

City Council of the City of New Castle
City Council Special Meeting
Public Workshop
New Castle Senior Center
400 South Street, New Castle
Wednesday, October 26, 2016 at 6:00 p.m.

Call to order: 6:03 p.m.

Roll Call:

Councilperson Megginson - present
Council President Ratchford - present
Councilperson Petty - present
Councilperson Di Mondì - present

Also present:

Jamie Rogers, Police Chief
William Barthel, City Administrator

President Ratchford opened the meeting with the City response to date to the increased visitor traffic and the balance needed between residents and visitors. The increase was rapid and unexpected. The City is still learning and trying new approaches. President Ratchford reviewed what has been done to address the problems caused by the Pokémon GO players.

The police have increased enforcement of the ban of texting while driving and speed limits. There is a need to balance the enforcement needs throughout the city. City residents are encouraged people to volunteer as VIPS. Trash cans have been added and the frequency of pickups has been increased. Communications have been added to the web site. The same rules apply to residents and visitors including obeying traffic signal and noise ordinances. The City has reached out to players on the Pokémon GO Facebook sites.

City Administrator reinforced the President's coverage of the steps taken.

Police Chief Jamie Rogers reported success with emails he sent to Niantic. The Pokémon gym at the wharf was removed due to being a construction site. The gym at the private home at 110 Delaware Street was an error and was moved to the Civil War Museum. With the removal of the gyms, the traffic and crowds in those areas have decreased and the police haven't received any complaints recently.

President Ratchford as that citizens present suggestions for solutions.

Sandy Beale of The Strand made an opening statement on behalf of a group that has been meeting. She started with the statement that the town doesn't need another divide and does not want to condemn Pokémon players. The group acted as a task force to record what they observed. They surveyed shops and museums inquiring about any impact from the Pokémon

player and increase in revenue. The group's concern is long range when the town will have more visitors from the National Park and will need to figure out how to deal with them. (See report from the group – see Attachment A.)

Binney Beale of The Strand addressed two issues for the group – the impact on resident parking and crowd control. The group recommends residential parking permits. There are many tight areas for parking. Mr. Beale has returned home to find parking spaces not available at his house. West Chester has residential and business interests combined in same block. West Chester has a Master Parking Plan put together by professionals that consult on parking issues for a living not by citizens. Mr. Beale has the contact information for Desman Design Management that is currently working with the Brandywine Parking Authority in Wilmington.

The group has observed littering and traffic violations and believes there needs to be better crowd control. They recommend an Ordinance that does not permit playing of video games from 8:00 pm to 8:00 am.

Dorsey Fiske of E 3rd Street believes there is an increase in littering, not just due to Pokémon GO but also dog walkers and others. While the group is delighted to hear that the City is putting more trash cans around town, none have been added at South Street. In general, the town doesn't have many trash receptacles. There are no trash cans or dog waste bags on the Battery and adding them within the park is a tie vote in the Trustees. The City can add trash cans and dog waste bags at the entrance of the Battery. It is very useful for the Council to listen to all of the citizens, not just the downtown residents.

The group suggests that the city purchase a mechanical “Billy Goat” to pick up trash including cigarette butts in the street. The cost is \$1000.

The group recommends a No Smoking ordinance, city-wide due to the health issues. The smokers are mostly people that come into town. They believe that this ordinance is important for the quality of life of citizens. People are turned off and don't enjoy coming to New Castle anymore because of messy conditions from trash and the crowds.

Karen Whalen of W 3rd Street, speaking on behalf of the group, stated that the loitering has impacted residents and visitor experiences. It causes a visual nuisance and doesn't keep with City's historic brand. The loitering problem includes groups and individuals on foot as well as cars idling. Residents have asked people to stop idling and have received belligerent responses. The issue is large and pervasive and difficult to address due to lack of resources which points to the need to regulate the time it can be played.

Keith Adams of Delaware Street spoke about traffic issues on behalf of the group. His own observations include standing stood outside his home at 2 pm when he counted 35 cars moving erratically with one hand playing Pokémon and one driving. Mr. Adams also observed people crossing at 2nd street that had close calls. There have been cars idling outside his windows. On Dalby Alley, people are using the area for urinating and defecating. Late night players are parking on sidewalks.

Binney Beale of The Strand made the closing statement for the group. They encourage the City to join in the class action suit against Niantic. The life style of the citizens has been compromised by Pokémon GO.

Police Chief Rogers was told by Niantic that they were working directly with Mr. Barthel and President Ratchford which is not true. He reported that a class action lawsuit was filed against a city out west that banned Pokémon GO. They had a meeting with the main players and reached agreement that they would come every morning to clean up.

Jim Meek of the Strand congratulated Council on their measured response. He said the curfew enforcement was not mentioned and complimented them on contacting Niantic. Mr. Meek plays Pokémon GO and explained that there are stops and gyms where creatures are found. In New Castle, the gyms are the George Reed House, the Holcomb Flag Pole, and Immanuel Church. There are 30 stops, some of which overlap. The creatures fight in the gyms and two or more people must work together. Pokémon GO stops and gyms are in National Parks, Longwood Gardens, Paris, London, and 3rd world countries. Police do need to enforce no playing while driving.

Judie Baldini of South Street asked what occurs in the game that causes someone driving to suddenly stop. Mr. Meek explained that there are Pokémon stops on South Street that have creatures available.

Dorsey Fiske of E 3 Street said that the problem with the Poke Monsters is that they are not interested in New Castle. The players just look at their phones and have no manners. She wouldn't object if they weren't urinating on houses and driving the wrong way on one-way streets.

Alice Jarvis of The Strand plays the game and explained that when people are driving slowly, it is to make the game think they are walking. There are rewards for walking certain distances. She believes Pokémon GO has done some good things. It brings people outside to walk and she families playing together. The hours of play cannot be restricted because you can't tell if they are playing Pokémon or reading an email. Ms. Jarvis observes dads playing Pokémon with their kids. She recommends that everyone think about the advantages and how it can be used in positive ways.

Every minute that police are stopping Pokémon, they are not working to block drug traffic or something else that is important. If you want the police to focus on Pokémon, you need to identify what you want them to stop doing.

Paul Hannum of East 3rd Street said that it is not the game but the behavior of the players that is the problem. The only concrete change is removal of two stops. He asked Council if the changes made have produced results and if Council has a way to track results from the changes? President Ratchford replied that enforcement is writing more tickets, some stops have been removed and the trash problem is reduced.

Mr. Barthel added that during the summer, crews spent one to two hours to keep up with additional trash. Right now, the crews are cleaning up every other day due to the reduction in players resulting in reduction in trash.

Gail Levinson of South Street said that she appreciates more trash cans on Delaware Street but there's nothing farther down the Battery. There is trash in the woods, for instance on Penn Street. Receptacles are needed for dog waste.

Jim Meek of the Strand stated that one positive effect of Pokémon GO is a reduction of Canada Geese.

Suzanne Souder of W 4th Street addressed the trash issue. She walks in Battery Park nearly every day and at the beginning noticed trash in the park and overflowing cans. The City added trash cans that helped relieve the issue. Ms. Souder suggested trash cans be added at the tennis court parking lot. Her experience is that most of the players have been polite. There will be a percentage of people in every group that behave badly. She finds many positives including families playing together.

Judie Baldini of South Street thanked everyone for their efforts – the Council, the Chief and the Committee. She has trash in her yard that needs to be picked up daily. South Street and Delaware Street have the majority of the parked cars. She would like a little more effort on moving violations and stopping with more emphasis on the South Street end of town.

Jerry Rousseau of 6th Street does not see players near his home. For him, the issue is parking. His elderly mother-in-law likes to go downtown and needs to be dropped off due to the lack of available parking. Navigating the streets is difficult due to number of people. Having the parking issues come up now is a positive thing because the issue needs to be addressed due to future visitation from the pier and National Park.

Wendy Dewhurst of W 5th Street said most of the hazard from players comes from traffic violations. She just got her learner's permit and needs to drive in town. She pushes her mother in a wheelchair on the bricks and sometimes has to use the street. They have almost been hit several times. Ms. Dewhurst is reluctant to support anything that raises taxes.

Sandy Beale of The Stand stated that the group has nothing against them. They would like to see the rules posted at the park entrance being enforced. She observed a person at a crosswalk when two cars went through. The rules are good but more enforcement is needed.

Karen Whalen of W 3rd Street believes people in town have been negatively impacted. The players are an infringement on life style and property values. The minority have to be protected by the majority. Her question is where do we go from here? What are the next steps?

President Ratchford thanked everyone and stated that Council always appreciates input. She asked for comments from Council.

Councilperson Di Mondri state that the City is very limited law wise. Visitors have the same rights as residents. There is the same number of ignorant people as there are in any group of that size. Police can't be everywhere. He advocates for resident parking and metered parking. 25% of enforcement and operations occurs at the Farmer's Market and isn't being paid for. There is an election in April. Ask the candidates when they are going to start collecting from the owners. Apartments are going to bring another 1000 residents and 500 cars to town that we need to be prepared for.

Councilperson Petty thanked everyone for coming out and thanked Mr. Meek and Ms. Jarvis for the explanation of Pokémon GO.

Councilperson Megginson declined to comment.

The **Motion to adjourn** was made by Councilperson Petty, seconded by Councilperson Di Mondri and **passed unanimously**. The Hearing adjourned at 7:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Janet Wurtzel
Clerk of the City of New Castle