

March
2024

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



As the warmth of March envelops our city, I'm filled with excitement and hope for the season ahead. Springtime has arrived, bringing with it a sense of renewal and rejuvenation.

It's a time when nature awakens from its winter slumber, painting our surroundings with vibrant colors and filling the air with the sweet fragrance of blossoms. Let's take a moment to appreciate the beauty that surrounds us and the wonders of the changing seasons.

As we bid farewell to winter, let's also embrace the opportunities that spring offers us. It's a chance for new beginnings, growth, and transformation. Let's seize this moment to set our intentions for the months ahead and embark on journeys of personal and collective progress.

I encourage each of you to step outside, soak up the sunshine, and revel in the joys of spring. Whether it's planting a garden, going for a hike, or simply taking a leisurely stroll through our city streets, let's make the most of this vibrant season.

As your mayor, I'm committed to working tirelessly to ensure that our city continues to thrive and flourish. Together, let's harness the energy of springtime to build a brighter, more prosperous future for all.

Wishing you a joyful and inspiring month filled with the blessings of spring!

Warm regards,

Willie

Willie T. Greene, Sr
Mayor
City of Galax



Happy St. Patrick's Day!

March City Council Meeting 3/11/2024

Here is a quick summary of our last Council meeting.

RECOGNITION OF VARSITY FOOTBALL TEAM STATE CHAMPION GALAX MAROON TIDE

JOINT PUBLIC HEARING WITH PLANNING COMMISSION The Commission and Council held a joint public hearing regarding a Zoning change requested for Tax parcels No. 78-12 and 81-1(A) (Bremmer). Application filed by Mr. David Bremmer, with regard to property owned by Shihua Xu Bremmer, requesting a zoning change to Parcels 78-12 and 81-1(A), located at 1011 S. Main Street, from R-1 Residential Low-Density, with a section of M-1 Light Industrial to B-2 Business General, to allow for redevelopment of the property into a compliant commercial use. City council was asked to review the recommendation from the Planning Commission and public comment on the project. **Council approved the request**

OLD BUSINESS

1. FY 2024 City Audit Results

Corbin Stone of Robinson Farmer Cox & Associates – Mr. Stone reviewed the 2022-2023 fiscal year audit for Council and took questions from Council as appropriate.

Council accept the audit as presented.

2. Potential Ordinance Changes re: Code Maintenance Issues

Tom Hager, Building Official – Council has heard from some citizens for many months or more about Maintenance Code compliance and what some feel has been an inadequate response from the City. There have been misunderstandings, misinterpretation of local / state codes, and some legitimate concerns brought forth by Staff and the citizens. Council has asked Staff and the City Attorney to review these issues and to see what, if any, changes could or should be made to City Code. After careful review, Staff has identified several changes in the ordinance that could be made to accommodate some of the complaints being received, while respecting the property rights of our citizens and stopping short of overburdening residents and potential residents alike. Mr. Hager, along with other staff, explained these potential changes and answered questions from the Council. **Council encouraged Staff to continue working on the proposed ordinance changes and come back when ready.**

3. False Alarm Policy - City Attorney Steve Durbin – In January, Fire Chief Mike Ayers made a request on behalf of the Galax Volunteer Fire Department that a False Alarm Ordinance be developed for the City of Galax. Since 2019, the calls for service for the department have risen 42% to an average of 500

calls per year. Over the past three years' worth of data, it has been found that 20% of those calls have been false alarms. While a certain amount of false alarms are to be expected and accepted, the lion's share of false alarms are due to 'repeat offenders'. Chief Ayers discussed how the situation is causing safety and morale issues, as well as taking up precious and finite resources. Council directed Staff to work with the City Attorney to propose an ordinance change to address the situation.

City council reviewed the proposed ordinance and will discuss at the April meeting.

4. 2024-2025 Budget Update – City Manager Michael Burnette – Mr. Burnette reviewed where the budget team is in the process of creating the draft FY25 budget. Additionally, the Budget Calendar was updated and a special called meeting was set for March 21st to receive the Manager's proposed budget.

Council agreed to holding the special called budget meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

5. Code Enforcement Activities Report – *Joey Davis, Property Maintenance Official* - Mr. Davis provided Council with an overview of his first few months on the job taking complaints and working with property owners to make sure properties within the City satisfy the Maintenance Code.

City council heard the presentation and asked several questions. They also thanked Mr. Davis for doing a great job.

March City Council Meeting 3/11/2024 (Continued)

6. Appalachian Center for Hope Grant Support - City Manager Burnette

– The City received a request for support from the Appalachian Center for Hope in Smyth County. This is a collaborative group and a 501(c)3 which exists to address the devastating effects of substance abuse in our region. They are inching closer to being able to renovate a building upon the grounds of the state hospital in Marion as a 60+ bed residential treatment center, which is desperately needed in our area. The organization is requesting Virginia Opioid Abatement Authority funds for the project and has asked the City of Galax to support that application. To date, the organization has been awarded grants of \$3 million from the Smyth County Community Foundation, \$650,000 in federal funds from Congressionally Directed Spending, and \$50,000 from the Virginia General Assembly. **There is no match or other funding being requested from the City.**

Council agreed to support and adopt the resolution

7. Grants Submission

Authorization – Jolena Young, Grants Administrator – Ms. Young presented three topics for Council review and decision. These included:

- Main Street Grant #1 - Requested that Council approve submission of an application for a \$50,000 T-Mobile Hometown Grant (Deadline March 31, 2024). The Main Street Board and City Administration are scoping possible projects: 1) A mural or

2) Improvements to Historic Mainstreet entry points.

- Main Street Grant #2 – Requested that Council approve submission of an application for a \$15,000 Virginia Main Street Vitality Grant. (Deadline April 5, 2024). DHCD Community Vitality Grants (CVG) are designed to assist organizations and communities in achieving their downtown revitalization goals. Mobilizing Main Street has program tiers and these grants are available for downtown revitalization efforts. There is a \$7,500 match required for this project. The Main Street Board and City Administration are scoping possible projects: 1) A Main Street website or 2) Wayfinding System Development.
- Request #3 - Re-Set Date for VDOT Public Hearings. Every two years, VDOT offers a SMART SCALE grant program for improvements to corridors of significance. This grant program is currently funding the E Stuart Drive sidewalk project from Larkspur Lane to Hanes Road along with the Food City Traffic Signal. A jurisdiction can submit two applications. Staff is working on two applications: 1) E Stuart Drive Sidewalk Phase III – This project is to construct sidewalk on E Stuart Drive from New River Trail State Park to Larkspur Lane. 2) Main Street Corridor – This project is to construct sidewalk with compliant ADA intersections on Main Street from Bartlett

Street to E Stuart Drive. Council originally set February 11 as the date for the required Public Hearing for this application. The Grants Administrator is asking for a new Public Hearing date be re-set for April 8, 2024.

City Council approved the submission of the two grants and the rescheduled public hearing date

8. COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CITY MANAGER

Mr. Burnette discussed several items including:

- Noting that the new Tourism website has been unveiled (visitgalax.com)
- Call for School Board Letters of Interest – Two seats are open on the School Board.
- Solid Waste Authority Terms – SWA is requested formal approval from Council for Willie Green’s term to run concurrent with his elected position on Council; CM Mitchell’s term to run 4 years from 1/1/2024 through 12/31/2027; and Michael Burnette’s term to run concurrent with employment as City Manager.

Council Approved

- Health Insurance Plan RFP – City was quoted an increase of 11% by our insurance intermediary. A request for quotes from other agencies has been advertised in the hopes that the increased rate will be reduced or eliminated. Proposals were due back on Monday, March the 15th.