

**South Kingstown School Committee and
Town Council Joint Meeting Minutes
Town Council Chambers, 2nd Floor
180 High Street
Wakefield, RI 02879
Tuesday, January 6, 2026**

School Committee Members present: Carol Vetter, Chairperson; James Restivo, Vice-Chairperson; Paula Whitford; Kate Macinanti; Bradley Shear, and Stewart Lander

School Committee Members absent: Michelle Brousseau

Others present: Michael Podraza, Superintendent; Patricia Proctor, Chief Financial Officer; Douglas Snow, Director of Technology; Liam Lynch, Director of Operations

Town Council Members present: Rory McEntee, President; Michael Marran, Vice-President; Patricia Alley; Deborah Bergner; Jay Wegimont

Others present: James Manni, Town Manager; Brian Silvia, Town Finance Director

1. Call to Order

A. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

Council President McEntee led the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

B. Land Acknowledgement Statement

Council President McEntee read the Land Acknowledgement Statement.

2. Discussion Re: Capital Improvement Program FY 2026-2027 - FY 2031-2032

- A. Overview by Town Manager and School Superintendent**
- B. FY 2026-2027 CIP Spending Plan: School Program**
- C. Proposed Capital Budget: School Program**
- D. Status of Facilities Plan**
- E. Update on Proposed New High School Project**

3. Discussion Re: Fiscal Impact of Capital Improvement Program Budget and School and Municipal Operating Budget for FY 2026-2027

A. Discussion Re: Fiscal Impact of Capital Improvement Program Budget and School and Municipal Operating Budget for FY 2026-2027

The meeting was opened by Council President McEntee and handed over to Superintendent Podraza for his presentation on the Capital Improvement Program. Mr. Podraza shares welcoming remarks and introduces members of his team as well as members of the School Building Committee Project Team.

The following agenda items are presented and discussed, as follows:

1. BLUF

- The District is not currently requesting additional funds in its CIP submission.
- Facilities Master Plan (FMP) based on 2022 Facilities Condition Assessment (FCA).
- Shifts in plan stem from prioritizing reimbursement & 2024 FCA (RIDE).
- Projects are moving targets and subject to change based on priorities and funding availability.
- Full CIP list, presented to the School Committee on 9/30/2025, is available on BoardDocs.

2. Funding Sources

- Re-appropriated Fund Balance: FY26 = \$1.155M.
- Federal Grants: Federal Communications Commission (FCC) reimbursements for purchases in previous fiscal years.
- No other insurance of expiring Federal grant-based projects on the horizon.
- FY26 Projects Breakdown
 - Replace Fire Alarm Initiating Devices - \$45,000
 - Install Fire Alarm Initiating Devices - \$36,000
 - Install GFI Receptacles - \$6,166
 - Replace Roofing - \$525,000
 - Repair Fencing - \$15,000
 - Upgrade/Repair Soffit - \$72,000
 - Replace HVAC - \$261,000

- Replace Lavatory Fixtures - \$180,000
- Replace Carpeting - \$15,000
- Total - \$1,155,166

3. Technology

Douglas Snow, Director of Technology, presented the Technology Capital Improvement Program. The main driver of the plan is the laptop replacement program. The laptop replacement cycle has a goal of approximately every 7 years; however, in practice, it is often every 10 to 12 years. Mr. Snow then shared recent projects: completion of wireless upgrades and core switches; upgrades to district security cameras (especially outdoors and in key interior areas); replacement of UPS/backup power at Broad Rock Middle School to protect the servers. Discussion ensued regarding a previously discussed emergency alert/badge system, which was not funded due to cost, building limitations, and shifting priorities; the related funds either remained in fund balance or were reallocated to more urgent capital needs.

4. Facilities

Liam Lynch, Director of Operations, presented the Facilities/Maintenance Capital Improvement Program. There were 56/61 projects listed in the South Kingstown School Department Capital Improvement Program that are eligible for reimbursement. Project types vary as follows: install wet pipe sprinklers; refinish handrails; abate pipe fittings; replace siding; replace gravity vents; replace wood doors; replace gutters; replace slate roofing; install exit signage; replace stage curtain; replace toilet compartments; replace heating-only fan coil unit; replace hot water boilers; paint building exteriors; replace gym padding; replace carpeting; upgrade electrical; repair/replace sidewalks. Mr. Lynch reported that there are ongoing roof and HVAC needs at Broad Rock Middle School, Matunuck Elementary School and West Kingston Elementary School. The major current focuses at Broad Rock Middle School are the lower roof and new rooftop HVAC units. The long-standing leak issues at Matunuck Elementary School have been acknowledged and are currently being managed with patching until full replacement is funded. Mr. Lynch emphasizes that all schools need work, and staff are trying to prioritize equitably while avoiding no-heat/no-school days as the district's prioritization is to keep the buildings warm, safe, and dry.

Council members stress the importance of keeping the buildings maintained and to have this maintenance take place equitably, understanding that emergencies/urgent issues do arrive.

Mr. Podraza then offered for consideration a proposed restricted capital fund that could be funded through State reimbursements stemming from projects paid with School Department fund balance, which could then be used to offset projects that exceed the \$2 million threshold, as well as new costs that may arise from the new South Kingstown High School and Curtis Corner Athletic Fields in the future. Discussion ensued with confirmation by Mr. Podraza and Ms. Proctor that this account would only be funded with RIDE reimbursements from non-bond school capital projects. The account would be held by the Town, but restricted to School Capital uses. There is clear agreement between the School Department and the Town Council that reimbursements from the high school bond itself would go toward reducing debt service. These funds would not go to the restricted capital fund.

Facilities Plan: Current planning is grounded in the 2022 Facilities Conditions Assessment and a new assessment, with a clear goal of needs focused on keeping buildings "warm, safe, and dry" through HVAC, roof, electrical, sprinkler, and life-safety projects, while more cosmetic or lower-impact items are dealt with at a later time. A new RIDE required facilities plan will take place in two years.

New High School Project Update: The South Kingstown High School project is the largest capital project the Town has ever undertaken, with an estimated cost of about \$141 million, with potential state reimbursements in excess of \$40 million. Discussion emphasized that the community expects that the enhanced RIDE reimbursement yield to the high school should be used to reduce the project's debt service and soften the tax impact. It should not be diverted to other purposes. It is stated that eligible capital projects (like HVAC or roofing at buildings) could be "bundled" with the high school in a single reimbursement submission to secure the higher reimbursement rate, however, that would require that the projects be substantially complete for the high school reimbursement filing, which is likely to take place in June, the month before the new school opens. Mr. Podraza cautioned that the school department has not yet confirmed with RIDE whether such bundling is permissible without risking the bond reimbursement, and that delaying reimbursement on annual capital projects could create a gap in meeting the required 3% maintenance of effort spending.

4. Public Comments:

Council President McEntee invites residents to come forward with comments.

Jim O'Neill - Mr. O'Neill raised concerns about fund balance and capital funding transparency, reviewing project numbers proposed and completed at this time. Mr. Podraza explained that the expenses discussed to date have been taken out of the fund balance. Mr. O'Neill shared his concern that using fund balance as revenue is a dangerous practice. Mr. O'Neill inquired as to the unfunded amounts as of July 1, 2025. Mr. Podraza explained that the audit has not yet been completed. Mr. Podraza provided an unaudited estimate given to him by Mr. Silvia. Mr. Silvia then explained that the school department has a school capital account as well as a fund balance account. Mr. Silvia stated that the audited numbers will be released later this month. Mr. O'Neill also questioned what the school department's needs might be this year and whether the needs would be the same as last year at this time. Mr. Podraza responded, stating that enrollment has had less of a decline at this time. Mr. O'Neill then addressed the conversation regarding the proposed restricted capital fund. Mr. McEntee acknowledged that this was the first meeting in which this item was being discussed, and there would be discussions at a later time.

5. Adjournment

A. Adjourn

Mr. McEntee thanks the School Committee and Administration for a productive, informative meeting and adjourns the meeting.