

WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL

Held Wednesday, September 25, 2024

Meeting: Jonathan Briggs, Prince Georges County School board

Mayor Jordan started the meeting at 7:30 pm., held in the Council Chambers and via Zoom.

- In attendance:** Councilmembers Amy E. Knesel, Danielle P. McKinney, Jenni A. Pompei, Rodney M. Roberts (7:43 pm) Kristen L.K. Weaver and Mayor Emmett V. Jordan and Silke I. Pope (illness).
- City Staff:** Josué Salmerón, City Manager and Shaniya Lashley-Mullen, Deputy City Clerk.
- Others present:** Jonathan Briggs, Prince George's County School Board Representative; Stephenie Arcido, Advisory Committee on Education (ACE) member and others.

Mr. Briggs outlined his responsibilities as a School Board member to include the following:

- fiscal management
- budget oversight
- community engagement
- and superintendent evaluations

He holds quarterly meetings with principals to support improved outcomes at schools and has rescheduled his town hall meeting to October 2nd. The Council discussed the ongoing challenges in the Prince Georges County Public Schools (PGCPS) system particularly regarding teacher recruitment and transportation. Mr. Briggs noted the national teacher shortage and emphasized the need for strategies to attract and retain educators, including recruiting temporary and substitute teachers. He also highlighted issues with hiring school bus drivers and crossing guards.

Mayor Jordan raised concerns about staffing in school libraries and having nurses in every school which Mr. Briggs agreed to address. Mr. Briggs committed to following up on the Safe Passage Program in Greenbelt and coordinating with the Building Services Team about sharing recreational facilities at Greenbelt Middle School. He also pledged to consider adding a related policy to the agenda for next school year. Council members expressed their appreciation for his assistance and requested updates on these initiatives. Ms. McKinney highlighted the need for more recreation spaces after the construction of Greenbelt Middle School and Dora Kennedy French Immersion School resulting in shared facilities. Mr. Briggs explained that temporary spaces serve various purposes beyond just space limitations and that the school district monitors student populations and staff ratios implementing boundary changes when necessary. Mayor Jordan asked when these changes are considered, receiving the answer that it typically occurs in October. He also voiced concerns about using temporary buildings for regular classes at Eleanor Roosevelt High School.

Mr. Briggs will follow up on the new building for Springhill Lake Elementary School and the transition with Dora Kennedy. Robert Goldberg-Strassler, 114 Lastner Lane, inquired about counselor-to-student ratios in the County. Mr. Briggs confirmed satisfactory ratios but acknowledged concerns regarding Springhill Lake Elementary's single counselor for over 900 students. He agreed to investigate further.

Bill Orleans, a Greenbelt resident inquired about a list of banked properties not currently utilized by the school system, and Mr. Briggs noted that this information is included in the Educational Facilities Master Plan. He also explained that while the HR Department handles hiring teachers, principals can still select candidates.

Jessica O'Rourke, 41 Ridge Road expressed concerns about a day-and-a-half internet outage at Greenbelt Elementary School, which affected instruction. Mr. Briggs acknowledged the issue and promised to coordinate with the superintendent on communication protocols for such incidents. Ms. Pompei questioned if the outage was connected to WSSC's work and if it also impacted William Wirt Middle School. She emphasized the importance of keeping the City informed about student safety during school emergencies. Mr. Briggs outlined the existing protocol for communication and emergency preparedness and confirmed that the school policy regarding cell phone use is under review.

Mayor Jordan expressed interest in discussing the Dora Kennedy French Immersion School and related construction projects.

Discussing Funding and School Partnerships

John Duffie, 4 Court Gardenway, raised concerns about the State of Maryland's federal funds from the American Rescue Plan for school improvements. Mr. Briggs explained these funds were already allocated for mental health and technology and promised to provide more details.

The Council discussed the permanent relocation of the Dora Kennedy French Immersion School to the Robert Goddard campus for the 2026/2027 school year.

Mayor Jordan expressed worries about the cultural impact and student safety during the transition. Mr. Briggs offered to arrange a tour of the new space. Concerns about the building's future and its condition were also addressed with Mr. Roberts questioning the need for new buildings. Mr. Briggs confirmed PGCPs would no longer own the Dora Kennedy building, and communication issues with developers regarding the Beltway Plaza redevelopment could affect local school capacity. He agreed to follow up on these issues. The work session focused on enhancing communication among the Prince George's County Planning Board, County officials, and local schools regarding development proposals. The Council addressed the funding gap in the Educational Facility Master Plan and challenges from the 'Blueprint for Maryland's Future' Bill. Ms. Arcido of the Advisory Committee on Education (ACE), emphasized support for local Greenbelt schools and mentioned the need for more committee members, including student representatives. Mr. Briggs shared plans to visit 17 schools and attend PTA/PTO meetings while Mayor Jordan offered meeting space. They agreed to reconvene at the end of the school year to discuss boundary changes and improvements.

The meeting ended at 9: 37 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Shaniya Lashley-Mullen

Shaniya Lashley-Mullen
Deputy City Clerk