CITY OF LAURINBURG
CITY COUNCIL MEETING
DECEMBER 12, 2023
CITY HALL AND POLICE DEPARTMENT
303 WEST CHURCH ST.
6:00 P.M.

Minutes

The City Council of the City of Laurinburg held its regular meeting on Tuesday, December 12, 2023, in the Council Chambers of the City Hall and Police Department at 6:00 p.m. with the Honorable James T. Willis, Mayor, presiding. The following Councilmembers were present: Mary Jo Adams, Mary Evans, Rosemary Rainer, and Andrew G. Williamson, Jr. Barbara Rogers joined the meeting remotely via telephone.

Also present were Charles D. Nichols III, City Manager; William P. Floyd, Jr., City Attorney; Harold W. Haywood, Administrative Services Director / City Clerk; Amanda Futrell, Administrative Support Assistant/Deputy City Clerk.

Mayor Willis called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Councilmember Mary Evans gave the Invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Willis mentioned that the City Council convened at 12:00 pm today for the swearing-in of Mayor James T. Willis, Councilmember Rosemary Rainer and Councilmember Mary Jo Adams.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The City Manager informed the Council that there is one change that is needed to the agenda. He stated that the date on item number 1c on the consent agenda should be changed to Thursday December 14, 2023, for the road closing. The City Manager stated that he needed to give two updates and to add items 13 and 14 to the agenda. He stated that one of the updates is an update on the North Fire Station and the other update is the Golden Leaf Stormwater Grant update.

Councilmember Adams moved to approve the amended agenda with a second by Councilmember Rainer and the vote was unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

There was no one present to speak.

CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Willis read aloud the Consent Agenda:

a) Consider minutes of November 14, 2023, regular meeting.
b) Consider Resolution No. R-2023-18, Finding of Facts, for a Special Use Permit for the development of an apartment complex on N. Wilkinson Drive.
c) Consider request for road closure of Cronly Street, from Main Street to Biggs Street on Thursday, December 14th from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. for Tis the Season event.

Councilmember Evans moved to approve the Consent Agenda with the changing of the date in item 1c to December 14, 2023. Councilmember Rainer moved to second the motion, and the vote was as follows:

Ayes: Adams, Evans, Rainer, Williamson
Nays: None
(Copy of Resolution No. R-2023-18 on file in the clerk's office)

PUBLIC HEARING

Request to rezone parcel no. 010205 01002 on Hwy. 74 Business/Andrew Jackson Hwy. from Industrial to General Business.

Mayor Willis opened the public hearing. Mr. Mac McInnis stated that this request tonight is from Rhetson Companies, Inc. Mr. McInnis stated that Rhetson is requesting to rezone parcels 010205 01002 from Industrial to General Business. He stated that the company's goal is to have retail development in the area. Mr. McInnis stated that it went to the Planning Board on November 7, 2023, and it was unanimously recommended for council to approve.

Mayor Willis asked if there were any questions for Mr. McInnis. There were no questions for Mr. McInnis.

Mayor Willis asked if there was anyone present that wanted to speak in favor of the purposed request to rezone parcel no. 010205 01002 on Hwy. 74 Business/Andrew Jackson Hwy from Industrial to General Business.

Public Comments in Favor of the Rezoning

An attorney from Smith-Bowers, Mrs. Jessica Bowers, located at 127 West Hargett Street, Suite 504, Raliegh NC was present to speak in favor of rezoning parcel no.010205 01002 from Industrial to General Business. Mrs. Bowers stated that she is the attorney for the applicant, Rhetson Companies. She stated that Rhetson applied on behalf of the property owners of the parcel, Riley and Melissa Burkman, requesting to rezone parcel 010205 01002 from Industrial to General Business. Mrs. Bowers handed out maps of the parcel that included an aerial view of the site, aerial view of the residential area and an aerial view of the proposed site plan for the parcel. She advised the Council that the orientation of the building has changed since the original site plan. Mrs. Bowers addressed the surrounding businesses and residential areas shown on the aerial maps and stated that the zoning request would really make the parcel fit in with its surroundings. She stated that they initially understood that the retail development that they are proposing would fit within the Industrial UDO but out of abundance of caution and working with planning they were advised to request the parcel to be rezoned from Industrial to General Business. Mrs. Bowers stated that there are four factors that make the consideration of rezoning the parcel reasonable for the Council to include the size and nature of the track, it demonstrates the compatibility of the parcel with existing businesses in the area, the impact of the zoning decision of the surrounding neighbors, and the relationship between the newly allowed use and previously allowed use. Mrs. Bowers asked the Council to consider rezoning parcel 010205 01002 from Industrial to General Business. She introduced Matt Taggart from Rhetson Companies. Mrs. Bowers stated that Mr. Taggart or the engineer on the project, Mr. Damon Nemy, can assist with any additional questions as well.

Mayor Willis asked if there were any questions. Councilmember Evans stated she just wanted to clarify the location of the parcel as being in East Laurinburg by the old flea market. The location was confirmed, and the City Manager stated that the parcel is not within the city limits but is part of the extraterrestrial jurisdiction.

Mayor Willis asked if there was anyone present that wanted to speak in opposition to the proposed request to rezone parcel no. 010205 01002 Hwy. 74 Business/Andrew Jackson Hwy from Industrial to General Business. There was no one present that wanted to speak in opposition to the rezoning. Mayor Willis closed the public hearing.

Councilmember Evans motioned to approve Ordinance No. O-2023-25 rezoning from Industrial to General Business the property located on Hwy. 74 Business/Andrew Jackson Highway and identified as Scotland County Parcel Number 010205 01002 because it advances the public health, safety and welfare and based upon the following:

The rezoning of Scotland County Land Parcel number O 10205 01002 located on the south side of Hwy. 74 Business/Andrew Jackson Highway from Industrial to General Business is consistent with an adopted comprehensive plan and any other officially adopted plan that is applicable because:

1) The General Business zoning district is established to accommodate commercial service and retail businesses which generally have as their market the entire city and surrounding area,
2) The Comprehensive Plan 2035 indicates the desire to have retail development along the entrance corridors to the City.
3) The current zoning in this area is mainly old industrial zoning which allows little to no retail development, the rezoning will allow uses that will stimulate future development by allowing more flexible options and utilizing existing infrastructure.

And it is reasonable because of the following:

1) The Rezoning to GB will allow uses consistent with future development goals.
2) Rezoning will benefit landowners by allowing parcels to change the zoning to General Business which will make the properties in the area more attractive to potential developers.
3) Retail development will benefit the existing residents in the area by enabling uses such as food and convenience stores which are not permitted in Industrial Zoning.
4) General Business zoning will maintain the present character of the City while promoting diversity and future growth.

Councilmember Rainer moved to second the motion, and the vote was as follows:

Ayes- Williamson, Rainer, Evans, Adams, (Rogers voted in favor via phone)
Nays – None
(Copy of Ordinance No. O-2023-25 on file in the clerk's office)

CITY MANAGER REPORTS

Presentation by N.C. State Representative Garland E. Pierce

The City Manager stated that tonight we have our House Representative Garland Pierce here with a presentation. Mr. Garland Pierce began his presentation by discussing how important water and sewer are to a community. He stated that he is delighted to have a conversation with the Speaker of the House and Senator Danny Britt about the budget. He stated that both sides voted for the budget and the presentation he is giving tonight comes from the NC House of Representatives side. He read a letter to the Council from Joy Hicks from Speaker Moore's office stating that the City of Laurinburg has been approved for 20 million dollars. He gave a breakdown of the use of the funds to include 2.5 million for McColl Road waterline replacement, 7.5 million for raw water system expansion for drinking water and 10 million for wastewater treatment plant revitalization. Mr. Pierce stated that he has been looking at all the water and sewer work going on in the community and he is glad the City Manager had the desire to reach out to him and Senator Britt to ask for the funds to assist. He stated that they will do what they can in the short session to try to add funding to the water and sewer projects for the City of Laurinburg. Mr. Pierce presented the Mayor and the Councilmembers with a check representing the 20 million dollars the City of Laurinburg will receive.

The City Manager wanted to add that this is the second year that Representative Pierce has helped the City of Laurinburg obtain funding for water and sewer repairs. He stated that two years ago the City of Laurinburg was able to secure 11.2 million in water and sewer repairs. The City Manager showed his gratitude to Representative Pierce for all he has done to assist the City of Laurinburg. Councilmember Adams thanked Representative Pierce for what he does for the airport as well. Councilmember Evans wanted to reiterate that the funds must be used on the projects for which they are allotted.

Water Leak Adjustment / Payment Plan Options - Bishop McDuffie

The City Manager stated that Mr. Bishop McDuffie wanted to come before the council to discuss options on his water billing due to a water leak that went on for three different months. He stated that the current policy allows for one billing adjustment every 24 months. The City Manager stated that the City of Laurinburg made an adjustment of one of his monthly bills during the time of the water leak from a little over $1500.00 to his average bill rate of $395.00. He stated that Mr. McDuffie wanted to see if there was anything else the Council could do to assist him.

Mr. Bishop McDuffie came before the Council and asked for consideration. He stated they found a leak on the campus of the Laurinburg Institute which has very old buildings. He stated that they found four leaks over a 20 something acre campus. Mr. McDuffie stated that they have around a $2200.00 to $2600.00 obligation to water bills while they are trying to get reestablished and reopened. He requested that the amount be considered non-collectable.

A conversation ensued about the reduction in amounts of the bills between the City Manager, the Councilmembers and Mayor Willis. The City Manager advised that the city has had requests like this prior from churches, retail establishments and grocery stores but the city has steered on the side of policy set by council. The Council and the City Manager also discussed the possibility of a payment plan option. Councilmember Rainer asked if the city knew if the leak had been fixed for certain. The City Manager advised that the city could only tell that there is no leak on the city's side. Mayor Willis asked Mr. McDuffie if he knew the leak was fixed. Mr. McDuffie stated that he can only assume that it is by the leak indicator on the meter. A conversation ensued between the Council about whether a decision should be made later to ensure the leak is fixed.

Councilmember Evans made a motion for the city to try to assist the Laurinburg institute which is a historical building. The Councilmembers, the Mayor Willis and the City Manager discussed if Councilmember Evans meant to put Mr. McDuffie on a payment plan or if she meant to reduce the bill. Councilmember Evans confirmed she wanted to reduce the bill. Councilmember Adams and Councilmember Williamson stated that reducing the additional bills will set a precedent with other citizens. Councilmember Rogers wanted to know if the historic building would fall in any category that would change how it would be decided. The City Manager stated he isn't aware of anything that would put the Laurinburg Institute in a different category. After further discussion, the Council decided that the City of Laurinburg should assist Mr. McDuffie by reducing the other two month's bill.

Councilmember Evans moved to instruct the staff to do a reduction of all three months water/ sewage bills.

Councilmember Rogers moved to second, and the vote was as follow:

Ayes- Evans, Rainer, (Rogers voted in favor via phone), Williamson
Nays – Adams

Southeast Regional Airport Authority Update

The City Manager stated that Mr. Seth Hatchell was in attendance tonight to give an update and do a presentation about the Southeast Region Airport Authority.

Mr. Seth Hatchell began his presentation by saying that he wanted to address changes that have taken place at the airport that can fall under four distinct categories. He stated the changes can be seen under the organizational level, the cosmetic level, technological level and the aeronautical level. Mr. Hatchell addressed organizational changes to include his promotion to Executive Director and the addition of a new department known as the Fixed-Based Operation. The FBO department handles the sale of fuel and the management of the airport's hangars. He stated that they also had the largest budget in the airport's history for FY 2023-2024. Mr. Hatchell stated there are 7 ongoing projects at the airport to include a new fuel farm, apron rehabilitation, airfield drainage, new t-hangars, a runway extension, a new terminal building and collection systems rehab. He also stated that there have been upgrades to the terminal building to include a new roof, new vinyl soffit, cleaned floors, newly painted kitchen, an updated lobby and a pilot's lounge. Mr. Hatchell also discussed additional upgrades such as new metal on the group hangar, apron cleaning, newly painted lettering, aircraft monitoring software, new point-of-sale software, a redesigned website that streamlines processes, a full-time aviation mechanic on site and a Certified Flight Instructor. Mr. Hatchell discussed the Sky-High Aerospace Expo and Fly-In scheduled for Fall of 2025. He stated that Mr. Hugh Dixon plans to do the airshow for the airport and wants to come before the Council to discuss the expo. Mr. Hatchell discussed the growth of the airport's base aircraft from 8 aircraft in 2019 to 35 aircraft currently.

Mr. Hatchell asked if there were any questions from the Council. Discussion ensued about the technology at the airport that allows pilots to cut on the runway lights on the airport while in flight. He addressed questions asked by the Council regarding the hours of operation of the airport, the size of the staff and the different companies that have used Laurinburg-Maxton airport. Mr. Hatchell showed the Council the new logo and advised that it was by a local artist, Mr. Quinyon DeBerry, who was one of the first members of the Southeast Regional Airport Authority. Mr. Hatchell addressed the possibility of repurposing the current terminal and building a new terminal. He also stated that there is a lot of work yet to be done before they can extend the runway. Mr. Hatchell stated that it's Southeast Regional Airport Authority's goal to spend more time in the school system to create interest among the youth.

Solid Waste/Recycling Committee Recommendations

The City Manager stated that Mrs. Angie Foster has a presentation with updates and the history of recycling program in the City of Laurinburg. He stated that they have had meetings and wanted Council to have this information during the budget process to determine what the city should do with recycling efforts.

Mrs. Angie Foster gave a history of the City of Laurinburg's recycling program which started in 1989 with curb-sort program. The product was taken to the recycle center which was built in 1990. She stated that a single stream program began in 2008 with the purchase of 95-gallon roll out carts. This led to the recycling center being closed with product then taken to Wagram Paper Stock. The recycling center was reopened during the time of 2014-201 due to Wagram Paper Stock discontinued taking single stream materials. During this process, funds paid for the product decreased and became an expense to the city. Mrs. Foster stated that contamination is high with the current program. The City of Laurinburg has educated the public and implemented a policy of fees which includes removing cans. Mrs. Foster said that contamination continues to be high. The City of Laurinburg is losing money in recycling program due to low rebates and recycling expenses. Mrs. Foster stated that the Recycle Committee came up with possible options that could produce a potential solution. She stated that the most recommended option was to remove the current blue recycling carts and create 2 Drop-Off Centers inside the city limits for recyclable items only. Mrs. Foster stated the committee recommends one drop off to be placed on the north side of the city and the other should be on the south side. She stated that the cost of the last "county" drop-off center in 2020 was around $350,000 but today's estimate is close to $500,000 due to rising cost.

A conversation ensued between Mrs. Foster, the City Manager, Mayor Will and the Council about the drop-off site recommendation. Mayor Willis stated that it would be a long process if the City of Laurinburg decided to replace the current process with drop-off sites. The City Manager stated the hopes of the Recycling Committee is to put the recommendations in front of the Council for consideration in the long term due to the fiscal loss of the current recycling program. Mrs. Foster gave the Council recycling program information for surrounding cities after Councilmember Williamson asked for comparison information. Mayor Willis stated that the Council would like the Recycling Committee to come up with some possible locations for the drop-off sites, more detail about would replace the 95-gallon recycling cans and more figures to assist the Council in deciding on the possible options. The City Manager stated that the Recycling Committee will bring that information to the Council.

2024 Council Meeting Schedule

The City Manager stated that this item is for the Council to approve the 2024 City Council meeting schedule.

Councilmember Adams motioned to approve the 2024 City Council Regular Monthly Meeting schedule. Councilmember Rainer moved to second the motion, and the vote was unanimous.

Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Budget Schedule

The City Manager stated that this item is for the Council to approve the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Budget Schedule.

Councilmember Adams motioned to approve the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Budget Schedule. Councilmember Evans moved to second the motion, and the vote was unanimous.

Sole-Source Exception to Purchase Fleet Wash Equipment

The City Manager stated that the City of Laurinburg has begun the process of looking for fleet wash resources to try to preserve the major equipment to expand the useful life of the equipment. He stated that they heard that the price of the equipment will be increasing after this calendar year. The City Manager stated that they had been in talks with Hydro-Chem Systems, Inc and have received a quote for the equipment and the amount is already factored into the budget. He stated that although the City of Laurinburg does not have the building for storage yet, we could go ahead and purchase the equipment to lock in the price for 2023. Mayor Willis asked if there had been any discussion between the City of Laurinburg and Scotland County about potentially partnering with this project. The City Manager stated that no discussion has taken place about partnering and due to the project being on city property the city would prefer to have ownership. He stated that once the project has been completed, they could look at the possibility of giving the option to Scotland County to utilize the equipment for a cost. A conversation ensued between the Council and the City Manager about where the equipment would be stored prior to the building being built. He stated that some of the equipment could be stored at Public Works and Hydro-Chem Systems, Inc may store the equipment until the building has been completed.

Councilmember Rainer motioned to approve the use of the sole-source exception allowed in N.C. General Statute 143-129(e)(6) to purchase the Automated Touchless Heavy Duty Truck Wash System from Hydro-Chem Systems, Inc.
Councilmember Adams moved to second the motion, and the vote was unanimous.

Legacy Mural Project

The City Manager stated that Community Development Director, Mr. Walker McCoy was back tonight to give a follow-up on the Legacy Mural Project.

Mr. Walker McCoy stated that the Community Development group has done more research on the Legacy Mural Project. He stated they started looking at this project when Mayor Willis sent an email after his daughter found out about the project and thought it was something that the City of Laurinburg should consider. Mr. McCoy stated that the artist plans to do 100 murals in 100 counties. He stated that they had the opportunity to meet with the artist and walk around downtown to look at possible locations for the mural. Mr. McCoy showed the Council photos of murals the artist has done prior. A conversation ensued about the cost of the mural. Mr. McCoy stated that they showed many locations to the artist, and he never mentioned a change in cost. The City Manager advised that they showed the artist the wall of the A.B. Gibson Building, the side of the Firestone building and McDuffie Square. He stated that after showing the artist the buildings, they met with Mr. McDuffie to talk about the four or five names he may like to see in the mural. The City Manager stated that they just wanted to bring this project to the City Council to see if it was something that they would like to pursue because the City of Laurinburg would need to get on the books with the artist. A conversation ensued about the mural project and the consensus was that they wanted to move forward with talking to the artist about a contract for a mural project.

Councilmember Williamson motioned to approve to move forward with execute a contract with the artist for the Legacy Mural Project.
Councilmember Adams moved to second the motion, and the vote was unanimous.

North Fire Station Update

The City Manager stated that the project has slowed due to an issue with the NC DOT which will result in its completion being after the holidays. He stated that the City of Laurinburg received a notice to proceed on June 24, 2022, after receiving all permits. The City of Laurinburg had its original site plan for the North Fire Station. The economic development project taking place adjacent to the North Fire Station also had a site plan with an additional driveway down from the fire station driveway. This resulted in the NC DOT stating that they could not have 3 driveway entrances in that short span. City of Laurinburg's wanted to work with the economic development project to share a driveway. The City of Laurinburg would need to change its original site plan due to what was advised by the NC DOT. The City of Laurinburg had additional expenses on the project now to include revised engineering and architect plans, relocating utilities, relocating water and sewer, and relocating of Duke Energy poles. The City Manager stated that on October 2, 2023, the NC DOT and consulting engineers advised that the utilities would need to be 7 feet deep so the NC DOT could put the NC DOT road in later. He stated that on November 8, 2023, the NC DOT found out that one of the Piedmonts Natural Gas lines was only 4 foot deep which resulted in the driveway entrance needing to be moved further south. The City of Laurinburg was not advised until December 4, 2023, that the road would need to be moved. He stated that the Economic Development Director had to call the City Manager to advise him of the issue. The City Manager stated that the additional expenses access due to the advisement of the NC DOT are estimated to be around $93,297.86 paid to just be right back at the original plan. He stated that he wanted Council's permission to reach out to Representative Pierce, Senator Britt and Senator McInnis to try to recoup some of the taxpayer dollars lost due to the advisement of the NC DOT. The City Manager addressed the unnecessary additional expenses and the delay in the project completion due to the NC DOT's advisement.

The consensus between the Council and Mayor Willis was that the City Manager should reach out to the NC representatives to try to get assistance in recouping taxpayer monies spent due to the advisement of the NC DOT.

Golden Leaf Stormwater Grant Update

The City Manager stated that he wanted to advise the Council that they have applied for the Gold Leaf Flood Resiliency grant for $870,000 to assist in a lot of the problem areas in the City of Laurinburg.

The City Manager stated that the Mr. Chris English wanted to invite the Council to the Chamber of Commerce drop in celebration that is taking place from 5:00 P.M. until 7:00 P.M. at Grand Tudor Khari in Laurinburg.

APPOINTMENTS

Mayor Willis stated that the bylaws on a couple of things were amended for the Southeastern Region Airport Authority. One of these amendments is the ability to move property more quickly in terms of property at the airport. He stated the bylaws have changed the appointment terms and now have a 1-year term, a 2-year term and a 3-year term. Mayor Willis made his appointments of Mr. Guy McCook to the 1-year term, Mr. Thomas Ammons to the 2-year term and Mrs. Mary Jo Adams to the 3-year term.

COMMENTS FROM CITY MANAGER, MAYOR AND/OR COUNCILMEMBERS

Councilmember Willaimson asked about the progress of the signage at McDuffie Square. A conversation ensued about the status of the signage and the hope to put the expense for the signage in the budget to be able to move forward with it in July of 2024.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Councilmember Williamson, seconded by Councilmember Adams, and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:18 p.m.

James T. Willis, Mayor

Harold W. Haywood, City Clerk