

**CITY OF LAURINBURG
SPECIAL MEETING/
CITIZEN INPUT SESSION
MARCH 5, 2019
MUNICIPAL BUILDING
303 W. CHURCH ST.
LAURINBURG, NC
6:00 P.M.**

Minutes

The City Council of the City of Laurinburg held a special meeting/Citizen Input Session on March 5, 2019 at 6:00 p.m. in the council chambers of the Municipal Building located at 303 W. Church St., Laurinburg, NC with the Honorable Matthew Block, MD, Mayor, presiding. The following Councilmembers were present: Mary Jo Adams, Mary Evans, James J. Garby, Jr. Curtis B. Leak, and Andrew G. Williamson, Jr.

Also present were Charles D. Nichols III, City Manager, and Jennifer A. Tippet, City Clerk. Leadership Team members present included: Robert Ellis, Treatment Plants Director; Harold Haywood, General Services Director; Stacey McQuage, Public Utilities Director; Tim Pierce, GIS Administrator; Darwin Williams, Police Chief; Randy Gibson, Fire Chief; Michael Mandeville, Community Development Director; Betty Galloway, Human Resources/Risk Management Director; and Angela Taylor, Administrative Support Assistant.

Mayor Block called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

Councilmember Williamson gave the invocation.

INTRODUCTION OF CITY STAFF AND SERVICES

The City Manager introduced the department heads. He explained that attendees were put into groups for discussion on issues or concerns that citizens wanted addressed with the department heads writing down the ideas. He added that the groups would prioritize ideas, then the lists would be presented to everyone present and Council would review the detailed list during the budget process.

Mayor Block explained the Citizen Input Session was a good way for citizens to provide comment on ideas for the City, things that could be done better by the City and compliments on City services or staff. He requested that attendees make comments relative to City services and nothing to do with the Scotland County tax rate. He added that staff and Council were in the process of crafting the upcoming budget which begins July 1, 2019.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS, PRIORITIZATION AND PRESENTATION

After approximately 25 minutes, the following results were presented by the various tables:

TABLE 1

RANK	ITEM
1	Continue to develop the “mindset” of cohesiveness when we work together, i.e. Tis the Season
2	Repaving streets/developments
3	Restore right-of-way in Laurin Lakes
4	Blues Farm & Appin Road – leaning tree

TABLE 2

RANK	ITEM
1	City storm water drainage and flooding
2	Street resurfacing
3	Continue efforts in downtown revitalization
4	Crime consultant (study)
5	On-going City departmental and financial support for Tis the Season

TABLE 3

RANK	ITEM
	Sidewalks/extensions within city limits
	Beautification projects-trees, etc. Create Green Spaces maintained by private groups
	New signs are good additions! Possibility for more? Involve County in sign placement.
	Keep up with recruitment of new business. Current work good to see.
	Increase parking down Railroad Street (west)
	Increase public activities downtown. Laurinburg After 5, Springfest, Christmas on Main, good start. Can we add more?
	Community Calendar – update/current
	Community involvement
	Adopt-A-Spot beautification locations

TABLE 4

RANK	ITEM
1	Need unity!!! (for all citizens)
2	Development downtown – build on Tis the Season and other initiatives. Good work (staff) cooperating with Tis the Season group – build on it
3	Improvements/more initiatives needed to reduce crime
4	Need cooperation with County/City to make recreation center possible/successful
5	Improvement of timeliness of street repairs after utility work completed (street resurfacing)

TABLE 5

RANK	ITEM
1	Emphasis on safety in school zones. *Collaborate with school system.
2	Consider a nice, safe park for walking, etc.
3	Explore changing downtown parking to diagonal

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *More spaces available *Easier to park vs parallel *Would have to make a one-way *Would change the appearance (something different)
4	Establish art district downtown
5	City is not cycle friendly
6	Yard waste, garbage & recycling collection is excellent. *More recycling containers/drop-offs downtown.

TABLE 6

RANK	ITEM
1	Work together publically, disagree less publically. Support City administration/staff.
2	Litter, curbing, grass cutting. Maintenance of rights-of-ways. Code enforcement.
3	Build on momentum from Tis the Season – Differentiate Laurinburg downtown all year long – Scottish theme?
4	Tsunami cameras or other preventative crime measures

WRAP-UP

Mayor Block explained that because there is a Mayor and five (5) councilmembers, there will be differing opinions, and that most citizens and staff prefer that disagreements be respectful and not personal attacks.

Mr. Jay Todd explained that the community is an environment of attack. He added that Mayor Block has good points, but everyone should find common ground and work together.

Mrs. Pat Poteat discussed Mayor Block’s use of social media such as Facebook to call people names and talk bad about people. She stated that she believed these discussion should be done one-on-one.

Mayor Block stated that the community went through a very bad and divisive process with the new City Hall and Police Department. He added that hopefully everyone had learned from that experience.

Mayor Block explained that many of the items mentioned this evening, such as resurfacing, curb and gutters, beautification, etc. cost money to accomplish. He stated that the City tax rate is low, and he then asked the group if they would support a higher tax rate in order to get some of the wishes done. He added that because the Scotland County taxes are so high, City Council has been reluctant to discuss raising City taxes. He added that the \$.40 tax rate did not cover much and generated \$3,000,000.00 in revenue, and the Police Department budget is approximately \$3,000,000.00. He further added that the rest of the City’s revenue is from sales tax revenue, and the City operates on a shoestring budget. He explained that the City did not have a recreation department, and he believed that citizens would like to see City parks improved. He added that municipalities are about providing more amenities.

Mr. Jay Todd explained that the City was like a business, and either expenses had to be cut or revenue increased. He added that inflation needed to be taken into consideration. He added that Council should consider raising the City tax rate as it would give Council another tool to do things that the City has not been able to do in the past.

Councilmember Williamson explained that revenues are so limited to property taxes, and if the City is not growing, the revenue does not grow either. He added that the defeat of the one-quarter cent (1/4 cent) sales tax increase referendum was a huge defeat, and he explained that he believed an increase in taxes would be poorly received in the community. He further added that an education effort on taxes would be needed in order to overcome the fear about increasing taxes.

The City Manager explained that staff would compile the list of items and mail the results to attendees.

Councilmember Adams thanked everyone for coming out to provide input.

Councilmember Evans explained that the City has a Crime and Drug Committee with a mission to research and make recommendations to Council concerning improving the safety of the community. She added that the Committee is currently short three (3) members and she encouraged interested parties to apply with the City Clerk.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Councilmember Williamson, seconded by Councilmember Evans, and unanimously carried to adjourn.

The meeting adjourned at 7:24 p.m.

Matthew Block, MD, Mayor

Jennifer A. Tippett, City Clerk