



CITY COUNCIL

Public Safety Committee

Monday, December 6, 2010
Council Office
7 p.m.

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

Others Attending: V. Spencer, C. Younger, L. Kelleher, J. Guckin, W. Heim, C. Geffken, D. Kersley, F. Denbowski

Mr. Waltman called the Public Safety Committee meeting to order at approximately 5:05 p.m.

Moving Traffic Violations Fines

Chief Heim stated that the average moving violation fine is approximately \$107.00, of that the City receives \$12.50 and the remainder goes to the State and County. He stated that the City cannot change its portion of the fine locally but would need to have this corrected with appropriate State legislation.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted that the \$12.50 received by the City does not cover the cost of issuing the ticket or for the Officer to go to court.

Chief Heim agreed and added that up until 2009 the State covered the majority of Police training expenses and the salary of pre-hired trainees. He stated that funding was also provided to cover the costs of annual training programs that the on-staff Police Officers are required to take.

Mr. Younger noted that as the majority of the fines are received by the County and the State they would have no incentive to increase the City's portion of the fine.

Chief Heim stated that the fine for failure to stop at a stop sign costs \$25 and is increased to \$107 after the state and County fees are added. Chief Heim stated that municipalities that do not have Police Departments are served by the State Police. When State Police issue moving violations the home municipality receives \$12.50.

The Committee next discussed the need to approach local State legislators to learn of their

willingness to lobby for change to the portion of the fine received by the municipality. The Committee also noted the need to learn the position of the PLCM on increasing the fine received by the municipality. Ms. Kelleher was asked to poll Mr. Sterner to see if he would support these two (2) initiatives.

Outsourcing Police Identification Unit

Mr. Geffken warned that portions of the conversation relating to Personnel or Union contracts would need to occur in executive session.

Chief Heim stated that the Act 47 Recovery Plan seeks a reduction in Police manpower Police by eliminating Non-Patrol and Non-Investigative units such as ID. He stated that the ID unit acts like the CSI program seen on TV. He expressed the belief that the City needs to retain the ID section so it can control those resources. He stated that the ID Unit is currently manned by four (4) Patrol Officers and one (1) supervisor. He stated that if the unit is outsourced four (4) positions would be reduced. Ms. Kelleher inquired if the outsourcing of the ID Unit would affect the Criminal Investigations Divisions ability to solve crime. Mr. Geffken warned that this topic would need to be discussed in executive session.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz inquired if the County is willing to take over this unit. Chief Heim stated that the County is interested as it already performs this function for other municipalities. However, the County would need to add additional Personnel to cover the workload located within the City.

Mr. Spencer inquired if Personnel in the ID Unit would transfer over to the County. Chief Heim stated that that was unknown. He added that if the Officers in the ID Unit have seniority the reductions would occur through attrition.

Mr. Geffken suggested that Council revisit this topic during discussions about the 2012 budget and the defined Act 47 Police manning reduction.

Mr. Robinson arrived at the meeting.

Transition of Codes to CD

Mr. Geffken stated that the Administration still plans to transfer Codes to the Community Development Department and have the Deputy CD Director oversee Codes. He stated that this transfer will properly rank Trades, Zoning, and Historic Preservation.

Mr. Spencer inquired if Council would be presented with a plan for revised Codes enforcement. Mr. Geffken stated that would be covered in the housing strategy.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for Codes to have defined performance measures and standards that accompany the transfer. She also noted the need for improved organization around enforcement efforts.

Mr. Geffken stated that performance goals and measures and standards will be developed in the housing strategy. He expressed his belief in the relocation of Codes to CD as it will bring together the necessary synergies.

Mr. Waltman noted the need for Codes Services to be seen as core services both internally and externally. He stated that Codes has historically been chasing problems throughout the City. He noted the need to rebuild Codes Enforcement to better coordinate resources. He also noted that during his ten (10) years on City Council he has received many plans and recommendations for improved Codes enforcement without any implementation or follow up.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz again noted the lack of follow through and coordination with Codes ordinance enforcement. She stressed the need for improved organization through a step by step process. Mr. Geffken expressed the belief that in the past Codes attempted to execute ordinances enacted without a proper implementation plan.

Mr. Waltman noted the need for all City employees to own the enforcement of all City ordinances. He noted that many City employees are blind to City conditions when they are out in the field during the business day. As an example he described the recurring trash problem at Tulpehocken and Buttonwood Streets and the identification of trash dumping at Ninth and Douglass Streets. He stated that employees drive by these locations daily but fail to report them.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need to better organize enforcement that builds a proper paper trail.

In response to a question by Ms. Reed, Mr. Geffken expressed the belief that some of the problem in the Codes department relates to ordinance execution prior to the review of Codes ability to execute and perform.

Mr. Waltman noted the need to begin Codes Enforcement with a baseline approach and build upwards from their.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested having certain ordinances be accompanied by an implementation plan so the Administration and Council can weigh the City's ability and capacity to deliver properly.

Housing Zoning Permits and Approval

Mr. Kersley stated that the City is seeking an independent legal review of the overall process for Housing and Zoning permits relating to residential use. He stated that the attorney providing the service will first obtain a general orientation on the issue including a review of the pertinent legislation, a review the rental application packet, a review the accumulated statistics and reports and then the attorney will issue recommendations for ordinance and policy changes. He stated that the attorney will interact with the Zoning Hearing Board, Real Estate Investors Association,

Reading-Berks Association of Realtors, and other key City personnel.

Mr. Kersley stated that the existing ordinance prevents the Zoning Administrator from handling applications that fall outside the AHO process.

Mr. Kelleher stated that complete applications that did not meet the AHO criteria should be sent to either the Zoning Hearing Board or City Council for approval. She questioned if incomplete applications are included in the backlog referred to. Mr. Kersley stated that the backlog does include incomplete applications.

Ms. Guckin stated that if she, as Zoning Administrator, denies the incomplete application, the applicant may appeal to the Zoning Hearing Board within thirty (30) days. The Zoning Hearing Board would then have to conduct their appeal hearing within the following forty-five (45) days. She noted that with approximately 1,479 properties in this category it would be difficult for the Zoning Hearing Board to expeditiously undertake the appeal process. Mr. Geffken expressed the belief that a specialized approach could alleviate this backlog. Ms. Gouckin added that each application has a different issue or accompanying problem.

Mr. Waltman and Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted that the delay has created gaps in service for City landlords. They suggested applying a triage approach. They noted the need to finalize this backlog as the issue has been hanging out for approximately four (4) years.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for the Administration to consider the lack of customer service that's involved in this process.

Comprehensive Housing Policy

Mr. Geffken recommended delaying this issue and including it in the housing strategy.

Property Insurance Requirement Ordinance

Mr. Geffken recommended addressing this ordinance in the housing strategy.

Safety at Schools

Ms. Kelleher stated that School Board Director James Washington stated that some District issues prevented him from moving forward on this project; however, as district issues are beginning to quell down he promised to devote time to this effort.

Mr. Waltman agreed, noting that he has had discussion with Mr. Washington about this issue.

Mr. Schlegel requested permission to speak and permission was granted.

Mr. Schlegel expressed his belief that a large part of the problem within the Reading School District comes from having older children intermingled in non-age appropriate grades. He also noted the lack of good communication between the parent and the School District.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested follow-up as a Committee of the Whole or Work Session. Mr. Waltman suggested first addressing the issue within the Public Safety Committee prior to taking it to large group discussion. He also noted how the combination of School District problems plays into City issues.

The Public Safety Committee adjourned at approximately 6 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk