

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

March 25, 2019

A meeting of the Public Safety Committee was held this date beginning at 4:03 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 (by phone), Councilmember Wagner (by phone), Councilmember Lewis, and Mayor Tecklenburg **Staff:** Chief Reynolds, Lieutenant Heath King, Janie Borden, Steve Ruemelin, and Bethany Whitaker, Council Secretary **Also:** Steve Chiles

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

Approval of Minutes

On the motion of Mayor Tecklenburg, seconded by Councilmember Lewis, the Committee voted to approve the minutes of the February 25, 2019 meeting. Councilmember Seekings abstained.

Report in accordance with the Civil Sidewalks Ordinance

Chief Reynolds stated he was going to defer to Lieutenant King who had done a large amount of work on this with his team. They had gotten positive feedback on this ordinance and positive feedback on expanding it slightly as described.

Lieutenant King stated that the Civil Sidewalk ordinance had been passed last April and they began enforcing it on May 18th with a 38 day education period. During that period, if an officer observed someone in violation, they were issued a warning, explained the ordinance, and it was put in the computer. On May 18th, they began active enforcement of the ordinance and if someone was observed in violation at that point, they received the first 'real' warning, which went into the system and any violations after that, a person could be issued a citation. Throughout all of the education period, and enforcement period, officers gave resource sheets that directed individuals to educational, legal, and shelter services. That was included in the computer entry. Sometimes, they came across college kids sitting and playing music, and they were all also warned. Throughout the last year, they issued a total of 12 citations to seven individuals, so a few people were cited multiple times. No one, at any time, was placed under custodial arrest. They all received the citation and were able to walk away. The ordinance, in

their opinion, was effective. That area of King Street was used for commerce, shopping, and there were a lot of people at one time on very narrow sidewalks. So, to have people lay or sit down on the sidewalk was a public safety issue with pushing people into the roadway and causing trip hazards. It was effective on King Street, but it had caused some issues on the side streets. The side streets that led into King Street were heavily used by college students and a lot of the side streets had businesses and hotels where people were constantly coming and going and the sidewalks were still very narrow. So, they felt like it would be effective to expand to the side streets.

Chief Reynolds stated that it was important that they showed a balanced approach. They were doing everything possible to help people affected by this. Lieutenant King had partnered with One80 Place and 529 Meeting. Today, they coordinated a meeting with all of the judges on this topic to brainstorm ideas and find a good balance to get the best outcome, so that it wasn't just a police-centric approach. In that meeting, some of the judges said they noticed positive improvements and there was good feedback from them. They wanted to share solutions and approaches to get the best outcome.

Lieutenant King said that when they encountered these individuals they had been able to refer some of them to 529 and One80. They had given a handful of people rides to different places and tried to reconnect them with extended family. While enforcement didn't always mean a citation, it always meant, for them, that there be some type of outreach whether it was through issuing a resource sheet or trying to connect them with the homeless coordinator. There was always some type of positive connection made.

Councilmember Seekings thanked the Chief and Lieutenant King for the outreach they had done throughout the community with this. It was important and they had to make the City more livable and reach out and help people in need. Councilmember Wagner thanked them, as well. Councilmember Lewis said he walked King Street between Sumter and Calhoun a lot and he had seen some improvements. It would help to extend it to the side streets. The biggest problem was probably Radcliffe Street. This would be a good thing. Mayor Tecklenburg said that he also wanted to thank the people at 529 Meeting Street. They called it the Navigation Center and they were working hard to provide any kind of assistance to those in need. They now had housing counseling, general medical counseling, mental health counseling, and job placement counseling, as well as referrals for addiction and substance abuse. They had put a great team together to help people in need. He was proud of that and it was amazing work they were doing.

An ordinance to amend the Code of the City of Charleston, South Carolina, Chapter 28, Section 45 to include streets crossing King Street for one block in either direction of King Street between and

including Line and Broad Streets and streets crossing North and South Market Streets for one block in either direction of North and South Market Streets between King Street and East Bay Streets.

Lieutenant King stated since the initial ordinance, a lot of people had gravitated out, but the sidewalks were just as narrow in some of these places. The traffic was almost just as heavy. That area was a business district for commerce and pedestrian traffic, and there was a need to not have impediments. If the ordinance passed, they would do another 30-day education period, just as they did last year, to make sure they were educating people. They wanted voluntary compliance and the last thing they wanted to do was write a citation.

Chairman Shahid said he knew they had a concerned citizen and that he had said this was a good thing and he appreciated what they had done with this. Mr. Chiles said that wasn't necessarily true. He didn't think they had done enough. He asked what the protocol was with getting someone to the facilities if they didn't want to go. Mayor Tecklenburg said they couldn't force someone to do something. Mr. Chiles said that this wasn't addressing the problem. Individuals were still there and became confrontational and vulgar. He experienced it every day. Chairman Shahid said this would hopefully give the Police Department a little more authority to address those things. People were entitled to be on the street, they just couldn't block passageway on the sidewalk. Mr. Chiles asked if there was any ordinance about loud vulgarity and threatening gestures. He had people threaten his life. Mr. Ruemelin stated that they would have to witness that. He could report it. Lieutenant King said they could talk after the meeting. Mr. Chiles said he appreciated the Police Department. He knew this was a sensitive subject, but it needed to be dealt with in a different manner. He was just giving them a different viewpoint. Chairman Shahid said they were glad to hear from him. It was important to hear from the citizens and if something was or wasn't working, they needed to hear it to get better.

On the motion of Mayor Tecklenburg, seconded by Councilmember Lewis, the Committee voted unanimously to approve the above ordinance.

Having no further business, the Committee adjourned at 4:20 p.m.

Bethany Whitaker
Council Secretary