

GREATER FALL RIVER VOCATIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING
251 STONEHAVEN ROAD, FALL RIVER, MA
DISTRICT OFFICE CONFERENCE ROOM
JANUARY 8, 2026

The regular meeting of the Greater Fall River Vocational School District Committee was called to order at 5:31 p.m. by Chairman Paul Jennings, with the following persons in attendance, Richard Manuels Jr. of Fall River, Joan Menard of Fall River, Donald DiBiasio of Somerset and Jeffrey Begin of Swansea.

Absent: William Flanagan of Fall River

Also in attendance were: Leslie Weckesser, Assistant Superintendent-Principal, Melissa Petrasso, Director of Finance, Attorney Gregory Brilhante, Helena Neves, Executive Secretary, Edward Hill, Steve Desmarais, Randi Costa and Jason Costa.

Remote attendance: Brian Bentley, Decio Matos, Kate Warren, Thomas Librera, Debbie Pacheco, Jonathan Root, and Richard Medeiros.

Mr. Jennings called for the roll call.

Mr. Jennings made the following announcement: In accordance with Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 30A, Section 20(f), any member of the public may make an audio or video recording of this public meeting. A member of the public who wishes to record a meeting must first notify the chair and must comply with reasonable requirements regarding audio or video equipment established by the chair so as not to interfere with the meeting. *Mr. Matos provided notification of intent to record.*

Mr. Jennings led the Pledge of Allegiance.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Mr. Manuels, and voted unanimously to approve the December 11, 2025 minutes and December 17, 2025, as submitted.

Mr. Jennings deferred to Mrs. Weckesser for the special recognition of Mr. Hill. Mrs. Weckesser noted that Mr. Hill entered Diman as a student in September 1968 and graduated in June 1972 from the Auto Collision Program. Mr. Hill's dedication to Diman did not end at graduation. In 1999, he returned as a member of the School Committee, where he served for 13 years. Mr. Hill co-founded the Diman Bengal Education Foundation and has been an integral member of the Diman Alumni Association, the School Building Committee, and numerous other civic and community boards. He truly exemplifies what it means to bleed orange and black. In recognition of his many accomplishments, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, honors Ed Hill as a community leader with the Public Education Award for his continued support, commitment, leadership, and sustained efforts to enhance the educational opportunities of the students at Diman Regional Vocational Technical High School.

Mr. Hill thanked everyone for the recognition and shared a couple of stories about his personal connection to Diman, including the construction of the existing building, its opening in 1968, and being the second student to enter the building. He described a lifelong loyalty to Diman and the community. His involvement in various Diman committees, including the School Committee, Diman Education Foundation, and School Building Committee further shows his commitment to Diman. Mr. Hill acknowledged the efforts by past and present board members, administrators, and community supporters for sustaining the foundation's mission and stability. He also expressed appreciation to the current leadership, including the new principal, superintendent-director, business manager, and foundation members, and acknowledged several individuals for their encouragement, service, and collaboration over the years.

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A written student report was provided in the absence of the student representative who was attending the DECA conference.

There was no Citizen Input.

Agenda item 2.1 Unfinished Business, b) District Curriculum Accommodation Plan was not discussed as it is not finalized. Mrs. Weckesser noted that the DCAP will be presented at the February meeting.

Mr. Jennings began the discussion of the Naming of Facilities agenda item and noted that Mr. Manuels requested to speak on the matter. Mr. Manuels stated that he wanted to share his opinion and feelings on the topic and read a prepared statement expressing his opposition to the renaming of facilities. Mr. Manuels concluded by stating that he did not support removing any names from named areas of the existing building and that he was prepared to make a motion to transfer all existing names to their dedicated equivalent spaces in the new building, ensuring that the legacy of Diman remains intact as the district enters a new era.

Mr. DiBiasio agreed that the individuals for whom the current facilities are named are deserving of the honor. He noted that the new school offers a fresh start, with opportunities to name spaces in recognition of more recent individuals. Mr. Begin asked what the plan would be for the current named spaces and whether there would be plaques on the walls or a large sign above the shop entrances, as has been done previously. He suggested that a resolution would be to recognize that these individuals, as well as the spaces named in their honor, represent the legacy of Diman, while also make room for future recognition.

Mr. Jennings stated that he proposed a uniform plaque for all spaces, each including a brief history of the honored individual. Mr. Begin agreed that the plaques should be the same size throughout the building.

It was moved by Mr. Manuels, seconded by Mr. DiBiasio, and voted unanimously to keep the current named facilities, and visit a new way to dedicate new areas or shared areas with new deserving candidates.

Mr. DiBiasio provided the MSBA Project update. The main floor is tiled from the main entrance down the corridor toward Room 251 and Culinary Arts. Classrooms on the second and third floors are mostly ready; painting is complete, whiteboards are up, doors are being installed, and floors are in. The gymnasium's floor is in progress; equipment such as batting nets, mats, and mat holders are being installed. There were some minor infrastructure issues with the catwalk in the auditorium, but the Team is working to resolve them. Once the weather breaks, the Auditorium's flat floor will be removed and replaced with the proper inclined floor. Polished floors are complete in Auto Tech and Graphics and moving on to the Trade Hall, and any other open space available. Roof work is complete. Almost all windows are installed with the exception of windows that are being used as temporary entryways for supplies. The Temporary Certificate of Occupancy (TCO) which was originally scheduled for June 1st, is now pushed to June 17th due to a delay in the installation of the Auto Collision pits for the paint booths. The fire alarms and sprinkler systems must be fully operational, limiting the move of equipment move. Although, there's a delay with obtaining the TCO, the opening of the new building for students is still on track for the upcoming school year.

Mr. Jennings asked whether the June 17th date is fixed or can it change. Mr. DiBiasio stated that Jonathan Sligar from Suffolk is confident the date will hold. Attorney Brilhante asked if any issues with the city are anticipated. Mr. DiBiasio responded that no problems have come up and noted that city inspectors are onsite almost daily.

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Mr. DiBiasio noted that 12 month staff should be able to move in by July. He stated that asbestos abatement will begin shortly thereafter, with demolition expected to start in October. The project is on budget and about 71.5% complete.

Mr. DiBiasio provided a summary of Prime Contract Change Order (PCCO) No. 013, which has been approved by the School Building Committee and needs to be reaffirmed.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Ms. Menard, and voted unanimously to reaffirm PCCO No. 013 for a total amount of \$148,617.14.

Mr. DiBiasio provided a summary of Designer Amendment #12 Additional Landscaping Scope. The proposed amendment for the amount of \$170,000 is for design services for the hill located behind the old softball field, and down toward the baseball field. The redesign of the area will address runoff water issues and will make the area more useful for students to sit, watch games, socialize, or even for outdoor classroom activities.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Ms. Menard, and voted unanimously to reaffirm the Designer Amendment #12 Additional Landscaping Scope, for a total amount of \$170,000.

Ms. Petrasso provided an overview of the MSBA project expenditures. Invoices from Colliers, KBA, and Suffolk reflect the billing for the month of December for the project. Quotes from AET Labs – Carpentry - installation of paint booths for the quoted amount of \$25,377.26, BODE Metal Fab installation for the rollout sheet rack and the cantilever roll rack rollout for the quoted amount of \$8,863.16, Guldmann, Health Assisting ceiling lift for the quoted amount of \$15,213.45 and MSC for various shops rolling carts for the quoted amount of \$229,514.66, were also presented for approval.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Ms. Menard, and voted unanimously to approve the following MSBA Project expenditures: Colliers Invoice #0001131041 dated 12/31/2025 for the amount of \$135,283.14, KBA invoice #20006.01-42 dated 12/31/2025 for the amount of \$127,087.00, and Suffolk Construction application no. 27 dated 12/31/2025 for the amount of \$5,904,739.34. The following quotes were also approved: AET Labs for the quoted amount of \$25,377.26, BODE for the quoted amount of \$8,863.16, Guldmann the quoted amount of \$15,213.45 and MSC for the quoted amount of \$229,514.66,

Mr. DiBiasio provided the Housebuilding/Facilities Sub-Committee report. The work at the Westport house is moving along nicely. The windows, doors and roof were installed before the Christmas break. The interior walls are going up. Electricity and HVAC will be onsite soon.

Mr. DiBiasio asked if anyone had any questions on the community projects list. There were no questions.

Mrs. Weckesser provided the Shop Placement report. This year, students were asked to rank their shop preferences from 1–18. The overall results were more balanced, showing strong work by the freshman exploratory teachers. Precision Machining & Engineering (formerly Advanced Manufacturing) and Dental, both showed significant gains compared to last year. Seventeen students did not receive one of their top six shop choices. There was also a substantial reduction in special education and ESL students not receiving preferred placements. Approximately 10 special education students did not receive a top six choice; this will be a targeted focus area with collaboration between administration, shop teachers, and the special education department to ensure appropriate grading and assessment. Freshman Vocational teachers were provided with three years of freshman first-choice data at the start of the year to

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support goal setting and program improvement. This effort is believed to have contributed to the more balanced placement outcomes. All but two programs are full. Mrs. Weckesser stated that she has begun discussions with Mrs. Griffin regarding the possibility of creating a two-year program for students who may want to transfer to Diman in their junior year.

Mrs. Weckesser reported on personnel appointments and retirements.

Mrs. Weckesser began the discussion of the Academic Paraprofessional. An additional academic paraprofessional position has been identified in the Title I entitlement grant to provide support to ESL, IEP, and 504 students. The request is to post and hire for the position. Attorney Brilhante asked if the current paraprofessional job description is in any way, shape, or form changing. If it is not, there is no need to take a vote because a new position is not being created. An individual employment agreement will be issued and the salary will be charged to the Title I grant.

Mr. Jennings read the following prepared statement regarding agenda item - 3.1.f – Discussion and Approval of Individual Agreement, Leslie Weckesser, Assistant-Superintendent Principal & Superintendent Director.

“As you are all aware, we are planning to move into the beautiful new Diman Regional High School in June 2026. Mr. Bentley, who has done an excellent job in leading our school during his tenure, is retiring, again, on December 31, 2026.

The School Committee seeking stability and continuity in our transition to the new building engaged in negotiations with Mrs. Weckesser in hopes of extending her contract as Asst. Superintendent so we could ensure the stability and continuity we believed was vitally important in the transition period and most definitely in the challenging opening of the new Diman Regional High School.

During this negotiation period, the School Committee also explored the possibility of negotiation with Mrs. Weckesser to possibly be our next Superintendent, as the Committee unanimously believed that Mrs. Weckesser possessed all the leadership qualities and professional expertise to lead Diman into the next chapter of our rich tradition of providing quality vocational education to the students of Greater Fall River. In addition, the Committee felt that Mrs. Weckesser would provide the stability and continuity we felt was needed at this crucial time.

Based on that, we will be entertaining and voting on a contract extension with Mrs. Weckesser, in which she will continue as Assistant Superintendent-Principal until December 31, 2026, and will then assume the position of Superintendent-Director effective January 1, 2027, and running until June 30, 2029, under the terms and conditions as negotiated.”

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Ms. Menard and voted unanimously to approve a contract extension with Mrs. Weckesser, in which she will continue as Assistant Superintendent-Principal until December 31, 2026, and will then assume the position of Superintendent-Director effective January 1, 2027, and running until June 30, 2029, under the terms and conditions as negotiated.

Mrs. Weckesser reported on the student travel requests

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It was moved by Mr. Manuels, seconded by Mr. DiBiasio and voted unanimously to approve the out of stated travel request submitted by Rick Medeiros, Automotive Technology Instructor quest for students to visit the Newport Car Museum in Portsmouth, RI on March 27, 2026 from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Mrs. Weckesser reported on the use of facilities request.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Mr. Manuels, and voted unanimously to approve the request by Halie Paiva and Ashley Teixeira, LPN to use Room 251 Restaurant and the kitchen on Saturday, February 7, 2026 from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. for their spaghetti dinner fundraiser and to waive all use of facilities fees.

Mrs. Weckesser began the discussion on graduation and noted that Mr. Bentley has requested adding the class president, the president of student government, a representative from the last graduating class of the Hartwell Street location and a representative of the first graduating class of the current Stonehaven Road location as speakers at this year's graduation. He has identified Steve Souza and Ed Hill as the representatives of the past graduating classes.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Mr. Manuels, and voted unanimously to add the class president, the president of student government, a graduate of the Hartwell Street School and a first graduate of the Stonehaven School to this year's graduation speakers.

Mr. Jennings began the discussion of Property and Liability Insurance and deferred to Ms. Petrasso for an update. Ms. Petrasso stated that she contacted the District's current insurance company, Hub International, but due to the timing and the holidays, she is still waiting on a response. Ms. Petrasso noted that she has also contacted Walecka regarding storage liability insurance options. Walecka provided a copy of an unsigned storage contract with two coverage options: option 1: \$0.60 per pound per article, with a maximum liability of \$2,000 per lot/unit and option 2: certificate of insurance based on valuation at \$5 per \$1,000 of value. The total value of the equipment being stored is approximately \$670,000 with the largest item being equipment for graphics. Under option 2, the insurance cost would be \$3,396.70 per month. The total monthly storage cost is approximately \$12,000, which includes: \$9,470 for storage and \$3,396.70 for insurance. Ms. Petrasso also noted that she has looked into other storage options, such as moving the stored items into the new building sooner, but has been informed that this is not possible.

Mr. Jennings asked if insurance policies automatically renew. Ms. Petrasso stated that historically, the policy has not been shopped for annually due to the long-term relationship with the provider. The current insurance policy expires in June and it locked in. Ms. Petrasso further stated that she will be reviewing alternative options and has already started to gather information/quotes.

Ms. Petrasso provided a summary of the monthly financial report. There are no budget adjustments has the carryover funds have not been received yet.

Ms. Petrasso provided an overview of the expenditures in excess of \$10,000.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Mr. Manuels, and voted unanimously to approve the expenditures in excess of \$10,000, as submitted.

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Mr. Bentley provided the Superintendent-Director's report which included an update on student enrollment, admissions, cooperative education and the LPN Program.

The next meeting will be February 12, 2026 at 5:30 PM.

It was moved by Mr. DiBiasio, seconded by Ms. Menard and voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 6:31 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Helena S. Neves

Helena S. Neves, Executive Secretary

Materials Included:

December 11, 2025 Minutes
December 17, 2025 Minutes
Prime Contract Change Order No. 013
Designer Amendment #12 Additional Landscaping Scope
MSBA Project Expenditures
Community Projects List
Shop Placement Report
Monthly Financial Report
Student Activity Agency Accounts Report
Expenditure Report
Superintendent's Report