



City of Fort Bragg

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Meeting Minutes Public Safety Committee

Wednesday, May 11, 2016

3:00 PM

Police Department Conference Room
250 Cypress Street

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

Committee Member Peters called the meeting to order at 3:00p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: 8 - Scott Deitz, Lindy Peters, Linda Ruffing, Fabian Lizarraga, Steve Orsi, Tom Varga, Debbie Desmond and Lesley Bryant

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approve Minutes of the April 13, 2016 Meeting

A motion was made by Committee Member Deitz, seconded by Committee Member Peters, that the Committee Minutes be approved. The motion was carried by unanimous vote.

PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None Received

CONDUCT OF BUSINESS

1. Discuss Pedestrian Safety Concerns at the Intersection of Main and Pine Streets
 - Public Works Director, Tom Varga, discussed the recent accident at the intersection of Pine and Main Streets involving a North Coast Brewery employee. As Main Street is also State Highway 1, Caltrans also had input into the matter.
 - Varga introduced David Morgan, the Chief of Traffic Safety for CalTrans for the Fort Bragg district. Morgan stated there are eight traffic signals in the Fort Bragg. Varga requested CalTrans replace the signal heads with "countdown timers" for all eight signals. This would give pedestrians a visual count down while they are crossing the street so they will know how long they have before the light turns green for traffic. Morgan has initiated a project to install the countdown timers, which should take place in the fall. The approximate cost of the project is \$210,000.
 - Morgan is also planning on coordinating the three light signals at Laurel Street, Redwood Avenue and Oak Street this summer, which should allow greater gaps in the traffic towards Pine Street. Once this has been accomplished, he will report back to Varga.
 - Committee Member Dietz stated the danger at the Pine Street intersection is increased for traffic heading southbound, as the Brewery building casts a shadow over the intersection, especially in the afternoon, obscuring the crosswalk. The question was raised as to whether the intersection is illuminated, and it was determined it is.

- Mark Ruedrich, President of the North Coast Brewery, is concerned for the safety of his employees and visitors who may not be familiar with the intersection. In the past twenty years there have been countless near misses. There are no signals on Main Street from Laurel to Elm Street. Traffic heading north and south seem to be reluctant to stop at the crosswalks for waiting pedestrians.
- Committee Member Peters stated there are no stop signs on East Pine Street from Harold Street until Franklin Street. Since the speedbumps were placed on East Fir Street there is more traffic on East Pine Street. Peters would prefer a warning system similar to the system in Willits in the area of McDonalds.
- Dietz thanked Morgan for the upcoming plans, but asked if there were any temporary fixes that could be implemented. The Brewery staff members are being told to use the crosswalk at Laurel Street. Temporary signs seem to get run over and need to be replaced frequently. Changing the layout of the crosswalk would give drivers visual clues, or having no lines at all might make the pedestrians more aware or careful.
- A lighted cross walk was suggested. Morgan stated an illuminated crosswalk would cost in the area of \$200,000 to \$250,000 and takes between one to two years to complete. To install the same warning system as Willits would involve removing one of the two left turn lanes on Main Street. The issue of the railroad crossing a half a block north of the intersection would impact any planned light at Pine Street.
- There were in ground crosswalk lights across Main Street at Laurel Street prior to the traffic signal being installed, but it created as many problems as it solved. The lights would activate quickly, causing vehicles to slam on their brakes, often when no one was even crossing the street. The lighted crosswalk did not work well in Willits either.
- City Manager Linda Ruffing stated the cost for light at Laurel Street was paid for by the City and a Hazard Elimination Safety Program grant. Varga stated this grant has been incorporated into the Alternative Transportation program. If a light were to be installed at Pine Street, the cost would be split 50/50 with CalTrans.
- The pedestrian countdown timers will be placed at all eight traffic signal intersections in the City. Pedestrians will have a better understanding of the amount of time left to cross the street safely. Due to the road being much wider at Main and Cypress Streets, the timer will be longer to allow safe crossing of the street.

Once the three traffic signals at Laurel Street, Redwood Avenue and Oak Street are better coordinated, it should create larger gaps in traffic at the Pine and Main Street intersection, allowing pedestrians to cross safely.

2. Discuss Pedestrian Safety Concerns at the Intersection of Elm and Stewart Streets

- Varga stated there are reports of safety issues with pedestrians crossing both Elm and Stewart streets at the intersection. There are currently stop signs on the Stewart Street sides of the intersection. There was a suggestion to possibly convert the intersection to a full four way stop. There are unintended consequences of having a four way stop; pedestrians are not as aware of possible safety issues, and some drivers do not stop, which can add a new element of risk. The main problem seems to be with the sight lines for those heading southbound on Stewart Street, due to the shrubbery and bushes at Holmes Lumber. There has been no formal analysis of the area, but the first fix would be to improve the sight lines. If that does not improve the problems with the intersection, then the issue can be revisited.
- Dietz agreed that the bushes need to be trimmed back and asked if the red zone could be increased to allow more visibility. Varga stated that he would be speaking to the Chief of

Police about that very issue and agreed it would increase the safety of the intersection. In the meantime, this intersection will continue to be monitored.

3. Discuss Raccoon Issue of Harbor Lite Lodge Trail

Public comment on this issue was received from: Joyce Baker, Chris Brennan, Carla Dimondstein, Frankie Kangas, Jason Hurst, Joan Hansen, Bernie Norvell, Laura Schroder, Leni Nowak, Darrel Davenport, Connie Keith, Anita Baez, Joan Cottrell, Fedora Holmes, Natalie Henderson, Tom Lane, Susan Johansen, Carrie Engle and Terry Vaughn.

- Before the discussion began, Peters announced that there would first be a statement made by City Manager Ruffing, followed by a presentation from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Specialist, Chris Brennan, and Joyce Baker, who has worked with animal groups for the last thirty years. After those presentations there would be an opportunity for public discussion. Peters stated that due to large number of citizens that would like to speak, the public comments would be limited to three minutes. He also asked that everyone who was speaking be polite and allow people to speak their minds. He expected everyone to be respectful and well-mannered, as this was an important topic.
- Ruffing stated she first wanted to provide assurances; The City is not attempting to displace or starve the cat colony in the harbor. The City supports the humane treatment of animals and is not anti-cat. This is a complicated community issue. Peters had received some comments from a citizen who had encountered aggressive raccoons on the trail after dinner at the Wharf one evening and asked to have the issue added to the agenda. At the same time, the Community Development Department (CDD) was working with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the USDA Wildlife Specialist after receiving a complaint of wildlife issues in the harbor.
- The USDA were concerned the cat feeding stations were attracting raccoons, skunks and rats. The CDD mailed a letter to the property owner, Harbor Light Lodge, and a copy went via email to the CCP. The letter mentioned several violations of the Municipal Code and requested that the issue be resolved. Carla Dimondstein stated the CCP did not receive this email.
- The owners of the Harbor Light responded to their notification, stating that the property belonged to the City. After reviewing the City layout, it was determined the land that the trail is on does belong to the City and Public Works staff were asked to remove the feeding stations on Monday, May 9th. The feeding stations are still at the City Corp Yard. They have not been destroyed and can be picked up by anyone who wants them back.
- On Tuesday, May 10th the City received numerous calls and e-mails regarding the removal of the cat condos. Social media exploded with comments and concerns regarding the harbor cats. Staff members were advising citizens to attend the Public Safety Committee meeting to discuss the situation and express their concerns.
- Ruffing asked people not to blame the City employees, as they were only following the request of their supervisor, and just doing their job. City Council Members have not been involved in this issue either. The Harbor Lite trail and the base of the slope where it meets the harbor is in the City limits. The Harbor is not in the City's jurisdiction. Ruffing stated the City has learned a lot from the cat foundations and the USDA representative. The City wants to share information, have a productive conversation and find solutions that will be acceptable to everyone.
- Joyce Baker opened her presentation by stating there have been animal groups in the harbor for over thirty years. There is also a history of feeding stations. Prior to approximately ten years ago, there was a huge public outcry over the huge feline population of feral and abandoned cats in the harbor. The cats took care of the huge rat

population that was initially the issue, but then the cats became a nuisance. Concerned citizens and tourists wanted something to be done.

- The trap and remove did not really work to reduce the population due to litters of kittens being born there. The Alley Cat Allies program of Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) is a very effective and efficient method of reducing numbers, when the program is followed to the letter. The cats are humanely trapped, taken for neuter or spay procedure, given a rabies shot, have an ear clipped and then returned to an area with established feeding stations at businesses and private residences. The feeding was done at pre-designated stations and during the daytime only. Food would be removed at night.
- This practice began to fail due to the feeding stations being in a public location and indiscriminate feeding taking place. Well intentioned citizens and tourists were putting food out everywhere at night, which only attracted wildlife. The majority of the food went to the wildlife at that point. Businesses and restaurants don't secure their dumpsters properly, which also increases access to food for wildlife. Homeless people bring in food to their encampments, and then leave garbage and waste, which is another draw for wildlife.
- The community needs to act together to address all the issues regarding the raccoon problem. Raccoons are easily adaptable and have become less fearful of humans by associating people with food. Due to the indiscriminate feeding they have become less nocturnal and can be seen out in daylight. Until the indiscriminate feeding stops, there will be raccoons and skunks.
- The current cat program needs to be allowed to continue, with feeding stations or the cats will again become a nuisance. The TNR plan needs to be kept in place to keep the cat population under control. There needs to be a plan to deter the raccoons, and slowly return them to being wild nocturnal animals. It may be that there needs to be a change in the designated feeding station locations. If there is a feeding ban, the cats will not go away. The cats will suffer and become a nuisance looking for food in other locations. Once the fishing industry diminished, the cats were left looking for another source of food. If kittens can be caught at a fairly young age they can be tamed and become good cats.
- Chris Brennan, USDA Wildlife Specialist, stated he has received many calls regarding nuisance animals. The southwest part of the City has been subject to property damage. Brennan can offer "technical assistance" which is non-lethal or "direct control" which involves catching the animals and then euthanizing them. He does not catch feral cats, and does not use bait that would entice cats.
- Brennan only responds if he receives a request for help. He has the requestor sign a contract and will work on their property only. Approximately 30 wild animals have been euthanized in the past few months. Brennan believes that feeding stations are a disaster for all the parties and animals involved.
- Brennan's primary concern is for human health and safety. Raccoon scat contains a parasite, which causes Raccoon Roundworm in the brain if it gets into the human blood supply. Lepto caused by raccoon urine, causes kidney and liver failure. Rabies carriers are raccoons, skunks, possums and gray foxes and all of those animals are in the harbor area.
- Brennan's number two concern is property damage. This is the most common call he receives. His number three concern is cat colonies creating a disaster for local wildlife, songbirds, endangered species ground nests and reptiles.
- Cat feeding stations become feeding stations for the alpha predator, which in this case is the mountain lion. One was sighted on Saturday, May 7th approximately one hundred and fifty yards from a feeding station. There was also a bear coming into town for approximately two months. Brennan prefers a non-lethal solution, but feels all feeding stations should be eliminated or the problems will not end. He believes as long as there is feeding, there will be issues in the harbor with wildlife.

- Carla Dimondstein is a member of the Eileen Hawthorn Fund Board. The Eileen Hawthorn program is in its 31st year. It provides the community with free and low cost spay, neuter and vaccinations for cats. Carla explained that the current feeding program only allows for feeding once a day and only in the afternoon. The number of feeding stations has been reduced. After visiting the area every day for the last three weeks, there have only been three raccoons in the area; one adolescent and two babies. The babies were there because their mother had been killed. Cats are not wildlife and Carla believes the plan for trap, neuter and return should continue. Cats should be adopted out if they are young enough (feral), or they are domestic cats that have been abandoned.
- It was mentioned that the reason this issue “blew up” was due to the lack of due process. The letter from the City stated that there would be fourteen days allowed to stop feeding the cats and to abate the problem. It also stated there would be a fifteen day window in which to appeal. The letter was sent out on May 3rd, the item was placed on the agenda on May 6th and on May 9th the cat condos/shelters were removed.
- The cats in the harbor are not wildlife. The harbor has a well-managed cat colony that has been managed for over 10 years, providing shelter, food and water. Removing the feeding stations does starve the cats. With the hasty removal of the stations, there was no due process and no chance to provide an alternative. The three main people involved with the cat care were working on formulating a plan, but they were not given the time they were promised or needed.
- As far as the disease issue is concerned, the harbor is a wildlife area and raccoons are everywhere.
- Apologies were made regarding the explosion of social media and untruths being spread.
- Ruffing agreed that the letter that went to the CCP should have been more of a notification, as it was the property owner who had the responsibility to remove the condos.
- Dietz asked about the possible health effects in regards to the rat population if the cats were to be removed from the harbor. Brennan stated there could be an increase of the vermin population, but he is only working on the areas he is contracted for.
- Peters stated he remembers seeing over 100 cats approximately 30 years ago between Carine’s and Anchor 2. It was determined that over the course of the last couple of years, the colony has moved to its current location. It was stated that feeding does not take place at the Kitty condos, as they are solely for housing, shelter and safety.
- Dietz asked how the condos could legally be placed on City property. Ruffing stated an encroachment permit would be needed, which the City would not be inclined to grant. Currently the Fort Bragg Municipal Code allows no more than five animals to be on any one parcel of property within the City limits. Part of the issue with the removal of the condos was the nuisance factor. There is currently no permit process to have the condos. The City is only concerned with the area that falls under the liability of the City, which is the small area where the condos were. The rest of the harbor falls under the County’s jurisdiction.
- It was suggested that the way to maintain the colony is to trap them, then feed them, not the other way around. There are currently approximately forty five cats in the harbor area. The structures were to allow the cats to get out of the weather, sleep and have protection from wildlife.
- Jason Hurst of the Harbor Lite Lodge stated that social media had blamed the Lodge for the complaint which led to the condos being removed. He mentioned that he believed feeding was taking place at the location of the condos. He agreed that there is no easy solution to the situation.
- Dietz commented that placing the feeding stations at businesses in the harbor sounded like a good idea, and would give greater control over the feeding stations and time of day the cats would be fed. Peters agreed, as then the cats would also not be being fed on City

property.

- A citizen commented that the City had a knee jerk reaction to the complaint they received. She asked if there might be a way to make the dumpsters raccoon proof as part of the solution to wildlife in the harbor.
- Brennan stated there is a raccoon proof feeder that has been used in other areas, although it is not 100% raccoon proof. The base of the feeder is small and made of a pipe of a similar material to PVC. It has small ledges requiring a cat to jump from ledge to ledge to get to the food. Raccoons can't jump like cats can so it limits their access to the food. The feeder needs to have a good rim to not allow feed to fall out, and it needs to be clear of trees. A commercial fisherman thought that the feeders might be part of a reasonable solution and asked if the City might be able to help purchase raccoon proof feeders. Peters stated the City would not be able to fund the feeders, but perhaps a fund-raiser could raise the money that would be needed. He agreed it would be more feasible for the businesses in the harbor district if the feeders could be put on their property.
- A citizen asked about the formal complaints the City had received from the USDA. They wanted to know what the complaints were and why it is the City's responsibility to respond. The feeding stations were in the City limits, so it becomes a code enforcement issue for the City and is not something that can be ignored. It is unfortunate how the situation transpired, but it is good to have everyone together to have this conversation.
- Peters stated that having this issue brought to the Committee is the first step in the process. From here, it could be sent to the full City Council for discussion and a recommendation for any action that might need to be taken.
- The citizen who was confronted on the trail about an hour before dusk stated it was a skunk and not a raccoon that confronted his wife. At the same time, there were two raccoons fighting with a cat at the bottom of the trail. Raccoons are usually seen between 5pm and dusk and there are usually three to five of them at a time. He does not want to use the trail now. He felt the outcry aimed at the Harbor Light Lodge was not fair and an apology should be given to the Hurst family.
- Another citizen lives in the area of Stewart Street and there are raccoons in her neighborhood as well as in the area of Glass Beach. Because of Fort Bragg's rural location, they are everywhere in the City, not just in the harbor area.
- People have been told that they will be cited by Fish and Wildlife if the feeding of cats continues, but the cats are continuing to be fed. Peters again stated that the City can only deal with what happens on City property.
- A well-managed colony uses the TNR program and feed during the day only - all food is collected prior to attracting other animals in the evening. It was suggested that perhaps the harbor should have signage advising the public and tourists that the cats are part of a well-managed colony and to not to feed the cats in the evening.
- A harbor resident stated the cats eat once a day in the early afternoon. They also felt that the biggest problem in the harbor was the transient population using the area as a public bathroom, which may be a bigger health concern than the raccoons. One citizen is afraid to go down the trail, not because of the wildlife, but because of the homeless population. The beach is in the City's jurisdiction, and there is the draw for that too.
- Another citizen stated he had lost his cat to a mountain lion on Chestnut Street. He agreed that it would be helpful to have the private property owners and businesses take responsibility for the feeding stations and the kitty condos could be placed there. With the development of the new coastal trail, some wildlife may be displaced.
- Volunteers and individuals have spent their own money to get the cats spayed/neutered. The CCP has taken over the operation over the past few years and has a plan to present to the Harbor District, City Council and the County. They are looking at getting signs made up

with contact phone numbers and email addresses on them for easier contact.

- Ruffing stated she would like to see a list of local animal groups with contact information as far as encouraging a community dialogue.
- At 5:10p.m., Chief Orsi left the meeting.
- It comes down to a public safety issue with raccoons, but cats are part of the problem. There will always be cats in the harbor. Peters hopes the TNR continues within the community, but the City had to do something when they realized the cat condos were on their property. Peters stated that he has trapped five feral cats himself in the past, and one of them was his favorite cat. He loves cats, and has always had a pet cat.
- Peters is willing to sit on a committee to discuss the issue further and hopefully come up with some humane solutions. He is willing to work with other groups in the community to come up with a solution that everyone can live with. He has heard the concerns of the community and feels there is no need to take the issue to the full Council at this time.
- It was suggested that feeding continue during the day only, and preferably not on City property. The public safety, and therefore liability, would fall on the City if it was on their property and they prefer to be out of the equation. Businesses in the harbor should be willing to help groups by allowing their property to be used for feeding and condos.
- Deitz agreed that the harbor district and businesses should be involved and the structures cannot be put back on City property. The Police Department will not be making it a high priority to enforce the non-feeding of cats. Deitz agreed that signs for the public would be a wonderful idea. He appreciated everyone being so heartfelt about caring for the harbor cats. He suggested a list of names and e-mail addresses of key people so a future meeting could be scheduled.
- Ruffing stated that this was a great discussion that identified several problems. She agreed that it is not a good idea to have the cat condos on City property. There is a need for coastal development permits and so much more if that were to happen.
- A break was taken at 5:20p.m. to allow the list to be made of people wanting to be involved in any future meetings. The meeting was adjourned immediately afterward.

Peters stated after the new community group meets, their suggestions could be presented to the Committee. The City would be willing to write letters of support to the County. Ruffing encouraged everyone to reach out to business owners and private property owners, but strongly encouraged no feeding at night by anyone. She also suggested that Sheriff Allman and Animal Control be included in the conversation and solutions.

4. Receive Oral Update from Staff on Departmental Activities

This item was not discussed.

MATTERS FROM COMMITTEE / STAFF

None received.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 5:20p.m. by Committee Member Peters.