CITY OF BUENA VISTA CITY COUNCIL

REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING & PUBLIC HEARING

April 2, 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, April 2, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.

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, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE, & PRAYER

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

ADG #2: APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

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

ADG #3: 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 Text Amendment to adopt new Section 702 Accessory Dwelling Units, for the purpose of allowing and regulating detached and attached accessory dwelling units.

Mayor Lineberry opened the public hearing.

- Tom Roberts, Zoning Administrator, gave a brief summary of the proposed amendment. He explained that ADUs are small, secondary residential units located on the same property as a primary dwelling and under the same ownership. These units may be attached to the main house or located in a separate structure. He noted that the City currently does not permit detached ADUs, although some similar arrangements exist as nonconforming uses from prior development patterns. He stated that many localities have updated their zoning regulations in recent years to allow ADUs as a way to address housing needs, and that this concept was identified as a potential solution in the City's recent housing study. The proposed amendment would allow detached ADUs by right, meaning property owners would not need to obtain a conditional use permit. However, the regulations would include limitations on size, occupancy, and other factors, as well as a requirement that the property owner reside in either the primary dwelling or the ADU.

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

ADG #4: APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE MARCH 19, 2026, REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING & PUBLIC HEARING

Motion to approve the minutes was made by Councilmember Gilliam, seconded Vice-Mayor Staton, and carried by Council.

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

- Heather Madison, 1674 Cedar Avenue, spoke in opposition to the proposed rezoning of the property on the 20th block of Chestnut Avenue. She echoed concerns raised at prior Council and Planning Commission meetings, emphasizing the importance of preserving the residential character of neighborhoods. She stated that while businesses may seek to expand and maximize operations, such goals should not outweigh the rights of residents to maintain established zoning protections. She expressed concern that the request is premature, noting that the Blue Ridge Abbey has not yet demonstrated sufficient operational history or data to justify expansion requiring rezoning. She further cautioned that approving the request could set a precedent for future rezoning applications, potentially leading to increased encroachment of non-residential uses into residential areas. Mrs. Madison urged Council to deny the rezoning request in order to maintain the integrity of the neighborhood's residential zoning.

- Mason Ludgate, 2056 Chestnut Avenue, provided an update in response to prior concerns, noting that vehicles had been moved, trash removed, and the property cleaned and maintained to improve its appearance. He explained that, due to the current conditional use permit, the owners are required to reside on-site, which includes storing personal belongings at the property. He added that, if the rezoning is approved, those items would be removed. Mr. Ludgate reiterated that the request is limited to utilizing sex additional existing rooms within the current structures, with no new construction proposed. He emphasized that [the applicants] are voluntarily limiting the use of the property specifically to the Blue Ridge Abbey operation within the two existing buildings, stating that broader commercial uses would not be permitted under this proposal. He also noted that the surrounding area already includes multi-family housing, suggesting the proposal would be consistent with nearby land uses.

  Councilmember Cash acknowledged the improvements and suggested the use of a dumpster on-site as a more effective and orderly waste management solution, particularly given concerns about alley conditions.

- Jerry Miller, 2215 Walnut Avenue, spoke in opposition to the proposed rezoning on Chestnut Avenue, raising concerns regarding fire and life safety compliance. He stated that, to his knowledge, no formal inspection has been conducted to verify that the structure can safely support its current or proposed use for transient lodging. Mr. Miller argued that approving a rezoning that would increase occupancy and commercial activity without documented safety verification represents a procedural deficiency. He emphasized that such approval could expose the City to risk, as the building has not undergone inspections typically required for lodging uses. He stated that the appropriate process should involve confirmation of life safety compliance prior to any rezoning consideration, and that Council does not currently have sufficient information to make a fully informed decision. Mr. Miller also referenced concerns regarding potential spot zoning and urged Council to uphold the Planning Commission's recommendation and deny the rezoning request.

- Wayne Fitzgerald, 545 East 23rd Street, also spoke in opposition to the proposed rezoning, emphasizing the importance of maintaining residential zoning protections. He expressed concern that approving the request could set a precedent for similar future requests, potentially leading to increased non-residential uses in established neighborhoods. While acknowledging the improvements made to the property, he stated that the area is zoned residential for a reason and urged Council to preserve the residential character of Buena Vista.

- Stanley Coffey, 1925 Chestnut Avenue, also expressed opposition to the proposed rezoning. While noting that the property improvements look good, he raised concerns that approving the request could set a precedent for additional rezoning in the area. He emphasized that the neighborhood is already somewhat congested, noting nearby churches, residences, and existing activity. He expressed concern that increased use could add to traffic and parking issues, citing instances of limited street parking. He stated that while he is not opposed to the business concept itself, he believes it would be more appropriate in a different location and urged Council to maintain the current residential zoning to avoid boarder impacts on the neighborhood.

ADG #6: REPORTS:

1. Mayor

Mayor Lineberry reported that spring activities are underway throughout the City and highlighted local youth sports. He noted his involvement in coaching and expressed enthusiasm for the upcoming season.

He also announced the upcoming Easter egg hunt at the park and reported attending the recent Coffee and Conversation event at Rockbridge Recovery. He also encouraged continued community participation and engagement.

2. City Manager/Interim City Manager

Mr. Handley began with an update on the wastewater treatment plant, noting multiple meetings with DEQ and engineers, as well as one-site work with support from the Maury Service Authority and Middle River Service Authority. Immediate improvements are already underway, including equipment replacements, and although a consent order from DEQ is still expected, the city is proactively completing items ahead of required timeline. The $2.3 million funding allocation is anticipated to support the larger upgrades moving forward.

He then addressed the city's budget, explaining that the funding gap has been reduced significantly—from approximately $1.9 million to about $450,000—through ongoing work with Finance Director Steve Bolster. Additional budget discussions are scheduled to continue closing that gap.

He also highlighted the major concern of delinquent personal property taxes. The city currently has around 1,920 delinquent accounts totaling approximately $1.3 million in unpaid taxes. Mr. Handley explained that new enforcement and collection strategies are being explored, including state setoff programs, potential DMV stops, and court-related enforcement options. He emphasized that these efforts will be carefully implemented and clearly communicated to the public. New software is also being introduced to improve tracking, reporting, and overall efficiency in tax collection, though full functionality will take time to roll out properly.

Mr. Handley also announced that the Public Works and Parks & Recreation Director positions have been filled. Michael Loudermilk will be the new PW Director and Ryan Groah will be the new P&R Director. Both are expected to start at the end of the month and will work collaboratively to improve operations across departments. He emphasized the importance of teamwork and acknowledged the significant responsibilities they are stepping into.

Lastly, he noted that the job profile for recruiting the next city manager is nearly complete and will soon be shared with Council to move forward with the hiring process.

3. City Attorney

None.

4. Council Committees/Members

Budget & Finance

Mrs. Gilliam reported that the committee met earlier in the week and made substantial progress in reducing the city's general fund shortfall. Through careful review, the committee identified a number of cuts, including a recommendation not to fund several newly requested positions for the upcoming fiscal year. They also reviewed requests from non-profit organizations and recommended level funding for those groups, even where increases had been requested. In the case of the fire department and rescue squad, the committee proposed funding approximately 15% of the requested increase rather than the full amount. Additional meetings are planned, and further revenue opportunities are being explored.

Mrs. Poluikis emphasized the significance of the progress made, noting that the budget gap had been reduced from $1.9 million to $450,000 through extensive effort and difficult decisions. She highlighted that many of these reductions came at the expense of already overextended staff, including departments that had requested additional personnel but agreed to forgo those positions. She also pointed out the contract between these sacrifices and the approximately $1.3 million in delinquent taxes, suggesting that collecting even a portion of those funds could significantly ease operational strain and improve working conditions for city employees.

Glen Maury Park Committee

Mr. Staton noted that they will be holding a meeting on Wednesday, April 8th at 6:00 p.m.

Cemetery Committee

Mr. Staton stated that they will be holding their first meeting on Monday, April 20th at 6:00 p.m.

Citizens Advisory Committee

Mrs. Noel-Branch reported on the March 17th CA Committee meeting and announced the appointment of officers: Heather Madison as Chair, Brent Styler as Vice Chair, and Sarah Burch as Secretary.

Outdoor Spaces Committee

Mrs. Noel-Branch noted that Brent Styler has been appointed as Chair, Chad Coffey as Vice Chair, and April Murphy as Secretary, with Mrs. Noel-Branch acting as backup secretary. Discussion centered on several key themes, including safety and infrastructure concerns related to aging fencing, lighting, bleachers, press boxes, and dugouts, particularly at Camden Field and Laurel Park. Field conditions were also discussed, with heavy usage, drainage issues, and legacy site conditions contributing to uneven surfaces and general wear. Financial stability was another focus, as tournament and event revenues do not consistently offset maintenance costs; the committee discussed standardizing fee structures while maintaining waiver options for charitable events.

The committee identified both near-term and long-term improvement opportunities. Near-term priorities include court restoration or conversion, reactivation of practice fields, and installation of small shelters. Long-term opportunities include expansion through partnerships, including with Rockbridge County and potential land acquisition. Specific facilities discussed included 10th Street Soccer Field, Secrist Field, Camden Field, and Laurel Park, as well as the potential conversion of tennis courts to pickleball courts. The committee also discussed the possibility of utilizing the middle school field for multi-sport practice with minimal investment and expressed interest in constructing a shelter at the basketball court.

The committee is researching grant and funding opportunities, including state, legislative, and tourism-related sources, to support project implementation. Action items include developing a prioritized improvement plan with cost estimates, continuing grant research, and engaging Melvin Henson as a consultant to the committee.

The next meeting is scheduled for April 23rd at 6:00 p.m.

Mrs. Poluikis also expressed appreciation for city staff, particularly public works employees, for their ongoing assistance with cleanup and hauling efforts related to school facility transitions, noting their consistent hard work and support.

5. Department Heads/Constitutional Officers/Court Clerks

None.

6. Invited Community Organizations

Jen Carpenter – Main Street Buena Vista

Mrs. Carpenter reported receiving a $5,000 grant from the Community Health Foundation, noting that grant funds must be used for designated project purposes, and emphasized the importance of such incremental funding successes.

She stated that MSBV plans to apply for a tourism marketing grant and is working to better coordinate with community partners to enhance visitor experiences. As an example, she highlighted an upcoming visit from a group of Norton motorcycle riders scheduled for June 22-26, with plans for downtown entertainment and a potential movie event in Magnolia Square.

She also shared that she will attend Main Street America training in Oklahoma and intends to bring back ideas to share with the City. She noted several upcoming local events, including bingo at the fire department, the kickoff of the downtown farmers market, and weekly Friday night events at Straws. She also promoted their monthly newsletter as a tool to improve communication and highlight ongoing activities and events throughout the City.

ADG #7: CONSIDER APPOINTMENTS TO BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, & COMMITTEES

Public Recreational Facilities Authority

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

Applicant: Joanna Clark

Councilmember Noel-Branch made a motion to appoint Mrs. Joanna Clark to the PRFA. Councilmember Cash seconded the motion, and it was carried by Council.

OLD BUSINESS

OB #1: SECOND READING OF AN ORDINANCE TO REZONE 2056/2068 CHESTNUT AVENUE FROM R3 RESIDENTIAL TO MU MIXED USE

This being the second reading, Councilmember Cash made a motion to read the ordinance by title only, with Vice-Mayor Staton seconding, and it was carried by Council.

Councilmember Cash moved to approve the ordinance with Councilmember Poluikis seconding. Ms. Burch completed a roll call vote of Council as follows:

Member	Present	Absent	Yes	No	Abstain
Mrs. Poluikis	X		X		
Mrs. Gilliam	X			X	
Mr. Kerr	X			X	
Mrs. Noel-Branch	X		X		

Mr. Cash	X		X		
Vice-Mayor Staton	X			X	
Mayor Lineberry	X			X	

By a vote of 4-3 the request to rezone 2056 & 2068 Chestnut Avenue was **denied**.

NEW BUSINESS

ADG #8: RECOGNITION/COMMUNICATION FROM VISITORS – NEW BUSINESS ITEMS

None.

NB #1: FIRST READING OF AN ORDINANCE TO ADOPT NEW SECTION 702 ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS

Ms. Burch presented the following ordinance:

Zoning Text Amendment

Section 702 Accessory Dwelling Units

AN ORDINANCE to amend Section 302 and adopt new Section 702 of the Land Development Regulations of the Code of the City of Buena Vista, as amended, for the purpose of regulating Accessory Dwelling Units.

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, Section 302 is hereby amended, and Section 702 is hereby adopted as shown in the attached "Exhibit A".

Prior to adjournment, Councilmember Cash expressed disappointment that the rezoning request for the Blue Ridge Abbey did not move forward, emphasizing the importance of economic growth and warning that failure to embrace change and development could lead to long-term decline similar to neighboring localities such as Clifton Forge. He encouraged openness to new opportunities and investment in the City.

Councilmember Gilliams objected to Mr. Cash's characterization of opposition as closed-minded, stating that her vote reflected her commitments to represent the citizens. She noted that multiple residents spoke against the rezoning during prior meetings and emphasized the importance of respecting those concerns.

Councilmember Noel-Branch acknowledged public opposition but stated that the business owners are also members of the community with a right to be heard and to pursue expansion. She emphasized the need to consider all perspectives and not favor one group over another.

Councilmember Poluikis stated that she voted in favor of the rezoning, citing concerns that the business may have been unfairly targeted. She noted that the area already includes non-residential uses and stated that the arguments presented against the rezoning did not line up in her opinion.

Mayor Lineberry explained that his vote against the rezoning was influenced by procedural considerations, noting that the revised request did not return to the Planning Commission for further review. He also cited the volume of public opposition compared to limited expressed support and encouraged future applicants to demonstrate broader backing and alignment with recommendations from boards and commissions.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:57 p.m.

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Sarah M. Burch, Clerk of Council Jesse D. Lineberry, Mayor