CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING

City Council Chambers

Monday, March 9, 2026 at 7:00 PM

MINUTES

Members Present

Mayor Becky S. Smith; Council Members Bill Whitmire, Allen Hook, Brenda Boyd, and Manny Tsambouniery were present. City Manager Josh Ross and City Attorney, David Smith were also present. Council members, Nellie Floyd and Chris Harmon were absent. A quorum was established.

Call to Order, Prayer, Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Smith called the meeting to order. Rev. Tripp Hord, Lead Pastor of First United Methodist Church, addressed Council and shared that members of the Bessemer City Ministerial Alliance had recently met to discuss several incidents affecting the community. Rev. Hord stated that local faith leaders wished to come together in support of the community and offer prayer during this difficult time. Rev. Hord then led those in attendance in a prayer for the community. Mayor Smith led the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Adjustment and Approval of the Agenda

By motion of Brenda Boyd and unanimous vote, the March agenda was approved with no revisions.

Special Presentation

Recognition of Public Safety Director-

Mayor Smith and City Council recognized Public Safety Director, Tom Ellis. This is Mr. Ellis' last council meeting as he will be retiring on April 1, 2026. Mayor encouraged the audience to applaud him for his 13 years of service to the City.

Student Appreciation- Students from Bessemer City High School, Bessemer City Middle School, Bessemer City Central Elementary School, Bessemer City Primary School, and Tryon Elementary were recognized by their principals and City Council as part of the Student Appreciation Program:

Mrs. Doneen Johnson, Principal of Bessemer City High School, and Mayor Smith, recognized the following students of the month: Leah Owens – 9th Grade Representative; Mackenzie Sevearance – 10th Grade Representative; Akira Montanez - 11th Grade Representative; and Carlito Perez – 12th Grade Representative.

Dr. Rebecca Wilson, Principal of Bessemer City Middle School, and Mayor Smith, recognized the following students of the month: Priscilla M. Wallace– 6th Grade representative; Ethan Tallent– 7th Grade representative; Tyshe'yana June – 8th Grade representative; and Kevin Cruz Urbana - 8th grade ENCORE representative.

Ms. Shannon Williams, 1st Grade Administrator of Bessemer City Primary and Mayor Smith, recognized the following students of the month: Ellie Bardsley - 3rd Grade representative; Sky Morton - 4th Grade representative; and Grayson Araujo - 5th Grade representative.

Ms. Shannon Williams, 1st Grade Administrator of Bessemer City Primary and Mayor Smith, recognized the following students of the month: Layla Nixon - Kindergarten representative; Khasmir Wallace - 1st Grade representative; and Madison Lobos- 2nd Grade representative

Mrs. Melissa Knick, Principal of Tryon Elementary and Mayor Smith, recognized the following students of the month: Dylan Limon Zopiyaxtle – Kindergarten representative; Piper Harmon – 1st Grade representative; Carter Williams – 2nd Grade representative; Maria Vasquez-Torres – 3rd Grade representative; Layliana Sewell Giles – 4th Grade representative; and Kaiden Carpenter – 5th Grade representative.

Request to Speak/Opportunity for Public Comment

Mayor Smith opened the floor for public comment. The following came forth:

- Tosha White of Helping Inc: Ms. Tosha White addressed Council and wished Bessemer City a happy belated birthday. She introduced herself as the founder and chair of the Gastonia Juneteenth Festival Committee and noted that the event was recognized by the City of Gastonia as a city event last year. Ms. White discussed the work of organizations assisting residents with access to affordable housing and referenced collaboration with community members including Tomeka Starr. Ms. White also spoke about the upcoming celebration of America's 250th anniversary and the importance of preserving and recognizing local history. She referenced the Vantine community and expressed interest in a collaborative place-making project that could include a bench, artwork, or other commemorative features at the Indian Springs park. Ms. White invited the city to participate in a collaborative community effort to create a lasting piece recognizing local history and heritage.

Consent Agenda
The following items on the Consent Agenda were unanimously approved by motion of Manny Tsambouniery:

1. **Approval of Minutes**: City Council will consider adopting the Regular Meeting minutes of the February 9, 2026 meeting.

2. **Approval of Minutes:** City Council will consider adopting Special Session Meeting minutes of the February 26, 2026 meeting.

3. **Approval of Minutes:** City Council will consider adopting Special Session Meeting minutes of the February 27, 2026 meeting.

4. **Street Closure-38th Annual Down Home Festival Ordinance**: City administration is requesting the temporary closure of the 100 Block of West Virginia, East Virginia, West Pennsylvania Avenue, and the 100 Block of North and South 12th Street for the 38th Annual Down Home Day Festival on Thursday, May 7th, Friday, May 8th and Saturday, May 9th, 2026.

5. **Street Closure-Alive! Concert Series 2026:** City administration is requesting the temporary closure of the 100 Block of West and East Virginia Avenue and the 100 Block of North and South 12th Street for the 2026 Alive! Concert Series on the 4th Friday of each month from April to October from the hours of 2:00PM-10:00PM.

Public Hearing – Day Care Text Amendments of the Land Development Code
As required by NCGS 160A-346, the City is required to hold a public hearing prior to adopting and amending any changes to Land Development Code (LDC). Mayor and Council wish to make changes to sections 2.7.B, table of uses, 2.8 additional standards, 10.2, use definitions of the LDC in regard to day care centers. Public notice of this public hearing was advertised in accordance of N.C.G.S. 160A-364.

By motion of Allen Hook and unanimous vote, the public hearing was opened at 7:44 PM.

Mayor Smith asked if there was anyone present to speak in favor of the text amendment. There was none.

Mayor Smith asked if there was anyone present to speak in opposition of the text amendment. There was none.

By motion of Brenda Boyd and unanimous vote, the public hearing was closed at 7:44 PM.

Ordinance to Amend the Land Development Code (LDC) (Day Care Text Amendment) 2.7.B, 2.8,10.2
By motion of Allen Hook, and a 3-1 vote, with Manny Tsambouniery in opposition, the ordinance amending Land Development Code (LDC) chapter 2, section 7.B, chapter 2, section 8, and chapter 10, section 2 was adopted. A copy of this ordinance is available for citizen review.

Consistency & Reasonableness Statement (Day Care Text Amendment)
City Council considered a Consistency and Reasonableness Statement for the proposed text amendment package titled "Refining Day Care Zoning." Council found the amendments to be consistent with the Bessemer City Land Use Plan, as they support the goal of promoting a desirable place to live and work while encouraging walkable communities and reduced motor vehicle traffic as outlined in the Vision 2020 Land Use Plan. Council further determined the amendments are reasonable because they create opportunities for accessory and home-based day cares while preserving the rural, small-town character of Bessemer City and do not constitute a downzoning under N.C.G.S. §160D-601.

By motion of Brenda Boyd and unanimous vote, the Consistency and Reasonableness Statement was adopted by City Council.

Public Hearing – Petition for Voluntary Annexation (Caromont Family)
City Council held a public hearing to hear public comment regarding a voluntary annexation petition from Rewire Investments LLC (Caromont Family Medicine) for property located at tax parcel #215177 (0.73 acres).

By motion of Bill Whitmire and unanimous vote, the public hearing regarding the voluntary annexation was opened at 7:46 PM.

Mayor Smith asked if there was anyone present to speak in favor of the voluntary annexation. There was none.

Mayor Smith asked if there was anyone present to speak in opposition of the voluntary annexation. There was none.

By motion of Brenda Boyd and unanimous vote, the public hearing regarding the voluntary annexation was closed at 7:47 PM.

Ordinance to Extend The Corporate Limits of the City of Bessemer City, North Carolina
Per NCGS 160A-31, City Clerk Hayes provided a certificate of sufficiency for Council review regarding a petition received by Rewire Investments LLC. Public hearing notice of the annexation was published in the local newspaper for public inspection ten (10) days prior to public hearing on February 25, 2026.

By motion Allen Hook and unanimous vote, City Council adopted an ordinance extending the corporate limits of the City of Bessemer City to include property located at tax parcel #215177 (0.73 acres). A copy of this ordinance is available for citizen review.

Public Art Easement Agreement
By motion of Bill Whitmire and unanimous vote, a ten-year easement agreement to allow the installation of an Ella May Wiggins Committee (EMWC) public art piece in the downtown area commemorating Ella May Wiggins with SSSS Holdings Inc. (Sam Serrano) was approved.

Resolution - Accepting Funding Offer for Lead & Copper Service Find and Replace
By motion of Bill Whitmire and unanimous vote, the resolution formally accepting North Carolina Department of Environmental Quailty (NCDEQ) funding offer in the amount of $1,499,700 for the lead and copper service find and replace project was approved.

Resolution - Approving the Sale of Beer & Wine
Council considered a resolution to allow the sale of beer and wine by the Illusion Dance Troupe out of Belmont during the 38th Annual Down Home Festival and 2026 Alive! Concert & Cruise-In Series.

By motion of Manny Tsmabouniery and a 3-1 vote, with Brenda Boyd in opposition, the resolution approving the sale of beer and wine was adopted.

Adopt Proposed Pay Plan
By motion of Bill Whitmire and unanimous vote, the proposed pay plan created by consultant MAPS group during the pay and classification study was adopted.

Approval of 2% COLA for City Staff
Council Member Allen Hook inquired whether the adjustment would apply to Council members. He stated that he did not wish to include an increase for Council salaries. Mayor Smith noted that Council had previously chosen to forgo salary increases in past years. City Manager Ross confirmed that the increase was only for eligible employees.

By motion of Bill Whitmire and unanimous vote of City Council, a 2% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for all eligible employees, effective April 1, 2026, was approved. City Council also authorized the City Manager to implement all necessary payroll and budget adjustments to carry out the approved increase.

City Manager's Report
City Manager Josh Ross provided updates regarding the upcoming budget process, including the timeline and the continuation of budget work sessions beginning at 2:00 PM.

Mr. Ross reported that the Strategic Plan, which was facilitated by the Centralina Council of Governments (CCOG), will receive periodic updates and will now include quarterly reviews to track progress.

He also reminded Council of the Brownfields Assessment community meeting scheduled for March 17, which will provide residents with information regarding the project.

Mr. Ross highlighted the importance of volunteerism within the community and referenced Council's recent opportunity to view a Habitat for Humanity home, which was made possible through volunteer efforts.

Additionally, he noted that the Parks and Recreation Department is currently hiring lifeguards for the upcoming pool season.

Council General Discussion

Mayor Smith opened the floor for discussion from Council. Council Member Bill Whitmire discussed the increase in his city utility bill. He expressed concern regarding the City's late fee percentage and stated that many municipalities and utilities companies like Duke Energy charge approximately 1.5%. He requested that the topic be placed on March 2026 Work Session for discussion. Council Member Allen Hook shared remarks recognizing Chief Tom Ellis and thanked him for his years of service. He noted that they both previously served with the State Highway Patrol (SHP) and stated it had been an honor to see Chief Ellis sworn in and serve the community. Council Member Brenda Boyd also thanked Chief Ellis for his service and recognized his efforts to help her side of the community. Council Member Manny Tsambouniery expressed appreciation to Chief Ellis and noted concerns regarding speeding on Costner School Road, requesting that the matter of additional speed limit signage be considered in future budget discussions.

Chief Ellis thanked the Police Department, Fire Department, Fleet Services, and City staff for their support and teamwork during his tenure.

City Clerk Hydeia Hayes briefly discussed upcoming University of North Carolina School of Government training opportunities available to elected officials.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:02 PM, by motion of Nellie Floyd and unanimous vote.

_____ _____

Becky S. Smith, Mayor Hydeia Y. Hayes, City Clerk