



CITY COUNCIL

Public Safety Committee

Wednesday, September 7, 2011
Council Office
5 p.m.

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

Others Attending: L. Kelleher, V. Spencer, C. Younger, C. Geffken, R. Natale, W. Heim, K. Kulp, C. Weidel

Mr. Sterner, Chair, called the Public Safety Committee to order at approximately 5:10pm.

I. Citizen's Service Center: Implementation Update

Ms. Weidel, while distributing the August report, explained that the report issued for July had some inconsistencies and errors. She stated that the errors have been corrected in the report distributed tonight. The report shows that during the month of August 1,095 complaints received were resolved and 558 complaints remain open. She explained that Police and Fire issues or complaints are not assigned an SR number.

Ms. Kelleher noted the recurring problem with complaints being closed out before they area truly resolved. As an example, she used a recent complaint regarding a perceived group home on Hampden Boulevard where by the complaint was closed when the Zoning Enforcement Officer stated that he would visit the property. She stated that the complaint should remain open until the inspector determines that either the property is not a group home or the property is brought into compliance.

Mr. Geffken stated that they are currently working to correct this issue. Ms. Weidel stated that training is occurring with various departments. Mr. Geffken stated that currently the update information is contained in a field that can be changed or deleted by subsequent users. He explained that update area will be moved into a "log" area within the Hansen system. He also noted that although while SR's will remain unresolved longer updates will be able to be obtained through the "log" tab.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz inquired about the timelines to address complaints. She described the

process used by Children and Youth Services.

Ms. Weidel and Mr. Geffken stated that they are also working to incorporate timelines into the complaint system. Mr. Natale stated that Codes already assigns a priority value and timelines. He explained that a Quality of Life type complaint will be closed out after a ticket is issued; however in a more severe situation that warrants a Notice of Violation (NOV) the complaint is marked closed when a NOV is issued.

Mr. Sterner noted the poor follow-up for complaints issued.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for improved communication with the Council office regarding definition of terms and practices.

Ms. Weidel offered to begin filing a report for all Council related complaints that are logged into the system.

Mr. Sterner inquired if the Council office walk-ins have reduced. Ms. Kelleher stated that the number of walk-ins has reduced over the past weeks.

Ms. Kelleher also explained that Council staff has discovered the origination of the calls coming from the 6187 number. She explained that people calling through this number are accessing the Council office information through the website. More people are using their computers to access City office phone numbers from the City's website and when they select the Council office number, the number is forwarded through the 6187 line.

Mr. Spencer inquired if Police and Fire complaints can go directly to the department Chief or if they must go through the Managing Director's office. Mr. Geffken stated that unless an emergency situation exists, complaints to the Police and Fire Chief should continue to go through the Managing Director's office.

Mr. Sterner inquired about problems that residents have over weekends when emergencies exist. He suggested having the Citizen's Service Center manned during weekend hours. Mr. Natale explained that residents experiencing emergencies over weekends should dial the Non-Emergency Police number as the Desk Sergeant has all critical contact information.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested that internal offices that are not 24/7 operations should add the emergency contact information at the end of the voicemail message that picks up during closed hours.

Quality of Life Ticketing Update

Mrs. Kelleher distributed a handout provided by Mr. Kersley.

Mr. Geffken explained that the following district breakout, year to date.

- District 2: 2,178 tickets were issued
- District 3: 2,140 tickets were issued
- District 4: 1,587 tickets were issued
- District 5: 2,311 tickets were issued
- District 6: 1,582 tickets were issued
- District 1: 679 tickets were issued

Ms. Kelleher inquired why the District 1 tickets appear so low as the Quality of Life violations appear to be much more significant in the South of Penn area. Mr. Natale stated that he will follow-up.

Mr. Spencer inquired if the Quality of Life ticketing occurs on Saturdays. Mr. Geffken replied affirmatively. Mr. Spencer inquired if the Quality of Life Officers issue tickets when they discover illegal construction projects. Mr. Natale stated that when Codes Officials discover construction projects occurring over weekends, the projects are reported to the Trades office and the Trades office follows up. He explained that the Trades office is responsible for issuing permits and oversight of projects. He stated that projects that are not properly completed with the required permit must be redone as directed by the Trades Inspectors. Mr. Natale stated that of the 349 appeals heard to date, 108 have been refunded.

In regard to the discovery illegal construction projects, Mr. Natale explained that the construction or Trade's permit fee doubles if a permit was not obtained prior to the job completion, unless the contractor or party was correcting an emergency situation.

Housing and Zoning

Ms. Kelleher stated that the housing permit ordinance is progressing nicely. She stated that Mr. Natale, Ms. Butler, and Mr. Kersley are meeting regularly to work through various issues. She stated that a recent meeting occurred to discuss clearing the backlog of properties that will come before Council for Conditional Use. She also explained that under the proposed ordinance, approximately one half of the 1,479 properties will receive Zoning permits and the remaining properties will require Conditional Use hearings. She stated that the group discussed various proposals which were reviewed by Mr. Younger this morning. She stated that this afternoon Ms. Butler informed the group that Mr. Younger determined that under the ordinance and the PaMPC, a quorum of Council is not required for a conditional use hearing and that one member of Council or an independent solicitor can conduct a hearing and potentially make a decision. Mr. Younger noted the need to define this process.

Mr. Natale stated that after meetings he has been working with Mr. Kersley and Mr. Tangredi to automate the Housing Permit process which will reduce mistakes.

Mr. Geffken inquired on the progress of the Act 90 work group. Ms. Kelleher explained that the Act 90 work group met a few weeks ago to discuss implementing two (2) additional Blighted

Property tools authorized by Act 90. She stated that the group discussed the tool allowing the City to revoke permits and licenses for property owners with delinquencies and Codes violations and the tool which allows District Attorney's office to file criminal charges and extradite property owners who have four (4) or more convictions at the Magisterial District Justice or Berks County Court of Pleas level.

Mr. Natale noted the difficulty Codes has had in obtaining convictions through the Magisterial District Justices offices.

Ms. Kelleher explained that after discussion with various City offices, a sample list of property owners for both tools has been identified. Mr. Natale will work with Ms. Butler to determine which cases will be tested.

Mr. Natale distributed a monthly report showing Property Maintenance activities, running from January through July. He stated that he will supply this report to the Committee monthly.

Ms. Kelleher noted a great number of rental properties visited and brought into compliance. Mr. Natale explained that illegal rental properties are identified through complaint and the monthly memo issued by the Council office.

Mr. Geffken stated that the determination of the Housing permit fee is under way and should be completed soon. He stated that Housing permit billing for 2011 should occur by the beginning of October. Ms. Kelleher noted that after that, housing permit billing will occur annually, April 1st, as required by the new ordinance.

Property Maintenance & Plumbing Codes Amendment Update

Mr. Sterner explained that he discussed this issue with Ms. Butler before the start of the Committee meeting. He stated that Ms. Butler explained that the updates to the Property Maintenance Code are almost complete and that Ms. Butler noted the need to incorporate some of the blighted property tools.

Mr. Natale also noted that the 2012 Property Maintenance Code has just been released and needs to be reviewed against the current draft before it can be finalized. Mr. Sterner stated that the Property Maintenance Code should be available for review at a Committee of Whole meeting planned for October 3rd.

Police Radio System

Chief Heim stated that a recent electrical storm caused some damage to the Police radio system. He stated that currently the radio system is working sporadically but the Department has a redundant system via cell phone, etc. He stated that work is being conducted to correct the deficiency.

Safety at Schools

Mr. Spencer asked Ms. Kelleher to contact Ms. Gresh at the Reading School District to arrange another Public Safety at the Schools meeting. Mr. Denbowski arrived and suggested that the City and School District apply jointly for a grant to create safe corridors. He stated that the maximum amount available \$10K.

Fire Station Rehab

Mr. Sterner inquired about the relocation of the Fire apparatus from the 8th and Court Street Fire Station. Chief Kulp stated that the apparatus has been relocated to another Fire Station due to work on the stations roof. He explained that rehab will also occur to the EMS building and to the 9th and Marion Fire Station.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted that at a recent Council meeting the IAFF President claimed that the City has been intentionally ignoring the maintenance of fire stations. Chief Kulp stated that the IAFF is aware that the City is working to correct the various deficiencies such as new roofing, painting, mold removal, etc. He explained the prioritization of the rehab schedule.

Police Update

Chief Heim stated that the Department is managing well with the current number of officers. He stated that although shootings and homicides have increased, they are not increasing at prior rates. He stated that the current class at the Academy will begin field training within the next month. He stated that a new class of Officers is expected to start in January.

Mr. Spencer inquired about the success of the new bilingual testing. Chief Heim reported that two additional candidates were hired due to the bilingual test. He expressed the belief that the bilingual test is working positively.

Flood Update

Chief Kulp explained that the normal level of the Schuylkill River is 11.6 ft. He explained that the action stage goes into effect when the river rises to 14.5 ft and the flood stage goes into effect when the river reaches 15.5 ft. He explained that the recent storm is projected to raise the Schuylkill River to 17.9 ft. He stated that the situation should be similar to Agnes in the early seventies due to the over saturation of the ground caused by the numerous rain events that have occurred during the month of August. He stated that this flood level will be approximately equal to the flood event that occurred a few years ago.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz inquired about the condition of Engelmann's Dam. Chief Kulp explained that Public Works monitors the conditions of dams.

Mr. Acosta inquired about how the Department contacts residents to warn them about potential flooding. Chief Kulp stated that personal contact is made with affected residents. Chief Heim added that as the river is expected to hit the flood level sometime after midnight, Police Officers have been advised to begin warning residents within the next few hours.

Ms. Reed noted the need for concise emergency communication with the public and the media.

The Public Safety Committee meeting adjourned at approximately 6:47 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk