

The Town of Laurel
Mayor & Council Meeting Minutes
August 18, 2025

A Mayor & Council Meeting was held at Laurel Town Hall in the Mayor & Council Chambers on Monday, August 18, 2025, beginning at 7:03 p.m. The following persons were in attendance Mayor Carlos Oliveras, President of Council Chris Calio, Jim LaRue, RogJenea Fisher, George Lodato, Jonathan Kellam, and Donald Holden. Also, in attendance were Director of Code Enforcement Ken West, Public Works Director James Foskey via ZOOM, Chief Robert Kracyla, Judge Ruffin, Finance Manager Melissa Cassimore, Recording Secretary Alexis Oliphant, and Town Manager Jamie Smith.

Mayor Oliveras opened the Court of Appeals at 7:04 p.m. The purpose of holding the Court of Appeals is to listen to any resident who wants to appeal the town's tax assessment for FY 2026. Town Manager Smith stated 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. 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 and she is working with state legislators to allow for two tax rates one for residential properties and the second for commercial properties.

Councilman Lodato inquired if residents wish to appeal their taxes how does the process work. She advised since the town is utilizing the 1974 Sussex County Tax Assessment List all appeals must go through Sussex County.

A resident inquired if they would receive two tax bills, one from the Town of Laurel and one from Sussex County. Town Manager Smith stated yes, you will receive both in which you would be responsible for.

Mayor Oliveras stated with there being no further questions or comments he closed the public hearing. The Court of Appeals closed at 7:08 p.m.

Town Manager Smith presented Mr. Ed Lewandowski a Recognition of Service Tribute. Town Manager Smith stated Mr. Lewandowski began working with the town in 2012 as a partner from the University of Delaware. Mr. Lewandowski is a huge supporter of the town, and the town thanked him for the service he provides. She stated Mr. Lewandowski has submitted several grants on behalf of the town including a grant for Tidewater Park. Mr. Lewandowski thanked the town for this recognition but also reflected on the hard work Mayor & Council, Mr. Brian Shannon of the LRC, and Mrs. Anne Davis have provided over the years as well. Mr. Lewandowski urged residents to see what Laurel can be and what Laurel should be.

Mayor Oliveras stated Mrs. Joyce Sessoms, from the ARK Educational Resource Center is in attendance tonight to present a brief presentation. Mrs. Sessoms stated she is the founder and executor of the ARK Education Resource Center. She stated the ARK is an after-school resource program that offers tutoring in math and reading. The goal of the ARK is to develop children. Mrs.

Sessoms introduced several families that the ARK has helped impact their children. She advised she has written a book called Education High School Grand Slam that is available in both a children and parent edition. Mayor & Council thanked Mrs. Sessoms for her time and the work she is providing for the youth.

Mayor Oliveras stated Mr. Charles Kistler, from the HELP Initiative is in attendance to provide an update to the Mayor & Council. Mr. Kistler stated he is the Executive Director of the HELP Initiative. Also, in attendance tonight is Mr. William Matthews and Mrs. Mallory Maneet from the HELP Initiative. Mr. Williams stated the HELP Initiative is a non-profit organization that offers free services. Mr. Williams stated Safety Kits were distributed at Hollybrook and Little Creek Apartments. Mr. Williams reviewed what items were included in the safety kits. Mr. Williams stated Food Kits are distributed with children being their main target. He stated 68 households have been served, 149 food kits have been provided, 54 children 5 years or less have received services and 50 children 10 years or higher have received services. Mrs. Maneet stated a survey was distributed at Hollybrook and Little Creek Apartments. She advised residents expressed concerns regarding guns, gangs, and violent concerns. She stated residents would like to see more community events, more activities for the youth, and a better overall physical appearance of the town. Mayor & Council thanked the HELP Initiative for their presentation.

Mayor Oliveras stated representatives of Neighborgood Partners, Discount Land Road are in attendance to provide a presentation. Mrs. Karen Speakman from Neighborgood Partners stated the proposed development Meadow View is 78 acres on Discount Land Road and is zoned as a Large Parcel Development Overlay District (LPD-OD). She stated Neighborhood Partners is located in Dover and it's been a non-profit organization for 50 years. Mr. Ryan Conway of McCrone Engineering presented a Concept Plan of Meadow View to Mayor & Council. Listed below are the details of the proposed development:

- 229 new homes (121 single family homes, 60 duplexes, and 48 town homes).
- Lot sizes will be made larger with fewer homes proposed.
- Proposing 49% open space, right of way, a play area, and a walking path.
- Wetlands in the rear will be preserved, and a landscape buffer is proposed.
- Proposing a commercial piece with two 10,000 square foot buildings.

Mrs. Trish Kellerheart from Neighborgood Partners advised they want to build housing for moderate households. Mrs. Speakman stated they're requesting if the town would consider maintaining the water/sewer and street infrastructure of the proposed development. Mayor Oliveras thanked Neighborgood Partners for their presentation and stated Mayor & Council will take their request into consideration.

The Mayor & Council Regular and Closed Session Minutes of July 21, 2025, were presented for review. Councilman Lodato made a motion to accept the regular and closed session minutes of July 21, 2025. Councilman Kellam seconded the motion. Vote was 6-0, with President of Council Calio abstaining.

The July 2025 Department Head Reports were presented for review.

- Public Works Director Foskey stated he had no additions to his report. He stated paving crews were in town on Rt. 24 due to sewer main breaks.
- Director of Code Enforcement West stated he had no additions to his report.

Councilman Lodato inquired if Mr. Mackey's concern regarding his neighbor burning trash for 2 years has been resolved. Mayor Oliveras stated he spoke with Mr. Mackey, and the issue has been resolved.

Councilman Lodato inquired clarification of the work orders cited on the code report. Director of Code Enforcement West stated violation notices are sent out and if the violation has been resolved by the property owner a work order is not issued.

Councilman Lodato asked if a Violation Report could be submitted just as the Permit Report is submitted in the Code Report. His understanding is that the complainor is protected under FOIA not the violator. Councilman Lodato also recommended Code Department to reside under the Police Department.

Town Manager Smith stated per the towns attorney any active non-criminal cases are exempt per FOIA and she will follow-up with the attorney for clarification purposes.

- 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 7/22/25 himself, Mayor Oliveras and Mrs. Amy Handy visited the Police Athletic Center in Wilmington, Delaware. On 7/29/25 himself, Mayor Oliveras, Councilman Lodato and Councilman Kellam attended the Habitat for Humanity Building Bridges through Community. On 8/1/25 he met with the new U.S. Attorney General of the state of Delaware Julianne Murray. On 8/6/25 himself, Mayor Oliveras, Town Manager Smith, and Mayors and Town Managers from Seaford, Cambridge, and Delmar met pertaining gun violence. On 8/15/25 the graduation of the 4th Laurel Police Youth Academy had 19 graduates.
- Town Manager Smith stated she has spoken with a developer pertaining to WAWA and she is expecting plans to be submitted to P&Z in the next couple of months. She advised the site work at the Promenade is moving forward. 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. She advised the ROSI Group will be presenting the Downtown

Development District (DDD) Renewal to P&Z in September and they will present to Mayor & Council in October for final approval. She advised the town will be transitioning with a Spring/April event that will feature a car show, bands, and vendors to replace the 4th of July event. The town will still hold the firework display on the 4th of July.

Councilman Lodato made a motion to accept the proposed Spring/April Event to replace the Annual 4th of July Celebration as presented. Councilwoman Fisher seconded the motion. Vote was 7-0.

Councilman Lodato inquired if the town currently has an economic developer. Town Manager Smith stated no, and she advised the town has several preliminary residential development approvals and with more roof tops it will attract more commercial businesses within the town.

Town Manager Smith explained a year ago she recommended to Mayor & Council for the relocation of the Alderman Court to the police station. She advised she has received approximately more than 50% of the funding needed from the state. She is requesting if she could move forward with the funding secured to begin the renovation of the relocation. President of Council Calio made a motion to allow Town Manager Smith to move forward with relocation of the Alderman Court to the police station with the funding that has been secured. Councilman Lodato seconded the motion. Vote was 7-0.

Councilman Kellam made a motion to accept the July Department Head Reports as presented. Councilman Holden seconded the motion. Vote was 7-0.

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. Councilman Kellam made a motion to accept the Policy for Traffic Pattern Changes as presented. Councilman Lodato seconded the motion. Vote was 7-0.

Mayor Oliveras presented the 2nd 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 2nd and Final Reading of Ordinance 2025-1. Councilman Holden seconded the motion. Vote was 7-0.

Councilwoman Fisher presented a proposed concept of the Laurel Youth Council to Mayor & Council. Councilwoman Fisher stated by creating a Laurel Youth Council it will allow the youth to learn more about how local government works and a better understanding of civic education and awareness. She expressed the importance of the youth being seen and that their voice is heard. Councilman Lodato inquired the time frame of the Laurel Youth Council. Councilwoman Fisher stated she is looking into holding a meeting in September to brainstorm ideas.

Councilman LaRue thanked the Mayor & Council for the opportunity to serve and is looking forward in working with the town staff.

Councilwoman Fisher stated if anyone has questions pertaining the Laurel Youth Council to please contact her.

Councilman Lodato thanked everyone for attending tonight's meeting.

Councilman Lodato inquired if Mayor & Council could establish a Business License Committee to review the FY2025 & FY 2026 List. Mayor Oliveras stated he will take it under advisement.

Councilman Kellam thanked the town staff and the police department for their hard work.

Councilman Kellam attended the Habitat Summitt and stated they will be holding a Youth Day on Tuesday, August 19, 2025, at Bryan's Bowling Alley from 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Councilman Holden stated there has been an increase of 4-wheelers on Center Street and W. 8th Street from 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. Chief Kracyla advised he is aware but police cannot chase them.

Mayor Oliveras thanked Chief Kracyla and his staff for holding the Youth Police Academy this past week.

Mayor Oliveras thanked Mrs. Handy and the O.W.L. team for holding a weeklong basketball camp for the youth.

Mayor Oliveras stated he attended the Public Library Health Fair and the ARK Backpack Giveaway this past week.

A resident, stated she received a Grass Violation Invoice in the amount of \$200.00 with an administration fee of \$50.00 She is requesting if the town would consider increasing the grass from 6 inches to 8 inches. Town Manager Smith stated the town passed an ordinance a few years ago to reduce the grass from 8 inches to 6 inches. The property owner has 7 days to

comply after a notice is received and if the property owner doesn't comply a work order is scheduled. She advised by this time the grass is easily exceeding 8 inches to 10 inches. Town Manager Smith stated it is Mayor & Council's discretion to amend the ordinance if they choose. Mayor Oliveras stated they will take her concern into consideration.

Mr. Harvey Watts, inquired if more African American Military Hometown Hero Banners could be featured on the poles throughout town. Town Manager Smith stated the families purchase the banners and the town displays the banners. She advised applications are available at Laurel Town Hall.

Councilman Lodato made a motion to hold a closed session discuss personnel and contractual matters. Councilman Kellam seconded the motion. Vote was 7-0.

Recessed at 8:31 p.m.

Reconvened at 9:24 p.m.

President of Council Calio made a motion to move forward with sale of the surplus property located on Poplar Street contingent to the attorney's approval of the sale agreement. Councilman Kellam seconded the motion. Vote was 7-0.

With there being no further business, Councilman Holden made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Councilwoman Fisher seconded the motion. Vote was 7-0.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Mayor

President of Council

Town Manager

Recording Secretary