

The Town of Laurel
Mayor & Council Meeting Minutes
September 15, 2025

A Mayor & Council Meeting was held at Laurel Town Hall in the Mayor & Council Chambers on Monday, September 15, 2025, beginning at 7:00 p.m. The following persons were in attendance Mayor Carlos Oliveras, President of Council Chris Calio, Jim LaRue, RogJenea Fisher via ZOOM, George Lodato, Jonathan Kellam, and Donald Holden via ZOOM. Also, in attendance were Public Works Director James Foslkey, Chief Robert Kracyla, Finance Manager Melissa Cassimore, Recording Secretary Alexis Oliphant, and Town Manager Jamie Smith. It was noted that the Director of Code Enforcement Position is vacant, and Judge Ruffin was absent.

Chief Kracyla presented the Police Promotion Ceremony to Senior Corporal Ashley Gardner. He stated S/Cpl. Gardner has been with the department for 8 years and her roles include being a detective, an evidence tech, and an accreditation manager.

Mayor Oliveras presented the Swearing-In Officer Ceremony to Community Officer Corporal Robert Quirk. Chief Kracyla stated Cpl. Quirk served 22 years with the Maryland State Police, and he will be responsible for public engagements, public service announcements, and public information.

The Mayor & Council Regular and Closed Session Minutes of August 18, 2025, were presented for review. Councilman Lodato wanted clarification regarding page. 3 when he made a motion to accept Laurel Heritage Day to replace the Annual 4th of July Celebration. Town Manager Smith stated the 4th of July Annual Celebration will be scaled back with just the 4th of July Fireworks Display only. President of Council Calio made a motion to accept the regular and closed session minutes of August 18, 2025. Councilman Kellam seconded the motion. Vote was 7-0.

The August 2025 Department Head Reports were presented for review.

- Public Works Director Foskey stated he had no additions to his report.
- Mayor Oliveras stated Judge Ruffin is not in attendance, but her report was submitted for Mayor & Council's review.
- Finance Manager Cassimore provided an update on Sheriff Sale properties within the town. She advised two properties are stayed and one property has made an agreement.
- Chief Kracyla stated the department issued 13 DUI's in the month of August. He met with the Laurel Ministerial Association regarding the Centennial Celebration at Mission Church on 8/20/25. The Laurel Police sponsored the first Police Accountability Association where Pastor Rob Brown was elected Chairperson and Mr. Dana Bolden was elected Vice Chairman on 8/26/25. He advised the Annual Laurel Night Out held at Laurel Elementary School on 9/9/25 was well attended. He stated the department has one officer position open and applicant testing was held on 9/13/25.

Councilman Lodato inquired who is responsible for the maintenance of the mill dam as there are excessive overgrown weeds that need to be addressed. Town Manager Smith stated DNREC Delaware Fish & Wildlife are responsible and she will reach out to them.

Councilman Lodato recommended if Department Heads can provide a brief synopsis of their report each month to allow for better clarification and communication to the public. Town Manager Smith stated packets are available for the public on the day of the meeting.

- Town Manager Smith stated last week a Concept Plan was submitted to P&Z for their review pertaining to 5 commercial pad sites located by the field across from Bargain Bills. She advised she is expecting a preliminary site plan to be submitted shortly along with an amended site plan being submitted pertaining to Wawa. She stated the Downtown Development District (DDD) Renewal will be presented at October's Mayor & Council for Mayor & Council's review and approval. It was highlighted that the DDD Renewal was presented at P&Z's Meeting in September and P&Z accepted as presented. Town Manager Smith stated the TAP Application Project 1st Phase is scheduled to begin in the Winter of 2026.

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

Mayor Oliveras presented the Oak Street Handicap Request & Gibson Avenue Handicap Request. Town Manager Smith stated the town has received two handicap requests: (1.) 106 Gibson Avenue and (2.) 214 Oak Street. She advised both requests have been tabled until Mayor & Council adopted the Policy for Traffic Pattern Changes, Parking Changes, Traffic Calming Devices/Speed Limit Changes, which was adopted at the August 18, 2025, Mayor & Council Meeting. She advised after she, Chief Kracyla, Public Works Director Foskey reviewed the requests and the policy they recommended to deny both requests as both individuals currently have off street parking available per the policy.

President of Council Calio made a motion to accept the recommendation to deny the Handicap Requests pertaining to 106 Gibson Avenue and 214 Oak Street as both properties have off street parking available per the policy. Councilman Lodato seconded the motion. Vote was 7-0.

Mayor Oliveras presented the Update on the Laurel Youth Council. Councilwoman Fisher stated she is looking into holding a Brainstorm Meeting on Saturday, October 4, 2025, with the time and location to be determined. After a brief discussion, Mayor & Council agreed to look into a date that best suits everyone due to prior commitments on October 4, 2025.

Mayor Oliveras presented the 1st Reading of Ordinance 2025-2, Chapter 97 Licenses. Town Manager Smith stated Ordinance 2025-2 will coincide with the policy that Mayor & Council approved pertaining to rental licenses in the FY2026 Budget. She stated Ordinance 2025-2 Section

92-6(A) Annual fee for renting of rooms or serving of food, will include the following amendment “Any dwelling units (as already listed in this paragraph) that are not occupied by the legal owner, regardless of whether monetary rent is exchanged. President of Council Calio made a motion to accept the 1st Reading of Ordinance 2025-2. Councilman Lodato seconded the motion. Vote was 7-0.

Councilman Lodato inquired if Mayor Oliveras would consider in establishing a committee to review licenses.

Mayor Oliveras presented the Update on Laurel Heritage Day. Town Manager Smith stated the inaugural Laurel Heritage Day will be held on Saturday, April 11, 2026. The event will include bands, food vendors, non-food vendors, and a car show. The location of the event is tentatively scheduled for Janosik Park as the construction of the walkway could be underway at that time. If construction is occurring everything will be moved to Market Street Square Park and the car show will be along Central Avenue.

Town Manager Smith stated she received the 4th of July Firework Contract 2026 that includes the cost of the tariffs. She advised the show will cost around \$23,000.00 and the town typically raises around \$13,000.00 She stated the town has budgeted to offset any differences.

Mayor Oliveras presented the Appointment of Board of Adjustments. Town Manager Smith stated the Board of Adjustments currently has two vacancies and per Delaware Code Board of Adjustment Members must have qualifications in the planning and zoning field. Town Manager Smith recommended Mr. Dan Ash Jr, as he works in building and construction and he is a resident of the town. Councilman Lodato inquired how individuals are recommended. Town Manager Smith stated she looks for individuals who have the expertise and knowledge needed to be a member. Town Manager Smith stated Mr. Ash, Jr. is in attendance tonight if Mayor & Council would like to ask him any questions. Mr. Ash, Jr. stated he works for Gils & Gilkerson where he is responsible in handling projects from \$100,000 to \$20,000,000 and believes this is a good opportunity to give back to the town.

Councilman Kellam made a motion to accept the recommendation to appoint Mr. Dan Ash, Jr. to the Board of Adjustments to fulfill the one vacancy. Councilman LaRue seconded the motion. Vote was 7-0.

Mayor Oliveras presented the Resolution 2025-6, Parks & Recreation Grant. Town Manager Smith stated this is a 75/25 matching grant in the amount of \$37,500 that will go towards the removing of the fence line and allowing an opening at the Boys & Girls club to allow for parking at Tidewater Park. She advised the \$9,000 match will be utilized from CTF Funds. Councilman Lodato made a motion to accept Resolution 2025-6. Councilman Holden seconded the motion. Vote was 7-0.

Mayor Oliveras presented Resolution 2025-7, DWSRF Loan. Town Manager Smith stated this resolution will allow for the burrowing of close to \$11,000,000 for the construction of a new water tower and water treatment plant at Dunbar. The SRF Loan is 100% principal forgiveness. The construction of the new water tower will replace S. Poplar water tower. Councilman Lodato raised the concern if the project is not completed in the time frame will it fall under a loan. Town Manager Smith stated she can always reach out for an extension if needed.

A resident inquired where the water tower will be located at Dunbar. Town Manager Smith stated the town owns land right behind Dunbar off of West 7th Street where the water tower and the well be located at.

Councilman LaRue inquired what will happen to S. Poplar Water Tower. Town Manager Smith advised the S. Poplar Water tower is over 100 years old and to provide maintenance it is easily over one million dollars. Town Manager Smith stated the S. Poplar Water Tower will remain standing until the new water tower is constructed.

Mayor Oliveras inquired projects like this does the public get notified before approval. Town Manager Smith stated this project has been discussed for several years and test wells were completed at Dunbar to determine if the site was applicable. Town Manager Smith stated the town owns this land and land was not needed to be purchased by the town.

Councilman Holden stated public input should be taken into consideration.

Public Works Director Foskey provided a brief overview of why the Dunbar site was selected.

Councilman Kellam advised if the town had to purchase land it would increase the cost of the project, which could mean an increase on residents taxes.

After a brief, discussion President of Council Calio made a motion to open the floor for the public comment pertaining Resolution 2025-7. Councilman Lodato seconded the motion. Vote was 7-0.

A resident, inquired if her property value will be decreased due to the location of the water tower. Town Manager Smith advised she believes it should not decrease your property value but it could decrease your insurance fire rating.

A resident, inquired how the water tower will look aesthetically in the neighborhood. Public Works Director Foskey stated they will review public input on the design of the water tower to make sure it will look aesthetically pleasing.

Public Works Director Foskey and Town Manager Smith both offered the public to visit the Rt.9 Water Tower to allow residents to have a better understanding of what's being proposed.

A resident, inquired if the town looked into other potential sites. Public Works Director Foskey stated the town looked into various locations including Washington Street/Wilson Street, the Laurel Fire Dept, and the current site. All of these sites were not adequate due to being not large enough and the potential growth for the Laurel Fire Dept.

A resident, inquired if the town looked into Roger C. Fisher Park. President of Council Calio advised once the town took ownership of the park the town isn't permitted to remove any trees.

Public comment is to remain open until October 13, 2025, pertaining Resolution 2025-7.

Councilman LaRue thanked the town staff for their great job and thanked the police department in hosting the Laurel Night Out.

Councilman Lodato stated he attended the SCAT Steering Breakfast where they acknowledged Town Manager Smith for her efforts regarding Sussex County reviewing the tax assessment.

Councilman Lodato stated he has visited Seaford Town Hall meetings where he will continue to visit different municipality meetings to see what we can bring to our town.

Councilman Lodato inquired when P&Z Minutes are supposed to be posted for residents review. He advised the last set of minutes posted on the website were from January 8, 2025. Town Manager Smith stated P&Z meets on as needed basis and the minutes are approved when a meeting is held. Councilman Lodato reviewed Delaware Code Title 22 Chapter 3 Zoning & Municipal Regulations stating Board of Adjustment 323 Meetings that all minutes should be filed immediately and be for public record and the board shall keep record of all meetings and showing the vote of each member. Town Manager Smith stated all Board of Adjustments and P&Z records are at town hall.

Councilman Lodato addressed his concern regarding that Mayor & Council need to be notified regarding variances being granted from commercial to residential that changes the appearance of the downtown. Councilman Lodato stated if it is going to change the character of the downtown he recommends the variance to come before Mayor & Council with a recommendation from the Board of Adjustments.

Town Manager Smith stated per the towns code the Board of Adjustments hears the variance requests where a public hearing is held and residents within 200 feet of the request are notified with a certified letter for public input. She stated per code the Board of Adjustments have the final decision and the Mayor & Council sit as the Appellate Board.

Town Manager Smith stated if Mayor & Council wishes to make any changes an amendment would need to be done to the zoning ordinance. She explained the following steps for an amendment is for Mayor & Council to bring their zoning recommendation to P&Z for their review

and then Mayor & Council can either accept or deny the recommendation from P&Z and any amendments are sent to the Office of State Planning.

Councilman Lodato recommended that all variance requests come in front of Mayor & Council for approval both relating to the Board of Adjustment and Planning & Zoning.

Councilman Holden stated there are no longer 4-wheelers traveling on town roads.

Councilman Holden inquired if the benches were installed at Tidewater Park. Public Works Director Foskey stated he will look to see if the benches were still at the Wastewater Treatment Plant and if so get them installed.

Councilman Kellam stated the Community Revival will be held at Mission Church on September 19th, 20th, and 21st.

Councilman Kellam stated the Laurel Senior Center will be holding an Indoor/Outdoor Yard Sale on September 19, 2025, from 8:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Mayor Oliveras thanked all the participants who helped out during the Laurel P.D. Night Out.

Mayor Oliveras provided a list of community activities for residents review:

- September 20th, a Film Premier at Dunbar from 3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
- October 2nd, Delaware Prosperity Project visiting the town.
- October 11th, a Dialogue Bus Tour to End Racism.
- October 19th, Movie Night at 6:30 p.m. -Pastor Rob.
- September 27th, Habitat for Humanity Clean-Up, volunteers needed.

Mrs. Sharon Ardisana, resident of Villa's, thanked Councilman Lodato for his insight of details pertaining town regulations.

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 8:28 p.m.

Reconvened at 9:26 p.m.

Councilman Lodato made a motion to approve the 2-year Police Union Contract. Councilwoman Fisher seconded the motion. Vote was 7-0.

With there being no further business, President of Council Calio made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Councilman Holden seconded the motion. Vote was 7-0.

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Meeting Adjourned at 9:27 p.m.

Mayor

President of Council

Town Manager

Recording Secretary