

**CITY OF LAURINBURG
SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING
MAY 4, 2020
CITY HALL AND POLICE DEPARTMENT
303 WEST CHURCH ST.
7:00 p.m.**

Minutes

The City Council of the City of Laurinburg held a special meeting on Monday, May 4, 2020 in the Council Chambers of the City Hall and Police Department at 7:00 p.m. 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; Jennifer A. Tippet, City Clerk; Police Chief Darwin Williams; and William P. Floyd, Jr., City Attorney (via teleconference).

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

Councilmember Adams gave the Invocation and then led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion was made by Councilmember Garby, seconded by Councilmember Rainer, and the motion carried unanimously.

Mayor Pro Tem Mary Evans explained that she had called the special meeting because citizens have been contacting her about actions the Police Department was taking to ensure citizens' safety in light of the recent gun violence in the community. She added that she believed that Council should present itself as a united front, publicly letting the public know that it is aware of the problems, and that Council supports and trusts the Police Department. She stated that the Police Department did an excellent job May 1-2, 2020 with "Operation Blackout".

Councilmember Adams read an email from Mayor Willis in response to Mayor Pro Tem Evan's request for a special meeting as follows:

"I believe our best course of action now is to support our Chief and let him do his job.

I'm sure Duke will be willing to talk with any council member who wants to hear details about these incidents. We do not need to panic and we should not be influenced by anyone outside Council and the P.D. to take any action. None of us are law enforcement professionals or have any expertise in these matters. I am thankful our P.D. is headed by a local man who knows this community, knows many of the young people and knows his job. If there are needs in the P.D., let

the Chief identify them and request them through normal channels. Let's stay the course and let the Chief and all of our officers know we have their backs.

Jim”

DISCUSSION ABOUT RECENT SHOOTINGS

Police Chief Darwin Williams explained that when there is a crime, the details must be put together and that type of information cannot be released when it is an ongoing investigation. He added that the Police Department knows the identity of the main individuals involved in the recent shooting incidents; however, he could not divulge that information in open session. He discussed that the Police Department was working to determine the factors and reasons for the recent incidents. He added that he would be happy to discuss the recent incidents with all of Council or one-on-one.

Mayor Willis thanked Chief Williams.

POSSIBLE NEW INITIATIVES TO REDUCE GUN VIOLENCE

Mayor Pro Tem Evans requested to know if there were any new initiatives or budget items so that more successful events such as “Operation Blackout” held May 1-2, 2020 could be held.

The City Manager explained that in the seven (7) years that he has been with the City, every initiative that Chief Williams has submitted to him has been presented and approved by Council. The first initiative was the 10 tsunami cameras which were then increased for a total of 15.

Upon question by Councilmember Rainer, Chief Williams explained that the only additional expense from “Operation Blackout” was overtime. He added that some officers tried to volunteer without pay.

Councilmember Evans stated that she wanted to let Chief Williams know that Council supports him and the Police Department, and to let citizens know that City Council cares about citizens. Citizens want to know what was happening with the recent shootings.

Chief Williams explained that society wants to hear about everything; however, in the law enforcement area, information cannot be shared about ongoing investigations.

The City Manager explained that if the Mayor or a Councilmember wanted to meet with him, or with him and the Police Chief, to request a meeting. He reiterated that information concerning ongoing investigations should not be released.

PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION OF POLICE DEPARTMENT BUDGET

Mayor Pro Tem Evans explained that she had asked for the draft Police Department budget in the event Council wanted to do something different.

Upon question by Mayor Pro Tem Evans, Chief Williams stated that the only extra expense from “Operation Blackout” was overtime pay for a few officers. He added that it was the Police Department’s goal to get the bad off the streets. Sometimes it takes up to a year and a half to develop a suspect for a homicide.

Upon questions by Mayor Pro Tem Evans, Chief Williams explained that the four units involved in “Operation Blackout” were: Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, the Scotland County Sheriff’s Department, and the Highway Patrol along with the Laurinburg Police Department. He discussed the mutual aid agreement with various law enforcement agencies. He further explained that this event was planned by his department and the other agencies were invited to participate.

Upon question by Councilmember Garby, Chief Williams explained that he and his staff were working on a program such as “Crimestoppers”.

Upon question by Councilmember Rainer, Chief Williams explained that the Police Department was grateful for the allies in the community and needed citizens to help with providing information.

ADJOURN

Motion was made by Councilmember Adams to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Rainer, and carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7:21 p.m.

James T. Willis, Mayor

Jennifer A. Tippet, City Clerk