CITY OF LAVONIA COUNCIL

REGULAR MEETING – MINUTES

August 3, 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 - Robert Ogburn
Asst. City Clerk – Barbara Busby
Police Chief – Shane Edmisten
DDA Director – Ashley Umbehant

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

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

Item 3. **Confirmation of a Quorum:**
Mayor Umbehant confirmed that all members were present, and a quorum was established.

Item 4. **Consent Agenda Items** & **Approval of Minutes:**

a) Approval of the August Meeting Agenda as presented.

b) Approval of Minutes – July 6, 2026, Regular Meeting; July 21, 2026, Work Session

c) Acceptance of the July 2026 Financial Report as presented.

Motion to approve the consent agenda items was made by Councilman Schulman and seconded by Councilman Murphy. The motion carried unanimously.

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Item 5. **GEFA – Phase II update**

Mayor Umbehant presented a resolution authorizing the City of Lavonia to borrow up to $5,000,000 from Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) to finance Phase II of the water plant upgrade. He clarified that of the $5,000,000 total, $4,000,000 would be forgiven, leaving the city responsible for repaying only $1,000,000. Phase I upgrades are expected to begin within a few weeks.

Motion to approve the GEFA Phase II resolution was made by Councilman Floyd and seconded by Councilman Madden. The motion carried unanimously.

Item 6. **Acceptance of the 2025 Financial Audit Conducted by Rushton**

The 2025 financial audit, conducted by Rushton and Associates and previously presented at the July 21, 2026, Work Session, was brought before the Council for formal acceptance.

Motion to accept the 2025 financial audit as presented was made by Councilman Murphy and seconded by Councilman Schulman. The motion carried unanimously.

Item 7. **Personnel - Appointment of Interim City Clerk**

Mayor Umbehant noted that City Clerk Angie Greer, in her 40th year of service with the City of Lavonia, will be retiring and has been on leave. Due to her absence, it was necessary to appoint an interim city clerk. The Mayor nominated Barbara Busby, who has been serving as Assistant City Clerk, to fill the interim role until Ms. Greer's retirement is effective.

Motion to appoint Barbara Busby as Interim City Clerk was made by Councilman Murphy and seconded by Councilman Floyd. The motion carried unanimously.

Item 8. **Employee Recognitions**

City Manager Robert Ogburn recognized members of the Public Works water treatment team for their extraordinary efforts during Hart County's water system failure, during which they worked extended hours to maintain sufficient water supply to the area. City Manager Ogburn also recognized the water and street department crew who worked approximately four days to locate and repair a difficult water leak originating on Andrews Drive and ultimately traced to Rainbow Drive. Commitment to Excellence certificates were presented to the following employees: Josh Mobley, Welsey Norton, Matthew Tice, John Payne, Josiah Creason, Scott Brown, and Rodney Andrews of the water and street departments. Not present were: Braden Coleman, Dalton Loudermilk, and Joseph Mitchell of the water treatment plant and Richard Wheeler of the water department.

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Item 9. **Legal:**

a. Alcohol Ordinance Amendment: Beverage Shop License, 2nd Read

The second reading of the alcohol ordinance amendment creating a Beverage Shop License was brought before the Council for approval.

Motion to approve the Alcohol Ordinance Amendment – Beverage Shop License on second reading was made by Councilman Schulman and seconded by Councilman Madden. The motion carried unanimously.

b. PUBLIC HEARING & 1st READ: RR-26-004

A public hearing was opened for rezoning application RR-26-004, submitted by Ponder Development, LLC (applicant) and Douglas Whitlow, Trustee of the Douglas Whitlow Trust (property owner), requesting rezoning of approximately ±20.0 acres on Highway 17 from B-2 (Local Business District) to R-1B (Single-Family Residential District – High Density), comprising a portion of Tax Parcel 053-179, for proposed residential development. No members of the public offered comments, and the public hearing was closed. As the Planning and Zoning Commission tabled the matter until their August 31, 2026 meeting and scheduled a work session later in the month, Council moved to table the item.

Motion to table rezoning application RR-26-004 was made by Councilman Floyd and seconded by Councilman Murphy. The motion carried unanimously.

Item 10. **Mayor's Report:**

Mayor Umbehant made the following announcements:

The Mayor's Council for People of All Abilities will hold its next meeting on Thursday at 6:00 PM at City Hall. All interested community members are welcome to attend.

Hippie Fest is scheduled for Friday evening downtown, featuring the Second Time Round Band.

The Police Department welcomed K-9 Lobo to the force the previous month.

The City has been awarded a $1,000,000 grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission and a $1,000,000 grant from the Georgia Transportation Infrastructure Bank, both designated for the downtown streetscape project. Mayor Umbehant noted that the overall project is estimated at approximately $13,000,000, and that engineering has been completed with efforts underway to maximize the impact of the available funds.

Three public hearings to set the millage rate are scheduled for August 13th at 6:00 PM, August 20th at 10:00 AM, and August 20th at 6:00 PM, with the 6:00 PM hearing on August 20th to be followed by a special called meeting. Mayor Umbehant noted that the city's millage rate is at its lowest level in many years and expressed confidence it would remain steady.

Item 11. **City Manager's Report:**
City Manager Robert Ogburn recognized Farmers Furniture for donating a refrigerator to City Hall and expressed appreciation on behalf of the city.

Item 12. **Final Comments:**
City Attorney Jay Doss introduced Faith Ivester, a rising sophomore at Georgia Tech majoring in biomedical engineering, who has been interning with Mr. Doss's firm during the summer and will be departing on August 14th to return to school.

No other comments were offered by those in attendance.

Item 13. **Adjourn:**
Mayor Umbehant adjourned the meeting at 5:51 P.M.

Upcoming Meetings:
August 24, 2026 – Work Session (If needed)
September 8, 2026 (Tuesday) – City of Lavonia – Regular Council Meeting @ 5:30 P.M.

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Courtney Umbehant, Mayor Barbara Busby, City Clerk