

DRAFT Minutes – Public Session
Chariho Regional District School Committee
February 10, 2026

In Attendance for the Committee

Louise D. Dinsmore, Chair
Laura Chapman, Vice Chair
Tyler Champlin (*for public session only*)
Polly Hopkins
Craig Louzon
Linda Lyall
Larry Phelps
Patricia Pouliot
Jessica Purcell
Karen Reynolds
Dianne Tefft

For Administration

Gina M. Picard, Superintendent
Dr. Michael Comella, Assistant Superintendent
Gregory Zenion, Director of Administration and Finance
Lynn Gouvin, Asst. Dir. Of Administration and Finance

Absent: Donna Chambers

This meeting was recorded and can be viewed at:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLjtoRWoC_Ov9u6vK7QAuwMDivBGmlce3O

Call to Order: Chair Dinsmore opened this meeting with a public Call to Order at 6:00pm and led this assembly with the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence.

Entering Executive Session: Motion - Member Louzon, made a motion, seconded by Member Reynolds, to enter Executive Session for the following: **A.** 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 (Pre-deprivation Hearings/Non-Renewal of Teacher Contracts); **B.** Under the authority of R.I. Gen. Laws Section 42-46-5(a)(5) for the purpose of discussions or considerations related to the acquisition of real property for public purposes wherein advanced public information would be detrimental to public interest. (*1. Land and Elementary Capital Plan update*) **C.** 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 the Executive Session Minutes of January 13, 2026 (Home Instruction Requests) 2. Approval of additional Home Instruction Requests.*) **Discussion:** None. **Vote:** Unanimous in favor. **Approved.**

This body entered Executive Session at 6:00pm and **reconvened** Open / Public Session at 7:00 pm.

Closing/Sealing of Executive Session Minutes- Superintendent Picard recommended that minutes pertaining to an individual's job performance or character (Non-renewal of teacher contracts) remain sealed. **Motion:** The motion was made by Member Louzon and seconded by Member Reynolds. **Discussion:** None. **Vote:** 10 in favor (Chapman, Dinsmore, Hopkins, Louzin, Lyall, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell, Reynolds); Opposed; None; Abstention: 1 (Champlain). **Approved.**

Superintendent Picard recommended that minutes relating to discussions or considerations related to the acquisition of real property for public purposes remain sealed. **Motion:** The motion was made by member Louzon and seconded by Member Reynolds. **Discussion:** None. **Vote:** 10 in favor (Chapman, Dinsmore, Hopkins, Louzin, Lyall, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell, Reynolds); Opposed; None; Abstention: 1 (Champlain). **Approved.**

Superintendent Picard recommended that minutes relating to the privacy of students and their records (approval of home instruction requests and executive session minutes from January 13, 2026, remain sealed. **Motion:** Member Louzon made this motion, seconded by Member Reynolds. **Discussion:** None. **Vote:** 10 in favor (Chapman, Dinsmore, Hopkins, Louzin, Lyall, Phelps, Pouliot, Purcell, Reynolds); Opposed; None; Abstention: 1 (Champlain). **Approved.**

Disclosure of Executive Session Votes- Vice Chair L. Chapman reported out that there were six votes that took place during the executive session this evening as noted: **1)** Vote to move forward with land appraisal; 9 in favor (Chapman, Dinsmore, Louzon, Lyall, Pouliot, Purcell, Reynolds); 2 opposed (Phelps and Hopkins); no abstentions. **Approved.** **2)** Vote to arrange a joint meeting with the Richmond Town Council regarding land; Unanimous in favor. **Approved.** **3)** Vote to Accept the Superintendent's recommendation for certified staff contract nonrenewals; Unanimous in favor. **Approved.** **4)** Vote to approve the executive session minutes from January 13, 2026; Unanimous in favor. **Approved.** **5)** Vote to approve home instruction requests; Unanimous in favor. **Approved.** **6)** Vote to end the executive session and reconvene public session; Unanimous in favor. **Approved.**

Recognition – The following points of recognition were reported out by Members Tefft, Chapman, Lyall, and Reynolds:

USDA Project Scales - We would like to congratulate our third cohort of student-paid interns, through our USDA Project SCALES grant. They did an amazing job supporting Chariho's many Farm to School initiatives: Ezri Acton, Rose Akram, Logan Berdos, Anita Brown, Abigayle Fortin, Annabelle Gonnello, Ethan Hopkins, Tara Huskey, and Abigail Segar. Mrs Scanapieco and Dr Kirakosian, who lead this initiative, are also to be commended for their dedication to the students and interns. Well done, team!

RI School Librarian of the Month – We congratulate Olivia McCullough, Library Media Specialist at Chariho Middle School for receiving the Rhode Island School Librarian of the Month award in December 2025. Ms McCullough's "The Shark Tank Middle School Edition project is a powerful example of how innovative library programming can elevate student voice, creativity and real-world problem-solving. Olivia's work reflects the very best of what school libraries can offer: dynamic learning spaces that foster collaboration, inquiry, and authentic application of skills. We are grateful to the School Librarians of Rhode Island and Rosen Publishing for this meaningful recognition and for Ms McCullough's continued commitment to highlighting excellence in Chariho and across all school libraries.

SPORTS - information courtesy of the Westerly Sun: **BOYS INDOOR TRACK** - The Chariho boys indoor track and field team posted its best finish in years, placing second in the state Class B Championships Saturday at Providence Career & Technical Academy. Charger Ben Steere won the 3,000-meter run (4:34.70) and the 4x800 relay of Gus Freelove, Leo Haxton, Isaac Graham and Ethan McCann finishing first in 8:17.73. Steere's win, according to long-time coach Bill Habarek, is one of the biggest surprises in program history. Ben set a personal best time by 20 seconds. **GIRLS INDOOR TRACK** - Freshman Meriden Alge won 1,000 (3:03.62) and senior Lidia Tabor won the 300 (42.38) to highlight Chariho's seventh-place finish at the Class C track and field championships Saturday. Tabor was fourth in the 55 dash (7.59), The 4x400 team of Allison Cole, Claire Short, Lillian Baxter and Alge ran in 4:44.34. The 4x800 team of Short, Grace Steere, Evelyn Campbell and Chloe Grissom recorded an 11:34.46. Also scoring were Grissom in the 1,500 (7th, 5:31.77) and Cole in the long jump (7th, 15-1.75). **BOYS BASKETBALL** - Dayton Lee scored 22 points and had eight rebounds, and Brendan Gleason scored 17 points with six assists to help the Chariho boys basketball team to a 66-47 Division II road win at Rogers on January 27th. Chariho (12-3) led throughout the game, taking a 20-14 lead after one quarter. Gleason's 3-pointer at the second quarter buzzer gave the Chargers a 37-27 halftime edge. Rohan Downing (14 points, 8 rebounds) made two three-point shots in the third quarter to stretch the lead to 18. Chariho is now ranked third in the 17-team RIIL Division II power ratings.

Public Forum – Chair Dinsmore read the rules of the public forum aloud and recognized the speakers individually. There were four speakers: Mr. Robert Burns from Hopkinton, Mr. Andrew Elsing of Richmond, Ms. Helen Sheehan of Richmond, and Mr. Scott Sunderland of Ashaway. Mr. Burns reported in the role of a parent, and he discussed that he recently spoke with a Dean at our Chariho Middle School who was very accommodating. The issue he brought up was that his child had received an in-school suspension write-up due to arriving at school a little late. He cited that he chooses to drive his child to school versus taking a bus, but the traffic pattern routinely takes an average of 19-25 minutes to get to the door of the school. She is, on average, 5 to 10 minutes late. However, the door is only opened at 7:20am and he doesn't favor dropping her off early to stand in the cold temperatures versus waiting in a warm car. He asked that the Administration re-evaluate the traffic pattern. He does not intend to allow his daughter to serve any in-school suspension due to this issue. Mr. Elsing reported that his concern is with the traffic pattern for Richmond Elementary School as well as the issue

with snow. He feels the sidewalks have not been cleared enough and the sidewalk along the fields, which he has been told is only in use during the summer, was only cleared today. He submits that sidewalk is routinely utilized when parents pick up their children year-round. He feels this is unacceptable. Some parents have parked in a small lot on 138 (near a clothing drop box) which is technically not school property, which he feels is also not safe as kids walk between moving cars. Some kids were walking on Route 138 too (not the shoulder). He's very concerned especially with the traffic, including tractor trailer trucks that pass very closely to those walkers. He did thank Mr. Zenion, who took the time to meet with him in person at the location in question. He feels everyone failed and wants the school department and town to re-evaluate the process, hoping that we can come up with a better solution if we collaborate. He'd like two things to be added to our next agenda: 1) Lack of parking at Richmond Elementary School; and 2) What kind of equipment the school department might need to help alleviate this issue. Superintendent Picard and Chair Dinsmore thanked him for his comments. Superintendent Picard stated that she's already spoken with the school Principal (Mrs. Martin) as well as Chief Johnson and Mr. Zenion. One of the revisions that the school department has been able to implement in this process is to revise pickup and drop off where only the students exit or enter the car. This keeps the line moving. Now, Mrs. Martin is working on a placard system to be able to ensure that nobody is getting out of their vehicles on 138. The state promised the school department that an additional lane was going to be created for school traffic when they put in the rotary, but that was not done. The school department also spoke to their vendor, who was very responsive to our feedback, about getting the work on campus and on the walkways done; it should have been done, no excuses. Our custodians even tried to shovel out the handicapped spaces themselves yesterday morning. While everyone is well-intended, in some cases there is equipment needed that we may not have had at the moment. The Superintendent reported that she told the Director of Facilities and Grounds, as well as Mr. Zenion, that her expectation is that when we put a bit out next year, we must ensure that each expectation is spelled out specifically when it comes to snow removal, etc. When we want something plowed, we mean all spaces, to the best of their ability. We are currently reviewing the properties, and we have technology reviewing videotapes to be sure she has a clear understanding of how the job was completed. She offered that she agrees with Mr. Elsing and thanked him for coming, adding that he is welcome to reach out to her directly. Mr. Elsing asked if we can consider putting something on our agenda to make the parking lot bigger along the front of the field and have a one-way in one-way out traffic pattern. Ms. Helen Sheehan of Richmond reported that she has been told, by someone who is very knowledgeable about the process, that there is land on the Chariho campus for the Unified Elementary School we are proposing. She hopes the School Committee will consider using that land, which they already own, to put a new school on to save money on buying more land. Mr. Sunderland from Ashway (Hopkinton) identified himself as the vendor that plowed on the Richmond Elementary School site. He stated that after speaking with the town Public Works, they told him where to push the snow and he does it. He's never had an issue in three years. We just had about 30 inches of snowfall, and he wonders where people expect it to go. It has to be piled up. As for the parking area on 138, he identified it is not a DOT approved parking lot. There is an asphalt path, as Mr. Elsing mentioned, but it does not reach that lot. It ends at the school parking lot. He feels kids should be taking buses. As taxpayers, it's a big part of what they pay for and the parents who choose to bring their kids to school everyday are wasting that money by not using the service. He feels that the issue of parking and walking on 138 is by parent choice and it's an issue for the entire community to deal with. He feels that if he has to move snow again, it will cost the district more. However, he did recently complete a five-hour workday with one machine and one of his guys, but he will forget about charging the district for it. He feels it was his mistake and will correct it because he's community minded. He did ask people from refraining from speaking ill of his company with the snow plowing. They don't understand what's involved.

Business – Motion: Member Reynolds made a motion to move Business Item 8B for discussion first, seconded by Member Louzon. **Discussion:** none. **Vote:** Unanimous in favor. **Approved.** Superintendent Picard stated that Kathy (Koziol) would distribute the update draft for bond language, from Karen Grande to the membership now.

Bond Language – Atty. Karen Grande answered several questions from the Committee regarding her new draft of the proposed bond language. At present, the only changes she made were to specifically say "one unified elementary school" and that the vote, overall, would be aggregate. She deleted, at the previous request of the school committee, any language that stated: "one or more schools" and "allows for remaining funds to be used for any changes needed at the Switch Rd. campus.". Chair Dinsmore requested clarification on this topic as she believes that the voters already voted on a \$15 Million bond for Switch Rd. campus improvements and we already

made a number of improvements with \$7.5 Million of that bond. There was still some language there relative to the Switch Rd. campus, but Atty. Grande identified that this gives the school department flexibility, in the event that there would be unspent bond dollars at the end of our One Unified Elementary school project, to use those monies at Switch Road campus in the event that it is needed there. Atty. Grande stated that if you have a single purpose bond issue, and you come in way under budget, you won't be able to use those unspent funds on anything else if something comes up. Member Chapman reminded this Committee that at the last meeting it was discussed that unspent funds could also be applied to debt service. Atty. Grande agreed that this is the case, but by adding this language, it would provide the School Department with the opportunity to apply unused proceeds at Switch Road in advance of or as an alternative to putting it back to debt service. However, if this Committee prefers to remove the language for Switch Road entirely, she'll comply with that request. As an example of the need funds that wasn't originally discussed, Atty. Grande reminded this Committee about Mr. Burns' comments this evening about trying to find a way to improve the travel pattern for the middle school. It may be a good idea to keep this option open, especially if you're considering moving grade five to the elementary campus, or for any future shifts for the Switch Rd. campus. It gives you the ability to be flexible when making those decisions. Member Purcell asked if the bond number could be rounded from \$110.2M to \$110 M. Atty. Grande stated that the recommended amount was \$110.2M so that's what the bond must say. While this is the "not to exceed number" the only legal limitation is that bonds are typically issued in \$5,000 denominations. Therefore, you wouldn't want to have some number that ended up in a two or as even because you would want to have something that's rounded to the \$5,000.00 denomination. While the Committee could agree to go less, she cautioned them to review the need. Mr. Zenion stated that \$110.2 Million is needed and what the project was already coming in at. He does not want to be short. Member Champlin looks forward to further information as to where this number came from. Member Pouliot asked who would make the decision to either use unspent funds on the Switch Road campus versus paying down the debt? It would be a majority vote of this School Committee. Member Champlin asked if this number is based off of the preliminary numbers we have through our stage one application. (Correct). Mr. Matt Blais, who came before our Committee in December, did explain the financial process. Member Tefft asked if the bond language was supposed to include having all three member towns sharing the cost of the bond equally (1/3 each). Even though this was discussed openly previously, **there was no vote taken on this issue.**

Motion: Member Tefft made a motion that the bond language be changed to reflect that all three member towns would share the cost of the bond equally. Member Phelps seconded this motion. **Discussion:** Member Pouliot asked if there is an issue regarding the Chariho Act language. Atty. Anderson stated that when it comes to education in the State of Rhode Island, the general assembly has the final say. They decide everything. If the General Assembly approves this bond be issued with equal responsibility (1/3 each town), then that's how it will be issued. If the General Assembly says it will be based on student enrollment, then that's how it will be issued. Member Louzon stated that if the state has the power to accept a one-third equal split, can they over-rule our bond language if we don't put it in as a 1/3 equal split as well? The answer was Yes; the General Assembly has the final word. They can refuse the bond, they can cut the amount, they have the final word. However, it has been Atty. Anderson's experience that the General Assembly typically follows the request of the community. Member Louzon recommends that the School Committee allow the Town Councils to come to this decision between them for this group. Member Hopkins asked the Towns to think about where they see their Town in fifty years; where will development be regarding incoming families, etc.? Do they think Charlestown will always be the town with the lowest enrollment? So much has changed for Chariho over the years, from a small school to what is now, a big regional district. We should be working together toward the same goal, and everyone has a vote, and everyone pays their equal share. Member Chapman stated that she believes the way the Chariho Act is structured, the towns responsibility is based on enrollment. If this was changed to equal thirds, and all the students from each town are using the same spaces, what would that change do to the long-term costs. Would those costs adjust? From an operating expense perspective, they should be based on student enrollment. Or is equal thirds just relative to this bond issue? Member Reynolds stated that the last time we discussed this bond language, we had three elementary schools and in the spirit of collaboration she voted for the 1/3 equal split, even though she felt it may not be fair to Charlestown, and it didn't pass. She's now a little concerned that this bond wouldn't pass if we vote for a 1/3 equal split. We had an eight to three vote to move forward with one unified elementary school with eight people in the majority across all the towns. If Hopkinton was the town who had less enrollment would the Hopkinton representatives want an equal split? She reminded this Committee that Charlestown carries a lot and there are things that Charlestown does that other towns do not.

Member Purcell stated that we are one district, and she believes that she doesn't just represent Richmond, she represents Chariho as a whole. There are a lot of kids that come into Chariho from outside districts as well. The current \$15 Million bond that passed is based on a per pupil split, not 1/3 each town, and this is how our educational funding comes in. Currently, Richmond has 37.78% of the population, Hopkinton has 38.78% and Charlestown has 23.43%. Charlestown would be around 600,000 in splitting the bond equally – and paying out \$887,000 a year. So, we'd be asking them to subsidize the other two towns to the tune of over \$200,000 per year for the life of the bond. That's significant. She is aware that the folks in Richmond and Hopkinton may point out that their property tax rate is about 15% and in Charlestown it's at about 5%, so once that number filters down to taxpayers, it's not as impactful. However, Richmond and Hopkinton get much more in state aid dollars at about \$7-8 Million each year, compared to Charlestown where they only get \$1.5 Million each year. She's not confident that Richmond or Hopkinton would want to split their state aid to give Charlestown more. There is a lot of volatility that comes with the per-pupil fluctuation that we see each year. Each year, we try to bring down the overall budget to appease the one town that had a bigger increase because they got a couple of kids when other towns lost a couple of kids. With a 1/3 equal split we would know what that number would be every year and we would avoid the fluctuation. So, what's the real answer to this? In recalling what Member Lyall added, the last bond some of us put a lot on the line in good faith and said, "let's have it pass in every town individually" and it didn't work out. She said that she is looking forward to hearing from other members on this, as well as members of each community.

Member Tefft added that when she stated that the towns share the cost equally (1/3 each) she specifically stated that we could revisit this and not have all three towns approve. She feels we need to come together on this and there are "gives and takes" with everything. She's not sure it's the right thing, but she's hoping it is, and that people are willing to make concessions. Member Hopkins said that since we were talking about a unified elementary school for the district, and in the last page of the budget, the enrollment at Ashaway is at 243 students, the enrollment at Charlestown is 327 (with Pre K students) and Richmond is at 464 students – which is surprising to her as Hopkinton is now on the lower end of the student population. (Superintendent Picard told her to look at the Tri-Town counts not the classroom counts) – Member Purcell added that Richmond got 100 kids from Hope Valley Elementary as well, but Hope Valley encompasses both Richmond and Hopkinton. Chair Dinsmore asked the Superintendent to weigh in. Superintendent Picard reminded this Committee that they need to look at the Tri town counts because some kids who attend Richmond may not live in Richmond, etc. Based on those numbers, Hopkinton has the most students, which is why Hopkinton got a huge increase in state aid. So, their percentage increase this year was very slight and Richmond and Charlestown did not. Member Louzon added that Charlestown only has approximately 23% of the students. Next year, they may have 22 or 24%. However, the bond works out, if we don't go to an equal third then each town will pay based on their student enrollment and we might be back up to 30% like we were years ago. We just don't know. However, as Member Lyall stated, would the taxpayers in Richmond and Hopkinton be willing to pay for an equal third if they only had 23% of the students? He guarantees they would not. Member Phelps added that he would be in favor of equal thirds because he is not sure what the population will be ten years from now.

Deb Carney, Charlestown Town Council President was recognized by Chair Dinsmore to add to this conversation. She stated the following: "She speaks for herself as the council has not yet had the opportunity to discuss this yet. They plan to discuss it at their meeting on February 23rd. Therefore, speaking only for herself, she is adamantly opposed to an equal third split. As Member Louzon pointed out, with just slightly more than 23% of the students in the Chariho district, the Chariho Act is very clear on how Charlestown pays for the operating costs, construction costs, etc. – it's based on student enrollment. When the Towns came together as one district in 1958, this is what everyone agreed to. When they further regionalized in 1986 and brought in the elementary schools, they agreed to this once again. As Atty. Anderson pointed out, the General Assembly is the ultimate authority. However, rest assured, Charlestown will vehemently oppose you trying to inflict one-third of the cost on them, which amounts to almost a quarter of a million dollars each year, in addition to what we should be paying based on the Chariho Act. This comes to approximately \$7 Million dollars over the life of the bond. She asked if the other towns would be willing to pay an additional quarter million dollars a year if they did not have to? State reimbursement is the equalizer in taxes right now. Charlestown pays more per student than Hopkinton or Richmond. In addition, she has a list of things that Charlestown has done over and above what Richmond and Hopkinton have done over the past thirty years. Charlestown will also not approve anyone changing the Chariho Act without their approval because they are not sure what else will change. Charlestown is paying right now for a third of the bond for campus 2010. We had agreed to that 16 years ago. We have paid

more than our fair share over the past 16 years, and nobody seems to acknowledge that. We also agreed to a 33% hold harmless provision in the CALA Bond, and for those of you that don't know what that is, we had agreed that no town would pay more than 33%, so when Richmond was over 33% of enrollment and when Hopkinton was over 33% of the enrollment, the district ate the difference. So, Richmond didn't pay more than 33, Hopkinton didn't pay more than 33 and the district, including Charlestown, made up the difference. Let's talk about the police officer in the middle school. Approximately 20-some-odd years ago, Charlestown agreed to put a cop in the middle school and we never regretted it. We paid for it 100%. We also paid our fair share to have the officer in Chariho high school. So, not only did we pay for the Richmond officer to be here, but we also paid 100% to have an officer in the middle school. For the past 40 years, both Charlestown and Richmond have paid for two elementary schools in Hopkinton. (Not one, but two.) Let's talk about plowing, which came up earlier. A few years ago, Richmond and Hopkinton said, "We're not paying for the plowing at the elementary schools. Charlestown's paying for ours. We plow our elementary school. Plus, we pay our fair share to plow Hopkinton and Richmond, Richmond. So, we are not going to sit by and allow you to say Charlestown's going to pay a third, and by the way, we'll do away with the veto power. If you pay your fair share, then we all get to say Hopkinton doesn't want it, they can veto it, if Richmond doesn't want it, they can veto it, but if we're going to do a third, Charlestown, you don't get a say. So just rest assured, we are not going to sit by and let you subject us to paying a third when that is not what the Chariho Act says. Thank you."

Michael Geary, Hopkinton Town Council President stated "as far as kicking it back to the town councils on who's going to pay what, I'd say no to it right now if it came in front of me, and I'm sure most of the town council would say no too. You guys were elected to do this. This is a damn good time, and I'll say this again, it's a damn good time, to rethink about opening up the Chariho Act. Okay, if you guys want some town involvement, we need to sit down and rewrite the Chariho Act. Thank you." Chair Dinsmore stated it is her understanding that in order to open up the Chariho Act, the town councils have to all agree to do that. (Correct)

Helen Sheehan, Richmond stated "it turns out I agree with Mike Geary. I think we should open the Chariho Act because one of the things that has happened is that, since all three towns are in this, none of us have any power. You give us the bill; we have to pay it. If we were under the town control, we would have more control over what is happening. I would like to see Richmond Elementary School renovated, not like new, just renovated to do the job. So, I'd like to see us open the Chariho Act and have us take back our school. I think that would be a lot less expensive for the town of Richmond and then we wouldn't have these arguments. If we were truly one unit, all the residents would pay equally. It would be blind and it wouldn't matter where you lived, you'd pay the same amount. So, the town councils, I'm going to put it to my town council too, open the Chariho Act and take this out."

Greg Avedisian, Hopkinton stated he wanted to add to the discussion about changing the bond language. *"As far as I'm concerned, any ambiguity, options, or contingencies will just cloud the (bond) language. It's going to provide fuel for the public people who are adamantly opposed to it and it's just going to provide fuel to their fire to provide misinformation or to just say that well "what if", etc. I noticed that the version of the bond last available on the website says the three schools: I'm just wondering why the most up-to-date bond proposal uh was not posted. Superintendent Picard stated that we just provided a comparison of the language because Atty. Grande was still working on the revision. The old one is still up there for comparison, and the new one will be posted after the School Committee has it tonight. He feels it just adds to the confusion. Regarding the cost sharing. He lived in Charlestown during the high school improvements and endorsed equal thirds but at the time, the student population was nearly equal, and it just didn't make sense to withhold funding for desperately needed improvements on the main campus for a few percentage points. The numbers are dramatically different now and, I think over the cost of 20 years, 30 years, it's going to be going to cost uh Charlestown upwards of \$7 million unless the student population changes. So that, in my mind, is the equalizer. You pay by the student, and if the student enrollment changes the then cost changes for each town. If you change it to one-third equal payments, it's for the life of the bond. In my mind, I want to see this pass because it's so desperately needed and I think to have the discussion about equal thirds and talk about opening up the Chariho Act, by the time we're done, we're probably looking at another ten years of students attending inferior elementary schools. I think this is just smoke and mirrors. I think there are people on this committee who would like nothing more than to see this bond fail and this will give them ammunition."*

Jeremy Palmer, Hopkinton stated *"I'd like to start by saying this is not to reopen the bond, I think would be fair to everyone because we're not dealing in the same times. I've heard a lot about the discussion of language and*

certainly it's changed since 1958, because in 1958 I think that people could gather in a room and speak openly and their voices would be heard equally. Today, I see a lot of crossed arms, Craig. People not listening, people who are selfishly demanding that they would not participate equally. In my mind when I hear one-third, one-third, I know that that's all more complicated than it seems because we're all speaking a different language. At the end of the day, the name of the school is Chariho. It is derived from all the towns that are equally benefiting from our school's education. So, I would strongly suggest that whatever is going on in the language that isn't understood by the majority of the people here, those people who have been elected to represent their towns would say so in a manner that is not politically driven, to find friendship within the group and think as individuals. In my mind if somebody can sit in a with a political community of people that they agree with, and then if you can sit in the room and you agree with every single one of them, then you're not thinking as an individual. So, I would implore to the people who were on the board who were elected for the reasons of their own, whatever the reason was that you guys got on the board and decided to make an impact in your community, that you would leave your personal feelings aside, listen to what's going on in the room, do not look for a fight and look for a resolution because that's what the community really needs here. I mean, I don't understand all the dialect that's being used in the room, and I would assume the majority of the people sitting in this room really don't know. They're looking toward the people that we've elected to represent us. I would suggest that you should take a personal inventory of who you are, why you're on this board, what your actual views are, and represent them. Because if you can sit next to someone again, and there's three people in the room, and you agree with every one of them, then you're not an individual. This is not 1958, let's change some things. let's get along, and find a resolution, not a fight. Thank you."

Greg Avedesian, Hopkinton asked *"If the bond goes before the General Assembly, and President Carney of Charlestown adamantly opposes it, will the General Assembly take that into consideration?"* Atty. Anderson said Yes, but that question is better presented to the State Representative and State Senator from Charlestown. Member Chapman asked what impact would be on the district if Charlestown opposed it, relative to the intricacies of the Chariho Act? Atty. Anderson answered that it's a political decision by the General Assembly, and he would be presumptuous to speak for the State Senator or State Representative of Charlestown as to how this would play out at the General Assembly. The Chariho Act does have an exit provision, and there was discussion about that, but without having it in front of him, he recalls it would require pay-off of your obligations at the time of exit.

Andrew Elsing, Richmond – asked about the length of the bond (30 years) and if that is set in stone. He asked if it was feasible to word it differently - for the first five years all three towns would pay 1/3 equal payments and at the end of five years they can readdress it and change it to per pupil enrollment for the next part, etc. Superintendent Picard stated that the state law uses student enrollment, so this comes up every year with the budget votes. Any district in town that is not regional pays per enrollment, which is how your state funding is determined. The Chariho Act also uses student enrollment. Atty Grande added that novel structuring has never been done before (that she can recall) and it probably could be done, but she would want to discuss it with the district's fiscal advisor to determine marketability of the bond. Assuming a 30-year amortization, you'd be issuing three multi year bonds, one with a certain payment structure, a second with a potentially different structure, and then the third with yet another structure. So, each time you issue the bond, you'll be selling it to different investors. You wouldn't necessarily have the same bond holders. Member Reynolds stated that if the State Senator and Representative from Charlestown do stop the process, then we'd have to start all over again, and how much money does that cost? Member Louzon said we've done this four times already, with this one being the third (if it does) that makes it to bond status. When the late Superintendent Ricci shepherded the 2010 bond issue that was the first one that had passed in Chariho in fifty years. He also asked if we sent a letter to the Town Councils to address this as we discussed at the last meeting. Superintendent Picard said she did send the letter out, but in the meanwhile, we needed to come to this meeting to make the motion. Chair Dinsmore stated that we agreed to send out a letter in the spirit of improving communications with the Towns to be collaborative. Member Pouliot stated that there may be a time that the Chariho Act does need to be seriously reviewed, but it's not when your feet are "to the fire" - No more delays, no more stick in the wheel to prevent us from getting what we all need to do.

Samantha Wilcox, Town Council President of Richmond was acknowledged by the Chair and stated that she is also speaking on her own behalf, but there are other members of their Town Council here tonight as well as the majority of Hopkinton's Town Council in attendance. She believes that the time to get answers about bond questions would have been at Omnibus. She agrees with the fact that the language for the bond lays in the

hands of this Committee, not the Town Councils. She doesn't think they have time on their agendas to have that discussion but could try and push it through in March. They do all plan to attend Chariho's Annual DFM on March 3rd. She also reiterated the question asked by Member Reynolds "If the bond is written as one-third split equally, and goes to the general assembly but is stopped by Charlestown (she states that Richmond has stopped some very big bills in the past), does this Committee have enough time to develop another bond questions or does all this work go out the window?"

Steve Moffitt, Hopkinton was acknowledged by the Chair and stated that the one thing in your control is building one unified school, but you cannot control population. He offered that he has a lot of respect for Deb Carney of Charlestown and has friends in all three towns, but he is in favor of splitting this by equal thirds as a regional school district.

Deb Carney, President of the Charlestown Town Council, asked for this item to be tabled in the spirit of cooperation as they only received the letter from Superintendent Picard last week. She read an excerpt from that letter aloud: "As part of the preliminary review, individual School Committee members have raised items for discussion. These are topics members have asked to be examined as part of a broader and transparent review process. These include Member Champlain, who asked that the Committee explore whether a one-third cost sharing framework among Charlestown, Hopkinton, and Richmond would be feasible or appropriate; Member Tefft who requested consideration of whether a proportional cost sharing model should not be pursued and having bond legislation require approval by each town individually rather than through an aggregate, districtwide, vote; Additionally, a suggestion was raised for the Town Councils to consider whether a cross-town council meeting might be helpful. These items are being shared for transparency and awareness. At this time, the School Committee is seeking input rather than consensus. We warmly invite members of the Town Councils to join the School Committee meeting on February 10th, 2026. If you are interested in listening to the discussion or sharing a perspective, if your council has thoughts or alternative considerations that you believe would be helpful for the School Committee, that feedback is welcome." Ms. Carney stated that the Charlestown Town Council did not have the opportunity to collectively discuss this, and Councilor Wilcox (Richmond) just stated the same. She also added that she did not believe Hopkinton had this opportunity either. The letter was not received in time to put this on their last agenda. Therefore, she is asking the School Committee to table this vote until their next meeting (March 2026) to give each of the Town Councils the opportunity to have these discussions.

Member Purcell stated that if we move forward to table, she asks that Karen Grande give this Committee an option about different (unique) structures to the payment system for a bond, as she feels it's a worthwhile idea to explore. She'd like more research on that topic. Member Pouliot asked how tabling this would affect our timeline. Atty. Grande reminded this body that everything is under the purview of the General Assembly, and they have certain procedures and rules. Those rules can be modified by a majority vote of the General Assembly, but they typically like to have everything introduced by April. She has seen local measures introduced closer to the end of the session but the closer you get the more politically fraught with difficulty it is to get legislation introduced and passed. Rules have to be modified, people have to agree to the submission, and consideration has to be given to whether there is enough time to have all the Committee meetings. The later you go in, the more risk there is that you may not get through the process.

Chair Dinsmore asked the Clerk to re-read the motion aloud. "The motion was to add language to the bond that all three towns must share the cost of the bond equally by one-third, one-third, and one-third."

Member Tefft asked if she could withdraw her original motion in favor of amending it. Both the original motion and second were withdrawn. Member Tefft stated that after hearing Deb Carney speak on this issue she does believe the towns should have more time to get together and review the proposals this Committee has brought before them tonight. **Motion:** Member Tefft made a motion to table this item and ask that Atty. Grande look at alternative payment structures to the bond." Superintendent Picard stated that this ask is too vague and that each time we ask the Attorney to do these kinds of queries we have to pay for that work. While Atty. Grande can give her a 'big-picture scenario' she does need to know exactly what the query is so she can ensure that this body gets the most accurate information possible. The superintendent suggested that they go ahead with a motion to table and then add a request at the end of this meeting for more structured legal opinion on the bond. This will work because you need a majority vote for legal questions. Atty. Anderson agreed that simply tabling this item now is the right course. **Amended motion:** Member Tefft amended her Motion to table this item and

Member Pouliot seconded that motion. Discussion: Member Pouliot ask if it can be brought up again because we have to get it to the General Assembly. Yes. **Vote:** Unanimous in favor to table this item. **Approved.**

Motion: Member Purcell made a motion that bond council, Atty. Grande, should provide this body with information on unique structures regarding three ten-year bonds; the first ten-year bond with an equal one-third split and the remaining two ten-year bonds being per pupil. **Discussion:** Atty. Grande recommended that if this body is only going to look at two structures, they should either do one 10-year bond or two 15-year bonds. **Member Purcell amended her motion to ask Atty. Grande to provide information to this body on the payment structure for two 15-year bonds; the first 15-year bond with an equal one-third split between all three towns and the second 15-year bond structured per-pupil. Seconded by Member Tefft. Discussion:** Superintendent Picard reminded this body that we also have to ask Matt Blais (financial advisor) to do this work, and she wants to make sure this Committee understands the requests they are making. There are additional legal fees for that. Atty. Grande explained that these are two separate 15-year bonds – issued one at a time as we have done with the main campus bond - they are not stacked. Essentially, this would be a planned refunding. We often do a refunding for interest rate savings purposes. Matt B. did recommend a 30-year bond. What this Committee is recommending is going to be expensive. What you normally see is issuance of a 30-yr bond and maybe a refinancing of that if interest rates improve in 10 years or so, to achieve interest rate savings. This would be a planned 10-year bond that wouldn't have any call option or redemption option. Then you essentially refund that bond with another 10-yr bond without a redemption option, and a different allocation of debt service. She has never seen this. Member Purcell asked if the fluctuation in student enrollment would skew everything? It would change the reallocation of the debt service. The debt service for the first bond is what it's going to be based on – interest rates at the time of issuance. The debt service on the second bond would be dependent on what rates are at that time of issuance, etc. It's just that the allocation of the debt service on the first bond would be a third, a third, and a third; the allocation of the debt service on the second bond would be on a per-pupil basis. Chair Dinsmore asked Atty. Grande (as our bond attorney) if she recommends this route. Atty. Grande believes there is a reason she's never seen it done and she's been doing this for almost 40 years. Chair Dinsmore asked if it would be a significant additional expense if it's split into two 15-year bonds? There would be double cost of issuance. (legal fees, financial advisory fees, underwriter fees, council fees, state public finance management board fee, etc.) You're also going to be in a situation where, say interest rates in 10 years go up instead of staying stable. You're going to have no ability to stay in that 10-year bond at that existing rate. You're going to have to refinance the bond even if it's at a higher interest rate in order to uh accommodate these other structuring concerns. Member Purcell stated that she doesn't want to over-complicate things and she appreciates the unique idea and the desire to compromise and reach a solution, but it doesn't seem to be a really feasible option. She also stated that she really doesn't want to pay the cost of investigating this, so she pulled her motion and Member Tefft pulled her second. **No vote taken. Motion pulled.**

Discussion of the Draft of the Superintendent Evaluation Rubric – Chair Dinsmore stated that this evaluation rubric is to be considered for school year 26/27 and asked the Superintendent to weigh in. She referred comments to Atty. Anderson first, who stated that several meetings ago both the Superintendent and the Chair graciously agreed to try and sit down to come up with something that they both thought was fair, equitable, and informative. The purpose of an evaluation is to be informative to both the committee and the person being evaluated. He is pleased to report that they worked very hard together; they worked through all their questions and came up with the draft evaluation tool that is being presented to you tonight. He offered his compliments to both of them on this work, stating that while he was on one or two of the calls, they truly did 99% of the work themselves. The question is now, what does this Committee want to do with it. It's his recommendation that the School Committee go forward and use it, don't put it on a shelf. One of the questions that has been raised is how you should do this. There are people that have never been involved in evaluations before or certainly not evaluations of a Superintendent. There's also a question of training; will you get some training on it. Yes, somebody can come out and do a presentation to train you on how to use this evaluation tool and you'll have someone available if you have questions down the line. Then someone has to take all of these evaluation forms back and put them together and look for common themes and set goals. He explains having worked in another district that had a Superintendent evaluation done only by the Chair and in his experience it's not a good idea. It's not fair to the Superintendent or the Chair. He has

suggested that the School District locate a retired superintendent to take on this process. That person would come in, do a presentation with the approved form as to how evaluations work, explain what is helpful and what is not helpful feedback. (For instance, to simply say the Superintendent gets a “2” without saying why, is not helpful) The same issue applies for someone giving a “4” on every item without explanation. Nobody is that consistent in the world. Once the Members of this Committee return the forms to this person (not Angela, not Louise, not Gina or himself), then that person writes up a report based on the input received. At that point, that person can come and meet with the Superintendent and the School Committee to explain the results. This is a fair way to do it. There is a cost to this process but it’s minimal. This will give it credibility. I remind those of you who were on this Committee in 2020, and I tell those who have joined the Committee since then, you went to an outside person (who is, sadly, now deceased) to run it – you did not try to run it yourselves. That was a very good, very fair way to do it. No-one complained afterwards of mistreatment, or inability to have their say, etc. Everyone talked it through. It was a good process. That’s his recommendation and he complimented Gina and Louise for working together on this, but the next step is implementation.

Chair Dinsmore and Superintendent Picard thanked Atty. Anderson for acknowledging their work. They put a lot of time into this exercise and agreed on this final draft. She knows the School Committee will want to weigh in but this is a “discussion only” agenda item so where do we go from here? Atty. Anderson reminded this body that any item on the agenda can be voted on; or they could add it to a special meeting. You can continue discussion, talk it out and get a feeling of where you are going with it. Atty. Anderson will look for the point person to implement the training and begin the process. He recommends this body continue their discussion tonight and hold the vote another day to make sure everyone is comfortable with the tool. It’s best to stay as neutral as possible and make sure everyone gets the necessary training. Superintendent Picard stated that she is happy to offer to the Committee a pilot review of her goals and progress within those goals to the rubric as a self-reflection, which is what we do with our Administrators and teachers in their evaluations. The Superintendent is the only member of the Chariho Regional School District that is evaluated every year, and she feels it’s good to follow through with it. She is a big supporter of feedback as it offers the best yield of results to be able to improve the district with teaching and instruction for students. So, the more thoughtful the feedback, the more robust we can be and adapt. A good example would be she and the Chair electing to work together on this. The Superintendent is a teacher in the classroom, and Chair Dinsmore is in the business world, working with clients and individuals. You don’t have to agree on everything, but you learn how to collaborate and communicate in a way that’s respectful and responsible. The Superintendent thanked Chair Dinsmore for working with her and being aligned. She is very proud of the recent budget presentation too, which helps the community better understand our work. With the collaboration of the Chair I’m able to ensure that anyone in the community regardless of political alignment or partisanship understands what we’re trying to say in the best interest of students. She thanked everyone for allowing them this opportunity and feels this rubric is based on high quality research, with national and international models, and she feels really strongly that it will provide the district, and whatever Superintendent you have, with a very good, robust, thoughtful way to provide feedback.

Member Purcell stated that she appreciates the concept of teaching the Members how to use this tool as it was something she provided in her original feedback. She really wants the Members to feel like they know how to do the evaluation. That said, she feels she needs more time to review this material as it was only received for review yesterday, so she prefers that this item remains discussion only tonight. Chair Dinsmore stated that it is important to know the timeline because Superintendent Picard has to be evaluated by a certain time and this body has to vote on a contract extension.

Member Lyall also recommended that people who haven't had a chance to review the rubric be given that time and push a vote on this off to another meeting. This way, if any Member has changes to add, those can be sent to the Chair and Superintendent Picard. Member Champlin added that in his professional career, he is scored on a rubric like this, however, it's different in the business world. He asked how closely aligned Superintendent Picard's goals are to this rubric. This rubric is aligned to the goals and national research. The goals are always aligned that way regardless of the tool, but this rubric really is more about ensuring that we anchor to what is most important to the committee. Chair Dinsmore shared her "big picture" and the Superintendent shared hers when creating this rubric and they melded those together in alignment. This rubric will work for any Superintendent.

Discussion and approval of the stage I application to RIDE – The Superintendent stated that this is just to reset our spot in line. This application has updated letters of interest, our letter of local support, our compliance agreement, and the building committee membership update. We are updating our demographic report with NESDEC (an updated enrollment report is required every year – and is usually done in March). We updated the five-year projections too as well as the Necessity for School Construction schedule. Most districts use the term "Building Committee" for this but we do not as our Building Committee is very specific to the Chariho Act language. The five-year capital planning opportunities are our responsibility by state law. The district asset reports, maintenance updates, operating budget, and any other updates necessary. Our recent communication with Rhode Island Energy about any rebates that we could possibly be receiving along with the current narratives of where we are in that process. This must be submitted by February 15th, and our Stage II application will now be submitted on September 15th. **Motion:** Member Purcell made a motion to approve this Stage I application to RIDE, seconded by Member Reynolds. **Discussion:** The Superintendent reminded this body that SLAM and Colliers have done this work at no additional cost. **Vote:** Unanimous in favor.

Approved.

Budget Workshop - Superintendent Picard provided the most current information to the Committee earlier this afternoon and posted the updates to the public on our website. If you go to the website, you will see the documents. She thanked Mr. Kona who offered that as feedback for us, and she included the Town Managers in her submission along with the Town Council Presidents and elected officials. This way we will all work from the same document. The "one-pager" – one page budget summary – is not something Superintendent Picard prefers to use. It causes too much confusion and does not provide absolute numbers. When we have a preliminary budget in January, we give you the best information we have at that time, which changes when we get updates from the Governor's office regarding allocations, or cuts are made by the Administration, or by the Committee. Within one day of receiving that One-Pager, the numbers can become obsolete. So that document is basically a workshop document for the school committee and they've used it well. The Omnibus meeting in January is a state requirement – all cities and towns in Rhode Island must have a meeting like this. We call it Omnibus because we are regional. We cannot alter the agenda of Omnibus because it comes from State law. When we are on the same page, the budget makes more sense. The One-Pager is a summary but it's not part of our actual financial system. While it was created with the best of intent, it's a man-made excel document and many updates have been made to the formulas based on new codes, etc. This can easily be corrupted, so it's not the most useful tool. While the Superintendent is very proud of the work we do, as is shown in our Audits, our financial team does their best to keep things updated and accurate. When Members get that document, it is out of our control as to how they or the towns utilize that information. The State law requires that the towns give maintenance of effort because we have a budget vote, and the Chariho act is very specific, on a proposed budget – not a final number. As we have heard, the General Assembly has the ultimate control over the Governor's budget, and our representatives will work at the legislature over the next few months on our behalf. Therefore, with the

numbers you have before you today, we are looking at an overall 4.99% increase. While this is difficult to swallow, we have already made many cuts (9 certified educators and approximately five- and one-half teacher assistants). With that being said, the Superintendent still feels we can remain on task for Vision 2029. Any other cuts will be the responsibility of the School Committee after tonight as they will "approve" (take over) the budget and work through it again. It is the Superintendent's responsibility to understand where the Committee's guardrails are in this process. The biggest budget drivers are: Sports and extracurricular activities (over 1 million dollars) for instance. Will you be looking at that?; Classroom sizes – we've already removed staff at the elementary level to get as close as possible to the class sizes suggested; our reduction of certified staff is based on attrition and retirements. We are at risk with this budget and that means you will have to put more dollars on the revenue side of the house to pay for things like those retirements. Each time we make a move, for instance taking a half-percent off a certain group of line items that were above 4%, as Chair Dinsmore suggested, we have to look at the particulars, we can't just take \$53,000.00 (for instance) off the top for the district. We have teacher contracts, vendor contracts, etc. The dollar amount in the school budget is also based on increases (inflation) like transportation, which is still a moving target, and utilities. We are waiting on the state's transportation audit which is due back this month. To date, every other district has saved at least one bus with this audit, so there are potential savings to be realized. The Superintendent will be fighting alongside our Representatives and Senators at the State House for Chariho. The League of Cities and Towns has had their meeting regarding the funding formula, and she has spoken to each Town Manager regarding her opposition regarding the Blue-Ribbon foundation funding formula. The transportation issue alone is a huge issue for Chariho, and to clarify, that's not part of the funding formula. That's categorical, which means it's never guaranteed and we have to fight every year for the classroom door. Our kids need these buses, and she feels this is an advocacy that the General Assembly will understand, and where Washington County is coming together. The money we need is not for supplies, as the supply increases were due to necessary science materials and things like CTE assessments (use to be under the Perkins grant, but is no longer supported). While Davies and the MET got a big bump (each over one million), we would like to see some of that money too; to go back to our operating budget. Therefore, the Superintendent will be pushing that at the General Assembly too. CTE for all will help us offer opportunities, like our agriculture program, which Ezri Acton and Susie Scanapieco presented to the Charlestown Town Council, to discuss one way the budget at the state is not funding just schools but also municipalities with composting. That helps to add \$12,000 to our budget for an unfunded mandate. We're asking the state to fund this, not by giving us new money, but by reviewing the Governor's budget with them and showing how we can access dollars that are already in the budget. Superintendent Picard stated that while she can appreciate the Learn 365 program, which is well intended, every other superintendent that's not regional is going to help their towns do one grant for mathematics. Superintendent Picard does more than that. With just one Administrative Assistant who handles the School Committee Clerk duties as well, she has to do more than most Superintendents. That was one way this Committee saved money. We are now reaching the point where services to students will be impacted. Investing in staff is important to handle student needs, personnel needs, etc. The Superintendent's job is legislated, as are the other 34 Superintendents in Rhode Island, to make sure the budgets they present are based on student need. The taxpayers are our Town Council's responsibility. The funding formula is based on enrollment, so when enrollment decreases, aid decreases but student needs may increase. That's an area where we need to advocate at the State House as well from our Town Councils, Representatives, Senators, and Town Managers. The high cost of special education is a huge driver. High cost of special education means that the cost is four times the amount of the per-pupil cost. It's really hard to get to that number but the students who have those needs are significantly impacted. We have changing services (diapering from PK to Gr. 12), feeding tubes, etc. and they too deserve the best education. Massachusetts and Connecticut funds their high-cost special education, Rhode Island does not.

Hopkinton and Richmond are working diligently with their economic development, however last year we put \$3 Million dollars back into the member contributions to lower the percentage requests from the towns. It can't go back to the Towns because it is part of the allocation of State Aid for Education. It's important to remember that State Aid is what it is. We can't get push back on those bills. This is always going to be a proposed budget, and the General Assembly will vote on that in June. Our KeyNet system houses our full budget. We have reports that are much cleaner and that's the system of reports we should be using versus the "one-pager" excel sheet and the budget book overall. It has served its purpose, but was created before the state moved to UCOA, and we're trying to make an old system fit into a new way the State tracks dollars. The financial dashboards are online, and Santiago from RIDE gave us a tutorial on how to use them. We are happy to have him return if necessary. If the Committee considers any additional cuts, it will most certainly affect student services in some way, whether it's a support staff member or athletics, etc. No decisions need to be made tonight, but the Superintendent does ask the Committee to provide guidelines. Once the Committee approves this budget, they take it over for school committee to begin thinking about how they want to move forward.

Member Purcell stated that she likes the "one-pager" overview. She'd rather we continue with it as we currently do not have an alternative. On the overview, from the budget workshop on 2/3/26, the Richmond number was 5.15% and the Town is responsible for the maintenance of effort. The Superintendent stated that Hopkinton's percentage is much lower due to the state aid but people are taking this one-pager and utilizing it in a way it was not intended. This is where all the confusion lies. The Superintendent said if she likes the one-pager you can create it in excel, create a PDF and export it, but the information there doesn't accurately reflect the school's entire budget. It's basically trying to do a municipal budget three times and is providing information that adds to the lack of clarity and confusion. We can provide any information you need if you ask. Therefore, when you look at Richmond's percentage at the time of the budget workshop on 2/3 it was 5.15%, today it is 4.99%. Remember, we do not have control over state aid either, so that can change, and frequently does. Member Purcell stated that the one-pager provides numbers from previous years as well, and she likes that feature as it helps her understand the average local increase. She sees that it's been very low overall, as state aid had been carrying Richmond over the years, and that there are important lessons in that one-pager. It would help to know all the information as well as how people are utilizing that information. Since Mr. Rosso at the Hopkinton Town Council, said words like "mistake or error", and that may not be accurate. Superintendent Picard replied that as a School Committee member they have the responsibility to ask questions and we can put something together but then if that document is utilized without clarity, inaccuracies come up and we don't look like we have accurate information, which is not the case. She stated that we're on the same team and she just doesn't advise that they use this one-pager anymore, it's problematic. Mr. Zenion will also tell you that while he was absolutely not ready for us to remove it, he sees what is happening across the towns and it's causing so much confusion, especially with a lack of finality to that bottom right hand corner, as we've discussed. There's much more that needs to be done to determine your final local increase. That is not something the school district can do without knowing all the facets of the towns' budgets either. We need to focus on the school budget workshop. I have a responsibility to you to ensure that we sort of realign to make sure that we're all talking. Mr. Rosso, Town Manager of Hopkinton, stated that there is a summary sheet in any sort of budget that he's created in his professional career. This budget is gigantic, with thousands of line items, so the average person cannot digest that. Having a summary sheet helps the residents (taxpayers) and the School Committee. He was invited to come here tonight, but he found that when he looked at the summary sheet at the Omnibus meeting and through his year over year analysis, having done this work for 12 years, he thought the increase to Hopkinton was palatable. It looks like \$383,000.00. He felt if the School Committee worked on a few more cuts, it could come

closer to \$300,000.00, which would be doable. However, on the Town side, facing all sorts of salary increases with unions fed up at getting 1 or 2 percent raises, we left the Omnibus feeling pretty comfortable. When he returned to start working on the Hopkinton Town budget, he sees an increase of \$725,000.00 when plugging in the numbers and began panicking. They looked at what the voters approved last year, which tied to their budget, and couldn't understand the increase. After speaking with Mr. Zenion, looking at the cover sheet in the prior year budget, it was not reflective of what the towns put into their budgets. It wasn't reflective of what the voters approved. He asked Mr. Zenion where the numbers came from and it was explained that there are adjustments made after the fact, which is fine, but it makes this very confusing. Superintendent Picard reminded Mr. Rosso that the voters do not approve the final number, they approve the projection with the numbers we have at the time. Mr. Rosso stated that he went to the Chariho website and saw that the last one provided there was dated March 17, 2025, to look at the numbers again and that information was reflective of the number that the Town put in their budget. The Superintendent reminded him that the voters do not approve a specific number. They approve a proposed budget and our legal counsel said when the General Assembly approves the Governor's budget they are the ultimate decision maker. They oversee everything. Mr. Rosso asked if Superintendent Picard is saying that the Voters have no say in what the final number is? She replied, No – your choice of words is inaccurate. The voters, according to the Chariho Act, are voting on the proposed number, the best we know of based on the General Assembly and Governor's State Aid at that time. We then use your maintenance of effort. When you, as the Town Manager, didn't want to change the payment, we had to get a letter from Atty. Anderson to your Solicitor to say if you withhold this money, the State's going to revert the money to the district. Mr. Rosso explained that he's trying to say that when Chariho shows a presentation with year-over-year increases and the number says 2.37% but then we get an actual increase of 4.5% it seems misleading. It's drastically understated to what the actual increase is for the taxpayers. Superintendent Picard asked him not to use language like "misleading" because she feels its very inaccurate and is an adjective that provides an evaluation or a judgement. There is lack of trust and collaboration here. It's important that we don't make assumptions about your budget or say something like "it's misleading" because that tells the public there's something not to trust. Let's anchor to the facts. The facts are that the law in Rhode Island says you can't give us less than the maintenance of effort based on the local expenditure that we received. Then state aid comes in, over which no one has any control. The General Assembly decides that and it's moving target. As fast as I can decrease the budget, or take out a bus, DCYF can give me new tuition rates for next year and we don't know what the number will be. When the budget is finally approved, the School Committee adopts it in March, and we go to the referendum with a number that is as close as we can get at that time. That's how every district works.

Mr. Rosso questioned, If the school committee approved the adoption of the budget on March 17th of a year and they realize an increase of \$880,000, where will that come from? That's an increase in expenses. The Superintendent explained that it comes from the votes of the School Committee. There are a lot of asks. Mr. Zenion stated that he very simply took what we billed Hopkinton (about \$202,000 more than what we came up with) and then they got an additional \$22,000 in additional state aid. That number is not arguable because you pay it every month. So, the one-pager tells you what we think based on what we know you are going to pay this year. Mr. Rosso stated that he did the same analysis for a period of 12 years and the numbers all matched, except this year. Mr. Zenion stated that with a school closing and then a spending of over \$700,000 in money that was not originally budgeted. When the Committee asked to see that laid out, we put in a whole extra column on the one-pager to see the adjusted numbers. Based on the conversation with Mr. Rosso, Superintendent Picard feels he may have budgeted off of that, but he should really be looking at the FY26 bill for the year. Mr. Rosso stated that he did, but he feels that the actual number has to be illustrated somewhere. The Superintendent asked him to reach out to her first. He said after he spoke with Mr. Zenion, he expected him to speak with the

Superintendent about their discussion. She said the Finance Managers should speak with each other and he should not tell the School Department and School Committee how to operate. He reiterated that he wants the School Department to illustrate, accurately, what the Town's actual increase is. Member Champlin called a point of order; he was not recognized by the Chair.

Chair Dinsmore feels that while all sides are coming at this with the best of intentions, we are all trying to understand and absorb the numbers. She feels this is a constructive moment where both sides have expertise to share. She also stated that she feels the Superintendent is saying that moving forward, we need to work together before we make these kinds of declarations in public meetings. She reminded him that these numbers are moving targets.

Member Champlin left the meeting at 9:32pm and stated that it's been a pleasure working with this Committee.

Chair Dinsmore stated that she appreciates these numbers and does need to understand the overall budget increase number and the impact on all three towns. (State Aid and local contributions as of today's date) Mr. Zenion reported the following: Before State Aid: Charlestown 4.05%, Richmond 4.11%, and Hopkinton 5.8%; With State Aid: 4.99% (overall) – Charlestown 5.02%, Richmond 7.82%, and Hopkinton 2.11%.

The Superintendent reminded this body that approval of this budget, as is, simply means we are moving forward and putting it in the School Committee's hands. It becomes their budget and they can make further cuts, if necessary. Mr. Zenion stated that the cuts requested by Chair Dinsmore would amount to \$53,000.00. Member Chapman asked if the School Committee can get a KeyNet report when changes are made. Mr. Zenion explained that KeyNet is going to provide professional development for us to run full reports directly from KeyNet, versus the way we are presenting the budget numbers now (via the budget book). While the UCOA numbers will work themselves out, the final number is the same. The Superintendent stated that we simply don't have enough staff to handle this with assistance. Member Purcell appreciates what was done in the budget already (increasing PK tuition and getting the rebate for the oil spill) and that the School Committee works with the Superintendent and her team to find areas to cut year after year. However, she's not seeing any other areas to cut. She would like to approve this budget and move forward with further workshops. Member Pouliot feels the only cuts she can see would be to sports programs, even though she feels that's not a popular opinion.

Chair Dinsmore stated that there will be more discussion at the March meeting before adoption. Mr. Louzon asked that we do not wait for the last possible moment to make cuts in the future. Chair Dinsmore reminded him that she suggested one-half percent cuts amounting to \$53,000.00. Superintendent Picard asked for some time as we have not yet seen our transportation audit and may be able to recoup some of that \$53,000.00. Member Reynolds asked if there was a ruling regarding DCYF on Friday. Yes – they were trying to charge all districts a rate for Sp. Education tuition, but it has no rhyme or reason and has never been stable. The Superintendent is concerned that DCYF may raise the overall tuitions as a result of losing their lawsuit. We will not know the amount they will be charging until we are through our budget season. Member Lyall asked that everyone to really digest this information and remember that the School Committee's responsibility is to put forward a budget that accommodates our students. We will have an opportunity to hear from the public at the DFM (District Financial Meeting) during the first week of March as well and we will need 25 voters from each town to be attendance. Chair Dinsmore stated that her concern is that we are trying to put in one unified elementary school with bond dollars and to put out a potentially large overall increase of 4.99% in April, is difficult to digest.

Samantha Wilcox, Town Council President of Richmond was recognized by Chair Dinsmore. She stated that she agrees with Gina that as a school committee, the charge is to put forward a budget that serves our students, but also our community. Her concern since being on the council is that they use the summary page as Mr. Rosso described and it's confusing because this year it's a different number than the prior year. We're building off of something very different when every other year it has carried over from year to year. Maybe a bigger explanation needs to be given. Superintendent Picard feels that she can no longer create a document that provides a level of confusion and it isn't her job to run municipal budgets, but to make sure the School Committee has the most accurate, up to date information they need for our school budget. Ms. Wilcox asked why the General Assembly didn't change the number every other year. She'd like to know where it came from. Member Phelps stated that he got his home tax assessment yesterday and it went up. He feels the voter's pocketbooks can only take so much, especially the elderly populations in the three towns. He hopes cuts will start at the top, with Administration. The Superintendent asked him to elaborate, and he stated that we don't need two Deans at Middle School or a Vice Principal at an elementary school. She reminded him that Richmond Elementary has almost 500 kids there, but if that's the Committee's decision, then it is. She also reminded him that Deans deal with mental health and school safety. He asked about the social workers we recently hired.

Motion: Member Purcell made a motion to approve the FY27 budget, seconded by Member Louzon.
Vote: 8 in favor (Chapman, Hopkins, Louzon, Lyall, Phelps, Purcell, Reynolds, and Tefft); 1 opposed (Dinsmore).

Approval of the 2027 School Committee calendar of meetings– Motion: Member Purcell made a motion to approve the calendar, seconded by Member Louzon. **Discussion:** Member Purcell asked to move the April meeting to April 13, 2027; All in agreement with that change. **Vote:** Unanimous in favor. **Approved.**

Approval of the SY 26/27 School Calendar – Motion: Member Purcell made the motion to approve the school calendar, seconded by Member Louzon. **Discussion:** Member Reynodls asked to change the January early release date to Janudary 14th; All in agreement with that change. **Vote:** Unanimous in favor. **Approved.**

Motion: A motion to continue this meeting past 10:00pm was made by Member Hopkins and seconded by Member Chapman. Initially, most members wanted to leave but the Superintendent reminded them that there is still the matter of the consent agenda and some things like important transfers that needed to be voted on. It wouldn't take long. **Vote:** Unanimous in favor. **Approved.**

Consent Agenda – approve as a group. Motion: Member Louzon made the motion to approve the consent agenda and read the donations aloud. Member Reynolds seconded. **Discussion:** None. **Vote:** Unanimous in favor. Donations: One, donation of a dollhouse with accessories for Richmond Elementary School from the Howard family. Thank you very much. Two, A donation from RIBA -Rhode Island Builders Association of \$3,991 to CTC for the construction of Project Playhouse. Member Hopkins added that the donation this evening of the snow removal from Mr. Sunderland (SNS Landscaping) – He thanked Mr. Sunderland who is contracted by the hour based on pieces of equipment.

Superintendent's Reports - The subcommittee reports were provided in the supporting documents. Strategic planning update - To remind many of you who may be new to strategic planning, publicly per

the law we have to present a strategic plan. You technically don't have to approve it, but we do appreciate feedback. You'll be getting our draft goals, and we will be giving you a Google form to be able to be able to share your feedback. It is presented by our teachers and our students most likely at our April meeting or May meeting. We will be sunsetting vision 2026 in December, but this budget prepares for Vision 2029. Survey Works is up and running and we are looking for as much feedback as possible. This allows us to have specific needs addressed within our School Improvement Teams. If parents can't come to a PTO meeting or a school improvement team meeting or a school committee meeting this is a great way for us to know what and how you feel about things happening in our district. So please go to the e update and fill that out. Thank you.

School committee requests for future agenda items or legal opinions. Member Hopkins would like to create a policy related to the use of Social Media by teachers and volunteers. Member Reynolds requested a Policy Committee update and agreed with Member Hopkins that the Social Media Use policy needs review. Member Purcell would like to write up and present a resolution regarding DCYF tuition. Chair Dinsmore asked that all requests be put in writing and forward to herself, Superintendent Picard, and the School Committee clerk.

Adjournment – Motion: Member Louzon made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Member Reynolds.

Vote: Unanimous in favor. **Approved**

This meeting adjourned at 10:10pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Angela Brasil
Chariho School Committee Clerk