



Town of HOLLY RIDGE

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HOLLY RIDGE TOWN COUNCIL Annual Budget Retreat March 15th, 2024 9:00 A.M.

Mayor Jeff Wenzel called the Regular Meeting of the Holly Ridge Town Council to order at 9:02 a.m. at the Holly Ridge Town Hall. Council members present were Councilman Misciagno, Councilman Hines, and Councilwoman Stanley. Also, present were the Town Manager, Heather Reynolds, Deputy Clerk, Tracy Martin, Finance Director, Chuck Strickland, Public Works Director, Mike McFann; Community Development Director Nate Rhue; Parks and Recreation Coordinator, Audrey Madia; Chief Sorg and Fire Chief Longo.

Invocation and Pledge

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

Adoption of Agenda

A motion was made by **Councilman Hines** and seconded by **Councilman Misciagno** to adopt the agenda as presented. *All Agreed.*

General Introduction, Ground Rules, Setting the Stage

General Introductions, Ground Rules, Setting the Stage – Mayor Wenzel introduced David Bone, Executive Director of the Eastern Carolina Council of Governments (ECC), as the facilitator for the retreat. Mr. Bone provided a brief introduction of himself and background information about ECC. The Town Council agreed to the following goals for the retreat:

- Discuss developing a unified vision for the Town.
- Perform SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis.
- Review status of projects/initiatives.
- Develop Town priorities for the 2024-25 fiscal year and beyond.

These four items are what the Town Council is to focus on.

The Town Council agreed with the following ground rules for the retreat:

- Have an open mind.
- Assume positive intent from each participant.
- Everyone participates; no one dominates – all ideas matter.

- Actively listen, be curious, and seek to understand.
- Be respectful.
- Disagree without being disagreeable.
- Be serious but have fun.
- Speak your truth without blame or judgement.
- Be inspired. Focus on “what possible,” rather than “what is wrong”.
- Leave on a united front.

Team Building Exercise – David Bone introduced a team building exercise involving the development of a vision statement about a team that works well together. Each participant completed the statement, “My vision of team that works will together is _____”. Participants shared their thoughts, then Mayor Wenzel led the conversation, and the Town Council developed the following statement:

“Our vision is a team that communicates openly, respects each other’s opinions, collaborates effectively, and shares a common goal.”

Developing a shared vision for the Town based on consensus – Mr. Bone provided a short presentation about developing a shared or unified vision for the community. He shared several quotes about why a shared vision is important, including “the greatest leaders mobilize others by coalescing people around a shared vision.”

“The greatest and most inspiring mountain climbing achievements in history are not so much stories of individual achievement but are stories of the extraordinary power of a unified, talented, prepared team that stays loyally committed to one another and to their shared vision to the end.”

Mr. Bone reviewed the essential characteristics of a unified vision.

- From everyone, for everyone – input from everyone in the organization.
- Ownership – “Our” organization.
- Identity – creates a sense of identity for the organization.
- Growth – a living vision that is reviewed, changes.

Mr. Bone said that having a unified vision does not mean limiting/repressing different viewpoints/opinions, that it is healthy and important to embrace diversity of opinion. The ability to disagree constructively is a trait of a strong, healthy organization.

Mr. Bone suggested the following strategies for managing differing opinions:

- Encourage open communication.
- Promote respectful disagreements.
- Explore opportunities for compromise/finding middle ground/finding items to agree upon.

Mr. Bone said consensus does not mean everyone agrees with everyone. Consensus is reached when mutual understanding is established, and decisions are reached openly and fairly.

SWOT Analysis – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

- Strength – what does an organization excel at?
- Weakness – what stops an organization from performing at its optimum level?
- Opportunity – what factors would give an organization a competitive advantage?
- Threat – what factors could potentially harm an organization?

The Town Council reviewed, refined, and added to the list and then informally voted on the priority items. Manager Reynolds and staff also participated in the informal prioritization. Each participant voted on their top priorities.

Listed below are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that were listed by the Town Council and staff.

- Location/close to the beach/great vacation area. (8) people chose this.
- Small town feel, friendliness
- It is people, diversity.
- Comparatively affordable and near Topsail, Surf City
- Dedicated, professional staff. (7) people chose this.
- Positive financial position. (4) chose
- Town has been debt-free for 3 years and lowered tax rate.
- Success seeking grant funds.
- Availability of land in the industrial park (2)
- Strong tax bas allowing reductions in tax rate (1)
- Established recreational amenities – working on it; moving in the right direction, but not where we want to be (2)
- Potential for growth (7)
- Support from residents- can get better.
- Engagement with citizens -up to individual Council Members, staff (2)
- Open/honest discussion between manager and staff (4)
- History/Camp Davis history (1)
- Family-oriented work life (1)
- Positive work relationships/team environment for staff (6)
- Advocacy/relationships with community, county/state officials and agencies – a force to be reckoned with (3)
- Great staff – dedicated staff make us look good (7)
- Diversity in experience; backgrounds of Council and community (3)

Weaknesses

- Communication (1)
- Lack of Cross-training (2)
- Need for CIP (4)

- Need for a strategic (5-10 year) plan (8)
- Need for more staff (5)
- Overcrowding/need for new facilities (10)
- Location-bottom of the county, distance from Jacksonville (4)
- Proximity to amenities and services in Surf City, which limits commercial development (3)

Opportunities

- To establish a vision for the Town (7)
- Steady, positive, controlled growth/progressive planning (1)
- Continued commercial and residential growth; more jobs, food, and entertainment; businesses all the way down Highway 50; could be shopping district for Topsail (1)
- A municipal fire department/EMS service; new municipal complex, EOC, police station (9)
- True Main Street/downtown (2)
- New medical center (1)
- Expanded recreation facilities/gym/sports complex (1)
- Expanded recreation programs (1)
- Establishment of Town Council districts (2)
- Citizen engagement (2)
- Communication
- Tech/software (1)
- More community programs (1)
- Property town acquired from Housing Authority (5)
- Become more proactive (2)
- New Town web site/portal that allows for more user-friendly processes (2)
- Expanded sidewalks connecting to Surf City (4)
- Updated policies and procedures (1)
- Supporting staff publicly and privately – show cohesiveness, developing the sense of team (5)
- Collaboration with Surf City (1)
- Make ordinances more business and citizen – friendly (2)
- Non-water-centric recreations opportunities; accentuate but differentiate (6)
- Vacation, rental housing, hotel – more affordable than other options at the beach (3)

Threats

- Providing services while maintaining a low tax rate; staffing (4)
- Lack of cohesive vision (7)
- Staying ahead of growth with investment in infrastructure (4)
- Natural disasters (1)
- Space availability for development, due proximity to marine base, county line
- Lack of cooperation (1)

- Keeping up with the market regarding employee compensation
- Security of workspace, controlled access, lack of office space (10)
- Trying to keep the small-town feel, division between old and new.
- Traffic
- Lack of water and sewer capacity (7)
- Not being mindful/respectful of processes, procedures, roles in the organization (10)
- Distressed homes (2)
- Pending lawsuits (1)

Highlights of projects and Goals – Successes in 2021-22

- Reduced taxes
- Town Hall building design – multiple designs prepared.
- Sewer jet
- Technology upgrades
- Move to fleet lease program.
- Creation of P.D. Criminal Interdiction Team
- Investment in P.D. body camera system
- Purchase of backhoe
- Fence around maintenance yard.
- Culvert crossings – 4 completed projects

Highlights of Projects and Goals – Successes in 2022-2023

- Reduced taxes
- Police Department purchase of tasers and RMS upgrade
- Additional code enforcement employee
- 2 additional Public Works employees
- Full Time community event coordinator/Public Information Officer in Parks and Recreation department
- Concession stand demo
- Community Center sound system/projector

Current/Planned Projects and Goals

- Cohesive vision for the Town -work in progress
- Municipal Complex – hoping to apply for Defense Community Infrastructure Program grant to fund the construction.
- Municipal Fire Department Plan – ongoing discussion
- Land acquisition for future facilities and growth – ongoing discussion.
- Grant writer position – funded; was filled; currently vacant.
- Street repairs – Housing Authority matter impacted funds that were set aside.
- Recreation facilities

Mayor Wenzel called for a recess at 10:44 a.m.

Mayor Wenzel called the meeting back to order at 10:45 a.m.

Councilman Patti arrived at 11:00 a.m.

A list of potential projects was developed and reviewed as a whole, and then the Mayor and the Town Council informally voted on the priority items. Staff did not participate.

- Financing street improvements – patching is not enough (7)
- Technology – including remote work options, better website portal, and more user-friendly meetings (5)
- Development of strategic plan/vision (4)
- Main Street initiative, true downtown, sidewalks (3)
- Drag Strip Road – entrance to industrial park (3)
- Continue to fund the Master Plan (2)
- Town Hall Complex – including Police Department, Emergency Operations Center (2)
- Fire Department building/plan (2)
- Non-water-centric recreation facilities (1)
- Secure workspace for staff

Priorities for Fiscal Year 2024-2025

- Legal expenses – a given; may need to fund the liability insurance deductible for items covered by insurance and budget accordingly for any items not covered by liability insurance.
- Streets – including potential financing options (4)
- Drag Strip Road (4)
- Capital improvements Plan (3)
- Fire consultant, plan (1)
- Non-water-centric recreational opportunities – may be able to access no cost option to develop a plan through the International Economic Development Council

Potential Priorities for Next 3-5 years

- Downtown
- Town Hall complex
- Continued funding for implementation of the Master Park Plan and recreational facilities
- Fire/EMS
- Continued investment in technology
- Continued investment in streets

Chief Longo said opening the EMS side of this opens up Pandora's box another project all together. Becoming a medical transport facility, you would fall into the county Cambridge EMS plan that everyone runs under. It is not impossible, but it is another financial relationship with those other stakeholders as well.

Chief Longo said on the fire department side, fortunately we are not in a state of emergency to where we must move aggressively on either side. Chief Longo said he would like to see a separate strategic plan in this moving forward.

Mayor Wenzel asked if we need to build one or just tweak the one, we put together last year. Chief Longo said the staffing model that was proposed last year was putting cost amounts on building the personnel model. Chief Longo said getting into how you want scheduling set up, operate, we have not gotten into the operating side of it. Chief Longo said the facilities are hugh and there are a lot of moving parts that are going to have to start at various times of this progression.

Adjournment

The retreat concluded at 12:15 p.m.

DRAFT

Attest:

Jeff Wenzel, Mayor

Tracy Martin, Deputy Clerk

These minutes were recorded and prepared by Deputy Town Clerk, Tracy Martin.