

# COLCHESTER SCHOOL DISTRICT

Board of Education Meeting  
Colchester High School Performing Arts Center

Tuesday, October 1, 2024  
7:00 p.m.

## MINUTES (General Session)

The Colchester Board of Education converted a regular board meeting to a community presentation on the facilities bond item that voters will consider on the November 5 election ballot. Board members in attendance were Board Chair Lindsey Cox, Directors Nic Longo, Ben Yousey-Hindes, Laurie Kigonya, Jennifer Fath and Student Board Member Rylee Friend. District administrators in attendance included Superintendent Amy Minor, Business and Operations Manager George Trieb, and Director of Curriculum and Instruction Gwen Carmolli, and Director of Student Support Services Carrie Lutz. Architects John Hemmelgarn and Polly Wheeler from Black River Design Architects were also in attendance to answer questions.

### I. Call to Order

Board Chair Lindsey Cox called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

### II. Citizen Participation

None.

### III. Approval of Meeting Minutes

Action

- September 17, 2024
- September 24, 2024

*Director Longo moved to approve the minutes from the meetings held on September 17 and 24, 2024. The motion passed unanimously.*

### IV. Community Presentation and Q&A on the Proposed Facilities Bond

Information

School board members, administrators, and architects provided a comprehensive presentation for community members outlining the proposed facilities bond on the November 5 ballot. The bond will fund enhancements to safety, upgrades to infrastructure, and improvements to learning spaces through renovating existing facilities and constructing new additions at schools in the district. While all five schools will see some level of updates, most of the funds will go to Porters Point School, Union Memorial School, and Colchester Middle School. Following the presentation, community members were invited to make statements or ask questions.

David Cohen of North Beach Road asked if the district had thoroughly evaluated what a completely new building would cost. John Hemmelgarn from Black River Design said they did a preliminary design and estimate. It would be more expensive, noting that new constructions typically involve higher expenses, including establishing underground utilities and site infrastructure. Mr. Cohen also raised concerns about the presence of PCBs and questioned whether the school board had issued a request for proposals from construction companies. Board Chair Lindsey Cox stated they cannot put out a request for proposals until taxpayers approve to spend the money by passing the bond. Mr. Hemmelgarn explained the role and process they used to estimate costs.

Ted Stokes of Fern Court appreciated the presentation but highlighted the financial burden on low-income individuals and families, emphasizing that many residents are renters who may face increased rent due to higher taxes. He urged the board to differentiate between essential and non-essential spending to reduce the size of the proposed bond.

Chris Dupont of Leclair Drive acknowledged the need for the project but stressed the importance of cutting unnecessary expenses. He inquired about contingency plans and whether PCB testing would be completed before starting renovations. Administrators confirmed plans for both.

Taryn Barrett of Orchard Drive shared she is an architect and commended the planning and dedication of those involved in the project, recognizing the difficult conditions teachers face in the current facilities. She expressed confidence that the team would successfully move forward with the necessary renovations and shared support for what was presented.

Dick Pecor of Middle Road highlighted the town's history of delaying necessary renovations until buildings are in poor condition, recalling past issues with outdated facilities at the town garage, town office, and police station. He stressed that many school buildings currently do not meet code, which poses safety risks, and shared his shock from seeing the pictures in the presentation that showed the current conditions of the buildings.

Tom Barry of Old Sawmill Road agreed that the case for renovation was strong and noted that much of the proposed work is essential. He mentioned a previous issue with a drainage pipe that arose from parking expansion and suggested budgeting for a stormwater management system.

Kate Ellingson of South Bay Circle and a teacher in the district, raised concerns about the safety of students during emergencies, like fires or school shootings, noting inadequate exit routes in the buildings. She highlighted the need for improvements and questioned the rationale behind waiting for emergencies to address critical issues at the two schools that are not receiving significant funds. She asked why the school board was not asking taxpayers for more funds to improve conditions.

Churchill Hindes of Thayer Bay Road appreciated the informative presentation and stressed the importance of safety and compliance with building codes, noting that the schools are exempt because of age, but that does not mean being out of compliance is okay. He reflected on the tragic consequences of the school shooting in Essex and wants to make sure the district's schools can keep the students and staff safe. He also expressed a desire for a one-on-one discussion about the structure of the bond and financial intricacies.

Pete Labrie of Julie Drive thanked the board for their commitment to a comprehensive, long-term approach to school facilities, cautioning against piecemeal solutions that could lead to higher costs. He asked whether the board had considered acquiring and rehabilitating state-owned properties.

Mark Gagne of Hidden Oaks Drive and teacher, coach, and parent shared his firsthand experiences of overcrowded classrooms and inadequate facilities. He stated the presentation did not exaggerate the current facility conditions. He emphasized the need for more than temporary fixes, as the current conditions are not conducive to effective teaching and learning.

Chris Dupont made a second comment, reiterating his acknowledgment of the need for renovations while voicing concerns over potential tax increases that could affect residents. He urged the state to help towns and districts fund renovations for their aging facilities. In lieu of any state assistance, he pleaded for the board to get the best possible price for the renovations.

Jocelyn Scheuch Shore Acres Drive expressed her support for proactive measures to ensure ADA compliance in schools and emphasized the importance of understanding the growth of the school population. She pointed out that the proposed expansion seems conservative, given the ongoing new construction in the area, and inquired about additional capacity in the plans. Superintendent Amy Minor responded that a demographic report informed the floor plans, indicating slight enrollment growth with a forecasted leveling off, and noted the inclusion of a flexible space to accommodate unexpected high enrollment in any grade while avoiding overbuilding based on the data.

David Cohen made a second comment, noting that he has been astounded and startled by the facility conditions shared in the presentation. He feels that many necessary renovations could have been accomplished incrementally in previous years. He emphasized the importance of affordability in light of the upcoming property reassessment and the potential tax impact on residents.

Kate Ellingson made a second comment, continuing to highlight the struggle that teachers face. She called for a broader discussion on funding for education and urged that the state hear the voices of teachers and community members.

Kari Carney of Landing Avenue and a fourth-grade teacher, expressed concern about classroom size and the current facilities' barriers to safety in the event of an emergency. She recounted a plumbing incident that disrupted learning, emphasizing the need for adequate space and facilities.

Vicki Brown, a special educator in the district, thanked the board for their thoughtful consideration of district needs. She voiced concerns about ADA compliance and the challenges students face in current facilities, stressing the importance of updates to provide the best education possible.

## V. Adjournment

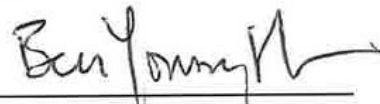
*Director Yousey-Hindes moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:48 p.m.*

Recorder:



Meghan Baule  
Recording Secretary

Board Clerk:



Ben Yousey-Hindes  
Board Clerk