



Town of Laurel Park
Town Council Work Session Minutes
August 14, 2025, at 9:30 AM
Town Hall- 441 White Pine Drive, Laurel Park, NC 28739

Attended:

- Mayor O’Cain
- Mayor Pro Tem Banta
- Commissioner Bridges
- Commissioner Bonnema
- Town Manager Reeves
- Town Clerk Banks
- Public Works Director Johnson
- WGLA Engineer Buie
- Edward Eaves
- Mark Morse

Call to Order

Mayor O’Cain called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

Approval of the Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda was made by Mayor Pro Tem Banta. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Old Business

Infrastructure Repairs Update

Town Engineer Buie provided an update on infrastructure repairs related to Hurricane Helene damage. He explained that the town had hired multiple consultants to assist with the recovery process, including the Land of Sky Regional Council to interface with FEMA, with WithersRavenel as the lead consultant for design of repairs, WGLA Engineering as a sub-consultant, and Bunnell Lammons Engineering (BLE) for geotechnical engineering. Watermark was hired to assist with parks.

Mr. Buie emphasized the importance of following proper procurement and contracting processes to ensure FEMA reimbursement. He noted that temporary work had already been completed, including emergency repairs on the Davis Mountain Road culvert providing access to Country Ridge, and temporary stabilization of slides and ditch repairs on Laurel Park Highway.

For permanent work, Mr. Buie explained that projects had been grouped strategically to exceed the FEMA threshold of \$1,037,000 that distinguishes between small and large projects. This approach was taken because large projects are reimbursed based on actual costs, while small projects are negotiated in advance, potentially limiting reimbursement if costs exceed estimates.

The grouped projects include:

- Culvert replacement project (highest priority)
- Hebron and Sunny Ridge
- Primary Roads (Hebron Road near Poplar Lodge, Roberts, and Laurel Park Highway)
- Davis Mountain Road
- Fairway Drive (including Panorama slide)
- Old Laurel, Orchard Circle, and Tower Circle

Mr. Buie outlined the complex process to progress to construction, including damage assessment, establishing scope of work, hydraulic and hydrology studies, codes and standards analysis, mitigation planning, design, and FEMA approval at each step. He indicated that the H&H study for the culvert project would be submitted to FEMA within two weeks but could not provide a definitive timeline for FEMA's review.

A potential positive development was revealed regarding DOT involvement. Mr. Buie explained that portions of Laurel Park Highway and Hebron Road were designated as "Federal Aid Routes," which could potentially involve the Federal Highway Administration rather than FEMA. Additionally, DOT had verbally indicated willingness to take the lead on the Davis Mountain Road design, though details were still being determined.

Town Manager Reeves elaborated on meetings with Chuck McGrady and DOT representatives, as well as a meeting with Representative Balkcom and other officials about potential state funding. Unfortunately, she reported that \$20 million in state flood mitigation funds cannot be used for FEMA-eligible projects.

Commissioner Bonnema inquired about potentially proceeding with designs without waiting for FEMA approval to expedite the process. Mr. Buie acknowledged this could be done but would involve risk if FEMA later rejected or modified the scope of work. Town Council discussed a potential approach of selecting certain projects to move forward independently while continuing to work through the FEMA process for others.

It was agreed that Mr. Buie would work with WithersRavenel and come back with recommendations for which projects might proceed with design work, excluding federal aid routes, to potentially accelerate the repair timeline.

Discussion of HWY64 Revised Proposal

The Town Council discussed a revised proposal from Watermark for the landscaping oversight on Highway 64 at a cost of \$9,500.

Commissioner Bridges asks about the major changes. Mayor O'Cain explained that the plans had been changed because many of the proposed trees were eliminated during DOT's review. The original concept had included a canopy effect, but DOT would not allow trees to be over 3.5-inch caliber. Additionally, Duke Energy had changed their requirements regarding tree locations.

Commissioner Bonnema asked about the budget line item for this expense, and Town Manager Reeves confirmed it would come from contract services in administration. The amount remained the same as previously budgeted, though the plans had changed.

Commissioner Bonnema inquired about details of the roundabouts, and Mayor O'Cain explained that those plans had been approved over a year ago as a separate detail. Town

Council agreed it would be beneficial to have Hunter Marks with Watermark present a comprehensive refresh on the entire project since it had been in development for over a decade and there were new Town Council members unfamiliar with past decisions.

Town Council also discussed that power lines would remain aerial as Duke had refused to bury them despite the town's efforts a decade ago to push for underground utilities.

Motion to approve the revised Watermark proposal for oversight of Highway 64 landscaping was made by Mayor Pro Tem Banta. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

New Business

Appointment of New Town Commissioner

Mayor O'Cain expressed appreciation for all the applicants, noting there were four candidates: Edward Eaves, Mark Morse, Bo Waddell, and Robert Fain. Mayor O'Cain commented that it was encouraging to see so many residents interested in serving.

Commissioner Bonnema, who had listened to the interviews via speakerphone, made a motion to appoint Mark Morse to fulfill the vacancy.

Motion to appoint Mark Morse as Town Commissioner was made by Commissioner Bonnema. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Mayor O'Cain congratulated Commissioner Morse and noted his extensive background with the town, including service on the Board of Adjustments, Planning Board, and Friends of Laurel Park. The swearing-in was scheduled for Tuesday.

Agenda Review

Town Council reviewed the agenda for the upcoming regular meeting. Town Council discussed adding the following items:

- Cell tower lease discussion
- Discuss dead trees
- Revisit the sewer "sphere of influence" agreement with Hendersonville, which expires at the end of next year. The council also noted that the Ecusta Crossing project was expected to be complete by October 18th according to the developer.

Mayor and Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Bonnema mentioned that the Sewer and Water Advisory Committee he serves on would be dissolving this winter, with a new committee being formed with four members from the county and four from the city. The new committee would not allow elected officials or employees. He suggested Moe Rainey as a potential representative for Laurel Park.

Commissioner Bridges inquired about whether there would be a Christmas tree lighting event this year, with concerns raised that last year's event was organized at the last minute.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn was made by Mayor Pro Tem Banta at 11:06 a.m. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

ATTEST:

Stephanie Banks
Town Clerk

Carey O'Cain
Mayor

Date: