

Chariho School Committee Special Virtual Meeting/ Budget Workshop
January 7, 2021

Committee Members Present: Chair Linda Lyall, George Abbott, Ryan Callahan, Donna Chambers, William Day, Gary Liguori, Craig Louzon, Linda McAllister and David Stall. Absent: Vice Chair Catherine Giusti, Sheila Grover and Lisa Macaruso.

Administrators/Others in Attendance: Superintendent Gina Picard, Assistant Superintendent Jane Daly, Director of Administration and Finance Ned Draper, Assistant Director of Administration and Finance Gail Wilcox, Retired Director of Administration and Finance Susan Rogers, Charlestown Town Council President Deb Carney, Hopkinton Town Council President Steve Moffitt, Hopkinton Town Councilor Bob Marvel, Richmond Town Councilor Lauren Cacciola, NEA ESP President Thomas Pirnie and other community members.

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

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

II. Budget Workshop

Chair Lyall stated that she is glad they can all work collaboratively given what is going on in the world today. The Superintendent noted that all School Committee members have been named co-hosts of the meeting so if she does not see someone in the waiting room, they can let the person in. She asked Ned to pick up where he left off on Tuesday. Ned stated that each member received an email that he sent this afternoon which includes an Excel spreadsheet of the 8-page overview and 40-page budget. He noted that he will include Town Treasurers on his emails as well so they get the same information. He responded to a question asked by Craig Louzon as to what .5% of the fund balance would represent. Ned noted this would amount to \$270,375.71. Hopkinton Town Council members asked how much this would relieve tax requirements to which Gary added how would this relate to each individual taxpayer. Ned responded that he is not aware of the census in each town so he could not answer this. Gary added that it would be a pretty small amount to each individual taxpayer yet it hampers the District's ability to cover unexpected/unanticipated expenses. Craig noted that it would amount to about \$101,742.00 to Richmond with about the same to Hopkinton and the remainder to Charlestown. Chair Lyall stated that the towns are saying that it impacts their operating budgets; they cannot afford to run because the school budget takes most of their money. Ned noted that they would have to factor how it comes out relative to population but they also have to look at the impact to commercial property as it is not all residential. Ned then provided an overview of what was cut prior to the School Committee receiving the proposed budget. Chair Lyall stated that the cuts were made in collaboration with school teams to which Bill added that it doesn't appear that any of the items cut impact teaching and learning. He has faith in the administration to look and see what else might be able to be cut without affecting teaching and learning. Ryan questioned line item 5241. Ned noted there are two significant changes with ELA curriculum due to state mandates. The Assistant Superintendent will provide a detailed explanation at Tuesday night's School Committee meeting. Ryan stated, in essence, to comply with state requirements in math and ELA, the District has to increase its budget by \$170,000 to which Ned responded "yes". Ryan then questioned the increase to tech 1:1 at the High School as other schools do not seem to have this impact. Gina asked, before moving to technology, if it was OK if Jane provided a summary of what she will discuss on Tuesday. Jane noted that the State has mandated that Districts provide a new curriculum (State Legislation) for English and Math by 2023. She formed a Committee who researched curricula and she will present the results on Tuesday. We will be able to reduce the current budget by \$20,000 (i.e. for Star and textbooks) if the Committee adopts the new curriculum. Overall for K-12, there will be about a \$187,000 increase. Gina returned to discussion on technology. She does know that leases have increased to which Ned added that the District has to purchase new computers each time a class moves through the four grades at the High

School. We also have to replace ones that can't be serviced. Ryan questioned if revenue (sale of computers at the end of the year) would offset this to which it was noted that sales had gone down as the impact of 1:1 with Distance Learning has increased. Computers that were scheduled to be sold had to be put back in service and those that could not be used, parts were taken from as our technicians are certified to repair computers. Ryan then asked if lines 5674 and 5698 had switched categories. Ned stated that he would have to research it but it looks like they did. The next question posed by Ryan was concerning line item 5833; what is driving this increase? Chair Lyall replied that this is for special education students. Ned commented that based on a review with the Special Education Department, this is for new and existing students. That is the estimate for next year. Some IEPs require a student to be serviced out of district so we have to pay tuition and transportation. Craig reiterated a concern he raised before. Lines 5835-5836 – why do we have to pay tuition to CCRI when there is currently no tuition for new students. Ned replied that this is for the Dual Enrollment and Running Start programs. He would question the equity as well as there is no cost if a student graduates high school but there is a cost if a student is still in high school. Gary explained this has to do with the Rhode Island Promise which allows free tuition for a High School graduate or GED student who will be enrolled full-time. Craig noted that he has an issue with this. Ryan's next concern was with lines 6211 and 6310 – maintenance supplies. It looks like this has been reduced but we don't know for certain if we will be in a different state of affairs next year. How did you arrive at this reduction if we have to continue with robust cleaning? Ned replied that the District stocked up at each school with items such as face masks. Everyone brought in their own so we won't have to invest again in things like this; we are prepared for next year. Bill, getting back to Jane's discussion, commented that the State is mandating this so the expense will be there whether or not the District wants to do this. Jane responded that there will be an expense but the cost is set with the program we select. The Committee went through a rigorous process and they believe the program they are recommending is the best deal for your buck and also the best quality program. The fact that we have to adopt an ELA and Math program by 2023 is a fact so there will be a cost associated with it. Bill added. Almost everything in the budget is mandated with the exception of contracts. When we hear from people that we are stripping the towns of their money, he wants people to know what the mandates are. He wants towns to either support the budget or shoot it down. We don't have much flexibility. The State of Rhode Island is the ultimate School Committee. Jane noted that one benefit of both programs is that they have 100% digital support and also hands-on. Ron Bryant brought forth a concern he had with tech hardware – line 5632 – MacBook Airs. Has anyone looked at switching platforms to Microsoft? Ned explained that the tech department can service both but that Apples tend to last longer and are more reliable. Ron felt there could be a substantial savings by switching but would be happy to hear why the District uses Apple. Craig, Jane and Donna all provided an explanation as to why MacBooks were selected. Craig noted that Mr. Ricci brought together a huge group of people to research this. Donna stated that she was on this Committee and they researched this for at least two years prior to initiating 1:1. Vendors came in and all agreed Apple would better meet the needs of the High School. Jane added that this was studied extensively. When the Middle School was added into the 1:1 process they determined that Chromebooks were sufficient to meet their needs but MacBooks were still chosen for the High School as this school uses Canvas and it meets AP, CTC and different needs at this level. Craig asked if they could be enlightened on the state transportation categorical aid. This was an incentive from the state given to regional schools because of the distance traveled by buses because regional districts lost the state aid that was given for regionalizing. Ned added that this is given to help offset the cost for regional transportation so he is not sure why the state can threaten to take this away if we go in-house for our statewide transportation needs. The state was considering releasing statewide transportation so he has asked another district and they have not had any negative impact by providing statewide transportation in-house. He does have a proposal from Ocean State Transit to start that service but no call into the state as he has to have School Committee approval to do so. Based on the numbers he has received, the District will see a savings over current costs. He did include this option in the bid proposal to see what other proposals might be (to handle what the state is doing now). Not that the Committee can vote on this now but if there is a consensus

for administration to go to the state and incorporate this in our new bid, we will begin the process now with Ocean State Transit if we can. Bill noted that this is the second night the Committee has met and the Superintendent will be going to the famous Omnibus Meeting. He is concerned with what she will tell the Town Councils and community on what we have accomplished in our two meetings. Linda McAllister stated that she looked at the budget carefully and it is well thought out. We are going into the unknown. Cuts that were made were substantial. What will children need? While we haven't lost a year, we have to look at resources we will need. Donna, too, liked what she looked at. She went through it line-by-line. She did not see any areas that could be cut. Last year they took some hits but last year's Omnibus Meeting was not all negative either. The Committee has been asked consistently to cut the fund balance. It is a conservative budget; what is costly are the state mandates. Craig agreed with Bill. He just wanted Gina to be prepared. The dynamics of the Town Councils has changed but that doesn't mean they won't bicker or complain. He solicited input from Town Council members on the call tonight. The main concern is always the fund balance. Gary noted that Lauren Cacciola, a Richmond Town Councilor, had her hand up. Lauren noted that she is here to listen. The concern for her is the kids and what is best for the school district. She is an advocate for schools. Deb Carney felt the School Committee was doing a good job going through the budget. There were big unknowns this year and could be some next year as well. There is never much pushback from Charlestown. She felt the discussion was appropriate and feedback was good. Donna suggested that Gina be prepared to address the newer/fewer concept. Gary, going back to Bill's and Donna's comments, stated that a lack of comments does not mean a lack of interest. He has not heard any ideas, concepts, cuts so if there are individuals out there who want to make cuts, they should speak up and not call out others. Bill clarified that his statement was not meant to upset anyone on the Committee. This is new territory for Gina. He has been going to Omnibus Meetings for years and Town Councils can be rough. He just thinks the Committee will be beat over the head if they don't make an attempt to cut the budget. Gina will have to convey to people that the Committee is open to keeping a budget that is fair to taxpayers, staff and students. There will be cuts and bruises before we get it passed. He did not mean it to be a slap to anyone. Gina noted her appreciation for the feedback. She is no stranger to conflict and ready to take it on. There are three large decisions that have to be made before we can approve this budget: 1) ELA curriculum (which Jane will speak to on Tuesday Night), 2) newer/fewer concept and 3) our bus contract which expires this year. In her short time here, she has seen a Committee who is committed to education. She will stay true to teaching/learning and will continue to advocate. Craig understood where Bill was coming from. The track record shows the way in which the Committee has been treated. There were two Council members who spoke tonight. The School Committee has never heard such kind words so early in the budget process. We may hear something different Wednesday night. George felt the Committee should be considerate to the Councils as the towns are concerned and worried about not exceeding the 4% cap. Ron Bryant, from Hopkinton, stated that he got involved because his taxes go up every year. He is now on a fixed income. He did look the budget over very carefully. He is against raising taxes but besides computers and a few capital expenditures, he doesn't see anything here that can be cut that would really affect the budget. Sometimes saving \$1.00 today could save \$5.00 tomorrow. They will have to really present newer/fewer well. He does want to hear more about capital improvements and would also like to hear from Steve Moffitt and Bob Marvel, Hopkinton Town Council Members. Ned stated that, based on discussions with Jason Sullivan and determined by RGB, these are the projects it was felt the District could take on in the five-year plan. He did note that items like the Hope Valley generator that is no longer as intense a need as it was before COVID and distance learning, could probably be put on hold unless the school was to be used as a shelter. He is hoping to get federal money back for COVID and restore what we spent. He suggested they stick with the \$30,000 Maintenance/Repairs line item for each school as that is for heater/ventilation maintenance. Charlestown parking was broken into two parts in order to save enough money over two years to do the project. This would be included in the newer/fewer project if this was approved. He did hear that Charlestown might be a tough sell on the newer/fewer concept. He asked if this project was something the Committee favored at this time. Craig questioned how

long it could be postponed because he thought it was mandated by RIDOT. Ned replied that part of it was engineering that was being done but the RIDOT issue is they feel the well is too close to where paving will be done. Donna agreed that this has been under consideration for a long time. If we put a band-aid on it and don't get newer/fewer passed, this could be a problem. She feels something needs to be done. She would like to see the design to which Ned responded that he should have prints available over the next few months. Donna suggested they hold the money in the budget for now. Ned moved to the CTC project. The agency that certifies the Culinary Program is coming in the spring. This project was put on the radar because of the age of the equipment and the program. The decision may be influenced by what the crediting agency tells us. Chair Lyall noted that she does not want to impact students being certified; is the equipment functional? If they kept part of it, would the District still be eligible for state aid reimbursement? Ned replied that he imagines there will be more conversations on this. We would have to have a complete list approved and submitted to get the 61% back. Bill, going back to Charlestown paving, stated that they could take a hard look at this and maybe do some paving; a band-aid in certain spots and same money. Ned then reviewed the big ticket items which included fire alarms, air handling, HVAC work at Marine Tech, the back side of Richmond Elementary School, Charlestown paving and the CTC project; the others are reasonable in scale. Bill asked if the Hope Valley upgrade to the fire alarm was a concern of the Fire Department as the District has already spent a considerable amount of money in all buildings on this. Hope Valley could no longer be operational if they go with newer/fewer. The Fire Department is the overriding authority; if they are comfortable with it then he will be too. Ron Bryant stated that he is looking at smaller items like eye wash stations at a cost of \$5,000-\$7,000 for these. He cannot comprehend this expense; it seems out of whack. The mixing valve station cost is grossly inflated. Roofing repairs to Charlestown School sound pricey. If you were replacing it, that would be one thing. He questioned the replacing of the Middle School gym to which Ned clarified that it was not the gym but the air handling unit in the gym. Ron continued. If we go newer/fewer, we would not need to spend this money. He agrees with Bill on the fire alarm system; \$100,000 is a lot of money if we are leaving the school. Ned noted that he will follow-up with Jason and get feedback from the authority having jurisdiction. Ron continued. \$53,000 for exploring cracks – that is a crazy amount of money. Ned stated that he will discuss this, the Charlestown roof and eye wash stations with RGB. He thanked all for their feedback. He understands the value of people's time and noted that he will get back with answers to the questions asked. He explained that in removing \$385,000 on the expense side, this could affect the \$1.4 million on the revenue side. He wanted people to know how the District works to balance the budget. Gina thanked the Committee for their support. She will continue to review things like enrollment, etc. Tuesday night should be a very extensive meeting. Craig made a motion, which was seconded by Linda McAllister, to adjourn. It was brought to Chair Lyall's and Craig's attention that the two Hopkinton Town Councilors wanted to say a few word. Craig apologized to the new members as he did not recognize their names. He pulled his motion and Linda pulled her second. Steve Moffitt introduced himself. He is the new Hopkinton Town Council President. He is a big supporter of education and a product of Chariho. He remembers Mr. Day very well and noted that Chariho was not always looked upon as a great place. His comments reflect Mr. Bryant's. No one wants taxes to go up but we have to do right by our children. He looks forward to the Omnibus Meeting and noted his appreciation for the work the School Committee has done. Bob Marvel stated that he, too, is a member of the Hopkinton Town Council. He reiterated what Steve and Ron said. He also appreciates and understands the necessary process to get through the budget. He is proud to live in an area where the school district is one of the strongest in the State but, in opposition, there are taxpayers who do not want to pay any more taxes. He also is looking forward to the Omnibus Meeting.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Ryan Callahan and it was
VOTED: To adjourn at 7:47 PM. In favor: Unanimous.

Donna J. Sieczkiewicz, Clerk