

The Honorable G. Rick Wilson, Chair
Dennis Grant Vice Chairman
John R. Kish
Council President Smith, Ex Officio Member
Bill Wellford
Stanley Spalding
Roy Smith, Alternate



Jay Meashey, Director
Department of Economic and Community Development

CITY OF LAUREL PLANNING COMMISSION

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Commission meets the Second Tuesday of each Month

SIX HUNDRED-TWENTIETH MEETING – REGULAR CITY OF LAUREL PLANNING COMMISSION TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2026 6:00 P.M.

The meeting was held in person in the Council Chambers with the Vice Chair, Mr. Dennis Grant presiding. The roll was called with Mr. John R. Kish, Mr. Wellford, Mr. Spalding and Mr. Smith in attendance. From the Department of Economic & Community Development, Mr. Jay Meashey, Director, and Ms. Brooke Herring, Community Development Coordinator. There were approximately four (4) members of the public in attendance.

The minutes from the February 10, 2026 meeting were approved as written, on motion by Mr. Kish seconded by Mr. Smith carried on a roll call vote of all members present.

The next item on the agenda was for Special Exception Application No. 978 for 21 C Street Laurel, Maryland 20707, filed by Mr. James Preston. Mr. Meashey stated the applicant is seeking approval to operate a rental hall at an existing retail establishment. He went on to discuss the history of this property, stating that on March 26, 2025, the City of Laurel Department of the Fire Marshal and Permit Services issued commercial Use and Occupancy permit to the applicant, for an Art Gallery and Event Space. On September 9, 2025, the applicant applied for the Laurel Thrive Small Business Grant Program provided by the Department of Economic and Community Development. During the routine review of Use and Occupancy permit as part of that process, staff discovered two (2) errors on the previously issued permit. First, an event space must be authorized through a Special Exception approval from the Board of Appeals. Second, an Art Gallery is not a defined use in the City's Uniform Land Development Code. The closest defined use is an Art and/or Cultural Center, which must be operated by a nonprofit organization. Mr. Meashey added that staff can issue a revised Use and Occupancy permit for a Retail Sales Establishment, Specialty, regardless of whether the applicant refers to the business as an art gallery. However, staff

cannot authorize an event space—defined in the ULDC as a Rental Hall—without approval from the Board of Appeals.

Mr. Meashey continued, stating the applicant submitted Special Exception Application No. 978 on January 15, 2026, seeking approval for Rental Hall use at 21 C Street. The property is zoned Commercial Village (C-V), where rental hall use requires a Special Exception. The applicant proposes operating the rental hall from 10:00 AM to 10:00 PM Monday through Thursday, and 10:00 AM to 12:00 AM Friday through Sunday. Based on the 1,400 square foot space, the Department of the Fire Marshal and Permit Services estimates the following maximum occupancies, 280 occupants standing, 200 occupants seated in chairs or 94 occupants seated at tables. City of Laurel departments and partner agencies were notified and asked to provide comments. The Department of Public Works raised concerns regarding parking, noting the applicant did not address parking requirements or availability. The Chief of Police noted that the application does not mention food or alcohol service, which are common at art events and rental halls. Other agencies raised no objections or did not provide comments.

Mr. Meashey explained parking is the primary concern. Based on the Unified Land Development Code requirements for a rental hall, the property would require 20 parking spaces plus one (1) per employee on the largest shift, and the applicant does not provide off-street parking. However, Section 20-16.6 of the Unified Land Development Code allows modification of parking requirements when certain conditions are met. Staff believes those conditions exist here, including 108 publicly owned on-street parking spaces within 500 feet, the absence of available land for new parking, access to public transit on Main Street, and the Parking Modification Zone established by the Mayor and City Council in 2016. The Main Street Business Area and Arts and Entertainment District are intended to function as a walkable commercial district where businesses benefit from shared parking and pedestrian traffic. For that reason, staff believes approving this use is consistent with the intent of the district and staff has determined that the application meets the criteria required for approval of a Special Exception. Therefore, staff recommends that the Planning Commission recommend approval of Special Exception No. 978 to the City of Laurel Board of Appeals, including modification of parking requirements, subject to the standard conditions regarding permits, compliance with laws and regulations, ADA requirements, operational standards, and limiting hours to those stated in the application.

The applicant, Mr. James Preston, 21 C Street Laurel, Maryland 20707, explained his plans to operate a cultural art gallery with occasional event rentals at a property located on C Street within the Arts and Entertainment District. He stated the purpose of the space is to revitalize the area and support local artists. The gallery would display artwork from artists representing diverse cultural backgrounds and would allow artists to exhibit their work without upfront fees. The gallery would receive a 20 percent commission on artwork sales. Mr. Preston added that the facility would primarily host small gatherings and community-

oriented events, including small wedding ceremonies and receptions, retirement celebrations and birthday gatherings, cultural and community events, seasonal arts and crafts activities and possible youth or young adult art programs during summer months. He emphasized that the venue is not intended to operate as a nightclub. The proposed hours of activity would generally focus on Thursday through Saturday evenings, with limited weekday use except during special events or summer programming. Mr. Preston indicated that there are no plans to obtain a permanent liquor license. Alcohol would only be served when permitted through a one-day permit issued by Prince George's County in conjunction with catered events. He noted that, in practice, the space would comfortably accommodate approximately 75 to 100 people and that events exceeding that size were unlikely.

Vice Chairman Grant stated there was no official public hearing required for this item until heard by the Board of Appeals, however, there were a couple members of the public wishing to speak on the application.

Mr. Peter Aloupis, Property owner of the Municipal Square Office Building, 13 C Street Laurel, Maryland 20707, expressed significant concerns regarding parking availability in the area. He stated that his property includes approximately 30 to 40 private parking spaces used by tenants during the day and during evenings, the parking lot is frequently used without authorization by patrons of nearby establishments. Unauthorized parking has resulted in repeated towing incidents and police involvement. He raised concerns that the parking conflicts have become increasingly confrontational. Furthermore, he indicated that similar concerns were raised previously when another nearby business, the Clyopatra Winery, applied for approval a few years earlier. He suggested the possibility of using his parking lot after business hours through a formal arrangement. He suggested that the City or nearby businesses could enter into an agreement for shared use of the parking lot, though compensation or other accommodations would be required. He emphasized that without a parking solution, additional event-related uses on C Street could exacerbate existing parking issues. Mr. Aloupis shared a video and photos with the Commission to back up his claims.

Mr. Stewart Sinex, Business owner of 3 Gear Games, 25 C Street, Laurel, Maryland 20707, expressed (2) two primary concerns; parking availability for customers and visitors to existing businesses on C Street and the noise impacts, particularly low-frequency bass from music played during events. He stated that bass vibrations have previously affected the shared building structure, causing discomfort to customers and occasionally requiring them to leave the premises. He requested consideration of possible restrictions on sound levels or bass amplification.

The applicant, Mr. James Preston, 21 C Street Laurel, Maryland 20707, responded to public comment by stating his patrons have been advised not to park in private lots and he has anticipated that his guests would use nearby public parking areas, including the lot across the street and available street parking. He

expressed openness to discuss potential parking arrangements with neighboring property owners if necessary. Regarding noise concerns, Mr. Preston noted that the building on C Street have very thin interior walls with minimal insulation, which contributes to sound transmission between units. The applicant indicated that some efforts have already been made to reduce noise, including purchasing sound panels. He reiterated that the venue is not intended to operate as a nightclub and would close by 12:00 a.m.

Commission members discussed the parking conditions along C Street and the broader parking challenges associated with the area's commercial uses. It was noted that many businesses on C Street operate without dedicated parking facilities, resulting in reliance on street parking and nearby private lots. Commission members suggested that the City administration, the applicant, and nearby property owners should explore potential shared parking arrangements prior to final consideration of the application.

Mr. Meashey agreed to meet with the neighboring property owner and applicant to discuss possible parking solutions. He also noted that the parcel referenced as a potential public lot across the street is privately owned and may have future development. Mr. Meashey emphasized the importance of continuing to support Economic Development and cultural activity within the Arts and Entertainment District while addressing infrastructure challenges.

The Commission, on motion by Mr. Wellford, seconded by Mr. Smith, and carried on a roll call vote of all members present, voted to **TABLE** Special Exception Application No. 978 for 21 C Street and requested for the City to engage with the property owner at 13 C Street regarding potential shared parking options and consideration of potential added conditions related to parking and operational impacts.

The next agenda item was Text Amendment No. 269 (Ordinance No. 2050) filed by the Mayor & City Council of Laurel. Mr. Meashey presented the Technical Staff report dated March 3, 2026, stating the proposed Text Amendment No. 269 (Ordinance No. 2050) would modify the unified land development code, chapter 20, "land development and subdivision regulations," section 20-22.73, "body art establishments." The purpose is to improve the City's regulation of establishments that offer tattooing and body piercing. Language regarding Body art establishments was first added to the ULDC in January 2017; since that time, the National Environmental Health Association developed the Body Art Model Code, a nationally recognized model framework used by state and local governments to implement Centers for Disease Control infection-control principles in body art establishments. Text Amendment No. 269 will incorporate best practices into our Code.

The Commission, on motion by Mr. Spalding seconded by Mr. Kish, and carried on a roll call vote of all members present, voted to **RECOMMEND** approval

of Text Amendment Application No. 269 (Ordinance 2050) as presented in the Technical Staff Report and proposed ordinance to the Mayor and City Council.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Approved: **Brooke Herring** Date: 4/14/2026

