

Galax City Council
Minutes
April 10, 2023

Galax City Council convened in regular session in the City Council Chamber area on April 10, 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 Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.

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

SPECIAL ACTION

- Mayor Greene presented Sylvia Donithan, Galax Police Dept. & E911 Dispatcher, a retirement plaque and watch for her years of service to the City from May 26, 1989 - May 1, 2023 – 33 years, 11 months.
- Mayor Greene read aloud a proclamation recognizing the 25th Year Anniversary of Twin County E911, and National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week.

Councilman Henck made the motion to approve the proclamation. 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.

- Vice Mayor White read aloud a proclamation recognizing the Galax High School Winter Guard for their awards in the Connecting Individuals through Performance Arts (CIPA) competition at the Star City Winter Showcase, in Roanoke Virginia.

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

- Mayor Greene informed Council of a resolution recognizing TCRH for 50 years of operations and service in Galax, Carroll and Grayson.

Vice Mayor White made the motion to approve the resolution. 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.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Regular Meeting of March 13, 2023

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve. 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.

Called Meeting of March 30, 2023

Councilman Warr made the motion to approve. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion, and it was 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

Public Hearing, School Board Candidates

Mayor Greene announced this was the date and time advertised for the public hearing regarding possible school board candidates. Mayor Greene opened the public hearing for comments. Council received three (3) letters of interest for the Galax School Board appointment. They included Larry Spangler (currently on school board), Mr. Fred Mitchell, and Mr. Chauncey Robinson. Mayor Greene opened the floor for public comments. All three candidates spoke address Council briefly. Mayor Greene closed the public hearing after no further public comments were made. Council will conduct this public hearing, and set a future date for interviews of prospective candidates.

There was a consensus to interview the three candidates at the next Council meeting on May 8, beginning at 4:00 p.m. in closed session.

Public Hearing, Galax City Schools FY2024 Budget

Mayor Greene announced this was the date and time advertised for the public hearing concerning the FY2024 budget for the Galax City Schools. Mayor Greene opened the floor for public comments. Ms. Susan Tilley, Galax School Superintendent was present and addressed Council. She discussed competitive wages for the staff, a three-year pre-school program, and a school-based health clinic. Ms. Tilley said the requested funding remained the same as the previous three years. The funding request from the City was \$4,062,714, level funding with the current fiscal year. The overall school budget was projected at \$20,753,185, a decrease of \$1,453,813 from the prior fiscal year. Ms. Tilley thanked City Council for all their support. With no further public comments made, Mayor Greene closed the public hearing. The scheduled meeting for the approval of the school budget was originally set for April 24, a called meeting. Ms. Tilley stated that it would be fine to wait and approve at the May 8 regular Council meeting. There was a consensus from Council to do so.

WCC Presentation, Dr. Sprinkle

Dr. Sprinkle was present and gave an overview of current WCC offerings, and presented the budget request for FY2024.

Appalachian Natural Gas, Dio Herrera, VP of Operations

Mr. Herrera contacted Keith Barker and made a request to seek support of City Council as ANG continues to develop plans for NG in Galax. Keith Barker explained the company was seeking to update to their franchise agreement for our area. ANG has been surveying the community at this time to identify possible routes, larger propane customers, etc. Mr. Barker provided a resolution of support approved by our attorney as supporting documentation to update their franchise agreement.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the resolution of support. Vice Mayor White seconded the motion. Councilman Henck suggested someone from the company attend the next City Council Public Services Committee meeting on May 8 at 4:00 p.m. to discuss their plans further. There was a consensus for Mr. Barker to comply with Councilman Henck’s request. The resolution of support 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.

P.U.S.H. Ministries Request

Ms. Jill Burcham of P.U.S.H. Ministries made a request to City Council at the March 3, 2023 meeting for support of a prisoner re-entry program which is being developed. A request letter and other support documentation was given to Council for a request of \$2000. The funding would provide services which would include – housing, transportation, evaluations for substance abuse issues, GED assistance, legal assistance, etc.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the funding request. Councilman Haynes 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.

Opioid Resolution

Keith Barker inform Council of a request to approve an Opioid Resolution. He further explained the Board of Directors (“Board”) of the Opioid Abatement Authority (“OAA”) was statutorily required to allocate a specific portion of the Opioid Abatement Fund (“Fund”) to each participating city and county (see Virginia Code § 2.2-2374(D)(2)). He said for purposes of this policy, this allocation would be referred to as the “OAA Distribution.” He said in order to receive the additional funds, the City of Galax must submit an application to OAA by the May 5, 2023 deadline. Mr. Barker further explained to encourage participating cities and counties to use all of their Direct Distribution funds fully for remediation and abatement, and to encourage participating cities and counties to report the use of their Direct Distribution funds to the OAA for the purpose of ensuring statewide adherence to the various settlement agreements, the Board hereby offers a voluntary financial incentive to each participating city and county. For each fiscal year that a participating city or county agreed to use and report their Direct Distribution funds according to the same standards they were required to use and report their OAA Distribution funds (i.e., the Gold Standard), the Board would agree to increase that city or county’s OAA Distribution by 25% above the base amount for that same fiscal year.

Vice Mayor White 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, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.

Chestnut Creek Study, US Army Corps of Engineers

Keith Barker gave an extensive update on the review of the National Flood Insurance Program and how adoption may impact business, industries, and residences along Chestnut Creek. Mr. Barker had contacted the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) staff in Huntington, WV, and asked if there was assistance regarding a re-evaluation of Chestnut Creek channel, the carrying capacity during flood stage events, and a possible upstream retention area if warranted. The USACE staff indicated their willingness to assist. A letter of interest must be submitted by June, with an award announced in August, and a study could begin in October.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the letter of interest submission to move forward. Councilwoman Ritchie 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.

Project Light - Deed Restriction

Keith Barker informed Council as part of the requirements for the IRF Grant on Project Light, 406 W. Oldtown St., was that a deed restriction must be approved for the property. The deed restriction mandates that the property must be operated in the manner that was approved in relation to the grant, for a period of no less than 10 years, generally cannot be sold, and no changes made in operational use without notification and approval by DHCD. Mr. Barker explained the grant was to the City, the property was

owned by the IDA, and Gods Storehouse would operate the programs; our attorney felt all three (3) parties must approve and sign the document.

Vice Mayor White made the motion to approve the deed restriction document required by DHCD for the property at 406 W. Oldtown Street. 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.

FY2024 Budget & Public Hearings

Keith Barker gave an overview of the FY2024 Budget. The Audit and Finance Committee met on 4/5/23 to review the draft FY2024 Galax City Budget. The work session went well and the committee made a motion to recommend proceeding with the draft budget, with one change to include funding for the Galax DSS Phase I Renovations. Mr. Barker said there were no proposed tax increases as part of the budget. There was a one-year reduction on vehicle licensing fees, and an increase in water/sewer rates. The budget recommendation was to consider amendments to the City Code Section 153-36 concerning the water/sewer rates and an amendment to the City Code Section 148-84 concerning the vehicle licensing fee. The reduction in the vehicle licensing fee would be a one-year relief of this vehicle license fee so it would be on the same yearly billing cycle as the personal property tax. Mr. Barker further explained the committee did not feel their second work session on 5/1/23 was needed and were ready to proceed with a recommendation to Council for consideration of the budget and that Council could proceed to advertising for the public hearings on the budget and ordinance revisions.

Councilman Larrowe, Chair of the Audit & Finance Committee, addressed Council regarding the 4/5/23 meeting. He said the committee went through a rigorous review of the budget. A summary was prepared departmentally which identified items that had changed modestly. He was pleased that the budget memo and explanations prepared by Keith Barker and staff, mirrored up exactly with the items on the budget that the committee had recognized as having significant changes. He said the revenue was reviewed as projected in the budget. He felt it was attainable and reasonable. A 6% change in compensation across the board was included in the budget. No good comparable salary information was available in the area. He said the City’s step program was being reviewed. He briefly went over departmental zero-based budgeting which was used to challenge department heads to think of how and why they’re spending money. Councilman Larrowe said there was no additional spending of the fund balance. Keith Barker confirmed by saying that everything that was in the fund balance transfer were items that were currently budgeted in this fiscal year. They were carried over projects that needed to be completed, with the exception of \$200,000 which was added for the DSS renovations. Councilman Larrowe added that the A&F Committee determined that additional work sessions and meetings were not needed due to a much better and earlier budget this year. Councilman Larrowe said the Committee was also prepared to recommend that Council set May 8 as the date for the public hearings concerning the Galax FY2024 Budget, the amendments to the City Code Section 148-84 regarding the vehicle licensing fee, and an amendment to the water/sewer rates.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to set May 8, 2023 as the date for the public hearing concerning the Galax City FY2024 Budget. 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.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to set May 8, 2023 as the date for the public hearing concerning amendments to City Code Section 148-84 concerning the vehicle licensing fee. 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.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to set May 8, 2023 as the public hearing concerning amendment to the water/sewer rates. 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.

NEW BUSINESS

Regional Day Care Regional Study, United Way of Southwest Virginia

Dr. Susan Patrick gave an in-depth presentation – which was recently given to BRCEDA, concerning a possible regional day care study and implementation plan. The study concerned the lack of available day care spaces in the region. Dr. Patrick discussed the tie to day care availability, and individuals needing that service so they can enter the workforce, it then becomes a direct tie to a need from our businesses and industries. The project as proposed would be regional in nature, with a goal of increasing day care slots through helping to create new home day cares and possible larger day care businesses. She explained the cost to begin the process was estimated at \$300,000 for 2 years, split among the partnering localities. She said this would provide a staff person, and assistance for licensing of new day cars, in addition to other incentives. The presentation by Dr. Patrick was planned for Carroll Co. at a later date, and she said Grayson had established a task force concerning the need for day care services. There was a general discussion by Councilman Larrowe and Councilman Henck which concluded that transportation and child care were major issues in our area.

Councilman Haynes made the motion to refer back to BRCEDA for review and additional work. Councilwoman Ritchie 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.

Chestnut Creek School of the Arts Presentation - Chris Pollins, Director

Chris Pollins, Director of Chestnut Creek School of the Arts was present and gave an update on CCSA activities to Council.

Galax DSS Request, Foster Care Resource Home Funding

Keith Barker informed Council of a request from Galax DSS for foster care resource home funds that could be used to supplement special activities for our foster care families. The activities were not ones that could be funded with state funding, and must be local only. Mr. Barker said the funds were typically used for special activities, sports equipment, additional clothing beyond the foster care allowable allocation, and an appreciation event for foster parents and foster children. The total request was \$4500 from Grayson County and \$4500 from Galax for \$9000 total. There was a discussion regarding the “Care Portal” and issues with participation.

Vice Mayor White made the motion to approve the request for \$4500. Councilwoman Ritchie 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.

Virginia Stormwater Management Plan for Wildwood

Keith Barker informed Council of a request regarding a Virginia Stormwater Management Plan for the Wildwood Project. The agreement would allow Galax to perform stormwater plan reviews, inspections, and management for the Wildwood site. State law changed last year that would allow a partner locality (Galax) in a regional industrial facilitation authority (RIFA) to perform stormwater management services for another partner jurisdiction (Carroll) if the second partner does not have a state stormwater program and both are partners in a property. Carroll does not have a stormwater program and Galax and Carroll are both partners in Wildwood. Mr. Barker explained if the agreement wasn't approved, plans for Wildwood must be reviewed by DEQ in Richmond and the wait times were up to 6 months. The agreement submitted was prepared by our attorney and was being considered by Carroll County also. Permit fees would be collected by Galax for our efforts, but he said no other funding was called out to be provided.

Mr. Barker added that our qualified staff had agreed to perform this work, and plans were in our office for review.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to adopt the agreement as presented and modified by DEQ. 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.

Cranberry Road Condo Project, Boundary Adjustment

Keith Barker informed Council of a request from Rick Vaughn concerning development along Cranberry Road. Mr. Barker explained that Mr. Vaughn is the owner of property directly across from Walmart and property on Cranberry Road. He said while we had been working on the zoning and utility information, part of his request was that the City consider an annexation of the portion of the project that was in Carroll County. Mr. Barker said this would address utility services, plan review, zoning, etc. He said that the City was unable to annex properties but could work on boundary adjustments between the City and adjoining counties. Mayor Greene and Mr. Barker spoke with the Carroll County Administrator and Board Chairman in February when this issue was brought to our attention, and they had tentatively agreed to support the boundary adjustment at this time; however, we may have to consider some revenue sharing depending on the project scope. Mr. Barker said with Council’s permission, we would continue discussions with Carroll and our attorney to develop the required submittals to the state for consideration and approval. He said it may worthwhile to also consider a boundary adjustment with Grayson County on the Galax West Site (Hampton Property) at the same time. This site was originally conceived as fully being in Galax for taxation, zoning, and utility consistency.

Councilman Henck made the motion to authorize staff and the City Attorney to continue conversations with Carroll County and Grayson County concerning a boundary adjustment for the projects as presented. 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.

Commercial Blight Abatement Project, DHCD Grant

Keith Barker informed Council of the agreement with DHCD for a blight abatement study funded through an Industrial Revitalization Fund Grant. He explained the intent of the project would be to do a drive through tour of Galax, specifically downtown or major corridors, and select a possible project for future funding. He said due to the quick completion date required by the grant (July 31, 2023) we contacted MRPDC and they were willing to perform the grant work for us. Mr. Barker said once the study was complete, it would give the City an opportunity to identify a possible IRF future grant project. He said the grant was for \$23,300 and required no local match.

Vice Mayor White made the motion to approve the grant and amend the budget to accept the funds. Councilwoman Ritchie 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.

Board Appointments

Keith Barker informed Council of several board appointments coming up for Council consideration. These included: Planning Commission (3), Board of Zoning Appeals (2), Recreation Advisory Board (2, 1 not eligible for reappointment), Library Board (1, not eligible for reappointment). Mr. Barker asked for permission to work with existing appointees to gauge their interest in reappointment in May or June and would begin any advertisements for those open seats or others Council may wish to recruit or advertise for. The consensus was to hold until the May meeting before advertising.

Auditing Firm, Renewal Contract

Keith Barker informed Council the City's current auditing agreement with Robinson Farmer Cox (RFC) needed to be renewed. He said the current agreement permitted a 2-year extension. The Audit and Finance Committee considered this issue at their April 5, 2023 meeting and recommend renewal of the RFC agreement for the additional 2-year term.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the Audit and Finance Committee's recommendation to renew the RFC agreement to perform the City audit for an additional 2-year term. Councilwoman Ritchie 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.

MRPDC Assistance, City Manager Search

Keith Barker discussed a MOU from MRPDC to assist City Council in the search for a new city manager. He said the agreement with MRPDC met procurement and terms could be modified.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the MOU from MRPDC for the City Manager search. 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.

Gavin Blevins, Interim City Manager Appointment

Keith Barker finished the meeting by an introduction of Gavin Blevins, the MRPDC staff member who would be serving as the Interim City Manager. Mr. Barker informed Council of the need to appoint Mr. Blevins the MRPDC Representative as the Interim City Manager and approve his appointments to respective boards that the City Manager would serve on.

Councilwoman Ritchie made the motion to appoint Gavin Blevins, MRPDC representative, as the Interim City Manager and appoint him to the boards the City Manager represented the City on. 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.

Councilman Henck discussed a request from Tammy Smith, DSS Director, to be appointed to the DSS Board in addition to Gavin Blevins. Councilman Henck was willing to be added to the DSS Board. Councilman Henck made the motion to approve the appointment. 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.

CITIZEN COMMENTS (Limited to 3 minutes per speaker or 5 minutes per group)

- Fayma Nye – Issues with open burning.
- David Brenner – Discussed commercial blight, coming into Galax from south end. Offered suggestions to make Galax thrive.

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

Councilman Larrowe moving forward on boundary adjustments, good on day care study, SWVA housing summit on 4/26 in Wytheville showcasing Galax properties, TCRH resolution in total acknowledging the 50-year anniversary.

Councilman Haynes asked about paving on Fries Road. Update on tourism, & housing symposium, maybe a discussion about housing on the Hampton property. GGEMS staffing doing better.

Vice Mayor White attending a Chamber ribbon cutting tomorrow. Representing Galax on a twin county leadership panel next week.

Councilwoman Ritchie told Mr. Bremmer that maybe grant blight abatement may help. Discussed the packet that Patti from Tourism included with the new logo, advertising, and rebranding.

Councilman Henck discussed a request for historic district expansion. Seen a real effort by the City in the last year to increase maintenance and beautify things. Excited about tourism season. Mentioned Fries Road paving – with Kipling Lane Project Fries Road needs to be addressed. Bowling alley back open.

Councilman Warr had questions about blight abatement. Tourism meeting, likes the new logo and information coming out in print. Fiddlers Fest may be a new item. Asking about some repairs on potholes on Main Street before festivals. Encouraged Mr. Bremmer not to let up. Virginia Main Street coming along. Need people involved to make things happen with Tourism.

Mayor Greene – Tourism meeting tomorrow at 3:00. Talked about blight, and street issues. He welcomed Gavin.

CLOSED SESSION

At 9:20 p.m. Vice Mayor White made the motion to enter into closed session under the following Code of Virginia categories:

- **Economic Development § 2.2-3711 A.5 of the Code of Virginia** - Discussion concerning a prospective business or industry or the expansion of an existing business or industry where no previous announcement has been made of the business' or industry's interest in locating or expanding its facilities in the community.

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

At 9:35 p.m. Council convened 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 White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Larowe, and Councilman Henck.

At 9:35 p.m. Councilman Warr made the motion to adjourn. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.

ADJOURNMENT at 9:35 p.m.


Mayor


Clerk