

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF  
HOPEWELL CITY COUNCIL AND SCHOOL BOARD HELD MARCH 1, 2018**

A Special Meeting of City Council and the School Board of the City of Hopewell, Virginia, was held Thursday, March 1, 2018, at 6:00 p.m. at Carter G. Woodson Middle School, 1000 Winston Churchill Drive, Hopewell, Virginia.

PRESENT: Jackie M. Shornak, Mayor  
Jasmine E. Gore, Vice Mayor  
Christina Luman-Bailey, Councilor  
Arlene Holloway, Councilor  
Anthony J. Zevgolts, Councilor  
Janice B. Denton, Councilor  
Brenda S. Pelham, Councilor

John M. Altman, Jr., City Manager  
Stefan M. Calos, City Attorney  
Ronnieye L. Arrington, City Clerk

ABSENT: Charles Dane, Assistant City Manager

PRESENT: Christopher G. Reber, Chairman  
Linda E. Hyslop Vice-Chairman  
Shirl A. Jefferson  
Wesley T. Joyner  
Nelson G. Cuffey  
Melody D. Hackney, Superintendent

**ROLL CALL**

Mayor Shornak opened the meeting at 6:03 p.m. Roll call was taken as follows:

Mayor Shornak	-	present
Vice Mayor Gore	-	present
Councilor Luman-Bailey	-	present
Councilor Holloway	-	present
Councilor Zevgolts	-	present
Councilor Denton	-	present
Councilor Pelham	-	present

**PRAYER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

Prayer was led by Christopher Reber, Chairman of the School Board, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

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**WORK SESSION**

Dr. Hackney presented the agenda. She acknowledged Mr. Altman's recent appointment as City Manager. She also noted that the students had prepared the meal and gave them accolades for their work. She went on to note that we are all one team, and acknowledged how much the City has shown support of education and the school system in the past regarding budgeting. She said that, with recent violence in schools including an episode at Carter G. Woodson, their emphasis was on safety and security for the children.

Dr. Hackney then gave a PowerPoint presentation on anticipated revenues, retirement/attrition, anticipated savings, VRS rate decrease, and other specific budget initiatives. She shared that the School Board was requesting \$2.1 million in additional funds. She noted that, although there was an anticipated increase of \$300,000 in health insurance costs, their goal was to not pass those costs on to the City.

Dr. Hackney then went over the results of the school classification and compensation study. She said that the study revealed they were below market standards in several areas. Councilor Pelham said that she noticed that the Admin and Clerical positions were listed together for an 89% increase. She noted that those two positions had very different salaries, and asked if there was a different percentage for each. Dr. Hackney said that each position was slated for an 89% increase. Dr. Hackney also hit upon staffing needs (teachers, bus drivers, custodial staff, etc.). She advised that Harry E. James School was still not accredited, and that this was a priority for the school system.

Dr. Hackney gave a list of future funding considerations, including career and technical program expansion, elementary school expansion, dual enrollment tuition costs, incentives to recruit and retain quality teachers, school safety and security, etc. When she spoke of school safety, Mr. Cuffey asked her to advise all about the recent threat to the school. Dr. Hackney described the recent gun threat made by a student Wednesday of this week. That student was suspended and the threat assessed. However, the following day, another student (believed sibling of the first child) continued the threat. Even though it was determined that this was not a credible threat, parents removed 200 students from the school in fear. Dr. Hackney reassured all present that the threat had been handled appropriately and that police and parents had been properly notified. Dr. Hackney then made a report of preliminary safety and security priorities, including hiring an expert consultant, SRO's, locking mechanisms for the doors (currently, the doors can only be locked from the outside with a key), more mental health experts, video surveillance, emergency communication system, etc. Dr. Hackney stated that these additional safety initiatives would cost approximately \$614,000. Mr. Reber noted that the safety figures were only recently put together. He stated that even though the schools were all state compliant regarding safety, the state was behind the times and both it and the City of Hopewell needed to make changes and updates.

Vice Mayor Gore stated that the conversation regarding safety initiatives and updates is excellent. Regarding the amount, Vice Mayor Gore stated that whatever was necessary for children safety was well worth spending. She also stated that she would like for the School Board and the City Council to have more joint meetings to share information. Dr. Hackney agreed with that idea, and said perhaps a subcommittee would also work.

Mayor Shornak thanked the School Board for its presentation. She said she was happy they were addressing safety issues. She addressed Woodlawn School and its myriad needs and stated she is glad the school board is focused on that. The mayor also thanked the chefs who prepared the meal, as well as the wait staff. She said the meal was delicious and the service was excellent. She also said she had no problem with the budget request presented by the Board.

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Councilor Luman-Bailey asked if there was any room for creativity within the budget. She said that she believed teacher retention could be improved if we required the teachers to live in Hopewell, and aided them by offering vouchers, low interest loans, etc. Mr. Joyner answered Councilor Luman-Bailey by saying that while those incentives may prove helpful, sometimes there is nothing better to entice people than cash, but he did think the voucher idea was great.

Councilor Denton said that she had spoken with Dr. Hackney last year regarding retention of teachers and asked if that had improved. Dr. Hackney said they are just starting to monitor that information by use of the exit interview. She also said that they made the reason why the teacher left one of the questions asked at the exit interview, along with what would it have taken for them to stay.

Councilor Gore remarked to Mr. Joyner that the Strategic Plan contained a section on providing housing for use in retention. She recommended to him that he contact Tevya Griffin, the Director of Development. Councilor Gore then asked how New Hope was doing since its inception. Dr. Hackney noted that New Hope did not have all of the programs offered by the regular schools since New Hope was a school for students who were unable to attend regular schools for various reasons. She also noted that the goal of New Hope was to incorporate those students back into regular school.

Councilor Pelham asked if Dr. Hackney had any figures for why teachers leave, other than salary. Dr. Hackney reiterated that they are just starting to gather that information.

Councilor Zevgolis thanked the School Board for its presentation. He said that it was premature for the City to make a decision about the budget just now as the General Assembly had yet to make any decisions about the Governor's proposed budget. He said he was very interested in the reasons people leave the City. He stated that state law allows the City to offer up to \$25,000 towards housing. He also wanted to know about children who get free lunch, and wondered if there were any unsuccessful programs that the school could cut. Dr. Hackney advised that, through federal funding, all of Hopewell's children get free lunch. She also said that they are very good about cutting any program that is not advantageous to the children.

Councilor Holloway commended the board because of their interest in advocating for the education of Hopewell's children, and for their hard work.

Mr. Cuffey thanked Councilor Zevgolis for his comments. He noted that Mr. Joyner was a watchdog for teacher retention, and that he worked very hard towards that goal. Mr. Cuffey also noted that during the recent active shooter threat, his children (who attend the school) verified that they had been trained by the school what to do and whether or not to evacuate.

Ms. Hyslop said she would like to not only retain teachers, but for our students to graduate and come back to Hopewell to raise their children, and for those children to do the same.

Ms. Jefferson noted that Hopewell has great students. She said that she was not as confident about the safety issue, and that when the threat occurred she kept her grandchildren at home.

Mr. Joyner noted all of the hardships and encumbrances to being a teacher, including low salary, continuing education requirements, licensing requirements, etc.

Mr. Reber thanked the Councilors for their time and attention.

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**ADJOURN**

At 7:43 p.m., motion was made by Councilor Luman-Bailey and seconded by Councilor Denton. Upon the roll call, the vote resulted:

Mayor Shornak	-	yes
Vice Mayor Gore	-	yes
Councilor Luman-Bailey	-	yes
Councilor Holloway	-	yes
Councilor Zevgolis	-	yes
Councilor Denton	-	yes
Councilor Pelham	-	yes

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Jackie M. Shornak, Mayor

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Ronnieye L. Arrington, City Clerk