

MINUTES OF THE MARCH 25, 2025, CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING

A REGULAR meeting of the Hopewell City Council was held on Tuesday, March 25, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.

PRESENT:

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

Councilor Daye made a motion to go into a closed meeting under Va. Code § 2.2-3711 (A)(1) to discuss and consider personnel matters, including board and commission appointees (City Clerk Contract, city clerk, city manager, city attorney performance evaluation process, Planning Commission, Keep Hopewell Beautiful, Architectural Review Board, Hopewell Water Renewal, District 19, Hopewell Redevelopment and Housing Authority, and Community Policy and Management Team) Va. Code § 2.2-3711(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 of real estate property, Insurance contract); and Va. Code § 2.2-3711 (A)(8) (Treasurer's and Director of Finance's duties; Code of Conduct), Vice Mayor Joyner seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Pass 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

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

Motion Pass 5-0

Vice Mayor Joyner made a motion to appoint Latonya Doctor and Brenda Pelham to the community planning management team committee, Rosalyn Capers to District 19, Chris Lofstrom to the Architectural Review Board, and Todd Butterworth to the Planning Commission, and Mayor Partin seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Pass 5-0

BUDGET WORK SESSION

Prior to the first budget presentation, Dr. Manker addresses the council to let them know there will be presentations on expenditures, CIP (Capital Improvement Plan),

and outside agencies, but no discussions are expected tonight. The budget is required to be balanced by April 1st, with a balanced budget to be presented on April 8th. For the new members of the council, Dr. Manker explains that throughout April, the council will review the balanced budget, providing members with an opportunity to adjust it according to their priorities. After that, minor tweaks will be made, and the final budget will be presented to the public in May.

1. Fire Budget Presentation – Chief Ruppert

Chief Ruppert opened the meeting by providing an overview of recent incidents, emphasizing the fire department's role in emergency response. On the 14th, the department received a call about smoke in a residence, which was upgraded to a structure fire. Upon arrival, one resident was found attempting to assist a burn victim who was also suffering from smoke inhalation. Firefighters successfully rescued both individuals and extinguished the remaining fire. Due to the severity of the victims' conditions and the lack of available aircraft for transport, eight personnel were needed to transport the victims via ground, with one requiring surgical intervention for airway issues. Both individuals are currently receiving treatment at VCU, one off a ventilator and improving, while the other remains on a ventilator but is expected to improve soon. Chief Ruppert highlighted the department's personnel challenges, particularly in EMS. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) recommends 16 personnel for a single-family structure fire, but the department fields only 13 on a typical day, with four of them dedicated full-time to ambulances. For residential fires in garden-style apartments, which are common in the city, the NFPA recommends 28 personnel, but again, the department only has 13 available. EMS personnel handle about 85% of the department's call volume, which leads to high burnout rates. The EMS call volume has doubled from 2017 to 2023, while staffing levels have remained the same. In late 2023, the department shifted to a 24-72 schedule to address recruitment and retention issues, which has helped attract new staff. Since then, the department has received nine viable applications, hired four, and has three more in the process. However, the department still requires additional staffing to fill the new shifts and ensure adequate EMS coverage. Chief Ruppert made several personnel requests. He asked for three additional EMS provider positions to fully staff the new 24-72 schedule, with an estimated cost of \$219,621.54. He also requested three more personnel for a third medic position to improve the department's ability to respond to both fire and EMS calls. This request would cost \$208,894.23. Additionally, he requested \$48,854 to fund a career

development program to support staff retention by offering a clear career path and advanced training opportunities. Regarding capital needs, Chief Ruppert mentioned the critical condition of Station One (which will be 100 years old in 2026) and Station Two (which is 75 years old). He also discussed the urgent need for new apparatus, including two fire engines and two ambulances. Due to prolonged lead times and increasing costs, fire engines now cost \$1.3 million and ambulances over \$500,000. The total cost for the four vehicles would be \$3.7 million. As a solution, Chief Ruppert proposed a leasing program to replace vehicles at regular intervals. This would involve leasing two ambulances at \$1,176,594 annually and fire engines at \$456,183 annually, totaling \$6,327,843 over seven years. He also suggested that EMS revenue and salary savings at the end of the fiscal year could be used to cover these costs. In terms of line-item requests, Chief Ruppert requested \$33,000 for recruitment and retention costs, including advertising and rookie school expenses, as the department has been actively recruiting due to a staffing shortage. Additionally, he asked for a \$25,960 increase in the vehicle leasing line to cover the increased costs of replacing two vehicles under the Enterprise leasing program. Lastly, he provided information on EMS overtime budget overruns over the past three years, although this was not a formal request. Chief Ruppert concluded by emphasizing the importance of long-term planning for capital needs to avoid emergency funding requests and ensure the department can continue to serve the community effectively.

Mayor Partin encourages department directors to run their budgets conservatively. He asked for Dr. Manker to put a policy in place maybe. Dr. Manker mentioned that the Fire department already has a policy in place, and Stacey and herself are currently working on that for the current budget.

Councilor Harris asked if there was a determination of where a new station would be. Chief Ruppert stated that they have not yet done an official study yet.

2. Expenditures, CIP, and outside agencies – Stacey Jordan

At the beginning of Stacey's presentation, Dr. Manker reminded the mayor that the meeting needed to be extended.

Vice Mayor Joyner made a motion to extend the meeting until completion of R6; Councilor Ellis seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Pass 6-0

Mrs. Stacey began her presentation. Mrs. Jordan outlined the proposed fiscal year 26 budget for the City of Hopewell. The budget focuses on maintaining current city operations, including the general government, enterprises, health and welfare, schools, and debt expenses. The strategy for the fiscal year includes ensuring operations continue at their current level while utilizing remaining funds to build reserves for the city. The budget accounts for a 12% increase in health insurance, equating to about \$600,000; a 3% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) across the board; and 3% increases for state and social services, as well as constitutional expenses. Employee salaries will see a 3% COLA increase, with specific adjustments for public safety, parks, and recreation to bring wages up from \$12 to \$15 an hour. Health insurance costs will see an 80% absorption by the city, with the remaining costs passed on to departments. Capital projects totaling \$7.6 million in engineering are carefully considered to avoid excessive impacts on the operating budget. Any general fund resources used for capital projects must be evaluated and prioritized. Revenue sources for these projects may include the general fund, long-term debt, revenue bonds, and state and federal grants. The budget also includes details on various city departments, such as police, fire, public works, recreation, and development. Expenses across these departments mainly reflect increases in salaries, health insurance, and VRS (Virginia Retirement System) contributions, with specific adjustments based on departmental needs and restructuring. A notable change in the City Manager's budget is the addition of employees for economic development and governmental affairs. In terms of enterprise funds, slight increases were noted across various services, including water, sewer, refuse, and stormwater, with adjustments for personnel and healthcare costs. Health and welfare funding, including social services and the Healthy Families program, will see a 3% increase from the state.

Debt service is also a significant portion of the budget, with payments increasing year-over-year, but with a significant drop expected by 2028, which will free up funds for future capital projects. The city's contribution to schools will remain consistent at \$13.58 million, and the budget includes a breakdown of capital projects over the next five years. Mrs. Jordan concluded the presentation by offering to provide more detailed information on any aspect of the budget upon request.

REGULAR MEETING

ROLL CALL

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

Prayer was offered by Pastor Blowe, followed by the pledge of allegiance by Mayor Partin.

Vice Mayor Joyner made a motion to approve the consent agenda, and Councilor Daye seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Pass 6-0

Councilor Holloway made a motion to adopt the regular agenda; Mayor Partin seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Pass 6-0

The city clerk reads the communications from citizens into the record. No citizens signed up to speak.

REGULAR BUSINESS

R-1 Health Insurance Adoption – Yaosca Smith

Mrs. Smith presented an update on the health insurance renewal for the upcoming plan year, which begins on July 1st. She introduced Mary Jones from One Digital, who would be presenting the recommendations. The renewal for the Local Choice program is set to increase by 12%, which amounts to an additional \$620,000 in costs. This includes a 13.9% increase in premiums for Medicare-eligible retirees, with their premiums rising from \$218 to \$232. After reviewing an analysis from One Digital, it was confirmed that the increase is in line with their assessment. Mrs. Smith then presented two options for addressing this increase. Option A proposes that the city absorb \$508,000 of the increase while employees would absorb the remaining \$112,000. Option B would see the city absorb the entire \$620,000 increase. Additionally, the plan includes adjustments to the high-deductible health plan due to changes in IRS regulations, raising the individual deductible from \$3,200 to \$3,300 and the family deductible from \$6,400 to \$6,600. However, the out-of-pocket maximums for this plan will remain unchanged. Mrs. Smith emphasized that decisions on the renewal must be submitted by April 1st, and open enrollment will occur between May 1st and May 15th. She recommended continuing with the three existing medical plans offered to employees and opting for Option A, which splits the cost increase between the city and employees. Mrs. Smith concluded by inviting any questions from the council.

Councilor Holloway made a motion to approve option A for the health insurance adoption. Mayor Partin seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Pass 6-0**R-2 HUD Hopewell Community Center Improvements – Charles Bennett**

Mr. Bennett addressed the council, thanking them for the opportunity to return and discuss the previous business. He reminded the members that, at the last council meeting, he had presented a request for earmark funding from the Community Development Fund. This request pertains to upgrades at the Hopewell Community Center, specifically for air conditioning and locker room improvements. Mr. Bennett emphasized that this is an annual opportunity to submit requests to Washington, DC, asking elected officials to include funding in their budget through the Community Development Fund, which is a HUD earmark. With the assistance of the city attorney, a resolution for this request had been prepared and included in the meeting's agenda packet. Mr. Bennett then asked the council to vote on approving the resolution, which would allow the city to proceed with the necessary paperwork and formally submit the request to elected officials.

Councilor Holloway made a motion to approve the resolution in support of the earmark request for the fiscal year 26 federal HUD community development funds. Vice Mayor Joyner seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Pass 6-0

R-3 Earmark miscellaneous pump station replacement city-wide – Michael Crocker

Mr. Crocker addressed the council, expressing his focus on water-related issues. He thanked Mr. Bennett for his earlier introduction and proceeded to discuss the city's wastewater treatment needs. He noted that the challenges extend beyond the treatment plant itself and mentioned the earmark request aimed at supplementing city funds to address critical infrastructure needs. Referring to the DeBerry report from March 2024, Mr. Crocker highlighted several pump stations that require full replacement, including Manchin Hills, North Colonial, and Sherwood Lane. While the earmark funding may not cover the full replacement costs, it would provide flexibility for improvements, upgrades, or rehabilitation of these and other pump stations. He listed ten high-priority pump stations based on the report, outlining estimated costs for each, which range from \$200,000 to \$600,000 per station. The earmark would help start addressing these issues, and he shared a sample budget from the report. Mr. Crocker also explained that the earmark requires a 20% city match if successful and asked for council approval of a resolution to proceed with submitting the federal earmark request. He concluded by offering to take any questions from the council.

Councilor Holloway makes a motion to approve the federal earmark funding opportunities for the fiscal year 2026 Hopewell water renewal as presented, and Mayor Partin seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Pass 6-0

R-4 Earmark Flock expansion technology – Donald Reid

Deputy Chief Reid speaks to the council, expressing their request for earmark funding regarding public safety technology, and lets the council know there is also a resolution prepared.

Councilor Daye made a motion to approve the earmark flock expansion technology resolution as presented, and Vice Mayor Joyner seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Pass 6-0

R-5 Re-Allocation of local funds to city-wide project pavement – Michael Crocker

Mr. Bessette explained that he and Mr. Crocker had worked together to draft a resolution for the proposed reallocation of funds, and he recommended placing it on the agenda for the next meeting, allowing Mr. Crocker to present it for a city council vote. He clarified that because the proposed reallocation represents less than 1% of the city's total annual budget, it does not need to go through the typical two-reading process and could instead be voted on at the next meeting. He explained that reallocations of more than 2% of the budget require two public readings, while those under 2% do not. This clarification was emphasized as important because, in the past, the council had debated similar issues and may have misunderstood the procedural rules. Councilor Holloway added a comment, noting the specific reference to section 15.2-257A of the code, which allows for this procedural flexibility. The discussion concluded with an acknowledgment of the rule's significance in shaping how budget reallocations are handled, particularly those under 2%.

R-6 Prince George – Hopewell Water Renewal Agreement – James Gaston

Mr. Gaston III, Deputy City Manager for the City of Hopewell, presented an update regarding a request from Prince George County to siphon 2 million gallons per day of water to their water renewal plant. The county is seeking this allocation for an economic development park they are planning to build and has requested a formal agreement or letter from Hopewell to allow this water transfer. The county needs a response by April 1st to secure a \$10 million grant from the Commonwealth. Currently, Hopewell is processing 9 million gallons per day, and Prince George's request would add an additional 2 million gallons. Mr. Gaston explained that while there are no specific

contract details or terms in place, the formal letter would enable Prince George County to pursue the \$10 million grant, provided they choose Hopewell's water renewal as the source, although other water sources are available to them. He mentioned that the city responded to the county's inquiries by submitting the requested letter on March 19th and that the county is still debating their next steps. Mr. Gaston further clarified that the county has the option to forego the \$2 million allocation and pursue other water sources, but they would lose the opportunity to access the \$10 million grant if they do not act by the April 1st deadline. He concluded by noting that Mr. Henley from HDR and Mr. Ker were present to answer any specific scientific questions related to the matter.

Councilor Holloway asked Mr. Crocker for surrounding areas to have interest in water renewals, what type of effect it would have given an answer now, and if they will be at a position to be able to handle that with the current issues that they currently have in place. Mr. Crocker answers in detail to this question. He states the key point to remember is that the city has the hydraulic capacity to meet the demands of Prince George County's request for 2 million gallons per day of water. Despite challenges at the plant, the city is currently meeting limits and has time to address necessary repairs and improvements. While the additional flow will not have an immediate impact, the city is positioned to be a viable source for the county's wastewater needs in the future. There are no significant burdens or challenges anticipated at this time, even with the ongoing repairs required at the plant.

Mr. Dan from HDR provided an assessment of the capacity of the city's wastewater treatment facility in response to a request from Prince George County for additional water flow. The evaluation considered both the hydraulic capacity and the flow the facility can handle. The plant is designed to treat domestic and industrial flows separately, which limits how additional flow can be processed. While the plant is meeting its current limits, one significant issue is the higher solids load coming into the domestic treatment side, which is 50% higher than originally designed. However, other factors, such as flow, organic loading, and nutrient loading, are lower than anticipated. If the solids issue can be resolved or adjustments are made to accommodate the higher solids, the facility could restore its capacity. Currently, there is approximately 4 million gallons per day (MGD) of available capacity in the short term, which is sufficient to handle the requested 2 MGD from Prince George. However, in the next 15 years, the facility would only have 3.6 MGD of available capacity, which would not accommodate a potential full 5 MGD request.

Councilor Holloway raised a concern regarding the 50% higher solids challenge mentioned earlier. He inquired about how the plant would be able to intake more flow given that it is already struggling with a higher-than-expected solids load. Mr. Dan explained that the key issue is the solids load, which exceeds the plant's design capacity. He suggested that if the source of the higher solids load could be identified and addressed, or if improvements were made to handle the increased solids, the facility would be able to accept more flow without exceeding its capacity. Therefore, the plant's ability to process additional flow depends on resolving the solids issue, either by addressing the root cause or upgrading the facility to handle the higher load. Mr. Crocker responded to Councilor Holloway's concern by explaining that the details of how to handle the additional solids load would need to be addressed at a later stage. He clarified that while the flow allocation from Prince George County could be confirmed, the specifics of the required upgrades to accommodate the higher solids load would need to be discussed once the flow is officially brought into the system. He further explained that from Prince George's perspective, they would weigh their options, such as considering the Blackwater Treatment Plant, which has its own capacity and geographical limitations, or potentially building their own plant. However, he emphasized that upgrading the City of Hopewell's plant to handle the additional flow would likely be more cost-effective for Prince George. He stated that any costs associated with upgrading the facility to process the additional solids would need to be shared between the city and Prince George, as it would not be solely the responsibility of Hopewell to bear the cost of such an upgrade.

Councilor Holloway made a motion to approve the allocation request of 2 million gallons a day to Prince George County. Vice Mayor Joyner seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL

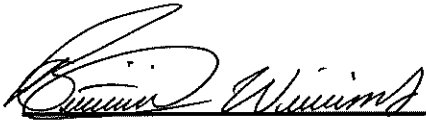
Mayor Partin -	Yes
Councilor Ellis -	Yes
Councilor Daye -	Yes
Councilor Stokes -	--
Councilor Holloway -	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner -	Yes
Councilor Harris -	Yes

Motion Pass 6-0

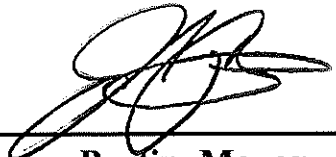
Meeting adjourned

ADJOURNMENT

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Brittani Williams", is written over a horizontal line.

Brittani Williams, City Clerk

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Johnny Partin", is written over a horizontal line.
Johnny Partin, Mayor