

**CITY OF LAURINBURG
CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING/RETREAT
MARCH 30, 2021
CITY HALL AND POLICE DEPARTMENT
303 WEST CHURCH ST.
6:00 p.m.**

Minutes

The City Council of the City of Laurinburg held a special meeting/retreat on Tuesday, March 30, 2021 in the Council Chambers of the City Hall and Police Department with the Honorable James T. Willis, Mayor, presiding. The following Councilmembers were 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; Harold Haywood, General Services Director; Carrie Neal, Finance Director; Police Chief Darwin Williams; Fire Chief Jordan McQueen; Michael Mandeville, Community Development Director; Stacey McQuage, Public Utilities Director; Tim Pierce, GIS Administrator;

Mayor Willis called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m.

Councilmember Williamson gave the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

DISCUSSION ABOUT THE TOWN OF EAST LAURINBURG

The City Manager explained that Ms. Sharon Edmundson of the Local Government Commission (LGC) had asked if the City of Laurinburg was interested in annexing the Town of East Laurinburg. He explained that the City provides water and sewer services currently to the town. He added that the City collects for the town \$20.00 per parcel per month for solid waste service, and then the City pays the Town of East Laurinburg in order for it to pay either its own crew or a contractor. He added that staff has concerns about the liabilities of the town including the condition of the road system.

Upon question by Councilmember Williamson, the City Manager explained that the property values in the Town of East Laurinburg are constantly going down, with the liability of the roads and infrastructure there, and the fact that the City is not the electric provider, he did not see any benefit for the City to annex the Town of East Laurinburg. He added that if it was annexed, that would probably put some burden on the City's existing taxpayers.

Upon question by Councilmember Adams, the City Manager explained that the Scotland County Sheriff's Department provides law enforcement.

Following further discussion, Councilmember Rainer moved to permit the City Manager to inform the Local Government Commission that the City of Laurinburg was not interested in taking over/annex the Town of East Laurinburg. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Williamson, and the vote was as follows:

Ayes: Rainer, Williamson, Evans, Adams, Garby

Nays: None

CURRENT POLICE DEPARTMENT INITIATIVES

Police Chief Darwin Williams explained that the Police Department was looking at several initiatives for the next fiscal year. Those initiatives are as follows:

- **Crime Stoppers.** Working with Scotland County Sheriff's Department, and Scotland County 911 System to restart the Crime Stoppers Program. Funds remain in the account from prior Crime Stoppers Program. There will be a board comprised of citizens from the City and the County. Fundraising efforts will be utilized to raise money for the reward money and to raise awareness of the program. The money from a Crime Stoppers tip will be awarded once the tip pans out and the individual is convicted. An individual calling in to Crime Stoppers with a tip will be given an identification number for future contact so that anonymity is kept intact.
- **Crime Analyst.** Working with Safe Cities GIS for analysis of crime statistics. Will be able to map criminal activity and possibly identify criminal quicker. Includes Map Nimbus for citizens to be notified when there is criminal activity around their homes. Also includes Analytical Dashboard to present crime data more efficiently.

Discussion ensued concerning the possibility of adding home security systems into the database.

REVIEW OF CITIZEN INPUT

The City Manager explained that there were no citizen submissions received for the Citizen Input Session.

GENERAL FUND DEPARTMENTAL BUDGETARY REVIEW

The City Manager explained that the General Fund budget tends to be a bit more difficult because of the City's low tax rate where the bulk of the revenue for the General Fund is derived. Items currently in the proposed budget include:

- Every capital request from department heads.
- Health insurance figures have not been received, so currently a flat renewal rate.
- Required employer percentage increase of 11.35% for retirement system.
- Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) of three percent (3%).

The City Manager explained that the bulk of revenues in the General Fund are from property taxes. The property tax rate remained at \$.40 per thousand, and for the special downtown district, the additional tax rate is \$.21. Revenues are relatively flat. A transfer of \$596,571 from the Electric Fund to the General Fund pursuant to G.S. 159B-39. Fund Balance Appropriated is

\$752,866 which is used to balance the budget. The Assigned Fund Balance Appropriated of \$521,128 is the City Hall debt payment.

Governing Body

The City Manager explained that there was small increase in the budget because of the COLA.

Administrative

The City Manager explained that this department includes himself and the city clerk. There were small increases due to the required increase in the retirement contribution and the COLA.

Personnel/Safety

The City Manager explained that this is the Human Resources/Risk Management Director and the Human Resources Assistant. Increased due to the required increase in the retirement contribution and the COLA.

Finance/Accounting

The City Manager explained that this department is the Finance Director and her two (2) accounting technicians. Increased due to the required increase in the retirement contribution and the COLA.

Taxation

The City Manager explained that this is the tax collector. Expenses are flat with the exception of the required increase in the retirement contribution and the COLA.

Building Maintenance (500)

The City Manager explained that this budget is for the custodian. A capital request of \$12,000 is included to purchase carpet pieces to replace carpet in the Police Department hallway with LVT tile to make the flooring more durable. Also included are the required increase in the retirement contribution and the COLA.

IT

The City Manager explained that the Contracted Services line item increased. The set amount for Contracted Services for IT has been flat and this budget includes approximately \$200,000 in improvements for the server room. The amount will be allocated throughout all four (4) funds as part of the Management Fees.

Planning and Zoning

The City Manager explained that this budget is flat operationally and includes the required

increase in retirement contribution and COLA.

GIS/Cemetery

The City Manager explained that this department was operationally flat with no capital. The GIS software costs are split between the City and the County.

Beautification

The City Manager explained that this department's budget was operationally flat. Several zero-turn mowers must be replaced and there is \$45,000 in the budget for other improvements for some of the Tis the Season efforts, Christmas decorations for City Hall and Police Department and finalize the McDuffie Square project. Also, a truck replacement is necessary.

Cemetery

The City Manager explained that this department's budget was operationally flat, but a mower needs to be replaced.

Police

The City Manager explained that the Police Department is a large department and the increase in operational budget due primarily to COLA and the required retirement contribution increase. Capital items include \$120,000 for three (3) vehicles and equipment for the vehicles. The other improvements of \$38,000 improving the former animal shelter on Hall Street which will be used for storage of large evidence. The Tsunami cameras are included in the Contracted Services line item. New radios are needed and are shown in the Equipment line item.

The City Manager requested that the Fire Department budget be discussed now as the Fire Chief had a meeting that he needed to attend. He added that after the Fire Department, continued discussion about the Police Department would be held.

Fire Department

The City Manager explained that the Fire Department budget includes the COLA and the required increase in the retirement contribution. In the \$111,192 equipment replacement line item, the final payment for a pumper that was financed is included. Also some equipment replacement is necessary.

Upon question by Councilmember Adams, Fire Chief McQueen explained that the equipment needed is for air packs at a cost of \$55,000. Other fire-fighting equipment and ropes are needed.

A discussion ensued concerning the paid and volunteer fire-fighters.

Upon question by Mayor Willis, the City Manager explained that the costs are being reviewed for the new North Fire Station and it is hoped that the station will be completed new fiscal year.

He added that the North Fire Station has a separate Capital Project Fund and is not included in this departmental budget.

Police Department (cont'd.)

A discussion ensued concerning the Durango vehicles purchased the previous budget year. Councilmember Garby explained that the 2020 Durango vehicles did not include the police package; however, the 2021 Durango vehicles would have the police package. The Police Chief explained that the department was looking for SUV's for the K-9 units, and they could possibly be Durango's. The Police Chief explained that the department now has a K-9 on each shift including the Gang Unit.

Rescue

The City Manager explained that Rescue is budgeted totally in the City's budget, and then the County pays one-half (1/2) to the City. Equipment replacement includes air bag replacement and radios.

Public Works – Administration

The City Manager explained that this department is allocated over all funds. Equipment replacement includes two (2) computers.

Streets & Highways

The City Manager explained that a total capital request of \$330,800 was included in this budget. It includes \$118,800 is for mowers and a dump truck. The \$200,000 for street resurfacing, and \$12,000 for signage – street signs, speed limit signs, etc.

Discussion ensued concerning the Powell Bill Funds and the \$10.00 vehicle assessment.

Upon question by Mayor Willis, Mr. Stacey McQuage explained that \$15,000 in Contracted Services was for engineering services.

Discussion ensued concerning patching holes in streets.

Storm Drainage

The City Manager explained that there was a large increase in the operational budget of this department. Contracted Services line item of \$200,000 includes \$50,000 for engineering fees and \$150,000 is half of the estimated cost to completely close the leaf pile at Public Works. The City Manager explained that in a few months, there would be a quasi-judicial hearing and some information concerning the close out of the leaf pile should not be shared until the hearing was held. The State has said that the City must close down the leaf pile which requires funding of approximately \$300,000 just to close. The cost will be split between Storm Drainage and Solid Waste Fund. \$25,000 added for culvert repairs for potential issues.

A discussion ensued concerning cleaning ditches. Mr. Stacey McQuage explained that the City hires six (6) people seasonally to clean ditches.

Councilmember Rainer explained that he had received citizen concerns that the ditches that used to be cleaned by the City on a regular basis are not being cleaned anymore.

Mr. McQuage explained that if the ditch is not owned by the City or if the City does not have an easement from the property owner(s), the City cannot clean those ditches.

Mayor Willis stated that he believed it would be beneficial for Mr. McQuage to transport him and Council to the various sites where the private ditches are not being cleaned.

Mr. McQuage explained that Mr. Jerry Glover petitioned that the City tile a ditch on his private property to aid in flooding. Mr. Glover paid for the materials and the City performed the work after Mr. Glover gave the City an easement.

A lengthy discussion ensued concerning storm drainage and that the City could not work on ditches on private property that perhaps the City had cleaned in the past. Councilmember Williamson suggested that Council should be updated by the engineer.

The City Manager explained that five (5) of the seven (7) problem areas were going to be addressed by a grant for the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). The projects were being bid. The two (2) areas that USDA would not allow funds to be used were Isabelle Street and Blue Drive because the issues were on private property.

Further discussion ensued concerning the storm drainage issues.

Fueling Facility

The City Manager explained that the City shares the expenses of this department with the County.

Garage

The City Manager explained that this department is split between all four (4) funds. Capital needs include \$13,438 for a new lift and to replace parts inventory.

Mr. Harold Haywood, General Services Director, explained that there was an increase in the Travel & Schools line item for needed hydraulic training.

Animal Control

The City Manager explained that this department is comprised on one employee and is under the Police Department.

Discussion ensued the leash law and the licensing requirement for dogs and cats.

Discussion ensued concerning the time the Animal Control Officer spends on animal control issues versus police duties.

Non-Departmental

The City Manager reviewed the line items in the Non-Departmental budget.

- Includes five percent (5%) increase contribution to the EDC.
- Request from the Arts Council.
- Contribution to the Laurinburg/Scotland County Area Chamber of Commerce.
- Contribution to the 911 System which the amount was reduced this year due to the Memorandum of Understanding.
- Humane Society contribution.
- General Fund debt service included which totals \$525,000.
- Includes transfer out to the Electric Fund of \$13,500.

Upon question by Mayor Willis, Mr. Haywood explained that the Public Relations money is for the Annual July 4th Fireworks, the quarterly newsletter and some funds for a City Hall grand opening.

Community Development (501)

The City Manager explained that the operational budget for Community Development was a slightly less than the previous year.

Mr. Michael Mandeville discussed the litter contract with Mr. Joe Brown and the receipt of an unsolicited bid from HCS, Inc. The HCS proposal is to provide some of the same services as Mr. Brown focusing on the corridors with 4,800 man-hours annually which equals 92.3 hours per week, as compared to the current 40 hours per week. The cost would be \$60,000 annually as compared to the current cost with Mr. Brown of \$35,000. The litter contract is included in the Beautification budget under Contracted Services and Mr. Walker McCoy supervises this contract.

Discussion ensued concerning the differences between the new proposal and Mr. Brown's contract. Council requested that staff talk with Mr. Brown to explore possible changes to his contract.

Mr. Mandeville explained that staff had been discussing for several years the possibility of a dog park in the city for citizens but also to entice travelers to stop in the city. He then presented a PowerPoint concerning the proposed dog park. The location is off the US 401 Service Road where a small park was located in the past. There would be an area for small dogs and an area for larger dogs, and would be enclosed by fencing. ElectriCities developed some proposed signage for the dog park.

The budget for the dog park would be as follows:

Total budget	\$40,000
Fence	\$27,000
Signage at park	\$ 250
Wayfinding signage	\$ 1,200
Fountain	\$ 2,600
Benches, trash cans, recycling can	\$ 2,500
Water line and pad	\$ 3,000
Mutt mitt refills	\$ 500

Discussion ensued concerning the lot and need to thin-out the brush to make the park safer and more visible, and that the park would operate from dawn to dusk.

Council requested that staff continue working on the dog park proposal.

Upon question by Councilmember Williamson, Mr. Mandeville explained that some of the projects that had been budgeted in his department had cost less than expected, so the funds were being used to work on McDuffie Square.

The City Manager explained that completion of McDuffie Square was included in the proposed budget for Beautification.

Mr. Mandeville discussed the downtown banners and the information he received from the City of Jacksonville. The City of Jacksonville does not have the banners in the downtown area, they are located at a veterans' park. The Town of Pilot Mountain has banners downtown, but there are no guidelines. Items to consider include:

- Will the banners be limited to just the downtown on South Main Street from Bizzell Street to Church Street.
- Jason Lighthall, Electric Services Director, does not suggest having two (2) banners per pole. There have been issues with trucks hitting the brackets, so they are turned in towards the sidewalk.
- Currently the City Code prohibits any signs from being attached to any electric light pole, so if the banners are approved, then the City Code will need to be amended.
- Is the banner program going to be open to just veterans or to other groups?
- Timeframe to allow banners to be hung.
- Whether to require users to utilize all polls or just a few banners.
- Extra time and labor to the Electric Department for changing out banners.

The City Manager discussed the concern about pole attachment agreements the City has with AT&T and Time Warner, and the need to be mindful of the agreements.

Following further discussion, it was consensus for this matter be taken to the Downtown Advisory Committee.

American Rescue Plan Act

The City Manager explained that the information concerning the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) is very preliminary and it is not known what the funds can be used for. The City has been allocated \$4.4 million that will be distributed May 2021, and the other half May of 2022. The UNC School of Government is working on providing guidance concerning these funds. It was hoped that guidance would be available before Council passes the FY 2021-2022 budget.

The City Manager explained that as the budget stands now, \$752,866 of General Fund-Fund Balance is needed to balance the budget. Having more concrete information would perhaps allow some of the ARPA funds to balance the budget to pay for some of the capital items in the budget.

Upon question by Mayor Willis, the City Manager explained that at the May council meeting, Council would call for the public hearing on the budget to be held on June 16, 2021, and he hoped that more information on the ARPA would be available by then.

Miscellaneous

Councilmember Evans requested that \$50,000 be placed in the budget for youth development such as a program like Youth Council or to partner with another agency such as those doing mentorships.

Mayor Willis suggested that the old North Fire Station could possibly be used by a non-profit for such activities.

Mr. Haywood explained that when a final report is filed with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) the City must state what it has done with the old North Fire Station building. He added that research would need to be conducted to determine if the City could give the building to a non-profit as well as FEMA regulations.

Mayor Willis also suggested that Council should discuss the potential greenway along Leith Creek.

Further discussion ensued concerning youth development and the North Fire Station property.

Upon question by Councilmember Rainer, the City Manager explained that there was no funds in the budget for stormwater projects on Blue Drive or Isabelle Street. Councilmember Rainer requested that stormwater projects for Blue Drive and Isabelle Street be added to the budget so that the citizens could be contacted to discuss.

The City Manager explained that estimated costs for the projects were available; however, it is unknown how much would be required for easements.

Councilmember Adams explained that she was not in favor of adding \$50,000 to the budget for youth development as she did not believe that to be a function of municipal government.

Discussion Concerning Future Meetings

Following discussion, it was consensus of Council to allow individuals who register with the City Clerk prior to meetings to attend meetings as long as COVID restrictions are in place.

Meeting to Discuss Enterprise Funds

Following discussion, it was consensus of Council to meet on Wednesday, April 14, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. to discuss the Enterprise Funds.

RECESS

Motion was made by Councilmember Garby, seconded by Councilmember Rainer, to recess the meeting until Wednesday, April 14, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. The vote was as follows:

Ayes: Garby, Rainer, Williamson, Evans, Adams

Nays: None

The meeting recessed at 8:56 p.m.

James T. Willis, Mayor

Jennifer A. Tippet, City Clerk