

The Town of Laurel  
Public Hearing Minutes  
June 2, 2025

A Mayor & Council Public Hearing was held in the Mayor & Council Chambers at the Laurel Town Hall on Monday, June 2, 2025, beginning at 7:00 p.m. The following persons were in attendance Mayor Carlos Oliveras, President of Council Chris Calio, Council Members RogJenea Fisher via ZOOM, George Lodato, and Jonathan Kellam via ZOOM. Also in attendance were Finance Manager Melissa Cassimore, Recording Secretary Alexis Oliphant, and Town Manager Jamie Smith via ZOOM. It was noted that Councilman Donald Holden was absent. It was noted there was one vacancy on Mayor & Council.

Mayor Oliveras stated the purpose of the public hearing is to hear the presentation of the proposed FY 2026 Budget. The proposed FY 2026 Budget was posted on the town website for citizens review and citizens were invited tonight to ask any questions regarding the proposed FY 2026 Budget. Town Manager Smith provided a brief overview of the budget process. She stated the town has achieved a balanced budget, 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 presented the highlights of the FY 2026 Budget. Town Manager Smith stated building construction of new homes continued in FY 2025 including the Rigbie and the Globe Building and the town is anticipating at least 28 town homes. The town continues to work with a commercial developer for the construction of a commercial business located on U.S. Route 13. Town Manager Smith stated the Sussex County re-assessments are currently holding their Court of Appeals, which is scheduled to be completed in June 2025. The town works daily to continue to comply with the regulations mandated by the state and federal government. Any surplus in the enterprise fund must be set aside into a reserve fund for improvements, upgrades, and unforeseen maintenance in that particular fund. It should not be used to offset shortfalls in the general budget. Town Manager Smith highlighted on the revenues and the expenditures of the budgets. The revenues include: increase in R/E Tax penalties, a State Revolving Fund will be paid off in FY 2026, a school grant for a SRO Officer to help offset the cost, with the salary being covered for 12 months, an increase in new residential properties that the town will see an increase in overall income, and proposing new fees along with adjustment of other use fees, which do not include water sewer, or trash fees. The expenditures include: a 5% increase in health insurance, pay increase for all staff, continued line item for MS4 expense, include expenses for federal mandate of lead and copper testing on privately owned properties, increase in janitorial expenses for the police dept; as they relocated to Dunbar, pay back line of credit, and majority of department expenses remained close to the same as FY 2025 with minor adjustments. Town Manager Smith reviewed the proposed Fee Adjustments for FY 2026. Attached are the proposed Fee Adjustments for FY 2026. Town Manager Smith stated the formal approval of the proposed FY 2026 Budget will be presented at Monday's, June 16, 2025, Mayor & Council Meeting. Town Manager Smith inquired if Mayor & Council or the public had any questions pertaining the FY 2026 Budget.

Councilman Lodato inquired if the sale of surplus property included the Poplar Street property. Town Manager Smith stated she is currently working with the state, which must go through the appraisal process. With the sale of this property, it will allow the town to pay both a SRF Loan and a line of credit.

Councilman Lodato inquired if Del-Dot and DNREC increases were listed. Town Manager Smith stated no, and the town is continuing to work with the State Legislators.

Councilman Lodato inquired about the fire line annual fee. Town Manager Smith stated it is a proposed \$250.00 fee a year and a sprinkler system is not mandated for private homeowners.

Councilman Lodato inquired why the Administration Personnel costs decreased from FY 2026 compared to FY 2025. Town Manager Smith stated the town switched Health Insurance Carriers in December 2024 to help alleviate costs.

Town Manager Smith stated she has been working closely with other municipalities regarding the new Sussex County Realty Tax Assessments. She stated multi-residential properties and commercial properties rates are decreasing while residential properties rates are increasing. She recommends moving forward in utilizing the current Sussex County Tax Assessment 1974 List.

Mayor Oliveras inquired if the town has support from our local legislators. Town Manager Smith stated yes, Senator Richardson, State Representative Dukes, and a representative in the Governor's office are in support of the town utilizing the current list.

Town Manager Smith stated Mr. Don D'Aquila is in attendance tonight regarding a proposed amendment to the business licenses with vending services. She advised she needs direction on how Mayor & Council wishes to proceed.

Mayor & Council agreed they will need to review first before any amendments are made pertaining business licenses with vending services.

Mr. D'Aquila stated he is hoping the town can provide some type of resolution pertaining to this matter.

Mr. D'Aquila stated the proposed FY 2026 Budget includes impact fees including: storm water impact fee, parks & recreation impact fee, police impact fee, fire sprinkler yearly fee, and fire sprinkler impact fee. He stated the prior years there were no impact fees and he feels this is a large cost for residential properties.

Mr. D'Aquila inquired how the fine cost of \$387,500 is made up from. Town Manager Smith this cost is made up of all the police fines.

Mr. D'Aquila inquired why the budgeted fine cost is projected lower than the previous year when the police department is fully staffed. Town Manager Smith stated the fines were budgeted lower because in previous years the fines have not been reached due to short staffing.

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With there being no more further questions, Mayor Oliveras closed the Public Hearing at 7:50 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