

Galax City Council  
Minutes  
May 10, 2021

Galax City Council convened in regular session in City Council Chambers on May 10, 2021, at 5:30 p.m.

At 5:30 p.m. Mayor Greene called the meeting to order with the following Council persons present and they are as listed: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Mayor Greene accepted a motion made by Councilman Haynes at 5:35 p.m. to enter into closed session. Mayor Greene stated the reason for the closed session was to discuss a personnel matter under the following Virginia Code:

- **Personnel Matter (School Board Appointment) – § 2.2-3711 A.1 of the Code of Virginia** - Candidates for employment; the assignment, appointment, promotion, performance, demotion, discipline, salaries, compensation, or resignation of employees.

Vice Mayor Mitchell seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Richie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

At 6:00 p.m. Council reconvened in open session. Mayor Greene certified that no items other than those allowed under the cited Virginia Code were discussed and no action was taken, with the following affirmation: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Councilwoman Ritchie prayed the opening prayer.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by special guest, Robert Tyler Haynes. A proclamation was given to Mr. Haynes for leading the pledge at a Council meeting.

In special action, Mayor Greene informed Council of a proclamation in observance of Emergency Medical Services Week, May 16-22. Chief Jason Busick of Galax Grayson EMS was present. Vice Mayor Mitchell thanked Mr. Busick & staff of GGEMS for the wonderful work they do in caring for our community.

Vice Mayor Mitchell made the motion to approve the proclamation. Councilman Haynes seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Richie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Mayor Greene informed Council of a proclamation in observance of Building Safety Month. Galax Project Manager, Jimmy Moss was present and was thanked by Councilwoman White for the work done on Parkwood Dr. where Ms. White lived. Councilwoman White made the motion to approve the proclamation. Councilman Warr seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman

Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Vice Mayor Mitchell made the motion to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of April 12, 2021. Councilman Larrowe seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Councilwoman White made the motion to approve the minutes of the called meeting of April 26, 2021. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Mayor Greene announced this was the date set for the FY2022 budget public hearing. He opened the floor for comments. Keith Barker explained as of that date, he said the budget was balanced, with no tax or fee increases included. Mr. Barker said as previously discussed, he had also removed any revenue from a proposed cigarette tax that had been considered. The total budget as presented:

- General Fund \$22,650,324
- Utility Fund \$ 3,315,500
- Stormwater Fund \$ 500,500

With no further public comments, Mayor Greene closed the public hearing. He noted no action would be taken until the June 14 meeting.

Mayor Greene announced this was the date set for a public hearing concerning a proposed cigarette tax ordinance in Galax. He opened the floor for public comments. Keith Barker explained while the City had joined the Mount Rogers Cigarette Tax Board, one of the regional partners (Carroll County) elected not to participate. He said that effectively eliminated them from implementing a tax at this time. Mr. Barker said after having discussions with Carroll and Grayson representatives, he recommended that Council not proceed with adopting the ordinance at this time since implementing the tax would put local businesses at a price disadvantage with other businesses, which was never the intent of the tax. There was a short discussion regarding the proposed tax between Council members. Mr. Barker said if in the future if Council decided to adopt the ordinance, it could be revisited. With no further public comments, Mayor Greene closed the public hearing. Councilwoman White made the motion for Council to wait on adopting the cigarette tax ordinance and do not approve it at this time. Councilman Haynes seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Mayor Greene announced this was the date set for a public hearing which concerned the movement of elections from November 2022 as mandated by new state legislation to November 2021 as discussed. He opened the floor for public comments. Keith Barker explained the proposed change would put Council elections on the same year as state elections in odd years vs. on the federal cycle with even year elections. He said this would also shorten the terms of all current Council members by 6 months. Mr. Barker closed by saying if Council proceeded with the change in elections, all City Council candidates would need to have their signatures for the election turned in by June 8, 2021. With no further public comments, Mayor Greene closed the public hearing. Councilman Larrowe made the motion for Council to move the May elections to

November. Councilman Haynes seconded the motion and it was approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr. Vice Mayor Mitchell opposed.

Mayor Greene welcomed Ms. Susan Tilley, Galax Schools Superintendent to discuss the Galax City School Budget for FY2022. Ms. City Council conducted the public hearing for the school budget at the April 12 meeting. Ms. Tilly addressed Council regarding the budget. She said there were no changes from last month’s meeting and closed by requesting the school budget be approved in order for the schools to offer teacher contracts and thanked Council for their support. Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the FY2022 Galax City School Budget. Vice Mayor Mitchell seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Mayor Greene announced it was time to consider the school board candidates which Council interviewed in April. He said there were two (2) open seats on the school board effective July 1, 2021, with a three (3) year term. Mr. Ray Kohl had withdrawn his name for consideration due to health reasons.

- Mr. Brett Sexton received 5 votes which included: Mayor Greene, Councilwoman Ritchie, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, and Councilman Larrowe.
- Mr. Eugene McCurdy received 2 votes which included: Councilwoman White, and Councilman Warr.
- Ms. Leah Joy Henck received 7 votes which included: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Mayor Greene announced the appointments of Mr. Brett Sexton and Ms. Leah Joy Henck to the Galax City School Board, each serving a 3-year term beginning July 1, 2021. Council thanked the candidates for their willingness to serve.

Mayor Greene announced there were a number of appointments that Council had been asked to consider, which included the following:

- A. Wytheville Community College – The term for Janet Nuckolls on the WCC board was expiring and she was not eligible for reappointment. Council was asked that the WCC appointment be held over until the June Council meeting.
- B. Planning Commission – There were 3 appointments needed for the Planning Commission. Brandon Boyles and Rita Reeves had both agreed to be reappointed, however a 3<sup>rd</sup> appointment was not identified. Council may wish to advertise for this appointment.
- C. Recreation Board – There were 2 appointments for the Recreation Advisory Board. Ms. Sylvia Richardson had expressed interest in being reappointed to another term on the Recreation Advisory Board. Ms. Janet Phipps had expressed an interest in being appointed to the Recreation Advisory Board.
- D. Library Board – Ms. Sarah Nielson had expressed interest in being appointed to the Library Board.
- E. Industrial Development Authority – There were 4 appointments expiring and 5 open seats. All current members of the IDA whose terms were expiring had offered to be reappointed. These included:

- Roger Neal
- Susie Garner
- Dr. Jim Adams
- Nathan Smith

Mayor Greene said we had also received a letter of interest from Sam Bartlett stating he would be interested in being appointed to the IDA. Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the appointments as presented and to advertise the Planning Commission vacancy. Councilman Warr seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Mayor Greene announced this was the date set for the public hearing which concerned the refinancing of Wildwood. He opened the floor for public comments. Keith Barker explained the current loan was a 30-year loan with readjustments in the rate every 5 years. He said with the possible change in the interest rate at the end of this year, BRCEDA agreed to let Davenport bid the refinancing. He said we received better term quotes from National Bank of Blacksburg (NBB) and at their 4/26 meeting, BRCEDA agreed to accept the new quote and proceed with NBB pending approval from the partner localities. Mr. Barker said City Council was asked to conduct the public hearing to consider the ordinance and refinancing agreement. With no further public comments, Mayor Greene closed the public hearing. Vice Mayor Mitchell made the motion to approve the ordinance and refinancing agreement for Wildwood Commerce Park. Councilman Larrowe seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Ms. Trish Fore, Regional Library Director gave Council updates on opening and operations at the library.

Chief Dewitt Cooper addressed Council regarding a Traffic Safety Committee report for an issue at the Food City intersection on East Stuart Drive. He said members of the Committee made contact with each affected business. The Traffic Safety Committee meeting was a result of complaints involving accidents and “close calls” as traffic which was turning left leaving the businesses directly across from the Food City entrance. According to records, there had been 17 accidents at this intersection from 2017-21. Chief Cooper informed Council that the Traffic Safety Committee recommended in order to alleviate the risk, the opening in question should be barricaded with signage to only allow incoming traffic from Route 58 and prohibit exiting. Chief Cooper said if this area was made an entrance only, there were 6 other curb openings that could be used as exits. Some would be right turn only, but others would allow access to the turning lane into the shopping center. Keith Barker reminded Council that the Mayor & Vice Mayor recently attended a public hearing and spoke regarding the City’s application for a \$850K VDOT grant for a traffic signal for this intersection. The lack of a traffic signal has caused the danger of traffic turning left and crossing the path of other exiting motorists. Mr. Barker noted that within the month we should have an update on the grant. Dr. Glenn Davis and Mr. William Furrow have a business at the curb entrance in question. Both spoke regarding their reasons for not making this area an entrance only. Council questioned and analyzed various scenarios and gave great thought into deciding what would be best for all involved. Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the Traffic Safety Committees recommendation of making this area an entrance only, using barricades to close part of the area, and installing signs. Councilman Larrowe amended his motion to include doing so on a 6-month trial basis with the Traffic Safety Committee re-visiting

the issue monthly with feedback from the business owners who were impacted by the change. Councilman Haynes seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Keith Barker gave an update on the Eastview Street DHCD application. He said as Council was aware, staff and our consultant worked towards an April 1 deadline to apply for a DHCD CDBG for the Eastview St. Housing Project. He said while staff were working on our elements of the project for the consultant, at some point the staff person working on our application did not feel we had secured enough applications and did not submit our application to DHCD. Summit had confirmed through their reviews of emails with this staff person that we were not notified of her concerns and decision to not submit our grant application. We were not notified of the grant not being submitted for approximately 3 weeks when it was discussed with our project manager. Mr. Barker said once he found out about the issue, he called our consultant and asked for an explanation on why the grant wasn't submitted, why we were not notified of issues that we could have addressed so the grant submittal could have occurred, and what our options were for submittal at a later date. He said he had spoken at length with Craig Wilson with Summit about the issue and the following was what Summit was prepared to do to address the issue.

- Summit changed our project manager to Craig Wilson. Craig had worked with Galax on projects for a number of years including our downtown project in 2007 and the first phase of the Bottom Area project.
- Summit would continue to work on the grant application to solicit additional owner applications and finish writing the grant narratives so we could submit the grant for an October/November deadline or, if required, a March 2022 submittal.
- Craig Wilson also would be our project manager as we move to completion of the current Bottom Area project. Summit was working to provide a smooth transition in managers through this process.

Mr. Barker closed by saying this grant opportunity had not been lost but was delayed for the time being. Information and public hearings had occurred and we know there was neighborhood interest. He said while we felt that our current application was strong, we were working under a very tight deadline based on when we started the work itself and where we also split our initial reviews on 2 neighborhoods. He said we still felt we had a valid and strong application and this additional time would allow us to strengthen it more.

Keith Barker spoke regarding the consideration for a City Council Salary increase for FY2023. Mr. Barker explained with the consideration of moving Council elections to November 2021, he asked if City Council wished to consider amending the salary that City Council received during the year. He said that Council currently received \$1000 for their service on Council, but this was far below other communities around us and our school board. Per the Code of Virginia, Council could set a salary up to \$11,500 for the mayor and \$11,000 for all other Council members. Mr. Barker stated our school board received a salary of \$4,800 per year (\$400 per month). He said if Council wished to amend the City Council salary, an ordinance must be adopted 4 months prior to the next general election, which could be accomplished with a June 14 public hearing prior to the November 2 elections. Any salary changes would not go into effect until July 1, 2022 so there would be no impact to the FY2022 budget that had been proposed. Mr. Barker said that we could check the other area localities to see what they were paid. Councilman Haynes noted that better pay would attract future candidates. Vice Mayor Mitchell said that he didn't want the pay set too high. Councilman Larrowe made the motion to proceed with a public hearing to amend City Council salaries by an ordinance. Councilwoman White seconded the motion and it was

unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Keith Barker asked Council to set June 14, 2021 as the date for a public hearing on a budget amendment for FY2021. He explained that we had some budget items that needed to be adjusted, and anticipated an amendment would be needed for the American Rescue Plan Act funds that may be received in May. Vice Mayor Mitchell made the motion to authorize a public hearing in June for a FY2021 budget amendment. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

## CITY MANAGER REPORT

Keith Barker gave an overview of the status of various projects and initiatives that were underway with the City or with regional boards that he was part of. He noted with Covid-19, some of our projects or board actions may have been delayed. These included:

- Completed the FY2022 Budget with staff and Council.
- Met with some council members and Sen. Kaine on his visit to Galax.
- Participated in an IDA meeting on several projects including OTM and Project Light.
- Participated in the visit with First Lady Northam at GES.
- Bottom Area Project, Eastview Phase
- VDOT Projects
- Stormwater Projects
- T.G. Vaughan Furniture Plant Study, VT Economic Development Department
- MRPDC Assistance

## COUNCIL COMMENTS

### **Councilman Larrowe**

- Discussed his attendance at a Workforce Development Recruitment Fair. 20 employers but few applicants.
- Discussed contacting Virginia government officials for a response regarding the extended unemployment and asked Council to consider sending a letter to the governor’s office.
- Councilwoman White noted the school board had voted to return to school in the fall full time.

### **Councilman Haynes**

- Showed a map which divided up the City into 7 sections. He proposed that each Council member adopt a section that they may live in or they travel through. He suggested each Council member to stop and meet people in their adopted areas to connect with them and monitor for concerns.

**Vice Mayor Mitchell**

- o Reminded Council of the May 19 ribbon cutting at Galax Elementary School.

**Councilman Warr**

- o Reported the sinkhole in front of Roy's Jewelry needed repairs. He also said that the last Cruise In turned out to be very good.

With no public comments, Mayor Greene accepted a motion made by Vice Mayor Mitchell at 8:14 p.m. to enter into closed session under the following Code of Virginia:

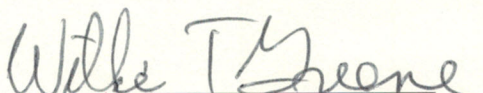
**Real Property § 2.2-3711 A.3 of the Code of Virginia** - Discussion or consideration of the acquisition of real property for a public purpose, or of the disposition of publicly held real property, where discussion in an open meeting would adversely affect the bargaining position or negotiating strategy of the public body.

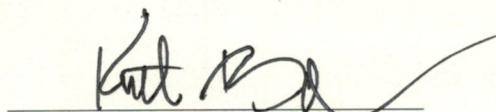
Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion and it was approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larowe, and Councilman Warr.

At 8:38 p.m. Council reconvened in open session. Mayor Greene certified that no items other than those allowed under the cited Virginia code section were discussed and no action was taken, with the following affirmation: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larowe, and Councilman Warr.

Councilman Warr made the motion to adjourn. Councilman Larowe seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larowe, and Councilman Warr.

ADJOURNMENT at 8:38 p.m.

  
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Mayor

  
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Clerk

