



City of Buena Vista City Council Regular Council Meeting & Public Hearings

June 5, 2025, 6:00 PM

Council Chambers – 2039 Sycamore Avenue

The City Council for the City of Buena Vista met for a Regular Council Meeting & Public Hearings on Thursday, June 5, 2025, at 6:00 p.m.

Members Present: Mayor Tyson Cooper

Vice-Mayor Danny Staton

Steve Webb

Michelle Poluikis

Stanley Coffey

Melvin Henson

Ronald Cash

Members Absent: None

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 HEARINGS

Public Hearing #1: Land swap consisting of transfer of approximately 2.058 acres of land to The Advancement Foundation and acceptance of approximately 2.282 acres of land from The Advancement Foundation.

Mayor Cooper opened Public Hearing #1.

- Kristina Ramsey, Economic Development Director, provided a brief report on the proposed swap. ADS has been a valued member of the community and local employer since 1966, currently employing about 86 staff. For the past 15 years, they have been leasing about 5.1 acres from the City (between 21st Street Railroad and the Riverwalk); it is a 10-year, \$3,500/year lease that is up for renewal in 2026. With increased operational needs and the desire for a more efficient and attractive use of the space, they began exploring more creative options including this potential land swap with The Advancement Foundation. TAF currently owns two parcels totaling about 6.9 acres and the City owns the two parcels leased to ADS. The proposal is to swap TAF's 2.3-acre parcel with the City's 2.1-acre parcel therefore reorganizing the parcels making it easier for both TAF and ADS to access what belongs to them (TAF would retain a 30-foot strip for future emergency access). Following the swap, the City would amend the ADS lease to include the new parcel. The lease terms would remain unchanged, and ADS would be responsible for, and have agreed to, any required fencing, screening, and site improvements. She mentioned that ADS has mentioned interest in purchasing the property, but right now there are a lot of approvals that would be required by their corporate office, so they are willing to continue the lease arrangement for now.

There being no other public comment, Mayor Cooper closed the Public Hearing.

Public hearing #2: Renewal and renegotiation of lease with Advanced Drainage Systems (ADS) of approximately 4.8 acres, to include approximately 2.282 acres of land to be acquired by The Advancement Foundation.

Mayor Cooper opened Public Hearing #2.

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

ADG #3: APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Councilmember Webb moved to approve the agenda, seconded by Councilmember Coffey, and carried by Council.

ADG #4: APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM THE MAY 15, 2024, REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING & PUBLIC HEARING

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

ADG #5: RECOGNITION/COMMUNICATION FROM VISITORS

- Kaye Ramsey, 2359 Laurel Avenue, brought forward concerns following an incident that had occurred in her neighborhood recently where a sewer line exploded in someone's home. She cited possible lack of maintenance on the sewer lines even though there is a sewer charge on the water bill each month. She urged Council to prioritize maintaining the sewer lines because this incident could happen to anyone and could be devastating. Mrs. Ramsey also encouraged everyone to withhold paying the sewer charge until something is done.

Mayor Cooper asked Mr. Tyree to put something together explaining what the City's responsibility is versus citizen and explaining the different parts of the bill code noting that the more education we can put out, the better.

ADG #6: REPORTS

1. Mayor

Mayor Cooper welcomed Dr. Ault, the new BVCPS Superintendent to the community. He has had the privilege of representing the City on the radio a few times over the last couple of months. He attended and represented the City at the PMHS graduation, the ribbon cutting for Amanda Kidd Insurance, and the business appreciation event that happened recently.

2. City Manager

Mr. Tyree advised of the upcoming Fridays in the Park featuring Frequency on June 6th and the Maury River Fiddler's Convention occurring on June 14-15th.

There will be a new swimsuit policy being implemented at the pool following some citizen complaints about inappropriate and revealing swimwear being worn. Mayor Cooper asked about the pool being closed several times recently. Mr. Tyree explained that there was a chlorine buildup one day and the others were because of rain or pH levels as well as if there is a "contamination" incident, the pool has to be cleaned through a 48-hour process according to VDH.

3. City Attorney

None.

4. Council Committees / Members

a. Budget & Finance

None.

b. Outdoor Spaces

None.

c. School Facilities

Mr. Tyree reported that he had spoken with Dr. Francis, and they are working on scheduling a meeting for later in June or early July.

Vice-Mayor Staton asked where in the budget it showed the compensation board reimbursements for constitutional office positions. Steve Bolster, Finance Director, advised that those figures can be found on page 4 of the budget under “Shared Expenses/ Reimbursements”.

Vice-Mayor Staton also brought up some concerns about the camp host at GMP noting that there are only supposed to be two vehicles allowed per site and they currently have five vehicles and two boats, basically ignoring the rules they are supposed to be enforcing. Councilmember Coffey also mentioned that both the host and his wife work during the day, so they are only there at night. Mr. Tyree stated that he would meet with Ed to investigate the situation.

5. Department Heads / Constitutional Officers / Court Clerks

Kristina Ramsey – Economic Development

Ms. Ramsey first mentioned that our regional tourism organization will be doing a strategic plan for the first time in over 20 years. They will be doing a series of individual interviews and focus groups to get input from different areas of the community. The first focus group is on June 12th at the Horse Center, and the second focus group is June 17th at the Innovation Accelerator.

She also mentioned the ribbon cutting for the new Mountain Gateway Community College Wilson Workforce Center that is happening on June 20th at 11:00 am.

There was a visioning and input session regarding the best potential use of the Library building that was really well attended and they got some great feedback. The general consensus was that folks want to see that building continue to be used for some public or mixed-use purposes. The consultants will continue to work through the summer in developing those plans and diving into the architectural conditions of the building.

There has been significant construction progress at the Innovation Accelerator, and they are aiming for a September grand opening; this is also the time frame that the Visitor’s Center will be relocating.

Ms. Ramsey then shared the following summary report for the Bontex assessments:

BACKGROUND

The Bontex site has long been a central focus of discussions about revitalizing Buena Vista’s gateway.

Vacant for 15 years, this former industrial site holds significant potential to drive economic and community growth. Efforts to reimagine its future have been underway, with renewed momentum through a Technical Assistance Grant from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

This grant enabled a comprehensive reuse study that assessed environmental conditions, structural needs, market opportunities, and potential redevelopment strategies. Building on ongoing conversations about the site's role in the community, the study provides a clear path forward for transforming it into a vibrant mixed-use destination.

The study resulted in several key deliverables, including an environmental assessment, a conditions evaluation, a market analysis, a conceptual reuse plan, and a trail connector feasibility study. These components offer a solid foundation to guide the next steps in remediation, redevelopment, and integration of the site into Buena Vista's broader economic and community goals.

KEY FINDINGS

Environmental Site Assessment (ESA):

The ESA identified several environmental challenges that must be addressed to prepare the site for redevelopment, including:

- **Abandoned Chemicals:** Abandoned chemical containers, including leaking drums and tanks, pose contamination risks.
- **Basement Conditions:** Standing water mixed with noxious chemicals and creosote seepage was observed.
- **Asbestos and Lead Based Paint:** Potential health hazards requiring testing and abatement prior to renovation.
- **Wastewater Treatment Infrastructure:** Deteriorating ponds and basins needing repair or removal to prevent illicit discharges into the Maury River.

Immediate Action: A \$50,000 Virginia Brownfields Assistance Fund (VBAF) grant application will soon be submitted for further assessment and removal of basement chemicals. This includes an additional \$50,000 commitment from the owner for a total project cost of \$10,000.

Conditions Assessment:

While the building structures are fundamentally sound (largely in fair to good condition) several issues require attention:

- **Roof and Masonry Repairs:** Failing roofs and deteriorating brickwork require stabilization to prevent water infiltration and structural damage.
- **Chip House and Section M:** The Chip House suffers from extensive termite damage, while Section M exhibits severe masonry failure and must be stabilized.
- **System Upgrades:** Mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and life safety systems are outdated and require full replacement to meet modern building codes.
- **Accessibility and Safety:** Accessible entries, routes, and restrooms must be established to comply with ADA standards.

The study estimates structural repairs will cost \$3.4 million, with additional costs of \$500,000 for foundation waterproofing and stabilization.

Market Analysis:

The market analysis identified potential redevelopment opportunities to address gaps in Buena Vista's economy and leverage the City's growing recreational and tourism appeal. Key findings within the 10-mile trade area include demand for the following:

- **Hospitality:** The site's industrial ambiance and riverfront location support a boutique hotel with 10-20 rooms, offering unique accommodations at projected nightly rates of \$200-\$250.
- **Retail Opportunities:** Market gaps within the trade area support a mix of family and women's clothing stores, sporting goods, home furnishings, art galleries, and pet supply shops, totaling approximately 55,000 square feet.
- **Dining and Beverage:** The site could support a brewpub with a restaurant and 250-capacity event space, alongside coffee shops, ice cream parlors, and smoothie bars, contributing another 15,000 square feet.
- **Recreational Rentals:** A shared 5,000-10,000 square foot facility could house equipment rentals, including kayaks, bikes, e-bikes, scooters, and camping gear.

With a total estimated retail potential of 67,000 square feet, the site's location and unique amenities position it as a transformative economic driver for Buena Vista and the greater Rockbridge Area.

Conceptual Reuse Plan:

The conceptual reuse plan for the Bontex Building Complex outlines a transformative vision to create a mixed-use hub that integrates recreational, retail, hospitality, and community spaces. This plan capitalizes on the site's historical architecture, industrial ambiance, and prime location by the Maury River to offer unique and vibrant experiences for residents and visitors alike. Key components of the plan include:

- **Pedestrian Plaza and Outdoor Features:** The existing eastern covered loading dock will be converted into a pedestrian plaza, serving as the primary entry point for the facility. This space will feature outdoor seating and host events, creating an inviting atmosphere for community engagement.
- **Retail and Recreational Amenities:** The interior of the mill will include a variety of spaces, including:
 - A marketplace with small vendor stalls and larger retail spaces offering goods such as outdoor gear, art, and specialty items.
 - Rock-climbing walls and outfitter retail spaces to attract adventure-seekers and connect them to local recreational opportunities.
- **Dining and Event Space:** A brewpub with a full-service restaurant will anchor the site, complemented by a second-floor event venue capable of hosting up to 250 guests. These spaces aim to attract community events, weddings, and other gatherings, filling a regional gap for industrial-style event venues with riverfront views.
- **Hospitality:** A boutique hotel with 10-20 rooms will occupy the western section of the site, leveraging the site's unique character and nearby recreational attractions. Designed to cater to both leisure travelers and families, the hotel will feature a mix of king and double-queen rooms, offering distinctive lodging not found in the immediate area.
- **Historical Integration and Accessibility:** Displays throughout the site will showcase the history of the mill and Buena Vista, adding educational and cultural value. Accessible ramps and entries will ensure the site is welcoming to all visitors, meeting modern ADA standards.
- **Trail Connection:** The reuse plan incorporates the proposed extension of the Chessie Trail through the property, with an elevated timber walkway and connections to the River Walk Trail. This integration enhances site accessibility and encourages eco-tourism while preserving the natural surroundings.

Trail Connector Feasibility Study:

The proposed trail extension follows the path of the former Chesapeake and Ohio rail line, connecting the Chessie Trail at the edge of the site through to the River Walk. This long-discussed trail connection, including the Regional Brushy Blue Greenway Plan, will link the Bontex site to the regional recreational network while enhancing community access and promoting local heritage. Key features include:

- **Elevated Timber Walkway:** A 260-foot elevated walkway is proposed to improve access at the western trailhead to address the existing steep terrain and make the trail from under the bridge more accessible. Due to the steep terrain of the riverbank, this is the only method that will enable accessible connection all the way through without significantly disrupting the natural embankment (& costing significantly more).
- **Trail and Site Integration:** The trail is proposed to connect directly to the building at various entry points with seating and shade options, blending recreation with the site's reuse plan to boost economic potential and attract visitors.
- **Golf Cart Path:** A parallel path to allow golf carts to safely access the site, whereas they cannot currently access the site as it is outside the golf cart zone and does not have a permitted crossing.
- **Historical Features:** The study proposes for the existing trestle at Chalk Mine Run to be preserved or reconstructed to ensure safe and functional connection to the River Walk Trail. This feature is essential for linking the trail extension to the floodwall and riverfront areas. Additional engineering assessments of the trestle's structural integrity will be required.
- **Improved Access Points:** Plans include reconfiguring the intersection at West 29th Street and Longhollow Road for improved safety, modifying the western entrance to Bontex for right-in/right-out access, adding medians, and new signalization to accommodate the increased traffic expected with the proposed redevelopment. Next steps involve conducting a Transportation Impact Study and developing detailed engineering designs in coordination with VDOT.

To make this trail connection a reality, we need to work with the Bontex property owner to finalize the route and set up easements. Environmental checks, surveys, and engineering plans will come next, ensuring the trail is safe and ready for construction.

The project is estimated to cost \$7.37 million. Once completed, it will connect community spaces, highlight Buena Vista's unique history, and create an amenity that supports recreation, tourism, and economic growth while tying into the redevelopment of the Bontex complex.

PROJECT NEXT STEPS

1. Environmental Remediation:

- Finalize the Virginia Brownfields Assistance Fund (VBAF) grant application and begin removing hazardous materials, including abandoned chemicals and tanks identified on-site.
- Conduct further environmental assessments to determine the need for a Remedial Action Plan (RAP) and implement necessary remediation measures. This is being planned using what is left of the \$200,000 in technical assistance from DEQ.

2. Rezoning and Regulatory Compliance:

- Initiate rezoning of the property to align with the proposed mixed-use redevelopment plan.
- Review and address zoning ordinances, land use policies, and regulatory requirements to enable future development.

3. Reuse and Redevelopment Planning:

- Refine the conceptual reuse plan based on community feedback and market analysis findings.

- Develop phased implementation strategies to prioritize elements with the greatest immediate impact, such as public-facing retail and hospitality spaces.

4. Structural Stabilization:

- Address critical structural issues, including replacing failing roofs, stabilizing damaged masonry, and repairing termite-damaged elements.
- Perform necessary waterproofing and drainage repairs to prevent future deterioration of foundations and basements.

5. Building Repairs and Upgrades:

- Restore historic elements such as brickwork, windows, and doors to preserve the site's character.
- Conduct detailed engineering studies to plan and estimate costs for system replacement and integration.
- Upgrade accessibility features, including ADA-compliant entries, pathways, and restroom facilities, to meet modern standards.
- Modernize HVAC, electrical, plumbing, and fire protection systems to support future mixed-use operations.

6. Developer Partnership:

- Collaborate with the property owner to attract a developer for phased project implementation.

7. Funding and Incentives:

- Pursue historic tax credits, state and federal grants, and other funding opportunities to offset redevelopment costs.
- Engage with private developers and investors to secure funding for project phases, leveraging incentives and partnerships to attract interest.

COST ESTIMATES AND TIMELINE

Redevelopment costs are estimated at \$35 million, with phased implementation projected over 5-10 years—contingent on funding availability and developer partnerships.

Breakdown of Major Costs:

- Environmental remediation: \$500,000+
- Structural repairs and stabilization: \$3.4 million
- System upgrades: \$11 million
- Dining, lodging, and retail renovations: \$6.5 million
- Trail connection: \$7.83 million

CONCLUSION

This project represents a transformative opportunity to turn the Bontex site from a blighted property into a dynamic gateway for Buena Vista, enhancing economic growth, community pride, and quality of life. Council support will be critical in advancing these next steps and ensuring the project's long-term success. We are fully committed to advancing this project and carrying out the plan – we could not be more pleased and excited with this progress.

Miss Ramsey noted that she is working closely with the property owner and their attorney to attract a developer and explore options, and now with these plans, we are in a much better position to do that. She also mentioned that the EPS on the federal level loves this plan, are ready to support, are encouraging us to apply for grants, and are putting us in front of bigger groups such as a planning conference in Portsmouth where we will be presenting and talking about Buena Vista and the plans that they've done with us.

**A complete copy of the report can be found in the Economic Development office.*

6. Invited Community Organizations

Jen Carpenter – Main Street Buena Vista

• Downtown Events & Grants

- **Summer Movies Downtown:** Three family-friendly movie nights are launching this summer with support from a Community Development Grant to activate public spaces and support foot traffic.
 - June 27th – 8:30 pm
 - July 11th – 8:30 pm
 - August 1st – 8:30 pm
- **Connect BV + Mountain Day Mini-Grants:** We've received two new project-specific awards:
 - Connect BV 2025 – Expands our storytelling + placemaking efforts
 - Mountain Day Activation – Collab with Arts Council to draw new visitors
- **SMARP Grant Wrap-Up (\$10,000):** Final phase underway for our small business support strategy. A full report and recommended next steps will be shared later this summer.

• Downtown Redevelopment Initiative

- **Place + Main VMS Site-Visit:** We've been selected as 1 of 10 Main Street towns statewide for a data-driven redevelopment strategy.
- **Tentative Dates/Times:**
 - Day 1 (July 30)
 - 9:00 – 10:00 am: Kickoff Meeting (Main Street + City Staff + Developers)
 - 6:00 – 7:00 pm: Community Walking Visioning Tour (open to public)
 - Day 2 (July 31)
 - 3:00 – 4:00 pm: Wrap-Up Meeting (Mayor, City Manager, Directors ONLY)
- **Downtown Property Inventory:** All downtown buildings are being evaluated for redevelopment potential. Property owners will only be contacted if selected for deeper analysis or incentive eligibility.

• Communications & Community Engagement

- **Newsletter Relaunch:** We're reintroducing our community newsletter to better highlight events, local wins, and revitalization updates.

- **Thank You:** To the Mayor and Council—thank you for your ongoing support and leadership. Our momentum downtown is only possible because of the investments you continue to make.

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

Mountain Gateway Community College

Ms. Cheryl Hickman's term on the MGCC Board expires on June 30, 2025. Ms. Hickman is unable to serve another term at this time. This is a four-year term and the first time it has appeared on the agenda.

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

Rockbridge Regional Library Board of Trustees

Mrs. Jessica Whipple's term on the Library Board expires on June 30, 2025. Mrs. Whipple is unable to serve another term at this time. This is a four-year term and the first time it has appeared on the agenda.

Applicant: Steve Webb

Councilmember Henson made a motion to appoint Mr. Webb to the Library Board with Councilmember Coffey seconding, and it was carried by Council with Councilmember Webb abstaining.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

NB #1: DISCUSSION & APPROVAL OF A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING A LAND SWAP WITH THE ADVANCEMENT FOUNDATION AND LEASE EXTENSION

Mr. Tyree read the following Resolution

Resolution

WHEREAS The Advancement Foundation (“TAF”) has requested a land swap with the City of Buena Vista (the “City”) by which 2.058 acres, noted as Parcel B on the survey entitled “Exhibit Survey for Parcels A, B, C, & D, attached hereto as “Exhibit A” (the “Survey”) and currently owned by the City shall be conveyed to TAF and in return 2.282 acres noted as Parcel C shall be conveyed from TAF to the City; and

WHEREAS Parcel B is currently part of the property being leased by Advanced Drainage System (“ADS”), which is being renewed, and ADS not only agrees to this swap but to substitute Parcel C for Parcel B in their lease as this will improve their current business operations in the City; and

WHEREAS ADS also agrees to an adjustment to the property currently being leased along the northern boundary of the lease area to Parcel D on the Survey.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that in the best interest of the citizens of the City of Buena Vista, the City will exchange Parcel B for Parcel C as shown on Exhibit A and that this new property will be substituted and made part of the lease with ADS and that ADS will further modify the remaining property covered by the lease to Parcel D.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Jason Tyree, City Manager for the City of Buena Vista, is hereby authorized to sign whatever documentation is necessary in order to effectuate these transactions, including but not limited to deeds of exchange and lease amendments.

Tyson T. Cooper, Mayor

Attest:

Sarah M. Burch, Clerk of Council

Date of Adoption

Councilmember Henson made a motion approve the Resolution, with Councilmember Webb seconding. 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 Resolution was unanimously **approved**.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Sarah M. Burch, Clerk of Council

Tyson T. Cooper, Mayor