

# Latest Hopewell City Council controversy ends

In early September, City Councilor and former Mayor Brenda S. Pelham pleaded no contest to three counts of not disclosing her employment with the Hopewell Public Schools system before voting on school related matters in council meetings.

In exchange for the pleas, special prosecutor Michael Herring, commonwealth's attorney in Richmond, dismissed 10 of the original 13 misdemeanor charges. The three remaining charges are carried over until September 2012 and will be dismissed in 12 months if Pelham keeps an otherwise clean record.

"I saw no sense in drawing the case out," Pelham said at the time. "The people who have accused me will always feel that I am guilty anyway," she said.



**PELHAM**

In May, a special grand jury indicted Pelham alleging she had knowingly failed to declare her conflict of interest in voting on school-related matters 13 times between June 2006 and July 2010. Pelham is a longtime employee with the Hopewell Public Schools system and works as attendance officer.

Pelham was arrested by special agents from the Virginia State Police's Bureau of Criminal Investigation. She was processed at Riverside Regional Jail, where she was handcuffed at the jail as part of standard procedure.

Pelham has admitted to having violated the law, but called it "a technicality."

The main point in the case is there was never any evidence that Pelham ever profited from not disclosing her employment with the school system. Also, Pelham said she never acted out of malice. "Everyone in the city knows where I work," she said.

Pelham has a point. It was no secret that Pelham worked for the school district and her failure to disclose the connection before votes was a technicality. But it was something that apparently should have been done.

Even special prosecutor Herring said that while Pelham violated the law, she had simply misunderstood the technical requirements for disclosure and that she had not tried to benefit from her position on council.

That puts the matter to rest. Hopewell City Council in recent years has been beset by controversy, divisions and disruption. Pelham chose to plead no contest in order to end the controversy.

Let's hope that Hopewell City Council members can move past this latest controversy and focus on the many pressing needs facing Hopewell residents.