CITY OF LAVONIA COUNCIL

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

February 9, 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: City Manager – Charles Cawthon
Assistant City Manager – Robert Ogburn
Assistant City Clerk – Barbara Busby
DDA Director – Ashley Umbehant

1. **Welcome and Call to Order:**
   Mayor Courtney Umbehant called the February 9, 2026, Regular Council Meeting to order at 5:30 PM.
2. **Invocation / Pledge:**
   Council Member Jeremy Madden led the invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.
3. **Consent Agenda Items:**
   a) Confirmation of Quorum
   b) Approval of February Meeting Agenda
   c) Approval of Minutes – January 5, 2026, Regular Meeting and January 30 & 31 Retreat
   d) Acceptance of January 2026 Financial Report

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

4. **Building Permit Fee Schedule Update**
   Mayor Umbehant noted that the building permit fee schedule had been submitted to Council for review prior to the meeting. There were two changes to the schedule:
   Trade permits were increased from $75 to $125 per permit, aligning with industry standards.
   A reinspection fee of $125 was established for failed inspections that require a revisit to the site.
   No questions were raised by the Council regarding the proposed changes.
   Council Member Jeremy Madden moved to approve the building permit fee schedule. Council Member Eddie Floyd seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

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5. **GTIB Downtown Streetscape Improvements 2026 Resolution**

Mayor Umbehant presented a resolution related to the ARC streetscape project for which the city had been awarded a grant. The resolution was required as part of an application for an additional grant that would help with the city's match portion of the ARC grant. The application fee was $250.

Council Member Eddie Floyd moved to adopt the resolution for the GTIB Downtown Streetscape Improvements. Council Member Andrew Murphy seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

6. **Legal:**

a) ***Contract with Bureau of Veritas for Building Inspections***

Assistant City Manager, Robert Ogburn, explained that Bureau Veritas had previously operated in the city before SafeBuilt. The change in contract was requested due to complaints about SafeBuilt's customer service, including difficulty making contact and unnecessary document requests that extended permit processing times.

Benefits of the new contract with Bureau Veritas included:

A revenue-sharing arrangement that would save the city money

Better local control over permits

Reduced costs for both customers and the city

More efficient processing, especially for commercial projects where delays are costly

The contract would be for one year, with annual renewals.

Council Member Michael Schulman moved to approve the contract with Bureau Veritas for building inspections. Council Member Jeremy Madden seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

b) **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, map parcel 053/179. Existing zoning is HB, Highway Business, in unincorporated Franklin County. Proposed uses:, retail store.

Mayor Umbehant opened a public hearing for zoning. No public comments were made. The zoning public hearing was closed, and the annexation public hearing was opened. No public comments were made. Following the close of the public hearings, it was noted that the Planning and Zoning Commission had voted unanimously to recommend approval.

Council Member Andrew Murphy moved to zone the property B-2 Local Business District if annexed into the city. Council Member Michael Schulman seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Mayor Umbehant opened a public hearing for the annexation.

Council Member Jeremy Madden moved to approve the annexation of this property as a first read. Council Member Andrew Murphy seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

c) **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 opened a public hearing for zoning. No public comments were made. The zoning public hearing was closed, and the annexation public hearing was opened. No public comments were made. Following the close of the public hearings, it was noted that the Planning and Zoning Commission had voted unanimously to recommend approval.

Council Member Eddie Floyd moved to zone the property B-2 Local Business District if annexed into the city. Council Member Andrew Murphy seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Council Member Michael Schulman moved to approve the annexation of the property as a first read. Council Member Eddie Floyd seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

d) **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

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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**.**

Applicant Britt McConnell explained that the proposed electronic billboard would be located on the northwest corner of the property near the car wash. He noted that it would be approximately 30% smaller than the double-stack billboard across from Chick-fil-A. The billboard would make advertising more affordable and help visitors know what businesses are available when they exit the interstate.
Additional features mentioned included:
The sign would be part of the Amber Alert system
It would automatically dim at night
It would include fail-safes to shut down if malfunctions occur
It would be regulated by GDOT
The monopole structure would place the bottom of the sign about 15 feet high with the sign extending 9 feet upward from there
Mayor Umbehant opened a public hearing for this property. There were no public comments. After the public hearing, Mayor Umbehant noted that the Planning and Zoning Commission had recommended the variance.
Council Member Andrew Murphy moved to approve the sign variance as a first read. Council Member Eddie Floyd seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

7. **Mayor's Report**
   - The PROPEL meeting held on January 20th had excellent attendance, particularly from city residents. The Mayor appreciated citizen participation. Based on feedback from the PROPEL meeting, the Mayor plans to schedule 2 "Meet the Mayor" events in the coming year where citizens could ask questions and discuss concerns.
   - The Mayor and Assistant City Manager Ogburn had recently met with Georgia DOT regarding upcoming projects. The proposed bypass around downtown Lavonia has been postponed until approximately 2044.
   - The City Council's annual retreat had been one of the longest sessions ever held, with productive planning discussions. The Mayor thanked the Council for their involvement and the staff for their assistance.
   - Several city representatives had participated in "Scrub Day" at Saint Mary's Sacred Heart Hospital, providing a behind-the-scenes look at hospital operations. The Mayor expressed appreciation to the Sacred Heart team and Council Member Michael Schulman for arranging the visit.
   - The Mayor acknowledged Fire Chief Adam Dawkins and his department for their excellent response to several recent structure fires in the community.
   - The Mayor announced that the first meeting of the Mayor's Council for People of All Abilities would be held the following night at 6 PM at City Hall. This initiative aims to connect education, businesses, and the community to improve life for people of all ability levels, including those with special needs. Creative Enterprises would be attending, along with representatives from special education departments at local schools and technical colleges.

8. **Assistant City Manager's Report**
   The Assistant City Manager thanked Council for the retreat experience, noting it was his first one. He reported that several items discussed at the retreat were already in progress, including roads, canopies, and striping. He commended both the police and fire departments for their excellent work during recent busy periods, noting that the fire department had responded professionally to several middle-of-the-night calls. He

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emphasized that the administration supports both departments and encouraged them to reach out if they needed anything.

9. **Final Comments**
   A member of the public asked what retail store would be going in on Highway 17, to which it was confirmed that it would be a Tractor Supply.

10. **Adjourn**
    The meeting was adjourned at 5:55 p.m.

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Courtney Umbehant, Chairman Barbara Busby, Assistant City Clerk