

Chariho School Committee
Omnibus Meeting Minutes - January 11, 2017

Present were:

Chariho School Committee Members: Chair Sylvia Stanley, Vice Chair Ryan Callahan, Donna Chambers, Catherine Giusti, Clay Johnson, Craig Louzon, Lisa Macaruso, Georgia Ure, Melania van der Hooft and Andrew Webb. **Chariho Administrators:** Superintendent Barry Ricci, Assistant Superintendent Jane Daly and Interim Director of Administration and Finance Susan Rogers. Also Present: School Committee Clerk Donna Sieczkiewicz.

Charlestown Town Council: Denise Rhodes, Bonnie Van Slyke and Steven Williams. Also in attendance was Town Administrator Mark Stankiewicz.

Richmond Town Council: President Paul Michaud, Vice President Mark Trimmer, Ronald Newman, Rich Nassaney and Gary Wright. Also in attendance were Town Administrator Karen Pinch and Town Treasurer David Krugman.

Hopkinton Town Council: President Frank Landolfi, Barbara Capalbo, David Husband and Sylvia Thompson.

Legislators: Senators Dennis Algieri and Elaine Morgan and Representatives Brian Kennedy, Blake Filippi and Justin Price.

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

Chair Stanley called the Chariho School Committee Omnibus Meeting with the Town Councils, which was held in the Career and Technical Center, to order at 7:00 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was followed by a moment of silence. She welcomed all and turned the meeting over to Superintendent Barry Ricci.

II. FY18 Budget Presentation

Superintendent Ricci noted his surprise and appreciation for such a large turnout. He provided an overview of the FY18 budget process. Action was taken by the School Committee at last evening's budget workshop so everything has been updated to reflect this action. He reviewed the major impacts to this budget: healthcare was up by 36% and is down to 18% at this moment, there is an increase in transportation costs (he is going to recommend to the School Committee to consider providing transportation on a need-basis. We have extra seats on the buses as our routes are prepared taking into consideration every Chariho student whether or not they utilize bus service. He is recommending the reduction of one bus. Federal funds are level-funded; he hopes there are no decreases. There is an issue with CTC enrollment from out of district schools. Revenue is down due to the competition from other programs that have been allowed to operate in area schools. Housing aid is down. This is a result of projects that were done two years ago. The revenue has been applied to new capital projects. We are beginning negotiations with our certified staff in a few weeks. Transportation categorical aid is up; it is as promised in the RIDE budget. We plan to extend 1:1 to grade two. Stipends for coaches will be brought up to the regional average of two years ago and he has taken \$400,000 out in anticipation of fund balance. When he first reviewed the budget he knew adjustments had to be made so he cut \$400,000 prior to sending it to the School Committee. The capital budget is usually between \$300,000 to \$400,000. This year we are only planning on replacing the Ashaway School windows (half was budgeted last year) and will set aside funds for half the cost of replacement windows at Hope Valley and a down payment on the redesign of the Richmond bus loop/drop-off area. The reappropriated fund balance is at 2.25% of the previous year's experience. The School Committee could choose to go to 2% per policy. The projected increase is as follows: Charlestown - +1.33%; Richmond - +5.64%; and Hopkinton - +2.29%. Richmond had an increase in enrollment which impacted its contribution rate. The

Superintendent opened the floor to questions. Sylvia Thompson commented that she thought the Superintendent said enrollment was flat to which Mr. Ricci replied he is projecting a flat enrollment for next year. This year, enrollment increased. Sylvia then questioned the 1:1 initiative. She wondered why the District would not put the savings it will realize by switching from MacBooks to Chromebooks back into the budget instead of accelerating the technology plan. The School Committee should look at this to give Richmond a break. The Superintendent explained that he anticipates getting revenue from the sale of MacBooks that are coming off the lease. This will go before the voters at the Annual Meeting. There is equity in MacBooks; none in Chromebooks. Keven Miller from Richmond questioned why the voters didn't have to approve the use of the savings as a result of the switch? Superintendent Ricci noted that the budget is constructed in October. He cannot predict what will happen after the budget is set. The School Committee has authority over the budget and voters approved it. He reminded all that the transportation categorical funding that was returned to the District was given to the three towns. Bob Cardozo from Richmond voiced his opinion that the problem lies in the fact that his town has no community planning. They just approved another housing plan which will bring in more kids and little revenue. We need to start planning for the future. Richmond Town Council President Paul Michaud asked if the Superintendent showed the School Committee a level-funded budget they could look at it. The Superintendent responded that the School Committee gets what is requested of him. He did not provide them with a level-funded budget because a level-funded budget will decimate this District. Paul then questioned if the budget was sequestered; the Superintendent asked him to explain what he was requesting. Paul rephrased his question; has the budget been frozen? Superintendent Ricci noted that he did put a freeze on unnecessary spending last week. CTC tuition is down by \$400,000 this year. Paul stated that Richmond has to have so much low-income housing; they are dealing with that as best as they can. The extra 52 kids this year are in the school budget right now to which the Superintendent disagreed. The extra students enrolled this year in Richmond were not included in last year's budget but we have accommodated them. Chair Stanley added that at last evening's meeting, the School Committee voted to forego their stipends. Bill Day expanded on the issues affecting this budget. The Commissioner of Education is allowing school choice and, while competition is good, we are the regional CTC center. We have an agreement that area schools would not be allowed to run programs and the Commissioner has not stood by this agreement. He is allowing area schools to run their own CTC programs. Students who attend Chariho may be allowed to go anywhere in the region. This will be a continuing problem. Chair Stanley noted her frustration with the fact that the Commissioner has refused to honor this agreement. Richmond resident Jackie Kenyon encouraged everyone to go up to the State House and be heard. Mrs. Bryson, a Richmond parent, stated that the District has excellent educators but the classes are at maximum capacity. She does not mind an increase in her taxes so long as her children get a quality education. Hopkinton Town Council Member Barbara Capalbo noted that she has been at every budget meeting except one. The extent of the budget is more than what most of the towns can handle. She would like to see a cut of between \$800,000 to \$1,200,000 but she does not want to see any programs sabotaged. As we improve CTC programs, more kids will come. Nell Carpenter from Richmond felt it was incredibly irresponsible to throw out a figure without giving specific line items to cut. What can we do without? She loves this school district and supports it but we need a tangible cut; not just plucking numbers from the sky. Richmond Town Council member Gary Wright questioned if he was still living in America. We can still work together. Many have come to the Richmond Town Council to say they can't afford an increase. They will leave and it will be only those who can afford it that will be educated in Richmond. Mrs. Bryson replied that she is not asking for a lot; she just wants what the kids have been receiving. She doesn't want them getting less. Richmond has some of the highest taxes in the state. Our children go to public school and we need to advocate for them. Representative Justin Price noted that the legislators are concerned with Chariho's issues and are making every effort to help. Mark Trimmer felt the school system is excellent and it can retain its excellence. He attended Chariho when there were double sessions with 30 students in a classroom. When health insurance costs go up, he bears the brunt. We should ask teachers to contribute more. Lisa Macaruso asked Mr. Trimmer to provide suggested items for the School Committee to analyze. She would like the Town

Councils to give us some ideas. Representative Brian Kennedy stated that they knew the funding formula would have an affect on the Chariho community so that is why they came up with transportation categorical aid. It doesn't offset it but it helps. Regarding the Commissioner, he marches to his own drum. He was appointed by Governor Raimondo. There is nothing that can be done other than suing the State of Rhode Island to which the Superintendent responded "we are." Senator Dennis Algiere added that Chariho is a great school district. There are great things said which is a credit to the School Committee, Town Councils, administration and staff. This is not an easy job. Last year there was a problem with categorical aid and by grouping together (all regional school districts); you worked collaboratively to get what belonged to you. He is upset with the Commissioner's decision and the legislators will do the best they can to help Chariho. It is unfortunate that High Performing schools like Chariho get penalized. Chair Stanley asked Charlestown if they had any comments. Town Administrator Mark Stankiewicz noted that the impact does not fall as heavy on Charlestown; they do not have any line items they want cut. Mark Trimmer stated that he worked as a remediation officer to assist the Westerly Hospital. While he does not have a grasp of the school budget, he contacted all contractors on behalf of the Hospital and was able to buy them three more years. Senator Algiere noted a strong objection to Mark's comment. The Hospital was going bankrupt and was in receivership; it was because of this, contractors cut their rates. This has no relationship to the Chariho budget. At this point, Chair Stanley noted they were getting off topic. Hopkinton President Frank Landolfi asked what would be realized if the School Committee lowered the fund balance to 2%. Superintendent Ricci replied it would be @ \$125,000. Frank had one recommendation – each town gets a dollar for dollar credit on the RYSE debt service to which the Superintendent replied that they have to follow legislation that was approved by the voters. Donna Kruger from Richmond questioned why the District had to honor what the Commissioner says? If a student makes a decision to go elsewhere, the family should pay the cost. Go with what you have budgeted now. She then questioned if the budget was inflated to which the Superintendent responded that we build the budget on what we know today. If we go with what we have today, you will have no money to apply to next year's budget. Discussion moved to the cost of capital projects and the five-year capital plan. The Superintendent explained that we have to complete 50% of the work that was approved by RIDE or become ineligible for housing aid over the next five years. Frank Landolfi suggested that some projects be delayed. The Superintendent responded that the money for years three, four and five will be higher. Chair Stanley added that she does not want to forego the Richmond bus loop project and wait for an accident to happen. There are lives at stake to which Hopkinton Town Council member Dave Husband responded "this can be delayed; no one has died yet." Sylvia Thompson shared specific cuts that could be made: delay 1:1 program and look at staff that is retiring. Superintendent Ricci replied that he has included all known retirements and has reduced the budget by \$400,000 in anticipation of additional retirements. Sylvia then suggested using more of the surplus. Look at the difference between audited and actual numbers. The School Committee should suggest a number and ask the Superintendent to cut it. He knows the budget. Barbara Capalbo noted that they did make suggestions; they have gone through the budget line by line. She wants the School Committee to do the same thing. They need to do their work; please own it. Chair Stanley commented that they have gone through the budget line by line. Georgia felt that it was hard to do a budget without an audit. She heard it was delayed because the state delayed it. We are still waiting for some of the numbers. Mark Trimmer questioned if an energy audit had been done to which it was noted that this was suggested at last evening's budget workshop. The Superintendent added that three years ago all the lighting was upgraded with a grant; it is now motion-sensored. Where we can, we have central control over heating and all classes at the High School are at 68°. They are thinking about a performance contract. Mark suggested they look at solar panels. The Superintendent noted that the District has researched these for the campus. The roofs were not feasible for this purpose. Georgia stated that she has been coming to the Omnibus Meeting for a long time and the three towns have snowplowing equipment but the campus is not plowed by any town so Chariho has its own trucks, sanders, etc. Maybe this is an area that can be looked at. Richmond parent Sheila Grover went through the budget line by line and attended the budget workshops. She compiled a list she will share with the Superintendent. It is not possible to drop

\$800,000 from this budget and honor our responsibility to our children. We can't afford to gut this budget and maintain the level of excellence. They need to work together to get the money back from the state. They should all contact Governor Raimondo and get rid of the Commissioner. Dave Husband felt that when it comes to money, there are things that we need and things that we want. Some of these we can wait on to which a Richmond parent replied "the drop-off area at Richmond School is scary and very dangerous. This is not something that can wait." She asked about CTC marketing strategy. The Superintendent explained the marketing tools they are using to recruit more students. Bob Cardozo agreed that they have been going through the budget line by line. There are two elementary buildings in Hopkinton; take out one of these. That will give us about a million dollars. Paul Michaud stated that the budget in and of itself is "stuffed". We elect the School Committee to do a job and he assumes they are doing their job. We can't just think of the kids, we have to think of all the people in Richmond. Seniors are asking for tax relief. They want to know what they can do about the school budget. Richmond parent Robin Woodmansee stated that many in Richmond are concerned about class sizes. She does not want to see any cuts to teaching or support personnel. Chair Stanley informed all that when kids go to charter schools, the money follows them. We are spending over a million dollars on charter schools. Richmond resident Juliana Golas stated they should look at matriculation and work on the Chariho Act. We are one district. She sees empty busses in the afternoon. She felt the District should negotiate with transportation. We also offer too many competitive programs. The Superintendent reiterated what he discussed earlier – he is looking to implement a need-based system for transportation. We now plan for every child that is enrolled and our buses run about 65-67% full. We do look at CTC and HS programs. We did not run an HVAC program because of low enrollment. Jackie Kenyon agreed that they should revisit matriculation. She complimented all in attendance for working together and getting along. A Richmond resident questioned matriculation and what was in place. The Superintendent explained the Chariho Act. Most districts have the flexibility to move students to other district schools to even out class size. He does not have that flexibility. All four governing bodies have to agree to a change or legislators won't approve it. A resident commented "why not just do it as it makes sense" to which Sylvia Thompson replied that it is because there are three different tax rates. Bill Day disagreed. It has nothing to do with the tax rate; it is a problem for parents who don't want their child going anywhere but to the school in his/her town. If you want to cut the budget, you need to start thinking about it. Catherine Giusti thanked all for coming. There were great ideas shared and the towns will decide what the schools will look like. Costs are rising; that we don't have control over. Level funding will change the way the schools look now. She appreciates the thoughtful input from everyone. Mark Stankiewicz also thanked everyone. The School Committee is ultimately responsible for the budget. They are sensitive to it. The biggest deterrent of property values is the school system. You always want to have the best so your property value stays high. Diane McKeen, Richmond resident, Chariho employee and President of NEA ESP, does not want the capital plan for Richmond improvements cut as this needs to be done. Staffing cuts will come back to bite you; you should slice from the top. Joanie from Richmond encouraged all, before making cuts, to volunteer hours in the classrooms. She did not want staff cut. She appreciates all the work they do. Ms. Fritz from Charlestown commented on the huge numbers going to charter schools that the District has to budget for. Can't we legally require the parents to cover this cost to which the Superintendent replied "no". We can't do that and we can't cut this. Lisa Macaruso suggested they consider doing an informal study to see what a child might need in our schools that they are getting at charter schools. Find a way to bring them back. Chair Stanley noted that the Chariho Act can be changed; it has been done before but it will take some work.

III. RYSE School Funding

Superintendent Ricci stated that he was invited to a Richmond Town Council Meeting to speak on RYSE School funding. RIDE has guaranteed us a minimum of 61% reimbursement but the money does not come to the District until the project is complete. The bond is available now but you will pay 100% on the bond and building hasn't even begun. We could borrow short term BANs (Bond Anticipation Notes) but there is interest attached to these or we can borrow from

our fund balance and pay no interest. We are interviewing for an architect in two weeks and hope to have a schedule in place. They will tell us when to borrow. We don't want to borrow without state aid. Frank Landolfi questioned if there was enough in the fund balance if we go that route? Superintendent Ricci replied that he didn't know. Once we have a construction schedule, he will know that. He feels the best way to go will be to do it for zero.

IV. Adjourn

Georgia Ure made a motion, seconded by Craig Louzon and it was VOTED: To adjourn at 9:09 PM. In favor: Unanimous.

Donna J. Sieczkiewicz, Clerk