

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

**Date:** January 31, 2013

**Time:** 10:00 a.m.

**Members Present:** Marc A. Grant, *Chairman*; John J. McCann, *Council Member*; Bill Harkins, *Council Member*

**Members Absent:** None

**Town Staff Present:** Lavarn Lucas, *Fire Chief*; Randy Lindstrom, *Administrative Battalion Chief*; Ed Boring, *Deputy Fire Chief – Support Services*; Brad Tadlock, *Deputy Fire Chief – Operations*; Joheida Fister, *Fire Marshal*; Benton Waller, *Battalion Chief – Training*; Esther Coulson, *Records Administrator/Town Clerk*; and Lynn Buchman, *Administrative Assistant*

**Others Present:** George Williams, *Council Member*; Jocelyn Metzger Staigar, *Hilton Head Area Association of Realtors*; and Joe Croley, *Lowcountry Inside Track*

**Media Present:** Brian Heffernan, *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**

None

**4. Unfinished Business**

**a. 2013 Fire & Rescue Strategic Plan – Review of Recommendations from the following Divisions: Operations, Bureau of Fire Prevention, and Training**

Before reviewing the Recommendations on the agenda, Chief Lucas noted several changes that had been made to the Recommendations following suggestions made by the Committee at its last meeting. These included the possible accreditations by the Emergency Management and the Ambulance Services and the request for off-island facility for evacuation. Chief Lucas provided initial estimates for the facility, noting size would depend upon the agencies occupying the facility, and current cost for building purchase. However, renovation cost would depend upon the condition of the building and the partners involved, with building and property cost estimated to be

much more. Mr. McCann inquired about the possibility of partnering with Technical College of the Lowcountry (TCL), and Chief Lucas explained the existing MOU with TCL and USC-B New River with Beaufort County. Acknowledging that his point was well taken, Chief Lucas agreed to check with TCL about their future building plans. Mr. Harkins asked that “value” be added to the Recommendations for the accreditations, and “value and cost” be added to the Recommendation for the government access channel. Chief Lucas agreed to do so.

Responding to a previous question from the Committee about any Recommendations that would affect the ISO rating, Chief Lucas indicated that after thorough review, he had determined that no Recommendations in the Strategic Plan would affect the ISO rating either positively or negatively.

Mr. Harkins asked if the Committee could be provided at a later date the ISO criteria and where Fire & Rescue stands so that the Committee could be more helpful. Chief Lucas indicated that he is currently working on a presentation for the Committee to explain what the rating schedule is, how Fire & Rescue was graded, why the points were received, and options for protecting that rating. He will return to the Committee with that presentation in the near future.

Chief Lucas began his review of the Recommendations on the agenda, as follows:

### **OPERATIONS:**

In response to Mr. Harkins’ inquiry about the need for a designated, certified Incident Safety Officer to provide on- scene oversight at emergency incidents, Chief Lucas explained this was not an overlay or extra, but was an enhancement of the current program to provide more training and a structured program using current staff. Federal and State OSHA regulations and National Fire Protection Association standards require the designation of a person at every scene that involves an immediately dangerous to life or death atmosphere whose sole responsibility is to function as the Incident Safety Officer, whose duties were outlined by Chief Lucas.

Mr. McCann, Chief Brad Tadlock, and Chief Lucas discussed the 42 paramedics on the line and 2 administrative staff assigned to training. Chief Lucas confirmed for Mr. Harkins and Mr. McCann that there would be no increase in personnel, and the minimum certified paramedics recommended would be accomplished through hiring practice and training of existing personnel.

Mr. Harkins asked Chief Lucas to consider the outsourcing of health and wellness services to an outside group. In response to Chairman Grant’s inquiry as to what is in place now to insure the health and wellness of employees, Chief Lucas explained the role and composition of the town-wide Safety Committee. He outlined the health programs currently available to employees and outside agencies providing educational materials and counseling. However, he cited a need to address health and wellness issues specifically directed at and related to firefighters, their occupation and exposures in an organized program with outside resources used as needed, but utilizing current staff.

Chief Lucas reviewed the Recommendations addressing basic issues of evaluating and improving policies and procedures, specifically as they relate to other agencies, to deal with emergencies that happen in the water environment and the need for a fire boat. Mr. Harkins noted his understanding as a boater of what a fire boat could do, but concerns from a cost standpoint that it was beyond the capability of what the Town should be involved in were expressed by Town Council at its earlier review and such concerns continued to prevail. At the same time, he recognized the need for ongoing cooperation and optimizing the relationship with the County in this particular area is the

pragmatic direction to go at this time, which Chief Lucas agreed was the basis for the first Recommendation. Mr. Harkins suggested that the boat be removed from the Recommendations, and Mr. McCann agreed that with so many quality items contained in the Plan, further discussion about the boat would take away from all the work done to develop the Plan. Chief Lucas expressed his understanding of their opinions.

Mr. Harkins asked Chief Lucas to give a brief overview of dirt roads, as his sense was that we have more dirt roads than we should, and he recognized that dirt roads do not lend themselves to safe operation of fire equipment. He noted the issue goes beyond the purview of this Committee, and is more an issue of intergovernmental relations with other entities, namely, the County and State, and questioned whether the Plan is the proper place for this issue. While agreeing with Mr. Harkins in principle, Mr. McCann suggested leaving it in the Plan to bring more attention to the problem.

Chief Lucas explained the complexity of the issue of dirt roads, and with the number of existing dirt roads, the Town's long-term plan would take 50 years to solve what he considers an immediate problem. He reported that the Town's last attempt to turn over 12 or 13 roads to the County resulted in the County opting not to accept them. For Fire & Rescue, however, the issue of concern is not who owns the road, but getting to the emergency. Chief Lucas displayed pictures of various local roads and conditions encountered during a 2-week period by Fire & Rescue to show examples of dangerous situations encountered on muddy and rutted roads in both wet conditions and drought. Mr. McCann and Mr. Harkins agreed there was a problem, and Mr. Harkins suggested that Chief Lucas create a metric plan to provide substantive awareness of the problem and suggested items to include. Chairman Grant stated his support and the need to look for a solution, and he requested the most traveled roads be identified and prioritized. Chief Lucas indicated that had been provided for community development or public facilities, and stressed the need to budget money for those roads owned by the Town and not been accepted by the County. Mr. McCann indicated this was important to know now for budget planning.

#### **BUREAU OF FIRE PREVENTION:**

Chairman Grant noted he could not support the Recommendation prohibiting residential open burning, since many people in Ward 1 burn yard debris. He explained that they do understand the risks, but they believe that it is a cultural way of life and beneficial in maintaining landscaping for those who cannot afford to hire others to do that. In addition, he pointed out there are people who use open fires in cold weather to stay warm. Chairman Grant questioned what regulations were in place and suggested that as we continue to move forward as a community, we look for a direction where there will be less open fires. Chief Lucas noted that while regulations exist, they are habitually violated by the majority of the people who burn. A PowerPoint presentation shown by Chief Lucas depicted the areas comprising PUDs where burning is already prohibited, and the only areas where burning was allowed, which would be the areas affected by the recommended ordinance. Figures were presented for the number of residences on Hilton Head Island and the total acreage comprising the Island, showing that it is a small percentage of the population that is creating the big problem. While he noted his sensitivity for the cultural issues, he pointed out it is not just a Ward 1 issue and cited bigger concerns for safety from fires, wild fires, and the health hazard from smoke, and also noted that this community is not a rural community anymore. Pointing out that the Recommendation does not suggest that recreational burning be forbidden, he suggested open burning of yard debris that smolders and smokes should be stopped, as it is dangerous and time consuming for Fire & Rescue.

In response to Chairman Grant's inquiry about the regulations in place and whether they are general rather than specific, a copy of Title 9, Chapter 7, Open Burning, of the Municipal Code was distributed to the Committee members by Chief Joheida Fister, Fire Marshal. Mr. McCann and Chief Lucas discussed enforcement of the current rules and the permits issued on-site, or if the fire does not meet regulations, the warning and citation approach being taken. Chief Lucas noted the flyers distributed, newspaper article reminding citizens of the rules, and the application for a burning permit itself that contains the rules and is signed and acknowledged. While agreeing a more aggressive approach can be taken for enforcement, he noted the firefighters are not policemen, are hesitant to force the issue, and at times it may not be safe to do so.

Mr. Harkins commented that the good of the whole should be a guiding factor in the decision making, with safety the main focus. While aspiring to be and promoting an environmentally sound community for the Island, open burning in backyards sends a major disconnect message. Rather, he suggested turning our energy toward what we can do as a community to help people find an alternative method to remove their refuse. Mr. McCann indicated his agreement.

Mr. Harkins asked about the Recommendation to partner with someone like the Sand Box to develop an interactive fire and life safety children's exhibit. While noting the Sand Box does wonderful things, he suggested the widest potential impact is through the school system. Chief Fister explained the current involvement in the school system and the partnering with Rotary and Safety Town, but noted the limitations imposed by the set curriculum other than during Fire Prevention Week and the need for a more permanent, interactive exhibit available for school field trips, summer programs with the Rec Center, or summer camps. Mr. Harkins and Mr. McCann suggested language to include partnering with the private section.

Mr. McCann asked for an explanation of the Recommendation for development of a procedure to address tree limbs overhanging the roadways. Chief Lucas indicated this was not an LMO issue, and described the process to work with Community Development on tree obstruction. Photos were shown of non-compliant tree coverage at numerous locations around the Island and the difficulty of getting the fire trucks in without damage. He explained this is similar to the dirt road issue in determining ownership and who is responsible to clear the vegetation. Mr. Harkins agreed this Recommendation should remain for the Town to figure out a procedure.

Mr. Harkins inquired about cultivating a heart safe community and suggested that this be done in conjunction with other willing health care providers, which Chief indicated was being done and the Recommendation would be revised to reflect that.

In response to Mr. McCann's inquiry about an ordinance prohibiting the sale and discharge of fireworks within town limits having been tried before, Chief Lucas indicated he had no knowledge of that. He explained the misunderstanding that Beaufort County did have an enforceable ordinance that only the Sheriff's Department could enforce, but to his knowledge, the only enforceable ordinance that exists is that you cannot discharge fireworks on the beach. Chief Lucas cited examples of calls responded to from the 4<sup>th</sup> of July several years ago and the time involved in each call. Adding to that there were other fire related and medical emergencies requiring response, a Bluffton Township Fire District engine was called to help run calls. Chief Lucas reiterated this was not a rural community anymore, and Mr. Harkins noted this goes back to the same principles advanced for open burning and such a prohibition should be embraced.

Apologizing for his error in previously reporting there was only one Recommendation that called for an increase in personnel, Chief Lucas noted his oversight in that there is a Recommendation for an increase in the number of fire inspectors, not specifically for this year, that is secondary to the request for a safety training officer. Mr. Harkins asked if a self-inspection program would help optimize the 3 existing people. Chief Fister indicated there is a self-inspection program and explained the additional responsibilities being assumed and the need for an additional inspector.

Chairman Grant suggested that this Recommendation might ask for an additional fire inspector once the economy improves. Chief Lucas indicated it was targeted for 2015.

### **TRAINING:**

Mr. McCann and Chief Lucas discussed the use of the Town training center by the Bluffton Township Fire District as a part of mutual aid training such as the HazMat team, urban search and rescue, and certain exercises conducted periodically in Bluffton and here. Chief Lucas noted no request has been made by Bluffton Township Fire District for the use of our facility. He outlined the administrative procedure in place that sets a reasonable fee schedule for use of the Town training center by outside agencies with indemnities covering the Town for liability. However, he noted they could not afford to take firefighters out of their station for training elsewhere and provide coverage with overtime or off-duty personnel.

McCann asked for cost figures for the upgrade and additional features for the existing training structure. Chief Lucas indicated a little over \$200,000 for the total was needed, but he identified individual parts that could be done piecemeal and outlined the costs estimated for each.

As to the Recommendation for a Safety Training Officer position, Chairman Grant asked if outsourcing would be more cost effective for safety related training. Chief Lucas noted the cost-effectiveness of sending a new firefighter to the Fire Academy in Columbia for recruit training. However, he stated it would be impossible, not to mention expensive, to outsource the additional training to our standards and specific operating procedures so that everyone is doing the same thing when they are on the scene together. In addition, he pointed out that all firefighters must receive both fire and EMS training. He elaborated on the fragmented system, the time required to comply with OSHA requirements, and the critical need that this position will fill to provide relief to the short-handed training staff.

Chairman Grant asked for public comments, and Jocelyn Staigar expressed her gratitude to Fire & Rescue for its efforts to keep the citizens of Hilton Head Island safe and healthy. She expressed concerns about open burning, and questioned whether the issue was open burning or enforcement, and a concern that if open burning was outlawed whether that would be followed if current regulations are not. She also commented on the Recommendation for a fire boat and likened it to the dirt road issue, suggesting that if Fire & Rescue is unable to respond to an emergency, there could be a liability issue and negative consequences to the Town.

Chairman Grant commended Chief Lucas and his staff for doing such a good job in thinking of the present and planning for the future through the Strategic Plan presented, and he confirmed that the Committee would continue to work with him to meet the needs of Fire & Rescue. Since Chief Lucas will amend the Plan to reflect the suggestions made today and present an edited document showing deletions and additions, Chairman Grant suggested that any vote for recommendation to

Town Council be held until Monday when the final document is presented. Mr. McCann and Mr. Harkins agreed to that procedure and added their thanks to Chief Lucas for his work.

**New Business**

None.

**Adjournment**

At 11:32 a.m. Mr. Grant moved to adjourn the meeting and Mr. McCann seconded. The motion was approved by a vote of 3-0.

Respectfully submitted:

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Lynn W. Buchman  
Administrative Assistant

Approved by:

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Marc A. Grant, Chairman