

The Town of Laurel
Mayor & Council Meeting Minutes
July 21, 2025

A Mayor & Council Meeting was held at Laurel Town Hall in the Mayor & Council Chambers on Monday, July 21, 2025, beginning at 7:00 p.m. The following persons were in attendance Mayor Carlos Oliveras, Jim LaRue, RogJenea Fisher, George Lodato, Jonathan Kellam, and Donald Holden. Also, in attendance were Public Works Director James Foskey, Chief Robert Kracyla, Judge Ruffin, Finance Manager Melissa Cassimore, Recording Secretary Alexis Oliphant, and Town Manager Jamie Smith. It was noted that President of Council Chris Calio and Director of Code Enforcement Ken West were absent.

Mayor Oliveras presented a Recognition to the Laurel High School Track and Field Team for a successful season. Coach David King stated the Boys team won the Southern Division Champion for a second year in a row. Coach King thanked the players and all the coaches for their hard work and dedication this season.

Mayor Oliveras presented a Recognition Tribute to Cpl. LaShawn Handy for his hard work and his diligent commitment to the community and to the school as a School Resource Officer.

Mrs. Amy Handy, from Operation West Laurel (O.W.L) advised this organization is an advocate and a voice for who have endured gun violence in recent years. She advised with the efforts of O.W.L. and other organizations she reported that there has been no loss of life within a year due to gun violence. She stated Paul Laurence Dunbar is a landmark and sole of West Laurel. She advised O.W.L. is petitioning to utilize the vacant wing that Children's & Families First have been operating in since June. She stated they could offer more services including Social Services, summer camps, and etc. She inquired if Mayor & Council would consider their proposal that way they can continue to reinvest in the community.

The Mayor & Council Regular and Closed Session Minutes of June 16, 2025, were presented for review. Councilman Holden made a motion to accept the regular and closed session minutes of June 16, 2025. Councilman Kellam seconded the motion. Vote was 5-0, with President of Council Calio absent and with one vacancy.

The June 2025 Department Head Reports were presented for review.

- Public Works Director Foskey stated he had no additions to his report.
- Mayor Oliveras stated Director of Code Enforcement West is not in attendance tonight, but his report was submitted for review. Councilman Lodato stated he had questions pertaining his report. Councilman Lodato advised he will hold his comments and questions until the next meeting.
- Judge Ruffin stated she had no additions to her report.
- Finance Manager Cassimore stated she had no additions to her report.

- Chief Kracyla stated on June 17, 2025, the Laurel P.D. hosted its first Police Accountability Committee Meeting, which is required by law. He stated on June 25, 2025, himself, Mayor Oliveras, and Mrs. Amy Handy discussed a strategy to develop a presentation to Senator Blunt-Rochester's team for the Town of Laurel, PAL and Re-Development Center.
- Town Manager Smith stated she has been in communication with a developer for a commercial development on Rt.13 and she is expecting plans to be submitted to P&Z in the next couple of months. She provided an update for the TAP Funding which is a walkway that will connect from the Mill Dam to Roger C. Fisher Park. She stated the first portion is likely to begin this fall and they're waiting for permits. She will continue to work with the railroad company to allow access to go underneath. She stated the town received funding for the Janosik Shore Line Stabilization and they're in the process of getting the Armory Core of Engineer Permit, which can take up to 12 months. She stated the town held another successful 4th of July event and thanked all the town staff for their hard work. She provided a Cost Breakdown Analysis to Mayor & Council for their review. She stated the total expenditures including equipment/supplies cost, and personnel cost totaled \$38,752.55 and the total revenue received, which included donations, vendor fees, and the car show totaled \$14,455. She advised the event had a short fall of \$24,297.55, which she explained majority of this cost was budgeted to include the cost of the fireworks and personnel costs. Town Manager Smith recognized Public Works Director James Foskey for the Employee Highlight in the Laurel Star.

Councilman Kellam made a motion to accept the June Department Head Reports as presented. Councilman Holden seconded the motion. Vote was 6-0, with President of Council Calio absent and with one vacancy.

Mayor Oliveras presented the Review of Policy for Traffic Pattern Changes. Town Manager Smith advised the town has received several traffic pattern changes requests in the last few months and the town currently has no policy in place. She stated in the past, she, Chief Kracyla, and Public Works Director Foskey would meet to discuss the proposal and present their recommendation to Mayor & Council. She stated this policy will allow for the Police Chief, Public Works Director, and Town Manager to still meet and discuss the following requests: Traffic Patterns, Parking Changes, and Traffic Calming Devices/Speed Limit Changes. She recommended the Mayor & Council to review the policy. Mayor & Council agreed to review the policy to allow for approval at next month's meeting.

Mayor Oliveras presented the Appointment of Ward 1 Councilman. Mayor Oliveras made the recommendation to appoint Mr. Jim LaRue to Ward 1 to fulfill Mayor's Oliveras 2-year term as Councilman. Councilman Holden made a motion to accept the appointment of Mr. Jim LaRue for Councilman Ward 1 to serve the remaining 2 years of Mayor Oliveras term. Councilwoman Fisher seconded the motion. Vote was 4-1, with President of Council Calio absent.

Mayor Oliveras presented the Oath of Office to Mr. Jim LaRue, Councilman Ward 1.

Mayor Oliveras presented Resolution 2025-5, pertaining Community Bank Account. Town Manager Smith stated this a resolution for the Town of Laurel authorizing the opening of a bank account for reserve funds to be used for infrastructure repairs, equipment repairs, unanticipated capital expenditures, and emergencies. She advised the purpose of this reserve fund is to be used for infrastructure repairs and improvements, equipment repairs and maintenance, capital equipment purchases, and emergency-related expenditures deemed necessary by the governing body or its designee. Councilman Lodato made a motion to accept Resolution 2025-5. Councilwoman Fisher seconded the motion. Vote was 6-0, with President of Council Calio absent.

Mayor Oliveras presented the Downtown Development District Update. Town Manager Smith stated the town has been designated a Downtown Development District (DDD) for 9 years that has helped fund 30 projects. She advised the funding is allocated through the state and there is an application process that the petitioner must go through. She advised the Delaware State Housing Authority overseas the funding and works closely with the Office of State Planning. The town's designation expires next year, and she is working the ROSI Group for re-submittal of designation. The designation is a 5-year designation, and the town can request for an extension. Town Manager Smith presented a Laurel DDD Update Presentation for Mayor & Council's review. She advised the expansion of the DDD will include an additional 35 acres. Mayor & Council were in support of the proposed changes/amendments to the DDD Plan.

Mayor Oliveras presented the 1st Reading of Ordinance 2025-1, Chapter 49, Animals. Town Manager Smith is proposing to amend Chapter 49 as the town is having issues with goats. After reviewing the ordinance, she advised the ordinance doesn't clearly state if goats are permitted or not permitted in town. She is proposing an amendment to Chapter 49, Article III, Prohibited Animals to include Subsections CC Small Farm Animals, DD Large Farm Animals, EE Small Livestock, and FF Large Livestock. She advised this amendment will not apply to anyone who prior to the adoption of Ordinance 2022-5, had any type of fowl. Councilman Lodato made a motion to accept the 1st Reading of Ordinance 2025-1. Councilman Kellam seconded the motion. Vote was 6-0, with President of Council Calio absent.

Councilman LaRue thanked the citizens for attending and he is looking forward in working with the town and the citizens.

Councilwoman Fisher thanked everyone for coming out.

Councilman Lodato congratulated Public Works Director Foskey on his Employee Spotlight.

Councilman Lodato inquired if Mayor Oliveras would consider creating a committee to review business license's within town. Town Manager Smith stated notices were sent for the businesses that have failed to pay for their business license.

Councilman Lodato advised the Mayor & Council needs more oversight on the P&Z Committee and the Board of Adjustments. He advised it needs to come in front of Mayor & Council for a final say.

Councilman Kellam congratulated the Laurel High School Track & Field Team and thanked all the community organizations for their hard work.

Mayor Oliveras thanked all the town for their hard work for the 4th of July Celebration.

Mayor Oliveras thanked Mr. Nick Little for the second Open Mic Night held on Sunday, July 13, at Roger C. Fisher Park.

Mayor Oliveras invited the citizens to One-Laurel that is held on the second and fourth Thursday of each month at 9:00 a.m. at Vital Church.

Mayor Oliveras congratulated Chief Kracyla for being presented a Hometown Hero Award in Pennsylvania.

Mayor Oliveras congratulated the following employees: Cpl. Handy SRO Officer of the Year and Mr. Josh Krueger for Waste Water Operator of the Year.

Town Manager Smith stated she is working with Delmarva Power on installing L.E.D. lights on West 6th Street. She advised Delmarva Power will be upgrading their electric distribution lines along Cooper Street, Gordy Road, East 4th Street, East 6th Street, and Route 13.

Town Manager Smith advised each year the town adopts the Sussex County Assessment List in July. She explained Sussex County did a reassessment and after review she noticed there was a significant increase to residential properties and significant decline on multi-residential and commercial properties. She advised after working with the towns attorney the town is permitted to utilize the Sussex County 1974 Assessment List as the towns budget was adopted on June 16, 2025, prior to the finalized list provided by Sussex County. She advised next year the town must adopt the new assessment list per the state. She recommends a Charter Change to be adopted next year to allow for two tax rates one for residential properties and the second for commercial properties. Councilman Lodato stated citizens taxes were to be adjusted with the new assessment list. Town Manager Smith stated yes, the purpose of the two tax rates are to alleviate the increase costs on residential properties. Councilman Kellam made a motion to accept the Sussex County 1974 Tax Assessment List to be utilized for FY2026. Councilman Lodato seconded the motion. Vote was 6-0, with President of Council Calio absent.

Mr. Esmund Eley, stated he and his wife LaToya Eley are the owners of Be the Change Properties and have a sub property called Faith Force Drive on Central Avenue, which is a 3million investment. Mr. Eley advised in 2024 they paid \$30,000 in buildings permits and paid a \$15,000 impact fee. Mr. Eley inquired if everyone who builds in the town gets charged a \$15,000 impact fee. Town Manager Smith stated the towns impact fee for water/sewer is \$10,000 per EDU. She advised the cost varies depending on how many units and the fee also includes the cost of each meter, a fire dept. fee, and a public facilities fee. Mr. Eley stated this fee is just for him to connect to town sewer/water and the town is not responsible for paying for any installation of piping or digging and trenching. Town Manager Smith stated that is correct. Mr. Eley advised the building permits were signed and they broke ground. He advised five months later the building is approximately 90% complete and all inspections were received. Mr. Eley advised he reached out to the town pertaining the sewer line and the town notified him stating there was no sewer line. Town Manager Smith explained to Mr. Eley in the packet you received states if there is no sewer or water that you would be responsible for an E1 Pump. Mr. Eley advised they received a bill from GMB for a site plan in the amount of \$8,200. Mr. Eley advised a trench crew was ready to begin work but then was notified the town had no easements for the property. Mr. Eley stated Public Works Foskey advised him his building should never have been built and Director of Code Enforcement West should have never issued a building permit. Mr. Eley stated Public Works Director Foskey advised him it is the towns negligence and it's on the town.

Public Works Director Foskey advised he did say that a permit should have not been issued due to the timing. To alleviate things like this from happening in the future Public Works Director Foskey stated Mayor & Council passed an ordinance a few months ago to avoid issues going forward. Public Works Director Foskey stated the town had easements for the water and the town finally received all the easements submitted by the attorney.

Town Manager Smith stated she, Public Works Director Foskey, Mayor Oliveras, and Mr. Eley will schedule a meeting to discuss further.

Mr. Blair Mackey, resident of 4th Street, thanked Mayor Oliveras and Chief Kracyla for installing a Speed Sign with flashing lights on 4th Street to help slower the traffic.

Mr. Mackey, resident of 4th Street, stated his neighbors are consistently bagging trash in their recycle and is not being picked up and inquiring if there was an outreach to help educate them. Town Manager Smith stated an article can be included in the newsletter and she can contact the trash company.

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

Regular Session Recessed at 8:24 p.m.

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Regular Session Reconvened at 9:36 p.m.

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 President of Council Calio absent.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:37 p.m.

Mayor

President of Council

Town Manager

Recording Secretary