



CITY COUNCIL

Public Safety Committee

Tuesday, October 4, 2010
Council Office
7 p.m.

Committee Members Attending: D. Sterner, Chair, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, J. Waltman

Others Attending: V. Spencer, L. Kelleher, C. Geffken, Lt. Evans

Mr. Sterner called the Public Safety Committee meeting to order at 5:25 p.m.

Increase in Crime

Mr. Waltman introduced the issue brought forward due to the increased in vandalism, robberies, and burglaries in the Centre Park and Albright areas. He noted that overall citizens are reluctant to report vandalism as they are advised when calling the Desk Sergeant that Police no longer respond to low level crime.

Lt. Evans noted his understanding of that perception but urged citizens to call and report vandalism due to the Departments focus on problem solving policing. He stated that city-wide crime is down; however, burglaries have increased in the Albright area. He noted that the department is running three (3) patrol cars less than last year, which reduces manpower by eighteen (18) men. He stated that the City began 2010 with a dramatic reduction in crime; however crime has increased over the summer months. He stated that the department has initiated a strategy to combat the burglaries on the east side of Reading.

Mr. Waltman noted the rise in car thefts city-wide. Lt. Evans stated that the majority of car thefts are caused by juveniles. He stated that more and more juveniles between the ages of 14-20 are seen on the streets during nighttime hours. He explained the problems with enforcing the nighttime curfew regulations. He explained that a curfew violation is a summary offense which goes to the Magisterial District Justice. Juvenile Probation is only involved if the citation issued by the MDJ is ignored. He also noted that the 3pm-11pm shift handles 40% of the Departments caseload.

Mr. Sterner inquired if the Police response depends on the severity of the crime or the specific

value of the crime. As an example, he used a broken window versus a burglary where the perpetrator took household electric equipment. Lt. Evans explained that the department prioritizes complaints and that victims are told that there will be no Police response at times so the victim isn't left waiting for the Police to appear at the scene when there is a low chance of that occurring. He explained that low level crimes such as slashed tires or broken windows can be reported using the form located on the City's website.

Lt. Evans described the large problems caused by repeat juvenile offenders. He noted the need for a good intervention program for first and second time juvenile offenders.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz explained that there are currently two (2) initiatives in progress. The first is the Mayor's task force on youth violence and the second is organized by St. Joseph's Hospital, funded by a grant. She suggested that Council invite these groups to make a presentation to the body of Council in early 2011.

Lt. Evans noted that the police officers on staff are doing a great job considering the reduction in personnel. He stated that Reading Police clear robberies two (2) times faster than the national average.

Mr. Waltman expressed his belief that the City is on the verge of a cave in as taxes are being increased without any improvement in City services. He noted the need to find a way to address the problems caused by rising costs like pension so that the City can provide improved services.

Vending Machine Fee

Ms. Reed joined the meeting via conference call.

Ms. Butler arrived at the meeting at this time.

Ms. Kelleher explained that the City recently increased its vending machine inspection fees to \$40 and \$45 a unit. She stated that the vending machine companies are objecting because an inspection is not performed. She explained that Ms. Reed organized a meeting with the vending machine companies to discuss the fee increases and the possibility of creating an improved program that will charge an annual registration fee and then charge an inspection fee to the percentage of the machines that are inspected annually.

Ms. Kelleher called the Committee's attention to the chart attached showing the various fees charged across Pennsylvania. She stated that the fees vary from \$10 to \$100 per unit in Sunberry. She also suggested applying a reduced inspection fee for locations where multiple machines are present in a banked setting.

Ms. Butler suggested introducing an ordinance to amend the fee at the October 13th meeting followed by the introduction of the new program ordinance.

Ms. Reed asked Ms. Kelleher to contact the vending companies and advise them of the City's forward movement. She also stated that a follow-up meeting will be scheduled with the vending companies after the ordinance is prepared.

Public Safety at Schools

As Mr. Washington was not present, the item was deferred to the October Public Safety meeting.

Implementation of Emergency Response Fee

Mr. Geffken stated that he consulted with Chief Rehr, who believes that the emergency response fee is unrealistic as the insurance companies will not pay this fee. PFM has only projected revenue valued at \$5K per year from the emergency response fee. The Committee decided not to move forward with this initiative, as it is not supported by the Administration.

Housing Zoning Permits and Approval

Ms. Kelleher reported that over the past week five (5) citizens were referred down to the Council Office from the Zoning Office to complain about Zoning permits that currently stuck in the pending mode. She stated that these citizens were then referred to the Managing Director's Office. She noted that this issue was discussed in September and she referred to the minutes attached to the agenda. She stated that Mr. Kersley appeared at the September meeting stating that 1,419 pending applications exist and 788 are incomplete applications. She also noted the need for City Council to deny the incomplete applications via resolution and suggested that new criteria for an expedited process be developed so applications could avoid individual hearings.

The Committee agreed that this issue needs to be finalized so the City can improve there enforcement on managing housing. They suggested setting a timeframe to correct this broken process.

Comprehensive Housing Policy – False Advertising

Ms. Kelleher explained that Legal Specialist Michelle Mayfield provided the statute that provides the City with the ability to opt in and begin enforcement on individuals who improperly advertise the zoning or use of a building prior to purchase. The fine is not to exceed \$1K and is a summary offense.

The Committee recommended including this issue in the larger housing strategy.

Review Ordinance Re: Property Insurance Requirement

This issue was deferred to an HPO Committee.

Mr. Geffken inquired if Ms. Kelleher was on this team and if meetings were occurring. Ms. Kelleher reported that, to date, no meetings have occurred. The Committee requested an update in October.

Vacant Outlet Buildings

Alan Shuman arrived at this time.

Mr. Sterner stated that the issue was raised due to complaints from residents and community groups in the outlet area. He inquired if Mr. Shuman has any development plans for the outlet properties. Mr. Shuman produced a plan developed in 2007 for the 8th and Oley and 9th and Windsor properties. He stated that these plans were reviewed with the redevelopment authority and the Mayor. He explained that the Mayor asked Mr. Mukerji to follow up; however, Mr. Mukerji has not returned Mr. Shuman's phone calls.

Mr. Shuman explained that he is currently meeting with the Zoning Administrator regarding the project.

Mr. Shuman stated that at 9th and Windsor, the portion of the building facing 9th Street will be demolished and the rear part on the Moss Street side will be rehabilitated for retail use on the first few floors with residential above. He stated that the Mayor put a hold on the CDBG funding for the demolition unless 100 jobs are guaranteed. Mr. Shuman noted the need to receive variances to reduce the parking requirements for the property. Mr. Shuman stated that the old outlets appeared in this building in the 1970's. Ms. Kelleher stated that at the City was still operating under its original Zoning ordinance enacted in 1957. Mr. Shuman stated that the parking requirements were not existent until sometime after the outlets began operating. He noted the difficulty in achieving redevelopment of the large outlet buildings with the stringent parking requirement.

Mr. Shuman stated that the building inspector and Fire Marshal inspect the property every six (6) months.

Mr. Shuman explained that the plan is moving forward on spec (before an investor is lined up) due to the difficulty in obtaining various City approvals. He also noted the need for the Mayor to free the demolition money. He described his efforts to seek additional assistance from the County and Community Development department.

Mr. Waltman noted the need for the Administration to support this project so it can move forward.

The Committee asked Mr. Geffken to coordinate with the County CD Department and the Mayor to, at a minimum, allow the demolition of the 9th Street portion of the building to occur quickly.

The Public Safety Committee adjourned at 6:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk

Issues for Follow-Up:

- Ordinance to adjust vending machine annual fees

- Ordinance to create a vending machine program
- Set timeframe to finalize the pending zoning applications
- Include the False Advertising Statute in the City's HOusine Strategy currently under development
- Report from HPO Team re Vacant Properties & Requirement for Property Insurance
- Demolition of Outlet building facing 9th Street at 9th and Windsor