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// A special meeting of the Council of the City of Lynchburg was held on the 16th day of April, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chamber, City Hall, Stephanie Reed, President, presiding. The following Members were present:

|                                                                                        |   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| Present: Stephanie Reed, Chris Faraldi, MaryJane Dolan, Jeff Helgeson, Martin Misjuns, |   |
| Larry Taylor, Sterling A. Wilder                                                       | 7 |
| Absent:                                                                                | 0 |

// Vice Mayor Faraldi asked to lead an invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

// In the matter of Public Utilities, Agenda Item #1, Council held a public hearing on the FY 2025 Water Rate. Mayor Reed opened the public hearing for comments from the public.

Roman Grochowski, resident of the City of Lynchburg, addressed Council regarding a sewer inlet at the Community Market Fountain. He said that the inlet had popped tires and torn off front bumpers of vehicles because it was proud in the ground. He said he had informed Public Works but did not get a response, and he was working with other City staff to address the issue.

There was no one else to speak in favor or opposition, either by phone, email, or in-person, so the public hearing was closed.

// In the matter of Budget, Agenda Item #2, Council held a public hearing on the FY 2025 Budget. Mayor Reed opened the public hearing for comments from the public.

Megan Huffman, representing PTO Connect, addressed Council regarding concerns about funding for LCS. She said that LCS could not withstand further budget cuts, and they were losing critical roles that helped to supplement the loss of funding. She said that students required more services after the COVID-19 pandemic, yet Council proposed reduced funding. She asked Council to consider whether this was the City they wanted to be.

Phil Stump addressed Council regarding the LCS budget. He said that the proposed budgets were unsustainable and did not keep up with inflation. He said public education was

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important for workforce equality and teaching children to work together, and it was the foundation of US democracy. He requested Council increase the LCS budget.

Jennifer Long, resident of Pawnee Drive, addressed Council regarding the closure of the Lynchburg Virtual Academy (LVA). She said that LVA was important to the success of her child in school, and closing the academy would have negative impacts on his education.

Cynthia Capps, representing Sandusky Elementary, addressed Council regarding the closure of Sandusky Elementary. She said that closing the elementary school would be devastating to students and teachers, and the surrounding schools would become overcrowded. She said that Council could pass a budget increase of \$3.2 million to prevent the closure of Sandusky Elementary.

Michael Bremmer, resident of Ward 4, addressed Council regarding the tax rate. He said that lowering the tax rate beyond staff's recommendation jeopardized the City's well-being. He said that LCS should receive the same 11% average increase other City departments were being given. He said City revenue had increased, yet the proposed budget represented a reduction of nearly \$50 million. He said that Council was destroying the very structure of the public education system; and they should prove him wrong by funding the \$48 million request.

Derrick Womack addressed Council regarding closing LCS schools. He said that the schools required necessary maintenance, but day after day, teachers and students continued to come to school. He said that he could not put a price tag on saving the schools for the students.

Rebecca May addressed Council regarding funding for LCS. She said that they needed to invest in education because the students would become future community members. She said that safe learning environments, small class sizes, certified teachers, and equitable instruction drew families to the City, but LCS must be fully funded to compete in these areas.

Aaron Reed addressed Council regarding the budget for LCS. He said that 30 years ago, discipline in the schools boiled down to referrals, suspensions, and expulsions; however, they now knew that the most effective way to address behavioral problems was by teaching and

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educating, not sending children away. He said that this approach cost money for specialists, staff, and learning environments. He said that costs had increased because they were now educating kids on how to read, do math, and behave in society, but this should be something to be proud of.

Molly McClennan, resident of 712 Riverside Drive, addressed Council regarding funding for LCS and the tax rate. She said that they must help children learn that each life held value and that they had a place within society. She requested that Council fund LCS and increase City taxes.

Kathleen Davis, resident of Ward 2, addressed Council regarding the tax rate. She said that the City's tax reductions had hurt schools and caused residents to lose jobs, causing real harm and damage. She said that landlords, some who did not live in the state, continued to raise rents on tenants despite the tax breaks provided by the City. She said that Council should stop sending tax dollars out-of-state, benefiting the wealthy, and instead give it to City schools and programs

Lanaux Hailey, resident of Ward 1, addressed Council regarding funding for LCS. She said that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted and forever changed the educational landscape. She said that skill deficits, chronic absenteeism, and building maintenance plagued school systems across the country. She said that best practices encouraged increased local funding, yet the City's budget lagged at 2015 rates and required the elimination of 103 staff positions. She said that Council manufactured the funding crisis, and Lynchburg residents had the choice to make changes in the next election.

Jennifer Woofter, resident of Ward 2, addressed Council regarding concerns about the tax rate and items cut from the budget. She said that as a homeowner and small business owner, she hoped to stay in the City for decades to come, but she did not want to live in a city which deferred needed CIP projects because of tax cuts. She said that reductions to the LCS budget put the long-term interests of students and families behind those of political donors.

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Dr. Beth White, resident of Ward 3, addressed Council regarding concerns about the reduced tax rate. She said that last year, she addressed Council about the negative impacts of a reduced tax rate, and now they were facing the consequences of the reduced rates. She said that schools would be closed due to a lack of funding, and this harmed the students and families.

Carley Shaffer, resident of Ward 4, addressed Council regarding the closure of LCS schools and funding for LCS. She said that nationwide and locally, the funding for LCS was laughable. She said that a struggling public school system led to higher costs and crime; but when the schools thrived, the City thrived. She requested Council to fund LCS to keep schools open.

Colleen Larkins, representing Save Sandusky, addressed Council regarding funding LCS. She said that keeping Sandusky and TC Miller open was worth the \$3.2 million. She said that closing Sandusky would leave 240 students without a place to go to school. She said that the students deserved to have their school remain open and requested Council fund the \$3.2 million to keep the schools open.

Beth Schrock, resident of Ward 4, addressed Council regarding funding for LCS. She requested that Council support education in the City. She said that despite increases in City revenue, Council was allocating \$3.2 million less than what was budgeted five years ago. She said that Lynchburg residents wanted excellent schools according to a City survey, receiving three times more votes than the second place item, mental health services.

Tiersha Royal, representing Sandusky Elementary PTO President, addressed Council regarding funding for LCS. She said that the closure of Sandusky and TC Miller would have negative impacts on the community, displacing 240 students without a place to go.

Kevin Larkins, representing Sandusky Student Council President, addressed Council regarding the closure of Sandusky Elementary and requested that Council find funding to keep the school open.

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Nettie Webb, representing Save Our Schools, addressed Council regarding funding for LCS. She requested that Council allocate an additional \$3.2 million to LCS. She said that public education was central to a vibrant city, and not allocating the necessary funds would be catastrophic. She said that closing schools went against the Council's goals of increasing literacy rates, supporting public safety, and compensating public servants.

Jordan Nesbitt, resident of Ward 4, addressed Council regarding funding for LCS. She asked when the City would intervene to address LCS administration shortfalls in maintenance and management. She said that if the \$3.2 million funding request was granted, they would continue to hold the administration accountable and look for creative solutions.

Kimberly Dyke-Harsley, resident of Ward 2, addressed Council regarding CIP. She requested Council to support the Jefferson Park Phase 2 project. She said that the timing of reduced funding to LCS coincided with when people of color became the majority demographic in the schools. She said she understood the national efforts to dismantle public education, and she disagreed with the lies that had been taught. She said that public education needed to be rebuilt.

Nichole Sanders, resident of Ward 3, addressed Council regarding LCS and concerns about the level funding proposed in the budget. She said that LCS staff needed to be fully supported. She said that strong public schools were integral to the community, and she urged Council to pay attention to and support the people who took their time to address Council at the meeting.

Carla Jones, representing TC Miller PTO, addressed Council regarding the closure of LCS schools. She said that if Council kept the schools open, they would be able to develop a plan to move forward. She said that urban schools required additional resources to address urban-specific problems. She said that closing the schools would overcrowd every other elementary school in the City, negatively impacting student learning. She said that education was the top priority for Lynchburg residents.

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Betty Kain addressed Council regarding LCS. She said that they were at a crossroads regarding the schools, and it had become a City-wide problem, not just a school issue. She said that the reduced tax rate and budget contributed to the issues. She said that while enrollment had decreased, the needs of students had decreased, and education was the key to address several problems in their community.

Jack Underwood addressed Council regarding the tax rate. He compared the City's tax rates to those of Plano, Texas, citing that Plano's high tax rates enabled the locality to have some of the highest ranked public schools in the country. He said that Council should not make the City like Plano or Uvalde.

Mayor Reed stated that for the past month, she had spent a significant amount of time with LCS administration, teachers, and families. She said that they did not want teachers to start leaving for other jobs because they were uncertain about their job security. She said that the City Manager had informed her that five councilmembers had requested funding to help Sandusky and TC Miller remain open for one more year. She said that at the next meeting, options would be presented to find available funds to keep the schools open.

Mayor Reed asked if there were members of the public wishing to speak who did not sign up.

Eva, a Sandusky Elementary student, said that she loved her teachers and the students, and she asked that Council help her school.

April Watson, resident of Ward 4, addressed Council regarding funding for public education. She said that they should increase funding for public education, not reduce it.

Sam Ford, resident of Ward 4, addressed Council regarding public schools and requested that Council fully fund public education. He said that the interactions within LCS encouraged students to serve the public in the future.

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Daniel, a TC Miller first-grade student, addressed Council regarding keeping schools open. He said that schools should be free, people should make good decisions, and there should be no war when deciding what schools should be closed.

A citizen who did not self-identify addressed Council regarding LCS. She requested that Council encourage the School Board to keep Sandusky open beyond a year.

Roman Grochowski, resident of Diamond Hill, addressed Council regarding concerns about use limits at the public library. He said that despite no one waiting in line, he was asked to stop his research because his time was up. He said that when no one was waiting, the limits should not apply. He said he had not received a response to his request for more information about the policy. He said that the library was seldom used, but it was a valuable resource, and the hours should be adjusted to make it more available to the community.

Pastor Shirley addressed Council regarding LCS. She asked what they could do to increase public school enrollment and get students back in school.

There was no one left to speak, either by phone, email, or in-person, so the public hearing was closed.

// The meeting adjourned at 7:47 p.m.

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Clerk of Council