April 25, 2022

Laurel City Council President Brencis D. Smith
Laurel City Councilmembers
8103 Sandy Spring Road
Laurel, Maryland 20707

Dear President Smith and Councilmembers,

With this letter, I present for your consideration the proposed City of Laurel FY2023 General Operating and Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Budget.

The priority of the FY2023 Budget is obviously the continuation of services our residents deserve and expect. This requires the complete dedication of tax dollars to fund the essential expenditures, compensation, employee insurance, property insurance, the Pension Fund contribution, debt service and the CIP, as well as contractual and legislative obligations, and to prepare for the reduction of customary revenue resources at a level no one can positively identify at this time.

As the Public Health Emergency continued, the Administration and City Staff worked diligently to keep up with ever-changing human resources policies and guidance that was issued from the Federal, State and County Officials. The position funded in the FY2022 operating budget that provided for a dedicated Human Resources Officer, has been of great assistance to the employees and the Administration. Throughout the course of the year, the City continued to respond to community needs by sponsoring food distributions and providing masks and COVID-19 test kits to many nonprofits, businesses, community service and faith-based organizations, and Laurel’s residents. Although there were several Executive Orders established to maintain public safety protocols throughout the City which curtailed activities such as in person meetings, large community events and access to public buildings, I am pleased to say that all Executive Orders have been rescinded! Elected Officials, City Staff and Volunteers experienced another busy year working to keep the City of Laurel the beautiful, safe and friendly community we all enjoy.

The City held a General Election for the Laurel City Council positions in November 2021. FY2022 funding supported a vote by mail option and as required by Resolution No. 2-21, a Resolution of the Mayor and City Council of Laurel, Maryland to set the date, time and polling location for Early Voting in the City of Laurel for the General Election of November 2021, early voting was held at the Laurel Municipal Center.

For FY2023, the City of Laurel Proposed Budget is presented without a tax rate increase, maintaining the City’s real property tax rate at $.71 cents per $100 of assessed valuation. The Personal Property tax rate will remain $1.69 per $100 of assessed value. The tax rate for the Special Taxing District is $0.03 per $100 of the full cash value assessment. The proposed budget continues all City services at FY2022 service levels and provides a two-and one-half percent Market Adjustment for all City employees.
The Administration and the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) developed a comprehensive plan for the first tranche of $12.6 million dollars of American Rescue and Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) funding the City received directly from the Federal Government. The spending plan was reviewed and approved by the City Council with OEM and the Department of Budget and Personnel Services (BAPS) administering the ARPA Program to ensure compliance with the United States Department of the Treasury’s Interim Final Rule. The City appointed an ARPA Committee charged with reviewing and approving specific projects requested by City Departments, various civic and non-profit organizations and City businesses. Approximately $4 million has been distributed directly into the community, with the remaining funding City Government projects. These funds have supported projects such as: the construction of a universally accessible inclusive playground, the creation of an apprenticeship readiness program, and provided funds to various food pantries throughout the City. Funds were also used for financial assistance to citizens and families for rent, utilities, and food. Additionally, funds were used for improvements to many home-based businesses like daycares and significant funding was provided to WSSC to assist Laurel residents with delinquent water and sewer service accounts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The ARPA funds also supported the Department of Economic and Community Development in their establishment of three (3) grant programs. These programs were aimed at businesses located within the City of Laurel who were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The City is due to receive another $12.6 million in August 2022.

Good news for City residents: in the Patuxent Greens subdivision, the City achieved a class 7 rating on our Community Rating System (CRS) Program, so residents can receive a 15% discount on their flood insurance premiums. The discount will automatically take place this spring for those with the Community Identification Number 240053. A Community Identification Number is a 6-digit number to identify each National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) community.

Over the past year, the Department of Public Works (DPW) debuted a pilot construction debris drop-off program and that will be expanded in FY2023. With the Mayor and City Council’s adoption of Resolution 9-21, the Department of Public Works implemented a process for the upgrade and repair of alleys. Public Works continues to expand and grow the City’s curbside organics recycling and composting program and added EPS (Styrofoam) recycling and charitable donation drop-offs to the semiannual electronics recycling and paper shredding events. Finally, DPW provided 2,950 bulky item pickups and 108 commercial special pickups in calendar year 2021 and resurfaced, repaired or replaced over 25 streets, curbs and sidewalks.

The Office of the City Administrator, along with the Environmental Programs Manager, continued its effort to promote sustainability and "Green Living" and worked with consultants to complete Phase I of a sustainability plan for the City focusing on responsible environmental management and conservation practices, embracing social equity, fairness, health, and wellness and supporting local businesses and economic growth. The City was accepted into the State of Maryland Department of the Environment’s Green Registry, which promotes and recognizes sustainable practices at organizations of all types and sizes throughout the State.

While responding to the COVID-19 crisis remained a constant, I am pleased to say several significant accomplishments occurred in FY2022, including:

- Presented the Operating Budget to the City Council with no tax increase and continued the same level of service to the community.
- Secured $2.5 million in State of Maryland funding and began working with the City’s Architectural and Engineering firm on the design of the new Multiservice Center Building,
Phase 1, to provide space and expand the recreation needs of the community; and Phase 2, to provide services to those in need in the Greater Laurel area.

- Passed Ordinance No. 1977 on June 28, 2021, prohibiting distribution of disposable single-use plastic bags in the City of Laurel.
- The Department of the Fire Marshal and Permit Services rolled out its new on-line permitting system that provided a more streamlined approach for conducting City business.
- Communications produced a Documentary titled "COVID-19 - One Year Later: The City of Laurel’s Survival Story"
- Communications produced a Bilingual PSA called "Take the Shot Laurel" to encourage the community to get vaccinated.
- Held many virtual community briefings on City’s response to COVID-19.
- Moved forward with the expansion of the City’s Organics Recycling Program.
- Started the Comprehensive City-wide Traffic and Parking Analysis.
- Established Juneteenth (June 19th) as an official City Holiday and established a Juneteenth Celebration Planning Committee to plan an annual City-wide event.
- Adopted legislation to provide for one virtual and one in-person Mayor and City Council meeting per month, with a meeting start time of 6:00 p.m.

The Administration continues to concentrate our efforts with economic development, financial stability, and sustainability, which will help us thrive after this Pandemic is over. Our debt obligations are under the authorized levels as mandated in our Charter, which are manageable for the proposed document. We continue to engage and assist our business community through the efforts of our Main Street and Economic Development Programs. The Department of Economic and Community Development (ECD) continues to work tirelessly with the business community with Federal, State, County and other funding programs for the Laurel community to keep our local economy thriving during these very difficult times. ECD administered grants that awarded a total of $374,827 in funds and technical assistance to property owners, businesses, as well as residents.

In FY2022, the City Clerk continued with the scanning and preservation of additional important documents of the City Government. The important project of preserving documents that represent the history of the City Government will continue this year. The Gude Mansion is now open for rentals and other events as permitted. Additionally, the Department of Parks and Recreation Administrative Offices were relocated to the Gude Mansion, which will allow us the opportunity to reuse their old space at the Municipal Center to accommodate the expansion of office space for a few Departments that have outgrown their existing space. Funds have been added to complete the alley improvements to "Alley Street" (#8), which will be the first alley to be completed under the City’s new Alley Policy, as approved by the Council.

With the City Council’s adoption of this proposed Operating Budget, we will continue our efforts to preserve and enhance City programs, such as the new “One and Done” program that I recently announced on Earth Day, Friday April 22, 2022. The One and Done Program will enhance the City’s recycling program that is not only good for the environment but will also be good for our residents and Department of Public Works crews.

As you know, with the City’s purchase of the property located at 204 Ft. Meade Road to be the home of the future City of Laurel Multiservice Center, we will continue moving forward on the project with another $2.5 million dollars from the State of Maryland. Phase 1 will begin in the
very near future and includes the renovation of a portion of the building to be utilized as Parks and Recreation space.

Planning for Phase 2 of the Multiservice Center is well underway and will require the City to provide for a Manager of the facility. I want to bring this person onboard before the facility is complete to work with the City’s Architectural and Engineering firms on the final design details and to begin work on procedures, policies, service coordination, outreach, and more. Funding for this position has also been included in this is budget.

Lastly, I have added funds to purchase print space for outreach to the Laurel community through methods other than social media and the internet. With the loss of the Laurel Leader, it is more important than ever for us to get the word out to our community and to provide them with firsthand information on City news, events, proposed and adopted legislation, and the many other things the Mayor and City Council are doing to make our community an even better place to work, live, raise a family and to have fun.

I would like to take this opportunity to make each of you and the general public aware that with the hard work of the Budget Committee, Ms. Michele Saylor, Director, Budget and Personnel Services, Ms. Sara A. Green, CMC, Chief of Staff, Mrs. Lisa Woods, Deputy Director, Department of Budget and Personnel Services, under the direction of Ms. Joanne Hall-Barr, Deputy City Administrator, the Administration has proposed a complete and balanced FY2023 Budget and CIP, while continuing to deal with the impact of COVID. Although the proposed budget is lean and conservative in nature, it is possible that we may be required to amend the budget throughout the fiscal year as circumstances change.

Thank you to members of the City Council for your continued support and dedication to our residents and businesses over the past year. A sincere thanks to the dedicated City employees and the leadership of City Administrator Christian L. Pulley, CPM and Deputy City Administrator Joanne Hall-Barr.

Continuing with sustainable practices and minimizing the use of paper, Councilmembers will be able to access the proposed budget for review on a City issued device for the eighth consecutive year. I look forward to your review and adoption of the FY2023 Budget and CIP document.

Sincerely,

Craig A. Moe
Mayor