



City of Hampton

22 Lincoln Street
Hampton, VA 23669
www.hampton.gov

Council Approved Minutes - Final City Council Work Session

Mayor Jimmy Gray
Vice Mayor Steven L. Brown
Councilmember Randy C. Bowman, Sr.
Councilmember Carolyn S. Campbell
Councilmember Michelle Taylor Ferebee
Councilmember Hope L. Harper
Councilmember Martha M. Mugler

STAFF: Mary Bunting, City Manager
Courtney R. Sydnor, City Attorney
Katherine K. Glass, MMC, Clerk of Council

Wednesday, May 28, 2025

1:00 PM

Council Chambers

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Gray called the meeting to order at 6 p.m. All members of the City Council were present.

Present 7 - Councilmember Randy C. Bowman Sr., Vice Mayor Steven L. Brown, Councilmember Carolyn S. Campbell, Councilmember Michelle T. Ferebee, Councilmember Hope L. Harper, Councilmember Martha Mugler, and Mayor Jimmy Gray

JIMMY GRAY PRESIDED

AGENDA

1. [25-0163](#) Briefing on Hampton's Poverty Landscape: Opportunities and Next Steps

Attachments: [Presentation](#)

City Manager Mary Bunting introduced the Director of Economic Empowerment and Family Resiliency, Ms. Deanna Valentine, who is leading efforts to help lift individuals out of poverty and move them toward self-sufficiency. This work aligns with the council's strategic priorities and requires collaboration beyond just government involvement. The presentation outlines the challenges people in poverty face when trying to improve their financial situation, as well as the barriers that make the process difficult.

Ms. Valentine began the presentation by stating the city of Hampton currently has a poverty rate of 13%, placing it slightly above Suffolk and below Newport News, Norfolk, and Portsmouth. The unemployment rate is around 4.2%, and poverty tends to appear in scattered pockets throughout the city rather than being concentrated in entire neighborhoods. A notable economic challenge is the median household income: while Virginia's state median is approximately \$90,974, Hampton's is significantly lower at \$67,758—a gap of over \$23,000. This difference suggests opportunities to raise local incomes through employment initiatives and job training.

The presentation also underscored the presence of the ALICE population—Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed individuals, commonly referred to as the “working poor.” These residents earn too much to qualify for public assistance but not enough to achieve financial stability. Unexpected expenses, like medical bills or car repairs, can easily pull them back into poverty. Because ALICE individuals often don't receive benefits, they're harder to identify and support, despite making up a significant portion of those in need. In Hampton, 40% of the population falls within the ALICE category, and when combined with those living in official poverty, more than half the city is struggling financially.

The data reveals a disproportionate impact of poverty and financial hardship on communities of color in Hampton. While 31% of city households fall under the ALICE category, minority households make up the majority of both the ALICE and poverty populations. That rate is already higher than the statewide ALICE average of 29%, underscoring the scale of economic pressure locally.

Ms. Valentine emphasized that poverty is not just about money, it's shaped by a range of situational, systemic, and social complexities. Key issues include: 1. Disconnects between people in need and the services available. Hampton may be “resource rich,” but many residents don't know how to access help, and providers themselves often lack coordination. 2. Budget cuts and staffing shortages are straining service delivery. Nonprofits face tough choices between cutting programs or staff, limiting their ability to support those most in need. 3. Systemic barriers, such as repeated eviction filings or criminal records, block people from stable housing or employment, keeping them stuck in cycles of poverty. 4. Competing priorities, for both individuals and organizations, often prevent consistent progress. With limited time, staff, or funding, priorities like housing, education, or financial literacy can fall through the cracks. 5. Social complexity, poverty is layered. Like peeling an onion, addressing it requires tailored, flexible approaches. One-size-fits-all strategies simply don't work for long-term, sustainable change.

Ms. Valentine offered a crucial reminder: poverty is not just about income. It's a web that touches health, safety, education, housing, relationships, and identity. And

when your entire social circle is navigating the same struggles, it becomes even harder to see a way out. When every system you reach for has either been cut or doesn't respond, the result is compassion fatigue, silenced efforts, and a growing sense of hopelessness. On the provider side, staff vacancies and burnout weaken the safety nets. Even those meant to help are often stretched too thin, sometimes grappling with the same conditions as the clients they serve.

This is more than just a policy issue, it's a call to see people in full context, to redesign support systems that are as resilient, connected, and compassionate as the people they're meant to serve. Ms. Valentine emphasized the importance of taking a comprehensive, human-centered approach to addressing poverty, one that goes beyond simply offering services or securing a job. It's about walking alongside individuals as they navigate each stage of their journey toward self-sufficiency, including how they manage their finances, access support, and sustain long-term stability.

A central theme was the need to assess whether existing community resources are still effective. Programs that may have been relevant a decade ago, or even pre-COVID, may no longer align with the realities people face today. Honest, data-driven conversations are necessary to ensure that community services are truly meeting current needs. One major recommendation was creating a centralized, up-to-date resource guide, perhaps in the form of an app or landing page. This tool would help residents in crisis quickly find reliable information about food, clothing, utility assistance, and more without the frustration of outdated or niche-specific directories.

Ms. Valentine also previewed the Hampton Stone Soup Initiative, a community partner roundtable designed to be action-oriented and inclusive of people with lived experience. These voices can offer vital insights into what's working, what's missing, and how to make support systems more accessible, practical, and inspiring. Their stories also help show others that progress is possible.

The discussion spotlighted the need for targeted post-secondary education and specialized job training to equip residents with the skills needed to achieve sustainable, upward mobility. Two weeks ago, the City of Hampton partnered with Virginia Peninsula Community College to host a community workforce training information session. The goal was to inform residents, many of whom qualify for free or low-cost certification programs, about career-building opportunities.

The importance of living-wage employment as a foundation for building and growing the middle class was highlighted. Calculations for a true living wage are based on essential household expenses like housing and food and can vary by locality. While some employers resist raising wages, there's consensus that fair pay is essential for

upward mobility, especially for the ALICE population.

Other community-building strategies discussed include: 1. Guaranteed Income Pilots, modeled after programs in Richmond and Alexandria, which provide \$500 monthly cash payments to working individuals excluded from state assistance, helping them stabilize and build savings. 2. Affordable childcare was identified as a major barrier. A year of care can cost as much as four years at a university, leaving many families on waitlists or overwhelmed during school breaks. There's a push for expanded, equitable access to safe and reliable childcare. 3. Smarter resource planning, moving away from duplication and toward solutions shaped by community feedback.

Concerns about the working poor in Hampton, particularly those facing housing instability were discussed. While neighboring cities like Norfolk, Newport News, and Virginia Beach have large-scale facilities or day centers for the unhoused, Hampton currently relies on a network of smaller shelters and services. These include organizations like HELP, Inc., Transitions Family Violence Services, Hope House Ministries, and the Salvation Army Virginia Peninsula, which provide essential support but may not match the scale of regional counterparts. Rather than focusing solely on building a large shelter, Ms. Valentine suggested a decentralized, community-based approach, repurposing existing properties (such as unused church buildings or donated land) to serve specific populations.

Ms. Valentine emphasized the importance of identifying pockets of need across the city. While areas like Historic Phoebus, show clear economic disparities, poverty also exists in more affluent neighborhoods where families may be doubling up or living in hidden hardship. The recommendation was made to use data-driven assessments to guide strategic investments, ensuring that city funds are directed where they can have the greatest impact.

There is a significant income disparity across neighborhoods in Hampton, with Historic Phoebus showing a median income of \$30,428, while nearby areas have household medians between \$90,000 and \$97,000. That \$60,000 difference reflects not just economic inequality but the uneven landscape of need within the city. While some communities are clearly lower-income, poverty exists even in affluent areas, often hidden within multigenerational or shared households where family members have taken in loved ones facing homelessness or hardship.

To address these challenges, Ms. Valentine highlighted the potential of a guaranteed income pilot, providing direct cash payments to families in the ALICE population and those in poverty. These funds could help bridge critical gaps, such as covering food, electricity, and basic living expenses between paychecks. The reassurance and

stability this creates for families, especially children, is invaluable.

Strong concerns were raised over Hampton's poverty rate, which exceeds both the state and national averages, despite the city being rich in resources. They highlighted the contrast between Hampton's relatively strong median income figures and the persistent pockets of poverty throughout the city, especially when compared to progress seen in Hampton City Schools over the past decade.

Open discussion emphasized the importance of being action and goal-oriented while also inclusive, especially in shaping solutions that address educational and economic disparities. The idea of "stacking credentials" and expanding workforce pathways was appreciated, but underscored the need to evaluate whether current programs are truly effective. Legacy programs, while historically valued, may no longer serve community needs in today's context. The importance of honest evaluations, not just relying on grant narratives or anecdotes, but digging into real performance metrics and responsiveness was expressed. Concern that community members in crisis don't have the time or capacity to chase down help that isn't available or isn't responsive was shared.

Ms. Bunting emphasized the profound complexity of poverty, highlighting the real challenge posed by the benefits cliff, a situation where individuals attempting to improve their financial standing by earning higher wages can lose access to essential benefits like food assistance or childcare aid. Incremental salary increases (e.g., from minimum wage to \$30,000 or \$40,000 annually) may not be enough to compensate for these lost supports, creating a disincentive to progress.

These structural barriers are built into federal and state programs, not determined locally, making local solutions all the more necessary. Ms. Bunting advocated for a collective, community-based approach, using local resources and partnerships to help individuals bridge these gaps until larger system reforms can be made.

Ms. Valentine provided an overview of ghost kitchens and community marketplaces. A Ghost Kitchen is a large, shared commissary kitchen, similar in concept to a barber shop or nail salon, where individual food entrepreneurs can rent space to operate their businesses. Each vendor uses the ghost kitchen's address as their business location, allowing them to legally prepare food for pickup or delivery. It functions like a food court, but without a dine-in area, and offers a low-cost entry point for aspiring restaurateurs. With mentorship and training, participants can build business skills and potentially transition into their own brick-and-mortar establishments. The Community Marketplace was likened to an expanded, more frequent version of a flea market, ideally held indoors to avoid weather disruptions. It would provide space for residents to sell meals, arts, crafts, and homemade goods

like jams or pastries. A future project included integrating community gardens into this vision, creating a space where people can grow, produce, and sell their own items, fostering entrepreneurship and local economic development.

Ms. Valentine clarified that while Hampton is “resource rich,” meaning the city has a wide variety of services available, from mental health supports and housing programs to diaper distribution and early childhood learning, accessing and tracking those resources can be challenging. The need for up-to-date coordination and better public awareness is imperative, noting that many programs are open to everyone, not just benefit recipients. They also addressed tracking efforts, explaining that resource tracking is currently a work in progress, managed by a small team. The approach involves categorizing residents by immediate readiness (e.g., color-coded as red, yellow, green) and helping individuals connect quickly to jobs, then providing further support like financial coaching or homeownership planning as they stabilize.

Concerns were raised about the fragmented intake process across service providers in Hampton. Individuals in need often have to fill out similar forms multiple times at different organizations, which can be especially frustrating during a crisis. While many community organizations have distinct missions and are willing to collaborate, there’s a clear need for streamlined coordination. The value of a centralized resource guide is profound, not just a directory, but a dynamic tool that could include an abbreviated application. This application could then be routed to relevant providers, reducing delays and missed opportunities for support. However, they also acknowledged the challenges of maintaining such a system, especially with limited staffing and the need for human oversight.

Outreach has centered on resource and job fairs, with the staff personally working to match individuals to opportunities and services. The ultimate goal is to meet people where they are, recognizing that while some need a job, others need upskilling, and still others are ready for long-term financial planning, all depending on their self-identified goals. Ms. Valentine shared that the initial resource info sessions, held in partnership with Virginia Peninsula Community College, had low turnout (three attendees at the first, one at the second), despite being promoted through marketing and social media. The plan is to continue hosting these sessions before each semester and explore new outreach strategies, including different venues and stronger community presence through events and QR code-accessible materials.

Ms. Valentine shared that the first event was actually the result of a serendipitous meeting at Virginia Peninsula Community College, which sparked the idea to move forward quickly. They also mentioned plans to continue these sessions and improve visibility by collaborating with community engagement staff, using tools like QR codes, and potentially distributing information through Peachjar, the school

communication platform.

Council expressed concern over the very low attendance at two recent community events and emphasized the need for a more targeted, two-pronged outreach strategy. This would involve not only inviting the general public but also clearly identifying and engaging specific populations, both the working poor and those experiencing deeper levels of poverty who may not be employed and require more intensive support. Council recommended expanding outreach methods beyond digital platforms by using flyers, direct mail, and partnerships with neighborhood associations, churches, and civic groups. Additionally, they suggested bringing events directly into neighborhoods, especially those with known pockets of poverty, to make participation more accessible, particularly for residents facing transportation barriers.

Ms. Bunting acknowledged and celebrated the work of existing community partners, such as Jobs for Life and the Sheriff's STAR program, both of which provide critical job readiness, life skills, and reentry services. These efforts highlight that Hampton's approach doesn't need to be centralized in city government alone, it's about supporting and aligning with trusted community organizations already doing meaningful work.

Presented by DeAnna Valentine, Economic Empowerment & Family Resilience Director. There were a few questions from members of the City Council. In response to a question from Mayor Gray, Latiesha Handie, Director of Youth and Young Adult Opportunities, provided some information. The City Manager, Mary Bunting, also acknowledge Dr. Tamara Temoney-Porter, Director of Human Services, who was in the audience.

Mayor Gray called a recess from 2:19 until 2:30 p.m.

2. [25-0120](#) Briefing on Options for Community Meeting Policy for Legislative Land Use Applications

Attachments: [Presentation](#)

Ms. Bunting introduced a joint presentation from Courtney Sydnor in the City Attorney's Office and David Lynch from the Community Development team regarding potential updates to the city's community meeting policy for land use applications. Historically, applicants have been strongly encouraged, but not legally required, to host community meetings to inform the public about their proposed projects before the items reach the Planning Commission or Council.

The City Attorney's Office has explored whether the city can legally mandate such meetings as part of the application process. The presentation will include: A legal briefing on the permissibility of requiring community meetings, policy options for structuring a mandate and considerations for exceptions.

City Attorney, Courtney Sydnor, explained City Council is considering whether to formally require community meetings for rezoning and use permit applications. Currently, such meetings are strongly encouraged but not mandated under the city's zoning ordinance. To make them a legal requirement, the ordinance would need to be amended. The purpose of requiring community meetings would be to allow early public input on proposed developments, giving residents, staff, and applicants a chance to identify concerns and opportunities before the project reaches the Planning Commission or City Council. This feedback could help assess how a proposal aligns with public health, safety, and welfare goals.

Three policy options were shared for Council consideration. 1. Require community meetings for all rezoning and use permit applications, with no exceptions, similar to Norfolk's model. 2. Require meetings but allow for waivers, based on guidelines aligned with Council's objectives. 3. Maintain the current practice of encouraging but not requiring meetings. If adopted, the ordinance would require that a community meeting occur before an application is advertised for Planning Commission review. Applicants would be responsible for providing notice, and staff would ensure compliance before advancing the application.

Norfolk's model mandates a neighborhood meeting for all development applications be reviewed by the Planning Commission. Applicants can either partner with a neighborhood organization (e.g., HOA or civic group), or host their own meeting with proper public notice. The only exception in Norfolk is if a neighborhood organization submits written support for the proposal. If no organization is available or willing, the applicant must still host a meeting independently.

David Lynch, from Community Development discussed potential waiver scenarios could include: Applications involving City, HRHA, or EDA-owned properties, depending on the nature of the development. Projects within designated business parks, where residential impact is minimal. Educational institutions or public facilities, where community meetings may not add value. Applications that align with existing land use plans or are not adjacent to residential areas. Cases with no anticipated traffic impact, though this would require further analysis. The goal is to balance transparency and community input with efficiency and practicality, ensuring that meetings are meaningful and not unnecessarily burdensome.

Mr. Lynch emphasized that traffic impact should be a key consideration when determining whether a community meeting is necessary. For example, a dense residential development would likely generate significantly more traffic than a single business in a business park, and thus may warrant more robust community engagement. Regarding notice requirements, the current practice is to notify property owners within a three-quarter-mile radius. However, flexibility may be appropriate reducing the radius in densely populated areas or expanding it in more dispersed neighborhoods. Regardless, the minimum standard would always align with state code, which requires written notice to adjacent property owners and those directly across the street for rezoning applications.

Mr. Lynch clarified that the state code notice requirement applies to the Planning Commission public hearing, and that any community meeting notice would need to meet or exceed that baseline.

Discussion expressed support for requiring community meetings in the rezoning and use permit process. Applicants are often asked, after their proposal is already before Council, whether they've held community meetings, which can delay progress. A formal requirement upfront, they argued, would give neighbors earlier input and allow developers time to adjust their plans accordingly, ultimately streamlining approvals.

Council supported an approach modeled after Norfolk, which mandates community meetings but allows for specific waivers. Waivers were recommended for situations involving public safety-sensitive uses (such as covert operations or sensitive nonprofit services) or publicly owned land where the city or its affiliates are the applicant.

Mr. Lynch clarified that city-owned or affiliated properties could be eligible for such waivers, particularly when the city, HRHA, or EDA is the applicant. However, in cases where a third-party developer is pursuing a project on city land, the city could still require a meeting to ensure community awareness.

Ms. Bunting emphasized that public input is valued, even for public land, when community impact is anticipated. However, allowing discretionary waivers in limited, security-sensitive cases would preserve operational flexibility. Council agreed that legal and staff teams should draft policy language that reflects these concerns and bring it back for review.

While there was general support for the potential implementation of a mandatory community meeting requirement for rezoning and use permit applications. Turnout and communication need improvement to ensure meaningful two-way

communication at community meetings. Turnout varies based on interest, location, and weather, and that applicants typically use mailed notices or flyers. Working neighborhood associations and commissioners need to help spread the word. Use of Existing Community Structures, council members inquired whether existing neighborhood meetings (e.g., HOA or civic groups) are used to disseminate information.

Discussion centered around allowing too many waivers. There is a need for consistency and fairness, especially when developments affect residential neighborhoods or involve off-campus properties owned by institutions. Notification Standards were discussed where poor notification (less than seven days' notice) led to low attendance. There was agreement that clear, standardized notification timelines should be established, longer than the five-day minimum required by state code. Balancing transparency and efficiency while community meetings are valuable, they may add time to the development process, potentially frustrating applicants.

Discussion emphasized improving the community meeting requirement for development proposals and highlighted the need to differentiate between public projects tied to city plans and private developments, with the latter seen as more critical for public engagement. Several alternatives were proposed to make participation more accessible, including electronic feedback windows alongside traditional in-person meetings. There was strong support for a consistent, clearly defined policy with early developer notification and standardized timelines for public outreach. It is necessary to explore a refined process allowing limited waivers in specific cases, such as for public safety-related projects or developments within established campuses, to ensure flexibility without compromising transparency.

Mr. Lynch emphasized the importance of clearly articulating the city's vision for growth and development, not only for large-scale projects aligned with master plans but also for smaller, individual proposals, such as a new business in a strip mall or on a vacant lot.

Discussion stressed that every development opportunity contributes to shaping Hampton's identity and brand, and that community expectations should be communicated consistently. Ms. Bunting affirmed this perspective and noted that the Community Plan and master planning process are the tools used to guide land use decisions.

Presented by Courtney R. Sydnor, City Attorney and Steven Lynch, Interim Deputy Director, Community Development Department

REGIONAL ISSUES

There were no regional issues to report on.

NEW BUSINESS

There were no items of new business.

CLOSED SESSION

3. [25-0161](#) Closed session pursuant to Virginia Code Sections 2.2-3711.A (.1) (.3) and (.8) to discuss an appointment as listed on the agenda, and to discuss the potential acquisition of real property in the Buckroe and Phoebus areas and consultation with legal counsel regarding the same, where discussion in an open meeting would adversely affect the city's bargaining position or negotiating strategy.

At 3:20 p.m., a motion was made by Councilmember Martha Mugler and seconded by Councilmember Hope Harper, that this Closed Session - Motion be approved. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Councilmember Bowman Sr., Vice Mayor Brown, Councilmember Campbell, Councilmember Ferebee, Councilmember Harper, Councilmember Mugler and Mayor Gray

4. [25-0160](#) Consideration of an Appointment to the Community Policy and Management Team (CPMT)

CERTIFICATION

5. [25-0159](#) Resolution Certifying Closed Session

At 4:25 p.m., a motion was made by Vice Mayor Steven Brown and seconded by Councilmember Carolyn Campbell, that this Closed Session - Certification be approved. The motion carried by the following vote:

Aye: 7 - Councilmember Bowman Sr., Vice Mayor Brown, Councilmember Campbell, Councilmember Ferebee, Councilmember Harper, Councilmember Mugler and Mayor Gray

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 4:25 p.m.

Contact Info:

Clerk of Council, 757-727-6315, council@hampton.gov

Jimmy Gray
Mayor

Katherine K. Glass, MMC
Clerk of Council

Date approved by Council _____