

**SPECIAL JOINT MEETING OF THE CITY OF SUFFOLK and SUFFOLK CITY
SCHOOL BOARD**

Tuesday, September 24, 2024 ~ 3:00 P.M.

City Council Chamber, 442 W. Washington Street, Suffolk, VA 23434

Board Members Present:

Karen Jenkins, *Chair*
Heather Howell, *Vice Chair*
Dr. Dawn Brittingham
Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck
Tyron Riddick¹
Kimberly Slingluff

Absent:

Phyllis Byrum

City Council Members Present:

Michael Duman, *Mayor*
Lue Ward, *Vice Mayor*
Leroy Bennett
Shelley Butler Barlow
Roger Fawcett
LeOtis Williams²

Absent:

Timothy Johnson
John Rector

Administrative Staff Present:

Dr. John B. Gordon III, *Superintendent*
Wendell M. Waller, *School Board Attorney*
Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*
Wendy Forsman, *Chief Financial Officer*
Dr. Okema Branch, *Chief Academic Officer*
Dr. Stenette Byrd III, *Chief of Schools*
Dr. Rodney Brown, *Chief of Administrative Services*
Terry Napier, *Director of Facilities and Planning*
John Littlefield, *Director of Technology*
Dr. Ronald Leigh, *Director of Secondary Leadership*
Dr. Andre Skinner, *Director of Career and Technical Education*
Dr. Catherine Pichon, *Director of Elementary Leadership*
Dr. Casaundra McNair, *Director of Special Education*
Anthonette Dickens, *Communications and Community Engagement Officer*

OPENING OF JOINT MEETING

➤ **Call to Order / Welcome / Introductions:**

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Duman at 3 p.m. He welcomed everyone in attendance. Mayor Duman introduced the City Council Members (Council Members Timothy Johnson, and John Rector were absent from the meeting). School Board Chair,

¹ Board Member Riddick arrived to the meeting at 3:11 p.m.

² Councilman Williams arrived to the meeting at 3:39 p.m.

Karen Jenkins, introduced the School Board Members (Board Member Byrum was absent from the meeting.)

DISCUSSION

➤ **Proposed SPS School Board FY 2026-2035 Capital Improvement (CIP) Request**

Dr. Gordon highlighted information from Suffolk Public Schools' CIP that was approved at the September 12, 2024 School Board Meeting. He recapped the order of the CIP and provided a narrative of each project. He indicated that renovations to Northern Shores Elementary School were currently in the design phase, and the Board's shift/plan to ensure the removal of mobile units at several schools. Dr. Gordon also addressed the need for a new School Administrative Offices location. Board and City Council Members discussed the projects and the order listed, options for an SAO location, and alternative use for schools that are no longer being used. All agreed that schools were listed first as student safety is a top priority.

➤ **City of Suffolk Financial Policies and Debt Limits / Review of FY 2025-2034 Adopted CIP & Proposed FY 2026-2035 CIP Schedule**

Charles Meeks, Director of Finance, provided highlights from key financial policies. He reminded everyone of the city's plan to use about \$22 to \$23 million to fill in the gaps with various capital projects throughout the city. He also gave an overview regarding debt policy ratio projections, and Bond capacity. Mr. Meeks shared that the city's bond capacity was increased last year to \$35 million and that the city continues to have a AAA rating. He highlighted the approved CIP for SPS, and the city's CIP for fiscal year 2026-2035 tentative development calendar. Mr. Meeks stated that he looked forward to working with everyone to put together the best plan possible for all involved.

There were no questions or comments from School Board and City Council Members.

➤ **Residential Development**

Kevin Wyne, Director of Planning and Community Development, presented information regarding residential development throughout the City of Suffolk. Mr. Wyne indicated that not much had changed from the last joint meeting in April 2024. He highlighted a shift in development in the northern end of the city to the central area of the city along Route 58 bypass. He explained that pipeline information is used as a tool to identify what developments, from a residential perspective, may generate school aged children. The information is also identified in the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO). Mr. Wyne talked about key developments in the city which will affect various schools, such as, River Club (NRHS, JYMS, CES or FBES), Spencer's Watch (JYMS), Burbage Grant Apartments (NSES, CFCMS, NRHS), and the Reserve at Cedar Point (OES, KFMS, KFHS). He also highlighted developments approved since the last joint meeting. Those include Parkwood (KSES, KFMS, LHS), and Pitchkettle Landing (EFES, KFMS, KFHS). He explained "heat maps" which showed areas that would generate students at the elementary, middle and high school levels. Mr. Wyne stated that there has been a slight increase of under 200 students over the last decade.

Board and City Council Members discussed how new developments are calculated and the number of school-aged children that result from those new developments. Dr. Gordon asked for a list of the major developments to be shared with him, as that information would be helpful when determining school size. It was suggested that the city and school board

work together to plan for future growth. Additional conversation/clarification ensued regarding residential and commercial zoning and development.

➤ **Major Transportation Projects & Draft Master Transportation Plan**

Robert Lewis, Director of Public Works, discussed roadway projects that are under construction and future projects that will have a potential impact to the school division. He highlighted the following projects: Holland Road/Route 58 widening (contract completion: December 2024), Shoulder's Hill Road/Bridge Road improvements (anticipated completion: Winter 2025), Nansemond Parkway/Wilroy Road Overpass (anticipated completion: Fall 2025), Nansemond-Bennetts Pasture Road Improvements (anticipated completion: Winter 2025), Pitchkette Road Realignment (anticipated completion: Fall 2026), Pughsville Drainage Phase II (anticipated completion: Summer 2025), Godwin Boulevard Improvements (anticipated completion: Fall 2028), Routes 10/32 Diverging Diamond Interchange (anticipated completion: Fall 2028), Route 460 Widening (preliminary engineering in progress, start of construction-TBD), Route 17-Bridge Road Widening (anticipated completion: Fall 2029). He also discussed projects funding. Mr. Lewis stated that we are all working towards the same goal of improving the city.

➤ **Transfer of SPS Property**

Al Moor, City Manager, thanked the School Board for transferring the property at Freeney Avenue back to the city. Discussion was also had regarding the Driver Elementary School property, returning it to the city by November 2024, and/or repurposing the property. Suggestions for repurposing the property included, location of the School Administrative Offices, a recreational facility with a joint use gym, or a school for primary grades. Additional discussion was had regarding the challenges with the various options suggested. Both bodies agreed that additional conversation is needed to ensure best use of the land and funding for repurposing.

Adjournment

➤ **Closing Remarks:**

School Board Members and City Council Members were thankful for the fruitful and open discussion. They looked forward to working together to alleviate the challenges faces by both bodies.

Vice Mayor Lue Ward and Councilman LeOtis Bennett recognized Dr. Brooks-Buck and Mrs. Byrum for their dedication to the school division, students, faculty, staff, and community of Suffolk. Both School Board Members will be retiring at the end of the year.

There being no further business, Mayor Duman and Board Chair Jenkins adjourned the Joint City Council and School Board meeting at 6:02 p.m.

Karen L. Jenkins, *Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*