

Galax City Council
Minutes
July 10, 2023

Galax City Council convened in regular session in City Council Chambers on July 10, 2023, at 6:00 p.m.

At 6:04 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 Haynes, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Henck. Councilman Warr was absent.

Vice Mayor White gave the opening prayer and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

SPECIAL ACTION

- Galax Maroon Tide Swim Team proclamations presented by Mayor Greene & Vice Mayor White for VHSL All State Combined Swim Championship.
- Department of Criminal Justice Services representative, Todd Clingenpeel presented Chief Cooper with a plaque for the Galax Police Department qualifying as a Certified Crime Prevention Community.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

➤ Regular Meeting 6-12-23

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the meeting minutes of June 12, 2023. Councilman Haynes seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Henck.

NEW BUSINESS

Public Hearing; Galax Building and Tradesman Certification Fee Schedule Ordinance Amendment

Mayor Greene opened the public hearing. Gavin Blevins, Acting City Manager, gave an informative overview regarding the request. The proposed ordinance amendment would increase the city’s building & tradesman certification fees to a rate more similar to surrounding jurisdictions. The proposed “permitting fee” which would include all first inspections, and is expected to generate revenue included in the FY24 budget. The increase would help alleviate the cost for implementing new online permitting software. Tom Hager, Galax Building Official gave an example of one of the proposed rate changes which was for commercial building permit fees. The rate of .08 per sq. ft. has been unchanged since 2002. The proposed rate would increase to .35 per sq. ft. The other rates have to be calculated based on the project size, but Mr. Hager informed Council that all the rates needed to be brought up to current market values. Mr. Hager discussed the proposed new fee schedule with Council, which will be posted on the City’s website. After Council’s discussion, Mayor Greene called for public comments. With no comments made, Mayor Greene closed the public hearing.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to adopt the Code as revised. Councilman Haynes seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Henck.

Galax Fire Department, Length of Service Awards Plan (LOSAP)

Gavin Blevins informed Council of a request from Galax Fire Department to approve a type of “retirement plan” in conjunction with the City. The Fire Department established the LOSAP plan in 1990. Councilman Larrowe, the LOSAP consultant, gave an in-depth overview of the awards plan. The LOSAP is designed

DW/ML 8-14-23

changes 8/14/23
made

specifically for volunteer groups or organizations. The plan helps to effectively retain and keep volunteers' long term such as the ones at the Galax Fire Department. The City contributes a certain dollar amount annually into a trust. ~~Based on the~~ ^{V - DW/ML} Volunteerism of the GFD members, ^{OX DW/ML} determines how much is allocated to each member. Issues with the Plan became apparent in early 2021. The common goal was to find a resolution. Councilman Larrowe further discussed the issues, and named the financial ^{DW/ML} consulting firms that were consulted. ~~The consulted sponsor's duties with respect to the selection, would include monitoring, and retention of investment options available under the Plan.~~ ^{DW/ML} The revisions to the Plan, becoming effective July 1, 2023, were reviewed by the GVFD Retirement Committee (the Plan's Administrator), ^{and} ~~currently is~~ ^{are} pending approval by the full Department. Council discussed the LOSAP until all of their questions were answered. Pursuant to the provisions of the Plan, City Council was asked approve the Plan; prior to the Department. Fire Chief, Mike Ayers, thanked Councilman Larrowe, for his many years of dedicated service working with the GVFD Retirement Committee, to develop the LOSAP. He also thanked Council for making the Plan possible. ^{Necessary Revisions to the C - DW/ML}

Councilman Henck made the motion to approve the LOSAP. Vice Mayor White seconded, and the motion was approved by the following votes of "yea": Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Henck. Mayor Greene, and Councilman Haynes abstained from the vote due to a conflict of interest.

Eastview Housing Project; Nondiscrimination Policy

A request was made for Council to adopt the Nondiscrimination Policy which was required for the Eastview Housing Project - Phase II, DHCD contract # 21-21-16. Gavin Blevins explained this was one of the last activities required for DHCD to issue the City a contract for the grant funds.

Vice Mayor White made the motion to adopt the Nondiscrimination Policy as presented. Councilman Henck seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Henck.

Eastview Housing Project; Residential Anti-displacement and Relocation Plan

A request was made for Council by the Department of Housing and Community Development, to adopt a required residential anti-displacement & relocation plan to govern the use of grant funds **provided under the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, as amended.**

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to adopt the plan as presented. Councilman Henck seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Henck.

Eastview Housing Project; Section 3 Business Plan

As required by the grant agency, Council was requested to adopt a plan to commit that the City of Galax, its contractors, and designated third parties shall use Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to utilize businesses and low-income residents of the Section 3 City in carrying out all activities, to the greatest extent feasible. This was one of the last activities required for DHCD to issue the City a contract for the grant funds.

Vice Mayor White made the motion to adopt the plan as presented. Councilman Haynes seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Henck.

Eastview Housing Project; MRPDC Administration Contract

Gavin Blevins informed Council following funding allocation cuts to the FY24 budget and due to the City no longer having a housing rehab. specialist, the City partnered with the Mount Rogers PDC to act as the official housing rehab. specialist for the project while simultaneously training Tom Hager, the Building

Official, so that the City could perform the rehab. specialist work in-house in the future. Funds for this project would come directly from the grant award.

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the contract as presented. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Henck.

Advertisement of Delinquent Real Estate Tax List

Gavin Blevins informed Council of a request to approve the annual publication of the delinquent real estate tax list as of June 30, 2023.

Vice Mayor White made the motion to approve the publication of the delinquent real estate tax list. Councilman Larrowe seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Henck.

Appropriation of FY2024 Galax City Budget

City Council was asked to appropriate the FY2024 budget that was approved at the June 12 meeting. The approved budget included:

- General Fund Budget - \$28,988,716
- Utility Fund Budget - \$6,681,880
- Stormwater Fund - \$497,900

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to appropriate the FY2024 City Budget as presented. Councilman Haynes seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Henck.

Appropriation of FY2024 Galax City Schools Budget

City Council was asked to appropriate the FY2024 City Schools budget that was approved at the May 8 meeting. The approved budget included:

- General Operating Fund - \$20,753,185
- Cafeteria Fund - \$956,536
- Textbook Fund- \$170,108

Councilman Larrowe made the motion to appropriate the FY2024 City School Budget as presented. Vice Mayor White seconded, and the motion was approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, and Councilman Larrowe. Pursuant to the Virginia Code 2.2-3112, Councilman Henck abstained due to a personal interest conflict.

Street Closure Request – Rex Theater Event

Gavin Blevins informed Council of the plans for a big show at the Rex Theater on August 25th. Brian Sizer and Blue Ridge Backroads, along with the Tourism Committee want to hold a “pre-show celebration” in the municipal parking lot - in front of the theater, from 3pm-6pm on August 25th, for a band, food truck, and attendees. A request was made for Council to approve the closure of the portion of E Grayson St. in front of The Rex from 1:00 – 7:00 PM, detouring traffic around Rex Lane & Carroll St., pending no issues with emergency services.

Councilman Haynes made the motion to approve the street closure request. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded, and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Henck.

Project Light – DHCD Resolution

Gavin Blevins made Council aware of a DHCD requirement which requests the approval of Council to appoint the City Manager to issue the notice to award the contract as negotiated with the lowest responsive bidder. *Councilman Haynes made the motion to approve the request as presented. Vice Mayor White seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Henck.*

CITIZEN COMMENTS – None

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

City Manager - Gavin Blevins reminded Council that the City Manager report was submitted in their council meeting packet prior to the meeting, and explained that revised information or updates would be highlighted in a new color from the previous update. New items were listed in the back of the report. He offered to answer any questions from Council. He said he was still working on some items to bring back soon.

Councilman Larrowe – Briefly critiqued the city manager’s report and agenda. He offered ways to bring follow up items from previous meetings forward to the old business category on new agendas. Example items from the June meeting included:

- Project to revise the Parks & Rec. Committee Charter, pickle ball courts, and ATM status
- City Manager Hiring Committee update
- Evaluation of the employee health insurance and affordability thereof
- Golf cart potential route changes
- Status of convention center study
- Suggested evaluation of organizational documents, roles and responsibilities with the IDA – ties in with training offered July 24 part of the strategic planning for IDA in Galax, Carroll, & Grayson, along with BRCEDA.
- Meeting with Mount Rogers Regional Partnership Director regarding evaluation of resources to area businesses and how to be more responsive to assist. Scheduling of a “Small Business Day” forum.
- AI – Relatively new useful tool – could be used for travel, or Excel applications to create data analysis.

Councilman Haynes – Recognized Sam Bartlett & Charles Cox for their efforts in cleaning up the property on the corner of S. Main and Pipers Gap Road, as well as other areas in the City. He also recognized the Galax City Employees for all of their hard work during difficult and changing times in the City. Councilman Haynes asked that thank you cards, signed by Council, be sent to those he recognized.

Vice Mayor White

- Informed everyone of a Micro-business Marketing Leverage Program – which is a reimbursement grant for small businesses related to tourism.
- Jeep Festival went well for a first-year event.
- Rodeo did very well with over 5000 in attendance.

Mayor Greene

- Discussed with Councilman Larrowe the possibility of holding a “Small Business Day” forum for local businesses. Councilman Larrowe planned to move forward with the idea.

Councilwoman Ritchie

- Discussed a Cardinal News article “Recompete Pilot Program” - which would invest \$200 million in the most persistently distressed communities across the country. She said it would need to be a large group effort with our local communities.

- New River Trail entrance on E. Stuart Drive being closed for bridge repairs. Discussed placing signs to give alternate locations to access the trail for visitors.

Councilman Henck

- Acknowledged the good news that Martin Warr was back home from his hospitalization. He wished him well and hoped to see him back at Council soon.
- Thanked Interim City Manager, Gavin Blevins, for continued week by week stability he's brought back to Galax.
- Mt. Rogers/Nichole Hair meeting to possibly include the Commerce Committee.
- DSS – Discussed renovation plans.
- Rosenwald Revamped – Making progress in partnership with the City.
- Public Services Committee to meet on July 18th.

CLOSED SESSION

Mayor Greene accepted a motion made by Councilman Larrowe at 7:50 p.m. to enter into closed session under the following Code of Virginia:

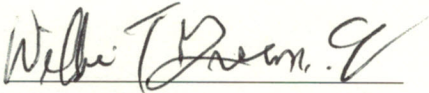
Personnel Matter – § 2.2-3711 A.1 of the Code of Virginia – OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER: Candidates for employment; the assignment, appointment, promotion, performance, demotion, discipline, salaries, compensation, or resignation of employees.

Councilwoman Ritchie seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Henck.

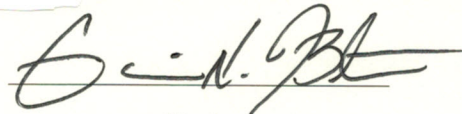
At 9:20 p.m. Council reconvened in open session. Mayor Greene certified that no items other than those allowed under the cited Virginia code section were discussed and no action was taken, with the following affirmation: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Henck.

ADJOURNMENT at 8:40 p.m.

Motion by Councilman Henck, Seconded by Council Woman White. All 6-0 voted 'yea'. DW/ML 8/14/23



Mayor



Clerk