EXETER SCHOOL BOARD
Approved minutes of the meeting held on August 3, 2026
Action on the minutes was taken at the September 8, 2026 meeting.

The Exeter School Board held a special meeting on Monday August 3, 2026.

PRESENT: School Board Members: Heather Ikemire, Kathleen Pratt, Tim Reed, and Shonni Holmes

ABSENT: Patrick O'Day

Administration: Assistant Superintendent Alison Bryant, Assistant Finance Director Michelle Larson, Facilities Director Travis Thompson

1. Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance
    a. Ms. Ikemire called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM. She led the Board and the public in the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Public Input
    a. Ms. Ikemire "started the clock" for public input for 30 minutes at 6:03 PM.
    b. Laura Knott, the parent of an incoming Kindergartener and 2nd grader at MSS, spoke about device use in elementary schools. Ms. Knott said studies have shown the negative impact of one-to-one devices such as iPads or Chromebooks: weaker motor skills, emotional dysregulation, reduced attention span, and making learning more difficult. She's also concerned about the District's use of iReady. In Dec 2025, California parents sued iReady's parent company for unlawfully collecting student data without parental consent and sharing it with third-party applications like Google Analytics. There is needless use of ed tech and screen time. She would like to see a committee formed to study computer use in classrooms and provide the Board policy and behavioral recommendations.

3. Central Office Update
    a. Director of Facilities: Proposed Unitil LED Light Project at LSS

        Director of Facilities Travis Thompson was present to discuss this item. Mr. Thompson said an opportunity was presented to LSS to look into converting the lighting into LED lighting. It has been done in East Kingston, Main Street School, Swasey Central, and School Street. This would replace all light fixtures with more efficient LED fixtures and incorporate solar harvesting to automatically dim and brighten depending on the sun coming through the windows. We had two bids and couldn't get a third, but Chris [Andriski] was ok with proceeding.

        If we move forward, Unitil will work with our company LED Connects, but the project has to be done by the end of the calendar year. The project quote is $195,337 for Lincoln Street. Part of Unitil's electric bills go into a fund for energy projects, and they are proposing to pay $155,229 of the cost from that fund. We would have to pay $40,507. Unitil will offer 0% “on bill” financing for our portion and it will show up on our electric bill. He thinks we can do the financing for between one and ten years, but he will confirm tomorrow. Unitil has given us the official document, we just need to tell them to move forward. The timing isn’t great because we’re rushing to get this done by the end of the year. If we say “go” tonight, he can be in touch with them tomorrow morning. LED Connects can start ordering everything they need tomorrow. He was told that all of the equipment is ready to be shipped here, although some of it may have been bought in the interim. He’s confident the majority of the classrooms and hallways could be done before the school year starts. Anything after the start of school, they could do nights and weekends work. He’s confident the project will be fully complete in September or October. It should have minimal impact on students.

Mr. Thompson said Main Street School had this done in 2020. Their actual electric bill for 2020 was $43,000. In FY21, it went down to $32,600; in FY23, $33,700; in FY24, $21,600; in FY25, $15,800. He added that teachers must adjust the light level manually at Main Street School, but the Lincoln Street School system would adjust automatically.

Mr. Thompson said the project cost is $197,737. Unitil is offering $155,229. We would have to finance or take from our Trust Fund $40,507. With on-bill financing for two years, we would instantly be cash-flow positive. The monthly payment for financing would be $1,687, while the savings would be $1,750 each month. We could go out to ten years, and we would be $1,400 per month cash flow positive. This is estimating a 1.6 cent rate. The cost per kilowatt hour is 0.6 cents now. In November, rates are going up to 1.055 cents per KWH. We will still see an annual savings of $20,000. The Board should decide whether to move forward and how to finance it.

Ms. Ikemire asked if we can get it in writing that the contractor won’t charge us overtime for nights and weekends. Mr. Thompson said yes.

Mr. Reed asked about the benefits to students and families. Mr. Thompson said this would be brighter and more natural light than the fluorescents. The brightening and dimming will make for a more comfortable learning environment. The energy efficiency is for all of our taxpayers in the community.

Ms. Holmes asked if with the disruption of tiles anything would need to be remediated. Mr. Thompson said no. There's nothing we would need to abate that he’s aware of. We’ve been doing the blue light project and it would be very similar. He added that there won’t be any conflict between those two projects.

Ms. Pratt asked whether there's no charge difference depending on how long we finance it. Mr. Thompson said that’s correct, there's no interest fee. All the utilities are doing similar things. The project has to be complete by the end of the calendar year. There may not be money next year, or not as much of an incentive. Most of the time they cover 50%, this time it’s closer to 80%.

Ms. Ikemire said MSS, this is without the light adjusting automatically; the savings here could be even more significant. What is the maintenance cost of replacing LED bulbs rather than fluorescents? Mr. Thompson said the LED lights should last a lot longer. They're probably more expensive, but he can find out.

Ms. Ikemire asked Ms. Larson to talk about the financing options. Ms. Larson said she would go with the bill-on financing. Money from the Trust is earning money. If this is 0%, that's a no-brainer. She recommended looking at a term of three to five years. We get three-year lock-ins on the electrical rate, and our lock-in ends in November. There is a significant increase for the next three years. We will probably want a little bit of a buffer.

Ms. Holmes moved to accept the proposal to move forward with the LED lighting project. Ms. Pratt seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

Mr. Reed suggested a term of five years. Ms. Ikemire asked why Ms. Larson recommended three. Ms. Larson said three was the break-even point of putting it on the bill. Mr. Thompson said he thinks the estimate took into account a very high rate. Two to three years will be a significant payback on the project. By not using the Trust, that keeps that money in your pocket for the unforeseen. Ms. Larson said we've been staying under budget on lighting.

Mr. Thompson said the Trust is a backup for Facilities and Maintenance, and we have water in the gym right now at Main Street.

Ms. Holmes asked about a penalty for deciding to pay it off from the Trust at a later date. Mr. Thompson said he can find out. Ms. Holmes asked if the rates will shift back down again or if this is an increase they will hold to for the foreseeable future. Mr. Thompson said he spoke with the negotiation company. We make a number of hedges through the years which are incorporated. This is what they see based on their market analysis. Unitil decides what they charge for delivery, which is in addition to the cost of the power. Three years ago, energy costs were very low, but now it's the opposite. There has been dramatic growth of data centers.

Ms. Holmes asked if we could do a six-year term. If we're locked in for three years and then again for three years, we could get more savings if the rates do increase. Even if our rate goes up dramatically in the second term, it would still even out. Mr. Thompson said if we did two years, in year two we would be $62.40 cents ahead.

Ms. Pratt asked why we would do a term of three to five years. Ms. Larson said we wanted to get to the point where we were breaking even, and create a cushion for the rate increase itself. Ms. Pratt asked why not to do longer. Mr. Thompson said it's up to the Board. Ms. Ikemire said she doesn't see the benefit of extending it too long. Mr. Reed said it keeps the monthly rate down over time.

The Board asked Mr. Thompson to reach out to Leeds Burchard of LED Conversions. Mr. Thompson called him during the meeting. Mr. Thompson asked Mr. Burchard if there is any type of pre-payment penalty if the Board chooses to finance for five years, and after three pay it off. Mr. Burchard said he didn't know. Mr. Thompson asked if the project cost of $195,000 includes nights and weekends with no overtime or additional charges. Mr. Burchard said it's included, there are no additional charges.

Mr. Thompson said he would find out from Unitil tomorrow about any pre-payment penalties.

Mr. Thompson said the full scope of the project is $195,737.19. Mr. Reed suggested a term of ten years. Ms. Holmes said that's a long time and a lot of Boards to hold onto this. Ms. Pratt said we decide things that future Boards have to deal with all the time. Ten years sounds like a long time, but there's no interest and we may have the ability to pay it off whenever we want. If we can't pre-pay, we could go three years, because that's when we'd break even. Mr. Reed asked if the Board can do a motion not to exceed a certain amount, and opt for on-bill financing for five years if it can be pre-paid and three years if not. Then we don't need to come back for another meeting. Mr. Thompson said he doesn't know if other schools have gone out to ten years. That's a long time. We'll have to give some money back or adjust the budgets every year if the payments go down.

Mr. Reed made a motion to fund the LSS LED system project with the interest-free on-bill financing plan with Unitil not to exceed $195,737.19. This is either over six years if there is no penalty for paying the balance after the financing begins, or for three years, if there is a penalty. Ms. Pratt seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

Ms. Ikemire closed public comment at 6:51 PM.

4. Non-Public Session
    a. There was no non-public session at this time.

5. Adjournment

Ms. Ikemire made a motion to adjourn at 6:51 PM. Ms. Pratt seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanna Bartell
Recording Secretary