

The Special Meeting of the New London Board of Education was held on February 12, 2025 in the New London Public Schools' Welcome Center and via Zoom Webinars.

1. Call to Order

President Elaine Maynard-Adams called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Present for the Board of Education: President – Elaine Maynard-Adams
Vice-President – Bianca Alexis-Sylvain
Secretary – Nathan Caron

Board Members Present: Karen Bergin
Alisha Blake
Danni Cruz (*participated virtually*)
Susan Hambey

Present for the Administration: Superintendent, Dr. Cynthia Ritchie

Due to Board Members participating online, all votes were taken by roll call.

Prior to the start of the discussion of the budget, Ms. Maynard-Adams shared Public Speaking is not an item on the agenda, but that she would be relaxing general rules of meeting order to allow for the Mayor, members of City Council, and members of the Board of Finance to both make comments and ask questions about the budget as it is presented.

Mayor Passero, City of New London Mayor, shared the following comments prior to the start of the budget discussions: He shared that he would like to clarify the City's position as we all move into this difficult budget cycle. There have been meetings of the Joint Budget Task Force for many months, which have included himself, members of the Council, Finance Director, have been fully engaged in this process. His goal was to avoid the publication of a proposed budget that was well out of the range of anything that the City of New London could support. There is a disagreement on that issue, but we are where we are now. He shared that he would like to explain to this Board as they work towards producing a budget to the City, that the reason there is such strong resistance on his part is to see an unrealistic request. The City has had a detrimental property tax increase due to the re-evaluations and many families suffered as a result. There are only 12,000 households in the City, and the number of households that have students is even smaller. Some of the statistics are that 57% of these households are ALICE households, meaning asset limited income constrained but employed. These are your families, some who have both parents working or a one parent household working numerous low paying jobs to make ends meet and they cannot. Just about one quarter of the population lives below the poverty line.

He continued that unfortunately in the State of Connecticut, the only revenue that a municipality like New London has is the property tax, which is regressive. The lower that you are on the totem pole, the greater percentage of your income is paying for property taxes. He shared that he has

struggled hard to lower the mill rate, recognizing that reality, because the beset way to support families and lift them up out of this cycle is to relieve the property tax burden. The tax burden which is already heavy became worse as the commercial sector went down and that shifted to households. It has been dramatic in its affects on the City. He stated that this is why it is so important to him that there is not an increased property tax burden on the City. He explained that he knows the Board of Education will advocate for staff and students, and would like them to remember that while they are advocating for the students to not forget their families. If the Board presents to Council a budget that requires a property tax increase of any kind, they will be directly impacting the families and hurting the families, which does not help the students. He stated that this is basic data and nothing new. Setting the people of New London up to fight for the scraps amongst themselves because we cannot give our students what the suburbs can is not the way to do it. It is no one's fault in the City of New London. This is a statewide and systemic problem which has been with us for a long time. He implored the Board to keep their principles in mind while the budget is developed, and he reiterated that he cannot take a budget that will impact the City.

Ms. Maynard-Adams also stated the following for the record: Good evening board members, superintendent and staff and members of the public. Tonight we begin the laborious task of reviewing our historically and chronically underfunded budget, this time for the 2026 fiscal year. I want to reiterate that our process started in October when, according to board policy, we set the parameters for the superintendent to draft this budget. At that time we directed Dr. Ritchie to bring us a same services budget. In plain English, we wanted a budget that reflects this year's programs and personnel at next year's projected cost, adjusted for changes in enrollment. We further directed that if the superintendent wished to include anything new she should explain it in detail, justify the addition and offer suggestions as to how to pay for it.

The budget before us does precisely what the board directed. A casual observer may ask "how can you possibly present a budget with a \$10MM shortfall". The succinct answer is because it is our job to advocate for our children, families and staff. We believe that just as a child is no less hungry because we can't afford to give him or her a sandwich, our children are no less needy because we can't afford to provide what they need or advocate for what they need.

The board will review the budget over the next two nights. We will pause for two weeks, then on March 3 take up final approval for a budget to be sent downtown. That pause gives us and the administration additional time to ask questions, contemplate changes, and perform further review. This pause also enables us to provide some of the additional information requested of us by the Board of Finance.

We are well aware of the fiscal constraints of the City of New London. We live here too, and we pay taxes here. We know that the city doesn't have \$10MM laying around to pump into education. Leaving aside the fact that we've been warning of this impending fiscal cliff for the last four years, we challenge the city to help us find ways to avoid disaster. The office of the mayor and the city council can partner with us to advocate at the state and federal level to either fully fund their mandates or reduce the mandates. The superintendent has discussed some \$3MM in potential savings through shared services. We hope that the mayor and the city will work with us to achieve these savings.

2. Discussion of the Proposed FY2025-2026 Budget

The following District Staff began the presentation of the FY2025-2026 Budget to the Board of Education:

- Dr. Cynthia Ritchie – Superintendent of Schools
- Mr. Rob Funk – Chief Financial Officer
- Ms. Melissa Flores-Seijo – Director of Business and Finance
- Dr. Jennifer Hills-Papetti – Assistant Superintendent
- Ms. Christine Pemberton – Executive Director of Talent and Human Resources
- Ms. Carrie Rivera – Executive Director of Student and Family Supports
- Mr. Miguel Gautier, Jr. – Executive Director of District Operations
- Ms. Kristea Francolino – Manager of Executive Support Services
- Ms. Janet Farquhar – Director of Magnet Pathways
- Ms. Maria Carrillo – Director of Multi-Lingual Learners

Each program was reviewed one by one, allowing Board members, the Mayor, members of City Council, and members of the Board of Finance to ask questions about both staffing, finances, and programming.

Mr. Cruz was momentarily disconnected from the meeting during the program discussions from 7:52 p.m. – 7:55 p.m.

The Board reviewed all program staffing and associated financial information in the budget book from page 1 through page 122. The Board will hold an additional meeting on February 13 to continue the review and discussion of the budget, to include overall financial information and school profiles, beginning on page 123.

3. Adjournment

Motion by Ms. Blake, seconded by Ms. Alexis-Sylvain, to adjourn the meeting.

Motion carried, 7-0

The meeting was adjourned at 8:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Nathan Caron
Secretary