

Summary Report
PIC Safety Committee
Meeting of Portland Police officers
Friday, May 8, 2009

In attendance. Mike Langella, Bob Hurley, Mike Murray, Sgt. Gary Hutcheson, Lt. Bill Preis, Capt. Ted Ross

We began by discussing the events of the previous two weeks and the heightened police enforcement of traffic safety laws on the island: seat belts, unregistered vehicles parked on island streets, towing, etc.

On the day that the seat belt citations were issued, the police department was testing a new amphibious vehicle which has the capacity to reach remote island areas which would limit accessibility by other means. This vehicle has the capacity to serve as a resource for the bomb squad and other police departments. The vehicle had been purchased with money from a Homeland Security grant, and was staffed by officers from a regular traffic enforcement unit that operates throughout the city. The officers were also responding to a citizen's complaint from GDI. Having found no violations on GDI, they came to Peaks to await the next ferry, and used their time to check for violations on Peaks.

Captain Ross made it clear that Peaks Island residents can now assume that they have received notice that all traffic and vehicle laws will be enforced on Peaks; that all officers assigned to Peaks will be expected to consistently enforce traffic and vehicle laws. He also reviewed a parallel expectation that all officers in the police department will have the opportunity to use their discretion at the scene of a traffic or safety violation – citation, warning, no action, etc. He acknowledged that traffic and vehicular laws on Peaks had been inconsistently enforced, and that this would change.

Last week, 5 tickets were served on Tuesday and 4 more on Friday. 36 vehicles on Peaks were posted for being non-compliant with registration laws, a few of those were more than 150 days overdue for renewal. The officers related that non-registered vehicles can also reveal that the owner may not have insurance coverage, which can be a safety and financial issue in case of an accident.

The officers described similar vehicle and traffic checks at other locations in the city, which were standard operating procedure. Generally, the police department does not provide warnings to citizens in other parts of the city about any traffic checks. Bob and I asked that in the future the police department would communicate to the PIC when enforcement expectations would change so that we could generally inform the public that such actions were forthcoming. We will talk more about this idea when we next meet.

At our request, Capt. Ross expressed an interest in working with us to define "community policing" in subsequent meetings. He began the process by indicating that one aspect of it is securing public input regarding the violations of laws residents of a community deem most pressing to them – e.g. underage drinking, drug sale enforcement, traffic speed, seat belt enforcement, etc. Bob and I agreed that this process would involve the PIC and community members so that a list of clearly focused community issues could be formulated. Police officers could then prioritize the investigation of those issues.

Bob and I expressed our view that patrol officers should be more active when present on Welch St. Captain Ross said that our expectation and the expectation of other Peaks islanders was reasonable and he would like to see that the patrol officers be more pro-active by circulating around Welch St., especially during busy boat arrival/departure times. We agreed that this matter would become part of a future agenda discussion about community policing.

We discussed the island problem of cars being parked for long periods of time on both island streets and the parking lot. This issue will be soon a part of future discussions about how to implement a clear plan for resolving the problem. Last week only one car was towed off the island last week. Two more were towed to other locations on the island.

We agreed to schedule monthly meetings to develop a framework for future discussions about police matters on the island. The proposed schedule will begin with a meeting in the first of June with Sgt Hutcheson and his superior officers.

We determined that Bob and I, as Chairs of the Public Safety Committee, would act as the primary link between the Police Department officials, Sgt. Hutcheson, and the PIC. We agreed that face to face meetings and verbal interactions would be a more productive way to work on island policing issues.

We concluded the meeting by briefly discussing the police staffing patterns throughout the year, especially the gap in officer –EMT trained coverage during the first shift. We didn't have adequate time to discuss this important issue in detail, however, Bob and I will present a proposal to the police department about this matter in June.

Submitted by: Bob Hurley and Mike Langella, Co-Chairs
PIC Public Safety Committee