

MINUTES OF PUBLIC HEARING ON AN ORDINANCE ESTABLISHING  
OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH PRIVATE ALARM SYSTEMS

January 9, 1996 Council Chambers 999,1202

President Nan Glass called the hearing to order at 7:20 p.m.

Present were Councilors Robert Bouvier, Kevin Connors, Liz Gillette, Nan Glass, Sandy F. Klebanoff, Patrick McCabe, John Ritter and Alfred A. Turco. Councilor Madeline S. McKernan was absent.

President Glass: Does the administration have a presentation, Mr. Feldman?

Mr. Feldman: We do, just brief and just by way of background before Jim Strillacci addresses the issue as well, this ordinance was introduced a number of months ago, I'm sure you recall. It met a wall of opposition, justified, and at the time I think Council in their deliberation pointed out a number of weaknesses. Since that time we have gone back and re-thought it, re-drafted it. Considerable credit needs to be given to the Chief of Police and the Fire Chief, Pat Alair from Marge's office. Pat has done yeoman's work, Larry Nyland who is here tonight and Carl Earn who as I think most of you know is one of our fire inspectors. All worked very, very hard and I think have pretty much corrected all the issues that were raised at that time but just by way of summary just let me tell you what the major changes are.

Again, this is an ordinance that deals with alarms both for burglar and fire and it deals with the way in which we treat those individuals, companies and residents, private residents who are connected to these fire and burglar alarm systems. You may recall that the original ordinance required, had a mandatory registration that residents who were connected, fire and police alarms were connected had to have a mandatory registration as well as pay a \$15 fee. That since has been dropped. It is now a voluntary registration and there is no fee unless you set a fee by separate resolution.

The other, I think most significant change again is that cumbersome language that you all had a field day with pointing out to us as far as the difficulty in understanding I think has pretty much been removed. What you will find is an ordinance that I think is clearer in its intentions and also there are sections now, actual policies that have been drafted by the Fire Chief and Chief of Police to again help establish certain standards but are not part of the ordinance. Those will be introduced as policies to you at some subsequent time depending upon what your verdict is on the ordinance itself.

You may want to look, I'll just point out the basic changes. On page 7 of the proposed ordinance it is underlined as far as the registration requirements and the voluntary nature of those registrations. There is an economic incentive to do it. There is a gratis six months regardless of how many false alarms that may occur in police and fire to encourage people to make a voluntary registration and the second I think most significant change is on page 13 where if there are repeated false alarms, both police and fire, there is a fine connected and those fines are established in 44-11(b)3, 44-11(b)4, about the middle of the page on page 13. Those are the basic changes before Jim speaks further about the issue but I appreciate and I know Jim and others appreciate the insights that you all gave us for those of you that remember the debate of I think it was last summer so your wisdom prevailed and I think we heard you. Jim is here to address other issues, too.

President Glass: Chief.

Chief Strillacci: Thank you, Mr. Feldman. For the record Jim Strillacci, Chief of Police. This ordinance was designed to reach a number of goals. The first one was to reduce unnecessary false alarms to allow better use of police and fire time. We just have in today figures from 1995 and we responded to 6,434 silent alarms, audible alarms and duress alarms which are a total of almost eleven percent of our calls for service for police in one year, 10.93 percent out of our 58,847 police calls.

Fire alarms went to 1,761 which is 2.9 percent of our calls so you can see this is a substantial chunk of police and fire time devoted to answering alarms. This ordinance should cut down that repeat offenders that are false alarm customer by making the ordinance more stringent. It will place some of the costs on these false alarms on the abusers. The ordinance is going to avoid the disadvantages we have had in our old system where we had alarms coming directly into the police station. We had some liability issues. New technology had come in which made our old equipment obsolete, in fact would not work without substantial infusion of money into it. We had maintenance problems. We had malfunctions. We had difficulty in assigning responsibility when the equipment did break and it is just as well we are going out of that business because in the middle of December the fire and police digitized alarms ceased to function due to corrosion and even if we had wanted to keep them we couldn't have without replacing them.

This should improve our service by having more alarm verification. In other words, an alarm company will check with a subscriber and call us back if it is in fact a false alarm and save the need to send an officer to that premises.

It should gain needed response info via the registration portions and it should streamline our enforcement through the use of the town ordinance violation system. It should make it a lot easier for us to collect the money that we are owed. Now, there were some objections raised in the first go round of this ordinance and Barry touched on some of them. The complexity of the original ordinance has been reduced considerably. Most of the technical things have been placed in the regulation section rather than the ordinance.

There was some objections to the arbitrary nature of the automatic tape dialer portion and that has been removed as far as police goes. We don't care what kind of alarm they send to us as long as it is functioning we will go to it. The registration and fees were objectionable to many and we have made some changes here. There is no fee. It is strictly voluntary and we have a financial incentive for those who wish to register. We give them a six month grace period of false alarms as far as payments go.

The false alarm definition was seen as strict by many. You have a question Madam Mayor? It was seen as strict by many. We do remind the objectors that we do give out three freebies before we start charging people and there is now an appeal process that we didn't have before through the hearing officer of the town. One thing we do have to point out is we need to appoint a constable to enforce violations through the ticket process. Larry is our designee for that so we need to dub him constable shortly.

I hope that will answer some of the questions which may come up. If not, we will be happy to come back up to the podium. Thank you.

President Glass: Just hang on a second, Chief. Does anybody have any questions or comments? Mr. Bouvier.

Councilor Bouvier: Just a question with regard to registering the alarm. If as a homeowner I register my system, what assurances do I have that this information is confidential, that I do register with the department, or is it something that can be accessed under F.O.I. Has that been looked into?

Chief Strillacci: It is not a public record.

Councilor Bouvier: Okay.

Chief Strillacci: It is not a police investigation and as far as I know it is not subject to F.O.I. I could pull out the statute and take a look at that if you would like but we have certainly never had any requests for that type of information from the public or from the press.

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Councilor Bouvier: So you can assure someone registering their system with the department confidentiality...

Chief Strillacci: Before we register anybody we will make sure we check that against the statute but to my knowledge that is not a public record.

Councilor Bouvier: Thank you.

President Glass: Anyone else? Mr. Turco.

Councilor Turco: I need a refresher but is the structure for fines, the penalties after the grace period expires, is it the same as the original proposal or has there been a change in the amount of penalty or frequency?

Chief Strillacci: It is the same as the proposal was last summer, three free ones and then it is \$60 for police alarms and \$100 for fire alarms.

President Glass: Chief, you were giving us some figures before, the number of so-called false alarms or alarms that were responded to and I heard 6,000 or something, of that how many were false alarms?

Chief Strillacci: Upwards of 99 percent are false alarms.

President Glass: Really. Is that because of faults in the equipment or is it individual homeowners triggering their own systems?

Chief Strillacci: Most frequent calls is user error.

President Glass: User error.

Chief Strillacci: And that would be mostly, not fire alarms but more in the area of burglar alarms.

Chief Strillacci: We were more concerned with the burglar alarms and fire service can speak to the other half but it is generally someone who doesn't shut it off, doesn't turn it on correctly, opens a door or forgets, things of that nature.

President Glass: I see. Mr. McCabe.

Councilor McCabe: In committee Chief you also discussed that where it is clearly a weather related mishap that that would certainly be something that you would take into consideration.

Chief Strillacci: The officers are given a wide discretion to call these in as no false alarm and write it off to the

weather. On a day like we had yesterday, quite a few calls came in.

Councilor McCabe: So you are hoping the 6,000 number ought to come down. This is proper incentive to.

Chief Strillacci: That is our fond hope and experience will bear it out.

Councilor McCabe: I think you have done a good job in trying to structure and accomplish that.

Chief Strillacci: Thank you.

President Glass: Mr. Ritter.

Councilor Ritter: One question, what percentage of the 6,000 would you say were repeat offenders or more than one time call?

Chief Strillacci: I don't have that at hand. Larry, do you have any feeling for that?

Mr. Nyland: That, I really can't speak to.

Chief Strillacci: There are very few that we go to that we haven't been to before. Most of them are familiar customers.

President Glass: Mrs. Wilder, how long have we had an alarm ordinance on the book? Do you have your ordinances there? Is this the first time that we have changed or amended the alarm ordinance? No? There have been previous adjustments, is that correct?

Mrs. Wilder: The Code indicates that this was adopted in 1983. There appears to have been an amendment, at least one in 1989 and that amendment relates to the permit requirement and exactly what that change was I don't know whether it was adding the permit requirement at that time or just modifying it.

President Glass: I guess my question is have we had any successes, in other words alarms that have actually resulted in interrupting a perpetrator or something of that sort?

Chief Strillacci: Absolutely. They are few and far between. We have more success in commercial to be frank because they tend to be more frequent sites of burglaries. The chance of making a substantial gain from a commercial burglary in an alarm premises leads the burglars to be more daring, the smash and grab types of burglaries, you will see that, a Radio Shack or a place of that sort, a furrier or some place where you can move quick. You take out a

substantial amount of goods and get away before the alarm registers and police can respond. Private dwellings we don't see that as often. It is relatively rare for us to go to an alarm in a private actual burglary.

President Glass: Thank you. Is there anything more? Mr. Turco.

Councilor Turco: Has anyone done or attempted a type of revenue projection, a sense of what based on the statistics, based on the burden that has been placed on the departments, and then given the fine structure, have we tried to quantify in any way what we might be looking at for revenue collection?

Chief Strillacci: Not to my knowledge.

President Glass: There is a fiscal impact statement which seems to suggest that it is because they have waived the fee it is hard to project what the revenues would be. It depends upon the number of property and business owners who participate in the program since it is voluntary.

Chief Strillacci: I would imagine that we would have some increased revenue in the beginning people would have the same habits and they would be hit with higher fines and there would be some diminishment over time as people find it worth their will to tune up their systems. Since it is rather late in the game, this has been planned to go into effect in the summer and if it is delayed it will definitely set us back a little farther as far as revenue.

President Glass: Mr. Turco.

Councilor Turco: This may be for Mr. Feldman, as it turns out but in the process of re-examining the proposed ordinance, has the administration conferred with any of the citizens who spoke at the last public hearing. There seemed to be a small number of fairly local citizens or people that had systems that felt strongly about the defects in the ordinance. I'm just curious informally whether there has been any dialogue with any of those persons.

Chief Strillacci: We were hoping to hear from some of those people at the public hearing but apparently they haven't turned out in droves.

Councilor Turco: But does that mean that there had been some informal contact or there hadn't been?

Chief Strillacci: Not to my knowledge.

President Glass: Speaking of which, is there a sign up sheet there?

Chief Strillacci: Yes, and it is blank.

President Glass: Is there anyone who wishes to, Mrs. Gillette.

Councilor Gillette: I had asked Barry about this earlier but the local alarm companies were in on the discussion and the formulation so, I mean I worry about us being in sync with what they are doing and this is fine with them? They are comfortable with it.

Mr. Feldman: Madam Mayor, Mrs. Gillette, yes. I, unless Larry indicates differently, the local alarm companies were aware of it, knowledgeable of the changes, and I don't think they expressed any concern whatsoever to you.

President Glass: Thank you, Chief. Is there anyone in the audience who wishes to speak to this ordinance? Are there any further questions? If not I will adjourn the hearing.

The hearing adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Norma W. Cronin  
Town Clerk/Council Clerk