

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

January 4, 2019

A meeting of the Public Safety Committee was held this date beginning at 4:00 p.m., at 80 Broad Street, City Hall, First Floor Conference Room

Notice of this meeting was sent to all local news media.

PRESENT

Councilmember Shahid, Chair, Councilmember Seekings, Councilmember Wagner (by telephone), Councilmember Lewis, and Mayor Tecklenburg **Staff:** Chief Reynolds, Dan Riccio, Janie Borden, Steve Ruemelin, Rick Jerue, and Bethany Whitaker

The meeting was opened with an invocation provided by Councilmember Lewis.

Approval of Minutes

On the motion of Councilmember Seekings, seconded by Councilmember Lewis, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the November 13, 2018 meeting.

Discussion on litter issue

Chairman Shahid said he had asked to have this meeting because when they had passed the ordinance regarding the plastic ban/single-use bags, it had come up that it wasn't a plastic bag problem, but a litter problem. Councilmember Seekings had stated that after a storm event, there were many bags floating around the James Island Connector. They had also received other complaints that the City wasn't enforcing the laws and needed to address better enforcement of the laws, and possibly make some changes concerning litter. He asked where they were with litter, and what they needed to be doing.

Dan Riccio said that within the neighborhoods and business, they had pretty good control over it because they had to take care of their properties. He had taken the liberty to come up with a plan for things like highway enforcement and pedestrian enforcement. He had discussed it with Chief Reynolds already to get his blessing. It wasn't anything major. One of the biggest issues was that there wasn't enough awareness about litter. That caused people to throw things out of their windows. The more awareness they could bring throughout the year, the less people would litter, in his opinion. It was something that needed to be in people's faces at all times. The education component was part of awareness. SCDOT was getting away from the 'chain-gangs' to pick up litter. They actually had employees now that went around and picked up litter

on the highways. They had said they would work with the City. They needed to keep it out in the public all the time with things like press releases, especially if they were doing an initiative in certain areas. They had some key players that they could partner with including the PIO, Livability, Police Department, Livability Response Squad, Keep Charleston Beautiful, Neighborhood and Business Services, and the SCDOT. The important thing would be enforcement and where the enforcement would be. His idea was to team up his employees in Livability with officers in the Police Department. They could ride together and patrol certain days of the week, in certain areas that were prone to litter. Livability employees couldn't stop vehicles or pedestrians, but with an officer making the stop and making the scene safe, his people could then engage and instead of issuing a blue state ticket with a smaller fine, they could issue Livability tickets with the maximum fine of \$1,087. The other key, so they wouldn't burden the Police Department's resources, the Livability employee could be the witness during court. His Livability officers could patrol areas of the City and remove prohibited roadway signs and graffiti, as well. The dirtiest parts of the City were the areas closest to the landfill. Trucks came in that were improperly covered. If they went down Bees Ferry Road, the trash was awful, and the reason was because of the trucks not being covered. He intended to put on a letter to all municipalities advising them to adhere to the ordinance addressing covering trucks, while they were in the City. If they were in violation, they would be getting a ticket. His goal was to go for the maximum fine each time, to send the message until people started waking up. He also wanted to use the message boards for awareness. They were going to do this in pieces, not all in one day and they should start seeing results.

Chairman Shahid said he noticed the litter on along major highways, such as along Sam Rittenberg Boulevard coming into West Ashley off the North Bridge. They had their task force out there regularly and it was many bags, tires, sofas, etc., coming off of trucks. Mr. Riccio said that if they counted the trucks going to the landfill, most of them were coming over the North Bridge, if they didn't take 526. He wasn't saying that was the only cause, but he had seen a lot of truck traffic through that corridor. The goal was to concentrate on those areas until the word was out. Chairman Shahid asked how they could measure this and see that they were making progress. Mr. Riccio said they could measure it with summons issuance and with the voluntary clean-ups. When Keep Charleston Beautiful did a campaign or clean-up, they would weigh the litter, and that gave them a measure of what was in the area. Chairman Shahid asked if they did a monthly count. Mr. Riccio said they could do it whenever they wanted. Monthly would probably be better. Chairman Shahid said that in his opinion, instead of issuing fines, he would much rather see people doing community service of picking up trash. Mr. Riccio said it used to be that way, but the Courts didn't like that as much anymore. He thought they had done away with roadside pick-ups because of liability. If someone was hurt while doing the community service, they could sue. Mr. Ruemelin said they normally give them alternatives. Chief Reynolds said he liked that idea in theory. If someone who had a CDL got a ticket like that, it could be a

career ender, versus a few hours of community services. Councilmember Seekings said they used to send people to clean up the horse barns for ten hours. Ms. Borden said they could still do that with Keep Charleston Beautiful. Mr. Riccio said that the State had the Palmetto Pride Program who did volunteer road-side clean-ups, as well. If there was something like a 'chain-gang', that was free resources through the County. Chairman Shahid said he just thought a 4-5 hour trip picking up trash would keep people from doing it. People with CDL's would be hit hard if they got a fine or were convicted. Mr. Riccio said if it was better for a CDL driver to have a blue state ticket, they could make that determination.

Chairman Shahid asked how Charleston compared to other communities and if this was a large issue they were facing. Mr. Riccio said he thought it was all over, in every community. When SCDOT cut the grass along the Interstate, they left all of the litter and chopped it all up, and it would stay. So, he would like for them to go in before cutting grass, and pick up the litter. He thought people just didn't think about it, and if they put it in the forefront, it would get more attention. Councilmember Seekings said that this was a community issue. If you saw someone drop litter on the ground, you thought it was ridiculous. If Keep Charleston Beautiful did a sweep, they could give them PR and show the results. They could get the word out that they were in the communities and build momentum. They wouldn't stop people from littering by giving them tickets. They would need to publically 'shame' them and make it inappropriate. Charleston was no better or worse than any place. It wasn't at epidemic levels. They needed to do a positive campaign. The biggest problem was people leaving things behind and they just needed to get people to take it with them. Councilmember Lewis said that they needed to start educating people that they could be fined for littering. It wasn't enforced as much. Councilmember Seekings asked if they could get with Keep Charleston Beautiful and do a campaign.

Ms. Borden said that under the State litter program, they had an actual number they could call and report if you saw someone throw something out a window. They could get that number out there. They could also include the City's hotline number and those people would send a letter out to the person who violated the ordinance stating that they were observed throwing something out the window and asking them not to do it again. Councilmember Wagner said that near the McDonalds on Maybank Highway, there were open ditches, and they were full of trash. The litter issue was large, because there were multiple jurisdictions. They wouldn't have an easy fix, but this was a good start. Mayor Tecklenburg thanked Mr. Riccio for taking the initiative for a fresh start. An education component would be the best thing to do. He would like to get citizens to just not throw out trash in the first place. He asked if they could use the State number in the City. They didn't have to use the hotline. Mr. Riccio said that Palmetto Pride was in charge of that. Mayor Tecklenburg asked what happened when you called into that

number. Mr. Riccio said they would send the person a letter that they were seen at a certain location littering.

Mayor Tecklenburg said he appreciated the idea of having the Livability officers ride with the Police Department. He asked Chief Reynolds if an officer would stop someone if they saw them throw something out of their car. Chief Reynolds said they would. He had a problem with someone who would do something like that. That wouldn't solve the problem, but they would stop them. Some people pulled into vacant lots and dumped a whole truck-load of things. Mr. Riccio said they did follow up on the illegal dumping. Chief Reynolds said that this had really come about when they were talking about the plastic bags, and for whatever reason, they were everywhere. The plastic bag ban wouldn't solve the problem, but it had brought a lot of awareness to it. Mr. Riccio said they would send someone out to check out the location on Johns Island. That would be on the property owner. Mayor Tecklenburg said that he was at Lowe's on James Island and the drainage area was covered in plastic. Obviously, it was headed to some waterway. Councilmember Lewis said that the dump trucks used to leave their dumpsters and they finally stopped. Mayor Tecklenburg said to give SCDOT his thanks because he had noticed in the last few miles of I-26, the trash had been a little better. They had definitely done some work. Chairman Shahid said they had key players identified, and asked if they could give a report in about a month. Chief Reynolds said that everyone had to be a part of this and this plan incorporated everyone.

Police Department Update

Chief Reynolds said they had some shootings in the last few months. There had been one at the Citadel Mall in the parking lot on one of the busier shopping days. There had also been one at Chuck E Cheese. There had been a shooting/homicide the previous morning in the Westchester area of James Island. One thing they had talked about was that the majority of the shootings had a nexus to the drug trade, to retaliation, and in some cases, to domestic violence and relationships. He pointed that out, not to diminish the seriousness of the shootings and deaths, but to frame it in a way that reassured citizens that these weren't random shootings. The area was generally a safe area. They were working closely with partnering municipalities. They needed to continue to pay attention and have open discussion. There were a lot of young people carrying guns.

Councilmember Seekings asked how the increased enforcement on traffic stops went. Chief Reynolds said it had been very well received across the board. It had reinforced that they did need to be out there and that there was a problem. They had done the bridge going into Mount Pleasant and although they gave a lot of leeway, there was no shortage in stops. They wrote over 100 tickets in a couple hour period. They had people doing 80 mph in that area and that was very unsafe. On the interstate, they had caught people up to 93 mph. Collisions in the last year had gone down, but there was still a lot of work to do. They had 15 fatalities from collisions in 2018. Every one was preventable. The final number for homicides would be ten and those were all preventable, as well. There was a lot of good they were

doing. They had a committee that was working with Keith Benjamin, Director of Traffic and Transportation. Awareness and education was a big component to this, as well. Chairman Shahid said that another way of saying that the shootings weren't random was that these people were familiar with one another. Chief Reynolds said that was correct. They knew each other, had relationships, had conflicts, specifically. They had done marches, talked about stopping the violence, and were working closely with all of their partners. Criminals didn't know boundaries. They had a meeting on James Island and the citizens were grateful to see the faces of local government officials and the Police Chief and County officials in the same room. They also had started meeting with the Citizens Police Advisory Council and that was very positive. There had been great dialogue. They were engaged, diverse, and well-represented from around the City.

Councilmember Lewis stated that several months ago, they had talked about looking at the State law versus the City law regarding golf carts. That was something they needed to look at again. Chairman Shahid said they could have another meeting in February. They hadn't finished their discussion on guns being stolen from cars, so they could bring both of those items.

Having no further business, the Committee adjourned at 4:44 p.m.

Bethany Whitaker
Council Secretary