

**Galax City Council
Minutes
March 9 2026**

Galax City Council convened in regular session in the City Council Chamber on March 9, 2025 at 6:00 p.m. Mayor White called the meeting to order with the following Council members present: Mayor White, Vice Mayor Greene, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, Councilman Coomes

PRAYER AND PLEDGE of ALLEGIANCE – Council Henck

Recognition of Retirement

Mayor White recognized Dwayne Harmon’s years of service and subsequent retirement from the Wastewater Dept in the City of Galax.

Mayor White presented the following Junior Mayors and Junior Vice Mayors:

- Junior Mayor Jaycie Pemberton
- Junior Mayor Susana Rivera Flores
- Junior Vice-Mayor Brody Long
- Junior Vice-Mayor Lucas Pineda

Mayor White recognized the Maroon Tide Athletes Swim Teams VASL Class 1a/2a swimming championship coaches, Trace and Sherry Lumpkin,

Briar Sessions (2) State Championships, Men’s 200-yard Individual Medley and 100-yard Butterfly.

Sophia Chaves (2) 3rd place finishes, Women’s 100-yard Freestyle and 100-yard Backstroke.

Adelyn Markham 11th in Women’s 100-yard Backstroke

Thomas Fant 10th 100-yard Breaststroke

Josiah Whitman 15th Men’s 100-yard Backstroke

Vivian Fant 15th Women’s 50-yard Freestyle and 8th in Women’s 100-yard Butterfly

Men’s Relays-2nd 400-yard Freestyle Relay (Briar Sessions, Ben Sheets, Thomas Fant, Josiah Whitman)

3rd 200-Yard Medley Relay (Briar Sessions, Ben Sheets, Thomas Fant, Josiah Whitman)

13th in Men’s 200 Freestyle Relay (David Briggs, Nat McFarland, Mateo Pineda and Josiah Whitment)

Also recognized by Mayor White,

Women’s Relays 8th in 200-yard Medley Relay 15th (Vivian Fant, Adelyn Markham, Grace Archer and Alexis Isom.)

Overall Boys team placed 4th and Girls team placed 11th.

Wrestling VHSL State Championships

Coaches: Trevor Malchano and Luke Malchano

Braeden Whitaker 157 lb. – 6th place medal winner

Alex Lopez 120 lb.

Lance Tate 150 lb.

Trey Markham 175 lb.

CITIZEN COMMENTS – Kate Fridell spoke about the School Zones. She believes they need to be marked out better. She does not believe there is significant amount of signage especially when coming off intersections.

CONSENT AGENDA

- Approval of October 2025 Financial Reports
- Approval of Hold Budget Amendment Public Hearing Councilman Henck made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Councilman Warr seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

Holiday Event Recap as presented by William Bottomley,

Mr. Bottomley reported on the success of opening weekend holiday event which included a helicopter arrival with Santa. Attendance was estimated to be 6000 participants, making it one of the largest events held.

Multiple activities were offered throughout the season, including

Horse drawn buggy rides, Zion Church live activity which is a new addition. Coffee trucks, Sponsor supported giveaways (candy canes and small trinkets) Community partners, including home health care and rehabilitation services, participated in the event. A total of 92 community Christmas trees were displayed. Four trees were awarded to selected groups including police, rescue services, and in Memory of Corrections Officer Jeremy Hall.

Recipients were permitted to decorate their trees as desired. The event continued to see strong community involvement with successful marketing efforts expanding reach and visibility. There will be some evaluating on advertising options and continued effective strategies for future events.

Overall,

Attendance results

An estimated 49,500 individual visitors with repeat visits totaling approximately 72,800 visits.

This marks the highest attendance on record, exceeding the previous record of 72,300.

Estimated traffic included approximately 18,200 vehicles over the six-week period.

Events and Operations Highlights

Peak attendance occurred during Thanksgiving weekend, (helicopter/Santa arrival)

Christmas festival weekends. The event continues to draw visitors from outside the region with significant travel noted among attendees.

Facilities & Storage

Existing storage includes: one 12X20 building, one 12X16 building. There is definitely a need for more storage to support growing inventory and expanded displays. This would allow for more decorations and lighting enhancements.

Future Enhancements. Exploring acquisition of additional decorations from other municipalities. Enhancements to the park entrance and Main Street corridor. Potential addition of a portable ice-skating rink, pending cost evaluation.

Possibly implementing a user fee to help offset operational costs.

Acknowledgements

Galax Police Department for traffic control and safety. Galax Fire Department for assistance with helicopter landing operations. The community for the continued support and participation.

Council Committee reviewed the internal committee structure and made assignments to the various committees.

- Audit and Finance
- Commerce
- Public Services
- Tourism and Downtown
- Housing and Infrastructure
- Possible Marketing.

City Manager Burnette gave a budget update. Revenues are projected to remain relatively flat due to broader economic conditions, including slowing economic activity, rising gas prices and declining interest rate returns. He was optimistic about the tourism and recreation related revenues. Health insurance costs are expected to increase by approximately 7%, contributing significantly to budget pressures. Estimated new expenditures are projected in the range of \$500,000-\$600,000.00 with approximately \$160,000-\$170,000.00 tied to employee related costs (including potential wage adjustments and COLA considerations. Additional impacts anticipated from school related funding needs (estimated 300-1000 additional students.

A 2-3% increase scenario is being evaluated with (2% as a step increase and 1% as COLA)

He will continue to refine the figures and present a more detailed budget.

A Budget workshop was scheduled for April 24th at 3pm.

New Business

Cyber Policy

Planning Director Doug Williams presented an outline of a cybersecurity compliance policy that is needed for funding for USDA Rural Development Funding for the City's \$ 8.8 million dollar water treatment plant project.

The USDA loan conditions multiple stipulations, one of which requires a written risk and resilience assessment and emergency response plan prior to bid.

Staff confirmed that; Required emergency response and risk assessment documents were completed in the prior year. Existing plans address Hazards such as Chemical releases and natural disasters however a formal cybersecurity component was not previously included prompting the need for this policy adoption. The proposed policy: Establishes an incident response team led by IT Director Larry Thompson, with involvement from the City Manager, legal counsel, third party IT providers and affected departments. References federal cybersecurity standards including NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) and CISA (Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency) guidance. Provides for security controls, incident response, monitoring and auditing. Supports compliance with applicable federal and State regulations and helps ensure continuity of municipal services. Adoption of the policy requires 3 signatures enabling certification that cybersecurity and emergency response measures are in place. Councilwoman Burnett made a motion to adopt the Cyber Security Policy as presented. Councilman Henck seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

School Board appointment: Coach Larry Spangler submitted a letter of interest for School Board. The Council discussed the appointment and stated they should advertise the vacancy before making the appointment. The position will be advertised and may require a public hearing at the next meeting. Councilman Warr made a motion to authorize the City Manager to advertise a Public Hearing as requested. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion. Councilman Henck abstained due to personal conflict.

Grants

City Manager Michael Burnette discussed the first grant request from Chief Dewitt Cooper who is currently under the weather. This Grant is for a local law enforcement grant. It is a no match grant and is to be used to purchase a radar unit for one of the vehicles and carious drug testing kits fir the officers for cocaine, meth and heroin. Councilman Henck made a motion to approve the Grant for Law Enforcement. Councilman Warr seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

City Manager Michael Burnette also discussed the Byrne Justice assistance grant available. This is a total award up to \$33,000.00 with a \$25,000 cash match. There has been some significant salary savings over the year that will be able to cover the cash match for this. This will be used to purchase two solar powered speed signs and upgrade the existing sign so you see those all around the city. There are many requests to move them in different places and it would be very helpful for the police department to have more.

Councilman Warr made a motion to approve the application for this grant. Vice Mayor Greene seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Sarah McKellop presented the Council with several Grant Opportunities related to water infrastructure and downtown revitalization projects.

Water Tank Project (City View)

Application proposed through the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund/STAG grant via the Department of Health.

Project involves construction of a 1-million-gallon water tank to replace an existing tank.

Total estimated project cost: \$3 million dollars. \$1 million is already secured through prior congressional funding. Remaining \$2 million needed to complete the project.

Current grant application details: Requesting approximately \$1.6 million. Requires a 20% local match (~ \$400,000) from the city. Combined funding would meet total project cost. Councilman Henck made a motion to approve submission of the grant application for the remaining funding. Councilman Warr seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Additional Grant-Rex Theatre Revitalization

A proposed application through DHCD/Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)

Funding request: \$700,000 for phase 3 of the Rex Theatre Project. Project components include:

Renovation of the Adams Building (manager's office, green room, lobby improvements)

Carpet replacement consistent with historic design. Potential lodging/apartment space improvements. ADA accessibility upgrades (restroom and apartment) Installation of a freight elevator for equipment transport.

Grant requirements:

T-Mobile grant

This grant is for \$50,000.00 and will be used for the Downtown Galax Grows Project as submitted. Council discussed uncertainty regarding timeline for grant award decisions. Ms. McKellop stated decisions are not always released on a fixed schedule. Additional funding opportunities may be pursued through Virginia Tobacco Commission tourism revitalization funding (e.g. DHCD programs) and potential tax credit opportunities.

The Council reviewed the list of requested dates to close City Streets for events as presented by Tourism Director Price-Love. Councilman Henck expressed opposition to such a large section being closed for the Car show. He stated it actually is counter proactive because it's such a large section that isn't being fully utilized yet, that other businesses suffer because there are such a large area people can't access. After a brief discussion There was a motion to approve the request before Council and a second by Vice Mayor and Councilwoman respectively. Vice Mayor Greene made a motion to amend the road closure to reflect that for the Classic Car show, the closure will be from Center to Old Town Road and not the entire closure originally asked but to approve all other requests. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

CLOSED SESSION

At 9:00p.m. made a motion to request for a Closed Meeting in Accordance with 2.2-3711 of the Code of Virginia:

- (A)(3) Discussion of the acquisition of real property or the disposition of real property

Councilwoman Ritchie seconded, and the motion was approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor White, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Robinson.

RETURN TO OPEN SESSION AND ACTION FROM CLOSED SESSION

At 9:12 p.m., Councilwoman Ritchie made the motion to come out of closed session. Councilman Warr seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved by all members present. All members 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 White, Vice Mayor Greene, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilman Warr, Councilman Henck, Councilwoman Burnett, and Councilman Robinson.

Councilman Warr made a motion to adjourn at 9:13. Vice Mayor Greene seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 9:13pm.

ADJOURNMENT at 9:13 p.m.

Mayor

Clerk