



## **City of Buena Vista City Council Regular Council Meeting & Executive Session**

August 7, 2025, 6:00 PM  
Council Chambers – 2039 Sycamore Avenue

The City Council for the City of Buena Vista met for a Regular Council Meeting & Executive Session on Thursday, August 7, 2025, at 6:00 p.m.

### **Members Present:**

Mayor Tyson Cooper	
Vice-Mayor Danny Staton	Steve Webb
Michelle Poluikis	Stanely 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: APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

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

### **ADG #3: APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES FROM THE JULY 17, 2025, REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING & EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Motion to approve the minutes was made by Vice-Mayor Staton, seconded by Councilmember Poluikis, and carried by Council, with Councilmember Webb abstaining.

### **ADG #4: RECOGNITION/COMMUNICATION FROM VISITORS**

- Amy Gilliam, 1710 Spruce Avenue, addressed concerns about the quality of the trash collection services. She noted instances she observed where trash cans were not placed back properly, and the lid were not placed back on cans and were thrown on the ground. She stated that we need better service, leadership, and accountability for that department. Mrs. Gilliam also cited the EPA's requirements for lead and copper monitoring improvements, with the initial inventory being due on October 16, 2024, but ours was not submitted until February 24, 2025, and of the 2.600 meters reported, 2.200 were reported as "unknown". She questioned if there is a process to improve the service line inventory, if there is a plan in place for the baseline inventory that is due in November 2027, and if an updated TAP monitoring plan has been developed as required. Mrs. Gilliam requested that Council hold the City Manager accountable, especially as his salary is partially funded through the water/wastewater fund.
- Dr. Heather Ault, new Superintendent for BVCPS, took a moment to introduce herself and stated that she is looking forward to meeting everyone and learning more about the community.

## **ADG #5: REPORTS**

### **1. Mayor**

None.

### **2. City Manager**

Mr. Tyree reported that through the RFP process, Alan McMahan has been procured as the building official for the City for at least the next two years.

There was some damage to the parking lot at City Hall recently when a company was removing a transformer from the railroad. They have already reached out and have a contractor coming to fix the parking lot within the next few weeks.

### **3. City Attorney**

None.

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

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

None.

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

Mr. Henson advised that they will be holding their next City tour on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, which will cover 28<sup>th</sup> Street to 15<sup>th</sup> Street.

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

None.

Mr. Henson reported that he had attended the recent Planning Commission meeting (he is a member) where they discussed the proposed dorms for SVU. He noted one question they discussed was how to get the students to come into downtown to enjoy the City.

Mr. Henson also attended the recent MSBV walking tour and noted that there was good participation and he feels that there will be some good information to come out of that session; he also thanked Jen Carpenter, Kristina Ramsey, and Ally Haney for all their hard work on organizing the event.

Mr. Cash provided a brief update on the Rockbridge[BV]250 efforts, noting that the “Flag Fund” is growing with commitments totaling around \$2,100, or roughly 10% of the total project cost (donations for the Flag Fund include \$200/star and \$500/stripe). He is also seeking team members to help handle the details of the flag garden project.

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

#### **Kristina Ramsey – Economic Development**

- July was filled with a lot of meetings and site visits with potential prospects.
- We received the \$50,000 Virginia Brownfields Assistance Grant for the chemical assessment and remediation in the Bontex basement; we are waiting for the owner’s \$50,000 match to be transferred so we can move forward with that project.

- Blue Haven Salon and Spa opened in Lew Hamilton's shopping center. They are a full-service salon and head spa offering services such as hair, manicures, pedicures, eyelashes, eyebrows, and waxing services.
- Foxtrot was sold to Tractor Supply. With Planning Commission approvals, they will begin construction this year, shooting for a mid-2026 opening. They will be demoing part of the building, but most of the building will remain the same. Miss Ramsey noted that this is a big win for the City as it is tough to attract these types of businesses because you have to have the right traffic counts and pedestrian traffic, among many other things, for them to consider the location.
- The Shenandoah Valley Workforce Development Board is working to analyze what is needed in the Shenandoah Valley and taking a deeper look at how we can partner with the Roanoke region to focus on the underserved areas. They recently completed a Talent Pathways Initiative report to determine what the needs are and set a path forward in a new direction, coming up with a lot of new initiatives.
- The Virginia Innovation Accelerator project is moving forward, and renovations continue. They are meeting with some larger prospects for the main building, and are still trying to plan for Junction 245, which is the marketplace. They are looking for small retail businesses [i.e., crafting, baking, wood whittling] to fill that space. These folks can set up their own booth in the space or they will have a manager on-site to do consignment selling for folks. The Visitor's Center will also be located in Junction 245.
- Tourism highlights include:
  - Buena Vista Visitor's Center statistics were up for May and June at 174 and 199 respectively.
  - This year's Tourism sponsorships include four Buena Vista events: Mountain Day, Connect BV, Coffee & Cars, and Nothin' Fancy.
  - *World Atlas* reported on the mural in Magnolia Square and the PMHS unveiling of Charlie Manuel Field.
  - Tourism is doing a survey for their strategic plan, which was extended to August 20<sup>th</sup>. This plan will set a strategic direction for our regional tourism for the next 10 years.
- There are contract negotiations occurring to finish out the front corner of Magnolia Square.
- There is a Regional Housing Summit planned for September 30<sup>th</sup> at the Virginia Horse Center. Residents, contractors, elected officials, and various other stakeholders will be invited to hear some training and presentations about housing in the Rockbridge area.
- Two interns, one from SVU and one from W&L, are working on the River Walk interpretive signage. They are writing stories that will one day go along the River Walk to tell the story of Buena Vista.
- There have been conversations with the railroad concerning cleaning up some of the mess behind City Hall on 21<sup>st</sup> Street. They have already begun working on cleaning up some old paint cans and things that have been laying around for a while and are committed to getting the area cleaned up, keeping in mind that they are actively working on the rail so there will always be some things sitting around.

- The third photo shoot just wrapped up. These shoots are for new marketing materials to add new photos to our website. Along those lines, the new website is taking much longer than anticipated but will hopefully be ready to launch soon and will have some fresh photos included. She thanked Ally Haney for the incredible job she did organizing these and the volunteers for coming out to help showcase our community.
- They are working on pulling together a list of folks for testimonials to include in a video series telling real stories of real people here in Buena Vista. This includes business owners, manufacturing partners, people who have visited the community and decided to stay, chosen to come by after leaving, real Buena Vista people. She is asking for recommendations of people who have incredible stories to share.
- They are working on fleshing out a plan for continued use of the radio as well as our content strategy and social media use and making a concerted effort to plan that out so we can do a better job, so all of these updates can be told to the community as well and beyond.

## 6. Invited Community Organizations

### Jen Carpenter – Main Street Buena Vista

- **Downtown Site Visit** – The Department of Housing and Community Development, Virginia Housing Real Estate Investment, Roanoke Mobilizing Program, and Friends of the Southwest were all in attendance for the visit; they said we had the most visitors to host over a two-day period than any other city in the state that has received these services. They focused on six vacant downtown buildings within a specific historic boundary downtown designated by the state. They did an inventory of all the buildings that are within those boundaries and uploaded it to Main Street America software. They should receive the final report soon. She also noted that they live-streamed the tour on Facebook which has over 5,000 views and over 70 positive comments.
- **Connect BV** – The committee is actively revising and finishing some flyers to highlight the different things that Buena Vista has to offer to hand out at the three outdoor events; August 30<sup>th</sup>; September 13<sup>th</sup>; and September 26<sup>th</sup>. Each of the events will have a slightly different lineup with the purpose of showcasing Buena Vista.
- **Virginia Tech Study** – Miss Kira Farley-Chandler, a senior at SVU, presented the findings of the study completed by Virginia Tech [paid for with a grant from Virginia Main Street] which specifically looked at three businesses that could potentially do well in Buena Vista. Based on surveys and data, some of the community needs include an upscale dining restaurant, family entertainment space, affordable small business spaces, and gathering spots such as cafes and wellness centers. To ultimately fix the empty storefront problem, they gave us three business concepts ranging from great, good, and not really practical.
  - The “great” concept is a mid-scale restaurant located on Magnolia Avenue, which would be projected to have a financial value of \$421,000.
  - The “good” idea is a family entertainment center to include things like mini golf, laser tag, and/or bowling; this is projected for a moderate return with some risk.
  - The least feasible idea would be a kayak and bike rental as it would be a seasonal business; this idea would not be viable currently because of the startup costs associated with it.

Some key data the provided was that there is \$1M+ projected increase in local entertainment spending by 2028 in Buena Vista; several nearby locations have had success with similar Main Street investments.

- **Skatepark Planning** – Nate Dransfield, with the Skatepark Advocates, stated that they are hoping to create a space that appeals to a wide group of people, not just skaters, who are looking for more options for things they can do outside to stay healthy. A big piece of what they are planning is to focus on a pump track, which is a unique outdoor feature that is essentially a track of hills that can be ridden on bikes, skateboards, or anything with wheels. This is something that seems to attract a lot of people and is rising in popularity across the country. As a skater, he noted that this is something he hasn't really seen in the skateparks and communities around Buena Vista, so it would be an exciting feature for us to have for our residents here and also to bring people in from outside the area. They are focusing on grants that they can apply for to help fund the project. There are a lot of community health grants that are focused on getting people outside. Along with this, they are working on putting together a nonprofit that can take on the grant application task and help them to have more of a professional and official presence, and to get more people involved.

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

##### **Planning Commission**

Mr. Justin Wiseman's term on the Planning Commission expires on August 31, 2025, Mr. Wiseman 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 being no applicants, the opening will be carried over to the next meeting.

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

##### **OB #1: DISCUSSION OF ESTABLISHING A CIGARETTE TAX**

Mayor Cooper recalled that at the last meeting Council was presented with a draft of the Code Section to implement the cigarette tax and their "homework" was to review the draft and come back tonight to decide whether or not to move forward. He noted that the intention tonight was NOT to implement the tax, but to come to an agreement on what direction they want to go on whether they want to pursue a cigarette tax or not. If implemented, it would mirror the City of Lexington and Rockbridge County at 25¢ per pack (vapes are not included as they are under the Virginia ABC) and is projected to bring in \$100,000 per year in revenue.

Councilmember Henson raised concerns regarding the potential loss in sales tax revenue from folks who come to Buena Vista to buy their cigarettes and end up buying other things while they are here and Councilmember Coffey feels that this is "targeting" a specific group of people. Concerns were also raised regarding the fact that the estimated revenue was included in the budget they approved without first approving the cigarette tax, and those conversations should have been had prior to the budget adoption.

There were several counterpoints made in response to the concerns. Councilmember Poluikis noted that she finds it hard to believe people will drive out of their way to come to Buena Vista just to save 25¢ on a pack of cigarettes when they would be spending more on the gas to drive here.

Councilmember Webb, in response to “targeting” specific people, noted that imposing this tax is no different than a City decal, because if you don’t have a car, you don’t have to buy a decal, therefore “singling out” people who drive cars. Councilmember Poluikis also noted that [the cigarette tax] was a way the Budget & Finance Committee saw to relieve some additional burden on the residents at-large. Councilmember Webb, who is the Chair for the B&F Committee, added that they worked for months to balance the budget, not to have a surplus, but just to balance it, and this is a chance for us to possibly generate \$100,000 in revenue for the City. Councilmember Cash added that this [proposed] tax is what is sometimes referred to as a “sin tax” that is imposed on items that are considered detrimental to the health of people. He added that if people choose to do things that hurt themselves, but the cost of that damage to them is spread across society, then there needs to be some way to level the cost and pull some of that expense back to the folks who are “creating the problem” so that everyone else doesn’t have to bear the burden of that cost. As for the issue of passing the budget with this “potential” revenue before passing the tax, Mayor Cooper advised that the idea of a cigarette tax was reported by the B&F Committee as early as the end of March and when the first drafts of the budget were presented, it was in there as a revenue line item, so if [Council] didn’t know it was in there, it’s because [we] weren’t paying attention. He added that the direction they needed to give Mr. Tyree and Mr. Kearney tonight is whether we want to move forward with the process of possibly having the cigarette tax. Mr. Kearney added that right now, we are just looking at going forward with a public hearing, not voting, or committing to anything tonight.

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## **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- 1. According to Section 2.2-3711 (A)(1) of the 1950 Code of Virginia, as amended, for the purpose of evaluating the performance of the City Manager.**
- 2. According to Section 2.2-3711 (A)(1) of the 1950 Code of Virginia, as amended, for the purpose of evaluating the conduct of a City appointee to the Rockbridge Regional Library Board.**

On motion by Councilmember Henson, seconded by Councilmember Webb, City Council convened in Executive Session.

## **RETURN TO REGULAR SESSION:**

On motion by Councilmember Henson, seconded by Councilmember Coffey, and carried by Council, City Council reconvened in regular session with the following certification:

### **CERTIFICATION OF EXECUTIVE MEETING**

**WHEREAS** the Buena Vista City Council has convened an Executive Meeting on this date pursuant to an affirmative recorded vote and in accordance with the provisions of The Virginia Freedom of Information Act; and

**WHEREAS** Section 2.1-344.1 of the Code of Virginia requires a certification by the Buena Vista City Council that such Executive Meeting was conducted in conformity with Virginia law.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Buena Vista City Council hereby certifies to the best of each member's knowledge that: (1) only public business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements by Virginia law were discussed in the Executive Meeting to which this certification resolution applies, and (2) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion convening the Executive Meeting were heard, discussed or considered by the Buena Vista City Council.

**VOTE:**

Councilmember Henson ✓	Councilmember Poluikis ✓	Councilmember Webb ✓
Councilmember Coffey ✓	Councilmember Cash ✓	Vice-Mayor Staton ✓
Mayor Cooper ✓		

**AYES – 7      NAYS – 0**

MEMBERS ABSENT DURING VOTE: None

MEMBERS ABSENT DURING MEETING: None

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Sarah M. Burch, Clerk of Council

**NEW BUSINESS**

**NB #1: DISCUSS & POTENTIALLY TAKE ACTION ON THE REMOVAL OF A MEMBER OF THE ROCKBRIDGE REGIONAL LIBRARY BOARD APPOINTED BY THE CITY COUNCIL IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 42.1-39 OF THE CODE OF VIRGINIA**

Mayor Cooper advised that Council received a letter of resignation from Mr. Thomas Bell wishing to resign from the Rockbridge Regional Library Board effective Friday, August 22, 2025.

Councilmember Henson moved to **accept** Mr. Bell's resignation effective August 22<sup>nd</sup>. Councilmember Coffey seconded the motion, and it was carried by Council with Councilmember Webb abstaining as he is a member of the Library Board.

**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