CITY OF LAVONIA COUNCIL

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

March 2, 2026

5:30 PM

Present: Mayor - Courtney Umbehant
Council Member - Eddie Floyd
Council Member - Michael Schulman
Council Member - Jeremy Madden
Council Member - Andrew Murphy

Attorney: Jay Doss

Media: Charlie Evanson, Franklin County Citizen
M.J. Kneiser, WLHR

Staff: Assistant City Manager – Robert Ogburn
Assistant City Clerk – Barbara Busby
DDA Director – Ashley Umbehant
Lavonia PD - Lieutenant Josh Akins

1. **Welcome and Call to Order:**
   Mayor Courtney Umbehant called the March 2, 2026, Regular Council Meeting to order at 5:30 PM.
2. **Invocation / Pledge:**
   Mayor Courtney Umbehant led the invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.
3. **Consent Agenda Items:**
   a) Confirmation of Quorum
   b) Approval of March Meeting Agenda
   c) Approval of Minutes – February 9, 2026, Regular Meeting
   d) Acceptance of February 2026 Financial Report

   Council Member Andrew Murphy moved to approve the consent agenda items. Council Member Eddie Floyd seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

4. **Waste Management Rate Increase**
   Assistant City Manager Robert Ogburn presented the Waste Management rate increases, explaining that Waste Management had implemented a CPI increase on commercial dumpster services. He showed council the current rates and the proposed increases.
   Michael Schulman moved to adjust the trash part fees as presented. Andrew Murphy seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

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5. **New appointments to the Historical Preservation Commission**

Mayor Umbehant explained that the updated bylaws for the Historic Preservation Commission created a 5-member board. The three current members are Priscilla Gothard, Marie Loftis, and Vivian Young (chair). He presented Beverly Thompson and Robert Wilkinson for appointment. Thompson had been a non-voting member for several years, while Wilkinson is a resident on Grogon Street who has become very involved and attends many meetings.

Eddie Floyd moved to approve Beverly Thompson and Robert Wilkinson to the Historical Preservation Commission. Michael Schulman seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

6. **Legal:**

a) ***RZ-2026-01/AX-2026-01 Annexation and Zoning:*** Danny Rueckel., applicant, Don Whitlow, property owner, seeks annexation and B-2, Local Business District zoning of 32.603 acres fronting on the north side of State Route 17, ap parcel 053/179. Existing zoning is HB, Highway Business, in unincorporated Franklin County. Proposed uses:, retail store.

Mayor Umbehant presented the second read for zoning of map parcel 053/179 for B-2 Local Business District Zoning.

Michael Schulman moved to approve the B-2 Local Business District Zoning. Eddie Floyd seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Mayor Umbehant then presented the annexation portion of the same property.

Jeremy Madden moved to approve the second read for annexation of the property. Andrew Murphy seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

b) ***R-2026-02/AX2020-02 Annexation and Zoning:*** Russell Hill, applicant, Hill Properties and Petroleum, LLC. property owner, seeks annexation and B-2, Local Business District Zoning of approximately 8.88 acres fronting on the north side of State Route 17, (map/parcel 062/148). Existing zoning is HB, Highway Business District, in unincorporated Franklin County. Proposed use: Vacant at this time.

Mayor Umbehant presented the second read for zoning of map parcel 062/148 for B-2 Local Business District Zoning.

Eddie Floyd moved to approve the B-2 Local Business District Zoning. Michael Schulman seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Mayor Umbehant then presented the annexation portion of the same property.

Andrew Murphy moved to approve the second read for annexation of the property. Jeremy Madden seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

c) ***Sign Variance (SV 2026-01***): B Square & Associates by Britt McConnell applicant Bailey & Sons Farms LLC & Evan Durrance property owner, seeks a variance to Chapter 6, "Advertising," Article II, "Signs," Section 6-46, "General size, location and other requirements" of the Lavonia Code of Ordinances, to install a digital billboard (13597 Jones Street) fronting on the north side of Jones Street (State Route 17)(Map/Parcels 063/126). Existing zoning: B-2, Local Business District. Existing use: Car Wash.

Mayor Umbehant presented the second read for the sign variance for 13597 Jones Street.

Andrew Murphy moved to approve the second read for the sign variance. Eddie Floyd seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

d) ***R-26-03 Zoning***:

Mayor Umbehant presented a rezoning request from Sonya Kay Legg for 9.14 acres on the north side of Hartwell Highway (map parcel L010/067A) to change from R-1A residential to B-2 Local Business District for a special event center. This was a first read with public hearing. He noted that Planning and Zoning had met and unanimously recommended approval of the zoning change.

Mayor Umbehant opened the public hearing for comments in favor of or in opposition to the rezoning. Hearing no public comments, he closed the public hearing and presented the matter to council. A council member asked about opposition during planning and zoning, and Mayor Umbehant confirmed there were no public comments in opposition, only one comment in favor from a representative. Four planning and zoning members were present (one absent) and unanimously recommended approval.
Michael Schulman moved to approve the rezoning to B-2 Local Business District as a first read. Jeremy Madden seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

e) ***Capital Improvements Element (CIE) of the comprehensive plan.***
Consulting City Planner Jerry Weitz addressed the council, explaining that state administrative rules require a public hearing at the outset of pursuing impact fees to give the public an opportunity to understand the program. He noted that the council had previously explored this in 2022 as part of a county-wide effort that ultimately didn't proceed. He outlined the process, including the need to appoint a 5-member development impact fee advisory committee with 3 real estate-oriented members. The work is expected to be completed by the end of the year, with a capital improvement element to be presented later identifying projects for impact fee expenditure.
Mayor Umbehant opened the public hearing for general comments related to the capital improvement element and impact fees. Hearing no public comments, he closed the public hearing. Weitz clarified that no action was necessary, as this was just a public hearing for information.

7. **Mayor's Report**

The inaugural meeting of the Mayor's Council on People with All Abilities took place on February 10th. The excitement and passion shown by participants for addressing special needs education and accessibility issues was inspiring. Due to the enthusiasm and urgency of problems to address, they scheduled an additional meeting for Tuesday, March 17th at 6 PM at City Hall, open to all citizens interested in participating.
The city hosted a listening session through the UGA Propel program involving Franklin County cities, the county, and Chamber of Commerce. This past Friday, UGA students visited as part of the program, touring the county with Lavonia hosting them at the end of the day. The City made a presentation on the Laovnia's redevelopment and economic development efforts. The students were very complimentary of the presentation and interaction with the city, and he looked forward to receiving a fresh perspective from their analysis.

8. **Assistant City Manager's Report**

Robert Ogburn provided an extensive report on city activities:
Infrastructure Projects: The McGee Road, Bear Creek Road, water loop project is complete except for final road dressing and seeding. The city is beginning another water loop project from Smith Road to New Town Road to serve the Gumlog area and eliminate dead ends. The East Main drainage project will begin within the week with all supplies delivered.
Property Improvements: The "buzzard building" behind Tri-County Hardware was demolished, and a concrete pad will be poured for a dumpster to serve tenants along that road, improving the area's appearance.
Parking Issues: After the Drinking Depot's grand opening, public complaints about dangerous parking conditions led to bringing in a company to assess the parking lot. They will resurface and remark the lot to improve traffic flow and safety, maintaining the same number of spaces.
Recreation: He and the mayor met with the recreation league for a productive discussion about ballpark cooperation. A small green building near the batting cages in disrepair will be demolished to create additional parking spaces, as parking remains an ongoing issue they're working to address.
Fire Department: The fire department submitted their Christmas parade policy as requested, which Ogburn reviewed and found satisfactory. He will distribute it to council for review.
Scout Hut: Estimates for exterior improvements have been sent to the mayor, with work to begin when weather improves, expected to take 1-2 weeks at minimal cost.

Audit: The city audit is nearly complete with indications that everything looks good, with final results pending.
Upcoming Events: Steel Works will hold their grand opening ribbon cutting on March 19th at 11 AM. A water summit is scheduled for April 16th at 6 PM to inform constituents about upcoming water treatment plant and wastewater projects, timeline, and funding, hosted by DCCM (formerly Peoples and Quickley).

9. **Final Comments**
Mayor Umbehant asked for final comments from council and citizens. Hearing none, the meeting was adjourned.

10. **Adjourn**
The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

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Courtney Umbehant, Chairman Barbara Busby, Assistant City Clerk