

## **MINUTES OF THE APRIL 22, 2025, CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING**

A REGULAR meeting of the Hopewell City Council was held on Tuesday, April 22, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.

### **PRESENT:**

John B. Partin, Mayor  
Rita Joyner, Vice Mayor  
Michael Harris, Councilor  
Ronnie Ellis, Councilor  
Susan Daye, Councilor  
Domonic R. Holloway, Councilor (Late)

### **CLOSED MEETING**

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to go into a closed meeting under Va. Code § 2.2-371 l(A)(29) and (8) to discuss 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 (Discussion of an unsolicited offer and an offer on real estate property); Councilor Daye seconds the motion.

### **ROLL CALL**

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

**Motion Passes 5-0**

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

**ROLL CALL**

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

**ROLL CALL**

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

**Motion Passes 6-0**

Councilor Holloway makes a motion to amend the agenda to Allow an announcement from himself. Vice Mayor Joyner seconds the motion.

**ROLL CALL**

Councilor Stokes-	Absent
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes
Mayor Partin-	Yes

Councilor Holloway-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes

**Motion Passes 6-0**

Councilor Holloway verbally announced his resignation from council. He made this declaration publicly and without prior notice or submission of any formal written resignation.

Councilor Ellis makes a motion to go into a closed meeting under Va. Code § 2.2-371 l(A)(29) and (8) to discuss 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 (Discussion of an unsolicited offer and an offer on real estate property); Councilor Daye seconds the motion.

**ROLL CALL**

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

**Motion Passes 6-0**

**PRESENT:**

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

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

**ROLL CALL**

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

**Motion Passes 5-0**

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

**ROLL CALL**

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

**Motion Passes 5-0**

Prayer by Reverend Blowe, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance, led by Mayor Partin.

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to amend the agenda to combine CCR-1 and R-1 together. Mayor Partin seconds the motion.

**ROLL CALL**

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

Councilor Daye- Yes

**Motion Passes 5-0**

Councilor Daye makes a motion to adopt the consent agenda. Councilor Ellis seconds the motion.

**ROLL CALL**

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

**Motion Passes 5-0**

**COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITIZENS**

**Andrew Walker-** a local property and business owner in City of Hopewell, addressed the council to express his interest in collaborating with the city to create a safe, designated space for ATV riding. He referenced a recent article concerning young people riding ATVs on public streets and identified himself as an ATV enthusiast who understands both the appeal and risks of such activity.

Walker explained that he had purchased 12 acres of land specifically for ATV riding with his family and friends. He sees this as a potential opportunity to partner with the city to offer young residents a structured, safe alternative to riding in unsafe or illegal areas. He emphasized that instead of simply restricting or penalizing youth for riding on the streets, providing positive alternatives would be a more constructive approach.

He noted that zoning is currently not an obstacle, but access to the property is limited due to the need to cross CSX train tracks or traverse land owned by WestRock or Dominion. Walker has spoken with Chris Ward regarding potential use of the property and is seeking guidance on how to proceed responsibly.

As a career educator and counselor, Walker underscored the importance of

engaging youth in positive ways and offered to collaborate with the Hopewell Police Department and Hopewell Public Schools. He expressed readiness to work with city officials and left his contact information with the clerk for follow-up.

Walker also presented photos to the council illustrating the current condition of the property and how it has been partially cleared for recreational use. He stressed that while many in the community have shown interest in using the space, he is currently hesitant to open it publicly without formal approval and proper zoning due to legal concerns.

Council members thanked Mr. Walker for his presentation and the information shared. His proposal will be further evaluated by city staff following their outreach.

**Karren Thayer** - a resident of Ward 7 in Hopewell, addressed the council to voice her concerns regarding the financial hardships faced by many local citizens. She introduced herself as a long-time Hopewell resident and widow of five years, sharing that she lives on a fixed income of \$1,653 per month, with a mortgage payment of \$742. She emphasized the financial strain this leaves her with, noting how little money remains for other necessities after covering housing costs.

Thayer highlighted that she is not alone in experiencing such economic difficulties and expressed frustration that more residents do not attend council meetings to make their struggles known. She warned that unless meaningful changes are made, the city risks losing residents who simply cannot afford to stay, either due to housing costs or increasing taxes.

She urged the council to consider alternatives to raising taxes as a means of revitalizing Hopewell, stressing that economic renewal should not come at the expense of citizens who are already struggling. Instead, she advocated for creative solutions that would bring money and development into the city without placing additional financial burdens on the existing population.

Thayer concluded by reminding the council that the well-being and retention of Hopewell's citizens should be their top priority, as the community is the foundation of the city's strength and sustainability.

**PH-1- Purchase of 101 City Point Rd E. Tax ID #0800060-** Charles Bennett, Economic Development Director

Charles Bennett delivered a detailed presentation to the Mayor, Vice Mayor, Council members, and citizens regarding the City of Hopewell's intent to purchase the former Bank of America property located at 101 City Point Road. Bennett explained that this process was made possible through public hearing requirements enshrined in Virginia law to ensure transparency in property transactions and ordinance changes. The property in question—approximately one acre in size with a 3,773-square-foot brick building including four drive-through lanes and ten parking spaces—is strategically located at a high-visibility intersection near key landmarks like the courthouse, Beacon Theatre, and several downtown businesses. The city submitted a \$500,000 bid for the property, which had previously been assessed between \$600,000 and \$750,000 over the past five years. Bank of America accepted the bid with a contingency clause that voids the agreement if public funds are not appropriated.

Bennett emphasized that this move is an investment, not merely a spending decision. He argued that acquiring the property below assessed value and redeveloping it for a retail use with a drive-through could significantly boost city revenue—potentially increasing tax receipts from approximately \$6,000 per year to \$50,000–\$60,000 annually through food and beverage taxes. This, he said, contrasts sharply with low-yield alternatives such as office space or nonprofit use. The city aims to reposition the property quickly for private-sector use through a sale or long-term lease, with performance agreements requiring food and beverage operations and drive-through service. Bennett concluded by reaffirming his commitment to only advocate for initiatives he believes are financially defensible and reiterated that, should Council reject the resolution, the city could terminate the contract with no financial penalty.

The public hearing was opened to the public, and community members signed up to speak.

**Ed Pappas-** a resident of 618 Appomattox Street in Ward One, voiced his opposition to the proposed acquisition of the former Bank of America property. He expressed concern that, given the many pressing priorities facing the city, spending money on such a purchase is not justified. While he acknowledged the argument that the acquisition could be viewed as an investment, he emphasized that the potential return on that investment is uncertain and may not be realized in a timely manner. Pappas urged the city to focus its limited financial resources on more immediate and urgent needs.

**Martin Mitchell-** a resident of Hopewell's Ward Three, expressed his opposition to the city's proposed purchase of the former Bank of America property. He argued that the city should not invest \$500,000 into a property that currently lacks a concrete redevelopment

plan and could potentially remain unused for an indefinite period. Mitchell emphasized that the city faces more urgent and immediate issues that such funds could help address. He also pointed out that the city already retains control over how the property could be developed through mechanisms such as the Economic Development Authority (EDA), zoning, and planning regulations, all of which ultimately require City Council approval. Mitchell suggested allowing a private buyer, such as the second-highest bidder, to acquire the property and bear all the associated development costs, after which the city could evaluate whether the proposed use aligns with its interests.

**Janice Denton-** a former council member known for her fiscally conservative approach, addressed the council to express her opposition to the proposed \$500,000 purchase of the former Bank of America building. She explained that she had spent the past two days carefully deliberating over the decision, acknowledging that her reputation as the council's "penny pincher" shaped her concern for the city's financial health. Denton questioned whether the city could afford such a purchase at this time, especially in the absence of a bond rating and without having received its Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR). She emphasized the lack of financial guarantees, asking pointedly whether the city could reliably meet its monthly expenses, concluding that it likely could not.

Denton cited a recent unexpected expense, the repair of a sinkhole on Winston Churchill Drive, as an example of how quickly emergencies can drain city funds. She warned against depleting the city's limited reserves for a property that lacks a clear, immediate use, characterizing the proposed purchase as spending the city's "nest egg" at a time of financial instability. She agreed with earlier speakers that the city retains zoning and planning authority over the site, and therefore does not need to own it in order to influence its development. Denton also pointed to a private development near I-295, which is proceeding without city investment, as evidence that progress is possible through regulation rather than direct acquisition. She concluded firmly that, given the uncertain financial outlook at the local, state, and national levels, this is not the right time for the city to commit to such an expenditure.

Councilor Daye makes a motion to extend the meeting until item R-9. Councilor Ellis seconds the motion.

**ROLL CALL**

Councilor Stokes-	Absent
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Absent
Councilor Daye-	Yes

### **Motion Passes 5-0**

**Riley Ingram-** Mr. Ingram addressed the council to express his strong opposition to the city's proposed \$500,000 acquisition of the former Bank of America building. Drawing on his experience in city government and state legislature, Ingram emphasized a recurring theme: the city does not currently know its financial standing. He recalled a visit from the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts during his time in the General Assembly, who informed him that Hopewell had not filed the required financial reports. Despite assurances from city officials at the time that these would be completed, they never materialized, and Ingram asserted that the city still lacks a clear picture of its finances today.

He expressed deep concern that the city is considering a major expenditure without a verified understanding of how much money it has, highlighting ongoing issues in the Treasurer's Office and even pointing out that the wastewater treatment facility's finances are not balanced. Ingram criticized the lack of fiscal transparency and accountability, pointing out discrepancies and inefficiencies across multiple departments. He also referenced dramatic increases in property assessments, some as high as 48%, and said these translate into de facto tax increases. He criticized council members for not openly acknowledging this to residents, stating that he was always honest about tax increases when he served.

As a seasoned real estate professional, Ingram shared that he had considered bidding \$200,000 for the property himself but ultimately did not. He argued that tax assessments do not reflect true market value and said, in his opinion, the building is not worth \$500,000. While clarifying that his remarks were not a personal criticism of the current developer involved, he firmly believed the investment would be a poor decision for the city. He concluded by questioning how the city could move forward with such a purchase when it fundamentally does not know "where it is" financially.

**Debbie Randolph-** a resident of Ward One and a former city council member, expressed her opposition to the proposed \$500,000 acquisition of the former Bank of America building. Drawing from her background in banking and her experience on the Economic Development Authority, Randolph acknowledged the importance of economic

development but emphasized her concern over the city's current financial state. She discussed the city's struggle to get its financial house in order, mentioning the efforts to bring in the state's Auditor of Public Accounts after years of financial mismanagement. Randolph recognized that the city had recently raised taxes, partly to address public safety issues, and noted that these funds were being directed towards improving the pay and conditions for public safety officials, which she fully supported.

However, she voiced concerns over the city's lack of available funds for essential infrastructure repairs, especially paving, which has been a recurring issue. Randolph argued that, given the city's existing financial challenges and infrastructure needs, now was not the right time to invest in the property. She acknowledged the desire to control future development but questioned the logic of using limited funds for this purchase when the city had pressing infrastructure needs and no emergency fund available. While she understood the potential benefits of the acquisition, she ultimately believed that with the current state of the city's finances, it was a risk that the city could not afford to take at this time.

**Ed Houser**- a resident of Ward Five, voiced strong opposition to the city's proposed purchase of the former Bank of America building for \$500,000. He echoed many of the concerns previously raised by Debbie Randolph, particularly emphasizing the urgent need for investment in Hopewell's deteriorating infrastructure. Houser pointed out that the city has pump stations on the verge of collapse and roads in such poor condition that they're damaging vehicles. He criticized the council for considering the acquisition of an empty building while basic city infrastructure remains neglected.

Houser also expressed frustration over the city's rising taxes, noting that they are already placing a burden on residents. He questioned the logic of making a financial investment at a time when, in his view, the city does not have the funds to do so responsibly. Arguing that if the building were truly desirable, it wouldn't be sitting vacant, he urged the council to reconsider the purchase and instead allocate the funds toward more immediate and essential needs that directly benefit the community.

**Evelyn Britton**- a resident of Cornerstone Court in the Fifth Ward, briefly addressed the council to express her agreement with the concerns raised by previous speakers regarding the proposed purchase of the former Bank of America building. She emphasized the importance of the council actively listening to the voices of the citizens. Burton concluded by urging the council to genuinely consider the feedback from the community and to prioritize the needs and concerns of Hopewell residents.

Mr. Bennett responds to concerns raised about the proposed purchase of the former Bank of America building. He acknowledged the validity of the citizens' concerns, particularly regarding taxation and infrastructure, and expressed appreciation for the high level of civic engagement around economic development. Bennett clarified that the city is now in a stronger financial position than in previous years, noting that the treasurer's and finance department's books are balanced and the city has a clear view of its daily cash position—something that had not been the case in the past.

He emphasized the importance of understanding zoning implications, noting that if the property is sold to a private party, any use allowed under the B-1 zoning district can proceed by right, without council or planning commission input. This includes the possibility of a buyer simply holding the property with no action, which could result in further deterioration. He warned that in economically distressed areas, it is often necessary for the city or Economic Development Authority (EDA) to take initiative, otherwise "bottom feeders" may acquire properties and allow them to decay, hindering progress.

Bennett stressed that the city cannot rely solely on cuts and savings to resolve its financial challenges, as repeatedly stated by financial advisor Robert Bobb. Instead, the solution lies in expanding the city's tax base, and he viewed the building acquisition as a strategic opportunity to do so. He highlighted that the council's bid had already been accepted, though the city does not know how many or what types of competing bids existed. Should the council choose to proceed, he pledged to market the property aggressively—potentially alongside the adjacent Teamsters building, now also available for marketing—to create a nearly one-acre retail-ready development site.

Bennett closed by reaffirming his dedication to the city, expressing his deep-rooted commitment as a lifelong Hopewell resident. While recognizing the imperfect timing, he stated he would continue seeking and presenting opportunities to support economic growth and demonstrate that Hopewell is a serious player in revitalizing its economy.

Mayor Partin raised a key question to the Finance Director in response to a public comment made by a former council member who claimed the City of Hopewell had no emergency funds. Seeking clarification, Mayor Partin inquired directly whether any emergency reserves currently existed. This led the Finance Director to affirm that the city

does, indeed, have emergency funds in place. She explained that in fiscal year 2024, approximately \$7 million had been set aside across various funds in accordance with the city's adopted financial policies, and similar savings were expected in fiscal year 2025.

Mayor Partin's question appeared aimed at addressing both public concern and ensuring accurate financial understanding among council and citizens. The discussion also highlighted ongoing tension between allocating funds for infrastructure improvements versus potential economic investments like the proposed building purchase. While the Finance Director acknowledged community concerns over priorities, she reiterated that the matter ultimately lies with the council's discretion. Mayor Partin facilitated this exchange in a way that underscored the importance of fiscal transparency and responsive governance.

Mayor Partin delivered a detailed and candid statement addressing the broader financial strategy and long-term planning guiding the current City Council's decisions, particularly concerning the proposed \$500,000 building purchase. He emphasized that the challenges facing Hopewell, particularly infrastructure decline, are not new and have been neglected by past councils for over a decade. He asserted that the current council is actively working to reverse that trend through investment, planning, and strategic initiatives.

The mayor acknowledged community concerns about infrastructure, taxes, and spending priorities but stressed that addressing infrastructure requires not only funding but significant lead time and engineering. He emphasized that immediate, large-scale investments aren't feasible without proper planning. While sympathetic to calls for using the funds directly for infrastructure, she pointed out that such spending must be methodically planned and budgeted.

Mayor Partin strongly supported economic development as a parallel priority, echoing comments from Economic Development Director Charles Bennett and consultants like the Robert Bobb Group and Alvarez & Marsal. He highlighted the risks of inaction, including undesirable private acquisitions of key properties that could hinder long-term growth. By controlling and strategically marketing the building in question—potentially alongside the adjacent Teamsters building—the city could encourage high-revenue commercial development, such as food and beverage or drive-through retail businesses.

He also directly rebutted claims that the city is financially unstable, affirming that Hopewell is currently meeting all payroll and expenses, and has implemented robust financial policies approved by independent experts and state officials. He pointed to the city's recent diagnostic bond rating as evidence of financial improvement, indicating that the city's fiscal standing is on the rise.

Mayor Partin concluded by acknowledging the emotional and political difficulty of the decision but framed the property purchase as a necessary and proactive move toward economic revitalization and long-term fiscal health for the city.

Councilor Ellis makes a motion to approve the resolution to purchase 101 City Point Road, tax Parcel ID 08000660, as presented in the resolution. Vice Mayor Joyner seconds the motion.

Mr. Harris delivered an impassioned statement questioning the city's hesitation to move forward with proposed economic initiatives, specifically those related to revenue generation and infrastructure investment. He repeatedly posed the question, "If not now, when?", highlighting his frustration with the ongoing delay in addressing the city's financial challenges. Harris emphasized that significant time had been spent in discussions with Mr. Bennett on strategies to boost Hopewell's revenue, yet the consensus appeared to be that now was not the right time to act. He expressed concern that the city was failing to seize opportunities to improve its economic standing.

Harris acknowledged that most public comments during the meeting were against the proposed actions, but he challenged whether these opinions accurately represented the full voice of the community. He pointed out that no one from his own Ward 2 had spoken, leaving him uncertain about his constituents' views. He stressed the importance of acting in accordance with the will of the entire city and suggested that a more formal referendum or outreach effort might be necessary to gather comprehensive input. Harris affirmed that he does not support spending taxpayer money on initiatives the people oppose, but he also questioned whether the feedback presented that evening reflected a balanced cross-section of residents.

Frustrated by the lack of clarity and possible council disunity, Harris questioned whether the council was adequately covering its responsibilities and whether the process was inclusive and transparent. His comments concluded on a note of exasperation, with him stating that he felt unheard and that the council was likely to proceed regardless of community input. He reiterated his central theme, "If not now, when?", before ending his remarks and indicating his intention to disengage from the discussion.

Councilor Daye asked Stacy Jordan, the Chief Financial Officer, about the impact of proposed investments on the city's bond rating. The inquiry focused on whether such investments, aimed at boosting the city's economy, would be viewed positively by bond rating agencies. In response, Stacy Jordan affirmed that any actions viewed as investments in the city's future would reflect well on the city's financial standing. She emphasized that efforts to improve the city's economy and make strategic investments

would indeed be looked upon favorably by rating agencies. The conversation concluded with a note of thanks for the clarification provided.

**ROLL CALL**

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

**Motion Passes 5-0**

**REGULAR BUSINESS**

**R-1 - Child Care Proclamation and CCR 1 First Responder dispatchers, and Animal Care Week-** Mayor Partin

Mayor Partin presented several proclamations to acknowledge significant contributions within the community. The first proclamation declared May 9th, 2025, as Provider Appreciation Day in Hopewell, recognizing childcare providers for their essential work in supporting children's growth, development, and educational advancement, as well as their contributions to the economy. The proclamation emphasized the importance of accessible and high-quality childcare, underscoring the city's commitment to fostering inclusive practices and supporting families through partnerships with local organizations.

The second proclamation recognized April 13th-19th, 2025, as Animal Care and Control Appreciation Week, highlighting the dedication of animal service professionals to the health, safety, and welfare of vulnerable animals. Mayor Partin commended these individuals for their efforts to rescue and protect animals from abuse, disease, and neglect, and acknowledged the role of animal care providers in ensuring community safety and public health.

The final proclamation designated April 13th-19th, 2025, as National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week in Hopewell, honoring the public safety dispatchers and telecommunications staff for their vital role as the first point of contact in emergency situations. The proclamation emphasized the critical importance of accurate information gathering, timely response, and effective communication in protecting lives and property

during emergencies. Mayor Partin urged all citizens to recognize the valuable contributions of public safety telecommunicators to the community.

**R-2 - MOA Nova South** - Tabitha Martinez, Recreation and Parks Director

Tabitha Martinez presented the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the 2025-2027 NOVA South swim season, detailing the structure and staffing requirements of the Aquatics Division. Martinez provided a comprehensive overview of the department's current staffing levels, consisting of three full-time positions and four part-time positions that are currently vacant. She highlighted that the department aims to extend pool hours by increasing staff coverage, particularly with the recent hiring of an Aquatics Program Specialist. Martinez emphasized the need for four full-time lifeguards to ensure consistent coverage throughout operating hours, minimizing reliance on part-time staff who are primarily students with limited availability.

Martinez outlined the existing and proposed pool schedules, specifying NOVA South's lane usage and rental rates. Currently, NOVA South rents lanes at \$11 per hour, with an increase to \$12 in the upcoming season and \$13 in the following season, with the goal of reaching the city council-approved rate of \$15 per lane per hour. She presented a visual breakdown of the proposed schedule, noting that NOVA South has requested increased lane usage, particularly on Saturdays, to replace Friday evening practices.

Additionally, Martinez reiterated her request for a full-time Aquatics Programs Manager to oversee operations, assist with the MOA implementation, and manage other aquatic programs, including swim lessons, marine training, and potential scuba diving courses. The budget request for the manager position, including benefits, is estimated at \$82,350 for fiscal year 2026. The MOA has been reviewed and agreed upon by NOVA South, following three rounds of negotiations, and Martinez expressed optimism about maintaining NOVA South's presence in Hopewell. She concluded by opening the floor for questions, clarifying the incremental increase in rental rates, and confirming that negotiations with NOVA South had been successfully resolved.

Councilor Ellis makes a motion to approve the MOA with NOVA South as presented and agreed upon by both parties, and to include the city manager's signature on the contract. Councilor Daye seconds the motion.

**ROLL CALL**

Councilor Stokes-	Absent
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Absent
Councilor Daye-	Yes

### **Motion Passes 5-0**

#### **R-3 - School Budget Presentation** - Janel English and Dr. Hackney

Dr. Hackney and Janel English, the Superintendent of Schools and Finance Director, respectively, presented the proposed budget for the upcoming fiscal year, emphasizing their commitment to the community. They requested approval to roll over savings from unfilled personnel positions due to challenges in recruiting qualified candidates. Janel detailed the revenue sources, stating that state funding increased by \$2.5 million, while federal, local, and other revenues decreased. The overall budget saw a 1.96% increase, totaling approximately \$1.5 million. The state contributes 63.8% of the total budget, federal funding accounts for 12.5%, local funding for 17.8%, and other funds for 5.8%.

Dr. Hackney highlighted specific budget needs, including funding for required teaching positions to meet staff-to-student ratios and an accelerated licensure program, given that one in three teachers is not currently considered highly qualified. The continuation of mental health supports, including a licensed mental health clinician in each building, was also emphasized. Additionally, a 27% increase in health insurance premiums will add over \$1 million to the budget. Specialized programming for non-traditional learners, particularly at the high school level, and a 3% salary increase to remain competitive with surrounding districts were also proposed.

Despite these needs, the proposed budget projects a \$2.1 million shortfall for the next fiscal year. To address this, Janel proposed using \$1.4 million in vacancy savings and strategically conserving funds during the third and fourth quarters to avoid requesting additional city funding. The total estimated cost for these additional needs is approximately \$4.6 million, with new state revenues estimated at \$2.5 million, resulting in a deficit of \$2.1 million. Dr. Hackney and Janel emphasized that these savings would allow the school district to present a budget that requests level funding from the City of Hopewell, consistent with the funding levels provided over the past eight years.

Council members expressed appreciation for the collaborative efforts and indicated support for the request. There was discussion regarding the necessity of a motion to

formally approve the rollover of savings, with consensus reached to include it in the budget resolution without a separate public hearing.

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to approve the Hopewell City fiscal year 2026 budget as presented. Councilor Daye seconds the motion.

**ROLL CALL**

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

**Motion Passes 5-0**

**R-4 - Evergreen Compensation Adoption** - Yaosca Smith, HR Director

Yaosca Smith, the HR Director, introduced Brian Wolf, Project Manager with Evergreen Solutions, who presented the findings and recommendations from the city's compensation and classification study. The study aimed to evaluate the current compensation system, assess market equity, and propose solutions for rectifying internal pay inequities. The study was conducted in four phases: outreach, internal analysis, external analysis, and the reporting phase, with the city currently in the final phase.

The study involved collecting market data from 19 peer jurisdictions, adjusting for the cost of living, and benchmarking 100 jobs to similar positions in the external labor market. The findings indicated that the city's pay ranges were below market, particularly at higher pay grades, where the city's ranges were narrower and offered less top-end growth compared to the market.

The proposed pay plan included a public safety step plan for sworn and certified police and fire personnel, structured from PS101 to PS125. The entry-level (Step 0) pay range starts at \$34,528, with the top-end (Step 20) reaching \$139,801. The plan is designed to provide structured, predictable pay progression for public safety roles.

A general employee pay plan was also presented, structured similarly to the public safety plan but with open ranges allowing flexibility in hiring rates based on experience and

qualifications. For instance, a dispatcher may be hired at \$41,000 or \$38,000, depending on qualifications, with flexibility to progress through the range.

Vice Mayor Joiner asked whether the step plan included dispatchers, and Wolf clarified that it only applied to sworn and certified personnel. Support staff, including dispatchers, would fall under the general employee pay plan.

Wolf outlined a hybrid parity approach for implementation, considering both years of service with the organization and years in the current job classification to determine placement within the pay range. The city's current policy allows up to six steps for prior experience, though Wolf suggested a flexible approach, potentially crediting 50-75% of previous documented experience.

The proposed implementation would occur in two phases. The first phase includes public safety and recreation personnel, with finance finalizing the cost analysis. Specific cost figures were not provided, but Wolf noted that finance and city management had considered budgetary constraints and prioritized the affected groups accordingly.

Smith requested formal approval of the step plan, emphasizing that it would be incorporated into HR policy and guide future hiring and pay adjustments.

Councilor Daye makes a motion to approve the step plan as presented. Vice Mayor Joyner seconds the motion.

**ROLL CALL**

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

**Motion Passes 5-0**

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to approve the two-phase approach for implementing adjustments as presented. Councilor Daye seconds the motion.

**ROLL CALL**

Councilor Stokes-	Absent
Councilor Ellis-	Yes

Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes
Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Absent
Councilor Daye-	Yes

**Motion Passes 5-0**

Before proceeding to the city attorney, Mr. Bassett indicated a possible misstatement regarding the school budget presentation. He clarified that the previous motion may have incorrectly referred to adopting the city budget instead of the city school's budget. The mayor acknowledged the correction and agreed to amend the motion to accurately reflect the adoption of the city school's budget.

Councilor Daye makes a motion to amend the previous motion to clarify the Hopewell City Public School budget. Councilor Ellis seconds the motion.

**ROLL CALL**

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

**Motion Passes 5-0**

**R-5 - Treasurer and Director of Finance Duties Ordinance Adoption** - Anthony Bessette, City Attorney

Mr. Bassett introduced three items for council votes: the Treasurer and Director of Finance Duties Ordinance, the Council's Rules of Conduct, and the ATV Ordinance. He noted that each ordinance had been previously presented and discussed in prior meetings. Before requesting a vote on the Treasurer and Director of Finance Duties Ordinance, he opened the floor for any further questions from the council. There were no questions.

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to approve the ordinance regarding the duties and functions of the director of finance and the city treasurer as presented. Councilor Daye seconds the motion.

**ROLL CALL**

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

**Motion Passes 5-0**

**R-6- Rules of Conduct Adoption** -Anthony Bessette, City Attorney

Mr. Bassett proceeded to the Council's Rules of Conduct and offered council members the opportunity to ask any further questions before proceeding with the vote. There were no questions.

Councilor Harris makes a motion to adopt the city council's rules of conduct immediately. Councilor Ellis seconds the motion.

**ROLL CALL**

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

**Motion Passes 5-0**

**R-7 -ATV Ordinance approval** -Anthony Bessette, City Attorney

Mr. Bassett proceeded to the ATV Ordinance approval and offered council members the opportunity to ask any further questions before proceeding with the vote. There were no questions.

Councilor Ellis makes a motion to approve the ATV Ordinance as presented. Councilor Harris seconds the motion.

**ROLL CALL**

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

**Motion Passes 5-0**

**R-8 - HWR Budget Presentation** - Michael Crocker, Public Works Director

Mike Crocker, Director of Public Works and Interim Director of Hopewell Water Renewal, presented the proposed operating budget for Hopewell Water Renewal, expressing gratitude to city staff, industry partners, and the TAC Committee for their collective efforts in preparing the budget. He noted that the budget represents a 1.86% increase over the previous fiscal year, primarily focused on maintenance and the reallocation of funds to address operational needs. Crocker emphasized the ongoing challenges in staffing, with nine vacancies out of 56 approved positions, impacting both plant and sewer system maintenance. He also highlighted efforts to assess the organizational structure for improved operational effectiveness. Council members raised specific budget-related inquiries, including a question about the "Levy in Lieu of Taxes," which has remained unchanged since approximately 2020. A council member suggested exploring a potential increase to generate additional funds for infrastructure projects, prompting Crocker to defer to Stacy for further explanation. Another council member questioned the significant reduction in the unaudited maintenance budget for 2023-24 compared to previous years, asking if this was due to deferred maintenance. Crocker acknowledged that the decrease likely resulted from delayed maintenance, as evidenced by current conditions observed at the facility.

Council members continued their discussion regarding the proposed Hopewell Water Renewal budget, with a focus on maintenance funding and staffing challenges. A council member inquired about the adequacy of the maintenance budget given ongoing operational challenges, prompting Mr. Crocker to acknowledge that while the proposed budget includes increased maintenance allocations, it may still require reallocation and prioritization throughout the fiscal year. He noted that deferred maintenance from prior years continues to impact current operations and that a significant amount of work remains to be addressed. Another council member questioned the status of specific maintenance projects, including the secondary clarifier, which had been previously reported to be in poor condition. Crocker reported that the industrial fine screens were reinstalled earlier that day, which should mitigate some issues with solids buildup, and that funds would be allocated to clean out sludge in the clarifiers.

Regarding staffing, Crocker confirmed that the budget includes funding for all 56 approved positions, despite nine vacancies, and explained that salary savings from these unfilled positions had previously been reallocated to cover legal fees related to the Fourth Amendment negotiations. There was further discussion about the potential for using any remaining salary savings for capital projects or engineering work, but Crocker cautioned that ongoing maintenance expenses would likely consume any remaining funds. He also noted that the commission had approved the Evergreen salary proposal, impacting the budget for water renewal employees, with the city responsible for only a quarter of the cost, as the remaining portion is covered by industry partners.

Questions were raised about the status of executive recruitment for permanent director and deputy director positions, with Crocker indicating that the interim director, expected to start soon, would handle the search. He emphasized that current staffing resources are stretched thin, leading to reliance on third-party contractors for critical maintenance projects.

Crocker continued presenting the proposed operating budget for Hopewell Water Renewal, emphasizing that the budget primarily addresses operations within the wastewater facility itself and does not cover infrastructure outside the facility, which is the city's responsibility. Crocker clarified that the budget includes a 1.86% increase, driven mainly by necessary maintenance allocations and some legal services costs related to the Fourth Amendment and potential state orders. He explained that the outside treatment revenue, which once significantly contributed to the city's revenue, has declined due to competition from other facilities and capacity issues, impacting the budget.

Crocker also addressed ongoing maintenance challenges, noting that while some necessary projects are funded, ongoing staffing shortages and deferred maintenance remain a concern. He emphasized the critical need to address infrastructure such as the oxygen plant, which is operational but nearing the end of its service life, with replacement costs estimated at \$17-\$20 million, contingent upon potential earmark funding. Crocker also mentioned the recent reinstallation of industrial fine screens, which should help prevent solids buildup in the clarifiers, and outlined plans for sludge removal as part of ongoing maintenance efforts.

In response to council questions about capital allocations, Crocker reviewed a list of prioritized capital projects, clarifying that while the list presented covers the upcoming fiscal year, the overall list of necessary capital improvements is extensive. He also detailed cost-sharing arrangements with industrial partners such as WestRock, noting that cost allocations are based on flow contributions. The proposed budget, which totals \$27.5 million, includes funding for operations, maintenance, capital expenses, and debt service payments.

Crocker commended staff and industry partners for their collaboration during a challenging budget season and acknowledged Deputy Director Andy Fitzwater for his significant contributions to maintaining plant operations. He also indicated that an interim director is expected to assist in the search for permanent leadership positions, with a focus on stabilizing the facility's operations amidst ongoing financial and infrastructure challenges.

Mike Crocker emphasized the critical condition of Hopewell's pump stations and the broader collection system network, highlighting significant infrastructure challenges that are largely hidden underground. He referenced a 2022-2023 report that assessed the pump stations, identifying several requiring full replacements, including Manchin Hills, North Colonial, and Sherwood Lane. Many stations lack adequate backup power, and hazardous gas levels have accelerated corrosion, posing safety risks to personnel. Crocker noted that while bypass pumping operations are necessary to prevent overflows, they incur significant costs, and he stressed that the report's cost estimates are now likely underestimated. To address these issues, the city has applied for federal earmarks but would still need to cover 20% of the expenses. Crocker urged the council to prioritize a comprehensive, long-term capital improvements plan to rehabilitate the pump stations and collection system, emphasizing that a five-year outlook is insufficient given the scope and urgency of the work.

The discussion centered around the need for a comprehensive survey and evaluation of the city's pump stations and sewer systems. Mike Crocker explained that while they are in the process of figuring out the best approach, the need for such a survey is urgent, and they aim to identify areas for improvement. The crew, especially Linda Newman and her team, have been using camera technology to survey the system, which has proved valuable. Crocker mentioned that while immediate actions like pump replacements were budgeted, there's a larger, long-term need for upgrades across the system.

Council members inquired about the budget for these repairs and upgrades, specifically whether there were funds allocated for pump station repairs beyond the Queen Ann project. Crocker explained that the budget for the sewer system, including maintenance and operations, is tight, with a significant portion going toward electricity costs for pump stations. However, he agreed to gather more detailed information on what funds are available for upgrades.

The conversation also addressed the potential for using general revenue to help fund these critical repairs over time, with the recognition that tackling these issues is vital for long-term system sustainability. Crocker emphasized the importance of developing a prioritized list of repairs and that, as failures occur, priorities may shift. The council discussed adopting a comprehensive plan and incorporating it into the overall budget for the year.

#### **R-9 -Waiver requests streets code - Michael Crocker, Public Works Director**

Michael Crocker addressed concerns about a waiver request from Amaral Homes, LLC, which intends to acquire two lots on Maryville Avenue. One of the lots is adjacent to an unopened section of Granby Street, which currently has a stream running through it and serves as drainage infrastructure for the surrounding area. According to the city's streets code, developers of lots abutting unopened streets are required to provide for the development and improvement of those streets. However, since this lot is a corner lot, Amaral Homes is eligible to request a waiver from this requirement, which only the City Council has the authority to grant.

The developer seeks a waiver from the requirement to develop the unopened section of Granby Street, arguing that they already have frontage on Maryville Avenue, which provides sufficient access for the proposed single-family development. The cost of opening and improving the street would be prohibitive for a single-family lot. Images and sketches of the proposed development were provided for context, though they are not directly relevant to the waiver request. Roberto, representing Amaral Homes, is present to answer any questions from the council.

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to approve the waiver request as presented.  
Councilor Ellis seconds the motion.

**ROLL CALL**

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

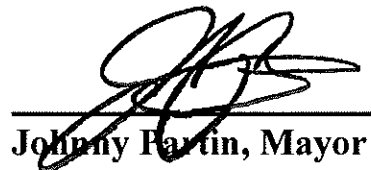
**Motion Passes 5-0**

**ADJOURNMENT**

Respectfully Submitted,



**Sade' Allen, Deputy City Clerk**



**Johnny Partin, Mayor**