

Galax City Council  
Minutes  
June 14, 2021

Galax City Council convened in regular session in City Council Chambers on June 14, 2021, at 6:00 p.m.

At 6:00 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.

Councilwoman White prayed the opening prayer and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

In special action, Mayor Greene congratulated and presented retiring employees with a plaque of appreciation and a watch. These included: Aaron Criner, Detective, Galax Police Department; (February 1997 – June 2021), J.B. Greer, Detective, Galax Police Department (February 1997 – June 2021), G.W. Shaw Jr., Utilities Superintendent, Galax WWTP and WTP; (November 1976 – June 2021).

Before Mr. Greene called Keith Barker to come forward, Delegate Israel O'Quinn made a surprise visit to the meeting to congratulate and present Mr. Barker with a resolution of appreciation from the House of Delegates. Mayor Greene concluded the presentation with Mr. Barker receiving his plaque and watch. Keith Barker retired as City Manager; (October 1992 – June 2021). Mayor Greene and Council thanked all of the retiring employees for their valuable years of service to the City.

Vice Mayor Mitchell made the motion to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of May 10, 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.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the minutes of the called meeting of June 1, 2021. 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 City Council had held a public hearing at the May 10 meeting concerning the FY2022 Budget. It was noted that some slight changes to the budget were made to reflect additional information and requests we had received. He said the FY2022 Budget was still balanced. Some of the changes included:

- The new City Manager salary.
- Mandated salary changes to the Registrar.
- A request from the Library for funding assistance on roof/dormer repairs.

- Included an estimate of the ARPA funds in the amount of \$1.2M. More recent information the City had received showed a first payment to the City in the amount of \$3.29M (from the state) and another \$1.2M directly from the Federal Treasury.

Keith Barker, City Manager, explained he previously had discussions with Vice-Mayor Mitchell and Councilman Larrowe concerning including a portion (\$225,000) of the fund balance for possible marketing studies that would assist Council and the City in economic development and / or support of local businesses as potential uses. He said economic development and business support were discussed as part of the Vision 2020 meeting with Council. Mr. Barker further explained that there may be funding available through the ARPA funds and the guidance was continuously changing on allowable use of the funds. He said Council may elect to spend those funds in a different manner than the requested studies. He said through May 2021, the budget was approximately \$1.22M above the budget estimate in Sales Tax, Meals Tax, and Lodging Tax. Mr. Barker said that he felt it was possible to include some funding from the fund balance in the FY2022 budget for those studies that can benefit the City. He closed by saying if Council agreed to that inclusion, he asked that the requested funds be included in:

- Revenue Line Item 10.3.3510.0101 Appropriated Fund Balance
- Expenditure Line Item 10.4.9102.6017 Contingency (this is not capital contingency)

Keith Barker informed Council that David Hankley, Commissioner of Revenue, had been reviewing the possible impact of personal property values this year. With the current shortage of used cars, those values had increased and were expected to be some percentage higher, perhaps between 8% and 14%, which would translate to an increase in taxes for vehicle owners. The current personal property rate that was advertised is \$2.25 per \$100 value. He explained Council could elect to leave the advertised value as it currently was, or could lower it closer to the time bills were prepared so we would have more accurate information concerning vehicle values.

**The current proposed budget:**

- General Fund \$22,689,821 (included social services)
- Utility Fund \$ 3,315,500
- Stormwater Fund \$ 500,500

**If the proposed budget was adopted as outlined above, selected tax levies for the fiscal year 2021-2022 would include the following:**

- Real Estate \$0.92 per \$100 based upon 100% assessment
- Personal Property \$2.25 per \$100 based upon 100% loan value
- Machinery & Tools \$1.60 per \$100 based upon 50% assessment

Vice Mayor Mitchell made the motion to approve and adopt the FY2022 budget and include the fund balance of \$225,000 for the requested studies. 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.

Mayor Greene announced this was the date advertised for two public hearings on zoning requests. Mayor Greene opened the floor for comments. Ms. Stephanie Dalton, Zoning Administrator, was

in attendance and gave an overview of the requests and the recommendations from the Planning Commission.

- Brian Dixon & Lewis Vaughn, Parcel 46-61 Givens St, R-2 to M-1 – Mr. Dixon and Mr. Vaughn requested that a vacant parcel on Givens St. be rezoned to M-1 so they could build a metal storage building on the site. The Planning Commission recommended approval of this request from R-2 to M-1.
- Jonathan & Sandra Venzie, 210 Calhoun St, R-2 to B-2 – Mr. and Mrs. Venzie own the building at 210 Calhoun St. that had served as an office building since it was constructed. Ms. Dalton said the building was located in an R-2 district and they had requested that it be rezoned B-2 to match the intended use of the structure as a business location. During the meeting, discussion was held on the potential use and the owners amended the request from B-2 to R-5 on the application. Ms. Dalton noted this would be a less intrusive use than the original request and felt it better suited the location and neighborhood. The Planning Commission recommended approval of the request from R-2 to R-5.

After a brief Council discussion and with no further comments made, Mayor Greene closed the public hearing. Councilman Haynes made the motion to approve the zoning request from Brian Dixon & Lewis Vaughn. 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.

Councilwoman White made the motion to approve the zoning request from Jonathan & Sandra Venzie. 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.

Council Pay Discussion - Keith Barker announced due to an oversight, he did not get the ad to the Gazette in time for the current meeting. He asked Council to approve and attend a called meeting on 6/16 at 10:00 AM to consider an ordinance change regarding Council’s pay. The last amendment to Council salary was voted on in 2003 and did not go into effect until July 2006. Mr. Barker said of each locality he checked with; the Galax Council salary was the lowest among the group. He noted that Council could discuss the issue at this meeting but a public hearing would need to be conducted to adopt the ordinance. There was a consensus among Council to hold the called meeting on June 16<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 a.m.

Keith Barker informed Council that the FY2021 budget amendment previously scheduled for this meeting would be held over and addressed at the July 12 meeting. He said the figures for ARPA funds had not been received yet.

Mayor Greene announced the following candidates for appointments which were being considered by Council:

- WCC – Roger Perez
- Planning Commission – (One seat) Ms. Ruth Lyons & Ms. Dana Olsen-Sworsey.

- DSS Advisory Board – Appointment of Vice Mayor Mitchell as Chairman of the DSS Advisory Board – as a temporary check signer until the new City Manager takes over the role.

Vice Mayor Mitchell made the motion to appoint Roger Perez to the WCC Board. 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.

Councilman Haynes made the motion to appoint Dana Olsen-Sworsey to the Planning Commission. 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.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to appoint Vice Mayor Mitchell to the DSS Advisory Board as Chairman until the new City Manager assumes the role. Councilwoman Ritchie 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 abstained from the vote.

Keith Barker as discussed at the May meeting, Council had asked that a letter be drafted for the Governor and federal representatives concerning the current issue regarding unemployment benefits, the federal subsidy, and issues with staffing needs at local businesses and industries. After a discussion among Council members, Councilman Haynes made the motion to have a letter sent to the Governor from Council as a group. Councilwoman White seconded the motion and it was approved by the following votes of “yea”: Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr. Those voting against the motion included: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, and Councilwoman Ritchie.

Mayor Greene welcomed William Bottomley who was present and gave an update on the High-Country Lights show he showcases at Felts Park each year. Council thanked Mr. Bottomley for all he does to make sure the show succeeds.

Chief Dewitt Cooper, Galax Police Department was present and gave an overview of the GPD activities over the past year, and how new laws would change some policing efforts. Council thanked Chief Cooper and the officers of the GPD for their outstanding service to the community.

Ms. Chris Pollins, Director of Chestnut Creek School of the Arts was present and asked City Council to consider an ordinance that would allow a tax exemption for newly purchased property. CCSA purchased the current pottery studio at 110 E. Oldtown St., making use of excess operating funds from this year and investment funds. The purchase would allow CCSA to secure the facility, and also save rent they were paying. The request was made under the Code of Virginia which would allow a non-profit to request a real estate tax exemption from the local government. Keith Barker noted this was not a guaranteed allowance under the code and each request must be considered separately. Mr. Barker closed by saying if Council agreed to proceed with consideration of the request, a public hearing and ordinance would need to be prepared for a future meeting. Councilman Haynes made the motion to set a public hearing at a later date after our attorney draws

up the ordinance. 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.

Chris Pollins, CCSA and Becky Guynn, a local artist, presented a public art project for consideration by Council. The project involved placing painted wraps on the metal electrical boxes in various areas downtown. All final projects must be approved by City Council. The cost would be approximately \$325 per box. Councilwoman White made the motion to approve the request. 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.

Chris Pollins from CCSA, requested a second public art project which would consist of decorating the pillars at the entrance of Felts Park with 3-foot sculptures. Councilman Warr made the motion to approve the request. 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 informed Council of a need to take action on a few appointments for the new City Manager, Matt Settlemeyer with his beginning date of July 1. He said while some boards were mandated that the City Manager serve on, others were optional. Mr. Barker recommended that Council consider these appointments at this time:

- RIFA dba Blue Ridge Crossroads Economic Development Authority (BRCEDA)\*
- Carroll-Grayson-Galax Solid Waste Authority (CGGSWA)\*
- Galax DSS Advisory Board\*
- Galax CPMT
- Galax Industrial Development Authority (IDA)\*
- Virginia Industrial Advancement Alliance (VIAA)
- Bottom Area Housing Board and Oversight Board (required for grant)
- Clerk for Council

*\* Requires oath at Grayson County Clerk of Court*

Vice Mayor Mitchell made the motion to appoint Matt Settlemeyer to the boards mentioned in the request. 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.

Mayor Greene informed Council of a draft ordinance and advertisement for a proposed increase in the courtroom security fee. Keith Barker explained that State legislation had changed to allow this fee to be increased from \$10 to \$20 as part of the fees charged for any criminal or traffic case. He said fees were used to cover courtroom security and equipment and this was an ordinance change and required a public hearing. Vice Mayor Mitchell made the motion to authorize a public hearing regarding the proposed fee change. 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.

Keith Barker asked Council to set July 19 at 1:30 PM as the date for a work session with members of the T. G. Vaughan Committee. Discussion would be on work to date and the proposed organizational structure as recommended from our attorney that can help to move the project along.

Keith Barker informed Council that Jolena Young, Twin County E-911 Coordinator, and the Twin County E-911 Board, had been working on an equipment study concerning the regions emergency services radio and tower system. He said there were many parts of the system that were beyond their useful life by a decade or more. He said the Twin County E-911 Board would be setting a regional meeting with City Council, and the BOS from Carroll and Grayson, in the near future to discuss the findings from our consultant, as well as possible plans for funding. Mr. Barker said this was not an inexpensive project, however the need for addressing the issue.

Keith Barker addressed Council regarding a schematic layout from MRPDC and Summit Engineering for the City's Kipling Lane property. He said while the feasibility and housing study was still being developed, a grant opportunity for housing had been developed by DHCD and funding had been provided to MRPDC for the project. The intent was to develop approximately 15 houses that would then be available to workforce in a community, to support population growth in a community and to provide affordable housing. He said Council would be kept informed as this grant opportunity evolved.

#### 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 which included:

- Traffic light study for the Food City Shopping Center. He said that the project to have a light installed would be a \$850K VDOT grant funded project to begin in July of 2022. He offered to answer any questions Council had regarding the report which had been given to them to review.
- T. G. Vaughan Project study
- M & M Trailer Park clean up

#### COUNCIL COMMENTS

- Councilman Larrowe – Discussed the structure of Council, vacant properties issue, the impact of new laws, tourism, communication, District Three buses, and discussed the need for an outside IT study exam to make sure we are protected with good back ups and protection from ransomware.
- Councilman Haynes – Asked for Council members to be assigned to the 7 areas of the City that they could “adopt” to look out for and reach out to help the citizens with concerns within these areas.
- Councilman Warr – Asked for the City to re-consider the installation of WIFI & charging stations downtown as a courtesy to our shoppers and tourists. Discussed the possibility of lowering the speed on Main Street from 25 to 20 mph. He thanked Keith for all he had done to help the City.

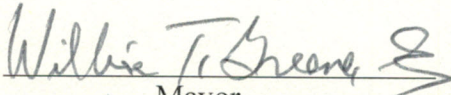
- Councilwoman Ritchie – Discussed HGTV and ideas for downtown.
- Mayor Greene – Discussed the Fifteenth T & L Session.

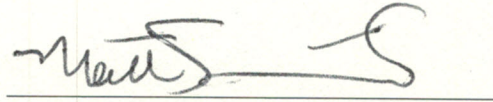
#### HEARING OF VISITORS

Attorney Nathan Lyons from the Lyons & Mitchell Law Firm informed Council that his firm had been hired by County Line Restaurant regarding one of several curb cut openings to his client's restaurant on E. Stuart Drive. Council voted at a previous meeting to set up barriers and signs to prevent motorists from exiting this area to turn left. Mr. Barker explained that a VDOT grant for a new traffic light was underway to alleviate the issue. There was a lengthy discussion between Mr. Lyons, Council members, Keith Barker, and Chief Dewitt Cooper regarding the safety of this intersection. There was a consensus to continue a discussion regarding the issue monthly between all involved. Mayor Greene thanked Mr. Lyons for attending and discussing the issue.

Councilman Haynes made the motion to adjourn. Councilman Warr seconded the motion.

ADJOURNMENT at 9:10 p.m.

  
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Mayor

  
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Clerk

