CITY OF LAVONIA COUNCIL

REGULAR MEETING – MINUTES

APRIL 6, 2026

5:30 PM

Present: Mayor Courtney Umbehant
Councilman – Eddie Floyd
Councilman – Michael Schulman
Councilman - Jeremy Madden
Councilman - Andrew Murphy

Attorney: Jay Doss

Media: M. J. Kneizer– WLHR
Charlie Eavenson – Franklin County Citizen

Staff: City Manager - Charles Cawthon
Asst. City Manager - Robert Ogburn
City Clerk – Angela V. Greer
Asst. City Clerk – Barbara Busby
Police Chief – Shane Edmisten

Item 1. **Call to Order**:
Mayor Courtney Umbehant called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone.

Item 2. **Invocation and Pledge of Alliance to the American flag:** led by Mayor Umbehant.

Item 3. **Consent Agenda Items** & **Approval of Minutes:**

Motion by Michael Schulman, seconded by Andrew Murphy to approve the Consent Agenda items as follows. Motion carried unanimously.

a) Confirmation of Quorum.

b) Approval of the April Meeting Agenda as presented.

c) Approval of Minutes: March 2, 2026 - Regular Council Meeting as presented.

d) Approval of the March 2026 Financial Report as presented.

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Item 4. **Legal:**

a) **R-26-03 Zoning**: **Sonya Kay Legg:**

Sonya Kay Legg, applicant/ property owner, seeks rezoning to Local Business District zoning of 9.14 acres fronting on the north side of Hartwell Highway (Map/Parcel L010/067A). Existing zoning is R-1A residential zoning, in the City of Lavonia, GA. Proposed uses: Specialty Event Center.

The Mayor announced that on a development since last month's approval of the first read, Mrs. Legg had listed the property for sale. He said that rezoning this property would introduce commercial property rights, with everything that is allowed in that, into two residential neighborhoods, Hartwell Road and Poole Street. He stated that his comfort with the request last month was based on a city resident and local business owner operating venue. The Mayor cautioned that there could be unintended consequences to allow B2-Local Business District to be located in the middle of those neighborhoods. His recommendation to Council was to deny the rezoning request and advised that other solutions, such as conditional use permits, could be used in order to allow the property to remain R1A – Single Family Residential while still permitting a specialty event.

Councilman Eddie Floyd agreed with the Mayor's concern and asked if the waiting period could be waived to allow the new owners, in the event of a sale, to apply.

City Attorney Jay Doss agreed that Council has the right to waive the waiting period on reapplication. He emphasized the importance of protecting citizens around the property, noting that B-2 zoning could allow various commercial uses.

Motion by Eddie Floyd, seconded by Michael Schulman to deny the second reading of the rezoning request of Ms. Legg and waive the waiting period for reapplication completely. Motion carried unanimously.

b) **Capital Improvements Element (CIE):**

Mayor Umbehant explained that this was the second reading of the Capital Improvements Element of the comprehensive plan. He noted the purpose was to inform the public about the CIE and its preparation process, as well as gather community input needs and goals. The CIE is required to support adoption of a development impact fee program. He affirmed that no additional public hearing was needed beyond the previous month's hearing, and this was the second reading.

Motion by Andrew Murphy, seconded by Jeremy Madden to approve the second reading of the Capital Improvements Element. Motion carried unanimously.

c) **Lease Renewal - Franklin County Coroner's Office:**

Motion by Michael Schulman, seconded by Jeremy Madden to approve the lease renewal with automatic renewal terms with Franklin County for use as the Coroner's Office. Motion carried unanimously.

Item 5. Mayor's Report:

Easter Egg Hunt Recap:

The Mayor acknowledged the Easter Egg Hunt as a wonderful success, with hundreds of children. The event would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of our staff, volunteers, and partners.

Spring Festival:

The Mayor reminded everyone that this Saturday is our Spring Festival, which will feature over 240 vendors offering a variety of goods and experiences. This festival promises to be one of our biggest yet, and he personally invited everyone to join him Downtown. He encouraged people to volunteer to help.

Upcoming Video Series:

The Mayor announced that he would be doing a series of videos on his Mayor's Page diving into the data about where Lavonia and Franklin County really stands in relation to our neighbors and our state. He stated that there has been an idea that there is a fight between growth versus no growth or farmers versus cities... and that it was a bunch of hogwash. He said that he would break down statistics that show us exactly where we stand and what we need to do to make Lavonia and Franklin County the best that it can be.

The Mayor recognized City Manager Charles Cawthon's retirement. This was his last meeting, and the Mayor thanked him for his service and all that he had done for the City of Lavonia. Mayor Umbehant concluded by acknowledging Mr. Cawthon, who was attending his last meeting after nearly 11 years of service. He expressed appreciation for Charles's partnership and friendship during his tenure.

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Charles responded that it had been a pleasure and honor to serve the Mayor, Council, and Citizens of Lavonia. He expressed confidence that Lavonia was in great shape with a bright future ahead.

Closing Remarks:
The Mayor invited all residents to stay engaged and reach out.

Item 6. **Assistant City Manager's Report:**

AutoZone:

Assistant City Manager Robert Ogburn began by acknowledging AutoZone's last-minute candy donation for the Easter egg hunt, which helped ensure all children received treats even if they arrived late or found eggs without candy.

Alexandria Gunther Recognition:

Mr. Ogburn introduced new employee Alexandria Gunther, who is working as a water technician. He indicated they have great plans for her future with the city and noted she has already made a positive impact on office morale.

Spring Street Park: He told Council of the progress of the Springview Height Park, which has included significant dirt moving by Public Works Director Rodney and his team, grill repair and pavilion cleanup by the Rotary Club, and plans for a walking trail and playground area. He stated they are targeting June for completion of the first phase.

Smith Road Water Line Project: He informed Council that the Smith Road water line project is progressing with pipe already delivered. Once the park work is completed, crews will install 1,500 feet of pipe to create a loop connecting Smith Road to Newtown, providing secondary feed to the Gumlog area as a needed capital improvement.

East Main and Rainbow Drive Drainage Project: Mr. Ogburn confirmed all infrastructure has been purchased for the East Main and Rainbow Drive drainage project and the project ranks third in priority behind the current park and water line work.

Charles Cawthon Retirement Reception: Mr. Ogburn announced a retirement reception for City Manager Charles scheduled for April 23rd from 4:00 to 6:00 PM to honor his service. He expressed personal gratitude for Charles's mentorship.

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Item 7. **Final Comments:**

Councilman Andrew Murphy reported visiting the Anderson County water treatment facility the previous Thursday with staff members Scott Brown and Marty Eckles to tour the operation and learn about potential improvements to address taste and odor issues in Lavonia's water system that sometimes creates an earthy smell. He indicated they observed processes that might be applicable to Lavonia's system to address these periodic water quality concerns.

Item 8. **Adjourn:**

Mayor Umbehant adjourned the meeting at 5:49 P.M.

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Upcoming Meetings:

April 20, 2026 – Work Session (If needed)

May 4, 2026 – City of Lavonia – Regular Council Meeting @ 5:30 P.M.

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Courtney Umbehant, Mayor Angela V. Greer, City Clerk