

**Galax City Council
Minutes
February 12, 2024**

Galax City Council convened in regular session in City Council Chambers on February 12, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.

At 6:00 p.m. Mayor Greene called the meeting to order with the following Council members present: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

Councilwoman Ritchie gave the opening prayer and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

NEW OFFICERS SWORN IN

Mayor Greene welcomed three new Galax Police Department Officers; Julian Wingfield, David Rose, and Candace Alphin, then administered the Oath of Honor.

RECOGNITION OF RETIREMENT

Mayor Greene recognized Tim Hill with the presentation of a retirement appreciation plaque and watch. He thanked Mr. Hill for nearly 29 years of dedicated service to the Galax Public Works Department.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Regular Meeting 1-8-24

Councilman Warr made the motion to approve the regular meeting minutes of January 8, 2023. Councilman Henck seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

OLD BUSINESS

High Country Lights Review

Mr. William Bottomley gave a presentation and reviewed numbers & reaction from the public for the most recent High Country Lights show held during the Christmas Season.

City Financial Review

Kyle Laux, Davenport & Company gave an in-depth presentation of his firm’s findings in relation to the City’s finances and provided potential next steps to ensure continued growth and stability of the City.

Key take away points included:

- City of Galax in good financial standing
- Davenport & Co. acting as financial advisors
- Water Plant renovation
- Fund balance discussion
- Need for policies & procedures

2024-2025 Budget Update

City Manager Burnette provided an update for Council on the current status of the 2024-2025 budget which included:

- Reviewed budget calendar
- First Council budget work session held
- Outside agencies requests received

- Galax School Board Budget Public Hearing set for 2-13-24 – Level funding requested
- Revenue projection expected in two weeks
- Draft budget to be presented to Council at March 11 meeting

NEW BUSINESS

Mount Rogers Regional Partnership Annual Update

Ms. Nichole Hair provided Council with an annual update and overview of the economic development activities pursued by her office during the 2023 calendar year and discussed plans for 2024. The United Way Daycare Program (Twin County Foundation) discussion was led by Councilman Henck.

Virginia Department of Health – Regional Opioid Abatement Authority Grant Proposal

Ms. Meagan Helmick, Health Director at the Mount Rogers Health District, made a request of Council for Galax to join a regional project for state Opioid Abatement Authority (OAA) funding. The proposal consisted of funding a mobile unit that would be available to provide traditional public health services. Council was told by Ms. Helmick that OAA funds could pay for our portion of the unit. City Manager Burnette made Council aware if OAA money couldn't be used, then the City had reserve funds available.

Vice Mayor White made the motion to allocate \$11,162.42 of opioid abatement funding pending approval from Jolena Young, Grants Administrator, that project qualified, and if it doesn't, secondarily, direct the City Manager to pursue alternate funding. Councilman Henck seconded. Councilman Warr agreed with the motion, except for the last part. He suggested that if alternate funding was sought, before Council committed the funds, it should come back to Council for final approval. Vice Mayor White agreed and amended her motion to reflect Councilman Warr's suggestion. Councilman Henck agreed to amend his second to reflect the change, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

Councilman Henck made a motion to authorize the City Manager to sign on for the partnership to apply for the OAA grant. Councilwoman Burnett seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

CSA Funding Shortfall and Budget Amendment Request

Ms. Tammy Smith, Director of Social Services, CPMT Chair, and Fiscal Agent of CSA, made a requested of Council to approve a budget amendment in the amount of \$148,000. If approved, this would avoid CSA running out of funding before the end of the fiscal year. There was a discussion of the high costs associated with residential facility costs, and Minnick Schools (\$100,000 per child per year) that DSS has to resort to for some children with special behavioral needs.

Councilman Henck made the motion to allocate an additional \$148,000 to CSA from the general fund. Vice Mayor White seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

Overview of 2024 Reassessment

Commissioner of Revenue, Ms. Rene Funk, gave a review of the high-level results of the 2024 Galax reassessment. Ms. Funk discussed the process and what property owners could do if they disagreed with their new valuations. Key points made:

- Last reassessment 2020
- Wampler Eanes Appraisal Group finished with appeals from 132 property owners/215 properties
- Housing market sales the last 4 years resulted in much higher real estate values on the reassessments.

- State Code requires localities to reassess every 4 to 6 years.
- The cost associated with our most recent reassessment was \$80,000.
- Board of Equalization being formed, three people willing to serve, will be appointed through attorney and Circuit Court for formal appeals for will handle formal appeals not satisfied by appeals Wampler Eanes Appraisal Group.
- Citizens concerned about the tax levy/rate with the high reassessment figures.
- State Code would allow City to lower the tax levy/rate to stay within one percent of the rate one year prior, or option of a public hearing could be held if you wish to not take it down that far.
- Current real estate tax rate - \$1.00 per \$100.00 on 100% assessment.
- Tax relief income limits were raised last year to assist citizens who qualified.

Councilman Henck made the motion to amend the agenda schedule to allow citizens to speak regarding the 2024 Reassessment, instead of waiting until the end of the meeting. Vice Mayor White seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

Those who voiced their concerns regarding the reassessment included: Dr. Cameron Gillespie, and Shane Coomes.

Request to Approve 2024 Street Closings

Ms. Patti Price-Love presented a list of street closures for 2024 to Council for approval. The closure requests typically come from events that help the City attract visitors to the downtown area. In addition, the Tourism Committee had requested the Galax Cruise Coordinator give them a list of her dates to include on our internal calendar. Main Street would not be closed for these, as the vehicles keep moving the entire time.

Vice Mayor White made the motion to approve the 2024 street closings list as presented. Councilman Warr seconded. Councilman Warr suggested the Event Coordinators use more coordination in re-opening the streets for safety reasons. Ms. Price-Love stated this recommendation would be listed in the Special Events Permit. The motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

Update from the Galax-Carroll Regional Library

Library Director Trish Fore provided Council with an in-depth overview of the library system and review the results of the library for the 2022-2023 fiscal year.

Property Maintenance Update

Mr. Joey Davis, City’s Property Maintenance Official, gave an update to Council on his activities since taking over the role in late 2023. Mr. Davis has been a Virginia Certified Residential Inspector and Property Maintenance Official since 2009. In October 2023, he accepted the Property Maintenance position and began the transition from Construction Technician Foreman/ Inspector to Property Maintenance Official. This was to be phased in from one day a week to a full-time position. As of mid-December, he is now working full time on Property Maintenance issues. In November 2023, Mr. Davis presented City staff and the Property Maintenance Committee with a map that divided the City into seven (7) zones. He now works each zone to completion and following up on complaints received as well. He provided further information on his compliance tactics and the statistics (results) to date. He commented that there was a process to follow to get results - that do work. He stated that he was committed to help make Galax beautiful again. Mayor Greene opened the floor for public comments regarding property maintenance issues. Those who spoke included: Maria Soto, Sarah Price, Shane Coomes, and Dr. Cameron Gillespie.

Mayor Greene called for a 5 minute recess, and later announced for the meeting to reconvene.

God’s Storehouse Construction Update

Ms. Jolena Young, the City’s Grant Writer, joined by phone. She gave an update to Council on the construction at 406 W Oldtown Street, the future home of God’s Storehouse. She explained the City of Galax was awarded a

\$74,000 grant from the Tobacco Commission for this project. The contractor encountered some issues that resulted in change orders which included new ceiling tiles, insulation, sheeting, a roof, and decking. Ms. Young will be looking for additional funding and savings instead of requesting money for the City's Fund Balance. A ribbon cutting is expected mid to late summer.

Historic Registrations Update

Ms. Young gave an update on the current status of a request to add Rosenwald-Felts to the historic register. Ms. Young explained the nomination had experienced a delay due to personnel issues in Richmond, but hoped to have everything back on track for a summer time nomination. After a discussion with Council of the possibility of a new historic district nomination, Councilman Henck suggested using funding on economic incentives to assist prospective new businesses to come to Galax. There was discussion regarding the new owner of the old Corinthian Salon building who had been trying to obtain historic tax credits for improvements to open a business there. After further Council discussion, Ms. Young summarized the consensus of Council regarding Rosenwald-Felts, we were under contract to make the changes, so no additional budget was needed. Ms. Young closed by stating the City would not pursue a specific new nomination outside of the historic district, but would look at alternatives for the former Corinthian Salon building which was purchased by Brantly Ivey.

Main Street Master Planning Contract Award

Ms. Young gave an update to Council regarding the Main Street Master Planning project. The City was awarded two planning grants through Virginia Main Street totaling \$74,000 which included \$25,000 in matching funds in the current fiscal year budget. Staff along with the Mobilizing Main Street Task Force, published a Request for Proposals, accepted proposals, narrowed the proposers to the top four, and held interviews with all four finalists. Staff has recommended an award to Destination By Design to do the master planning work for \$99K to \$125 range. *Councilman Henck made the motion to authorize the City Manager to execute documents necessary to award the contract to Destinations by Design for \$99K for the Virginia Main Street Strategic Plan, and if the cost were to go above this amount, the City Manager would be required to present to Council for approval. Councilman Warr seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.*

Request to Schedule a Public Hearing for Smart Scale Projects

Ms. Young informed Council that every two years, VDOT offered a SMART SCALE grant program for improvements to corridors of significance that did not require matching funds. This grant program is currently funding the East Stuart Drive sidewalk project from Larkspur Lane to Hanes Road along with the Food City Traffic Signal. She further explained in the FY2024 cycle, we were awarded funding for the East Stuart Drive sidewalk improvements from Hanes Road to Walmart. A jurisdiction would be allowed to submit two applications. The two proposed applications for the FY2026 cycle would include the East Stuart Drive Sidewalk Phase III, and the Main Street Corridor Project to construct sidewalks with ADA compliant intersections on Main Street from Bartlett Street to East Stuart Drive. Ms. Young requested approval to make application for the two projects, and to set a required public hearing for the next meeting on March 11.

Councilman Henck made the motion to authorize Ms. Young to apply for the two VDOT project grants, and set March 11 at the date for the required public hearing. Councilwoman Burnett seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

Police Department Request to Apply for SRO and Equipment Grants

Captain James Cox made a request of Council (on behalf of Chief Dewitt Cooper) to authorize the Galax Police Department to apply for the following four grants for the GPD:

1. **DCJS School Resource Officer Grant** to continue to remain at the Galax Middle School.

2. **The Law Enforcement Block Grant** would be used to purchase a multiple channel camera DVR system at the police firing range.
3. **Byrne Justice Assistance Grant** for up to \$75K award to purchase equipment with a 25% match to implement electronic ticketing.
4. **Community Policing and Youth Engagement Grant** would fund the Police Explorer Program and Citizen's Police Academy.

The drone program request on the agenda was withdrawn last minute due to drones being prohibited to be purchased using Justice Assistance Grant funds.

Councilman Henck made a motion to approve the request of the four grants presented by Captain Cox. Councilman Warr seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

The citizen comments were made during the meeting earlier as noted in minutes.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM MAYOR, CITY COUNCIL, AND COUNCIL COMMITTEES

Vice Mayor White made the motion due to the late hour of the meeting, that communications from City Manager, Mayor, City Council, and Council Committees be made to each other through email. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Zoning Administrator

City Manager Burnette made a request that since Gavin Blevins was no longer working for the City, that Tom Hager, Building Official, be appointed as Zoning Administrator per City Code 160-161, until the new Planning & Community Development Director could be hired.

Vice Mayor White made the motion to approve the request. Councilman Warr seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

Public Hearing Request

Planning Commission made a request to hold a public hearing at the March 11 meeting, to hear a zoning request by Dave Bremmer from R-1/M-1 to B-2.

Councilman Warr made the motion to approve the request. Councilman Bowers seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

Holiday & Trash Schedule

City Manager Burnette made a request of Council to approve the 2024 Holiday & Trash Schedule Calendar.

Vice Mayor White made the motion to approve the request. Councilman Warr seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

Board of Equalization

City Manager Burnette informed Council of three volunteers who were willing to serve on the Board of Equalization: Jason Bowers, Dedra Lineberry, and Chad Fitzgerald. Our City Attorney requested that Council formally recommend these individuals to the Circuit Court for appointment.

Councilman Henck made a motion to recommend Jason Bowers, Dedra Lineberry, and Chad Fitzgerald to the Circuit Court for appointment to the Board of Equalization. Councilman Bowers seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

Department of Social Services – Administrative Board

City Manager Burnette made a recommendation of Council to change the current DSS Local Government Official Administrative Board of one, in which he serves on, to an Administrative Board, which would name five people to a new Board of Directors that would oversee DSS going forward. City Manager Burnette felt that a five person board who were made up of individuals who were well versed in DSS, with more specific expertise and time would offer more to DSS than he could provide. If approved, an ad for letters of interest for the board members would need to be placed, and bring back to Council at the March meeting to dissolve the current board of one, and the move forward with the new five person Administrative Board.

Vice Mayor White made the motion to approve the request. Councilwoman Burnett seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

CLOSED SESSION

Mayor Greene accepted a motion made by Vice Mayor White at 10:55 p.m. to enter into closed session under the following Codes of Virginia in Accordance with 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.
- (A)(3) Discussion of the acquisition of real property or the disposition of real property

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

At 11:55 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 Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.***

ACTION FROM CLOSED SESSION

Vice Mayor White made a motion to come out of closed session at 11:45 p.m. Councilwoman Burnett seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

Planning Commission Appointment

Vice Mayor White made the motion to appoint Ms. Leesa Gayheart to the Planning Commission. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded, and the motion was approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers. Councilman Henck abstained.

CPMT Appointment

Councilman Warr made the motion to appoint Amy Vaughan to the CPMT Board. Councilwoman Burnett seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice

Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

Tobacco Commission Grant

Councilman Bowers made the motion to approve the application for grant from the Tobacco Commission for the Vaughan Commons Project. Councilman Warr seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

Rex Grant

Councilman Henck made the motion to approve the request to apply for grant to make improvements at the Rex Theater. Councilman Warr seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Richie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.

At 11:45 p.m. Councilwoman Ritchie made the motion to adjourn. Vice Mayor White 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.

ADJOURNMENT at 11:55 p.m.

Mayor

Clerk