CITY OF LAVONIA COUNCIL

REGULAR MEETING – MINUTES

December 1, 2025

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
Asst. City Clerk – Barbara Busby
Police Chief – Shane Edmisten
Mainstreet - Ashley Rose Umbehant

Item 1. **Call to Order**:
Mayor Courtney Umbehant called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

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

Item 3. **Consent Agenda Items** & **Approval of Minutes:**
Mayor Umbehant noted one change to the meeting agenda: Item 4, Garbage Rate Adjustments, would be omitted from the meeting. The Mayor asked for approval of the consent agenda with this change.

Motion to approve the consent agenda with the noted change was made by Michael Schulman, seconded by Andrew Murphy. The motion carried unanimously.

a) Confirmation of Quorum.

b) Approval of the December Meeting Agenda as presented.

c) Approval of Minutes: November 3, 2025 - Regular Council Meeting as presented.

e) Acceptance of the November 2025 Financial Report as presented.

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Item 4. ~~**Garbage Rate Adjustments**~~

Item 5. **Thomas & Hutton contract review for engineering services for the ARC grant.**
Assistant City Manager Robert Ogburn noted that this was a standard contract for engineering services with no unusual provisions. Mayor Umbehant clarified this contract would authorize the city to begin a contractual relationship with Thomas and Hutton for the ARC grant project, which is the $1 million grant recently awarded to the city for downtown improvements.

Motion to approve the contract for engineering services for the ARC grant was made by Andrew Murphy, seconded by Eddie Floyd. The motion carried unanimously.

Item 6. **Review of 2026 employee Holidays and 2026 Meeting Schedule**

Mayor Umbehant presented the 2026 employee holiday and meeting schedule, noting there were no changes to the holidays from the previous year. The only Tuesday meeting scheduled for 2026 would be the meeting following Labor Day. The mayor also noted the work session dates were included in the packet. No action was required on this item.

Item 7. **Legal:**

a) An Ordinance Amending the Zoning Ordinance of the City of Lavonia, Georgia
Attorney Jay Doss opened the public hearing, explaining that this was the first reading of ordinance amending the text to the city's zoning ordinance. He outlined the process for the public hearing and detailed the proposed amendments which included repealing several articles of the zoning ordinance and adopting new articles related to zoning districts, the official zoning map, and definitions.
No comments were received from the audience during the public hearing.
Assistant City Manager Robert Ogburn reported that the Planning and Zoning Commission had reviewed the amendments at their meeting and recommended approval.
During Council discussion, Councilman Jeremy Madden noted the amendments would provide more zoning districts to choose from, and Mayor Umbehant added that the changes would strengthen the wording related to conditional uses.

Motion to approve the zoning ordinance amendments was made by Michael Shulman, seconded by Michael Schulman. The motion carried unanimously.

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b) **FY2026 Budget**

City Manager Charles Cawthon noted that no changes had been made to the budget since its first reading at the previous meeting. Mayor Umbehant opened a public hearing for the proposed 2026 budget. No comments were received from the public, and the hearing was closed. Council members had no questions for the City Manager about the proposed budget.

Motion to approve the 2026 budget as presented was made by Jeremy Madden, seconded by Andrew Murphy. The motion carried unanimously.

c) Alcohol License Renewals

City Manager Cawthon presented the alcohol license renewal applications, explaining that all were renewals of existing licenses, and all were in order. He requested conditional approval for Franklin Tobacco, as the owner (who also owns Franklin Package) was out of the country but was expected to submit a renewal application after the meeting. Councilman Madden asked whether the city rechecks all applications annually. The City Manager clarified that unless something changes with a license, they don't typically go through the entire process again.

Motion to approve all returned renewal applications and to conditionally approve Franklin Tobacco's renewal pending their application submission was made by Eddie Floyd, seconded by Michael Schulman. The motion carried unanimously.

Item 8. **Mayor's Report:**

Mayor Umbehant reported on a busy month, highlighting work on parks planning, hosting community meetings, and participating in hosting a beauty pageant. He mentioned the annual tree lighting ceremony which, despite concerns about weather, attracted approximately 1,200 people. The Mayor thanked public works, facility maintenance, and the Downtown Development Authority for their work on holiday decorations. He announced upcoming holiday events including the Lavonia Depot Christmas Market on Saturday from 9 AM to 2 PM, and the Christmas Parade on Sunday, December 7th at 3 PM. The Mayor noted the parade route would be different from previous years and encouraged residents to be aware of the changes. He mentioned there were over 60 entries in the parade already. Mayor Umbehant concluded by thanking council members and attendees for their contributions to Lavonia and wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Item 9. **City Manager's Report:**

City Manager Cawthon provided an update on the ABM project, which is now substantially complete. He noted that the water plant is now generating solar power, which should help balance rising energy costs. He highlighted that during power outages, they would be able to generate power and continue processing water. The City Manager concluded by wishing everyone a Merry Christmas.

Item 10. **Final Comments:**
Councilman Michael Shulman wished everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.
No comments were received from visitors.

Item 11. **Adjourn:**
Mayor Umbehant adjourned the meeting at 5:47 P.M.

Upcoming Meetings:

January 5, 2026 – Regular City Council Meeting

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Courtney Umbehant, Mayor Barbara Busby, Assistant City Clerk