

Aiken City Council Minutes

February 1, 2013

Aiken's Horizons

Present: Mayor Cavanaugh, Councilmembers Dewar, Ebner, Homoki, and Price.

Absent: Councilmember Diggs

Others Present: Richard Pearce, Gary Smith, Ed Evans, Charles Barranco, Larry Morris, Glenn Parker, Alicia Davis, Kim Abney, Tim Coakley, George Grinton, Leslie Wilcher, Sara Ridout, Philip Merry, Amy Banton, of the Aiken Standard, and Chad Mills of Channel 12.

The Aiken City Council met at Rye Patch at 100 Berrie Road SW for their annual Council retreat called Horizons 2013, beginning at 12 noon with lunch.

Mr. Pearce welcomed Council to the 27th annual Horizons Retreat for Council.

MASC ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Recreation Department
Senior Commission

Mr. Glenn Parker, Parks, Recreation & Tourism Director, shared with Council how we are promoting Aiken in different magazines. He showed Council the ad in the magazine called "Virginia Sportsman." He stated in March seven A-List writers will be coming to Aiken, and they will spend three or four days in Aiken. The Recreation Department will show them Aiken and introduce them to some people in Aiken. This will produce articles in some more magazines.

Mr. Parker distributed some promotional items for the Recreation Department and Aiken. He pointed out these items are purchased with Accommodations Tax funds.

Mr. Parker then reviewed for Council the submittal to the Municipal Association for the 2013 Achievement Award. The project selected was the Senior Commission. He said the presentations would be on March 4 or 5, 2013. He pointed out that some pictures and some magazine articles were submitted with the application. He reviewed the questions and answers submitted. He pointed out that this was the first time the Recreation Department had submitted an application. He stated it was felt the Senior Commission was unique in that they had not found another municipal body that has appointed a volunteer commission simply to focus on seniors. It was felt that would be a selling point for the project. He said staff is still working on how they might do the presentation.

Mr. Parker then talked to Council about the presentation made to Council by the Aiken Young Professionals. He reviewed for Council the things that had been done for the Young Professionals, and what might be able to be done for them. He stated the Recreation Department had done things with the AYP in the past. AYP helped with the Horses and Courses event last year. They have been asked to help with the event again this year. About 12 AYP people helped with the PAL-5K Run sponsored by the Public Safety Department. The AYP had a tent set up at the Kite Festival to draw people in. The Recreation Department provided services to the AYP for the 5th Friday events.

Mr. Parker stated he felt the main issue is a communication issue. He said the AYP talked about kick ball and flag football. He said the Recreation Department has offered flag football through PRT for 5 or 6 years and presently have 17 teams in the league. Some staff members have met with some AYP members and talked about kick ball. Staff figured what the fees would be to offer a kick ball league. He said it was offered and only one team signed up. He said the Recreation Department can offer the programs, but we have to figure out how to reach that age group. AYP mentioned facebook and twitter. He said the Recreation Department follows them on twitter, but they don't follow the city. The Augusta Young Professionals have their own twitter page, and they have

followed the Recreation Department on twitter. He said from what he heard at the Council meeting, Recreation staff will need to meet with the group and see what can be done. He pointed out presently we are working on the budget, so now would be a good time to meet with them to see what programs can be offered. Mr. Parker stated one program that has taken off is the late afternoon and early evening road races at Citizens Park. He stated a 5K race, which is 3.1 miles, can be done on Citizens Park. He said there have probably been 5 road races within the last year at Citizens Park. He said that is an area in which the young people like to participate. He felt this may be something they would be interested in. He said AYP spoke of concerts, open mics at Hopelands Gardens. He felt possibly the AYP might not want to be at Hopelands, but possibly Citizens Park would be a better place for a concert for them. He pointed out we have the mobile stage, and that could be set up at Citizens Park.

Mr. Pearce pointed out the AYP had mentioned "funky events." It seems that would be events out of the ordinary, not the traditional programs. Mr. Parker stated the Recreation Department can facilitate events, if the AYP will tell them what they want and help coordinate a concert.

Mr. Parker stated regarding kick ball, staff figured the cost would have been \$200 a team. Possibly they could not find a sponsor or get enough people to participate. He said possibly there may have to be alternate ways of funding the programs. He said the Recreation Department tries to break even on the programs. He said, regarding the night lighting at Citizens Park mentioned by the AYP, there is a big open area on Banks Mill Road that is not lit. Lighting for the area was requested in the budget several years ago. He said the plan is to leave the area flexible. The Recreation Department would like to light the perimeter of the field, but that would cost about \$500,000. He pointed out also that there is a residential area just across the street, so any lighting would have to be shielded to deflect light on the park.

Mr. Pearce stated in talking with Derrick McLane they are interested in casual leagues. It would be kind of a pick up facebook game of kick ball, not necessarily structured. He said in some recreation facilities there are fields with a timer for the lights which can be turned on for a short time for a game of kick ball.

Mayor Cavanaugh felt it would be good to sit down with a small group and talk about the events that had been done and the participation in them. Councilwoman Price suggested that possibly a committee could be formed much like the Senior Commission. Mayor Cavanaugh also suggested that some of the Young Professionals be asked to serve on some of the boards and commissions.

Councilwoman Price pointed out the Young Professionals have indicated that they want to get involved in the community. They meet regularly. She pointed out in their meetings they are positive and constructive and want to get involved.

Councilman Ebner stated he was interested in getting one of the members on the Recreation Commission as his appointee. He felt Council should look at getting young, old and in between on the committees.

GRANTS

Mr. Pearce stated that Councilmembers had been asking various questions about grants. He said the grants that the Engineering and Utilities Division is working on probably represent about \$25M of grant money and Capital Projects Sales Tax projects. He said he had asked Larry Morris to review the grants and projects for Council.

Mr. Morris stated he wanted to give Council a general overview of the grants and projects. He said the projects completed at the airport include the instrument landing system with a FAA grant of \$438,467 and SC Aeronautics grant of \$279,968, the Airport Layout Plan Update with a FAA grant of \$85,557 and SC Aeronautics grant of \$2,304, and replacement of the lighting on runway 7/25, with a FAA grant of \$1,120,140 and SC Aeronautics grant of \$29,477. He said the airport facilities have been upgraded to the point where the airport is about the 19th busiest airport in the state. It was pointed out that

a compass rose was being installed using an asphalt pavement, with a cost of about \$17,000 to \$20,000.

Mr. Morris stated there are several roadway enhancement projects and drainage projects. The enhancement involves filling in ditches, adding sidewalks, and lighting. The drainage project includes filling the ditch along the eastern side of Whiskey Road from East Gate Drive to Ola Hitt Drive. The city is designing the system and DOT will install it. He said there are three major projects under the State Infrastructure Bank, including Dougherty Road, which is currently being designed, the University Parkway widening and Hitchcock Parkway widening projects.

In response to a question as to when DOT will be back about the Hitchcock Parkway widening, Mr. Pearce responded there will be a presentation next week to the ARTS Subcommittee. They will probably report that 75% of the people who came to the November, 2012 public information session were opposed to the project, but of the 75% opposed about 70% realized something needed to be done. He said staff is working on an alternative plan to that recommended by DOT. The approach will be to try to come up with a solution that will handle the traffic level. There are about 19,000 trips per day on the road. He stated the concept DOT presented in November was more capacity based. He said they had met with some of the neighborhood representatives from Fox Chase. He said there may be some opportunities to improve traffic flow as opposed to just looking at capacity. It is hoped to come up with improvements within the existing right of way, rather than having to obtain additional right of way, and to have a concept plan within about 60 days. It is hoped to have something that will help traffic flow and also be more attractive than what was presented in November. Once the consultant has an alternative plan, we could schedule a special meeting for an information meeting to get input. Then that could be taken to DOT before the ARTS Subcommittee meeting in May.

There was a general discussion about the projects of widening Silver Bluff Road and Hitchcock Parkway and the plans that had been presented by the SCDOT. Councilmembers were concerned that something needs to be done, but they did not want a five lane road in the middle of a residential area. It was pointed out that money for Hitchcock Parkway is all within city control, not SCDOT control. There was concern about the length of time it takes to get road projects done. It was pointed out there are many agencies involved in road work and it takes a long time to get a project approved.

Councilman Homoki expressed concern about the covers on the manholes not being level with the road on Whiskey Road. He asked if something could be done to raise the manholes so they would be level. Mr. Morris stated he would have to work with the local Highway Maintenance Engineer on that issue.

Mr. Morris continued review of the grants and projects, stating that a building pad at Ventures Industrial Park is currently under construction. He stated that Aiken Electric Cooperative gave the city \$250,000 for construction of the pad. He said it would be a 50,000 square foot site with all utility taps, storm sewer connection and a graded parking area. He said that is what industries are looking for now, rather than a building.

Mr. Morris stated in Crosland Park we have been working on the Safe Routes to School program, and the project is in the design stage. The City purchased two lots under the Northside Initiative funding and removed the homes to provide a better and safer route to walk to school. The project involves sidewalks, street lights and landscaping.

Mr. George Grinton stated Leadership Aiken County has a class project each year. This year the class has adopted the two lots the City purchased in Crosland. The plan is to try to make the lots with more accommodations than just a sidewalk. The plan is to try to make sure the children are safe and provide a spot for the parents to wait for their children and provide a parking lot. The class is raising money to provide a concrete pad and shelter for parents to wait for their children. There will also be picnic tables in the shelter and bulletin boards. He said the project will kind of be a mini park for the neighborhood in addition to providing a nice place for children to walk to school.

Mr. Morris then reviewed the Community Development Block Grant program. He stated the city will be in its third year of a weatherization program this summer. He said over 100 homes have been weatherized under the program. He said the city was in its 14th year of funding from the Housing and Urban Development to help with repair to homes to meet code, street lights, upgrade utility service to areas, and operate an after school program for at risk children.

Mr. Morris pointed out the city had applied for a forgivable loan from SCDHEC for the installation of radium removal equipment at Shiloh Springs. He said this work was mandated by DHEC and EPA because a radium level had been measured above the maximum level permitted under the Safe Drinking Water Regulations.

Mr. Morris stated the city had received a grant from SCDHEC for \$3M for the Green Infrastructure Storm Water Control Project, which was done in 2011. The city is currently partnering with Clemson University to obtain a grant from EPA to locate an Intelligent Cities Institute in Aiken, which will provide technical expertise on the use of Green Infrastructure in the urban environment.

Other smaller grants were mentioned, such as the grant from the Municipal Association of S.C. for \$2,000 to buy safety equipment, a \$70,000 grant from SCDOT for the Dougherty Road Corridor Study. The Recreation Department receives grant money of about \$45,000 from the SC PRT for advertising. The Heritage Corridor and Farmers' Market Preservation grant was about \$18,000. A Tax money of about \$14,000 for tournament bidding was received. Public Services applied for a grant of \$20,000 for green streets to help moderate to low income neighborhoods with tree planting. Also, Public Safety has used the 1033 program, which is military surplus equipment. The city has about \$500,000 in equipment which was purchased for very little money. The city has a Traffic Signal Maintenance Agreement with SCDOT which is about \$95,000 a year. It was pointed out the city pursues many grant opportunities to help keep taxes low.

Mr. Morris then reviewed the infrastructure projects. He said the city's aging infrastructure, including water, sewer and storm water utilities demand attention. He stated staff is trying to have plans ready to be able to do projects when the third round of Capital Projects Sales Tax money starts coming in. He reviewed five major water projects for water lines, eight projects for sewer lines, and four projects for storm sewer. He said money is being budgeted for engineering and surveying work, and to save funding most of the design work for the water and sewer projects are done in-house. He said we usually use a consultant for roadway projects.

Councilman Dewar asked when staff does work in-house for a project whether the city is reimbursed for the cost of engineering work and whether it is charged to the capital projects. It was pointed out that was done some for the first two rounds of sales tax. Councilman Ebner felt it should be set up to charge the staff time to the project. He felt any cost for the project should be charged to the project. Mr. Pearce pointed out all funds spent where there is a bill for the work for the capital project are charged against the Capital Projects Sales Tax list.

There was discussion on change out of the water meters. It was pointed out we are using our current personnel to change out the meters. It will probably take five years to change out all the meters. The personnel are currently concentrating on fixing leaks. It was pointed out that meters will probably have to be changed out every 10 years. There was discussion on how the old meters were being disposed of. It was pointed out the city would be selling the old meters on Gov Deals.

Mr. Morris reviewed future projects for Council. He pointed out future projects are projects that are scheduled for design and construction within the next five years. He reviewed the proposed roadway projects, including widening of University Parkway and Hitchcock Parkway, Dougherty Road turn lanes at Whiskey Road, a connector from Dougherty Road to the Mall, the Neilson-Walmart connector, the Whiskey Road-Powderhouse Road connector and the Whiskey Road-Centennial Parkway project.

There was a question as to whether there were any new tenants in the shopping center with the Fresh Market. It was pointed out that the type of tenants will make a difference in the amount of traffic in the area. Mr. Pearce responded that there had been no applications for any businesses there. There was a question regarding the connector road behind Walmart to Neilson. Mr. Morris stated he had been in contact with engineers with Walmart, and we are still pursuing the project.

Councilman Ebner asked about the Whiskey Road/Centennial Parkway roadway. It was pointed out that had been an ongoing matter for about six years. Mr. Morris stated the property owner is interested in waiting to get the road built until he has a developer that wants to develop part of the property so he can join the city's funds with the developer's funds and get a better road. He said the property owner is still interested in the roadway, and we are trying to get a public-private partnership to get the best use of funds.

Mr. Morris reviewed the 21 projects listed for water and sewer utilities. He pointed out the Shaws Creek Water Plant Disinfection Byproducts Upgrade project is another unfunded mandate and will be needed if the plant violates stringent EPA rules. The plant currently meets the standards. In response to a question regarding personnel at the water plant, Mr. Morris stated there are 5 employees who operate the plant on shifts. Three of the employees have the highest level operating certificate. These 5 employees run 4 major plants. Mr. Morris stated the city is looking at obtaining some portable generators to be ready for disasters.

Mr. Morris reviewed future storm water projects, including George's Pond for a regional detention pond, Palm Drive drainage, Highland Park Storm Drain, Crosland Park Drainage, and Sand River Drainage. In response to a question about George's Pond, Mr. Morris stated the pond would not require expansion from where it is now. However, we need to get an outfall structure through the Athol roadway dam so we can get water out of the pond. He pointed out when there are heavy rains and the pond fills up, water goes across the roadway, and that needs to be addressed.

Mr. Morris also reviewed future projects for the Airport which would be eligible for FAA funding grants. He said the security fencing needs to be finished. A study needs to be done to determine whether Runway 7/25 needs to be extended 500 feet. The Aviation apron needs to be expanded and the area developed to allow for greater use of the airport.

Councilman Homoki asked if someone had asked about building additional hangars at the airport. Mr. Morris stated someone had inquired several months ago, and he was advised to wait until the new Airport Layout Plan was done and approved. That has been done, and the person was notified that he could come and talk about new hangars at the airport now.

NORTH SIDE INITIATIVE

Mr. Pearce stated the next discussion is on the Northside Initiative. He stated Leslie Wilcher, the new Project Coordinator for the Northside Initiative, is present. He stated that George Grinton will be assuming Larry Morris' position in May when Larry retires. He said with the changes in staff it was felt it would be a good time to take a look at where we have been with the Northside Revitalization Initiative, see where we are heading, and what new ideas we may have for the program.

Mr. Morris stated he would review the past of the Northside Initiative, and then George Grinton and Leslie Wilcher would talk to Council about the future of the program.

Mr. Morris stated the Northside Initiative is very important. It is not just Crosland Park, Toole Hill, or Edgewood, but it is the entire northside. He pointed out the first job was Toole Hill. He showed a slide of the Toole Hill area showing where the city had built houses and purchased lots and reconfigured the lots. He pointed out that 31 homes were built in Toole Hill. Water mains were replaced on Dillon and Toole. New meters and services for water were installed, as well as new sewer services. Street lights, curb and gutter, sidewalks, and landscaping were done in the Toole Hill area. He stated the owners in the Toole Hill area had taken pride in the area since the city had built some

new homes, and the area had been revitalized. He said several churches helped residents in the area with work on their homes. He pointed out Asheton Oaks was another area that the city had revitalized. He said it had been a run down trailer park with a lot of crime. The city purchased the property, cleared out the old trailer park and built new homes in Asheton Oaks. Mr. Morris then talked about Crosland Park. He said the city had renovated 12 homes in Crosland Park and was working with local realtors for listings. Nine homes are on the waiting renovation list. The City has 6 vacant lots in Crosland Park, with one community garden and two Safe Routes to School lots. Seven homes in Crosland Park are rented, and three of them have been renovated. Several sections of the sewer lines in Crosland Park have been renovated by moving the sanitary sewer lines from the backyards to the street. He pointed out a lot of work had been done in Crosland Park.

It was pointed out that the sewer lines in Crosland Park were put in the backyards. Crosland Park was supposed to be temporary housing, and septic tanks were installed. The septic tanks started giving problems very shortly after being built. He said the sewer lines were put in the backyards because plumbing was there for the septic tanks.

Mr. Morris stated Edgewood was another area the city had worked with. Three homes were built in the area, and they are occupied by owners. Eleven lots were cleared. Sidewalk installation was completed along Sundy from Hampton to Kershaw and along Hampton from Horry to Sundy and along Kershaw from Hampton to York. Storm sewer lines were installed from Sundy to Hampton and water mains replaced on Sumter. He said there are still some storm drainage problems in this area that need to be addressed. The problem is mostly getting water to the inlets. It was suggested that cleaning the ditch would help with the drainage problems.

Mr. George Grinton stated the Northside Development Services group became the responsibility of Engineering and Utilities Department this past summer. He said they had been talking about what things might be done to put more energy into the Northside Redevelopment. He pointed out Leslie Wilcher is the new Project Coordinator. He asked her to introduce herself. She pointed out she had experience in working with the Georgia Department of Economic Development, and for the last five years had worked for the Augusta State University. She said she had her Master in Public Administration. She had purchased, rehabilitated and sold three of her own properties. She said she was eager to get to work in the Crosland Park area.

Mr. Grinton stated one thing Ms. Wilcher would be working on is a stronger marketing effort for the Crosland Park properties that the city owns. They are in the process of listing with four realtor firms. They will be aggressively marketing the homes. There are new pricing targets. Some concerns were that the pricing for the homes was too high. It was pointed out that the houses are now priced in the \$80,000's. He said one thing he was excited about in the Crosland Park area is the Safe Communities Initiative. He felt in the future, with the changes that are proposed, that the perception of Crosland Park will change. He pointed out that the number of calls from Crosland Park to Public Safety has decreased in the past year. He said the homes that the city has renovated are energy efficient homes. He said there is a reputation for the area to be overcome, and that is what they will be working on.

Mr. Grinton pointed out some of the things being done with the Crosland Park Neighborhood Association and the Safe Routes to School have helped with the outlook for Crosland Park. They see that the city really cares, and they are seeing tangible results. He said each small improvement helps the area. He said we are coordinating the repaving of the roads with SCDOT as work is done on the sewer lines.

Mr. Grinton stated there are also opportunities in other areas such as Edgewood and Toole Hill where we will continue work. The focus first will be on Crosland Park.

Mr. Grinton stated there have been several energy renovations in Crosland Park. He said 140 homes have been weatherized. We have conducted Energy Efficient Workshops. Currently we are renovating the Community Center house in Crosland Park. He said the EPA grant project is being combined with CDBG money to do some renovations. There

is one more year on the EPA grant. There is about \$196,000 of the \$300,000 left to pay for the renovation of the additional 9 homes in inventory. The goal is to sell some houses to generate some cash flow to fund the other initiatives. He said that was the reason for emphasizing marketing first.

Mr. Grinton stated the city has received CDBG funding for 14 years, and the funding has been going down each year. The money will be used to connect the completion of the renovations on Croft Street so it will connect to the Safe Roads to School. Some is being used for renovation of the Community Center. Some funding is also being used to fund things for the Safe Community Program that Cynthia Mitchell is working on.

Mr. Grinton stated that Eustis Park development is one of the projects under the Capital Projects Sales Tax for the proposed Senior/Youth Center. He said the Safe Routes to School design is at the review stage with SCDOT. He said the Leadership Aiken County class project will also help the northside.

Councilman Ebner suggested that, when Council looks at the goals, he felt it would be good to take a look at the Crosland Park housing. He said the initiative was started in early 2009, and there have been a lot of changes on how the houses are renovated and how they are priced. He felt we should take another look at our policies regarding the housing in Crosland Park and how we renovate them. He pointed out the contractors had not been able to help with the project like they did in Toole Hill. He said a lot of changes had been made, including staff changes.

PUBLIC SAFETY PROGRAM UPDATE

Mr. Pearce commended Chief Barranco and his staff for the well organized first Call-In that Public Safety held on Thursday under the Safe Communities Program. He pointed out the participation by the various law enforcement agencies and the community agencies. He said all the comments he had heard were very positive. He commended Chief Barranco for completing one year as Chief.

Chief Barranco stated some great things had been accomplished during the year, but there had been some difficult things to deal with. He said he wanted to update Council on some of the things that are going on in Public Safety.

Chief Barranco reviewed some of the programs of Public Safety. He pointed out the Pencils and Putters program, which provides mentoring, tutoring and fun for youth. It is a collaborative effort with First Tee of Aiken. The average attendance is 20 to 30 youths per session. He pointed out the Parent Project, which has been held for six years. He said the program aids parents to develop their parenting skills to deal with issues rather than calling law enforcement. The Project Lifesaver program is a joint effort with the Aiken County Sheriff's Office, North Augusta Public Safety Department, and Aiken Public Safety. It provides a way to locate individuals that might wander due to mental conditions such as dementia or autism. He said there had been 3 successful rescues in the program. The PAL Program is a program that involves youth in athletics and other activities. Over 600 youth have been involved, with a less than 2% offending or reoffending rate. The Blue Night Run program provides funding for PAL equipment and programs. Over 265 participated in the program the first year. Another program which is in its 12th year is the Fishing Program. It is a fun filled family fishing day designed to expose youth to the fun of the outdoors and teach life skills. Other programs sponsored by Public Safety include Mobile Movie Nights, Engagement & Education in neighborhoods, and Fire Prevention Program. He pointed out the Fire Bureau had conducted over 30 residential fire inspections and provided free smoke detectors. A total of 671 inspections were conducted, and 499 violations were found and corrected. He said these inspections help to reduce the chances of fire as well as chances of injuries due to fires. The Fire Prevention Program conducts tours, programs and visits to schools on a regular basis. These visits and tours help educate youth on fire safety. In the Public Safety Citizen Academy 24 citizens got to see the ins and outs of Public Safety. This is another avenue to increase the dialogue with Public Safety in the community.

Chief Barranco then reviewed the Safe Communities Initiative. He said a lot of hard work had been put into the Safe Communities program this year. He reviewed how we got there and where we are going. He said the strategy consists of the basic notion that offenders are rational in their thoughts. If offenders know that they are stripped of their anonymity and confronted by both law enforcement and the community together, they are forced to make rational changes and decisions. He said violent crime is what makes people scared to walk the street and play in their yards. He pointed out there is a very small percentage of the population that creates a large percentage of the crime. The key is to identify those people. He stated the numbers show that if we can affect violent behavior, it will trickle down to the other crimes as well. He stated the Safe Communities Program got started because we had some high profile violent crimes in Aiken in the last year. He pointed out that Cynthia Mitchell had transitioned to Public Safety as Community Services Coordinator. He said that had helped tremendously in connecting with Safe Community. He said in June, 2012, he and Richard Pearce traveled to High Point, NC to hear about their program and see if it could be something we could use in Aiken.

Chief Barranco pointed out the Food for Thoughts meetings that were held to hear from the citizens. In October, 2012, members of High Point, NC Public Safety were in Aiken to describe what they had done and how they had been successful. These meetings were attended by over 200 citizens. He said community meetings were started and are continuing to talk about community concerns. He said there was a conference call from Professor Kennedy of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice to discuss the implementation of the strategy. He said it was emphasized that the national plan that has been established should be followed. He said they have tried to follow the plan to build a solid foundation. In November, meetings were conducted with the patrol shifts and department members to reinforce the strategy and started collecting data on who to call in. Lt. David Savage was named the Violent Crime Task Force Coordinator and has dealt with the offenders on a regular basis. Meetings were also held with other law enforcement agencies to make the program a partner with other agencies. He said in December, 2012, the Aiken Safe Communities Action Team was formed from members of the community and the Council of Neighborhoods in order to focus on the offenders. He said there were 15 members of the community in law enforcement who traveled to North Carolina to view one of their call-ins and conduct training sessions. The list of offenders was finalized in January, 2013, with the help of the partners in law enforcement. Chief Barranco stated the first call-in was held and 15 offenders were notified and 12 showed up. He said the call-in was a very powerful message to the offenders by law enforcement and the community. He said the two offenders who did not show up would be notified personally. It would be a condensed notification.

Chief Barranco stated that members of the Aiken Safe Communities Action Team were present at the call-in and let the offenders know that they want to provide resources to the offenders that were called in. He said there were representatives from many organizations present. He said we will not be able to get a job for everybody, but will be able to help in many ways such as getting a driver's license, Social Security card, etc. to be able to get a job.

Council discussed the program and the call-in. There was a question as to how often a call-in would be held. Chief Barranco responded that had not been decided, but would probably be once a quarter. He pointed out High Point is doing call-ins on initiatives now in addition to violent crimes. He said he understands they do call-ins quarterly on each initiative.

Councilman Ebner asked if the city could possibly employ some of the offenders. Mr. Pearce responded that the city has employed some offenders in the past and currently has some working for the City. He pointed out that we would have to look at each one on a case by case basis. He said Goodwill is involved, and they have a good training program for jobs and they identify appropriate people for a position. Councilman Ebner felt the city should be a leader and set an example.

Chief Barranco reviewed for Council the time involved in training new Public Safety Officers. It was pointed out that 48 weeks are involved in training for new Public Safety

Officers and that is if all the sessions line up perfectly. He said the South Carolina Criminal Justice Academy allows 60 recruits in a class, and there can only be four members from a particular agency unless given special permission. He said Aiken had received special permission on occasion. He said the South Carolina Fire Academy only allows 25 in a class and only has 5 classes per year. He said that is limited to 2 from an agency without special permission. He pointed out a lot of training is involved and a lot of organization has to happen for the classes to fall in line with the timing. He pointed out that the four officers hired last February will go on the road on February 8. On March 15 four more officers will go on the road. He said the department is moving quickly to get the officers trained properly. He said the training also includes the Driver/Operator training.

Chief Barranco then reviewed the Public Safety Officer separations for the calendar year 2012. Out of 20 officer separations, there were 9 retirements, 5 hired by other agencies, 4 voluntary resignations, 1 termination, and 1 killed in the line of duty. He pointed out there are 2 more officers scheduled to retire this year under the LERI program, and 9 more took advantage of the program before January 2, 2013.

Councilman Dewar stated he felt the number of officers lost in the past year was a significant loss. He said he understands there are 17 officers in various stages of training. He said his concern is the loss of a number of officers. He said it would seem that the loss would have some effect on the ability to get the job done. He said he was also concerned about compensation. He understands some left for more money and others left for less money. He wondered how long an officer would be a PSO I. Chief Barranco responded that some officers retired as a PSO I. Councilman Dewar said his concern is that when we lose an officer, we lose our investment in the training.

Mayor Cavanaugh stated he was concerned too and felt others were concerned also. He said we do need to find out why they left. He said he understood that five had been hired by other agencies. He said he understood that Aiken does start off Public Safety Officers at a lower rate, but over a period of time the officers will reach a higher pay than other agencies. He pointed out that there were two deaths of officers during that time also. He said he was glad to see that we have a lot of officers in training and that they are moving on and will be on the road soon.

Mr. Pearce pointed out regarding compensation some of the other agencies do start officers with a higher salary, but they are then on a plateau for a very long time. He said we have a 6 months' probation period, and then they are entitled to a 5% increase. The other incentive is the Master Career Path, and increases are granted as the officer meets those milestones. If an officer has an associate or bachelors degree, there is also an incentive pay. Chief Barranco pointed out there is also a fitness bonus under the Wellness Program, and the bonus depends on the level of fitness. The program is voluntary. He said the Master Career path is a non-supervisory tract that gives people the opportunity to earn additional money. He said also when the officer completes the Police and Fire Academy there is an increase in pay of 5%.

Councilman Dewar asked if there was a chart which shows the pay scale for Public Safety Officers. Mr. Pearce responded there is a chart which shows the rates for the officers. Councilman Dewar said he had heard there are Public Safety Sergeants making more pay than Lieutenants. Mr. Pearce responded that based on years of service there could be Sergeants making more than Lieutenants. If someone has been with the city for a long time in the past there were merit increases, and it could be possible with longevity for someone who has been with the city for a long time to be making more than a higher ranking officer.

Chief Barranco stated it could be possible for a Sergeant to make more than a Lieutenant if they have been with the city for many years. Some of the officers came in and worked through the Master Career path, and they received a 2 ½% increase for each milestone they met. That is carried forward as a part of their salary. They may have also received a merit increase which became a part of their salary. Years of service is also a contributor to their salary.

Mr. Pearce stated every year the city looks at one-fourth of the positions and evaluates the job and compensation and makes adjustments. He said we do, however, want to make sure we are paying fair compensation.

Councilman Dewar stated he would like to have more detail on the Public Safety salary structure. He said it is just hard for him to understand that a Sergeant could make more than a Lieutenant, but he understands what happened.

Mr. Pearce stated this matter is not just in Public Safety, but is city-wide. He said the way the system has been set up and what he has historically seen the city do is reward loyalty. For long service there are incentives throughout the way. We have set up benefits, compensation, vacation, sick leave and how that is handled rewards loyalty. He pointed out we are in an era now that for someone to work somewhere for 5 years is a long time.

Councilman Dewar stated he felt that every position has a maximum value to the community.

Mr. Pearce stated he was talking about what the philosophy of the City of Aiken has been. He pointed out for many years the City has recognized there are people who have institutional knowledge which has been gained over the years. He said with Larry Morris leaving in May there is a concern that a lot of institutional knowledge walks out the door. He said there is a value in that, and you do not just reach a wall and it stops. He said it has not been the policy of the City of Aiken historically that a person reaches a maximum and they will never go beyond that. He said there may be some entry level positions and the employee is very highly reliable and provides a lot of valuable services, and to never increase that person's pay will discourage performance. He said we have tried to look at ways to recognize productivity and innovation. The other key component is the loyalty to the City of Aiken and to public service. He said, however, we are always willing to look at matters.

Mayor Cavanaugh stated he felt the question is whether our pay scale is where it should be and the reasons we have lost people. He felt we should look at North Augusta and others to see how we compare and whether the employees left for more money or for other reasons.

Council continued to discuss the compensation and reasons people have left the City of Aiken.

Mr. Pearce pointed out employees have not received a cost of living increase in about 4 years. He said we are constantly trying to do things to encourage our employees. He said he feels the City of Aiken has a tremendous work force, and they are not paid what they could earn in the private sector in many cases. He said we are always mindful of what the taxpayers pay to support the City of Aiken. He felt the taxpayers get an excellent value for what we pay in salaries versus the services we deliver. He said we get a lot of complimentary letters on the services of our employees.

MUNICIPAL COURT

Mr. Pearce stated Paige Tiffany is present to give Council an update on the Municipal Court operations. He said she had been employed by the City for almost a year.

Ms. Tiffany stated when she started with the city last year at the end of March, 2012, there were 167 pending cases. She said in 10 months she has brought the total number of cases with pending jury trials down to 68 cases. She said in looking back at the records for 10 months before she came and 10 months after she came, there has been an average of 136 cases pending. There has been about a 60% reduction in the pending cases since she came to work with the city. She pointed out that even though she had brought the number of pending cases down, she had tried not to compromise conviction rates. In reviewing the records, it was determined that approximately 31 cases per month are adjudicated through a guilty plea, a jury trial, or a dismissal. On average, only 10% of jury trial requests are dismissed by the Solicitor, resulting in a 90% conviction rate.

During this time the average number of new defendants requesting jury trials has averaged 22 per month. Since April, 2012 the number of new defendants requesting jury trials has been reduced through efforts to negotiate potential cases before a jury request is submitted. Ms. Tiffany stated she attends court each morning speaking with Public Safety Officers and defendants in order to facilitate an agreement between the parties.

Approximately 25% of all defendants requesting jury trials are a result of a DUI arrest. Since June, 2011, Aiken Public Safety has made an average of 12 DUI arrests per month. Of those, an average of five results in new jury trial requests in Municipal Court.

Ms. Tiffany stated the Patrol Division of Public Safety has made an average of 113 arrests per month. They also issued an average of 59 warrants per month. In addition, the Patrol Division issued an average of 366 Uniform Traffic Tickets and 143 tickets for other criminal charges per month.

Ms. Tiffany stated the Public Safety Department as a whole made an average of 200 arrests per month since June, 2011. They also issued an average of 83 warrants, 435 Uniform Traffic Tickets per month and 155 tickets for other criminal charges.

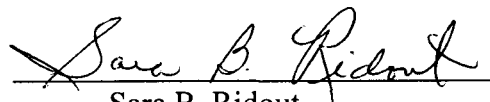
Ms. Tiffany stated through cooperation with Public Safety Officers, Municipal Court personnel and Judge Carroll, the backlog of pending jury trials has successfully been reduced without compromising conviction rates.

Ms. Tiffany stated she had been asked to look at having Livability Court. This is a court where, instead of coming to criminal court, there is a separate court which hears things such as neighborhood disputes. She pointed out that Charleston has a very successful Livability Court, and she is going to look at their setup. She said there has also been some interest expressed in reestablishing the Youth Court. She said she is working with the Aiken County School District on the possibility of a Youth Court again. She said there is some interest in establishing a county-wide Youth Court, which would take the cooperation of several agencies.

There was a question regarding the use of Pat Corey as Assistant Solicitor. Mr. Pearce stated Ms. Tiffany had talked about the use of an Assistant Solicitor, but she wanted to see how her first year went before making a decision. It was pointed out the number of pending cases had been reduced significantly during Ms. Tiffany's first year as Solicitor. It was pointed out the position was to be used on an as needed basis.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 4:45 P.M.


Sara B. Ridout
City Clerk