

December
2023

Introduction

This Newsletter is to give you an overview of the activities and discussions of council, along with the status of various projects and initiatives that are underway with the city. The intent is to be as transparent as possible.

Vision

“Galax is a vibrant, diverse, friendly, citizen engaged community that pursues a culture of excellence.”

Mission Statement

“The city provides high quality public services to sustain an excellent community in which to live, work and play.”

A Minute with the Mayor



*Season's Greetings
from Mayor Greene*



As we approach the joyous holiday season, I am delighted to extend warm wishes to each and every one of you. It is with great pleasure that I, Mayor Greene, send heartfelt greetings for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. This festive time of year serves as a wonderful opportunity for reflection, gratitude, and togetherness. As we gather with our loved ones and reflect on the accomplishments and challenges of the past year, let us also embrace the spirit of unity that defines our community.

May this Christmas be filled with love, laughter, and cherished moments with family and friends. As we welcome the New Year, let us look forward to new opportunities, growth, and continued prosperity for our beloved Galax.

I am honored to serve as your Mayor, and I am grateful for the privilege of working alongside such a vibrant and resilient community. Your dedication to making Galax a better place is truly inspiring, and I look forward to the continued collaboration and progress we will achieve together in the coming year.

On behalf of the entire Galax Municipal team, I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. May the holiday season bring you joy, peace, and the warmth of community.

Best regards,

***Willie T. Greene, Sr.
Mayor of Galax***



Welcome to Our Newest Council Members



Kathy Burnett

I am married to Mark Burnett, and we have 3 children and 6 grandchildren. I am a Women's Health Registered Nurse and Mark is a retired sergeant with the Galax Police Dept., as well as a fireman with the Galax Volunteer Fire Dept. We are members of the First Baptist Church in Galax. We enjoy riding our E bikes, tooling around town in our golf cart, camping at the beach, and spending time with our kids and grandkids. We are honored to be a part of God's Storehouse Soup Kitchen and look forward to the current transformation of the Storehouse facility, happening right in our neighborhood. I believe I have joined council at a very exciting time in our city, as we undertake the Main Street program, prepare for the Vaughan furniture renovations, and work diligently to update our city water and sewer systems. I look forward to working with our current council members and city leaders to make Galax the best place to live, work, and play.



Hunter Bowers

I was born and raised in Galax VA. I graduated from Bluefield University in 2022 with a Bachelor's of Business Administration. I will be graduating from Western Governors University in December of 2023 with a Masters of Business Administration.

Fun facts: I have been playing golf since I was 18 months old. I have traveled all around the Blue Ridge Mountains playing golf. I will be transitioning to full time ministry in January of 2024.

Hunter was appointed to fill councilman Travis Haynes' seat. He will serve until the special elections in November 2024.

Kathy was elected in the general election held this past November. We look forward to working with them and having them on our team.

December City Council Meeting 12/11/2023

Here is a quick summary of our last Council meeting.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Council paid special recognition to Travis Haynes (7-1-18 to 11-8-23) and Mike Larrowe (1-28-19 to 12-31-23) for their service to the City of Galax as City Council Members. Each received a plaque for their contributions.

PUBLIC HEARING(S)

1. Public Hearing to Consider Amendments to the Stormwater Utility Fee Ordinance
POSTPONED TO 1/8/2024

OLD BUSINESS

2. Update from the Code Compliance Committee
On November 15, 2023, the Code Compliance Committee met for the

first time. In attendance were citizen representatives, two Council members, and various City Staff. The Committee discussed a wide variety of issues, complaints, and potential solutions regarding enforcement of the City's nuisance regulations. All parties were listened to and Code Enforcement Officer Joey Davis

ended the meeting with a detailed action plan to handle complaints as they come in as well as being proactive in a zone pattern throughout the City.

3. Update on Small Area Plan Progress and Request to Hold a Joint Public Hearing (Gavin Blevins)
The Planning Commission and Staff have been working through the

review process of the Creekside Small Area Plan and how it fits into and potentially alters the trajectory of the City.

The general feeling now is that the Creekside Small Area Plan is a catalyst for the City to implement various concepts of urban planning and traditional neighborhood design into the Comprehensive Plan, including at a minimum the provisions for an urban development area(s). These concepts support the Creekside Small Area Plan and lay a foundation for more inclusionary, form-based zoning practices which would allow the City to replicate – in essence – the proposed development on a much smaller scale throughout applicable sectors of the city.

The Planning Commission is exploring the vision and implications of various changes to our land use regulations carefully, given the time available, and are thinking about what these changes can do to create a more resilient city overall, considering how current and proposed initiatives may interplay with the goals of the City.

4. Discussion on Appointment to Fill the Council Vacancy of Travis Haynes.

Council appointed Mr. Hunter Bowers to fill Travis Haynes' seat on council

NEW BUSINESS

5. Discussion on Illegal Gaming Machines (Chief Cooper)

Police Chief Cooper reviewed with Council the evolving state stance on "electronic games of skill". In 2020, the Virginia General Assembly gave an exemption to these machines being unlawful to mitigate the business impacts of COVID-19 and the exemption was to sunset on June 30, 2021. These machines were primarily limited to gas stations and truck stops.

Machines were regulated by the Virginia Alcoholic Beverage Control Authority and each machine was taxed at \$1,200 per month. Every machine outside of this registration system became an illegal gambling machine per the Code on June 30, 2020 while those that were properly registered were allowed to operate under the legislatively-created one year exemption. The General Assembly did not act to allow any "Skill Game" to continue to operate as of July 1, 2021. Thus, every machine which had been operating under license with the ABC Board became an "illegal gambling device" on July 1, 2021. Since that time, the legality of these machines has been debated in the Courts.

On October 13, 2023 a ban on these games in Virginia

went back into effect after the state Supreme Court vacated the injunction that allowed thousands of the betting machines to remain in gas stations, bars, and convenience stores. Chief Cooper described to Council the Department's current efforts to eradicate these illegal gambling machines from the City.

6. Discussion on Potential Use of Blue Line Solutions (Chief Cooper)

Blue Line Solutions is a law enforcement owned and operated photo speed program with a vision and mission based solely on the reduction in speed, crashes and injuries in school and work zones. Blue Line Solutions has noted partnerships in seven states and with twelve localities in the Commonwealth of Virginia with over a 90% reduction rate. Council asked for more information.

7. Request to Adopt Updated Emergency Operations Plan (Captain Cox)

City Council approved the updated Emergency Operations Plan and adopted the National Incident Management System through Resolution.

8. Creation of and Appointments to the Local Building Board of Appeals
Council created the LBBCA and appointed the following members: GW Hill (contractor); Jamie

Keatley (Realtor/property manager); John Adams (contractor); Chris May (certified building official); Keith Barker (architect); and Yancy Powers (alternate).

CITIZEN COMMENTS

(Limited to 3 minutes per speaker) There were no new comments.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY MANAGER BURNETTE

- Felts Park Guardrail to be fixed by January 1st
- Congratulations to all involved with the Old Time Appalachian Christmas event
- Mount Rogers Health District Helpline for Spanish Speakers in the Community Activated
- New Elected Officials Training Available
- Congratulations to Galax PD for National Night Out - Awarded 4th place nationally for areas 5,000-15,000 population
- Final adoption of documents related to \$3 million grant/loan for Water Treatment Plant design
- January 8, 2024 Council Meeting
 - 2024-2025 City Budget Calendar Review
 - Organizational Meeting
- Writ of Special Election approved