

The Board of: Riceville Volunteer Fire Department
Met at: 6:30PM
On: Monday, August 14, 2023
For: Special Meeting of the Members
Moderator: Dan Little (Chairperson)
Members Present: Lee Barrett, Kent Creasman, Judy Dillingham, Dan Friday,
Kathy Higdon, Lisa McCallister and Carla McLendon
Not Present:
Guest(s):

1. Call the Meeting to Order: Dan Little called the meeting to order at 6:38PM.

Registration closed at 6:30PM but anyone in line at that time was allowed to register to vote. Dan relayed the only purpose of this meeting is to consider the removal of Board Member Dan Friday. He explained that each Board Member followed by each Community Member registered to speak would be given three (3) minutes in which to express their comments on this matter and that no other topics would be allowed to be addressed. Dan further explained that if anyone registered to speak changed their mind or if their comments had already been addressed by others, they were not required to speak.

Dan Little asked Kent Creasman to conduct timing of each speaker along with Chief Kelly and then proceeded to give each Board member an opportunity to speak.

Lisa McCallister cited Section 3.5 of the Bylaws, which speaks to acting in the best interest of the Department and to act only to the furtherance of the Department's mission. It is her opinion recent actions by Dan Friday do not support these statements. She noted ongoing disclosure of confidential information (spouse present at an Executive Meeting at which a personnel matter was being discussed and in which Dan Friday was remotely participating); speaking to a legal matter during the July Regular Board meeting (Board had not finalized decision on disclosure); and requesting unapproved financial reports sooner so he could discuss with friends and business associates. (These reports are in draft form and not yet approved by the Board.)

Judy Dillingham thanked Dan Friday for his years of service to the Board and the Community. She noted during his tenure as Secretary the minutes were always accurate, articulate and meticulous. She noted there were two Department, non-Board members present at the Executive Meeting referenced by Lisa McCallister and alleged the former Chairperson had purposefully selected a meeting date for when Dan Friday would not be available. In regard to the legal matter referenced by Lisa, Judy relayed she had been called before the Federal Grand Jury in April 2019 and was advised by the Federal Prosecutor that as a witness she was not held to confidentiality and could speak with anyone about the issue.

Carla McLendon noted she had nothing new to add, agreeing she had concerns about Dan Friday having a family member present at an Executive Meeting.

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Lee Barrett relayed Dan Friday had been voted off by the Board at the May Regular meeting and in accordance with Bylaws approved/written by Dan, noting Dan is now contesting those same Bylaws. Lee also relayed Dan was not on the Committee that recommended reopening the Community Center after Covid, yet he is taking credit for that action. Lee stated he agreed with the comments made by Lisa about the Executive Meeting and addressed the date of that meeting was arrived at by polling the Board and selecting a date that worked best for the majority.

Kent Creasman stated he does not feel Dan Friday supports the Chief, former Chiefs or the Firefighters. It is his opinion Dan oversteps his boundaries of Board oversight by getting involved in Department operations, noting multiple conversations have taken place in Board meetings on this issue. Kent shared we [the Board] are here to support the Community; take care of Community funds/tax dollars and support the Firefighters and make sure they have what they need to serve the Community.

Kathy Higdon stated she felt everything had already been said.

Dan Friday read a document he had prepared and which had been handed out to many Community members as they arrived at tonight's meeting. At one point, Dan Little noted Dan Friday was out of order when speaking to the legal matter on which the Board has not finalized the decision on disclosure. Dan Friday responded, "This is my chance to speak, so I'm speaking," displaying disregard for the Chairperson's authority and direction.

Dan Little relayed he agreed with some of the comments made tonight; however, noted some of the information contained in the document handed out by Dan Friday was misleading. He specifically referenced the legal matter which the Board has discussed but has not yet come to a decision on disclosure.

Dan Little explained the Bylaws do give the Board authority to remove a Board Member. In consultation with our legal advisors, it has been determined this is not in keeping with NC General Statutes. As a result, the Special Meeting of the Members was called to address the matter. He thanked Community members for coming to the meeting tonight and noted regardless of the outcome, this Board will continue to support this Community and this Fire Department.

2. Public Comment from Members: Dan Little read the guidelines associated with Public Comment from Members and then called upon those registered to speak. Summer Rain, Emili Fonteneau, Tom Fiedler, Peter Millis, Anthony Frake, Heidi Hensley and Dennis Altman made public comment. Four registered community members chose not to speak and three names were illegible.

Most Community members spoke in favor of Dan Friday, with several commenting they felt the reasons given for removal did not rise to the level of such action and noting the need for transparency, especially in regard to finances and litigation. Heidi Hensley spoke to the removal of Board members by the Board President in 2017, noting those removed were not given an opportunity to speak or to have a Community vote.

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Dan Friday stated that he did not think everyone had been made aware of the Public Comment Registration, noting that it had not been brought to his attention upon registration. While this may have been because, as a Board member, he was not required to register to speak and because of the illegible names, Dan Little asked if there was anyone else who wished to make a comment.

Community Member Rebecca Randall spoke in support of Dan Friday, referencing responsibilities of the Board, and also commenting on transparency in regard to finances and litigation.

Community Member Dean Reed noted an EMT employee was late to the meeting, as he had been on a call. Dean asked if the employee could be allowed to register and vote. Dan Little explained this would not be possible, as registration ended at 6:30PM, and one car had been turned away for arriving after that time.

Dan Little called for a motion to move to the voting portion of the meeting. Lee Barrett made a motion to move to voting. Lisa McCallister seconded the motion. Dan Little did not vote; all other Board members voted Yes, so the motion carried.

3. Conduct Vote: Dan Little asked for two Department employees to pass out ballots in exchange for the ticket provided to each person eligible to vote. Fire Department employees Captain Chris Redden and Mary Brown were asked to hand out a ballot to each person with a ticket, which indicated they had registered and were eligible to vote.

Dan Little asked Lisa McCallister to count the number of eligible voters on the registration sheets. He and Judy Dillingham counted the tickets that were returned in exchange for a ballot. Both counts totaled 107.

4. Count of Votes; Announcement of Results: Dan Little asked Kent Creasman and Carla McLendon to read/verify the votes from the ballot box. He asked Lee Barrett to tally the votes on the dry-erase board. Kent removed the security seal from the lock box and read the votes. According to the tallies on the board, the vote was 59 For Removal and 48 Against Removal.

Dan Friday thanked the Community for giving him an opportunity. Dan Little announced the results of the voting; noting the number of registered voters and tickets matched the number of tally marks on the board, for a total of 107. He thanked those who assisted with the registration process. He thanked the Community for coming out and reminded everyone the next Regular Meeting of the Board will take place on Monday, August 21, at 6:30PM, and the next Annual Meeting will take place the second Monday of October.

5. Adjournment: Dan Little called for a motion to adjourn. Lisa McCallister made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:52PM. Kent Creasman seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

DISCLAIMER ADDED BY/FROM THE RVFD BOARD OF DIRECTORS: This document is NOT an official statement from the Board; rather, it is the opinion of Dan Friday. Some statements in this document may not be true or are unsupported.

I am Dan Friday. I was voted onto this board in 2017 by the community and again in 2020.

The entire time I have been on this Board I have been an advocate of the Fire-fighters and the EMS personnel that work here. I have tried to make sure they have good pay and great benefits as well as a way to save for their retirement. In fact, I made the motion to give them their most recent pay raise back in February.

I have also spent my time on this board trying to make sure that the communities Tax dollars are spent wisely and without waste.

Since 2018 I have worked hard to recover Tax dollars that in my opinion were taken improperly without approval of the Board of directors. A trusted employee paid himself unapproved overtime compensation and hours of leave that he was not entitled to. I have been trying to recover approximately **\$465,279.00** of your money. This is my opinion, and this opinion is backed up by our accountants at JPS.

It is also my opinion that the Board does not want this information to become common knowledge. I feel that the entire community should be aware of this situation.

There is currently a lawsuit and a counter suit with the department concerning this matter.

I would like to see the Board release all pertinent information to this suit. I would like the forensic audit by Scott Hues of JPS released to the public, I would also like the notes that were sent to the bookkeeper, and the current deposition released to the public.

Law enforcement is also involved in this situation. It has moved from Local to State to a Federal Grand Jury.

How many of you folks know that this Board has asked to raise your taxes?

In February I asked how we were doing financially. I was told that we were doing great, we had plenty of money in reserve. Twenty-eight days later they asked to raise your taxes. Not only did this Board ask to raise your taxes but they needed a penny raise and they asked for twice that. They got it. I have been here almost six years and that has never happened before. This is the largest Tax increase on the Riceville Citizens that the Department has gotten since I've been here.

Since I have been on this Board I have also tried to be a champion for community involvement. I have worked to keep the Community center open for public and private events.

I have worked to welcome and keep Community Yoga

I have worked to have the Farm stand and the little Community Libraries.

I was supportive of The Coffee Social and I would like to see it return to the Center.

I have also been vocally in support of the community to use this space for Family Reunions and other events.