

Chariho School Committee Special Virtual Meeting/ Budget Workshop
January 19, 2021

Committee Members Present: Chair Linda Lyall, Vice Chair Catherine Giusti, George Abbott, Ryan Callahan (joined at 6:05 PM – trouble linking in), Donna Chambers, William Day, Sheila Grover, Gary Liguori, Craig Louzon, Lisa Macaruso, Linda McAllister and David Stall (joined at 6:34 PM – trouble linking in).

Administrators/Others in Attendance: Superintendent Gina Picard, Assistant Superintendent Jane Daly, Director of Administration and Finance Ned Draper, Assistant Director of Administration and Finance Gail Wilcox, Retired Director of Administration and Finance Susan Rogers, NEA ESP President Thomas Pirnie, Hopkinton residents Ron Bryant, Teachers Courtney Moffitt and Paige Leddy and School Committee Clerk Donna Sieczkiewicz.

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

Chair Linda Lyall called the meeting of the Chariho School Committee, which was held virtually, to order at 6:00 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was followed by a moment of silent meditation. She welcomed all to the third budget workshop meeting.

II. Approval of Minutes

a. Special Meeting Minutes (Budget Workshop) of January 5, 2021 – Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the Special Meeting Minutes (Budget Workshop) of January 5, 2021.

Catherine Giusti made a motion, seconded by Donna Chambers and it was VOTED: To approve the Special Meeting Minutes (Budget Workshop) of January 5, 2021. In favor: Chambers, Day, Giusti, Grover, Liguori, Louzon, Lyall, Macaruso and McAllister. Abstained: Abbott. The motion carried by a vote of 9 in favor with 1 abstention (Callahan and Stall were not in attendance for the vote).

b. Special Meeting Minutes (Budget Workshop) of January 7, 2021 – Superintendent Picard recommended approval of the Special Meeting Minutes (Budget Workshop) of January 7, 2021.

Catherine Giusti made a motion, seconded by Donna Chambers and it was VOTED: To approve the Special Meeting Minutes (Budget Workshop) of January 7, 2021. In favor: Abbott, Chambers, Day, Giusti, Liguori, Louzon, Lyall, Macaruso and McAllister. Abstained: Grover. The motion carried by a vote of 9 in favor with 1 abstention (Callahan and Stall were not in attendance for the vote).

III. Budget Workshop

Superintendent Picard reviewed comments from those who attended the Omnibus Meeting and budget workshops. She and Ned worked on a list of proposed cuts from the comments received. Ned walked everyone through the adjustments they are proposing. The only action approved by the Committee to date is to add \$46,000 to CALA revenue. The rest will be pending your vote. On the list, after the additional CALA revenue, is in Section 6 – Reduce Town capital contributions to zero. This will result in a cut to the budget of \$217,687. They reassessed this line item based on discussion at the Omnibus Meeting and understand that there will be COVID money available for capital projects. The next, Section 5 – Row 1 – is a reduction to the budget of \$270,376 which is a result of lowering the fund balance to 2.5%. Based on current operations, distance learning has saved funding this year. The recommendation of 2-4% of fund balance will need to be reassessed next year as we do not want to keep going to 2%. Section 4 – Row 5781 – Transportation Non-Public – there was one respondent to the recent bid and that was Ocean State Transit. It is anticipated that there will be a savings of \$157,871 from what was proposed;

it is specified to this line item but will be spread out over several. ELA Districtwide Curriculum was another concern raised at these meetings. This is located in Section 4 – Row 6384. If we remove funding from FY22 and look at the FY21 budget to fund this, it will result in a reduction to the FY22 budget of \$151,000. It is felt with the savings on transportation, travel, etc. that the purchase can be made this year so they can continue with the plan to implement the new curriculum next year. Gina explained their rationale for the need to purchase this and implement it sooner rather than later is that the State is mandating changes to science and math. We have to spread these out so teachers can receive professional development training. This will be an additional lift for certified staff so she does not want to push ELA out any longer. Ned continued. Discussion with the Fire Marshal has resulted in a proposed reduction of \$113,200 as we will be able to remove the voice activated alarm system and the dry sprinkler service at Hope Valley School. We will need to do some work to the Alarm system but it is felt this can be covered with savings from the eye wash stations. Right now he is not recommending any reduction to the proposed funding for the eye wash stations and mixing valves as they need to check with OSHA first. Section 6 – CTC Culinary – it is felt that this can be reduced by \$150,000 pending accreditation review. The total number of reductions, including the increase of \$46,000 in revenue, is \$1,106,134. They have asked all principals/directors to come up with additional reductions in the \$5,000 to \$10,000 range in case we do not see the anticipated revenue. If these are all approved, Charlestown will see an increase of 1.16%; Richmond 2.41% and Hopkinton 2.08% with the overall increase at 1.97%. Donna noted a concern with the ELA curriculum. It needs to happen so she wants to be reassured that the money will be found to purchase this in FY21. Ned responded that they will find the money for this purchase in the FY21 budget. He would prefer to find some federal money for this but this is uncertain at this time. Based on current projections, he feels they will be able to fund it this year. If need be, they can look at lowering the CTC Culinary funding. Donna commented that as long as she has been on the School Committee the Towns have pushed to reduce the fund balance. She feels that reducing it to 2% would make it very difficult to move it back up again. As Ned said, we can't function on 2% next year. She would consider voting to lower it to 2.25% but no lower than that. Catherine stated the reductions look great. She complimented all on a great job. She agreed with Donna; she will approve a reduction to 2.25% but only if administration is confident that with the ELA Curriculum funding coming out of this year's budget, it will all make sense. Ryan asked Ned where they stand on healthcare; is it still 4.1% to which Ned replied "yes". Ryan questioned when this would be locked in. Ned responded that he will reach out tomorrow and see that it gets locked in. Ryan asked if the District had heard anything different on State aid to which Ned replied "no, they haven't heard anything and we will be depending on that." Ryan then asked if there is any outstanding expense/revenue that is unknown to them that could impact the budget. Ned stated that is a big one – State and Federal aid. That is the only reason he would suggest they could go with a reduction in fund balance to 2% this year as he does not know where it will land next year. Bill asked if the District would be reallocating money into the Hope Valley capital expenditure to deal with the fire panel. He is having a problem without a better understanding of the misinformation that RGB has sent them. He still has a grave concern with the eye wash stations and funding that is being set aside to these. He has looked at the one at Charlestown School and feels it will probably cost around \$500. He wants to make sure that money is put back into the Hope Valley fire alarm system. Things that have been done by RGB has misled them and he hopes they don't do anything that they will have to retract due to misinformation. Ned noted that they had a conversation with an owner's representative to narrow down the numbers. He will be more prepared to talk about this on Thursday. He is confident that they can make the reductions and still accomplish what they need to for next year. They have a plan to work with RIDE to extend the timeline due to COVID. They can get a more cohesive plan to put in RIDE's hands. He will provide an updated version on Thursday. Gina added. Like Ned said, they are not pleased with RGB's presentation or capital projects' list. So they did discuss it and are looking at hiring a Commissioning Agent. They feel it best to bring this on sooner rather than later. It is required by RIDE and a Commissioning Agent is more specific on project costs so we can prepare a better, more thoughtful five-year plan. Craig stated that he talked with Ned at length about this and Ned

alluded that he was looking into this. He is totally impressed with Gina and Ned as they know where cuts can be made. The Town Councils wanted \$700,000 to \$1,000,000; our administration got us to that point and made it easy for the School Committee. He thanked them. Gina noted that thanks also go to Jane, Sue and all who worked on the budget. They have been very thoughtful of the teaching/learning plan. They held the ELA curriculum sacred as they know this needs to happen. Linda McAllister wanted to tell everyone how much they appreciate all the work that has been put into this, especially with the ELA program moving forward. She agreed that the lowest she will go with the fund balance is 2.25%. They cannot go down every year as it won't be long before we can't take care of what we need to. She also thanked everyone for the work they have done. Craig made a motion to accept the suggestions from Ned excluding reduction of the fund balance which will be reduced to 2.25%. Chair Lyall suggested that they take each recommendation separately in the event discussion is needed on any one of them. Craig pulled that motion and made another motion to reduce the fund balance to 2.25% (Section 5 – Row 1). He asked Ned if he could supply a figure for this to which Ned noted it would take a few minutes. Catherine suggested they begin with motions on the ones they have the figures for. This will give Ned and others a chance to come up with the difference in the fund balance amount. Craig pulled his motion.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Catherine Giusti and it was VOTED: To reduce Town capital contributions to zero (Section 6 – Revenue); a reduction to the budget of \$217,687. In favor: Abbott, Callahan, Chambers, Day, Giusti, Grover, Liguori, Louzon, Lyall, Macaruso and McAllister. Abstained: Stall (as he just joined the meeting). The motion carried by a vote of 11 in favor with 1 abstention.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Catherine Giusti and it was VOTED: To approve a reduction of \$157,871 to Section 4 – Row 5781 – Transportation Non-Public. In favor: Unanimous.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Catherine Giusti and it was VOTED: To remove \$151,000 from the proposed budget – Section 4 – Row 6384 – ELA Curriculum Districtwide so long as this is addressed with other funds in this year's budget. In favor: Unanimous.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Catherine Giusti and it was VOTED: To remove, after discussion with the Fire Marshal and School Committee review, Section 6 – Hope Valley Fire Alarm/Dry Sprinkler System line item; a reduction to the budget of \$113,000. In favor: Unanimous.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Catherine Giusti and it was VOTED: Reduce Section 6 – CTC Culinary line item by \$150,000 pending accreditation review. In favor: Unanimous.

Craig Louzon made a motion, seconded by Catherine Giusti and it was VOTED: To reduce the Fund Balance (Section 5 – Row 1) to 2.25% - a reduction of \$135,188 to the proposed budget. In favor: Unanimous.

Craig noted that the proposed budget has been reduced by \$970,946 according to his calculations. Ned stated that he would like to redo the page and provide an update on Thursday. Right now, it looks to him that the overall increase will be @ 2.25% or @ 1.44% after state aid has been applied.

Sheila commented that doing all this cutting was a good thing but she will be asking to add something back in. She would like the District to re-establish two days of elementary foreign language instruction which will amount to @ \$130,000. She feels the program has suffered

considerably. They tried hard not to cut programs or services and she feels the kids are not progressing as quickly. Best practice is three days per week. The District was given high praise for having elementary foreign language. She feels kids are being shortchanged. Chair Lyall noted that she believes the cost would be more like \$105,000 (\$70,000 for salary and \$35,000 for benefits). Lisa stated that she is going to vote contrary to how she usually votes. She supported these cuts last year and there was no data that shows they were leading to fluency. We absolutely need to keep the program but truthfully immersion programs are the best practice. She would like to see this in Chariho. What are the fluency measures going into the Middle or High School? Two days of immersion would be best practice. Her own kids have taken language for years and cannot speak fluently. David shared Lisa's sentiments. He does not feel there is a noticeable difference in his three children in elementary school. The program gives them enough exposure but he agrees that immersion is the only way it will be beneficial. Private schools generally offer this. Gary reiterated much of what was said. His daughter is a sophomore and she spent half a year in Spain. Maybe they can create an afterschool program or club in foreign language. What people need is a minimum of twenty minutes a day as exposure. Sheila is conceptually on the right track if kids are motivated. Chair Lyall did not believe they were at a point where they would want to make a motion. Sheila noted that the points are well taken and she did not have a motion at this time. She will gather more information but finds it hard to believe that twice as many days of something won't be a benefit. Lisa encouraged her to make this a future School Committee agenda item so they can have a robust discussion but she cannot get on board financially right now. Chair Lyall asked the Superintendent if they could gather data by Thursday to which Gina responded that it would be difficult to gather it that quickly. Lisa clarified that she requested data but no motion so she won't need the data for budget purposes. If Sheila puts this on a future SC agenda, she will want the data at that time. Chair Lyall asked if there was anything else that anyone wanted to discuss. She felt this was a very productive workshop and credited administration for their hard work. All were appreciative as it made the evening very easy for the Committee. Craig commented that whoever is Chariho Finance (and he is guessing it is Sue Rogers) has helped out a lot to which Ned echoed that sentiment. Gina added that Jane, Sue, Gail and Committee members have given ideas and the structure to work with. It takes a team and both she and Ned stated that it is a pleasure to work in this District.

Gary Liguori made a motion, seconded by Craig Louzon and it was VOTED: To adjourn at 7:00 PM. In favor: Unanimous.

Donna J. Sieczkiewicz, Clerk