

**CITY OF LAURINBURG
SPECIAL MEETING/
CITIZEN INPUT SESSION
FEBRUARY 25, 2020
CITY HALL AND POLICE DEPARTMENT
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 February 25, 2020 at 6:00 p.m. in the council chambers of the Municipal Building located at 303 W. Church St., Laurinburg, NC with the Honorable James T. Willis, Mayor, presiding. The following Councilmembers were present: Mary Jo Adams, Mary Evans, James J. Garby, Jr. Donald Rainer, 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: Dixon Medlin, Treatment Plants Director; Harold Haywood, General Services Director; Tim Pierce, GIS Administrator; Darwin Williams, Police Chief; Jordan McQueen, Fire Chief; Michael Mandeville, Community Development Director; Betty Galloway, Human Resources/Risk Management Director; and Angela Taylor, Administrative Support Assistant.

Mayor Willis called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

Councilmember Rainer gave the invocation.

INTRODUCTION OF CITY STAFF AND SERVICES

The City Manager introduced City staff present. He explained that in the past, the citizens were divided into groups for brain-storming; however with only eight (8) citizens present he requested that the citizens in attendance present their ideas or concerns. He added that the list of ideas or concerns would be presented to Council for review during the budget process.

Below are the summary comments of the individuals:

CITIZEN	CONCERN(S)
Rosemary Rainer	1) North Fire Station 2) Water and sewer lines
Doris McLaughlin	1) Vacant homes and lots 2) Inability to use draft for equal payment plan for utilities
Shirley Campbell	Light bills/electric rate
Adrian Turner	Light bills/electric rate
Wade Hatcher	Ongoing drainage issues on Cypress Drive in Laurin Lakes
William Tyson	Maintenance of streets/potholes

Fred Mabry	No major complaints. City is well run.
Marvin Womble	No concerns, just here to listen.

Councilmember Rainer explained that the City had hired Cape Fear Engineering to look at the stormwater issues to develop plans and costs to address the issues.

A discussion ensued concerning condemnation of houses. The City Manager explained that in order to condemn a house, certain legal standards must be met. Staff works with property owners in order to either have the owners to tear down dilapidated structures, have the structures used by the Fire Department for training purposes, or the City can demolish structures with the costs associated with demolition added as a lien against the property if the owner does not pay the costs.

The City Manager discussed the following concerning the issues submitted:

- *North Fire Station.* Council has given staff direction to research the possible location for the North Fire Station on Aberdeen Highway on property that is owned by the Scotland County Economic Development Corporation (EDC). The Golden Leaf Foundation has provided two grants to the City for relocation in the amount of \$1.25 million; however, the City must get through the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) process first. Staff is finding design/build firms for the project. FEMA has been asked to attend the last two (2) Council meetings, but would not agree.

Upon question by Mayor Willis, the City Manager explained that the timeframe for completion is unknown since the FEMA process has to be completed first.

- *Water and Sewer Lines*
 - *Stormwater.* The City hired Cape Fear Engineering to develop plans for seven (7) high priority areas that experience stormwater issues. The firm will present the issues with each area along with solutions and costs. The majority of the issues are not in public rights-of-way; therefore, the City would need to obtain easements from private property owners. Once the study is presented to Council, Council would determine what can be included in the budget.
 - *Water and Sewer Lines.* Capital Project Fund of \$3.5 million was set up for six (6) major projects which are underway. Willis Engineers is the City’s water and sewer engineering consultant, and Mr. Chuck Willis gave an update on the projects at the January Council meeting. These projects are slow moving as they require a lot of planning. In August 2019, an Asset Inventory Assessment of the City’s water and sewer infrastructure was completed and it included recommended actions with very high price tags.
 - *Sewer Project in Produce Market Road Area.* The City obtained a \$2 million Community Development Block Grant-Infrastructure to rebuild the pump station on Produce Market Road and repair/replace other sewer infrastructure. Since the grant is a federal grant, there are many processes that had to be completed first, and it is hoped that the work will begin soon.

Mr. Haywood explained that the construction bids for this project will be presented to Council at the March 17, 2020 meeting for approval.

- *Inability to use draft for equal payment plan for utilities.* The City Manager explained that he would need to research this issue.
- *Light bills/electric rates.* The City has conducted an energy audit at Ms. Campbell's house.

Ms. Campbell explained that she used all of the light bulbs the City employee gave her to use. She added that the City conducted an energy audit the previous year.

The City Manager explained that the City could come to Ms. Campbell's house and conduct another energy audit.

The City Manager presented information on the City's tax rate and utility rates in 2018 as shown on "Attachment A" to these minutes which are hereby incorporated as part of these minutes. The attachment shows that the City's tax rate of \$.40 per hundred dollars is the second lowest behind the Village of Pinehurst.

Based on the average residential water and sewer rates, the City is lower than four (4) of the municipalities with which the City was compared.

Based on electric rates from Duke Energy Progress, Lumbee River Coop, Pee Dee Electric and the City of Lumberton (also an ElectriCity member) the City's average monthly bill is lower than all except Duke Energy Progress. The City's electric rate is slightly higher than Duke Energy Progress.

Upon questions by Mr. William Tyson, the City Manager explained that the figures were from 2018, but the City rates had not changed.

Upon question by Ms. Turner, the City Manager explained that the cost of the Christmas lights downtown do not get billed to the residents. Residents are billed only for what goes through their electric meter.

Ms. Turner discussed a program through the government in South Carolina that paid to make her apartment energy efficient. She requested that the City look into a program, especially for the elderly.

Councilmember Adams discussed the Laurinburg Housing Authority's efforts to make its units more energy efficient and to make the residents more responsible for the energy usage.

After clarifying with Mr. Tyson, the City Manager stated that he would have the potholes on Alexander Avenue checked.

WRAP-UP

Councilmember Evans stated that Council received good input from the citizens.

Councilmember Garby stated that he was glad everyone attended.

Upon question by Ms. Turner, Councilmember Adams explained that there was not a community center for children. She added that the Scotland County Parks and Recreation Department and the Scotland Memorial Library have many activities for children.

ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

James T. Willis, Mayor

Jennifer A. Tippett, City Clerk