

Stamford residents express need for East Side library, push to approve schools budget

By [Shaniece Holmes-Brown](#), Staff Writer April 10, 2026

Stamford High School senior Matthew Minnick asked city officials to approve \$350,000 in Mayor Caroline Simmons' \$73.1 million capital budget to design a Ferguson Library branch on the East Side of the city during a joint Board of Representatives Fiscal Committee and Board of Finance meeting public hearing Wednesday night at Rippowam Middle School.

Shaniece Holmes-Brown/Hearst Connecticut Media Group

STAMFORD — [Stamford](#) High School senior Matthew Minnick said he knows what it's like to not have access to a local library while growing up in the city's [East Side neighborhood](#).

Minnick, 18, spoke during a joint public hearing Wednesday of the city's Board of Finance and Board of Representatives Fiscal Committee, and asked them to approve the \$350,000 in Mayor Caroline Simmons' capital budget to cover the cost of designing a new library.

The meeting, which took place at Rippowam Middle School, was about the mayor's 2026-27 operating and capital budgets. The [operating budget is \\$747.4 million](#); and the capital budget, designated for construction projects and the city's infrastructure improvements, totals \$73.1 million.

Items covered under the capital budget include the East Side library project that Minnick spoke about at the hearing.

"Growing up in a single-parent household, I wasn't privy to having rides to the Ferguson Library (located in downtown Stamford), and biking in the winter just wasn't an option," Minnick said. "So having this location in the East Side is a very necessary thing that I think everybody should consider here."

Although he later attended Turn of River Middle School — from which the Harry Bennett Branch of the Ferguson Library is less than one mile away — Minnick said not having a library nearby had a major impact on him.

"I was lucky enough to go to Turn of River and have a library near me, but that's just one circumstance out of many kids who don't have that resource in the East Side," he said. "Along with that, we've seen how when it came to the pop-up library on East Main Street, that there is demand... that there are families and that there are kids who really want this resource and need this resource."

The pop-up library Minnick referred to is Ferguson Library's "bookmobile," which travels to different areas throughout the city. The new library is planned to be at the former Edward J. Hunt Recreation Center location in Courtland Park, which was demolished in 2023.

Other high school students also spoke highly about the project, including Stamford High senior Aryeh Pollack, who attended the meeting with his father, Jonathan, who also spoke in support of it.

"As a student who wants a library, who doesn't have the options to be able to have access to transportation like cars and parking, this is a great opportunity for me," said Aryeh Pollack. "This is a great way to make parks more lively and have students come together, and there are no real concerns in my mind. So I strongly urge us to let this pass."

James Grunberger, the co-founder and chair of local nonprofit East Side Partnership, said the organization is focused on improving the neighborhood's quality of life for the past 25 years. He said the new library would be part of that continued mission.

"These residents do not have a walkable library," he said.

There were also various speakers who asked the board to fully fund the Board of Education's proposed \$372.1 million 2026-27 budget.

Resident Pamela Smith, 47, said she is the mother of a first grade student attending Northeast Elementary School who receives extra support through an Individualized Education Program and emphasized the importance of funding public schools.

"We need to invest in our public schools and not have to fight for this year after year," she said. "And I would ask each board member on all of the boards to educate themselves on special education."

Smith described the anguish she feels while seeing the rising education costs across the state — with increasing health care premiums being a large factor — while school districts are struggling to fund critical services like special education.

"I get a lump in my throat when I hear people gasp at the amount of money the district spends on out-of-district placements and transportation. In these moments, I feel like real children and families with legitimate challenges are reduced to a budget line, and that feels dehumanizing," she said. "We need to come up with real, actionable, long-term solutions to address the fact that as public school enrollment is declining yearly, (while) the percentage of students' need of support services continues to increase yearly. Education systems keep placing more demands on young children without regard to what is developmentally appropriate for them. And when they're not compliant, they're pathologized."

Antonia Better-Wirz, the operations chair of the BOE, said fully funding the school district's budget "is about protecting what our students already need and deserve."

"When funding falls short, it is not the number that suffers. It is our children," she said. "With state and federal funding remaining flat, or declining, the responsibility falls on us as the community, and this is where our values are tested. Do we choose to invest in our children, or do we accept paths that will quietly erode the quality of their education?"

The Board of Finance will have a special budget meeting next Tuesday, then the Board of Representatives will make budget deliberations on April 30.

April 10, 2026

[Shaniece Holmes-Brown](#)

General Assignment Reporter