



CITY OF BUENA VISTA CITY COUNCIL

REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING

August 6, 2026 | 6:00 PM

Council Chambers – 2039 Sycamore Avenue

The Buena Vista City Council met for a Regular Council Meeting on Thursday, August 6 2026, at 6:00 p.m.

Members Present:

Mayor Jesse Lineberry

Vice-Mayor Danny Staton

Michelle Poluikis

Amy Gilliam

William Kerr

Ronald Cash – *arrived at 6:04*

Members Absent:

Stephanie Noel-Branch

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

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

ADG #2: APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Vice-Mayor Staton moved to approve the agenda, Councilmember Gilliam seconded, and the motion carried.

ADG #3: APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE JULY 16, 2026, REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING

Councilmember Gilliam moved to approve the minutes, Councilmember Kerr seconded, and the motion carried.

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

No one spoke.

ADG #5: REPORTS:

1. Mayor

Mayor Lineberry welcomed newly appointed City Manager Krystal Onaitis to her first Council meeting. He noted that Buena Vista City Public Schools would begin the following week and wished students and teachers a successful school year. He also highlighted some upcoming community activities, including Main Street Buena Vista's Connect BV event at the end of August.

2. Interim City Manager

Mr. Handley thanked City Council for the opportunity to serve and for their trust and support during his tenure. He stated that his goal had been to establish a strong foundation for the incoming City Manager and expressed his hope that the transition work would assist Ms. Onaitis as she begins her tenure.

He recognized the City's regional government partners, specifically Rockbridge County and the City of Lexington, and thanked Spencer Suter and Tom Carroll for their assistance and willingness to collaborate during his time with the City. He also expressed appreciation for Buena Vista's engaged citizens, particularly those who regularly attend meetings and remain focused on finding solutions and opportunities for the community.

Mr. Handley also praised City department heads and employees, stating that the City's workforce is exceptional and works diligently to serve the community. He noted that significant work remains underway, including the wastewater treatment plant, school-related projects, roads, infrastructure improvements, and efforts to improve City systems and processes. He expressed confidence that continued attention to these areas would allow the City to make faster progress.

He welcomed Ms. Onaitis and stated that, based on his observations during the transition, he believes she brings a strong level of competence and experience that will help propel Buena Vista forward while maintaining the City's community culture. He also recognized nonprofit partners, including Rockbridge CAN, Unity for Kids, Project Horizon, Rockbridge Recovery, and HOPE House, for helping address important needs within the community.

He acknowledged that Buena Vista continues to face significant challenges but expressed confidence in the City's leadership and staff and optimism about the City's future. He noted that he will continue to have a working relationship with the City through his new position as Superintendent of the Rockbridge Regional Jail.

In closing, Mr. Handley encouraged Council members, City employees, and other public servants to remain focused on serving the community, acting rather than simply criticizing, learning from setbacks, and remaining committed to causes larger than themselves. He thanked Council, staff, community partners, and residents for their support.

3. City Manager

Ms. Onaitis provided an update on her first week with the City. She reported that she has focused heavily on one-on-one meetings with City Council members, department heads, and constitutional officers in order to establish relationships and better understand the City's operations. She noted that she has met with the majority of those folks and will continue those meetings during the following weeks.

She reported attending the convocation and the high school and described the event as a welcoming introduction to the community. She also began intentional regional engagement, meeting with leadership from Rockbridge County and the City of Lexington, including Spencer Suter, Tom Carroll, and Lexington's interim mayor, David Sigler.

Ms. Onaitis has also begun visiting departments throughout City Hall and plans to tour operational facilities, including Public Works, the Police Department, and the City's water and wastewater operations. She reported that community outreach efforts are beginning as she schedules meetings with community members.

A major focus of her first week has been working with staff to identify and prioritize projects and operational processes. Ms. Onaitis noted that the City's financial challenges have appropriately been a major focus for some time, but that other systems and processes may have received less attention as a result. She stated that she is working with staff to ensure those processes are functioning properly, remain compliant with applicable requirements, and do not create additional problems for the City.

She also discussed efforts to improve public communication, transparency, and trust. She is working with Council and department heads to identify opportunities for more intentional press releases and informational presentations during Council meetings. These efforts will help residents better understand City finances, expenditures, VDOT projects and responsibilities, and the City's work with regional and community partners. She thanked Council and City employees for the warm welcome and stated that she has had a positive first week with the City.

4. City Attorney

None.

5. Council Committees/Members

Mr. Cash reported that planning is underway for the City's Labor Day celebration. A planning meeting was scheduled for the following morning to finalize as many details as possible, with additional decisions expected as the event approaches. He encouraged residents to attend the celebration, beginning with the parade and continuing with music, food, fellowship, and other activities. He emphasized the importance of the event as an opportunity for residents to connect with their neighbors, candidates for elected office, and the community.

6. Department Heads/Constitutional Officers/Court Clerks

None.

7. Invited Community Organizations

Jen Carpenter – Main Street Buena Vista

Mrs. Carpenter reported that MSBV has received new "Students and Alumni Welcome Here" stickers that will be distributed free of charge to brick-and-mortar businesses in Buena Vista. The initiative originated from a Southern Virginia University marketing class that has worked with Main Street for about a year. The stickers feature logos of all local colleges and high schools and are intended to promote regionalism and demonstrate that local businesses welcome students and alumni from throughout Rockbridge County.

She announced that The BeeVe, now with Asunder, was selected as one of only 25 businesses nationwide to receive a \$30,000 National Main Street America grant. The business plans to use the grant to purchase a food truck that will allow it to operate throughout the region. She noted that the business is the only Virginia recipient of this award and that the recognition will provide significant national exposure. Mrs. Carpenter also highlighted the value of the City's Main Street program in connecting local businesses with national grant and development opportunities.

She also announced an outdoor movie at Magnolia Square following the Farmers Market and provided an update on the upcoming downtown walking tour. The tour, inspired by Mrs. Carpenter's participation in the Main Street America conference in Tulsa, will provide participants an opportunity to visit downtown buildings that have been vacant or underutilized, including properties that residents may have passed for years without seeing inside. The tour is intended to highlight redevelopment opportunities and generate interest in downtown properties.

Mrs. Carpenter also announced Connect BV, scheduled for Monday, August 24, from 5:00-9:00 p.m. The back-to-school community event will include free ghost tours, hidden golden gnomes with cash prizes, games, sales, live music, and participation from community partners at Magnolia Square.

Lastly, she reported that MSBV submitted a Virginia tourism grant application designed to promote Buena Vista as a homestay destination. The initiative would encourage visitors to stay in Buena Vista while exploring attractions throughout the region, highlighting the City's location as a gateway to the Blue Ridge Parkway and other regional recreation and tourism opportunities.

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

Rockbridge Regional Jail Commission

Mr. Wayne Handley has resigned from the Jail Commission. This appointment will begin immediately and will expire on January 14, 2027. This is the first time it has appeared on the agenda.

This seat must be filled by a staff member, typically the City Manager.

Councilmember Poluikis made a motion to appoint Ms. Krystal Onaitis to the Rockbridge Regional Jail Commission. Vice-Mayor Staton seconded the motion, and it was carried by Council.

Rockbridge Regional Public Safety Communications Center Board

Mr. Wayne Handley has resigned from the PSCC Board. This appointment will begin immediately and will expire on January 14, 2027. This is the first time it has appeared on the agenda.

This seat must be filled by a staff member, typically the City Manager.

Councilmember Cash made a motion to appoint Ms. Krystal Onaitis to the Rockbridge Regional Public Safety Communications Center Board. Councilmember Gilliam seconded the motion, and it was carried by Council.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

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

None.

NB #1: DISCUSSION & APPROVAL OF A RESOLUTION TO AUTHORIZE APPLICATION FOR IRF FUNDS

Mr. Roberts presented a resolution authorizing the City to apply for funding through the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development's Industrial Revitalization Fund (IRF) for the redevelopment of the building located at 2076 Magnolia Avenue, at the corner of 21st Street and Magnolia Avenue. Southern Virginia University purchased the building in 2022, and the property had been vacant for approximately 10 years.

Mr. Roberts explained that SVU plans to transform the building into an arts center featuring gallery space, student and faculty studios, offices, classroom space, storage, and workshop areas. The gallery would provide space for public exhibits and community events, while the studios and classroom areas would bring SVU students downtown on a regular basis and strengthen the connection between the university and downtown. The gallery is expected to be open to the public, with no admission fee.

The estimated project cost is \$950,000, with SVU providing \$500,000 and requesting \$450,000 through the IRF grant. Mr. Roberts explained that the IRF program provides funding to rehabilitate commercial and industrial buildings for new uses that contribute to community vitality. He noted that Buena Vista has previously participated in the program through the Virginia Innovation Accelerator and Mountain Gateway Community College.

He clarified that the City is required to serve as the applicant for the IRF program, but the City would not be required to provide funding for the project, front project costs, or administer the grant. If awarded, the grant agreement would be directly between DHCD and SVU, making the City's role primarily that of the grant applicant.

Councilmember Cash asked whether there would be assurances that the building would remain dedicated to the proposed arts-related use for a specified period. Mr. Roberts stated that no such requirement had been incorporated into an agreement at that time, although SVU's substantial investment in the specialized renovation would likely encourage continued use of the building for that purpose. Councilmember Cash also asked about the proposed classroom space, and Mr. Roberts explained that the building would include several small studio spaces and one or two classroom/conference-style spaces in addition to the gallery.

Councilmember Gilliam expressed concern that Council was only learning about the application at the meeting and was being asked to approve a resolution retroactively because of the grant deadline. She

requested that staff work with SVU in the future to better coordinate grant application timelines with City Council meeting schedules, so Council has an opportunity to review proposals and ask questions before being asked to authorize an application. Mr. Roberts acknowledged the concern and explained that discussions regarding the project began in mid-June, with the project budget and contractor estimates continuing to be developed through July. Councilmember Gilliam stated that she felt Council was basically being “strong-armed” into making a decision, emphasizing that this was not the intended role of City Council.

Ms. Burch read the following Resolution:

**Industrial Revitalization Fund Application
Southern Virginia University**

WHEREAS the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development has established the Industrial Revitalization Fund grant program to leverage local and private resources to achieve market-driven redevelopment of industrial structures, creating a catalyst for long-term employment opportunities and ongoing physical and economic revitalization; and

WHEREAS Southern Virginia University purchased in 2022 the former vacant and blighted retail property at 2076 Magnolia Avenue; and

WHEREAS Southern Virginia University intends to transform this blighted structure into a state-of-the-art, off-campus educational facility dedicated to SVU’s rapidly growing art and design; and

WHEREAS Southern Virginia University has committed up to \$500,000 of its own cash funding to this capital project to serve as match.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City of Buena Vista shall apply for \$450,000 of Industrial Revitalization Funds for Southern Virginia University’s building renovations at 2076 Magnolia Avenue; and

BE IT ALSO RESOLVED that the City Manager or her designee is hereby authorized to sign and submit appropriate documents for the submittal of this Industrial Revitalization Fund application.

Jesse D. Lineberry, Mayor

Attest:

Sarah M. Burch, Clerk of Council

Date of Adoption

She emphasized that local support has been instrumental to the program's success, noting that more than \$200,000 in local contributions was committed before opioid settlement funding was awarded, along with support from 33 community partners and 14 letters of support. The new funding will sustain housing, peer recovery services, transportation, harm reduction, testing, and workforce reintegration efforts while allowing the organization to continue identifying and addressing unmet recovery needs.

Mrs. Turner concluded by thanking City Council for its partnership and reaffirmed The Community Foundation's commitment to transparency, collaboration, and expanding recovery services to ensure individuals and families affected by substance use disorders continue to receive the support they need.

Mrs. Turner then introduced Mark Peters, a graduate of the HOPE House recovery program and soon-to-be first graduate of the Maury River Recovery Court. Mr. Peters shared his personal journey, describing more than 10 years of active addiction, repeated incarceration, and unsuccessful attempts at recovery that resulted in the loss of his family and stability. He credited HOPE House with providing the support and environment that enabled him to achieve lasting recovery after his release from jail. Mr. Peters reported that he has since completed the HOPE House program, earned his peer recovery support certification, and now works as a peer recovery specialist, helping others facing similar challenges. He expressed gratitude to The Community Foundation and City Council for supporting recovery services, stating that the investment has transformed not only his life but the lives of many others.

Councilmember Cash thanked Lori Turner and Rockbridge Recovery for providing HOPE House participants who volunteered during the City's July 4th celebration, noting that their assistance was invaluable and that they demonstrated a strong work ethic, positive attitudes, and a commitment to serving the community. He noted that the experience reflected the program's emphasis on building character, relationships, and life skills in addition to supporting recovery.

Councilmember Cash also shared that Josh Clark, Rockbridge Recovery Substance Use Services Director and the 2026 SAARA Peer of the Year, is his grandson. He spoke about Mr. Clark's personal journey from addiction and incarceration to recovery through Rockbridge Recovery, noting that remaining in the local community and connecting with the organization's services played a significant role in his success. Mr. Cash praised the positive impact of HOPE House and Rockbridge Recovery on individuals and the community and thanked Mrs. Turner for her leadership and dedication to the program.

NB #2: FLOOD HAZARD RESILIENCE PLAN PRESENTATION

Mr. Roberts presented an overview of the City's newly completed Flood Hazard Resilience Plan. He explained that the plan was developed to provide a high-level assessment of the City's flood risks and establish priorities for future flood mitigation projects, maintenance, and policy improvements. The plan builds upon the City's 1999 watershed plan, which included extensive hydrologic modeling and numerous recommendations for improvements throughout the City's creek basins. He noted that, over the past 25 years, some recommended projects have been completed while others remain outstanding, while others have been undertaken that were not included in the original plan.

Mr. Roberts stated that the new plan reviews the City's individual creek basins and sub watersheds, identifies gaps in flood hazard mitigation planning, recommends policy and programmatic changes to improve resilience, evaluates the impacts of projects completed over the past 25 years, and identifies potential future projects. The plan also includes operations and maintenance recommendations, including guidance regarding creek maintenance, flood control structures, permitting requirements, and best practices. He noted that some locations will require additional detailed hydraulic and hydrologic studies before specific projects can be designed or pursued.

He explained that the plan is already beginning to inform City department priorities and potential grant applications. He also reported that he has pursued additional floodplain management training and that updating the City's floodplain management ordinance is another priority because the existing ordinance is outdated and does not fully align with current state requirements.

Council requested that the City's consultant, Hunter Young, come to a future meeting to provide a more detailed presentation. Ms. Onaitis agreed, stating that it would be particularly helpful for Council to understand the methodology used to prioritize projects and to identify which recommendations could be incorporated into future budgets and grant applications. She noted that the plan ranges from relatively simple maintenance activities, such as cleaning inlets and culverts, to larger-scale initiatives, including consideration of a potential stormwater utility.

Councilmember Cash emphasized the importance of Council having a thorough understanding of Buena Vista's flood risks given the City's history of significant flooding. He recommended holding a dedicated

evening or Saturday morning work session so Council could review the plan in greater depth and ask questions before making decisions regarding future mitigation efforts. He also asked about responsibility for maintaining vegetation in waterways. Mr. Roberts explained that responsibility varies depending on the location and whether a creek section has previously been modified through a project. In areas where the City has completed projects with associated operations and maintenance plans, the City generally has responsibility for maintaining the creek to the standards established by those plans. He noted that the new plan includes mapping of previous projects and a two-page guide for property owners addressing maintenance of creeks located on private property.

Councilmember Poluikis asked whether the plan addresses the deteriorating culvert of Woodland Avenue. Mr. Roberts confirmed that the Woodland Avenue culvert replacement is identified as a recommended project in the plan and that design work is already underway. Councilmember Gilliam asked about the City's potential responsibility if flooding or property damage occurs due to the existing culvert. Mr. Kearney agreed to review the issue and provide Council with additional information.

Councilmember Cash recommended that the City consider temporary traffic restrictions and warning signage at the Woodland Avenue culvert, including limiting heavy truck and potentially bus traffic until the culvert can be replaced. He expressed concern about the condition of the structure and the need to protect the public from a known hazard. Ms. Onaitis agreed that the City could pursue signage and restrictions. Councilmember Gilliam asked whether formally identifying and warning the public about the hazard could increase the City's liability. Mr. Kearney agreed to research the issue, while Ms. Onaitis noted that, generally, proactively identifying a known infrastructure defect, warning the public, restricting traffic as appropriate, and actively working toward a permanent solution demonstrates that the City is taking reasonable steps to address the hazard.

Mr. Roberts concluded by noting that the complete Flood Hazard Resilience Plan will be made available online. He explained that the main plan is approximately 100 pages, with extensive appendices incorporating existing regional and other planning documents.

NB #3: DISCUSSION & APPROVAL OF AN APPROPRIATION RESOLUTION

Mr. Bolster began by noting that this appropriation resolution involves two separate funds. The first portion was for Fund 19, the School Fund, and the impact of the state's recently adopted biennial budget. He explained that the state budget, which was not approved until June 29, included additional funding for public schools, including a 4% salary increase, additional at-risk funding, and increased special education funding. The additional state funding requires an additional \$44,132 local match from the City.

Mr. Bolster also explained that the City can meet this obligation without increasing the City's overall budget by reallocating funds from the workers' compensation budget line; those premiums came in lower than anticipated, providing sufficient budget capacity to transfer the required amount to the School Fund. He noted that the Budget & Finance Committee reviewed and supported the proposed action. He also noted that failure to provide the additional local match would result in approximately \$171,000 in state funding having to be returned.

Dr. Ault added that the local share of the state funding formula is about 21 cents for every dollar, with the state providing the remaining 79 cents. Councilmember Poluikis noted that the additional \$44,132 local contribution would support salary increases for about 140 full-time school employees and emphasized the importance of accepting the additional state funding rather than returning it to the Commonwealth.

The second portion of the resolution concerned Fund 60, the Opioid Settlement Fund. Mr. Bolster explained that the City tracks opioid settlement funds separately from the General Fund and only appropriates funds once an award or expenditure is known. The City anticipates receiving approximately \$812,000 in opioid settlement funding, which will be passed through to The Community Foundation for Rockbridge, Bath, and Alleghany. He clarified that the City is acting as a pass-through for the funds and

that the money will not represent an additional expenditure from the City's General Fund. Once the funds are received, staff will coordinate with The Community Foundation to process the appropriate payment.

Ms. Burch presented the following resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of Buena Vista, Virginia, that the following appropriations are, and the same are hereby made, for the period ending **June 30, 2027**, from the UNAPPROPRIATED SURPLUS of the **SCHOOL FUND** and expended as follows:

FY 2027 BVCPS Amended Budget

19.6600.69130	School Expenses	<u>\$44,132.00</u>
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Sub-total 1		\$44,132.00
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Total School Fund Appropriation		\$44,132.00
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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, 2027**, from the UNAPPROPRIATED SURPLUS of the **OPIOID SETTLEMENT FUND** and expended as follows:

FY 2027 Opioid Abatement Authority Cooperative Partnership Grant – Rockbridge Recovery/HOPE House

60.5157.68015	Program Activities	<u>\$812,459.00</u>
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Sub-total 1		\$812,459.00
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Total Opioid Settlement Fund Appropriation		\$812,459.00
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Approved: This 6th day of August 2026.

Jesse D. Lineberry, Mayor

Attest:

Sarah M. Burch, Clerk of Council

Vice-Mayor Staton moved to approve the resolution, Councilmember Gilliam seconded, and the motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Sarah M. Burch, Clerk of Council

Jesse D. Lineberry, Mayor