

Martinez City Council Public Safety Subcommittee Meeting
June 9, 2014
Martinez, CA

Present: AnaMarie Avila Farias, Councilmember
Michael Menesini, Vice Mayor

Staff present: Acting Police Chief Eric Ghisletta
Police Officer Mike Estanol

Others present: Rich Verrilli, resident
Rick Jones, Martinez Gazette
Jim Neu, Martinez Environmental Group
Tony Semenza, Martinez Civil Service Commission and Executive Director of
the Community Awareness and Emergency Response

1. Call to order.

Vice Mayor Michael Menesini called the meeting to order in the Board Room at 6:00 p.m. with both members present.

2. Neighborhood Policing Area Update.

Chief Ghisletta began the report, discussing the assignment of officers to 24 (potential) neighborhoods in the City and the plan to bring them to the Public Safety meetings for periodic reports. He introduced Officer Estanol, who is assigned to Area 2, which includes the downtown. Officer Estanol discussed why he chose Area 2 and his hopes for the program, what he wants to accomplish, and some of the current issues for the neighborhood.

Vice Mayor Menesini asked about the garbage issue that was mentioned, and Officer Estanol explained concerns between Barrel Age and New Way Cleaners regarding the garbage cans left out an extra day because Barrel Age was closed the first day after pickup. Vice Mayor Menesini commended Officer Estanol for his proactive approach.

Councilmember Avila Farias asked about the latest update on the crime statistics, etc. Chief Ghisletta indicated he had not brought the report with him, unfortunately. He said he could make it a regular part of the Subcommittee agenda.

Councilmember Avila Farias asked about the realities of the homeless situation in Martinez, particularly related to panhandling in the downtown and impacts of the River House. Officer Estanol stated that much of the problem is perception, not reality. He commented on those who end up in Martinez after incarceration or hospitalization, and he noted that it tends to go in spurts, and is especially noticeable during warmer weather.

In response to a further question from Councilmember Avila Farias, Chief Ghisletta discussed timing issues with releases from the jail occurring after the last buses run.

Councilmember Avila Farias also commented on issues with homeless at the train station and the hospital, which Chief Ghisletta and Officer Estanol discussed at length with the Subcommittee – including types of hospitalizations, prerequisites for releasing patients, and potential impacts from the closing of a hospital in San Pablo.

Vice Mayor Menesini provided additional information about hospitalizations for mental issues and legal requirements/limitations. He acknowledged that having the County hospital in Martinez does have its impacts on the City and its residents. Councilmember Avila Farias commented on pending legislation that is intended to address the San Pablo hospital, but will affect other communities as well.

Councilmember Avila Farias asked about plans for the National Night Out on Tuesday, August 5th. Officer Estanol reviewed his plans for the downtown area. Councilmember Avila Farias asked about plans for other neighborhoods, which were briefly discussed.

Item 4 taken out of order.

4. Railway Oil Transportation

Chief Ghisletta commented on Mr. Semenza's experience as a 22-year+ fire chief (retired) for Chevron.

Vice Mayor Menesini thanked Mr. Semenza for coming and lending his expertise.

Mr. Semenza provided more information about his experience and knowledge. He noted firstly that none of the refineries in Martinez are receiving Bakken crude oil by rail, although they might be receiving it in another manner. He confirmed that there is one train that goes through Martinez carrying crude oil from Stockton to Richmond along Highway 4 every 7-10 days. He noted that the root cause of the rail accidents, however, is speed or traffic, not the crude oil. He also pointed out that the number of accidents compared to number of trains is very low.

Mr. Semenza indicated that the length of time that would be needed to replace the old cars would be a minimum of 3-5 years. A member of the audience asked the number of cars per train and the capacity of each. Mr. Semenza said the usual capacity is 30,000 gallons, with potentially 100 cars per train.

Vice Mayor Menesini asked about the proposed project in Rodeo and potential increase in rail traffic. Mr. Semenza said those would be propane cars, and there are already hundreds of them going through on a daily basis. He also confirmed that propane is transported by trucks as well.

Vice Mayor Menesini asked what Mr. Semenza thought were the most important issues currently, and Mr. Semenza indicated if he were on the Council he would want to know what is moving through the downtown and what is traveling along Highway 4. There was brief discussion of the safety measures that have been instituted for propane transport, and Mr. Semenza confirmed that the mutual aid agreements that the City has would mean a very quick response time should there be an incident in Martinez.

Jim Neu, Martinez Environmental Group, asked about Bakken crude that is traveling through Martinez, and Mr. Semenza confirmed there is some going through the City for Tesoro, but none for Shell or Chevron. Mr. Neu also mentioned a Phillips 66 project in Santa Maria, and he asked about its potential impacts on Martinez.

Mr. Semenza confirmed that the Santa Maria project would not route through Martinez. He also reviewed the safest ways to transport Bakken crude – beginning with pipeline, by ship, by barge, and lastly by truck. He acknowledged very few incidents with pipeline deliverance because of safeguards that have been put in place.

Vice Mayor Menesini commented on the San Bruno PG&E explosion; he and Mr. Semenza discussed contributing factors to the incident. Vice Mayor Menesini also discussed his concerns with PG&E gas lines in Martinez and that precautions were needed.

Jim Neu asked about railcars stored west of Martinez, and Mr. Semenza said, if anything is contained within, it is likely propane. There was some discussion as well about mandatory placards that are required on stored railcars to identify what is inside if they are not empty. A question was raised about much-needed improvements to the railroad infrastructure across the country, which was briefly discussed.

Councilmember Avila Farias summarized next steps for the Subcommittee, including identification of what is being transported on local roads and what is coming through the downtown. She asked, and Mr. Semenza confirmed that the Highway 4 transport would be of greater importance because of the length of the highway that passes through Martinez neighborhoods; he suggested that speed of the transport was important as well as the makeup of the tanks. Councilmember Avila Farias noted that getting those answers would be a good first step for the City, as well as developing safety plans to prepare for a potential incident.

Vice Mayor Menesini commented on the necessity for police and fire to be notified when a hazardous material is transported through Martinez. Mr. Semenza indicated he had contacts that could tell when and what type of maintenance has been done on the infrastructure and any inspections that have been made. He asked whether the Council would like a presentation on the issues, and Vice Mayor Menesini said very much so.

Councilmember Avila Farias outlined the next steps including establish some type of communication with the rail system and try to get Acting Chief Ghisletta on the notification list. It was suggested that the Highway Patrol be contacted to see if they were on the notification list. Councilmember Avila Farias also noted the need to contact the rail administration to discuss rail speeds.

Mr. Semenza stated that CAER has a safety summit once a quarter; the next meeting will be held in September. He indicated that they will be bringing in someone from the Federal Railroad Administration to discuss where the regulations are regarding tank cars, speed, and other areas of concerns. The meetings are held at the Shell Club House from 8:00 a.m. until noon. Councilmember Avila Farias asked that further information be sent to her or the Deputy Clerk.

Mr. Verrilli asked about WesPac and potential increases in capacity, which Mr. Semenza discussed. The question was raised whether they were looking to increase the storage capacity for Bakken crude, and Mr. Semenza reiterated that most of the area refineries would do better with pipeline distribution rather than railcars. He also questioned whether WesPac's proposal would even be approved, given the approvals from local governments along the routes.

Mr. Verrilli questioned what Kinder Morgan will be doing with the Bakken Crude it will receive from Stockton, and Mr. Semenza confirmed the Kinder Morgan facility is not big enough for onsite storage, so it must be planning for some to go into a pipeline for further distribution, etc.

The Subcommittee thanked Mr. Semenza for his presentation and information.

3. Social Media.

Chief Ghisletta updated the Subcommittee on information available to the public from the free program called Nixle, which provides free updates via cellphone or email for public safety information or announcements. He mentioned Twitter as another possible way to keep people informed about public safety services, programs and issues. In addition (or instead of), Councilmember Avila Farias suggested nextdoor.com as a way for residents to receive and/or provide information about the community. She indicated she would send a link to Chief Ghisletta, and perhaps Martinez could be the first little city to encourage participation, as many of the big cities have already.

5. Public Comment (Items not on the agenda)

Vice Mayor Menesini asked if there was any further public comment.

Members of the audience expressed appreciation for the information provided by Mr. Semenza regarding the crude oil transportation issue. Councilmember Avila Farias agreed good progress was made. Mr. Neu commented on legislation that was recently passed requiring notification of the transport of Bakken crude through affected jurisdictions, but he wasn't sure exactly how or to whom notification is made. He also commented on the anticipated increases in the amounts and frequency of the transports. Vice Mayor Menesini acknowledged it was a high profile issue.

Vice Mayor Menesini suggested that a future presentation to the Subcommittee from the Fire Department include a discussion of fire conditions and potential fire storms and ways to reduce the risks.

Members of the audience asked how often the Subcommittee meets and how or if they can be notified. The Subcommittee indicated that it is meeting quarterly for the time being, and those who want to be notified should supply their information to Deputy City Clerk Mercy Cabral.

Mr. Verrilli questioned whether the Subcommittee and/or the City should be involved in the WesPac project in Pittsburg. Vice Mayor Menesini said it certainly was an issue to be followed, and he would have no problem speaking up on the matter if Martinez public safety is implicated. He noted there were other issues in the past on which he has taken a stand when he felt it was warranted, even if other Councilmembers did not. There was brief general discussion of what action or position the City of Pittsburg has taken and the Pittsburg Unified School District and State Attorney General Kamala Harris.

6. Adjournment.

The Public Safety Subcommittee meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m. to the next regular meeting in September, 2014, date to be announced.

Respectfully submitted,
Mercy G. Cabral, Deputy City Clerk