

Chariho School Committee Meeting  
Regular Session – July 16, 2024

Committee Members Attendance: Chair Catherine Giusti, Vice Chair Karen Reynolds, Donna Chambers, Tyler Champlin, Kathryn Colasante, Polly Hopkins, Craig Louzon, Larry Phelps, Patricia Pouliot and Jessica Purcell. Absent: Linda Lyall. Resigned: Andrew McQuaide.

Administrators and Others Attendance: Superintendent Gina Picard, Assistant Superintendent Michael Comella, Director of Administration and Finance Ned Draper, Systems Administrator Eric O'Brien, Charlestown Town Council President Deb Carney, Hopkinton Town Council Vice President Scott Bill Hirst, Hopkinton Town Councilor Sharon Davis and School Committee Clerk Donna Sieczkiewicz.

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

Chair Catherine Giusti called the meeting of the Chariho School Committee, held in the Chariho High School Library, to order at 6:45 PM. She asked all to please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence.

II. Motion/Vote to go into Executive Session

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin and it was VOTED: That the School Committee go into executive session and close the meeting to the public under the authority of R.I. General Laws Section 42-46-5(a)(8) for the purpose of reviewing and/or approving matters which relate to the privacy of students and their records (1. Approval of Executive Session Minutes of June 18, 2024 - Home Instruction Requests and 2. Approval of Executive Session Minutes of June 18, 2024 - Appeal of CTC Admission Denial). In favor: Unanimous.

III. Reconvene Open Session/Pledge of Allegiance/Silent Meditation

Chair Giusti reconvened the meeting at 7:00 PM and thanked all for their patience. She then asked all to please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence in memory of the Francis Family.

IV. Closing/Sealing of Executive Session Minutes

There were no minutes to seal.

V. Disclosure of Executive Session Votes

Vice Chair Reynolds reported there were three votes taken in executive session. The first vote, approval of executive session minutes of June 18, 2024 – Home Instruction Requests, passed with 8 in favor and 2 abstentions with Chambers and Champlin abstaining and Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds voting in favor.

The second vote, approval of executive session minutes of June 18, 2024 – Appeal of CTC Admission Denial, passed with 8 in favor and 2 abstentions with Chamber and Champlin abstaining and Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds voting in favor.

The last vote, to return to open session was unanimous with 10 in favor with Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds voting in favor.

VI. Recognition – Superintendent Picard asked all to please join her in congratulating/thanking the following:

1. High School Senior Chaia Elwell, 2024 Recipient of the Providence Journal Courage Award.
2. High School Junior William Ellis, one of 62 students from across Rhode Island, earned the Herbert and Claiborne Pell Medal for US History. This award recognizes college and high school students in the state who have excelled in US History.
3. SkillsUSA National Champions: Erin von Housen (Silver Medal in Architectural Drafting); Ella Murphy (8<sup>th</sup> place in Baking and Pastry Arts); and Tori Babineau, Emerson Flynn and Mia McNiece (8<sup>th</sup> place in Crime Scene Investigation).

#### 4. Charlestown School Committee Representative Andrew McQuaide for his service to the Chariho School District.

It was with a mixture of gratitude and sadness that Superintendent Picard announced the departure of Ned Draper, our Director of Administration and Finance. Over the past four years, Ned has been an invaluable part of our District, contributing his skills, dedication and positive spirit to every project and task. Ned's contributions have greatly impacted our success and he will be missed by all of us. We wish him all the best in his future endeavors and he was thanked for his outstanding work and dedication to the Chariho community.

#### VII. Public Forum

Chair Giusti noted that Louise Dinsmore is first. Louise introduced herself and stated she was from Richmond. She wished Ned the best – a big loss to the District – his skills, his demeanor – he is an exceptional human being and she just wanted to thank him for always being willing to answer questions, the many she has had over the years. She thanked him for his service. She noted that she is the President of the Forgotten Taxpayers and a candidate for Chariho School Committee. She has a point she would like to make tonight then followed up by a question for Superintendent Picard. This past weekend the world witnessed a failed assassination attempt of a former United States President. Donald Trump's life was spared and he evaded a fatal bullet to the head. She would like to call attention to the verbal bullet that was hurled at last month's School Committee meeting by Richmond resident Christopher Kona. Mr. Kona, who neglected to reference that he serves as the Chair of the Richmond Democrat Town Committee, took a verbal shot at the Moms for Liberty. At the June 18<sup>th</sup> meeting, Mr. Kona said and she quoted, "I wanted to speak about the rising threat from Moms for Liberty in Rhode Island. These people have been coming to School Committee meetings espousing fear. They are trying to bully town members and School Committee members. They are going to be vile in their discussions. They're going to try to scare you." He goes on to say that "one of the goals of Moms for Liberty is to undermine the effectiveness of our public schools." Louise stated, let her set the record straight for Mr. Kona and our community. She signed the Mom's for Liberty Parent Pledge for candidates and elected officials. She was proud to sign it and is unapologetic about it. And here's what the Pledge states, "I pledge to honor the fundamental rights of parents including, but not limited to, the right to direct education, medical care and moral upbringing of their children. I pledge to advance policies that strengthen parental involvement and decision-making, increase transparency, defend against government overreach and secure parental rights at all levels of government." There is nothing vile in that pledge. There is nothing undermining the effectiveness of public education in that pledge. That pledge is reasonable. So to Mr. Kona, the Chair of the Richmond Town Committee, please stop hurling your verbal bullets her way. There is something Mr. Kona and she agree on and that is bullying is never acceptable. So to that end, she'd like to point out that a Board member of the Friends of Chariho approached her aggressively in a school parking lot last month. She was unhinged, pointing her finger in my face, acting erratically. Louise stated that she reported the incident to the Richmond Police. This is the same woman that called her "evil" and posted that all over social media. She also posted personal things about her son and that is not acceptable. So to Mr. Kona, instead of hurling verbal bullets at mothers who demand to have a say in what their children are learning in school, as they should as parents, why don't you spend your time calling out your surrogates who take it upon themselves to bully candidates, like me, who represent a different point of view. She repeated, she represents a different point of view from time to time. She regularly asks questions about spending. She is an independent, critical thinker. It's perfectly fair for others to challenge her ideas but character assassination must stop. She would expect Mr. Kona to challenge ideas not attack moms. Mr. Kona, the verbal bullets need to stop, you're better than that. Then looking at Mr. Kona she repeated, you're better than that. Moving on, she'd like to ask the Superintendent about the status of the flooding problem at Richmond Elementary School. If you remember last month, she asked Superintendent Picard about the plan to mitigate the flooding issue at the school and was hoping, perhaps, Superintendent Picard could outline any steps that have been taken to ensure that students and staff aren't impacted by this flooding issue in the future. Is there any update you can give? Superintendent Picard responded that she can't guarantee that it is not going to happen in the future. We are doing the best we can with the facilities that are 90+ years old. That is why she recommended new structures – new

facilities. You can't just lift up the building - fix the grounds and level that – the grading that needs to be done. So we have widened drains, we have added pumps, we have fixed and repointed bricks. We continue to mitigate the needs as necessary. In the last few rainstorms, and we have had a few, we haven't had flooding and that's a good sign but she can't guarantee that we won't see it again. So far, since the last time we widened the drains and added more pumps and bags, we have not seen any other problems to date. Ned added that when we get over two inches of rain per hour or oversaturation when we have heavy spring rainfall and get an inch or more per hour, the water table becomes very high and that is what creates the problem. Louise thanked them.

Chris Kona from Richmond stated that he wanted to at least start with a quick reminder that the School Committee is limited in the extent to which they can answer questions when presented those in Public Forum so folks that use Public Forum should keep that in mind – that if they would like to have a discussion with the Committee about some of its policies, he recommends they add it to the agenda. His statement in defense to Louise's comments – so he did speak out at the last School Board meeting about Moms for Liberty. Having heard Bob's response, he doesn't feel bad at all about anything that he said. He feels like the statements that he made were validated in the statements issued by Bob on behalf of Moms for Liberty at the School District with regard to the way they deal with transgender and gender non-conforming students. As a student (parent) of two kids at Chariho Schools which is his principal representation as well as from the perspective, as Louise Dinsmore said - he is the Chair of the Richmond Democrats - so, therefore, he does want to make sure that they are representing folks who also have children in Chariho Schools for which this is a concern. Those statements made by Bob last month at the School Board meeting represent a threat against his students who are at the school and the way they are educated. Chariho so far has been doing a phenomenal job of educating gender non-conforming students and the success in Chariho is a testament to Chariho's success in this area and so he would encourage the Chariho School District and Chariho School Committee to continue to maintain your policies in these areas to support students, like his, who are in there. If Louise is concerned about the way that her children are educated, she may want to bring that up with the administrative boards for the schools that her children attend as opposed to the Chariho School Committee. Thank you.

### VIII. Business

A. Rhode Island Ethics Commission Presentation – Superintendent Picard introduced Rhode Island Ethics Commission Staff Attorney Lynn Radiches who was asked to provide information on the Rhode Island Ethics Commission and the Rhode Island Code of Ethics. Lynne noted that all elected and appointed officials are subject to the Code of Ethics in Rhode Island. Trainings are not mandated but she was grateful to be asked to attend this evening. She has a power point she will review and asked that questions be held until the end of her presentation. She began by explaining what ethical conduct is and noted that ethical or unethical conduct is determined not by looking at the results, but by looking at the conduct itself and judging its inherent rightness or wrongness. She urged all to focus on their action, not the result. She acknowledged the Staff that comprises the Ethics Commission; all appointed by the Governor but five are chosen from lists supplied by the House and Senate. She then explained who is subject to the Code of Ethics. Conflict of Interest, when to recuse from taking part in discussion or action and how to recuse were also discussed. Other topics that were highlighted included secondary employment, gifts, transactions with subordinates and hardship exceptions. She stressed the importance of not sharing or disclosing confidential information as this could result in a complaint being filed. She then discussed how to file a complaint, what an Advisory Opinion is and how to request one. She ended her presentation with who is required to file a yearly financial statement; what needs to be included and the purpose of it. Craig commented on a Supreme Court ruling in Indiana. Sharon Davis asked if she keeps track of who attends these trainings to which Lynne replied that she tracks numbers, not names. She noted that training is also available on a pre-recorded line. Scott Bill Hirst commented on a complaint he filed years ago regarding the Planning Board (a person appointed their spouse). He noted that he did not file it on the official form and the Planning Board receives no compensation so he was wondering if this is why they did not feel there was a violation. Lynne replied if there was money involved, that would have been an issue but as there was no compensation, there was no financial gain for anyone. Craig stated that he feels what the State did by alleviating School Committees of some of their

responsibilities (i.e. hiring/firing of employees) helped protect School Committee members. Lynne noted that she is grateful to those who volunteer their service and commented that she feels a School Committee member has it tougher than others. Lynne was thanked for her presentation.

## B. Field Trip Requests

1. Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the request of Chris Haberek and Stacie Pepperd for 2 students and 2 chaperones to travel to the FFA National Competition and Convention in Indianapolis, IN from October 21, 2024 to October 26, 2024.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Karen Reynolds and it was VOTED: To approve the request of Chris Haberek and Stacie Pepperd for 2 students and 2 chaperones to travel to the FFA National Competition and Convention in Indianapolis, IN from October 21, 2024 to October 26, 2024. In favor: Unanimous.

2. Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the request of High School Boys' Cross Country Coach Bill Haberek for 12 students and 2 chaperones to travel to Pilgrim Pines Conference Center (Cross Country Camp), West Swanzey, NH from August 25-27, 2024 (this was a yearly trip prior to COVID).

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Karen Reynolds and Tyler Champlin and it was VOTED: To approve the request of High School Boys' Cross Country Coach Bill Haberek for 12 students and 2 chaperones to travel to Pilgrim Pines Conference Center (Cross Country Camp), West Swanzey, NH from August 25-27, 2024. In favor: Unanimous.

C. Memorandum of Understanding Between Westerly Public Schools and the Chariho Regional School District to Form a Rhode Island Interscholastic League (RIIL) High School Girls' Swim Co-Op Team – Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the Memorandum of Understanding between Westerly Public Schools and the Chariho Regional School District to form a Rhode Island Interscholastic League High School Girls' Swim Co-Op Team. She noted that the District will be exceeding the maximum number for independent swimmers (which is 3) as we currently have five females who are interested in swimming. This will also keep us in compliance with Title IX as we offer a swim team for male athletes. Craig made a motion, which was seconded by Karen, to approve the Superintendent's recommendation. Karen clarified that the cost to the District is \$3500 to which Gina replied "correct".

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Karen Reynolds and it was VOTED: To approve the Memorandum of Understanding Between Westerly Public Schools and the Chariho Regional School District to Form a Rhode Island Interscholastic League (RIIL) High School Girls' Swim Co-Op Team. In favor: Unanimous.

D. FY25 Grant Application with Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank for Upgrading/Updating of Charlestown Elementary School Wells – Emerging Contaminants Grant – Superintendent Picard recommended approval to submit a grant application to Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank to upgrade/update public water service wells at Charlestown Elementary School, in the amount of \$615,000.00, to eliminate/reduce polyfluorinated substances (PFAS). Karen made a motion, which was seconded by Craig, to approve the Superintendent's recommendation. Craig asked what are the numbers at Charlestown to which Gina replied Charlestown is at 4 parts per trillion; the other schools are at zero or none. Ned added that the number needs to be below the State regulation which is 20 but in five years when the EPA regulations kick in, we won't be compliant because it will have to be under 4. He noted the High School is at 8 but the other wells on campus are at zero so we can utilize those. Karen summarized that if the District does not get the grant, they will have to come up with \$615,000 to which Gina responded that she is confident that we should get the grant as we have been working with them on this. The Green Ribbon Sustainability Award helps with grants. Craig asked if the \$615,000 was solely for Charlestown to which Gina replied "yes".

Karen Reynolds made a motion, seconded by Craig Louzon and it was VOTED: To approve submission of a FY25 Emerging Contaminants Grant application to Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank to upgrade/update public water service wells at Charlestown Elementary School, in the amount of \$615,000.00, to eliminate/reduce polyfluorinated substances (PFAS). In favor: Unanimous.

E. Selection of Necessity for School Construction Members – Superintendent Picard stated, as you know, we need to begin elementary planning for the selection of Necessity for School Construction members. While we don't have the money yet to be able to hire architects or engineers for the planning, it is important for us to capture the ideas that people want to pursue so we can put this in the RFP so you will be able to see the amounts for each of the choices/options. That's why we are looking to begin in August. She is recommending both John Devereaux and Greg Zenion. They were both already on the Necessity for School Construction team and have a good history of what has been done to date. She is also recommending the reappointment of the School Committee members that were on this Committee previously, if they are in agreement to be reappointed. She asked the Committee if they wanted to vote on these together or separately. Chair Giusti asked for a motion so they can discuss this or if the Committee would like to take them separately. Kathryn stated she would like to take them separately. Chair Giusti asked for a motion to reappoint John Devereaux and Greg Zenion to the Necessity for School Construction Committee. Jessica made a motion, which was seconded by Karen and Donna, to reappoint John Devereaux and Greg Zenion to the Necessity for School Construction Committee. Chair Giusti requested a show of hands of those who are in favor of the motion. All but Kathryn noted they were in favor. Chair Giusti asked if she would be abstaining to which Kathryn replied that she thought they were going to discuss this. Chair Giusti replied that she did not think there was a need for discussion as both were previously appointed by the Committee. She asked Kathryn if she had an opinion to which Kathryn responded that she was just wondering if there were other people in the community that would be interested that also had experience in construction. So rather than just assuming that they're the best candidates without putting it out to the community, how do they know they are? That was her thought. Gina explained that one thing to note is that the Hopkinton Town Council did appoint Greg Zenion as their member on the Building Committee. Greg was also a previous member of the Necessity for School Construction Committee so she believes the Hopkinton Town Council has faith in Greg Zenion. John Devereaux has a strong history of the electrical needs of the District. While other people may have electrical background, they don't have the inner workings of the actual intricacies that we have been dealing with. So while, yes, we all have people that we know but these members represent a history that is important to this task. But again, you can vote 'no'. Kathryn replied that her thought was not that she has any issue with the candidates, it was more just the fact that should be put out to the community in case there was anyone else that has experience that would be interested. That is entirely her thought. Also does John Devereaux work for the school? Gina replied that he is a vendor to which Kathryn responded, he's a vendor? Gina stated that to be on this committee, it has to be a community member. There is no stipend for this position. Kathryn asked her to explain vendor – what does she mean by that? Gina explained that he is hired to do a service. Like with the telephone pole fire this past weekend. He was called in to assist. Kathryn remarked, so he's our electrician to which Gina reiterated that he is hired to do electrical work and is also a member of the town. RIDE requires this. He would be one of many members on this committee. Kathryn noted that she is just going to share her opinion which is that she would like to see it go out to the community to see if there is anybody else interested that may have even superior experience – so she's just putting this out there. Chair Giusti stated, based on these comments, they will vote again.

Jessica Purcell made a motion, seconded by Karen Reynolds and Donna Chambers and it was VOTED: To reappoint both John Devereaux and Greg Zenion to the Necessity for School Construction Committee. In favor: Chambers, Champlin, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds. Abstained: Colasante. The motion carried by a vote of 9 in favor with 1 abstention.

Donna made a motion, which was seconded by Jessica, to reappoint the four existing School Committee members (Catherine Giusti, Craig Louzon, Pat Pouliot and Karen Reynolds – if they choose to be reappointed) to the Necessity for School Construction Committee. All four noted that they would be fine with staying on. Tyler commented that this work will be extended for a period of time and questioned how this will affect School Committee members after the election in November. Gina replied that the requirement is only one School Committee member so if someone is not running for re-election, you will still be covered. Larry asked what about Ned to which Gina explained that the person replacing Ned will assume this responsibility as it is a requirement of RIDE. Kathryn asked what if someone doesn't get elected and someone who gets elected wants to be on the Committee. Gina replied that everything goes back to the School Committee to which Karen added that all subcommittees are reviewed by the School Committee after an election so they can revisit this. Pat commented that any member can attend. Craig stated they may not have a vote, but they have a voice.

Donna Chambers made a motion, seconded by Jessica Purcell and it was VOTED: To reappoint Catherine Giusti, Craig Louzon, Patricia Pouliot and Karen Reynolds to the Necessity for School Construction Committee. In favor: Unanimous.

F. Outside Management Study – This item was requested by Craig Louzon in response to requests from Hopkinton Town Council Vice President Scott Bill Hirst. Craig stated that he requested this because he has heard Scott ask for this for many years and Craig asked if the main goal was for tax relief. Hopkinton Town Councilor Sharon Davis replied 'no'. She researched a district that had conducted a study (Prince George's County Public Schools, Maryland) in 2016. In addition to the documents she presented to the Committee prior to the meeting, she read the following statement she had prepared: *The last Chariho Facilities and Financial Study was conducted in 1999 by MGT of America Inc. The study was commissioned to address the facility and financial needs of the district for the next ten years (1998-2008) based on rapidly increasing enrollment projections up to 4470 students in 2008. As of 2023, the 1999 enrollment projections were found to be very inaccurate. The highest actual district enrollment was 3891 students in 2001, was reduced to 3746 in 2008, and has decreased to 3008 students in 2023. During the same time-frame, the Chariho budget increased from \$32,844,641 in 2001 to \$50,327,187 in 2008 and was \$62,191,037 in 2023. Clearly it is time to conduct a new management audit to cut costs. A similar audit request was made by Senator Elaine Morgan in a 1/14/2020 letter sent to me. She urged the school committee and the three town councils to conduct an independent financial audit and independent management study. She also felt that residents of all three towns would benefit from these two studies, both by achieving cost savings and by having a management plan to continue to provide students the education they deserve – but at a price taxpayers can afford. Senator Morgan's comments inspired me to ask Governor McKee in June 2023 if there was state funding for these studies. Per our Hopkinton Town Council's 7/17/2023 letter to Cheyenne Cazeault, Director of Municipal Affairs, we requested funding for a management audit that extends beyond the typical financial audit. We wanted the audit to examine the way resources are applied, determine the efficiency and effective application, assess whether the desired results are being achieved, and create actionable recommendations. We would model our audit on the Continuous Business Process Improvement Study/Management Audit conducted by the Prince George's County School System in 2016 (sent to you) and study three of the five areas that they studied. We would study Business and Management Services, Information Technology and Support Services. Prince George's County Schools also studied Human Resources and Curriculum. We were not interested in those two areas because our school district personnel are doing a great job of implementing RI mandated curriculum requirements. Based on the Chariho 2021-22 Report Card, our school district is performing better than the State average by most educational measurements – ELA 44.8% versus State 33.1%, Math 40.2% versus State 26.6%, and Science 51.8% versus State 30.7%. We believe we can find cost savings in other areas that would result in tax relief for our residents. Based on my research, I identified three Rhode Island firms who can perform the management audit for \$60,000-\$80,000 or less and submitted the cost request for funding to the Education Representative from Governor McKee's Office. Unfortunately, we were told there was no funding available. I received the same answer from the RI Foundation. Tonight, I am suggesting that the Chariho School District find the funding in your budget. I am also suggesting*

*that some of the money spent for athletic trophies (\$45,000) be diverted to the cost of the study. As a former Buyer, I would be happy to work with the Chariho Superintendent, Director of Finance, and School Committee to create a customized RFP that was approved by all parties. Thank you again for your consideration. I am looking forward to your reply.*

Superintendent Picard noted her appreciation for all the work Sharon did. She stated that the enrollment studies done in 1999 were under old laws and were inaccurate. That law was updated and the data is much more efficient. The Prince George's study was done off an audit that revealed several findings. We hired a new auditing firm last year as it was suggested that it would be best to have a new set of eyes looking at the District. The audit was done and there were no findings or recommendations. The District did participate in a management study and actions were recommended but nothing was done. She does not want to spend money that should go to students on an audit that may contain recommendations that no one wants to follow. She thinks Scott Bill Hirst would disagree with Sharon regarding our staffing. Data exists and is put out by RIDE every year on their website. It also talks about performance. UCOA is the State's way of tracking information from each school district to provide transparency and accountability. Her recommendation is that the School Committee and Town Councils should take the time to review this data. She thinks a lot of questions could be answered by reviewing it. She would be happy to have a RIDE representative come in and present to the School Committee and Town Councils before we utilize dollars for information that no one will follow. As an FYI, we do not spend \$45,000 for athletic trophies. This line item is large and includes uniforms, first aid, trainer, etc. Sharon stated that the reason she went looking for this information is because people kept asking for this. She has participated in them and they ask "how can this be done more efficiently." She is not hung up on the dollars as Chariho is under the average per pupil rate for the State. Ned stated that he reviewed the documents submitted by Sharon. Prince George's County is way different than Chariho. Their budget is over a billion dollars and they spent around \$500,000 on the study. He agreed with Gina. Take a look at the data that exists. UCOA breaks out our spending and compares it to every district in the State. What is your return on investment? Efficiencies can be gained. We looked at depot bus stops but these are not well received in this District. What was not talked about in the Prince George's study – what is the revenue side? He would suggest the Towns consider a revenue side – how to collect tax income to offset the money that is spent on education. We have expanded our income from tuition, grants, etc. He is not sure of any other district that has done this. Sharon noted that the Hopkinton Town Council has been looking at grants. Gina added that our new auditor said our fund balance should be 5-7%. They just returned from DC, accepting the District's Green Ribbon Award for Sustainability and people there were shocked that this District has a fund balance of just 2%. Everything cannot live on the backs of our students. Charlestown's tax dollars are lower because there is economic development there. Richmond and Hopkinton need to look at business development. Top Golf would be a lucrative business. We are not even going up close to inflation. We received the Green Ribbon Award mostly due to grants, not tax dollars. We are always looking at efficiencies but it can't be at the cost of student education. Kathryn commented that having a lot of data is different than having another set of eyes looking at everything. No insult to what Chariho is doing but personally she believes the study should be done. Sylvia Thompson told her that the three towns voted to do this and \$100,000 was put in the budget for it and it was never done. She believes they should do it. Jessica thanked Sharon for all her work. She noted that Scott Bill Hirst has not given any back-up to his request. She feels the goal of Mr. Hirst is to cut costs and closing Hope Valley School was a way to look at efficiencies. RIDE did present at a Budget Subcommittee meeting and she would like them to present at a School Committee meeting. Polly, too, thanked Sharon for taking the time. There was a lot of information shared with them. Gina commented that she would agree if all Town Councils agreed that the recommendations made would be followed. She has been involved in efficiency work. You hire people and then doubt their work. If you find the money, she will do it. Karen thanked Sharon for going above and beyond to find funding but she is not sure where the fee of \$60,000 to \$80,000 came from. Sharon responded that these figures were quoted by a couple of vendors. Karen stated that they have already cut \$80,000 for a bus, cut the fund balance by \$152,000 and removed K from Hope Valley for around \$434,000. They are now looking at having to find \$60,000 to \$80,000 for a study; this sounds inefficient to her. They need to look at the data that is available. It was previously stated at a meeting that the Town Councils and School Committee would all supply the funds. Sharon noted that she, too, is tired of hearing this mentioned over and over again. That

is why she did the research and wanted to discuss it. If the study is done, Gina feels that a recommendation might be that the District needs more staff and others probably won't support that. Gina replied that was why the District appreciated having new auditors come in and not find anything wrong in the District's audit and complimented us on how we run it. The study will probably also come back with a recommendation to increase class sizes and completely closing Hope Valley School. Just cutting K at Hope Valley hasn't gone over well nor would increasing class sizes. She doesn't believe that going to the contractual class size is good for students. We are always collaborating with our administrators. If you can find the money and we commit to following the recommendations, she is on board. Donna also thanked Sharon and noted that she appreciated Sharon's candor. She agrees with all that the Superintendent has said. The School Committee worked hard to cut the budget to bare bones. They can't find \$80,000 and she is not sure the study would produce anything that would save money. She knows Prince George's County and does not feel it compares to Chariho. Sharon replied that they would have to customize the RFP. Donna added that they saw the hoopla when they spoke about cutting K at Hope Valley. She thinks the District is doing a very efficient job. We have talented staff to make these decisions and she does not feel they should spend \$80,000 or more on a study. She asked Mr. Hirst where he thought they could find efficiencies. Pat commented that they implemented a study for the Federal Government to find efficiencies and they all were required to take trainings. Gina explained that The Trust comes in for maintenance but not to that extent; it exists but not in the same way. It is important to know it exists to get your questions answered. It is a balance with students. Chair Giusti noted that she does not have an issue with any findings and would support one if the findings were implemented. What we do need to do it to take into account all the stakeholders – the three Town Councils and the School Committee. We won't get a consensus with all the officials on what they would like to see in the study. No one looked at the findings from the last study. It is not the findings that concern her, it is getting consensus from the four groups. Scott Bill Hirst stated that he believes strongly in an outside management study. The MGT study recommended equalizing the tax rate. That is a sticking point and a detriment to Charlestown. He voted against the Hopkinton Town Council going to the State. It is not the power of the Hopkinton Town Council to approve the Chariho budget like in North Providence. Educated people get ideas from educated people. He reminded all that 79% of Hopkinton's budget goes to Chariho and 80% of Richmond's so those two have an obligation to their towns to make sure they get services. The positive is you would get information from credentialed people. His proposal is best as it removes the politics. Have outside professionals look at school operations. Do what you may with the study. How extensive it is depends on what you have to spend. Take into consideration the towns' finances. We have a public school complex in America. Gina stated she appreciated Mr. Hirst's passion for the topic. She is on the School Committee in North Providence. If Hopkinton was not part of Chariho (and originally they were not), it would cost them a lot more. It was costing the towns more money so that is why they chose to regionalize. When Charlestown was going to remove itself, it was going to cost them more money. First and foremost, the School Committee's obligation is to the students – this is in legislation; the Town Councils are responsible for the taxes. I would be looking at Charlestown as a fabulous partner. They contribute more than they are required to. If we can't collaborate and communicate across the four bodies, we won't be able to agree on the parameters of a study. She has done this work. If the budget didn't pass, the District would have had to completely close Hope Valley School. The School Committee would not have a choice. We have been able to do a lot more in this District because of grant funding. We should have RIDE come in and present so everyone will understand how to look at the data. Craig thanked Sharon and responded to a comment made by Scott Bill. Mr. Hirst said this was not about politics but it is about politics. MGT suggested tax equalization. Back then, Charlestown would have paid 60%. Our enrollment has dropped. The School Committee discussed doing a study back when Andy Polouski was on the Committee and Andy said 'no way'. The recommendations from previous studies were never followed so he wasn't going to waste money. It was discussed again several years back when Barry Ricci was Superintendent. Charlestown had an increase of 5 students and was billed \$550,000 more; that was \$110,000 per student. Why – because Richmond lost 37 students. He stated that he is not for this study. He reviewed what the three schools can handle for enrollment (minus Hope Valley). Tyler stated he had a couple questions. He has never understood why people are looking for a management study. They think we are bloated at the top. We aren't and they will find that this is not true so we will waste money to



find out something we already know. What are the credentials to do this? Right now, he does not support an outside management study. Kathryn commented that the School Committee's first obligation is to the students – she hears this constantly – and Town Councils are responsible for taxes but because 80% of Richmond's budget is outside of their Town Council's control – unless School Committee members are responsible enough to look at this – they can't dismiss their obligation to look out for the people who pay taxes. She would be dishonest if she pretended to understand the whole scope of it but she sees no harm in inviting a vendor to come that has experience in this. Big companies do these kinds of things. We should entertain a vendor at a meeting to which the Superintendent noted that it is against the law to have a vendor come present and then bid on a project. The Committee does have a responsibility to the taxpayers by reviewing and approving the school budget. How many Hopkinton and Richmond School Committee members made motions/decisions to cut the budget? Feel free to come in and watch us work. People claim we are bloated at the top – we are not. The time and effort you as a School Committee member put into your budget is where you help your towns. The reason School Committees were created was to advocate for students. She would push on the Town Councils to look at more efficiencies like bringing in business to help with taxes. We could cut teachers and close schools but that won't be a fun conversation. It has been hard just cutting Kindergarten this year at Hope Valley when she had to look at the impact to 30 students versus 3000. The realistic vision is that Hope Valley has to close. The budget we present each year is way below inflation and based on the history, studies were done but not acted on. Craig added that this past budget season it took Charlestown to make most of the cuts; we all have to make them. Donna, in reference to what Jessica said, commented that when they went out to bond for new elementary schools to take advantage of State money, two towns voted it down when in fact, they had already approved the bond for the State. Kathryn stated that after thinking about her comment to have a vendor come and present, she respects the fact that it would be illegal to have a specific vendor make a presentation and then bid on the job. She would like to explore getting more information about a study. Jessica referenced the comment that big businesses do this all the time. She doesn't see it. Would they put out an RFP to see who is out there doing these studies to which Gina replied, doing what? That is the concern to which Chair Giusti again reiterated her comment that they will not be able to get all parties to agree on the parameters of the study. Sharon stated that she asked the Governor for money and he asked what kind of study so she sent him the Prince George's County RFP. Gina noted that their RFP references the findings in Prince George's County audit. We didn't have any findings in our audit. They would base the study off a hunch. Sharon stated that is why she provided the final report to which Gina thanked Sharon for all her work. It was greatly appreciated. Chair Giusti noted the robust conversation they had on this topic and commented that she does not see any action on the floor. She appreciates that everyone was cordial in their remarks and as there is no action on this, they will move to the next item.

G. Individual School Committee Member Request for Conference Fee Reimbursement – Superintendent Picard stated that this is on the agenda as a reminder that any individual School Committee member expenditure exceeding \$75.00 requires prior approval of the School Committee (Rules of Conduct - Item # III-E). The Rules of Conduct were last updated in 2015. We have an invoice for a conference that was attended by a couple of members that we need to pay. Chair Giusti has authorized payment of the invoice. Craig commented that when they set an amount of \$75 or more that needs authorization it was because people were going to conferences that cost \$300 or \$400. Chair Giusti noted that no one has asked to go to a conference and she does not think that members knew that this conference would be over this amount. They can amend the Rules of Conduct or have members pay the extra. Pat questioned if they went to the conference and didn't know they needed approval. Karen stated that she was one who attended the conference. She has gone three years and this is the first time it has come up so she is guessing they increased the cost this year and it exceeded what was allowed in the past. She is fine with reimbursing the District as she finds this conference informative. Polly made a motion to amend the Rules of Conduct (Item #III-E) to \$100. Craig stated he would second it if Polly would change the amount to \$125.00. Gina reminded all that they are required to have six hours of professional development each year. This conference covers some of it as does certain subcommittees.

Polly Hopkins made a motion, seconded by Craig Louzon and it was VOTED: To amend Item #III-E of the School Committee Rules of Conduct from \$75.00 to \$125.00. In favor: Unanimous.

H. Next Steps as they Relate to Elementary School Planning and the Phase-Out of Hope Valley Elementary School – Superintendent Picard stated that this item will be included on each agenda as the Committee will need to determine if further action will be taken in regards to Hope Valley School as we prepare for the FY26 budget season. Her recommendation for the budget would be a slow roll-out (i.e. for FY26 phase out both K and grade 1). If the School Committee has a different direction it would like to go, she needs to know this. If a budget increase is not acceptable to the community, you may want to consider closing the school. In August, when the Necessity for School Construction Committee meets, they will look at options to pursue. They will be holding this meeting at Richmond School and the next meeting possibly at Charlestown School. They do have leaking at Charlestown and the Middle School so they would like to meet in the schools so the Committee can see what needs to be done. The Chariho Team has been very honest with the taxpayers and community about the cost to renovate. There were no other comments or questions.

I. Budget Transfers – Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the Transfers for July 16, 2024.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin and it was VOTED: To approve the Transfers for July 16, 2024. In favor: Unanimous.

J. FY24 Budget Update – Ned noted that the revenue side is slightly over budget at around \$50,000; he is not sure there will be too much more activity. The available \$2 million will shrink with paychecks, etc. The lunch fund is a weakness. We had about \$20,000 in collections which is now at between \$30,000 and \$40,000. We will have to examine a possible increase to the cost of lunch in FY27. Louise questioned item 8J on the line item status report. It appears there is \$691,000 available; what is typically paid out with this? Ned explained that this includes utilities. There was a savings in oil and a savings with the budget freeze. Some of this will be moved to offset the increase in healthcare. Jessica questioned the line item for private, parochial and public schools to which Gina commented that public refers to charter schools. Ned explained that we do not get DCYF billing in a timely manner so some of this funding will be used for that purpose.

#### IX. Consent Agenda Items

Chair Giusti asked if there were any items that needed to be pulled. Tyler pulled A-1, A-2 and A-3.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin and it was VOTED: To approve the remainder of the Consent Agenda Items. In favor: Unanimous.

B. Bill Review – Accepted.

C. Personnel Actions – None at this time.

D. Permission to Issue Bids/Request Quote – None at this time.

E. Permission to Award Contracts – Awarded the following:

1. Contract Operation Services for Public Water Bid to Northeast Water Solutions, Inc. per the attached memo from Ned Draper dated July 10, 2024 and the bid tabulation sheet.

F. Home Instruction – Action taken in executive session.

G. Grants – None at this time.

H. Donations – None at this time.

A-1. Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Karen Reynolds and it was VOTED: To approve the Executive Session Minutes of June 18, 2024 – Approval of Executive Session Minutes of May 14, 2024 (minutes not sealed). In favor: Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds. Abstained (due to absence): Chambers and Champlin. The motion carried by a vote of 8 in favor with 2 abstentions.

A-2. Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Karen Reynolds and it was VOTED: To approve the Executive Session Minutes of June 18, 2024 - Memorandum of Agreement Between the Chariho Regional School District and NEA Chariho pertaining to Article 12A (minutes unsealed June 18, 2024). In favor: Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds. Abstained (due to absence): Chambers and Champlin. The motion carried by a vote of 8 in favor with 2 abstentions.

A-3. Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Karen Reynolds and it was VOTED: To approve the Regular Session Minutes of June 18, 2024. In favor: Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds. Abstained (due to absence): Chambers and Champlin. The motion carried by a vote of 8 in favor with 2 abstentions.

#### X. Reports

A. Subcommittee Reports – None at this time.

B. Superintendent's Report

1. District Transportation Update – The deadline to register for fall bussing closed July 1<sup>st</sup>. Reminders, including emails and texts, were sent. Those families who register late may have to wait for transportation to be assigned if their registration will have an effect on a route or capacity limits on a bus. As a reminder, approved transportation requests may be rescinded if a student does not ride for ten consecutive days with no reasonable explanation. Athletics may impact a student's need for bussing so this is taken into consideration.

2. Kindergarten Registration and New Registration Update – Ashaway has two classes of 22 each; Charlestown has 53 registered for 3 classrooms and Richmond has 80 with 20 in each of the four classrooms.

3. 2024 Summer Advance will be held July 22 through July 25. This Advance is an integral part of our continuous improvement efforts aligned with our District Vision. It is a dedicated four-day professional development event where our administrations come together to engage in collaborative work on a variety of critical topics. They participate in training, discussions and planning sessions on key areas such as multi-tiered systems of support, student engagement strategies, data-driven decision-making, and leadership development. The outcomes of the Summer Advance contribute to the continued success and advancement of our District.

4. US Dept of Education Green Ribbon Award Presentation – The Superintendent stated that she was pleased to share that she, Ned and Mike recently returned from Washington, DC where they were honored to receive the US Dept. of Education Green Ribbon Schools Sustainability Award. This prestigious recognition underscores the District's commitment to sustainable practices, student and staff health and wellness and environmental education. During their time in Washington, they not only celebrated this achievement but also participated in numerous sessions and workshops focused on advancing the District's sustainability efforts. Chariho is the first District in the State to receive this award.

C. Coming Events were highlighted.

#### XI. School Committee Requests for Future Agenda Items or Legal Opinions

Jessica Purcell requested they invite RIDE to a future meeting for a data portal presentation.

#### XIII. Adjournment

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Karen Reynolds and it was VOTED: To adjourn at 9:49 PM. In favor: Unanimous.

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Donna J. Sieczkiewicz, Clerk