

**Galax City Council
Minutes
January 12, 2026**

Galax City Council convened in regular session in the City Council Chamber on January 12, 2026 at 6:00 p.m. City Manager Burnette called the meeting to order with the following Council members present: Vice Mayor Greene, Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, Councilman Coomes

The following members were sworn in, Sharon Ritchie, Willie Greene, Evan Henck, and Shane Coomes.

PRAYER AND PLEDGE of ALLEGIANCE – Mayor Greene lead the opening prayer.

ELECTION OF MAYOR

City Manager Burnette stated that, at the conclusion of the calendar year, terms for certain council members as well as the offices of Mayor and Vice Mayor, are subject to appointment with the Vice Mayor position occurring every other year. He noted that it is his duty to appoint a mayor at this time, and opened the floor for nominations for the position of Mayor for the upcoming two-year term.

Councilman Warr nominated Vice Mayor Beth White for Mayor. Councilwoman Burnett seconded the motion.

City Manager Burnette called for any other nominations.

Mayor Greene made a motion to close nominations. Vice Mayor White seconded the motion.

City Manager Burnette announced the nomination of Beth White for Mayor and called for a vote. With no opposition, Vice Mayor Beth White was duly appointed Mayor of the City of Galax for the term ending December 31st 2028.

Mayor White thanked her teammates for the opportunity to serve, and opened the floor for nominations for Vice Mayor.

Councilman Warr nominated Even Henck.

Councilwoman Ritchie nominated Willie Greene for Vice Mayor. Councilwoman Burnett seconded the nomination.

Mayor White called for any additional nominations; hearing none, she closed the nominations and called for a vote. Upon a formal vote, Willie Greene was appointed Vice Mayor.

RECOGNITION OF RETIREMENT: K-9 OFFICER ROCCO, SHAWNEE JONES

Mayor White recognized Rocco, a K-9 dog that was purchased for the Galax Police Department, for the purpose of drug detection, finding suspects, articles of evidence, and missing persons. Rocco spent 5 years with his handler Shawnee Jones. Mayor White thanks Shawnee Jones for 23 years of service and Rocco as well. Chief Cooper announced they have another K-9 that is being trained presently to step up when Rocco is ready to retire.

RECOGNITION CHAUNCEY ROBINSON

Mayor White recognized Chauncey Robinson, former Councilman for the City of Galax. She thanked him for his dedication and service to the community and presented him with a plaque.

RECOGNITION MICHAEL AND DANA WOODEL

Mayor White recognized Michael and Dana Woodel for their many years of dedication and service to the City of Galax. She expressed her appreciation for their contributions to the community, which were met with applause from those in attendance. Mayor White wished them well in their retirement and acknowledged the lasting legacy they leave behind

RECOGNITION DAVID FLIPPIN

Mayor White recognized David Flippin for his 20 years of service to the City of Galax. She said much like the Woodel's; David's thumbprint can be found all over the City of Galax. She thanked him for his excellence.

The retirees were all presented with a watch, signifying they no longer have to be anywhere on time, but also with a prayer that every time they look at their watch, they will be reminded of the moments that have been invested by them and the community, and the wonderful moments they carry away with them.

RECOGNITION RITA REEVES

Mayor White recognized Rita Reeves for her 4 years of service on the Planning Commission as well as the Advisory Board for Social Services. She thanked her for being the kind of neighbor that makes Galax known for its kindness of people and willingness to help a neighbor in need. She quoted Winston Churchill by saying “We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.

Mayor White opened the floor for Citizen comment.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Mayor White noted the time had been set aside for public comment and read the required guidelines. She stated that public comment provides citizens the opportunity to address City Council, either in person or in writing on matters within the Council’s responsibilities. Each speaker is limited to three minutes and groups are limited to five minutes. Comments must be directed to Council as a whole and not to individual members or staff. Profane, vulgar, or insulting language will not be tolerated. Comments on matters outside the purview of City Council or not related to local government are not permitted. Public comment is not a question-and -answer session, and Council Members will not respond during this time. The Chair may rule a speaker out of order for violations and may have a speaker removed upon a second violation.

Mayor White recognized Brandon Anders as the sole speaker.

Brandon Anders, representing the Public Works Department, addressed Council and expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to work under Mike Woodel’s leadership over the past several years. He spoke to Mike’s integrity and strong work ethic throughout his 48 years of service to the community. Mr. Anders highlighted Mike’s leadership style, noting his ability to lead by example, earn respect, support his team and make employees feel valued. He also recognized the lasting impact Mike has had on the department through mentorship, relationship building and setting high standards. On behalf of the Public Works staff, Mr. Anders thanked Mike for his service and leadership and congratulated him on his retirement, wishing him continued health and happiness.

CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor White stated that the December minutes were not ready for approval and requested a motion to defer consideration of the December minutes to the next scheduled Council meeting. Vice Mayor Greene made a motion to defer the December minutes. Councilman Warr seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Following the removal of the December minutes, Mayor White requested a motion to approve the remaining items on the consent agenda. Councilwoman Ritchie made a motion to approve the remaining items on the consent agenda. Councilman Warr seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

ORGANIZATIONAL BUSINESS

The meeting schedule for 2026 was reviewed

Councilman Henck made a motion to approve the meeting schedule for 2026.

Councilman Warr seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

The holiday schedule for 2026 was reviewed,

Councilman Warr made a motion to approve the holiday and trash schedule for 2026

Councilman Henck seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

Strategic Planning meeting was scheduled for Wednesday February 4th with a contingent back up of Tuesday February 10th. Or Tuesday February 3rd.

There was a discussion of council appointed seats on various committees.

Councilman Warr made a motion to approve the appointment of council members to the various boards and committees as outlined in the attachments as well as the staff appointments, Councilwoman Burnett seconded the motion, The motion passed unanimously.

ADOPTION OF ROBERTS RULES OF ORDER TO GUIDE COUNCIL

Councilman Henck made a motion to adopt Roberts Rules of Order to guide council. Councilman Warr seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

An auditor presented the City’s financial audit for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, noting that the City received an unmodified (clean) opinion, indicating the financial statements are materially accurate. The auditor reviewed key financial highlights, including a general fund balance of approximately \$18.5 million, with unassigned funds remaining stable at approximately \$17.3 million. Long-term obligations decreased slightly to approximately \$23.7

million and include pension-related liabilities. Enterprise funds including water, sewer, stormwater, and the Rex Theatre, reported a net position of approximately \$11.6 Million, reflecting an increase from the prior year. The auditor noted the importance of monitoring long-term obligations in relation to available funds balance. Revenue trends were discussed, including fluctuations in local tax revenues such as meals tax and personal property tax. While some revenues have begun to level off following prior increases, overall trends remain generally positive. The auditor also reviewed property assessments noting slight declines in personal property values following prior peaks as well as growth in public service assessments. Additionally, audit findings included standard adjusting entries related to the school board's financial reporting, with expectations for improvement following recent staffing and procedural changes. Overall, the auditor indicated the City remains in stable financial condition, with key indicators comparing favorably to state averages.

BLUE LINE SOLUTIONS UPDATE

Chief Cooper provided an update on the implementation of the City's traffic safety program, noting that the project has been underway for approximately three years. He reported that the city has received the necessary permits and that the implementation process has been efficient, with City staff providing strong support and cooperation.

The program includes the installation of video technology for traffic enforcement as required by state legislation for court-adjudicated offenses. Coordination with the power company is ongoing to complete installation, and all required permit fees have been paid. The program is expected to launch prior to the end of the current school year, beginning with a public information and education phase, followed by a warning period before full enforcement.

Chief Cooper emphasized the importance of education prior to enforcement and shared data from comparable jurisdictions demonstrating significant reductions in traffic violations following implementation. Examples included reductions of over 90 percent in school zone violations after the education and warning phases.

OLD TIME APPALACHIAN CHRISTMAS FESTIVAL REVIEW

A presentation from the Tourism Department provided a review of the 2025 Old-Time Appalachian Christmas Festival reporting strong attendance of approximately 4600 individuals an increase of roughly 500 attendees from the previous year. The event demonstrated continued growth and regional draw, with visitors from multiple states and an average stay of approximately 90 minutes, contributing to increased activity for local businesses. Downtown merchants and vendors reported strong sales and steady traffic throughout the event. While final meals and sales tax data are pending, lodging tax revenues showed a slight increase. The festival also received positive feedback on social media and strong community participation, including intergenerational attendance and a wide variety of activities such as live music heritage events, and children's programming.

The event was also noted as a successful collaboration among City staff, community partners, volunteers, and local organizations. Transportation services, including the shuttle bus saw increased usage compared to the prior year. The festival continues to support the City's tourism goals by promoting downtown activity during the winter season and reinforcing Galax as a year-round destination. A suggestion was also discussed regarding the potential for additional seasonal events to further expand tourism opportunities in the future.

WATER SYSTEM UPGRADE PROJECT-APPROVAL OF LEGAL SERVICES AND BOND COUNSEL CONTRACTS

The City Manager reviewed attachment 8 in the Council packet. Noting that the City is pursuing up to \$8.8 million in financing through the USDA Rural Development program at favorable rates and terms. He explained that, as part of the requirements, the City must have both legal counsel and bond counsel under contract prior to proceeding with borrowing. Two contracts were presented for Council's consideration: one for the City Attorney to provide legal services related to the project, not to exceed \$18,000.00 and one for bond counsel services not to exceed \$47,000. Approval of these contracts would allow the City to move forward with the water project. Councilman Warr made a motion to approve the contracts as outlined for the Upgrade Project-approval. Vice Mayor Greene seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

WATER SERVICE POLICY

Councilman Henck made the following statement. The question of how the city bills for water was brought to me by concerned citizens. They felt they were paying unfairly for the water to their single property. After I reviewed their situation and collected all the data, I agreed with them in part. The part that I agreed with them on is as follows, they actually have two lines entering their property, one of them is in our historic district and has a separate upstairs and a separate downstairs. They rent the upstairs to a business executive who comes to stay a couple times a year. He uses barely 1000 gallons per year. The downstairs, just in comparison, I'll say this again in a moment. But my last water bill, which is for two months, was 9000 gallons. The downstairs of this portion, which is served by one water

line, is vacant. The property owners receive a bill every two months which has two sections. One for the upstairs unit, where they have it granted, and one for the downstairs unit, which is vacant. That is as per our city code, 153-36.1 which calls for us to count individual units of space. Which whether those are residential or commercial, this line that services this portion, the upstairs and the downstairs, in total, has about 1200 square feet. That's 600 square feet down and 600 square feet up, and yet their BI monthly bill has regularly been \$192 for what is almost always less than 1000 gallons of water per billing cycle. In comparison, I paid \$174, nearly \$20 less on my last water bill for 9000 gallons of water at my home, so this property owner who has invested in our downtown and is trying to help grow our city by keeping their property in great shape and bringing business and life to our downtown, Is really subsidizing my water by paying over nine times what I'm paying per gallon. As I said, the Public Services Committee, reviewed, considered and weighed into this. I don't speak for them tonight, but I have benefited from their input as this has evolved, and with all of their inputs and discussion and suggestions in mind, I am proposing, and it will be my motion that we amend our water policy to allow three units per water line from all owners in the city of Galax, before counting units and applying minimum bills. Keep in mind, each unit is a separate space, whether it's residential or commercial. This would apply to all properties in the city, not just our downtown, all properties.

Council discussed a proposed amendment to the City's water billing policy to allow up to three (3) units per water line prior to the application of minimum billing charges. The intent of the amendment is to create a more equitable rate structure and support economic activity for property and business owners. Staff and Council reviewed data related to the potential financial impact of the proposed change with estimated annual revenue reductions ranging from approximately \$80,000.00 to \$120,000.00. It was noted that the proposal would apply citywide to all residential and commercial properties. Following a discussion, a motion was made by Councilman Henck to advertise the proposed amendment to City Code 153-36.1 and to schedule a public hearing. The motion included direction to work with City Attorney to prepare appropriate ordinance language for consideration at a future meeting. Councilman Warr seconded the motion. Vice Mayor Greene abstained. The motion carried

DISCUSSION OF FY2026-2027 CITY BUDGET

City Manager Burnette presented a proposed budget calendar outlining the timeline for development of the upcoming fiscal year budget. The process includes distribution of operational and capital request forms followed by Council budget work sessions beginning in late January or early February, potentially in conjunction with the Council's strategic planning session.

Staff will collect departmental responses in February, with the budget team preparing a draft budget through late March. Multiple Council work sessions are anticipated to review priorities, budget pressures and opportunities, with a formal budget presentation expected by the end of March. Public hearings and adoption are anticipated in May or June, aligned with school system's required timeline. Council discussed the current process and the balance between Council priorities and staff recommendations. Council members expressed interest in improving communications and timing, noting challenges experienced in prior years when priorities were identified after draft budgets had already been developed.

Council considered options to enhance involvement, including receiving departmental requests earlier, reviewing a list of unfunded requests and potentially scheduling additional work sessions. It was also discussed whether department heads should present directly to Council or continue communication through the City Manager.

Consensus was reached to continue using strategic planning sessions to establish Council priorities, with staff incorporating those priorities into the budget development process. Council was in general agreement with the proposed timeline and approach, with no formal vote taken.

NEW BUSINESS

The Finance Department presented a proposal to expand the City's online payment system to include miscellaneous invoices (e.g., business licenses and building permits), in addition to existing utility payments. The expanded system is expected to be implemented within a week. A fee Structure was outlined, including a 2.95% transaction fee for debit/credit card payments and a flat \$0.95 fee for e-checks. The proposal requests Council approval to pass these fees on to customers who choose to use the online payment system.

It was noted that the city currently absorbs fees for in person payments but has historically passed online utility payment fees to customers. Discussion included whether fees should also be applied to in person transactions, with staff noting that most local governments pass such fees to customers regardless of payment method.

Council discussed the convenience factor of online payments and the variability of fees based on payment type. It was emphasized that use of the online system is optional, and customers may avoid fees by paying in person or by mail. Vice Mayor Greene made a motion to approve the fee for online payments. Councilman Henck seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

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

Route 58 Speed Limit Discussion,

Staff discussed a recent accident on Route 58 westbound toward Grayson County at Mountain View, an area previously identified by Council as a concern. The current speed limit decreases to 35mph upon entering the city from the west, and staff noted that public works has been awaiting formal Council action to establish and implement the speed limit.

It was confirmed that no additional approval outside the City is required, however a public hearing may be necessary. It was suggested that lowering the speed limit westbound from Main Street into the City to align with the existing 35 mpg limit and to improve safety. Plans include installing larger, more visible signage, including median and signs for both directions, and potentially adding flashing speed warning signs.

Council discussed aligning (matching) westbound and eastbound speed limits. Some concern was raised regarding the transition of speeds, particularly from Baywood, where speeds decrease gradually (60 mph to 45 mph to 35 mph). It was suggested that the westbound speed limit be adjusted while leaving the eastbound side unchanged for now to maintain a more gradual transition. Council indicated general consensus to proceed. A motion was entertained to lower the westbound speed limit on Route 58 from Main Street to the City limits to implement appropriate signage improvements. Councilman Warr made a motion to change the speed limit on westbound Route 58 to match eastbound speed limit with additional signs to be installed. Councilwoman Burnett seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Request for Closed Meeting in Accordance with 2.2-3711

Councilman Warr made a motion to enter closed session at 9:45pm. Councilman Henck seconded the motion. Council entered closed session at 9:45pm.

- (A)(1) Discussion of personnel matters
- Council members health insurance
- (A)(3) Discussion of the acquisition of real property or the disposition of real property
- Adams Building -\$345,000.00 and April 30th to close

Return to open session and action from closed session

At 10:10 P.M. Vice Mayor Greene made a motion to come out of closed session. Councilman Henck seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Councilman Coomes certified that no items other than those allowed under the cited Virginia code section were discussed and no action was taken, with the following affirmations, Mayor White, Vice Mayor Greene, Councilman Henck, Councilman Warr, Councilwoman Ritchie, and Councilwoman Burnett.

There was a brief discussion about Health Insurance for Councilmembers. Councilman Henck made a motion to cease offering health insurance to Council-members when those members are eligible for health insurance through other means such as their spouse, Medicare, or employment. Current Councilmembers would be grandfathered in, for the remainder of their term. Councilman Warr seconded the motion. The motion passed 4-3.

Councilman Warr made a motion to purchase the Adams Building located at 115 Grayson Street, Galax VA in the sum of \$345,000.00 to close by April 30th. Councilwoman Burnett seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

With no further business at hand, Vice Mayor Greene made a motion to adjourn at 10:15pm. Councilwoman Burnett seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT 10:15 P.M.

Mayor

Clerk

