

**CITY OF LAURINBURG
CITY COUNCIL MEETING
SEPTEMBER 21, 2021
CITY HALL AND POLICE DEPARTMENT
303 WEST CHURCH ST.
7:00 p.m.**

Minutes

The City Council of the City of Laurinburg held its regular meeting on Tuesday, September 21, 2021 in the Council Chambers of the City Hall and Police Department at 7:00 p.m. with the Honorable James T. Willis, Mayor, presiding and physically present. The following Councilmembers were physically present: Mary Jo Adams, Mary Evans, James J. Garby, Jr., Donald Rainer, and Andrew G. Williamson, Jr.

Also present were Charles D. Nichols III, City Manager; Jennifer A. Tippet City Clerk; and William P. Floyd, Jr., City Attorney.

Mayor Willis called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Councilmember Rainer gave the Invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion was made by Councilmember Adams to approve the agenda as submitted. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Evans, and the vote was unanimous.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Mr. Michael Edds, 1207 Blue Drive, expressed discontent about the City not fixing the storm drainage on Blue Drive.

CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Willis reviewed the Consent Agenda:

- a) Consider minutes of June 16, 2021 regular meeting
- b) Set public hearing to be held on October 19, 2021 to consider a request to rezone from Residential-6 to General Business property located at 329 Gill Street
- c) Consider request to close Speller Street from Washington Street to Anne Street on October 23 from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
- d) Consider Resolution No. R-2021-17 in Opposition to Environmental Budget Provisions included in Senate Bill 105 (the Appropriations Bill)

Councilmember Evans moved to approve the Consent Agenda. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Garby, and the vote was as follows:

Ayes: Evans, Garby, Rainer, Williamson, Adams

Nays: None

CITY MANAGER REPORTS

MELISSA MIRANDA, ELECTRICITIES – STATE OF THE STATE’S ENERGY WORKFORCE

The City Manager explained that the City was fortunate to have Ms. Melissa Miranda, Vice President of Human Resources for ElectriCities, present. The City is having problems keeping trained linemen in the Electric Department, as are other members of ElectriCities. Staff asked ElectriCities for guidance and assistance in retaining valuable linemen. Currently out of nine (9) employees in the Electric Department, seven (7) of the positions are linemen, and only four (4) of those positions are filled. One (1) of those linemen is out of work for an injury, leaving only three (3) crew members to work.

Ms. Melissa Miranda thanked Council for the opportunity to discuss ideas for retaining and attracting employees. She explained that she focuses on strategies to assist ElectriCities’ members in attracting and developing talent. She presented a PowerPoint with highlights as follows:

- Driving Forces
 - Three (3) high level forces:
 - Modernization and rapidly changing industry. Technology advancements and customer expectations evolving rapidly. So electrical utilities are reviewing building up physical infrastructure as well as technological infrastructure to respond to these changes. Putting more demand on traditional skill sets as well as new skill sets. Also seeing new types of competition.
 - Employees hired today are very different from 10 years ago.
 - Workforce is more transitory and more likely to change jobs. Have more desire to control their own destiny, and often difficult to attract into trades. The industry is changing and it is more difficult to interest people to get into the industry.
 - Retirements and attrition of employees
 - Shifting from predictable retirements to unpredictable turnover in the form of voluntary resignations.

Ms. Miranda discussed competition. Historically when a local government is looking to hire other personnel, it looks at other entities that look like the local government. The skill sets required of a local government utility are not unlike what is required in the public sector utility industry such as Duke Energy, coops or a contractor. Often local government utilities require broader skill sets because a smaller system requires that an employee wear more hats. An employee that becomes employed by a local government entity will be less skilled than

desired. One (1) of the shifts being seen in the utility field is that some of the skills needed to do line work and electric utility work are also used for fiber. The competition for employees is expanding.

Ms. Miranda explained that there was a lot of turnover in the electric industry. In the past employers could plan for retirement turnover; however, at the national level and within North Carolina, the turnover is shifting. The expected level of retirement is leveling off, but is being replaced by voluntary resignations. In North Carolina in public power, the turnover rate is at approximately 21%. Most turnover is focused in the first five (5) years. The first five (5) years for a lineman is a very critical learning and development timeframe. Replacing a lineman is a very difficult and time consuming job.

- Impact of Turnover
 - Safety - Skill development takes up to 5 years for competence and 10-15 years for mastery. Electric line work is a very dangerous job.
- Financial
 - Training costs
 - Recruiting costs
 - Contract labor
 - Customer perception
 - Organization culture and morale
- Top Turnover Drivers
 - Compensation
 - Limited career path
 - Work-life balance issues
 - Insufficient challenges
 - Leadership
- Competitor Attraction and Retention Strategies
 - Base Compensation - Experienced lineworkers earn approximately 35% more at southeast investor-owned utilities such as Duke Energy, and 20% more at southeast public power utilities than in NC public power
 - Bonuses – On average southeast energy jobs are eligible for incentive bonuses at 6-10%
 - Defined career paths tied to rewards
 - Advancement based on defined criteria
 - Incremental pay increases at each step
- Key Observations
 - A number of attraction drivers are already well established – organizational purpose, work-life balance, challenging work and strong leadership
 - Compensation for entry-level roles is aligned with NC Public Power and NC cooperatives, but below investor-owned utilities
 - Compensation for experienced roles becomes increasingly misaligned with all market perspectives as responsibility grows]
- Possible Considerations
 - Implement a defined career pathway tied to rewards
 - Establish a compensation philosophy that identifies your preferred competitive

- market and where you want to establish pay relative to market competition
- Regularly update compensation benchmarking to maintain alignment with your target market (every two (2) years is ideal)

Upon question by Councilmember Williamson, the City Manager explained that because of the turnover in the Electric Department and the intense competition for electric linemen, staff wanted to review the pay plan for the Electric Department separately from the other departments.

Discussion ensued concerning career paths. Ms. Miranda explained that each position is at a defined level and there are only nine (9) positions in the City's Electric Department, so there are positions that you cannot go beyond unless there is a vacancy. One (1) option that ElectriCities has added into its career progression is that once an employee reached the senior levels, there was a Master level which gives employees encouragement to grow and to keep learning.

Mayor Willis stated that the Electric Department and crews are very important to the community.

It was consensus of Council for staff to move forward with the recommendations from Ms. Miranda, and bring back to Council in a couple of months.

GENERAL FUND FINANCIAL UPDATE FOR FUTURE POTENTIAL PROJECTS (NORTH FIRE STATION, I. ELLIS JOHNSON RESTORATION, PARTNERS IN MINISTRY) CONSIDERATION

The City Manager explained he wanted to look at the position of the General fund in light of several projects that were being considered – the North Fire Station, the I. Ellis Johnson restoration, and the funding request from Partners in Ministries. He presented a PowerPoint.

The FY 2021-2022 Budget is comprised of the four (4) Funds – General Fund, Electric Fund, Water/Sewer Fund and Solid Waste Fund. Approximately 80% of the City's budget is in the three (3) enterprise Funds, with the General Fund representing approximately 20% of the entire budget. Any of the three (3) potential projects would have to be funded from the General Fund.

The City Manager reviewed the General Fund-Fund Balance as of the last audit, June 30, 2020, as shown below:

6/30/2020 Audit	
Non Spendable	\$ 39,362
Stabilization by State Statute-Restricted	\$ 534,668
Assigned-Future Bond Debt	\$ 542,415
<i>Unassigned</i>	<i>\$ 1,496,970</i>
Total Fund Balances	\$ 2,613,415

LGC Reserve Requirement

<i>Unassigned FB</i>	\$	1,496,970
8% (annual expenditures)	\$	665,808
FB Available to Appropriate	\$	831,162

City Reserve Requirement

<i>Unassigned FB</i>	\$	1,496,970
16% (annual expenditures)	\$	1,331,616
FB Available to Appropriate	\$	165,354

The City Manager explained that the FY 2020-2021 audit would be presented in a couple of months. He added that staff should hear from The Golden Leaf Foundation in October concerning the additional funds requested for the North Fire Station, and hopefully the State budget will be passed soon which will include funds for the North Fire Station. He further added that staff does not want to expend any of the American Rescue Plan funds until the US Treasurer issues specific guidance on how those funds can be spent. Bids will be requested for the North Fire Station so that staff will know actual costs instead of estimated budget, with bids expected the end of October.

Councilmember Rainer suggested that the City wait to take any action on any of the three (3) projects until after the FY 2020-2021 audit is presented. He added that the North Fire Station is still the top priority; and Council needs to let Partners in Ministry that the City is not in any position to provide it with funding; and, that he suggests that the City continue moving forward with the I. Ellis Johnson Restoration project. He added that Council needed to let the County know what it intended to provide for the I. Ellis Johnson project as there was a committee meeting the following day.

Discussion ensued concerning the I. Ellis Johnson Restoration project. Councilmember Rainer explained that a County Commissioner told him that the County will provide \$2.4 million for the project with the City providing in-kind work and paying for the electricity.

Councilmember Williamson expressed concern about moving forward with the I. Ellis Johnson project until the City receives an official proposal from the Scotland County Board of Commissioners.

Following discussion, Mayor Willis explained that he was hearing from Council that there was consensus of Council that the City wanted to participate in some way for the I. Ellis Johnson project, whether it was in-kind or in monetary funding.

Further discussion ensued concerning the lack of an official proposal from the Scotland County Board of Commissioners, and a clear understanding on how funds will be allocated for the I. Ellis Johnson project.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Mr. Michael Mandeville, Community Development Director, presented a PowerPoint with highlights as follows:

- Downtown parking lot
 - Future green space has been prepped by public works
 - Irrigation installation and final landscaping will begin once the Beautification crew summer responsibilities slow down
 - After irrigation is installed a layer of topsoil will be added and the grass will be rolled out
- Laurinburg Chamber of Commerce Litter Sweep
 - Fall litter sweep dates: September 27-October 2
 - Collect vest, gloves, and trash bags at the Chamber office
 - Trash bags can be dropped off at any of the 5 recycling centers in the county during their hours of operation
- Bicycle Plan
 - 3rd of 4 steering committee meetings is on Tuesday, September 28th at 11PM.
 - 2nd open house will also be Tuesday, September 28th at 5:30 PM
 - The last steering committee meeting will be Wednesday December 15th at 11 AM
 - Stantec will then begin working on the final draft and will deliver in the spring of 2022
- 2020 Census
 - City of Laurinburg population 2020 census- 14,978
 - 2010 population- 15,962
 - 6.16% decrease
 - Redistricting
 - If there is more than a 5% population change in any district then district lines must be redrawn to correct imbalance
 - Lumber River Council of Governments (LRCOG)
 - LRCOG will be using ESRI GIS software to assist the City of Laurinburg in determining if redistricting is necessary
 - Development of a redistricting plan
 - At the conclusion of the project, the City of Laurinburg will have a redistricting plan, including maps and supporting demographic data
 - Alternative Plans
 - LRCOG staff will work with the City and whomever the City designates to formulate up to four alternative plans as requires in developing an acceptable plan

The City Manager explained that the COG had provided two (2) redistricting map options which will be on the October 19, 2021 agenda for discussion, and which will be emailed to Council. The public hearing would be held in November.

- Update on Retail Strategies
 - Since July 2019 to present, there has been 126% recovery of retail foot traffic in Laurinburg
 - Over the same period, tourism has increased 135%
- Downtown/Main Street
 - Events
 - September 25th- Farmers Market
 - October 7th- Sip and Shop
 - October 30th- Fall Festival
 - Updated speakers downtown- Will be installed by holiday season; there has been delays in receiving materials/equipment for installation
 - Two (2) façade grants completed in the month of September

Upon questions by Councilmember Williamson, Mr. Mandeville explained that the two (2) façade grants were for Theresa Alexander to replace the roof of the jewelry store and for awning at White's Jewelry Store. He added that City staff has quarterly calls with Retail Strategies, and that the next one would be the following week.

The City Manager explained that Retail Strategies personnel would be meeting with staff in person the following week.

Upon questions by Councilmember Adams, Mr. Mandeville explained that Railroad Street Bar & Grill was supposed to open in October. He added that there has been no activity with a plan for the former Firestone Building, including the mural.

CONSIDER REQUEST FROM LAURINBURG PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH TO SUPPORT CURB AND GUTTER FROM NC DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

The City Manager explained that Mr. David Harling, on behalf of the Laurinburg Presbyterian Church had requested that the City notify North Carolina Department of Transportation that it was in favor of the installation of curb and gutter Presbyterian Park on West Church Street.

Following a brief discussion, Councilmember Williamson moved to authorize the Mayor to send letter to NC Department of Transportation supporting Laurinburg Presbyterian Church for installation of curb and gutter along its property on West Church Street (Presbyterian Park) across from the Church. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Garby, and the vote was unanimous.

AUTHORIZE THE USE OF SOLE SOURCE EXCEPTION OF GS 143-129(e)(6) TO PURCHASE AIR CURTAIN BURNER

The City Manager explained that staff was requesting that Council authorize the use of the sole source exception of GS 143-129(e)(6) in order to purchase the air curtain burner for the Solid Waste Fund. He added that there was only one (1) company that manufactures the yard

waste air curtain burner.

Councilmember Evans moved to authorize the use of sole source exception of GS 143-129(e)(6) to purchase air curtain burner. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Garby, and the vote was as follows:

Ayes: Evans, Garby, Williamson, Adams, Rainer

Nays: None

CONSIDER RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE USE OF EMINENT DOMAIN THROUGH THE PROCESS OF CONDEMNATION

The City Manager explained that he was requesting that Council authorize the use of eminent domain through the process of condemnation in order to obtain property owned by Scotland Development Corporation and the other by St. Andrews. The City has a well on abutting property, and in order to continue replacement of wells, additional abutting property is needed. Following discussions with St. Andrews, the process to obtain the property would be an easier process through eminent domain. An appraisal was prepared for the property.

The City Attorney explained that the City need two (2) small slivers of property in order to have the appropriate buffer around each well. The appraisal value of the property will be deposited with the Scotland County Clerk of Court's Office, and all parties with interest in the property including financial institutions will be notified. He added that Councilmember Williamson needed to be recused from voting on this matter because he is president of Scotland Development Corporation.

Councilmember Adams moved to approve Resolution No. R-2021-18 authorizing the use of eminent domain through the process of condemnation for the expansion of the water supply and distribution system of the City of Laurinburg. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Garby, and the vote was as follows:

Ayes: Adams, Garby, Rainer, Evans

Nays: None

(Councilmember Williamson recused from voting)

(copy of Resolution No. R-2021-18 on file in city clerk's office)

COMMENTS BY MAYOR AND/OR COUNCILMEMBERS

Councilmember Adams explained that the Lumber River Council of Governments provides many services to Laurinburg and Scotland County. She added that the COG spent \$354,000 in Scotland County since June, 2021.

Councilmember Evans explained that Mrs. Dorothy Tyson was present. She thanked Mrs. Tyson for having the Scots for Youth participation in the Flags Across America event in front of the City Hall and Police Department Building on September 11th.

Mrs. Tyson thanked the City for allowing the Scots for Youth to have the event in front of the City Hall and Police Department Building. She thanked the City Manager and City Clerk for their assistance in planning the event; and for the firefighters who assisted with the flag presentation. She added that the flag was presented to Councilmember Evans.

ADJOURNMENT

Councilmember Rainer moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Williamson, and the vote was unanimous.

The meeting adjourned at 8:23 p.m.

James T. Willis, Mayor

Jennifer A. Tippet, City Clerk