

**CITY OF LAUREL
MASTER PLAN REVIEW COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES- DECEMBER 4, 2025**

The meeting convened in the Council Chambers of the Laurel Municipal Center at 6:07 P.M., with The Honorable Chairman G. Rick Wilson presiding. Committee Members Present: The Honorable Frederick Smalls, Mr. Calvin Burns, Ms. Maria Gonzales-Jackson, Mr. Sophady Uong, Mr. Garrett Jackson, Mr. Nadol Hishmeh and Mr. Mark Plazinski, Deputy Chief, Laurel Police Department. Staff support in attendance from the Department of Economic & Community Development were Mr. Jay Meashey, Director, Mr. Monta Burrough, Deputy Director, Ms. Alexis Williams, Planner I. Ms. Brooke Quillen, Community Development Coordinator, serving as Secretary to the Master Plan Review Committee was in attendance virtually. From the Department of the City Administrators' Office, Ms. Nekesa Matlock and Ms. Christina Cornwell from the Department of Emergency Management. There were approximately two (2) members of the public in attendance.

Mr. Burrough, ECD Deputy Director, began the meeting by welcoming and thanking everyone for attending throughout the year. He noted there is not officially a quorum to vote on the minutes from the last meeting so those will be put on hold for now. He then introduced the new Department of Economic and Community Development Director Mr. Jay Meashey.

Mr. Jay Meshey, ECD Director, stated he was excited to now be a part of the Master Plan update process even though it is nearing the end, adding he looks forward to working with everyone and is grateful for the residents that have been involved.

Ms. Ursula Gnan arrived at 6:12 p.m.

Mr. Ed Steere, Consultant/Owner from Polestar Analysis, started discussion with a focus on the transition from the previous 12 (twelve) visions planning framework to the new state-mandated 8 (eight) principles, the current progress on the Master Plan update, and outstanding sections that require additional drafting or coordination with state and county partners. He stated there are currently 191 pages of the new draft, which is reorganized from the last plan, the previous Master Plan was organized around the state's 12 (twelve) visions, however, the new state legislation requires the plan to align with 8 (eight) principles instead. Mr. Steere reported an early chapter in the plan will summarize the new state requirements and briefly describe how the plan addresses each principle and each major section of the plan will include a box at the beginning identifying which principles that section addresses, adding this approach will ensure full coverage and makes state compliance clear to readers.

Next, there was a conversation regarding progress on the draft content with sections still being developed such as Affordable Housing. This chapter is not yet written as it was not part of the 2016 plan and must be newly developed. Affordable housing is a major national issue and a priority of Governor Moore, so this section requires careful

attention. Second, he stated that the overlay districts maps were updated and reviewed last month. The number of overlay districts has been reduced from over a dozen to a more focused list. The narrative descriptions for each overlay district: purpose, development goals, and recommendations are still missing and need to be written. Lastly, general recommendations in several sections still lack their final recommendations. These will be added as drafting proceeds.

Mr. Steere described the nature of the plan update stating the project began as an update of the 2016 Comprehensive Plan, not a full rewrite. It has since evolved into a hybrid between an update and a partial overhaul. He announced some legacy text (such as the history of Laurel) remains but is out of date and requires editing for current relevance. Newly drafted sections such as Public Safety, Fire, and EMS are current and have not been previously reviewed by the Commission. He explained sections not fully reviewed are Sustainability and Human Resources. Mr. Steere said the initial drafts by staff are strong, but some grammar and clarity edits are needed. He commented on the Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) section which has not yet been drafted, and he explained a meeting with the State of Maryland is scheduled for next week and the plan's ADU content will be developed after that discussion. He reported the State of Maryland is still determining its overall approach and is seeking input from local jurisdictions, including the city, furthermore, existing ADU regulations in the city and county may not fully meet the requirements of the new state law, which becomes enforceable in October of next year. The coordination with Prince George's County is ongoing; it was noted Ms. Michelle Garcia is providing county-level updates to him as it becomes available.

Mr. Steere had a brief discussion regarding what is expected on growth management and how it ties into the upcoming zoning rewrite, adding that clarifying growth objectives will help align the zoning update with statewide planning principles and local priorities. Next, he talked about the growth areas and zoning district assignments. He then discussed the need to determine which zoning districts should apply to each identified growth area. Mr. Steere explained this step is necessary before completing the plan and before discussing land use expectations with adjacent counties. He announced there will be a map review later in the meeting that will assist in determining appropriate zoning designations. Mr. Steere disclosed not all topics discussed in these meetings will appear in the final plan, but some items will and staff will ensure key themes are addressed.

Committee members asked how to differentiate updated language from the 2016 version. There were concerns raised regarding multiple draft versions and difficulty tracking what is new, updated, or unchanged. Suggestions made were to include dates in headers or footers to identify when each section was last updated, label sections that are carryovers from the 2016 plan versus new or substantially add margin notes or highlights to draw attention to significant updates. Some Committee members responded that track-changes are not effective because the document has been extensively reorganized. It was agreed that Committee members and staff would add date stamps, margin notes, or highlights where feasible, moving forward.

Next Mr. Steere discussed the utilities chapter that is currently highlighted because it has not yet been updated. Mr. Burns noted the importance of discussing water and sewer capacity, especially given county-level concerns about whether infrastructure can support new development. Mr. Steere stated water and sewer considerations are a major factor for developers when evaluating sites. He explained the updated plan will include water and sewer planning categories, which were missing in the 2016 plan and the plan will clearly state that the City of Laurel does not control water/sewer infrastructure and that authority rests with WSSC. Mr. Steere noted the overlay district narratives will be drafted based on tonight's discussion and the zoning district assignments for growth areas will be refined following map review. He explained the ADU (Accessory Dwelling Unit) section will be written after consultation with the State of Maryland next week and staff will compile additional content from remaining drafts and ensure comprehensive coverage.

The Committee and Mr. Steere then discussed the future of the racetrack property and its relationship with the MARC station area, noting that much of the land is expected to become state-owned as part of the racetrack funding agreement. It was emphasized that redevelopment potential particularly around the MARC station depends on State decisions and improvements to transit service. Mr. Jackson suggested the expansion of MARC hours and frequency would be essential for supporting a mixed-use district with housing, employment, and entertainment. Mr. Steere noted the Governor's recent executive order directing State agencies to advance transit-oriented development (TOD) on surplus land, including MARC properties, may create opportunities for coordinated redevelopment, with the State likely to pursue an RFP-style process for selecting development partners.

The Committee then commented on redevelopment near the racetrack and MARC station explaining that it cannot proceed until the State formally releases the property, and that part of the area, including the Legion ballfields and portions of Riverfront Park, which is restricted as project open space and cannot be developed. Mr. Burns talked about the City's open space needs, acknowledging a possible acreage deficit but also recognizing that State policy prioritizes infill over expanding municipal open space. The group also identified opportunities for workforce housing and mixed-use development but stressed the need to balance economic activity with nearby residential concerns. Mr. Jackson stated the City lacks sufficient nightlife and evening destinations, though new uses would need to be sited carefully to avoid noise impacts on adjacent neighborhoods. Chairman Wilson noted the City has recently approved several existing restaurants to include live entertainment to their use, which includes live bands or a DJ.

Discussion then focused on Main Street property conditions & enforcement challenges with non-responsive and absentee property owners regarding façade improvements. Without a clear City mandate or enforcement mechanism, conditions are unlikely to change. Committee members noted a recent turnover in Main Street property ownership, which may result in gradual improvements over the next 5–6 years. Deputy Chief Plazinski reported public safety concerns and disorder incidents during the Fourth of July Independence Day celebration this year. He explained that approximately 200–

250 juveniles organized via social media a gathering in the City's Town Centre shopping center parking lot. He stated the City's police resources were strained due to event-related traffic and limited staffing, adding that officers were required to move groups between locations without the ability to resolve the situation through arrests alone. He stated a curfew was discussed post-event but would not have applied during the time of the incidents. It was explained that the City's fireworks, not Main Street, were identified as the primary attraction. Main Street and Riverfront Park experienced minimal issues and functioned as intended, however there were similar incidents noted in other surrounding jurisdictions.

Chairman Wilson talked about parking & liability issues with private parking availability along Main Street. Mr. Burns expressed concern over the empty parking lots on Main Street and suggested perhaps an agreement could be made between the City and those property owners for public use. It was noted that churches and other property owners cited insurance and liability concerns as barriers to public use, however, some indicated willingness to participate if the City covered increased insurance costs. Further evaluation of potential costs and partnerships was suggested by Committee members. The Committee went on to discuss limited visibility and clarity of access points between Main Street and Riverfront Park, including 4th Street, Avondale, and the Post Office Avenue area adding there is insufficient signage, and visual cues were noted as barriers. Discussion followed on improved wayfinding and bike/pedestrian connections as priorities. Mr. Steere emphasized the importance of maintaining Main Street as the primary commercial core. Most Committee members agreed on concentrating activity on Main Street rather than expanding commercial uses to adjacent streets. Chairman Wilson also noted high property acquisition and tax costs in Prince George's County as constraints on reinvestment. Mr. Burns expressed concern with narrow sidewalks, gaps in building frontage, and overall walkability challenges along Main Street and potential improvements were then discussed including streetscape enhancements and selective sidewalk widening without significant parking loss. The Committee members had a general agreement on the need for a comprehensive Main Street study addressing wayfinding, pedestrian safety, streetscape enhancements, and parking/access management.

Ms. Maria Gonzales-Jackson left at 7:30 p.m.

Committee members commented on potential Main Street enhancements, that would likely begin with an RFP for a landscape architecture or civil engineering study to develop improvement concepts and any resulting projects would require funding could be incorporated into the City's Capital Improvement Program (CIP). Mr. Smalls stated many topics discussed tonight such as wayfinding, façades, streetscape improvements are actually project-oriented and near-term but must be supported by the Master Plan to align with the CIP. Mr. Steere reminded the Committee that the Master Plan's role is to establish long-term goals, trends, and activity centers, while implementation is primarily the responsibility of the City, followed by private investment. Committee members noted that Main Street revitalization requires active City leadership, economic development tools, zoning alignment, and potential public private partnerships, particularly related to

parking, distinguishing it from other growth areas. Mr. Steere noted that annexation requirements vary by circumstance and do not always require unanimous consent and for planning purposes, the City of Laurel must identify potential areas, propose appropriate land uses, and evaluate infrastructure and public facility needs, including how such facilities would be made available or financed.

Mr. Steere detailed annexation requirements, including demonstrating service capacity to the State and coordination with the County adding that while counties cannot block annexation, opposition to proposed land uses may prevent re-zoning for up to five (5) years. Committee members expressed the need for site-specific service analyses for annexation areas. Mr. Steere added State infrastructure funding may be available within designated priority funding areas and growth areas in review for potential annexation areas were examined, consisting primarily of residential uses with limited commercial and industrial areas. Existing industrial areas were discussed as possible long-term transition areas and stable residential areas are generally recommended to remain unchanged.

The discussion then focused on development incentives, particularly the role of density as a primary driver for annexation and redevelopment. It was noted that MXT zoning provides significant development flexibility, including increased density and height, making it a strong incentive compared to existing county zoning constraints. Attention turned to the Konterra Town Center (in Prince George's County) area and surrounding properties. While Konterra as a whole was viewed as too large for full incorporation into the City, members discussed the potential value of selectively annexing portions of the property, particularly in the northern areas. These areas may benefit from the flexibility of MXT zoning, which could allow more intensive or diversified development than currently permitted under Prince George's County regulations. Interest has been driven by the planned redevelopment of the hospital campus for healthcare-related uses and the declining viability of large-scale brick-and-mortar retail, which Konterra was originally envisioned to support. Mixed healthcare and related institutional uses were identified as more realistic long-term options.

The discussion acknowledged that approval processes differ significantly between the City and County. Laurel's independent planning authority, due to its exclusion from the regional planning district, was identified as a major advantage. City-level approvals were described as more streamlined and predictable than those required through the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, providing an incentive for developers to pursue annexation and City zoning. Emerging interest in data centers was also noted, particularly in light of recent County policy discussions. While not fully explored, members acknowledged that flexible zoning and City autonomy could make Laurel more competitive for such uses. Overall, members identified density, zoning flexibility, and a more efficient entitlement process as key incentives the city could leverage to attract targeted redevelopment and selective annexation, particularly in large or transitioning areas such as portions of Konterra.

The conversation addressed incentives for annexation and redevelopment, with public safety identified as the most compelling factor. Committee members noted that

enhanced policing and City level public safety services have been a decisive factor in previous annexations, including multifamily developments, particularly in contrast to perceived challenges within Prince George's County system. Committee members then discussed Laurel's unique autonomy in land use, zoning, and entitlements, noting that this independence provides the City with tools unavailable to most other jurisdictions in the County. It was explained this autonomy allows the City of Laurel to more effectively shape scale, scope, and development outcomes, supporting the City's ability to "chart its own destiny." Mr. Steere clarified that while the City has strong tools available, the Master Plan is necessary to organize, legitimize, and align those tools with long-term policy direction and one primary goal of the current Master Plan update is to create a more user-friendly, readable document that reflects updated rules and regulations and better positions the City to leverage its assets.

Then Committee members reflected on prior Master Plans, noting that earlier updates, including the 2016 plan, largely maintained existing policies without significantly advancing new ideas. The current effort was described as more proactive, with direction from City Administration to produce a high-quality, forward-looking document that could serve as a model for other municipalities with more visuals. The discussion then briefly shifted to affordable housing and Committee members referenced areas with higher concentrations of multifamily and income-restricted housing, particularly near major shopping centers and along Laurel–Bowie Road. Committee members went on to discuss whether any areas of the City of Laurel experience a concentration of poverty and identified several apartment complexes and corridors as potential focus areas for further analysis.

Housing and redevelopment trends were then reviewed, existing multifamily and income-restricted housing and older 1950s apartments. Housing is generally dispersed, with no significant concentration of poverty. Recent and ongoing developments are noted, including new multifamily and infill projects near retail centers. Older complexes identified as potential redevelopment opportunities. Emphasis on leveraging proximity to City services like police to support redevelopment while maintaining community diversity. Mr. Steere discussed the rental market trends, and it was noted the census data is lagging, supplemented with property manager contacts and daily pricing software. He added that large operators like Greystar are noted for using third party software, with recent settlement over anti-competitive practices. It was agreed among Committee members that historical housing patterns and current market trends is essential for planning, redevelopment, and Master Plan updates.

Mr. Steere noted housing observations and housing trends prevalence of multiple families subleasing within single units; some work/live units above Main Street stores house several families, occasionally causing management or safety issues. Discussion among Committee members then emphasized tracking demographic and economic conditions, including rents, home values, and recent home sales. New apartment construction and other residential developments are ongoing, with updated data to be included in future reports from Mr. Steere. Committee members expressed appreciation for collaborative input throughout the year, noting that the Master Plan update reflects

community contributions. Mr. Steere announced the next meeting (tentatively in January) to be scheduled; future coordination and follow-up will be communicated.

The Committee, on motion by Mr. Smalls, seconded by Ms. Gnan, and all members present, voted to approve the minutes from November 19, 2025, minutes as written.

Approved: Brooke Herring

Date: 3/24/2026