

MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 10, 2026 CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING

A SPECIAL meeting of the Hopewell Council was held on Tuesday, February 10, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.

PRESENT:

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

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to go into a 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 EDA); § 2.2-3711(A)(1), to discuss personnel matters including board and commission appointments (HRHA liaison, School Board, City Attorney annual evaluation); and § 2.2-3711(A)(8) (Beacon Theatre update). Mayor Partin seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 6-0

A roll call was conducted after returning from the closed session.

PRESENT:

John B. Partin, Mayor
Rita Joyner, Vice Mayor
Michael Harris, Councilor

Ronnie Ellis, Councilor
Susan Daye, Councilor
Malik Wheat, Councilor
Lovena Rapole, Councilor

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

ROLL CALL

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

PRESENT:

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

REGULAR MEETING

City Manager's Report - Michael Rogers, Interim City Manager

The City Manager, Mr. Rogers, delivered a comprehensive report highlighting several major updates and operational efforts. He

announced the successful completion of the search for a new Director of the Hopewell Water Renewal Agency, conducted with assistance from MGT Executive Recruitment under a state-authorized contract. Eleven applications were received for the highly specialized position. A steering committee composed of regional wastewater utility leaders and two members of the Hopewell Water Renewal Commission played a key role in evaluating candidates. Following this process, Matthew Ellinghouse was selected and is scheduled to begin on February 18. Mr. Ellinghouse currently serves as Deputy Director of Engineering and Development for Hanover County Department of Public Utilities and previously held a leadership role with Hopewell Water Renewal. He is a professional engineer with extensive experience in water and wastewater operations and holds advanced degrees from the University of Richmond and Virginia Tech. The City Manager expressed optimism that Mr. Ellinghouse's return would support reform and renewal of the facility.

Mr. Rogers also reported on the success of Hopewell's Lobby Day in Richmond, organized by DBS Government Relations in coordination with Senator Lashrecse Aird and Delegate Lindsey Dougherty. Approximately 40 individuals attended the City's breakfast reception, and the Hopewell delegation—totaling 17 participants—was formally recognized in both legislative chambers. Additionally, the Mayor, Vice Mayor, and City Manager recently met with Senator Aird, Delegate Dougherty, and Minority Leader Terry Kilgore to receive updates on the City's legislative priorities. The City remains optimistic about legislative outcomes and continued advocacy efforts.

The City Manager recognized the leadership of Fire Chief Rupert and Deputy Fire Chief Williams for their management of the Emergency Operations Center during Winter Storm Fern, as well as the exceptional efforts of staff, particularly Public Works. Chief Rupert then provided a detailed after-action briefing on the City's storm response. He explained that forecasts from the National Weather Service predicted significant snowfall followed by ice accumulation and prolonged freezing temperatures, creating the potential for catastrophic impacts such as widespread power outages, transportation disruptions, and risks

to vulnerable populations. Based on these projections, the City prepared for severe conditions by prioritizing transportation access, sheltering operations, emergency response continuity, and coordination with state and utility partners.

Deputy Fire Chief Williams outlined the City's preparedness measures, including staffing the Emergency Operations Center in two 12-hour operational periods and using Microsoft Teams for the first time to allow some staff to work remotely. The City pre-positioned fuel, salt, sand, and brine, coordinated with the State Emergency Operations Center, and prepared Hopewell High School as a warming shelter, including deploying a large generator to ensure power reliability. Additional fire, EMS, and public safety personnel were assigned, and a shared documentation system was implemented to track response activities. Coordination with Dominion Energy and continuous weather monitoring were emphasized as critical components of situational awareness.

Public Works Director Monique Robinson detailed snow removal operations, noting that crews operated continuously for five days using alternating 12-hour shifts, totaling approximately 2,760 man-hours. Primary roads were pre-treated with brine prior to the storm, followed by plowing and treatment of primary and secondary roads as conditions allowed. Despite prolonged freezing temperatures and ice accumulation, all roads were treated, and crews continued addressing icy areas and clearing access to public buildings, sidewalks, and facilities. Limited icy conditions persisted in some areas, and crews continued to respond to citizen calls as needed.

Sheltering operations were also reviewed, highlighting the extensive coordination required among Social Services, Fire and EMS, Public Works, the Sheriff's Office, Recreation, and Schools. The warming shelter at the high school was fully staffed and operational for over 12 hours but ultimately saw limited use due to the absence of power outages. Public safety agencies increased staffing levels, deployed storm response vehicles equipped with chainsaws and supplies, and ensured continued emergency response capabilities throughout the event.

In closing, staff presented preliminary cost and activity figures, noting that the storm response involved nearly 3,900 man-hours and cost the City just over \$94,000, excluding overtime still under review. While the response was deemed highly successful, opportunities for improvement were identified, including expanded training on virtual EOC operations and a comprehensive review of emergency assignments for all City employees. City Council members expressed strong appreciation for the extraordinary teamwork, dedication, and round-the-clock efforts of staff, particularly Public Works and sheltering partners, and thanked everyone involved for their professionalism and commitment to public safety.

Second Quarter Financials – Stacey Jordan, Deputy City Manager

Ms. Jordan presented the City's second quarter financial report for Fiscal Year 2026, noting that a full January citywide update would be provided at the next Council meeting. Citywide revenues are trending 2.5% higher—approximately \$6.7 million more—compared to the prior year, while expenses are trending 1.5% higher, or about \$4.6 million more than FY25. The increase in expenses is primarily attributed to annual salary increases, cost-of-living adjustments (COLA), fringe benefit increases, and higher school expenditures. She reminded Council that key revenue collection months for the City are December, February, May, and June.

For the General Fund, second quarter revenues are trending 0.31% higher (approximately \$874,000) compared to FY25, while expenditures are trending 3.1% lower (about \$288,000 less), largely due to timing of transfers. In the Enterprise Fund, revenues are trending 7.78% higher—about \$4 million more than the previous year—due to improved on-time billing, collection of outstanding balances from a prior utility administrator, and a shift to monthly capital billing instead of billing at fiscal year-end. Enterprise expenses are trending 2.9% (approximately \$2.2 million) higher due to ongoing capital project completion. In response to a Council question regarding General Obligation bonds for two sewer pump stations, staff indicated that most current Enterprise expenditures reflect DEQ-related projects and

maintenance needs at the Water Renewal facility, with bond-funded projects not yet significantly reflected in spending.

School revenues are trending 0.34% higher (approximately \$856,000), largely due to increased state revenues, while school expenditures are trending 3.22% higher (about \$3.1 million) compared to FY25. Ms. Jordan then reviewed departmental budget-to-actual variances, explaining that several departments appear temporarily off-trend due to lump-sum payments or timing issues that should balance out by fiscal year-end. These include Accounting (multiple audits completed in one year), Circuit Court (office supplies, equipment, and professional services), Information Technology (Office 365 mitigation paid upfront), Police and Sheriff (software, body camera, and taser service contracts), Marina (roof repair), Human Resources (HR manual consultant), and Voter Registrar (part-time election staffing). Regarding Hopewell Water Renewal (HWR), expenditures are trending slightly above the expected 50% midyear mark at 56%, reflecting increased maintenance and capital needs, as well as DEQ compliance efforts. However, staff anticipates the department will remain within budget overall, with a possible additional funding request of approximately \$500,000 to complete outstanding work.

In response to Council questions about year-end projections, Ms. Jordan explained that despite certain categories trending higher, overall City expenses remain approximately \$2 million lower than the previous year at this point, indicating the City is on track to maintain revenues exceeding expenditures if trends continue. Overtime trends were also reviewed, with higher usage noted in the Sheriff's Office and Treasurer's Office due to vacancies, and in the Voter Registrar's Office due to election-related staffing.

Ms. Jordan reported significant salary savings resulting from vacancies across departments. General Fund salary savings total approximately \$2.5 million at midyear, Enterprise Fund savings total \$657,000, Social Services savings total \$363,000, and Healthy Families savings total \$86,000. These savings may be reallocated later in the fiscal year for capital projects or other eligible needs within their respective funds.

The City plans to bring forward a midyear reappropriation request to allocate available funds toward additional capital projects.

Finally, Ms. Jordan reported that 1,500 invoices totaling \$6.8 million were processed in December, and all debt service payments remain current. She announced that the Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) has been completed, submitted to the Federal Clearinghouse and the Auditor of Public Accounts, and that the City is on schedule to meet the March 31 deadline for Fiscal Year 2025—bringing the City fully up to date on its financial reporting requirements. Council expressed appreciation for the report.

Crime Summary Report – Gregory Taylor, Chief of Police

The Police Chief presented the January crime summary, noting the report reflects data through January 18 and that he will return later in the month to provide the February update. Overall, violent crime is down 29% compared to the same period last year. However, property crime is up 71%, driven primarily by a 100% increase in larcenies, rising from 10 incidents in January 2025 to 20 in January 2026. These larcenies largely involve thefts from motor vehicles and thefts of personal property such as bicycles and lawn equipment. Motor vehicle theft, however, has decreased by 67%. Due to the increase in larcenies, total major crime is up 38% compared to last year. When compared longer-term to 2023, the City has experienced a 29% decrease in violent crime, an 8% decrease in property crime, and an overall 12% reduction in total major crime, indicating a broader downward trend. The Chief also reported zero fatal and non-fatal opioid overdoses so far in 2026, one verified shots-fired incident to date, and no changes in Neighborhood Watch participation.

Regarding staffing, the department recently held applicant testing at the police academy, with five candidates receiving conditional offers and undergoing background checks. Seven recruits began the academy on January 5, and four recruits graduated and are currently in the Field Training Officer (FTO) program. One emergency communications operator remains in the background process, and there are currently

seven vacant police officer positions. Community engagement efforts remain steady, with the next Citizens Police Academy scheduled for March 5–7 at the police department. The HEAT (Help Eliminate Auto Theft) program has received supplies and will announce distribution dates soon. The next Business Watch meeting is scheduled for February 12, location to be determined. Planning has begun for the Special Olympics and the Memorial Breakfast, which will be held May 7 at 7:00 a.m., with the program beginning at 8:00 a.m. Additionally, School Resource Officers have implemented a “Heroes in Training” curriculum for students interested in law enforcement careers, set to begin March 2, 2026.

The Chief also presented findings from several speed studies conducted in response to citizen complaints. On Brown Avenue (speed limit 25 mph), a one-week study recorded 1,062 vehicles with an average speed of 18.41 mph and an 85th percentile speed of 23 mph. Only 73 vehicles (6.87%) exceeded 25 mph, with an average violation speed of 28.79 mph, and no vehicles exceeded 45 mph. Although some Council members expressed concern that visible police presence may have influenced driver behavior during the study, the Chief stated that no changes are currently planned, but the area will continue to be monitored and may be re-studied. A second study on Cedar Lane in Maplewood (also 25 mph) recorded 4,576 vehicles with an average speed of 23.78 mph and an 85th percentile speed of 28 mph. Only 37 vehicles exceeded 37 mph, with an average violation speed of 28.76 mph. Accident data from January 2022 through January 2026 for Maplewood, Cedar Lane, and Brown Avenue showed seven accidents in the area, none at intersections, and none involving injuries or animals. Finally, a traffic study conducted on West Broadway near Broadway Baptist Church (35 mph zone) recorded 28,415 vehicles during a five-day period, with an average speed of 26.8 mph and only 43 vehicles exceeding 45 mph. Council inquired about time-of-day variations, but the study did not show significant differences. A similar study for West End Christian Church is pending. The Chief concluded by offering to answer questions, and Council thanked him for the report.

Actions Resulting from the Closed Meeting

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to appoint Councilor Daye as the HRHA Liaison. Councilor Rapole seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 7-0

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to appoint Patience Bennett to fill the unexpired term on the School Board. Councilor Harris seconds the motion. Mayor Partin requested that the minutes reflect his recusal from the matter and noted that the required recusal form had already been submitted. The acknowledgment was made, and the recusal was recorded in the minutes.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 6-0

Prayer by Reverend Tucker, 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

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

Motion Passes -0

During the Communications from Citizens portion of the City Council meeting, the Clerk read the standard statement outlining the procedures and guidelines for citizen participation. The statement explained that this segment, limited to a total of 30 minutes, occurs at each regular council meeting. Citizens wishing to address the Council must approach the microphone, state their name, and, if they reside in Hopewell, provide their ward number. Each speaker is allotted up to three minutes to speak. The statement also emphasized that individuals may not speak on items scheduled for a public hearing and that all remarks must be directed to the Council as a body, rather than to individual members. Additionally, it was noted that personal, abusive, or slanderous statements, or behavior inciting disorderly conduct, are prohibited and may result in the individual being barred from future participation and removed from the chambers.

Laura Greenwood, Ward 6

During public comment, Miss Greenwood expressed strong dissatisfaction regarding the recent City Council retreat held in Williamsburg. She stated she felt misled about the retreat's purpose and objected to what she described as condescending remarks. She criticized the decision to hold the retreat outside the City, arguing that the same agenda items could have been accomplished locally at significantly less cost, estimating a savings of over \$10,000 to taxpayers. Miss Greenwood suggested that local venues, such as the library, could have hosted the meeting free of charge and that local restaurants could have provided catering, thereby supporting local

businesses. She also questioned whether the retreat was truly necessary for team building and expressed concern about certain expenses incurred. The comments concluded with Miss Greenwood stating her disappointment and reserving the remainder of their time.

In response, the City Manager addressed the concerns raised about the retreat. He noted that planning retreats is a common and widely accepted practice among governing bodies across the country, providing councils with an opportunity to build consensus and address significant projects. He stated that the Williamsburg retreat allowed Council to focus on one of the City's major issues—the future of the Hopewell Water Renewal facility, including consideration of whether to sell the facility or pursue an operations and maintenance contract. As a result of discussions at the retreat, Council decided not to sell the facility and instead directed staff to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for operations and maintenance services. The City Manager reported that proposals had been received and would soon be reviewed, with a recommendation to Council forthcoming. He concluded by affirming his professional view that planning retreats are not a waste of taxpayer funds when they help advance major City priorities and foster effective collaboration among Council members.

Mark Burroughs, Ward 3

Mark Burroughs, a Ward Three resident, addressed Council during public comment regarding the recent Williamsburg retreat. He began by stating that although he had prepared written remarks, he intended to speak more directly. Mr. Burroughs asserted that public comment was an opportunity for Council to listen rather than respond, and expressed frustration that he had previously left a message to complain about the conduct of a City employee but had not received a response. The presiding officer reminded him to direct his comments to the Council body as a whole and not to single out individuals. Mr. Burroughs continued by criticizing the Council's oversight of staff responsiveness and raised concerns about retreat expenses, specifically referencing

approximately \$100 spent on wine. He questioned whether alcohol was consumed during official sessions or as part of an after-hours gathering and argued that such costs should not have been funded with taxpayer dollars.

Mr. Burroughs further objected to the overall cost of the retreat, which he estimated at approximately \$17,000, contending it was excessive and unnecessary. He compared the City's retreat to a planning session held by another locality, stating that theirs was conducted at a lower overall cost. He accused the Council of misrepresenting details related to the retreat and maintained that public funds should not be used for what he characterized as inappropriate or nonessential expenses. During his remarks, he exceeded the allotted time and was advised that his time had expired. The presiding officer thanked him for his comments and proceeded with the meeting.

Regular Business

R-1 FY24 ACFR- Stacey Jordan, Deputy City Manager

Ms. Jordan, introduced Mr. David Foley, Partner with Robinson, Farmer, Cox Associates, the City's external auditor, and expressed appreciation for his firm's work in completing the Fiscal Year 2024 audit within a shortened timeframe. Mr. Foley addressed the Council and provided an overview of the audit for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024. He explained that the audit consists of three primary components: (1) an audit of the City's financial statements to ensure they are prepared in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP); (2) a review and assessment of the City's internal controls over financial reporting, conducted under Government Auditing Standards; and (3) the federal compliance or "Single Audit," required because the City and School Board expended more than \$750,000 in federal grant funds. He noted that for the federal compliance portion, auditors follow guidelines established by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to ensure adherence to grant requirements.

Mr. Foley reported that the City received an unmodified (clean) opinion on its financial statements, indicating they were fairly presented in accordance with GAAP. However, the auditors did report material weaknesses in internal controls over financial reporting. These findings are primarily related to the timely completion of monthly reconciliations, including bank reconciliations, property tax reconciliations, utility reconciliations, and the reconciliation of subsidiary ledgers. He explained that these issues were largely consistent with prior years, as the City has been working to address and correct procedures from earlier fiscal periods. He noted that Fiscal Year 2025 will be the first full year under the current financial management structure, and improvements are anticipated as updated procedures are fully implemented. The federal compliance report for major grant programs was clean, with no material weaknesses, significant deficiencies, or instances of noncompliance identified for either the City or the School Board.

During Council questions, a female Council member asked whether the reported material weaknesses were unexpected or whether any departments, including the School Board, had presented unusual concerns. Mr. Foley responded that the findings were anticipated, given the City's efforts to reconcile prior-year financial activity, and confirmed there were no unexpected departmental issues. With no further questions from Council, Mr. Foley was thanked for his presentation, and the meeting proceeded.

R-2 Beacon Theatre Update – Anthony Bessette, City Attorney

Mr. Bessette addressed the Council regarding ongoing efforts over the past seven to eight months to modernize the Beacon Theatre's governance structure. He explained that staff and the Theatre's board have been working to transition the organization toward operating as a nonprofit, tax-exempt entity, while also ensuring its programming remains aligned with the community it serves. Mr. Bassett noted that the Beacon Theatre is a City asset and that updated Articles of Incorporation and bylaws—already adopted by the Theatre's board—would soon be brought before Council for ratification. He further stated

that, contingent upon Council's approval, additional board members would be appointed in April. As part of this transition, staff has been collaborating with the John Randolph Foundation to explore potential support in guiding the Theatre's future direction. He then introduced Mr. Kevin Foster, Executive Director of the John Randolph Foundation, to present information on how the Foundation might assist.

Mr. Foster greeted Council and provided a detailed overview of the advantages of forming a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. He outlined significant financial benefits, including exemption from federal and state income taxes, potential local property tax exemptions, eligibility for sales tax exemption, and the deductibility of charitable donations for individuals and corporations. He emphasized that nonprofit status would enable the Beacon Theatre to pursue grant funding opportunities unavailable to for-profit entities, citing organizations such as the Virginia Commission for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. He also discussed additional financial and operational advantages, including in-kind donations, naming rights opportunities, reduced postage rates, and increased marketing potential tied to charitable contributions.

Mr. Foster further explained the legal and governance benefits of nonprofit incorporation, including liability protections for directors and officers, increased credibility through IRS oversight, and a governance structure that promotes fiduciary accountability. He noted that nonprofit status allows for greater artistic freedom and mission-driven programming, which could enhance cultural diversity and experimentation in performances. He highlighted the community impact of nonprofit status, including expanded volunteer engagement and opportunities to serve underserved populations. He also reviewed operational requirements, such as restrictions on political activity, limitations on private benefit, and rules regarding charitable deductions when goods or services are provided in exchange for donations.

In concluding, Mr. Foster outlined how the John Randolph Foundation could assist the City and the Theatre, including helping identify qualified board members with diverse skill sets, facilitating community listening sessions to align programming with regional interests, and

potentially providing grant funding for operational, project-based, or capital needs. He noted that the Foundation currently manages an endowment benefiting the Beacon Theatre, which has generated more than \$45,000 annually in grant support in recent years. Mr. Foster emphasized that he was not advocating for a specific vote but that the Foundation was willing to support the Theatre as a valuable community asset. Council members expressed appreciation for the presentation and indicated interest in receiving guidance and assistance from the Foundation as the City moves forward with restructuring the Beacon Theatre's governance.

R-3 Crisis Communication Plan Presentation – Robert Williams, Deputy Fire Chief, and Ginger Holland, Public Information Officer

Mr. Williams and Ms. Holland presented an update to the City Council on the newly developed Crisis Communication Plan, providing residents and council members with a packet containing the full 30-page plan. They explained that the plan was developed in collaboration with the Fire Department and approved by the City Manager to establish a formalized procedure for communicating effectively during emergencies or crises. The plan outlines the activation process, starting with notification of the City Manager by the designated department head, Police Chief, or Fire Chief, who then determines whether the Mayor and Council need to be informed. The core team responsible for messaging includes the City Manager, Deputy City Manager, Police Chief, Fire Chief, Emergency Management Coordinator, and the Public Information Officer. Once messaging is determined, the Public Information Officer or, in life-threatening situations, the Police or Fire Chief delivers the information through multiple channels, including press releases, social media, the Emergency Alert System, and, if needed, door-to-door notifications or mobile apps.

Council members asked several clarifying questions about the plan's readiness and level of detail. It was noted that while a hard and steady plan is not yet fully in place, the Emergency Operations Plan, approved in 2024, provides guidance for scenario-specific incidents such as

severe weather, chemical spills, or criminal events. The Crisis Communication Plan is intentionally broad to allow flexibility in response, with the leadership team tailoring actions and messaging to the specific situation. Members discussed past gaps in communication during events such as winter storms and the Hopewell Water Renewal spill, emphasizing the importance of rapid, clear, and accurate messaging to residents, especially vulnerable populations.

Mr. Williams and Ms. Holland highlighted operational tools, including the Hopewell Alerts system, which provides automated messaging via text, phone calls, and emails, and the Integrated Public Alert Warning System (IPAWS), which can broadcast alerts to all cell phones and public media in the community. These systems allow multiple layers of communication to ensure the public receives timely and actionable information. The team confirmed that the plan also incorporates a debriefing process after incidents to assess effectiveness, document lessons learned, and improve future responses. Council members expressed support for the plan and emphasized the importance of preparedness, rapid decision-making, and the flexibility to address diverse crisis scenarios. The presentation concluded with no further questions, and Council expressed appreciation for the comprehensive briefing.

R-4 Lamb Center for Arts and Healing Resolution for Tax Exemption Public Hearing – Anthony Bessette, City Attorney

The City Council considered the second reading of an ordinance regarding a real estate tax exemption for the Lamb Center for Arts and Healing. The ordinance had previously been publicly advertised, and a public hearing was held. On first reading, a vote was required under the city charter to pass, which necessitated a five-member majority. At this meeting, the ordinance was brought back for a second reading. The Council was invited to ask questions or discuss the item with staff, but no discussion arose. Vice Mayor Joyner made a motion to adopt the ordinance, which was seconded by Mayor Partin. During the roll call vote, six Councilors voted for it, while Councilor Ellis voted against.

The motion passed, officially approving the real estate tax exemption for the Lamb Center for Arts and Healing.

ROLL CALL

Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes
Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	No
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Wheat-	Yes
Councilor Rapole-	Yes

Motion Passes 6-1

R-5 Fair Housing Resolution – Chris Ward, Director of Planning and Development

During the meeting, Mr. Ward addressed the Mayor, Vice Mayor, City Council members, and residents regarding a proposed Fair Housing Resolution. He explained that as an entitlement community, Hopewell receives annual funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in the form of Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). One requirement of this funding is that the city takes an action that promotes fair housing. Mr. Ward noted that while the city has undertaken various initiatives in the past—such as obtaining Fair Housing certification for staff, distributing informational brochures, and partnering with housing nonprofits and legal aid—this year they proposed adopting a formal Fair Housing Resolution, which had been included in the Council packet.

He explained that the resolution is straightforward and based on a HUD model, affirming the city’s support for fair housing and prohibiting discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, and disability. The Development Department serves as the city’s Fair Housing office, receiving local complaints and coordinating with the Virginia Fair Housing Office. Mr. Ward emphasized that the city seeks to vary its annual fair housing actions, and future initiatives may include landlord and tenant workshops. Following his presentation, a motion was made to approve the

resolution as presented by the Department of Community Development. The matter was described as clear and straightforward, with Mr. Ward available to answer any questions from the Council. The motion was made by Vice Mayor Joyner and seconded by Mayor Partin.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 7-0

R-6 Virginia Gateway Presentation – Charles Bennett, Director of Economic Development

During the meeting, the Mayor introduced Mr. Keith Boswell from the Virginia Gateway Region to City Council, noting that some members were meeting him for the first time while others were familiar with him. Mr. Boswell delivered a detailed presentation on the Gateway Region’s economic development initiatives, emphasizing that Hopewell is centrally located within this region. He provided a historical overview, noting that the Virginia Gateway Region was established in 1960 as the oldest regional economic development organization in the Commonwealth. Over time, the group has grown to encompass four cities (Hopewell, Colonial Heights, Petersburg, and Emporia) and five counties (Prince George, Dinwiddie, Sussex, Brunswick, and Greensville), with contributions from each community supplemented by grants and private donations.

Mr. Boswell outlined the organization’s strategic mission and pillars, which focus on facilitating business opportunities, igniting partnerships, and delivering innovative resources for communities. He stressed that economic development is a team effort and highlighted partnerships with entities such as Brightpoint Community College to support

workforce development. He also emphasized the region's industrial advantages, noting that Hopewell and the surrounding areas are "land-rich" and industrially oriented, making them attractive for new and expanding businesses. He described ongoing initiatives, including site development, pursuing grants such as EPA Brownfields funding, and supporting the pharmaceutical cluster in Petersburg, which has national significance in producing active pharmaceutical ingredients.

The presentation also covered recent successes: in the previous year, Hopewell participated in approximately 31% of Gateway Region projects, hosted several site selectors, conducted seven site tours, and facilitated 25 workforce-related visits. Mr. Boswell highlighted key sites, including the Green Plains property, as critical opportunities for industrial development. He stressed collaboration with the city's Economic Development Director and expressed optimism about the region's future growth. The presentation concluded with an invitation to the Council to review annual reports and a suggestion to discuss a potential Regional Industrial Facilities Authority (RFA) in the future to facilitate cost and revenue sharing for industrial projects, particularly given Hopewell's limited land availability. The session ended with the Council agreeing to place the RFA discussion on a future agenda.

R-7 Hope Center Shelter Operations Update – Charles Bennett,
Director of Economic Development

During the meeting, the Mayor introduced Pastor Darrell Boggs and Pastor Thurman Collier to provide a report on the Hope Center and its activities since opening operations in the former CREW building on November 15th. Pastor Boggs addressed the Council, expressing the Hope Center's deep commitment to serving the city's most vulnerable population. He emphasized that the Hope Center operates under the City of Refuge, a 501(c)(3) organization, and described its mission as more than just providing shelter—it aims to eradicate homelessness and help individuals transition quickly into independent housing.

The Pastors outlined the Center's basic services, including food, clothing, and shelter. Since April, the Hope Center has served over 6,000 meals with the help of multiple churches and civic groups, feeding approximately 35 individuals per night, some of whom are food-insecure but not homeless. Clothing donations are managed through First Baptist Church, offering individuals the ability to select needed items in a dignified manner. The shelter currently operates a 27-bed facility, but has had to accommodate 34 people due to increased demand, including temporary stays for about 45 individuals since opening. Volunteers assist with evening operations, while eight staff members supervise overnight. Inclement weather has occasionally required 24-hour operations, stretching both staffing and budget resources.

Pastor Boggs also highlighted the wraparound services provided once individuals are in shelter. These services include job placement support, mentoring, education (including GED and college enrollment assistance), and transportation support. The Hope Center has even provided three automobiles this year to help individuals maintain employment, positively impacting multiple households. The Center's next goal is to transition clients into transitional housing, supporting them in developing independence, financial management, and stability, ultimately aiming for permanent housing.

Council members and other officials expressed strong support and gratitude for the Pastors' work, praising their commitment, effectiveness, and the comprehensive nature of the services provided. Vice Mayor Jordan and Councilor Harris commended the Pastors for maximizing the city's contributions and enhancing outcomes for clients. Pastor Collier emphasized the ongoing need for staff support, particularly during 24-hour operations, and shared examples of outreach, such as hosting a Super Bowl event for shelter residents and providing emergency hotel placements during extreme cold. Charles and other staff echoed the Pastors' dedication, noting their remarkable ability to mobilize volunteers and maintain operations under challenging circumstances. Overall, the presentation highlighted the

Hope Center's holistic approach to combating homelessness and supporting vulnerable individuals in Hopewell.

R-8 Machinery and Tools Tax Rebate Ordinance (second reading) – Charles Bennett, Director of Economic Development

During the meeting, a city official presented for the fifth time on the Enterprise Zone Machine and Tools Tax Rebate program but shared a change in perspective: after reviewing the financial implications, the City Manager's office recommended not implementing the previously proposed changes. The official provided a recap of the existing program, explaining that when a company installs new machinery to produce goods, it applies for Enterprise Zone benefits through a process approved by the Commissioner of Revenue, with the city office signing off once the equipment is operational. Currently, companies receive a 30% rebate on their machine and tools tax for three consecutive years, totaling a 90% rebate before paying 100% thereafter. This structure has been in place for 12 years.

A detailed financial analysis was shared, showing that over the last ten years, the program facilitated over \$602 million in new machine and tools investments, averaging \$60 million per year. Even after rebates, this has generated approximately \$2.5 million in new revenue annually. The official initially proposed reducing the rebate to 80% in year one to accelerate city revenue, but calculations revealed potential risks: large investments combined with staggered rebates could create a temporary dip in revenue, making the proposal financially unstable.

Given these findings, the official recommended maintaining the program exactly as it exists, with the only change being an extension of the program expiration date from December 31, 2025, to December 31, 2029, following the state's extension of the Enterprise Zone. This approach preserves industry benefits, ensures consistent revenue, and avoids unintended financial gaps. The Council moved to approve this amendment, with a motion by Vice Mayor Joyner and a second by

Councilor Daye, keeping the program's rebate structure intact while updating the expiration date.

ROLL CALL

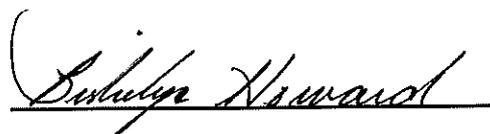
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes
Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Wheat-	Yes
Councilor Rapole-	Yes

Motion Passes 7-0

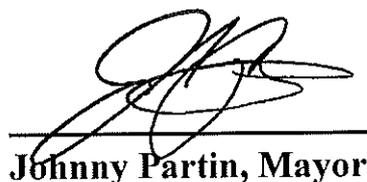
During the meeting, Mayor Partin highlighted notable achievements by members of the Hopewell community. They recognized Trayvon Henderson, a local athlete, for representing the city at the Super Bowl and executing the game's final play, an exciting moment for the community. Additionally, the speaker acknowledged Dr. William Butler, a member of the Hopewell Planning Commission, who was honored as the 2025 Veteran of the Year in the Fourth Congressional District. The speaker emphasized that Hopewell has many individuals contributing positively to both the community and the country. Following these acknowledgments, a motion to adjourn the meeting was made, seconded, and unanimously approved, officially concluding the session.

ADJOURNMENT

Respectfully Submitted,



Bishelya Howard, City Clerk



Johnny Partin, Mayor