

**CITY OF LAURINBURG
SPECIAL/JOINT CITY COUNCIL MEETING
JANUARY 29, 2019
SMALL BUSINESS INNOVATION CENTER
16800 US HWY NORTH
7:00 p.m.**

Minutes

The City Council of the City of Laurinburg held a special/joint meeting on Tuesday, January 29, 2019 at the Small Business Innovation Center at 7:00 p.m. with the Honorable Matthew Block, Mayor, presiding. The following Councilmembers were present: Mary Jo Adams, Mary Evans, James J. Garby, Jr., and Curtis B. Leak. Councilmember Andrew G. Williamson, Jr. was absent due to an illness in the family.

Also present were Charles D. Nichols III, City Manager, and Jennifer A. Tippett, City Clerk.

The following Scotland County Commissioners were present: Chairman Bob Davis, Whit Gibson, Tim Ivey and Betty Blue Gholston. Also present from Scotland County was Kevin Patterson, County Manager and Brian Graham, Scotland County Parks and Recreation Director.

Others present included Mr. Greg Woods, Chief Executive Officer of Scotland Health Care System; Dr. Summer Woodside and Dr. Carolyn Banks, Scotland County School Board members. Arriving later were Mr. Ron Singletary, Rev. B.J. Gibson, Mr. Henry Tyson and Mr. Raymond Hyatt, Scotland County School Board members.

Mayor Block called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Chairman Davis called the Scotland County Board of Commissioners meeting to order.

Councilmember Garby gave the Invocation.

Upon question by Mayor Block, the City Manager explained that Councilmember Williamson was absent due to an emergency in his family.

DISCUSSION OF RECREATION/COMMUNITY CENTER IN LAURINBURG

Mayor Block welcomed attendees. He explained that after the sales tax referendum was defeated, Council discussed next steps for a recreation/community center since there was momentum for such an endeavor.

Mr. Graham explained that the citizens voted down the tax referendum, but that the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board would like to continue with the initiative to build a recreation/community center.

Mayor Block explained that it had been a long-standing desire of Laurinburg citizens to have a recreation/community center in Laurinburg. He added that at the December, 2018 Council meeting, he stated that he believed that Council should go in a different direction if a recreation/community center was going to be built, and that perhaps the City should explore the possibility on its own. He further added that the County Manager had stated that if the sales tax referendum did not pass, the recreation center would not be built. He further explained that Councilmember Williamson wanted to get the entities together to discuss the matter.

Upon question by Mayor Block, the County Manager agreed that if the sales tax referendum did not pass, the recreation center would not be built.

Commissioner Ivey stated that the money generated from the sales tax increase would have been used for operational costs of the center, not for construction.

The County Manager explained that the operating costs of the facility in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan would have cost approximately \$500,000.00 annually to operate. He added that the capital funding would need to be determined.

Upon question by Mayor Block, Mr. Wood explained that the Scotland Health Care Board supported the referendum, but did not discuss funding. He added that he thought that the Board would contribute some funding for capital and some for operational costs.

Councilmember Garby suggested that the entities needed to come to consensus of plans for a facility.

Upon question by Mayor Block, Dr. Banks stated that the School Board supported the idea of recreation/community center, but never discussed finances.

Mayor Block explained that there was support in the community for the idea of a recreation center. He added that some members of Council believed that one (1) recreation center in Laurinburg was not the right way to think, and that perhaps there needed to be a recreation/community center in a centralized location within the City with the City taking the lead, and perhaps some type of health facility located near the hospital along with the extended outdoor aquatic facilities at the Morgan Complex proposed by Mr. Graham. He discussed the sales tax referendum and suggested that timing was one of the factors in its defeat, along with the fact that Scotland County does not have the money for an outdoor recreation center. He added that with the four (4) entities – City of Laurinburg, Scotland County, Scotland County School Board and Scotland Health Care System – working together, perhaps the referendum would have passed. He further added that he believed City Council will go in a different direction after the next election.

Chairman Davis explained that the County has a long-range plan for a recreation center at the Morgan Complex; however financing had not been discussed.

Upon question by Commissioner Gibson, Mayor Block stated that he believed the only way a recreation/community center would be built in Laurinburg was if the City built it, and that the school system and Scotland Health Care System could participate financially.

A discussion ensued concerning the need for boards to work together among themselves as well as with each other.

Councilmember Leak discussed the history of recreation in Laurinburg and Scotland County. He explained that Council would support the county-wide recreation effort and had contributed through funds and in-kind work at the Morgan Complex. He added that transportation should not be an issue to the Morgan Complex because the Scotland County Area Transportation (SCATS) is free. He discussed the need for the entities to work together in partnership for a Scotland County Recreation Center for everyone to enjoy.

Upon question by Mayor Block, School Board Member Singletary explained that the school system's swim team would be interested in an indoor pool.

Upon question by Mayor Block, the County Manager explained that unless the County Commissioners wanted to raise property taxes, he did not know how the County could generate operating revenue for a recreation center. He added that the capital cost of the facility would be approximately \$10-12 million, and if a 20-year bond was done by the County, the annual payment would be \$700,000.00 plus operating costs. He further added that without significant revenue options, he could not recommend a plan for the recreation center to the County Commissioners.

Commissioner Gibson stated that he believed that the Commissioners were interested in discussing a recreation center, but funding is the issue because the County cannot commit to funding the operating costs.

School Board Member Banks explained that she believed that many voters did not understand the purpose of the sales tax referendum, and suggested better communication and teamwork in the future.

Commissioner Ivey explained that he believed that there was not support for the referendum because the plan for the center was not concrete.

Commissioner Gibson explained that he believed the responsibility of the elected officials to communicate the purpose and importance of the need for a recreation center.

School Board Member Singletary explained that the groups in the meeting needed to have an honest conversation before trying to discuss the need for a recreation center with the public.

Councilmember Evans explained that citizens were concerned about the economic situation in the County.

School Board Member Singletary expressed concerns about access for all students to a recreation center as well as the need for an honest assessment of the need for a recreation center.

Councilmember Leak suggested that each of the entities present appoint two (2) members to a subcommittee to develop a plan and vision for a recreation center, and then present to the various boards.

Commissioner Gholston suggested having the sales tax referendum in May, 2020 since no entity has the funds to operate a recreation center.

Commissioner Ivey stated that before a referendum is discussed, a plan for the recreation center needed to be drawn as well as a funding plan determined.

Councilmember Garby stated that a recreation center could be built in phases to be more economical and affordable.

School Board Member Gibson explained that if every entity agreed that they wanted to pursue a recreation/community center, then he suggested following Councilmember Leak's recommendation for a sub-committee.

Councilmember Adams explained that City Council had pledged support to the County for the recreation facility proposed by Mr. Graham; however she would not be supportive of the City putting the tax burden on the citizens of Laurinburg to build a recreation center.

Mr. Wood stated that a recreation facility has never been part of the health care system's mission; however, the health care system would support what the community wanted. He added that if the governing boards could determine plans for recreation center, the health care system would support it.

Commissioner Gholston explained the input from the other members of the Board of Commissioners was needed.

Commissioner Davis explained that he was not interested in raising taxes for the citizens.

ADJOURN

Motion was made by Councilmember Adams, seconded by Councilmember Evans, and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 8:21 p.m.

Matthew Block, MD, Mayor

Jennifer A. Tippet, City Clerk