



CITY OF BUENA VISTA CITY COUNCIL

REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING & PUBLIC HEARING

March 19, 2026 | 6:00 p.m.

Council Chambers – 2039 Sycamore Avenue

The City Council for the City of Buena Vista met for a Regular Council Meeting & Public Hearing on Thursday, March 19, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.

Members Present:

Mayor Jesse Lineberry

Vice-Mayor Danny Staton

Amy Gilliam

Michelle Poluikis

Stephanie Noel-Branch

Ronald Cash

Members Absent:

William Kerr

ADG #1: CALL TO ORDER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE, & PRAYER

Mayor Lineberry called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., and Councilmember Cash delivered the prayer.

ADG #2: BUENA VISTA CITY COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING

Pursuant to Code of Virginia Section 15.2-2204 and the City of Buena Vista Land Development Regulations, the City Council received comment on the following matter:

Zoning Map Amendment – Tax Maps 34-1-2-57-3, 34-1-2-57-5, and 34-1-2-57-7 consisting of the property at 2056/2068 Chestnut Avenue to rezone from R3 Residential Limited to MU Mixed Use for the purpose of operating a hotel with up to 16 rooms.

Mayor Lineberry opened the public hearing.

- Jerry Miller, 2215 Walnut Avenue, spoke in opposition to the proposed rezoning. He expressed concerns that the request disregards the intent of the existing R3 residential zoning and the expectations of long-term residents, stating that commercial uses should be located in appropriate business or mixed-use areas rather than within established neighborhoods. Mr. Miller also raised concerns about potential illegal spot zoning, noting that the affected parcels are surrounded by residential properties and that the proposed rezoning would be inconsistent with the comprehensive plan. He stated that such action could primarily benefit a private property owner rather than serve the public interest. He urged Council to deny the rezoning request.

There being no further public comment, Mayor Lineberry closed the Public Hearing.

ADG #3: APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Vice-Mayor Staton moved to approve the agenda with Councilmember Poluikis seconding, and it was carried by Council.

ADG #4: APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE MARCH 5, 2026, REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING

Motion to approve the minutes was made by Councilmember Poluikis, seconded by Councilmember Noel-Branch, and carried by Council.

ADG #5: RECOGNITION/COMMUNICATION FROM VISITORS – NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None.

ADG #5: REPORTS:

1. Mayor

Mayor Lineberry reported that he received an invitation to attend the swearing-in ceremony for new officers of the Buena Vista Fire Department, scheduled for this upcoming Saturday. He also reported that he will attend the State of the Community Breakfast hosted by the Chamber of Commerce and will provide an update on that at the next meeting. He noted that he looks forward to attending additional events throughout the City as warmer weather approaches and highlighted that there are many exciting activities taking place.

2. Interim City Manager

Mr. Handley reported that the City is continuing efforts to fill leadership positions in Public Works and Parks & Recreation, noting that interviews have been completed and several strong candidates were identified. He anticipates that offer letters will be issued prior to the next Council meeting. He emphasized the goal of having all department head positions filled well in advance of the start of the new fiscal year to ensure a smooth transition and effective implementation of new budgets.

He provided an update on potential streaming services for City Council meetings, stating that the City has received preliminary cost estimates from three companies. He noted that initial implementation costs are estimated at approximately \$12,000 for services, with additional hardware costs ranging from \$20,000 to \$30,000, and ongoing annual costs of about \$9,000. He added that staff will also be exploring potential grant opportunities to offset costs.

He reported continued coordination with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) regarding the wastewater treatment plant. He stated that a written action plan has been developed, including proposed chemical treatment interventions and rotating biological contactor (RBC) upgrades. The plan has been reviewed favorably by our engineers, and a follow-up meeting is scheduled to establish specific timelines before submission to DEQ. He noted that initial phases of the work will proceed using funds included in the FY26 budget, while the City awaits the anticipated federal funding for additional upgrades.

Lastly, he reported that the Budget & Finance Committee held its initial meeting on the draft budget, noting ongoing financial challenges, but expressing confidence in the City's ability to develop a workable budget.

3. City Attorney

Mr. Kearney reported that he has contacted the Virginia FOIA Council to explore the availability of a free training program. He stated that he is awaiting a response and hopes to receive additional information within the next week. Once details are confirmed, he intends to schedule a training session to take place either before or after a Council meeting as soon as possible.

4. Council Committees/Members

Cemetery Committee

Mr. Cash reported that the Committee plans to address several minor issues at the cemetery and noted that management of cemetery operations is more complex than it may appear. He stated that there are some pending matters that are progressing, although slowly. He noted the need for the Committee to meet and review current operations, including a comprehensive update of the cemetery's operating guidelines, which were last published in 2000. He noted the importance of involving maintenance staff in these discussions to ensure that policies and practices appropriately serve the cemetery and the families of those interred.

Citizens Advisory Committee

Mrs. Noel-Branch reported that the Committee met on Tuesday and had a productive discussion that generated several ideas the Committee will be working to implement. She noted that the Committee is planning to organize its first town hall meeting and will be working on scheduling. She also reported that a suggestion box will be made available at City Council meetings to encourage public input and increase citizen engagement, allowing attendees to submit questions or topics of interest.

The Committee's next meeting is scheduled for April 21 at 6:00 p.m.; weather permitting, the meeting will be held at Magnolia Square.

Glen Maury Park Committee

Mr. Staton reported that the Committee held its organizational meeting, during which members discussed priorities, including needs, goals, and key items for the upcoming year. He noted that while several topics were introduced, the Committee plans to explore these matters in greater detail at its next meeting and will provide a more comprehensive update at that time.

Mr. Lineberry added that he also attended and confirmed that Mr. Staton was selected as Chair of the Committee and advised that individuals with questions or concerns related to Glen Maury Park should contact Mr. Staton.

Budget & Finance

Mrs. Gilliam reported that the Committee met on Monday to review the draft budget. She noted that the City Manager, finance staff, and department heads have worked diligently to prepare the draft. She also stated that the Committee has significant work remaining in the coming weeks and reported that the current draft reflects an approximate \$1.9 million shortfall.

5. Department Heads/Constitutional Officers/Court Clerks

Kristina Ramsey – Economic Development

Miss Ramsey provided an update on the relocation of the Visitors Center to the Virginia Innovation Accelerator, noting that the new facility is anticipated to open by the end of May. She explained that the new center will feature an experiential design, including large interpretive panels focused on Buena Vista and the surrounding region, a floor map of Rockbridge County with key attractions, and interactive visual elements highlighting local mountain views. She noted that the center will serve as a key location of learning about the City's history and regional attractions.

She also reminded Council of the upcoming groundbreaking ceremony for the Rooftop Terrace development at 2013 Magnolia Avenue, scheduled for March 25th at 12:00 p.m., and encouraged Council members to attend.

She also announced the first Rockbridge Outdoors Fest, scheduled for June 13th from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. at Glen Maury Park. She stated that the event will focus on outdoor recreation and will include vendors, demonstrations, and activities. She noted that organizers are currently seeking vendors, participants, and sponsors, and encouraged interested parties to reach out for more information.

Tom Roberts – Community Development

Mr. Roberts provided a brief update on the ongoing streetscape project, noting that construction continues despite some unexpected conditions, which are being addressed as work progresses. He advised that, during the upcoming week, contractors will be cutting trenches across streets at the intersection of Magnolia Avenue and 21st Street to install new electrical conduit for traffic signals. As a result, the east side of 21st Street (library side) will be closed on Monday, with detours in place. He further noted that Magnolia Avenue will be reduced to one lane with alternating traffic on Tuesday and Wednesday, with flaggers present to manage traffic flow. Notifications will be distributed to the

public, including through Rockbridge Alert. He added that the overall project remains on schedule for completion in mid- to late-May, with final paving to occur at the end of the project. He added that new streetlight poles are expected to arrive soon, with installation anticipated to begin in April.

6. Invited Community Organizations

Jen Carpenter – Main Street Buena Vista

- *Rockbridge Outdoors Fest*: Main Street will host a rubber duck race as a fundraiser, with all proceeds supporting downtown efforts. She recently conducted a beta test of the logistics for the event.
- *“Get to Gnome BV” Scavenger Hunt*: A new self-guided scavenger hunt initiative featuring small gnome figures with QR codes will connect participants to historical information and local stories at various downtown locations.
- *DIG Grant Application*: In partnership with Kristina Ramsey, Main Street is applying for the Downtown Investment Grant to enhance downtown signage and wayfinding, including directional maps to Glen Maury Park and other key areas.
- *Downtown Events Master List*: A comprehensive, living calendar of approximately 60 downtown and city-wide events for the year is being developed to help residents and visitors track activities.
- *Downtown Gift Card Program*: Main Street is exploring a pilot gift card program through the Word on the Street app, with Buena Vista participating as a beta tester at no cost.
- *Mountain Day Planning*: Planning for Mountain Day has begun, with Councilmember Cash joining the committee to explore expanding the event with additional activities the night before and after.
- *Statewide Downtown Rev-Ups*: Upcoming professional development sessions for downtown leaders are held quarterly, with the next session on May 12th in Lexington; she encouraged Council members to participate.
- *Farmers Market*: the downtown Friday Farmers Market will resume soon.
- *Social Media and Outreach*: Main Street’s Instagram account has grown from about 200 to over 2,000 followers, and the newsletter now has over 350 subscribers. Recent reporting from Virginia Tourism indicates that Instagram is a key platform for travel decisions, highlighting the importance of these efforts.

ADG #6: CONSIDER APPOINTMENTS TO BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, & COMMITTEES

Public Recreation Facilities Authority

Mr. Jason Tyree has resigned from the PRFA. This term will be effective immediately and will expire on June 30, 2026.

As there were no applicants for this opening, it will be carried forward to the next meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

ADG #7: RECOGNITION/COMMUNICATION FROM VISITORS – NEW BUSINESS ITEMS

Phil Huffman, 73 Deer Haven Drive, expressed opposition to the proposed ordinance related to the Chestnut Avenue rezoning project. Mr. Huffman referenced the prior Planning Commission decision to

deny the hotel. He questions why the issue was being brought back to Council despite the Planning Commission's denial and emphasized the importance of respecting the Commission's recommendations. He voiced concerns that current zoning decisions could negatively impact residential areas and suggested that disregarding the Planning Commission's decisions could set a precedent for undermining zoning protections throughout the City. He urged Council to study this and believes they should deny it.

Mayor Lineberry clarified that even when the Planning Commission denies something, [applicants] still have the opportunity to bring that business to Council. Mr. Kearney confirmed that the Planning Commission's role is advisory, and their recommendation—whether in favor or against—must be considered, but the City Council is the sole body with authority to make the final determination.

NB #1: DISCUSSION & APPROVAL OF AN APPROPRIATION RESOLUTION

Mr. Bolster introduced the appropriation request submitted by Lori Turner of The Community Foundation, seeking funding from FY26 opioid abatement settlement money in the amount of \$22,979. The funds would be split evenly between Rockbridge Recovery and the Maury River Recovery Court programs. Mr. Bolster noted that these funds are external settlement monies, not locally generated revenue, and that similar requests were sent to Rockbridge County and Lexington. He recommended postponing consideration of the FY27 request until that fiscal year begins.

Mr. Kearney noted that additional settlements are expected, which may increase available funds in the next fiscal year. He clarified that the funds come through state-administered settlements from opioid manufacturers and distributors, including Purdue, Kroger, and Walmart, and must be used exclusively for abatement purposes.

Lori Turner, Executive Director of The Community Foundation, provided further context on the opioid abatement funding, explaining the distinction between direct and indirect funds, and emphasized that unspent funds must be allocated by April 1 each year or returned to the state. Mrs. Turner also provided an overview of The Community Foundation's programs:

- The men's recovery house, operating since April 2024, served 14 men in 2025, including participants from incarceration and the Maury River Recovery Court.
- A women's program opened in January 2026, housing four women under a similar model.
- An outreach/peer drop-in center provides harm reduction services, care kits, peer support, and walk-in services.
- In 2025, the programs recorded: 225 interviews, 481 peer sessions, 156 peer support group participants, 111 group participants, 78 one-on-one sessions, and 8 individuals transitioned from incarceration into substance use services.

Mayor Lineberry acknowledged the impact of the programs and the quality of the new facilities.

Ms. Burch presented the following resolution:

Appropriation Resolution

BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of Buena Vista, Virginia, that the following appropriations are, and the same is hereby made, for the period ending **June 30, 2026**, from the **UNAPPROPRIATED SURPLUS** of the **OPIOID SETTLEMENT FUND** and expended as follows:

FY 2026 Funding Request (Rockbridge Recovery & Maury River Recovery Court)

60.5157.68015	Program Activities	<u>\$22,979.00</u>
Subtotal 1		\$22,979.00

Total General Fund Appropriation

\$22,979.00

Approved: This 19th day of March 2026.

Jesse D. Lineberry, Mayor

Attest:

Sarah M. Burch, Clerk of Council

Councilmember Noel-Branch moved to **approve** the resolution, Councilmember Cash seconded the motion, and it was carried by Council.

NB #2: FIRST READING OF AN ORDINANCE TO REZONE 2056/2068 CHESTNUT AVENUE FROM R3 RESIDENTIAL LIMITED TO MU MIXED USE

Ms. Burch presented the following Ordinance:

**Zoning Map Amendment
2056 & 2068 Chestnut Avenue
34-1-2-57-3, 34-1-2-57-5, and 34-1-2-57-7**

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BUENA VISTA, VIRGINIA, that after a duly called public hearing, in accordance with the general welfare of the citizens of Buena Vista and in accordance with good zoning practices, the following property shall be rezoned from R3 Residential Limited to MU Mixed Use, and the zoning map for the City will be amended to reflect this change: three parcels identified as Tax Map parcels 34-1-2-57-3, 34-1-2-57-5, and 34-1-2-57-7, being addressed 2056 and 2068 Chestnut Avenue; as shown on Exhibit A.

BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED that the applicant proffers that the primary use henceforth of these parcels shall be as either a hotel or single-family dwelling, or a combination thereof, until such time as there is a subsequent conditional use permit or zoning map amendment affecting the use of these parcels.

BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED that if the site development described in the staff report (Exhibit B) is substantially revised, or such construction is abandoned, then the zoning map amendment shall be rendered null and void.

Mr. Daniel DeSouza, the owner and developer of the property, presented the proposal for rezoning for the Blue Ridge Abbey, to allow rental of six additional rooms, increasing the total from 10 to 16. Key points included:

Property Background:

- The main house and carriage house are historic Victorian-style homes.
- Previous owners operated businesses including a hair salon and apartments.
- The current owners, local residents, and veterans, have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in restoration and preservation.

Proposal:

- The request is to rezone to allow full utilization of the existing rooms for lodging.
- No new construction or expansion of the footprint; the historic character remains unchanged.
- This is distinct from an Airbnb—guests receive breakfast, personal interaction with hosts, and added security.

Community Impact:

- Guests are primarily short-term tourists and family of SVU, W&L, and VMI students.
- Traffic and pedestrian activity are minimal; most guests arrive late and depart early.
- Parking is sufficient for up to 28 cars, exceeding the anticipated need.
- Neighbors have expressed support, noting minimal disruption.

Concerns:

- Safety and human trafficking prevention training required to be completed by staff.
- Property maintenance will be improved; any current construction-related clutter will be removed before opening.
- Historical preservation and property value are positively impacted; appraisals indicate neighboring property values have increased since renovations.
- White Tree Inn nearby operates as a boarding house and short-term rental with similar occupancy limits, indicating the neighborhood already accommodates short-term lodging.

Councilmember Noel-Branch confirmed that previous elements of the proposal, including the cottages, are no longer being considered and noted that the property has historically supported commercial-type uses, including a salon and rental units. Councilmember Cash acknowledged the improvements made to the property and the importance of preserving historic structures, while emphasizing the need for attention to maintenance and detail to build community trust. He encouraged a gradual approach to change and noted the broader need for the City to remain open to thoughtful development in order to sustain growth.

Mayor Lineberry expressed general support for the Blue Ridge Abbey concept but raised concerns about the broader implications of rezoning. He noted that while the current proposal may be appropriate, a zoning change could create opportunities for future use in the neighborhood that may not align with community expectations. Mr. Kearney clarified that Mr. DeSouza has voluntarily included proffers in the request limiting the use of the property strictly to a hotel or private residence.

Mr. Roberts also clarified that both bed and breakfast and hotel uses are limited to a maximum of stay of 30 days, and it was noted that similar or greater levels of activity may already occur at nearby properties, such as the White Tree Inn, which operates under a different zoning classification. There was a general balance between supporting economic development and preserving neighborhood character, with several council members emphasizing the importance of careful consideration moving forward.

This being the first reading, no action was taken at this time.

NB #3: APPROVAL OF A RESOLUTION OF APPRECIATION FOR MR. JASON TYREE

Ms. Burch presented the following Resolution:

Resolution of Appreciation Honoring Mr. Jason Tyree for His Service as City Manager

WHEREAS Jason Tyree has faithfully served the City of Buena Vista as City Manager for the past five years, providing steady leadership, thoughtful guidance, and a strong commitment to the continued progress of the community; and

WHEREAS Jason is originally from Amherst County and brought with him valuable public service experience from his work in the City of Lynchburg and the Town of Buchanan before relocating to Buena Vista with his wife, Tiffani, and their two sons, Jackson and Ryland; and

WHEREAS during his tenure as City Manager, Jason worked collaboratively with City Council, staff, and community partners to advance important initiatives that have strengthened the City's economy, infrastructure, and quality of life; and

WHEREAS under his leadership and with his dedicated efforts, the City successfully achieved several major accomplishments, including the settlement of the golf course debt, the expansion of Modine Manufacturing, the opening of a Tractor Supply store in Buena Vista, the establishment of Mountain Gateway Community College's Wilson Workforce Center, the opening of The Virginia Innovation Accelerator and Junction 245, the development of Magnolia Square, improvements to the Glen Maury Park Campground, and the remodeling of the City's swimming pool; and

WHEREAS Jason was also instrumental in securing federal funding to support critical upgrades to the City's Wastewater Treatment Plant, helping ensure the continued reliability and sustainability of this vital public utility; and

WHEREAS throughout his service, Jason has been known for his professionalism, integrity, and unwavering support of City staff, fostering a collaborative environment and encouraging excellence in public service; and

WHEREAS the City Council, City staff, and the citizens of Buena Vista wish to express their sincere appreciation for Jason's leadership, dedication, and contributions to the community during his time as City Manager.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City Council of the City of Buena Vista, Virginia hereby expresses its heartfelt appreciation to Jason Tyree for his five years of outstanding service as City Manager and extends its best wishes to him and his family for continued success and happiness in all future endeavors.

Adopted this 19th day of March 2026.

Jesse D. Lineberry, Mayor

Attest:

Sarah M. Burch, Clerk of Council

Councilmember Cash moved to **approve** the Resolution with Councilmember Poluikis seconding, and it was carried by Council.

Mr. Tyree expressed his appreciation to Mayor Lineberry, City Council, and staff for their support during his five years of service. He noted that there were challenges and opportunities during his tenure and emphasized that the City's accomplishments were made possible by the dedication and hard work of City staff. He also thanked the constitutional officers and the public for their collaboration and support. He also noted that he and his family will continue to reside in the city and that he looks forward to staying involved in a different capacity.

NB #4: DISCUSSION & APPROVAL OF A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH FLOYD-DAVIDSON AMERICAN LEGION POST 126

Mr. George Sullivan, American Legion Post Commander, presented the proposal to establish a "Road of Honor" banner program along Magnolia Avenue extending to 10th Street. The program would recognize and honor veterans by displaying banners featuring their photos on existing utility poles. He noted that the initiative has been in development for several years and would be implemented gradually as a long-term community project.

Mr. Sullivan explained that the American Legion would be responsible for fundraising, production, installation, and maintenance of the banner, including organizing volunteers. He added that banners may be seasonally removed during winter months to prevent damage and reinstalled in the spring. The program would allow recognition of both local and non-local veterans.

Mr. Handley clarified that the City would not incur costs for new poles, as the program will utilize existing utility poles owned by Dominion Energy. He explained that Dominion requires a formal partnership with the City in order to permit use of the poles, which is the purpose of the MOU. He noted that the MOU outlines program details, including banner specifications and installation procedures, and that similar programs exist in other localities.

Mr. Sullivan also stated that coordination with the City would occur prior to installation of any banners to ensure proper placement and approval. Mr. Kearney advised that the agreement could be executed administratively by the City Manager but was presented to Council for awareness and input. Council indicated support for the program, and Mr. Handley will proceed with finalizing the MOU and coordinating implementation with the American Legion.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:32 p.m.

Sarah M. Burch, Clerk of Council

Jesse D. Lineberry, Mayor