

**TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND**  
**PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE REGULAR MEETING**

**Date:** October 1, 2012

**Time:** 10:05 a.m.

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

**Members Absent:** None

**Town Staff Present:** Greg DeLoach, *Assistant Town Manager*; and Lynn Buchman, *Administrative Assistant*

**Others Present:** George Williams, *Council Member*; Captain Toby McSwain, *Beaufort County Sheriff's Office*; Jocelyn Metzger Steigar, *Hilton Head Area Association of Realtors*; and Eleanor O'Key, *Lowcountry Inside Track*

**Media Present:** Tom Barton, *Island Packet*

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**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**

Motion to approve the minutes of the September 10, 2012 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. Update on Fixed Automatic License Plate Recognition Equipment**

Chairman Harkins reminded the Committee of the previous discussion with the Sheriff's Office as to new technology for license plate recognition and their request for an update on such equipment. He further noted an article from the September 29<sup>th</sup> issue of the Wall Street Journal featuring "New Tracking Frontier – Your License Plates," as a further reference to the topic.

Captain Toby McSwain from the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office noted the brief conversation that had occurred at the last Crime Statistics meeting about automated license plate readers (LPRs), which his office has been exploring for quite some time. The benefits, he explained, far outweigh the cost, although the system is not cheap. He related to the Committee his first-hand exposure almost 15 years ago to a mobile system mounted in a Vancouver Police Department vehicle. Captain McSwain played a brief video clip for the Committee demonstrating the use of the automatic license plate recognition equipment available through PIPS Technology.

At the conclusion of the video, Captain McSwain pointed out the significant advantages to such equipment. He reported that the PIPS Technology engineers had met with the Sheriff's Office to determine locations where fixed mounted systems should best be positioned to capture license plate information for all vehicles coming onto and leaving the Island. Links to similar systems at Savannah-Chatham County-Metro, Charleston, and access to all SCDOT license plates would allow sharing of information not only for stolen vehicles, but also provide assistance in locating sexual predators, DUI surveillance, drug enforcement, and Homeland Security targets. The fixed mounted system costs approximately \$100,000.00 to cover all lanes at the intersection of US 278 and Squire Pope Road, and the portable unit for a patrol car costs approximately \$15,000.00. However, additional staff would be required to process the data obtained.

Mr. Edwards inquired about tracking procedures for criminals who live on the Island and might not travel off Island for such equipment to locate. Captain McSwain indicated intelligence is currently collected tracking crimes and locations and arrests made in geographical areas, but such information is only accessible from the office. The Intelligence Division created within the last 6 months and new software and a report management system being implemented over the next 12 to 18 months will provide more detailed data that will be readily available to officers on the streets.

Mr. Edwards and Captain McSwain discussed how license plate recognition would be limited to SC plates provided by the SCDOT system, however, tags entered by the Sheriff's Office and Amber Alerts from other geographical areas would be transmitted through the system immediately to all patrol cars outside of the dispatch system. Captain McSwain reported that strict Federal regulations on intelligence databases exist for retention of records, with a purging system in place, and access to records is not available to the public without a Court order.

In response to Ms. Likins questions, Captain McSwain explained that the fixed mounted system would come with its own software to capture pictures and GPS locations, and this that could not be integrated with the current Island cameras. He also confirmed that collection from parking violators as shown in the video does not apply to this area. He reported that two mobile units are currently being purchased through Federal grants by the Sheriff's Office for north of the Broad.

Captain McSwain referred a question from Chairman Harkins to the Sheriff to answer as to whether the US 278 – Squire Pope intersection could be considered a key Beaufort County intersection, and therefore be a County expense for exploration of grant monies. He explained for Chairman Harkins the difference in cost for a fixed mounted system and mobile unit and how each would operate.

Chairman Harkins indicated the logic is compelling that with better technology there will be more potential arrests, creating greater volume, and requiring more manpower and expense. He encouraged the creation of a business model, with pluses and minuses and offsetting savings from a societal standpoint in terms of reducing crime.

Captain McSwain agreed that a fixed mounted system that would run every vehicle that came on and off the Island would require an officer to be at or near that intersection to respond and run vehicles down that were identified. However, he pointed out the system would be working 24 hours around the clock, and one officer could not do the same work by himself. He compared the cost for employing one officer versus the system cost, and Chairman Harkins noted the benefit of the system if it does in fact help reduce crime on the Island, which would then inure to our benefit from a public relations standpoint and help in our core business tourism.

Although he did not know the source of the grant for the purchase of the two units on order, Captain McSwain indicated the Sheriff's Office is always exploring the availability of Federal grant funds and would like to see such a system in place on the Island.

Chairman Harkins and Captain McSwain discussed potential conflicts with use of the equipment and any existing or pending legislation that focuses on privacy. As noted by Captain McSwain, there is no expectation of privacy, and no difference in license plates run manually by an officer versus use of equipment automatically running those plates.

Chairman Harkins' concerns about protecting the accessibility of the database were addressed by Captain McSwain, who outlined the Federal and State regulations and processes that are followed and compliance checked so no outside access is allowed to information obtained.

Ms. Likins asked Captain McSwain to follow up with the Sheriff to determine if there are granting opportunities, particularly matching grants, so that a game plan can be made to move forward with such a system.

Mr. Edwards and Captain McSwain discussed reports and statistics that can be generated through such a system, and a possible plan for a fixed mount system to start, with the addition of mobile units yearly to create a massive database for the Island.

Chairman Harkins noted that if the Committee does support further study on this, he felt the key elements of the study should include:

- documentation of the success of 3 or 4 other cities;
- the potential economic impact on the community;
- the potential for external funding sources;
- the possibility of integration of this effort with the County, not only in terms of systems, but in terms of cost sharing; and
- documentation that this is not in conflict with any existing State or Federal privacy laws.

Comments from the public were solicited, and Councilman George Williams questioned Captain McSwain about the scanning of all license plates, which would include those with no outstanding warrants. Captain McSwain explained how criteria would be entered for targeted stolen vehicles, amber alerts, and requests from other law enforcement sources, but the scanned plates of the average citizen would not trigger an alert. Chairman Harkins noted that the awareness of this system in the criminal community might dampen their enthusiasm to remain in the area.

Jocelyn Metzger Steigars asked for an explanation of the difference between the use of cameras in Ridgeland and issuance of speeding tickets that was deemed unconstitutional and this proposed camera system. Captain McSwain explained the Ridgeland system was designed to capture the speed of a car, take a photo of the car to identify the driver, and notify by mail the offender. However, the license plate recognition system is not equipped to provide speed calculations. It is considered a privilege to drive in the State, not a given right, so scanning is no different from the current system of having your tag run, with no expectation of privacy. He pointed out that officers are trained to use the information for law enforcement purposes only.

In response to Chairman Harkins' inquiry, Greg DeLoach, Assistant Town Manager, noted that while the Committee is not being asked to take any action today, the criteria outlined by the

Chairman would be helpful for the Sheriff's Office to develop some type of business plan with a proposal to be made at budget time for Council consideration. Added components for the business plan should include maintenance, insurance and replacement cost, as well as additional personnel required, even if grant money is identified for the initial purchase.

Chairman Harkins indicated the goal of the Committee is to continue to evaluate new systems such as this to ensure a safe community for businesses and families who live here or plan to visit.

## **5. New Business**

### **a. Proposed 2013 Public Safety Committee Meeting Dates**

Motion to approve the Public Safety Committee meeting dates for 2013 was made by Kim Likins and seconded by Lee Edwards. The Motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

Ms. Likins mentioned a recent newspaper article concerning sentence reform and the support being sought by Sheriff Tanner and Solicitor Stone for the Truth in Sentencing law. While noting her support as an individual, she asked if the Committee could do anything collectively to voice its support. Chairman Harkins reported on several recent informal conversations concerning this subject with the Sheriff, Solicitor, and Representative Andy Patrick, who is advancing a bill and garnering support from his colleagues. He respectfully suggested that the Intergovernmental Relations Committee take a look at this and keep the members advised.

Ms. Likins also noted receipt of an e-mail regarding a new community group that is forming called the Hilton Head Community Action Group. Although she had no specific information on their mission, she understood it was formed to work more closely with law enforcement and the Solicitor's office in helping make sure that the Town is safe and providing positive activities for our youth. She will try to obtain additional information.

Kathie Fayfich, a resident of Peregrine Point, expressed her concerns about her neighborhood which she described as unsafe due to commonplace gunfire, drugs, dog fighting, and domestic disputes in the adjacent Allen Road area. She asked for more control of the criminal elements. Chairman Harkins indicated the Committee shared her concern and would encourage the Sheriff's Office to investigate. However, he noted that while not diminishing the concerns she expressed, in looking at the crime statistics for the Island, the trend is in an overall positive direction. He commended Ms. Fayfich for coming forward, and he encouraged a deeper look at the situation under the direction of the Sheriff's Office.

## **Adjournment**

At 11:00 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:

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Lynn W. Buchman  
Administrative Assistant

Approved 11/05/2012 by:

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Bill Harkins, Chairman