

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

April 26, 2021

A meeting of the Public Safety Committee was held this date beginning at 1:33 pm, by video conference.

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

PRESENT

Committee Members: Councilmember Shahid (Chair), Councilmember Seekings (Vice Chair), Councilmember Shealy, Councilmember Mitchell, and Mayor Tecklenburg

City Staff: Steve Ruemelin, Chris Jardin, Geona Shaw Johnson, Councilwoman Delcioppo, Councilwoman Jackson, Chief Reynolds, Chief Curia, Andrew Dickson, Rick Jerue, Lt. Byrne, Shylah Murray, Jason Bruder, Susan Herdina, Jennifer Cook, and Andrea Derungs.

1. Invocation

The meeting was opened by an invocation led by Councilmember Shealy.

2. Approval of Minutes

On a motion of Councilmember Seekings, seconded by Councilmember Shealy, the Committee voted unanimously to approve minutes from the March 9, 2021 meeting.

3. Report on Civil Sidewalks Ordinance

Steve Ruemelin said Council passed the Civil Sidewalks Ordinance in April 2018. Section G provided that the Police Department give a written report to the Mayor and Councilmembers that evaluated the effectiveness of the ordinance after one year and every two years after that. The ordinance made it unlawful to sit or lie down upon a public sidewalk on King Street between Line Street and Broad Street and on North and South Market Street between King Street and East Bay. A person must be warned before they were cited, and the City was to maintain an outreach plan summarizing the City's efforts to assist those who were chronically found sitting or lying on the sidewalk. The first offense was a \$25 fine, \$50 for the second, and a third or subsequent offense could be punished with up to 30 days in jail and/or a \$500 fine. The ordinance was amended in February 2020 to include a provision which provided that a person convicted of a third or subsequent violation would be prohibited from returning to the streets or sidewalks delineated by the ordinance for a period of 60 days. In 2018, there were a total of 12 tickets written to 7 different individuals. In 2019, 18 tickets were written to 15 different individuals. In 2020, 10 tickets were written to 9 different individuals. There was some recidivism, but overall, they didn't write a lot of tickets related to the ordinance. He said Lt. Byrne had pointed out three things in regard to the enforcement of the ordinance. First, there was somewhat of a loophole in that people would sit on a windowsill or on the curb, but their feet would still be on the sidewalk, and when an officer approached them and said that they couldn't be sitting on the sidewalk, the individual would get literal with the definition. Second, it was somewhat difficult to keep track of individuals who had received warnings, as opposed to those who may be on their second or third offense. Finally, the ordinance should be amended to say only Market Street, not North and South Market.

Chris Jardin said that in response to an increase of problems associated with homelessness along the King Street corridor, CPD had initiated a full-time outreach coordinator. A lot of folks in the community who were homeless faced a lot of barriers to improving their situation and finding housing, and a ticket or arrest on their record contributed to the barriers that prevented them from improving their situation. The out-reach program was aimed at addressing the root problem of why people ended up on the King St. corridor. Within the last six months, the coordinator had engaged with 121 individuals just in the King and Market Street corridors. She had been able to build relationships over time with the individuals and create connectivity to some of the local resources that existed, like the Navigation Center and One80 Place. By bringing services to folks, you could eliminate a lot of the barriers that prevented them from seeking those resources. He said they needed to strike a balance between ordinances and putting in the work and resources to build connections and get to the root of the situation. Councilmember Shahid asked if all the cases resulting from citations were being referred to the Homeless Court. Mr. Ruemelin said that people were asked on their first appearance in Court if they were interested, and if they were, they were referred to the Homeless Court. Mayor Tecklenburg asked if they knew how many people showed up to Court after they were ticketed. Mr. Ruemelin said that in 2018, 3 of the 12 showed up. In 2019, 4-8 showed up. In 2020, there were 10 tickets issued and 2-6 showed up. Mayor Tecklenburg said that by removing the warning requirement, it would make it easier for the Police to track who had been cited. Lt. Byrne said the issue with the warning was more of an internal issue with the Police Department and that even if the Mayor's proposal to remove the warning moved forward, it would not mean that they would begin citing and arresting people immediately. They frequently gave warnings and advised people instead of just ticketing them. Councilmember Seekings asked if there was a way for them to tell, as they interacted with people along the corridor, how many of them were homeless and how many had chosen to make the street one of the stops along their way in any given day. Chris said he didn't have that data in front of him, but that Talia kept records of every individual she interacted with. Councilmember Mitchell said he was glad to hear that even if they removed the warning requirement that officers would still speak with individuals. Education was always the key. Councilmember Shahid said he was noticing individuals sleeping on the perimeter of the corridors and asked what the approach to that should be. Mr. Jardin said they were an under-sheltered community and there were no shelters taking admission at this time. He emphasized the need of using actual social workers, not just Police, to connect these people with the resources they needed. He said this ordinance addressed a short-term problem and that they needed to focus on a long-term solution. He said a lot of people had relocated from downtown to West Ashley or up to North Charleston.

On a motion of Mayor Tecklenburg, seconded by Councilmember Mitchell, the Committee voted unanimously to ask staff to prepare amendments to close the loophole about body parts extending onto the sidewalk, to remove the requirement of giving a warning, to clarify the Market Street designation, and to issue a restraining order after the third violation.

- 4. Agreement between CPD and Dignity Best Practices in support of the development of a proposal to enhance CPD's behavioral health crisis response practices and in furtherance of the overall goal of the 2020 Justice Assistance Grant which aims to improve CPD's response to individuals experiencing mental illness, substance use disorder, and/or homelessness through a calls for service analysis. (Information Only)**

Steve Ruemelin said this would be a contract to use \$4,500 in grant money to hire Dignity Best Practices to evaluate CPD's current response to people with mental health, substance abuse, and homelessness issues. They had proposed a five-part process to come up with a hypothesis; assess the current state of affairs; do some qualitative research and speak with patrol officers, social workers, the community engagement team, and mental health experts; look at what other cities were doing and how that might be useful; and then present findings to command staff. Mayor Tecklenburg asked if they would make sure that the company connected with Chris and Talia and the Navigation Center and One80 Place. Councilwoman Delcioppo said it made her happy that they were not jumping straight to criminalization and were taking steps to help people address the root problem.

5. Submission of a letter of support for FAVOR Lowcountry's funding proposal to DAODAS to support the Certified Peer Support Specialist Lowcountry Staffing Initiative to increase access to Peer Support services in the Lowcountry. This supports the goals of the Charleston County Addiction Crisis Task Force in equipping law enforcement agencies with the expertise of SUD support services. (Information Only)

Steve Ruemelin said the peer support specialist's job would be to identify people that were suffering from drug addiction or may have overdosed. Whenever Police responded to a call relating to this, the PSS would follow up with the individual and their family to try and get them the treatment they need. They anticipated CPD's role as assigning officers to work with the PSS, identifying victims of overdose, escorting the PSS when attempting to locate the victim, if needed, keeping statistics, tracking overdose cases, identifying hot spot areas, conducting drug take back events and Narcan distribution, and continuing their work on the task force. Councilmember Shahid asked if this was part of Judge Hendrick's program with the opioid crisis. Chief Reynolds said it would complement those efforts. He said they needed to shine a light on this significant problem and that all the agencies in the Lowcountry were working together.

6. Review of Emergency Ordinance 2021-055. Action may or may not be taken.

Chief Reynolds said they had agreed to have this in place for 30 days and to be very judicious and collaborative in exercising it, if needed. He thought it was prudent to keep it in place for the remainder of the 30 days. He said its use was focused on the verdict of the George Floyd trial, but there were a lot of other things going on in the Country that were painful and that people were demanding justice for. Mayor Tecklenburg said it ran out in about two weeks' time.

7. Executive Session pursuant to Section 30-4-70(a)(3) of the South Carolina Code for discussion regarding the development of security personnel or devices.

On a motion of Councilmember Shealy, seconded by Mayor Tecklenburg, the Committee voted unanimously to enter into Executive Session at 2:18 p.m.

On a motion of Councilmember Mitchell, seconded by Councilmember Shealy, the Committee voted unanimously to come out of Executive Session at 3:31 p.m.

Having no further business, the Committee adjourned at 3:32 pm.

Andrea Derungs
Clerk of Council's Office