was now seeking.

Mr. Edwards indicated he had received comments reflecting a public perception that fire and rescue had become a large part of the budget, but there was no need for another “toy” and no real demand from the boating community. He noted that although the operating budget of fire and rescue might not increase, the operation of the boat, training and staffing would take money that could be spent elsewhere; therefore, it should not be considered cost neutral.

Ms. Likins noted her appreciation for the efforts made to make the boat cost neutral. However, she expressed disappointment that a collective effort with Beaufort County was not possible, particularly since the Town assumes payment of EMS and rescue cost that typically would be paid for by Beaufort County. She noted that our citizens pay taxes into the County, but no services or funds were available for Hilton Head Island. She also had received no significant public response indicating a need for the boat.

Chairman Harkins indicated the proposal had been well presented by Chief Lucas. Since the waterways are shared with our neighbors in Beaufort County, he felt this represented an opportunity for regional participation and it was regrettable that none was forthcoming from the County at this time. He acknowledged that control is an issue, but could be removed with good management policy. He related that the general perception in the community is that although fire and rescue has very qualified and astute professionals, many view the department as overstaffed, overbuilt, and overcapitalized. He added further that this situation may create an opportunity for more public education about the department. Public comments were elicited, but there were none.

Mr. Edwards further commented that cost neutral still results in an expenditure of \$300,000 of taxpayer money for the boat, as the grant is not free money. He pointed out that even if we not paying the bill for all of it, we all need to be good stewards of our tax money. He noted that if our taxpayers do not want the boat, then money should not be spent on it.

A motion was made by Lee Edwards that a recommendation be made to Town Council that the Grant not be accepted, and seconded by Ms. Likins. The motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

5. New Business

a. Speed Limit Treatment on the Charles E. Fraser Toll Bridge and Palmetto Bay Road

Darrin Shoemaker, Traffic & Transportation Engineer, presented a proposal to revise the existing speed limit treatment on the Charles E. Fraser Toll Bridge, as well as the segment of Palmetto Bay Road between the Toll Bridge and Sea Pines Circle. He pointed out that a large number of

the major roads on the Island are state maintained roads, and others are maintained by Beaufort County – both of which have the ultimate authority to say what the speed limit will be on their roads. However, those agencies will rely on the Town Traffic Engineer to vet any requests and recommend changes for consideration, with support of such recommendation from the Town Council before revisions are made. He presented Town Staff's suggestion that the Town request from the SC Department of Transportation an increase in the speed limit on the Charles E. Fraser Bridge from 40 to 45 mph, with the limit on Palmetto Bay Road from the Audubon Newhall Preserve to Island Crossings Shopping Center to increase from 35 mph to 40 mph, as well.

Mr. Shoemaker related the history of the speed limit treatment since the opening of the Cross Island Expressway, including studies conducted by the SCDOT recommending revisions that were ultimately considered too liberal by Town Council. He also noted a letter to the editor last year suggesting that the treatment was inequitable, over-conservative, and constituted a speed trap with selective enforcement of the speed limit occurring. While no one thought this was the case, it did initiate new discussions about the limit. Shortly after that, the Town received a letter from the Greater Island Council Transportation Committee expressing concern about the existing limits and suggested revisions. The Town Manager asked Staff for recommendation as to most equitable and appropriate speed limit treatment.

Sketches showing the existing speed limit treatment and Staff recommended revisions were presented and explained in detail by Mr. Shoemaker. He noted that initial conversations with SCDOT about the changes had been favorable and indicated a likely approval of the speed limit revisions. Location of existing signs and proposed new signs were outlined by Mr. Shoemaker.

Ms. Likins acknowledged the difficulty in staying within the existing 40 mph speed limit coming over the bridge, and particularly for visitors to the Island who might receive tickets as soon as they are almost at their destination. She asked if the signage where the speed changes to 40 mph could be more significant. A discussion followed with Mr. Shoemaker as to size and placement of signs to convey the message of new speed limit treatments.

Mr. Edwards and Mr. Shoemaker discussed the areas of increased speed in relation to the pedestrian and bike paths, noting that on the bridge the breakdown lane for vehicles is shared with bicyclists and pedestrians. Mr. Shoemaker noted that the recommendation for an increased speed limit is based partly on the absence of any intersections or driveways on the roadway under discussion.

Mr. Edwards and Captain McSwain discussed the public perception of a speed trap, which both agreed was not the case. However, Captain McSwain supported the increased speed limit to help the traffic flow, but could not comment on whether it would make the highway any safer.

Chairman Harkins and Mr. Shoemaker discussed the concrete barriers on either side of the bridge and the fact that they are designed to accommodate higher speeds. They also discussed ways from a design standpoint to make the bridge safer at increased speeds for joggers, walkers, and bikers, noting that to date no such collisions have occurred. Chairman Harkins indicated his support, but encouraged Staff to solicit suggestions from the biker community for ways to improve safety.

Mr. Edwards stated that he was not aware of any public demand for increased speed limits, and 5 mph on these sections would not save time or money for a commuter. Mr. Shoemaker acknowledged this was the first time this Committee had been involved, however, he noted it was a recurring point of discussion every few years, with the Greater Island Council's Transportation Committee having prompted this appearance. Although their initial request was for a change to 55 mph, after Staff's review at the Town Manager's request, the Greater Island Council has unanimously endorsed the Staff recommendation.

Chairman Harkins and Captain McSwain discussed the tickets and the discretion given the officers, however, Captain McSwain acknowledged there was no mechanism to track the location and how and who gets the tickets. Chairman Harkins noted that since we are trying to put our best foot forward as a welcoming group for our tourists, it would seem that efforts would be better placed on signage for increased awareness of speed limit changes.

Mr. Edwards noted that although no collisions had yet occurred, he wanted to keep it that way. Considering the bicycle friendly community award, he was not in favor of increased speed limits without raised awareness and protection for the pedestrians, runners, and bikers.

Public comment was sought and Frank Babel, a bike advocate, reminded the Committee that we are either a bicycle friendly community or we are not. However, he noted that the 45 mph speed limit proposal is the right compromise. He expressed his opinion that the problem is not speed but distracted drivers. He suggested alternatives of more effective rumble strips as are being used on Gum Tree, color to set off the bicycle lanes, designating the breakdown lanes as bike and pedestrian lanes only, or a flashing sign showing the speed limit and current speed.

Ms. Likins indicated the suggestions were good and moved that the speed limit treatment issue be deferred to the next committee meeting so that Mr. Shoemaker and his staff might incorporate safety considerations for bikers and pedestrians. Mr. Edwards seconded and the motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

b. 3rd Quarter 2011 Crime Statistics

Captain Toby McSwain presented the Third Quarter 2011 Crime Statistics, noting that the quarter was fairly quiet in comparison to prior years. He reported no major shortages concerning manpower, with the bar details on Friday and Saturday nights continuing with no major problems.

Crimes Against Persons

Captain McSwain reported 4 cases lower in comparison to this quarter of 2010, with no homicides or murders in the last quarter. There were no major arrests of significance for multiple crimes. There are still some robbery cases from previous quarters where arrests are expected soon.

Property Crimes

Captain McSwain reported these crimes have increased by 4, with more detail and analysis given about the crimes and where they are occurring. Task forces will continue to saturate problem areas when manpower and budget allows. However, he noted that property crime has always been #1. Visitors to the Island feel safe, don't lock doors, leave valuable possessions in clear sight in vehicles, and efforts are being made for public awareness.

Ms. Likins inquired if rental property companies are being diligent in their efforts to let guests know that they need to lock the cars. Captain McSwain noted that a video had been produced 8 or 9 years ago in conjunction with Hargray and shown on a Hargray channel, but he was not sure it was still being shown. Efforts to set up meetings with rental companies in the North and South Forest Beach areas have not been very successful.

Captain McSwain also noted that in conversations with the Chamber, he had experienced some mixed feelings they had about discussing safety and crime when they are promoting the Island.

Vehicle Collisions

Captain McSwain reported that vehicle accidents were down by 48 cases from last year's third quarter. He explained that they are looking at the areas where these are occurring and providing Mr. Shoemaker with pertinent information for tracking purposes. The same numbers are used to set up traffic teams to work those areas. He expressed his support for Mr. Babel's suggestions, and noted the flashing speed limit signs have proved effective and would be moveable to any location, with the cost of the sign being \$4,000 to \$6,000.

In response to Ms. Likins' inquiry about the fatal accident on Marshland, Captain McSwain explained he had no details of the cause, but noted the accident occurred in the middle of the night in a dark area with no lights, with patrols normally focusing on more high traffic areas.

Tickets

Captain McSwain noted that tickets are lower, and manpower changes concerning the traffic team will probably be made. Those officers currently on the team have been there for quite some time, and a transition is needed.

In summary, he noted that it was a good quarter. Volunteers continue to provide a great service to the community, and the department is very thankful and glad to have them.

6. Adjournment

At 11:15 a.m. Mr. Edwards moved to adjourn the meeting and Ms. Likins seconded. The motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

Respectfully submitted:

Lynn W. Buchman
Administrative Assistant

Approved by:

Bill Harkins, Chairman

Memo



To: Public Safety Committee

From: Darrin Shoemaker, Traffic and Transportation Engineer (Voice (843)341-4774)
(Cell (843)384-5021)

Via: Steve Riley, Town Manager

Date: 11/30/2011

Re: Speed Limit Revision Recommendation – Charles E. Fraser Toll Bridge / Palmetto Bay Road

Recommendation: No recommendation is being made; staff is responding to a request for additional information made by the Public Safety Committee at their November 7th, 2011 meeting relating to a previously proffered staff recommendation to request the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) to implement a speed limit revision on the subject roadways.

Summary: The committee requested staff to examine alternative methods to improve the separation of motor vehicle traffic from non-motor vehicle traffic on the Charles E. Fraser toll bridge. Staff has discussed the matter with SCDOT officials, who remain interested in ensuring access to the improved shoulders, otherwise known as “breakdown lanes,” throughout their entire length across the toll bridge in order to provide a refuge area for motorists with disabled vehicles. Therefore, any sort of substantive barrier to physically separate the travel lanes from the breakdown lanes would not be allowed by SCDOT. Audible rumble strips applied in the form of thermoplastic domes atop the 4” wide white edge line would be allowed by the Department, but would require installation at the cost of the Town. The only location within the Town known to staff where this treatment has been installed by SCDOT is along the recently resurfaced Gum Tree Road, and a photograph of this treatment is attached. An effort to install the raised thermoplastic domes along both directions from end to end on the toll bridge is estimated to cost \$6,000 based on industry averages.

Another alternative may be the application of raised reflective pavement markers, or “cats eye” markers, typically employed to improve visibility of pavement markings at night or after dark. While this treatment would not be nearly as effective at generating an audible warning to encroaching motorists as the above thermoplastic dome treatment, it would serve to enhance safety at night for both motorized and non-motorized traffic. This treatment’s estimated cost is \$1,600.

Staff has been unable to identify any other feasible alternative treatments in response to the Committee's request, but has recently observed that the existing white edge lines on the toll bridge are very worn and are not providing the desired visibility during daytime or nighttime conditions. Staff will discuss this situation with SCDOT to request maintenance on these edge lines at once and be prepared to brief the Committee regarding the results of this discussion as well.

Background: A recommendation to revise the existing speed limit treatment on the Charles E. Fraser toll bridge and on a segment of Palmetto Bay Road was presented to the Public Safety Committee on November 7th, 2011. The recommended revision would increase the existing speed limit from 40 MPH to 45 MPH on the Fraser toll bridge and from 35 MPH to 40 MPH on Palmetto Bay Road between Palmetto Business Park and the Target Road traffic signal.

