

SOC-2018

Good evening,

Thank you to the council for allowing me to present the State of the City to you and to the public.

In accordance with MS Code 21-8-17 which states that the Mayor shall annually report to the council and the public on the work of the previous year and on the condition and requirements of the municipal government.

I offer to you the state of the city of Laurel, MS for the year 2018.

Laurel was incorporated in 1882, and out of 345 municipalities in the state, Laurel is #22 in population.

I desire the employees of the city of Laurel to emulate something Walt Disney said; Whatever you do, do it well. Do it so well that when people see you do it, they will want to come back and see you do it again, and they will want to bring others to show them how well you do what you do.

The city has around 300 employees, making us #15 out of the top employers in Jones County. If at all possible, I would like to be able to give the full-time employees pay raises in the next budget year. We always begin with a hope, sometimes it happens sometimes it does not, but it will be on the table.

We have five departments which are headed by departments heads; those are Fire, Parks and Recreation, Public Works, City Clerk/ Finance and Human Resources. The position in police is currently vacant due to the untimely passing of Chief Tyrone Stewart. We have a Superintendent of Inspection, a municipal court judge, a judge pro tem, a city prosecutor, a city public defender and a court administrator. Our city attorney handles our routine legal issues and Suez is contracted to handle all the city's water production and distribution, wastewater collection and treatment, billing and collection. Included on the water bill that Suez distributes and collects is also the city garbage fee.

Human Resources has four employees and is headed by Mrs. Nellie Satcher, included in that department is the payroll clerk, the Safety Coordinator and Mrs. Satcher's assistant. They hired 28 Ameri Corp workers in 2018, 8 employees retired, 51 employees hired, 42 employees received the flu shot, down from 65

last year. They also conducted CPR training, Sexual harassment training for all employees, participated in Governor's Job Fair, Phelps Dunbar's MS Labor and Employment Law Conference, had supervisor training for all department heads, Did the city of Laurel's Compliance report for PERS, and the LPD "Color of Law" violation presented by the FBI. We were able to retain the same premium cost for our self-insured health insurance for another year, we remain covered by Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

Mary Ann Hess heads the City Clerk/Finance Department, with four employees besides herself. In FY 2018 the mayor and council approved an Ad Valorem tax increase of 1 mil to set up a vehicle fund in order to make payments on a \$750,000 note. We were able to purchase 27 new vehicles for the police, public works and Parks and Recreation. The plan is to be able to purchase new vehicles every five years at a cost of \$750,000, thereby keeping our fleet up to date. At the end of the budget year we were also able to purchase two additional new pickups for the Laurel Fire Department, giving us a total of 29 new vehicles added to our fleet for the year. In the FY 2019 budget the mayor recommended and council approved a 4 mil Ad Valorem tax increase to be set up in a separate street fund, these funds will be exclusively to pave streets, this is the first time that the city of Laurel's budget has had a fund exclusively for the paving of streets, this will give us paving funds in perpetuity or until another council changes it. The Mayor recommended and the council approved creating a separate fund for the Road and Bridge allocation from the county, thereby removing it from the General Fund and placing it into its own fund, to be used exclusively for road and bridge work, giving us another source of street funding, again this is a first. The city had an increase in valuation and the value of a mil. The school District had a small decrease. In FY 2018 the city's valuation was \$174m and for FY 2019 it rose to \$185m. The school's valuation decreased from \$194m in 2018 to \$193m in FY 2019. The value of a mil for the city increased from \$164.4 thousand in FY 2018 to \$176.0 thousand for FY 2019. The value for a school mil decreased slightly from \$184.9 thousand in FY 2018 to \$184.3 thousand for FY 2019. We collected \$20,038,995 in Ad Valorem taxes compared to last year \$19,105,906 which is a 4.7 % increase over last year. Out of this amount the Laurel Schools received \$12,602,111 and the city received \$7,436,884, that amounts to a 6.8% increase over last year. The Laurel School District is a very important element to the city of

Laurel, as schools are to any city. Our last ranking for the District was an “F” and that is not acceptable. According to Walt Disney, “our greatest national resource is the minds of our children.” I know that our children can achieve, and they must achieve. On the agenda tonight, I have an appointment for the Board of Trustees of the Laurel Municipal Separate School District. I do not take this or any of my appointments lightly; Mrs. Nancy Breland is well known in the community and is also a retired educator with the Laurel School District. With the amount of taxes that is distributed to the District each year, we must have better results, and I believe that Mrs. Breland can help us get there. I urge her confirmation. The city of Laurel’s total sales tax diversion for 2018 was \$8,838,716, which was an increase of 5.7% over last year where we collected \$8,336,407. Out of over 345 municipalities reporting sales tax on a monthly basis, Laurel is in the top 15 cities in sales tax collection each month. Sales tax collection is important in Laurel seeing that about 57% of our General Fund budget comes from sales tax. In our Tourism tax we collected \$1,721,156 which is a 12.5% increase over last years’ \$1,505,833. This is actually more of a Recreation Tax than it is tourism, but it is the two cents that is added to hotels and restaurants to fund the Sportsplex, the Natatorium, the Magnolia Center and other recreation expenses. For FY 2017 we received a clean audit and the FY 2018 audit is currently underway. We entered into a contract with Schneider Electric for \$2,778,948, we made various improvements to several city buildings including replacing some HVAC, lighting and telephone systems. At the end of the physical year, this contract was complete. The city of Laurel is a member of the Emergency Management Council, the funding for this agency comes from Jones County at 45%, city of Laurel at 45% and the city of Ellisville at 10%, to fund the operations of this center. This Emergency Council also purchased new radios for all the entities associated with it and the city of Laurel has a payment of \$194,698 annually, we are entering into our third year of an 11 year note on radios. Because of efforts by Councilman Thaxton while a member of this agency, he helped to negotiate a payment less than the normal 45% that we usually pay to fund operations, payments being based instead on the number of radios that we have in our possession. As of 1/16/19 the city of Laurel had a cash balance in all its funds of \$32,017,027, with the bulk of these funds in capital improvement accounts where we pay back the bonds that we have taken out to pay for major street, water and sewer and recreational improvements. The City Clerk’s office issued 117 new business

licenses for 2018, that number was down from 125 the previous year. In August the office contracted with Digital Filing Solutions for the scanning of old records in the City Clerk's office. At the last council meeting we entered into another contract to scan the remainder of the files in the clerk's office, Human Resources and files in the old Gibson building in order to clean it out, hopefully for sale, we do have a contract, but have not closed as of yet. On the agenda tonight, the potential buyers are seeking a 30-day extension on the contract that expired yesterday.

The Public Works Department is headed by Lorenzo Anderson who is Public Works Director and City Engineer. They are tasked with the management and maintenance of the city's streets, fleet, sanitation and drainage through ensuring adherence to applicable codes and regulations. These activities are carried out utilizing in-house staff, outside firms and companies and various other governmental agencies. They have a total of 53 employees and they always say they could use more bodies, I'm sure they are correct. In 2018 they had 21 employees to either retire, resign or be terminated. They had two promoted or transferred. They collected 8,473 cu. Yds. Of rubbish, which is equal to approximately 4 NFL football fields with a height of 1 foot. They collected 23,012 cu. Yds of debris which is equal to approximately 11 NFL football fields with a height of 1 foot. They completed 1,870 work orders which included: 408 cut-outs patched, 353 potholes patched, 170 ditches cut and cleaned, 30 curb and gutters cleaned, 6 demolitions, 306 lot cleanings, and 597 miscellaneous orders. Public Works purchased one Knuckle Boom at a cost of \$160,500 from Waters International and one Bush Hog Tractor for \$114,000 purchased locally from McNeil Tractor. They received eight of the new trucks that were purchased last year. One of their major tasks right now is to take care of the enormous number of potholes that we currently have to deal with, but we do have a plan.

The Laurel Police Department is currently being headed by Captains Tommy Cox, Shane Valentine and Billy Chandler, following the sudden demise of Chief Tyrone Stewart. They have 54 sworn officers with two currently in the academy, for a total of 86 employees. The department handled 32,806 complaints which was 6,147 less than a year ago. That number averages 2,733 complaints per month. They made 2106 arrests which is 317 less than 2017. That averages about 175 arrests per month and about six per day. A sampling of the arrests was 10 for

aggravated assault, 8 for aggravated domestic assault, 2 possession of alcohol by a minor, 436 Capias/failure to appear, 65 careless driving, 513 contempt of court, 559 various drug offences, 3 drive-by shooting, 138 DUI, 114 simple assault, 148 simple domestic assault, we had one homicide for the year. Of the 2106 arrests there were 32 use-of-force reports. That number represents force used in only 1.5% of arrests. Of the 32 uses of force- 19 were Taser, 7 pepper spray, 4 empty hand and 2 apprehended by K-9. Even though it may not be on Facebook or other social media the LPD disciplines officers when the need arises. I know many complain about officers, but if it is found that they are in the wrong, they are dealt with. I am still of the impression that the body cameras have reduced the number of complaints against the police by a large percentage. There have been many instances where someone will come in and lodge a complaint, only to have it be refuted by the evidence on the body camera. We do back our officers, but they are not above the law. In 2018 there were 2 officers terminated, 1 officer reprimanded and suspended, 7 officers received written reprimands and 2 receiving verbal warnings. Laurel Police Department received twelve of the new vehicles purchased during the year for patrol and the Investigative Division. In September Investigator Evans attended Law Enforcement Alliance Peer Support training, and later that same month he was called upon to assist fellow officers in Brookhaven to deal with the tragic loss of two of their officers. Officer Cynthia Robertson continued work with DARE, to educate children about the dangers of drugs, hundreds of 5th graders graduate every year. LPD continued the Healthy Hero's Program where at least 684 children were educated about the benefits of healthy behavior, during 12 events. Night out Against Crime was held again last year with great success with informational booths, entertainment and food. In October LPD participated in the nationally recognized Domestic Violence Awareness Month. This was headed by Teya Cooper and they also collected 22 units of blood, during a drive. LPD sponsored two children from the Salvation Army Angel Tree, this is their 7th year of participation. They also rang the bell for Salvation Army and collected approximately \$700. They had their annual Stuff-A-Truck for the Good Samaritan Center and collected over \$1,000 in cash and 5 ½ truckloads of food items. Partnering with Fraternal Order of Police, LPD, Walmart and Laurel Ford they provided 25 bikes to deserving children, and had 18 children to participate with Shop with a Cop. From LPD, the items listed are just a sampling of the ways that the officers and staff of LPD contribute to the community in ways

that are considered traditional law enforcement roles and in many that are not. These contributions occur on an almost daily basis. Car seat give-a-ways, scam alerts, K-9 demonstrations and speaking to clubs and other groups are things that are too numerous to mention. The Laurel Animal /Pest Control is under the LPD. On last year they responded to 1304 complaints. They picked up 456 loose animals on city streets and owners brought in 23 animals. They euthanized 415 animals and 16 died at the shelter due to parvo and other diseases. A total of 39 animals were adopted or given away. They picked up 133 dead animals off the streets. 9 dogs are currently available for adoption. Between April 15-October 15 they sprayed all city streets, alleys, parks and ball fields for mosquitoes. This was the fourth year that we had no reports of West Nile Virus in the city of Laurel. Traffic Maintenance is also under LPD who helps to move us around the city safely and efficiently.

The Department of Inspection and Maintenance is led by Superintendent Harold Russell. He has a total of 7 employees. They issued 669 building permits for a total dollar amount of \$29,359,580. There was a total of 19 demolitions during the year with 5 being done by the city and 14 privately. They had 1140 lots reported and the city cleaned 250. They tagged 173 vehicles. They often have a thankless job, because much of their contact with the public is about some violation that has occurred. They are an important part of the whole. Statement from Inspection: the face of Laurel is always changing with the renovations or demolition of older structures and the construction of new homes and businesses. The change is often small for those who live among it daily, but quite dramatic for those returning to Laurel after extended absences. The Inspection Department is here to help develop or redevelop properties using the comprehensive plan as our guide. We welcome persons to come by and talk with us for projects under consideration. Our staff will make every effort to assist you in making your dream a reality. Code enforcement is vital to what we do. Our building and electrical inspectors as well as field inspectors are here to assist you with your project or your property. Through continuing education and self-development each of the inspectors are able to assist you with code questions or compliance. It is the stated goal and mission of this department to provide the correct information or answer to any and all questions correctly the first time without unnecessary delay. That is accomplished through a thorough knowledge of city ordinances and

adopted codes. In the event of a delay, a thorough research of ordinances or codes applicable to the question will be made promptly and professionally so our citizens and contractors can proceed with their projects which enhance Laurel as the "City Beautiful" in the eyes and lives of those who live and visit here. The Inspection Department has six aging vehicles, and they are requesting a new fleet.

Parks and Recreation is headed by Elvin Ulmer and he has 48 employees, and 27 AmeriCorps workers. Elvin has a trusted assistant who keeps everything running smoothly, that being DeWayne Daniels. Of the vehicles that we purchased last year, 7 went to Parks and Recreation. They had a busy year, from removing dead and diseased trees, maintaining and planting seasonal flowers in all the city flower beds, and maintaining city trees. They received an AmeriCorps grant in the amount of \$263,548 for 40 members. At the Susan Boone Vincent Sportsplex they host Dixie Youth Baseball, where during the spring they had over 430 participants and over 40,000 in attendance and in the fall, they had 195 participants and over 15,000 in attendance. During the year the department hosted Select Baseball, soccer, tennis, splash pad, at the Natatorium they hosted physical therapy, lifeguard training, water aerobics, pool parties, school swim teams and individual walk-in swimming. At the natatorium they also replaced an outdated gas boiler with an energy efficient electric boiler to heat the water in the pool, this was done under the Schneider contract. They hosted 4 high school soccer tournaments: Sumrall-30 teams, Laurel High-60 teams, West Jones-50 teams and Northeast Jones. Hosted a Hispanic Adult Soccer League with approximately 200 participants each weekend. Hosted the Laurel-Jones County Youth Soccer Spring League with 562 participants and approximately 42,000 in attendance from March-May. Hosted the Laurel-Jones County Youth Soccer Fall League with 212 participants and approximately 15,000 in attendance from September-October. Hosted Select Soccer team practices throughout the year. Hosted an adult flag football tournament at the soccer fields. In the Hospitality Building they hosted several league events and also the Suez Annual Crawfish Boil. The Boots Smith Fields are well used being utilized by Laurel High Girls Fast-Pitch Softball practice and games, youth softball and select ball. On West Drive Fields we hosted Dixie Boys Summer Ball 13-14-year-olds. Dixie Majors Summer Ball 15-19 years-of-age. Pre-majors 15-16 years-of-age State Tournament. Dixie Majors 17-19 State Tournament, hosted Laurel Christian School home baseball games and practice.

We hosted the now defunct Urban Professional Baseball League. Gardiner Park, Boston Park, Oak Park football field, Oak Park Swimming Pool, K.C. Park, Mason Park, Leontyne Price Park, Pinehurst Park, Daphne Park, Sandy Gavin Park, Cameron Center, L. T. Ellis, Train Depot, B. E. Murph Center, Cemeteries, and the Knaive Pool are all maintained and operated by Parks and Recreation. Facilities Maintenance has three employees who report to Mr. Ulmer, and they are tasked with keeping all the buildings that the city owns up and running. One minute they may be replacing a light bulb, and the next minute unclogging a toilet. They maintain the fountain at Pinehurst Park, built a new office for Recreation Administration, this is being used by Tim Barksdale who is over Programs and AmeriCorps. They completed over 500 workorders last year. When you see those Christmas decorations magically appear downtown, they are the ones who do it. When you see a city flag flying at half-staff or see one replaced, they did it. They do a terrific job in keeping buildings running efficiently. The B. E. Murph Center for Seniors overseen by Mrs. Lula Cooley is always busy, and it gives our seniors somewhere to go and something to do during the week and often on the weekends. The facilities that we rent are being used on a regular basis, they are the Train Depot, Cameron Center and L. T. Ellis Center.

The Laurel Fire Department is led by Chief Mark Nichols, they have a total of 61 employees, they had 2 resign, 2 retired, 1 terminated and 2 rehired. The Department responded to 780 calls, down from 854 last year. They had a total loss of \$1,147,500, compared to \$1,397,255 last year. The largest monetary losses were understandably from fire where they responded to 111 and had a total loss of \$1,146,200. Included in the 780 calls there were 121 motor vehicle accidents with injury, and 145 motor vehicle accidents without injury. Unfortunately, the department had two fatalities at one fire and another fatality where the victim died a few days later at the hospital from injuries suffered in the fire. They responded to 11 Mutual Aid calls for assistance from outside the city. Our wish list for the department still includes 4 new stations, those being Stations: 1,2,4 and 6, all of these stations were built in the 1970's. They are all in need of replacement, the question is, where does the money come from? The Department added a new ladder truck to its fleet, at a cost of \$685,704.00. The city received a total of \$105,832 in the fire insurance rebate, and these funds were used to make

payments on three fire trucks and turnout equipment. Another truck is paid out of the General Fund and the new ladder truck is paid out of the Debt Service, for a total of five fire trucks. Chief Nichols has presented a plan to the Civil Service dealing with the process of promotions, it was approved by the mayor and Civil Service and it is believed that this will be a seamless process to future promotions. We are still currently having a Class 5 Fire Rating, but we continue to do the things necessary to move us to a Class 4, we are anxious to make that move.

Information Technology replaced 110 desk top computers on a four-year lease. They also are working to centralize computers at City Hall and the Police Department into one system. They upgraded camera systems at most locations. They were involved with Schneider to replace our phone system to VOIP, with the phone system being internet based, it gave more flexibility and a lower cost. They are also involved in upgrading the scanning capabilities, whereby we can do most if not all the scanning inhouse, thereby saving money by not having to contract it out.

The Municipal Court Administrator is Rebecca Clark, in addition to Ms. Clark are 3 Deputy Court Clerks and 3 Court Bailiffs. They normally hold court on Monday and Wednesday and when the load requires, they have arraignments on Friday. At one time, the city of Laurel budgeted close to a million dollars in court fines deposited into the General Fund. Those times have changed, with lawsuits being filed by various organizations that prohibit persons from being jailed if they are considered indigent, and also with laws not allowing you to run a debtor's prison, the collections have fallen drastically, when people realize that they cannot be jailed for not paying, they don't pay. Along with the collections being less, the State gets their share of what is paid before the city gets its share. For instance, let's take a typical month, in January of 2018 we collected \$76,488.54 in fines, \$27,094.25 of that went to the State, right off the top. We were then left with \$49,394.29 after the State took their share. We then had to deduct from that total thousands of dollars to other State mandated expenditures, such as Crime Stoppers, DARE, Equipment Account from Court, Law Library, and money to the Department of Public Safety Interlock Fund. So, after these deductions, we were left with \$43,066.76 to place into the General Fund, out of the original \$76,488.00

that we began with, we had to pay to the State and others \$33,422. We have to further examine this department.

Suez, formerly known as United Water has an annual base contract of 3,925,029, they have partnered with the city of Laurel for the last twelve years. Suez is contracted to have 48 employees on staff. They are responsible for any cash shortages that occurs within the management and operation of the City of Laurel's Customer Service Department. Suez is responsible for any and all environmental fines that may occur due to the operations of the plants. Suez accepts or shares the liability in many claims due to sewer backups and vehicle damage that are not the responsibility of Suez. Suez has paid out over \$600,000 since they first contracted with the city. Suez accepts liability for any vehicle accident in which a Suez employee is driving a city vehicle. At the request of the Mayor, Suez reduced its annual escalation fee by 13%, for this budget year. They took the city's place by beginning to contribute \$2,000 to the Sawmill Square 4th of July Fireworks Show, supports the city of Laurel Christmas party with a donation of \$500, and contribute to the Animal Rescue League. Suez contributed \$2500 to the Parks and Recreation Department for citywide athletic programs. They support various councilmembers Ward events or special functions. They contributed \$1,000 to Ward 1's Brighter Tomorrows Scholarship. They conducted a "Show and Tell" at St John's Day School and look forward to expanding to other schools in the future. They annually participate in the Downtown's Touch A Truck. Suez purchased a boom truck for \$96,000 and this purchase saves the city approximately \$112,000 annually by not having to rent this equipment. Suez installed an Aqua Ultrasonic platform at the 90-acre Smyly Lagoon. It is now algae free, and with-it being algae free it makes wastewater treatment more efficient and less costly. They completed 313 corrective work orders in 2018 and 1921 preventative work orders. There were no SSO's (sanitary sewer overflows) due to pump or lift station failures. The only SSO's were due to weather and heavy flows. We had no violations from DEQ during the year. On December 27th we received 12 inches of rain in eight hours, our wastewater plants remained in compliance and permits were not violated, this is good news. A Lime Slurry System was installed in 2016 and in 2017 we saw a savings of \$14,050 and for 2018 we had a savings of \$16,942, we continue to see savings in the purchase of chemical lime. Both of our wastewater plants were inspected by MDEQ in October and both

passed with no significant findings. Per the contract Suez is required to provide 4 vehicles to the Laurel project, at year's end they were providing 13 trucks, 2 Boom Trucks, 1 Backhoe, 2 mowers, and one four-wheeler. Suez repaired 1453 water leaks, located 1483 lines, replaced or repaired 48 fire hydrants, did 24 water taps, 33 sewer taps, plugged 37 water/sewer services, unclogged 652 sewer clogs, 98 sewer cave-ins and 11 orders to repair/raise manholes. In the 2018 budget there was \$400,000 for emergency repairs, we finished the year \$41,146 over budget. Some of the repairs included sewer main repair because of sewer cave-in on Melon St at a cost of \$111,668. Install 200 ft of 8" sewer line at Walters and Hickory at a cost of \$77,040. N 15th Ave and W 10th St sewer cave-in \$56,682. Replaced 400 ft of 8" sewer line on Creek Avenue at a cost of \$34,483. Replaced sewer line on Ole Miss Dr for \$13,826. Install new manhole at 7th Ave and Garden Dr for \$16,965. Queensburg Ave and Purvis St, car hit fire hydrant \$23,192, thousands of dollars lost by businesses because they had to close because of no water. 6" water line repair on Hawkes Rd for \$10,500. Crosby Drive installed new 6" inch water main and 2 fire hydrants at \$8,799. Hwy 84 6" force main at Springer Salvage \$32,940. 10" hot tap at hangars at Sanderson Farms \$23,722. There are several tasks that Suez is able to do and save the city some money when a contractor did not have to do it, whereby the city is only out of the material and the labor is absorbed in the annual contract. These are not always possible, because they must be free to do the work on their normal repair and maintenance. A sampling of these are: they installed a new 6" water main and service lines, and set 2 new fire hydrants, on Fernwood. On Lake Park installed 800 feet of water main, 2 new fire hydrants and 12 new service lines. Replaced all above ground piping including new valves at Well #4 and Well #6. Made repair to perimeter line at N 7th Ave and Garden. Replaced water service lines and upgrade them to a new 6" inch line from an old galvanized line on Melon. On Capital St between Palmer and Pearson installed new 2" water main and new services because of leaks and low water volume. Tied in 6" water main across the bridge on Airport Drive west of Margaret Drive, providing much needed pressure and volume east of Airport Dr, for fire protection. The city has obtained for Suez through lease purchase a 2018 Caterpillar backhoe and a Caterpillar Mini Excavator. They will also be acquiring two 2020 Western Star dump trucks through lease purchase. During 2018 a new jet vacuum truck was purchased for use by Suez at a cost of \$343,114 and the old jet truck was given to the Public

Works Department. For the year Suez collected \$12,441,301 in water and sewer, while this seems like a lot, this is basically just operating expenses. This is not unlike the fund balance that we mentioned in the finance portion that we had \$32 million as a cash balance, but as it was mentioned the bulk of this is to make payments on the many bonds that we have. It's not like it is just money sitting somewhere drawing interest. We intend to request a 3% increase in water and a 3% increase in sewer next month. I believe that we have been good stewards of the funds that we are being asked to oversee. I would hate for us to be in the position of Greenville who made the news in August, where they were increasing their sewer rates by 32% to help pay for federally mandated repairs to the sewer system. Their minimum sewer bill increased on October 1st from \$11.41 to \$15.06. Our proposed increase would be about 94 cents, 38 cents for water and 56 cents for sewer. Many citizens and visitors are discussing streets in the city, and it has been the wisdom of this council and administration to replace water and sewer lines beneath the streets whenever possible before paving, to keep from destroying a new street, when a leak or cave-in occurs. It is also the understanding of all the elected officials that the only legal way to pay for water and sewer projects is through the public utility fund, which is the water and sewer fund. We will discuss this more when it comes up on the agenda.

As we look into 2019 here are some of the projects that are upcoming.

1. Central Avenue Roundabout and 500 Block Improvements, will be bid in Summer of 2019. Funding: MDOT TAP application. Cost of \$1.3 million. Project includes removing of flagpole, realignment of roundabout, constructing raised center island, removal of brick pavers and pedestrian and drainage improvements.
2. 5th Avenue and 13th Avenue Utility Improvements, in progress, scheduled to be complete in Fall of 2019. Funding: City Bonds, repaid from Public Utility Funds, an Army Corps of Engineers grant and a State of Mississippi allocation. Cost of \$5.5 million. Project includes replacement or rehabilitation of water mains, sewer mains, water and sewer services on 5th Ave from Central to Northview Drive and 13th Ave from Jefferson to 12th St.
3. 5th Avenue and 13th Avenue paving. Paving contract will be let after utility work is complete. Funding: City Bonds. Cost: \$2 million. Project will include milling, asphalt overlay and drainage improvements.

4. Beacon Street (Leontyne Price) Gateway Project. It is in the Design Phase. Right-of-Way has been acquired and utility relocation in under construction- Roadway Construction should begin in 2019. (Inside joke, Whitney does not believe it). Funding: MDOT: LPA with match from City Bond issue. Cost: \$5 million (\$1 million local match). Project includes roadway and pedestrian improvements along Beacon Street from MDOT ROW to Central Avenue.
5. Sportsplex Expansion. It is in the Design Phase- Army Corps of Engineers permit acquired, working with MDEQ on construction testing requirements- Earthwork Phase should begin late Spring 2019). (Inside joke, Elvin does not believe it). Funding Source: City Funds. Total cost: \$10,750,000. Project includes addition of 8 softball fields, 2 press boxes and additional parking.
6. 2018 Overlay Project Contract III (Design Complete, Construction to begin Spring 2019) Funding: City Bond Cost: \$3 million Project included roadway improvements for streets included: a. Northwood Dr from Old Bay to 7th Ave. b. Sunrise Dr from University Ave to Tower Dr. c. Bay Circle Area including Broadway Dr, Bay Circle, Highland Woods Dr, Lake Park Dr. d. 7th Ave from 13th St to Northview Dr. e. MS Avenue from Chantilly to Dead End. f. 12th St from 7th Ave to 10th Ave. g. Yates Ave from 5th Ave to Magnolia St. h. N 4th Ave from 17th St to Dead End. i. 8th St from 6th Ave to Daphne Park. j. Gladiolus Dr from S 19th to Dead end. k. Iris Dr from Gladiolus Dr to West Dr. l. Sandra and Rebecca St Area from Iris Dr to West Dr (incl. Hilton and Harold). m. Commerce St from Leontyne Price to Central Ave bricks. n. Parker Drive from Hwy 15 N to Old Bay Springs Rd. o. 10th St from Wansley Rd to Hwy 15 N. This project includes Wards 1,2,3,4,5,6.
7. 2019 Pavement Assessment (Data collection is complete and 5-year report will be presented to City in Spring of 2019). Funding: City Funds. Total Project: \$95,000. Project will include the assessment of every street within the City with the use of infrared pavement scanning technology. End result: A 5-year paving plan based on the data collected.
8. West 12th St Widening (Design complete and Right-of-Way is being secured- Construction to begin in late Spring/Summer 2019. Funding: City Funds. Total Project Cost: \$840,000. Project will include the widening and paving of W 12th St from Wansley Rd to Hwy 15 N.

9. CDBG Water System Improvements (In Design Phase, Construction in Summer 2019. Funding Source: CDBG and match from Public Utility Fund. Total Cost: \$1.2 million. Project will include water tank rehabilitation at Plants 2 and 3 and replacement of aerators at Plants 2 & 3.
10. Annual Bid CIPP of Pine Street. Funding Source: Public Utility Fund. Total Project Cost: \$140,000. Project will include Cured in Place Pipe lining of Pine St Sewer.
11. The Laurel Skate Park is on the agenda tonight to contract with Pillar Designs for the documents to proceed with the construction of the park. the time for construction when awarded is 45 days. Funded by a grant from Wildlife and Fisheries and a Tony Hawke Foundation Grant. Project is to build a skate park at Daphne Park.
12. The Raising Canes Dog Park will hold its ribbon cutting on Saturday at 1:00 p.m. at Mason Park. Project is to build a dog park for large and small dogs. Funding: Leadership Jones County Class, through fundraising, major donor was Raising Canes Chicken Fingers.

I would like to mention Walt Disney's wisdom once again. Disney stays clean because they are dedicated to keeping it clean. A journalist famously told Walt Disney that Disneyland would be a mess inside of a week after it opened. Disney told him that, "we're going to make it so clean that people are going to be embarrassed to throw anything on the ground." Could it be as simple as making the park so nice that a mob of people would just feel too guilty about messing it up? Studies show that a clean environment can affect behavior positively while a dirty environment can do the opposite. Another reason for Disney's cleanliness, is "everyone picks up the trash" they are specifically instructed to look down and pick up anything within reach. Doesn't matter what job they have. If they see trash on the ground, pick it up. In other lines of work, you'd expect someone to say it's not their job, not at Disney. All work together. Everybody is encouraged to do a little picking up when needed. You may see a mess, but it won't be there for long. Disney once carefully observed guests, and noticed that they would only walk about 30 steps holding trash, before throwing it down, so guess what? They place garbage cans every 30 steps. The secret to Disney is doing things you don't need and doing them well, and then you realize you needed them all along. The city of Laurel has a litter problem! I have hired two part-time individuals who will

do one thing and one thing only and that is to pick up litter eight hours a day, five days a week. One will work four hours in the morning and the other will work four hours in the afternoon. They will oversee a fine workers crew, and pick up litter themselves, and again their only job will be to pick up litter all over this city. They will have a route and when they finish that route they will start over, throughout the entire city. We may not be able to be as clean as Disney, but we are going to be cleaner than we are. These individuals will make approximately \$8,000 annually, and again, the fine workers will be working off their fines to the city, this will help us in our fine collections also. These positions will be funded 50% from Public Works and 50% through Parks and Recreation and will be supervised by Parks and Rec. We are having many visitors come to our city, and we need to look our best for them. We must end this problem.

Our Grant Writer Whitney Pickering obtained \$296,168 in grants for the year. Tony Hawk Grant for the Skate Park- \$5,000. Ameri Corps for \$263,548 and a FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grant for \$27,620 for training. We appreciate the funding which allows us to free up funds for other uses.

We have many people who throughout the year are temporarily displaced through no fault of their own, such as house fire, flooding, something a landlord may have done to have the person without shelter, etc. I am in discussion with the Laurel Housing Authority to partner with them in a Continuum of Care Program through Housing and Urban Development. If we partner with LHA we would establish a board who would set guidelines on the occupancy of a structure that would have about four apartments to be built through a grant from HUD to provide temporary housing to individuals on an emergency basis. There is a need in our city, and that is one of the initiatives we will be working on during this year. Laurel Housing is already in the housing business, so it seems the perfect fit. We will be bringing more details in the near future.

Laurel Housing Authority is planning to be complete with the first phase of construction at the old State Hospital property, in March. This phase will have 32 units; 16 2-bedroom and 16 3-bedroom units. The next phase on the actual hospital property is scheduled to begin with clean up this year. This will be a great improvement to a very dilapidated area.

Our annexation in Pendorff was approved by the court, it was appealed by the Pendorff Association, so we are looking at approximately two years for a decision from the Supreme Court.

As we mentioned last year, we need to decide if we are going to remain in the cemetery business. We are filled up in all our facilities and we need at least a 15-acre spot to accommodate having a city cemetery.

The city of Laurel is fortunate to have an organization such as Laurel Main Street to help us in the revival of downtown Laurel. Judi Holifield and this volunteer group spend many hours seeking ways to improve our downtown and I believe it is evident by the success that they are experiencing. For the record, we appreciate and support this organization. We appreciate the many entrepreneurs who risk their time and finances to invest in our downtown, we couldn't do it without you. Fact Check: There was a rumor going around that the city was selling buildings downtown for a \$1 if the buyers would renovate and reopen as a business. This is not true, the city owned one building downtown, besides city hall, it was located on Oak St and for a little while, years ago, it housed the Inspection and the Housing Departments. We sold that building at the fair market value several years ago and it recently began doing business as Elegant Evenings. All the investments downtown is from private individuals investing their own money. The city does have a tax incentive program for the downtown area, where you may be exempt from a portion of your Ad Valorem tax, based on the amount of the improvements that are made to the building.

We are appreciative to the HGTV show Hometown, it brings people to our city and it can be seen in our Tourism Tax collections. We are glad for the success of Ben and Erin and what the show means to Laurel.

I would like to end with another Walt Disney quote, as I think about the streets, the potholes, as I think about the lack of money to do what needs to be done, as I think about problems with personnel and everything it takes to keep all the parts moving in the city, he seemed to sum it up perfectly.

I always like to look on the optimistic side of life. But, I'm realistic enough to know that life is a complex matter. Walt Disney

On February 5, 2019 the state of the city of Laurel, MS is sound.

Thank You!