

Galax City Council
Minutes
December 8, 2025

Galax City Council convened in regular session in the City Council Chamber on Monday, December 8th 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, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Robinson.

PRAYER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Vice Mayor White

MOTION TO AMEND THE AGENDA –Councilman Henck made a motion to amend the agenda to include a discussion about personnel in closed session under Virginia code, section 2.2 3711. Councilman Warr seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mayor Greene announced there are several public hearings on the docket for the evening, the first of which would be a zoning change request. Mayor Greene opened the public hearing at 6:12pm.

Mayor Greene introduced Director of Planning and Commercial Development Doug Williams, to lead the discussion regarding the request.

Director Williams began by stating that this will be the first of three public hearings under consideration, as recommended by the Planning Commission.

PUBLIC HEARING/ ZONING CHANGE REQUEST

Mayor Greene called the public hearing to order. The matter under consideration was to change the zoning district at Larkspur Lane from a low-density residential (R1) district, to a B-2 district, for the purpose of relocating a business that is currently established in Galax.

The business specializes in sales and installation of radio and safety equipment for public safety vehicles. The site is located on Larkspur Lane, bordering Country Club Lane. Director Williams presented a map of the area and identified the zoning classifications surrounding the property. (Commercial Properties of NC, LLC Parcel 37-103-107)

The application was submitted, and there were questions about items on the application, as well as requests for additional information about design and development.

Director Williams went on to say there has already been some ongoing development in that particular area. The environmental program manager inspected the site and issued a stop-work order until proper permits were obtained. A soil erosion plan has already been made for the site.

This area currently includes an office building, a multi-family dwelling, and two private apartment buildings across the street.

CITIZEN COMMENTS: There was concern from a neighbor north of the site about soil conditions. Director Williams reiterated that the soil erosion would be addressed in the development plan. Another neighbor expressed concern about noise and lighting.

Director Williams affirmed that noise and lighting mitigation are addressed under the current zoning ordinance.

Most correspondence received expressed concerns about stabilization of the site, which has already been mitigated and will continue to be monitored. He went on to explain that there will be a 15-foot distance between the perimeter where zones B touches R.

James Jordan, a resident that borders the property had questions about the live fence that would be planted, including how tall the trees would grow. He expressed concerned he will lose his privacy. He also raised concerned about drainage.

There was additional concern regarding assessment values and the potential difficulty of selling a home located in a commercial or non-residential area.

Most comments were related to drainage concerns which Director Williams addressed through the water mitigation and storm runoff plans.

Michael Hutchins addressed the concerns raised by many as the representative of Commercial Properties of NC, LLC, the company requesting the zoning change. He addressed drainage concerns stating that topsoil from the site has specifically cultivated for the purpose of preparing it for proper drainage and erosion prevention.

There was a question regarding how many employees would be working at this building. Mr. Hutchins stated there would be no more than 12, including four field technicians who would work outside of the building. Questions were also raised about traffic. Mr. Hutchins stated there would be minimal traffic, primarily consisting of the exchange of vehicles from different agencies.

Councilwoman Ritchie made a motion to change the zoning on Larkspur Lane from R-1 to B-2, as presented by Director Williams and recommended by the Planning Commission. Councilwoman Burnett seconded the motion.

Councilman Henck stated, as a reminder to Council, that when the Planning Commission considers a request from a property owner for rezoning purposes while they may get the application that includes what the final product will be, ultimately what their role is, is to see if the re-zoning fits the principles of planning for the City. They should look at the adjacent properties nearby, and across the street and ask does it fit or does it reasonably fit, so they have “like” zoning. Consecutive or near each other, does it fit the area. They also consider the view point of neighbors. They aren’t voting on what business is going to go there. They aren’t voting on the whether they approve or don’t approve of the final project that is being proposed. They are looking at whether or not the proposed building fits within the zoning category.

Mayor Greene stated that there was a motion on the floor and called for a vote. All those in favor signified by signifying the affirmative motion. Those opposed, likewise. The motion carried.

PUBLIC HEARING/CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT

The public hearing was called to order. Under consideration was a conditional use permit regarding a mural, submitted by the Downtown Galax Grows committee. The request came before Council because it exceeds the sign measurement limitation allowed by law in the City of Galax.

This application has undergone consideration twice in public hearings via Planning Commission as well as a public hearing on November 18th. The site is located in downtown Galax diagonally behind the grassy lot. (Parcel 55-150-105 West Center Street).

A strip of property is owned by Guy Russell and another strip across the street that is owned by Nick Avila. Those property owners were notified of the application and proposal. The building itself belongs to Ed Barker.

Mr. Barker has agreed to the mural which will face towards Main Street.

Director of Planning and Commercial Development Doug Williams, read the Planning Commission's recommendation to approve the conditional use permit request for installation of the building mural for Section 161. 34F of the City Zoning Ordinance, pending acceptance by the City Council.

The future recommendation for approval of the mural artwork design, will be determined by members of the Downtown Galax Grows Committee.

The property owner adjacent to the site commented and said they felt the mural was slightly too bright for them.

With no further public comment, Mayor Greene declared the public hearing closed at 7:02pm.

Vice Mayor White made a motion to approve the conditional use permit to allow a mural to be erected as stated in the application. Councilman Robinson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING/ CONSIDERATION OF UPDATES

A public hearing for consideration of updates to the Zoning Ordinance in the form of a map and text amendments related to the location of substance abuse treatment facilities within areas designated for business or residential use as opposed to the business Medical District, B3.

A request was made by City Council October 6th 2025 to act expeditiously in evaluating recommendations regarding the location of substance abuse facilities, particularly in residential districts R2.

There was a workshop held on October 28th 2025 by the Planning Commission. The information presented to the Council, is the result of that workshop that was reviewed by the City Attorney Steve Durbin. The planning commission is recommending the adoption of the amendments applied to three ordinances and definitions submitted to Council. In a public hearing held November 18th the definitions of clinics and hospitals were replaced with definitions that are recognized by the Virginia association of Zoning Officials. Those definitions were changed to Health-care facilities and Institutional use.

Director Williams stated drug and alcohol treatment centers, medication assisted treatment centers and in-patient mental health facilities are included in the definition of healthcare facilities. There needs to be a breakout of specifically what would be considered healthcare. The term Institutional also has a very vast definition. This verbiage needs to be specific.

Attention was drawn to the third page of the handout submitted by the planning commission that states professional offices such as legal engineering and architectural offices as examples could exist in the area that was revised to exclude hospitals from two districts altogether, and changes the definition to "clinics".

Moving to the B2 District, there is no reference to a hospital in that district.

Medical facilities or drug/alcohol treatment centers must obtain a Certificate of Public Need before consideration in the district. The Virginia Dept of Health or Virginia Dept of Behavioral Health and Development Services would oversee this process depending on the type of facility. The rule is already built into the State law and referenced in the local B3 Ordinance. The main purpose of COPN process is to control insurance costs, prevent unnecessary duplication of services, (for example to many similar facilities in one area) Protect public infrastructure costs such as water, sewer, gas, and stormwater systems which could be strained if new large facilities are built where similar ones already exist. This requirement comes from provisions in the State Code section 32.1-102.3.

The Certificate of Public Need (COPN) acts as a filter to determine whether a facility is appropriate for a specific area. These departments (previously known by different names) were responsible for licensing facilities such as the Life Center in the past. Under the B-3 medical business ordinance, drug and alcohol rehabilitation

centers are not listed as permitted uses but instead are classified as conditional uses.

Conditional uses require A public hearing before the Planning Commission, a second public hearing where the Planning Commissions recommendation is presented to the City Council. The process begins with obtaining the COPN which serves as an initial qualification step before moving forward.

The COPN process requires that proper Zoning be in place, creating a bit of a chicken and egg situation, zoning and COPN approval depend on each other. Any application may need to indicate that one part of the process is pending while the other is being completed. The Planning Commission recommended revisions that allow staff to work with the city attorney to address necessary legal details.

The revisions mainly give the Zoning administrator flexibility to further review how the COPN requirement applies. The overall recommendation is to approve the proposed amendments, while allowing additional legal review and coordination with the City Attorney.

A motion was requested to approve the recommendations that had been discussed. Councilman Warr made a motion to approve the recommendations as outlined. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion.

PUBLIC HEARING

The next public hearing is the adoption of the ordinance to amend the name of the Industrial Development Authority.

City Manager Michael Burnette stated a few months earlier a request was made to change the name of the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) to the Economic Development Authority (EDA). The reason for the name change is to better reflect the broader role of authority, not just supporting industry but also: Attracting retail and commercial businesses. Supporting workforce development. Promoting overall economic growth. This type of name change has been happening across the state for about a decade. The city already has an ordinance (originally adopted around 1979) governing the authority. No public comment was made. The public hearing was closed. Councilman Henck made a motion to change the name of the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) to Economic Development Authority (EDA). Councilman Robinson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The next public hearing is for an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2026, City Budget.

Judy Taylor-Gallimore, Director of Finance, presented the amendments.

She explained that this is a routine budget amendment, mostly involving rolling over funds from the prior year into the current years budget.

The majority of the items do not involve new spending. They simply recognize funds that were already received and restricted for specific uses.

EMS, for life grant, routine funding carried over, opioid funds continued funding from prior year allocations.

Animal shelter programs, several items relate to funding for shelter operations and projects. United Way hurricane relief funds, funds received previously and now being used on projects this year.

Capitol Improvement fund transfer, money from surrounding counties used for animal shelter kennel renovations along with \$25,000.00 in donations that supported the work. Additional grant items 8-10 recognizing revenue and expenditures tied to grants that began in prior years. Overall, no additional city funds are being spent, these are mostly accounting adjustments to reflect existing funding.

No public comment.

Public hearing was closed.

A motion was made by Councilman Warr to accept the recommendations as outlined. Vice Mayor White seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The floor was opened for public comment. There was no public comment.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Regular Meeting of November, 2025

Councilman Henck made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

City Manager Michael Burnette gave an update of the renovations underway at the Rex Theatre. The project has entered phase one of construction and bids have just been opened. Phase one includes major upgrades such as Audio, video, and lighting improvements used for shows, movies and concerts.

Stage sound equipment with a bid of about \$501,265.00.

Structural and electrical upgrades including reworking electrical systems, adding structural beams to support new equipment, installing new screens and projectors, which equated to roughly \$345,000.00. Total cost for this phase is approximately \$846,265.00.

Funding sources include \$300,000.00 from the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission \$5000 from the Twin County Community Foundation. Some local matching funds were shifted from future projects to help support this project which does not use federal funding which allows the city to keep the costs down.

Councilman Warr made a motion to approve the phase one bid and award the contract. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

There was a discussion about the outdoor basins at the water treatment plant work, and one of the paddle wheels may need to be replaced in the very near future. Both paddle wheels have been repaired several times but one is now near failure and on its last leg. If the paddle wheel fails, the plant would be left relying on only one functioning flocculator which creates a risk to reliable water treatment operations. The city plans to hire Lawless Welding, the only bidder for the project, to repair the failing paddle wheel. The estimated cost of this repair is \$41,000.00. This repair is considered to be a temporary fix, to keep the system working until a larger long-term solution can be implemented.

Long term solutions would be to re-engineer the flocculator basins with a newer more durable design.

This long-term project may involve funding sources such as a USDA Rural Development loan.

The larger redesign could take 6-18 months so the temporary repair is needed now. If approved the repair work could be completed in about 30-45 days. A request of \$41,000.00 was presented to the City Council for repair to the wheel paddle. Vice Mayor White made a motion to execute the requested document to approve the repair. Councilman Robinson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The Traffic Safety Committee reviewed the intersection of Reserve Rd and Mountain View Blvd. This intersection has been known for several accidents. The Committee proposes the following,

Adding street lights to improve visibility

Reducing the speed limit to 35 MPH

Upgrading signage by replacing smaller signs with larger more visible signs, similar to those used elsewhere across VA.

Considering additional placement of traffic control features (likely more signage of warnings)

Chief Cooper gave an update about Blue Line Solutions.

There was a brief discussion about water rates and how they are calculated.

NEW BUSINESS

A proposed M.O.U. (Memorandum of Understanding) was included in the council packet. The M.O.U. relates to continued partnership for downtown revitalization efforts. Downtown Galax grows has been supported by prior collaborations, and this new M.O.U. updates earlier agreements. Changes were needed due to;

Personnel changes at the Downtown Galax Group.

Updated state-level Main Street program requirements.

The new version clarifies how both parties will work together moving forward, to increase downtown vitality, and to continue development and improvement efforts

Representative John Crookshanks was present to answer any questions about the M.O.U.

City Staff are working with the Recreation Advisory Commission to improve the High School baseball/softball experience at Felts Park and Mountain View. A key improvement is installing PA systems to allow announcements, music, and game day features. Stage Sound has already viewed the sites and is scheduled to be in town during the theatre renovation project. The cost would be roughly \$15,000.00 per park for the PA system. Councilwoman Burnett made a motion to approve the P.A. project. Councilman Robinson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

There was an announcement about the Downtown Galax Grows facade improvement program.

There was a comment about a Workforce Development meeting in Whitfield, which was a joint meeting with all of their Boards.

Councilman Robinson expressed his joy in having been able to work in such a wonderful capacity and that he appreciates the talent he has worked with. Finally, in closing Manager Burnette Thanked Councilman Robinson for his service.

He then discussed a tax deadline that was moved from Friday to Monday because of inclement weather. Virginia State Law requires the Council pass two resolutions, the first resolution to retroactively extend the deadline for personal property taxes and real estate tax from December 5th to December 8th at 5:00pm due to weather.

And a second resolution to formally approve the extended due date for Tax payments. Vice Mayor White made a motion to approve the resolution to extend the deadline for property tax payments from December to December 8th. Councilwoman Burnett seconded the motion.

Vice Mayor White made a motion to approve the resolution to extend the deadline for Real estate tax payments due to inclement weather from December 5th to December 8th. Councilwoman Burnett seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Councilman Henck made a motion to enter closed session at 8:10pm. Vice Mayor White seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting closed at 8:10pm.

City Mayor

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