

Good evening,

In accordance with MS Code 21-8-17, 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.

Thank you to Council for allowing me to present the State of the City for Laurel, to you and the public.

I offer to you the State of the City of Laurel, MS for the year 2019.

Laurel was incorporated in 1882, and out of 340 municipalities in the state, Laurel is #21 in population. With approximately 300 employees, the City of Laurel is #15 in the top employers in Jones County. We will be seeking to reward our employees with an increase in pay if at all possible, this year.

We adopted a mission statement for the City and it should be displayed in each department, it reads; "The City of Laurel is dedicated to delivering excellent municipal services and public safety through participatory government that is responsive to our entire community and consistent through the fiscally responsible use of resources in a manner that promotes outstanding cultural, recreational, educational and economic opportunities for residents and businesses." To further define our aim, in Chapter 16 of the revised Personnel Rules and Regulations you find, "Every employee must remember that the City of Laurel is a taxpayer-supported entity and the citizens of the City paying those taxes should receive the best possible quality and highest standard of service possible." Using these criteria, this year I will offer a letter grade to each department, based on how they are performing these functions.

The City of Laurel has six department heads who oversee various operations: City Clerk/Finance, Fire, Police, Parks and Recreation, Human Resources, and Public Works. In addition, we have a Superintendent of Inspection, a municipal 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, water distribution, wastewater collection and treatment, billing and collection. Included on the water bill collected by Suez is also the city garbage fee.

The Department of Finance is headed by City Clerk/Finance Director Mary Ann Hess. She has four other employees in this office. The Administration proposed and Council approved a 4-mil tax levy to be designated specifically for street repair and placed into its own fund; this is the first year of this collection. The Administration also recommended and Council approved removing from the General Fund the funds that are received from the County in the form of Road and Bridge funds and also placed into its own fund, for the purpose of street repair and maintenance. That total from Road and Bridge had annually been in the neighborhood of \$800,000, and we moved one half last year and will remove the other half in this year to this street fund. Revenue from these two funds should give us in the neighborhood of \$1.3 million-

\$1.5 million for paving annually; this will be the first time we would not have to borrow the funds to do paving.

The City and the School District showed increases in their assessed valuation. In 2019 the City valuation was \$185 million; for 2020, it is \$191 million. The School District rose from \$193 million to \$197 million. The value of a mil increased for the City and the School District. The City increased from \$176,000 in 2019 to \$181,900 for 2020. The School District rose during the same period from \$184,300 in 2019 to \$188,400 in 2020. I always like to point out on our Ad Valorem tax, in 2019 we collected \$21,483,703, which was an increase over last year by \$1,444,708. What is interesting about the Ad Valorem tax is that we collected \$21,483,703, but the Laurel School District received the bulk of that to the tune of \$12,748,686 and the city's share was \$8,735,017.

Our sales tax collections for 2019 was \$9,177,031, compared to \$8,838,407 for 2018, which was a 3.7% increase. In 2018 we had a 5.7% increase over the prior year. I would like to point out again that out of over 340 municipalities across the state, the City of Laurel consistently ranks #15-16 in Sales Tax Diversions each year. From our Recreation Tax, that is generally referred to as the Tourism Tax, for the year of 2019 we collected \$1,778,467 which compares to the prior year of \$1,721,156, being a 3.2% increase over 2018. Both of these funds are showing increases year after year.

We adjusted our water and sewer rates by 3% to cover our increased cost from the Public Utility Fund; you will note that this item is again on the agenda for tonight. As a recap of our bonds: in 2015 we issued a \$10 million street bond. A total of \$1,666,356 was spent in 2019 and it has a balance of \$4,169,184 left for remaining projects such as 5th Avenue and 13th Avenue paving. A \$4.4 million recreational improvement bond was done for the addition at the Sportsplex. We have design costs spent so far out of this fund, and the balance is currently \$3,970,946. A \$3 million Street bond has a remaining balance of \$1,229,786 which will be used for our match for the Leontyne Price Gateway. We issued a \$3 million Drainage Bond in 2019. In 2019 we refinanced the Schneider Loan which was taken out to do energy savings projects in the amount of \$2,662,857 saving the City \$176,105 in interest. The FY 2018 audit was successful and clean. Four audit findings were included in the report; corrective action has been taken to ensure these findings are not repeated. The FY 2019 audit is underway.

A total of 115 new business licenses were issued last year compared to 117 for 2018. As of 1/31/2020, the City of Laurel had a cash balance total in all of its funds of \$28,700,149.40; the bulk of these funds are in the capital improvement accounts where we have taken out several bonds to pay for some major street and recreational improvements. We also made our annual payment on the radios, used by Police, Fire, Public Works, Inspection and others in the amount of \$194,698 which was year 4 of an 11-year loan; this is a debt shared with Jones County, Ellisville, and all the entities who use these radios. Our finances are in a firm position. I give the City Clerk/Finance office a B-.

The Human Resources Department has Director Nellie Satcher and four employees. The city of Laurel still employs approximately 300 people with 12 of those being AmeriCorps grant workers.

We had three employees retire and hired a total of 65 during the year. Of those, 29 are still employed and 26 regulars were terminated and also 10 AmeriCorps workers were terminated for various reasons.

We only had 53 Flu Shots administered this year.

All employees should have received Sexual and Workplace Harassment Training during the year.

We have been working on the revision of the Personnel Rules and Regulations along with the department heads. It is being proofread in order to present to Council and then to the printer.

There were several EEOC claims that were defended and moderated during the year, with none being found with the City at fault.

The Human Resources Director attended the Annual MS Labor and Employment Conference in August.

Workers Compensation Claims in the past were astronomical; they are now at the lowest point in several years with all the safety practices that have been put in place. In the past, employees would go out on Workers Comp and stay for months and sometimes even years, costing the city thousands of dollars. We hired South Group to manage our Workers Comp and the cost has dramatically fallen. These are costs savings that are not readily known that the citizens are no longer having to pay out. From 2019 there are only 8 claims still open. The total incurred for 2019 was only \$89,978, which is the lowest in years. We have had 11 claims so far this year for a total of \$15,280.

The Safety Coordinator is in the Human Resources Department and is doing an excellent job. The position was lax in the enforcement of safety rules and regulations, and in November 2018 we replaced the coordinator. Since that time the new person has ensured that all three City of Laurel elevators are certified and being serviced twice a year; this was not being done. All the city's fire extinguishers are up-to-date, serviced and in place in the buildings and vehicles to protect the city's assets. All of the emergency generators are in service and are having maintenance done on them twice a year to ensure power in emergency situations. She has developed and run driver's license checks every two months to ensure that our drivers are legal, again to protect the city of Laurel in case of an accident. Timely insurance claims are being filed to recoup money that had not been received from vehicle and other accidents. Even though we were paying premiums, we were not filing claims to collect. She created and sends out monthly notices for vehicle service; we pay a lot of money for these vehicles and since they belong to the taxpayers, we need to make sure that they are maintained as well as possible so that they can last as long as possible. She ensures that supervisors hold monthly safety

meetings as stated in the Loss Prevention Policy and Procedures Manual. She has implemented safety checks for all city playgrounds and parks to lessen any city liability. We continue to conduct random drug tests to ensure the safety of employees. She has kept up with ways of improving the safety program for the city and has also stayed abreast of the proper procedures for filing different types of claims. Some of the supervisors and employees who are not accustomed to following the safety criteria of the city are not too happy with the new coordinator, but she has been a major asset to the city. The Human Resources Department is rated as a B-.

The Laurel Police Department is headed by Chief Tommy Cox who was named Chief last year after the demise of Tyrone Stewart. He ended the year with 53 sworn officers on staff, after having had 8 move to the county after one of their own was elected sheriff, and we had others relocate elsewhere. We need to look at some additional funding for salaries for our officers in order for the City of Laurel to remain competitive with surrounding departments, whether that be the county, the schools or other municipal departments. There is currently a survey being conducted by the Chief to see where we rank with other like-sized departments. There were several promotions made last year in the department. They purchased four vehicles last year, 3 for patrol and one for Animal Control. They worked 32,185 complaints, which was 621 less than last year's 32,806 complaints which averaged 89 complaints per day. They made 1885 arrests, compared to 2106 last year. which averaged 6 arrests per day. We experienced two homicides for the year and they are both being prosecuted. While any crime committed against an individual is not good, we seem to be moving in the right direction with fewer complaints and fewer arrests.

A sampling of the 1885 arrests were: 24 for aggravated assault; 6 aggravated assault on police officer; 490 Failure to appear; 28 child restraint violation; 6 contributing to the delinquency of a minor; 4 desecration of a cemetery; 111 disorderly conduct; 6 drive-by shooting; 114 various DUI; 82 disobeying traffic control devices; 195 driving while license cancelled, suspended or revoked; 19 various embezzlement; 38 expired tag; 175 various shoplifting; 322 various drug charges; 34 possession of firearm by convicted felon. There is one area that is dear to my heart that we did not have a single arrest or ticket issued on, and that was littering. I have informed the Chief that I am not pleased with that. There is a perception by some that we have a lot of force initiated by police against arrestees, when in fact out of 1885 arrests there were only 44 use of force reports, which represents only 2.3% of the arrests. There were 834 State accident reports filed with an additional 704 incident report accidents with the majority of those being parking lot crashes.

LPD received 4 written citizen complaints in 2019 and all were determined to be unfounded. Officers received 15 disciplinary warnings with 2 resulting in officer suspensions. There were 2 internal affairs investigations, and one resulted in an officer clearance and one resulted in an officer suspension.

LPD continued the CIT (Crisis Intervention Training) with the majority of officers certified in the program.

LPD once again participated in the DEA Drug Take Back, this program collected 1387 pounds of drugs. They have also partnered with SCRMC to have a fixed collection point located at the hospital.

Captain Caraway has continued the DARE program with the 6th graders at the Middle School, this year graduating 500.

Night Out Against Crime was held in August headed by Cpt. Caraway, Booking Officer Allison Harris and Clerk Rhonda Arrington. The overflow crowd enjoyed school supplies, food, entertainment and information booths.

LPD's Victim Advocate Teya Cooper coordinated activities for Domestic Violence Awareness Month, a proclamation by the mayor and a blood drive that collected 22 units of blood.

Coffee with a Cop was initiated by the Chief as an outreach in an informal setting which stresses one-on-one conversations between officers and citizens.

The 4th year of the Fill-A-Truck program was held to benefit the Good Samaritan Center. The program was dedicated to the memory of the Late Tyrone Stewart, and collected over \$2600 and 9 truckloads of food.

The FOP provided Christmas to 26 children, the officers sponsored the Salvation Army Angel Tree and also sponsored 3 additional children whose house recently was destroyed in a fire. LPD rang the bell for Salvation Army at Wal Mart collecting \$575 for this program, and they also distributed 25 bikes donated by our friends at Laurel Ford.

LPD plans to continue its mission of proactive policing for the purpose of crime deterrence into the new year. LPD also plans to continue and expand our public outreach programs in order to further our good Officer/Citizen relationships.

Animal/Pest Control is under the auspices of the LPD, and they have three employees with the Supervisor being Yolanda Powe. Last year they responded to 1162 complaints; they picked up 511 animals off the streets, and owners brought 41 animals to the shelter. They euthanized, through a veterinarian, 415 animals and released 60 animals into the wild, such as raccoons, possums, snakes, etc. Eighteen animals died at the shelter due to parvo and other animal-related diseases. A total of 53 animals were adopted or given away. They also cleared the city streets of 102 dead animals. They held 32 animals for the city of Ellisville and billed \$5343 for housing, feeding and cleaning of these animals. During the mosquito season (last year April 15 – October 15) they employ two part-time spraying employees. They sprayed all city streets, alleys, parks and ball fields for mosquitoes. This was the fifth consecutive season without any reports of West Nile Virus by a citizen of Laurel. The supervisor will attend a mosquito training

in Jackson this month, and they will decide when to begin spraying for this season. This department has someone on call at all times.

Traffic Maintenance is also within LPD and they have three employees with the supervisor being Joe McCullum. They are responsible for keeping the traffic flowing smoothly, from doing tasks like repairing traffic signals, painting traffic lines at intersections and other areas, maintaining all the traffic signs, and installing new street signs. If they were not here you would readily tell that they are missing. It is interesting to hear when there is an electrical storm and several traffic lights are out of service at the same time; it definitely affects the flow of travel. This department has someone on call 24/7.

The Municipal Court has Rebecca Clark as the Administrator, and five other deputy court clerks; we reduced the number from seven employees to six, thereby saving the taxpayers approximately \$22,000. This change was in order for the court to be more efficient and to reduce the overall cost of court. As we have mentioned previously, the court does not generate the funds that it had in years past. In the past, the judge had the ability to threaten offenders with time in jail for nonpayment of fines, but the court has devolved in a way that you can no longer legally imprison for not paying fines. This stems from class-action lawsuits by groups like the ACLU and others, and the offenders are aware, so collections therefore are down. There was a time that we would deposit \$1 million + in the General Fund from court; in 2019 we deposited \$490,529.96 which is a major decrease. We initially collected \$873,414, but the State received \$313,081 of that. There were other state mandated payments to things like the Law Library, DARE, Crime Stoppers, Equipment for Court, Interlock, etc., so we were forced to look for ways to cut back in court. Additionally, we were able to credit \$196,155 to prisoners who chose to work off their fines at places like Public Works, Recreation, Salvation Army, Soup Kitchen and other places. We don't receive the actual money, but we do have the use of their services which is valuable. Some of the fine workers have actually transitioned to regular full-time employees in Public Works and Recreation. With all of its many operations, I offer the LPD a B grade.

Elvin Ulmer is the head of Parks and Recreation, and he is completing his 18th year in this position. Elvin always tells me that I don't pay him enough, and I agree, but the thing I love most about Mr. Ulmer is that when I request something to be done, his always response is, "I'll take care of it." And he does. He is over Parks, and he has a dedicated employee Rejeana Loper who is one of the best employees that the city has. Throughout the year they removed 19 diseased, dead or dangerous trees, pruned and shaped trees throughout the city, maintained flowerbeds in parks, downtown and around the city. This department keeps the fountain in Pinehurst Park going and set up maintenance for Loblolly Festival. Parks and Rec was awarded the AmeriCorps grant where they hired 30 workers. All 30 had CPR training, 8 had lifeguard training, 10 had basketball coach training, 10 had track instructor/meets, 10 had cheer/dance instruction, and 10 received environmental training. The SPORTSPLEX hosted Dixie Youth 5-12-year-old baseball with 490 participants and approximately 40,000 in attendance from March-

June. They hosted the Dixie Youth 5-12-year-old Fall League with 212 participants and approximately 15,000 in attendance from September-November. They also hosted Dixie Youth baseball 9- and 11-year-old state tournament, hosted 2 Dixie Youth warm-up tournaments, hosted Dixie Youth 10- and 12-year-old subdistrict tournaments, hosted the Dixie Youth 9U and 12U Playoff Tournaments. They hosted the 2019 Soccer State Games and the Select Baseball team practices throughout the year. They hosted 4 high school soccer tournaments for Sumrall (52) teams, Laurel (60) teams, West Jones (80) teams and Northeast (23) teams. They hosted one adult Co-Ed Softball tournament. They hosted L-JC Youth Soccer Spring League with 550 participants and approximately 42,000 in attendance from March-May. (If you notice the numbers, it appears that soccer is threatening baseball at the Sportsplex.) They hosted L-JC Soccer Fall League with 364 participants and approximately 18,000 in attendance from Sep-Oct. They hosted select soccer team practices throughout the year and an adult flag football tournament at soccer fields. Splash Pad that was open from May-Sept helped host numerous birthday parties, church picnics, school field trips, family reunions and team parties throughout the year. The Hospitality Building hosted several youth and high school baseball coaches' meetings, hosted baseball official and umpire meetings, hosted family reunions, birthday parties and wedding and baby showers.

The Natatorium hosted three Laurel Swim Association Invitational Swim Meets, the West Jones High Swim Meet, the Laurel Swim Association and high school practices. Also at the Natatorium, our staff hosted water aerobics, physical therapy, swimming lessons, lifeguard training and installed a new boiler through the Schneider contract.

In Tennis at the Sportsplex, Parks/Recreation hosted Laurel High School District Tournament, the Laurel High School Tennis Season Home Matches, Youth Tennis Camp, USTA Men's and Women's Leagues, and provided courts for member and open play throughout the year. Improvements included resurfacing to peeling spots on all courts, the purchase of new nets for all courts, and repairs to court lights.

BOOTS SMITH FIELDS: Hosted Laurel High School Fastpitch practices and home games and a youth softball tournament, provided fields for select teams and all-star team practice, and provided fields for Dixie Youth league practices.

WEST DRIVE FIELDS: Hosted Dixie Boys 13-14-year-old summer league baseball. Hosted Dixie Majors 15-19-year-old summer league play. Hosted Dixie Pre-Majors baseball 15-16-year-old state tournament in July. Hosted Dixie Majors Baseball 17-19-year-old state tournament in July. Hosted Laurel Christian High School Home baseball games and practices. Hosted Home School Baseball League practices and games. BBQ Pit hosted several fundraisers.

GARDINER PARK: Replaced receptacles for electrical supply. Made repairs to park benches and tables. Repaired walking track bridge. Replaced concrete poles for "NO Parking" area in grass. Purchased and replaced swing seats in park. Hosted American Heart Walk. Hosted one 5K Run,

hosted St John's Field Day, hosted several Birthday Parties. Hosted a track clinic, Easter Egg Hunt, Fundraiser for Autism, First Baptist Church Youth Field Day.

BOSTON PARK: Hosted city league youth baseball games and practices. Hosted birthday parties throughout the year. Hosted several family reunions and picnics. Hosted a tent revival. Installed new basketball goals.

OAK PARK FOOTBALL/FIELD HOUSE: Hosted Spriggs Football League from September-October. Hosted Adult football league. Repaired water fountain, breaker box and entrance gate.

OAK PARK SWIMMING POOL: Hosted several private birthday parties. Made various repairs. Held swim lessons and paid swimming during summer.

K.C. PARK: Hosted birthday parties, family reunions. Hosted a community Easter Egg Hunt, community cookouts, graduation parties and memorial events.

MASON PARK: Painted and repaired dog park sign, made various other repairs. Hosted 2 5-K Runs, hosted numerous birthday parties and family reunions. Hosted Art League Annual Day in the Park.

LEONTYNE PRICE PARK: Reinstalled iron fencing, assisted in installing equipment for grand opening of music park.

PINEHURST PARK: Hosted weddings, receptions and birthday parties. Hosted gathering for several photo shoots; for prom pictures, local school pictures, Oak Park Reunion, Girl Scouts, Praise in the Park and added lights to the fountain.

DAPHNE PARK: hosted numerous birthday parties and family reunions. Hosted annual Walk for Jesus. Various repairs.

SANDY GAVIN PARK: purchased and installed new playground unit, purchased and replaced swing sets.

PROGRAMS: Had outstanding numbers of participants in basketball, track and cheer/dance. Elvin Ulmer's team won tournament and his grandson scored 12 points, even though they had not won a game all year, they came ready in the tournament.

CAMERON: Remodeled and repainted kitchen. Hosted weekly activities such as Youth Leadership training, Karate classes, United Blood Services Blood Drives, Foster Grandparents, Church Services, Modeling classes, business meetings, weddings and receptions and birthday parties. Hosted open play for basketball as well as tournaments. Made various repairs. Cameron had 300 facility rentals.

L. T. ELLIS CENTER: Made various repairs. Hosted open play adult and youth basketball, several weddings, receptions and birthday parties, hosted church services and events, hosted family

and high school class reunions, hosted Summer Camp and Summer Feeding program. Had open swim and pool parties, hosted Blue's show, Pro-Am Boxing. L. T. Ellis had 51 facility rentals.

TRAIN DEPOT: hosted many events including anniversary parties, birthday parties, wedding rehearsals, weddings and wedding receptions. Hosted events for Senior Center, such as the Sweetheart Ball, Senior Prom and Senior Christmas Ball. Hosted Citywide Christmas Party, Annual MLK Breakfast. Hosted baby showers, business meetings, family and class reunions. Made various repairs. Depot had 117 paid rentals, and 17 No Charge for groups such as the Laurel School System, EDA, D. J. Transit and Boy Scouts.

B. E. MURPH CENTER FOR SENIORS: They continue to have many events and activities for the seniors in the community. They have guest speakers on a regular basis on various topics. They also had art classes, exercise class, jewelry making class, computer classes, crocheting, AARP monthly meetings, Monthly birthday celebrations, Mother Day Breakfast, Father's Day Breakfast, Thanksgiving Dinner, Christmas Lunch and karaoke tea.

CEMETERY: We had 37 plots sold at Oak Hill #2 and 3 at Hickory Grove. Both of our cemeteries are full. At Hickory Grove the only plots available are the ones where present owners sell to another person. The city has none available. Oak Hill #2 is likewise full. If we are to continue in the cemetery business, we are going to need a minimum of 15 acres to begin a new cemetery. The cemeteries continue to be maintained on a daily basis.

FACILITY MAINTENANCE: They worked a total of 650 work orders to keep all the city buildings up and running. This also includes the swimming pools and fountain at Pinehurst. They also did maintenance and repairs on city lighting in historic district including 5th and 6th Avenues. They repaired all city park restrooms. We have major vandalism at our park bathrooms on a regular basis; we attempt to have things for the visitors to do at the park, and we always have those who want to destroy what we are attempting to do. This crew also sets up the beautiful Christmas decorations downtown and throughout the city.

Laurel Parks and Recreation is in the midst of several projects at this time:

1. The Skate Park is nearing completion; we need to do some landscaping and add some seating. Mr. Ulmer informed me today that they are skating on it as of today. This will be an added addition to the quality of life in the city. Skateboarding is a very popular sport, and I am pleased that we can provide a place for the young and not so young to be able to come and enjoy. The park is designed in a way that if we choose to add to it at a later date, it will be able to accommodate. I was looking over my last year's talk, and we went out for bids for the Skate Park at the same meeting. That was pretty good time, since we had to rebid the project. I hear naysayers all the time complaining that there is nothing to do in Laurel. Let me assure you that Mr. Ulmer is constantly attempting to come up with activities that enhance our recreation department.

2. We are working through the final designs for the renovation of the tennis courts at Daphne Park. Even though these courts may be designated as the home court for the Laurel High Soccer team, it will also be available for private tennis playing, when not being utilized by the high school. Mrs. Whitney Pickering was able to obtain \$225,000 for this project, from Wildlife and Fisheries, along with some other grants.

3. Elvin's pride and joy, and the most anticipated project in recreation since the construction of the Sportsplex and the Natatorium is the completion of the 8-Plex Softball complex. We have the funds for the first phase which was approximately \$4 million, but we are waiting on all the approvals. We are also in the beginning stages of borrowing funds for the second phase, that will complete the project, which was in the neighborhood of \$8 million.

4. As you recall Council recently gave approval for Neel Schaffer to design a long-range master plan for the remaining available property at the Sportsplex, especially in the area where the Bear Creek Golf Course once stood. Since the 8-Plex took in part of the old course, Mr. Ulmer has thoughts of creating a nine-hole golf course, to be used by residents and also by those who come to the Sportsplex for tournaments, swimming, etc. Included in the future plans are also the inclusion of more tennis courts. The thinking is that if we have the proper number of courts within the city, we could recruit major tennis tournaments to come to town.

A dedicated group of citizens is attempting raise funds to purchase a special needs playground that would be installed at the Sportsplex. The construction price is in the neighborhood of \$1 million. It too would be a welcomed addition to the Sportsplex and would definitely add to the quality of our living here. The Southern Civitan Club of Laurel has already installed a wheelchair swing set, and this other equipment could be built around this first piece. I would give Parks and Recreation a grade of B+.

The Laurel Fire Department is headed by Mark Nichols, and has 65 firefighters and command staff. During the year three were hired, 2 were terminated, two resigned, and one retired. During the year they purchased one 2019 Dodge Ram as the chief's vehicle, one 2019 Ram as a Fire Prevention vehicle, a 1991 Reserve pumper, from the Magee Fire Department, a 2018 Battalion Chief truck was totaled and replaced by 2019 Ram, paid for through insurance. They received a \$65,000 Assistance to Firefighters Grant through FEMA, obtained by Whitney Pickering. They had 21 firefighters' complete various forms of training at the State Fire Academy. They also replaced all flooring and painted the interior of Station 2 on Susie B Ruffin Avenue. They responded to 928 calls up from 780 in 2018. The estimated total loss from last year was \$830,520 down from \$1,147,500 last year, which is \$316,980 less in loss. Once again, the highest loss was in fires, where they responded to a total of 107 last year compared to 111 in 2018. They had 146 vehicle accidents with injury; they had 121 with injury last year. They worked 174 vehicle accidents without injury in 2019 versus 145 in 2018 without injury. Fortunately, the department had no fire related fatalities for the year, that is always the goal, to have no loss of life and the minimum amount of damage. Unfortunately, we did have a fatality on yesterday in a house fire. They responded to 9 Mutual Aid calls outside the city limits,

compared to 11 in 2018. These calls included 36 paid employees from the Laurel Fire Department. The wish list for the department remains the replacement of four stations: 1, 2, 4 and 6, all of these stations were built in the 1970's. The City received a total of \$109,426 in fire insurance rebate, and these funds were used to make payments on three fire trucks and turnout equipment. Another truck is being paid out of the General Fund and the new ladder truck is paid out of the Debt Service, for a total of five trucks being financed. Chief Nichols' new promotion protocol had been presented to Civil Service in my last State address; it still has not been approved by Civil Service. It is still believed to be a smooth process in promotion in the department. We still currently have a Class 5 Fire Rating, but we continue to steadily make the necessary improvements to move us to a Class 4 ranking, that move will be welcomed. Laurel Fire Department receives a B.

IT installed new servers at City Hall and the Police Department. After setting up the new servers, the In-Code software at City Hall was upgraded along with the software at the Police Department. They are working on upgrading the communication system at the Sportsplex which will allow for better communication with the press boxes and dugouts. They are in the process of moving our email service to a new provider that will allow more flexibility in sending larger emails and more storage per user.

Our Inspection Department is headed by Harold Russell. Aside from Harold, there are five other employees and one vacancy as of today. The department issued 801 building permits in 2019, compared to 669 in 2018, even though we had more permits the total value was less. \$15,197,731 for 2019 and \$29,359,580 for 2018. There were 5 permits for new home construction versus 12 last year. There were 3 new commercial structures for 2019 and 11 for 2018. There were 19 demolitions done for the year with the City taking down 9 and owners taking down 10. They assisted Laurel Housing Authority with inspections for the grant they received completing 48 inspections for the year.

In the grading system I give Inspection a C-. in my opinion they do some things very well, such as site plans, building inspections, electrical inspections, technical matters and demolitions. This department also does a good job with The Planning Commission and the Historic Preservation Commission. The Historic Commission recently received a \$10,000 grant from Mississippi Department Archives and History, to possibly expand our historic district.

By their own report, in 2018 they had recorded 1140 unclean lots, compared to only 208 for 2019, in 2018 there were 3049. I began to ask for a breakdown by each inspector, and even though there has been some progress, one particular inspector was reporting twice as many violations, as two others combined. In my opinion, the city looks good in some areas, but in others it looks terrible. I have pointed this out to Inspection and expect some results. There are too many junk vehicles, too many junky yards, too many addresses missing, too many shade tree mechanics, too many areas that look like we have thrown our hands up. If we are to be the "City Beautiful" this cannot continue. It was mentioned from someone in Inspection that we

needed to change the culture. In my opinion, we don't have time to change the culture; we have a Code of Ordinances that we need to use instead.

Suez, formerly United Water, is our water, sewer and billing company for our public utility. This year marks the 13th year that the City has been under contract with Suez. During 2019 there were several promotions within the staff. Brent Shelby was promoted to Assistant Project Manager; Lindsay Goblirsch was promoted to Customer Service Supervisor. Mike Votta obtained his Class IV wastewater license and was promoted to O & M Supervisor of Wastewater; Blake Smith received his Class C water license and was promoted to O & M Supervisor of Water Production. Terry Padgett is still living the dream.

Suez is required by Contract to have a staff of 48. They provide in-house and externally delivered training for employees to maintain their current certification, achieve new certification and expand their knowledge and expertise in their job areas. Uniforms and personnel safety equipment (footwear, safety vests, gloves, safety glasses, etc.) and safety supplies are provided for employees at an approximate annual cost of \$76,000.

The tornado that hit the city on December 16, hit Plant 1 extremely hard. This affected the ability of Plant 1 to be online and produce water for the City of Laurel. Even though they lost the ability to run Plant 1, Suez was able to maintain the water supply for the City without interruptions. The resulting damage was in excess of \$573,000.

Suez is responsible for any cash shortage 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 operation of the plants. With their goal of being a partner with the City of Laurel, Suez accepts or shares the liability in many claims due to sewer backups and vehicle damage that are not the responsibility of Suez. Since the beginning of the City of Laurel's contract with Suez, Suez has paid a total exceeding \$600,000 in claims. Suez accepts liability for any vehicle in which a Suez employee is driving a City vehicle. Suez reduced the annual escalation fee by \$25,000, for the budget year October 2019 through September 2020.

They contribute \$2,000 annually to the Sawmill Square Mall's 4th of July Fireworks. They support the Annual City of Laurel's employee Christmas Party with a contribution of \$500. Suez supports Parks and Recreation by donating \$500 to the Dixie Pre-Majors State Champions. They also sponsored a 5- and 6-year-old Dixie Youth team with a \$500 donation. On an annual basis they support ward events or special functions. In June they donated \$1,000 to Ward 1's Mentoring Program. Suez also supports fundraisers for the Animal Rescue League. They donated \$500 to the Back the Blue Partnership program and also donated 500 Suez coloring books and crayons for the LPD to give away at various events. Suez donated over 5,000 pieces of candy for the City of Laurel Christmas float in the parade. They take pride in participating in the Touch A Truck event in downtown and have on display several pieces of equipment for the children; they also provide handouts for the children.

Suez is required by contract to supply four vehicles for the Laurel project; at year's end they were providing 12 trucks, 2 Boom trucks, 1 backhoe, 2 mowers and one four-wheeler. These vehicles are being used at Wastewater, Water Production and our C & D Department. The use of this equipment saves the City of Laurel approximately \$112,500 by not having to rent from outside vendors.

During 2019 the wastewater supervisor communicated closely with our outside industries that have pre-treatment permits, i.e., Masonite, Wayne Farms and Sanderson Farms. He also worked closely with Harold Russell Superintendent of Inspection, and these communications resulted in the "cleaning up" of the waste that is sent to our wastewater treatment plants. The City of Laurel budget should recognize substantial savings in the use of chemicals due to this effort.

The Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) visited both of our wastewater plants twice during the year, and there were no findings. At the Massey and Smiley Wastewater facilities they treated 2,882,023,000 gallons of waste, at Water Production they produced 1,981,654,560.

In addition to the daily work of repairing water leaks, unclogging sewer lines, etc., the crews in the C & D Department (Collection and Distribution) do their best to complete additional jobs for the City in order to save the City from having to contract them out. This results in substantial savings to the City. On W 12th St they installed 1400 feet of 6" water main, installed one fire hydrant and three new water services. During the rehab of the MS Ave Lift Station, they excavated an area approximately 8 ft. deep and 20 ft. wide in order to be able to replace two new valves. Our wastewater employees worked closely with C & D to complete this task. Approximately 8 feet of sewer main and one service line was replaced on 21st St.; a 2-inch water main was disconnected by C & D crew to allow the contractor to relay a new 6" water line on Bay Circle. C & D completed the installation and activation of a new 6" water main, service lines and one fire hydrant on Highland Woods Drive. C & D replaced a total of 28 new water services on Parker Drive from Hwy 15 N to Old Bay Springs Rd. A total of six sewer services were replaced on 18th St.

In regular maintenance they responded to 1353 water leaks, located 1535 lines, replaced/repared 51 fire hydrants, did 32 water taps, 21 sewer taps, plugged 7 water/sewer services, cleared 574 sewer clogs, repaired 132 sewer cave-ins, and 17 calls to raise/repair manholes.

The City of Laurel has a total of 16 water wells; we entered into contract to rehabilitate some of our water wells to increase our production. Well #12 was rehabbed and had a capacity increase of 56%. The rehab Well #16 resulted in a 20% increase in capacity. Well 3-A rehab resulted in a whopping 65% capacity increase. Well 5-A is currently undergoing rehab. Due to the increased capacity after the well is rehabbed, there is a significant savings in electrical costs to the City.

During the summer, Water Production was able to setup the new Well #7 well house with new equipment and safety features. The majority of the work was done by Suez, including design, resulting in a substantial savings for the City. Suez updated the Risk Management Plan in-house and submitted it to Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Automatic Chlorine Shut-off valves were installed at Water Plant 2 and Water Plant 3 for safety of the operators and citizens living in these areas.

The annual regulatory inspection of the water system by Mississippi State Department of Health resulted in an overall rating of 5.0 out of 5.0.

During 2019 Customer Service collected a total of \$12, 772,115.08. Customer Service had a total of 11,971 requests for various types of service for the year.

I think we are all familiar with the fact that whatever is done concerning water and sewer must be paid for out of the Public Utility Fund, which is the monthly water and sewer bills. This is the reason that it is suggested by all knowledgeable about the system that small increases be done annually so that we can continue with the repairs and replacements that are needed for our system.

I would like to give you sampling of some of the work paid out of the Public Utility Fund. 1. Moose Drive Transfer Station sewer repair- \$40,876. 2. Sewer repair at 7th Ave and Garden Drive- \$4,785. 3. Old Bay Springs Rd sewer cave-in- \$28,931. 4. Smyly and Massey Lagoon road improvements-\$51,684. 5. Village Park sewer repair- \$4318. 6. Parker Drive replacing water service lines-\$25,168. 7. Parker Drive sewer repair- \$18,706. 8. Massey Lagoon road repair-\$17,860. 9. Highland Woods replacing water mains and fire hydrants-\$12,814. 10. 4th Ave and Kingston St sewer line repair-\$7,032. 11. Bay Circle replacing water lines and upgrading meters-\$28,201. 12. 1015 1st Ave sewer line repair-\$8,230. 13. Pearson and Simmons St sewer repair-\$27,358. 14. Sunflower Dr, 6" water main and new taps-8,028. 15. Sanderson Farms, fire system-\$44,984. 16. 13th St sewer repair-\$17,366. 17. 16th Ave at 12th St sewer repair-\$3,733. 18. Meadow Lane sewer repair-\$7,900. 19. MS Avenue rehab of MS Ave Lift Station-\$22,490. 20. Carter Ave between 27th and 28th St sewer cave-in- \$49,888. 21. Susie Ruffin, sewer repair-\$11,114. 22. S Maple sewer cave-in- \$12,744. 23. Old Amy Rd replace sewer main-\$15,363. 24. 1420 2nd Ave, water main-\$6,438. Our original budget for emergency repairs was \$410,590 and we spent \$476,014; we ran overbudget by \$65,424. Even though it was over budget, we had two choices, repair it or not, so we chose to repair it.

The City also financed two dump trucks, a mini-excavator and a backhoe for Public Utility Department with a five-year loan in the amount of \$28,686 annually. In 2019 we spent over \$2 million to make loan payments in the water/sewer fund, such as Bonds, State Revolving Fund, CAP loans, etc. Over \$1.3 million was spent on "normal" water/sewer projects in 2019, plus an additional \$2.3 million spent out of bond proceeds for 5th and 13th Avenues.

Our Public Works Department is currently in transition; Lorenzo Anderson left his position on February 7 and a week later on the 14th Polly Price, long-time office assistant retired. There are

a lot of things that go on at Public Works, and based on the criteria that we set at the beginning, I would give the department a C-. We don't have a lot of details for the year, because as I mentioned, both the people who would compile this information are no longer with us. We will be examining in the near future the feasibility of outsourcing the garbage collection. We are having too many issues in getting the garbage picked up on Monday and Tuesday - you will be hearing more about that soon. We will also be looking at the possibility of outsourcing the shop at Public Works; the turnaround rate on many of the repairs are simply unacceptable. When we look at the salaries, retirement, insurance, vacation, sick leave, vehicles etc. with these divisions of Public Works, the question becomes, Are the taxpayers being best served by our policies?

Whitney Pickering who is our primary grant writer secured a FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grant in the amount of \$65,734, an AmeriCorps grant for \$138,551, and a MS Wildlife and Fisheries Land and Water Conservation Grant for Daphne Park's Tennis Courts at \$225,000.

Some of the ongoing and completed projects and the status are:

1. 2019 Overlay Project Completed: Project cost \$2.5 million, from City funds. Streets improved were: a. Northwood Drive from Old Bay Springs Road to 7th Ave. b. Sunrise Drive from University Drive to Tower Drive. c. Bay Circle Area, including Broadway Drive, Bay Circle, Highland Woods Drive, Lake Park Drive. d. 7th Avenue from 13th Street to Northview Drive. e. Mississippi Avenue from Chantilly to Dead End. f. 12th Street from 7th Avenue to 10th Avenue. g. Yates Avenue from 5th Avenue to Magnolia Street. h. N 4th Avenue from 17th Street to Dead end. i. 8th St from 6th Avenue to Daphne Park. j. Gladiolus Drive from S 19th Avenue to Dead End (including Gladiolus Circle) k. Iris Drive from Gladiolus Drive to West Drive l. Sandra and Rebecca Street Area from Iris Drive to West Drive, (including Hilton and Harold). m. Commerce Street from Leontyne Price Blvd. to Central Avenue. n. Parker Drive from Hwy 15 N to Old Bay Springs Road. o. 10th Street from Wansley Road to Hwy 15 N.
2. Central Avenue Roundabout and 500 Block Improvements. It will remove flagpole, realign the roundabout, construct a raised center island, remove the brick pavers which are not historic but were place there during the 1970's Urban Renewal. There will be drainage improvements and pedestrian traffic improvements. The 500 block of Central will also be reopened to 2-Way traffic. This is a MDOT funded grant with the total cost being \$1.3 million. Construction should be bid in Summer of 2020.
3. 5th Avenue and 13th Avenue Utility Improvements. This includes replacement and rehabilitation of water mains, sewer mains, water and sewer services on 5th Avenue from Central Avenue to Northview Drive and on 13th Avenue form Jefferson to 12th St. This total project is \$5.5 million and is funded through City Bonds, Army Corps of Engineers and the State of Mississippi. This construction part of the project should be completed in April 2020. We have caught all kinds grief on the project, but when it is completed it will be a great improvement.

4. 13th Avenue Paving and Drainage. This includes milling overlay and drainage improvements. Total cost of project is \$2 million, from City funds. Bids will open on this project on March 23.
5. 5th Avenue Paving and Drainage. Project will include milling; asphalt overlay and drainage improvements. Total cost of this project is \$2.5 million, expended from City funds. During this phase we will remove the brick curbs from 5th Street to 13th Street and replace them with standard concrete curbs. If you noticed the Leader Call, we will also install stamped and painted asphalt crosswalks in this area. Construction should begin in May of 2020.
6. Leontyne Price Gateway. Right Of Way has been acquired and utility relocation is almost complete. Project includes roadway and pedestrian improvements along Leontyne from MDOT ROW to Central Avenue. Total project cost is \$5 million with a \$1 million match from City and MDOT. Construction should begin in Summer 2020.
7. Laurel Sportsplex Expansion. Total project cost is \$8,500,000, funded through City funds. Project includes the addition of 8 softball fields, 2 press boxes and additional parking. Earthwork should begin late Summer of 2020.
8. 2020 Overlay Project, construction should begin in April 2020. Total cost of project \$1.5 million. Streets to be improved are: a. Elizabeth Avenue from Chantilly St to Munson Street. b. 24th St from 5th Avenue to Hwy 11 c. Clairmont Circle (all streets from Old Amy to Old Amy). d. Oak Park Blvd. from Queensburg Avenue to Railroad. e. Wansley Road from 10th St to Flynt Road. f. 18th St from 7th Avenue to 5th Avenue. Old Amy Road from Old Bay Springs Road to Hwy 15 N g. Pearson Avenue from Brown Street to the Dead end. h. 5th Avenue from 24th Street to City Limits. Most if not all of these streets, with the exception of 5th Avenue will need major water and sewer repair.
9. West 12th Street widening. Construction began in February 2020. Funding source is City funds. Project is \$840,000. Project includes widening and paving of 12th Street from Wansley Road to Hwy 15.
10. Jefferson Street Road Diet and Pedestrian Improvements. Construction has been awarded and work should begin in March 2020. Funding sources: City funds, Jones County funds, SCRMC funds. Total project cost is \$630,000. Project will include the reduction of Jefferson Street to a 3-lane section, improved pedestrian safety crossings, and milling and overlay of Jefferson Street.
11. Daphne Park Tennis Courts. The construction should begin in the Summer of 2020. The total cost of the project is \$600,000 and is funded through City funds, United States Tennis Association Grant and a Mississippi Department of Wildlife Parks and Fisheries Grant. This project includes construction of 5 new post tension concrete surfaces on the exiting tennis courts at Daphne, add a new pro shop, new observation deck, new netting, and make it ADA assessable. The plans are to have these courts available as the Home Courts for Laurel High School Tennis.
12. CDBG water system improvements Phase I at Plant 3. It is currently under construction. The total cost of the project is \$220,000 and is funded through CDBG and City Public

Utility Fund. Project includes water tank rehabilitation and replacement of aerator at Plant 3.

13. CDBG water tank system improvement Phase II at Plant 2. It is in the design phase and construction should begin Summer of 2020. Total cost of project is \$1 million, and is funded through CDBG and City Public Utility Fund.
14. CIPP (lining of sewer lines with cured in place plastic pipe) on 18th Street. Construction completed. Total cost was \$40,000, and funding was from City Public Utility Fund. This process allows the sewer line to be rehabilitated without having to dig up the pipe. It is not possible in all situations.
15. CIPP of Pine Street. Project complete. Total cost of project was \$154,000. Also included the CCTV of Parker Drive.
16. FEMA project for the replacing of the bridge at Iris Drive has been funded in the amount of \$670,000. We received the Hydraulic Study from IMS Engineers on Monday the 2nd, which was one of the prerequisites to receiving the funds. Mr. Anderson is supposed to see this through to completion. As a matter of fact, we have a meeting with FEMA tomorrow along with Mr. Anderson.
17. We received \$625,000 from the State, thanks to Senator Juan Barnett, on last year to address flooding on Brown Street in Queensburg area. We have not yet earmarked those funds; Mr. Anderson never developed a concrete plan for the flash flooding. We may have to employ Neel-Schaffer to oversee this project to deliver some relief to the residents of the area.
18. The Chapel of Angels Drainage grant from Soil and Water Conservation is still in their courts. We chose to allow them to do the engineering and advertisement, and we just heard from them this morning that we needed to submit a request for an extension. This project is \$87,500, and it will alleviate some erosion behind Chapel of Angels.
19. We were able to sell the Gibson building and work has already begun on it. We look forward to good things from that sale.
20. We had some major business leave the city last year: Coca Cola moved to Hattiesburg, and their building is for sale. Southern Beverage moved and their building is for sale. Sanderson Farms Hatchery is leaving 13th Avenue and building a new building at the Tech Park in Ellisville.
21. We contracted with Neel-Schaffer to develop a Master Plan as to how to best utilize the remaining acreage at the Sportsplex, I look forward to what they present.
22. I hate to steal anyone's thunder, but you who know how municipal government works, you know you normally don't bring an idea and it starts tomorrow, especially one that costs a large amount of money. We had a citizen come to the Council meeting on February 4 to complain about Martin Luther King Avenue not being paved. This project had been discussed, but until you find funding, there is no reason to just talk about a project. As a matter of fact, I was waiting to reveal this tonight, if you remember Mr. Carmichael wanted to discuss Martin Luther King Avenue a couple meetings ago, and I kind of brushed him off, because I was waiting on tonight. When we were working on

the list for the 2020 paving project, it became apparent that we would need funds for the infrastructure, because all the streets that were being identified, needed water and sewer work done. So, we discussed a Revenue Bond, the kind that is repaid from the Public Utility Fund or water and sewer bills; it will probably be in the neighborhood of \$3.5 million-\$4 million. Feeling that this was the time to include Martin Luther King Avenue, we have this street scheduled to be a project in the near future. The estimated cost of this project is \$3 million. I would like to forewarn the representatives of Wards 4 and 5 that it will be a long project. It will be reminiscent of 5th and 13th Avenues. It is a long street; it has terrible water lines; it has bad sewer lines; it has inadequate drainage; the curbs and gutters and sidewalks will need to be replaced. It will be a long project, and those who have not quite finished their civil engineering degree will talk about you on Facebook on the streets and everywhere else, because it is taking so long. It will take time, and every day that it rains, they will not work; it will take time, so get ready.

23. We received 2 housing grants in 2019, one for \$124,784 from USDA and one for \$505,000 from Mississippi Home Corp. The intention of the Home Corp grant is to totally rebuild at least two homes and do major renovation on four more. The intention is to use the USDA funding to do some minor repairs along with the Home Corp to possibly do some cosmetic type work on the other four that we renovate. This will be some welcome improvements to the City. Also, we will be having a public meeting on March 24 at 5:30 to see about applying again for some USDA funds for renovation. It will be same criteria; you must be on deed, must live in house, etc.
24. Hwy 15 South AKA Cooks Avenue from Cross Street to Central Avenue/E 1st Street is the responsibility of the City. We are going to have to address our portion, soon.
25. We are constantly criticized about the streets, but as anyone can tell from this report, we are spending lots of money on our streets. Also, the two-cent tourism tax, nor grants allocated for other projects can be used for streets. That is the reason we have set aside funds specifically to deal with our 165 miles of streets. We have a plan and we are instituting that plan.
26. Growth continues Downtown. Contractors are feverishly working on buildings right now to try to complete them for use. I continue to remind you that a few short years ago, some of the only things going on in Downtown were people coming to pay their water bills, do some banking, go to the post office, pay their taxes, buy a tag, and go to church. As soon as they finished that task, they left Downtown. Of course, that was BMS, (Before Main Street.) A great deal has happened SMS (Since Main Street.) The City of Laurel thanks Main Street; The City of Laurel appreciates Main Street; The City of Laurel supports Main Street. We cannot name every single thing that you have done; it would take all night, but just know that the City of Laurel is glad that Main Street is here! To praise Main Street is not to take away from any other group or part of town; it is just to let Main Street know we do appreciate their hard work and mostly for no pay.

This is the State of the City of Laurel, Mississippi for the year 2019. The state of the city is sound and improving daily. As the saying goes, look around The Proof is in the Pudding!

Thank you.