



CITY COUNCIL

Public Safety Committee

Monday, June 7, 2010

Council Office

6 p.m.

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

Others Attending: C. Geffken, W. Heim, L. Kelleher, C. Younger, V. Spencer

Mr. Sterner called the Public Safety Committee meeting to order at approximately 6:15 p.m.

Vehicle Noise/Quality of Life

Ms. Kelleher introduced Mr. Thomas and Mr. London to the Committee, explaining that Mr. Waltman invited them to attend so they could convey to the Committee some of the quality of life issues they experience caused by vehicle noise in their neighborhood. She stated that this issue has been going on for approximately three (3) years with little improvement. Mr. London and Mr. Thomas described the quality of life issues they experience that are caused by the disrespectful and uncaring attitudes of neighbors and cab drivers over the last three (3) years.

Mr. London noted the need for the City to enforce their laws so behaviors are changed. He described his and Mr. Thomas's success by taking the issue to MDJ Lachina. Mr. Thomas stated that using this approach has caused some improvement. He noted that he and Mr. London are not being critical of the Police Department. He suggested requiring multi-unit rental properties to install doorbells and require cab companies to obtain the phone number of the party calling for cab service so they are able to call the phone number on arrival rather than repeatedly blasting on the vehicle horn.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she has experienced similar issues in her East Reading neighborhood.

Mr. Thomas noted that at times Police claim they cannot issue violations if the owner is not operating the vehicle.

Chief Heim stated that the owner is only responsible for parking tickets acquired when the vehicle is being used by another party. He added that to issue a successful citation, Police need the identity of the driver. He stated that cab services are a public utility service and cannot refuse to provide service to anyone that requests service.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for the cab clients to be ready when cabs arrive.

Mr. London again noted the isolated success they have seen when calling the Police Department to respond to this issue. He again noted the need for the City to change the behavior of those being disrespectful to basic quality of life regulations.

Chief Heim stated that the best way to achieve an improved success rate would be to seek a State law change. He suggested seeking the assistance of Senator O’Pake and Representative Caltagirone.

Mr. Waltman inquired about the City’s ability to use other methods such as Business Privilege License Revocation to resolve this issue. Mr. Younger stated that he would need to research the issue further.

Housing Permits

Mr. Younger stated that the City’s unable to change zoning once it is issued through the AHO process, even if the subject property did not comply with the AHO criteria.

Mr. Waltman suggested considering the revocation of zoning permits if certain behaviors exist or applying a moratorium that would require the de-conversion of properties who exhibit certain behaviors.

Mr. Younger and Ms. Kelleher noted the belief that zoning is mandated by the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code and that zoning runs with the land after approval, unless the decision is appealed within thirty (30) days. Ms. Kelleher stated that an approved use can be abandoned if the use is discontinued for six (6) months to a year and the property is not marketed.

There was next a discussion on limiting rentals. Mr. Younger noted the need to provide justification to successfully win the court challenge that would follow. Ms. Kelleher explained that proper justification can be provided after the City is able to determine the location of all inner-city rental properties and then show increased public safety calls for service (Police, Fire, and Property Maintenance) when compared against the same calls made to owner-occupied properties.

Mr. Geffken stated that he has started to research Public Safety calls made to rental properties. Ms. Kelleher noted that as all rental properties are not yet identified the results of that search will

be limited.

The Committee asked Ms. Kelleher to research the City's ability to seek a moratorium or revoke zoning permits.

Chief Heim stated that a number of properties in the Code's inspection backlog is unavailable this evening. He stated that Code's officials have started to reduce the number in the backlog.

The Committee requested a monthly report going back over the past year, showing the number of backlog inspections achieved.

Quality of Life Ticketing

Chief Heim stated that the issue is again moving forward and Council will be introducing the quality of life ticketing ordinance at an upcoming Council meeting. Ms. Kelleher stated that Council will be introducing the ordinance at the Special Meeting on Friday, July 11th. She stated that Chief Heim has requested that the ordinance be in place at the end of June. If the ordinance is introduced on Tuesday, June 15th the fourteen day lay over period required by the Charter will not be achieved until the day after the next regular business meeting scheduled for Monday, June 28th. Chief Heim stated that he is excited that this issue is moving forward to fruition. He explained that the inspectors have tested the use of handheld devices and mobile printers, which will enable the inspector to immediately post properties.

Comprehensive Housing Policy

The Committee discussed the need for a comprehensive housing policy to be developed to protect and improve the City's housing stock.

Mr. Geffken stated that the Administration plans to search nationwide for someone experienced in the housing industry.

Property Placarding Process

Chief Heim explained that Codes and RAWA work cooperatively and post properties when the water utility is discontinued. He stated that approximately 80%-90% of the homes placarded are unoccupied for the period the water utilities are discontinued. Chief Heim stated that he is unsure if this same process applies to owner occupied residential properties.

Property Insurance Requirement

Mr. Younger stated that the samples provided at the last meeting focus primarily on rental properties. He inquired about the Committees disposition to add all commercial uses. He noted the difficulty property owners will have obtaining insurance for vacant buildings.

Mr. Waltman noted that this requirement could act as a deterrent for those speculators planning to purchase large commercial properties at tax sale. He suggested devising a formula that would

define the proper parameters and include the requirement of an escrow payment if the property fails to acquire property insurance.

Mr. Younger stated that he would develop the ordinance requested that will include residential and non-residential buildings.

The Public Safety Committee adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk

Issues for Follow-Up:

- Review - Ord requiring Property Insurance for Residential and Commercial properties - Solicitor
- Audit of Housing Permit/Zoning Applications Currently in the Backlog – D. Kersley
- Review – Ordinance creating new expedited zoning approval process – D. Kersley
- Review – recommendation on expansion of Codes service hours