

Galax City Council

Minutes

May 11, 2020

Galax City Council convened in regular session by conference call on May 11, 2020 at 6:00 p.m.

At 6:00 p.m. Mayor Mitchell called the meeting to order.

Councilwoman Ritchie prayed the opening prayer and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Vice Mayor Plichta made the motion to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of April 27, 2020. Councilman Greene seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved by the following spoken affirmations: Mayor Mitchell – “yea”, Councilman Larrowe – “yea”, Councilwoman White – “yea”, Vice Mayor Plichta – “yea”, Councilman Greene – “yea”, Councilwoman Ritchie – “yea”, and Councilwoman Haynes – “yea”.

Mayor Mitchell announced regarding the public comment period for the Galax City School Budget for fiscal year 2021, there were no comments, letters, phone calls or emails received. The public comment period that was advertised was from April 27 through May 7. Keith Barker confirmed that he did not receive any questions or comments from the public either. Mr. Barker stated the budget request from the City was still steady at \$3,986,291 plus the debt service for the upcoming year. Mayor Mitchell declared the public comment period closed. Keith Barker confirmed that it would be brought back up at the May 26 meeting for final consideration.

Mayor Mitchell announced Council had been requested to consider an AEP easement that would impact City property at Monta Vista Cemetery. Keith Barker noted that a public comment period would be required with this request since it was use of land owned by the City of Galax. Mr. Barker added that an advertisement had been published regarding the matter. Mayor Mitchell informed Council the public comment period would begin on May 11 and extend through May 21. Councilwoman White made the motion to approve the public comment period. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following spoken affirmations: Mayor Mitchell – “yea”, Councilman Larrowe – “yea”, Councilwoman White – “yea”, Vice Mayor Plichta – “yea”, Councilman Greene – “yea”, Councilwoman Ritchie – “yea”, and Councilwoman Haynes – “yea”.

Mayor Mitchell announced that regarding the FY2021 Galax City Budget, the public comment period needed to be set. Keith Barker informed Council that an advertisement would be sent to the Gazette for the public comment period to begin May 15 through May 25. The next meeting would be May 26. He said the rates were set as discussed. Real Estate set at .92/\$100, which was a 7.5 cent increase; Personal Property at \$2.35/\$100 which was a .10 increase; Machinery & Tools \$1.60/\$100, which was a .10 increase. Mr. Barker said changes would be made depending on how Council would like to pursue it. He said in working on the budget, he had additional discussions with Tammy Smith, DSS Director. She had done a full year cost projection on our CSA costs for FY20/21. The number which was originally used in the budget was \$330,000. He said Ms. Smith felt this figure was higher than it needed to be since DSS had 18 fewer children in care now. She also thought the budget could be reduced to \$260,000. Mr. Barker said that was \$70,000 less than what was discussed at the final budget meeting. He said if Council was agreeable, he had looked at the elimination of the tax increase for Personal Property, which would keep it at \$2.25/\$100. Mayor Mitchell asked if this would still leave DSS with enough if a few more children were added

later. Keith Barker confirmed it would leave some contingency in their budget for added children, especially since the City would pay 30% of any placement. Councilman Greene asked if First Family would begin this year. Mr. Barker said it would help when this comes into effect, but it had been postponed until January 30, 2021.

Keith Barker also discussed the impact of COVID-19 on Sales, Meals, and Lodging taxes for the upcoming year. He said it was estimated that there would be a reduction of \$1,000,000 in revenues but we won't really know until later. He said the tax rate increases would make up a portion of the lost revenue and if we chose not to do this, we would be looking at severe budget reductions in departments and programs. Keith Barker explained whatever rates that Council decided would be advertised, they can be lowered prior to billing if our revenues are better than budgeted. He said the comment period would be from May 15 through May 25. Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve the advertisement of the proposed tax rate increases of Real Estate at .92/\$100, Personal Property at \$2.25/\$100, and Machinery & Tools at \$1.60/\$100 and that the advertisement of the budget for the public hearing comment period for May 15-25. Councilwoman White seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following spoken affirmations: Mayor Mitchell – “yea”, Councilman Larrowe – “yea”, Councilwoman White – “yea”, Vice Mayor Plichta – “yea”, Councilman Greene – “yea”, Councilwoman Ritchie – “yea”, and Councilwoman Haynes – “yea”. Mayor Mitchell added how much Council appreciated the amount of work staff does in putting the budget together. He said it's a long process and takes a lot of time to do.

Mayor Mitchell informed City Council of a request to set the public hearing for amendments to the stormwater ordinance, specifically Section 125-19(I)(6) regarding stormwater fees. Keith Barker explained the proposed budget included an increase in the annual Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU) from \$1.50 monthly/\$18 annually to \$6.25 monthly/\$75 annually. He said funds would be used for stormwater projects and work proposed by the PER that the Lane Group performed in January 2019. Mr. Barker explained the intent was to leverage these funds for VDOT Revenue Sharing Grants to address the stormwater projects. He said the first major project proposed was the work along Calhoun St. and Bartlett St. that severely impacted Blevins Building Supply and Vaughan-Bassett in 2018. City Council was asked to set the public hearing for May 26. Due to restrictions with Covid-19 and the prohibition against public gatherings, the proposed public hearing comment period would be tentatively set from May 15 – May 25. Comments may be received by phone call to the City Manager's office (276-236-5773), by mail to 111 E. Grayson St., or by email to public_comment@galaxva.com. All comments would be read into the public record at the May 26 City Council meeting. Final approval could be at the May 26 meeting or at the June 8 meeting when the final budget would be considered. Councilman Haynes made the motion to approve the advertising of a public hearing for the Stormwater Ordinance revisions as presented with the public comment period from May 15 through May 25. Councilman Greene second the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following spoken affirmations: Mayor Mitchell – “yea”, Councilman Larrowe – “yea”, Councilwoman White – “yea”, Vice Mayor Plichta – “yea”, Councilman Greene – “yea”, Councilwoman Ritchie – “yea”, and Councilwoman Haynes – “yea”.

Mayor Mitchell informed Council of a resolution in support of Building Safety Month, which is observed annually in May. Keith Barker said Building Safety Month was sponsored by the International Code Council as a campaign to make individuals aware of the importance of the building codes and the efforts of local code officials to help promote safe, efficient, and livable buildings. He said the event which was planned for this year was canceled due to COVID-19. Councilman Greene made the motion to adopt the proclamation. Councilwoman White seconded

the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following spoken affirmations: Mayor Mitchell – “yea”, Councilman Larrowe – “yea”, Councilwoman White – “yea”, Vice Mayor Plichta – “yea”, Councilman Greene – “yea”, Councilwoman Ritchie – “yea”, and Councilwoman Haynes – “yea”.

Mayor Mitchell informed Council of a resolution recognizing Hospital Week held May 10-16, 2020. Mayor Mitchell discussed how the public had been educated through the pandemic as to the heroes that work in the healthcare arena in ER’s, ICU’s and hospitals. This resolution would be a way to say thank you and that we recognized the value they have in our community. Vice Mayor Plichta made the motion to adopt the resolution. Councilman Haynes seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following spoken affirmations: Mayor Mitchell – “yea”, Councilman Larrowe – “yea”, Councilwoman White – “yea”, Vice Mayor Plichta – “yea”, Councilman Greene – “yea”, Councilwoman Ritchie – “yea”, and Councilwoman Haynes – “yea”.

Keith Barker reminded Council of the next Council meeting, which was approved in January 2020, would be moved to Tuesday, May 26 due to Memorial Day on May 25.

Keith Barker informed Council that Harbor Freight Tools, a national chain store, had announced that they were going to locate in Galax. Construction would begin later in the year, then finish near the end of the year to first of the calendar year. They would move into the Food City Shopping Center. The store would take up 15,000-16,000 square feet of space where the former Mexican restaurant and a couple other stores were. The new owner of the shopping center, Mr. Pat Crosby, said the company name was Galax Stuart Drive, LLC. The new store would create approximately 35 jobs. Mr. Barker said there were 1050 locations nationwide. He closed by saying with Hobby Lobby, Big Lots and Harbor Freight Tools, we’re seeing that there was definitely some interest from larger national retail chains locating to our area.

City Manager Report – Keith Barker discussed the projects he was currently working on which included:

- Bottom Area Project
- Cranberry Road Project
- McArthur Street Traffic Signal/Sidewalk Project
- Galax Elementary School Renovation
- Parkwood Dr. Stormwater Project
- Animal Shelter Bid
- FY21 Budget
- Discussed COVID-19
- Monta Vista Cemetery - Improvements

Council Comments –

Councilwoman Plichta asked if our library was still closed. Keith Barker confirmed it was and discussed the reasons for the public’s safety.

Councilman Larrowe commented how Meadow Street had been in rough condition for a while. He asked about something to improve the situation. Keith Barker explained this was the contractor’s

responsibility, but he would send a note to the project inspector with the Lane Group to speak to the contractor. He also said he'd check to see if Adams Paving could pave that portion at least.


Councilwoman White inquired about the rising COVID-19 numbers. Keith Barker gave an update on his communications that had been taken with the Galax Health Dept. as well as working with Capt. James Cox. Councilman Haynes asked if there was any information on how many of the current cases were hospitalized or at home. Mr. Barker said they were all at home. Only one hospitalization in the beginning. He also said of the cases, there were several members of one household infected and some were multigenerational, children, parents, grandparents, etc. Mayor Mitchell said this shows we still need to reinforce the need of social distancing.

Councilman Larrowe inquired about the animal shelter project. Keith Barker explained we would bid it with a base bid that would include the Petco portion of the project. He went on to discuss the project in detail.

Councilman Greene announced that he was on a conference call with the Governor last week discussing the CARES Act. Keith Barker said we had been following it and were waiting to see what the guidelines included. Councilman Greene said many of the local fire department's fundraisers had been cancelled and maybe it was possible this could be used to help them. He said he hoped to find out more information regarding this soon. The VML Conference in October was briefly discussed.

Councilman Larrowe discussed several items which included: Congress being scheduled to evaluate another sleeve of support and the healthcare community looking for bilingual support. He also discussed the T. G. Vaughan plant project and the possibility of having a community gathering to solicit ideas virtually. Keith Barker said he would reach out to Opportunity Appalachia and they had a lengthy discussion regarding this. Councilman Larrowe also thanked Keith Barker and said they were hoping to keep the Vaughan Project moving along as best as they could.

ADJOURNMENT at 7:11 p.m.



Mayor



Clerk