

A workshop the Great Falls Town Council was held on September 9, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. Town Hall Community Center. Attending were Mayor Brantley, Council Members Gonzalez, McManus, and Eagle; Council Member Worthy, Dutton, and Craig was absent. Also attending was MASC Field Services Manager Charlie Barrineau.

Mr. Barrineau gave a new council orientation session.

- All Council Members need the same information.

- There are five types of meeting:

 - Regular council meeting: one a month is required by law

 - Special meeting: Workshops, Informal Meetings; they are open to public, but public is not by law open to comment.

 - Emergency meeting: should be rare in only incase of real emergencies. Most things can wait 24 hours.

 - Public Hearings: have to have public comments, but can have rules (ie. Time limits). Public Hearings are needed for budget, zoning, annexations)

 - Executive sessions: Personnel, investigative/security, economic development and contractual matters. Got to state on agenda what it regards.

- Council Members need to read the agenda packet before meeting so they can be prepared for the meeting. Agenda packets need to go out on the Friday before the meeting.

- Be on time for meetings. Silence phones and stay off of them, no side conversations during meetings. If an issue arises, don't call out each other at meetings. Speak one on one after the meeting. Don't finger or roll eyes. Body language is important. Council Members are under a microscope.

- A written Agenda must be posted 24 hrs in advance of meetings. Be careful with amending the agenda. If needed something not requiring a vote can be added with a two-thirds vote. If something that requires a vote is added, it needs to be done with a 24hr notice.

- A quorum is four members of council. Texts, emails, phone calls, social media of four members is considered an illegal meeting. Informative texts are okay, but no discussions.

- Ordinances are law and require two readings; some require public hearings (ie: selling land, annexing land, borrowing money, setting council salary)

- Resolutions are one vote. They are not law, and are opinion of council.

- Public Engagement is not mandated for all meetings. Council should decide rules for public participation and maintain order. Council takes comments under advisement to avoid commenting and responding to public comments.

- Council Members should be mindful and ask chair permission to gain the floor.

- Executive Sessions should be short. Get in and out. Public thinks you are hiding information. No minutes are taken and no votes are allowed. Executive session needs to stay between council members, and they

need to trust each other. Losing the trust of fellow council can make you become ineffective council members. The agenda must include a simple indication that action may be taken following executive session on matters discussed.

- An annual budget must be adopted by ordinance after a public hearing. Newspaper notice minimum 15 days in advance of public hearing. Complete independent financial audit. Submit annual Local Government Finance Report. There are penalties for non-compliance.

- There are limits to revenue. Property taxes are limited to CPI and population growth. New service or user fees require positive majority vote. Anytime fees or taxes are raised consult attorney.

- Revenues are restricted to pay costs of service or program for which fee is paid. State Accommodations Tax: Statutory restrictions and state definition of tourism related expenditures. Local Accommodations and Hospitality Taxes: Local definition of tourism related expenditures. Victims Assistance: Statutory restrictions and state definition of victims services. Meaning revenues must be spent in correct funds.

- Funds held in trust are state fines, fees, and assessments. Employee payroll deductions including retirement, deferred compensation, federal and state tax deductions, and insurance premiums. Government will come after any signaturist and can hold liens against them.

- General Restrictions on Public Funds.

 - Expenditure of Public Funds require public purpose.

 - Council salary increases are only by ordinance and motioned by outgoing council members before a general election and will go into effect after the election.

 - Council expenses should be reimbursed and no per-diems. Only pay actual expenses. Council policy determines what is reimbursable.

 - Violations may trigger criminal or state ethics to enforce action.

- As long as officials are acting within official capacity the Tort Claims Act will protect them from being held personally liable. Otherwise, officials can be personally sued.

- Freedom of Information Act: It is best to get requested basic and straight forward information out as quick as possible. Some information can be blacked out including bank account numbers. Meetings must be open. Anything put into writing is subject to a FOIA request. Cannot restrict social media if you've posted that you are an elected official and you are posting town business; if discussion arises, it can be considered a public forum and you cannot block or delete comments.

- The public can record meetings.

- Officials must complete the Annual Statement of Economic Interest.

- Conflict of Interest: Refrain from voting and participating. Willfully do so and upon conviction forfeit office or position. Prepare written statement before meeting describing the matter and the potential conflict. Printed copy needs to go in the minutes. Council members should not point out other members for a conflict of interest in public. You cannot use your official office to gain economic interest, or to influence governmental decisions in which there is an economic interest.

Economic Interest is an interest distinct from that of the general public in a purchase, sale, lease, contract, option, or other transaction or arrangement involving property or services in which a public official, public member, or public employee may gain an economic benefit of fifty dollars or more.

A Public official, public member, or public employee may not, directly or indirectly, knowingly ask, demand, exact, solicit, seek, accept, assign, receive, or agree to receive anything of value for himself or for another person in return for being.

No person may offer or pay to a public official, public member, or public employee and no public official, public member, or public employee may solicit or receive money in addition to that received by the public official, public member, or public employee in his official capacity for advice or assistance given in the course of is employment as a public official, public member, or public employee.

- Cannot use of government personnel or facilities for campaign purposes. You cannot use your position to encourage people to vote for you.

Committees:

Meetings are open to the public.

Two members of a three-member committee are considered a quorum: phone, text, email, or in person.

Agenda must be posted 24 hours before a meeting. Bulletin board, Facebook, website, and media must be notified.

All communications must be formal at meetings and open to the public.

Minutes must be taken.

Members can look into stuff even if they are not the chair, but communication is key.

Can have committees of one, or liaisons. Meetings are not required for liaisons.

All committee meetings must be formal.

Respectfully Submitted

Jessica Eubanks