

## **City Council Study Session Minutes – May 9, 2011**

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At 7:30 p.m. Mayor Maxwell called the regularly scheduled Anacortes City Council study session of May 9, 2011 to order. Eric Johnson, Nick Petrish, Erica Pickett, Brad Adams, Bill Turner, Cynthia Richardson and Brian Geer were present.

Mayor Maxwell announced several upcoming community events. The Boys and Girls Club annual fundraising breakfast is Thursday, May 12, at 7:00 a.m. at the National Guard Armory on M Avenue. The Swinomish will celebrate a ground breaking on Tuesday, May 10 from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. on Casino Drive for their new 100-unit hotel. Waterfront Festival starts May 20.

The mayor thanked a group of volunteers including K-Kids who worked in the Anacortes Community Forest Lands on May 7 to remove invasive non-native plants: Brian Tottenham, Joan Knowles, Hershel Janz, Cassidy Janz, Charlene Janz, Hector Hernandez, Laurel Hernandez, Chaundrea Grooms, Justin Turner, Paige Turner, Bill Sarvis, Jennifer Lindberg, Francis Arnold, John Kiner, Abel Chomjak, Carol Chomjak, Tony Vecchione and Emma Cunningham.

### **Public Safety Update**

Police Chief Bonnie Bowers provided an update from the Anacortes Police Department. She said that in 2010 Anacortes was again named one of 20 safest small towns in America. Chief Bowers reviewed the organization chart for the department which includes 25 commissioned officers and 7 support staff. She noted that of the 21 men and 4 women officers, 22 of them live on Fidalgo Island. They average 14 years in law enforcement and many work their entire careers in Anacortes. The Chief reported that following some recent retirements and new hires most of the officers are now between 30 and 60 years of age which is exactly what is desired and that projected retirements will occur at a steady rate.

Chief Bowers then reviewed crime statistics. She said crime has gone down steadily for the past 10 years, calls for service were down last year and reported felony crime has declined. Misdemeanors were up last year including lots of property crimes. Violent crime continues to be very low with fewer than three reported sexual assaults per year and about four arsons per year. The Chief said the department is proud that this city of nearly 17,000 people has fewer than 20 serious assaults each year. She said domestic violence continues to be a challenge with about 100 calls per year average.

Chief Bowers then addressed property crimes. She said property crimes are largely crimes of opportunity. She said the rate dropped after an intensive public education campaign in 2008 but in 2010 thefts increased again. She observed that in the current economy thieves are more desperate and the department is seeing more shoplifting and vehicle prowls. Burglaries dropped in 2010, however. She said fraud and identity theft are referred to Federal jurisdiction and so are hard to handle locally.

Chief Bowers turned to traffic safety. She said most criminal traffic arrests are suspended license drivers. DUI statistics were down slightly in 2010. She observed that apprehending drunk drivers requires officers to be out on the streets and said that having fewer service calls overall has freed up officers to pursue DUIs. Regarding traffic citations, the Chief said in 2008 she challenged officers stop a lot of cars, issue a lot of warnings and write a lot of infractions to reduce traffic collisions and make the community safer. She said that paid off last year when crashes decreased. Mr. Geer asked about the impact of the new school zone warning lights. Chief Bowers said they have been effective and that infractions have gone down in those zones. Mr. Turner asked if citizens should call in suspected drunk drivers. Chief Bowers said absolutely, drunk driving is a crime in progress and should be called in.

Chief Bowers reported that crime rates continue to drop nationally. Experts say this is due to better policing, a swelling prison population, a decline in the crack epidemic, and the aging of the population. She said in Anacortes proactive policing and an aggressive crime prevention program are making a difference. She said the community is also very proactive about watching out for neighbors and the auxiliary patrol puts in over 1500 hours per year.

The Chief then presented budget figures for 2005-2011 and noted the department has not had to lay off any officers. It has found alternative funding through many different grants and the city's insurance authority and has spent frugally. The department also reduced costs by closing the office on nights and weekends so one non-commissioned position did not have to be filled when it was vacated by a retirement.

Chief Bowers said the largest cost is incarceration. She said funds spent on extradition have gone down because Anacortes officers no longer travel out of county to pick up offenders wanted on misdemeanor warrants. However, medical expenses went up from \$4500 in 2005 to almost \$22,000 in 2009. Jail is also expensive: \$68/night in Skagit County jail plus a \$40 booking fee, or \$53/night for work release. Oak Harbor jail costs \$65/night for convicted misdemeanors. The Chief stressed that these costs are not optional: the department is responsible for medical costs and jail fees until a suspect is charged in Superior Court which usually takes three days. If they are held in custody the City continues to pay until the detainee is convicted of a crime. For misdemeanor arrests the City is responsible for all medical bills while a person is incarcerated. If a detainee has private health insurance the City bills them but detainees on Medicare or Medicaid lose those benefits while they are in jail.

Chief Bowers then described some of the steps the department is taking to control incarceration costs. These include sending those with short sentences to Oak Harbor to serve their jail time rather than having them wait for space available at Skagit County and negotiating a better split on medical costs at both hospitals. In 2009 the split was 80/20 split but for 2011 it will be 55/45. Mrs. Richardson asked who pays the non-city side of the split. Chief Bowers said the hospital district, so in fact still the taxpayers. She noted that federal taxes pay for those services if clients are on Medicaid or Medicare and said very little is ever charged back to or collected from the detainee.

Chief Bowers discussed possible cost savings from alternatives to incarceration. Chief Bowers said 85% of Anacortes offenders are eligible for work release and 60-100 per month are currently sentenced to the County jail alternatives program. However, many offenders don't show up for their assignments so their files come back and costs are incurred to re-sentence them. Chief Bowers said Sedro Woolley and Burlington both run their own work programs. She said setting up such a program requires a part-time coordinator to attend court, screen offenders, and assign them to work crews immediately. Statistics show that the sooner an offender is assigned to a crew the more likely s/he is to complete the sentence. Offenders can work for City departments or for private entities. The coordinator supervises inmate labor, reports back to the court on the hours worked, and when the sentence is complete the coordinator goes back to court and the fine is paid. The Chief said down sides are that workers are on the City's L&I and aren't always highly skilled or motivated but that between the economic value of the work performed and not paying jail fees the City could realize an economic benefit in a short period of time. Mr. Geer asked if knowing a sentence is likely to be work release rather than jail time makes offenders more likely to commit future crimes. Chief Bowers said she didn't have statistics to determine that.

On other matters, Chief Bowers advised that the Crown Victoria police car is not being produced anymore so the department is researching a new model. Fuel economy and performance are both criteria but patrol cars must also handle prisoners as well as officers. She said police vehicles are well used when replaced but should still hold some resale value. The Chief then listed some of the department's many community programs: Safe Routes to School, safety programs in the schools, Second Step in middle and elementary schools, Auxiliary Patrol, Citizens Academy and Little Citizens Academy, victim outreach program, timely press releases, and the domestic violence offender treatment program. She said the department is dedicated to physical fitness and that ten officers recently participated in the voluntary physical fitness test. She announced that officers have made public safety, traffic safety and officer safety their goal for 2011. The Chief added that the department will be very busy with accreditation through the summer. Chief Bowers concluded by noting the upcoming Police Week and said May 15 is Police Memorial Day. She explained the National Association of Chiefs of Police's Under 100 initiative to decrease police deaths nationally.

Mr. Petrish asked about the drug situation in Anacortes. Chief Bowers said there are drugs in the schools in Anacortes as there are everywhere and that the department makes small arrests, mostly for marijuana.

She discussed enforcement challenges with the new medical marijuana law. She said Anacortes is seeing less methamphetamine and more heroin. Mr. Petrish asked if there are any unsolved murder cases that should be reviewed. Chief Bowers said that is something the administrative captain will be looking into as soon as the accreditation process is over, especially if there is any DNA evidence involved. She noted that "cold cases" are a priority of Sheriff Reichardt and the Anacortes department will work with the county on any such cases. Mr. Adams asked when and why citizens should call 911. Chief Bowers said in Skagit County 911 is central dispatch and should be called any time a citizen needs to bring something to the attention of police, fire or medical aid. She said people who are still uncomfortable calling 911 for non-emergencies can use the business number which is 428-3211. Mrs. Richardson asked if Anacortes sees a lot of crimes preying on older or disabled citizens. Chief Bowers said no, the community has a very strong network watching out for seniors. Mr. Johnson asked if it is true that it costs \$25 to call 911. The mayor explained that the City is charged a per-call fee based on averages but he would never discourage anyone from calling 911. It is an efficient centralized call center and the fee is the same whether citizens call 911 or the non-emergency number. Mr. Johnson asked if there will be a cluster of police retirements coming up at one time. Chief Bowers said no, they expect a retirement every 1-3 years. Mayor Maxwell said most of the officers are on a defined contribution plan, not a defined benefit plan, so there is no unfunded liability for police retirement.

Fire Chief Richard Curtis then provided an update on a couple of issues affecting the Fire Department. First he announced that a new community notification system called MyStates came on line in Skagit County in the past week. This replaces Rapid Notify. He said MyStates is a web based system that was purchased by the Tesoro and Shell refineries and can issue notifications throughout the county. Currently MyStates uses the phone book database. It will soon use the 911 call center database which is more complete but still misses many cell phones. Mayor Maxwell announced that personal cell phones will soon be able to register so placing an emergency call from a cell phone will let 911 know where to dispatch aid. Chief Curtis added that citizens can also register to be notified via text messages, email, voice mail, Blackberry, pagers, and some properly configured reader boards and websites. He thanked the mayor and Chief Bowers for working to get MyStates implemented by May 1.

Mrs. Richardson clarified that the purpose of MyStates is to notify affected portions of the community in case of an emergency. Chief Curtis concurred and added that the school district could one day purchase the ability to use it to reach parents as well. He said MyStates can notify geographic zones or the entire town or county. Mr. Turner asked if MyStates would be used to notify the public of refinery emissions. Chief Curtis said it would be used only for emergency situations because it does cost money to activate. He said MyStates can also notify community responders of refinery events and can issue special team notifications such as for a confined space team, rope rescue team or personnel callback. Chief Curtis explained that the 911 center would conduct the notifications. Field responders would call 911, give a password, and advise of the geographic area to notify and type of message, then the 911 dispatcher would activate the message system.

Chief Curtis then addressed a topic of recent public concern, compact fluorescent light bulbs. He said there have been unsubstantiated reports that some CFLs have burned or put out a flame. The Chief said no government body has confirmed these reports. He said the suspect bulbs are manufactured in China where base materials are not required to be fire resistant as they are in the United States. The Chief said the best way to purchase safe bulbs is buy bulbs with a UL label. Mr. Petrish asked if the bulbs can be recalled. The Chief said the Consumer Product Safety Commission is currently recalling CFL bulbs made by Trisonic, DuraBright, and Teng Fei. The Chief explained that in the normal course of operation CFLs dim over time, the base darkens and then there's a loud pop, a slight odor and maybe even smoke when the bulb burns out but the bulb should never emit flame and anyone seeing flame from a bulb should report it to the Fire Department. The Chief then addressed the question of mercury in fluorescent bulbs. He said it is a very small amount but if a fluorescent bulb breaks citizens should evacuate people and pets, air out the room, shut off forced air heating and cooling, collect debris in a glass jar, use duct tape to pick up particles, then seal the jar and dispose of it at the recycling center or up at the City Maintenance Shop. He said more details are available at the EPA website (<http://www.epa.gov/cfl/cflcleanup.html>).

Chief Curtis then addressed emergency medical services. He said services in Skagit County are coordinated through the EMS Commission established by the Skagit County Commissioners. The Chief displayed the response time for ambulances in four zones. The Chief said Anacortes is one of three contract agencies that provide paramedic-level ambulance service. Anacortes provides two ALS ambulances and responds to Fidalgo, Guemes, and Cypress Islands. He clarified that the Island Hospital ambulance is not contracted to the EMS Commission. The second agency, Central Valley Ambulance Authority, is a public corporation under Skagit County Commissioners that contracts for four ALS units and covers the county east to Lyman. The third agency is Aero-Skagit Ambulance which is a non-profit corporation providing one ALS ambulance and serves from Lyman east into the wilderness areas.

Chief Curtis then listed some of the responsibilities of the EMS commission which makes level of service and policy decisions, distributes EMS levy funds to contracted agencies, provides initial EMT training, coordinates EMT and paramedic retraining, pays the two Medical Program Director's salaries, provides injury prevention training, provides dispatch services for all seven ambulances, partially purchases ambulance units and provides Fire District initial response BLS supplies. In response to a question from Mrs. Richardson the Chief explained that EMT training is a basic 130-hour class that lots of firefighters take and it trains for recognition of medical conditions whereas paramedic training is 800-1200 hours of training plus practical experience. Unlike EMTs, paramedics can provide cardiac medication, administer IVs, provide cardiac shocking, and perform other invasive procedures for life saving. Mr. Petrish suggested replacing the oldest of the City's ambulances.

Chief Curtis then addressed EMS funding. He said Anacortes receives funds from the County EMS levy of \$0.25 per \$1000 based on the 6-year levy cycle for which the next election is scheduled in 2012. The Chief noted that levy funds will fall short by about \$200K in 2011 due to falling property values. The City also receives revenue for patient billing through Island Hospital. The Chief said current EMS challenges include falling reimbursements which are down to 55 cents for every dollar spent; increasing pressure to use ambulances for inter-facility transfers which takes firefighters out of the service area; more need to move patients from specialist to specialist at different hospitals; rising costs of labor and equipment; defining limits of service for the next EMS levy; and ensuring the economic viability of ambulance providers. The Chief said currently the EMS reimbursement doesn't even cover the cost of one of the City's two ambulances. Mayor Maxwell explained that the EMS Commission has decided ambulances will be fire based but fire departments need their staff to fight fires. He said hospitals used to provide ambulance service but the City of Anacortes inherited that duty when the hospital didn't have 24-hour staff. The mayor called for a clean division of responsibility for services, for inter-facility transfers for instance. Mr. Turner asked if the City has any control over reimbursements. Chief Curtis said the City increases rates 3-4% every year and some private insurance pays for ambulance service but Medicare and Medicaid pay only what they choose to pay regardless of what agencies charge. Mr. Adams observed that inter-facility transfers take firefighters/paramedics out of town which leaves fewer staff to protect public safety and suggested the hospital should take back responsibility for patient transfers. Mrs. Richardson asked how reimbursement works in practice. Chief Curtis said the ambulance provides service, then the hospital bills the patient's insurance company or the patient directly if the patient has no insurance. He said the collection rate on uninsured patients is less than 0 and the loss is written off. Mrs. Richardson suggested the Anacortes Fire Department should be able to set minimum staffing levels that may limit personnel availability for transfers. Mayor Maxwell said the City is still negotiating a realistic level of service. He observed there is much more demand for ambulance service than there was twenty years ago.

There being no further business, at approximately 8:48 p.m. the regularly scheduled Anacortes City Council study session of May 9, 2011 adjourned.