

**CITY OF LAURINBURG
COUNCIL MEETING
MARCH 15, 2008
MUNICIPAL BUILDING
303 WEST CHURCH ST.
LAURINBURG, NC
8:00 a.m.**

Minutes

The City Council of the City of Laurinburg reconvened its annual planning retreat from Friday, March 14, 2008 at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, March 15, 2008 in the council room of the Municipal Building with the Honorable Matthew Block, Mayor, presiding. The following Councilmembers were present: Rembert DeBerry, Amanda B. Faulk, Curtis B. Leak, Thomas W. Parker, III, and Herbert M. Rainer, Jr.

Also present were Craig F. Honeycutt, City Manager, Dolores A. Hammond, City Clerk, Cindy Carpenter, Finance Director, and Bob Bell, Human Resources Officer.

Mayor Block reconvened the meeting at 8:10 a.m.

ELECTRICITIES

Margaret Cline, ElectriCities Retail Operations Manager, made a presentation on the Introduction to North Carolina Public Power and explained the history of ElectriCities.

A discussion ensued after the presentation on the rising fuel costs. Councilmembers also expressed concerns over the continuing rate increases from ElectriCities.

The meeting was recessed at 9:20 a.m. and resumed at 9:25 a.m.

Mayor Block talked about his vision for the City of Laurinburg.

He stated that one of the top three issues at the citizen input session was beautification. He feels that if City Council does not hand down directives to staff that some of the issues brought up about the cleanliness of the community will not be addressed.

Mayor Block stated that he has reviewed examples of other municipality's beautification committee efforts.

Following a discussion concerning the City's beautification department, Mayor Block suggested that a beautification committee should be formed.

Councilmember Faulk stated that there is an image committee at the Laurinburg/Scotland County Area Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) and suggested that this committee be empowered to help with the clean-up of the community. Councilmember Parker suggested that the Chamber's committee members be appointed to the City's Beautification Committee, if decided upon, and that Council appoint members from other areas of the community.

There was a consensus from Council to explore having a Beautification Committee and that each member from Council would appoint someone from their district to serve on the committee as well as members from the Chamber's Image Committee.

The City Manager stated he would review and compile a set of by-laws for a beautification committee and present a draft document to Council at its April meeting.

A discussion then ensued on the dilapidated buildings in the downtown area as well as other areas in the community.

The City Manager explained that the City enforces the minimum housing code and follows procedures to force the owners of dilapidated property to clean up or secure the property.

Upon further discussion, there was a consensus that staff review the current nuisance ordinance and the minimum housing code and see if there are ways to strengthen both to better clean up the community.

Council discussed retail recruitment and the formation of a retail recruitment committee.

After a lengthy discussion, there was a consensus to wait until Scotland County hires its economic developer before giving any direction on this concern.

The City Manager stated that he would like Council to consider a program to help the low income citizens of Laurinburg. He stated that staff is working on a proposal that would allow citizens, businesses, etc. the opportunity to donate monies to a special fund to help city residents with their utility bills during the winter months. The program would not be administered by the City but by an organization such as Church Community Services.

He further stated that he would have a proposal for Council to consider at its April meeting.

SOLID WASTE FEES

Mayor Block provided Council with costs on solid waste fees from surrounding areas. He stated that some of the municipalities contract out trash pick up.

A lengthy discussion ensued about contracting out trash pick up. It was noted that the City of Laurinburg picks up more than trash with its current fee. Other items included in the fee are recycling, bulky item pick up, limbs and leaves, white goods, and other items. Most of the items are not included in other municipality trash pick up.

Councilmember Leak suggested that a solid waste committee be formed if Council decides to revisit the City's solid waste procedures.

Following further discussion, there was a consensus among Council that a solid waste committee be formed and that staff prepare a request for proposal and look into contracting these services out.

Councilmember Parker stated that a request for proposal would allow Council to compare differences in contracting out solid waste and what the City provides.

The City Manager stated that he would formulate a proposal to present to Council at its April meeting.

WORK SESSION

Mayor Block suggested that a work session be held in order to further talk about the needs of the City before Council begins its budget sessions.

Councilmember Parker stated that these sessions could be twofold: preliminary budget discussions and a tentative agenda work session.

Upon further discussion, there was a consensus to have a work session one week prior to Council's meeting date. The first work session will be held Tuesday, April 15, 2008 at 6:30 p.m. This meeting will take place in the conference room of the Barrett Building. The reason for the location of the work session is that the Laurinburg Planning Board usually meets in the council room of the Municipal Building at this time. There will be consideration given if there is not a Planning Board meeting held in the council room that the work sessions may be held in the upstairs council room of the Municipal Building.

Councilmember Leak stated he would like to discuss back payments in relationship with availability fees (fees charged where service is available, but residence is not connected e.g. water/sewer) and solid waste fees.

The City Manager explained that currently there are a number of citizens who have not paid availability fees or solid waste fees. Some of these residents were annexed into the City in 1994, and some are renters and do not own the home.

He informed Council that a proposed policy is being formulated that would hold the property owner responsible (in the event a renter resides in the home) for availability fees. The renter would be responsible for all other services provided by the City.

The City Manager also stated that part of the proposal would be that if solid waste fees are not paid, the City can pick up the garbage can. There was also discussion that if the garbage can is picked up that there will be a fee to return it to the resident.

He further stated that the current policy is that the City can go back and collect up to 12 months fees if the City makes a mistake in billing, etc. He suggested that for those citizens who now owe outstanding fees that the City collect back payments of 12 months to get everyone current.

Cindy Carpenter, Finance Director, stated that at Friday night's retreat there was discussion about increasing the City's late payment fee for utility bills.

The City Manager stated that a proposal will be submitted to Council for review for back payments to the City as well as an increase in the late payment fee.

The meeting was recessed at 11:25 a.m. and resumed at 11:35 a.m.

Mayor Block talked briefly on the North Carolina Department of Transportation (DOT) projects which include the widening of 401 North and Interstate 74. He also stated that other areas need to be addressed with DOT such as the Laurinburg/Maxton Airport, North Main Street, South Main Street, and a pedestrian bridge over Highway 401 at the West Boulevard and Highway 401 North By-pass (Wal-Mart site).

Following a lengthy discussion, there was a consensus that a request to DOT should be submitted to ask for improvements along the North Main Street/Aberdeen Road area and South Main Street. These are gateways to the community.

Councilmember DeBerry stated that the lighting was not sufficient at the Northside Square Shopping Center.

Councilmember Leak suggested that there needs to be more visibility along that area (Northside Square Shopping Center) as well as more police presence.

Councilmember Rainer reiterated his concern about the lighting along South Main Street. He stated that both sides of the street could use some benches and there should also be designated bus stops along the way. He then stated that this would take years to accomplish but suggests that this idea be considered.

Councilmember Parker stated that the area around Montrose Drive is pretty dark and asked that someone take a look at the area.

Councilmember Leak asked if anyone had contacted the City about a drainage ditch on John's Road in the area of Subs and Cream on South Main Street.

Councilmember DeBerry stated that he remembers this issue coming up before Council previously.

The City Manager stated that no one had contacted him about the drainage ditch and that he would find any information about the previous request and provide it to Council.

Councilmembers Rainer and DeBerry stated that on McGirt's Bridge Road, especially during events taking place in the area, vehicles are parked along the roadway making it difficult to see oncoming traffic and that they would like staff to investigate the situation.

The City Manager stated that McGirt's Bridge Road is a State Road and that he would contact the representative in Rockingham for further discussion.

Mayor Block then introduced the topic of recreation in the City of Laurinburg. He stated that this was another area of concern presented at the Citizen Input session. His main focus is that there are not any gyms open on the weekends for young people to utilize. He stated that St. Andrews Presbyterian College, at one time, had its pool open to citizens, but does not do so now. He also stated that he had discussed this matter with St. Andrews College's president and that he seemed open to dialogue regarding the opening of the pool on weekends.

Councilmember Rainer talked passionately about young people not having a place to play basketball on the weekends.

Discussion ensued concerning Scotland County's Parks and Recreation program and the City's concerns about some of the parks and lack of facilities for young people to play basketball. It was stated that most of the gyms were at the schools and would need School Board approval for use. There was a consensus that a joint meeting be held with the Scotland County Board of Commissioners and to also invite the Scotland County Parks and Recreation Director, the Superintendent of Scotland County Schools, and the Scotland High School basketball coach.

Mayor Block then stated that another issue that was brought up at the Citizen Input session was high taxes and the school system floor.

Following a lengthy discussion, there was no decision made concerning the above mentioned issues.

Councilmember Leak discussed the City's tax rate which is currently set at \$0.40 per \$100.00 valuation. He stated that he would not like the proposed tax rate to be more than \$0.42 cents per \$100.00 valuation.

Following a brief discussion, Councilmembers DeBerry, Rainer, Faulk, and Parker also stated that they would not like to see the tax rate increased more than \$0.02.

Councilmember Faulk stated that she would like the Mayor to try and be more in tune to the tone of the articles from the Mayor's Desk that are printed in the newspaper.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Councilmember DeBerry, seconded by Councilmember Parker, and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:04 p.m.

Matthew Block, Mayor

Dolores A. Hammond, City Clerk