CITY OF BUENA VISTA CITY COUNCIL

REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING

March 5, 2026 | Immediately Following the PSA Meeting

Council Chambers – 2039 Sycamore Avenue

The City Council for the City of Buena Vista met for a Regular Council Meeting on Thursday, March 5, 2026, following a meeting of the Buena Vista Public Service Authority.

Members Present:

Mayor Jesse Lineberry
Vice-Mayor Danny Staton
Amy Gilliam
Michelle Poluikis
William Kerr
Stephanie Noel-Branch
Ronald Cash

Members Absent:

None

ADG #1: CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Lineberry called the meeting to order at 6:10 PM.

ADG #2: APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

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

ADG #3: APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE FEBRUARY 19, 2026, REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING & PUBLIC HEARING

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

ADG #4: RECOGNITION/COMMUNICATION FROM VISITORS – NON-AGENDA ITEMS

- Kristina Ramsey, Economic Development Director, addressed Council to express her support for the proposed revisions to the City's home occupation regulations. She noted that she worked with Mr. Roberts to update the regulations and believes the revisions move the City in a positive direction by balancing the character of residential neighborhoods with support for small-scale business. She stated that home-based businesses are more common in the community than people realize and contribute meaningfully to the local economy. She explained that many of these businesses participate as vendors at events such as Mountain Day, helping activate those events and highlight the community's creativity. Miss Ramsey also emphasized that home occupations can serve as an entry point for entrepreneurship by allowing residents to test business ideas, build a customer base, and potentially grow into larger ventures, including opening a brick-and-mortar location or moving int spaces such as Junction 245 and the VIA. In some cases, these businesses also provide supplemental household income for families. Miss Ramsey encouraged Council to consider the proposed revisions and make a decision that supports both neighborhood character and the City's growing small business community.
- Dennis Hawes, 196 Poplar Avenue, spoke on behalf of the Rockbridge Area Republicans regarding a proposed resolution opposing the recent congressional redistricting in Virginia. He presented a written resolution drafted by the group for Council's consideration and noted that Council may modify it as they see fit. Mr. Hawes highlighted that in 2020, Virginia voters approved a constitutional amendment

establishing a nonpartisan redistricting commission. The statewide vote was 2.7 million in favor and 1.4 million opposed; in Buena Vista, the vote passed 3 to 1 in favor. The proposed new congressional map would split the current 6th District into five separate districts, with some stretching from the Shenandoah Valley to Fairfax County, which he argued violates the constitutional requirement for compactness. He described the amendment's language as misleading, citing phrases like "fairness" and "temporary adoption" as confusing, and questioned the trustworthiness of the newly elected General Assembly and Governor, noting prior actions on taxes and salaries, and expressed concern that the redistricting may unfairly benefit one political party.

Mr. Kearney clarified that the Virginia Supreme Court issued an order allowing the election to proceed and suspending objections from jurisdictions like Tazewell County. Early voting is set to begin, and the resolution cannot legally prevent the election. He added that the Attorney General also stated that any local resolution attempting to impede the election would be legally invalid, and while Council may express a position on the redistricting, they cannot take any action that would interfere with voting.

There was discussion regarding the importance of gauging citizen input on the redistricting before taking any formal action and ensuring that any future discussions or resolution does not impact early voting or violate state law. Council indicated that they would consider citizen feedback on the issue and may revisit it at a future meeting.

ADG #5: REPORTS:

1. Mayor

Mayor Lineberry reported that he participated in Reading Across America at Kling Elementary, reading to every class from pre-K to 1st grade. He noted the enthusiasm of the students and expressed pride in the bright future of Buena Vista's youth.

He recognized the student-athletes for their achievements in wrestling, basketball, and track and field, praising them for excelling both on the field and in the classroom.

He mentioned the upcoming flea market hosted by the American Legion and encouraged everyone to stay engaged with local events and things that are happening.

He also acknowledged the work of city employees during this period of interim leadership and unfilled positions. He thanked those that are stepping up to fill gaps and those continuing their regular duties, recognizing their patience and dedication.

2. City Manager/Interim City Manager

Mr. Handley provided an update on several topics:

Streaming Service

The city is evaluating three vendors for meeting streaming service: Diligent, eScribe, and CivicPlus. We are still waiting to hear back from Diligent. There is a meeting scheduled with eScribe to finalize scope and pricing. CivicPlus is the most comprehensive option, as we currently use their online code hosting service, Municode. An update on vendor selection and recommendations will be provided at an upcoming meeting.

Staffing Updates

Applications for Parks & Recreation Director and Public Works Director positions have been strong with 32 applicants for Parks and 6 applicants for Public Works. Interviews and candidate notifications will proceed soon, and he will provide updates at the next meeting.

Wastewater Treatment Plant

Regular meetings are occurring with DEQ, engineers, and interim PW Director George Bains to develop a checklist of actions for the plant. We are also collaborating with the Maury Service Authority to improve operations and are working on acquiring some Rotating Biological Contactors (RBCs) from

Augusta County to replace some of our inoperative units. These RBCs are part of the wastewater treatment process, improving contaminant removal and efficiency. The replacement units will have no additional cost beyond existing budgeted funds.

FOIA Training

FOIA training is required bi-annually for city officials. The next online training course through the FOIA Council is in April. Mr. Handley offered to explore alternative dates and times for an in-person training session to accommodate everyone's schedules.

School Facilities

Dr. Ault is planning for two public listening sessions; those dates will be shared with Council once confirmed.

Budget Preparation

The city is in the process of preparing the FY27 budget, with multiple review sessions scheduled for March 16th, 23rd, and 30th. The goal is to circulate a proposed budget for public hearings by April and adoption in May.

Mr. Handley also emphasized the strength and dedication of the city workforce and ongoing focus on project momentum and operational improvements.

Mr. Tyree highlighted that the transition with Mr. Handley is proceeding smoothly, noting that he has quickly gained understanding of city operations. He also confirmed that his last official day in office will be March 15th, and he anticipates that Mr. Handley will be fully prepared to assume responsibilities on that date.

3. City Attorney

None.

4. Council Committees/Members

School Facilities Committee

Mrs. Gilliam reported on the joint City Council and School Board meeting, during which both bodies voted unanimously in support of the new school plan. She also noted that the SF Committee had an educational session on the four different types of construction options available for the project. While a recommendation was discussed, Mrs. Gilliam indicated it was not yet time to announce that publicly. The Committee approved moving forward with issuing an RFP for the project.

Mrs. Poluikis added that the city is fortunate to have Superintendent Dr. Ault, noting the significant effort she has invested in identifying the best solution for the schools while being mindful of cost. She also mentioned the cooperation of school leadership, including Dr. Jones at the high school, who has been working diligently to ensure the project proceeds in a way that remains positive for both teachers and students.

Outdoor Spaces

They will be holding their first meeting on Thursday March 26th at 6:00 p.m.

Cemetery Committee

Mr. Cash reported that the Committee has not held a meeting yet, but he had personally visited the cemetery to observe conditions. He noted that snow and ice removal operations caused noticeable damage to turf along the shoulders of several cemetery roads where plows pushed snow and debris and asked whether any restoration work had begun.

Mr. Bains responded that crews had already begun addressing the issue. During the previous week, staff used a dump truck and backhoe to remove excess dirt and debris that had been pushed onto the

road edges during plowing operations. He stated that while they had focused first on clearing those piles, they had not yet begun filling in the ruts or repairing the turf damage but would begin addressing those areas next.

Budget & Finance

Mrs. Poluikis reported that the Committee has begun its work on the upcoming budget. She explained that staff are currently collecting budget information from the various city departments, with Mr. Bolster coordinating the process and compiling the submitted materials. She added that the Committee expects to have more detailed information available at the B&F meeting on March 16. To help move the process along, they have also scheduled two additional Committee meetings in March, which should help keep the budget review on track.

Mrs. Gilliam raised a question regarding committee procedures and FOIA requirements. She explained that during the recent B&F Committee meeting, she and Mrs. Poluikis were the appointed members, Mayor Lineberry attended as an ex officio member, and Mrs. Noel-Branch was also present. She asked whether that situation meant the committee should have been taking official minutes.

Mr. Kearney responded that because it is a committee of the City Council, it is considered a public meeting regardless of the number of members present. He explained that whether a committee has one, two, three, or more members, the meeting must be publicly posted and conducted as an open meeting under FOIA. He added that the "rule of three" typically applies only to informal gatherings. He further stated that when a group meets formally as a council committee, it is treated as an official public meeting and requires proper notice and minutes.

5. Department Heads/Constitutional Officers/Court Clerks

David Clements – Police Department

Interim Police Chief Clements reported that the department is authorized for 22 sworn officers but is currently operating with 18 officers, representing a 20% vacancy rate. Among the current staff are four School Resource Officer positions, one of which is currently being filled through a shared agreement with one Community Resource Officer and one patrol officer who split their time between their regular responsibilities and school duties. In addition of patrol officers and SROs, the department also has a Community Resource Officer, a regional Drug Task Force Officer, and a Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Investigator, whose position is partially grant funded and who also assists with internet crimes against children and child abuse investigations.

Mr. Clemens explained that the department is preparing to begin a major hiring effort and will be advertising widely. While the department hopes to attract already-certified officers who could begin working immediately, it is likely that several new hires will need to attend the police academy beginning in June. Those recruits would complete approximately six months of academy training followed by three to four months of field training, meaning they would not be fully operational until sometime next spring. In the meantime, the department will continue operating with current staffing levels, with officers, supervisors, and special assignment personnel helping cover patrol shifts so that operations, training, and leave time can continue.

Mayor Lineberry asked about the reason for officer turnover, to which Mr. Clements responded that the department has historically experienced fluctuations in staffing, with officers sometimes moving between nearby agencies such as the County or VMI and occasionally returning to Buena Vista. He added that the city offers strong employee benefits, which can help with retention once officers gain more experience.

Mr. Clements also highlighted a recent community outreach and fundraising effort connected to the Special Olympics Polar Plunge. Due to frozen conditions at their planned location, the department instead hosted a dunk tank event, raising $1,555 for the cause. He noted that the department hopes to continue hosting similar events in the future to grow participation and awareness.

He also spoke about the department's continued commitment to operating as a values-driven organization, emphasizing integrity, respect, courage, and service. He said the department will continue focusing on those principles while ensuring officers provide the highest level of service to the community.

Lastly, Mr. Clements reported that he, former Chief Handley, department lieutenants, and administrative staff member Marnie Mikels travelled to Danville that morning to attend a meeting of the Virginia Law Enforcement Professional Standards Commission regarding the department's accreditation. The Police Department successfully passed its most recent assessment and received renewed accreditation, marking about nine years of continuous accreditation. He noted that the process requires meeting 193 professional standards, with departments required to demonstrate compliance with nearly all of them through extensive documentation and review every four years. Mr. Clements credited Mrs. Mikels for her significant work preparing documentation for the review and noted that the accreditation reflects the leadership and effort of the entire department.

Mrs. Mikels added that the officers serving Buena Vista are a dedicated group who work hard for the community, often going beyond normal duties to assist residents whenever needed.

Mayor Lineberry thanked the department for its continued efforts, especially given the current staffing shortages, and asked that the officers be reminded that Council appreciates the extra work they are doing to keep the department running efficiently.

6. Invited Community Organizations

Purple Heart Homes

Mike Lennon, a retired United States Marine Corps veteran provided an overview of Purple Heart Homes and its mission to assist veterans with housing needs. Mr. Lennon shared that his father served in the Marines from 1944 to 1963, was wounded five times in combat, received three Purple Hearts, and is now buried at Arlington National Cemetery. He explained that Purple Heart Homes was founded in 2009 by Dale Beatty and John Gallina, two veterans who were severely injured when their vehicle stuck anti-tank mines during the Iraq War near Fallujah. After returning home to Statesville, the two veterans decided their mission would be to continue moving forward with their lives rather than focus on their injuries and to support veterans from all eras of service.

The organization began by building wheelchair ramps for older veterans, particularly those from Vietnam, Korea, and World War II. As the work expanded, projects grew to include porch and deck repairs, door widening for wheelchair access, ADA-compliant bathrooms, roof replacements, and larger home modifications. PHH eventually developed the capacity to build modular homes for veterans in need, including one early case involving a veteran living in a garden shed. The organization plans to sell some modular homes to the public and reinvest profits into veteran housing programs.

Mr. Lennon noted that three projects have already been completed in the Buena Vista and Rockbridge County area, including:

- A wheelchair ramp for an Air Force veteran on Forge Road, completed in partnership with Habitat for Humanity and local volunteers.
- A rebuilt front deck and stairway for a local law enforcement officer and veteran who lost his leg to osteosarcoma.
- A ramp and deck replacement for a Vietnam veteran whose balance had been affected by nerve damage linked to Agent Orange exposure during the Vietnam War.

Rex Brust, President of the Lynchburg chapter of PHH, spoke next to describe the organization's regional impact. The Lynchburg chapter, established in January 2024, completed six projects during its first year, assisting veterans with needs such as wheelchair ramps, roof replacements, window installations, and bathroom remodels. In 2025, the chapter completed fifteen projects, providing an estimated $250,000 in community value through volunteer labor, donated materials, and contracted

work. So far in 2026, the chapter currently has several active projects serving veterans in Appomattox, Lynchburg, Campbell County, Bedford, Amherst, Nelson County, and Rockbridge County. Mr. Brust also highlighted a current project in Franklin County to build a 1,200-square-foot home addition for a family caring for two orphaned children after a tragic incident involving a veteran suffering from severe PTSD.

Stephen Johnson, Vice President of Manufacturing for PHH and a 28-year Army veteran, also spoke about an upcoming national project. Purple Heart Homes has applied for permission to build one of its modular homes on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. as a public demonstration project around Veterans Day. Construction will occur either September 27 – October 5 or November 1 – November 9. The plan is to transport materials from Statesville, North Carolina, build the modular home on the National Mall within one week, and move the completed home to Glasgow afterward. Mr. Johnson announced that a local landowner has donated the land in Glasgow where the home will be located. The goal is to provide the home to a veteran in need. If a suitable veteran cannot be identified, the home will be sold, and the proceeds will be reinvested into PHH's veteran housing programs.

Mr. Johnson also explained that PHH is expanding production of its modular homes, which range from 320 square feet; 480 square feet; 960 square feet; or up to 1,400 square feet using specialized construction panels.

Mr. Lennon closed by encouraging community involvement and noted that Rockbridge County is home to approximately 2,250 veterans, many of whom may benefit from the services provided by PHH. He added that the organization welcomes volunteers and local partners interested in helping establish additional chapters and expanding veteran support efforts in the region.

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

None

OLD BUSINESS

OB #1: SECOND READING OF AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND CITY CODE SECTION 705: HOME OCCUPATIONS

Mr. Roberts stated that the purpose of the amendment is to clarify the regulations, so they are easier for applicants and staff to understand and enforce, while balancing the ability to operate businesses from home while protecting the residential character of neighborhoods.

Councilmember Noel-Branch raised concerns about the proposed limit of three customers at one time and twelve customers per day, noting that it could affect some home businesses. She asked how long it would take for someone to receive a decision if they applied for a special exception. Mr. Roberts explained a request would go to the Board of Zoning Appeals and a meeting would likely be scheduled within about 30 days, with a decision typically made at that meeting. He noted that the Board would rely on the ordinance's intent language and neighborhood impact when considering exceptions.

Councilmember Gilliam also questioned the customer limits and compared them to local bed and breakfast businesses that can have multiple visitors and parking spaces in a residential area. Mr. Roberts explained that B&Bs and home daycares are regulated separately in the zoning code and are not subject to the home occupation rules.

Mr. Roberts also acknowledged that the customer limits were somewhat arbitrary, but the numbers provide a clear standard, unlike the current ordinance which only references "excessive traffic." He added that successful home businesses may eventually outgrow their homes and move to commercial spaces. He also suggested a weekly limit could be another option if Council preferred more flexibility. Miss Ramsey noted that the proposed numbers were informed by examples from other localities.

Councilmember Cash mentioned that this has been discussed for more than a year and that Council should move forward with a decision, noting it could always be amended later if needed. Councilmember Poluikis agreed, adding that the proposed limits are reasonable and emphasized the importance of balancing support for home businesses while protecting residential neighborhoods.

As this was the second reading, Councilmember Cash moved to read the ordinance by title only. Councilmember Noel-Branch seconded the motion, and it was carried by Council. Ms. Burch read the ordinance by title.

Councilmember Cash made a motion to adopt the ordinance as presented with Councilmember Noel-Branch seconding. Ms. Burch completed a roll call vote of Council as follows:

Member	Present	Absent	Yes	No	Abstain
Councilmember Poluikis	X		X		
Councilmember Gilliam	X		X		
Councilmember Kerr	X				X
Councilmember Noel-Branch	X		X		
Councilmember Cash	X		X		
Vice-Mayor Staton	X		X		
Mayor Lineberry	X		X		

The ordinance was unanimously **approved**, with Councilmember Kerr abstaining.

NEW BUSINESS

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

None

NB #1: DISCUSSION & APPROVAL OF AN APPROPRIATION RESOLUTION

Mr. Roberts explained that this project involves a failing culvert located at the intersection of 6th Street and Woodland Avenue. The bottom of the pipe has deteriorated and is expected to collapse if not addressed. The City applied for and was awarded funding through the Community Flood Protection Fund to design a replacement for the structure. The grant was applied for in the fall, and the City received award notification in late January.

The total project budget for the design phase is estimated at $130,000. Of that amount, $117,000 will be reimbursed through the grant, with the City providing an $11,800 cash match and approximately $1,200 in in-kind staff time. Mr. Roberts requested Council appropriate $65,000 in the current fiscal year so the City can begin the design process and hire an engineer, noting that the project is expected to span two fiscal years, with the remaining amount included in the next fiscal year's budget.

Mr. Roberts explained that the engineering work will determine the appropriate replacement structure, which could be either a larger culvert or a bridge, depending on the results of a hydraulic analysis of the creek. The project is considered a flood hazard mitigation effort because the existing culvert is known to be undersized for stormwater flows. Public Works has previously installed a temporary headwall to stabilize one end of the structure, but the culvert ultimately needs to be replaced.

He added that the City could apply for additional Community Flood Protection Fund grants in the future to support construction of the replacement once the design is complete. The design cost estimate was

prepared with assistance from engineer Hunter Young, who has also been working with the City on a flood hazard resilience plan.

There was additional discussion regarding the importance of addressing the failing culvert and the potential flood risk to nearby homes. It was noted that the study will evaluate the most appropriate, effective, and durable long-term solution to ensure adequate water flow and reduce the risk of flooding.

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 **GENERAL FUND** and expended as follows:

New Grant Award (Community Flood Preparedness Fund – Culvert Replacement Project)

10.8402.56188	DCR CFPF Culvert Replacement Project	$65,000.00
Subtotal 1		**$65,000.00**
Total General Fund Appropriation		**$65,000.00**

Approved: This 5th day of March 2026.

_____
Jesse D. Lineberry, Mayor

Attest:

_____
Sarah M. Burch, Clerk of Council

Councilmember Cash moved to **approve** the resolution, Vice-Mayor Staton seconded the motion, and it was carried by Council.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM.

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Sarah M. Burch, Clerk of Council

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Jesse D. Lineberry, Mayor