

Galax City Council
Minutes
March 13, 2023

Galax City Council convened in regular session in the City Council Chamber area on March 13, 2023 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, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck. Councilman Haynes was absent and Councilwoman Ritchie arrived at 6:07.

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

SPECIAL ACTION

Mayor Greene presented Edwin Ward, City Engineer, a retirement plaque and watch for his years of service to the City from Jan 21, 2003 to Jan 31, 2023.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Regular Meeting of January 23, 2023

Councilman Henck made the motion to approve. Councilman Larrowe seconded the motion, and it was approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck. Vice Mayor White abstained.

Regular Meeting of February 13, 2023

Councilman Warr made the motion to approve. Councilman Henck seconded the motion, and it was 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, Tax Relief for the Elderly Ordinance

Mayor Greene announced this was the date set for a public hearing to consider amendments to Chapter 137 of the City Code concerning tax relief for certain elderly or disabled citizens. Mayor Greene opened the floor for comments. Keith Barker, Interim City Manager, explained that Council discussed this in a previous meeting, and it was agreed to consider raising income limits, retroactive to January 1, 2023. Per Council's previous discussion and included in the ordinance, the amount of the exemption shall be \$400 for the real property of qualifying taxpayers having combined household incomes of up to and including \$30,000. The amount of the exemption shall be \$300 for the real property of qualifying taxpayers having combined household incomes in excess of \$30,000 but not more than \$35,000. The amount of the exemption shall be \$200 for the real property of qualifying taxpayers having combined household incomes in excess of \$35,000 but not more than \$40,000. No exemption shall be available for taxpayers having combined household incomes in excess of \$40,000. Mr. Barker asked if Council wished to also consider raising the net worth from \$75,000 to a higher value. He said surveys of localities close to us were done to see what they had established as the maximum net worth and found the following:

- Carroll County \$125,000
- Grayson County \$100,000
- Wythe County \$100,000
- Patrick County \$100,000

With no further comments, Mayor Greene closed the public hearing.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to modify the net worth allowance to \$100,000, and to approve the amendments to Chapter 137 of the City Code concerning tax relief for certain elderly or disabled citizens. 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.

Public Hearing – VDOT Project, E. Stuart Drive Crosswalk at New River Trail

Mayor Greene announced this was the date and time set for the public hearing concerning a possible Transportation Alternative grant from VDOT for the installation of a flashing crosswalk at the New River Trail to the opposite side of E. Stuart Drive. Mayor Greene opened the floor for comments. Keith Barker explained as the possible project at the former T. G. Vaughan Plant continued to move forward, it was worth consideration on how to make a safer access to the NRT from T. George Vaughan Drive for pedestrians. The proposed project would be a flashing crosswalk only, and not a traffic signal as that would not qualify for any VDOT funding and it would be located too close to other signals. Approval of an application does not obligate the City to accept funds, but the project would require a 20% match if it moves forward. With no further comments, Mayor Greene closed the public hearing.

Councilman Warr made the motion to continue discussions with VDOT for a potential application. 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.

Appalachian Natural Gas, Dio Herrera, VP of Operations

Mr. Dio Herrera gave an overview of possible work ANG is looking at in Galax. While ANG had a franchise from the SCC for the installation and operation of natural gas in Galax, but had expired. Mr. Herrera asked for possible future support from City Council to renew their franchise in the future. ANG will be surveying the community to identify possible routes, larger propane customers, etc. Mr. Barker noted there was no action needed, but there would be a resolution at the April meeting.

Downtown Tree Study, VT Forest Resources & Environmental Conservation

Keith Barker discussed the recent concern regarding possible root damage to sidewalks and root infiltration from the trees downtown into the storm system and sewer system. He explained that Mr. Moore did reach out to VT and they had conducted an onsite survey to look at tree conditions, tree trimming, health of the trees, sidewalk damage, etc. The report was given to Council. Mr. Barker explained while they addressed what they could visually observe, they acknowledged that another group would need to conduct camera work for below ground issues. Mr. Barker added in the stormwater survey that the City conducted in 2018/2019, no root infiltration was observed, however it was understood that a more detailed camera inspection may be needed for this assessment. He said it was known that Public Works has not had root issues downtown, but again we do not have any camera work to properly assess issues that may not be known. Mr. Barker reached out to Kevin Heath with Lane Group concerning a possible review of the stormwater and sewer system downtown, specifically where the trees in question are located. His firm did our

stormwater assessment in the 2018/2019 report and has that baseline of work to start with. Mr. Barker said while they did not have camera work in-house, Mr. Heath could contract with a company to have that work done at an estimated cost of \$10,000, based on approximately 2 days of camera work with a final report and video. Mr. Barker asked Council's permission to allow staff to work with Lane Group on developing this assessment for a comprehensive report to provide to you at a later date. Funding would be from the *Streets – Landscaping and Tree Trimming 4100-3170* line item. He closed by saying if the report did show needed work, he would recommend that no work on any tree removal be conducted until the late fall season at least, since we are just entering warmer weather and a tourism season. There simply may not be enough time to conduct an assessment and take actions on any tree removal if it is recommended and then repair necessary sidewalks.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion for staff to proceed with the study by Lane Group. 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.

School Board Appointment

Keith Barker informed Council we had received three (3) letters of interest for the Galax School Board. They were from Larry Spangler (currently on school board), Mr. Fred Mitchell, and Mr. Chauncey Robinson.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to set the public hearing at the April meeting, and interview and appoint at the May meeting. 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.

Galax Water Plant & Wastewater Plant Review

Keith Barker informed Council that he had signed the agreement with CHA for the evaluation of the GWTP and GWWTP and how a transition to a public utility to a private for-profit utility may work. He said per the agreement, we should have information back within 60 days.

Opioid Resolution

Keith Barker presented a resolution for consideration from our attorney concerning a settlement from retail vendors regarding the opioid lawsuits. Mr. Barker said he could not speak to the amount of this settlement and how much would be directed to Galax, however it was recommended by our attorney that Council approve the resolution as presented. Mr. Barker said the managers in Carroll, Bland, Wythe, and Smyth were approving this resolution at this time also.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the opioid resolution as presented. 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.

Opioid Funds Distribution

Keith Barker informed Council of a proposal, developed by staff, for distribution to entities that had expressed some interest in managing the opioid funds we currently have, and the funds we would receive over the next 17 years. We currently have \$35,000+/- and expect \$9,000+/- more each year going forward. Funds must be used for addressing opioid needs in our community. The intent was to see proposals from organizations that work in our community, how they would

utilize the funds, and how they would track success. He said while were no proposals in hand at this time, we had been contacted by regional entities regarding management of the funds. The concern among staff is that funds would be used elsewhere in a larger pool with little impact to our community. Mr. Barker asked for Council's permission to solicit proposals and bring a recommendation back to Council at a future meeting.

Mr. Barker also discussed meeting with the Recovery Court judges and representatives from each locality to discuss a possible use of a portion of the funds we received, and an opportunity to apply for a regional collaborative grant through the Virginia Opioid Abatement Authority for funding that could address other needs that Recovery Court has identified. He said while the overall planning was just underway, a regional grant from Galax, Carroll, and Grayson could be submitted by May 5, 2023 for funds that could address more intensive therapy, housing, counseling, etc. that were not funded now. He said while no funding match was required, it would improve our scoring on a possible grant. The Recovery Court asked that we consider ear-marking \$10,000 of the current funds we have as a possible match for the grant. Grayson committed 1/2 of their funds for the Recovery Court already and Carroll would discuss this on 3/14.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the RFP, and distribute. 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.

Councilman Henck made the motion to earmark \$10K for the collaborative grant – if counties also put in \$10K. If not, bring back to council. 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.

BRCEDA Strategic Planning Funding

Keith Barker discussed a prior meeting where Council had the opportunity to participate in a regional strategic planning strategy that BRCEA was conducting. He said we were receiving invoices at this time, and the study was approved, however funding was not allocated for it. He asked City Council to approve a transfer of \$25,000 from line-item 9102-6017 Contingency to line-item 8304-5699 Transfer to BRCEA.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the additional CSA funding request as presented. 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.

Rosenwald Felts Update, Sylvia Richardson

Ms. Richardson gave an update on the Rosenwald Revamped Committee and their discussions on Rosenwald Felts. Mr. Joe Steffen, a native of Galax and also served on City Council 40 years ago, addressed Council regarding the Rosenwald Felts School. Ms. Richardson said the committee was working on their 501c3 status & organizational documents. There was a discussion to have Council members meet with the Rosenwald Revamped Committee going forward as their plans progress, while they're developing a business plan, and have discussions on how they envisioned the future of the facility.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to appoint Councilman Henck, Vice Mayor White, and Councilwoman Ritchie as an alternate, to the Rosenwald Revamped Committee. 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.

NEW BUSINESS

DSS Request, Additional CSA Funding

Tammy Smith, Galax DSS Director, informed Council that there was a need for additional CSA funding due to higher placement costs of some children in foster care. The additional funding anticipated is \$65,000 for the remainder of the fiscal year. This is a mandatory local expense. Staff recommended amending the budget to move funds as follows:

- 9402-6017 Carroll Shared Services (\$40,000)
- 3302-3840 Payments to Juvenile Probation (\$25,000)
- 4530-5660 Comprehensive Services DSS \$65,000

Mr. Barker informed Council this was a transfer of funds within the budget, so no public hearing was required.

Councilman Henck made the motion to approve the additional CSA funding request as presented. 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.

Twin County Chamber of Commerce Presentation

Ms. Laura Whitt gave an overview of the Chamber and upcoming events.

Trish Fore, Library Update

Ms. Trish Fore gave an update on our regional library system and the Galax library in particular.

E. Stuart Drive, Sewer Upgrade Project

Keith Barker discussed the E. Stuart Drive Sewer Project. He said it had been bid two times, with no bids submitted the first time and a single bid received on the 2nd round of bidding. The base bid received was \$990,335 from Carolina Grading & Utilities, Inc. with engineering fees contracted at \$70,000+/-, for a total project cost of approximately \$1,060,335, not including a contingency. Council budgeted \$810,000 for the total project and we applied for a DEQ grant for funding assistance, but were notified on 3/7/23 that we were not successful. In order to continue with progress on the project Council would need to make a budget amendment of \$299,500 at this time to sign the contract with the bidder. The budget amendment would be to move \$299,500 from line item 50-4-9959-6017 Contingency to 50-4-9900-1191 East Stuart Drive Sewer Replacement for a total project cost of construction, engineering, and contingency of \$1,109,500. Mr. Barker noted that we could consider rebidding the project, but at this point there had been limited interest and we also know that there are material shortages on sewer line itself. Mr. Barker closed by saying that we have known that while this project would provide an upgrade to the sewer system in that area, and would makes it more maintenance friendly, it must be accomplished for the proposed commercial development on the south side of E. Stuart Drive. He said the timing was critical to get this project started.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the budget amendment as presented, and to authorize the City Manager to sign the contract for the E. Stuart Drive Sewer Replacement Project. 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.

Sidewalk Evaluation

Keith Barker discussed a proposal from Precision Infrastructure Management to perform a walking assessment of all 10+ miles of City sidewalks, provide an assessment based on ADA guidelines, and develop a detailed GIS layer with recommended items for correction. The company then could use this data to perform future corrective work on areas prioritized by the City for work. He said their equipment was proprietary for the work and therefore could meet the sole source procurement. Mr. Barker said if Council approved this project, work would come from the Streets line item at a cost of approximately \$9,875. He said repair work that may be identified for the upcoming year, and subsequent budget years, would also be part of the Streets budget.

Councilman Henck made the motion to approve the proposal for the sidewalk evaluation by Precision Infrastructure Management and authorize the City Manager to sign the agreement. 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.

Funding Request – Arts Council

Keith Barker informed Council of a funding request from Laura Romanowski with the Arts Council for additional funding in the current budget. He explained when the lease for the Rex Theater was approved, and provisions were made for use by the City or other community groups we support, there were no provisions made or called out on usage fees. The current lessees have been covering all operating costs and were requesting rental fees from groups wishing to make use of the Rex, so that they may offset utility costs, operational costs, and offset lost revenues for Friday and Saturday usage. He said since the lease was put in place after the beginning of the fiscal year, the Arts Council did not anticipate the fees for the events they plan. They were requesting additional funding in the current fiscal year in order to offset the lease fees for their spring production. The funds, if approved, would be a reimbursement after they have made payment to the lessee and presented the City with proof of payment. The request from the Arts Council was \$3250 and could be paid from line item 1201-3200 Contracted Labor in the City Administration line item.

Vice Mayor White made the motion to approve the funding request for the Arts Council. 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.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Jill Burcham with P.U.S.H. Ministries requested funding from the City in the amount of \$1000 to help those struggling with addictions, and re-entry after being released from prison with lodging, transportation, food, and fuel costs.

Dr. Cameron Gillespie discussed the need for a street crossing across East Stuart Drive. He also gave his thoughts regarding the preservation of the Rosenwald Felt School.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY MANAGER, MAYOR, CITY COUNCIL, AND COUNCIL COMMITTEES

City Manager – Keith Barker

- FY2024 Budget
- Attended several meetings
- Boundaries adjusted in Carroll Co. Cranberry Area
- City Engineer working part time
- National Flood Insurance Program
- Galax Water Treatment Plant design

Councilman Warr

- Downtown Tourism Committee
 - Branding presentation on 3/14
 - New advertising logo

Councilman Henck

- Thanked Keith Barker & Mayor Greene for getting the City back on track.

Councilwoman Ritchie

- Pleased to be back at her first Council meeting after surgery.

Vice Mayor White

- Assisting and recruiting Galax High School students who have taken an interest in local government.

Councilman Larrowe

- BRCEDA – budget time with local counties
- Workforce Development
- Dist. Three
- FY24 Budget Discussions
- PUSH Ministries – Re-entry Program
- Tourism presentation – Rebranding
- Rosenwald Felts – Thanked all for attending

Mayor – Willie Greene

- MRPDC – Annual Meeting
- Thanked Mr. Joe Steffen for attending

CLOSED SESSION

At 8:20 p.m. Vice Mayor White made the motion to enter into closed session under the following Code of Virginia categories:

- **Personnel Matter – § 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.
- **Legal Matters § 2.2-3711 A.7 of the Code of Virginia** - Consultation with legal counsel and briefings by staff members or consultants pertaining to actual or probable litigation, where such consultation or briefing in open meeting would adversely affect the negotiating or litigating posture of the public body; and consultation with legal counsel employed or

retained by a public body regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice by such counsel.

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.

At 9:05 Councilwoman Ritchie made the motion to reconvene in open session. Councilman Larrowe seconded the motion. 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 White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Henck.

Councilman Warr made the motion to enter into an agreement with Mt. Rogers to provide the interim City Manager services. 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.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to adjourn at 9:08 p.m. 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.

ADJOURNMENT at 9:08 p.m.


Mayor


Clerk