

MINUTES OF THE MARCH 10, 2021 CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING

A Special Joint Meeting with the Hopewell City Council and the Hopewell Redevelopment and Housing Authority was held Wednesday, March 10, 2021, at 6:30 p.m. The meeting was scheduled to be held by electronic communication only, pursuant to Va. Code § 2.2-3708(A)(3).

PRESENT: Patience Bennett, Mayor, Ward 4
John B. Partin, Jr., Vice Mayor, Ward 7
Arlene Holloway, Councilor, Ward 2
Jasmine Gore, Councilor Ward 3
Janice B. Denton, Councilor, Ward 5
Brenda Pelham, Councilor, Ward 6

Absent: Deborah Randolph, Councilor, Ward 1

John M. Altman, Jr., City Manager
Sandra R. Robinson, City Attorney
Mollie P. Bess, Interim City Clerk

ROLL CALL

Mayor Bennett opened the meeting at 6:32 p.m. Due to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), the meeting was held via Zoom Video Communications. Council was allowed to either call in on the telephone, or were able to video in using a smart phone, computer, laptop, or tablet. At 6:35 p.m., Mayor Bennett requested a roll call, as follows:

Mayor Bennett	-	present
Vice Mayor Partin	-	present
Councilor Randolph	-	Absent
Councilor Holloway	-	present
Councilor Gore	-	present
Councilor Denton	-	present
Councilor Pelham	-	present

SPECIAL MEETING

Mayor Gore called this joint special meeting of the Hopewell Redevelopment and Housing Authority and City Council to order. She welcomed all visitors, Commissioners and guest.

Councilor Partin moved to adopt the agenda. His motion was seconded by Councilor Pelham. Upon the roll call, the vote resulted:

Mayor Gore	-	yes
Vice Mayor Bennett	-	yes
Councilor Randolph	-	Absent
Councilor Partin	-	yes
Councilor Holloway	-	yes
Councilor Denton	-	yes
Councilor Pelham	-	yes

Motion passed 6-0

HRHA – Mr. Benham, HRHA, established ground rules on length of meeting and informal time keeping. Proposed a 90 minute meeting time and to table any items that may need to be discussed further for a future meeting.

PIPER SQUARE REDEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Actively involved in the construction process. Project was fully funded in the winter and has been in the development phase for a couple of years. The first 3 building have been cleared and are starting to be rehabilitated. In the last couple of week families have moved onsite to temporary housing. There are 4 sets of building and each set will about 90 days to complete. The whole process is scheduled to be completed by this time next year. What is to take place is a substantial rehabilitation, the property will be dealt with its erosion issues, from landscaping to just the grounds themselves. There will be new flooring, cabinetry, lighting, fixtures, appliances throughout, some bathrooms added to some townhouse style apartments. The exterior will have a new face put on which includes new roofing and central air conditional, via a new HVAC system, very energy efficient.

LONG TERM HOUSING

Has been a long standing discussion about the overall quality of Housing for some time. It impacts HRHA ability to effectively deploy housing vouchers and in the event we would think about getting additional vouchers, one of the constraints always brought up is that we are difficulty deploying what we have. Reluctant in considering requesting any additional vouchers. Conversations about VAG vouchers, which are vouchers specifically for veterans, would that be a program we would be willing to incorporate. Just recently we were awarded some VAG vouchers, a very small number, we could manage that number of vouchers. If HUD or Veterans Administration decided they wanted to assign substantially more vouchers to Hopewell, we would have been concerned about our ability to find quality house for those veterans. That leads us to that City Housing Authority has had about the Rental Inspection Program and how effective it is or can be in ensuring the quality of some of these housings are brought along to a slightly higher standard. Need more ability to have an enforcement effect for the RIP. HRHA standards may be higher that what our or HUD requirements are. Find a way to educate and help make a change. How can our program and HRHA requirements come together? Would you maybe consider making the vouchers portable. Has to be level of commitment above what we have had in the past. Have to make a commitment jointly that we are going to do something about it, if we are going to improve the quality of housing. Can standards for city be amended or adjusted? Could lose potential income for Hopewell by issuing mobile/portable vouchers.

Point of Interest – Councilor Gore will put on agenda for future meeting to ask council to direct staff to develop a resolution in partnership with Executive Director of Housing Authority to create a joint committee to address housing and the strategic plan and the Rental Inspection Program and if so, then that would give direction to start that work and then bring back to both parties for approval.

Rental Inspection Program is only active and only assigned to two areas in the city, City Point and B village. By Code of Virginia it cannot be for the entire city, we can increase the rental inspection area, but at no time can the entire city be a rental inspection area. At February 2020 city council meeting staff did present some solutions to restructure the rental inspection program, in this budget we did request a position and we will see how that moves along. Areas included increasing inspection areas, increasing buildings that are added to the inspections, increasing frequency of inspections and reassessing inspections fees. See power point for further information and discussion in the future. Action steps

Agreed to have some joint meetings to get to the meat of this and having approved on a city council agenda, may give more staying power. Address issues and make a decision as a city. Portability voucher is not a preferred recommendation, but ask the question can vouchers be made portable. There is an administrative plan that talks about how vouchers are issued and what amount of time that person that is issued the voucher has to stay in Hopewell before that voucher can be portable. That is largely based on the administrative plan that was developed and approved by the Board. It is desired to keep the vouchers in Hopewell for at least the first year, because of the money that is associated with those vouchers. The Housing Authority voucher program is over a \$3 million program. So we are giving the money to surrounding area when we make the vouchers portable. One factor to look out is there are 200 landlords, of those how many actually reside in Hopewell. IF rent payment is going to a landlord in Colonial Heights, he is likely not spending money in Hopewell. Of that 200 how many are actually Hopewell resident property owner landlords. The tenants stay in Hopewell, they go to school in Hopewell, they show in Hopewell, etc. Quite a few of the landlords live in Hopewell.

Homeless Prevention Strategy is there one that the City has? If there is a strategy in place we need to work together to understand and implement it and if House Authority has a role in that strategy, we need to know what it is so that we can be more effective in supporting the city. We have warming shelter and participate in Crater Area Care that provide services and shelter for homeless. City recently partnered with Commonwealth Catholic Charities prior to COVID. They receive money through our community development grant program and other funds to provide rapid rehousing for homeless population. Currently, they are receiving COVID care funding for rent, mortgage and utility payments for those that have been behind due to loss of income due to the COIVD pandemic and also helping with sheltering the homeless that have been on the streets and more susceptible to the COIVD virus by putting them in hotels and to help them get into permanent housing. Would need to put something in place to provide support after COVID is over. Year and half ago we conversed with Legal Aid as to how we could help educate our applicants on their rights and helping them with their rights on how to file a formal complaint. We make sure they know that legal aid is always available. How can we hold landlords accountable? We thought could require landlords to get a business license then we could put regulations on their business licenses requirements to meet certain standards, that was the approach we thought we could take. However, the law excludes specifically landlords from business license requirements. Left with limited options. We could look at building code and other options there, maybe zoning.

ADJOURN

Motion made to adjourn meeting by Councilor Denton, seconded by Mayor Bennett. Upon roll call, the responses resulted:

Mayor Bennett	-	yes
Councilor Holloway	-	yes
Vice Mayor Partin	-	yes
Councilor Gore	-	yes
Councilor Denton	-	yes
Councilor Pelham	-	no

Motion passed 5-1


 Patience Bennett, Mayor


 Mollie Bess, Interim City Clerk

