



**TOWN OF HOLDEN BEACH
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
EMERGENCY MEETING
MONDAY, MARCH 23, 2020 – 4:00 P.M.**

The Board of Commissioners of the Town of Holden Beach, North Carolina met for an Emergency Meeting on Monday, March 23, 2020 at 4:00 p.m. Present were Mayor J. Alan Holden; Mayor Pro Tem Gerald Brown; Commissioners Woody Tyner, Brian Murdock and Mike Sullivan; Town Manager David W. Hewett; Town Clerk Heather Finnell; Public Works Director Chris Clemmons; Public Services Crew Leader Scott Cunningham; Assistant Town Manager Christy Ferguson; Inspections Director Tim Evans; Fiscal Operations Supervisor Margaret Lancaster; Police Chief Jeremy Dixon; Lieutenant Frank Dilworth; Sergeant Adam Milligan and Attorney Jennifer Carpenter. Commissioner Pat Kwiatkowski participated via telephone.

Mayor Holden called the meeting to order.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Elaine Jordan asked the Board to consider the ripple effects of what they are considering. She talked about what the attorney said earlier. She suggested incremental approaches. Governor Cooper issued an order that shut down a lot of businesses that you can't have social distancing with. She said the Town can shut down public parking and other things, but to shut down short-term rentals would have huge effects.

Gina Martin said she has a long history here and owns a small business on the island. She has girls whose husbands already lost their job and girls who work two jobs to support their families. She also asked the Board to take this on an incremental basis. She suggested that people who are concerned about others should help them out. She asked that the Board think long and hard before they shut things down and destroy the economy of the island and the ability of the Town to pay its bills.

CONSIDER ACTION THAT MAY BE NECESSARY DUE TO THE CORONAVIRUS THREAT

Town Manager Hewett said the conference with the governor and municipal government officials is actually tomorrow at 2:30 p.m. Other information we received is schools will be closed until May 15th. We have been discussing how services would be delivered.

Mayor Holden asked for commissioner input. Commissioner Kwiatkowski said the Board has what she wrote this morning. A lot of what she proposed is very similar to what Ocean Isle put out in their proclamation. Her items are her thinking of what the Board should do.

Commissioner Sullivan said the Board had a lot of discussion this morning. He asked for Mayor Holden's feeling before the Board comments. Mayor Holden stated there have been a lot of comments, calls and

emails. Our thoughts are pretty much in line with Ocean Isle Beach. He has a summary of their document. He read his suggestions on what he thinks would take place if he made a decision right now:

- Restrict access to municipal buildings to essential staff and Town officials. All interaction with the staff would be limited to phone, email or text.
- This item is especially hard for him - Discontinuance of short-term rentals. All rental agencies and property owners who rent properties within the Town will be instructed to have all renters who rent for a period of less than three months' duration and their invitees, vacate the premises and leave no later than 2:00 p.m. on March 25th. Effective immediately there should be no rental occupancies of any nature or duration within the Town until April 4th, which is a Saturday.
- All public parking and parking within the Town rights-of-way is prohibited with an exception of Town officials, government employees and contractors.
- All previously approved group activity applications are hereby revoked.
- Public restroom facilities and any other Town buildings will be closed until further notice.
- Restrict public gatherings to groups of no more than 10 persons at all public areas.
- Property owners are encouraged to stay close to home and follow social distancing protocols.
- The Town encourages all individuals and business owners to adhere to CDC, federal and state guidelines regarding COVID-19.
- We reserve the right to impose further restrictions deemed necessary as the pandemic progresses.
- The Town is not attempting to limit travel on the HB Bridge at this time.

Mayor Holden said that is the summary of where he thinks he is right now with the commissioners' guidance and input.

Commissioner Sullivan said he agrees with everything Mayor Holden said. There are 12 states that have a travel restriction telling people to stay home. At least three or four of those are states where we get a lot of our renters. He asked why we would want them to travel here if the governors of those states don't want their people to travel within their state. He inquired why we would want someone who may be asymptomatic to come here and potentially spread the virus. He would have no problem with people finishing out their stay for the people who are already here. He suggested letting people currently renting finish this week out, then imposing the restriction on Saturday. Mayor Holden agreed and said that would be March 28th.

Commissioner Tyner said he thinks this is a reasonable first step. He wants to make sure it is understood that the Board will need to revisit this. He feels bad for the small businesses and the people dependent upon rentals, but if we saved one life.

Commissioner Murdock stated this is truly a heartbreaking decision to even think about having to make. He said he does think the Town should follow suit with Ocean Isle, at least as a start. He said he thinks we need to visit it as necessary. He stated he hopes the fear of this virus doesn't remove the peace on the island. Commissioner Murdock urged everyone to take care of their neighbors and help them as you see fit. Be vigilant in taking care of yourselves and the people around you. In the building industry it will be devastating at best. Our economy is dependent on people coming here and enjoying this place. He said he thinks it is a good start; it is a decision that is not easily made. This is nothing anyone has ever seen or dealt with, so we don't have a plan for it.

Mayor Pro Tem Brown said be proactive now while we have the chance. We can revisit it every day if that is what it takes. He stated let's go ahead and get started. It's unprecedented. If anything, stay on the side of caution. He doesn't like seeing anyone lose a job for a week or two, but if we are proactive now then we are ahead of the ballgame. If we give it a few days and get a report of one case, one could be 100 overnight. That is what is critical. Mayor Pro Tem Brown said he thinks it is the time to make a choice and he thinks the Board is in unison.

Commissioner Tyner agreed with everything Mayor Pro Tem Brown said. He said he thinks the Board is all in unison up here. We all hate what we are having to do. He is concerned about the health of the island and concerned if the Town doesn't take steps now three weeks from now, we will need to shut the island down for a month because we have an outbreak. He would rather shut it down for two weeks now and open it back up at Easter, than watch the whole month of April be gone too.

Commissioner Kwiatkowski asked for confirmation that everything will start immediately. The only thing changing is they will let current short-term renters finish their week. Mayor Holden agreed.

Attorney Carpenter stated she thinks the actions being taken are a good graduated step to address the needs of the Town and that they are reasonably necessary to protect the citizens of Holden Beach. As long as we make sure that the wording of the provisions that you stated you want are specific enough so everyone is clear about what is permitted you should be good.

Commissioner Kwiatkowski suggested that the Town send a blast out once this happens to encourage the nonresidents property owners to make sure that nobody in the family is feeling unwell before they come here.

The Board agreed to let Ms. Jordan speak outside of the public comment period. Ms. Jordan asked about the no new rentals restriction and if a rental could start after April 4. Mayor Pro Tem Brown said it seems to him that the Town will be visiting this situation daily. His opinion is to put a time when you can start renting is jumping the gun. Mayor Holden stated the intent we have is that come April 4th, we have hopes of being back to normal. Anything beyond April 4th will be at risk. Ms. Jordan said so we can rent after April 4th and if it was closed someone could have travel insurance. Mayor Holden advised her to check with the travel insurance company. Attorney Carpenter said if you are going to put a specific date on it, you need to balance the interests between if you would really allow them to come down or you could maybe leave it open ended until rescinded. Mayor Holden stated the decision about April 4th won't be made at the last minute.

The Board talked about meeting again.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Commissioner Tyner to adjourn at 4:31 p.m.; second by Mayor Pro Tem Brown; approved by unanimous vote.

ATTEST:

J. Alan Holden, Mayor

Heather Finnell, Town Clerk