



## City of Buena Vista City Council Regular Council Meeting & Public Hearing

June 6, 2024, 6:00 PM  
Council Chambers – 2039 Sycamore Avenue

The City Council for the City of Buena Vista met for a Regular Council Meeting & Public Hearing on Thursday, June 6, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.

**Members Present:** Mayor Tyson Cooper  
Michelle Poluikis  
Ronald Cash  
Todd Jones

**Members Absent:** Vice-Mayor Danny Staton  
Melvin Henson  
Steve Webb

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

Mayor Cooper called the meeting to order and delivered the opening prayer.

### **ADG #2: BUENA VISTA CITY COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING**

Mayor Cooper opened the Public Hearing.

#### **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding to procure equipment for the proposed Mountain Gateway Community College (MGCC) Wilson Workforce Center located at 2019 Forest Avenue**

Community Development Director, Tom Roberts, reported that Mountain Gateway Community College is proceeding with construction on the Wilson Workforce Center. He noted that this is a very large, expensive construction project with a total budget of about \$6.4 million, but that doesn't include all of the furnishings and equipment. Most of that money is already secured, including an Industrial Revitalization Fund grant that they received a few months ago. He provided some background, stating that last year Council approved, and the City applied for a Community Development Block Grant on behalf of MGCC for construction. That grant was denied because they deemed that the particular program that we applied for was not appropriate for construction funding for community colleges. However, they did say that purchasing equipment for the Center would be eligible, so that application is being completed now. The application is due on June 12th, and we still have some details to work out, such as the amount that we are applying for, because it is contingent on which equipment items are eligible, and which are not. MGCC has provided a long list of items that they need, including the prices, but we have to determine what on that list is eligible. It will be no more than \$1 million. He noted that the Department of Housing & Community Development must contract with the City for the grant and the money has to "flow through" the City, but we will be assigning the risk of the project to MGCC and/or the Real Estate Foundation. That means we will be signing a Memorandum of Understanding with them stating that they are going to spend the money on these designated items, and they will procure them in the correct way. There is no out-of-pocket cost to the City and the Central Shenandoah Planning District

Commission will have administrative oversight of the grant.

Councilman Jones asked Mr. Roberts to clarify that this is a grant and not a loan obligation; he said that yes, it is a grant. Councilman Jones then asked if these are funds that currently lie with the State. Mr. Roberts said that the source of funding for Community Development Block Grants is federal through the Department of Housing & Urban Development, and they delegate those funds to the states for distribution. The State DHCD has a variety of programs focusing on different areas such as housing or downtown revitalization. This particular grant is through the Community Economic Development subprogram, which means the driving factor is job creation. The reason this project is eligible is because the programs they are training for will create and contribute to the retention of jobs in the area and in addition to that, specifically jobs for low to moderate income people.

No one from the public spoke.

Mayor Cooper closed the Public Hearing.

### **ADG #3: APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

Councilwoman Poluikis moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Councilman Jones, and carried by Council.

### **ADG #4: APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE MAY 16, 2024, REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING**

Motion to approve the minutes was made by Councilman Cash, seconded by Councilwoman Poluikis, and carried by Council.

### **ADG #5: RECOGNITION/COMMUNICATION FROM VISITORS**

- Thomas Bell, 2370 Walnut Avenue, spoke as a representative of the Library Board. He extended his thanks to Council for fully funding the Library in this year's budget. He said that with this additional funding they will be able to fully open beginning the week of Labor Day. They have their community board up featuring pictures of community members with their library cards. They also have some summer reading programs, including one called Chalk the Block, where people go to the library and sign up then go around to downtown businesses. This program helps folks get to know our downtown and our businesses.
- Sandra Manuel, 2574 Edgewood Road, spoke about some concerns she has regarding the penalty on City decals. She stated that the notification for decals says the due date is March 1<sup>st</sup>, but there is nothing on that stating a fee if they are not purchased by that date. She noted that she purchased her decals on March 11<sup>th</sup>, and the penalty she was charged was \$170.52 for three vehicles. She mentioned that City Code states that the City is allowed to charge a penalty, but there is no notification anywhere that there will be a penalty charged. Her understanding was that if she didn't purchase it in time, she would be subject to a ticket from the police, but she wasn't aware of any late fee. She further noted that on water bills and tax bills there is a late fee notice, but since there is no notice for a penalty on decals, she doesn't feel that it is fair or appropriate to charge somebody if you don't notify them that they will be charged. She stated that she would appreciate Council's consideration into reducing or taking the charge off of her bill since there was no notification.

Mayor Cooper asked Mr. Tyree if he could speak with Treasurer Amy Hudson about our communication to make sure we are more thorough.

## **ADG #6: REPORTS**

### **1. Mayor**

Mayor Cooper reported that he represented Council at the PMHS graduation, the Senior of the Month banquet, and the School's retirement dinner. He stated that the Senior of the Month banquet was especially nice, being able to hear those students honoring a member of the school community that has blessed and changed their lives. He said that it was a great opportunity to be there and to see and hear beautiful messages from these students that they shared about the mentors that they have had, and this reaffirmed his gratitude and appreciation to the school district for loving our kids. He mentioned that there were seven or eight retirees being honored at the retirement dinner, with one of them having worked in our school district for 44 years.

### **2. City Manager**

Mr. Tyree mentioned that we have started receiving applications for the new administrative assistant position that will be working with Kristina Ramsey; we will be accepting applications from now until June 20th.

The BVPD summer camp begins Monday, June 10th. They have three age groups (elementary, middle, and high school ages). This will last for a few weeks.

The Fiddler's Convention is June 13-15th. The Fiddler's Committee said there has been a lot of interest this year, and they are expecting a good turnout.

The roof at City Hall is still being worked on and the air conditioning will be off intermittently over the next week or so. He noted that he has directed staff to dress comfortably during this time.

City offices will be closed on June 19th for the Juneteenth holiday.

### **3. City Attorney**

Mr. Kearney stated that we signed all the documents for closing on the USDA loan today and are now just waiting for the funding. We should be receiving the wiring instructions this evening, so hopefully by tomorrow or Monday we will have the money to pay off those two existing debts.

### **4. Council Committees / Members**

#### **a. Budget & Finance**

None.

#### **b. Outdoor Spaces**

Mr. Tyree mentioned that there was a plan to meet in June, but with Vice-Mayor Staton and Councilman Henson both recovering, that is up in the air as of now.

#### **c. School Facilities**

Councilwoman Poluikis reported that their first meeting went great. She stated that she was impressed with what Dr. Francis said about their plan going forward to have things assessed and see where we stand and then to address the issues that our schools are facing. Their next step is for them to see exactly what the anticipated growth is for the school district.

The next School Facilities Committee meeting is scheduled for June 18th at 6:00 pm at the Ramsey Center.

Councilman Jones stated that beginning in 1977, the General District Courtroom/Council Chambers was his workplace at least once a week, and this renovation and flipping of the room has been talked about for 25-30 years and he is extremely happy that it finally got done. He extended congratulations to Mr. Tyree for getting this done and he is happy that we had the wherewithal to do it. He also noted that during his tenure with City Government, there were at least two big plans about making this building more usable and practical. He mentioned there is more work to be done, noting that the fact our citizens coming to pay their taxes have to navigate through a hallway full of juvenile court defendants and participants and that is not always the most pleasant experience. He knows we are working on it, and he is appreciative of the progress.

## **5. Department Heads / Constitutional Officers / Court Clerks**

None.

## **6. Invited Community Organizations**

### **a. Bryson Adams – RARO**

Mr. Adams provided the following Director's report:

- Spring ball programs are all in the All-Star Tournaments
- Summer is the slow season, until football starts in the fall
- Fall registration is closed, but you can still sign up, you will just be on a wait list and will get on a team eventually
- RARO Adventures finished their kayak program today

Mr. Adams went on to say that unfortunately, RARO is coming to Council for an ask. He stated that they were trying to be proactive in getting their budget turned in, and since that point they have had three resignations on the staff. One of those is James Clark who has been with RARO for over 40 years and served as a part-time facilities worker. They already have an opening for another part-time facilities worker, but they would like to combine both of those part-time positions into one full-time. That does put them at a deficit in the budget. They aren't asking for a budget amendment for the new fiscal year, but they are asking that Council give their blessing on proceeding with the full-time position. He noted that he looked at their budget for a few minutes and found about half the money they need for this, so he is confident that they will be able to make the necessary cuts and adjustments over the next year to cover the additional expense. All prior years, they have come in with a surplus and have asked to roll that over into the next year, but this year they didn't have that due to additional expenses for replacing football helmets which was about \$9,000. Also, the County miscalculated their health insurance, so that was a huge additional expense. Those two things are almost the exact amount that they were over budget at the end of the year. He also mentioned that the Lexington City Council hasn't discussed this yet, but they were in support of it. Their City's portion at this point to cover the deficit, based on participation, would be about \$3,000-\$6,000, but he feels confident that they can make that up throughout the year.

## **b. Brooke Dalton – Main Street Buena Vista**

Mrs. Dalton reported that she had attended the Main Street America conference at the beginning of May in Birmingham, AL. She noted that she gained some valuable ideas and was able to network with other executive directors from all over the nation. She said their motto is “rip off and reuse” so she was able to “steal” a lot of great ideas.

MSBV hosted the Business Appreciation Breakfast on May 31<sup>st</sup>, which had an excellent turnout. Good Karma provided donuts and breakfast sandwiches and Asunder provided coffee. She gave kudos to Good Karma for the amazing job they did.

On Tuesday, June 11th, they are collaborating with Austin Rehl on a community service project. Beginning at 8:00 am, they will be cleaning up Penny Park and painting/fixing the downtown trash cans. She noted that there will be five groups of about ten young men coming in to do this work. At Penny Park they will spread mulch, trim the bushes, and freshen it up.

The weekend of June 21st is the Bike Virginia event. They are teaming up with Rockbridge Outdoors for a welcome table in Town Square. There are expected to be hundreds of bikers coming through.

The Connect with BV event is being held again this year, and the school will be working with them to host. This event is a “welcome to town” for incoming students and teachers that are new to the area. Businesses stay open late; there is food and music and a lot of fun!

MSBV was approved for a SMARP grant, which is a small area planning grant focused on business support; they were awarded \$10,000. They will use this to focus on helping our small businesses and trying to create a façade program within MSBV that will be sustainable.

## **ADG #7: CONSIDER APPOINTMENTS TO BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, AND COMMITTEES**

### **Board of Zoning Appeals**

Mrs. Jody Fix has resigned from the Board of Zoning Appeals following her appointment to the Economic Development Authority. This appointment will begin immediately and will expire on December 31, 2026. This is the fifth time it has appeared on the agenda.

There were no applicants for this opening; it will be carried over to the next meeting.

### **Planning Commission**

Mrs. Marolyn Cash’s appointment expires on June 30, 2024. Mrs. Cash is willing to serve again. This is a four-year term and the first time it has appeared on the agenda.

Councilman Jones moved to reappoint Mrs. Cash to the Planning Commission. Councilwoman Poluikis seconded the motion, and it was carried by Council.

### **Central Shenandoah Planning District Commission**

Mayor Tyson Cooper’s appointment expires on June 30, 2024. Mr. Cooper is willing to serve again. This is a three-year term and the first time it has appeared on the agenda.

Councilman Jones moved to reappoint Mayor Cooper to the CSPDC with Councilwoman Poluikis seconding, and it was carried by Council.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### **OB #1: SECOND READING OF AN ORDINANCE ESTABLISHING THE TAX RATES FOR THE CITY OF BUENA VISTA FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025**

Mayor Cooper began by explaining that the Ordinance currently reads \$1.27 as the current tax rate. He noted that there has been confusion due to the letters that the assessor sent out and he believes there should have been a cover letter included with those to explain the situation that we find ourselves in as a community. He said that it has been a very long time since our property values went up. We are learning and making mistakes as we learn how to deal with the values going up. We are now required to reset the tax rate by equalizing it so that it is roughly equivalent to what citizens were paying before the reassessment. We estimate that the rate will be 91¢ instead of \$1.27, but we don't know for sure yet.

Councilman Jones expressed his disappointment and irritation, stating that it is unacceptable that the appraiser did not get the job done in time for us to be able to have this done in our usual fashion during the month of May. He mentioned that unfortunately this company was the only ones that bid on the job when it was put out. He suggested that we send a note along with our payment to them saying that it was unacceptable that we were forced into this position. That being said, the rate has to be set in June and right now all we have is the \$1.27, which of course doesn't work as it is out of line with the reassessments. To equalize it, we think it is 91¢, but we aren't positive because we don't have that final figure from the assessor. Recalling what was discussed at the last Council meeting, they would have that by June 18th, which would be in time for our June 20th meeting. He then suggested that we table this for tonight and set it for the June 20th meeting so that we can set an accurate rate.

Mr. Kearney advised that since we are unsure if we will have that final rate by the 20th, he worded this Ordinance as such that the rate will automatically reduce to whatever the final rate comes in at and they won't have to reset it. Whether it comes in at 90, 91, or 92¢, it will automatically come down to that. If they wanted to further reduce it, they could do that after getting that final number as well.

Mr. Clemmer stated that the assessor is meeting with citizens through June 12th, but if they still wish to appeal, they would have to go through the Board of Equalization. Once that is done, that is when we get the official, final number. In theory, based on that, we would have to adjust it again.

Councilman Jones asked if we could set it at 91¢ and feel safe with that. Mr. Kearney said that not knowing if that is at the 101%, it could cause us to be in violation by overshooting and then we would have to have another public hearing and go through the whole process again. He further explained that we have to set this by the end of June, but it may be July before we have the final number. So with this Ordinance, the rate automatically adjusts down to whatever that final number is.

Councilman Jones asked what the process and requirement is for the Board of Equalization. Mr. Kearney stated that we need to get members appointed and they are appointed by the Circuit Court with us helping to line those people up. There has to be certain people with certain backgrounds on the Board.

**An Ordinance Establishing the Tax Rates for  
The City of Buena Vista, Virginia for the Fiscal Year 2025**

**BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL FOER THE CITY OF BUENA VISTA, VIRGINIA,** that in accordance with Section 26-1 of the Code of the City of Buena Vista, there is hereby levied upon taxable real estate an effective tax rate of One Dollar and Twenty-Seven Cents (\$1.27) per One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00) assessed valuation for the Fiscal Year 2025, subject to the provision that the City is currently in the process of finalizing a real estate reassessment which will result in an increase of more than One Percent (1%) in the total real estate property tax levied. Upon completion of this reassessment, the rate of levy shall be reduced to One Hundred One Percent (101%) of the previous years' tax levy in accordance with the terms of Section 58.1-3321 of the 1951 Code of Virginia, as amended.

**BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED** that there is hereby levied upon personal property a tax rate of Five Dollars and Eighty-Five Cents (\$5.85) per One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00) assessed valuation for the Calendar Year 2024, said levy to be based upon the value of such property as of January 1, 2024.

**BE IT FURTHER ORDAINED** that there is hereby levied upon all public service corporation real estate the sum of One Dollar and Twenty-Seven Cents (\$1.27) per One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00) assessed valuation for the Fiscal Year 2025, said levy to be adjusted due to the reassessment as outlined above.

**BE IT STILL FURTHER ORDAINED** that all other tax rates not expressly defined above shall remain the same until further action by Council.

Due to the continuing reassessment and the necessity to enact this Ordinance by July 1, 2024, this Ordinance shall be considered an Emergency Ordinance.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tyson T. Cooper, Mayor

Attest:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sarah M. Burch, Clerk of Council

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Adoption

Councilwoman Poluikis moved to approve the Ordinance with Councilman Jones seconding, and it was carried by Council. Ms. Burch completed a roll call vote of Council as follows:

Member	Present	Absent	Yes	No	Abstain
Councilman Henson		X			
Councilwoman Poluikis	X		X		

Councilman Webb		X			
Councilman Jones	X		X		
Councilman Cash	X		X		
Vice-Mayor Staton		X			
Mayor Cooper	X		X		

The Ordinance was **approved** by unanimous vote.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**NB #1: RESOLUTION FOR CDBG FUNDING TO PROCURE EQUIPMENT FOR THE PROPOSED MGCC WILSON WORKFORCE CENTER**

Mr. Roberts read the following Resolution

**City of Buena Vista  
Community Development Block Grant  
Community Economic Development Grant Resolution**

**WHEREAS** Mountain Gateway Community College provides workforce development services to the City of Buena Vista, the Rockbridge region, and the Alleghany Highlands; and

**WHEREAS** Mountain Gateway Community College has begun construction on the Wilson Workforce Center located in downtown Buena Vista; and

**WHEREAS** the City of Buena Vista seeks to support furnishing the Center with necessary equipment for workforce training.

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that pursuant to two public hearings, the City of Buena Vista wishes to apply for up to \$1 million of Virginia Community Development Block Grant funds for the Buena Vista MGCC CDBG CED 2024 project.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that City Manager Jason Tyree is hereby authorized to sign and submit appropriate documents for the submittal of this Virginia Community Development Block Grant proposal.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that City Manager Jason Tyree shall enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with Mountain Gateway Community College Real Estate Foundation and/or other entities necessary to allocate responsibility for implementation of this grant to said entity or entities.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tyson T. Cooper, Mayor

Attest:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sarah M. Burch, Clerk of Council

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Date of Adoption

Councilman Cash asked what types of equipment this would cover. Mr. Roberts said that the list includes a diesel tractor, a lift for engines, various cutting machines for the machining program, and a long list of smaller equipment items down to wrench sets. The programs that most of this equipment is associated with are the machining and the diesel mechanic. They already have most of the equipment for the welding and HVAC programs.

Councilwoman Poluikis mentioned that she recently went on a field trip with a group of students to MGCC and it was very nice to see that they have so many programs where students can go and learn something where they can make a decent living. She said it was exciting to see this and to see the students finding things they would be interested in, and she is very excited that they will have a presence in the City.

Mr. Roberts also pointed out that many of the programs that will be offered at the Wilson Workforce Center are part of a program offered by the State called Fast Forward. This offers income eligible students a dramatically reduced cost for these programs. For example, an income-eligible student can get their CDL for \$100-\$150 from start to finish.

Councilwoman Poluikis moved to **approve** the Resolution, seconded by Councilman Cash and carried by Council.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

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Sarah M. Burch, Clerk of Council

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Tyson T. Cooper, Mayor