

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

Wednesday, April 10, 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
Phyllis Byrum
Tyron Riddick
Kimberly Slingluff

City Council Members Present:

Michael Duman, *Mayor*
Lue Ward, *Vice Mayor*
Leroy Bennett
Shelley Butler Barlow
Roger Fawcett
John Rector
Timothy Johnson

City Council Member Absent:

LeOtis Williams

Administrative Staff Present:

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

OPENING OF JOINT MEETING

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

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Duman. He welcomed everyone in attendance. He mentioned that items on the agenda were agreed to by both City Council and the School Board and the importance of both bodies coming together to discuss the issues at hand. Mayor Duman introduced the City Council Members (Council Member LeOtis Williams was absent from the meeting). School Board Chair, Karen Jenkins, introduced the School Board Members.

Mayor Duman gave instructions regarding the flow of the meeting and presentations. In order to allow sufficient time for questions and answers, each Councilman/Board Member was allotted up to five minutes to share their comments, questions or concerns.

DISCUSSION

➤ **Proposed SPS School Board FY 2024-2025 Operating & Capital Budget Request**

Mrs. Forsman, Chief Financial Officer, gave a brief summary of the Superintendent's Proposed Budget that was presented to the School Board on February 29, 2024. Mrs. Forsman focused on allocations, requests from the City and overall expenditures. She also provided an overview of how things have been adjusted over the last couple of years due to grant funding. She highlighted information from the C.A.R.E.S. Act funds/timeline, proposed

(step) raises, Early Childhood-VA Pre-K (classroom addition at BTWES), Return on Investment (ROI), 2024-2025 City Request (additional \$4 Million), 2024-2025 Governor's Proposed Budget (\$6,047,712), 2024-2025 Total Budget (increase of \$8,152,162, budget total \$242,729,720), General Fund Revenue breakdown, 2023-2024 Proposed Budget breakdown, and the 2024-2025 Proposed Budget breakdown.

➤ **Proposed Suffolk City Manager FY 2024-2025 Operating & Capital Budget**

Charles Meek, Director of Finance, provided an overview of the City's budget with an emphasis on school funding. Mr. Meeks presented their Budget Priorities, Fiscal Year 2025 Proposed Budget (\$882,100,325-across all 17 funds), General Fund Revenue (projecting a \$28.9 Million dollar increase), Budget Highlights, and Public Education (\$75.3 Million-School Operations, \$28.6 Million-Capital Funding for JFKMS & NSES, \$11.5 Million for debt services, and \$739,702 for School Administration/Operations building leases).

School Board and Council Members engaged in conversations that included questions and answers regarding money allocated for the Northern Shores project, the process for identifying sinkholes and costs associated with repairing versus a temporary fix of sinkholes. Both bodies felt that the extra money should be used to ensure that foundations of new schools are prepared properly with the best materials to prevent future sinkholes. They also agreed that it would be advantageous for City inspectors to look at the work completed by contractors to ensure that the foundations are solid, including the workmanship and materials used. City Manager Moor agreed that inspections are not only completed on new schools but on buildings being repaired. Dr. Gordon suggested that for future new schools, consideration is given to grading and inspection of land for any potential areas that may cause sinkholes, before deciding to build on that site.

Mayor Duman stated that with the increase in revenues, the City is in a better position to fully fund the school systems request and felt that both budgets were good new stories.

➤ **SPS Operations Facility Relocation - Transfer of SPS Property to City**

Mr. Moor, City Manager, presented information regarding SPS's Operations Facility and the transfer of SPS property to the City. He discussed the condition of the property on Freeney Avenue and how the new facilities building on Bright Lane is a better, safer and more efficient building. He recommended the release of Freeney Avenue back to the City for possible demolition of the property for the betterment of the entire neighborhood as the current condition of the building is not suitable for any use. Mr. Moor also requested the transfer of Driver Elementary School (DES) back to the City. He stated that the property could be surplus. Mr. Moor suggested an alternative site for relocation of the School Administrative Offices (SAO). He suggested an evaluation to possibly build an addition on the current Operations site which would house all employees located at SAO. He stated potential next steps for moving forward would include transfer of properties and claiming them as surplus, SPS and City to develop a joint-use agreement for DES gym. It was also mentioned that the Superintendent and City Manager meet to discuss and analyze options for moving SAO to the site at Operations before the next the CIP.

Dr. Gordon and School Board Members agreed that Bright Lane was a great compromise. He indicated that all items that needed to be preserved have been moved out of Freeney Avenue. Additionally, he stated that the money allocated for SAO's relocation was allocated to pay for the rebuilding of John F. Kennedy Middle School. Dr. Gordon expressed his concern with transferring both properties — Freeney Avenue and Driver — back to the City without having a solid plan in place for the relocation of SAO; however, he stated that

he would fully support the Board's decision to transfer the property at Freney Avenue back to the City. Dr. Gordon suggested a compromise of building for building. Additional conversation ensued as questions and concerns were expressed regarding the delay in returning Driver Elementary School back to the City and the promise of a new location for SAO as the relocation of SAO has been delayed over the past several years. It was also stated that the school (DES) is a magnet for crime and vandalism and the community would like to see something done with the vacant building.

Both City Council and the School Board agreed to explore possible solutions for DES and for SAO.

➤ **Enforcement Camera Revenue - Funded School Safety Projects**

Mr. Moor presented information regarding the enforcement cameras, the revenues, and the school safety projects. He explained the enforcement camera funding (outstanding revenue - \$4,923,216, operating expenditures - \$2,853,468, and the remaining balance totaling \$8,055,516). He stated that the revenue collected is declining and is not a revenue maker. Because safety is being taken more seriously, fewer citations are being written. Mr. Moor highlighted various safety measures needed and those that are being put in place around the schools and City including the need for crosswalks at KFMS (Phase 1), train information program, upgrades to emergency vehicles, SPS and City sidewalk additions, bulletproof vests, bomb detecting canines, and the Mill Street guardrail (Phase 2). Mayor Duman explained how the stop light system works, its cost, and how fees are handled. He indicated that strict state codes are followed regarding the collecting and handling of fees (which are handled by a contracting company). He also stated that initial money received from citations paid goes towards the monthly \$100,000 fee for having the enforcement camera contract. Mayor Duman indicated that the contract will actually be revenue neutral making it difficult to budget those funds from year to year. Additionally, he stated that the money collected goes into a fund to be spent on public safety concerns. These concerns come as recommendations to City Council from the Public Safety Committee, which Dr. Gordon is a member of. This committee recommends to City Council what the money should be spent on. One of the first initiatives was for the money to go towards the school but this is a city project that goes into a city fund. Mayor Duman also briefly shared his concern regarding a lawsuit that has been filed regarding the enforcement camera fees, but he is unsure of the lawsuit's validity at this time.

Mayor Duman agreed to continue making safety a priority for citizens and the school division in the city of Suffolk.

➤ **Elementary School Options - Elephant's Fork (EFES) & Kilby Shores (KSES)**

Mr. Moor shared information regarding the rezoning of the elementary schools. He talked about the efforts on rezoning elementary schools as a way to satisfy the requirements of the Department of Justice. He highlighted the proposed zoning for Lake Kilby and Kilby Shores in addition to information from the cooperative strategies study that was presented February 3, 2021. Mr. Moor discussed how both Elephant's Fork and Kilby Shores Elementary Schools' location and current conditions created safety issues, and he highlighted future proposals / considerations that will correct these issues. He suggested three possible options: Option 1- Build 2, 800 seat replacement schools (\$110 million), Option 2- Build 1, (centrally located) 1,000 seat school (\$70 million), and Option 3- Build 1 (centrally located) 800 seat school and consider a 200-seat addition to NSES or other abutting elementary school (\$91 million).

Dr. Gordon indicated that if schools were built based on the options presented by Mr. Moor, schools would have no room for growth, they would potentially open at capacity. However, he agreed with Mr. Moor regarding the extra classrooms at NSES but pushed back on the options presented. Dr. Gordon stated that his support would always be for Option 1 with the caveat of a different location for EFES and the possibility of Forest Glen Middle and Kilby Shores Elementary Schools sharing the same campus style site.

City Council and School Board Members shared their concerns regarding these elementary schools and felt that this issue must be resolved by both bodies as fast as possible. It was stated that the city and the schools used different formulas for calculating capacity, and suggested that the City Manager and Superintendent work together closely to develop one method for determining school capacity so that both bodies would be on the same page so that future schools are built for the opportunity of growth and not for the current population.

Both City Council and School Board Members were appreciative of the information shared, the dialog had, the various options discussed/suggested, including two schools, campus schools, and/or repurposing schools. They felt that education is the number one backbone of the country, and they agreed that the City Manager and the Superintendent must continue working closely together to come up with the best solution not for the school board nor city council, but for the citizens and the students of the city.

Vice Chair Howell left the meeting during discussion at 5:39 p.m. due to a previously scheduled meeting.

RECESS

- Mayor Duman recessed the meeting for a 10-minute break.
- The meeting was called to order at 5:51 p.m.

DISCUSSION cont.

➤ **Residential Development**

Kevin Wyne, Director of Planning and Community Development, presented information on residential pipeline development relative to the school districts. He provided information about residential development that is committed (projects that have an approved engineering site plan but have not yet been completed) versus non-committed (projects that do not yet have an approved engineering site plan). He highlighted development in the Northern, and Central growth areas. He stated that the most stress remains in the Nansmond River High School area however; Lakeland High School's area remains under leverage from a capacity perspective. Col. Fred Cherry and John Yeates Middle Schools are in good shape relative to pipeline development; however Forest Glen Middle School remains the most stressed (from a capacity perspective) utilizing pipeline data. He added that Elephant's Fork and Kilby Shores Elementary Schools are the most stressed as it relates to pipeline data.

Mayor Duman expressed his disappointment in the information presented. He was hoping for a more specific presentation as to pipeline development in each individual neighborhood which showed whether development was active or inactive, and to the percent that it was built-out, and reflected student generation that was going to result from the build-out that also looked at capacity. He suggested that a report as referenced be compiled and sent to all members of the City Council and the School Board. This report would provide the School Board with information regarding neighborhoods that are not yet built-out and what the student generation would be if and when they are built-out. City Council and School

Board Members asked questions and provided comments. Based on a question about the Planning Commission and their inclusion in the joint meeting, Mayor Duman explained why the Planning Commission would not be involved in this meeting. He added that the commission becomes involved when there is either a conditional use permit or rezoning to allow for additional building. He also explained the use of proffers based on a member's question. Mayor Duman explained that proffers are voluntary and proportionate on how much a school would cost at full capacity. He also added that they can be used for expansions, but only if the project is in the CIP. Additional conversation, questions, and comments ensued between members and Mr. Wyne. It was suggested for Suffolk Public Schools to have a viable role in the comprehensive plan of the City of Suffolk.

Members thanked Mayor Duman for requesting additional specific information and they felt that it would be helpful for moving forward.

➤ **Major Transportation Projects**

Gerry Jones, Assistant Director of Public Works, presented information regarding key construction projects, road construction projects that are ongoing or coming in the near future so the School Board can be aware the impacts to transportation. Mr. Jones provided updates to the roadway project on Holland Road, Shoulder's Hill Road at Bridge Road, Shoulder's Hill Road Widening, Nansemond Parkway/Wilroy Overpass, Nansemond-Bennetts Pasture Road improvements, and Pitchettle Road realignment. He also provided updates on the Pughsville Drainage Phase II, Godwin Boulevard Improvements, Routes 10/32 diverting diamond interchange, Route 17 (Bridge Road) widening, Route 460 widening, Suffolk Seaboard Coastline Trail segments, and Nansemond Parkway over Beamons Mill Pond.

City Council and School Board Members asked questions, shared their concerns with the various projects, and the lack of work done to roads and ditches in the rural areas that remain a hazard to the school transportation department. Mr. Jones agreed to provide additional information regarding the members questions at a later date.

Board Member Riddick left the meeting during discussion at 6:39 p.m. due to a family emergency.

Adjournment

➤ **Closing Remarks:**

City Council Members, School Board Members and Dr. Gordon shared brief closing remarks. All appreciated the meeting including historic information shared and the collaboration between the two governing bodies. It was agreed that they can do a better job building new schools and agreed with the need for preschool classes in each school. They also liked the option of an early childhood center included in future development.

Members felt that the meeting was productive, interactive, and transparent. They agreed to move forward with respect, trust, and working together. Members also appreciated and encouraged the City Manager and Superintendent to continue working closely together to hash out what's best for all citizens and students in the City of Suffolk. They also looked forward to the next joint meeting, possibly in August of 2024.

There being no further comments or concerns, Mayor Duman and Board Chair Jenkins adjourned the Joint City Council and School Board meeting at 6:54 p.m.