

**MEETING MINUTES
REGULAR SESSION
MARCH 11, 2025**

The Council for the City of Covington held a work session meeting on **Tuesday, March 11, 2025, at 6:30 p.m.** in the Council Chambers of City Hall located at 333 W. Locust Street, Covington, Virginia.

Mayor William E. Carson Jr. called the meeting to order. Mayor Carson asked City Clerk Amber N. Nicely to show that all Council members were present.

Council members in attendance were Mayor Carson; Vice Mayor Fred Forbes III; Councilwoman Susan S. Crowder; Councilman Raymond C. Hunter; and Councilwoman Susan S. Wolfe. Also in attendance were City Manager Allen Dressler and City Attorney Mark Popovich.

The Invocation was delivered by Pastor Stephanie Clark, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Carson and the Council thanked Pastor Clark for her invocation.

CONSENT TO MINUTES

Mayor Carson requested a motion to approve the past meeting minutes. Vice Mayor Forbes motioned to approve the following agendas. Councilman Hunter seconded the motion. The Council approved all agendas with no corrections.

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| 1. Called a meeting for a reorganization of the Council. | January 10, 2025 |
| 2. Regular meeting. | January 14, 2025 |
| 3. Work Session meeting. | February 04, 2025 |

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Covington City resident Charles Anderson addressed the Council on several concerns that he has for the City of Covington. Mr. Anderson is a member of Covington’s Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1033. He was recently appointed to the position of Recruitment Officer for VFW Post 1033. Mr. Anderson warned the Council that VFW Post 1033 is at risk of closing due to the lack of membership. He is asking the Council for assistance in getting community engagement to encourage growth in membership. Mr. Anderson spoke about his concerns about the City’s war memorials and monuments. He advised that the war memorial at the Alleghany County Courthouse is in dire need of repairs. Mr. Anderson asked the Council to assist in helping take care of the area’s war memorials and monuments. Mr. Anderson stated that these memorials are important and need to be taken care of in order to assist in educating future generations about past foreign wars such as Desert Storm, Afghanistan, and the Iraq wars. Mr. Anderson has concerns that the Alleghany Highlands Industrial Heritage and Technology Discovery Center will shut down with the upcoming retirement at the end of 2025 of the VFW Post 1033’s Chaplain, Dr. Paul Linkenhoker. Mr. Anderson spoke about his concerns about the lack of adequate housing and jobs in Covington. He hopes to see the future of Covington flourish and bring in more jobs. Mr. Anderson also talked about his frustrations with the citizens using social media as a way to voice their opinions instead of taking the proper actions to show up to Council meetings and address the Council themselves at meetings. Mr. Anderson stated, “The Citizens need to show up and speak up. This place should be full of people with a line out the door, with all the complaints I see on Facebook.” Mr. Anderson thanked the Council for listening to his concerns. Mr. Dressler assured Mr. Anderson that he would have the help of the City Manager. Mr. Dressler asked Mr. Anderson to assist with identifying which memorials need repairs. Mr. Dressler said that he understands that Dr. Linkenhoker plans to retire at the end of the year. Mr. Dressler assured Mr. Anderson that there are plans in motion that will help prevent any possibility of the Discovery Center closing. Mayor Carson also assured Mr. Anderson that the City of Covington is already working on plans for the Discovery Center and that the City of Covington will not allow it to close. Mr. Dressler informed Mr. Anderson that the plans for the future of the Discovery Center will make it bigger and better than before. Mr. Dressler thanked Mr. Anderson for speaking and reassured Mr. Anderson that he had the support of the city.

PRESENTATION BY CHIEF OF POLICE, CHRIS SMITH

Mayor Carson welcomed Chief of Police, Chris Smith for his presentation.

Chief Smith advised Mayor Carson that Mr. Dressler would start the presentation.

Mr. Dressler calls up to the front of the Council, Covington City Police Officer, Sergeant Justin Jefferson. Mr. Dressler explained that Sergeant Jefferson is changing careers after being with the Covington Police Department since June 2013. Mr. Dressler spoke on how long he has been involved in Youth Sports as a coach and mentor to many of the area’s youth for a very long time. Mr. Dressler visited the times that he had coached and worked with Sergeant Jefferson. Mr. Dressler

**MEETING MINUTES
REGULAR SESSION
MARCH 11, 2025**

stated, "He is one of my kids and I'm proud to say that." Mr. Dressler felt it was important to honor one of his kids, and then he presented Sergeant Jefferson with a whistle. Mr. Dressler explained the meaning of the whistle and recounted a time when Sergeant Jefferson was a teen and a Lifeguard at the Covington City Pool. Mr. Dressler thanked Sergeant Jefferson for his dedication and time to the Covington PD. Mr. Dressler concludes his portion of the presentation and welcomes up Chief Smith.

Chief Smith starts his portion of the presentation. He explains that Sergeant Jefferson was unable to get recognition for his 5 years of service due to Sergeant Jefferson being in the Police Academy at the time of his 5 years of service. Chief Smith presented Sergeant Jefferson with a 10 Years of Service Award and Pin. Chief Smith explains the importance of the pin. The giving of the pin is a new tradition that the Covington Police Department started recently as a way to help retain Officers at the Covington PD. Chief Smith spoke about the tragedy of losing fellow Covington City Police Officer Caleb D. Ogilvie. Chief Smith talked about the challenges that an event like this can have on the mental health of the people around. Chief Smith shared with the Council that a challenging life event prompted Sergeant Jefferson to retire from law enforcement and seek a new career path. Chief Smith then presents Sergeant Jefferson with a 12-Year Service Award.

Chief Smith read the award.

"We want to thank you for your 11 years of service to the City of Covington, citizens, and the Covington Division of Police. For the sacrifices that you made through the course of your career. We also thank you for the care and attention you gave to those you came into contact with on a daily basis. You will always be missed as a member of our team and will never be forgotten. Farewell. Godspeed in your next chapter. -Your family at the Covington Division of Police."

Sergeant Jefferson emotionally thanked everyone.

Chief Smith asked the Council to adopt an ordinance that grants tax exemptions on real estate property of Widows of fallen First Responders. Chief Smith informed the Council that this ordinance is similar to the one he and the Town of Clifton Forge enacted to benefit the Widow of Fallen Officer Ogilvie, who resides in the Town of Clifton Forge. Chief Smith felt that it was important to ask for an installment of the ordinance this week because it is the 3rd anniversary of the death of Officer Ogilvie. Mayor Carson informed Chief Smith that the city is already in the process of working on getting the ordinance in front of the Council to vote on. Mayor Carson explains that the ordinance has to have a public hearing before the Council can vote. Mayor Carson informed Chief Smith that the ordinance's public hearing will take place at the next Council meeting on Tuesday, April 01, 2025. Chief Smith thanked the Council and concluded his presentation.

PROCLAMATION IN RESPECT AND IN MEMORY OF ROBERT K. BENNETT, II

Mayor Carson asked Mr. Dressler to read the Proclamation. Mr. Dressler called up Mr. Bennett's family. His family, who were in attendance, were his wife, Cynthia (Cindy) Beamer Bennett, daughter Madison King Bennett, and his sister Cynthia Bennett Paxton. Mr. Dressler started off the Proclamation, "As we gather in recognizing our dear beloved Rob," Mr. Dressler stated, "It was always wonderful to work with someone who liked to work with kids as much as we did." Mr. Dressler revisits times with Mr. Bennett and how influential Mr. Bennett was on children. Mr. Dressler said Mr. Bennett was a lifelong area educator and served as the former Covington City Mayor. Mr. Bennett was more than an educator; he cared for the kids and the area. He was a great friend to many. Mr. Dressler thanked former City Clerk Becky Scott for assisting with drafting the Proclamation for Mr. Bennett. Mr. Dressler reads the following Proclamation dedicated to Mr. Bennett.

"Proclamation In Respect and Memory of Robert (Rob) K. Bennett, II

WHEREAS, Rob Bennett dedicated his time, talent, and leadership through serving citizens of the City of Covington as Mayor and City Council Member; as well as supporting the Commonwealth of Virginia and the United States Government; and WHEREAS, Rob Bennett was totally devoted to the staff, students, families, and supporters of Covington High School and Jeter Watson Intermediate School, as well as the Covington City School Board and staff, as their teacher, mentor, principal, advocate, and friend; and WHEREAS, Rob Bennett was a passionate and energetic advocate for the athletic and academic teams, coaches, and supporters of Covington High School, where he found great joy in coaching, guiding, and mentoring many; and WHEREAS, Rob Bennett was a civic-minded individual who served on local boards, such as the Alleghany Highland Regional Library and Reassessment Board for the City of Covington; as well as serving his church, Edgemont Presbyterian, as Deacon and a member of the choir; and WHEREAS, Rob Bennett believed in fighting for fairness above all, whether on the local, state, or national level; NOW, THEREFORE, members of the Council of the City of Covington, Virginia, do hereby recognize ROB BENNETT on this 11th day of March, 2025, for his educational and community legacy, hard work, and unceasing dedication to the betterment of the City of Covington, our citizens, and our youth." Mr. Dressler concludes the reading of the Proclamation for Mr. Bennett. There was applause and a standing ovation from everyone in Council Chambers. Mr. Dressler hugged and thanked Mr. Bennett's family.

ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

1. Ordinance O-25-02 Tax Exemption for Widows of Fallen First Responders. Motioned by Vice Mayor Forbes to table until a public notice hearing has been advertised. **The Council will hold the public hearing at the Council work session on Tuesday, April 1, 2025.**
2. Resolution R-25-06 Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) (Reimbursement received from FEMA – No City Match). Vice Mayor Forbes read the grant information. Vice Mayor Forbes motioned to approve. All in favor, “Aye” from the Council.
3. Resolution R-25-07 Economic Development – Potential Joint Purchase of Property. Vice Mayor Forbes read the resolution. Mayor Carson motioned for approval. Councilman Hunter seconded the motion. With an all-in-favor “aye” from the Council.
4. Resolution R-25-08 Columbia Gas Road Repair Reimbursement. Vice Mayor Forbes motioned to add R-25-08 to the meeting Agenda. Mayor Carson read that Columbia Gas will be giving \$372,474.08 to fix recently patched roads. Vice Mayor Forbes motioned to approve. Councilman Hunter seconded the motion with an all-in-favor “aye” from the Council.

APPOINTMENTS

Mayor Carson began the Appointments portion by explaining that there are different committees that each Council member will become a representative of.

1. League of Older Americans Advisory Council- (expired December 31, 2024)

Councilwoman Wolfe motioned to **appoint Councilman Hunter to the League of Older Americans Advisory Council.** Vice Mayor Forbes seconded the motion. With an all-in-favor “aye” from the Council.

2. Alleghany Highlands Chamber of Commerce & Tourism – (expires December 31, 2026)

Vice Mayor Forbes motioned to **appoint Councilman Hunter to the Alleghany Highlands Chamber of Commerce & Tourism.** Councilwoman Crowder seconded the motion. With an all-in-favor “aye” from the Council.

3. CLEO – Chief Local Elected Officials Consortium – Workforce Development – (expired when term on Council ended, December 31, 2024.)

Councilman Hunter motioned to **appoint Vice Mayor Forbes to CLEO – Chief Local Elected Officials Consortium.** Mayor Carson seconded the motion. With an all-in-favor “aye” from the Council.

4. Alleghany Highlands Social Services – (expires June 30, 2026)

Vice Mayor Forbes motioned to **appoint Councilwoman Wolfe to the Alleghany Highlands Social Services board.** Councilman Hunter seconded the motion. With an all-in-favor “aye” from the Council.

5. OTC – Olde Town Covington – (votes are ongoing and do not expire)

Councilman Hunter motioned to **appoint Councilwoman Crowder to OTC – Olde Town Covington.** Vice Mayor Forbes seconded the motion. With an all-in-favor “aye” from the Council.

6. Roanoke Valley Alleghany Regional Commission CEDS – Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy- (expires June 30, 2027)

Vice Mayor Forbes motioned to appoint **Mayor Carson to the Roanoke Valley Alleghany Regional Commission CEDS – Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.** Councilman Hunter seconded the motion. With an all-in-favor “aye” from the Council.

7. Roanoke Regional Partnership – (expires December 31, 2027)

Vice Mayor Forbes motioned to **appoint Mayor Carson to the Roanoke Regional Partnership.** Councilman Hunter seconded the motion. With an all-in-favor “aye” from the Council.

8. Regional TAP Board – (expires July 31, 2025) (Mayor Carson currently serves on the local TAP board.

Vice Mayor Forbes requested to be **appointed as the Regional TAP Board representative.** Motion seconded by Councilman Hunter. With an all-in-favor “aye” from the Council.

9. Appointment of CPMT Parent Representative (State policy for local governing body to appoint) (currently Corey Bowles is the representative)

MEETING MINUTES
REGULAR SESSION
MARCH 11, 2025

The current CPMT representative, **Corey Bowles**, is requesting to remain the representative. Motioned by Councilwoman Wolfe. Seconded by Councilman Hunter. With an all-in-favor “aye” from the Council.

10. To appoint a member to the IDA – Industrial Development Authority. Mayor Carson explains that no one has volunteered to be a member of the IDA. The representative cannot be a Council member. Mayor Carson requested that the IDA appointment discussion be continued at the next meeting on **Tuesday, April 01, 2025, for the public hearing**. Councilwoman Wolfe asked to have the IDA explained. Mr. Dressler informed that the IDA is an entity that promotes Economic development by providing support to businesses. Mr. Dressler used the 410 on Main as an example of a type of project that the IDA manages. If allowed, **Councilwoman Wolfe volunteered to be the representative of the IDA**. Vice Mayor Forbes motioned to appoint. Councilman Hunter seconded the motion. All in favor “aye” from the Council. Mr. Dressler explained to Councilwoman Wolfe that the IDA meets quarterly at the Alleghany County Government Building. Mr. Dressler would advise Councilwoman Wolfe when those meetings will occur.

Councilman Hunter asked Mayor Carson when the Alleghany Highlands Chamber of Commerce & Tourism meets. Mayor Carson advised Councilman Hunter that Becky Nuckols has the schedules.

Mayor Carson advised Councilman Hunter that the next meeting for the **Alleghany Highlands Chamber of Commerce is Tuesday, March 25, 2025, at noon** at the old Sona Bank. Now known as 5 Sides. Located at 511 Main Street, Clifton Forge, VA 24422.

CITY MANAGER

Mr. Dressler begins his report by thanking the Mayor, Vice Mayor, Council members, and the members of the audience that was in attendance. Mr. Dressler advises the Council that there are a lot of great things happening in the City of Covington, and he is proud to be standing before the Council and reporting all the new things going on. Mr. Dressler informed the council that last week, we welcomed a new employee on board. Ms. Amber Nicely is the new City Clerk. Mr. Dressler extended his heartfelt gratitude to Ms. Nuckols for stepping up and taking the Interim City Clerk position for the past 9 months. Dressler recognized Ms. Nuckols's service as Interim City Clerk by giving her an arrangement of flowers and a card to show his appreciation. Mr. Dressler said, “Becky is a wonderful person and a wonderful employee. Allen Dressler is not afraid to tell you how fortunate he is to get to work with Becky.” Mr. Dressler is looking forward to working with Amber and meeting in the afternoons to put together Agendas that will move projects forward smoothly. Mr. Dressler reminded the Council that a few weeks ago, a Proclamation was passed making the month of April the “Clean Month” for the area. Mr. Dressler extended his appreciation for the Proclamation. Mr. Dressler extended a thank you to the staff in Central Accounting for adding a schedule of events and information for the City of Covington on the back of utility bills. Spring Cleanup will take place on the East side of the tracks from April 28-May 2, 2025, and May 5-9, 2025, for the West side of the tracks. During these dates, area residents' refuse can be picked up and taken to the landfill as a complimentary bi-annual service to the residents of Covington, VA., from the City of Covington. Hydro-flushing will occur once again on March 30th through April 11th, 2025. Hydro-flushing is done twice a year. Hydro-flushing is crucial to the Fire Department. This ensures that there isn't any debris or issues with the city's Fire Hydrants. Mayor Carson and Vice Mayor Forbes are looking into doing quarterly meetings again with the local governments. They will be working with the Town of Clifton Forge Mayor Jeff Irvine to make arrangements. Quarterly meetings will be a great opportunity to meet, discuss areas of concern, and share ideas. Mr. Dressler invited the council members to visit the Water Treatment Plant, the Waste Water Treatment Plant, and the Landfill. May 10th, 2025, will hold a bike safety program at Jackson River Sport Complex. The Director of the Developmental Services Department of the City of Covington, Eric Tyree, and Tony Smallwood, the Building Enforcement Officer, have been busy with the multiple building projects that are in progress and making sure residential property upkeep is enforced. The new Casey Field House is coming right along. Lockers, building siding, decorations, and final touches are coming soon. The Hotel Collins Park had a wooden board privacy fence installed overtop to hide the fabric fence. The Mini Golf Course is coming along well at the Jackson River Sports Complex. Concrete cutting has started at the Mid City Mall Parking lot. Drainage will be tapped into the drain system and not the sewer system. The South Alleghany Avenue, Beech Street to Pine Street sidewalk project is almost ready to be advertised to receive bids. This weekend, March 14-16, 2025, we will welcome 30-plus teams to play on 7 athletic fields for a Travel Baseball tournament. New signage has been installed at the corner of Monroe Street and Main Street to identify Virginia Main Street. Currently working with the Virginia Tech Community Design Assistance Center at no charge to the city, completed a market study on the former Edgemont School building. The school is currently working on a conceptual design for Edgemont School. Councilwoman Crowder asked if there were any other areas planned for sidewalk projects in the area. Mr. Dressler advised that they will start on July 1st, 2025. This year South Alleghany sidewalk project is a combined joint effort with the Department of Transportation and the City of Covington. Councilman Hunter informed Mr. Dressler that he saw the new tenants of the former Applebee's building cleaning up the property.

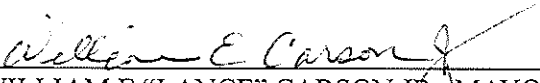
MEETING MINUTES
REGULAR SESSION
MARCH 11, 2025

NEW BUSINESS

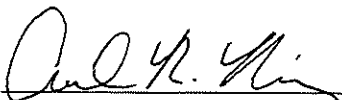
Mayor Carson invited everyone out to the Baseball Tournament this weekend to help support the two local teams that are competing.

Mayor Carson has informed the Council members to attempt to attend any ribbon cuttings of the Alleghany Highlands Chamber of Commerce that occur in the City of Covington.

With no further business to come before the Council, the meeting was recessed until **Tuesday, March 18, 2025, at 6:00 pm with a called Joint meeting with the Alleghany Highlands Public Schools.**


WILLIAM E "LANCE" CARSON JR., MAYOR

ATTEST:


RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY:
AMBER N. NICELY, CITY CLERK