

# Public Safety Committee

August 20, 2024, 10:00 am

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Seabrook Island Town Hall, Council Chambers  
2001 Seabrook Island Road  
Seabrook Island, SC 29455



## MINUTES

### CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Kortvelesy called the regular meeting of the Public Safety Committee to order at 10:01 am.

### ROLL CALL

**Committee Members Present:** Dan Kortvelesy, Chairman; Ed Maher, and John Kinne

**Town Staff Present:** Joe Cronin (Town Manager), Katharine Watkins (Assistant Town Manager), Abigail Grooms (Communications and Events Manager)

**Others Present:** Chief Ryan Kunitzer, St. John's Fire Department (SJFD), Robert Edgerton and Mike Sosnowski, Island Beach Services

### FOIA STATEMENT

Ms. Watkins confirmed that the committee was in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act. Notice of meetings and agendas were posted and furnished to news media and all persons requesting notification.

### NEW BUSINESS

Beach Patrol

Island Beach Services, the "Beach Patrol" provided a report to the committee. Their representative began with stating that the beaches had undergone significant change since Island Beach Services began providing service. High tide prohibits patrols between Boardwalks #3 and #9, and beyond Camp St. Christopher. Mr. Kortvelesy stated that SIPOA has a beach renourishment project scheduled for October 2025 and he hoped that the project will allow beach patrol staff to access some of those areas.

Mr. Kortvelesy asked patrol staff what council could do to ensure that the beaches remain protected. Mr. Edgerton stated they held brainstorming sessions that included the idea of adding an all-terrain vehicle that could access areas of the beach that are difficult to reach, installing cameras on drones, and installing lifeguard towers. Beach patrol staff stated that their main concern was the beach near Boardwalk #4. This area is a concern due to the volume of swimmers in or near swift flowing currents.

Mr. Kinne asked patrol staff how many emergencies they typically respond to in any given season. Staff stated that they can only remember five emergencies since 2003.

Mr. Kortvelesy asked patrol staff what kind of working relationship they had with SJFD. Staff and Chief Kunitzer stated they had a good working relationship. They attend first responder training together and the beach patrol depends on the fire department for access to equipment that the beach patrol does not have, particularly boats.

Beach staff stated a problem they are having is communicating with other agencies while on the beach. Staff said there is a noticeable gap in radio tower coverage on the beaches of Seabrook Island that causes communications with SJFD and the Charleston County Sheriff's Office to be dropped. Chief Kunitzer said he has communicated this gap to Charleston County Government as an issue that needs addressed.

#### SJFD Strategic Plan

Chief Kunitzer gave a report to the committee on the SJFD strategic plan. The plan will cover the next five years. SJFD solicited feedback from the communities they serve and shared that information with their own staff. Planning sessions were originally only scheduled to last three days but stretched into weeks. The Chief said this was a good thing for staff and ultimately resulted in a better plan. Chief Kunitzer stated that goals are hiring and retaining qualified staff, data acquisition and management, maintaining capital resources, staff training, and acquiring international accreditation.

Mr. Kortvelesy asked Chief Kunitzer about the possibility of SJFD acquiring grant funding. Chief Kunitzer stated that they have applied for grants in the past. He stated that grants at both the local and federal level are broken into two categories, staffing, and capital acquisition. He stated they have not been successful recently in acquiring funding.

Mr. Kinne asked Chief Kunitzer what the rate of turnover was for newer staff. The Chief replied that in the last year it was the lowest it has ever been. He said that it is rare for a firefighter to leave SJFD to work at another local fire agency.

Mr. Cronin asked about the frequency of calls and if call volume increased in the warmer months. Chief Kunitzer stated that Seabrook will see a small increase in the summer season, but not to the extent of Kiawah's increase.

Mr. Kortvelesy thanked the chief for attending and said he would share the plan with the rest of the committee.

#### Tropical Storm Debby

Chief Kunitzer stated that the storm was good for staff from a preparation standpoint. He commented on how pleased he was to see

that residents heeded the warning from emergency management personnel to stay home. He said the fact that the roads were clear helped his staff respond to emergencies during and after the storm.

Mr. Kortvelesy said he was disappointed to hear from residents that they were not receiving pertinent information about the storm. Abigail Grooms stated that storm updates were sent to individuals on the email list as well as posted to the Town's website. Ms. Grooms said the information that is available to residents is more extensive than the updates supplied by the Seabrook Island Property Owners Association (SIPOA). Mr. Kortvelesy stated that this is caused by resident interactions with the Town being limited. He encouraged individuals to sign up to receive regular emails from the Town.

Mr. Kinne asked if it might be possible for SIPOA to share their email list with the Town. Mr. Kortvelesy said the communications aspect is an issue that is often discussed by the Disaster Recovery Council (DRC). Mr. Kinne commented that if SIPOA has email addresses for all residents, they should be sharing that with the Town.

#### 2025 Budget Needs

Mr. Kortvelesy stated that the Public Safety Committee's budget needs historically, have been low. Mr. Cronin reminded the committee that Seabrook Island will host the 2025 Disaster Awareness Day.

Mr. Kortvelesy asked for any other information related to 2025 budget needs. In response to beach patrol staff, Mr. Cronin asked for the members' attitudes on a year-round beach patrol. Mr. Kortvelesy said he would like to hear from patrol staff about providing a scaled back service in the off season.

Mr. Kortvelesy addressed the possible need to upgrade communications equipment. He asked Mr. Cronin if it would be appropriate to ask staff from Charleston County Government speak to the Public Safety Committee in the next few months.

Mr. Cronin said that there is a need to replace batteries in the 800 MHz radios owned by the Town. Mr. Kortvelesy stated that any budget request that comes from the committee should at least maintain what the Town already has.

#### TetraTech/Phillips and Jordan

Mr. Kortvelesy asked Mr. Cronin about the possibility of representatives from TetraTech and Phillips and Jordan being present at one of the next two meetings. Mr. Cronin said he would ask them to attend the October meeting.

#### CITIZEN COMMENTS

Mr. Kortvelesy informed the committee he received a comment related to Low-Speed Vehicles (LSV) impeding traffic between town hall and the

traffic-circle. Mr. Kinne asked about installing pullout lanes for use by LSV's.

Mr. Maher stated the problem was an LSV operator's lack of awareness of local rules related to impeding traffic.

Mr. Cronin stated that staff received a comment related to tree roots damaging parts of the pathway. Mr. Cronin said staff were working on repairs in those areas.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, Mr. Kortvelesy declared the meeting adjourned at 11:52 am.

Peter D. Wiggins II  
Town Clerk

