

**TOWN OF RANLO BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING AND  
PUBLIC HEARING  
THE RANLO LODGE  
2000 SPENCER MOUNTAIN ROAD, RANLO, NORTH CAROLINA 28054  
THURSDAY, APRIL 8, 2021 6:00 PM**

**MINUTES**

**Governing Body Present:**

Mayor	Lynn Black
Mayor Pro-Tem	Katie Cordell
Commissioner	Robin Conner
Commissioner	Jamie Fowler
Commissioner	Effie Locklear
Commissioner	Doug Moore

**Staff Present:**

Town Manager	Jonathan Blanton
Finance Director	Lieke Janssen-Castro

**I. Call to Order and Roll Call**

Mayor Black called the meeting to order and Town Manager Jonathan Blanton conducted the roll call. All members were present.

Mayor Black offered the invocation.

**II. Adoption of the Agenda**

Commissioner Locklear motioned to adopt the agenda and Mayor Pro-Tem Cordell provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

**III. Approval of the March 11th 2021 Board of Commissioners' Regular Meeting Minutes**

Commissioner Moore motioned to adopt the March 11th 2021 Board of Commissioners' Regular Meeting Minutes and Commissioner Fowler provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

**IV. Comments from Attendees**

- (i) Jeff Moore, of 1007 Strawberry Lane, addressed the Board regarding the proposed fee increases in water/sewer costs and his opposition to the proposed property tax increases. Mr. Moore also spoke to the enforceability of the Town's ordinances. He stated that the Town's ordinances should be enforced fairly to everyone and not on a complaint-only basis.
- (ii) Charlotte Roberts, of 2494 Ridge Avenue, addressed the Board regarding spending over the last few years in the Town. The Mayor and Director of Finance spoke to the importance of fund balance. The Mayor stated that the Town only has debt associated with a small trash-truck. The Town Manager provided Mrs. Roberts with a print-out of recent spending.

Mrs. Roberts spoke regarding the Town's Police Department and former Chief Tim Anderson. She voiced her concerns with the Town's take-home vehicle program. Commissioner Moore spoke to the importance of having the Town's essential staff on standby and the Mayor commented that different pieces of equipment are at times on different vehicles.

Commissioner Conner spoke to the need for funding for the Boulder Court Project. Commissioner Conner explained the issues surrounding the construction of Boulder Court. She stated that the projects were signed-off on by former Chief Anderson and that over one million dollars is needed to repair the project. Mrs. Roberts inquired as to what Mr. Anderson gained from the project. Mayor Black stated that he did not believe Mr. Anderson intentionally signed off on anything knowingly.

The Town Manager reviewed the expenditures of the Town for the last four years, the issue surrounding the Town's standing with the Local Government Commission, and recently submitted audits.

- (iii) Teresa Moore, of 1007 Strawberry Lane, addressed the Board regarding four-wheelers/motorcycles being driven around a field on Ridge Avenue and opposition to hunting within the Town.

Mrs. Moore also spoke to issues with parking on Strawberry Lane, lack of police presence within her neighborhood, basketball goals within the road, water and sewer issues within her yard, and congestion of traffic.

The Board and the Town Manager discussed the issues with Mrs. Moore and the remedies available under revised ordinances. Mrs. Moore referenced restrictions within her neighborhood. The Town Manager stated that the Town Attorney advised that the Town cannot enforce private agreements between property owners that are not codified within the Town's ordinances.

- (iv) Jim Burns, of 2499 Ridge Avenue, addressed the Board regarding the revised parking ordinance and his opposition to Ridge Avenue being included on the no-parking ordinance. He also spoke to previous problems that he faced with the Town including concerns regarding tree-stands, deer baiting/feeding, and hunting within his backyard.
- (v) Jessica Haley, of 5201 Sunriver Road, addressed the Board regarding prior issues within the Town. Ms. Haley addressed the situation of the acceptance of Boulder Court by the Town, the Town's lost-water report and how it can be remedied, the Town's missing audits over the last years, the Town's dwindling fund-balance, and her frustration with the current situation.

The Board discussed Ms. Haley's concerns. The Mayor spoke to the Town's previous audit contract with Collis and Associates. Ms. Haley spoke to the Town consistently missing deadlines from the Local Government Commission and past issues surrounding the continuing occupation of the tenant within the Town owned building at the corner of Lowell Road and Spencer Mountain Road.

Ms. Haley spoke to issues surrounding utility rates not increasing over the last few years and comingling general and utility funds. Commissioner Conner commented on dishonesty and poor leadership over the years. Ms. Haley reiterated the amount of money that the recently completed audits showed in the fund balance.

The Mayor stated that the Town has new equipment, new vehicles, and no current debt. The Mayor and Ms. Haley discussed and disagreed upon the current state of the Town and the Town's finances. The Board further discussed Ms. Haley's concerns and Ms. Haley encouraged the Board to listen to the residents when they address the Board with potential issues and problems.

- (vi) Rudy Brown, of 501 Rhyne Circle, addressed the Board with a situation he experienced with the Town in 2018. Mr. Brown expressed his frustration with an escalated water bill from that time and problems with employees of the Town in addressing his problem.
- (vii) Randy Thomason, of 1309 Redland Drive, addressed the Board with concerns regarding traffic on Redland Drive in conjunction with new construction. He thanked the Board for their support in the naming of Billy Ray Fulbright Drive and requested that the Board remove the road from the new no-parking ordinance. Mr. Thomason also requested the Board to consider constructing restrooms at Gardin Park.

Commissioner Conner inquired as to whether flashing-lights could be installed near the new Fire Department. Mr. Thomason and Commissioner Moore commented that the issue had been researched and that it is currently cost prohibitive to fund the project.

- (viii) Tonya Marshall, of 1317 Waylon Avenue, addressed the Board regarding the new no-parking ordinance. She spoke to the issue of not having an appropriately sized driveway and that electrical equipment in her yards made extending the drive-way impossible. The Board discussed Ms. Marshall's issue and the possibility of issuing parking permits for residents who face similar issues. The Town Manager encouraged Ms. Marshall to come by Town Hall and he would discuss the issue with her.
- (ix) Commissioner Conner spoke to the Town's ordinances and the enforceability of the ordinances. The Town Manager stated that there is a revised ordinance before the Board for consideration that specifically outlines the steps for code enforcement.

## **V. Public Hearing for Revised Updates to the Town's Code of Ordinances**

Commissioner Locklear motioned to open the public hearing for the proposed revised ordinances and Commissioner Moore provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

The Town Manager gave an overview of the revised seventeen ordinances that were for the Board's consideration. Mr. Blanton stated that this is a product of nearly one year's work with American Legal Publishing to revise and codify the Town's Code of Ordinances.

The Board reached consensus to clarify the specific portion of Ridge Avenue that is designated for no-parking (beginning at Burke Street), to remove Billy Ray Fulbright Way from the no-parking ordinance, and to add a subsection regarding a permitting process for on-street parking.

Commissioner Moore inquired as to the Town's subdivision ordinance, specifically in reference to street standards. The Town Manager confirmed that the Town does have a detailed subdivision ordinance and that changes may be made in the next round of revisions.

Mayor Pro-Tem Cordell stated that there is a conflict with the speed limits listed in the ordinance and the speed limit signs that are posted. She stated that 15 miles per hour would be acceptable for the specific streets that are in conflict.

The Mayor invited the public to speak and stated there would be a three-minute time limit.

Mr. Randy Thomason addressed the Board and thanked them for rescinding Billy Ray Fulbright Drive.

Mrs. Teresa Moore inquired as to whether the Board would consider no-street parking on one side of Strawberry Lane. The Board discussed the issue and Mr. Jeff Moore spoke in support of the measure. Mrs. Moore also stated that she was not given notice when her neighbors requested a set-back variance.

Commissioner Fowler inquired as to the enforceability of the ordinances. The Town Manager stated that the penalties and enforceability for each ordinance is specified within the revised ordinances. Mr. Blanton stated that the white-goods ordinance and the no-parking ordinance would become effective April 9 and that no-parking signs would be ordered soon.

Mr. Jeff Moore thanked the Board for allowing him to speak and left the meeting.

Commissioner Locklear motioned to close the public hearing and Commissioner Moore provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

Commissioner Moore motioned to revise the no-parking ordinance in reference to Ridge Avenue to reflect the discussion within the public hearing. The motion included no-parking for only a portion of Ridge Avenue from the s-curve at Burke Street. Commissioner Fowler provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

Commissioner Fowler motioned to remove Billy Ray Fulbright Way from the no-parking ordinance. Mayor Pro-Tem Cordell provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

Commissioner Conner inquired as to what the process of enforceability would be and the Town Manager explained the revised process under the new code enforcement ordinance. Commissioner Conner and Locklear inquired as to who the code enforcement official was and Mr. Blanton stated that Pam Moore holds the position.

The Town Manager stated that he was exploring the option of new code enforcement software that would allow staff to track and manage complaints on individual properties.

Commissioner Fowler inquired regarding permitting for no-parking areas. The Town Manager stated that the ordinance could be amended now, or in the future, to address the issue of permitting. Mr. Blanton stated he would review and bring options for consideration back to the Board.

Mayor Pro-Tem Cordell motioned to approve the ordinances as presented and as amended. Commissioner Conner provided the second. The vote was 5-0 for the adoption of all revised ordinances.

## **VI. Request of Support from Gaston Together for Gaston Vision 2040**

Representatives from Gaston Together made a presentation to the Board requesting a contribution of \$1,044.00 to the Gaston County Vision 2040 Project. David Williams and Gina Shell with the Gaston County Manager's Office both spoke regarding growth and development throughout Gaston County. The Board discussed the proposal and requested more information from Mr. Williams and Ms. Shell.

## **VII. Presentation and Overview of the Second Draft of the Fiscal Year 2022 Budget**

The Director of Finance and the Town Manager presented the second draft of the fiscal year 2022 budget for the Board's consideration. Mr. Blanton explained that the revised budget is based on the discussions from the March 26th 2021 budget meeting.

Mayor Pro-Tem Cordell requested a copy of projected funds vs. proposed funds from fiscal year 2021 to fiscal year 2022. The Town Manager stated he would prepare and remit the information to the Board.

The Board discussed the revised budget and noted changes from the first draft of the fiscal year 2022 budget. Among the issues discussed were increasing the line item for the replacement of water meters, decreasing the line item for capital outlay in the Police Department and increasing the same for Non-Departmental for vehicle repairs, the benefits of outsourcing maintenance of the Town's vehicles, and the importance of accurately projecting maintenance costs.

The Director of Finance explained the basis for the projections of various line-items, which included reviewing prior years' actual costs and budgeting accordingly. The Board discussed the drug-fund, the retirement of the Police Department's canine, and potential tax increases, as well as utility increases.

The Town Manager stated that the second draft is based on a .50 cent tax rate and the proposed utility rates that were published in the prior month's utility bill. Mayor Pro-Tem Cordell inquired as to whether the Citizen Advisory Master Planning Board had reviewed the draft budget. Mr. Blanton stated that the budget was reviewed at the Tuesday meeting of the Advisory Board and that there was considerable buy-in for the proposal.

Mayor Black inquired as to whether there was any room for lower adjustments in the recommended rates provided for in the draft budget. The Town Manager responded that any increases are at the discretion of the Board. Mr. Blanton stated that he would revise the budget to reflect any rates that the Board agrees to set.

The Director of Finance underscored the importance of adjusting utility rates and pointed to the large deficit within the Utility Fund. Mrs. Janssen-Castro recommended the utility rates stand as-is and Mayor Pro-Tem Cordell stated that the Town would be best positioned to act now, as opposed to wait until a later date. The Town Manager spoke to how much a one-cent tax increase would affect the Town's budget.

Mayor Black confirmed that the last major tax and utility increase was in 2014. The Town Manager confirmed. Mayor Pro-Tem Cordell stated that the 2021 budget is projected to run at a deficit. Mr. Blanton responded that the budgeted expenditure amounts and the projected amounts for both the General Fund and Utility Fund are showing an overage. Mr. Blanton also stated that additional revenue from COVID-19 funding, previously unclaimed sales tax funds, and FEMA grant monies have helped provide additional revenue to the Town that would not have otherwise been available.

Mrs. Janssen-Castro spoke to the amount of money that has been allocated from the fund balance to balance past budgets. The Mayor inquired as to what was the primary cause of the overages within the Town's departments. The Town Manager stated that he felt the source of the overages is contributed to the Utility Fund and the continued cost of maintaining a dated distribution system.

The Town Manager furthered that the fiscal year 2021 budget is skewed because the budget was based on several years of unaudited budgets and internally incorrectly posted journal entries.

Mayor Pro-Tem Cordell inquired as to Powell Bill Funding. The Town Manager stated that the Town submitted the first revised Powell Bill Map, which included previously unreported streets, for the

first time since 2015. Mr. Blanton stated this would likely result in a small increase to Powell Bill funding. Mr. Blanton also warned that if the Town did not take action to satisfy questions from the State Treasurer's Office, that Powell Bill Funding and sales tax could be in jeopardy.

Mayor Pro-Tem Cordell, Mr. Blanton, and Mrs. Janssen-Castro discussed the possibility of a capital improvement plan in the future to demonstrate how additional funding would be used to benefit the Town.

Mayor Black confirmed that the increase in fees is not a result of the Town planning to build a new Town Hall complex. Mr. Blanton stated that all capital projects are on hold and that the proposed rate increases are not being generated for the primary purpose of building a new facility.

Mayor Black also acknowledged the previously voiced concerns of the Town's take-home vehicle program. The Town Manager and the Director of Finance provided information regarding fuel costs within the Town's departments. The Mayor stated that the expenditure is not excessive when compared to the benefit to the Town. He also noted the move from the Gaston County Landfill to Waste Management also saved the Town money from a fuel perspective in the sanitation budget. Mrs. Janssen Castro noted that the overall costs with Waste Management resulted in an approximate \$6,000.00 savings to the Town.

Commissioner Moore inquired as to whether additional funding is available in the budget should the Town be able to utilize inmate labor later. The Town Manager confirmed. The Mayor inquired as to cuts from the fiscal year 2021 budget and Mr. Blanton stated that over \$400,000 was cut from the prior fiscal year's budget's discretionary spending and capital projects.

The Board made final remarks regarding the draft budget, including cleaning costs of The Lodge, formulas for franchise taxes from the State of North Carolina, and commercial/industrial rates for businesses in the upcoming fiscal year budget. No formal action was taken.

#### **VIII. Motion to Adjourn**

Commissioner Locklear motioned to adjourn the April regular meeting and Mayor Pro-Tem Cordell provided the second. The vote was 5-0.

ATTESTED TO:

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Mayor Lynn Black

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Recorder and transcriber of the minutes for Special Board Meeting of April 8th 2021