

Town of HOLLY RIDGE

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**Holly Ridge Town Council
Special Meeting
March 20th, 2012
11:00 a.m.**

Purpose of Discussing Finances, Membership, General Operations, and Other Concerns of the Holly Ridge Volunteer Fire Department

The Special Meeting of the Holly Ridge Town Council was called to order by Mayor Elmer Padgett at 11:00 a.m. Council members present were Mayor Pro-Tem Edwards, Councilwoman Dingler, Councilman Wright, Councilwoman Stanley, and Councilman Hines. Staff members that were present were Manager Maiorano and Heather Reynolds, Town Clerk. Members from the Fire Department included Brandon Longo, Scott Longo, and Chris Gandy. Counsel present was Attorney Stroud.

Invocation and Pledge

Councilman Hines gave the Invocation and Mayor Padgett led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Discussion of the Finances, Membership, General Operations, and Other Concerns of the Holly Ridge Volunteer Fire Department

Councilman Wright asked Brandon Longo to come to the podium and explained that he would be asked some questions. Councilman Wright also explained that due to the circumstances Brandon may not be able to answer all of the questions. Councilman Wright stated at the last meeting William made a reference to why the money from the relief fund was transferred, and we all heard what that was. Councilman Wright went on to say on page six of the audit of the department – that is the statement that he gave to the auditor at that time, which is completely different from what he said.

Councilman Wright stated he knows \$8,500 of the \$30,000 loan was used for generators but wanted to know the amount used for paving. Brandon stated \$15,100 is what was on the final invoice. Councilman Wright stated that left a balance of \$6,400. Brandon stated on top of the generators there was a bill from the LP gas company where they installed the tank and the fire department was charged the price of fuel. Brandon stated he thought the price for fuel was \$400 - \$500. Councilman Wright asked about the balance of the loan. Brandon said the membership voted that money to go back to pay the loan. Councilman Wright asked if that money has been accounted for. Brandon stated to the best of his knowledge it had been.

Special Meeting Minutes

20 March 2012

Page 2 of 3

Brandon went on to say the Fire Department will be going back and looking at all the records to make sure everything is accounted for.

Councilman Wright suggested looking at the by-laws and making sure they are up to date and compliant.

Councilwoman Stanley asked Brandon if he is acting Chief. Brandon answered yes. Councilwoman Stanley asked if he was going to have meetings every month like the by-laws say. Brandon answered yes. Councilwoman Stanley asked if the Council could attend. Brandon stated yes. Councilwoman Stanley asked when the meeting is held. Brandon answered the third Wednesday of every month is the business meeting.

Councilman Edwards asked if a reminder could be sent through the Town Clerk. Brandon also mentioned a possible chance of their meetings being moved back to Monday evenings. Mayor Pro-Tem Edwards asked what was going to be done about elections. Brandon responded due to the by-laws and a need for firefighters having certain certifications the elections are on hold for now and they will have to wait to fill the current vacancies. Brandon explained voting rights to the Council.

Councilwoman Dingler stated there have been major changes in the leadership at the Fire Department and wanted to know what the plans are. Brandon said the main priority is the financial status with everyone including the County and the Town. He also said they are going to strive to improve customer service for the citizens.

Mayor Pro-Tem Edwards stated there are deep concerns among the taxpayers and he wants it on record that there needs to be a full investigation and he thinks John is going to work with the County to investigate the finances and maybe even go further than that and go back at least to when we started giving the fire department a lot of money. He went on to say there needs to be a full investigation and if there is any wrong doing then the SBI should be called into it. He said there is a lot of concern and he can't blame them because everyone pays a lot of tax dollars. He also said the way the last meeting went it seemed to him that the fire department is being operated like a secret society or a country club and he was told it was ran like a corporation. Mayor Pro-Tem Edwards stated you do not run a corporation off of tax money and you have to be open with it and it needs to be open to the public. Mayor Pro-Tem Edwards said the Council has woken up a sleeping giant and he has received calls and texts concerning the Fire Department. He also said this issue needs to be out there because the people do not want a cover up, but we do not want the appearance of a cover up and we are going to have to lay some ground rules down on how the tax money is being spent and we need to know where it is being spent.

Brandon stated there is no doubt that the Fire Department is open to anything.

Scott Longo stated he is excited about the future for the Town and for the Fire Department. He thinks it was misguided for a while but they are getting back on track now and there are excited volunteers over there. He went on to say after the meeting on the 28th it will be public knowledge that the fire department will be operating with the Town and the County.

Councilman Wright asked about ways to implement gas monies. Scott stated there is going to be more accountability at the fire department. Councilman Wright asked about the morale over at the Fire Department. Chris Gandy said there are a few that know what has happened but they are cautious because they are afraid the Town will stop the funding. Chris went on to say that they will do whatever they need to in order to show the Town and the County. Chris stated Brandon and himself are taking pay cuts. Chris said they are younger than Greg and William; he wanted the council to know they can learn.

Councilman Wright asked if the department is going to reapply for the funding from the county for the part-time position. Brandon stated yes and it is already in the works.

Councilwoman Dingler asked if the funds from the Town and the County are going into one account. Brandon stated yes. Mayor Pro-Tem Edwards expressed concern about the paid firefighters being in town when on the clock because the town needs coverage. Brandon stated there are strict guidelines in place.

There was much discussion about staffing and coverage issues at the fire department and Brandon stated there will be adjustments on the schedule. Brandon said there will be a minimum of two people per day. Councilman Hines asked Brandon what would help him to do his job. Brandon stated more communication, having someone at the meetings, and going through the Town Manager with concerns.

It was agreed among the Council to have a firefighter at the monthly Town Council Meetings to give an update following the police department comments.

Mayor Pro-Tem Edwards said better communication will cut down on the chances of mismanagement.

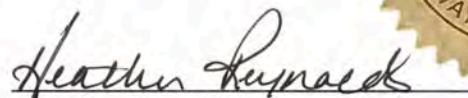
Mayor Padgett asked if the Council was satisfied with the answers. Everyone was satisfied.

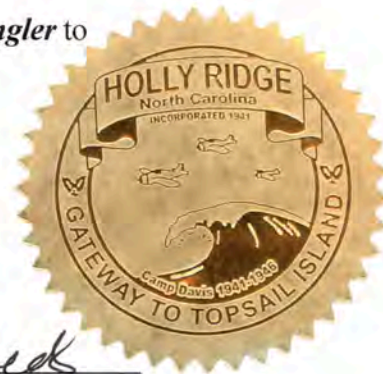
Adjournment

A motion was made by *Councilman Hines* and seconded by *Councilwoman Dingler* to adjourn at 11:40 a.m. *All Agreed.*

Attest:


Elmer Padgett, Mayor


Heather Reynolds, Town Clerk



These minutes were recorded and prepared by Town Clerk Heather Reynolds.