

**Special Town Council Meeting Minutes  
Morehead City, North Carolina**

**Tuesday, March 19, 2020**

The Honorable Council of the Town of Morehead City met in Special Session on Thursday, March 19, 2020, in the Municipal Chambers located at 202 South 8<sup>th</sup> Street, Morehead City, North Carolina. Those in attendance were:

COUNCIL PRESENT: Mayor Gerald A. Jones, Jr.; Councilmembers George Ballou, David Horton, Keri V. McCann, William F. Taylor, and Diane C. Warrender.

STAFF PRESENT: City Manager Ryan Eggleston, City Attorney Derek Taylor, Communications Director Alize Proisy, and City Clerk Cathy Campbell.

STAFF PARTICIPATING VIA "TEAMS": Fire Chief Jamie Fulk, Finance Director Jewel Lasater, Police Chief Bernette Morris, Human Resources Director Susan Nixon, Parks and Recreation Director Jerry Riggs, IT Director Jon Snyder, Planning Director Sandi Watkins, and Public Services Director Daniel Williams.

OTHERS: Elise Clouser of the Carteret News Times; Sydney Hargrove, and Ruth Jones. Carteret County Manager Tommy Burns, Carteret County Emergency Services Director Stephen Rae, and Carteret County Health Director Stephanie Cannon participated via teleconferencing.

Mayor Jones called the special meeting of the Morehead City Town Council to order at 2:00 p.m. with a quorum present. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the COVID-19 coronavirus.

Referencing the rapidly changing environment, Mayor Jones stated that the first community acquired transmission has been reported within the state meaning that the virus transmission generated from within the state. Social distancing is encouraged in order to protect others.

**INFORMATIONAL PRESENTATION BY CARTERET COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR**

Carteret County Health Director Stephanie Cannon gave a report on the Health Department and County's response to COVID-19 stating that 97 cases of COVID-19 have been confirmed within the state. The numbers are updated daily at 11:00 a.m. At this time, there are no confirmed cases within Carteret County; however, she expects this to change. Medical personnel are collecting specimens from patients that meet the testing criteria. There is no treatment for the virus so health professionals are stressing preventative measures and social distancing. They are urging sick people should stay home, and well people should limit exposure to other people especially large groups.

The Carteret County Health Department is monitoring the situation and staying in contact with state officials. Ms. Cannon's staff is providing updates to medical providers as information changes, and helping restaurant owners to understand Governor Cooper's executive order as it pertains to their businesses. The Health Department is also monitoring citizens returning from other areas and testing them. All tested individuals are placed in at-home quarantine and monitored until results are in. If they test positive, they will be ordered to isolate at home, or at a hospital if their health condition requires.

Carteret County Emergency Services Director Stephen Rae reported that the Countywide Task Force was implemented last Friday including individuals from the hospital and health department. They will meet daily. The Carteret County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) submitted 11 requests for State resource assistance. One request was filled, two are pending and six were rejected. The rejections were due to the nationwide shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) kits and the determination that N95 masks are no longer required. Face and eye splash protection was provided and test kits are being processed for the Health Department. The County is establishing a warehouse for supplies that will be arriving from the State.

In response to questions presented to the County officials, the following info was provided:

- Based on the NC Department of Health & Human Resources map, the 97 cases appear to be primarily located in Durham, Wake, Chatham, and Mecklenburg Counties, with a few cases in Onslow, Craven and Pitt Counties. However, with our transitive lifestyle, it is only a matter of time before it arrives in Carteret County.
- The ill are isolated and the exposed are quarantined. Any confirmed cases in Carteret County will be isolate at the hospital or home depending on their health condition.
- There are legal measures that can be used to enforce isolation or quarantine orders; however, they have found that most people want to do the right thing and are cooperative.
- Based on the Wilson case today, there is reason to believe that community-acquired transmission has begun. The State now believes there are more cases than have been reported because people are staying home and not going to the doctor.
- The County will follow the State's messaging as far as restrictions and limitations.
- The County is in an okay position in regard to the supply of ventilators, medical equipment and test kits, and the Health Dept. is in an okay situation regarding Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and test kits. The hospital is as prepared as they can be at this time.

- The States mandate is for restaurants to provide carryout and delivery service only. Restaurants cannot serve at outdoor seating areas; however, it is permissible, at this time, for patrons to utilize the outdoor seating to eat their carryout orders as long as they maintain the social distancing recommendations. It is also permissible for patrons to use restrooms.
- Carteret County believes that it is not possible to close the county borders due to the mass number of entrance points; however, the County is discouraging non-residents from entering.
- Questions about outdoor bar service should be directed to the ABC Commission.

Fire Chief Jamie Fulk asked for clarification of who will provide test results to EMS units for patients that are transported to the hospital. Ms. Cannon stated that the Health Department is tracking all tests, and if positive, they will conduct a contact assessment and notify all potentially exposed individuals to include EMS personnel. She stated that the risk is very low for those who are wearing appropriate PPE. Anyone that might have been exposed while not wearing the PPE should self-isolate for 14 days.

## **DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS**

Each department director gave a report on their operation modifications and safety measures implemented to protect staff and the public. All reported that staff is being separated to maintain the social distancing, with as many as possible working from home. All staff meetings are being conducted remotely using Teams software.

Parks and Recreation Director Jerry Riggs reported that the Recreation Center is closed. The parks and docks are open and active. Parks and Recreation staff continue to clean the park facilities and bathrooms daily. Construction work on Shevans Park and the docks continues to move forward.

Finance Director Jewel Lasater stated that Billing and Collections continue to respond to customer inquiries via phone and email. Utility payments are collected and processed daily as received through mail and the drop box. Billing and Collections is able to provide for new utility accounts and cash payments. This is being done from the window adjacent to the ADA ramp in the front of the City Hall building. Electronic payment methods are being encouraged.

Library Director James Swann reported that the Library closed Monday, May 16, 2020. Six (6) of their eight (8) employees are over 65 years of age placing them in the high-risk category. He continues to monitor email and process book returns. He is looking at the possibility of providing curb service.

IT Director Jon Snyder is working out of his vehicle and Information Support Technician Jordan Marriner is working from home to address issues remotely. Mr. Snyder responds to issues that require onsite maintenance. Mr. Snyder is working with other directors to ensure that they have the equipment necessary to support offsite capability.

Human Resource Director Susan Nixon remains accessible to staff via email, phone, and telecommuting. She is not allowing any face-to-face interactions. She is sharing leave and work

schedule adjustment information as it changes. Policies affected by COVID-19, such as the telecommunicating policy, are being updated as quickly as possible.

Planning and Inspections Director Sandi Watkins reported that her staff continues to receive and process permits via email, the new temporary drop box, and the new permit portal. Code Enforcement Officers and Building Inspectors continue to work in the field by appointment. Social distancing is maintained as much as possible. Ms. Watkins stated that the Planning Board is scheduled to meet next Tuesday evening to consider four items that will then come before Council as public hearings in April.

Public Services Director Daniel Williams reported that field staff has been separated as much as possible with only one person per vehicle. Morning meetings are conducted outside maintaining social distancing. Water plant operations have been restricted to key personnel only with operators assigned to specific water plants to prevent cross contamination. City Hall construction and Bridges Street paving continues to move forward.

Communications Director Alize Proisy stated that she has ramped up communications. Internally, she is working with the manager and Susan Nixon to make sure employees have all the information they need to stay safe. Externally, she is utilizing different methods of communication to ensure all customers are reached. As of Saturday, March 14, 2020, 515 people visited the City's website. Individuals are signing up for the "Notify Me" app; however, she would like to increase the number of participants. Currently, 232 subscribers are signed up for emergency alerts, 198 for important alerts, and 197 weather alerts. The City has three (3) different Facebook pages: the City page, Fire Department page and the Police Department page. The City began with 4,000 followers a year ago and is now up to 12,473 followers. This morning's posted about Walmart hours received over 11,000 views. Fire and Police Department pages often see as much as 35,000 views. The City has 1,000 Instagram followers. In addition to social media outlets, she continues to work with Carteret News Times as well as local television and radio stations. Recently she implemented a city newsletter that was inserted into utility bills at the cost of \$227 for 6,000 inserts.

Fire Chief Jamie Fulk stated that COVID-19 has caused tremendous changes in the Fire Department operations including the volume of protective gear use and the way they respond to calls. Fire prevention education and car seat installations have been discontinued in an effort to limit potential exposure.

Police Chief Bernette Morris reported that the police department is conducting business as usual while observing more stringent protective measures. Officers are asking if anyone is sick when responding to calls and taking reports by phone and email whenever possible. The department ordered N95 masks and PPE kits.

In response to questions, the following information was provided:

- Chief Fulk stated that the department does respond to and transport flu victims as part of normal operations. Currently, when responding to respiratory calls, one person will suit up and go do an assessment before the rest of the crew engages.
- Chief Fulk advised that they are unable to maintain appropriate separation at Station #3 due to facility size; however, the potential impact at the station is not any greater than that experienced when working together in emergency vehicles.

- Chief Morris advised that the department is monitoring activity concerning health regulation guidance. So far, there have been no problems. A copy of Governor Cooper's declaration has been provided to every officer, and they are prepared to impose enforcement if necessary. All SROs are back on patrol.
- Ms. Watkins stated that she is exploring other potential methods for permitting and inspections should COVID-19 be drawn out.

### **MANAGER UPDATE**

City Manager Ryan Eggleston reported that eight (8) to ten (10) staff members are piloting a work from home program in an effort to minimize social distancing. He will be forwarding Council with instructions for Microsoft Teams so that he can begin to meet with them remotely, if necessary, as done during this meeting with the management team. Starting tomorrow, he will try and provide Council with a daily recap via email, and he is exploring the possibility of conducting public board meetings with the use of video conferencing.

Council agreed by consensus to cancel all City sponsored public events, such as the April 11, 2020 Easter Egg Hunt, scheduled to take place within the next 30 days.

Mr. Eggleston then distributed to Council information on COVID-19 provided by a resident who works as a health care worker.

### **PUBLIC MEETINGS**

Councilmember Horton raised questions about the possibility of conducting public meetings remotely. City Attorney Derek Taylor stated that statutorily electronic meetings are not permissible; however, during a time of crisis when the City has little other choice, a judge may afford a greater degree of latitude. He suggested that the City take every means possible to conduct the meeting like a regular meeting, such as providing notices that include directions for public participation. Attorney Taylor advised against holding quasi-judicial hearings in this manner.

Crowds must be managed for any onsite meetings in order to uphold the State's mandate to maintain the 50 person limit and social distancing. Therefore, he encouraged Council not to take on any topics that might draw a lot of interest. Attorney Taylor confirmed that there is no statutory requirement for the Council to hold a meeting every month. Notice must be given of any cancelled meetings.

Furthermore, Attorney Taylor recommended that Council adopt an ordinance allowing for electronic meetings should they plan to move in this direction. Councilmember Taylor made a motion **to prepare an ordinance permitting electronic meetings that will be considered for adoption at the April 7, 2020 workshop meeting**. Councilmember Horton seconded and the motion carried unanimously. (5-0) Attorney Taylor was asked to prepare the ordinance and to make it applicable to all city boards and commissions.

Attorney Taylor reminded Council that the same open meetings laws apply to electronic meetings. Teams communication should be limited to two council members at a time.

**CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION 2020-R-17**

City Manager Ryan Eggleston presented and reviewed Resolution 2020-R-17 for consideration. This resolution grants authority to the city manager regarding state of emergency powers relating to personnel, utility and city government policies and general business operations during the Town of Morehead City’s State of Emergency as declared on March 16, 2020 due to COVID-19.

After some discussion, it was requested that the following changes be made:

- Add the words “in consultation with the mayor” to the resolution title.
- Remove the words “or designee,” “as available” and “but not limited to” in the “Now Therefore” paragraph.

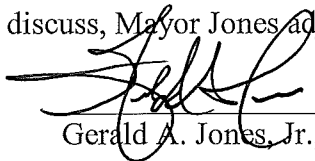
Attorney Taylor was asked for his opinion on giving the manager such authority. Attorney Taylor stated that the intent of the resolution is to relieve the mayor from day-to-day responsibilities, and to provide a way to expedite processes such as developing and implementing policies.

Councilmember Horton made a motion **to adopt Resolution 2020-R-17, granting authority to the city manager, in consultation with the mayor, regarding state of emergency powers relating to personnel, utility and city government policies and general business operations during the Town of Morehead City’s State of Emergency as declared on March 16, 2020 due to COVID-19 with changes as specified.** Councilmember Taylor seconded and the motion carried unanimously. (5-0)

Considering some of the procedures that might fall under this resolution, Council discussed discontinuing utility cutoffs and the waiving of late fees and credit card payment fees. Council agreed by consensus to suspend cutoffs, and to judge the waiver of late fees on a case-by-case basis. Council was not in favor of cancelling the credit card payment fee because as a third party fee, the City would have to pay on behalf of the user. Instead, staff is to encourage other payment options.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no other business to discuss, Mayor Jones adjourned the meeting 4:32 p.m.

  
Gerald A. Jones, Jr., Mayor

  
Attest:  
Cathy Campbell, City Clerk

