

Galax City Council  
Minutes  
September 12, 2022

Galax City Council convened in regular session in City Council Chambers on September 12, 2022, 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 White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck. Councilman Haynes was absent.

Mayor Greene prayed the opening prayer and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

## APPROVAL OF MINUTES

### Regular Council Meeting of August 8, 2022

Councilman Henck made the motion to approve the August 8, 2022 regular meeting minutes. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.

## OLD BUSINESS

### Public Hearing – FY22 Galax City Schools Budget Amendment

Mayor Greene announced this was the date set for a public hearing for the FY2022 Galax City Schools budget amendment presented by Ms. Susan Tilley, Galax School Board Superintendent. The amendment was primarily due to increased federal grant funding. The floor was opened for public comments. There were no comments made. Mayor Greene closed the public hearing. **Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the FY2022 Galax City Schools budget amendment. Vice Mayor White seconded the motion, and it approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr. Councilman Henck abstained from voting pursuant to VA Code Section 2.2-3112.**

### Public Hearing – Proposed Amendment to § 148.80 Notice of Illegal Parking

Mayor Greene announced this was the date set for a public hearing for the proposed amendment to 148.80 of the Code of the City of Galax – Notice of Illegal Parking. Council previously discussed this code section at the July meeting. The proposed ordinance would add an additional subsection to the existing Section 148-80 to provide a process for the issuance of citations to General District Court if parking tickets have not been paid within five (5) days of issuance. Mayor Greene opened the floor for public comments. With no comments made, the public hearing was closed. **Councilman Henck made the motion to approve the parking amendment. Councilman Warr seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.**

### Regional Animal Shelter 1979 Agreement

The Regional Animal Shelter Agreement created in 1979 was previously discussed at the August meeting. Mr. Moore informed Council that he would meet with the Carroll and Grayson Administrators to go over and re-evaluate data from the shelter, and report back to Council.

## NEW BUSINESS

### Presentation by David Mikula, President of Mikula-Harris Branding Advertising & Design

David Mikula gave an informative presentation on branding, marketing, and advertising, and how this could be applied to Galax. He discussed his firm’s “Three Phase Brand Development Process”. Mr. Mikula noted that proposals would be reviewed by the October meeting. The cost of Mikula-Harris services will be covered by the Virginia Tourism Grant that Galax was awarded.

### Proclamation by Twin County Regional Healthcare recognizing September as Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

TCRH requested approval by Council for a Suicide Prevention Awareness proclamation. Vice Mayor White read the proclamation aloud. **Councilwoman Ritchie made the motion to approve the proclamation. Councilman Larrowe seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.**



#### Resolution by New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board

Barry Moore informed Council of a request to adopt a resolution by New River/Mount Rogers Workforce Development Board and City of Galax recognizing September as Workforce Development Month. **Councilman Larrowe made the motion to adopt the resolution as presented. Councilman Warr seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.**

#### Resolution authorizing participation in the DHCD Exploring Main Street Program

Jolena Young, Grants Administrator made a request of Council to adopt a resolution to apply as an Exploring Member to the Virginia Main Street Program. Ms. Young explained this tier of membership had minimal requirements, but was necessary to participate in DHCD grants for downtown investment. It would be the first step required in the revitalization project. **Councilman Warr made the motion to adopt the resolution as presented. Councilman Henck seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.**

#### Personal Property rate and/or assessment percentage and/or no action taken

Council held a lengthy discussion regarding the implications of the personal property tax assessment this fall. Councilman Larrowe, Chair of the Audit and Finance Committee, provided a summary of the committee’s review at the 8-30-22 meeting. Councilman Larrowe explained if the City decreased the revenue by rebating a significant amount of personal property taxes, then we would have increased dollar-for-dollar our deficit spending, which would be significant. The City’s personal property rate is currently \$2.25 per \$100, and the assessment percentage is 100% of loan value. In closing comments David Hankley, Commissioner of Revenue, added his concern for public outcry over lack of rebate. **No motion or vote was made by Council either way on the subject, leaving the tax rate the same by default.**

#### Tax Relief for the elderly and disabled

Galax City Council’s Audit and Finance Committee met on August 30, 2022 to discuss tax relief for the elderly and disabled. Information was provided to Council for its consideration and decisioning without recommendation regarding the elderly and disabled real estate tax exemption along with historical budget implications. Discussion included the proposed increase of income levels the tax relief applicants. However, to make these changes, the City Code would need to be amended and a public hearing would need to be held. Due to tax relief applications being due by April 30, this action was deferred to a later time. **Councilman Larrowe made the motion to authorize the City Manager and staff, including the City’s lawyer, to move forward with code change amendments for tax relief calendar year 2023, and to authorize an inquiry of how to allow the eligibility of tax relief for citizens with past due taxes. Councilman Henck seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.**

#### Police Salary Adjustment Proposal

Councilman Larrowe gave a report from the August 30 Audit & Finance Committee meeting related to a proposal by Chief Cooper, to amend the budget for the Galax Police Department salaries in the amount of \$80,509. The Committee reviewed information provided from Chief Cooper regarding current staff salaries and competing salaries in nearby localities. The concern was that the GPD’s relatively low compensation was adversely impacting both recruiting and retention, which could ultimately impact citizen safety. After analyzing the information, the Committee made a recommendation to approve the budget amendment in the amount of \$80,509, and referred the recommendation to Council for approval. **The Audit & Finance Committee’s recommendation stood as the motion; Councilman Henck seconded the motion.** Councilman Henck added that the Public Services Committee also met to consider this issue, but did not vote on this subject, but had a consensus in support of the Audit & Finance Committee’s recommendation of the need to increase the salaries of the GPD. He added there was also a similar discussion for the Department of Social Services on the agenda, and expressed his concern for all of the other city departments in need of support for raises for staff, and encouraged the City Manager to work on ways to fill the gaps. Mayor Greene commented that he was against taking any money from the school system. Councilman Larrowe clarified that the issue of school funding was never mentioned at the Audit & Finance Committee and was in the agenda synopsis in error. Mayor Greene asked where the funding for the raises would come from. After further discussion by Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr clarified the funding would come from the fund balance, Councilman Larrowe agreed. **The Police salary adjustment proposal was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.**



#### Department of Social Services Salary Adjustment Proposal

Councilman Larrowe clarified that Tammy Smith, director of the Galax DSS, addressed the Committee regarding the competitiveness of salaries in the Galax DSS relative to other nearby and regional departments. She reported that the department has been struggling with a high turnover rate and reduced applicant pool over the last three years. Ms. Smith believed that \$100,685 was needed (based on a complete staff schedule of compensation and benefits provided to and reviewed by the Committee) to close the departmental gap to an acceptable level, and accordingly recommended that as a budget amendment request to the Committee. That was designed to move our entry level compensation to \$40,000 with appropriate adjustment to experienced staff. Councilman Larrowe said the Audit & Finance Committee's recommendation was to approve to amend the budget to increase the salaries of the DSS employees in the amount of \$100,685. It was recognized that Virginia and/or the Federal government provides a portion of the funding for this increase. Ms. Smith anticipates that the local share of that increase would be about \$68,446 for FYE 23 and fall to \$15,102 for FYE 2024. **The Audit & Finance Committee's recommendation to approve \$100,685 for DSS, stood as the motion; Councilman Warr seconded the motion. It was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.**

Director of Finance, Judy Taylor-Gallimore, inquired as to where the funds were coming from for the budget amendment. It was confirmed \$68,446 would come from fund balance.

#### District Three Re-appointment and Alternate to Board of Commissioners

**Councilman Henck made the motion to re-appoint Councilman Larrowe to the District Three Board. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion. It was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck. Councilman Larrowe made the motion to re-appoint Councilwoman Ritchie as alternate to the District Three Board. Vice Mayor White seconded the motion and it was Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.**

#### Rooftop of VA CAP Board Appointment

Two City of Galax positions serve on the Rooftop Board. After HR Director - Judy Bolt's retirement, a vacancy remained. Ms. Taylor-Gallimore, Finance Director, was unable to locate any employees in the Finance Department who would be able to serve. Vice Mayor White, who currently serves on the Rooftop Board, explained the vacant position was for the Rooftop Finance Committee and Board, a dual role. **Councilman Henck made the motion to advertise the vacant position. Councilwoman Ritchie volunteered to serve as an interim board member until one was appointed. Councilman Henck amended his motion to appoint Councilwoman Ritchie as interim board member. Councilman Warr seconded the motions, and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.**

#### Galax Parks & Recreation Advisory Board – Two Appointments

Mayor Greene announced two vacancies on the Galax Parks & Recreation Advisory Board. Ms. Jennifer Morris and Mr. Brandon Boyles expressed an interest in serving on the board. **Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the appointments of Jennifer Morris and Brandon Boyles to the Parks & Recreation Board. Vice Mayor White seconded the motion and it was approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr. Councilman Henck abstained from voting.**

#### Planning Commission – Re-appointment

Mayor Greene explained Councilwoman Ritchie serves as the Council representative on the Planning Commission. Her term expired 6-30-22 and she would like to continue to serve. **Vice Mayor White made the motion to re-appoint Councilwoman Ritchie to the Planning Commission. Councilman Henck seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.**

#### Galax Department of Social Services Advisory Board – Appointment

Mayor Greene explained Councilman Henck has been serving as Interim Chair on the Galax Department of Social Services Advisory Board, since the departure of the previous City Manager. Pursuant to Virginia Code Section 63.2-307, effective immediately, it was requested of Council to appoint Mr. Barry N. Moore, Galax City Manager, as Chair for the Galax Department of Social Services Advisory Board. Councilman Henck clarified the appointment was for the "Local" Board and not for the Advisory Board. **Councilman Henck made the motion to appoint Barry N. Moore to the DSS Local Board. Vice Mayor White seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of**



**“yea”:** Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.

#### Video Recording of City Council Meetings

Councilman Henck requested Council to consider authorizing the City Manager to use Council discretionary funds to retain Eugene McCurdy, who currently provides web support for our galaxva.com web page, to provide a report on how to set up video recording of Council meetings. Such a report would include a recommendation for the technology equipment needed and setup given for our Council chamber area as well as storage and sharing options. Barry N. Moore agreed to research the options for audio/video recording. There was a consensus for Mr. Moore to bring back his finding on audio/video equipment to Council for further discussion.

#### **CITIZEN COMMENTS**

Commissioner of Revenue, David Hankley, addressed Council regarding tax bills with no rate changes and billed as they were. He stressed his concern for public outcry for reductions. He said all localities had taken some sort of action either before or after taxes were billed.

#### **COMMUNICATION FROM CITY MANAGER**

- Status of restrooms for Felts Park, South Main Street, and Galax Farmer’s Market
- Original Animal Shelter Agreement Discussion
- Update on Human Resources Manager, and Code Compliance/Zoning Officer

#### **COMMUNICATION FROM MAYOR, CITY COUNCIL, AND COUNCIL COMMITTEES**

##### Councilman Warr

- New Business Downtown - Black Sheep Customs
- Thankful for the presentation by David Mikula

##### Councilwoman Ritchie

- Cardinal News report - Migration from big cities to small towns/cities

##### Councilman Larrowe

- Audit & Finance Committee – Visits to businesses
- Small Area Plan – Continues to progress
- MOOG – Congratulations for successful open house event
- VA Dept. Historical Resources – Vaughan Project
- ARPA Funding Strategy
- Capital Improvement Budget to be discussed
- Whistleblowing Topic - Benefits

#### **ADJOURN**

With no further business or comments, Councilwoman Ritchie made the motion to adjourn. Vice Mayor White seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Henck.

ADJOURNMENT at 8:25 p.m.



Mayor



Clerk