

# REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, October 9, 2025 ~ 5:00 P.M.

Suffolk City Hall, 442 W. Washington Street, Suffolk, VA 23434

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## Board Members Present:

Heather Howell, *Chair*  
Sean McGee, *Vice Chair*  
Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham  
Valerie Fields  
Karen Jenkins  
Tyron Riddick<sup>1</sup>  
Kimberly Slingluff

## Administrative Staff Present:

Dr. John B. Gordon III, *Superintendent*  
Wendell M. Waller, *Esquire, School Board Attorney*  
Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*  
Keesha Johnson, *Deputy Clerk*

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## OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION

### ➤ Call to Order:

Board Chair Howell called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

## MOTION TO GO INTO A CLOSED MEETING

### ➤ Attorney Wendell Waller read the following motion:

A motion is needed to go into a closed meeting to discuss the following item and subject pursuant to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act found at Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711:

1. Record Review 2025/26-2RR regarding the assignment of a student to Turlington Woods School, where the discussion in an open meeting would involve disclosure of information contained in the student's scholastic record.

Which is authorized by the Virginia Freedom of Information Act, found at Virginia Code Section 2.2-3711 (A)(2).

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to go into the closed meeting as read by Attorney Waller.

Upon roll-call vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0 / Absent: 1 (Riddick). The motion Passed by vote of 6 to 0.

Board Chair Howell reminded Board Members that personal devices are not allowed in the closed meeting, but SPS issued laptops are permitted in the closed meeting area.

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<sup>1</sup> Board Member Riddick arrived at the meeting at 5:39 p.m.

## RECONVENE IN PUBLIC MEETING

- Meeting Called to Order:  
Board Chair Howell reconvened the public meeting.

## CERTIFICATION OF CLOSED MEETING

- Attorney Wendell Waller read the following certification:  
A Resolution of Certification of the Closed Meeting of October 9, 2025 Pursuant to Section 2.2-3712 of the Code of Virginia (1950)

WHEREAS, the School Board of the City of Suffolk convened a closed meeting on this date pursuant to an affirmative recorded vote and in accordance with the provisions of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act; and

WHEREAS, Section 2.2-3712 of the Code of Virginia (1950), as amended, requires a certification by the School Board that such closed meeting was conducted in conformity with Virginia law.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the School Board of the City of Suffolk hereby certifies that, to the best of each member's knowledge, (i) only business matters lawfully exempted from open meeting requirements by Virginia law were discussed in the closed meeting to which this resolution of certification applies, and (ii) only such public business matters as were identified in the motion convening the closed meeting were heard, discussed or considered by the School Board of the City of Suffolk.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Slingluff seconded the motion to approve the Certification of the Closed Meeting as read by Attorney Waller.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0 / Absent: 1 (Riddick). The motion Passed by vote of 6 to 0.

## SCHOOL BOARD WORK SESSION

- School Administration Office and Student Generation Rate:  
Kevin Hughes, Interim City Manager, and Kevin Wynne, Director of Planning and Community Development, using a PowerPoint presentation, provided a summary of the Riverbend project. They discussed the conceptional master plan and the impact the project will have on certain schools. They also talked about proffers, conveyance of the property (VDOT building for SAO), growth trends within the city which impacts student enrollment, and student generation numbers as outlined in the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). They explained that the project was unique in nature as it provided a renovated facility for the School Administrative Offices, without having to wait until years 2031-3035 for a new facility (as outlined in the current Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). They also shared that the Planning Commission would hold a hearing regarding the project on October 21, 2025 and City Council's Public Hearing would be on November 19, 2025. Mr. Hughes indicated that from the city's perspective, Option 2 (options listed below) would be ~~the~~ most problematic as the city cannot negotiate or force conditions on the developer.

- ✦ **Option 1:** A Resolution Of The School Board For The City Of Suffolk, Virginia Offering Its Support For Rezoning Application Rzn2025-00004 (Conditional) Riverbend Project Regarding 2.3 Acres And An Office Building, Valued At \$6.2

Million Dollars For Future Use As A School Administration Building Subject To Certain Enumerated Conditions.

- ✦ **Option 2:** A Resolution Of The School Board For The City Of Suffolk, Virginia Offering Its Support For Rezoning Application Rzn2025-00004 (Conditional) Riverbend Project Subject To Certain Enumerated Conditions.
- ✦ **Option 3:** A Resolution Of The School Board For The City Of Suffolk, Virginia Offering Its Support For Rezoning Application Rzn2025-00004 (Conditional) Riverbend Project Subject To Certain Enumerated Conditions.

Board members asked questions and engaged in discussion with city officials regarding the following: (1) proffers; (2) conveyance and ownership of the VDOT building; (3) scope of renovations to be completed to prepare the building for occupancy; (4) revenue that will be generated by selling land; (5) length of time the VDOT building has been on the market; (6) subdividing acres is a possibility; (7) the city paying for the VDOT building and giving it to schools; (8) allowing the schools to keep proffers; and (9) the consequences should the School Board not offer its support for the project because the city would like for the School Board to take advantage of this opportunity. Mr. Hughes stated that he looked forward to receiving the Board's decision regarding the Riverbend project in writing.

## **MEETING RECESS**

- Meeting Called to Order:  
There being no further discussion, Board Chair Howell recessed the meeting at 6:16 p.m.

## **RE-OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING**

- Meeting Called to Order:  
Board Chair Howell re-opened the public meeting at 7 p.m.
- Pledge of Allegiance:  
Board Member Fields led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Moment of Silence:  
A moment of silence was observed by all in attendance.
- The Mission of Suffolk Public Schools:  
Board Member Slingluff read the mission of SPS.
- Musical Selection – Col. Fred Cherry MS Choir – Directed by Sarah Haigh  
The Col. Fred Cherry Middle School Choir performed two songs “I Dare You, arranged by Andy Beck and “Galop,” written by Ken Berg.

Board Members congratulated the students for the wonderful performance. They also thanked Ms. Haigh for her work with the students and for making a difference in their lives through music.

## **ACTION ON CLOSED MEETING ITEM**

### ➤ Student Record Review Number 2025/26-2RR

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to uphold the recommendation from the Student Services Review Committee for Records Review Number 2025/26-2RR.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 7 to 0.

## **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

### ➤ Approval of Agenda:

Board Member Jenkins moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to approve the agenda.

Board Chair Howell reminded board members that if they planned to have any discussion or consideration of the additional option regarding the Riverbend project, the option must be added to the agenda.

Board Member Jenkins moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the amended motion to approve the agenda with the addition of Option #3 Resolution (Support for Rezoning Application RZN2025-00004 (Conditional) Riverbend Project Subject to Certain Enumerated Conditions) to the School Administration Office and Student Generation Rate (Item #2 under New Business).

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 1 (McGee) / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 6 to 1.

## **PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA TOPICS**

### ➤ Citizen Comments on Agenda Items:

The Clerk read the statement of decorum for speakers who sign up to address the Board.

1. Ann Harris – Re: VDOT Admin Building. Ms. Harris shared concerns/observations regarding the VDOT building. She indicated that information shared by the city was not clear and important data was cherry-picked which would have negative effects on school proffers in the long term, sets bad precedence for future development, and puts SPS in an awkward position.
2. Jennifer Willman – Re: Riverbend Proposal. Ms. Willman shared concerns with the Riverbend Project Proposal. She felt that the proposal was a well-crafted illusion put forth by the city that would not realistically benefit Suffolk Public Schools but would be a costly deception.
3. Kelly Hengler – Re: School Administration Office and Student Generation Rate. Ms. Hengler was not present to address the board.

## **CONSENT AGENDA**

### ➤ Approval of the Consent Agenda:

Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 6 / Nay: 1 (Slingluff) / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 6 to 1.

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There was no Unfinished Business

## NEW BUSINESS

### ➤ Powerschool TalentEd Suite

Dr. Gordon provided an overview of issues experienced with the current Frontline/Applitrak programs and how Powerschool will improve processes between the Human Resources and Finance Departments and cost savings associated with the new program. Discussion was had regarding contract overlap/information, student population increase, data breach concerns and prevention of future breaches.

Board Member Riddick moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to approve the transition from Frontline to Powerschool TalentEd Suite.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 7 to 0.

### ➤ School Administration Office and Student Generation Rate

Board Chair Howell led the discussion regarding this item. She reminded the board that action was needed, as requested by the city, regarding the board's decision to support or not support the Riverbend Project and the SAO building that could derive from it. She also reminded the board of the three options to be considered (listed below) and that according to the attorney for the developer, Option 2 was not functional.

**Option 1:** Support for Rezoning Application RZN2025-00004 (Conditional) Riverbend Project regarding 2.3 acres and an office building, valued at \$6.2 million dollars for future use as a school administration building for Suffolk Public Schools subject to the following enumerated conditions:

1. That 2.3 acres and an office building, valued at \$6.2 million dollars for future use as a school administration building for Suffolk Public Schools be donated by the applicant; and
2. That the school administration building must be completed and ready for a move-in before the current lease of the professional building expires on December 31, 2028.

**Option 2:** Support for Rezoning Application RZN2025-00004 (Conditional) Riverbend Project subject to the following enumerated conditions:

1. That 2.3 acres and an office building, valued at \$6.2 million dollars for future use as a school administration building for Suffolk Public Schools be donated by the applicant;
2. That the school administration building must be completed and ready for a move-in before the current lease of the professional building expires on December 31, 2028;
3. That support for the housing component of the Riverbend project is conditioned on the following:
  - a. that there be a phased-in schedule for construction of the housing units;
  - b. that the 168 age-restricted multifamily units be completed in the first phase;
  - c. that construction of the 329 townhomes will only begin after a plan has been approved to expand Hillpoint Elementary School; and d. that funding for land acquisition and site work for a new Elephant's Fork Elementary School be expedited and included in FY 2026-2027.

**Option 3:** Support for Rezoning Application RZN2025-00004 (Conditional) Riverbend Project subject to the following enumerated conditions:

1. That 2.3 acres and an office building, valued at \$6.2 million dollars for future use as a school administration building for Suffolk Public Schools be donated by the applicant;
2. That the school administration building must be completed and ready for a move-in before the current lease of the professional building expires on December 31, 2028;
3. That support for the potential student generating housing component of the Riverbend project is conditioned on the following:
  - a. that there be a phased-in schedule for construction of the potential student generating housing units according to the following schedule for the approvals of certificate of occupancies that shall be cumulative:  
2025 0 certificates of occupancy  
2026 0 certificates of occupancy  
2027 0 certificates of occupancy  
2028 100 certificates of occupancy  
2029 100 certificates of occupancy  
2030 100 certificates of occupancy  
2031 29 certificates of occupancy.
  - b. that funding for land acquisition and site work for a new Elephant's Fork Elementary School be expedited and included in FY 2026-2027.

Adam Edbauer, General Manager with Ryan Homes, was present at the meeting and engaged in discussion with the school board. They discussed the projected gross profit for Ryan Homes, cash proffers, and the options the board would be considering. He explained that cash proffers are the typical process of Ryan Homes and if he had known that conveying the VDOT building instead of offering cash proffers would cause such a problem, he would have suggested proceeding as normal with cash proffers. Mr. Edbauer also stated that Option 2 was not feasible as a way to proceed, and that rezoning was necessary or Ryan Homes would be in a challenging position. He further added that Ryan Homes worked conscientiously to provide creative solutions for all parties involved while striking a good balance between the city, the school division, and Ryan Homes. Board members explained that current structural and overcrowding issues within the division needed to be addressed first before moving forward with any project and that the Riverbend project would exacerbate those issues. Additional discussion ensued between the parties regarding the size of the parcel compared to Bridgeport, the number of units at Bridgeport, Buy-Right usage, building ownership and value (estimated \$6.7 Million). Board Members expressed their non-support for the project and Dr. Gordon stated that Mr. Edbauer's suggestion with conveyance of the building in lieu of cash proffers, was a creative way for all to benefit from this project and is not how proffers typically work.

Board Chair Howell and Dr. Gordon thanked Mr. Edbauer for speaking with the board and stated that a joint meeting with the city, including the developer, would be great as they could have worked together to make this project a win for everyone.

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to reject all options and say no to the Riverbend Project.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 7 / Nay: 0 / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 7 to 0.

- Ordinance 2025/26-32 through Ordinance 2025/26-41  
First reading only, no action required at this time nor was there any discussion.

## **PUBLIC SPEAKERS ON AGENDA TOPICS**

- Citizen Comments on Agenda Items:

The Clerk read the statement of decorum for speakers who sign up to address the Board.

1. Juliette Thompson – Re: Politics Impacting Children’s’ Learning. Ms. Thompson expressed her concerns with the recent voting pattern of her board representative. She felt that her representative’s vote often followed the political rhetoric of national figures rather than the needs of Suffolk’s children.

## **BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS**

- Comments and Reports by School Board Members:

Board Chair Howell reminded Board Members of their five (5) minutes time limit. Board Members:

- Were thankful for the board working together and engaging in difficult but meaningful dialogue.
- Thanked the music teacher and students for a wonderful performance, parents/guardians and the community for partnering for better schools. They also thanked Dr. Gordon and his team for leading SPS to higher heights, teachers/bus drivers/all staff for all that they do, borough constituents for their continued support, and the public speakers for sharing their comments and concerns. Also thanked Mr. Napier for overseeing various projects that needed attention over the years.
- Enjoyed fruitful discussion at townhall meetings, and information shared at a safety conference that a board member attended. The conference highlighted safety/security methods that are already initiated within the division.
- Enjoyed school/department visits and thanked the principals and staff for the tours and their hospitality. Special shout out to the principal at BTWES, SWES, KSES, JFKMS, FGMS, and LHS, and Jessica Allen in the transportation department.
- Encouraged City Council to reject the Riverbend project and the request to rezone the plot of land for the project, move forward with purchasing land for a new Elephant’s Fork Elementary School, to build multiple schools simultaneously to keep up with the growth of the city, and work with the School Board to address the need for a new School Administrative Offices.
- Were excited about the groundbreaking ceremony and information forum for the Northern Shores Elementary School expansion project.
- Expressed concern with an incident that occurred on the school bus and is in support of a full, in-depth review of disciplinary processes, procedures for addressing student behavior on school busses.
- Were appreciative and thankful to friends and family for being supportive while working through serious decisions regarding board responsibilities.
- Wished everyone a blessed evening.

## **INFORMATION ITEMS**

- Board Chair Howell encouraged the board to look at the information items and the note regarding financial bills and payroll reports.

## ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

There being no further discussion, Board Chair Howell adjourned the October 9, 2025 School Board Meeting at 8:34 p.m.

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Heather Howell, *School Board Chair*

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Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*