CITY OF BUENA VISTA CITY COUNCIL

REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING

October 15, 2026 | 6:00 PM

Council Chambers – 2039 Sycamore Avenue

The Buena Vista City Council met for a Regular Council Meeting on Thursday, October 15, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.

Members Present:

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

Members Absent:

Mayor Jesse Lineberry

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

Vice-Mayor Staton called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and Councilmember Kerr delivered the opening prayer.

ADG #2: APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

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

ADG #3: APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE OCTOBER 1, 2026, REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING, PUBLIC HEARING, & EXECUTIVE SESSION

Councilmember Gilliam moved to approve the minutes, Councilmember Noel-Branch seconded, and the motion carried.

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

- Tobler Hughes, 1 University Hill Drive, a new Buena Vista resident and student at SVU, introduced himself and expressed his excitement about becoming involved in the community and participating in local service opportunities.
- Avery Brinton, 1 University Hill Drive, shared a proposal for a free community car wash organized through SVU. She distributed copies of the proposal to Council members and explained that she is working with SVU's Service Council and Student Life staff, April Harris and Carrie Brotherson, to coordinate a possible event in early November at Glen Maury Park. She also hopes to partner with the owner of Holy Cow to support the business.

ADG #5: REPORTS:

1. **Mayor**

   None.

2. **City Manager**

   Community Engagement and Outreach: Ms. Onaitis reported that the City continues to receive citizen inquiries and concerns, primarily related to utility billing, including questions about rates and unusually high bills potentially caused by leaks. She also reminded residents that household trash must be placed in a trash can, as placing loose trash at the curb is a code violation.

She reported that Mountain Days was a success, with strong attendance downtown and a particularly successful first year for the children's activity zone. She recognized Council members and staff who assisted with the event and noted that Delegate Terry Austin's office had reached out with questions about Magnolia Square and the timber frame pavilion.

Additional community engagement efforts included a recent BV Beat recording by Chief Clements highlighting the SHIELD program and regional canine training at Glen Maury Park along with police department press releases on crime prevention. She also encouraged residents to visit the fall-themed photo display at Glen Maury Park.

She attended the regional social services ribbon-cutting and the Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity, where City and regional representatives participated in discussions and showcased the area. She noted the City's interest in locating a Virginia Department of Health office near the social services facility to improve access to health and human services.

Staff and Process Improvements: Ms. Onaitis reported holding individual meetings with department leadership and conducting the fifth executive team meeting. These meetings take place during weeks when Council does not meet and provide an opportunity for staff to review upcoming agendas and discuss departmental activities.

The City continues working to standardize finance and HR forms to improve consistency, reduce confusion, and support compliance with FOIA and public records retention requirements. A citywide safety training was also completed, with additional training through the Virginia Risk Sharing Association (VRSA) anticipated in January, covering topics such as workers' compensation, FMLA, and reporting responsibilities.

Regarding the RDA financial software, IT has met with department heads and constitutional offices to identify system issues and user needs. Staff are compiling the feedback, which will be used to prepare a formal letter to the vendor outlining the City's concerns.

City Operations: She reminded everyone that the 45-day utility billing grace period will end October 24. Residents with questions about their bills were encouraged to contact the City, and accounts must be current by that date to avoid potential fees or service interruptions.

The City's upcoming Pothole Blitz is scheduled for the week of October 26. Residents are encouraged to report potholes by providing the exact location or nearest intersection, with Public Works planning to address as many areas as possible through cold-patch repairs.

She also discussed upcoming Halloween activities with Main Street, including the annual trick-or-treating event at the lower campground at Glen Maury Park. She requested Council's support for temporarily reduced campground rates to encourage campers to participate by handing out candy, providing children with a safe, traditional trick-or-treating experience.

She also reported that Hurt & Proffitt contractors would be visiting City Hall to assess needed work and provide cost estimates.

DEQ Consent Order: Ms. Onaitis reported that she, the Public Works Director, and the City Attorney recently met with the Department of Environmental Quality to discuss concerns with the City's wastewater consent order. Discussions focused on clarifying the requirements, addressing aggressive deadlines, and working toward a more realistic compliance schedule.

She explained that the City is seeking to ensure the consent order reflects feasible improvements to the existing wastewater treatment plant through renovation, retrofitting, and modernization rather than requiring full replacement of the facility. The City currently has a utility services RFP advertised to secure a firm that can provide technical assistance with water and wastewater projects, maintenance priorities, funding opportunities, regulatory compliance, and consent order requirements.

Economic and Community Development: She reminded Council that the EDA Façade Improvement Program is open, with applications being accepted through November 6. Brownfields applications are expected to open in early spring, with an initial focus on publicly owned properties.

She also reported receiving a draft scope of work from Timmons Group for the City's economic development strategic planning efforts. The project will evaluate approximately 8-10 City-owned properties, considering utility capacity, land use, topography, potential uses, needed improvements, and marketing strategies. The assessment will also consider potential site-readiness funding opportunities and whether certain properties may be better suited for sale to adjacent property owners.

She noted that the Police Department continues to increase its public outreach and media presence and recently received the Rising Star Award for the local Triad chapter. Chief Clements also attended the Governor's First Unified Readiness Summit, a statewide emergency management exercise.

Schools Collaboration: Ms. Onaitis reported that funding analyses related to school needs are ongoing, with several financial scenarios expected from the City's financial advisors, Davenport. She reminded Council that the City's community conversation regarding the proposed additional 1% sales tax is scheduled for October 20 at 6:00 p.m. The meeting will provide information about the referendum, the legally permitted uses of the revenue, and what purchases would be subject to the additional tax.

Finance: She advised Council to anticipate an appropriation request at the November meeting related to a delayed vendor invoice for salt purchased in January 2026. Because the purchase occurred during the previous fiscal year, but the vendor did not submit the invoice until about 10 months later, an appropriation will be necessary to process a payment.

She also provided an update on the expenditure report being developed for Council, which is expected to be presented in November. She cautioned that the report may initially provide budgeted amounts alongside estimated year-to-date expenditures, as staff continue working through the annual audit and outstanding reconciliation items.

3. City Attorney

None.

4. Council Committees/Members

Mr. Cash thanked Jen and Neil Carpenter for their hard work and contributions to Mountain Days, noting the many hours they devoted to planning and coordinating the events. He shared that he enjoyed the children's activities and praised the children's behavior and participation. He noted that the girls won many of the event competitions and highlighted the importance of creating lasting memories for the children. He also discussed opportunities to improve next year's event, including better signage directing visitors to the children's area and expanding participation. Mrs. Noel-Branch agreed that the pie-eating contest was a highlight, noting that even one parent joined in and enjoyed the opportunity of making memories.

5. Department Heads/Constitutional Officers/Court Clerks

Tom Roberts – Community Development

Mr. Roberts provided an update on the Community Garden, explaining that organizers are developing a clearer policy regarding use of the pavilion and confirming that the public is welcome.

He also reported on discussions with Austin Rehl of the Rockbridge Creative Institute regarding a proposed U-Pick blackberry operation at Meridian Farmstead on the north end of the City. The project would initially include about two acres, with the potential to expand to eight acres. The City is exploring the Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development (AFID) grant program to help fund the project, with additional details and matching requirements still to be determined. The proposal also

includes using the Innovation Accelerator's commercial kitchen to package harvested blackberries into jams, jellies, and other products.

6. Invited Community Organizations

Jen Carpenter – Main Street Buena Vista

Mrs. Carpenter began her reported by thanking Council and the community for their support and assistance with Mountain Days, noting that the event was a meaningful and encouraging experience.

She announced that MSBV was awarded a $9,000 Downtown Investment Grant through the Governor's office. The grant will support a wayfinding signage project to improve connections between downtown and other community assets, including Glen Maury Park. She will coordinate with the City Manager regarding the City's proposed in-kind match.

She also reported that 18 people participated in the Buena Vista downtown walking tour during the Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity, with positive feedback from attendees. MSBV was also awarded a Virginia State Tourism Homestay grant to promote local lodging options, including Glen Maury Park and short-term rentals. As part of the initiative, Main Street will work with the City to identify registered lodging businesses and help ensure applicable lodging taxes are collected.

Mrs. Carpenter also shared that Leaf and Lore received a Virginia State Tourism Grant in collaboration with Virginia Main Street and tourism organizations to develop a Shenandoah Valley book crawl and day-trip itinerary featuring independent bookstores.

She announced that the annual Halloween Spooktacular will be held Saturday, October 31, from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m., including the return of the golf cart parade. She also noted that she will work with the City Manager to develop a formal memorandum of understanding between the City and MSBV as part of the organization's accreditation requirements. An annual impact report will also be prepared and presented to Council.

Councilmember Noel-Branch praised Mrs. Carpenter's work and shared positive feedback received from participants in the Governor's Summit and walking tour, noting the welcoming atmosphere created by local businesses and the positive impression of Buena Vista.

ADG #6: PRESENTATIONS TO CITY COUNCIL & THE PUBLIC

Kim Shaw, Rockbridge Area Community Services

Ms. Shaw provided an overview of RACS services and recent accomplishments. She reported that RACS served 1,772 individuals during the previous fiscal year, including 352 Buena Vista residents, representing approximately 20% of those served. RACS provides services related to mental health, substance use, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and prevention, along with 24-hour emergency services.

She reported that RACS has implemented its permanent supportive housing program, with about 15 available placements. One individual has been housed, and additional referrals are pending. She noted a need for additional landlords willing to participate in the program. She also highlighted RACS' partnership with the local Recovery Court program and the expansion of its intensive outpatient program from one group to three, each serving up to 12 participants.

RACS is preparing to expand services at the Eagle's Nest building in Buena Vista, with renovations underway and a goal of opening by the end of the year. Ms. Shaw also announced the purchase of Maple Hall in Timber Ridge, which is planned for use as a residential substance use treatment facility offering 30-, 60-, and 90-day stays. The goal is to provide a full continuum of treatment and recovery services locally, reducing the need for individuals to seek residential treatment outside the area.

Ms. BreAnne Rogers shared information about several RACS programs and upcoming events. She encouraged Council to help promote the Magnolia Players' Christmas performance at the Magnolia Center, scheduled for December 21 and 22 at 1:00 p.m. She also highlighted the monthly veteran breakfast, which typically serves 20-25 veterans and is open to family members, and their ongoing caregiver support group.

Ms. Rogers and Ms. Shaw also discussed RACS prevention and peer support efforts, including:

- Providing crisis intervention training resources and community prevention information to local law enforcement.
- Partnering with the BVPD on their recent cop camp.
- Reaching 672 area students through the Catch My Breath vaping prevention curriculum.
- Hosting a mental health awareness walk, which drew 63 participants despite rainy weather and included a visit from Officer Matt Slagle and K-9 Hans.
- Scheduling their next annual prevention forum for June 10, 2027.
- Expanding peer support services for veterans, individuals experiencing mental health or substance use challenges, and participants in intensive outpatient programs. RACS peer services have assisted about 100 individuals during the year and also provide support at the regional jail, serving approximately 15-20 inmates each week.

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

None.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

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

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