



City of Fort Bragg

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Meeting Minutes Public Safety Committee

Thursday, November 12, 2015

3:00 PM

Police Department Conference Room
250 Cypress Street

Special Meeting

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

Committee Member Peters called the meeting to order at 3:01p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: 6 - Scott Deitz, Lindy Peters, Linda Ruffing, Fabian Lizarraga, Tom Varga and Debbie Desmond

Absent: 1 - Steve Orsi

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Minutes of September 9, 2015

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

PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None Received

CONDUCT OF BUSINESS

1. Discuss Bainbridge Park Public Safety Issues

Public comment on this item was received from: Malcom Macdonald, Elaine Ball, Judy Valadao, Jill Yahelga, Kathy Silva, Bob Silva, Derek Hoyle, Becky Parrish, Marvin Parrish and Gina Cline.

The following was noted during discussion of this item:

- Committee Member Peters placed this item on the agenda as he has been approached by more than one resident regarding derelict activity taking place at the park during the day with children and other members of the public present.
- There have been many transients hanging out at the park recently, sitting against the Veteran's building, sleeping, drinking and smoking. This is not a new issue for the City of Fort Bragg and the City has taken measures in the past such as removing the picnic tables, clearing out some of the trees and building a new bathroom to help minimize the attraction for transients. It is a public park and residents are encouraged to take their activities there.
- Chief Lizarraga stated that the officers have been doing extra patrol at the park whenever possible. Every shift is checking the park and doing foot patrol when they can, especially for

any transient activity near the garden shed. The concentration now is on behavior and conduct of those at the park. The Officers have to catch suspects in the act before they can cite them for any violations unless citizens are willing to make a citizen's arrest. The Department recently cited 4 adults for illegal camping who were found sleeping in a white van at the park. They were also counseled on the camping laws. The van had been reported numerous times by the residents and Neighborhood Watch citizens. The hope of the Police Department is to restore the park for families.

- Committee Member Peters confirmed that there are surveillance cameras in the park. A City ordinance states there is to be no smoking or drinking in public parks and that is posted at Bainbridge Park. If anyone is seen by an officer doing any of these things, they can be cited for the violation.
- The transients currently hanging out at the park are not here looking for help to improve their lives or to find a job and the law doesn't mean all that much to them. Often involving the homeless in the community by giving them odd jobs to do can improve the problems, but no one believes the individuals in this group want to work for anything.
- The Police Department is working on better access to the surveillance cameras in the park. Having better cameras would be helpful. It was suggested that the surveillance could be put online so that citizens could watch and monitor the surveillance and call the Police when they see what they believe to be illegal activity.
- The picnic tables were taken out of the park to be replaced with new ones made by those at Parlin Fork. The trees were taken down because they were diseased and dangerous. The Bainbridge Park enhancement workshop is next week on the 17th at 4:00 to discuss what the community would like to see in the park and everyone is encouraged to attend.
- The City is planning on putting lights on the basketball courts. This light should carry onto the grassy area as well, which will help with exposure at night.
- Adult transients are using the library to hang out on comfy furniture, using the restrooms and taking advantage of everything they can in Fort Bragg, such as the meals at the Hospitality House. Many believe they are here to stay because there are so many free benefits available to them and they aren't hassled here. Many of the transients are believed to be from out of state.
- The transient issue is a hard problem to solve because the park is there for everyone.
- Peters mentioned that he has heard the Police in Cotati approach transients as soon as they enter the City limits. They question them, check them for warrants and arrest them for anything they can. They make it very uncomfortable for them and the word gets out to the transients to stay out of Cotati. Chief Lizarraga mentioned that yes; the Police can approach the transients and do what is called a, "field interview" to see what they are up to. The officers need probably cause to look in someone's back pack or ask them to empty their pockets.
- Often when citizens make a call to the Police Department the activity has ended by the time the officers arrive on the scene. Deitz asked if it would be possible to do any patrolling with an undercover officer to help facilitate arrests for the numerous violations that are occurring at the park. The Chief stated that we may be able to use our Task Force officer for such a detail.
- Committee Member Peters asked about the possibility of doing Bike Patrol at the park so that it isn't as obvious that the Police are arriving or patrolling. The Department has a number of Bicycle Patrol officers that can be utilized whenever possible to patrol the park.
- Citizens say the Police response to calls at the park has been very good. They will contact people and talk with them, even if they don't see them violating any laws or municipal codes upon arrival, as is often the case. Foot Patrol would be very welcomed at the park and in the general area of the park.

- One of the females living in the Harrison Street transitional housing comes over to the park quite often to hang out with the transients. Perhaps someone could let the Hospitality Center know about this and see if they can do anything to stop it. Hanging out with transients who have no regard for the law is not going to help this woman transition into a better life.
- Committee Member Peters asked if a citizen takes a photo of one of the transients breaking the law, such as drinking in the park, and then they call the Police, would that be something the officers can use to arrest the person? Chief Lizarraga responded that this might be helpful as an investigative tool to identify someone. The citizen needs to know that their phone would then be subject to subpoena if the person goes to court.
- If transients are arrested, their criminal history is checked in California and out of state. Often out of state warrants are found and if the state will extradite, they can be arrested on the warrant.
- Chief Lizarraga suggested a very visible uniformed Police Officer presence at the park. He would like to see two Police vehicles there at a time. They could park on each side of the park and leaving their lights on, then walk the park and talk with any transients that they encounter to find out what they are up to. He wanted to make sure the residents agree that would be ok and it wouldn't make them feel like the Police are "taking over" their park. Everyone in attendance thought that would be a positive step in resolving the issues. Committee Member Deitz like the idea of the Police presence, saying if you can break the habit that the transients have of meeting and hanging out at the park that it would go a long way in helping with the current problems in the park.
- One citizen said he has been retaliated against for taking photos of the transients. He believes they are doing many different drugs, not just marijuana and the problem needs to be taken more seriously. Police presence is helpful but it isn't enough. The City needs to address the benefits that are being offered to the homeless and quit attracting them because of the many benefits. The garden shed has maintenance equipment and supplies for Public Works to maintain the park. It also has a work bench and power source that is needed. It might be possible to remove the shed as the location is such a continual source of problems because the transients can hide by the shed and not be seen from the street.
- The churches are doing the Christian thing by feeding the hungry. That isn't a benefit that anyone should be trying to take away.
- On the west side of the park the trees are growing up so high that they are starting to block the street lights when as much light as possible is needed in the park at night.
- If the new plans for the park can attract more families, maybe the transients will leave or find somewhere else to hang out. They definitely do not want to be around other people. The City may be using a reservation system in the future to reserve the park for birthday parties and other activities for citizens and families.
- It was suggested that the Chief review the park rules and municipal code with the Officers so they are well aware of what they can cite these people for, such as smoking in the park. Also to confirm that they officers know that dusk is one hour after sunset.
- It was also suggested that an article appear in the newspaper with a reminder of all of the park information and rules. City Manager Ruffing can include that information as part of her City Notes in the newspaper.
- The tennis courts are currently open until 10:00p.m. and the rest of the park is open from "dawn to dusk"; even though the sign says the park hours are 7:00a.m.-10:00p.m. Per Ruffing, the sign is going to be changed. It was suggested that the basketball courts also be open until 10:00p.m., now that they will soon be lighted like the tennis courts.
- The rules in Wiggly Giggly playground do not allow glass. It was suggested that rule also apply to the rest of Bainbridge Park and other parks in the City. This change will require an

ordinance amendment.

- Please report as much information as you can when you contact Dispatch. The Chief has been working with Dispatch to improve communication and will let them know patrol at the park is a priority for the Department. The Chief expressed his appreciation for all of the input and apologized for letting the problem get to the point it is now.

The Police Department will increase patrol at Bainbridge Park with more foot patrol and bicycle patrol. The Chief will also see about using the Task Force officer to help with enforcement of laws, rules and municipal codes at the park. The park sign will be replaced with the correct hours of operation. Families are encouraged to use the park as much as possible. If the park is being used by the community, the transients will not be comfortable there and will hopefully go elsewhere.

2. Discuss Bicycle Safety and Enforcement of Laws

Public comment on this item was received from: Marvin Parrish & Becky Parrish

The following was noted during discussion of this item:

- This item was brought to the committee by a bicycle riding member of the public.
- Peters stated that he rides his bike around town quite often and he usually seems to be the only bicycle rider stopping at stop signs and following other bicycle laws.
- Bicycles have been observed not riding in single file, riding on the wrong side of the road, crossing in the middle of a street (jay biking), not waiting for signals to cross at an intersection and riding through cross walks, just to name a few. There is concern that someone is going to get injured or killed due to the continual violation of bicycle laws.
- There is a new law in California which states that a driver must give bicyclists three feet as they pass them on the road. If there's not enough room for a driver to give three feet of space, they must first slow down before safely passing.
- There are many bicycles going to the new coastal trail and riding through the Glass Beach area. The bike lane is very wide on Elm Street and visitors have actually been seen driving in the bike lane.
- There seems to be three or four different types of bicycle markings on the streets around town. It would be beneficial to have consistent markings throughout the town. Along with the international bike symbol it might be beneficial to also have text that says, "Bicycles Only".
- It appears that many bicycle riders do not realize they are actually vehicles that need to go by the same laws as vehicles. Riders need to be educated and parents need to teach their children the rules of the road.
- Peters mentioned that law enforcement still hosts the Coast PAL (Police Activities League) Bicycle Rodeo every year, which offers children a great education in bicycle safety and the laws concerning safe bicycle riding. Free helmets are also given out to any children who need them. The law states that children under 18 are required to wear helmets.
- It was suggested that perhaps the hotels and motels in the City could offer Bicycle Safety brochures to their guests who are visiting with bicycles. Brochures could also be handed out at the Bicycle Shop. This would be a way to say, "Welcome Riders, here are the rules". Committee Member Deitz suggested the City put out a flyer on Bicycle Safety. Safe Routes to Schools funds may be available to develop such a flyer.
- Public Works Director Varga will re-visit the Elm Street bike lane and the markings for other bike lanes in town as well. It was suggested that the City possibly make the bike lanes more visible at night with reflective or yellow paint. Varga also mentioned that it is lawful for bicycles to ride on sidewalks in Fort Bragg.
- The Chestnut Street multi-use trail may cause some confusion for bicycle riders.

- There was a hit and run accident recently on the Pudding Creek Bridge where a vehicle hit a bicyclist. The accident did not appear to be the fault of the bicycle rider. The Police Department has been focusing more on bicycle safety because of that accident.

City Manager Ruffing mentioned that 10.5A of the City's Municipal Code covers regulations for Bicycles and she would advise that everyone read it over. The Police Chief will ask Sergeants to remind the Officers during briefing to be aware of the bicyclists in the City and to enforce the bicycle laws.

3. Discuss Public Safety Issues in City Alleys

- Unfortunately, the two citizens who brought this item to the committee were not able to attend the meeting today.
- The alley house at 543½ North McPherson Street between Harrison and McPherson Streets is a rental that the owner is having problems keeping renters in, due to issues that occur in the alley. The problems include people working on their vehicles at all hours of the night, broken down cars sitting around, noise and other activities all through the night and possible drug dealing and consumption occurring. The owners feel their property value has gone down as a result of this situation and would like to see the City make that alley a no parking area. They would also like to see more of a Police presence there, especially in the evenings.
- The owners attended a Public Works Committee meeting and were directed to the Public Safety Committee to express their concerns.
- Chief Lizarraga noted that enforcement has been ramped up in the past seven days in this alley and a number of enforcement actions have been taken. Four adults were recently arrested at this address. The occupant is a well-known heroin addict who was arrested for possession of narcotics and probation violations as well. There was also an Assault & Battery case taken at this location recently, which occurred between some of the people who were hanging out in the alley. The Police Department is making this location a priority and extra patrol has been requested to keep the alley clear.
- The Traffic Committee has reviewed the owner's request for no parking in the alley. Varga has looked at it and asked Community Development to review the area for any violations and they were not able to find any actionable violations. The biggest obstacle to not allowing people to park in alleys is that so many people need to use the alleys to obtain access to their homes. It is an ongoing effort to balance the needs of everyone who lives in the alleys. The City does not want to take away parking for the many law abiding citizens living there.
- Varga stated that signage does not seem to be an effective way to correct any parking issues in the alleys.
- It was mentioned that the alley between the Headland's Coffee House and Café' Verona is often blocked due to cars parked there or people hanging out there. Varga will check the signage in that alley and the Police Department can also include this area in their downtown foot patrol.

Peters will follow up with the citizens who brought this to the committee and let them know about the recent arrests and the ongoing efforts to keep their alley clear of undesirable people. Peters also commended the Chief for the extra efforts of the Police Department in this matter.

MATTERS FROM COMMITTEE / STAFF

- Ruffing informed the committee that she, the Community Development Department staff and Scott Schneider attended a webinar that the League of California Cities put on

concerning the new marijuana regulations. At the next Public Safety Committee meeting she would like to bring a report to the committee and then bring it forward to the Council for direction. The City will need some policy direction from the Council on regulation of edibles and regulation of delivery of medical marijuana. The City already has regulations regarding cultivation and dispensaries, but there is a new element that has been brought about by the Senate and Assembly bills that were just passed.

- The Chief and Ruffing are working toward being prepared for the winter. The plans are moving forward to get the EOC (Emergency Operations Center) looking more like a functioning EOC. They want to bring back to the Committee an update of the Emergency Plan, which will be much simpler than the older plan. They will also be bringing to the Council a resolution for the City to adopt a county wide Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan, which needs to be done before the end of December.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 4:55p.m. by Committee member Peters.