

State of Rhode Island

County of Washington

In Hopkinton on the fifth day of February 2024 A.D. the said meeting was called to order by Town Council President Michael Geary at 7:00 P.M. in the Town Hall Meeting Room, 1 Town House Road, Hopkinton, RI 02833.

PRESENT: Michael Geary, Scott Bill Hirst, Sharon Davis, Stephen Moffitt, Jr., Robert Burns; Town Clerk Marita Murray, Town Manager Brian Rosso, and Solicitor Stephen Sypole.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order with a moment of silent meditation and a salute to the Flag.

ROLL CALL

Councilors Hirst, Moffitt, Davis, Burns, and Geary announced they were present.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCILOR HIRST AND SECONDED BY COUNCILOR MOFFITT TO MOVE THE MANAGER’S REPORT TO THE TOP OF THE AGENDA.

IN FAVOR: Hirst, Davis, Burns, Moffitt, Geary

OPPOSED: None

SO VOTED

TOWN MANAGER REPORT

Retirement of Chief Palmer

Mr. Rosso announced that Chief Davis S. Palmer would be retiring at the end of February. He noted that Chief Palmer has served as the Chief of Police since January 2012, leading a dedicated team of fifteen sworn officers and a total of twenty-two employees. His law enforcement journey began after his education at East Greenwich High School, Bryant College, and Anna Marie College. Before joining the Hopkinton Police Department, Chief Palmer gained extensive experience in the East Greenwich Police Department and Rhode Island State Police from 1986 to 2012, where he served in various divisions, including the Detective Division, Intelligence Unit, and Narcotics Division, where he excelled as a canine

handler. He was recognized for his exceptional work with several commendations and letters of appreciation. Chief Palmer's impressive resume highlights his involvement in significant cases, such as the largest cocaine seizure in Rhode Island State Police history, as well as over twenty homicide investigations and arrests. He has also collaborated closely over the years with various Police Departments and Federal Agencies, including the FDA, DEA, ATF, Secret Service, and the FBI. In 2023 Chief Palmer was awarded the Neil J. Houston, Jr. Memorial Award for his dedicated service and citizen contribution to the criminal justice profession. Throughout his tenure as the Hopkinton Chief of Police, Chief Palmer has accomplished remarkable achievements that have fostered excellence within the department. Under his leadership, the Hopkinton Police Department received accreditation from the RI Police Accreditation Commission in 2018, a status that we have proudly maintained. Chief Palmer has also been a driving force behind the Twenty for Twenty Campaign, which prioritized transparency, communication, and human rights within our community. Through this campaign, our department has undergone training on implicit bias, committed to diverse hiring practices, increased face-to-face interactions with the public, and engaged in external civil cultural, and social justice training. In 2022, he assigned an officer to one of the first ever Compassion Dogs for Public Relations to further enhance the department's community outreach efforts. Chief Palmer's commitment to public safety extended beyond our town borders. He joined the Hope Initiative for Addiction in 2021, providing crucial mental health crisis intervention services. It is with great joy and appreciation that we bid farewell to Chief David S. Palmer. We extend our heartfelt gratitude for his unwavering service, leadership, and dedication to ensuring the safety and well-being of our community. As he embarks on a well-deserved retirement, we wish Chief Palmer nothing but joy, relaxation, and cherished moments with his loved ones.

Chief Palmer thanked Mr. Rosso for his tribute and prior Town Manager Bill McGarry for hiring him. He also wished to thank the current and previous Councils, noting that when he started the job, they had lost a Captain and two Sergeants due to the police reform that occurred which allowed him to work with the union to change the contract and the rank structure. Because they changed the

captain position to a non-union position, it allowed him to choose a Captain. He believed he made the right choice with Captain Mark Carrier who was very loyal to the Town Council, Town Manager, himself, and the Hopkinton Police Department. He felt he was leaving the Town in good hands and that they had recruited well. It was an honor and privilege to have worked for Hopkinton, where he has felt supported by the Town.

Mr. Rosso added that he had asked Captain Mark Carrier to take on the role of Acting Police Chief for the time being, which he had accepted.

The Council thanked Chief Palmer for his many years of service and loyalty to the Town and wished him the best of luck.

Hopkinton Citizen's Police Academy

Captain Mark Carrier discussed the start of a Citizens Police Academy. He explained that the academy was a ten-week program in a classroom setting to show the community the internal workings of the Police Department. This was not a recruitment drive, but more of a community orientation so people can get to know the officers and what they do daily. They will be discussing fraud, scams, domestic violence, patrol functions, DWI, active shooter training, use of force, and range simulators. There are still available spots if anyone would like to sign up. The class will be held on Wednesdays at the Ashaway Fire Department from 6:00 p.m. to 8 p.m. and the Town Council was welcome to stop in at any time.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Sarah Steverman of Main Street, noted that she was a lifelong resident of Hopkinton and was recently appointed Chair of the Economic Development Commission (EDC). She noted that the EDC was finally able to reconvene after a seventeen-year hiatus. The EDC hoped to establish a suggested process for new and prospective business owners to initiate development projects in Hopkinton and plan to begin informal studies of existing trends and reports and move to exploring new options to attract newcomers to Hopkinton, to reside, make a living, or enjoy what the town has to offer. All of this would be conducted with an objective, responsible, and sustainable lens through which development may take place in Hopkinton. The EDC presently consists of three residents, and they are looking for more resident input either by formally applying to the commission or informally through surveys

and other correspondence which can be expected to be on the Town’s website soon. Maryanne McNamara of North Road asked if there was an active Planning Board and Mr. Rosso noted that there was. She noted that there was no active Conservation Commission and she wondered who she could speak with about recent storms that have caused water run-off, erosion, and land clearing going on in town. Councilor Geary asked if she was referring to a particular area in town and she indicated no, this was happening all over town and there was water draining onto the roads. She asked who she should speak with regarding these issues and Councilor Geary referred her to the Town Manager. She noted that she had been reviewing real estate guidelines regarding wetlands and she did not see anything stopping someone from building on a wetland.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA ORDER

The Chariho presentation was moved to the end.

CONSENT AGENDA

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCILOR HIRST AND SECONDED BY COUNCILOR BURNS TO APPROVE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 22, 2024; APPROVE TOWN COUNCIL EXECUTIVE SESSION MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 22, 2024; APPROVE THE ANNUAL AND MULTI-YEAR GOALS.

IN FAVOR: Moffitt, Hirst, Burns, Geary

OPPOSED: None

ABSTAIN: Davis

SO VOTED

VACANCIES AND APPOINTMENTS

Board of Canvassers

This matter was scheduled to discuss, consider and possibly vote to accept the resignation of Judith Scholfield from the Board of Canvassers as of March 1, 2024.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCILOR DAVIS AND SECONDED BY COUNCILOR HIRST TO ACCEPT THE RESIGNATION OF JUDITH SCHOLFIELD WITH REGRET.

IN FAVOR: Hirst, Davis, Moffitt, Burns, Geary

OPPOSED: None

SO VOTED

Economic Development Commission

This matter was scheduled to discuss, consider and possibly vote to appoint Joseph Moreau to the Economic Development Commission.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCILOR HIRST AND SECONDED BY COUNCILOR DAVIS TO APPOINT JOSEPH MOREAU TO THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION. Discussion:

Councilor Hirst wished to thank Mr. Moreau, who he felt was the ultimate volunteer in Hopkinton. He noted that there were numerous vacancies on Boards and Commissions, and they needed more volunteers.

IN FAVOR: Moffit, Davis, Burns, Hirst, Geary

OPPOSED: None

SO VOTED

NEW BUSINESS

This matter was scheduled to discuss, consider and possibly vote to adopt a Resolution in Support of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, 2024 Legislative Priorities.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCILOR HIRST AND SECONDED BY COUNCILOR DAVIS TO ADOPT A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF THE RHODE ISLAND LEAGUE OF CITIES AND TOWNS, 2024 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES.

IN FAVOR: Hirst, Davis, Moffitt, Burns, Geary

OPPOSED: None

SO VOTED

TOWN MANAGER REPORT

FAFSA

Mr. Rosso explained that they are holding several workshops to assist residents in filling out FAFSA applications. They are holding these with Learning 365 funds from the state and an independent FAFSA consultant, Jeff Decker, was assisting

them. The town has held one of the three events, which resulted in a great turn-out. The next event will be a virtual event on February 15th, and the third event will be in person, but they are still working out the details. He explained that FAFSA is similar to financial aid for college applications, and it can be tedious to complete for people that are not familiar with the process.

CHARIHO REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT STAGE II APPLICATION

This matter was scheduled to discuss the Chariho Regional School District Stage II Application.

Superintendent Gina Picard, Principal Guiseppe Gencarelli, Chief Operations Officer Mario Carina, Finance Director Ned Draper, and Building/Grounds Director Jason Sullivan of the Chariho Regional School District were present. Ms. Picard explained that the law changed around 2018 regarding school facilities and how they must maintain them. By 2023 all districts had to make sure that 3% of their operating budget was allocated for capital improvement planning. Per RI General Law, Chariho must spend \$1.8 Million Dollars annually on maintaining school buildings. State legislators ensured that the school building authority had specific requirements for school construction and for capital improvement planning, they are required to include a stage two application in order for their five-year capital improvement plan to be approved. In order to meet the criteria, they must review their facility needs (Stage 1) in comparison to new construction. In Stage I they hired an architect and project manager to determine the facility needs. That study determined that there was a trailer used at the Ashaway Elementary School for students who are in the Alternative Learning Academy and Richmond Elementary School has continuous flooding issues. She felt that all of the elementary schools were aging and based on the maintenance needed over the next five years, the district's recommendation was to move forward with new construction and main campus maintenance. Back in 2018 there was an election where Hopkinton, Richmond and Charlestown overwhelmingly approved this project, which was to authorize \$250 Million in bonds over five years. She wanted people to understand what was in their application for stage two and what the impact would be of having a bond up to \$150 Million Dollars, with a potential of

76% to 81% reimbursement which are temporary bonuses that will not exist after February 15, 2024. Ms. Picard went on to state that when she first arrived at Chariho, they were already engaged in a process around their stage two application. They were looking at one large school or two to three schools; however, due to Covid it stalled the process and caused a lot of confusion. Every time they have to reset, they have to resubmit and make sure the architect updates the data. Bond Option A would happen in the Spring of 2024 and the 76% reimbursement was almost a guarantee, with 81% possible. This bond would be for three new elementary schools, one in every town, and prioritized maintenance for the main campus. Bond Option B would happen if Bond Option A did not pass, and this would be prioritized needs at their base rate of 61% reimbursement. Most cities in Rhode Island do not have this level of reimbursement but they do because they are a regional school district. Option C is basically what they are doing now because they do not have a capital improvement plan. It would be emergency needs only and they would need to spend \$1.8 Million Dollars annually per the state law. Councilor Davis asked if there was any reimbursement with Option C, and Ms. Picard noted that it would be up to \$500,000 because they do not have an approved Capital Improvement Plan per the state law requirements. Ms. Picard explained that right now they would be paying \$28,000,000 for a \$150,000,000 bond, which is about \$2.3 Million Dollars annually of principal and interest. Chariho's base rate is 61%; however, there are bonuses for health and safety, educational enhancement, newer and fewer and replacement. They were confident that they would receive 76% reimbursement and they were waiting to see if they would qualify for the replacement bonus of 5%. She noted that people were asking if this was a need or a want and she felt that this was a need. For example, Hope Valley Elementary School is not ADA compliant, meaning that handicap parents or students cannot get to other floors in the building. There are three major needs across the elementary schools, plumbing, electricity, and HVAC. You are less likely to see where your tax dollars are going with renovations. One of the things that you get with new construction is two additional bonuses as part of the formula from RIDE, which means that per student they will receive \$2,100 for furniture, and \$3,000 for technology. The overall cost to Hopkinton's taxpayers equates as follows:

enrollment of 1,123 students or just over 38%, for a total cost of \$879,980 and therefore Hopkinton's tax impact would be 67 cents. If you had a home assessed at \$400,000, it would result in a \$269.59 per year increase and Bond Option B would be the same. Richmond and Charlestown are lower. Ms. Picard showed another slide which showed Bond Option A with 81% reimbursement with a 20–25-year bond. The cost of the bond would be \$150 Million Dollars, the State would pay \$121 Million Dollars and Chariho would pay \$28.5 Million Dollars and the annual cost would be \$2,300,000. The town's costs were based on enrollment. They know that they cannot defer the maintenance of the Career and Tech facility, which is their highest priority and must be done over the summer. The schools need a minimum of \$150,000 of security updates, the Chariho Middle School skylights are leaking at a cost of \$400,000, the electrical and energy management work that has to be done is about \$200,000, and the emergency generator needs are approximately \$500,000. They would have to resubmit applications for Stage I and II if the bond did not pass, which is \$1 Million Dollars at minimum. If the bond does not pass, then they will have to prioritize the projects needed. She noted that the elevator at Ashaway Elementary was not ADA compliant and the estimate in 2020 was approximately \$200,000. Playground updates for ADA compliance can cost up to \$1 Million Dollars and they are waiting on final quotes. The total cost for all updates is approximately \$6 Million Dollars and after reimbursement will be approximately \$2.3 Million Dollars. Councilor Geary wished to make clear that they would not receive the bonuses unless they completed the projects within the five-year period and Ms. Picard agreed stating that they had to meet the project compliance. Councilor Geary did not believe they could build three new schools in five years. Ms. Picard responded that it would be unlikely that one school would not be done in five years, so once that school is completed the town would receive 76% to 81% on that project. If two schools were built, they would receive the same percentage for that. If the third school did not finish within the five-year timeline, then they would get the average of that based on where the project was done. When they looked at that and went a year out, it was still approximately 76.7% on average. She noted that one of the things that they heard was that schools like Harvard have old buildings which they renovate. She explained this was because they have large

endowments. She noted that in 2018 Harvard updated their HVAC at one of the halls which cost \$13 Million Dollars for 22,000 square feet. Richmond Elementary is 53,000 square feet, so that would cost \$30 Million Dollars for Richmond's HVAC in 2018 and with inflation would be more today. She felt it was their responsibility to make sure they were educating the youth and also providing safe and healthy environments. Richmond Elementary School was acknowledged by RIDE as the highest growth across the state and will become a Y Cast Rockstar and their video will be upcoming in the next few weeks. They are very proud of the work they are doing and their fiscal responsiveness. There was also a misconception that the Hope Valley Elementary School was just a part of the capital improvement plan. In actuality, the closing of Hope Valley Elementary School was a conversation that actually started last year regarding the budget. Regardless of the bond, based on financial projections, they would have to move forward with closing Hope Valley Elementary School; they do not have enough funding and their enrollment has decreased.

Principal Gencarelli stated that he truly recognized the community's feelings about Hope Valley Elementary School. Chariho's administration team is one of the strongest in the state and some elementary school principals have been there for 10+ years, which is almost unheard of. When he first heard of the decommissioning of Hope Valley Elementary School, he had mixed emotions. It is really not the building that makes the school, it is the people that are in the building. There is a need for new schools because they are old, outdated and need significant improvements. They have a responsibility to serve the children and make decisions that are fiscally responsible for our towns. Regardless of whether the bond passes or fails, the plan is to close Hope Valley Elementary School due to budgetary constraints and the major capital improvements needed. He understood this was not a popular decision but with Hope Valley closing anyway, why would we not want to participate in the RIDE incentive of possibly receiving 76% to 81% reimbursement. This was a harder decision for the adults than it is for the children. Children are resilient and this will not affect them the way people may think. The children listen to the debates, arguments and negativity, and he hears it throughout the school and some of the comments are not accurate. He felt this would benefit

the communities and the education system, and an investment in our schools is an investment for our children.

Superintendent Picard indicated that in the past parents had suggested that they felt that the main campus was receiving the largest number of investments and not the elementary schools. She noted that the main campus has been the place where most investments have gone, because Chariho High School was overcrowded and in need of updates, the campus 2010 bond accomplished a lot. There was also an approved bond in 2018 for CALA, which removed trailers for vulnerable students on the main campus. They have been asked every budget season since she has been Superintendent to be more fiscally responsible and they hear that and understand. She noted that she could not, in good conscience, not provide the opportunity that existed for three new schools. This did not mean that they had to vote for it, but her responsibility was to provide the information and assure that everyone understood the opportunity that exists. The timeline is always the same, Stage I is either in September or February for facility review, which is required every five years. Stage II is how they would address the facilities and part of the criteria is that they address new construction, and they did put forward a proposal that suggested they move to new construction for the elementary schools. On January 23, 2024, the School Committee revised language based on feedback from the Town Managers and Town Clerks that April 9, 2024, would be too fast for them to be able to manage the budget vote, due to the proximity of the Presidential Primary Vote so the School Committee revised the date of the bond vote to May 7, 2024. At that School Committee meeting, Bond counsel explained that they were looking to get 76% reimbursement when the project was completed; however, you legally cannot get a bond if it does not exist at the time the bond is issued so therefore, they have to say that they will receive 61% at minimum. She noted that if anyone would like additional information, they should view their January 23rd meeting on YouTube. Councilor Moffitt questioned when Stage III would commence, and Ms. Picard advised that Stage III would start if the bond vote is approved. Stage II is about what is possible, not about what you are getting. They have asked for parity with the new schools so each town would be receiving the same asset. There is a lot of information on the Chariho website but what they wish everyone to know is

that you can have 100% of Chariho elementary school students in new buildings by 2029 at the same annual cost of prioritizing maintenance. Councilor Burns asked who voted and when, to close Hope Valley school. Ms. Picard indicated that there never was really a vote to close Hope Valley school. Last year the School Committee members had asked her to bring a proposal of what it would look like to close Hope Valley. At the March meeting, if you go to the budget sheet, it says Hope Valley phase out. There was a vote by the School Committee for the bond legislation which says one new school in each town. Councilor Burns next asked if the new schools are built who would own them and Ms. Picard explained that the towns would own them. Councilor Moffitt wanted everyone to realize that Ms. Picard's job was to present what is possible and it is up to the voters to decide. Councilor Hirst stated that he was not impressed with the way Chariho handles their finances. He wished for an outside management study which they had not agreed to. They only look at things they want to. Also, it was highly likely that there would be cost overruns; who would be paying for that. Councilor Geary presented a graph which showed several new schools which were recently built with bond money and their overage cost. Councilor Hirst noted that they cannot guarantee that they will not have cost overruns and be able to complete the projects before the deadline. Ms. Picard noted that Councilor Hirst did not have to listen to her, but she was hired to provide the towns with this opportunity. She has no control over whether the School Committee wants to do a management audit or not; however, at the last Omnibus meeting it was suggested that if the Hopkinton Town Council paid for it, the School Committee would be willing to do that. Her responsibility is for student education and facility needs, not a management study, which would be a School Committee conversation. She explained some of the cost overruns on Councilor Geary's graph was because they added other projects. Councilor Hirst noted that 83% of the school budget was fixed costs and Hopkinton is already paying 79% of its tax dollars to education. Ms. Picard responded that two years ago Mr. Draper came to her and recommended they condense the elementary schools, which fiscally would be very difficult, and she said no and then were level funded. She met last year with the administration team, the elementary school principals and it became clear to them, if they closed Hope Valley, they would be

able to utilize resources in a more efficient way, including school psychologists, social workers, reading and math specialists. She was present tonight, to answer questions about this and have the opportunity for the Councilors to have this conversation. Level funding made them want to close Hope Valley School and she is being fiscally responsible. Councilor Hirst asked Ms. Picard to address the concern that the Chariho Act was not being followed, as far as siblings going to the same schools. She noted that he was referring to Article 13 of the Chariho Act, and if kindergarten does not exist in that school, it means students cannot enroll in it, which is no different than when the district moved grade 5 to the Middle School. Councilor Hirst noted that he would appreciate it if any legislation regarding education be forwarded to each Town Council so they can consider the financial fall out. Ms. Picard noted that she was on the Legislative Committee of the Superintendent Association, and she speaks very adamantly against unfunded mandates, but she has no control over the legislation. Councilor Hirst suggested that the RI State Constitution, Article 12 Sec. 1, states that the General Assembly's role is to support public schools and libraries and the School Committee could advocate for changes. He was concerned by Charlestown's favorable tax situation. Ms. Picard noted that she had no control over what is in the Chariho Act. Councilor Hirst questioned how this project would be funded between the towns and Ms. Picard noted based on the Chariho Act, it is per student. Councilor Davis believed that what Councilor Hirst wanted was to change the Chariho Act. She had tried to get the School Committee to make this motion, but no one would. Her question was what was being guaranteed. Someone from Charlestown had asked if voters approved this bond, did they have an out if they were not going to receive the reimbursement percentage that they were looking for. Ms. Picard noted that they felt confident about the newer and fewer three bonuses because they would utilize closing Hope Valley for swing space (they are actively looking for a second) to be able to move students in and at the end of the project they would be given back to Hopkinton. Councilor Davis asked what constituted the percentage for newer and fewer and Ms. Picard explained it was an additional 5%; health and safety was 5% and educational enhancements of 5%. The additional 5% came from a facility condition index. Councilor Moffitt noted that Hopkinton receives \$6.6 Million

Dollars in State aid for education, Richmond receives \$6.29 Million Dollars, and Charlestown receives \$5.1 Million Dollars, which meant that Hopkinton receives more money than Charlestown. Charlestown does have a lower tax rate but their tax base is equal to Richmond and Hopkinton. There was a big discrepancy because residents pay different property taxes, but there is also a big discrepancy in state aid. Councilor Burns wished to thank Ms. Picard and her representatives for coming to this meeting. He owns Evans Welding and does steel erection and fabrication for local contractors. The cost of metal has skyrocketed in the last two years and the availability of materials is challenging. He was concerned with cost overruns for the proposed new buildings. This would leave the overrun costs to the taxpayers and felt this may cripple them. He understood Ms. Picard's position with school needs; however, he felt the taxpayers will be the ones to decide; however, he did not support this bond. Ms. Picard noted it would cost the same annually regardless of whether there were new schools but felt if new it would be less upkeep in the future. Councilor Geary thanked Ms. Picard, the teachers and the staff. When he looked at the Johnston and Cranston overages he was concerned. Ms. Picard noted that those were pre-Covid and her goal is to stay within the 5-year plan. Councilor Geary thought that the extra \$269 per household that is being asked will break some people who are already struggling. His biggest concern was the cost overruns, because it will happen and then someone will now have to ask the taxpayers for more money. He noted that he spoke with the three top builders in the state if this were something that could be achieved, and they stated no due to material availability. He suggested obtaining grant money to make the schools ADA compliant. He cannot support this. Councilor Moffitt noted that the schools are on average 75 years old and patching them would be for almost the same amount of money. He thought they needed new schools, and was concerned about overruns; however, if everything lines up, we will be receiving 81% reimbursement. Councilor Geary argued that when Wood River Health Services expanded, there was a 15-month hold up for an elevator, even though they had ordered this prior to blueprints. Councilor Moffitt asked if he would be for this if everything went as planned. Councilor Geary indicated maybe, but there were too many factors. Councilor Davis noted that she knew about cost overages in her

previous employment as Director of Administrative Services for the University of Connecticut and the Architectural and Engineering Services Department. Whatever contractor the school went with would need to put a lot of overages in their budget. She also did not like the look of flat roofs in the design. Ms. Picard noted that if the voters voted yes, then each Town Council would appoint members to the building committee. Councilor Davis noted that she was in favor of this bond because she felt financially it made sense.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Sylvia Thompson of Lawton Foster Road noted that she could appreciate that the Chariho School Committee has difficult decisions to make. Whether to build new schools, declining enrollment, when to close a school or repair schools. She is a member of the Chariho District Finance Committee, but she was here because she grew up in Hope Valley and attended Hope Valley Elementary School. The Hope Valley School parents and staff were shocked to learn at one meeting that kindergarten would not be available this September 2024. There was a family that moved here from California who picked Hope Valley School because of its excellence. Children that started in Kindergarten at Hope Valley School with a pre-K sibling have a right pursuant to the Chariho Act to attend kindergarten this September. These parents and their children are concerned that brothers and sisters will be going to different schools. We want families to stick together. A better approach for the School Committee would be to put the kindergarten back and then instead schedule community meetings over the next year, especially with the Hope Valley parents, and hold these meetings in the town and present a detailed plan as to why changes are needed, which school their children will attend and listen to parental concerns. If the newer and fewer bond should fail, she agreed that the Chariho School Committee does not need a \$30 Million Dollar bond over five-years for district wide repairs since Chariho will receive a 61% reimbursement. It would actually be an \$11.7 Million Dollar bond over five years. The Chariho Act allows the School Committee to do temporary borrowing in one year and pay it back the following year when 61% is reimbursed to Chariho in September. For example, \$2.3 Million Dollars could be put in the Chariho budget as an expense to repair the schools, but the taxpayers are only taxed for the 39% plus banking fees

for short term borrowing. This would cost less than \$1 Million Dollars each year for capital improvements. In the past, when she was on the Town Council, the legislation group at the time advised that they would not accept one-third for each town unless all three towns agreed. Hopkinton did not agree and they stopped the 2010 campus for about a year. It was agreed to be one-third for each town because the Charlestown Town Council agreed that they wanted the project to go forward, and they decided that it would be okay. This was not something the School Committee did, it was because the three Town Councils agreed to it. She advised that the 67-cent projected effect of this bond would bring the town over the 4% cap and this did not include the Chariho budget. She wondered how high the town would be over the cap. She asked if Chariho included funding for the EPA required environment impact statement for the school, and thought the cost was around \$150,000 per elementary school and did they include the cost of new onsite septic systems. Ned Draper of the Chariho Regional School District noted that the question regarding the EPA he would refer to SLAM in terms of what they've included in their cost estimate so far. He knew they had done soil testing, but as to what level had been reported and what they have estimated so far, he could not say. As far as septic costs are concerned, that was included and would be part of the bond money. Councilor Moffitt questioned if the bond money was federally funded, or if it was taxpayer money. Mr. Draper noted it was state funded. Councilor Moffitt did not believe the EPA required environmental impact statement was required since they were not using federal dollars. Mr. Draper felt there were strategic implications for how they have handled things so far. SLAM and Colliers are familiar at the national level, and the reason they designed a similar building is to reduce the expense, design issues, and environmental concerns.

Maryanne McNamara noted there was a growth ordinance in effect which was supposed to be reissued or rehashed in December of 2023. Solicitor Sypole noted the Town Council had voted to extend that ordinance for a certain amount of time and he believed they asked the Planning Board to study this and recommend any changes. Councilor Moffitt noted that any low- and moderate-income project is not required to follow the cap. Councilor Geary felt she should speak with the Town Manager regarding her questions.

Joe Moreau of Old Depot Road agreed with the concerns with the cost overruns. He was the Director of Public Welfare for two years and met with a lot of residents. He felt \$269 for some people could feel like \$269,000 dollars. He believed in education, but things have changed now. He has not been to a school committee meeting since he had gotten up to speak at the podium and was told he could not speak due to not having any children in the school system. There are many residents in Hopkinton that cannot afford \$269 more.

Jeff Dubay of Hope Valley noted that they were the family who had moved here from California and his son is a second grader at Hope Valley Elementary whose teacher is Mrs. Moffitt. He has another son who is supposed to start kindergarten in September. This proposal is breaking his family apart as well as the community. He asked if the Superintendent had the authority to close the Hope Valley Elementary School and who voted for this. He also questioned the Chariho Act, Section 13 stating that siblings go to the same school, he felt they found a loophole with getting rid of new kindergarten classes. Ms. Picard noted that it was not her decision to close Hope Valley, she was asked to bring forward a plan that included the budget cut of beginning to phase out Hope Valley School, one grade at a time. The neediest building was Hope Valley, because it needed the most repairs, and she had a responsibility to bring forward what was asked of her. She was also asked to bring forward a plan that would have Hopkinton with no more than a 2% increase for the budget. She called committee members after the meeting and wanted them to understand that doing that would mean a faster phase out of Hope Valley. She was asked to do better with their budget and there's only so many times you can move around the amounts. She was also asked to bring a proposal that would completely close Hope Valley next year, and the School Committee will be making decisions on February 13th. The Committee continues to have conversations about budgetary impacts, they wait for the annual finance meeting for a last round of input and then at the March meeting they determine the final budget for the voters. If it gets level funded then it would go back to the School Committee, and they are asked to make more cuts. A budget vote of no would mean Hope Valley would close faster. Mr. Dubay asked if the school would be closing, and Ms. Picard stated that it would depend on the School Committee's decision. Mr. Dubay asked if the

school would then bus these children to other schools if the bond did not pass. Ms. Picard noted that if the bond did not pass, and the School Committee determined that they would be closing Hope Valley Elementary School, there would be a draft of new lines to show which children would attend Richmond Elementary School and which children would attend Ashaway Elementary School.

Tyler Champlin, a Chariho School Committee member, noted that this is a process they go through as a committee. Ms. Picard was taking a lot of heat about removing kindergarten from the Hope Valley Elementary School and possibly closing Hope Valley, but that is a process that the School Committee goes through, asking her to present them with a budget. She has given them a proposal. His understanding was that removing kindergarten from Hope Valley would save the district approximately \$475,000 for this year. He enjoyed playing with the budget and noted that they could put the money back into the budget but then this would come back to voters that would then have to approve that increase, because it had to be paid somehow. He had suggested if they were to keep Hope Valley, they could cut teaching positions and maximize class sizes across the district, but nobody would want this, and this would only keep Hope Valley for another year or so. No one has voted to remove Hope Valley school, yet. It was the School Committee's decision to make that decision, weighing all the options.

Edward Lowe of Brook Drive felt they were overlooking the fact that the Hope Valley and Ashaway schools are the property of Hopkinton, and it is the financial responsibility of Chariho to maintain those schools through repairs and capital improvements. He felt that Chariho had failed to meet things such as, ADA compliance and accommodating disabled parents and children. This is a federal law and for them to ignore this requirement is on them. When the town gave Chariho the schools to use, they were in good condition and able to be used as schools. What he has now heard is that they have not made capital improvements or met the ADA requirements of the law and felt they were returning them as shells only to be good for demolition. He recommended the Council require Chariho to look at the Hope Valley and Ashaway Elementary Schools to determine what needed to be done to comply with every requirement that is imposed on a school for Chariho cannot shed this obligation. One of the slides asked if this was a want

or a need, and a primary driver for the new construction is the Hope Valley school is going to be 90 years old next year and the district elementary students who are responsible for meeting 21st education requirements deserve new facilities to meet these requirements. Hope Valley is a blue-ribbon school and one of its teachers has been awarded National Recognition as Teacher of the Year. These achievements say to him that it is not just the age of the school that determines the ability to meet standards or requirements, but the teachers, students and a concerned community. He felt they were being rushed to make decisions among options that are not in the best interest of Hopkinton. Lastly, the SLAM presentation specifically stated that on-site septic costs are excluded from the cost.

Ms. Picard felt this was inaccurate because they are required by law to maintain the facilities, they also have to submit a capital improvement plan every year to RIDE. She noted that the amount of money that has gone into both Hope Valley and Ashaway Elementary is extensive. Nobody was stating they were neglectful because it would be untrue and illegal. She noted that if anyone wanted to view their budget they could look online and view every single capital improvement plan. The cost is the same whether they patch or rebuild; the cost for the supplies are the same whether they patch or build. She felt that they should be proud of the work that has been done; however, things get old and have to be repaired. She had a responsibility to share this information and notify the district when there is a concern, and something is not going to be safe. She noted that she would be happy to sit down with anyone who would like to see the amount of dollars that have put into any of the schools, and the kind of work that has been done.

Mr. Lowe did not feel that the presentation of 61% guaranteed reimbursement and the assumed 76% or 81%, was not an accurate representation of the costs. The legislation that Senator Morgan will be submitting was written in a manner that stated there is only 61% guaranteed reimbursement. He felt the way to present it to the voters is to say that these are the costs that we can tell you are actually going to happen, but if we are lucky enough to get the extra bonuses it may be this.

Louise Dinsmore of Richmond noted that she was the President of the Chariho Forgotten Taxpayers, which is a community group that advocates for information being spread through the grassroots so taxpayers can make educated decisions. She

felt Ms. Picard and representatives have gone above and beyond in presenting this information to all of the towns. When someone is buying a home and obtains a mortgage, they receive a truth in lending statement. The taxpayers deserved a truth in spending statement to disclose what the tax impact could be for the taxpayers of Hopkinton. She wanted to remind everyone that if the bond passes or goes to plan B, there is going to be a financial impact to the taxpayers. Town budgets and school budgets always go up every year and how much can the taxpayers' bear. The taxpayers are not limitless ATM machines and there are real financial implications for our families. She is concerned she will be priced out of her home and is concerned for the taxpayers.

Catherine Guisti of Hopkinton, a school committee member, noted that she appreciated the conversation tonight, and they have discussed some of the same issues. Every year they hear people tell them to cut the budget, the taxes are too high and to make fiscally responsible decisions. She wanted taxpayers to understand that this was what they were trying to do. She wanted people to take an honest look at this bond and urged people to get their information through their Town Councils, School Committee and Chariho website. Councilor Geary noted that people are having to make judgment calls on which bills to pay and they are asking the taxpayers for more. Councilor Hirst noted that Ms. Guisti, as Chair of the School Committee, had the power to put on the agenda a discussion of an outside management study and she had not used that power for even a discussion. Shelly McClinsey of Hope Valley is a parent of children who had gone through Hope Valley Elementary, and she wanted to thank the School Committee for thinking about being fiscally responsible. Richmond has one school, Charlestown has one school, and Hopkinton has two schools. She felt it made sense to have Hopkinton have one school. She noted that she is a teacher in the district and would love new schools but not because she wants them, the children need a new school. She wanted a classroom with working outlets, which can charge computers for 21st century learning, and a classroom that is not flooding. She noted that she has lived in Hopkinton for 47 years, and understood that our taxes are out of control, but she chooses to stay here because she loves the district.

Edward Lowe of Hope Valley noted that he heard the new schools would be built on the same footprint as the existing schools. If the Richmond school is flooding, it did not make sense to put a new school in an area that floods.

ADJOURNMENT

A MOTION WAS MADE BY COUNCILOR HIRST AND SECONDED BY COUNCILOR DAVIS TO ADJOURN IN HONOR OF THE RETIREMENT OF POLICE CHIEF DAVID S. PALMER.

SO VOTED

Marita D. Murray

Town Clerk

Sydney Fernandes

Deputy Town Clerk