

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF CITY COUNCIL HELD JANUARY 11, 2022

A special council meeting of the Hopewell City Council was convened Tuesday, January 11, 2022, in the City Council Chambers, Municipal Building, 300 North Main Street, Hopewell, Virginia.

PRESENT: Patience A. Bennett, Mayor, Ward 7
John B. Partin, Jr., Vice Mayor, Ward 3
Deborah B. Randolph, Councilor, Ward 1
Arlene Holloway, Councilor, Ward 2 (Remote)
Janice B. Denton, Councilor, Ward 5
Brenda S. Pelham, Councilor, Ward 6 (Remote)
Jasmine E. Gore, Councilor, Ward 4 (Remote)

John M. Altman, Jr., City Manager
Cynthia E. Hudson, Acting City Attorney
Mollie P. Bess, City Clerk

ROLL CALL

Mayor Bennett opened the meeting at 6:30 PM.

Roll call:	Mayor Bennett	-	present
	Vice Mayor Partin	-	present
	Councilor Randolph	-	present
	Councilor Holloway	-	remote
	Councilor Denton	-	present
	Councilor Pelham	-	remote
	Councilor Gore	-	remote

Mayor Bennett asked the City Clerk if the absent Councilors would be joining the Council Meeting, Ms. Bess explained that they would be present in Closed Session for convenience purposes.

Vice Mayor Partin moved to go into Closed Session pursuant to Va. Code Section § 2.2-3711 (A)(1) for discussion, consideration, or interviews of prospective candidates for employment; assignment, appointment, promotion, performance, demotion, salaries, disciplining, or resignation of specific public officers, appointees, or employees of any public body (School Board, City Clerk) and for the purpose of discussion or consideration of the investment of public funds where competition or bargaining is involved, where, if made public initially, the financial interest of the governmental unit would be adversely affected. The motion was seconded by Councilor Denton.

Roll call:	Councilor Randolph	-	yes
	Vice Mayor Partin	-	yes
	Councilor Denton	-	yes
	Mayor Bennett	-	yes

Motion passed 4-0

RECONVENE OPEN MEETING

Motion to come out of closed session made by Vice Mayor Partin, which was seconded by Councilor Denton.

Roll call:	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

Pursuant to Va. 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?

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

Certification passed 7-0

Mayor Bennett moved to go into open meeting. Roll call responses were recorded as follows:

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

AMEND/ADOPT AGENDA

Councilor Pelham moved to amend the agenda to discuss the declaration of local emergencies. The motion was seconded by Councilor Gore. Before the vote was taken, Councilor Randolph moved to amend the agenda under Regular Business; item **C-6 Routine Approval of Work Sessions** to include a work session

for redistricting on February 3, 2022 at 6:00 PM for Council to discuss redistricting with the City Manager. Councilor Randolph’s motion was seconded by Councilor Denton. Mayor Bennett suggested voting on the amendments separately. Councilor Pelham asked for clarification from Mr. Altman when the due date to have the redistricting completed is. Mr. Altman stated that while redistricting is only due 60 days prior to the election, the City would like to have the issue addressed as soon as possible so that potential candidates for Council are aware of the ward parameters prior to June.

Mayor Bennett suggested voting on the regular meeting agenda before addressing consent agenda items. The decision to include declaration of local emergencies was to be placed under information and presentations before Mr. Michael Terry’s Financial Report, if the vote passed. Councilor Randolph expressed that she would like Council to discuss with the City Attorney whether or not the declaration was necessary. Mayor Bennett stated that the City Attorney’s advice on the topic would be sought if the motion passed to place the item on the agenda.

Roll call:

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

Motion passed 4-3

AMEND/ADOPT CONSENT AGENDA

To address Councilor Randolph’s motion to amend under **C-6 Routine Approval of Work Sessions** to include a work session for redistricting, the consent agenda was voted on before the start of the regular session.

Roll call:

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

INFORMATION/PRESENTATIONS

City Council Calendar – Mayor Bennett introduced two versions of City Council calendar proposals, the first featuring one Regular Council Meeting per month – the minimum requirement per the City Charter – every second Tuesday of each month. The second calendar featured Regular Council Meetings on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month.

Councilor Denton, stated that she was in favor of adopting the one meeting per month schedule. She cited that meetings could always be added should the need arise. She also stated that it would give the City Manager and the City Clerk more time to put the agenda together. Councilor Pelham disagreed, stating that rarely is Council able to maintain just two meetings per month, often needing to schedule additional sessions to address City issues. Councilor Randolph agreed with Councilor Pelham that there are many items are being removed from the agenda or continued to a later date. Councilor Pelham also stated that City Council cannot afford to meet once a month. She also suggested that for the months of November and December there only be one meeting per month due to the holiday season. Councilor Partin moved to amend the Council Calendar, eliminating a second meeting during summer months to allow for family vacations, removing the meeting on dates 6/28/22, 7/26/22, 8/23/22, 11/22/22, and 12/27/22 from the calendar. Mayor Bennett called for the vote.

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

Motion passed 4-3

Broadband Coverage & Munis for Schools Update – Dr. Concetta Manker began her presentation, highlighting the process through which the City was helping Hopewell schools implement Munis and the timeline that was followed leading up to the acceptance of the contract with Munis, choosing their opting for the SaaS option. While Council had a number of questions from security revolving around cloud-based server hosting to clarification regarding budget dollar allocation, Dr. Manker was able to address concerns of the Council with some assistance from Mr. Altman.

Councilor Gore motioned to extend the meeting until completion of R-1. The motion was seconded by Mayor Bennett.

Roll call:	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

Dr. Manker then moved the presentation over to address Broadband for Hopewell Communities, highlighting some of the perks, thanking the businesses hosting the equipment necessary to offer public Wi-Fi, and demonstrating how the program positively affects the community.

Councilor Pelham inquired about the ongoing cost to continue to provide this program, and Mr. Altman answered; they both agreed they could discuss more in depth over budget works sessions.

Councilor Gore brought up, after Dr. Manker had left the podium, she had advocated to hire a broadband manager when the next budget session comes around.

Declaration of Local Emergency

Councilor Randolph was hesitant to adopt the declaration of local emergency, because she felt that the constituents would have limited access to speak with their councilors, if they were going to attend Council Meetings via phone or Zoom attendance.

Councilor Denton expressed fears regarding the risks surrounding COVID-19, and that she would prefer not declare local emergency.

Councilor Gore noted that the purpose of declaring local emergency was not to deny citizens access to Council, but to allow council to attend council meetings via Zoom. She cited the continued risk of COVID-19, and noted that if citizen engagement was the concern that IT could become involved and generate more options for remote engagement.

Mayor Bennett followed up on Councilor Gore's concerns, noting that Council could not meet a quorum if City Council members contracted COVID-19 or be exposed. The declaration of local emergency would allow council to meet even in the event of one or more Council members needed to quarantine.

Cynthia Hudson, Acting City Attorney, then explained the legality and potential necessity for the declaration.

Councilor Pelham explained that she was in favor of the declaration, mentioning that regarding her involvement in education, she encountered a lot of high risk groups and did not care to potentially expose herself or the children to COVID-19 unjustly. She also noted that the council sessions were available to the citizens electronically and their involvement was not hindered in any way.

Councilor Partin and Councilor Pelham asked Mrs. Hudson for clarification if the declaration would interfere with Council policy to require at least four Councilors present physically on the dais to reach a quorum; Mrs. Hudson stated that she would have to review the information and return with an answer.

Councilor Gore pointed out that the Declaration of Local Emergency would eliminate the necessity for four councilors be present on the dais, as was the case during the height of the pandemic, and that no further information would be needed to vote on the matter. As a result, Councilor Gore moved to authorize the city of Hopewell's Director of Emergency Management to execute the local declaration of emergency in response to COVID-19 and all active COVID-19 variants as written. The motion was seconded by Councilor Pelham.

Roll call:	Councilor Randolph	-	no
	Councilor Holloway	-	yes

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

Motion passed 5-2

Financial Report

Finance Director, Michael Terry delivered the financial report. Councilor Pelham asked that he provide the status of the FY2019 audit, and asked when the audit for 2018 would be complete. Mr. Terry directed City Council members to the agenda packet which contained a draft of FY2018 which had a projected date of completion of January, 2022. Councilor Pelham asked if working with an auditor for FY2019 would assist. City Manager, March Altman stated that no work had been done on that yet. Michael Terry continued his presentation, and that the audit process was delayed by school system because they had to re-do an entire fiscal year of work.

Mr. Terry briefly reviewed the upcoming fiscal years and concluded his report. Councilor Randolph motioned for Council to consider having Mr. Altman to invite the Treasurer and School Superintendent to the March 8, 2022 City Council meeting to give updates on status of 2019 audits. Vice Mayor Partin seconded the motion.

Roll call:	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

After some discussion amongst Council regarding the expenditure of COVID relief funds, Councilor Gore motioned to hold a work session on March 22nd, 2022 to review past budget resolutions/ordinances to discuss authority in limitations as it relates to transferring city funds. Councilor Randolph seconded the motion.

Roll call:	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

Rental Inspection Program

Tevya Griffin, Director of Planning and Development, began her presentation on the Rental Inspection Program Update. The program was first initiated in 2005, and there was no penalty fee, no initial inspection, and no periodic inspections. She addressed the exemption of rental inspection for family members – addressing that there was no way to prove familial relation. She proposed a number of fees and possible liens for the City to be able to collect monies based on the program.

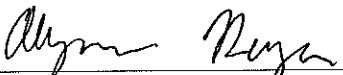
After Director Griffin’s presentation, Councilor Randolph asked why the part time assistant to collect these fees had such little experience. Ms. Griffin explained that the employee in question was one of a few applicants, and had Munis experience. Councilor Randolph then asked about certificates of compliance, and enforcement regarding renting to new tenants. Mrs. Griffin stated that the inspections would likely have to be requested by incoming tenants, noting that many landlords likely wouldn’t request the inspection on their own. Councilor Gore thanked Mrs. Griffin and stated that she would have the City Attorney get in contact with her to flesh out the legality and enforcement of the penalties. City Manager March Altman then offered that the rental community would like be upset, and asked City Council not to back down on the program.

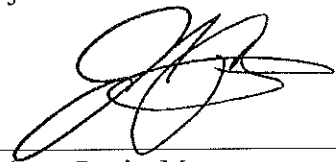
Councilor Gore moved that Director Griffin provide documentation to City Attorney to draft an ordinance for council to review. Councilor Randolph seconded the motion.

Roll call:	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

Per the vote to adjourn at the completion of R1, the Meeting was adjourned.


Alyson Reyna, Clerk Pro Tem


Johnny Partin, Mayor