

(The following is not a verbatim transcript of comments or discussion that occurred during the meeting, but rather a summarization intended for general informational purposes. All motions and votes are the official records).

SPECIAL MEETING – CITY COUNCIL

-APRIL 16, 2026-

Special meeting of the City Council was held on Thursday, April 16, 2026 in the Cranston City Council Cranston City Hal, 869 Park Ave., Cranston, Rhode Island.

I. CALL MEETING TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order at 5:45 P.M. by the Council President.

II. ROLL CALL:

Roll call showed the following members present: Councilwoman Graziano, Councilmen Andujar, Ritz, Traficante, Councilwoman Vaziri, Councilmen Campopiano, Buonanno, Council Vice-President Haroian and Council President Wall -9.

Also Present: Anthony Moretti, Chief of Staff; Nicole Renzulli, Governmental Affairs & Communications Director; Christopher Millea, City Solicitor; Michael Marcello, City Council Legal Counsel; David DiMaio, City Council Budget Analyst; Rosalba Zanni, Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committee.

**CITY OF CRANSTON
RHODE ISLAND**

**NOTICE OF SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CITY
COUNCIL**

Thursday, April 16, 2026 at 5:45 p.m.

Special Meeting of the City Council will be held **in the Cranston City Council Chambers, Cranston City Hall, 869 Park Ave., Cranston, RI 02910** for the purpose of considering the following items listed on the agenda. Remote viewing is also available by using the logon information provided below, as posted on the City's website at www.cranstonri.gov, and Secretary of State's website at www.sos.ri.gov.

Join from PC, Mac, iPad, or Android:

<https://zoom.us/j/91578997736?pwd=5R2dO97osq8Mbm8UdEiIW0s0jKM9U.1>

Passcode:388697

Phone one-tap:

+16465588656,,91578997736# US (New York)

+16469313860,,91578997736# US

Join via audio:

+1 646 558 8656 US (New York)

+1 646 931 3860 US

+1 301 715 8592 US (Washington DC)

+1 305 224 1968 US

+1 309 205 3325 US

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

+1 507 473 4847 US

+1 564 217 2000 US

+1 669 444 9171 US

+1 669 900 9128 US (San Jose)

+1 689 278 1000 US

+1 719 359 4580 US

+1 253 205 0468 US

+1 253 215 8782 US (Tacoma)

+1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)

+1 360 209 5623 US

+1 386 347 5053 US

Webinar ID: 915 7899 7736

International numbers available: <https://zoom.us/u/aJKRJZx9l>

Technology problems should be reported immediately to:

CranstonCityCouncilMedia@gmail.com

YouTube Livestream

The meeting will be live streamed on YouTube. Click the link below to view the meeting. You will only be able to watch the proceedings.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtE9vwA1B1PQHuftrNPcZjg>.

This Special Meeting of the Cranston City Council has been called by the Council President, Daniel R. Wall, pursuant to the Cranston City Charter Section §3.07 and Section 2.04.060 of the City's Code of Ordinances.

The members of the City Council listed on the attached certification have been notified as provided for in §3.07 of the Charter: Council President Daniel R. Wall, Council Vice-President Kristen M. Haroian, Councilwoman Emilia Vaziri, Councilman Richard D. Campopiano, Councilman Christopher E. Buonanno, Councilwoman Bridget R. Graziano, Councilman Andy M. Andujar; Councilman Frank J. Ritz, Jr.; and Councilman Michael Traficante.

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL

III. PUBLIC HEARING FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2026-2027 BUDGET

(no votes to be taken)

IV. ADJOURNMENT *(Vote may be taken)*

And I hereby request the City Clerk to notify all Council members of the Call of the special meeting.

Executed at Cranston, Rhode Island, this 14th day of April, 2026



Daniel R. Wall, Council President

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that a true copy of the attached Notice of a Special Meeting of the City Council to be held on Thursday, April 16, 2026 at 5:45 p.m. in the Council Chambers, City Hall, Cranston, Rhode Island was delivered via electronic mail on the 14th day of April, 2026 to the email addresses listed below:

Daniel R. Wall
Danwall67@gmail.com

Kristen E. Haroian
kristenharoian@gmail.com

Richard D. Campopiano
Rd.camp@yahoo.com

Andy M. Andujar
voteandujar@gmail.com

Christopher E. Buonanno
councilmanbuonanno@gmail.com

Frank J. Ritz, Jr.
frankritzforcranston@gmail.com

Bridget R. Graziano
bridgetforcranston@gmail.com

Michael A. Traficante
mtraficante@nellmct.com

Emilia Vaziri
Vaziri4cranston@gmail.com

/s/ Rosalba Zanni
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees

III. PUBLIC HEARING FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2026-2027 BUDGET

Anthony Melillo, Vice-Chair of School Committee, 33 Harvard St., appeared to speak and stated that he would like to start with a few of what he likes to call myths vs. facts because public understanding matters when we talk about public schools. Myth #1, during COVID, the School District added over 100 positions using federal funds. Fact, in reality, over the last four years Cranston Public Schools has reduced their staff by 95 positions. This is the District making difficult decisions to live within its means. Myth #2, the City of Cranston provides the School Department with millions of dollars every year for their Operating Budget. Fact, over the last six years, the School Department has received an average of approximately \$1 million per year. While any support is appreciated, that level of increase has not kept pace with the real costs we face, costs that continue to rise every year. The heart of why they are here this evening is responsibility. There are many challenges facing the Cranston Public Schools today. Their buildings are aging, costs will be rising, mandates continue to increase, the financial pressure are real and significant, but he would like to be clear about something, it is not the School's fault that many of the School buildings are crumbling with age. It is not his fault that decades of infrastructure needs have finally caught up with us, but it is their responsibility to fix it. It is not your fault that Federal and State mandates continue to grow every year. It is not his fault that healthcare costs continue to rise faster than revenues, but it is our fault, our responsibility to manage them. It is not your fault that ratified contractual obligations must be honored. It is not his fault that utility cost, transportation expenses and fleet maintenance continues to climb, but again, it is our responsibility to address them. None of us created these challenges alone. Many of these issues have developed over the years even decades, but today we are the leaders entrusted with solving them and the truth is responsibility does not belong to one body, one department, one Administration. It belongs to all of us, the School Committee, the City council, the Mayor's Office and our State partners. When we work together, Cranston succeeds because this is about 11,000 students who make up 11% of our City's population, but 100% of our future. Tonight, he asks that we continue to work together and not assign blame for the past and accept responsibility for the future.

Kathrn Crowley, School Committee Member, appeared to speak and stated that as a School Committee Member, she feels obligated to speak for the Schools and most importantly for the children and the teachers of the City of Cranston. When the Mayor spoke last night, he stated that the School Department had had a structural deficit for the last four years. Simply put, it is the negative difference between what a City department needs to function properly and the amount of Revenue available to finance those needs. When the School District projects the expense to operate Schools for a year and the City indicates it is only going to provide an amount less than needed to cover those expenses, that creates a structural deficit. The Mayor's proposal to increase the School District's budget by \$1.5 million is inadequate to support the needs of this District this year. As a taxpayer, she is very conscious of the tax raise. She also understands cost to taxpayers for nearly everything they buy has gone up. The same cost increases are occurring in the Schools. To maintain the same quality of education for our children, the Schools need more funding. The School District is doing everything in its power to reduce its cost. Studies are in place to reduce the number of Schools in the City within the next year or two.

Keith Catone, School Committee Member, 16 Windsor Rd., appeared to speak and stated that to the extent that the City Budget is balanced at all, which of course we realize now it is not, it has been balanced on the backs of the Schools because the Schools are filling gaps that should otherwise be filled by the City. Last year, there were residents in this Chamber who talked about and testified that they would be willing to pay more taxes if it meant sustaining the high quality of our Schools. Collectively, our challenge is how are we ensuring the public that we were going to be stewards, trustful stewards of these dollars? We have to start being transparent and telling the truth. Claiming deficits that are not there on the School side is not a good look. Claiming that a Budget includes no layoffs when you know structurally that there will be and will continue to be layoffs as a result of that proposed Budget on the School side.

Valerie Schule appeared to speak and stated that she listened to the Mayor's Budget presentation and found herself deeply troubled. She says to all government, State, Federal and local, the days of going to taxpayers to dig yourself out of holes is over. We have nothing left to give. Should you come to the taxpayers for more and more, she wants to hear you did your part. Buying out some employees, though she is thankful and happy for them, is not good enough. Unfortunately, the buck does literally stop here. You will have to make painful tough decisions and the people expect you to make them. One of the things she does love about Cranston is the Schools. They are underbudget and you expect them to cut staff and programs. Mayor Hopkins told us what this Budget did and did not do. She would like to tell what that \$42 a month does for many people, especially seniors. Our Budgets are already strained to the max. She spends a lot of time going through grocery flyers, plan her meals according to the sales. Movies are long since gone, eating out is a thing of the past, all she has left is breakfast after Church and that may be on the chopping block if her taxes are going to go up. She knows very few people who can afford this and many people it will hurt.

Steve Stycos, 37 Ferncrest Ave., appeared to speak and stated that from 2024 to this current Budget, the School funding has gone up 4.3% total for that period. Meanwhile, the Fire Department has gone up 15.6% and the Police Department has gone up 12.5%. Another big expense in the City Budget is Debt Service, payment of principal and the interest and that is at an all-time high in this Budget of \$12.5 million. When you get to the Capital Budget, it is important that you cut those Capital projects that are not essential. In the Audit that was done in 2025 Budget year, the Ice Rink has a cash balance of \$665,000. That has been set up as an Enterprise Fund and Director Strom, who he has a lot of respect for, and he and Mr. Strom have disagreed that that should not be in that. Why should the Ice Rink be in a separate Fund from the Park Department or any other department? He does not think that has ever been approved by the City Council. If you look in the Audit, there is also a \$852,000 cash balance in the Charter School Account. That money says in the Audit it is restricted. He does not know why it is restricted, but that would be something he would suggest be looked at especially considering that the Charter School, as he understands it, is no longer independent, it is part of the School Department. So, could they use that \$852,000? Two other items that should be looked at is tax breaks, which the Finance Committee has been discussing and one of those is a tax break for Veterans. He pointed out that that tax break does not help the Veterans who are most in need. It should be income limited and there should be some provision for people who rent. He also addressed the elderly tax break and stated that we have a lot of people in this community who have enough money who are over 65. He is eligible for that tax break, but he does not take it.

Steve Frias, 107 Garden Hills Dr., appeared to speak and stated that he was speaking in his personal capacity. He stated that last night he notified the Administration that the Capital Budget for FY27 was incorrect. He hopes everyone has received the correct copy today. The Charter and State Law both state that four fifths vote is required to go over 4% tax levy so seven out of nine vote. The Charter requires the Budget be adopted by May 15th. In the prior Resolution the City Council waived the April 1st requirement. He does not believe you have the authority to do that. As far as the finance problem the City is facing, based on his own view, this was a failure in local government, failure by both City and Schools, Executive and Legislative and both parties. The failure goes back to we were over relying on one-time revenue sources for the federal funds. He warned about this in 2022 in writing and in person that if you do not get rid of the reliance, you will end up with a structural deficit that you will have to end up paying for or have multiple years of tax increase. If the City had raised taxes by about 2-3% in 2021 or 2024, you would be at about a 2 or 3% increase now. He thinks that would be more tolerable by taxpayers. Now you are at the stage of what to do. He does not recommend going further above 8%. He thinks you need to look at spending cuts. People behind him and for the rest of this week will be advocating for more money and do not want cuts. He will be the voice of those that want spending cuts. Where do you cut? First, you have to look at the Schools. He respects the School Department, but the problem he has is when he looks at the Audit, which is an independent third party, they refer to the School Department as having 1,554 jobs. That is FY2025 and they refer to an increase of

additional personnel staff post COVID19 pandemic. In FY2019, the Audit refers to them as having full-time jobs of 1,530 so it looks like it is increased under the Audit. The School Department can explain why the Audit says one thing and what they present to you is another. In 2010, they had staff levels of between 1,431 to 1,462. When it comes to the City funding more to the Schools, the State is not contributing enough. On the City side, one department that has not had cuts is the Fire, it has gone up by 8 positions. you probably have to eliminate 20 positions in the City to eliminate \$6 million spending to go to 4% levy.

Council President Wall indicated to Mr. Frias that he handed out an amended Capital Budget since there was an error in the initial one. He asked if that is correct and that has been rectified. He asked Director Renzulli if that has been updated online. Director Renzulli stated, yes.

Anna Medeiros, School Committee Member, appeared to speak and stated that she is present this evening as an advocate for all the students and the Schools asking for all the financial support the Council can give or find to allow the Schools the opportunity to do their jobs and to provide necessary services for the children in our community. To her, it is really nice to have pickleball parks, beautiful parks if you are into that, but they are truly nice to have. It is not what comes to mind when she thinks of her pride of Cranston especially when she knows the reality of where a majority of our students spend their days and the environment that our teachers are expected to shape our children in. she understands that in many ways the Council's hands are tied, but please know that every single dollar counts and urged everyone to do everything they can to help the Schools get as close as possible to their ask so they can do right by the students and the families that are counting on all of them.

Domenic Fusco, Chair of School Committee, 167 Fiat Ave., appeared to speak and stated that he is extremely proud of our School Committee. They have come together and worked hard to make Cranston Schools the best they can be and thinks that they have done a damn good job. For the past twenty years, he has stood before this Committee as a parent, a School Committee Member and once again as Chair of the School Committee and each year he has the same request. Do what you can to fund their Budget. He thanked the most recent Councils for their support that they have given. The additional funds they contributed have been a huge help. He deeply appreciates the Mayor's increase, however, it is not enough. Several years ago, it was a different story. We had a Council that was adversarial towards the Schools. They said that the Schools got more money from the State so they did not need to fund the Schools and all it did was exasperate the problem. As everyone knows, the School Department is the largest department in the City. It employs under 1,200 workers now and maintains 20 buildings and most importantly, they educate 11,000 students. The Schools do not generate any funds. They must live with what was deemed appropriate by the City and State. It is easy to criticize and say you must live within your Budget. If they had reliable funding sources, maybe they could. This year, the Schools took a novel approach going through a zero based Budget. During Budget hearings, one of his colleagues asked what percentage of the Budget do we actually control, the answer is less than 10%. They tried to get creative. They have ESSRA funds available, they used them, they got additional programming, they used them to fill some positions, but unlike our neighbors to the immediate South, they knew they had to start putting those positions back into their Budget and they did or they eliminated them. This is why they are not in the same position as them. Most of our Budget goes towards salaries and benefits. Like the City, they are grappling with rising healthcare costs. As a self-insured District, they have seen medical claims spike turning a once healthy surplus into a deficit we must now repay. Cranston Public Schools are truly the poster child of what? Doing more with less. Cranston is the second largest School District. On average, they spend \$19,950 per student, well below State average of \$22,800. Many other cities and towns are operating closer to \$25,000 per student and we are showing results. We are doing the job, we are doing with less, but we can't do it anymore. It is time to do something. We have no choice but close Schools, increase class size, cut programs. Something we do not want to do.

Jonathan Francis, President of Local 1363, appeared to speak and stated that he understands the City is hurting. He thinks everyone in this room wants to try to achieve the same goal. The Police and Fire Departments have taken a beating in the newspapers over their Overtime Budget. He would like to clear up a few misconceptions. A comment was made this evening that the Fire Department has expanded by eight positions without any vacancies. That is a half truth statement. The Fire Department has expanded by eight spots. They put on a fifth rescue that is severely needed. Last time a rescue was added was in 1984 and they are doing about 8,000 runs a year. This rescue was added at the beginning of this year and the City is doing currently 18,000 runs. That is the true part. The false part is the vacancies. Currently, the City of Cranston, as of tomorrow when the Chief of the Department retires, they are going to be down twelve members. That may not seem a lot to some people who are not in the profession, but that is additional shifts that they are required to work. On top of that, they are at the mercy of the State Retirement Board when it comes to occupational injuries and illnesses, which severely impacts their Overtime as well. They already operate at minimum manning. Minimum manning is 43 firefighters per shift. The national standard is to have four firefighters per truck. They currently fall short of that standard on half of the trucks in this City. That leads to injuries at fire on the fire ground which increases that Overtime Budget. Fire Department employees have been always willing to work with the City and they always stand with everyone in the City. The misconception that they are driving up the Overtime Budget is not true. There are some factors that do attribute it to it, however, the mechanism for the Fire Department to reduce that number has been stripped from them over the last few years. The Fire Department stands with you and willing to work with the Council.

Sally Finkle, 55 Roger Williams Circle, fifth grader at Park View Middle School, appeared to speak and stated that if money is taken away from the Schools, their middle school sports are at risk. Sports gives kids like her ways to meet others with similar interests and gives them motivation to go to School each day. She asked, on behalf of her friends, coaches, teachers and every kid in Cranston on a team, to please fully fund the Schools.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

Rosalba Zanni
Assistant City Clerk/Clerk of Committees

Minutes approved as written May 18, 2026

Attest: Tracy A. Nelson, City Clerk