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CITY OF LAUREL ETHICS COMMISSION

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**Laurel Ethics Commission
Open Meeting Minutes
Thursday December 4, 2025
In Person Meeting**

The Ethics Commission Meeting was called to order at 6:36pm by Chairman James Hester. Roll was called with Chairman James Hester, Vice Chair Toni Drake, Commissioners Karen Lubieniecki, and Lynne Sport present. Also present were City Administrator Christian Pulley, Deputy City Administrator Nekesa Matlock, Counsel to the Ethics Commission Dennis Whitley III, Administrative Assistant Laura Christoplos, City Councilman Jeffrey Mills, and resident Danielle Delgado.

The Agenda was approved as written by unanimous voice vote.

The minutes from both the Open and the Closed portions of November 12, 2025, meeting were approved by voice vote.

At 6:43pm, Chair Hester read the statement to close the session. A motion was made, seconded, and passed by unanimous roll call vote to close the session at 6:46pm. The Commissioners, Legal Counsel and staff moved into a closed session.

At 7:53pm, the Commission moved to reopen the meeting. The open meeting was restarted at 7:57.

Item 1 was the discussion of Ms. Delgado’s complaints. Ms. Delgado thanked the Commission for their work tonight and all the work they do.

Ms. Delgado stated that she has fallen in love with Laurel, despite only being here for a short time. She did not hear the Mayor’s comments until days after the meeting since she had to leave after saying her piece. She was alerted to the comments by others. She was saddened by the Mayor’s comments

Ultimately her goal was to make people realize the beautiful and diverse history of Laurel. To be labelled as disrespectful for wanting our City to do better and to live up to saying it is diverse and inclusive really hurt Ms. Delgado, as well as the ramifications such as discouraging others who may want to speak out about an issue for fear of being labelled as a disrupter.

Commissioner Lubieniecki made a motion that after consideration the Commission has determined that the complaint does not reach the level of an Ethics violation. Commissioner Sport seconded the motion.

Chair Hester thanked Ms. Delgado for her comments. He said that she made an important point. Commissioner Sport reiterated that even though it does not rise to the level of an abuse of position, it does not mean that we think what you said is not important. We understand exactly where you are coming from. Chair Hester stated that they all felt he could have been more diplomatic. Sometimes people do not realize the impact of their word selection. He assured Ms. Delgado that she had raised a good and serious point, and the Commission had taken it very seriously.

The Commission moved on to discussion of Ms. Delgado's complaint against Councilmember Mills. Chair Hester thanked Councilman Mills for attending. He offered both Ms. Delgado and Councilman Mills the opportunity to make additional statements, or provide any additional information.

Ms. Delgado was concerned as a citizen. She recognized that the situation started with harm done to Councilman Mills and his campaign, but that is not her issue. She is concerned with the words and numerous quantities of posts across social media through a number of different Facebook groups. She did not feel that it was befitting, especially on a Facebook profile that labelled him as a City official. There was a Laurel Independent article about this situation in which Candidate, now Councilman, Smith said he did not want to comment because it made the City look bad. She mentioned labelling actions as hate crimes, bringing up race, calling constituents clowns, etc. This was on personal, as well as, what appeared to be, professional accounts. Ms. Delgado also thought this did not put the City in a good position.

Councilman Mills responded that Ms. Delgado said she had seen it on a professional account, which would mean an account created by the City IT Department. Councilman Mills referred to the City Social Media Policy standards which state that individuals use of social media sites on behalf of the City must comply with the following standards: "All official social media accounts/sites created and/or maintained by the City must conform to this policy as well as other applicable City policies, including, but not limited to, City Standards and Department Policies."

Councilman Mills emphasized "created by the City." He does not have a City created website, or social media page. Therefore, he says, this is an untruth. He also claimed that "the individual,

my colleague, who stole my political signs,” who gave the information to Ms. Delgado, basically set her up for failure.

Commissioner Lubieniecki asked for clarification about where the images in question came from. Counsel Whitley stated that there was a misunderstanding about where the information came from. Ms. Delgado may have said a “Professional account, “ but she did not mean a City of Laurel account. Councilman Mills stated that Ms. Delgado just said, “a Councilman Facebook account.”

Councilman Mills stated that Counsel Whitley was speaking for Ms. Delgado. Chair Hester explained that we had a complaint that included screen shots from Facebook pages that were provided to us by the complainant. They appear to be from private Facebook pages. On one particular page, the cover photo has “Council President Pro Tem” under Councilman Mills image.

Councilman Mills stated that this is not his account. Chair Hester clarified that it was not an official City account. Councilman Mills denied that it was his Facebook page. He said that his only Facebook account is the CDL Business account. Both Chair Hester and Commissioner Lubieniecki stated that there are two accounts. One under Jeff Mills, and one under CDL Book Club.

There was a delay while staff attempted to airdrop the Facebook page onto the room screen. This did not work. Councilman Mills was provided with copies of the posts in question.

Counsel Whitley asked Councilman Mills to put his phone down and look at the pictures and confirm whether they were from his Facebook account or not. Councilman Mills replied, “How would I know?” He reiterated that if it doesn’t say CDL Bookclub it is not his. He then asked to be shown a City of Laurel page.

Councilman Mills stated that if it is not about the Social Media Policy, which Ms. Delgado said he violated, there is nothing else to talk about. Administrator Pulley stated that Councilman Mills was reading from the Staff Social Media Policy, not the Councilmembers Social Media Policy.

He then said that the meeting is to talk about the Councilmember’s account, and he does not have one. Counsel Whitley said that we are here to talk about your personal account. Councilman Mills disagreed and said that his personal account is his personal business. He continued to say that if we are not talking about an account that came from the City, there is nothing to discuss.

Chair Hester stated, “We believe there is.”

At one point in the meeting Councilman Mills abruptly left the room and then returned a few minutes later. He then threw a large wad of bills on the table toward Ms. Delgado saying: “I’ll give you a thousand dollars if you show me a Councilman Jeffrey Mills account. The money is

yours.” He repeated this more loudly, then said “There is none. Goodnight” *At the same time* Ms. Delgado held up photocopies of the Jeffrey Mills Facebook personal pages in question. Councilman Mills ignored this and picked up the bills and left.

Vice Chair Drake made a motion to continue this at another time to allow Counsel time to do more research. Commissioner Sport seconded the motion. Chair Hester clarified that we are asking our attorney to look into this more deeply, to decide what can be legally defended, realizing that the First Amendment and Freedom of Speech are being protected. Free speech does have some limits.

Section 7 of the Social Media Policy deals with personal accounts. Counsel Whitley quoted from page 5 of the Policy which talks about a disclaimer, and content moderation statement for official accounts. He thought it would be good to add this to the personal account section. It would rectify the issue here. City Administrator Pulley did not disagree, but thinks that this is a gray area with Freedom of Speech. It’s a Code of Conduct situation.

Counsel Whitley said that the Council would be the best place for corrective action if they have a Code of Conduct. If it doesn’t violate the Council Code of Conduct, it’s hard for us to step in and fight the battle that they don’t fight.

Commissioner Sport thought we should review the Code of Conduct. Counsel Whitley said we don’t have the ability to enforce it. Commissioner Sport believed that it would still provide us with valuable insights for this discussion. Chair Hester said that the Code of Conduct informs the Abuse of Position provision.

Chair Hester reminded the Commission that the Councilmembers are voluntarily serving. They do not have to be Councilmembers. They need to hold themselves to a Code of Conduct that may or may not violate the First Amendment. If they wish to have wide open First Amendment Rights, they don’t have to be a member of the Council.

Counsel Whitley agreed, but reiterated that we are not the appropriate people to enforce that. Commissioner Lubieniecki would like to see the list of inappropriate content put into the Personal Accounts Section of the Policy as well. That way each of the bullet points would be something one could be legally brought to task for.

City Administrator Pulley suggested moving forward with Counsel Whitley writing a memo, or email, that City Administrator Pulley could present to the Council, and probably our City Solicitor.

We may not be able to do anything about this instance, but in the future, it will give us something.

Ms. Delgado brought up the fact that Councilman Mills’ title is on the cover photo on his personal account. Chair Hester stated that the title in that image is on a chyron pulled from a television interview. He is not directly putting it in.

The motion on the table was passed unanimously by voice vote. Counsel Whitley restated the motion: To table this matter to allow Counsel and the Commission the opportunity to further investigate any possible violations of the Ethics Code by the Councilmember. Commissioner Sport asked for a timeline.

Times were discussed for the next meeting. City Administrator Pulley said that it should be in person since there will probably be a closed session involved. Staff will send an email out. City Administrator Pulley will send out the Code of Conduct to the Commissioners.

Ms. Delgado wished it to be on record that no one had sent her here. She can speak for herself.

Commissioner Lubieniecki made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Vice Chair Drake. The meeting adjourned at 8:35pm.