

Special Meeting Minutes of the Town of Highlands Board of Commissioners Meeting of August 2, 2021, at the Highlands Civic Center, 600 North Fourth Street, Highlands, North Carolina

Town Board Present: Commissioner John Dotson, Mayor Pro Tempore Amy Patterson, Commissioner Donnie Calloway, Commissioner Brian Stiehler, Commissioner Marc Hehn and Mayor Pat Taylor

Also Present: Town Manager Josh Ward, Human Resource Director Emilie Nickerson, Police Chief Andrea Holland, Parks & Recreation Director Lester Norris and Town Clerk Gibby Shaheen

1. Meeting Called to Order

Mayor Taylor called the meeting to order at 4:00pm.

2. Adjust and Approve the Agenda

COMMISSIONER DOTSON MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS PRESENTED, WHICH WAS SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER STIEHLER AND THE VOTE WAS UNANIMOUS.

3. Purpose of the Meeting

Mayor Taylor said the Governor's press conference last Thursday ordered state facilities to be masked and for those not vaccinated to be tested. The Governor encouraged all municipalities and counties to require the same.

4. Delta Variant Updates: Introduction of Special Guest

HCA CEO Tom Neal said there had been a rise in Covid cases, and introduced HCA Chief Medical Officer Dr. Bill Hathaway who confirmed a tremendous increase in the United States, North Carolina and Western North Carolina. Dr. Hathaway discussed the fact of vaccinated people's ability to pass the virus after the CDC reported 469 cases after an event in Cape Cod, and stressed the importance for everyone to socially distance and wear a mask. Questions to Dr. Hathaway regarding mandating masks verses mandating vaccines, employer mandated vaccines and vaccination approval. Dr. Hathaway said masks were effective if used appropriately; private businesses can require a vaccination, and unclear if government can require it for an unapproved vaccine, but that should be coming in the fall.

5. Governor's New Order & Request to Municipalities

Mayor Patrick Taylor there is no ordinance affecting private companies.

1. Mask Requirements in Town Facilities

Mayor Patrick Taylor said as we have followed the governor previously he suggested that masks be required in all town facilities - Town Hall, Rec. Park, Conference Center and Police Department. Mayor Taylor added there were a significant number of employees not vaccinated.

COMMISSIONER CALLOWAY MADE A MOTION TO REQUIRE A MASK BE WORN IN ALL TOWN FACILITIES EFFECTIVE THE NEXT BUSINESS DAY, WHICH WAS SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER STIEHLER AND THE VOTE WAS UNANIMOUS.

The question was raised if the Fire Department and ABC store was required to wear a mask and the answer was all town facilities.

2. Employee Vaccinations

Mayor Taylor said mandating vaccines is problematic since it is not fully approved. Discussion was held about the number of unvaccinated employees. The Board reviewed possibilities of incentives, education and weekly testing for the unvaccinated, which would be a challenge.

6. Possible Resumption of Vaccination Clinics

HCA CEO Tom Neal said the vaccination clinics would probably not resume unless they had 100 people, and that would make it worthwhile and would propose to put one on the calendar and see if anyone would sign up if and when it is needed.

Mayor Taylor asked about students ages 12 and up from Highlands, Rabun Gap and Blue Ridge wanted the Pfizer vaccination, and Neal said the plan is to be proactive so it would be considered.

7. Use of Gymnasium & Recreation Facilities

The Board agreed to leave the usage of the gymnasium and recreation facilities as they were, with the requirement of wearing a mask.

8. Adjournment

AS THERE WERE NO FURTHER MATTERS TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS, COMMISSIONER CALLOWAY MOVED TO ADJOURN WHICH WAS SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER DOTSON AND UPON A UNANIMOUS VOTE, THE TOWN BOARD ADJOURNED AT 5:00PM.

Patrick Taylor
Mayor

Gilberta B. Shaheen
Town Clerk