

Galax City Council
Minutes
January 9, 2023

Galax City Council convened in regular session in City Council Chambers on January 9, 2023. 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, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.

Councilman Larrowe gave the opening prayer and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Regular Council Meeting of December 12, 2022

Councilman Haynes made the motion to approve the December 12, 2022 regular meeting minutes. Councilman Henck seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.

OLD BUSINESS

God’s Storehouse

Ms. Kisha Johnson, Director of God’s Storehouse and Soup Kitchen, provided an update on recent progress and presented Council with a check for \$25,000. This repayment is for a portion of the required match from God’s Storehouse towards the project being funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission. Ms. Johnson thanked City Council, the Board of Directors at God’s Storehouse, and Ms. Jolena Young, City of Galax Grants Administrator, for believing in the project and all of the hard work & dedication that has been given.

Ms. Jolena Young, Grants Administrator Update

Jolena Young gave an update on recently awarded and upcoming grants and programs including Mobilizing Main Street and Rosenwald-Felts. Ms. Young discussed the \$1 Million grant awarded from the state’s Industrial Revitalization Fund (IRF) for Project Light (God’s Storehouse). Gov. Glenn Youngkin announced the grant on Dec. 27. The IRF grants provide gap financing for construction projects aligned with local and regional economic development strategies, primarily in distressed communities. Ms. Young briefly discussed other grants that were available. Council expressed their appreciation for all of Ms. Young’s hard work on obtaining grants for the City of Galax.

Wytheville Community College Board Appointment

Council was asked to appoint a Galax City resident interested in serving on the WCC Board. The vacancy was advertised. After discussing, Councilman Henck made the motion to appoint Mr. Jack Roberts to the WCC Board. Vice Mayor White seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.

Elderly & Disabled Real Estate Tax Exemption Program

Councilman Larrowe who serves as the Audit & Finance Committee Chair, provided information to Council regarding the elderly and disabled real estate tax exemption. **The A&F Committee made a recommendation that would also serve as the motion for Council**, to direct management to draft or modify the Elderly & Disabled Real Tax Exemption Ordinance as necessary to reflect the following option for the year 2023:

Maximum Exemption:	Income Level:
400	30,000
300	35,000
200	40,000

Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the recommendation made by the Audit & Finance Committee and it was and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.

VFCO Project Reimbursement Analysis, Refer to IDA for approval

Councilman Larrowe informed Council of the Audit & Finance Committee’s recommendation regarding the VFCO Project Reimbursement Analysis. The Committee reviewed the operating income and expenses summary relating to the Vaughan property being held for development. *See table below. The Committee wanted to share their recommendation with Council to forward the reimbursement request to the IDA to pay Vaughan Furniture Company and VRG, LLC as set forth in the schedules provided.

Vaughan Furniture Company - VRG, LLC Net Operating Revenue and Expense Summary 2020 through 2022	
Net operational out of pocket	
<i>Vaughan Restoration Group, LLC</i>	
Year 2021	+/- 10,755.55
Year 2022	(40,176.60)
Total VRG	(29,421.05)
 <i>Vaughan Furniture Company</i>	
Year 2020	(10,964.08)
Total VFCO	(10,964.08)

Councilman Henck commented that he believed that the request should have been passed to the Commerce Committee instead of the Audit & Finance Committee. He asked Council to look at this request with fresh eyes. He made it clear that he fully supports and is 100% behind the development of the Vaughan Furniture Project; however, how the City is involved in this process is critically important. He didn’t agree with the reimbursement of \$10K to VFCO that was sold in 2020 to the Vaughan Restoration Group. Mayor Greene interjected and there was further discussion. Councilman Henck stressed there was no approved agreements, documents or minutes in existence to reference an agreement that would allow almost \$40K to be paid to VFCO and VRG, LLC.

Councilman Henck suggested a motion to move the matter to the end of the meeting and to direct management to enter into a performance agreement. Discussions continued, then Mayor Greene confirmed a motion by Councilman Henck, which was seconded by Councilwoman Ritchie, to table until the February meeting - with no action, and refer to the Commerce Committee who would report back their recommendation to Council. Discussion continued among Council members.

Mayor Greene accepted an amended motion by Councilman Henck to table the topic until a called meeting could be set before the February meeting. Councilman Warr seconded the motion and it was approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck. Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Haynes, and Councilman Larrowe were opposed. Discussion continued among Council members.

Mayor Greene revisited the original motion by Councilman Henck with the approved amendment. He confirmed the motion which included City Council would hold a called meeting at a later date to discuss the VRG reimbursements with details regarding the creation of a contract, and the summary of details of the meeting would be referred to IDA, who would make a decision and send back to City Council. Mayor Greene called for those in favor of the motion to signify their approval, and it was approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck. Councilman Haynes and Councilman Larrowe voted "nay".

Galax Creek Side Small Area Plan Discussion

Barry Moore, City Manager, informed Council of the Galax Creek Side Small Area Plan which was provided to Council prior to the meeting by Ms. Anne Darby, AICP Dept. Manager with Summit Design and Engineering Services. Council discussed the plan which is basically a concept at this point. Councilman Haynes made the motion to forward the Small Area Plan to the Planning Commission for review before coming to Council for approval. Councilman Warr seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.

Galax Water Treatment Plant Discussion

Barry Moore briefly discussed the Galax Water Treatment Plant which is in need of major repairs. Mr. Moore stated that we are aggressively seeking grants and ways to repair or the replacement of the water plant, and we are considering all options at this point. Jolena Young, Grants Administrator, discussed the RFP for the engineering design portion of the grant.

A called meeting with American Water Company was previously set for January 19th at Crossroads. Councilman Henck made the motion to make this an open meeting. Vice Mayor White seconded the motion. Vice Mayor White, Councilman Henck, and Councilwoman Ritchie voted "yay" to an open meeting. Mayor Greene, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Haynes, and Councilman Warr voted "nay" to an open meeting. The motion/second failed. After more discussion, Mayor Greene stated that he misunderstood the motion and would like to change his vote for the meeting to be held in open session. There was one objection, Councilman Haynes, to Mayor Greene changing his vote, therefore, it was not allowed. Councilman Larrowe stated it was premature to hold such a meeting open to the public and added there were provisions in the VA Code to apply to this type meeting so that it could be held closed. Councilman Henck informed Council a private meeting was allowed under the Virginia Code for FOIA purposes, but he had received an opinion from Steven Durbin, City Attorney that a closed meeting was not advisable under the Public Procurement Act.

NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Meagan Helmick – Twin County Free Clinic Update

Ms. Helmick, President of the Free Clinic of the Twin Counties, updated Council on the details of expanding their services to again include dental starting next year. There are plans to also expand other services which would possibly include a community health resource hub downtown for citizens. She expressed her appreciation for the annual funding approved by Council.

Mr. Corbin Stone, Managing Director – Robinson, Farmer, Cox Associates

Mr. Stone presented the FY2022 Audit Report to Council. Prior to this meeting, he had met with the Audit & Finance Committee on January 5 via Zoom to go over the details of the audit report.

Mr. Stone had positive comments about the operations of the City's Finance Department. He also thanked City Council for their support and hard work.

Approval of 2023 City Calendars

Council was asked to approve the following calendars for 2023:

Festivals and Street Closures
City Council Meeting Calendar
Holidays & Sanitation Calendar
FY2024 Budget Calendar

Councilman Haynes made the motion to approve the 2023 Holiday/Trash Calendars. Councilman Larrowe seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

None

COMMUNICATION FROM MAYOR, CITY COUNCIL, AND COUNCIL COMMITTEES

Councilman Larrowe

- Discussed the possibility of pulling area groups & boards together to meet and work together on items.

Councilman Henck

- Discussion the Kipling Lane Project.
 - Not comfortable with the Kipling Lane Project being taken up in the Galax Development Corporation meetings, since they were a private entity, and the Kipling Lane Project was unrelated to Galax Development Corporation's work on the Vaughan factory.
 - Would like to be invited to the Galax Development Group meetings.

Councilman Warr


- Tourism Meeting 1-10-23

Mayor Greene

- Possibility of meeting in closed session in the future to discuss items prior to the open Council meeting.
- City Attorney's advice on closed session

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

ADJOURNMENT at 8:55 p.m.



Mayor



Clerk

