

Chariho School Committee Meeting
Regular Session Minutes – December 12, 2023

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

Administrators and Others Attendance: Superintendent Gina Picard, Assistant Superintendent Michael Comella, Director of Administration and Finance Ned Draper, Systems Administrator Eric O'Brien, NEA President Vin Levcowich, Richmond Town Councilor Helen Sheehan, Hopkinton Town Councilor Sharon Davis, Senator Elaine Morgan, 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 Andrew McQuaide 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 November 14, 2023 – Approval of Home Instruction Requests and 2. Approval of Home Instruction Requests); any persons to be discussed have been so notified. In favor: Unanimous.

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

Chair Giusti reconvened the meeting at 7:01 PM and asked all to please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence.

IV. Closing/Sealing of Executive Session Minutes

1. Superintendent Picard recommended that minutes pertaining to the privacy of students and their records (Approval of Home Instruction Requests) remain sealed.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Andrew McQuaide and it was

VOTED: That minutes pertaining to the privacy of students and their records (Approval of Home Instruction Requests) remain sealed. In favor: Unanimous.

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 November 14, 2023 – Home Instruction Requests, passed with 10 in favor and 1 abstention with Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Purcell, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot and Reynolds all approving and Champlin abstaining.

The next vote, approval of home school requests, passed with 11 in favor with Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds all approving.

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

VI. Recognition – The following were congratulated/thanked:

1. Postseason Awards: High School Field Hockey – Chaia Elwell (Division II Offensive Player of the Year, 2nd Team All-State, All-Tournament Team, All-Academic Team); Victoria Barrette (1st Team All-Division, 2nd Team All-State, All-Academic Team), Brogan Manni (2nd Team All-Division); Taylor Browning (Honorable Mention, All-Tournament Team); Madeleine Barrette (All-Tournament Team); Rachael Barrette (All-Academic Team); Sophia Gagner (All-Academic Team), Elinor Hammett (All-Academic Team).

High School Girls' Cross Country – Erin vonHousen (1st Team All-Division, 1st Team All-Class, 1st Team All-State).

High School Girls' Volleyball (AVCA – American Volleyball Coaches Association) – The Team received the Team Sportsmanship Award – Jules White (1st Team All-Division, 1st Team All-State, All-Tournament Team); Katja Nelson (2nd Team All-Division, 2nd Team All-State, AVCA All-Region, AVCA Best and Brightest, All-Academic Team); Alexis Cole (3rd Team All-Division, 3rd Team All-State, AVCA Best and Brightest, All-Academic Team); Emma Kocab (All-Tournament Team, AVCA Best and Brightest, All-Academic Team); Elle Clark (AVCA Best and Brightest, All-Academic Team); Finleigh Callahan (All-Academic Team); Gianna Fitts (All-Academic Team); Maya Iskander (All-Academic Team).

High School Girls' Tennis – Emily Ballard (1st Team All-Division); Allison Cole (1st Team All-Division Doubles); Sara Johnson (1st Team All-Division Doubles); Molly Owren (1st Team All-Division Doubles); Olivia Gray (1st Team All-Division Doubles); Megan Ballard (2nd Team All-Division); Faith Owren (2nd Team All-Division); Kaitlyn Daniels (2nd Team All-Division Doubles); Lily Jackson (2nd Team All-Division Doubles); Sadie Grissom (Team Sportsmanship).

High School Girls' Soccer – Emily Brown (1st Team All-Division); Rachael Abbott (2nd Team All-Division); Reid DosSantos (3rd Team All-Division, All-Tournament Team); Tori Babineau (1st Team All-State, All-Academic Team); Grace Downey (All-Tournament Team); Charlie Edmunds (Alice Sullivan “Perseverance Award”).

High School Boys' Soccer – Kody Poplaski (1st Team All-Division, 2nd Team All-State); Brandon Knowles (1st Team All-Division); Christian Resinger (2nd Team All-Division, All-Academic Team); Jakob Bennett (3rd Team All-Division).

High School Football – The Team received the Dick Reynolds Sportsmanship Award - Grayson Snyder (1st Team All-Division, All-Academic Team); Brady Anderson (2nd Team All-Division); Isaac Hague (2nd Team All-Division, All-Academic Team); Ryan Taylor (2nd Team All-Division); Sawyer Mason (3rd Team All-Division, All-Academic Team); Benjamin Donohue (3rd Team All-Division); Josh Bolek (All-Academic Team); Shea O'Brien (All-Academic Team); Gavin Card (All-Academic Team); Logan Smith (All-Academic Team).

2. Congratulations to Jon Anderson and the law firm of Brennan, Recupero, Cascione, Scungio & McAllister on their selection as one of 2024 Best Law Firms.

3. Middle School Teacher Michelle Conary Brittain received the 2023 RI Middle School STEAM Educator Award presented by the Rhode Island Department of Education and the Rhode Island STEAM Center at Rhode Island College. Michelle was in attendance and was congratulated.

VII. Public Forum

Robert Cardozo from Richmond wanted to publicly apologize to Superintendent Picard and Donna for his tone at the last meeting. It was totally uncalled for and he apologized to both.

Polly Hopkins from Hopkinton stated she would just like to read an update and this is posted on social media. This concerns a Southwell vs. McKee mask lawsuit against the Rhode Island Department of Health and the Governor. So she will just read what was put on social media. “We’re pleased to announce that Southwell vs. McKee Parents’ Mask Lawsuit against the Governor and the Rhode Island Department of Health reached a settlement this morning after months of tedious wrangling over the Parents’ Discovery Demands. The State has agreed to hold public hearings on the efficacy of masking among other things. This is notable because, to our knowledge, this is the first time there will be a public regulatory process in the cost risks versus benefits of masking in K through 12. This means the State of Rhode Island will have to prove in public that masking children does more harm – more good than harm. This means the parents get to submit their own experts and the State will have to defeat them before they ever order another masking mandate on a child again. Our parents are confident that when the hearing is held, we will be able to show, beyond any reasonable doubt, that masking children causes irreparable harm, which was the quote from the Judge. We expect that the public hearings will be held in late winter, early spring. More to come later. There were some other concessions being wrested from the incompetent fingers of our government bureaucrats but this was a big one. Additionally, as part of the settlement agreement, all School Committees will be receiving a letter from RIDOH explaining that masks are not mandatory ever, even in the case of a positive COVID test. They are only recommended. No kid can be excluded from school for not wearing a mask ever again. Thank you.

Vin Levcowich, Richmond resident, English Teacher at Chariho High School and President of NEA Chariho, stated he was here today to address an abhorrent and hateful public statement made by a member of this Committee about a certified educator in this District. School Committee member Polly Hopkins posted the following despicable comment to Facebook and I quote “Someone should check on Sandra Laub...after her notorious role playing Golda Meir, she leapt onto the Anti-racist bandwagon and whole-bodily supported the ARTF at Chariho. She must be splitting into two between support of Israel and Hamas. Snort” (end quote). For the record, I’m disgusted that I had to say those words aloud. As you allow these hateful words to sink in, allow me to read two numbered points from this Committee’s code of Basic Management Principles and Ethical Standards: #16 – Avoid criticizing employees publicly and #17 – Strive to promote a harmonious working relationship with all School Committee members and school staff that are based on mutual respect, fairness and openness. To my knowledge, this Committee reviews this code each year. Employees of Chariho are expected to adhere to all policies created by this Committee. Is this Committee prepared to practice what they preach when one of their own clearly violates their principles and ethics? Thank you for your time. Chair Giusti stated that it is not practice typically for this School Committee to respond to public comment but given what was just shared, she will allow Polly to respond. She asked Polly if there was anything she would like to say? Polly thought it was a fair statement. She..all of that is public knowledge. Her use of the word “comrade” is public knowledge; it is on public social media. Her banner role of playing Golda Meir – yeah – she has seen her on the Anti-Racism Task Force saying the things that are counter to exactly those two points so there is concern when you have somebody that is so socially out there as a teacher, putting this stuff on social media and then the counter on both ends of it. It is pretty stunning. Chair Giusti stated they will hold on any further comments and move on.

VIII. Business

A. FY23 Audit – Superintendent Picard reported that, as this was Sahady’s first year with Chariho, testing of our processes was extensive so as to ensure controls were comprehensively evaluated in their first engagement. A special thanks to Ned Draper, Lynn Gouvin and the entire Business Office for a job well done as there were no findings or recommendations. She recommended approval of the FY23 Audit. Andrew made a motion, which was seconded by Linda, to approve the audit. Ned noted that Mary Sahady was in attendance to give a brief rundown of the audit. Mary apologized for being a little “frazzled”. It took her over two hours to get here. The introduction is 100% correct; the financial records here are in really good shape. The books and records have been well maintained. The information the public receives on a monthly/quarterly basis is accurate. She noted that the format was slightly different this year as they have to comply with regulations. She then went through each page. She stated that the first section hasn’t changed. This is where the District has the opportunity to speak of the results. Following this description are the financial highlights, the statement of activity and changes and, lastly, an opportunity to talk a little about the budget and actuals. The basic financial statements start on page 15. You will see that all assets and liabilities are broken down into two categories; governmental and business. The District does have a number of business-type activities with the largest being the lunch fund. Page 16 is the net position – the sum total of all activities. She explained that although there is a negative number, there are no problems as this is a result of the pension liability. The District deposits each year the required amount. Page 17 is a statement of activities. They are required to report major funds separate from non-major funds. Pages 19-21 are the Reconciliation; this is where the fund balance is broken down (restricted, committed, unassigned). Of the \$7.9 million, \$3.4 million is non-spendable as claims deposits. Committed funds total \$1.8 million and that leaves \$2.6 million remaining. Page 48 is a detail of the District’s committed fund balance at year-end. You still have COVID-related expenses. There is also money set aside for capital projects that have been awarded but not completed. The notes to the financial statements describe this in more detail. The next section includes Proprietary Funds with the major one being the lunch fund. There is no significant change in District policies and there was a positive fund balance at year-end. She then reviewed the notes and explained each one. The surplus was \$1.6 million with \$500,000 of that a result of timing of contributions from the Towns. Lastly, is supplementary information – Annual Supplemental Transparency Report which is sent to the State for approval. The State uses this for comparisons with other districts. Tyler questioned the comment regarding timing of contributions from member towns. Ned explained that because Chariho is unique, the towns receive the State Aid. State Aid came in after the vote and additional money from the State came in after that. This is what Mary meant by timing. She wanted to point this out because people will think it was bad budgeting. Tyler then asked if the pension is

driven by the State to which Mary replied “yes”. He noted a big increase from last year. Ned commented that is because of COVID, what you had the last few years changes the liability. You will see big swings. Tyler then questioned a discrepancy in the Employer’s share listed one place at \$41 million and in another for \$39 million. There is about a \$2.5 million difference. Ned noted that each year there is an adjustment. The State basically nets out (about a \$3 million expense but it nets itself out). Mary showed Tyler where it nets out. Gina stated there is always a question about fund balance. Our policy states we should keep 2-4%. What is a healthy fund balance the District should have? Mary responded that GASB would say 10%. Andrew asked, in her professional opinion, what is more typical? Mary replied that it is hard to say because you are a District. It should be higher (at least 5-7%) because you have no way to raise additional monies. You have to go back to the towns. Andrew thanked Mary and thanked Administration. Acknowledging that this was the first year with her firm, the community should feel good about the quality of the books kept here. This is worth celebrating. Sharon Davis commented about the fund balance at 10%. Please don’t think you can have that. The towns already give around 80% to the District. Gina replied that she was not looking to ask for that but the public should be aware that the District’s percentage is very low. Bob Cardozo asked Mary when does she envision the District’s post-employment expenses to exceed 10% of the budget to which Mary replied that she cannot project that as it is not the job of an auditor. You would need an actuary or special study.

Andrew McQuaide made a motion, seconded by Linda Lyall and it was
VOTED: To approve the FY23 audit. In favor: Unanimous.

Chair Giusti stated she would entertain a motion to move Item G ahead of Item B.

Jessica Purcell made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin and it was
VOTED: To move Item G before Item B. In favor: Unanimous.

G. Necessity for School Construction Stage II Application Procedures Review and Discussion - Mario Carreno, the Chief Operating Officer at RIDE who oversees the School Building Authority, is here to provide an overview of the Stage II application process and to answer questions. As a reminder, all Districts must have an approved 5-year Capital Improvement plan and in order to get a Capital Improvement plan approved, a Stage II application is required. Mario noted that he is a fellow School Committee member in Lincoln. You need to do a cursory look at the opportunities that are available to you. The State will reimburse districts for school construction projects with the base at 35%. Because Chariho is a regional district, the base is 61% but it can go as high as 81%. The average age of your elementary schools is 75 years old with two close to 100 years old. The District is down to 1107 students or just over 65% capacity. There are a lot of extra seats in old buildings. The State itself is down to 23,000 students and it wants to make sure that it is not throwing good money after bad. All four of the elementary schools are deemed in poor shape. Does it make sense to renovate? If you have two buildings you can combine to one new one, the State will give money for that. For example, if you look at getting a \$150 million bond, your share will only be \$28 million to perhaps do all new schools. The State will pick up the tab. The bonuses will be expiring soon so now is the time to seize the bonus money. The Stage I application the District sent in identifies your needs which total \$30 million just to keep the elementary schools safe, warm and dry. Does it make sense to spend money on these buildings that are almost 100 years old? This is a critical decision. Does it make sense to renovate when you can right-size your buildings for your needs? Stage II is where you look at solutions to the needs. This is when you hire an architect as you need to hand in plans to the State by February 15. You can take advantage of your annual vote in April and be under contract by the end of the year. As of July 1st, the State’s commitment decreases but your needs won’t go away on their own. Your buildings are not designed to meet the needs of students in this century. Linda commented that the 2018 statewide bond unlocked housing incentives; what is the number of districts who have taken advantage of this? Mario noted that 45 communities, including Charter Schools, have participated for a total of \$4 billion in bonds. Tyler stated he assumes bonds are issued through the State. Is Chariho issuing the bond or are the towns – how are the bonds issued? Mario replied, generally speaking and he will use Lincoln as an example as they just got approved last November, the Town of Lincoln issued the full amount of the bond until it completes the project and then the State will pay a piece of the debt service. Tyler asked whose credit rating is that based off of – the three towns or the State’s credit rating? He assumes the

municipal credit rating will be different than the State's credit rate which will affect the interest rate which affects the overall cost. Mario noted that for school construction projects, you have to go through RIHEBC (Rhode Island Health and Educational Building Corp) because they provide a credit enhancement. School construction bonds are very attractive to investors for two reasons; the first is because a significant piece is backed by the State and the second piece is if you don't make your debt service payments, the State will syphon away your basic education aid – your funding formula – to pay investors. So, as a result, you get a very favorable interest rate because it is basically guaranteed for investors. Gina noted that there is a shift in renovation versus new construction to which Mario added that in building new, you don't have to concern yourself with phasing; it moves faster and you don't run into surprises. It is cheaper to build than to renovate. Chair Giusti clarified that if they go out to bond for \$150 million, our cost would be \$28 million versus the projected \$30 million to keep the old buildings warm and dry to which Gina added that it would just cover the highest level of priority and nothing more for the \$30 million. Chair Giusti questioned the incentives. Mario explained that the bonuses can be stacked on each other with a focus on new/fewer to address underutilization, educational enhancements and safety/health. This is the only way to get four of the six bonuses. Gina stated that the 2017 Stage I application noted \$70 million in building deficiencies. Warm and dry is just to keep the buildings running. She asked Mario to explain why RIDE requires the District to discuss new buildings. Mario explained that many districts enter the process without having all the details. You need to form a building committee and work smoothly with your towns. You should meet between Stage I and Stage II to discuss the process. He is here to explain the opportunity that will not be available in six months. He highly doubts that the bonuses will be extended. He can promise that the District will never again see an 81% reimbursement rate. Gina added that the District has a Necessity for School Construction Committee which begins the process. If the bond passes, we then have appointees to a Building Committee as required by the Chariho Act. Kathryn questioned if Mario had any thoughts to the empty buildings they will have with the State incentivizing new buildings to which Mario responded that the State has a Committee to see if the old buildings are OK for affordable housing. Gina felt that they would most likely have to knock down the buildings so they can build on the same property. Mario noted that if they were able to sell the buildings that could be seed money. Gina explained that this is just Stage II, then they have to get to Stage III which she is guessing could take 5 years. Mario commented that June 30, 2029 is the deadline to finish projects so the longer you wait, the higher the construction costs go. It is better to work quicker. Kathryn asked if Mario had a copy of the integrated design approach as mentioned with Northeast Collaboration that is consistent with State policy. Mario explained that this is similar to LEED. There are certain construction requirements. We will meet with the District on any new construction because you won't get State Aid if you don't comply with LEEDS. He will send this information to the Superintendent and she can share it. Andrew noted they are in the early stage of the process and need to be concerned with timelines to which Gina provided her timeline of meetings. On January 8, there will be a community meeting to incorporate conversations with an official plan provided to the School Committee at the February meeting. The application then goes to RIDE. You can't just build what you want. The Necessity for School Construction meetings are open to the public and Mario will come to every meeting scheduled with the Town Councils which are scheduled for: Richmond-January 16; Charlestown-January 22; Hopkinton-February 5. They hope to put this on the ballot in April. Tyler commented that he is hearing a lot about empty seats in classrooms. Why doesn't he see that? They can reconcile the wasted space but he is concerned with overenrolling. Are our classrooms small compared to the rest of the State? Gina noted that the average is 20 students but Hope Valley is small with 15 and 14 in each of the Kindergarten classes. They did see a bump in pre-K. Tyler then asked when the Stage II application is realistically required by the State to which Gina responded that the Capital Improvement Plan is required by February 15th even if we just do warm, safe and dry. Tyler questioned if they would see the costs in the Stage II Plans to which Gina replied "yes". Polly asked when did they begin Stage I? Gina recapped the timeline. This began last January/February during the budget process. On March 14th they discussed decommissioning of Hope Valley School. On April 25 she was directed by the Committee to do a survey. The District Strategic Plan was approved on May 23 and in June the Committee asked her to do facility walks through all the elementary schools. On September 12th the Committee approved Requests for Proposals. Updates to the public were provided during the October 12th and October 24th meetings. On November 8th the bids were scored and on November 14th you selected SLAM as your architect. A Necessity for School Construction Meeting was held on December 4th; this was discussed at the December 12th Health and Wellness Subcommittee Meeting and now tonight. These meetings were all open to the

public. Polly stated that they resubmitted Stage I in September so was it during Stage I when you lost the vote? Gina responded that there never was a vote. That is why you had to resubmit Stage I. Enrollment had to be redone and updated. Colliers helped revise Stage I. Kathryn noted that they will have to do Stage II regardless of whether they renovate or do new. These are inflationary times and costs are going up fast. You said yourself that this could take like five years. Personally she has been involved in construction projects and just one item, in less than nine months, over doubled in price. It seems to her that it is going to be difficult to really foresee the actual expense this will be. Building, there are always unforeseen things. Every company has a shortage of help which pushes up wages in every area. These are real concerns she has. Andrew commented that Kathryn's concerns are well-noted and are applicable to any work they have to do. Gina stated that they have to go out to bond to which Chair Giusti added that this is regardless of whether they do warm, safe and dry or a new build. She does not want this lost. The District does not have the money for the necessary repairs. Mario noted that some districts are making schools more efficient. Once you issue a bond, you cannot exceed it. You will know the cost ahead of time. Municipal bond interest is at 4%. There are no mechanisms to refinance. The interest is also reimbursable. Jessica asked if there is any way to speculate the cost to maintain the old buildings versus building new ones. Gina advised all to come to a Necessity for School Construction meeting. That is why they have talked about closing Hope Valley School. Our students deserve schools that do not look like they do. Chair Giusti reminded all that they are looking at \$28 million for new versus \$30 million for the old buildings to which Jessica added, plus the cost to maintain new buildings versus the old ones. Gina stated that they can staff three schools in a more efficient way to which Ned added because we have vacancies, this is the time to reduce staffing. They won't need to let anyone go. Lower enrollment, less staff. We can right-size our buildings. In the audit we were \$900,000 short on labor because we could not fill the vacancies. Gina noted that the District has three bonds that will sunset in 2027 so this is a good time for the District to consider this. Ned stated that right now they cannot do building rentals like we used to. We are relying on volunteers. Gina added she has been meeting with the principals and they feel having three new gyms with separate entrances can be designed as community hub buildings. We currently cannot use the tennis/basketball courts at Richmond School. Larry asked if they phase out Hope Valley School, will the staff be absorbed to which Gina responded that they have to look at the timelines of when you begin to phase out. Ashaway is a two-track school which means two levels in each grade. This would become three levels. Hope Valley pre-K would go to the school that holds pre-K. Through attrition, they would not have to let anyone go. Larry questioned the two principals (Ashaway and Hope Valley) to which Gina replied that Chariho has the lowest number of administrators in the State. She would not be cutting anyone. Craig questioned the savings to which Gina noted that they will have to look at timelines. If there is room in the back of the current Charlestown School, they can begin to build the new school there and then use the current Charlestown School for the students from one of the other elementary schools. Craig stated so eventually there will be a savings in closing the old elementary schools and replacing them with three new ones. Having three buildings to maintain versus four – there are going to be savings. Ned noted once they get the new enrollment projections and work with SLAM, they will get a ten-year horizon on enrollment and staffing needs. Staffing will decrease with a decrease in enrollment. Craig felt they should see a 35-40% decrease with one less building. Kathryn asked if part of SLAM's directive is to come back to the Committee and tell them what the cost will be to renovate versus new to which Gina replied that she believes the plan they show the Committee will be a capital plan for warm, safe and dry. Larry asked if they had considered building one new school for all elementary students to which Gina responded that this never went to a vote but was not what the community wanted. Tyler felt that Hopkinton losing an elementary school will be huge to that town. Gina stated that the plan is to use the sites we have unless a town has another site they would prefer. The Chariho Act does not state that students have to attend school in their town. In Section 13, page 14, it references that a student who enters in a school in Kindergarten will remain in that school which means if you live closer to an elementary school that is not in your town, you can begin school there. We will create zones. It is no different than what you have been allowing as parents can voluntarily transfer their child to any one of the elementary schools. Andrew noted that the District has already been doing this with our special education population. We are transporting students with disabilities to an elementary school in another town. If we feel strongly about that, then we need to rethink how we are educating our special education students. Bob Cardozo from Richmond asked, if we go out to bond and if construction is \$150 million (hypothetical) and the Chariho community is on the hook for \$28 million and there is a cost overrun, who is responsible? Mario explained

that the District cannot overspend its bond. Investors may invest more. Newport was short and went to market and got additional money but are only paying back the original amount. It is easier to make changes at the beginning. The State will not approve a project that will cost more than what you plan to borrow. Gina added that the Building Committee, appointed per the Chariho Act, would meet and review costs. Craig noted that they just went through this with CALA. Sharon Davis from Hopkinton asked if they are building next to or tearing down current buildings, does it cover land acquisition. Gina explained that demolition is part of the cost. The District could demolish the 1904 building as part of its project. Sharon questioned if the District was expecting to tear it down to which Gina replied that she cannot say. She hopes to know more in January. Polly commented that it said demolishing was not included. Gina responded that it won't cover demolition of a building if we are not building on that site. We have to build on that site and it will be covered. Helen Sheehan from Richmond felt it was a narrow pathway to get to 81%. What is the likelihood we will get 81%? Right now, the way the taxes go, Richmond and Hopkinton pay more. She would like to see the cost allocated 1/3, 1/3, 1/3. District Clerk Donna Sieczkiewicz, who was on the last building committee, explained that Richmond and Hopkinton do not pay more per student than Charlestown because of the amount those two towns receive in State Aid. Charlestown actually pays more per student. The last building project, Charlestown agreed to pay 1/3 but was not required to because the Chariho Act states they pay according to enrollment. Andrew agreed but noted that they could have a conversation around bonds. Payment would be subject to the conversation. Craig also agreed. Charlestown pays \$2,500 more per student than Richmond and Hopkinton. Mario explained that the 81% depends on how the District chooses to do the project. The pathway is there for the 81%. A few other districts put language in place that they could not exceed a certain number. Chariho can do this. Louise Dinsmore from Richmond thanked the Committee for having this conversation. She looked at the November 20th Necessity for School Construction meeting minutes. Did the meetings with the Town Councils take place? Gina reiterated that the Health and Wellness Subcommittee discussed this and she has already noted the dates for the meetings with the Town Councils. Louise stated that it is a nice timeline RIDE puts out. Stage II mentions town approval. After the School Committee approves this, it goes in front of the Town Councils. What happens if the Town Councils don't approve it? Gina explained that they are presenting to the Town Councils on the dates noted. Because we are a District, it doesn't mean that the Towns have to approve it. We have to go bond no matter what. Louise asked how they planned to solicit community support in such a short timeline along with the budget cycle coming up. Please consider all of this. Gina replied this is about saving money. We recognize our taxpayers want us to be more efficient. We are trying to be more efficient to which Louise replied that this will cost them a lot more. Gina asked Louise if that was the truth. Louise asked where the \$440,000 for the architect was? Gina responded that this money was already committed by the School Committee. Louise noted that she had been on five projects that came in way over budget. Jim Sullivan from Charlestown stated he was an educator and on the School Committee. He visited all the schools. He stated they have to be very cautious. In his humble opinion, this is too much of a financial commitment and he would not support it. He felt they were asking for too much. Andrew agreed with Jim that it was too much of a financial commitment but what they heard tonight, continuing the status quo will cost us more money. This is the fiscally prudent thing for them to be doing. He agrees with the Superintendent. You can't have it both ways. You are asking us to be fiscally responsible. Practice what you preach. Suzanna Tingley from Richmond said she does not want to be intimidated by RIDE's timeframe. They are only incentivizing new schools. Look at some of the designs – bizarre. RIDE has partnered with Rhode Island Housing to get more low income properties. Craig commented that several years ago when "factory in the field" failed, taxpayers' spoke. \$25 million to \$30 million will have to be borrowed at less reimbursement than if we build new. This is not the factory in the field. We are going from four elementary schools to three, one for each town. We went with what taxpayers wanted. Pat questioned how this will be packaged to the taxpayers. Will everyone vote on the entire package? Tyler replied that this is different from the budget; it has to pass in each town by a majority in each town. Chair Giusti thanked Mario for attending. Chariho taxpayers are paying to support other school projects. She would like to see some of the money come home to Chariho students. She repeated the expense it will be to renovate old buildings. Senator Elaine Morgan from Hopkinton (District 34) commented that ten years ago RIDE came out of Rhode Map RI; RIDE wants to use scare tactics. These buildings will be used to house illegals and low income people. Urban families will move here and change the rural character. At this point, Chair Giusti noted they will move on to the next item.

B. Contract with SLAM Architects – Superintendent Picard recommended acceptance of the proposal and approval of the AIA contract with SLAM Architects, pending legal counsel review, per specifications that were developed at the Necessity for School Construction Committee Meetings of November 20th and December 4th, which include required services to complete a RIDE Stage II Application, secure necessary specifications to go to bond and set in place necessary approvals for a Chariho Building Committee to be formed. This contract was reviewed by the Necessity for School Construction Subcommittee who unanimously voted to send the contract to the School Committee for final approval. As a reminder, the formation of a Building Committee, as noted in the Chariho Act, is established if the bond passes. That Building Committee will then direct/determine the final project in the RIDE Stage III and Stage IV processes per the Chariho Act. Craig made a motion, which was seconded by Andrew and Karen, to approve the contract with SLAM Architects. Larry asked if this item can be tabled to a later date to which Gina explained that the Committee has already approved SLAM as the architect. This is just approving their contract. Sharon Davis questioned why no borings were done at Hope Valley School to which Gina replied it was because the District will not be using this site. It would cost more money. This is required. The Committee has selected the architect and the District has already used its emergency \$500,000 for State Aid reimbursement. Any additional projects or repairs we will have to pay dollar for dollar for. Polly asked how this happened before going to bond to which Gina explained the process. There are bonuses on the table and we have to go through the Stages now. Carol Peterson from Hopkinton stated she had a question on the exclusions (referring to the contract). Aren't some of these necessary to move forward? Derek from Colliers Project Management noted that was a great question. Those are all the things the District will eventually need but right now we are only doing what is absolutely necessary to get through Stage II. We are not doing anything quickly or irresponsibly. We want a minimal risk to the taxpayers. Craig asked about the demographics report that was done not too long ago. Why do they need another one if this one is not that old? Derek explained that their strategy is to minimize costs but the State is the majority partner and they are looking at covering 80% of the cost. They are a tougher audience as it is their money. They have two criteria when it comes to demographics: 1) when you build you have room to house all your students and 2) they do not want communities that want to build something larger than what is needed. They will not consider a demographics report that is older than six months. NESDEC has most of this information already so that will help with the cost. Jennifer Sylvia from Hopkinton requested clarification. The District is asking for \$150 million and hoping to get 81% from the State so taxpayers will pay 19%. Gina clarified that the District is not asking for \$150 million; that was a hypothetical number for use to compare a new build to renovations. This agenda item is about the contract so she cannot go into detail about the State Aid reimbursement but the District would be eligible for 81% if it meets all the criteria the State sets forth. Suzanne from Hopkinton asked where the money for the architect came from to which Gina replied that it was already committed by the School Committee. Tyler added that they will still need to have an architect on board regardless if they decide to do a building project or not. They need to move forward with capital projects/renovations which require an architect.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Andrew McQuaide and Karen Reynolds and it was VOTED: To approve the contract with SLAM. In favor: Unanimous.

C. School Committee 2024 Meeting Schedule Revision – Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the revisions to the 2024 School Committee Meeting Schedule which include incorporating a Budget Workshop in a Regular Meeting and deleting and/or changing the date of previously-scheduled meetings. With the many subcommittee meetings we will be involved with, organizing our calendar to meet our current needs made sense. We can always add a meeting if one is needed. Andrew made a motion, which was seconded by Tyler, to approve the School Committee 2024 Meeting Schedule revision. Chair Giusti added that they will be moving to one meeting per month but she reminded all that the subcommittee meetings are public meetings and are open to all. Helen Sheehan stated that the next Necessity for School Construction meeting didn't have a start time. Gina replied that the start time has not yet been determined. Chair Giusti reminded all School Committee members that if they are in favor of this, the meetings will have to be a little tighter.

Andrew McQuaide made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin and it was VOTED: To approve the School Committee 2024 Meeting Schedule revision. In favor: Unanimous.

D. Budget Transfers – Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the Transfers for 12/12/23. Craig made a motion, which was seconded by Andrew and Tyler, to approve the Transfers for 12/12/23. Kathryn questioned the cost of two café tables and four chairs for \$1734.00. This seems like a lot of money. Karen noted that the District has to use approved vendors to which Kathryn replied that it still seems astronomical. Gina reminded all that the School Committee cut the furniture budget the last two years.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Andrew McQuaide and Tyler Champlin and it was VOTED: To approve the Transfers for 12/12/23. In favor: Champlin, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds. Abstained: Colasante. The motion carried by a vote of 10 in favor with 1 abstention.

E. FY24 Budget Updates – Andrew, due to the late time, referred all to Ned's memo but requested that the standard practice will be for Ned to give an overview going forward.

F. School Committee Budget Workshop Meeting Format – This item was requested by the Budget Subcommittee. Tyler commented that the Subcommittee met last night and put more definition/parameters around the format. They have a few recommendations to put forth to the entire School Committee. There is a column in there that is misleading – FY24 Year-to-Date – this is not how the District appropriates/spends money. There is also a column for each year. The Subcommittee is recommending removal of the Adjusted Budget column and only see the actuals as this is all that is needed. This should include all the transfers. Removing those columns gives space for a FY25 Proposed column. They want to see what the variance is from FY24 approved and the variance in FY23 actuals in real dollars. They would like to see variances of 2% from the prior year or more than a \$10,000 increase; they want the rationale. Gina gave an example of some items that were previously funded by ESSER – would this help? Tyler replied “yes”. They would like to be much more informed. In Section 3 of the budget book on page 8 (Summary), they would like a key of what each code means (object codes). They have also requested that at each Budget Workshop the agenda should include Public Forum. This is where we do our work. He would like to hear adjustments/motions made. The District Clerk questioned the need for Public Forum as this item is for items not on the agenda. Where a Budget Workshop is for the sole purpose of discussing the budget, the public can speak on this item. Tyler agreed that a Public Forum would not be needed for the Workshops. Gina summarized: 1) Budget Updates; 2) School Committee actions and 3) Record and stream these meetings. Craig asked if Ned and his staff were ready or able to handle these recommendations to which Tyler responded that Ned was involved in these discussions. Ned noted that the budget packet will be ready after the 1st of the year. Tyler noted one more request. He would like to see a recommendation from Administration for cuts that will level fund the budget at the January 11th meeting. Linda commented that where she worked, they would build a budget from zero, then 1%, 2%, etc. to which Tyler responded that the District has reporting constraints; they cannot go below FY24. They will see, with the comparative at the end, if this is conducive to what they want. Chair Giusti noted that procedurally no motion is needed but asked if there were any members who were hesitant about the recommendations that were made. If so, please say something now. She thinks this is a great move in the right direction. We want to work with Town Councils and the community in getting a budget passed. She asked Gina and Ned if they were comfortable which they were. Kathryn thanked the Budget Subcommittee as she feels this will be advantageous to all and she realizes it took a lot of time.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin and it was VOTED: To extend the meeting past 10:00 PM. In favor: Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds. Opposed: Phelps. The motion carried by a vote of 10 in favor with 1 opposed.

IX. Consent Agenda Items

Chair Giusti asked if there were any items to be pulled. Seeing none, Craig acknowledged the donations and thanked the donors.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Andrew McQuaide and Linda Lyall and it was VOTED: To move all of the Consent Agenda Items. In favor: Unanimous.

A. Minutes – Approved the following:

1. Executive Session Minutes of November 14, 2023 – Approval of Executive Session Minutes of October 24, 2023 (minutes not sealed).
2. Regular Session Minutes of November 14, 2023.

B. Bill Review – Accepted.

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

D. Permission to Award Contracts – Awarded the following:

1. Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) Section 75 and Related Analysis to NyHart per the attached bid tabulation provided by Ned Draper. The agreement proposed is for three years with two optional renewal years for a five-year total of \$27,350.
2. Clinical Psychological Services to New England Psychological Services (NEPS) for services in FY25-FY27 per the fees provided and subject to legal review.

E. Home Instruction – Action taken in executive session.

F. Grants – None at this time.

G. Donations – Accepted the following:

1. Donation from the Chariho Rotary of books to the elementary schools.
2. Donation from Nancy Pirnie, Richmond, RI of a flagpole kit with solar light, valued at \$250.00, as a parting gift to Chariho Central Office Administration.
3. Donation from Joseph Jr. and Martha Quaratella of \$50.00 in memory of their father/father-in-law, Joseph Quaratella Sr. (Mr. Q), a long-time employee of Chariho who passed away on March 14, 2023.

X. Reports

A. Subcommittee Reports

1. Budget Subcommittee will meet on December 11, 2023. Included in the packet was a copy of the draft minutes of November 6, 2023.
2. Health and Wellness Subcommittee Meeting will be held on Tuesday, December 12, 2023 at 4:00 PM in the High School Library. Included in the packet was a copy of the draft minutes of their meeting on October 10, 2023.
3. Policy Subcommittee draft minutes of the November 14, 2023 meeting are attached. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for January 9, 2024.

B. Superintendent's Report

1. Effective School Solutions Parent Workshop – The Language of Behaviors: Understanding Challenging Behaviors – Wednesday, January 10, 2024 at 7:00 PM – see the attached flyer for the Zoom Meeting link.

C. Coming Events were highlighted.

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

Andrew McQuaide requested, given what was shared in Public Forum, an opportunity to discuss the conduct of School Committee member Polly Hopkins. He would like an opportunity to vote on a formal censure of School Committee member Polly Hopkins at the next meeting or an earlier one if that can be arranged.

XII. Adjournment

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin and it was VOTED: To adjourn at 10:02 PM. In favor: Unanimous.

Donna J. Sieczkiewicz, Clerk