

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

8103 Sandy Spring Road • Laurel, MD 20707
301-725-5300 • www.cityoflaurel.org
Commission meets the Second Tuesday of each Month

SIX HUNDRED-TWENTY FIRST MEETING – REGULAR CITY OF LAUREL PLANNING COMMISSION TUESDAY, APRIL 14, 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. Wellford, Mr. Smith and Council President Smith. From the Department of Economic & Community Development, Mr. Jay Meashey, Director, Ms. Raven Nee, Deputy Director, Mr. Connor Johnson, Planner III and Ms. Brooke Herring, Community Development Coordinator, were in attendance. There were approximately nine (9) members of the public in attendance.

The minutes from the March 10, 2026 meeting were approved as written, on motion by Wellford 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. This item was tabled at the March 10, 2026, Planning Commission meeting. Mr. Johnson stated the applicant is seeking a special exception approval for rental hall use at the existing Preston Cultural Art Gallery and Liberty Hall, which has been operating since March 2025 in the CV Commercial Village Zone. Proposed hours are Monday through Thursday, 10 AM to 12 PM and Friday-Sunday: 10:00 AM – 12:00 AM. The primary concern had been parking requirements. Under the Unified Land Development Code, a rental hall requires 10 spaces per 1000 square feet available to patrons. With a 1400 square foot floor plan, the minimum required is 20 spaces plus 1 space per employee. Since the original submission, Mr. Preston negotiated and executed a parking lease with the owner of off-street lots at 13 C Street, providing 30 off-street parking spaces, which fully satisfies the code requirements.

The applicant, Mr. James Preston, 21 C Street Laurel, Maryland 20707,

addressed the Commission regarding the use of a parking lot associated with his business operations. He stated that if the City wished to utilize the lot, he would be willing to cooperate under fair terms. However, he emphasized that due to costs associated with his application, he intends to enforce parking restrictions, including towing unauthorized vehicles. He noted that any unauthorized use of the lot would result in fees, which he believes to be reasonable and necessary.

Mr. Wellford inquired about parking enforcement and signage, referring to an existing sign on the property. He asked whether additional signage would be installed to ensure that parking spaces remain available for Mr. Preston's business patrons, particularly during evening hours.

Mr. Peter Aloupis, Property owner of the Municipal Square Office Building, 13 C Street Laurel, Maryland 20707, spoke in support of Mr. Preston's application. He thanked the Commission for reviewing visual evidence illustrating existing parking challenges. Mr. Aloupis expressed interest in developing a broader solution, potentially involving a private public partnership with the City, to expand parking availability for multiple businesses in the area rather than limiting access to a single business. He noted that various methods for identifying authorized users of the lot had been discussed, including permits, hang tags, or valet services, though no final approach has been determined. He also raised concerns about ongoing unauthorized parking, specifically referencing issues with patrons from a nearby business.

Mr. Wellford clarified that the current arrangement under discussion is a private agreement between Mr. Aloupis and Mr. Preston. He suggested that, if additional businesses require parking, they could be included in the agreement through shared cost arrangements. Mr. Wellford also acknowledged that parking demand may fluctuate significantly during events, potentially reaching high attendance levels.

The applicant, Mr. Preston responded that he had recently communicated with neighboring business owners regarding potential parking arrangements, offering monthly agreements to allow their customers to use the lot. He stated his intent was not to profit significantly but to ensure adequate parking access for surrounding businesses.

During the public hearing, significant tension arose between the applicant, Mr. Preston and Mr. Aloupis, the owner of 13 C Street. Mr. Preston indicated he had discussed with neighboring business owners about potentially sharing parking arrangements, which Lupus strongly objected to, stating their agreement was exclusively for Mr. Preston's business use, not for subletting to others. The disagreement became heated, with both parties raising their voices and ultimately requiring intervention from the commission.

Mr. Wellford expressed concerns about the parking situation, referencing video evidence from the previous month showing traffic and parking congestion on C Street. He stated he did not feel comfortable approving the application due to unresolved parking issues.

However, Council President Smith argued that the commission should focus only on what was formally presented - the executed parking agreement between Mr. Preston and Aloupis. He emphasized that any private disputes between the parties were separate from the application review and should not prevent approval of an otherwise compliant proposal.

Director Meashey clarified that the parking lease was included in the packet and that any approval would be contingent on the validity of that parking agreement.

The Commission, on motion by Mr. Wellford seconded by Mr. Smith, and carried on a roll call vote of all members present, voted to **recommend approval** to the Board of Appeals on the Special Exception Application No. 978 for 21 C Street Laurel, Maryland 20707, with the amendment that the parking agreement remains in place between the two (2) parties.

It was noted by staff that the Board of Appeals meeting is scheduled for April 23, 2026.

The next agenda item was for Plat Of Subdivision Application 979 for 14402 Baltimore Avenue Laurel, Maryland 20707, filed by KCI Technologies for Resolution No. 26-04-PC. Mr. Johnson presented the staff report explaining that the owner of the property is Ms. Carol Rose of Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. The subject property is located in the O-B office building zone and contains two buildings: a vacant commercial building and an Atlantic Union Bank with drive-through service. The proposed subdivision would place each building on its own separate lot. Mr. Johnson explained that the Department of Public Works had no objection to the subdivision. The vacant lot will have 25 off-street parking spaces including two (2) ADA accessible spots, while the Atlantic Union Bank lot will have 31 off-street spaces including two (2) ADA accessible locations.

A representative from KCI Technologies, Mr. Atm Islam, KCI Technologies, 11830 West Market Place, Suite F, Fulton, Maryland 20759, explained that the situation was somewhat unusual as there were already two account numbers on what appeared to be one property. The subdivision would simply formalize the property line that logically should have existed. They indicated plans to beautify Baltimore Avenue and transform the vacant space into something new and exciting for the city.

Mr. Mark Rittenburg, AMR Commercial, LLC., Bethesda, Maryland 20814, Contract purchaser of the building and representative of the applicant was also

present, stating that an easement agreement will be recorded to address shared ingress, egress, and cross-parking between the two lots.

Commission members expressed nostalgia for the former Einstein's Bagels location, with the representative acknowledging the community's fondness for the establishment and promising to install something appealing in its place.

The Commission, on motion by Mr. Smith, seconded by Mr. Wellford, and carried on a roll call vote of all members present, voted to **approve** Plat of Subdivision Application No. 979 as presented in the Technical Staff Report.

The last item on the agenda was for Special Exception and Variance Application No. 980, submitted by Baltimore Gas and Electric for the use of tower, height and setbacks at 921 Ninth Street Laurel, Maryland 20707, for recommendation to the Board of Appeals. Mr. Meashey presented the staff report. Stating the application was submitted by Ms. Corinne Smallwood on behalf of BGE, seeks to build a new communications tower at BGE's existing electric substation property. The existing 60-foot communications tower is obsolete and will be removed upon completion of the new project. He explained due to the unusual shape and dimensions of the lot, BGE cannot meet the standard setback requirements of 50 feet more than the tower height (156 feet required). The proposed tower will be 106 feet with an antenna extending 3 feet and 1 inch above, totaling 109 feet and 1 inch, which exceeds the 100-foot height limit by 6 feet. Therefore, BGE requires both setback and height variances, plus a special exception for the communications tower use.

Mr. Owen Strohmer, Network Building & Consulting, 6095 Marshalee Drive Suite 300 ElkrIDGE, Maryland 21075, answered questions about potential interference with television and cell phone reception, confirming that BGE operates on specific FCC-assigned frequencies that do not interfere with commercial services. He also addressed health concerns, explaining that these are very low-watt antennas with much less power than standard commercial cellular antennas.

Mr. Wellford clarified that this tower is exclusively for BGE's internal communications between facilities, not for commercial carriers.

Mr. Strohmer explained that the technology helps deliver critical infrastructure services specific to the substation, including power and grid management, smart meter systems, and helps existing equipment operate more efficiently. He added that the Prince George's County Telecommunications Transmission Facility Coordinating Committee reviewed and recommended approval. Additionally, the Department of Public Works obtained a "fall zone" letter from engineers confirming the communications tower should not impact adjacent residences even in the event of tower failure.

The Commission, on motion by Mr. Wellford seconded by Mr. Smith, and carried on a roll call vote of all members present, voted to **recommend approval** to the Board of Appeals on the Special Exception and Variance Application No. 980 for 921 Ninth Street Laurel, Maryland 20707, as presented in the Technical Staff Report.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Approved: *Brooke Herring*

Date: 5/12/2026

