

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF CITY COUNCIL HELD FEBRUARY 14, 2023

A regular council meeting of the Hopewell City Council was convened on Tuesday, February 14, 2023, in the City Council Chambers, Municipal Building, 300 North Main Street, Hopewell, Virginia.

PRESENT: John B. Partin, Jr., Mayor, Ward 3
Jasmine E. Gore, Vice Mayor, Ward 4
Rita Joyner, Councilor, Ward 1
Michael Harris, Councilor, Ward 2
Janice B. Denton, Councilor, Ward 5
Brenda S. Pelham, Councilor, Ward 6
Dominic Holloway, Councilor, Ward 7

Dr. Concetta Manker, Interim City Manager
Danielle Smith, City Attorney
Alyson Reyna, Myasia Jackson, City Clerks Pro Tem

ROLL CALL

Mayor Partin opened the meeting at 6:30 PM. Roll call was taken, as follows:

Mayor Partin	-	present
Vice Mayor Gore	-	present
Councilor Joyner	-	present
Councilor Harris	-	present
Councilor Denton	-	present
Councilor Pelham	-	present
Councilor Holloway	-	present

Quorum established

Councilor Holloway moved to go into Closed Session pursuant to Va. Code Section § 2.2-3711 (A) to discuss and consider business contracts and personnel matters, including board and commission appointments; the assignment and performance of specific appointee and employees of City Council; and to the extent of such discussion will be aided thereby, (A)(4) for the protection of the privacy of individuals personal matters not related to public business. The motion was seconded by Councilor Denton.

Roll call: Councilor Joyner - yes
Councilor Harris - yes
Mayor Partin - yes
Vice Mayor Gore - yes
Councilor Denton - yes
Councilor Pelham - yes
Councilor Holloway - yes

Motion passed 7-0

RECONVENE OPEN MEETING

Vice Mayor Gore moved for Council to come out of Closed Session, seconded by Councilor Joyner. Councilor Harris was not present on the dais at the time of roll call.

Roll call:	Councilor Joyner	-	yes
	Councilor Harris	-	
	Mayor Partin	-	yes
	Vice Mayor Gore	-	yes
	Councilor Denton	-	yes
	Councilor Pelham	-	yes
	Councilor Holloway	-	yes

Motion passed 6-0

WORK SESSION

WS-1: Chris Ward began his presentation on the Zoning Amendment Request to add “Boarding Kennel” use to a pet shop in the B1 zoning district. He indicated that, in addition to holding a public hearing and sending letters to adjacent property owners of the requesters of the Conditional Use Permit, staff and the Planning Commission were both in favor of the zoning amendment request. Councilor Pelham asked, for point of reference, what Mr. Ward meant by “individual CUP”; Mr. Ward explained that the zoning amendment request, if adopted, would allow any business, not just the requesters, to add “Boarding Kennel” to use of “Pet Shop.” Councilor Joyner commented, speaking highly of the business that initiated the process, as did Councilor Denton.

WS-2: Stephen Edwards began his presentation about the Stormwater Resilience Plan and Overview, he highlighted his team, their completed and current projects, an overview of the scope of their duties and responsibilities within the City, and mentioned the community outreach they have achieved. Mr. Edwards also noted some deficiencies within the Stormwater team such as staffing, funding, and oversight of code violations. Councilor Gore asked for point of clarity, what was stopping them from addressing their supervisors directly regarding code violations and the necessary repairs needed. Mr. Edwards responded that, under previous management, his staff had faced retaliation. Vice Mayor Gore recommended seeing the City Manager about such problems. Councilor Pelham asked how projects were adopted, and Mr. Edwards explained that they are moved through the process via bid.

Councilor Denton asked for point of clarity on the creation of a Stormwater division as a separate entity from Public Works. Mr. Edwards again explained it was to defend his team against previous retaliation, and stated that Vice Mayor Gore’s solution of speaking to the City Manager would likely suffice in response to the issue. Councilor Holloway asked if the Stormwater projects were done on a priority basis. Mr. Edwards confirmed that often times the projects are considered emergencies and handle them based on severity.

AMEND/ADOPT AGENDA

Vice Mayor Gore moved to adopt the agenda. The motion was seconded by Councilor Denton.

Roll call:

Councilor Joyner	-	yes
Councilor Harris	-	yes
Mayor Partin	-	yes
Vice Mayor Gore	-	yes
Councilor Denton	-	yes
Councilor Pelham	-	
Councilor Holloway	-	yes

Motion passed 6-0

AMEND/ADOPT CONSENT AGENDA

Councilor Joyner moved to adopt the consent agenda. The motion was seconded by Councilor Denton.

Roll call:

Councilor Joyner	-	yes
Councilor Harris	-	yes
Mayor Partin	-	yes
Vice Mayor Gore	-	yes
Councilor Denton	-	yes
Councilor Pelham	-	yes
Councilor Holloway	-	yes

Motion passed 7-0

INFORMATION/PRESENTATIONS

Community Crime Update

Police Chief, AJ Starke presented the monthly crime summary. Chief Starke gave an overview of YTD crime statistics, and highlighted the number of violent crimes, as well as drug crimes and overdoses. He mentioned the various solutions that Hopewell Police Department have explored, including assistance from State Police, partnership with the US attorney’s office, citizen’s academy, neighborhood watch programs, and the Violent Crime Taskforce.

Financial Report

Finance Director, Michael Terry began his monthly financial report. He stated that the FY2019 auditor had been working on a draft, and the projected completion would be by the end of February, 2023. Mr. Terry noted that the FY2023-2024 budget was upcoming and informed City Council that as of the time of presentation, the budget timeline was on track.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

PH-1 Chris Ward presented a public hearing for the Conditional Use Permit for Cedar Lane. He explained that the initial work session regarding the CUP was in October, 2022 and denial was recommended at the time. Contact with the applicant was attempted on several occasions with no response, explaining the gap in time since the first work session. Denial was recommended due to the style of the proposed house being out of character in comparison to others in the neighborhood. Councilor

Harris asked what constitutes out of character. Chris Ward explained that characteristics such as size, style, and building materials determine what is characteristic/uncharacteristic. Councilor Joyner noted that the lot in question was in her ward, and agreed that the house would be out of character.

Wayne Stewart, citizen of Ward 1, came to speak at the podium that he was in favor of City Council voting to deny the application and that he would like to see a house similar to others in the neighborhood. Diane Stewart, citizen of Ward 1, stated that she volunteered at the local food pantry, and that she had seen the owner of the lot working there after not seeing him for a few months; suggesting perhaps he had been in legal trouble and was serving community service.

Councilor Denton moved to deny the request. Vice Mayor Gore seconded the motion.

Roll call:	Councilor Joyner	-	yes
	Councilor Harris	-	yes
	Mayor Partin	-	yes
	Vice Mayor Gore	-	yes
	Councilor Denton	-	yes
	Councilor Pelham	-	yes
	Councilor Holloway	-	yes

Motion passed 7-0

PH-2 Chris Ward began his second public hearing regarding the Spot Blight ordinance. He explained an overview of the program, how scoring worked, the wording of the ordinance, and abatement plans.

Councilor Holloway moved to declare 905 Arlington Rd, 3104 St. Charles St, and 1800 Trenton Ave., as blighted, and the approval of demolition as an effective abatement plan for each property. The motion was seconded by Councilor Denton.

Roll call:	Councilor Joyner	-	yes
	Councilor Harris	-	yes
	Mayor Partin	-	yes
	Vice Mayor Gore	-	yes
	Councilor Denton	-	yes
	Councilor Pelham	-	yes
	Councilor Holloway	-	yes

Motion passed 7-0

COMMUNICATION FROM CITIZENS

Iry Chandler, citizen, Ward 5, expressed concern with her personal property tax doubling. She explained that as a senior citizen on a fixed income, and that she had to split her payments just to meet the deadline. Mayor Partin noted that the deadline had been extended, but that he understood her frustrations. Ms. Chandler asked Council to explain why the tax rates were suddenly so high. Mayor Partin suggested she speak with the Commissioner of Revenue regarding assessment rates. Ms. Chandler said that she had been to the Commissioner's office and still did not understand. Mayor Partin explained that it was up to the Commissioner to explain and give an understanding. Ms. Chandler asked if there was tax relief for seniors and various council members confirmed that there is a program in place. Vice Mayor Gore

clarified on Mayor Partin's suggestion to see the Commissioner of Revenue, indicating that position was a state position and was the reason City Council could not provide more information.

Earline Allen, citizen, Ward 6, stated she had an issue with standing water in her driveway. She noted that this had been an issue for over a year, despite having reached out to the City regarding the issue. She indicated that this created a dangerous situation for herself, as she was elderly. Mayor Partin introduced Mr. Stephen Edwards in the pews for Ms. Allen and stated that he would be happy to help. Ms. Allen expressed that she was also upset by personal property taxes and that her taxes went up \$200 from last year. Mayor Partin suggested she set an appointment with the Commissioner of Revenue.

Ed Houser, citizen, Ward 5, expressed dissatisfaction with personal property tax increases and stated that his home value was assessed 226% higher than his last assessment. Mr. Houser then stated that he had been to the City Council meeting on February 9 regarding OneHopewell, and questioned council on the funds for the program.

REGULAR BUSINESS

R-1 Stormwater Manager, Stephen Edwards presented to City Council the possibility of rolling stormwater fees into personal property taxes. He explained that, through data integrators, a percentage of stormwater fees paid by citizens are not collected by the City. Vice Mayor Gore noted that the topic of bringing stormwater fee collection in house had been discussed various times throughout the years. She asked Dr. Manker to look into all revenue sources with the contractor, then asked Mr. Edwards if he meant just his part of the contract or ending business with the contractor altogether. Dr. Manker noted that no action was required at the time of the presentation, it was simply a way to explore various options to improve revenue. Councilor Harris asked Mr. Edwards if he thought it was in the best interest of the citizens to add to real estate taxes at such a volatile time surrounding the issue. Councilor Denton was skeptical about being able to collect 100% of the tax, and expressed the need for a way to charge the owner of the property, not the tenant of the property. She also expressed that it would need to be looked at more broadly regarding the full scope of the contract, rather than just the stormwater fee.

Councilor Holloway agreed with Councilor Denton, noting that property owners had already been burdened in recent times and would likely pass the fee along to their tenants. He felt that it would be best for council to look at the whole contract and not just stormwater if it were pursued. Councilor Pelham agreed with Councilor Holloway that property owners would likely pass the fees to their tenants, but that she was in favor of taking the billing in house. Vice Mayor Gore stated that she had asked for the contract to be reviewed previously, because while the contractor's function was to collect revenue, if revenue was being lost during the collection, then it would be best to end the contract. Councilor Joyner thanked Mr. Edwards and stated that she was in favor of the idea. Mayor Partin thanked Mr. Edwards, and noted that any recaptured funds could be used for infrastructure products. He noted that the fee should be charged to the homeowner, because that is the person creating the impervious cover, creating runoff.

R-2 Interim City Manager, Dr. Concetta Manker presented to City Council a staff recommendation for the allocation of salary savings for the purchase of additional police uniforms. Vice Mayor Gore moved to approve the allocation. Councilor Joyner seconded the motion. Councilor Pelham asked if it was necessary to spend salary savings. Dr. Manker stated that it was ideal, as the funds had already been appropriated in the salary line item. After some discussion amongst Council, it's decided that further breakdown of budgetary discussion should be addressed in Closed Session. Councilor Holloway expressed some concern about utilizing salary savings, suggesting that council should be wary of departments seeking excess funding at the start of a fiscal year and misappropriating it later.

Roll call:	Councilor Joyner	-	yes
	Councilor Harris	-	yes
	Mayor Partin	-	yes
	Vice Mayor Gore	-	yes
	Councilor Denton	-	yes
	Councilor Pelham	-	no
	Councilor Holloway	-	yes

Motion passed 6-1

REPORTS OF THE CITY MANAGER

Interim City Manager, Dr. Concetta Manker, presented to City Council options for bringing utility payments in-house. At 9:30, Councilor Holloway motioned to adjourn. Due to unfinished business items, Councilor Holloway withdrew the motion. Dr. Manker highlighted some options for citizens to make their payments, detailing the cost of each option. Vice Mayor Gore asked council and Dr. Manker if they were open to the idea of going for a bid to explore collection options, stating that the current contract was not written well enough to collect the full amount of money, delinquent payments in particular. Mayor Partin asked if Council had interest in taking just the stormwater fee and applying it to the real estate tax, to which a few councilors said no. He asked if there was interest in bidding and lowering the contract amount. Dr. Manker noted that this had been explored previously, and was found to be more expensive than the current contract. Councilor Holloway inquired about a line item in the presentation, noting that it would cost \$50,000 more to bring payments in-house. Vice Mayor Gore noted that, despite the increase, it will likely allow the City to capture more of the total revenue. Councilor Denton stated that she liked the idea of citizens having a place to go and pay their bill, but was unhappy with the potential cost of \$1,000,000 and would prefer to table the discussion until next year's budget works.

Vice Mayor Gore moved to extend the meeting to finish the utility payment item. Mayor Partin seconded the motion.

Roll call:	Councilor Joyner	-	yes
	Councilor Harris	-	yes
	Mayor Partin	-	yes
	Vice Mayor Gore	-	yes
	Councilor Denton	-	no
	Councilor Pelham	-	yes
	Councilor Holloway	-	yes

Motion passed 6-1

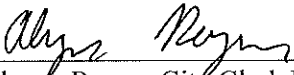
Vice Mayor Gore asked Dr. Manker to clarify for the record what the line item was for \$464,000. Dr. Manker explained that this was already money being paid to the contracting service to perform administrative services, including collecting payments. Citizens have made complaints about not reaching customer service, not receiving bills, and not having a physical location to pay. Vice Mayor Gore asked council if there was a consensus that all were in favor of Dr. Manker pursuing the rental option in more detail, all in favor.

ADJOURN

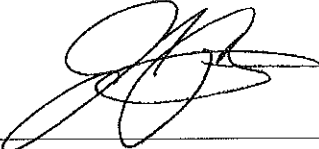
Councilor Holloway motioned to adjourn.

Ayes – 7

Nays – 0



Alyson Reyna, City Clerk Pro Tem



Johnny Partin, Mayor