



**Town Council
Work Session Minutes
May 15, 2025 – 9:30 a.m.**

Mayor O’Cain called the Work Session Council Meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. on April 10, 2025, in person at Town Hall, 441 White Pine Drive, Laurel Park, NC 28739.

The following attended in person at Town Hall:

- Mayor O’Cain
- Commissioner Banta
- Commissioner Bonnema
- Town Manager Reeves
- Assistant to the Town Manager/Zoning Administrator Hollis
- Town Clerk Banks
- Finance Director Kidd
- Police Chief Trotter
- Public Works Director Johnson
- Public Works Pearce
- Don McIntyre

The following were absent:

- Commissioner Bridges
- Fire Chief Tim Garren

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Mayor O’Cain noted revisions to the agenda under New Business, to include discussion of the Mayor Pro Tem appointment. He also informed the Board that he has scheduled a phone meeting with Chris Burns at 10:30 a.m. to discuss FEMA emergency repairs

OLD BUSINESS

a) Update on Hurricane Helene Repairs and Contracts

We have signed contracts with WithersRavenel and WGLA. Town Manager Reeves will be meeting with Mr. Will Buie today and again on Monday to go over a plan. We heard about new options, but we do not know the legitimacy of them. Town Manager Reeves and Erin Hughes from Land of Sky met virtually yesterday with a Landslide Taskforce member from FEMA. We have invited Kirk to join the meeting with all the other representatives on Monday so that everyone is at the table. Commissioner Bonnema recommended that the Town begin conversations with potential creditors to explore financing options. Commissioner Banta agreed,

noting the Town faces approximately \$12 million in repairs. Given the slow pace of FEMA reimbursement, it could take 6 to 8 years to fully recover and restore infrastructure to pre-storm conditions. Mayor O’Cain asked Town Manager Reeves to contact the NCLM to find out what loans are available when this comes to pass and how qualify. Town Manger Reeves said she reached out and spoke with a representative at the NCLM and he sent a draft template for this type of RFP on dealing with these types of loans.

b) Approval of Watermark’s Ecusta Crossing Landscape Plan

This is not far behind the WithersRavenel signed contract. We do have an active contract. Right now, we are planning on shutting down Hebron Road where you would turn to go up to Poplar Lodge and up to Essowah Drive. As in shutting down we mean closing completely.

c) Approval of Watermark’s Ecusta Trail Landscape Plan

Town Manager Reeves said she is working with Land of Sky, Henderson County and Henderson County’s debris removal contractor SDR on a timeline to clean out Town parks.

Discussion of Town Commissioner Application Process

Town Manager Reeves stated we had a special meeting regarding this. After that special meeting was held, she and Assistant to the Town Manager/Zoning Administrator Hollis met virtually with Paige Dowling, Town Manager of Sylva NC. Town Manager Dowling said she has been through the Town Council procedure a few times and is well-versed in the process. Town Manager Reeves said she was a fountain of knowledge and gave us everything we needed and more. We now have a projected timeline for the current vacancy, what happens after someone is appointed temporarily and throughout the election process.

Town Managers Reeves stated she would meet with Town Clerk Banks after today’s Town Council meeting to go over that procedure. On June 12, 2025, applications will be distributed to the Town Council during the Work Session meeting and no candidates’ names will be shared prior to June 12, 2025. Following the regular meeting on June 17, 2025, the Town Council will vote by ballot to fill the vacancy, and the Town Clerk will announce the selected candidate on June 17, 2025, at that Regular Meeting. Town Manager Reeves stated there are no group interviews in this process. You are welcome to meet with the candidates as you see fit, but it is not an interview process as a body. If it was an interview process as a body, it would have to be held in a Public Open Meeting or The Town Council as a body would have to select one individual to represent the Council in those interviews for those candidates. Mayor O’Cain asked Town Manager Reeves to reach out SOG regarding the interview process as a group.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Approval of FY25 Audit Contract and Engagement Letter

Finance Officer Kidd said she received the engagement letter from RBC for the FY25 audit and the projected cost is \$24,600 and we budgeted \$25,000. We were already on their calendar and will start preliminary work June 9th and 10th of 2025 with the audit starting August 19th and 20th of 2025. Commissioner Bonnema ask it there was a price difference from last year and Finance Office Kidd advised it was about the same.

Motion: Mayor O’Cain called for a motion to approve. Commissioner Banta made the motion. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

B. Approval of Town Manager's Authority for Budget Adjustments

Town Manager Reeves explained how budget adjustment and budget amendment are different. The budget adjustment is within the department and Town Manager Reeves is requesting approval for her authority to make budget adjustments which will allow her to move money from line to line in the same departmental budget. She will not be adding or taking money away but shifting it from line to line which has already been allocated for that department.

Motion: Mayor O'Cain called for a motion to approve. Commissioner Bonnema made a motion. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

C. Discussion of Ecusta Trail Draft Amenities Agreement

Town Manager Reeves spoke with Christopher Todd and Marcus Jones and at this point because we do not know what Ecusta Trail will have at the end of the county's construction she thinks we should pause at the amenities agreement and let them know that we plan to write one and the city will do the same. Town Manager Reeves said the first part will be signing the MOU and sending them our \$15,000 for the fiscal year. Once we decide what amenities the Town wants placed there based on what is and is not there upon completion by the County then we can draft the Amenities Agreement.

D. Discussion of Town Hall Capital Reserve Fund Allocation

Finance Officer Kidd said they are proposing a \$325,000 transfer into the Capital Project Fund for Town Hall since we do not know what is going to happen with the Town Hall building. Town Manager Reeves said we do not have any quotes at this time to mitigate. Mayor O'Cain said the initial intent of that \$300,000 was design and still have about \$275,000 in there. Finance Officer Kidd the request was for an additional \$300,000 because they do not know what it will cost to repair the current Town Hall Building or to rebuild. Commissioner Bonnema said he would be concerned about moving money at this point from a perception standpoint when we are also talking about cashflow issues and once we decide to do something then that would be a more appropriate time. Town Manager Reeves will get three separate quotes for repairs. Mayor O'Cain said as a compromise, let's increase that \$275,000 up to \$350,000. Commissioner Bonnema agreed but does not know if there is a reason to do it right now.

E. Approval of One Day Liquor License for the July 5th Picnic

Motion: Mayor O'Cain called for a motion to approval. Commissioner Bonnema made a motion. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

F. Mayor Pro Tempore Vacancy Appointment

Mayor O'Cain said he would like to go ahead and make an appointment due to his traveling and needing someone to step in if needed. Due to longevity and knowing what all has transpired the choice needs to be Commissioner Banta. Commissioner Bonnema said he fully supports that, but he does not like that Commissioner Bridges is not here, and he would like to check with her first. Mayor O'Cain asked to add this for discussion on Tuesday May 20, 2025, at the Regular Meeting.

AGENDA REVIEW

Add Mayor Pro Tempore to Tuesday May 20, 2025

MAYOR AND COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Banta said during prior discussion regarding Police salaries and retention, he asked Police Chief Trotter what it would take to bring those levels up to a competitive nature and if she could get those figures together. Town Manager Reeves advised that had been done and in the most recent draft budget that was sent out last Friday included a 9% COLA for all permanent full-time employees excluding herself with no merit, they treat everything as a COLA and with that 9% it puts us in a very competitive place right now. It does not remove the salary survey that needs to be done and does not remove future adjustments that still need to be made but it is a jump in the right direction. Police Chief Trotter said she would not say very competitive but it is a step in the right direction. Town Manager Reeves said this has not been maintained and is not a 1-year or a 2-year fix.

Mayor O'Cain made a call to Chris Burns to discuss FEMA. FMA has said we cannot do certain repairs and expect reimbursement. The most current issue is Hebron Road, it is almost completely washed out and it is extremely dangerous, and someone is going to die. We are going to set up concrete barriers and close off Hebron Road. It was ran by Police Chief Trotter, Fire Chief Garren and we have no choice. Laurel Park owns 90% of The Town's Roads and we must get something done. Mayor O'Cain asked Burns to run this by Chuck Edwards. Burns stated he would be glad to but asked that Town Manager Reeves send him all the case numbers, and stated he still has three FEMA workers that are in the office, and he would speak to them about it.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor O'Cain with no further business he moved to adjourn. Commissioner Bonnema made a motion. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

ATTEST:

J. Carey O'Cain
Mayor

Stephanie Banks
Town Clerk/ Deputy Tax Collector

Date