MINUTES OF THE MARCH 23, 2023 CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING

A SPECIAL meeting of the Hopewell City Council was held on Thursday March 23, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.

PRESENT:

John B. Partin, Mayor
Jasmine Gore, Vice Mayor (Absent)
Rita Joyner, Councilor
Michael Harris, Councilor
Janice Denton, Councilor
Brenda Pelham, Councilor (Absent)
Dominic Holloway, Councilor

Attendance

WORK SESSION

WS-1- FY24 Departmental & School Budget Presentations and Outside Agency Requests. Dr. Manker introduces Dr. Hackney and Janelle to present the work session this evening. Dr Hackney shares some good news and bad news. The good news is they are working really hard in the school district to not have to ask for any new money this year. The bad news is Janelle is about to share with you some preliminary figures the best that we have at this point, for anticipated State revenues, once we have a state budget. Dr. Hackney states they have looked at all three versions, the governors, the houses, and the senates and continuing to make sense of all three. We will most likely get some form of compromise between the three versions currently being explored. But, for now, we can only project broadly, as the three differ very significantly. One by millions of dollars. Janelle's also going to share with you bad news but I think it's going to get better, that our enrollment over the past few years has started declining. We are currently studying the why of that trend and right now we think it's related to three things. The first being Covid. We have seen a significant increase of applications for homeschooling. We believe when parents share with us their rationale, it is usually tied to their fears around disease control in a public school and worries about their kids being exposed to disease upon returning to our schools. The second we have seen is a dramatic increase in a number of specialized placements needed for our students due to the intensity of their behavioral social and emotional needs, post-Covid and again, we think that's tied to Covid. These placements are usually, most of them, funded by CSA funds, which means we don't get State funding based on enrollment for any of those kids and that number is hitting close to 70 right now. The third reason we are seeing a decline in enrollment is possibly the Piper Square renovation. We've lost a significant number of students in particular from Harry James Elementary School. We are hopeful when this project is complete, our understanding is this fall when it's going to be complete, some of the students that were our students prior to being displaced or wherever vouchered to live temporarily, that those students will come back. We are estimating that on a pretty serious pretty good formula of an excess of 35-40 students. Dr. Hackney continues that the state revenue is being reduced based on our average daily membership or enrollment and we have lost over 200 students since Covid over the last three years. Now to the good news as a result of that decline in enrollment, we believe that we can make several budget cuts pretty comfortably. Clearly, if enrollment is reduced considerably we can squeeze some teachers, some materials without significant impact. She states they have started the process to do this and Janelles' going to share with you the amount of cuts we are comfortably making. These would be through attrition. No employee would lose their jobs. Council members, our biggest priority is to not request any additional money this year and our only priority for new initiatives is to be able to fund the proposed raise for our employees that is reflected in all three versions of the state budget. The governors version is for five percent. The other two versions, the House and the Senate are seven percent. Dr. Hackney states there is some bad news with that because the funding they give us is sufficient but for only SOQ funded positions Virginia standards of Quality. That is the lowest Benchmark for the required positions for which we are funded. Thanks to you and the federal government, we are able to supplement that with additional much needed and critical positions but when it comes to funding a raise all we get is the cost to implement that raise for those positions so we have to make up the difference. Janelle will share that with you and show you the exact figures for that. We want to fully be able to fund any of those three versions. That is the only new initiative in our budget and we are hopeful that we can implement that when we have a state budget. With the additional money they are going to give us as well as some cuts that we think we can potentially identify. Dr. Hackney turns the meeting over to Janelle and asks that this is just preliminary. Its hard to build a budget when you don't know how much money you're going to have yet from what is your biggest revenue source. She states she has talked to delegate Coyner, the Superintendents Association and the Virginia School Board Association. The latest information we have is that we should be able to expect a state budget by the end of April. Dr. Hackney states this will be much easier when we have a finalized budget. She makes clear that our goal is to ask for no additional monies from our base budget this year. Janelle comes to the podium the share some information on Revenue Losses due to Enrollment Decline, showing how much money is being lost due to the loss of students. She details the budget reflecting all three budget versions and how much in student loss. Janelle states there may be a request for additional local funding that may be requested. She outlines three different budget versions and the levels of funding, along with a compensation supplement raise that would be provided to All employees and additional funds that would be needed for each version for this budget. Janelle reminds us that none of these figures are solid figures because we don't have a state budget yet. It could be any of these versions any combination or something totally different. As soon as we have final figures we will come back to you with the actual needs.

Wanda Brown from CSA presented a Services budget, which is normally present every year, for $3.2 million dollars. For the last two years, CSA has not gone over budget during the fiscal year, but have gone under budget. Ms. Brown talks about the high and low budget use over the last 2-3 years, since Covid and the role CSA has played to supplement alternate school attendance which directly affects the CSA budget. Ms. Brown is requesting the same budget and primarily almost the same budget she had last year for services and administrative costs.

Charles Bennett gives thanks and appreciation this being his first time addressing council and thanks council for the honor of being able to serve in the City of Hopewell his hometown. He presents his first budget this year and wants to focus on some of the services that were asking for. Mr. Bennett states there are parts of the budget that were set in place before his arrival for obligations the city has made in the past through Economic Development and continues to highlight them and moves to services that he is requesting this year.

Tabitha Martinez with Parks and Recreation presents their budget for fiscal year 24. Her total operational request is for $99,629.26 across six divisions: Recreation Center, Events, Athletics, Communities, Pool and Parks Operations. Ms. Martinez gives the breakdown for the individual division amounts specific to each division of her department.

Ray Spicer Director for Hopewell Social Services presents the budget. He also announces that after 41 years of service in the department of social services system, he plans to retire in October. Mr. Spicer speaks of the surrounding cities and counties he has served in but is most proud to end his service in the City of Hopewell. He expresses his appreciation for the support that He and Social Services has received form the management staff, City council and the citizens of Hopewell, the leadership team and the Hopewell Department of Social Services staff, who work tirelessly to serve the population of Hopewell. He presents two budget requests and supplies the detail and reasoning for the requests. Mr. Spicer asks that council gives their consideration tonight to help align the minimum salaries comparable to Dinwiddie Department of Social Services. Mr. Spicer explains how and why he examined the minimal salaries for several surrounding counties and cities. He talks about staff that serve in specialized areas of the Department of Social Services are being lost to other jurisdictions. Mr. Spicer talks about the hiring challenges with Dept. of Social Services open positions that they are not able to fill because of un-qualified applicants and low application pool. He asks for the raise to meet Dinwiddie Social Services salary of a total $74,010.00. The local amount is $11,471.00 of the $74,010 amount. Mr. Spicer is requesting council to consider for their budget $11,471.00. This will move all the minimum salaries for our agency in total. He asks if council is not inclined to move all the salaries to what is comparable to Dinwiddie, he implores council to consider our family services staff. He adds that he focuses on them because they are the ones that we seem to have the most difficulty recruiting for. Virginia Code requires a degree in social work or related field and because of college debt, etc, this staff has to take a lot of things into consideration when in terms of what they have to do to make ends meet. To achieve this total the amount of funding requires $16,640 and of that total, the local match is $2,580. He goes on to state that not all of Dinwiddies' Social Services positions aligned with ours. If council was to approve this request we would have to work with the city's HR office to make some modest adjustments for those discrepancies of what we are structured like and Dinwiddie is like.

Councilor Joyner makes a motion to allow Councilor Pelham to participate virtually. Councilor Holloway seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL:	Councilor Joyner	Yes
	Councilor Harris	Yes
	Mayor Partin	Yes
	Vice Mayor Gore	(Absent)
	Councilor Denton	Yes
	Councilor Pelham	(Excused)
	Councilor Holloway	Yes

Motion Passes 5-0

Hopewell Water Renewal-Mr. Thompson-Presents information on increases for the capital budget in the last year. He explains the repair of different machinery, service contracts for leasing such as fleet vehicles, increasing security, medical/ laboratory supplies, replacement of parts such as valves and chemicals to aid and keep needed machines operational. Two concrete tanks that need to be rebuilt to be operational. The only change is the price in leasing.

City Council Budget- Dr. Manker. Dr. Manker refers the council to the booklet to section D. The budget was scaled back last year but there are funds currently in the budget and would like to have a conversation as to what you would like to see in your council budget. Which events, conferences, or memberships that you would like to attend. As it stands, each councilor has $3,000 for their ward, ward improvement costs or other initiatives you would like to pursue. It's not uncommon for each ward member to join together to purchase something. As it stands right now, each member has about $15,000 in their advertisement budget, telephone and fax is about $1,500, we reduced the travel, lodging and convention line item in the last budget. She states that she received word that council may want to attend a VML conference. We would need to maybe discuss how many would like to attend. The conference is scheduled for November in Atlanta. There are some smaller costs like office supplies, we have someone to record our videos, it is being streamed as a backup we also have a hard copy. That cost is there because we are required to have a record of each meeting.

ADJOURNMENT:

Mayor Partin motions to adjourn,

Yes 5

Noba 0

Johnny Partin, Mayor

Brittani Williams, City Clerk