City of Fall River Massachusetts
Office of the City Clerk

ALISON M. BOUCHARD
CITY CLERK

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ASSISTANT CITY CLERK

JOINT MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL AND SCHOOL COMMITTEE

MEETING: April 8, 2025 at 5:00 p.m.
Council Chamber, One Government Center

PRESENT: President Joseph D. Camara, presiding;
Councilors Shawn E. Cadime, Michelle M. Dionne, Paul B. Hart, Bradford L. Kilby, Linda M. Pereira, Cliff Ponte, Andrew J. Raposo and Laura-Jean Sampson

ABSENT: None

IN ATTENDANCE: Superintendent Tracy Curley, Fall River Public Schools
Kevin Almeida, Chief Financial Officer, Fall River Public Schools
Kenneth C. Pacheco, Chief Operating Officer, Fall River Public Schools
Emily Arpke, Interim Director of Financial Services

President Camara called the meeting to order at 5:17 p.m. and announced that the meeting may be recorded with audio or video and transmitted through any medium.

The following School Committee Members were present at the meeting:

PRESENT: Mayor Paul E. Coogan, Collin Dias, Thomas Khoury, Michelle "Mimi" Larrivee and Shelli Pereira.

ABSENT: Kevin Aguiar and Bobby Bailey

1. Citizen's Input Time – None

2. Review of the fiscal and financial condition of the city, revenue and expense forecasts, and other relevant information in preparation for the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

Superintendent Tracy Curley, Fall River Public Schools, provided an overview of the School Department's goals for Fiscal Year 2026, including retaining existing employees expanding the Special Education programs, strengthening college and career pathway programs and addressing safety and infrastructure needs within the school buildings.

Kevin Almeida, Chief Financial Officer, Fall River Public Schools, provided a PowerPoint presentation which included information regarding student enrollment and employment data, net school spending increases over the past few years, building maintenance projects and growing costs for school transportation. Mr. Almeida also provided information regarding funding for the School Department provided by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts through various state laws and grants. Mr. Almeida explained that, since Fiscal Year 2020, the School Department

has needed additional City funding to balance net school spending, but that funding contributions have been met consistently. The Chief Financial Officer of the Fall River Public Schools stated that the proposed budget of the School Department for Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) totaled $197,837,210 for the operating budget and $13,118,324 for the transportation budget.

Councilor Raposo requested additional information regarding pre-kindergarten enrollment data, school bus costs, and plans to adjust school districts within the City. Superintendent Curley stated that there are over 400 children in the pre-kindergarten program, including full and half-day students. Kenneth C. Pacheco, Chief Operating Officer, Fall River Public Schools, provided a detailed description of planned changes for the school bus system, such as new bus stop locations to help shorten the length of bus rides, recently purchased electric-powered vehicles, and contracts with various transportation companies. Councilor Raposo and Superintendent Curley also discussed vacant positions within the School Department, the high costs of third-party staffing agencies and the ongoing reorganizations of various departments to accommodate these vacancies. Councilor Raposo and Mr. Pacheco discussed how the School Department would utilize the surplus funding that is no longer needed for the school lunch program. Mr. Pacheco explained that they will use this capital to renovate kitchens within various schools and to fund expenses for specialty student lunches.

School Committee Member Shelli Pereira arrived at 6:04 p.m.

Councilor Ponte and Mr. Pacheco held a detailed discussion regarding a recent feasibility study that was conducted to assess school transportation costs and efficiency. Mr. Pacheco stated that the School Department has decreased their third-party contracts to three vendors for daily bus service and one vendor for student trips. Councilor Ponte expressed concern that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts wouldn't adjust funding to assist the City with school bus expenses, and that federal and state funding may be significantly limited in the next few years. Councilor Ponte and Mayor Paul E. Coogan discussed the Administration's plans to utilize retained earnings from previous fiscal years to assist with the cost of the new B.M.C. Durfee High School. Mayor Coogan confirmed that discussions are ongoing regarding the use of these funds to offset costs to the taxpayers of Fall River. Councilor Ponte, Mayor Coogan and Mr. Pacheco held a detailed discussion regarding the renovations and repairs of the old B.M.C. Durfee High School Nagle Auditorium and payment responsibilities for transportation to Diman Regional Vocational Technical High School. Mr. Pacheco explained that the ongoing construction and repairs for the auditorium will begin in June 2025 and the project is under the supervision of the Director of City Operations. Mayor Coogan explained that transportation to Diman Regional Vocational Technical High School is funded by outside sources, not the City of Fall River. Councilor Ponte, Superintendent Curley and Mr. Almeida discussed the costs of employment, contracts, and vacancies within the School Department, as well as third-party staffing agencies. Mr. Almeida emphasized that certain types of funding, such as annual Free Cash from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and net school spending must be used, in full, each year, which limits the School Department's ability to retain funding through earnings.

Councilor Ponte, School Committee Member Collin Dias, Mr. Almeida and Mr. Pacheco held a detailed discussion regarding school bus transportation costs. School Committee Member Collin Dias stated that he had worked to increase the budget allocation for these transportation expenses but was not successful. Mr. Almeida and Mr. Pacheco emphasized that they are working diligently to improve the efficiency of the school bus routes and bus stops to achieve a reduction in overall costs, and Mr. Almeida explained that there was a reimbursement from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts of roughly $1,400,000 this past fiscal year. School Committee

Member Shelli Pereira clarified that that funding increase that she and School Committee Member Collin Dias had proposed totaled $750,000. School Committee Member Collin Dias made remarks regarding the School Committee's vote that a petition be sent to the Massachusetts State Auditor in relation to mandatory unfunded requirements, including school transportation.

Councilor Dionne and Superintendent Curley held a brief discussion regarding the recent cyber-attack on the technology system within the Fall River School Department. Superintendent Curley explained that they are still collecting information regarding this cyber-attack, and that the School Department does not have an insurance policy for this type of issue.

Councilor Cadime emphasized that the legislators from various, affluent communities in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are not empathetic to the challenges that Gateway Cities, such as Fall River, experience with funding requirements. Councilor Cadime explained that he has traveled to the Massachusetts State House with colleagues to advocate for additional state funding, but that these attempts have been unsuccessful. Councilor Cadime suggested that the City Council and School Committee attempt to advocate for state funding to assist all twenty-six Gateway Cities.

On a motion made by Councilor Ponte and seconded by Councilor Raposo, it was unanimously voted that the City Council send a letter to the Fall River Delegation, the Massachusetts Speaker of the House, the Governor and leaders of the other Gateway Cities in Massachusetts regarding the need to adjust funding for mandatory unfunded requirements.

On a further motion made by School Committee Member Collin Dias and seconded by School Committee Member Thomas Khoury, it was unanimously voted that the School Committee co-sponsor a letter to the Fall River Delegation, the Massachusetts Speaker of the House, the Governor and leaders of the other Gateway Cities in Massachusetts regarding the need to adjust funding for mandatory unfunded requirements, with School Committee Members Kevin Aguiar and Bobby Bailey absent and not voting.

School Committee Member Shelli Pereira, following the vote, stated that she rescinded permission for her name to be placed on the letter. Mr. Khoury expressed his support for the letter and suggested that the letter also be sent to the United States Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Teachers Association.

Councilor Raposo, School Committee Member Collin Dias and Superintendent Curley, discussed bargaining negotiations and reorganization of various departments. Superintendent Curley stated that the contracts are expected to be completed within the next few months.

Vice President Pereira, Mr. Pacheco and Mr. Almeida discussed various aspects of the renovation of the Nagle Auditorium at the old B.M.C. Durfee High School, including the Request for Proposals (RPF) process. Vice President Pereira expressed concern that the City does not have a permanent procurement officer. School Committee Member Collin Dias and Mr. Pacheco discussed water and sewer costs for various school properties, including the swimming pool at the new B.M.C. Durfee High School.

Councilor Ponte emphasized that the City needs to focus on spending reductions throughout all departments, including the School Department. Superintendent Curley explained that various factors present financial challenges and that the adjustments to transportation costs were imperative. Superintendent Curley also emphasized that the letter the City Council and School Committee voted to send to various elected officials, while well-intentioned, would most likely create additional financial hurdles for the School Department. Councilor Cadime agreed with Councilor Ponte and stated that a large sum of net school spending isn't being used for the actual schools, but for transportation that is very expensive, and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts should provide additional financial assistance.

School Committee Member Collin Dias and Mr. Almeida held a brief discussion regarding net school spending amounts, school lunch funds and a defunct Committee within the City Code related to auditing procedures. Mr. Almeida reiterated that the school lunch funds contain surplus capital, and this account will assist with funding renovation projects in various school kitchens, and the School Department will maintain a small balance within this account following the completion of these projects. Councilor Kilby explained that, during a recent meeting of the Committee on Finance, a discussion was held regarding the excess school lunch funds with the representative of the auditing firm. Councilor Kilby stated that the representative has seen excess balances related to school lunches in many municipalities following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Emily Arpke, Interim Director of Financial Services, provided a detailed PowerPoint presentation regarding the planned FY26 Municipal Budget. Ms. Arpke provided information regarding the process of discussing budget proposals with all Department Heads and comparing proposed budgets from previous fiscal years to actual spending within each department. The Interim Director of Financial Services also described changes within local receipts, investment income and changes within the Solid Waste Division that affected the City's funds. Ms. Arpke provided information regarding revenue and expense forecasts for various matters, such as health insurance costs and the Diman Regional Vocational Technical High School debt assessment, general fund expenses, such as Cherry Sheet assessments and debt services, and overall updates to the financial processes and procedures that will be improved over the next fiscal year. The Interim Director of Financial Services emphasized the need for transparent, organized financial data including the budget itself, as well as Quarterly Budget Reports.

Vice President Pereira requested that additional information regarding Solid Waste contracts and expenses be provided to the Councilors before future budget discussions. School Committee Member Collin Dias and Superintendent Curley held a brief discussion regarding capital improvements within the City and the School Department. School Committee Member Collin Dias made a motion to express the School Committee's disapproval of the proposed FY26 Water and Sewer Enterprise Fund budgets, but there was no second and the motion failed to carry.

President Camara requested that all City Councilors reach out to Ms. Arpke prior to the budget discussions that will be held, to request specific information and data that they'd like to discuss regarding various departments.

On a motion made by School Committee Member Collin Dias and seconded by School Committee Member Michelle "Mimi" Larrivee, it was unanimously voted to adjourn the School Committee meeting at 7:09 p.m., with School Committee Members Kevin Aguiar and Bobby Bailey absent and not voting.

On a motion made by Councilor Dionne and seconded by Councilor Raposo, it was unanimously voted to adjourn the City Council meeting at 7:09 p.m.

List of documents and other exhibits used during the meeting:
Agenda packet (attached)
PowerPoint Presentation re: the FY26 School Department Budget,
presented by Kevin Almeida, Chief Financial Officer, Fall River Public Schools
PowerPoint Presentation re: the FY26 Municipal Budget,
presented by Emily Arpke, Interim Director of Financial Services

A true copy. Attest:

Alison M Bouchard

City Clerk

In City Council, May 13, 2025
Approved.

PAUL E. COOGAN
Mayor

City of Fall River
Massachusetts
Office of the Mayor

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CITY CLERK
FALL RIVER, MA

JOINT MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL AND SCHOOL COMMITTEE

APRIL 8, 2025 AT 5:00 P.M.

CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ONE GOVERNMENT CENTER

AGENDA

1. **Citizens Input**
2. **Review of the fiscal and financial condition of the city, revenue and expense forecasts, and other relevant information in preparation for the Fiscal Year 2026 budget.**

Paul E Coogan

Paul E. Coogan
Mayor

ADA Coordinator: Gary P. Howayeck, Esq. 508-324-2650

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