



City of Fort Bragg

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Meeting Minutes Public Safety Committee

Wednesday, February 11, 2015

3:00 PM

Police Department Conference Room
250 Cypress Street

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

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

ROLL CALL

Present: 5 - Scott Deitz, Lindy Peters, Stephen Willis, Steve Orsi and Debbie Desmond

Absent: 1 - Linda Ruffing

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approve Minutes from November 12, 2014 Public Safety Committee Meeting

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

MATTERS FROM COMMITTEE / STAFF

- Committee Member Deitz announced that he was relinquishing the seat of Chairman of the Public Safety Committee to Committee Member Peters.
- Committee Member Peters requested that Fire Chief Orsi and Police Lieutenant Gilchrist give a brief oral report on the effects of the recent storm and power outage on their departments.
 - ~ Chief Orsi stated that the Fire Department started handling calls related to the storm on Friday mid-morning with trees going down. From Friday to early Monday morning the department handled approximately fifty calls, which was a high number considering the weather was nice during the day, so the majority of the calls were coming in at night when the storm was hitting. On Sunday night, heavy winds hit and the paging system went down. Eighteen volunteers were manning the station and responding to calls coming in by phone. All downtown engines were going out on calls, plus the duty officer truck and utility truck. The majority of the calls being received were for downed lines. As fireman, there isn't a lot they can do in that situation, other than put out cones and make sure no one is going to get hurt by the downed lines. There were two structure fires, both of which were contained to just one room and no one was hurt. There were also a few medical aid calls. Monday there were twelve calls, which is still high volume for a volunteer department that gets about five hundred calls a year. Chief Orsi gave his guys a lot of credit for the great response. Peters asked why the paging system went down. Chief Orsi noted that the County microwave system was having problems that affected agencies all over. The County person in charge of the radios was working very hard the entire time to keep everyone's equipment operational. The pagers were only down from Sunday night until about 4:00 a.m. Monday. Cell phones were operational, which helped a great deal, as far as communication during

the storm. Chief Orsi also mentioned that the new fire truck is now in service.

~ Lieutenant Gilchrist stated that the Police Department had some difficulties. When the power went out the department lost their radios because the County generator didn't come on like it was supposed to and the P.D. microwave runs off of the County generator. Once that was remedied the radios were still not working because the P.D. microwave was somehow fried in the process. Fisher Wireless came over and had it repaired by morning. Saturday night the department lost the station generator. The damage was irreparable and it will need to be replaced. The City has already started the process of locating and purchasing a new generator. The City electrician came in with a generator and worked for two days to keep the basic systems running at the P.D.. There was no flooding and no roads were blocked, however some minor sign damage was reported. Officers responded to many alarm calls as alarms were going off due to the power fluctuations. Most citizens heeded the stop lights that weren't working on Main Street, although a few were cited for driving through without stopping, nearly causing collisions. All things considered, it went fairly well.

PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None Received

CONDUCT OF BUSINESS

1. Receive Oral Update Regarding Homeless Issues and Discuss City and Agency Responses and Programs

Public comment on this item was received from: Kim Evans, Wendy Wall, Barbara Fox, Vicky Miller, Lynelle Johnson, Anna Munoz, Charles Peavey, Susan Holli, Malcom Macdonald and Judy Valadao.

The following was noted during discussion of this item:

- **Jennifer Owen, the Housing & Economic Development Coordinator for the City of Fort Bragg, presented a written report summarizing City and agency responses and programs related to homelessness issues in the City of Fort Bragg.**
- Owen stated that in researching how the City has addressed homeless issues she began by reviewing past Public Safety Committee meeting minutes. She noted that there has been a big focus on these issues since late 2010. Many recommendations have been made by the Committee and implemented by the City, which are noted in her written report. Most of what the City is doing now seems to have come from the 2011 responses to the concerns discussed by the Public Safety Committee.
- One of the recommendations that came out of the Public Safety Committee was that there should be a committee formed of agencies and non-profit service providers for the homeless to focus on what actions could be taken. An agency response to issues that come from the public was required, since the agencies are the ones who can take action, acquire the funding sources and implement the change. The City was the instigator in starting such a committee in May 2011, which was the Interagency Coastal Homelessness Action Group (ICHAG). The group evolved to include mental health issues in the last year, and is now Coastal Action Group for Homelessness and Mental Health Issues (CAG). The focus is to identify our needs on the coast and to make sure we get our fair share of county wide funding as that has been an ongoing issue.
- Another group that the City is involved with is the Mendocino County Homeless Services Continuum of Care (MCHSCoC). This is the group that makes our County eligible for HUD funding. The City is an Advisory Member of this group.

- Owen reviewed the list in her written report of the City's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) award activities related to homelessness issues.
- **Anna Shaw, the Executive Director of the Mendocino Coast Hospitality Center, presented a written report summarizing the Mendocino Coast Hospitality Center services and their impact on homelessness.**
- Transitional housing is a temporary situation for the homeless who are moving from homelessness to independent living but it is not their permanent home. Per Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guidelines, to be eligible for transitional housing the person has to be homeless, must have a documented disability or a child under 18, be clean & sober and actively working on goals they have set with their case manager, including permanent housing. From day one, they are working on obtaining permanent housing. Many of these people are employed and families with children. People in transitional housing pay approximately 30% of their income for the housing. People on general assistance pay \$89.10 per month and those who have social security benefits pay around \$270 per month. Ten percent of their rent is saved in a separate account and given back to them when they leave the program, which is a way for them to save for a deposit on permanent housing or to buy furniture or other items they might need.
- Finding permanent housing is a daily struggle, but the Hospitality Center staff is very creative and knowledgeable and possess many techniques needed. It sometimes takes two years for housing to become available. HUD requires the staff to help people increase their incomes by helping them get jobs and acquire all benefits that they are entitled to.
- Pets are sometimes allowed in transitional housing. The person fills out a request for reasonable accommodation for service related animals. The animal needs to be spayed/neutered and be up to date on vaccinations, which the Center can help them achieve. Animals are accepted in compliance with Fair Housing Laws.
- There was a concern expressed about the transitional housing that is proposed for the Old Coast Hotel that transients would be attracted to the location and hang out there.
- Many people who go into transitional housing have had substance abuse problems. Everyone has to test clean and sober for thirty days before they are admitted and after that random testing is done. The Center works with local doctors on pain management contracts for the clients who need prescription medication. If someone's behavior is disruptive they are given a thirty day notice that they will need to leave, which they live out at Hospitality House.
- The people who live in transitional housing are people who work at Safeway, people with small children and elderly women, who are not the kind of people who attract transients. Prisoners who have been released and are transitioning into the community are not eligible for transitional housing. Visitors are not allowed in transitional housing without permission. The offices and day to day client services will close every day at 5:00 p.m.
- Many people are not clear on the fundamental difference between a Homeless Shelter such as Hospitality House that has minimal conditions in order to check in on any day and the longer term independent living that occurs at places like the Harrison Street transitional housing facility.
- The coast used to have 33 beds of transitional housing but they were fairly run down, they were spread all over town and the conditions were not good. People living in bad accommodations are going to behave badly. They were very anxious to get good transitional housing open again that was properly run, clean, tidy and comfortable. It was done in a phased way and the Harrison Street House with 15 beds was acquired. The five units at the new location will be the same as the 15 units and will adhere to the same requirements since they are in the same program.
- It was asked if the Coast Hotel location is a "done deal" or if there is still room for

negotiation. The vote has already been taken and because the project has not been on the City Council Agenda for the last two meetings, the supporters are not going to attend the meeting to discuss something they feel has been settled.

- Peters stated that as an elected official that has been out in the community talking to people, he felt that if the Coast Hotel location for this project had been placed on the ballot for the community to vote on, it would have lost unanimously. He also feels this issue has actually galvanized citizens that maybe haven't attended a City Council meeting in a long time.
- The Old Coast Hotel property is going through escrow. From a political standpoint, the grant money has been awarded by CDBG and the Old Coast Hotel fits the strings that are attached to the grant. The original address was on Harrison Street but due to the opposition to that location the address was changed to the Old Coast Hotel location. When the City Council voted in resolution form to change the address, that was the "green light" to move forward. Unless two members of the City Council resent that action by changing their vote, then there is nothing to stop what has taken place. Or if Anna and the Hospitality Center finds another location and comes back to the Council with it and they go through with another resolution, the location could be changed. But there is a timeline connected with the grant. If the grant money is not spent by a certain time the City would not be eligible for funds through the next grant cycle in 2017.
- The entire crux of the anxiety about the new transitional housing has to do with the new location of the Center.
- Owen stated that HUD's concern is that the location is protecting and meeting the fair housing needs of the poor.
- The concern was expressed about having the new Center in a commercial area where it would be detrimental to the immediate community and a disservice to the people in general. It was stated that you shouldn't help one group of people at the cost of the wellbeing of others.
- The Old Coast Hotel building will sublet space to Integrated Care Management Services (ICMS). Their services include crisis response and clinical assessment. The Hospitality Center will provide five units of transitional housing and the Wellness Center, which will include group programming, life skills and various mental health recovery support groups. As it would be open to the general public, they would expect 40-50 people a day at the Wellness Center.
- People in town feel threatened because some of the homeless population are people who chose that life style and feel they bring with it a criminal element.
- **Charles Gilchrist, Acting Lieutenant for the Fort Bragg Police Department, presented an oral report and written statistics on arrests and contacts with the homeless/transient population in Fort Bragg in the last two years.**
- The services that people are afraid of already exist, even though they are not downtown. The Police Department does not receive calls to the Hospitality Center. No arrests have been made there in three years. There are no problems at the current Hospitality Center and the Police Department does not expect to have any new problems at the new location.
- There are two completely different issues at hand here. There is the transient problem with individuals hanging out at the Post Office, the bank, etc.
- The Police Department has asked the Hospitality Center Board about having an office at the Old Coast Hotel location. It would enable the officers to do more foot patrol in the downtown area, which seems to be where most transient problems occur. Having an office at this location was not suggested because it was thought that there would be increased crime because of the Center's new location.
- Looking at the statistics Gilchrist provided, it was clear that the Department has already

given out more citations for illegal camping in six weeks of 2015 than they gave all year in 2014 and almost as many for open container as well. The majority of these have been issued directly to the transient population.

- The Department has found that warnings don't work and they have decided to be extremely aggressive with these issues as well as loitering and panhandling, without violating people's rights.
- Neighborhood Watch has been very good with getting citizens to report possible crimes and become more involved in their community, which has been very helpful to the Police Department. The Department also receives a lot of information through e-mail on the Neighborhood Watch listserv. Sergeant Kendl and Sergeant Lopez have been doing a good job of working with Neighborhood Watch and responding to their concerns.
- A person who receives a citation for violating the Fort Bragg Municipal Code for illegal camping or open container must go to court where it is determined if a violation occurred and what the penalty will be. There isn't a great deal of support to prosecute these Municipal Code violations in local courts.
- The Department recently hired an officer from the Los Angeles Police Department, Joe Breyer. Breyer was specifically assigned to the transient detail and worked some of the worst neighborhoods in the state. He has some good ideas about how to address these issues. A plan was formulated to make a list of habitual drunks that the Penal Code refers to as "drunkards". There is now a list of people that local merchants are not supposed to sell alcohol to. The District Attorney sent this list out to all merchants that hold an alcohol license. The merchants were upset because the program was not explained to them before they received the list. Many of them were violating their license by selling alcohol to intoxicated people. The Department believes that public intoxication arrests are down and the actual transient count is down due to transients going elsewhere to get their alcohol.
- Gilchrist believes this new program has been good for the community. The officers are being more aggressive with these issues, but not overly aggressive. No complaints have been received regarding the increase in citations. Malcom Macdonald, of Cop Watch, indicated that the only comments he has received have been positive.
- Gilchrist stated that the underlying mental health issues cannot be dealt with when people are intoxicated. The Police Department is trying to help get these people in a state where they can actually be clear enough to try to access help.
- The Department has a Problem Oriented Policing (POP) program set up to work with the Four Square Church and the issues that seem to be centered at that location. There have already been some improvements, such as vehicles being removed.
- In response to a question on the subject, Gilchrist mentioned that because of Proposition 47, when officers arrest someone for methamphetamine now they are only cited because it is a misdemeanor.
- Committee Member Deitz mentioned that the reason this issue was brought to the Committee was because many concerns were heard at the public hearing over a month ago about the problems downtown and he felt the City and agency programs and responses to the homeless issues should be discussed. The purpose of this meeting was not to discuss or decide if the Old Coast Hotel project is going to happen. The City Council voted for this project and as far as he is concerned, the issue is over and he hopes the community can move on. He wanted to remind people that the Center will not be a homeless shelter as it is often being referred to. The community now needs to be proactive and try to come up with solutions to the other problems in our City related to transients.
- Peters stated that the Hospitality Center is trying to help people who want to reintegrate into society. The people who have no interest in reintegrating into society are where the focus needs to be. He felt a representative of the Ornter Group, who is responsible for mental

health services in the county, should have been at this meeting. The City has done many things to try to help with the transient issues, such as removing the picnic tables from Bainbridge Park and closing the public restrooms by Town Hall. There are other things that can be done to improve the situation with people who are not interested in receiving help from groups like Love in Action and the Hospitality Center. Many people in the community are concerned that these are the people who will show up at the new Hospitality Center thinking they can receive services there.

- It was mentioned that the people Peters is referring to do not want the kinds of services that the Hospitality Center or Wellness facilities will be offering. They want to be as far away from these types of services as possible. They are not interested in bettering themselves or getting off of drugs and/or alcohol. They will not be going to these types of facilities no matter where they are located. They are not interested in yoga classes or money management advice.
- Peters stated that he wants to create a Citizen's Advisory Committee to help develop specific, practical, easy, cost effective solutions to deal with the transient and homeless in our town who are not interested in improving their situations and chose to live like they do. The Committee could include Peters, representatives from Neighborhood Watch, the Police Department, business owners, Hospitality Center and other concerned citizens. As a representative from City Council, Peters could bring any solutions to the issues back to the Public Safety Committee and who would then make recommendations to the Council.
- Some expressed concern about not being noticed about using the Old Coast Hotel for the new location of the Hospitality Center. Peters agreed that citizens should be over noticed on any proposed items in the community and he will be addressing that at the upcoming City Council goal setting retreat.
- Deitz agreed that more community involvement is necessary at the beginning of a project and stated that the Council will go beyond what is legally required as far as noticing the community in the future.

Peters will move forward with creating a Citizen's Advisory Committee that will work on solutions to the issues that have been raised concerning the negative impact of transients and homeless in Fort Bragg who do not want to improve thier lives or take advanage of the services that are offered.

MATTERS FROM COMMITTEE / STAFF

- Committee Member Peters mentioned a recent hit and run accident between a vehicle and a pedestrian that occurred at the intersection of Redwood and Main Streets in the crosswalk that runs from the south west corner to the south east corner. He would like the Police Department to review statistics for accidents at that intersection and discuss how safety might be improved at the next Public Safety Committee meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 p.m. by Committee Member Peters.