SPECIAL PUBLIC HEARING MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MANCHESTER SCHOOL DISTRICT SAU #37

February 18, 2026 **6:30 p.m.**

1. Mayor Ruais called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

2. The Clerk calls the roll.

Present: Committee Members Turner, Parr, Want, Taylor, Stewart, O'Connell, Potter, St. John, Garrity, Hamer, O'Neil-Wong, Smith, and Mayor Ruais.

Absent: Committee Members Georges and Bergeron.

3. Mayor Ruais advised the purpose of the special public hearing meeting is to give the residents of Manchester the opportunity to address the board regarding the proposed Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) General Fund Tax Cap compliant budget in the amount of $235,507,700.00, Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) General Fund Baseline Budget in the amount of $251,405,787.00, Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) General Fund Fully Funded Budget in the amount of $265,290,706.00, as well as the FY27 School Food and Nutrition Budget of $6,300,000.00 and the FY27 Capital Improvements Projects (CIP) Priority Listing of $7,850,000.00. All people wishing to speak will have up to three (3) minutes to do so, and any comments must be directed to the chair. Any resident wishing to speak will come forward to the nearest microphone, clearly state their name and address when recognized and give their comments.

Committee Member O'Connell stated that before we hear from our citizens, he wanted to recognize we have a new school board member with us tonight, representing Ward 9, School Board Member Stan Garrity. We have all been affected by the passing of former Mayor Bob Baines, and we have missed him in this chamber, and will continue to do so. I think, in his voice, however, he is confident that School Board Member Garrity is going to represent Ward 9 with great ability, and he is very happy that he has been chosen. We are all grateful to the Board of Mayor and Alderman. It's a testament to Mr. Garrity and his work in this city over many years as

a long lifetime firefighter and Chairman of the Heritage Commission and history buff and all the other things. It speaks well to all of who he is, that the Board of Mayor and Aldermen voted for him last night unanimously.

Bryan Watson, 8 Renard Street, stated:

I'm a resident of Manchester, and I am the Assistant Principal of Bakersfield Elementary School, the President of the Association of Manchester Principals union, the husband of a devoted teacher in Manchester and the proud father of two children that continue through the Manchester public school system. My background was not in education. I was a small business owner in construction and landscaping for many years, even with my wife's own stresses she brought home every day, I couldn't comprehend the full severity of challenges that face educators. 10 years later, I get it. I'm not here to talk about numbers as a parent. I don't want my child to be represented by a number. I want them to be represented as our greatest resource and hope for the future. It is not minerals, fossil fuels, land or whatever else it is the next generation of leaders from the students that we teach today. We must give schools and students the resources to face a society that is more complex than ever and faces a host of issues that will need productive citizens and educated minds to solve them. They deserve that support from us for the future they will inherit from us. Public educators are some of the most dedicated, selfless, hard-working individuals I've had the pleasure of working with. I am proud to be part of Manchester. I am proud of my own selfless staff that goes above and beyond every day. We cannot continue to do more with less. It's not sustainable or what's right for our children. We feel the immense pressure to deal with some of the most heartbreaking scenarios that. One can imagine misplaced accountability and an ever changing landscape of political discourse in education, I see, hear and feel this stress in all of my unique roles, make no mistake, I understand that our job, that is our job, and that is what we signed up for. We will continue to persevere and put forth our best efforts, regardless of outside perceptions, influences and budget constraints, however, we need the public and city support, or we run the risk of burning out our most dedicated public servants in a field where it's already a struggle to find bus drivers, Paris, teachers, nurses, special education teachers, I can certainly appreciate the complexities of building a budget, the fiscal's responsibilities, and the host of issues that it creates. However, education in America has been chronically underfunded for years. It is not perfect, as most things in life, but our future deserves

better. We cannot afford to lose staff. We cannot afford to take step backwards when the needs are so high. As an educator, I favor supporting a budget that puts students first. As a president, I favor supporting a budget that puts students first. As a parent, I favor a budget that puts students first. And lastly, as a tax paying resident of Manchester, I favor a budget that puts students first. I hope the City of Manchester will also put students first. Thank you for your time.

Kristen Bannister, 160 Ridge Road, stated:

I've been a resident in Manchester for 25 years. I've had three children that have gone through the Manchester School system and graduated, and in that time that they've been in the school, I've seen a slow decline of educational quality and extracurricular opportunities that are available to them. I strongly believe that Manchester's future depends on the strength of its schools. Schools are the number one thing that growing families look at when deciding where to live. They look for strong academics, strong social development and extracurricular opportunities. I'm part of a local medical practice, and in the last 10 years, not a single new doctor has even considered Manchester as a place to raise their families, and the prime reason is because of the school systems, and that's heartbreaking to me. We have a great community. Quality of local education also fuels business and attracts new industry, which in turn increases new tax revenue. The current tax cap, which well, while well intentioned, is hurting our city. Opponents of raising the cap often argue that it burdens taxpayers, and I get it. I don't want to pay more than I have to, but the reality is underfunded schools leads to higher long term costs for all of us, more crime, lower property values and lower quality of living. Mary ways, you've mentioned that you want to address root causes of problems, there are plenty of data that show increased spending on education raises graduation rates and lowers the likelihood of adult poverty. The data also consistently shows that policies which reduce poverty also lead to less crime a community values are reflected in its budget. If we say that we value education but refuse to adequately fund it, we are sending a clear message about our priorities. I recognize that you have a monumentally difficult task in creating a fiscally responsible budget that is mindful of taxpayers, but also builds the infrastructure that will allow Manchester to thrive in the long term. I urge you and any Alderman that may be listening tonight to consider that a modest increase in the tax cap is not just an expense, it is a strategic investment in the city's prosperity, economic competitiveness and quality of your life. Thank you.

Jessica Spillers, 73 Jobin Drive, stated:

I watched the Finance and Facilities meeting from last week, and it seems apparent to me that a tax cap compliant budget as presented, shows that with the decrease in revenues, it'll leave a gap of $2.5 million for the school district to close. If Manchester School District asked for a tax cap, it would increase its budget by $7 million which is literally something the city could not afford, according to last week's presentation. The city side has shorted itself by keeping taxes under what is allowed by a cost of living adjustment we are now reaping those consequences. Was that 2.45% worth it. Let me ask the members of our community who voted for this, who are in favor of it? What did you do with that 2.45% savings? Did you even notice it, or was it just nice thinking you were getting something back that you never gave in the first place? Let me tell you, as a former member of this board, what the schools could have done with that 2.45%. They could have back filled every vacated position at the end of last school year. They could have expanded middle school sports. They could have fully implemented tap on, tap off safety systems for bussing. They could still have all of those emergency funds which were depleted due to the negligence and greed of a few, no one who is a member of this board or of the district. Of course, the budget gap is $16 million because as a city, we have chosen leaders who value wealth over prosperity. What I mean by that is that we have put people in power who place a higher import on the accumulation of money over the community's broader sense of well-being. I know many of you on the board personally, and I know you are dedicated to the holistic success of the city and more specifically, its schools, its teachers and its children, as I am now only your constituent and a proud parent of a public school kid who can now read thanks to a public school teacher. Mrs. Dion, I implore you to put forward to the alderman the budget that reflects the true value 30 education system. In addition to presenting the required tax cap compliant budget. I implore you to present the fully funded budget to our aldermen so that the people of the City of Manchester can be truly prosperous. Thank you.

Nick Want, Belmont Street, stated:

For truth and disclosure, my wife Leslie is on the board. So, I think what I want to address Mayor Ruais is really decisions that you've made. You talk about that a vision is just that and a vision unfunded is just a hallucination. And so, we are in this position now where we do not have enough money, where we are looking to make cuts based on decisions that you made, and you

have to be responsibility for the outcome and you can actually fix this. You can drive a solution. Because you're in that position. We have a tax cap in the city. The taxpayers and the voters voted for a tax cap. What the tax cap does is it limits the amount of money that the city can spend. So, there's a good benefit to that, in that it prevents people from overspending previously. I just want to spend the money we have versus a group of people that want to overspend. But what it also does is it provides guidance. It provides the basis for what the tax increase should be, and for whatever reason, you decided to way underfund that the last few years, which has put us in this deficit situation. There was no reason to underfund our tax cap, not to exceed it. You could have even come within a few percentage of points of it and still had less than tax cap compliant budget, but you chose not to do that. So, now you need to fix this problem, not by pushing it down to the schools. And you've also underfunded the city. Highway got half of the money it needed last year because of your failure to fully fund our city. So, you're in a position, Mayor, where you need to fix this. So, we've got a couple budget options that are in front of us. You need to advocate, you need to take a vision, unless you have a nightmare for the city, which is what we're living now. So, if you have a true vision for our city that is reasonable prosperity, good quality schools, solid businesses, places where people want to live, it's up to you to make that leadership role and to lead us through this problem that you have created. Thank you.

Mary Georges, 18 Blodget Street, stated:

I am the representative for ward three, district 23 and I live in Manchester. I stand before you today as a concerned taxpayer, advocating for Manchester public school, the city I call my home, the city where I stayed having my children, they went to public school, and I believe that public schools are where my children went is a fruit for Sarah Georges to stand here as a school board member because she get a good education from the public school. That is what I believe and that is what I stand for. The proposed budget cut for 16 million or what will severely impact our children's educations, leading to larger classes size and the potential loss of vital programs. Investing in our schools is investing in our future. Quality Education equips our children with the skills they need, strengthens our community and boosts our local economy. Well-funded schools create a more skilled workforce, which ultimately benefits everyone. I urge you to reconsider this cut and prioritize the education of our children. Let's work together to find solutions that ensure a bright future for Manchester. I love this city and I'm going to ask you again, please try to do your

best. I don't know what it is going to be, but you can make it for us to have a better city. And I would like it to have a nice city like before, the best city. It was putting our city as the best city, the first best city in the nation, I would like that. Why? Because the kids have a good education, and I think that is what we need. Thank you very much. I appreciate that. I hope you're going to make a decision to do the best for the city. Thank you very much.

Andrew Redlund, 44 Kenbermer Street, stated:

I am a teacher in the school district. Last fall, Mayor Ruais stood in front of me, my colleagues and my students, and he said that room had as much talent as any room he had been in. Manchester has never had a talent gap, we have had an opportunity gap. A school budget that is anything less than fully funded exacerbates that opportunity gap. When class sizes go up, student outcomes go down. When teachers and staff are laid off, student outcomes go down. When students can no longer participate in extracurricular activities because their families have been priced out of them, outcomes go down. And when students cannot reliably get to school, outcomes will go down. These are the realities we will face with anything less than a fully funded school budget. When I moved back to Manchester and started teaching in the school district in 2024, I gave up a higher salary because I love this city. I am invested in this community. I believe in our future, I believe in our city, and most of all, I believe in our students. It is time for this board and this city to believe in our students as well. The only budget that should be advanced tonight is one that fully funds our schools. Thank you.

Okiyanaeh Neptune, Student at West High School, stated:

I'm a senior at Manchester West High School, and as a representative of our student board here in Manchester, I stand before you not just with numbers on a spreadsheet, but the future of our city in mind. Manchester is filled with diverse minds, students from different neighborhoods, cultures and backgrounds, each giving unique talent and perspective into our classrooms. In those rooms, sit future engineers, small business owners, nurses, teachers and civic leaders. That diversity is not just something to celebrate. It is our city's greatest strength. It is our engine of our power potential. But right now, our district is performing below level in our math, reading and writing, our SAT scores fall below the state and national averages. These numbers are not just reflection of a lack of ability. They are a reflection of a need for greater support. Our students are

capable. What they require are tools, the resources and the stability to grow. Cutting this budget will not solve those challenges. It will deepen them. Larger class sizes, reduce academic programs. These are not pathways to improvement. There are obstacles when you reduce funding in a district already working to raise achievement, we do not create efficiency. We diminish opportunity. Education, as we both know, is a privilege. The opportunities you were given helped shape your leadership and your path to public service. For many families in Manchester, public education is their only pathway to that same opportunity. It is their bridge to upward mobility. When we cut funding, we risk making that privilege conditional, making it available to some but harder to reach for others. If our students are performing below average today, the answer is not less investment, it is stronger commitment, because the long term, cost of underfunding education far outweighs any lying issue in our community, struggling readers become struggling graduates. Gaps in math become gaps in workforce readiness and our future generations pay that price. Manchester has extraordinary potential, but potential requires belief, and belief requires action. I urge you to see our education budget not as an expense, but as an investment in the intellectual and economic future of this city. If we want Manchester to thrive tomorrow, we must choose to strengthen our schools today. Thank you.

Deepasha Giri, Student at West High School, stated:

Typically, I am a student, a student school board member and tonight a concerned student. Although the budget still has many phases remaining, I felt as though I should emphasize an aspect of school. I have previously advocated on behalf of and continue to encourage the board of aldermen to consider as one of the most significant factors of education, engagement in the classroom, a significant aspect of education that can be made or broken by an unfitting budget. Engagement in the classroom cannot be done without the help of proper funding. What makes a classroom are the teachers, but also the resources they are provided. It's the test textbooks, the updated technology, the different forms of literature, the varying art supplies and mediums. The classroom thrives when the students can engage with the material and the current lack of resources are causing our students and our classrooms to suffer. Teachers have had to purchase their own books and art supplies for classes in order to create a thriving work environment, and even with these efforts, engagement continues to suffer. With a lack of resource students is students remain unengaged, and learning does not reach its full potential. In order to create

classrooms that foster learning and growth, we must provide our educators with the tools to be able to do so. We must advocate on behalf of our educators and their tools for the sake of our student body, a student body that Carey so much potential and so much talent. I only encourage you to support a budget support the students and teachers in the classrooms so that they may foster a space that thrives, a student body that learns in a community that grows. Thank you.

Saylor Mylly, Student at West High School, stated:

I reside in ward 10. Tonight, you are going to hear a lot of pleas. You are going to hear emotion. You are going to hear stories about students and teachers and families and how school funding affects them. And these stories matter, because school funding does affect people from the moment they step into kindergarten classroom at five years old, shaping not only their education, but. Their opportunities, their confidence and the course of their entire life. But tonight, I also want to present you with something else. I want to present you with the data right now, the average SAT score in Manchester is a 1060 that number on its own might not seem alarming, but it sits almost 200 points below proficiency for college readiness. That gap is not just a number. It represents students who are less prepared, less confident and less equipped to pursue higher education and competitive careers. Now I want to compare Manchester to a city with a similar population, Oakville, Ontario and Canada like Manchester, Oakville serves a diverse student population and operates within the constraints of public education system, but their outcomes tell different story. The most comparable standardized tests in Ontario is the OSS LT, the Ontario Secondary school literacy test and Oakville, the test is a proficiency rate of 91% 91% that means nearly all of their students are meeting literacy standards necessary for success, not just in school, but in life. It is not the intelligence of the students that change that makes this difference. It is not their potential, it is not their motivation, it is the investment made in their education. Funding determines class sizes. It determines whether students have access to updated textbooks, technology and academic support. It determines whether struggling students receive intervention early or fall behind silently. It determines whether schools can offer advanced courses, extracurricular programs and opportunities that build not only academic skills but confidence and purpose. When funding is cut, these opportunities disappear, and when these opportunities disappear, potential disappears with them. Education is not an expense, it is an investment. Every dollar put into education returns to the community through a stronger workforce, higher

earnings, lower crime rates and greater economic stability. But when funding is cut, the cost does not disappear. It shifts. It shifts onto students, onto families and onto the future of this community, the students sitting in Manchester classrooms today will become the workforce, the leaders and decision makers of tomorrow. The question is not whether we can afford to invest in them. The question is whether we can afford not to. So tonight, I urge you, do not see school funding as a number on a spreadsheet. See as an investment in human potential. See as an investment in the future of Manchester. And please do not cut school funding any further. Thank you.

4. Mayor Ruais advises that if there is no one else present wishing to speak, a motion is in order to take all comments under advisement and further to receive and file any written documentation presented.

*On motion of **Committee Member Turner,** duly seconded by **Committee Member Want,** it was moved to take all comments under advisement and further to receive and file any written documentation presented. All were in favor and the motion passed.*

5. This being a special meeting of the board, no further business can be presented unless by 2/3 majority and a motion is in order to adjourn.

*On motion of **Committee Member Turner,** duly seconded by **Committee Member Parr,** it was moved to adjourn. All were in favor, meeting adjourned at 6:57 p.m.*

True Copy. Attest.
Respectfully Submitted,

Angela M Carey

Clerk of Committee