

**CITY OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING REPORT
MARCH 11, 2014 – 2:00 P.M.
CITY HALL SECOND CONFERENCE ROOM
1737 MAIN STREET**



Members of the Columbia City Council conducted a Public Safety Committee Meeting on Tuesday, March 11, 2014 at City Hall Second Floor Conference Room, Columbia, South Carolina. The Honorable Brian DeQuincey Newman (Chair) called the meeting to order at 2:15 p.m. and The Honorable Sam Davis and The Honorable Leona K. Plough (Non-committee member) were present. The Honorable Cameron A. Runyan was absent.

APPEARANCE OF THE PUBLIC

No one appeared at this time.

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

1. Update on the Implementation of Recommendations from the Hospitality Zone Task Force

Mr. Ruben Santiago, Interim Police Chief gave an update on the implementation of recommendations from the Hospitality Zone Task Force (HZTF). The committee was comprised of over sixty (60) members. The HZTF Districts include: Five Points, Vista, Main Street, Harbison Boulevard, North Main Street and Garners Ferry Road. The most high profile area is Five Points. He said working with the community leaders and business owners in Five Points has been fruitful and successful. He said the long term resolution for public safety includes increasing police presence and cameras. He said foot patrol policing and community safety officers were implemented in the Vista, Main Street and Five Points.

Councilor Newman asked about mounted police patrol.

Mr. Ruben Santiago, Interim Police Chief said we have looked at best practices in other cities; it comes down to budget and maintenance to include trained personnel to assist with the horses.

Councilor Davis inquired about the horse per unit.

Mr. Ruben Santiago, Interim Police Chief said the minimum will be two (2) per unit; for events, two (2) additional horses can be added.

Councilor Newman asked about the crime statistics in the hospitality areas.

Mr. Ruben Santiago, Interim Police Chief said last year's crime rates have been the lowest in seven (7) years for the department including the hospitality districts. The department will be closing out its 1st quarter for February 2014 and new numbers will be available in March.

Councilor Davis asked will foot patrol be implemented in neighborhoods.

Mr. Ruben Santiago, Interim Police Chief said yes.

The committee received this report as information. No action was taken.

2. Police Department Update

Mr. Ruben Santiago, Interim Police Chief said the department is preparing for the new police chief. He said in January 2014, the department lost fourteen (14) officers and is aggressively recruiting and formulating a plan on being a more effective agency.

Councilor Davis asked about the classification of the 14 vacancies.

Mr. Ruben Santiago, Interim Police Chief said seven (7) officers moved on to other agencies and the remainder either moved out of state or left for personal reasons.

The committee received this report as information. No action was taken.

3. Police Benevolent Association

Mr. Joseph Czeladko, SC Police Benevolent Association (PBA) said that the association continues to fight for all police officers. PBA represents sworn law enforcement officers and support personnel by providing legal services and advocating changes to improve the quality of work & life for people employed in all aspects of criminal justice. It is composed of law enforcement officers employed by federal, state, county and municipal governments. Since October 2013, its membership has increased. He noted that the association raised money for the St. Baldrick's Cancer Foundation for the upcoming event on March 22nd and will sponsor the 2014 Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Treatment Center Workshop for all officers all across the state. He said PBA has set up fitness centers to help officers with training and maintaining a healthier lifestyle. The Columbia Police Department received a 3.37% raise in January 2014.

Councilor Newman asked about the comp and class study.

Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager said it's moving along; two (2) consultants will be interviewed in a few weeks. The process will begin once the team is in place; it will take 8 to 9 months for the study to be completed.

Mr. George Botash, Columbia Police Department expressed concerns about grant funding not being accepted by the city.

Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager clarified that the city has a full time grant writer that is very active with the police department.

There was a consensus of the committee to have staff compare other agencies general salaries, work with PBA by including it into the comp/class study and to give an update to the committee in May.

4. Municipal Court Update

Ms. Dana Turner, Chief Administrative Judge gave an update on the Municipal Court case numbers. In the past fiscal year, the court reviewed approximately 45,000 cases, which includes: 20,600 traffic cases, 10,000 criminal cases and 6,300 parking cases. She said this fiscal year; the department is on track with meeting the same numbers. As of February 2014, the court has processed 9,533 criminal cases and 22,830 traffic cases. Last fiscal year, the court collected approximately \$937,000 in revenue with an increase of 22.5%. In addition to the previous revenue, the court collected \$91,000 for the victim fund, which was included into the police department's budget. She said this fiscal year revenues are on track with meeting the same numbers. As of February 2014, the court has collected \$784,167.85 in revenue and has collected \$95,500 for the victim fund, which has exceeded last year's total. She said the budget request for this fiscal year includes: adding a 4th minstrel recorder position, updating the security system and increasing juror fees from \$5.00 to \$10.00 per day. She said three judges are up for reappointment in June 2014.

There was a consensus of the committee to have staff compare parking ticket procedures from other municipal courts to include have legal draft a document regarding juror fees; and to give an update to the committee in April.

5. Code Enforcement Update

Councilor Davis expressed concerns about the limitations of the state's code enforcement as it relates to abandoned houses around commercial development.

Ms. Krista Hampton, Development and Planning Services Director said residential enforcement is different from commercial enforcement and cannot be in two different places. She said the department is responsible for residential enforcement. She said the department is not just inspectors; it has a utility & vector control crew that helps with maintenance. This crew has to remain with code enforcement.

Councilor Davis asked about repeated violations.

Ms. Dana Turner, Chief Administrative Judge said we are confined only to what the law allows, which is to impose a fine or jail time. She said the court doesn't have the power to order the property to be torn down.

There was a consensus of the committee to have staff research other alternatives for abandoned houses and to give an update to the committee in April.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:45 p.m.

Submitted by:

Niki Daniels, City Clerk's Assistant
Office of the City Clerk