

MINUTES OF THE APRIL 14, 2026 CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING

A REGULAR meeting of the Hopewell Council was held on Tuesday, March 24, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.

PRESENT:

John B. Partin, Mayor
Rita Joyner, Vice Mayor
Michael Harris, Councilor
Susan Daye, Councilor
Malik Wheat, Councilor
Lovena Rapole, Councilor

Councilor Daye makes a motion to go into closed meeting under Va. Code § 2.2-3711(A)(3), (8), and (29), to discuss the acquisition or disposition of real property, where discussion in an open meeting would adversely affect the bargaining position or negotiating strategy of the public body, the award of a public contract where discussion in an open session would adversely affect the City’s bargaining position, and to consult with legal counsel regarding specific legal matters (real estate contract discussions, support agreement with the EDA); § 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 open meeting would adversely affect the negotiating or litigating posture of the public body (National Opioid Settlement); § 2.2-3711(A)(1), to discuss personnel matters (Beacon Theater Board). Councilor Rapole. seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Wheat-	Yes
Councilor Rapole-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes
Mayor Partin-	Yes

Motion Passes 6-0

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to reconvene the open meeting. Councilor Wheat seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Wheat-	Yes
Councilor Rapole-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes
Mayor Partin-	Yes

Motion Passes 6-0

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?

PRESENT:

John B. Partin, Mayor
Rita Joyner, Vice Mayor
Michael Harris, Councilor
Susan Daye, Councilor
Malik Wheat, Councilor
Lovena Rapole, Councilor

REGULAR MEETING

Hooray for Hopewell History Presentation - Charles Bennett, Director of Economic Development

Kyle English presented the Department of Tourism's concept for a flagship summer 2026 event called the "Hooray for Hopewell History Celebration," which is being planned in connection with Virginia's VA250 initiative commemorating the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution. He explained that the statewide initiative encourages communities to educate the public about their local contributions to the founding of the United States while also celebrating the occasion. The proposed event is scheduled for June 27, 2026, and is intended to serve as a large family-oriented celebration focused on Hopewell's history, tourism, civic engagement, and downtown economic activity.

English described the event as a family fun festival that will take place throughout Downtown Hopewell and at Appomattox Manor. Planned activities include a children's entertainment area called "Kitty Land," which will feature inflatable attractions, games, and a kayak pool attraction previously used at the Rivers and Roads event in September 2025. In addition to family activities, the event will feature history walking tours, trolley tours, civic organization participation, vendor booths, and public safety engagement activities. Representatives from organizations such as the Hopewell Fire Department and Hopewell Police Department are expected to participate in "Touch-a-Truck" activities and distribute branded merchandise to residents and visitors.

A major focus of the event will be the historical walking tour experience. English explained that visitors will be able to scan QR codes displayed on sandwich boards located throughout downtown Hopewell. Each QR code will provide information about different historical points of interest, including notable individuals from Hopewell, historic locations where important events occurred, and products manufactured in the city both historically and today. The educational

aspect is intended to emphasize Hopewell's role in the broader story of Virginia and the founding of the United States.

Transportation between downtown Hopewell, City Point, and Appomattox Manor will be provided through a trolley system. Visitors will be able to ride the trolley to Appomattox Manor, explore the grounds and Grant's Cabin, and then return downtown. English noted that the city is collaborating with the National Park Service, which has agreed to participate in the event. As part of that partnership, the National Park Service secured the Chesterfield Concert Band to perform from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. near the riverfront as attendees transition toward the evening fireworks show organized by Parks and Recreation.

English also discussed logistical planning for the event, emphasizing the city's goal of minimizing street closures and reducing the need for extensive public safety resources. The current plan calls for limited closures on portions of Coston Street and Library Street while keeping Broadway open in order to maintain access for existing downtown businesses. Several businesses have already agreed to remain open during the celebration, and organizers intend for the event to promote rather than disrupt local commerce. Vendor participation will also be carefully managed to avoid competing directly with established downtown businesses.

In closing, English summarized the concept as a community-wide celebration that combines historical education, family entertainment, tourism promotion, civic involvement, and economic support for downtown Hopewell. He then invited questions from Council members, though no questions followed immediately after the presentation.

Crime Summary Report – Gregory Taylor, Chief of Police

Gregory Taylor presented the Hopewell Police Department's April Crime Summary Report, highlighting significant decreases in both violent and property crime rates. He reported that violent crime was down 32% and property crime was down 13% for the reporting period, resulting in an overall 18% reduction in total major crime during April. Taylor explained that the department continues to compare current statistics to data from 2022, which he identified as the year the department began implementing additional technology initiatives. Using that comparison, he noted that violent crime has decreased by 29% since 2022, while property crime has declined by 30%. Overall major crime, when compared to 2022 levels, has also decreased by 30%, which Taylor attributed in part to the department's technological investments and policing strategies.

Taylor also provided an update regarding suspected opioid overdoses within the city. He stated that in 2026 there had been one fatal overdose and three non-fatal overdoses, for a total of four incidents. Although he acknowledged the fatality as unfortunate, he emphasized that the overall number of overdose incidents remains the lowest compared to previous years. He then discussed verified "shots fired" calls, reporting that the city experienced 64 verified incidents in 2024, 54 in 2025, and only six verified calls so far in 2026, indicating another substantial reduction in serious criminal activity.

During the report, Taylor reviewed updates to the city's Neighborhood Watch program. He announced that the Ward Seven neighborhood watch group formerly known as Autumn Woods would return to using the name Lord O' Taylor. Meetings for the group are scheduled for the fourth Wednesday of each month at Woodlawn Presbyterian Church beginning at 6:00 p.m. He explained that this is considered a new neighborhood watch group and noted that the current neighborhood captain is a council member. Taylor added that there were no other significant changes to neighborhood watch operations throughout the city.

Taylor also discussed staffing and recruitment within the police department and emergency communications division. He reported that application testing was held at the police academy on April 25. At the time of the presentation, the department had three vacancies for emergency communications operators, with two applicants currently undergoing background investigations. Additionally, there were five unfilled police officer positions, with three applicants remaining in the background process. Taylor outlined several upcoming recruitment events, including an April 17 event at Virginia State University, a May 7 recruitment event in Ashland, Virginia, and transition program recruitment efforts scheduled for June 11 and August 11 at Fort Lee.

The report also included updates regarding community policing and public engagement activities. Taylor announced that Officer Tiffany Sherrod had been assigned as the new ward officer for the newly established Ward Seven neighborhood watch group. He then reviewed several upcoming community engagement events involving the police department. These included the annual Police Memorial Breakfast scheduled for May 7 at 7:00 a.m. at the Moose Lodge, participation in the "Little Feet Meet" Special Olympics field day held at Hopewell High School, a criminal justice student question-and-answer session at Virginia State University on April 17 from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., and the department's annual Drug Take Back event scheduled for April 25 at police headquarters from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Taylor concluded the April Crime Summary Report by stating that he was available to answer any questions from City Council. Following the conclusion of the presentation, no questions were raised by Council members.

Mayor Partin responded to Gregory Taylor's April Crime Summary Report by commending the Hopewell Police Department and its leadership for the continued reductions in crime throughout the city. He specifically praised the department's men and women for their efforts and highlighted the significant decreases in violent crime, property crime, and opioid-related incidents. Mayor Partin emphasized that the reduction in opioid fatalities and non-fatal overdoses reflects the success of collaborative partnerships between the city and community organizations, including the C-Center and City of Refuge. He expressed appreciation for the teamwork and leadership demonstrated by Mr. Rogers, Stacy, and the entire leadership team, thanking them for their continued dedication and work on behalf of the community.

An Initiative Focusing on Hopewell's Disproportionately High Burden of Fatal Opioid Doses – Dr. Elle J. Merkle, Crater District Planning

Dr. Elle J. Merkle of the Crater Health District appeared before City Council alongside Senior Epidemiologist Katrina Saffri to discuss overdose prevention efforts and the ongoing opioid

crisis in Hopewell. Dr. Merkle explained that her role focuses on overdose prevention programming and noted that while the district has made significant progress in Petersburg, Hopewell continues to experience a disproportionately high rate of overdose fatalities that requires urgent attention. She outlined her presentation agenda, which included discussing the current overdose situation in Hopewell, framing addiction as a treatable chronic brain disorder, explaining the role of naloxone in reversing opioid overdoses, and introducing a proposed harm reduction vending machine program that the Crater Health District hopes to bring to the city.

Dr. Merkle began by explaining the role and mission of the Crater Health District, which operates under the Virginia Department of Health and serves approximately 160,000 residents across Hopewell, Petersburg, Emporia, and several surrounding counties. She noted that Hopewell represents roughly 15% of the district's population but carries a much heavier burden when it comes to overdose fatalities. She emphasized that both the health district and the City of Hopewell share similar goals related to improving public safety, strengthening healthy families, and advancing economic growth through healthier communities.

Using data from the Virginia Department of Health, Dr. Merkle reviewed long-term trends in drug overdose deaths dating back to 2007. She explained that the opioid crisis initially stemmed from overprescribing prescription pain medications, which eventually led many addicted individuals to seek drugs on the street after prescription regulations tightened. She described how street drugs became increasingly dangerous due to contamination and the growing presence of fentanyl, a synthetic opioid significantly more potent than heroin. Dr. Merkle noted that overdose deaths rose sharply leading up to 2021 because of fentanyl's widespread availability and increasing potency. However, she also pointed to a flattening trend in overdose deaths after 2021, suggesting that public health interventions and increased access to naloxone may be helping to reduce fatalities.

Dr. Merkle then focused specifically on Hopewell data, comparing overdose trends in Hopewell and Petersburg by ZIP code. She highlighted that approximately 30% of overdose fatalities within the Crater Health District occur in Hopewell, despite Hopewell representing only 15% of the district's total population. She described this imbalance as evidence that Hopewell carries a disproportionately heavy overdose burden and emphasized the need for targeted public health interventions within the city.

A major portion of Dr. Merkle's presentation centered on educating Council members about addiction and overdose. She stressed that addiction should not be viewed as a moral failing, but rather as a chronic and treatable brain disorder similar to diseases such as diabetes or high blood pressure. She explained the biological effects of opioids on the brain, noting that opioids bind to receptors that both create feelings of euphoria and suppress breathing. During an overdose, slowed or stopped breathing can cause a person to suffocate. Dr. Merkle then explained how naloxone works by displacing opioids from those brain receptors, temporarily restoring breathing and preventing death. However, she cautioned that naloxone's effects only last between 30 and 90 minutes, making emergency medical treatment essential after an overdose reversal.

Dr. Merkle introduced the concept of a public health harm reduction vending machine, which the Crater Health District plans to install in Hopewell. She explained that these vending machines

became more common during the COVID-19 pandemic as a method of distributing health supplies such as masks and sanitizer, and many now include naloxone and other harm reduction materials. The proposed machine would operate similarly to a vending locker system, allowing individuals to access supplies discreetly. In addition to naloxone, the machine could contain items such as condoms, hygiene kits, socks, first aid supplies, snacks, and information about treatment and recovery services. Dr. Merkle emphasized that naloxone would always be available free of charge and that the contents could be adjusted based on community needs and seasonal demands.

She asked City Council members to support the program by helping identify an appropriate location for the vending machine and by promoting community education about naloxone and overdose prevention. Dr. Merkle strongly encouraged all residents, including sanitation workers and public employees, to learn how to administer naloxone through the “Rapid Revive” training program. She argued that increasing access to naloxone has likely contributed to the recent flattening of overdose death trends and stressed the importance of reducing stigma surrounding addiction to encourage more people to seek treatment.

Council members asked several questions regarding implementation timelines and the city’s expected role in the initiative. Dr. Merkle explained that the Crater Health District had recently acquired the vending machines through a donation and was currently working through logistics to transport them to the district. One machine is planned for Petersburg and one for Hopewell. She stated that once a location is secured, implementation could move forward relatively quickly. Additional discussions would then occur with property owners and community stakeholders regarding maintenance, partnerships, and sustainability.

Mayor Partin responded positively to the proposal, describing the vending machine concept as an innovative idea that could significantly benefit the community. He recommended that Dr. Merkle and her team meet with city leadership, including the incoming permanent City Manager Vincent Jones, to discuss potential collaboration and funding opportunities. Mayor Partin also suggested that opioid settlement funds received by localities might potentially help support the initiative. Dr. Merkle welcomed continued collaboration with the city and offered to provide naloxone training sessions for Council members and staff. She concluded by expressing her desire to increase the amount of naloxone available throughout Hopewell and thanked Council members for their time and consideration.

ACTIONS RESULTING FROM CLOSED MEETING

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to appoint Donald Barber, Bruce Brockwell, Elliot Eliades, Dr. Eliza Lamb, Avon Miles, Courtney Bujakawski, Dr. Gary Ackerman, John Redling, Nancy Flowers, and Barbara Patton to the Beacon Theater Board. Councilor Daye seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Wheat-	Yes
Councilor Rapole-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes

Mayor Partin- Yes

Motion Passes 6-0

Councilor Wheat makes a motion to direct the city attorney to enter a combined subdivision participation and release form as presented. Councilor Daye seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Councilor Daye- Yes
Councilor Wheat- Yes
Councilor Rapole- Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner- Yes
Councilor Harris- Yes
Mayor Partin- Yes

Motion Passes 6-0

PRAYER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Prayer by Reverend Boggs, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States by Mayor Partin.

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to adopt the consent agenda. Councilor Daye seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Councilor Daye- Yes
Councilor Wheat- Yes
Councilor Rapole- Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner- Yes
Councilor Harris- Yes
Mayor Partin- Yes

Motion Passes 6-0

COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITIZENS

Steve Ramano, Ward 3

Steve Romano, a Ward Three resident living on Circle Drive in Hopewell, addressed City Council regarding the financial burdens faced by senior citizens living on fixed incomes. Speaking from personal experience, Romano explained that he and his wife have been retired for approximately 12 and 14 years respectively and now rely primarily on Social Security. He contrasted their current financial situation with their earlier working years, when paying bills, owning multiple vehicles, purchasing gas and groceries, and dining out were manageable expenses. Now retired, he explained that their financial circumstances have changed significantly and require them to live much more carefully within a fixed budget.

Romano expressed frustration with the city's continued collection of personal property taxes on older vehicles owned by retirees. He explained that after one of his vehicles stopped working, he chose not to replace it because maintaining a single vehicle was more financially practical. He stated that the remaining vehicle, which is approximately ten years old, is used only for essential needs such as doctor visits and trips to Walmart and Food Lion. Despite the car's limited value, he noted that he is still required to pay personal property taxes on it, which he described as unreasonable and burdensome for seniors living on fixed retirement incomes. He remarked that when he first moved to Hopewell 25 years ago, people in New York were shocked by how low local personal property taxes were at the time, but he said that perception would no longer exist today because of how expensive those taxes have become.

Romano also referenced the city's financial reserves, stating his understanding that Hopewell currently holds millions of dollars in various investment and financial accounts, including funds managed through Kaplan Portfolio, LGIP, and Schwab accounts. Given those available funds, he questioned why the city could not provide tax relief for senior citizens, particularly regarding personal property taxes. He acknowledged that the city continues to pursue numerous development and infrastructure projects, including riverwalk improvements and housing construction, but stated that reducing the tax burden on seniors was his personal priority and concern.

He emphasized that retirees on Social Security cannot simply increase their income through additional employment, explaining that whatever retirement income seniors have is all they can depend upon. Romano urged the city government to manage its finances responsibly and "live on a budget" in the same way retirees are forced to do. He concluded by encouraging City Council to consider providing assistance or tax relief to elderly residents struggling with rising costs, noting that while some individuals may not need help, many others, including himself, would greatly benefit from it.

Mark Burroughs, Ward 3

Mark Burroughs, a Ward Three resident, addressed City Council regarding concerns about state legislation, Second Amendment rights, and issues involving the city's tax collection process. Burroughs reminded Council that several months earlier he had spoken publicly about the importance of monitoring legislation being passed or rejected at the state level and understanding how those decisions could impact the City of Hopewell. Following that earlier meeting, he said several residents informed him that Hopewell had previously adopted a resolution declaring itself a "Second Amendment Sanctuary City." Although he was not living in Hopewell at the time the resolution was passed, Burroughs stated that he believed Council members had a responsibility to remember and uphold the commitments previously made by the city regarding Second Amendment protections.

Burroughs expressed concern that some Council members appeared prepared during the previous fall to support restrictions on weapons in city parks and other public properties. He suggested that those discussions conflicted with the city's prior stance as a Second Amendment sanctuary

locality. He urged Council members to keep those earlier commitments in mind as they interact with state legislators and consider future local policy decisions related to firearms and constitutional rights. He emphasized that actions taken at the state level can directly affect local residents and argued that city leaders should remain consistent with past positions and commitments made on behalf of Hopewell citizens.

In addition to his concerns regarding gun rights, Burroughs raised complaints about the city's personal property tax collection and vehicle registration process. He described the experience of a friend who had previously fallen behind on vehicle taxes but had recently paid the overdue taxes in full approximately three weeks earlier. According to Burroughs, despite the taxes being paid, the Department of Motor Vehicles had still not released the vehicle registration because the Treasurer's Office had allegedly failed to properly notify the DMV that the taxes had been satisfied. As a result, his friend remained unable to renew the vehicle registration and legally drive the vehicle to work.

Burroughs further criticized the city's contracted tax collection agency, stating that the agency had failed to properly maintain and share records and that the fees being charged to residents were excessive. He argued that the collection practices were especially problematic given the income levels of many Hopewell residents. He strongly encouraged City Council to pressure the Treasurer's Office and other city officials to seek a different collection agency, describing the current agency's performance as unacceptable. He concluded his remarks by thanking Council for their attention.

Victor Lavimodiere, Ward 3

Victor Lavimodiere, a longtime Hopewell resident of approximately 25 years, addressed City Council for the first time during the public comment period. He began by explaining that he attended the meeting primarily to observe the proceedings and introduce himself to Council members. Lavimodiere asked whether he could take photographs of the Council members so he could better associate names with faces. Council members informed him that photographs, names, and ward information for each member are already available on the City of Hopewell's website. During the exchange, there was some lighthearted discussion among Council members regarding which ward he lived in before Lavimodiere resumed his remarks.

Lavimodiere then expressed concerns about the overall direction of the city and the financial difficulties being faced by residents, particularly retirees. He stated that while he was not accusing City Council of intentionally doing wrong, he felt the city was "not doing right" in certain areas. Echoing concerns previously raised by another speaker, Steve Romano, Lavimodiere explained that he has been retired since 2019 and now finds it increasingly difficult to manage financially. He emphasized that the economic strain on retirees is serious and not something to be dismissed lightly.

He stated that he would like to remain living in Hopewell but expressed frustration with how city funds are being spent. According to Lavimodiere, his primary concern is not necessarily the existence of city projects or spending itself, but rather the manner in which taxpayer money is allocated and managed. He indicated that residents want greater accountability and careful

consideration regarding city expenditures, especially given the financial pressures facing many citizens on fixed incomes.

Toward the conclusion of his remarks, Lavimodiere asked Mr. Rogers for clarification regarding a previously mentioned Thursday night meeting. After confirming that the meeting would occur that Thursday evening, he thanked Council and concluded his comments.

Laura Greenwood, Ward 6

Laura Greenwood, a resident of Ward Six, addressed City Council with a concern regarding the display of the American and Virginia state flags at the local high school. Greenwood stated that several residents from her area had recently informed her that the high school was not flying either the United States flag or the Virginia state flag. Curious and concerned, she said she personally visited the school to verify the situation and confirmed that the flags were indeed not being displayed.

Greenwood noted that the school has a Junior ROTC program and suggested that ROTC students could easily be responsible for raising the flags in the morning and lowering them at the end of the school day. She emphasized that because the school receives city, state, and federal funding — all supported by taxpayer dollars — it would be appropriate and respectful for the school to properly display the flags. Greenwood asked City Council to look into the matter and consider ensuring that the flags are consistently flown at the high school. She concluded her remarks by thanking the Council.

Debbie Randolph, Ward 1

Debbie Randolph, a Ward One resident, addressed City Council regarding concerns about the process used to establish and appoint members to the Beacon Theater board. Randolph explained that over the previous 30 to 60 days she had heard increasing discussion within the community about the Beacon Theater and had attempted to gather more information through City Council resources and the city's Talent Bank system. While she appreciated being present to witness the appointment of board members, she questioned whether the city had followed a sufficiently open and transparent process in selecting those individuals.

Randolph stated that she had not seen significant public advertisement or outreach informing citizens about opportunities to serve on the Beacon board. She explained that many people she spoke with during her research were unaware that the board positions even existed or that appointments were being made. Additionally, she noted that there was no specific information listed on the city's Talent Bank webpage regarding the Beacon board or instructions explaining whether interested citizens needed to submit applications through the Talent Bank system. According to Randolph, several individuals told her they had instead been asked to submit resumes directly, which raised additional questions for her about how candidates were identified and evaluated.

She expressed concern that the process appeared inconsistent with what she believed should be a standard, open government procedure for selecting board members. Although Randolph clarified that she was not objecting to any specific individuals who had been appointed, she questioned whether Council members had already selected preferred candidates privately before the public process occurred. She suggested that if that were the case, it could undermine public confidence in transparency and fairness.

Randolph also requested that City Council provide citizens with more detailed information regarding the city's overall plans for the Beacon Theater moving forward. She stated that she had heard discussions suggesting the theater could potentially operate under a nonprofit structure and referenced her familiarity with the Beacon Theater's original formation and redevelopment process. Randolph explained that she had previously worked with individuals involved in the theater's early development and understood that the financing and tax credit arrangements associated with the project had historically been complex and difficult to manage. She acknowledged that the city attorney, along with outside legal advisors, was likely working through those legal and organizational issues with Council.

Ultimately, Randolph urged City Council to ensure that future actions involving the Beacon Theater remain transparent, publicly communicated, and inclusive of citizen participation. She emphasized the importance of openly informing residents about the city's plans for the theater, the role of the board, and whether the proposed structure would ultimately serve the best interests of the city, the theater, and the community members involved. She concluded her remarks after encouraging Council to maintain a fair and open process moving forward.

Darlene Thompson, Ward 6

Darlene Thompson, a Ward Six resident, addressed City Council with strong criticism regarding the city's financial management, tax increases, and recent budget decisions. Thompson referenced events from approximately three years earlier when the Robert Bobb Group was brought into the city administration. She stated that shortly after the group's arrival, Mr. Branson was hired at a salary of approximately \$13,000 per month and soon warned City Council that Hopewell was financially unstable and headed toward serious financial trouble. Thompson argued that since those warnings, City Council has repeatedly increased financial burdens on residents through higher taxes and fees rather than adequately addressing spending concerns.

Thompson specifically criticized actions taken by City Council beginning around May 2024, stating that Council approved increases in tax rates, higher real estate assessments, and expanded trash collection fees, among other charges. She emphasized that the increases affected residents across the board and argued that the city continued imposing additional costs on taxpayers without sufficient regard for the financial strain placed on citizens. According to Thompson, residents entrusted Council members to represent their interests, but she believed the Council instead continued approving measures that negatively impacted taxpayers.

She also criticized a recent city-related trip to Williamsburg, which she claimed cost approximately \$17,000 for less than a full day of activity. Thompson stated that during discussions related to the wastewater treatment plant, city officials proposed an additional fee of

\$5.25 per resident. She calculated that multiplying the fee by the city's roughly 10,434 residents would generate approximately \$54,000 per month, or more than \$657,000 annually, for the city. Thompson argued that the city continued seeking additional revenue from residents despite already increasing taxes and fees in multiple other areas.

Throughout her remarks, Thompson repeatedly referenced budget figures presented by city officials, particularly noting that the city's fiscal year 2026 budget was reportedly \$8.4 million higher than the previous year's budget. She described this increase as money ultimately collected from taxpayers and expressed frustration that city leaders continued discussing additional revenue needs without acknowledging what she viewed as significant surplus funding already generated from residents. Thompson argued that citizens are effectively forced to pay whatever taxes and fees the city imposes and accused Council of failing to adequately consider the burden placed on local families.

Thompson concluded by connecting these financial concerns to the upcoming local elections, noting that several Council members would soon be seeking reelection and asking residents for signatures and votes. She questioned why residents should support elected officials whom she believed had not acted in the best interests of taxpayers. She ended her comments by thanking the Council.

CJ Glover, Ward 1

CJ Glover, a Ward One resident and student at Carter G. Woodson Middle School, addressed City Council to advocate for renovations or replacement of Carter G. Woodson Middle School, Mills E. Godwin, and the Woodlawn Learning Center. Speaking from a student's perspective, Glover emphasized that students and staff deserve to attend and work in buildings that are both safe and properly maintained. She stated that while some improvements have been made in certain areas of the schools, including portions of the library and front areas, many serious safety and infrastructure problems remain unresolved throughout the buildings.

Glover identified several specific concerns regarding the condition of the schools. She explained that there are not enough bathrooms available for students and that many existing bathrooms contain broken fixtures. She also raised concerns about hallways lacking sprinkler systems and classrooms that do not have windows or accessible exits, which she believed could create dangerous conditions during emergencies such as fires. According to Glover, some classrooms appear to violate fire safety standards because students would have limited or no ability to escape in the event of a fire. She stated that these conditions create unnecessary risks for students, teachers, and staff members.

She further explained that conditions at the Woodlawn Learning Center are even worse than those at Carter G. Woodson Middle School. Glover emphasized that students should be able to enter school buildings feeling safe regardless of their personal circumstances and should not have to worry about unsafe facilities or potential tragedies. She expressed concern not only for students, but also for teachers and staff members, including her own mother, who works in the school system.

Throughout her remarks, Glover repeatedly stressed the importance of investing in school safety improvements and proper infrastructure maintenance. She urged Council members to consider how they would feel if they or their own children attended schools with missing sprinkler systems, insufficient bathrooms, open ceiling tiles, leaking tar, broken fixtures, and other hazardous conditions. She questioned whether city leaders would want to ignore such risks or instead take action to fix the buildings before a tragedy occurs.

Glover concluded by asking City Council to prioritize funding for renovations, repairs, or replacement projects for Carter G. Woodson Middle School and the Woodlawn Learning Center. She reiterated concerns about broken fixtures, inadequate bathroom facilities, classrooms without windows, missing sprinkler systems, exposed ceiling areas, and leaking materials throughout the schools. She thanked Council members for allowing her to speak and for listening to her concerns about student and staff safety.

Following the public comment period, City Council addressed several concerns raised by citizens during the meeting, particularly comments regarding transparency surrounding the Beacon Theater board appointments and criticisms about the city's financial management. Mayor Partin first responded to comments made by Debbie Randolph concerning the process used to appoint members to the Beacon Theater board. He asked Mr. Bassett to explain the outreach and public communication efforts that had taken place regarding the Beacon Theater project and the appointment process.

Mr. Bassett explained that City Council had publicly discussed the Beacon Theater process during multiple meetings over several months. He stated that a presentation outlining the process and anticipated appointments had been provided during a January City Council meeting, although one earlier January meeting had been canceled due to weather. Bassett further noted that at a February meeting, Kevin Foster from the John Randolph Foundation gave an additional presentation focused on community engagement and future planning for the Beacon Theater. During those meetings, Bassett said Council repeatedly discussed the upcoming appointments and encouraged public participation. He explained that, similar to other boards and commissions appointed by City Council, interested citizens were always welcome to contact the Clerk's Office and express interest in serving. Although the Beacon Theater board would oversee a private institution, the city still followed a process similar to other city-appointed boards. Mayor Partin then directly encouraged Randolph to submit her own application if she wished to serve, emphasizing that all applicants would go through the same process without special treatment.

Council then turned its attention to comments made earlier by Darlene Thompson and another citizen regarding the city's finances, taxes, and recent policy decisions. Mr. Bassett addressed concerns about financial policies and audit findings, explaining that if City Council had not implemented new financial policies and procedures, the city would likely still be receiving the same serious audit deficiencies identified in prior years. He reminded attendees that in 2019 the city received a disclaimer audit opinion, which is considered one of the worst possible audit outcomes because it reflects severe financial management concerns. Bassett stated that through policy reforms and financial oversight improvements, the city has since progressed to receiving an "unmodified opinion," which he described as a clean audit and the standard municipalities should strive to achieve.

Bassett also clarified comments regarding budget trend analyses and claims of surplus funds. He explained that the financial trend reports shown during meetings are intended to compare year-over-year revenue performance rather than demonstrate the existence of unused surplus money. According to Bassett, when reports show revenues trending higher than the previous year, that simply indicates the city has collected more revenue during the current fiscal period compared to the same period the year before. He noted that increased revenues were largely the result of improved collections within the Treasurer's Office and additional grant funding, while the city has attempted to keep expenses relatively stable within the adopted budget. Bassett emphasized that these reports should not be interpreted as evidence that the city is sitting on large amounts of excess funds.

Mayor Partin then asked Ms. Jordan to address broader concerns regarding the city's financial condition before recent reforms were implemented. In response, Jordan stated that without City Council's intervention to address years of poor financial management and weak leadership, the city could have continued moving toward insolvency or even bankruptcy. She explained that prior to her arrival, sometime around fiscal years 2023 or 2024, the city's primary operating account reportedly had a negative balance, meaning the city lacked sufficient cash flow to cover obligations such as payroll and accounts payable. According to Jordan, city officials at the time were not properly monitoring cash flow or maintaining adequate financial oversight, creating a highly dangerous financial situation for the locality. She stated that the city was forced to transfer money from investment accounts into operating accounts simply to ensure payroll could be met. Jordan further explained that managing city cash flow and banking operations falls primarily under the authority of the Treasurer's Office.

During the exchange, one citizen attempted to interject additional comments, but Mayor Partin stated that the individual's allotted speaking time had expired and instructed her to communicate further questions directly through email or phone contact. The discussion concluded with Mayor Partin thanking Ms. Jordan and Mr. Bassett for what he described as helping to clarify misinformation and misunderstandings regarding the city's financial management and policy decisions.

Regular Business

R-1 (Public Hearing) Conditional Use Permit for 1001 Perrymont Road, and 225 South 15th Avenue – Chris Ward, Director of Planning and Development

Chris Ward addressed City Council to present two conditional use permit requests, beginning with a request related to property located at 1001 Perry Road, parcel number 2540010. Ward explained that both requests before Council that evening were first readings. The applicant for the first conditional use permit was Charles Bennett of Joy Fellowship Church, and the property is located in Ward Four within an R-2 residential zoning district. The request sought approval to install a six-foot fence within the property's front yard area, even though the city's zoning ordinance currently limits front yard fences in the R-2 district to a maximum height of four feet.

Ward reviewed maps and aerial images showing the property location and the proposed fence placement. He explained that the proposed fence would not surround the entire property but

instead would be constructed only along the eastern portion of the site near the church's athletic fields. According to Ward, the applicant argued that the taller six-foot fence would improve containment around the athletic fields, increase safety for children using the recreational areas, and provide better overall security for the property.

Ward also presented images submitted by the applicant showing the style and appearance of the proposed fencing and entranceway. After reviewing the proposal, planning staff concluded that the taller fence would support the applicant's stated goals of enhanced safety and security. Ward noted that while public comments had been solicited through the city's advertisement process, staff had not received written comments directly. However, during the Planning Commission's public hearing on the matter, two individuals spoke. One individual opposed allowing a six-foot fence in the front yard, while another person expressed concerns related to a nearby ditch line.

Despite those comments, Ward explained that city staff recommended approval of the conditional use permit subject to specific conditions. Those conditions included requiring that the final fencing and entranceway remain substantially consistent with the examples and plans presented to Council during the meeting. Ward further reported that the Planning Commission unanimously recommended approval of the permit during its public hearing with a 5-0 vote, including the staff-recommended conditions. He concluded by noting that the applicant was present at the meeting to answer any questions from Council before moving on to the second permit request.

Chris Ward presented the second conditional use permit request of the evening, which concerned property located at 225 South 15th Avenue, identified as parcel number 0241000. Ward explained that this was also a first reading before City Council. The applicants for the request were Eugene Brown, Dante Patton, and Linwood Jefferson. The property is located in Ward One and is zoned B-2 Limited Commercial District. The applicants were seeking approval to operate an auto repair shop at the location. Ward reminded Council that in June of the previous year, the city amended its zoning ordinance to require conditional use permits for auto-related businesses, making this request subject to additional review and conditions.

Ward displayed both a general location map and a close-up aerial view of the property. He noted that Council members and residents might already be familiar with the building because portions of it are currently used as a McDonald's employee and management training facility. Ward explained that staff carefully reviews auto-related businesses because such uses can create concerns involving parking, outdoor storage, noise, air pollution, hazardous waste disposal, safety risks, aesthetics, and potential impacts on surrounding property values.

According to Ward, the applicants proposed a relatively limited operation that would utilize only two of the six available service bays at the property, specifically the two front bays. The applicants stated that no repair work would occur outside the building and that inoperable vehicles would not be stored on the property. Additionally, the repair shop would operate strictly on an appointment-only basis, meaning there would be no walk-in customers or vehicle drop-offs left outside the facility. The applicants also committed to properly handling, storing, and disposing of all hazardous liquids and materials in compliance with environmental regulations.

Ward then reviewed street-view images of the property, noting that the location includes a fenced and secured parking area that would remain locked during evening hours. He emphasized that the property already provides adequate off-street parking and sufficient indoor space for storing materials and equipment associated with the business. Staff determined that the building layout and proposed operational practices would help minimize potential negative impacts often associated with auto repair businesses. Ward also reported that the city had not received any public comments regarding the application during the advertisement period.

Based on its review, city staff recommended approval of the conditional use permit subject to several conditions designed to protect surrounding properties and ensure compliance with city regulations. These conditions included prohibiting outdoor storage of parts, materials, or equipment; banning outdoor displays of items for sale; requiring all vehicles associated with the business to remain in the off-street parking area; mandating that all repair work occur indoors; and requiring inoperable or abandoned vehicles to be removed or stored indoors after 30 days. Additional conditions required compliance with all regulations related to hazardous materials and full compliance with all applicable local, state, and federal laws. Ward noted that these conditions were consistent with those imposed on a previous auto-related conditional use permit approved by the city several weeks earlier.

Ward concluded by informing Council that the Planning Commission had unanimously recommended approval of the request with a 5-0 vote, including all staff-recommended conditions. He stated that the applicants were present at the meeting to answer any questions from Council members before the public hearing was opened. After asking whether Council had any questions and seeing no requests to speak, the Mayor proceeded to open the public hearing on the matter.

Mark Burroughs addressed City Council during the public hearing regarding the proposed conditional use permit for an auto repair shop at 225 South 15th Avenue. Although he stated that he did not personally know the applicant seeking to open the business, Burroughs used the opportunity to express broader concerns about the city's approach to economic development and small business growth.

Burroughs argued that City Council frequently discusses the importance of attracting new businesses and increasing local revenue, yet in his view the city simultaneously creates unnecessary obstacles for entrepreneurs through complicated approval processes and regulatory requirements. Referring specifically to the conditional use permit process for the auto repair shop, he suggested that requiring small business owners to navigate lengthy hearings and approvals sends mixed messages about the city's commitment to supporting economic growth. He described the situation as contradictory, stating that the city cannot claim to encourage business development while also making it difficult for businesses to open and operate.

He encouraged Council to reduce what he characterized as bureaucratic "headaches" and roadblocks for small business owners, arguing that simplifying the process could lead to increased small business investment and economic activity within Hopewell. Burroughs concluded his remarks by thanking Council.

Councilor Wheat makes a motion to approve the conditional use permit for 1001 Perrymont Road and 225 South 15th Avenue as presented. Councilor Harris seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Wheat-	Yes
Councilor Rapole-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes
Mayor Partin-	Yes

Motion Passes 6-0

R-2 (Public Hearing) Modification to development standards 915 Riverside Avenue – Chris Ward, Director of Planning and Development

Chris Ward presented a modification to development standards application concerning property located at 915 Riverside Avenue, identified as parcel number 0660888. The application, which was being introduced as a first reading and public hearing item, involved Virginia American Water’s intake pump station located just east of the Route 10 bridge. Ward explained that Virginia American Water, as the applicant, was requesting approval to add barbed wire security fencing along the top of the existing perimeter security fence surrounding the facility.

Ward noted that the zoning district where the pump station is located does not normally permit barbed wire fencing. However, the city’s zoning ordinance contains a process allowing applicants to request modifications to development standards under certain circumstances. According to the proposal, Virginia American Water sought permission to install three strands of barbed wire on top of the existing security fencing to provide additional protection for the city’s water intake infrastructure. Ward emphasized that the request was being made specifically for security purposes related to critical utility operations.

He then reviewed the legal standards the city must evaluate when considering a modification to development standards request. Ward explained that the request should not be approved if it effectively constitutes a rezoning, variance, special exception, or additional land use not otherwise permitted under the zoning ordinance. Staff determined that the request did not meet any of those disqualifying conditions. Ward further explained that ordinary financial considerations could not be the primary justification for granting the modification, and staff concluded that the request was motivated by security concerns rather than cost savings. He also stated that the request did not alter any previously imposed property-specific conditions established by City Council or the Board of Zoning Appeals, nor did staff believe that the applicant had created the circumstances necessitating the request.

Based on those findings, Ward explained that city staff recommended approval of the modification request. The recommendation included one primary condition requiring that the fencing comply with standards already established elsewhere in the zoning ordinance for industrial districts. Under those industrial district standards, fencing may reach a maximum

height of ten feet and may include no more than three strands of barbed wire within that height limit. Ward noted that the proposed fencing would comply with those same standards.

Ward also reported that the Planning Commission unanimously recommended approval of the request with a 5-0 vote, including the staff-recommended condition. He informed Council that no public comments had been received regarding the application and noted that a representative from Virginia American Water was present at the meeting to answer any questions from Council members if needed.

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to approve the modification to development standards at 915 Riverside Avenue as presented. Councilor Wheat seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Wheat-	Yes
Councilor Rapole-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes
Mayor Partin-	Yes

Motion Passes 6-0

R-3 (Public Hearing) Ordinance Authorizing the Issuance of General Obligation Bonds –Stacey Jordan, Deputy City Manager

Jimmy Sanderson of Davenport & Company and Chris Culp of the law firm Hunton Andrews Kurth appeared before City Council to discuss the ordinance authorizing the issuance of general obligation bonds to fund school system improvements. Sanderson, serving as the city's financial advisor, provided an update on the financing process and explained that the city's audit was expected to be completed the following day. He noted that the completion of the audit was an important milestone because potential investors were waiting to review the city's financial information before proceeding further with the financing discussions. Sanderson stated that the city's goal was to return to Council at the May 28 meeting with details regarding investor interest, projected interest rates, loan terms, and overall financing conditions. However, he cautioned that the process should not be rushed and indicated that additional information would become available as negotiations progressed.

Sanderson then introduced Chris Culp, bond counsel for the city, to explain the legal process associated with issuing the bonds. Culp explained that his firm works closely with the city attorney, finance department, and financial advisors to ensure that the proposed financing complies with both Virginia state law and federal tax regulations. He stated that bond counsel's role is to ultimately provide a legal opinion to bond purchasers confirming that the bonds meet all applicable legal requirements and that the interest earned on the bonds will be exempt from federal income taxes.

Culp explained that before the city can issue debt, Virginia law requires City Council to hold a public hearing and consider adoption of a bond ordinance. He noted that the ordinance before

Council that evening represented the first reading of a short-form authorization allowing the issuance of up to \$15 million in bonds for school improvement projects, primarily focused on HVAC upgrades and related infrastructure needs within the school system. Following adoption of the ordinance, Council would also consider a bond resolution that establishes detailed financing parameters, including the maximum principal amount, maximum interest rate, and maximum repayment term.

According to Culp, once those parameters are approved, authority to finalize and execute the financing could be delegated to city staff and the Mayor, provided the final agreement remains within the limits authorized by Council. He explained that the structure of the financing was similar to a previous general obligation financing approved by Council during the prior fall.

During the discussion, Council members clarified the procedural steps required moving forward. It was explained that the city was holding the required public hearing and first reading that evening, with a second reading and additional action potentially occurring at the May 28 meeting. However, Culp clarified that if Council chose to do so, it could also approve the ordinance on first reading that same evening provided there was sufficient support among Council members, which would eliminate the need for additional action at the next meeting. The discussion concluded with Council members confirming their understanding of the process and available options regarding the bond authorization.

Mark Burroughs, a Ward Three resident, addressed City Council during discussion of the proposed \$15 million general obligation bond issuance for school improvements. Burroughs referenced previous discussions held during a January 13 Council meeting, stating that during that earlier conversation Ms. Jordan indicated the bond funds would not be used exclusively for school projects, but could also support other city expenses, including improvements to City Hall. He also recalled earlier discussions involving stormwater fee increases and stated that he believed residents had previously been told those increases would help fund school-related infrastructure projects, including HVAC improvements at the high school. Burroughs questioned the consistency of the city's messaging regarding how major capital projects and improvements would ultimately be funded.

Burroughs expressed strong concerns about the city continuing to take on additional debt while simultaneously increasing taxes and fees on residents. He argued that although the proposed bond financing might provide temporary financial relief or allow projects to move forward in the short term, the long-term repayment obligations would ultimately fall on taxpayers for many years into the future. He questioned whether Council had adequately considered where repayment funds would come from and warned that residents were already financially strained by rising taxes and city fees. According to Burroughs, many citizens, including himself, felt "taxed out" and increasingly unable to absorb additional financial burdens imposed by the city.

He also connected his remarks to earlier comments made by a student speaker regarding unsafe and deteriorating conditions within local schools. Burroughs argued that addressing school infrastructure and safety concerns should be the city's highest priority. He criticized recent city expenditures that he viewed as less essential, specifically referencing approximately \$25,000 spent on a security barrier at the Commissioner's Office and an additional \$4,005 spent on chairs

for the same office. In his view, those combined expenditures could instead have funded practical improvements such as installing additional bathrooms or repairing facilities in schools where students had raised serious concerns about safety and infrastructure deficiencies. Burroughs stated that if middle school students are publicly raising concerns about unsafe conditions, then city leaders and adults should have already been addressing those issues proactively.

Finally, Burroughs questioned accountability for the city's past financial problems and management failures. Referring to earlier comments made by Mayor Partin and city officials regarding financial mismanagement over the previous decade, Burroughs pointed out that several current Council members were already serving during portions of that period. He asked who within city government had actually been held responsible or terminated because of the financial problems now being discussed publicly. While acknowledging that some elected officials may have lost office over time, Burroughs argued that he had not seen meaningful accountability among city staff or administrators despite residents continuing to bear the financial consequences. He concluded by expressing frustration that taxpayers are still paying for past mistakes while seeing little evidence that anyone has truly been held accountable.

Laura Greenwood, a Ward Six resident, addressed City Council regarding the proposed \$15 million bond issuance and expressed strong concerns about transparency, financial management, and the use of taxpayer funds. Greenwood stated that information previously provided to a member of the Citizens Oversight Committee outlined a list of approximately 13 or 14 separate projects and expenditures totaling roughly \$14.6 million that were allegedly associated with the proposed financing. However, she argued that the language contained in the actual bond documentation presented to the public appeared to differ significantly from those earlier representations. According to Greenwood, the bond ordinance specifically described the financing as being for school-related construction, equipment replacement, and facility improvements, particularly HVAC upgrades, and did not mention the numerous additional projects referenced in the earlier materials. She suggested that this inconsistency created either a serious discrepancy or a deliberate misrepresentation of how the borrowed funds would ultimately be used.

Greenwood also praised the Treasurer's Office and Commissioner's Office for what she described as their willingness to provide records and transparency when she reviewed financial documents. However, she expressed frustration that despite the city holding substantial investment balances, officials were still seeking to borrow additional money through long-term debt financing. Referring to financial records she reviewed, Greenwood stated that the city currently possesses investment accounts totaling more than \$21 million. Given those existing funds, she questioned why the city would pursue a \$15 million loan carrying interest costs approaching 5%, which she argued taxpayers would ultimately be responsible for repaying.

Throughout her remarks, Greenwood repeatedly accused city officials of misrepresenting information to residents and unnecessarily increasing the financial burden on taxpayers. She argued that rather than taking on additional debt and paying interest, the city should instead use available investment funds more responsibly to address infrastructure and school needs directly.

Greenwood urged Council to “play smart” financially and stop imposing additional costs on residents through borrowing and tax increases.

Greenwood concluded her comments by warning City Council not to underestimate the Citizens Oversight Committee or the level of scrutiny residents are placing on city finances and decision-making. She strongly suggested that citizens are closely monitoring the city’s financial actions and expressed anger and distrust toward what she viewed as ongoing misinformation and lack of transparency from city leadership.

Jan Glover addressed City Council in support of school renovations and improvements, explaining that she attended the meeting after losing a bet to her 11-year-old daughter, CJ Glover, who had earlier spoken before Council about unsafe conditions at Woodlawn Learning Center and Carter G. Woodson Middle School. Glover humorously explained that her daughter challenged her to come speak publicly after CJ herself had the courage to advocate for repairs and replacements at the schools. Although she jokingly expressed concern about risking her job by speaking openly, Glover said she ultimately felt compelled to support her daughter’s concerns and discuss both the condition of the schools and the city’s bond financing discussions.

Drawing on her experience as a teacher, Glover referenced how seventh-grade students learn about bonds, economics, and government finance while studying history and civics. She explained that bonds are financial instruments purchased by investors and repaid by governments with interest over time. Glover noted that bonds function as part of a municipality’s capital and investment structure and emphasized that city investments are intended to generate ongoing revenue and financial stability. She acknowledged that while she does not consider herself a math expert, she understood enough about finance to explain that if a city spends down its principal investment funds directly, it loses the future interest income those investments generate. She compared it to retirees spending down their retirement principal and thereby reducing future income streams.

Glover argued that taking out loans or issuing bonds can sometimes be financially wiser than exhausting investment reserves, particularly during periods of inflation. She explained that because inflation rates are currently higher than some borrowing rates, the city may ultimately repay loans with money that is worth less in the future than it is today. In her view, this can make borrowing a practical financial strategy rather than simply spending down reserves. Through her comments, Glover appeared to challenge criticisms from previous speakers who questioned why the city would pursue borrowing while still maintaining investment accounts.

At the same time, Glover strongly supported prioritizing school improvements and described serious maintenance issues at her workplace. She stated that she regularly has to shake out her coat before leaving work because of cockroach problems within the building, emphasizing that the issue is related to the condition of the facility rather than the students themselves. Her comments reinforced concerns previously raised by students and other residents regarding deteriorating infrastructure, safety concerns, and unhealthy conditions within school buildings.

Throughout her remarks, Glover mixed humor with serious concerns, referencing her teaching background, her graduate education, and her experience teaching civics and economics. She

attempted to explain financial concepts in practical terms while also emphasizing the urgent need to improve school conditions for both students and staff. Her comments were ultimately cut short when Council informed her that her allotted speaking time had expired, after which she thanked Council and concluded her remarks.

Darlene Thompson, a Ward Six resident, returned to the podium to respond to comments made by city officials following earlier public remarks regarding the city's finances and proposed bond issuance. Thompson argued that if City Council members and staff are permitted to publicly respond to citizen comments during meetings, then residents should likewise be allowed to reply to statements made by officials, particularly when citizens believe inaccurate information has been presented. She strongly disputed several financial explanations given earlier in the meeting and maintained that city residents were not being provided with the full truth regarding Hopewell's financial condition.

Thompson referenced statements previously made by Finance Director Stacey Jordan when she first arrived in Hopewell, recalling that Jordan had reportedly stated the city's budget had been inflated by approximately \$7.1 million following the departure of former city management. Thompson emphasized that she has attended City Council meetings consistently since 2018 and closely follows the city's financial discussions, insisting that her comments are based on information publicly presented during those meetings rather than misinformation or speculation. She argued that the financial documents and numbers presented by the city demonstrate that Hopewell is not operating in a deficit severe enough to justify borrowing an additional \$15 million. Thompson questioned how the city could have developed and justified such a major financing plan so quickly and suggested that the process lacked proper planning and transparency.

Throughout her remarks, Thompson repeatedly pointed to examples of city spending that she believed contradicted claims of financial hardship. She referenced developer Charles Bennett and projects involving the marina, stating that the city previously approved substantial funding requests related to those developments, including amounts she described as \$500,000, \$94,000, and an additional proposed \$500,000 allocation in the upcoming budget. Thompson argued that city leaders continue approving large expenditures and development incentives while simultaneously claiming that the city is financially struggling and needs to increase taxes and borrowing.

She also criticized the city's relationship with the Robert Bobb Group and associated consulting expenses. Thompson claimed that the Bobb Group received more than \$3.5 million in compensation from the city while also referencing monthly payments to consultants and city administrators. She argued that city staffing and administrative costs have continued to increase, including the hiring of additional employees and support staff, despite officials previously describing the city as financially unstable. According to Thompson, the city's actions are inconsistent with the behavior of a government facing a true financial crisis.

Thompson further stated that the city has repeatedly increased financial burdens on residents through higher taxes, real estate assessments, and various fees while maintaining substantial investment balances. She contrasted the city's ability to invest millions of dollars with the

financial struggles faced by ordinary residents who, in her view, cannot afford to build personal savings or investments because they are overwhelmed by taxes and rising living costs. She insisted that the Treasurer's Office itself had presented records showing the city possesses significant investment accounts, reinforcing her belief that additional borrowing is unnecessary.

Throughout her comments, Thompson repeatedly denied accusations that citizens were spreading misinformation, arguing instead that residents are relying on publicly available financial records, budget documents, and Council meeting discussions. She concluded by stating that she intends to continue attending meetings and speaking publicly until city leadership changes course. Thompson also expressed hope that voters would remove certain Council members from office during the upcoming elections because she believed they had failed to represent the best interests of Hopewell taxpayers.

Following the public hearing discussion regarding the proposed bond financing and city finances, Mayor Partin addressed what he described as repeated misinformation and misunderstandings presented by certain members of the public during the meeting. He first directed questions to Finance Director Stacey Jordan regarding claims about the city's stormwater fees and tax increases. Mayor Partin asked whether City Council had ever increased the stormwater tax itself, noting that the stormwater program is an unfunded mandate required by the Commonwealth of Virginia. Jordan clarified that City Council had not increased the stormwater fee, but rather only changed the billing method by moving the fee from the Data Integrator utility bill onto residents' real estate tax bills. Mayor Partin thanked Jordan for clarifying that point for the public record.

Mayor Partin then turned to broader concerns regarding the city's past financial condition and accountability for previous fiscal problems. He stated that Hopewell had not been managed properly for many years leading up to the current administration and emphasized that since approximately 2015, there had been significant turnover in both city leadership and City Council membership. According to Mayor Partin, the current Council and management team inherited numerous financial problems created by prior administrations and have had to make difficult decisions in order to stabilize the city's finances and correct years of poor financial management. He specifically argued that previous City Councils diverted capital funding originally intended for school system improvements in order to balance city budgets, which he stated contributed to the need for the current bond financing for school infrastructure projects.

Mayor Partin then asked Stacey Jordan whether prior city budgets had placed Hopewell on a path toward financial instability or bankruptcy. Jordan responded that previous budgets were in some cases overstated and financially unsustainable, citing examples where anticipated funding levels did not match actual revenues received. She explained that these practices contributed to the city's long-term financial difficulties. Jordan also referenced Hopewell's inclusion on the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts' fiscal distress list, noting that the city had remained on that list for a significant period of time but is now finally in the process of being removed. She described this as an important achievement for the city and evidence that financial reforms implemented by the current administration are improving Hopewell's financial condition. Mayor Partin emphasized that the fiscal distress designation and related audit information are publicly available on the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts website and argued that the

administration's statements regarding the city's past financial problems are based on factual documentation rather than misinformation.

During the exchange, several members of the audience attempted to interject comments and challenge statements being made by city officials. Mayor Partin repeatedly reminded attendees that public comment periods had already concluded and stated that the current discussion was intended solely to address misinformation raised during the hearing. At one point, Mark Burroughs attempted to continue speaking from the audience, prompting Mayor Partin to issue a final warning instructing him to stop interrupting or face removal from City Hall. When the interruptions continued, Mayor Partin directed the deputy present at the meeting to escort Burroughs from the chambers.

After order was restored, Mayor Partin continued questioning Stacey Jordan regarding allegations that the city had intentionally inflated or misrepresented budget figures in previous years. Jordan indicated that she had not stated that the city intentionally inflated budgets, though the discussion referenced concerns regarding prior financial practices and inaccurate revenue assumptions. Mayor Partin concluded the exchange by stating that the discussion had addressed what he considered to be misinformation and disinformation raised during the public hearing.

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to approve the ordinance authorizing the issuance of general obligation bonds for the city of Hopewell, Virginia and the maximum principal of \$15,000,000 as presented. Mayor Partin seconds the motion.

Councilor Rapole spoke in support of the proposed bond financing for school infrastructure improvements, emphasizing that the city is facing an urgent and unavoidable need to address failing HVAC systems within the school division. She stated that the School Board and school administration have repeatedly informed City Council that the city essentially has two options: either replace the aging HVAC systems now or continue paying increasingly large repair costs while risking total system failure. Rapole explained that if the HVAC systems fail completely, schools could lose air conditioning and climate control to the extent that buildings would become unsuitable for students and staff, potentially forcing school closures. She stressed that because of these circumstances, City Council is effectively in a position where action must be taken to address the school facilities issues. Rapole stated that she wanted to publicly go on record expressing her support for assisting the school system through the proposed financing plan.

Following her comments, Mayor Partin added that city officials had previously attempted to secure state funding assistance for the school infrastructure needs. He explained that the city worked with state legislators and sought inclusion in both the House of Delegates and Senate budget proposals through budget amendments. According to Mayor Partin, city representatives met multiple times with senators and delegates serving on key money committees in an effort to advocate for Hopewell's school funding needs. However, despite those efforts, the requested funding was ultimately not included in either the House or Senate budget bills, nor was it added during the budget reconciliation process between the two chambers.

Mayor Partin stated that although the city unsuccessfully pursued outside state assistance, the underlying problem remains that the schools must have functioning HVAC systems in order to

safely operate. He noted that if the HVAC systems fail and school buildings become unusable, students cannot legally be sent into those facilities. He further argued that the public would much rather see students attending safe, functioning schools than being forced out of classrooms because of infrastructure failures. The discussion concluded with Mayor Partin asking whether any other Council members wished to comment before proceeding with the meeting agenda.

ROLL CALL

Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Wheat-	Absent
Councilor Rapole-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes
Mayor Partin-	Yes

Motion Passes 5-0

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to approve the resolution providing for the issuance, sale and award for the city of Hopewell, Virginia of general obligation bonds for public improvement bonds in one or more series heretofore authorized and providing for form details and payment of such bonds as presented. Councilor Harris seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Wheat-	Absent
Councilor Rapole-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes
Mayor Partin-	Yes

Motion Passes 5-0

R-4 Supplemental Appropriation for the School Board – Janel English, Director of Finance for Public Schools

Janel English appeared before City Council on behalf of the Hopewell School Board to request approval of a supplemental appropriation to the school division's budget in the amount of \$509,700. She explained that the request was necessary due to the school division receiving additional state, local, and grant funding that was not included in the originally adopted budget. English provided Council with background information regarding previous budget actions, noting that City Council approved the school division's original budget on April 22, 2025. Since that time, Council had also approved two prior supplemental appropriations: one in September 2025 totaling \$778,650 and another in February 2026 totaling approximately \$4.76 million. According to English, those earlier appropriations were primarily related to grant funding received by the school division after the original budget adoption.

English explained that the newly requested \$509,700 supplemental appropriation reflects several additional grants and funding sources recently awarded to Hopewell Public Schools. These include an Early Childhood Provisionally Licensed Teacher Grant, an additional School Security

Officer Grant, a Year-Round Schools Grant, and grants from both the Cameron Foundation and the John Randolph Foundation. She stated that these funds would support a variety of educational, staffing, and school safety initiatives within the division.

As a result of incorporating the new grant funding, English reported that the school division's operating budget would increase to approximately \$76.3 million, while the total Hopewell Public Schools budget, including all funding sources, would rise to approximately \$82.26 million. Her presentation focused primarily on formally notifying Council of the new funding sources and requesting authorization to amend the school budget accordingly so the funds could be properly allocated and utilized by the school division.

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to approve the school division supplemental approach and resolution to amend the fiscal year 26 Hopewell Public Schools supplemental budget appropriation as presented. Mayor Partin seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Wheat-	Absent
Councilor Rapole-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes
Mayor Partin-	Yes

Motion Passes 5-0

ADJOURNMENT

Respectfully Submitted,



Sade' Allen, City Clerk



Johnny Partin, Mayor