

Galax City Council  
Minutes  
December 11, 2023

Galax City Council convened in regular session in City Council Chambers on December 11, 2023, at 4:00 p.m.

At 4:00 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, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.

#### **CLOSED SESSION**

*Mayor Greene accepted a motion made by Councilwoman Ritchie at 4:05 p.m. to enter into closed session under the following Codes of Virginia: Personnel Matter § 2.2-3711 A.1 Personnel discussion of appointments to City Boards, Commissions, etc. (Candidates to fill vacancy on Galax City Council.) Councilman Warr seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.*

At 6:10 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, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck.

#### **ACTION FROM CLOSED SESSION**

Mayor Greene informed those present that the reason for the closed session was to discuss the vacant Council seat, and to interview three candidates that included: Russell Austin, Chauncey Robinson, and Hunter Bowers. He thanked all of the candidates that applied. He stated that each one interviewed were very good candidates, and any one of them would do an excellent job. Mayor Greene called for votes for the candidates by Council. Russell Austin – 0 votes, Chauncey Robinson – 1 vote by Mayor Greene, and Hunter Bowers – 5 votes by Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr, and Councilman Henck. Mayor Greene announced that Hunter Bowers would be appointed to take the open seat that was vacated by Travis Haynes. Mayor Greene and Vice Mayor thanked the candidates and those who had submitted their letters of interest.

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

#### **SPECIAL RECOGNITION**

Mayor Greene presented a plaque recognizing Councilman Haynes and Councilman Larrowe for their dedicated service to the citizens of Galax.

#### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Regular Meeting of 11-13-23

*Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the regular meeting minutes of November 13, 2023. Councilman Warr seconded. Councilman Henck made Council aware of a correction. Councilman made an amended motion to incorporate the correction reflected. Councilman Warr seconded. The motion 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(S)**

Mayor Greene announced the Public Hearing to Consider Amendments to the Stormwater Utility Fee Ordinance would be postponed until the 1-8-24 Council meeting. Michael Burnette stated with the required legal requirements, some documents were not ready yet.

***Councilman Warr made the motion to move the public hearing to consider amendments to the Stormwater Utility Fee Ordinance to the 1-8-24 meeting. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded. The motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr and Councilman Henck.***

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### **Code Compliance Committee Update**

Councilman Larrowe gave an in-depth update from the Code Compliance Committee. He explained 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.

### **Update on Small Area Plan Progress and Request to Hold a Joint Public Hearing**

Gavin Blevins informed Council the Planning Commission and Staff had been working through the review process of the Creekside Small Area Plan and how it would fit into and potentially alter the trajectory of the City. He said the general feeling now was that the Creekside Small Area Plan was 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). Mr. Blevins explained the Planning Commission was exploring the vision and implications of various changes to our land use regulations carefully, given the time available, and were thinking about what these changes could do to create a more resilient city overall, considering how current and proposed initiatives may interplay with the goals of the City. He said the “town hall” held on 12/05/2023 received a dishearteningly low turn-out, but we did have a more in-depth discussion on the thoughts above, specifically, which was productive. He said the next public “forum” would be held specifically regarding the Creekside Small Area Plan and would be facilitated by Anne Darby of Summit Design. Mr. Blevins made a request of Council to approve the scheduling of a joint public hearing with the Planning Commission at the Council’s next regular meeting on January 8<sup>th</sup> to hear further public comment on the proposed Small Area Plan. ***Vice Mayor White made the motion to approve the request to schedule the aforementioned joint public hearing with the Planning Commission on January 8, 2024. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded. The motion 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**

### **Discussion on Illegal Gaming Machines**

Chief Cooper reviewed with Council the evolving state stance on “electronic games of skill”. He said the latest ban went back into effect on October 13, 2023 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 discussed the current efforts by GPD to eradicate these illegal gambling machines from the City.

### **Discussion on Potential Use of Blue Line Solutions**

Chief Cooper and a representative from Blue Line Solutions discussed a camera product with Council to determine if the City should invest in the program. Blue Line Solutions, 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 shared partnerships in seven states and with twelve localities in the Commonwealth of Virginia with over a 90% reduction rate.

***Councilman Larrowe made the motion to table the discussion until further information could be presented. Councilman Henck said the Public Services Committee that he chairs, had discussed Blue Line Solutions, but a formal recommendation had never been made. After a discussion ensued, Councilman Larrowe amended his motion to include a public hearing on the matter at the 1-8-24 meeting. Councilman Henck seconded. The motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr and Councilman Henck.***

### **Request to Adopt Updated Emergency Operations Plan**

Captain Cox from the GPD presented an updated Emergency Operations Plan for Council’s consideration. The Code of Virginia, § 44-146.19 requires that every four years, each local and interjurisdictional agency shall conduct a comprehensive review and revision of its emergency operations plan to ensure that the plan remains current, and the revised plan shall be formally adopted by the locality's governing body. Captain Cox reviewed the City's plan and updated information within it to reflect changes in personnel and resources. Captain Cox also included sections VIII and IX to the Basic Plan section regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as access and functional needs of the citizens we serve. He stated that a master copy of the plan was kept at the Emergency Operations Center (Galax Police Department) and was routinely updated to reflect changes in personnel and contact information. Captain Cox explained further in addition to the Emergency Operations plan, Council also needed to formally adopt the National Incident Management System, in which the City commits to use the system for unifying and coordinating all emergency responders' efforts during incidents.

***Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the updated Emergency Operations Plan and to adopt the National Incident Management System through Resolution. Councilman Henck seconded. The motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr and Councilman Henck.***

### **Creation of and Proposed Appointments to the Local Building Board of Appeals**

Gavin Blevins discussed with Council the required appointment of a Board of Appeals to hear cases involving questions of building code and building code interpretation within the City. Building Official, Thomas Hager was absent. Mr. Blevins explained in accordance with § 36-105 of the Code of Virginia, there shall be established within each local building department a Local Board of Building Code Appeals (LBBCA). The LBBCA shall consist of at least five members appointed by the locality for a specific term of office. A discussion ensued regarding the requirements of the board. Mr. Blevins explained to meet the requirements of the Code, Staff had solicited interested persons to serve on the new Galax LBBCA. These recommendations were: GW Hill (contractor); Jamie Keatley (Realtor/property manager); John Adams (contractor); Chris May (certified building official); Keith Barker (architect); and Yancy Powers (alternate). Staff provided a slate of candidates that would fulfill the State requirements and have agreed to serve should they be called upon.

***Vice Mayor White made the motion for the creation of a Local Board of Building Appeals with the appointments set forth before Council, and to direct Gavin Blevins to create a staggered term of service. Councilman Warr seconded. Councilman Henck inquired about the requirements of the alternate. The motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr and Councilman Henck.*** After an additional discussion ensued, the City’s attorney, Steve Durbin, recommended an amendment to Vice Mayor White’s motion to allow Council to set the terms of the LBBCA. Vice Mayor White then amended her original motion. Councilman Warr amended his second. Gavin Blevins clarified the misunderstanding. He explained that five members, would be in one cycle for 2-year terms. Then, two members plus the alternate would be in the second cycle for the full four-

year terms. He said members Barker, Adams, and Keatley would be on the 4-year cycle, and May, Hill, and Powers would be on the 2-year cycle. *Vice Mayor White amended her motion to what Mr. Blevins recommended. Councilman Warr seconded. The motion 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 PUSH Ministries - Discussed a new accountability program
- Sarah Price – Cleaning up the City of Galax

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

### **Michael Burnette – City Manager**

- Recreation Center guardrail replacement
- Old Time Appalachian Christmas – complimented Patti Price-Love
- Mount Rogers Health District Spanish Helpline available
- Congratulated National Night Out GPD – 4<sup>th</sup> place nationally
- VRA Funding loan closing – Financing Agreement needed approval from Council. Public Hearing was in October.

*Councilman Larrowe made the motion to re-adopt the financing agreement as presented. Councilman Henck seconded. The motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Larrowe, Councilman Warr and Councilman Henck.*

- Special election to be held in November 2024. Hunter Bowers to serve until then
- Budget Calendar – January 8
- Organizational meeting – January 8

### **Councilman Warr**

- Best wishes to Mike Larrowe in his retirement
- Thanked Patti Price Love for the Old Time Appalachian Christmas Festival

### **Councilman Henck**

- Praised Gavin Blevins on the work on the Comprehensive Plan
- Review of VA Code regarding removal of vehicles
- Reminder of Public Services Meeting

### **Councilwoman Ritchie**

- Christmas festival was a success
- Comprehensive Plan
- Small Area Plan

### **Vice Mayor White**

- Twin County Resource Guide
- Cornerstone Church – Warming Center

- Christmas Party for Foster Families at Christ Chapel Church
- Thanked Dana Woodel for 20-year anniversary working for the City of Galax

**Councilman Larrowe**

- Workforce Development Programs Study
- District Three – Beneficial to area Senior Citizens
- Business Personal Property - modify form

**Mayor Greene**

- Praised the Christmas festival

**CLOSED SESSION**

*Mayor Greene accepted a motion made by Vice Mayor White at 8:50 p.m. to enter into closed session under the following Codes of Virginia: 2.2-3711*

- (A)(5) Prospective or expansion of business or industry where no previous public announcement has been made
- (A)(1) Personnel Discussion of appointments to City Boards, Commissions, etc. Mount Rogers Community Services Board Appointment
- (A)(3) Discussion of the acquisition of real property or the disposition of real property
  1. Rex Theater Lease
  2. Tower Property
  3. Water Utilities

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

*At 9:45 p.m. Vice Mayor White made the motion to reconvene in open session. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded. The motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Henck.*

*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 Henck made the motion to re-appoint Susie Dixon Garner to the Mount Rogers Community Services Board. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded. The motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Henck.*

*Mayor Greene adjourned the meeting at 9:55 p.m.*



Mayor



Clerk

