

CITY OF MACKINAC ISLAND
MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING
Wednesday, June 05, 2024 at 3:00 PM

City Hall – Council Chambers, 7358 Market St., Mackinac Island, Michigan

I. Call to Order

Mayor Doud called the Special City Council meeting to order at 3:00 pm, and welcomed Officer Gruits

II. Roll Call

PRESENT

Tom Corrigan
Steven Moskwa
Anneke Myers
Alan Sehoyan
St. Onge

ABSENT

Richard Chambers

VI. New Business

Mayor Doud noted that Officer Gruits has met with the Public Safety Committee twice, both meetings went very well, but wanted to give the full Council the chance to ask any questions they may have.

Councilman Corrigan

- What do you feel are the three biggest problems you will face as Chief of Police?
 - Officer Gruits felt that there were definitely safety concerns, especially concerning vehicles.
 - See vehicles all of the time - sensitive dynamic with many “close calls”, a slight change to that dynamic could result in some serious injuries.
 - Working together and trying to limit and reduce those “close calls” would be beneficial
 - Safety concerns that are present on the Island. This is a unique environment where we have many off season and seasonal visitors and different types of workers. As a resident, as a parent, there are concerns regarding the intentions of people who are working and visiting here.
 - General safety concern regarding lack of overall surveillance on the Island
 - Need more control over visibility on docks, Main St., Market St., and a few other areas in case of larger, tragedy or mass casualty-type issues.
 - City needs to have control of surveillance so they do not have to go through surveillance of private companies
 - Open to future conversations of how to implement and management this
 - Councilman Corrigan inquired, out of those three (3) points, which do you feel is the most important?
 - Officer Gruits commented that he felt that his last point regarding overall surveillance was the most important
 - Councilman Corrigan inquired if Officer Gruits has researched the cost of something like this
 - Officer Gruits noted that he had only recently in to it personal surveillance for his home and the Forest Way Townhomes, but had not looked in to with overall Island surveillance in mind
 - Councilman Corrigan agree that this is needed.
 - Going forward, the IT Committee should be looking in to and discussing this

Councilman Sehoyan

- Thanked Officer Gruits for his time served on the Island
- What are your thoughts on electric bikes and congestion in the downtown area
 - Mayor Doud has been working on implementing a speed limit in the downtown area and we are close to getting this completed. What do you see as the biggest concern with electric bikes and congestion in the downtown area?
 - Officer Gruits commented that he believes, for the electric bikes, we are at a fair place, speaking on the way the ordinance is structured, and providing a reasonable accommodation to those who need it. However, we also need to be willing to be creative on how we view this issue going forward.
 - Have concerns with devices that make it easier to go faster and trying to implement speed compliance

- Speed in town is something that is harder to enforce, but officers can always go the route of carelessness / careless riding
- Discussions on how to manage this will be crucial going forward
- Councilman Sehoyan asked if, in regards to reasonable accommodations, do you think with the assistance of legal counsel you would be willing to be stricter with the licensing process?
 - Officer Gruits noted that this is definitely an issue. It is very difficult process.
 - We are seeing more and more electric bikes being used by contractors, seasonal workers, and Island residents alike
 - Simple observation and then enforcement action is not the answer, but there is certainly an issue.
 - Maybe the answer is the City working with the ADA to get more aggressive, or we try to look at a creative solution – “reasonable need” – gets this away from the disability topic a bit, lessening the possibility for a lawsuit
 - Definitely encounter situations that fall outside of the “mobility disability” category where a reasonable need comes in to play
 - At this point, unless we are willing to work with the ADA to change our approach, then some creativity may be important
 - Councilman Sehoyan noted that he agreed, as there are other physiological difficulties that people can have that would make riding a regular bike difficult
- Councilman Sehoyan voiced how much he, among many others, likes seeing Officer Gruits out on the streets, and inquired if Officer Gruits felt that being Chief would change how often he is out and about?
 - Officer Gruits stated that he hopes that does not change at all as he loves being out and talking with the public. His goal is for that not to change.
 - This position is a working position and will give him the opportunity to continue to work with the public as well as the other officers
 - Mayor Doud commented that many felt the same regarding senior transports in the winter
 - Officer Gruits commented that he doesn’t see why the Chief position would prevent him from continuing to doing this type of work.
 - There is a lot of talk within the department on how the transport system could use some modification.
 - Having a second person Monday through Friday assisting with transports and escorts is the solution to the overall problem
 - If only one officer is doing all of the transports and escorts for an entire 12-hour shift, that becomes exhausting
 - Having two officers working during the day would be a huge improvement to the system

Councilman St. Onge

- Fully endorse the Committee's recommendation to hire Officer Gruits as Chief of Police
- Officer Gruits, you are probably one of the better liked people on Mackinac Island - are you and your family prepared for a year from now when that will change just by you doing your job? You will be in a position where people may not like you for following rules or making people follow the rules
 - Officer Gruits noted that he has had to take enforcement action during his employment here, and in the position of Chief, you are the one who pulls more of the scrutiny.
 - Feels that if you are reasonable to people, then they are more likely to understand.
 - For most people, if you are reasonable and the community knows you’re reasonable, if you take enforcement action most people will understand.
 - Not a number driven person, does not believe you can force compliance through numbers, but can earn compliance through cooperation with the community (which comes with enforcement action from time to time)
 - Overall yes, Officer Gruits and his family are prepared for what may come

Councilman Corrigan

- Touched on the mental health issue that occurred the other night – how do you feel about the recourses that were available?
 - Officer Gruits responded that he was happy to see that the issue was resolved the way it was, but it did bring up a dier issue the department has currently, which is only having one vehicle on the island (the other vehicle is stationed in St. Ignace in case of the need for a transport to an off-island facility).
 - The two on duty officers responding already had the only vehicle at the response location (at least two officers are required to maintain the perimeter), which meant that other responding officers had to rely on other agencies to transport additional officers and equipment to the scene.
 - The Mackinac Island Fire Department has been a huge help to the Police Department whenever needed, but expecting other agencies to always have to assist the police department in transportation is problematic. We need to consider other options for additional officers responding to a critical situation.
 - Does not really make sense to have another vehicle stationed on the island during the summer, especially since parking is an issue, but there has to be a way for additional officers responding to critical issues to get to the location outside of the one vehicle the department has at their disposal
 - Mayor Doud noted that this was a good point
- Councilman Corrigan inquired, in terms of enforcement, how do you intend to enforce the soon to be set speed limits?
 - Councilman Corrigan commented that it probably wouldn't be a bad idea for the police officers to have electric bikes in the case of a pursuit. For speed limit enforcement, the only way to do that is to have the ability to chase the person – perhaps this is a partial solution to the department's overall transportation issue
 - Officer Gruits responded that a secondary vehicle of some sort is needed, but not necessarily an electric bike
 - It is very difficult to catch someone who is going faster than you, and doing it easier than you. Does not mean that there aren't solutions thought.
 - In town, the issue most likely isn't speed, it is probably carelessness – a lot of the issues stem from some sort of careless behavior
 - Do think there are other solutions
 - Officer Gruits noted that he has been told by Troopers who have been previously posted on the Island that emergency response only electric bikes would be the safest and fastest way to respond to an incident. But that does not mean that is the only option – very interested in finding a creative solution to this issue as the department does not want to rely on electric bikes, especially due to the opposition from the public

Mayor Doud

- Inquired what Officer Gruits' opinion is on the Chief of Police responding to critical incidents, even if they are not necessarily Police related?
 - Officer Gruits responded that he felt the Chief of Police should absolutely be present to provide whatever assistance and services they can in the situation at hand – this applies to any serious incident that may occur

Councilman Moskwa

- Commented that he is glad to see someone who wants to be a working Chief rather than just administrative
- Councilman Moskwa asked Officer Gruits to talk more about his perception on “community policing”
 - Officer Gruits responded that he feels that law enforcement has shifted over the years from enforcement based to community oriented, and that he feels that is a needed shift. Feels that this community is one of the greatest examples of why that is necessary. Does not think that the Department, City, community, workers, or visitors benefit by the Police Department being an enforcement arm and trying to achieve numbers and perusing citations.
 - Policing here needs to be community oriented, and that means working with and getting to know the community
 - Compliance and cooperation are key

- Mayor Doud noted that a big asset Officer Gruits has is his previous years here working as a Police Officer. You know the people, the island, and the school - this is a big benefit. A new person coming in would have to learn all of that, but you are already prepared to make the next step.
- Officer Gruits commented that he couldn't ask to walk in to a better situation. A win win situation for him. Working with fantastic and knowledgeable officers.
- Councilwoman Myers noted that she does not have any questions, had that Officer Gruits had great interviews with the Committee. Feels that Officer Gruits is a great asset to the community.
- Councilman St. Onge noted that he hopes the Public Safety Committee will sit down and go through the ordinance book as he feels there are a lot of local ordinances that have been thrown to the wind. Need to figure out where our priorities are - if things aren't going to be enforced, they need to be taken off the books.
 - Officer Gruits noted that he felt this was a very good point and idea. There are some ordinances which are still valid, but need to be updated due to current circumstances. Also need to communicate ordinances / rules / laws better to the community so they have a better understanding
 - Councilwoman Myers reminded the Council and Officer Gruits that it is important to understand the history of why an ordinance was created before deciding to take it off the books

Mayor Doud opened the conversation to public comment:

- Island resident and Fire Department member Chuck Pereny noted that Mackinac Island has seen a lot of Police Chiefs come and go, and now that we have a great candidate, it is important to keep him around. Mr. Pereny stated that he felt Officer Gruits was the best person for the job.
- Officer Gruits stated that he is not planning on leaving, regardless of how this opportunity turns out
- Island resident Ben Horn stated that it has been a pleasure to work with Officer Gruits over the years, and that his assistance with all of the work at Stonecliffe has been appreciated

Attorney Evashevski noted that, when hired, the details of Officer Gruits contract will need to be worked.

- Councilwoman Myers noted that this process should start with conversations between Attorney Evashevski and Officer Gruits with details previously discussed in the Public Safety Committee meeting
- Attorney Evashevski will present a draft contract to the Council at a later date

Motion made by Moskwa, seconded by Sehoan, to hire Officer Michael Gruits as Chief of Police, and to have the contract details worked out at a later date.

Voting Yea: Corrigan, Moskwa, Myers, Sehoan, St. Onge

Mayor Doud congratulated Officer Gruits and asked - when you came to Mackinac Island did you ever think you would be Chief?

- Officer Gruits responded that, when he first took the job here, he wasn't sure if he and his family were going to be able to live here at all. This position is an honor and I thank the Council for their decision.
- Officer Gruits stated that his main concern of the safety of the residents, visitors, and contractors remains with this position

VIII. Adjournment

There being no further business, motion by Myers, seconded by Moskwa, to adjourn at 3:41 pm.

Voting Yea: Corrigan, Moskwa, Myers, Sehoan, St. Onge