CITY OF LAURINBURG
CITY COUNCIL MEETING
MAY 21, 2024
CITY HALL AND POLICE DEPARTMENT
303 WEST CHURCH ST.
4:30 PM

Minutes

1. CALL TO ORDER

The City Council of the City of Laurinburg held a special meeting on Tuesday, May 21, 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 Mary Jo Adams gave the Invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. DISCUSSION OF FISCAL YEAR 2024-2025 BUDGET

The City Manager advised that the proposed budget for the fiscal year 2024-2025 was completed early and that he will be going over it with the Council today. He stated that the Council will be sent any changes made or updates prior to the budget being due. The City Manager stated that he would discuss four fund budgets, which included the General Fund, the Electric Fund, Water & Sewer Fund, and the Solid Waste Fund.

The City Manager stated that the budget has a cost of living adjustment of 5% for the employees of the City of Laurinburg. He stated that this would maintain the longevity contribution that the Council beefed up last year to help employee retention. He stated it also improves the fringe benefits package. The City Manager discussed the benefits, including insurance, for employees of the City of Laurinburg.

The City Manager discussed the General Fund Budget. He stated that the proposed budget would maintain the 40 cent tax rate currently paid by residents. He discussed items on the budget to include equipment replacement, potential items to add to the art garden, and possible decorations for holidays for Downtown Laurinburg. The City Manager discussed expenses with the police department to include continued leasing of the Tsunami cameras, license plate readers, and tasers. He discussed 3 replacement vehicles in next year's budget and replacement of the evidence building for the police department. He stated that the police department would also replace rifles, tactical gear, and shields. The City Manager discussed budget items for the fire department to include replacement of a 1991 brush truck and replacement of fire and rescue equipment. The City Manager discussed funds budgeted for street repairs. He discussed structural issues with the Commonwealth Bridge and funds that have been budgeted to complete the current project to close the bridge. He advised the Council that CSX asked about the possible acquisition of the Commonwealth Bridge. He advised that if CSX acquired the bridge, the funds would no longer need to be budgeted for that project. The City Manager discussed storm water improvements that have been funded in the budget. He stated that the City has applied for a Golden Leaf Grant to assist and should have information on the grant application on June 6, 2024. He also discussed equipment replacement in the City's garage which was included in the budget. The City Manager discussed budget items for organizations that the City contributes funds to, including the Scotland County Humane Society. A conversation ensued about the funding for the Scotland County Humane Society and their request for an increase in funding. The City Manager stated that the funding to the humane society will stay the same as it was in prior years. He stated that the City, the County, and the Scotland County Humane Society would continue to meet to ensure everyone knew their role. A conversation ensued about whether the contribution balances to other organizations were the same as last year. The City Manager confirms that they are the same as last year. A discussion ensued about the Capital Improvement Plan. The City Manager advised the Council that support received from our legislators has assisted the City in completing a lot of capital projects.

The City Manager discussed the Electric Fund. He stated that there are not any proposed rate increases on electric rates in the proposed budget for the fiscal year 2024-2025. He discussed the big ticket items for the fiscal year 2024-2025 budget in the Electric Fund. Budget items included the utility fleet vehicle wash facility (funds allocated between several funds), two vehicles for the meter readers (split between the Electric and Water & Sewer Funds), consumer billing lobby improvements, equipment replacement on area light LED conversions, added equipment for the tree crew, meter expenses, and fiber upgrades. He stated that there are also funds budgeted for the relocation of infrastructure at Scotia Village for its expansion. He stated that another big budget item is for GIS mapping of the City's electric and fiber. The City Manager also discussed funds budgeted for a program for the substations to allow the City to switch from one substation to the other electronically rather than manually when needed.

The City Manager explained that Chuck Willis and Raftelis are both in attendance to address things that will affect the Water & Sewer Funds. He stated that Chuck Willis will present the results of the water and wastewater system asset inventory and assessment study at the regular City Council meeting tonight. He stated that Raftelis will also present alternatives to restructure the water and wastewater rate schedules. He discussed big ticket items for the Water & Sewer Funds, such as water production and treatment capital projects, water distribution tools, waterline repairs, sewer line repairs, and wastewater treatment.

The City Manager discussed the Solid Waste Fund. He stated that the City will be monitoring the new recycling initiative to try to reduce the expenses in the solid waste budget. He stated that the Solid Waste Fund tends to teeter on a zero cash amount. A conversation ensued about the amount of tipping fees the County would be requiring. The City Manager stated that there hasn't been any indication of the amount increasing. A conversation ensued about how much the new recycling initiative would affect the amount of tipping fees the City will pay. The City Manager advised that the products placed in the recycling bins that were not recyclable resulted in the products being taken to the County rather than being recycled. He stated that the cost of the tipping fees shouldn't see much of a change due to this. The City Manager discussed additional big ticket items from the Solid Waste Fund to include a new conveyor belt for separating solid waste, purchase of a new mini excavator, building of a new pole shed, and funds for replacement dumpsters.

The City Manager advised the Council that they will receive the proposed budget with any updates, including any direction given by the Council by June 1, 2024. He stated that tonight, they will call for a public hearing on June 18, 2024, to discuss the budget and fees schedule.

The City Manager stated that the minutes were pulled for the City Council meeting and that the Council voted to assist I.E. Johnson with utilities. He stated that it was approved by the Council at the October 19, 2019, Council meeting to cover the cost of electricity, sewer, water, and solid waste for up to a maximum of $50,000 per year for the first two years. He stated that it would expire in October 2023. A conversation ensued about further assistance to I.E. Johnson. Councilmember Rogers asked if numbers could be pulled to see the utility usage for I.E. Johnson to see what assistance the City can provide. The City Manager stated that he will gather information about the usage of the I.E. Johnson center for the Council to review. Councilmember Adams asked if the Council can be provided with additional information such as how much financial assistance I.E. Johnson has received from the legislature, what its total budget is, and if other local cities or towns participate in assisting their local centers like I.E. Johnson. A conversation ensued about why the assistance was initially started. The consensus was that the assistance was initially to help the I.E. Johnson center since it had just opened. A conversation ensued about possibly providing assistance to I.E. Johnson in other ways that would not affect the City's budget.

A conversation ensued about funds to be used to assist with vacant houses. Mr. Walker McCoy, the Community Development Director, advised the Council that there was a small increase in the amount for that line item. He stated that the plan is to use those funds and to come back before the Council when additional funds are needed.

A conversation ensued about two houses on South Main Street that were in disarray. Mr. McCoy stated that they are going through the processes required with the homes being in foreclosure. A conversation ensued about whether the City has a list of priority properties to be removed. Mr. McCoy stated that there was a list.

3. COMMENTS FROM MAYOR AND/OR COUNCILMEMBERS

Mayor Willis applauded the staff for a good budget. He stated that he appreciated all the feedback from the Council.

4. ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting was adjourned at 5:40 p.m.

James T. Willis, Mayor

Harold W. Haywood, City Clerk