

MINUTES OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF LAUREL

January 28, 2025

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 Dave Waggoner at 6:30 p.m. on January 28, 2025.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

| | |
|---------------|---------------|
| Thomas Canape | Heidi Sparks |
| Michelle Mize | Jessica Banks |
| Casey Wheeler | Irv Wilke |
| Richard Klose | Jodi Mackay |

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

OTHER STAFF PRESENT:

Michele, Braukmann, Civil City Attorney
Brittney Harakal, Administrative Assistant
Kurt Markegard, Planning Director/Interim CAO
JW Hopper, Fire Chief
Kelly Strecker, Clerk/Treasurer

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

MINUTES:

Motion by Council Member Wilke to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of January 14, 2025, as presented, seconded by Council Member Mize.

Council Member Canape read the attached letter.

With no objection, the minutes of the regular meeting of January 14, 2025, as presented, were approved. There was no public comment or Council discussion.

CORRESPONDENCE: None.

COUNCIL DISCLOSURE OF EX PARTE COMMUNICATIONS:

Council Member Mackay stated she has a few constituents reach out to her regarding the CAO issue.

PUBLIC HEARING: None.

CONSENT ITEMS:

- **Claims entered through January 24, 2025.**
A complete listing of the claims and their amounts is on file in the Clerk/Treasurer's Office.
- **Clerk/Treasurer Financial Statements for the month of December 2024.**
- **Approval of Payroll Register for PPE 1/19/2025 totaling \$250,361.49.**
- **Council Workshop Minutes of January 7, 2025.**
- **Council Workshop Minutes of January 21, 2025.**

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

Motion by Council Member Klose to approve the consent items as presented, seconded by Council Member Wilke. There was no public comment or council discussion. A vote was taken on the motion. All eight council members present voted aye. Motion carried 8-0.

CEREMONIAL CALENDAR: None.

REPORTS OF BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS:

DW

- Budget/Finance Committee Minutes of January 14, 2025.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (THREE-MINUTE LIMIT): None.

SCHEDULED MATTERS:

- **Resolution No. R25-10: A Resolution Of The City Council Authorizing The Mayor To Execute An Agreement For Provision Of Fire Services For The Laurel Urban Fire Service Area ("LUFSA").**

Motion by Council Member Sparks to approve Resolution No. R25-10, seconded by Council Member Wilke. There was no public comment or council discussion. A vote was taken on the motion. All eight council members present voted aye. Motion carried 8-0.

- **Resolution No. R25-11: A Resolution Of The City Council Authorizing The Mayor To Execute An Independent Contractor Service Contract With Ace Electric, Inc.**

Motion by Council Member Banks to approve Resolution No. R25-11, seconded by Council Member Wilke. There was no public comment or council discussion. A vote was taken on the motion. All eight council members present voted aye. Motion carried 8-0.

- **Resolution No. R25-12: A Resolution Of The City Council Authorizing The Mayor To Execute An Independent Contractor Service Contract With Interstate Power Systems.**

Motion by Council Member Wheeler to approve Resolution No. R25-12, seconded by Council Member Wilke. There was no public comment or council discussion. A vote was taken on the motion. All eight council members present voted aye. Motion carried 8-0.

- **Resolution No. R25-13: A Resolution Of The City Council Authorizing The Mayor To Execute An Employment Agreement For The Position Of Chief Administrative Officer.**

Motion by Council Member Canape to approve Resolution No. R25-13, seconded by Council Member Wilke.

Denise Hammer, 508 6th Avenue, made a public statement about the retention of a CAO. A copy of the statement was not provided to Council in written form."

The attached letter from Josh Bickle was read into the record.

Council Member Mackay read the attached statement into the record.

A Council Member asked that the Council vote separately on the two-year terms and the five-year terms. The City Attorney clarified that it is not possible to separate out a Resolution by way of two different contracts subject to the same Resolution, as proposed by the Council Member because Council Members vote on Resolutions and cannot negotiate and/or amend contracts.

Motion by Council Member Wilke to table Resolution No. R25-13. Motion did not appear to be seconded, although the Mayor stated that a motion and second had occurred. The Motion was voted on with a 5-3 outcome in favor of the Motion to Table. The Mayor noted that a super-majority was required and that, as such, the motion did not pass. [Upon extensive review of the recording no second can be heard.]

Council returned to the main motion. Mayor Waggoner took a roll call vote. Council Members Canape, Wheeler, Klose, Mackay, and Banks voted aye. Council Members Mize, Wilke, and Sparks voted no. Motion carried 5-3.

ITEMS REMOVED FROM THE CONSENT AGENDA: None.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS (ONE-MINUTE LIMIT): None.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION:

A Council Member applauded this body for their willingness to speak their minds in reference to the CAO resolution.



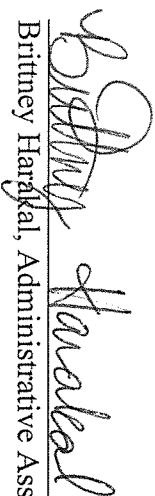
MAYOR UPDATES: None.

UNSCHEDULED MATTERS: None.

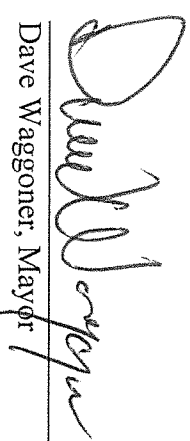
ADJOURNMENT:

Motion by Council Member Mackay to adjourn the council meeting, seconded by Council Member Wilke. There was no public comment or council discussion. A vote was taken on the motion. All eight council members present voted aye. Motion carried 8-0.

There being no further business to come before the Council at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 6:53 p.m.

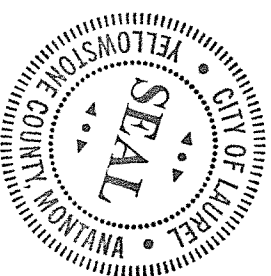

Brittney Harakal, Administrative Assistant

Approved by the Mayor and passed by the City Council of the City of Laurel, Montana, this 11th day of March 2025.


Dave Waggoner, Mayor

Attest:


Kelly Streckey, Clerk/Treasurer





Tom Canape

102 6th Avenue

Laurel, MT 59044

406-861-2400

Ward 1B Council Member

Thank you for giving me the time to speak.

At last week's workshop meeting on 1/21/2025, we had an open discussion on the position of CAO Chief Administrative Officer. At this time, I would like to thank Council Member Mize for her questions. Also, Council Member Jodi McKay, thanks as well. There was a lot of time and research to come up with these questions. And as we know, there are no wrong questions. They need to be asked. Again, thank you both.

Also, I would like to say that the responses Mr. Markegard gave to us, with no hesitation, was spot-on. He had answers to all the questions with explanations. That shows his comprehensive knowledge and convictions to this position as well as his present position with the City. Thank you, Kurt. Thank you, Mayor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Canape". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the top of the first name.

Brittney Harakal

From: Ward 1A
Sent: Tuesday, January 28, 2025 6:23 PM
To: Brittney Harakal
Cc: Ward 1B
Subject: FW: Please read into the record

Brittney-

I will read this into the record under public comment for Resolution R25-13

Thank you!

Heidi Sparks- Council Member
City of Laurel- Ward 1
406-671-0911
Ward1a@laurel.mt.gov

From: Josh <josh@montezumagardens.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 28, 2025 10:07 AM
To: Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Please read into the record

Dear Councilman Canape, Councilwoman Sparks

I am writing you regarding the proposed contract to hire a CAO for Laurel. I have been living in Laurel as a renter for a while, but I just closed on a house here in December, and I look forward to the next chapter of my life as a permanent resident of this city. As someone hoping that this city will embrace a sustainable and prosperous future, my concerns are threefold:

- I understand there is some question if the budget can handle payments for new services, such as the firetruck. I do think that having strong emergency services is vital for this community, but I would like to know that the city has income and expenditures well in hand. I understand that the intent of wrapping in the duties of the current city planner with a higher paid CAO position is to save money, but we all know from doing our personal budgets that \$100 short is \$100 short. If the CAO position is to take the administrative workload off of our elected officials, we should probably look at reducing the compensation accordingly.
- I am concerned that combining a heavy administrative workload with the duties of the current city planner will lead to a "swiss army knife situation," that is, good in a pinch but not really sufficient to get the job done right. As a homeowner, I want to see Laurel grow responsibly by taking advantage of the trends for growth that are very apparent. Well thought out city services to a growing tax base would go a long way towards sustainability for a CAO position.
- My final concern is based on my knowledge of best HR practices. Merging an existing position with new HR responsibilities as a CAO does create conflict when addressing hiring/labor concerns. The best HR practice is to have a department that is completely separate from leadership and supervisory roles. I am not sure that the current plan will provide that.

Thank you for your consideration and the reading of my concerns into the record,

Joshua D Bickle
111 Yellowstone Ave,
Laurel, MT

I've had a lot of reservations regarding this resolution. Not necessarily about Kurt and what he brings to the table, but about the path we took to get here. As I mentioned in ex parte, several constituents reached out to me regarding this appointment and whether or not it was financially smart, whether or not it was necessary and if it was a wise move for the city. Many asked about the process as it was disjointed, unprofessional and messy. I agree with their summation. I was extremely bothered by the way questions were responded to and the incredibly dismissive and disrespectful tone that was taken with certain council members. It is our duty to weigh decisions that effect our city and to ask tough questions. It is my hope that if this appointment goes through it will bring civility and more respectful discourse from the executive branch of our city government.

Jodi Mackay