



**Town Council
Budget Workshop Meeting Minutes
April 21, 2025, at 1:00 PM**

Mayor O'Cain called the Budget Workshop Town Council Meeting to order at 1:00 pm on April 21, 2025, in person at Town Hall, 441 White Pine Drive, Laurel Park, NC 28739

The following attended in person at Town Hall, 441 White Pine Drive, Laurel Park, NC 28739

- Mayor O'Cain
- Commissioner Bonnema
- Commissioner Bridges
- Commissioner Banta
- Town Manager Reeves
- Assistant to the Town Manager/Zoning Administrator Hollis
- Town Clerk Banks
- Finance Officer Kidd
- Police Chief Trotter
- Public Works Director Johnson
- Parks Technician Hensley
- E. Eaves

The following were absent:

- Public Works Pearce
- Mayor Pro Tem Hansen

Mayor O'Cain said to forgo the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of the Consent Agenda

Mayor Carey O'Cain called for a motion to approve the agenda. Commissioner Bridges made the motion to approve the agenda. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Review of the FY26 Budget

Town Manager Reeves stated this is the second draft of the FY26 operating budget. We went over the initial figures back in February and since then we will be fine tuning some capital expenses and additional revenue information that has been provided by the county and state.

Revenues

Mayor O'Cain stated the big-ticket items are property and sales tax. Town Manager Reeves stated for sales tax they have projected \$1,000,000 and that is a safe number. The Powell Bill line is \$125,000 and per Finance Officer Kidd that is a sound figure, but she has not received the projected figure for this upcoming year. Mayor O'Cain asked about interest earned, he said we are projecting \$115,000. Finance Officer Kidd said she spoke with a representative from North Carolina Capital Management, and he gave her a percentage on what they projected it to look like and the \$115,000 is based off the projection he gave her. Mayor O'Cain asked why we are bumping NC utilities franchise tax actual of \$168,997 through March to \$144,166 and wanted to know if that made sense. Commissioners Bonnema, Banta and Bridges stated that utility costs have gone up.

Mayor O'Cain asked when the SBA agreement is up, Town Manager Reeves said she believes the contract ends in 2026. Town Manager Reeves stated at the Budget Retreat we bumped the legal fees from \$5,000 to \$10,000. Mayor O'Cain asked Town Manager Reeves and Finance Officer Kidd if they both felt comfortable with the projected income and they both said yes, and it is a conservative approach. It is April so if something drastic happens we still have time to adjust.

Assistant to the Town Manager/Zoning Administrator Hollis spoke about the building/zoning fee schedule and said not much has changed but he has found where we were not charging fees and there are some cost changes there as well. Starting off we need to change some of the wording to simplify and make it easier to understand as well as the fees. Mayor O'Cain stated that for storm water, Pro-Tem Hansen had said previously we needed to up that by \$25.00 dollars. Mayor O'Cain suggested increasing that from \$5.00 to \$10.00 per month.

Town Council

Town Manager Reeves said the figures are the same after updating them from the Budget retreat. Legal services were originally \$5,000 and increased to \$10,000. The stipend originally was \$18,000. The training line is \$1,500. Finance Officer Kidd stated we are way over budget this year for the State of The Town Dinner, which was budgeted for \$3,000 and \$5,000 was spent. Finance Officer Kidd asked if they wanted to increase that from \$3,000 to \$5,000 and Mayor O'Cain said yes. Commissioner Banta asked if we could still do the Appreciation Dinner and Finance Officer Kidd advised there is \$3,900 allocated for that and as of March 31, 2025, nothing had been spent from that line item.

Administration

Town Manager Reeves and Finance Officer Kidd said they believe the formula for salaries appears to be incorrect and they will look into that. Compensatory pay was doubled due to having two hourly employees in Town Hall and part of the salary wage adjustments is switching Laura in Parks from part-time to full-time, which would drop the part-time salary from \$30,000 to \$0 in parks. Commissioner Bonnema asked if the salary increases were included and Town Manager Reeves said yes. Town Manager Reeves said as of right now Merit and COLA combined of 6% is my pitch. With a 4% COLA and up to 2% for merit. Other municipalities in the county are around a 3% COLA and doing different merits with an average for the county

being close to the 3% which would equal 6% total. Going into the anticipated salary survey we can predict where we are going to fall so, we might as well start increasing salaries now. We are already short-staffed and Public Works and Police cannot recruit anyone, so we need to at least retain the employees we have.

Mayor O'Cain stated that under contracted services there was an actual through March of \$89,000 and we are projecting \$58,000 and Town Manager Reeves said bringing on Bronwyn Burleson was an unanticipated contract service. Commissioner Banta said this was offset by salaries. VC3 and Kaitland with Land of Sky are contracted as well.

Mayor O'Cain said the budget for FY25 was \$825,000 and for FY26 it would be \$844,000 and asked if we were comfortable with that. Town Manager Reeves pointed out that building maintenance was discussed at the Budget Retreat to have a needs assessment done for Town Hall and she does not have any approximate cost for that, however she will get quotes. Mayor O'Cain said there is money set aside for Town Hall. Mayor O'Cain said we need to decide whether we should make some abatement. Mayor O'Cain asked if we received any money for storm damage. Town Manager Reeves stated we have received money for wind damage but not for flood damage. Commissioner Bridges asked what the response was from the insurance company regarding the mold and mold remediation. Town Manager Reeves submitted photos of the roof boot leak and the report received through Mark Case's colleague and hopes to get support from them, but they do split it up between wind and flood damage and so far, they have only discussed wind damage, and she is waiting to hear back about the water damage. Town Manager Reeves said due to Rhododendron Park being in a floodplain we are completely on our own. Commissioner Banta would like an estimate to repair Town Hall. Town Manager Reeves said she would make a few phone calls and get quotes. Mayor O'Cain, Commissioners Banta and Commissioner Bridges would like to get three quotes on what it would cost to get the building back to pre-storm condition. Mayor O'Cain said depending on what it would cost to repair Town Hall and if they decided to go that route, he would also look at the cost of renting three doublewides for staff to work in until repairs are complete. Town Manager Reeves advised The Town Council that the NCLM will no longer be offering Dental and Vision, insurance and Finance Officer Kidd and Town Clerk Banks have been checking into replacement coverage through the Hilb Group, and it looks like we will be in good shape.

Workers' Comp Claims

Town Manager Reeves said there was a minor claim in Public Works in January, and it was very minor.

Police

Town Manager Reeves said Erich Junger was recently hired full-time and they still have one full-time position and now one part-time vacancy. At the Budget Retreat they increased that part-time salary originally at \$10,000 but pitched at \$30,000 and we put \$40,000 depending on certifications. Police Chief Trotter was asked if she felt that was appropriate and she said if you go by surrounding areas without comparing apples to oranges, we would still be behind in pay. Commissioner Bridges said she believes they should be around \$25- \$26 dollars per hour. Mayor

O'Cain asked what it would take to get you to that \$25-\$26. Chief Trotter said some of the Police Officers and Public Works employees have the longest tenure at Laurel Park with a few of them being here 10 years or more. Commissioner Bridges stated she believes someone that has been here 10 years or more should be making \$28-\$30 per hour and could go to another agency making closer to \$40 per hour easily. Finance Officer Kidd said that is where the pay study would be beneficial. On the capital outlay Mayor O'Cain asked if she was okay with the replacement of police vehicles. Police Chief Trotter said she was not worried about that since she just got two new vehicles. Town Manager Reeves included 2 AED's, 4 radios, 2 vests, 2 rifles, 8 handguns, dispatch services through the city and 3 flock cameras which were discussed at the Budget Retreat.

Public Works

Mayor O'Cain asked Johnson how he felt about salaries and wages. Johnson said they are lower than Hendersonville Public Works and feels that contributes to why they cannot hire anyone and stated he has had a few applicants, but they have not been very good applicants. Johnson said he has one full-time vacancy. Commissioner Banta asked what the starting wage is and Town Manager Reeves stated it is \$18.45 per hour. Mayor O'Cain asked Town Manager Reeves, Public Works Director Johnson and Parks Technician Hensley to discuss wages. He said he does not want to just increase wages, but he wants to be able to hire people and retain them. Town Manager Reeves said they had the capital outlay at \$35,000 and that included the Turbo Turf Brine Maker, Turbo Turf 300 Gallon Gas Sprayer, Myers Cross Conveyor. We removed the replacement Generator, Upgrade for the Bunkhouse Generator Transfer Switch but kept the On Demand Water Heater System for the Brine Maker. Public Works Director Johnson stated that he found an option that offered a better value. To maintain salt inventory, we may need to bump that amount from \$7,000 to \$10,000. Mayor O'Cain said to order the Myers Cross Conveyor even if we need to make a budget adjustment.

Parks

Mayor O'Cain suggested we look at hiring someone in an apprenticeship program or something of that nature for part time for summer help. Commissioner Bridges suggested someone in a master gardening also. Town Manager Reeves said that she, along with Parks Technician Hensley and Finance Officer Kidd, discussed increasing the Contracted Services budget from \$3,000 to \$10,000, and they also raised the Park Maintenance allocation from \$7,500 to \$15,000. Town Manager Reeves provided Town Council with an update on the Parks capital outlay. During the Budget Retreat, a portion of the capital outlay request was dedicated to constructing a garage at Rhododendron Park. However, she noted that now may not be the appropriate time for this project due to ongoing FEMA involvement, the debris removal process, necessary park repairs, and concerns about building within a floodplain. Instead, we have decided to prioritize the installation of a paver walkway and wheelchair access, as these improvements are expected to offer a quick return on investment."

Mayor O'Cain discussed the people running the sleeve under the railroad tracks at Daniel Drive. He said they will be spending about \$40,000-\$45,000 dollars on that and wanted to know if the

Town could contribute and that the sleeve will enhance the ability for other people to tie into it from Upper and Lower Laurel Park. The request came from Marti Rimbault who owns the property and is the one pushing to get the sleeve. Mayor O'Cain believes Laurel Park would benefit from this, and he would like to donate \$10,000 dollars but would not commit to any dollar amount until he saw what the deal was on paper. Commissioner Banta said he would need more justification before determining a figure. Commissioner Bridges said she is not opposed to it but did not think she could agree with \$10,000 dollars. Mayor O'Cain then stated if approached and asked, he would let them know we would consider participating but in a minor role.

FEMA

Mayor O'Cain inquired about how the Town plans to manage the \$11 million loan at this stage. While there is a possibility the loan could be converted into a grant, it currently is a loan. He emphasized the importance of communicating that the Town may be committing to annual payments of \$500,000 over the next 20 years to repay the loan. To meet this obligation, there may be a need to increase property taxes by six cents per year. Town Manager Reeves will be meeting today with Mr. Will Buie and WhithersRavenel for a discussion about FEMA repairs.

Resolution

Mayor O'Cain reported that during the last LGCCA meeting, the Town of Flat Rock introduced a resolution expressing opposition to state control over local matters such as annexation, zoning, accessory dwellings, and related regulations. He stated that he would like the Town of Laurel Park to adopt a similar resolution and send it to the state."

Motion Commissioner Bridges made a motion, Commissioner Bonnema seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Commission Banta wanted to make everyone aware that Representative Chuck McGrady and the NCDOT have monthly meetings and usually go around the state. He believes Representative McGrady will be coming to Hendersonville next month. Representative McGrady and NCDOT will be coming to Laurel Park to look at the roads and landslides.

Encroachment Agreement

Town Manager Reeves informed the Council that Jay Egolf has submitted an encroachment agreement to construct a retaining wall that would extend three feet into the right-of-way. She noted that Mr. Egolf has already signed the agreement and has been proactive in moving the project forward. However, approval from the Town Council is required to proceed. Mayor O'Cain expressed his support for approving the agreement

Motion Commissioner Bonnema made a motion to approve contingent on Attorney Sharon Alexander response. Commissioner Bridges seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor O’Cain moved to adjourn at 3:05pm. Commissioner Bridges made the motion; Commissioner Bata seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

ATTEST:

J. Carey O’Cain
Mayor

Stephanie Banks
Town Clerk/Deputy Tax Collector

Date