

MINUTES OF THE MAY 27, 2025, CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING

A REGULAR meeting of the Hopewell City Council was held on Tuesday, May 27, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.

PRESENT:

John B. Partin, Mayor
Rita Joyner, Vice Mayor
Michael Harris, Councilor
Ronnie Ellis, Councilor
Susan Daye, Councilor
Yolanda Stokes, Councilor (Virtual)
Dominic Holloway, Councilor (Late)

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

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Absent
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes

Motion Passes 6-0

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to name Mr. Bessette as the clerk Pro Tem.
Councilor Daye seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Absent

Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes

Motion Passes 6-0

Councilor Daye makes a motion to amend the agenda to move up the reports of the City Manager after the information and presentations. Councilor Ellis seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Absent
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes

Motion Passes 6-0

CLOSED MEETING

Councilor Daye makes a motion to go into closed meeting under Va. Code § 2.2-3711(A)(29) and (8), to discuss 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, unsolicited offer on city owned real estate); Va. Code § 2.2-3711(A)(8) (Arihant v. Hopewell update); and § 2.2-3711(A)(1), to discuss and consider personnel matters, including board and commission appointments (District 19, Hopewell/Prince George Heal Families, School Board, Hopewell Redevelopment and Housing Authority and City Clerk Position). Mayor Partin seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Absent
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes

Councilor Harris- Yes

Motion Passes 6-0

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

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes

Motion Passes 7-0

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

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes

Motion Passes 7-0

Councilor Holloway makes a motion to appoint Susan Gill to the District 19 Community Service Board and Britney Irving to the Hopewell Prince George's Healthy Families Board. Councilor Daye seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes

Motion Passes 7-0

REGULAR MEETING**PRESENT:**

John B. Partin, Mayor
Rita Joyner, Vice Mayor
Michael Harris, Councilor
Ronnie Ellis, Councilor
Susan Daye, Councilor
Yolanda Stokes, Councilor
Dominic Holloway, Councilor

Prayer by Reverend Tucker, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance, led by Mayor Partin.

Councilor Daye makes a motion to approve the consent agenda. Vice Mayor Joyner seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes

Motion Passes 7-0

INFORMATION/PRESENTATIONS

Minol Utility Billing Presentation - Kevin Marcinek

Kevin Marcinek, representing Minol and accompanied by his colleague Jason Brown, began his remarks by expressing gratitude for the opportunity to speak. He emphasized their intention to formally introduce themselves to the council and provide a high-level overview of Minol's operations. Marcinek outlined the main points of their presentation, which included background information on Minol, an explanation of the billing process, and a discussion of their strategic goals. He conveyed confidence in Minol's ability to support the city effectively, particularly through collaboration with the finance department. Marcinek concluded his introduction by reiterating his appreciation for the chance to present and engage with the city.

Councilor Daye makes a motion to extend the meeting until item R-3 is complete. Vice Mayor Joyner seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes

Motion Passes 7-0

Mr. Marcinek continued his presentation by introducing the core team and emphasizing their extensive industry experience. Jason, who leads Minol's implementation team, will work closely with the city's internal staff to gather the necessary data for sewer and trash billing. Marcinek highlighted that Minol has over 30 years of experience in the U.S. and more than 75 years globally, stressing that billing is their core business and the company is well-prepared to manage the transition smoothly in partnership with Stacey's team.

He provided a brief history of Minol, noting that it is a privately held, family-run

company based in Addison, Texas, with roots in Germany. Initially focused on submetering for multifamily apartment complexes—installing meters to measure individual unit usage and billing tenants accordingly—Minol expanded into the Department of Defense housing sector. In this market, they helped modernize utility metering during privatization efforts across military bases such as Fort Belvoir and Fort Adams, installing systems for water, gas, and electric usage. This work led to their entry into the municipal sector, where they now handle comprehensive utility billing services for cities.

Minol currently processes about 450,000 bills monthly across its three main markets: municipal clients, military housing, and multifamily properties. Marcinek also noted that their sister company, Zenner, manufactures water and gas meters and may already be working with the city in that capacity.

A key focus of Marcinek's remarks was Minol's value proposition for the City of Hopewell. He outlined their full-service approach, which includes billing, a dedicated call center, print and mail services, payment processing, collections, financial reimbursements, and detailed reporting. He emphasized the importance of timely and accurate collections and reporting for city staff, particularly for finance personnel like Stacey. Each client's needs are met with tailored customization, and the company is committed to transparency and regular updates.

Customer service was another major focus. Marcinek explained that Minol's call center is highly stable with low turnover, prioritizing fast, responsive service to residents. Additionally, automated features are in place for those who prefer not to speak with a representative, streamlining issue resolution and payment processes.

Finally, Marcinek stressed the importance of strong, ongoing communication and partnership. Minol aims for a long-term relationship with the city, not a short-term contract. They've already outlined a plan for consistent collaboration with the city's finance team through regular weekly and monthly meetings. The presentation concluded with Marcinek inviting any questions before transitioning to Jason Brown, who would detail the billing implementation process.

During the meeting, speaker Jason Brown provided a comprehensive overview of the utility billing implementation and customer service process his company offers to municipalities. He emphasized that while the company follows a standardized process for all clients, it can be customized to fit the unique needs of each city. Brown explained that initial meetings, like the one held earlier that day with city staff, help identify current issues so the process can be tailored effectively. The onboarding includes a thorough audit of existing accounts and a parallel billing run to align with prior billing systems and ensure accuracy from the start. The company receives meter read files from Virginia American Water, which are used to calculate sewer usage, and it also works with trash providers to ensure all

aspects of utility billing are correctly addressed.

Customer service is a key focus, with a full-time, U.S.-based team that experiences low turnover and strives to resolve most issues in a single call. Bilingual support is available, and an IVR system allows customers to either quickly speak to a representative or self-serve their account needs. Each city is assigned a dedicated Client Relations Manager, who serves as the main point of contact throughout the partnership and ensures continuous communication. Weekly meetings are held during the initial setup phase, transitioning to monthly check-ins for ongoing coordination.

Payment options are flexible and convenient, allowing residents to pay by mail, online, over the phone, or in person at city offices. Payments made in person can be instantly posted to customer accounts, improving efficiency and satisfaction. The process aims to make utility payments as seamless as possible for customers, recognizing that utility bills are a sensitive issue for many residents.

Brown also outlined the company's structured approach to customer inquiries and escalations. If a customer service representative cannot resolve an issue, it is escalated internally before involving the city, reducing unnecessary communication burdens on city staff. Reconciliation of payments is done weekly, and comprehensive month-end reports are provided to the city, including breakdowns of payments, outstanding balances, and disconnections.

Finally, Brown stressed the importance of transparent communication with residents to ensure they recognize the legitimacy of bills and understand any changes. The company is exploring options for outreach via the city's web portal or other channels to maintain strong community trust and engagement. Brown concluded by reaffirming that successful implementation depends on clear, consistent communication and collaboration.

Councilor Holloway raised concerns regarding the company's customer service performance, specifically referencing online employee and service ratings. He noted the company's Glassdoor score of 2.8 out of 5 and inquired about their Better Business Bureau standing, emphasizing the importance of quality customer service during the city's transition to a new utility billing provider.

In response, Kevin acknowledged he was not familiar with the exact ratings but committed to following up with that information. He stressed that the company intends to track and share comprehensive service metrics with the city, including the number of calls received, the nature of those calls—whether positive or negative—and call durations. He emphasized a commitment to transparency, pledging to provide data that will help the city evaluate performance and guide improvements.

Kevin also addressed the anticipated high call volume due to the city's size and stated the company is prepared to add staff as needed. He noted that improvements like online billing tools could reduce call volume over time. Additionally, he reiterated that recorded customer calls are accessible to city officials, allowing full review of interactions in the event of complaints.

Councilor Holloway clarified that his inquiry extended beyond employee review platforms, seeking data on the company's broader customer service reputation and municipal client feedback. Kevin welcomed continued dialogue and offered to provide more detailed information. He emphasized openness to council feedback and recognized that the process wouldn't be perfect but would be shaped collaboratively.

Vice Mayor Joyner inquired about the number of municipalities the company currently serves. Kevin responded that they are presently working with six different municipalities. Joyner then inquired about the length of those service relationships, and the representative stated that their longest-standing partnership has been with the City of Torrance, California, since 2016. He mentioned that Torrance has approximately 36,000 accounts. Vice Mayor Joyner followed up by asking about the company's collection rates. Although Kevin did not have exact figures on hand, he estimated that most of their municipalities have collection rates in the upper 90% range, likely between 90% and 95%. He explained that collection effectiveness varies depending on the municipality's enforcement capabilities. For example, municipalities that can place liens or disconnect water services tend to have higher collection rates, whereas those that only bill for services like trash may experience more difficulty in collecting payments. Kevin noted that the company works closely with municipalities by implementing strategies such as autodialed reminder calls to encourage timely payments.

Mayor Partin inquired whether the company's billing system allows customers to pay in advance and have that amount credited to their account, potentially reducing or eliminating the next month's bill. Kevin confirmed that this is indeed possible—customers can prepay, and the amount will be held as a credit on their account. Each monthly statement would reflect the remaining credit balance. Mayor Partin noted that some citizens prefer to forecast their expenses and pay in advance with a single check, and Kevin affirmed that the system accommodates this preference. The mayor then asked whether call center specialists are able to assist senior citizens with setting up automatic billing. Kevin confirmed that the call center staff can provide help with this process.

Reports of City Manager: City Manager's Report, and statement from the Mayor

Interim City Manager Michael Rogers delivered an encouraging update to the Mayor and City Council, beginning with a commendation for Chief Greg Taylor and the Hopewell Police Department. He announced that the department had successfully achieved recertification by the National Association, highlighting the rigorous nature of the process, which includes on-site visits and verification of submitted documentation. Rogers praised the department's teamwork and professionalism in securing this notable achievement.

He then announced a significant leadership change within city administration, elevating Chief Financial Officer Stacey Jordan to the position of Deputy City Manager. While she will continue her responsibilities as CFO, Jordan will now also oversee several departments, including Public Works, Hopewell Water Renewal, and Recreation, among others, as designated by the Interim City Manager. Rogers expressed confidence in Jordan's capabilities, noting her impressive work on the city budget and audits, and emphasized his commitment to mentoring her as she grows into a more prominent leadership role within local government.

Reflecting on his early days in office, marking his third week, Rogers shared that he is still in the process of familiarizing himself with city operations to establish a smooth and effective cadence for all staff. He stressed his philosophy of "boring government," meaning efficient, drama-free service focused solely on results for citizens. He assured the Council that his leadership will prioritize professionalism, transparency, communication, and execution. Rogers concluded by reaffirming his promise to deliver excellent public service and ensure council concerns are heard, understood, and acted upon by staff.

Mayor Partin addressed concerns raised by citizens during previous city council meetings regarding the termination of two city employees. He clarified that some residents believed the terminations were unjustified and that the council failed to provide an explanation to the public. Mayor Partin explained that the council had, in fact, voted to terminate the employees *without cause*, which simply means that the employees were granted their contractual severance pay rather than being accused of misconduct—*not* that the termination was without reason. He emphasized that the council did have reasons for the decision, and that the matter was thoroughly discussed for nearly four hours during the February 12th meeting, as well as in subsequent meetings. However, he noted that because these are personnel issues, the council is legally and ethically obligated to protect the privacy of the former employees. As a result, the specific reasons for the terminations cannot be disclosed publicly, despite the council's desire for transparency.

COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITIZENS

Alec Shull - addressed the City Council to request assistance with relocating his business. Shull owns Hopewell Pawn & Loan and Liberty Firearms and Surplus, which he has operated in the city for 17 years. He shared that his business currently serves a large clientele, with around 450 active pawn customers and over 1,200 items in pawn. His monthly financial activity ranges between \$30,000 and \$125,000. Shull explained that he has recently been asked to vacate his current rented location by June 30 due to a change in property ownership and disagreements over construction handling and lease terms. He emphasized the urgency of the matter, as his relocation could leave many customers without access to their pawned or layaway items—over 300 layaways are still active.

Shull has identified a new potential location at 705 West City Point, the site of the former Food Land store, which is currently zoned B-2. Since pawn shops are only permitted in B-3 zones under city regulations, he is seeking a zoning variance or a possible rezoning of the property to B-3 to legally continue operating his full business, including pawn services. While he could operate the firearm retail portion under the current zoning, that alone would not suffice. He stressed that if a solution is not found soon, he may be forced to close, potentially forfeiting customers' belongings, as he is not legally obligated to return items after vacating. Shull expressed his strong desire to remain in Hopewell, contribute to the revitalization of local properties, and continue serving the community. He plans to formally approach the council within the week to explore potential solutions and appealed for the council's support in keeping his business local.

Ripley Ballou - a resident of Ward One, addressed the City Council with several comments and concerns. He began by congratulating the newly appointed Interim City Manager, commending his introduction and the positive, professional tone he is establishing for the city. Ballou expressed appreciation for the commitment the new Interim City Manager has made to the community. He then turned his attention to the recent speed limit reduction on Route 10, acknowledging that while the change has been in effect for about a month, he only began seeing active enforcement within the past week. During a few drives, he noted observing four police cars in pursuit of speeders, which he viewed as a positive sign of enforcement. However, Ballou suggested that installing speed cameras might be a more effective solution, both for safety and as a revenue stream, as they would deter speeding without requiring officers to chase violators. He emphasized that many drivers, particularly trucks, still do not appear to be slowing down and stressed the importance of making it clear that the reduced speed limit is serious and for public safety.

Finally, Ballou addressed what he described as unacceptable behavior by some speakers at the previous council meeting. He strongly urged the council to enforce Rules 405 and 406, which regulate public comment, encouraging them to use the gavel to stop individuals from making threatening, personal, or disruptive remarks during meetings. He concluded his remarks by thanking the council.

Mark Burroughs - began his address by acknowledging himself as one of the “obnoxious” individuals referenced earlier, challenging anyone to try to silence him. He expressed uncertainty about whether the recent firings of the City Manager and Clerk were motivated by racism, but criticized the optics of the decisions, calling them poor. Burroughs argued that much of the recent turmoil could have been avoided had the council communicated openly from the start, as Mayor Partin had done in his speech. He voiced frustration over what he perceives as censorship of citizens’ voices during council meetings and the use of law enforcement to suppress public input.

Burroughs acknowledged that two councilors had engaged with him respectfully after the last meeting, which helped him develop some respect for them. However, he remained critical of the council as a whole, stating that while he appreciates their positive contributions, the negative actions seem to overshadow the good. He urged council members to remember their true role as public servants—not rulers—and to honestly assess whether they are serving the community or personal or external interests. Burs firmly declared he would not remain silent when council decisions harm the city.

He concluded by inviting protesters and community members to go beyond demonstrations by actively supporting local children’s sports teams, the Boys and Girls Club, and community clean-up efforts, encouraging them to be part of real solutions rather than just seeking media attention. He thanked the council for their time.

PUBLIC HEARING

PH-1 - Second Reading Fiscal year 26 Budget Adoption- Stacey Jordan, CFO

Stacey Jordan, Chief Financial Officer, addressed the council with details regarding the second reading of the Fiscal Year 2026 budget. She reminded the council that the first reading took place on May 13th, followed by a community budget meeting on May 20th. The total proposed fiscal year budget is \$222,772,514, with the General Fund accounting for approximately \$70.5 million. Key highlights included implementation of classification and compensation

adjustments for public safety and recreation employees, a 3% state-funded cost of living adjustment (COLA) for social services and constitutional officers, as well as a 3% city-funded COLA for city employees. The budget also absorbs a \$500,000 increase in healthcare costs. New positions added include an aquatics program manager, assistant city attorney, and three firefighter roles. The school operating fund remains level-funded at \$13.5 million, and mandated social services through CSA are funded. Though the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is limited, \$650,000 was allocated, alongside \$250,000 set aside for reserves. Jordan noted the budget resolution for fiscal year 2025-26 was set for adoption that evening. After her presentation, there were no questions from the council, and no members of the public signed up to speak during the public hearing.

During the meeting, a discussion arose concerning an email statement submitted by Karen Thayer from Ward Seven, which had not been read aloud at the previous meeting due to time constraints and the absence of the presiding officer because of a medical issue. After some clarification and exchange between council members, the email was read into the record by a council member. In her statement, Ms. Thayer condemned the recent firing of the City Manager and City Clerk, calling for the resignation or removal of Mayor Partin, Vice Mayor Joyner, and Councilors Ellis and Daye. She accused these officials of putting the city at risk through a lack of transparency and making decisions without involving all constituents, particularly highlighting concerns of racial exclusion of Black constituents. She expressed frustration over unanswered questions regarding the justification for the firings and the high monthly salary of the new interim City Manager, questioning the fiscal impact on the city. Ms. Thayer characterized the leadership as incompetent and racist, emphasizing that their unilateral decisions have caused harm to the city and called for accountability through resignation or removal from office.

Ms. Thayer addressed the newly appointed interim City Manager, Mr. Rogers, offering a formal welcome to Hopewell while also cautioning him about the political and civic environment he was entering. She expressed appreciation for Mr. Rogers's stated commitment to transparency, emphasizing that transparency has long been a primary demand from the community and has consistently been lacking from the current city leadership. Ms. Thayer encouraged Mr. Rogers to remain true to his word and uphold that promise, noting the hope that he would bring a change in how city affairs are conducted.

Vice Mayor Joyner makes a motion to adopt the fiscal year 26 budget resolution as presented. Councilor Daye seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes

Motion Passes 7-0

PH-2 - Tax Rate Ordinance Title 34- Stacey Jordan, CFO

Stacey Jordan presented a proposal to amend Chapter 34 of the City of Hopewell Code related to taxation. She began by clarifying a correction in the agenda item title—from “Tax Rate Ordinance” to “Amendment to Chapter 34 of the City of Hopewell Code”—stating that this change was procedural and did not affect the substance of the ordinance. The purpose of the amendment was to update the city code to reflect the tax rates already adopted annually by the council, thus eliminating the need to re-adopt unchanged tax rates every year. This step, she explained, was a common practice in other localities and aimed at increasing clarity and accessibility, particularly for the public accessing the city’s ordinances.

City Attorney Bessette supported Jordan's explanation, noting inconsistencies and outdated information in the publicly accessible code, emphasizing that the proposed update only incorporated existing, approved tax rates. However, some council members, particularly Councilor Stokes and Councilor Holloway, voiced concern over the timing and communication of the amendment. They felt blindsided, having not received prior notice or discussion of the change, and stressed the importance of transparency and full understanding before making such amendments. Although they acknowledged that the change itself appeared to be a routine cleanup, they were uneasy about the process and preferred to delay a vote to review the changes more thoroughly.

Councilor Holloway echoed concerns about council members not being fully informed in advance and emphasized a broader pattern of pre-discussed decisions being brought forward without proper council-wide discussion. Despite agreeing with the intent of the amendment, both Holloway and Stokes felt the item should be tabled until council had time to review it properly.

The public hearing was then opened, but no one had signed up in advance.

Darlene Thompson, from Ward Six, expressed deep frustration and concern during the meeting regarding the city's budget process and overall governance. She questioned why the city conducts first and second readings on budget ordinances during the budget period even after residents have already received their real estate tax bills. Referring to this recurring issue, she emphasized that it creates confusion and undermines trust in the process. Thompson criticized the city's internal operations, stating that the administration needs to "clean up [its] house," particularly pointing to hiring decisions and what she perceived as wasteful spending.

She raised issues about the interim City Manager receiving a salary of \$21,000 and the recent appointment of Stacey Jordan as deputy, which she claimed adds to financial burdens without transparency. Thompson cited previous incidents, such as Jordan's alleged role in the arrest of the city treasurer, as part of a pattern of problematic leadership changes. She also accused the council of repeating past behavior, referencing the hiring and firing of a previous IT director, Dr. Manker, and insinuated that recent appointments may be performative efforts to maintain racial appearances.

Thompson criticized the lack of transparency in hiring and financial decisions, such as appointing a part-time assistant city attorney at a high salary and a new interim at \$115,000, alleging these decisions were made without citizen input. She questioned the motives and priorities of council members, accusing them of acting with "stone faces" and without accountability while mismanaging taxpayer funds. She lamented that the city's budget had increased from \$17 million to over \$20 million, claiming this burden was placed on residents without public involvement or oversight. Her remarks concluded just as her speaking time expired.

During the public hearing, Natalie Hoskins identified herself and began by expressing her support for Dr. Manker and Brittani Williams. She attempted to raise concerns regarding perceived disparities in how information is shared among city council members, specifically questioning why it appears that Black councilors do not receive the same level of information as their White counterparts. When asked if her comments were directly related to the amendment of Chapter 34 of the City Code, which was the subject of the hearing, Hoskins clarified that her remarks were in response to Councilor Holloway's earlier comments about transparency and unequal access to information regarding ordinances. Although city officials attempted to redirect her to stay on topic, Councilor Holloway

affirmed that her statement was relevant to a broader point he had raised about how information is shared before votes are taken. Despite this, the presiding officer reminded Hoskins to keep her comments focused specifically on the public hearing topic. She then concluded her remarks respectfully.

Councilor Daye makes a motion to approve the amendment to Chapter 34 of the city code as presented. Vice Mayor Joyner seconds the motion.

Councilor Stokes makes a motion to lay on the table for the day. Councilor Holloway seconds the motion.

During the discussion, Councilor Holloway raised concerns about whether there would be any issue with tabling the ordinance update until the next council meeting. He emphasized the importance of council members having adequate time to review materials and questioned why some members, including himself, had not received the full packet of documents related to the ordinance update. Stacey Jordan explained that while the budget resolution had already been adopted (which included the updated tax rates), the city's ordinances still needed to be revised to reflect those changes for consistency and transparency, especially since the public-facing municipal code (MuniCode) currently displayed outdated tax rate information.

It was clarified that the ordinance update was largely a "housekeeping" task meant to align the city code with what council had already passed in prior years. Attorney Bessette noted that delaying the update could potentially interfere with the Commissioner of the Revenue's billing processes and affect timely updates to MuniCode, which only publishes changes four times per year.

Ultimately, he withdrew his second to the motion to adopt the ordinance, and with no remaining second, the motion died.

The original Motion was put back on the floor.

Councilor Daye makes a motion to approve the amendment to Chapter 34 of the city code as presented. Vice Mayor Joyner seconds the motion.

Mayor Partin addressed the council, opening the floor for discussion and expressing appreciation to Ms. Jordan for her efforts in correcting and updating the city's ordinances. He took the opportunity to gently remind the City Council of their responsibility to read the agenda packets in advance of meetings. Mayor Partin

emphasized that these packets are distributed both electronically and in printed form on Thursday, allowing ample time for review. He noted that if council members have questions, they should raise them prior to the meeting. Reinforcing the importance of the ordinance updates, he echoed the sentiments of the City Attorney and Ms. Jordan, stating that these clean-up actions are necessary due to issues left unaddressed in previous years.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	No
Councilor Holloway-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes

Motion Passes 6-1

REGULAR BUSINESS

R-1- Budget Amendment Resolution- Supplemental Appropriation #4 & #5 - Dr. Melody Hackney, Superintendent of Schools

In the absence of Dr. Hackney, a representative—Ms. English—provided an update on the Hopewell City Public Schools' budget. She began by confirming that the original fiscal year 2025 budget had been approved by City Council on May 28, 2024, with additional supplemental appropriations subsequently approved on September 24 and January 28. Since those approvals, the school division has received a total of \$146,000 in additional funding from various sources. This includes a \$23,000 grant from the John Randolph Foundation, a \$15,000 Early Childhood Provisionally Licensed Teacher Incentive Grant, and a \$108,000 School-Based Mental Health Grant. Ms. English concluded by formally requesting that City Council approve a resolution to amend the FY25 supplemental budget appropriation to account for these newly awarded funds.

Vice Mayor Joyner makes amotion to approve the Fiscal Year 25 Hopewell Public Schools supplemental budget appropriation as presented. Councilor Ellis seconds the motion.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes

Motion Passes 7-0

R-2 - IRF Grant Application Resolution - Charles Bennett, Economic Development Director

Charles Bennett addressed Council to discuss a resolution request for permission to apply for a grant through the Industrial Revitalization Fund (IRF). Bennett explained that this grant opportunity arose after representatives from the Commonwealth of Virginia visited Hopewell in April during a Virginia Brownfields Conference and encouraged the city to apply, based on past success with similar funding, such as the Lamb Arts project and the redevelopment at 207 Broadway.

However, the opportunity came with challenges. The grant requires a one-to-one match, which must be provided by property owners since the city has not allocated funds for this. In response, Bennett and Drew from the Hopewell Downtown Partnership emailed downtown property owners with details about the opportunity and the necessary requirements. Only two owners responded: Gerald Bosch, who owns a property intended for a coworking space, and Jason Barrio, who owns the former Social Services building at 256 Cawson Street. Of the two, only Barrio's building met the IRF's requirement of being considered "blighted."

Bennett clarified that if awarded, the funding for a for-profit project like this would be issued as a low-interest loan rather than a grant, with a current minimum interest rate of 5%—a correction from the previously stated 2.5%. He acknowledged and thanked Debbie Randolph for catching that error in the council materials.

The application is due May 30, and Bennett emphasized that all preparation and match funding are being handled by the developer and the Downtown Partnership. He requested council approval to proceed with the application, as the city must serve as the official applicant and upload the materials. No taxpayer money would be used. He noted that while competition for the \$3.8 million in state funds is stiff, the team has positioned the old Social Services building for possible partial funding, particularly for mold remediation caused by longstanding roof leaks.

Bennett apologized for the short notice and the lengthy explanation but stressed the importance of presenting the details fully, especially since this was the first formal presentation to the council. He offered to answer any further questions from the council.

Charles Bennett concluded his presentation to the council by reiterating that the grant application would involve *no taxpayer dollars*. He emphasized that the council's resolution needed to certify only two things: first, that the property—the former Social Services building at 256 Cawson Street—meets the definition of *blighted*, and second, that the council authorizes him to submit the application on behalf of the city by uploading the resolution and supporting materials.

Bennett noted the urgency of the matter, explaining that the resolution must be uploaded by the end of the day on Friday. He asked the city clerk to be prepared to sign the resolution if council approval was granted that evening. He underscored the importance of taking the opportunity, stating, “*You never win what you don’t play,*” and reminded the council that without submission, Hopewell would have no chance of receiving the funds.

If successful, the grant would assist in transforming the currently blighted building into a usable space, adding approximately 11,000 square feet of business-ready space in downtown Hopewell. Bennett added that the most likely intended use for the rehabilitated space would be *medical offices*, citing the building’s size, natural lighting, and accessibility as key factors supporting that purpose.

Councilor Holloway makes a motion to approve the resolution as presented.
Councilor Harris seconds the motion.

In response to Councilor Harris’s question about why the Hopewell Downtown Partnership was selected as the fiscal agent for the grant application rather than the Economic Development Authority (EDA), Charles Bennett provided a detailed explanation, citing both timing and strategic alignment.

First, Bennett explained that the EDA only meets on the first Monday of each month, which made it logistically impossible to involve them in this particular grant process, as the application deadline falls before their next scheduled meeting. At the time the opportunity arose, no complete proposal had yet been assembled, and even now, the team is actively compiling the necessary materials—“building the airplane while we fly it,” as he described.

Secondly, and more strategically, Bennett emphasized that the Hopewell Downtown Partnership is the city’s accredited Virginia Main Street organization, which operates under the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)—the same agency administering the grant. Using the Downtown Partnership as the fiscal agent strengthens the application’s alignment with the DHCD’s mission and structure.

He also pointed out that the Downtown Partnership already has a revolving loan fund in place through the Small Business Diversity Bank, which is currently being used for another revitalization project at 207 Broadway. This existing infrastructure makes it more efficient to channel the funding through them.

Finally, Bennett noted that Drew, executive director of the Downtown Partnership, has been leading the technical work—assembling the documents and writing the application—which further justified their role in this time-sensitive and labor-intensive process.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes

Motion Passes 7-0

R-3 - Resolution Amending the Fiscal Year 2025 Capital Budget- Stacey Jordan, CFO

Stacey Jordan presents a resolution regarding the reallocation of capital reserve funds. Specifically, she proposed moving \$500,000 from the previously allocated \$1.5 million in the FY24 capital reserve to support critical sewer infrastructure projects, including the Queen and Pump Station and various sewer street repairs. She explained that in 2023, the city had earmarked funds for specific sewer projects and placed them in its Local Government Investment Pool (LGIP). To ensure financial flexibility, the city adopted a reimbursement resolution in April that allows it to pay project expenses up front and then reimburse itself from the LGIP using general fund procedures. Jordan clarified that this new resolution would officially designate \$500,000 of the existing capital reserve to the identified sewer projects, and while the city would initially pay out of pocket, it would ultimately be reimbursed from the LGIP funds set aside last year specifically for these types of improvements. She emphasized that this action aligns with prior planning and ensures continued investment in essential infrastructure.

Councilor Daye makes a motion to approve the resolution for the city council of the city of Hopewell, Virginia, amending the Fiscal Year 25 capital budget as presented. Vice Mayor Joyner seconds the motion.

Councilor Holloway requested clarification on the allocation of the \$500,000 from the capital reserve. He specifically asked how much of that amount was designated for the Queen and Pump Station. Stacey Jordan responded that the funds would initiate the design phase for the Queen and Pump Station project, which, along with the Manchin Hill station, is currently non-operational. She explained that this portion of the funding would cover the initial design work and also support other sewer-related capital projects.

Councilor Holloway then inquired why the full amount previously allocated for sewer projects wasn't being applied now, noting that the Public Works Director, though absent, had requested funds for additional sewer infrastructure needs. Jordan clarified that while the total project costs are indeed higher than \$500,000, this initial allocation was necessary to begin critical components—specifically, \$250,000 for design work and another \$200,000-plus for a vendor contract. She emphasized that this approach allows the city to pay upfront using current funds, then reimburse itself from the designated LGIP funds. This phased process will

enable continued progress on infrastructure repairs while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

Mayor Partin expressed gratitude to Ms. Jordan, Mr. Rogers, and Mr. Campbell for their efforts in addressing the administrative and logistical delays associated with the sewer infrastructure project. He acknowledged their work in cleaning up paperwork and moving the project into the design phase. The mayor emphasized that the project, approved over 18 months ago, should have already been completed, and he criticized the delay, noting that it contributed to preventable sewage leaks. He commended the team for working diligently to ensure progress is now being made swiftly, in hopes of preventing any further incidents.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin-	Yes
Councilor Ellis-	Yes
Councilor Daye-	Yes
Councilor Stokes-	Yes
Councilor Holloway-	Yes
Vice Mayor Joyner-	Yes
Councilor Harris-	Yes

Motion Passes 7-0

ADJOURNMENT

Respectfully Submitted,



Sade' Allen, Deputy City Clerk



Johnny Partin, Mayor