

The Town of Laurel
Mayor & Council Workshop
June 1, 2026

A Mayor & Council Workshop was held in the Mayor & Council Chambers at the Laurel Town Hall on Monday, June 1, 2026, beginning at 7:00 p.m. The following persons were in attendance Mayor Carlos Oliveras, President of Council Chris Calio, Council Members RogJenea Fisher, George Lodato, Donald Holden, and Jonathan Kellam via ZOOM. Also in attendance were Public Works Director James Foskey, Judge Nick Mirro, Finance Manager Melissa Cassimore, Recording Secretary Alexis Oliphant, and Town Manager Jamie Smith. It was noted there was one vacancy on Mayor & Council.

Mayor Oliveras presented a Proclamation claiming June 2026 “Gun Violence Awareness Month.”

Mayor Oliveras stated the purpose of the workshop is to hear the presentation of the proposed FY 2027 Budget. The proposed FY 2027 Budget was posted on the town website for citizens review and citizens were invited tonight to ask any questions regarding the proposed FY 2027 Budget. Town Manager Smith provided a brief overview of the budget process. She stated the proposed FY 2027 Budget represents a 13% increase, while understanding the increased cost to operate the various sectors of the municipal government and balancing that without financially burdening our citizens. Town Manager Smith stated building construction of new homes continued throughout FY 2026 and is expected to remain into FY2027 alongside commercial development within the town. She did state the 4 pad sites were not included in this budget as they are still in the preliminary phases. She advised the budget includes new structures of incentives for the Downtown Development District. Town Manager Smith stated Sussex County completed its property reassessments, and the town has adjusted its tax structure to establish two separate tax rates: one for residential properties and one for commercial properties. During the process of reviewing and calculating the proposed tax rates it was evident that residential properties were experiencing higher assessed values than commercial properties. Taken these factors into consideration the proposed tax rates have been structured to ensure the town is able to meet its financial obligations while also working to minimize the tax burden placed on property owners. The budget includes increased expenses for consultant costs, demolition costs, infrastructure repairs, capital improvement project, debt service, personnel costs, insurance cost, and general increases to supplies, materials, and repairs. The town staff continues to work daily to be sure the town is in compliance with all regulations mandated by the state and federal government. By federal law, the water and sewer systems are enterprise funds, which means they are to be fully funded by the system users and not supported by any other funding sources, including taxes, grants, etc. Any surplus realized is transferred to help offset the general fund to help offset costs that would otherwise impact the general fund and property tax rates. Town Manager Smith highlighted the revenues and the expenditures of the budget. The revenues include: R/E Tax penalties, is an increase of \$62,985.00, proposed tax rate for Residential Properties is \$0.47 per \$100 of the assessed value and Commercial Properties \$0.98 per \$100 of the

assessed value, increase to water usage and sewer rate of \$0.50 to each per 1,000 gallons, along with \$0.50 to each base rate, increase rental license to \$175.00, flat rate of business license established at \$225, Plan Review for Residential of \$150/hr., Inspection and Plan Review for Commercial of \$0.05% of total costs, towing fee amended to include Admin Fee of \$50 and septic receiving increase of \$0.005 per gallon, Court Security \$20 increase, amendment to COPS Grant to add \$65,000 to the budget, and with the increase in new residential properties we will see an overall increase in income of water, sewer, trash, and taxes. The expenditures include: increase to all insurances, debt service increase, funds to hire consultant to rewrite the zoning ordinance, personnel compensation adjustments, funds for demolition of derelict properties, increase repairs to infrastructure, loss of the Laurel School District paying for the School Resource Officer, Wastewater Treatment Plant Capital Improvement Project, include expenses for Federal Mandate of Lead and Copper Testing on privately owned properties, and majority of department expenses remained close to the same as FY 2026, with some minor adjustments. Town Manager Smith explained the DDD Incentive Structure, which includes a building permit waiver incentive up to 30% depending on the cost of construction and a tax abatement on improvements on an incremented abatement starting with 50% year 1, 40% year 2, 30% year 3, 20% year 4, and 10% year 5. Town Manager Smith inquired if Mayor & Council or the public had any questions pertaining to the FY2027 Budget.

Mayor Oliveras inquired how much the town is losing from the funded SRO position. Town Manager Smith stated the school district paid the entire salary and benefits of the SRO, which was \$110,000.00.

Councilman Lodato stated he reviewed the budget documents and couldn't find the budgeted vs the actuals and inquired how the town gets the supported information to produce the projections.

Town Manager Smith stated when she works with the Department Heads and the Budget Committee, they review the actuals to determine whether they need to project higher or lower.

Councilman Lodato inquired what information the Budget Committee utilized to prepare the proposed FY2027 Budget as the last audit completed was FY2023.

Town Manager Smith we utilize the town's finance software Edmunds to determine what has been expended on expenditures and what revenue has been received per all departments.

Mrs. Laina Betts inquired if the numbers are verified due to the town's audit being behind.

Town Manager Smith stated agencies, banks etc., the town has loans with receive copies of the town budget, and they receive the latest copies of the town's audit.

Mrs. Sharon Ardisana, resident of the Villas, inquired if Mayor & Council received a different budget report than the public received.

Town Manager Jamie Smith stated yes, Mayor & Council received a line-item budget report.

Mrs. Cheryl Barber, resident of Gibson Avenue, inquired why personnel cost was down from the previous year.

Town Manager Smith stated the town is not losing employees and the town allocates differently into funds that are a revenue source. The town is allowed to allocate a portion of an employee salary into departments that generate revenue.

Councilman Lodato inquired about the clarification of delinquent taxes.

Town Manager Smith stated its properties that are taken to a tax sale. She explained last year there were several that were sent over to the town's attorney. She advised all of the owners came in and brought their taxes current besides three. Two out of three are stayed due to having heirs to the property; however, once all legal obligations are met the properties then will be going to tax sale.

Mrs. Ardisana, inquired how the delinquent taxes are calculated on what the town is expected to get.

Town Manager Smith stated the projection is based on how many the town sends to the attorney and the town receives what is owed to the town. The property owner is also responsible for any attorney and Sussex County Fee's. The town tries to submit two rounds per year.

Mrs. Ardisana, advised the town budgeted for \$300,000 in delinquent taxes and inquired if the town is close in reaching that projection.

Town Manager Smith stated yes, the town should be close when the second round is closed.

Mrs. Ardisana, advised she was reviewing FY2025 and inquired if delinquent taxes were reported under line item "Interest on Real Estate Taxes."

Town Manager Smith stated she would have to look into that.

Mrs. Ardisana, stated the town adopted \$315,000 in delinquent taxes in FY2025 and amended it and removed the \$315,000 as the town did not realize any of the money.

Town Manager Smith stated the town did not receive the proposed amount of \$315,000 as they were not scheduled during that fiscal year.

Mrs. Barber inquired if the auditors would address that line item.

Town Manager Smith stated if it was a concern to the auditors they would recommend renaming the line item.

Mrs. Ardisana, inquired if the town should budget the delinquent taxes at a lower projection as this year the town is budgeted at \$250,000.

Town Manager Smith stated when taxpayers pay prior to the property going to tax sale it will go under the penalty line item.

Mrs. Ardisana stated in FY2024 there was no line item for Interest on Real Estate Taxes or no line item for the \$315,000 budgeted.

Town Manager Smith stated on FY2024 there was a line item for \$315,00 and in FY2023 there was a line item for \$260,000 and in FY2022 there was a line item for \$250,630.

Councilman Lodato inquired how many homes would need to go to tax sale to realize \$250,000.

Town Manager Smith stated last year the town took 10 to 12 properties to tax sale where three properties did not pay with two out of the three properties being stayed due to having heirs to the property.

Councilman Lodato inquired if \$10,000 is what the town is projected in vacant housing fees.

Town Manager Smith stated it should be more but kept it at \$10,000.

Mrs. Betts inquired if the town has a schedule of projects or a capital improvement plan.

Town Manager Smith stated many of the town projects are state funded.

Town Manager Smith reviewed the proposed FY 2027 Budget pertaining to revenues and expenditures line items.

Councilman Lodato inquired the increase of business license is due to the town changing the structure.

Town Manager Smith stated yes, a flat fee of \$225.00 for a business license is being proposed.

Mrs. Ardisana inquired about line-item Interest & Penalties of \$171,000 if that should have been recorded in that line item.

Town Manager Smith stated she would need to look into that.

Mrs. Betts inquired the definition of transfers.

Town Manager Smith stated any revenue that is transferred to offset any expenditures. She provided an example of realty transfer tax is revenue that can be transferred into the towns general fund.

Councilman Lodato inquired why the line-item Wastewater & Water Impact Fees were projected at zero for FY2025 and FY2026.

Town Manager Smith stated the town hasn't projected anything in the last previous years due to limited residential growth. She advised the town is now currently experiencing more residential growth.

Mrs. Ardisana advised the town is not putting anything in the Capital Improvement Account but the town does have a Capital Improvement Account.

Town Manager Smith stated yes, the town does have a reserve fund with interest bearing. She advised the town is part of the PFAS Litigation where the town receives payment which is placed into the reserve fund.

Public Works Director Foskey stated the town has submitted 13 projects to SRF Funding and the focus is to improve state-maintained roads. He stated it's approximately \$45,000 to repair a state-maintained road.

Town Manager Smith stated the town has secured SRF funding and majority of the funding is principal forgiveness.

Councilman Lodato stated the police department makes up 43% of the budget and inquired if that is similar to other towns.

Town Manager Smith stated other municipalities' police departments are between the 40% to 50% range.

Mrs. Ardisana, requested if the public could receive the proposed budgeted vs. the actual's for the last three years in future executive budget summaries.

Mrs. Ardisana, stated the Budget Committee Agenda's and Minutes were not available online and it was under her understanding that every committee must publish an agenda and minutes to the public.

Town Manager Smith stated she typically does not post the Budget Committee Agenda's or Minutes online.

After a brief discussion, President of Council Calio recommended Town Manager Smith to reach out to the town's attorney for clarification.

Councilwoman Fisher made a motion to hold a closed session to discuss personnel matters. Councilman Holden seconded the motion. Vote was 6-0, with one vacancy.

Regular Session Recessed at 7:54 p.m.

Regular Session Reconvened at 8:07 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 one vacancy.

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Meeting Adjourned at 8:08 p.m.

Mayor

President of Council

Town Manager

Recording Secretary