

**Galax City Council
Minutes
February 9, 2026**

Galax City Council convened in regular session in the City Council Chamber on February 9, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. Mayor White called the meeting to order with the following Council members present: Vice Mayor Greene, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, Councilman Coomes.

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 6:05pm

PRAYER AND PLEDGE of ALLEGIANCE: Councilman Warr lead the meeting with a prayer followed by the pledge of allegiance at 6:07 P.M.

RECOGNITION OF RETIREMENT: DWAYNE G. HARMON (Wastewater Department)

RECOGNITION OF RETIREMENT: MICHAEL T. BROWN (Water Department)

Mayor White presented both retirees with a plaque and watch for their years of service. She thanked them both for their outstanding performances and expressed hope that, when they look at their watches, they would fondly remember their time spent serving the people of Galax.

PUBLIC HEARING: Change in Water Meter Policy

Mayor White opened public hearing at 6:07pm. The floor was opened for public comment.

Council members discussed proposed changes to the City's water billing policy as it relates to multi-unit properties. The original proposal would have applied separate billing for the first three units per property, with additional charges for each unit thereafter. However, staff recommended revisiting the proposal due to uncertainty regarding final cost impacts and alignment with the advertised public hearing language.

A revised approach was presented to simplify the policy by allowing one water bill per property for up to four units per water line with no changes for properties containing five or more units, which are already required to have master meters. This revision was intended to create consistency and reduce administrative complexity.

Staff indicated the estimated financial impact of the revised proposal would result in approximately \$36,000.00 in annual revenue reduction. (approximately \$18,000.00 each from water and sewer). It was also noted that the originally proposed version could result in a greater revenue loss though exact figures were not available.

During the public hearing, Council members expressed the need for clearer financial data and cost breakdowns before making a final decision, including potential impacts on rates and taxpayers. Additional clarification was requested regarding ordinance language, meter connections, and billing structure.

Following discussions, Council agreed that the proposal had evolved significantly from what was originally advertised. Based on guidance from the City Attorney, it was recommended to table the current proposal and proceed with a new public hearing.

Action Taken

The public hearing was closed at 6:20 p.m. with no further public comment.

A motion was made by Councilman Henck to

- Hold a new public hearing in March, and
- Advertise updated ordinance language reflecting the revised policy (one bill for up to four units per water line).
- Vice Mayor Greene seconded the motion. The motion passed 6-0. Councilwoman Ritchie abstained.
- Staff will provide finalized ordinance language and cost estimates prior to the next meeting.

BRCEDA

Ashlyn Shrewsbury provided an overview of the Mount Rogers Regional Partnership, a regional economic development organization serving Bland, Grayson, and Carroll Counties, as well as the City of Galax. The organization focuses on job creation, increasing capital investment, supporting existing businesses and improving quality of life in the region.

Ms. Shrewsbury highlighted fiscal year 2025 accomplishments, including 238 new jobs supported, \$128 million in capital investment, 40 project leads, 75 business visits, and 20 FRI's. A major project included a 65-acre greenhouse development at Longwood Commerce Park, representing approximately \$105 million in investment and 118 jobs. Additional regional expansions including Hitachi Energy, were also noted.

She reviewed workforce development efforts, reporting 293 students and 506 individuals served through talent and career programs along with marketing initiatives that generated over 30,000 views and multiple media placements. Ongoing site development efforts including a regional site study and infrastructure improvements were also discussed.

Ms. Shrewsbury noted continued support through Tobacco Commission grants to attract foreign direct investment, including the region's certification as an FDI-qualified community. She also highlighted the implementation of a private investor funding model to support future growth.

Council discussion included questions regarding vacant industrial properties, coordination with property owners, and collaboration with local economic development authorities. Ms. Shrewsbury confirmed ongoing efforts to market available sites and support regional partnerships.

Ms. Shrewsbury thanked the City Council and City Manager for their continued support.

CITIZENS COMMENTS: None

CONSENT AGENDA:

Approval of January 2025 Financial Reports (attachment #1)

Appointments to the Twin County Airport Commission (attachment #2)

Policy Change: Payment of Leave upon Retirement (attachment #3)

Approval to hold Budget Amendment Public Hearing.

Approval to apply for a Virginia Tourism Grant.

Councilman Warr made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda

Councilwoman Burnett seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS:

Grants Director Sarah McKellop presented multiple upcoming grant opportunities primarily through the Virginia Department of Energy and other regional programs.

A key grant discussed was the Community Oriented Resilience Energy (CORE) grant.

Primary Proposal

Recommended project: Mobile solar-powered generator approximately (\$225,000.00)

Purpose: Provide backup power for communication infrastructure, including:

- 911 dispatch
- Fire and law enforcement
- Emergency communications during severe weather

Benefit:

Mobility allows use at multiple sites (e.g.) communications tower, recreation center, water pump station).

Funding Details

- Proposed application:
- \$150,000 grant request.
- Additional funding may be sought through
- APCO

- Appalachian Voices
- Appalachian Solar Finance Fund
- Grant awards very widely depending on participation; no guaranteed amount.

Council Action,

Councilman Warr made a motion to apply for the grant as outlined. Councilman Henck seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Southwest Virginia Program Grant (Tourism Focus)

A second grant was discussed, Southwest Virginia regional program (FY2026)

Focus areas include tourism and downtown improvements.

Proposed concepts:

- Movable/pop-up streetscape elements (seating, bike racks, trash receptacles, lighting.)
- Flexible design to support events and festivals.

Ranger Station Discussion

Discussion on potential State funded ranger station near trail (Rex Lane Area):

- Seen as a major economic development opportunity.
- Could catalyze Creekside Vaughn redevelopment

Council discussed contributing matching or seed funding. (\$50,000-\$100,000 range suggested) to strengthen the project.

Concerns raised:

- Project cost likely several million dollars.
- City contribution would be partial and strategic, not full funding
- Need for clarity on total funding sources and project readiness.

Emphasis on

- Submitting well-developed single-project applications for better scoring.
- Ensuring matching funds and project readiness
- Balancing ambition with realistic funding capacity.

Final Action

Councilman Henck made a motion to apply for the grant as outlined. Vice Mayor Greene seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Virginia Commission for the Arts-Communities Partnership Grant.

Annual grant program supporting local arts organizations.

Funds distributed to:

- Twin County Arts Council
- Chestnut Creek School of the Arts
- Grant amount up to \$4500, with a 1:1 city match, totaling approximately \$9000. In support.
- Purpose: Sustain arts programming and community arts funding.
- Application deadline April 1
- Administration requested approval to submit the application.

Council Action:

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

Downtown Investment Grant (Virginia Main Street Program FY2027)

- Focus: Downtown wayfinding system (signage/navigation improvements).
- Partnership: City and downtown organization (Galax Grow's)
- Funding Structure:

Match requirements vary.

- Over \$50,000 - 1.1 match

- \$25,000-\$50,000 - 2:1 match
- Up to \$25,000 - 3:1 match

Proposed project:

\$25,000 City match with 2:1 funding resulting in a \$75,000.00 project.

Project details:

Intended to support downtown navigation and visitor experience.

Must begin Fall of 2026 and be completed by fall 2027.

Considered a manageable short-term project aligned with downtown master planning.

Continued investment in:

Arts and Cultural programming

Public Art, (murals, installations)

Downtown development and tourism infrastructure.

Emphasis on:

Leveraging matching funds

Partnering with local organizations.

Selecting achievable, high impact projects.

Stormwater Infrastructure grant discussion:

Grant writer McKellop introduced a recovery funding grant opportunity totaling approximately \$1.4 million available statewide.

The grant is a rolling application, meaning funds may be awarded until exhausted. Early submission is encouraged.

Grant Details

Designed for construction and non-construction projects that:

Support disaster recovery

Improve Infrastructure

Enhance economic resilience.

Potential award range \$2 million to \$20 million.

Expected to fund up to 80% of project costs (possibly more depending on economic distress level)

Proposed Project:

Stormwater infrastructure at:

Glendale Road

Valley Road (near hospital area)

Project Includes:

Drainage and watershed improvements

Pipe installation and water redirection

Managing runoff across Route 58/458 into nearby creek

Estimated total Project Cost:

Approximately \$2.3 million.

This grant would supplement an existing VDEM hazard mitigation grant application (approximately \$500,000 anticipated)

Project Impact

Would address significant stormwater and drainage issues in the area

Work largely contained within existing right-of-way, though technically complex.

Intended to fully resolve stormwater concerns at the identified intersection and surrounding watershed.

Council Action:

Councilman Henck made a motion to apply for the grant as outlined, Vice Mayor Greene seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

USDA Rural Development Community Facilities Grant.

Ms. McKellop presented a USDA community grant opportunity aimed at supporting essential community infrastructure in rural areas.

The grant can fund:

Construction, renovation or improvement of facilities.

Equipment purchases and related project expenses.

Facilities such as community centers, childcare centers and emergency shelters.

Proposed Project

Use the Recreation Center as the qualifying community facility.

Project scope:

Upgrade the HVAC system including installation of air conditioning.

Address existing heating issues.

The facility is designated as an emergency shelter, making reliable heating and cooling critical for emergency operations.

Funding Details

Grant covers up to 55% of the eligible project costs based on regional eligibility.

Estimated project cost:

Approximately \$350,000 (preliminary estimate)

Application is open year-round but early submission is encouraged.

Purpose and Impact

Ensures the Recreation Center can function effectively as

A Community facility, a designated emergency shelter under the city's emergency operations plan.

Council Action,

Councilman Henck made a motion to submit the USDA grant application. Councilman Warr seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Resolutions-Grant Funding Appropriations

A resolution was presented to authorize the appropriation of funds for a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) through DHCD for the water treatment resilience generators project.

- Grant amount: \$776,600
- **Required local match:**
- \$120,600
- Purpose to incorporate the funds into the City budget.
- Councilman Henck made a motion to approve the resolution, Councilman Warr seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

A second resolution was presented for funding through the Appalachian Regional Commission for Rex Theater revitalization project.

- Grant award: \$700,000
- Required local match
- \$1,202,670

Matching funds to be sourced from:

- Department of Historic Resources grant \$672,672
- Additional DHR/Tobacco Commission grant: \$225,000
- Tobacco Regional Revitalization Commission: \$300,000
- Twin County Commissioners Fund: \$5,000

Purpose: To appropriate funds into the City budget (funds not yet received; contract negotiations ongoing)

Councilman Warr made a motion to approve the resolution Councilman Henck seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY MANAGER, ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER, MAYOR, CITY COUNCIL, AND COUNCIL COMMITTEES

With no further business at hand, Councilman Warr made a motion to adjourn at 7:32p.m.

CLOSED SESSION:

No closed session proposed

ADJOURNMENT at 7:32 p.m.

Mayor

Clerk

