

**CITY OF LAURINBURG
CITIZEN INPUT SESSION
MARCH 14, 2013
A. B. GIBSON CENTER
322 SOUTH MAIN ST.
LAURINBURG, NC
6:00 P.M.**

Minutes

The City Council of the City of Laurinburg held a special meeting March 14, 2013 at 6:00 p.m. at the A.B. Gibson Center located at 322 S. Main St., Laurinburg, NC with the Honorable Thomas W. Parker, III, Mayor, presiding. The following Councilmembers were present: Mary Jo Adams, Curtis B. Leak, Kenton T. Spencer and Andrew G. Williamson, Jr. Councilmember J.D. Willis arrived at 6:11 p.m.

Also present were Harold W. Haywood, Interim City Manager, and Jennifer A. Tippett, City Clerk. Department Head members present were: Cindy Carpenter, Finance Director; Kimothy Monroe, Interim Chief of Police; Amy Martin, Human Resources/Risk Management Director; Robert Ellis, Water and Wastewater Services Director; Stacey McQuage, Utilities Director; Robert Smith, Electric Distribution Director; Randy Gibson, Fire Chief; Brandi C. Deese, Planning and Development Director, and Tim Pierce, GIS Administrator. Also present was Benita Mullis, Administrative Support Assistant.

Mayor Parker called the meeting to order at 6:09 p.m. He stated that the purpose of the meeting is to obtain citizen input on how the City will operate beginning July 1, 2013.

The Invocation was given by Councilmember Spencer.

The Interim City Manager thanked the citizens for their interest and for attending you, important for developing budget and introduced Amy Martin, Human Resources/Risk Management Director; Cindy Carpenter, Finance Director; Robert Ellis, Water and Wastewater Services Director; Robert Smith, Electric Distribution Director; Brandi Deese, Planning and Development Director; Stacey McQuage, Utilities Director; Tim Pierce, GIS Administrator; Jenny Tippett, City Clerk; Randy Gibson, Fire Chief; Kimothy Monroe, Interim Police Chief.

The Interim City Manager explained that the goal for the Citizen Input Session is to obtain feedback and input regarding City Services. He added that the citizens' input is taken seriously when developing the budget for the upcoming Fiscal Year. He added that although the economy presented many challenges, with the community coming together, the City kept the tax rate steady and raised the solid waste rates only once in the past few years. He further added that the City has been successful in not increasing fees or taxes in order to continue providing essential services. He explained that the City had not been able to add a lot of new services over the last few years, but was staying with the basic

level of services by utilizing technology in the most effective ways possible. He then discussed the top 9 items from the 2012 Citizen Input Session as follows:

1. Install cameras in high crime areas to assist police

The City partnered with Laurinburg Housing Authority to obtain a grant to install several cameras around the City in the amount of \$221,000. The grant application and approval process is lengthy, but the cameras should be installed within the next several weeks. Prior to the grant application, representatives from the Laurinburg Housing Authority obtained the advice of the Police Department as to best placement of the cameras. Discussions have been held regarding possibly purchasing additional coverage.

2. Increase police staffing

The number of positions has been increased by one sworn officer who will begin in May. Unfortunately in 2012 and 2013 there was high turnover in the Department so we have struggled to remain at full staff. It is anticipated that the cameras will be installed by the end of this week.

3. Faith-based programs-rehabilitation/use community services

The City has not been approached by any faith-based organizations to partner in these type endeavors. The City is currently pursuing a Community Development Block Grant to improve the Newtown and Glen Acres neighborhoods; however, this is not a faith-based initiative.

4. Build on strengths we have and foster a positive attitude

Efforts have been made to increase positive information throughout the community and to promote pride in our community. The City and County are continually working together to collaborate and work together. He cited the recent ribbon cutting at the Small Business Innovation Center (SBIC) as one of the more successful efforts of the City and County working together.

5. Drains/flooding

The City continually evaluates drainage and flooding issues. Our Street Department cleans ditches utilizing temporary laborers and periodically cleans storm drainage lines. When we receive a complaint about an area, we investigate each complaint and take any action as needed that can be accommodated in the budget.

6. Litter clean-up/enforcement/use inmates to pick up litter/increase Adopt-a-Spot Program

Periodically the City uses inmate labor to pick up litter along major thoroughfares in the City and will continue to do so. Project was stalled but we hope to start again on

Monday. We also use current City staff as available, particularly before events in the community.

7. Pedestrian Bridge at Wal-Mart/West Blvd.

The cost of building such a pedestrian bridge is cost-prohibitive. The last estimate from the North Carolina Department of Transportation in 2011 was \$1.4 million.

8. Downtown lighting needs improvement

The City's Electric Department investigated retrofitting the current lights with better and brighter fixtures. This was cost-prohibitive. In order to properly light Main Street from Church to Bizzell Street, the City would have to rebuild all electrical wiring, poles and fixtures. The estimate in 2009 was \$444,000. NCDOT would have to approve this project as Main Street is a state-maintained road.

9. Building demolition-abandoned buildings

Since 2012 the City has been more aggressive in code enforcement for substandard buildings. From January 2012-December 2012 the City demolished 26 substandard properties, with 9 of these being demolished by the property owner. Thus far in 2013, the City has demolished 4, had 2 repaired by the owner, 1 donated to Habitat for Humanity for repair and will have 2 live burn training exercises for the Fire Department.

The 2012-2013 budget for demolition was \$30,000; however, in 2011-2012 approximately \$11,000 remained unspent. Therefore, Council approved a budget amendment taking the approximately \$11,000 from Fund Balance and appropriating it for additional substandard removal, making the total 2012-2013 demolition removal budget approximately \$41,000.

The Interim City Manager recognized Mrs. Amy Martin, Human Resources Director, as the facilitator for the evening.

Mrs. Martin explained that the purpose of the Input Session was to gather the participants' ideas and organize them so that if possible, the City could take action.

Discussions ensued at the tables from 6:19 p.m. until 6:46 p.m.

Mrs. Martin then asked each table to prioritize the top seven (&) items discussed at the table, elect a spokesperson and then voting on the top items will be conducted.

The following items were presented from the five (5) tables:

Improve appearance of the fronts of the buildings on Main Street.
Remove unsafe and unsalvageable buildings.
Manicure/edge curbs & sidewalks /right of way and trees in right of way on main thoroughfares.
Drainage issues on Church St.
Increased enforcement on leash law
Improvement of beautification services, decrease litter
Community litter awareness program in city and county
Improve cellular services, specifically 4g
Better business environment for new businesses
Provide assistance to downtown merchants with facelifts to buildings downtown
Planning or planting of more native trees
Creation of walking trails or outdoor recreation spaces
Recruitment of retail, restaurants or tourism efforts
Beautification of right-of-ways in annexed areas
Holes filled where boom trucks make holes
Improve lighting in areas that are dark-trouble shoot throughout the City
Downtown curbing needs to be improved
Median on Lauchwood needs to be improved near hospital and water plant
Ditch at Lauchwood needs to be cleaned regularly – a lot of trash
Community activity signs need to be addressed – Churches, non-profits, etc. as there is no way to know about events.
Remove excess dirt when installing light poles instead of mounding
Stop light on blue farm needs to be set as regular stop light as permanent light.
Clean up post office inside and out and do beautification around it. Encourage them to clean up.
Litter problem in city and county
Animal control-feral cats. Enforce ordinances that are in existence.
Recruit restaurants
More social events downtown
More sidewalks
Youth center in the City

The participants then voted for their top choices utilizing the four (4) green dots they were provided upon registering.

Mayor Parker stated that Council and City staff want to respond to the issues brought up by the participants, and that some are already being worked on. He encouraged the citizens to contact staff, himself or any member of Council with any issues. He added that the City is trying to move from being a good city to a great city. He thanked the citizens for attending. He further added that the information gathered would be published.

Mrs. Tonia Stephenson, President of the Laurinburg-Scotland County Area Chamber of Commerce, explained that as a new resident, she thought the City was a great city.

Mr. Charles Parker expressed concern about the litter and trash problem in the City and County.

Mayor Parker explained that initiatives were underway between local churches, the Chamber of Commerce and the City to clean up the area.

Reverend Howard Whitehurst commented that he always receives excellent and immediate response from City staff.

Mr. Kenny Bethea stated that the Youth Center was very important to him because he felt that the youth in Laurinburg needed to know how valued they were by the City.

Mayor Parker thanked everyone for attending and participating. He explained that when Council works on the budget, it is the citizen's budget. He further explained that it is Council's job to balance the wishes of the citizens with the available funding. He concluded by stating that Council does its best to keep taxes down while also delivering the services the citizens desire.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Councilmember Spencer, seconded by Councilmember Leak, and unanimously carried to adjourn.

The meeting adjourned at 7:26 p.m.

Thomas W. Parker, III, Mayor

Jennifer A. Tippett, City Clerk