



Richmond Community Alliance
Encouraging constructive community engagement and action

NEWSLETTER

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Candidate Information Page!

<https://richmondcommunityalliance.com/candidate-info>

Peaks

Successful and Informative Meet the Candidates Forum

The candidates forum on October 2 sponsored by the League of Women Voters was well attended by about 40 people in the Town Council Chamber. Four School Committee candidates – Jessica Purcell, Louise Dinsmore, Karen Reynolds, and Clay Johnson; and five Town Council candidates – Jim Palmisciano, Samantha Wilcox, Mark Trimmer, Dan Madnick, and Mark Reynolds participated. The forum was recorded and has been viewed almost 300 times. It can be viewed here [Richmond Meet the Candidates Forum](#). School Committee candidates are first and the Town Council forum begins about 1:13:00.

Valleys

Municipal Court Delayed

At the October 1 Town Council meeting it was announced that the Town Administrator has delayed taking the steps needed to get the Municipal Court up and running. The Town Council passed an ordinance establishing the court in May. The administrator explained she wanted to wait for the next council to be seated to make sure there was support for the Municipal Court. One of the items in the Republican Town Council candidates' platform is to eliminate the court. It would be a mistake to eliminate the court before it even starts, especially because it was approved by voters in 2022 by 1776 to 1565 votes. Being able to adjudicate traffic violations and zoning issues locally rather than in courts in Wakefield will save the town money because police officers and staff will not need to travel and wait. It will also be more convenient for residents to deal with traffic violations at Town Hall.

Other Items of Note

Noble's Notables – League of Women Voters “Meet the Candidates” Forum Recap

On Wednesday, October 2nd, the League of Women Voters - South County held a “Meet the Candidates” Forum at the Richmond Town Hall. All the Chariho School Committee candidates for Richmond participated, but only the Democrat Candidates and the Independent Candidate for Richmond Town Council were present. The Republican Candidates for Town Council did not attend. I encourage any and all Richmond voters to watch the forum [Richmond Meet the Candidates Forum](#)

Richmond Town Council Candidates

It became quickly obvious that the Town Council candidates agreed on several major points. Mark Reynolds, Dan Madnick, Samantha Wilcox and Jim Palmisciano, (running as Democrats) along with Mark Trimmer, (running as an Independent) gave responsible, constructive responses to the questions submitted. First and foremost, the candidates agreed that developing the town within the means of its current infrastructure is important. Also, methodically developing the basic municipal infrastructure where needed for business and services will ensure a prosperous future. Supporting the police (especially keeping the Richmond PD 3rd Shift) will provide for public safety. It is vital that town staff are respected and given the tools they need to do their job. Another point of agreement is moving forward with the municipal court to provide a cohesive application of town ordinances. Finally, keeping the rural atmosphere of Richmond intact is of vital importance. All the candidates espoused working together and where they disagree, will not be disagreeable. It is obvious that these candidates bring a variety of experience and ideas to the table.

The Town Council candidates also presented an environment of transparency and honesty coupled with the constraints of fiscal responsibility. Many times, throughout the forum, the Town Council candidates acknowledged that they must be fiscally responsible with taxpayer dollars and that each dollar spent must be done so reasonably. This does not mean that facilities or policies, like a new community center proposed by Councilwoman Wilcox, should be dismissed just because of cost. The various benefits must also be considered when weighing proposals. Who knows what policy or facility considerations the Republican slate wishes to implement. They tout wanting to be “open for business” but little else is publicly available.

It is important to note that none of the candidates present at the forum have current ethics violations scheduled for hearings, as the lead Republican does. The 3rd shift question regarding the Richmond PD is of extreme importance since this is the timeframe in which the police are most needed. I emailed the Republican candidates for town council individually and to their organizational account enquiring as to their intent to end the 3rd shift for the Richmond Police Department. As of this date, no Republican candidate has responded. It is safe to assume they

will pursue this policy which puts saving a few tax dollars at the expense of public safety. They claim to “back the blue” until their wallets will be affected.

Richmond School Committee Candidates

While the Town Council candidate forum was cordial and presented a responsible and reasonable vision of the future, the School Committee candidate forum presented two differing agendas. The candidates present were Clay Johnson, Karen Reynolds, Louise Dinsmore, and Jess Purcell.

From the start, it was obvious that the Republican candidates (Clay Johnson and Louise Dinsmore) were focused on the fiscal aspect as well as negative specifics of Chariho. As an example, Mr. Johnson opened with a statement citing his “core competency” of getting things done by relating a story how the inappropriate relationship of two teachers with students inspired him to run for office, be elected, and implement policies for this issue in 2017. This was followed by Mrs. Dinsmore focusing on her business experience as a key attribute of why she should be elected along with promoting the Dinsmore/Johnson campaign slogan of “All A’s for Chariho.” The premise of their argument being that the current school committee members have lost focus on what priorities should be.

Watching the forum, it became obvious that the Republican Candidates have little knowledge of the actual day-to-day operation of the school or what policies will be effective. They continuously focused on contentious social issues and fiscal matters. As an example, no mention of the process to remove or restrict library books in the school that already exists was noted by the Republican Candidates even though they desired to have only “age-appropriate material” in the libraries. Also, neither Republican Candidate noted that all curriculum is available online while proposing to have all teachers post all lesson plans for public scrutiny. It seems that these two candidates got together and asked, “What ideas will sound good to the voter even though we have no experience in the classroom?”

Neither Republican candidate noted Chariho’s successes other than their appreciation for the Chariho Tech Center because it generates revenue. They continued to cite standardized test scores from the 8th grade as a reason for them to be elected. Mrs. Reynolds noted that specific, one day, one grade level tests are a concern, but the Chariho administration and the current school committee continues to work to address the issue. Mr. Johnson also presented that Chariho costs were high, but insinuated rankings were low. The fact that the high school ranks in approximately the top 10% of the nation contradicts this insinuation of not getting our money’s worth from the school district. (While this was not noted during the forum, Chariho is ranked by U.S. News and World Report as #2,355 out of approximately 25,000 high schools in the U.S. of which nearly 18,000 were ranked by the publication. Also, Chariho ranks in the top 10 of public high schools in the state.)

The budget theme continued as Mrs. Dinsmore and Mr. Johnson steered clear of their history to “level fund” the budget and said they didn’t support that action. Mr. Johnson noted that “level funding” wasn’t a cut but didn’t acknowledge that a rise in costs for mandatory programs would mean removing discretionary programs. The denial of supporting “level funding” is also in contrast with recent history. Mrs. Dinsmore has constantly opposed budget increases since becoming an activist on this issue and always publicizes her success in defeating the budget in 2022. Mr. Johnson has a history of voting “no” on budgets or not showing up for votes to pass them. It was a surprise that he stated he supports the \$15 Million maintenance bond, but then insisted the payment should fall within the current budget which sounds exactly like “level funding.” A safe assumption is that, if elected, Mr. Johnson and Mrs Dinsmore will demand a shifting of money in the existing budget to make the \$1.28 Million payment required annually for the bond. That means \$1.28 Million in student services and programs will be unfunded... which means programs will end... which means they are cut. Just like the end of the world language program in the elementary school in 2023 that Mrs. Dinsmore is responsible for from her level funding efforts, other programs will be off the table for Chariho students if the Republican candidates are elected.

A significant discussion also occurred regarding the aging elementary level infrastructure. Specifics were not discussed and a general theme of a time consuming and thorough process ensued. Given that Mr. Johnson and Mrs. Dinsmore fought against 3 new elementary schools at a discount of 75%-81%, who knows what their plan would be. Mrs. Purcell and Mrs. Reynolds wanted to revamp the infrastructure and keep an elementary school in each town. Obviously, that option will be more expensive now. Moving forward, it can be assumed that a compromise of location, size, and facilities available will have to occur.

The Democrat candidates presented a different view to being on the School Committee. In general, their position is a “student first” approach but acknowledge there are fiscal realities that must be dealt with. Mrs. Purcell noted that all budget increases over the last decade have averaged less than inflation. This statistic (not acknowledged by the Republican candidates) underlines the point that the school is responsibly run. Remember, of the 4 regional school districts in Rhode Island, Chariho is 3rd in cost per student while running two more school buildings than the 3 other districts. Adding to the theme of responsible fiscal governance was the Democrat candidates acknowledgement of methodical closure of Hope Valley Elementary School. This will reduce costs but will put a strain on the other aging elementary school facilities in the district.

One point of budgetary expansion noted by the Democrats candidates was in the increase of benefits for support staff. Mrs. Purcell noted that several custodial, aid and assistant positions go unfilled every year. These responsibilities then fall on staff who should be focused on education

and administration. Increasing pay and benefits to be competitive in the job market for these positions will make the school more efficient. As with substitute teacher pay, this vital aspect of the budget needs to be addressed, but the Republican candidates made no mention of it as they focused on overall costs.

When it comes to the teacher contract that will expire in the next term, all candidates acknowledge that retaining staff talent is of paramount importance. The only oddity in this discussion is that Mr. Johnson wants the negotiations to be public. His attempt to do this during his last 6-month stint on the school board could have been costly as this is viewed as an “unfair labor practice” that could have resulted in arbitration decisions against the taxpayers. The standard practice, even in the private sector, is for union negotiations to be conducted by a small group behind closed doors. This way, the give and take on each side is not used against or for either party. Obviously, Mr. Johnson wishes to use contract negotiations against teachers in order to manipulate the outcome.

Concerning actual school policy, Mrs. Reynolds and Mrs. Purcell take the approach of working with the administration to find the best solution. They acknowledge that there are different students with different perspectives and priorities as there are parents who differ in perspective and priorities. They agreed with their Republican opponents that parents should be involved with their students throughout their educational journey.

Final Thoughts

During my military service, I learned that “If you think you’re the smartest person in the room, you’re in trouble as a leader.” It is obvious the Republican candidates for School Committee view themselves as all-knowing with all the correct solutions. The absence of the Republican Town Council candidates lends itself to the same attitude. They simply feel it is, “Their way or the highway.” The arrogance that they cannot learn or benefit from the ideas and knowledge of others is truly astounding.

In contrast, the Democrat/Independent candidates present a vision of a well-run government at the town and school level. A team effort to improve Richmond is the overall theme. Is it everything that everyone wants? No. Is there compromise? Yes. Reasoned, methodical, ethical, and thoughtful government will beat the “ad hoc” method any day. Consider this as the election on November 5th approaches and please make sure to vote!

Town Council Meeting 10/1 Quick Takes

1. Council unanimously approved Edward Smith, E.P. Smith Properties, LLC’s request for a change to the zoning designation of 8 Richmond Townhouse Road (Chariho Furniture) from Residential Use (R-2) to General Business (GB). Also approved was a corresponding amendment to the Comprehensive Plan’s Future Land Use Map, changing the designation of the

property from Medium Density Residential to General Business. The Planning Board and Town Planner provided a thorough advisory opinion endorsing the amendments.

2. Council unanimously approved awarding a bid to Solitro Property Solutions for parking and access improvements at Saila Preserve, for an amount not to exceed \$121,120 (pending additional funding from RI DEM and the Land Trust). Saila Preserve is an 112-acre property with a right of way across an adjacent private property. The work will include building a bump out on the town right of way for public parking, and constructing a boardwalk over the wetlands leading to the trail head. Eagle Scouts have already created trails and a kiosk, and the Youth Conservation Corps has done some work on invasive plants, but in order to open it to the public, the parking and boardwalk need to be completed.

3. The Town Administrator updated the council on the status of unspent ARPA funds and discussed reallocating \$249,000 to potential new projects, as long those projects are under contract by the end of the calendar year. Council unanimously approved reallocating funds remaining from radio tower, IT, town hall carpet renovation, a road study and unused small business grants. The Town Administrator has already put bids out for potential projects, including town hall interior painting, roof replacement, power washing and other maintenance for council consideration, so that selected projects can be done within the timeline if approved.

4. The Town Administrator updated council on the establishment of a Municipal Court. She noted that Town Hall staff are waiting for a new council to be seated to be sure there's still sufficient support for the court before moving forward with plans. In public comment, Chris Kona reminded councilors that residents voted in favor of the Municipal Court in a town referendum.

5. Council unanimously appointed Susan A. Gardner to the Dog Park Committee.

Upcoming Meetings

October 8 – Planning Board – 6:30 pm at Town Hall

October 15 – Town Council - 6 pm at Town Hall

October 16 - November 4 Early Voting 9 am - 4 pm at Town Hall

October 22 – School Committee – 7 pm at Chariho High School Library

October 22 – Planning Board - 6:30 pm at Town Hall

November 5 - Election Day - 7 am - 8 pm - Town Hall, Richmond Elementary & Chariho High School. To find your polling location <https://vote.sos.ri.gov/>

Town Council and Planning Board agendas: <https://clerkshq.com/richmond-ri>

School Committee agendas: https://www.chariho.k12.ri.us/school_committee/meeting_schedule

Community Calendar

October 12, doors at 6 pm, show starts at 7 pm – Maddie Potts Foundation comedy fundraiser at Alaina's Ale House (343 Kingstown Road) to benefit the children of Stephanie Francis. Tickets \$25, 18+ show. Raffles and 50/50 drawing. Food menu and cash bar available. For tickets, to donate, or sponsor, please visit: <https://www.funny4funds.com/.../maddie-potts-comedy.../1394>
For more info, please contact Alyssa: 401-480-5804

October 19 & 20, 10 am to 4 pm – the 18th annual HopArts Studio Trail weekend is a self guided studio tour in scenic southern RI. Discover unique artwork, fine crafts, and meet talented local artists. Find the trail map and more info about participating artists at <https://www.hoparts.org/>

December 6 – Save the date for the annual tree lighting at Town Hall. Details to come!

Future Ideas

We would like to spotlight local businesses, people, and points of interest in our area in future newsletters. If you have an idea for a person/place to feature, or an event to include on the community calendar, feel free to email us at rca4richmond@gmail.com. We also welcome any tips or items of concern that you wish to bring to our attention.