



**MINUTES**  
**CITY OF COLONIAL HEIGHTS, VIRGINIA**  
**Special Meeting of the Planning Commission**  
**Tuesday, April 4, 2023**  
**5:00 p.m.**

**I. Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m.

**II. Roll Call**

Present:

Mr. Hartson

Mrs. Schiff

Mrs. Hamilton

Mrs. Levenson-Melvin

Mr. Kohan

Absent:

Mr. Kwiek

Mr. Wade

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**III. Determination of Quorum**

A quorum was determined.

**IV. Work Session Item**

City's proposed FY2024-2028 Capital Improvements Plan (CIP)

Mr. Smith made an overview presentation of the CIP saying the CIP has a total of \$213.67 million in project costs that include both funded and unfunded sections. The projects proposed for funding FY24- FY 28 is \$22.26 million which is slightly higher than the number indicated in the CIP document shared earlier with the Commissioners. Local match funds for Boulevard Spur of \$79,901 need to be added to FY23-24 appropriations which change the overall FY23-24 funded value to \$2,653,559. This will reflect some changes to the totals of certain line items in the document.

Mr. Hartson asked Mr. Smith to what extent the increase in the interest rate has impacted the City's ability to borrow. Mr. Smith said that the prevailing rate of interest would be of interest to the City if it chooses to borrow in the coming year. Mrs. Rhodes, the Director of

Finance shared that the agents that the City has been consulting on these matters have said that the rates should settle down in a year or two which would be the timeframe that the City might be considering for borrowing. Mr. Smith added that the City would re-evaluate the situation at the time it chooses to officially borrow.

Mr. Smith presented a summary of the first-year (FY 24) projects and related costs. He said the Auxiliary City Hall parking lot project is to build an expansion of the City Hall parking. The houses that existed on 218 Highland and 211 James have been removed. The Engineering Department is working on the design of the parking area which will take a few months. He added that these parcels will come back before the Planning Commission for rezoning to RO (Residential Office) to match City Hall from its current Zoning which is RL-Low density residential.

The Ridge Road Culvert Replacement project has been prioritized early in the CIP because the City has been awarded revenue-sharing funds from VDOT for a reconstruction project of a portion of the Ridge Road. The drainage culvert at Ridge Road is at the same location where the work is planned. Hence this culvert replacement needs to be done at the same time.

The Boulevard at Westover was a part of the previous CIP but it is back on the current one with an increased cost estimate. The City's share is \$39,313 which could allow the City to get increased funding of \$250,000 from VDOT. Mr. Flippen added that though no assurances have been obtained from VDOT on their part of the funding, it is promising that the funds would come through once the Council approves the drawings and plans. Mr. Hartson inquired if the litigation was resolved. Mr. Fisher responded that it has been resolved in concept, but the Truist Bank trust holder needs to be still satisfied. Mr. Fisher added that the City has the authority to do the work.

Some of the other important projects that Mr. Smith shared are Branders Bridge right turn lane extension which shows external funding, the Lakeview Avenue modernization, Phase 1 which is going on currently, Colonial Heights High School sidewalks showing additional City match funds, Boulevard Spur Appomattox Greenway Trail, White Bank Park & Fort Clifton Asphalt Path Renovation to replace the paths in the two parks, and the Gateway Roundabout improvements is an addition to previous \$50,000 City funding. The Gateway Roundabout project was discussed at the City Council retreat. The idea is to put flag poles at the center island with lights, landscape, additional stamped concrete, and a City sign which requires VDOT approval. Lastly, the CHHS fine arts renovation, the CHHS front entrance, and administration area projects of the school were also discussed.

Mr. Smith shared that there are other projects in the funded section in the CIP for the later years which have to be appropriated year by year.

Mr. Smith said the Stormwater transfer would be for the Total Maximum Daily Load project which needs to be done in order for the City to meet the environmental requirements to reduce the Chesapeake Bay impact. The City has been purchasing credits towards this and this year will be the last to meet the 2023 goal. The 2028 goal is not reflected in the plan currently and will have to be worked into the upcoming CIPs. Mr. Kohan asked if there were any legal implications if the City did not meet the requirements and if there was a deadline

by which the City needs to meet this requirement. Mr. Flippen responded that the City needs to meet sequences which are 5% by 2018 and up to 40% by 2023 and 100% by 2028. Back in 2018, the City met the requirements through street sweeping but since the strategy changed, the City switched to buying credits. He explained that the City was initially planning to invest this money in projects like stream restoration within the City. But the study showed an investment requirement of \$7 million to meet the 40% target as opposed to the purchase of credits which requires an investment of \$ 1.6 million. Technically it has been referred to as an unfunded mandate.

Mr. Smith congratulated Mr. Flippen's team for their efforts which have resulted in the City getting a grant of \$311,000 reimbursing the City for the previous funds paid.

Mr. Hartson requested Mrs. Schiff to present her ideas from the position paper to the Commissioners. Mrs. Schiff said the Post office at Pickwick is a privately-owned building of historical significance that is not kept well and suggested that the City consider purchasing the building and putting it to good use like creating additional office spaces. Since the building is located in the Historic District, grants would be available for the revitalization of the building. Mr. Hartson asked if there was currently overcrowding in the City Hall. Mr. Smith responded that the City offices could use some additional space in the building. He added that once the Health Department moves out of their current building, some of the city offices will be reallocated to reduce overcrowding in City Hall.

Mr. Hartson asked the Commissioners if they saw merit in Mrs. Schiff's proposal. The Commissioners discussed that the renovation cost would be substantial and agreed that the idea was visionary, had merit, and was worthy of consideration. The Commissioners discussed the possibilities of the project being eligible for historic tax credits.

Mr. Fisher asked Mrs. Schiff what her source of information was for the property assessment value of the Post Office of \$450,000 that she shared in her paper as the 2022 assessment value that he had was \$196,000. Mrs. Schiff and the other Commissioners agreed that the lower assessment value was good news if the City would like to consider purchasing the property.

Mrs. Schiff said she would like the idea investigated by the City. Mr. Smith suggested that the Staff have an opportunity to take a look at it and discuss it with the City Council. He added that knowing where it is located and tax credits being available, a developer may be interested in restoring the property and keeping it in its existing use and may have something attractive to bring people to it.

Mrs. Schiff shared the idea of repairing and repaving Hamilton Avenue and Meridian Avenue. Mr. Hartson shared that there is an unfunded project in the CIP to pave Hamilton Avenue.

Mrs. Schiff remarked that the lighting at the east end of Temple Avenue is almost non-existent. The part of Temple Avenue from Conduit Road to the bridge going to Prince George County is very dark and should be evaluated. Also, the corner of Temple Avenue and Conduit Road has a stream with old trees and bushes ruining the potential for a scenic spot.

This could be cleared and grass sewn on the banks of the stream. It would provide a nice view at very little cost. She also proposed the concerned department check the feasibility of a project to paint the fire hydrants to make them more visible.

*A copy of the position paper prepared by Mrs. Schiff is annexed as Annexure 1.*

Mr. Hartson asked Mr. Smith why projects #4-8 in the funded portion of the CIP do not show any money assigned to them. Mr. Smith responded that they are shown in the further out year time periods.

Mr. Hartson asked Mr. Smith if the Gateway Roundabout project was approved by the Council based on the recommendation by the Planning Commission, and if it would be implemented in the next budget year. Mr. Smith responded that if it is approved then it would be implemented earlier than that. Mr. Hartson and Mr. Kohan asked if the power and water facilities are available for lighting the flag pole and watering the landscape. Mr. Skalak responded that both power and water were available in the roundabout. Mr. Hartson suggested installing a four-sided monument sign that is lit at the roundabout.

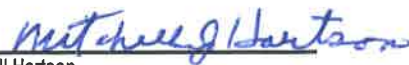
Mr. Kohan asked Mr. Hoover, the Fire Chief, which one was a higher priority - the building improvement works for Stations 1 and 2 or the replacement of equipment. Mr. Hoover responded that the department has a 15-year vehicle rotation program. The department has Six EMS vehicles, four of which are usually staffed, one remains in maintenance and one is used for rotation. Currently, the top priority for the department would be EMS vehicles. He added that architecture and engineering studies are being conducted on the stations and in the future, the priority would be to make improvements to Station 1.

Mr. Hartson shared that he liked the idea of having another station in the Southpark area.

The Chairman and the Commissioners agreed to continue the discussions during the regular meeting at 6:00 PM.

**V. Adjournment**

Mrs. Schiff made a motion to adjourn and Mr. Kohan seconded the motion with all Commissioners in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 5:45 pm.

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Mitchell Hartson  
Chairman

X   
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Joseph Carter Jr.  
Secretary

## **Annexure 1: Position Paper by Mrs. Schiff**

Pickwick Shopping Center was the only shopping area in Colonial Heights in the 1950's and 1960's. Our first post office was built in 1949 and remained in use until the new facility was built on the Boulevard. Since Colonial Heights does not have a true "old town" area other than Pickwick because of the nature of the Boulevard, it would only seem logical to preserve and revitalize Pickwick to recapture some of our history. It is in the Chesterfield Highlands Historic District, which was the first designated in the City, therefore, making it eligible for grant funding. Currently, the Pickwick area is lacking continuity. There is a new, modern CVS, a historic post office, updated attorney's offices, an art gallery, beauty shop, and a new party venue that is available for rentals. On the front side facing our main corridor is a blight-ridden, dark rental area that is not maintained and has no identity. Homeless people have begun using the bench in front of CVS and the alley between the front of Pickwick and the back of Pickwick as a place to sleep, etc.

In the late 1990's, the roads were paved, lighting installed, and an attempt to improve drainage, etc., was completed in hopes that merchants would open small businesses and offices making an attractive area to enhance our history. That did not work as the majority of the properties belonged to an owner who was not interested in participating. The building that housed the old post office is stately and brick with a copula on the high-pitched roof containing a potentially beautiful light, I have attached a copy of the city assessment for the post office building which indicates that it is assessed at \$196,000. The property is not for sale at this time.

I respectfully request that the Planning Commission make a recommendation in the Capital Improvement Projects to purchase the old post office building and appropriate additional funds for needed repair and restoration. The City could use this building to house the Voter Registration Office and provide the needed storage for all of our voting equipment or for any other City office that needs more space. It would preserve our history, provide needed space and begin a positive trend for this area to help contribute to the longtime vision of a better south end of our City.

When Southpark Mall opened in 1988, the mayor formed a Beautification Committee to ensure that the Boulevard was not ignored. Awards of recognition were given to businesses along that corridor who maintained or bettered their business properties. A lighting ordinance was also adopted to require new buildings to include front lighting to match the existing lighting. My point being, we have started the process of making things better, but it seems to die on the vine so to speak. So much needs to be done to improve the property south of Temple Avenue

Additionally, many have come to me about repairing and repaving Hamilton Avenue and Meridian Avenue. Both are in very bad shape. I would also recommend that these two streets be included in the paving area.

The lighting at the east end of Temple Avenue is almost non-existent. The part of Temple Avenue from Conduit Road to the bridge going to Prince George County is very dark and should be evaluated. Also, the corner of Temple Avenue and Conduit Road has a stream with old trees and brush ruining the potential for a scenic spot. This could be cleared and grass sewn on the banks of the stream. It would provide a nice view at very little cost.

Believe it or not, many various citizens have approached me about painting the fire hydrants to make them more visible and to enhance the appearance of our community. I would also like to propose that the appropriate department director look into this request to determine if it is feasible.

We also have learned that there are great things proposed for the intersection of I-95 and Temple Avenue. We thank those responsible for that project.

In conclusion, as the old saying goes “one thing leads to another” if we start the cleanup and revitalization process, perhaps it will catch on and we can recapture the beauty and integrity of our community.