// A special called meeting of the Council of the City of Lynchburg was held for the purposes of conducting a joint Work Session with the Lynchburg City School Board on the 29th day of April, 2025, at 4:00 p.m. at the I.T. Conference Center, 3550 Young Place, Lynchburg, VA 24501. The following Councilmembers were present:

Larry Taylor, Curt Diemer, Sterling A. Wilder, Chris Faraldi, Stephanie Reed, Martin Misjuns, Jacqueline Timmer 7

Absent: 0

The following School Board members were present:

Atul Gupta, Martin Day, Anthony Andrews, Gloria Preston, Letitia Lowery, Farid Jalil, Daryl Conner, Mark Tinsley 8

Absent: Christian DePaul 1

// Vice Mayor Diemer led the invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

// In the matter of Introductions, Agenda Item #1, Councilmember Wilder, Co-Chair of the Joint Committee, thanked Council and the School Board for their work on the Committee.

// In the matter of Lynchburg City Schools, Agenda Item #2, Council held a joint work session with the School Board regarding the City and Schools Joint Committee's Recommendations. School Board Vice Chair Dr. Martin Day, Co-Chair of the Joint Committee, provided a presentation on the recommendations. The City Council & School Board Joint Committee ("The Committee") was formed by the Lynchburg Mayor and School Board Chair on Feb. 12, 2025.

Vice Chair Day stated that the purpose of the Joint Committee was to explore policy matters and funding that concerned both governing bodies. The Committee will provide a collaborative review, analysis, and recommendations regarding the use of infrastructure funds. The Committee met bi-weekly, to work on topics including, but not limited to, the following:

- Identify long-term goals and develop a short-term action plan
- Identify the location of the student population and determine system capacity
- Overview of building conditions and major maintenance needs
- Budget and capital improvement program
- Ongoing revenue and efficiency considerations

The Committee met on Feb. 27, Mar. 12, Apr. 3, and Apr. 10 and discussed everything except "student location and capacity", which the Committee decided it could not reasonably address, and the Committee did review and discuss information on all the topics listed. The Committee considered over 30 possible recommendations based on information provided by both City and Schools staff, and ultimately decided on eight recommendations to be presented to the full bodies of both the School Board and City Council.

Vice Chair Day noted that the Committee believes these recommendations will help Lynchburg better provide for its schools and the students its serves, as well as initiating more constructive relations between the City Council and School Board in the future. The Committee understands that its role is not to make binding decisions but to provide recommendations.

Vice Chair Day reported that the Committee's first recommendations concern the City's CIP plan, including rearranging the order of planned CIP allocations so that their order is reversed—reflecting a new order of $30 million, $20 million, and $10 million to provide more funding available to work with up front. Once the City adopts the CIP through 2028, the Committee recommends not altering its school-related CIP plans through FY2030 without prior consultation with the School Board. The Committee recommends that the City support the full requested increase in the operating budget of $5.5 million, which is beyond the City Manager's proposed CIP plan.

The Committee recommends retaining repairs to the track at E.C. Glass High School as a high priority; adopting the plan from the Facilities and Finance Committee, which includes the repurposing of T.C. Miller to an alternative education facility; making a decision to close a second elementary school in FY26-27; recommending that no school facilities be constructed through the CIP cycle ending in 2030; and continuing to meet at least quarterly to discuss cost-savings for both City and School resources, including possible department mergers in FY2027.

Councilmember Wilder said the City Manager and acting Superintendent were not in favor of the CIP because of the time involved for planning and design, and the City Manager proposed that cycle based on capital projects already in place and what could be accomplished based on available funding and the funding formula. He did not support the proposed funding schedule for the CIP since the projects required time for planning and design.

Board Member Conner supported the reorder to the CIP schedule because some of the work that was required in the schools did not require a great deal of planning, such as roof and field replacements, which he believed did not require architectural plans. He said that the proposed $30 million in funding would enable LCS to begin urgent repairs, whereas the $10 million would not enable them to address projects concurrently.

School Board Chair Dr. Atul Gupta said that the needs of LCS totaled $109 million, so the funds could be spent. He noted that six out of 11 elementary schools were rated below 70, meaning they were in dire need of repairs. He said that E.C. Glass cannot even be used beginning this fall semester, and he sees that less than one third of needs are being fulfilled.

Councilmember Faraldi asked what the reorder of the funding schedule would look like and why.

Vice Chair Day stated that they are just asking for a reorder of the funding schedule.

Councilmember Faraldi asked if the Superintendent had indicated if it would be possible to spend $30 million within the first year of the CIP.

School Board Chair Gupta said that the need is $109 million today and is already existing—not for future plans.

Councilmember Faraldi asked again if the Superintendent had indicated he could spend the $30 million within the first year.

Superintendent Dr. Ben Copeland explained that after reviewing the timing of the CIP and what was brought up at the task force meeting, it would be challenging to expend $30 million in the first year. He said that the $60 million was roughly half of the total needed. He said that the $10 million allocation for the first year was a better schedule because the primary window for school projects was from the first week of June to the end of August, allowing only 10 to 12 weeks for major work to be done. He cited an example of replacing HVAC units while students were in class, which would be uncomfortable for them. He said that anything to be done in 2025 would need to come in for bid now, with some of this not even billing until the fourth year. He said that the first round of funding would not become available until July 1, which made it challenging to spend the funds, even $10 million, during the summer of 2025. He reiterated that the order of 10, 20, 30 works out best.

Councilmember Faraldi noted that if the $30 million appropriation was not expended fully, it would carry over into later years; furthermore, the City would likely issue bonds to finance the $30 million allocation. He asked how much of this was financed versus cash up front, and how the proposed rescheduling would impact the rest of the CIP.

Chief Financial Officer Donna Witt replied that it would be bonded, stating that they would need to reorganize at least $20 million in projects to create capacity. She said if they were transportation projects, that would impact their revenue-sharing agreements.

Councilmember Reed expressed support for the original CIP project schedule. She said the best time to do school projects was during the summer break, and there is no question of need and how much is needed immediately—it was just a question of timing.

Board Member Conner said that if the $30 million was not allocated this year, it was not guaranteed that Council would allocate the rest of the funds in subsequent years. He said that even if they could not break ground on school projects in the summer of 2025, they could begin the necessary planning and design, which would prepare them for projects to begin in the summer of 2026.

School Board Chair Gupta said he understands the Superintendent’s concern about work during summer, but there is a front-end summer in June and July where work could be done versus the backend part in August.

Councilmember Misjuns asked what they would do with the $10 million now, which he understood would be design and engineering. He said that they don’t need those steps for roofs, and there was about $6.5 million identified for roof repairs, which could also prevent damage to the floors, and he wanted to prioritize roof repairs and replacements. He said that he was flexible on the $30 million but was not flexible on the $10 million, as water entering these buildings can cause damage and create mold.

Superintendent Copeland noted that replacing roofs on commercial buildings required architectural planning, and it was not similar to replacing a roof on a personal residence. He mentioned that the process often required significant tear-offs of roofing and insulation, as well as mitigation measures needed for water drainage.

Councilmember Misjuns agreed with Dr. Gupta that there’s no reason the roof repairs couldn’t commence by the beginning of next summer or even sooner, reiterating is concern about water entering the buildings.

Councilmember Timmer expressed the need to address as many concerns of LCS as quickly as possible in a sustainable manner. She pointed out that deferred maintenance costs increase over time, and they should work with the schools to prioritize funding allocation for school building maintenance in the CIP.

Vice Mayor Diemer stated that he also wanted to prioritize roof replacements, noting that he wants to make sure there is enough money there to really fix them. He said that he appreciated the School Board’s need for clear direction, and he heard the Committee’s concerns that money from City Council can be fickle, so they should act now. He emphasized that these issues didn’t happen overnight, and the sooner they addressed them, the better.

Vice Chair Day explained that the motivation for changing the CIP schedule was to secure funding as early as possible so that LCS could follow through on projects. He said that if the City did not follow through on projects, it becomes a deferred maintenance situation, which was his understanding of the reordering rationale.

Councilmember Faraldi noted that City Council could not make a decision that would bind the actions of a future Council.

Vice Chair Day said that if Council finds itself in a situation where they cannot fulfill a prior commitment, they should consult with the School Board.

Councilmember Wilder emphasized the importance of consistent communication and meetings between Council and the School Board.

Board Member Jalil suggested continuing the Joint Committee to facilitate communications, and the final recommendation presented was to either keep the continuance of this Committee periodically or create a new body.

School Board Chair Gupta cautioned that convening three members of a public body necessitated a public meeting.

Councilmember Misjuns said he did not support allocating the full $5.5 million increase for LCS operational funding, noting that the recommendation from the City Manager was $2.7 million. He said that they should instead find efficiencies within the school division, such as consolidating the City and LCS IT departments.

Councilmember Wilder expressed support for allocating the $5.5 million increase, stating that he also wants them to look at their real estate tax rates. He said that the public balks at suggested increases but also wants better schools, roads, etc. He stated that when he was on the School Board many years ago, a plan for Sandusky Elementary was shifted back then, and they needed to address these school needs. He also mentioned the Fire Department budget increasing by $10 million, whereas school funding had remained flat. He emphasized that they need to find funds for their children, as that is a priority.

School Board Chair Gupta stated that efficiencies need to be across the board, and students needed to be treated equitably. He stated that every family will make sacrifices for their children, and the school division has been efficient for a long time—with 80% of their budget allocated to human resources, including teachers. He noted that behavioral issues have continued to increase, meaning that teachers require additional support.

Councilmember Faraldi said that they incorporated a step increase for firefighters, and he emphasized the need to increase step increases for veteran teachers and reduce pay compression. He said that the City needed to focus on retaining teachers to remain the premier educators in Central Virginia, and he wanted to ensure where the money was going.

Superintendent Copeland reported on what comprises the $5.5 million, explaining that it starts with the local component match for the Governor’s 3% pay raise, step increases for all employees who are at the point in their careers, increases starting minimum wage from $15 to $17 an hour, increases starting teacher salaries to $50,000, and includes required components for VRS and other benefit supports such as health insurance cost increases, as well as 10 bus aides on the highest-need buses with student behavior issues, and a building-level substitute teacher in every building. He stated that it also makes a meager attempt to keep up with inflation for bills such as electricity and water. He noted that the initial requested increase was about $10 million, but they worked to get that down to the $5.5 million.

Councilmember Misjuns stated that actual monies spent for LCS in 2015 were $87,351,955; actual revenues in 2024 were $111,052,271, which was a substantial difference. He agreed with Councilman Faraldi's statements and the need to increase pay for veteran teachers. He noted that the step increases for LCS were not funded for a long time, which created an issue. He stressed the importance of increasing administrative and classroom support so that they retained those veteran teachers, who are leaving in droves for reasons besides just money. He said that Superintendent Copeland was working overtime to address the issues that are driving them out, and he urged the School Board to select a permanent superintendent who would back up the teachers.

School Board Chair Gupta noted that they increased law enforcement entry pay to $50,000 a year, and they needed to mirror that with the schools. He noted that entry-level positions for the City are $20, whereas school bus drivers were paid $15. He stated that the younger teachers can switch to the county system and make a few thousand more, so they do.

Board Member Lowery stated that she was one of those veterans teachers, and they went 10 years without a pay increase. She stated that the reason teachers were leaving because they were frustrated.

Board Member Conner stated that he worked in the Transportation Department, and bus drivers made $10.35 an hour for five years straight. He said there were some gaps that needed to be addressed.

Councilmember Reed agreed with Dr. Gupta that they made changes across other department such as police and fire for the purposes of recruitment and retention, and they needed to do the same with schools. She said they were losing teachers for many reasons, and people were not going into education as a career, and schools were having to incentivize. She encouraged everyone to watch the 40 Ways Coalition meeting, where a panel of high school students addressed safety concerns and requested the installation of metal detectors at the high schools. She said that they also expressed concern about numerous fights at the schools, stating that they were the number one place where the students did not feel safe and emphasized the need to listen to students and address safety.

Board Member Tinsely stated that this is not just a pay problem, as there have been leadership and administrative issues that need to be addressed. He said the $5.5 million is bare bones in his mind, and a large portion of it would be assigned to raising salaries to get to $17 an hour entry-level pay increase and the $50,000 minimum for starting teachers. He emphasized that they can work on efficiencies and hopefully realize savings in future years - but right now, they needed to "pay the mortgage".

Councilmember Misjuns asked the School Board to pursue the installation of metal detectors at LCS high schools. He stated that he knew there were parents who complained about it, but it was up to the schools to protect their students.

Councilmember Faraldi asked what the strategy was for the increased school administrative costs, which was needed for planning purposes, and he noted that the City is currently contemplating eight cents on the dollar for real estate. He suggested the implementation of a school funding formula in combination with the rest of the Committee's recommendations. He said that agreeing to an increase locks Council in, with unknown future variables such as enrollment levels. He added that he hoped the School Board was having capacity discussions now, regardless of the funding, and he wasn't sure why the Committee was tasked with this. He said that there should be a public body that met regularly, established by a vote of Council, to ensure communication between Council and the School Board.

Board Member Preston said that there would always be disagreement, with two different factions here—so ongoing conversation was needed, and she commended the Committee's work and said they shouldn't stop now. She said that she supported regular meetings between the School Board and Council.

Board Member Jalil expressed concern about "partial information," stating that the work was often long and tedious and required a commitment to learning all aspects. He said the reason they were requesting more funding is because they were always behind, adding that the ongoing turnover was severe and citing prior Council decisions as a primary factor. He expressed his support for funding the $30 million first, noting broad public support for repairs to the EC Glass track and opposition to the commitment not to build new school buildings.

Councilmember Reed requested that when the School Board addresses school closures, they make the decision at the beginning of the year to provide families and staff time to process the proposed plan. She also asked that the School Board stick to whatever plan was decided and not change it late into the process.

Councilmember Misjuns stated that he did not support the establishment of a funding formula due to how a funding formula directed by that City Council had impacted the Norfolk school division related to school closures and consolidation. He noted that there was about $70 million in waste related to surplus schools, as the funding formula encouraged the budget to grown even if enrollment was slowing. He stated that the Lynchburg School Board needed to do its due diligence in observing enrollment trends. He also said that the primary issue he received commentary on during the Committee process was the E.C. Glass track improvements.

Vice Chair Day clarified that the recommendations presented were not formal motions, but suggestions for City Council and the School Board to consider.

Chair Gupta suggested that the School Board and City Council hold a retreat to facilitate planning.

Mayor Taylor declared the Committee to be resolved.

// The meeting adjourned at 5:13 p.m.

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Clerk of Council