

The Town of Laurel  
Mayor & Council Meeting Minutes  
April 20, 2026

A Mayor & Council Meeting was held at Laurel Town Hall in the Mayor & Council Chambers on Monday, April 20, 2026, beginning at 7:00 p.m. The following persons were in attendance Mayor Carlos Oliveras, President of Council Chris Calio, RogJenea Fisher via ZOOM, George Lodato, Jonathan Kellam via ZOOM, and Donald Holden. Also, in attendance were Public Works Director James Foskey, Director of Code Enforcement Dan Hogg, Chief Robert Kracyla, Finance Manager Melissa Naselli, Recording Secretary Alexis Oliphant, and Town Manager Jamie Smith. It was noted that there was one vacancy on Mayor & Council.

Mayor Oliveras presented a Tribute to Mr. Kyree Muse for the Boys & Girls Club Junior Youth of the Year.

Mayor Oliveras stated Mrs. Joyce Sessom's from the ARK is attendance to recognize one of her students. Mrs. Sessom's stated students competed in a Black History Month Contest this past February where the 1<sup>st</sup> place winner was awarded \$100.00 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> place winner was awarded \$50.00. She stated Mrs. Taylor Harry was awarded 1<sup>st</sup> place and she presented on Garrett Morgan.

Mayor Oliveras stated Mrs. Anne Marie Townsend, from the ROSSI Group is attendance to present on the Zoning Ordinance. Mrs. Townsend stated the General Assembly passed Senate Joint Resolution 8 (SJR8), directing the DHSA to create a pilot program to provide technical assistance for municipal government related to zoning reform to allow for more affordable housing. She advised in response to Delaware's housing affordability crisis, the General Assembly passed House Bill 442 creating the Affordable Housing Production Task Force. This zoning reform will allow for more choices and styles. The DHSA opened an application process for municipalities to participate in this pilot program where they could select zoning reform options and the Town of Laurel applied to participate. Mrs. Townsend explained the approach that includes the following steps (1.) Project Initiation, (2.) Zoning & Regulatory Framework Analysis, (3.) Barrier Identification & Strategy Alignment, (4.) Drafting Amendments, and (5.) Presentations to PC, Council & HRC. She explained that a Housing Resources Committee (HRC) is an advisory group of non-participating jurisdictions and state agencies who have deep understanding of local development processes. The HRC will meet monthly with municipals officials attending every other month. The following agencies DNREC, Del-DOT, DSHA, a Municipal Planner, and a New Castle County Land Use Representative will represent the committee. She shared the following participating jurisdictions who are participating in the program. She provided a brief overview of the housing affordability in Delaware. She stated cost-burdened households include households who spend at least 30% of their total income on rent or mortgage payments and utilities. The median monthly housing cost in Laurel is \$1,019 and the individuals would need to make \$3,397 a month to afford median housing cost in Laurel. She explained fewer people are making the transition from renters to homeowners with only 21% being first time homebuyers. She stated the owner and renter occupancy in Laurel includes 60% of renter occupied and 40% homeowner occupied. She advised the town submitted a resolution to allow ADU's and/or "missing middle" housing types as permitted in residential zones. Mrs. Townsend stated she will send Town

Manager Smith a link that will allow Mayor & Council to provide additional feedback. Mrs. Townsend inquired if Mayor & Council had any questions or comments.

Director of Code Enforcement Hogg recommended to Mayor & Council that an engineer stamp be required on structural plans instead of an architectural stamp for multi-height buildings.

Mayor Oliveras stated Mr. Joe Lawson, from Southern Delaware Alliance for Racial Justice, is in attendance to provide an update. Mr. Lawson stated he has been attending One-Laurel Meetings on a regular basis. The objective of Southern Delaware Alliance for Racial Justice is ending racism in Sussex County, the state, and the country. Their primary goal is to support the youth where they provide scholarships and academic recognition. He explained various programs including the Dialogue to End Racism and the History Book Festival. The Vice President was in attendance, and she expressed her concern regarding legislative advocacy and probation reform. Mayor & Council thanked them for their time and presentation.

Mayor Oliveras stated Mr. Charlie Kistler, from the HELP Initiative, is in attendance to provide an update. Mr. Kistler presented the Delaware Energy Fund and Delmarva Power Customer Relief Fund for residents can apply for. The Delaware Energy Fund provides assistance to consumers whose household income is less than 350% of the federal poverty level and will be funded and administered by Energize Delaware. The Delmarva Power Customer Relief Fund is made possible through a one-time \$4.5 million charitable contribution from Exelon, Delmarva Power's parent company, to the Delaware Energy Fund, and is designed to support limited to moderate income customers. He presented on "Project Safe Neighborhoods," (PSN) initiative is to contribute to the reduction in criminal activity and the lower energy burden for residents as well as build trust in neighborhoods through education and behavioral change. He explained the primary goals included to improve public safety by installing energy-efficient lighting, educate residents in improving emergency response, and build and strengthen a sustainable partnership among neighborhood stakeholders. A representative from Community Solar Circle presented on how residents can start saving 10-20% on their monthly electricity bills with partnership with HELP Initiative. Mr. Kistler stated he will need a letter from the town for authorization pertaining the program.

Mayor Oliveras stated Mrs. Handy from Operation West Laurel, is in attendance to provide an update. She advised OWL will be creating community gardens to promote crime prevention and environmental design within the town. She provided an update on three proposed community gardens: (1.) A flower garden installation at the Laurel Police Dept. (2.) A community vegetable garden located at Mt. Zion Property, and (3.) A peace and healing Garden where they will be partnering with the Laurel High School. She advised Project Rise Students will be helping with the maintenance of the gardens to help engage young men. She advised they continue to provide academic support and mentoring along with their workforce training program.

Mrs. Handy addressed her concern regarding the street party that occurred this past weekend. She wants assurance the town has a plan in effect pertaining community violence to prevent the

violence that occurred in 2023. She stated a coordinated task force needs to be implemented that includes conversations with the school district, the town, and law enforcement. She looks forward for a response within the next month.

Mayor Oliveras shared his concerns pertaining the incident that happened this past weekend and he has met with Chief Kracyla, Captain Bryan, and Lieutenant Bauer regarding the situation.

Mayor Oliveras stated Mrs. Michelle Harris, from One-Way Apostolic Ministries is in attendance to provide an update. Mrs. Harris stated she is inviting Mayor & Council to attend an outreach on Sunday, May 24, 2026 at Roger C. Fisher Park from 1:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. She is proposing 100 to 150 people will be in attendance. She is requesting if police officers could provide general security and if water access is available for a baptism pool.

The Mayor & Council Regular and Closed Session Minutes of March 17, 2026, were presented for review. Councilman Holden made a motion to accept the meeting minutes of March 17, 2026, as presented. Councilman Lodato seconded the motion. Vote was 6-0, with one vacancy.

The March 2026 Department Head Reports were presented for review.

- Public Works Director Foskey stated the Transite Main Replacement on 8<sup>th</sup> Street will be wrapping up shortly as they have one more tie in to complete. He stated the Hometown Hero Banners were installed two months earlier than scheduled.

Mayor Oliveras thanked Public Works Director Foskey for the car show held at Heritage Day.

- Director of Code Enforcement Hogg stated he has completed his first full month and he is getting acclimated to all the systems. He stated 21 housing violations were cited and 10 permits were issued, which he stated both will be picking up as were entering warmer months.
- Judge Ruffin stated she had no additions to her report.
- Finance Manager Naselli stated she contacted the Delaware Office of Unclaimed Property and the towns name was on the list and the town will be receiving money.
- Town Manager stated a Community Clean-Up was held on April 10, 2026, and she wanted to thank all the volunteers who participated. She advised the Laurel Public Library held a clean-up as well. She thanked Operations Manager Oliphant, Public Works Director Foskey, and Mr. Brent Boyce for all their hard work towards Heritage Day. She advised Senator Richardson was the winner of the Mayor "Cluckin n'Chicken," Toss. She also thanked Mrs. Ann Davis who donated the chickens and the Laurel Historical Society for having their properties open and having a petting zoo. She provided an update pertaining

the Promenade that a contractor will be on site with building plans submitted to code for their review with 1<sup>st</sup> phase of construction following.

Councilman Kellam made a motion to accept the March Department Head Reports as presented. President of Council Calio seconded the motion. Vote was 7-0.

Town Manager Smith presented the 11<sup>th</sup> Street Update. She stated a resident attended a previous Mayor & Council Meeting and had requested 11<sup>th</sup> Street to be closed. She reached out to Del-DOT as a portion of VanBuren Street is state owned and they advised her a traffic impact study will not be required. She advised the next step is for Town Manager Smith, Public Works Director Foskey, and Chief Kracyla to provide a recommendation to the Street Committee. She stated a portion of land is in the town's short-term growth area and by closing the street it could limit the town's access. She advised the town could look into reducing the speed limit as an alternative than closing the street.

Councilman Lodato expressed his concerns regarding past issues that haven't been addressed and that are not carried over on the agenda under old business. The items he mentioned included (1.) At May 2025 Meeting he inquired if code violations could be listed on the town's website and (2.) At July 2025, October 2025, and December 2025 Meetings he inquired if Mayor & Council could have final say on Board of Adjustment and P&Z Meeting zoning decisions.

Town Manager Smith presented the Delaware Park and Recreation Grant. Town Manager Smith stated each year the town is eligible to apply for a \$25,000 matching grant. She stated the Laurel Lions Club has reached out to the town inquiring if the town would apply for the grant on their behalf for the construction and installation of pickleball courts at North Laurel Early Learning Academy. She advised she has reached out to the state and town is allow to apply on behalf of the Lions Club. She stated the Lions Club will have a maintenance agreement stating they will be responsible for maintenance of the courts for 20 to 25 years. She advised the school is under the understanding of the installation of the pickleball courts.

Mr. Shwed stated the Laurel School District is in agreement and they will continue and support the installation of the courts. He stated they have raised \$42,000 and the estimated completed cost is \$56,112.00. He thanked Mayor & Council for their time and consideration.

Councilman Lodato made a motion to apply for the Delaware Park and Recreation Grant on behalf of the Lions Club for the installation of the pickleball courts at North Laurel Early Learning Academy. President of Council Calio seconded the motion. Vote was 6-0, with one vacancy.

Town Manager Smith presented the Water/Sewer Connection Policy. She advised approximately a year and a half ago Mayor & Council updated the Utility Requirements that in order to get a building permit a property owner must have water and sewer on the property and be up to town specs. She is proposing an amendment to the policy for properties that are not on a state-maintained

road to pay a flat fee for water and sewer tie in when applying for their permit to allow the town to handle tie in. Town Manager Smith stated this will allow owners to work on renovations while the contractor is lining up to complete the work. Currently no building permit is issued until all infrastructure work is completed. President of Council Calio requested an amendment to be drafted for consideration.

Town Manager Smith stated a Letter of Authorization must be accepted on behalf of Mr. Kistler's HELP Initiative Program as presented earlier. President of Council Calio made a motion to accept a letter of authorization on behalf of the HELP Initiative Program. Councilman Lodato seconded the motion. Vote was 6-0, with one vacancy.

Town Manager Smith presented Resolution 2026-3. Town Manager Smith stated a resolution is needed on behalf of the town to authorize transfers, receive copy bank statements, or borrow from the line of credit at M&T Bank. She advised a resolution would be needed to include authorization. Councilman Lodato made a motion to accept Resolution 2026-3. Councilwoman Fisher seconded the motion. Vote was 6-0, with one vacancy.

Councilman Lodato thanked the town for their hard work at Heritage Day.

Councilman Lodato stated the Communication Committee Meeting has met two times and minutes will be updated to the website soon.

Councilman Lodato inquired if a representative pertaining the clean-up around the shoreline at the mill dam has been addressed. Town Manager Smith stated yes, they have been contacted.

Mrs. Sharon Ardisana, resident of the Villas, expressed her concern regarding the continuation of funding the Alderman's Court. She advised there are six alderman courts within the state with them being mostly beach municipalities who are generating more revenue due to parking violations. She recommends the town to utilize the Court of Commons Please instead of funding the Alderman Court. She stated if the town chose to do away with the Alderman's Court the town could save an estimated \$200,000 in operating cost that could be generated to the police department to staff a drug investigation unit versus pulling patrol officers from the road. She reviewed FY 2024 and FY 2025 Alderman Court financials and expressed the court isn't generating enough revenue to operate the department. She requests at the next Mayor & Council Meeting that the town present on the feasibility study if the town is elected to transfer to the Court of Common Please.

Mrs. Elizabeth Collins, owner of property at the end of 11<sup>th</sup> Street, expressed her concerns with the request Mayor & Council received to close 11<sup>th</sup> Street, as it will limit access to her property if ever developed.

Mrs. Trina Ennis, Gibson Avenue, expressed her concerns regarding the last weekends block party at Little Creek.

Mr. Steve Kamer expressed his concerns regarding 219, 229, and 239 Market Street. He advised the property has several unregistered vehicles. Town Manager Smith stated this an ongoing issue with this property. As it sits it's Mayor & Council's discretion to amend the zoning ordinance to resolve this issue if they elect.

Mr. Kamer expressed his concerns regarding the mini vans parked at the 1921 Building. President of Council Calio stated this property is owned by the Laurel School District and they could address any concerns.

With there being no further business, Councilman Lodato made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Councilwoman Fisher seconded the motion. Vote was 6-0, with one vacancy.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:15 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