



**MINUTES
TOWN COUNCIL
PUBLIC HEARING**

**PROPOSED SCHOOLS
MODERNIZATION APPROPRIATION**

**August 24, 2026
6:30 PM - Council Chambers**
<https://youtube.com/live/jDGzG-3Qi34>

1. Roll Call

The Chair called the Public Hearing to order at 6:33pm.

Present: Linda Allegro, Gina Cekala, Robert Cressotti, Carol Hall, Cynthia Mangini, Maya Matthews, Marie Pyznar (remotely), John Santanella, Aaron Thomas, Lori Unghire, Zach Zannoni

Absent: None

Also present were Town Manager, Matthew Coppler; Assistant Town Manager, Steve Bielenda; Town Attorney, Cindy Cieslak; and Town Clerk, Sheila Bailey.

2. Call to Order

The Public Hearing was called to order at 6:33pm.

3. Legal Notice and Ground Rules

The following Notice of Public Hearing was published in the Journal Inquirer in its issue of August:

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the TOWN OF ENFIELD shall hold a PUBLIC HEARING in the Enfield Town Hall Council Chambers, 820 Enfield Street, Enfield, Connecticut Monday, August 24, 2026, at 6:30pm to allow public comment on the proposed "Appropriation of \$511,000,000 for the new construction of Hazardville Memorial Elementary School, Prudence Crandall Elementary School, Parkman Elementary School and Barnard Elementary School and for the conversion of Eli Whitney Elementary School into the Eagle Academy Therapeutic Day School, and to authorize the issuance of bonds or notes of the Town in an amount not to exceed \$89,000,000, with the balance funded by grants and other available funds."

Chair Cekala announced the ground rules.

4. Public Hearing

Peter Jonaitis, 3 Farmstead Circle

Mr. Jonaitis, lifelong Enfield resident and former educator, reflected on past projects in town, such as Enfield Square, Fermi High School and JFK Middle School, which were widely discussed and which have since fallen into disrepair and closed, with JFK being the only one getting remodeled. He stated that maintenance of the schools was deplorable. During the remodel of Enfield High School, the town was reimbursed up to 70% by the state, and they kept both high schools open during the process. He doesn't understand why the town would need to demolish the elementary school buildings to build four brand-new schools. He believed they could remodel them to like new status and ensure that they are properly maintained afterward. During the 1970s-1990s, Enfield had a great teaching and administrative staff who were given creative freedoms before current mandates were passed. The mandates set by the state are currently unfunded by the state which have driven up costs in towns across Connecticut.

Maureen Griffin, 98 Abbe Road

Ms. Griffin said the elementary schools are in dire need of attention and work. She asked whether they should continue to "band-aid" them or do a one-time rebuild. When considering the financials, she said the greater return comes from the referendum proposal being put forward. The money the town would have to pay was far less than if they had to fund the project themselves, because the state would be funding a majority of it. Ms. Griffin has had the opportunity to tour the schools and hoped that the public would have a chance to do the same in the near future. The cost to rebuild the schools to a like-new status would far exceed the cost of this proposed project. While she doesn't like paying taxes, she understands that they are a necessity. Starter homes are marketed mainly to young families, and schools are on the priority list when considering where to live. It is important to prioritize elementary schools to maintain home values in town and make Enfield more marketable. It's important to put this on the ballot, and she hoped that residents would vote in favor. She also wanted to see a long-term maintenance plan put in place for all town buildings going forward.

Danielle Girard, 18 Edgewood Drive

Ms. Girard was in support of the school modernization plan. She has seen firsthand the condition of the elementary schools. It was unfair to continue to allow students, teachers and staff to learn and work in those conditions. She understands the importance and responsibility of being an elected official and all the work and time that goes into the position. She asked if the school modernization plan was as important as it's being made out to be, then why haven't they had more Town Council representation and involvement throughout the process? She has heard for months from countless Council members about how important this project is. During the third Community Conversation, Councilor Pyznar stated

that the schools needed to be redone, and she wanted a "big bang for her buck", and this project would do just that. It was Ms. Pyznar's wish that this project would pass as it would be a win for Enfield, and Ms. Girard agreed. It would create safe and secure buildings for Enfield students. Ms. Girard wanted to know what changed that would allow for a pivot in the proposed project. If residents vote no on this referendum, it still leaves the schools in disrepair and in need of improvements. Then the new question becomes, do they want to keep paying out of pocket for piecemeal improvements every year if this does not pass? Or would they rather the state shoulder the majority of the costs for new buildings? It's important the residents know the cost, tax impact, timeline and exactly what to expect. She stated that misinformation and exaggeration needs to stop regarding this situation. She wants voters to make informed decisions based on facts.

George Young, 8 Holly Lane

Mr. Young stated that he had many reasons why he was not in favor of this project. He said that the Council is pro-education but has forgotten about the taxpayers and seniors. He commended the Building Committee for the work they had done. After reviewing the June 30th financial report, he said that the proposed \$89M would be added to the current bond debt of \$118.4M. He said that Deputy Mayor/ State Representative John Santanella stated in the past his concerns about how high the town's debt already was. The FY2025 report showed a drop in debt and interest, and it was important that it continued on that trend. Instead, the debt has continued to increase. He explained how per capita and total household income drop when a spouse passes, but that real estate taxes do not decrease proportionately. Over the course of about a decade, there was a population decrease of around 4,000 individuals, but the student enrollment remained relatively the same at 5,000 or so students. He said that the tax burden has shifted from businesses to single-family homes. The Council is pushing for more affordable housing and multifamily units, where the focus should be on creating an industrial base. He said they should freeze the taxes of seniors or increase their exemptions.

Gary Young, 320 Abbe Road

Mr. Young stated that the new schools would not impact their current school rating in the state, which is currently ranked in the low 50%. He explained how important it is to have accurate information and for homeowners to understand the impact on their property taxes. Over the last 19 years, he has seen his taxes double where his home value has not. He said the Enfield School system has consistently dropped in ranking. He reiterated that new buildings do not increase that ranking. School systems are the first thing that families look at when considering moving to a new town. It was important to note that \$95M would be used for renovations which would heavily impact taxpayers. The \$89M would be used for new schools. The town recently spent a lot of money on a new field at the Annex, although

they have yet to decide the future of the building on the property. The renovation to the field at the Annex had been questioned by a Council member, and yet it still passed. They need to have maintenance plans for the other town buildings. He said it was important that they do an inventory of all the town-owned buildings and create an identified usage plan. Any buildings not being utilized should be sold.

John Malinowski, 1302 Bigelow Commons

Mr. Malinowski asked residents to vote yes to the referendum. He said the vote was deeper than just school buildings. It was more about the future of Enfield students, the town, and the type of community Enfield will become over the next few decades. The condition of the schools has been discussed for years. Problems have been studied, alternatives considered, and decisions delayed. They've tried for years to make the current buildings work, but doing nothing has caused the schools to deteriorate further. The current buildings are not in a condition to meet current educational standards and could not last another decade. He said that building new schools would be expensive because a project of this size requires a significant investment. Taxpayers expect their investment to be thoughtfully planned and responsibly managed. This new construction project would mostly be reimbursed by the state. He stressed the importance of a good school system and its relevance to families deciding where to move. He said that this would not just be of benefit to Enfield students, but a benefit to the town's future. He urged everyone to vote yes at the referendum.

Patricia Wright, 66 Oakwood Street

Ms. Wright said she would love to see new schools in town. The current schools can no longer be temporarily fixed or patched, and they need to be completely replaced. She said this referendum should have everyone uniting from every party and background. She stressed the importance of clear and concise information and facts surrounding the project to silence the naysayers and those providing misinformation.

Tyler Johnson, 40 Dale Road

As a former Enfield schools' student, Mr. Johnson came in support of the project. He agreed that the schools need some updating and focused on the community impact. He stated that it would help create jobs for people in town or who are looking to move here. He is in support of the project and would like to see it move forward with possible labor agreements in place to allow area workers the ability to be a part of the project.

Amanda Pickett, 33 Guild Street

Ms. Pickett thanked everyone in attendance because tonight's discussion was an important one. She attended Enfield's Convocation event earlier in the day along with around 875

staff and teachers who proved that Enfield education goes beyond just the buildings. She said the schools cannot be ignored any longer. They currently have more than \$330M in identified maintenance needs. The costs of those repairs will only continue to rise if they are not addressed now. The question voters will face in November is not whether they will invest in Enfield schools, but rather how they intend to do it. Piecemeal repairs just cost taxpayers more in the long run with less state reimbursement. The alternative would be to make thoughtful long-term investments that would address the needs, create programs and a more cost-effective path for taxpayers. The proposed plan would also create space for programs like preschool and create a more unified elementary experience. The team has considered building reuse and maintenance plans. She said she has reviewed the cost and state reimbursement, and believed the referendum should be a clear yes.

Randy Daigle, 55 Cottage Road

Mr. Daigle expressed his disappointment at how nonfactual information had spread. He said he has volunteered his time over the last 28 years to various building committees and said that this was the first time it had gone from a non-partisan issue to a political one. He said that Enfield would be eligible for up to 82% of the cost of the project, which is the highest percentage across the state. The effect on the mill rate would be .027%, and that wouldn't go into effect for another 6–8 years. The goal of this referendum is to lock in the reimbursement rate. There is a 15% reimbursement rate for Pre-K being offered right now, which they are calling an incentive. In two years, it will no longer be an incentive but instead a mandate, and that 15% reimbursement will no longer exist. The expected tax increase would equate to about \$47 a year. The initial conversation about the future of the schools started about six years ago. The hiring of an architect was four years ago, and it didn't go anywhere. Many of the schools are in such poor condition that if you were to open a window it would fall out. He would love to see the schools renovated to new, but there would be nowhere to put the students in the meantime. He said the most logical way would be to build a new building, tear down the old one, and then move students into place and do the fields. He is disappointed that it has become a political conversation, and that his own Republican Party never talks about the reimbursement rate. They only talk about it costing \$500M, but it is not what the taxpayers end up paying.

Patrick Thibodeau, 20 Cora Street

Mr. Thibodeau named thirteen Enfield schools built between the 1950s to the 1970s. His generation benefited from the schools the town built during those years and said it would be hypocritical to not support this referendum. The Building Committee did good work, ran multiple scenarios and alternatives, and this referendum would be the most beneficial. He would be voting yes. Back when they were constructing those schools, they had an economic development plan to help pay for the construction, which is missing from this

proposed project. He said if the town is asking residents to fund an \$89M project, then the town's obligation should be to grow the tax base to support it. The economic challenges the town faces are fixable, and he recommends an outside consultant to negotiate a new mall agreement and give the Economic Development Commission a role in reviewing commercially significant zoning applications. He said that 60 years ago the town leaders knew that building the schools went alongside building the tax base. He said the school building project is an investment that needs to happen, because the buildings have served their purpose for the last 60 years.

Joe Courtney, 125 Jackson Road

Mr. Courtney was in full support of the project and future job opportunities that came along with it. He believed it would be beneficial to his son and future children, and he would fully support their construction.

Michael Ellis, 34 Wilstar Circle

Mr. Ellis has children in the Enfield school system. He is also a carpenter and knows the work that goes into school construction. He knows that there are things in the Enfield schools that are encapsulated, such as asbestos that would need to be abated. He stressed that parents would not want their children sitting on carpets and floors that had asbestos underneath. Many of the tiles he walked on in his son's school are showing signs of wear and should be abated. The schools are over 40 years old and need to be updated or redone.

Margaret Perry, 281 Washington Road

Ms. Perry said that everyone stresses the maintenance but doesn't address the individuals who do the maintenance. Currently, they are making repairs on things that no longer have parts being made. They are being placed in dangerous and uncomfortable positions, and they should have the most up-to-date equipment. Many of what they work on can no longer be maintained and should be replaced altogether in order to keep students and employees safe.

Michael Ellis Jr., 34 Wilstar Circle

Mr. Ellis Jr. is a CT carpenter and former Enfield student. He is aware of the maintenance that the schools need, and as a resident he sees the benefit of having work available in town when the time comes.

Chris Lange, 90 South Road

Ms. Lange was in support of the proposed referendum. She has not had children go through the Enfield School system, but she is aware of the issues in the schools, like black mold, rust, and possible asbestos. As a lifelong resident, she knows that the schools were in

questionable shape when she was in school. She said that since the town would get reimbursement, then they should do the project. She said she would like more readable information, possibly to post at the library. She said the answer should be a yes. And if not yes, then why?

Christopher Karpenko, 167 Abbe Road

Mr. Karpenko said he believes that he has been swayed to a yes vote after hearing about the financial aspects of the project. While he does not have children, he and his wife are contributing to the tax base, and he is in favor of his taxes going towards education because it is important to him. He said it was important that they advertise the 82% reimbursement rate and broadcast the information in more areas than just the libraries.

Tina LeBlanc, 22 David Street

Ms. LeBlanc said that many students experienced water pouring from the ceiling at Stowe Early Learning and were transferred to Enfield Street School. The ceiling tiles have been falling into toilets, there are trash cans collecting dripping water, as well as water coming in through the windows. This is happening across all the elementary schools. She referenced a study from 2019 which should be redone in 2026. It showed that for the number of town buildings and their age and conditions, the town is grossly understaffed by buildings and grounds. That is part of the reason they cannot keep up with maintenance plans. If this referendum does not pass, then the money will go to another town in the state and Enfield will be on the hook for funding the plan down the road. The conditions of the schools are impacting the students and staff daily. She would be voting yes.

Dean Gousse, 151 Spring Street

Mr. Gousse said it was imperative to look at the real numbers, because the town would be saving a lot of money. He explained that 30 years from now, students will be attending the schools they are seeking to build today. He agreed that Randy's plan of building a new school first and then demolishing the old schools would be the most appropriate way to move forward.

MOTION by: John Santanella, seconded: Aaron Thomas to extend public communications. Upon a **SHOW OF HANDS** vote, the Chair declared the **MOTION** adopted unanimously.

Peter Jonaitis, 3 Farmstead Circle

Mr. Jonaitis congratulated members of the Democratic Town Committee for their turnout, as fewer Republicans showed up. He said that after listening to all the speakers, regardless of whether the referendum passes, Enfield will be getting better schools one way or another.

He just wanted to see improvements made in the most cost-effective way, whether it was brand-new construction or renovated to new. The increase in taxes wouldn't go into effect for another 6 years. He would like to see the former Fermi High turned into a trade school. He said that most Enfield graduates end up going elsewhere after graduation. For anyone who worked in the Blue House of JFK years back, they were always sick. He said that many teachers who used to teach at Fermi were out for 6–12 months, due to some issue with the building. He stated that it wasn't the building that would be teaching the students, but the teachers. Teachers need to be able to do their jobs without influence from the state and federal governments. While he realized there was not much they could do about it, he would like to see others fight back. He was not impressed with the current Town Council or Board of Education.

John Malinowski, 1302 Bigelow Commons

Mr. Malinowski said that new construction would be an economic stimulant. The town would be utilizing architects, engineers, construction managers and other trades would benefit. It could allow Enfield businesses to benefit and participate. He said that state reimbursement would give Enfield an opportunity that they should pursue. He would be voting yes.

Randy Daigle, 55 Cottage Road

Mr. Daigle realized that many people are concerned about what the Plan B option would be if this didn't pass. He stated that there was no Plan B because the Building Committee completed the only job they had. Plan B would cost the taxpayers \$95M with less than 30% reimbursement. He said the schools should have been started 6 years ago, because they are in dire need. Under the ceiling tiles of multiple schools, there are countless buckets. Prudence Crandall's' gym houses portable classrooms; some have no working heating systems or working windows. He said there is no Plan B, because if this fails, Enfield schools will lose accreditation. He said that the Building Committee did all they could to ensure this would be the most cost-effective and least tax burden to residents. This is the town's last chance to update the elementary schools while receiving a large state reimbursement. Residents need to know that with the vote, the town would not be writing a \$500M check the next day. The project would continue for at least 10 years, completing three schools at a time. Then they would need to go back to the state for reimbursement on two other schools. If, for some reason, Enfield did not receive 82%, they would then receive 75% reimbursement from the state. He reminded the public that this project would not be instantaneous. It would be another two years before they design the buildings, and then they would need to go out to bid. The town would only be paying for what they use, similar to a line of credit. He said that there is no Plan B, and this needs to pass.

Maureen Griffin, 98 Abbe Road

Ms. Griffin thanked Mr. Daigle for clarifying that the town would not be paying the \$89M right from the start. She said that the schools are falling apart, and the most economical plan is the one being presented in the referendum. Once the project is complete and the school grounds are updated, there will be a lot of useable space for weekend use. She said the project is a win for the town, and she hoped that residents would vote in favor.

Amanda Pickett, 33 Guild Street

Ms. Pickett stated that this should not be a political issue. The decision is based on cost-effectiveness, taxpayer responsibilities, and community priorities. She said the schools deserve a thoughtful investment. She thanked the bipartisan BOE members who were in attendance and took the time to understand the proposal. She responded to a previous comment saying that the BOE is trying to stay focused on education and not politics. She said that she takes her responsibilities very seriously. She would be voting yes in November.

Patrick Thibodeau, 20 Cora Street

Mr. Thibodeau clarified a previous statement. He explained that the town of Enfield is outmatched, and the Council's job is not to negotiate deals. He said if another mall proposition comes forward, they need to hire an outside consultant to guide them through the process, possibly paying for it with TIF funds. The Council's goal should be to extract maximum value and not save money on consultant fees. Many surrounding towns utilize consultants, and he believed Enfield should do the same. He explained that the developers know vastly more than the Council in a buyer/seller relationship. The reasoning for the car wash on the corner of Phoenix Avenue and Hazard Avenue is because it would be central to both a car wash and an auto parts store. The other larger car washes in town were not taken into consideration during the Economic Development Committee meetings. He said it's important to get economic development right in order to create funding opportunities to offset taxpayer revenue. He said the easiest way was to create a bridge between the Town Council and Economic Development Committee and communicate those ideas to the Zoning Board.

5. Adjournment

Hearing no other members of the public who wished to speak, the Chair declared the Public Hearing closed, and the hearing adjourned at 7:36pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Sheila M. Bailey, Town Clerk
Clerk of the Council

Lindsay Petrucci, Assistant Town Clerk
Secretary of the Council