CITY OF LAURINBURG
CITY COUNCIL MEETING
JULY 21, 2026
CITY HALL AND POLICE DEPARTMENT
303 WEST CHURCH ST.
6:00 PM

Minutes

1. CALL TO ORDER

The City Council of the City of Laurinburg held its regular meeting on Tuesday, July 21, 2026, 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, DeMarco Allen, James McLean, Rosemary Rainer, and Andrew G. Williamson, Jr.

Also present were Charles D. Nichols III, City Manager; William P. Floyd, Jr., City Attorney; Amanda K. Futrell, City Clerk; Brooke Bathie, Deputy City Clerk; Harold W. Haywood, Budget & Management Services Director; Mac McInnis, Planning and Zoning Officer; Walker McCoy, Community Development Director.

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

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Councilmember Adams moved to approve the agenda, with a second by Mayor Pro Tem Rainer, and the vote was unanimous.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Ms. Doris McLaughlin of Lincoln Street addressed the Council regarding the City's after-hours emergency utility assistance phone number, (910) 291-1999. She stated that she experienced difficulty reaching someone through the after-hours number before eventually receiving assistance for a power outage at her residence. She noted that she had also contacted the Police Department and was directed to use the emergency utility assistance number. Ms. McLaughlin further stated that she was asked to provide photographs of the issue at her residence to assist the emergency utility personnel in assessing the situation and determining the appropriate response.

4. CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Willis read aloud the Consent Agenda:

a. Consider the approval of the draft minutes for the June 16, 2026, Regular Meeting, the June 29, 2026, Regular Meeting (Reconvened from June 16, 2026), and the Closed Session minutes for the January 20, February 17, and May 19, 2026, Regular Meetings.

b. Consider the semi-annual surplus property sold report.

c. Authorize the Mayor to execute the Order to Collect Property Taxes.

d. Set a public hearing for Tuesday, August 11, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. to consider a request to rezone Parcel No. 01006708002, located on Dundee Drive, from Residential-6 to Office/Institutional.

e. Consider the application to use the shelter facility at Hammond Park by Youth Against Violence of Scotland County for a Gun Violence Awareness Event on July 18, 2026, from 10:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.

f. Consider the application to use the shelter facility at Hammond Park by Xplicit Ryders Motorcycle Club for a Back to School Drive on August 15, 2026, from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m.

g. Consider the application to use the facilities at McDuffie Square by Fierce Dance Company for a dance performance on July 29, 2026, from 4:00 p.m. until 8:00 p.m.

h. Consider the application to use the facilities at McDuffie Square by Laurinburg Rotary Club for the 2027 Suds & Swine BBQ & Music Festival on April 9-10, 2027, from 12:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m.

i. Consider the application to use the facilities at McDuffie Square by the African American Heritage Committee for the Kuumba Festival on September 26, 2026, from 7:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m.

j. Consider the application to use the facilities at McDuffie Square by the Scotland County Area Relay For Life for the Annual Scotland County Area Relay For Life on September 25, 2026, from 12:00 p.m. until 11:00 p.m.

k. Consider the application to use the facilities at McDuffie Square by an individual for the Back the Blue Bike Ride on September 19, 2026, from 7:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m.

l. Consider the application to use the facilities at McDuffie Square by the Laurinburg Police Department for the National Night Out on August 04, 2026, from 4:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m., and approve the closure of Railroad Street, from Gill Street to Main Street, from 4:00 p.m. until 10:00 p.m. for this event.

m. Consider the application to use the facilities at McDuffie Square by an individual for an American Legion Post 50 fundraiser and Veterans Awareness event on October 17, 2026, from 8:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m.

Mayor Pro Tem Rainer moved to approve the Consent Agenda. Councilmember Adams seconded the motion.

Councilmember McLean stated that Item (e), Consider the application to use the shelter facility at Hammond Park by Youth Against Violence of Scotland County for a Gun Violence Awareness Event on July 18, 2026, from 10:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m., on the Consent Agenda should be removed because it did not occur. The City Manager confirmed, stating that Item (e) could be removed.

Mayor Pro Tem Rainer moved to approve the Consent Agenda with the deletion of Item (e), Consider the application to use the shelter facility at Hammond Park by Youth Against Violence of Scotland County for a Gun Violence Awareness Event on July 18, 2026, from 10:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. Councilmember Adams seconded the motion. The vote was as follows:

Ayes - Adams, Allen, McLean, Rainer, Williamson

Nays - None

5. PUBLIC HEARING

a. Consider a request for a Special Use Permit for Parcel No. 01004202025 located east of Deluca Street, south of R. Graham Street, and north of West Allen Street to establish and maintain a Community Garden (Continued from June 16, 2026 meeting).

Mayor Willis stated that the Public Hearing had been continued from the June 2026 meeting to consider the request for a Special Use Permit. He explained that the request differs from a rezoning request because it is a quasi-judicial proceeding. He noted that, as part of the process, any individual wishing to provide testimony either in support of or in opposition to the request must first be sworn in by the City Clerk before addressing Council.

Mayor Willis reconvened the June 16, 2026 Public Hearing to consider a request for a Special Use Permit for Parcel No. 01004202025 located east of Deluca Street, south of R. Graham Street and north of West Allen Street, to establish and maintain a Community Garden. He opened the floor for comments in favor of the request from any qualified witness or person.

Comments in favor of the Special Use Permit request

Mr. Larry Everett was sworn in by the City Clerk and provided a piece of information to Council. He stated that he is one of the shareholders of the investment company that donated the subject property to Galilee United Methodist Church for the development of a community garden. He explained that the information distributed to Council included a letter from a realtor indicating that the proposed project would not negatively impact surrounding property values. Mr. Everett stated that, as requested by Council during the previous meeting, he and representatives from Galilee United Methodist Church met with surrounding residents to discuss alternatives to the current plan. He noted that no residents were opposed to the community garden itself; however, Mr. J.D. Willis requested that 50 feet of property between his residence and the church property line be sold to him. Mr. Everett explained that Mr. Willis' property is approximately 120 feet in length, which would result in the purchase of a 120-foot-by-50-foot tract of land. He stated that, if the church sold that portion to Mr. Willis, the same 50-foot portion would need to be offered to Ms. Mamie Massey, who may not wish to purchase 50 feet of additional property. Mr. Everett stated that there were no collective objections to the project, contingent upon the sale of the requested property, and explained that the church's intent is to support the neighborhood while promoting youth safety and educational opportunities.

Comments in opposition to the Special Use Permit request

Ms. Navette Daje of Graham's Temple Church of God in Christ was sworn in by the City Clerk. She stated that the church is not opposed to the proposed project but has several questions and is seeking additional information regarding zoning, the waterline, parking, traffic, and liability associated with the community garden. She explained that Graham's Temple Church of God in Christ received notification regarding the project but did not attend the previous meetings related to the Special Use Permit request. Ms. Daje stated that the church would like further clarification regarding potential liabilities associated with the project to ensure that any responsibilities or impacts related to the garden would not extend onto Graham's Temple Church of God in Christ's property before the project moves forward.

The City Attorney stated that the opposition must have time to review any information submitted by the proponent prior to making their comments.

Mr. J.D. Willis was sworn in by the City Clerk and reviewed the letter from the realtor provided by Mr. Everett. He stated that he continues to oppose the proposed use associated with the Special Use Permit request for the development of a community garden. He confirmed that he had requested that the Church sell him the 50-foot portion of property located adjacent to his residence. Mayor Willis asked Mr. Willis to clarify the location of his home residence on the map displayed, and Mr. Willis identified the location for Council. Mr. Willis stated that, while the proposed use must meet the requirements of the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), including the nine conditions required for approval of a Special Use Permit, he believes one of the conditions has not been satisfied. He referenced the requirement that "the special use will not be injurious to the use and enjoyment of other property in the immediate vicinity," and stated that the proposed community garden adjacent to his backyard would negatively impact his enjoyment of his property and surrounding properties. Mr. Willis further stated that, according to the UDO, the area proposed to be used as a prayer garden, which would also include beehives, does not constitute part of a community garden. He noted that there are no other five-acre community gardens located within residential areas of the City of Laurinburg and requested that Council follow the requirements of the UDO and deny the Special Use Permit request.

The City Attorney stated that anyone with rebuttal evidence was welcome to provide further comment.

Mr. Everett rebutted Mr. Willis' comments, stating that even if Mr. Willis purchased the requested 50-foot portion of the Church's property, his parcel would still be adjacent to the Church's property. He questioned why Mr. Willis' support of the Special Use Permit request would be contingent upon the purchase of the additional property. Mr. Everett reiterated that the proposed community garden is a nonprofit initiative intended to benefit the community and stated that the project would not negatively impact surrounding property values. He also noted that the lot had already been cleared.

Mr. Willis provided additional comments in response to Mr. Everett's rebuttal. He reiterated that the UDO must be followed and stated that he did not have a copy of the written ordinance available during the meeting with Galilee United Methodist Church, at which time the parties discussed that the purchase of 50 feet of property was not a feasible solution. Mr. Willis again stated that prayer gardens and beehives were not addressed as part of the UDO requirements. Mayor Willis asked Mr. Willis to clarify whether the prior discussion regarding surrounding residents purchasing 50 feet of Galilee United Methodist Church's property was no longer being considered. Mr. Willis confirmed that the discussion was null and void.

The City Attorney reiterated that Mayor Pro Tem Rainer must recuse herself from voting on the matter. He explained that evidence had been submitted regarding potential impacts on property values and stated that the primary issue before Council was the consideration of enjoyment of surrounding properties as outlined in the UDO. He noted that Council had reviewed the site plan and would be able to evaluate the potential impact of the proposed use on neighboring properties. The City Attorney stated that Council would need to determine, at its discretion, whether the proposed use was appropriate and met the applicable requirements.

Councilmember Adams stated that the letter provided by the realtor from Hasty Realty was not signed and asked whether it was customary for the expert who provided the information to be present so that Council could ask questions. The City Attorney explained that, in a judicial hearing, there would typically be stricter considerations regarding evidence presented; however, because this matter is a quasi-judicial hearing, the standards for accepting evidence are less restrictive. He noted that the inability of Council to question or cross-examine the realtor may be considered when determining the weight and credibility of the evidence and would be a relevant factor in Council's decision-making process.

Mr. Willis stated that he is not concerned about property value deterioration, only the UDO.

The City Attorney asked Planning and Zoning Officer Mac McInnis to clarify whether Graham's Temple Church of God in Christ could utilize an area at the rear of its property as an ancillary use for a prayer garden. Mr. McInnis confirmed that the church could use the referenced area for a prayer garden as an accessory use. The City Attorney stated that the next step was for Council to deliberate on the evidence presented and make a decision based on their own discretion.

Councilmember Adams stated that, based on the consistency statement provided to Council during the previous month's meeting, a community garden classified as an agricultural use is not consistent with the City's adopted Comprehensive Plan or any other officially adopted applicable plans. She also stated that she had researched areas within the City limits where rural residential agricultural uses would be appropriate.

The City Attorney stated that Council is required to consider the consistency statement; however, the consistency determination is not required to be the sole or definitive factor in the final decision reached by Council.

Councilmember Williamson stated that he believes community gardens can be beneficial to the community. He expressed, however, that they should be located in appropriate areas where they would not negatively impact surrounding properties or residents' enjoyment of their property. He stated that, in his opinion, community gardens are not intended to be located within residential areas.

Councilmember McLean stated that his concern was related to the consistency statement presented to Council. He explained that, if Mr. McInnis determined that the proposed land use was not consistent with the adopted Comprehensive Plan, and the City Attorney advised that the inconsistency could be considered as part of Council's decision-making process, then he believed that determination should be given appropriate consideration.

Councilmember Allen stated that he agreed with Councilmember McLean's statement regarding the consistency statement.

Councilmember Adams stated that she agreed with the comments made by Councilmembers Williamson, McLean, and Allen. She stated that she believes a community garden could be beneficial to the community if located in a more suitable area but expressed concern regarding the number of acres proposed for this particular use. She further stated that, after viewing the cleared lot, she had concerns about the potential impact on the enjoyment of surrounding property owners.

Mayor Willis confirmed that there was no more deliberation from Council or comments from either party, and he closed the Public Hearing.

Councilmember McLean moved to deny the request for a Special Use Permit for Parcel No. 01004202025 located east of Deluca Street, south of R. Graham Street, and north of West Allen Street to establish and maintain a Community Garden, as presented. Councilmember Adams seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.

6. CITY MANAGER REPORTS

The City Manager stated that two budget appropriation ordinances were before Council for consideration: one covering the General, Electric, Water and Sewer, and Solid Waste Funds, and a separate ordinance for the Downtown Fund. He noted that he wanted to highlight several items within each budget, particularly in light of Senate Bill 889 and Senate Bill 474. He explained that, because the two Senate Bills had not been finalized by the end of June, Council had adopted an interim appropriations ordinance, which had allowed the City to continue normal operations during the first three weeks of the fiscal year.

a. Consider the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Budget Appropriations Ordinance.

The City Manager stated that the Council held the required public hearing on the proposed budget during its June meeting and that only a few revisions and updates remained for consideration prior to adopting the Fiscal Year 2026–2027 Budget Appropriations Ordinance. He explained that the property tax rate had been reduced to 38 cents, which had already been incorporated into the proposed budget, and he outlined the resulting financial impact. He further stated that the City was utilizing the Cemetery Perpetual Care Fund in its entirety to balance the budget for the current fiscal year, noting that those funds would no longer be available as a budget-balancing resource in future years.

The City Manager explained that the proposed budget includes $650,000 for the joint fueling facility capital project, with $325,000 to be funded by the City and $325,000 by the County. He stated that, following recent discussions with County officials, he was initially under the impression that the project was no longer included in the County's budget. He noted that, because the underground storage tanks are located on City property, the City would need to determine how to proceed with the project independently if County funding was unavailable. The City Manager further stated that he later spoke with the County Manager, who advised that the omission was an error and that the County Commissioners would consider appropriating the County's $325,000 share at their August 2026 meeting. He noted that the proposed City budget continues to include the anticipated County contribution, adding that, if the County ultimately declines to fund its share of the project, a budget amendment would be brought back to Council for consideration.

The City Manager stated that the proposed budget includes the planned 10% Water and Sewer rate increase, which was originally scheduled to take effect on July 1; however, he noted that implementation of the rate increase has been affected by Senate Bill 889 and Senate Bill 474. He further stated that he plans to present an update on Solid Waste and Recycling to Council in August, but emphasized that the budget must first be adopted. The City Manager concluded by noting that the total proposed budget for the General, Electric, Water and Sewer, and Solid Waste Funds was $47,212,326, based on a 38-cent property tax rate.

Councilmember Adams asked about the amount of fund balance being appropriated in the proposed budget. The City Manager stated that the amount of fund balance being used had been reduced and that appropriations from the fund balance were included in all four funds. He explained that the proposed budget appropriates approximately $184,000 from the General Fund balance, $528,000 from the Electric Fund, $527,000 from the Water and Sewer Fund, and $324,000 from the Solid Waste Fund. The City Manager further explained that fund balance appropriations are treated differently in the General Fund than in the Enterprise Funds. He noted that the Enterprise Funds are based on the amount of cash available in each fund and stated that the City had accumulated sufficient cash in the Solid Waste Fund to purchase a major piece of equipment.

Mayor Pro Tem Rainer stated that the fund balance appropriations were based on the reserve levels recommended by the City's auditor. The City Manager confirmed that they were and explained that the auditor's primary focus is typically on maintaining an adequate fund balance in the General Fund. He also noted that the ordinance before the Council was the official budget appropriation ordinance that ordinarily would have been adopted in June.

Councilmember Williamson moved to approve the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Budget Appropriations Ordinance, as presented. Councilmember Allen seconded the motion.

Councilmember Williamson commended the City Manager and City staff for their hard work and dedication in preparing the proposed budget. He expressed his appreciation for the thoroughness with which staff gathered the necessary information and carefully evaluated each budgetary decision.

The vote was as follows:

Ayes - Adams, Allen, McLean, Rainer, Williamson
Nays - None

(Copy of Ordinance No. O-2026-15 on file in the Clerk's office)

b. Consider the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Budget Appropriations Ordinance for Downtown.

The City Manager explained that downtown property owners pay a separate 21-cent tax rate, which is matched by the City of Laurinburg. He stated that these funds are dedicated exclusively to improvements within the downtown historic district. He noted that, historically, the tax has generated between $20,000 and $25,000 of revenue annually, with the City's matching contribution bringing the total available funding to approximately $50,000.

The City Manager noted that several downtown property owners have pending property value appeals with the Scotland County Tax Department, which could reduce the projected tax revenue. He explained that the proposed budget currently before the Council totals approximately $95,000, based on the current assessed property values and the corresponding City match. He stated that the City would defer finalizing the budgeted revenue until the County completes the property appeal process.

Councilmember Adams asked to clarify whether the proposed amount included the City's matching contribution. The City Manager confirmed that it did and explained that the projected increase of approximately $45,000 was based on the current property valuations. He noted that many downtown property owners are appealing their assessments and that previous appeals have often resulted in reduced valuations, which could lower the final revenue. He stated that, at this time, the proposed budget is based on the revenue currently projected to be received.

Councilmember Allen moved to approve the Fiscal Year 2026-2027 Budget Appropriations Ordinance for Downtown, as presented. Councilmember Williamson seconded the motion. The vote was as follows:

Ayes - Adams, Allen, McLean, Rainer, Williamson
Nays - None

(Copy of Ordinance No. O-2026-16 on file in the Clerk's office)

7. COMMENTS FROM MAYOR AND/OR COUNCILMEMBERS

The City Manager stated that the 150th Celebration Sesquicentennial Committee met last night and requires Council approval of the proposed logo. He stated that there were various logos with different color schemes and taglines, but that tonight the only approval needed is for the tagline. He referenced "Celebrate Together" and "Deeply Rooted - Still Growing" as two of the options presented to Council. Councilmember Williamson stated that he prefers "Celebrate Together."

Council unanimously approved the tagline, "Celebrate Together," for the logo.

Mayor Willis stated that he and Councilmember Williamson continue to serve on the Economic Development Corporation Board and that the Board continues to discuss opportunities to promote and support growth within the local economy.

Councilmember Adams addressed airport updates, recognitions and information regarding the annual air show on October 17th. She asked the City Manager if there had been any other inquiries about the after-hours number. The City Manager stated there had not been, and that every review of the service thus far had been positive. He added that it was customary for the operator to ask for photographs of the utility issue to ensure each crew had the tools necessary to fix it upon arrival.

8. CLOSED SESSION (PERSONNEL)

a. Set City Manager's Salary.

Councilmember Williamson moved to go into closed session at 7:00 p.m. pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11(a)(6) to discuss setting the City Manager's Salary. Councilmember Adams moved to second the motion. The vote was unanimous.

Councilmember Adams moved to adjourn the closed session at 7:12 p.m. and return to the open meeting. Councilmember Williamson moved to second the motion. The vote was unanimous.

Councilmember Adams moved to offer an extension of the City Manager's contract by five years from the 2028 expiration date, and to increase the City Manager's Salary by a 3% cost-of-living adjustment. Councilmember Allen seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous.

9. ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Councilmember Williamson, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Rainer, and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:14 p.m.

James T. Willis

James T. Willis, Mayor

Amanda K. Futrell

Amanda K. Futrell, City Clerk