



City of Buena Vista City Council Regular Council Meeting

October 16, 2025, 6:00 PM
Council Chambers – 2039 Sycamore Avenue

The City Council for the City of Buena Vista met for a Regular Council Meeting on Thursday, October 16, 2025, at 6:00 p.m.

Members Present:

Mayor Tyson Cooper	
Vice-Mayor Danny Staton	Steve Webb
Michelle Poluikis	Todd Jones
Melvin Henson	Ronald Cash

Members Absent: None

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

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

ADG #2: APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Vice-Mayor Staton moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Councilmember Webb, and carried by Council.

ADG #3: APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE OCTOBER 2, 2025, REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING & EXECUTIVE SESSION

Motion to approve the minutes was made by Councilmember Coffey, seconded by Councilmember Henson, and carried by Council.

ADG #4: RECOGNITION/COMMUNICATION FROM VISITORS

- Cordelia Derr, 1353 Birch Avenue, expressed her support for the proposed cigarette tax stating that she believes this has been a missed revenue opportunity for the City. She noted that Rockbridge County and Lexington already have this tax in place, and she feels that the City should have enacted it at the same time to remain consistent regionally.
- Amy Gilliam, 1710 Spruce Avenue, began by referencing comments made by Councilmembers Webb and Cooper during the June 17, 2021, City Council meeting, in which they expressed opposition to implementing a cigarette tax at that time. She noted that the previous concerns highlighted how the cigarette tax could disproportionately affect lower-income residents, would not reduce smoking rates, and could lead to hardship for families already struggling. She also quoted Councilmember Cooper as saying that if we needed more revenue, we should go after the people who can afford it as opposed to adding a burden to people that can least afford it. Mrs. Gilliam then shifted her comments to more recent financial decisions noting the allocation of \$250,000 for the Town Square project. She stated that this was not included in the budget, which shows fiscal irresponsibility and poor long-term planning. She connected this to the river

access agenda item, arguing that this type of decision-making, without considering future implications, is what has led to ongoing budget issues. Returning to the proposed cigarette tax, Mrs. Gilliam noted that while she is not entirely against the tax, she does feel that it should be lower than 25¢. She suggested that Council consider a lower rate or explore other types of taxes that more people could contribute to.

ADG #5: REPORTS

1. Mayor

Mayor Cooper expressed his gratitude for Mountain Day and everyone who was involved in that. He noted what a phenomenal event it was, and that it broke multiple records.

2. City Manager

Mr. Tyree first commended staff for their hard work and dedication in making Mountain Day a success. He recognized Ryan Groah from Public Works for stepping up to assist with some logistics, noting an email shared by Chief Handley expressing his appreciation for Mr. Groah's efforts. Mr. Tyree stated that this was the largest MD event to date.

He and Chad Coffey, Executive Director of RARO, met with Dr. Ault to provide her with an overview of RARO's operations and had a productive discussion aligning on some mutual goals, including RARO's use of school gym space.

He reported that the Planning Commission, in November, will review draft revisions to the City code regarding "farm animals". This will just be a preliminary review for now, with potential for a public hearing at a later date. They are also tentatively planning a Planning Commission public hearing on the home occupation ordinance during their November meeting. They have already reviewed a draft, and staff is beginning to reach out to stakeholders, business owners, and residents to gather input.

Mr. Tyree also reported on his attendance at the recent Virginia Municipal League conference in Roanoke. He highlighted the growing role of data centers in local economies, noting the job creation and revenue potential. He explained that many localities are implementing a tangible personal property tax on servers, CPUs, and other related equipment at a rate of about \$4.00 per \$100 assessed value, which is generating significant revenue. He also discussed the 1% local sales tax option that can be used for school construction, including new buildings, additions, gyms, or maintenance projects, emphasizing that this could help offset our future school construction costs. He mentioned that about 80% of the localities at the conference support this.

3. City Attorney

None.

4. Council Committees / Members

a. Budget & Finance

None.

b. Outdoor Spaces

They are planning the final City tour for November 8th, which will focus on 15th Street to the southern city limits. Following that, sometime in December he would like to have a Council

retreat to go over all of the Committee's findings.

c. School Facilities

Mrs. Poluikis reported that they held a meeting to discuss the Mountain Gateway facility. They were informed that that building would actually not be feasible to house the middle school as it does not meet current Department of Education standards. There were several reasons for this, including the lack of bathrooms near the classrooms, insufficient classroom square footage, a kitchen that would need to be redesigned, the lack of a gym, stormwater infrastructure issues on non-city-owned land, and the road access does not meet DOE standards. Addressing these issues could cost as much as or more than expanding the current high school. Dr. Ault is willing to collaborate and seek solutions that align with both the schools' needs and the City's budget. The Committee will continue focusing on finding a workable solution for relocating only the middle school, not building an entirely new facility.

Mr. Henson also reported that the Fire Department received a certificate from the Department of Fire Programs for their 120th anniversary. He also advised of an upcoming essay contest for 6th to 8th graders in celebration of America's 250th anniversary. The contest has regional and national prizes ranging from \$125 to \$100,000.

Mr. Cash reported on the Tree Board's recent activities. They held a meeting a Camden Field to discuss the trees that were removed and to begin planning for replacements and additional tree plantings, focusing on species that are attractive, sustainable, and less prone to issues like splitting and disease.

Mr. Coffey raised concerns about the ongoing issues with the creeks in the City and asked what they process is for getting those cleaned up, particularly those that are on private property. Mr. Tyree recalled his report from the last meeting where he advised of the \$12,000 permit applications process through DEQ. He noted that the next step is to seek guidance from the Budget & Finance Committee on funding, as it was not included in the current budget, before bringing a funding recommendation back to Council to make a final decision. He also clarified that when the City performs preventative maintenance, such as creek cleaning, we are required to have those permits or we could be fined, however, homeowners can maintain the creeks on their private property without permits.

Mr. Roberts added an update on the City's flood resiliency plan, which includes reviewing the City's creeks, evaluating past projects, and identifying recommendations for both capital improvements and routine maintenance. He noted that the plan will help the City better manage flood hazards and create a schedule for ongoing creek maintenance, with a final version expected in early 2026. He also noted that creeks are highly regulated, and maintenance activities in areas not previously improved or covered by easements require permits, while sections with prior improvements and maintenance agreements can be maintained without additional approvals.

There was further discussion regarding the practical and financial burdens of maintaining creeks for residents, particularly elderly homeowners who may struggle to keep the creeks behind their property clear. Mr. Coffey suggested that occasional controlled water releases could help naturally clear debris and Mr. Cash noted the importance of maintaining stream channels, particularly near bridges and culverts, to prevent infrastructure damage and flooding.

Mr. Kearney explained that liability for flooding depends on the location of the incident and property ownership, noting that in Virginia, creek beds typically form part of a property and are the responsibility of the property owner. Mrs. Poluikis suggested exploring ways for the City to assist homeowners that may be unable to maintain their creeks, possibly through coordination with the Tree Board or providing support. Mr. Roberts added that there is an educational component to that as well, as sustainable creek maintenance practices such as planting larger, deep-rooted plants along creek banks to stabilize soil and minimize debris accumulation can actually reduce long-term upkeep.

It was noted that while some creek sections have been maintained, the majority still require substantial work, and the upcoming study will provide detailed information on the condition of all seven creeks in the City, including blockages, and recommendations for maintenance and capital improvements. The goal is finding solutions that balance regulatory compliance, property rights, flood prevention, and sustainable creek maintenance to protect both residents and infrastructure.

5. Department Heads / Constitutional Officers / Court Clerks

Chrissy Ruley – Human Resources

- She is managing day-to-day HR functions while also focusing on several major initiatives, including a comprehensive job description overhaul. Many of our job descriptions have not been updated since 2006 and revising them is a fundamental step towards ensuring role clarity, alignment with current responsibilities, and compliance with evolving standards. She is also working on a personnel manual update, maintaining a biennial review cycle to ensure ongoing compliance.
- In collaboration with Lisa Schenk and utilizing NEOGOV and VRSA resources, she is preparing to launch a comprehensive internal training university. This will provide staff with consistent, accessible opportunities for professional development and compliance training.
- She noted efforts to streamline and enhance the employee performance evaluation process to support employee growth and organizational accountability.
- She is hoping to utilize the internship program that Chief Handley is spearheading to help with some of the large scale projects to help move her department forward and to help invest in our future workforce development.
- She also noted some hiring and retention challenges, explaining that the City faces a competitive labor market with fewer qualified applicants and rising salary expectations, particularly impacting public sector recruitment. She emphasized that turnovers add strain to existing staff, which creates a cycle that can make retention even more difficult. This is why updated job descriptions, enhanced training programs, and improved evaluation processes are more important than ever right now. They support not only the recruitment, but also employee engagement and satisfaction.
- She shared some workforce statistics: in 2025 year-to-date, approximately 20 new employees were hired, and 10 employees have separated, with one of those being a retiree. We currently have 85 full time employees and 25 part time employees.

6. Invited Community Organizations

Cordelia Derr – RARO

- Tackle Football: The regular season has concluded for all age groups, with playoffs scheduled next week and the championship “Super Bowl” the following week. Throughout the season, juniors and seniors traveled to Bath County, Alleghany, and Covington. Out of 105 participants, 42 of them, or 41%, are Buena Vista youth.
- Soccer: The regular season ends next week with playoffs beginning afterwards. Soccer All-Stars practice has begun. Of 264 participants, 59 (22%) are from Buena Vista.
- Flag Football: Expanded this year to include 7- and 8-year-olds, where it was previously only offered to 5- and 6-year-olds. Out of 52 participants, 12 (23%) are BV youth. They plan to expand the flag football program to include all age groups next year.
- Cheer: Out of 110 cheerleaders, 28 (25%) are from Buena Vista.
- With other local middle schools beginning their own football programs, they are expecting that PMMS will follow that and have their own team next year as well. If this happens, RARO will not offer a senior tackle football program next year, since that age group would fall into the middle school age range.
- Registration is now open through October 19th, with online registration now required for all programs. Practices are scheduled to begin in early November for rookie, junior and senior groups, with games starting in late December or early January.
- Fee waivers remain available for low-income families; you just have to show proof of government assistance such as WIC, Medicaid, or TANF. Chad Coffey can also approve waivers on a case-by-case basis.
- They are still in need of additional indoor basketball facilities in Buena Vista. Discussions are ongoing with Dr. Ault regarding use of PM facilities. RARO already has first access to County school facilities when they aren’t using them, per an MOU, but they are seeking a clear agreement with PM to ensure access.
- Camden Field currently serves as the primary practice and game location for football, but scheduling conflicts during games can push practices aside. RARO hopes to reserve Camden Field solely for games, freeing other spaces for safer and more productive practices.
- The scoreboard for Secrist Field is awaiting final sponsorship and is planned to be installed in time for the spring baseball/softball season.

Kristina Ramsey – MSBV & Economic Development

- This was the largest Mountain Day yet, with 30-40 more vendors than usual, and the area was expanded by an extra block and a half. Post-event surveys have been sent out and they have already received over 50 responses.
- Spooktacular is scheduled for Friday, October 31st from 4:00-6:00. This year, they are including a golf cart parade that will begin around 5:15-5:30. Businesses can register for Spooktacular through Main Street’s website and social media pages.
- The Virginia Innovation Accelerator and the Chamber of Commerce hosted a well-attended

business after-hours event this evening beginning at 5:00 pm.

- Junction 245 had their soft opening during Mountain Day, with tours given to attendees. The taproom is still in development, and a formal ribbon-cutting is scheduled for December 3rd.
- The Housing Symposium is scheduled for Tuesday, October 21st at the Virginia Horse Center from 8:30 am – 3:30 pm. Presentations will focus on the housing study and strategies to improve local housing affordability and availability. Keynote speakers include Chief Handley and a Buena Vista resident who has paid off their Habitat home. Cindy Forbes, the Modine plant manager, will also be there to share employee housing challenges.

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

None.

OLD BUSINESS

OB #1: SECOND READING OF AN ORDINANCE TO ENACT A CIGARETTE TAX

There being no changes, Councilmember Webb made a motion to read the Ordinance by title only, with Councilmember Coffey seconding, and it was unanimously carried.

Councilmember Webb then made a motion to approve the Ordinance as presented, noting the financial benefits for the City considering how tight our budget is currently. He added that Council had originally held off on implementing this tax several years ago to observe how it affected Lexington and Rockbridge, and after a year, they were satisfied with it. Councilmember Cash seconded the motion and Ms. Burch completed a roll call vote of Council as follows:

Member	Present	Absent	Yes	No	Abstain
Councilmember Henson	X			X	
Councilmember Poluikis	X		X		
Councilmember Webb	X		X		
Councilmember Coffey	X			X	
Councilmember Cash	X		X		
Vice-Mayor Staton	X			X	
Mayor Cooper	X		X		

The following Ordinance was **approved** by a vote of 4-3:

Ordinance Enacting a Cigarette Tax

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BUENA VISTA, VIRGINIA, that in accordance with the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Charter for the City of Buena Vista, the City hereby imposes a tax on all cigarettes sold in the City of Buena Vista in accordance with the terms and conditions of the provisions attached hereto as new Article XIV of Chapter 16 of the Code of the City of Buena Vista.

This Ordinance shall become effective thirty (30) days from the date hereon subject to the provision that the collection of taxes associated with this Ordinance shall begin on January 1, 2026.

Tyson T. Cooper, Mayor

Attest:

Sarah M. Burch, Clerk of Council

Date of Adoption

NEW BUSINESS

NB #1: DISCUSSION OF VOF EASEMENT FOR RIVER ACCESS

Mr. Roberts presented Council with an overview of a proposed Virginia Outdoors Foundation (VOF) easement for river access. This project began in 2023 with a grant application to fund the design of new public access to the Maury River, a need that has been identified in multiple plans over the years, including the Outdoor Recreation Plan, the RERC Plan, and the Downtown Plan, as well as some other regional plans. Two potential sites were evaluated. The first is behind the Public Works shop, and the second is behind the Innovation Accelerator. The Innovation Accelerator site was considered for its potential to tie into a future outdoor recreation outfitter at that location. Concept-level designs have been developed for both sites, with more detailed planning conducted for the site behind Public Works. Discussions have focused on phased implementation, cost-effective construction, and the use of city crews to complete some of the work. Additional grant opportunities are also being explored for the construction, but they are currently only in the design phase, so construction funding conversations will take place at a later time. He clarified that receiving the VOF grant reimbursement is not contingent on building the access, however it is contingent on recording this easement, and added that the grant deadline is in November, and this easement needs to be recorded in order to get the reimbursement. He also noted that no formal action is required from Council at this time; a public hearing will be scheduled in November, with potential adoption following that.

The easement would dedicate approximately six acres of riverfront property to VOF for permanent public recreational use. This would include restrictions on ensuring that the property cannot be subdivided; the site must remain open to the public; only improvements supporting public recreational use are permitted; and impervious surfaces are capped. The proposed easement area includes the riverside portion of the old unused C&O railroad tracks that are owned by the City, extending from Chalk Mine Run down to ADS. Councilmember Cash noted the potential for the area to serve as a site for canoeists, kayakers, and fishermen, including informal camping, which could attract visitors. Mr. Roberts added that this would also provide improved public access for walking, picnicking, and other riverfront activities, citing the accessibility from nearby neighborhoods and SVU. He mentioned other ideas for amenities including hammocks and picnic tables to make the area more inviting.

Councilmember Henson asked about potential FEMA or Corps of Engineers involvement as well as relocation of the gravel parking lot at Public Works. Mr. Roberts explained that the easement area is designed to avoid any conflicts with FEMA regulations or the flood levee, and construction is planned to avoid placing structures in the water, which would require additional permits. They have not yet had discussions regarding relocating the gravel lot but mentioned a few areas that could be used.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Sarah M. Burch, Clerk of Council

Tyson T. Cooper, Mayor