

**October 12, 2021  
Regular Meeting**

**MINUTES OF THE CITY COUNCIL MEETING**

A Regular Meeting of the City Council of the City of Hopewell, Virginia, was held Tuesday, October 12, 2021, at 6:30 p.m. in the City Council Chambers, Municipal Building, 300 North Main Street, Hopewell, Virginia.

PRESENT:                   Patience Bennett, Mayor  
                                  Johnny Partin, Vice Mayor  
                                  Deborah Randolph, Councilor  
                                  Arlene Holloway, Councilor  
                                  Jasmine Gore, Councilor  
                                  Janice B. Denton, Councilor  
                                  Brenda S. Pelham, Councilor (arrived at 6:05 pm)

John M Altman, City Manager  
Peter Eliades, Acting City Attorney  
Mollie P. Bess, City Clerk

**ROLL CALL**

Mayor Bennett opened the meeting at 6:30 p.m. Roll call was taken as follows:

Mayor Bennett	-	present
Vice Mayor Partin	-	present
Councilor Randolph	-	present
Councilor Holloway	-	present
Councilor Gore	-	present
Councilor Denton	-	present
Councilor Pelham	-	absent (arrived at pm)

Moved to go into Closed Session by Vice Mayor Partin and seconded by Councilor Denton pursuant to Va. Code Section 2.2-3711 (A)(1) for discussion, consideration, or interviews (HRHA and School Board) of perspective candidates for employment; assignment, appointment, promotion, performance, demotion, salaries, disciplining, or resignation of specific public officers, appointees, or employees of any public body.

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

Motion Passes: 7 – Ayes  
                  0 – No

**CLOSED SESSION**

Motion to come out of closed by Vice Mayor Parton and seconded by Councilor Randolph

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

Motion Passes: 7 – Ayes  
0 – No

**CERTIFICATION**

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 closed meeting?

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

Motion Passes: 7 – Ayes  
0 – No

**WORK SESSION**

**WS-1 – Residency Requirements for certain City Officials and Department Heads**

Mayor Bennett turned work session over to City Manager Altman. This topic came up when Ms. Griffin requested a waiver of the provision at Council’s last regular meeting and Councilor Pelham made a motion to have a work session this evening to discuss the provision of the code. Councilor Pelham suggest that we entertain that we change the ordinance wherein anyone who lives outside the City still has to live within that 30 mile range, especially directors and above. She would like except for the Chief of Police, the assistant City Manager, Chief of Fire and Public Works, those employees should live within the City, because of emergency situations. City Manager Altman stated just following on those comments if Council were agreeable, we could bring back an amendment that deleted the second sentence in b, which is the sentence that says “if they relocate, they have to relocate within the City”, it would stop there where it says that have to live within 30 miles of the city limits during employment. So b, if we just eliminated the second sentence which requires department heads to relocate their permanent residence if they move. Reshape the first sentence to say, “The assistant city manager and department heads must reside within 30 miles of the city limits of the City of Hopewell during their employment and are exempt from the Residency Requirement. Councilor Randolph said that most of their constituents are against top

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city management at the salaries that they get paid for living anywhere but within the city. Will not be not be able to support this item. Councilor Denton stated that we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and years ago when this was adopted, we lived and played in Hopewell, but today we are very diversified. She is looking at the best person for the job, as a city we need to get ourselves in shape so that people want to come here and live. Personally feels like we need the best personnel we can get within a certain range, today we can get anywhere in a matter of moments, have all kinds of communications, we can stay communicated. Mayor Bennett has one question when she looks at section 2-4 c, city council may waive any provisional requirement of this ordinance, city council may grant such waiver by ordinance, resolution or motion. Is the waiver from Director Griffith in the packet tonight? City Manager stated that is not for consideration this evening, we wanted to have the work session to see where city council is on this. The intention was to have it on the next agenda depending upon what was decided this evening. Mayor Bennett will do more research on this and want to have consider that we take up at the next city council. Mayor Bennett stated that council consider that they take action and create an ordinance for a conflict of interest form. That's the Financial Disclosure form which is the form that council does have and would like council to consider and think about that. Vice Mayor Partin stated that if you are a director or leader that has meaningful influence in this community and the ability to bring about positive change, he feels that you should be resident in this city, because the decisions you make as a leader and as a department head or director, you should be bound by those same exact decisions that you end up making. He does not support. Mayor Bennett says we are limiting ourselves to competition. If we have a great candidate, but we take someone that lives in the city, we are limiting ourselves. Councilor Holloway stated that title or position does not interfere with the person doing their job. Supports person living outside of the city long as in 30 mile radius. Councilor Gore stated that we have heard three options tonight and tasked City Manager Altman with clarifying when this comes back on the agenda, give us multiple versions, because she heard three tonight, one within 30 miles, one with certain directors and one with all directors, would like to have all three. She would like to release a poll with that information. Mr. Altman stated that he heard the following: one option was to allow dept. head to live within 30 miles of the city if you move regardless, two was to add additional positions to A or somehow work it that fire chief, police chief and public works director to live within the city and three is the original version that we have now. Councilor Randolph stated that city council can waive any provision of this requirement/ordinance at any time, council can vote to change this on an individual basis if they so choose, not sure what we are here on this. Mayor Bennett stated was we were unclear on what we have in place, this provision is from December 2019 for add-on of number C. Prior the 3 councilor appointees and all dept. heads were required to live in the city. Will place as an R item for the Nov. 9, 2021 agenda. Seeking legal counsel if this needs to be a Public Hearing. We will put back on as a Public Hearing. Council Gore said it was not a requirement but that we requested due to the feedback. Will check on public hearing first and will update council with emails. If a public hearing is requested we need to figure out the language for that.

**REGULAR MEETING**

Mayor Bennett officially called the regular meeting to order.

Roll Call:	Mayor Bennett	-	Present
	Councilor Randolph	-	Present
	Councilor Holloway	-	Present
	Vice Mayor Partin	-	Present
	Councilor Gore	-	Present
	Councilor Denton	-	Present
	Councilor Pelham	-	Present

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Mayor Bennett welcomed everyone to the Regular Meeting. Councilor Pelham provided the prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Councilor Denton.

Motion made by Vice Mayor Partin and seconded by Councilor Denton to adopt the regular meeting agenda.

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

Motion Passes: 7 Ayes  
0 No

**AMEND/ADOPT AGENDA**

Motion made by Vice Mayor Partin and seconded by Councilor Randolph to adopt the agenda.

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

Motion Passes: 7 Ayes  
0 No

Motion made by Vice Mayor Partin and seconded by Councilor Randolph that we amend the consent agenda to remove applicants for the City Attorney Process from public view

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

Motion Passes: 7 Ayes  
0 No

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POI by Councilor Gore, this is for the Mayor– wants clarity on the vote that Council took at the last meeting on Thursday. Last week council voted to put out an RFP to hire someone in the interim capacity and authorize the mayor to select someone who is neutral so that we can have someone in the seat and that motion passed. Is that under way right now? Mayor Bennett responded, Yes, halfway, Mr. Altman and the Mayor have had a discussion, will talk with Mr. Altman again tomorrow, Mr. Altman did get the RFP's and we will discuss tomorrow. As soon as the RFP draft that Mr. Altman sent to the Mayor has been reviewed, before she makes any decision it will come to council. Councilor Randolph asks do we know how long the RFP process will be? Mayor Bennett stated that she has just received the Va Code, they will go through and make sure they are utilizing the VPPA in the current manner and process and she will make sure council is kept up to speed. Councilor asked what are we doing in the interim? We need to discuss if Mr. Eliades would like to come back during the interim. Council will receive an email with any progression. Mr. Eliades stated that on the record if any member of council or the city manager has a question or needs him to look at needs him to look at the code, he will do it. He will handle whatever needs to be handled until we can get someone and he is not all that concerned about the compensation. The record reflects that per Mr. Eliades “someone stated that Mr. Eliades spoke eloquently about an issue” and for the record he stated that he a substitute judge and he cannot appear before Council and be political and that was a political speech by his brother Elliott, Council Denton corrected him and stated it was actually his Mr. Eliades dad, so let the record state that it was NOT Peter Eliades but his dad, Homer Eliades. Councilor Pelham stated that we consult with Mr. Peter Eliades on any issues within the next two weeks. Mayor Bennett asked Mr. Eliades if he would be available for the October 26 City Council Meeting and he stated that YES, he would. However, he is asking for compensation for the meeting.

A substitute motion on the floor by Councilor Pelham and seconded by Councilor Gore that we consult with Mr. Peter Eliades on any legal issues within the next two weeks and also the meeting on October 26 with the same compensation as the prior two meetings.

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

Motion Passes: 7 Ayes  
0 No

**INFORMATION/PRESENTATIONS**

**Financial Report**

Report given by Mr. Michael Terry, Financial Director for the City of Hopewell. Today we will cover the finance department progress report covering the period of July 1 through September 30. Topics to be covered will deal with the external reporting and other operating and support functions for the City, the development information and internal reporting. The three areas being talked about are the annual financial reporting progress, the auditor of public accounts reporting and the single audit. Now in the process of finalizing the 2018 Financial Audit Report. The single audit has been initiated with schools

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and they are working through that audit process. Under the Operational Report, he would like to focus on the state comp board, the city has done all of its submissions and are up to date from July through September, also have made progress with the Dept. of Criminal Justice. Over to budget development for FY22, as of the end of Sept. 30 the finance department has completed its review of the financial plan for FY21-22 and that document will be posted on the website at the end of the week and will also provide City Manager with hard copies for City Council. Over to internal reporting, reviewed activity for the period and as of September 30, there have been no cross fund transfers made by the City Manager. That concludes his report.

Councilor Gore asked Mr. Altman when are we going to hire an auditor to do the next year's audit. If we can get comments by council, we can get the RFP out by next week. Mayor Bennett made Council aware that the email was sent out by Mr. Altman prior, but he will resend the email and she asked that Council provide their comments for the RFP for the external auditor to Mr. Altman by Friday, October 15.

Councilor Gore asked City Manager Altman to please get with the IT Director to see if Council can get the Munis training. Does Council want to train individual or as a group? Preference is to do individual training, so each Councilor needs to reach out to IT department to schedule individual training and to copy City Manager Altman on their request to IT. Need follow-up on items that were discussed at prior meeting – those items will be discussed at the October 26 City Council meeting.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

**UB-1 – Time frame between boards and commissions**

Motion made by Councilor Randolph to authorize the City Clerk to advertise any standard term expirations at least two weeks prior to the term expiration and hold all submitted TBR applications for a specific Board or Commission and for any unexpected resignations to be advertised at least three weeks to the general public and all of the submitted TBR's need to be held until that three week period is completed.

Council Gore state that we voted at a recent meeting to direct the City Clerk immediately advertise any vacancies that we have and to include the vacancies in the City Council agenda packet under the Clerk's section and for her to come back with a recommendation and give presentation at an upcoming meeting. Council Randolph stated that she was unclear why this was on the agenda again. Mayor Bennett stated that maybe we should create an Ordinance so that there is something in place for the future. Councilor Randolph is willing to remove her motion from the floor.

**COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITIZENS**

Tavorise K. Marks, Hopewell Business Owner – State Farm Office. Would like to focus on public safety, wants to make sure that his business is secure when he is not around in the event himself or one of his employees have to call on someone to come and assist, wants to make sure the most well prepared, fast and most competent individual arrive to assist. Wants to make sure that his voice is heard as a new business owner as to the importance of public safety in the City of Hopewell. Education and Public Safety are paramount to success in any locality.

Councilor Gore stated a motion needed to be made to waive the rules as Mr. Marks spoke on an item that pertained to the agenda.

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**REGULAR BUSINESS**

**R-1 – Yearly Pay Increase Proposal**

Mayor Bennett turned the meeting over to City Manager Mr. Altman for the presentation by Chief Afzal for a review of the salaries of the Departments of Fire, Police and Public Works for a Public Safety Salary proposal.

Motion made by Councilor Gore and seconded by Vice Mayor Partin to extend the meeting to cover the R-1, public safety presentation.

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

Motion Passes: 7/0

Chief Afzal stated that the problem that the police department is facing right now is retention. Not having a hiring problem, we are having a retention problem. We went from in December of this past year to having a full staff to having 10 vacancies, we hired 7 people and we still have 10 vacancies. At the speed we are continuing to lose people it is definitely becoming a critical issue. A couple of issues in our City is that people are moving to another locality where they can earn more money and they are taking the training and expertise they learned here to their new job and then we have to start from the beginning again. By the time our officers are learning the community, they are off somewhere else for more salary. Status quo is not going to be good enough at this point. We are 20 people down in a 68 people department. Of the officers we have, 48 of them have less than 5 years of service with Hopewell. Officers make critical and split second decisions, the more experience you have the quicker you can respond. Only 14 officers have more than 10 years. We are recommending a grade 26 (\$49,000) the starting salary is more competitive. Getting rid of pay bands except for 26 and 27. Virginia officers coming from other jurisdictions who are already here, giving them credit for service up to 6 years. This does not include the Chief or Deputy Chief. We are talking about a \$1500 to \$1600 increase on a yearly basis as long as they are doing their job, which will max out at about \$78,000. The cost for just police officers is \$323,000 currently, to get to full staffing will cost \$27,769 and if all positions were filled you would add another \$111,000. The \$323,000 includes bringing officers matching their step with the years of service and those that have come from other jurisdictions, giving them credit for up to 6 years of their previous credit. If you add the telecommunications/dispatchers, then you add another \$73,000, because there are 12 of them (including one part timer) and then when you include sworn with them your cost goes up to \$396,000 and the yearly cost goes up to \$526,000. If you include animal services, you would add another \$20,000 and the cost goes up to \$416,000 and the following year you are asking for an additional \$130,000. If all employees are included which is in records, support staff, crime analyst, then you are talking about adding another \$44,670 to the payroll and now the cost becomes \$461,607 and the following year it would be about \$140,000 that you are adding to it.

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Podium was turned over to Ben Ruppert, Emergency Management Coordinator for his presentation for pay increases in the Fire Department. He indicated they are currently 10 members down and 7 of those are medics. In the tri-cities area we are the lowest paid fire department. We are considerably lower on our starting pay for medics (about \$8000) less. According to NFP national standards there should be a minimum number for a standard single family dwelling is supposed to be 17 firefighters to address the issue. We have a minimum of 13, which includes the Battalion Chief, also includes several medics, we are well below the national standard and that is if everyone is not out on a call, we usually have 2 to 3 ambulances out constantly. So if everyone is sitting in the station when we get a call, the max out is 13 on a regular day. Our average experience for our current firefighter is 2.2 years, 90% of staff are 5 years or less, 5% have 10 or more years of experience. We are at a deficit from the experience level. We have a tremendous call volume and a lot of inexperience. We are talking about grade 26, about 2 ½% steps for each year for each member, all members that are currently employed, moving them to the step where they would be based on their years of service and as far as our supervision it would be the same as what the police proposed. We would look at their years of service and make sure that they are at least 5% above that person below them with the same years of service. Would like the opportunity to give that additional 6 years of credit for full time employment fire fighters who come from full time employment from other jurisdictions. The fire chief or Mr. Ruppert's position were not included in these numbers. The cost of moving everybody that we have currently in the plan is \$225,308.86, that does not include the 10 vacancies, so over time as those vacancies are filled with the new starting pay that would be an additional \$43,173.68 annual increase and then when we look at the average annual cost of increase for each successive year we are talking about \$85,320.27. It is important to be able to retain the people that we hire. Mr. Altman said we would go the Unassigned Fund Balance to fund this. This is just officers and fire fighters at this point and that total is \$619,328.47 that is a total of the salaries plus the vacancies for the current year. The unassigned fund balance is \$7,203,072, it is the money that we have that are unassigned right now. Councilor Gore asked for clarity on what the rainy day fund balance is. Council Gore thinks that equity needs to be addressed.

Motion made by Vice Mayor Partin and seconded Councilor Denton that we approve the yearly step increase proposal as presented for the police, firemen and EMS, appropriate \$548,385.29 from the unassigned fund and to begin this effective November 1, 2021.

Substitute Motion made by Councilor Randolph and seconded by Councilor Gore by that we approve the yearly step increase proposal as presented for the police, firemen and EMS, appropriate \$619,328.47 from the unassigned fund and to begin this effective November 1, 2021 and to include the step increases and vacancies.

Mayor Bennett wanted it noted for the minutes we are approving the entire plan not only for this year but for the entire plan for the years that are set here.

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

Motion Passes: 7/0



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Motion made by Vice Mayor Partin and seconded by Councilor Randolph to authorize the City Manager to move the dollar value of \$619,328.47 from the unassigned funds to the police department and fire department salary line item.


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

Motion Passes: 7/0

City Manager Mr. Altman stated that he can prepare a budget amendment ordinance for the next meeting to make it official.

Meeting Adjourned

  
Patience Bennett, Mayor

  
Mollie Bess, City Clerk

