

Galax City Council
Minutes
March 8, 2021

Galax City Council convened in regular session in City Council Chambers on March 8, 2021, at 6:00 p.m.

At 6:00 p.m. Mayor Greene called the meeting to order with the following Council persons present and they are as listed: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Vice Mayor Mitchell prayed the opening prayer and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

David Hankley was honored by Council and presented with a plaque by Mayor Greene. A proclamation was read aloud reflecting on his retirement as Chief from the Galax Fire Department where he served as Fire Chief for the last 19 years of his 40-year career. Councilman Haynes made the motion to approve the proclamation for Mr. Hankley. Vice Mayor Mitchell seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Vice Mayor Mitchell made the motion to approve the minutes of the regular meeting of February 8, 2021. Councilman Haynes seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Councilman Haynes made the motion to approve the minutes of the called meeting of February 22, 2021. Councilman Larrowe seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Mayor Greene announced this was the date and time set for a public hearing regarding the consolidation of the North and South voting precincts into the new West voting precinct and opened the floor for comments. David Phipps, Galax Registrar, spoke about the consolidation. He explained the combination of the districts would be for citizens on the west side of the City that vote in local/state/federal elections and for our citizens that also vote in Grayson County elections (Sheriff, Clerk of Court, Commonwealth Attorney). He said the East voting district would remain unchanged. Mr. Phipps closed by saying the intent of the Electoral Board would be to begin notifying registered voters of the change, but the new voting district would not be in effect until after May 16, 2021. With no further public comments, Mayor Greene declared the public hearing closed. Councilman Haynes made the motion to approve the ordinance as presented. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Mayor Greene announced this was the date and time set for the public hearing for a conditional use permit for 104 Cranberry Road to allow the construction of a climate controlled self-storage facility. Keith Barker spoke to Council regarding the request. He explained the Planning Commission heard this request on March 3, 2021 and recommended approval of the request. The request was permitted under the conditional use permit for a B-2 parcel. Mr. Barker explained since this was a conditional use permit, Council could review the request and may accept the

Planning Commission's recommendation, may choose to not accept the Planning Commission recommendation, or may take no action and the recommendation of the Planning Commission would stand. Mayor Greene opened the floor for public comments. With no comments made, he declared the public hearing closed. Councilwoman White made the motion to approve the conditional use permit request. Councilman Haynes seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, and Councilman Warr. Councilman Larrowe abstained from voting due to a business conflict.

Mayor Greene announced this was the date and time set for the public hearing which concerned the DHCD application for Eastview Phase II. Janet Jonas, Project Manager with Summit Design, was present with a power point to inform and explain the housing project that staff and consultants had been working on. She informed Council after consideration of neighborhood applications turned in, and a review of possible project areas and costs; the housing committee voted to proceed with the Eastview St. area as the next housing project application. Ms. Jonas said the goal would be for this application to be submitted in April 2021, and to consider submitting another application for the first phase of Matthews St. in March 2022 or 2023. She said a second community meeting was held on Feb. 24 at the Rex Theater for residents of Eastview Street. She explained that past projects have had limits for DHCD funding of \$700,000 but the new limit was now \$1,250,000 for a housing project. Mr. Barker said we had not completed the budget for the project and would need to have a called meeting on Monday March 22 for Council so the budget and final resolution for the project could be approved. Mayor Greene opened the floor for public comments. With no comments made, Mayor Greene declared the public hearing closed.

Keith Barker informed Council of two open seats on the Galax IDA. He said that he received a letter of interest from Mr. Anthony Edwards who currently serves on the Chamber of Commerce and works with Skyline Bank. He said the term could be considered a new term with an expiration of March 2025. Vice Mayor Mitchell made the motion to appoint Anthony Edwards to the IDA. Councilman Larrowe seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Keith Barker presented the social media policy drafted by our attorney to Council for consideration. Mr. Barker explained while it was not intended to restrict staff in personal speech, nor intended to review personal pages and posts on a continuing basis, we hoped to provide guidelines of what were acceptable posts and pictures from staff when using social media or other platforms. He said the intent was to educate and set guidelines for appropriate public posts and help staff recognize that their actions could represent both themselves personally and the City. Councilman Larrowe made the motion to approve and adopt the social media policy. Councilwoman Ritchie seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Ms. Susan Tilly, Galax Schools Superintendent, was present and discussed a budget amendment for the FY2021 budget primarily due to CARES Act funds the schools received. Councilwoman Ritchie made the motion to approve the budget amendment. Vice Mayor Mitchell seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Keith Barker spoke to Council regarding the previous discussions of a cigarette tax. A draft agreement & draft ordinance to create and join a new board – the Mount Rogers Cigarette Tax Board, was given to Council for review and consideration. He said the state authorized counties to begin assessing a cigarette tax beginning in July 2021 and a number of counties we work with and adjoin, including Carroll & Grayson, were also considering implementing the tax. Mr. Barker said the first step was to create the board. He asked that Council authorize April 12, 2021 as the public hearing to consider the ordinance for the board creation. He noted the consideration and adoption of the ordinance for the board did not obligate Council to set a tax rate, however with pending legislation, Council would be required to be part of a board to implement the tax going forward. Adoption of a tax rate and ordinance would occur at a later meeting. Vice Mayor Mitchell made the motion to set April 12 as the public hearing for the ordinance to create the Mt. Rogers Cigarette Tax Board. Councilman Warr seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Dr. Sprinkle, President of Wytheville Community College was present to give an overview of WCC and made the FY2022 budget request.

Keith Barker informed Council of a FY2021 Budget Amendment which would consist of the transfer of funds for a vehicle purchase. Mr. Barker explained after reviewing the current budget, he wanted to request that Council consider authorizing the purchase of a vehicle from our line item 10.4.9900.1140 Capital Contingency. He said there was currently only one vehicle for travel by staff from the Municipal Building for training and events outside the City and it was a 2007 Ford Explorer. He had staff price various vehicles. We could purchase a Tahoe or similar vehicle for approximately \$36,000 through the state bid contract. He noted the vehicle would serve staff and the city manager’s office going forward. Mr. Barker closed by saying should anything happen at the police department where they needed a vehicle, this one would be a “police edition” and available as a back-up. We have done this in the past. Vice Mayor Mitchell made the motion to approve the budget amendment request to purchase a new Tahoe or similar vehicle. Councilman Larrowe seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of “yea”: Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larrowe, and Councilman Warr.

Mayor Greene addressed a comment to Council & Staff if we could work on approving a budget without a tax increase for the upcoming year. Mr. Barker replied that the current budget that he and Judy Taylor-Gallimore had been working on was currently balanced with no tax increase with the exception of a proposed cigarette tax. He noted that we were currently ahead on meals and sales taxes by \$750,000 than what was budgeted through the February reports.

CITY MANAGER REPORT

Keith Barker gave an overview of the status of various projects and initiatives that were underway with the City or with regional boards that he was currently part of.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

- Councilman Warr – Informed Council that 2 new businesses were now downtown. His concerns were the upcoming increase in the minimum wage on May 1. He said that sales could decrease due to the cost of goods which would lead to higher unemployment and possibly small businesses forced to close. He reached out to Israel O’Quinn to address his concerns. He suggested that we help to promote support for small businesses. His other

concern was the state covid regulations which had shut down the local events in Galax. He said tourism & events were so important to our economy - especially downtown, that he felt everyone should reach out to our representatives to voice our opinions to open up.

- Councilwoman White – She had spoken with the community regarding our plans for upcoming events. She hoped we could find a balance between safety and supporting businesses through tourism. She said our health department had been doing a great job in getting vaccines out there. She volunteers and sees how hard they work. She was hopeful more vaccines would continue to make it here and make it out into the community.
- Councilwoman Ritchie – Discussed the raising of the minimum wage. She felt as long as it was done in steps, we would survive it; although she said it seemed to be happening quickly. She also discussed the economy, the stimulus checks, and spending.
- Vice Mayor Mitchell – Extended a special word of thanks to William Bottomley with High Country Lights. He said that he appreciated Galax having the tremendous show that Mr. Bottomley put on. He said especially since we had the Covid restrictions, it made a way for us to feel normal.
- Councilman Larrowe –
 - ❖ Informed Council that the Workforce One Stop Center certifications were underway with the Workforce Development Board in which he serves. He explained the certifications were required in order for the centers to receive funding. He said he had been appointed to be on the evaluation team that would serve our region which included Galax and Wytheville. He said that he sees this as a good opportunity to learn more about these centers since these were so desperately needed in our area.
 - ❖ Discussed the TG Vaughan Project briefly. He and Keith Barker had the opportunity recently to meet with the legal team by phone. He said they discussed the organizational structure as well as a discussion regarding performance agreements. He said there had been project progress in the in the areas of environmental studies, engineering, and architecture. There had been a presentation by Summit Designs to developers and investors in February, but had no feedback as of yet. The project cost was also included in the presentation. He said they would be working on getting the public involved through various communications.
 - ❖ Regarding the budget, he was excited that no tax increase was planned. He felt that the reason was due to the stimulus impacting our local sales tax. He wasn't sure how much would be replicated in the future, so he suggested to proceed cautiously.
 - ❖ Briefly discussed the recent legislation to tax or not tax PPP proceeds which had been a big debate between the House and Senate.
- Mayor Greene –
 - ❖ Regarding the minimum wage increase discussion, he told Council that he had a small business when the minimum wage went up years ago. He said it was very difficult and his business never did make a profit after that change. He felt the reason for the sales tax increase was due to people who weren't going away as much because of covid so they were spending more in our area.
 - ❖ Met with the National League of Cities by conference call recently. The vice president discussed Covid related grants totaling \$250M which would be available to localities. He said \$4M for urban areas and \$3M for rural areas, for private and public projects. He sent the information to Keith Barker for review.

With no public comments made, Councilwoman White made the motion to adjourn. Councilman Warr seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved by the following votes of "yea": Mayor Greene, Vice Mayor Mitchell, Councilman Haynes, Councilwoman Ritchie, Councilwoman White, Councilman Larowe, and Councilman Warr.

ADJOURNED at 7:51 p.m.

Willie T. Greene
Mayor

Warr
Clerk

