

Walterboro City Council
Special Called Meeting
March 25, 2013

MINUTES

A Special Called Meeting of Walterboro City Council was held at City Hall on Monday, March 25, 2013 at 10:00 A.M., with Mayor Bill Young presiding.

PRESENT WERE: Mayor Bill Young, Council Members: Paul Siegel, Dwayne Buckner, Charles Lucas, Tom Lohr and Bobby Bonds. City Manager Jeff Lord, City Clerk Betty Hudson and City Attorney George Cone were also present. There were approximately 12 persons present in the audience. Council Member Randy Peters was absent.

The Mayor called the meeting to order and called on Council Member Buckner for the invocation and Council Member Lohr to lead the Pledge of Allegiance to our flag.

The purpose of this meeting was to hear a presentation on Public Safety from Dr. Craig Fraser of the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF).

Since Mr. Fraser had not arrived at the meeting, the Mayor entertained a motion to enter an Executive Session. He announced that the next agenda item following Executive Session would be the Public Safety presentation by Mr. Fraser.

A motion to enter an Executive Session was made by Council Member Lucas, seconded by Council Member Lohr and passed unanimously, except Council Member Peters was absent and did not vote. The Mayor announced that the meeting would enter an Executive Session for a discussion of negotiations incident to proposed contractual arrangements. The meeting then entered into an Executive Session.

The meeting returned to Open Session and City Manager Lord introduced Mr. Craig Fraser of PERF, for a presentation on the law enforcement aspects of our Public Safety Department and what improvements can be made.

Mr. Fraser then gave remarks about his proposal to work with the Public Safety Department. He stated that his firm is 35 years old and is a private nonprofit firm which is headquartered in Washington, D.C. He said, we exist for only one reason, and that is to improve policing. He stated that his firm has worked with about 200 police departments of all sizes across the country in the last fifteen years. The smallest group we did a study for was 12. We have done others as large as Chicago and Los Angeles. He noted that his firm has done previous research looking at bullet proof vests, getting officers to wear them more frequently, and also did some research looking at license plate readers, to get help in finding stolen vehicles. We also have done a series of forums, where we bring people together to talk about issues that are a major concern to the police department.

He told Council that his proposal is outlined in three major parts. His three-part plan would first include a determination of the core things that this community wants its police department to do. We do this by looking at documents, evidence, data and we also talk to a lot of people. We would also interview the City leadership.

Secondly, PERF would inspect the department internally, looking at data, workload for patrol, workload for investigators, how many administrative support people are needed in order to handle the workload. We would want to know what approach the department has been using to deal with the problems of crime and violence. Are there long range things or short range things that are being done to help prevent crime? We will look at the amount of community policing and the community engagement in problem solving.

The third part of the plan would be to look at how all this works together in a crime strategy for this agency dealing with the problems of crime in Walterboro.

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Mr. Fraser then briefly detailed the professional credentials for the three people who would be doing the study. He said we expect to be on-site probably twice. The three of us will probably be here a total of 9-10 days. We will talk with a lot of people in that time.

Council Member Buckner then thanked Mr. Fraser for coming from Washington, DC, for his presentation. He then said, you mentioned a three-prong approach, with information from the community, and that is important to me. Taking that information and looking at the Department, and then you would develop a strategy. Could you elaborate a little more on the community part of it?

Mr. Fraser answered that first of all, we would want to talk with the leadership. We would do interviews with City Council, and City Administration. Secondly, we would talk to people within the community. The way we have done which is most effective is to have three or four focus groups of community members. If you so desire, we would have open meetings as well. Mr. Fraser stated that his work would take a total of 120 days from the start time to the end and the filing of his report.

Council Member Buckner then asked, do you address public perception in your strategy? Mr. Fraser answered that those concerns would be addressed.

Council Member Lohr asked, in terms of formulating your report, where are you in the followup part of it? Mr. Fraser clarified that part of the report is an implementation plan. In the scope of this particular study, followup would have to be a separate engagement, but there would be an implementation plan that we would lay out for you with some time lines.

Council Member Bonds then asked, are you going to leave us with a specific set of recommended strategies that we can then employ and if we so desire, then also have our folks report back to us on their work in accomplishing those specific strategies? Mr. Fraser said that the study would include an implementation strategy, a series of recommendations, and a series of things that have to happen to implement those recommendations.

Council Member Bonds then asked about accreditation. He stated, I would like your thoughts on the accreditation process, is this something we need to do. How would it be different from retaining your services? What can you tell us about the certification process and whether not this is something we need to also be looking at? Mr. Fraser told him before coming to PERF some 18 years ago, he managed the accreditation process, so I am very familiar with the process. The keys to accreditation are that you look at the guidelines and have policies in place that you follow that match the guidelines. When we do a study like this, we will look at issues of high risk policies. We'll look at things like use of force and harassment. We'll look at a series of things that will very quickly get an agency in trouble and cost the city lots of money. That does not mean we will cover every particular policy that the accreditation people would want you to have in place. Our work would probably be a great springboard to accreditation.

Accreditation does some really good things. It shows that you will have a very professional department, that you have met standards of your peers by size, and it enables you to continue to look at that. It does take a considerable amount of organizational effort. It takes somebody that is going to shepherd it; someone who is going to monitor it for a period of time. One of the things we could do as part of our study is to make a recommendation whether or not you should pursue accreditation.

Council Member Siegel then ask if PERF was involved in the North Charleston project. He asked Mr. Fraser to comment on their involvement in this project.

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Mr. Fraser said that study was aimed at helping the city to find ways to reduce violence. The study for Walterboro would be more comprehensive, looking at the police department and its crime prevention efforts.

Mr. Buckner then asked for specific experience the firm has in dealing with municipalities the size of Walterboro. Mr. Fraser cited experience in working with Grass Valley, California with about 25 employees, and another agency in Hampton, CT.

Council Member Buckner then asked Mr. Fraser what do you perceive is the issue with us here, this department, this community as it relates to crime and violence? Mr. Fraser answered, I don't know that. I've done research, but until we talk to people I think I would be out of bounds to give you an answer.

Mayor Young then said, we have a Public Safety Department, so would you also be looking at our fire side, or only at the police side? Mr. Fraser said he would only be looking at the police side.

Mayor Young then asked, after you have given us your plan, what are your followup procedures for helping us during the implementation process?

Mr. Fraser responded, unless we did a separate engagement for implementation for followup, that would be a different thing, but there is an ongoing informal relationship with people that we work with.

Mayor Young asked how many cities under 10,000 population that your organization has completed a study for? Mr. Fraser responded that this is about one dozen.

Upon a question raised by Council Member Bonds on the difference between his organization and ICMA, Mr. Fraser responded that the key for his firm (PERF) is that we focus only on police. He said, our research arm brings us the best knowledge about what works in policing.

Further discussion was held, after which the presentation was concluded.

The Mayor then entertained a motion to enter an Executive Session. Council Member Lucas so moved. Council Member Lohr seconded the motion that passed unanimously. Council Member Peters was absent and did not vote. The Mayor announced that the meeting will enter into an Executive Session for a discussion of negotiations incident to proposed contractual arrangements. There was a 5 minute recess by the Mayor and the meeting then entered Executive Session.

The meeting returned to Open Session and a motion was made by Council Member Lucas to hire ICMA for our study for both fire and crime. Council Member Bonds seconded the motion. In discussing the motion, Council Member Buckner said he would support this motion with the hope that ICMA would do an in depth study of the community, go out and do those forums and talk to people to see what their needs are as it relates to the Public Safety Department.

The motion then passed unanimously, except Council Member Peters was absent and did not vote.

There being no further business to consider, a motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Council Member Lohr, seconded by Council Member Lucas and passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 12:50 P.M. Notice of this meeting was

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distributed to all local media and posted on the City Hall bulletin board at least twenty-four hours prior to meeting time.

Respectfully,

Betty J. Hudson
City Clerk

APPROVED: May 14, 2013