

TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE REGULAR MEETING

Date: December 7, 2015

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Members Present: Marc A. Grant, *Chairman*; Bill Harkins, *Council Member*; and Lee Edwards, *Council Member* (arrived at 10:10 AM and left at 11:20 AM)

Members Absent: None

Town Staff Present: Darrin Shoemaker, *Traffic & Transportation Engineer*; Jeff Buckalew, *Town Engineer*; Brian Hulbert, *Staff Attorney*; and Lynn Buchman, *Senior Administrative Assistant*

Others Present: Lt. Jason Covington, *Beaufort County Sheriff's Office*; Allison Coppage, *Beaufort County Staff Attorney*; Tallulah Trice, *Beaufort County Animal Services Director*; Franny Gerthoffer, *Executive Director of Hilton Head Island Humane Society*; and Eleanor O'Key, *Lowcountry Inside Track*

Media Present: Zack Murdock, *The 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 November 2, 2015

A motion to approve the minutes of the November 2, 2015 meeting of the Public Safety Committee was made by Mr. Harkins and seconded by Chairman Grant. The motion was approved by a vote of 2-0. Mr. Edwards was not in attendance when the vote was taken, but he was not present at the November 2, 2015 meeting.

4. Unfinished Business

None

5. New Business

a. Review of 2015 Bicycle Collision Statistics

Frank Babel asked that the Committee consider requesting the South Carolina Department of Transportation to review and possibly to reduce the speed limit from 45 MPH to 40 MPH on both Union Cemetery Road and Spanish Wells Road from Marshland to US Highway 278, and he outlined his reasoning for such requests. Chairman Grant asked whether major accidents in these areas justified this request, and Mr. Babel indicated his request is based on future developments and the history of roads since 2000 where speed limits have been reduced from 45 MPH to 40 MPH.

Darrin Shoemaker, Traffic & Transportation Engineer, informed the Committee that Mr. Babel's emailed request to study Union Cemetery Road was forwarded to SCDOT several weeks ago, and SCDOT has offered to undertake a speed limit study of that road for the Town. However, they have not been approached concerning Spanish Wells Road. He noted he was not aware of any significant collisions on Union Cemetery Road, but he did indicate there have been a number of rear-end collisions on Spanish Wells Road and accidents in the vicinity of the Jarvis Creek Bridge.

Mr. Babel asked Mr. Shoemaker to review with the Committee the statistics on 2015 bicycle collisions, and he would then present ideas for mitigation of these numbers.

Mr. Shoemaker referenced the charts included in the agenda packet, and reviewed with the Committee the bicycle collisions occurring by year since 2008, noting the 19 thus far in 2015 and the locations. He detailed the locations, monthly statistics, and time of day when most vehicle/bicycle collisions had occurred since July 1, 2012. Noting there is no upward trend in the number of collisions, he suggested the Town's efforts made to improve safety have been successful.

Discussion followed concerning how the statistics are used, the improvements needed and already implemented at the intersection of Folly Field and Mathews Road, which has the highest number of reported collisions. Chairman Grant suggested commercials and public service announcements be considered concerning bicycle safety during tourist season.

Mr. Babel reminded the Committee about the mission and vision of the Bicycle Advisory Committee, and their collaboration with the Town, Chamber, and others to maintain and improve the Town's Gold Designation Standard. He reviewed in detail the "5 E's" established by the League of American Bicyclists – education, encouragement, enforcement, evaluation and engineering. He stressed the need for budgeted funds for safety projects they have identified.

A discussion followed concerning the ways in which the Town Staff works with the Bicycle Advisory Committee, and Mr. Babel praised the Town's maintenance program, but emphasized the need for more funding for pathway and safety improvements. Further discussion ensued concerning various ways to accommodate high-speed cyclists, the public education needed, and the ideas that the Bicycle Advisory Committee is bringing to the Circle to Circle Committee.

Lt. Jason Covington with the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office noted that at this point in time the low number of vehicle/bicycle collisions does not warrant the addition of a resource officer for enforcement, but he stated the BCSO would support the Town in any way it could to insure the safety of citizens and tourists. Mr. Edwards expressed his understanding, and Mr. Babel also indicated he was pleased with the support given by the BCSO, and that education and signage are the keys to reducing collisions. Chairman Grant acknowledged the challenges faced during the summer, and thanked Mr. Babel and the Bicycle Advisory Committee for their suggestions.

b. Consideration of a Request to Adopt the Beaufort County Animal Control Ordinance

Brian Hulbert, Staff Attorney, stated that Beaufort County had asked the Town to repeal its current Animal Control Ordinance and adopt their Ordinance so that Beaufort County can assume the lead in enforcing the Ordinance within the Town limits. Otherwise, the Town will continue to enforce its own Ordinance, and Beaufort County will have no role in enforcement within the Town limits. He referenced the Intergovernmental Agreement proposed by Beaufort County, a copy of the current Beaufort County Animal Control Ordinance, and a copy of the Town Ordinance included in the agenda packet. He noted Beaufort County had mirrored the current language in the Town Ordinance concerning regulations for dogs on the beach. Mr. Hulbert emphasized that Staff has no recommendation regarding this request.

A discussion followed concerning what would be gained or lost with the adoption or rejection, and Mr. Hulbert noted a rejection of the request would result in the loss of the expertise and enforcement of the Beaufort County experts. He pointed out that Town Code Enforcement Officers are not trained to capture or house dangerous animals, and the Ordinance would provide consistency throughout the County.

Allison Coppage, Beaufort County Staff Attorney, addressed the Committee, and introduced Tallulah Trice, Beaufort County Animal Services Director, and Franny Gerthoffer, Executive Director of the Hilton Head Island Humane Society. She outlined the partnership with the Humane Society and the MOU that was approved for first reading that would develop a new animal services campus. She explained that part of the MOU and partnership is modifying and updating the Animal Control Ordinance and the building of an animal services campus in Okatie, for which Hilton Head Island Humane Society will commit \$1 Million in fundraising, with the County expending approximately \$3.5 Million.

Ms. Coppage explained the need for the updated Ordinance that addresses the specific County concerns, the consistency throughout the County it provides, and the year-long project that was undertaken. She outlined in detail those sections that mirror State law, and the major changes that included license requirements with varying fees and a revised appeal process to the Beaufort County Magistrate for determination of dangerous dogs and for all violations.

Discussion ensued concerning specific sections of the Beaufort County Animal Control Ordinance. Ms. Coppage stated her request is that the Town consider adopting the Beaufort County Animal Control Ordinance by reference in its totality, and the MOU would give the County to enforce the Ordinance within the Town limits. She indicated that she currently handles the prosecution of all animal control ordinance violations and would be doing so for the indefinite future.

Further discussion followed concerning the license requirements for all animals, the need for licensing and microchips to locate owners of pets, and the various fees associated with the licenses. Ms. Coppage explained that the partnership with Hilton Head Island Humane Society would enable veterinary services to be available at the new campus in Okatie, with 400 vouchers available for free spraying/neutering.

Further discussion among the Committee members, Ms. Coppage, Ms. Trice, and Ms. Gerthoffer continued concerning pit bulls and their designation under the Ordinance as a restricted breed, which would require mandatory spaying and neutering. Ms. Coppage explained that spaying and neutering would prohibit breeding and reduce the overpopulation, decreasing the euthanasia rate. Statistics would be maintained and reviewed in 18 months to assure that the Ordinance is addressing the problems. Ms. Gerthoffer added that the Ordinance would actually save pit bulls from euthanasia that is occurring now at the County Shelter, reducing the population through spaying and neutering. She noted they are not adoptable due to restrictions placed by rental agencies, higher homeowner insurance rates, and they become “lifers” leaving less space for other adoptable pets. She noted the Hilton Head Shelter will distribute 400 vouchers for spaying and neutering required under the Ordinance, taking the financial burden off those citizens who need help.

Chairman Grant and Ms. Coppage discussed how the determination is made that a dog is a pit bull or pit bull mix and the procedures followed, including the right to appeal the determination to the Beaufort County Magistrate. Mr. Harkins confirmed with Ms. Coppage that breeding of pit bulls would not be allowed in Beaufort County under the Ordinance, but a reassessment of the population is scheduled in 18 months. Ms. Trice explained that “backyard” breeders of pit bulls will be found through monitoring of social media, Craigslist, advertised sales, and complaints from citizens.

Ms. Coppage assured Mr. Harkins that if the Ordinance is adopted Countywide, the funding and resources would be available to make it effective.

Further discussion followed among the Committee members, Ms. Coppage and Trice concerning the tethering section of the Ordinance, and how the Code Enforcement Officers work cooperatively with pet owners to assist in providing the appropriate donated tethering devices if needed, show how to set them up, and follow up to make sure it is used properly. They also discussed livestock, goats, chickens, pigs, and horses and the process for determining whether they fall under the “animals running at large” section of the Ordinance. All agreed that the goal was to work with citizens to fix problems rather than fine them, but repeated offenses would be prosecuted. Ms. Coppage indicated all violations to the Ordinance would come before the Magistrate in Bluffton for local residents.

Ms. Coppage noted any substantial changes or amendments to the Ordinance would need to be submitted to County Council, but if the issue could be addressed elsewhere in the Town Code, that could be done and enforced by the Town. Mr. Hulbert added that the enforcement of the dogs on the beach would continue to be handled by Town Code Enforcement Officers under the Town Code Section on Beach Prohibitions, and Ms. Coppage indicated Beaufort County could assist with that enforcement if the Ordinance is adopted.

Chairman Grant asked for public comment, and Eleanor O’Key asked for clarification as to whether the dogs on the beach section would apply to other areas of Beaufort County, which Mr. Hulbert assured her was the case since this is a countywide Ordinance. However, because this also appears in Town Code under Beach Prohibitions, it would always be protected even if Beaufort County amended its Ordinance as to this section. Ms. Coppage confirmed that Beaufort County would work with municipalities to exempt certain Towns from specific sections if needed. Mr. Hulbert also pointed out that the Town can exit from the MOU at any time.

The Committee acknowledged the work undertaken by Beaufort County and the value and consistency to the citizens and animals that the Beaufort County Animal Control Ordinance provides. Chairman Grant asked the Staff Attorney to carefully review the Ordinance before it is submitted to Town Council with the Committee’s recommendation to adopt it. Mr. Harkins also commented on the excellent job done by all the presenters, and asked them to return to the Town Council meeting when this is discussed further. Mr. Grant moved that the Committee recommend that the new Ordinance be approved by Town Council, and that the current Town Animal Control Ordinance be repealed. Mr. Harkins seconded the motion and noted that although Mr. Edwards left the meeting before the vote, he had indicated his support, as well. The motion was adopted by a vote of 2-0.

6. Adjournment

At 11:51 a.m. Mr. Harkins moved to adjourn the meeting and Chairman Grant seconded. The motion was approved by a vote of 2-0.

Respectfully submitted:

Lynn W. Buchman
Senior Administrative Assistant

Approved by:

/Approved January 4, 2016
Marc A. Grant, Chairman