

**Galax City Council**  
**Minutes**  
**May 8, 2023**

Galax City Council convened in regular session in City Council Chambers on May 8, 2023, at 4:00 p.m.

At 4:02 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, and Councilman Warr.

Mayor Greene accepted a motion made by Councilman Larrowe at 4:05 p.m. to enter into closed session under the following Code of Virginia:

- **School Board Appointments - 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.

Councilwoman White seconded the motion and it was approved by the following votes: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Councilman Haynes joined the closed meeting at 4:20 p.m.

At 6:05 p.m., Council reconvened 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 votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr. Mayor Greene stated that Councilman Henck was not present in the meeting.

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

### **SPECIAL ACTION**

#### **William Bottomley Recognition**

William Bottomley of High-Country Lights, was surprised by Tony Quesenberry, with a sign honoring him installed at Felts Park recognizing him for his dedicated efforts concerning the High-Country Lights show he sets up each year. Mr. Quesenberry also informed Mr. Bottomley that a scholarship honoring his dedication to High Country Lights was awarded to one child chosen by the Galax DSS for the Summer Activity Program at the Galax. Mr. Bottomley thanked everyone and added that he was speechless.

#### **Melba Knox Recognition**

Mayor Greene recognized Ms. Melba Knox, a long serving member of the Electoral Board, and an Officer of Election for over 22 years. Mayor Greene presented Ms. Knox with a plaque of appreciation. She thanked everyone and encouraged citizens to take part as an Electoral Board member or an Officer of Election.

#### **Introduction of Build Official**

Gavin Blevins, Interim City Manager, introduced Mr. Thomas Hager who was hired as the City Building Official. Mr. Hager has also taken on responsibility as the Interim Engineering Department Head following the retirement of the City Engineer. Council welcomed Mr. Hager to the City.



<b>Inside City Rates</b>	<b>Current</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
Water & Sewer Base Rate (6000-gallon min.)	\$34.00	\$39.00
Over 6000 gallons	\$ 4.75	\$ 5.50

  

<b>Outside City Rates</b>	<b>Current</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
Water & Sewer Base Rate (6000-gallon min.)	\$68.00	\$78.00
Over 6000 gallons	\$ 9.50	\$11.00

Mr. Blevins further explained the proposed increase in rates was a reflection of increases in operating costs and the required debt covenant you must maintain on the WWTP debt service. He added since this was an ordinance change, it would go into effect on July 1, 2023 if approved. Mayor Greene opened the floor for public comments. With none being made, the public hearing was closed.

***Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the amendments to City Code Section 153-36 as presented. 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.***

**Public Hearing, Zoning Requests**

Mayor Greene announced this was the date previously set for the public hearing of proposed zoning requests. He declared the meeting open, and Gavin Blevins gave the background and specifics of the proposed zoning changes which included the following information:

- Michael J. Cacoso – 122 Armory Rd; request rezoning from R-1 Low Density Single Family to R-2 Medium Family Residential
- Nick R. Avila – 500 Glendale Rd, parcel 36-37; request rezoning from B-2 General Business to B-4 Central Business

Mr. Blevins informed Council that unfortunately, the planning commission was unable to meet quorum requirements, and their public hearings on the above rezoning requests were cancelled. He said City Council cannot act on the rezoning requests without the Planning Commission holding a public hearing on each application prior to City Council action. Mayor Greene opened the floor for public comments. With none being made, the public hearing was closed.

***Councilwoman Ritchie made the motion to set a special meeting date to include a new joint public hearing to include both City Council and the Planning Commission on Thursday, May 25<sup>th</sup>. 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.***

**School Board Appointments**

Mayor Greene announced that Council had received three letters of interest for the single Galax School Board appointment. The applicants included - Larry Spangler (currently on school board), Mr. Fred Mitchell, and Mr. Chauncey Robinson. A required public hearing was held at an earlier meeting and Council interviewed the applicants in closed session earlier in the evening prior to the meeting. Mayor Greene asked each Council member to vote for one applicant when their name was called.

- Larry Spangler - Four votes from Councilman Haynes, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, and Councilman Warr.
- Fred Mitchell - One vote from Councilman Larrowe.
- Chauncey Robinson - One vote from Mayor Greene.

***Councilman Henck abstained from voting due to a conflict of interest pursuant to Virginia Code Section 2.2-3112.***

After confirming the majority vote with Dana Woodel, Deputy Clerk, Mayor Greene announced Mr. Larry Spangler would be re-appointed to the Galax School Board. His term would now expire June 30, 2026. Mr. Spangler thanked everyone for their votes and support.

### **Galax City Schools FY2024 Budget**

Mayor Greene welcomed Ms. Susan Tilley, Galax School Superintendent. The City Council held the public hearing as advertised at the April 10<sup>th</sup> City Council meeting. Discussed at the last meeting, the funding request to be provided from the City was \$4,062,714, level funding with the current fiscal year (FY23). The overall school budget was projected at \$20,753,185. Ms. Tilley gave a presentation regarding the FY2024 Schools Budget at the last meeting. She offered to answer any questions from Council. Councilman Larrowe asked if there had been any changes in the request to the City since the public hearing. Ms. Tilley said that Richmond had approved the “skinny” budget which provided for a 5% raise for staff, not the 7% which was approved by the School Board and Council. The 5 % is guaranteed and she said they expected that to change later, then the 7% raise would be reflected.

***Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the Galax City School FY24 budget as presented. Vice Mayor White seconded the motion. Councilman Henck interjected that he was abstaining from the vote due to a personal conflict pursuant to VA Code Section 2.2-3112. It was approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.***

### **P.U.S.H. Ministries Request**

Gavin Blevins reminded Council of the request that Ms. Jill Burcham of P.U.S.H. Ministries had made at the March 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting. Ms. Burcham had made a request of City Council for support of a prisoner re-entry program. The services she was proposing include – housing, transportation, evaluations for substance abuse issues, GED assistance, legal assistance, etc. At the April 10<sup>th</sup> meeting, Council approved the request to fund P.U.S.H. Ministries in the amount of \$2,000. Following the April 10<sup>th</sup> meeting, the W-9 that Ms. Burcham provided had both her SSN and an EIN. She also provided a document where she established the EIN with the IRS. The EIN was assigned to Jill Burcham per this document – not to P.U.S.H. Ministries. This had caused a conflict due to the City only being able to donate to "institutions or associations" that provide charitable services to residents. Mr. Blevins also was advised by the city’s legal counsel that what had been provided was not enough to qualify as an institution or organization within the meaning of the Code.

***Councilman Larrowe made the motion to suspend payment pending the resolution of the issue of corporate existence. 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.***

### **Virginia Stormwater Management Plan (Agreement) for Wildwood**

Gavin Blevins informed Council of a request to approve an agreement that would allow Galax to perform stormwater plan reviews, inspections, and management for the Wildwood site. State law changed last year that allowed 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 did not have a state stormwater program, and both were partners in a property. Mr. Blevins said that Carroll did not have a stormwater program and Galax & Carroll were both partners in Wildwood. If we did not approve the agreement, plans for Wildwood must be reviewed by DEQ in Richmond, and we understood the wait times were up to 6 months. The agreement presented was prepared by our attorney and was being considered by Carroll County also.

*Councilman Henck made the motion to approve the agreement as presented. 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.*

### **Various Board Appointments**

Mayor Greene announced the following board and/or committee appointments:

- Planning Commission: Three seats
- Board of Zoning Appeals: Two seats
- Recreation and Advisory Committee: Two seats
- Library Board: One seat

*Councilman Henck made the motion to table the appointment until the June 12 meeting. 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 Henck made the motion to authorize the City Manager to advertise the appointments in the newspaper, our website, and social media. 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.*

### **District III Gov. Cooperative**

Mayor Greene stated that District III Gov. Cooperative Council representatives that served annual terms needed to be reappointed. They were currently filled by Mike Larrowe with Sharon Ritchie as alternate.

*Councilman Henck made the motion to re-appoint Councilman Larrowe as the Council representative, and Councilwoman Ritchie as the alternate. 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.*

### **Smoke on The Mountain**

Gavin Blevins reminded Council that at the January 2023 meeting, a list of events and street closures for the 2023 calendar were approved. He explained the Chamber of Commerce was now requesting that City Council amend the street closure to include an additional area from Old Town Street to Calhoun on Main Street.

*Councilman Warr made the motion to approve the additional street closure on Main Street as requested. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion.* Mayor Greene asked if there were any comments. Councilman Warr explained that Smoke on the Mountain had outgrown the area provided. He discussed a business on Main Street within the closed area that was not agreeable with the closure. He said that an alternate entrance and exit was being worked on to make the closure work for them. After further discussion regarding the closing, *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**

### **Certified Crime Prevention Community Program**

Gavin Blevins informed Council of a request from DCJS to approve a Resolution of Participation and a Statement of Intent to Participate as a Certified Crime Prevention Community. This would be the City's fifth re-certification; each re-certification is for a period of three (3) years. Mr. Blevins explained the program encouraged localities to develop and implement collaborative community safety plans within a flexible framework designed by the Commission. Furthermore, it would provide an ongoing process by which communities could reassess and update their plans to address emerging community safety issues. To obtain certification, a locality must meet 12 core community safety elements/strategies augmented by a minimum of seven approved optional elements.

*Councilman Henck made the motion to approve the resolution and statement of intent 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.*

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

- Melissa Peddy addressed Council thanking them for appointing Larry Spangler to the School Board. Ms. Peddy reminded everyone that she was still collecting petition signatures for an elected school board - taking the burden off City Council, and putting it back into the hands of our citizens to vote on the school board members.
- Sarah Neilson spoke regarding the re-zoning that was mentioned earlier in the meeting. She said that she had some concerns and wanted to get more information.

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

#### **City Manager Report**

Gavin Blevins provided an in-depth report to Council concerning all the activities he had been involved in since he began working in Galax. He offered to answer any questions that Council may have had. Vice Mayor White thanked him for serving and said that City Council was glad to have him.

#### **Councilman Larrowe**

- TCRH – National Nurses Week, May 6-12
- ChatGPT - AI Program, Useful in Tourism
- Grant Availability – Main Street Program
- Proposal Feasibility Study relating to a possible Convention Center located at the Vaughan Project Property
- Elderly & Disabled Tax Relief Discussed – Consensus to direct City Manager to make sure the ordinance was followed through and codified.

#### **Vice Mayor White**

- Twin County Regional Hospital – 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration
- Galax Farmer's Market opening this week

### Councilman Henck

- Thanked the City Public Works Dept. and Maintenance Dept. for making the City look great -
  - Paving in the City
  - Farmer's Market
  - Curb & Sidewalk across from Municipal Building
- Idea to incorporate our new brand "Mountain Made" – partnership in marketing with our larger & smaller businesses
- Public Services Committee Meeting
  - Water Plant update
  - CHA - pending reports
  - Sidewalk project improvements - future plans pending
  - Appalachian Natural Gas – representatives attended
  - Emergency Preparedness Plan – Due Dec. 2023

### Councilman Warr

- Thanked Public Works for the repair work done on 100 block of Main Street
- Downtown clean up scheduled

### Councilwoman Ritchie

- Travel writer coming to Galax

### Mayor Greene

- Requested that Committee Reports be added to the Council agenda/packets
- Thanked Public Works – Visited while working on streets Downtown
- Mayor's Meeting - Attended in Abingdon
- City Manager search discussion

***Vice Mayor White made the motion to adjourn at 7:15 p.m. 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 7:15 p.m.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Mayor

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Clerk

