

Chariho School Committee Budget Workshop
January 3, 2023

In attendance: Chair Catherine Giusti, Donna Chambers, Tyler Champlin, Kathryn Colasante (arrived at 6:02 PM), Polly Hopkins, Craig Louzon, Linda Lyall, Andrew McQuaide, Larry Phelps, Patricia Pouliot (arrived at 6:02 PM) and Karen Reynolds. Absent: Vice Chair Gary Liguori.

Also in attendance: Superintendent Gina Picard, Assistant Superintendent Michael Comella, Charlestown Town Council President Deb Carney and District Clerk Donna Sieczkiewicz.

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

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

II. Budget Workshop

Chair Giusti stated the intent of tonight's meeting is to go through the budget. There will be time for questions. Superintendent Picard welcomed all and thanked the staff who worked so hard on the budget. The focus is to accelerate learning and educational opportunities. This year we are working to create a new District Strategic Plan that ensures we continue on a path of success. Our plan will be focused on continuing to offer our students a high-quality and rigorous public education. It is important to note that the economic situation in our nation and state creates a challenge with the budget. However, we remain committed to building a budget that meets the needs of our students. We are proud to note that we have three Blue Ribbon Elementary Schools, three of our elementary schools are ranked by US News in the top ten in the state, the Middle School is ranked in the top twenty-five middle schools in RI and the High School is ranked in the top ten among all RI high schools. We began the process on October 1. Changes to the budget can be made up to March 14th when the budget is adopted. Staffing is our largest investment. This budget has no professional development or curricula included as these are being covered by ESSER funds. We will, however, be required to assume these in FY25. They focused ESSER funding on State mandates. We have received \$829,000 in grants so far this year and we were just notified that we were awarded another one this week for \$1.2 million. The fund balance over the last thirteen years has been at only 2% which is the minimum that we are required to have. She will focus on an overview today and go deeper into the budget on Thursday. If you want any documents for the next meeting, please let us know ahead of time so we can prepare them. Any questions asked will be noted online under Frequently Asked Questions. The budget is organized by State requirements (UCOA). She has asked Ned to prepare a document for Thursday depicting those line items that have either a big increase or a big decrease. Our Capital Improvement Plan is a RIDE requirement. Staffing line items in red are those paid by grants (IDEA) and some by ESSER which will sunset at the end of this year. She asked if there were any questions or additional information the Committee would like to see. Craig questioned why Providence was listed in here under Revenue to which Gina noted that it could be a change in coding (MET School). Craig asked if everything was up-to-date. Gina commented on one change; two UCOA codes had to be shifted which resulted in a decrease to the budget of \$300,000. Craig requested a listing of what is in IDEA and ESSER to which Catherine asked that the two be differentiated. Andrew appreciated the budgeting (staffing) and questioned if they could incorporate the fixed costs into this (percentages). That would be helpful and educational. Tyler noted that he spoke with Ned and has requested Sections 3 and 4 be provided to him in Excel format. Goldie Williams asked how much training does the District have for kids on the spectrum. Gina responded that the District has increased training and as she mentioned already, the District is expecting a \$1.2 million dollar grant which will be used to increase mental health services. Tyler requested the percent increase from FY23 to FY24; as a piggyback off Andrew's request. Tyler then reviewed the timeline. The Superintendent will take into consideration anything noted at the Omnibus Meeting. On February 7th, the School Committee will accept this as their budget. Gina added that the last time changes can be made will be March 14th. Craig hoped that everyone will respect the process and allow the Committee to utilize all budget workshops. Chair Giusti noted her agreement. Before the Superintendent even presented it, comments about voting no on the budget were made. That is disappointing. Please give it an honest look and do the work you were elected to do. Review the budget and then make suggestions. Donna added that suggestions should be made per line item

and be specific on your input. Chair Giusti commented that it is very helpful when Ned puts together the string of emails or questions in between meetings. Please let Ned or Gina know and they will keep a running tally of questions or concerns. Gina noted that whenever they have a heads-up it is much easier for them. Donna stated that some members have already voted the budget down without making any suggestions or motions to cut it. This is our job right now. Linda pointed out that 61% of the budget is certified staff. Have you looked at savings to which Gina replied that they have reduced a classroom at Charlestown School and at Richmond but a class was added to another grade at Richmond. The average class size is about 22. There are more opportunities to cut as we are making schedule changes but we do need to add World Language. We may not be able to run some AP courses if enrollment is less than 10 students. There is an increase in the Culinary budget due to the increased cost of food. The program will be hindered if we cut too much. Any impact going forward will be to staff and programs. To get under 4% for every town will result in a \$2 million cut. There will be a complete change about education value in Chariho if this much is cut. Andrew questioned what, if any, conversations or thoughts have been discussed regarding mail-in ballots. Gina responded that she spoke to Mark Stankiewicz in Charlestown and they offered mail-in ballots last year. Their cost was between \$6,000 to \$8,000. It will cost us a great deal more to offer it to residents in all three towns. Craig asked if the District would have to pay for this to which Gina replied "yes." She will look into it if that is what the Committee would like but she did not budget for it. Kathryn Colasante questioned the breakdown of students in each classroom. Gina noted that she can find this information in Section 7. Everything but kindergarten are actuals. Craig asked Gina to explain real quick the impact of student population after a certain date. Gina stated that the District is required to pay overages to teachers if, after a certain date, additional student(s) are added to a classroom over the maximum allowed per contract. Kindergarten is one example. Richmond typically enrolls late. Andrew asked if Gina could highlight what actions the new legislators could take on behalf of Chariho. Gina noted that the funding formula is one; out-of-district transportation is another. We are currently paying \$1,000 per day for one student for Statewide transportation. Statewide was supposed to be cheaper. We explained we could do it for a lot less money and they told us that if we take this on, we won't get transportation categorical aid. Curricula resource is yet another one. Curricula was vetted by RIDE and we will be required to get new science curriculum by FY25. There will not be any ESSER funding to offset this. We did receive full Title I funding for the Middle School; the funding will depend on the federal government. Linda asked about the new foreign language requirement to which Gina stated that the current 7th grade class will be the first freshman class required to take two years of a foreign language. Unfortunately, these teachers do not exist. URI put out two last year and RIC put out one. RIDE puts this in as a graduation requirement but we can't meet it if we do not have teachers. Kathryn questioned if Gina had asked departments to look at where cuts could be made to which Gina explained that they have already cut a little over \$600,000 from the budget so we would need to cut an additional \$1.2 million. Our football sled cannot be repaired so we need a new one. We are going to try to purchase it out of this year's budget. Andrew noted, to the District's credit, they have applied for funds outside the District for the purchase of the sled. Tyler questioned the impact of home schooled students. Gina explained that whatever number of students we have on October 1st is what we get paid for. Anyone coming in after that date does not get billed for until next year. There is also new legislation that hasn't happened yet but will cost us about \$7500 to provide a GED program. Goldie asked if the District has considered getting languages online like charter schools do. Gina responded that the District does this but we are still required to have a paid instructor. Goldie asked if home schooled students can get services such as speech to which Gina noted that, like Preschool, if a student is in need of special services and they are being home schooled, the parent needs to make a request. If it is determined the student is in need of services, we have to provide them. As there were no additional questions or comments, Chair Giusti asked for a motion to adjourn.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Tyler Champlin and it was
VOTED: To adjourn at 6:55 PM. In favor: Unanimous.

Donna J. Sieczkiewicz, Clerk