

MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 16, 2025, CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING

A SPECIAL meeting of the Hopewell City Council was held on Thursday, January 16, 2025, at 6:30 p.m.

PRESENT:

John B. Partin Jr., Mayor
Rita Joyner, Vice Mayor
Michael Harris, Councilor (Virtual)
Ronnie Ellis, Councilor
Susan Daye, Councilor
Yolanda Stokes, Councilor
Dominic Holloway Sr., Councilor (Virtual)

Councilor Daye makes a motion to allow Councilor Holloway and Councilor Harris to participate remotely; Mayor Partin seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Councilor Harris-	Abstain
Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Abstain
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes

Motion Passes 5-0

Mayor Partin made a public statement at the conclusion of Monday night's meeting that the closed session was not certified; he asked for a motion certifying that the only matters described in the notice for that closed meeting were discussed.

Vice Mayor Joyner makes the motion, and Mayor Partin seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris -	Yes

Motion Passes 7-0

CLOSED MEETING:

Councilor Holloway makes a motion to go into a closed meeting pursuant to Va. Code Section § 2.2-3711 (A)(1) “to discuss and consider personnel matters, including board and commission appointments” (Hopewell Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Planning Commission, Healthy Families, Community Policy and Management Team) and Discussion, consideration, or interviews of prospective candidates for employment; VA Code § 2.2-3711(A)(29) “Discussion of the award of a public contract involving the expenditure of public funds, including interviews of bidders or offerors, and discussion of the terms or scope of such contract where discussion in an open session would adversely affect the bargaining position or negotiating strategy of the public body; and Va. Code Section § 2.2-3711(A)(7) Consultation with legal counsel and briefings by staff members or consultants pertaining to actual or probable litigation, where such consultation or briefing in an open meeting would adversely affect the negotiating or litigating posture of the public body; followed by an open session to discuss the repeal of the recently adopted conflict of interest policy; and to the extent such discussion will be aided thereby”, Councilor Ellis seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes

Councilor Holloway-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris -	Yes

Motion Passes 7-0

Reconvene Open Meeting

Councilor Daye makes a motion to reconvene an open meeting. Mayor Partin seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris -	Yes

Motion Passes 7-0

CERTIFICATION PURSUANT TO VIRGINIA CODE § 2.2-3712 (D): Were only public business matters (1) lawfully exempted from open-meeting requirements and (2) identified in the closed-meeting motion discussed in the closed meeting?

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris -	Yes

Motion Passes 7-0

WORK SESSION

1. **Zoning Ordinance, adding churches as an allowable use in R1-A district** – Chris Ward, Director of Planning and Development

Mr. Ward began his work session explaining to the council the zoning amendment request to add churches as an allowable use in the R1-A low-medium density residential district. The applicant, Restored Hope Church of the Nazarene, is seeking this change for a district that covers parts of Wards 4, 5, and 7, where churches are currently not permitted. The request is to allow churches throughout the entire district, not just specific properties. The R1-A district has historically excluded churches, despite their presence in the area for over 60 years, including the applicant's previous location, which was destroyed by fire in 2019. After research, no compelling reasons for the exclusion were found. Staff recommends approval of the amendment, and the Planning Commission has already voted 4-0 in favor of the request. There was one public comment in support during the public hearing. He is not asking for any action tonight, but the council was invited to ask any questions. Council had no questions for Mr. Ward.

REGULAR MEETING

Councilor Daye makes a motion to amend the agenda to add R-6 to end all litigation against Councilor Ronnie Ellis, and Vice Mayor Joyner seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Abstain
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	No
Councilor Holloway-	No
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris -	Yes

Motion Passes 4-2

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to extend the meeting until R6 is complete. Mayor Partin seconds the meeting.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes

Councilor Holloway-	No
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris -	Yes

Motion Passes 6-1

R-1 – Economic Development Authority Strategic Plan – Charles Bennett, Economic Development Director

Mr. Bennett began with a presentation of the City of Hopewell's Draft Strategic Economic Development Plan, which has been revised and updated. This plan was initiated after a city council retreat in early 2024, where three key areas for the city's health and sustainability were identified: establishing a comprehensive financial infrastructure, developing an economic strategy to support the city's growth and stability, and enhancing public safety. In June 2024, the city council tasked the Economic Development Department, led by the director, to coordinate with the Hopewell Economic Development Authority to update the previous 2014 plan. After working closely with city officials and other stakeholders, the updated draft was finalized in November 2024. Due to time constraints, the director opted not to read the entire 4,436-word document during the meeting but emphasized the importance of council members reviewing the plan ahead of an Economic Development Summit on February 6. Council members are encouraged to review the document and provide feedback on any disagreements or areas for modification before the summit, with the goal of having an adopted plan by then. The director highlighted that the plan includes strategic areas of the city where economic growth and development could be influenced, both through public initiatives and partnerships with developers and investors. The director also shared recent positive movements in the city's real estate market, with properties, both commercial and residential, seeing increased activity, which signals growing optimism and potential for economic progress. The director urged the council to take the time to review the plan thoroughly before the next meeting, where action on the plan will be requested.

R-2 – Approval of forensic audit contract – Dr. Manker, City Manager

Dr. Manker presented a request for approval of forensic audit services during the meeting, noting that on November 19th, the previous city council had directed the city manager to issue an RFP for these services. After completing the selection process, a vendor has been chosen, and the staff is now seeking council approval to proceed with the forensic audit. The request includes authorizing the city manager to enter into a contract on behalf of the city for the services, with a cost not to exceed \$84,000. Any unused funds from this amount will be returned to the city's coffers. The funds for the audit will come from salary savings, which will be presented at the Finance Committee meeting on January 21st. Dr. Manker concluded the presentation and opened the floor for discussion.

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to approve the forensic audit services and directs the city manager to enter into a contract on behalf of the city of Hopewell with approving the cost of up to \$84,000, and Councilor Daye seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
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Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	No
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris -	Yes

Motion Passes 6-1

R-3 – Waive all penalties, fees, and interest for Personal Property Taxes until March 7th, 2025

– Stacy Jordan, CFO

Ms. Jordan addressed the council regarding the potential financial implications of moving the personal property tax due date from March 15th to March 7th. She explained that the Hopewell Code (Section 34-44) requires that tax statements be mailed at least 15 days before penalties for nonpayment apply. The Treasurer's Office sent out the bills on January 3rd, which, historically, the city had done two months in advance as a courtesy to taxpayers. However, it is not a legal requirement. Ms. Jordan highlighted that delaying the due date could impact the city's revenue collection and, consequently, delay the completion of capital projects. This delay could also lead to another budget freeze, as personal property taxes are collected once a year, unlike real estate taxes, which are collected twice annually. She recommended keeping the due date as March 15th to ensure timely revenue collection, but ultimately, the decision is up to the council. She also suggested an alternative option to leave the due date as is but waive penalties, interest, and fees until March 7th. If the council opts for this, a resolution would be needed for the Treasurer's Office, which could be presented for a vote at the next regular meeting.

Councilor Harris makes a motion to waive all penalties, fees, and interest for personal property until March 7, 2025. Councilor Stokes seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris -	Yes

Motion Passes 7-0

R-4 – Repeal of Recently Adopted Conflict of Interest Policy

Mayor Partin shared that he had a productive conversation with Councilor Harris regarding a particular item, leading to a new approach that he believes will be more beneficial for the city. The proposal is to invite the Virginia Conflict of Interest Advisory Council to a work session, allowing all members of the city council to receive training, ask questions, and gain insight. This session would also serve as an informative opportunity for the public. In addition, Mayor Partin suggested that the Ethics Committee work on converting the existing conflict of interest policy into a Council Code of Ethics, following the Attorney General's decision that the city cannot have its own separate conflict of interest policy.

Councilor Stokes makes a motion to invite the Virginia Conflict of Interest Advisory Council to a training and work session in February, Councilor Harris seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris -	Yes

Motion Passes 7-0

Councilor Daye makes a motion to charge the ethics committee to work on converting the existing conflict of interest policy to a council code of ethics; Vice Mayor Joyner seconds the motion. Mayor Partin opens the floor for discussion.

Councilor Ellis clarified what the motion was for. He asks can you get rid of the policy now and then work on the code of ethics next. The mayor asked if the council was ok with the friendly amendment. Councilor Holloway states he has had this conversation before, and he does not understand why the council is fighting to replace this. He was under the impression with the ordinance and resolution they have that the council believed the situation the city is facing is a conflict but was requesting to repeal the conflict of interest. He mentions he has statements where he feels there is a state of privilege in place and recorded conversations where councilors were standing in place of being an Uncle Tom. He thinks the direction the city is going with this is a scary place because there is indeed a conflict of interest. How can we have a city councilor being the boss of the city manager and also working for the city manager? These things are great concerns.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes

Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	No
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris -	Yes

Motion Passes 6-1

R-5 – Initiation of Zoning Text Amendments for Motor Vehicle Uses - Christopher Ward, Director of Planning & Development

Mr. Ward addressed the Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Council members regarding a request to investigate specific uses across various zoning districts in the city, particularly focusing on automotive-related uses. He explained that according to State Code 15.2-2286, there are three ways to initiate such an investigation: through a citizen petition, by the Planning Commission, or by the City Council. Mr. Ward emphasized that while an individual council member cannot directly initiate staff review, the entire council body has the authority to do so. He clarified that this resolution was presented as an R-5 item for consideration, which would allow the Council to move forward with a staff investigation into automotive uses within the city, reviewing any existing performance standards or identifying new ones that could be implemented. He also mentioned that staff would look into any additional considerations that the Council might deem relevant for these automotive-related uses. Mr. Ward concluded by offering to answer any questions the Council may have about the resolution.

Vice Mayor Joyner speaks, mentioning this was her request because she sees the proliferation of automotive repairs on City Point Road. There is a used car lot or repair place, and there is a proliferation of them, and they are popping up everywhere. She wants to know if there is a way to control this in some way.

Mayor Partin also thinks it is a good idea because some houses are working on vehicles in the street and leaving them in the streets for days at a time.

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to approve the resolution to initiate a zoning ordinance amendment to review the zoning regulations regarding motor vehicle usage; Councilor Daye second the motion.

Councilor Stokes says she would have liked more time to discuss this and can Mr. Ward could be more specific in his goals with this. She clarifies this motion is to allow them to gather information on ways to make the different areas of the city better.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes

Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris -	Yes

Motion Passes 7-0

Councilor Daye makes a motion to end all litigation legal actions, lawsuits, de meres, and appeal petitions against Councilor Ronnie Ellis, Vice Mayor Joyner seconds the motion.

Councilor Holloway speaks in reference to this motion to the citizens. He states litigation has been brought up against the city, and he has a court system that hopefully he can trust. He thinks it is in the city’s best interest to continue to allow the city attorney to go forth with the litigation so the court can properly rule. He hopes the council would not be biased in this space, and he plans to bring information to the public. This is something he thinks should have had a public hearing to allow citizens to speak on the matter. He states all seven councilors have stated this is a conflict, so he cannot understand why they would end litigation.

Councilor Stokes states it was her understanding that they did not have any litigation moving forward. She would have liked to see this play out.

The city attorney mentions the current motion is worded incorrectly and states it should read: The lawsuit that is pending Mr. Ellis has against the city. The city chooses to dismiss its interest in the lawsuit and not pursue it. The mayor confirms that the motion read as it should be will get rid of de meres and appeals.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Abstain
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	No
Councilor Holloway-	No
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris -	Yes

Motion Passes 4-2

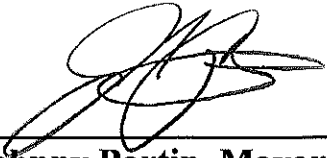
For the record Councilor Ellis recused himself from this discussion.

ADJOURNMENT

Respectfully Submitted,

Brittani Williams

Brittani Williams, City Clerk



Johnny Partin, Mayor