

MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 24, 2026 CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING

A regular meeting of the Hopewell Council was held on Tuesday, February 24, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.

PRESENT:

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

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to go into a closed meeting under Va. Code § 2.2-3711(A)(3), (8), and (29). to discuss the acquisition or disposition of real property, where discussion in an open meeting would adversely affect the bargaining position or negotiating strategy of the public body, the award of a public contract where discussion in an open session would adversely affect the City's bargaining position, and to consult with legal counsel regarding specific legal matters (real estate contract discussions, support agreement with the EDA); § 2.2-3711(A)(1), to discuss personnel matters including (City Attorney annual evaluation, City Clerk six month evaluation, and review City Manager finalists).

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 7-0

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

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 7-0

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

PRESENT:

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

REGULAR MEETING

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

During his report, the City Manager began by introducing Matthew Ellinghouse as the new Director of Hopewell Water Renewal, noting that he has been in the role for approximately one week and is already actively engaged in operations. A more comprehensive update on the department's status will be provided at the next Council meeting. The City Manager also addressed a matter raised at the previous meeting regarding a FOIA request that revealed \$180 had been spent on wine during the September Council retreat and charged to the City. He clarified that this charge was a mistake, as all alcoholic beverages should have been billed to his personal account as Interim City Manager. He apologized for not identifying the error sooner and

reported that he has reimbursed the City Treasurer \$180, ensuring no wine expenses remain charged to the City.

He then addressed questions regarding his compensation. He explained that the Council's contract for interim city manager services is with The Robert Bobb Group and that the total monthly contract amount is less than the total compensation package, including benefits, of the previous City Manager. He further stated that his individual monthly compensation is roughly equivalent to that of the former City Manager but remains below the prior total compensation when benefits are considered.

The City Manager provided an update on the ongoing search for a permanent City Manager, emphasizing that hiring a City Manager is one of the Council's most important responsibilities. In November, Council engaged Colin Baenziger & Associates to conduct the search. Thirty-five applications were received, and nine candidates were presented to the Council for consideration. Council is currently narrowing the field to six finalists who will be interviewed on March 5 and 6. On March 5, candidates will tour the City and meet with department heads. That evening at 6:00 p.m., a 90-minute public town hall forum will be held at the Community Center, moderated and featuring all candidates responding to questions. Residents are invited to submit questions and register for the event through links available on the City Council website to ensure adequate accommodations. A mix-and-mingle session will follow the forum to allow residents to meet candidates individually. On March 6, Council will conduct interviews throughout the day and may be prepared to make an announcement by March 10, though no commitment was made.

Regarding the legislative package submitted to the General Assembly, the City Manager reported that the City's requested charter amendment concerning the composition of the Hopewell Water Renewal Authority has passed both houses and is awaiting further action by the Governor and completion of the legislative process. However, four primary budget amendments submitted by the City did not pass this year. He noted that Council and staff traveled to Richmond to advocate for these

initiatives and emphasized the importance of continuing to actively lobby for the City's interests in future sessions.

He also clarified that the Blue Gala is not funded by the City of Hopewell's general funds. The event is organized by Healthy Families and serves as its largest annual fundraising initiative, with all proceeds supporting the Emergency Family Crisis Fund, which assists local families facing urgent needs such as housing instability, utility payments, and infant essentials.

The report concluded with employee recognitions. Tabitha Martinez, serving as department liaison to the Vision Committee, provided an overview of the committee's role in fostering morale and coordinating the Employee of the Quarter program. The award is based on peer nominations recognizing job knowledge, teamwork, dependability, quality of work, and leadership. The Employee of the Quarter was announced as Allison Swindell of Hopewell Water Renewal. She was recognized for her exceptional computer and data management skills, willingness to assume responsibilities beyond her job description, high-quality work, supportive attitude, and leadership in organizing meetings to improve workload efficiency. She expressed appreciation for the recognition and described the department as her work family, thanking her colleagues for their support.

January 2026 Financials – Stacey Jordan, Deputy City Manager

Deputy City Manager Stacy Jordan presented the January Finance Committee financial report, providing a citywide overview of revenues and expenditures. She reported that, overall, revenues for fiscal year 2026 are trending 3.8% higher than fiscal year 2025, representing an \$8.3 million increase. At the same time, expenses are trending 5.6% higher, or \$12.4 million more than the prior year. She reminded Council that the City's key revenue due dates occur in December, February, May, and June, along with quarterly reimbursements from state and federal sources. The increase in expenses is largely attributable to annual salary adjustments resulting from the Class and Compensation Study, as well as increases related to schools and enterprise capital

expenditures. She clarified that although financial statements may appear to show a deficit when comparing revenues and expenses at this point in the fiscal year, the City is not in financial distress. The City currently maintains approximately \$9 million in its bank accounts and \$20 million in investment accounts, and the apparent imbalance reflects the timing of revenue collections versus expenditures.

Focusing on the General Fund, Ms. Jordan reported that revenues are trending 0.51% higher, or \$1.4 million more in fiscal year 2026 compared to fiscal year 2025. Expenses are trending 5.4% higher, also about \$1.4 million more than the prior year, again largely due to Class and Compensation Study adjustments. Despite these increases, she emphasized that the General Fund is performing better in fiscal year 2026 than in fiscal year 2025, reflecting improved monitoring and management of expenditures.

Within the Enterprise Fund, revenues are trending 8.55% higher, or \$5.4 million more than the previous year, while expenses are trending 7.1% higher, representing a \$4.66 million increase. The growth in revenues is attributed to timely billing and capital billing for fiscal year 2026. Increased expenses are primarily related to ongoing capital projects and regulatory compliance work associated with DEQ NOV requirements. An update on capital project progress within the plant will be provided by the Hopewell Water Renewal team at the March 10 meeting.

Regarding Schools, revenues are trending 2.92% higher, or \$899,000 more than the prior year, while expenses are trending 7.9% higher, or \$4.7 million more in fiscal year 2026 compared to fiscal year 2025. A decrease in federal revenues is due to the expiration of ESSER grant funding, which had previously provided significant financial support to schools. Additionally, the City is awaiting the second-quarter Head Start reimbursement from the federal government, which has been submitted and is pending receipt.

Ms. Jordan also reported that 1,441 invoices were processed through Accounts Payable, totaling approximately \$8.1 million in payments. The City has completed 62% of its debt service payments on time. She

provided an update on the fiscal year 2025 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR), stating that it is on track for completion by March 31 with no current issues or delays. Once submitted, the City will be fully caught up on its financial reporting and will have the opportunity to travel to New York in April to receive its initial credit rating. Council members expressed appreciation for Ms. Jordan and her team's leadership and diligence in improving the City's financial standing and ensuring accountability and progress.

Crime Summary Report – Gregory Taylor, Chief of Police

Chief Taylor presented the end-of-year crime statistics for 2025, along with the February 2026 crime summary. He reported that the City closed out 2025 with 92 total violent crimes, the same number recorded in 2024, resulting in a 0% change in violent crime year over year. In contrast, property crime showed significant reductions, including a 21% decrease in burglaries, a 21% decrease in larcenies, and a 65% decrease in motor vehicle thefts. Overall, property crime declined by 31%, contributing to a total major crime reduction of 26% for 2025.

For February 2026, Chief Taylor reported continued positive trends. Violent crime is currently down 43%, and property crime is down 35%, resulting in a total major crime reduction of 37% so far this year. Regarding opioid overdoses, there have been zero fatal overdoses and two non-fatal overdoses reported in 2026 to date. Verified shots fired incidents decreased from 64 in 2024 to 54 in 2025, a reduction of 10 incidents. Thus far in 2026, only one verified shots-fired incident has been reported.

Chief Taylor also provided updates on staffing and recruitment. Applicant testing was held on February 21. There are currently three vacant Emergency Communications Operator positions, with one applicant still undergoing background checks. Police department vacancies have decreased from seven to six following a recent hire who will begin on April 1. Three additional applicants remain in the background process, and 40 applications have been received within the past two weeks. No changes were reported regarding CPO (Community Police Officer) assignments.

In community engagement efforts, the Citizen Academy remains scheduled for March 5 through March 7 at 6:00 p.m. at the Police Department. The department continues participation in the HEAT initiative to combat auto theft, with A Platoon actively conducting enforcement efforts throughout the month. The Tri-City Police Memorial Breakfast is scheduled for April 8 at 7:00 a.m. at the Hopewell Moose Lodge. Additionally, School Resource Officers have implemented a “Heroes in Training” curriculum beginning March 2, designed to introduce students interested in law enforcement to volunteer opportunities and career pathways.

Chief Taylor also presented the results of a nine-day speed study conducted from January 15 through January 23 on Maplewood Avenue, where the posted speed limit is 25 miles per hour. During the study period, 2,579 vehicles were recorded. Of those, 91.28% were traveling under the speed limit, while 8.72% exceeded it. The average speed of vehicles exceeding the limit was 27.54 miles per hour, and no vehicles were recorded traveling above 37 miles per hour. The department will continue to monitor speeding in the area and conduct covert speed studies as needed.

During the Council discussion, a member raised concern about two reported forcible rape cases already recorded in 2026 compared to three total cases in 2025. Chief Taylor responded that both 2026 cases remain under investigation and involve parties who were known to one another. He concluded the report by offering to answer any additional questions from the Council.

Actions Resulting from the Closed Meeting

There were no actions resulting from the closed session.

Prayer 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 Ellis seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes -7-0

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

Laura Greenwood, Ward 6

During the Communications from Citizens portion of the meeting, Ms. Laura Greenwood addressed City Council and expressed continued frustration regarding what she characterized as a waste of taxpayer money related to the Council retreat. She stated that she was offended by a previous comment made by the Interim City Manager suggesting that citizens could continue to object to the retreat “if they dare,” which she interpreted as disrespectful and threatening. Ms. Greenwood argued that the Interim City Manager lacks respect for Hopewell residents because he does not live in the City and therefore has no personal

investment in the community. She further suggested that Council members should also feel insulted by the remark.

Ms. Greenwood also raised concerns about elected officials' communication with their constituents. She stated that she had been told by a Council member that contacting constituents was too expensive, and she criticized this position, noting that each Council member receives approximately \$4,000 annually in taxpayer-funded budget allocations. She asserted that these funds should be used strictly for constituent communication and that any unused funds should be returned to taxpayers rather than used for other purposes or donated without constituent approval.

Additionally, Ms. Greenwood stated that her contact information had reportedly been shared with the newly appointed Ward Six representative two weeks prior, but she had not received a call or email. She expressed disappointment and concluded that this indicated a lack of concern for constituents. Drawing on her professional background in marketing and communications, she stated that she intends to inform residents in wards up for election or reelection about Council voting records. She clarified that she did not consider her remarks a threat but rather a proactive effort to ensure transparency and accountability. She further stated that if necessary, she would utilize Freedom of Information Act requests to obtain information sought by the Citizen Oversight Committee and make it public.

As her allotted time expired, the Mayor informed Ms. Greenwood that her time was up. She attempted to continue speaking and reiterated her commitment to making information public. The Mayor again advised that her time had concluded and directed an officer to escort her from the podium to allow the meeting to proceed. Ms. Greenwood offered her contact card, and the Councilor indicated he already had her card from a previous meeting.

Tommy Wells, Ward 5

Mr. Tommy Wells, a resident of Ward Five, addressed City Council during the Communications from Citizens portion of the meeting,

highlighting several community concerns. He began by expressing urgency regarding grocery access in Hopewell, noting that the City currently has only one chain grocery store, down from five in previous years. He explained that this shortage creates significant difficulties, particularly for seniors and residents who cannot easily travel to neighboring towns, and described long checkout lines at the existing store as increasingly problematic. Mr. Wells urged Council to involve the Economic Development department or other appropriate channels to attract additional grocery stores to the City.

He then raised concerns about the poor condition of street line markings, explaining that they have been difficult to see since last summer and were further impacted by snow and ice. He stressed that clear street markings are essential for safe driving, especially for seniors like himself, and requested that the City prioritize repainting the most critical areas.

Finally, Mr. Wells promoted his television program, *Conversations with Andre Whitehead*, which interviews police departments across Virginia, including Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, and Virginia Beach, to explore their needs and support law enforcement initiatives. He requested that Hopewell be included in the program, which airs Sundays at 9:00 a.m. and Mondays at 5:00 p.m. Following his remarks, Council acknowledged his points, particularly regarding street markings, and asked Public Works to conduct an assessment to identify and address the areas most in need of repainting.

Mark Burroughs, Ward 3

Mr. Mark Burroughs, a resident of Ward Three, addressed City Council with comments emphasizing the importance of respectful engagement between elected officials and citizens. He referenced a prior Council statement suggesting that citizens could object to the Council retreat “if they dare,” noting that such language sends the wrong message. Mr. Burroughs stressed that public participation is not an act of daring but a responsibility and right of citizens who live in the City and contribute through taxes. He argued that strong leadership does not posture or provoke, nor does it frame public input as confrontational; rather, it

welcomes scrutiny and can confidently withstand criticism. He emphasized that the words used by Council members matter, particularly when citizens already feel disconnected from local government, and that dismissive or combative language further erodes public trust. Mr. Burroughs concluded by urging the Council to clearly communicate that citizen input is expected and respected, and that embracing professional, respectful engagement is essential for effective leadership and building trust in the community.

Ed Houser, Ward 5

Mr. Houser addressed the City Council during the Communications from Citizens portion of the meeting, expressing strong criticism of the Council retreat and its associated expenditures. He acknowledged Deputy City Manager Stacy Jordan for her work but focused his remarks on the retreat, noting that citizens have a right not only to object but to challenge Council decisions. He emphasized that, unlike larger municipalities, Hopewell does not have excess funds to spend on expensive retreats, and he suggested that it would have been more appropriate for the Council to hold the retreat locally and support local businesses. Mr. Houser questioned the purpose and outcomes of the retreat, noting conflicting explanations about whether it was related to improving Council operations or the wastewater treatment plant. He criticized the Council's adherence to procedural rules and alleged misconduct in past actions, including illegal firings and failure to comply with City codes during meetings. He concluded that, with Council members receiving \$21,000 a month, he expected a higher standard of professionalism, particularly in interactions with citizens who speak during public comment.

Debbie Randolph, Ward 1

Ms. Randolph addressed the City Council regarding the previous discussion about the Council retreat and related comments from the Interim City Manager. She expressed concern and disappointment over the statement that citizens "dared" to object, noting that in her 22-plus years of following the City and Council, she had never heard such

language directed at residents. She emphasized that retreats are meant to allow Council members to work together and improve collaboration, referencing the “Team Hopewell” concept, but questioned why the retreat had to be held out of town. She suggested that all Council members had the opportunity to approve or disapprove the location and expense, and she inferred that, since no objections were raised, it was likely agreed upon by all.

Ms. Randolph noted that while \$17,000 was not a catastrophic expense, it could have been spent more efficiently, with part of the funds redirected to benefit the local community. She also expressed concern that the City Manager, Mr. Bob, may not have approved of such an expenditure based on his experience in other municipalities. Despite previous criticisms directed at the Council and City staff, Ms. Randolph expressed appreciation for the transparency provided during the meeting, particularly regarding questions handled by the Deputy City Manager. She underscored the importance of clear, proactive communication with citizens to allow feedback and informed discussion before decisions are finalized. Ms. Randolph concluded by thanking the Council for the information shared and encouraged continued openness and transparency moving forward.

Sha’rah, Fuller, Ward 5

Ms. Sha’rah Fuller, a resident of Ward Five, addressed the City Council to highlight upcoming community events and emphasize the importance of civic engagement. She reminded residents of the City’s TRIAD meeting on Thursday, February 26th at 10:00 a.m. at the VFW on Lynchburg Street, noting that while TRIAD focuses on enhancing safety, security, and quality of life for older adults, all residents are welcome to attend. She also announced Ward Five’s monthly Neighborhood Watch meeting scheduled for Monday, March 2nd at Wesley United Methodist Church, with the option to attend virtually via Facebook if weather conditions are poor. Ms. Fuller additionally shared that Ward Seven, supported by Councilor Oli, is in the early stages of establishing its own Neighborhood Watch and encouraged residents from all wards to participate and support the initiative.

Beyond community meetings, Ms. Fuller addressed broader civic needs in Hopewell, highlighting staff shortages in schools and city services, including bus drivers, teachers, paraprofessionals, and public works employees. She urged residents to move beyond online complaints and take direct action by applying for jobs, volunteering, and supporting boards and commissions that are actively working to improve the community. She emphasized that meaningful change requires citizen participation and collective effort, noting that dedicated volunteers are essential for daily operations such as assisting students at schools and maintaining city services. Ms. Fuller concluded by encouraging residents to engage actively and contribute to the City's betterment.

Justin Goodman, Prince George County, VA

Justin Goodman, a former resident of Hopewell now living in Prince George, addressed the City Council to express concerns regarding the rapid expansion of utility infrastructure, including high-voltage transmission lines, substations, data centers, and distributed energy projects. He began by thanking the Board and invoking the principle that “with great power comes great responsibility.” Mr. Goodman emphasized that while electricity and infrastructure development are necessary, the pace of expansion often outstrips regulatory oversight, updated public health reviews, and meaningful community engagement. He cited examples from other localities, including a recent referendum in New Kent restricting public comment, to illustrate a national trend of accelerated infrastructure deployment with limited citizen input.

Mr. Goodman raised specific concerns about cumulative electromagnetic exposure, outdated public health studies, insufficient buffer zones between infrastructure and sensitive areas such as homes, schools, and athletic fields, and the lack of independent, long-term health monitoring. He argued that regulatory compliance alone is not enough when standards are based on decades-old assumptions and limited historical data. He encouraged Council members to critically examine utility company claims of safety, referencing environmental advocacy such as Aaron Brockovich’s work, and stressed the importance of asking these questions now to avoid future public health regrets. He concluded by leaving materials with the City Clerk for

distribution to the Council and reiterated the need for proactive oversight, civic responsibility, and careful consideration of community health impacts as the City continues to navigate infrastructure growth.

Regular Business

R-1 Proclamation Honoring Shanna Story, Former Chairwoman of the Economic Development Authority – Hopewell City Council

The first item on the agenda was a special recognition ceremony honoring Shanna Story for her service as Chair of the Economic Development Authority (EDA). Members of City Council gathered at the front of the chamber for the presentation, underscoring the significance of the occasion. It was noted that Ms. Story had recently concluded an extended term as Chair and that her leadership during this period resulted in substantial accomplishments for the Authority and the City.

The Vice Mayor read a formal proclamation recognizing Ms. Story's dedication and contributions. The proclamation acknowledged the vital role of volunteer leadership in promoting economic growth and community development and commended Ms. Story for assuming the chairmanship shortly after her appointment. It highlighted her initiative in conducting a comprehensive review of the EDA's materials and operations, bringing greater organization, structure, and renewed direction to the Authority. The proclamation further recognized her steady and strategic leadership during significant matters, including foreclosure proceedings and auctions of the VDOT/Mill property, negotiations related to the Boathouse lease, and the Authority's inaugural acquisition of property. Through her collaborative and forward-thinking approach, the EDA was described as having emerged as a legitimate and proactive economic engine for the City of Hopewell. The proclamation concluded by formally commending Ms. Story for her outstanding leadership, dedication, and meaningful contributions to

the City's economic advancement, and it was executed on February 24, 2026, by Mayor John Partin and Vice Mayor Rita Joyner.

Following the reading, Ms. Story expressed her gratitude and emphasized that the accomplishments were the result of a collective team effort by the EDA members, noting in particular the support and guidance provided by Charles, who helped the board better understand key issues. The ceremony concluded with photographs and expressions of appreciation from Council members, marking a celebratory and appreciative moment.

R-2 Budget Overview and Schedule – Stacey Jordan, Deputy City Manager

Ms. Jordan provided City Council with an update on the Fiscal Year 2027 budget calendar and the current status of the budget development process. She reported that the City is well underway in the budget season, having already completed departmental meetings with the City Manager's Office. Departmental presentations to Council and the community are scheduled for March 10 and March 24, at which time there will also be a first-read overview comparing projected revenues and expenditures for the upcoming fiscal year.

Ms. Jordan highlighted several financial challenges impacting this year's budget planning. The City is facing a projected 15% increase in healthcare insurance costs, following a 12% increase last year that amounted to approximately \$500,000. She noted that rising claims contribute directly to higher premiums and stated that a meeting with the City's insurance representative was scheduled to explore options that would best support employees while minimizing cost impacts. Additionally, the City is experiencing a slight decline in revenues related to personal property and business licenses, largely due to assessment value phase-outs, resulting in an estimated \$500,000 reduction. Further compounding the issue, the Holiday Inn has lost its Department of Defense contract, leading to an anticipated \$120,000 loss in revenue for the current year.

Given these revenue constraints and rising expenditures, Ms. Jordan explained that departments were asked to prepare budget scenarios reflecting 5% and 10% reductions across the board. She commended departments for working collaboratively to identify reductions, noting that significant new revenue growth is not expected until the next reassessment cycle. She also announced that the City will again host budget town hall meetings, similar to the prior year, to provide community members an opportunity to review the proposed budget and ask questions. These meetings are scheduled for April 16 and April 23 at the Community Center. With no further questions from Council, the update concluded.

R-3 FY 2026 Supplemental Appropriation from Schools Public Hearing – Stacey Jordan, Deputy City Manager

Janelle English, Director of Finance for Hopewell Public Schools, addressed City Council during the public hearing to request approval of a supplemental appropriation amending the Fiscal Year 2026 school budget. She explained that the School Division is seeking to increase the current budget by a total of \$4,758,285, reflecting additional state and federal funding as well as the rollover of prior year surplus funds. Ms. English noted that the original FY26 budget was approved in April, followed by a supplemental appropriation of \$778,650 approved by Council in September. Since then, the School Division has completed the closeout of the previous fiscal year and finalized updated grant allocations and carryover amounts, resulting in the proposed additional funding.

She detailed that the operating budget would increase by \$3,220,711, along with an additional \$310,000 in state grants designated for security equipment and mental health services. The cafeteria fund would increase by \$869,152, and the building and bus replacement fund would increase by \$668,422. With these adjustments, the total Hopewell Public Schools budget for FY26 would rise to \$81,747,756.

Following the presentation, Council members were given the opportunity to ask questions, but none were raised. A motion was made

and seconded to approve the resolution amending the FY26 Hopewell Public Schools supplemental budget appropriation as presented. With no further discussion, Council proceeded to a roll call vote.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 7-0

R-4 Kevin Randesi’s Appeal Public Hearing – Kelly Davis, Deputy Director of Planning and Development

City Council reviewed the appeal of an Architectural Review Board (ARB) decision denying a request to paint the exterior brick at 206 North Seventh Avenue. At the outset, the Mayor outlined the agreed-upon procedure for ARB appeals: the applicant would have five minutes to present, followed by five minutes for the ARB Chair, then a public hearing, Council questions, and finally a vote.

The applicant presented his appeal, emphasizing that the issue was not about aesthetics but about consistent application of standards, equal treatment under existing ordinances, procedural fairness, and avoidance of arbitrary decision-making. He explained that the case had already gone through two ARB hearings and one prior City Council hearing. He displayed photographs of the building, noting cracked mortar, prior patchwork, discoloration, and other visible imperfections. He argued that painting the brick—using Sherwin Williams “Classical White”—would improve the building’s appearance and complete prior improvements. He referenced other downtown properties with painted brick, including 425 East Broadway and 115–117 South Main Street, as well as painted brick on City Hall itself, asserting that at least 36 buildings in the B-1 district have painted brick or block. He contended that denial of his application would negatively impact his property

value, discourage reinvestment by other downtown property owners, and undermine revitalization efforts. In closing, he asked Council to reverse the ARB's denial, approve the application, provide clearer guidance for consistent and objective standards, and ensure equal application of those standards. He also noted that the appeal process can be intimidating for property owners.

Philip Hughes, Chair of the ARB, then presented the Board's position. He acknowledged the applicant's argument regarding equal treatment but stated that key factual differences distinguished the cited examples. He explained that one previously approved property was built in 1975 and already painted, making it outside the historic period of significance, while the subject property dates to 1916 and retains original brick. Regarding 115–117 South Main Street, he stated that the building had been heavily modified over time, including brick removal and replacement with cinder block, making strict historic preservation standards impractical. He emphasized that ARB decisions are guided by historic preservation principles established by the Secretary of the Interior and training received through state-level preservation programs, which strongly discourage painting previously unpainted historic brick due to long-term moisture risks. He cited personal experience with moisture damage at his own historic property and cautioned against using historic buildings as “guinea pigs” for newer paint technologies that claim to mitigate such issues. He stated the denial was not personal but part of a broader effort to protect downtown's historic character and maintain consistent preservation standards.

Council members asked several questions. Vice Mayor expressed concern that modern paints are specifically engineered to prevent moisture issues and noted that the structure is currently classified as non-contributing. Mr. Hughes responded that while such products may appear promising, long-term impacts remain uncertain, and the ARB prefers a precautionary approach. Council members also inquired about the meaning of “contributing” status and the ARB's jurisdiction. It was clarified that the ARB oversees two designated historic districts—the downtown business district (B-1) and the City Point residential historic district—rather than the entire City. Discussion included the distinction

between contributing and non-contributing structures and how the ARB evaluates age, historic significance, and level of modification when making decisions.

The Vice Mayor, noting her past service as Chair of the ARB, acknowledged the difficulty of the issue and indicated she might not vote in alignment with the current ARB recommendation. Mr. Hughes concluded by reiterating that his role was to present the Board's position and that the decision had not been unanimous. The Mayor then opened the public hearing.

Mark Burroughs, Ward 3

During the public hearing portion of the ARB appeal, Mark Burroughs, representing Ward Three, spoke in support of the applicant's request to paint the exterior brick. He began by noting that he was not an expert on brick or masonry but framed his comments around personal property rights and individual freedom. Mr. Burroughs stated that when a person purchases property, they should have the autonomy to make decisions about it without seeking permission from others, regardless of zoning or historic district regulations.

He argued that the building owner should have the right to paint the property if he chooses, even if such a decision could cause deterioration in the future. He maintained that any long-term consequences resulting from painting the brick would be the owner's responsibility. He further remarked that if the owner were to seek public funding in the distant future to address damage caused by painting the building, the City could decline such assistance at that time.

While acknowledging the City's goal of preserving and maintaining an attractive downtown, Mr. Burroughs emphasized that he would rather see a painted building that looks well-maintained today than focus on possible long-term impacts, particularly given the number of vacant or deteriorated buildings currently in the City. He concluded by reiterating his support for allowing the property owner to proceed with painting the building.

Ed Houser, Ward 3

Ed Houser, representing Ward Three, spoke during the public hearing in support of the applicant's request to paint the exterior brick. Mr. Houser stated that he had attended several prior meetings regarding the matter and expressed concern over the reasoning provided in earlier discussions. He recalled that during the first meeting, some board members objected to the selected paint color, which he questioned as being unrelated to structural concerns. He further noted that at a subsequent meeting, concerns were raised about whether the painting would be done correctly, which he argued should be the responsibility of the property owner and contractor rather than the Board.

Mr. Houser acknowledged the Architectural Review Board Chair's comments regarding moisture issues and historic preservation, but compared the situation to past practices such as the use of lead paint, which was once widely accepted before later being deemed unsafe. He suggested that current paint products recommended for brick applications represent modern best practices and should be accepted accordingly. He emphasized that the property owner is attempting to improve the appearance of an older building, which would enhance property value and, in turn, potentially increase City tax revenues. Mr. Houser concluded by questioning why the City would oppose an improvement effort that could benefit both the property owner and the community financially.

Debbie Randolph, Ward 1

Debbie Randolph, a resident of Ward One, addressed the Council and acknowledged that it may have seemed like the same individuals were speaking repeatedly, but she wished to offer a different perspective from the prior speakers. Ms. Randolph stated that she understood and respected the purpose of the Main Street Program and its reliance on the U.S. Department of the Interior standards for historic buildings. However, she expressed concern about the rigidity with which those guidelines are sometimes applied and questioned whether the City currently has a clear and balanced approach in enforcing them.

She reflected on past experiences within the historic district in Ward One, noting that when the district designation was expanded, many

existing residents had no choice in the matter. She explained that strict adherence to Department of the Interior standards created financial burdens, particularly when homeowners were required to install highly specific and costly windows or materials that many could not afford. She emphasized that there was little flexibility or “give and take,” which led to frustration among residents and realtors. According to Ms. Randolph, this inflexibility discouraged potential buyers and business owners from investing in properties within the historic district because the regulatory requirements were perceived as too restrictive.

While acknowledging the importance of preserving historic structures and maintaining standards to prevent inappropriate alterations, Ms. Randolph urged Council and the Architectural Review Board (ARB) to reconsider how rigidly those standards are enforced. She encouraged broader discussion about how much reasonable leeway could be granted in order to attract business development and investment while still protecting the character of the historic district. She concluded by asking Council to consider flexibility in the current case and to evaluate the overall approach moving forward for the benefit of residents, business owners, and the City as a whole. Following her remarks, the public hearing was closed and Council proceeded to questions for staff.

During the Council meeting, Councilor Harris inquired about the Architectural Review Board (ARB) and whether there were any plans to expand its oversight throughout the city, beyond the current historic districts. He noted that areas outside the recognized historic districts, such as the Harris Snack Bar on Reverend C.W. Harris Street, hold historical significance that may not be formally recognized. They expressed concern that while the ARB protects certain districts, other historically valuable sites across the city could be overlooked or unprotected.

In response, staff explained that recent amendments to the ARB legislation and City Code allow for the addition of individual landmarks to the ARB’s review, though there is currently no plan to create new historic districts. Staff noted that individual properties, like the one mentioned, could potentially be added to the landmark list, and ongoing conversations were in progress regarding other historic sites, such as a

nearby church. They emphasized that creating new historic districts requires a formal, strict process regulated by the state, including public input and mapping on the zoning records, making expansion a careful and deliberate process. The speaker acknowledged this explanation, expressing agreement that while historic preservation is important, enforcement should be consistent and not overly restrictive, particularly when it could hinder individuals conducting business.

Following the discussion, the Vice Mayor makes a motion to approve Mr. Randesi's request to paint his building, with the condition that the paint used must be designated as appropriate for brick surfaces, in accordance with preservation and material standards. Councilor Wheat seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 6-1

R-5 City Seal Public Hearing – Anthony Bessette, City Attorney

Mr. Bessette presented a housekeeping measure regarding the City Seal, noting that many Virginia localities include language in their ordinances describing the appearance of the seal and regulating its use. He explained that historically, Hopewell's Code of Ordinances had overlooked this, and the proposed measure would formalize rules for the seal's use. Specifically, the ordinance would designate the seal for official city documents and communications only, prohibiting its use in advertising products, political campaigns, or any context that might imply city endorsement. Mr. Bessette noted that the proposed language aligns with ordinances in nearby localities such as Richmond, Colonial Heights, and Chesterfield County.

The Council expressed appreciation for his proactive efforts on this and other measures. The public hearing was opened, and with no speakers signed up, it was immediately closed. A motion to adopt the ordinance regulating the use of the City Seal was made by Vice Mayor Joyner and seconded by Councilor Harris, moving the measure forward for approval.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 7-0

R-6 CDBG CV Fund Appropriation Public Hearing – Chris Ward,
Director of Planning and Development

Mr. Ward presented on the allocation of remaining Community Development Block Grant – Coronavirus (CDBG-CV) funds, noting that the city currently has \$31,202.27 in unspent federal funds from the 2020 COVID-19 allocation. He emphasized that these funds must be spent by the end of September of the current year to retain them. The CDBG-CV funds are federally restricted and can only be used for specific types of projects, with previous allocations supporting homeless outreach and related services. Over the past few years, the city has attempted several allocations, and most recently, the CDBG committee—composed of four City Council members at the time—voted 3-0 to recommend allocating the remaining funds to the City of Refuge for homeless services.

Following Mr. Ward’s presentation, the public hearing was opened, and with no speakers signed up, it was immediately closed. A motion to approve the reappropriation of the CDBG-CV funds as presented was made by Councilor Harris and seconded by Councilor Daye, moving the allocation forward for approval.

ROLL CALL

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

Motion Passes 7-0

R-7 Conditional Use Permit for 501 North 4th Avenue, 238 East Broadway, 1104 Kruper, and 1004 Elm Street Public Hearing –

Chris Ward, Director of Planning and Development

The meeting addressed four Conditional Use Permit (CUP) applications, with all public comments consolidated into a single period at the end. The first application, for 501 North Fourth Avenue in Ward One, requested approval to construct a single-family home on a non-conforming lot. The lot was smaller than required by the RO-4 zoning district, but staff recommended approval, noting that the proposed 1,440-square-foot, three-bedroom, two-bath home would be slightly larger than the neighborhood average. Standard conditions included a minimum 12-inch eaves, 20% tree canopy coverage, proper driveway and foundation materials, and substantial conformance to the proposed elevations. The Planning Commission recommended approval with a 5-0 vote, and no public comments had been submitted.

The second CUP application was for 238 East Broadway in Ward Two, where the applicant requested two second-floor apartments smaller than the B-1 ordinance allows. The building's historic nature prevented larger units, but the units would include full kitchens, in-unit laundry, and mixed-use compatibility with commercial ground-floor space. Staff recommended approval with conditions for trash receptacles, clearly identified apartment addresses, and uniform window coverings. The Planning Commission recommended approval with a modification requiring uniform window coverings. No public comments were submitted.

The third CUP application was for 1100 Cooper Avenue in Ward Six, where the applicant proposed a two-story duplex on a conforming R-2 lot. Each unit would have approximately 1,200 square feet, three bedrooms, and two and a half baths. Staff and the Planning Commission found the design compatible with the neighborhood, mindful of materials, scale, and layout, and recommended approval with standard conditions including eaves, tree canopy, driveway, and foundation requirements. No public comments were submitted.

The fourth CUP application was for 1004 Elm Street, also in Ward Six, requesting approval to use a B-3 highway commercial lot for a single-family dwelling. The proposed 1,610-square-foot, three-bedroom, two-bath home would match surrounding residential properties in scale, materials, and character. Staff recommended approval, citing alignment with the Comprehensive Plan's support for residential infill development. The Planning Commission also recommended approval 4-0, and no public comments were submitted.

After opening the public hearing, only one representative for the last applicant, Blue Fish Contractor, LLC, spoke briefly on behalf of the contractor. The public hearing was then closed. A motion was made by Councilor Daye, seconded by Councilor Ellis, to approve all four CUP applications as presented, with staff-recommended conditions, including the Planning Commission modification for 238 East Broadway. The Mayor confirmed that the motion incorporated all standard conditions and the Planning Commission's additional requirement regarding window coverings.

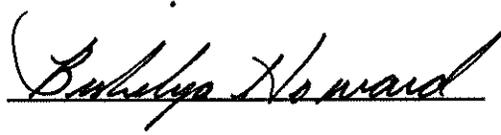
ROLL CALL

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

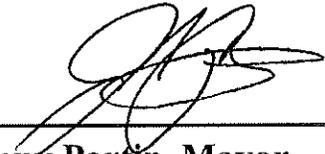
Motion Passes 7-0

ADJOURNMENT

Respectfully Submitted,


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

Bishelya Howard, City Clerk


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

Johnny Partin, Mayor