CITY OF LAVONIA COUNCIL

REGULAR MEETING – MINUTES

MAY 4, 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
City Clerk – Angela V. Greer
Asst. City Clerk – Barbara Busby
Mainstreet - Ashley Rose Umbehant
Deputy Police Chief – Daniel Carson

Item 1. **Call to Order**:
Mayor Courtney Umbehant called the meeting to order and welcomed those attending, offering a special welcome to the Boy Scouts present as guests of the Council.

Item 2. **Invocation and Pledge of Alliance:** led by Councilman Michael Schulman, followed by Pledge of Allegiance.

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.

a) Confirmation of Quorum.

b) Approval of the May Meeting Agenda as presented.

c) Approval of Minutes: April 6, 2026 - Regular Council Meeting as presented.

d) Acceptance of the April 2026 Financial Report as presented.

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Item 4. **Professional Municipal Clerks Week Proclamation:**

Mayor Umbehant introduced a proclamation recognizing Professional Municipal Clerks Week. He took the opportunity to express appreciation for City Clerk Angie Greer, who has served the City of Lavonia for nearly 40 years, and Assistant City Clerk Barbara Busby, noting that both play a vitally important role in the continuity of city government.

Motion made by Andrew Murphy, seconded by Eddie Floyd to accept the Professional Municipal Clerks Week Proclamation. Motion carried.

Item 5. **Caudell Drive Master Meter:**

Ms. Alina Nicoara, owner and manager of the duplex properties on Caudell Drive, appeared before the Council to formally oppose the water department's plan to transition the property from 16 individual water meters to a single master meter. She submitted a signed petition from herself and her residents for the record.

Ms. Nicoara presented four primary arguments against the conversion. First, she contended that removing individual meters destroys the incentive for water conservation, citing data suggesting water waste can increase by up to 30% without individual accountability, and that the change would contradict the spirit of the Georgia Water Stewardship Act, which promotes sub-metering. Second, she argued that master metering is inequitable, as it forces low-usage residents—such as seniors on fixed incomes—to subsidize the higher water consumption of neighbors. Third, she noted that the property is already fully plumbed for individual meters and suggested that if the city's concern is the cost of reading or maintaining older meters, she would be open to discussing a modernization plan or a meter-read fee rather than consolidation. Fourth, she raised concerns about leak detection, arguing that 16 individual meters allow a leak to be pinpointed quickly, whereas a single master meter could allow a significant underground leak to go undetected for months. She also raised the specific question of who would be responsible for maintaining the underground water line infrastructure between the master meter and each existing unit, referencing a prior underground leak in January that had been repaired by the city.

Mayor Umbehant responded on behalf of the city, explaining that the policy rationale for master meters on rental properties stems from the city being left with unpaid water bills when tenants vacate. He framed the policy as placing financial liability where it appropriately belongs—with the property owner rather than the city. He clarified that as a matter of standard practice, the city maintains water lines up to the meter, with responsibility for lines beyond the meter belonging to the customer. He acknowledged the concern about shared costs among tenants and noted that sub-metering on the owner's side of the master meter remains an option.

Council Member Andrew Murphy requested that the matter be brought to the upcoming work session for a broader discussion—both regarding this specific property and the city's master meter policy as a whole. Mayor Umbehant confirmed both topics would be added to the work session agenda.

Item 6. **Legal: N/A**

Item 7. **Mayor's Report:**

Mayor Umbehant delivered several updates. He reported that the city's Spring Festival drew approximately 6,100 visitors and received widespread praise for the manner in which Lavonia hosted the event. He credited AGLC for bringing visitors to the city with the recent RenFest.

The Mayor noted that he and City Manager Ogburn have held multiple meetings with a retail strategies firm as part of an ongoing effort to diversify retail options for residents and strengthen Lavonia's commercial base.

He announced that the Mayor's Council on People of All Abilities would hold its third meeting the following evening at 6:00 PM at the City Hall, and he extended an open invitation to the public. He described the council's mission as identifying ways to promote inclusivity and ensure equitable access to daily life for individuals with special needs.

On the subject of water infrastructure, the Mayor reported that the city has held two recent stakeholder meetings—one with customers and one with Hart County Water and Sewer Authority, Franklin County, and city engineers—to share the timeline for upcoming water plant upgrades. He outlined three phases of capital improvement. Phase 1 and Phase 2 are each $5 million projects with approximately $4 million in loan forgiveness built into each, meaning the city's local cost obligation for both phases combined is approximately $2 million. Phase 3, expected to be completed in approximately five years, will be fully funded at no cost to citizens and will increase the city's water production capacity from approximately 2.4 million gallons per day to nearly 6 million gallons per day. Mayor Umbehant characterized this expansion as sufficient to address projected water shortages in Lavonia, Franklin County, and Hart County, and accommodate future growth in the region. He attributed the city's strong infrastructure position to the vision of prior leaders and reaffirmed this Council's commitment to continuing that legacy.

Mayor Umbehant also reported on the city's participation in a UGA Propel Program - planning initiative in which student scholars surveyed every city in Franklin County. He noted that scholars placed Lavonia last on their tour specifically because they believed the city already had a strong command of its own needs. He shared that the scholars ultimately used the Lavonia model as the framework they applied to their countywide recommendations, calling it a significant compliment to city staff and leadership.

Finally, the Mayor referenced an ongoing video series on his Facebook page in which he is breaking down the Georgia Power Economic Development Community Index report as it pertains to Franklin County. He stated that the series is intended to be objective and data-driven, with a subsequent discussion of actionable solutions to follow once all videos have been published. He expressed hope that the effort would foster unity around shared challenges rather than the divisions that frequently characterize local discourse.

Item 8. **City Manager's Report:**

City Manager Robert Ogburn provided operational updates across several areas. He highlighted the recent implementation of a work order management system for water, sewer, and streets departments, which has improved routing efficiency and daily task coordination. He reported that the system logged 55 water-related work orders in the prior month—ranging from leaks to meter repairs—as well as 31 garbage and streets-related work orders covering pothole patching and roadside cleanup. He noted the system is also being used to identify meters that have not registered readings, enabling earlier intervention on potential issues.

He also reported that work on the Smith Road water line expansion is underway, with approximately 1,800 feet of pipe already in the ground out of a total estimated project length of 5,200 feet. He also noted that clearing work has commenced on East Main Street in connection with an ongoing storm drainage improvement project.

On public safety, Mr. Ogburn highlighted that the Lavonia Police Department recently underwent an on-site review for police accreditation and recorded zero noncompliance issues, effectively passing the assessment with distinction. He noted this is a significant achievement that reflects the department's commitment to meeting nationwide standards of law enforcement practice.

Mr. Ogburn reported that the city's website is being actively updated, with staff member Maria Roberts leading content efforts including fire safety information, drought awareness related to the current Level 1 drought status, project highlights such as the Smith Road water line work, and employee spotlights. He encouraged Council members and the Mayor to submit any informational items they would like to see on the website.

Item 9. **Final Comments:**

Council Member Michael Schulman recognized International Firefighters Day, expressing gratitude to both past and present firefighters—including volunteers—for their service locally and across the country.

No members of the public came forward with comments.

Item 10. **Adjourn:**

Mayor Umbehant adjourned the meeting at 5:54 P.M.

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Upcoming Meetings:

May 11, 2026 – Work Session (If needed)

June 1, 2026 – City of Lavonia – Regular Council Meeting @ 5:30 P.M.

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Courtney Umbehant, Mayor	Angela V. Greer, City Clerk

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