

Chariho School Committee Budget Workshop  
Regular Session Minutes – January 18, 2018

Committee Members Present: Chair Sylvia Stanley, Vice Chair Ryan Callahan, Ronald Areglado, Donna Chambers, Murat Dymov, Catherine Giusti, Clay Johnson, Craig Louzon, Lisa Macaruso (arrived at 6:08 PM), Georgia Ure and Melania van der Hoof. Absent: Stephen Huzyk.

Administrators Present: Superintendent Barry Ricci, Assistant Superintendent Jane Daly, Director of Administration and Finance Susan Rogers and Assistant Director of Administration and Finance Gail Wilcox. Also in Attendance: Hopkinton Town Council Member Barbara Capalbo, Richmond resident Kristin Svenningsen-Haxton and School Committee Clerk Donna Sieczkiewicz.

I. Meeting Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance/Silent Meditation

Chair Stanley called the meeting of the Chariho School Committee, which was held in the Chariho High School Library, to order at 6:00 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was followed by a moment of silent meditation.

II. Budget Workshop

Superintendent Ricci distributed and reviewed Update #2. Rep. Justin Price requested information related to the transportation of two students on the statewide system to the Rhode Island School for the Deaf and Sargent Rehabilitation Center. A copy of the November invoice is attached and was also sent to Rep. Price. We have asked for a waiver so we can provide our own transportation. For November alone, the cost was \$16,684.46 to transport one student to the School for the Deaf and \$10,284.68 to transport one student to Sargent. Item #2 is in response to questions asked at the Omnibus Meeting regarding 1) calculation of debt service payments by the member towns and 2) certified staffing FTEs over the past ten years. Sue reviewed the debt service numbers with Bond Counsel. Sylvia Thompson requested the information on staffing. Barbara Capalbo noted that the District has cut 40 full-time FTEs over 13 years. This is really good and she appreciates it. The third item is related to an error on a document requested by Ron; the corrected copy is attached. The fourth item pertains to questions asked about expenses related to litigation. The detail from the Superintendent's proposed budget is attached. We learned last Friday that the District now has to budget for seniors going to CCRI through CCRI's Running Start Program. We believe the bill will be between \$20,000 to \$25,000. Item #5 is enrollment data; the Superintendent is researching the tuition cost. We hope to get more information on this as we move forward. Georgia requested a detail of out-of-district special education tuition. Information is attached (#6). Each line represents a different student; this does not include transportation. We have been running short in this account for the past two years so two additional (potential) students have been budgeted for in this proposal. We used to have \$75,000 set aside in fund balance that was earmarked for out-of-district students who move into district after the budget is set. We do not have this money set aside anymore. We did not budget extra for transportation. An inquiry was made by Lisa concerning the cost to the District for SAT and PSAT exams. Sue's response is attached (item #7). Clay questioned item #4 to which the Superintendent noted that this includes a 2% increase to Jon's retainer (he based the 2% on what the teachers got). Ron asked if The Trust covers anything to which the Superintendent responded that The Trust is representing the School Committee members. They cover their own legal fees.

Barbara apologized for missing meetings; she has been ill. She wanted to note that the budget is a lot better than in the past. This is Hopkinton's year with increased enrollment so it will be a problem for them. Hopkinton supported Richmond last year; she hopes that Richmond will support Hopkinton. She presented questions she had on specific line items and offered recommendations for cuts. She noted that, while she feels the District is efficient on lighting and HVAC, she felt they were blowing money on computers and monitors – leaving them on all night. She suggested items such as this be turned off every day. After presenting detailed areas where she feels cuts can be made, Ron asked if she was looking for @ \$135,000 in cuts. Barbara replied that she would like to see at least

\$200,000 out. The budget is tight; she is very happy with it but feels a little more can come out. She is not at all happy with the legal fees. She stated that Hopkinton would like to see a reduction of \$500,000 but that is only if the transportation money is restored in full. The Superintendent noted that healthcare may have movement as some people have left the HSA. Kristen is gathering information on this. The Superintendent asked the Committee for direction; where do they want to land in the end?

Lisa noted a concern she has on line #5116 (page 19) – AP money was removed before and put back in. Did parents complain about it being removed? The Superintendent noted that there were no complaints; there is hardship money for those who cannot afford the fee. We do not pay for any others (i.e. PSAT or SAT). He felt that kids taking AP classes are very capable of passing the exam but when exam day comes, they don't seem to care. The Committee could consider reimbursing those students for the cost of the test if they score a '3' or above. We can experiment and see if this will have any impact. Ron stated that he would want to create equity for those who can't afford it so he could live with a merit-based concept. We pay for all the athletic equipment for our athletes but we don't pay for our academic kids. Lisa agreed. The Superintendent noted that the District uses a merit basis for a lot of things (i.e. grades dictate parking and participation in athletics). Craig noted that he can agree with merit to a degree but there are those students who work hard but don't score well on tests and may only get a '2'. They won't get reimbursed. The Superintendent noted that he is not aware of any students not taking AP courses because of the fee.

Catherine questioned transportation categorical aid. If they pass the budget without counting on the additional \$588,000 and then they get the money, where does this money go? The Superintendent replied that it would go into revenue. Catherine stated that she has mentioned before that she is concerned about the fund balance. Last year they took a gamble on this money to which the Superintendent responded that they added teachers in anticipation of getting the \$189,000 that was owed us. If we didn't get that money, those teachers would not have been added. We don't have that to fall back on this year. Ron shared Catherine's concern. They were able to help Richmond last year because they had the contingency. The Superintendent noted that they can make the reduction and then if they get the money, don't give it back to the towns. Put it in the fund balance. He feels this is the better way to go. Craig asked Barbara what she felt was a reasonable amount to cut. Barbara felt that \$400,000 would help. You can start by cutting \$150,000 from healthcare and transportation. If you win the legal cases, do you get your lawyers' fees covered? The Superintendent replied that if they win, they will go after that but it is not something they can really count on. Ryan noted that he would like to see a line item – Legal Revenue \$200,000. Clay commented that a group he was with won a long time lawsuit and they put in for their attorney's fees. This wasn't granted; it is very unlikely we would get it.

Lisa asked the Superintendent to review a new publication that came out today regarding football helmets (concussions). She asked that the District's equipment be evaluated and recommended that they phase in protective gear. Discussion centered on whether or not parents should be required to pay for a better helmet (one that exceeds the required standards).

Clay asked if a budget forecast had been done. The Superintendent noted that it was included in a School Committee packet. It is an extreme guesstimate because RIDE level-funded everything for five years. Clay asked if any of the towns provided this information to which Sue and Barry both responded that they hadn't received anything yet.

Murat noted that there are requests from Hopkinton to reduce the budget. Should they schedule another Budget Workshop? The Superintendent replied that it would be smart to schedule another one. His preference would be for the Committee to give him some idea as to where they want to end up. Ryan agreed that another meeting was needed. They should give a target amount based on the comments made this evening. They can begin with the \$200,000 mark. He is not saying he will support them all but he feels this would be a good start. Ron thought they should start at \$150,000. They could be draconian and let people know what will happen if they cut too much.

Catherine objected to this as she reflected on what happened last year when they did this. She does not want to scare people. Lisa agreed. She does not want to go in the direction of getting public support through fear. What passed the budget were the Friends of Richmond and Charlestown Representatives going to their communities and getting people out to vote. She suggested they begin at \$150,000 and provide menu choices for up to a \$200,000 reduction. Craig felt he could live with this. Ron noted a different reaction when they put out the budget. People in Charlestown liked to see where that budget would leave the District. They want to know this. They want to see what the consequences of a large cut will be. Chair Stanley questioned if there was a possibility that any litigation would be settled this year to which the Superintendent replied that he did not know. She agreed going with a reduction of \$150,000 but did not want to cut too deep. Clay stated that they can draw from the fund balance so long as they get it back to 2%. The Superintendent cautioned all. The fund balance is not a lot of money for a budget this size. Georgia asked if they have another workshop, can they cut more. The Superintendent responded that they can add or cut all the way up to adoption of the budget. Murat asked if it was too late in the process to look at the athletic upgrades. The Superintendent replied that it was not too late and he intends to review this before the next meeting. Barbara commented that the suggestions she made do not include personnel or programs. The Committee will have to get some money from the large ticket items such as transportation and healthcare. The Superintendent again cautioned all that they are way behind on the Capital Plan. He does not feel the suggestion he made is being considered. Lisa stated that she was holding back as she does not want to put more money into Hope Valley School if they are going to consider combining the two schools. The Superintendent suggested that they put the money in reserve. He agrees that you don't want to spend money now on a school until you know the route you want to take. Catherine asked the Superintendent to again state the requirement to which he responded that the District has to spend at least 50% on what is listed in the Capital Plan within five years or it could lose State Aid. Catherine questioned, if they receive additional money for transportation and healthcare, can this money be earmarked for this. The Superintendent responded "yes".

### III. Adjustments to Superintendent's Proposed Budget

Catherine made a motion, which was seconded by Georgia, to ask the Superintendent to prepare a budget document showing \$200,000 in reductions to the budget. Lisa asked if they should amend this to include "no cuts to programs or staff". Ron and Craig both felt that it was not fair to handcuff the Superintendent. Chair Stanley noted that she is opposed to the motion as she would only like to see \$150,000 cut.

Catherine Giusti made a motion, seconded by Georgia Ure and it was

VOTED: To ask the Superintendent to prepare a budget document showing \$200,000 in reductions to the budget. In favor: Areglado, Callahan, Chambers, Dymov, Giusti, Johnson, Louzon, Macaruso, Ure and van der Hoof. Opposed: Stanley. The motion carried by a vote of 10 in favor with 1 opposed.

Georgia asked when they would know about transportation, healthcare and oil (as they didn't accept the bid). The Superintendent acknowledged that the District only received one bid and they are working off that bid to project for the budget. He is not sure when they will have definitive information regarding these items.

### VI. Adjournment

Prior to adjourning, dates were reviewed for another Budget Workshop which was scheduled for Thursday, January 25, 2018 at 6:00 PM in the High School Library.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Catherine Giusti and Clay Johnson and it was VOTED: To adjourn at 7:51 PM. In favor: Unanimous.

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Donna J. Sieczkiewicz, Clerk