

MINUTES OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF LAUREL

April 14, 2026

A regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Laurel, Montana, was held in the Council Chambers and called to order by Council President Canape at 6:29 p.m. on April 14, 2026.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

Thomas Canape	Sara Naylor
Brent Edgmond	Jessica Banks
Casey Wheeler	Irv Wilke
Richard Klose	Jodi Mackay

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

OTHER STAFF PRESENT:

Britney Harakal, Administrative Assistant
Forrest Sanderson, Contracted Planner
Kelly Strecker, Clerk/Treasurer
Kelly Gauslow, Accounts Payable
Matt Wheeler, Public Works Director
JW Hopper, Fire Chief

Council President Canape led the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag.

MINUTES:

Motion by Council Member Mackay to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of February 10, 2026, as presented, seconded by Council Member Klose. There was no public comment or Council discussion. A roll call vote was taken on the motion. All eight Council Members present voted aye. Motion carried 8-0.

CORRESPONDENCE:

- Police Monthly Report – March 31, 2026
- Public Comments Received by April 10, 2026.

COUNCIL DISCLOSURE OF EX PARTE COMMUNICATIONS:

Council Member Mackay disclosed correspondence she sent to Governor Greg Gianforte regarding communication from the State concerning the proposed forensic facility and noted that no response had been received.

PUBLIC HEARING:

- Public Hearing on a variance Requested By Drew Nordman To Allow Side-Corner Minimum Setback For An Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) In The Approximate Location Of The Existing Non-Conforming Garage.

Council President Canape opened the public hearing regarding a variance request submitted by Drew Nordman to reduce the required side corner setback for an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) located at 201 North 5th Avenue.

Forrest Sanderson presented the staff report and reviewed the recommendation of the Laurel Yellowstone City-County Planning Board. He explained that the Planning Board recommended approval of the variance reducing the required side corner setback from 20 feet to 16 feet, finding that six of the seven required variance criteria had been met.

The applicant, Drew Nordman, spoke in support of the request, explaining that the proposal would replace the existing nonconforming garage with a larger garage containing an ADU while maintaining the existing setback.

There being no opponents or additional comments, Council President Canape closed the public hearing.

kmf

CONSENT ITEMS:

- **Claims entered through April 10, 2026.**
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 March 2026.**
- **Approval of Payroll Register for PPE 3/29/2026 totaling \$294,818.45.**

The Council President 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 roll call 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:

- Budget/Finance Committee Minutes of March 24, 2026.
- City/County Planning Board Minutes of March 18, 2026.
- Emergency Services Committee Minutes of March 23, 2026.
- Laurel Airport Authority Minutes of December 16, 2025.
- Laurel Urban Renewal Agency Minutes of March 23, 2026.
- Tree/Park Board Minutes of April 2, 2026.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (THREE-MINUTE LIMIT):

Byrne Manley addressed the Council regarding the proposed state forensic facility. He expressed concerns about community safety, the future use of the property, proximity to nearby schools, and the State's characterization of residents' concerns as unfounded.

SCHEDULED MATTERS:

- **Appointment of Amy Mullaney to the Public Works Committee.**

Motion by Council Member Mackay to approve the Mayor's appointment of Amy Mullaney to the Public Works Committee, 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. R26-08: A Resolution Of The City Council Authorizing The Mayor To Approve A Change Order With Earth Mover's Excavation For The Project Known As The Bernhardt Ditch Improvements Project.**

Motion by Council Member Edgmond to approve Resolution No. R26-08, 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. R26-09: A Resolution Of The City Council Approving The Variance Requested By Drew Nordman To Allow Side-Corner Minimum Setback For An Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) In The Approximate Location Of The Existing Non-Conforming Garage.**

Motion by Council Member Banks to approve Resolution No. R26-09, 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. R26-10: A Resolution Of The City Of Laurel City Council Authorizing The Mayor To Execute All Necessary Agreements For Services Performed By Emergency Networking Related To Electronic Management Systems For Laurel Fire Rescue**



Motion by Council Member Wilke to approve Resolution No. R26-10, seconded by Council Member Klose. 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. R26-11: A Resolution Of The City Council Authorizing The Mayor To Sign An Agreement With CivicPlus For Services Relating To Upgrading The City's Website, Agenda And Meeting Management, Media, AudioEye, And DocAccess.**

Motion by Council Member Naylor to approve Resolution No. R26-11, 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.

ITEMS REMOVED FROM THE CONSENT AGENDA: None.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS (ONE-MINUTE LIMIT):

Forrest Sanderson, on behalf of the Laurel Urban Renewal District, provided updates on the Barnhart Ditch Improvement Project, noting the project remains on schedule and within budget. He also announced upcoming bidding for the Downtown Improvement Project and continued progress on the Southeast Fourth Street lighting project.

Elizabeth Gilg announced that the mayoral recall petition had exceeded the required number of signatures for submission to the Elections Office. She also informed the public that an additional public records release had been posted online.

Kris Vogele announced an upcoming public hearing regarding the State's MEPA review for the proposed forensic facility, scheduled at the Laurel Public Library, and encouraged public attendance.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION:

Council Member Klose announced the upcoming quarterly Cemetery Committee meeting and requested that the updated moratorium be placed on the following week's Workshop agenda for Council review.

Council Member Mackay thanked the Laurel Urban Renewal District and Forrest Sanderson for their continued work and progress on City projects.

MAYOR UPDATES: None.

UNSCHEDULED MATTERS: None.

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion by Council Member Wheeler 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 7:19 p.m.


Britney Marakal, Administrative Assistant

Approved by the Mayor and passed by the City Council of the City of Laurel, Montana, this 28th day of July, 2026.


Kris R. Vogele, Mayor

Attest:


Kelly Strecker, Clerk/Treasurer



Print Name _____

~~Address~~ Address

Fan Meadell

1241 Elkhorn Drive

Dyane Manley

1018 7th Ave

Print Name	Address Address
STANLEY HOPPER	504 CANDLER
JODY DEL PARIARE	1309 ELKHORN DR
MILES & MICKI WALTER	419 8TH AVE
SHAR WADDELL	1241 ELKHORN DRIVE
KRIS VICK	306 E 10TH ST - LAUREL
JULIE JONAS	1201 W 4TH ST - LAUREL
DEVINE SHAPIRO	

Print Name	<u>Address</u> Address
Jennifer Lorenz	916 5th Ave
Amber John	1224 W 4th St
Ryan Letherer	1224 W 4th St
Christina Malmer	3000 Chief Looking Glass
Foster Malmer	610 64th St
Cheryl Hill	109 W. 1st Street
Jeremy Lavelle	1035 9th Ave
Jaquelyn Holmes	366 Woodland
Shelley White	512 Wyoming Ave

March 31, 2026

Dear Members of Laurel's City Council

I am writing in support of the forensic hospital the state is proposing to build in our fair city. I think this addition will bring many well-paying jobs, the tax base will increase, and most of the merchants in town will profit through the increase in well paid members of our community.

I understand some community members are upset about the way this project got off the ground. But I don't think that is a reason to oppose the hospital.

So count me as a supporter of the hospital.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Les Fuglevand', with a stylized, cursive script.

28 Vista Lane

Laurel, Mt.

Brittney Harakal

From: Matt <gilgm12@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, March 28, 2026 10:02 AM
To: Brittney Harakal; elizabeth@laurelcared.com
Cc: Civil Attorney; Ward 4B; Ward 1A; Ward 1B; Ward 2A; Ward 2B; Ward 3A; Ward 3B; Ward 4A; Kelly Strecker; City Mayor; Kurt Markegard; Michael Skinner; naturecalls406@gmail.com; montanahomesolutions@gmail.com; thefrontporchmt@gmail.com; shawna@carltondepot.com
Subject: Re: Hello Attorney and Council
Attachments: image001.gif

Michele and City of Laurel -

Thank you for the fee schedule and for continuing to respond while traveling. I have three issues to raise.

1. The city's FOIA fee schedule violates state law.

The schedule charges \$50/hour for city staff research, \$150-\$250/hour for contracted staff, and \$250/hour for city attorney review. MCA 2-6-1006(5) caps all public records search fees at \$25/hour and requires the most cost-efficient method. Under subsection (5)(c), the first hour of service is free after a \$5 filing fee. The city's rates are 2x to 10x the statutory maximum. State law preempts this schedule.

I do not consent to a "quote from IT" for the four email searches I submitted on March 26. These are narrow searches - two parties, 55 days each - that any city employee with email access can perform in minutes. Under the statute, this falls well within the first free hour. I expect production, not a bill.

2. The city's IT vendor has a direct conflict of interest in this matter.

John Roberts, a Senior Network Technician at Morrison-Maierle - the company operating as "Systems Technology Consultants" under the city's contract - has been publicly and actively antagonizing community members on social media regarding the facility. Screenshots are attached showing:

- His Facebook profile listing his employer as Morrison-Maierle (Attachment 1)
- His comment dismissing community concerns: "these people never actually do any research before posting this shit lol" (Attachment 2)
- His comment calling a community member "honey" and telling them to "go play in your sandbox" (Attachment 3)
- His comment: "You people need something productive to do your time, Jesus Christ" - to which **Mayor Waggoner personally replied: "I like John's humor"** (Attachment 4)
- A thread showing Roberts deleting his own comments when community members began screenshotting them, and Mayor Waggoner's engagement with Roberts being called out by constituents (Attachment 5)

This is the person - or this person's company - that is handling public records production, quoting fees to the city for FOIA compliance, and determining what documents are "responsive." The mayor who signed this vendor's contract renewal on February 10 is publicly endorsing this employee's mockery of the

citizens requesting those records.

I am formally requesting that the city confirm in writing: what search terms were used for the consolidated FOIA pull, the full document count by custodian, and that no records have been altered, withheld, or deleted during vendor processing.

3. Kelly and Brittney have not answered a yes-or-no question.

I understand your explanation that they were uncomfortable responding due to the legal issues raised, and that your office has addressed the legal questions. I appreciate that. But the question I asked Kelly and Brittney is not a legal question — it is a factual one: *Have you been asked or directed by Waggoner or Markegard to delay, limit, or withhold production of any records?*

That is a yes or no. It does not require legal analysis. Your answer on their behalf - however thorough - is not a substitute for their individual, personal responses. If the answer is no, it should take five seconds to say so. The continued silence on this specific question is noted.

Respectfully,
Matt Gilg

Attachments:

1. John Roberts Morrison-Maierle.png
2. John Roberts - These People.jpeg
3. John Roberts - Honey.jpeg
4. John Roberts - Waggoner.jpg
5. John Roberts - Waggoner Like.png
6. John Roberts Prison Position.jpeg



John Roberts

Digital creator · 464 followers



@john.roberts.590186



Senior Network Technician at Morrison-Maierle

Add friend



John Roberts Top contributor

Matt Ryan let 'em! I'm eccited for new job opportunities and growth in the community. I don't care if they put it across the fence from me. I'm not scared of it because I actually know what the facility is.



John Roberts Top contributor

Jessica Sawyer these people never actually do any research before posting this shit lol

8m Like Reply



Matt Ryan Author

John Roberts and you've researched the economic impacts of prisons?

Dumbass.

1m Like Reply



John Roberts Top contributor

Matt Ryan let 'em! I'm eccited for new job opportunities and growth in the community. I don't care if they put it across the fence from me. I'm not scared of it because I actually know what the facility is.

2m Haha Reply

1



Matt Ryan Author

John Roberts maybe if you'd ask them more often, they wouldn't be dropping a prison in your backyard.

5m Like Reply



John Roberts Top contributor

Matt Ryan look honey, I'm not here to argue opinions with you all day. You go play in your sandbox and I'll play in mine.

9m Like Reply

Sandi Whitman replied · 1 Reply



John Roberts
You people need something productive to do your time, Jesus Christ.

9w Like Reply

4



Coreen Tomek
John Roberts How ironic that you say this when I've seen you post more than anyone on this issue. Maybe YOU need something better to do! I know you seem to thrive on goading people online so I will not respond to your posts again. I do believe you more than likely will not live literally right next door like I will. So, I think you should get a life.

9w Like Reply Edited

5

Sandi Whitman replied · 1 Reply

The comment Hilary Anderson is replying to has been deleted.



Hilary Anderson
 Dave Waggoner A lot of your constituents are voicing serious concerns and not laughing.

9w Like Reply

5



John Roberts
Hilary Anderson why are you screenshotting comments? Nothing better to do?

9w Like Reply



Hilary Anderson
Why are you deleting comments now?



9w Like Reply 2



Reply to Hilary Anderson



Hilary Anderson
 Dave Waggoner since you liked this comment why don't you speak up on what's going on here?

9w Like Reply

8

10:00



< Anonymous member's post ...



John Roberts ·

4h · · ✨ Rising contributor

You people need something productive to do your time, Jesus Christ.

Reply 3



Dave Waggoner ·

8m · · ♀ Top contributor

Hilary Anderson I like John's humor

Reply



Hilary Anderson ·

1m · · ♦ Admin

Dave Waggoner A lot of your constituents are voicing serious concerns and not laughing.

Reply



Wri...



Matt Gilg

mattgilg.dev

Cell: 860.771.3511

On Fri, Mar 27, 2026, 4:14 PM Brittney Harakal <bharakal@laurel.mt.gov> wrote:

Schedule of Fees Link:

<https://cityoflaurelmontana.com/clerk-treasurer/page/schedule-fees>

R26-05 Link:

<https://laserfiche.cityoflaurelmontana.com/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=294361&dbid=0&repo=CityofLaurelMT>

Brittney Harakal

Council Administrative Assistant

City of Laurel

P.O. Box 10

Laurel, MT 59044

406-628-7431 ext. 5503

406-628-2289 fax

From: Civil Attorney <civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov>

Sent: Friday, March 27, 2026 3:39 PM

To: Matt <gilgm12@gmail.com>

Cc: Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>; Brittney Harakal <bharakal@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2A <ward2a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2B <ward2b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3A <ward3a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3B <ward3b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4A <ward4a@laurel.mt.gov>; Kelly Strecker <kstrecker@laurel.mt.gov>; City Mayor <citymayor@laurel.mt.gov>; Kurt Markegard <kmarkegard@laurel.mt.gov>

Subject: RE: Hello Attorney and Council

Mr. Gilg:

City Staff requested of me, which I had no objection to, that I respond to your emails, due to the legal issues raised therein. They are not attorneys, and rightfully so, when any communications received by City Staff raise legal issues, the response is best addressed by my office.

With regard to the retention of IT services, the City works with an outside IT vendor that has been retained by the City for a number of years (the same company during my tenure of 5 years or so). They have changed their name several times, I believe, based upon Resolutions that I have prepared, and I don't want to misspeak here. I believe it was previously GET Systems Technology. *By way of this email, I ask that Brittney provide you a copy of the Resolution passing fees/charges, as well as outlining services, provided by the City's IT Vendor.* I don't have a copy of the executed Agreements in this regard, with easy access right now, especially since I'm traveling back to Billings today.

I hope that the information that I provided clarified the timing involved. I will have a link to all of the downloaded documents before City Staff leaves for the weekend, and my intention is to spend whatever time is necessary this weekend to finalizing the production. That will **not** include the additional 50k of documents pulled related to zoning,

annexations, etc ... as there is no conceivable way that I can get through 60k pages of documents this weekend to finalize production. However, that will be an ongoing effort, and I am hopeful that we can have that information to you as soon as I'm able to review it all.

With regard to CM Wheeler's vote several weeks ago, I want to clarify some things, from my perspective, as Legal Counsel for the City of Laurel:

1. I have never had any concerns about any "conflict of interest" by CM Wheeler. I have no reason to believe that CM Wheeler discusses City matters with PW Director Wheeler. I also have no reason to believe that CM Wheeler is/was/will ever be motivated to vote – one way or the other – based upon PW Director Wheeler's position within the City. There are no financial or pecuniary interests that I have knowledge of, related to these two individuals, and most specifically, related to the land use decisions in front of CC.
2. I must respectfully disagree with your characterization that CM Wheeler was the "deciding vote" on the proposed Emergency Moratorium Ordinance. There were three CC Members that voted against the Ordinance, and all three equally voted as they did. Not one vote, or another, was the "deciding vote."

I will continue doing my best to provide you information, as it is sought.

I hope that you have a good weekend.

Best Regards,



Michele L. Braukmann

Civil City Attorney

City of Laurel

Cell Phone: 406.671.4333

civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov

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From: Matt <gilgm12@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, March 27, 2026 2:24 PM
To: Civil Attorney <civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov>
Cc: Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>; Brittney Harakal <bharakal@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2A <ward2a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2B <ward2b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3A <ward3a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3B <ward3b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4A <ward4a@laurel.mt.gov>; Kelly Strecker <kstrecker@laurel.mt.gov>; City Mayor <citymayor@laurel.mt.gov>; Kurt Markegard <kmarkegard@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Re: Hello Attorney and Council

Thanks for the clarifications Michele.

No answers yet from the Clerk, the inhouse IT staff, or anybody else at the city on this topic.

I will again ask the name of the contracted external IT company, because at this point I'm running out of faith in their ability and capacity to do the job in a competent manner without overcharging the city. Did they bid for that contract?

I'm also disheartened that nobody else from the city seems to feel the need or obligation to provide answers to my other simple questions.

--

Matt Gilg

mattgilg.dev
Cell: 860.771.3511

On Fri, Mar 27, 2026, 2:16 PM Civil Attorney <civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov> wrote:

Mr. Gilg:

I apologize that I did not address the legal questions asked in your earlier emails. I am traveling back from Tennessee today after the unexpected death of a close friend.

The City does not have a "written notice of denial," pursuant to Mont. Code Ann. § 2-6-1009, as the City is directly working with its outside IT vendor to produce responsive documents. It has taken longer than anticipated, as I have been informed that there are thousands of documents that were pulled with the relevant search terms. As noted in my earlier email, I am hopeful that a large bulk of documents will be available for production to you directly by earlier next week.

With regard to the questions about CM Wheeler's vote on the Emergency Moratorium Ordinance, I am not aware of any conflict of interest by CM Wheeler. If there is something in particular you are referring to, from a legal standpoint, please advise, and I will do my best to respond.

Thank you.

Best Regards,



Michele L. Braukmann

Civil City Attorney

City of Laurel

Cell Phone: 406.671.4333

civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov

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From: Civil Attorney

Sent: Friday, March 27, 2026 2:05 PM

To: 'Matt' <gilgm12@gmail.com>

Cc: Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>; Brittney Harakal <bharakal@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2A <ward2a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2B <ward2b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3A <ward3a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3B <ward3b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4A <ward4a@laurel.mt.gov>; Kelly Strecker <kstrecker@laurel.mt.gov>

Subject: RE: Hello Attorney and Council

Mr. Gilg:

As Clerk-Treasurer, Kelly has provided the Consolidated PRR to the City's outside IT vendor. As I understand it, the City's IT vendor provided potentially-responsive documents to the City this week, which Staff has been reviewing to ensure appropriate responsiveness. I appreciate your other email confirming that the City can continue to produce responsive documents that include the over 50k documents that were pulled for the Part 3 request.

I believe that the City will have Part 1 and Part 2 documents to the C.A.R.E.D. Committee by early next week. Staff has been working diligently on pulling out "any junk mail" and non-responsive documents, and a full set of documents should be produced after my review, which I intend to get done this weekend.

Best Regards,



Michele L. Braukmann

Civil City Attorney

City of Laurel

Cell Phone: 406.671.4333

civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov

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From: Matt <gilgm12@gmail.com>

Sent: Thursday, March 26, 2026 6:53 AM

To: Civil Attorney <civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov>

Cc: Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>; Brittney Harakal <bharakal@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2A <ward2a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2B <ward2b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3A <ward3a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3B <ward3b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4A <ward4a@laurel.mt.gov>

Subject: Re: Hello Attorney and Council

No response from anyone yet.

Michelle, can you speak to Kelly's role in ensuring the legal accuracy and completeness of delivered FOIA records?

Thanks,

Brittney Harakal

From: Elizabeth Wilson <elizabethanngilg@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 25, 2026 12:17 PM
To: Ward 1B; Ward 1A; Ward 2A; Ward 2B; Ward 3A; Ward 3B; Ward 4A; Ward 4B; City Mayor; Brittney Harakal; Civil Attorney; City Clerk; Laurel City Planner
Subject: A personal response to Jodi's clarification

You get to choose if the following offends you. If it does - then it's directed at you.

Clearly an effective process has not been established for records requests, otherwise Kelly would have known what she was supposed to be searching for. What does anyone even do over there? For nearly 100k per year our city clerk isn't capable of reading the records request or reviewing the motion? We really have to provide clarification on this the day after a deadline is not met? This is embarrassing, and unacceptable.

Can anyone shed any light on why no records from part B of our request have been released? Those aren't even records that you would have to search for. None of part B would be privileged - and at this point we have little reason to believe that anyone in city hall is doing what they say they are. I don't care if there are a lot of records. I don't care if this is difficult for city employees. These are things that WE, THE COMMUNITY, are having to do because nobody who is getting paid or has been elected seems to be able to competently do their jobs.

You all are paid. Some are elected. The community should not have to babysit you to make sure you are making decisions that are in the best interest of Laurel. Do you really not know right from wrong? Shame on all of you. What are you so afraid of? It's not hard at all to stand up for what is right - TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT. Complacency, laziness, self-centeredness, and ego has no business in public service. WHY DO WE EVEN HAVE TO ASK CITY COUNCIL TO PUT THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH IN CHECK?! Ask for the records yourself. Demand them. Do your job. If you voted something through or approved something while you were asleep at the wheel, OWN IT. MAKE IT RIGHT.

Are none of you aware that the Mayor runs around calling women "bitches" and "cunts"? There's no way you aren't aware - It's not like he is shy about it. Why do we have to make a fuss to get such a heap of shit removed from leading our city?

Let me be clear - IF YOU DO NOT CALL OUT DAVE FOR THE THINGS HE SAYS AND DOES, you are as guilty as he is - you are as disgusting as he is - and you should be ashamed of yourselves. If you are not capable of caring for this city more than you care for Kurt, or Dave - you should remove yourself as a representative of Laurel.

- Elizabeth Gilg

Brittney Harakal



City Mayor
Wednesday, March 18, 2026 5:11 PM
Brittney Harakal
FW: Concerns Regarding Proposed State Mental Health Prison

Dave Waggoner
Mayor
City of Laurel, Montana
(406) 628-8456 extension 5501

From: Steve Rodgers <mrswwrogers@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 18, 2026 5:10 PM
To: City Mayor <citymayor@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4A <ward4a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3A <ward3a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3A <ward3a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2B <ward2b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2A <ward2a@laurel.mt.gov>
Cc: Ward 3B <ward3b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3A <ward3a@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Concerns Regarding Proposed State Mental Health Prison

To the Mayor and Members of the Laurel City Council

Subject: Concerns Regarding Proposed State Mental Health Prison

Mayor and Council Members,

I am a resident of Laurel who cares deeply about the long term health, stability, and prosperity of our community. I appreciate the opportunity to voice my opinion.

I support mental health treatment and the need for expanded services in Montana. However, the location, financial impact, and long term obligations associated with this proposal raise significant concerns that must be fully considered.

1. Permanent Loss of Tax Revenue

Because the state does not pay property taxes, annexing this land for a state run facility would permanently eliminate:

- Future residential tax revenue
- Future commercial tax revenue
- Long term development potential on one of Laurel's most valuable remaining growth areas

This represents **millions of dollars in lost future revenue**—funds that would otherwise support streets, sidewalks, parks, police, and essential city services.

2. The Location Benefits the State, Not Laurel

It is clear why the state selected this site:

- Easy extension of sewer and water
- Immediate access to I 90

- Proximity to Billings for staffing

These factors make the project convenient for the state, **but convenience for Helena does not equal prosperity for Laurel. The city should not sacrifice its best growth corridor simply because it is the easiest option for the state.** The citizens of Laurel have clearly voiced concerns as to the proximity of this Mental Prison to Laurel Elementary school.

3. Laurel's Growth and Identity Are at Stake

I think of Laurel as a bedroom community. Our economic health depends on:

- New housing
- New families
- New businesses
- A growing tax base

Giving up this land for a non taxable state facility **blocks Laurel's most logical direction for future expansion.** Meanwhile, our streets and sidewalks are already deteriorating (by the way, throwing a shovel of asphalt into a hole and patting it down with a shovel is not fixing our streets). **Without new tax revenue, Laurel will struggle to maintain basic infrastructure,** and the appearance of our town will continue to decline. **The condition of our community directly affects the families and businesses we attract.**

4. The Jobs Argument Does Not Hold Up

The mayor has stated that he had interest in the project because of potential job creation. However:

- Laurel does not have enough housing for 90–100 new employees and their families
- We are giving up the very land that could have supported that housing
- Most workers will live in Billings or between Laurel and Billings

Laurel would carry the burden while other communities receive the economic benefit.

5. Aging Infrastructure and Long Term Liability

Laurel's water, sewer, and road systems are already aging and strained. If the city annexes this land to a non-tax paying entity:

- Laurel becomes responsible for providing services to the facility
- When infrastructure fails, **the state will not pay to repair or upgrade it**
- **Laurel taxpayers will bear the cost**

This is a long term financial liability that the city must not take on without full understanding and safeguards.

6. The City Should Negotiate Compensation

If the state insists on this location, insists on annexation and shoves this facility down our throats (there is a chance that could happen), then City of Laurel should negotiate a one time **Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) of at least \$5 – 10 million to offset:**

- Permanent loss of taxable land
- Increased demand on city services
- Long term infrastructure costs

PILOT agreements are common nationwide and provide fair compensation when governments remove land from the tax base.

7. Need for Transparency and Public Involvement

This proposal has advanced with limited public communication and zero input from the citizens of Laurel. A decision of this magnitude requires:

- **A full public impact study**
- **Additional open forums**
- Clear disclosure of funding, ownership, and operational plans

The residents of Laurel deserve transparency and a complete understanding of the long term consequences.

Conclusion

I respectfully urge the Council to gather complete information, prioritize the long term interests of Laurel residents, and slow this process down or stop it all together. I am not opposed to mental health services. I am opposed to annexation and **long term financial burdens being placed on our city without transparency, planning, or compensation.** Help Laurel grow the right way; this Mental Health Prison will turn Laurel into a trash town.

Make Laurel Great Again!

Thank you for your time and for your service to our community.

Kind Regards,

Steve Rodgers
626 W 13th St.
Laurel MT. 59044

Brittney Harakal

From: Laura Kirschenmann <laurakirschenmann@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, March 19, 2026 8:41 AM
To: Ward 1A; Ward 1B; Ward 3A; Ward 3B; Ward 4A; Ward 4B
Cc: City Mayor; Brittney Harakal; Civil Attorney
Subject: Fwd: Emergency Ordinance

Hello,

I wanted to forward my email as public comment to all of you ahead of tonight's meeting and vote on the emergency ordinance. Thank you all.

Laura Kirschenmann

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Laura Kirschenmann** <laurakirschenmann@gmail.com>
Date: Tue, Mar 17, 2026 at 10:50 AM
Subject: Emergency Ordinance
To: <ward2a@laurel.mt.gov>, <ward2b@laurel.mt.gov>

Hello,

I am writing to you as my assigned elected ward officials to urge you to vote in favor of the emergency ordinance that will be discussed tonight and brought before you to vote on this week. I trust that as you, Brent and Jessica, along with the remaining council members review this ordinance, you will find it will serve you well to ensure this protects our city and provides ample time to review our city's current infrastructure state and demands along with all the other concerns that have arisen recently. Passing this ordinance is imperative to ensure the state of Montana and BOI cannot attempt to move forward with annexation. It is extremely frustrating that we have gotten to this point without you all first having the chance to go through a thorough review process and public input. We now have a chance to at least put a layer of protection in so that proper procedure and investigations can take place.

I thank you both kindly for your time and commitment to this matter and for serving your constituents.

Sincerely,

Laura Kirschenmann
939 W 4th St.
Laurel, MT 59044

Brittney Harakal

From: Amber Zahn <zahn.amber@myyahoo.com>
Sent: Sunday, March 22, 2026 10:12 AM
To: City Mayor; Ward 1A; Ward 1B; Ward 2A; Ward 2B; Ward 3A; Ward 3B; Ward 4A; Ward 4B; Kurt Markegard; Civil Attorney; Brittney Harakal
Cc: Cheryl Front Porch Hill; Shawna Hopper
Subject: City Authority and Statutory Obligations Regarding Annexation

City Council Members,

I am writing to address the City's role and legal authority regarding the proposed annexation associated with the forensic mental health facility.

There appears to be a growing perception that this decision is outside of the City's control. Montana law makes clear that it is not.

Under Montana Code Annotated 76-2-203, zoning and land use decisions are required to be made:

"with reasonable consideration, among other things, to the character of the district and its peculiar suitability for particular uses, and with a view to conserving the value of buildings and encouraging the most appropriate use of land throughout the jurisdiction."

The statute further requires that decisions promote public health, safety, and general welfare, and support compatible development.

These are not discretionary guidelines. They are statutory obligations.

A secure, 24-hour forensic mental health facility serving court-ordered individuals connected to criminal proceedings is a fundamentally different use than residential housing. That difference directly implicates the City's duty to evaluate compatibility, district character, and the welfare of the existing community.

In addition, Montana law requires that zoning and annexation decisions be made in accordance with the City's adopted growth policy. Growth policies are intended to guide where higher-intensity or institutional uses are appropriate and to protect the character of established residential areas.

Under Montana Code Annotated 7-2-4601, the City has the authority to approve or deny annexation. Annexation is not automatic, and it is not required simply because it is requested. It is a discretionary decision that must be exercised in a manner consistent with the law and the long-term interests of the community.

This places a clear responsibility on the City.

If a proposed use is not compatible with the surrounding residential area, if it conflicts with the character of the district, or if it does not support the general welfare of the existing community, the City has both the authority and the obligation to act accordingly.

This annexation decision is one of the few points where the City has the ability to determine whether this placement is appropriate.

The community is looking to you to exercise that authority consistent with Montana law and the City's own planning framework.

If this annexation is approved, it will be understood by the public as a determination that this use is compatible with the surrounding residential area and consistent with the character of the district.

If that is the City's position, it should be clearly stated and supported on the record.

Respectfully,
Amber Zahn

Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer

Brittney Harakal

From: Ward 4A
Sent: Monday, March 30, 2026 7:15 AM
To: Brittney Harakal
Subject: FW: Acting on time sensitive matters to keep our community whole and intact

From: Kris Vogeles <threepeat43@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, March 29, 2026 3:45 PM
To: Ward 4A <ward4a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2A <ward2a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2B <ward2b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3A <ward3a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3B <ward3b@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Acting on time sensitive matters to keep our community whole and intact

Dear City Council,

Inaction turns to complicity when matters are not dealt with appropriately and in due time.

There may not be a city council meeting scheduled this week but it might be a necessary time to hold a special meeting and possibly go into executive session before making crucial decisions or taking immediate action.

I understand matters have been difficult and timing is not always convenient, however isn't it time to address the multitude of issues caused by the executive branch of our city?

Timing, scope, and immediacy would suggest you secure secondary counsel to discuss litigation and pending legal matters with. Not that our current counsel isn't fit, but that she may be too close to some issues and an outside counsel can provide you with confirmation of counsel you hear from the city attorney and also provide you with guidance on serious impending legal matters.

Given the lack of a moratorium on planning matters, there are going to be strict timelines you will need to be cognizant of as well as two or three potential lawsuits entering in the next few weeks.

The time to take a week off (although probably needed) is not now given the enormous amount of issues on your plate right now.

In addition, there seems to be a growing leadership gap at the city that is going to complicate things even more as time and matters progress. The community remains behind you and we want to be certain that our community survives this period of confusion and dissension and comes out stronger and together.

We know your role is not easy, but we ask that you act before the time to act passes which would place many in a difficult situation where they (or you) become compromised to the point of being a part of the problem.

City ordinance says it only takes two agreeing council members to add items to an upcoming agenda. I would sincerely hope that information you have received raises enough concern to call a special meeting.

Thank you for being a leader and protector of our city.

Sincerely a citizen who cares for our town,

Kris Vogeles

Brittney Harakal

From: Ward 1B
Sent: Thursday, March 26, 2026 8:34 AM
To: Civil Attorney; Brittney Harakal
Cc: Kelly Strecker
Subject: Fw: Prison
Attachments: Canape - organizational chart.docx

From: Monna Rae Adickes <monnarae@cbthebrokers.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 25, 2026 12:00 PM
To: Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Prison

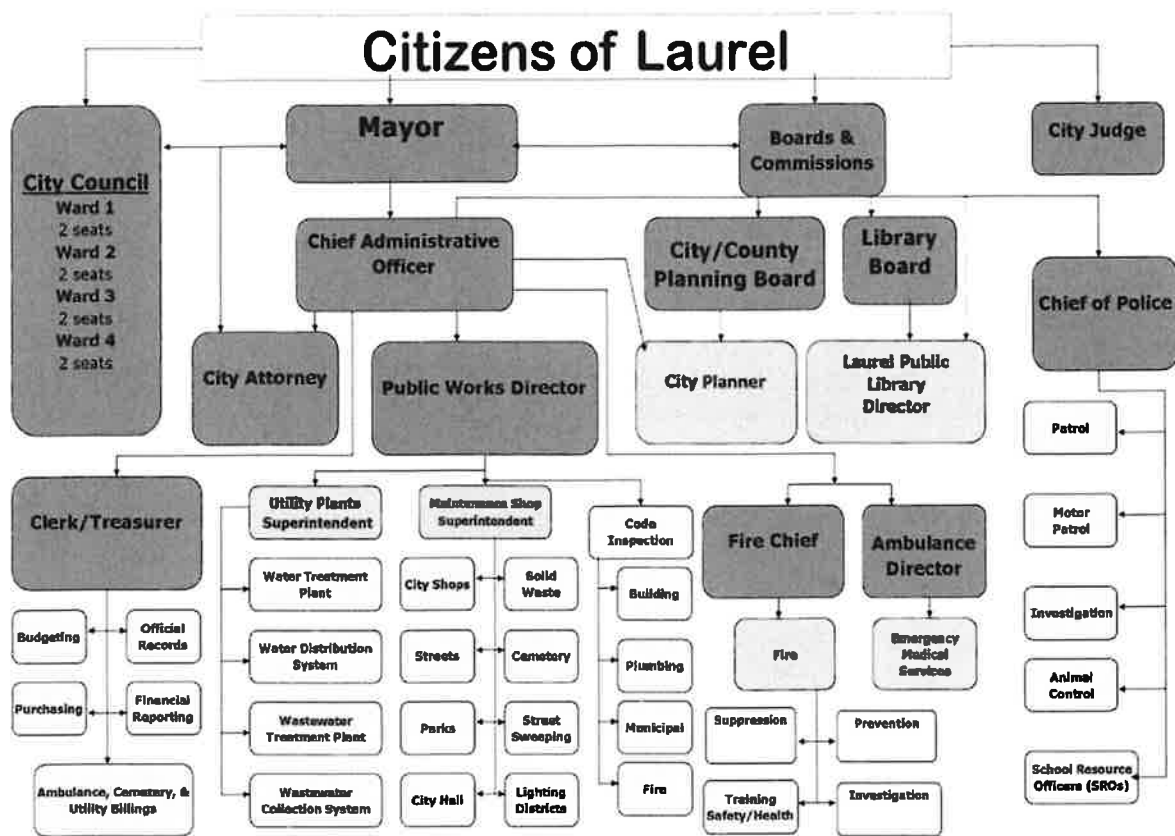
See attached



MONNA RAE ADICKES
Real Estate Broker

📞 406-860-4284
✉ monnarae@cbthebrokers.com
📍 3135 Meadow View Drive
Billings, MT 59102
🌐 www.mra406.com

 **COLDWELL BANKER** THE BROKERS



Tom Canape,

You fail to realize that you work for the citizens of Laurel. As a councilperson it is your duty to protect us, both fiscally and physically. Instead, you have thrown our fiscal (home equity) out the window and have opened our backyards to felons.

Please do us all a favor and step down. It is clear you are either a party to the good ole boys club or not a clue as to how city government works, as you are clearly unaware of your duties as a council person.

Monna Rae Adickes
102 8th Ave #B

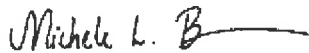
Brittney Harakal

From: Civil Attorney
Sent: Wednesday, March 25, 2026 6:57 PM
To: Ward 1A; Ward 1B; Ward 2A; Ward 2B; Ward 2B; Ward 3A; Ward 3A; Ward 4A; Ward 4B
Cc: City Mayor; Kurt Markegard; Kelly Strecker; Brittney Harakal
Subject: FW: Prison
Attachments: Klose - organizational chart.docx

All:

Please see the attached. It will be included in the next week's packet.

Best Regards,



Michele L. Braukmann
Civil City Attorney
City of Laurel
Cell Phone: 406.671.4333
civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov

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From: Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, March 25, 2026 6:30 PM
To: Brittney Harakal <bharakal@laurel.mt.gov>; Civil Attorney <civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Fw: Prison

From: Monna Rae Adickes <monnarae@cbthebrokers.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 25, 2026 12:01 PM
To: Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Prison

See attached



MONNA RAE ADICKES

Real Estate Broker

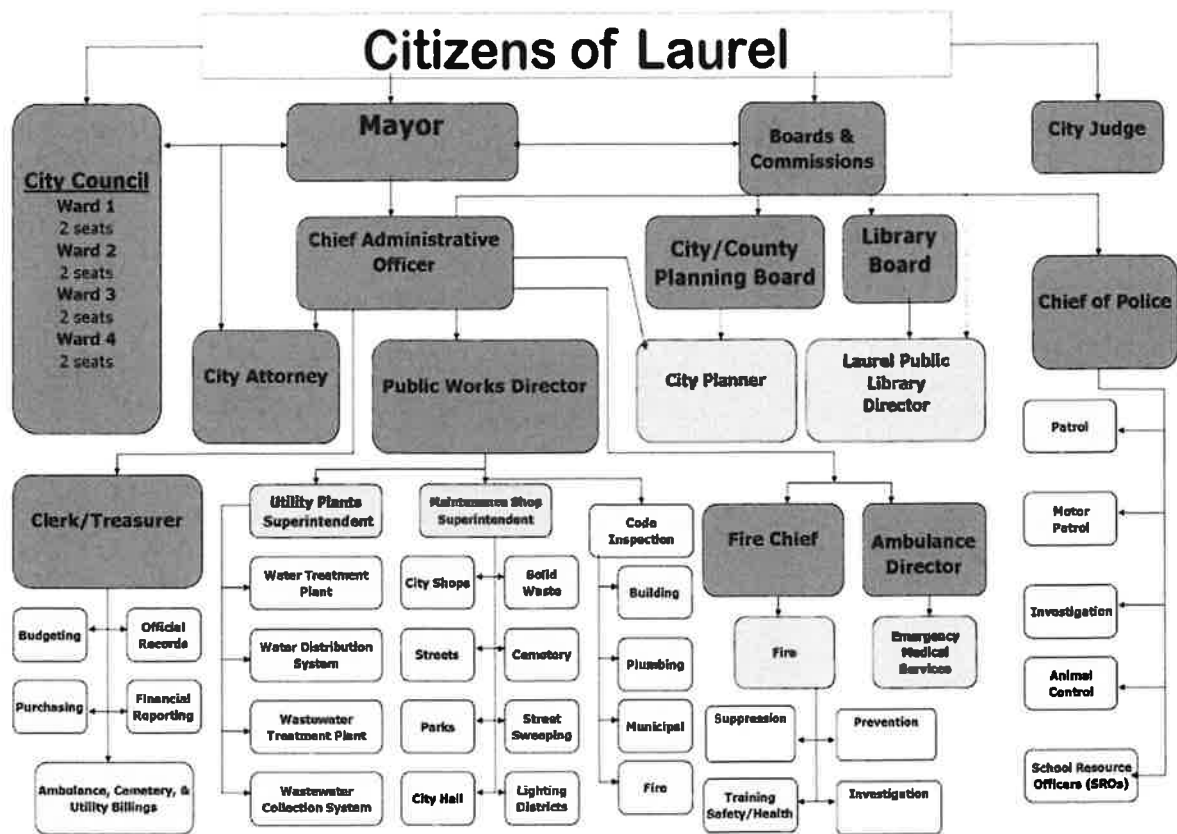
☎ 406-860-4284

✉ monnarae@cbthebrokers.com

📍 3135 Meadow View Drive
Billings, MT 59102

🌐 www.mra406.com

 **COLDWELL BANKER** THE BROKERS



Richard Klose,

You fail to realize that you work for the citizens of Laurel. As a councilperson it is your duty to protect us, both fiscally and physically. Instead, you have thrown our fiscal (home equity) out the window and have opened our backyards to felons.

Please do us all a favor and step down. It is time to retire, as you are clearly unaware of your duties as a council person.

Monna Rae Adickes
102 8th Ave #B

Brittney Harakal

From: Ward 2A
Sent: Sunday, March 22, 2026 8:29 PM
To: Brittney Harakal
Cc: City Mayor; Civil Attorney
Subject: FW: State forensic hospital laurel



Jessica Banks

Ward 2A City Council Member
Mobile: 406-690-7181
Email: ward2a@laurel.mt.gov
P.O. Box 10
Laurel, MT 59044
Home Page | Laurel MT (cityoflaurelmontana.com)



From: Deb Pulse <gidgetrabbitt03@yahoo.com>
Sent: Friday, March 20, 2026 1:40 PM
To: Ward 2A <ward2a@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: State forensic hospital laurel

I am writing as a concerned Laurel resident to formally express my strong opposition to the proposed construction of a facility for the criminally insane within our community, particularly at its currently planned location.

The proposed site is located approximately 500 yards from an elementary school and within an established residential neighborhood. This proximity raises serious concerns regarding public safety, child welfare, and responsible land-use planning. Schools and residential areas should remain protected spaces, and the placement of a high-security mental health correctional facility so close to children is both alarming and inappropriate.

In addition to safety concerns, this project directly conflicts with the intent of existing zoning laws. Residential zoning is designed to preserve quality of life, promote stability, and encourage thoughtful community growth. Introducing a facility of this nature into a residential area undermines those principles and sets a troubling precedent for future land-use decisions.

The long-term economic consequences are also significant. The presence of a prison for the criminally insane in close proximity to homes and schools will inevitably lead to decreased property values, making it more difficult for current residents to sell their homes and discouraging new families from moving to our town. This will deter residential development, private investment, and business growth. In turn, this will cause stagnation to the city's future and could potentially reduce its tax base.

Furthermore, the strain this facility would place on already limited local resources cannot be ignored. Emergency medical services, fire departments, and law enforcement agencies are not currently equipped to absorb the increased demands such a facility would generate. Diverting these critical services to support the prison would reduce response for local residents and place unnecessary risk on the Laurel community.

Additional concerns include infrastructure stress, staffing logistics, and long-term operational impacts—many of which could disproportionately affect the local community while offering little benefit in return.

While I recognize the importance of secure and appropriate facilities for individuals requiring mental health treatment, such facilities must be placed in locations that prioritize public safety, adhere to zoning standards, and respect the wellbeing of surrounding communities. This proposed location fails to meet those expectations.

I respectfully urge you to oppose this project as currently planned and to advocate for alternative locations that do not place children, families, property values, and residential neighborhoods at unnecessary risk. Our community deserves thoughtful planning, transparency, and a meaningful voice in decisions that will permanently shape our future.

Thank you for your time, service, and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,
Debra and Tj Pulse
911 10th Ave Laurel
406-855-3147/406-951-0388

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

Brittney Harakal

From: City Mayor
Sent: Wednesday, March 25, 2026 4:29 PM
To: Brittney Harakal
Subject: Fw: Forensic Mental Prison

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone
[Get Outlook for Android](#)

From: Nathan <bsdcmillion1@yahoo.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 25, 2026 4:27:03 PM
To: City Mayor <citymayor@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Forensic Mental Prison

Sent from my iPhone

Why is the Forensic Mental Prison being shoved down the town of Laurel Montana's throats??????? This is a disgrace what the state and Dan Villa who is a plain an simple snake oil salesmen and you our Mayor. Not even going to mention Kurt Markegaard he is irrelevant all he is good for is doing your dirty work 🙄 What are trying to do to our small town???? You all should be ashamed of your actions. Disregard who put you in the positions that you hold. We will remember come election. Disgusting is what you all are doing. Why are we not able to view the recorded City Council session??? How convenient for technical difficulties. Do better or resign!

Brittney Harakal

From: Laurel CARED <connect@laurelcared.com>
Sent: Thursday, March 26, 2026 10:06 AM
To: Civil Attorney
Cc: Kris Vogelee; Elizabeth Wilson; Shawna; Samantha Mayes; The Front Porch; Brittney Harakal; Ward 1A; Ward 1B; Ward 2A; Ward 2B; Ward 3A; Ward 3B; Ward 4A; City Mayor; Kelly Strecker; Kurt Markegard
Subject: Re: Consolidated Records Request

The request for part 2 shouldn't require a search of any kind. We want the emails and any other type of communications between all city staff/officials discussing what to send to IT and copies of the correspondence between city staff/officials and IT. Timestamped. And we want the name and contact info for who the city has been using for IT.

We will compare it to statements made by city staff/officials. If they have lied about what they have done and when - we will address that and share with the community and press - obviously.

Part 3 was never a immediate concern. We made it clear that we would be requesting that information down the road in an organized manner.

On staff comms. The most cost effective way for the city to execute this request would be to produce phone logs and text logs for all city staff/officials phone numbers - both personal and city issued - as well as calls that have come in and been routed through the city switchboard. From May 2025 to current. None of this information would be privileged - including call logs to and from the city attorney. With this information, CARED would be able to narrow down and provide specific dates and times of text logs that we would like produced - DIRECTLY FROM THE PROVIDERS. This can be done. It will not cost much. We don't want Dave and Kurt providing their own records. That is not at all appropriate. In fact, it's not appropriate that they be involved in this process at all.

We do not expect this to be a single step production. We never have.

On the past 5 years of land use matters and all decisions made by the City of Laurel, Dave, and/or Kurt - when we get to it, I will take it all. I will comb through every record. I will hire help if I need to.

I want to be very clear on this last message. It's a personal one - from myself and my family.

Dave. Kurt. City of Laurel.

We will continue to request waiver of fees when warranted, but to believe that we will be deterred or slowed down by financial barriers would be a mistake.

I don't recommend underestimating our means. If you force us into wasting money that could otherwise be put to positive use - I will only be come more of a thorn. Waste your money on an attorney, Dave - I dare you. You know exactly what you have done and the things you have said - and so do I 🤖

Elizabeth Gilg
Laurel C.A.R.E.D

On Wed, Mar 25, 2026, 5:18 PM Civil Attorney <civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov> wrote:

Dear C.A.R.E.D. Community:

The City is working diligently on the public records requests. An initial search term with IT returned about 5-6k in records. I assume most of those are irrelevant, although I have not reviewed them.

The secondary search, related to Part 3, that included all zoning, annexation, and land use issues resulted in 60k communications. I'm not sure that this is what you are seeking?

I'm trying to be proactive here and help you in what you are looking for. But, when you ask for the broad based categories that you, in Parts 2 and 3, these things are very broad.

I am concerned, because while I completely appreciate that you believe these issues are "one off," they simply are not. When we receive 60k search term emails from IT to produce, how possibly do you expect City Staff to cull through these documents?

I guess, at this point, I want to ask you – blanket, straight up. What is that you want? If you want all communications between Kurt and the Mayor and State officials, we can produce those. I think they have been, other than what the Mayor is providing, which is his choice. But, if you are on a "fishing expedition" for all zoning, annexation, and other issues, then we can produce this information, but I can assure you, as I represent, it will be over 50k in volume of documents, none of which I can imagine have to do with your immediate issue. And, the City will have to charge for this. L

If you want phone records, please identify what phone numbers you want records from. And, even if the City produces all phone records showing communications between the Mayor and Kurt, what does this tell you? The Mayor and CAO talk regularly by phone. None of which has to do with this facility.

I admire your work and your courage and dedication to accountability. But, you are putting a burden upon the City that we cannot meet, and not only can we not meet it, it is legally defensible not to meet. The City has no obligation to produce the information that you are requesting, in its broad based manner.

I ask very specific things from you:

1. Narrow your PRR to what you are trying to gain as far as information. Please provide identifying information and search terms.
2. Don't go on a fishing-expedition for any land use issue the last five years. If you want to do that, I can assure you, we can produce this information, but it will involve fees.

I ask this community to "take a step back." I said this last night at CC. I know emotions are heightened. Things are hard right now. Trust is not existent, and I understand the reasons why. But, if we are all going to serve our community well, we will all lessen the emotional issues involved, we will all step back and think about how to address things rationally, and we will not burn our City Staff to the ground in the process. I know that the C.A.R.E.D. group has impassioned positions. I see that, and I respect that.

But, right now, I'm dealing with City Staff that are at desperate spaces. We can all criticize them. Believe me, I'm not "loving the look going on right now." But, I have a CAO and City Staff so scared about how to act, it's a complete impediment.

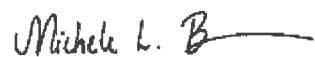
I ask for some basic things from this community, moving forward:

1. Moving forward, communicate with me on matters. I will help to address issues, and I will dispel things, as they need to be dispelled. I will respond, and I think I always have.
2. I cannot make "magic" here. That's not possible. But, I will take a leadership position and help to work through these things.
3. Please communicate your issues to the Mayor directly. I cannot speak for the Mayor, nor would I purport to. I separate out my responsibility to City Staff separate from the Mayor. If and to what extent the Mayor responds, that is on him. It has nothing to do with me, our City Staff, etc. The Mayor is an elected official, and he needs to show up as such.

Please feel free to provide information. I'm broken about where our City is right now. I can assure you, better days are ahead. I know that. I'm doing my best, and I know our City Staff is.

I welcome any feedback.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michele L. B" followed by a horizontal line.

Michele L. Braukmann

Civil City Attorney

City of Laurel

Cell Phone: 406.671.4333

civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov

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Brittney Harakal

From: John Esp <johnespforSenate@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 6, 2026 8:27 AM
To: Ward 4A; To: governor@mt.gov; Dan; BOI.ED@mt.gov; Charlie; Cc: contactdoj@mt.gov; John; Vince; Lee; Ward 1A; Ward 2B; Ward 1B; Ward 3B; Ward 2A; Ward 3A; Ward 4B; City Mayor; Kurt Markegard; Civil Attorney; Michele Braukmann; Brittney Harakal; cwhite@yellowstonecountymt.gov; mwaters@yellowstonecountymt.gov; mmorse@yellowstonecountymt.gov; dehrlick@dailyMontanan.com; amitchell@billingsgazette.com; info@yellowstonecountynews.com; Jaci Webb; news@kulr.com; msilvers@montanafreepress.org; jonathon.ambarian@kxlh.com; shawna_1975@hotmail.com
Subject: Re: The rest of the story
Attachments: The Key Points from St. Louis 2.docx

Hi all, See the attached document for your consideration, Thanks, John Esp

On Sun, Mar 15, 2026 at 10:54 PM John Esp <johnespforSenate@gmail.com> wrote:
Hi all, See the attached Word document, John Esp

Key Points for Yellowstone County Leaders to consider from the following timeline.

From the following data and local decisions made in this South St. Louis neighborhood, it appears that people and their varied activities are compatible with a Forensic Hospital in the adjacent neighborhood. As you can see from the timeline below, many children centric uses have been initiated and then expanded very near or adjacent to this 180 bed Forensic Facility since it started caring for the mentally ill in 1997.

Timeline of development within a few hundred feet of the Forensic Treatment Center

- **1994:** A historic 4 story wing of the **St. Louis State Hospital** was torn down and construction began on a modern (for its time) 4 pod psychiatric hospital and cottages. The Yellowstone County Facility will have the added advantage of 30 years of advancement in security techniques, and electronic technology.
- **1997:** Patients were relocated from other historic wings to the newly constructed **St. Louis Psychiatric Rehabilitation Center** on the Hospital campus.
- **1998-2001:** The **South City Family YMCA** was constructed on the site of the demolished 1912 west wing of the St. Louis State Hospital. It opened to the public in **December 2001**.
- **2000:** The **Premier Charter School** opened its doors on the site of the former Hawthorne State Hospital to **524 students k - 6th grade**. A major \$2 million renovation in 2018 added to the capacity. **Current enrollment approx. 1000, pre-K – grade 8.**
- **2012-2013:** **Gateway Science Academy** renovated a shuttered school building (\$3 million “full gut rehab”) and opened down the street for the 2013-14 school year. **Enrollment: approx. 811 gr. 6-12**
- **2020:** Officially renamed the **Forensic Treatment Center – South** to reflect its specialized role in forensic inpatient psychiatric care. The Center treats court ordered patients only, similar in nature to those anticipated in the proposed Yellowstone County Forensic Facility.

Further observations of the neighborhoods within a one-mile radius of the FTC-South. Data from the American Community Survey (ACS) 2024 5-year estimates.

The median income in the census tracts within a one-mile radius of FTC-S are roughly 1.5 times higher than the median income for the City of St. Louis as a whole.

Fifty one percent of the residents in the radius over 25 years old have a Bachelor’s degree or higher.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) School and District Navigator Tool notes 7 public schools within a one-mile radius of FTC-S, including the two that were opened within a few hundred feet of the Forensic Facility **after** it was completed and occupied by forensic patients as detailed in the timeline above. There may be private schools in the area, but data for them is not readily available.

There are at least 3 City Parks within the one-mile radius of FTC-S, one of which, the 289-acre Tower Grove Park is designated a National Historic Landmark attracting over 2 million visitors per year.

Real Estate data per the **Zillow Home Value Index (ZHVI)** over time since January of 2015, with the exception of a few recent years, shows comparable growth in values in the zip code containing the FTC-S (63139) and the growth in values for St. Louis as a whole.

Brittney Harakal

From: Ward 4A
Sent: Tuesday, April 7, 2026 7:01 AM
To: Dan; Charlie
Cc: Brittney Harakal; Civil Attorney; City Mayor; Laurel CARED; Deming, Lee; Vince
Subject: FW: Laurel

Good Morning,
I wanted to share an email that I sent to the Governor yesterday.
Thank you,
Council Member Jodi Mackay

From: Ward 4A
Sent: Monday, April 6, 2026 11:52 AM
To: To: governor@mt.gov <governor@mt.gov>
Subject: Laurel

Dear Governor Gianforte,

I am a member of Laurel's City Council. I will keep this correspondence short so as to not waste either of our time.

The 8 members of Laurel's City Council sent you, Mr. Villa and Mr. Brereton an email on Tuesday, March 3, 2026. To date, we have not received a response.

In a recent email to Senator Ricci and Representative Deming, you stated, "BOI has presented three times to the Laurel City Council." To be clear, **Mr. Villa has not "presented" anything to Laurel City Council.** He has used the "public comment" portion of our City Council meetings to drop tidbits of information on a massive, controversial project. Public Comment is a time for citizens to address the council. It does not allow for questions or discussion. "Presented" implies he took the appropriate steps to be placed on the meeting's agenda to meaningfully communicate with the Council and the community. His cowardly use of "Public Comment" is completely inappropriate and disrespectful to our City Council and our citizens. As Governor of this great state, you should be appalled by the disrespect shown to your constituents.

This volatile situation in Laurel is causing lasting, potentially irreparable, damage. Despite many opportunities to do things right the primary parties have doubled down and continue to make things worse.

Please do not continue this pattern of disrespecting, discounting and disregarding Laurel's citizens. Engage. Listen. Communicate. Do the right thing.

Sincerely,

Council Member Jodi Mackay

CITY HALL
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City Of Laurel

P.O. Box 10
Laurel, Montana 59044



Office of the City Planner

VARIANCE REPORT VAR-26-01

Drew Nordman

Side -Corner Minimum Setback

March 23, 2026

BACKGROUND:

The City of Laurel has had zoning since the early 1970's as authorized by §76-2-301 et. seq MCA. These regulations set minimum and maximum standards for all lands located with the jurisdiction of the City of Laurel. These regulations establish standards for the height, bulk, and location of structures.

The property owner is requesting to construct an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) in the approximate location of the existing non-conforming garage. The subject property address is 201 N 5th Avenue and may be described as Lots 19 and 20 Block12, Laurel Original Townsite, located in Section 9, Township 02 South, Range 24 East, P.M.M., City of Laurel, Yellowstone County, Montana.

The subject property is zoned R-6000, and is adjacent to two public rights-of-way (5th Ave and W 2nd Street). The subject property is developed with a non-conforming residence and a non-conforming garage. The non-conformity at issue in this request is related to the Side Corner Setback Requirements of the Laurel Zoning Regulations. Both the front and side corner setbacks are 20 feet from the public right-of-way.

Both existing structures are protected as 'Legally Existing Non-Conforming Uses'. The non-conforming use section of the Laurel Municipal Code is included in this report. The applicant was aware of this standard at the time of requesting a building permit from the city and has requested a variance as outlined in their application.

The application materials address several other points that outline the anticipated benefits of the project. The application materials are incorporated into this report by reference.

LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

Lots 19 and 20 Block12, Laurel Original Townsite, located in Section 9, Township 02 South, Range 24 East, P.M.M., City of Laurel, Yellowstone County, Montana.

APPLICANT(S):

Drew Nordman
201 5th Ave
Laurel MT 59044

AGENT:

NONE

EXISTING CONDITION:

The subject property is a platted subdivision within the City of Laurel. The property is developed and is served by public water, sewer, streets, and solid waste collection. The property is 8,400 square feet in size.

PROCESS:

- The application for a Variance was submitted on February 2, 2026, and is scheduled for a public hearing on March 18, 2026 by the Laurel Zoning Commission.
- The Zoning Commission following the Public Hearing must adopt findings of fact and issue a formal recommendation to the City Council on the requested variance. The Zoning Commission may propose conditions or modifications to the request so long as the findings of fact support the condition(s).
- Those findings of fact and conclusions as well as the record minutes of the public hearing will be submitted to the City Council for consideration, hearing and final decision.
- The City Council will conduct a duly noticed Public Hearing on the Zoning Commission recommendation, findings of fact, and any conditions mitigating the impacts associated with the request. This hearing will occur on April 14, 2026.

ZONES INVOLVED: Existing and Proposed

- R-6000 – Residential 6000.
 - The required setbacks for structures are:
 - Front 20feet
 - Side 5 feet
 - Side Corner 20 feet per Text of Regulations
 - Side Corner 10 feet per Dimensional Graphics R-6000
 - Rear 5 feet
 - Text and Graphics R-6000 Attached.
- Rule of Construction of the Laurel Municipal Code and Zoning Regulations.
 - The most restrictive standard is the governing regulation.
 - As such, the 20 foot side yard setback is required to be applied.

➤ Laurel Municipal Code.

✓ Chapter 17.56 - NONCONFORMING USES

✓ 17.56.010 - Nonconforming use designated.

Any lawful use of the land or buildings existing at the date of passage of the ordinance codified in this chapter, and located in a district in which it would not be permitted as a new use under the regulations of this chapter, is declared to be a nonconforming use, and not in violation of this title at the date of adoption of the ordinance codified in this chapter; provided, however, a nonconforming use shall be subject to, and the owner shall comply with the regulations set out in Sections 17.56.020 through 17.56.070.

(Prior code § 17.64.010 (part))

✓ 17.56.020 - Extension of.

The nonconforming use of a building may be extended throughout any part of a building clearly designated for such use but not so used at the date of the adoption of this chapter. No nonconforming use may be extended to occupy any land outside the building nor any additional building not used for such nonconforming use at the date of adoption of the ordinance codified in this chapter. The nonconforming use of land shall not be extended to any additional land not so used at the date of adoption of the ordinances codified in this title.

(Prior code § 17.64.010(A))

✓ 17.56.030 - Additions, repairs and alteration allowed when.

A. No building used for a nonconforming use shall be enlarged, extended, reconstructed, or structurally altered, unless the use is changed to one which complies with the provisions of this chapter; provided, however, permits may be issued for the reconstruction of an existing building to be continued as a nonconforming use if the following conditions are complied with:

1. If a single- or two-family dwelling is presently a nonconforming use, and is located in a residential area, and is destroyed, the dwelling may be rebuilt. However, qualifying dwelling units located on arterial streets or roads must conform to the applicable setback standard;
2. New use would decrease the automobile parking congestion in the area;
3. New use would not increase the cubical contents of the structure, floor area ratio, if such would violate provisions of this chapter;
4. Such reconstruction would be one in accordance with the city building, plumbing, electrical codes and fire prevention code;
5. The issuance of such permit would not violate the provisions of Section 17.56.040 of this chapter.

(Prior code § 17.64.010(B)(part))

(Ord. No. O08-05, 6-17-08)

✓ 17.56.040 - Applicability when building damaged or destroyed.

- A. If any building in which there is a nonconforming use is damaged by fire, flood, explosion, wind, war or other catastrophe, in an amount equal to or greater than fifty percent of its assessed valuation, it shall not be again used or reconstructed to be used for any use except one complying with the provisions of this title in which it is located. This

subsection specifically does not apply to nonconforming, one and two-family dwelling units.

- B. In addition, repairs and maintenance work may be carried out each year in an amount not to exceed twenty-five percent of the assessed value of the building for that year. Such repairs and maintenance work shall not increase the cubical content of the building, nor the floor area devoted to the nonconforming use. Nor shall it increase the number of dwelling units provided in a building.
- C. Nothing in this chapter shall be deemed to prevent the strengthening nor repair of a building which may be necessary to restore the building to a safe condition or to improve the sanitary conditions of the building; provided, that such strengthening and repair may not be used to restore a building to the provisions of Section 17.56.040 of this chapter.

(Ord. 06-12 (part), 2006; Ord. 06-06 (part), 2006; prior code § 17.64.010(B) (part), (C))

✓ 17.56.050 - Restrictions on moving building.

Any building in which there is a nonconforming use shall not be moved unless it is moved to a district in which the use for which the building was designed is permitted by this title. If any building in which there is a nonconforming use is moved any distance whatsoever, the building shall thereafter be used only in compliance with the provisions of this title for the district in which it is located.

(Prior code § 17.64.010(D))

✓ 17.56.060 - Continuance and change.

A nonconforming use may be continued in accordance with the provisions of this chapter, but it shall not be changed to any other use except the one which would be permitted as a new use in the district in which the building is located.

(Prior code § 17.64.010(E))

✓ 17.56.070 - Discontinuance.

If for any reason a nonconforming use ceases for a period of six months any new use must conform to the provisions of this title for the district in which the use occurs, and the nonconforming use no longer allowed.

(Ord. 04-5 (part), 2004; prior code § 17.64.010(F))

RATIONAL BASIS FOR VARIANCE:

“Variance” means an adjustment in the application of the specific regulations of this title to a particular piece of property which property, because of special circumstances applicable to it, is deprived of privileges commonly enjoyed by other properties in the same vicinity or zone.

Findings of Fact: Standard of Review

A recommendation for Approval or Conditional Approval of a Variance shall require the Board of Adjustment making each of the following Findings of Fact:

1. Special Conditions

There are special circumstances or conditions that are peculiar to the land or building for which the Variance is sought that do not apply generally to land or buildings in the neighborhood; and

➤ Zoning Commission Finding:

- First, this property has unique physical conditions. As a corner lot, it is subject to two street-facing setbacks, which significantly reduces the usable building area. The existing house and garage were built long before current setback standards, and their placement limits where a replacement structure can reasonably go. W. 2nd Street is also classified as a residential local access or collector street, which typically corresponds to a smaller setback than 20 feet.

2. Not Result of Applicant

The special circumstances or conditions have not resulted from an act of the applicant or been established to circumvent this Ordinance; and

➤ Zoning Commission Finding:

- The Zoning Commission did not issue a favorable finding on this criterion.

3. Strict Application Unreasonable

Due to the special circumstances or conditions, the strict application of this Ordinance would deprive the applicant of reasonable use of the land or building or create an undue hardship on the landowner; and

➤ Zoning Commission Finding:

- Third, applying the 20-foot setback strictly would create an unreasonable hardship. Moving the structure further north would push it into the limited remaining yard space and create conflicts with the existing home. It would also make it difficult to design a safe, functional, and code-compliant garage and ADU.

4. Necessary to Provide Reasonable Use

Granting the Variance is necessary to provide a reasonable use of the land or building; and

➤ Zoning Commission Finding:

- Fourth, the variance is necessary for reasonable use. The new structure will be wider than the existing garage, but placing it in the same general location is essential for the design to work. Without maintaining the current setback, constructing a practical garage and ADU becomes extremely difficult.

5. Minimum Variance

The Variance is the minimum variance necessary to allow a reasonable use of the land or building; and

➤ Zoning Commission Finding:

- Fifth, this is the minimum variance needed. I am not asking for anything beyond the long-standing 16-foot setback that has existed for decades.

6. Not Injurious

Granting the Variance will not be injurious to the neighborhood or detrimental to the public welfare; and

➤ Zoning Commission Finding:

- Sixth, the variance will not be injurious to the neighborhood. The new structure will meet all current building and fire codes, and it will not interfere with the clear-vision triangle. Maintaining the existing setback preserves the visual rhythm of the street. In fact, after surveying 31 nearby corner lots, more than three-quarters do not meet the current 20-foot standard, so this request is consistent with the neighborhood.

7. Consistent with Ordinance

Granting the Variance is consistent with the purposes and intent of this Ordinance. A variance to the Allowed Uses of a zoning district is prohibited.

➤ Zoning Commission Finding:

- Finally, the variance is consistent with the intent of the ordinance. It does not change the allowed uses of the property. It supports orderly development, maintains neighborhood character, and allows the addition of an ADU, which aligns with state housing policy under MCA 76-2-323.

CONDITIONS

Conditions or restrictions may be placed on the approval of a Variance.

None were proposed by the Zoning Commission.

EXPIRATION

A Variance shall expire one (1) year from the date of approval if the next logical step in the development process is not commenced. The next step in the development process includes but is not limited to applying for a building permit, commencing the use, or applying for a Development Permit.

DISCUSSION:

While the Zoning Commission Did not find favorably on all 7-review criterion, they did find favorably on 6. It was the Commissions stated belief that the standard of review is the “Preponderance of the evidence”.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Zoning Commission recommends that the City Council adopt their Findings of Fact and Grant the requested variance to the Side Corner setback on Lots 19 and 20 Block12, Laurel Original Townsite, located in Section 9, Township 02 South, Range 24 East, P.M.M., City of Laurel, Yellowstone County, Montana, reducing the side corner setback from 20 feet to 16 feet..