

City of Laurel

LET'S TALK

TOWN HALL

REPORT

February 2024



REPORT OVERVIEW

Mayor Keith R. Sydnor and the Laurel City Council met with residents on January 25, 2024, in the Council Chambers of the Joseph R. Robison Laurel Municipal Center, for a Town Hall Meeting to find out what were their questions and concerns.

The following Town Hall Report outlines the questions at asked by Laurel's residents, followed by the answers from the Department with the corresponding question number:

- Q1.** Request a community cleanup day for citizens to pick up trash (Parks and Recreation)
- Q2.** Request a cleanup of the debris in the Roland B. Sweitzer Community Park pond. (Parks and Recreation)
- Q3.** Request to hire a grant writer to receive funds from the Federal Government from the Inflation Reduction Act. (Undergoing review by the City)
- Q4.** Lack of greenspace/opposed to the development of the Corridor Center. (Undergoing review by the City)
- Q5.** Request City of Laurel to follow the Department of Energy and State of Maryland Electrical Energy Rebate Program. (Undergoing review by the City)
- Q6.** Concerns on 4th Street and Compton Street Alley – standing water, potholes, etc. (Public Works)
- Q7.** Lack of Visibility on 4th and 5th Street, making a right or left turn onto Main Street. (Public Works)
- Q8.** Incentivizing high tech corporations and upscale businesses to move Laurel. (Economic and Community Development)
- Q9.** Closing a part of Main Street for walkability to promote businesses via art festival, music festival. (Economic and Community Development)
- Q10.** Stop Sign at Sandy Spring Road and Carriage Hill Drive. (Public Works)
- Q11.** Restoration of Walker Branch Stream - Rocky Gorge Reservoir. (Emergency Management)
- Q12.** Rent Stabilization. (Undergoing review by the Mayor and City Council)
- Q13.** Affordable Housing. (Economic and Community Development)
- Q14.** Juveniles Crime, as well as Fentanyl Use. (Laurel Police)
- Q15.** Detecting loud noise from automobiles, with some way to measure the noise and give a citation. (Laurel Police)
- Q16.** Racing and speeding on local streets. (Laurel Police)
- Q17.** Traffic concerns on Laurelton Drive and White Way. Can there be some type of signage or arrow to prevent head on collisions. (Public Works)
- Q18.** Sidewalks for RT 197 heading toward 198. Need to coordinate with Prince George's County. (Public Works)
- Q19.** Issue at Clubhouse Blvd. Need steady green arrow for 10-15 seconds right away to avoid accidents, as well as Protected Bike Lanes, and Cross signal pedestrian button at Sandy Spring and Van Dusen Roads not working. (Public Works/Economic and Community Development)
- Q20.** Laurel Park Racetrack possibly closing in 3 years. (Will follow this concern)
- Q21.** American Climate Corps - train young people for jobs in clean energy. (Undergoing review)
- Q22.** Website to look up crime reports, DPW issues, etc. (Community Information)
- Q23.** Hometown Banners on Main Street. (Public Works)

LAUREL POLICE DEPARTMENT

Working in partnership with the community, the Laurel Police Department is committed to providing the highest quality of law enforcement service to the City of Laurel citizens by aggressive Crime Prevention and vigorously pursuing and arresting criminals. The Department promotes community safety by seeking solutions to any situation that creates fear or threatens the quality of life in the City of Laurel.

Please see below the questions/issues and answers pertaining to this Department from the Town Hall:

Q14. Juvenile Crime and Fentanyl Use.

The Laurel Police Department has also observed that juvenile-related crime has developed into a major concern over the last few years. The Department makes great efforts at keeping the community safe via enforcement initiatives, crime education and prevention efforts, and community engagement, as well as assistance from available technology and engineering measures. One of the most concerning issues remains a lack of accountability for juveniles responsible for crime in our community, region and statewide. Recent Maryland legislative measures have made it unlawful to arrest those responsible for many crimes if they are under the age of 13 (only a few extremely violent felonies are excepted). For instance, if a 12-year-old steals a car, assaults a classmate, or threatens to conduct a school shooting, they cannot be arrested in Maryland. Also, law enforcement is no longer permitted to question anyone under the age of 18 who is detained for a criminal act, even a murder, robbery, or carjacking. The exception is if a person under 18 has a lawyer, the lawyer can permit an interview, but the under 18 suspects cannot independently do so, and their parent or guardian cannot allow an interview either, only their attorney may.

As for concerns with drug overdoses, members of the Laurel Police Department (LPD) are trained in administering Narcan to opioid overdose victims and carry the drug with them to assist during such events. In fact, LPD members have had two recent recoveries of overdose victims. LPD also helps the community with such assistance measures by conducting training seminars and distributing Narcan to our community members wishing to assist during these tragic overdose events. We also conduct enforcement and education efforts in our community to help combat the effects of the illicit drug trade in Laurel, including undercover and task force operations and teaching the DARE program in the City.

LAUREL POLICE DEPARTMENT CONT'

Q15 and Q16. Detecting Loud Noise from Automobiles; A Way to Measure the Noise and Give a Citation; Racing and Speeding Concerns.

The Laurel Police Department (LPD) conducts robust traffic enforcement and education efforts, as well as working with Public Works and other partners on engineering solutions. Our agency is also an original member of the Council of Government's Safe Roads Task Force, and the Chief is the current Chair of that group. Traffic-related concerns are not just a local issue, but a National problem as well with Street Takeover and Exhibition Driving events that are a major issue where community, officer and driver safety are a focus for law enforcement. We work with many regional partners to effectively address this issue, as well as representatives in Annapolis, to help adjust legislation for more effective enforcement of these unsafe driving practices. LPD does enforce the traffic and criminal laws in order to help keep our community safe, including utilizing available technological tools such as Automated Enforcement devices, noise meters, and speed enforcement technology, as well as officer observations leading to enforcement and education measures. The City also utilizes speed humps, speed trailers, and speed indicators as a means to help manage and slow traffic throughout the community. However, enforcement efforts alone are not enough. To be most effective at protecting the community, law enforcement, our other criminal justice partners and the community, must work together to help manage this concern.



PUBLIC WORKS

The Department of Public Works (DPW) provides a wide range of services to the citizens of Laurel. Services include residential and commercial refuse and recycling collection, street and sidewalk maintenance and repair, storm drain maintenance, tree management, engineering solutions for public safety, effective management of the Capital Improvement Program, which includes upgrading roads, sidewalks and curb and gutters, maintenance of the automotive fleet, snow and ice removal and quick and effective responses to inclement weather.

Please see below the questions/issues and answers pertaining to this Department from the Town Hall:

Q6. Concerns on 4th Street and Compton Street Alley – standing water, potholes etc.

Need to review the City's alley policy.

Q7. Lack of Visibility on 4th and 5th Street making a right or left turn onto Main Street.

Public Works has currently improved sight distance issues on Main Street and 5th Street by restricting parking with bollards, speed bumps, roadway markings and sign placement. Main Street and 4th Street will be next to correct any sight distance issues, but will require warmer weather to install the material.

Q10. Stop Sign at Sandy Spring Road and Carriage Hill Drive.

Public Works has inspected both entrances to this community where the stop signs are installed and found no issues with the stop sign being faded or fading.

Q17. Traffic concerns on Laurelton Drive and White Way. Can there be some type of signage or arrow to prevent head on collisions?

A DPW project inspector has inspected the delineator signs at this intersection and has reported back that they need replacement. A traffic analysis will be conducted at this intersection to observe any other issues regarding head on collisions and speed.

Q18. Sidewalks for RT 197 heading toward 198.

This roadway is out of the City of Laurel jurisdiction and is owned by the State Highway Administration (SHA). Public Works will put in a request with SHA about the community concerns.

Q19. Issue at Clubhouse Blvd. Can there be a steady green arrow for 10-15 seconds right away to avoid accidents? Protected Bike Lanes; Sandy Spring and Van Dusen Roads pedestrian cross signal button not working.

The City of Laurel had a safety audit conducted with this signal in the scope of the audit. The findings show that it is suggested that MDOT-SHA adjust the left-turn signal timing for nonpeak times. DPW has already put in this request with the State Highway Administration for the adjustment. As of now Sandy Spring and Van Dusen Roads are not a bike lane, but could be looked at in the future to possibly become one. And a DPW Project Inspector will inspect the pedestrian push button and schedule repairs. This pedestrian signal is also on the schedule to be upgraded.

Q23. Hometown Hero Banners on Main Street.

This is being reviewed by Public Works for possible addition at the beginning of Main Street.

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Department of Economic and Community Development maintains and oversees the built environment within the City of Laurel. The Department is responsible for Zoning Compliance, Subdivision and Development Review, Historic Preservation Review, Economic Development, Affordable Housing, and implementation of the City's Master Plan. These activities are intended to improve the life quality in the City of Laurel.

Please see below the questions/issues and answers pertaining to this Department from the Town Hall:

Q4. Lack of greenspace – Opposed to the development of the Corridor Center.

The Corridor Center Project is currently under review by internal and external staff. If the City is going to keep up with the need for housing in the region, we will need to explore all our options when it comes to providing an adequate amount of recreation facilities/parkland/greenspace, whether that is located directly in the City limits or surrounding the City.

Q8. Incentivizing high tech corporations and upscale businesses to move to Laurel.

The City is currently exploring all options when it comes to bringing in new businesses which includes various high-tech operations and upscale businesses. The possibility of new grant programs being offered will aid in the attraction of these types of businesses.

Q9. Closing a part of Main Street for walkability to promote businesses via art and music festivals.

The Main Street Committee has spoken about this at several meetings. Staff is very open to working with the businesses along Main Street to coordinate more events along the street, which may include closing the street for some of these events. We want to utilize our Arts and Entertainment District along Main Street.

Q13. Affordable Housing.

The City Council passed the first For-Sale Affordable Housing Ordinance in the history of the City in 2023. The City has also had an affordable housing rental program since 2015.

Q19. Clubhouse Blvd – Steady green arrow for 10-15 seconds right away to avoid accidents.

The traffic consultant for the Patuxent Greens Project analyzed this issue during their traffic study and determined that modifying the existing southbound MD 197 left turn signal from what is called E/P (Exclusive/Permissive) five-section signal head to a dedicated left turn on green arrow only could help alleviate the problem. This improvement will eliminate the operational safety and sight distance challenge that exists for cars that are either northbound or southbound in the left turn lane. The Applicant has agreed to submit Traffic Signal Modification Plans and to fund this particular improvement.

PARKS AND RECREATION

Parks and Recreation is a full-service agency offering recreation programs and services throughout six facilities and 19 park sites encompassing over 222 acres of parkland. The Department is in the business of creating memories that make life worth living! Whether you are looking for a class to participate in, a place to work out and get in shape, a sports league, swimming pools, camp programs, or senior social activities, the Department of Parks and Recreation has something for you.

Please see below the questions/issues and answers pertaining to this Department from the Town Hall:

Q1. Request a community cleanup day for citizens to pick up trash.

The Parks and Recreation Department holds two annual community clean ups. These events allow for community participation and serves as a great opportunity for students to get their required community service hours. The Department also supplies individuals or organizations to create their own cleanups at their leisure. See how you can help Laurel stay clean:

1. The first one is **The Patuxent River Clean Up** on Saturday, April 6 from 10 am to 12pm. This will be the City of Laurel's 16th year participating in the statewide event coordinated by the Patuxent Riverkeepers. The staging area will be Riverfront Park located at Avondale Street. Volunteers will be asked to assist in removing trash and debris from the shoreline and surrounding park along the Patuxent River. Trash bags and gloves, along with some hard tools will be provided and you are asked to dress appropriately.
2. The second event is the annual **Earth Day Clean Up**. This event corresponds with the National Global Earth Day Celebration. The event meets at the Granville Gude Park and Lakehouse on Saturday, April 20 from 10 am to 12 pm. This clean up allows volunteers to come out and due their part in cleaning around the Laurel Lake while making a difference in the community. Trash bags and gloves, along with some hard tools will be provided and you are asked to dress appropriately.
3. In addition to the organized cleanups, the Department of Parks and Recreation along with the Department of Economic and Community Development have launched an ongoing Green Up and Clean Up Program as part of the "Keep Maryland Beautiful Campaign." **Community Clean Up Kits** are available for pickup. These kits come with buckets, trash pickers, trash bags and gloves. The kits are available to any organization, group or individuals who want to plan their own clean up on their schedule. Simply call the department (301-725-7800) to schedule pick up of your clean up kits and tell us your location of your clean up. Park staff will pickup your trash the following day.

PARKS AND RECREATION CONT'

Q2. Request a cleanup of the debris at the Roland B. Sweitzer Community Park pond.

The Department of Parks Recreation has been treating the pond over the years. Last year particularly, we contracted a company to treat the pond to specifically target the parrot feather or duckweed as seen on the surface. Parrott Feather is often mistaken for algae and it's not. It's a versatile plant for ponds and water gardens. It oxygenates the water and provides fish a place to hide and reduces algae. It can take over a body of water due to its large size. The City will continue to treat the pond and will try to make the pond more appealing to visitors. We also contracted a company last summer to clear brush, vines, cattails and undergrowth from around the perimeter of the pond to better promote a more appealing area.



COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

We are a full-service agency offering recreation programs and services throughout six facilities and 19 park sites encompassing over 222 acres of parkland. The Department is in the business of creating memories that make life worth living! Whether you are looking for a class to participate in, a place to work out and get in shape, a sports league, swimming pools, camp programs, or senior social activities, the Department of Parks and Recreation has something for you.

Please see below the questions/issues and answers pertaining to this Department from the Town Hall:

Q11. Restoration of Walker Branch Stream - Rocky Gorge Reservoir.

Per Clean Water Partnership, the project is slated to start in mid-February with a break in March for a stream closure period and back to the project in mid-June. The ETA is expected to finish the project this fall. Property owners adjacent to the project will have received the following brochure:

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, IN ALLIANCE WITH THE CLEAN WATER PARTNERSHIP (CWP), HAS BEEN WORKING ON THE PLANNING AND DESIGN OF A WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT IN LAUREL, MD, 20707.

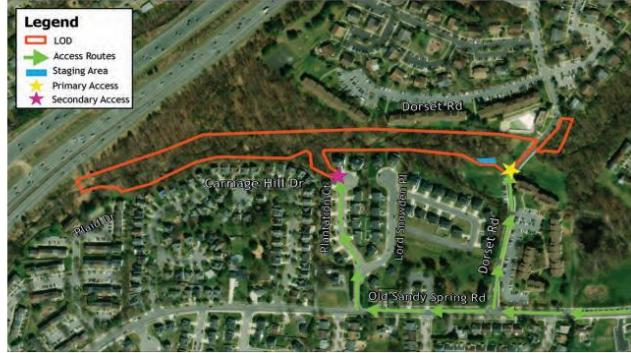
PROJECT DETAILS INFO:
This is a restoration project to improve the condition of the affected stream. Stream restoration is a best management practice (BMP) that stabilizes eroded streams, restores natural aquatic ecosystems, and improves water quality.

The proposed stream work will include designing and grading the stream channel using appropriate riffle-pool sequencing, cross-vanes, and sills. Additionally, increased floodway capacity will be achieved, allowing for improved drainage during storm events.

See the overview map for additional details. After construction is complete, all disturbed areas will be returned to stable conditions.

Legend

- LOD
- Access Routes
- Staging Area
- Primary Access
- Secondary Access



PROJECT NAME	SR-77 Walker Branch Stream Restoration
PROJECT ADDRESS	Near 15614 Dorset Rd, Laurel, MD 20707
CONTRACTOR	RES
CONSTRUCTION START DATE	Spring 2024
CONSTRUCTION FINISH DATE	Fall 2024
CONSTRUCTION HOURS (typical):	Monday – Friday: 7 a.m. – 4 p.m. Saturday (as needed): 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
CONSTRUCTION PARKING INFO	Crews will park vehicles on the Dorset Rd parking lot and within the project site.
SITE ACCESS INFO	Construction crews will access the site via an entrance off Dorset Road. Approximately 1 to 5 trucks will deliver materials to the site each workday. All construction and staging will occur within the project's limit of disturbance (LOD). The LOD is the boundary within which all construction, materials storage, grading, landscaping, and related activities will occur.
RESIDENT PARKING RESTRICTIONS	There will be no parking restrictions.
TREE REMOVAL	Construction crews will remove several trees to make room for the stream restoration. Crews will plant new trees at the end of construction to replace removed trees. Additionally, invasive vegetation will be removed and replaced with native plants and shrubs.

COMMUNITY-BASED INFORMATION

Q22. It was asked where residents could find information.

The City of Laurel uses multiple platforms to reach out to residents and businesses about what is happening in and around the City:

- The City of Laurel web site, www.cityoflaurel.org:
 - Information from Public Works about traffic safety/calming devices and how residents can request a study can be found at <https://www.cityoflaurel.org/400/Traffic-Safety>.
 - Information about the Laurel Police Department's crime data can be found at <https://www.cityoflaurel.org/164/Police>.
 - Residents can sign up for alerts and report issues at:
 - <https://www.cityoflaurel.org/1487/MyLaurel-Mobile-App>
 - <https://www.cityoflaurel.org/AlertCenter.aspx>
 - Residents can sign up for the RSS (Real Simple Syndication) feeds at <https://www.cityoflaurel.org/list.aspx> to receive updates from different Departments within the City.
- The City of Laurel App, **MyLaurel Maryland**: The City of Laurel has a newly updated application, or App, called *MyLaurel Maryland*. Available for both Androids and iPhones, residents and businesses can sign up to use this app at <https://www.cityoflaurel.org/1487/MyLaurel-Mobile-App> and then use it to:
 - Report issues and make requests directly to City Departments.
 - Access information on prominent events in Laurel.
 - Quickly call common city phone numbers.
 - Receive Emergency Notifications.
 - And more!
- City of Laurel **Social Media** Platforms: Many of our Departments make use of Social Media through the Facebook, X, Instagram, and YouTube platforms to keep the community informed. Please visit our Social Media Center at <https://www.cityoflaurel.org/209/Social-Media-Center> and be sure to follow and like to stay in the know about what the City has going on for its community residents and businesses.
- **The Laurel Ledger**: Most everyone with a City of Laurel address has been receiving the City's local paper, the Laurel Independent, for the past 2.5 years. In the center of that local paper, is the City Government's insert, **The Laurel Ledger**, that outlines Department highlights, Council Legislation, Emergency Tips, Green Tips and events coming in the following months, plus a calendar you can pull out and put on your fridge. Be sure to keep an eye out for it, usually the 2nd Wednesday of the month, in your mailboxes and stay in the know!
- **Digital Signs** – The City of Laurel has seven digital signs located at different facilities around the City to help inform residents and visitors what meetings and events are happening, as well as when and where. It also allows for Non-profit organizations in the City to advertise four times a year the different events they have happening to help reach more of the Laurel community. If you have an organization, and would like to learn more about utilizing these signs, please call 301-725-5300 ext. 2109.

And please, if you have any other ideas on how we can get community information to you, email the City at CAdmin@laurel.md.us.

IN CLOSING....

Mayor Keith R. Sydnor and the Laurel City Council want to thank all the residents that came out to the Let's Talk, Community First Town Hall. It is because of citizens like you that come out and speak up, that helps make Laurel a great place to live, work and thrive.

Keep your eyes out for the next Town Hall and we hope to see more of our Laurel community residents in attendance then!

In the meantime, if you have any immediate concerns, please call 301-725-5300 and our City staff will be on hand to answer any questions or concerns you may have.

