



# *CITY COUNCIL*

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## *Public Safety Committee*

**Tuesday, January 22, 2008**  
**Meeting Report**

**Attendance:** D. Sterner, S. Fuhs, S. Marmarou, J. Waltman, M. Baez, V. Spencer

**Others City Staff Attending:** L. Kelleher, C. Kanezo, L. Churchill, C. Younger, M. Talbot, J. Khokhar, K. Zeiber

### **I. Wastewater Treatment Plant**

Council entered into executive session at 5:30p.m. to discuss matters related to the Wastewater Treatment Plant and associated Consent Decree. The executive session concluded at 6:15p.m.

### **II. Scrap Metal Ordinance**

Mr. Spencer remarked that the ordinance, which was introduced at the 01/14/08 Regular Meeting of Council, has already produced a great deal of interest among local scrap dealers. Mr. Spencer noted that the ordinance currently before Council is based upon an ordinance in place in Lancaster, Ohio.

Mr. Churchill suggested Council needed to consider the specific context of the ordinance. Nationally, the theft of scrap metal has become an increasingly serious issue for local police forces. Rising costs have created an underground market for stolen materials.

Deputy Chief Talbot noted that if cooperation was received from local scrap dealers the provisions of the ordinance would not be difficult to enforce. Deputy Chief Talbot explained that statistics indicate that scrap metal thefts are the only Part I Crime that actually increased from 2006 to 2007. The thefts are driven by increasing profit margins associated with scrap materials.

Mr. Sterner questioned how many dealers currently operate within the City. Deputy Chief Talbot indicated two established dealers are operating. Deputy Chief Talbot added that the proposed ordinance could serve as the basis for a regional ordinance. The Police Department has already had positive discussions with the County. Mr. Churchill remarked that most municipalities copy

legislation adopted in Reading. This is due to the fact that regional municipalities are fearful of inheriting Reading's problems.

Mr. Waltman remarked on the importance of supporting legitimate operations; he questioned if a less severe, though enforceable, ordinance could be developed. Deputy Chief Talbot repeated his belief that the proposed ordinance was hardly restrictive. As soon as scrap dealers and their customers became aware of the new requirements information could be shared between both relatively quickly. In addition, Deputy Chief Talbot noted it is against Pennsylvania law to knowingly accept stolen materials. The proposed ordinance provides for a less severe civil, as opposed to criminal, sanction.

Mr. Waltman questioned what properties are being targeted. Deputy Chief Talbot stated properties of all types and dispositions have been victimized; properties from owner occupied residences to vacant structures.

Mr. Goldstan, of Goldstan Trading, noted that the ordinance requires the collection of customer Social Security numbers. Mr. Goldstan questioned if such a requirement was legal. Deputy Chief Talbot replied that on the advice of the City Solicitor, a Social Security number would be optional. Mr. Younger remarked that to provide a Social Security number would require the development of a mechanism to protect those numbers from theft and misuse. The development of such a mechanism could be burdensome; if such information were optional, the burden would be substantially less.

Mr. Goldstan further questioned the impact the ordinance would have on his business. Mr. Marmarou asked how often Mr. Goldstan dealt with customers he wasn't familiar with. Mr. Goldstan replied that the majority of his trade is occupied with repeat and steady customers and that he is typically leery of new customers. Mr. Goldstan further remarked that the nature of the business is time sensitive. This means that a scrap dealer must move quickly on a transaction before value drops or the customer takes their business elsewhere.

Deputy Chief Talbot commented that the proposed requirements for scrap dealers are analogous to requirements already in place – and in place for some time – for pawn shops. Pawn shops have been able to adjust, as will scrap metal dealers.

Mr. Marmarou described his experiences with pawn shops while serving on the Police Force; he agreed that there was initial resistance but it was overcome. The requirements proved less difficult than initially believed.

## **II. Onsite Property Manager Requirements**

Mr. Sterner requested that Mr. Khokhar describe how Codes ensured that property managers were provided as required by ordinance. Mr. Khokhar stated that ordinance was difficult to actively enforce. Often violations are discovered while investigating unrelated issues. Nor does

Codes have the resources to mount a serious effort. Mr. Sterner expressed concern that Codes is not actively interested in enforcement.

Mr. Waltman opined that better enforcement methods likely existed; the Codes Department would have to be more creative. Mr. Waltman suggested Codes contact each property owner and recommend the owner designate one of their tenants to serve as the manager.

Mr. Marmarou thanked Mr. Waltman for the good idea; however, it is unworkable. Mr. Marmarou used his own neighbors as examples of people who willfully disregard the ordinance. Mr. Waltman agreed that it is difficult to convince tenants to take ownership for their situation, though with the right incentives someone might be willing to do so.

### **III. Park and Recreation Advisory Council**

Mr. Waltman suggested that City Council and the Administration look at methods of reinvigorating the existing Park and Recreation Advisory Council. Mr. Waltman felt that the Council could serve as a tool for expanding existing, and developing new, programs. The Council would hopefully be able to address the key thirteen to sixteen year old demographic. Mr. Waltman described existing programs for this particular demographic as woefully inadequate.

Mr. Churchill agreed that improved recreational opportunities for City youth are necessary. Mr. Churchill reminded the members of Council that splitting funding between Pal/Olivets and Near Centers has resulted in two half baked recreational programs. Mr. Churchill noted that he had directed Park and Recreation Staff to consider alternatives for 2009; such alternatives would hopefully emphasize concentration of resources.

Mr. Spencer requested Mr. Zeiber to briefly describe the function of the Park and Recreation Advisory Council (PARC). The board brings together representatives of various playground associations and should ideally be working with Parks and Recreation to develop new recreation programs. In practice the PARC accomplishes very little, due to lack of leadership and the assorted agendas of the members. Mr. Zeiber thought the representation of the group should be increased by having new members, from throughout the City, serve.

Mr. Waltman recommended approaching the School District with an agreement to share resources. Mr. Spencer pointed out that the School District already provides a large number of youth related activities. Mr. Waltman replied that existing School District programs accomplish a great deal; however, the hope is to reach the children on a more direct level, not just open gyms for a few hours on weeknights.

Mr. Churchill commented that political support will certainly be necessary to advance recreational opportunities. Mr. Churchill added that the type of outreach proposed by Mr. Waltman was significant. Similar programs in other municipalities require substantial resources to run effectively.

Mr. Waltman encouraged staff to begin considering possible revisions to the existing PRB. Mr. Zeiber indicated the he would do so and would provide recommendations as soon as possible.

The Committee of the Whole adjourned at 7:15p.m.

*Respectfully submitted by Chris Kanezo, Deputy City Clerk*