

**CITY OF LAURINBURG
CITY COUNCIL RETREAT
FEBRUARY 26, 2011
DIANE HONEYCUTT CENTER (RCC)
ROOM 130
600 MCLEAN STREET, LAURINBURG, NC
8:00 A.M.**

Minutes

The City Council of the City of Laurinburg reconvened its regular meeting of February 22, 2011, recessed on that date until February 25, 2011, and reconvened and recessed on that date until this date and time, February 26, 2011 at 8:00 a.m., in Room 130 of the Diane Honeycutt Center located at 600 McLean St., Laurinburg, North Carolina with the Honorable Matthew Block, Mayor, presiding. The following Councilmembers were present: Herbert M. Rainer, Jr., Thomas W. Parker, III, Kenton Spencer, and Joy Ellison. Councilmember Curtis B. Leak was absent.

Also present were Edward F. Burchins, City Manager, and Dolores A. Hammond, City Clerk.

In attendance also was Margaret Henderson with the School of Government-Chapel Hill, NC.

Mayor Block reconvened the meeting at 8:09 a.m.

Mayor Block stated that the first item on the agenda is to prioritize the items Council would like to address.

Councilmember Spencer stated that the Laurinburg/Maxton Airport should be the first item of discussion.

Mayor Block explained that there was a consensus among Councilmembers to discuss the Laurinburg/Maxton Airport.

Councilmember Parker explained that the Airport Commission had met to discuss the proposed paving of the runway. He stated that the airport is in need of one-half million dollars in the form of a bridge loan to match a State grant to pave the runway. He explained that there is some fear that the North Carolina Department of Transportation (DOT) money will be cut unless the Airport Commission can show that it has a match for the grant that DOT will provide.

Councilmember Spencer reiterated Councilmember Parker's concern.

Councilmember Parker explained that if the airport is considered part of the County's economic assets then the match for the grant is a viable investment.

Councilmember Parker motioned that the City of Laurinburg fund the Laurinburg/Maxton Airport Commission \$500,00.00 for the purpose of it being a match in the form of a bridge loan until appropriate financing can be obtained on behalf of the Airport.

He then stated that the airport may not ever need to use the money, but the match is required in order to obtain the grant from DOT.

The City Manager stated that a letter needs to be sent to the Airport Commission that the City of Laurinburg certifies that it will match the grant in the amount of \$500,000.00.

Councilmember Rainer seconded the motion, and it unanimously carried.

A discussion ensued regarding the loan, and there was consensus that the City Manager and the City Attorney collaborate with the Laurinburg/Maxton Airport Commission Attorney to research and draft details of the loan for Council review.

The City Clerk stated that she is Scotland County's representative on the Transportation Coordinating Committee (TCC) for the Lumber River Council of Governments. She explained that the North Carolina Department of Transportation State Improvement Plan (STIP) beginning 2012 is being discussed. She asked Council if there are any projects that they would like submitted to the Committee for discussion.

She informed Council that the widening of US Highway 401 North and South is on the current plan as well as the widening of US Highway 15/501 (Aberdeen Road).

She explained that the pedestrian bridge/walkway over US Highway 74 near Wal-Mart was not included in the current STIP. She informed Council that, if they would like this project included, Council should formally request it.

There was discussion on projects to be submitted.

Motion was made by Councilmember Spencer, seconded by Councilmember Rainer, and unanimously carried to submit the following projects to the TCC: A pedestrian bridge/walkway over US Highway 74 near Wal-Mart; a turning lane at the Wal-Mart location that would come out at Wal-Mart near the gas pumps onto Highway US 401 South By-pass; a crosswalk on US Highway 401 South By-pass at the intersection of US Highway 15/401 South By-pass; and a stop light at the intersection of West Boulevard and Turnpike Road.

Councilmember Rainer stated that, in light of present economic conditions and the price of gas, during the early morning hours stop lights should be changed to caution instead of drivers having to come to a complete stop.

The City Manager stated that he had contacted DOT last year and that they were not interested in putting the lights on caution. He explained that if Council wanted him to pursue this issue once again, he would be glad to do so.

The City Manager was directed to provide Council a report at the next meeting on stoplights where signalization could be changed to caution.

Councilmember Parker stated that he needed to leave around 10:00 a.m. and would be back around noon.

Mayor Block then asked Council how they would like to begin the meeting. His suggestion was that the City Manager give an update on his projects.

Councilmember Parker stated that he would like to discuss the succession plan and how it should be addressed.

The City Manager stated that he would bring the information back to Council at the next Council work session which would be in March.

Councilmember Spencer stated that he feels that Council does not give the City Manager a clear scope of the projects they direct him to pursue. He explained that he feels that Councilmembers need to give the City Manager clear instructions along with a timeline for feedback, formalization, and presentation to Council for approval. He then explained that he feels that is why a number of issues keep coming back to Council to revisit. He further stated that he would like to see projects completed before the City Manager is given more projects to complete.

The City Manager stated that his assumption is that, if Council has approved an item for the budget, unless specifically stated, his timeline is to complete it within the budget year.

Councilmember Spencer explained that during the year items come up that require immediate attention and sometimes other issues get delayed until they are once again brought up.

The City Manager stated that staff had approached other entities about their succession planning, but most of them do not have such a program.

Councilmember Ellison stated that the Town of Carrboro is working on a succession plan.

The City Manager stated again that he would have information on succession planning at Council's next agenda workshop which will be held March 15, 2011.

Ms. Henderson stated that in order to wrap up this portion of the conversation, there is a clear expectation that Council wants timely accountability, variety and updates from the City Manager.

Ms. Henderson then stated that the initial point is what issues Council wants to discuss during this meeting.

Ms. Henderson directed a question to the City Manager on issues he feels he needs to begin preparing a budget to present to Council in the upcoming months.

The City Manager stated that he would like to discuss personnel.

Mayor Block stated that he would like to discuss items from the citizen input session.

Councilmember Ellison stated that she would like to discuss staffing issues and street lighting.

Mayor Block then stated that he would like to discuss downtown issues.

Councilmember Rainer stated that he would like to discuss infrastructure issues and partnerships with non-profits.

Councilmember Parker stated that he would discuss issues that Council deems necessary.

Councilmember Spencer stated that he would like to discuss youth issues.

Mayor Block stated that he feels that personnel is the most important issue. This is because of the change in leadership that has taken place over the past year and one-half.

Councilmember Rainer stated that he would like to start with the list from the citizen input session.

Following a brief discussion, because of the length of the list, there was a consensus to look at another time to discuss the citizen input list.

There was then a consensus that the City Manager give a brief update on the federal and state government.

The City Manager explained that the change in leadership at the State level would probably impact local governments, but it is still early in the State budget process. He also stated that the federal impacts of government would hit the counties more than municipalities.

He commented on state sales tax, franchise taxes, video sweepstakes, and the assumption that the North Carolina Department of Transportation may be heavily cut.

He continued his update on state and federal government and potential revenue streams that the City could enact that are already in place such as privilege tax fees for local businesses. He explained that in some cities there is a vehicle tax charged to citizens.

He also explained that professionals and real estate businesses are not charged a privilege tax. He stated that he is not advocating for these changes but thought that Council might like to consider new revenue streams for the City.

A discussion then ensued on the internet sweepstakes law.

Councilmember Parker suggested that the City Manager research the City of Lumberton regarding its internet sweepstakes fees.

The City Manager and Council discussed other issues introduced by the State and brief discussions were held on the State budget and potential cuts.

A discussion then ensued on the City's electric fund and its debt service to Electricities of North Carolina.

Councilmember Ellison stated that Council should focus on items that the City has control over such as revenue streams, generating money for recycling and annexation.

The City Manager explained that staff and the City Attorney are drafting agreements with utility entities such as Time Warner and AT&T because they attach their equipment to City poles. This will provide a revenue stream to the City.

Councilmember Rainer suggested that the special tax district be extended to include the South Main Street area from the set district towards Harris Teeter to the stop light on Highway 15-401 South and then towards the Wal-mart area.

Councilmember Ellison stated that she would like to see the City look at annexing areas into the City.

The City Manager explained the annexation process and stated that there is legislation in the General Assembly dealing with annexation.

Councilmember Ellison stated that she would also like to consider generating revenue from the City's recycling program. She explained that there is no revenue received for recycling.

Mayor Block asked Council to consider annexation areas into the City.

Councilmember Parker motioned not to consider any annexation at this time.

Councilmember Spencer seconded the motion, and it received the following votes:

Ayes: Parker, Spencer, Rainer

Nays: Ellison

Councilmember Ellison motioned that the City Manager research how the City can generate revenue for its recycling program including new revenue streams from the

collection of metals and other materials the City collects. Councilmember Rainer seconded the motion and it unanimously carried.

Councilmember Parker stated that, in looking at ways to save money for the City, it will be in personnel not in revenue streams. There needs to be a more efficient government in order to save money.

PERSONNEL

Mayor Block stated that there are two major items dealing with personnel that the City Manager has suggested. The first is restructuring staff and the downtown area. He stated that Councilmember Ellison has also suggested the position of a public information officer.

Councilmember Ellison stated that she also would like to have more employee input into the succession plan and how to become more efficient.

Councilmember Ellison also stated she would like to have an employee survey conducted to learn how employees feel about their working conditions, etc. She then stated that there have not been any evaluations of employees for the past two years or any pay raises. She feels as though Council should not make policy without getting input from employees. She also stated that, with the discussion of restructuring of the organization, buy-in from the employees would be beneficial to everyone.

The City Manager stated that the entire personnel system needs to be evaluated including pay scale, policies, job descriptions, compliance with laws, and merit plan.

A discussion ensued on the last pay and classification plan that was conducted in 2006.

Councilmember Rainer stated that OSHA standards should be investigated to ensure that City employees are following safe working conditions.

The City Manager stated that there needs to be an objective viewpoint regarding City employees in pay and classification as well as safety standards.

Councilmember Ellison stated that there has been discussion about the Employment Security Commission and the fact that it conducts employee surveys at no charge. She also stated that upon completion of the survey, the data can be turned over to whoever conducts the proposed pay and classification plan.

Councilmember Ellison motioned that the City Manager authorize the Human Resources Department to contact the Employment Security Commission (ESC) and find out when they can conduct a survey of City employees. Councilmember Rainer seconded the motion. The motion was tied as the voting was as follows:

Ayes: Ellison, Rainer

Nays: Parker, Spencer

There was more discussion on the process. Councilmember Ellison stated that safety questions should be included in the survey.

Mayor Block voted yes in order to break a tie in favor of the ESC conducting a survey of City employees.

Councilmember Spencer stated that at this point he feels that Council has not discussed fully what they want to achieve.

The City Manager stated that he would like to develop a scope of review and get quotes from companies to take a look at how to update the City's system. He stated that this would also include how the City can automate some aspects of the system in order to do things like conduct evaluations more effectively and efficiently.

Councilmember Parker suggested that the proposed survey be conducted and the results brought back to Council in order to take the second step of a proposed pay and classification pay.

Councilmember Rainer stated that he does not believe that an employee survey such as described by Councilmember Ellison would affect a proposed pay and classification plan.

The City Manager stated that he recommends a time line in order to conduct a proposed pay and classification plan. He commented that he did not think an employee survey would be a negative for the employees.

Motion was made by Councilmember Rainer and seconded by Councilmember Ellison that the City Manager bring back to Council a proposal plan for a consulting company to conduct a personnel analysis.

The City Manager stated that he would bring a time plan to Council on a proposed pay and classification plan at the agenda workshop in either March or April.

Councilmember Parker stated that he needed to leave the meeting at this point (10:00 a.m.) but would return around Noon.

Motion was made by Councilmember Rainer, seconded by Councilmember Spencer, and unanimously carried to allow Councilmember Parker to be excused from the meeting.

Council recessed at 10:00 a.m.

The meeting resumed at 10:10 a.m.

The City Manager explained that one key department head has retired and that another will retire in July. This will present opportunities to save money or restructure the organization.

He stated that last year the mood of Council was attrition and that, if Council is still in that same mood, there are opportunities to save money and create other opportunities for employees when restructuring the organization.

He then discussed a new organizational structure to line up responsibilities where people report and the job function is under the correct person. This new perspective would give people different tasks, and the timing of the proposed pay and classification would allow this to happen.

He also explained that the City needs another technology person and a part time code enforcement officer.

The City Manager stated that Bill Peele, Zoning Officer, is retiring July 1, 2011. He informed Council that he would like Brandi Deese, Zoning Officer, to take his position and then consider hiring another zoning officer.

The fire department is another issue to be addressed in that a full time fire chief has been suggested with an in house promotion if qualifications are met. He stated that he feels that more training needs to be implemented in the managerial aspect of the Fire Department.

Both the personnel in the Fire Department and the job descriptions would need to be reviewed before a recommendation can be made.

The City Manager stated that he would have some decisions and options for Council to review regarding the fire department and restructuring during the budget process. He explained that he has plans to propose an engine company but will discuss it more during the budget process.

Mayor Block commented on the City's website and stated that would like to see a living, breathing vibrant site. He stated that if a public information officer position is approved that this person could also dedicate time to development of the website.

The City Manager stated that the updated website should be completed in the next couple of weeks. He explained that Jenny Tippet is working on the site and that he would like to see her continue in that position.

Upon question by Councilmember Rainer, the City Manager stated that the webmaster would not fall under the technology department but that he is looking at assigning the GIS position under the technology department as well as adding another technician. The City Manager stated that he would email the updated website for Council to review.

There was a consensus that the restructuring of the City's organization, proposed pay and classification plan, and other options that would impact the budget be discussed more during the budget process.

Ms. Henderson stated that during the Management Team retreat it was stated that, if Council spoke with one voice instead of fragmented instructions to the staff, that would make the most positive impact on employees work performance. She then stated that based upon conversations with the Management Team, Councilmembers appear to be directing staff members in their duties.

Ms. Henderson explained that in most jurisdictions requests for information are channeled through the City Manager.

The City Manager stated that he will bring this concern to the full Council if concerns of this nature continue.

Ms. Henderson stated that all levels of instruction should be directed to the City Manager.

Councilmember Ellison asked if questions should be directed to the City Manager.

Ms. Henderson stated those should also be directed to the City Manager.

Councilmember Spencer then explained his perception of the concern about questions and/or instructions being directed to the City Manager.

The consensus among Council is that if there is direction from a Councilmember to staff that the City Manager bring the situation to their attention for discussion.

Councilmember Spencer stated that Council had previously discussed putting in a suggestion box for City employees. He then stated that he feels that this is an item that can be implemented immediately.

Following discussion, motion of Councilmember Spencer, seconded by Councilmember Rainer, was unanimously carried for the City Manager to initiate within 30 days an employee suggestion box.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Councilmember Rainer stated that the street lights in the City should be brighter. He explained that if the special tax district is expanded that would be a way of generating more dollars for lighting. He also stated that in the City Limits there are lots of trees which block lighting along the streets, and this issue should be addressed.

Councilmember Ellison stated that before she became a Councilmember lighting in the City was a concern for her.

The City Manager explained the City requirements for lighting as well of the North Carolina Department of Transportation's requirement for distances in street lighting.

The City Manager stated that the City could look at more energy efficient lighting that could be more beneficial to the City.

The City Manager stated that he would verify with staff whether City policy requires that adding more lighting come before Council.

There was consensus among Councilmembers that the City Manager bring back to Council what it would take to make the City brighter.

The City Manager stated that he will bring to Council what the lighting standards are currently and some options for Council to consider.

Councilmember Rainer mentioned a new light had been installed in the Sherbrooke area, and the City Manager stated he would investigate what type light it is and inform Council.

Councilmember Ellison stated that the City should consider the lighting in residential areas before lighting the business areas is addressed.

Upon discussion about lighting the interchanges and exits, the City Manager stated that there have been conversations with the Scotland County Tourism Development Authority (TDA) about lighting the interchanges. He stated that the discussion was concerning lighting on three Highway 74 interchanges and that the cost would be approximately \$500,000.00. He informed Council that the TDA had sent a letter to the City indicating that they would contribute \$100,000.00 towards the proposed project.

The City Manager stated that he informed TDA that the proposed project would be for Council to consider.

Councilmember Spencer stated that the entrance signs into the City had also been discussed.

The City Manager stated that this project is underway and that this information would be presented to Council for consideration. He then stated that there is \$5,000.00 budgeted for the upgrade of entrance signs.

A discussion ensued concerning Broadband. The City Manager stated that all contracts have been signed and revenue concerns have been addressed.

Following questions about commercial broadband, the City Manager stated that Clarity Communications, with which the City has contracted, has had discussions with the hospital and the college and that there have also been discussions about the Wagram area.

The City Manager informed Councilmembers that the automated meter reading bids will be opened March 1, 2011 and then brought to Council for discussion and direction.

The City Manager also explained that the City needs to develop a new Capital Improvement Plan and needs to include the description of what the improvement is instead of just numbers. He stated that he hopes the issue can be addressed in September and addressed in a three to five year plan.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH NON PROFITS

Councilmember Rainer stated that when he became a Councilmember the City was funding three non-profit organizations. He explained that the funding has now been eliminated. He then stated that groups still appear before Council requesting funding. He stated that at some time this issue needs to be re-addressed by Council. He indicated that there are organizations that have events that bring people into the City and that Council should consider whether to help those organizations. He specifically mentioned the Storytelling Arts Center in the downtown area.

Ms. Henderson informed Council that the School of Government-Chapel Hill has information on funding for non-profits and would be happy to send this information to the City Manager to share with Council.

Councilmember Spencer stated that he was in favor of Councilmember Rainer's request. He suggested that an arts council advisory board could be formed in order to present to Council its recommendations for consideration.

Councilmember Ellison also addressed non-profits. She stated that she felt that a policy should be considered in determining funding for non-profits if Council chooses to revisit the funding of these organizations.

Councilmember Rainer suggested that the City Manager bring information regarding non-profits to the Council.

Councilmember Spencer then suggested that because there is so much with which Council has tasked the City Manager that Council research the School of Government's website on non-profits which is www.sog.unc.edu. He added that on the publication page there is information regarding non-profit organizations.

YOUTH

Councilmember Spencer updated Council on the City of Laurinburg Youth Council. He stated that the Youth Council has discussed short term strategies to present to Council. He stated that one of the initiatives the Youth Council has been considering is bringing back a resource center which at one time was sponsored by the Laurinburg Housing Authority. The Housing Authority lost its federal funding because of budget cuts. He informed Council that he has met with Nancy Walker, Laurinburg Housing Authority

Executive Director, to discuss upgrading a current location on Stewartsville Road which is owned by the Housing Authority. This facility would house a computer lab, a library, and other educational tools for Laurinburg's youth.

A discussion ensued on the Council's participation in opportunities for the City's youth during the summer season.

Councilmember Spencer then discussed recreational and educational opportunities for the City's youth (13 & over) that the Council could consider.

Councilmember Rainer stated that the City is not in the recreational business but is in the quality of life business for its citizens.

Councilmember Spencer stated that he had received an email from Stuart Blount, Assistant Superintendent of Scotland County Schools, stating the he will discuss a summer program about leadership with the Youth Council. He also stated that they are looking at partnering with the Laurinburg/Scotland County Chamber of Commerce to create a more detailed shadowing program for youth.

Councilmember Spencer concluded by stating that he is in the process of working on a budget to bring to Council for consideration during the budget process.

LAURINBURG DOWNTOWN AREA

Councilmember Rainer stated that most of the merchants do not own the buildings in which they operate. He continued by stating that historically as the shopping centers have increased utilization of the downtown area has declined.

Council decided that before discussion continues they should take a short break.

The meeting recessed at 11:35 a.m.

The meeting resumed at 11:40 a.m.

Councilmember Spencer stated that the Laurinburg Downtown Revitalization Corporation (LDRC) is tasked with the revitalization of the downtown area and he feels that they do not have enough funding to be efficient.

He discussed whether or not the City should provide more funding and opened the floor for discussion about Council's role in LDRC.

The City Manager stated that he feels that LDRC feels as if its role is to promote festivals and events in the downtown area to help increase sales.

He discussed the downtown summit which was held with Council and the proposed projects such as a Main Street Program and the North Carolina Downtown Development

Association. He stated that he is a member of LDRC and that they would discuss these items at their retreat in March.

He also stated that LDRC would like the City to consider partial funding for a report from the North Carolina Downtown Association regarding the downtown area and what direction it could take.

He then reported that LDRC is developing an agreement with the owners of the property behind the old Market Furniture Building to maintain the parking area located there.

Councilmember Rainer stated that he feels the downtown area needs a large named business (an anchor store) to bring more people into the downtown area.

A discussion then ensued on LDRC, its limited funding, downtown parking, and the lack of a full time director.

Councilmember Ellison stated that she would like more to see more grants applied for through Community Development to help the downtown area.

Councilmember Rainer suggested that the City purchase property and offer rent free to an anchor store that would bring people into the downtown area.

A discussion continued on downtown development and a proposed study from the North Carolina Development Association.

No decision was made regarding the proposed study at this time.

Mayor Block asked Council if they would like to consider continuing a downtown summit to find out what the merchants would like to see happen in the area.

He explained that the purpose of the previous meeting was a planning session for the upcoming downtown summit.

Councilmember Rainer suggested that all property owners, those renting buildings for their businesses, and all stakeholders in downtown be invited to the summit if Council chooses to continue downtown discussions.

It was then stated that LDRC members, the Scotland County Economic Development Director, and a Laurinburg/Scotland County Chamber of Commerce member also be invited to attend the meeting.

Councilmember Parker arrived at 12:14 p.m.

At this point of the meeting, Councilmember Parker received a summary of the downtown area discussion.

Councilmember Parker stated the question is whether the City wants a viable downtown. He then stated that he feels the downtown summit is a good idea. He suggested a survey to find out if any of the downtown property owners, etc. are interested in having a summit. He then stated that he felt that 50 percent of the property owners live within a 25 mile radius.

Following further discussion, motion was made by Councilmember Spencer, seconded by Councilmember Parker, and unanimously carried to continue with the downtown summit.

The City Manager stated that he would coordinate the meeting with LDRC and develop a list of downtown stakeholders to present to Council.

Mayor Block discussed extending the special tax district that was suggested by Councilmember Rainer.

Following a lengthy discussion, Councilmember Rainer motioned that the City Manager look into the amount of additional revenue that would be generated by expanding the special tax district to include all of South Main Street, past the Mexican restaurant, then turning right at the stop light on US Highway 401 South By-pass to the stop light at West Boulevard with those revenues being restricted in terms of how they could be used.

Councilmember Parker seconded the motion and it carried with Councilmember Spencer casting the only dissenting vote.

Councilmember Rainer then suggested that the income from the special tax district could be used to offer incentives to property owners. The role of LDRC could be expanded to where they could offer loans to businesses for repairs, improvement of lighting etc. that would entice more customers and businesses in the area.

Councilmember Spencer explained that he opposes the proposal for a tax increase because of the economic times and the fact that it would take a toll on small business that would not benefit from the tax.

A discussion then ensued on building codes and inspections as part of the fire code.

The City Manager stated that the enforcement of the building codes and the inspections by the fire department regarding the fire code may result in the property owner having to make repairs to his/her building.

The conversation then centered on phone calls that Councilmembers may receive regarding the enforcement of City ordinances and fire codes.

Councilmember Rainer stated that discussion of the citizen input session should be had at a separate meeting because of the broad issues listed.

Mayor Block asked if Council would like to have a separate meeting to discuss issues listed during the citizen input session.

Councilmember Parker mentioned free WiFi.

The City Manager stated that there is Wi-Fi available now but that the City would like to discuss the service during broadband discussions.

Motion was made by Councilmember Spencer, seconded by Councilmember Rainer, and unanimously carried to table the citizen input session list for discussion at Council's March meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting adjourned at 1:02 p.m.

Matthew Block, Mayor

Dolores A. Hammond, City Clerk