**CAROLINA BEACH**

Town Council Emergency Meeting Minutes

Friday, March 20, 2020 @ 1:00 PM

Council Chambers

1121 N. Lake Park Boulevard

Carolina Beach, NC 28428

**ASSEMBLY**

An Emergency Meeting of the Town of Carolina Beach Town Council was held on Friday, March 20, 2020, at 1:00 PM at Council Chambers.

PRESENT: Mayor LeAnn Pierce, Mayor Pro Tem Jay Healy, Council Member Lynn Barbee, Council Member Steve Shuttleworth, Council Member JoDan Garza

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ALSO PRESENT: Town Manager Bruce Oakley, Town Clerk Kim Ward, and Town Attorney Noel Fox

**1. MAYOR PIERCE OPENED THE MEETING**

**2. CORONAVIRUS UPDATE**

**ACTION:** Motion to go into closed session to discuss an attorney-client matter in accordance with North Carolina General Statute 143-318.11(a)(3)

Motion: Mayor Pierce

Vote: UNANIMOUS

Council returned from closed session at 1:20 PM.

Mayor Pierce asked Ms. Fox to address the closed session. Ms. Fox said the purpose was to seek advice from the Town Attorney on the limitations and potential liability for the Town in declaring a state of emergency and what it authorizes the Town to do. Mayor Pierce opened the matter for discussion among Council.

Council Member Garza said he wants to follow suit with what the county and state are doing. He thinks doing something ahead of that could put residents into a state of panic. He also said it is important to maintain a balance between business and everyday life.

Council Member Barbee said he wants to do the opposite. He said he thinks it is important for the Town to declare a state of emergency because residents are looking to Council for action and leadership.

Mayor Pro Tem Healy said he agreed with Council Member Barbee. He said lots of people are coming into Town to get away from the COVID-19 situation where they live, and it’s putting residents at risk.

Council Member Shuttleworth said he is comfortable with declaring a state of emergency because it allows Council to take action and be in a proactive position.

Mayor Pierce said the number one goal is to protect the public, and Council can’t do that without certain powers given by a state of emergency. She said residents are looking for leadership, and Council can’t move forward without being in a state of emergency. She declared the Town in a state of emergency due to the coronavirus pandemic. She stressed that residents should not panic because this is a technicality needed to protect them.

Mr. Oakley discussed options available for the Town to help limit people coming over and interacting in large groups, such as closing beach accesses, parking lots, and parks. He said closing Snow’s Cut Bridge to non-residents is also an option, but Town staff is recommending smaller steps at this point.

Mayor Pro Tem Healy said closing the bridge is extreme and could be a later action, but he wants to try closing beach accesses and parking lots first to try to deter people from coming here.

Council Member Barbee asked what steps are necessary to close the bridge. Mr. Oakley said the Town would need to consult with Kure Beach and come up with a plan for re-entry and staffing. Mayor Pierce said closure of the bridge would be difficult to manage on a Friday afternoon and that Kure Beach officials would like the Town to take a soft step first. Council Member Barbee said he agreed with Mayor Pro Tem Healy and wants to curtail access to places where people congregate.

Council Member Garza said he is against closing the beaches and parking lots because he does not want to create panic. He said these moves are similar to martial law. He said the Town needs to make sure businesses survive and should wait for the State or County to make them take any closure measures or await being advised by someone with a science background, especially because there have been no deaths in the state so far.

Council Member Shuttleworth said he would rather close the bridge to non-residents than close beaches and parks. He said he realizes it’s a drastic step that could have logistical problems, but he thinks patrolling the beach to keep people off is also problematic. He said people who don’t live or work here do not have any business in the Town. He said Council should not wait for deaths or an increased level of cases to take action and that we would rather lead than follow.

Mayor Pierce said Council has to protect public safety first and foremost, and the economic impact can be figured out when this is over. She said she was in favor of a soft approach first while Town staff evaluates the logistics of and makes a plan for further measures, including possible bridge closure. She said now that other local beaches have closed, people were flocking here.

Council Member Barbee asked about the process for bridge closure vs. beach closure. Police Chief Chris Spivey said it is not difficult to close the beaches, nor is it much of a challenge to close the bridge. He said the main problem is maintaining bridge closure over the long term. Fire Chief Alan Griffin said there is a quick plan in place for bridge closure, but he agreed with Chief Spivey that there could be problems for sustaining it over the course of several weeks. He said the main issue is that unlike a hurricane, there are no resources available inland for help because everyone is dealing with the same disaster situation. In addition, he said it’s very labor-intensive because there will be lots of people coming and going and needing to be vetted before coming over.

Council Member Shuttleworth said he would go along with beach closure for now but thinks Council needs to look at moving further and faster with a bridge closure to all except those who live and work on the island.

Council Member Garza said he would be in favor of closing Freeman Park only.

**ACTION:** Motion to close all beach access to the public, close public parking lots, and close Freeman Park effective immediately today

Motion: Mayor Pierce

Vote: 4-1 (Council Member Garza opposed)

Mayor Pierce asked Town staff to move forward with a plan for possible bridge closure in case that is something Council feels is necessary in the future and to continue investigating further measures that Council might need to take. She urged residents not to panic but to practice social distancing and use phone and website access for Town services.

**3. ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Pierce made a motion to adjourn at 2:05 PM. Motion passed unanimously.

Submitted by:

Kimberlee Ward

Town Clerk