



Town of Laurel Park
Town Council Regular Meeting Minutes
October 21, 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
Commissioner Morse
Town Manager Reeves
Town Clerk Banks
Finance Officer Kidd
Chief of Police Trotter
Public Works Director Johnson
Public Works Crew Leader Pearce
Edward Eaves
Philip Wiehe
Mike Erwin

Absent:

Fire Chief Garren

Call to Order

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

Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor O’Cain led those in attendance with the Pledge of Allegiance

Public Comment

Philip Wiehe of 3676 Laurel Park Highway, Laurel Park, NC 28739 provided a brief update on the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee. He reported that the committee had worked on the resident survey during their last two sessions, which was currently receiving final adjustments from the consultant Alexis with Land of Sky then will go back out to the Steering Committee for any final edits. Once complete, the survey will be distributed to residents in November using a mailing list through Friends of Laurel Park. Residents would receive a postcard with a QR code to complete the survey online, with paper copies available at Town Hall for those unable to use the online format. The goal was to complete the survey process by the end of the year, though it might extend into January depending on response rates.

Mike Erwin of 209 Rowland Dr. Laurel Park, NC 28739 expressed concerns about the Rowland and Roberts Drive intersection, representing residents of Rowland Drive. He stated that conditions had worsened over the last year with little attention over the past six months. The tarps are nonfunctional, water pipes were hanging with minimal support, and he believed property values in the neighborhood had declined as a result. He asked if contingency funds could be used for temporary repairs to support the water pipes and replace the tarps. He also noted that vehicles ignoring road closure signs were causing damage to his driveway.

Mike Erwin also reported on behalf of the Friends of Laurel Park about the bear naming contest for the two bears carved by Louie Lachusa. After all votes were collected, the two names selected by Mr. LaChusa for the bears were "Stormy" and "Unity". Mr. Erwin said they would like to honor Mr. LaChusa for his donation to the community by placing two modest aluminum signs (approximately 12x16 inches) with brown background and white lettering to be placed by each bear. Mr. Erwin requested approval from Town Council to order and place the signs. Mayor O'Cain asked if it would be possible to mount the sign directly on the stumps. Mr. Erwin said yes, we have options and he will see what Mr. LaChusa thinks about that. Mayor O'Cain stated they will have more discussion later in today's meeting.

Ed Mattern reported on behalf of Friends of Laurel Park and is proposing four outdoor concerts for next year, down from five this past year. Mr. Mattern submitted dates for the Council's approval and mentioned that the concerts would be held at either Laurel Green Park or Jump Off Rock and starting at 5 PM. He also noted they were planning to hold approximately three winter concerts at Echo Mountain Inn.

Approval of the Agenda

Mayor O'Cain noted two additions to the agenda: a FEMA update and a cell tower letter from the attorney. These items were added under Staff Reports.

Motion to approve the agenda as amended was made by Commissioner Morse. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Consent Agenda

The consent agenda included minutes from September meetings, the quarterly year-to-date budget report, tax collection report, and zoning report. Commissioner Morse noted one correction to the September minutes regarding the cell tower discussion, changing "4 years" to "40 years" of free use.

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

Old Business

Approval of Carolina Climbers Coalition MOU

Town Manager Reeves presented the Memorandum Of Understanding with the Carolina Climbers Coalition, which had previously come before the Council but was delayed between inboxes. She noted that Attorney Alexander had made minor edits and are included in the version before the Council today. Mayor O'Cain asked about hold harmless provisions, and Town Manager Reeves stated yes and confirmed that would be handled as separate documentation, with Laurel Park named as additionally insured, similar to other event

arrangements. Mayor Pro Tem Banta suggested changing references from "Parks and Greenways" to "Public Works" as more appropriate in section 1b. Public Works Director Johnson confirmed this change was acceptable.

Motion to approve the Carolina Climbers Coalition MOU as amended, made by Mayor Pro Tem Banta. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

New Business

Discussion of Board of Adjustment Applicants

Town Clerk Banks reported on Board of Adjustment vacancies stating they have three vacancies. One ETJ regular member, one ETJ alternate, and one Laurel Park resident alternate. Megan Woods was the only ETJ applicant at this time. For the Laurel Park resident alternate position, there were multiple candidates including Susan Draayer, Chas Fitzgerald and Kathy Martin, all who were recommended by the current Board of Adjustment members. After discussion, the Council decided to ask the Board of Adjustment to make their recommendation for the Laurel Park alternate position.

Motion to recommend Megan Woods to Henderson County as the ETJ regular member for the Board of Adjustment made by Commissioner Morse. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Cell Tower Update

Commissioner Bonnema gave a brief update on the cell tower lease and informed the Council that he had emailed them a draft letter, prepared with Attorney Alexander's assistance, to notify the SPA of the Town's intent not to renew the current cell tower lease when it expires in 2027. He noted the lease expiration date will need to be verified and corrected before the letter is sent out. Mayor O'Cain stated he had no issues and was happy with the letter and to have Attorney Alexander amend and release.

Signs for the Bear Carvings by Louie LaChusa

Town Council stated that if the signs are within the requirements of the UDO they would be fine with them and referred Mr. Erwin back to the Zoning Administrator Natalie Berry.

Staff Reports

Town Manager

Town Manager Reeves provided a FEMA update, noting that the agency had increased the threshold for informal contract processes from \$250,000 to \$350,000, which would expedite park restoration. She reported that Laurel Green Park would be addressed first because it would likely fit within that \$350,000 threshold, while Rhododendron Lake Park presented more significant challenges, with sand and silt not currently eligible for FEMA reimbursement.

Regarding storm damage repairs, Town Manager Reeves stated that thirteen culvert replacement projects had been submitted to FEMA and were under review by the CRC. The Town provided maintenance budget information to demonstrate prior care of infrastructure, as they did not have pre-disaster photos or specific maintenance logs for culverts. She confirmed that approximately \$207,000 had been obligated by FEMA but not yet received by the town.

Town Manager Reeves reported that the Roberts Drive landslide and another landslide on Laurel Park Highway were priorities once the culvert approvals were received. The Council discussed potential temporary measures to address the Rowland and Roberts Drive situation, with Public Works Crew Leader Pearce noting challenges include 4–6-inch shallow fiber optic

lines that complicated ditch maintenance. Public Works Director Johnson said they can put another tarp on the landslide but was not sure how long it will last.

Town Manager Reeves also shared information from the Native Plant Stewardship Committee on invasive plant management priorities, which would be presented to the Council at a future meeting.

Town Manager Reeves provided an update on the Ecusta Crossing timeline, showing progress with the wet well installation and projecting completion by December 18, 2025. Commissioner Bridges discussed whether to share this information with homebuyers, Mayor O'Cain stated that information would need to come from the realtors or notify Sonny Iler who oversees the division and all the realtors work for him, and he can handle it. Commissioner Bonnema had concerns about taking responsibility for a timeline they have no control over.

Public Works

Public Works Director Johnson reported that debris collection is about complete, with an additional 377,000 pounds of wood debris collected since the last Council meeting, along with 134 bags of leaves. Public Works had also worked on road shoulder stabilization on Hebron above South Drive and the road shoulder on Ransier Drive to the Gingerbread house on Laurel Park Highway. We have rebuilt the riprap ditch on West Ramp near the tennis courts. They have also been mowing and blowing leaves off the roadways. Public Works Director Johnson mentioned some hydraulic issues with the backhoe due to being overworked beyond weight limits. He stated he found a dealer that did reach out to him regarding the conveyor for the dump truck and it is going to be a little more than what was budgeted. He also found out that the dump trucks hydraulics are insufficient to run it and will require an upgrade to run it if Enterprise allows it since the vehicles are leased through them.

Mayor O'Cain inquired about storm debris on Hebron Road cut through and also on Echo Circle, including the synthetic wood flooring that had been there for over a year. Brandon indicated they were focusing on natural debris first but would address construction debris soon, estimating a day or two of work once leaf collection was complete.

Police

Chief Trotter reported for Fire Chief Garren, He is working on getting a truck back in service but wanted you to know that for the news article he did what was asked and did article pertaining to winter heating tips and included property ash disposal to prevent home and brush fires. Police Chief Trotter said the Police Department had 13,429 activity items last month, mostly house checks, resident checks, business checks, and area checks. There were 99 vehicle stops resulting in 44 warnings, 11 arrests, and 44 citations. The department conducted 38 investigations leading to 23 charges, including credit card fraud cases still under investigation. There were 4 drug-related arrests and 4 DWI charges.

Chief Trotter also announced the upcoming Halloween in the park event on October 25, 2025, from 5-7 PM, she expressed concern about the number of people attending due to competing events on the same day. She also stated the banner was ordered and should arrive on 10/22/25.

Administration

Finance Officer Kidd reported that auditors would likely attend the November or December Council meeting, with confirmation pending. She also mentioned open enrollment for benefits, noting a substantial increase in premiums now based on salaries rather than a flat rate, plus a

2.4% surcharge being collected through retirement for the state health plan. She advised that budget amendments may be needed later to cover these costs.

Town Clerk Banks also announced that Town Hall will be closed to the public Monday, October 24, 2025, for retention day to review and purge files according to records retention schedules.

Mayor and Commissioner Comments

Mayor O'Cain requested that center lines be painted on major thoroughfares even though paving had been suspended. He also mentioned plans to replace Christmas lights at the pump house and requested assistance with installation. Mayor O'Cain also stated the discussion on the dead trees will be suspended at this point.

Mayor O'Cain announced there will be an LGCCA meeting this afternoon and that he would attend with Commissioner Morse to introduce him to the other members.

Mayor O'Cain stated at 10:29 am there is no further business, and they would like to go into a closed session.

Closed Session - NC GS 143-318.11 (a)(6)

Mayor O'Cain called for a motion to enter closed session to discuss attorney information under the applicable NC GS 143-318.11(a)(6). Commissioner Morse made the motion at 10:30am. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Adjournment

Mayor O'Cain called for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Morse made the motion at 10:32 am. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.