



Town of Laurel Park
Town Council Regular Meeting Minutes
August 19, 2025, at 9:30 AM
Town Hall – 441 White Pine Drive, Laurel Park, NC 28739

Attended:

- Mayor O’Cain
- Mayor Pro Tem Banta
- Commissioner Bonnema
- Commissioner Morse
- Town Manager Reeves
- Police Chief Trotter
- Public Works Director Johnson
- Public Works Crew Leader Pearce

Absent:

- Fire Chief Garren
- Town Clerk Banks
- Commissioner Bridges

Call to Order

Mayor O’Cain called to order at 9:30am

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

Monte Kruger of 2007 Laurel Park Hwy discussed the Crystal Springs historic arch that was damaged by Hurricane Helene. Mrs. Kruger explained that her husband had organized community members to remove debris from Crystal Springs with the town's help. The town had offered to use a crane to remove the tree stump crushing the arch, but repairs to the arch itself would require additional funding. Friends of Laurel Park had offered to match donations up to \$1,000, but we need to raise \$6,000 total. Mrs. Kruger requested support from Town Council in sharing information about their GoFundMe campaign, noting that donations would go to a 501(c)(3) organization and be tax-deductible. She also mentioned they are working on getting three bids for a stonemason that they will be happy to bring before the Town Council if needed.

Mayor O’Cain expressed support for the project and emphasized the importance of hiring a qualified stonemason. The council requested that the low bidder be vetted by the council to ensure quality work, potentially through photos or having the stonemason attend a meeting.

John Pezzano of 158 Laurel Park Place inquired about potentially converting property next to Laurel Park Place into a park, offering to donate money toward the project. Mayor O’Cain explained that the town is currently overwhelmed with FEMA responsibilities and cannot allocate additional funds for such an acquisition at this time.

Philip Wiehe of 3676 Laurel Park Highway mentioned he and Commissioner Bridges have been working on the production of Godspell since shortly after Hurricane Helene last year. They have got a number of team members organized and would love to have this in Laurel Park and would like to have a tent like the one used for the Centennial Picnic, possibly a little smaller. It was mentioned to Mayor O’Cain about having it in Laurel Green Park or in The Village Shopping Center. Mr. Wiehe approached Friends of Laurel Park about their help but noted the Friends of Laurel Park had declined to serve as a financial pivotal point for the production.

Mike Erwin of 209 Rowland Drive expressed concern about invasive plant species following Hurricane Helene and encouraged continued support for invasive species removal efforts.

Virginia Erwin of 209 Rowland Drive thanked Public Works Director Johnson for starting work on Rowland Drive, Mrs. Erwin requested that council meeting minutes be posted on the website, and expressed concern about the condition of roads, particularly the main road to Jump Off, while understanding budget constraints due to FEMA.

Irwin Rawet 280 Rowland Drive raised concerns about the deteriorating condition of Rowland Drive, noting exposed pipes and crumbling infrastructure that could potentially collapse. Mayor O’Cain acknowledged the frustration with FEMA delays but explained that proceeding without FEMA approval could cost the town over \$15 million and result in significant tax increases. Mayor Pro Tem Banta and Town Manager Reeves also elaborated on FEMA.

Approval of the Agenda

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

Consent Agenda

July Monthly Zoning Report / Minutes: 7/14/25 and 7/15/25

Motion to approve the consent agenda. Made by Commissioner Bonnema. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Old Business

Ecusta Crossing Improvement Guarantee Extension

Town Manager Reeves explained that this project has been ongoing for some time, and the public infrastructure needs to be completed before the project can be finalized and Certificate of Occupancy issued. The improvement guarantee extension is required by state law, and the town has been renewing it regularly. Town Manager Reeves recommended extending it until February 2026, though the developer hopes to complete the project sooner, possibly by late October 2025.

Mayor O’Cain noted the developer's projected completion date of late October and asked if this seemed realistic. Mayor Pro Tem Banta expressed skepticism about the timeline based on past performance. Town Council acknowledged they had limited options other than extending the guarantee.

Motion to approve the Ecusta Crossing Improvement Guarantee Extension until February 2026. Mayor Pro Tem Banta made the motion. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee Update

Mr. Wiehe reported progress on the Comprehensive Plan, noting that draft chapters 1 and 2 and a complete draft matrix had been received. The committee is waiting for Land of Sky's new employee, Alexis Baker, to get up to speed before scheduling a meeting of the Technical Review Committee to review land usage criteria. This will help develop a detailed master map that will drive the rest of the process.

Discussion of Dead Trees

Mayor O'Cain indicated he would like Police Chief Trotter to arrange a meeting with the landowner, Town Manager Reeves, and himself regarding dead trees to try to reach a resolution. If that fails, they will proceed to "plan B." The council briefly discussed their expectations for the landowner, which included removal of the trees, replacement of trees, and stabilization of the damaged roadway edge.

New Business

Oath of Office for Town Commissioner

The oath of office was administered to the new Town Commissioner Morse.

Appointment of Knox Crowell to Parks and Greenway

Town Council considered the application of Knox Crowell to fill a recent vacancy on the Parks and Greenway Board.

Motion to appoint Knox Crowell to the Parks and Greenway Board. Commissioner Morse made the motion. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Approval of the Amendment to the Parks and Greenway Board Bylaws

Town Manager Reeves presented a simple amendment to the Parks and Greenway Board bylaws to change the quorum requirement from "4 members" to a "simple majority" of the board. This change was requested because when the board doesn't have a full 7 members, determining what constitutes a quorum becomes difficult.

Motion to approve the amendment to the Parks and Greenway Board Bylaws changing the quorum requirement to a simple majority. Mayor Pro Tem Banta made the motion. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Discussion of Cell Tower Lease

Mayor O'Cain asked Commissioner Bonnema and Commissioner Morse to review the cell tower lease documentation and determine the best approach and get a letter to SBA or General Dynamics regarding their lease extension stating that we are not in concurrence with extending that lease. He noted that this matter dates back to the 1980s, and the commissioners should get up to speed on the history of the lease.

Discussion of Annexation and Sewer Service Agreement

Mayor Pro Tem Banta explained that the sewer service agreement with the City of Hendersonville was implemented in 2021 and is a 5-year agreement that expires next year, with a 180-day written notification clause. He suggested renewing the agreement or starting discussions with Hendersonville about renewal.

The agreement establishes a sphere of influence around Laurel Park, requiring anyone not currently connected to Hendersonville Sewer to annex into either the Town of Laurel Park or City of Hendersonville depending on where they fall in the sphere of influence. Mayor Pro Tem Banta recommended continuing with the agreement if the City of Hendersonville agrees.

Mayor O'Cain asked Mayor Pro Tem Banta to draft a letter expressing the town's desire to renew the agreement.

Town Manager Report

Town Manager Reeves reported that FEMA had approved reimbursement of \$201,000 for emergency measures (Category B) taken by the Laurel Park Police and Public Works Departments during Hurricane Helene in September and October 2024. This success demonstrates that with the correct policies, procedures, and documentation in place, the FEMA reimbursement process can work. Town Manager Reeves emphasized the importance of the behind-the-scenes administrative work being done to secure these funds.

Department Head Reports

Public Works

Public Works Director Johnson reported several tree removals and maintenance activities, including replacing a culvert at the end of Westwood Drive, conducting maintenance around the Ecusta Trail, and cleaning up Crystal Springs. He noted they have removed about half of the debris on the mountain starting from the top and working down. He also mentioned issues with the culvert near the pump house that has been causing drainage problems, which they plan to address with a contractor.

Mayor O'Cain asked about debris on Echo Drive that had been sitting for nearly a year, and Public Works Director Johnson confirmed they plan to collect construction debris after completing their current work on Woody Drive.

Commissioner Bonnema inquired about the equipment to assist with shoulder work. Public Works Director Johnson also mentioned challenges in getting parts for equipment to assist with shoulder repair, and the Town Manager Reeves inquired about the Roberts culvert that caused a major landslide, suggesting they check if it is on the repair list and consider implementing erosion control measures in the meantime.

Police

Police Chief Trotter shared insight about the department's activities, noting they handle approximately 12,000 events annually, including residential and business checks. In the past month, they have dealt with 6 neighbor conflicts, 2 suicides, 5 drug arrests, 2 mental health calls, 78 vehicles pulled over, 57 tickets written along with other issues.

Police Chief Trotter also discussed his plans to update the department's outdated policies, some dating back to the 1980s. She aims to pursue state certification for the department rather than CALEA certification, as the state certification is free while CALEA would cost approximately \$40,000 annually. She requested permission to review and revise policies in sections and provide them to Town Council for approval. Mayor O'Cain agreed and said to proceed.

Police Chief Trotter addressed questions about enforcement on the Ecusta Trail, explaining that they enforce town ordinances and state laws, such as helmet requirements for children under 15.

Fire

No Report

Administration

Town Manager Reeves briefly mentioned that auditors were on-site that day and the following day.

Mayor and Commissioner Comments

Mayor O’Cain discussed committee assignments for the new commissioner, noting that they needed to determine which committees to assign to Commissioner Morse. It was suggested that Commissioner Morse could serve as the backup on Metropolitan Planning, which is a voting position that requires attendance.

Motion to Adjourn

Motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Morse at 10:30 AM. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion

ATTEST:

Stephanie Banks
Town Clerk

Carey O’Cain
Mayor

Date