

Chariho School Committee Meeting
Regular Session – March 12, 2024

Committee Members Attendance: Chair Catherine Giusti, Vice Chair Karen Reynolds, Donna Chambers, Tyler Champlin (arrived at 7:00 PM), Kathryn Colasante, Polly Hopkins, Craig Louzon, Linda Lyall, Andrew McQuaide, Larry Phelps, Patricia Pouliot and Jessica Purcell.

Administrators and Others Attendance: Superintendent Gina Picard, Assistant Superintendent Michael Comella (arrived at 7:00 PM), Director of Administration and Finance Ned Draper, Assistant Director of Administration and Finance Lynn Gouvin, Systems Administrator Eric O'Brien, Development Officer Katie Kirakosian, Middle School Principal Greg Zenion 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 6:30 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)(1) for the purpose of discussion and/or action pertaining to an individual's job performance or character (1. Approval of Executive Session Minutes of February 15, 2024 - Pre-deprivation Hearings/Non-Renewal of Teacher Contracts and 2. Review of Superintendent's 2023-2024 Goals and 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 February 15, 2024 - Home Instruction Requests and 2. Approval of Home Instruction Requests); any persons to be discussed have been so notified. In favor: Unanimous (Champlin was not in attendance for the vote).

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

Chair Giusti reconvened the meeting at 7:04 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 an individual's job performance or character (Review of Superintendent's 2023-2024 Goals) remain sealed.

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

VOTED: That minutes pertaining to an individual's job performance or character (Review of Superintendent's 2023-2024 Goals) remain sealed. In favor: Chambers, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds. Abstained: Champlin. The motion carried with 11 in favor and 1 abstention.

2. Superintendent Picard recommended that minutes relating 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 relating to the privacy of students and their records (Approval

V. Disclosure of Executive Session Votes

Vice Chair Reynolds reported there were five votes taken in executive session. The first vote, approval of executive session minutes of February 15, 2024 – Non-renewal of Teacher Contracts,

passed with Chambers, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds all voting in favor.

The second vote, to move items #3 & #4 before item #2, passed with Chambers, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds all voting in favor.

The third vote, approval of executive session minutes of February 15, 2024 – Home Instruction Requests, passed with Chambers, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds voting in favor.

The fourth vote, approval of home instruction requests, passed with Chambers, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds voting in favor.

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

VI. Recognition – The following were congratulated:

1. High School Girls' Indoor Track: Erin vonHousen won the 3000 and took third in the 1000 at the RIIL State Championship. She then set a school record with her 2nd place finish in the 2-mile at the New England Indoor Track and Field Championship. At the Nike Indoor Nationals in New York City, she set new school records finishing 21st overall in the 1-mile on Friday, finishing 24th in the 800 meters on Saturday and lowering her school mark on Sunday in the 1-mile by 5 seconds finishing 11th overall.

Emily Brown took third in the 55-meter hurdles which qualified her for the New England Championship where she finished 19th in the preliminaries. At the Nike Indoor Nationals, she competed in the preliminaries of the Emerging Elite 60-meter hurdles finishing 48th.

2. High School Boys' Indoor Track: Eli Sposato came from behind to win the 300 at the RIIL State Championship. He finished 10th in the 300 at the New England Championship where he lowered his own school record. He took 26th in the Emerging Elite 400 meters at the Nike Indoor Nationals.

Tom Golas, Ethan McCann, Cam Eidam and Jared Peltier finished 6th in the 4x800 relay at the State Championship and competed in the New England Championship where they finished 26th.

3. High School Senior Regan Clark placed 3rd at this year's prestigious Poetry Out Loud Rhode Island State Competition.

4. Ashaway Grade 3 student Edie Mitchell, Artessy Logo Winner.

5. Middle School Wrestling Team placed 6th in the State Tournament with Enzo Falcone placing 3rd (75 lbs), Cian Archer 4th (82 lbs), Landon Martin 5th (112 lbs), Cedar Shuler 7th (180 lbs) and Garrison Maraia 8th (106 lbs).

6. (In attendance) Middle School Wrestler Michael Newton won his second straight State Title at 100 lbs and Jackson Nickerson won the State Title at 165 lbs. They attended with Coach Josh Merritt.

(In attendance) High School Wrestler Ryan Currier won the 157-lb title at the RIIL State Championship Wrestling Tournament and placed 4th at the New England Wrestling Championship.

(In attendance) Freshman Wrestler Aidan Fahlman was named the Freshman State Champion (144 lbs).

7. CTC Hospitality Juniors Gavin Apice, Morgan Allen, Juliet Costa, Ellie Hammett and Olivia Swanson placed 1st in the Hospitality Management Competition at the Crowne Plaza (two juniors were in attendance). Each one received a \$2,000 scholarship to Johnson and Wales University, reciprocal for four years for a total of \$8,000. Senior students Alexia Katechis, Madeleine Barrette, Hailey Harrington, Madeline Moorehead and Kali Callahan placed 3rd and they each received a \$1,000 scholarship to Johnson and Wales University, reciprocal for four years for a total of \$4,000. Congratulations to all and thanks to Instructor Don Fair.

VII. Public Forum

Louise Dinsmore from Richmond had a couple questions. The first pertained to the Stage II application that was submitted to RIDE. She understands it was around 4,000 pages. If someone

from the public wanted to review this, could they get a digital copy? Gina noted that a digital copy would have to be split into many files but she could provide a link to the document. Louise's next question was where did the money come from (\$440,000) to pay SLAM and Colliers to which Ned responded that it was taken from FY23 balance reserve. Louise wanted to know what the language will say on the ballot for the budget vote. Gina replied that the Chariho Act has specific language. The question is "Shall the Chariho Regional School District annual budget for the school year as adopted by the regional school committee be approved" (yes or no). This is done so that ballots can be printed for multiple years and it saves money. We do provide fiscal information to each town for their voters.

VIII. Business

A. Get the Foam Out Grant – Superintendent Picard recommended approval to submit the Get the Foam Out Grant request to the RIDE School Building Authority (with potential collaboration with the Rhode Island Recycling Club) in the amount of \$54,221.60 (with a match of \$27,110.80) for reusable trays, reusable plates, tray and plate carts, dishwasher soap and descaler for use in the Middle and High Schools. Katie Kirakosian is in attendance to answer any questions. She thanked Katie, Ned and Toni Lucier from Chartwells for all their work on this grant. Andrew made a motion, which was seconded by Craig, to approve submission of the Get the Foam Out Grant. Jessica asked if this will help meet the legal requirements for composting to which Gina replied it will help us avoid the cost of hauling the trash. Katie noted there will be another grant coming to the Committee that pertains more towards the composting issue. Jessica asked about the match. It was explained that it is in our food service fund; we are adequately funded. Jessica asked about this occurring during the middle of the year to which Katie explained that legislation comes into effect January 1st and will continue. She used this date as this is when the funds will be expended. Craig asked if this will be going out to elementary as well. Katie replied that the largest need is at the High School and Middle School. We already have reusable trays at the elementary level so there is a limited need there. They will collaborate with the elementary schools as these students are the most excited when it comes to separating everything. Kathryn asked if the District was compelled to do this to which Katie noted that as of January 1, 2025 the Styrofoam ban goes into effect. We are not compelled to apply for the grant but we want to be fiscally responsible. Kathryn asked if Chartwells is our provider, why do taxpayers have to take on this expense? Ned responded that we are an enterprise fund which is a combination of federal grant money and students' buying meals. We got further ahead during COVID so the way we anticipate it, we think we will be fine in FY25 but may need to increase meals in FY26. This is not a complete taxpayer cost. Gina added that the food service provider is not responsible to provide everything to which Ned noted that things like equipment in the kitchen is our responsibility.

Andrew McQuaide made a motion, seconded by Craig Louzon and it was
VOTED: To approve submission of the Get the Foam Out Grant. In favor: Unanimous.

B. 21st Century Learning Centers Grant – Superintendent Picard recommended approval to submit the Nita M. Lowey 21st Century Community Learning Center Grant request to RIDE for \$180,000 annually or \$900,000 over five years for Chariho's Afterschool Tutoring, Culture and Health (CATCH) Program to support academic performance in math, support academic success for students receiving special education services and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and promote a positive school climate through support of students' social-emotional wellbeing. We plan to partner with Arcadia YMCA, Tomaquag Museum and the Center for Evidence-Based Practices at Bradley Hospital/Incredible Years. There is no cost to families for this program. Katie is available to answer any questions. She then thanked Katie, Susie Scanapieco and Dr. Comella for all their work on this grant. Craig made a motion, which was seconded by Andrew, to approve submission of the 21st Century Learning Centers Grant. Pat questioned how this would mesh with 365 at the YMCA. Gina explained that they will come to us on site and run programs here. Tyler wondered what would happen after five years to which Gina explained that ESSER was used before but this was part of the operating budget so we will have to consider it five years from now. Katie added that we will reapply at that time. Andrew noted his appreciation as these are groups he is concerned with. Gina

stated that we are the only District who applied so we are well placed to get it and every five years as well. Katie added that Chariho is the only one in Washington County to apply. It is difficult for our neediest students to get transportation so she is glad they will have access. Jessica Swain from Ashaway asked if this was similar to the YMCA School's Out Program to which it was noted that the School's Out Program is a day care program that parents pay for. The YMCA did come into our schools to provide this service and did assist with homework but it was a before and/or after day school day care program. Katie added that staff will identify the students. Mike added that this grant is for a specific population for Middle School and CALA students.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Andrew McQuaide and it was VOTED: To approve submission of the 21st Century Learning Centers Grant. In favor: Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot and Purcell. Recused: Reynolds. The motion carried by a vote of 11 in favor with 1 recusal.

C. 2024-2025 School Calendar – Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the 2024-2025 School Calendar. Vacations are aligned with other South County School Districts' and RIDE's calendar. She noted that a couple years ago, Westerly decided to do away with February vacation and took a hit with the accountability system that is now in place because of the extensive absence of both students and staff. They have gone back to taking the week break in February. Teacher and student attendance is now being monitored so she would not be in favor of doing away with this break. Andrew made a motion, which was seconded by Craig, to approve the 2024-2025 School Calendar. Jessica asked if it wouldn't be better to cut back on this break now that we are required to take Juneteenth off. She feels this should be considered due to the problem we have with wind and rain days. Craig asked, for future reference, if we get inclement weather, are these options that can be used (i.e. take days from the spring break)? Gina replied that typically you wouldn't change a school calendar mid-year as people have already made plans. This year we have asked the State to waive two of our days that we were asked to close and not run buses. She is still waiting to hear. Craig asked so what are the options if we can't go past June? Gina responded that State law says a minimum of four days have to be built into your calendar. There is a statute in the law regarding federal disaster days which the two days we have requested be waived were considered federal disaster days. She does think the Council would say if you use all four days first, they may consider waiving days. Virtual Learning is not an option with wind as power is usually out. Our issue lately hasn't been with snow days. Virtual Learning law states that students must have three hours of live instruction for the day to count as a school day. If power goes out in one or all towns, there is a good chance we won't get three hours in so the day won't count.

Andrew McQuaide made a motion, seconded by Craig Louzon and it was VOTED: To approve the 2024-2025 School Calendar. In favor: Unanimous.

D. Approval of Funding Formula Resolution – Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the Funding Formula Resolution. If legislation changes, we could see a reduction in aid.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Andrew McQuaide and it was VOTED: To approve the Funding Formula Resolution. In favor: Unanimous.

E. Appointment of School Committee Building Committee Representatives (one per town) – Superintendent Picard stated that after reviewing the Chariho Act, the School Committee will need to appoint one member per town (not two as previously thought). The Building Committee, per the Act, will be comprised of the same number of members as the School Committee. The Towns have been asked to forward the names of three individuals who reside in their respective town as soon as possible. Pat and Karen both volunteered for Richmond. It was noted that the votes taken at the last meeting need to be rescinded as two members from each town were appointed and only one member from each town is required. Andrew rescinded his motion and Donna rescinded her second to appoint Craig Louzon and Linda Lyall to the position of School Committee Representatives from Charlestown to the Building Committee. Andrew rescinded his motion and Pat rescinded her second

to appoint Tyler Champlin and Larry Phelps to the position of Hopkinton School Committee Representatives to the Building Committee. Andrew rescinded his motion with Tyler and Craig rescinding their seconds to appoint Karen Reynolds and Patricia Pouliot to the position of Richmond School Committee Representatives to the Building Committee.

Linda Lyall made a motion, seconded by Andrew McQuaide and it was VOTED: To appoint Craig Louzon to the position of School Committee Representative from Charlestown to the Building Committee. In favor: Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds. Abstained: Louzon. The motion carried by a vote 11 in favor with 1 abstention.

Patricia Pouliot made a motion, seconded by Polly Hopkins and it was VOTED: To appoint Tyler Champlin to the position of School Committee Representative from Hopkinton to the Building Committee. In favor: Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds. Opposed: Chambers. Abstained: Champlin. The motion carried by a vote of 10 in favor with 1 opposed and 1 abstention. Donna provided her reason for opposing Tyler is because she was a little concerned with the fact that he homeschools his children.

Jessica made a motion, which was seconded by Andrew, to appoint Karen Reynolds as the School Committee Representative from Richmond to the Building Committee. Kathryn felt they should discuss qualifications of each person as Pat is interested in the position as well. Chair Giusti noted that she feels Karen has been supportive of the bond and initiative and Pat did not support the bond and is not in favor of this project so she could not support her. Jessica added that Karen was in attendance more than Pat at the Necessity of School Construction meetings. Karen, speaking for herself, noted that she attended all of the Open House visits and she works in education. Kathryn stated they needed to look at cost overruns at which time it was noted that she needs to stick to the motion. Kathryn noted her reasoning for requesting this is different. She doesn't know what kind of expertise they might have; maybe building or have they been in charge of budgets. That's why she asked. Craig expressed his confusion. There is a motion on the floor and the way Roberts Rules are supposed to work is you discuss the motion. Discussion should be on the candidate we are voting for. If some people find the candidate is not worthy enough in their mind, they can shoot the candidate down and if the candidate does not come up with sufficient votes to be selected, then we move on and nominate someone else. Gina stated it is her understanding that if there is another member who is interested, you can ask your Town Council to appoint you. Chair Giusti asked if there are any more comments on the motion which is to appoint Karen. Kathryn wanted to address what Craig said. Her intention was to have a more informed vote. Without knowing any expertise either has as far as building or budgets, she can't make an informed vote like she would like to. Chair Giusti explained that people are certainly welcome to abstain as well.

Jessica Purcell made a motion, seconded by Andrew McQuaide and it was VOTED: To appoint Karen Reynolds to the position of School Committee Representative from Richmond to the Building Committee. In favor: Chambers, Giusti, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Purcell and Reynolds. Opposed: Hopkins and Pouliot. Abstained: Champlin and Colasante. The motion carried by a vote of 8 in favor with 2 opposed and 2 abstentions.

F. State of Rhode Island Memorandum of Understanding to Participate in the State Electricity Consortium Purchasing Pool – Superintendent Picard recommended approval, per the memo from Ned Draper dated March 12, 2024, of the State of Rhode Island Memorandum of Understanding so that we may be included in the statewide electricity bid going out this spring/summer. If approved, we will participate in the State program with the intent to select the most advantageous rate and term provided. Craig made a motion, which was seconded by Andrew, to approve the State of Rhode Island Memorandum of Understanding to participate in the State Electricity Consortium Purchasing Pool. Craig asked if this will have any effect on the agreement we have with the entity in Bradford to which Ned responded that it will not.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Andrew McQuaide and it was VOTED: To approve the State of Rhode Island Memorandum of Understanding to participate in the State Electricity Consortium Purchasing Pool. In favor: Unanimous.

G. Budget Transfers – Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the transfers for March 12, 2024. Craig made a motion, which was seconded by Andrew, to approve the Budget Transfers for March 12, 2024. Kathryn requested clarification on Purchased Service (#4). It goes from one line item to another. How will this be reflected in the budget? We do make transfers every time we meet. Gina commented that this was an adult who was moved for a student in need. Ned explained that Chariho has a policy that governs budget transfers location/object. Once we meet the threshold, we have to get School Committee approval. They try to link e-codes so the numbers are pretty much the same as long as they are like expenses but across different object codes is when it will look different. The budget details Inactive, Adjusted, and Actuals.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Andrew McQuaide and it was VOTED: To approve the Budget Transfers for March 12, 2024. In favor: Unanimous.

H. FY24 Budget Update – Andrew asked Ned to give a high-level overview. Ned noted that they have implemented a freeze as the healthcare trend is running higher than expected. We are hoping the vacancies give us room. Tuitions are tracking well and we have reasonable results with grant funds. Louise questioned the Status Report FY24 – what has not been expended? For example, line 212 Library has a quarter of a million dollars remaining and we are three quarters into the year. Ned replied that this line item is the one that probably contains wages. We run a summer payroll; it does not stop the end of June. Louise then questioned line 221 Curriculum Development. What curriculum needs to be developed? Ned responded that you will see salaries in here to which Gina added that the curriculum team works all year long. Mike noted that they are currently revising Health, Social Studies, Middle School STEM and Business. Louise thanked them for the answers.

I. FY25 Budget

1. Adjustments to FY25 Budget – The Superintendent asked Ned Draper to enclose a memo with everyone's questions. He included that along with a memo pertaining to the FY25 Healthcare estimate. He is recommending an increase to our budgeted FY25 healthcare line by 2.5%, or an increase of \$163,305, in addition to the FY25 budget (section 3, page 2, line 1375) to ensure adequate healthcare funding levels. The Superintendent stated she fully supports his recommendation. This is also the last opportunity for adjustments to be made prior to adoption. If adjustments are made, she will request that the Committee take a short recess so Ned can recalculate figures. Craig questioned the request for an additional teacher at \$90,000. Gina explained that Early Childhood Intervention has more students so we are in need of adding an AM and PM class for Preschool. We also have an increase in DCYF tuition that we were informed of after the budget was prepared. Craig stated that a motion was made and seconded and he voted to put money back for Hope Valley School. He agrees with what Ms. Wilcox said at the Annual Meeting. We will not know why people didn't support the budget; whether it is because they want Hope Valley School to be phased out or they can't afford the increase to the budget. With the additional expenses we have to incur, he made a motion, which was seconded by Kathryn, to cut \$434,831 from the budget by removing Kindergarten at Hope Valley School next year. Jessica stated that she would rather address the items that need to be added in first before making cuts. Craig rescinded his motion and Kathryn rescinded her second. Jessica made a motion, which was seconded by Karen, to add \$330,000 to the budget for DCYF tuition (\$75,000), Healthcare (\$165,000) and a Pre-K Teacher (\$90,000). Jessica Swain from Hopkinton asked what school would the Pre-K teacher be assigned to and has it been posted? Gina responded that she is not sure at this time where the teacher will be placed and no positions will be posted until after the budget is passed. Louise asked if the \$90,000 for a teacher is a higher step teacher to which Gina noted not necessarily. This amount includes salary and benefits. Louise asked about the healthcare to which Tyler replied that amount is for the District. Kathryn felt \$90,000 seemed high; how much goes to healthcare? Ned noted that overall, benefits can be 30-40% depending on the plan chosen. Gina added that this individual will

need both Early Childhood plus Special Education certification. Andrew felt recruiting someone for this position will not be a walk in the park and he asked Gina to provide some rationale for this. Gina explained that when they needed to hire a teacher for the Charlestown Pre-K class, it took about 6 months and then that person didn't work out. This position serves a high-level of need population. We also have issues trying to find teachers for High School Math and Science as these jobs pay more in the private sector than teaching. We normally have to hire top step for these positions. Pat questioned the use of APRA funds for two teachers to which Gina explained that the District didn't hire two teachers. We have an agreement with Effective Solutions and instead of hiring teachers, we use their services. The Middle School Dean position was moved to ESSER, which was not her recommendation last year. Ned was asked to provide figures with this \$330,000 added back. Ned stated that the total is \$765,000 (which includes the money that was added back for Hope Valley Kindergarten). Before State Aid, Charlestown is at 2.22%; Richmond at 2.41% and Hopkinton at 4.84% for an overall increase of 3.28%. After State Aid, Charlestown is at 1.64%; Richmond at 1.9% and Hopkinton at 5.1% for an overall increase of 2.94%. Tyler asked Ned to provide the dollar amounts which are as follows: Charlestown \$12,734,000; Richmond \$16,016,000 and Hopkinton \$15,896,000. Donna commented that she doesn't believe the Committee has a choice about adding back this \$330,000. Jessica questioned why the amount is higher for Hopkinton after State Aid; it is usually lower to which Gina replied not always.

Jessica Purcell made a motion, seconded by Karen Reynolds and it was
VOTED: To add \$330,000 to the budget for DCYF tuition (\$75,000), Healthcare (\$165,000) and a Pre-K Teacher (\$90,000). In favor: Unanimous.

Craig stated that he predicted that Hopkinton would go over 5%. State law doesn't allow going over 4%. They can ask for a waiver but the State doesn't have to approve it. Craig made a motion, which was seconded by Linda, to cut \$434,831.00 from the budget by eliminating K at Hope Valley School next year. Ned was asked to review the numbers for this cut. The cut would include: a part-time TA for \$11,000; removal of two buses for \$160,000; a full-time teacher for \$96,000; a full-time custodian for \$43,000; removal of capital projects for \$95,000 and a full-time TA for \$30,000. Jessica noted it is difficult to consider this. She understands why this is on the table and she thinks this is a strategic and targeted move considering where we need to go as far as consolidation and having four schools across three towns is proving to not be sustainable but she does want to acknowledge that it is a difficult discussion. She appreciates the feedback from folks on how they are feeling but Hopkinton at 4.2% is as unfeasible as Hopkinton at 5.1%. Tyler stated that he wanted to see what it would look like to put it back. He held back on expressing his opinion on closing the school but he felt it was time to publicly state his position. He thinks there is some confusion amongst, maybe it's just Hopkinton voters to be 100% honest, what he's hearing, what people are saying is 'how do we keep Hope Valley open?' or, 'if we approve the budget, we keep Hope Valley open.' Well, no, we are kind of at that point where we are between the proverbial rock and a hard place where if we approve this budget as is, with this cut, Hope Valley K is gone which is putting us on a path to remove Hope Valley completely, 100% in the future. While he does not think that it is a wrong path, and the most fiscally responsible path, it's hard to swallow for a lot of folks. He also noted that rejecting the budget would only hasten the complete closure of Hope Valley School. Now we're just shooting ourselves in the foot because, if we reject the budget, we're heading down a path to level funding which means Hope Valley closes totally next year. Hinging on a vote in May, we would be sending 191 students to other schools. We don't have the space to put the kids. He asked for the plan for the past two months and hasn't seen it yet. Even with this cut, Hopkinton will be at 3.99%. Their municipal budget is \$130,000 or .07%. This will put them over 4%. This budget doesn't have a shot to pass in Hopkinton. We have to cut it further. Craig stated that he had empathy for parents and kids but he truly believes wherever they go, they will get the best education possible. We have been working on phasing out Hope Valley for a long time. He has faith in our administration; they will do the best job for our students. This \$434,000 is a start; it doesn't mean we have to stop there. Whether new schools win out, we will be down to three schools. You said it Tyler, Hopkinton wants its cake and eat it too. Kathryn commented that Tyler mentioned a misunderstanding that is out in Hopkinton – he posed a good question. Gina, you have thought about this – 14 more classes in District. Andrew reminded

all that the motion on the floor is to remove Kindergarten only. Gina replied, the 'what if' game is not a game you want to play with students' lives. Hope Valley has been on the table since the 90's. We talked about it last year. It is not an easy decision. She didn't make it; it came from the School Committee. She has spoken with staff and administration first. She has to be thoughtful around all students. Hope Valley will have 149 seats without Kindergarten. This is the reason she believes it should be done in phases. How to impact the fewest students. Begin with possibly 36 first which some of these are only three years old so they will not be going to Kindergarten. This year we had 31 Kindergarten students at Hope Valley. She does think the bond is important. Phase out Hope Valley slowly. If you do it all at once, classes will be 18-22 student. The majority of preschoolers are from Richmond and Charlestown, not Hopkinton. She cannot make any decisions on Kindergarten enrollment until she has a decision from the School Committee. In the end, she cannot create a plan without a commitment and a decision from the Committee. You have to tell me what to do. Chair Giusti stated that phasing out just Kindergarten was the Superintendent's initial plan; not close the whole school. We added it back in. She is concerned that some residents continue to believe that a way would be found to save Hope Valley School. There seems to be people who think there's a magic bullet to keep Hope Valley open forever and there just is not. That is reality and it is an unfortunate reality. We are trying to do it in a mindful way. A parent from Hope Valley stated they are affected by this. They live across the street. She asked what the class size was now to which Gina noted that we haven't enrolled for this year yet. She clarified that she was wondering the size this past year. Gina replied that the Kindergarten classes range from 15-20 with the numbers as follows: Ashaway 20/19; Charlestown 20/21; Hope Valley 16/15; Richmond 17/18/18/18. If we close just K at Hope Valley, the anticipated class size next year would be a maximum of 19 (they will go from 10 K classes to 9 K classes). The parent then asked if she could choose from any of the other schools to which Gina explained how the transfer requests will work. Polly asked hypothetically what would happen if everyone chooses to go to Ashaway School. Gina responded that they will be assigned to their closest school and it will be 1st come, 1st served based on enrollment. Abby McGuire from Hope Valley asked if the Chariho Act pertained to older siblings. Gina explained that once she gets direction from the School Committee, she can do a plan. We should be able to accommodate older siblings. As far as the Chariho Act goes, she used 5th grade as an example. Once it was decided to remove 5th grade from the elementary schools and place them in the Middle School, there was no longer a grade 5 for students to attend at the elementary level. They can matriculate so long as there is a program/grade available at that school. Jennifer Silvia from Hopkinton thanked the Committee for putting the motion back on. She feels badly for families in turmoil over this. For many in Hope Valley, Richmond is just a stone's throw away. She thanked the Committee for trying to understand fiscal responsibility to taxpayers. Gina explained that if the School Committee closes Hope Valley, teachers would be added in each school. We do have space but class size may increase. If the bond passes, they will prioritize Hope Valley. Jessica provided some historical data. She noted how unsettling this is but Hope Valley actually started as a junior high school. This has helped her have a perspective on change. Jessica Swain asked why they didn't start by removing Pre-K to which Gina replied there are very specific laws to Pre-K. We have to have specific class sizes. Richmond originally had all Pre-K, then Hope Valley had more space but we had to renovate rooms to move them there. Shelly McGlinsey, a Hopkinton resident and Richmond School teacher, thanked Craig for making the motion and the Committee for being fiscally responsible. She could not support the budget as it was and as much as she doesn't want Hope Valley to be phased out, she doesn't want the money added back in. She feels better now about the budget if this funding comes out. She knows this is emotional but they will take care of your kids at Richmond School. It just makes sense that each town has one elementary school. Diane Tefft from Hopkinton reminded all that construction of Bushy Brook is currently on the table which could be another 144 homes in Hopkinton. If the bond doesn't pass, where will these kids go? Chair Giusti stated, while she appreciates the question, it is not relevant to the motion. She anticipates, however, that it will be answered tonight. Craig responded that he believes there will be sufficient room if they phase out Hope Valley. Charlestown School is certified to hold 443 and currently has 253 students; Richmond is certified for 532 and currently has 360 students; and Ashaway is certified for 258 students and currently has 198. Kids are resilient. Wherever they go they will do well. Chris Morrone from Hopkinton stated that he currently has a first grader and one going into K next year. If his son

goes to Richmond and his other child stays at Hope Valley, would there be two different buses. Gina responded that we already have that for some families. Transportation for us is very high so getting them to the closer school will save money. Depot stops are still an option.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Linda Lyall and it was VOTED: To cut \$434,831.00 from the budget by eliminating Kindergarten at Hope Valley School next year. In favor: Chambers, Colasante, Giusti, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds. Opposed: Hopkins and Phelps. Abstained: Champlin. The motion carried by a vote of 9 in favor with 2 opposed and 1 abstention.

Karen asked what the numbers would be with this cut. Ned replied, before State Aid, Charlestown is at 1.47%, Richmond is at 1.65% and Hopkinton is at 4.06%. After State Aid, Charlestown is at .8%, Richmond at .86% and Hopkinton at 4.0%. Craig asked for an explanation on mowing. Ned commented that this will depend on the weather. If we get a lot of rain, we will need to mow more often. If we only have three schools, we will need one less custodian. It will also save on mileage as they will be traveling to one less school. Craig asked about Hope Valley capital projects to which Ned noted that was included in the cut that was just made. Karen asked what would it take to get Hopkinton to 2%. Gina replied they would have to close Hope Valley School. Chair Giusti noted that she would like to see them get Hopkinton to 3% to which Tyler guessed that this would mean about \$400,000 more in cuts without State Aid. Craig clarified that this is without the additional \$330,000 that may have to be added back due to a reduction from the State. Gina replied that he is correct. Pat asked about cloud-based services; why are we still using IT? Wouldn't this be a cost savings? Gina noted that we have done this already. Our IT Department is very small and we need it for curriculum needs. Ned added that Keystone is cloud based; there are so many different requirements by law. The IT Department is required to support the District and what is required by law. Chair Giusti commented that a Chair usually doesn't make motions for cuts so she is looking to others to do this. Tyler asked about the cut of \$160,000 for transportation. This may have been included with the Hope Valley cut. Gina explained that they can remove two buses with the Hope Valley cut. If the Committee chooses to go with depot stops and transportation shifts, it could result in another \$240,000 in savings but most will not want to see this at the elementary level. The Chair clarified that \$160,000 could be saved if they choose to go with depot stops for the Middle School and High School (a cut of two buses). Craig stated that, as a member of the Transportation Subcommittee, they ended up allowing a bus to go into a housing development off Pine Road because of parent concerns. They will have to live with their decision if they move to depot stops. Ned noted that if there is a Kindergarten student, all kids could go to the K stop. Linda made a motion, seconded by Tyler, to cut the budget by \$160,000 by creating depot stops for the campus runs. Ocean State Transit will develop the routes and they are reviewed by police for safety before they come to the School Committee. Ned stated that most bus complaints go to him. Some parents will question why we don't have more stops. We need to balance time and distance. Karen asked how many kids take the bus to which Gina replied that they plan for all of them but every season could be different. For example, High School athletics may have an impact on the number of High School students who ride. Ocean State is very good. They will let us know if we can take a bus off. Ned noted there are 1325 registered riders for the campus to which Jessica noted that is over one-third of our student. Gina commented that our buses are typically never full. Andrew stated that the reason why he opposed it last year is because it impacts the daily lives of many students and families, particularly for students who don't have economic means to provide transportation. He will oppose this but will respect the majority. Chair Giusti asked how far will a student need to walk to which Ned replied that the current policy allows K students a $\frac{1}{4}$ mile walking radius, grades 1-4 have a $\frac{1}{2}$ mile radius, grades 5-8 have a $\frac{3}{4}$ mile radius and grades 9-12 up to one mile. Craig echoed Andrew's comments but he is not hearing many other ideas for cuts so he feels obligated to vote in favor of this. Shelly McGlinsey commented that she lives on a main road and she has a child who is only 14. She feels $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile is a long walk. As a teacher, she knows it is hard enough to get middle and high school students to go to school but walking may only add to this. She feels attendance may become an issue. Larry stated that he lives on a main Rd, 138 Spring Street, and they already have depot stops. Teach them, it can be done safely every day. Kathryn noted her concern was more

with the heavy backpacks some of these kids carry. What about winter when it is dark and snowy. Tyler knows this is done in conjunction with the police; are there certain restrictions to which Ned responded that he cannot speak to the criteria used by the police but he believes areas that have blind spots or environmental issues would not be used as a bus stop. A parent from Hope Valley agreed that a mile is not a big deal but her issue was more about the speed of vehicles. Even though it might be a 25-mph zone, people don't drive 25 and they don't stop at crossings. Jessica Swain suggested they increase the parking on campus for students to which the Superintendent responded there is no space on campus. Andrew added that, while he appreciated the suggestion, this will not save money in this budget as paving is quite expensive. Katie commented that one of her green teams is collecting data on transportation and one suggestion would be to carpool. Jen Silva asked how many HS/MS runs have depot stops to which Gina clarified that a depot stop is where a majority of the bus is at one stop. We don't currently have depot stops but out-of-district students may be utilizing them. One way to look at this is just like late buses. The stops are spread out. Chair Giusti noted that if this fails, they can still look at cutting one bus.

Linda Lyall made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin and it was

VOTED: To cut the budget by \$160,000 by creating depot stops for the campus runs. In favor: Chambers, Champlin, Giusti and Louzon. Opposed: Hopkins, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds. Abstained: Colasante. The motion failed by a vote of 4 in favor with 7 opposed and 1 abstention.

Linda noted that she brought this up for discussion and vote but she does not like depot stops. She just does not know where else cuts can be made. Craig made a motion, which was seconded by Kathryn Colasante for discussion, to reduce the budget by \$80,000 by removing one bus with additional route efficiencies as possible. Gina and Ned both explained that this would be at the elementary level. Kathryn asked if this will lengthen the bus times to which Gina noted that there will be more efficiency as we will be moving kids closer to their school. Ned did note that Charlestown and Richmond Schools usually have one bus each that lags behind the others. This could be a challenge. Kathryn clarified that there would be no significant negative impact to children to which Ned replied that they will have to watch the times.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Kathryn Colasante and it was

VOTED: To reduce the budget by \$80,000 by removing one bus with additional route efficiencies as possible. In favor: Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Louzon, Lyall, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds. Opposed: Hopkins and McQuaide. The motion carried by a vote of 10 in favor with 2 opposed.

Craig asked for the number of late buses we run to which it was noted there are 3. Craig had no motion to make. Chair Giusti questioned lowering mowing to which Gina stated she wouldn't recommend this unless Hope Valley was closing completely this year. Andrew made a motion, seconded by Tyler, to reduce the fund balance by \$152,000 which would leave 2%. Andrew stated that historically he is against this as it is not fiscally prudent and we should be closer to 5-7%. Considering this, they talked at a Budget Subcommittee meeting how the shifts in enrollment affect one town more so than another. He would like to hear where people are at. Craig agreed with Andrew. He normally would not do this and has not in the past been supportive of it. He is leery of what the State may do but will side with Andrew on this. Kathryn asked Gina how many years has she been here to which Gina replied four. Kathryn asked how many times has the District had to use this. Ned replied, relative to the baseline, we have not but on a planful basis, we have. Gina added that every September you plan to use it. Tyler commented that they do make reservations post fiscal year end to which Ned said they keep an eye on the unassigned fund balance. Tyler clarified that you still leave whatever the % is to which Ned responded that he is correct. Gina noted that just recently they had an issue with the Hope Valley School septic system which had to be drained twice. This cost about \$6,000 and there was a question as to whether or not the leach field was giving out. We think it is a result of the high water table as we are still in a flood watch. She can't go back to the towns for more money. She is glad there hasn't been an emergency but she is

not a gambler. Chair Giusti echoed Andrew and Craig. Typically she is not in favor of cutting this but they have stalled and cuts need to be made. Andrew asked Ned to please share the dollar amount to which Ned noted it is just over \$1,200,000. Andrew commented that a district our size and with the age of the elementary schools, this money can go in a snap.

Andrew McQuaide made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin and it was VOTED: To reduce the fund balance by \$152,000 which would leave 2%. In favor: Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Purcell and Reynolds. Opposed: Chambers and Pouliot. The motion carried by a vote of 10 in favor with 2 opposed.

Jessica asked if the bond passes, can they cut capital at the other schools. Ned replied that they will need every penny they have in capital. You are running on your capital reserve. This will be the next budget hurdle the School Committee will have to face. Jessica then asked if they could cut custodial positions. Ned responded not unless you cut classrooms. Gina added that vacancy in this department is a huge problem. Chair Giusti stated that an additional \$232,000 has been cut to which Andrew asked if the numbers could be run again. While Ned and Lynn were calculating numbers, Tyler requested an explanation on page 22 of 49, section 4 #4999-5002 – there seems to be large increases over FY24. Gina explained that this is money for Professional Development which was placed in ESSER last year and put back in the budget this year. Tyler asked if this is mandated by contract to which Gina replied it is state mandated. New teachers have to have training. A majority of the increase is a result of things that ESSER covered. We utilize Early Release Days so we aren't paying more money. To Mike's credit, RIDE has given us coaching money. Kathryn suggested they look at cutting Purchased Service line #4964 – catering refreshments. FY25 is almost double FY24 (the actual was \$10,732 with \$19,451 budgeted this year). What is this? Gina explained that this covers snacks for students during testing or special events run by schools. Kathryn felt parents could supply the snacks for testing. She made a motion to cut line item #4964 by \$9451.00. There was no second to the motion. Gina felt that this was minimal and that parents and teachers already supply a lot. Andrew made a motion, which was seconded by Linda, to adopt the budget. Chair Giusti requested they take a recess while final numbers are calculated. Andrew rescinded his motion and Linda rescinded her second.

Tyler Champlin made a motion, which was seconded by Linda Lyall and it was VOTED: To extend the meeting past 10:00 PM. In favor: Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds. Opposed: McQuaide. The motion carried with 11 in favor and 1 opposed.

Andrew McQuaide made a motion, seconded by Linda Lyall and Jessica Purcell and it was VOTED: To take a five minute recess so Ned and Lynn can compile the numbers. In favor: Unanimous.

Chair Giusti reconvened the meeting at 10:07 PM.

Ned stated that the numbers are as follows: Before State Aid, Charlestown is at 1.07%, Richmond is at 1.25% and Hopkinton is at 3.66% for an overall increase of 2.11%. After State Aid, Charlestown is at .36%, Richmond at .30% and Hopkinton is at 3.41% for an overall increase of 1.4%.

2. Adoption of FY25 Budget – Ned stated that the member town's contribution with debt service is \$58,341,117, an increase of 2.11%. Superintendent Picard recommended that the Committee adopt the FY25 budget with the member town's contribution with debt service at \$58,341,117, an increase of 2.11%. Andrew made a motion, seconded by Linda, to adopt the budget with the member town's contribution with debt service at \$58,341,117, an increase of 2.11%. Jim McCabe from Charlestown noted some concerns. The goal is to keep Hope Valley going but he assumes if the budget doesn't pass, Hope Valley will go. Can they look at moving Kindergarten and Grade 1; would this be an option? Craig appreciated the suggestion but wondered if the Chariho Act would play into this. Gina explained that if the School Committee agrees to close another grade at Hope Valley, that grade

would no longer exist so Hope Valley would no longer be a K-4 school. Jen Silva wondered if any positions were created as a result of ESSER funding to which Gina replied no. The School Committee moved a Dean into ESSER last year but this was an existing position and she moved it back to the operating budget this year. Jen answered 'so you can cut this' to which Gina stated she would not recommend it. Chair Giusti noted that any position can be cut so long as they are compliant with the contracts. Jen felt that they could have cut teacher raises last year, instead you removed World Language. Jen was asked if she ever received raises to which she replied she didn't. The places she has worked for either closed down or merged. Pat Moore from Hope Valley has been in the District for fourteen years. Looking at the Census, why burden the lowest paid people. Hopkinton is the lowest paid. Her household combined income is less than a top tier teacher. People who work in the schools are amazing but the budget needs to be cut. Chris Morrone questioned a teacher was removed from Hope Valley when the money was cut, but a teacher is being put back in for Pre-K. Gina explained that they are anticipating a lower salary for the additional teacher.

Andrew McQuaide made a motion, seconded by Linda Lyall and it was VOTED: To adopt the budget with the member town's contribution with debt service at \$58,341,117, an increase of 2.11%. Chair Giusti stated that a roll call vote will be taken on adoption of the budget. Donna Chambers – yes; Craig Louzon – yes; Patricia Pouliot – no; Larry Phelps – no; Karen Reynolds – yes; Kathryn Colasante – no; Catherine Giusti – yes; Polly Hopkins – no; Andrew McQuaide – yes; Jessica Purcell – yes; Linda Lyall – yes; Tyler Champlin – it still puts Hopkinton over the 4% cap – no. The motion carried by a vote of 7 in favor with 5 opposed.

IX. Consent Agenda Items

Chair Giusti asked if any items needed to be pulled. Tyler pulled A-1 and A-2. Craig recognized the donations and thanked the donors.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Andrew McQuaide and it was VOTED: To approve the remaining Consent Agenda Items. In favor: Unanimous.

A. Minutes – Approved the following:

3. Regular Session Minutes of February 15, 2024.

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

1. Financial Reporting Software – Approved contracting with ClearGov to provide software services per the attached proposal at an annual cost of \$29,000 and a one-time setup fee of \$8,775 with a prorated June 1st start date for a total of \$40,191.67. The source of funds for this is capital fund balance from our FY23 reservation.

F. Home Instruction – Action taken in executive session.

G. Grants – None at this time.

H. Donations – Accepted the following:

1. Donation from The Wellness Collaborative (Dan Fitzgerald) of 95 personal toiletry bags, valued at \$750.00, to Chariho schools.

2. Donation from Home Depot, Westerly (Bernie and Robin) of vinyl plank flooring, valued at \$180.27 to the CTC Construction Program Playhouse Project. A special thanks to Teacher Assistant Bonny Pride for her assistance with this donation.

A-1. Andrew McQuaide made a motion, seconded by Polly Hopkins and it was

VOTED: To approve the Executive Session Minutes of February 15, 2024 – ESP MOA (minutes unsealed February 15, 2024). In favor: Chambers, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds. Abstained: Champlin. The motion carried by a vote of 11 in favor with 1 abstention.

A-2. Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Andrew McQuaide and it was VOTED: To approve the Executive Session Minutes of February 15, 2024 – Approval of Executive Session Minutes of January 9, 2024 (minutes not sealed). In favor: Chambers, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell and Reynolds. Abstained: Champlin. The motion carried by a vote of 11 in favor with 1 abstention.

X. Reports

A. Subcommittee Reports

1. Necessity for School Construction Committee met on February 12, 2024. The draft minutes of this meeting were included in the packet.

B. Superintendent's Report

1. SurveyWorks – The Superintendent stated they are reaching out to families to complete SurveyWorks. Last year there were 857 responses; to date this year there are over 1000. She is proud of the increase.

2. Artessy – HS Chorus 3/22 at 7:00 PM in the MS Auditorium; Visual and Performing Arts from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM on 3/23 – Middle School. She encouraged all to attend.

3. Effective School Solutions will hold their third workshop on *Depression in Children and Adolescence* on Wednesday, March 13th at 7:00 PM via zoom. See flyer for more details.

4. Kindergarten Registration will begin on March 23rd (information will be available at Artessy).

C. Coming Events – She encouraged all to take a look at the District calendar for upcoming events.

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

Jessica requested they consider forming a subcommittee to look into the history of Chariho; like a timeline.

Andrew asked that discussion take place on School Committee Member Phelps' complaint to the Office of Human Rights.

Craig commented that those who shoot down the budget (by voting against it) should be making motions to cut something.

XII. Adjournment

Andrew McQuaide made a motion, seconded by Craig Louzon and it was VOTED: To adjourn at 10:32 PM. In favor: Unanimous.

Donna J. Sieczkiewicz, Clerk