

**MINUTES
CITY OF LAUREL
CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2019**

A Council Workshop was held in the Council Chambers and called to order by Council President Eaton at 6:30 p.m. on November 19, 2019.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Emelie Eaton	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Heidi Sparks
<input type="checkbox"/> Bruce McGee	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Richard Herr
<input type="checkbox"/> Scot Stokes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Irv Wilke
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Richard Klose	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Bill Mountsier

OTHERS PRESENT:

Bethany Langve, Clerk/Treasurer
Brent Peters, Fire Chief
Jaime Swecker, Fireman

Public Input:

Brent Peters, 1995 Saddleback Dr., stated he thought this was going to be on the agenda tonight to discuss about the issues about the Fire Department as per the last Council meeting. Obviously, we are not; I would like to address the Council. What are we trying to fix? The last 22 years, I have been a responder in Laurel. We have had a problem in the EMS, not a result of the EMT, as they are a strong, dedicated people, but a problem with the staffing to cover all of our calls. These volunteers have poured a lot of time and dedication into the community, and they get to where \$3.50 an hour doesn't cut it for them anymore. They move on and get careers, so they move on. For the last ten years, they have been talking to City administration about full-time EMTs to fix the problem. That's the only thing that's going to fix the problem in Laurel. He is happy to say that he has been informed that the City is hiring five full-time EMT positions now. But the next question is who is going to manage those people. He was given a letter on November 8th stating the intent was to hire a full-time Fire Chief to oversee this. Right now, the Fire and EMS are two separate groups. Wouldn't the money be well spent hiring a full-time EMS Ambulance Director than a full-time fire chief. An ambulance Director that could run the day-to-day operations and schedule them so that we would have max coverage of shifts, manage the State and Federal requirements for the service, assist as an individual responder and build relationships with the surrounding community and mutual aid agreements. I have provided the name of one individual to the past and present administration; they could probably bring added benefits to Laurel. They were a paramedic supervisor. They currently work in a critical care. They were also the director of one of the largest EMT training facilities in Montana. She could bring the possibility of 75 to 100 EMTs to Laurel to help us fix our problem. After being presented that letter, I was trying to think what the mindset behind hiring a full-time fire chief. The Fire Department this year is 110 years old, and we have never missed the call. In 110 years, we have never failed to respond in Laurel. So what is it? We have progressed over the years. We have had to reorganize and restructure as modern firefighter tactics come about. We have

restructured our own department within the last ten years to meet the needs of our community. There is a lot of talk out there that the Fire Department is afraid of change in itself. We are not; we are realists. We understand that if the law dictates that, we need to change our department. We also know that in the society that we have that if we are not able to do our duties that we need to change also. We are very open to changes, but we are not very open to changes when we don't need to. Currently, we are a class three City. We won't know if we are a class 2 city until the 2020 census. As a class three City, there is no requirement for a paid fire chief. If we become a class two city, we are still very limited on what level of paid Fire Department we have to be. It doesn't say in Montana Code Annotated that we need a paid fire chief, paid administration, pay Fire Department, partial paid or a part-time paid or anything. The only reference is that it does say that a second-class city can have a supplementary volunteer Fire Department to aid the paid Fire Department. It doesn't say directly that we have to have a paid Fire Department. if that's the case, per my phone call to the Department of Labor, I would constitute as a part-time Fire Chief. I am a part-time City employee, according to the Department of Labor. because my stipend is 20% of what a paid fire chief would be. I pay all State and Federal Taxes. I receive a W-2 that I am a City employee. Therefore that would make me a City employee. That would make the requirement of a part-time Fire Chief. The design of the Fire Department right now, we have 13 stipend positions. Those 13 stipended positions for a lot of work over there. One of the positions is the Maintenance Captian. who saves the City thousands of dollars a year working on maintaining the equipment we have over there, so we don't have to contract it out to someone else. We have a communications officer over there that saves the City thousands of dollars by taking care of the communication problems, including programming our radios and pagers so that we have clear communications on fire grounds. We have a full Fire Marshall Office over there that investigates every fire for cause and origin; not all-volunteer Fire Departments have this and assists the PD in criminal investigations as well as the Yellowstone County Sheriff's Department. We have an award-winning fire prevention program that interacts with school-aged children multi times a year, teaching them about fire safety and fire awareness and fire prevention as well as summer safety, bike safety, and as a result from that, we have very few calls from school-aged children starting fires. The list goes on. out of those 13 stipends, it is not anywhere close to what they would pay for a full-time chief. that full-time chief would need to take on those roles as well as any other roles in reference to the Ambulance. So it makes sense to keep the structure of the Fire Department the way it is. Look at hiring a full-time EMS Director to manage the EMS Department. Last thing I want to address is teamwork. The City of Laurel needs to work as a team to determine what is best for Laurel. Individualists are only one-dimensional. Research codes, laws, options, opinions, case studies to have a clear understanding of what the right decisions are for Laurel. We need to work with other communities and other resources to find out what has worked and not worked. So we don't make the same mistakes. We have a smart, dedicated people right here in Laurel sitting right amongst us making the decisions for Laurel. We do not have to model ourselves after another City. Communicate, we need to talk to each other; we need to communicate the thoughts and ideas regardless if we agree or not. Thank you.

Shawna Hopper, 504 Roundhouse Drive, I am the wife of a firefighter, and yes, I am the person who posted on the community watch Facebook page last weekend. I posted to make the residents of Laurel aware of the changes the Mayor and the City plan on imposing. I am 100...a 1000% for the safety of our community. The point of the post was just to inform and communicate, which I

feel is lacking. I am here to ask a couple of questions. What is the real problem here in Laurel? Is it the EMT and Ambulance, or is it the Fire Department? What is the plan for the Emergency Services Department here?

Both short-term and long-term. I feel this has to be planned out and execute with the City Residents, the Mayor, the Council, both EMS departments to ensure the safety of our residents. From reading the new statements from the Mayor and the Ambulance Director the past few months, the Mayor's documents, the City budget, and the Mayor's emails to its residents, it does not appear there is an effective, properly planned out proposal. It seems to change daily. I know that the Mayor has stated he has talked to area Fire Chiefs that have transitioned to a paid Fire Department but has he spoke to the actual firefighters fighting fires in those departments? There are hardships that they struggle with daily with getting backing from their volunteers. Their systems struggle also. Why change Laurel's? It has been successful for 110 years. I am also curious why the City would pay one individual more than every single firefighter, their combined wages and stipends when they are not the problem. So my request to all of you is, please fix the problem at hand. Be honest and transparent on a short and long-term plan. Respond and communicate to all emails, to all concerns that all citizens have. Again the safety of this community is most important. Let's fix the problem for those that support us. Thank you.

Jamie Swecker, 3 Penstemon Ln, sorely disappointed tonight. Ms. Sparks requested the Mayor address this at the Workshop this evening. Last week, he agreed to that. He's not here. We have personal lives; I know he does as well. We are human. But he made a commitment to be the Mayor of this City. Those personal obligations sometimes have to be put aside to run this government to the benefit of the citizens. He's showing he doesn't care. To me and the rest of the people in this room, he doesn't care, but he does the citizens of this City. To me, it's disrespectful of you. You requested him, all of you. This is your Workshop; we are just citizens but remember you all work for the taxpayers. He works for the taxpayers. He gets a check from the taxpayers. I don't care if he is hunting. He said he would be here. I hope you hold him accountable for not being here. Thank you.

1. Ordinance - An Ordinance Amending Title 12 Chapter 12.28.060 Of The Laurel Municipal Code For The Purpose Of Changing The Parks And Playground Equipment Closed Hours, Correctly Reference The Proper Section Of LMC For Violations, And Add An Event Exemption.

Park Board spoke in length about the best hours of the parks. The recommendation for the park hours to be 6:00 a.m. to 10 p.m. except for fireworks during the 4th of July or other event's involving the entire community. The goal was to address the vandalism. Currently, there are cameras located at the big park; cameras can be placed at South Pond as well. The second goal was to give the ordinance some teeth so the Police can do their job. People are still able to cross the park, just not loiter.

It was questioned what the punishment is. Park Board member, Evan Bruce, clarified that the original ordinance pointed to the wrong section. This ordinance will need to be adjusted when Riverside Park is completed.

It was clarified this ordinance would have a first and second reading.

General Items

Executive Review

Council Issues

Council President Eaton made the following statement. It is provided in the City Charter as well as Chapter 2.04.020, both paragraphs a and b in LMC, that the Mayor and only the Mayor has the executive power to hire personnel, remove personnel, create new positions, change existing positions. We are the legislators; we have the power to approve appointments, approve the budget that allows personnel to be paid. According to the Mayor's request, we do not have the legislative power to change the Mayor's mind on a personnel issue. This issue has been planned for a long time, and it is underway at this moment. Further, we were also informed of pending changes to the fire personnel when the printed budget was presented to us and approved on September 3rd of this year. Page 4 of the introduction of the budget from the Mayor states, "The general fund appropriations are budgeted at \$4,690,704 with revenues coming in at \$3,920,872. This represents the use of \$769,832 of the reserves. Most of these appropriations are due to the hiring of emergency services staff. I, meaning the Mayor, have made it a number one priority to find a solution to the significant problem our City is facing regarding Ambulance Responses. Our volunteer staff needs support, and I am going to provide them that by hiring a full-time EMS/Fire Chief and three full-time EMT Firefighters. I challenged my Clerk/Treasurer to budget this staff, and she did. Our Emergency Services Committee is working on a mill levy to put out to our citizens to help pay for the needed equipment. The Clerk/Treasurer and Ambulance Director are going to apply for a SAFER Grant to help fund a portion of the wages for these three years. This is a huge endeavor, and I want to thank the volunteer Fire Department for being the first to suggest this type of structure to me. Therefore when we passed the budget, we approved the Mayor's request to put into action these personnel changes. Additionally, I double-checked with the chair of the Emergency Services Committee this past Sunday, and he assured me that the mill levy is intended to fund only the ambulance department. And lastly, the City Budget is not running in deficit. We used \$769,832 out of our reserves for this project. I make this statement because I do not want any Council Member to embarrass themselves by assuming legislatively alter or amend a personnel issue. Personnel issues are the domain of the Mayor alone. We pass the laws to allow for budgetary changes and approve or not the candidates that are chosen to staff the positions that are created. But we do not involve ourselves in personnel issues themselves.

Heidi - the Mayor contacted after last week's meeting and stated he would not be here and that item was pulled from the agenda. That item was moved to the 3rd of December. Will have to confirm next week.

Council Member Sparks made the following statement. I appreciate everything our firefighters do for our community. I admire and respect the loyalty and passion of our volunteer Fire Department. With that being said, I want to briefly address the social media situation of recent weeks. The manner in which concerns and frustrations are being expressed within social media groups and pages is both unprofessional and inappropriate. I personally have seen individuals associated with our Fire Department name-calling, cussing, and going so far as attacking those who do not share their views and opinions. This is counterproductive and is degrading to

themselves, the volunteers, the Fire Department, and their argument overall. I absolutely understand that change is hard. I also understand that there are valid concerns and legitimate frustrations and questions. But at the same time, our firefighters are leaders within this community, and with that comes an expectation of professionalism. Again I thank our many volunteers for their dedication to our safety, and I truly appreciate everything they do for our community.

Council Members Wilke and Klose echoed the statement made by Council Member Sparks.

Public Works Committee met last night at the December 3rd Workshop; please bring your Pavement Management Plan. This plan will be beneficial in the discussion about the plan for next year's Pavement Maintenance.

Other Items

Review of Draft Council Agendas

2. Review Draft Council Agenda of November 26, 2019.

Attendance at Upcoming Council Meeting

Announcements

3. Employee Volunteer Recognition:

Council President Eaton read recognized the following people for their years of service.

Geralyn Stevens	29 Years	Library
Susan Canape	24 Years	Police
Travis Pitts	23 Years	Police
Monica Salo	18 Years	Court
Jessica McCartney	12 Years	Police
Dylan Ceaser	6 Years	Water Plant
Keith Burns	6 Years	Fire Department
Michael Jenkins	6 Years	Fire Department
Thomas Sarkela	6 Years	Fire Department
Jamie Swecker	6 Years	Fire Department

Emergency Services Committee's next meeting is Monday, November 25, 2019, at 6:00 p.m. in Council Chambers.

The council workshop adjourned at 6:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Brittney Moorman
Administrative Assistant

NOTE: This meeting is open to the public. This meeting is for information and discussion of the Council for the listed workshop agenda items.