

## MINUTES OF THE MARCH 23, 2021 CITY COUNCIL MEETING

A meeting of the Hopewell City Council was held on Tuesday, March 23, 2021, at 5:30 p.m. in the City Council Chambers, Municipal Building, 300 North Main Street, Hopewell, Virginia.

**PRESENT:** Patience Bennett, Mayor, Ward 7  
John B. Partin, Vice Mayor, Ward 3  
Deborah Randolph, Councilor, Ward 1  
Arlene Holloway, Councilor, Ward 2  
Janice B. Denton, Councilor, Ward 5  
Brenda Pelham, Councilor, Ward 6

John M. Altman, Jr., City Manager  
Charles Dane, Assistant City Manager  
Sandra R. Robinson, City Attorney  
Mollie P. Bess, Acting City Clerk

Tevya W. Griffin, Director, Department of Development  
Ms. Christine Browning and Mr. Edward Howell, property owners  
Dr. Concetta Manker, Director, IT

**ABSENT:** Jasmine E. Gore, Councilor, Ward 4 (arrived later)

### ROLL CALL

Mayor Bennett called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m. and requested a roll call:

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

### CLOSED MEETING

At 5:40 p.m., Councilor Partin moved to go into closed meeting pursuant to Va. Code Sections 2.2-3711 (A)(1) to discuss and consider personnel matters, including the recruitment and appointment of a City Clerk, and to consider prospective candidates for various boards and commissions; (A)(7) and (8) to consult with legal counsel and staff regarding specific legal matters and probable and actual litigation requiring the provision of legal advice and where such consultation in open meeting would adversely affect the City's interest; and to the extent these discussions will be aided thereby (A)(4) for the protection of the privacy of individuals in personal matters not related to public business. Councilor Randolph seconded the motion. Upon the roll call, the vote resulted:

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

**Motion passes 6-1**

**RECONVENE OPEN MEETING**

Councilor Partin moved that Council come out of Closed Session. His motion was seconded by Councilor Randolph. There was no discussion. Upon the roll call, the vote resulted:

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

**Motion passed 7-0**

**CERTIFICATION**

Council responded to the question pursuant to Virginia Code §2.2-3712 (D): were only public business matters (I) lawfully exempted from open-meeting requirements and (II) identified in the closed-meeting motion discussed in closed meeting? Upon the roll call, the responses resulted:

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

Motion was made by Vice Mayor Partin to extend the meeting to 10:00 p.m., seconded by Councilor Randolph. There were no discussions. Upon the roll call, the vote resulted:

Councilor Randolph	-	yes
Councilor Holloway	-	yes
Vice Mayor Partin	-	yes
Councilor Gore	-	yes

Councilor Denton	-	yes
Councilor Pelham	-	yes
Mayor Bennett	-	yes

**Motion passed 7-0**

**BOARD APPOINTMENTS**

Councilor Partin made a motion to appoint Laurie Goff the Recreation Commission. His motion was seconded by Councilor Randolph. There was no discussion. Upon the roll call, the vote resulted:

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

**Motion passed 7-0**

At 8:07 p.m., Mayor Bennett called the meeting to order and requested a roll call:

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

The prayer was led by Mr. Charles Dane, followed by the Pledge for Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, which was led by Councilor Denton.

Mayor Bennett requested the motion to amend or adopt the regular meeting agenda. Motion was made by Vice Mayor Partin and seconded by Councilor Pelham.

Discussion: Councilor Randolph made a sub-motion to amend the agenda to remove R-1 which was seconded by Councilor Denton.

Mayor Bennett then asked Ms. Cynthia Robinson, Acting City Attorney, if was appropriate for a substitute motion to have a vote. Ms. Robinson stated that she had not heard any objection from the person who originally made the motion (Partin). If the sub-motion (by Randolph) is accepted – not put to the body for discussion – then Council can move forward and vote on the sub-motion. There was no discussion. Upon the roll call, the vote resulted:

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

**Motion failed 4-3**

Returning to the original motion to amend or adopt the regular meeting agenda, which was made by Vice Mayor Partin and seconded by Councilor Pelham, Mayor Bennett requested a roll call. Upon the roll call, the vote resulted:

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

**Motion failed 4-3**

Because the motion failed to adopt the regular meeting agenda, there was a lengthy discussion between Council and the Acting City Attorney. Councilor Pelham consulted Ms. Robinson regarding the reconsideration of the failed vote. Ms. Robinson advised that the person on the prevailing side of the vote can make the motion to reconsider. Councilor Pelham made a motion to reconsider approving the agenda; however, a point of order was called by Councilor Denton, who stated that Councilor Pelham was not on the prevailing side of the vote to reconsider it. Mayor Bennett stated that as written, the prevailing side of the vote consists of Councilors Randolph, Denton, Holloway and Gore.

Ms. Robinson stated that there were two back-to-back votes dealing with the agenda. Councilor Pelham is on the prevailing side of the motion to amend to remove Francisco Landing, and if her reconsideration was to that vote, then she can go forward. Councilor Pelham is not in the prevailing party on the vote to adopt the agenda as presented. Ms. Robinson suggested that the motion be done in two parts: move to reconsider, vote on it, and then raise the exact same question and take another vote.

After further discussion, and assistance from Ms. Robinson, Mayor Bennett restated the motion to reconsider the substitute motion to remove the Francisco Landing item from the agenda. This motion was made by Councilor Pelham and seconded by Vice Mayor Partin. The Mayor reiterated that this motion is just to allow reconsideration, and requested a roll call. Upon the roll call, the vote resulted:

Councilor Randolph	-	yes
Councilor Holloway	-	yes
Vice Mayor Partin	-	yes
Councilor Gore	-	yes

Councilor Denton	-	yes
Councilor Pelham	-	yes
Mayor Bennett	-	yes

**Motion passed 7-0**

Mayor Bennett requested a motion to amend the agenda to remove Francisco Landing from the agenda. The motion was made by Vice Mayor Partin, and seconded by Mayor Bennett. There was no discussion; Mayor Bennett requested a roll call. Upon the roll call, the vote resulted:

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

**Motion passed 6-1**

Mayor Bennett requested a motion to adopt the consent agenda, which was made by Vice Mayor Partin. Councilor Gore made a motion to adopt and amend the consent agenda to place the City Council Boards and Commissions under C6, Routine Approval of Work Sessions, for the next regular City Council meeting. Her motion was seconded by Vice Mayor Partin. There was no discussion; the Mayor requested a roll call. Councilor Denton asked to have the motion repeated. The Mayor repeated the motion and asked Councilor Gore for verification.

Councilor Gore restated the motion: "Motion is to approve and amend the consent agenda to reschedule the City Council Boards and Commissions work session and place it under C6, Routine Approval of Work Sessions, for the next regularly scheduled Council meeting."

Mayor Bennett requested a roll call. Upon the roll call, the vote resulted:

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

**Motion passed 7-0**

Mayor Bennett gave the floor to Mr. John M. Altman, City Manager and Mrs. Tevya W. Griffin, Director of Development.

**PUBLIC HEARING**

**PH-1 2408 Lynchburg Street Conditional Use Permit** – Mrs. Griffin’s presentation regarded the requestor of the Conditional Use Permit located at 2408 Lynchburg Street. This matter was discussed at the February Work Session meeting. The applicant wished to construct a 6 ft. fence in the front and side yard of their property. Zoning only allows 6 ft. fences in the back yard or side yards if it is an interior lot. The owner’s property is a corner lot, and the request is for a fence on the side of the yard, which is not allowed per the ordinance. Ms. Christine Browning and Mr. Edward Howell, owners, are available to answer any questions. The reason for the fence (which has already been built) is to deter pedestrians from littering on and walking through their yard from the railroad tracks. Their property is located in R-2, Ward 5. The Planning Commission held a public hearing on January 7, 2021; recommended approval of request (3-0).

Ms. Browning announced that there are vagrants pitching tents on the other side of her fence. She brought this matter to the attention of the police; was told that it was part of the City’s responsibility.

Mayor Bennett thanked Ms. Browning for letting Council know about this matter, and then she opened the floor for discussion.

After discussion, Mayor Bennett closed the public hearing and requested a motion to approve the fence at 2408 Lynchburg Street. The motion was made by Councilor Denton and seconded by Councilor Pelham. There was no discussion. Mayor Bennett requested a roll call. Upon the roll call, the vote resulted:

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

**Motion passed 7-0**

**PH-2 Hopewell Public Schools FY21 Budget Amendment** – Mr. Altman presented the Hopewell Public Schools’ request to amend their FY21 budget. They received state grants, updated local grants, correction to local appropriations, as well as some carryover amounts for federal grants. They also received \$1.5 million in extended school year grant from the state, and also security equipment grants. The federal and local grants must be updated to include carryover amounts from the previous year. The total requested amount of budget amendment is \$2,524,089.00. The operating fund is amended by \$2,009,529.00; cafeteria fund amended by \$14,560.00. The last budget amendment included the Office on Youth funding. There are no local funds involved, just state and federal.

After a lengthy discussion, Mayor Bennett opened the floor for public hearing. There were no comments for the City Manager to relay, so the Mayor closed the public hearing.

A motion to approve the school's division FY21 supplemental appropriations as presented was made by Councilor Denton and seconded by Vice Mayor Partin. There was no discussion. Mayor Bennett requested a roll call. Upon the roll call, the vote resulted:

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

*(\*Mayor Pelham stated that she spoke to the City Attorney, her paperwork is on file; she can participate in the voting process, as she has no personal gain for her employment in the school system)*

**Motion passed 7-0**

### **REGULAR BUSINESS**

**R-2 Digital Transformation for Online Forms and Documents** – Mr. Altman discussed the City's receipt of various downloadable forms for citizens in the process of appropriate departments. The idea is to empower citizens to complete forms online as opposed to downloading paper forms and emailing. He also discussed ways to make payments online and having other things routed to the appropriate departments through this process. He gave the floor to Dr. Concetta Manker, IT Director.

Dr. Manker gave a very detailed presentation. Mr. Peter Roccaforte, the City's representative, was available for questions from Council. Dr. Manker's discussion regarded the current project, investing in and utilizing Laserfiche, the City's current document management system. This integration will allow forms and documents to be used online, and interface with forms that are currently available. She gave the floor to Mr. Peter Roccaforte for a three minute detailed presentation.

Mr. Roccaforte shared examples from other municipalities and cities as well as the City's current forms that are being transformed online. His presentation included the use of GovOS as the digital solution to streamline documents, with yearly upgrades. He ended his informative presentation with a summary of the 2020 quote for subscription to GovOS of \$38,045.00.

Dr. Manker thanked Mr. Roccaforte for his presentation, and opened the floor for questions from Council.

After lengthy discussion, Mayor Bennett acknowledged Councilor Gore's raised hand.

Councilor Gore made a motion to approve the request for transformation for IT to process and implement the project quoted for \$38,045.00. Her motion was seconded by Vice Mayor Partin.

Councilor Denton asked Mr. Altman if there is any problem financing this project, and Mr. Altman replied that funding should be available. He asked Mr. Roccaforte when will the \$21,000.00 recurring cost start with respect to next year's budget. Mr. Roccaforte stated that the recurring cost will kick in at time of renewal. There is an option for a multi-year setup that will allow to buy some time in the future, with no renewal date each year, and this choice allows for grandfathering into that rate.

Mr. Altman also asked if there was a discount on the multi-year option. Mr. Roccaforte replied affirmatively; there is a 3% discount for the 3 year option, and 5% discount for the 5 year option.

Mayor Bennett thanked Mr. Roccaforte for his presentation. There was no further discussion. Mayor Bennett requested a roll call. Upon the roll call, the vote resulted:

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

**Motion passed 7-0**

**R-3 Communication from Citizens** – Mr. Altman discussed the issue of communications from citizens. This form in regards to the digital transformation aspect provides concerned citizens with a way to input feedback to the Councilors' public comments for public hearing. Also, there is a request regarding the submissions of video and voice recordings. He gave the floor to Dr. Manker.

Dr. Manker presented the public comment form to be reviewed by Council, and opened the floor for feedbacks and comments.

Due to technical issues, Mayor Bennett was unable to see whose hand was raised, so City Clerk Mollie Bess was able to acknowledge the raised hands of Vice Mayor Partin and Councilor Gore.

After a lengthy discussion, Councilor Gore made a motion to support implementing the public comment form with the addition of video submissions at the next regular Council meeting. She indicated that she can wait for Council's discussion before moving forward with her motion.

Mayor Bennett's technical issue was resolved and therefore enabled her to acknowledge raised hands.

Vice Mayor Partin agreed with Councilor Gore to implement this form.



Councilor Randolph had no major issues with the form; however prefers to have in-person meetings restored. She also shared comments from her constituents expressing the continuance of the ability of viewing all meetings electronically.

Councilor Denton likes the form; wished that this implementation started a year ago; wishes for Council to return to chambers.

Councilor Pelham likes the form.

Mayor Bennett returned the floor to Councilor Gore.

Councilor Gore stated for the record that “Council Live!” was part of the early digital transformation in which citizens can view live streams of the meetings; wished that this form was available two years ago. At the time of this request, the majority was not willing to support this. She made a motion to approve the draft Public Comment Form to add a slot for council meeting dates, so that the clerk can help manage that and to begin implementation immediately for the next regularly scheduled meeting, and make advances to include video submissions at a later date. Her motion was seconded by Vice Mayor Partin.

After further discussion, Mayor Bennett requested a roll call. Upon the roll call, the vote resulted:

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

**Motion passed 7-0**

### COUNCILORS REQUEST

**CR-1 (Councilor Gore) - Develop Participatory Budgeting platform to include/engage Hopewell residents in the creation of the FY 2021-2022 Budget and implement the Open Finance software previously adopted by City Council:** Voted for approval two years ago by Council to purchase and implement the Open Finance software to allow constituents to view the budget and see where funding goes, the breakdown of the budget, and to allow for participation in the budgeting process. In participatory budgeting, communities select items they would like the public to gauge what they would like to see funded. Councilor Gore is asking to find another way to include the public in the budget process.

Mr. Altman explained that due to COVID, this item had taken a back seat to other things that staff had to do. He will go through the MUNIS update first with Dr. Manker, and then try to implement the software system. He is looking forward to implementing these things for the upcoming year.

Councilor Gore asked if the quote from 2-3 years ago has or will expire and will Council reach out and get an updated quote for Open Finance.

Mr. Altman replied that the cost may have gone up a bit, but not a great deal but will make that work. Since it was voted upon, he will move forward with implementation. Stated that this is a good opportunity for citizens' input.

Councilor Gore asked if this opportunity could be possible with the utilization of POLCO, our community survey app, or another type of app to do something similar for feedback. She asked him if he would be open to supporting something like a poll using POLCO or something similar.

Mr. Altman replied that if this is something that Council would like to do then he can explore how this can be done; maybe more of a discussion of priorities among citizens for funding. He gave the floor to Council for thoughts on using participatory budgeting.

Councilor Randolph disagreed with the City Manager regarding the purchase of the software; she wants to know how much the price has increased before automatically absorbing the cost. She requested that Council find out the cost of the software and then bring that information back to Council.

Vice Mayor Partin, who was next to speak, had to excuse himself from the meeting. In the meantime, Councilor Gore asked a question regarding the Open Finance software. She wanted to know that since the motion passed to purchase and begin execution of the software, would this be a motion to reconsider putting Open Finance back on the agenda.

Ms. Robinson responded to Councilor Gore, stating that if it's the exact same motion revisited, and has not been approached yet, and beyond the time for reconsideration, she opined that the proper motion to bring something back would be "a motion to amend something previously adopted," but advised that she doesn't know exactly what the motion was or specifically what the transaction looked like after the motion passed. Procedurally speaking, if it's the same thing, since this is now two years removed, it would be a motion to amend something previously adopted.

Councilor Gore then asked Mr. Altman if Council is okay with exploring some type of survey. POLCO allows attachment of documents, videos, and other descriptions as educational components, and she deferred to Council for support something like this on a draft basis.

Vice Mayor Partin returned to the meeting; Mayor Bennett gave the floor to him, and he asked Mr. Altman for verification of purchasing Open Finance or POLCO, and Mr. Altman confirmed that POLCO was purchased, but Open Finance was not purchased. Vice Mayor Partin agreed with Mr. Altman on bringing back the idea of purchasing Open Finance and presenting polls to the public.

Mayor Bennett's sudden absence was due to her dead computer battery; she logged back into the meeting by phone.

Councilor Randolph expressed a concern regarding the decision to approve the City finance software based on cost. She asked Ms. Robinson if the software was not purchased based on the cost given, and if the cost increased considerably, should Council readdress that cost.

Ms. Robinson stated that she needed to review the actual motion to determine if there have been any issues raised. She said that she was not prepared to answer completely at this time. Authorization is for the original cost at the time of the motion. If cost has increased and the motion is remedied to a specific amount and shortage then it has to be a motion to amend something previously adopted. Another option: if it is two years past and nothing has been done, then rescind the vote if something has not occurred that cannot be taken back.

Councilor Gore's point of information to Ms. Robinson is that the motion passed to implement; unless the dollar amount is higher than approved, implementation can begin as this is the direction of Council. Ms. Robinson stated that this correct as long as this is speaking to the contract amount.


For sake of clarification, Councilor Gore stated that the agreement is not based on the amount but on the software to choose, which is the one with the best integration. She said that she will check to verify that the amount was written in the minutes. If the cost does not exceed the dollar amount, then Mr. Altman can move forward with the plan to implement the software. She asked Council if there was a consensus to move forward with the participatory budgeting and getting a poll drafted.

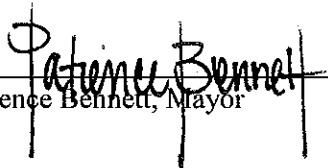
Vice Mayor Partin was not opposed.

Councilor Randolph answered affirmatively, until Council has more information about the software.

## ADJOURN

Per the Council rules, the meeting was adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

  
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Mollie P. Bess, City Clerk

  
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Patience Bennett, Mayor