

Meeting Minutes

City Council/School Board Subcommittee

March 2, 2026

5:00 p.m.

ACPS Board Room

1340 Braddock Road

In-Person with Zoom Access

(Links to this meeting are posted on the [City and ACPS Websites](#))

City Council and School Board Member Attendees:

Mayor Alyia Gaskins

Councilman John Chapman

School Board Chair Michelle Rief

School Board Vice Chair Christopher Harris

Approval of Minutes

The first item of business was approval of the November 24, 2024 meeting minutes. Mayor Gaskins moved to approve the minutes and Mr. Harris seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion of the 2026 Work Plan

Mayor Gaskins explained that after the December meeting she and Chair Rief met to further refine the approach to the work plan. The goal is to structure meetings so that the committee is not only receiving updates but also reviewing relevant reports and data, discussing how that information is being used, and considering how it can inform policy discussions between the City Council and School Board. The work plan outlines proposed topics by month, and staff are compiling a list of related reports and potential questions that may guide the discussions.

Mr. Harris shared his perspective on the structure of the meetings. Having served on the subcommittee for less than a year, he noted the importance of ensuring the meetings result in clear direction and outcomes. He suggested incorporating deliverables and key performance indicators (KPIs) where appropriate so that meetings are more efficient and help guide the work of staff and the committee throughout the year. He also suggested that, rather than providing brief updates on multiple topics during a single meeting, the committee might consider dedicating more time to individual topics, allowing staff to return with follow-up information or deliverables in subsequent meetings.

Mayor Gaskins asked clarifying questions about how that approach might work in practice and whether it would involve extending meeting time or simply shifting how topics are scheduled across meetings. Mr.

Harris noted that his suggestion was primarily about adjusting the agenda and providing space for deeper discussion of individual topics rather than simply receiving reports.

Mayor Gaskins also reflected on how the subcommittee's meetings have historically been structured. In the past, meetings often followed a standing agenda that included recurring updates on similar topics each time the committee met. The proposed approach instead distributes those topics across the year so they can be discussed at the time when information or reports are most relevant. She noted that topics such as budget planning, long-term capital planning, shared operations, youth programming, youth employment, and safety are recurring areas of discussion, and the work plan attempts to align those conversations with when related reports or initiatives occur during the year.

The group discussed the importance of aligning topics with the annual calendar of reports and initiatives. For example, March is the Month of the Young Child, when the Kids First Years organization typically releases its report and hosts its early childhood summit. Similarly, youth employment discussions could align with the planning period for the City's summer youth employment program. Members agreed that including brief explanations for why topics appear in particular months could help clarify the structure of the work plan.

Mr. Harris also raised the question of whether the subcommittee should formally document its purpose or charge. In reviewing past materials, he had not been able to identify a formal statement outlining the committee's role. He suggested that establishing a purpose statement could provide clarity and continuity for future members. As an example, he shared a possible statement that the subcommittee exists to align capital planning, operating budgets, growth projections, and youth outcomes through joint policy direction and measurable commitments.

Mayor Gaskins noted that it is common for boards and committees to have a documented purpose or charge and agreed that it could be helpful to memorialize the role of the subcommittee. However, she emphasized the importance of ensuring that meetings remain focused on the substantive work of reviewing reports and discussing issues rather than spending too much time on procedural matters.

Councilman Chapman expressed a similar view. He noted that the subcommittee has historically served as a forum for communication and coordination between the City Council and the School Board, particularly around shared topics such as budget, capital planning, and major projects. He pointed out that previous discussions, such as those related to the high school project, have taken place over multiple meetings as projects evolved. While structure and planning are helpful, he emphasized the importance of maintaining flexibility and focusing on the key initiatives and issues that require joint discussion.

Planning for the March 23 Meeting

The committee then discussed the agenda for the March 23 meeting, which is currently scheduled to focus on Early Childhood and Health and Wellbeing.

The Mayor indicated that potential early childhood updates could include information from Kids First Years, along with an update from DCHS on data and trends related to early childhood in the community.

For the health and wellbeing portion of the meeting, the Mayor proposed providing updates related to the Community Health Needs Assessment.

During the discussion, members suggested several additional items that could be considered for future meetings. Chair Rief suggested an update on ALX Beyond, the online platform designed to help families locate out-of-school time opportunities across the city. Another idea was to hear about work underway through ACT for Alexandria, which has convened a youth employment and career and technical education work group that is conducting a landscape study of youth employment, internship, and workforce opportunities in Alexandria.

Mayor Gaskins noted that ALX Beyond has been providing individual briefings to City Council members, but if the committee felt it would be helpful, a joint update could be scheduled in the future.

Chair Rief also requested time to provide an update on the Link Club program, particularly regarding the impact of recent grant funding changes affecting two sites.

Presentation: Long Range Educational Facilities Plan Scope of Work

Sophie Huemer explained that the purpose of the proposed scope of work is to launch development of the Long Range Educational Facilities Plan as soon as possible so that staff can begin analysis and produce key deliverables. The plan will establish a collaborative, data-driven framework to align school modernization with enrollment growth and fiscal realities. It will also expand on the roadmap outlined in the Joint Facilities Master Plan, defining capital priorities for Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) over the next 15 to 20 years.

Key deliverables of the plan will include updated enrollment and capacity analyses, revised educational specifications aligned with Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) guidelines, and evaluation of Alexandria-specific land use constraints. Staff also anticipate providing interim findings related to middle school capacity in fall 2026 to support ongoing planning discussions. The plan will further develop a fiscal framework for capital projects and clarify how decisions are made regarding renovation, new construction, and adaptive reuse.

Huemer noted that the operational focus of the plan will include existing ACPS buildings and sites, small area plan-designated sites, and opportunities for adaptive reuse.

The expected outcomes of the plan include addressing middle school capacity challenges, establishing updated long-term enrollment projections, and aligning aging infrastructure needs with fiscal constraints. The plan will also aim to improve transparency in how ACPS capital improvement decisions are made and communicated.

Huemer described the stakeholders involved in the process, including students, parents, teachers, staff, and the broader Alexandria community. The plan will include opportunities for stakeholder input at key phases.

Execution of the project will be led by ACPS and City staff in partnership with an external consultant. Oversight will be provided by an internal technical work group composed of staff from ACPS and the City, while the School Board and City Council will serve as the ultimate decision-making bodies.

Phased Work Plan

Huemer outlined the proposed phased approach for the plan.

Phase One will focus on project launch and establishing a common set of facts. This includes updating the database of school and City facilities, reviewing industry standards for capacity and utilization, and forming the technical work group.

Phase Two will include detailed analysis of the collected data, including updates to the long-range enrollment forecast. During this phase, staff also expect to provide options related to middle school capacity and begin work on updated educational specifications.

Phase Three will focus on strategic modeling and site identification. Staff will establish clearer criteria for determining when to pursue new construction, renovation, or adaptive reuse. This phase will also formalize decision-making criteria that have historically been applied more informally.

The final phase will emphasize fiscal coordination and adoption of the plan. This includes improving interagency coordination around the Capital Improvement Program (CIP), presenting periodic updates to both boards, and ultimately seeking adoption by the School Board and endorsement by City Council. Each phase will include deliverables shared with the public to ensure transparency and opportunities for feedback. Staff also plan to develop a communications strategy and establish a regular update cycle for the plan, likely every three to five years.

Next Steps

Huemer stated that staff hope to initiate the procurement process as soon as possible and establish the technical work group shortly thereafter. The core group is expected to include staff from Planning and Zoning and Capital Projects Planning and Design, with additional departments involved as needed. The goal is to begin Phase One of the work in summer 2026.

Discussion

Mayor Alyia Gaskins expressed support for moving the project forward and asked about the potential role of community stakeholders and elected officials in the oversight process. She noted that the previous plan involved a committee with community members and referenced a recent memo from colleagues suggesting creation of a subcommittee.

Councilmember Chapman responded that the plan is primarily technical in nature and suggested that policymakers allow staff and consultants to lead the technical analysis. He emphasized the importance of allowing experts to develop the plan and bringing policymakers in at key milestones to review and respond to findings.

Mayor Gaskins suggested the possibility of creating an ad hoc group of City Council and School Board members to serve as a point of contact for periodic updates. Huemer indicated that regular check-ins with such a group could be helpful, noting that the internal technical work group will meet frequently and that monthly or bimonthly check-ins with elected officials could provide useful oversight.

Planning and Zoning Director Paul Stoddard added that staff could also return to the subcommittee at the completion of each project phase to present progress and gather feedback.

Mayor Gaskins also emphasized the importance of developing a community engagement plan alongside the technical work plan to ensure the public has meaningful opportunities to provide input throughout the process rather than only at the final stage. She further recommended including additional City staff, such

as representatives from the Department of Planning and Development and legislative and legal staff, at key stages of the work to ensure alignment with land-use policies and potential legislative changes.

Huemer summarized that staff would develop additional documentation outlining the rhythm of internal meetings, external check-in points, and departmental involvement. She asked whether the procurement process could move forward while these refinements are prepared. Subcommittee members expressed support for initiating procurement while circulating additional materials as an addendum.

Additional Feedback

Subcommittee members suggested incorporating an assessment of the previous Long Range Educational Facilities Plan into Phase One. This review would examine what was accomplished, what remains relevant, and lessons learned from implementation.

Members also discussed the importance of establishing clearer decision-making frameworks for prioritizing school capital projects and improving coordination between the School Board and City Council when making funding decisions.

Interim Deliverables

Discussion also addressed the proposed interim deliverables related to middle school capacity. Mayor Gaskins noted that the timing of the overall plan may not align with the upcoming CIP cycle and encouraged staff to manage expectations regarding what interim findings could realistically inform near-term decisions.

Sharing Draft Materials

Members agreed that the draft scope of work and presentation materials should be shared with the full City Council and School Board. Staff will label the documents as drafts and circulate them to both bodies, with a request that feedback be submitted by March 20. This approach allows colleagues to provide input without delaying the procurement process.

Other Business

During other business, members noted several upcoming items:

- The revised Alexandria Police Department Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with ACPS is expected to be presented to the School Board on April 9, with a tentative public hearing scheduled for April 16.
- A future update on the APD policy review is anticipated later in the spring.
- The Mayor highlighted ongoing briefings related to the Duke Street Small Area Plan and encouraged continued participation by both boards.

Mayor Gaskins also raised the topic of increased Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activity in the community and suggested exploring a joint conversation between City Council and the School Board to ensure both bodies are informed about related policy and operational responses. Staff indicated that they would follow up with possible approaches for facilitating that discussion.

Looking ahead to the upcoming joint budget meeting, the Mayor noted that the presentation will include a summary of the proposed operating and capital budgets, as well as a deeper discussion of the City Manager's proposal to reserve funds for certain capital projects. The City Council also intends to begin discussing potential approaches to school funding beginning in FY 2028, including whether funding should continue as a lump-sum transfer or be provided in specific categories to improve transparency and accountability.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at **6:08 p.m.**