

REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF THE SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday, September 11, 2025 ~ 5:00 P.M.

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

Board Members Present:

Heather Howell, *Chair*
Sean McGee, *Vice Chair*
Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham
Valerie Fields
Karen Jenkins
Tyron Riddick
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*

OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING/WORK SESSION

➤ Call to Order:

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

➤ VDOT Building Update

Kevin Hughes, Interim City Manager, Kevin Wyne, Director of Planning and Community Development, and Gary Jones, Deputy City Manager, provided information regarding the Riverbend project. The project would consist of an office building for the School Administrative Offices (SAO), 497 residential units (townhomes/age-restricted multifamily units), commercial office use, a waterfront marina, clubhouse, and potential restaurant. The team discussed the project's application process, acreage, zoning/possible rezoning, proffers, the conceptual master plan, and the project's relation/impact to Hillpoint Elementary and King's Fork High Schools. They also talked about conveyance of the property, advancement of capacity for impacted schools, funding currently listed in the city's CIP for construction of a new SAO building (\$22 million), and competing projects. Next steps include Planning Commission Public Hearing scheduled for September 16, 2025, and City Council's Public Hearing (tentatively scheduled for October 15, 2025). Mr. Hughes concluded the presentation by requesting to receive a formal response from the school board regarding their intent to move forward, before city council's public hearing.

Board Members engaged in discussion and asked questions regarding: (1) funding listed on the City's CIP versus SPS's CIP; (2) Proffers; (3) the project's inclusion of residential units not being in the best interest of SPS because it will further lead to school overcrowding; (4) timelines; (5) the lack of realistic replacement plans for existing infrastructure and schools; (6) concerns with the condition of the current SAO building; (7) building multiple schools at one time; (8) the cost to rehabilitate VDOT building for staff to occupy before 2028; and (9) ownership of the VDOT building.

➤ CIP Discussion

Wendy Forsman, Chief Financial Officer, provided a historical perspective of the School Board's Capital Improvement Projects. She discussed new/renovation projects listed on the school board's CIP beginning with the year 2001 (the oldest CIP record found) through the

present. She discussed projects that were completed, those that are still incomplete and listed on the current CIP, and those that never came to fruition. Mrs. Forsman highlighted projects listed on CIP for 2027 that will be submitted to the city (pending board approval). They included the following (in no particular order): EFES-new land, early childhood center at EFES-renovation, CCAP-renovations, KSES/FGMS/NPES-new schools, NRHS-addition, JYMS-new school, and SAO-phase 2. She also explained that CIP is a 10-year plan with a once per year renewal cycle. She further explained that 7 of the 11 projects on the proposal, the city delayed funding until years 5-10 on the adopted 2026-2035 CIP, and that most of those projects have been on the CIP request for more than 20 years.

Board Members, Dr. Gordon and Mrs. Forsman engaged in dialog regarding various projects on the CIP. Members expressed their concerns and asked questions about funding sources, the possibility of an early childhood center, schools capacity issues, other projects/repairs needed throughout the division, the possibility of multiple projects being worked on at the same time, and the recommendation by a board member to build schools simultaneously and in a shorter period of time. Board Members completed their rank order sheet and submitted them to the clerk for compiling. Results will be shared and voted on during New Business (Capital Improvement 2027-2036 Submittal to City of Suffolk.)

➤ Audit Discussion

Dr. Gordon, and Mrs. Forsman provided information regarding the need for specificity in developing an RFP for financial audit of school funds. Clarification was needed for the (1) audit's contract and terms of agreement, (2) scope of services (general requirements), (3) scope of work (fiscal years), (4) the use of et cetera (etc.), and (5) points system for evaluating respondents (rubric). Mrs. Forsman emphasized the need for clarification as changes cannot be made after the RFP has been issued. She also stated that a committee would need to be created to evaluate all responses to the RFP that will be based on the approved rubric. Members must ensure that all of their requests are specifically documented in the RFP. She gave examples of potential pitfalls and/or exorbitant cost in reviewing each Purchase Card transaction and requesting accounts payable vendor invoices to be exported from software and suggested thresholds for the inquiries.

Discussion ensued as board members asked questions and provided clarification of the proposal. Board Chair Howell summarized the clarifications and suggestions (removal of "etc.", dates for terms of agreement, and the proposal should layout requirements/scope of services, and the rubric/points scale). This should be discussed and voted on at the next meeting (September 25, 2025). Additional conversation ensued between the board and Mrs. Forsman regarding the concern and the enormous impact that the audit will have on the Finance Department's staff and the possibility to employ someone specifically to gather information needed for the audit.

Board Chair Howell apologized to the public for the length of the work session and recessed the meeting for 20 minutes to allow staff to have dinner.

MEETING RECESS

➤ Meeting Recess:

There being no further discussion, Board Chair Howell recessed the meeting at 7:14 p.m.

RE-OPENING OF PUBLIC MEETING

- Meeting Called to Order:
Board Chair Howell re-opened the public meeting at 7:39 p.m.
- Pledge of Allegiance:
Board Member Riddick 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 Dr. Brittingham read the mission of SPS.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- Approval of Agenda:
Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve the agenda with removing the August 14, 2025 minutes from the Consent Agenda and adding it to New Business.

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

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. Dr. Shawn Green – Re: Expansion of Nansemond River High School and the Current Capital Improvement Plan. Dr. Green expressed an urgent need for the NRHS expansion to be moved up in the CIP.
 2. Janet McKinney – Re: Minutes of August 14, 2025. Mrs. McKinney expressed that the minutes of August 14, 2025 were not a true record of the meeting and a disparity as to how comments by different members are portrayed.

CONSENT AGENDA

- Approval of the Consent Agenda:
Board Member Riddick moved and Vice Chair McGee seconded the motion to approve the Consent Agenda.

Board Chair Howell clarified for Board Member Slingluff that the minutes were removed from the Consent Agenda during the approval of the agenda and placed as Item 4 under New Business.

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

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

➤ Ordinance 25/26-13 through Ordinance 25/26

Board Chair Howell asked if the board would consider the ordinances collectively or separately. Board Member Riddick agreed to consider the ordinances collectively. There was no dissention from other board members. Attorney Waller suggested that the Board consider Ordinance 25/26-17 separately because it should be sent back to the Policy Review Committee (PRC) for PRC to consider comments received from the Local Advisory Committee for Special Education (formerly SEAC).

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to collectively approve Ordinance 25/26-13 through Ordinance 25/26-22, with the exception of Ordinance 25/26-17 (Item #5).

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

➤ Ordinance 25/26-17: An Ordinance Amending Chapter 8, Article 33, Section 8-33.3:1 entitled “Remediation efforts explained; alternate means for remediation; when retake not allowed; students who fail grade 8 reading or mathematics test, etc.; remediation record maintained; student’s ineligible for remediation recovery” of the Policies of the Suffolk City School Board - Second Reading

Board Member Riddick moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to send Ordinance 25/26-17 back to the Policy Review Committee (PRC).

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

NEW BUSINESS

➤ Capital Improvement 2027-2036 Submittal to City of Suffolk

The Clerk read aloud the following results of the rank orders submitted by Board Members:

1. Elephant’s Fork Elementary School
2. Nansemond River High School
3. School Administrative Offices
4. Kilby Shores Elementary School
5. Nansemond Parkway Elementary School
6. Forest Glen Middle School
7. College and Career Academy at Pruden
8. John Yeates Middle School
9. Early Childhood Center at EFES (Pre-K Center)

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Fields seconded the motion to approve the CIP rank order as read by the Clerk for submission to the City of Suffolk.

Board Member Riddick confirmed that a letter would be sent to the city council asking them to consider moving forward with Elephant’s Fork Elementary replacement, Nansemond River High addition, and the School Administrative Offices building simultaneously. Board Chair Howell confirmed that is the intent.

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

➤ Payment of Bills and Payroll August 2025

Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Members Riddick and Jenkins seconded the motion to approve the Bills and Payroll for August 2025, as submitted.

Upon roll call vote, the vote was: Aye: 5 / Nay: 2 (Dr. Brittingham, Slingluff) / Abstain: 0. The motion Passed by vote of 5 to 2.

➤ Resolution 25/26-7: A Resolution Approving the Terms and Conditions of a Right of Way Agreement Between the Suffolk City School Board and Virginia Electric and Power Company, D/B/A Dominion Energy Virginia

Board Member Dr. Brittingham moved and Board Member Jenkins seconded the motion to approve Resolution 25/26-7.

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

➤ School Board Meeting Minutes: August 14, 2025 - First Monthly Meeting

Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the motion to approve the minutes from August 14, 2025 with the addition verbatim of comments, beginning with Board Members Comments when Board Member Riddick began speaking, through the adjournment of the meeting.

Mr. Riddick led the discussion addressing the meeting adjournment, and requested that comments from all board members be included in the minutes, including statements made after the camera feed was stopped as the meeting was not technically adjourned. Board Chair Howell expressed concern with gaveling to end the meeting but uttering the word “convened” instead of “adjourned.” She asked Attorney Waller if the gaveling would signify the end of the meeting? Attorney Waller clarified that the meeting technically was not adjourned by gaveling however, from a practical standpoint, the meeting was over as people began to leave. He added that the meeting did not officially adjourn without gaveling and announcing “meeting adjourned.” Additional questions/clarification ensued between Board Chair Howell, Attorney Waller, and Board Member Riddick regarding rectifying the official end of the August 14th meeting, and the request that there be a transcription of the meeting. Mr. Riddick requested for it to be notated in the minutes that there was additional discussion from all parties that was not reflected in the minutes due to audio disconnection. He also requested via FOIA, text messages regarding the situation currently being discussed between Board Chair Howell, Vice Chair McGee, Board Member Dr. Brittingham, and Board Member Slingluff. The conversation resulted in an amended motion by Vice Chair McGee.

Vice Chair McGee moved and Board Member Dr. Brittingham seconded the amended motion to approve the minutes from August 14, 2025 with the addition of verbatim comments from the start of board member comments (Business by Board Members), when Mr. Riddick began to speak, to the end of all available audio recording of the meeting; and adding a statement that additional comments made by Mr. Riddick and others were not captured by audio recording before the feed was disconnected.

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

- Citizen Advisory Committee Organizing & Training Session Highlights Recommendation
Board Member Jenkins shared highlights from the Citizen Advisory Committee Organizing and Training Session that was held on August 4, 2025. Committee members gained clarity, shared concerns, and learned from each other. Mr. Melvin Bradshaw, Community Engagement Facilitator, shared his committee's successes and how they work to meet the needs of Suffolk Public Schools, parents, and students. Committee members also expressed concerns regarding DEI policies and how that could potentially hinder services they provide in certain capacities or to address certain student issues. They stressed the need for continued guidance to prevent unintentional overstepping of boundaries and/or violation of policies while trying to fulfill their committee responsibilities. The training was well attended by over 40 participants, who enjoyed interactive activities, dialogue, unity, and collaboration of a shared purpose. Special School Board Committee Chair Jenkins, extended her gratitude to committee members Riddick, Dr. Brittingham, Fields, and also thanked Mr. Bradshaw, Ms. Gardner, and the members of the Citizen Advisory Committees.
- Ordinance 2025/26-23 through Ordinance 2025/26-31 - First Reading
Ordinance 2025/26-23 through 2025/26-31 were for first reading only, no action required at this time. There were no questions or comments regarding these ordinances.

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. Travis McKinney – Re: Clean Up. Mr. McKinney expressed concern with comments made by a board member that embraced separation and segregation of people.
 2. Janet McKinney – Re: Civil Discourse. Mrs. McKinney expressed concern with division on the board and retribution shown by a board member. She requested via FOIA, Policy Review Committee meetings regarding Ordinance 23/24-21, Ordinance 23/24-22, and Ordinance 23/24-23.
 3. Sandra Hubbard – Re: Military Directory Data Exchange Opt Out Form. Ms. Hubbard expressed her concerns for children/students who opt out of sharing their data on the military data form and involuntarily take the ASVAB test that can send them on the path to go into the military.

BUSINESS BY BOARD MEMBERS

- Comments and Reports by School Board Members:
Board Members:
 - Welcomed all back for the school year, encouraged goals for the best possible year.
 - Congratulated Mr. Bryant and the KFHS administration for their efforts to keep students focused on learning.
 - Appreciated and thankful for board discourse.
 - Recognized the significance of Sept. 11th and beg all to have discourse without leading to tragedy and violence.
 - Appreciated the support, encouragement, participation, and trust of the community and borough.
 - Expressed that votes made are done in the best interest of all children.
 - Learned from mistakes made out of frustration and will continue to move forward.
 - Attended and enjoyed the STEM Academy Ribbon Cutting Ceremony, NRHS football game, presentation given at a church by Board Member Jenkins. Attended and enjoyed a

Federal Advocacy conference in Washington DC to advocate for SPS to receive additional funding.

- Looked forward to upcoming community information sessions, and attending PTA meetings.
- Encouraged borough to pay attention to board meetings to ensure innovations that they want to see happen are being implemented.
- Thanked the Suffolk Public Schools family for starting the new year in a powerful and positive way.
- Enjoyed visiting schools, bus rides/stops, the new entrance at NRHS, convocation.
- Thanked the Board for great dialogue and sharing of insight.
- Encouraged all to reach out to City Council to do more to prioritize and support schools.
- Commended Board Chair Howell on her role as Chair.

ADJOURNMENT

➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

Board Chair Howell adjourned the September 11, 2025 School Board Meeting at 8:49 p.m.

Heather Howell, *School Board Chair*

Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*