



Town of Hilton Head Island  
**Community Services & Public Safety Committee**

Monday, November 23, 2020 at 9:00 am

## **MEETING MINUTES**

**Present from the Committee:** Marc Grant, William Harkins, Tamara Becker

**Present from Town Council:** David Ames

**Present from Town Staff:** Josh Gruber, Scott Liggett, Jeff Buckalew, Julian Walls, Alice Derian, Lindsey Rambow, Karen Knox

**Others Present:** Captain Angela Viens, *BCSO*, Mike Wagner, Ralph Wagner, *Shore Beach Services*

**Present from Media:** None

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### **1. Call to Order**

**2. FOIA Compliance** - Public notification of this meeting has been published, posted, and distributed in compliance with the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act and the requirements of the Town of Hilton Head Island

**3. Roll Call** – Council Member Lennox was absent. Council Member Becker filled in as Alternate.

### **4. Approval of Minutes October 26, 2020**

Councilman Harkins moved to approve the Minutes of October 26, 2020. Chairman Grant seconded. The Minutes of October 26, 2020 were unanimously approved.

### **5. Citizen Comments**

Public comments concerning today's Agenda items were to be submitted electronically via the Town's Open Town Hall Portal. The public comment period closed Friday, November 20, 2020 at 4:30 pm. At the conclusion of the Open Town Hall, there was one citizen comment. Citizens who wished to speak at the Meeting had to call in no later than noon on Friday, November 20, 2020 at noon. No citizens signed up to speak at the meeting.

### **6. Unfinished Business**

### **7. New Business**

#### **a. 2020 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Crime Statistics**

Captain Angela Viens stated that one thing they have seen in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter and it has bled over to the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter is our Crimes Against Property Stats. We have seen an increase, especially with our car break-ins. We talk about this I believe 2-3 times a year. Please lock your cars – we have our gated communities across the Island have been hit. You can see where these events are happening. 85% of the cars that have been broken into have been unlocked and we are losing a lot of fire arms. They are getting onto the street because people are leaving them in their cars and leaving them unlocked. We are starting a campaign through social media. It encourages folks to take their valuable items out of the

car, lock their car before they go to bed. It is something that everyone can do. Most of the cars are getting broken into between 1:00 am and 5:00 am. They are on foot or on a bicycle and just going door to door in neighborhoods and pulling on car doors. Other than that, our traffic accident stats have been on a steady increase since 2017. Overall, we are doing good. My biggest message to anybody who is listening is please, please lock your car doors.

b. **Shore Beach Services End of Season Report**

Alice Derian advised that changes to the Town Code were adopted on November 19, 2019 which prohibited personal property being left on the beach between sunset and sunrise. As a result, for the 2020 beach season, the Town expanded our contracted “beach management services” to include removal of such abandoned personal property. This took place four days per week on the beach between the hours of 9:00 p.m. and 1:00 a.m. which was performed by Spartina Marine Consulting. Effective June 1<sup>st</sup> of this year we have been reporting monthly on beach management activities and services provided by Spartina Marine Consulting and also the Town’s ongoing Franchise Agreement with Shore Beach Services. As a result of those services provided, a total of 594.69 tons of trash and recyclables which includes bagged and abandoned personal items was removed from the beach for a total cost of \$144,683.59. \$117,073.16 represented the cost for the services provided by Shore Beach and Spartina, while \$27,610.43 was paid in hauler fees for the disposal of those items.

Between May 1<sup>st</sup> and October 31<sup>st</sup>, 17,022 abandoned pieces of personal property have been removed from the beach. Of this number, chairs topped the list at 5,925, followed by miscellaneous items which was 3,830 – an item which would be considered miscellaneous would be clothing. Umbrellas – 2,883, toys were 1,867, towels 1,273 and 1,244 tents. The Agreement with Spartina Marine provided the Town an opportunity to invest 251 hours of educating beach patrons about beach etiquette and preservation, in addition to the 13,721 advisements given largely by Shore Beach Services. The holes and shovels category resulted in the largest number of advisements given, those being 4,138 followed by alcohol 3,772, glass 3,168, dunes 2,186, personal property 319 and lights lastly at 138. In October we held a joint meeting to review what consideration should be made. No action is being sought at this time. Staff is collecting stakeholder information and assessing the potential for programmatic changes and potential policy revisions for Town Council’s consideration in advance of the 2021 season. Topics of discussion include communication, signage, amending guidelines for boats on the beach, review of the extent of trash and recycling receptacles compared to the pack it in pack it out philosophy. Prohibition of certain types of personal property being brought on the beach, such as tents and modification to regulations which may govern Fish Haul Beach.

Council Member Harkins asked Ms. Derian if she had comparisons going back 3-5 years and do we have any similar data from other beach communities that are open to the public to see if we are right in the middle or are we off to the right or left. Ms. Derian said they do not have any statistics on what other communities collect from the beach. We have started to touch base with communities such as Kiawah, Folly Beach and Isle of Palms to see for instance their trash receptacles where they provide them, etc. to see if we want to reduce the footprint of those. We do not have any numbers on the type of trash and debris that they collect from those receptacles or off the beach as far as abandoned property items go. It seems that most communities only provide trash receptacles at their beach access points where we have a lot more receptacles available for beach goers – 224 trash and 74 recycling containers right now. We provide a lot more receptacles than most communities do. To answer the other part of your question – we don’t have any historical data to compare. This Agreement with Spartina Marine has provided us pretty much with a baseline going forward

to track all of these items and the tonnage to see what changes and recommendations we need to make and go from there.

Council Member Becker asked Ms. Derian if she had any anecdotal stories to tell with regards to the advisements on digging of sand holes and the shovels. Ms. Derian said one of the things that we are looking at is staff is considering reviewing the signage that we currently have and maybe including that on the signage going forward. For the most part people understood accepted the advisement and understood the purpose behind it.

Chairman Grant said he thought Town Council should refer this item to the Parks & Recreation Commission to look at in terms of strategies of how we can reduce our footprint in terms of trash because enforcement is not the only answer that we should be looking at in terms of having more police and Code Enforcement out there. We need to look at how the public can help the Town improve the safety and the quality on the beach with the trash. Maybe the Committee might be able to assist us with that and that might be through communication or some new ideas and concepts.

Councilman Harkins said we have been frustrated about this for a long time and thanks to Alice and her colleagues we are starting to quantify data. For a Town that tries to pride itself as being eco sensitive, we pride ourselves in protecting the environment and we want to maintain or enhance our brand the data here is really disgraceful. I move to send this item to Town Council with the recommendation that they forward it to the Parks and Recreation Commission to see if some brighter minds can come up with some ideas. Council Member Becker seconded. The motion unanimously passed.

**c. Reconsideration of Point Comfort Road Speed Hump Request**

Jeff Buckalew stated if you recall this item came to us born out of the Point Comfort Neighborhood's request for speed humps in their neighborhood due to a speeding problem they perceived. It came to the Committee last year and it was going to full Town Council but was sent back to Committee. What the Committee had recommended back then was they were in favor of installing the speed humps but they also directed staff to develop a Traffic Calming Policy. To address the Traffic Calming Policy first, we are recommending that we adopt the Beaufort County Traffic Calming Policy. They have a very good clear and concise policy. Part of the beauty of it is it would be a consistent policy on all public roads on Hilton Head Island, whether they are owned by the Town, County or State. The State is not putting speed humps on any of their roads. They pushed that down to the County or the Municipality and they make them apply to put speed humps on State roads. We do have several County roads on the Island. I do not know if anyone has petitioned to have speed humps on the County roads, but the County does have a policy for that. If we were to adopt that policy, we would be consistent with the County and we could deal with those requests on a more consistent basis. One thing about that policy I included in your packet, there are traffic calming measures that may be included under this policy and I would recommend that we add interactive speed signs as one of the tools or options that is not currently in there. I would also ask the County that they update their policy to include that as well.

In speaking of the signs, this is the staff's recommendation in lieu of installing the speed humps now as you have to go to the DOT and apply and get permission for that. What we would like to do is install two of these interactive speed signs. These are the "Your Speed Is" signs you see on the side of the road. They track your speed and give you instant feedback. If you are exceeding the speed limit some of them flash or give some notification. The DOT has recently issued a policy on such signs. I spoke with the District Traffic Engineer in Charleston and he said this policy was born out of a need at the DOT to address

the randomness that they are seeing with these signs. They see signs from here to Myrtle Beach – different varieties, different colors, different flashing lights, etc. that may distract drivers and so they are trying to standardize that. They have set forth a policy by which we would need to comply. The signs we purchased last year comply with that policy except for there is a flashing white circle that emits once you are exceeding the speed limit. The DOT does not allow any flashing lights, strobes, etc. so we would have to disconnect that or block out those lights. What we would do under this recommendation is we would conduct a speed study and we would apply to the SCDOT to install these interactive “Your Speed Is” signs on Point Comfort Road. We would put two of them kind of mid-block on the road facing each direction and we would put those in place and let them work throughout the summer and come back and make an assessment in August or September on the effectiveness of those signs. If they were deemed not to be effective we would come back to Town Council and then the next step would be speed humps.

Council Member Harkins asked in terms of the petition signed by the landowners, what does the data tell you of the percent that represents the Community. Mr. Buckalew said the County policy and the DOT policy both require 75% and the petition we received last year did meet that threshold. Council Member Harkins asked if we had any data on accidents and tragedies on the road in that Community? Mr. Buckalew stated the Traffic Engineer tracks that data and consults with BCSO and there have been no accidents going back to July, 2013 on Point Comfort Road. There was one accident on one of the side streets since that time and that was a vehicle backing out of a driveway that struck another passing vehicle. Speed was not a factor in that accident. Council Member Harkins asked if we had introduced speed humps in any other part of the Island and if so, have we been able to measure the efficacy of that. Mr. Buckalew said no, not on any Town roads. We have had projects in the past where the Town is building a road or reconstructing a road and we have had neighborhoods request them. We have none in place on Town roads. Council Member Harkins asked what Fire Rescue’s view on the speed humps are. Mr. Buckalew said if it does not impede progress to a call out – they looked at the number and spacing of the humps and looked at what it would do to response times and on this particular proposal or petition, they deemed it would be acceptable.

Council Member Becker asked what the measure of success is with the “Your Speed Is” signs. Mr. Buckalew said they are buying two modules to plug into these signs that tracks the data and will give us statistics. We will put these in place and we will measure how many vehicles exceed the speed limit. Mrs. Becker said there are speed humps on Sandy Beach Trail that are effective for traffic coming through where the hotel splits and a lot of traffic goes past there and it really makes a difference in people slowing down. I also think that we have a petition that represents the majority of the residents in the neighborhood, it is their quality of life that is affected and it is what they experience every day. While our statistics may indicate that the speeds are not being exceeded and accidents are not happening, I think those who live in the neighborhood have a different perspective having to deal with it every day. Given the fact that the petition met the threshold and Fire Rescue found it to be acceptable, I would be inclined to go ahead and ask that the speed humps are put in place.

Council Member Ames stated Point Comfort is in his ward and he is very familiar with this situation and I think it is important for the Committee to understand that the first  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Point Comfort Road has very few entrances, but all those entrances are to communities. There are no driveways until you get passed Ashton Cove and then all of a sudden you have single family houses on the side of the road where up to that point can accommodate 35 mph without any difficulty. All of a sudden you have driveways, cars backing out, children coming out of houses and it becomes very dangerous within a couple hundred feet. I think that is the circumstance that most concerns the families and property owners in Point Comfort.

Somehow the cars have to be forewarned and I think the interactive speed sign will help, but my position on this has been that if the property owners of Point Comfort want to have speed humps and they understand that there is some inconvenience with the speed humps then I support that request. This has been a situation that has been an aggravation and concern for a number of years. I think we should entertain the possibility and the request the property owner's decision on the six speed humps and then move forward to they want to proceed.

Chairman Grant stated as we look at how we address speeding in neighborhoods, I think we have addressed this long enough and we need to go ahead and move forward with the speed humps especially now that Fire Rescue believes it would not delay timing and the Community understands that. What I would ask the staff for future reference where we move forward and look at other communities similar to this is maybe alternatives in terms of instead of paving, but look at gravel. I don't know if a different asphalt would encourage slowing down and possibly signage, but I think that is something that needs to be brought to the full Town Council as to what other Communities are using to slow down the speeding. It might be cheaper, but I think that is something we need to look at. I know we have talked about this for at least 2-3 years in dealing with Point Comfort and it is time we move forward with the speed humps now and add in addition to those signs. That will also provide data. We cannot wait till something happens and then we regret not moving quick enough to address that.

Josh Gruber stated if the Committee's recommendation is going to be installing the speed humps, the speed limit signs (the radar signs) really become ineffective at that point because you are no longer gathering data about the actual movement of the traffic flow through there because obviously the cars are going to be slowing down for the speed humps. It wouldn't be doing both simultaneously because one cancels out the other. Staff's recommendation was partly because this potentially sets a lot of precedent for other areas on the Island. It is not to say that it may not be warranted, but if we are going to make a decision, we want that decision to be based upon solid data showing that it is necessary. That is why this was kind of an incremental approach in that if we put the speed sign out there, we gather the data that says it is being effective and the speeds are now slowed which means you don't need the speed humps or you have put the speed signs out there, the data shows that it is not being effective then we need to take that next step forward which is installing the permanent speed humps. My point in saying this is there are a lot of communities out there that would say I just want you to put them in, I don't care about the data, I just want you to put them in. We have to be careful about setting that precedent that we are going to install these in every location because while it may not be significantly detrimental to Fire Rescue in this particular location, if that grows to a certain extent that very well could have a negative cumulative effect on that service. My total point is I want to make sure that we are acting upon the data which is driving these decisions.

Council Member Becker stated she appreciated Josh's input on that and I absolutely want to make sure that I am on the record of saying that any future expansion of a speed hump policy must be approved by Fire Rescue. Those moments that it takes to get to a situation are absolutely critical and you can count them on your hand and before you know it tragedy happens. That is a given that any expansion of moving this forward would require Fire Rescue is comfortable with and has signed off on it or it is a non-starter. For this particular case, I think as you have said Marc this has been going on for quite some time and it is a situation where those who are impacted by it have continued to pursue it which means it is continuing to be a situation they are uncomfortable with. I think they know best with regard to that and I stand by my commitment to move this forward.

Council Member Harkins moved that the Committee forward this to Town Council with a recommendation to respond in a positive way by inserting the speed humps and ask Town Council to petition to SCDOT to give the green light to do that. Council Member Becker seconded. The motion unanimously passed.

d. **Review of Yacht Cove Intersection Crosswalk Lighting Pilot Project**

Jeff Buckalew said he was reporting back to Council on the overhead street light project. This was a pilot project. The primary objective was to illuminate the crosswalks at night so that motorists would have a greater awareness of folks crossing the road. It took a lot more time than we anticipated and cost a lot more money than we anticipated, \$175,000 for the total cost and this had to be permitted through SCDOT. That was part of the reason it took so long for the design and approvals. We then had to acquire easements to set the lights on private property on the Yacht Cove side of the parkway. It has been in place since August and we solicited public opinion feedback on the project. We did media and had some TV stations and The Island Packet do stories and try to drive people to the public opinion survey. We had 197 people respond to the survey. There was 57% dislike, 33.9% likes, 65% didn't want to see more crosswalks illuminated, 68% were against funding these lights instead of building more pathways, 59% experienced difficulty with their eyes adjusting to the darkness after passing through the lights, 65% did not feel it was a cost effective use of funds for crosswalk safety, 58% claim they always obey the pathway stop and yield signs and 57% thought there is not enough public education on this topic.

The take away from that public opinion survey were more folks dislike the lights than like the lights and staff needs to be a better job of educating the public on crosswalk safety, on SC laws regarding crosswalks, etc. We know that is something we need to do but as far as public opinion that is what you have. Chris Darnell also took this to the Design Review Board last week to get their take on it post installation and see what they thought. The Committee wasn't a formal vote, but the Board said they didn't think the lights were in keeping with Island character, but if we had to install lights, they liked this style. We looked at the unsignalized crosswalks on 278. There are eight remaining besides Yacht Cove. If you were to project that cost out, and you wanted to illuminate the other crosswalks, it would be \$1.4 Million to do so.

We are bringing this back to Committee for discussion as to whether the Committee wanted to take a motion or refer it to a Town Council Workshop discussion item.

Council Member Harkins asked what Mr. Buckalew's recommendation is. Mr. Buckalew stated he would not recommend we go forward with the program to illuminate all the other crosswalks.

Councilman Harkins said the birthing of this process came from the long history of accident activity and then the tragic death of the young girl at this location. My recollection is that we were going to use this as a beta sight in terms of functionality and aesthetics and effectiveness and then springboard from this to other locations. Another hot location is near the Duncan Donut location where there is high density, low income community where little children run across the street. Respecting the comments from the public in terms of aesthetics I think safety trumps all of what has been said. Why can't we become creative from an aesthetic standpoint and still address in a curative way the situation with lighting systems that may slow down or mitigate the situations that we see every day. I am disappointed in this report. I would hope that we could say we have learned a few lessons here, but let's not stop. Let's figure out how we can do it better. Doing it better may be stylized in an individualistic way given the unique locations throughout the Island so that one size doesn't fit all. Let's roll up our sleeves in a very deliberative way and a very ad-hoc way and start addressing the other locations that lend themselves to tragedy.

Council Member Becker said the realistic view of 278 and our pathways and crosswalks is that they just no longer fit together easily. 278 increasing traffic, higher speeds, more people just in general on bikes and walking and then the idea which lends itself to more of an urban setting, but we still want to cling to and I hope we can the idea that we are a small quaint Island where people can get out on their bikes, walk their dogs and cross the road to get that snack that mom sends them out to get safely. The two just don't mix. They don't fit together anymore. Does lighting the area make all the difference? In my mind, if it was my child or I was trying to cross the road at an unsignalized light, I wouldn't take that chance even with the lights above. To me more light means more speed. You can see more, you are going a little bit faster. You are not necessarily slowing down. It just doesn't seem to fit together for me. I would otherwise actually encourage that we discontinue, create barriers so that we don't have unsignalized crosswalks. Do I think that means that everyone will stop crossing at places where they shouldn't be crossing – no. There will always be people who will cut through the landscape or however to get across. The idea of planning a place where you can do that on this type of road that it has become just doesn't make sense. I am not encouraged by it, I wouldn't want to cross it or have anyone else cross it. I don't know the answer to this question so maybe someone can provide some history for me. The Palmetto Dunes under the roadway tunnel – how did that come to be. Why don't we have more situations like that? Mr. Buckalew said that was put in by the developers years ago and you had a vehicular bridge that afforded the opportunity to do that. The Town took that bridge over and rebuilt it. We demolished the old narrow bridge and built a new wide bridge that met standards. It is a cost issue – do you bridge across or do you somehow landscape or barricade folks and direct them down to the signalized crosswalks which are far safer? That is the issue and there are 8 of those left. We mitigated two crosswalks in the Shelter Cove/278 project we did. I understand your concerns completely and it would be best to direct people to the signalized crosswalks. Council Member Becker said you mentioned costs in the underground tunnel way – is there a way to get something put together with that so we would know in terms of what that expense looks like? It certainly would add to the quality of life, the aesthetics of the Island. I think it would go a long way.

Council Member Harkins said from his casual readings on this subject, we seem to have four alternatives 1) bridge over the road, 2) tunnel under the road, 3) add a signal or 4) remove the crosswalk.

Council Member Ames said Yacht Cove is within his ward and there are some serious concerns of constituents in Yacht Cove regarding this situation. Mr. Buckalew mentioned that the construction had to be done on private property. Unfortunately, some damage was done to the private property irrigation and lighting system and that has created some ill will and we haven't resolved that matter yet. I think that is something that has to be resolved. Mr. Harkins spoke to the four different options and he also suggested being a little more creative. I think that our community ought to be pushing SCDOT more aggressively to resolve design issues more consistently with our value system on the Island. When Pope Avenue was being repaved, it was suggested that we reduce the paving width to slow cars down. That was rejected by SCDOT and yet the Town of Port Royal is doing the exact same thing at this time. I think that as the Island has grown and as Mrs. Becker has suggested, we have a conflict that is almost unresolvable. I really believe that as the Island has become more urban, by necessity we require more lighting at night. Just the other day in terms of the parking lot at Coligny, there were complaints by merchants that employees didn't like to go there and park at night because it was unlit. I think we are coming to that point in our community where we have to really recognize safety is an issue. I think that how we allow people to cross 278 is a combination of light and then road design and perhaps traffic calming measures. It isn't a simple decision. I think we have to recognize what Mrs. Becker was saying – we have just gotten to the point where 278 for vehicular traffic is very

inconsistent with the notion that people can safely walk across it. I would like something done with the private property issue at Yacht Cove and secondly, I think the light issue has to be factored in with road design. Regarding the idea of underpasses, there was an unusual circumstance at Shelter Cove because it was adjacent to a water body that allowed the water table to be much lower than otherwise would be the case. If that same design were tried elsewhere on the Island, your underpass would be filled with ground water most of the time and would require pumps to be operating virtual nonstop. However, the fundamental question is how long does it take to get from Stoney to Sea Pines Circle on 278 and are we going to ask people to slow down for the safety of people crossing the roadway.

Chairman Grant said he believes with what everyone has said. Thank each of you for the knowledge you brought to the table this morning, but realistically just like Mr. Harkins said we have to do something in front of Sandalwood area and I think that is where we need to move forward on next. The reason why I say that is because so many children live in that area that crosses the street and sometimes with no parent. I believe it is our job to focus on safety first and then aesthetics second. I would ask let's ask the staff to either implement what we have now or come up with something better. This might be something that can be discussed at the Town Council Workshop. It needs to be discussed at the Workshop because safety is very important. Let's learn from what happened at Yacht Cove. I think we need to move forward with this until staff comes up with a better solution to address the aesthetic situation.

Chairman Grant asked for a motion to support what we have done in Yacht Cove and move it forward to the Town Council for more discussion.

Council Member Becker made a motion to take this topic forward to the upcoming Town Council Workshop for further discussion. Council Member Harkins seconded. The motion unanimously passed.

#### **8. Executive Session**

At 10:00 a.m. Council Member Harkins moved to adjourn to Executive Session to conduct interviews for a vacancy on the Parks and Recreation Commission and to also review Talent Bank applications for a vacancy on the Board of Zoning Appeals. Council Member Becker Seconded.

#### **9. Adjournment**

At 10:58 am, the Committee returned to Open Session. Chairman Grant moved to adjourn. Councilmember Harkins seconded.

**Submitted by:**

**Karen D. Knox**

**Approved: January 25, 2021**