



# *CITY COUNCIL*

## *Public Safety Committee*

**Monday, January 3, 2011**

**Council Office**

**5 p.m.**

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

**Others Attending:** V. Spencer, C. Younger, L. Kelleher, J. Guckin, C. Geffken, D. Kersley, F. Denbowski, H. Tangredi, R. Robinson

### **Interim Plan for Fire Department**

Mr. Geffken announced that First Deputy Kevin Kulp will be the Interim Fire Chief, while the continues its search for viable candidates. He stated that employment outreach is being conducted by Nehr, out of West Sacramento, California, and they obtained a good response, including two (2) local individuals.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz complimented the Fire Department for their handling of City fires in East Reading over the past weekend. She noted the dangers associated with the aging housing stock.

Mr. Waltman inquired how the new manning rotation will work financially for 2011 and what impact the lack of a contract will have on Fire overtime. Mr. Geffken expressed the belief that at the desired 56 hour manning schedule will work in Reading as it has been used successfully in Easton. He stated that 56 hour manning schedule is not common place; however it is used in southern states.

Mr. Waltman noted that the lack of control around Fire overtime due to arbitration may cause Fire overtime to exceed that projected in the 2011 budget. Mr. Geffken stated that \$700K has been budgeted for Fire overtime in 2011 and he expressed the belief that the City will be able to cover the variables. He stated that this amount is equal to that budgeted in 2008 for Fire overtime.

Mr. Waltman noted the need for the Administration to closely monitor various financial issues to avoid the many surprises uncovered in the Act 47 recovery plan.

Mr. Sterner requested an update in Executive Session on personnel and contractual matters.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the affect lack of Codes enforcement has had on fire prevention.

### **Transition of Codes to Community Development**

Mr. Geffken stated that he has been meeting regularly with Chief Heim and Mr. Robinson regarding the transition of Codes from Police to CD. He stated that Mr. Natale is the Acting Property Maintenance Manager and asked Mr. Kersley to provide an overview on Codes initiatives.

Mr. Kersley stated that the quality of life ticketing has been further framed out and can show repeat violations at properties. He stated that the Administration is currently considering a case management model in Codes to allow the use of various remedies to resolve issues in designated geographic areas.

Mr. Geffken noted their continued work to develop a good transition plan and improve the oversight and performance in the Codes division.

Mr. Spencer questioned the fit of the Ricktown Manager within the CD Department. Mr. Geffken replied that the Ricktown Manager will report to the Mayor but will have oversight by the CD Director and others.

Mr. Sterner and Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz requested a job description with an organizational chart showing the fit within the CD Department to provide clarity.

Mr. Spencer inquired if the salary of the Ricktown Manager will be covered by CDBG. Mr. Geffken stated that the salary will be covered 60/40 with CDBG funds.

The Committee next discussed the need to improve the performance of Codes as a whole from enforcement and education to employees handling issues discovered when in the field.

Mr. Waltman described the garage business located in the 300 block of West Windsor Street. He stated that this legal business has expanded it's scope and is now affecting pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz agreed with the need for improved oversight and performance of Codes but also asked the Administration to consider collaboration beyond the City. She suggested coordinating with others in the field such as the County Sheriff, Children and Youth Services, Probation, etc.

Mr. Spencer inquired if Chief Heim has advised Mr. Robinson on the structure and organization of the Codes division. Chief Heim stated that he provided input on the preferred structure and management of the division.

### **Transition of Call Center to Services Center**

Mr. Geffken questioned the relevance of this topic on the Public Safety agenda. Ms. Kelleher stated that it is placed on the Public Safety agenda due to the number of Codes complaints that are referred to this area.

Mr. Geffken stated that City Hall was closed to the public this morning for training of Services Center staff, which will be composed of Treasury, Tax, and Call Center employees. He stated that temporary signage is in place. He stated that the training session with affected employees was successful and expressed the belief that this improved model will operate efficiently due to the cross-training of all employees.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz inquired about expediting complaints generated by City Council. Mr. Geffken suggested that Council continue to funnel their complaints through Council office.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need to improve the complaint reporting and the complaint follow-up to provide improved accountability. Mr. Sterner agreed with the need for improved performance and accountability in this new office.

Mr. Geffken stated that follow-up is difficult due to the volume of complaints referred to the Call Center due to its low staffing level. He expressed the belief that the improved staffing in the Services Center will assist in providing better follow-up.

Ms. Kelleher stated that problems with follow-up are also created when complaints are closed out before they're resolved. She stated that many complaints are closed out by receiving staff after Zoning Enforcement letter is sent or a Notice of Violation is issued; however, that complaint should not be closed out until the issue is resolved. Mr. Geffken stated that the managerial changes should correct those behaviors.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz requested regular reporting on the Customer Service Center by Council District and broken down into the various complaint areas.

Mr. Spencer also noted the need to provide reports to department directors where complaint calls are assigned.

### **Field Testing of Quality of Life Ticketing**

Mr. Kersley stated that the quality of life system is built out but not tested. He stated that Codes supervisor Jim Orrs has been assigned this project, which will start tomorrow. He stated that during the testing period no fines will be issued; however the system will be checked to make sure proper documentation is provided. He reported that the municipal aides have not been hired yet as the quality of life ticketing has not been field tested. He stated that the ticketing system expects to go operational in February. He stated that every Property Maintenance Inspector and Maintenance Aide can issue tickets. He noted the value of the paperless system

which will improve mishandling and follow through. He also stated that this system will now provide live data to inspectors while they are in the field and more robust reporting options.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the deteriorated conditions in the 1300 and 1400 blocks of Perkiomen Avenue. She stated that there various Codes violations easily visible and suggested using the neighborhood as a target for the field testing.

Mr. Waltman noted the need to correct enforcement and improve education to resolve many communication problems with property owners.

Mr. Robinson noted that the quality of life ticket ordinance will be amended to move the appeal powers over to the Community Development department.

### **Housing and Zoning Permit Backlog**

Mr. Kersley stated that the City is seeking assistance from an independent attorney who will be making recommendation early in February. He stated that much of the research will be completed by Legal Specialist Mayfield which will offset the cost of the independent attorney retained.

### **Comprehensive Housing Policy**

Mr. Geffken suggested referring the false advertising resolution to the housing strategy area.

Ms. Kelleher stated that this topic was placed on the agenda due to information obtained at the last Conditional Use hearing. The property owner provided documentation showing the listing sheet and listing agent where the property was advertised as a legal 3 unit when in fact it did not have zoning. She noted that the Law department last reported on this issue. They noted the need for the City to prepare legislation to opt into the State statute.

Mr. Younger agreed and noted that if the City opts into the State statute the realtor can be criminally charged by the Police Department. He stated that he will further research this issue.

Mr. Geffken agreed to move forward, as long as this area will not be handled by the Codes division.

### **Public Safety at Schools**

Ms. Sterner suggested deferring this topic until Mr. Washington can attend the Public Safety meeting.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that as Reading School District board meetings often conflicts with the Monday night Council meeting schedule. Ms. Kelleher was asked to contact Mr. Washington regarding an alternative date or about forming the steering committee who can address the issue on a non-Council or School District Board meeting night.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted that the Community Foundation is offering a \$1,000 grant to promote safety in streets.

The Public Safety Committee adjourned at approximately 6:30 pm.

*Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk*