**After submitting her resignation letter, Hopewell's city attorney moved to change her contract.**

Two days after Hopewell’s city attorney told the City Council she was resigning, she revised her contract.

The changes, subject to council approval, would allow Sandra Robinson to be compensated for more than 100 hours of unused paid time off.

Hopewell Mayor Patience Bennett signed off. The council voted to approve the edits, despite not knowing how much money she would receive. Some council members remain concerned over the undisclosed dollar amount. One initially took legal action.

“This is taxpayers’ money. I needed to know an amount,” said Councilor Janice Denton, who filed an injunction in Hopewell General District Court over a vote she found improper.

Robinson became the city’s legal chief in 2019 after Hopewell cycled through at least other three attorneys in the past decade. Her predecessor, Stefan Calos, [**cited abuse by city councilors**](https://richmond.com/news/local/central-virginia/they-seem-to-want-the-news-to-be-bad-trust-deficit-on-display-as-growing/article_022dad34-e103-5f5e-a7ee-fc5fc3d59075.html) in his decision to leave.

Her last day will be Oct. 5, she told the council in a brief resignation letter last month that the city provided in response to an open records request.

“I want to thank you very much for extending the opportunity to serve you and the City of Hopewell,” Robinson wrote. “It has been a wonderful experience, and I will always look back on it with great appreciation.”

Neither Robinson nor Bennett returned interview requests Friday.

Robinson changed her contract because she “suffered the loss of 124 paid time off hours due solely to carryover limits imposed on paid time leave awarded, accrued but not used,” according to the amendment. Robinson wrote that because she was deemed an “essential employee” during the coronavirus pandemic, it was “impractical” for her to take time off.

Robinson, whose contract lists an annual base salary of $155,000, struck contract language that says she could only carry over 45 days of PTO annually.

City attorneys who resign are ineligible for severance but can receive paid time off in both the pre-existing and amended versions. However, before the amendment, there was a stipulation saying the employee would be compensated only for “properly-accumulated PTO, including up to the maximum 45-day carryover.” That language was struck and replaced with: “will be compensated all unused PTO.”

The position is one of a handful City Council members appoint, so the body had to vote on the changes. They first took up the matter on Aug. 19, but members participating remotely could not vote due to technical issues.

Denton, one of the members who did not vote initially, took legal action.

“I didn’t want to do an injunction ... [but] I felt so strongly this was not right and I felt it was my responsibility,” said Denton, who dropped the court case because the council voted on the contract again on Tuesday.

Councilor Brenda Pelham made the motion to approve Robinson’s contract both times. She doesn’t have any concern with approving the changes without knowing the dollar amount.

“My concern was they [other council members] made an issue out of providing the PTO when every appointee in the last 17 years who has departed got a package,” Pelham said in an interview. “There was no concern because she earned her PTO; when you earn something, you get it.”

Councilor Debbie Randolph, who voted against amending the contract, asked several times for a dollar amount and has yet to receive a response.

Randolph estimates the extra PTO payout is between $9,500 and $10,000. Robinson’s contract states her “normal office hours” as 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., creating an 8.5-hour workday. The 124 hours of paid time off equate to roughly 14.5 days.

“Who ends up hurting out of this is the citizens,” Randolph said in an interview. “We have money that could have been used for something else.”

Randolph reviewed Robinson’s contract during the hiring process, and “felt 45 days was very reasonable.” The contract stated that 45 unused PTO days could be carried over annually.

Councilor Jasmine Gore said Tuesday night that she supported the change “because it was done proper and in writing, well before our meeting.”

Gore, who was not immediately available on Friday, signed off on the city attorney’s original contract when she was mayor.

Robinson received a lump sum of 80 hours of paid time off upon her arrival to Hopewell and was able to accrue an annual sum of 324 hours of PTO, according to her contract. It is unclear if the 124 hours Robinson is seeking is part of the annual sum of 324 hours or in addition to those hours.

Robinson previously worked in Louisa and Culpeper counties as a county attorney. During her tenure, she received any cost-of-living adjustments provided to all city employees; potential annual consideration to receive an increased salary; and paid travel expenses including mileage.

Pelham, who has served on the council for almost two decades, said Robinson has given her the best legal advice out of all of the attorneys she’s worked with.

“She has been the most competent city attorney. She knows Virginia law extensively,” said Pelham, who wants the next attorney to be an individual and not an entire law firm.

Denton, who spoke favorably of Robinson’s work, said the main issue is bringing someone in quickly, whether on a permanent or interim basis.

**Youngkin utilized ride-along to feature Chesterfield police in campaign video**

**CoByline with Patrick Wilson**

GOP gubernatorial nominee Glenn Youngkin recently stood before a Chesterfield County police car and panned opponent Terry McAuliffe as being weak on crime in a campaign video that also featured on-duty county police officers.

Department policy prohibits vehicles from being used for political purposes and allows officers to participate in political activity only when off duty.

But for this video, the Youngkin campaign negotiated terms for a scheduled ride-along with police last month and filmed the candidate. The campaign posted a [**video of the ride-along on Youngkin’s Twitter account Aug. 9.**](https://twitter.com/GlennYoungkin/status/1424816698729828362)

The video included footage of the Chesterfield Police Department, Youngkin riding inside a car with an officer, and Youngkin walking with officers outside.

Chesterfield Police Chief Jeffrey Katz said in an interview the department made no accommodation for Youngkin that it wouldn’t for any citizen, candidate or elected official.

“If they have a desire to learn more about the Police Department, policing profession, the manner in which we serve our community, our practice is to embrace those people and to show them as much as we possibly can,” he said.

Katz said he viewed the video before it was published and told the Youngkin campaign he didn’t like it because Youngkin talks about crime going up in Virginia, while crime in Chesterfield, Katz said, is down.

“We’re doing really, really well in our county and our Police Department, so when I have a political candidate who’s in a car that’s marked Chesterfield County police, and that candidate is talking about skyrocketing crime in Virginia ... I don’t think that the video reflected favorably upon our brand as an organization,” Katz said. “I thought the video missed the mark.”

Youngkin has made crime a top issue in his campaign, calling out former Gov. Terry McAuliffe’s record in TV ads and touting support from elected sheriffs across the state. McAuliffe, a Democrat, has run ads in response featuring sheriffs who support him. Sheriffs, unlike police chiefs, are partisan, elected officials.

Public records obtained in a Freedom of Information Act request show that the Youngkin campaign made several special requests for his ride-along.

A campaign staffer sent Chesterfield police an email saying Youngkin’s schedule wouldn’t allow him to ride for an entire shift. The campaign requested 20 minutes of driving and 20 minutes of walking in a designated area.

The campaign also asked if it could mount a camera in the car to film during the ride-along.

“Instead of responding to calls, we’d like to go to a specific area of town where Glenn could walk with the officer/deputy and learn about crime in the area. Maybe the area is [a] high drug trafficking area or an area where there is gang activity. Press would get footage of this and maybe we mic glenn up during it too,” the campaign email to police said.

Katz said the officer in the video was on duty. Records showed Youngkin and the officers were in the area of the Rollingwood and Pocoshock Ridge apartments off Chippenham Parkway. Police sent the Youngkin campaign news releases about three shootings, two of them fatal, in those areas since February.

“The Youngkin campaign doesn’t dictate what our patrol officers do. If our officer was requested or summoned to a call our officer would respond to that call,” Katz said.

Although Chesterfield’s ride-along regulations, which are signed by participants, say cameras and voice recorders are prohibited unless the chief grants prior approval, Katz said filming by any ride-along participant is allowed and he has never approved or not approved anyone filming on a ride-along.

“If someone’s exercising their First Amendment right in a government vehicle to speak freely, to videotape their time in the car or whatever, we’re not in a position to tell someone they can’t do that,” he said. “It would actually be a civil rights violation to inhibit someone’s First Amendment rights.”

Records show a police supervisor emailed the Youngkin campaign on Aug. 6: “Hope everything went well yesterday. Let me know if you need any follow up. Thanks again.”

Youngkin staffer Devin O’Malley responded: “Great event. Thank you for all your help getting it organized.”

O’Malley also emailed the police supervisor and a police spokesperson on Aug. 9 with a draft of the campaign video, writing: “Just want to make sure you all are ok with this.” There is no record of a written response from Chesterfield police.

O’Malley told the Richmond Times-Dispatch he emailed police the video at their request because they wanted to see it before it went online.

Nationally, police sometimes draw scrutiny over political involvement.

In 2014, a Democratic candidate for Maryland governor was criticized for using uniformed Baltimore police officers in campaign ads attacking his Republican opponent, [**The Baltimore Sun reported**](https://www.baltimoresun.com/politics/bs-md-police-political-ad-20141016-story.html). A department policy prohibited officers from appearing in uniform in political ads.

In 2018, the campaign of U.S. Rep. Jennifer Wexton, D-10th, was [**mocked for using campaign aides in costumes**](https://www.rollcall.com/2018/06/01/top-comstock-challenger-criticized-for-fake-cops-in-ad/) to play police officers in a digital campaign ad. Wexton’s campaign director said at the time that the campaign had seen other campaigns criticized for putting uniformed police in ads and wanted to avoid that controversy.

Some Democrats in 2020 [**expressed concerns about police bias**](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/election-police-officers-bias/2020/10/31/78eba664-1ae8-11eb-82db-60b15c874105_story.html) in favor of President Donald Trump, such as an officer in New York City chanting “Trump 2020” via his loudspeaker and an officer in Miami wearing a Trump face mask at a voting location.

Policing and support for law enforcement is a top issue in this year’s statewide campaigns following the murder of George Floyd in 2020 by Minneapolis police, increased scrutiny of police, and a rise in crime rates in some American cities.

Youngkin is touting an endorsement from the Virginia Law Enforcement Sheriffs Association and endorsements from [**more than 50 sheriffs**](https://www.youngkinforgovernor.com/post/youngkin-announces-massive-support-from-law-enforcement-community?utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-_o0y6Qv0s8vdjTUrKTiw5a3MqXXDVoFL3NAYVIGa9ejtXNSWj0IivJz8GteZN72x5Vyoxo).

In the Richmond area, Chesterfield Sheriff Karl Leonard, a Republican, appears in a **[Youngkin TV ad endorsing him](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AP1FMy5Swks&t=1s" \t "_blank)**.

McAuliffe is [**running a TV ad**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmhf-nB5eA8&t=12s) featuring Henrico Sheriff Alisa Gregory, a Democrat, defending McAuliffe’s record on law enforcement issues.

Youngkin and sheriffs who support him accuse McAuliffe of turning his back on law enforcement by embracing “radical elements” of his party, and say Youngkin would be a strong supporter of law enforcement. Youngkin supports legal principles that prevent civil liability for officers who shoot people, while McAuliffe supports reforms that would allow civil lawsuits to proceed against officers if they broke the law.

Sheriffs who support McAuliffe say he supported funding increases for law enforcement while he was governor, and say Youngkin opposes measures to restrict guns.

**Improvement touted at mass vaccination clinics at Richmond Raceway in Henrico, but more supply needed**

Since Jan. 18, nearly 16,000 doses of coronavirus vaccines have been administered at clinics at Richmond Raceway in Henrico County.

However, if more doses were available, approximately 6,000 vaccines could be administered in a 12-hour period at the raceway site. Currently, the Richmond and Henrico Health Districts are receiving roughly 6,400 doses per week from the state, so after the health districts split up the vaccine, Henrico receives approximately 3,800 doses.

“I think the most important takeaway here is that, where we were a few weeks ago is a far cry from where we are now,” Dr. Danny Avula, the state’s COVID-19 vaccine distribution coordinator, said Tuesday night at the Henrico Board of Supervisors meeting.

“Things are moving in an incredible direction and very quickly,” Avula said. “And again, we have the capacity to vaccinate at a larger scale; we just don’t have the vaccine to be able to do it.”

Henrico officials leaped into action in early January to locate the raceway as a site that not only provided ample space but also access to bus routes and interstate highways.

Through a regional effort, public safety and public school employees in Richmond and the counties of Henrico, Hanover and Goochland have been able to receive a vaccine dose at the raceway.

“We want to be able to take care of our whole community,” said Jackson Baynard, chief of Henrico’s Office of Emergency Management and Workplace Safety. “We’re focused regionally because regional partnerships are what makes the difference.”

This past weekend’s rollout at Richmond Raceway was aimed primarily at people age 75 and older. After officials received additional doses, nearly 7,500 area residents, including from Chesterfield and Hanover counties, received a vaccine there on Saturday and Tuesday.

“I know the rollout has hit some bumps, but I am fully confident that as vaccines are distributed to Henrico County, we will make sure they get into arms quickly,” Henrico Supervisor Tyrone Nelson said after Tuesday’s Board of Supervisors meeting.

Nelson remains hopeful that the need for equitable distribution across different racial and ethnic groups in the region will continue to improve as the rollout progresses. Black and Latino residents have accounted for more than a third of the state’s COVID-19 deaths.

While the Richmond and Henrico Health Districts provide weekly doses of the vaccine, Henrico is the primary partner with the raceway to keep the clinics up and running. The county is spending approximately $25,000 a day for the rental cost of the raceway.

To get the mass vaccination clinics underway, the county entered into two private-public partnerships, one with the raceway for the space and one with Westwood Pharmacy.

One Saturday last month, Henrico County Manager John Vithoulkas called Mark Oley, the owner of Westwood Pharmacy, at 7 a.m.

Vithoulkas hadn’t woken up feeling under the weather — he was just ready to plan for the vaccine rollout.

“‘Mark, I need help,’” Vithoulkas recalled telling Oley.

Vithoulkas knew receiving enough doses to vaccinate everyone would be difficult. But with Henrico already having contracts with Westwood for some county facilities, he knew that the pharmacy could help establish a vaccine supply.

Westwood put in a helping hand immediately, vaccinating Henrico public school nurses, so they could in turn give inoculations themselves.

“We are accustomed to doing vaccinations, but this is something completely new,” Oley said. “It is a challenge, but we approached it and wanted to do it as safely and effectively as we can.”

For Dr. Shubhro Pal, director of pharmacy at Westwood, having a hand in the vaccine rollout has been exhilarating.

“We as a team here enjoy the challenge and want to help the people in our county,” Pal said. “We’re looking to vaccinate as many people as we can and get herd immunity.”