

A special meeting of the Beaufort City Council was held on May 1, 2007 at 5:00 p.m. in the City Hall Conference Room, 302 Carteret Street. In attendance were Mayor Bill Rauch, Mayor Pro Tem George H. O'Kelley, Council members Donnie Ann Beer, Gary B. Fordham, Mike Sutton, and City Manager Scott Dadson. In accordance with South Carolina Code of Laws, 1976, Section 30-4-80(d), as amended, all local media were duly notified of the time, date, place and agenda of this meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

The Mayor called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

ORDINANCE ADOPTING EMERGENCY BUDGET

The City Manager stated this emergency ordinance allows for the expenditure of unbudgeted funds for traffic personnel, equipment, and other matters arising from the damage and closure of the J. E. McTeer Bridge. It will become effective upon adoption and expires automatically. Expenditures are being tracked in the FEMA manner as though this were a natural emergency. It still has not been determined if the City will be reimbursed. The Mayor inquired as to how repayment would be made. The City Attorney, William B. Harvey, III, replied possibly through the barge company's insurance if there is enough after covering repairs to the bridge. The Finance Director, Shirley Hughes, pointed out if the City is not reimbursed, this will have to be paid through the fund balance. Councilman Fordham reminded Council of the money recently appropriated for the Performing Arts Center and said in his opinion those funds should be used. Ms. Hughes added that the funds earmarked for the Municipal Center could be reallocated if the City is not reimbursed.

On motion by Councilwoman Beer, second by Councilman Fordham, Council voted to adopt the emergency ordinance. (Copy of ordinance at end of these minutes)

TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT IN THE CITY DUE TO BRIDGE CLOSURE

The City Manager displayed a map showing the traffic detour plan during the McTeer Bridge closure while explaining Ribaut Road, Boundary and Carteret Streets will function as thoroughfares. Left turn movements will be limited on Carteret Street to keep the traffic flow moving. Duke and Craven Streets will be access streets manned by police personnel to allow residents of the Point to come and go. Tomorrow morning beginning at 5:30 a.m. until 7:00 a.m., there will be a lane reversal allowing both lanes of traffic from the airport on Ladies Island into town. This traffic will be managed by the Sheriff's department. The left lane of traffic will travel Bay Street and the right lane will continue onto Carteret Street.

Other information of importance that he mentioned was the State is sending 30 Troopers to assist the police and sheriff's department. The Coast Guard has modified the bridge opening schedule of which the times were listed; however, that does not apply to barges under tow. Also, a boat takes fuel to the Air Station on Thursdays and the bridge will open for it. The schedule on week ends for the boat traffic and vehicle traffic using the bridge are slightly different, he said. The City Manager stated there are daily meetings regarding traffic situations and they are trying to be consistent so there is a pattern to eliminate some of the confusion.

SCDOT has a contractor on site and has declared this a state of emergency from their perspective.

In reply to Councilman Sutton's question regarding turning right onto Bay from Carteret Street, the City Manager said four intersections are being encouraged to allow traffic onto Bay Street. Also, there are no turning restrictions on Ribaut Road and Boundary Street. After the morning and afternoon rush hours, right turns onto Bay Street from Carteret Street are allowed. The intersections at Craven and Duke Streets are manned by police officers to assist drivers into the Point. The information will be distributed through the press, Main Street Beaufort, and the newspaper. The City has authority from the State Department of Transportation to manage traffic however necessary to make it safe. Adjustments are being made as necessary. Councilman O'Kelley suggested riding bicycles as an alternative.

Councilman Sutton suggested improving the signage because what is in place is not adequate. The Chamber of Commerce Executive Director, Carlotta Ungara, mentioned tourists will park at the Visitor's Center and walk but signage is important to avoid confusion. The City Manager noted a meeting is scheduled for tomorrow at noon with the County Traffic Engineer and if there is a safety issue, it will be discussed.

The Bay Street merchants expressed concern about not allowing traffic onto Bay Street from Carteret Street. They asked the times to turn right be extended and since parking is not being allowed near the corner of Carteret and Bay Streets, why can't that be a right turn lane. The police chief explained that area is needed to park vehicles in case of an accident so as not to cause the traffic to back up. Councilman O'Kelley mentioned that if the traffic is no worse at 3:00 p.m. than it is at 1:00 p.m. then maybe the time could be changed. Police Chief Dowling said that would be taken into consideration after the lane reversal goes into effect tomorrow. Mr. Sutton and Mr. O'Kelley pointed out that everyone is suffering but any consideration that be given to assist the merchants needs to be considered. Ambulances will be allowed to traverse the McTeer Bridge. Also, the construction on U.S. Highway 21 has been suspended due to the large number of dump trucks, cement trucks, and contractors having difficulty getting to the site. Alternatives of pontoon bridges, boats, and ferries were discussed to alleviate the traffic during the next three months. The City Manager said there are approximately 59,000 vehicles that usually use both bridges daily and are now forced to use one bridge.

Councilman O'Kelley suggested contacting the Corps of Engineers who controls the Intracoastal Waterway to investigate any problems as far as pieces of the bridge falling into the river. The City Manager added that the U.S. Coast Guard has been very helpful and are investigating too.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before Council, the meeting was adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

BILL RAUCH, MAYOR

COUNCILWOMAN DONNIE ANN BEER

COUNCILMAN GARY B. FORDHAM

COUNCILMAN GEORGE H. O'KELLEY, JR.

COUNCILMAN MIKE SUTTON

ATTEST:

BEVERLY W. GAY, CITY CLERK