

The Town of Laurel
Mayor & Council Meeting
August 19, 2024

A Mayor & Council Meeting was held at Laurel Town Hall in the Mayor & Council Chambers on Monday, August 19, 2024, beginning at 7:09 p.m. The following persons were in attendance Mayor John Shwed, President of Council Chris Calio, Carlos Oliveras, Robin Fisher-Cornish via ZOOM, Jonathan Kellam, Donald Holden, and with one vacancy Ward 4. Also, in attendance were Director of Code Enforcement Ken West, Public Works Director James Foskey, Chief Robert Kracyla, Finance Manager Melissa Cassimore, Recording Secretary Alexis Oliphant, and Town Manager Jamie Smith. It was noted that Judge Ruffin was absent.

Mayor Shwed presented the Police Promotion Ceremony. Chief Kracyla recognized Cpl. Matthew Porter for his promotion.

Mayor Shwed opened the Court of Appeals at 7:12 p.m. The purpose of holding the Court of Appeals is to listen to any citizen who wants to appeal the town's tax assessment for the FY 2025. Mr. Jim LaRue, resident of East 6th Street, inquired about the 30% tax increase. Town Manager Smith advised the purpose of tonight's hearing is to allow the public to comment on the Sussex County Tax Assessment List that was adopted in July 2024. If the public wishes to challenge, there assessment they're directed to contact Sussex County. Mayor Shwed stated with there being no further questions or comments he closed the public hearing. The Court of Appeals closed at 7:12 p.m.

Mayor Shwed stated Mrs. Stephanie Saulsbury, resident of West Sixth Street, is in attendance tonight to present Neighborhood Concerns pertaining West Sixth Street. Mrs. Saulsbury stated they are rental houses on West Sixth Street with multiple families residing in single family homes. She advised the tenants are causing a disturbance including blowing their horns loud in the early morning and late evenings, holding large group gatherings, and blocking streets, loitering teenage girls, overflowing their trash canisters, utilizing all the on-street parking, and urinating on private property. She stated the following rental homes are causing disturbances including 210 West Sixth Street, 209 West Sixth Street, and 222 West Sixth Street Rental Homes.

The owner of 218 West Sixth Street, stated there is an alley way between 6th and 7th Street that is referred to as an Emergency Route. She proposed if this alley way could be a one-way street.

Mrs. Saulsbury, resident of West Sixth Street, advised there is a significant sewer smell occurring at her residence mainly at night and when it rains.

Chief Kracyla advised Mrs. Saulsbury to provide him with her contact information that way they can implement a strategy for the criminal matters that were brought up.

Mayor Shwed advised we want our town to be safe and a fair town. He stated the town's attorney is currently working on addressing the rental issues the town is facing.

Mrs. Melodie Stanley, inquired if town would consider putting a cap on rentals and what the percent of rentals are in town. Town Manager Smith advised it's approximately 50% rentals and 50% owner occupied.

Town Manager Smith advised the town currently doesn't allow multi-family residing in a single-family dwelling. She stated by federal law the town may not ask if residents residing in the dwelling if there related to one another. She advised the town is currently working on this matter with the town's attorney.

Mrs. Saulsbury, resident of West Sixth Street, inquired about the Nuisance Ordinance. Town Manager Smith advised the ordinance covers all properties for criminal and code violations. If it's a criminal violation the police department responds and if its code violation the code office responds. For the property to be declared a nuisance, the property must accumulate 12 points in a 6-month period. She advised in this case the rental license could be revoked if it meets the threshold requirements.

Mrs. Saulsbury, resident of West Sixth Street, inquired if the town was going to investigate the sewer smell pertaining her street. Public Works Director Foskey stated smoke testing was completed last year, and nothing was detected in the area. Public Works Director Foskey advised there could be a dry trap within the resident's homes allowing gas to come in. Public Works Director Foskey stated a flow channel partial obstruction was found outside and the town has received Del-DOT permits to complete, which should be completed in the next couple of weeks.

President of Calio proposed to handle the 6th and 7th Alleyway just as the town handled Wolfe Street and Tenth Street.

The Mayor & Council Regular and Closed Session Minutes of July 15, 2024, were presented for review. Councilman Kellam made a motion to accept the regular and closed session minutes of July 15, 2024. Councilman Oliveras seconded the motion. Vote was 6-0, with one vacancy.

The July 2024 Department Head Reports were presented for review.

- Director of Code Enforcement West stated he had no additions to his report. Councilwoman Fisher-Cornish complemented the numerous new homes being completed in the town.
- Public Works Director Foskey stated he had no additions to his report.
- Chief Kracyla stated National Night Out will be held on Tuesday, August 20, 2024, at North Laurel Elementary School from 4:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. He stated the police department held their Youth Police Academy with 22 entries that was held in early August.

- Mayor Shwed stated Judge Ruffin is not in attendance tonight, but her report was submitted for review.
- Finance Manager Cassimore stated the past due property taxes and penalties decreased by \$20,000 which is good for the new tax year.
- Town Manager Smith advised the town is a recipient of funding for the Shoreline Revitalization at Janosik Park where a match will be needed.

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

Town Manager Smith presented the Development Updates.

- **Wawa:** The owner will be submitting their Final Site Plans to the town shortly.
- **Rigbie:** Site work has begun.
- **Laurel Dutch Inn:** A soft opening will be held on Thursday, August 22, 2024.
- **Solar Energy Farm:** A Concept Plan was submitted and reviewed by P&Z on August 14, 2024. The proposed location is on Old Sailor Path at the Old Campground.
- **Villages of Millwood:** A Master Plan/Concept Plan was submitted and reviewed by P&Z on August 14, 2024. They're proposing a construction of 2400 homes with a small portion of commercial. This is a long-term project, and the town is working with the towns engineer pertaining sewer capacity.

Mayor Shwed presented the 1st Reading of Ordinance 2024-2 pertaining an Amendment to Chapter 69 Curfew Ordinance. Town Manager Smith advised the town amended the curfew ordinance earlier this year to include the ages 17 years or less with a 11:00 p.m. curfew. Town Manager Smith advised with the proposed amendments it will remove the written notification and the parents will be required to attend parenting classes. Chief Kracyla advised the fine violation will go up \$25.00 increments with the first violation beginning at \$50.00. President of Council Calio made a motion to accept the 1st Reading of Ordinance 2024-2. Councilman Kellam seconded the motion. Vote was 6-0, with one vacancy.

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

Mayor Shwed stated he participated in the Sussex County Habitat for Humanity Home Dedication on Center Street.

Mayor Shwed stated the Laurel School District held their open session and Councilman Kellam, Chief Kracyla, and Town Manager Smith attended. He advised students from the first grade through the twelfth grade presented a song "We Love Laurel."

Mr. LaRue, resident of 204 East Sixth Street, stated he has 18 active rental properties within the town. He stated with the 30% tax increase it was hard on a lot of people.

Mr. LaRue stated the new trash service is day and night compared to what the town recently had.

Mr. LaRue inquired why residents are still residing in dwellings with condemned placards placed on them. Director of Code Enforcement West stated he allows tenants 30 days to find a new place to reside.

Mayor Shwed followed-up with Mr. LaRue pertaining to the 30% tax increase and advised the town didn't increase any fees this fiscal year and with a decrease in the trash fee.

Mr. Johnson presented Home Teens, Choose Ones program to Mayor & Council. The program is geared towards youth to help them prevent crime.

Councilman Oliveras 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 8:35 p.m.

Regular Session Reconvened at 8:51 p.m.

With there being no further business, Councilman Holden made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Councilman Kellam seconded the motion. Vote was 6-0, with one vacancy.

Regular Session Adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

Mayor

President of Council

Town Manager

Recording Secretary