

Chariho School Committee Meeting
Regular Session Minutes
March 14, 2023

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

Administrators and Others Attendance: Superintendent Gina Picard, Assistant Superintendent Michael Comella, Director of Administration and Finance Ned Draper, Administrative Assistant to the Director of Administration and Finance Kathy Koziol, Administrative Assistant to the Assistant Superintendent Nancy Pirnie, Systems Administrator Eric O'Brien, Athletic Director Justin Cahoone, NEA Chariho President Vin Levcowich, Charlestown Town Council President Deb Carney, Hopkinton Town Councilor Sharon Davis, Richmond Town Councilors Michael Colasante and Helen Sheehan, Attorney Jon Anderson and School Committee Clerk Donna Sieczkiewicz.

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

Chair Giusti called the meeting of the Chariho School Committee, held in the Chariho High School Library, to order at 6:00 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was followed by a moment of silent meditation.

II. Motion/Vote to go into Executive Session

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin and Linda Lyall 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 (Approval of Executive Session Minutes of February 7, 2023 - Pre-Deprivation Hearings/Non-Renewal of Teacher Contracts); under the authority of R.I. General Laws Section 42-46-5(a)(2) for the purpose of discussion and/or action pertaining to collective bargaining (1. Approval of Executive Session Minutes of February 7, 2023 - NEA Certified Staff Negotiation Update); under the authority of R.I. General Laws Section 42-46-5(a)(2) for the purpose of discussion pertaining to litigation/legal update (1. Approval of Executive Session Minutes of February 7, 2023 - C.A. No. PC-2021-06474 - The Robinson Green Beretta Corporation v. Chariho Regional School District, through its Chair, Linda Lyall and 2. Update on C.A. No. PC-2021-06474 - The Robinson Green Beretta Corporation v. Chariho Regional School District, through its Chair, Linda Lyall); 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 7, 2023 - 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. All were asked 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 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 of Home Instruction Requests) remain sealed. In favor: Unanimous.

2. Superintendent Picard recommended that minutes pertaining to litigation/legal update (Update on C.A. No. PC-2021-06474 - The Robinson Green Beretta Corporation v. Chariho Regional School District, through its Chair, Linda Lyall) remain sealed.

Andrew McQuaide made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin and it was VOTED: That minutes pertaining to litigation/legal update (Update on C.A. No. PC-2021-06474 - The Robinson Green Beretta Corporation v. Chariho Regional School District, through its Chair, Linda Lyall) remain sealed. In favor: Unanimous.

V. Disclosure of Executive Session Votes

Chair Giusti reported that the first vote, approval of executive session minutes of February 7, 2023 – Pre-Deprivation Hearings/Non-Renewal of Teacher Contracts passed unanimously with Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot and Reynolds voting in favor.

The next vote, an amendment to the executive session minutes of February 7, 2023 – Litigation/Legal Update (RGB), was approved by Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot and Reynolds.

The next vote, approval of the amended executive session minutes of February 7, 2023 – Litigation/Legal Update (RGB) was approved by Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot and Reynolds.

The next vote, approval of executive session minutes of February 7, 2023 – Home Instruction Requests, was approved by Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot and Reynolds.

The next vote, approval of executive session minutes of February 7, 2023 - NEA Negotiation Update, was approved by Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot and Reynolds with Louzon abstaining.

The next vote, approval of Home Instruction Requests for this evening, was unanimous with Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot and Reynolds voting in favor.

The final vote, to close executive session and return to open session, was unanimously approved by Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps, Pouliot and Reynolds.

VI. Recognition – The following were congratulated:

1. High School Junior Erin von Housen placed first with a school-record time (10:33.07) in the 3,000 at the Class Medium Girls' Indoor Track Championship. She topped the field in the 1,000 at the Last Chance Qualifier Girls' Indoor Track Meet.
2. (in attendance) High School Sophomore Logan Rekowski has been invited by the National Academy of Future Physicians and Medical Scientists to serve as a delegate to the 2023 Congress of Future Medical Leaders in Boston. He will be representing the State of Rhode Island and Chariho High School. During the Congress, he will receive an Award of Excellence from the National Academy of Future Physicians and Medical Scientists. He will have the opportunity to be mentored by Nobel Laureates, deans of top universities and leaders in scientific research to learn about cutting-edge technology and will be able to watch a surgery in real-time. Participation in this program will earn him college credit. Logan has already completed a certificate in digital design with the RI School of Design and is part of the Chariho Robotics Team. Logan was congratulated and received a Chariho pin.
3. (in attendance) Chariho CTC's Hospitality and Tourism Management Team of Seniors Morgan Desarro, Isabella Basile, Elisabeth Kendall, Liliana D'Alfonso and (did not attend) Juniors Catalina Grandchamp, Jenna Antunes, Rachel Abbott, Lilian Raboin and Madeline Moorehead won the Hotel Management Portion of the 11th Annual Rhode Island Pro-Start High School Culinary Arts, Foodservice & Hotel Management Competition. Seniors were awarded a scholarship for \$2000 per year rolling for four years for a total of \$8,000 each and Juniors were awarded a scholarship for \$1,500 per year rolling for four years for a total of \$6,000 each. Congrats to Instructor Don Fair. They were congratulated and all received a Chariho pin.

4. (in attendance) Middle School Wrestling Team captured both Division II and the State Wrestling Titles - Varsity State Title results: Michael Newton placed 1st at 88 lbs; Jackson Nickerson placed 2nd at 140 lbs; Aaron Carrasquillo placed 2nd at 205 lbs; Enzo Falcone placed 3rd at 70 lbs; Dustin Peno placed 3rd at 100 lbs; Aidan Fahlman placed 3rd at 133 lbs; Aaron Rice placed 4th at 82 lbs; Ezrah Schonrog placed 4th at 165 lbs; Landon Charette placed 5th at 94 lbs; Jacoby Dove placed 5th at 126 lbs; Cian Archer placed 6th at 75 lbs; Reilly Porter placed 6th at 119 lbs; Evan Fahlman placed 7th at 150 lbs; Collin Collet placed 8th at 112 lbs; Brayden Craig 106 lbs. Cedar Shuler - JV State Champion at 140 lbs. Head Coach – Joshua Merritt and Assistant Coach – Terrence (Terry) Thomas. Along with receiving Chariho pins, the Varsity Team received citations from Representative Megan Cotter.

VII. Public Forum

Chair Giusti informed all that Public Forum is an opportunity for someone to speak on an item that is not on this evening's agenda. She reviewed the list and noted that only one speaker listed has noted the topic to be something not on the agenda. Andrew McQuaide stated that it is with sadness and celebration that he was acknowledging receipt of Pattee Dipollino's retirement letter. Pattee noted in her letter that it was a privilege and pleasure to be a business teacher, school counselor, class advisor, mentor and volunteer for the students of the Chariho Regional School District for the past 37 years. It is educators like Pattee who make our school district so great. He wanted to publicly acknowledge and thank her. Chair Giusti asked the others who wish to speak to please hold their comments as the topic they listed is on this evening's agenda. Procedurally, the School Committee speaks first on the topic being addressed and she will then call on those who have requested to speak.

VIII. Business

A. Adrenaline Fundraiser/Waiver for Fundraising and Commercial Activity Policy – This item was requested by Athletic Director Justin Cahoone. Justin and Shaun O'Neil from Adrenaline are in attendance. Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the fundraising request which will require a waiver to our current Fundraising and Commercial Activity Policy. Andrew made a motion, which was seconded by Donna, to approve the request and the waiver. Justin stated that there is a lot of talk and need for fundraising by our coaches who do a lot of work. Their main focus should not be fundraising; it should be the athletes. Shaun from Adenaline stated this was the 1st time in eighteen years he was invited to speak at a School Committee meeting. Adrenaline has been around for twenty-five years; he works in basically every school in the State. His goal is to make it easier for coaches and athletes to fundraise. Adenaline has an app that was developed to make it easy. This allows athletes to reach outside the community. The app saves all the information on athletes. He runs 18 fundraisers in North Kingstown and none step on the toes of any other fundraisers. He works directly with the athletic department. Gina noted that on page two, sections A & D of the policy, these fundraisers are not allowed. Other districts do not have this in their policy. Andrew stated that this was an opportunity for him to look at the policy and he is comfortable with the policy as is with a waiver for this fundraiser. He thanked Justin, Shaun and all coaches. Pat asked if the app was free or was there a cost to which Shaun replied there is no fee and no risk to any athletic program. The payout is dependent on the fundraiser. The app is just a mechanism to make the process easier. All contacts and all names are protected and not distributed; he will put this in writing.

Andrew McQuaide made a motion, seconded by Donna Chambers and it was VOTED: To approve the Adrenaline Fundraiser request which will require a waiver to the current Fundraising and Commercial Activity Policy. In favor: Unanimous.

B. Rhode Island Department of Education Memorandum of Agreement for the Menu for Success Program – Superintendent Picard recommended approval to enter into the Agreement with the Rhode Island Department of Education regarding the Menu for Success Program. Through this grant program, we will receive a food truck and associated supports that promote entrepreneurship, culinary arts, automotive learning, graphic design and more. If approved, all members will need to sign the MOA. Linda made a motion, which was seconded by Andrew, to approve the MOA for the Menu for Success Program. Linda stated that this sounds like a great idea. Kathryn asked if there was any cost to the District. Gina replied that the grant is from the School Building Authority. They will give us \$125,000 but we will have to purchase food and products to sell but these will bring in a profit. Pat asked if it is a

mobile food truck, can it partake in food truck events? Gina responded that it is mobile and there are lots of capabilities but we have to have teachers to do this work. Tyler asked how they are envisioning this being used to which Gina explained that the RFP is due this summer. The Governor will do one large event and teachers will be invested as part of a CTC program. This is new territory for school districts. We will start with what we know and then hopefully expand on that. Karen asked about the ten-year commitment to which Gina replied that they want to ensure that we will use this truck for the next ten years. Kathryn asked about the minimum of attendance at one RIDE organized event per year. Gina stated that they want to ensure that we will participate in one event per year. Lincoln has offered the site and their DPW will clean up. This is part of a business plan that students will create. We also do not have the Boosters at events that occur on the fields by the tennis courts so this could possibly be used there.

Linda Lyall made a motion, seconded by Andrew McQuaide and it was

VOTED: To approve the Rhode Island Department of Education Memorandum of Agreement for the Menu for Success Program. In favor: Unanimous.

C. 2023-2024 School Calendar – Superintendent Picard noted that the State now provides a calendar in hopes that Districts can coordinate vacation weeks and days off. Vacation weeks shift in April as we have to steer clear of SAT, PSAT and State testing dates. Greg Amore has suggested legislation that would require students to be out of school on April 23, 2024, which is the Presidential Primary date but this has not yet been decided. Superintendents met last Tuesday to discuss the calendar. She has decided to extend April vacation through Monday, April 22nd as families will probably not return from vacation for one day knowing students could be off on Tuesday, April 23rd. Students would return to school on April 24th. The rest of the calendar is typical with the majority of South County districts taking a full week off in February with the exception of Westerly. She recommended approval of the 2023-2024 School Calendar. Andrew made a motion, seconded by Linda, to approve the 2023-2024 School Calendar. Karen asked if they could forego Early Release Days on months with vacation weeks to which Gina responded that they have already coordinated with trainers for Right to Read on these days. We can, however, try to look at these in the future. Tyler noted that the District is locked into Graduation and questioned that only five days have been set aside for make-up days. He is worried about how long this calendar will go into the end of June. Gina replied that she and Dr. Comella have reviewed laws and as we have the longest instructional day in the State which exceeds what is required by law, we can request up to two days as we exceed the required hours. A colleague in Barrington does this so that would be two days we would not have to make-up. We could have an additional two days for Right to Read as legislation allows this. We can then walk back our calendar to 177 days need be.

Andrew McQuaide made a motion, seconded by Linda Lyall and it was

VOTED: To approve the 2023-2024 School Calendar. In favor: Unanimous.

D. 2024 School Committee Meeting Schedule – Gina explained that, because we livestream our regular School Committee meetings, she has changed the calendar so that the budget will be presented at the first School Committee meeting in January and not at a separate Budget Workshop. She recommended approval of the 2024 School Committee Meeting Schedule. Andrew made a motion, which was seconded by Karen, to approve the 2024 School Committee Meeting Schedule with one caveat. This School Committee has not had the opportunity to do a debriefing of the budget so a budget subcommittee has not yet been established. He can envision that a subcommittee may debrief on our budgeting process so that could have an impact on budget meetings.

Andrew McQuaide made a motion, seconded by Karen Reynolds and it was

VOTED: To approve the 2024 School Committee Meeting Schedule and should the School Committee establish a Budget Subcommittee and this subcommittee comes forth with changes to the Meeting Schedule, the School Committee will revisit the 2024 School Committee Meeting Schedule. In favor: Unanimous.

E. Discussion of Chariho School Committee's Participation in Tri-Town Subcommittee Proposed at Omnibus Meeting and Possible Appointment of Two Members – This item was requested by Chair

Giusti. She noted that at the Omnibus Meeting there was discussion about the potential to form a subcommittee comprised of members of the three Town Councils and School Committee to discuss issues pursuant to Chariho. At that meeting we talked about unfunded mandates. She had emailed correspondence with the Presidents of the Town Councils where they all agreed they would be putting this on their agendas. Before this went on an agenda, however, it came to her attention that a group had already formed and had already met twice. She is not really sure what was discussed as there was no posted agenda. They met purposely to avoid the Open Meetings Act and have discussions amongst themselves to see if there was an appetite to form this working group. There was further email correspondence between her and the Town Council Presidents of Charlestown and Richmond where the three of them kind of agreed that this was not in the spirit of what was discussed at the Omnibus Meeting. None of them were comfortable with forming a subcommittee that wasn't going to adhere to the Open Meetings Act. She has had subsequent conversations, one with Councilor Davis, and Chair Giusti noted that she appreciated Councilor Davis' efforts in terms of having this meeting and talking about things but as she shared with Councilor Davis, it sounds like things that were discussed had nothing to do with Chariho, like Land Use Act and accessory units. These are not Chariho-related issues. What made her further uncomfortable is if you are going to have a meeting to talk about things related to Chariho, she would have expected that they would have reached out to the Superintendent to see if she wanted to attend one of those meetings. To her knowledge, that didn't happen. She is not thrilled with how this process started. She has had some conversations with the Town Council President of Charlestown who has reiterated she did not attend these meetings although in the public it has been stated that she did attend these meetings. So right now, she is not inclined to engage in this process. It needs to be further vetted. Maybe the Town Councils need to discuss it a little further so they can reach a consensus. She is not in favor of engaging in this process as it is a little too murky for her right now. She is not pleased with how this happened and the meetings at Dragon Inn and someone's house when the bulk of this Committee didn't know that these were happening. Her recommendation is to not engage at this time. This is the position she has heard that Charlestown has taken and Richmond she does not think has come to a consensus and decided one way or the other. She will open this up to discussion. Donna stated that she is in agreement with Chair Giusti. It was suggested at the Omnibus Meeting but never officially said it was moving forward. She is not comfortable with this; she thinks it is very political. She has unfond memories of riding a school bus to Providence to discuss mandates. At any time, we can invite legislators to come here and speak to the entire School Committee. She understood the purpose to be discussion on unfunded mandates. She is not comfortable either. Andrew asked the Chair if a motion should be made prior to discussion to which the Chair responded that she is really just looking for consensus so no motion is needed at this time. Craig echoed the comments made. He doesn't think he will ever be in favor of this as we have elected officials who can address this as that is their responsibility. We have the largest elected board in the State of Rhode Island called the Chariho School Committee and they can address education mandates. Linda agreed as well. The Chair answered/alluded to some of her concerns. If this was set up to be an open meeting with minutes taken and who participated, but she is a little uncomfortable on how this has started. If she felt that the conversations were productive or could be productive, she would be open to that but at this point she is not sure what it is so she will vote "no" to participating. Kathryn stated she would like to say first that she was a little disappointed but not entirely surprised that this has taken on a negative characterization. Yes the impetus for this started at the Omnibus Meeting; her husband started it and he did reach out to a couple members of councils to see if there was interest. They did express interest and everything starts with conversations. There was no nefarious intent and again she is disappointed but not surprised that a negative cloud has been thrown over this. Basically this is incorrect. She watched the Charlestown Town Council meeting and she did not see that the Town Council of Charlestown said they would not do it. What they said was what their concerns were. If those concerns were met, she believes there was interest, however, she would readily say that the scope was hashed around at the Dragon Palace, a public place, and it did go beyond in conversation beyond the mandates. There was no quorum and it was perfectly legitimate for members that are on the Town Council or School Committee to meet with other elected officials on any issues they feel would benefit our towns and the people they represent. So to put a negative spin on a meeting that was initiated for the express purpose of alleviating unfunded mandates, something she's heard of since being in this town that is being a financial hardship on the school. Having beginning conversations in a public place to cast dispersions to that, she thinks is unnecessary. That is all it was. There is a lot out

in the public about a group that was meeting and making decisions. The only decision made was to bring the discussion to the Town Councilors. The appropriate person was reached to make sure the Open Meetings Act was not violated. There was nothing wrong with meeting at Dragon Palace or her home. Charlestown did not take it off the table. We can pick two School Committee members and two town councilors from each town and not make a quorum. Nobody would have a problem taking minutes. They would be transparent. So the incorrect thing that was said, and I am sure entirely innocently, at the Charlestown Town Council Meeting was this – basically it was said there is a lot out in the public about a group that has been meeting and making decisions. The only decision that was made was to bring the ideas that were discussed to the various Town Councils. That is the only decision that was made and again, as elected officials, there is nothing that precludes her from meeting with anyone on the Committee so long as it is less than a quorum and the appropriate person was reached out to regarding open meetings laws to make sure it was all done fine. Prior to her getting on the School Committee, she sent out an email – she can pull it out of her notebook – to show that she was asking what would qualify as being allowed or disallowed under the OMA. So there was nothing wrong with having the meeting at Dragon Palace and there was nothing wrong with meeting in her home. And truthfully the idea of it was to make people more like people. When we're in public, it is a little different atmosphere than when we are chatting amongst ourselves. This is the sole purpose. There was a concern about transparency; there was nothing illegal that was done. Charlestown did not take this off the table. Moving forward, there would be no problem having minutes even if there isn't a quorum. We can pick two members from the School Committee, two from Charlestown, two from Richmond and Hopkinton. It still is not a quorum so we don't meet the criteria of having to meet OMA laws. Nonetheless, to put people at ease, nobody would have a problem doing that and the other concern that was brought out was that other topics were discussed besides our mandates. That is well within our rights as we have various people from different bodies working together; why is there a negative to that. Again, for comfort level, narrow the scope to what we just talked about; just discuss mandates. My recommendation would be – I won't say it yet, I will let Linda chime in. Chair Giusti commented that she was not saying nothing illegal was done but she did not like the look of it. You are right – knock yourselves out. She doesn't like how the process started and as a Chair, she is not comfortable with moving forward. Linda added that Kathryn is right; they can go ahead and meet. We are asking tonight about forming a subcommittee and that has to follow Open Meetings Act laws. Kathryn stated that she does not think the Chariho name was attached. They were preliminary discussions and the only thing decided was to bring it to the Town Councils. Chair Giusti replied that the reason they have a Committee is to vet this out in public. Pat commented that it was her understanding that the discussion at the Omnibus Meeting was about mandates and funding that is not provided as these impact the budget. You bring it to the public as legislatures said they struggle being heard. Councilor Colasante said he wanted to see collaboration with School Committee members to help support the General Assembly representatives and increase our power. We can't have our voices drowned out. Chair Giusti asked if Pat was saying the School Committee should not be a part of this to which Pat responded that the Town Councils should meet to decide whether to go to the General Assembly. Put it out there to see if we want to participate. It doesn't stop them from moving forward. Tyler stated that listening to what was proposed at the Omnibus Meeting, he liked what he heard. He was invited to the first meeting but couldn't attend. He wasn't invited to the second meeting. He agrees that nothing wrong happened here, but he does not like the way it was done. Something should be done – 100%. We sit here and we go through this budget and we look at all this spending that's mandated by the State and we can't do a darn thing about it. I think we should do this the right way. I think this Committee should be involved. We are a tri-town regional district and for God's sake, we need to start working together because if we don't, this school will be going to hell in a hand basket. He would support doing this as part of the School Committee but it needs to be done in the correct way. Karen thanked Kathryn for her explanation and Tyler for his passion. She feels it was done behind closed doors. She would like to know more about it. Donna commented that they have always worked respectfully with the Town Councils as a group for the benefit of the schools and children. She does not believe anyone from Charlestown was invited. She is not willing to move forward on this. There is something we can do as we have new legislators who are willing to listen. Tyler agreed with Donna. The idea of this was to have a working group to get this going. Kathryn noted that with some people this will resonate with to start building relationships. She saw the Charlestown Town Council and they seemed comfortable if it was limited and open. There should be a concentrated effort to tackle unfunded mandates. People

say they need more information. It is pretty simple, elect people and they meet with representatives from the General Assembly and lobby to stop any future unfunded mandates. Craig commented that as parents he is sure they have all heard the statement "pick your battles". If the State has an epiphany and listens and fund all mandates, what changes? The taxpayers will still pay. He does not appreciate being chastised just because we don't agree. Polly felt this provides them with a unique opportunity. Donna went on a bus to Providence to defeat mandates and got nowhere. Maybe we can start something and others may follow. This is a democracy and other schools may connect with us. Instead of worrying about meetings where people are brainstorming, we can really make a difference. Linda stated that she didn't want to close the door because she was open to open dialogue. She doesn't understand why all are not thinking as "Chariho". If we all think that way, do we need more information. Come up with a proposal and then come back and we can talk about it. Donna noted that Kathryn mentioned a lobbying group. She does think mandates need to be addressed but doesn't think we should get into it politically. She suggested that someone form a lobbying group – it doesn't have to be a Chariho group. Pat stated that Samantha Wilcox did make a recommendation to make a Mission statement. Nothing is going anywhere so they have to meet to propose this to the Town Councils. Karen commented that she thinks that they all want something but not sure what it is. Why do we need the Town Councils. Is this for past or future mandates – we can join forces with other School Committees. Chair Giusti stated that often they will write Resolutions that are adopted by other School Committees. We all do want something but she feels they should have the Town Councils and School Committee come together and write a proposal. If the group that has met wants to continue to meet, they can knock themselves out. They can meet how often they want. She feels this should be a subcommittee of the School Committee but she is not going to be involved with a group that is formed that does not conform to the Open Meetings Act. Kathryn commented she will say it again, it was just discussion. If the Chariho School Committee is willing to choose a couple members to come to the discussion, there is power in numbers. If there was a public statement, we can propose legislation that we are all in agreement. They need to look at future unfunded mandates; she does not know about going backwards. She likes the idea of a lobbying group. Polly asked is there political motivation behind this – yes there is. You are speaking to legislators. We have to get to the politics of it. We have to have politically-motivated people. It is survival mode for us. Sharon Davis stated that when Mike Colasante made the suggestion at the Omnibus Meeting, she did not think it was going to be a subcommittee of the School Committee. She thought it would be a group of all. They met at Dragon Palace at February 11 and Mike passed out a list of potential topics to address. The next meeting was on February 25. She sent an email to the Attorney General's Office to see how to do this. She read her email to all. She received a response and was told they could meet and not violate OMA. We have to start somewhere. What comes first, the chicken or the egg? She then read the issues they wanted to address. She looked at this as an opportunity for more to be involved. It is not an "us" and "them". We need to work together. She sees nothing wrong with what they did. Each Town Council has their own thoughts. Nothing nefarious happened. She would only support something if all three towns and the School Committee were in favor. She really wants a financial management study. The perception is the Chariho budget has a lot of fat in it. She hopes the Committee is interested in participating. She is not married to anything. Legislation that helps Chariho helps all of us. Andrew noted that he would like the School Committee to be mindful of the time. It is his observation that this Committee does not do its best work after 9:00 PM. He will reserve his comments until the end. Polly thanked Ms. Davis and those for doing the hard work. If we are going to work together, how does land use come into play to which Sharon replied that it does have an effect on planning and zoning. Craig stated that Mr. Ricci did the leg work and found two companies who do management studies but the cost was very high. How about the towns also do a management study to find out how to best manage their budgets and their towns. Michael Colasante said that when he came up with the proposal at the Omnibus Meeting, he wanted a culture of collaboration where they all work together; not Democrat or Republican. He put together a Tri-Town Collaboration worksheet and left a place for suggestions. He would like to give a copy to each School Committee member. It really depends on the time, opportunity and people in place to make some changes. He wanted to get a perspective from each Town Council. Steve Stokes from Charlestown will not open the Chariho Act but Michael felt that everyone could benefit by this. Let's put politics aside and work with the General Assembly. He talked with others who agree. The education formula was set up to come off the backs of the taxpayers. We need to show them they better get their act together. Deb Carney, Charlestown Town Council President, stated that the Charlestown Town

Council discussed this at their meeting last night. Her perspective is this committee existed twenty years ago. The idea that went through her mind is that there would be a posted meeting and minutes would be taken. It would be open to the public and held in each town. What bothered her is that this was not set up the way it was discussed at the Omnibus Meeting. The scope was limited to unfunded mandates and Hopkinton's request for a management study of the school district. Her impression was that this subcommittee would be related specifically to Chariho. You would need to ask three members from the School Committee to volunteer; one from each town. Charlestown will relook at this if the School Committee decides they want to put something forward. Any thoughts should be brought back to the respective groups for discussion. There is nothing stopping us from going to our legislators. We do have a forum for getting our voices heard. She would ask that the focus for this subcommittee to start with would be two items. What does Hopkinton want in the management study and the cost? Chariho has to be on board and she wants everyone to be aware of the discussion that occurs. Polly commented that she hasn't seen anything in the paper to which Deb replied that there was an article in *The Westerly Sun* which stated that Charlestown was on board with this. Helen Sheehan, a Richmond Town Council member, noted that everybody agreed something needed to be done but no one did it so Michael started it. So there was a little bumbling about getting all the right forms and everything in order. So I would like you to not throw the baby out with the bath water because it's a really good idea. Kathryn stated that she would like to make a motion that they elect at the next meeting two members to participate in a discussion with any of the Town Council members to which Polly questioned why two; she would think they would have three – one from each town. Kathryn stated she will write out a motion for the next meeting. Tyler asked if they could get a copy of Charlestown's Resolution to which Deb Carney noted that it was a draft motion that Steve Stokes added to. She will provide it to the Committee. Tyler commented that Charlestown has done the work, we can piggyback off that. Chair Giusti stated that she would also like to talk to Mike Geary and Mark Trimmer to get their motions. It sounds like the School Committee does not have an appetite for this tonight so we will wait until a future meeting. Jim Sullivan from Charlestown had comments on the budget. Jim was asked to please wait until they get to the budget item. Polly suggested they maybe just elect a liaison; she was asked to wait on this. Andrew pointed out that the coalition's actions to date had not been collaborative. They could have met in a public meeting and they chose not to, and that was a choice. They could have vetted this publicly and they chose not to, and that was a choice. And when they cherry-pick individuals to participate, that is not how you develop a concentrated effort for collaboration and it's definitely not how you develop a culture of collaboration. That's not bumbling. Those are intentional decisions and it has clearly impacted the ability for us to move forward. With that said, he shared the sentiments that many other people have shared. Let's try this again and let's see if we can do this in a public fashion, in a way that truly develops a culture of collaboration.

F. FY24 Budget

1. Adjustments to FY24 Budget - The Superintendent noted that this is an opportunity for adjustments to be made prior to adoption of the budget. If adjustments are made, she will request that the Committee take a short recess so Ned can recalculate figures. She then made a recommendation that the Committee place back into the budget the CCRI funding of \$68,255 as we are mandated to provide funding and we currently have five students who have moved forward with applications. Donna made a motion, which was seconded by Craig, to add \$68,255 back in the budget for the CCRI Running Start Program. Karen asked what the cost was per student to which Gina thought it was about \$7,500 but would check this. Kathryn stated that they really do not have an option but to add this back if it is mandated. Karen asked what the pre-Covid number was of students who applied. Gina responded that it was an average of five to ten students.

Donna Chambers made a motion, seconded by Craig Louzon and it was

VOTED: To add \$68,255 back in the budget for the CCRI Running Start Program. In favor: Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Pouliot and Reynolds. Abstained: Phelps. The motion carried with 10 in favor and 1 abstention.

Craig stated that a lot of people want them to bring the fund balance down to 2% and they were given a list this evening from Ocean State Transit of the impact the \$70,000 cut will make on bus routes next year. He cannot live with both of these. The first concern he has about the change in bus stops is the

one at Tamanaco in Charlestown which is Post Rd. Post Rd. is Rt. 1. He will make a motion to cut the fund balance to 2% if the \$70,000 is restored for transportation. Chair Giusti commented that two motions will need to be made. She is not in support of cutting the fund balance. Kathryn asked if the stop Craig referenced was on the highway to which Craig replied it is the highway. Larry asked why the bus can't go in and stop at a house to which it was explained that this is how the \$70,000 would be cut – by having students walk out of developments to a main road. If a bus goes in and stops at one house, it will have to stop at others. Craig made a motion, which was seconded by Tyler, to restore the \$70,000 back in the budget for transportation. Andrew noted that this is what happens when you make motions to cut without knowing what is involved. The cut involved pulling bus stops out of certain neighborhoods which may require increased walking distances and students picked up much earlier. He voted against this and this doesn't happen intermittently. It happens every day, two times a day. He supports the reinstatement of the \$70,000. Donna agreed. She cannot support these bus changes for the safety of our students.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin and it was
VOTED: To restore \$70,000 to the budget for transportation. In favor: Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide and Reynolds. Opposed: Phelps. Abstained: Pouliot. The motion carried by a vote of 9 in favor with 1 opposed and 1 abstention.

Craig made a motion, seconded by Kathryn, to reduce the fund balance from 2.25% to 2.0%. Chair Giusti questioned how much this would be to which Gina replied \$148,000. Donna stated that she will not support this. We have been very protective of the fund balance and she is not comfortable cutting it with all the other cuts that have been made. Andrew commented that they have taken calculated risks with many of the cuts that have been made. Even at 2.25% we will not have a robust fund balance. We will be going as low as our policy affords; we should look elsewhere.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Kathryn Colasante and it was
VOTED: To reduce the fund balance from 2.25% to 2.0%. In favor: Champlin, Colasante, Hopkins, Louzon and Phelps. Opposed: Chambers, Giusti, Lyall, McQuaide, Pouliot and Reynolds. The motion failed by a vote of 5 in favor with 6 opposed.

Kathryn stated that Gina mentioned they could do without library books. She checked and noted that we do have a library exchange program so students could use this. We can eliminate that line item. Gina commented that they do replenish every year.

Kathryn Colasante made a motion, seconded by Polly Hopkins and it was
VOTED: To cut \$14,000 from library books for the entire district. In favor: Chambers, Champlin, Colasante, Giusti, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, McQuaide, Phelps and Reynolds. Opposed: Pouliot. The motion carried by a vote of 10 in favor with 1 opposed.

Larry asked if the Superintendent had looked at Sharon Davis' cuts. Gina replied that she has met with Sharon and reviewed her cuts. People use words like "padded" or "fat" in our budget. She disagrees. She has to assure everyone that she does not put the District at risk. We can't get subs, teachers are on leave, we have vacant positions. There are several things that there is money left in the budget for. We are utilizing grants for mental health that should be coming from the budget. We desperately seek out ways to mitigate. Do a management study; we have nothing to hide. Have at it, but she will not take anything away from students' education. People think there is a lot of "fat" in our budget. That is a nick at her integrity, at Ned's integrity and the entire team's integrity. She cannot control unfunded mandates. She spent over two hours speaking with Sharon Davis. We use ESSER funds to meet compliance. Our teachers go above and beyond for our students. The School Committee has worked hard to get a good budget to our taxpayers. All are going above and beyond. Our educators felt the pain when people brought up test scores. Why wasn't Hope Valley mentioned? They had an 11% increase in Math. It takes time and collaboration. It doesn't come with us arguing. The highest rate in Hope Valley was the best in the State. The towns have to work with us. I have an open-door policy. Come to my office, look at the budget. The expectation is we have to do better. There has to be economic development to assist with taxes. We are doing more for our students with grant

opportunities. Everyone will leave here and tell taxpayers how to vote. When you go to the polls, look at a student – our kids are worth it. Donna thanked Gina for her comments and noted that people should respect the professionals to do their jobs. Tyler stated that he was contemplating getting up to speak but will speak from his seat. He fought against the School Committee and the budget last year and the reason for that was community members felt like they were not being heard. We are in the service of education. You know what our biggest expense is - paying the teachers. He works for an insurance company. You know what their biggest expense is – losses. He did some digging around the southern part of the state and looked at Westerly – 80% of their budget is salary and benefits; Barrington, who he hears us compared to all the time, is at 83% for salary and benefits, North Kingstown 80%, East Greenwich 79%, Narragansett 79%, Coventry 83%; ours is 78% based on the budget we just put together. He won't put together a budget he cannot support. At this point he is done. Voters will vote against us but we are not out of line compared to the rest of the State. Time to move on.

Tyler Champlin made a motion, seconded by Craig Louzon and it was

VOTED: To recess at 9:15 PM so Ned can calculate the numbers. In favor: Unanimous.

Chair Giusti reconvened the meeting at 9:31 PM.

2. Adoption of FY24 Budget – The Superintendent stated that, based on adjustments made this evening, she will ask Ned to present the new numbers. Ned stated that the FY24024 is now at \$68,573,222 (total budget including operating, capital, special revenue, enterprise and debt service expenditures, but does not include revenue of \$7,800,450) with the member towns' contributions to be \$57,134,310, an increase of 1.74% with anticipated state aid. Percentage increases to each town with anticipated state aid is Charlestown 1.67%, Richmond 1.47% and Hopkinton 2.07%. Tyler asked Ned to please break down the amounts per town. Ned provided the figures as follows: Charlestown - \$13,933,732, Richmond - \$21,684,758 and Hopkinton - \$21,515,820 for a total of \$57,134,310 before state aid is applied. Larry asked what the amounts would be after state aid is applied to which Ned reported the total would be \$43,371,633 with Charlestown at \$12,528,759, Richmond at \$15,717,333 and Hopkinton at \$15,125,541. Donna made a motion, which was seconded by Tyler, to approve the budget as read by Ned in the amount of \$57,134,310. Mike Chambers from Charlestown congratulated the School Committee and administration for recognizing the students this evening and last week. This is one of the few school districts that he is aware of who invite students to meetings to be recognized. He asked administration to give the public a feeling for possible considerations for programs and personnel if the budget is voted down. In general, what would you have to consider if you have a level-funded budget two years in a row. Gina stated that would be a catastrophic impact if it is level-funded again. She would have to reduce classroom teachers which would increase class size, cut most, if not all, of the teacher assistants, look at cutting JV and Middle School sports, extracurricular activities, decommissioning of Hope Valley School, grounds service, purchased services, math specialists, library clerks. Mr. Chambers commented that voting it down is dangerous thinking. He hopes people paid attention to the cuts that were made. Gina stated that people didn't see how the level-funded budget impacted our students. We cut the World Language program and had to revamp it elsewhere. We appreciate the fact that everyone is impacted but our job is to worry about our students. We have to become the "we" and it is not the "we" right now. Our students have needs and she is hopeful that people will see the investment. Sharon Davis from Hopkinton stated that she was disappointed that the health benefit line was not touched more and the fund balance cut to 2%. She believes another \$750,000 can come out of the health benefit line item. She really believes in public schools but still thinks the budget could be adjusted. Betsy Alvarez from Hopkinton commented that the gentleman who spoke asked what her question was – what more would be cut. We need to pass this budget. She understands Hopkinton has a 2.07% increase but what is in the budget is needed. Teacher Assistants are important. They are in our hallways, monitoring bathrooms, assisting with students. Her son has had supports and she urges all those who are thinking about voting "no" please don't. She cannot afford to send her kids to private school. Please don't tell false lies. We need to invest in our kids. Jim Sullivan from Charlestown extended compliments to Gina for the very good job she is doing. Children need to get the tools to go out into the world. A lot is happening here. He spoke before of sovereignty, accountability and collaboration – all very important to education. Say "no" to mandates and bring the basics back. Pay the teachers well so we can keep the best and hire the best. It is very challenging to

teach today. Negotiate a one-year contract; Forgotten Taxpayers will benefit from one-year contracts. We should spread the word of God to our students. The Charger emblem depicts the Knights' Temple. Thanks for all the hard work you do. Teachers have a tough job. Jim McCabe from Charlestown and Friends of Chariho noted that administration and the School Committee have done a good job of addressing the concerns of the public. He does have a few more concerns. Does the current budget reflect the best estimate of negotiations and is there a cost involved with mediation that could affect the budget? Gina responded that the budget does include the best estimate of negotiations but there is no money budgeted for mediation. Mr. McCabe thanked the School for reinstating the bus transportation funds and thank you for all you've done. He encouraged all to vote for the budget. Polly commented that, she's judging now, she sees a lot of comfortable people sitting here, people who are very comfortable with taxes going up. Have us step in their shoes – the people in our community who struggle on a daily basis with food and heat. We should stop and reflect. What may be small increases in their taxes is a big increase to them. She's been that single mom so she can speak for them. If we pass the budget, go out and help our neighbors; carry them through. Larry asked if the amount being voted on is on the ballot to which the Clerk noted that the ballots are printed as required by the Chariho Act with the question *"Shall the Chariho Regional School District annual budget for the school year as adopted by the regional school committee be approved?"* with a Yes or No answer. Having the ballot printed this way saves money. The clerks usually have the budget amount posted for all to see. Sharon Davis added that in Hopkinton, hard copies of the number are distributed. Larry questioned what number will be shown to which Ned responded both numbers are posted on the website with the number being voted on is what Donna has in her motion. Larry felt taxpayers would be going in blind. Chair Giusti noted that she will take it as her charge and others should take it as their charge to get the word out. This is part of your job. Donna asked for a roll call vote.

Donna Chambers made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin, to approve the budget as read by Ned in the amount of \$57,134,310. Donna Chambers – absolutely yes; Craig Louzon – yes; Patricia Pouliot – yes; Larry Phelps – yes; Karen Reynolds – yes; Kathryn Colasante – nay; Catherine Giusti – yes; Polly Hopkins – abstained; Andrew McQuaide – yes; Linda Lyall – yes; Tyler Champlin – yes. The motion carried by a vote of 9 in favor, with 1 opposed and 1 abstention.

Chair Giusti commented that if you voted "yes" tonight for the budget, the assumption is you will support the budget. If you go out into the public and try to get the budget defeated after you voted "yes" for the budget, it would be really disingenuous of you.

IX. Consent Agenda Items

Chair Giusti requested items to be pulled; nothing was pulled. Craig acknowledged the donations and thanked the donors.

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

A. Minutes – Approved the following:

1. Executive Session Minutes of February 7, 2023 – Approval of Executive Session Minutes of January 10, 2023 (minutes not sealed).
2. Regular Session Minutes of February 7, 2023.
3. Special Meeting Regular Session Minutes of March 7, 2023 – NEA Certified Staff Negotiations.
4. Special Meeting Regular Session Minutes of March 7, 2023 – Litigation - School Committee Neutrality in Case No. 2023-26-M.P. and Case No. 2023-28-M.P. – Purcell v. Johnson v. Chariho Regional School Committee
5. Special Meeting Regular Session Minutes of March 7, 2023 – Litigation - Supreme Court Case No. 2023-26-M.P. – Jessica Marie Purcell v. Clay Johnson et al. and Supreme Court Case No. 2023-28-M.P. – Clay Johnson, in his capacity as Council Appointee to Chariho Regional School et al. v. Chariho Regional School Committee
6. Public Budget Hearing/Annual Meeting Minutes of March 7, 2023.

B. Transfers – Approved.

C. Bill Review – Accepted.

- D. Revenue/Expenditure Account Status Report – As per enclosed.
- E. Student Activity Fund Balance – As per enclosed.
- F. Personnel Actions – None at this time.
- G. Permission to Issue Bids/Request Quote – Approved issuance of the following:
 - 1. Audit and Agreed Upon Procedures
- H. Permission to Award Contracts – None at this time.
- I. Home Instruction – Action taken in executive session.
- J. Grants – None at this time.
- K. Donations – Accepted the following:
 - 1. Donation from Lisa, Christopher and Michael Ricci and their families of \$10,000 to the Barry J. Ricci Scholarship Fund.
 - 2. Donation from the Hab and Stacy Barton Family Fund of \$500 to the Barry J. Ricci Library.
 - 3. Donation from the United Theatre, Westerly, RI of a \$100 Movie Package to Hope Valley School for their STEAM Night.
 - 4. Donation from Friend Excavation (Brendan and Kayla Friend), Richmond, RI of \$738.00 of excavation work outside the Richmond School Greenhouse.

X. Reports

- A. Subcommittee Reports – Nothing to report.
- B. Superintendent's Report
 - 1. SurveyWorks – We are currently surveying families to determine the effectiveness of our schools. We need this feedback as School Improvement Teams utilize this information to form their plans. There will be an opportunity during Artessy to complete the survey.
 - 2. Artessy will be held on Saturday, April 1; the community is invited to the Chariho Middle School. There is a promotional video online and all were encouraged to view it.
 - 3. All-Day Budget Referendum – Tuesday, April 4, 2023 from 8 AM to 8 PM in each of the three Town Halls.
- C. Coming Events were highlighted.

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

Craig questioned if there would be tickets for sale for the Friday Night Buffet to which Gina responded that, due to a conflict with SkillsUSA, the buffet will not be held on Friday, March 31st but will be held at a later date. Craig then noted that they have always invited retirees to a meeting at the end of the school year and he wondered if they will be doing this again. Gina stated they are invited to Convocation. She would look into this.

Kathryn requested discussion related to participation in a collaboration with other towns regarding unfunded mandates.

Polly asked all at the table to please speak into the microphones as people in the audience and at home cannot hear those who do not use the mics.

XII. Adjournment

Andrew McQuaide made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin and it was VOTED: To adjourn at 10:13 PM. In favor: Unanimous.

Donna J. Sieczkiewicz, Clerk