

**SPECIAL JOINT MEETING OF
SUFFOLK CITY COUNCIL & SUFFOLK CITY SCHOOL BOARD
Wednesday, December 3, 2025 ~ 4:00 P.M.
City Council Chamber, 442 W. Washington Street, Suffolk, VA 23434**

Board Members Present:

Heather Howell, *Chair*
Sean McGee, *Vice Chair*
Dr. Dawn Brittingham
Valerie Fields
Karen Jenkins
Kimberly Slingsluff

Virtual Attendance:

Tyron Riddick¹

City Council Members Present:

Michael Duman, *Mayor*
Lue Ward, *Vice Mayor*
Leroy Bennett
Shelley Butler Barlow
Ebony Wright
John Rector
Timothy Johnson
LeOtis Williams

Administrative Staff Present (Suffolk Public Schools):

Dr. John B. Gordon III, *Superintendent*
Wendell M. Waller, *School Board Attorney*
Tarshia L. Gardner, *Clerk*
Dr. Okema Branch, *Chief Academic Officer*
Dr. Rodney Brown, *Chief of Administrative Services*
Dr. Stenette Byrd III, *Chief of Schools*
Dr. Jessica Avery, *Director of Human Resources*
Melvin Bradshaw, *Communications and Community Facilitator*
Dr. Katelyn Leitner, *Director of Curriculum and Instruction*
Terry Napier, *Director of Facilities and Planning*
Dr. Catherine Pichon, *Director of Elementary Leadership*
Dr. Andre Skinner, *Director of Career and Technical Education*
Dr. Ronald Leigh, *Director of Secondary Leadership*

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**Administrative Staff Present (City of Suffolk):**

William Hutching, Jr., *City Attorney*  
Kevin Hughes, *Interim City Manager*  
Erika Dawley, *City Clerk*  
Aziz Felder, *Deputy City Manager*  
Gerry Jones, *Interim Deputy City Manager*  
James Buie, *Police Chief*  
Charles Meeks, *Director of Finance*  
Mark Furlo, *Director of Parks and Recreation*  
Kevin Wyne, *Director of Planning & Community Development*

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<sup>1</sup> Due to work requirements, Board Member Riddick attended the meeting virtually from Powhatan County, VA.

## OPENING OF JOINT MEETING

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

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Michael Duman at 4 p.m. Mayor Duman welcomed all council members, City Manager Kevin Hughes, and City Attorney William Hutching. Board Chair Howell welcomed all board members, including Board Member Riddick who attended virtually, Attorney Wendell Waller, Superintendent Dr. John Gordon III, and Board Clerk, Tarshia Gardner.

## DISCUSSION

### ➤ **Capital Improvement Plan (Suffolk Schools Approved CIP)**

▪ Board Chair Howell led the discussion. She pointed out that the CIP listed in the packet prepared by city offices was not accurate but was an older plan that was approved in 2024. Mrs. Howell explained that Elephant's Fork Elementary School (EFES) was still a priority behind all current ongoing expenses and that due to capacity issues at Nansemond River High School (NRHS), it was moved to priority #2 on the current CIP. She shared that the board's request was for planning and design of NRHS to begin next year and completed before the capacity issue reaches crisis mode. Mrs. Howell emphasized the need for the EFES (land purchase) and NRHS (planning and design) to stay on track with the dates listed in the CIP for the school division. Dr. Gordon summarized major projects listed on the division's approved CIP:

- Preventative Maintenance
- Northern Shores Elementary (2026-27)
- Elephant's Fork Elementary (2027), projected cost: \$61 million
- Nansemond River High (2028), projected costs: \$42 million
- School Administrative Offices (2027), projected costs: \$7.6 million
- Kilby Shores Elementary (2031), projected costs: \$72.2 million
- Nansemond Parkway Elementary (2032), projected costs: \$73.8 million
- Forest Glen Middle (2033), projected costs: \$84.7 million
- College & Career Academy at Pruden (2034), projected costs: \$3.5 million
- John Yeates Middle (2032-34), projected costs \$87.75 million

### ➤ **Capital Improvement Plan (Draft CIP, City of Suffolk)**

Kevin Hughes, Interim City Manager, provided an overview of the city's presentation. He shared that collaboration with the Planning Commission to start the public process will be December 16<sup>th</sup> with the hopes of a final CIP approved by Council on February 18, 2026. Stephanie Wells briefly explained steps already completed in the city's current CIP. She highlighted constraints and considerations including debt limits, keeping the city's AAA bond rating status, fund balance reserves status, and factors that could negatively and positively influence the City's rating. Ms. Wells explained that those positive factors allow the city to proceed with projects until bond fundings are available while avoiding issues like economic pressures, downturns in the economy, and natural disasters. Avoidance in these capacities prevent large amounts of debt and increasing tax rates. Mr. Hughes highlighted the city's proposed projects and funding sources and explained the five (5) year summary of projects which included over \$105 million planned for Suffolk Public Schools. Additionally, he provided a breakdown of the city's proposed CIP for the school division which consisted of the following order:

- Preventative Maintenance (2027-31) \$43 million
- Northern Shores Elementary (2026-27) \$3.2 million
- College & Career Academy at Pruden, \$3.5 million
- Elephant's Fork Elementary (2026-29), \$59 million
- Kilby Shores Elementary, \$72.2 million
- Forest Glen Middle, \$84.7 million
- Nansemond Parkway Elementary, \$73.8 million
- Nansemond River High (2029-31=\$25 million), 6-10 yr.= \$17 million, \$42 million
- John Yeates Middle, \$87.75 million

- School Administrative Offices (2026-29), \$7.6 million (based on approval of the Riverbend project and receipt of the VDOT building). If not approved, the alternative places a building for SAO in years 6-10 with an estimated cost of \$22 million
- Early Childhood Center at EFES, \$18 million

He concluded with a recap of the CIP calendar as previously mentioned.

School Board and City Council members engaged in dialogue regarding the information presented. They discussed planned growth of the city and building of schools to accommodate growth, the plan for EFES (land purchase versus building on the current site), Suffolk Public Schools' budget, the school board's approved CIP versus the City's CIP, and project funding (bonding vs capital reserves). They also discussed possible outcomes regarding the Riverbend project as it relates to options for the School Administrative Offices.

### **Adjournment**

➤ **Closing Remarks and Adjournment:**

School Board Members and City Council Members were thankful for open dialogue and looked forward to working together for the success of the City of Suffolk and Suffolk Public Schools.

There being no further business, Mayor Duman adjourned the Joint City Council and School Board meeting at 5:37 p.m.

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Sean P. McGee, *Board Chair*

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Tarshia L. Gardner, *Board Clerk*