

Chariho District Financial Meeting/Public Budget Hearing
March 1, 2022

Committee Members Present: Chair Linda Lyall, Vice Chair Catherine Giusti, Ryan Callahan, Donna Chambers, William Day, Craig Louzon, G. Linda McAllister, Karen Reynolds and endawnis Spears. Absent: George Abbott, Gary Liguori and Lisa Macaruso.

Administrators Present: Superintendent Gina Picard, Assistant Superintendent Michael Comella, Director of Administration and Finance Ned Draper, Director of Technology Shawn Cole and Systems Administrator Eric O'Brien. Also in attendance: School Committee Clerk Donna Sieczkiewicz.

Hopkinton Moderator Ed James called the Chariho District Financial Meeting/Public Budget Hearing, which was held in the Chariho Middle School auditorium, to order at 7:33 PM. He introduced himself and welcomed all to the Chariho Budget Hearing. He then asked all to please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. He noted that a quorum of registered voters was present (Charlestown 25; Richmond 39; and Hopkinton 30). Moderator James pointed out the exits in the event of an emergency evacuation and reviewed the rules of the meeting (anyone wishing to speak must approach the microphone and publicly announce their name and town of residence for the record). As this is a Public Hearing, the School Committee will take comments made by the public regarding the budget into consideration. There will be no votes taken this evening. The budget will be voted on at the All-Day Referendum scheduled for April 5. He asked that reading of the Warrant and Minutes from last year be waived. A motion was made by Scott Bill Hirst and seconded by Craig Louzon to waive the reading of the Warrant and Minutes of last year. There were no objections. Moderator James then introduced School Committee Chair Linda Lyall who recognized fellow School Committee members and Administrators in attendance. She thanked all for attending the meeting. Chair Lyall stated that the School Committee has approved the FY2023 budget in the amount of \$55,693,405 (Member Towns' Contribution with Debt Service); an overall increase of 1.81%. Impact to each town is as follows: Charlestown – an increase of 2.59%. Richmond – an increase of 2.05%, and Hopkinton – an increase of 1.05%.

Scott Bill Hirst, a member of the Hopkinton Town Council, noted that he was speaking on behalf of himself and not the Council. He would like to know what the figures are for the non-recurring line item and the maintenance of effort as the school budget can't go any lower than this. Ned replied that he cannot provide those numbers right now but would get them to Scott. Scott noted that this is a legal issue as these have to be met. The move to ask Town Councils to fund the Maddie Potts Field House is his next concern. This should be paid by the Chariho School budget. He will vote against anything that has to do with this. Seventy-five percent of Hopkinton's budget goes to the school budget. He would like an independent management study done. He will vote against the budget as the School Committee needs to get real.

Jeremy Palmer, a Hopkinton resident, spoke next. He commented that the budget is financially unacceptable to the community. He is a small business owner and the last thing he would do as a business man is propose a bill that is irrefutable. As a taxpayer, he will not accept a bill that needs to be cut. At the end of the day, the majority of people in this room would agree that we are taxed beyond our limit. It is the people sitting on the Board's responsibility. They just see more, more, more and the taxpayers need to say "no". Those in control should be financially responsible. We are not saying "no" to our children. We have limits. Find a way to make it cheaper. If not, you are not doing your job.

Kim St. Clair, a Hopkinton resident and Chariho teacher, noted that she was embarrassed as she feels she is being included in Mr. Palmer's comments. She is in it for the kids and does not know where else the budget can be cut. Our rooms are at capacity. We have to teach in a totally different environment. We have cut back on electricity and heat. Where would you like to cut?

Mr. Palmer began responding from the back of the room and several times was asked to please refrain from making comments while another person is speaking. He stated that he feels he needs to respond to the questions. Kim continued. The Committee has made cuts to the budget and for the first time she can remember, Hopkinton has the lowest percent. She chose to live in Hopkinton knowing what the taxes were. Prices are going up everywhere. She thanked the Committee.

Michael Colasante from Richmond stated that now is the time to get back involved. He has six kids so years back he was more involved. He spoke of the budget one year that was \$22.9 million and \$1.9 million was cut. Another year \$600,000 was cut and \$1.2 million in yet another year. Not one teacher was cut. He asked the Committee to not take what he was saying personally but this year's budget is \$63 million. Everything is mandated but you are the ones who get things passed and then say there is nothing we can do about it. We have no local control. How many payroll positions are being paid for with ESSER funds that we will be on the hook for? There is plenty of money to be cut and he will show what can be cut.

Louise Dinsmore, a Richmond resident, noted that the Superintendent sent out a slide deck and she thanked her for it. She is a professional fundraiser and she recommended that at meetings like this, you present slides on why you are asking for the money. She thanked the School Committee as she knows it is not an easy job. Her family moved from Coventry as they were looking for great schools and towns that are fiscally responsible. The school district was a huge factor in their move but 76.4% of their taxes are for the schools. She is paying 32.5% more today in taxes than she did in 2016 and she is not sure she can afford to continue to live in Richmond. She looked on the website for school rankings and noted how all of the schools, with the exception of the High School, went down considerably on test scores. Ashaway went down ten spots; Richmond went to number 35, Charlestown was down and Hope Valley went from 15 to 58. The Middle School went from 13th in 2019 to 21. She realizes this was during COVID. The High School is the only one that went up, from 9th to 8th. You are asking for a 3% tax increase. Why should we give a tax increase with these results? We are not necessarily high performing any more. We need to be fiscally responsible and the jury is out as to whether or not we will get a good return on our investment.

Goldie Williams, another Richmond resident, said to cut the lawyer as he goes against all parents and cut CALA because bullies run the school. They should either be in juvie or the other place. She doesn't know why the Superintendent has an assistant; is it because he doesn't know the job?

Andrew McQuaide from Charlestown stated that he did not anticipate speaking but the conversation that has been going on is not reflective of the feelings of his community. He was on the School Committee for six years and is a graduate of Chariho. He is nothing but impressed with the quality of education his daughter is receiving at Charlestown School. He looks forward to supporting this budget and does not know if all opinions were accurately reflected tonight.

Hopkinton resident Jeremy Palmer reiterated to taxpayers that they are not taking a loss in their children's education. He has two children attending Chariho schools and he attended as well. He thanked Ryan Callahan for attending the meeting that was held last night and noted that he felt that Ryan's voice was not heard and it should have been heard. People's voices are not being heard. Think about your obligation to your community. If you say "yes" to the budget, you are saying "yes" to those who are spending our money. There is no going back. People in charge will always say there is more money. Level fund the money; make the right choice. Think about our children as there is no going back. They will be facing this in the future. Thank you.

As there were no more people wishing to speak, Moderator James called for a motion to adjourn. A motion was made, seconded by Craig Louzon and the meeting was adjourned at 8:08 PM.

Donna J. Sieczkiewicz, Clerk