

**Galax City Council  
Minutes  
March 11, 2024**

Galax City Council convened in regular session in City Council Chambers on March 11, 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 Ritchie, Councilman Warr, Councilwoman Burnett, Councilman Bowers. Councilman Henck joined the meeting by phone. Mayor Greene confirmed his location and reason for his absence from the meeting. *Vice Mayor White made the motion to approve Councilman Henck's request to join the meeting by phone. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.*

Councilman Warr gave the opening prayer and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **SPECIAL RECOGNITION**

#### **Galax Maroon Tide – VHSL State Varsity Football Championship**

Players and coaches from the State Champion Galax Maroon Tide was recognized by Mayor Greene and Council for their achievement, hard work, and positive impact on our community.

### **JOINT PUBLIC HEARING WITH PLANNING COMMISSION**

Brandon Boyles, Planning Commission Chair, called the joint meeting to order and confirmed a quorum with Mr. Boyles, Sharon Ritchie, Dana Sworsy, and Janet Nuckolls present. Mayor Greene opened the public hearing. Gavin Blevins informed Council of an application filed by Mr. David Bremmer, regarding property owned by Shihua Xu Bremmer. The request was 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. The general usage range of the proposed amendment would be expanded to permit a broader range of commercial uses. Mayor Greene and Mr. Boyles opened the floor for public comments. Dave Bremmer informed Council and the Planning Commission of his plans for the proposed rezoned property which included a motorcycle city and campground. The property would also have a 50's theme and include a waterfall, pool, beach, motorcycle repair shop, general store, a chapel, baptism pool, movie theater, and many other plans. David Hankley and Ernest Hodges spoke in favor of the rezoning request. All positive comments were made by both. With no further comments, Mr. Boyles and Mayor Greene declared the public hearing closed. Recommendations from staff included Mr. Blevins who gave additional information regarding the property's past, current, and future uses. He noted that Mr. Bremmer's planned use of the property would be allowed and compliant if rezoned. Mr. Blevins made the request of the Planning Commission and City Council to approve the rezoning request, and consider map amendments to the neighboring parcels along South Main Street which doesn't conform with current zoning. Mr. Boyles asked Mr. Blevins if the rezoning was approved, this would remedy the non-conforming neighboring parcels. Mr. Blevins confirmed. Mr. Boyles made the recommendation to City Council that the application for rezoning as presented be approved. Mayor Greene called for comments from Council. Councilman Warr stated the work that had been done by Mr. Bremmer and adjacent property owners was amazing and greatly appreciated. *Councilman Warr made the motion to approve the recommendation from the Planning Commission to approve the rezoning application request as presented. Councilman Bowers seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers. Dana Sworsy made the motion to adjourn the Planning Commission from the public hearing. Janet Nuckolls seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by all votes of "yea" by the Planning Commission. Mr. Boyles declared the meeting adjourned.*

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Regular Meeting 2-12-24

*Vice Mayor White made the motion to approve the regular meeting minutes of February 12, 2024. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Bowers.*

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### **FY 2024 City Audit Results**

Corbin Stone of Robinson Farmer Cox & Associates, was present to review the 2022-23 fiscal year audit with Council. Mr. Stone informed Council that the City was currently in a good position. Mayor Greene thanked the auditors and City staff for their hard work on the audit.

### **Potential Ordinance Changes - Code Maintenance Issues**

Tom Hager, Building Official, addressed Council regarding a few citizens comments for many months regarding the City's Maintenance Code compliance, and an inadequate response from the City. He explained there have been misunderstandings, and misinterpretation of local & state codes, and some legitimate concerns brought forth by Staff and citizens. The City Attorney was asked to review these issues to see if any changes should be made to the City Code. A draft list of proposed amendments to Chapter 160 (Zoning) was established. After Council discussion ensued with Mr. Hager, there was a consensus to bring the final ordinance changes back to the April meeting for Council's review after the City Attorney finalizes the document.

### **False Alarm Policy**

City Attorney, Steve Durbin, addressed Council regarding a proposed False Alarm Ordinance for the Galax Fire Department. The matter was discussed in January by Fire Chief Mike Ayers who made a request on behalf of the GFD, that a False Alarm Ordinance be developed for the City of Galax. He explained since 2019, the calls for service for the department had 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. He stated while a certain number of false alarms were to be expected and accepted, the majority of false alarms were due to repeat offenders. The situation is causing safety and morale issues, as well as taking up precious and finite resources. A Council discussion ensued. There was a consensus for Staff to meet to finalize details of the ordinance.

*Councilman Warr made a motion to review the False Alarm Ordinance for the next month, put on the April meeting agenda to discuss further, and then set a public hearing at that time. 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.*

### **2024-2025 Budget Update**

City Manager Burnette updated the Council on the current progress of the FY2025 City Budget, including an updated budget calendar.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Code Enforcement Activities Report**

Joey Davis, Property Maintenance Official 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.

### **Appalachian Center for Hope Grant Support**

City Manager Burnette informed Council the City had received a request for support from the Appalachian Center for Hope in Smyth County. He explained this was a collaborative group and a 501(c)3 which existed to address the devastating effects of substance abuse in our region. He explained they were getting 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 was desperately needed in our area. There was further discussion regarding assisting with the first year's operating costs. Smyth County would be willing to apply for funding from the Opioid Abatement Authority, and the organization had 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. Council was asked to support a regional OAA grant for a 60+ bed residential treatment center in Marion, VA and adopt a resolution of support.

*Vice Mayor White made the motion to approve the request as presented. 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.*

### **Grants Submission Authorization**

Jolena Young, Grants Administrator, requested that a public hearing date be reset for 2 SMART SCALE VDOT Grant Projects. They included a **Sidewalk Project** from Larkspur Lane to Glendale, and to **Upgrade Intersections** on the Main Street corridor to be ADA compliant

*Vice Mayor White made the motion to reset the public hearing for the May 13 meeting. 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.*

#### **T-Mobile Hometown Grant**

Jolena Young, Grants Administrator, requested that Council approve the submission of an application for a \$50,000 T-Mobile Hometown Grant. Mrs. Young explained the Main Street Board and City Administration were scoping possible projects which included a mural or improvements to Historic Mainstreet entry points.

*Councilman Warr made the motion to approve the request as presented. 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.*

#### **Main Street Vitality Grant**

Jolena Young, Grants Administrator, made a request of Council to approve the submission of an application for a \$15,000 Virginia Main Street Vitality Grant. She explained the DHCD Community Vitality Grants were designed to assist organizations and communities in achieving their downtown revitalization goals. There would be a \$7,500 match required for this project. The total project would be \$22,500. The Main Street Board and City Administration were scoping the following possible projects: 1) A Main Street website or 2) Wayfinding System Development.

*Councilman Warr made the motion to approve the request as presented. 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.*

**CITIZEN COMMENTS** (Limited to 3 minutes per speaker or 5 minutes per group) - **NONE**

#### **COMMUNICATIONS**

##### **CITY MANAGER**

City Manager Burnette discussed the following topics:

- *Tourism Website Unveiled* – [www.visitgalax.com](http://www.visitgalax.com)
- *Two School Board seats expire 6-30-24*. Council consensus to advertise.
- *Solid Waste Authority requested specific terms:*
  - Mayor Greene - to run concurrent with his Council term
  - City Manager Burnette - to run concurrent with his employment
  - C.M. Mitchell – to run 4 year term Jan. 1, 2024 – Dec. 31, 2027

*Vice Mayor White made the motion to approve the terms as specified. 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.*

- *Health insurance quote* from current provider showed an 11% increase for employees. Human Resources advertised an RFP for other quotes.
- *Discussion regarding PUSH Ministries \$2000 contribution*. Council discussion ensued regarding the contribution. Consensus to recommend Ms. Burcham to go through as a regular (formal) FY2025 Budget request by sending in specific details of the request to be considered.

#### **MAYOR, CITY COUNCIL, AND COUNCIL COMMITTEES**

- **Councilman Bowers**
  - District Three Meeting
- **Councilwoman Burnett**
  - Public Safety Committee Meeting
    - Blue Line Solutions
    - Lafayette & Grayson St. traffic signal to dismantle
    - Four way Stop Signs – Painting the intersections
  - Public Services Committee Meeting
    - Blue Line Solutions
  - School Board Social Event
- **Vice Mayor White**
  - VML Conference

- **Councilman Henck**
  - Joining via phone - held comments until next meeting
- **Councilwoman Ritchie**
  - Patient & Family Advisory Committee at TCRH – making improvements
- **Councilman Warr**
  - Discussed [www.visitgalax.com](http://www.visitgalax.com) – huge improvement
  - VTC Strategic Planning Session
  - Tourism Committee discussed Harvest Host

**CLOSED SESSION**

*Mayor Greene accepted a motion made by Vice Mayor White at 8:45 p.m. to enter into closed session under the following Codes of Virginia in Accordance with 2.2-3711:*

- (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
- (A)(5) Prospective or expansion of business or industry where no previous public announcement has been made

*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 9:30 p.m. Councilman Warr made the motion to come out of Closed Session. Councilman Bowers seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by all votes of “yea”. 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**

- *Councilman Warr made the motion to set a public hearing for Grounded Coffee at the April meeting. 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.*
- *Councilwoman Ritchie made the motion to adjourn. 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.*

*Mayor Greene adjourned the meeting at 9:35 p.m.*



Mayor



Clerk