



# CITY OF LAUREL

## OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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May 1, 2024

Laurel City Council President James Kole  
Laurel City Councilmembers  
8103 Sandy Spring Road  
Laurel, Maryland 20707

Dear President Kole and Councilmembers,

I am proud to present for your consideration my first budget message and FY2025 City of Laurel General Operating Budget and Capital Improvement Program (CIP), with **no proposed property tax rate increase**.

The largest priority of the FY2025 Budget is the continuation of services our residents and business owners deserve and expect. This requires the complete dedication of Laurel 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 potential reduction of Federal, State, and County revenue resources at a level no one can positively identify at this time. While we strive for the highest level of service to our residents, we are ever mindful and act conservatively as we continue to deal with the economic and social fallout resulting from the pandemic shutdown and recovery.

As we move further from the worldwide pandemic, we have returned to more normal operations and have experienced a lessening of some of the challenges presented in the past three years. The Administration and City Staff continue to adapt to the many changes as a result of the pandemic, but FY2024 saw a trend towards a positive climate for recruiting, hiring, and retaining the City workforce. The City seized the opportunity to implement a new pay plan for all City employees well ahead of the State's requirement for an increase in the minimum wage. City pay scales were adjusted allowing for increases from 7% to 18%. Additionally, the City instituted large signing bonuses for our Law Enforcement staff to help even the playing field as Law Enforcement Agencies across the nation struggle to recruit staff. The FY2025 proposed budget continues its commitment to staff with a proposed 2.5% COLA and 2.5% merit increases. The FY2025 proposed budget also includes funding in accordance with the fourth Collective Bargaining Agreement between the City and FOP Lodge No. 11 and the first Collective Bargaining Agreement with UFCW Local 1994 MCGEO for some members of the Department of Public Works. These efforts will continue to allow the City to remain competitive in its recruitment and encourage the retention of a well-trained workforce.

For FY2025, 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 FY2024 service levels.

In my short tenure as Mayor, let me highlight some of the accomplishments of my office as I move forward with my vision for continuing to provide the citizens of Laurel with a safe, prosperous, inclusive, and healthy community.

- Hosted a “Let’s Talk Town Hall” meeting where citizens were invited to share their concerns and pose questions for my administration. A report was completed and posted for public view, addressing the twenty-three questions or concerns generated at the meeting.
- Panelist for Nonprofit Prince George’s County, Inc. Breakfast with Tiffany – speaking to various nonprofit organizations on how Municipal Government can be a partner.
- Hosted Prince George’s County Council for a tour of the Laurel Multiservice Center for their annual retreat.
- Hosted Anne Arundel County Government officials for a tour of the Laurel Multiservice Center for partnerships in providing transitional housing and wrap around services to the most vulnerable population.
- Hosted Mayor and City Council Retreat to discuss upcoming FY2025 budget and goals and provide leadership training for City Council members and Department Heads.
- Investing in Crime Prevention by hosting a Townhall Public Safety Summit conducted by the City of Laurel Chief of Police.
- Attended the Office of the State’s Attorney for Prince George’s County Municipal Retreat to discuss juvenile and criminal justice reform and community resources.
- Created an IT Support Specialist Apprentice position for a high school junior or senior.
- Created a new Multi Culture Advisory Committee to celebrate the City’s diverse population.
- Sponsored 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Black History Essay Contest for Elementary, Middle and High School Students.
- Hosted an “open discussion” with local United States Military Veterans.

With the election complete, the Clerk to the Council is working to ensure newly elected officials are provided with the information and training necessary to execute their responsibilities. The Clerk will now focus on evaluating and updating the City’s Election Code to make the process easier for both candidates and residents.

The Administration, the Office of Community Resources and Emergency Management (CREM), the Department of Budget and Personnel Services, and the City-appointed ARPA Committee continued to oversee the many projects, programs and distributions from funds received from the Federal Government as part of the American Rescue and Recovery Plan Act (ARPA). \$5,143,370 was distributed directly into the community, with the remaining funding for City Government’s lost revenue and community projects. The second and final round of funding allowed the City to continue to provide support to the business community and non-profit agencies such as LARS, Elizabeth House and CASA. Additionally, a significant amount of

funding will support improvements to the City's infrastructure through various CIP projects. A large portion was allocated to support the development of the first of its kind, City of Laurel, Craig A. Moe Laurel Multiservice Center (LMSC). With support from our Annapolis Delegation, CREM was awarded \$3,000,000 for FY2025 in State funding and will receive \$82,000 in grant funding from its newest LMSC partner Employ Prince Georges. With the Multi Service Center's anticipated September opening, CREM and its many sponsoring community nonprofit partners ready themselves with securing staff, programs and services that will help and support the needs of the most vulnerable members of our community. Additionally, the Department of Community Resources and Emergency Management successfully recertified for the Community Rating System, which provides residents in Special Flood Hazards Area a 15% discount on flood insurance. CREM received FEMA approval on the City and County's Hazard Mitigation Plan, installed six (6) flood warning gages and participated in many community special events including Main Street Festival and July 4<sup>th</sup> Celebration and hosted emergency operations trainings, workshops and exercises. The Emergency Manager, Director of CREM was appointed Vice-Chair of Maryland Municipal League's Emergency Management Department and was appointed by Governor Moore as Director of the Local Directors of Emergency Management.

The Department of Economic and Community Development (ECD) continued to administer many grant programs for the business community. The Department procured grant funding totaling \$125,000 that was awarded to 23 local businesses for Business District & Neighborhood Safety and Main Street Improvements. The funding will provide enhancements around the business district. ECD, working together with the Environmental Programs Manager, reestablished the Farmer's Market and worked to accept SNAP benefits, allowing greater access to all for healthier food options. The market was such an overwhelming success that the department has expanded to host the market every week from May through September. Additionally, ECD successfully held its first Laurel Restaurant Week, highlighting many of the City's eating establishments. Finally, along with the Mayor and City Council, ECD established the first for-sale affordable housing legislation and will be hosting the first Housing Summit in cooperation with the Department of Budget and Personnel Services, HUD, and Prince Georges County Housing and Community Development and Maryland Department of Housing and Development.

As the City responds to business and residential growth, the Department of Fire Marshal and Permit Services (FMPS) continues to be busy with permitting, building inspections and code enforcement. The Department has expanded its code enforcement staffing to provide more hours of coverage on evenings and weekends and added the Housing and Rental Enforcement Specialist to improve operations, address issues and reduce wait times. The department has completed over 2,500 inspections including all those required for the Overlook and Westside developments. The department has integrated the use of digital platforms for use by engineers, architects, developers, and citizens to access adopted City codes, standards, and amendments. It is easier than ever to submit permit applications, plans and pay fees online.

With its ongoing commitment to sustainability, the Mayor and City Council passed legislation which established the removal of single use plastic bags at points-of-sale in all businesses. With the second phase of the City's sustainability Plan underway, the City worked with MWCOG consultants and Governance Alive to host a series of citizens focus groups. The City will continue working to put residents' ideas and voices into action. Mirroring Prince

George's County, the City is moving forward on its commitment to reduce organic waste as it passed legislation requiring mandatory residential composting effective July 1, 2025. The Sustainability Programs Manager (formerly Environmental Programs Manager) is creating an educational campaign, working with Homeowners Associations on compliance and will assist in coordinating distribution of composting carts so all residents can meet the July 1st deadline. The City's ongoing efforts to reduce refuse that ends up in the landfill is helping to meet the goal of reducing harmful emissions and provides a financial benefit with the reduction in tipping fees.

The Department of Public Works (DPW) is also instrumental in initiating environmentally friendly alternatives to traditional City services. The City realized an 80-ton reduction in Sodium Chloride (road salt) use with the introduction of the new Brine System. The Brine System, made up primarily of water, not only results in cost savings, but reduces chemical runoff into our creeks, streams, and rivers as well as our storm drains. Salt is a contributor to the breakdown of our roads, pavements, and drainpipes. DPW continued its light conversion program with the replacement of 65 HID and high-pressure sodium fixtures with new LED light fixtures allowing for an increased life span from three (3) years to 25 per fixture and 25% reduction in maintenance costs. DPW continues its response to traffic and pedestrian safety concerns and completed numerous citizen-requested speed traffic studies that resulted in the installation of 8 traffic calming devices and increased signage throughout the City. DPW continues to evaluate crosswalks in the City and make improvements such as the installation of the raised pedestrian crossing 7<sup>th</sup> Street to the Library from Carroll Avenue and no-parking marking on Main Street to improve line of sight at intersections. Other DPW highlights include the successful passing of the County's Stormwater Pollution Plan that acts to reduce contaminants in water entering storm drains running to the Chesapeake Bay, the completion of citywide concrete repairs for sidewalks, curb and gutters and handicapped ramps, and the paving of two major streets (Laurel & Compton Avenues) as well as minor repairs on Main and Montgomery for a total outlay of 1,650 tons of asphalt.

The Department of Parks and Recreation continues its progress to improve recreation spaces around the City. With the completion of Phase I of the LMSC, the Department of Parks and Recreation has hit the ground running with utilizing the space for several new sports programs, rental opportunities, and additional community events such as the Black History Celebration, Women's History Month program and July 4<sup>th</sup> fund raiser. The Department continues to work diligently as it oversees the remainder of the project and looks to the September opening of phase II. The Department completed the resurfacing of outdoor basketball and tennis courts around the city. New high tech light poles were installed around Granville Gude Lake that contain energy efficient LED lighting, Wi-Fi access, incorporated sound system, an emergency push-to-talk station and digital information banners. With grant funding from the Maryland Department of General Services, the outdoor ballfield lights at Stephen P. Turney were replaced with energy efficient LED lighting. The Department of Parks and Recreation continues to work with the Laurel Arts Council by providing public art initiatives to beautify and educate our community. This year saw the installation of original, citizen generated vinyl traffic box wraps at various intersections in the community. A local Artist completed a mural at Sturgis Moore Park depicting the lifecycle of the butterfly. Working with the Environmental Affairs Committee, a pollinator garden will be planted. The Arts Council and Environmental Affairs Committee have also partnered with the Department to upgrade Larry T. Smith Park with sculptures and pollinator gardens. The Department of Parks and Recreation was proud to open

and dedicate its newest park at the Overlook development, as the Marcus Colbert Community Park. Parks and Recreation is eagerly awaiting the completion of the pedestrian bridge replacement project at Riverfront Park and the renovations to both the Main Street and Greenvew Drive Pool Complexes. Also, the Department completed an assessment of the Historic Dam Ruins and is moving forward on the restoration. With the award of \$1.2 million dollars from the State of Maryland, improvements to the site will also include accessibility upgrades to the overlook area.

As the City moves forward adjusting to uncertain economic and social conditions, I am pleased to highlight several significant accomplishments that occurred in FY2024, including:

- Presented the Operating Budget to the City Council with no tax increase and continued the same level of service to the community.
- The City was awarded the honor to complete a video *“Prioritizing Community in a Fast-growing City,”* and was showcased at the International City/County Management Association’s annual conference in Austin, Texas. The video can be viewed on the City’s YouTube Channel.
- The City was selected by the National League of Cities (NLC) to participate in their Centennial Roadshow: 100 years, 100 Cities. Celebrating the organization’s 100-year anniversary. NLC’s tour stop to Laurel featured a tour of the Multi-Service Center and a video highlighting how the vision of the Center came to fruition.
- Secured an additional \$3.0 million in State of Maryland funding for LMSC.
- Secured \$1.2 million of State of Maryland funding to support City efforts to stabilize the Old Dam Ruins.
- Largest number of filled positions at the Laurel Police Department in 10 years resulting from new recruitment and retention programs.
- Met regulatory requirements for a new Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Program to aid in law enforcement.
- LPD partnered with LVFD, LVRS and Prince George’s County Fire and Emergency Services Department to participate in the Overdose Detection and Mapping Application Program to help determine “hotspots” of opioid use and adjust deployment, enforcement, and lifesaving efforts for the community.
- Completed installation of public WIFI at all city facilities and parks and enhanced security and surveillance to improve residents’ safety.
- Overhauled the City website to a more user-friendly format that also integrates the Municipal Code function and SEECLICKFIX App.
- Established the on-line 311 services via the MyLaurel Mobile App making City services more readily available and responsive to residents and businesses.
- Integrated the Convey 911 App to provide inclusive language solutions for both emergency and non-emergency situations ensuring equal access to the City’s essential services.
- The Department of Communications doubled the number of memberships to Laurel TV allowing for greater on-line viewing participation in the City’s broadcast of community events.
- Completed “Laurel City Podcast Studio & Channel” and exceeded the number of projected memberships.

- The Department of Communications will complete by fiscal year's end, the overhaul of Council Chambers and public conference rooms at the Municipal Center with state-of-the-art equipment allowing for better home viewing of meetings and enhanced hybrid operations.

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. Ana Navarro, MMC, Executive Assistant to the Mayor, Mrs. Lisa Woods, Deputy Director, Department of Budget and Personnel Services, Melissa Klinger, Human Resources Officer, and under the direction of Ms. Joanne Barr, Deputy City Administrator, the Administration has proposed a complete and balanced FY2025 Budget, and CIP.

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 resolute City employees and the leadership of City Administrator Christian L. Pulley, CPM and Deputy City Administrator Joanne Barr.

Continuing with sustainable practices and minimizing the use of paper, Councilmembers will again be able to access the proposed budget for review on a City-issued device for the ninth consecutive year. I look forward to your review and adoption of the FY2025 Budget and CIP document.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith R. Sydnor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Keith" and "R." on the first line and "Sydnor" on the second line.

Keith R. Sydnor  
Mayor