

MINUTES OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF LAUREL

NOVEMBER 12, 2019

A regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Laurel, Montana, was held in the Council Chambers and called to order by Mayor Tom Nelson at 6:30 p.m. on November 12, 2019.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Emelie Eaton Heidi Sparks
 Bruce McGee Richard Herr
 Scot Stokes

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT: Irv Wilke Bill Mountsier
 Richard Klose

OTHER STAFF PRESENT: Bethany Langve, Clerk/Treasurer

Mayor Nelson led the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag.

Mayor Nelson asked the council to observe a moment of silence.

MINUTES:

Motion by Council Member McGee to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of October 22, 2019, as presented, seconded by Council Member Eaton. There was no public comment or council discussion. A vote was taken on the motion. All five council members present voted aye. Motion carried 5-0.

CORRESPONDENCE: None.

COUNCIL DISCLOSURE OF EX PARTE COMMUNICATIONS: None.

PUBLIC HEARING: None.

CONSENT ITEMS:

- **Claims for the month of November 2019 in the amount of \$631,656.47.**
A complete listing of the claims and their amounts is on file in the Clerk/Treasurer's Office.
- **Approval of Payroll Register for PPE 10/20/2019 totaling \$188,989.05.**

The mayor asked if there was any separation of consent items. There was none.

Motion by Council Member Eaton to approve the consent items as presented, seconded by Council Member McGee. There was no public comment or council discussion. A vote was taken on the motion. All five council members present voted aye. Motion carried 5-0.

CEREMONIAL CALENDAR: None.

REPORTS OF BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS:

- Review the following Minutes:
 - Budget and Finance Committee Draft Minutes of October 22, 2019.
 - Park Board Minutes of October 3, 2019.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (THREE-MINUTE LIMIT): None.

Corey McIlvain, 903 6th Avenue, stated he wanted to voice his support for the Fire Department and the way it is currently structured and operated today. He is the first to admit that he does not know all the facts and is not privy to those facts, but what he has heard is troublesome. He stated like you [Council], he volunteered to be part of the Fire Department, not like you [Council], he volunteered to give back to my community through the mechanism of our Volunteer Fire Department. Similar, he

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hopes, the same thing that motivated you [Council] to run for City Council and to run for Mayor. It is hard to explain to people why we put ourselves in this position. Whether it is on the Fire Department or the Council, but some of the things brought to his attention, he finds troubling. He does appreciate those Council Members who came to the Fire Station last week and engaged in conversation and listened to their concerns. He stated that he finds it a little bit concerning that the Council wasn't as well informed as he had expected them to be, especially considering the proposed changes are drastic. The Fire Department is over 100 years old and has been extremely successful and doesn't know anyone that would or could disagree with that. The level of service based off the ISO rating has been outstanding, and the department is very, very proud of that, and very proud of the service they provide to the community. The things that are troubling are the proposed changes going forward with a full-time chief, with the budget cuts to help facilitate that. He stated he finds those troubling. He questioned what's broke, that there is nothing broke with the Fire Department, its upheld its end of the bargain for over 100 years and is thriving. Yes, the EMS is broke and needs a solution. He asked that Council supports the Fire Department in its current state while moving forward to address the EMS issues. They work with the EMS hand in hand. They work with the Police Department hand in hand. All three function at the highest level. Let them keep doing what they are doing, let the PD do what they are doing and get the EMS up to the same level and keep serving the citizens of Laurel.

Jaime Swecker, 3 Vista Lane, stated he would like to speak about stats. The Fire Department is over 100 years old. Just going back a few years. In 2015 they had 408 calls; they made 408 of those calls. In 2016 they had 454; they made 454 of those calls. In 2017 they had 412; they made every single one. In 2018 they had 360, again 100%. And in 2019 to date they have had 300 calls, again 100% success. His question to you [Council] is why change something that is successful. Why take money from a successful department to fund something that is not needed in the Fire Department. It makes no sense to him as a taxpayer. Why spend \$75,000, \$80,000, whatever it's going to cost Laurel and taxpayers for something that is not broken. If the Fire Department is not broken, hire an EMS director to fix that problem. The Fire Department is not broken. He has stats that he can give to every one of you [Council] upon request. They have the stats to back up what they do for this community. This is just the fire calls and does not include the countless number of hours they donate for the 4th of July or Christmas to Remember or any other event that they hold within the City of Laurel. As a Council, as a Mayor, he would hope your number one priority to the taxpayer is to do the best job you can do with the least amount of tax dollars. This proposal is raising taxes on everyone in the community.

Zach Winchell, 2742 S. Ramshorn, stated he grew up here. He was born and raised in Laurel his whole life. For the last nine years he has been a member of the Fire Department, and for three and a half years prior to the nine years he served on the reserve force here in town. That is approximately 12.5 years serving this community. He stated he would like to address some concerns that he has with the City's plans to change the structure of the Fire Department. He feels that this path forward is irresponsible and premature and does a disservice to the citizens of Laurel. Since 1909 the department has not missed one fire call. That is taking time away from any extracurricular family activities, ball games, etc. Often times it's late at night, and they put themselves in danger to protect complete strangers, protect friends, and sometimes one of their own. He feels that the plan to hire a full-time chief is an expense to the taxpayers that they do not need at this time. He feels this could be a blow to the organization and cause financial hardship on businesses in town. Specifically, there are a lot of entities that come in for the 4th of July or Safety Day. They are all spending monies at the grocery stores, gas stations, and restaurants, and the list goes on. They take the Santa Clause to the park every Christmas and hand candy out. That is not the Fire Department deal, that is a Fire Association, which is outside of the Fire Department giving back to the community. Hiring a full-time chief could possibly jeopardize that because they could say no they are not able to use fire equipment to take Santa Clause around, or you cannot do this, or you cannot hold your meetings on City property. Where does that leave us and where does it leave the community. He stated he would like to point out a couple of things he noticed from the October 24th interview that the Outlook had with Mayor Nelson. He stated that he has two concerns, number one being street maintenance, and number two to improve ambulance service. He goes on to say that up until this summer the Laurel Ambulance was combined with the Laurel Fire Department, which he said was not an ideal situation. He also stated that the decision to merge the two was not approved by the City Council and this resulted in bad ambulance response times to calls. The ambulance calls were an issue prior to being combined with the Fire Department. He went on to say that since his time as Mayor the departments have been separated, and the call response times have improved. Those calls have improved because there are two Firefighters who decided to become EMT's who live in the City of Laurel and can respond to those missed calls when those outside of the City of Laurel are not staffing the ambulance hall. He then said the process has begun to create a full-time chief, and he will be looking at

communities around who have changed to this structure and communicate with them for what has and has not worked. In one sentence, he says that the combined departments did not work. In the next sentence, he states that he is hiring a full-time fire chief. Not once did he address the EMS. How is hiring a fire chief going to fix the EMS? If the Fire Department was not responsible or responding to their calls or droppings calls would you hire a full-time EMS Director to fix the Fire Department? He stated he is not against change but is against the irresponsible changes that can affect our Community. He stated he is also very disappointed in the lack of integrity of our Mayor; he has not once in all his talks come forward to speak to them as a group, to explain why a change was being made. He stated he would leave with one last thing if he takes the change being brought forward as a personal attack on those on the Department. He stated he feels this is a ploy to remove a department head from a position he has been very successful at for the last eight years. He feels that they want to hire someone who is a yes man if you will, who will follow their direction no questions asked. He stated the last question he has for you [Council] is what is the cost? What will it cost the community, what will it cost the taxpayers? Before anything is brought forward there should be clear and concise; the people deserve that. They need to know what it is going to cost them. That is not just a monetary cost.

SCHEDULED MATTERS:

- **Confirmation of Appointments.**
 - **Appointment of Victoria Wessel and Michael Cassou to the Laurel Volunteer Ambulance Department.**

Motion by Council Member Sparks to approve Victoria Wessel and Michael Cassou to the Laurel Volunteer Ambulance Department, seconded by Council Member Eaton. There was no public comment or council discussion. A vote was taken on the motion. All five council members present voted aye. Motion carried 5-0.

- **Resolution No. R19-83: A Resolution Of The City Council Authorizing The Laurel-Yellowstone City-County Planning Board To Work With Staff And The City's Engineers To Prepare Comprehensive Updates To The City's Growth Management Plan.**

Motion by Council Member Stokes to approve Resolution No. R19-83, seconded by Council Member McGee. There was no public comment or council discussion. A vote was taken on the motion. All five council members present voted aye. Motion carried 5-0.

- **Resolution No. R19-84: Resolution Approving An Amendment To The Contract With High Point Networks For The City Of Laurel's Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) Service And Support And Authorizing The Mayor To Sign All Change Order Documents On The City's Behalf.**

Motion by Council Member Herr to approve Resolution No. R19-84, seconded by Council Member McGee. There was no public comment or council discussion. A vote was taken on the motion. All five council members present voted aye. Motion carried 5-0.

- **Resolution No. R19-85: A Resolution Of The City Council Adopting The Yellowstone County Emergency Operations Plan On Behalf Of The City Of Laurel, Montana.**

Motion by Council Member McGee to approve Resolution No. R19-85, seconded by Council Member Eaton. There was no public comment or council discussion. A vote was taken on the motion. All five council members present voted aye. Motion carried 5-0.

- **Resolution No. R19-86: A Resolution Approving An Amendment To The Task Order For The City Of Laurel's 2019 Pavement Maintenance Repairs Project And Authorizing The Mayor To Sign All Change Order Documents On The City's Behalf.**

Motion by Council Member Eaton to approve Resolution No. R19-86, seconded by Council Member Sparks. There was no public comment or council discussion. A vote was taken on the motion. All five council members present voted aye. Motion carried 5-0.

ITEMS REMOVED FROM THE CONSENT AGENDA: None.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS (ONE-MINUTE LIMIT): None.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION:

Council Member Stokes requested the park hours be on the next Workshop. Mayor Nelson asked for clarification if this was the changing of the park hours. It was replied, yes. Mayor Nelson asked for clarification if this was an ordinance. It was replied yes.

Council Member McGee stated the Emergency Services Committee meeting scheduled for November 25th was originally not going to take place. That meeting is going to take place, and he will get the agenda items to the Clerk/Treasurer this week. If there are any items that need to be on the agenda, he needs them this week.

Council Member Sparks requested an update on West Railroad as it was tabled at the last meeting. Mayor Nelson clarified that KLJ is still working on the task. He asked if Council would like to wait until that is completed to be presented to them. Council Member Sparks stated that would be fine. Mayor Nelson stated he would ask that KLJ break the numbers down on each task item to show Council.

Council Member Sparks stated given the meeting that Council had last week with the Fire Department and the concerns address tonight, and as a Council Member who does not sit on Emergency Services she does not have a lot of information on what's going on can there be discussion on the Fire Department situation at next weeks Workshop. Mayor Nelson stated he is elk hunting next week but will come out of the woods for Council Workshop. He stated it spoils his week but will be here anyway and will get three days in any way.

Council Member Eaton stated the Public Works Committee meeting will be next Monday. There are two items that are not on the regular agenda. One as added as a request for the 2019 income for the septic dump station. Will also be adding a review of the pavement maintenance plan and whether the Public Works Department has plans to advance their plans for street maintenance with the increase of income for 2020. The minutes will be provided this weekend for all members who have email. They will also be provided at that meeting.

Council Member Eaton requested the City Attorney attend the next meeting to answer the questions brought up at the last Council meeting regarding the Library Board minutes.

MAYOR UPDATES: None.

UNSCHEDULED MATTERS: None.

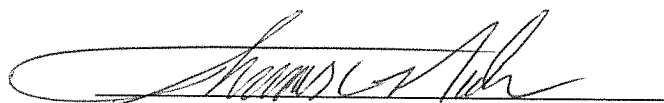
ADJOURNMENT:

Motion by Council Member McGee to adjourn the council meeting, seconded by Council Member Eaton. There was no public comment or council discussion. A vote was taken on the motion. All five council members present voted aye. Motion carried 5-0.

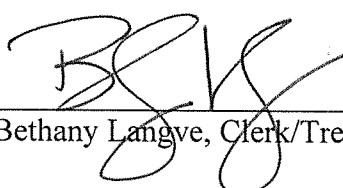
There being no further business to come before the council at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 7:02 p.m.


Brittney Moorman, Administrative Assistant

Approved by the Mayor and passed by the City Council of the City of Laurel, Montana, this 26th day of November 2019.


Thomas C. Nelson, Mayor

Attest:


Bethany Langve, Clerk/Treasurer