

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

Wednesday, February 1, 2023 ~ 3:00 P.M.

City Council Chamber, 442 W. Washington Street, Suffolk, VA 23434

Board Members Present:

Tyron Riddick, *Chair*
Heather Howell, *Vice Chair*
Dr. Dawn Marie Brittingham
Dr. Judith Brooks-Buck
Karen Jenkins
Kimberly Slingsluff

Board Member Absent:

Phyllis Byrum

City Council Members Present:

Michael Duman, *Mayor*
Lue Ward, *Vice Mayor*
Leroy Bennett
Shelley Butler Barlow
Roger Fawcett
John Rector
Timothy Johnson
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 all in attendance, introduced City Council Members and introduced School Board Chair, Tyron Riddick. Chair Riddick then introduced the School Board Members.

DISCUSSION

Mr. Moor, City Manager and Dr. Gordon, Division Superintendent, thanked City Council and the School Board for the opportunity to share information as they have worked closely regarding the plan moving forward with the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and the John F. Kennedy Middle School project.

Terry Napier, Director of Facilities and Maintenance, presented information on Suffolk Public School Board's CIP which was presented in December and submitted to City Council for review. He highlighted 11 projects (presented in priority order) that were listed in the CIP and recapped the funding requested according to the years listed. However, he focused on the top priorities in the first five years of the CIP.

Tealen Hansen, Director of Finance for the City of Suffolk gave an overview of the City's CIP, process and timeline. The CIP will be presented to City Council for review at its meeting on February 15, 2023 followed by a public hearing and adoption by City Council on March 1, 2023. Ms. Hansen highlighted information from the Planning Commission's proposed CIP which include the following Suffolk Public Schools projects and funding:

- John F. Kennedy Middle School – \$45,500,000 (\$7.5 million was already allocated this year for JFKMS design and start of construction)
- Northern Shores Elementary Addition – \$15,390,000
- Schools Major Repairs/Systems Replacement – \$3,575,000

Ms. Hansen also explained the Literary Loan application, the process, and how those funds, if the application is approved and granted by the state department, will be used for the first year of the JFK replacement project. These funds will not be in addition to, but will replace the bonds that were allotted for the project from the City. The deadline to apply for the loan is February 10, 2023.

Mr. Moor, explained the current cost estimate for the JFK project which totaled \$74,760,808 (2023 Dollars, 5% escalation). The city had only allocated \$53 million for the project; therefore, the project faces a \$21 million-dollar deficit. Suggestions were made to review the following areas to possibly re-allocate funds and/or restructure items in the project to reduce/close the deficit gap:

- Re-allocation of the Human Resources Building Renovation Funding - \$9.7 mil.
- State School Construction Grant Funding – 20% Project Cost.
- Proposed JFK Middle School square footage (125,000)/student size (800).
- SECEP Facility & Data Center square footage
- Anticipated Improved Construction Environment
- FY 2024-2033 CIP Project Adjustments

Dr. Gordon added that there is no guarantee that the division will receive the loan and that approximately 100 schools across the state are eligible to apply. The state will determine which divisions that will be awarded the loan and once determined, there is no timeline as to when the funds will be received. Funds can be distributed within the month of approval or as long as three years after approval. He stated that the state will consider the poorer schools first for these loans.

Dr. Gordon gave reasons for keeping the SECEP facility and Data Center exactly as presented in the project's design. He added that it would cost over \$1 million to educate SPS' SECEP students if the design of this facility is altered. This fee would only cover educating students, not transportation or anything else needed for the students. He also stated that the cost would be between \$60,000 to \$80,000 per mile to move fiber optic cables associated with the move of the Data Center to the Human Resources Building. This cost would be to move only the cables, other fees required for the move would be in addition to those costs. He added that such a move would likely affect not only SPS but also the surrounding communities as they may lose internet services for a prolonged period of time. Dr. Gordon stated that moving the Data Center to the HR building would potentially be a multi-million-dollar project therefore, it would be cost effective to keep SECEP and the Data Center at its current location and in accordance with the design plan.

To prevent any confusion, Mr. Moor provided clarification of the difference between the loan and grant programs as both were mentioned interchangeably during the meeting. He reiterated the cost gap and the need to close or eliminate the gap to proceed with the project.

Discussion ensued and the following comments were the consensus of City Council and Board Members:

- John F. Kennedy Middle School needs to be rebuilt as soon as possible.
- Meetings to discuss the JFK project adds to delay causing an increase in costs.
- Suffolk Public Schools and City Council must continue working together and explore other avenues to eliminate the funding deficit.
- Keep capacity for new schools at 800 or more. No member supported a reduction of seats.
- New schools should be built based on future growth of the city.
- John F. Kennedy should be built to include state of the arts technology equivalent to what's in the schools in northern Suffolk like Col. Fred Cherry Middle School.
- Possibly extending the CIP to cover/close the cost deficit.

Dr. Gordon reiterated the importance of SECEP and the Data Center being in separate buildings, and agreed with the possibility of extending the CIP to accommodate the deficit. However, he explained that extending the CIP does not mean pushing the project back in time but it means an additional fiscal year will be added to the CIP. He felt that now is the time to move forward with the rebuilding of JFK as the project has been discussed for the past 10 years and the move of SAO to the HR building has been discussed for the past 14 years. Dr. Gordon is not in favor of combining schools as it would not be in the best interests of the schools and communities which it would serve and would be a waste of money. He also stated that it would not be fiscally responsible to renovate schools as this would also be a waste of money.

Council Members agreed that the City should stay within their fiscal restraints as it would not be sustainable to increase the debt rate without increasing the tax rate or having some kind of additional money coming into the city.

City Council Members agreed to strategically move forward in the most cost-effective way possible with the goal still being to rebuild JFK. They also agreed to look again at the CIP to determine which projects will not proceed forward while JFK is being completed. Recommendations regarding the CIP will be brought back to the City Council after thorough review by Mr. Moor and his team.

Adjournment


➤ **Closing Remarks:**

Dr. Gordon thanked everyone for the opportunity to come together to discuss possibilities between the two Boards. He also clarified what soft costs are and the need to have it included in the plan. He explained the need to eliminate the perception that the City Manager and Superintendent do not communicate regularly because they do work hard to ensure that both parties are on the same page. Dr. Gordon stated that they will move forward with rebuilding JFK as if the all funding was complete and available and he looked forward to continuing to build positive relationships with the School Board and City Council members.

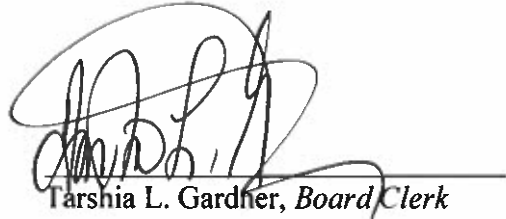
➤ Adjournment of Meeting:

There being no further comments or concerns, Mayor Duman thanked School Board and City Council members for diligently working together to move the city and schools forward successfully.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:45 p.m.



Tyron Riddick, Board Chair



Tarshia L. Gardner, Board Clerk