



TOWN OF LA PLATA

Town Council Minutes

July 29, 2025, 6:00 PM

Regular Meeting

Council Chambers, La Plata Town Hall

305 Queen Anne St.

La Plata MD

PRESENT: Mayor Jeannine James
Councilman Paul Guttenberg
Councilman Patrick McCormick
Councilman Gregory Sampson, Jr.
Councilman Tyjon Johnson

ABSENT:

TOWN STAFF: Chuck Stevens, Town Manager
Michelle Miner, Assistant Town Manager
Karina Larsen, Town Treasurer
Lawrence J. Jones, Jr., Town Clerk

GUESTS:

1. Call to Order

1.1. Call to Order

Attendees, please use meeting courtesy. Virtual attendees are asked to mute microphones when joining the meeting. Participants may be muted by the Town Clerk and meetings will be recorded.

In accordance with the Open Meetings Act, the public has the right to view/listen to the discussion only. At their discretion, the Town Council may allow participants to voice questions or provide comments on the topics under discussion. Written comments may be submitted via email to Legislative@townoflaplata.org. Individuals wishing to address the Town Council may sign up in advance on the Town's website (Public Communications) or on the meeting sign-up sheet.

Join on your computer, mobile app, or room device.

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Meeting ID: 240 806 147 692

Passcode: 2T5Bm6FQ

Mayor James called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

1.2. Roll Call

The Town Clerk conducted Roll Call.

1.3. Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor James led all assembled in the Pledge of Allegiance.

1.4. Approval of the Meeting Agenda

Councilman Johnson moved to approve the agenda as presented.

Moved By: Tyjon Johnson, seconded by Paul Guttenberg.

Ayes: Mayor James, Councilman Guttenberg, Councilman McCormick, Councilman Sampson, Jr., Councilman Johnson

Passed

2. Disclosure of Closed Session

2.1. Disclosure of Closed Session on July 1, 2025

Mayor James read the Disclosure of Closed Session.

3. Consent Agenda

Councilman Johnson moved to approve all items under the Consent Agenda.

Moved By: Tyjon Johnson, seconded by Paul Guttenberg.

Ayes: Mayor James, Councilman Guttenberg, Councilman McCormick, Councilman Sampson, Jr., Councilman Johnson

Passed

3.1. Approval of Resolution 25-11 Open Meetings Act Training Designation

3.2. Approval of Resolution 25-13 Pavement Overlay and Repair Services Contract Renewal

3.3. Finance Committee Appointment

4. Petitions, Communications, and Appearances

4.1. Proclamation: Farmers Market Week (08/03-08/09)

Mayor James read the Proclamation for Farmers Market Week.

5. Matters of Information

5.1. Wastewater Treatment Plant Update

The Town Manager provided an update on the Waste Water Treatment Plant.

5.2. CEO Stipend

Mayor James made a statement about the CEO Stipend:

Before we proceed, I'd like to make a formal statement and respectfully request that it be entered into the official minutes of tonight's meeting, pursuant to Sections 3-3 and 8-4 of our Rules of Procedure. A written copy will be provided to the Town Clerk.

As Mayor, I believe it is important to address the public accusations regarding the stipend I received while serving as Chief Executive Officer during the Town Manager vacancy. While I have remained silent out of respect for the process, it is now necessary to present the facts.

When the Town Manager resigned, the Council chose not to appoint the Assistant Town Manager due to personal circumstances she was managing at the time. In accordance with our Charter, the operational responsibilities of the Town then defaulted to the Mayor. This was not without precedent. In the late

1980s, a former Mayor also assumed the role of CEO during a managerial vacancy and received a stipend for those additional duties.

In this instance, the idea of a stipend did not come from me. It originated with the Council. They consulted with the Assistant Town Manager, Human Resources, and the Town Attorney before lawfully approving and appropriating the stipend in a closed session held on September 3, 2024. I had no role in initiating, approving, or authorizing that stipend. I served solely as a non-participating recipient and carried out the duties assigned to me in good faith.

I must also raise a critical question: What is the legal or ethical distinction between my situation and that of the former Mayor who received a stipend under nearly identical circumstances? If his stipend was considered valid, by what standard would mine be treated differently?

In short: I did the work. I did not authorize the stipend. The Town followed precedent established decades ago. Asking for repayment is improper, unfounded, and sets a concerning standard for future governance.

Accordingly, and pursuant to Section 6-5 of the Council's Rules of Procedure, I move to table this discussion for the following reasons:

First, on June 24, 2025, legal counsel for Councilmember McCormick filed a notice of claim under the Maryland Local Government Tort Claims Act. The claim directly references the stipend, alleges improprieties in its authorization, and signals intent to pursue legal action. Continuing this discussion without our legal counsel present may place the Town at legal risk, something we should aim to avoid.

Second, as stated, I did not authorize the stipend. It was lawfully approved by the prior Council, acting under its legislative authority and with advice from the Town Attorney. I was a third-party beneficiary of that decision. None of the Council members who approved the stipend are present this evening, and to my knowledge, none have been formally consulted about their decision.

The practice of revisiting and publicly challenging duly authorized actions of a previous Council—absent context or direct consultation—establishes a troubling precedent. If each new Council reinterprets or undermines the legal decisions of its predecessors, we risk eroding the continuity, stability, and integrity of local governance.

If this matter is truly about transparency, ethics, and legality, then those raising concerns should begin by seeking clarification from the Council that made the decision. Otherwise, this becomes less about accountability and more about personal attacks disguised as procedural concerns which undermine the credibility of this body and the trust of the residents we serve.

There is a motion on the floor to table this discussion until such a time where the Town is represented by legal counsel and that the prior Council has been formally consulted on their decision.
Do I have a second?"

Councilman McCormick made the following statement:

"I think it's interesting you (Mayor James) use the phrase transparency and your concern for it if you're going to table this conversation...I've received 25 comments in the last 28 days about this. Folks deserve to hear what happened. I think if everything is above board like you say, you should have no problem answering the questions I have for you in this discussion."

“I think this right here (the vote) just showed the difference in the level of transparency that certain Council members and the Mayor are committed to. I think that needs to be noted by our town residents. In my opinion, this is, I mean, I don’t want to say absurd, but this is absurd and this is an issue that will come to light and needs to be discussed.”

Mayor James moved to table the CEO Stipend discussion.

Moved By: Jeannine James, seconded by Paul Guttenberg.

Ayes: Mayor James, Councilman Guttenberg, Councilman Johnson

Nays: Councilman McCormick, Councilman Sampson, Jr.

Passed

5.3. Town Council Rules of Procedure

The Town Manager solicited revisions to the Town Council Rules of Procedure from each member.

6. Public Comment

Micheal Madatic spoke on the topic of Wastewater Treatment Plant.

7. Matters of Council Discussion

7.1. US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Loan for Sewer System Project One

The Town Council reached a consensus to proceed with legislation.

Ayes: Mayor James, Councilman Guttenberg, Councilman McCormick, Councilman Johnson

Nays: Councilman Sampson, Jr.

Passed

7.2. Professional Services Agreement for Legal Services

The Town Council reached a consensus to proceed with legislation.

Ayes: Mayor James, Councilman Guttenberg, Councilman McCormick, Councilman Sampson, Jr., Councilman Johnson

Passed

8. Legislation

8.1. Ordinance 25-07 Authorization of General Obligation Bonds Evidencing USDA Loans for Sewer System Project One (1st Reading; For Introduction)

AN ORDINANCE concerning

Authorization of General Obligation Bonds Evidencing USDA Loans for Sewer System Project One

FOR the purpose of authorizing and empowering Town of La Plata (the “Town”) to issue and sell to the United States of America, acting through the United States Department of Agriculture (“USDA”), upon the Town’s full faith and credit, two separate general obligation installment bonds, one in original principal amount not to exceed Four Million Eight Hundred Forty-Two Thousand Dollars (\$4,842,000) and the other in original principal amount not to exceed Two Million Seven Hundred Twenty Thousand Dollars (\$2,720,000), pursuant to the authority described herein, for the public purpose of financing, reimbursing and/or refinancing all or a portion of the costs of activities relating to a sewer system improvement project generally referred to as “Project One” and related costs, as further described herein; providing that each bond shall be sold at private sale without

advertising or publication of notice of sale or solicitation of competitive bids in a direct purchase transaction to the United States of America; determining or providing for certain details of the bonds; providing that the Council of the Town (the “Council”) by resolution shall determine or provide for other details of the bonds; acknowledging and confirming the provisions of certain resolutions to be adopted by the Council as required by USDA; covenanting to comply with a certain letter of conditions issued by USDA, as amended, unless any provision thereof is waived or modified; providing that any such bond will be payable in the first instance from sewage treatment plant and sanitary sewerage system revenues, including (without limitation) revenues for use of or connection to such plant and system, to the extent lawfully available for such purpose; providing for the imposition and collection of ad valorem taxes sufficient for the payment of debt service on the bonds; providing that the full faith and credit and unlimited taxing power of the Town are pledged to the payment of debt service on the bonds; providing that debt service on the bonds may be payable from other sources legally available for that purpose; authorizing certain officials to take certain actions in connection with the bonds; authorizing modifications of the bonds and related documentation to be provided for by resolution; overriding any inconsistent provision of the Town’s debt policy; providing that the provisions of this Ordinance shall be liberally construed; and generally relating to the issuance, sale, delivery and payment of and for the bonds.

The Town Manager conducted the first reading of Ordinance 25-07 Authorization of General Obligation Bonds Evidencing USDA Loans for Sewer Project One.

8.2. Resolution 25-12 Professional Services Agreement - Legal Services (For Introduction and Consideration of Adoption)

A RESOLUTION concerning

Professional Services Agreement – Legal Services

FOR the purpose of authorizing the Town Manager to enter into a Limited Scope Legal Services Agreement for the provision of legal services to the Town of La Plata during the transition period for the Town Attorney position; and all matters generally relating thereto.

Councilman Guttenberg moved to adopt Resolution 25-12 Professional Services Agreement as presented.

Moved By: Paul Guttenberg, seconded by Tyjon Johnson.

Ayes: Mayor James, Councilman Guttenberg, Councilman McCormick, Councilman Sampson, Jr., Councilman Johnson

Passed

9. New Business

Councilman McCormick made a statement : “We talked a lot about what powers the Council does and doesn’t have. And one of the powers we do have is censorship (censure). And I will definitely be exploring options for the actions that occurred.”

9.1. Town Manager Report

The Town Manager provided updates to the Town Council.

9.2. Reports from the Mayor and Town Council

The Town Council provided updates about respective Boards and Commissions that they serve on.

Councilman McCormick made the following statement : “We talked a lot about what powers the Council does and doesn’t have. And one of the powers we do have is censorship (censure). And I will definitely be exploring options for the actions that occurred.”

10. Adjourn

10.1. Adjournment

Mayor James made a statement:

"Before we adjourn, I would like to make a final statement and respectfully request that it be entered into the official record of tonight’s meeting pursuant to Sections 3-3 and 8-4 of our Rules of Procedure. A written copy will be provided to the Town Clerk.

Over the past several weeks, the topic of the stipend I received while performing the duties of Chief Executive Officer during the Town Manager vacancy has overshadowed the critical work we were elected to do. It has become a distraction—not just to me, but to the business of this Council, our staff, and our community. Important policy discussions, infrastructure priorities, and public services have been delayed or sidelined while this issue dominates our agenda.

Let me restate clearly and unequivocally: The stipend was lawfully authorized and appropriated by the prior Council on September 3, 2024. I did not request it, I did not initiate it, and I did not vote to approve it. I was assigned duties by that Council and carried them out in good faith, consistent with our Charter and longstanding precedent.

This is not the first time a Town of La Plata Mayor has received a stipend while fulfilling those responsibilities. What made that action appropriate but mine suddenly improper? That question deserves serious consideration, and it must be asked without political motive or personal bias.

Because Councilman McCormick has initiated a legal claim under the Maryland Local Government Tort Claims Act regarding this matter, I have chosen my words carefully. I speak only the facts and not speculation, so as not to compromise the Town’s legal position.

This Council must reflect on the precedent we are setting. If every action taken by a previous elected body is later questioned, reinterpreted, or politicized without full context, we jeopardize the integrity and continuity of local governance.

As we move forward, I ask that we return our focus to the work that matters most: delivering results for the residents we serve. That is why we were elected.
Thank you, and this meeting is now adjourned."

Mayor James adjourned the meeting at 8:58 PM.

Submitted by:

Lawrence J. Jones Jr., Town Clerk