

MINUTES OF THE JUNE 23, 2026 CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING

A REGULAR meeting of the Hopewell Council was held on Tuesday June 23, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.

PRESENT:

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

CLOSED MEETING

Councilor Daye makes a motion to go into a closed meeting under Va. Code § 2.2-3711(A)(8), for the purpose of consultation with legal counsel (General assembly legislative requests, ammonia release); § 2.2-3711(A)(7), to consult with legal counsel on actual or probable litigation (Hopewell Water Renewal Commission); § 2.2-3711(A)(1), to discuss personnel matters (School Board, Hopewell Electoral Board, Tow Board). Councilor Wheat seconds motions.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 5-0

Councilor Wheat makes a motion to reconvene the open meeting. Councilor Daye seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 7-0

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

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 7-0

WELCOME TO VISITORS

REPORT OF THE CITY MANAGER

City Manager Vincent Jones provided several community and operational updates. He informed the public that Virginia American Water would be conducting an emergency road closure on the westbound side of East Randolph Road between East Broadway and East Carlson the following day and encouraged residents to be aware of the traffic impacts. He congratulated the Hopewell Police Department on the graduation of six new police recruits from the Crater Criminal Justice Academy, recognizing this as an important milestone for the department. Mr. Jones also recognized longtime City employee Debbie Persian on her retirement after 29 years of service to the City of Hopewell. He noted that she had previously served in the City Manager's Office before working in the Healthy Families Department and thanked her for her years of dedicated service to the city and its residents. Lastly, he announced that the Parks and Recreation Department would host a town hall meeting at the Community Center from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. the following evening to gather public input on the future of the City's recreation programs and facilities. He added that an additional town hall meeting was planned for the following week and that more information would be shared after the initial meeting. Mr. Jones concluded his remarks before the Council proceeded to staff reports.

May Financials – Stacey Jordan, Deputy City Manager

Stacey Jordan present the May Finance Committee report, providing an overview of the City's financial performance through the month of May. She reported that citywide revenues were trending 7.54% (\$14.7 million) higher in Fiscal Year 2026 compared to Fiscal Year 2025, while expenditures were trending 7.15% (\$17.2 million) higher. The increase in revenues was primarily attributed to higher state revenues, increased Hopewell Water Renewal (HWR) capital billing and collections, and revenues generated through the City's new utility billing system. Increased expenditures were largely the result of the annual compensation adjustments implemented through the Class and Compensation Study, as well as increased school and enterprise capital expenditures. Ms. Jordan noted that staff had begun projecting year-end financial results and anticipated the City would end Fiscal Year 2026 with revenues exceeding expenditures by approximately \$19 million. Ms. Jordan then reviewed the General Fund, reporting that revenues were trending 1.09% (approximately \$1 million) higher than the previous fiscal year, while expenditures were 0.61% (\$1.5 million) higher. She again attributed the expenditure increase to salary adjustments resulting from the Class and Compensation Study.

Based on current projections, the General Fund was expected to finish the fiscal year with approximately \$1.7 million in revenues over expenditures. Reviewing the Enterprise Fund, Ms. Jordan stated that revenues were trending 30.2% (\$14.5 million) higher than Fiscal Year 2025, while expenditures were 13.5% (\$5.9 million) higher. She explained that the revenue growth was driven by Hopewell Water Renewal's timely utility billing and upfront capital project billing, while increased expenditures reflected the continued implementation of capital improvement projects associated with Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) requirements. She noted that Hopewell Water Renewal had already invested \$7.3 million in capital projects during the current fiscal year compared to \$1.6 million at the same point in the previous year. The Enterprise Fund was projected to end the fiscal year with approximately \$5.1 million in revenues over expenditures. Ms. Jordan also summarized the financial status of the School Division, reporting that school revenues were trending 23.56% (\$496,000) lower than the prior fiscal year due primarily to the expiration of ESSER grant funding. School expenditures, however, were trending 13.75% (\$6.8 million) higher, reflecting increased operational costs. Despite these changes, the School Division was projected to conclude the fiscal year with approximately \$976,000 in revenues over expenditures. Concluding her report, Ms. Jordan stated that during May the City processed 1,468 accounts payable invoices totaling \$8.2 million and had completed nearly all scheduled debt service payments, with only 5% of annual debt payments remaining for the fiscal year. She further reported that Finance staff had begun biweekly closeout meetings with Hopewell Public Schools and the City's external auditor, David Foley, to prepare for the Fiscal Year 2026 audit. She noted that all City financial closing items were due by August 31, while school financial submissions would be completed in September due to additional reporting requirements. Ms. Jordan stated that the city remained on schedule to complete the fiscal year closeout and audit process on time.

Hooray for Hopewell Event update – Kyle English, Business Retention and Expansion Specialist/External Relations Officer

Kyle English provided an update on the City's upcoming VA250 Hooray for Hopewell History Celebration, scheduled for Saturday, June 27. He informed Council that the day-long event would begin at 12:00 p.m. and celebrate the history of Hopewell, concluding with a fireworks display at approximately 9:30 p.m. Mr. English stated that the overall structure and operations of the event remained largely unchanged since his previous presentation to Council, although several enhancements had been made, including relocating the portable restrooms and adding additional family-friendly activities such as face painting and balloon art. He advised that Council had been provided with the day's operational schedule outlining the sequence of events. Mr. English also reported on the City's marketing efforts, noting that approximately \$300 had been spent on social media advertising, which had reached more than 35,000 people, with approximately 1,200 individuals expressing interest in attending through Facebook. He added that he had recently completed an interview with ABC 8, which was scheduled to air on Thursday to further promote the event. Mr. English announced that Delegate Carrie Coyner Doherty and Senator Lashrecse Aird had confirmed they would attend at least a portion of the celebration and provide remarks during the afternoon program. Mr. English expressed appreciation to the many City employees and volunteers assisting with the event. He thanked the Hopewell Police Department for providing three officers to assist with crowd and traffic control; Kelly Pratt and James Jones for their work developing the historical storyboard displays and

digital storytelling components; Jasmine Mackin for her assistance with event preparations; Economic Development Director Charles Bennett for his leadership in planning the event; Rah Fuller for serving as volunteer coordinator; and Mike Whittington for overseeing public safety operations. During Council discussion, Vice Mayor Joyner asked about volunteer opportunities and scheduling. Mr. English explained that volunteers could serve for whatever amount of time they were available, whether a two-hour shift or the entire day. He stated that volunteers would be checked in and out, assigned responsibilities, and directed throughout the event by the volunteer coordinator and support staff. Mr. English encouraged Council members to help recruit additional volunteers and reiterated that the celebration would conclude with a fireworks display, emphasizing the City's efforts to promote the event as a full-day community celebration designed to attract residents and visitors to Hopewell.

ACTIONS RESULTING FROM CLOSED MEETING

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to appoint Dr. William Butler and Mrs. Brenda Pelham to the school board. Councilor Daye seconds this motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 5-0

Councilor Wheat makes a motions to appoint Laura Rapp to the Library Board, Michael Arndt to the Recreation Commission, and Jerry Tucker, Mike Mcterrain, Brenda Livingston, and Marshall Fouts to serve on the Towing Board. Councilor Daye seconds this motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 7-0

PRAYERS AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Prayer by Pastor Collier, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States by Mayor Partin.

Councilor Wheat makes a motion to adopt the consent agenda. Councilor Rapole seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 7-0

COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITIZENS

Jeffrey Murray Torres Ward 3- Jeffrey Murray Torres stated that he moved from Fort Lee to Ward 3 in 1996 and has been a resident of Hopewell for nearly 30 years. Mr. Torres announced that he is a candidate for the Ward 3 City Council seat and wanted to introduce himself to the Mayor, Vice Mayor, Council members, and the citizens of Hopewell. He remarked that the community would likely be seeing more of him over the coming months as he campaigned for the position.

Justin Goodman, addressed City Council regarding several environmental and public policy concerns. He expressed opposition to the proposed Shoemith landfill expansion, describing it as a potential ecological disaster that he believes could negatively affect Swift Creek, the Appomattox River, and the James River. He encouraged the city to engage with Chesterfield County officials regarding the matter and voiced concerns about environmental oversight and accountability. Mr. Goodman also commented on the Hopewell School Board's public comment procedures, expressing concerns about what he understood to be requirements for submitting comments in advance of meetings. Additionally, he raised concerns regarding environmental compliance at the Advanced Six facility, stating that he believed the plant had experienced prolonged periods of noncompliance and expressing frustration over odors reported by area residents. He questioned the City's oversight of air quality monitoring and urged greater attention to environmental concerns affecting the community. Mr. Goodman further discussed electrical transmission lines located near local schools, stating that he had conducted independent readings that he believed indicated elevated levels warranting further review. He informed Council that he intended to publish his findings and meet with School Board representatives. At the conclusion of his remarks, Council advised Mr. Goodman to submit his documentation and supporting information to the City Clerk so it could be distributed to the members of City Council for their review.

Laura Greenwood Ward 6, addressed the City Council regarding several community concerns. She thanked the city for ensuring representation at the recent Virginia American Water meeting and expressed her appreciation to those who attended on behalf of Hopewell residents. Ms. Greenwood also revisited the issue of the City's feral cat population, noting that she had previously emailed Council and City staff regarding the matter. She explained that the Hopewell

Humane Society is the only local organization providing trap-neuter-return (TNR) services but reported that, although she had been placed on a waiting list, the organization was currently unable to provide services due to a lack of funding. She emphasized the need for community support of the TNR program, explaining that the process not only reduces the feral cat population through spaying and neutering but also ensures that captured cats receive rabies vaccinations. Ms. Greenwood contrasted this with the City's registration and vaccination requirements for dogs, noting that no comparable system exists for cats, including owned cats that are allowed to roam freely. She expressed concern about unaltered domestic cats breeding with feral cats and stated that the growing population posed both public health and safety concerns. Citing a previous incident involving a resident who required rabies treatment after being bitten by a rabid cat, she urged Council to consider providing financial support for the Humane Society's TNR efforts. Ms. Greenwood stated that she had provided City staff with an estimated funding amount and had encouraged representatives of the Humane Society to speak with Council regarding the program. She concluded by thanking Council for its time and consideration. Following Laura Greenwood's public comments regarding the City's feral cat population, Mayor John Partin asked whether she had invited representatives from the Hopewell Humane Society to address City Council. Ms. Greenwood explained that she had contacted the organization by email and identified a representative named September, who informed her that the Humane Society's trap-neuter-return (TNR) program was currently unable to continue due to a lack of funding. She reiterated that addressing the issue over several years through a sustained TNR effort would help reduce the feral cat population while ensuring cats receive rabies vaccinations. The mayor asked whether the Humane Society had submitted a formal funding request to the City. Finance Director Stacey Jordan confirmed that the organization had not requested funding from the city. Mayor Partin stated that he would encourage the Humane Society to do so and directed City Manager Vincent Jones to have City staff contact the organization to determine whether a partnership or funding initiative could be developed to support the TNR program and address the City's feral cat concerns. Mr. Jones informed Council that he had already visited the Hopewell Humane Society the previous week and had also discussed the matter with Police Chief Gregory Taylor. He advised that staff would work with the Humane Society through the City's Animal Control Department to support the program. Mayor Partin then requested that the City Manager provide Council and the public with an update on the initiative during a future City Manager's report, and Mr. Jones agreed to do so.

Sha'rah Fuller, Ward 5, addressed City Council to encourage community involvement in the upcoming Hooray for Hopewell History Celebration, the City's official Virginia 250 commemorative event. She clarified the event's name to distinguish it from previous community events and emphasized the continued need for volunteers. Ms. Fuller stated that volunteers of all ages and availability were welcome, noting that even individuals who could only assist for a short period would be appreciated. She also encouraged attendees to prepare for warm weather by dressing appropriately and staying hydrated while participating in the day's activities. Ms. Fuller also announced that the Ward 7 Neighborhood Watch meeting would be held the following evening at 6:00 p.m. at Woodlawn Presbyterian Church, and noted that Wards 4 and 5 would continue holding Neighborhood Watch meetings on the first Monday of each month. She encouraged additional residents to become involved in Neighborhood Watch efforts, stressing that strengthening the community requires active participation from its residents. Ms. Fuller spoke about the importance of community engagement in supporting Hopewell's youth,

emphasizing that parents, neighbors, and community leaders all have a responsibility to help guide and mentor young people. She encouraged residents to look out for one another's children and to work collectively to create a safer, stronger community. She concluded by highlighting ongoing partnerships among the Hopewell Redevelopment and Housing Authority (HRHA), Neighborhood Watch organizations, the Hopewell Police Department, and other City departments, stating that while City government can provide leadership and resources, lasting community improvement depends on active participation and collaboration from Hopewell's citizens.

Mark Burrough, Ward 3, addressed City Council regarding several community concerns. He first requested that the City review its policy at the Hopewell convenience center regarding tandem-axle trailers. Mr. Burrough explained that although his tandem-axle trailer is for personal use, he is charged commercial disposal fees when transporting residential yard waste, while residents using similarly sized single-axle trailers may dispose of the same materials at no cost. He asked the City to consider a policy that distinguishes personal-use trailers from commercial vehicles. Mr. Burrough also requested an update on funding for the Sheriff's Office radio communications upgrades, noting that previous discussions had referenced potential grant funding and alternative funding options. Finance Director Stacey Jordan responded that the project would be funded through salary savings and offered to follow up with him directly by email with additional information. In addition, Mr. Burrough asked that information about volunteering for the upcoming Hooray for Hopewell History Celebration be shared publicly through Facebook and other City communication channels to encourage community participation. Mr. Burrough concluded by expressing concerns about an increase in gunshots and property crimes in Ward 3, including reports of slashed tires and thefts from vehicles. He acknowledged that Police Chief Gregory Taylor was not present but asked that these issues receive additional attention. In response, Mayor John Partin encouraged residents to report suspected gunfire immediately so law enforcement could respond promptly and better identify the source. He noted that the city was also evaluating new gunshot detection technology capable of distinguishing gunfire from other loud noises, such as fireworks or vehicle backfires, and accurately identifying the location of incidents. The mayor added that the system under consideration is compatible with the City's Flock Safety camera and license plate reader network, which could further assist law enforcement investigations. Mr. Burrough expressed support for the technology, noting its similarity to systems used by the military.

April Jones-Tyler, Ward 2, addressed City Council regarding several concerns involving the Hopewell Redevelopment and Housing Authority (HRHA) and the Hopewell Police Department. She stated that mildew in her public housing bathroom had not been addressed and alleged that her trash had not been collected on one occasion, which she said was later attributed to the city. Ms. Jones-Tyler also expressed concerns that her grievances submitted to HRHA had not received responses and discussed ongoing legal matters related to her housing. Ms. Jones-Tyler further described concerns regarding a police report and communications with the Hopewell Police Department, stating that she had attempted to follow up on an assault investigation. She also made allegations regarding access to her personal digital accounts and devices, as well as concerns involving her interactions with HRHA and other organizations. Additionally, she stated that she had received what she believed to be an incorrect housing recertification packet and expressed concerns regarding enrollment in an after-school program for her children. Following

public comments, Mayor John Partin asked City Manager Vincent Jones to review the City's current yard waste disposal policy in response to an earlier public comment regarding disposal fees for tandem-axle trailers. The mayor noted that it had been his understanding that City residents disposing of yard waste were generally permitted to do so without charge, regardless of trailer type, and requested that staff verify the policy. Mr. Jones agreed to review the matter and report back.

REGULAR BUSSINESS

**R-1 (Public Hearing) Amendment of the Fiscal Year 2025-2026
Hopewell Public School Operating Budget by the Total of \$40,000
(Fund 14) and \$18,590,000 (Fund 063), increasing the total budget
to \$100,887.456 – Janel English, Director of Finance for Hopewell
Public Schools**

Janel English presented a request for City Council approval of a supplemental appropriation to amend the School Division's Fiscal Year 2026 budget by \$18,630,000 in additional federal, state, and local funding. She explained that the School Division's FY2026 budget was originally approved by City Council in April 2025, with subsequent supplemental appropriations approved in September 2025, February 2026, and April 2026. Ms. English reported that the School Division had recently been awarded approximately \$3.43 million in new grant funding, including the Prioritized Aspiring Educator Grant, Teacher Effectiveness Support in Critical Shortage Areas Grant, Dual Enrollment Certification Mini-Grant, Supplemental I-Teach Funding Grant, and a School Construction Assistance Program (SCAP) Grant. In addition, the budget amendment included \$15.2 million in City funding designated for capital improvement projects at Carter G. Woodson Middle School and Hopewell High School. Upon approval of the supplemental appropriation, the School Division's operating budget would increase to \$76,345,087, the Building and Bus Replacement Fund budget would total \$19,258,422, and the overall Hopewell Public Schools budget would increase to \$100,887,456. Following the presentation, Mayor John Partin opened the required public hearing. With no speakers signed up to comment, the public hearing was closed. Before concluding the item, Mayor Partin requested that Ms. English provide City Council with a finalized list of the capital projects to be funded through the \$15.2 million appropriation. While acknowledging that improvements to Hopewell High School were the primary priority, he asked that Council also receive the complete prioritized list of additional projects. Ms. English agreed to provide the requested information.

Vice Mayor Joyner makes motion to Amendment of the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Hopewell Public School Operating Budget by the Total of \$40,000 (Fund 14) and \$18,590,000 (Fund 063), increasing the total budget to \$100,887.456 Mayor Partin seconds this motion

ROLL CALL

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

Councilor Wheat - Abstain

Motion Passes 6-0

R-2 (Public Hearing) Real Estate Lease Amendment for Ice House at the Hopewell City Marina located at 1051 Riverside Ave. – Charles Bennett, Director of Economic and Development

Charles Bennett presented a proposed lease amendment for the Central Virginia Ice Company regarding its ice vending machine located at the Hopewell City Marina. He explained that the company's original lease, executed in 2014, was set to expire at the end of the month. Following negotiations, staff recommended a 36-month lease amendment that would allow the company to continue operating at the marina. The proposed agreement includes an approximately 10 percent increase in rent, establishing an annual lease payment of \$6,300, or \$525 per month. Mr. Bennett advised that Council's agenda packet included the proposed resolution, copies of the original lease agreement and the lease amendment, as well as the required public hearing advertisement published in the Progress-Index. He concluded by offering to answer any questions from Council regarding the proposed lease amendment.

Vice Mayor Joyner makes motion for Real Estate Lease Amendment for Ice House at the Hopewell City Marina located at 1051 Riverside Ave Mayor Partin seconds this motion

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 7-0

R-3 Conditional Use Permit Request from Yousef Abualia to Operate a Used Automobile Dealership on Parcel #025-0225, Also Identified as 3805 Oaklawn Blvd., in the B-4 Corridor Development District – Chris Ward, Director of Planning and Development

Chris Ward presented the second reading of a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) application for 3805 Oaklawn Boulevard (Parcel 0250225), located in Ward 7 and zoned B-4 (General Business). Mr. Ward provided a brief overview of the request, noting that City Council had previously amended the zoning ordinance in June 2025 to require a Conditional Use Permit for all new automobile-related businesses. Mr. Ward summarized the applicant's justification for the request, stating that the proposed automobile dealership is consistent with surrounding commercial uses, would improve the property's appearance through aesthetic enhancements, and aligns with the City's Comprehensive Plan. He reviewed the site plan submitted by the applicant, explaining that customer parking would be located adjacent to the building, vehicle display areas

would be situated closer to the roadway, and the site provided sufficient parking in compliance with City ordinances. He also noted that all parking areas would be located at least 50 feet from the road and that the existing building was adequate to accommodate the proposed use. Mr. Ward reported that staff recommended approval of the Conditional Use Permit subject to several conditions, including resurfacing, seal coating, and striping the parking lot; submitting a final parking plan to the Development Department; restricting parking to designated spaces only, with no parking on grass or on vehicle ramps or lifts; maintaining landscaped islands with mulch and installing street trees; repainting the existing pole sign if it remained in use; prohibiting excessive decorative displays and vehicle washing on the property; and requiring compliance with all applicable local, state, and federal regulations prior to issuance of zoning approval. Mr. Ward advised that no public comments had been received regarding the application and that the Planning Commission unanimously recommended approval by a 4-0 vote, subject to the staff-recommended conditions. He also noted that the applicant was present at the meeting to answer any questions from Council.

Councilor Rapole makes motion for Conditional Use Permit Request from Yousef Abualia to Operate a Used Automobile Dealership on Parcel #025-0225, Also Identified as 3805 Oaklawn Blvd., in the B-4 Corridor Development District Councilor Wheat seconds this motion

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 7-0

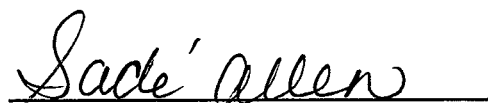
R-4 Virginia America Water Company Rate Increase case update – Anthony Bessette, City Attorney

Anthony Bessette presented a status report on the City's intervention in the Virginia American Water rate case before the Virginia State Corporation Commission (SCC). He explained that Virginia American Water sought to increase customer rates to recover approximately \$115 million in capital improvement costs incurred since its previous rate case. Mr. Bessette noted that this marked the first time the City of Hopewell had intervened in a utility rate case before the SCC. Mr. Bessette described changes made by the General Assembly in 2025 that altered the regulatory process for water utilities. Under the revised law, water utilities are no longer required to first demonstrate that their capital improvement projects were reasonable before seeking to recover those costs through rate increases. Instead, they need only demonstrate that the amount proposed to be charged to ratepayers is reasonable. He stated that this legal change significantly affected the City's ability to challenge the requested increase and shaped the City's strategy throughout the proceedings. Reviewing the timeline of the case, Mr. Bessette explained that Virginia American Water filed its application in November, after which the city intervened and actively encouraged public participation. He reported that Hopewell residents submitted a

substantial number of public comments to the SCC—more than were submitted by residents of Alexandria despite that city's significantly larger population. He also noted that the city successfully encouraged Prince George County to intervene in the case, joining Hopewell and Alexandria in representing customers affected by the proposed rate increase. Mr. Bessette advised that the City incurred approximately \$16,000 in legal fees and costs related to its participation in the case. He reviewed the negotiations that resulted in a settlement, explaining that the parties participated in two rounds of settlement discussions that reduced the proposed rate increases from Virginia American Water's original request. He stated that the matter was resolved through settlement rather than proceeding to a formal evidentiary hearing because the SCC's Office of General Counsel supported the settlement, the Attorney General's Office declined to take a position, and Alexandria also indicated its willingness to settle. While acknowledging that customers would still experience a rate increase, Mr. Bessette emphasized that the City's participation resulted in meaningful savings for Hopewell residents and all Virginia American Water customers statewide. Mr. Bessette also highlighted the extensive written comments submitted by City staff and residents to the SCC, including comments from Director of Social Services Wanda Williams, Economic Development Director Charles Bennett, and numerous Hopewell residents. He stated that these comments were considered by the Commission during its review of the case. Looking ahead, Mr. Bessette informed Council that Hopewell, Alexandria, and Prince George County intended to pursue legislative changes to restore the requirement that water utilities demonstrate the necessity of capital improvement projects before recovering those costs through rate increases, bringing water utilities into alignment with the standards applied to other regulated utilities in Virginia. He stated that the localities planned to work with their legislators and meet with the Attorney General's Office to seek support for the proposed legislation. He also noted that, as part of the settlement agreement, Virginia American Water voluntarily agreed that its next rate case would be evaluated under the "reasonable improvement" standard, despite current law not requiring it. During Council discussion, Councilor Harris asked whether there were additional actions City Council could take to further advocate for residents. Mr. Bessette encouraged Council members to participate in the City's annual legislative advocacy efforts at the General Assembly and to speak directly with legislators about the importance of restoring stronger oversight of water utility rate increases. Mayor John Partin thanked Mr. Bessette, Assistant City Attorney Brenda "BJ" Gilliam, and the legal team for their work on the case. He stated that while the City incurred legal expenses, the long-term savings achieved for residents, businesses, and City operations far outweighed the cost of participation. Mr. Bessette echoed those remarks, commending Ms. Gilliam for quickly developing expertise in the complex area of utility regulation and noting that the City's efforts also reduced operating costs for municipal facilities that pay Virginia American Water utility bills.

ADJOURNMENT

Respectfully Submitted,



Sade' Allen, City Clerk



Johnny Partin, Mayor