

TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE SPECIAL MEETING

Date: October 25, 2011

Time: 3:00 p.m.

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

Members Absent: None

Town Staff Present: Lavarn Lucas, *Fire Chief*; Brad Tadlock, *Deputy Fire Chief – Operations*; Ed Boring, *Deputy Fire Chief – Support Services*; Randy Lindstrom, *Administrative Battalion Chief*; Paul Rasch, *Emergency Management Coordinator*; Tom Fultz, *Director of Administrative Services*; Marcy Benson, *Senior Grants Administrator*; Shawn Colin, *Comprehensive Planning Manager*; Susan Simmons, *Director of Finance*; and Lynn Buchman, *Administrative Assistant*

Others Present: George Williams, *Council Member*; Sheriff P.J. Tanner, *BCSO*;

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. Regular Public Safety Committee Meeting of October 3, 2011

Motion to approve the minutes of the October 3, 2011 regular 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. None.

5. New Business

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

Chairman Williams reminded the Committee that this was brought to Town Council at its last meeting and remanded to the Committee for review and consideration. He thanked Chief Lucas and his staff for the quick response to the request for additional information.

Chief Lavarn Lucas expressed his appreciation to the Committee for the opportunity to answer questions about the proposal raised in the Town Council meeting, and a Power Point presentation covering key points was introduced.

As to the question of responsibility, Chief Lucas pointed out the following factors he felt indicated the responsibility fell on the Town of Hilton Head Island:

- The Town Limits of Hilton Head Island included approximately 21 square miles of tidal waters, including marsh areas and beach, with responsibility to control the activities that take place in these waters.
- Town business licenses are required to operate in the tidal waters within or traversing through the Town Limits.
- Enjoyment of the waters surrounding Hilton Head Island is specifically targeted in advertisements funded by the Town to encourage tourism.
- The Town is providing infrastructure for access to the waters through boat ramp and future sailing/rowing center.
- Law enforcement in tidal waters is provided through a contract with the Sheriff's Office and the Town would also be responsible in other emergency service functions, as well.
- The Town has contracted for limited lifeguard and first-aid services on the beaches and adjacent waters.
- Town Codes and Ordinances establish and require EMS and fire responses, including those occurring on the waters within the Town Limits.
- The Fire & Rescue Master Plan adopted by Ordinance recommends 2 fire and rescue boats to be funded with alternative funding sources, which funding is covered mainly by this Grant.
- Under the existing mutual aid agreement with the Beaufort County Local Emergency Planning Committee the Town has agreed to provide hazmat technician response to southern Beaufort County. However, he pointed out that protection to Daufuskie Island is not possible at this time, nor in the 21 square miles of tidal waters within the Town Limits.
- One of the Destination 2020 Guiding Principles is to "Protect the Natural Beauty" of Hilton Head Island and its waters and beaches, and mechanisms to provide that protection in the cases of fire and hazardous material releases in the waters are needed.
- Town Council 2016 Goals to "Re-Establish Pre-Eminence for Environmental Stewardship" could not be accomplished without the ability to control hazardous materials in the marine environment which the Town depends on for tourism and its livelihood.

For past history and statistics regarding fire and rescue emergencies involving the water, Chief Lucas referenced in detail 17 articles from the Island Packet, dating from 1997, the latest 2 occurring last week. He pointed out that boat fires at docks can be more easily and safely attacked from different angles with a fire boat, preventing the possibility of an entire marina being destroyed.

In addition, Chief Lucas provided a detailed report from the Fire and Rescue Records Management System for the past 5 years of the boat fires, searches for missing or distressed persons in the water, assistance to sinking vessels, patients on a boat or en route to a marina or dock, and gasoline, oil or diesel spills or leaks. He noted these numbers are incomplete, as the Records Management System does not specifically identify an incident as being water related.

Mr. Edwards questioned the current procedures for patient pick-ups from marinas or docks and the procedure for spills or leaks. Chief Lucas noted that ambulances are currently dispatched to marinas or docks to pick up patients. He further explained that for spills, the hazmat rig, as well as a pumper or two, would be dispatched with absorbent materials if the water is reachable, or boats borrowed to apply the absorbent materials to pick up as much of the spill as possible. He noted that in many cases the tide is moving the spill and nothing can be done, and as they have no booms or way to deploy them, so the spill eventually dissipates.

Chief Lucas pointed out what effects these type of emergencies could have on the Town. These included:

- Liability the Town assumes because of its responsibility to provide proper rescue, EMS services, and fire containment for boats and marinas.
- Damage to natural resources from contaminated beaches, marshes, and loss of flora and fauna.
- Reduction in tourism dollars, both immediate and long-term.

As to Town Council's inquiry about the type boat proposed to be purchased with the Grant and cost, Chief Lucas explained in detail the 26' Harbor Guard Boat, known as the Fire Hawk. He outlined the cost as being a total of \$292,045, for boat and equipment, which is fully funded by the Grant. Although additional equipment and supplies would be needed and purchased, he noted this would be done only when grants or additional funding allowed. Additional personnel would not be requested, as the boat would be a resource to be used as other resources by on duty staff with overtime only as necessary. In response to Ms. Likins' inquiry, Chief Lucas noted that resources needed for a boat response would depend upon the call and staffing. Normally, current resources could be moved to balance the personnel and units available; however minimum staffing would require overtime until the unit is back in service, which is normal operation.

Chief Lucas agreed with Chairman Harkins that EMS response for medical emergencies is currently being provided with boats directed to the nearest marina or dock and resources dispatched for pick up and transport, but not as effectively as they could with a fire and rescue boat. However, he noted that the boat would be launched only if it were more efficient.

Ms. Likins asked how other areas are handling incidents in their waters and whether they have such rescue boats. Chief Lucas responded that it was his understanding that Beaufort County EMS does not have any boats. Individual fire departments have different mechanisms, such as small boats not equipped for firefighting or EMS, or jet skis. He noted that they are calling DNR, Coast Guard, and other agencies for assistance as the Town is currently doing.

Chief Lucas explained in detail the training plans and certifications being considered for operators and crew and the costs and expenses involved. He indicated that future grant funding would be sought through Port Security or other funding sources for EMS, hazmat and firefighter

training, and he expressed confidence that such training could be done at no expense to the Town. However, since this funding is not a certainty, he acknowledged that the Town should be prepared to assume these costs, but desired additional planned certifications and training exceeding the minimum legal requirements would only be done with grant or alternative funding.

A lengthy discussion ensued among the Committee members and Chief Lucas concerning estimated deployment and special event coverage, dockage fee quotes, need for a future lift, and fuel cost projections based on exact and similar fire and rescue boats. Chief Lucas expressed confidence that continued investigation would result in reduced costs.

Chief Lucas outlined the warranties for the boat, engine, hull, and equipment and the maintenance to be performed in-house. At expiration of the warranties, Chief Lucas estimated that the yearly maintenance cost would be absorbed into the fire and rescue maintenance budget.

Chief Lucas noted that the Homeland Security Grant had few requirements, with no hidden guidelines, and is similar to one currently funding the Hazmat Program. Although mutual aid must be provided when resources allow, Chief Lucas indicated if staffing or money was not available, such aid could be denied. The purpose of the Grant is to prepare the Town to handle its own emergencies and not be solely dependent upon the Federal Government to provide aid.

Although not finalized, Chief Lucas indicated Sheriff Tanner was agreeable to discussing a cost sharing arrangement. However, Chief Lucas felt that no cost sharing was necessary, but would be pursued if Town Council directed this as a requirement for the acceptance of the Grant.

To finalize, Chief Lucas presented the detailed cost overview figures, noting the first and fourth years' costs to the Town, and pointing out where additional grant and alternative funding might reduce the costs. He also noted that EMS revenue had not been factored in.

Ms. Likins inquired if Fire and Rescue could find the funds within their \$13+ million budget, but Chief Lucas explained that \$12 million was payroll and could not be touched, and the remainder had been trimmed as much as possible; however, portions could be absorbed, but not all.

Mr. Edwards and Chief Lucas discussed the development of the training program based on other programs in existence.

Chairman Harkins complimented Chief Lucas on the comprehensive presentation and respectfully requested the Chief to reconsider his response to Ms. Likins relative to the absence of any flexibility in his budget. Given the tough economic times, Chairman Harkins asked if there was any way to make this expense neutral for the budget. Susan Simmons was asked to comment on realistic revenue assumptions for extension of ambulance coverage to the waterways. Chairman Harkins also asked Sheriff Tanner to comment on a possible commitment with the County for cost sharing.

Susan Simmons, Finance Director, explained that her department was involved in the EMS billing based on information received from Fire and Rescue and rates set dependent on the level of care and mileage. As Town Council sets those fees, she pointed out that special fees could be considered for water rescue calls, and additional revenue would depend upon the volume of calls. A discussion followed among the Council Members, Ms. Simmons, and Chief Lucas concerning collection rates, hazmat response billing procedures and reimbursement, and the need for revenue generation figures.

Sheriff Tanner appeared before the Committee and praised Chief Lucas for his presentation and its completeness. Sheriff Tanner did note that the figures were probably high. In response to Ms. Likin's inquiry, Sheriff Tanner explained the use of volunteers who assisted in water related emergency rescues in other areas of the County and all along the coast. However, he pointed out the demographics are different in this area, and expressed his support of Chief Lucas's efforts to obtain the fire rescue boat through the Grant. He noted that if the Town decides it does not want the boat, Beaufort County would be willing to take it.

Ms. Likins pointed out that it was not a matter of not wanting the boat, but a cost benefit analysis was needed. She pointed out that the Town already handles the huge cost of its own EMS, and Beaufort County is paying other entities to handle this type of rescue. She indicated she would like to see the County share in the expenses as it does have some responsibility to the Town and it would be a benefit to the County, as well.

Chairman Harkins indicated Beaufort County Councilman Stu Rodman expressed support of a joint program between the County and Town with cost sharing, and Sheriff Tanner indicated the County Administrator had also expressed such support. Although the Sheriff's Office provides law enforcement, Sheriff Tanner noted they are also involved in rescue, though not trained as firefighters or EMT's.

Chairman Harkins expressed two key concerns – one being an unknown revenue generation figure and the other being the unknown level of commitment from Beaufort County.

Chief Lucas indicated that in conversations with Homeland Security subsequent to the Town Council Meeting of last week, they had indicated that an answer was needed as soon as possible, as the Grant would be awarded to the next on the list if not accepted by the Town soon.

Mr. Edwards reminded the Committee and audience that although the Grant is coming from the Federal government and does not cost the Town, it is not "free money" as we all pay for the Federal money. He said that, he agreed that the fire boat would be a great asset, and thanked Chief Lucas for the presentation that cleared up questions remaining from the Town Council meeting, but he remained unclear as to whether there was a demand for it at this time.

Sheriff Tanner noted that although not "free money", the Grant will be awarded and is an opportunity for the Town to recoup some of the federal tax money paid and use it locally to benefit the citizens of Hilton Head Island. He recounted his history in dealing with grants and the strings attached; however, he noted the block grant through Homeland Security is completely different. From a public safety standpoint, Sheriff Tanner indicated his full support; however, he noted that any financial issues would have to be approved by County Council.

George Williams, Town Council Member, asked the Committee to consider several points. He noted that having a boat would not have changed the outcome of the incidents reported by the Island Packet nor would it be effective for major hazmat or spills. He also noted that fuel usage figures are probably based on idling speed, as higher speeds would burn higher levels of fuel.

Ryan McAvoy appeared before the Committee and agreed that the decision should not be based on hazmat or previous incidents, but rather on future incidents, recognizing that Hilton Head Island is a world-class destination and the tourism dollar is the backbone of our economy. He stated that we cannot afford as a community not to have a fire rescue boat.

Mr. Edwards indicated he was still struggling with the need and demand for the boat, although he was willing to look at this further after reviewing what the County might have to offer for cost sharing. As to revenue generation, he thought this would be very low, as most incidents would result in the ambulance picking up the patient at the marina. Although he acknowledged there might be a time issue for acceptance, he felt a few more weeks to decide was not unreasonable.

Ms. Likins agreed and recognized that the presentation was excellent, with the fire rescue boat being something that the Town would love to have. However, with the current economy, she considered the cost unjustifiable. She indicated her preference that the cost, if possible, be covered under the fire and rescue budget, and that Beaufort County share the expenses.

Sheriff Tanner reminded the Committee that if Beaufort County contributes to the cost of the rescue boat, his recommendation would be that the boat be used county-wide and not exclusively for Hilton Head Island.

Chairman Harkins cited the unknown factors of the extent of Beaufort County's participation, the revenue generation and clarification of charges, and the possibility of finding an expense neutral solution that remained to be addressed before a recommendation of support could be made.

Chief Lucas commented that the statistics presented were in no way meant to imply that a boat would have changed the outcome in any way. The purpose was to point out how many emergencies do exist on the water now. Increased incidents will continue as the amount of people on the water increases. He agreed that boat would have no effect on a major oil spill, however, it would be a preventative measure for small contaminations and spill events. He notes that his presentation was a honest representation of the dangers and facts, with costs computed on a worst case scenario. However, he felt that additional grants would bring the cost down significantly, but no guarantee could be made.

Mr. Edwards made a motion to defer a decision pending further information from the Finance Department on potential revenue generation and a determination from County Council of cost sharing possibilities, and Ms. Likins seconded. The motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

6. Adjournment

At 5:10 p.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