

**CITY OF LAURINBURG
CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING
FEBRUARY 20, 2024
CITY HALL AND POLICE DEPARTMENT
303 WEST CHURCH STREET
4:30 PM**

Minutes

1. CALL TO ORDER

The City Council of the City of Laurinburg held a special meeting on Tuesday, February 20, 2024, in the Council Chambers of the City Hall and Police Department at 4:30 p.m. with the Honorable James T. Willis, Mayor, presiding. The following Councilmembers were present: Mary Jo Adams, Mary Evans, Rosemary Rainer, Barbara Rogers, and Andrew G. Williamson, Jr.

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

Mayor Willis called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m. Councilmember Barbara Rogers gave the Invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. COMMENTS FROM MAYOR WILLIS

Mayor Willis stated that this meeting is part of the annual budgeting process where the public is invited to give input to help the Council set priorities. Mayor Willis addressed social media posts that were very complimentary to the globe that was used for the decorations in downtown Laurinburg during the holiday season. He stated that some people suggested that the City should have this type of decoration for other holidays, such as Easter, Fourth of July and Thanksgiving.

3. INPUT FROM THE PUBLIC

Mayor Willis opened the floor for input from the public.

Mrs. Robin Walker of McIntosh Road, Laurinburg NC, stated that she had just moved back home to Laurinburg after 46 years. She stated that she is thrilled with

the growth and the new things that she is seeing in Laurinburg. She stated that she hopes to find ways to volunteer and see where she can make a difference. She stated that she loved the way Main Street was decorated during the holidays. Mrs. Walker stated she felt so let down seeing the corner of Railroad and Main Street being empty after the holiday decorations were removed. She stated that she thought that it would be wonderful if there was something there year-round that people could take photos in front of and enjoy. She suggested maybe a heart on Valentine's Day or a flag on the Fourth of July. She stated people on social media suggested she come today to speak in front of the Council with the suggestion. Mrs. Robin Walker stated that it is good to be home.

Mr. Wade Hatcher of Cypress Drive, Laurin Lakes subdivision in Laurinburg, NC spoke before the Council. Mr. Hatcher wanted to address the roads in the Laurin Lakes community and on Cypress Drive. Mr. Hatcher stated he and his wife bought their house in the early 1980s in the most beautiful neighborhood in Scotland County. He stated that after annexation by the City of Laurinburg, the right of ways on both sides of the road were dug up. He stated that one side was dug up for water lines and the other side was dug up for sewer lines. Mr. Hatcher stated that the City said that the right of way would be restored as close as possible to its original condition. Mr. Hatcher stated that he addressed the City Council about this in 1996 and was told that the contractors had left town. He stated that he was told that the City would take care of it, but it had never been done. He stated he has brought this up at prior Citizen Input Sessions, but it has not been completed. Mr. Hatcher stated that during work done in 1996, the City discovered a previously unknown drainage problem. He stated that the City dug deep ditches on the east side of Cypress Drive to assist with the drainage issue. He stated that there has been flooding issues since the ditches were dug and the City has tried to fix the issue by deepening the ditches. Mr. Hatcher stated that he brought photos to show some of the issues. He stated the photos show drop offs that make hazards for driving, walking, and parking. He stated that the edges of the pavement are also cracking. Mr. Hatcher asked the City Council how they would feel if the right of way in front of their houses looked like any of the photos. A conversation ensued between Mayor Willis and the City Manager about having the roads inspected and bringing a plan before the Council regarding the issue with the roads.

Mrs. Doris McLaughlin of Lincoln Street in Washington Park came before the Council to express her concerns about the number of vacant houses and empty lots that are still present in her neighborhood. She stated that she has been working with Mr. Mac McInnis to get that addressed. She stated she understands that there is a process, but she wonders if there is a way to shorten the process. Mrs. McLaughlin stated that when you have a house that has the roof falling in and the doors are open, it doesn't take much to know that no one owns the

property, no one cares about the property, or taxes have not been paid on the property. She stated that when these properties are not addressed, they are not only eye sores, but are also potentially dangerous. Mrs. McLaughlin stated that these properties attract squatters and pests. She stated that she has one next to her that she has been working on with Mr. Mac McInnis. She wanted to know if the City could condemn the properties, do controlled burns, or destroy the properties. She stated that she knows one of these properties was burned by a squatter. Mrs. McLaughlin stated that she understands that there is a process to establish the ownership of the properties, reach out to the owner of the properties and find out what the plans are for the properties. She stated that by the time expenses are paid to do this process, more money has been spent than the value of the property. Mr. McLaughlin also wanted to know if the City had considered planting wildflowers on large vacant lots to make them more appealing due to the height the grass grows between cuttings. A conversation ensued about the City's new process regarding foreclosures that no longer waits for the County. There was also a discussion about the City working with the Laurinburg Fire Department to do controlled burns and the need for property owners to reach out if they need guidance on removing these structures. The City Manager advised that property owners must agree, and the City could not do any work, including planting flowers, on private property. The City Manager encouraged property owners to partner with the City to try to minimize the cost of removing these structures. Mrs. McLaughlin stated that Mr. McInnis has reached out to the property owner of the property beside her home and has not had any response. She stated that Mr. McInnis educated her on the procedure that must be followed and advised the structure next to her property is on the list to be destroyed. A conversation ensued about the increase in foreclosures, how many properties will fall into the hands of the City, and how the City will then have to manage the properties. Councilmember Evans asked Fire Chief McQueen to explain the process of the controlled burns. He advised that the properties must be suitable for training, which would include the structure having a roof, windows and a floor which would eliminate anything with a roof falling in. He advised that not all properties would be approved for controlled burning by the Laurinburg Fire Department.

The City Manager addressed an electronic submission that was received from Mrs. Robin. She wanted to know about CPR classes for City of Laurinburg employees. The City Manager stated that training is available, and the fire department has a training coming up soon.

4. DISCUSSION OF FISCAL YEAR 2024-2025 BUDGET TOPICS / PRIORITIES

The City Manager stated all items under item 4 are high level topics that need to be addressed. He stated that some of the topics will need to be addressed prior to

the budget, most topics will be addressed during the budget process, and one topic will need to be addressed afterward.

a. Curbside Recycling

The City Manager stated that curbside recycling and the electric rate study are high priority items. He stated that they have thought about having another budget workshop where they focused on just the curbside recycling program and hoped to have the Council hear about the electric rate study. He stated that the City has teamed up with Utility Financial Solutions and that the council should hear UFS's presentation leading up to the budget. The City Manager stated that he has heard from many council members about the curbside recycling program. He stated that there seems to be some push-back about removing the curbside service program. He stated that the topics could be discussed tonight, but he really wants to try to have a meeting prior to the March meeting of the Laurinburg City Council to just focus on the electric rate study and the curbside recycling program. The City Manager stated that there will be a presentation from UFS to give their findings and recommendations. He stated that it would be followed up with a presentation by the Electricities staff to go over trends. He addressed three rate increases that Duke Energy has announced over the next 3 years. He stated that the cost of natural gas in the past two years has affected everyone in the utility business. A conversation ensued about options for the curbside recycling program, including options such as reducing curbside with a central drop-off location or removing current recycling bins and issuing them out on a request basis with an additional contract. The City Manager asked the Council for any direction they wanted the City to pursue. He stated he wanted to give an intro into the City's recycling options and dive deeper into it during the budget process. A conversation ensued about the profitability and cost of the recycling program. The City Manager advised that the average for the last 3–5 years is around a \$300,000 loss per year. The City Manager stated that a drop-off location would allow a larger variety of items to be recycled. A conversation ensued about the use of the current recycling trucks to pick up regular garbage if curbside recycling is discontinued. The City Manager stated that the design of the trucks is the same, so the recycling trucks could be used for regular garbage. A conversation ensued about a possible location for a drop-off location. Councilmember Williamson recommended that the Council not dive too far into the recycling issue tonight and he thinks people need to see the presentation presented by public works. He encouraged citizens to come out and express their opinions before the Council. The members of the Council asked for additional information as to what surrounding cities still have recycling programs. The City Manager stated that the information could be covered in the presentation.

b. Electric Rate Study

The City Manager requested that the electric rate study and curbside recycling program to be discussed on March 19, 2024, at 4:30 p.m. prior to the regular Laurinburg City Council meeting.

Councilmember Williamson motioned to call a special meeting on March 19, 2024, at 4:30 p.m. to discuss the electric rate study first and start at 5:00 p.m. to discuss curbside recycling. The motion was second by Councilmember Rainer and the vote was unanimous. Councilmember Adams asked if the public could be given the time for the recycling presentation, so it could be advertised. The City Manager stated that the presentation would take place at 5:00 pm.

Councilmember Adams asked the City Manager about a proposed \$5.35 increase in solid waste fee for this year shown in last year's budget message she received. The City Manager advised that we have not received anything about the tipping fee from the county, which will have an impact. He stated that we will reach out to the county for that information.

c. Water & Sewer Rate Structure Amendments

The City Manager stated that we will have a recommendation on a structure amendment to the water and sewer rate. He stated that Raftelis and Willis Engineering assisted with a rate study last year. He stated it was completely grant funded, but it is not completed at this time. The City Manager stated that the full grant amount was to amend the rate structure with recommendations of rates. He stated that it was decided that a rate increase was necessary and that was presented. He stated that they did not have time to complete the rate structure. The City Manager stated that the City of Laurinburg's water and sewer rate structure is confusing and has a lot of different tiers compared to others. He stated that Raftelis is working on consolidating the structure. He stated that the plan is to be able to implement the new rate structure that is easier to read and more user-friendly with the July 1, 2024, start of the budget.

d. Fleet Wash Facility

The City Manager stated the equipment for the fleet wash facility was purchased prior to the price increase. He stated that there have been some scary quotes submitted about the cost of building the facility. He stated that there had been some consideration about subbing out the building of the facility and doing it ourselves with the use of our talented employees. The City Manager stated that there have been some favorable numbers for using this option. He stated that we have not received all those figures, but that will be part of the budget process. He stated that he hopes we will be able to implement the fleet wash facility, and it will

be something the entire city will be able to utilize. A conversation ensued about the purpose of the fleet wash facility. The City Manager advised the fleet wash facility will extend the useful life of the City of Laurinburg's equipment and fleet. He explained that it could possibly be a source to generate revenue if other organizations are interested in utilizing the fleet wash facility.

f. City Entrance Signs Replacements

The City Manager stated that the City of Laurinburg's entrance signs were installed around 9–10 years ago. He stated that they are a foam-based material and there has been concern about power washing the signs to remove grime. He stated that the Community Development Department stated it may be time to update the 8 signs because the signs have served their useful life. The City Manager also stated that the City did a rebranding about a year after the signs were installed. He stated that the hope is that the new logo which was established with the rebranding will be incorporated moving forward.

e. Police Department Firing Range / Firefighter Training Facility

The City Manager stated, as part of the aftermath of hurricane Florence, that FEMA paid to have the existing firing range building moved. He stated that the building has had a lot of weather damage. He stated that we really want to get the Chief a state-of-the-art facility to do all his training. He stated that the firefighter training facility would be at the same location. The City Manager stated that thanks to Representative Garland Pierce and Senator Britt, the City was able to obtain a direct appropriation of \$300,000 in last year's budget for this project. He stated that the hope is to combine the projects, and they will be in a similar location just across the road from each other behind public works. He stated that the goal is for the projects to be mirrored with both projects having a training location, a potential inside seating areas for training and the training tower will be in a similar location as the firing range. A conversation ensued about the location of the current firing range, the location of the new firing range, and the specs of the new firing range. The City Manager stated that there may be some future requests for the projects that will need to come before the Council.

g. Scotland County Water Agreement

The City Manager stated that the Scotland County Water Agreement that is currently in place was signed and executed on November 6, 1995. He stated that there has only been one amendment to the agreement since it began. A conversation ensued about what the agreement consists of including the sale of water, maintenance, billing, and treatment. The City Manager stated that the

reason that he is mentioning this tonight is that the City must let the County know that they want to update or amend the agreement. He stated that the agreement expires on November 6, 2025, and the City must let the County know about amendments and updates a year prior to the water agreement expiring. He stated that he wanted to put it on the Council's radar since the City will need to contact the County by November 6, 2024, with its intent with the agreement. The City Manager stated that the City Attorney is aware of the agreement. He stated that Willis Engineering is going to help with amendments that should be made to the contract to meet 2024–2025 standards and any updates to language that may be needed. He stated that the process is not something that can be done overnight and that the city will be working hard to make sure to give the County proper notification.

h. Scotland County Tipping Fees

The City Manager stated that solid waste costs are driven by Scotland County tipping fees. He stated that Scotland County has a landfill, but it is a construction and demolition landfill. He stated that municipal waste goes to the County's transfer station, and it is hauled to Uwharrie landfill. He stated that the County gets increases from Uwharrie for hauling and tipping fees. He stated that the City is held to those rates in determining what is passed on to citizens for solid waste monthly fees. The City Manager stated that the City has voiced concerns in the past that the county implemented the availability fee of \$85 per parcel in the County versus the City residents paying \$55.00 plus the fees the City has to pass on due to the waste rates. He stated that he plans on having discussions with the new County Manager about this issue to see if they can get on the same page. He stated that they are also exploring multiple options, but the hope is to be able to work with the County to come to a plan to lower cost.

The City Manager stated that employees should be on the list. He stated that employees are a priority, and that the city needs to ensure that employees are where they need to be due to cost of living and inflation. He stated that the cost-of-living adjustment would be a priority as well.

5. COMMENTS FROM MAYOR AND/OR COUNCILMEMBERS

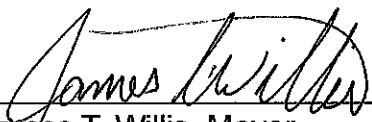
The City Manager asked the Council if there were any priorities or things they want to explore at the upcoming budget meetings. Mayor Willis asked if there were any comments from the Council.

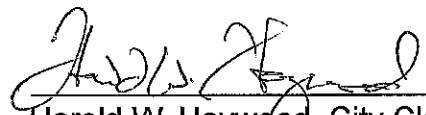
Councilmember Williamson stated that he does think that the demolition issue is important, and he thinks that the Council might need to be prepared to make the

budget amount for demolitions somewhat higher. The City Manager stated that he thinks that it has been \$30,000 for years. He stated that the City tries to help with asbestos and burning. The City Manager stated that the hope is to strengthen the City's relationship with the County to potentially partner with the County on demolitions. He stated that it could result in more demolitions and the Scotland County C & D landfill could help by considering waiving tipping fees to help the entire community look better. The City Manager stated that he looks forward to more conversations with the County Manager to work on growing a partnership and relationship.

6. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Willis adjourned the meeting at 5:27 pm.


James T. Willis, Mayor


Harold W. Haywood, City Clerk