MINUTES OF SPECIAL JOINT WORK SESSION
OF THE NEWPORT NEWS CITY COUNCIL
AND THE NEWPORT NEWS SCHOOL BOARD
HELD IN THE DOWNING-GROSS CULTURAL ARTS CENTER – BANQUET ROOM
12410 Wickham Avenue
January 22, 2019
4:00 P.M.

PRESENT: McKinley L. Price, DDS; Sharon P. Scott, MPA; Tina L. Vick; Dr. Patricia P. Woodbury; Saundra N. Cherry, D. Min.; Marcellus L. Harris III; and David H. Jenkins

ABSENT: None

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Dr. Terri L. Best; Douglas Brown; Marvin L. Harris; Gary B. Hunter; Shelly Simonds; and Lisa Surles-Law

OTHERS PRESENT: Dr. George Parker, III; Cynthia Rohlf; Collins Owens; Mabel Washington Jenkins; David Freeman; Lyn Spratley; Leonard Wallin; Mary Lou Rouseau; Tiffany Moore-Buffaloe; Brian Nichols; Lisa Cipriano; Keith Webb; Patrick Finneran; Venerria Thomas; Florence Kingston; Eoghan Miller; Zina Middleton; and Josh Reyes

I. Call to Order

Mayor McKinley Price called the Special Joint Work Session of the Newport News City Council to order. He advised that all members of the City Council were present. He welcomed the members of the School Board. He thanked the City Council and School Board for the opportunity to meet.

II. Opening Remarks

Mr. Gary Hunter, Chair, Newport News School Board, called the Special Joint Work Session of the Newport News School Board to order. He thanked the members of the City Council and School Board and for the opportunity to meet.

Chairman Hunter advised, as promised, members of the School Board would continue their conversations with the Newport News City Council in an effort to show unity. The School Board wanted to further their conversation on the Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) and Huntington Middle School. Chairman Hunter extended thanks to Mayor Price, members of City Council, and the City Manager for inviting the Newport News School Board to participate in a Joint Work Session. On behalf of the School Board, Chairman Hunter advised that they looked forward to the enlightening conversation.

III. Discussion of Capital Improvement Projects

Mayor Price again thanked everyone for their attendance. With the consensus of the City Council and the School Board, he wanted to establish a few things prior to moving forward. With regard to the Huntington Middle School site, City Council not only wanted to look at the school, but the entire site. City Council wanted to move forward with the plan. Where Huntington Middle School fit into would be a critical issue. Historically, Mayor Price shared, several years prior, when the site was developed, it was the feeling of the Newport News Police
Department (NNPD) that 30th Street could not be closed because they were worried about policing that area as it was a large site. Because of response times and technology, the NNPD feel that would no longer be a problem, which opened up for the City to be able to handle a site from 34th Street to 28th Street, which opened the possibilities of looking at recreation, as well as looking at community services, looking at the school, looking at ball fields, and looking at the whole site in a different way that would hopefully be a facilitated procedure that would have citizen input and develop a plan for the future of the site – also involving the school.

Mayor Price turned the meeting over to City Manager Cindy Rohlf to review some of the things the City was looking at in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).

City Manager Rohlf addressed the comprehensive approach for looking at the Huntington Middle School site, and to give some perspective that she received talking with City Council and the rationale from those conversations. She shared that the City had been working on redevelopment in the Southeast Community over the previous two year or more, with the Choice Neighborhood Initiative (CNI) with the intent being to transform the environment in the lives of the residents in the Southeast Community. She indicated that a school was an important investment in any community, not just the Southeast, but was also an investment in financial resources. From the City’s perspective, it was very important not to undertake this in a vacuum. They did not want to look at it as “just a school,” but wanted to look at the entire picture to get some idea, particularly in a community like the Southeast Community, that had other social and economic challenges. City Council wanted to be able to roll it all in together and look at more than “just a school,” which they learned in the CNI process, was critical to be successful. Things needed to be viewed comprehensively in terms of learning about the needs of the community. This was similar to the Denbigh-Warwick Area Plan, where the City was looking at making substantial investments. The thought was to bring the community together and see what the community needed to make sure the City’s resources were being invested where needed. This was about trying to maximize the needs of not only the existing facilities, but the new facilities to be constructed as well.

City Manager Rohlf showed a map to illustrate there were a number of public facilities in close proximity to the Huntington Middle School site. There were a number of groups, both City and volunteers, which would provide a number of services to the City and the community, ranging from athletics to job training. City Council supported many of the efforts in the community – either the City’s financial resources or the use of the City’s facilities. The discussion about the replacement of Huntington Middle School provided a great opportunity to engage the community, and thought it was important to take an inventory of the assets – not only public facilities, but the assets being provided in the community in the way of programs and services. They would look at the other opportunities available, the services being provided, and what services were being duplicated. Based on the inventory taken in the community, a plan could be matched up to determine what kind of facilities were needed to address the more pressing needs. City Manager Rohlf felt there were educational needs as well as recreational needs. She advised that City Council wanted to consider the connectivity of the school. There was City-owned land, which created the opportunity to take the site out a little further.
City Manager Rohlf mentioned, when talking about services and the kinds of things to do in the Huntington Middle School area, they realized there were some limitations and parameters of what could be done, particularly in a school site. Nothing should introduced into that area that was not fitting with the main purpose of the school. The replacement of Huntington Middle School was seen as a critical part in the City’s overall redevelopment efforts. There was an opportunity, beyond the school, to explore other ways in trying to improve the community. The City anticipated, it would be a cooperative effort, with the City taking the lead on the planning part, in working with the School Board, stakeholders, and citizens, to come forward, to get a better idea of the needs of the community, to begin building around those needs.

City Manager Rohlf indicated specific details were not available at this point; but she and Dr. Parker had met. The intent would be working with the Schools (NNPS), engaging the stakeholders to include parents, the recreational community, volunteers, etc. She did not anticipate this taking a long period of time. As suggested by the Mayor, the City would have someone assist with this process to ensure a facilitative discussion from the community. With concurrence of City Council and the School Board, get back together with a timeline for moving forward. This comprehensive approach would be the most impactful on the community as a campus type approach.

City Manager Rohlf turned the meeting over to Mayor Price.

Vice Mayor Vick shared that City Council spoke briefly on the subject at the January 8, 2019 Regular Meeting of City Council. To be clear, she recalled Council discussion about the looking at the entire area around Huntington Middle School, but Councilman Harris pointed out, if there was a majority to move forward on replacing Huntington Middle School, it would take approximately 18-20 months. Councilman Harris responded, he recalled the discussion around moving forward to rebuild Huntington Middle School, would take be at least 4-5 years; and discussion was around doing something sooner rather than later, but they continued to kick the stone down the road. Vice Mayor Vick recalled City Council discussion around looking at the entire area, but there was some concern about the timeline, and questioned whether it would be prolonged if the majority agreed to rebuild Huntington Middle School.

City Manager Rohlf replied there had been a presentation in terms of the school, but there may be other things to be incorporated, i.e. enlarging the gymnasium or the auditorium for future community use; but she was not sure how that would fit in. Those changes/additions may be impactful, and the school many not be the facility as we currently know, particularly if the opportunity was presented to make the most of the investment. City Manager Rohlf implied that the City should not miss an opportunity with this size investment, and to find out years later, it would have been better for the community with all of the other redevelopment if the school had been positioned differently or were able to enlarge the field or increase the size of the auditorium, or to include additional community space. Once the inventory was available, it could be determined that the extra community space was not needed, and was compounded someplace else in the building. The decision was not to delay the process, but the intent was to enhance the facility, understanding that the main purpose was a good quality education; but not to forget there
was a community that the City was in the process of redeveloping. This could be a key factor with this type of investment to the Southeast Community. Regarding the approach, City Manager Rohlf advised the school would be a piece of a larger plan and there may be portions of the school that should be enhanced that could better serve the needs of the community, as opposed to coming back years later and making another investment.

Mayor Price advised there was no intent to try to delay the building of the school. If there was something that would enhance the school or enhance the neighborhood and not be duplicative of the services in the community. City Council wanted to get through the process as quickly as possible. City Council knew there was a date by which the School Board wanted to recruit an architect to build the school. City Council wanted to have some concept of what the school would be comprised of, in communication with the School Board. There was a 1/3 mile track, which was not an official sized track, and it was that size because 30th Street could not be closed. If the street was closed, a 1/2 mile track would be inevitable, but it was a matter of where it should be, in position with the school, the other needs that would be identified that would go on that site; e.g. a ball field. This would be phased, but there would be a plan. As soon as the time could be identified, where the school would be situated, and the size of the school, to have the architects ready so the school could be built as soon as possible. Mayor Price indicated, this was a more comprehensive look. He advised as soon as the first piece of the school was identified, it would be City Council’s intent to move forward.

Councilwoman Scott indicated she was glad to participate in the discussion, to be inclusive of what the community needed. As she and her colleagues travelled around the country with the National League of Cities (NLC) they saw what others were doing across the United States, with dollars being restricted. Everyone was constructing multi-purpose buildings. The opportunity to add some of the components that were discussed during the City Council Work Sessions would have maximum impact for the community and was the best use of the taxpayer’s dollars. With less available dollars to invest, City officials had to be good stewards of the public dollars. It was her hope, as the City moved forward, that the School Board and the City Council could think about the maximum impact for the community. As the school was built, City Council could decide what would be located around the school and how it would impact the community, i.e. whether there would be workforce training on site, whether there would be an opportunity for some of the community colleges to hold classes, whether GED classes would be held, or physical activities referencing her service on the task force for childhood obesity. Councilwoman Scott indicated that she was excited about the conversation and looked forward to seeing what the site could be.

Dr. George Parker, Superintendent, Newport News Public Schools, advised throughout the process that was in place, there had been several discussions around the use of community space in the school, and what the needs of the community were, but there had not been an appropriate venue to have this discussion, because the conversation was always around building another school. He indicated what was being proposed would allow the conversation, to enable the School Board to determine what the school campus was capable of, in terms of serving the overall community. An adult education program, and other services, had been a part of the
discussion, but it was something the NNPS could not move on. There were conversations about what could be done across 30th Street, but it was not something the NNPS could act on. He felt that conversation would be helpful, as it would allow the NNPS to coordinate the entire Huntington Middle School campus, and move forward with a plan. The NNPS communicated that they wanted to have a building in place within the next 3-4 years. Moving forward, as that plan was put in place, a timeline should be communicated that would be appropriate to allow the NNPS to plan for providing the best services for the students. Dr. Parker advised there had been conversation about what could be done across 30th Street, what could be done to better serve the community, but there had not been an appropriate venue as they had been talking about building another school. He stated the conversation around the table with City Council had been refreshing, and created a great opportunity to collaborate with the City.

Councilwoman Woodbury expressed concern about the conversation as she had access to a study that mentioned, in the State of Virginia, the school population was declining, even in Northern Virginia, which had never happened. She referenced the study shared by the School Board in November 2018, that indicated there would be sufficient students for a Middle School, but Newport News also has a high school that was only two-thirds full. She suggested thinking in terms of school population in the State, and what would be done about another school, i.e. Warwick High School, which is in critical condition and needs replacement. She was in favor or looking at the big picture, and questioned what would be done about a high school that was over populated, and one which was only two-thirds full. Looking at the bigger picture was smart. Although studies showed there would be sufficient students to warrant a Middle School, she suggested staying abreast of the figures.

School Board Member Dr. Terri Best commented that she also liked the idea of looking at the bigger picture, and studying the community to plan so that there would be a positive impact on the entire community. She expressed concern that this project would be pushed back, specifically the time line as far as building a school. She was concerned that once again the people in the Southeast Community were being told to “wait,” and be patient. The burden, as far as busing, was in the Southeast Community. The majority of the students attend Booker T. Washington Middle School. Once again, the Southeast Community was told to be patient, and their time would come. Dr. Best noted that the plan sounded good, but there was so much that was unknown.

Councilman Harris commented on the timeframe, and inquired how the other Middle School students would be effected. Approximately 200 students were located in Heritage High School, and there were a few more at Crittenden and Hines Middle Schools. He questioned how those numbers would look moving forward in 3-4 years, having a Middle School in the Southeast Community. Councilman Harris questioned whether there were numbers that would shed a better light on what both bodies should study for the future. He indicated it would be a challenge, having spent a great deal of time at the November 2018 Joint Meeting between the School Board and City Council talking about learning cottages.
Dr. Parker responded, moving forward with a particular plan in mind, at least one year, no more than two, those numbers would be in hand. Those schools would be at capacity, but as one looked at a school at or near capacity, then one would look at the services provided to the students. One of the schools was a gifted education site, and other students from around the City may not be accommodated who would be seeking a zoned placement. Dr. Parker replied that services would be impacted, as Huntington was moved into the two Middle Schools. Dr. Parker indicated it would not be the ideal situation; but NNPS did not want to continue having a partial Middle School located in a High School, which would not be ideal. Certainly Huntington students could not fit into Heritage High School. He indicated if a plan could be communicated to provide the best service possible, the opportunities available to students would be maximized on a short-term basis. The key was to communicate a plan. He hoped this was nearing completion, which would allow NNPS to plan, to ensure the best services were being provided.

In response to Dr. Best’s concerns, Mayor Price advised that he too was a long term resident of the Southeast Community, and a graduate of Huntington High School, he hoped that moving forward, there would be continued communication between the City Council and the School Board, and a continuous plan, without any blame to where we were and how we got there. His goal was to have a consensus between the School Board and the City Council, and there may be extremes on both sides, of what they wanted to do, but there would be a consensus and a majority of both, with a concise plan of what that school would do, what the site would be, and a concise dedicated plan, so that no matter how the boards changed, that plan would be available moving forward. He stated, if that was accomplished, a great service would have been done for the Southeast Community. Mayor Price hoped, jointly, the School Board and the City Council, would come to consensus, and on an expedited plan, as quickly as possible, taking the needs of what the NNPS had in mind, doing what was best for the students, and also looking at the community, in that site, with the best use for that community. Mayor Price advised that Huntington had always been historically the center of that community, and it was his goal, and the vision of many, to make it that again – the center of the community, and perhaps making it even better.

School Board Member Shelly Simonds advised that she had always been supportive of moving forward with Huntington as quickly as possible, and after done with Huntington, to move over to Warwick High School, which had similar needs. She inquired how City Council planned to fund the needs of the NNPS that would come in the coming decade. She referenced bonds, and questioned whether the City would do another bond issue to fund the school. She also questioned what would be the timeline for the bonds. She asked for a sense of, historically, how much the City took on over a ten-year period in bonds.

City Manager Rohlf replied that the City had just gone out to the bond market to sell $85 million worth to fund projects, to include the SCOT relocation. She stated the City did not have that kind of cash available, and did historically go out to seek bond cash. This was a part of what the CIP was - a 5-year plan. Each year the City would determine what the City could afford and what their capacity was and which project they could afford to pay, to include City projects and NNPS projects. City Council, with staff, reviewed the priorities, and looked at the funding available. The City had the capacity and could go out to borrow money, but the key was
how much the City could afford. No matter the amount borrowed, it had to be repaid, which showed up in the City’s Operating Budget as debt service, which was the amount to be repaid. There was a legal obligation to pay this amount off the top. Over the years, debt service would be impacted by the City’s ability to do anything; i.e., to be able to give the NNPS more funding for operating, to give raises, to do library services, to do additional recreational facilities—it was a balance, which the City constantly reviewed. City Manager Rohlf advised that priorities were reviewed, to determine what the debt would be, to determine some of the other operating expenses, and to make the challenging decisions about how to balance that, knowing what was coming up on the operating side, and knowing what was available in terms of facilities and other public needs. Once the bond sale is done, the City tried to go out to do the projects as quickly as possible to make the money last as long as possible, so not to have to go as frequently to the bond market. The City anticipated that the funds received in the bond sale should last approximately 18 months. Staff was still working on the CIP, trying to figure out numbers of what it would look like in terms of Huntington Middle School, and where it should be placed. She reiterated there was only so much the City could afford. There may be a situation where a project was moved or pushed back, which was done more often than she would like. Something may have to be moved, pushed back, or adjusted, because when this level of funding is added for a school of this magnitude, the City’s debt service would be problematic in order to be able to maintain operating services that were important to the citizens.

City Manager Rohlf advised that City Council had been waiting to have this conversation with the School Board, in order to know where they were, and what was needed to program. She wished it was as simple as getting the money, and not having to repay it, but it was the debt service, which was a major consideration, and was competing against public safety facilities, libraries, and recreation, which were all equally important. It was an investment in the school Southeast Community, fit in nicely with what was being done for redevelopment purposes. She advised that City Council had already committed a good deal of funding to support what was being done with the CNI. She stated the investment was being made, but needed to keep carrying it through.

In response to Dr. Best’s comments about “kicking the can down the road,” delaying projects, and saying “hurry up and wait,” Councilwoman Scott advised that the North District was a product of that. She stated, in 20 years, there had been three capital projects—a ball field, one-half of a community center, and one fire station—and she was very sensitive to waiting, but felt City Council was in a great position to actually have some place for the students to go so it could be done right the first time. Councilwoman Scott advised that the Denbigh community was waiting for the second half of the community center, which was approved in 2005, built in 2012, and they only received one-half. This provided an opportunity to do things differently than was done in the past—not to delay, but to get it done and to make it more encompassing.

School Board Member Douglas Brown pointed out the one word was “urgency.” He advised that historically, it was the lack of urgency that got the NNPS and City Council to the current position. He was very encouraged by the conversation to take a comprehensive look, but advised that every month that went by presented a lack of opportunity for students that lived in
the Southeast Community. It created a hardship and increased operating costs on the NNPS. He wanted to leave knowing that the NNPS could move forward, select an architect. He advised there was a great sense of urgency, not just for Huntington, but for Warwick High School, Sedgefield Elementary School and Denbigh High School. He indicated there were a number of school facilities that have critical needs and need to be addressed in a quick and urgent manner. He indicated that Huntington needed to be done, and then move on to another set of schools. School Board Member Douglas Brown pointed out, in the NNPS capital budget, whenever capital funds were not expended by City Council, it hit the NNPS in their operating budget because they were then spending more dollars on capital projects and maintenance. There was a cost no matter what.

Councilwoman Woodbury advised that the stress was always in City Council’s awareness. She shared that City Council was scheduled to vote on over $1 million on roof replacements for the NNPS at the January 22, 2019 Regular Meeting.

City Manager Rohlf reiterated that she and Dr. Parker had met and held several conversations; and in the spirit of working together, she understood when there were schedules to meet and critical needs arose. It was challenging to wait one or more years for funding. The City had worked and managed through City staff to come together. She advised that the City Council would consider an ordinance to appropriate $6.4 million for the NNPS to enable them to move forward with key projects. The City was working through their existing projects to move these to the forefront because they were familiar with some of the challenges. The 2019 appropriation for the NNPS would be on the agenda before City Council at the January 22, 2019 Regular Meeting. City Council had shared with her how important education was to the community.

Councilman Jenkins expressed his support for Huntington Middle School. He felt it was an important part of the Southeast Community. He indicated this was an 80-year decision, which was how long the old school lasted, and he anticipated the new school to last just as long. He did not want to see a rushed decision, or make compromises, but wanted Huntington to be a great school for the Southeast Community to ensure that all of the children received the best possible education. Councilman Jenkins commended the NNPS for working so aggressively to put a plan together, but believed there were compromises made along the way. He was not sure that compromise needed to be made along the way, but he admired their spirit of doing so. Looking at the Huntington Middle School project, Councilman Jenkins felt an exact plan was not needed, or to know exactly what the project would look like. In looking at other City projects, there was flexibility, and could get some design input into the process of building projects. Looking at the City budget, specifically the discretionary budget for capital improvement, Councilman Jenkins shared, there was not much available, and a great deal of that money had already been committed, or was coming to the City in the form of grants, and other projects which had restrictions. Asking for the amount of money it would take to rebuild Huntington Middle School was huge, and would probably not come out of one CIP. He suggested the City move forward, get appropriations for Huntington Middle School, with the understanding that there was not an exact plan in place, and that funding would probably be over several years. If the City Council and the School Board could work together on that, and ensure that Huntington
Middle School was built, and know that it was a great and a model school that would represent the City of Newport News for many years to come, a great job would have been accomplished.

Dr. Parker responded that he believed it was done that way in the past – over two years – in particular, when there were major capital projects. A caveat of that piece, when the NNPS went to bid for an architect, or to build a facility, they had to have a final dollar figure. The architect would bid on the dollar figure that was set. If that was in the final year of the appropriation, and had a final figure, that figure would be the final amount in the RFP and the architect would be able to make that designation. There was a question regarding the cost of architects – Dr. Parker responded, what he had seen in the City was a variance of four percent (4%) to eight percent (8%) of the cost of the total building, would be the architect’s charge, which was how they determined the amount to charge to design the building. He advised, if the project was funded over multiple years, NNPS would not be able to go to bid in year one. They would have to have a bottom line figure and be able to go to bid in the second year of that appropriation.

School Board Member Dr. Terri Best inquired whether the expectation was that members of the School Board and the City Council were to be in agreement on moving forward with a community plan or just a school. In response to Dr. Best, Mayor Price replied that his interpretation of a consensus between the School Board and the City Council was that City Council had committed to doing a general plan for the entire Huntington Middle School site, and would expedite as soon as possible in that site where the school would be, the amount, and the cost, and get it to the NNPS as soon as possible. School Board Member Dr. Terri Best asked Mayor Price to repeat his statement for clarity. Mayor Price repeated that he believed that the consensus from the City Council was that (1) City Council would come up with a plan for the entire site; and (2) as quick as possible, in that site where the school would be, the size and the cost, get that to the school division; and (3) fund it as quick as possible.

School Board Member Dr. Terri Best questioned, the timetable that the NNPS had currently regarding Huntington Middle School whether it was scratched.

Dr. Parker responded that his recommendation to rebuild Huntington would remain March, at the appropriate cost, based on a study by the NNPS. Based on when the City goes to bond, to fund the current plan. They would not be able to fund the current plan for another fiscal year after, so it was already delayed based on the current plan of funding the $2.8 million and the $50 million.

Dr. Parker indicated that it would be around the same time, if the City did a campus design and appropriated the $2.8 million to design the building. It would take one year to design the building. If funded over two years for the cost of the building and the NNPS would have to go to bid for the contractor in the second year of that appropriation. Dr. Parker responded that the NNPS was looking at possibly a three year plan if it could be expedited to design the campus, if expedited, and received a design for the campus in a timely manner.
City Manager Rohlf replied, that had been the City’s practice in terms of funding. It could take from 12-18 months, which was a conscious decision to manage in terms of cash flow - depending on cash flow and how often the City goes to the bond market. It was not just school projects, but all projects. Based on financial issues, this was an intentional time lag.

Vice Mayor Vick reiterated this was a normal time lag to see how everything would fall into place.

City Manager recalled in the conceptual design and the way the school was planned, it took into account the entire site. She indicated once the commitment was made, and the design started, it was too far to go back and revisit. City Manager Rohlf advised that there was some flexibility in the design portion to make adjustments, but there were costs associated with the adjustments. City Manager Rohlf stated, as much as the City could do to ensure whatever was being put forward, it was still the City’s intent to let the NNPS drive the process about the product received for Huntington Middle School. The City only wanted it to be done with a collaborative effort to benefit the community. There were many projects done in other communities, and the City also wanted that community to see what was available. It was up to City Council how to move forward. She reiterated it was not the intent of the City to delay anything, but wanted to make sure the money that would be invested in any project, not just Huntington Middle School was spent to the best of our ability, and to make the most impact, particularly in the Southeast Community.

Councilwoman Woodbury questioned whether there would be a consultant to work on the “big picture.” City Manager Rohlf responded, not necessarily a consultant, but someone to help facilitate gathering the information, as it was not just about building a school, but about the delivery of services, and to get some idea about the agencies and the services offered and how the City should repurpose some of its many facilities so not to duplicate services throughout the City.

School Board Member Lisa Surles-Law stated that she was excited about the conversation around the table, as it was not just about education and academic achievement, but was also about environment and community. She reiterated the City Manager’s comment about not duplicating anything in the community and wanted to take an assessment. She indicated education was not being duplicated in the Southeast Community. She expressed concern that the children in the Southeast Community be treated as all others were treated, particularly those in our homes - making them a priority. She got nervous because it sounded as though it could get dispersed. She wanted to ensure that the children did not get lost, and that the needs of the community were heard.

School Board Member Marvin Harris heard only about a plan. He suggested that the City Council provide the School Board or the community with a plan on what they wanted to see in the area of Huntington Middle School. He questioned whether there would be a school on the site. He heard that a great deal wanted to be attached to the actual project. City Manager Rohlf responded there would be a plan. She stated that other things may not be attached to the school. She viewed Huntington Middle Schools as a stand-alone piece to the area plan.
School Board Member Marvin Harris viewed the whole project attached to the school. He recommended that the City provide the School Board a plan on what they wanted done with the entire site, and he did not think the plan should take two years.

In response to School Board Member Harris’ comments, Mayor Price replied the plan would be a collaborative plan, and it would not take two years. He stated the School board should be a part of that conversation. School Board Member Harris noted that the School Board had time expectations, and they all knew it was a priority to put a school on the site. To have addition conversations about what else should be attached to that piece of land, as far as the community was concerned, it would not be a problem, but the School Board could not say what that was. They could only say they wanted a school to house X amount of students and teach X amount based on a Virginia State law. He recommended that the City provide the School Board a plan for anything else to be put on that land, and that way everyone can distract from that plan. At the end of the day School Board Member Harris stated that a school was needed.

Based on School Board Member Harris’ comments, Mayor Price confirmed that would be done. The school was a critical part of the site. The City would contact some experts and for example, if a library was decided as a part if the school, perhaps that could be combined with the plans that the City had for the community, and join that to make it bigger and better.

School Board Member Harris inquired, if there was no school on the site, what would be the City’s actions for the community efforts, taking the school completely out of the picture. Mayor Price replied, if the school was out of the picture, the City still planned to look at that entire site for the best interests of the community as far as recreation, employment, community services, etc. School Board Member Harris there would have been a budge attached to the City’s effort regardless of whether there was a school attached or not. He stated it was understood that the school would be the largest line item. And so, if there was still conversation around a school not being there, there would be a bond sale to cover whatever the City wanted to see on the site. His recommendation, and felt it did not need collaboration with the NNPS, because they had spent money on a plan. He stated there was already a standing plan or drawing for a school. He did not think it was a good idea to spend more taxpayer dollars to rehash the idea and come up with another plan as the NNPS had spent the money for a plan.

Dr. Parker responded there was a conceptual plan in place about what services or programs the School Board would like in the School. School Board Member Harris indicated that he did not feel that the NNPS should take the lead. Mayor Price interjected that the NNPS would not take the lead. He advised that the City would take the lead in looking at the entire plan, and the City and the School Board would jointly look at where the school would be located on the site. School Board Member Harris indicated that the NNPS should not be a “hitching post” as the budget would be pretty large, and the City could fund what other programs for that site, regardless of whether the School Board had in mind. Mayor Price disagreed.

School Board Member Simonds reiterated what she heard – it seemed as though City Council had made progress – tapping into other funding mechanisms and different sources where they could fund different projects, which made way for more innovation and opened up to
other possibilities for thinks the City had access to, but to which the NNPS did not have access. She felt there were neat possibilities available.

Councilwoman Cherry expressed her support for rebuilding Huntington Middle School. She stated the understanding of the community and some of the stakeholders, residents, that they did not understand the budget process. They did not understand bonds and how the City went about securing funding. Their interpretation was they could approach the City, who would be able to supply the money immediately. She indicated, as long as the City Council and the School Board understood what it would take, and how it occurred, the two bodies could continue to move forward as long as they communicated to the community, “yes, we are going to have a school,” and yes, the City would take the lead, and was looking at a whole community project, so that the community did not feel they had to wait again. Councilwoman Cherry advised that she was a strong advocate of moving forward, especially for the Southeast Community. The conversation around the table was not about waiting again but everyone needed to understand how the City got its money and how the City funded what was funded, how the City went about building facilities, and how the City went about the CIP.

Mayor Price pointed out, if the money was available, the project would still take two years to build the school. Councilwoman Cherry advised that the community did not understand that it would take two years. She reiterated that the community needed to be educated about whether the money was available, it would still take two years to build. The urgency was that City Council was causing the issue with Heritage High School, which was not the point. The community needed to be educated that City Council was not slowing down or delaying the process and causing angst for the kids at Heritage High School. It would take time whether the money was or was not readily on hand. This message needed to be communicated to the community clearly to help them understand the process.

Vice Mayor Vick stated that the City moved around in so many different ways, and indicated there had not been a clear commitment, by the City Council. She inquired whether there had been a commitment of $50 million to rebuild Huntington High School. She advised, in the City’s communication, City Council had to be clear because there had not been a commitment of $50 million; then there was an area pinpointed, which made people feel funny about the process. There had been no initial commitment for $50 million from the City Council as a body.

Councilwoman Cherry stated there was not going to be $50 million for a school. She did not see City Council committing to $50 million only for a school.

Vice Mayor Vick advised that City Council had not committed to funding a school as a body, and now City Council was looking at other things around the site. She indicated, even though City Council knew what they were thinking, they needed to be more clear and communicating that yes, we are committed to building a school. Mayor Price felt that had been stated. City Council would look at the whole project, and as soon as possible, the school would be the first project on that site. Vice Mayor Vick advised that she had not heard the commitment of $50 million for the school as a body. Mayor Price indicated it had not been
communicated until today. Vice Mayor Vick advised that no vote had been taken. Mayor Price advised no actual amount had been agreed on, but City Council was committing to rebuilding Huntington Middle School. There was a conceptual plan from the NNPS of what was wanted in that; and City Council would look at the site, and come up with a consensus, between the City Council and the School Board, about where the school would be, what it would look like, how much it would cost and what would be included.

School Board Member Douglas Brown thanked Vice Mayor Vick for her thoughts. He shared there had been some anxiety at the beginning of the meeting, but was relieved that City Council had committed to rebuilding Huntington Middle School, and was appreciative to learn that. The only thing he wanted clarity on – It was January 2019, and in September of X year, what is X for the NNPS? In talking about the whole process, breaking ground, building, unlocking the doors for kids to come into the school. What is X? Mayor Price replied that he could not supply what X was. School Board Member Douglas Brown questioned whether there was a range, i.e. 2022-2023. Mayor Price replied X would be as soon as possible. As soon as the City Manager reviewed the budget, and the resources. City Council was going through a process to eliminate things to make up funding, as there were things the City had to do first to be able to come up with a date.

Councilwoman Scott stated that some of the angst with the School Board and the public was that they had not bought into the new leadership model, under the leadership of the new City Manager. Things were being done differently to reach the same goal. It seemed labor intensive and that delays were built in, but that was far from the truth. She stated until everyone understood that the City was attempting to get the “best bang for the buck,” and do the best for the community, these misunderstandings would continue. Councilwoman Scott stated that people wanted to hear “ABCD” from the City Council and the School Board. She indicated City Council should come up with a timeline, come back together with a presentation of the proposal, which would make everyone feel better about the project’s timing.

Dr. Parker advised that the two bodies were saying “Huntington Middle School would be rebuilt.” He stated that was not the conversation at the Joint Meeting between the School Board and the City Council on November 20, 2018. It was a positive meeting, but that was not the consensus at that time; but now the conversation was around “how can we get it done” was very refreshing. Dr. Parker indicated progress was being made and he was appreciative of the conversation around the table.

Councilman Jenkins pointed out that the decision to close Huntington Middle School was made less than one year previously. Compared to other City projects, he felt there had been tremendous work done on this project and was moving forward in a timely manner. When looking at other CIP projects in the City, it was not unusual to look out 5 – 10 years. It was his hope that the two bodies could come together to start projecting forward so that this problem did not constantly arise. The School Board and the City Council needed to come together to have tough discussions and to make the tough decisions for the citizens of Newport News.
IV. Closing Comments

School Board Chairman Hunter thanked both the members of the City Council and the School Board for their attendance and participation. He was hopeful for the allocation of $6.4 million for the capital needs of the NNPS immediately. He was happy to be talking with the City Council. His reason for coming was to hear that Huntington Middle School was on the docket to be rebuilt. From this point forward he shared the need to work on a timeline. He reiterated comments made by Councilman Jenkins about Huntington Middle School being closed one year ago and were now in the next steps of the discussion to move forward. He was happy to hear that Huntington Middle School would be rebuilt.

Dr. Parker thanked the City for the $6.4 million in capital dollars to allow the NNPS to move the FU 2019 capital projects forward; i.e. the HVAC, roof replacements, etc. He thanked City Council for taking initiative to help the NNPS fund those projects moving forward, as these would ensure that the students were learning in an appropriate environment.

Dr. Parker reminded of his promise to both boards that they would not read about the NNPS estimate of needs in the newspaper. He wanted the City Council to see the NNPS priorities in advance, and would forward an electronic version of the NNPS priorities. Prior to distributing the NNPS budget to the School Board, Dr. Parker wanted City Council to see what those priorities were. He announced that the NNPS would hold a Community Budget Work Session on Monday, February 4, 2019, 6:00 p.m., at the School Administration Building (12465 Warwick Boulevard).

Mayor Price thanked both the members of the School Board and City Council for their attendance and bringing the matters to the forefront. He stated what was planned would be best for the community and the students in the long run. He thanked everyone for their patience and participation. It was obvious if one listened closely to the comments, there were different extremes and different ideas, but both bodies need to reach a consensus of those ideas in an effort to move forward.

V. Adjourn

Mayor Price adjourned the meeting of the Newport News City Council.

Chairman Hunter adjourned the meeting of the Newport News School Board.

THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS,
ON MOTION, COUNCIL ADJOURNED AT 5:18 P.M.
Mabel Washington Jenkins, MMC
City Clerk

McKinley L. Price, DDS
Mayor
Presiding Officer

A true copy, teste:

City Clerk
Mabel Washington Jenkins

Mabel Washington Jenkins, MMC
City Clerk

McKinley L. Price, DDS
Mayor
Presiding Officer

A true copy, test:

City Clerk