The Town of Laurel
Mayor & Council Meeting Minutes
October 19, 2026

A Mayor & Council Meeting was held at Laurel Town Hall in the Mayor & Council Chambers on Monday, October 19, 2026, beginning at 7:00 p.m. The following persons were in attendance Mayor Carlos Oliveras, President of Council Chris Calio, Doug Taylor, RogJenea Fisher, George Lodato, and Jonathan Kellam. Also, in attendance were Director of Code Enforcement Dan Hogg, Public Works Director James Foskey, Chief Robert Kracyla, Judge Ruffin, Finance Manager Melissa Naselli, Recording Secretary Alexis Oliphant, and Town Manager Jamie Smith. It was noted that Councilman Donald Holden was absent.

Mayor Oliveras presented a Tribute to former Mayor Shwed's family for his tremendous years of service and contribution to the town. Town Manager Smith stated the Annual Mayor's Challenge held on Heritage Day will be named the "John J. Shwed Mayor's Challenge," and the park located on Carvel Avenue will be re-named after him.

Mr. Seyan Deer stated he attended last month's Mayor & Council where he raised his concern that his food truck on Poplar Street was forced to shut down. He stated he is here tonight for clarification on what the next steps are in moving forward.

Town Manager Smith stated she met with Mr. Deer after last month's meeting and that the information was provided to the town's attorney for his legal advice as it's a different zoning. She stated she has a meeting with attorney next week and she will follow up with Mr. Deer afterwards.

Mr. Deer stated the individual who he is renting the property from advised him that the town building is using the same driveway.

Town Manager Smith stated the state owns the building currently and the previous owner who bought the building had the understanding that the entrance is to be a shared entrance with the State Social Service Center. She advised this is recorded on the deed.

The Mayor & Council Regular and Closed Session Minutes of September 21, 2026, were presented for review. Councilman Lodato made a motion to accept the September 21, 2026, minutes as presented. Councilwoman Fisher seconded the motion. Vote was 6-0, with Councilman Holden absent.

The September 2026 Department Head Reports were presented for review.

- Public Works Director Foskey stated he submitted a revised copy of his report as the figure was mistyped regarding the resulted income for septic receiving. He stated the town currently has 4 breaks on state-maintained roads.

- Director of Code Enforcement Hogg stated there 147 completed activities, 58 grass notices, 31 work orders, 51 rental inspections, 15 building permits, and 6 stop work orders. He reminded everyone that a permit is required for about anything in town limits.

- Judge Ruffin stated she had no additions to her report.

- Finance Manager Naselli stated the town has received about three quarters of the taxes have been paid.

- Chief Kracyla stated on September 2, 2026, the U.S. Senate and Representatives were at Hollybrook Apartments that focused on funding and projects that were occurring. He stated Laurel Night Out was a great event where there was a lot of community engagement. He continues to hold meetings once a month at Hollybrook and at Little Creek. He has been working with the Laurel Middle School where he has had the opportunity to speak in front of students to build the bonding mechanism between the police. He attended the Laurel Library Event an Evening with the Author pertaining to Arthur Pitts, 54 Miles.

- Town Manager Smith stated Wawa has begun their site work at Rt.13. She stated the 410 residential housing development proposed on the east side of Discount Land Road, have been in contact with the town as their engineers and the towns engineers are working on an infrastructure plan. She stated on September 28, 2026, Governor Matthew Meyer officially nominated 25 new Opportunity Zone 2.0 to the U.S. Treasury. Laurel is now a new opportunity zone 2.0. The opportunity zones are economically distressed communities designated at the census tract level, and it allows for taxpayers who reinvest in eligible capital gains into qualified opportunity funds that invest in opportunity zone properties to potentially qualify for federal tax benefits. To qualify for the tax incentives, investors must reinvest eligible capital gains into a qualified opportunity fund. They must deploy capital into qualified zones, property, and businesses located within designated census tracts. She advised on October 8, 2026, she and, along with other town managers, were invited by Mr. Charles Anderson, the State Director of HUD, to attend a meeting at the Mill in Seaford and to take a tour of the area and to meet with other federal HUD representatives. The meeting was to share how an opportunity there can be beneficial to a community. She requested a meeting with the same representatives to invite them to the town to learn more about the program where they can take a tour and to share their input as well. She explained Mayor & Council in the past discussed the non-conforming use of car sales in the town center zoning. She talked with the attorney last week, and there are a few things that the town needs to do to move forward with this. The town needs to define the affected categories and what you don’t want permitted in your various zonings. She advised it's not by property and it has to be a use. We also need to document legitimate planning reasons and to develop a phase-out period in which the town does. She stated Mayor and Council must take into consideration the phase-out period and what efforts are needed to bring a property that's no longer a non-conforming use back into compliance. She stated today she was notified that our Google Grow with Google is all set up and it's been approved. She advised she has drafted an advertisement, which needs to comply with Google and Google needs to sign off on it. She

has sent it to the Department of Labor as the town is teaming up with them. She stated there are 100 certificates that people can utilize from the town.

Mayor Oliveras stated the certificates are free and online which leads to employment, which the town has been working on this for the past year.

Town Manager Smith stated the town continues to work on the FY2025 Audit where we are getting to the point that it should be wrapping up soon. The auditors have received everything that they have requested from the town other than the list they sent last Friday afternoon as the town is working on gathering that information for them.

Mayor Oliveras inquired what the SRF Fund was.

Town Manager Smith stated it's the State Revolving Fund that she mentioned last month for the water re-lining along Sixth Street from West Street heading out of town limits.

Councilman Lodato made a motion to accept the September 2026 Department Reports as presented. Councilwoman Fisher seconded the motion. Vote was 6-0, with Councilman Holden absent.

Mayor Oliveras presented the Communication Committee Report. Mrs. Cheryl Barber was in attendance to present the Communication Committee Report. She stated the Communication Committee was established to identify opportunities to improve the communications between the Town of Laurel, the school district, and our town residents. The committee consists of three residents and two town council members. They recommended that the town newsletter be updated, which was completed and very well received. They developed a Welcome to Laurel Brochure, which has been passed by city council, and hard copies have been recently distributed at a Laurel events. The committee is currently reviewing the town's website as the committee identified some opportunities for improvement, and they're in that navigation, accessibility, online services, public information, and security. They're recommending replacing the older website with a new one that has more resident-focused protocol, utilizing more current protocols, and focusing on speed because ours is a little bit clunky security decentralized communication. The findings that they found regarding the older website are that it's useful, but it is a bit difficult to navigate, and there are some important documents missing, such as the town audits, budget, and budget versus actual reports. It does have forms that you can fill in forms online, but it does not have status tracking ability or capabilities. Also, it does not have a calendar and it's missing important community resources and civic organizations. The new website should be easier to navigate, easier to maintain, be secure, comprehensive, and have fillable forms. The navigation should be intuitive, easy to use, include search capabilities, quick links, reliable access to all devices, and language translation function, which should be included. Maintenance should be easy for administrative staff and update monthly reports and documents. Whenever possible, links to relevant sites and information be included. Also, it should be secure, role-based access. That means you should have all of the

budgets and the audits and the financial reports, the agendas, the minutes, reporting, and all of those things. Forms should be fillable, and they should be able to be tracked. Mrs. Barber presented Attachment #1 an example of the Home Page and Attachment #2 the Website Menu Structure. **(BOTH ATTACHMENTS WILL BE INCLUDED AS A REFERENCE IN THE MINUTES).** They understand that Laurel is small, and there are some funding challenges, and so they did contact a Delaware state organization that provides website development, training, and maintenance, which is free. They contacted them in June, and they were advised that they weren't taking on any new clients. She advised if the town reaches out to them they may get a priority. They held a meeting with Tim Smith from Delmarva Digital and he provided a broad range from $15,000 to $50,000 as they didn't have all the information that they needed at that time. She stated the committee only has two recommendations. The first one is that the town actually look into acquiring a new comprehensive website, rather than trying to fix the one they had with incremental developments, because that can get costly and it may not make it more useful, so it might be better to just go with a new protocol. The second one is that the communication committee be established as a permanent standing committee, so that it could continually provide ongoing oversight of the town's communication initiative.

Councilman Kellam stated the Laurel Senior Center is creating a new website and they contacted GIC, as well. They contacted an alternated firm as well where it was going to be half the price where they would be able to set up and run the website.

Councilman Lodato stated they spoke with them regarding that already and the problem with that one they're using is the security. Their website isn't going to need the security that a municipality would need.

Councilman Lodato made a motion that we accept the committee's report and recommendations. One, the town looking to acquiring a comprehensive replacement for the existing website rather than increment updates, and two, to establish the communications committee as a permanent standing committee that would provide continuity and ongoing oversight of the town's committee communication initiatives.

Mayor Oliveras stated it's a lengthy report and wanted to allow Mayor & Council more of an opportunity to review the report.

Councilman Lodato stated he wanted to be clear of the motion that he was trying to make is that the only motion that he's trying to make is that the Mayor & Council accept to look into the recommendations that the committee made. They're not looking for any kind of commitment to anything.

Councilman Kellam seconded the motion. Vote was 5-0, with President of Council Calio abstaining and Councilman Holden absent.

Town Manager Smith made a recommendation to hold a workshop to allow for more informal discussion. She advised the first meetings of the month are held open to allow for a workshop if Mayor & Council elect to hold one. She advised no matters is voted in a workshop. Mayor & Council were in agreement to hold a workshop on Monday, November 2, 2026.

Mayor Oliveras presented the Vacant Structure Ordinance Update. Town Manager Smith stated she, Director of Code Enforcement Hogg, and Councilman Lodato have met a few times pertaining this ordinance. She advised Director of Code Enforcement Hogg has provided her with a copy of the City of Salisbury's ordinance, and she has reviewed other municipalities' ordinances. She stated Councilman Lodato has shared his concerns pertaining the ordinance. She recommended holding a workshop to allow Mayor & Council to review different municipal ordinances to determine what they would like to include in order to create a draft ordinance. Mayor & Council were agreement to include the Vacant Structure Ordinance Discussion on November 2, 2026, Workshop.

Mayor Oliveras presented the Zoning Ordinance Updates. Town Manager Smith stated last week a public meeting was held where the Rossi group presented on the Technical Assistance Grant through the Delaware Housing Authority on accessory dwelling units. She went through the various criteria of what different accessory dwelling units could look like as this is something the town wanted to go forward with. She did an exercise with the residents that were in attendance. Mrs. Rossi asked for feedback in which she'll be compiling and presenting to Mayor & Council with recommendations based on that feedback. Mrs. Rossi will go before P&Z on November 4, 2026, meeting, present the same presentation. This project will be wrapped up in spring, so we still have several months where we are taking resident feedback. Town Manager Smith stated if anyone has any questions, please submit them to her and the presentation is available on the town's website for resident's review.

Mayor Oliveras presented the FOIA Information Guide for Consideration. Town Manager Smith stated the town receives several FOIA requests throughout the year. Per state law the town has a FOIA coordinator and the town follows all the guidelines of the state law as it pertains to FOIA and providing all the necessary information that the town is required to provide. She advised the town receives a lot of requests from people who reside outside the state, as the town is permitted not to fulfill a non-resident request per FOIA. The town also receives requests that are not eligible and permitted per FOIA. Town Manager Smith stated she drafted a FOIA brochure, in which she burrowed from another municipality. The brochure offers general guidelines to FOIA which includes: What falls under FOIA, What's eligible for FOIA, How do you go about requesting records, and What is not eligible under FOIA. Town Manager Smith advised she wanted to get Mayor & Council's approval for making the guides available at town hall and the towns website. Councilwoman Fisher made a motion to accept the FOIA Information Guide as presented. President of Council Calio seconded the motion. Vote was 6-0, with Councilman Holden absent.

Town Manager Smith presented Upcoming Events and Upcoming Holidays. She stated the Western Sussex Broad Creek Bash will be held on Saturday, October 24, 2026, from 7:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at Janosik Park as it was postponed in August due to weather. The Laurel Community Trunk or Treat will be held on Saturday, October 24, 2026, at Bryans' Bowling Center from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. She stated the Town of Laurel's Christmas Parade will be held on Friday, December 4, 2026, with the parade beginning at 7:00 p.m. and line-up at 6:00 p.m. She advised parade applications are available at Laurel Town Hall or online.

Councilman Taylor thanked the Communication Committee for the report presented and thanked Councilman Lodato for leading the committee and everyone that was involved.

Councilwoman Fisher thanked everyone for coming out and stated Mrs. Precious Henry will be providing a Laurel Youth Legacy Update.

Councilman Lodato thanked the communications committee for all the work they did involving their three projects. He stated the town newsletter's recommendations were well received and residents enjoyed reading them. He advised a lot of work went into The Welcome to Laurel and they've been handed out at town events. The committee has been working together for about six months, and he just wanted to thank the committee for coming out and giving up their time and helping the town. He thanked Chief Kracyla and his team for putting together a great Laurel Night Out for the community. He thanked Director of Code Enforcement Hogg for his report and it shows that his department has been very busy.

Councilman Kellam thanked the town staff for their hard work. He attended the O.W.L. Impact Awards which was a well-attended event. He thanked the public for coming out this evening.

Mayor Oliveras announced the Councilman Kellam was named Western Sussex Chamber Citizen of the Year.

Mayor Oliveras stated he attended the Homecoming Parade and the O.W.L. Impact Awards, which both events were well-attended. He thanked Councilwoman Fisher for her continuing efforts pertaining the Laurel Legacy Youth Foundation. He stated a book club and an movie premiere was held in town. He thanked the Laurel Public Library for all their hard work and activities.

Mrs. Precious Henry of the Laurel Legacy Youth Foundation, advised an event was scheduled for October due to the weather it was cancelled and they will be holding an event in November. Their goal is to bring people together through activities and to support youth, strengthen families, and encourage leadership. Throughout November, they're planning activities such as pumpkin painting activity workshops, faith-based youth leaderships, parent workshops, and a month-long canned food drive to help local families during the Thanksgiving season. They're working towards hosting the Laurel Family Day Peace Festival during the second week of

November. With the details to come, we want this to be an activity to be more than just a series of events. They want it to be an opportunity for churches, parents, businesses, organizations, and residents to work together to build a stronger and more connected Laurel. They welcome community members, volunteers, and local partners and parents who want to be involved. Together, they can create opportunities for youth and that they stand behind one another.

Mr. Corey Wells, resident of Rehoboth Beach, stated he has been spending quite a bit of time in Laurel looking at potential future investments, scouting locations, and talking with residents. He's here today to continue due diligence activities and to raise concerns stemming from a recent experience with the Laurel Police Department and the Alderman Court. Concerns about whether traffic enforcement is being used as a revenue tool rather than a public safety measure. On September 30, 2026, he was issued a cell phone citation while he was taking a photograph of an unsafe vehicle. He was taking a photograph of an unsafe vehicle, a chopped-up school bus with the shell separating from the frame, posing a serious danger to pedestrians and others. Taking a photograph to document and report a safety hazard is explicitly permitted under 21 Delaware C Section 4176 C Subsection C Subsection 2. Despite that clear statutory exception, he was cited a ticket anyways. Since then, he’s been forced into an ongoing struggle with both the Police Department and the Alderman Court to simply obtain basic discovery materials that any fair process should provide. He requested departmental policies for cell phone enforcement, any communications or directives regarding enforcement quotas, instructions given to officers around September 30, 2026, statistics on traffic stops, including demographics due to past racial profiling, and dash cam and body cam footage from the officers stopped that day. These are routine, reasonable requests and yet at every step, he encounters delay, obstruction, and a lack of transparency. This raises a larger question about: is Laurel using its police force and its Alderman Court as a revenue mechanism rather than a justice system? He complied with all the officer's instruction, but that officer was laser focused on him getting a $225 ticket, and it gave the impression that the town needs money in their pocket. He advised the officer has been sent out today for one purpose, as what he stated was to issue cell phone tickets. That raises a concern about we're here to do quotas, we're here to meet a budget shortfall, we're here to give a fine to someone who maybe resides in Rehoboth Beach and isn't likely to contest. He questioned if it was a rural citizen that they see every day they probably give a warning and not knowing that he spends most of his time in Laurel. Residents have also raised concerns about missing revenue from unenforced ordinances, inconsistent financial reporting, and the town's reliance on fines. The Alderman Court structure, creates an inherent conflict of interest when the town financially benefits from every citation process. When municipality depends on fines to fill budget gaps, policing stops being about safety and starts being about income. He asked if Mayor & Council would review the town's reliance on fine-based revenue, examine enforcement directives given to officers, evaluate whether the Alderman Court structure supports judicial independence, not just money, and ensure residents can obtain discovery without obstruction. Again, he hopes to talk about more positive things in the future as he keeps exploring the town for potential investments.

Mrs. Stacy Lane, Laurel Public Library stated their Tail Trail at Market Street Square Park will be changing soon as posters were created the Laurel Elementary and Intermediate students. She stated the library partnered with the town and O.W.L. and held Author Night featuring 54 Miles and author Leonard Pitts Jr, which was a well-attended event. She stated they will be having their Coat Giveaway on December 19, 2026, and anyone interested can register on November 2, 2026, by calling Delaware 211.

Mr. Ron Handy, stated he is still recovering and has been attending the meetings via ZOOM.

Mayor Oliveras stated a tribute will be presented to Laurel Pizzeria on Friday, October 23, 2026, at 4:15 p.m.

President of Council Calio made a motion to hold a closed session pertaining personnel and contractual matters. Councilwoman Fisher seconded the motion. Vote was 6-0, with Councilman Holden absent.

Regular Session Recessed at 8:02 p.m.

Regular Session Reconvened at 8:32 p.m.

With there being no further business, President of Council Calio made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Councilman Kellam second the motion. Vote was 6-0, with Councilman Holden absent.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:33 p.m.

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Mayor

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President of Council

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Town Manager

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Recording Secretary