

MINUTES OF THE APRIL 28, 2026 CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING

A REGULAR meeting of the Hopewell Council was held on Tuesday, April 28, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.

PRESENT:

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

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to allow Councilor Harris to participate remotely. Councilor Daye seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 5-0

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to amends the agenda to include a R-6 item for recognition of City employees. Councilor Wheat seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 6-0

Councilor Rapole makes a motion to go into closed meeting under Va. Code § 2.2-3711(A)(3), (8), and (29), to discuss the acquisition or disposition of real property, where discussion in an open meeting would adversely affect the bargaining position or negotiating strategy of the public body, the award of a public contract where discussion in an open session would adversely affect the City's bargaining position, and to consult with legal counsel regarding specific legal matters (real estate contract discussions); § 2.2-3711(A)(1) and (8), to discuss personnel matters (Beacon Theater Board, Library Board, Wetlands Board, Brightpoint Community College, Salary

Supplements). Councilor Daye seconds the motion.

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

Motion Passes 5-0

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

ROLL CALL	Councilor Wheat-	Yes
	Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
	Councilor Harris -	Absent
	Mayor Partin-	Yes
	Councilor Rapole-	Yes
	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?

PRESENT:

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

REPORT OF THE CITY MANAGER

Actions taken to address employee surveys – Michael Rogers, Interim City Manager and Ben Ruppert, Fire Chief

Fire Chief Ben Ruppert presented a summary of a departmental action plan developed in response to the employee survey results. He explained that the survey identified three primary areas of concern: workplace environment, relationships with upper management, and employee pay. Several secondary concerns were also highlighted, including training and development, communication within the City, employee relations, and workforce quality. At the direction of the City Manager, department directors reviewed the survey findings and developed

recommendations that could serve as options for the incoming City Manager to address these concerns.

Regarding employee compensation, Chief Ruppert noted that pay was a significant concern among employees. One recommendation was to create a performance incentive program to reward exceptional employees who consistently demonstrate high levels of effort, efficiency, and capability. The proposal would provide additional compensation to top-performing employees, with approximately 10 percent of the workforce eligible for recognition. He explained that flexibility would be needed depending on department size, but every department should have at least one employee who could qualify. He stated that such a program would encourage continued excellence and recognize employees who make outstanding contributions to City operations. He also recommended revising the methodology used in future compensation studies. Rather than comparing positions solely based on broad salary ranges, he suggested examining actual employee pay levels in relation to years of experience and comparing those figures to similarly experienced employees in neighboring jurisdictions. This more detailed approach, he said, would provide a more accurate “apples-to-apples” comparison and help identify employees who may still be undercompensated despite recent pay studies.

Addressing workplace environment concerns, Chief Ruppert explained that directors sought more detailed data from the survey vendor because the issue varied significantly across departments. He noted that solutions such as expanded remote work opportunities may be appropriate for some departments but would not be feasible for operational divisions such as Fire or Public Works. Although the requested departmental breakdown of survey responses was eventually provided, it was received after the committee had completed its recommendations. As a result, he stated that further review would be necessary. In the meantime, the group identified several preliminary improvements, including increasing schedule flexibility where operationally feasible, expanding employee recognition programs, and potentially providing employees with additional leave on birthdays or work anniversaries. He also emphasized continuing and strengthening the efforts of the City’s Wellness Committee and Vision Committee, which he described as already performing valuable work to improve employee morale and engagement.

Chief Ruppert next discussed strengthening relationships between employees and upper management. He explained that survey feedback suggested employees desired a stronger connection with leadership. One recommendation was to distribute the City Manager’s report, which is currently provided to Council members, to all City employees. Doing so would keep employees informed about City initiatives and accomplishments across departments and help them feel more connected to organizational progress. He also suggested that the City Manager provide semi-annual updates directly to employees, either through presentations at employee luncheons or through regular communications. Additionally, he advocated for “leadership by presence,” encouraging managers, directors, and the City Manager to spend more time engaging directly with employees in the workplace. He stated that increased visibility and interaction would improve communication and strengthen relationships throughout the organization.

To encourage greater dialogue between leadership and staff, Chief Ruppert recommended regular departmental town hall meetings where employees could speak directly with department

directors, ask questions, provide feedback, and discuss operational concerns. He indicated that these forums would create more opportunities for two-way communication and help leadership better understand employee perspectives.

In discussing communication across the organization, Chief Ruppert emphasized the importance of increasing both the frequency and variety of communications with employees. He recommended improvements to the City's intranet to make information more accessible and useful. He also suggested expanding the use of Hopewell Alerts to communicate important employee-related information such as weather-related office closures and other operational notices. Another recommendation involved creating formal channels through which employees could submit suggestions for improving City operations. Under this concept, employees whose ideas were adopted and implemented would receive some form of recognition or award.

Finally, Chief Ruppert addressed training and professional development opportunities. He stressed that employees are the City's most valuable asset and that continued investment in their development benefits both employees and the organization. Recommendations included expanding internal training opportunities, particularly for onboarding and specialized systems such as Munis software. He also suggested quarterly "Lunch and Learn" programs covering topics beneficial both professionally and personally, such as CPR training. Additionally, he recommended increasing employee access to professional development and technical training opportunities offered through professional associations and external organizations. While noting that the City already offers a college tuition reimbursement program, he encouraged exploring partnerships and additional resources that would make specialized training more accessible. He concluded that expanded development opportunities would not only improve employee skills and knowledge but also help employees feel valued, appreciated, and invested in by the City.

After completing his presentation, Chief Ruppert asked if Council members had any questions. Seeing no requests to speak, he concluded his remarks and thanked the Council for the opportunity to present the recommendations.

Why Localities Borrow Money – Anthony Bessette, City Attorney

City Attorney Anthony Bessette addressed questions that had been raised regarding the City's recent issuance of bonds. He explained that he had prepared remarks to help Council and the public better understand why local governments often finance projects through bonds rather than spending available cash reserves or liquidating investments. Speaking in an educational capacity, Bessette emphasized that municipal finance differs significantly from personal finance and that several important considerations influence the decision to issue debt.

Bessette began by explaining that many City funds are legally restricted and cannot be used for purposes outside of their designated uses, even when they show positive balances. He addressed concerns that Hopewell had previously been "broke," stating that this characterization was inaccurate. He noted that the City had remained cash-flow positive, even during financially challenging periods. Instead, he explained that Hopewell's historical financial difficulties stemmed more from mismanagement, including inadequate transparency regarding fund balances, improper use of funds committed to specific purposes, and insufficient oversight of

financial resources. These issues, he said, created challenges but did not mean the City lacked cash entirely.

He next discussed the importance of maintaining financial stability and reserve funds. Bessette explained that local governments must maintain adequate reserves to respond to emergencies such as storms, infrastructure failures, economic downturns, and other unforeseen events without resorting to sudden tax increases or service reductions. According to financial advisors, cities similar to Hopewell should maintain between two and six months of operating expenses in readily available cash reserves. He stated that Hopewell currently maintains approximately two months of annual operating expenditures as liquid cash and emphasized that these funds are reserved strictly for emergencies and are not intended for routine spending.

Bessette also described the City's investment holdings as an extension of its financial reserves. Unlike liquid cash, invested funds may take time to access and can fluctuate in value based on market conditions. Financial advisors recommend that the City maintain investments equal to approximately ten percent of its annual budget. He reported that Hopewell currently maintains investments at roughly that level and has historically earned an average annual return of approximately 6.72 percent after accounting for inflation. Because these investments generate returns over time, he noted that preserving them can often be financially advantageous.

Turning to the rationale for issuing bonds, Bessette explained that long-term capital projects such as road paving, school renovations, and wastewater infrastructure improvements are expected to provide benefits for decades. Financing such projects through bonds spreads the cost across both current and future residents who will benefit from the infrastructure. By contrast, paying entirely with cash reserves or investment funds would require current taxpayers to bear the full cost of assets that future generations will also use and enjoy. He stated that bond financing creates a more equitable distribution of costs over time.

Bessette further explained that issuing bonds can be financially preferable when the City's investment earnings exceed the interest costs associated with borrowing. He illustrated this concept by noting that if the City can earn approximately seven percent on its investments while borrowing through bonds at five percent, maintaining the investments and issuing bonds results in a stronger overall financial position. In such circumstances, liquidating investments to avoid borrowing would actually reduce the City's long-term financial benefits.

Addressing suggestions that the City could instead sell property to fund projects, Bessette acknowledged that property sales can sometimes be appropriate but cautioned that real estate, like financial investments, should be evaluated strategically. He noted that market conditions may not always make property sales advisable and that disposing of assets solely to avoid borrowing may not be in the City's long-term interest.

In concluding his remarks, Bessette summarized that maintaining reserves and investments while issuing bonds helps protect the City's financial stability, preserves its creditworthiness, and ensures preparedness for emergencies. He stressed that all municipalities eventually rely on bond financing for major capital projects. He also warned that depleting reserves can signal financial weakness to credit rating agencies and lenders, resulting in higher borrowing costs when bonds

must ultimately be issued. He stated that Hopewell's current borrowing challenges reflect financial decisions made in previous years and underscored the importance of rebuilding and maintaining strong reserves moving forward. Overall, he emphasized that bond financing allows the City to share infrastructure costs fairly across generations while safeguarding its financial position.

Following the presentation, Mayor Partin commented that municipal finance can be difficult for the public to understand because it differs from personal financial practices, where paying cash is often viewed as preferable. He noted that local government must operate on a much larger scale, serving over 23,000 residents as well as regional wastewater customers, correctional facilities, and military installations. He expressed appreciation for the explanation and highlighted the City's progress in restoring investment reserves to approximately ten percent of the annual budget. Mayor Partin also noted the Council's ongoing discussions about further increasing reserve levels to strengthen the City's financial standing and improve its attractiveness to credit rating agencies, which could lead to more favorable borrowing terms in the future.

Mayor Partin added that Bessette's written statement would be posted on the City's website because questions about bonds and municipal finance had arisen repeatedly during recent Council meetings. The official explained that making the information publicly available would help residents better understand the fundamentals of municipal finance and the reasoning behind the City's financial decisions.

Governmental Financial Overview – Stacey Jordan, Deputy City Manager

Deputy City Manager Stacey Jordan delivered a financial overview presentation intended to help Council and the public better understand the City's finances, budgeting process, fund balances, audit results, and efforts to improve its financial standing. She noted that the presentation had previously been presented in greater detail during the City's first budget town hall meeting and stated that both the presentation and City Attorney Anthony Bessette's bond financing explanation would be posted on the City's website for public review.

Jordan began by discussing the City's financial policies, explaining that Hopewell formally adopted financial policies after her arrival in 2024 and that these policies are available on the City's website under the Finance Department section. She then reviewed the City's major revenue sources, outlining the broad range of taxes, fees, grants, and other revenues that support municipal operations. These include real estate taxes, public service corporation taxes, penalties and interest, local sales taxes, utility taxes, business license taxes, lodging taxes, telecommunications taxes, rental taxes, permit and licensing fees, EMS and Freedom of Information Act fees, court fines, parking fines, DMV-related revenues, marina revenues, rental income, bond proceeds, insurance taxes, surplus property sales, grants from the Commonwealth of Virginia, federal grants, and various reimbursements and miscellaneous revenues. She emphasized that the City relies on a diverse revenue structure to fund services and operations.

Turning to the budget process, Jordan explained that Virginia law requires the City to adopt a balanced budget each fiscal year. The budget serves as both a financial plan and a policy document that outlines the City's priorities, anticipated revenues, expenditures, and any

significant policy changes from the prior year. She described the budget as an estimate of what is necessary for the City to operate successfully and stressed the importance of distinguishing between organizational needs and wants. Department heads, she noted, are responsible for managing operations within their approved budgets and ensuring that expenditures remain aligned with available resources.

Jordan next discussed financial stability, cash reserves, and investments. Referencing guidance from the Government Finance Officers Association, she explained that a financially sustainable community provides services within its available means while simultaneously preserving its ability to continue delivering those services in the future. She described financial health as a “three-legged stool” consisting of sound financial positions and parameters, effective budget practices, responsible management of liabilities, and awareness of political and economic conditions that may affect the City’s finances. Maintaining stability across these areas, she said, is essential for long-term fiscal sustainability.

A significant portion of Jordan’s presentation focused on fund balance classifications. She explained that governmental fund balances are divided into five categories, each with distinct restrictions and purposes. Nonspendable fund balance includes assets that cannot legally be spent or must remain intact. Restricted fund balance consists of resources dedicated to specific purposes by outside parties. Committed fund balance includes resources designated for particular uses by formal Council action. Assigned fund balance reflects resources intended for specific purposes through Council direction or delegated authority. Finally, unassigned fund balance represents the portion available for general purposes. Jordan emphasized that fund balance should not be confused with cash because it includes non-cash assets such as receivables and represents a financial snapshot at a specific point in time. She noted that the figures contained in the City’s Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) reflect conditions as of the close of the fiscal year on June 30, 2025. She also announced plans to provide a more detailed review of the ACFR during a future Council meeting so residents could better understand the various financial statements and exhibits contained within the report.

Jordan then reviewed the City’s basic financial statements. She explained that the ACFR contains multiple types of financial reports designed to provide different perspectives on the City’s financial condition. The government-wide statement of net position provides a snapshot of overall financial health. The statement of activities functions similarly to an income statement by showing revenues, expenses, and changes in assets over time. Fund financial statements provide detailed information regarding assets, liabilities, equity, revenues, expenditures, and changes in fund balances. She also referenced fiduciary fund statements, which account for assets held on behalf of others, such as pension funds. These reports collectively provide a comprehensive view of the City’s financial position and operations.

Discussing audits, Jordan explained that the City’s external auditing firm, Robinson, Farmer, Cox Associates, issues an opinion regarding whether the City’s financial statements fairly present its financial condition. She outlined the four possible audit opinions: unmodified (the highest and cleanest level of assurance), qualified, adverse, and disclaimer. She reminded Council that Hopewell received a disclaimer opinion in prior years due to deficiencies in financial reporting and recordkeeping. The latter three opinions are considered modified opinions

and indicate varying degrees of concern regarding the reliability of financial statements. She noted that restoring the City's financial reporting credibility has been a major focus of recent efforts.

Jordan then addressed the City's bond rating efforts. She explained that Hopewell has not maintained an official bond rating since 2018 but now has an opportunity to pursue one because its financial statements and audits have been brought current. She stated that the City has been working with its financial advisors to conduct diagnostic bond rating reviews following completion of each ACFR and indicated that Hopewell could potentially achieve a Moody's rating equivalent to approximately Aa3, which she described as a strong rating. She explained that obtaining a bond rating would improve the City's access to capital markets and potentially lower borrowing costs.

Jordan outlined several factors that rating agencies consider when evaluating a municipality. These include maintaining adequate fund balances and liquidity, managing long-term liabilities responsibly, demonstrating strong financial management practices, and sustaining economic stability. She explained that the City's strategy for issuing new general obligation bonds is structured so that debt payments align with the retirement of existing obligations. For example, as older debt is paid off, budget capacity becomes available to absorb payments on newly issued debt without requiring tax increases. She emphasized that this approach benefits residents by allowing the City to address infrastructure needs while maintaining financial stability. Jordan also noted that refinancing existing debt could create additional savings for the City in the future.

The presentation also reviewed factors that can positively or negatively affect bond ratings. Jordan explained that rating agencies such as Moody's, Standard & Poor's, and Fitch closely examine reserve levels, liquidity, tax base strength, economic growth, debt levels, household income trends, population growth, budget forecasting accuracy, long-term planning, debt management policies, and reserve policies. She noted that declining reserves, increasing debt burdens, or deterioration in the tax base can negatively affect ratings, while strong reserves, stable finances, population growth, and effective financial management can strengthen ratings. She highlighted that many of these best practices have already been incorporated into the City's adopted financial policies.

In closing, Jordan stated that Hopewell is moving in the right direction financially. She noted that the City had completed its Fiscal Year 2025 ACFR, was working to remain on schedule for Fiscal Year 2026 reporting, and had successfully eliminated some prior audit findings. Although additional work remains, she expressed confidence that the City is continuing to make meaningful progress toward stronger financial management, improved transparency, and long-term fiscal stability.

March Financials 3rd Quarter – Stacey Jordan, Deputy City Manager

Deputy City Manager Stacey Jordan presented the City's Third Quarter Financial Report, providing Council with an overview of revenue trends, expenditures, departmental budget performance, overtime usage, salary savings, accounts payable activity, and debt payments for Fiscal Year 2026 compared to Fiscal Year 2025. She explained that the report represented a

budget-to-actual trend analysis intended to show how the City was performing financially at the end of the third quarter relative to the same period in the prior fiscal year.

Jordan reported that, citywide, third quarter revenues were trending 1.38 percent, or approximately \$12.5 million, higher in Fiscal Year 2026 compared to Fiscal Year 2025. Expenses were also trending higher by 1.63 percent, or approximately \$12.1 million. She explained that the increase in expenses was primarily due to annual salary and fringe benefit increases, along with increased school-related expenses. Revenue growth was attributed to increased collections from Data Integrators, the City's previous utility billing vendor, and improved utility billing collections. She also reminded Council that the City's key revenue due dates occur in December, February, May, and June, with real estate taxes and machinery and tools taxes due on June 15.

For the General Fund, Jordan stated that third quarter revenues were trending 7.44 percent, or approximately \$6.9 million, higher in Fiscal Year 2026 than in Fiscal Year 2025. General Fund expenses were trending 0.98 percent, or approximately \$916,000, higher than the previous year. She explained that the increase in expenses was mainly tied to the three percent annual salary increase, while the revenue increase was due in part to transfers and rollovers from purchase orders from the prior year.

Jordan then reviewed the Enterprise Fund, reporting that third quarter revenues were trending 7.78 percent, or approximately \$4.9 million, higher in Fiscal Year 2026 compared to Fiscal Year 2025. Expenses were also trending higher by 9.9 percent, or approximately \$4.5 million. She explained that revenue improvements resulted from on-time billing, collection of money owed from Data Integrators, stronger collections through the City's new vendor, Manno, correct billing from Manno, and monthly capital billing to industrial partners rather than annual billing. The increase in expenses was attributed to capital projects and higher maintenance and operations costs.

Regarding the school system, Jordan stated that school revenues were trending 4.38 percent, or approximately \$1.6 million, higher in Fiscal Year 2026 than in Fiscal Year 2025. School expenses were also trending higher, by approximately 1.31 percent, or about \$500,000. She indicated that the slight revenue increase stemmed from state revenues, while the spending increase was related to maintenance and other necessary work within the school system.

Jordan also reviewed departmental budget-to-actual performance for the third quarter. She noted that, because the City was approximately 75 percent through the fiscal year, departments should generally be around 75 percent of their budgets. Overall, the City was at approximately 71 percent, which she described as on trend. A few departments were above the expected level, but she explained that those variances were tied to identifiable one-time or lump-sum costs that should balance out by the end of the fiscal year. These included Finance, which was slightly high due to multiple audits occurring in the same year; the City Clerk's Office, which had increased advertising costs; Community Services Act (CSA), which had increased service costs; Economic Development, which had incentive payments; Human Resources, which had consultant costs for updating the HR manual; Information Technology, which had contract-related expenses; the Marina, which had roof repair costs; Police, which had software service contract payments; the

Treasurer's Office, which had delinquency process costs; and Victim Witness, which had service-related expenses. Jordan emphasized that these expenditures were generally timing issues rather than indications of budget overruns and were expected to normalize by the end of the fiscal year.

Jordan then discussed overtime expenditures by department. She explained that several departments had overtime pressures related to staffing vacancies, emergency response requirements, or special circumstances. Public Works garage overtime was largely driven by vacancies within the department, while Police overtime was also elevated. Refuse operations required a budget transfer related to Emergency Operations Center activity during a storm event. The Sheriff's Department experienced overtime costs associated with staffing vacancies and would require a budget transfer to address those expenses. Additional overtime was connected to storm response activities, twenty-four-hour on-call coverage requirements, and staffing needs in various departments. The Treasurer's Office required a budget transfer related to delinquency collection efforts, while Voter Registration incurred additional overtime and part-time assistance costs due to an increased number of elections during the year.

Jordan reported that the City had identified approximately \$649,102 in salary savings through the third quarter. She outlined how those savings would be reallocated to address operational and capital needs. Approximately \$400,000 would be used to complete the remainder of the City's audit work for the fiscal year. Additional allocations included \$25,000 for Commissioner of the Revenue security upgrades and office-related expenses, \$50,000 for a sewer line repair at Fire Station No. 2, \$105,000 for a water leak repair at Fire Station No. 1, and \$80,000 for the Sheriff's Office radio system. She noted that the radio system expense was not covered by Compensation Board or ICE funding and therefore would be funded through available salary savings. Jordan advised Council that no formal reappropriation was necessary because the expenditures could be handled through budget transfers.

Finally, Jordan reviewed accounts payable and debt payment activity. She reported that during the third quarter the City processed 4,029 invoices totaling approximately \$20 million. She further stated that the City had paid 73 percent of its debt obligations for the fiscal year and that all debt payments had been made on time. Jordan concluded by noting that the City's finances remained on track overall, with revenues and expenditures generally trending as expected and departments operating within acceptable budget parameters as the City moved toward the close of the fiscal year.

Fiscal Year 2025 ACFR – Stace Jordan, Deputy City Manager

David Foley, a partner with Robinson, Farmer, Cox Associates and the City's external auditor, presented the results of the Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report audit. He stated that the audit had been completed and that the final report would be uploaded to the State and the Federal Clearinghouse by Thursday, prior to the required deadline. Foley explained that the audit included three primary components: an audit of the City's financial statements to determine whether they were prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles; a review of internal controls over financial reporting in accordance with government

auditing standards; and a federal compliance review, also known as a single audit, which is required when a locality expends more than \$750,000 in federal grant funds.

Foley explained that the audited financial statements include three separate reports from the audit firm. The first is the independent auditor's report, which contains the firm's opinion on the City's financial statements. He reported that the City received an unmodified opinion, also known as a clean opinion, meaning the financial statements were prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles.

Foley then reviewed the report on internal controls over financial reporting. He stated that the City showed improvement in Fiscal Year 2025 compared to prior audits and noted that the number of findings had been reduced by more than half. He specifically cited improvements in bank reconciliations, explaining that the City is now completing reconciliations monthly, using Munis to perform them, and staying current with those reconciliations. Foley said these improvements demonstrated that the City is moving in the right direction with its financial reporting controls.

Although progress had been made, Foley noted that some repeat findings remained. He stated that the remaining concerns primarily involved the need for timely monthly reconciliations of subsidiary ledgers, including property tax balances and utility fund balances, to the general ledger. He also noted that some material audit adjustments were required during the audit process. Foley explained that if the City continues strengthening monthly reconciliation procedures and completes them consistently and timely throughout the year, those remaining findings could likely be eliminated.

Foley next discussed the audit firm's report on compliance with major federal grant programs under Uniform Guidance. He reported that this portion of the audit was clean, with no significant deficiencies, no material weaknesses, and no instances of noncompliance identified. He stated that the City received a clean opinion on the Uniform Guidance audit as well.

Foley concluded by noting that the audit process had been a long journey and that it was encouraging to see the City's audits finally caught up. He offered to answer questions from Council.

Vice Mayor Joyner asked about the remaining material weaknesses and whether, based on Foley's experience and the City's progress, he believed the City could achieve an on-time, clean Fiscal Year 2026 audit with no material weaknesses. Foley responded that the audit firm could work with management during Fiscal Year 2026 to monitor progress. He stated that if the City completes the necessary monthly reconciliations timely throughout the year, he believed the City could reach that point. However, he cautioned that the outcome would depend on whether those procedures are fully implemented and maintained.

Councilor Johnny Wheat asked for clarification regarding the timeline for completing the Fiscal Year 2026 audit. Specifically, he inquired when the audit would be finished now that the City's financial reporting and audit schedule had been brought current.

In response, external auditor David Foley explained that the goal is to complete the Fiscal Year 2026 audit by December 15, 2026. He noted that now that the City is caught up on its audits, the audit process can begin much earlier than in previous years. Foley explained that many audit procedures, including internal control testing and compliance testing, can be performed before the close of the fiscal year and before the final financial figures are available. As a result, audit work typically begins during the spring and summer months, allowing auditors to evaluate systems, controls, and compliance requirements in advance.

Foley further explained that the final phase of audit fieldwork generally occurs during September and October, after City staff have completed year-end financial adjustments and prepared the financial statements for review. At that stage, auditors conduct their final testing and verification of financial information. He stated that this streamlined process should position the City to meet its objective of completing the Fiscal Year 2026 audit by mid-December, significantly improving timeliness compared to previous years.

Following Foley's explanation, Councilor Wheat thanked him for the information. No further questions were raised on the audit timeline.

Mayor Johnny Partin delivered remarks celebrating the completion of the Fiscal Year 2025 audit and the City's progress in overcoming years of financial challenges. He described the occasion as a historic and exciting moment for Hopewell, noting that while the final audit report still needed to be submitted to state and federal agencies, the City had effectively closed a difficult chapter in its history and was entering a new era of financial accountability, professionalism, and stability. He stated that the achievement was the result of years of effort by numerous individuals and organizations and took the opportunity to publicly recognize those who played significant roles in helping the City recover from more than a decade of financial difficulties.

Mayor Partin began by recognizing former Mayor Jackie Hornik and former Vice Mayor Wayne Walton. He recalled watching them from the audience more than eleven years earlier as they sounded the alarm when the City's audits first became delayed. He specifically referenced the late Fiscal Year 2015 audit and the subsequent overdue Fiscal Year 2016 audit, noting that they worked diligently to hold the administration accountable and bring attention to the growing financial issues. While acknowledging that the City did not fully understand at the time the severity of the problems it faced, Partin thanked them for raising awareness and initiating conversations that ultimately led to corrective action.

He next recognized former Virginia Secretary of Finance Steve Cummings and former Deputy Secretary of Finance John Markowitz, who were not present but whom he believed were following the meeting. Partin praised both men for their genuine concern for Hopewell and their willingness to assist the City during its financial struggles. He explained that they worked extensively with state leadership and budget committees to secure the services of Alvarez & Marsal, which conducted an operational audit and developed a remediation plan at no cost to the City. He also noted that they offered to fund an experienced interim city manager to assist the City while a permanent search was conducted, though that offer was ultimately declined by City Council. Despite that decision, he stated that both officials continued supporting Hopewell through advice, guidance, and assistance in identifying grant and funding opportunities.

Mayor Partin then recognized Nancy Zuk and the Alvarez & Marsal team. He credited them with entering a difficult financial situation and developing a comprehensive turnaround and stabilization plan that continues to guide the City's recovery efforts. He noted that despite not having access to every report they requested, they still produced recommendations that remain valuable today. He estimated that their work provided roughly seventy to seventy-five percent of the solutions needed to address the City's financial issues and stated that many of those recommendations continue to be implemented successfully. Partin also praised Zuk for maintaining a personal interest in Hopewell's progress after the formal engagement ended and for continuing to provide guidance and support to City officials.

Partin next acknowledged Robert "Bob" Heatherness, Jack Regan, Russ Branson, and their team for providing financial management and turnaround services after the Alvarez & Marsal review. He explained that the City engaged them to perform accounting remediation and financial recovery work rather than relying solely on internal staff. He credited the team with cleaning up the City's financial records, developing many of the policies and procedures currently in use, identifying instances of fraud, helping remove problematic employees, preventing the City from moving closer to insolvency, and discovering shortcomings with a third-party vendor that ultimately saved the City significant amounts of money. He noted that those savings were later redirected toward capital improvement projects.

The Mayor then recognized former Councilor Brenda Pelham for her role in promoting stronger financial oversight. He described her as a strong advocate for accountability who consistently asked difficult questions and demanded high standards from both administration and finance staff. He credited Pelham with helping restore capital improvement planning, supporting the return of the City's fifteen-year paving program, strengthening stormwater infrastructure initiatives, and encouraging the adoption of financial policies and procedures that remain in place today. He also thanked her for her continued public service and efforts to assist the Hopewell Redevelopment and Housing Authority.

Partin next recognized Senator Lashrecse Aird and Delegate Carrie Coyner for their bipartisan efforts on behalf of Hopewell. He praised their cooperation with state finance officials and legislative committees in securing assistance for the City and supporting legislation related to fiscal distress. He noted that they faced opposition at various points but continued advocating for measures that would help Hopewell recover. He stated that their efforts not only benefited Hopewell but also helped establish safeguards that could prevent other Virginia localities from experiencing similar financial crises in the future.

Turning to the City's external auditor, David Foley, Partin thanked him for his persistence and dedication throughout the lengthy audit recovery process. He recalled his own frustration during earlier audit presentations when little progress was being made and contrasted that with the positive outcome being celebrated. Partin praised Foley and his firm for helping guide the City through years of financial remediation and expressed optimism that Hopewell would now move forward with timely audits and ultimately achieve a completely clean audit with no findings.

Mayor Partin also recognized Interim City Manager J.C. Rogers and City Attorney Anthony Bessette, describing them as a force multiplier for the City. He credited them with saving the

City substantial sums of money and helping professionalize City Hall. He highlighted their efforts to address financial management issues at the Beacon Theatre, improve operations within the Economic Development Authority, resolve audit-related deficiencies, address challenges at the wastewater treatment plant, and assist the Hopewell Redevelopment and Housing Authority. He thanked both men for their leadership and commitment to improving City operations.

Partin again recognized Senator Aird and Delegate Coyner for their work during the most recent General Assembly session, particularly their advocacy for state funding. He noted that they submitted a record number of budget amendments on Hopewell's behalf, seeking funding for wastewater treatment plant improvements, HVAC replacement at Hopewell High School, riverfront recreation projects, and public safety initiatives. Although not every funding request was approved, he expressed appreciation for their efforts and enthusiasm about continuing to work with them as Hopewell moves forward.

The Mayor then offered special recognition to Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer Stacey Jordan, whom he described as the "woman of the hour." He stated that while consultants and financial advisors played important roles in the City's recovery, recruiting Jordan to Hopewell may have been one of the most important decisions made during the turnaround process. Partin praised her leadership, expertise, determination, and work ethic, crediting her with helping bring the City's audits current, coordinating diagnostic bond rating reviews, strengthening compliance with financial policies and internal controls, and making it possible for the City to fund tens of millions of dollars in capital improvements. He further noted that her work contributed to restoring the paving program, expanding sewer pump station improvements, addressing stormwater drainage problems, and creating a stronger financial foundation for Hopewell's future.

Finally, Mayor Partin recognized his fellow Council members, including Councilors Harris, Rapole, Daye, Ellis, Wheat, and Vice Mayor Joyner. He acknowledged the criticism, misinformation, harassment, and personal attacks they endured while making difficult decisions related to the City's financial recovery. Despite disagreements on some issues, he praised the Council for working together, finding compromises, and remaining committed to improving the City. Partin stated that Hopewell is now in the strongest position it has been in more than a decade and is entering a new era defined by professionalism, financial accountability, and good governance. He expressed confidence that the City's future is bright and that the hard work undertaken by Council and staff has positioned Hopewell for continued growth and success. He concluded by inviting everyone in attendance to join him in applauding all of the individuals and organizations recognized for their contributions to the City's recovery.

Waste Water Pump Station Update – Matt Ellinghaus, Director of Water Renewal

Matt Ellinghaus, Director of Water Renewal, presented an update on the City's wastewater pump station improvement program and ongoing compliance efforts related to the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Consent Order. He noted that he had previously appeared before Council approximately one month earlier to provide an update on operations at the Water Renewal Facility and had been asked by Interim City Manager J.C. Rogers to return and provide a status report on the City's pump station projects. Ellinghaus explained that some information

regarding the Consent Order would overlap with previous discussions but stated that the update was important for keeping both Council and the public informed about ongoing infrastructure improvements.

Ellinghaus began by discussing the Queen Street Pump Station project, which is currently in the survey and design phase. The project includes a complete rehabilitation of the station as well as force main improvements. He explained that survey work is largely complete, but a portion of the proposed force main alignment must cross CSX railroad property. As a result, the City and its engineering consultants are working through access agreements and insurance requirements with CSX before survey crews can enter the area and complete the remaining fieldwork. Once the final survey data is collected, engineers will be able to complete hydraulic analyses, determine appropriate pump sizing, and advance the project into the next phase of design and construction.

He next provided an update on the Jackson Farm Pump Station project, which is being funded through the Virginia Clean Water Revolving Fund loan program. Ellinghaus explained that the project includes a complete rehabilitation of the station and an evaluation of methods to increase capacity, either by installing an additional pump or upsizing portions of the force main system. Additional improvements will include electrical upgrades, ventilation improvements, integration into the City's Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system, and installation of a replacement backup generator. He noted that ventilation improvements are a recurring need throughout the City's wastewater system because hydrogen sulfide gas generated in wastewater environments can damage electrical equipment when ventilation is inadequate. Many of the City's pump stations were built before modern ventilation standards existed, making these upgrades necessary to improve reliability and extend equipment life. Ellinghaus stated that project scoping is underway and that the funding becomes available on July 1, positioning the City to move forward with design work immediately.

Turning to the Station Street and Mansion Hill Pump Station projects, Ellinghaus explained that both facilities will undergo complete station renovations, including replacement of mechanical equipment and numerous safety improvements. He noted that several pump stations throughout the City have deficiencies involving railings, lighting, ventilation, and worker safety conditions that must be addressed. At Station Street, one of the primary concerns is the accumulation of gases within the wet well area due to the existing configuration, making ventilation improvements a priority. The project will also include electrical upgrades and installation of a new backup generator. Preliminary engineering work is currently underway, and discussions with engineering consultants are ongoing to finalize project scopes and begin design activities. At Mansion Hill, the rehabilitation effort will similarly focus on safety, reliability, and capacity improvements. Because future development activity is anticipated in the area, including the Victor Landing project, Ellinghaus stated that engineers will evaluate opportunities to increase pumping capacity through larger force mains or revised pump configurations to accommodate future wastewater flows.

Ellinghaus then discussed improvements underway at the First Street Pump Station. He explained that the project is currently being funded through the department's maintenance budget and that temporary bypass pumps are operating while permanent upgrades are completed. New pumps have already been delivered, but installation has been delayed because a larger temporary

bypass system is needed to allow the station to be fully taken offline during construction. Once the larger bypass is established, crews will remove accumulated debris and grit from the wet well, install the new pumps, and complete additional upgrades, including new grinder equipment. Ellinghaus noted that completing the work will allow the City to discontinue the costly rental pumps currently in use and significantly reduce monthly operating expenses. He added that a new flow meter has already been installed, improving the accuracy of system monitoring.

In addition to the major rehabilitation projects, Ellinghaus outlined several ongoing maintenance initiatives occurring throughout the wastewater collection system. These include replacing outdated auto-dialer alarm systems with cellular modem technology that provides real-time operational data to the Water Renewal Facility. The upgraded systems will allow operators to remotely monitor pump levels, generator status, alarms, and other critical information, improving response times and operational awareness. He also reported that the department continues to replace pumps and rotating assemblies at smaller stations, upgrade wet-well level sensors with newer ultrasonic and laser technologies, improve ventilation systems, and install better lighting to enhance worker safety during nighttime and emergency operations.

Ellinghaus concluded his presentation with an update on the City's Consent Order with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). He explained that the Consent Order resulted from a series of notices of violation and inspections at the wastewater treatment plant. The agreement was signed by the City Manager in February, underwent a public comment process, and was fully executed by DEQ on April 9. He emphasized that DEQ had been supportive throughout the process and notably did not impose any civil penalties. According to Ellinghaus, DEQ recognized that the City's limited resources would be better spent correcting infrastructure deficiencies rather than paying fines, allowing funds to remain in Hopewell and be directed toward system improvements.

One requirement of the Consent Order is the completion of an updated Comprehensive Pump Station Evaluation. Ellinghaus explained that a previous evaluation had been conducted several years ago, and DEQ now requires a current assessment of the City's pump station infrastructure. The City is currently working with an engineering consultant and expects to receive a proposal within the coming weeks. The updated evaluation will examine all pump stations throughout the City and establish a roadmap for future rehabilitation and replacement projects. Ellinghaus noted that as Hopewell's financial condition continues to improve and the City becomes eligible for additional grants, loans, and funding opportunities, the comprehensive evaluation will help prioritize future investments and accelerate needed infrastructure improvements.

Michael Rogers asked for an update regarding the Operations and Maintenance (O&M) contract procurement process and inquired whether Council could expect to receive the contract for consideration and award at the next meeting.

Matt Ellinghaus responded that the City had completed its initial review of the submitted proposals and had narrowed the field to the top two respondents. He explained that staff had returned to those firms with requests for additional information and a more standardized pricing format. According to Ellinghaus, the original Request for Proposals (RFP) allowed vendors flexibility in presenting pricing concepts and terms, which made direct comparisons difficult. To

ensure a fair evaluation, the City requested that the remaining proposers submit pricing information using a consistent format so that proposals could be reviewed on an “apples-to-apples” basis.

Ellinghaus stated that the revised submissions were expected to be returned to the Purchasing Department by the following day. Once received, staff would begin a detailed evaluation of the updated proposals. He noted that the timeline for bringing a recommendation forward would depend on how quickly the City could complete interviews with one or both of the remaining firms. Nevertheless, he emphasized that the process was moving in the right direction and progressing as planned.

While Ellinghaus could not definitively state that a contract award would be ready for Council action at the next meeting, he expressed optimism that staff would be able to return with a clearer recommendation and identify the preferred direction for moving forward. He explained that after selecting a preferred proposer, the process would transition into contract negotiations and final agreement discussions. Ellinghaus concluded by saying that he expected to return at the next Council meeting with additional information and a more substantive update on the status of the O&M contract procurement. Rogers thanked Ellinghaus for the update.

ACTIONS RESULTING FROM CLOSED MEETING

Councilor Daye makes a motion to appoint Sharon Neal to the Brightpoint Community College Board and Raelin Wolfe to the Library Board. Councilor Wheat seconds the motion.

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

Motion Passes 6-0

PRAYER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

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

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

Motion Passes 6-0

COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITIZENS

Mark Burroughs, Ward 3

During the public comment period, Mark Burroughs, a Ward Three resident, addressed City Council and began by offering an apology related to remarks he made at the previous Council meeting. He stated that he had not realized that a young child, identified as "CJ," was still present in the meeting room when he spoke before leaving. While Burroughs clarified that he did not retract the substance of his comments, he acknowledged that he should have been more aware of his surroundings and apologized to the child and her parents for the circumstances.

Burroughs also corrected a statement he had made at the previous meeting concerning utility rate increases. He explained that he had incorrectly stated that a stormwater fee increase had been considered by Council on January 13. Upon further review, he acknowledged that the matter considered at that meeting was actually a sewage rate increase rather than a stormwater increase.

Despite those corrections, Burroughs stated that he remained concerned about what he viewed as contemptuous treatment of citizens by a member of City Council. He expressed strong criticism of the conduct he believed had been displayed toward members of the public and stated that, in his view, elected officials and public servants have a responsibility to treat residents with respect. While acknowledging that he personally held negative opinions toward the individual involved, he argued that there is a distinction between a private citizen expressing dissatisfaction and a public official who is accountable to the taxpayers and residents they serve.

Burroughs further stated that he had little tolerance for individuals who, in his opinion, demand respect while relying on the authority of others. He remarked that although he appreciated the passion demonstrated by the individual and recognized some of the improvements that had occurred within the City, he nevertheless believed that the person should resign from their position and seek opportunities to address audiences elsewhere.

Concluding his remarks, Burroughs stated that he was pleased to see the City's audits completed and expressed optimism about Hopewell's ability to move forward. He acknowledged that the process of restoring the City's financial standing had not been easy and encouraged Council to consider developing new ordinances or policies governing the conduct and accountability of Council members and City officials. He stated that such measures could help ensure that future failures in governance or oversight would be addressed promptly and appropriately.

Karen Thayer, Ward 7

During the public comment period, Karen Thayer, a Ward Seven resident, addressed City Council regarding citizen engagement and municipal services. She stated that residents elect and compensate Council members to serve the community and expressed a desire for citizens to feel that their opinions, concerns, and perspectives are genuinely considered when decisions are

made. Thayer emphasized that while Council members are responsible for making policy decisions, residents want assurance that their voices matter and influence the decision-making process. She referenced previous statements made by Council acknowledging the importance of citizens and urged Council to demonstrate that commitment by making residents feel heard, valued, and respected. Thayer stated that, in her opinion, many citizens currently do not feel that their concerns receive adequate consideration.

Thayer also raised concerns regarding residential trash collection services. She noted that residents pay approximately thirty dollars per month for refuse collection services that are scheduled to occur four times each month. However, she stated that her trash is often collected only once per month despite her continuing to pay the full fee. Thayer questioned the fairness of paying for a service that is not consistently provided and compared the situation to paying for groceries but receiving only a portion of the items purchased. She expressed frustration that residents continue to be charged the full amount despite what she described as incomplete service delivery and argued that citizens should receive the level of service for which they are paying.

Following her comments, Mayor Johnny Partin thanked Thayer for her remarks and advised her to provide her address to the City Clerk so that the issue could be referred to the Central Virginia Waste Management Authority (CVWMA) for follow-up. Thayer responded that she had already reported the issue multiple times and routinely calls each month regarding missed collections. In response, Mayor Partin stated that if the problem had been reported repeatedly, providing the information to the City Clerk would allow the City Manager to follow up directly with the appropriate service provider to investigate and address the recurring issue. Thayer thanked Council, and the discussion concluded.

Roger Saunders,

During the public comment period, Roger Saunders addressed City Council regarding concerns about roadway repairs and paving work in the Kings Court area. Saunders began by noting that he had previously raised concerns about Kings Court during the prior year but acknowledged that the City had done a good job addressing some of those issues. However, he stated that he remained concerned about the quality of repairs associated with utility work performed by the gas company.

Saunders explained that after the gas company completed work involving excavation and installation of infrastructure, he believed the roadway was not properly inspected before paving was completed. He stated that holes and defects remained in the roadway where the utility work had occurred and suggested that evidence of leakage or other deficiencies was still present before the road surface was repaved. According to Saunders, the City paved portions of Kings Court and the area near Luther Boulevard without first ensuring that all underlying issues had been properly corrected. As a result, he expressed concern that public funds had been spent on paving work that may now require additional repairs because the roadway was not adequately inspected beforehand.

He further stated that portions of the roadway between New York Street and Dublin Street had not been fully paved and continued to contain potholes and deteriorated pavement. Saunders remarked that motorists were still encountering potholes and rough road conditions in the area and questioned whether the repairs associated with the gas company's work had been completed properly. While he acknowledged that the City had made improvements, he maintained that a more thorough inspection process should have occurred before paving was undertaken to avoid additional work and expense later.

In response to Saunders' comments, Mayor Johnny Partin asked Interim City Manager Michael Rogers whether Public Works Director Monique Robertson could follow up on the concerns. Rogers indicated that staff would review the matter. Mayor Partin then asked Saunders to provide his contact information so that City staff could investigate the issue and communicate directly with him regarding the findings. Saunders replied that he had previously reported the concerns but stated that he would provide his information again. Mayor Partin encouraged him to leave his address and contact information with either the City Manager or the City Clerk following the meeting so staff could properly track the complaint and follow up with him. Saunders agreed, and the discussion concluded.

April Jones, Ward 2

During the public comment period, April Jones-Tyler, a Ward Two resident living at the Thomas Rolfe Court community, addressed City Council regarding ongoing maintenance and communication issues with the Hopewell Redevelopment and Housing Authority (HRHA). Jones-Tyler stated that she had appeared before Council on multiple occasions with the same concerns and expressed frustration that, despite receiving notices and acknowledgments, the underlying issues in her housing unit had not been resolved.

Jones-Tyler explained that several maintenance problems remained outstanding, including repairs needed to her bathtub, window units, and bathroom. She stated that although she continues to receive notices indicating that her concerns have been documented, no meaningful corrective action has been taken. According to Jones-Tyler, she has repeatedly followed the established reporting procedures and has elevated her concerns through multiple levels of management and administration, including contacting individuals higher within the organization's chain of command. Despite these efforts, she stated that the problems remain unresolved.

She further alleged that she has experienced retaliatory actions after reporting maintenance concerns. As examples, Jones-Tyler stated that after requesting repairs she has returned home to discover new issues, such as leaks beneath her sink or a toilet that no longer functioned properly. She expressed concern that problems sometimes appeared shortly after she reported other maintenance issues, contributing to her belief that retaliation may be occurring.

Jones-Tyler also voiced concerns about communication and access to her unit by maintenance personnel. She stated that when she reports issues to the housing office, maintenance staff are sometimes dispatched to her residence without advance notice. She described one situation involving a non-functioning toilet where she had placed a trash bag in the toilet as a temporary

measure to collect waste until repairs could be completed. As a single mother balancing childcare responsibilities and health concerns, she explained that she was attempting to manage the situation as best she could while waiting for assistance. She alleged that maintenance staff entered her unit, photographed the condition, and left the toilet seat in a different position than she had left it, creating concerns about how the situation was documented. Jones-Tyler stated that she had retained photographs of the conditions in her unit and the temporary measures she had taken while awaiting repairs.

Throughout her remarks, Jones-Tyler emphasized that she has filed numerous grievances regarding her concerns but has not received responses explaining the outcome of those complaints or the next steps in the grievance process. She stated that she has attended multiple Housing Authority board meetings and continues to seek guidance regarding how grievances are handled and what actions residents can take when they believe their concerns have not been adequately addressed. Her primary request was for greater transparency and communication regarding the grievance process so that residents understand what occurs after a complaint is submitted and what remedies may be available.

At the conclusion of her allotted speaking time, Jones-Tyler was advised that her time had expired. She thanked Council for the opportunity to speak, and the public comment concluded.

Sha'Rah Fuller, Ward 5

During the public comment period, Sha'Rah Fuller, a Ward Five resident and Neighborhood Watch leader, addressed City Council to share information about several upcoming community events and to encourage greater civic participation and support for local youth. Fuller greeted Council and City staff and explained that she wanted to inform the public about opportunities for community engagement in the coming weeks.

Fuller announced that a joint Ward Four and Ward Five Neighborhood Watch meeting would be held on Monday, May 4, at 6:00 p.m. at Wesley United Methodist Church. She explained that going forward, Neighborhood Watch meetings for Wards Four and Five would be conducted jointly to better serve residents. Fuller noted that she currently serves as the Neighborhood Watch captain for Wards Four, Five, and Seven, which she described as a significant responsibility. She encouraged additional residents, particularly from Ward Four, to volunteer and become involved in neighborhood leadership roles, emphasizing that greater citizen participation is needed to strengthen community engagement and public safety efforts.

Fuller also highlighted the approaching end of the school year and encouraged residents to support local students as they participate in a variety of academic and extracurricular activities. She noted that students are currently involved in baseball and soccer competitions, band events, graduation activities, and other programs. Fuller praised local students for their resilience and achievements, noting that many have continued to excel academically despite facing personal hardships and challenges. She specifically recognized students who have maintained honor roll status, participated in the National Honor Society, and achieved success at Hopewell High School, Appomattox Regional Governor's School, and Maggie L. Walker Governor's School.

Fuller stated that these students deserve recognition and community support for their accomplishments.

She further encouraged residents not only to promote student activities on social media but also to attend events in person. Fuller observed that attendance at football, basketball, and baseball games is often strong, but other student activities receive less community support. As an example, she referenced a recent drumline event and expressed disappointment that attendance was largely limited to parents despite the students' award-winning performances. Fuller noted that members of the drumline had recently traveled to Newport News to compete against several other schools and stressed the importance of showing support for students participating in arts and academic activities as well as athletics.

Fuller also informed the public that the upcoming week would include Standards of Learning (SOL) testing and participation in the "Stand By Me" initiative. She encouraged community members to gather outside Harry E. James Elementary School, DuPont Elementary School, and Patrick Copeland Elementary School to cheer on students as they entered school to take their examinations. Fuller stated that students and parents work hard throughout the school year and that seeing encouraging faces from the community can provide motivation and support during testing periods.

Concluding her remarks, Fuller reiterated her appreciation for the students, families, and community members who continue to support local youth and encouraged residents to become more involved in school and community activities. She offered to answer questions from anyone seeking additional information about upcoming events and noted that she remains readily available to assist residents. Mayor Partin thanked Fuller for her comments and community involvement.

Darlen Thompson, Ward 6

During the public comment period, Darlene Thompson, a Ward Six resident, addressed City Council regarding the City's financial recovery efforts, infrastructure investments, taxation, and concerns about equity in the distribution of public improvements. Thompson began by commenting on remarks made earlier in the meeting regarding the completion of the City's audits and the recognition of individuals involved in the financial recovery process. She stated that she found it noteworthy that individuals associated with prior administrations were now being praised after years in which previous administrations had frequently been cited as contributing to the City's financial and operational challenges.

Thompson expressed concern about what she perceived as unequal investment in different areas of the City. She stated that she had observed road paving projects, bicycle lane improvements, and other infrastructure investments occurring in predominantly white neighborhoods, while she believed predominantly Black neighborhoods had not received comparable attention. As an example, she referenced Courthouse Road as one of the few roadway projects she had seen moving forward and argued that residents in Black communities continue to feel overlooked when infrastructure improvements are prioritized.

She further stated that City leaders were portraying recent accomplishments as evidence of successful governance while, in her view, many residents continued to bear the financial burden of increased taxes and fees. Thompson argued that citizens have faced numerous tax increases and additional charges in recent years and contended that those financial contributions from residents have played a significant role in enabling the City's financial recovery. She expressed disappointment that, in her opinion, citizens had not received sufficient recognition for the sacrifices they have made through increased taxes and utility costs.

Thompson also questioned the costs associated with the City's financial recovery efforts, including payments made to consultants, auditors, and financial management firms. She referenced the substantial expenditures associated with outside consultants and audit services and questioned whether residents had received adequate value from those investments. She noted that many of the audit discussions continued to focus on internal controls and financial processes and expressed frustration that the benefits of those improvements were not always apparent to residents in their daily lives.

Additionally, Thompson raised concerns regarding representation and personnel changes within City government. She referenced the departures of several Black public officials and employees over recent years, including administrative and elected positions, and expressed concern about the impact those changes had on representation within local government. She argued that members of the Black community have consistently supported City leadership through their votes and civic participation but do not feel they are receiving equitable benefits or representation in return.

As she continued her remarks, Thompson referenced comments and recommendations made by financial consultants regarding the City's fiscal condition and questioned the role those assessments played in subsequent decisions affecting residents. Before she could complete her statement, Mayor Johnny Partin advised Thompson that her allotted speaking time had expired. Thompson briefly questioned whether additional time was available, but Mayor Partin reiterated that her time had concluded. The public comment period then proceeded to the next speaker.

Regular Business

R-1 (Public Hearing) Ordinance Granting a Non-exclusive Cable Franchise to Verizon of Virginia, LLC – Brenda Gilliam, Assistant City Attorney

Anthony Bessette, City Attorney, presented an ordinance authorizing a non-exclusive cable television franchise agreement with Verizon. He explained that under Virginia law, companies such as Verizon, Comcast, and other cable providers must enter into a franchise agreement with a locality before they can offer cable television services within the jurisdiction. He noted that these agreements must be formally adopted by ordinance, which is the purpose of the item before Council.

Bessette stated that Verizon had approached the City seeking authorization to provide cable television services to Hopewell residents and that City staff had negotiated the terms of the franchise agreement. He explained that the proposed agreement establishes various requirements and obligations for Verizon, including customer service standards that the company must meet while operating within the City.

He further noted that the agreement provides benefits to the City and the school system by making a public access channel available should either entity choose to utilize it. Additionally, the franchise agreement provides for the City to receive a five percent franchise fee on cable television revenues generated by Verizon within the City. Bessette explained that the fee is collected through the Commonwealth of Virginia and distributed to the locality as authorized under state law.

Summarizing the practical effect of the ordinance, Bessette stated that approval of the franchise agreement would allow Verizon to begin offering cable television services to residents of Hopewell in the near future, thereby increasing consumer choice for cable service providers within the City.

Bessette also addressed questions that had been raised regarding internet and telecommunications services. He informed Council that the City Attorney's Office is separately working with Verizon on an additional franchise agreement related to internet and telecommunications services. He advised that a separate ordinance concerning those services is expected to come before Council for consideration and adoption in the near future.

Mayor Johnny Partin announced the opening of the public hearing on the proposed ordinance authorizing a non-exclusive cable television franchise agreement with Verizon. He informed those present that only one individual had signed up to speak during the public hearing period. Mayor Partin then recognized Mark Burroughs, a Ward Three resident, and invited him to come forward to provide his comments on the proposed franchise agreement before Council.

During the public hearing on the proposed Verizon cable franchise ordinance, Mark Burroughs, a Ward Three resident, addressed Council and expressed confusion regarding the need for the franchise agreement. Burroughs stated that he did not intend to create controversy but wanted clarification because he had already been receiving Verizon service at his residence in the Mansion Hills area for nearly two years. He questioned why Council was now considering a franchise agreement if Verizon services were already available to some residents. Burroughs also remarked that he was not suggesting any improper conduct but wondered whether there was an additional benefit to the City associated with the agreement beyond simply authorizing service.

City Attorney Anthony Bessette responded by asking Burroughs for additional information. Bessette stated that if Burroughs was in fact receiving Verizon cable service at his home, he would appreciate receiving an email from him so the matter could be investigated further. Bessette noted that Verizon was not currently authorized to provide cable television service under a City franchise agreement and expressed interest in learning more about the services Burroughs was receiving.

Burroughs explained that Verizon representatives had canvassed his neighborhood several years earlier, going door-to-door to determine interest in service. He stated that residents who requested service subsequently had it installed. Burroughs further indicated that he currently receives Verizon Fios service at his home and had previously subscribed to cable television service through Verizon as well, although he later canceled the cable package because of the cost. He reiterated that Verizon service had been available in his neighborhood for some time.

Following Burroughs' comments, Bessette thanked him for bringing the matter to the City's attention and indicated that he would follow up to better understand the situation.

Councilor Daye makes a motion to approve the ordinance granting a non-existing cable franchise to Verizon. Virginia, LLC as presented. Mayor Partin seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 6-0

R-2 (Public Hearing) Ordinance Implementing the Public-Private Educational Facilities and Infrastructure Act of 2002 (PPEA) – Anthony Bessette, City Attorney

Anthony Bessette, City Attorney, presented an ordinance related to the Public-Private Educational Facilities and Infrastructure Act of 2002 (PPEA). He explained that the PPEA is a Virginia law that provides local governments with an additional method of procuring goods and services beyond the traditional processes authorized under the Virginia Public Procurement Act. According to Bessette, the legislation is primarily intended for larger-scale projects and infrastructure initiatives, such as the construction of schools, public facilities, or other significant capital improvements.

Bessette explained that the PPEA allows localities to enter into public-private partnership arrangements with private entities for the development, financing, construction, operation, or maintenance of qualifying public projects. He noted that while the law authorizes this alternative procurement method, state law requires a locality to first adopt a local ordinance establishing the procedures and framework that would govern the use of PPEA procurement before it can utilize the process.

He emphasized that the ordinance before Council was not a contract, did not authorize any specific project, and did not commit the City to any procurement activity. Rather, the ordinance simply established the legal framework necessary for the City to utilize the PPEA process in the future if Council determined it was appropriate for a particular project. Bessette described the

ordinance as filling an existing gap in the City’s procurement tools and providing Hopewell with an additional option available to many other Virginia localities.

Summarizing the purpose of the ordinance, Bessette stated that it would serve as a procedural mechanism and policy framework, allowing the City to consider public-private partnership opportunities in the future without requiring further foundational legislation. He characterized it as another tool in the City’s toolbox for addressing future infrastructure and development needs.

Following the presentation, Mayor Johnny Partin announced the opening of the public hearing on the proposed ordinance and invited public comment.

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to approve the ordinance implementing the Public-Private Educational Facilities and Infrastructure Act of 2022 (PPEA) as presented. Mayor Partin seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 5-0

R-3 (Public Hearing) Proposed Tax Rates for 2027 – Stacey Jordan, Deputy City Manager

Deputy City Manager Stacey Jordan presented the proposed tax rates ordinance for Fiscal Year 2027. She explained that the ordinance establishes the City's tax rates for the upcoming fiscal year and advised Council and residents that no changes to the existing tax rates were being proposed. Jordan stated that there had been no requests to increase any tax rates and emphasized that the City administration was recommending that all current tax rates remain unchanged for Fiscal Year 2027.

Jordan also informed residents that the following year would be a scheduled real estate reassessment year. She clarified that a reassessment does not automatically result in a tax rate increase. However, she noted that property owners could see changes in their assessed property values as part of the reassessment process, which could affect individual tax bills. Jordan stressed that while assessed values may increase or decrease based on market conditions and the reassessment process, the City was not proposing any increase to the tax rate itself for the upcoming fiscal year.

She concluded by reiterating that the proposed ordinance maintained existing tax rates and that no tax rate increases were included in the Fiscal Year 2027 budget proposal. Following her presentation, the mayor thanked Jordan and proceeded with the public hearing process.

Following the opening of the public hearing on the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 tax rates ordinance, Mayor Johnny Partin recognized Mark Burroughs, a Ward Three resident, to speak.

Burroughs stated that he had a question regarding the City's upcoming reassessment process. He recalled that during the previous reassessment cycle residents had been informed that property values were determined using comparisons to properties in neighboring communities and specifically referenced Williamsburg as an example. Burroughs asked whether the upcoming reassessment would continue using comparisons to neighboring localities or whether property values would be based more directly on local Hopewell market conditions and home values.

In response, Deputy City Manager Stacey Jordan explained that City Assessor Nelson Pollard had recently provided a detailed presentation on the reassessment process during the City's budget town hall meetings. She noted that the presentation addressed the methodology used in determining assessments and how comparisons are made across different localities and housing markets. Acknowledging that Burroughs had been unable to attend the presentation due to work obligations, Jordan advised him that the presentation would be posted online and available for public viewing so residents could better understand the assessment process and valuation methodology.

Burroughs thanked Jordan for the information, and no further discussion followed. The public hearing then continued.

During the public hearing on the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 tax rates ordinance, Darlene Thompson, a Ward Six resident, addressed Council. As she began her remarks, Mayor Johnny Partin reminded her to keep her comments focused on the subject of the public hearing. Thompson responded that she intended to speak specifically about the tax rates and their impact on residents.

Thompson argued that residents have experienced increases in both property assessments and the overall financial burden imposed by the City. She stated that citizens are ultimately the ones feeling the effects of taxes, fees, and other charges adopted by the City and expressed concern that residents continue to bear the cost of the City's financial recovery efforts. Thompson maintained that numerous decisions made by Council over recent years have resulted in increased costs for taxpayers and stated that she intended to continue speaking on behalf of residents whom she believed were struggling with those financial obligations.

She criticized what she viewed as excessive reliance on recommendations made by outside financial consultants and argued that while consulting firms received substantial compensation, taxpayers were left to absorb the resulting costs. Thompson asserted that many residents were facing difficulty paying the various taxes, fees, and assessments imposed by the City and stated that citizens were increasingly frustrated by the financial pressures they were experiencing.

Thompson further remarked that Council was not proposing a tax rate increase for the upcoming fiscal year because, in her opinion, the City was already receiving significant revenues from existing taxes and assessments. She argued that property reassessments and other revenue-

generating measures had already increased the financial burden on residents and suggested that additional increases would be difficult for taxpayers to absorb.

Toward the conclusion of her remarks, Thompson urged residents to pay close attention to the actions of elected officials, particularly those who would be seeking reelection. She encouraged citizens to become more informed about the role City Council plays in adopting budgets, tax rates, and other financial policies. Thompson expressed her belief that many residents do not fully understand the connection between Council decisions and the bills they receive and urged voters to hold elected officials accountable for those decisions.

As she concluded, Thompson reiterated her concerns about the financial burden facing residents and stated that she would continue advocating on behalf of taxpayers who she believes are struggling with rising costs. Her comments concluded, and the public hearing proceeded.

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to adopt the proposed tax rates for 2027 as presented. Councilor Wheat seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 6-0

R-4 (Public Hearing) Fund 41: Resolution Amending the Hopewell Water Renewal FY2026 Budget to Pump Station Repairs – Matt Ellinghaus, Director of Hopewell Water Renewal

Matt Ellinghaus, Director of Water Renewal, presented a request for a budget amendment to the City’s Wastewater Collection System and Pump Station Sewer Fund. He explained that the proposed amendment would increase the Fiscal Year 2026 budget by approximately \$2.3 million and was tied to previously identified revenue discrepancies involving wastewater service charges billed to Prince George County.

Ellinghaus stated that during the fall, the City discovered discrepancies in the meter readings used to calculate Prince George County’s wastewater treatment charges. Based on the original meter data, the City had anticipated receiving approximately \$820,000 in revenue for wastewater services provided to Prince George County. However, after further review and reconciliation of the meter readings, it was determined that the actual value of services provided was significantly higher, resulting in a revised revenue amount of approximately \$3 million. He explained that the discrepancy was discussed with Prince George County and ultimately resulted in a negotiated settlement of approximately \$2.3 million to reconcile the difference between the services delivered and the amount previously billed.

Ellinghaus noted that both the Hopewell City Council and the Prince George County Board of Supervisors had previously reviewed and approved the settlement agreement. He stated that the purpose of the current request was to amend the Fiscal Year 2026 budget and formally appropriate the additional \$2.3 million in revenue so the funds could be used to address urgent wastewater infrastructure needs and emergency repairs.

He explained that the additional funding would help the City continue making progress on wastewater system improvements, particularly at aging pump stations throughout the City. Ellinghaus noted that several pump stations currently rely on rented portable bypass pumps to maintain operations while repairs and upgrades are being completed. These rentals represent ongoing monthly costs that place pressure on the utility budget. He further stated that the City has experienced several emergency repairs in recent months, including a force main failure near Queen Anne Pump Station that required immediate contractor assistance and substantial expenditures to prevent wastewater from escaping the system and entering surrounding drainage areas.

Ellinghaus emphasized that the requested funding would help maintain momentum on infrastructure improvements, support compliance with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality Consent Order, and ensure that wastewater remains safely contained within the City's collection system. He stressed the importance of continuing emergency repairs and preventative maintenance efforts to avoid system failures and environmental impacts.

During discussion, a Council member referenced the Queen Anne Pump Station project and asked whether Ellinghaus could provide additional information regarding project costs and cost increases associated with that project. Ellinghaus clarified that the Queen Anne Pump Station rehabilitation project itself was separate from the budget amendment under consideration. He explained that his reference to Queen Anne involved a recent emergency force main repair and not the larger pump station improvement project previously approved by Council. He noted that the emergency repair addressed a force main break and was independent of the long-term rehabilitation project. The Council member acknowledged the distinction and requested that staff provide additional information regarding project costs at a later date. Ellinghaus agreed to provide the requested figures and information.

During the public hearing on the proposed wastewater fund budget amendment, a disruption occurred involving Mark Burroughs, a member of the audience. As Burroughs addressed Council, Mayor Partin repeatedly instructed him to limit his remarks to matters relevant to the public hearing. Burroughs responded that his comments were related to the topic under consideration and continued speaking.

As the exchange became increasingly contentious, Burroughs made remarks directed toward Mayor Partin, stating that speaking loudly did not intimidate him and asserting that he was not intimidated by the individual's behavior. Mayor Partin again directed him to confine his comments to the subject of the public hearing.

Burroughs then made a statement referencing Virginia's mutual combat law and remarked that he would be willing to meet Mayor Partin at any pump station of their choosing. Following that

statement, Mayor Partin determined the comments to be inappropriate and directed law enforcement personnel present to remove Burroughs from the meeting. Burroughs objected to the action, arguing that he had not made a threat and characterizing his statement as an offer rather than a threat.

Mayor Partin reiterated the instruction for Burroughs to be removed from City Hall, and law enforcement proceeded with the removal. The disruption concluded, and Council returned to its consideration of the public hearing item and the remaining agenda business.

Councilor Rapole makes a motion to approve the resolution amending fund 41 of the Hopewell Water Renewal Fiscal Year budget for the pump station repairs. Vice Mayor Joyner seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 6-0

R-5 (Public Hearing) Fund 32: Resolution Amending the Hopewell Water Renewal FY2026 Budget to Operations and Maintenance for Critical Repairs to the Hopewell Water Renewal (HWR) Plant – Matt Ellinhouse, Director of Water Renewal

During Council's consideration of the wastewater fund budget amendment, a confrontation involving audience member Mark Burroughs continued after the presiding officer directed that he be removed from the meeting. The Mayor instructed deputies to remove Burroughs from City Hall, stating that his conduct and comments were no longer appropriate for the proceedings.

Burroughs responded that he meant no disrespect toward the deputies and stated that he had “made an offer,” maintaining that he had not issued a threat. As deputies moved to escort him from the meeting room, discussion continued between Burroughs and the presiding officer. Burroughs objected to being removed and argued that his comments were being mischaracterized. The presiding officer nevertheless reiterated the instruction for deputies to remove him from City Hall.

As the exchange escalated, Burroughs made additional remarks directed toward the presiding officer and others present, criticizing the decision to remove him and expressing frustration with how the situation was being handled. Deputies continued carrying out the Mayor’s directive while Council attempted to return its attention to the agenda.

During the disruption, another Council member appeared to interject that Burroughs had been making a comment rather than a threat. Despite that observation, the Mayor maintained the order

for removal and directed that the meeting proceed. Burroughs continued speaking while being escorted from the chamber, after which the disruption concluded and Council moved on to the next agenda item.

Matt Ellinghaus, Director of Water Renewal, presented a second budget amendment request related to the City's Water Renewal Fund (Fund 32). He explained that the amendment would appropriate revenues received in excess of the amounts originally budgeted and make those funds available to address emergency repairs and infrastructure needs associated with the City's ongoing compliance efforts under the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Consent Order.

Ellinghaus stated that the City was requesting authorization to incorporate approximately \$1,089,577 into the current operating budget. He explained that a significant portion of the funding, approximately \$460,000, consisted of an insurance reimbursement received for repairs previously completed during the fiscal year. Those repairs were necessary after a fire damaged portions of the wastewater treatment facility's incinerator system. According to Ellinghaus, the fire was caused by the failure of a quench water pump, and the insurance proceeds represented reimbursement for expenses the City had already incurred to restore the affected equipment.

He further explained that the remaining revenues consisted primarily of miscellaneous revenues and reimbursements that exceeded original budget projections. The funds would be used to support a variety of critical maintenance and repair projects throughout the Water Renewal Facility. Ellinghaus indicated that the planned expenditures included repairs and equipment purchases necessary to restore and maintain primary and secondary clarifiers, grit channels, and other essential wastewater treatment infrastructure. He emphasized that these investments are needed to improve operational reliability and ensure continued compliance with regulatory requirements.

Ellinghaus also reviewed the funding distribution among the City and its industrial wastewater partners. He explained that while the total budget amendment exceeded one million dollars, a substantial portion of the funding came from sources that would offset costs to the City. In addition to the insurance reimbursement, approximately \$350,000 represented direct reimbursements from industrial users, including Ashland and AdvanSix, for pump stations and infrastructure components in which they share operational costs. As a result, Ellinghaus noted that the actual additional expense attributable to the City and its industrial partners collectively was significantly lower than the total appropriation amount.

He concluded by explaining that, after accounting for the insurance proceeds and industrial user reimbursements, the net additional cost associated with the proposed expenditures was approximately \$300,000. Ellinghaus stated that the budget amendment would allow the City to continue addressing critical infrastructure needs, maintain progress toward compliance with the DEQ Consent Order, and support the long-term reliability of the wastewater treatment system. Following his presentation, Council proceeded with consideration of the budget amendment.

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to approve the resolution amending fund 32 of the Hopewell Water Renewal Fiscal year budget to operations and maintenance for critical repairs to the Hopewell Water Renewal plan as presented. Councilor Wheat seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

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


Motion Passes 6-0

ADJOURNMENT

Respectfully Submitted,



Sade' Allen, City Clerk



Johnny Partin, Mayor